**Tau Ceti IV**

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**Tau Ceti IV**

by [orphan_account](#)

**Summary**

Set just after Into Darkness
Several days ago, the colony on the swirling planet of Tau Ceti IV stopped all communications.
With human crew unable to cope with the heat, Kirk sends down two more capable crew members to investigate - Spock, and to Spock's horror a young communications lieutenant who is half betazoid, an empath capable of reading his otherwise carefully guarded emotions, setting off a chain of events that cannot be stopped.
When a distress message from the betazoid arrives telling him that she is about to die, and that she has lost Spock, Jim must decide what to do to get his First Officer back.
With Spock deep in the Pon Farr and Uhura unavailable, the pair find themselves in a difficult situation - but the bigger threat of uncovering a top secret and highly illegal Section 31 mission looms dark on the horizon.

(Basically a pon farr fic where fuck-or-die sex makes things worse, not better, everyone gets a little bit fucked up, and secret government organisations spell trouble for anyone who gets too close - and the Enterprise has gotten right up in their business...)

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A Lost Colony

Uhura stepped from the turbolift and out onto the main bridge. People milled around and the display showed the ellipse of the Earth, hanging, unsupported, in the vast expanse of space. She said a silent farewell to her home planet and moved towards her station.

Spock brushed past her on the way to his seat, and she caught him by the arm to stay him. He turned to face her wordlessly, and returned her kiss with a calculated movement. He didn't fully understand the link between their love and this particular activity, and it always seemed to her that it required a great deal of effort for him to perform it, especially in such an open place, but the kiss was nonetheless a real one, with real affection behind it. Her hand rested on the blue fabric that covered his shoulder for a beat longer, before she released him and they both took up their places.

It pleased her to no end that he was willing to kiss her with people to watch, awkward and mechanical as always, but an admission to all who saw that he did feel and he did love her, despite a lifetime of burying emotion beneath logic. It wasn't a cold logic, she knew; he was compassionate even at his most analytical, but it was not the warm emotion of a human.

She checked the communications displays, all normal, and turned her attention to Kirk.

“All right everybody,” he announced. “We are making our way to Tau Ceti IV, it's a class H planet with a large mining colony, and all communications with them were lost two days ago. It's probably just storm or something and they'll be back up in no time but we're going to check it out before it becomes a situation.”

He pressed a button, and the officers in the room went back to their tasks, assured that his next sentence was not for them. “Scotty, are were ready to go?”

Uhura relayed their departure to Earth, and within minutes they were at departing the solar system at full impulse. When they were far enough from any objects to switch to warp six for cruising and her services were no longer required, she stood and relieved herself from her post, abandoning her lover to his conversation with their captain to make her way to her own cabin. She intended to take the shower she'd missed that morning, but wished she'd bathed in real water before coming aboard for months of sonic showers and flannel washes.

“It's not that young a colony,” Jim mused, “It must be old enough to have secure communication links, what is it, 40 years old?”

“Fifty three,” Spock corrected his captain.

“Damn, that's even older than you.”

Spock bristled internally, and could tell that Jim knew it even though he carefully kept his face empty of emotion. “I am twenty nine. I am only three years older than you, Captain.” he reminded him. Jim only smiled.

“That would make you almost thirty by my count.” He said stubbornly.

“Twenty nine is almost thirty,” Spock replied, as though the human was unaware of this piece of
Jim chuckled, and continued with what he had been saying. “Yeah, well either way that's more than old enough to set up a system that a storm shouldn't damage. There are almost 7,000 people on that planet. I wonder what happened.”

“An ionic storm could perhaps block their signal,” he supposed. “But it would have to be a severe storm in order to prevent them from launching a shuttle to send a distress signal from above the atmosphere.”

“Well,” the captain said, “We've got another 11 days of this left, I'd rest up if I were you – I was thinking of sending you down as part of the landing party, I think you might be the only one who can stand the heat!”

Spock nodded, and stood up. “Then if you please, I would go and eat something.”

“Of course,” Jim said as he left, turning back to the display to watch the tiny points of light edge their past; smiling at the thought of his younger, naive self, imagining himself a captain sailing his great ship through the ocean of stars.
Controlled Communications

Chapter Notes

(In this the communicators are something more like a very advanced blutooth headset)

It had been three days since they left Earth, and Spock could not sleep. He lay awkwardly on his side along the edge of Nyota's bunk. Although it was uncomfortable, Spock knew that usually he was able to sleep in this position, but this night he conceded it was illogical to do so. Whilst he was asleep, the cramped arrangements did not disturb him, but as he lay awake watching the faint blue light of some control pad somewhere play off Nyota's skin, he was uncomfortable aware of his locked shoulders and the pressure on his right hip.

Before he got up, he ran his left hand down her nude side, splayed in a Vulcan salute, enjoying the soft feel of her skin, and the curve above her hip. It was not an movement he would naturally have performed, but he had once been vaguely aware of her doing the same for him when she awoke in the night, and had found the sensation pleasant. He covered her with the blanket for which he had been a replacement, and softly padded away, taking his shoes to put on outside the door so as not to wake her with his footsteps.

He loved her deeply, he thought as he slipped on his shoes in the hallway. Deeply, but with great restraint. Indeed, he loved her all the more that she accepted his stiff embraces and respected that the tiny gestures of human affection he showed were in fact immense to him. She did not expect from him the exhausting physicality that Jim and his girl friends exchanged. The thought of sleeping with multiple women whom he barely knew frightened him, although not enough to shake his calm.

He wondered as he wandered, what it must be like to be with Jim. He shook the thought off. The mechanics of such intercourse were known to him, but even the few times he had coupled with Uhura had been delicate and abstemious, even on her part. Nyota was gentle to him, and he doubted greatly whether he would have allowed himself to partake in such an act had she not guided him so lovingly through it. He did not need the same guidance the second time, but expressing his lust was most certainly not a second nature to him.

As he walked aimlessly through the hallways and down an emergency stair well whose alarm he deactivated automatically, his thoughts turned to her comforting him after the death of his mother. He had not known, then, how to express such a profound grief. The thought took his metaphorical hearth from his chest, swollen from thoughts of Nyota's love, and crushed it, dropping it like a stone into the pit of his belly.

It was 1296 days since the destruction of Vulcan and his mother's death. When he was very young, before the illogic of having a preferred number had been sternly impressed on his person, he had loved the number 1296. Six to the power of four. The number of rectangles on an 8 by 8 chess board. Later he had admmitted to her that he still held a preference for the number 1296. She had thought this as strange as his father did, but for very different reasons. She had not found his minor non-conformity shameful, though. She was perhaps the only one who, until the day of her death, had never made him feel so.
He did not cry as he emerged from the stair well and reactivated the alarm, although the low lighting would have hidden it if he had. Instead he ground his teeth imperceptibly, willing himself to lose the building emotion. His poor human mother had died, and there was no one to cry for her. His father admitted his love, but was too well disciplined to imagine doing such a thing. What had it been like for her, an emotional human surrounded by Vulcans, so cold that to a human they must have seemed cruel? What would it be like to know no one would cry for you upon your passing?

The idea of his mother being so isolated even after her death sparked emotions even he could not ignore.

Spock stopped dead in the darkened corridor, suddenly desperate for the tear to flow.

_Mother_, he whispered to himself. _I'm so sorry. I'm sorry no one mourned you._ He sank down against the wall and sobbed for a minute, breathing deep ragged breaths that hurt his chest and made his head dizzy, crying for her and not for him. He held a lungful of air in for quite some time, until the verging panic subsided, and wiped at his eyes and running nose. Control. He thought. I am in control of my emotions. Control felt like a fresh betrayal, but it would not do to be witnessed in his current state in a hallway.

Finally he managed to regain most of his composure, although he still felt sick with guilt. He walked again, and found himself on an upper deck in main engineering. Below him, the boy Chekov snored softly in a chair, dead to the world. Deciding the Ensign was unlikely to notice him, he settled down on the floor, his knees to his chest, and fiddled with his communicator. Taking off the back panel, he began to disassemble it, slowly, piece by piece, until all that remained was the magnet and the wires going into the in-ear phone itself, as though trying to remember the order to put them back in. He knew it by heart. _Break it down and build it up._ He said, too low for even his own ear to pick up.

_I am in control._ Break it down and build it up.

James Tiberius Kirk strolled the darkened hallways of his ship like a stalking animal, perhaps one of the now extinct big black cats that used to roam on Earth. He'd decided that tonight he did not need to sleep, but wanted instead to explore. Perhaps in the morning he would take them up to warp 8 for a while, clear a bit of new space. A few years ago, an hour at the observation deck had the power to satify that need, but now he longed to be on an alien planet's surface, observing its strange animals and the variety of people it might contain. For the moment he contented himself with strolling down the darkened passageways, consoled that they looked different with the dimmed lighting that was failing to tell his body clock it was night.

He walked with a surety rarely afforded to any man, or anyone of any other gender for that matter. His destiny was secure about him, his friends and loved ones safe, and he was heading to a new adventure.

Glancing through a window in one of the doors to his right, he caught sight of someone sat huddled on the opposite platform of the engineering deck. Not wanting to startle whoever it was, he walked around the passage on the outside until he reached that door. Peering through a nearby window, he realised it was Spock, immersed in some sort of detailed work with a now dismantled piece of equipment.

When the door slid open and Kirk stepped through it, Spock did not look up. For a moment Jim
simply stood there, watching his colleague apparently ignoring him.

There was an unusual puffiness around the half-Vulcan's eyes, and whilst his face betrayed no emotion, there seemed to be a resigned nature to the way he worked with the machine. Finally he had taken everything from the little ear piece that housed his communicator. Jim was about to make a comment about damaging equipment, but thought better of it when Spock still did not look up at him, instead picking the last component he had removed and slowly fitting it back in to the rounded box which house the main receiver.

Kirk slotted himself in next to his friend, somewhat squashed between Spock's shoulder and the wall, his back to the railings, and handed him the next piece. He took it without word, and connected it back to the first, engrossed in the delicate work.

Suddenly Spock heaved a huge sigh, and Jim realised that this was the best his companion could do to show emotion around him. He placed a hand behind Spock where there was a gap in the safety railings, and rubber his upper back awkwardly. Spock was not someone he knew how to calm down, but then the Vulcan was hardly not calm. He accepted the somewhat uncomfortable attempt at hugging him though, and kept intently at his work.

After another minute, Kirk handed the little back panel of the communicator to him, and he clicked it back into place with a juddering sigh that suggested he may indeed have been crying earlier.

Knowing he was meant to do something, but made awkward by association with the logical First Officer, Jim squeezed his back gently and allowed them to sit there another minute. Then he strained to push himself up and offer a hand to Spock, who took it and allowed himself to be pulled to his feet.

After they passed through the sliding door, blocking out Chekov's quiet snores, he looked at his companion. “Are you okay? Did something happen?”

There was a moment before Spock gave his measured reply. “I am quite alright. I could not sleep. And you Jim? You are up very late also.”

“Ah,” he smiled at him. “I'm fine, just checking up on... The ship.”

He knew Spock was lying about having been fine, but somehow he felt that Spock knew he was aware of his knowledge, and was surprised at how pleased he was that the Vulcan had allowed him to be of any comfort at all whilst he recovered from his unfortunate foray into emotion.

Spock had been slightly horrified when Jim came out onto the balcony with him. He had feared that the man would ask things of him, or be annoyed about his communicator, which was lying in parts about his person. But the silent offer of companionship had comforted him, and lifted the stone from his belly again.

Maybe Jim had not realised it, but when he handed him those few components, he had aided in Spock's own private metaphor for building himself back up again, and it felt good to be supported in a way that had been cut from his life 1296 days prior.

Something had confused him about the touch on his back, but he reassured himself that it was simply meant as a kind gesture, and allowed the lingering warmth of another person caring for him to take him off to bed; it was logical, after all, now that he was feeling better, that he should rest
before the days ahead.
Tau Ceti IV

Tau Ceti's sky swirled with red dust like a planet on fire. Spock's supposition had been correct; an ionic storm raged across much of the planet's northern hemisphere, choking it, and preventing any message being sent out or any shuttle being sent up.

Heat signatures showed that the surface temperature of the planet at latitudes further north than 30° were currently “only” around 50° C, but beneath the storm, at the equator, it was now 68°, far hot for any human crew member to attempt to traverse on foot.

As he'd imagined, Kirk had no choice but to beam down Spock and Lieutenant Hayves, a half Betazoid, half genetically manipulated human whom he could tell made Spock anxious, although he didn't show it. The problem was, that whilst he didn't need to show it for Jim, as a long time friend to know, he also did not need to show it for Hayves to know. Mercifully for Spock, she was not a telepath, only an empath by virtue of only being half Betazoid. Kirk had been somewhat afraid that his deeply private friend would actually refuse to go with a woman from a culture in which the entire concept or privacy was so alien that children had their weddings naked in front of family, and everyone knew exactly what each other thought at any given moment. However, he soon realised that he was a fool to expect prejudice from one who had faced so much of it for his own mixed heritage, and regretted the thought.

And so he was not surprised when Spock entered the transporter room looking more guarded than ever, as though a poker face would keep the Lieutenant's mental powers at bay, to stand on the pad of white light. Hayves was tall and plump with long frizzy hair and brown skin. She stepped up onto the pad next to the blank faced Vulcan and smiled at Kirk, taking a sip from a large bottle of water which she sensibly carried for the trek. It would take them six days to reach the site of the colony, if they could keep up the pace in such a heat, and Kirk hoped Spock was similarly prepared; of course he was.

He smiled back, and saw Spock's mouth twitch, although he did not think it was a sense of humor turning up the corners of the Vulcan's mouth.

Uhura walked in at that moment, to embrace him goodbye. Kirk could swear he saw Spock smelling her clothes. It took him a moment longer than he'd've liked for him to decide that their closeness didn't bother him.

Chekov flustered excitedly about the controls, pushing button and confidently ignoring the flashing red light which popped up when he set the coordinates.

“Im getting closer to zhe colony, Captain!” He exclaimed proudly, his thick accent making him sound even more earnest than he'd intended. “Machine says I cannot do it, but I can do it!”

Kirk wasn't over the moon at the prospect of relying on Chekov's estimates rather than the precise calculations of the computer, but he trusted the kid and let him have his way.

“Goodbye Hayves, Spock.” He said, and they were engulfed in a haze of spun gold and disappeared.

Uhura stood still in front of the console for a second after they were gone. Then she turned and said
aloud, “Sometimes I wish I could ask her what he was feeling,” and before Kirk could tell if she were saying it to him or to herself, she left.

“Don't we all?” Muttered McCoy, brushing past her on his way in.

Kirk did not reply. He was thinking of the night a week ago, when Spock had let him witness his struggle to control his emotions, and realised that he did not wish for Hayves insight; he knew all that he needed to know.

Kayla Hayves gasped when her lungs filled with the scalding air of Ceti IV. The humidity was mercifully low, but the air felt chokingly hot nonetheless. For a second she could feel the shock of the heat on the man beside her, but he quickly repressed it and she lost her ability to read his feelings again. She squinted against the high wind, thankful for its cooling effect, and looked up to the red sky above them. The dust was high and the air below clear, but it was so thick to the north of them that the day appeared to be black.

Commander Spock surprised her in how well he was able to shield her from his emotions, simply by refusing to feel them himself. In a moment before they had been beamed down, she picked up a hint of indignation, she supposed at herself for her ability to read his feelings. She wondered if perhaps he was able to feel her attempting to access them. Had she been raised anywhere but Betazoid she might have been embarrassed, but her lack of privacy had been so complete for most of her life that she was not bothered by the prospect of him knowing of her attempts.

She took a swig of the water, but felt as though it immediately leaked back out onto her skin as sweat. Spock look for all intents and purposes as dry and cool as he had on the ship.

“We are on the planet surface now, Jim,” he was forced to shout into the communicator over the whistle of the storm.

“That's good, Mister Spock,” the Captain replied. “You should have contact with us for at least the next few hours, but Chekov managed to get you closer than we thought we'd be able to – it's a three and a half day walk from here. I advise you try and get that half a day done this afternoon before sun down.”

“Very well, Jim. We will begin now.”

“Alright. I want you to find a way to communicate with us as soon as you get there, you copy? Even if you have to walk all the way back, I wanna know everything's okay. Kirk out.”

After a moment he turned to her expectantly. “Shall we?” he asked, gesturing at the direction in which they were meant to go.

“Of course,” she replied, and they began the long journey north.

The heat was painful, even to Spock. His body increased blood flow and rushed to cool itself, but he could not help but let an invisible shudder at the shear surprise of it go through him. He was sure it was not lost on Lieutenant Hayves, but there was little to be done about it after the fact.
Now four hours later, and he could see her body was drenched in sweat. He believed that he himself had risen in temperature to perhaps thirty three point five degrees. However, in the time that they'd been moving the temperature had dropped somewhat.

His communicator bleeped, in perfect working order in spite of its recent reassembly.

“Spock do you copy?” It was Jim's voice.

“Jim?” he said simply.

“Alright, we reckon we're gonna lose you pretty soon, so let's stick to the plan. There are some unusual readings coming from the north, but we can't tell if it's just distortion from the storm. You find a way to tell us if it turns out to be something. If in four days time we haven't heard from you, we'll send a search party out, okay?”

Looking for confirmation from Hayves, he responded, “Understood. We will be making camp soon, so it may be possible for us to stay in contact until tomorrow morning. If so I will attempt to talk to you before we set off tomorrow, but I would not worry if we are unable to do so. Is this acceptable?”

“Sounds fine. Good luck Spock, Uhura sends her love,” Jim's voice replied, earnestly.

“Thank you Jim. Spock out.” he responded, smiling internally.

When he turned to face Hayves he saw her watching him, and knew that she had felt his affection for both Jim and Nyota.

“We carry on,” he told her. “We shall make camp a mile north of here.” And trudged on past her without another word.
Camping Out

The On the third morning, Hayves awoke groggily and stumbled out of her one person tent. She felt nothing, as per usual, from the Vulcan in his own. She knew that he needed less sleep than she. Presumably he made sure to be awake before she rose to ensure that she was unable to intrude on any emotions he may feel whilst dreaming – although she imagined, privately, that he lacked the imagination to have a dream self very much different from his waking demeanor, if he did dream, and when he did he probably kept himself as devoid of feeling as when he was awake. He wasn't bad, she knew; when she did feel emotion from him, it was affection for someone else, or a feeling of resentment toward her, but no animosity whatsoever. Still, she was getting tired of him. They had not been able to contact the Enterprise the next morning, and his company, whilst intended to be quiet and companionable, was strained by the immense effort he was investing in crushing his emotions. *If only he had not had to sacrifice decent conversation for the cause.*

Without shame or any nervousness, she undressed outside the tent from the light sleeping gown she'd worn to bed, grateful that the sun for the past two days had been obscured by the thick storm above. It had cooled significantly and was now around 54 degrees, back within what she considered comfortable with the aid of course of her mother's altered genetic make up.

She took a pre-dampened wash cloth from a water-proof pouch just inside her tent door and began to wash herself, cleansing off the sweat of the night. It was a poor attempt; the damp spongy cloth had already been used the previous two mornings, and it was mostly smearing the sweat and grime more evenly across her body, but it cooled her a little and she was pleased she'd brought it.

When she had dressed again in her uniform, which was a little stiff from her dried sweat and definitely chafing at her arm pits, she looked about.

It was unlike Spock to have not got up by this point, although she knew, from a brief grip of shock on the first morning, that he was not comfortable to find her naked, and had perhaps wisened to her routine.

When after five minutes he did not emerge from his tent, she went and shook it from the outside.

“Commander?” She shouted at it. The tent wasn't amending its empty status.

Almost ripping off the closures to open it, she found it empty. Spock's bag and supplies were still inside.

“Shit,” she said to the tent. “SHIT! Where are you Commander?”

It did not reply. It was a tent.

“Spock!” she called. “Commander Spock!” Desperately she fumbled for her communication device and called into it, only to hear her voice echoed by Spock's communicator from within the tent.

She circled the area of their camp, wishing they'd camped on the softer sand fifty meters to the east. At least then he would have left foot prints.

Becoming paranoid, she grabbed for her phaser, but no target materialised. She aimed at the tent instead, furious at its lack of useful information. In the end she didn't fire, expecting that Spock might need it when he cared to turn up again. She sat inside her own tent, until the heat of the day brought it to a sweltering temperature that even she could not bear. For a moment she thought perhaps he had caught heat stroke and wandered off to die, but then remembered that it had been
only 48° in the night, and that as a part Vulcan he was designed to be more suited to the heat.

Packing up her tent she pondered what she could do. In her back pack was a single rocket, pre-programmable with a single message to be fired above the cloud. She could use it, and then take Spock’s with her to the colony. *But,* she thought, *what if he returns and needs it?* Sighing, she realised that she would have to continue on without him. She could reach the colony and then combine her message of his absence with her findings when she arrived. If Spock returned, he would surely head north after her, and contact her with his communicator.

Miserably she began to trudge northwards towards the colony she could see glinting dully through the smog, far in the distance.
Uhura sat at her post, attempting to contact the colony for the Nth time. Spock and Hayves had not responded since Kirk's last message, and despite it being only three days, and doubtful that they had even reached the colony yet, she felt a rising anxiety in her gut.

Kirk, on the other hand seemed somewhat immune to this. He was in the rec room lounge area beating Scotty at 3D chess a third time that day, leaving McCoy to sit in his seat and do what little needed to be done in orbit, which it turned out was mostly conversing with her.

“So, how did you two, you know, get together?” He asked her with feigned disinterest. The real question, of course, was how on Earth, or indeed anywhere else in the galaxy, did someone enter into a relationship with one such as Spock.

“I was his student. I asked him on a date, and he accepted.” She said simply. She had been so horrified when the words came out of her mouth that she almost failed to understand when he had responded that it would be “most pleasant” to do so. Still, even she had not expected his attempts to assign her to a different ship after his own appointment to the Enterprise. She was lucky, she supposed, that he had allowed her to persuade him otherwise.

“So, did he already have a crush on you, or..?” McCoy let the question hang casually, although he looked at the controls in front of him intently, as though they actually required any of his attention.

“I don't know,” she replied. “I think he likes me now, but I was never really sure of the start point.”

“Of course he likes you now,” McCoy forgot not to let his curiosity show. “I'd say he loved you, even if it’s hard to believe he’s capable of such a thing. Good luck getting him into bed!”

Uhura said nothing; it occurred to her that to the rest of the crew members, he was about as sexual now as he'd ever been - not at all - and that it might actually be beyond them to imagine him in bed with anyone. She realised that she had once thought like that, too.

Apparently she'd left that silence too long, and McCoy turned to her with an eyebrow raised almost above his hair line. She pretended not to notice, secretly satisfied at her hardly subtle advertisement of their sexuality, in a way which would have horrified Spock were he there.

Unfortunately for Spock, he was not there.

He awoke somewhat confused and dazed from an uncomfortable sleep in a place cool and so dark that it took even his eyes a minute to adjust. He pushed himself into a sitting position, his hand slipping in something wet and almost causing him to fall. He was dizzy, disoriented, and his arm felt hot and inflamed.
When his eyes finally focused, he looked down at the arm to find it wounded and festering. Flesh had been torn from it and it his uniform was ripped crudely open mid-way up his forearm. There looked as if there were tooth marks in the skin. He bit back panic for a few seconds, thankful that the green coppery blood had become sticky and clotted, and he was in no danger of dying from blood loss.

There was little more he could do in this darkness, he decided, and forced himself to stand, ignoring the aching joints and nausea which threatened to topple him. He could not recall acquiring the injury, or coming to this place.

The cave was lit only by a glowing substance on one wall, probably a simple life form, and it seemed that Spock was contained within one long winding passage. It would be logical for him to find his way outside; lieutenant Hayves would be anxious about him now. He reached for his communicator. It was not there. Nothing to be done for it then, but to seek out the exit and hope that he was not too far behind her.

After three hours of going down passage way after passage way, the cave had not opened out, and Spock began to panic. It was irrational, he knew, but the emotion came unbidden from nowhere. He was furious at being stuck within the cave, desperate for the outside world. Pummeling his fists against the cave wall did nothing.

He yelled, a wordless cry of frustration, kicking a delicate crystal formation growing up from the floor of the cave. It shattered into tiny grains of salt. Why was he so angry? He stormed off in yet another random direction, trying to find a passage that led up, or perhaps to an underground river that must surely have created it.

Walking down yet another stone corridor, he caught a glimpse of his own arm in the eerie glow of the slime on the walls, and noticed that a few inches above his wound was a small lump in his arm. His hands shaking with fury, he pulled at the fabric of his shirt and ripped it open to just above the protrusion. There in his arm, a vein was swollen, as though plugged with something. When he put a finger out to touch the lump, immense pain engulfed the entire limb.

He hissed and grit his teeth against it, using the rock for support, but then felt himself flood with relaxation, and sank down the wall. He smiled at the lump in his arm. It wasn't so bad, after all...
Midday arrived and Hayves pushed on towards the colony, eating her rations of protein nibs as she moved. It was getting darker as she neared the colony, and now she was just 6 miles away. The storm seemed, if anything, to have worsened; her visibility of the huge compound which housed 6,600 of the 6,700 people on the planet was now barely in her range of vision. Buffeted by the wind, she found sand and dust getting into her eyes, but did not stop to rinse them. Behind her she heard a noise, like an animal’s cry. *It's the wind*, she told herself. *It's the wind. Keep on going.*

So she did, blinking away the sand and trying to ignore the little red dots in the corner of one eye. The particles in the air burned her skin slightly, but like her vision, McCoy would be able to fix that when she got back to the ship.

For now she continued, reigning in her fears, determined to make it to the colony.

Jim glanced over at Uhura, observing her anxious pacing. “He'll be fine,” he wanted to tell her. Last night he would have done so, but this afternoon he was beginning to worry as well. The massive storm covered 31% of the northern hemisphere of Tau Ceti IV; an area greater than that of the continent on which he was born. The meteorologists down in their lab had assured him that no such events had occurred in the planet's atmosphere in the last 73 years, when records began to be kept on its weather conditions. In fact, the ions in the storm were mostly heavier elements, not known to be stored in any great quantities within the planet's lithosphere.

For all intents and purposes, someone had introduced 4,000 tons of various positive ions, which were scrambling the electrics of any device within it, and the signals of anything trying to transmit through it. It was sabotage.

It was getting to the point where he was beginning to worry that the planet had been quietly invaded.

He regretted sending down only two officers, and secretly he regretted that one of them was Spock. Kirk hated to lose any of his crew, but the idea of losing Spock was something else.

Where would he be, he thought, without the Vulcan to keep him in shape? And would he even want to be there? He shuddered involuntarily. Losing Spock was not an option.

“Bones,” he said, turning to McCoy. “How long can someone survive in that cloud?”

“What, before they disintegrate away? Minutes. The acid will melt you.” He concluded. “But the cloud is high up for such a fierce storm. Someone on the ground I'd say a week before you were incapacitated, maybe two before you were dead.”

He looked worriedly at Kirk. “We won't let it come to that, Bones.” He said. But he could feel sweat beading on the back of his neck which was not due to climate control.
For no apparent reason, Uhura felt irritable. Perhaps it was her anxiety about Spock, but she was used to both of them being separated on dangerous missions. There was no reason why this should not be the case now.

She felt that she would know if he had died, but was suddenly horrified that the thought had even sprung to her mind. She had done thirty, forty, fifty more dangerous things with him, and the thought only occurred to her when she could see him in genuine danger. Standing on the brink of death was something he accepted with a calm that made him vulnerable, as she'd decided the moment he had stood in that volcano and waited for his own bomb to freeze him to death.

This time it was different. She was simply angry with everyone in the room. How dare they have allowed him and Hayves, a communications lieutenant to go there alone? What were they thinking? Sending two barely armed officers quite literally into the eye of an artificial storm?

She prowled the main deck, suddenly desperate to be outside, with her lover. But she brought herself back to her seat and sat down. She had to be there to accept any attempts to communicate with the ship, after all.

Hayves felt sick with the heat. The humidity rose with each step she took towards the dully shining colony just half a mile ahead of her. Her hair clung to her skin. The storm above was so thick that it seemed like dusk, and the noise of it blocked out the sounds around her, making her jumpy.

She was certain she was feeling ghostly emotions coming in from all around her. Anger, misery, guilt. Hunger. Her skin crawled, and she hurried on, terrified that she was being followed.

Somewhere up ahead of her a pair of red dots glinted like cats eyes before vanishing. She swore she'd seen the same thing fifty paces behind her.

Terror gripped her gut as she spotted another pair, and another, and she stopped for a second and retched with the heat and fear, emptying the lunch rations from her stomach. Tears she'd have liked to attribute to the vomiting rinsed her eyes and she scrambled forwards, her jellied limbs carrying her quickly and jerkily.

She fumbled with her communicator as she ran, although it took several attempts to press the button.

"Ceti IV colony one, do you copy?" she begged it. There was no response and she sobbed aloud. Desperately she made a second attempt, and then changed the frequency. "Spock? Commander Spock! Please, copy me!"

He did not answer her, just as he had not for the entire morning. Where was his calm now, when she really needed it?

She wheeled around. Pairs of red dots were all around her now, glinting, getting closer. She thought she heard footsteps, and another of those desperate cries in the distance.

She was not going to leave this retched planet, she realised. She grabbed blindly for her back pack and pulled out the rocket, before recording her final message and shooting it up through the storm.

Tears flowed down her face, as a man emerged from the dust to her left. His eyes glowed red and his face was set into a mask of pure rage.

"No!" She screamed, backing away, stumbling on the uneven ground. "Get away from me!"
He may have heard her, but he did not listen.
Space Jump

Uhura had become no less agitated over the course of the day. Scotty's accent grated against her as he explained some plan of lowering an electromagnet into the storm to attract the ions in it. It did not feel to her to be one of his most successful plans, and she was glad when he left.

She looked over at Kirk to find him looking back at her. He gave her a strained smile and stood stiffly, walking slowly to her console.

“Are you okay?” He asked.

“Fine.” She lied, curtly. How the hell was she going to be fine?

“Don't lie to me.” He replied, looking away from her at the main display screen, and then away again as the swirling clouds over the planet reminded him of the situation. “Look, he's never gotten into a situation we've not been able to get him out of, right? They've still got half a day to send a signal, they're probably fine.”

But we're not there to get him out of it. She thought. Irritated she turned away, pressing unnecessary buttons and rechecking all frequencies as though it were possible that something could have malfunctioned in the five minutes since she’d last checked.

Suddenly her monitor buzzed at her. Incoming. It had to be Spock.

“Incoming message, Captain,” she switched the broadcast from her ear piece to the bridge speakers.

“Junior grade lieutenant Hayves to Enterprise,” Uhura cursed her colleague's voice, and then cursed the panic in it. Where was Spock? There was a lengthy pause, filled only by ragged breathing. “I, I-, that is, Commander Spock, I haven't seen him since last night, I'm being followed. I'm not gonna make it to the colony,” there was a sob. Uhura sat, rigid with shock. “There's something down here. I don't know what's happened, it's not just a storm... Tell my family I love them.”

“End Broadcast.” Announced the console.

Kirk's throat felt like it contained a baseball. He stood like a fool looking at the computer in front of Uhura, not knowing what to do.

“McCoy,” his voice grated in confusion. The doctor appeared next to him, fear evident on his face. Forcing himself to remain calm, he gave the orders. “You and four security officers will join me in a shuttle. I want you to ready any acid proof suits we have and I want you to be down there with your med kit in ten minutes, sharp.”

Uhura wheeled on him. “I'm coming with you.” She stood up.

“No,” he told her. “You'll stay here, you're taking the conn whilst I'm gone.”

“I am not leaving him down there.” She hissed at him.
Well neither am I!” He resisted the urge to force her back to her seat. “You are staying on this ship Lieutenant, because I need someone up here who knows what they’re doing, and I can't afford to lose the chief communications officer with Spock down there trying to communicate with us! You stay here, that's an order.”

He turned to Bones for assurance, but the doctor was already gone.
All eyes in the room were turned to him and Uhura. She said nothing, and so he took his cue to leave.

McCoy felt as though he was about to faint. The acid suit was warm in and of itself, and his sweat fogged the visor. He hated flying, and here he was, about to be catapulted through a cloud of volatile and poisonous acid and then allowed to fall for 14 kilometres, to land on a hostile planet. His parachute might fail, his acid suit might have a weakness somewhere, or simply be overwhelmed by the density and low pH of the acid in the air. He might have a heart attack and die.

Kirk punched his arm in a way that he was sure was intended to be comforting, but served as little more than acknowledgement of his fear.

“Are you sure this is safe?” He asked.
Kirk gave him a quizzical look. “You're the doctor not me. I was hoping you'd be pretty sure of that yourself.”

McCoy’s stomach lurched as they stood to grab hold of the bars, and then again as the gravity of the ship changed so that his back was against the ceiling. As the door opened, and he saw Jim and the other officers being sucked out into the stratosphere, he almost forgot to let go.

Kirk's parachute retracted into its burned pouch. Despite his worry, falling through empty air like that was still exhilarating. He removed his helmet and looked about him. The sky was dark and the air choked with dust, visibility about 100 metres. 20 metres away, McCoy removed his own helmet, and bent double, spitting out a held in mouthful of sick.

Jim sighed and walked over to his friend, the security officers following him obediently. It was hot, and his limbs felt heavy with the greater gravity.

When he arrived it fell to him to decide how to split up the search party. Bones looked in bad shape, but still he was more valuable than the other officers. He should go to search out Spock further south, and Kirk should lead the other two officers to the colony to find out what was going on.

But he didn't feel like dividing it up that way.

He turned to the officers. “Lieutenant Arros,” the Bajoran looked at him. “Lead these men to the colony. Set your phasers to stun, and find out what they hell is going on around here. Try and find Hayves if you can. Stay in contact as much as possible. I'm going back the planned camp for last night with Bones; we will try to find Spock and meet you up at the Colony ASAP. Got that?” He nodded.
“Come on,” he said to McCoy, turning him round to face the south. “I trust you didn't shit yourself as well as throwing up?” He joked.

McCoy glared at him, wiping his mouth on a sleeve. “I'm fine,” he said, pulling the sweltering acid suit off and dumping it on the ground. “Let's go.”

Spock knew by now that he was delirious, and most definitely lost. He needed so desperately to be outside, to find Hayves, get back to the ship, and almost a full day of searching for a way out of the cave had left him exhausted and no nearer to finding the exit.

He stopped in a particularly well-slimed area to examine his arm. The wound had scabbed over, although it was still tender and clearly infected. He had no water to wash it with. The odd lump had travelled further up his arm, almost to his shoulder, leaving a trail of bruised blood vessels behind it.

It was highly illogical for him to be so delighted in its presence. Several times he had been certain that he was going to remove it, regardless of the pain, but each time he came to do it, a feeling of tenderness flooded him. It seemed fatter now, feeding off his nutrients. Other people should know about it. They'd want one too if they knew what it was like. He needed to show them so badly that his chest ached, and he scrabbled at the walls of the cave, tears running down his cheeks.

“Get me out of here!” he cried at the lifeless rock. “Please, get me out.”
Spock stroked the lump in his shoulder. A split second of pain gave way to pure bliss. In moments of lucidity, he was aware that he was being drugged by the creature, but those were now few and far between. The cave seemed unending, and every corner he had rounded teased him with the glow of evening light, which unfailingly emerged to be the odd slime clinging to the wall.

Now he sat, somewhat resigned, on the damp floor of the cave, although it was with conscious effort that he did not renew attempts to escape the caverns. Better to let the others find him. He knew they would be scared of the creature, but once they were infected, once they were blessed with it, they would understand.

It was fatter now, and stood out as purple against the green bruises that bloomed along its path.

This is ridiculous, he told himself. I’ll not be driven to worship some parasite. But the creature continued to make its way upwards, toward his neck, and there was nothing he could do to stop it.

Kirk snatched McCoy’s flask away, short tempered with the heat. “You know, for a doctor you sure as hell take care of your liver.”

Bones looked at him with only mild concern before reaching out and taking it back. Jim was sure he took the extra swallow for his benefit. “Nonsense.” He replied. “I’m just a little more realistic about the time span I’m gonna need it for than you seem to be. In twenty, thirty years I’ll die on that ship, and I won’t need a liver. Last thing I want is to go down without alcoholism as well.”

“Oh yeah well, if you wanna drink yourself into oblivion, be my guest, but at least have the decency not to drink Spock into it as well.” Jim responded. Spock had not answered any of his attempts to communicate with him so far, and the slow pace of the search under the rising heat made him worry even more. He tried his communicator a fourth time that morning, only to get the same reply.

“We’re all worried about him Jim.” McCoy said. He felt that there was much left that needed to be said afterwards, but he wasn’t sure what it was or where to begin, so he didn’t and they simply picked their way across the rugged landscape in silence.

Kirk allowed himself to become so involved with his own thoughts that when a noise sounded through his communicator he jumped, as though someone had just spoken in his ear.

“Lieutenant Arros to Captain Kirk do you copy?” The sound was crackly, no doubt due to interference from the storm.

“Copy Lieutenant,” he said, looking at Bones as though he had been the source of his surprise.

“We’ve reached colony one. Not a person in sight! We’ve not seen anything that could’ve got Hayves or Spock, but it might be that they’re staying away from such a large group. Found anything?”

“No. And remember, Spock might not have been “got” at all.” He said, largely for his own benefit. “Head towards the second colony. Have you managed to get in contact?”
“Negative Captain. Will let you know the second anything turns up.”

“Alright,” he sighed. “Kirk out.”

Bones was slightly ahead of him now, and the distance between them made Jim more conscious of the possibility of being attacked. He hurried to keep up in the choking warmth of the afternoon.

“Jim, look!” McCoy was pointing ahead. “This must be where they made camp last night.”

Spock’s tent was still there, roughed by the wind but with its electronic tent pegs keeping it in the ground. Kirk caught up and opened the covering flaps, bending to look inside. All of Spock’s equipment was still within, his sleeping mat unrolled and apparently slept on, and his communicator lay at the furthest end, the ear piece twisted from the receiver as though pulled out at an angle.

He took a moment to banish the shake from his voice before turning to address McCoy. “It’ll shock you to know that he isn’t here. Doesn’t look like there was much of a struggle, but I wouldn’t rule one out. Maybe he went for a walk or something.”

While Bones was relaying their discovery to Arros, Kirk simply sat in the entrance of the tent. He went through its contents – food rations, water, Spock’s hand phaser, a spare uniform. Even his shoes were still inside. There was nothing sentimental, nothing to suggest it was Spock who’d been in there, except for his smell. He inhaled deeply as McCoy turned back to him.

“What are you alright? Are you crying?” McCoy said to his back.

“No I am not.” He glared at his friend, mostly to prove that his eyes were clear. “I was just.. Clearing my lungs.”

McCoy turned back to the landscape. “Sure.”

They had continued on for another hour, when Bones noticed something that looked like a raindrop dashed on the rock beneath his feet. The rock was green where it was wet. He looked up for the origins as Jim bent to inspect the drop itself, but saw no rain clouds.

“ Weird. From the reports they don’t get hardly any surface water here, no rainfall in decades.”

“It’s not rain.” Kirk looked up at him. He tried to smudge the edge of the droplet, but it had dried hard to the rock beneath it. “It’s blood, Spock’s blood.”

Either side of them the drops continued, more frequent on their right until they began with a spatter, and to their left they became evenly spaced about a metre or so apart until they disappeared into a crag in the bedrock, smudged here and there by Spock’s own bare feet.

They raced to it, expecting Spock to be trapped within it, but when they finally reached the entrance to the caves, he was nowhere in sight.

Forgetting to contact the other team, they each hastily lowered themselves into the hole in the planet and plunged into the darkness of the caves.
Inside it was cool, and so black that McCoy felt as though he were suspended in interstellar space. He clicked a torch out of his medical kit and examined the floor of the cave. A large patch, perhaps the equivalent of an entire unit of the Vulcan’s blood had dried on the ground, with several handprints around it. He began to worry that his friend had died of the injury and been carried off by some large animal, but decided that the handprints were Spock getting up. His eyes began to adjust to the inky dark, and he saw a faint skin of luminosity covering the walls ahead.

“It was night when Spock got here, then he probably wouldn’t have realised he needed to go up to get out. I reckon even he’d have been out cold for a while,” He said aloud. “If he was wounded badly enough then he probably hasn’t even noticed the bruises from the fall.”

The cave ran away in two directions, but a single droplet of blood indicated that Spock had gone to the right, and the followed the path until it branched again. Unwilling to split up, they picked the right path a second time.

Spock was on his feet again. He passed through the same passages a second, third time, trying to make his way back to where he had started. His vision was shifting and the colours seemed a little odd, as though he was looking through rose tinted glasses. He was not entirely certain of his own movements, and fell repeatedly to his hands and knees as he went. He was sure he’d been here before.

Perpetually lost, he scratched again at the walls and punched the low ceiling of the chamber, grunting at the bruised knuckles it gave him in return. The sound echoed, and as it bounced back a second time, Spock let out a shriek of despair. He was never going to get out of here. Jim and Uhura and everyone else he cared about would never hear of his discovery. He would die alone in the ground. Uhura would mourn, and his captain would grieve briefly and then continue on without him, never knowing how much Spock cared for him. How much Spock would give to him if he had the chance.

Finally his legs gave out completely, and he knelt upright where he fell, waiting for death to claim him.

The only thing keeping Kirk going was the fact that they had yet to find a body. He stopped them at yet another intersection for a break. Three hours in the caves, and they had been back on themselves twice but were still finding new passages. Without a phaser to blast off the ceiling, Spock would die in here if he hadn’t already.

Just as he felt tears beginning to burn his eyes, McCoy motioned to him. “Jim, there’s some strange marks on these walls.”

In one of the passages, the mould on the wall had been scratched away, as though someone were trying to escape through it. It seemed too illogical to be Spock, but then Jim had to remind himself that the half-Vulcan was wounded. Still, something about the animal nature of it made the hair stand up on the back of his neck.

They carried on down the tunnel, until he stopped McCoy by grabbing his shoulder. Up ahead a
Spock was barely conscious when his prayers were answered. He heard the footsteps before he saw them, but he knew that one pair was his captain. His captain. He heard his name gasped in horror as Kirk reached him, supporting him with his strong arms.

“Spock! Spock are you okay?”

He did not reply with words, only leant forwards slightly, and with his parched lips took his captain for his own.
“What the hell?!” Kirk jumped back, reflexively slapping Spock hard across the face before he could stop himself. The first officer’s head snapped around and he lost his balance, crumpling to the floor in confusion. Kirk himself stepped backwards, feeling betrayed. “He fucking bit me!”

Spock was clearly out of his mind. His face was blank except for the beginnings of a bruise on one cheek, and tears ran down it onto the ground. He appeared to be mumbling something.

McCoy grabbed Jim by the arm, pushing him aside and taking out his scanner to pass it over the Vulcan, who convulsed slightly in pain as his shoulder hit the floor, before relaxing as though it were his own bed. His arm was wounded and infected, likely completely incapacitated. Bones was more concerned by the trail of green passing up his arm and over his shoulder, like a poisonous trail, and even more so by the pink glint the scanner illuminated when he shone its light into Spock’s unfocussed eyes. “You just hit my patient, now please stay back, Jim.”

“He bit me.” The human repeated blankly, torn somewhat between outrage and concern for his friend, and he had to admit, no small amount of guilt for the shadow of green blooming on his cheek.

Bones ignored him. “There’s something in his neck!” The scanner blinked unhappily and projected an image onto Spock’s throat. Within his equivalent of the internal jugular vein was a parasite the size of a ten-year-old’s thumb, its segments ringed by tiny undulating legs. Spock attempted to look up at him, but McCoy pushed his bruised face gently but firmly back down, exposing a small lump that indicated the presence of the parasite now lodged deep within his circulatory system. It had to act as a hollow tube, or else Spock would have lost oxygen to his brain by now.

He couldn’t risk the lazer scalpel; many parasites were known to release toxins when burned, and he wasn’t going to risk it for an unknown creepy crawly.

McCoy turned away to his medical pack and withdrew a lancet, donning sterile gloves before unwrapping it. The noise roused Spock’s attention again, who looked at him with terror when he turned caught sight of the blade.

“No!” He rasped, throat dry. “You don’t understand! Do not take it out! It is a gift! Do not! Please!”

“A gift?” He asked, sceptically. “I’m not gonna perform surgery on you without anaesthetic, I’m just going to poke it with the blunt end.” When this did not seem to comfort Spock, Leo straddled his chest, pinning his body and working arm to the floor, and signalled to Jim, who went to hold the commander’s head down, stroking his friend’s hair in an attempt to calm him.

He poked the lump with the blunt end of the scalpel as he had promised, and Spock writhed beneath him in agony, a cry rising from deep in his belly. The scanner readings showed that the pain was caused by hypersensitivity around the parasite, but that immediately afterwards there had been a huge injection of oxytocin and opiates into his bloodstream. No wonder Spock seemed to want to keep his “gift”.

Deciding that the creature would not kill the patient if removed, he reached back for a sterilising swab and forceps, and taking a preloaded hypo of local anaesthetic. He could put Spock under, but was concerned that once he’d done so the Vulcan might not wake up. Fortunately Spock’s lower blood pressure made it possible to open and repair a major vein such as this in the field, and if this
had been Jim in the same position, he would not have dared remove it. He nodded at Jim. “It’ll be
easier on him if we do it now. It looks like he’s becoming addicted to it. Keep him steady.”

Kirk nodded back, tightening his grip on Spock’s scalp.

When he felt the cool of the swab against his neck, Spock shrieked, twisting his working fingers
into the back of McCoy’s uniform, clawing him through it. He looked pleadingly at his captain,
whose hands were kept well out of biting range, but held him as tenderly as possible whilst still
immobilising his head. “No!” he sobbed. “Please, I cannot live without it, Jim, don’t let him take it
out! You would understand if you had one, just wait! Please.”

But his captain said nothing, and Spock screamed as the hypo for the anaesthetic hissed against his
throat.

McCoy’s hands shook slightly as he cut through the skin and muscle protecting the inflamed blood
vessel. Spock’s protests had faded to weak sobs and pleas after the anaesthetic dulled the pain,
although he still scraped at the skin of the doctor’s back. Blood leaked out of the wound, coppery
and green, as he pulled gently with his forceps on the intact jugular, trying to judge where the
creature’s head began. When he found it, he clamped above and below, and slit open the vein
lengthways. As it split, a blue-purple segmented worm pulsed threateningly. It collapsed beneath
the pressure of the forceps as he pulled it out, more blood leaking from within it than had come
from the incision itself.

He placed the specimen in a jar, and hastily used the scanner’s autosuture setting to seal the edges
of the sliced vein together, careful to exclude any air, before removing the clamps to restore
circulation to Spock’s brain. He was pleased with himself; although his eyes had rolled back into
his head, Spock’s brain had starved of oxygen for less than 60 seconds. His friend would be fine.

He disinfected the wound again, and sealed it shut. His gloves felt wet with blood, and he slipped
them off, discarding them carelessly.

After he had donned a clean pair of gloves to dress Jim’s bitten neck, he injected Spock with a drug
he hoped would stop any eggs hatching, and decided it would be wise to do the same to Jim. He
had not found any parasite or eggs in his wound, but he wasn’t willing to chance a surgery like that
on a human.

Kirk sat with his back against McCoy’s, exhausted. Spock slept with his head on Jim’s stomach
and shoulders in his lap, his face serene but tracked with dried tears in its layer of grime. Despite
the situation, Jim enjoyed the closeness between the three of them, particularly with Spock. The
Vulcan was rarely tolerant of any sort of physical affection, especially when it was not for the
benefit of Uhura, but Kirk liked to think it reassured his friend on some level.

He tried to imagine what Spock would do were he in pain, and was reminded of the simple salute
Spock had given him through the glass as he lay dying of radiation. Drowsy with medication, he rested his hand on Spock’s chest, revelling secretly in the smoothness of the skin beneath the uniform as he spread his fingers.

Spock awoke slowly. He opened his eyes and did not know where he was. A knee dug into his back and as he tried to right himself from the painful position, he found a resistance on his chest. A hand he recognised pressed the Ta'al into the centre, a few inches from his heart. He lay back and let it rest there a moment longer, his head rising and falling as Jim breathed.

He took a quick stock of the situation: He was in the dark, a stone cell or a cave of some sort; his arm was injured and bandaged, clearly McCoy’s work; from the sounds of the breathing behind him, he was alone with Jim and McCoy - and he felt terrible.

Having established these facts, he collected himself and stood up with a start, disturbed by the unexplained intimacy and needing to gain some distance between him and what he now recognised as a very human act of affection.

Without his Spock’s weight against Jim, McCoy’s weight forced the captain’s face toward his own knees. He swore beneath his breath at the rude awakening and struggled to extricate himself from the awkward position. He looked about for the absent Spock, still feeling the memory of the pressure from his head against his belly, and found the commander standing as if to attention several metres away.

“Captain,” he said evenly, belying the nausea that resulted from several doses of various medications.

“Spock,” he groaned, blinking at him in the dark. “What business do you have looking so well after all this?”

Spock missed the good-natured intent of the question and set his face in its usual unreadable expression. “Business, sir?” He asked, confused by the question.

“What? –Never mind.” Kirk shoved McCoy’s arm out of his way and stood up, clumsily.

“Might I ask our location and how we got here, Captain? I seem to be suffering some sort of amnesia, or else I was taken from my bed.”

Kirk blinked at his friend, debating where to begin.

“My most recent memory is of our departure from Earth.” Spock prompted him.

Jim’s heart sank a little. He did not remember the moment they shared in the engineering room. He sighed and explained the events between their arrival in orbit and coming across Spock in the cave.

“--And then you bit me.” He said, sounding more resentful than he’d meant to.

“Bit you?” Spock said, confused. “Please clarify?”
“You were crazy. We had to hold you down and cut out some parasite from your neck.” He explained. He hesitated for a moment and then, to his own shame, revelled in revealing Spock’s compromised state to the eternally composed Vulcan. “You were crying and screaming. You begged us not to take it out; you practically shredded McCoy’s back trying to get him off of you.”

Spock looked down, somewhat disturbed by the information. He was thankful that such a loss of reason had been witnessed only by the doctor and his captain, but he was still deeply embarrassed that it had taken place at all.

“I do apologise. I had not meant to harm you.” He said, before the pause grew too long.

He had already done too human a thing today; he had told a lie. He remembered the entirety of their journey to the planet, and of his first day’s trek heading north into the storm with a young lieutenant. But after awaking in such a position of intimacy with the captain he had faltered, and decided that he would acknowledge neither that particular sleeping arrangement, nor the previous close experiences they had shared. After his tears in front of Jim as he lay dying in the engine chamber, any show of sentimentality was too much to risk. He wanted desperately to meditate.

He reached up to stroke the small scar on his neck. It was tender, but did not hurt. Careful not to display any emotion, he sidestepped his captain and knelt next to the sleeping doctor. “Well, it seems we had best wake McCoy and get out of this place. The others will be concerned for our wellbeing.”
McCoy had still been slightly tipsy when Spock’s alien strength had hauled him to his feet with a bruising grip on his shoulder. The look he received as the Vulcan picked up the alcohol on his breath sobered him up, however.

“What, can’t a guy have a drink in his down time, Spock?” He asked, knowing already what the response would be.

“Feel free, doctor, to spend the entirety of your.. “down time,” as you call it, as inebriated as you wish. You are on duty, therefore it is against regulation that you consume anything—“

McCoy startled him out of his prepared speech with a phaser blast to the roof of the cave at its lowest point.

“Jesus Bones!” Kirk jumped.

“What are you doing?” Spock demanded, looking from Bones to the blasted rock to his commanding officer.

“Getting us out of here.” He aimed another blast at the same spot, and was rewarded with the blinding light of the overcast day, filtering in through a small hole. He fired a third time and was pleased to find it created a hole the three of them could pass through. “Give that five minutes to cool down and we’ll be out of here.”

“You could have collapsed the cave on all of us.” Spock could not let it go.

“Could have, but didn’t. I don’t know what your plan was to get us out of here, but I’ll bet it was gonna take longer than mine, so just leave it.”

“McCoy, this is not a democracy,” Jim reminded him, although he didn’t seem too bothered by his actions, beyond his initial surprise.

“To the relief of all involved.” Spock interjected. Although his expression hardly changed, McCoy was well aware that irritation was the only emotion Spock was frequently willing to concede. “That course of action was highly illogical.”

McCoy stood below the hole. Almost immediately there was a voice in his ear piece.

“Officer Rickson to Dr McCoy, you copy?”

“Copy that,” he said. Spock opened his mouth to say something, but McCoy gestured at him to shut up.

“Doctor!” Rickson sounded elated. “We thought you were dead! It’s been two days since your last contact.” There was excited chatter in the background.

“Well, I’m not, just sober.” He raised his eyebrow at Spock. “We’ve found Spock in a cave, and with that and the storm there was no way to get hold of you. Give us one minute and the captain can talk to you but for now we need to concentrate on getting out of here, McCoy out.”
They made it back to where Spock’s tent stood, now distorted and torn by the harsh winds, and decided it was as well to rest there than continue on, with Kirk still tired and McCoy repeatedly scanning Spock for any signs of ailment. The Enterprise it seemed had found a way of clearing some of the ions from the storm, and Kirk supposed that it was either Scotty or Chekov with their giant magnet. It was not sufficient to communicate with the ship, but it had cleared enough dust from the lower atmosphere that they had been able to communicate with the other search team, who had come to the base of the other colony, which was now turned refugee camp.

From just over 100 individuals, the small glass complex was now crammed with over 800 people, and the two doctors who were there had been struggling for days to control the epidemic with insufficient supplies.

Although the idea of zombies sprung to Kirk’s mind, the real cause of the outbreak was the spawning of a non-native parasite inside the main water supply of Colony 1, causing all but a few hundred people who had not drunk any to become infected at the same time as the ion storm. Eggs had also been put within Colony 2’s water supply, but had been discovered on time.

The good news was that, unlike zombies, none of the infected were dead. The bad news was that they tended to die of exposure after days of not drinking and searching the wasteland for more apparent beneficiaries of the pathogen.

With access to a hospital, all those who had not perished thus far would survive, but many would require brain surgery to remove the worm.

Despite his earlier comments about not being a democracy, Kirk deferred to Bones’ expertise – or rather his paranoia- and they agreed to take shifts that evening to prevent any further disappearances. They set up the two remaining tents end to end and piled all of their remaining things into McCoy’s tent.

“Come on, this tent was not meant to take one person and three people’s stuff it was meant to take one guy!” He’d complained, but shut up when Jim told him his alternative was to share the space with him or Spock instead.

Leaving the doctor with orders to wake Spock in three hours, Kirk rolled out his matt next to Spock’s and lay down next to him, shirtless in the heat. The Vulcan was already asleep, dressed in his spare uniform, which seemed like a first to Jim; Vulcans slept far less than humans did, and Spock was no exception to that rule.

He lay on his back next to the sleeping form, the brushing of their shoulders reminding him of that night on the Enterprise, when he had assisted in helping Spock fix his ear piece.

Several hours later, Spock had awoken to the sound of McCoy’s snores. What an effective night watchman, He thought to himself, sitting up next to Jim.

The human next to him was sleeping deeply, his breathing heavy and slow. This was a situation Spock had wanted to avoid. Sometimes logic was best served by not thinking about a problem, particularly one such as this.
He felt hot and bothersome, and envied his captain for being the one to be topless. It would not do for both of them to be so.

He wondered what Jim thought of him. He must be so ashamed after my performance under the influence of the parasite. He knew on some level that this was not how Jim thought, but if he knew what his captain was not thinking, he had no concept of what the man did think of him. I have to find out…

What he had just thought of doing was unthinkable, illegal on many worlds. But, he convinced himself, it was the only logical course of action. It was his duty as First Officer to ensure he knew of the Captain’s intentions, was it not? Still, what he was about to do was highly unethical, and he had no idea what Jim would do should he get caught. It might very well stand as mutiny.

The thought did nothing to stay his hand, however, as he reached up to rest his fingers gently on Jim’s face and, careful to shield his own thoughts, lurched as an invisible spectator into his dream.

He watched for a moment that took an age, as a blue-green Orion girl stripped before him and pushed him back onto a bed in what appeared to be a messy dorm at the Academy. Before he knew what was happening, he looked down to find her unzipping his fly and pulling out his human erection.

This was the last straw for Spock, who panicked and jumped back.

Suddenly he was not looking at the girl, but at Jim’s open eyes in the low light of their tent. With a pang of shame he realised that he had somehow ended up with an erection, not from the sight of the girl, but from the transference of his captain’s own arousal during the meld. He hoped the black fabric of his regulation pants disguised it.

“What the hell were you doing Spock?” his captain growled at him, keeping his voice low to avoid waking McCoy.

Spock looked at him with a deliberately blank expression. His only logical escape was to lie, again. “I thought you were having a nightmare. You were mumbling in your sleep.” He said.

Jim had the decency to blush, but he was still not convinced. “So you decided to… to look into my head?” He asked, accusingly. “Why didn’t you just wake me up?!”

Spock seized the only way out he could. “It seemed the logical thing to do.”

The human looked at him, knowing that it was anything but logical, but too tired to trust his own assessment. “Whatever. Look, Spock, just… Just don’t do things like that. You of all people know about privacy.”

“I regret the impact of my decision,” he replied. He tried to guard his voice, but it just sounded cold. “I will not repeat this intrusion without your permission again.” He lay back down, pretending to sleep, his back to Jim. Staring at the blank fabric of the tent, he could hear his pulse racing, concentrated on ridding himself of his “problem” by shaming it out of sight, no closer to answering any of the questions he had been trying to solve. If Jim wasn’t disgusted with him before, he sure as hell would be now, he thought.

Jim sighed behind him and lay back down, still confused as to what the hell had happened.
Ophiocordyceps Unilateralis

Spock was not one for wishing things, but if he had been, he would most certainly have wished that he had not attempted the mind meld with Kirk the night before. He had barely spoken to the human all morning, aside when logic necessitated it, and was certain that Kirk had ordered McCoy to perform a covert psychological evaluation as they travelled.

He heard the scanner behind him. Apparently covert was not the manner in which the doctor wished to evaluate him.

“I am fine, doctor,” he insisted. “I do not believe I have suffered any long term damage.”

“The hell you haven’t,” McCoy ignored his protests. “You’re still too hot and your hormone levels are everywhere. I hope to god I left nothing in you.”

“I am fine,” he repeated. McCoy was about to mount a second protest, but a message over their communicators silenced him.

“Lieutenant Arros to Captain Kirk,” the storm-distorted voice said.

“Copy, Lieutenant,” Kirk responded.

“More information on the pathogen, sir. It appears to be a bioengineered helminth-like worm that has been designed specifically to take over the host’s brain.”

“Like the Ophiocordyceps unilateralis of your Earth,” Spock interjected, his interest piqued. “It is a fungus the spores of which are inhaled by ants, causing them to climb as high as possible before the die, so that its spores may be released with a greater chance of infecting more ants.” He explained.

“Something like that. Only far more complex - intelligently designed, if you will, to take control of a conscious brain by releasing hormones that increase both violent tendencies and loving ones, whilst convincing the host that the parasite is in fact somehow beneficial to them.” The signal crackled. “The weakness is that one of the chemicals it releases reacts with the fluids in most species eyes, turning them red. This might be an unintended side effect or it might have been done intentionally to cause panic, or simply highlight who was infected. Any news from the Enterprise, sir?”

Kirk blinked up at the swirling dust high above them. “None yet, Lieutenant. It’ll take them weeks to clear that much dust. Is that all?”

“That’s all Captain. Arros out.”

Spock turned to McCoy, blocking his captain from his own line of sight. “What a singularly fascinating organism. I should like to examine it later if I might.”

“You might not,” the doctor said resolutely. “You were addicted to the opiates that thing was releasing only 24 hours after you were infected. I don’t trust you within a mile of it.”
Sulu watched Uhura pace the bridge for the Nth time that day. The second attempt at removing the ions from the atmosphere had been a resounding failure; the electromagnetic interference was too much of a strain on the engines and they had been lucky to retrieve all the shuttles intact.

The storm had in fact grown, absorbing non-ionised particles into the air with it, dominating even more of the planet than it had done when Kirk had left.

“Why don’t you take a break?” He offered. “The last rocket’s message said that he was alive, even Hayves might not be dead out there.”

“It’s not good enough.” She said quietly. “There’s no way of us ever beaming any of them up. It’ll take anyone at the centre of that storm two weeks to get out far enough, even if they left now. Anything could happen.” She felt wretched. Alive was very much her bare minimum for Spock’s wellbeing, and Lieutenant Arros had mentioned a disease which he had thought it appropriate to specify twice did not turn people into zombies. Junior medical staff had been rifling through everything from data banks to out-of-print medical texts from 16th century Orion, and found nothing even remotely like it contained within a single organism.

“Eleven days,” Chekov piped, as though this achievement would spare her any heartache.

She groaned inwardly, certain that all crew were aware of how uncomfortable she was captaining the ship; as fifth in command, it was the first time she had even held the responsibility, but with Kirk, Spock and McCoy on the planet’s surface and Scotty absorbed in finding some new solution to their pressing technical issues, the duty fell to her.

Exhausted, she rescinded her refusal to rest, handing command over to Sulu and retreating not to her own cabin, but to Kirk’s ready room.

It was as messy as she’d come to expect from him, but the bed was made, and she lay down on top of the blanket. For some reason she could not shake the idea that some harm had come to Spock. Closing her eyes and using meditation techniques he had taught her calmed her, though, and she slept into an easy sleep.

Spock was in her bedroom at the academy. His black uniform looked becoming on him, and he regarded her carefully, deciding what he was going to do. It was not forbidden for graduates at the Academy to have carnal relations with students, provided the Academy itself was made aware, but this was not how he had imagined entering a relationship.

“Uhura,” he began.

She cut him off. “Nyota, Spock.”

“Nyota. I find myself in the difficult position of having to decide whether such an act as you propose would interfere with your education and my duties.” She swore that he looked somewhat pained at being forced to talk about the relationship, something he avoided doing at all costs.

“Relax, Spock.”

“It would be unwise for me to ignore the possibility of our relationship ending before the conclusion of your studies, and were that to compromise your ability to work effectively—“

She stopped him again, this time with her lips on his. He returned the kiss with a calculated motion, as though it was his first, although she knew otherwise. He tasted of toothpaste, like he often did,
and smelled only of soap. The lips were soft, and his eyebrows sceptical, although she knew this was no reflection on his actual emotions.

“I would like for us to sleep together, Spock,” she said plainly, knowing that for him such a question needed to be said in such a way that it could not be misinterpreted. “Would you like to have sex with me?”

He paused for a moment. It was a panic, she knew. If he hadn’t wanted to, he would have declined promptly and left the room, only to deny it ever happening. No, it was his desire for it conflicting with his need to behave in the most logical manner that stayed him.

“I would like it,” he said finally, and she knew there was a “but”. “…but I fear it may not be beneficial to you in the long run.”

She ignored the half-hearted warning, and pulled the stretchy hem of his uniform up over his head, discarding it by the bed. His chest was silken under her fingers.

He allowed her to push him down onto the bed, and sat patiently as she undressed, before turning and sliding his pants and underwear over his hips. They caught on his semi-erect penis, and he looked her in the eye as she tugged them down past it. She couldn’t see the pleasure in his face, but somehow she could feel it where her fingers grazed his skin.

She jumped a little when she felt his hand against her breast, testing the weight of it. He had no technique, but her nipple hardened as he dragged his nails lightly over it.

His body shuddered as she ran her fingers gently from his Adam’s apple and over one of his own nipples and down to his navel. She wondered if he was ticklish, and dismissed the thought as silly. She stroked lower, tracing a line from his hip, over the flawless skin, through his dark public hair and up the length of his hardening member, wiping the first drip of pre cum from the tip.

His kissed her, his tongue on her bottom lip. His hand made its way down to her own genitalia, and it transpired that he knew a little more about human biology, or at least about sex, than she had thought him capable of. His eyes were alert when she looked at him, watching for her response.

She kissed his neck, with hot, wet kisses as she mounted him. His lips parted, and he moaned when she gripped his cock and pushed him inside.

Uhura sat bolt upright in the bed, embarrassed that she had dreamt such a dream in a bed that was not her own.
Kirk lay somewhat cautiously next to Spock, whose eyes were closed, but whose breathing suggested he was still awake. The heat of their two bodies in the small tent was almost unbearable, and it kept him awake, thinking of the Vulcan’s strange behaviour the night before.

Spock placed a very high value on privacy, so it seemed all the more inappropriate that he’d actually attempted a mind meld without Jim’s permission. For some reason he got the feeling that this was not a mystery he could solve with authority or McCoy’s interference.

“Spock?” He asked the tent, anxious for a reply.

There was a pause so long he had begun to think the Vulcan really was asleep. “Yes?”

In a moment of rare social anxiety which he attributed to the lack of an audience and to the rubbing off of Spock’s own lack of smoothness in interpersonal affairs, Kirk forgot what he was going to ask.

After a second lengthy pause, he settled on a simple question. “Are you okay?”

Spock turned his head towards him, although his eyes focused on a spot just above Kirk’s face.

“I am.” He said. They both knew the question had been more than an enquiry to his wellbeing. “I will not attempt to meld with you again, Captain, you have no need to worry.”

“I’m not worried about you trying to meld with me. I’m worried about why you felt the need to.”

Spock was silent, and Kirk braced himself for his friend to give him the cold shoulder.

“I was curious,” Spock swallowed audibly, “as to your emotions regarding my… Earlier loss of constraint.”

“Why didn’t you just ask?” He asked, before he realised that it was a stupid question. Of course Spock wasn’t going to ask him about his emotions, especially when the concerned Spock himself.

“I was not able.” Came Spock’s ambiguous answer.

They lay in the dark for a further moment, until Kirk turned up on his side and reached out a hand. He realised that for a second time he had no idea what he had intended to do; he had no specific gesture in mind, just a feeling that he ought to make some kind of gesture.

Spock took his hand from the air gently, and placed it on the place where they mats met between them. His hand lingered on top of Kirk’s before he retracted it again, tucking it to his chest.

“I’m not angry with you,” he reassured him. “I know it wasn’t you who bit me. It was just some parasite, Spock. Anyone would have done the same. It wasn’t a weakness.”

Spock rolled onto his back again, laying his arms carefully by his arms.

“I know.” Touching Jim’s hand had told him so.
McCoy awoke with a fright to the sound of a phaser blast being followed by the sound of someone keeling over. He fought his way out of his tent, gun in hand, to see Jim holding his own phaser in one hand and keeping back Spock with the other. A little girl of about seven lay face down on the ground, and Spock was clawing at Kirk to be able to get to her.

“What the fuck?” he swore, pushing both Jim and Spock out of his path as he reached the girl, flipping her onto her back. Her eyes were open, stunned, and glowed with a dull red light. In her mouth was a ripped strip of Jim’s tent.

“No! Let me see her!” Spock shouted. The desperation in his voice surprised Bones enough to look round in time to observe it on his face, before Jim stunned him as well and lowered his limp body so that all but his feet were inside the tent.

They were silent for a moment whilst McCoy worked, trying to find the parasite on her body. She had no bite marks, so must have been infected by the contaminated water supply. The parasite was in her brain, and there was little he could do unless he wanted to risk giving her brain surgery outside of a hospital, with no general anaesthetic beyond their phasers, and a total of two units of human blood on his person, more if he could find that either he or Jim were a match.

“There’s nothing I can do, Jim. She needs a hospital.” He said.

“We’re only half a day away from Colony 2,” Jim mused. “We can take her there when we go in the morning.”

Bones shook his head. “Spock won’t be able to cope with it. He’s as addicted to this parasite now as he was before I took it out. We can’t carry them both, so we’ll have to keep both of them tied up and wait for guards to come from the Colony to us to help.”

“I doubt a knot will hold Spock, but I suppose that’s our only option.” Kirk pressed a button on his ear piece. “Kirk to Lieutenant Arros, copy? Good, I need at least two armed officers sent to my coordinates immediately. We have an extra casualty on our hands, and Spock’s not doing so well either. Be here by morning. Kirk out.”

When he was done the Captain turned an accusing eye on him as he pulled a rope from his pack and sliced it in half. “Did you actually think I’d killed some little kid?”

“No!” To the captain’s credit, Bones had not. “You might be an asshole but you’re not a fucking child killer.”

“Good,” Kirk eyed him suspiciously as he backed into the tent, rope in hand, to take care of Spock.

“And I suppose you get to tie up our friend whilst I’m left with a rabid child. I’m not sleeping next to her you know!” McCoy took his own rope and, without cutting it, simply wound it round the little body as if he was making a poor attempt at mummification, and tied off the ends. He looked longingly at the tent, before shoving her roughly into it and yanking his blanket out from under her to sleep on the hard floor between the two tents. “Fucking asswipe.” He mumbled, downing a mouthful from his worryingly light flask and lying down on the ground.

Spock awoke for the second time in two days to find Kirk asleep beside him, only this time, he found his arms and legs bound.
With a pang of shame he remembered the events of what must now be half an hour ago; awaking to the sound of ripping fabric and staring into a red glint through the hole in the tent.

A need had overtaken his body and his mind that he could not control; he had to get to those eyes, to be bitten, to get to the bliss he had felt with the parasite. It was illogical, and he knew it, but before he could think he had rushed out to the girl, felt her filthy hands grab his shoulder, felt her lunge for his tenderly exposed throat.

And then she had fallen to the ground like a rag doll, and Jim had hauled him out of the way, stopping him from getting to her.

Testing the bonds proved that he was unlikely to be able to escape from them without waking Jim, and made reaching the girl near impossible. He berated himself for even considering trying to reinfect himself in his now calmer state, feeling strongly that logic should exempt him from addiction. Of course, he knew it only exempted him from the risky behaviours that led to them, but surely, he would be able to resist now? He knew why McCoy had refused to let him look at the specimen taken from his own person.

Given a life of stern logic and little emotion, this proved to be the most miserable night’s sleep Spock had ever had.
McCoy awoke at dawn to the sound of screaming. His heart in his throat as he opened his eyes, he looked toward the source only to discover it coming from his own tent. He unzipped the front flap only to find that the girl they had intercepted the night before was struggling against the bonds, kicking her feet so hard that his rather poor attempt at a knot was beginning to come loose.

“What the hell- is she alright?” Kirk’s voice said behind him. The noise was beginning to hurt McCoy’s ears, and when he grabbed her leg to pull her to him in order to retie the rope, her voice broke gratingly.

“I’m not sure.” He tied the rope back up, and she stopped screaming as suddenly as she’d started. It turned out to be the least of their problems, because when he glanced back at Jim he did so just in time to see Spock, arms still tied in front of him, emerge from their tent. He caught the Vulcan as he hurled himself at the child.

“Spock, stop, you’ll crush her!” He pulled his desperate friend back by his hair.

Spock’s face was emotionless and his voice steady, although he still lunged for the inside of the tent. “Restrain me.”

“Already on it.” Kirk had bound his legs as his upper body was stuck within McCoy’s tent, immobilised by the hand gripping his hair and another yanking his arms away from the girl. Between them they dragged Spock back to his mat and McCoy sat on his legs, even though his struggling had ceased.

“She screamed because she knew I had been infected,” Spock said certainly from underneath him. “She was calling for me to come and reinfect myself.”

McCoy released him and crawled back out to where the girl lay motionless. His scanner told him her body was pumped with dangerously high levels of opiates, and he rushed for a syringe of adrenalin. It shocked him, then, that when he leaned over her to stab it into her heart, she looked back at him.

Her brown face was grazed down one side, fleck of blood hanging on it in the same shade as her eyes. Her hair was in two bunches on either side of her head, one clean and frizzy and the other matted with what he hoped was her own blood. She looked at him with them, and he couldn’t tell if it was the virus, but he thought that she looked kind, and somehow wise. “You’ll be sorry you made yourself wait for this.” She said, her voice hoarse from the screams. The hysteria she’d been taken by just moments before had evaporated. “I know you think I’m silly and crazy, but I’m not.” She assured him. “I’m very clever, and you’ll know it when they get you.”

He sat there stunned, needle in hand. “And why is that?”

“Because it’s the best thing.” She said with her previous certainty. “Come here,” she urged him. There was a tiny piece of something red caught between her teeth.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea.” He made sure he was out of range.

“Neither did Enna but she thanked me afterwards.”

It made McCoy shudder to know that the small child in front of him had bitten another person until they bled in order to infect her with a dangerous pathogen. She sounded so intelligent and so sure
of herself. He wondered if it was Enna stuck in her teeth and then decided that he didn't want to know any more about her.

“Yeah, well I’m gonna say thanks, but no thanks.” He carefully returned the syringe to his kit.

“My name is Cam.” She told him, craning her neck to face him. He felt at once desperate to ignore her and guilty for doing so.

“Call me Bones.” He told her, relenting.

“When you change your mind I will bite you.” She said, and lay her head back down.

Odd, he thought to himself as he heard the sound of a car pulling up nearby; She must be less than a quarter of Spock’s age, but she’s four times more persuasive.

Spock was grateful to be in a separate car to the child, although only on a purely logical level. It had been so long since he’d been in a land vehicle, that he had somehow managed to forget they existed. The air conditioning hit him like a plunge into icy water, but Jim seemed relieved.

Breakfast was offered and declined; the smell of the greasy Earth food Jim was eating was making his stomach nauseous and his head pound.

He dragged his eyes away from the dust storm outside, if only to take his mind from the glinting pairs of eyes they were passing at lessening intervals. “May I request a drink?”

Jim and Lieutenant Arros looked at him strangely, and Spock realised that he had interrupted their conversation. Kirk passed him a bottle that he had clearly drunk from.

Spock fixed him with his best blank stare until a fresh one was offered. Vulcans did not share drinking vessels, and despite being beyond caring, he could not afford two lapses in one request for a drink. A joke was made at his expense, which he did not understand. This, at least, was normal.

“Come on Spock,” Jim slapped his arm playfully.

“Do not touch me,” he said as firmly as he could, jerking his arm out of reach. Jim laughed but backed away in his seat slightly, not wanting to call him out on his uncharacteristic behaviours in front of Arros and the scientist from Colony 2 who sat in the passenger seat beside him.

The agitation he was feeling did not seem entirely to be a product of his unintended foray into the realm of addiction. He was unable to halt a mounting anxiety, which was beginning to flutter about in his stomach. Anxiety was an illogical emotion; it had no influence on a positive or negative outcome, and therefor was redundant.

This thought did not comfort him as he realised he was unable to control the gnawing sensation that something bad was going to happen. Hormones and adrenaline surged through his blood stream. He felt hot and bothersome. He should have been able to control this. Unless...

No: He was 29; almost thirty. It was almost unheard of for a Vulcan to finish puberty so late. He knew of one man who had entered into his first Pon Farr at the age of 26, but most of the people whose ceremonies he had attended had been aged somewhere between 17 and 24. He suddenly felt cheated that not only could his human heritage have failed to spare him the trauma of what he
believe to be about to happen, but that it had made him late, unable to look to his peer group for help, although he doubted they would have been willing to aid an outsider like himself in such a delicate matter.

His home planet was gone and his betrothed with it. Uhura was 480 kilometres above him. He closed his eyes and attempted to meditate on the issue, allowing himself to go back to the safety of his many levels of mental discipline and the security of a lifetime of rationalising problems, but try as he might, he realised that the impending event was not a logical one. The rumbling of a real engine settled him into a rhythm he could no longer achieve on his own.

When someone opened the car door from the outside to let him out, he forced himself not to snap at them for the interruption, instead compelling his limbs to work against their own better judgement and stepping out of the car in front of the surprisingly large complex before him: They were inside the ring of a large electrified fence, which had hastily been topped with barbed wire. The building before him rose up like a glass cliff from the rock, six stories high and 150 metres long. The red-black eye of the cloud reflected in it, looking into him like the eyes of the child in McCoy's tent.

“I think,” he said quietly to Jim, “that I might like to retire somewhere to rest.”

They sat in a cramped office adjoining the main research laboratory on the second floor. Colony 2 was a tiny science colony of one building which house staff and laboratories, which had been set up to establish the most effective complete ecosystems for terraforming. A similarly tiny old man who Jim believed had to be half Orion and half human sat behind the desk, almost buried by a lifetime of papers.

“...And so we’ve been keeping the infected in the main warehouse under lock down. They’re still as intelligent as they were before they became ill, it’s a job to keep them there I tell you. My wife has taken charge of the security around there, but we only have ten security on staff! And you can’t trust anyone who we’ve successfully treated with the infected or in the lab- they just reinfect themselves! We've really no supplies left to treat the addiction.” Said the man, whose name Kirk could not pronounce. Doctor Axjerbl’s hands shook as he beckoned a similarly old human woman into the room. “This is my wife, also Doctor Axjerbl.”

“Call me Christa,” she said. Her back was bent at an even greater angle than her husband’s, but she declined the seat Bones offered. “We are most in need of some sort of anti-inflammatory,” she rustled through a crate of unspecified medicines and procured a preloaded syringe. She looked exhausted, and Kirk did not take offense when she turned on her heal and left again without a word.

“Forgive her,” Axjerbl said. “She has been working all night. We’ve the added problem you see, of containing those who have already been treated. It’s near impossible to keep them here without keeping them in our animal exercise yard. Some of them have even been willing to attempt to climb the electric fence to escape.” He indicated a window. Glancing behind him Kirk and McCoy both looked outside; within the perimeter fence was a large enclosure, heaving with people looking like refugees.

“How many are in there?” Kirk asked, appalled. He respected the need for them to be detained, but to say the facility was inappropriate was more than an understatement.

“At present? Three hundred and fifty three. Soon to be three hundred and fifty four, with the one
you brought in.”

For a second Jim had no idea who the man was talking about.

“You’re going to put Spock in a cage with a bunch of parasite addicts?” Bones said, his voice nearing disgust.

“Where else would we put him? If he is not contained he will certainly attempt to expose himself to the parasite.” The tiny man attempted to appear in control.

Jim stood up. In truth, he was worried about Spock and his unusual behaviour. “Look, I would rather tie myself to him than put him in there. He’s too... Proud, to be herded like some farm animal. He's a member of my crew, I need him with me.”

Axjerbl shook his head. “It has to be done. He is being scanned and searched now, and once we have established that he is healthy and carrying no... Illicit materials, he will join the others.”

“If you put him in there you’re gonna end up with zero people in that cage.” McCoy raised his voice. “ Dr Ax-j… -Look, he’s not a miner or a researcher, he’s our Chief Science Officer, and our First Officer. You put him in that enclosure and he will find a way to get out of it.”

“I’m sorry Doctor, but you have no jurisdiction here.” Axjerbl looked threateningly at Jim, as though to warn him that his own jurisdiction also ended when he left the ship.

Spock was not in the bedroom it had been implied the scientist was leading him to. Instead he was in a room with a tiled floor and walls, that looked suspiciously as though it was a recently appropriated mortuary.

“What is this?” He asked the woman who had been in the car with them.

“You are to be screened for pathogens before joining the others in the enclosure.” She said. “Please remove your clothing.”

Spock stiffened. This was all he needed. “Explain.” He demanded.

“All those who have previously been infected are contained in the enclosure.” She said, offering no further information.

“What enclosure?” He asked. She ignored him.

“Sir, I am going to ask you please to remove your clothes. If you would prefer to be screened by a male this can be arranged.”

“No,” He told her.

“Good, Please place your clothes in this container for decontamination.” She held out a plastic tub. Her chirping voice and equally bouncy brown hair annoyed him, although he knew it to be an illogical response to the way a woman he had just met chose to get her hair cut.

“No I will not remove my clothing.” He clarified. Indignation coursed through his veins like never before.
She opened her mouth to order him to do so, and before he knew it his hand was on her neck and he was lowering her to the floor, dropping her about two feet above it and not feeling a shred of guilt for the crack that told him she would likely have a head injury.

He locked the door behind him, back out in the courtyard. Freedom was there, in plain sight. There were two guards on the gate they had driven in through, both of whom he could easily circumnavigate should he wish. Beyond the fence he could not see the red eyes staring at him, begging him to join them, but he knew they were there. He could have that bliss again. Have the one thing he so desperately needed.
Spock slid round the back of the guard post. He had somehow managed to remain unseen. His own equivalent of adrenaline surged powerfully in his blood stream, making his limbs shake and his heart beat so hard he could feel it in his side. He could see the guard nearest him patrolling outside the guard station, an androgynous person in their thirties. It was clearly not a military compound; both guards carried phasers but wore only their normal work clothes, lab coats draped over the chair in the small structure.

As the human came closer to him, he reached his hand round the corner of the plaster wall and grabbed them by the neck, pinching so hard he almost broke the skin. Something almost uncontrollable and completely illogical within him would have done anything to fuck that person right now, in whatever orifice was available. As they were out for the count, he simply let them drop to the ground against the building, if it could be called such a thing. Taking up the unconscious guard’s phaser, he approached the door from the other side. The man within look directly at him, and Spock realised he would have to abandon the stealth approach.

“Excuse me sir, I wouldn’t go out there if I were—“

He stunned the man with the borrowed phaser before he could even realise what was going on.

For a second Spock stood there, realising that after days of constant supervision and restraint he was finally free. He looked out into the dust storm, and there he saw them – a pair of eyes, glistening with desire. Kind eyes, in a sense. Eyes even a Vulcan could not resist.

Lieutenant Hayves stood less than 30 metres from the entrance to Colony 2. She stared at the figure standing outside the guard station, and the figure stared back. His unshielded emotions drowned her in intensity; anger; fear; lust. He wanted her to bite him and then he wanted to fuck her like his life depended on it; in fact, it almost seemed as though his life did depend on such a thing.

He walked steadily towards her, and as he did so his feelings became clearer. It wasn’t her he really wanted. She could feel how desperate he was to see Uhura. He was from the Enterprise, then. And she could feel something repressed, buried so deep that even in his current state she could not feel it at such a range. A more secret lust; a more shameful breed of love. It was not until his hands reached out and touched her bitten throat that she was able to identify the object of that love, or indeed who it was who was feeling these things. She salivated heavily, looking at his imploring features. Spock is in love with the Captain. She thought. And that was the last thing she remembered.

Jim was almost resigned to the idea that Spock would be kept with the others in the cage, when the door was banged open unceremoniously and the Vulcan walked in, his face steely and a little paler than usual.

“Spock!” He jumped from his seat and compelled his friend into it.
Axjerbl was at a loss for words.

“Do not,” Spock breathed heavily between words. His struggle for control was obvious, “Force me to decide between you and that pathogen again.”

“I won’t.” Kirk said sternly, fixing Axjerbl with a glare, taunting him for his lack of faith.

He put a hand on Spock’s shoulder. The heat of his skin radiated through the fabric of his uniform, unbearably hot against the climate controlled room. “As there are no native life forms on this planet and the parasite has clearly been bioengineered, I’m declaring this a military situation.”

“A military situation? No one has even claimed responsibility for the release of the parasite! This is a scientific problem with a scientific solution!” Axjerbl stood also, although his head came only to the height of Kirk’s nose.

“Not one that you seem to be managing.” Kirk said stubbornly, gesturing to the world outside the office. “You’re operating on kids without anaesthetic. You’re keeping people in cages outside with no shelter immediately after that surgery. This is a military operation now.”

“Then I shall head it as such!” Axjerbl shouted.

He pointed a finger at the doctor. “Do you hold a military position, sir?”

There was a silence in which a scream could be heard from outside, within the caged enclosure. Dr Axjerbl had never served in the military or any branch of Starfleet. They all knew that there was no one on the colony above the rant of Lieutenant – no one aside from his self and Spock.

“I believe,” Spock said, having calmed himself down, “That one of your scientists is locked in your… Examining room, quite unconscious. Your front entrance may also be compromised.”

The belated threat from his normally disciplined colleague made Kirk immediately on edge, and he gripped the shoulder tighter, catching McCoy’s gaze as Dr Axjerbl called for someone to investigate.

When the silence persisted for too long, McCoy stood up. “Is there a room for us?”

Before Axjerbl could respond, Arros moved to aid Jim in standing Spock up. “Me and the others have a dormitory down the corridor, I will take you there.”

They left the doctor sitting in his seat, suddenly aware that whatever power he had held prior to the arrival of the young captain was long gone by now.

Spock sighed deeply as Jim and Bones pushed him onto the lower bunk of a bed. He could tell the outlet of breathe worried them. He could not recall sighing in front of them before. McCoy’s scanner was bleeping before he could even speak. He half wanted to protest Jim’s presence for the exam, but he knew it was illogical to do so as Dr McCoy would doubtlessly tell him what he found as soon as they left the room.

“His hormone levels are ridiculous,” he said as though Spock were not present. “What you would call his adrenaline, it’s dangerously high. His sex hormones are more than three times their usual count. Dammit Jim, his temperature’s literally rising as I watch it. 35.43; 35.44... If this carries on
he’ll die!”

“Has he been bitten?” The captain asked.

“No. He’s all clear for physical injuries. All clear for pretty much everything, in fact. There’s no cause I can find for the hormones or the fever.”

He reached out to touch his forehead and Spock retracted instinctively. “Don’t touch me.” The words came out in a growl. “There’s nothing you can do.” He said, as patiently as he could manage whilst still glaring at the hand, which threatened to loom back over his face.

“What do you mean? You know what this is?” Jim asked. “There must be something.”

“There are anti-adrenaline drugs I can give you; and hormone blockers.” McCoy provided.

Their interference annoyed him and he attempted to compose himself. “They will do nothing for me.”

“Spock, are you on heat?” Bones asked, as tactical as ever. It was meant as a joke, light relief, but Spock did not detect this.

Instead he lay rigid on the bed and fought for control before he spoke. “No…” It was technically true. Evolutionarily speaking, nothing native to Vulcan went “on heat”. The reproductive cycle of many animals had a similar mechanism, but it was defined differently in most science text books. He opened his mouth to say more and then realised what he was doing and shut it. His head felt so hot he could barely see the two men by his bed.

It was too late, Jim had seen. “What were you about to say, Spock?”

“I think I would not like to say it after all, sir.” He said.

Jim shook his head. “Spock, this is important, you could be dying here!”

“Please,” he begged, grateful it did not reach his eyes or voice. “Respect my privacy in this matter.”

“Don’t make me order you to tell me Spock.” His captain said softly. Spock felt sick.

“We do not speak of it to outsiders. Indeed, we do not speak of it among ourselves.”

“Who is “we” and what is it we don’t speak of?” Kirk was impatient. His face swam a little as he leaned over Spock in an attempt to look him in the eye. Spock fixed his gaze on the bottom of the bunk above. “Are “we” the Vulcans? Answer me dammit.”

“Yes.” Spock answered, hoping it would be sufficient, but knowing that this was unlikely.

“I spent a fucking year studying alien biologies on top of my medical degree when I was at the Academy,” McCoy said indignantly. “Why did no one say anything about this?”

“It is not spoken of.” Spock repeated.

“Well I’m afraid you’re gonna have to break your vow of silence, because I wanna know.” McCoy demanded. “Are you on heat or aren’t you? What is it you need to break out of this thing? For God’s sake you’re not gonna last another three days in this state!”

Only three days left? It was less than Spock had hoped. Perhaps his half human body had less of a
tolerance for such things than the average Vulcan. “Of a sort.” His voice sounded quiet. Weak. “I will say no more on the matter.”

“Spock, this won’t leave this room but you have to tell us.” Kirk ordered, although there was an anxious note to his voice. “Whatever it is, it can’t be so embarrassing that we won’t still try to help you. You’re my First Officer and I can’t afford to let you die because you won’t tell us what’s wrong.” When Spock did not respond for a moment, he added. “And we’re your friends.”

Not for much longer, Spock thought. If he did not die of the indignity as a profoundly irrational part of him believed he would, he would die of the fever.

His voice sounded dry and resigned as he spoke. “I am entering the Plak Tow, the blood fever. It is the culmination of our sexual cycle. Every seven years we experience the Pon Farr. It is most undignified. It drives us to mate, or we die of the fever.” To soothe the scientist within him, he added, “It is much like the sexual cycle of the female ferret on your Earth; each year they must mate and if they do not, their hormones build up and kill them.” He regretted his addenda. It made him seem even less like the logical, advanced being he was for the other 2,551 days of the cycle.

When no one else responded, he pushed himself up to look at them, doing his best not to seem as though he was literally dying of primitive sexuality. Their wide eyes and gaping mouths told him he was failing.

“If you knew about this, why didn’t you say something?” Kirk asked. “I’d’ve had you off duty for a month if I had to. We could have taken you to the Vulcan colony, anything you needed.”

“I did not know. I believed that due to my human half this would never befall me.”

“Wait,” McCoy said. “How old are you? And your balls are only just dropping?”

“I am twenty-nine and my testes descended a long time ago.” The man was irritating him. Actually, everything was irritating him. His breath caught in his throat, taken away by a glut of words and theories he needed to expel. “I believe this has been triggered by exposure to the hormones secreted by the parasite. Plak Tow is characterised by very high levels of hormones analogous to—“

“Calm down Spock,” Jim told him.

“--your adrenaline. The parasite must have been releasing it to counter-effect the opiates it also secreted, or else human hosts would die off quickly.” He continued, exhausting himself.

“Spock, it’s alright. All we have to do is find someone for you to have sex with and you’ll be fine, right?” McCoy said. “Uhura will understand.”

Mentioning both another partner and Uhura in the same breath was a mistake Spock struggled to forgive. “Do not imagine that the Pon Farr is anything like the lusts you humans harbour.” He struggled to make sense and looked away from the pair of them. “When I take a partner to ease the fever, I will bond with them for life. Their mind will meld permanently to mine, it is a telepathic link which is near impossible to break. Now, unless either of you can procure Lieutenant Uhura within the next three days, please leave me alone. I am tired.”

They both looked sadly at him. He closed his eyes against it and kept them closed as he heard them retreat towards the door.

“Can we bring you anything?” It was Jim’s voice.
“Just peace and quiet so I can meditate.” He replied, tersely, and regretted it immediately. Kirk was going to remember his last few days of life as a bitter, undisciplined fool.

And Uhura would not remember them at all.

He gave a single dry sob after they had left the room.
A Fair Trade

Chapter Notes

(Warning: Gore; depiction of surgery without anaesthetic)

Kirk kicked the broken rocket where it sat at McCoy’s feet and the resulting explosion burned a hole in the leg of McCoy’s uniform pants and another in the perimeter fence as the communication device ripped through the metal wire and out of the main compound as though it sought the same freedom Spock had that morning.

“Whoa!” Bones jumped back. “Stop it Jim, if you destroy everything in this fucking colony it’s still not going to fix Spock!”

Hayves, miraculously, had been found, unconscious from a Vulcan neck-pinch just ten paces from the entrance to the compound. Bitterly, and with as much guilt, Kirk decided he would trade her for his First Officer in an instant. He had considered every option. The rocket was going to do nothing, even less now; the terrain would become impossible to navigate by car only a few miles beyond their camp from last night and it was a 3.5 day walk from there to a place where both the communicators and transporter would –hopefully- work, and that was if Spock was fully mobile, which he decidedly wasn’t. Spock refused the idea of bonding with any of the several women who had offered their services, including a young officer on their own party, who Kirk would soon be recommending for promotion. Unless a miracle could be worked from Uhura’s end, Spock was actually going to die of blue balls.

He felt responsible, he realised, for having ordered the Chief Communications Officer to stay behind on the Enterprise- half her inferiors could have taken over her position for the time they’d been down there – everyone on both colonies spoke Standard and xenolinguistics was not a skill needed to fix communications during a storm. It was his fault, simply because he had wanted to be the one to save Spock. What made him so special? Nothing. And he was worse than a simple failure. He had put his friendship before the actual friend.

“I could order him to sleep with Officer Abitos.” He said, desperately.

“You can’t order people to fuck Jim, and if you could it’d be rape by anyone’s standards.”

McCoy’s words shamed him and he paused for a second.

“He’s going to die.” His voice sounded distant.

“It’ll be alright,” McCoy attempted to console him. He shrugged Bones’ hand from his shoulder. Neither of them believed his words.

Bones stood in the warehouse, outside the massive floor to ceiling cage, which currently contained more than 900 diseased people, snarling, hissing, calling, seducing him all at once. He walked around the side until he saw the figure of the Lieutenant he recognised. She sat in a corner, head on her knees with her eyes closed, motionless. Her hair was lank and her skin had lost its lustre, she
seemed otherwise unharmed except for the bite which infected her, standing out red but bloodless on her neck.

“Hayves.” He said, too quietly, he believed, for her to have heard.

Her head snapped up at him, eyes blazing, and she threw herself at the mesh of the cage before others could take up the space.

For a moment he thought she was delirious. Her head moved to rest on the mesh as though it was too heavy for her to hold up. It took her a moment to find a position from which the layer of sweat beading on her brow did not cause her to slip. Her eyes were unfocused, although she was looking at his face.

“You are worried about Spock.” She said, unsolicited. He stumbled backwards, not prepared for her to be so lucid. Why was Spock delusional when he was infected? Was he already in the Pon Farr when we found him? Or does it do this to all Vulcans? He wondered. He guarded himself from answering her question, fully expecting to be manipulated.

“Yes,” he said at last.

“I don’t know what it is that ails him,” her lips brushed against the metal as she spoke, “But I do know what the cure is.”

“He doesn’t want any of the women here,” he said, aware he’d made it sound as though they were a commodity. “There’s a mental bond that forms when he… Does his thing. He doesn’t want it with just anyone.”

She smiled at him knowingly, and he had the distinct sensation that he was about to be manipulated into doing something. She worked her wrist through a gap in the fence.

“Come here,” She reached out to him.

He leaned forwards, knowing he was about to do something utterly stupid. Her hand was clammy where it gripped the skin of his cheek.

“It doesn’t have to be a woman…” She whispered, breath hot against his chin. She moved as if to kiss his throat, and bit it with such force that it made a wet, crunching noise. He felt nothing.

He should have about an hour before the larva began producing the addictive chemicals that would take over his mind.

“And you think he’ll shag a guy who’s down here instead?” he shouted through his now burning throat, angry that he’d allowed himself to risk his own neck, very literally, for such useless information. Those infected who had yet to notice his presence heard and he saw a hundred bodies slam into the metal between the rails, fingers and hands and wrists forcing their way through, reaching for him as she had only moments before. Her body blocked their path.

“I know it,” she hissed, her eyes rolling into her head, the blood foaming in her mouth. His blood, he noted. Her mission complete, she pulled her arm back and crumpled to the floor of the enclosure, unconscious before she even hit the floor. He staggered backwards as fingers caught against his shirt. It was hot and wet. The skin beneath his Adam’s apple felt like it had been pressed against hot coals.

An alarm sounded and two scientists rushed over, pinning him to the floor with his neck extended. His heart beat so hard and so fast that he could feel the blood leaking from his neck leaving in spurts. The pressure of it against the wall of his chest seemed as though it would smash through his
sternum. Fingers pressed hard into his shoulders and head, bruising him and breaking capillaries, but he was in too much pain to understand what was happening.

He braced himself against the pain as someone reached forceps into the torn flesh. He could feel them miss several times, pulling accidentally on shredded bits of skin or muscle. He screamed and there was vomit in his throat. The forceps were cold against the hot agony of the wound. He felt them plunge deeper, press against the exterior wall of his windpipe. He choked, and then something warm and slippery was being eased out; long and thin, it clung to the inside of the blood vessel it was embedded in, and its body stretched as it was pulled on.

The parasite curled in the forceps as they drifted out of focus, and he passed out on the linoleum floor.

The shit he did in the name of friendship, he thought as the world faded to black. If Spock survived this Pon Farr crap he fucking owed him one.
Desperate Times

The Mrs Dr Axjerbl turned out to be far more understanding than her husband, as she dosed Bones with codeine and paracetamol and handed him a damp cloth to wipe his tear stains away. “I hope that was worth it young man. I’ve seen a disappointing kiss in my time, but that one was something else.”

He attempted to say something to the effect that it had been an exchange for information, but achieved only a gurgle, the vibrations of which forced him to lie back down on the examining table.

“I’d give it a day or two dear,” she told him. “You’ve had my assistant pocking your larynx with a piece of metal whilst you screamed your head off. Honestly, why they didn’t bring you in here, I could’ve at least had you properly cleaned up. Operating on the floor, 30 feet from an examining room! Can you believe such a thing, doctor?”

McCoy did not believe it and nor did he have a day or two. Whatever state Hayves had been in, she had not been malicious. She would not have said what she had if she didn’t genuinely believe there was someone who could save Spock. He just hoped to god that the one man Spock might shag wasn’t him.

He tried to get out of the bed and fell unceremoniously to the floor. Dr Axjerbl plucked the flannel from his hands.

“Off you go then, you’re clearly not going to listen to me and you’re no use to us in here until you can at least speak. Come back when the pain killers wear off.”

In this time of sliding automatic doors, lock picking might be considered a redundant skill. As a child Kirk had discovered amongst his brother’s possession two things; the first was a book of “pursuits for boys” from the 1960s on Earth – an old, tattered linen bound volume, detailing everything from how to trap and skin a rabbit, to how to make a pea-shooter, to how to pick a lock. The second was an old wooden chest with S. K. engraved onto it in black relief. He knew it was not Sam’s chest, merely a hand me down from a previous Samuel Kirk, and the mystery of what could be inside it had held him captive almost as tightly as his need to explore, then and now.

It had taken Kirk almost four hours to open the lock, even with the instructions from the book. Its contents were much older than he’d imagined, from the 1990s and the time of the Eugenics Wars. Ration books and propaganda leaflets and a resistance newspaper; a celebratory news clipping from the New York Times detailing the fall of the last of the empires commanded by the super-beings bred for power; an old chocolate bar wrapper that no longer smelled of its original contents.

Kirk was glad that he was so deeply irreverent or he might have found himself a historian instead of a captain.

Nonetheless, he was also glad for the chest, because he found himself sitting on the floor outside the dormitory picking the lock with two bits of wire. Spock had locked the old-fashioned door and stopped responding when anyone called through it, his communicator apparently broken or off. Thankfully, Kirk’s fine motor skills had improved somewhat since the age of 9 and it did not take
him four hours this time.

McCoy sat nearby with his back to the wall and his eyes closed, looking almost as green as Spock did under fluorescent lighting. Jim left him there to sleep as he finally managed to open the door, after just ten minutes of effort. There was probably an art to lock picking, but it was an art he was content to know only the very basics of, so long as it opened this one door for him.

The lights were off and the inside of the room was dark. Spock was not in the bed. A single meditation candle procured from nowhere burned on a plate in the centre of the floor. Kirk closed the door behind him and blinked as his eyes adjusted to the low light, trying to find Spock.

Eventually he grew accustomed enough to make out the figure, sat on the floor next to the bed with his knees to his chest. Around him were the tiny components of the earpiece, catching the flickering light.

As Kirk approached, he saw that Spock was holding the casing in a shaking hand. Around his wrist the skin looked as though it had been scratched and pierced, probably by the bed spring from the old fashioned (and now thoroughly abused) mattress, which lay on the floor near the candle. The mattress itself had a hole near the centre that looked as if it had been punched through. Spock didn’t look up from the tiny magnet next to his feet.

Kirk lowered himself down next to the Vulcan and reached out slowly to take the communicator from his hand. The hand was hot and dryer than he’d expected. Spock’s face was blank but his captain knew it was only a cover for pain and fear and hopelessness.

Kirk picked up the magnet for the speaker and slotted it into its place in the casing. The tiny wire that connected it to the first transistor went next, and then the actual sound processing microchip went in. Spock watched while each piece was reconnected as though it held a great importance. In went the transmitter, the receiver, the microphone, and when the communicator had been returned to something like order, he snapped the back casing over the exposed parts and into place. He turned it on and off again to check if it worked. There was a slight crackle in its microphone when he listened to himself tapping it in his own earpiece, but otherwise it seemed to be running as normal.

He held it out to Spock. When the hand took it away, it was burning even hotter and shaking harder. Jim put his own arm around Spock’s back above the level of the mattress, and rubbed between his shoulders.

“I’ve arranged,” he said, “for you to have a room to yourself.” It had taken a lot of organising, and the scientist couple who lived in the room had not been happy to have to remove all of their things, although they had done so when ordered.

Spock’s voice shook as he spoke, not quite as hard as his hands did. It sounded dry, but worse, it sounded lost. Small. “I do not wish to be alone.”

Kirk pulled him closer and savoured his friend’s scent. His heart broke a little. Spock had assumed that he had arranged some place for him to die by himself in this strange place. “I’ll be there the whole time.” He said.

He left Spock to drag McCoy onto a bunk, bumping his head rather unceremoniously on the headboard. He looked awful, but he’d survive to panic another day. Kirk swallowed the thought with unease, knowing full well that the same might not be true for Spock. At this rate 3, or rather
2.5 days seemed a hopeful outlook.

He half carried the Vulcan down the corridor and round a corner to the other, smaller room. The former residents had left it unlocked, and Kirk pushed Spock through the door and gently onto the bed. The body was hot and lighter than he’d’ve liked it to be.

“Spock, I need to talk to you.”

For a moment Spock’s facade slipped and he looked at Kirk as though the man was about to break up with him. He looked very young and very ill. Then it locked back into place. “About what do you wish to converse?”
The human swallowed a lump in his throat, which at that moment felt worse than the swelling in McCoy’s. “I… Bones said… That Hayves said… That you…”

Spock looked at him, too sick to even raise an eyebrow. He feared that Hayves had managed to figure out the feelings that he himself had refused to deal with.

“She said that the Pon Farr… Didn’t have to be with a woman.”

Spock didn’t know how Hayves could have discovered this, let alone revealed it in her state. The implications of the question puzzled him. “…Negative. It can be any gender.”

“So, so if there was, say, a guy here, that you, you know, liked, or maybe you just didn’t mind,” his captain stumbled over the words. Spock felt his internal organs going through similar motions. “..Um, melding with, uh, I’m sure I, I’m sure he’d be… happy, to do it. F- for you…”

Kirk couldn’t tell if his nervousness was fear for Spock’s wellbeing, that he might refuse, or the knowledge that he might very well be making both the worst and the single most important proposition of his life.

Spock did not know what to say, and so he said nothing at all. His head was filled with a blind panic. How could he look Jim in the face, with him knowing what he undoubtedly did? “Happy to do it for you”? Jim did not sound very happy at all. He was simply afflicted by a human concept of politeness. Spock was going to lose Jim as a friend, and Nyota as a lover, all for the sake of one day of poor sexual intimacy forced by cold biological fact, or he was going to lose himself. Right now the thing he was most preoccupied with losing was control.

His mind drifted back to the first time Nyota had kissed him. He had seen it coming, acted to respond in kind, expecting it to be just what it was, a kiss. His lips on her lips. He had thought understanding this particular human behaviour would not be possible. Too irrational. He had been almost confused, when it raised the hair on the back of his neck, when he had leaned in needing more. Her mouth was soft and her taste, her human taste, had been stronger than he had imagined. He had stood there, as cool and collected as he could manage, and drank in her scent.

He looked at Jim, who sat next to him on the bed as though he were an ill relative. He supposed, in a way, that he was. Jim cared for him on some level, even if it wasn’t the same love he felt for him. Something broke in Spock’s side. He fought to keep his face straight.

“But I love her.” He said. And he did. He loved her deeply, passionately, in a way she had to coax out of him in private places. It was not something he said often, and he felt the betrayal more keenly, that he had said it in front of Jim and not in front of her, and was now looking at the prospect of bonding, for life, with someone who was also not her. Someone who he loved, but who
Jim let him lie there for a moment as he set his features back in their usual positions. “I know. She knows… Spock, you can’t really believe that Uhura would prefer you to be dead than meld with someone else?”

Of course he didn’t. If she loved him half as much as he loved her she’d die before she let it happen. And he desperately wanted to believe that she did. His face felt wet, but he pulled back from his captain’s hand as it went to wipe the tears.

“Do not. I do not trust myself.” Not to bond with you the second you touch my skin. He ignored the other interpretation of his words, which widened Jim’s eyes considerably.

His head felt so hot it seemed as though he was about to pass out. It was too much. The very possibility that he could get what he needed, that Jim might… It was sending him over the edge. He had to make Jim leave, now, before it was too late anyway. His friend did not understand, had a cruel way of teasing. There was no way Kirk should have been offering himself like this.

“Please leave me,” he asked. He couldn’t see the human but he knew from the pressure on the bed he had made no move to get up.

“No.”

He jumped at the touch of something cold and wet on his forehead. It was a washcloth. He did not remember Jim getting such a thing, but his memory was not at its best.

Jim wiped off almost a week of dirt and cave slime and misted blood from his face, before standing to rinse the cloth in a sink Spock only now noticed. The walls of the room were a creamy yellow, and even with the lights dimmed, they were too bright for him to look at.

When Jim returned, he still had the cloth in hand, and sat down just behind him. He tugged the sleeve of Spock’s shirt up, forcing the fabric to stretch around the thickness of his shoulder.

“What are you doing?” Spock asked. His captain did not respond, but began to slowly wipe his arm, from the inside of his wrist, up to the top of his shoulder and down again. Spock sat rigid, but could not contain the serrated breath that cut the air between them at the cold shock. The overload of hormones in his body screamed at him to do something. Fight, flee. Fuck. He could have done all of the above at that moment. As it happened, his body was almost paralysed by indecision. He needed them all, and could obtain none. He could not fight Jim, his oldest friend. He could not flee this place. Everyone knew what he looked like, and after his behaviour 10 hours ago they all expected trouble. It took every ounce of willpower he had left to deny himself the last. He hoped that this was not a cruel human joke.

“Just helping you cool down.” The human replied.

He was not helping anyone cool down. Spock’s body responded to the touch like a long lost lover, and it was all he could do to keep anything “down” at all. He realised Jim was relying on the fact that Spock was fighting a losing battle. He knew, honestly, that he was also depending on Jim to persuade him.

“Do you want me to stop?” His captain asked.

Spock caught his eye for a fraction of a second, but said nothing. Jim took it as permission, and encountered no response as he pulled the hem of Spock’s uniform up over his head.
The body underneath smouldered as though it could barely contain the man within it. There was
dried blood on the un-cleaned arm and on his chest where it had run from his neck. It looked as
though Spock had lost a fight on a freshly cut lawn. When Jim gently wiped the Vulcans throat
and chest, he heard the catching of his breathe. Spocks eyes were barely focused. The water
evaporated quickly from his skin, wanting no part in what was happening.

Spock felt a prickle of shame in his chest where the blood had been smeared away. Jim had
guessed it was him. He had no doubt of this now. The betrayal, it seemed, was complete. If his
friend did not leave the room now, right now, he would have no way to pretend this had not
happened. He could have hidden casual sex, although even now both the act and the cover up
seemed illogical and unnecessary. But to hide a bond like the one he was about to form. It would
be impossible. And whilst he knew Nyota did not want him dead, he knew that if he survived she
would not be able to forgive him, either. Perhaps, he reasoned, it was better that she leave him
angry than in mourning. This did not make it any easier.

He could not bring himself to move away or speak as Jim returned, the cloth wetter than before.
The flannel brushed against his nipple, he suspected it was not by accident.

Spock attempted to dissociate from his body whilst the human did his work. He needed the space
to think things through. He wondered how long he had left; after this there would be nothing he
could hide. Kirk would know of four years of ever more complicated feelings. Buried lust that had
nothing at all to do with the Pon Farr; the true nature of Spocks affection for him. It was all too
much too quickly, which struck him as ironic, since until this point their relationship had
progressed quickly to being best friends and then stagnated for the 18 months, since the incident
with Khan. Spock knew that best friends did not really classify as stagnation in a relationship, but
his need had always been for something more. This, too, held quite some irony. As a child and a
young adult, and even for much of his time at the academy, Spock had been alone, with very few
people he could consider anything more than acquaintances. Thya was a word almost as strange
to him then as the concepts it embodied in Standard. Now he was surrounded by people he could
call friends, lovers, siblings. He even held a special affection for McCoy, although he often felt it
returned buoyed by an insult.

He came back to reality with a slight jolt as the waistband of his pants rubbed over his erection
through his underwear, as Kirk dragged them off. His upper body did not really feel any cleaner;
instead, it felt sticky and hot. Sweating must leave humans as uncomfortable as it did dehydrated.

Vulnerable did not do his position justice. He put both his hands firmly onto the bed behind him,
twisting them into the sheets as Jim ran the washcloth up the inside of his thigh. He saw red for a
fraction of the second, something between pure lust and anger that Jim was intentionally tempting
him. What was left of his control was leaving him now.

Jim placed the damp flannel onto Spocks underwear, allowing the cool wet to seep through the
fabric as he crossed the room for something. Spocks vision cut off about 10 feet away from his
face and for the few moments he was gone, Kirk was just another feature in the blur that the room
had become.

Spock couldnt identify the tube in his hand when he returned. He couldnt even tell if the writing
was too small or his vision too fuzzy.

Jim leant over him, his hand resting very lightly on top of the cloth, drawing out an involuntary
sound. His lips moved a bare centimetre from Spocks.
“That is unnecessary,” he heard his voice saying. “The Pon Farr does not require that—“

Kirk kissed him, barely a peck, just a simple brush of mouth on mouth. “I require it.” He said, and that was all Spock could bear any longer.
A small part of Kirk felt his current state of arousal to be morally repugnant. Spock was clearly as scared and upset as he was turned on, and the idea of finding another person who was so vulnerable so attractive seemed to him to be somewhat predatory. In all honesty, he could not remember being this aroused in his entire life. A heat surged out of Spock where their lips touched and filled his body with a lust he had never before encountered.

Spock nipped urgently at his bottom lip and then kissed the spot, lapping at the tender place and tasting the iron sweetness of his captain.

Despite knowing full well what the situation was, Kirk found his… friend’s? Partner’s? lust to be something both hot and frightening. The loss of control was so out of place that it held both the draw of something illicit and the possibility of some terrible backlash, which acted only to make it all the more sweet. Spock tasted coppery, just slightly, as though the tongue that met his as he dipped into the open mouth had recently been sucking on keys.

It was Spock who pulled away first, or rather, he pulled Jim away. Vulcan fingers held his shoulders hard enough for their tips to bruise as he suspended Kirk’s torso above him. Jim inhaled air as Spock exhaled it, their lips an inch apart. It took him a moment to realise what Spock was doing, until his clothed cock brushed against Spock’s own through his underwear.

Spock murmured something, the words lost to the cloud of lust he breathed out with them. The breath was hot on Jim’s throat.

“What is it?” He tried to catch the Vulcan’s eye, but somehow he doubted Spock could see very much at all.

“I’m burning,” the first officer said with great conviction, as though it were happening to someone else. Jim had to remind himself that this was a new experience for both of them.

Spock released his iron grip on his shoulders, and he dropped down so that their chests met and their genitals pressed against each other. He bumped his forehead lightly on Spock’s; it didn’t hurt. Nothing hurt. Both his upper arms would be covered in little bruises.

He kissed Spock’s closed mouth again, rocking his hips gently, and the hands found their way under his shirt.

Sexuality poured in through his skin where his lover touched it, so hot it almost hurt. Inhuman strength ripped his uniform and tore it aside, and Spock’s body arched up to meet his newly bared skin. Too slow. Given the choice he knew Spock would be in him right now.

Knowing that if he didn’t take control for a moment and lube Spock up, the Vulcan would gladly have him dry, he pushed himself away to drag off the now sticky undergarment which was all that
protected Spock from his gaze. There was no big reveal as he tugged them over his cock; they were both too desperate now. Spock wrapped his arms around his head, clawing at air as though it would grant him some sort of self-restraint.

Spock’s cock was proportional to his body, although not as Jim had expected it. His pubic hair was more like the hair on his head than the wire that graced his own body. The shaft was pink, not green as he’d imagined, although he could see green blood flowing in the veins under the skin, and the head was what could be described by a colour chart as “olive”. The balls were big and tight, as though their contents were unusually swollen. He resisted the urge to touch them, taking the tube of lubricant, which seemed to attempt to disguise itself as toothpaste. The gel was cool against his palm. He held Spock’s erection by its shaft as gently as he could, and slowly ran his open hand up its underside, from base to tip. The head dripped with warm precum, which mixed with the gel as he spread back down over the other side of the member. Spock’s keening cry made his own cock jump.

Deciding he could afford to tease just a little more, he stroked the head of the penis lightly, all the way around with a finger. The pre-ejaculate spilled onto him, musky and wet.

Spock sobbed into his arms, tugging at his hair. He needed Jim now, but the human still had pants on. “Take them off!” He moaned.

Kirk jumped off the bed before Spock could rip his trousers as well as his shirt. He yanked them down along with his underpants and stepped out of both, fully aware of the eyes on his cock.

Spock looked at it, entranced by need. It would have amused McCoy that it was slightly smaller than it had been in the dream he had invaded, but it wasn’t small either. It was redder than his, a little slimmer. He wanted it in his mouth, but didn’t trust himself not to bite.

Instead he sat up shakily and held on to Jim by his hips, palms against the razor-sharp bones. He half pulled, half lifted the human over him so that he straddled him, his cock inches from where it needed to be.

Kirk locked his legs into place to prevent Spock from unceremoniously entering him in a single well-aimed thrust. “No. I’m gonna need at least a bit of foreplay first.” He said firmly, and proffered the tube.

Spock held himself deathly still, whilst the red faded from his vision. He could easily force Jim’s legs apart if he chose to, and he made himself wait until that danger had passed.

He shoved the human a little too roughly to the side, causing him to fall off of Spock and onto the bed next to him. He held Jim’s knees firmly apart with his elbows, ripping the tube open at the sides and letting its contents seep onto his fingers.

The look of concentration on Spock’s face was familiar, and would have warmed him at any other time. Right now, however, Kirk was already too hot, and the idea that such a simple task was taking so much control concerned him.

Spock on the other hand was amazed at the fact that he had any control at all. He was deep in the Plak Tow now, and he had never known a Vulcan to respond to anything said to them during this later stage. He wondered if this was a result of his half human heritage sparing him the worst of it, or if his mental agility was such that it granted him more control than others. He didn’t have time or capacity to dwell on the matter.
His shaking hand slick to the wrist he pressed a finger roughly into the ring of muscle between Kirk’s legs. He heard the human grunt in pain but took no heed of it, adding a second finger immediately and scissoring the tight entrance almost too forcefully, as though he were used to the task and knew Jim’s limits. In reality it was a lack of willpower that made him so frenzied.

“Fuck!” Jim swore as a third finger stretched him. A sensation passed from the human through his fingers. It was burning and intense, distorted by the Plak Tow, and he couldn’t tell if he’d torn the muscle or touched his prostate.

Nails raised welts on his back. He moved his fingers again and Jim arched his back suddenly, a cracking noise coming from his jarred vertebrae. The hole was tight and it didn’t seem to loosen as he stretched it, although it did become more pliable. Spock had been at his task for barely twenty seconds and it felt like an hour. He pulled his fingers out too quickly, and Jim hissed at the friction. Spock barely heard.

Kirk’s breaths came in ragged gasps of fear and pleasure and pain. A girl had once told him the trick was to relax, but he was finding that very difficult to do right now. He just had to hope that there would be some lucid aspect of Spock whenever they finally entered the meld.

Spock seemed to be ignoring his legs as though they could hold their almost splits position the entire time, but he allowed him to hook them over his shoulders. Jim couldn’t see the Vulcan’s cock, but he felt it when the head nestled against him for a half second, hot and pulsing like the rest of Spock, before it plunged halfway in.

Spock may have looked young and vulnerable, boyish, earlier, but it was a man’s desire that filled him now, that quite literally filled Jim as he let himself all the way in. He felt curiously powerful, the adrenaline high feeling so good it almost blinded him to the physical sensations. He felt like he had a lot of blood, of living fluid in him that would spill at any moment. Intellectually, he would have thought that the chances of him somehow managing to impregnate Jim in this arrangement were approximately $141,471 : 1$ – but he wasn’t thinking anything right now, and the hormones were telling him he could fertilise everyone in this colony, infected and all. The smell of human sweat and pheromones was salty and musky and sang in the air around them, or maybe only in Spock’s mind. It mattered not.

Kirk groaned and bit his own tongue as Spock stretched him. It didn’t hurt, per se, but the fullness of it was distinctly uncomfortable. After the jerky initial penetration, he froze for a moment. Jim couldn’t see any signs of sentience in the Vulcan, so assumed quite correctly that he was already close to release. For some reason Spock’s body wasn’t allowing it to happen though. Too early. He felt the thought and wondered if it was Spock’s or his own.

In the pause he looked up at Spock’s face. He looked abstracted, his eyes glazed over, suggestive of both bliss and purgatory. There was no sweat on him, but he seemed somehow to sparkle with some sort of condensation. His eyebrows were up slightly, partially concealed by his messed up hair line, and mouth was open.

Finally Spock’s body reengaged with that primal part of his brain which was still attempting to corral this event into something resembling intercourse. He gasped as though he had been holding his breath in for a long time; and placed his hands on the bed either side of Jim.

The next few thrusts decreased in discomfort until Kirk began to appreciate the subtler pleasures of being penetrated. He could feel the unusually powerful pulse as Spock’s blood surged through his member. Uncalculated movements made Spock’s erection grind unexpectedly against his prostate, and the Vulcan lowered himself so that Jim’s own cock was sliding against his stomach. To his own surprise, he felt the pressure building in his groin and knew he was about to cum. Just before
he managed it, Spock, sensing he was close, reached between them, and gripped the base of his cock so tightly it hurt, forcing him to wait. A few thrusts later he released the hold and jerked him instead, so that he came almost immediately into the hand, spasming around Spock as the Vulcan also ejaculated. The universe contracted until all that was left of it was his body and Spock’s touch. The liquid felt hot inside of him, and the orgasm rolled its way through his abdomen and back down as he spattered Spock’s palm with semen.

He felt something odd within himself. Not another conscience, but then Spock wasn’t one of those any more. He must have been something, however, because the connection was there, in the back of his mind, observing – a synchronised orgasm was something Kirk had only achieved a handful of times in his life, and hell had he been trying. At the very least, whatever it was gave the Vulcan excellent timing.

Spock remained hard within him, and he somehow managed for his own arousal to simply plateau instead of waning. He knew that his libidinousness was artificial, a product of Spock’s Pon Farr, created by the telepathic nature of his touch. What a logical side of the Pon Farr, Kirk thought as he regained the ability of cognizant thought, to keep the partner aroused as the sufferer. He doubted Spock would be able to appreciate this particular aspect of logic.

He ground down onto the humming organ, his body being taken over by that alien need. His mouth clamped onto a spot on Spock’s throat, and he bit and sucked, drawing copper-green blood into his mouth as though he were dying of thirst.
Blood Fever

Hayves awoke from where she had keeled over with a criss-cross of indented flesh on her cheek from the wire of the caging. With no one in sight who was uninfected the unbearable lust to spread her wonderful Master abated a little. There was a pale green substance on her chin, tiny circles of emerald where the blood rich foam from her mouth had dried out.

For an empath, this cage was particularly awful; in fact, she was able to sense the feelings of everyone in the compound, and a few parasite-addled souls outside of it. Need was everywhere, along with the release of fulfilled addictions. She tried to find the clearer minds about her, waiting for the gift she had to bring.

More powerful, though, she found a different kind of need. Her commander. He felt to her then like some animal; his every movement instinct, his thrusts no more resistible than his breathing. The telepath radiated so much of his being, simple though it was at that moment, that she could feel the bite on his neck, parallel to the faint scar from McCoy’s theft of his parasite. She could feel him cumming again and again until his groin ached, and she could feel that none of that was enough, that he could cum a hundred times more before the fever was out.

Much fainter she could feel a consciousness within him; it wasn’t his. Had she been saner, she’d probably have taken some sort of satisfaction from knowing she’d been right about Spock and her captain. She always liked it when she was right.

Spock fucked him until he forgot his own name and semen ran down his thighs and ruined the sheets. The same lust that drove the Vulcan also drove him, forcing him to accept the brisk pace even when the cleft between his legs was tender and bruised, and his cock so spent it could no longer keep up with the telepathic Pon Farr.

Kirk somehow managed to draw him into a kiss, and it was noisy and wet, left a string of saliva running between their mouths, verdant with the blood that had hung on his lips from the bite.

When Spock came again, he could no longer take it. It had been almost two and a half hours, crushed into that position, and Spock hadn’t withdrawn from him once.

“Stop!” He shouted at Spock, knowing he couldn’t hear. Before the Vulcan could begin thrusting again he unhooked his cramping legs and braced them against the pale stomach, pushing hard.

Without any kind of grip on the man beneath him, Spock slid off and rolled onto his back. He seemed a little stunned and didn’t try to mount him again.

Trying his best to ignore the pain, Kirk got slowly up from the bed. As Spock had withdrawn from him, he had been followed by enough semen that there was almost an unbroken trail between the damp patch where Jim had lay and his still hard cock, which stood out from him at a perfect right angle. The white liquid was tinged with pink, and from the feel of his ass Kirk speculated that this was not some other unknown aspect of Vulcan biology.

He limped to the ensuite, taking the lubricant with him. Inside he felt raw and swollen; the pain was deep and now that his contact with Spock had been broken, it was almost too much. He found with some relief that he did not need the bathroom, probably something to do with the Pon Farr, he
imagined, and instead stepped straight into the -real water- shower. He wondered that sonic ones were not employed on such a dry outpost, but was grateful nonetheless. The water ran white, then red, and he leant heavily on the wall for support.

Before he could collapse under the stream, he made himself get out. It was too tempting, but Spock wasn’t finished. Dripping water on the floor, he gulped more down from the tap. Spock might not need to eat or drink for this, but he certainly did. He wrapped himself in a towel and made to re-enter the bedroom, before he decided to stop and put a finger wet with the lube up into himself. The sensation made him struggle for breath, but it would be nothing on the pain he would feel if Spock took him without it; the walls as he felt them were already burned by friction, and he was bruised internally, including his prostate, which he hadn’t known could bruise at all.

When he did manage to stand again and enter the bedroom, Spock was curled on the floor with his hands over his ears, eyes screwed shut.

Spock didn’t notice Jim leaving him, but when he had recovered from the pause his body had taken to recover, he found himself to be alone on the bed. Betrayal –not unreasonable, mind. Abandonment. Jim had had enough and left him to die of his fever, to burn to death. His cock was so hard it felt like it was made of alabaster, and the skin of it was almost blistered from the relentless movement. His balls felt hot and heavy, like swollen lymph nodes producing white blood cells, but in this case sperm.

He was still sick with the fever, and he shook in despair as he realised it would overcome him. He slid from the bed onto the cool floor with a thump and wrapped his arms around his head. He had been prepared to die with dignity, before the ones he loved. He would freeze to death in front of Nyota a hundred times before he would choose to die like this; pitiful, naked, uncontrollable. Weak on the floor of some colony, his relationship with her ruined, his friendship with Jim all but destroyed. He could feel the connection with his captain, but he didn’t dare use it. Ashamed. What he had done was shameful, he had slept with his captain when he was pressured into it by his foolish human emotions, allowed himself to become vulnerable out of worry, and Spock had taken advantage.

They would find his body and they would know. Jim would feel guilty about not being able to save him, but in reality, he would hate him. Uhura would realise he betrayed her for no reason. That he was pathetic, ruled by lust. Because he had accepted only Jim, they would all know of his feelings.

He could barely think these things, but he could feel them, and his vision failed, contracting to shapes in the dark. He closed his eyes and covered his ears to protect them from the rush of his own blood. Where was logic now? Even his own mind had deserted him, and all that was left was emotion, as raw as his flesh. He was lonelier than he had ever been. Guiltier than he even felt for his mother. He couldn’t cry about it now, there was nothing left of him to do so.

He didn’t hear Jim moving around, and started at the familiar rough coolness of the washcloth against his skin. It wiped him down from head to toe. He concentrated on doing nothing as it dabbed away the semen from his member. He felt it pulsating, needing Kirk as much as he did, and he knew that if he so much as opened his eyes he would not be able to stop himself - and Jim would never forgive him. He had lost all sense of time, but he knew that the human must by now be in agony.

Go, he wanted to say. Just leave me to die. Go, I can’t control myself. But he didn’t, because he
couldn’t. To do so would break his concentration and he would be back inside his captain before he could stop it, so he simply lay there until he felt it, hot, cool, human breath on the head of his cock.

A degrading sexual act, that he had never let Uhura perform on him. Jim’s tongue caressed the head lightly, and suddenly Spock was gripping his hair, forcing him down onto it and thrusting. Despite the tenderness, it felt shockingly good; cold at the base where the air passing by cooled Jim’s saliva and hot at the tip in the back of his throat. Jim’s gag reflex only stimulated him further, and he came quickly and hard. The human spluttered as he released his scalp, pulling off and gasping for breath, choking on stray semen that had somehow managed to enter his windpipe.

Spock was lost again to the fever. Jim spat what he could of his release onto the floor and swallowed what he couldn’t. Spock’s touch was a relief to him; it triggered a rush of adrenaline and endorphins, much like the parasite did to its victims. He felt his penis slowly respond to it, twitching as he looked at the Vulcan panting on the floor.

He wiped his mouth on the skin of his arm and shuffled closer to Spock’s head. A little bit of reciprocation wouldn’t go amiss right now. He let his cock rest on the Vulcan’s cheek, precum running from the tip and into the seam of his mouth. After a few seconds, swollen lips parted. He didn’t lick the juices away, but accepted Jim’s erection into his mouth when he leaned over to do the same for Spock’s. He felt teeth at his base as he deep throated the green phallus before him. When he pulled back slightly to simply suck, hard, on the olive head, Spock copied him. He took this to mean he liked it, letting the roughness of his tongue brush the glans as the pale hips bucked. They each lasted a little longer this time, and when Jim came it was dry and almost, almost painful. He drank Spock’s essence down quickly, not wanting the warm salt of it in his mouth when he was hot and thirsty. The Vulcan did not release his still hard cock, and he didn’t release Spock’s either; and so it continued.

He sucked on his own finger alongside Spock, and then reached between the Vulcan’s cheeks and pressed into him. Spock was actually wet inside, a little trick of Vulcan biology he hadn’t known. His hole was tensing and relaxing as he let his teeth scrape ever so lightly against the slit of the cock in his mouth, and the whole thing clamped down on his finger when he finally found Spock’s prostate, swollen to the size of a golf ball as it struggled to keep up with supplying semen. He stroked it gently and the writhing mass beneath him shuddered uncontrollably. He added another finger, the wet hole providing all the lubrication needed, and strummed the sensitive gland. He could feel the Vulcan’s orgasm tightening around his fingers, almost enough to break them with each clench. Unintelligible noises escaped Spock’s lips, slurred curses in languages only he could understand as he spurted hot into Jim’s mouth.

It seemed that they could both enjoy this.
At some point, Spock had passed out on top of Jim. His fever had finally broken and exhaustion had taken over from the Plak Tow immediately. After several hours of lying beneath the Vulcan, covered in cum and blood and spit, having dreams he couldn’t distinguish from reality, Kirk had begun to worry. Nothing he did could stir his bedmate, Spock was unreachable. Had he known how to use their telepathic bond, he might’ve reassured himself, but he didn’t. Spock wasn’t just asleep, his head was empty and every muscle in his body slack.

The body above him was limp and heavy and it hurt to struggle out from underneath it. His knees were too weak to carry him and he hit the floor like a piece of meat. Between his legs, an opaque red solution of semen and blood made him stick to the floor uncomfortably.

His ass disobeyed him as he attempted to stand up, achieving instead only a steady trickle of blood. How undignified. Oh well, there was nothing for it but to do what he always did in situations he couldn’t get himself out of.

He dragged himself across the floor smearing it with bodily fluids and grabbed his own pants, fumbling through the pockets. Unable to find his own, he took out Spock’s communicator and turned it on. It hummed in his ear, probably his fault from earlier. He called Bones.

An annoying sound in his own ear roused McCoy from his prolonged rest. After a minute he recognised it to be Jim’s voice.

“What?” He said rather abruptly, sitting up against his own better judgement. His neck hurt like hell. Someone had left a bottle of codeine and a syringe of precious morphine on a stool by his bed, the latter he administered to himself without a second thought. As he relaxed he noticed the digital clock on the wall. He had been asleep for 26 hours.

“Fuck!” he shouted into the microphone. He hadn’t been with Spock.


“Is Spock alright? Did you find someone?” He asked the ear piece.

“Uh… Kind of. Now can you just get your ass down the fucking corridor and in here please?” Jim meant the room he’d got for Spock.

“What’s “kind of”?” he entreated, but Kirk had already turned off the device.

He sat for a moment, letting the painkillers do their job and then hauled himself down the corridor, ignoring the fact that his med kit was scraping along the floor and he was dressed in his underwear beneath a dressing gown he did not remember owning.

He stood outside the door, waiting for it to slide open and then realise he had to do it himself. Who on Earth (or wherever) had thought it more appropriate to fly wood over than to use building materials mined from the planet itself? He pushed the handle down, stepped into the room, and stepped immediately back out again, feeling as though he’d walked into a nightmare, or a wet dream gone terribly, terribly wrong.

The stench of sweat and blood and sex diffused into the hallway like the smell of cooking in his mother’s house. He would not have such things going on in his mother’s house.

“For God’s sake Bones, close the door!” Jim croaked at him. It took several seconds before he understand that Jim meant for him to be inside that door when he closed it.
Jim had come to Bones for a lot of problems. He had come to him wounded, needing to get on a ship, having an allergic reaction (McCoy was willing to concede that this may have been his fault); he had come to him having independently discovered that it was indeed possible to fit one’s tongue into the little hole in the vacuum tube for blood collection, but not to take it out again, and he had even come to him dead.

McCoy supposed that he should have prepared himself for the day when he had come to him naked with his dick raw and their mutual best friend’s spunk pouring out his bloody asshole, but unfortunately he hadn’t.

Spock lay face up and covered in Jim’s blood and his own release, out stone cold. His cock wasn’t as green as he’d imagined it to be.

“Bones, a little help here?” He snapped back into the present and rushed forward to help hold Kirk up. The captain looked pale and ill; there was something green on one side of his face, his eyes were sunk back into his skull and his lips were cracked.

“He didn’t…” Rape you? He held Jim’s shoulders protectively. They were covered in little black bruises and a single crescent shaped cut, dug into by Spock’s fingers.

Kirk managed to give him a look which told him that he was still maintaining his own invincibility above all else. “No. He was just…A bit rough.”

He held Jim with one hand whilst he scrabbled for the scanner with the other. Over all, Jim was probably going to be fine, but he went over him several times anyway.

“I think I’m gonna be sick…”

With the coolness only a trained medical professional could manage, McCoy lowered Kirk to the ground, supported by his own hands, and moved his dressing gown neatly out of harm’s way as the contents of Jim’s stomach were expelled in several gasping retches.

The whiteness of it surprised him; of all things he had expected, Jim giving head was not one of them. He heard the doctor in him speak. “A lot of people find that semen can make them nauseous.” Jim wasn’t done. Another mouthful spattered to the floor. “Jesus Christ.”

Bones held his breath against the scent of cum and vomit and scooted Jim along the floor into the bathroom. He settled for dumping his fellow human into the shower in a position which was clearly hurting his ass, and then went back into the bedroom to look over Spock.

The scanner told him his body was still in shock, but he no longer had the fever and his hormone levels were descending to normal. He couldn’t tell if he was in some sort of coma or an incredibly deep state of meditation, and suspected that the two were not mutually exclusive for a Vulcan.

Kirk woke up when he returned to the bathroom. He didn’t seem as embarrassed as he ought to be, but maybe he was too tired or worried for it.

“I’ll be okay, look at Spock first,” he tried to insist.

Bones shook his head. “He’ll be fine. You are gonna get a fucking infection if you don’t let me do my Job.” He handed Kirk his own codeine supply and watched him take two with the water from the shower. “This is so fucking far beyond the call of duty…” He complained.

“I know.” Jim looked at him. “I’m grateful.”

“Well,” He said, “It wasn’t my arse on the line…”

“The next joke you make will be your last.” Kirk grit his teeth as McCoy flipped him out of the shower and face down onto the bathroom rug.

“You might wanna hold off the death threat until after I’ve had my finger up your ass.” The cheeks were bruised purple from what he assumed was the constant slap of Spock’s balls, and the crack was doing worse. He donned a pair of gloves and coated a finger in medicated ointment. “You know, on the ship I’d’ve just given you a pill for this, but there’s none left down here, so…” He tried to ignore Jim’s strangled yell and the fact that his finger came out bloody.

Spock kept his eyes closed long after he had awoken, not ready to face Jim as McCoy did his best to repair the damage. He listened to their strained conversation, and an occasional grunt or
whimper; he could tell he had done something awful to Jim. He smelled blood, and sick, and he knew he was responsible. Eventually they left the room, McCoy persuading Jim that it would not be possible for him to rest here.

Spock allowed himself to curl up and stare blankly at the wall, blocking out the blood on the mattress. His emotionless visor protected him from the worst of the misery, but he still felt it, the guilt of what he had done. He couldn’t remember arriving in this room, or if he had asked for consent. He dared not touch the connection they now had. The vitriol Jim had obviously been shielding him from whilst he was in the room would be too much. He couldn’t bear to be despised by someone to whom he had shown what he inevitably just had. Hated by the one he was melded with.

When McCoy returned he forgot to reassume his original position.

“You’re awake?” He did not respond, concentrating as hard as he could as a small crack in the headboard. Maybe he was responsible for that crack. It made him feel sick.

“You can’t stay in here,” McCoy told him. He felt a hand on his elbow and tried to pull away. There was nowhere to go.

“I am too dirty to go back to the other room.” His voice held unpermitted disgust and he shut his eyes, ashamed at both the outburst and the reason for it.

“We’ll clean you up.” McCoy gently tugged his arm across his shoulders and put an arm about his waist, walking him to the shower, which was still on.

Bones was being kind to him, but he didn’t deserve it. He wanted to refuse the towel wrapped around his shoulders, and the way McCoy rubbed him down with it. He still felt dirty.

He looked at his feet. There was a red stain on the bathroom rug. Jim must think him to be revolting. He certainly agreed. What on Earth had he done?
Chekov knew his optimism annoyed those around him. He couldn’t help it—everything had somehow turned out okay for him, for his entire life. An adored child genius; the successful attempt to save Earth, the defeat of Khan—he had even seen his captain brought back to life. He had his regrets, of course; he had been unable to save Spock’s mother, and had witnessed the destruction of an entire world, six billion people. But his own family, and the one he had made on the ship for himself, remained largely untouched by the violence in the world around them. He had never faced a no win situation, and he knew he wasn’t about to now.

He soldered the far end of the central coil to its power source, the third and final one in his giant electromagnet. Early that morning, and long before his shift began, he had bounced out of bed with his tremendous idea, and had set about making it a reality immediately in his pyjamas. No one paid him any heed; he was respected here. It made him proud to be somewhere where his age was rarely used as a weapon against him, and instead made him stand out as exceptional, not a freak. He had never been bullied for it, but to be on a ship where the average IQ was in the 120s had helped him settle in.

Now his plan was complete, and he could probably even expect a commendation: The shuttle was wrapped in 80 times in a coil of wire, coated in heat resistant material for entry to the atmosphere; the inside had one giant 300 coil ring touching two of the walls and the floor and ceiling, and a smaller 260 coil ring within that.

Deciding it was worth wasting power to test his machine, he wired it to the main ship and diverted the current into the wires. He took off his own shoe and dropped it in the centre of the magnet’s focus. It took more than a minute for the sole to finally touch the ground. It was perfect.

He turned the power off and shoved his foot back into his shoe, hopping to the turbolift as he did so.

Lieutenant Uhura was on the bridge as expected. For the last two days she had seemed unusually depressed, and resisted his attempts to cheer her up. He couldn’t tell if she was just worried because it had been so long since they had heard anything at all, or if there was some greater problem, but he hoped his news could cheer her up.

She was in her chair talking quietly with Sulu about weather patterns.

“Lieutenant! Lieutenant Uhura!” She flinched at his enthusiasm.

“What is it, Ensign?” She sighed.

“I have done it, I have found a way to clear the atmosphere!” She considered him for a moment, her face a little less lifeless.

“What’s the plan?” She pushed herself up from her seat and followed him back into the turbolift.

Kirk lay face down on his bed, inexplicably anxious. He had attempted to speak to Spock, and got the same even replies he was used to from the Vulcan; he probed at Spock’s presence in the back of his head, but got no response at all.

He had no idea what he should be saying to Spock, or what he wanted Spock to say back, so he didn’t push it. He suddenly felt very foolish. Spock had taken him out of need. He hadn’t wanted to sleep or meld with Jim. He was probably embarrassed or scared for his relationship with Uhura. Why had he let himself think he was anything other than a necessity? What on Earth about Spock’s desperate union with him would make him think he was anything special? It had certainly been a violation of the bounds of their friendship, and maybe a violation of Spock, too.

“Spock, I want to apologize,” He began, but was cut off.

“There is no need.” Spock said, a little too sharply. “I should also apologize to you. I hope it will not impede our professional relationship. I will never make you speak of this incident again.”

Their professional relationship? Jim wanted to argue this. He wanted to tell Spock that he would do
it all again, that he valued him, cared for him; but Spock’s words left no room for him to do anything but keep quiet.

He couldn’t just leave it though. He needed to break Spock’s outer shell; there was no way he could just let their friendship go, even if anything else was out of the question.

Before he could decide what to say, he heard a buzz from his communicator. He jammed it into his ear expecting Arros’ voice.

“Kirk?” It was Uhura.

“Uhura?” He sat up as best he could, and so did Spock. “How the hell did you manage to clear the ion storm?”

Spock’s eyebrows were above his hairline. Kirk couldn’t tell if his greener-than-normal complexion was a result of too much blood in his cheeks or too little. A pang of guilt came from nowhere. Why did he feel guilty? Hadn’t he just saved her boyfriend? No. It wasn’t his guilt. It was Spock’s, invading his mind through the meld.

“We had to sacrifice a shuttle. Chekov rigged it so that it carried enough electromagnets to draw the ions out of the storm to a place about eighteen kilometres south of you. You’re still in the storm, but most of the ions scrambling our signals are all down their now. We managed to move about 2,900 tons. It should be safe to beam you up. Is Spock there?”

“Yeah, he…” The words stuck in his throat. He looked to Spock, who took out his own earpiece.

“Hello Lieutenant,” He said, as though nothing was wrong.

“Spock! I was so worried about you!”

Jim pulled his earpiece out and rolled over in the bed, wincing in pain. He told himself that he wasn’t trying to ignore their conversation, he was just giving them privacy. He looked up and found Bones awake to meet his gaze, and willed himself to look tired instead of disappointed before he slammed his head back into the pillow.

When they had all prepared themselves for beam up, Spock dressed neatly in his uniform, Kirk in his black undershirt and Bones in the now rather musky dressing gown, Spock turned to them both.

“I would appreciate if you did not mention recent events to Lieutenant Uhura.” He said crisply. “I will relay what I must to her myself; if the two of you, and anyone else who knows what happened would refrain from talking about it unless she approaches you, I would be very grateful.”

There was no disagreeing with that, so they both nodded.

“Energize.”

Uhura rushed to Spock, reaching him almost before he was completely in the room with them. She kissed him hard, but although he responded she sensed he was rattled by something.

“Thank God!” She sighed, putting her hands on his face and titling it so that she could check if he was alright.

“I would like to speak to you in private,” he said, quietly, so that only she could hear.

“The three of us, all in sick bay, now,” Bones announced.

“I would like to request a brief stop at my own chambers first,” Spock looked at him for permission.

“You have half an hour in your…Chambers. Then I want you in the sickbay. Got that?”

Uhura led Spock not to his room but to hers, relinquishing her responsibility to Scotty. The door slid shut behind them and she pulled him into an embrace. He lent into it a little stiffly.

“Are you okay? What the hell happened? Dr Axjerbl said you’d been infected by a parasite that’s taken over the whole of Colony 1 and turned it into zombies!”

Spock looked surprised, as though he’d forgotten the event entirely.

“I am quite alright. The parasite was removed,” The pause he left was too long.

“…But?” she asked, dreading the answer. She rubbed both his arms up and down, until she noticed a dressing on one and held it up before her. “You’re injured.”
“It is only a minor wound. It is from the bite that infected me…” He swallowed. “But we have little time before I am expected back at the sickbay, and this is not what I came to tell you.” The silence gnawed at Spock’s stomach like Uhura gnawed at her own lip. She composed herself and squeezed both his shoulders. “What is it? You can tell me.”

“Whilst I was on the planet’s surface… The heat or the hormones from the parasite, they, triggered something in me. The Pon Farr.” He looked blankly at her even though his voice shook a little.

“Your… Mating cycle?” She asked. He had warned her once of it. After the first time they had had sex, he had admitted to her that he had been a virgin, that he had always imagined that he would only ever have sex during the Pon Farr. There was a bite on his neck. She wanted to close her eyes against it, but she couldn’t look away from him.

He nodded. She realised she was gripping his arms too hard and let go, her hands falling to her sides. She’d had a few boyfriends before, and she knew she’d been cheated on in the past. But this was Spock, and because it was the Pon Farr, she wasn’t even really allowed to blame him.

She went and sat on the foot of her bed, staring at the dresser on the opposite wall.

“So you… Found someone else…”

The silence pressed in on her chest, but she forbade herself from getting upset.

“It was unavoidable,” Spock told her. “I was presented with the decision of dying, or… Mating with—"

She shut him up by putting her hands momentarily over her own ears. “I don’t want to know. You did what you had to do, Spock. I don’t want to know who she was, your safety is enough. Let’s just move on and pretend like this didn’t happen.”

All she could hear was his quiet sigh.

“Okay,” he said.

But he could not.
Jim had been confined to sickbay with Spock and McCoy for two days now. Despite his own condition, McCoy had to be in charge of their care himself, as all other qualified staff with the exception of a rather skittish nurse had been beamed down to the surface, alongside most of their medical supplies. Kirk didn't want a single team down there on the surface without someone trained to remove parasitic bodies, and the Colony 2 scientists were struggling as it was.

In the next room the nurse was keeping Lieutenant Hayves heavily sedated; she had been operated on by another doctor before beam down and given a heavy dose of a drug to stop the parasite eggs in her system from hatching. Nonetheless, McCoy had extracted tens of tiny worms from her bloodstream and saliva, and her eyes were still red when a torch was shone into them.

McCoy himself had refused their request for separate rooms, saying that he was too ill himself to be traipsing around after the both of them whilst the officer next door had worms. Unfortunately, forced confinement with him hadn't made Spock any more desirous to talk, so he distracted himself with McCoy, who seemed to still be experiencing a degree of distress from the events of the past week.

“For gods sake Jim, I'm a doctor, stop worrying about me,” Bones tried to rebuff him for the look of concern he had cast in the doctor's direction. It was smoke and mirrors, he really wasn't looking well, and the only eye contact Jim had received from Spock had come the night before, when the man had sat bolt upright in bed clutching at his throat and choking loud enough to wake them both.

“Have you seen yourself?” He sighed and let it drop, patting him on the shoulder and ignoring the pain in his rectum as he bounced up from the bed.

“You can forget it Jim, I'm not letting you out early. Get back on the bed before your ass starts leaking blood again.” McCoy teased dismissively. He knew this wasn't a real possibility. He should heal fine with that nurse fingering him and an IV food supply for the next several days. He would have laughed were it just the two of them in the room.

Spock tensed where he was lying on the biobed, and his face fell to the side, facing away from the pair. McCoy seemed not to notice, but it still bothered Kirk. He couldn't tell if Spock was avoiding talking about the Pon Farr or talking to him, and the latter prospect made him anxious. He wanted to return Spock to work as soon as possible, if only to force him into interaction without literally having to order it.

Though he would never admit it, Kirk was beginning to feel a little used. He knew, objectively, that Spock had not chosen for it to be so, and that he had offered himself up knowing that he was doing so to fulfil that need for Spock. Well, he chose to believe that was why he did it. But still, he felt as though he had been fucked and thrown away like the tissues he'd had strewn about his dorm at the Academy.

Still, he had more to deal with than Spock right now; he had already disobeyed McCoy and contacted Starfleet Command several times, to discuss the possibility of invasion. There were several species they now knew were immune to infection by the parasite, and he was determined to keep this as military an operation as possible, to prevent it getting into the hands of Section 31, although their hands had been rather few and far between since Khan had arranged for one of their main buildings to be blown up 18 months ago.

For now there was nothing he could do, except to send help with the clean up operation on the
colony and sit, awkwardly but restlessly, on his bed in sickbay with machines blinking at him. The boredom was agonizing. He jumped back out of the bed. “I’m gonna have a shower.” He said before Bones assumed he was making an escape. He tried to catch Spock’s eye as he left the room, but found himself quite obviously ignored.

Oh well. Spock might be ignoring him, but that didn't mean he had to ignore Spock. The shower in the sickbay was one of its few luxuries; certain treatments were not compatible with sonic showers, so it possessed the option of a real one instead.

He supposed Bones would advise against it, but he didn't really care that he was jerking off a cock that was still sore from overwork. He felt a little guilty when his thoughts drifted not to the many girlfriends and anonymous women and aliens of no particular gender, but to Spock as sucked his cock and came in his throat; hot and hard and wet. What he wouldn't do to fuck that tight wet hole between Spock's legs. To have his dick rubbing against that sweet spot up inside him and not his fingers. To hear Spock, relinquishing his control not to some fever, but to the pleasure Jim was giving him, to hear him cry Kirk's name and not the senseless utterances of the Pon Farr – not that Jim had had any problem with those. He wanted Spock to want him as deeply as he had that day, but without the interference of some sort of mating cycle.

Then he felt it, a familiar sense of surprise through the two locked doors between him and Spock. It was too late now, he was already cumming into his hand, his semen joining the stream of water that hit the wall of the shower. The moment he was done, he turned off the water and stepped out of the cubicle, standing for a long time in front of the mirror. Shit. He realised instantly the level of violation he'd just committed. Of course Spock would have to have felt that, they were bonded together as mates for just such a purpose. He hoped Spock had only felt his pleasure and not seen inside his head, but he knew instinctively that this wasn't the case. No one was ever surprised when Jim's sexual escapades were revealed.

Spock knew he could look away, shield himself, ignore what he was seeing in Jim's head. He wasn't sure exactly whose privacy was in fact being violated the most by what was happening, but he knew that one aspect of it was up to him to prevent. He had broken down the door, as his mother had once told him after he had melded with her by accident as a child. You must always remember to knock. He could stop watching, but a little part of him didn't want to, a part of him which he wanted to attribute to the meld, but which had been there long before the Pon Farr.

He was experiencing a memory, the Pon Farr from Jim's perspective. He couldn't remember the oral sex, but he was vaguely aware that it had happened. The imagined Spock was insensible, shaking, clean only from his recent scrub down at Jim's hand. He sucked on Jim's cock with no particular goal other than to do so, jerked into Jim's mouth, accepted the finger and gave a wordless cry as it brushed his prostate. He could feel it, the raw lust and overwhelming pleasure of it. His fingers digging into Jim's thigh, the flat of Jim's tongue on the head of his penis. And he could also feel Jim's own pleasure, the ache in his cock and groin from too many orgasms, the taste of salt, the smell of sex and sweat, the sting of his ass.

Spock crushed his erection with a thought, but didn't have the willpower to withdraw from his captain's mind. Suddenly the image, the sensation changed, and Spock was shocked to find Jim's thoughts departing from the true course of events. He knew they had not done this, Jim had not taken him. The imaginary Spock called out Jim's name. The real Spock panicked. The daydream shattered and he withdrew from his captain's mind, caught red handed as a human might say. What would Kirk say to this? He knew that he and his Jim were -- He caught himself mid thought. He would not permit a possessive adjective to be used before Jim's name, even if he could justify it for his title. Jim was objectively everyone's captain on the Enterprise, was he not?

He didn't remember having sat up, but he maintained the position and tried to slow his breathing. He could not allow this to happen again; he was a fool for letting it happen this time. He was taunting himself, spying on Jim and probably breaking several laws in the process. The illogic of
his own behaviour made him want to berate himself, but it would do no good. He could not allow Jim to bring this up, as he knew he would not be able to lie about his feelings. It was better if he made certain that it was not to be talked about at all.

McCoy would never forgive Jim if he allowed himself to catch a chill on top of everything, so he took up a towel and wrapped it around his own shoulders. He dressed as slowly as he could, mind and pulse racing with the adrenaline his body always pumped out in response to everything going wrong. He felt almost as though he were dizzy or that his own movements were unreasonably slow.

When he returned to the room, McCoy wasn't there, probably tending to Hayves, but Spock was sat up in bed with a posture that seemed to convey a severity his face did not. Jim sat mechanically on his own bed, a shiver running up his spine that made his nostrils flair. He swallowed the lump in his throat, but it stuck painfully in his larynx.

“I must apologise,” For a second Kirk thought that he himself had spoken, but it was Spock. “For being so uncommunicative. I have been tired from the Pon Farr. I must also thank you, Captain, for intervening. I do not wish you to believe I would rather have died, or rather have... Dealt, with anyone but you in the absence of Lieutenant Uhura.” Jim knew those words were not meant to inspire the hope they did. “Indeed, I am somewhat glad she never got to see me in such a state. I regret that you did so, and I do not wish for either that or the confusing influence of the meld to interfere with our friendship or out capacity to work as an effective team. The situation on Tau Ceti IV is definitely in urgent need of our full attention. I believe that evidence of the source may be found somewhere on the planet's surface, if we were to clear enough of the ground level ion interference in the area around the shuttle.”

Kirk sat mutely as Spock turned the conversation irreversibly from what he knew was a flat denial of his emotions to work related matters. The confusing influence of the meld? He knew that was intended to invalidate his attraction, and it was at that moment as effective as his earlier reference to their “professional relationship”. There was so much he had needed to say in between the two conversations that the Vulcan had silenced. He knew it had been on purpose, so he said nothing. Still, he was as relieved as he was disappointed and the adrenaline was ebbing away.

“I'll order a team to go down there with tricorders and patrol the area on foot tomorrow.” He said, as though he were talking to someone inconsequential, keeping hi face expressionless. Spock was rubbing off on him in more ways than one.
Uhura waited for Spock to show up. She had visited him once in sickbay, but had felt too awkward to stay for long. Kirk hadn't met her gaze, maybe because he knew what had gone on down on the colony and was embarrassed.
Her knotted emotions had dissipated over the last three days and she was no longer feeling the hurt she had when she found out about the Pon Farr incident. She had promised herself when they first got together that she would attempt to see the logic in all things Spock; there was simply no point in not doing so, she would only come out of any arguments annoyed that she had taken the irrational stance.
Presently, the sliding door to her quarters opened and Spock stepped into the room. He looked clean and healthy in his fresh uniform, despite being a little thinner than she'd have liked. “Nyota,” He took a deep breath and she knew he was about to apologise. She crossed the room before he could do so, and wrapped her arms about him.
“It's okay. It's okay.” He accepted her gentle kisses and allowed her mouth to brush away tears that had never fallen from his cheeks. Sadness and confusion came into her where their lips touched. She stroked his back and his hair, but she knew that this was Spock and she couldn't heal his ailment with human gestures of affection.
She led him to her bed and sat down, pulling him so that he leaned against her. She kissed his eyebrows and his ears, more for her benefit than his. She did it to remind herself that she loved all of him, his Vulcan side included; other people often treated him as a challenge, to bring out his hidden emotions, expecting some sort of great catharsis. She knew, though, that he had his own way of dealing with these things, and that he needed as much support in going through his own steps to reassure himself as he did in showing the emotion.
She had a hundred questions to ask, but for now the weight of his head on her shoulder and the scent of Vulcan and Spock in her room was enough. She let him fall into his meditative trance against her, and lay them both back on the mattress, where they were meant to be.

Sulu had never been so thankful for the restoration of the normal chain of command. He never wanted a minute of responsibility for something as big as the Enterprise again if it killed him, even if all he had been in charge of was ensuring that the orbit didn't decay and communications were maintained with Starfleet Command. Now Kirk was here he was safely back to his position as helmsman, and Uhura hadn't murdered anybody.
For about a week the bridge had been filled with ensigns and junior grade lieutenants whose names he'd kept forgetting and who were invariably too eager to please. He'd been surprised by how much he'd missed working with Chekov, who had spent much of the last week in Engineering. His replacement had been staggeringly bland and had said no more than three or four sentences to him over the whole period.
Now the boy genius was back, proudly telling everyone who would hear about how he had managed to clear the ions from the atmosphere. Sulu didn't mind that he'd endured the anecdote four times now, he found the excitement sweet.
“And now I zhink if I could just get zhe current in zhe shuttle switched off, I could use it a second time furzher from zhe current location and we could search zhe area using zhe ship's sensors, Keptin?” He looked expectantly at Kirk in the captain's chair. “It would have to be anozher space jump, but I could do it!”
Sulu knew Jim was about to crush the hope in the young ensign's eyes. Chekov had barely any military experience, none at all in fact, and there was no way he'd be sending down a boy who was still a full year younger than the next youngest Academy graduate on the ship.
“Do you need to be the one to disconnect the power?” Kirk asked him.
“Well... No, but...” Pavel sighed and slumped back into his chair, just mature enough not to plead. “I'll go down with a security team and another engineer.”
Sulu ruffled Chekov's hair apologetically, his hand staying tangled in the golden curls just a second longer than it needed.
“You must teach me how to fight.” He pouted. Sulu doubted that fencing capabilities were Jim's main concern when the prognosis was possible invasion. “Sure,” he said anyway. He could do with the practice.

McCoy attempted to tell Jim he was too ill to manage a space jump but found himself ignored. He didn't have time to persist in his condemnation of the plan, however, as he wanted to give drugs that would prevent any parasite reproducing to each of the four members of the security team and the engineer who would be space jumping with them.
Spock had climbed into the captain's chair with an air of relief, he'd noted. He supposed it must be strained between them at the moment, but they seemed to have talked a little more in the last day and a half and he was thankful for small mercies.
The crew of the space shuttle tolerated his probing and injections without complaint and took their places holding the bar which would position them for launch with much more grace than he had several days ago. Their acid suits would have to stay on once they were on the surface this time to protect them from the ions surrounding the shuttle-come-electromagnet. Hopefully they were resistant to human teeth as well as acids and alkalis, he thought.
“Look after yourself Jim,” he said as forcefully as he could. “Anyone gets bitten down there I want you to beam up the second that shuttle gets moved off. I mean even one of you I want whole team back here, understand?”
“No one is going to get bitten.” Kirk said stubbornly. “I'll contact you as soon as the shuttle is out of the way and the ion interference cleared.”
It was as good as he was going to get, because all staff apart from the pilots and those space jumping were being told to leave the shuttle. He stood and watched the door closing, feeling tired with the unfairness of it all.
Spock did not come to see them off.

Kirk had deja vu as the heat hit him. A little thrill of fear ran up his spine, although he reminded himself that they were sticking together this time and there was no missing Spock. There was also no doctor to projectile vomit everywhere. The black ion cloud had started much lower here, and now he was on the ground his vision persisted for only a few metres in front of his face.
He looked about blindly, his communicator useless, until suddenly someone grabbed his arm. It was the engineer, Ensign Mehta, whose first name he forgot. The middle aged ensign trudged towards the faint signal on his tricorder and Jim followed as the cloud got denser and denser. He was afflicted by the strangest sensation of his own body being pushed and pulled by the magnetised cloud that was causing a red light to blink on his breathing apparatus and scratching the visor of the acid suit. He couldn't tell if the security team was behind them or not, but either way they were only a few dozen metres from the shuttle and they could find them afterwards.
He could see almost nothing now but they had reached what must have been the shuttle, a huge black hulking thing where the ions were so dense around it that Mehta was having to use his entire body weight to move them out of the way to get to the cut off switch Pavel had mercifully put on the outside.
Jim had expected the huge cloud of impossibly fine dust to collapse in on them when the switch was flicked, but instead it hung in the air, losing density as the irresistible magnetism of the shuttle ceased and the ions in the atmosphere repelled each other.
Mehta was still working, resetting the auto pilot and timers and climbing inside the shuttle through
its hatch to check over the circuitry. Then the ensign rushed back out, grabbing Jim again and shouting at him, “Run, run!” And they ran. The shuttle's thrusters turned on and the heat it threw out brought the men from uncomfortable to unbearable, as it surged upwards and south. For a moment the cloud remained behind, as choking as it had ever been, and then the timer tripped and the electromagnets turned back on. It was like being caught in a tornado; the ion cloud rushed to catch up with the shuttle at gale-force speeds, bowling Jim over like a child's doll. He could no longer see Mehta, and began to worry that he would be dragged off by the wind – and then the cloud was gone and the air cleared. Mehta was sitting up on the ground a few paces ahead of him, and a member of their security team was sprawled nearby, her visor cracked from what would have been a particularly nasty bump on the head; she was lucky to have been wearing the suit.

The trio gathered themselves together. Kirk tried to contact the remaining three security staff on his earpiece, but no one copied him. He span about trying to see anyone out cold on the ground, but he could not. Now the air was clear he got his first good look at the landscape. The ground itself was a yellowish colour which seemed orange due to the light of the sun spilling in through the stratosphere, Rayleigh scattering turning it a burnt orange-red. They were on relatively high ground, and he could now see the previously ominous shape of Colony 1 in the distance, shining orange on its hill. No wonder they called it Amber City. He took off the helmet and stepped out of the damaged acid suit, leaving it on the ground. It was far too hot for that.

“Kirk to Enterprise,” he tried the other frequency.

“Copy,” Uhura's voice replied. “Putting you through to Commander Spock.” It all seemed in that brief time that everything was normal.

“Captain, we are able to detect only yourself and two others close to your location, can you get a visual fix on the remaining members of the team?” Spock asked him.

“No, we lost them in the cloud. They can't be far though.” He said.

“Negative. There are only three life forms within two hundred fifty metres of your current location, and those within seventeen kilometres are all infected with the parasite.” Spock informed him.

Chekov's voice interrupted them. “Sir, zhere is a large metil object six hundred metres from where you are now. Thirty metres long and seven metres in diameter. It looks like a ship, heavy shielding, I cannot tell if there are life forms aboard or not.”

He considered the situation for a moment.

“Captain, it would be logical for you to continue on to the object. I could beam down additional security officers to your location, and we could continue the search for the missing crew members remotely.” Spock's flawless logic didn't seem to be failing him, despite everything.

“There's no point beaming more officers down, we've lost enough already. Locate the missing crew and get them over to us pronto. Chekov, I want the coordinates for the object.”

Coordinates given and search under way, he beckoned the other two to follow him towards the signal. “Set your phasers to stun but be prepared to change to setting seven if necessary.” He was reluctant to give an order to kill, but he suspected that whoever had released the parasite onto the colony didn't share his misgivings.

“Detecting infected humans nearing your position, Captain.” Spock told him. “Be vigilant around the object, its shielding prevents us from detecting any lifeforms underneath it as well as inside.”

“It could be a trap,” he chose to voice his fears. “Do you detect any life forms between us and the object?”

“No Captain, and I would not recommend changing your course or returning to your original position, there are now a total of twenty-two infected individuals within one hundred and fifty metres of your position. There are none directly between you and the object at this moment but there are several who could reach it before yourselves.”

Jim kept his march towards the coordinates, his knuckles white on his phaser. He was more concerned by his inability to see the infected than by the possibility of their being so close by.
Cautiously they mounted a small ridge and could see dull metal ahead of them. The landscape here was rugged, angular rocks jutting up from the floor of the valley, as high as six story buildings. He would never see anything coming in this.

Still, he had little choice but to carry on.

“There are infected individuals within 70 metres of you now, Captain.”

“Make sure you're ready to beam us up if this all goes to shit.” He told Spock, and began picking his way across the uneven ground towards the object.

As they got closer the rock formations crowded around them like an oppressive twenty first century cityscape.

The metal object was indeed a ship; a mobile Federation science lab, from the look of it, and one in need of some repair.

A sound Kirk had often heard in situations where someone had been tortured sent Mehta's hands over his ears and Jim's finger to the button of his phaser, but the great walls of rock bounced the noise around until they could no longer find its origin.

“Captain, there are five infected humans within thirty metres of your position!” Even Spock's voice had a hint of urgency. Kirk brought them to a halt to look around for the approaching threat.

“Captain they're on you!”

The woman from the security team fired her phaser at something in his peripheral vision, and he turned to Mehta, about to give the order to energize only to find the engineer pinned to the ground by a huge man whose gnashing teeth sliced the flesh of his shoulder to rags. His officer's mouth opened in a wordless scream as something hit the back of Kirk's head with a fleshy thud.

“Fuck-!” He shouted before his ear slammed into the floor, shattering his communicator.
“Beam them up.” Spock commanded. The transporter room did not respond. “Beam them up, that is an order!”

A timid voice replied, “Impossible sir. I can't even tell who's who and Kirk's signal has just disappeared.”

Spock said nothing, but stood and walked to the turbolift.

“Spock!” Uhura blocked his path. “You can't go down there, the ship needs a first officer. If Kirk is dead-”

He cut her off. “He is not dead. The Enterprise needs its Captain, and it is my job to ensure his safety.”

His voice was even but she knew better than to probe him for emotion. She shouldn't have said he could be dead, Spock would never let his best friend die so easily.

“He is alive,” he said with surety. “And I will beam down and find him. Contact Starfleet Command, inform them of what has happened. I believe there is an 81 percent chance that what we are experiencing is an invasion.”

He brushed past her and pushed McCoy out of his way.

“There's no way in hell you're going wi-“ The doors shut out the doctor's voice as they closed leaving Spock alone in the lift. He refused to take heed of what should have been panic and told himself that what he was doing was the best thing for the ship and not just for Jim.

He did not go straight to the transporter room, but to the armoury. The officer on duty obligingly armed him “to the teeth” and provided him with protective clothing. He decided it would be worth also bringing a blowtorch. He turned without thanking her and stepped back into the turbolift. He tried to probe the bond with Jim in his mind, but got no response; the bond was still present, though, so he kept himself calm with the knowledge that this probably meant the human was still alive.

When he arrived at the transporter room both Bones and Nyota were already there and both standing on the lit pads.

“Get off.” He told them. “You are not coming with me.”

Nyota shook her head and neither of them obeyed his orders.

“Security please ensure that Lieutenant Uhura and Doctor McCoy remain on this ship.” He went to stand on a still available pad.

“What?” Bones shouted at him. Nyota also wore an expression he supposed was outrage.

“You are to remain on the Enterprise. Please excuse me if calling security was an unnecessary precaution, but from each of your past records it seemed logical to ensure you would both comply.”

He spoke over them to prevent an argument as four members of security entered the room and walked the pair of them out.

He looked to the control pad to find Chekov operating it. “Sir, are you to beam down inside the object or next to it where we last saw zhe Keptin?”

“Beam me to Captain Kirk's last known coordinates. When you're ready.”

And then his vision of the transporter room disappeared, blocked by swirling light, only to be replaced by an oppressive heat. Just up ahead of him he could make out the top of what had to be a ship above a sharp wall of rock. It looked to be a Federation vessel, possibly for research or scouting.

He looked about for signs of the three crew members who had been there only minutes before. The last joint of a human finger lay a few metres away from him, oozing blood and cooking gently in the sun. It wasn't Kirk's finger, and he justified his relief at this fact as being for the best interests of the Starfleet. His tricorder read nothing in the immediate area beyond bare rock and the shielded mass of metal behind it. He didn't need it to know Jim was in the ship.

He held his phaser firmly. Set to kill.
“There is no indication as to where they went, although the ship ahead would seem the logical answer to that question.” He told whoever on the Enterprise who was listening. There was no surprise that it was Nyota. “Spock, it looks like all but two of the infected people have moved away to the west of you. I'd follow them, I don't want you going in there on your own, we have no idea what we'll find.”

“We will find Captain Kirk.” He said, aware that he must sound stubborn. “I sense that he is up ahead of me.”

“How? We're not getting any readings from up here. Has something come in on your tricorder?”

“No.” He attempted to find a logical way to avoid the uncomfortable revelation, and failed. “I am able to sense him through the bond from our mind meld.”

There was an awkward silence which he did not attempt to fill with information as he walked slowly on the parched earth, rounding the jagged tower of rock. The ship before him was indeed a Federation science vessel, probably originating on Earth. It had not answered Nyota's attempts to communicate with it.

“Check records for a ship, NCC-11934, name Lamark.” The ship was definitely not thirty by seven metres; it was an Oberth class vessel with only a part of the front saucer section uncovered by the ground. He could find no logical reason for it to have landed in such a position, but the impact course was precise and the ejecta minimal for such a big collision; someone had clearly intended to park it that way up, even if there seemed to be no benefit from doing so.

“It's a science vessel meant to be doing biological research on a moon off of UV Ceti I.” Uhura told him, her voice a little strained.

“UV Ceti is a flare binary, there is no chances of life ever existing on that moon. Why would the Federation send a research vessel there?” He walked around the hull trying to find some kind of entrance, but he had never served on an Oberth vessel and he could only assume that there was some other way in via a buried part of the starship.

“Classified.” Which meant of course that it was Section 31 work. He wondered what it was they were doing that required it be kept so out of the way.

“It looks like our “invasion” may have its origin closer to home than we had thought.” He wondered if saying such things could get him fired. Maybe worse. “I am unable to locate an entrance. I intend to use a torch to cut through the hull. I will require that the Enterprise use the forward phasers to lower the shields.”

“Forward phaser banks ready Commander,” Came the familiar Scottish lilt. “I'd get back if I were you.”

Spock was already the minimum distance required by Starfleet regulations, but he took a few more steps to be sure. “Fire.” He ordered.

The light where the phaser hit the shielding was too bright for even his double lidded eyes to look at, and he backed, dazzled, into one of the towering angles of rock. Before the weapons stopped firing and it was safe to look about him, he felt a brilliant pain in his right arm, just below his shoulder. He flailed to his his assailant, but they were already gone.

The light died, and although the pain in his arm did not, he was able to look down at it. Copper blood spilled out around a fresh bite mark which had pierced his uniform but not torn it. The burn of it sang through his abused flesh and forced him to use the rock to maintain his balance.

“Shields down to zero Commander. Is everything alright? Your frequency shows your arm is injured and you are in a mild shock.” Chekov added to the fray. It was all getting too confusing for him to keep up.

He swallowed the bile and ignored the vertigo that pulled the rock away from him and span him upside down. The mission, his personal mission, had to go on. “Everything is fine. It is a minor injury that may be tended to once I have found Captain Kirk.” He could hear Uhura's tense breath hissing slightly in his ears. “Are there any life signs within the ship?”

“Unusual readings, sir. It seems there is some piece of equipment inside interfering.

Pain is psychological. He closed the distance between him and the hull, choosing a spot he predicted would have little between himself and the interior; he didn't want to be damaging
important electronics if he could avoid it. His arm felt hot and it protested when he moved. The skin felt tight from the swelling as though he didn't have enough of it. He ignored these things, though, and decided against the blowtorch. He'd be better off using his phaser for this.

He aimed and fired, and again, and again. Eventually the thick metal began to soften, and he used the torch to melt a reasonable outline for a door into it, before blasting out its centre.

He allowed a minute for the metal to cool. It wasn't long enough, but he was not interested in preventing small burns on his own person, he had greater priorities. It bothered him that he could not identify the drive to do this. Duty never evoked any emotion in him, and this was by no standard the first rescue mission he'd been on for Jim; it was an accepted part of their friendship as it was their professional relationship. He could only conclude that this behaviour was a result of his bond with the human, that his instinct to protect his mate was compelling him to leave the ship without its first or second in command to recover Kirk. The quietness of the bond also worried him, for quite different reasons.

He would not wait another minute for his “door” to cool. He slipped inside, careful not to touch the edges.

After Spock had entered the ship there had been no contact, but Uhura could not help but feel a twist in her gut that she knew was not from her concern for his well-being. She could do nothing to re-establish contact, and the distortion from whatever was in the ship was blocking her from watching Spock's frequency.

Instead of staying at her redundant post, she caught up with McCoy in sickbay and cornered him. She would have to phrase this delicately, if he thought he was breaching confidentiality he would never give her anything.

“Uhura. Are you alright?”

“Yeah, I'm fine, I just, um, wanted to talk to you about the bond between Kirk and Spock.”

He looked at her suspiciously. “What about it?”

“You know the one I mean.” She rebuffed him, trying to sound like she knew more than she did.

“The mind meld. He said it could help him find Kirk, how does that work?”

“I'm not entirely sure, but I'd believe him if he's said it.” The doctor was careful.

“He said he doesn't know that much about it but that you might know a bit more. I know you're not an expert on Vulcans, but...”

Bones shrugged. “I doubt it. Neither of them have really told me much about it, I thought it was better to leave it a while, because it was too soon.”

The knot tightened as her hunch became something far too concrete. Oh yes, McCoy was careful, but he was not careful enough. “I would be surprised if there wasn't some awkwardness,” she said as coolly as she could manage. “After all, they did, you know...”

Bones stepped innocently into the trap of false security she had left him. He laughed a little nervously. “Yeah, I guess it's probably just worse because he's the only one Spock would have-”

He stopped suddenly, seeing her expression. The confirmation hit her like a truck, and the fact that Spock had requested Jim reversed back over her. Her reaction was profoundly physical and unexpected. “Shit.”

She said nothing and allowed him to sit her on a bed. “He didn't tell you who it was did he? Why the fuck would he do that?” Bones had the grace to sound angry on her behalf.

She knew that it was she who had refused the information, but she still couldn't quite believe he had still withheld it from her. When he had mentioned the meld, something had clicked into place, and now it was no longer a necessary fuck with an anonymous woman. Spock had requested Jim as his mate. The fact that he could still use the bond from the meld told her all she needed to know.

He had mated with Jim, and knowing Vulcans, it was probably for life. She couldn't decide whether she was going to be sick or have a panic attack, so she let Bones put her head between her knees and inhaled when he told her to do so.
For some reason, Spock had anticipated a greetings party. He was pleased to find no such thing as he lurched in through the hole. The artificial gravity generator was for some reason still on despite the ship's vertical positioning, and he stumbled until he found a way to stand in which both the planet and the ship's gravity equalled out. The effect was disorienting, although he doubted such a measure was needed as the lighting was dimmed to night levels. His inner ears evidently did not find this equilibrium, and the entire ship seemed to spin about him. He stopped for a moment needing to tend to his arm. He didn't want to, but he tied it off just above the bite anyway. It wouldn't help if any parasites made it to a blood vessel deep enough, but it wasn't worth the risk. Although there was no chunk taken out of him like his last encounter with an infected person had resulted in, the teeth had broken his skin like human skewers and it reminded him of the bite he had found on his neck when he awoke from the Plak Tow. He banished the thought from his mind, knowing his body would never withstand a second onslaught of the Pon Farr so soon after the last one. Either way, he doubted his body would respond to such a disruption to his cycle the same way this time.

He half walked, half fell through the maze within the Lamark, unsure of where he was headed for and unable to access the computer. He felt as though Jim was in here somewhere, but the ship was 120 metres long of passageways and dead ends, and the layout permitted for many small isolated compartments and laboratories. The climate controls were set to a more comfortable temperature, and he told himself it was the contrast that made him shudder. If he had been open to such feelings, the atmosphere would have held a dark promise to it, but he was not one for instinct in such matters. Still, something was incorrect, besides the gravity and the orientation of the vessel and the empty corridors. Nausea constricted his stomach as something deep under the flesh of his arm squirmed against bone and tourniquet. He reached an intersection in the passage and slipped, allowing himself to slide with the planet's gravity through an access corridor. He tried the turbolift at the end, but it did not recognise him, or was broken, so he was forced to continue on foot.

After half an hour his entire arm burned and ached like a traumatic broken bone being squeezed too tightly. Adrenaline from unknown origin kept him on his feet even as the world spun and faded in and out of his sight in the poor lighting. His grip on his phaser was slipping as though his palms were sweating, but when he looked the hand holding the grip was smeared lightly with blood that he couldn't properly distinguish in the dark. He couldn't feel either of his hands properly and they shook with a rage he did not now feel. Or maybe a fear, which he might feel.

Kirk's back felt twisted, and he struggled to straighten out with no real concept of who or where he was. When his feet met a resistance he opened his eyes to discover he was in fact in a glass fume cupboard, one of several, in his black undershirt. Clearly he had been strip searched by someone who had afforded him enough dignity to dress him again, but not enough to turn his shirt the right way around before doing so. He wondered if he'd been awake for this and if he'd struggled. He hoped not, feeling that right now it was probably better that he had submitted graciously to whatever was going on that to have fought and lost. He still didn't know where he was or why he
was tied hand and foot in a science lab. No one seemed to be observing him, in fact, no one was visible at all. 

His ear felt as though it were full of a hot clotted liquid, and he imagined he would have some other bruises, but there were no great injuries to his person that he knew of.

For a mere second his head filled with blind panic. He swore he was cornered, he felt a terrible pain in one of his arms, he felt scared and out of control of himself. When the fear retracted to the back of his mind he checked the arm as best he could in the confines of the tank and with his wrists bound in front of him. It seemed fine. Nonetheless he felt oddly weak, as though he were recovering from a muscle relaxant or simply terrified. It stopped him from freeing his hands or kicking out the screen that trapped him, because when he tried he lacked the motor skills and his bare feet slapped the glass loudly and to little effect.

Nervous of attracting attention to himself, he curled back against one side of the fume cupboard and prepared to wait.

Uhura willed Scotty to give up his command to her, but she didn't ask and he didn't give. Because the loss of contact had been foreseeable and Spock had entered the Larmor intentionally, regulations told them to wait a minimum of four hours before sending a party to bring him back, provided there was no reason to believe he had come to any harm. She resented that her first reaction to hearing that he had essentially married someone else was an unbearable desire to see him. She needed his explanation, for him to tell her things were alright. That he loved her and Kirk was just a solution to a problem. She wasn't naïve enough to believe it, but she was desperate enough, and right now it was probably a good thing Scotty was in command, because she'd be there with him before he'd even had a chance to go in if she could.

McCoy flinched as she punched the punching bag in one of the gymnasiums, as though the blow had gone straight through it and into his cheek where he stood, several metres behind, watching her.

“I don't need a doctor here to look after me.” She said, more forcefully than McCoy deserved, but not as forcefully as she wanted to.

He ignored he anger, knowing that it wasn't really directed at him. “What about a friend?”

She didn't respond; she'd never really thought of him as a particularly good friend, but she didn't want to be alone with her thoughts and he was the only one on offer.

When the silence became too drawn out, he left briefly and came back with something that tasted like whiskey, but with a suspiciously syntheholic after taste. Just like McCoy to be looking out for the hangover before she'd even taken a sip. She gulped it down anyway, waiting for the warmth and the familiar buzz.

“Since when did you become everybody's mother?” She asked.

He looked tiredly into his own drink, lips a little tighter than usual, the bags around his eyes a little tighter. “Since I got on that shuttle and sat next to Jim. This place is full of orphans looking for someone to give them limits. It's my job to provide.” He drank deeply and set down his empty glass on the edge of the biobed she occupied.

“Everyone except Spock,” she said, thinking of how much he regulated his own behaviour. How intentional his every move was.

“Even Spock.” McCoy sighed. His look was pointed, and she wasn't sure if she was supposed to feel better or worse for this, but fortunately the synthenol was preventing her from feeling much of anything.

Spock would have done anything at that moment for either synthenol or a mother, preferably his own. The emotions raging in him were very much real, very not a product of psychology; rather a release of chemicals into his system.
He had established a policy of checking every room he went into for signs of Jim, and had entered the transporter room expecting the same emptiness that had greeted him elsewhere. Surprised red eyes blinked back at him as the door slid open, and for a minute he and the infected man in the blue uniform simply stared at each other. He made no move to bite Spock, so must have been able to sense that he was already a host.

Then a phaser jabbed into his back like a hypo and he realised he was surrounded by an enemy far more used to the gravitational arrangements than he was.

“Drop your weapon,” the man in the transporter room said. He did so, and a woman reached down to take it. “Take our guest to the brig, and see to it that he is properly treated and introduced.”

He was taken quite roughly by a guard of four that emerged from nowhere to the holding cell, confused by what he had just seen.

As soon as he was inside the forcefield was raised. He looked blankly at the woman who had taken his phaser, and who scowled at him on discovering it was set to kill.

“Hello. I am Doctor Lark. You are now a captive of the Hosts and the Masters. You will be held here until you are ready to fulfil your duty, and then you will be released.”

Before he could ask any questions, she left, and the guards on the door ignored him.

After a short while the forcefield dropped momentarily and alien he was unable to place in his dazed state entered. The red-eyed humanoid unpacked a medical kit and removed both the tourniquet and Spock’s uniform shirt. Too confused to resist, he didn't, and just stood as the wound was cleaned and dressed, and several hypos injected into his neck. One was a painkiller.

“There we are, that should speed things up.” The doctor told him.

Careful to control his intonation, he asked, “Speed what up? Who is are the Hosts and who are the Masters? What duty have I to perform? Where is Captain Kirk? Why am I being held in the brig? Why has your ship not responded to our communications? Why are you parked in such a manner? Why did you enter the atmosphere at all? To what purpose is your mission here and why is the artificial gravity still on?” Endless questions poured unbidden from him.

The doctor’s head shook. “We are the Hosts! You and I! Your duty is to the Masters and to the Followers, you must spread the glory of the Empire to those Followers who are as of yet not Hosts.”

“I will not.” He protested, but he could already feel his resolve breaking. He sank to the floor because he couldn't find “up” and his knees were shaking with adrenaline.

The doctor did not respond, and left him alone in the cell, awaiting his own morbid transformation, or maybe just the Pon Farr, to claim him.
Spock was fairing better this time around as the parasite's effects took hold, but not so well that he didn't panic at his trapped state when the drive to be outside overtook him. His vision was already turning red, and the light from the reaction in his eyes dazzled him slightly. The constant struggle to maintain a position in which he was upright according to both types of gravity was proving stomach-turningly difficult, and he had regurgitated his replicated plomeek soup onto the deck plates some time before. The soup also seemed to have issues establishing where "down" was, so in the end he lay as far as he could from it with his feet on the wall which seemed to be closest to the planet's gravitational pull.

His thoughts flicked between his need for Kirk and the competing need to escape and spread his disease, between moments of agony and pure medicated bliss. His only thought for Nyota was the sudden, shameful realisation that he'd not thought about her at all since he got in here.

Earlier he had run into the forcefield and bounced off it a few times, narrowly missing his spreading pool of vomit, and now it was edging closer to his position on the floor. He no longer cared enough to move away, almost insensible with pain and pleasure and a hundred different needs. It seemed as though he had been there forever, but the chronometer adjacent to his cell informed him he'd been gone from the ship just 1 hour and 46.2 minutes.

The doctor had come back once already to search him, and now returned a second time to reassess. The infected alien seemed surprised at the results on the medical scanner, as though Spock had progressed faster than expected. It could have been something to do with his having being infected before, but Spock hoped that it was a mistake based on the doctor not knowing the progression of the parasite within a Vulcan. Indeed, these humans seemed to be far more in control than he was, despite their blood red eyes and hypersalivating mouths.

“How... Is it that you are so controlled and others with the parasite are not?” He managed to grit out, his voice strained and shaking.

The doctor looked critically at him and rolled him out of the spreading sick. “After the Masters have fulfilled their breeding potential, they put us to other uses. They allow us back our normal functions so that we may spread our faith. In a month's time you will achieve the same glory. For now, though, you are free to go. You will very soon be ready.”

Spock felt ill-equipped to appreciate his coming glory as he was dragged to the transporter room and made to stand on the pad.

“But I must find Jim!” He told them, as though his desires counted for something. “I must have my Captain back.”

The man with the surprised red eyes from earlier ignored him and fiddled the controls. “You will have him back, we will give him the blessing. But we need him here, and you are ready now to spread the Masters and you will not return until you have done so.”

His actions were illogical, but Spock was past caring. He wrenched his arm from the guard's grip and fled the room, scrambling up the corridor as the officers tripped after him. His gamble paid off; their parasites prevented them from shooting him and risking the safety of the one he hosted.

Warning shots bounced off the walls, but within seconds he was out of sight and falling down a corridor as they slid behind him. The adrenaline from the parasite made his heart pound in his side and he sped off into the bowels of the ship.

(Warning: Death; emaciation, neglect)
He slipped into an area of deep shadow to catch his breath and his pursuers ran on ahead of him. The little hairs on his skin prickled with fear worked into terror by the chemicals in his blood. He held off his ragged gasps until they were out of ear shot and then retched again, choking on bile. The burn of it in his windpipe reminded him why he had escaped in the first place, he had to find Jim. He hoped Jim had not been bitten yet, because telling himself that he could bite somebody if he found his captain was the only thing preventing him from walking back to the transporter room of his own volition. Maybe if he did so and he asked for his communicator the Enterprise could beam him aboard and he could bite someone there. No. McCoy would rip it out of him a second time and he could not bare that.

In the end, his compromised logic won out, and he began to wander the mostly empty ship again for signs of his human. He suspected that Jim was in fact bait for the crew and felt a tingle of joy that they would be able to share this with him when they beamed down in two hours to search for him.

He immobilised a young scientist with a nerve pinch and stepped into Lab 1. The laboratory was bleakly lit with a repaired overhead light which leached colour from the room so effectively that it looked as though it were decorated in red and pink.

He looked over the equipment, not really caring about it, but hoping some sort of clue would jump out of him from nowhere. It seemed the lab had not been in use for some time, dust had settled on the surfaces and coated delicate technologies.

He got his wish; a screech from the adjoining lab that would have chilled his blood before he'd been infected. Now it only excited him and he hurried toward the sound, feet squeaking against the linoleum floors.

There was a man strapped to a bed, so emaciated it took Spock a moment to identify his human origin. Patient Zero. His eyes were red and his skin grey and malnourished, dehydrated, he was foaming at the mouth. He had an empty IV going into one arm, and was immobilised from his ankles to a strap holding his head in place, but one his other arm had gotten free and he reached it out towards the Vulcan. The being within the animal that was now Spock fought for control, and he undid a strap even though doing so did not further his cause. He knew he ought to do some sort of emergency first aid on the obviously dying man, but he no longer had the will to help him at all. His intervention probably did not save the patient, as he had not even managed to sit up in the time it took Spock to explore the room and decide on his next course of action.

Spock blinked and was somewhere else. He did not remember getting there, but he had, and he was still undetected. He was in an engineering room, probably an auxiliary one. It was dark. He walked away and appeared again, somewhere else, with no recollection of the journey. Foam dribbled down his own chin now, and he did not wipe it away. He was in a sickbay full of more strapped down patients he hadn't the time to save, some of whom were already fragrant with death, others mad with fear and desperation. No one was there tending to them to stop him. He was in an abandoned communal mess. Old food that had been left in a hurry rotted at the tables, coats were still slung over chairs.

Behind him he heard footsteps and he turned to the red glint of a security officer's eyes. Her phaser was pointed at his chest, and he backed away until his shoulders slammed into the replicator on the wall.

And then he was in a storage compartment, alone. He didn't know where the woman had gone, but there was blood under his nails. He exited the tiny room and came face to face with the sign for Lab 4.

As time wore on, Kirk found he could feel more and more of Spock's emotions. Something was wrong, his carefully implemented shields were being lowered, and the behaviour he could now detect was erratic and impulsive. Fear; a need to run; bloodlust and anger and violence. A desire for him. Jim strained to keep his own actions under control, but there was nowhere to run and
nothing to lash out at. The room was almost too dark for his eyes to focus, and the only stimulation
to keep him awake beyond his own anxiety was the surge of emotion from Spock. He wanted
Spock, and he wanted himself, to bite himself. The thought was enough to tell him what had
happened to compromise his first officer.
Suddenly he heard a door open, and the work lights came on, blindingly bright after hours in the
dark.
The red eyes of one of his captors flashed at him dangerously as the figure approached. He
recognised Spock with a jolt of fear, not trusting him because Spock did not trust himself. Kirk
found his shoulders pressing up against the far wall of the tank as Spock moved through the
laboratory and past the other fume cupboards towards him, mouth open and gathering speed.
Spock slammed into the glass and it cracked under his body weight. Foam from his mouth sprayed
it, milky with tiny eggs. He hit the glass again and it gave beneath him, causing Spock and a
thousand little squares of safety glass to land on Jim hard enough to wind him.
A siren sounded and a red light flashed, making the Vulcan's eyes appear normal for a single frame
of Kirk's vision, before Spock bolted at the sound of the alarm, smacking himself on the door as he
flew out of it.
Jim sat, dazed and surrounded by glass, unable to move for his own restraints. When no one came
after several long minutes, he felt the mess of emotion and adrenaline strengthening in his head,
and heard Spock's footfalls returning. He stood in front of Jim with unfocused eyes, and Kirk could
feel the internal war between Spock's need to protect his captain and his need to bite him.
It was not his neck Spock caught as he leant down. The kiss was rough and unexpected, and Kirk almost flinched back from Spock's mouth. His First Officer tasted faintly of vomit and salty parasitic eggs, and his lips were dry and cracked. Spock gripped his face tightly, digging glass into his cheek until it pierced his palm and Jim's skin at the same time. Jim didn't care, the desperation sank in through the fingers on his scalp and he hoped that relief made it back to Spock. The foaming saliva felt unpleasantly wet although Spock's tongue itself was dry. Kirk spat to his side when the kiss broke.

His resistance broke with it, so he allowed Spock's needy lips to trace their way to the mostly healed bite, where his neck joined his shoulder, teeth grazing his skin. A wave of pleasure passed through Spock and into him when they sank into the flesh.

It wasn't enough, and the Vulcan peppered the skin of his neck and collar bone with tiny bites that just broke the skin. There was a sensual aspect to it, Jim knew, but he couldn't tell if it was the work of the parasite or the fact that it was him, or maybe the bond between them. He did not think now was the right time to tell Spock that since both of them had been injected with a drug that inhibited the hatching of the eggs in their blood and spittle, a mixture of which had been smeared by Spock's mouth over his neck and chest, making his black undershirt sticky.

He pushed the science officer away before he could pick up on the thought, and Spock evidently let him, as there was little chance of him being able to force even a half Vulcan to move if he didn't want to.

The contact broken, the pain of the bites shocked him and he sat still, blinking at the equally motionless commander. He had no idea what had possessed him to allow that to happen, and knew they needed to get out of here. It was a miracle, or a trick at least, that they had not been intercepted yet, especially with the alarm and the red light flashing overhead.

“Let’s get out of here.” He said, gesturing toward the door. Spock looked frightened, his eyebrows a little closer together and the red eyes a little wider.

“We must not go back to the ship,” he insisted, earnestly. “McCoy will take the Masters from us.” Jim made sure they weren't touching as he formulated his lie. The Master had to be either parasites or whoever had sent them. He decided to keep his response ambiguous. “We have. I will order McCoy to infect everyone on the ship, and none of them will want to be cured. I need you to untie my hand and feet.”

Spock lacked the necessary fine motor skills to untie the bonds, but retained enough to use a scalpel abandoned on a counter top nearby. There was a dried yellow stain on it, and he tried not to think what it might be as he shook cutting Jim's feet loose. He should have done the hands first and let the human do his own feet, but he'd also been bereft of foresight.

Spock knew intellectually that he was being lied to, and it wasn't a very convincing lie. But he was overcome by his need to reconcile being close to Jim and to infect new people, and he chose to believe it. In any case, part of him could not believe that Jim would condemn him to the loss of the Master.

Jim dragged him, sliding through spinning hallways, to the place he believed he had cut the door into the hull.

He did not remember any complications or altercations, but by the time they reached the hole Jim's nose was bleeding freely, and he exclaimed, “Thank god, I thought we were gonna have to go back on ourselves a third time.”

Spock felt himself go slack as they passed into the stifling heat.
Jim materialised in the transporter room of the Enterprise with Spock pressed against his chest and his hands around the Vulcan's waist. When he looked up for the medical team, his gaze was met by Uhura's stare. She looked as angry as she did sad, and he was gripped with guilt as he handed Spock over to Bones' ministrations.

The blood had clotted in and around his mouth and chin, and his face was cut from glass. He had no idea what his neck looked like.

Spock cried out, awaking again in McCoy's grip. He turned to Kirk for help that he knew he wouldn't receive. Jim was certain the Vulcan was appealing more to his position than him as a person, but it seemed to be the last straw for Uhura who wheeled and left without a word. For some reason he also felt guilty for Spock. He wondered if the Vulcan had noticed her leaving, but he seemed so distressed now that it seemed unlikely that he'd noticed her at all.

Bones held Spock's head back firmly by the forehead and gave him hypno after hypno, a junior doctor sitting on his legs and being kicked mercilessly.

Spock made no more noises beyond his initial shout, but scrabbled desperately at McCoy's shirt as the sedatives took effect.

Eventually he was still enough to get loaded onto a stretcher, and Bones turned to Jim as he was loaded on. “Get him prepped,” he yelled at a nurse. “You're coming to sickbay. That nose looks brok-- Jesus Christ!” McCoy's eyes landed on his throat.

Jim looked down as though he would be able to see it. The was only one bite in his line of sight, marked by a damp patch on his shirt.

“Is it that bad?”

“That bad? You're a mess!” Bones shook his head. His expression was pained and he missed a beat as he led the way out the door, checking Spock was out the way. “Jim, I... Think I did something...”

“You think you did what?” His tongue felt thick and his voice was nasal. “What, Bones?” He walked into the doctor when he stopped again in the doorway. He tried to protect his nose, but smudged McCoy's uniform with snotty blood. Bones was clearly too worried to be disgusted.

“I think I told Uhura that it was you Spock fucked in the Pon Farr.”

Jim only blinked at him, until the CMO felt too uncomfortable to stay still and finally continued out of the sliding door. “She didn't know?”

“I don't think she wanted to know. Or maybe Spock just didn't tell her.” He flapped his hands. “I dunno. She was really torn up... I thought she knew, she indicated she did. Spock's gonna flip...”

The conversation was cut short when they reached sickbay, but he couldn't help but wonder what that meant for him and Spock. His own selfishness made him feel worse than the broken nose.

Spock would never forgive either of them if he lost Uhura. The anxiety was bitter in his mouth.
There was a feeling of unease about the ship, Chekov noted. He sat at his post, navigating to nowhere, eating a strange fruit that he'd replicated on his break out of either curiosity or boredom. Sulu didn't feign interest this time, as he sometimes did, but smiled a little anxiously at him. The bridge seemed too solemn given the recent return of its captain and first officer, and the arrival of the USS Curiosity as medical back up. He supposed they might be mourning the loss of the other officers. Pavel only really knew Mehta, and not very well, and felt no reason to believe he was anything worse than infected.

The bridge was empty of its usual officers with the exception of himself and Sulu; Spock was in sickbay, the Captain confined to quarters to recover from his minor head injury and countless scrapes and bruises, and Uhura was for some reason absent. He wondered if their disappearance meant they expected that Spock might die, but dismissed it; Hayves had been convalescing on a steady drip of morphine for the last five days.

He jumped up from his careful dissection of the purple fruit when Sulu clapped a hand to his shoulder.

“Want to come watch a movie in my quarters after shift?” He asked. He looked hopeful, as if Pavel might refuse.

Really Chekov was pleased for any interaction with Hikaru, or anyone at all in a non-work context. His youth always hit hardest during recreation. “It would be my pleasure, sir.” He responded too quickly, regretting his choice of words. He turned back to his console, trying to look casual.

Sulu laughed at him. “Alright, should we skip dinner? I have a replicator in my room, so...”

Casual failed him and he blushed at the thought of being alone in Sulu's room. His own were shared quarters, but it had only just occurred to him that Sulu's must not be. There were perks in being a Lieutenant.

“Okay.”

McCoy was relieved to have Spock under heavy sedation and on a biobed where he could keep him under his gaze at all times. No one ever listened to him when he told them to beam straight up. This was all getting ridiculous, and he never intended to perform surgery on someone's brain via their internal jugular vein again if it killed him. Still, he couldn't bring himself to disassemble that pretty and extremely strong skull for better access, and the surgery had gone fine even if it had taken over two hours.

As Chief Medical Officer he was allowed to stop anyone else from going down onto the surface, but he doubted it was worth the fight with Jim with an epidemic and five missing members of the security team.

And there were enough internal problems to cause fights already. Neither Jim nor Uhura had come to visit Spock in the nine hours since he had come out of surgery. This was another reason for Bones to keep him asleep longer. That and the pixelated saliva that he'd rinsed from the Vulcan's mouth countless times, carrying hundreds of tiny unhatched eggs.

Spock looked weak and thin, his face bruised and with a hint of stubble, and his eyes were unusually sunk back in his head, as though he were wearing sickly gothic make up. Tubes of antibiotics and morphenolog ran up his intact arm. The other was recovering with the recent help of the dermal regenerator, the bite too messy and irregular to attempt to close it any other way. Rarely had Spock looked so ill. He was largely out of danger, and he wasn't in Pon Farr that Bones could tell, but he wouldn't want to speculate on whether the Vulcan would be able to survive another round of either his own mating cycle or exposure to the parasite. He'd run the regenerator over the scars later, but he felt fare more helpless in undoing his own mistake. He hoped Uhura would see sense before Spock realised what had happened.
Spock's dreams took on a profoundly more unsettling nature under the influence of morphenolog. It filled the gap where the comfort of the parasite used to be, but as he came round from the anaesthesia into a lighter opiate haze, his mind forced him to confront problems better addressed by meditation. He watched Jim die several times, the shock of the hot tears on his face, his fists pummelling Khan. He watched him wake up.
The first time Uhura kissed him was on their first date. It was his first kiss of any kind. His mother had kissed him, but he had never kissed her back that he could remember and his father was never anything more than companionable. He had never had any other kind of relationship where a human kiss was necessitated before, and it took him by surprise, though not an unpleasant one. That he'd liked it was perhaps the most surprising thing of all.
The memory of his mouth on Jim's the day before felt like betrayal, and in his dream the hurt of it killed her.
He woke up suddenly, the pain and confusion following him. He found his arms trailing tubes, a machine beeping incessantly behind him and himself confined to the bed by a catheter. He felt very vaguely that something important had been taken from him, and he twisted painfully to look around the sickbay to find it.
McCoy somehow noticed his distress from the other room and came through.
“Spock, it's alright. You're safe now.” The doctor pushed his chest gently but he refused to lie back down.
“Where is Jim?” He demanded, finding his voice. He could not remember their return to the ship, and he had no idea whether Jim had made it or not.
“He's a lot better off than you. Now lie back down or I'll sedate you.” He let himself be pushed back onto the bed, but felt the odd sting of the hypospray in his shoulder anyway. Extra morphenolog.
“You're in withdrawal,” Bones told him, “And you're recovering from an improvised brain surgery courtesy of yours truly.”
That didn't sound encouraging, but Spock didn't care. The opiates were all he needed. The opiates and Jim.
He didn't have time to check the thought before his brain became the disordered, drug-induced cinema it had been before.
Kirk launched into his work as though his life depended on it. He had not sent anyone from his own ship down to the surface since his own return six days ago, with the exception of the medical teams he didn't dare withdraw from Colony 2.

He knew he ought to have confronted Spock, who was due to be confined to quarters from about 14.00 that afternoon for another two weeks, but it was too much for him to attempt to deal with alongside the epidemic and the growing evidence of Section 31's involvement.

It was unclear whether they had intended to release the parasite on Tau Ceti IV or not, but from Spock's reports he guessed the latter. Theologically the parasite was interesting, almost a literal enactment of the many theories of humankind creating its own gods. Indeed, Hayves had eventually been transferred to the brig, because there was simply no other way to keep her on the ship. She knew, objectively, what had happened to her, but like any addict, nothing could come between her and her fix. The empath was, it turned out, an expert in manipulation, to McCoy's cost, and more recently that of the ensign in the transporter room, who was now taking more sedatives than she was. At least McCoy seemed to be dealing better with the memories of his own emergency surgery. Jim was both relieved and a little guilty that he hadn't been there.

The Curiosity had set up a better compound for treating the now 1,400 people who had had the parasite removed and the 750 left to go. They were now equipped to treat people with advanced stages of the disease, and the greatest focus was on the hundreds of brain surgeries to perform, addictions to treat, and free infected people to lure, a dangerous endeavour that involved a Scooby-Doo like strategy of human bait. The only difference was that in the old Earth cartoon, the bait never got caught; the same could not be said for several of the volunteers.

Jim was more concerned with having to discuss this with Command. Something had to be done before Section 31 turned into another CIA. Using 72 people as weapons followed less than two years later with killing a minimum of 350 people, and counting, who died of exposure or dehydration, in an attempt to design a biological weapon. The ion storm bothered him the most; he could see no reason for anyone to transport that much material to the planet and release it, unless it was an intentional cover up of the virus. He'd order an investigation whether Command asked him to or not, the moment Spock was well enough to give more information. It might mean sending down his entire security team in order to secure the Lamark and find out what the hell was going on. It had occurred to him that Spock had responded to his suggestion of how the spread the parasite to the ship when under its influence, and he wondered if the parasite was designed to control and not to kill.

He slumped, exhausted in his chair on the bridge, ignoring refreshments that were no replacement for sleep. He would have asked Uhura to relieve him, but the odd silence between them had persisted, so he made Scotty come up from Engineering to sit in his chair instead, before he collapsed in his bed in the Captain's Ready Room. For the last three days he'd slept here and not in his quarters and the place was dishevelled and needed airing, which was of course impossible.

Spock had been back in his own quarters less than two hours before the door buzzed. He opened it without checking who it was, and Uhura stood on the other side of the threshold. He was not surprised to see her; it was only logical she seek him out in private, but his still stomach tried to roll without his permission. Her face was set with the same concentration she'd shown on many a difficult mission, but this was different. It took him only 4.1 seconds to figure out why, but he still did not know what to say.

He said nothing, and neither did she, so he stepped aside for her to enter as hospitality demanded. When the silence pervaded into its second minute, he broke it. “I understand why you're angry with me,” He began.
“I’m not angry!” She cut him off with a passion that he thought contradicted her words. “I’m hurt.” This was worse, he felt. He would have faced her anger a several times over to avoid the inflection in her voice. Before he could apologise she raised he hands and he thought she was going to hit him, but they merely flailed uselessly to her sides. He had felt frustration, and knew how his body wanted to act on it, but even with the past few years spent in human company he still had to search for the links as though he were matching them to an image in a text book. Nyota was frustrated with him.

“You know.” Her voice held a note of bitterness. “I always told myself I'd never let myself get this way over a man. There's this stupid hollow idea that a woman always needs a man to complete her, and I swore I’d never let myself feel that way. I’m a fucking person Spock.”

He wanted to tell her he knew this, and that he had always found her to be quite intact, but stopped himself.

“A healer may sever the bond formed between myself and Jim, I--”

“No.” She said firmly.

“Why?” He had to ask.

She shook her head and laughed, looking away. Her apparent happiness confused him for a moment before it evaporated.

“Because look at you. Look at him!”

“Please be assured that the...mating and our appearances bear no correlation.”

Uhura ignored him. “You know, I think he's the only person you ever respected without it being out of politeness. The only person who ever really had to earn that from you. He fucking...” She hesitated. “He fucking completes you.” She grinned as though it were funny, but he was not amused and he did not believe she was either. “What other team could you work on?” The words were spat with too much anger for it to be an admission of defeat, and Spock was thankful, because the idea of putting the two people he loved up against each other was too much. He flinched at the association of the word love with Jim more than at Uhura's words.

“But...” He thought for a moment, not sure if he was saying what needed to be said or if he was just being manipulative. “I love you, Nyota.”

“I know,” she said quietly. Then she pursed her lips. “But can you honestly tell me you don't love him?”

He opened his mouth to respond, then realised he had nothing to say and shut it. His love for Jim was definitely different to his love for her, but a lifetime of denying the validity of emotion made it impossible to tell exactly where the differences lay.

Eventually he knew his silence had been enough. “What do you want us to do?” He wanted to cover his ears to shield himself from the answer.

She let him worry for a while, picking her words carefully and then abandoning them several times. “I don't know.”

She touched his elbow in a way that disarmed him; familiar, but ambiguous, and not unlike the way that Kirk would touch him before the Pon Farr. She left him with more questions than answers, and the sensation that she was taking a part of him away with her.

He sat on the edge of his bed, in control of his emotions but not feeling like meditation. Too human a problem with too human an answer.

He didn't sleep, but lay awake thinking things through in a way he presumed a human must when something troubled them.
Liar Liar

When Spock returned to work Jim had begun the surprisingly easy task of avoiding him. He sent a request to his PADD for him to help in the investigation, and had him working reduced hours in the science labs, or on the bridge on different shifts to himself. He busied himself with his own duties, filing report after report, carefully implying the involvement of Section 31 without stating it directly, and avoiding anything that might suggest that Spock or Hayves would be left permanently unfit for service by framing their recoveries in the most positive lights possible without actually seeing either of them in person.

He had the far less gratifying task of informing the crew that one of the members of the security team, Ensign Claire Staldt, who had space-jumped with him into the ion storm the second time had been found dead yesterday, having wondered too far south and died of heat stroke as confirmed by the autopsy. Worse was composing that morning’s dispatch to her parents. Two of Kirk’s earliest missions had been incredibly violent and high casualty. He had addressed their parents and partners and children at Federation mass funerals, tearful, but impersonal, when they were already aware of their relatives’ deaths. Thus far, however, he’d had yet to lose a crew member during the five year mission, and therefore had never actually had to be the one to inform a family of their loss.

He had sent them a solemn, apologetic and grateful message, listing off the various achievements of the young woman. She had been 23, and when he cried alone in the ready room afterwards, he’d cried as much for her parents’ sakes as for her, who he’d known by surname only. He would bring her ashes home personally, he said. The guilt was crushing.

Jim felt old. He wanted to be swearing and drinking and pissing off Spock with McCoy, but somehow it seemed like this had all been taken away by the last two and a half weeks. Still, he could claim a little bit of that back now.

He returned to his quarters, mainly because the ready room's replicator didn't do alcohol, or even synthethol, and he called McCoy in with him.

“Let's get wasted.” He said as soon as Bones buzzed at the door.

“Finally,” McCoy held out a bottle he had brought. Jim was clearly more predictable than he liked to think, but right now he wasn't about to start complaining about access to Bone's precious real whiskey.

He shoved aside his carefully set up chess set in favour of replicator pizza and watching a holo movie instead. Fuck academic pursuits, he wanted to pretend for an evening that he was still a student cheating his way through the Kobayashi Maru.

Twice as intelligent, half as wise, Spock thought to himself as he sat in his seat on the bridge. It was not a Vulcan saying, although its true origin escaped him, but it seemed to describe his current situation adequately. He felt, for all of his intelligence and mental order, completely unprepared to deal with matters of interpersonal relationships. Vulcan wisdom was learned by rote as much as by experience, and it occurred to him that Chekov, who sat three metres away at the navigation console, setting their course for Earth, was probably better equipped to provide relationship advice than his father. This despite the fact that Chekov crushed hopelessly on anyone who he found attractive or simply kind, whereas his father had maintained a marriage of 28 years which had been ended by death and not divorce. Perhaps that was why a Vulcan could not aide him; their relationships were too simple. Too logical.

“Sir?” Chekov caught him staring and blushed. Sulu gave Spock a guarded glance.

“I noted your absence from the mess last night,” He covered himself. “If you have lost appetite you ought to report to sickbay.”

Chekov blushed more and checked monitors that did not need checking. How illogical embarrassment made a human. “S-sir, I was, I, I ate in Lieutenant Sulu's quarters, sir.”
He raised an eyebrow to indicate he expected further explanation, but the Ensign offered none. Even Pavel Chekov was managing his relationships better than Spock. If Vulcans sighed he would have done so, but feeling inferior to Chekov was illogical.

“Ready for warp, Commander.” Sulu said.

He checked in with Scotty, and then with Jim, and once they confirmed, he ordered Warp 6.

“Eleven point four days until we reach our destination, sir.” Chekov was clearly relieved that the subject had changed, so he abandoned his line of enquiry and withdrew into thoughts of Nyota and Jim. And morphenolog, which he had refused to take since the day before, annoyed at the way its continued hold undermined his mental discipline. He suppressed the physical symptoms of withdrawal easily, but found his irritability harder the check, and the need for opiates akin to a need for food or water. Mercifully in all other aspects, even those of concern and which might have distressed a human, he was as calm and serene as always. What is, is. He told himself, cool reason the perfect counter for the passion inducing twist of emotions he had felt facing Nyota.

“Lieutenant Uhura, please take the conn.” He said, with no inflection. “I would like to see what the laboratory has discovered about the Draconian mould.” All research on the parasite had been transferred to the surface of Tau Ceti IV; Jim hadn't trusted Hayves to stay away from it otherwise. Mould and oxygen efficiency were now his main areas of study.

Nyota looked at him curiously as he departed the seat, and he avoided the eye contact tactfully, heading for the turbolift.

He blinked in confusion when the door opened and he found it already occupied. “Captain,” he said respectfully, intending to exchange places with him as he presumed Jim wanted.

Kirk's blue eyes lit up at the sight of him, shaking him off his balance. “Spock, just the man I was looking for!” The joviality of his captain after days of indifference set him a little on edge, and he jumped when Jim clapped a hand to his shoulder and wheeled him into the turbolift beside him. “You're coming to mine. You play chess?”

“Captain, I remind you that I am on duty, I need to attend to several experiments currently--” Kirk swayed towards him, using his shoulder for balance. “I changed your rota.” His breath on Spock's face was hot and smelled strongly of alcohol, but Spock no longer had any excuse to do anything but follow him to his quarters. “Do you then?”

“Do I what?” He replied with professional agitation.

“Play chess?”

“I do.” Spock wondered whether he was being taken into the room and sat down amongst the mess for the purpose of hearing bad news, but did not allow himself to worry about it.

“Cool!” Jim said to the room, leaving Spock to decide if his enthusiasm was mere affectation. Nonetheless, his inebriated captain managed to carry the chess board to the table without knocking down any of the carefully laid out pieces. On later inspection, they would prove to be magnetic.

“Want any food?” Jim stood in front of the replicator punching in the code for pizza. The buttons that coded for it were particularly worn out.

He was about to decline but decided he would rather have something to look down at should the conversation test him. “I will have an apple.”

Kirk returned with his pizza and a perfectly formed apple from the machine. Spock stared at the fruit in his outstretched hand. “Have you any cutlery?” He took it by the stalk and set it on the table next to the chess board.

Jim was drunk and culturally insensitive, and the look he returned was gormless. “You want a knife an' fork for an apple?”

Spock knew humans liked to touch their food, as Kirk had already demonstrated with both his apple and the pizza, but he did not understand why he would be denied utensils. “If it is possible.” Jim blinked at him and then slowly reached out for a drawer and placed a knife, fork and plate in front of him, as though it were a great effort. “Do you need a spoon as well?”

“This should be adequate.” He responded flatly, not rising to the obvious teasing.

When Kirk's laughter didn't falter, Spock took white despite it being on the far side and went first, trying to redirect the Captain's attention. He moved a pawn to free his rook and hoped his
demeanour conveyed expectation, but realised that it only seemed to be raising the tension in the room.

“So,” the human moved his knight first, a bold move which could have been strategy or alcohol. “How’s the experiment coming along?”

The Science Officer knew Kirk had no idea what the current experiments were, so he simply picked out his personal favourite. “The organism from Sigma Draconis III is growing well under laboratory conditions. It is a fascinating species that resembles an Earth slime mould. I speculate that it is similar to the first multi-cellular organisms to evolve on the planet. It has a quite unique evolutionary history as the planet has no deep oceans or even seas, but a remarkably even surface which is mostly shallow water, mud and rock. The species itself has many things in common with the slime mould – it can live as an individual single celled organism, but a colony can form together in a ‘slug like’ arrangement to move toward more favourable conditions, and in a large enough colony some cells will specialise to act as sexual organs, sending up structures to release spores.” He took Kirk's knight and two pawns. Kirk took only one of his, and waited for him to stop speaking.

Instead of concurring with his interest in the Draconian slime mould he caught Spock's eye. “Enough, I wanna talk about you.” His speech was slurred but less so than before. “What do you wish to know, Captain?” He said politely, taking a rook.

Kirk groaned. “Jim. Jesus can you even have a personal conversation? If you would rather be working fine, go, but otherwise my name is Jim.”

Spock stayed in his seat. “What do you wish to know, Jim?”

Jim's mouth turned up at the corners and he made yet another careless move. It cost him a pawn. “How come you joined Starfleet and not the Vulcan Science Academy? You got a place there, and even here your specialism is in science.”

The Vulcan found himself pleasantly surprised by the question. He thought for a moment until he could devise the most concise and least revealing answer. “The Academy was of the belief that my dual heritage put me at a disadvantage.” His voice was neutral.

“Fascinating,” Kirk replied in a manner that told him that he was both the subject of a joke and also of an investigation. “You chose to defend the human side of you which you spend so much of your time resisting.” His voice held no animosity, but genuine curiosity. If it had been anyone else Spock might have been annoyed by the way in which his short comment had been reverse engineered into the original thought.

His mind flicked to his mother. “Yes, I suppose I did.” He moved his queen out of danger via Kirk's bishop, and focused on slicing a small mouthful from his apple. It rolled frustratingly on his plate and he was forced to steady it with his fingers before he could pierce it with the fork. Jim watched, his eyes burning into Spock's chest.

“Your turn,” Kirk said. Spock looked at the bishop he had just taken. “To ask a question.” A thousand questions competed for space, each more important than the next. Somehow in the confusion the winner slipped out unchecked. “Is this a date?”

He felt his ears colour at Jim's laughter. “Do you want it to be?”

It was not a response, but it seemed to be Kirk's next question. Silence being licence among humans, he forced himself to find an adequate response. “I do not know.” He said at last. “I apologise. I have recently ceased use of morphenolog.”

Jim looked like he wanted to press but took the hint and let the issue drop. “How are you?”

Spock recovered. “I am... Doing as well as can be expected. I will make a full recovery provided I do not come into contact with the pathogen again. Check.”

Jim moved his king out of harms way, his eyes fixed on Spock's. “I didn't just mean physically.” The Vulcan moved his rook again, but didn't announce check. He squirmed almost imperceptibly in his seat, hoping his opponent's attention would be captured by the game.

Unfortunately for Spock, Jim was playing to prolong their conversation, not to win. Their fingers brushed lightly as he moved the king onto the level below. Spock reminded himself that such a touch meant far less to a human than it did to him, but the thought did nothing to stem the desire
for real, meaningful contact.
His thoughts were broken by an accusatory finger pointed a few inches in front of his face, well within his personal space. “For a Vulcan, you're probably the biggest liar I've ever met.”
He stared at the finger as though it had been the one to insult him, and not Jim. “I beg your pardon?”
Kirk huffed and took his hand out of range. “You're a liar. Almost pathological.”
“How so?” He kept his tone mild, but his withdrawal-weakened body flushed with irritation.
“Every day you get out of bed and someone asks you how are and you lie. Every time someone asks what you're feeling, you lie. Even your vacant god damn expression is a lie!”
“I have no reason to hide emotions I do not feel.” Spock knew he sounded stubborn. Jim's exasperation was enough, and he stood, knocking down his king. “If you will excuse me, I have work to attend to.”
He thundered out of the room in a way that a human would judge to be slightly annoyed and a Vulcan deem an expression of emotion bordering on the shameful, and prowled to his station in the botany laboratory. A particularly illogical orchid looked at him impeachingly, and he glowered at it until an ensign took it away. At least his slime moulds didn't judge him.
Drunk Communications

Jim wandered through the empty corridors of the Enterprise, avoiding stations like sickbay and the bridge that he knew were manned at all hours. The only people he passed were Lieutenant Arros and the young ensign assigned to security to cover Claire Staldt's unfortunately vacant position, who were on patrol.

He stopped outside the communication's department, surprised to hear Uhura's voice coming through the door, which was half open because a young officer was standing too close.

“I don't care if it didn't seem urgent, if it's an unusual transmission I expect to be informed! What I don't expect is for ensigns to be taking objective decisions on the part of the entire ship while their superior officers go about oblivious to important information!”

The officer in the doorway cowered. “Sorry ma'am.”

“Sorry Lieutenant!” Uhura breathed dangerously.

“Sorry Lieutenant!” The youth offered - too late.

“You are dismissed for the remainder of this shift. Your pay will be docked for the equivalent time that you failed to report a transmission on an unused frequency, which is four days. You will report tomorrow as usual but you are one fuck up away from losing your job! Now get out!”

The woman turned to leave. As soon as the door closed behind her she thumped into Kirk's chest, her eyes clouded with angry tears. “Sorry sir, I didn't see you there, sir.” He turned around in the direction she was headed and walked with an exaggerated haste ahead of her, until he reached a turning, hoping it would lighten her up a little. Being her commanding officer didn't make it easy. She offered him a nervous smile when she turned to head towards her quarters, but he knew she'd spend the evening crying.

He squashed any thoughts of both her and Spock, and thanked whatever deity happened to have afforded him the protection of being Uhura's superior. If she shouted at him like that when she wanted to, he'd be crying himself to sleep too. He decided in the interest of personal safety that it would be wise to crush his curiosity about the broadcast and rely on her telling him if it turned out to be important.

The hangar deck was quiet and empty. It smelled functional, of grease and cooling fluids and food eaten on the job, comfortingly similar to the engineering department of the Starfleet Academy. The engineering bay of the ship smelled more of alcohol when he arrived; Scotty and a middle aged woman were asleep at their posts, and otherwise it was empty.

As he surveyed the bay from the balcony, it occurred to Kirk that he was looking for Spock, expecting to find him sat up against a wall at every next turn. Somehow he remained convinced that he would find him somewhere, but be damned if Kirk was going to actually go to Spock's room.

As it happened, such an attempt would have been fruitless anyway. Spock jumped in alarm as the door to botany opened, almost dropping the petri dish he had been studying with no particular goal. He relaxed a little when his eyes found Jim, as though it was less of a slip in professionalism to have one's captain find you squatting inside an under-surface storage compartment than to be discovered by an ensign.

The components of his communicator were laid out neatly on the floor in front of him, ordered into wires and nano-computer chips and transceivers and several other less specific collections.

Jim walked over, unphased by the lack of any further acknowledgement. He took a small electron microscope out of the next doorless cupboard along and folded himself into its space next to Spock. He couldn't see the Vulcan's face, but he could see his hands and feet where they stuck out.

“I wanted to apologise,” He started. Spock bristled in his compartment as the companionable silence between himself and the slime mould in the petri dish was broken. The slime mould did not
“I accept,” he said. He did not say, you may go now. Accordingly, Jim did not leave, disappointing Spock when he didn’t reject the blame being laid solely on his person. He snatched up the case for his communicator, intending to repair it and head straight to his own quarters, but Jim was already holding the magnet for the in-ear speaker. The Vulcan held his hand out, like a parent confiscating a banned item from a child.

Kirk returned the magnet with the same deliberate sloth he had shown in providing cutlery four hours before. His fingers lingered unnecessarily against Spock’s, sending static up his spine. The hand withdrew, brushing against his index finger as it did so, making Spock shudder. He hoped that it was subtle enough for Jim to have missed it.

“Are you okay?” The Captain rephrased his earlier question, holding out that first nano-chip, which Spock had discovered as the source of the humming noise. It did not connect so close to the magnet, where it would be subject to electromagnetic interference. He connected it there anyway. Spock took his time answering, indulging an illogical desire to give Jim the impression that he did not intend to answer. When he did his voice was milder than his words. “Not really.”

Kirk’s fingers ghosted against his wrist as he passed a thin wire. The hand stroked the bond between them as it touched Spock, but he doubted the human could feel it. “I’m sorry.”

“You have already apologised.” The science officer told him, staring at the place where their skin had met.

“I meant I’m sorry you’re upset, not sorry I was being a dick about you earlier. Separate apologies.” There was a chink and a wet swallowing. After a minute a flask was thrust round the wood that separated them.

Spock accepted, not bothering to mention that Starfleet regulation #432.1 stipulated that no food or drink could be consumed in a laboratory, or that #1318.3 maintained that either the captain or the first officer should remain sober at all times, even when neither is on duty. He decided that it would be illogical to wipe the top given that he and Jim had endured far more physical contact than the sharing of a bottle, and swallowed deeply. The alcohol burned his tongue and throat and made him cough, but he kept drinking until the vacuum created within the flask demanded his lips be removed or suffer the consequence. He let their fingers stroke on purpose when he handed it back.

“You should be careful with that,” Jim told him. “Stuff’s like, 60%. Bones keeps telling me it’ll turn me blind.” He shook the bottle to discover that Spock had consumed almost 200ml. “Jesus, you’re gonna be wasted.”

“Unlikely. The Vulcan body contains up to five times the alcohol dehydrogenase of a human. Assuming my own physiology in such matters is approximately half way between the two values, I should have two to three times the alcohol resistance you possess.” But Spock had to concede that he was feeling significantly lighter and a little giddy, if not blind.

“You’re still gonna be wasted.” Jim swigged the last of the unpleasant beverage, his speech slurring gently. “Replicator's best alcohol hand sanitiser. Drink water before you go to bed.”

Spock supposed he should have known that the acrid liquid was not in fact intended for human consumption. He hoped the lapse in his mental performance was a normal result of alcohol and not a side effect of some unknown chemical.

“You know,” Kirk continued, “When I first met you, I thought you had your shit so together... Like, you were fucking here to like, fucking babysit me.” Spock’s brain automatically filtered out the references to coitus. “You had a professional fucking attitude about your whole frigging planet collapsing. Everything that would’ve made me go to shit, and you were just fucking fine. Never knew if I was meant to be you or break you.” He coughed, his throat dried by the alcohol. “Hell if I ever thought I’d see the day when you were passed out on the floor and I was leaking your fucking cum from both ends. I s’pose I broke you then, didn’t I?”

The first officer knew the words were designed to extract an emotional response, but he surprised them both by laughing. It was an unnatural sound, scraping into the air like an animal’s last breath. The hysteria was so complete that the historian within him warned with images of a 19th Century incarnation of Bones approaching him with a mechanical vibrator and a water spray. As it
happened, McCoy only flapped about decreased liver function and gave him several detox hypos in an attempt to rectify the situation the following morning.

“I suppose you did.” The voice was even when it broke out between the shuddering laughter. “I do not believe I am qualified to babysit you, James Tiberius Kirk.”

His unusual behaviour had clearly alarmed both Kirk and the slime mould, which withdrew its flattened disk-body into a small slug, on a slow motion mission for a more appropriate home. Kirk also seemed tense for a moment, but then sighed, his head thumping against the panel between them. “You're drunk.”

“Your assertion is correct. However, I believe the effects on myself will dissipate far sooner than your symptoms.” He levelled, snapping the back of the communicator into place. Withdrawal and the beginnings of a hangover combined to form a throbbing headache, and he crawled out of the small space, seeing Kirk for the first time.

The human's eyes were sunken and tired, with lines of stress crinkling the edges. He was flushed with inebriation and his hair stuck to his forehead with sweat. Spock set the petri dish down in the only empty slot on its holder, among nineteen others. Then he uncapped a bottle of distilled water meant for rinsing equipment and gulped it down in several large mouthfuls. He sat back down with his back to a unit housing a huge centrifuge, opposite Jim. Their feet could have touched if he had stretched his legs out.

“Is this a date?” Kirk was too drunk to smile with any emphasis on mocking his first officer, so he flashed his teeth in a grin instead.

“Do you want it to be?” Spock quoted back, but didn't dare catch his eye. He didn't have to, as Jim's head fell back, unconscious before it hit the wood of the unit, leaving Spock no less confused but far more intoxicated than before he had arrived.
Jim's head split with the sound of Uhura's voice practically booming into his room through the comms unit.

“Captain Kirk, I know you can hear me now get up and get your ass to the bridge! I've managed to decode a transmission from what looks like a ship on an asteroid we passed about half a light year back. You're gonna want to hear this!”

“Jeez, alright I'll be there.” He replied over his earpiece. He could feel the throbbing of his own pulse as it pressed against the plastic. When he opened his eyes he was no longer on the floor of a botany lab, but in his own quarters, to which only Spock and McCoy had the entrance code. He was a little disappointed to find himself still dressed in yesterday's crinkled uniform. It was surprising how short a time it took for him to get over years of disparaging, disappointed glares and to get used to being desirable. He supposed it was the dream come true of the womanising asshole he'd been before he'd gained his captaincy. Lucky fucker. The irony of his softening morning wood being tucked against his belly for a man was not lost on him.

Not bothering to change or wash, although he most certainly was in need of grooming, he scrambled to the turbolift and walked out onto the bridge just as Sulu looked about to enter a panic attack from the mess of information being thrown across the deck.

“Taking her out of warp, Commander.” He was spared the wrath of a female yeoman for calling an inanimate object “her” by the stress of the moment. Kirk secretly liked to tell himself that the Enterprise was indeed a woman, and that he was married only to her, but he suspected quite correctly that most of the women crew members might take issue with that fact.

Spock was in the command chair attempting to look at two PADDs and the main display at once whilst being talking to a member of security. He did not stand up when he saw Jim.

“What's going on?” He demanded, taking in Chekov's frightened face and the jittery ensign holding Spock's attention. “What happened?”

Instead of breaking out of his island of calm, Spock gestured to Uhura to fill Jim in and continued to look over some important document.

“I detected a broadcast on an unusual frequency that had been broadcasting for the past five days yesterday evening. They were on an asteroid but now they've disappeared from our sensors.” She had clearly been up all night working on it. Various bits of information competed to escape her. “I decoded it and managed to translate it half an hour ago. It's a Section 31 vessel, they've been discussing our involvement on Tau Ceti and the release of the plague there. They've got kill orders for everyone on the Enterprise, the Curiosity and on the planet surface, sir.”

The entire bridge save Spock seemed to hold its breath.
What Kirk had walked into was apparently a ship-wide mutiny with the consensus of everyone on board. It made him feel proud. They all waited on him to proceed, Spock vacating the command chair. Jim sat down in it stiffly and considered his options, which it seemed were few. He turned on the comm, making sure his voice was heard by the entire ship. “Well then everybody, I'm sure the rumour mill has already done my work for me, but it seems that with our little tryst on Tau Ceti we've made it onto the “to kill” list of Section 31, and we can either sit here and wait for them to come to us or we can go back and do our best to get out alive. Since we've got nothing to lose, I'm gonna suggest we all get down to the act of High Treason. All personnel to battle stations!”

Then he slammed red alert and the bridge sped into action as though someone had just pressed “play”.

“Sulu, bring us about 180°, go back at Warp 8, Chekov plot the fastest course back to Tau Ceti IV, I'm willing to bet they're gonna be headed either for us or the colony and I don't wanna give 'em more notice than we have to. Uhura, stop all communications and broadcasts, I want this ship silent. Whatever power isn't going into the warp drive I want it on shields. Ready the phaser banks.”

Spock regarded him with interest.

“What, you wanna just wait for them to come make us have an “accident”? The adrenaline was making him giddy and sick with anticipation at the same time, but Spock was his usual not-relaxed, not-agitated self, navigating the worst-case scenario with a natural ease. He didn't even look hung over, and it was at times like these that Jim wondered why their positions were not reversed.

“On the contrary, Captain, I am no more eager to face death than yourself, especially at the hands of an unaccountable, rogue government organisation.” He left something unsaid, but Kirk couldn't place it, and time did not allow for him to try. “At this speed we could reach Earth in less than two days and request amnesty with Starfleet. However I would concur with the conclusion you have doubtlessly made yourself, that Section 31 on Earth would have sent out another ship to deal with us themselves. This is the only logical course of action I can conceive of in which both the Enterprise and the residents of the colony have a chance of surviving.”

“Where do you put the odds?” Kirk asked, noting that the phaser banks were now ready but not sure exactly what to do with Spock's complicity.

Spock himself seemed confused by the turn of phrase, waving away an ensign from the science department to concentrate on the matter at hand. “If by “where” you mean at what percentage, I calculate that if we manage to catch the ship unaware of our return and there is only one Section 31 vessel in the area, we have between a 27 and a 31.6 percent chance of both us and those on or orbiting the planet surviving, depending on the technology and arsenal of the enemy ship. If we lose the element of surprise I calculate the chances of success at 6.7 percent, or 14.4 percent for just the Enterprise surviving the initial attack, or 16.3 for the Enterprise being destroyed but the Curiosity and the colony surviving. If, however, they have rebuilt sufficiently since Khan's attack to have more than one ship in the vicinity, I--”

“Enough, hold it with the bad news already!” Jim cut him off, anxious enough as it was. Bones whisked his way onto the bridge with a scanner going over each member of the primary crew, hypos flying in reckless abandon. His eyebrow quirked when he had to give both Jim and Spock detox and liver function boosters, then Jim and Uhura both caffeine, and he ignored Jim's protests that caffeine should never be given in any form other than coffee. “You guys are a mess. If this wasn't an emergency I'd have the lot of you down in medical faster than you could even say coffee! I don't know what you've all been doing but dammit I'm a doctor, not a babysitter!”
He slapped Kirk's back hard enough to make the world roll in his dehydrated skull, before disappearing back into the turbolift to make checks on others at their battle stations.

“Ironic,” Jim acknowledged out loud, mostly to himself. “How alive you feel when someone tells you you're about to die.” The sound of the red alert made a familiar chill pass up his spine. It felt as though he were in the middle of a space jump, but the rushing in his ears was only his own blood, and the feeling of whizzing through space was from the stars passing by as they zoomed at Warp 8 back to the planet that Kirk had never wanted to see again only hours before.

No one took any notice apart from Spock who looked up from his position at Uhura's station, probably examining the transmission. “Illogical.” He concluded.

Unlike Jim, Spock found it difficult to derive any enjoyment from their current predicament. He bumped into Uhura several times and it was all too easy to get caught up in her panic. He ached for the physical contact with her he had once denied himself so freely, and longed to feel her thoughts through his skin.

Mostly, though, there was the nagging sensation of wanting to go back to the planet, just for the slight possibility that he might be able to find a way to reimfect himself. As with all of his deepest desires, it was much easier to resist when the chances of obtaining it was slim. Now as they closed the light years closed between them the need stirred with a renewed passion.

It was time to find McCoy again, or really anyone who could procure for him morphenolog.

“Everything's fucked.” Sulu thumped the armrest of his chair. Spock had to agree.
It took less than five hours to reach the last known coordinates of the Section 31 vessel, and less than forty minutes to search the area and establish that it was no longer there. After this, Kirk had taken them down to yellow alert to allow the crew to rest for the two days it would take to close the distance to Tau Ceti IV. He wanted to put the Enterprise into warp 9, but didn't dare drain the extra power from the shields to do so. He was also tempted to send a warning ahead to the Curiosity, but knew that now the Enterprise had strayed off course and lost contact, any broadcast would be too suspect; any hidden message would be decoded immediately and the the ship's trajectory triangulated in the process. He couldn't risk it, especially as they were now only five hours from their destination. The crew was back on shifts, but he hadn't left the bridge or his ready room in the past two days, too anxious to return to quarters and mind racing too fast to sleep.

“Spock, what do you reckon will happen if we manage to deal with the Section 31 ship?” He asked.

Unusually, the First Officer did not respond. When he turned to look at the Vulcan, he was standing just to Jim's right as he had been for the past five minutes, but his eyes were closed and his face serene.

Now was not the time to be sleeping on the job. He jammed a finger hard into Spock's back and pushed. Spock recovered with just enough time to prevent himself falling face down on the deck plates. His neck snapped around to the source of his fall, and whilst his expression was as lacking as always, Kirk could feel the irritation hitting him in waves.

“Having a nice nap?” He asked, taking a PADD from an ensign and declining her request for reserve power to be diverted to botany.

“I was not “napping”, as you say,” a pulse twitched in Spock's jaw. “I was merely meditating on certain urgent matters.”

Although it was Spock's default, the blank face reminded Jim of a defiant child refusing to be admonished. “Of course you were. Now if you don't mind, you don't get paid for day dreaming so get up and do something- we could get blasted out of the air any minute!”

Spock blinked slowly, ignoring the secret and utterly illogical hope that had settled in him; maybe Section 31 would capture and infect them, and he would get his parasite back.

“Captain, I sincerely doubt the chances of my remaining on payroll after this particular mission. The likelihood of us being “blasted out of the air” is extremely slim, as we are not within an atmosphere, and the implication would be that we would somehow fall down onto the surface of a planet or other body around which we are currently not orbiting.” The unnecessary stream of words grounded him a little. He knew what Jim had meant, and Jim knew he knew so did not bother to qualify.

Eventually he gave up and walked briskly to look over Sulu and Chekov at their stations, as though he were likely to pick up on anything they hadn't. All he did pick up was that Chekov had an angry red blotch just peeking out of his collar. Spock homed in on this under the pretence of being useful.
“Mr Chekov,” he said with what he hoped was concern, but really at this point could have been any emotion. His last dose of morphenolog had all but worn off. “You have some discoloration of the skin about your neck; it would be prudent to seek the aid of Doctor McCoy or Doctor M'Benga before we return to red alert.”

The boy managed to look at him as though Spock had announced some obscure and perhaps distasteful fetish to the bridge in spite of his obvious anxiety about impending doom. He opened his mouth to respond, but only a small squeak came out before Spock's attention was drawn away by the sound of Uhura's voice. He would have to ensure Chekov sought medical attention later.

“Shit. I mean, Captain, I'm getting a distress signal. From the Curiosity, they're under attack from an unknown vessel!” She silenced the bridge with the tone of her voice. The sensors and machines were all extremely quiet beneath the sound of baited breath.

Kirk grit his teeth, the cogs working in his head visible to the entire deck. He sighed heavily, pressing a button on his own controls. “Battle stations everyone, we're on red alert. Scotty I want all auxiliary power diverted between the engines and the shields. Sulu. Go to Warp 9. Lower to Warp 7 when we're within 12 million kilometres of the planet.”

“Aye sir,” Sulu responded, pushing hard on the lever. They momentarily lost lighting and the shields were almost out, but returned when the ship was blasting past other star systems at what Spock believed to be approximately 1,630,000,000,000 kilometres per hour.

“Captain, the Curiosity has been hit. They are unable to retaliate, sir, all of their power is going in to maintaining their shields. I don't know if we're gonna make it on time, they seem--” Uhura smashed several buttons on her console, to what end no one else could tell. A small green light shone to her right. Spock was by her side in an instant.

“Lieutenant, stop broadcasting!” He ordered, reaching for the cut off.

She smacked his hand out of the way. “I'm not broadcasting! It's coming from elsewhere in the ship, I can't stop it from here.” She shouted into her comm for someone to begin decoding the message.

“Can you shut it off from within the communications department?” Spock asked, a little too close to her face as she stood up.

“Maybe. I'd have a better chance of stopping it if I could find whoever is broadcasting. It's too late though, they've triangulated our location and probably our trajectory.” She looked to the captain to confirm that she could leave, but he was occupied between Chekov and Sulu and a red warning light.

Spock made the executive decision and sat down in her chair before she could do anything. “Go Lieutenant. Report to me when you find whoever is sending the transmission and have communications report to me as soon as they have any of it decoded.”

She was already in the turbolift, and so was Chekov.

Jim was shouting at Scotty through his comm, ordering him to find a way to restore the ship to Sulu's control.

“Oh cannae do that sir, they've overridden the controls on the main and auxiliary bridge! The best we can hope for is to be able to block their signal.”

Spock was unable to compartmentalise all of the information coming at him. He bit hard on his lip
because the pain allowed him to pretend that the relief that followed it when he was afflicted by the parasite would soon follow, and then he turned to Uhura's console.

//We can't hold them off much longer. Curiosity to any Federation vessel, we need help. We are being attacked, we are in orbit around Tau Ceti IV on a medical mission. We are being attacked. This is a distress signal. We can't hold them off any longer we have lost the main bridge! Repeat, we have lost the main bridge!//

A minute of explosions and shouting followed, before a deadly silence. He could do nothing but listen. After what felt like an hour, but in reality was less than thirty seconds, the frequency opened again.

//Curiosity to any Federation vessel. The attack has stopped. The enemy vessel is retreating. We are on auxiliary power and we have lost the main bri--//

The power shut off and with it the inertial dampeners; the Enterprise dropped out of Warp 9 so suddenly that the bulkheads screeched under the tension and the entire crew was hurled forwards with as they slowed from light speed to 0.93 light speed – a loss of 20 million metres a second- in less than one minute. A vehicle at warp 9 had no greater velocity than one at warp 1, Spock pondered for a moment, because velocity was determined with relation to light speed. It was his last cohesive thought.

The lights failed and the controls in front of Spock crunched in on themselves like he bonnet of a totalled car, showering the place he had been seconds before in high-voltage sparks, and he was slammed into the front wall of the bridge along with the rest of the alpha shift crew. An ensign's arm cracked between the dual force of being thrown into the wall and Spock smashing into her. He could feel her ribs snap as the same time as one of his, as the Enterprise continued to slow and they were all pressed to the far edge of the round room.
After several minutes of deceleration, the Enterprise came to a juddering halt. Auxiliary power came on with a stutter, just working enough to run the life support systems and keep the lighting at 50%. Spock found himself in a pile of bodies, all with varying degrees of injury. He took stock. Three of his ribs were broken and his right wrist dislocated. His upper left leg was torn and he could not recall which of the many consoles was responsible. Blood dribbled gently from a minor vein, coming out bronze-gold and quickly oxidising to green on contact with the air.

Jim and Sulu had both been thrown through the main display screen, and he predicted that they were both unconscious, but alive. Maybe brain damaged. He disengaged from the limp ensign on top of him and went to survey. Jim was bleeding badly from a head injury on his forehead. Sulu was out cold and his entire left side was bruised and battered with broken bones. The ensign Spock had crushed was dead, and he made no effort to establish how she had died. A nurse looked as though she might have broken her spine just above her waist. Her hip bone protruded sharply through the skin, but she was breathing. Hendorf, whom Kirk called “Cupcake” looked stunned but largely unharmed.

The only other person in the room who was conscious was the woman who had replaced Chekov as navigator; she had been attending to electronics when the breaks had come on, and instead of hitting the wall had been thrown hard against her own console. There were deep cuts on her shoulders where they had dug into the metal surrounding the panel she had removed for her work and she was obviously in shock, but she would live.

He attempted to walk towards her but his leg disobeyed him and it was only logical for him to simply lay himself down on the floor for a moment to recuperate. Only logical, but he regretted it immediately, because from where he was lying on the floor he could see the body of Ensign Olverson, the second youngest crew member after Chekov. His head had smashed into the back of the captain's chair and his brain flowed out of his cracked skull like a liquid.

There is no pain. Pain is psychological. There is no pain. The thought was not enough. Spock could not force himself through the aching ribs and arm to get up and face the devastation around him, so he did not.

The navigator sat alone in the silence, her brain struggling to come to terms with what had unfolded in the last day, but she could barely remember who she was. Emma, or Emily. Something like that. She looked at the navigation controls that she worked on beta shift. They were all broken. She wished the auxiliary power hadn't come back on, but when she closed her eyes Olverson's image stayed in the back of her mind, an overripe fruit dropped from a great height onto the deck.

Uhura's eyes stubbornly refused to focus, and her head felt like the boy three decks above looked.
“Lieutenant, you must wake up! Zhere has been... I do not know, an accident, or...”

One of her eyes finally managed to get a picture. The other was swollen and she didn't bother to open it. Chekov was surprisingly put together, she mused, despite one gorgeous cheek bone being obviously fractured and inflamed, and a bloody nose. He was calm and firm with her as he pulled her upright, although his hands were shaking badly. When she was standing she put out an arm to a bulkhead to steady herself, but he gripped her elbow instead. She looked down at it. The radius had snapped and poked out of the skin. Thank god for the sudden rush of adrenaline. She hoped it would last until she could get her hands on some morphenolog.

“Careful Lieutenant, you are injured.”

They were alone in the corridor but on of the adjoining doors was seeping blood slowly onto the floor. She swallowed something metallic, looking at Chekov to avoid the remains of an inevitably deceased colleague. “Are you okay?”

“Aye, Lieutenant. You, ah, you broke my fall...” He looked younger again now that he had a superior to step in and make decisions.

“I think you'll find your fall broke me,” she said with every ounce of her remaining humour. “How long was I out?”

“I hawe been awake about zhirty minutes, but I don't know how long it could hawe been before zhen.”

They set about with a silent agreement to find out how everyone else on the ship had fared, not optimistic but still hopeful. The turbolift wasn't working, and all of the doors required Pavel to force them open. Lab 1 was empty; so was the communications department. The hangar deck was empty too, and there was a full complement of shuttles in it – no one had been evacuated. They were simply gone. There was blood on the deck of the bridge, but no people and no bodies.

Without the hundreds of people who ran it, the Enterprise was a frighteningly lonely place. They made it to sickbay and the only life form present was a solitary Tribble, an escapee from a lab. They dosed her with painkiller and Chekov splinted her arm, doing his best to ignore her shouts and screams. The boy was no doctor, but he had a strong stomach, at least. The last thing she needed was him wimping out before he could level a bone-knitter at her. His triage skills were somewhat lacking, and she forced herself to stay alert whilst he fiddled the controls. The charge didn't hold, but she reckoned the bone was attached enough. They didn't bother with an osteo regenerator, because neither of them could operate one, and she couldn't have stayed conscious even if she'd had the training.

In Kirk's dream he was sitting in the alcove beneath the countertop in botany, listening to Spock's laugh. He tried to look around the divider to see what it looked like, but when he did so the Vulcan's face was blank, completely featureless like rubber had been stretched across it.

His hands lit up with sparks of electricity, and he turned to see the real Spock standing behind him, face grim and set, but there. “It is time you awoke, Captain.” He said it in Vulcan, but Kirk could feel the meaning, like he was holding it in his hand.
He did wake up, not to his bridge, but to someone else's brig. Two of Spock's fingers gently stroked the back of his hand sending the static that was Spock's consciousness in through the skin. The room smelled of blood and the gentle beginnings of rotting people. When he sat up to look around, the world insisted on staying horizontal, and his Vulcan steadied him moving his hand to his shoulder.

Unlike his mental self projection, the real Spock was indeed looking worse for wear. Jim stared at his face for a moment, reassuring himself that it was all definitely there. It was, bruised and bleeding, eyes glazed, but all present and correct. Spock's other arm hung limply at his side. The wrist seemed elongated and was ringed with bronze bruises, dislocated and twisted. He held Jim up, but was barely upright himself, and his left leg was stretched out on the floor beside them. It looked septic, but was not the source of the smell.

That was behind him, six or so bodies neatly laid out in a line. Including the two ensigns and the nurse from the bridge. The navigator who worked beta shift was keeping a cross-legged vigil next to them as though they were all sitting comfortably, eyes misted with shock much the same as Spock's were. He wanted to talk to her, but her face was closed off, unreachable through the trauma. To her right was a second line, that Jim prayed was the alive-but-unconscious pile, comprised of Sulu and Hendorf and several people who were not on the bridge with them; Cupcake was moving slightly, but the rest were all as still as their dead counterparts.

He wondered if his exclusion from the pile was a “Captain's Privilege” thing or just a decision on Spock's part. He suspected the latter, because regardless of recent goings on, Spock had always cared about him. Usually.

“Where are we?” He said. His voice sounded strangely cheerful, as though somebody else was exclaiming it. He felt very detached, somehow beyond caring for the situation.

Spock looked like he was waiting for someone else to reply, but there was no one else, so eventually he spoke. “We do not know. It is likely, however, that we have been captured by the Section 31 vessel. Why they did not simply kill us I am at a loss to explain.”

The questions worked their way into shape in Jim's mind. “Where are the others?”

Spock looked at him curiously. “Not enough information.” He said, as though Kirk had asked about the likely outcome of an entirely neutral even. “Are you okay, Captain?” His voice was emotionless but the hand on Jim's shoulder wasn't.

“Yeah, I just, I'm a little rattled.” He said. In reality he felt so dissociated and indifferent that he wasn't entirely certain he was actually in his body. Nonetheless, the hand left his shoulder feeling somewhat bereft of contact and the sight of Spock's wrist was making him nauseous. “Do you want me to try re...locate that?”

Spock jerked the limb away. “Do not.” He was abrupt enough to make Hendorf stir again. “You don't know how to reduce a dislocation, and it will be immensely painful.”

“Thought you trained yourself out of feeling pain?” He asked out of genuine curiosity.

“That was before I found myself captured on an enemy ship with kill orders for each of us, broken ribs and a wounded leg, whilst suffering from opiate withdrawal.” His voice was low and even though his mercifully present face maintained its calm exterior, Jim knew he'd just been snapped at, so he didn't push his luck. Instead he fought his way over to Sulu and Hendorf surrounded by an almost untouchable serenity – probably a counterbalance to Spock's lack of stability. One side of Sulu looked fine, but the other was a litany of broken bones and cuts. His lack of consciousness
would have been worrying were Jim not in an almost hysterical state of calm.

So he simply leant too close to Hendorf’s battered but otherwise intact face and whispered, “Morning Cupcake, pleased to see me?”

Hendorf's eyes fluttered open, scowl preformed and waiting. “No.” He pushed Kirk aside to sit up and take in the damage.

It occurred to Kirk that he might have been having a breakdown. Spock ought to have been citing regulation and taking command, but while he was clearly watching Jim, he didn't show any inclination to do so, or even seem to notice that his jovial behaviour was out of place in the darkish brig without any proper explanation as to why they were even alive.

He tried to do something useful, and looked about the room for any obvious escape routes. This being the brig, there were none.

Spock wasn't looking at him any more, he was staring at something else. Kirk turned in the direction of his gaze.

A figure was standing on the other side of the forcefield.
The second he saw the red glint, the entirety of Spock's body froze. The room faded momentarily to black, leaving only himself and the pair of eyes on the other side of the forcefield. Then the forcefield opened, and he attempted to close the distance between him and them, but instead found himself pulled back to a painful reality by a hand just above his broken wrist. He could feel Jim through his skin, and he knew he was letting Jim feel his own need, his own desperation, silently pleading to be let go.

“Stay back, Spock.” It was clearly an order. Spock was fully capable of dragging them both across the incongruously clean, white floors of the overly well-lit brig, of getting what he needed. He shifted in the grip, but said nothing. His limbs locked for a second time in indecision.

Again the figure, a woman with long, pale hair and skin in a plain black uniform broke his resistance by stepping through the portal and allowing the forcefield to close behind her. Her red eyes made her look almost as though she had albinism, however her freckled face showed she did have some pigment, and her foaming mouth gave the altogether more alarming impression that she was in fact gravely ill. Rabid. She walked slowly, her movements too jerky to be entirely deliberate. Spock strained against Kirk's hold, although he did not bother to break it; he didn't need to.

“Spock, don't let her touch you, you hear me? That is an order!” Jim was squeezing his dislocated wrist, trying to reach him. Spock elbowed his Captain in the throat and shoved him aside as the woman reached him. He put his hands out, onto her face, an approximation of an affectionate gesture. The dislocated wrist gutted out at a sickening angle, and the movements of the hand were clumsy and numb, but he ignored the pain that had moments ago been almost overpowering.

“You must be Commander Spock,” She said, her voice deadly and even, despite the wobbling breaths that matched those of Jim who was choking on the floor behind him under the protection of Hendorf. “And you are Captain Kirk.” She did not look at the Captain or otherwise indicate that she was referring to him. “I am Hassing. My rank is as irrelevant as yours is about to be.”

She gripped Spock's face in a mirror action, preventing him from drawing her to him. She smelled of unnatural chemicals, to which a more logical Spock would have attributed her extraordinary level of control. “I thought it was a mistake not to kill you, but now I know I was incorrect. You will be the new Hosts to the Masters.”

“What do you mean not to kill us?” Jim spat from the floor. “You call that line of bodies “sparing” us?”

She stroked the Vulcan's cheeks with one hand, maintaining a firm purchase on his jaw with the other, refusing to acknowledge Kirk.
“It is an act of mercy. Only 32 of you are dead. The rest will live in peace and bliss! I have disobeyed my orders in order to protect you, and to show you the wonder of being a Host!”

“How did you know we were coming?” The Captain demanded, when it became clear Spock was not going to continue the conversation.

“Because we baited you. Do you think we could not have hidden our transmissions from the like of you?” She said without inflection.

“Maybe I just have faith in my Communication's Officer,” Kirk countered.

“So did we.” She leaned in gently towards Spock. “And luckily for us your Lieutenant what's-her-name gave us access to your ship's computer in exchange for being subject to the Masters.”

“Spock, don't you dare let her touch you, Spock!” Kirk grabbed his elbow and hauled uselessly back on it. Hendorf didn't seem to fully understand what was happening and stood by as though witnessing a simple relationship dispute.

Immediately, Jim's fear and concern broke the barrier of Spock's skin, and his hands locked Hassing's face in its current position, her eyes burning into his.

“Spock, I know you think you need it, but please, don't. I need my First Officer here!” The bond flooded Spock with the sensation that Jim needed him for more than duty, but Hassing was surging forward, her lips so close he could feel her wet breath on his cheek and neck. Her eyes bulged slightly, control all but gone.

“Spock, no!” Spock's hands reacted to the pleading before his brain could decide on a course of action, and jammed abruptly into the infected woman's face. He could hear his pulse, the buzz of it slowing down to an almost human pace as the room slowed around him.

The joints in his wrist crunched painfully into place, and Spock was certain at least one was damaged, but he said nothing. Instead he pressed his fingers to her cheeks and the side of her head. The soft flesh of Hassing's face moved out of his way like that of a mango, nails gouging her skin, bruising deep indents and crushing the flesh against the bone until every last cell seemed to give way. The only sound in the room was that of his finger breaking her left temporal bone away from the parietal, caving it into the soft brain like a child breaking an old Earth Easter egg. Her zygomatic bone fractured and caved similarly under his thumb on her right cheek, and the weakened skull crunched in on itself, obliterating her face and the front of her head. It reminded him of the way his planet had been sucked into its own centre.

Sharp bits of bone slipped and cut his fingers as Hassing's body crumpled to the floor in front of him, leaving him holding only a handful of loose fragments and brain and an eye. The eye burst where a splinter of the sphenoid pierced it and he watched the liquid ran down his arm, over the bruises and swelling.

Then he turned back to his Captain, hands held out rigidly before him. Grey matter splattered onto the floor beneath them, as Jim's horrified face looked on.

As soon as the teeth broke her skin a cold realisation seized upon Hayves and battered her with a type of guilt reserved only for the worst of traitors, twisting in her stomach and burning the back of her throat.
The man before her in his black uniform sighed against her collar bone in satisfaction, as though he'd taken a long awaited drink or eaten a pleasant meal.

When she pushed him away and craned her neck down, the bite was bright red against her dark skin. Raw and open, but not overly bloody. She could feel a slight wriggling somewhere in it, and the first rush of opiates flood into her body like a dry river bed.

Guilt forgotten, she rested her head on the bulkhead of her guest quarters, savouring her first real hit in days.

Spock's face was still and blank, as it usually was, but this time it was clearly for different reasons. Kirk's eerie calm was shattered by Spock's near catatonic state.

The smell of metal and meat made Jim want to throw up, but he couldn't for reasons he could only assume pertained somehow to protecting Spock. That didn't stop his breath escaping as panicked gasps, or the shaking of his hands, even as he set his expression into the grim mask McCoy wore when dealing with a critical patient.

Much later it occurred to him how odd it was that he was so disturbed by Spock's violence. He'd seen Spock kill before; knew that Spock had tried to kill for him before. He'd even been vaguely aware of Spock killing for him with his bare hands, inside the belly of the Lamark, and once or twice before. But he'd never killed when he didn't have to. All Spock needed to administer was a single nerve pince to the woman's neck. Instead he'd crushed her like her head was a rotten candy apple, and was now holding parts of her out to Kirk like a cat's unwanted gift.

Hendorf returned to the present with a string of curses that did the situation no justice whatsoever. The navigator was still in her place, no more in shock than before, brain on automatic.

Despite their presence, Jim felt more alone than he had since that first voyage on the Enterprise. More alone, even than during the Academy. He would have done almost anything for Bones to be there with him. Let no one say that James T. Kirk undervalued his best friend.

Suddenly he felt impossibly more sick. If thirty two were dead, that meant there were twenty-two dead crew members elsewhere, any of whom could be Chekov, or Uhura, or Scotty, or Bones.
No one came to check on Hassing or the crew still locked within the brig. Kirk had become frantic when, seven hours later no one had come to provide food or water, to which the navigator had responded by breaking her vigil, if not her silence, and using a previously unacknowledged replicator at one end of the brig. Jim was almost as relieved to find facilities were in fact provided, quite obviously, indeed, in the same corner. He was thankful that at least someone seemed aware of their surroundings, even if the shell-shocked crew member was frustratingly mute. He was at a loss as to why she dutifully provided him with a brie sandwich, of all things, but at least it was something to feed to his surviving crew and the ever emaciated Spock.

Spock had spent the best part of their time sitting, staring blankly at the body on the floor, as though he expected Hassing to get up and move again. For some reason Kirk couldn't bear to intervene in the disgusting scene, so he distracted himself with applying replicated ice to dangerously large areas of Sulu's feverish body, trying not to think of why he was doing it and not Bones.

Hendorf tiptoed aggravatingly around Spock as though the latter was deep in thought, but unless Spock had shielded himself better than ever before, his mind was a total blank. After just a few weeks of telepathic connection Jim's mind felt oddly empty, as the quiet, unobtrusive and often unreadable buzz of Spock's presence fell silent in the back of his mind.

Sulu's skin was mottled and hot, although he breathed easily enough to convince Kirk that he would make a full recovery. It seemed to be just broken bones, and the Lieutenant's eyes fluttered occasionally behind their lids.

*Why am I making such bad decisions?* He thought to himself. *I'm supposed to be in charge and I didn't even check to see what was in the room with us.* It occurred to him that he was probably in shock, but he couldn't place exactly why. Jim had literally died before with fewer psychological implications.

Uhura awoke with a deep, unrelenting agony throbbing at the core of her arm. Beside her Chekov roused almost immediately, eyes sunken into hollows of worry, lower lip crusted with blood where he'd bitten it.

She allowed herself only a moment of indulging her own pain before she sat up, gritting her teeth and sending back the groan that rose in her throat to whence it came. She couldn't show her fear in front of Chekov; he seemed to be held together only by the knowledge that he didn't have to take the difficult decisions.

“Lieutenant! You have been asleep for four hours! I could not find a working computer but I think it is likely that the crew was beamed aboard the enemy vessel.”

He looked expectantly to her for orders she didn't have, and she steadied her voice through sheer willpower. “I agree, Ensign. Can you give me any indication on the ship's status?”

“Yes, Lieutenant. The shields are all down, except for some places between the bulkheads which are still shielded – ah, where we were earlier, Lieutenant. It may have stopped them from beaming
us out. Zhe warp engines are down, zhere's no way I can do anyzhing about zhis, maybe Meester Scott, but we may be able to get quarter impulse if we are lucky. Zhere was a hull breach by zhe auxiliary crew quarters on deck nineteen, but it is sealed off. Zhe only working wiew screen is one in zhe Botany lab. Environmetal and life support systems are working on minimum, from what I can tell. Lieutenant, I zhink I may be able to repair zhe transporter in room four...”

He waited for a response, and she had to give one if only to shield him from the hopelessness of their predicament. “We'll go down to the Botany lab then... You try and fix that transporter and meet me down there when you're done. They must have taken the crew somewhere...”

He nodded and made his way briskly to the door, which opened without complaint.

Eventually it seemed that Hendorf had tired of Spock's stupor and decided to intervene. He tried to turn Spock's face toward himself, and Jim did not fight the urge to push him out the way and take his place. The smell of death had risen to a crescendo around the oblivious Vulcan, a sticky, lumpy, red sheen clinging to his hands that wafted so sickly sweet into Kirk's nostrils that he retched brie and bread onto the floor beside him.

Cupcake had the professionalism to pretend not to notice, and ceded his place to Jim without argument.

Spock's clouded, unfocused eyes didn't meet his gaze, but nor did he attempt to circumnavigate his Captain to get another look at the definitely dead Section 31 agent. He didn't resist when Kirk slid him across the floor towards the facilities in the corner, or move when the sonic shower tickled at his skin, leaving it and his tattered clothes clean to the last atom, as though the blood had never been there. The Captain swallowed his guilt at the fact that his Vulcan still seemed somehow... soiled to him.

Touching Spock felt somewhat sinister and forbidden in a way Kirk couldn't place. He held his First Officer up against the wall of the shower by his shoulders, but the soft, fleshy warmth beneath his hands felt illicitly obtained, and his eyes on the misted gaze felt as though they were prying into places they didn't belong. Spock's body felt very alive, for some reason. It felt like a betrayal when a living Spock failed to respond to him through the bond. Or perhaps it felt like a loss.

Botany was as empty as was expected when Uhura pried open the door with her good arm after another two hours' sleep. The lighting flickered ominously for a moment as she stepped around the raised counter for plants to the two parallel rows of desks. Plants and other things resembling them had slid off onto the floor, pots smashing, and a pinkish flower-like appendage was leaking a blue, spicy smelling sap. Between two desks was a climate controlled tank full of shattered Petri dishes, out of which little orangey green slug-like things were making their escape. On the right of it was a work station often claimed by Spock, and to it's left was one she knew to belong to Sulu.

Spock's desk was the only thing in the room which seemed to retain some order; the PADD on it was somehow intact and had fallen back into what was clearly its intended place; the apparatus was neatly arranged in two open doors above the two little alcoves beneath which contained equipment she should probably have been able to identify but couldn't. The only difference was that a slug had
made its way across the table leaving a glistening trail of slime behind it. His scent, Vulcan and exciting, lingered in the air around it.

Sulu's workstation was a mess, whether a result of being thrown about or simply a reflection on its owner she couldn't recall. Slime mould slugs had made their home amongst the debris of abandoned plant samples, the smashed crockery of meals taken in the lab (against regulations, she was certain), a spilled bottle of universal indicator dying the plastic a yellowy green. A single birthday card was lodged between the remaining half of a mug and a recently vacated plant pot. She picked it up and flicked a slug off of it, wondering why Sulu had kept it six months after his birthday.

It was vintage, real, non-replicated card made from trees, depicting a woodland scene, with Happy Birthday written on it in iridescent glitter. How ironic the 21st century had been, printing trees on trees. Inside is a messy scrawl of crossed out and backwards letters and words, someone unused to writing by hand in the Standard alphabet.

*Dear Hikaru, I know it is meant to be the other way around, but I just wanted to thank you for a wonderful birthday. Pavel. And in tiny writing beneath, P.S. Я не смею написать это на английском языке, но я люблю тебя. Uhura smiled and at the same time felt immediately guilty for the invasion of privacy. P.S. I do not dare to write this in English, but I love you.*

The warmth in her stomach dropped when Chekov stepped into the room behind her, looking miserable and exhausted. She'd had a feeling he was seeing Sulu, but somehow she'd managed to forget that he was also pining for a particular person whom he'd lost to the past day's events. She put the card down again as discreetly as possible, tucking it out of reach of the small organisms invading the Botany lab.

“Zhe transporter room is ready, Lieutenant.”

For the first time since the depths of the *Plak Tow*, and for only the fourth time in his life, Spock's mind was completely and utterly devoid of its usual functions. Every last one of the many humming calculations and carefully compartmentalised thoughts that worked steadily between his pointed ears had gone silent, leaving only an image in his mind of a woman with foaming lips and waiting teeth, and invaded occasionally by the soft murmurings that came from Kirk beside him.

Spock looked straight ahead, but watched Jim tending too him in his peripheral vision. He could not feel his hands, but he could see them shaking, and the way Kirk held them away from himself as he supported Spock's weight beneath the sonic shower.

Later Spock would wonder where the murmurs came from, and how they managed to breach his empty mind, but for the moment he simply allowed them to wash over him like the tickle of the sonic, to carry away the red eyes as the murmurer carried the sticky blood from his fingers, and the scraps of flesh from beneath his nails.

He could feel his Captain in the back of his mind, but could send nothing back. Shock and disgust tempered with concern. Later it would make him feel sick; he would be racked with misery born more from uncertainty from guilt, a silent, personal trial that he would attempt, and fail, to rationalise away, fuelled by Jim's disapproval. He would forget, however, the deep, deep loneliness he found within Kirk, a result, perhaps, of his temporary withdrawal from their bond. Not because it was insignificant to him that he made Jim feel this way, but because he could not rationalise the
cause, and the possibilities frightened him.
**Death and Disease**

*Space is death and disease wrapped in darkness and silence.* He'd said it before and he'd say it again. Only right now, it wasn't true. The death and disease was there, alright, but it was noisy and terrified and illuminated by offensively white fluorescent lighting. The converted prison, né recreation room, was filled to the gunnels with people in various states of poorly treated injury, and a large and growing number of people infected with a certain deadly parasite. Deadly, because the man who'd come in to meet and greet them was now among the eleven dead fenced off with chairs and tables. Nine were now infected, and Bones didn't have the sterile equipment needed to operate – nor did he have the anaesthetic, he thought with a shudder, fingers stroking his own healed neck.

He, and the hundred and two (surviving) others crammed into the rec room crowded as much as possible into the “good corner”, although in reality they took up much of the room, including the centre and the “shit corner,” so named because that was where the buckets were. Opposite that, past the doorway and its temporary forcefield, was the infected corner of snarling but effectively bound people who screeched and groaned in their distress. He'd had to barricade them off with more furniture, because people in shock had formed a habit of running to the infected to “help”.

“I don't get paid enough,” he griped to the barely conscious Doctor M'Benga, as he redressed the other's wounded shoulder with a bit of his own under shirt and the strongest drink rec room replicators would supply. It was a lie, he got paid well, very well, actually, as the Chief Medical Officer of the Starfleet flagship. Much better than he had been in his year of actually being the country doctor he claimed to be. After the five year mission he could probably retire, but now he found that he would miss the black, and his friends with it. He chuckled at the irony of even thinking that at this moment. Stuck in a room that looked like a refugee camp with the dead and the dying, treating his colleague with whiskey and his own broken nose with ice. How archaic. It didn't change the fact that all he wanted to see was Jim's face, to be reassured that their captors hadn't simply killed the bridge team as a caution.

Jim did not recall falling asleep, but when he did he saw Spock's hands on Hassing's face, crushing and squeezing until the inevitable crack. When her skull finally gave way, he heard Carol Marcus scream, and he looked up to see not Spock, but Khan standing over Alexander Marcus' prone body.

When he sat up, choking on fear, his eyes met Spock's unblinking gaze. He expected his observation to be a private affair, and was taken aback when the Vulcan cocked an eyebrow. Caught staring, he looked away quickly.

The navigator was attending to a recently revived Sulu; or rather, she dumped ice next to him gormlessly and stood in a sloppy parade rest by his side as he struggled to sit up.

Not wanting to look a gift horse in the mouth, Kirk stood from his place slumped against the wall opposite Spock, who sat rigidly in the centre of the brig, and staggered over to Sulu.

Sulu grimaced against the pain, but there was little Jim could do in their current situation. He needed bone regenerators and pain relief, and preferably Bones, none of which were on hand.

“Sulu, can you hear me?”
Sulu grit his teeth and managed only a hoarse cry that faded to a hiss of pain. Kirk put his hand on his sternum, the only patch of unblemished skin he could find. He wasn't sure how or when Sulu had lost his uniform shirt, but he wished he hadn't because the reality of the broken body was almost as sickening as the scene in his dream, and the scene across the room.

Hassing's body had been removed from the centre of that room and neatly arranged by the pungent row of corpses, probably by the same person who had stripped Sulu and applied extra ice to the swollen, cracked and bruised ribs.

Sulu shuddered in cold and agony, his eyes watering and breaths shallow. Kirk tried to make the same soothing noises for him as he had for Spock, but they wouldn't seem to come.

“Shit, man. You're gonna be alright, we're gonna get you out of here...”

It didn't seem to comfort Sulu, who was going purple with exertion and had long since abandoned his attempt to sit up. The noise in the pilot's throat could have come from any animal, the universal word for anguish.

When Jim next look up, Spock was beside them both, apparently ignoring the festering wound to his own leg and the pain in his wrist, which was somewhat less swollen now. Clearly Spock had been the one with the ice. Without speaking, but maintaining his usual calm, Spock brushed Kirk's hand on Sulu's chest aside, and squeezed his neck gently. Sulu went slack on the floor, the muscles in his face relaxing.

“Sleep,” Spock commanded softly, as though it had some bearing on whether Sulu would pass out from the nerve pinch.

The pair of them sat for a moment, until the navigator slouched off to lie face down on the floor, too rigid to be trying to follow Sulu into oblivion.

“You're back.” Kirk's throat was dry.

“I am.” Spock didn't meet his gaze, choosing instead to examine his hand on Sulu's skin. Then he reached around and took up the ice from the floor and began laying it over the purpled ribcage.

After a minute he spoke again, obviously to Jim although he gave no indication that this was the case. “When – if – we are recovered, I should like to have you testify my mental incapacity at my court martial.”

Kirk squinted, the space behind his eyes pounding with a headache called Spock. “Your what?”

“My court martial. The murder of any individual merits investigation. I will be court martialled, and I will be given two options; either I admit my guilt and am sentenced to upwards of fifteen years, or I resign from Starfleet on mental health grounds and claim insanity, and spend several years in a rehabilitation facility before being allowed to return to New Vulcan. I should prefer the latter, as I believe I was not in control of my actions fifteen point seven hours ago.”

“What? No. I'd shove her out the air lock before I let you go down for murdering someone with kill orders on us.” Now that Spock was taking responsibility for her death he felt a surge of protectiveness and resentment.

Spock gave him a withering look which ended too quickly. “You will do no such thing. If you do not report me to Starfleet Command, I will be forced to do so myself. I will not allow you to risk your career for my actions.”
Kirk directed his glare at Sulu instead of his First Officer, unable to look at him. “It was practically self defence. She was gonna kill us.”

Without missing a beat, Spock corrected him, as coolly as if he'd mad an erroneous conclusion about a scientific experiment. “She was unarmed and intended on infecting us with a curable, non-fatal disease.”

Suddenly Kirk found himself hot with anger. He turned to Spock, grabbing his shoulders too tightly and shaking too hard. Spock's head snapped back once before he held his posture rigid against the assault. “Then why. The fuck. Did you do it?”

Spock shrugged him off, irritation plain on his face. A lock of his hair didn't fall back into place, but stood as a cow lick on top of his head.

“Well Spock? Are you gonna fucking answer me? If she wasn't a threat why did you do it? You're the fucking moral one, you're the one who's always in control. Why did you have to fuck things up?”

“You need not raise your voice, I am less than two feet away from you,” the Vulcan curtly sidestepped his questions.

“Answer me, god-dammit!” It was an order.

Spock began to sigh and then caught himself, visibly suppressing it. His nostrils still flared. “Because I did not want her to touch you. Because the last time someone attacked us I was unable to protect you. Because although I am Vulcan and possess far superior logic skills to yourself, I do not always act logically, I do in fact make mistakes. Because the morality of the issue was not my primary concern next to your well-being, because I do lose control. Because I am not some infallible being as you clearly expect me to be, and I do, as you say it “fuck things up”.”

By the time he reached the curse, Spock's lips were the barest inch from Jim's. The acerbic tone of his voice made the hair stand on the back of Kirk's neck, running down his spine like an unwelcome feather. Rage and regret glittered in Spock's eyes, and he realised he had been rubbing in something the Vulcan had been ashamed of.

“It's hot when you swear, ya know that?” He grinned, but the words sounded like a jibe anyway. Unsurprisingly, Spock did not smile back, looking agitated, reminding him of his own bad mood.

*When most people say that they're fallible, they don't mean they fucking murdered someone.* Kirk could swear that he had not said the thought out loud, but Spock recoiled as though he'd been spat at, wrenching himself away from the human and stepping fully dressed under the sonic shower, willing the gentle hum to cover up the sound of his Captain's heavy breathing.

“So, you and Sulu...?” Uhura let the question drift and instantly regretted it, as Chekov tensed with his fingers still inside the back of the display screen.

“We are... We just started dating. Uh - Properly. I mean, we, uh... We started, kind of, and zhen we stopped, and zhen...” He stuttered on the words. “I mean zhat we, I, I... I hawe liked him for a wery long time, but he...”

“Your birthday was months ago, though...” She said without meaning to.
He looked at her in surprise before realisation dawned on his face. “I did not know you speak Russian.”

“And you didn't know the Sulu could have translated it the second he got that card?” She asked, brushing off the past tense. Sulu was still alive. They couldn't all be dead.

“I asked him not to...” Chekov's voice faltered at her raised eyebrow.

“Sulu's got integrity, but not that much integrity.” She teased lightly as Chekov got back to work.

“I know.” He said, smiling softly to himself, but didn't elaborate. “Zhere, zhe ship's computer is now link whizh zhis wiew screen again. I can use zhiz to calculate where we should beam down and input zhe coordinates into zhe transporter.”

The holographic screen lit up with blue light, displaying a loading scene for a second before it showed a three dimensional graphic of the ship's position in space. They were in the outer reaches of the Tau Ceti system. A hundred or so kilometres away was another ship, an unmarked Federation vessel. Towards the centre of the system, planet IV was surrounded by debris and the evac shuttles of the Curiosity, still bobbing about the planet, working through the emergency to deliver the aid. A single shuttle was heading out slowly in their direction, on impulse power in a belated and half hearted attempt to offer help.

“Zhat shuttle will take six more hours to reach our position,” Chekov assured her. “We could hair zhem and ask zhem to go to warp...”

“I don't want to break subspace silence...” She mused to herself. She wanted someone else to make this decision for her, felt ill-equipped to choose whether to go in now or wait for back-up.

Chekov, evidently, had decided for her. “If we are assuming zhat zhe enemy ship is still going to attack, zhen zhey will just attack zhe shuttle also...”

“Alright then,” she looked at him. He filled his body like an adult now, ready for responsibility but not willing to challenge her authority. Maybe command track had been the right thing for him after all. “Beam us aboard. If you can do it in the least populated location possible, I'd be grateful.”

“Aye, Lieutenant... Well, I suppose you are Keptin for now.” He caught her look of apprehension before she could stifle it. “Just giwe me fifteen minutes and I will hawe zhese coordinates plotted. I will have to do it blind from zhe transporter room.” He did not repeat the title.
"Fine" has Variable Definitions

They aimed for the cargo hold, but the ship layout was not as expected and they found themselves on the empty auxiliary bridge.

Uhura stood by the door, gripping her phaser hard enough that her knuckles cracked whilst Chekov hacked the computer and accessed the last twenty four hours of records. He talked far too loudly as he worked. “Zhis computer, it is wery strange, it works using four isolinear subprocessors to create a core which communicates wizh each part separately. None of zhe processes requires more zhen two of zhe subprocessors at onc-”

“You're speaking the one language I don't understand,” she tried not to sound too severe but it did her no good. “Can you do it or not, Ensign?”

“Of course, of course.” He flapped her question away.

Unfortunately everyone on the ship was human and there was no determining who was friend or foe; worryingly, there were far too few life forms on the ship, and Uhura hurried Pavel out of the bridge and down the corridor as briskly as possible less he slump into the depression she could practically see on the horizon.

They didn't dare use a turbolift, and instead crept about like children playing spies, heading for the brig.

She stumbled, too close to the door that the computer had informed them was an occupied lab. It slid open and a man tumbled out and onto Chekov. The Ensign let out a barked scream, throwing the man back. He hit the bulkhead and crumpled to the floor, dead.

Without looking into the lab, Uhura grabbed Chekov's arm and ran, her footfalls thunderously loud in the quiet ship, not stopping until her subordinate's panicked gasps necessitated.

“Head between you're legs, Chekov,” She ordered weakly, trying to catch her own breath. He obeyed her, bracing his tail bone against the wall panel, eyes shut tight. She couldn't let his morale fall any further, and moved him on the moment his chest stopped heaving. “Come on, Ensign. It's gonna be fine.”

The next member of the crew they were unlucky enough to happen upon was also dead, and the next, and she changed routes until she was no longer certain where they were or where they were going.

Eventually they reached Rec Room 2, which held either 101 of her own colleagues, or 101 of their surviving enemy. When she approached the door leaving Chekov to “stand guard”, she was repelled by a forcefield that threw her down at his feet.

“Shit, Chekov, can you disable that?” She'd jarred her tender arm, and took the time he spent working on the panel by the wall to recover.

“Yes Lieutenant, one minute.” As far as she could tell he was just mashing random buttons, but the crackle of the forcefield distorted and then disappeared nonetheless. The door behind it sighed
gently as it opened.

The smell inside made her choke and Chekov's eyes water. Rotten meat, excrement, sickness.

To the right was a fenced in crowd of bound and gagged members of the crew, and to the left McCoy and M'Benga were running an ad hoc sickbay on replicated fruit and dairy products.

A hundred heads snapped in their direction and the bustle of the room muted to the groans of the ill and dying.

M'Benga looked confused for a moment and then broke out into a smile. Bones looked dubious.

“Lieutenant!” M’Benga rushed for them, scattering dazed patients with McCoy on his heal. He grabbed her shoulder in a professional approximation of a hug and reached to ruffle Chekov's hair before Bones shoved him aside to sweep them both over with some kind of scanner.

“You been bitten by anything in the last 44 hours?” He sounded gruff and resentful even as relief showed in his eyes.

“Not that we're aware, Doctor.” She smiled at him, and he managed a half second of a grin to flit across his face. “Chekov and I were left behind when you lot were presumably beamed over. Can't find any of the original crew alive on this ship, you're the first people we've seen.”

She looked to Chekov to provide them with more information, but his eyes were scanning the room, searching faces in the way she realised she ought to have been doing herself.

“They're not here, kid,” Bones clapped a hand to the Ensign's back. “Chekov? They're not here. I'd've told you right away if they were. Doesn't mean they aren't somewhere else on this ship, and if they're here we'll find 'em, ya hear?”

Chekov had relapsed to his shocked, obedient self, but nodded. “Aye doctor. We will look for zhem now, won't we?” He glanced at her for direction, but McCoy didn't seem to be as reliant on her opinion.

“Sure we will. Doctor M'Benga'll stay here and me and whoever else is healthy enough to come with ya'll help search this lump of rust.” McCoy gestured to the ship, which as far as Uhura could tell was similar to the Enterprise but in fact better maintained and more advanced – not that she voiced this later to Scotty. “If I can get to their sickbay I can find out what's killing these bastards before it takes any more of us.”

A particularly potent waft of the room's cloying scent ushered them from the room and made Uhura retch. Four members of security who looked in half decent shape accompanied them, eager to escape the confines of the room.

“Damn. I forgot what nice, clean, recycled air smells like.” Bones muttered to them.

They gathered weapons from the stiffened corpses in Transporter Room 2. They didn't need them. Chekov's throat was filled with bile he was too anxious to release, and he stubbornly pushed thoughts of Sulu to the back of his mind when he saw the forty or so bodies in Rec Room 1.

“That's odd,” Bones nugged one with his foot. “This body's been here a good two, maybe three
days already, it's gone limp again, but this one,” he kicked another, which failed to yield, “Probably
died about twelve hours ago. People were just... Walking over their dead colleagues, didn't even
bother to move the bodies.”

He flashed a light into the stiff corpse's eyes. The man had been dark skinned and haired, but his
mouth was crusted in dried saliva and the torch picked out a red gleam. McCoy took samples.

They found another 59 crew in brigs 3 and 5. Brig 4 held only 8 dead crew members. Chekov
turned each one over, but none of them were Sulu. One was boy he'd roomed with in his first year
at the Academy, though.

The sickbay of the Section 31 ship should have been a catastrophe, riddled with corpses or the
dying or failed attempts at a cure. It wasn't. There were seven dead medical staff and one man who
had died with a broken leg, lying on the bed waiting for treatment. All eight had died of the same
thing, and Bones unceremoniously split open the back of a middle aged woman's head to extract
the parasite. It was as dead as she was. He took it for tests.

“As Spock would say, “fascinating,”” He announced. “They've been using a cocktail of drugs to
stimulate the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, probably to allow them greater self control under the
parasite, and a reaction between the type of dopamine they've been using and the Rhodamine B
secreted by the parasite has resulted in a large build up of a molecule I've not seen before, but that
causes them to suffer histoxic hypoxia in the affected cells.”

“What?” Chekov blinked at him.

“They took a drug, it reacted with something the crap that makes their eyes red, they all died
because the new compound stops their brain cells taking up oxygen.” He felt like Spock must
constantly feel, dumbing things down.

“Zhank you doctor. As you know I do not hawe a medical degree myself.” Pavel said it softly, but
Bones knew when he was being told. He shot a “what's up with him?” look at Uhura, which she
didn't meet.

“Right, well there's not much we can do here. We ain't seen any of 'em alive so it's probably too
late anyway an' as far as I can tell they didn't medicate any of ours, so I suggest we get onto finding
the rest of the crew.”

He watched Uhura for confirmation, and when she nodded he gathered all the medical supplies he
could carry and marched out the door, aching to be clear of the penetrating gaze emitted by one
Ensign Chekov.

The lighting in the brig didn't change according to the time of day as it did elsewhere on the ship. It
was brightly lit at all times to allow prisoners to be properly surveyed.

The startling red against the previously sterile white of the floors gave the whole room an
uncomfortably medical aesthetic which Jim noted Spock was now avoiding at all costs. The harsh
light seemed thick and palpable as it swirled the dust in the air, and choked them with a smell of
death that was never filtered out completely by climate control.

He had no idea how long they'd been there, but it felt like days as the uneasy silence stretched between him and his First Officer. The food synthesizer in the brig didn't provide any alcohol and he couldn't even drink himself into oblivion.

Kirk tried to close his eyes against the room, but his back ached where he'd lent for too long against the edge of the bed that an unconscious Ensign with a broken everything now occupied, and the red of the light that percolated through his eyelids reminded him of the blood caked to the floor, and worse, the blood the sonic shower had stripped from Spock's skin. He opened them abruptly.

Spock sat close to the forcefield, legs crossed. Somehow he surrounded himself with a sense of privacy, despite being sat in the middle of a room of people in front of a clear screen that could, at any moment, reveal yet more observers.

Not wanting to shatter it, he got up and walked over rather than shout across the room.

“Spock.”

The Vulcan took his time to clear his thoughts before opening his eyes to respond with a questioning eyebrow. “Captain?”

Jim blinked at him, unable to recall what it was he'd intended to say. “I'm serious, about...”

“How about, Captain?”

He gestured in the general direction of the point in the room where Spock and the unfortunate agent Hassing has intersected. “About not wanting you to mention this in your report, if we ever get out of here.”

Spock was quick and measured in his reply. “Impossible. Even as a Starfleet Captain, you cannot order me to commit an illegal act.”

Kirk breathed slowly and unclenched his fists with a conscious effort. The lump on his head throbbed. “As your friend, then, Spock,” He waited on a response that ended up taking form only in the stiff set of Spock’s jaw. “Look, I didn't help you out on that damn planet to have that fucking parasite take you anyway.”

The Vulcan's eyebrows knit together imperceptibly. He turned to Jim, almost curiously, but there was something else in the gleam of his irises. “You believe that you deserve something from me in payment for aiding me. You believe it gives you privileges over my actions, that we have some sort of special relationship that transcends the duty I hold to Starfleet.”

The Captain tried and failed to ignore that kick to the gut. He put his hand across his face in an exasperated action to cover the fall in his features that he couldn't suppress. He knew that fucking a dying friend didn't make a lover, nor indeed did it make them in love with you, but that didn't mean he didn't want something special with Spock. He tensed at the realisation, and when he took the hand away he couldn't meet the First Officer's almost-glare.

“You know that's not true.” He said, aggravated when Spock's eyebrows breached his hairline. He moved the conversation on before the Vulcan could impart the expected logical protest into the pause. “You think there's even going to be an investigation? This is Section 31 not some random space ship that's wondered into Federation space! Do you even know how fucked this is? How screwed we are unless we play this 100% right? I'm not telling them you crushed a woman's skull in a fucking report when the only way I'm even gonna be able to protect us at all is by saying it was
Section 31 but it was all a terrible mistake. Say you won't put anything in your report I haven't approved.”

Spock kept his perfect posture and fixed his eyes ahead of him, lips pressed firmly together.

“Say it, Spock.”

The Science Officer huffed single breath minutely more forcefully than the rest, something Kirk had only over the last few months learned was a well suppressed sigh. “Fine.”

A memory surfaced in Kirk's head, ambiguous and formless as though it were not his own, unplaceable. “'Fine' has variable definitions. 'Fine' is unacceptable.” He whispered to himself, but not so quietly as to evade his First Officer's superior hearing.

Spock looked around at him, eyes wider than he'd ever seen them and a look of vulnerability threatening on the edge of his features. Then he set his face rigidly back into its usual mask.

“Are you okay?” Jim felt that he'd said something wrong but couldn't identify it.

“Fine.” Spock said simply, his eyes locked onto the back wall of the brig. “I am fine.”
Uhura was beginning to get more anxious with each member of their own crew they found, dead or alive, who wasn't a member of the bridge team. Specifically, they were not Spock. It wasn't that she didn't care about her own Captain, simply she no longer knew how she was supposed to relate to him. A major aspect of their relationship, i.e. how they each related to Spock, had been impeached upon, and from watching her Vulcan and from over four years of dating him, she had a feeling the damage was permanent.

She ignored her stomach, which was refusing to settle, and pushed the thoughts of the lifeless faces to the back of her mind.

Bones evidently struggled to do the same. A woman who worked in engineering slid out of a forcefield enclosed storage room, in pieces, revealing four wide-eyed members of the Enterprise's technical specialists, glassy eyed with trauma.

The body was literally sliced into five; sharp bits of the torn Enterprise had been thrown into her, or she had been thrown onto them. One of the specialists, a man in his fifties she recognised as one of the new, post-Khan crew members had one leg tied off, foot missing and badly bandaged in his own uniform shirt.

She looked away as McCoy swore and began a brief first aid process that made the man scream so loud the bulkheads sang back an echo. As soon as this was done they moved off, leaving the man to his colleagues, and aimed for where Chekov remembered the other brigs being from his rendezvous with the computer.

Bones had aged a decade in half two days. She rubbed a hand across his back but it made him jump. “Sorry there, Uhura. Lost in thought.” He paused as though they were falling back to companionable silence, but the suddenly needed to fill it again. “I thought the ones they'd put in with me and M'Benga had been they worst off. I thought they put them there because they needed medical attention. But they're all like that...” He spoke quietly, eyeing Chekov as though he didn't trust him. She supposed he didn't understand the reason behind the Ensign's earlier bad attitude. It didn't matter, as the pain from his broken cheek bone seemed to be getting to him, and the boy had barely spoken in an hour.

She didn't want to respond to the morbid implications of McCoy's statement, so she didn't. “A shuttle is heading for us at impulse from the Curiosity, last I checked. They'll be about an hour.”

It was relevant enough to distract him. “On impulse? Why don't they use warp?” He asked, incredulous and a little dazed.

“Saw the Enterprise disabled, saw the... Other ship not moving. I guess they're waiting to see if they're gonna get shot out the sky.” She tried to sound up beat but it failed somewhere around the
word “disabled”.

“Well they're not, why didn't you hail them?” He raised an eyebrow incredulously.

She ignored it. “I didn't wanna break subspace silence. Just in case we're not the only ones getting reinforcements.”

They found the Captain. A navigator, Ensign Emma Raik, was looking eerily out of the forcefield, as close to it as she could get without her nose touching. When Chekov turned it off, she fell forward like a door on a hinge into the arms of a redshirt from security.

They scrambled inside, no longer noticing the horrendous smell, but none of them able to avoid taking in the huge red stain on the floor.

Kirk's face split into a grin as he saw them from his position in one corner of the room, talking to Hendorf. Both looked battered, but alive.

“Bones! Uhura!” Kirk launched himself upright and over to the now empty fourth wall, met by McCoy who scanned him immediately without a word, pushing him to the floor.

“Well, as usual, you'll live by some miracle or another.” He brushed off his desire to cling to his best friend in favour of enacting that Hippocratic oath of his.

Spock was sat cross-legged facing into the room, back rigid, meditating. He opened his eyes, but took a moment to recognise Bones and Uhura as they knelt in front of him. He opened his mouth to speak but only groaned before promptly shutting it.

“Massive infection;” The Doctor told him as though it might ease his discomfort. “Your leg is pretty bad, I'm gonna need to drain it and you're gonna need every antibiotic in the book, but if you're a very good Vulcan I might let you keep it.”

Spock was not so ill that he could not raise an eyebrow. His gaze fixed the Doctor's face as he took the only antibiotic hypo Bones had left without a grimace, to the exclusion of Uhura. She tried not to care.

She had him all to herself, though, after Chekov's shriek tore McCoy away.

Sulu lay on his right side on one of the two beds in the cell, left side black and broken, one rib almost poking out of his skin; radius shattered; broken collar bone. The skin was swollen and had a purplish shine to it. Bones reassured Chekov it looked worse than it was and gave Uhura a look back that said the opposite.

“Jim, how long has he been unconscious? Has he woken at all?”

Kirk stood almost on tip toes, bouncing anxiously. “Yeah, I'm not sure how many times but Spock's been knocking him out with Vulcan nerve pinches. We didn't have any painkillers...” He sounded apologetic but McCoy took no notice.

“Good. This is probably agony, if he'd spent too long conscious like this our biggest problem would probably be psychological. Gimme my medkit, I wanna make sure he's stable before we try and move him.”
“Move him?” Jim looked baffled. “Where to?”

Bones flapped in the direction of the medkit on the floor by Spock. “Jim, he can't stay here, there are corpses in this room.”

“Oh.” Kirk spoke in the direction of the pile of bodies. “Yeah, of course. I forgot.”

To McCoy's credit, he managed to time his horrified expression for when Kirk was still looking away and said nothing of it.

They moved everyone alive out into the nearest conference room. There was a small purple slug like creature on the floor, moving slowly on rings of tiny legs. Uhura stepped on it with her boot as soon as she saw Spock's gaze was on it.

She felt exhausted, and everything ached from having had to half carry him there. He might have been slim, but those dense Vulcan bones didn't get their strength without a cost, and that cost was Uhura's back and bad arm.

She had to ignore it, though, so she could assess how long it would be before the shuttle reached them.

“There's not a lot I can do without breaking subspace silence, but I can broadcast an old fashioned radio signal. They're only four light minutes away, they'd get it soon enough, if they're listening.”

Kirk rubbed the bridge of his nose. “Yeah, do that. There's not a lot else we can do. We're gonna have to break subspace silence though, we're gonna need to be towed away for repairs and there's no way I'm doing it in this tin graveyard. By the way, what happened to all the Section 31 personnel? Why is no one stopping us?”

“All dead sir. The parasite.” A smile played on Kirk's face and he looked pointedly at Spock, who saw the look but ignored it.

Uhura made the broadcast, and eight minutes later they got a response.

“Among us are four doctors who we'll beam over straight away. We only have the capacity for 36 of your crew on this shuttle, less if they're seriously injured. We'll meet you in your transporter room, leave the sick where they are and we'll sort out the best way to move them with your staff.”

Kirk wrung his hands together tightly as he looked over Uhura's draft for their distress signal for the third time. It was perfect as she'd written it, of course, but he was still too nervous to order her to send it.

“Captain.” She tried to pull his PADD away from his hands where his fingers were pressing rainbows of fuzzy pixels into the screen. “Captain, there's no time like the present.”

He allowed her to snatch it from him after a moment of resistance. “Fine Lieutenant, send it.”

Bones sighed as he came through the doors and sat heavily in the adjacent chair, drying off his
hands with paper towels.

“Nothing like good old soap and water to get bacteria off your hands,” he told Kirk's raised eyebrow. His voice lowered a little. “Right, so am I to list an official cause of death for all the Section 31 personnel? Or are you going for an unofficial one?”

“You've already started on the paperwork?” Jim groaned at him. If there was one thing that could make the situation worse it was the prospect of having to write it all up. “What is the cause of death?”

“Histotoxic hypoxia – the cells of their brain were stopped from using the oxygen they were breathing by a chemical reaction between a drug they were all on and the chemical the parasite used to make your eyes red which produced a chemical that inhibited their ability to reoxidise NADH and... They brains were starved of oxygen.” He finished his explanation prematurely as Kirk's face became unreadable.

“So it wasn't... Just the parasite? Our crew who are infected are curable?” For some reason he seemed torn by the prospect.

“Yeah... Jim, what's wrong?”

The Captain twitched before standing to wheel McCoy out the door. “Walk with me, Bones. I need to get some air. Uhura, Hendorf, you do what you can here. Use the ship's comms if you need me.”

When they were halfway down the corridor Bones stilled him. “What's wrong?”

Jim's lips thinned and he moved them off again down the maze of passages.

“Damnit Jim, I know you didn't need some air because there is no air out here. Just say what it is you have to say that you couldn't say in front of Uhura. Is it about Spock?”

*Perceptive bastard.* “Yeah. I don't want him so much as allowed near this parasite, or any research on it or anything ever again. I'll order him not to look at it. I won't allow it on my ship, and I'm not gonna let it be talked about.”

Bones looked at him, a little too worried to be angry. “You can't just ban people from talking about a traumatic experience, Jim.”

“Then it's a good thing we have a ship psychologist.”

McCoy span in front of him, blocking his path. “Spill it. I'm ordering you as the Chief Medical Officer on board the Enterprise to tell me what is going on before I allow you to make a decision I believe would jeopardise the mental health of the crew.” Both of his palms rested on Kirk's chest and he could feel the quickened pulse and breathing. “Come on man. You know I'm not being unreasonable.”

Jim sighed heavily and settled his back against the wall, pulling away from the hands on his chest. One of them draped itself over his shoulder. “Spock, uh... When a woman came from Section 31, he tried to go to her, you know, to be infected, and I ordered him not to let her bite him...”

Bones squeezed the shoulder but saw the blood on the floor of the brig behind his eyes, anticipating what was to come. “What happened?” He prompted gently and firmly. He sounded calm, professional. He felt like he was a first year med student doing his very best Doctor Voice.

The Captain shuddered and leaned back hard, squashing Bones' arm against the bulkhead. “He just,
I dunno. He just crushed her skull. Like Khan did to Marcus.” He squinted. McCoy had nothing to say. “I don't know. He could've nerve pinched her, but he didn't. He crushed her. Took about 10 seconds for him to do it too. And then after, he just stared at her, like he was waiting for her to get back up.” He shook his head and slumped a little against his friend's shoulder. “He wants to be reported for murder and he wants me to help him plead insanity.”

Bones sighed until all the air was expelled from his chest. “There's no way I'm gonna be able to hide the drug, Jim. Section 31 will probably handle this investigation themselves to cover up their real involvement, I won't even get a look in. We need a better way to cover it up.”

Kirk shook his head again. “I don't care if they know about the drug and I don't care if they know Spock killed their agent. I don't want Spock to know about the drug. I want him to think that if she'd bitten him or me we could have died. I want him to think he killed her on instinct. To save our lives. It's the only way I'll be able to justify not letting him report it.”

“You think you can lie to Spock?”

“No,” Jim admitted. “He's inside my head. But he's already heard the implication that they did die of the parasite from earlier, and I can refuse to ever talk about it again or let him talk to anyone who's gonna tell him.”

“Alright.” Bones grumbled. “Compromise. We'll refuse anything to do with the parasite and ban all crew who've been infected from talking or being told anything about it except with you and anyone from medical on the grounds it could be detrimental to their recovery. But we have to deal with that woman's corpse, there's no way Section 31 is gonna tolerate us killing one of theirs, even if she was hours from death. There can't be any evidence to incriminate Spock.”

They sent agent Hassing's body out an air lock, aiming it at the sun.

“At least she'll get cremated in... about 400 hours.” Bones told him as they watched it go, grim but matter-of-fact. Everybody's mother.
“Hokni’tu Spokh-an ha.” It had been months since Spock had heard another speak in Vulcan, but it only took him 0.9 seconds to realise that the speaker was not a native one.

It was 0411 hours, Enterprise time. He had been unconscious for 14 hours and 9 minutes. He was tied to the bed with soft restraints.

“Spokh? Spock? Can you hear me? Are you awake?” Doctor M’Benga tapped his face lightly. Spock batted it away. He was not in a healing trance.

“Affirmative, Doctor. May I enquire as to our current location?” He finally managed to focus on the image of M’Benga's tired face.

“We're in Amber City – that's Colony I of Tau Ceti IV, I'm afraid, which is why you're in restraints. Sorry. The infection here's almost cleared, but we're not risking it.”

“That is only logical,” Spock assured him. “May I also press you for information on the Enterprise and the well-being of the Captain?”

M’Benga smiled at him in the way a doctor often does when a patient asks something usually out of bounds. “Now I don't want you so much as sparing a brain cell for anything work related right now, Mr. Spock, but I also know you won't rest until I tell you. The Enterprise is in bad shape- she's not habitable. The USS Constellation will be here in 2 days to tow you to the nearest place it can be repaired, or maybe just to Earth. Scotty says it'll take 2 months, McCoy says they crew'll take three. Captain Kirk is fine. You on the other hand. You're not doing so good, so why don't you just lie back while the antibiotics do their job?”

It was clearly not a question, because the doctor left.

If Spock had been interested in his surroundings, he might have noted how apt the name Amber City was for Colony I. Outside his window, the storm had given way to a golden sun that reflected off the reddish surrounding the towering aluminium buildings. They were in fact, not very high – the tallest had seven stories – but months spent in space give one a curious perception of size when on an actual planet surface, even a Vulcan.

Life on Tau Ceti IV was beginning to resume normality in the aubade of previously absent desert birds who had returned to the area in the aftermath of the ion storm; those who had successfully recovered had secured and repopulated Colony I on a steady drip of methadone and a cocktail of other drugs. They walked the street below, a little sluggish, a little disturbed by recent events.

Spock spared them no further thought though; he looked to the sky, trying to see the Enterprise or the Section 31 vessel. It was a fool's errand, like attempting to look at an Olympic swimming pool on the surface of Pluto from Earth with the naked eye. Spock knew where it was. He closed his eyes and focused inwardly on that invisible, impalpable thread between himself and his Captain.

He allowed himself to meditate properly, and with the help of the drugs in his blood stream was able to fully organise his thoughts for the first time in days without falling into the trap of emotionality. He attempted to analyse his feelings toward both Kirk and Uhura and his current situation without actually feeling them, but ultimately failed and abandoned the attempt, opting instead to enter into a healing trance. Perhaps a degree of the psychological damage the parasite had done had a neurological root, that could be dealt with with the correct application of logic.
“Forty hours until rendezvous with the Constellation, Captain.” Uhura told him. He sat in the chair of the conference room like it was the Captain's chair, legs spread, one draped over the arm, filling the space. But his eyes were dull and ringed with tiredness, and his mouth set a hard line from cheek to cheek.

The chair creaked, and for a moment he believed the noise was coming from his bones. He had never felt so world-weary. Everything he’d achieved so far had been the best possible outcome of a situation. He had saved Earth from destruction by Nero, from war at the hands of Admiral Marcus, and from the less than savoury intentions of Khan. But this, this was pointless. There were 179 crew from the Section 31 vessel, all dead. Of his own crew, 61 had died. Sixty-one. Without the counter of 8 billion saved, the book seemed decidedly unbalanced.

Bones was frozen in position next to him, asleep with his elbow on the table and his hand pinching his nose, keeping his own head aloft. Stretching from his own uncomfortable chair, Kirk lifted back the Doctor's head, pushed the arm down on the table, and laid McCoy back down so the arm cradled his face. Bones looked like he was in his late forties. There was something haunting about the extra lines around his eyes that Jim couldn't deal with right now and so pushed to the back of his mind.

He deftly removed the PADD from in front of Bones, regretting turning the screen on.

Casualties:

Missing: Lieutenant Junior Grade Hayves (?)

Injuries:

Psychological:

- ALL CREW EXPERIENCING SOME DEGREE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA
- Suspected Acute Stress Disorder (HIGH treatment priority - expected to progress to PTSD in at least 40% without treatment within 21 days): 40%(conservative estimate)-85% (see suspected list C below)
- Suspected anxiety disorder (various): 78 (see list D below)
- Suspected Depersonalisation Disorder – 34 (see list E below)
- Suspected sleep disorders (various) – Inestimable; up to 90%

61 dead:

Causes of death:

- Head trauma – Ensigns Radavick, Peters (Andrew), Snozral; Lieutenant Bridth
- Internal bleeding – Ensigns Kambrian, Anderrson, Lovvik, Peters (Kadleigh), Lieutenant Junior Grade Marleki; Lieutenant Commander Mitchell
• Organ failure – Ensign Kri’nal
• Heart attack – Ensign L’an; Lieutenant Junior Grade Kole
• Blood loss – Ensigns Iilk, Prozen; Nurse Wenderson; Doctor Bussel
• Septic shock - Ensigns...

Kirk slammed the PADD face down on the table, trying to un-see the names of his friends from the list. Lieutenant Commander Mitchell; Gary Mitchell, his friend and classmate from the Academy. Nurse Wenderson, who was shadowing M’Benga, and who he knew McCoy was at least amicable towards. Their deaths leached the life out of Bones, every one of them. God only knew how long he’d been awake; he slept deeper than any of the bodies they’d moved to the rec room for identification and to seal them off from the living crew. There were too few body bags and no storage space for such a large number of dead.

Had it just been him and Bones there, Jim might have cried; rather, he’d have drunk himself under the table, and then cried, as the boundaries of their relationship demanded. Bones would have too, but at a different point in the evening. It wouldn't do to have both of them crying at once – who would be there to straddle that awkward place in a friendship between patting someone's shoulder and giving them a full on hug? As it was, Chekov was pacing the room in agitation that Kirk was tempted to suppress with an order but hadn't the heart to, and Uhura was working with surprising efficiency. They could all save their collective breakdowns for later.

Several medical staff who Spock could not distinguish as being from the Curiosity or from Colony I itself gasped in horror as M’Benga slapped him hard enough that his head snapped back. There was a scuffle as someone evidently tried to intervene, but they must have failed, because the next blow came, hard enough that he cut the inside of his cheek on his teeth. He opened his eyes just in time to stop as third blow impacting the same side of his face, pulling out of reach, stretching his arms in the restraints.

“Thank you, Doctor, that will be sufficient.” He suppressed his minor irritation at the stunned faces of the foolish Human doctors around him. “You will find that I am quite cured of my dependence on the parasite and these various drugs you currently have me ingesting.”

M’Benga’s hand brushed his as he released his wrists from the cuffs, letting in a rush of human emotion which Spock expertly deflected. He was again himself, a fact about which he was disturbingly conflicted. He was still confined to the ward, however, so once he had made his own, personal round to check the welfare of his crew, pausing over Sulu and Scotty before returning to his bed, he had plenty of time to dwell on the emotions he had passed over before. He was relieved to be back in control of his emotions and his body, but somehow discontent with the fact that he was now expected to control his feeling at all times. Outbursts in his now largely healed state were completely unacceptable, but nonetheless he would miss the ability to lose himself for moments at a time, allowing himself to feel and for that to be known, consequences be damned. It seemed to be a disharmony between his psychological health as a human and his psychological health as a Vulcan, two polar opposites of being.

He could not identify the nature of his feelings towards his Captain. He did not wish to. There was
too much at risk; himself, Uhura.
Bones sagged, drunk, against Jim in their shared room the stuffy crew quarters of the Constellation. Jim had been offered the guest quarters, but he'd declined them to allow some of his more disturbed crew members the greater privacy.

Fortunately the Constellation had shed all unnecessary crew members at Sirius IX temporarily in order to accommodate the extra passengers, leaving only a full medical team and others needed to run the ship on board.

“And when I checked this morning, my PADD had a message thanking me for my promptness in filling out my report!” Jim slurred in the Doctor's direction. “I checked and they have every department head's report, including yours,” He gestured at Bones with the bottle of bourbon only to have it commandeered. “You didn't submit it did you?”

“Actually I did,” McCoy took a swig, the beginning of which missed his mouth and sloshed onto the wall behind him. “Oops. I submitted it yesterday evening before they had the chance to forge it. Not that it said anything explicitly incriminating on it, I'm not that stupid. Ya really think they were gonna let you write your own report for this mess? No way Section 31 was gonna let anything not worded to their exact standards be reported to Starfleet Command.”

Kirk thought on it for a moment. “I guess not. Still, at least Spock is cleared though. They didn't know enough about Hassing to put it in.”

“Good. Nice to know he can get away with murder ain't it?” Fortunately Kirk could tell this wasn't meant as a dig at Spock; he was feeling protective nonetheless. He ignored it.

“If he was the only one things wouldn't be so bad...” He trailed off. As the shock had faded, anger had taken its place. The bitterness settled deeper into him with every corpse he identified and every crew member Bones had to sedate after a breakdown in the mess. Not even after the Narada, when some of his crew found themselves to have lost entire floors of dorm mates at the Academy had the Enterprise experienced such a fallout. Apparently the line between mourning and post traumatic stress lay somewhere above losing tens of colleagues but below being locked in a room with them, unable to help as they died.

Bones murmured an affirmative response but seemed to have nothing else to say. In the silence, the weight of his best friend's arm across his shoulder was no longer a comfort but a hobble; Kirk needed so desperately to be out in the black going on as normal, but he couldn't even get that.

“I don't wanna stay on Earth long. When we get back I'll make sure there's a full team of engineers and get the ship back to normal as soon as possible and we'll be off.”

Even drunk, McCoy twitched. “No you won't. There's least a hundred crew gonna need a minimum of four months rehabilitation to be cleared for duty again.”

Kirk withdrew his arm from behind Bones' back, agitated. “Well I can pick up any essential crew from this years graduating class at the Academy. We can leave without half of those anyway and pick them up when we next come by.”

McCoy's hand dropped from his shoulder and he shoved aside the bourbon hard enough that the
bottle span on its base a few times before settling. Kirk usually knew he was in for it when booze wasn't enough to tame Bones. Instead of shouting at him, the Doctor stood up with as much dignity as his inebriated form would allow.

“Then you'll have to do without your CMO.” He began to walk towards the door, but stumbled. He visibly considered his options and then headed back to his own bed and dropped into it stiffly, facing the wall.

In his drunken state it took Kirk a moment to identify the hurt in McCoy's voice, but it was plainly there. “Come on Bones. It'll be fine.”

The Doctor's back was too rigid for him to have fallen asleep, but he made no reply, breathing too quietly for Jim to hear.

For good or ill, Kirk wasn't subtle. He kneed the coffee table out of his way, scraping it across the floor, and plopped down on Bones' bed beside him, unavoidably close, and leant over so that he could see his friend's face.

McCoy turned away even though it meant looking into the pillow.

“Hey, you okay?” The words sounded clumsy and ill chosen, but Kirk didn't know what else he could say.

He rested a hand on McCoy's shoulder, but it was jerked away.

“Am I okay?!” Bones growled at his hapless pillow. “The hell I am! You wanna know what's happened to me in the last month, Kirk?” Kirk thought he already did, but he didn't get the opportunity to say so. This was for the better. “A friend of mine, an annoying friend who's usually a complete ass, but a friend, went missing on a random planet, and I got shot through space to look for him when some woman sent us a message saying he was probly dead. And when we found him he had some weird fucking parasite in his neck, which he turned out to be addicted to, and I had to operate on him in a cave after he bit you. And then in the night I had to give up my tent to a six year old zombie and then we got to the goddamn colony and the fucking hobgoblin turned out to be in heat, so I got bit by my freaking colleague and then operated on without anaesthetic to sort the asshole out. Not complaining, just doing my fucking job, Jim, but then I had to deal with he fallout from that too – something I never want to see again if I live a hundred years -” Kirk wanted to interrupt an say that he'd got the worse deal of the Pon Farr situation, but maybe he hadn't.

“Without anaesthetic?” He asked, his voice not nearly as sympathetic as he'd hoped. “Why didn't you say?”

Bones grunted and turned to face him, his mouth stretched to a point where despite the flash of teeth Jim couldn't tell if it were a smile or a grimace. “Because you were bleeding Spock's fucking goblin juice that's why! Because Spock was dyin' and I had more urgent priorities!” He swiped the air as though it would fend off the pity in Jim's eyes. “An then you got your damn selves caught up in it a second time and I had to do unplanned brain surgery on the hobgoblin, before it turned out that some fuckin' government agency was trying to kill us and there was a mutiny – remember that part?” Kirk nodded mutely at the rhetorical question. He loved Bones, but he wasn't used to these heart to hearts with him when it wasn't Jim who was being examined to make himself feel better. He realised, belatedly, that whilst Bones was often his emotional crutch and a wonderful friend, he was just the opposite. The only reason for McCoy to be dealing with him was that he was so caustic he made few friends, and so loyal he never felt the need to. “And then I'm thrown through a wall panel in sickbay an' I wake up in a room with a hundred and fifteen members of my crew, four of 'em already dead and more of 'em critical than I can shake a magic wand at.” Abruptly he's
facing Kirk, gripping his wrist hard enough to bruise. Jim wants to shy away from the intensity of his gaze, but he can't. Bones needs this or it wouldn't be happening. “And I couldn't do a thing about it! I had to amputate a woman's leg with broken bits of metal a whisky!” McCoy's hand on Kirk's arm is squeezing so tightly it's shaking, like he can't tell if he's angry or helpless. “They were dyin', Jim, of things I could cure before I even started med school! Blood loss and septic shock! I spent five years trainin' to be a doctor and all I learned to do was operate machines to be doctors for me!”

The tears in Bones' eyes were hot and passionate and didn't fall. Kirk blinked his own back. It was upsetting to see his friend this way but he wasn't going to deflect it only himself like he usually did.

“You saved that Lieutenant's life, Bones,” He reminded him gently, reaching for his shoulder a second time and not being shaken off. McCoy covered his face. “You saved her life with a torn up bit of ship and a couple of shots, and don't you dare beat yourself up over it!”

He heard a sob from beneath the defensive arms. It was the first time he'd ever seen Bones cry, with the exception of the time a girl he'd been seeing had dumped him when they were both coming down from doing ecstasy, and that didn't really count.

“Doctor Bussel bled out whilst I did it. I let my colleague die whilst I saved her.” McCoy whispered in an attempt to stop his voice breaking, but it somehow managed it anyway. His body shook with sobs so small they sounded like laughter.

“You had to make a decision, Bones. Nguyen would have died too if you'd tried to save Bussel. You're a doctor, you picked the one with the best chances of survival, and you acted. You did what you could.” Kirk had no idea what he was doing, but his rehash of every lecture Pike had ever given him on the responsibilities of being in command seemed to be leaching the passion from McCoy's despair. “I know it's hard. I hate making those decisions and it never gets any easier. But you made the right one, Bones, and you did your best.”

“It wasn't good enough.” He said softly, but his voice was no longer breaking. He took his hands away from his face and clasped them in front of him.

“That's not your fault. You know it isn't.”

“I do,” he relented with a small sigh. “Think I could do with some of that damn hobgoblin logic right now.”

Jim ran his hair through his hair and patted McCoy's chest before getting up off the bed. He tripped, having forgotten he was half a bottle under the table, but landed on his own bed.

“You can have your four months, Bones.” He said, but heard only a snore in response.

By some kind of mistake, Uhura found herself sharing quarters with the hobgoblin in question, and his resolute logic was frustrating her more than ever. He had spent the day catching up on scientific papers sitting on the small couch in the room, stock still. Breathing regular, not even a fidget – he'd told her once that it was illogical to sit oneself in an uncomfortable position in the first place, and he economised his movements to maximise his concentration. Uhura didn't doubt for a second that he could've concentrated on those peer reviews whilst tap dancing on a rolling boulder, but there was no point debating it. He was just too functional to be standing in the aftermath of a
government organisation-orchestrated tragedy, dealing with a three-way relationship crisis that made her head real despite years of communications and sensitivity training, and his impassivity was finally testing her limits.

“Could you just go to bed?” She snapped at him as he sat cross-legged on the floor, preparing to meditate.

He didn’t even look at her. Somehow that was worse than the usual blank look of incomprehension; it meant he didn’t even think her request was worth asking about. “I could not. I have many things to meditate on at this moment.”

“But nothing to discuss?” She raised her voice unnecessarily; she was standing so close her toes brushed the undersides of his knees.

He managed the look of incomprehension then. Too little, too late. “What is there to discuss, Nyota?”

“Uhura!” She corrected without meaning to. He understood that, at least. He tried not to react, and failed, looking up at her for just a second like a beloved animal being rejected. Uhura sighed, not really wanting to, but also unwilling to break up with him. “Sorry. Just... You try and solve problems with other people but you only ever deal with them within yourself.”

He stood up, realised he was now far too close to her, their chests almost brushing, and sat back down on his bed. “I know I am being obtuse,” He said with considerable effort. “But please be specific on what it is you wish for us to talk about.”

She forced back an expression of exasperation; he genuinely did need her to qualify. “I need us to talk about... Us. You, and me... And Kirk.”

Uhura would swear to anyone who’d listen that the little flare of nostrils and the little fall of his shoulders was a sigh. “If you so desire... Uhura.”

She smiled slightly at him, but he failed to identify it for what it was. “It’s still Nyota, Spock. And it’s not about wanting to, it’s about needing to. You might be able to deal with this weird ambiguous relationship we’ve got going on, but I can’t. I need something concrete. I need to know what’s happening. Do you understand?”

He nodded but didn’t make eye contact. She sat down on the bed beside him, used, these days, to slouching against the wall whilst he sat unsupported with a posture that made her back throb to look at it. She closed her eyes so she didn’t have to.

“I care about you so much, Spock. More than anything else on this ship, or on the Enterprise.”

He hummed softly, more in acknowledgement than agreement.

“I care for you, Nyota...” He tested her name as though it was the first time he’d said it.

“But not the most. It’s weird isn’t it?” He didn’t know what she was talking about, but she continued nonetheless. “You’re so restrained about caring for things, but you care for so many and so much.” She expected herself to sound bitter, but it didn’t make her voice. She sounded like she felt; so tired she didn’t know if she could ever get back up. Her bones groaned with aches too deep from McCoy’s hypos to cure, and her muscles were relaxed only because they lacked the strength to tense up. “You do care about me, but you care about Kirk. You care about the ship, you care about regulation, you care about Vulcan, you care about your parents.” She could keep listing, but Spock had closed his eyes next to her. “Caring is logical to you.”
“Yes.” His lips barely moved as he spoke. “But I did not come to love you because it was logical.”

“No,” She pulled him against her by the shoulders, no longer able to stand the formality. The posture had been a façade, she realised with relief. She could feel muscles in his back tensing and relaxing, coiled tightly. He melted against her like he always did in private moments, reminding her of their former intimacy. “I love you too Spock. But I'm not sure what we are any more. Are we still going out?”

She kissed the back of his neck just below the hairline, and he tilted his head back so he could look upside down into her eyes. She stroked his cheek absently. She knew she was kissing him in Vulcan terms, but he seemed to bask in it, even now.

“I do not know,” he said finally. “Am I correct in my assumption that the sexual aspect of our relationship has been compromised, or even terminated?”

She had no response planned. “...Yeah.”

“But you still love me?” He seemed to be almost pleading, but not quite willing to relinquish control. It was okay; she didn't expect or want him to beg. “And I still love you?”

She wasn't sure why he'd asked if he loved her, but she confirmed it anyway. “Yes.”

“I am sorry, Nyota. If you no longer wish for my company I will make arrangements to move quarters.” He made no move to get away from her, however, head still cradled against her chest, back against her belly.

“You know that's not what I want, I want us to stay...” she chided, almost light hearted.

“Is this level of intimacy standard between friends?”

“No. We're not friends, we're...Something else.” She messed his hair up and then smoothed it back into place. “I just think it would be better if we both saw other people, as well as whatever this is.”

He blinked at her curiously but still did not reject her touch, which would have been far too personal for him to tolerate before their relationship. “Who else would I see?”

She rolled her eyes. “I dunno. I thought maybe your mate would be a good place to start.”

He sat up to look at her curiously, and she instantly missed the closeness but didn't reach out. “Jim and I do not possess a relationship of a romantic or sexual nature.”

Uhura laughed at him and patted his arm playfully. Ironically this was something she'd picked up from Kirk. “You might not possess it, but I can tell you it possesses you. God, you could cut the sexual tension with a knife, if you were into knife play.”

She stretched out on the bed, leaving Spock to ponder the nature of such knife play, and let the warmth of the knowledge that their relationship was changed but not lost seep into her as she drifted off to sleep.

When she awoke in the night for a drink, he was still sat next to her, legs entangled, thinking but not meditating on what she had said.
One a side note, I've had several requests for the rest/ending of this story from various people on various sites, which include:

-Spock dancing
-Kirk and Spock having sex
-"Kirk and Spock having sex but it being awkward because now that Spock isn't in PF their personalities get in the way and Spock talks all the way through but eventually lets himself enjoy it."
-Spock stepping on a crunchy leaf (???)

Anyone got any preferences on which of those I should include, if any? Feel free to suggest other things too.
(And I'm not sure *how* I'd get Spock to dance - it wasn't specified)
The safety of the Constellation overwhelmed Jim. Bones had seemingly recovered, or at least enough to be back to his usual gruff self, unresponsive on an emotional level. It was odd, really, how someone could wear their heart so openly on their sleeve and yet turn around and attack in spite of it. The lack of immediate danger allowed Jim's mind to cast itself forward to their arrival on Earth. It danced over a hundred different possibilities of their arrival. At first he'd envisioned something similar to their previous homecomings, sombre but ultimately a relief, but over the days the musings morphed horribly into more and more complicated fantasies of the darker kind. The idea that they could ever be allowed to take on Section 31 and win, even if winning felt like the most bitter loss they'd experienced since the Battle of Vulcan.

He was bone tired, aching, and he was becoming more and more certain that the second they set foot on the planet that something terrible would happen to them. They would be taken into “quarantine” and shot against the wall. Maybe the parasite was a failed attempt at mind control and they would be infected and drugged and forced to act as agents for Section 31. Maybe the Constellation wasn't even taking them home; it was escorting them to a rendezvous with some other unmarked vessel to be finished off.

The paranoia got the better of him; the crew of the Constellation bothered them little, assuming them to be paralysed, and only McCoy, M'Benga and the remains of Sickbay staff had any real interaction with them; McCoy had put the entire rest of the crew on leave.

For the first two days of their nine day journey, he'd done what was expected of him; rallied the few crew members he could find in the communal mess, visited the bridge and managed an awkward conversation with Captain T'Lay, a half Vulcan, who unfortunately for Jim had been raised on Earth without Surak's teachings. Spock regarded her as a curiosity; she kept her emotions adequately in check, but she was expressive, hot tempered, and Spock had advised him discreetly that he would be wise to avoid physical contact. What bothered Jim most, though, was that she could lie. Any other Vulcan he would have considered completely trust worthy, even in his obviously compromised mental state; but he could not cope with the possibility that she, and every one of her crew, were deceiving them and leading them to their doom. On the third day he did not return to the bridge.

He passed Spock several times that day, and each time Spock looked more and more ill at ease. Despite having seen Spock losing control and at his most vulnerable multiple times in the past several weeks, it still seemed strange to Jim. The difference was impossible to place; it might have been a subtle facial expression, or body language, or maybe his hairdresser had mistakenly used the wrong bowl, Kirk couldn't tell. He didn't miss Spock's hand gliding through his hair as he thought it, though Spock did not look up.

Spock could tell he was feeling this, probably. He said nothing, in fact, he said so little to Kirk on any subject that it was making Jim even more uncomfortable. The ever opinionated Spock was
normally quiet, yes, but this level of silence around him held an unnatural quality that made Jim's skin crawl.

Perhaps something was wrong with Spock, or maybe he had some strange telepathic premonition that something bad was going to happen. As the days progressed, so did his unwanted fantasies, each involving Spock to a greater degree. In the confines of Jim's head Spock was beaten, tortured, shot, was forced to commit suicide. He was sent to Jim in small pieces every time Kirk accidentally mentioned anything that could incriminate Section 31. All memory he had of the last month was erased, he was given brain damage cutting him off from the outside world; the delicate telepathic instruments that were his hands were cut off. He turned himself in for the murder of Agent Hassing, and lost his position at Starfleet; his appeal on mental health grounds was denied and he was given life imprisonment, where other inmates hurt him and laid their dirty, criminal paws on what they should have known belonged to Kirk, and he'd be able to do nothing to stop them.

In a dream Kirk would not remember upon waking, save for a lingering feeling of dread and a throat seemingly filled with cotton wool, the planes of Spock's newly malnourished body, disrupted by sharp ribs and jutting hips was painted bronze and green in the fingerprints of other, fouler men. The penal colony would have been identified by the wakeful mind as fictional, some bastardisation of Rura Penthe and Azkaban, which existed only in a classic 21st Century novel, where pre-22nd century problems like prison rape, the use of torture and a lack of central heating had not been corrected. The whip carried by a non-specific Section 31 entity carved Spock's flesh to the bone like an expert chef, sinking through before jerking back out when tugged. The dream Jim was a mere observer and not a character, save for when Spock, broken and dying on the floor, used his last breath to curse him.

It was the first real nightmare Kirk had had since his mother left Frank. How ironic that he'd only gained the bladder control that meant his sheets were still dry when there was no longer anyone to kick him for wetting them. The irony was wasted on him this time.

As the days on the Constellation wore by, Spock found himself more and more afflicted by an anxiety that was not his own. Butterflies became aggressive alien wildlife in his abdomen and the replicated fruit he ate for breakfast caught on a lump in his throat and settled heavily and expanded uncomfortably in his stomach as though he were eating dried pulses. The terror he felt came in waves, but there was always an underlying fear, even when it was lessened. Something was very wrong with Jim.

Spock was unaccustomed to the intensity of the emotion and the inescapable nature of a feeling that was not under his conscious control panicked him further. His reaction was decidedly physical, and it concerned him that a human might be dealing with such unchecked emotion all the time. How could one be expected to run a service, a country, a planet or a starship under such conditions?

He had little to do aside from read scientific publications in their room, so Nyota undoubtedly noticed, but either mistook it for a normal response to the situation on Spock's part, or simply lacked the resources to deal with it. Both were equally likely.

More concerningly, he could not identify the nature of what Jim was worried about without actively probing his mind, and that did indeed seem to be a gross trespass on Kirk's person. Without the focus Jim's emotions must have had, they cold fear was redirected by Spock's
overloaded brain to matters that normally gave him minor concern. He was immediately concerned when Nyota inhaled a tiny quantity of her water and had a coughing fit; he felt a gnawing sensation in the back of his mind for his dead colleagues that he could not suppress, and for some reason he was unduly disturbed by the prospect of reuniting with his father after this debacle was over. Mostly though, he was distressed that Jim could be feeling this way at all. He had resisted the urge to go to him, knowing that McCoy would let nothing bad happen to his best friend, but nonetheless lost sleep and precious meditation time wondering what was perturbing his Captain, why, and how he might solve this problem. He had flashes of other emotions; a burning, purposeless rage that he eventually fixed on any person or object that could potentially be causing this unrest in Jim's mind.

By the fourth day he was sporadically certain that Jim was being attacked, interspersed with periods when he realised that this notion was purely farcical that they were all perfectly safe on the Constellation. However, he made up his mind to confront his Captain. It may have been an invasion of Jim's privacy to allow himself to feel his emotions, but it was one Spock no longer had the luxury of avoiding, and it seemed only logical that as First Officer he seek an end to his Captain's troubles.

He made his way to the Captain's quarters, a shared cabin, but there was an 86.9% probability that McCoy was supervising the treatment of Enterprise crew at this hour, although Spock made no secret of his belief that the man was not well enough to do so. Humans were subject almost entirely to their own emotions, and he had never been more sure of this than he was now.

As per Starfleet regulation, he knew the code to the Captain's room, and he keyed it in. There was a buzzer, of course, but he did not use it. Instead he simply punched in the numbers with trembling fingers and cold, clammy skin. His pulse was presumably speeding up to accommodate his stressed state, but he heard it in his ears slow, almost humanly so. The lump in his throat swelled so as to almost obstruct his breathing.

He was hyperventilating when the doors slid open, and so was Jim Kirk. The lights were set to twenty percent, dim, but by no means dark. Kirk lay prone on one of the beds, startling at the hiss of the doors. Instead of turning to face the intruder like he normally would, he curled sharply in on himself, in that hopeless child mindset, in which, faced with an inevitable danger, the brain decided that the only possible course of action was to prevent itself from seeing its attacker.

“Captain?” Spock's voice shook. Logically, he knew the room was dim but otherwise only occupied by himself and Jim, but it seemed as though the trepidation ought to be as tangible to others as it was to him.

Jim shuddered in reaction to his voice. Spock was mystified as to whether this was a good or a bad sign, but unable to offer another solution to this illogical circumstance, he took a few steps forward. There had only been two metres between himself and the foot of Jim's bed to begin with, and he was there all too suddenly with no further ideas on how to proceed.

On what was usually a well regulated instinct, he leant slowly down. Jim's face was impassive in a way that would have been unremarkable on Spock but that was entirely unacceptable on his Captain. His eyes were open, but he did not withdraw as the Vulcan's hand reached for his cheek, nor indeed did he react in any way at all.

The second Spock's fingers touched Jim's psi points, before he could even initiate the meld, the terror boiling under his skin erupted through the sensitive nerves of the Vulcan's hands, burning and frightening for reasons beside their own nature. Were Spock not frozen in shock at the intensity, he would have jumped back immediately. However, his hand could not move, and in the
four seconds it took to regain control of his muscles he decided he would persist.

Unlike all his previous melds, he felt strangely as though Kirk was pouring out of himself rather than Spock being sucked in. There was simply too much happening to be contained in one skull.

He was faintly conscious of the fact that his fingers were slipping in the human's sweat, but the meld did not break.

He groped for some calm or positive emotion from within himself to project onto the convulsing mind, but found only a dulled reflection of the horror he witnessed in the other. He was certain, though, that Kirk knew he was there and was aware of what was happening. Still, Spock could not find words or even a comprehensive image; he did not form into an image of himself in Kirk's mind, nor could he act upon or influence the events playing out before him.

They began more organised, or at least more relevant, and splayed out through Jim's memories from their current point in time. He was Jim, desperately worried for Spock, shoving a headless, mutilated corpse into an air lock with McCoy. If there had been anything of Spock left to acknowledge this, it would have profoundly disturbed him. He was Kirk three days ago, trying to comfort McCoy and feeling utterly helpless. Kirk waking up disoriented in a brig on an unknown vessel, watching as Spock killed Hassing and produced the body he'd had to dispose of in the previous image. The moment before he passed out as the Enterprise crunched in on itself, hurling them across the bridge, the sound of bone snapping, and the viewscreen shattering as Sulu's body slammed through it. More distant images, the taste of Spock's mouth, salty with eggs in a fume cupboard; curiously not the Pon Farr itself, but the pallid look of Spock's skin before they'd figured out what had to happen. The reddening glint in his infected eyes. Spock missing. A moment on their last mission when it seemed like Uhura might be tortured to death before their eyes. Dying in an air lock, pawing at Spock's hand.

The image morphed and met with its double from Spock's mind, and they were both, presumably, watching as Kirk died; as Spock's fist cracked Khan's skull. The first five minutes after McCoy injected Jim with Khan's blood, when no one knew if it was working or would work.

Then it was Jim again, watching Spock holding Pike as he died, a mess of loss and love and a relief at Spock's compassion, that Pike had not died alone.

Other moments in Spock's past; the look on his face when his mother turned to him, knowing that he was just two metres short of his goal of saving her, and the empty transporter pad. The worst part being that he did not know the exact moment that she died, so stared at the place where she ought to be until he was certain she was dead. Watching Vulcan collapse in on itself, knowing that that ball of rock was six billion people.

Cruel children at school, from whom his mother could not protect him and his father lacked the will. A middle aged man, an uncle or step parent, perhaps, kicking a boy who wasn't Spock or Kirk; Sam Kirk, leaving home forever at the age of fourteen. Driving a car off a cliff and having Frank belt him so hard that his mother saw the bruises when she got home three weeks later and kicked him out of the house. Too late for Sam.

It seemed to go full circle, and Spock could tell that the new image, or lack thereof, was the most recent. A faceless group of shadow people, who surrounded them and spoke in unclear voices. A grey, vaguely defined hand reached out, revealing two purple, ciliated parasites. Spock put his hand out to take one, but he did not have a hand. They were in trouble, they had seen things they should not. They had to be dealt with, taken out of the picture. They knew about agent Hassing; they'd intercepted her body. Kirk had to pay. Spock had to pay. Spock. They were here to take Spock.
“Lights to 100 percent!”

Spock was rolling backwards, his hand torn from Jim's brow, leaving an invisible brand. McCoy flipped him off the edge of the bed and into a sitting position with his head between his knees in a single fluid motion, but not before the First Officer had somehow managed to throw up on his scrubs. It was dyed a red from the plomeek that momentarily horrified the doctor in the millisecond it took him to remember that Vulcans possessed green blood.

“Christ,” he muttered to himself, before he turned to Jim to bring his legs into the recovery position.

Spock's gasps were shallow and far too close together, his chest constricting and his head spinning. Bones stood, shrugging off his soiled outer shirt and chucking it into a waste disposal on the far wall. “Deep, calm breaths, guys...”

Bones hovered between them, unsure of whether this had been a mutual breakdown or if Spock had somehow attacked Jim, and unwilling to assume which was the case.

When his breathing returned to normal, Spock simply sat on the floor of the bedroom, establishing control of his muscles one by one to stop his own shaking. He was perplexed as to how the Doctor had managed to simply control this phenomenon with a few words and a change in posturing.

“Is anyone gonna tell me what just happened or am I gonna have to learn how to do a mind meld myself?” McCoy demanded.

Spock's throat was tight and bitter with bile. It was Jim who spoke. “'Snothin' Bones. Just a panic attack. It's fine now.”

“Just a panic attack? Since when did you have panic attacks?” He didn't wait as the answer was obvious, so rounded on Spock who was suspiciously silent. “And what in God's name were you doin'? You find any gold in there? Sticking those pointy green fingers where they don't belong!”

In the pause, Spock recovered. “Fascinating,” he said with enough genuine interest to make Jim sit up and McCoy's eyes roll. “I do not recall having a logical reason for initiating the meld. I appear to have been acting spontaneously on an... impulse.” He turned to face Jim, who squinted back the way he usually did when he thought Spock was saying something ridiculous. “I meant only to help, not to hinder. It did seem to be logical at the time, it is only now that I realise myself to have been incorrect. I am at a loss, however, to explain how you ended this “panic attack”, Doctor?”

Bones scowled at him, eyebrows contorting into their usual, curious positions. “I told you both to damn well breathe! There's no magic trick to ending a panic attack, just don't damn well waltz into someone else's head and give yourself one!”

Jim swung his legs over the side of the bed, bumping Spock lightly on the way past. Unlike Spock's body, he still shook minutely. “Lights to 75 percent.” McCoy rounded on him, but before he could speak Kirk threw himself at his bedside manner and clung on for dear life, puppy dog eyes engaged and locked on target. “I need to talk to Spock. Please?”

“Jim, if you need me her-”

“I don't.” Jim cut him off so abruptly even Spock blinked as he watched the exchanged. The Doctor looked obviously stricken and began to slink towards the door. “Urgh, no Bones, you know I didn't mean it like that! I did need you and I'm very grateful you came when you did. But now I need to talk to Spock.”
McCoy sighed at his own overreaction, bracing his arm against the door frame. “Fine. But you better be done by the time I get back from my shift. Means you have two hours.” He left with a backwards glance to show that his expression was no longer the wounded one of a few seconds before.
Spock sat expectantly on the bedroom floor for one point six minutes, waiting for Kirk to speak, but he did not. He had a bad feeling about the conversation, and while he attributed this to the panic attack he had intruded upon, it made him no more eager for the discussion to begin. He also had his own subject matters to discuss, but they had four point eight days left until they reached Earth and he would have time to address a certain line of deceit on Jim and McCoy's parts.

They still had one hour and fifty nine point four minutes left, but Spock's reluctance was illogical and he had to balance the Captain's need to take this at his own pace with the time restriction. “Captain?” He asked, trying to imitate McCoy's voice when he had been offering Kirk his help. He failed, but was not overall dissatisfied with sounding thoughtful and pensive. “What is it you had wished to discuss?”

Jim huffed and lay back on the bed, toying with the sheets. “I'm sure you'll think of something. I just needed Bones to be gone, didn't want the questions.”

It was hard for Spock not to feel a little used. He did not want the aforementioned “talk” to take place, but to hear that he was unimportant enough that Kirk had nothing at all to say to him in spite of all that had taken place was most unwelcome. In that case, he as First Officer had a duty to pose the questions himself, did he not? He was going to get his talk whether Kirk had intended it or not.

He skipped the first few questions on Bones' script, lucky enough to avoid dealing with the barriers Jim no doubt surrounded himself with by virtue of common experience. “Your stepfather was cruel and beat you.” He stated rather than asked the first event that came to mind.

Kirk smiled that smile that had fascinated Spock when he first joined the Academy; a bitter smile that did not mean happiness or amusement. “Frank was a prick,” he said simply. “You beat up other kids at school.”

Spock noted the deflection and determined that he should say something appropriately profound in response. “Children can be cruel, Jim, even Vulcan children.” As an afterthought he added, “Uhura was angry at me for not talking about my problems. I see now that this particular fault is common between us.”

Jim laughed. He seemed amused, this time, but Spock was mystified as to why. “Frank wasn't my problem. You think I let myself get affected by a slap here and there?” Spock wanted to say that he had seen more than a “slap here and there,” and that it would be very normal for a human child to suffer damage when faced with physical abuse, but he held his tongue so as not to cut Kirk off when he looked about to say more. “Nah. That wasn't it. I had an abandonment complex, can't you tell? Dad died, Mom left me with Sam and that asshole Frank, Sam left me on my own with Frank. Used to be my worst nightmare you know? People leaving me.” Spock wondered at the use of the term “used”; as far as he was concerned, his Captain still had abandonment issues. Jim shook his head. “I don't even know why I'm telling you this shit. I never talk about it, not that it's a secret, I just... Never need to.”

Kirk seemed to have calmed down over the course of their conversation. “Perhaps you do need to.” His Vulcan said, sagely.
“Maybe,” Jim agreed, but he'd clearly had enough of it because he moved the conversation on again. “What was yours?”

“My what?”

“You weird problem thing. Inferiority? Didn't know Vulcans did that.”

Spock twitched, and although Jim did not see it, he felt it. “I did not fit in there, as I do not among humans.” Kirk looked like he wanted to contest this, but thought better of it. “Here you regard me largely as a Vulcan, but on Vulcan they saw me as... Human, mostly, others simply as... Tainted, by humanity. There is no land where I am at home and no people who are truly my kin besides my immediate family, the crew of the Enterprise—” He forced this admission to sound as insignificant as possible. “—And other half Vulcans, of whom I know seven surviving.”

Jim 'hmm'ed at him. “I guess it's like being mixed race used to be...” He mused.

“It is nothing of the sort, Jim Kirk.” Spock knew he sounded like a human parent but disregarded it. “I am not an allegory for racial tension on Earth, which by the way persists, apparently under your nose. I am something which until one hundred and four years ago was a medical impossibility, and something which those on Vulcan were wise to consider so closely, now more so than ever. We - Vulcans - are not so... Prolific, as humans, with our tendency being towards long life but only one or two children, even in times of economic necessity. It was not a problem before the loss of our home planet, but in these last 3.6 years it has become most pressing. Even before then, interbreeding with a species which breeds more readily but lives a shorter life was not attractive because of the changes it implied for us. Our years are different to yours, longer, our lives are longer. The mix of genetic material is disruptive to that. You will notice that I just completed puberty at the age of twenty nine, a little late, by Vulcan standards, and induced chemically. I was informed by my counterpart that he was thirty eight before he experienced it. And he is extremely elderly now, but is considerably younger than my father.” Spock closed his mouth with a glance at the chronometer. They had just one hour and forty one point one minutes left, and he was talking about something largely irrelevant.

“That doesn't make you inferior. We don't measure worth in life expectancy.” Jim's eyes burned into him with a higher esteem than Spock has ever possessed of himself.

“I am aware.” Now.

“We're really having this conversation, then?” It was a rhetorical question, so he carried on uninterrupted. “You're still fucked up about your mom and Vulcan...”

“I am not “fucked up,” I am fine, but understandably... disquieted at the loss of my planet and my mother.”

“That's Vulcan for “I'm fucking traumatised.” You don't have to pretend to be fine, you know. It would be more worrying if you actually were fine.”

Spock pursed his lips, but remained impassive. “Indeed.”

“So you admit it?” Jim brightened at his perceived victory. “You just lied.”

“I did not lie.” He bristled at the flow of illogic to which he was resigned but persistently frustrated by.

“You literally just told me to my fa- Fuck it. It doesn't matter, you're a shit liar.” Kirk laughed that strange laugh again. Spock decided not to be offended; he had learned the hard way that humans
used humour to cope with difficult subjects.

“I do not wish this to derail us from the matter at hand.”

“What's that?” Spock felt as though he were being intentionally antagonised. Kirk could not have told him if he was.

“There are several important things for us to discuss in the next one hundred point three minutes.” Spock chose his words carefully, knowing that they could not be retracted once spoken. “Firstly there is the matter of my behaviour and its consequences whilst under the influence of my withdrawal symptoms. Secondly we must discuss the nature of your fears, regardless of the rate at which they have apparently dissipated, which I believe will lead us on to what we might encounter on our return to Earth. Lastly...” He stalled, reconsidering. “...It might be pertinent to explore the nature of our relationship.”

Kirk raised both eyebrows, deciding whether it was better to pick on the word pertinent or explore. “Explore, eh?” -Far better to milk an unintended euphemism. “I'm up for a little... Exploration.”

“I do not understand.” Spock cocked his head.

Jim sighed; another joke wasted because the only one to hear it was a Vulcan. “Oh, god. Nothing. Never mind. It's just a thing they say about teenagers, “exploring” their sexualities.”

Spock's eyebrows outran his hairline, arching dangerously as unwanted images flashed through his mind, and almost certainly through Kirk's. “You propositioned me?”

Jim laughed at him for the nth time in twenty-two minutes. “Only if you're sure.” He said smoothly with a seductive glint to his eyes.

Spock swallowed a fresh lump in his throat and panicked, with no idea what to say. “I... I... Captain, we have only one point six hours and we must also deal with these other mat-”

He stopped because Kirk was laughing at him so hard that he clutched his stomach and tears squeezed from the corners of his eyes. Spock realised that he was the subject of yet another joke and shut his mouth with an audible clack of teeth.

“Jesus! You actually... Oh my God... And...” He wheezed heavily between words, “All you could... Think of to say was... We don't have time?”

A stranger would have been oblivious to the withering look he directed at Jim, but his Captain stopped laughing suddenly, and to his surprise Spock realised that he had just made the situation more awkward.

Kirk saved him from having to say anything, but it only left him dreading the progression of their conversation further. “But that's for when we discuss – I mean, explore our relationship later, isn't it? On with the show.”

Spock was mortified, and Kirk must have been showing a very rare degree of compassion to have shafted a topic that made Spock's skin crawl for one which he had been trying to avoid to the extent of banning crew from talking about the parasite.

When the pause was about to have twins, Spock suppressed his sigh and spoke. “You and Doctor McCoy released Hassing’s body from an air lock.”

“Yeah.”
“And then you cleared up the evidence of my involvement with her death.”

“Yes.”

“Did you wipe the databases of all video evidence?”

“I did.”

“I see.” Spock was unable to accurately assess his feelings on the matter. The sigh forced its way out of his chest as a little puff of breath. He stood, wondering why he had not done so when being teased earlier, and sat heavily down on the bed as Kirk opened his mouth in protest at the possibility that he might leave. “Then I have no choice than to accept that I will be unable to prove my involvement with her death.” Relief flooded him where his Captain's elbow brushed a small section of his hip which had been exposed by his transition from the floor to the bed, and the Vulcan was inexplicably glad that he had relented, for Jim's sake as much as his own. “If I am asked, we must simply hope that I am a better liar than you say.”

“You're just going to... Accept it?” Kirk asked incredulously.

Spock moved his hip out of range to check that he was certain. “Jim, I have no desire to leave” you Starfleet, nor indeed to own up to my own bad behaviour, as illogical as that may be. This will be the only time, however, that I will stand by and permit this to happen. I should not have done so this time, but I find it too late to do otherwise and I am... Unwilling. I did a terrible thing, Jim.” His eyebrows knit together at the pain in his own voice, pain he had tried his best to suffocate out of existence.

His Captain's arm across his shoulder startled him slightly. Spock stared ahead in confusion, wishing illogically that Kirk had reached out with a romantic gesture and not a friendly one. He felt the human warmth through the back of his under-shirt, comforted somewhat by it and no longer overwhelmed by the human need for physical contact – at least not from this human. Indeed, he longed for the touch to be skin on skin, but did not dare to initiate or ask for it.

“I believe this leads on well to the subject of your recent episode.”

Jim drew in a serrated breath, like that of a recently crying child, kneading Spock's clothed shoulder with his palm on the exhale. “I believe it does. It's nothing, just nerves.”

Spock turned to him with a raised brow, realising too late how close their faces were with Kirk's body slung over his back. The pleasant human warmth being cycled through Jim's lungs smelled faintly of whiskey, and was intoxicating despite the obvious lack of any significant quantity of any drug. “You are a terrible liar, James Tiberius Kirk.”

His keen ears picked up the hitch in Jim's throat, and he did not turn away, although the intimacy of the moment terrified him. His pulse raced, buzzing in his size like the belly of the Enterprise, and his body felt clammy again, but with a different kind of energy. Spock's lips were nine point seven centimetres from Jim's, and he wished to rectify that.

He swallowed audibly and shattered the moment. Kirk pulled back a little, resting his shoulders on the wall. “So I am.” To Spock's relief Jim continued talking; his own throat had seized up and was not responding to his attempts to make it work again. “I don't know. I just, I feel like there's no way they'll let us get away with this. I mean, our only hope is to be un-disappearable, right? If they can get us, they will. We've got to get enough of the suspicion onto them to make it too suspect to eliminate us, but not so much that they think we're so much of a threat we've got to be dealt with anyway.”
If Spock believed in the old gods of Vulcan, he would have prayed to them to ask that they erase any trace of the small squeak that escaped his mouth when he opened it from Jim's memory. “--It sounds like you have a plan.” He said at length.

Kirk shook his head. “No plan. Just... An outline of what the plan needs to achieve.” His face crumpled a little. His pain nagged the back of Spock's mind but he could offer no understanding or solution. “Fuck I miss Pike.” He hadn't spoken of his former mentor since the beginning of the five year mission. I just... I just need one person in command who I can trust.”

He sobbed several times, although he didn't cry. Spock knew he was not expected to offer any physical comfort in the way Kirk so often did to him, but he was desperate to do it anyway. The moment he decided to give in to temptation, all his experience with such things as kindness and friendship stepped neatly out of his mind, leaving him to reach round and pat Jim's cheek awkwardly. It worked, although not as intended. His Captain smiled and leaned into the touch, just long enough for Spock to feel his affection, but not so long as for it to become uncomfortable.

“Sorry Spock, I know this isn't your thing.” Incorrect. This was apparently more of “Spock's thing” than the Vulcan had ever anticipated, and he wished for more of their curiously tactile relationship. His sensitive fingers itched to touch, and despite the failure earlier, his mind ached to be melded with that of his bondmate.

“It is quite alright. It is understandable to feel such feelings after a loss, especially in a situation where you know the individual could have helped.”

“Yeah. I guess.”

“If it is of any reassurance to you, Jim, I believe I may have a plan to ensure our safe return. It will require the cooperation of T'Lay, whom I am certain will oblige us with adequate explanation. She was acquainted to me before the destruction of Vulcan, and her lack of adherence to the teachings of Surak means she is more likely to follow an illogical course of action if she believes it to be the correct one.” He offered, aware of Kirk's reluctance to involve a third party.

Jim, however, trusted Spock's judgement if nothing else, and did not question it. “You mean your plan is illogical?”

The Vulcan's face broadcast the opinion that his Captain ought to know better. “It is logical for us, but she would stand to gain little aside from an official reprimand from my idea.”

Time slipped through their fingers like sand and Spock became very aware that they had just four more minutes before Doctor McCoy's scheduled return, and were still outlining their strategy for dealing with Section 31. McCoy would be back before they had talked about them, and this was both a relief and a regret.

They concluded that they would need to meet with T'Lay as soon as possible, and that Spock should arrange this presently. He needed to break off the intimacy of the casual half-hug of Kirk's arm, anyway, before he yielded to it or McCoy infringed upon it. He would not admit to it were his life in peril, but he failed most miserably in controlling his impulses towards Jim twice that afternoon, taking his fingers gently and lifting them over his head as he disengaged himself from their seating arrangements to organise the meeting, pretending not to notice the tingle of bioelectricity making his hand twitch as a result of the stolen kiss.

He bumped into Bones as he made his escape, and did not apologise.
(You've probably all noticed I've stopped proof reading this and updating daily; I'm sorry for both of these things, but as I'm really busy at the moment it's this or nothing! Please point out any really clunky sentences or spelling/grammar errors though. I don't know when I'll get a chance to reedit this thing...)
Sulu feels oddly ambivalent about the fact that Pavel is clearing a mixture of the Lieutenant’s blood and vomit from the both of them, wiping them each down with the soiled bedding and stripping off his shirt for the wash. It isn’t sexy, but it isn’t the unbearable show of weakness it ought to be. The mission must have really fucked him up this time, beyond the cracked ribs and torn ligaments and the impact fracture to his pelvis.

He loves Pavel and he wants desperately not to; it’s cowardice, through and through; he loves Kirk and Uhura and everyone else, but he accepted long ago that there was a significant chance that he might lose one or all of them. It’s part of the job, and it’s a risk they all knew. He does not love them in the same way he loves Chekov; a deep, aching love that yearned for far too long to be expressed to be ignored now.

He held off Pavel for so long, and fuck the boy was persistent, but he did it. It wouldn’t do to take him straight out the cradle, so he didn’t. Permitted the awkward flirting, and the barely-ambiguous touches, and the weird Russian love notes and didn’t respond with anything more than a polite acknowledgement, and okay, maybe the odd action that could be interpreted as just-friends but would doubtlessly be seized upon and seen as romantic or sexual.

It was weird at first, the inappropriate obsession Pavel had with him; but he’d been trapped between his sense of decency and his own disinclination to put any form of stop to it. He wouldn’t say that it had taken Chekov very long to win him over, not really, but he’d held himself back. Given it the chance to all go away. He’d been so… cautious.

He was bitter that the universe had seen him finally give in and sought immediately to put an end to his delusion, that he and Pavel could be happy and safe together. He thanked his lucky stars, albeit resentfully, that the one of them they’d chosen to fuck up had been himself, even if the look on Chekov’s face showed the horrors of his own realisation with the inverse situation. They would never be safe out here, and yet the only thing either one of them loved on par with the other was the job. The space; the Enterprise; the lingering sense of adventure that the little world down below seemed to have lost for them both.

Chekov returns silently with mouthwash and a bowl for him to spit into, and a cloth to wipe away the evidence. The intensive anti-contusional treatments were working, but now that Sulu would have to be eating real food again the blood that he’d swallowed and inhaled from his injuries was making its appearance yet again, and Pavel was here to clean it up.

He sponged the remains of the blood from Sulu’s chin, his touch delicate and bittersweet like everything had been in the last two days of Sulu being properly conscious. The Ensign moved like he was afraid to break him, and one false move could spell the end of them both; Sulu didn’t doubt it. His good-natured humour in relation to fear and danger had no place in the curtained off corner of another ship’s sickbay with their home towing behind it and half of those they lived with dead or worse. He wished he could find it in him to break the solemn atmosphere that surrounded them, some way of lifting Pavel back up and into himself again, but all he had to offer was requests for
painkillers and a constant need to be in physical contact with Chekov, as though this would ensure their continued safety. He clung as subtly as he could, feeling less safe than he ever had. It wasn’t that Hikaru’s life had ever not been worth living, or that he had nothing to live for. Rather, he had never had someone else he needed to live for him, and the thought of losing that was far worse than the idea of dying himself. If someone attacked them now, the only thing that would make him think twice about dying for Pavel was the prospect that the Ensign might feel the exact same way about him. They didn’t talk about it.

The kisses they shared were desperate even without the sense of urgency. Sulu bruised Chekov’s cheeks and neck with kisses when he was there and cried when he wasn’t, waking up in cold sweats imagining that he was waking up in the belly of that strange Section 31 vessel with Pavel nowhere in sight. He cursed the universe, and Section 31, and then he cursed himself, for loving someone with the deep personal failing that was mortality.

The second he was well enough he was going to rip that ugly hospital gown off and fuck Pavel into a bulkhead and remind them both that they weren’t dead yet.

Bones wasn’t a therapist. Uhura would never argue that, and nor was she about to argue with his prescription of a gin and tonic in his makeshift office in what had been billed as her “one to one counselling” session.

“I mean, let’s face it, we’ve all just had a decade lopped off our life expectancies since we started workin’ this job,” he was telling her, not bitter, but resigned as he poured a double measure of gin surreptitiously into her glass. “If you don’t need a drink after this last month, you’re probably immortal. Consider it my treat. All booze now has to be approved by yours truly, I don’t trust you to restrain yourselves after what happened yesterday.”

She doesn’t ask him to elaborate, instead taking a gulp of her drink and willing her face not to scrunch up at the strength. Clearly McCoy was among those who needed a hand practicing restraint in the synthehol department.

“Did my psych assessment turn up anything?” She sounded more nonchalant than she felt, but the gin would soon swing her one way or the other. She squeezed the lemon into her drink, but was still pretty certain that what she was drinking was suitable for use in surgery, or maybe for unblocking crains.

“Nothin’ I can’t magic away with a bunch of pills and a couple weeks intensive therapy. From a real psych. Mild depression, acute stress disorder that probably won’t turn into anything more serious and should go away with the same meds as the blues. I’ll give you something for the lack of sleep but I reckon you’re bringing insomnia on yourself by tryin’ to share a bed with Spock.”

“I’m not,” She said too quickly, unsure yet whether she regretted this or was glad to have it off her chest.

He looked at her before topping up her drink. “Wow. Sorry. Uh, good timing guys.”

“I know,” Uhura sipped at the mostly gin. “God, is there any more tonic water?”

He passed it over, trying and failing not to seem too interested. “Mind if I ask why? I mean, I was always amazed you managed to tolerate him for so long, but you seemed so… I dunno, good
Nyota sighed heavily, synthehol fumes burning the insides of her nostrils. “Yeah, why not? There was a ton of reasons. They should’ve been things we could deal with, but Spock always tries to reason shit out. I mean, fine if it’s a one-person problem, but the issues were between the two of us instead of talking to me about them, he’d just think up all these –weird- solutions for himself and then somehow he was always surprised when I didn’t come up with the exact same conclusions as he did. The whole Pon Farr thing. Bonding with Kirk. And the whole parasite thing? He never said a word about it to me! Well, six words actually – just enough to tell me to mind my own goddamn business.” She knew she was ranting and she didn’t care. “He thought he could fight addiction with logic.” She spat the word as though it were responsible for the bitter taste in her mouth. “And damnit, he wouldn’t even touch me after because he thought Kirk might see through their magical psychic bond, and I just need to get laid so bad that not being able to sleep with him was the last of many, many straws.”

“Is that an offer?” He’s joking. They’re not each other’s type, and he’s never really hit on her before, nor she on him.

“Depends, your hands as legendary as you told Doctor Marcus they were?” She was willing to humour him. Hell, but the time she’d finished her single drink she’d be willing to screw him, so why not? Bones wasn’t unattractive. And he was the perfect antidote to Spock, so emotionally vulnerable that it sometimes hurt to look at him.

“What can I say? Got a surgeon’s hands.” He smiled flirtatiously, so open that her mind was made in seconds.

“Fuck it,” Uhura gulped the dregs from her glass. “I could do with a rebound.”

He didn’t take offense; they both knew what this was. He looked surprised instead. “Serious? Damn, that chat up line must be good if it’s workin’ six months down the road.”

She laughed. “Don’t flatter yourself, Leonard. Your place or mine?”

They ended the session early.

T'Lay was a surprising bridge between Jim and Spock. She was logical in her own way, deeply humanistic in a way that would have appealed to Bones, and she oozed sexuality enough to put Kirk to shame. All in all, she was the collective nightmare of every male psychiatrist from before the 1980s, and quite a handful from after. Intoxicating. Despite this, she seemed to occupy very little space within her own room. She sat on a chair at the desk with her knees drawn to her chest, arms lolling casually between them, fiddling with a small magnetic puzzle, the aim of which Jim could not decipher. It was an odd juxtaposition; she seemed to have endless energy, toying with things and tapping her feet or hands, and yet she curled her person into the chair as though it were imperative that she fill it exactly within an imaginary line. The walls were bare except one, on which she kept a single frame filled completely with sand from the late Vulcan. There were no ornaments save a sizeable collection of 3D puzzles laid in a neat line at regular intervals down the centre of the desk, a gap showing the placement of the one she now held. On the floor was a traditional Vulcan rug, exactly square with the centre of the room.

“You've changed, Spock.” Her accent had surprised Kirk at first; apparently, she had been raised in Yorkshire on Earth, and she spoke accordingly, although her use of words portrayed an extensive
educational background. The winning smile she gave Spock looked natural but strange on her Vulcan features, and there was something a little devious about it. Something knowing and more than a little carnal in nature. “For the better though. Don't think you had it in you.”

“Din't?” Spock pressed, cocking his head.

“Din't. Did not. Could you really not tell that from context or were you just being a snob?” She didn't wait for his bewildered reply. “You know I'm not in the habit of doing unofficial press releases, much like yourselves and everyone else serving high up in Starfleet. You're asking me to risk my job, and worse, if Section 31 perceives me as a threat, it might not spare you – it could just add me to their list.” She snapped her legs down out of the chair and flung out her arms, suddenly taking up a great deal of space. Kirk got the impression that she took up exactly as much of it as she meant to at any given time. “But I s'pose youse did save the world, din't you? So we're all in your debt, really, and Section 31 has to find out that they can't just do as they like somehow, an't they? Gotta be the hard way.” She seemed excited, if the increase in volume and the precariously lilting accent was anything to go by. Kirk's brain was translating her strange dialect into Standard with a considerable lag. He wondered if vowels were considered a weakness in her area. Nevertheless he's bathed in fresh relief that she's taken their idea and run with it. Spock had given him the impression she might take some convincing.

It turned out that Spock was not a diplomat – something Jim considered a saving grace – and his plan centred around a coalescence of what Jim had told him over the previous week and a double dose of common sense. The fiery T'Lay grew impatient with his attempts to word a press release and snatched his PADD away, deleting the entire document and not bothering to use it as a basis for her rewrite.

When Kirk looked at him, he was struck by the realisation that although he knew Spock to be insulted, he was unable to distinguish whether this was from some subtle indicator in his otherwise emotionless features, or through the bond inhabiting a newly awakened corner of Jim's mind. T'Lay seemed to have noticed too, looking up impassively from the middle of her new introduction. “How long have you been mated?” She asked, simply and abruptly enough to startle Spock to an almost physical reaction, her accent rained back appropriately to a clipped Vulcan standard one. Jim laughed nervously as his First Officer floundered. Her unwavering gaze bit into Spock, letting him know he wouldn't be able to simply avoid this one.

“We bonded unintentionally.” He words himself with noticeable care. “My *Pon Farr* was triggered whilst we were isolated from… My partner at the time.”

Kirk tried not to stare when he caught the implication. Spock and Uhura weren't a thing anymore?

“So you fucked the only person available? Why didn’t you just go back to New Vulcan and break the bond?” Her expressive face said far less than Spock’s in that moment.

Numbness pervaded Kirk’s senses as he waited for his First Officer to speak.

They hadn’t had time to go to New Vulcan was surely the logical answer, but Spock hadn’t said anything about it, and in a moment of shock Kirk realised he was holding his breath to hear what Spock was going to say, praying that he wasn’t simply going to tell her they’d get around to it when they could.

Spock did not ease his Captain’s discomfort, instead finding it less revealing to answer the first question and ignore the second. “I chose the only person available whom I trusted in such a situation. Although I… Regret what happened, it was much better that I do it with a friend than a stranger.” Jim couldn’t tell if he was flattered or hurt by the answer. He needed to leave.

“Is it okay if we get back to the press release?” He demanded, not caring that his emotions were obvious.
Spock whirred back into motion on the task, forcing T'Lay off the topic.
Jim knew Spock was not going to try to talk to him about what had been said earlier that afternoon, but he was still disappointed when the Vulcan whisked himself off to his and Uhura’s shared quarters as though it had never happened. Spock was too astute to forget, which meant he was intentionally avoiding the conversation.

Kirk headed slowly back to his own quarters, trying not to look too absorbed when Scotty accosted him briefly with a report on the Enterprise. Repair time was looking like it could push up to four months – in line with McCoy’s estimate for the repair time of the crew.

He sat alone on his bed until well after the end of Bones’ shift, not certain if he was waiting for the Doctor or relieved for the time to himself. For the first time in weeks he had something to think about which wasn’t life or death. It was an odd feeling and not as welcome as it ought to have been.

Why on Earth or any other planet had Spock concealed the possibility of simply dissolving the bond from him? It was unlike his… Friend, to lie by omission. The look on Spock’s face when T’Lay had mentioned it suggested that perhaps he himself did not know his reasoning.

A mixture of betrayal and confusion and something suspiciously, worryingly like hope settled in his chest and crushed his lungs until he was fighting to maintain his normal breathing, staring with unfocussed, burning eyes at a smudge on the opposite wall panel. He felt very Spock-like, centering himself around the scraped coating of the wall, blocking out everything but white on grey and horizontal lines. He wondered who had created the abrasion and how, why. It might have been a fight, a thrown object, between the two officers who lived here in their absence. Maybe they’d been moving some personal item of furniture.

His reverie was broken by the sound of someone outside the door. He heard the code being punched in and the sigh as the panel slid out the way.

“Hey Bones, long shift?” He asked as casually as he could, hoping McCoy would believe that he’d only just sat down on the bed.

“It is not Doctor McCoy,” Spock’s voice made him jump and he jerked to face the door. “He is… Otherwise engaged.”

His First Officer stood in the doorway keeping it open. In the silence, he looked down and tugged his uniform straight.

Jim had a hundred questions he wanted to ask, but settled on the most obvious. “What are you doing here?”

Spock cocked his head very slightly, a thoughtful expression on his face. “I found Uhura had… Otherwise engaged our accommodation.” An answer so ambiguous even Spock looked as though he knew it was essentially a lie.

“She’s engaged your accommodation? What the hell does that even mean?” Jim didn’t want to play games, but he tried not to sound too pissed, either; the way Spock occupied the doorway made him suspect that the other man had been uncertain as to whether joining him in his quarters was wise and was prepared to bolt. Despite Jim being the one sat down, Spock felt as though he was the one in the compromised position should they argue and shuffled awkwardly into the room until the door finally closed.
He did not wish to answer this question. “She is making personal use of it with the Doctor for whom you mistook me.”

Kirk blinked at him. He could so easily be referring to a medical examination or a counselling session of some sort, but… “…She’s fucking Bones in your shared room?”

He expected Spock to reprimand him and deny it, but he simply inclined his head, and then failed to bring it back up again.

“Shit. I mean, fuck, she’s cheating on you?” He asked in disbelief.

Spock shrank into a neat box of himself in an impression of T’Lay and a confined space. He still met Jim’s eye unwaveringly, but it took effort. “The confines of our relationship never excluded her from casual sexual contact with others, but that is no longer relevant.” His control as iron as he spoke; not even a twitch that would betray the complete mess of emotion that Kirk could feel smouldering through the bond.

Spock could have gone to a rec room or an observation deck and meditated without disturbance or a need for sleep. The fact that he’d come to Jim was significant, and he tried to remember that as he assessed the situation. The pause lingered as though the conversation of the night before had left a deficit of silence between them, which had to be reclaimed. Jim’s palms were wet with cold sweat.

At length he finally managed to formulate a reply. “Chess?”

Spock made no indication as to whether he approved of the suggestion, but Kirk set up the board anyway. It was in the room when he and Bones had arrived.

Unusually, Spock took white and with the advent of the game the silence progressed to something less oppressive. Companionable. Something they might have had was it not for the last month. A feeling of loss stuck in Kirk’s throat at the thought, but he swallowed it down.

“Did you walk in on them?” He asked as Spock snapped up his pawn en passant.

Spock waited for him to make his move and then castled his own King before answering, slowly. “Heard.”

He looked distracted, and the expression in turn distracted Jim enough that he ruined his own discovered attack by moving a rook to take an adjacent pawn.

“Are you okay?” Spock moved a pawn to release material. He was playing aggressively rather than his usual complex strategy and the change concerned Kirk.

The Vulcan considered lying or avoiding the question, but discounted both ideas based on how poorly they had served him of late, even if he was never aware that he was lying at the time. “No.”

Jim lost his queen to Spock’s pawn because his King was in check. It was going to be a quick game, and he was now playing for information rather than a win.

Their fingers brushed as he moved his knight to take an offending bishop, sending an electric shitstorm straight up his arm and into his brain. A moment of confusion and pain and guilt that left before he could unpack the deeper meaning behind it.

Spock closed his eyes against a loss of control and lay down his King in resignation. Jim looked down at the board. Spock had been four moves to check mate.
Jim’s EPSER rating would make a brick look psychic, but he still managed to predict Spock’s escape and he stood fast enough to reach over the table that he knocked over the chess set. His hand closed around his Vulcan’s upper arm, and even through the thin undershirt he could feel the simmering of a hundred unchecked emotions. Spock was breathing through his mouth, pupils blown, taken by a wildness that he could not allow to manifest in any behaviours external to his own body.

“I must leave.” He said hoarsely. He didn’t pull away and Kirk didn’t let go.

He wanted to hug Spock, but it seemed so… Unacceptable. Not permitted.

“Jim, you must let go.” Spock told him. He looked as though he’d run a mile or twenty, but otherwise he portrayed no particular feeling. The muscles in his arm pulsed under Jim’s touch.

“No.”

They stood before the abandoned chess set with no further connection or attempt at conversation or evasion until the muscles stopped working under the Vulcan skin and Spock had instated a veneer of true control over his feelings.

Kirk could feel the relief and the gratitude in his hand. Relief that he had not tried to draw Spock into a cathartic scene, that he had understood that emotional health for him was control, not release.

When he was done, he folded his wrists behind his back at parade rest and pulled minutely back. Jim let his hand drop, leaving an invisible warm handprint in Spock’s cool Vulcan skin. They both hunkered to the floor to pick up the scattered pieces, resetting the chessboard.

They didn’t play a second game. They ate replicated food in the easy quiet sitting on Jim’s bed, and then Kirk fell asleep at one end, leaving Spock to meditate until dawn at the other.

To say that T’Lay’s “press release” was more aggressive than Kirk and Spock’s rendition would have been was to say that a hurricane was more aggressive than a rain cloud. Spock the scientist and Kirk the explorer could not have predicted the choice of words of T’Lay the military general inexplicably still serving on an exploratory vessel.

At 0900 hours the next morning, the ship’s warp nacelles “broke down” and all communications channels except the one used for transmitting public information found themselves “disrupted”. It was bullshit so obvious that the only thing protecting them was the fact that technically, these problems were possible and could be argued as such by the government as well as themselves, despite the obvious falsehood.

T’Lay made her broadcast from the bridge, an act of daring that Kirk would have proposed himself, before he’d reached the point where he felt pre-emptively beaten by the world. Her words were bold and defiant and always only just on the edge of being too unbelievable; the fact of the matter was, however, that Section 31 and anyone else watching would be fully aware that she was not there to talk about dilithium crystals and faulty communications consoles. She stood as she spoke with her First Officer, Decker to her left and Kirk to her right, with Spock standing rigidly next to him. When she spoke her accent was the flawless Standard one could expect to hear coming from a computer or a public announcement.

“This is Captain T’Lay of the USS Constellation, registry NCC-1017 broadcasting on public
frequencies from the border of Sector 001 and 003, our communications equipment is experiencing some difficulties with all other frequencies and also with two way communications, so I will be unable to receive any responses to this broadcast. We are experiencing difficulties with our port nacelle and are on impulse power only right now. This should be fixed within the next 44 hours, but until then we are stuck approximately 4.7 light years from the Sol system. This will delay our mission towing the USS Enterprise and transporting her surviving crew from the far side of Sector 003 in the Tau Ceti system, where they were, I’m sure we all agree, very unfortunately attacked by the Section 31 vessel registry S31-202, the crew of which had been suffering from a parasitic infection which made them act against orders.” She provided the necessary get-out clause that would no doubt save their skins. “The infestation which began on the fourth planet in the Tau Ceti system’s Amber City, designation Colony 1 is being dealt with on the planet’s surface by the remaining crew of the Curiosity, designation NCC-2011, also destroyed by the S31-202, but will all crew safely evacuated except for three. As you know, it was of utmost importance to remove the unshielded vessel from the system via towing to prevent a breach of the Prime Directive as the ship would no doubt have been detected by the advanced but pre-warp society developing on Tau Ceti III…” She rambled on about several unrelated topics to make it seem as though her recent disclosure of classified information was a passing matter, but Jim could practically feel the humidity rise from the cold sweat that took the room. She had literally stated the involvement of Section 31, live, on a frequency that could be accessed by any news channel or other ship.

She ended the transmission with a smile and a polite ta’al as the bridge crew stared open-mouthed at her. Then she swept off the bridge leaving Decker the conn and the Captain and First Officer of the Enterprise to trail behind her.
The Sharpest Knife

T’Lay was not particularly big, but she possessed a similar lankiness to Spock. She seemed to change volume at will, and thus she filled the whole of her living space in her Captain’s quarters, leaving Kirk and Spock sat awkwardly close on the tiny couch, as though her limbs extended out into the room from where she draped herself across the furniture on the other side of her desk. Her chair creaked beneath her Vulcan weight on its back two legs as she leaned like a human schoolchild, and her boot broke the order of the bepuzzled table.

Spock was not one to admire someone without – extremely – good cause, but he would not deny that he was somewhat enthralled by her. Had he known her better in his adult life, he might have found himself bonded with her instead of Kirk, if she’d have had him. He doubted she would.

“So, boys. I know it wasn’t quite what we’d agreed, but as they say, the best defense is a good offense, and I’ve always had a knack for offending people.” Her accent had slipped back into place. The more Spock heard it, the more he realised that, like her posture, it was exactly as she meant it at all times; the lilt was precise, measured, each syllable perfectly formed in its imperfection.

“It sounded like you’d been planning that one out for way more than 12 hours.” Kirk remarked, impressed.

Her smile was slight. She was pleased with herself, but not arrogant about it. This further endeared her to Spock on a fundamental level. “Well, I can’t say I weren’t looking for the opportunity.”

“A most intelligent response to the situation,” Spock congratulated her. “And a most creative use of information on your part.”

“Ta.” Her gaze held an intensity far greater than her words, and Spock did not shrink from it.

Jim was oddly quiet, and not in the companionable way that he had been the day before in the wake of their chess match. At one time, this change in atmosphere would have gone straight over Spock’s head, but he had grown used to the nuances of human behaviour, or at least, of this human’s behaviour, and this was no longer the case. He displayed many of the behaviours that he would were he about to speak; he parted his lips slightly and shut them again, took deep but irregular breaths that suggested he might be about to talk at some length, and sighed at odd moments.

Spock was too polite to probe his emotions through the bond and had no physical contact through which to read his thoughts, even if he had been so inclined. The vague portal he visualised between them was green and yellowish and hazy. He had no hypothesis for the change in imaginary aesthetic from the usual ever-changing swell of colour, but some nagging sense that it ought to be significant.

Eventually Kirk just huffed and punched the code in for his own door. It opened, revealing that Doctor McCoy was as yet still on shift.

This was of course intended as Spock’s cue to leave, but he did not. Jim was not so rude as to leave him standing outside the door for him – or rather, he knew of the futility of such a course of action,
given that Spock knew the code and had clearly set his mind on observing this strange behaviour in
the hopes of procuring the explanation that Jim had no desire to provide.

“What?” He demanded, not letting Spock in but not shutting him out either.

Spock did not bat an eyelid. “Please elaborate.”

“What are you waiting for? Why did you follow me here?”

The First Officer scrambled for an explanation. “You are— Acting strangely. Seemingly distressed.
Distracted. ‘Green.’

Jim gave himself a cursory glance and raised both eyebrows the way he often did when Spock had
said something ridiculous. “Green?”

Spock did blink now, realising that what he had just said amounted to some breach of imaginary
privacy that they had held rigidly between them ever since he had admitted to sensing Jim’s
distress two days before. He considered his options carefully. He could terminate the conversation
here, but this would likely make Kirk’s need for an explanation all the more urgent, given his
proclivity for irrationality. He could lie, and claim to have misspoken or attribute the greenness to
some other source or his own vision. This would no doubt lead him to an encounter with Doctor
McCoy. He did not blame the Doctor for what he had overheard the day prior, nor did he have the
right to blame Nyota, but he still felt conflicted on the matter and it would be premature to put them
both in the same place. Also, Spock was disinclined to lie. “Something is disturbing you.”

If Spock did not recognise the emotion clouding Kirk’s mind, he recognised the look of accusation
on his Captain’s face and took half a step backwards. Jim mirrored his action and the door slid shut
between them, leaving Spock bewildered on one side, and himself fuming at no one in particular on
the other.

Spock had his moment of revelation too late. “You are jealous?” He asked the closed door. It did
not react, but he was certain his assertion was correct. “Of what are you jealous?”

The door still did not respond, but Jim was no longer green. He was orange with frustration at
Spock’s continued attempts to comprehend an emotion he did not understand. For all his need for
privacy, Spock did not feel like respecting his Captain’s. As First Officer, it was his job to maintain
a healthy working relationship between them, and Kirk’s emotions were definitely directed at him,
and definitely not healthy.

The door opened again as his hand reached the keypad, and Jim fixed him with an angry glare.

“Don’t you ever take a damn hint?” He asked having worked himself up further.

“At what were you attempting to hint?”

Jim rolled his eyes. “God, it’s like talking to a computer. Get out of my room.”

Spock let the insult pass. “I am not in your room, Captain.”

Kirk thumped his hand illogically against the bulkhead in a display of human aggression and
dominance that had absolutely no impact on the Vulcan before him. “Fuck it. You’re confined to
quarters until your next shift. Get out.”

He pressed the control pad on the opposite side of the wall and the door blocked him from sight.
Spock frowned at it, and then frowned at Doctor McCoy who dragged himself up at the end of his
shift.

“What’s up with you?” He asked in his usual manner.

“I trust you are not waiting on me to provide a list of all things with a degree of visual angle above eye level from my current orientation.” The Vulcan replied hastily, heading for his quarters before McCoy could respond.

Uhura was lying on her bed when Spock entered the room. She was only mildly concerned that it still smelted of sex from the day before, and that he had not returned since before her encounter with Bones.

He sat deliberately on his bed and then lay back on it, parallel to her, and stared at the bare ceiling. His awkward presence was aggravating, distracting her from the report she was reading on the communication status of the Enterprise.

He was restless in his inactivity; she had never seen him not do something- he was always reading, or meditating, or working. He was never without purpose.

“What’s up?”

He groaned at the repeated question and declined to reply.

“Don’t you have somewhere to be?” She huffed in irritation.

“The Captain has confined me to quarters so if you were hoping to enjoy privacy, you would be wise to seek it elsewhere.” Wow. Where did she start on that one?

“Kirk’s confined you to quarters?” She repeated.

“I believe that is what I just said.” Spock folded his hands neatly over his navel.

“Why? What did you do?”

He shifted on the bed, frowning upwards as though something on the chrome plates was offending him. “I did nothing that I consider cause for his current state of mind. He appears to be jealous of someone or something and when I mentioned this he became aggressive and confined me to quarters until the beginning of my next shift. Was I rude to enquire?”

“I think Jim’s probably used to your brand of rudeness by now.”

Spock set this revelation of his own faults aside for later analysis. “Then perhaps he is jealous of T’Lay’s execution of my plan to ensure our safe return?”

Uhura shook her head. “No. Jim always acknowledges other people’s good work. He wouldn’t get an ounce of respect as Captain if he didn’t.”

“We have seen no one else this morning. He is not jealous of me, and thus I can only conclude it is she of whom he is envious. Why would he envy her?”

The genuine confusion in his voice made Nyota laugh.
“This amuses you?”

“Yes. God, no wonder he got pissed at you. How can you be so stupid with an IQ like that?”

He asked her for clarification, but she only shook her head again. “Figure it out for yourself. Guess he’s figuring out the hard way how obtuse you are when it comes to relationships. I should’ve warned him, but I didn’t feel like it.”

She rolled over, and this time Spock took the hint and did not attempt to further engage her in conversation.
Domestic Thrill Seekers

It wasn’t that Jim was unused to jealousy, or that he was in any way ill-equipped to deal with it. He wasn’t bitter by nature, but he had wanted for a fair few things in his life. He had been jealous of children with fathers; of Sam for his ability to escape the “family” he had been forced to endure. He was jealous of people more influential, or well liked, or attractive than himself, and for the most part he simply ignored it. The other children were no more responsible for their parentage than he, and had he been in Sam’s position he’d have left too. There were always going to be more powerful, likeable, attractive people in the galaxy, and he accepted this, was at peace with it.

It would not have bothered him to feel the way he did a month ago; Spock was his closest friend aside from Bones, over whom he had always liked a certain monopoly. Not that he required exclusive access, but there was always a twinge when any of his bridge crew took too well to someone from another ship.

But that was then and this was now. Now the implications of his jealousy for T’Lay were quite different. She was, in many ways, what he hoped others saw him to be. She was young, perhaps two years older than himself - younger than Spock. But despite her fiery, impulsive behaviour, the perception that most Federation members held of Vulcans leant her a great deal more credibility than they would direct at him for at least another five years. Their confidence was reflected from within her; her every action was planned, deliberate, and most importantly she was confident that it would lead to the best possible outcome from any situation. What looked like impulse was a complex series of statistics, regulations, memories from past experiences and an analytical mind that had kept Spock rock hard all morning, and not as metaphorically as Kirk would have liked.

He could smell it, he was certain. Well. He wasn’t certain, but he could perceive it somehow and scent was as good an explanation as any. Admiration, respect, and a sapiosexual brand of lust, which was the cause of carefully suppressed arousal. No one had ever done that to Spock before in Kirk’s presence. He loved and cared for and respected Uhura, and she had worked very hard to achieve and maintain that. Jim was unsure as to whether Spock actually respected him, but at least he loved him in some strange, Spock-ey sense. The fact of the matter was, though, that the only things that elevated him above T’Lay in Spock’s view were his rank and their current status as mates. And the latter, it seemed, could be temporary.

This still should not have bothered him. After all, he’d slept with Spock and bonded with him out of necessity, hadn’t he? He was relieved that they weren’t bonded for life with no hope of reprieve. He was. He should have been. He wasn’t. He was jealous and threatened, and he was torn between worrying about the possibility of losing Spock and the equally frightening realisation that perhaps, maybe, he might potentially be happy with their arrangement as it was. Theoretically, he could like Spock as more than a friend. The feelings were a mess and without decades of self-imposed discipline and introspection, he was at a loss to explain them. But he did know one thing. Whatever it was he wanted, whatever he had with Spock, he sure as hell didn’t want anyone else to have it – least of all someone as perfect for Spock as T’Lay. It was selfish, and he didn’t care.

It spoke to the depths of his feelings that he was more concerned with Spock’s potential romantic partners than the prospect of returning to a danger welcome on the planet they called home, something which had terrified him to distraction two days before.
Bones dragged himself into the room from his shift. “What a damn day. And what the hell is up with the hobgoblin?” He wanted to know.

Jim grunted. “He was being pissy so I sent him to his room.”

“You what?” McCoy stood over him where he lay face up on the bed like the angry parent he was destined to be. “You can’t just confine someone to quarters because of your personal relationship problems!”

“He was the one with the problem!” Kirk snapped. Even as he did so he realised that the inverse was true.

Bones was similarly unconvinced, crossing his arms and tapping a foot. “Like hell. He’s just limped down the corridor with his tail between his legs like a whipped dog. I think you might’ve actually hurt his subprocessor.”

“I’ll get him an new one. Anyway, he’s fine, he’ll probably won’t stay confined, he’ll just go fuck it all out with Captain T’Lay anyway.” Him and his big mouth.

The Doctor let out a short laugh. “Are you serious? Can you hear yourself kid?”

“Shut up before I confine you to not-quarters. I wanna sleep.” Jim knew of the words’ futility, but he tried nonetheless.

“Are you kidding me? You’re not gonna tell me what’s wrong? Jim, I’ve had my fingers up your ass when it’s full of Spock’s cum. There’s nothing more you can tell me about that’s ever gonna surpass that, so why don’t you get that metaphorical stick out of it and tell me what your problem is.”

Kirk swallowed a resentfully drawn laugh and glared. “How long are you gonna keep bringing that one up?”

Bones shoved him aside by the hip so he could sit on Jim’s bed and tug his boots off. “Till the second the court rules on the injunction. Now spill.”

“You’re an asshole, you know that?” He flipped over with some rearranging so that his back was to McCoy and he was facing the wall.

“So I’m told.”

“I don’t feel like it.” Jim tried to sound as though he was casually changing the topic, and not sulking at a wall in their shared bedroom.

“Didn’t ask if you felt like it.”

Kirk could hear a medical scanner being passed over his back. “Stop that.”

“Doctor’s prerogative.” At times like these, Jim wondered why on Earth he hadn’t arranged Bones a transfer years ago. He turned around and grabbed for the scanner, which McCoy promptly jerked out of reach. “Medical log, stardate 2260.whatever, Captain Kirk acting strangely, refuses to submit to medical examination. He looks a bit green, I suspect he may have been bit by the dangerous “jealousy bug”, pursuing further investigation.”

Jim shoved him hard and he tumbled to the floor, weak from laughing at his own joke. “Real funny. You’re such a fucking bastard!” He wished he wasn’t having to bite back laughter; really, it only encouraged him. “Screw you.”
“Don’t think it’s me you wanna screw. I’d say a certain Vulcan’s on the menu though.” Bones teased him.

Jim kicked him again, aggravated as he cut so close to the truth. “You don’t know what you’re talking about. Why bother asking me if you’re gonna answer all your own questions?”

Finally McCoy relented, standing from the floor and heading to the replicator, where he punched in his personal access code which he had refused to reveal to anyone else on board, and retrieved two beers. “Someone has to.”

Uhura had once, in the early days of their romantic relationship, told Spock that he possessed a child’s sense of justice. He had sought further clarification on this issue, but when she had declined to provide any, he had approached the only other figure in his adult life with whom he engaged in any sort of rapport regarding topics which might possibly compromise others’ opinions of him. His mother had smiled and assured him it was not a wholly bad thing on her next visit to Earth.

“Justice,” she had said “Is perhaps the only area in which a human child surpasses a human adult. Children have an innate sense of justice. They know when something is unfair. And then adults come along with that horrible sentence, “life’s not fair”. And once they’ve heard it too many times, they forget justice and become the adults that make up juries and pass regressive laws.”

He had looked at her curiously. “Nonetheless, there is no innate justice in the universe; therefor the statement would tend to be correct.”

She scoffed at him in a way she rarely did, conditioned out of obvious emotionalism by the long years on Vulcan. “Don’t think that just because the universe is not just, people can’t be either Spock! It’s an excuse adults tell children to justify their own lack of justice. To justify inaction. That way they can just wander through a village with no clean water and say “Oh, how sad. I could pay someone to build fresh water supply, but life’s not fair, just the way it is, I can’t help everyone.”"

Years later Spock still could not understand how humans could attempt to justify injustice, but he still possessed the same sense of fair and unfair. And Kirk was being unfair. If there was a problem between them, a mediator ought to have been introduced, typically the Chief Medical Officer, or if they should prove partial to one side over the other, someone in the chain of command, from top to bottom as appropriate. Spock had committed no punishable offense – he did not believe he was guilty of insubordination, and moreover, Jim had not accused him of it.

Also, as 0800 hours approached the following morning, Spock realised he did not actually have a next shift.

At precisely 0800, when his shift would have started were he on one, he left his quarters anyway with the intent of facing Jim down and laying out his accusations. He encountered him in rec room 1 engaged in discussion with Mr Scott concerning structural weaknesses within bulkheads. His presence immediately ended the conversation, but he chose to remain standing in accusation.

Kirk’s face mirrored his own, filled with concealed agitation. “What?”

“I wish to make a complaint.”

“What?”
“I wish to make a complaint.” Spock straightened his sleeves.

“Yeah, I heard you. This isn’t customer service. What do you want to complain about?” Jim looked nervous, as though he were anticipating an answer but unwilling to reveal this.

“About the conduct of a fellow Starfleet officer.” Spock said, as though he were reporting minor graffiti on Starfleet property and not the Captain to himself. Jim stood leisurely and the First Officer drew himself up in preparation for a conflict, but none was forthcoming.

“I think we better do this in private,” Kirk sighed grimly like he was expecting the subject of the complaint to be someone other than himself, despite it being perfectly clear that the only people Spock could not impose minor discipline on were of Commander rank and above.

Jim gripped his arm and led him from the room, his touch leaving Spock conflicted about his decision to complain, but within a minute, they were alone in a small conference room. The Vulcan prepared to engage the stream of disorienting information he usually regurgitated in any argument, unperturbed by interruption or another’s opinion, but the Captain put out both palms in a gesture of peace. Expecting animosity, Spock had nothing to do but to close his mouth again, making Jim visibly relieved.

“Look, I know I was a dick yesterday…” He did not finish the sentence; clearly the acknowledgement was intended also as an apology. Inadequate. The First Officer responded only with a raised eyebrow. “Alright, God, I’m sorry, okay?”

“Your apology is not satisfactory without an explanation.” Spock knew that this was the incorrect thing to do. One did not decline an apology. Still, any follower of Surak’s teachings knew that to apologise was illogical, as it stemmed from another illogical, offensive action.

Jim rolled his eyes. “You know what? Make your complaint to Starfleet, what are you gonna tell them? The Captain sent me to my room?”

The human half of Spock wanted very much to mirror his pointed look to the ceiling, but he quashed it easily. “I did not make a complaint to Starfleet, nor did I indicate my intention to do so. I made my complaint to you.”

Jim’s nostrils flared and he stared intently at the wall behind Spock. Had the man in question not been between himself and the door, he might have fled.

“For what reason were you envious of T’Lay?”

“Have you seen her?” Kirk gestured wildly to his right as if to indicate her presence. “How the hell am I meant to compete with that?”

Spock now regretted asking, as he had more questions at this point than he’d had upon entering the room. “I was not aware you were competing.”

Again Spock picked the wrong answer and sent Kirk into a spiral of grunts and meaningless movements of frustration.

“And why did you see fit to vent your emotions on my person rather than discuss them with myself or address them with Captain T’Lay?”

Jim turned away and sat in a conference chair. “Oh. My. God.” He looked like he might be surprised, but this did not seem to be the emotion he wished to convey. Spock sat in an adjacent chair, unintentionally giving the impression of someone trained to deal with bereavement.
“It is illogical to hide an emotion if one cannot control it.” He quoted.

“Well I can hardly tell you.”

“Why not?” These things ought to be taught to Vulcan children in schools.

“Because you just had to ask that question!” Jim flailed again, but remained seated.

It was illogical to allow oneself to be hurt by words. Had it been anyone else, Spock would have remained unaffected, but this was James T. Kirk, someone who Spock consistently failed to ignore.

“Lieutenant Uhura cited my lack of propensity to talk through problems as a main reason for discontinuing our romantic relationship.”

“Did she? Well you’ll get no complaints from me, now piss off.”

Tired of arguing, Spock did as he was told, chair scraping loudly as he pushed it back. “If you can no longer work with me, I can no longer serve with you on the Enterprise. I shall request a transfer.”

They both knew that given the instability of their situation with Section 31, this was untenable, but it made a poignant note to storm out on nonetheless. He knew which buttons to press when the need arose. By most standards, Spock perambulated leisurely from the room, but after a moment silence, Kirk groaned loudly into its emptiness and followed.

“For fuck’s sake, Spock.”
Jim trailed Spock as he prowled the Constellation with a sense of purpose, which, given that he was off duty, he couldn’t possibly have. Jim’s legs were burning by the time Spock made a mistake; the Constellation’s exploration endeavours focussed on dangerous and near impossible to research areas which other ships couldn’t reach; namely, it had been outfitted to work in clouds of material and the outer layers of gas giants and even, once, a brown dwarf star. It held the record for the first and conceivably the only staffed vessel to ever conduct a successful research mission into a star.

As such, instead of the customary biological research laboratory in which Spock spent so much of his free time aboard the Enterprise, was a contained lab for the study of gaseous and similarly insubstantial phenomena, empty now they were in transit, and unlike the biological research laboratory, this room contained a huge fume cupboard that dominated the far side from wall to wall. In short, it possessed only one point of entry or exit, and Jim was in the way. The sight of the fume cupboard made them both nervous, but Kirk had found his opportunity and he wasn’t about to release it without due exploitation.

“Spock.”

“Must you insist on following me unnecessarily?” Spock could feel what Bones dubbed his verbal diarrhoea building in the back of his throat and prepared to release a stream of assertions. “Your behaviour directly contravenes article-“

“Spock, I’m not doing this.”

“-131 of the Starfleet guidelines concerning the behaviour of commanding officers and-“

Jim squared himself to the doorway blocking any chance of escaped barring use of physical force. Spock kept up his defense. “-abuse of authority or privileges, which pertains specifically to the discipline of senior members of the command-“

“Spock, I know I fucked up okay? Can we calm down?” Jim tried to appeal to the impassive face working before him.

“-team. 131.2 clearly stipulates that where a relationship breaks down between two members of the command team a mediator should be involved and if –“

“Then why didn’t you get a mediator in here?”

“-the relationship is irreparable plans must be made so that one or both transfers to a different shift, or if necessary, vessel, and I remind you that I am calm and that it was you who followed me here and I had not the time to involve a mediator, and you did not seek to obtain one for yourself, would it be more convenient to schedule this meeting for another time before which a mediator may be found?” Spock reached a natural pause in his own speech and was forced to descend into silence.

“Uh, no, we don’t need a mediator.” Kirk snapped back.
“Very well. I shall need time to prepare my application for transfer.” He said shortly, resisting the desire to cross his arms.

Jim could see the softness to his defiance, but Spock did not lie. He expected Jim to stop him or he really would transfer. “What? No you won’t. And there are no officer positions going in the fleet.”

“It is not in your authority to make such a decision. I am certain that if I were to accept demotion, I would be welcome to transfer onto the Constellation.”

“You’re not going anywhere without me!” His Captain almost-shrieked. The emotion of it froze Spock for a second, and all that could be heard was the hum of the warp engines and Kirk’s inexplicably heavy breathing.

Something in the sound made Spock want to give in. A metaphorical place in his chest constricted at the idea of his actions causing Jim pain, and his stomach felt heavy with the suggestion that he might abandon him. That’s what he had suggested, knowing full well what the impact would be. It was not a lie; if their relationship was irreparable, it was only logical that he should leave. But he hoped that this was not the case. Wanted, illogically, that Jim would react in that he had predicted given the prospect of abandonment. It sliced through the jealousy he felt at the idea of Spock joining T’Lay’s ship to a much deeper anxiety, and Spock had encouraged, or rather, caused this display of emotion and vulnerability. He reasoned that this was healthy for a human.

“You do not wish me to leave.”

“Of course not.” Jim’s throat sounded tight. He looked small, and his eyes and cheeks burned with threatening tears and embarrassment respectively. He did not look at Spock. “Look, I know she’s better than me. If that’s what you want I won’t stop you, just…” He put out his hands as though to make a gesture, but had nothing to do to express himself and let them fall heavily to his sides in defeat.

Spock cocked his head. “Who is better than you?”

“T’Lay.”

The First Officer weight the words on his tongue, which clicked audibly when he opened his mouth. “She is an inspiring individual. You, on the other hand, have your own merits.”

Jim squinted, trying to see the merits in question. “What are they? She’s more intelligent, she’s a better leader, she’s a better diplomat, she’s a better general, she’s hotter than me…”

Spock blinked at the idea that her physical attractiveness would elevate her above his Captain in his estimations, and at the fact that Jim considered this a factor of contention, but made no comment. “You are a better friend, Jim.”

Kirk pressed the heels of both palms to his eyes and rubbed, trying to drag the tears away and pass them off as tiredness. Spock was an empath when it came to touch, but his ability to actually gauge the feelings of another with a metre and a half of air between them was limited and he suspected that he may actually have got away with it.

How, then, did the bastard always manage to play his feelings like this? Appealing to Kirk with an emotional connection between them reminded Jim that they shared something that Spock and T’Lay did not. It was also the wrong emotional connection. He couldn’t tell which of these had finally pushed him to breaking point.

It was a blurry line between the places of Spock that were Jim and the places that were for him, but
one or both of them ached.

“You are jealous of Captain T’Lay because you believe that I favour her over yourself?” Kirk’s mouth twisted into a hard line of confirmation and he swallowed wetly. He did not speak so Spock deemed it appropriate to address him as though he had answered in the affirmative. “In many ways, you are correct.” Jim twitched, but remained mute. “T’Lay has her allure and she is mentally highly stimulating. I could be content with her. That said, do not imagine that this means I prefer her, or that I desire to be with her. It is a simple fact, which I acknowledge. There are more than two hundred and ninety billion people in the Federation. T’Lay is simply a… Statistical probability.”

Kirk felt somewhat mollified, but he still shook his head. “No she’s not. She’s… Extraordinary.”

“Yes. Among two hundred and ninety billion, she does indeed “stick out”, as you might say. As do you, and you,” He paused for breath, “Understand far more of subjects like friendship and human kindness than someone with “attitude” and a textbook morality like T’Lay will ever comprehend. And…” He debated the relevance of his information thoroughly before finally compromising. “T’Lay is ko-ka-ashausu.”

He wedged himself through the gap between Jim and the door and was gone, leaving his Captain to think on what he’d just said.

The next time Kirk saw Uhura, she told him that ko-ka-ashausu was the Vulcan for “lesbian”. Kirk did some stupid shit sometimes.
T’Lay had, for much of her life, been extremely aware of “sticking out”. On both Earth and Vulcan she had been alien, been queer, been brash and challenging to expectations of her behaviour. Unlike Spock she had revelled in it. It wasn’t a fault on his part so much as it was arrogance on hers. Of this she was aware, and yet, she was greatly unwilling to exchange places.

Growing up on Vulcan, Spock had had only two thirds the strength of his peers. On Earth, T’Lay had had double the strength of hers, three times the tenacity, and mental discipline that, whilst rejected much of the time, she could tap into whenever she wanted. As a child, she had considered her Vulcan blood superior, and had only been forced to reevaluate her perceptions of species when she had first gone to Vulcan as a teen. Where they saw logic, she saw cowardice, and where they saw restraint, she saw repression. And oh, she had tried to fully embrace the teachings of Surak; anyone of any species could do so, provided they had the mental discipline. They had made her sick, and weak, and lifeless, and for the years that followed she had insisted that rather than having different standards of mental health from other species, Vulcans had the very same ones. They had simply changed the goal posts in their evaluations so that a collective mental fuckup didn’t show up on statistics.

Later still, she wasn’t sure. She was too old, and too intelligent, now, to view one half of her heritage as inherently better than the other, but she still could not fully account for the differences. Instead, she watched Spock and Captain Kirk with amusement and feigned disinterest. What mind as great as hers could realistically ignore the opportunity to study an accidental bonding between a half-Vulcan and a human with the ESPER ratings of an irradiated brick?

Initially, she had thought Spock to be asexual, but during her meeting with the pair of them, she had revealed something more telling. The man was, as far as she could tell, straight, yet bonded with a male. It wasn’t impossible. There was more than sexuality to any relationship, but this had to be a most unusual case. There must, on some level, she supposed, have been something at least sensual between them. A need for touch, a physical love.

Spock had been careful to avoid physical contact with her, and she had noticed it. He accepted the casual touches of his Captain, and sometimes it even looked as though he was about to reciprocate, only to reign himself in at the last moment. Yes, Spock was attracted to her, and yet inexplicably he wanted Kirk. Perhaps it was a kind of love she had yet to encounter. James Tiberius Kirk, on the other hand - he was clearly a man who couldn’t have that kind of connection without sex, and he’d be damned if he allowed Spock to have it with anyone else, especially her.

She laughed about it later in Preeyam’s messier quarters over wine that she had been forced to extract from the Enterprise’s overly anxious CMO, who’d put a ship-wide ban on alcohol from replicators despite having no authority there. Her own CMO seemed helpless in Doctor McCoy’s wake. She didn’t blame him, the Doctor certainly seemed to have quite a presence, and she wasn’t willing to argue the point with either of them.

Preeyam smiled at her observations through her curtain of dark hair with the drink heating her face. “Well he can’t have you,” she said without conviction – not that there was any need. “You’ve got your own subordinates to fuck.”

“So I have. But don’t insult me by pretending you actually give a shit about my rank. You just do
what I tell you ‘cos you know I’m always right.” She bit into her replicated crustacean. She was told it was one of the poorest approximations of the real thing a replicator could do, but she didn’t know for certain, having never eaten non-replicated meat. She savoured the taste of rebellion against Vulcan austerity and displaced compassion for machine-assembled cells as Preeyam flinched.

“Look who’s modest? I do what you say because it’s in my job description. Do you have to eat that with the shell on?”

“Yes,” she crunched through it, pulverising the flesh and spitting out the exoskeleton pieces that remained into the bowl provided for shells. She could have replicated the prawns without the shells on them, but this was much more amusing. “Then I order you to fuck me.”

Her Lieutenant gave her a look which suggested her application for sexual activity had been declined for reasons pertaining to a shit sense of humour, and worse eating habits. “Sorry babe, that wasn’t on my contract as navigator. Also, I’m on gamma shift which starts in…” She looked around for the chronometer only to see it hidden beneath a discarded uniform shirt.

The Vulcan in T’Lay twitched at the mess, but regurgitated the required information when prompted. “Fourteen minutes.”

“Shit,” Preeyam shoved her chair back and dragged a gold shirt that T’Lay knew to have been dirty from the day before over her head. “Gotta go.”

Some days T’Lay would join her on the bridge for gamma shift, just for the banter and because she got by on 5 hours sleep per night, but today she amused herself with following around a bickering half-Vulcan and his human at a distance and eavesdropping on their conversation.

It was her ship, after all. She had a right to know what was going on, and the gas labs needed patrolling, anyway. What she happened to have overheard was… Interesting. She laid her assumptions about Spock being straight aside. Maybe he was something else entirely.

Without the pressing discomfort of envy fresh in Kirk’s mind, it returned to thoughts of Section 31 and their return home and particularly to his recently deceased crew and their relatives, who no doubt had been informed by the disgustingly impersonal list of casualties Bones had sent ahead of them from the Section 31 vessel. He rested somewhere between distraught and furious, and suddenly, the little jealous episode he’d had seemed like a welcome break.

When Bones got back from working his seventh consecutive 14 hour shift, eyes ringed with hollow circles so dark they could have been bruises, the injustice of everything hit him in torrents and he pressed his pillow over his head so the Doctor couldn’t see the hot, angry tears it blotted out.

His capacity for doctoring and friendship running on empty, McCoy didn’t question his best friend lying in bed holding a pillow to his face as if attempting to smother himself, and instead collapsed on his own in exhaustion.

The odd teenage buzz that sex with Uhura had given him had run out well before his last shift had ended in Nurse Sze miscarrying at five and a half months. He attributed it to stress and trauma, but they’d been so hopeful that since she’d made it through the worst of it, she’d make it to Earth and to a specialist ward. Now she was too weak to even use the bereavement room. She’d be lucky to
make it home at all.

He was too disturbed to sleep and too exhausted to cry, so lay prone and motionless on this mattress which belonged to someone else in a room that wasn’t his.

After what could have been anything from a few minutes to a few hours, he heard a rustling and a blanket was draped over him. It must have been Jim’s, because he was lying on top of his own. A hand ran up his back and down again, smoothing or stroking, it didn’t really matter anymore.

The door opened and closed, leaving Leonard alone with his grief and a rage that stuck in his throat. His mouth was wet with all the tears he hadn’t cried, and he swallowed against the misery before he finally succumbed to sleep.

With two days to go until their arrival in the Sol system, Jim had worried about all possible scenarios on their return until there was nothing left to play out. He had worried about the ones that ended in death; the ones that ended in their arrest; the ones that ended in them being declared insane and locked up in a hospital for life. He had worried about the ones where they got away with it but it came back to bite his ass, and the ones where the Enterprise was decommissioned and he and his bridge crew reassigned to different ships, the family they’d built disbanded.

And now he’d ran out of scenarios revolving around Section 31, he was stuck thinking about the more likely ones, where he and Spock, and Bones, and Uhura, and Scotty, and Sulu and Chekov all made it out alive, uninterred, and united. Where he’d hoped to find comfort, he’d found a reality that he wasn’t ready to face. Bones had finally crashed after seven double shifts, no longer able to maintain the relentless momentum that had kept him from himself. Doctor M’Benga was now in charge of who got to drink what, because Leonard alone with a replicator had become a terrible idea the moment no one else’s life depended on his steady hands. Sulu was definitely depressed, and God only knew what had happened to Chekov. Even Scotty wasn’t able to get out unscathed, although he was generally happier now that Keenser was back in oyster-shape. Uhura was the only one who looked to be doing okay. Her medication was working, the no strings attached fuck she’d drawn out of Bones was working even better, and she seemed to have maintained a workable friendship with both himself and Spock despite it all. Jim did not like to think about Spock. The thoughts depressed him too much, morphed in his head so that one second, he wanted them to be lovers, and the next he believed it impossible. He wondered about the Vulcan’s intentions to sever their bond, but he didn’t ask in case he got an answer.

He couldn’t keep away, though, so that evening, when the inertia had finally become too much for Bones and the Doctor had taken a night shift, a single one this time, he found himself in Spock and Uhura’s quarters.

He had spent the last few weeks feeling as though he didn’t know how to be around Uhura, but clearly she had dealt with any such feelings regarding him, because she had him sat down with a drink playing Scrabble with them before Spock could even react.

He wasn’t really equipped for such a commitment at this time. After a full five minutes consideration he started the game with LIME and gave up all hope of winning when Uhura worked the L into LAMBAST. He played on, poorly, just to watch Spock’s features fall immeasurably as his ex finished off all of her pieces on her fourth turn by spelling out AGGREGATE.

“You two suck at this,” she announced.
She’d clearly found the chink in the armour that housed Spock’s competitive side, because he replied tersely, “Perhaps we should instead evaluate your skill at chess?”

Nyota did deign the quip with a response. “So, what are you two going to be doing whilst the repairs are taking place?”

Jim stared at the place where LAMBAST and STOIC intersected. He hadn’t actually made any plans, as his ever optimistic mind had told him he’d either be dead or in jail, where planning served only to disappoint and choices were frankly limited. “I guess I’ll go back to Riverside. My mom probably won’t be there, she usually works six months of every year with Starfleet off world and the other six months she splits between doing research at the Academy and in some weird research centre in Chicago, so she’s barely ever home.”

They both turned to Spock, who did his best impression of someone not included in the conversation. With a pang of guilt, Kirk realised that Spock didn’t have anywhere to go to. His home planet was relegated to a pint of sand framed on T’Lay’s wall. Uhura also seemed to realise the cause of the pregnant pause, and alleviated it by jumping up from her seat. “Well I’m taking in a course at the Academy in non-vocalised auditory languages, and I’m also starving. Anyone feel like going down to the mess to grab something there? I know we’ve got the replicator here, but I’m getting cabin fever from being cooped up so long.”

Spock relaxed minutely, grateful for the change of topic.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this chapter took ages! I’ve been overhauling my life, so I just haven't had a lot of free time.
Spock could have won that Scrabble match if he’d played LONELY instead of YELLOW. He’d have cut off the E from her AGGREGATE and won. It was illogical, he knew, to have shied away from playing an emotion on the holographic board game, but he had. It was also, probably, illogical to feel lonely in a room with two people he would undeniably claim to love. Well. Maybe he would not claim it out loud, but it was still the truth.

Still, hearing of their plans left a metaphorical bitter taste in his mouth. It was not that he envied them, but that he was jealous. Spock drew a rigid line between the two – envy where one wanted something at the expense of someone else who had it, and jealousy, where one desired something but would not wish to claim it from another. And he did not wish to claim Jim’s home from him. But he so desperately wanted somewhere other than the broken Enterprise to call his.

Jim put the privacy lock on the door to his and Bones’ quarters and stripped off his sweaty undershirt and pants. He went into the bathroom and took a water shower, as cold as he could bear it, to wash away the lingering thrill of adrenaline and nerves from making his speech, detailing what the crew could (very little) and could not do (anything involving mentioning Section 31; talk to the press; travel outside the Sol system; stay out of communication range…). He felt a little sick from it, or maybe from the helplessness of having no real way to ensure the safety of his crew, beyond political manoeuvres that seemed out dated at best.

As expected, Bones overrode his privacy lock on both door and bustled into the bathroom looking overly warm. The Constellation’s ambient temperature was a full four degrees warmer than the Enterprise, perhaps because of the four Vulcan’s who alongside T’Lay ranked above Lieutenant. Their quarters were cooler, but not enough to take the edge off.

“Get out of there, you’ll use all the water and then I’ll have to take a sonic.” McCoy demanded, opening the cubicle door with Jim still naked inside it.

“No. I’ve still got shampoo in and I’ve barely been in here a minute.”

Bones huffed and tapped his foot, not allowing the door to close. “You got ten seconds to get it off before I shut the water off and prescribe you only sonic showers for the next month.”

“You asshole, I bet you can’t even do that!” But he rinsed his hair quicker.

“I can, I’m the CMO. Now get.” He shrugged out of his shirt. It was nothing new. They’d roomed together, and Jim had never been shy of his body – rather, he had frequently lost control over it to apparently mandatory sexual health checks that left McCoy embittered at the fact that he had never caught anything, in spite of his habits. The Doctor, simply became too lazy to always be dressed around Jim at some point in their second year at the Academy.

Kirk soaked up the last few seconds before the inevitable violent removal from the cubicle, resigning himself when Bones gripped both his arms and spun him bodily out of the spray. Before he could shove Jim away and step into the shower, however, he stopped, eyes locked on something in the doorway.

“What is i-“ Jim turned around to see what he was looking at. “Spock?”
The Vulcan paid him no heed, but pierced McCoy with a look that would kill Surak himself. “Release the Captain at once.”

Bones gave him that shove, but didn’t step back into the flow. “I am reporting you for a sexual assault.”

“What?” Jim and McCoy said in unison.

The glare switched focus to Kirk and he shrank back, towards Bones. This was the wrong thing to do. “Did you wish for Doctor McCoy to touch you in such a manner?” Spock demanded.

“What manner?” Leonard growled over the Captain’s shoulder.

“No. Yes. Spock. What are you doing in here? Why’d you override the lock?”

The First Officer bristled outwardly enough to have earned him time in a mental facility on Vulcan. “Ensuring the Captain’s safety, as is my duty as First Officer.”

The chill was getting to Kirk now, as was the atmosphere. “Protecting me from what, Spock?”

Spock’s face was so rigid it look like he might not be able to speak at all. “I would have thought that was obvious. Evidently I was mistaken.”

He swooped out of the bathroom and was gone, just as the water turned off automatically. “Shit.” Bones muttered.

“Yeah,” Kirk agreed for entirely different reasons.

“Somehow I don’t get the feeling those were First Officer duties he was performing there,” McCoy said sceptically, gesturing at Jim to vacate the bathroom. “Out. I’m gonna have to take a sonic because of that damn hobgoblin. And put a towel on, you’ll catch your death and I don’t wanna see your goddamn ball sack getting sucked back up inside you thank you very much.”

“Okay.” said Jim, realising too late that he was already outside the bathroom and the door was now, again, locked. Not that that seemed to matter to anyone, these days.

Standing on Earth was strange. He’d been on planets in the last few months, several of them, but none of them were in any way like those on Earth. Different mass, different temperature, different atmospheric composition. The first thing he noticed, though, was the sound. Thousands of people milled around San Francisco, talking, laughing, playing music. There was the sound of various vehicles, advertisement screen, children and animals, the elderly, students. It was a good sound, an alive sound that was very different from that of Riverside.

There was no greetings committee for them when they beamed down, aside from the biggest psych eval team Jim had ever seen. Every single member of his crew, including himself and Spock was processed. Treatment plans were drawn up, prescriptions given, and over a hundred of his crew was admitted as inpatients for a minimum of three nights. Most would take longer. This list included Bones and Sulu, but, as he had done all he could during the process to avoid it, not himself. Nor was Spock included, as doubtlessly they had no real idea of what emotional health
meant for a Vulcan and they were happy to just trust him with it.

Now they stood outside the facility with those who weren’t staying in the hospital. Kirk had no idea what to say or do, or how he should relate to Spock given the events of the day before. He should probably discipline him. Normally Spock would volunteer himself for discipline, but he hadn’t done so this time.

“Where are you going?” He asked his First Officer’s back as Spock studied a sign he had doubtlessly read countless times before.

“I am not required to tell you my location on shore leave.” Spock said without turning to face him.

“Actually, I think I did a whole long speech just yesterday about how everyone was to tell me exactly where they were at all times. Everyone includes you.”

“Everyone-“ The Vulcan began but seemed to reconsider. “…I have no intended destination. Therefor I will go to the Academy and offer assistance in teaching.”

“You wanna come to mine, for a bit?” Kirk asked and them regretted it. Spock was clearly angry at him, and upset that he had nowhere to go, and this seemed like the perfect recipe for violent rejection.

There silence stretched until Jim thought Spock was simply ignoring the question, but then; “I will consider it.” Spock told him, before walking off in another direction, apparently at random, with an affected sense of purpose.

Maybe Spock did feel envy, after all.
A forced (or rather, unavoidably necessary) bonding and a night of sexual activity does not a relationship make, the rational majority of Spock’s mind conceded. The rational majority was not the part of his brain which felt, through the bond, that something bad was going to happen – not bad in the sense that there was something objectively wrong, but bad in the more carnal sense, that something was about to happen without him, something he should have been included in.

The animosity he felt now towards the doctor was also illogical, and so he catalogued it for further analysis later and quashed the emotion before it could take hold. He knew Bones had meant no harm, and he knew that, despite appearances, the situation had not been a sexual one, and it unsettled him to find such a fundamental imbalance within himself.

Apologies were illogical; they are, by default, a product of illogical behaviour; if one has acted logically, one has nothing to apologise for – the fault lies with unforeseen events and the behaviour of others if the outcome is less than optimal. This was why, when Spock checked in to the medical facility currently holding several hundred of his fellow crew members, he reflected that he had never before apologised to the Doctor. Leonard, whom he held in secret high esteem, was illogical, emotional, irrational and often hypocritical. Moreover, on the few times in which the man was correct where Spock was not, his conclusions were drawn from poor evidence or intuition. Spock would not apologise for these events. He was aware of his own shortcomings; stubbornness and pride, and he often yielded to them where Leonard McCoy was concerned.

Still, he found himself interrupting the man’s second day of convalescence.

It was the psychological wing of the hospital at the Academy where McCoy had doubtlessly trained in xenobiology. For some reason, Spock had not anticipated the possibility that the Academy would have a dedicated two hundred beds, one hundred of them in private rooms, specifically allocated for psychiatric patients. This was also of concern to him.

Unlike a similar facility he had seen once on Vulcan, this part of the building was not designed to be clinical and clean, nor was it designed for meditation, although such introspection was clearly encouraged. It maintained a casual atmosphere; there were large open spaces with communal area, old movies being shown, games played, food eaten and even cooked and a multitude of other activities a human might find reparative. It was not designed to treat individual patients, but to deal with the fallout of mass trauma and communal maladies. It was frightening.

Doctor McCoy was where the nurse had implied he would be; room P48. The doors here locked out other patients, but not guests or staff, so Spock did not have time to announce his presence or request permission to enter before it slid open.

The room inside had offensively cheerful lemon yellow walls; it was small, three by five metres with a small bathroom, entirely devoid of sharp objects or dangerous chemicals, was attached. There was a window letting in daylight above a small desk; the closet held casual clothes and the shelves Leonard’s personal possessions; books, an antique stethoscope, a framed drawing produced by a small child. The opposite wall contained a slightly large single bed, with a quilt and a multitude of mismatched blankets, designed to make one feel at home on it, and a Doctor McCoy
McCoy lay like a dead man, his body haggard and thin, cheeks sunken and hollow and his eyes were rimmed with red. An abandoned copy of Of Mice and Men lay open on the carpeted floor by the bed. He was wearing Starfleet issue pyjamas.

“Look who’s here.” The Doctor drawled without appearing to have actually opened his eyes. Someone had evidently announced Spock’s impending presence.

As Bones clearly did not expect a reply to his statement, Spock simply stated his reason for coming. “I wished to apologise to you.” The words were tight, reluctant to come.

McCoy’s eyes snapped open with a mixture of surprise and suspicion. “Well I never. Did Jim order you to do this?”

Spock crushed the first kindlings of resentment, and extinguished the familiar drive to antagonise the man, even in jest. Bones was not well enough to engage in what Kirk called “banter”. “He did not. Jim does not know I am here.”

McCoy actually sat up on the bed and scowled. “I’m gonna have to call a doctor and get you admitted to this place, something’s gone terribly wrong.”

The Vulcan ignored the empty threat. “I’m glad this is gratifying to you. I apologise for my actions and retract my accusations of two days ago.”

Bones paused and looked around the room as though it could provide him with an appropriate response. Eventually he gestured broadly at it. “Sit down.”

There was only one chair in the room, and Spock hesitated before taking it.

“God I need a drink,” McCoy said, addressing a generic alcohol administering entity. “I’m serious when I say you apologising makes me think something’s wrong with you. Like, more so than you storming uninvited into my goddamn bathroom and accusing me of sexual assault for being naked in it.”

Spock pursed his lips as Bones stood up from the bed and took something from a shelf. Then he found himself being scanned with a type II scanner. “They permitted you to bring this with you during treatment?”

Bones gave him a somewhat sad grin that he usually reserved for when one of his patients was making a valiant show of being cheerful in the face of imminent tragedy. “It’s my emotional crutch. You’re fine. Weird.”

He fiddled with the dials, trying to find some kind of error. Spock caught his wrist and stilled it before withdrawing hastily from the contact. “I am here to apologise because my behaviour was illogical.”

McCoy’s laugh was short and a little bitter. “The hell it wasn’t. It was perfectly logical. I was messing with your man, apparently.”

“I know you were not... How is your condition?”

“How do I look, Doctor Spock?” The twinkle in his eye was present, even if it did not have its usual gleam.
“Terrible.” He did. He looked awful.

Bones nodded his head, smiling slightly as he flumped heavily back down onto the bed. “S’about right. But I’ll live, if we catch it on time we can amputate.”

The Vulcan was momentarily alarmed before he realised he was still being teased.

“This… Bond, thing, you have with Jim. Give you any hassle?”

Spock considered how much he ought to reveal. “I believe it caused me to give you hassle during the aforementioned incident.”

“Oh. That why you felt the need to come into the bathroom and then scare the crap outta me?” The doctor did not seem angry or in any way affected by the conversation. Rather, he seemed tired, and let his head drop uncomfortably back to rest against the ridge of his upper back.

Spock cocked his head. “I frightened you?”

Bones eyed him searchingly, looking vulnerable and grey against the colourful bedding and yellow walls. “Well duh. You could rip me in half, or Jim if you wanted to. I’m not stupid enough to think I could do anything if you wanted to take more practical action than glaring me the fuck down.”

Another concerning revelation. Spock tried to ignore the twist that this revelation of distrust peaked in him, a fresh wave of not belonging.

He did not think it was visible on his face, but what Bones lacked in touch telepathy he certainly made up in empathy and altruism. “Not like that, asshole. I didn’t actually think you were gonna hurt us, or rather, me, I’m just paranoid and neurotic like everyone else in one of these tin cans in space ought to be but isn’t. I trust you. I was just… Scared that maybe my trust was misplaced.”

Spock tried to reconcile the word asshole with the disclosure of trust and failed. Could it be that asshole served both as a slur and a term of endearment where the doctor was concerned? “I see.”

An alarm went off.

“Sorry, Spock, I gotta go. Gotta talk about everything that’s ever upset me whilst high and under a load of magnets for about two hours.” Bones stretched up off the bed and turned to his cupboard, shirking off his pyjamas and pulling on a black t shirt. He had an ugly scar at the junction of his shoulder and neck that he had yet to try and remove and that Spock had failed to notice before.

As Bones was taking off his pyjama bottoms in full view, Spock took his cue to leave and did so. He turned in the doorway, in time to catch McCoy’s “junk” before he snapped the boxers up all the way. “It may be some time before I next see you, if not in the next few months, then on the Enterprise. Live long and prosper.” He raised a ta’al, feeling oddly sentimental.

Instead of breaking the moment, Bones sealed it by returning the gesture, jeans around his knees and using the other hand to hold his fingers apart. If Spock was one to roll his eyes, he would have done so then.

He left feeling more confused about McCoy, and the nature of his own feelings for Kirk than when he had arrived, but inexplicably he felt less lonely.

Chapter End Notes
A few more requests (I've still got the old ones in mind, worry not):

Two people have requested this be a McSpirk fic in the last three or so days. I've set it up now so it can go either way and I guess I'll just see what people think?

Also someone has requested I put in a person from my real life as a character. I totally have plans for this, but I've interpreted the term "person" rather... Liberally....
Spock shuffled his papers to reassure himself that none had spontaneously departed from the small pile in the past five minutes. Admiral Komack sat stiffly across from him, behind the desk, with every medal he’d ever mistakenly been awarded pinned to the breast of his grey uniform, for what purpose Spock could not distinguish.

The office smelt of bureaucracy and status and the lingering aftertaste of too many awkward pauses. Admiral Komack smelt of caffeine and expensive whiskey.

The antique grandfather clock in the corner ticked too slowly for Spock’s taste, and it occurred to him that they were contributing to the bank of uncomfortable silences Komack had no doubt accrued over his years, and he refused to be affected by or even acknowledge it, meeting the man’s steady gaze unwaveringly as the minutes crawled by.

As the clock struck 0800 Komack shifted and cleared his throat. “As Kirk is la-“

The door opened and Kirk dragged himself in in his crumpled black uniform, which clearly had remained in his and McCoy’s apartment in his absence, and probably had not been washed since the last time he had worn it.

“Just in time!” He announced, a little too jovial, affected for Komack’s benefit.

The Ambassador gave him a particularly sour smile, which looked about as natural as grin on Spock might. “So you are… Let us get down to business. Have you any idea how much paperwork it has taken for me to sort out this mess? How many hours of meetings? I know you boys think I’m a grouchy old man, but I’m not actually here to kiss Section 31’s ass.”

Kirk matched the man’s posture, sitting ramrod straight in the chair he had not been offered. “All due respect, sir, but you’ll excuse me if I worry more about the death of more than sixty members of my crew and the injury and trauma to the rest than about the fact that you had to do your job.”

Komack drew himself up aggressively, but seemed to reel himself in. After a moment he said, “So I shall. But goddamnit, every time there’s a major problem around here you two are bound to be balls deep in it.”

Spock opened his mouth to ask the meaning of the term “balls deep”, but Komack continued before he could do so.

“I have had conflicting reports from various sources, including your own and three separate reports from Section 31. I don’t know what the truth is, but I want to know it now. From you.”

“Where d’you want us to begin?” Jim asked.

The Admiral shook his head. “Not from you. From Spock. At least he won’t spin me the same bull as you’ll try to.”

The piercing yet dull irises locked onto Spock’s again. The Vulcan wished for time to meditate on the way he would word the speech no doubt expected from him, but he knew this would not be granted. “I am uncertain as to how to proceed. And I am, as I am sure you have extrapolated…"
Concerned with the consequences of my providing certain information.”

Komack brushed the comment away with a wave of his hand. “You don’t know the half of it, son.” Spock did not like this man calling him ‘son’. He also doubted that Komack saw him as one. “You do your little posturing games with T’Lay, or rather, you let that woman play them for you when the real business goes on down here. So here I am hearing from you some bullshit story about how it must all be an accident, from them I hear some crap about how it’s an internal goddamn affair – I said “tell that to the parents who lost their kids” and they tell me they had rogue operatives, but then we have a whistleblower saying it was all intentional but the Enterprise wasn’t meant to get mixed up, and then I get a whistleblower whistleblowing on the whistleblower,” He paused for effect or breath, “Telling me that the other ship out there was actually ordered to destroy the Enterprise. So, I want to know what the hell happened out there. And don’t go giving me no bullshit about faulty braking systems, there’s no way dud breaks were going to crush the whole Enterprise like the hood of a 2033 Ford Mustang. So what exactly happened, Spock?”

“You still have yet to suggest any measures to ensure the safety of the Enterprise or her crew should what I have to say prove incriminating to anyone from a government organisation.”

Komack smacked both his palms onto the table, startling Spock. Jim did not react; perhaps it was a gesture intended somehow to be business-like. “Okay Spock, here’s the deal. You’re gonna tell me what happened. And I’ll try to deal with it as a diplomat. And if that fails, Section 31 is by no means the only secret government organisation capable of sorting things out behind closed doors.”

Spock looked at Jim, who seemed to be contemplating the offer despite it not actually being offered to him. Nonetheless, regardless of Komack’s obvious lack of respect, he would of course defer to Kirk anyway. “Captain?”

Jim met his eye and nodded. “It’s alright, Spock. You can tell him.”

Jim left the meeting as emotionally exhausted as he had been when he’d first stepped off the Enterprise onto dry land. He went to see Bones, but found the man not at his post; he’d discharged himself that morning to go and see his ex-wife and daughter. Kirk cringed at the thought of McCoy seeing anyone with whom he’d had a shitty divorce right now, but maybe his little girl was really what he needed. Jim had met her, twice. Actually, he was relieved to find her on Earth, because he vaguely recalled that she’d been at school on Cerberus before the crop failure. She must have been on Earth by the time it happened or Bones would have made sure he was there for her, he was certain. It was odd to think of Bones having an eleven-year-old daughter.

It was worse, though, to think of him as vulnerable, and the idea of him being on a psych ward as a patient made Jim feel sick. He hadn’t visited in the month they’d been planetside. Actually, he hadn’t seen a single member of his crew, with the exception of a single video call from Scotty regarding the repairs. He felt guilty, and yet he was already made up to get on the next transport back to Iowa, to Riverside. He had little to do but sleep and drink, but hey, he deserved a bit of R&R, right?

The shuttle pulled up. He stepped on, found a seat and sat down next to the usual commuters amongst the smell of fast food grease and overzealous applications of some kind of strange perfume.

“Twenty minutes to destination.” The automated voice announced.
It was the crummiest bar in a mile radius, and he knew it. He was here to get drunk and here to get laid, and since he was famous now neither was usually a problem. Bar staff were happy to tolerate a fight if it was “Captain Kirk vs. X”, even take bets on it. They’d give him free drinks to claim his patronage. But the sex. He missed being an anonymous sexual encounter. The one thing women outside the Federation did better was to not recognise him. When he fucked them, they were in it for the sex; to get pleasure out of him just like he was doing with them. But here on Earth as a local celebrity, there was no give and take; people were willing to worship him.

Something about the Enterprise officially being an exploratory mission transformed him from a military leader (which he wasn’t, but nonetheless he had seen his share of battle) into a hero, and from a ship’s Captain into some kind of strange sexy action scientist, none of which was true. Well, he’d give them sexy. And maybe action. But Spock would probably nerve pinch him if he took them up on scientist.

Tonight though he wasn’t looking for good sex, he was looking for a good fuck.

He sat in an empty stool and ordered one of whatever the tall Andorian woman next to him was drinking, on the house as expected. It was repulsive, but he swallowed it down anyway.

Spock removed his Starfleet blacks and placed them in the refresher. He would not need them again for some time, and had returned to leave after the morning’s gruelling meeting.

He sat cross legged on the floor of his bedroom and began to meditate on the day, counting down his breaths, feeling his muscles relax, loosen, grow heavy. He identified, noted and then rationalised each of his emotional responses he had felt throughout the day before cataloguing them for any further analysis later, releasing them from his conscious. He had awoken feeling saddened by the loss of a particular colleague. He rationalised that his feelings were both expected and futile; his sadness would not bring her back, nor would it honour her memory. He catalogued it and released it from his mind. He worked through each and every one. His distaste for Komack. Frustration at Jim’s lateness. Fear for the safety of Jim and Uhura and the rest of the crew. The last one, though, he could not identify, and nor could he be certain of the cause.

Something bothered him, remotely and from outside of himself.

Since he could do nothing further with his meditation session, he abandoned the attempt and read through the various communications on his PADD. His last psych had forbidden him from working. The man clearly did not know that to continue functioning correctly was the bare minimum for Vulcan mental health and thought his insistence on continuing various research projects unhealthy. Spock did not have the strength of will to get a second opinion.

As he read his paper on foetal heart beats and infection rates, the feeling of discomfort only grew. For some reason he felt compelled to be near Jim, like he had a month ago before they had finally reached Earth, when he had severely invaded Leonard’s privacy.

He dismissed it as illogical jealousy, but found his fingers pressing rainbow distortions into the screen of the PADD. It was unsettling and subconscious and innate, and the stronger it grew the
more he was unable to distinguish the fear of someone else approaching Jim romantically or sexually from a feeling of foreboding, of something very much worse about to happen.

When he could ignore it no longer, he donned a grey jumper, took up his tricorder and communicator and left.

Chapter End Notes

So I've decided against McSpirk; I've not written any yet but I'm sure I will in the near enough future. 
In the meantime, I've definitely written about all combinations of the three in pairs - if you're feeling bored here is a McKirk fic http://archiveofourown.org/works/916626 
Here is a Spones drabble http://archiveofourown.org/works/949659 
And here for good measure is more Spirk porn. 
http://archiveofourown.org/works/891640
If you poison us do we not die?

If Sulu had ever said he felt like a cradle snatcher, he rescinded the statement and sought to hide all evidence of having made it in the first place. A hundred years ago, his last psych report would have had him taken off of active service; two hundred, and they’d have discharged him entirely. Three hundred years ago and he would be sent back into a warzone untreated and then shot for desertion when he relapsed.

Somehow this man, this boy, Pavel Chekov had come out of the Tau Ceti catastrophe not unscathed, but well enough to be the one pushing him down onto his own couch and feeding him pierogi made in his own kitchen on the day of his being discharged from the psych unit.

Hikaru’s stomach rumbled to spite his anxiety and he bit into the weird thick dumpling. Pavel looked at him with soft round eyes that Sulu knew by now to hold no true innocence or naïveté, just hope and adoration.

“What’s the matter? You do not like it?” Chekov was already standing up to move back to the kitchen.

“No!” Hikaru said too quickly. “It’s fine, really.”

He thought Pavel might be about to say something else, demand further explanation, but he did not. He simply opened his arms and Hikaru fell into them, holding his plate awkwardly in the gap between their bellies. He found all of a sudden that he wanted to explain anyway. “I’m not ready for this and I don’t deserve you.” He sobbed into the soft cashmere of Chekov’s cardigan, squeezing tight enough to feel the warmth and the fleshy aliveness of Pavel’s surprisingly solid body.

The navigator took his plate and placed it on the coffee table. For a moment they stayed apart, until Chekov scooted Hikaru over to lean further onto him. “You are ready for this. You know they would not have discharged you if you wasn’t. And do not be a fool, Hikaru, of course you deserve me.”

Sulu wanted to believe him, was desperate to believe. But still, the food that Pavel had made the effort of making turned to flour in his mouth, and the arms around him met only with guilt. He needed this, so badly, but what right did he have to ask it of Pavel? What right did he have to ask anything of this boy who had undoubtedly seen far worse than he on that ship, who had come to find him, and who had sat with him every day in the Constellation’s sickbay. The amount that Pavel loved him terrified him before; now it drowned him in guilt and shame. Why had he held off for so long? Unnecessarily long, given that Chekov’s eighteenth birthday would have been sufficient (according to Chekov, as a Russian citizen he’d been legal by sixteen. Sulu ignored this statement). He was terrified that Pavel might love him more than he loved the boy back.

“Shhh,” the Ensign soothed him. “You do not have a choice. You have to have me. I will go nowhere no matter what you say. Have you not learned this in three and a half years?”

Pavel lifted his face with gentle fingers on his cheeks and kissed him, soft, open mouthed, almost chaste. Sulu tasted salt from his own tears.

He made a noise into Chekov’s mouth, which had they not been kissing would still have lacked any true meaning.
“Do not resist me,” Pavel demanded. “I have your snot on me now. See, I am yours.”

Hikaru laughed wetly, pulling back to wipe at his streaming eyes and nose with a sleeve. The laughter turned into a few quiet sobs, and Chekov pulled him back in, kissing fresh tears away.

Several things occurred to Spock on the shuttle to Riverside. The first was that he had no idea of Jim’s precise location. The second was that, were anything to happen to them on Earth, the Enterprise was not available for their escape. This led him to further realise that if the senior officers were out of the way, their subordinates might become a new target for any retaliation or suppression on the part of Section 31. Lastly, it occurred to him that he could not in fact prevent Jim from engaging in sexual activity, ever again, even with his septennial Pon Farr. He flinched in his seat when he caught himself assuming Jim would be with him for his next time. Why would he? He’d been with Spock out of necessity. They were only still bonded for reasons Spock could not entirely place and so wrote off as taking up too much time lest he examine the facts and discover something else. Jim would not want him again; in fact, he was certain the thought would repulse, even traumatising him. The image of him heaving up Spock’s own ejaculate was burned into Spock’s mind. He blinked it back, but others followed it, going back further to other images he believed must have disturbed his friend, moments during the Pon Farr. To his horror, he was forced to suppress a wave of arousal before it could enter the conscious of the one for whom it was aimed via the link. The physical distance between them was an effective barrier, but even on an interstellar scale many claimed to be able to feel one’s bondmate; they were indeed an extension of oneself.

Brushing the train of thought aside, he messaged Scotty’s PADD asking him to prioritise fixing one medical shuttle and stocking it completely “as a precaution, in case of emergency”.

Ensign K’Ahs needed a third round of surgery, and Bones was determined to be the one to deliver it, no matter what this nurse, who, incidentally, he did not believe to be an actual mental health nurse, thought.

“Come on Christine,” he nagged. “I’m a surgeon, let me perform surgery!”

She shook her head, continuing to block his access to the only exit to his own corridor. “Doctor McCoy, you are still my patient and my responsibility is to you and your health first, which means you’re going to sit your ass down in a chair and relax for an afternoon.”

“I’ been relaxin’ for four weeks! I’m K’Ahs’ doctor, I should be in there makin’ sure he’s alright!” He was painfully aware that he was trying to stare down this particularly unmoved woman whilst wearing Starfleet issue pyjamas. He wished he were wearing scrubs.

“Leonard,” she spread her hands diplomatically. “I’m sure that Doctor Mittens will be more than proficient enough to deal with a simple reconstructive procedure.”

“Doctor Mittens? Is that a character from a children’s book?”

“Doctor Mittens is a top surgeon at the Academy whose specialism make him far better suited to performing this surgery that yours make you. Leonard, you have four days left before your
discharge, and you are going to demonstrate to me that you are well enough to make decisions in your own best interest by having your lunch and then by going to your two thirty therapy session, or you might just find yourself stripped of your licence until I trust you with one!”

He shut his mouth and returned to his room, grumbling quietly.

With no specific knowledge of where exactly Jim’s childhood home was, Spock inspected the town. Riverside was, to put it mildly, a depressed area. Most of the jobs available were within the shipyards where the Enterprise had been constructed. There were a little over three thousand people, many new immigrants as a result of the shipyards opening forty years ago, and two bars. They seemed as good a place as any to start.

The first one Spock entered was obviously old and mostly empty, populated only by a large handful of local patrons, mostly older men.

The second was busier, newer and full of younger people drinking stronger drinks under harsher lighting and louder music. Exactly the kind of place Kirk loved and Spock disdained.

He spotted Jim, still apparently conscious, talking to a pair of young women in a similar state of inebriation, and had to forcibly restrain himself from interfering. He took a seat on the other side of the bar, partially concealed by a row of spirits and a woman wearing a sickly perfume and watched.

He growled at a bottle of vodka as one of the women lent over Jim “accidentally” landing her palm over his crotch. Spock could hear her laughter but not discern her words.

Suddenly his view was blocked. “What’s your poison?” A burly barman demanded.

Spock looked at the man in bewilderment, fear prickling the hair on his arms, stepping back suddenly from his chair.

The barman seemed surprised at his reaction, as though Spock should have known that this was the question he was about to be asked.

Spock’s hand fell to where a phaser should be, but as he was not on duty he was not carrying one. He backed away further and circled the bar, his eyes not leaving the perplexed features of the barman, until he reached Jim. The two women looked at him strangely, although the man in question seemed not to notice.

He moved close to Kirk’s ear so as to speak unmonitored. “Captain.”

Jim jerked in his chair, spilling some of the dairy-based alcoholic beverage he was holding. His head whipped round, face centimetres from his First’s. “Spock?”

“Captain. It is not wise to react. I fear we are being monitored.”

The women looked despairingly at the lack of space separating the two officers and headed elsewhere.

“What? How come? And why are you here?”

“The man at the bar just offered me my preference of poison.” He said quietly.
For a moment, Jim said nothing. Then he made a strange sound, his face pained. Spock’s hands flew to his shoulders as he swayed slightly, supporting him. He was shaking, hard.

“Captain? Jim, are you alright?”

Something came out of Kirk’s nose and he choked slightly. “Captain?” Spock flipped open his large handheld communicator, used where an earpiece was unnecessary. Before he could call for Doctor McCoy, Jim’s hand closed around his wrist.

“Stop… Stop,” he gasped, struggling for air. His face was red and his eyes watering. “Oh my… god.”

“Jim?” Spock squeezed his shoulders, feeling him continue to shudder with each choked breath. “Tell me, what is wrong?”

“Nothing!” He finally managed to gasp. He locked his arms around Spocks so that he was mirroring the way the Vulcan gripped his shoulders, arms weak with trembling. “Oh… my God… Spock. For like a second… You scared the crap outta me… And then… Oh my god…”

Spock cocked his head, eyebrows knit, trying not to sound confused or offended. “You are… Amused?”

Jim wiped his eyes but continued laughing, lasting to a persistent giggle fuelled by the alcohol in his blood. “Yes! Spock! It’s a saying.”

“What is a saying?”

“What’s your poison!”

The green and red flashing lights spared the bar a view of Spock’s blush. He attempted to disengage himself from Kirk’s hold on his arms, mortified, but the drunk man clung on like a limpet, hanging his head in mirth.

“That is illogical. Why would anyone purchase poison at such an establishment?” He did his best to salvage his dignity.

“Because alcohol is a poison, duh.”

Spock would have prayed had believed in a god with the power to make Jim forget this event. For now he had hoped that high blood alcohol was the deity he needed.

The Captain’s laughter was subsiding and his fingers relaxed on Spock’s arms, stroking little circles of warmth through his thin jumper. He was drunk and sexually frustrated, and very very close. The hairs the barman had raised on Spock’s arms did not go down.

“Let us leave this place,” he said, needing to escape both the intensity of Jim’s grip and the heady reminder of his own humiliation.

“Alright,” Jim stumbled from the chair as he got out of it, more drunk than anticipated. Spock tolerated the arm across his shoulder and headed them both out through the front exit.

The cold of the air chilled him, and he was gladder than he’d admit to have Jim’s side pressed up against his. “Where is your residence?”
Scopaesthesia

Jim had spent very little of his energy describing Riverside to Spock, save to describe it as a “shithole”.

As they made it to the far side of the English river, Spock was more and more inclined to agree. Unshielded from the dust blowing in from the quarry by the fast flowing waters, the handful of streets took on the yellow-red tinge of the fine powder blowing through the air. The buildings were old in a way that some considered to be old fashioned and sentimental and a larger majority, amongst whom was Spock, viewed the state of the buildings as dilapidated and the result of an incredibly depressed local economy. On the other side of the river, with the bars where he had obtained Jim were new housing developments and schools and even a small hospital, built over the last 30 years to accommodate the four thousand new workers brought in by the Riverside Shipyard. They outnumbered original inhabitants 3 to 1.

Stumbling slightly despite having accepted Spock’s vice grip on his upper arm, Jim dragged them down the main road and round a corner, until the houses were so far apart that only one could be seen from any given vantage point on the flat landscape. The wind whipped the dust into tiny dust devils as the passed the quarry.

Eventually he tripped his way up the drive way to a multi-floored wooden building, 20th century according to its appearance, and held together by sheer force of will and not-enough-love. In spite of this and the arid climate, the plants in the pots outside were mostly alive.

They stood at the door, looking at the peeling paint.

“Mom’s not home,” Jim told him through an alcoholic haze, looking at the darkened windows as though he hadn’t been staying here for the past month and had only just realised this. Spock could not discern whether he as disappointed or pleased by this.

“Evidently not,” he agreed. “Where are your keys?”

“Well,“

Spock supressed a huff at the lack of attention to security, and then released it anyway as he looked round to take in some fifty such candidates, all containing varieties of flora one might expect to find in a garden on Earth.

He left Jim leaning heavily on the door frame and began systematically searching beneath each pot, eliminating the begonias, the cornflowers and a rose, on which he stuck his thumb in the dark. A brassica yielded no positive result.

“Jim, can you not specify whi-“
He turned back to discover the front door open and the Captain presumably inside. He sighed in the privacy of the empty front garden and followed.

Kirk was considerably less drunk than Spock thought he was. He didn’t want to talk to the half-Vulcan, he had too much going on in his own head that he needed to sort out.

The more he thought about it, the more it bothered Jim that Spock has reached a point where he would assume a threat rather than a misunderstanding. Once, Spock had assumed that conflicting or illogical information was incorrect or incomplete, and he would search to find the inconsistencies. The last three months had leached the scientist out of him, leaving only iron control masking a lingering, weary sense of danger. The idea that Spock was scared to his bones was infinitely more frightening than anything that had actually happened in the last 3.7 years.

Now Spock was standing in his darkened house, eyes straining to take in the gloomy surroundings. He wonders what his… His… He wondered what Spock saw. Jim tried to look around the hallway and see it for the first time, to look at the wooden door as though it held no familiarity, but the dent in the corner of the frame two feet above the ground would always be where Sam chipped his tooth when Frank kicked him too hard, and the lines drawn above it would always be his and Sam’s heights from every year until Sam’s 13th and Jim’s 8th birthdays. Contrary to popular belief, before the worst of Frank’s abuses, Jim’s birthday had not been a funeral march or a memorial service. His mother had always said she wasn’t an undertaker, and that was true. It was just a shame she wasn’t really a parent, either.

“Jim?” Spock asked, concern shining through his emotionless features.

Kirk started out of the memory.

“The spare room is upstairs, second on the left beyond the bathroom. The other two rooms on the right are Mom and Sam’s. I’ll give you the tour in the morning.”

Spock watched him, moving slowly to the stairs. Jim wondered why he was showing so much reluctance and then realised he’d forgotten to act drunk. “’M off to bed.” He slurred purposely.

When he staggered to his doorway across the hall, Spock was still watching him.

“What? How come you followed me all the way here, anyway?”

Spock twitched, certain that he had escaped the question by virtue of inebriation and the subsequent hangover. “I had a…”

“Feeling.” Jim supplied.

“…Premonition that you might come to harm alone.” He said.

It raised a hundred questions in Kirk’s moderately drunk mind, but before he could ask them, Spock was gone.
The spare room was sparsely decorated, but the double bed was made. Spock did not lie down in it, but instead settled on the wooden floor to meditate, drawing out the emotions of the day like streams of data from his conscious.

Try as he might, he couldn’t find a logical reason for his behaviour, nor for Jim’s apparent acceptance of Spock’s embargo on his promiscuity, or his sudden arrival. He’d felt, quite illogically, that he had been watched all day. Studies showed that Homo sapiens was often subject to such illusions, and that the feeling of being watched was an evolved response due to the fact that it was better to mistakenly assume one was being watched than the inverse.

He discarded the sensation with some effort, and sank deeper into meditation, observing the link between Jim and himself, although not Jim directly. It was odd to imagine that somehow his brain had attuned itself to that of James T. Kirk in a single night, to such an extent that he could feel him preparing to sleep in the room downstairs. The link was stronger now, the tiny changes in electric currents and magnetism and radiation reaching tiny sensors in Spock’s skin. He pondered at how his brain saw the bond as a tangible location in his own headspace, when it often felt like he was feeling Jim through his hands or the sensors on his face where the meld points were, and whether his Captain performed this kind of introspection on him.

Illogically, his brain attributed the sensations colours, in the same way they translated thoughts into words during a meld. The colours became brighter and he drifted into a meditative trance that a human doctor might struggle to differentiate from sleep and unusual seizure activity. They burnt into his eyes where his own vision ought to be. A constant buzzing started in his ears that morphed into sounds, like voices under water. He wanted to stop, to escape, but interest held him in this inner level of himself, or of Jim, until the voices were discernible and the shapes people.

He was Spock. For some reason, being Spock was strange. He wasn’t meant to be Spock, he wasn’t Spock.

He stood in a room with Jim, with him, the wooden door bolted shut. The wooden walls were off white. The wooden floor was wood colour.

One tables and in sacks around them were tens of thousands of fruits, green skinned with shallow ridges around the edges giving the impression that each was a seven pointed star.

Jim reached for one.

“No, Jim, it’s poison!” It was strange to hear himself say.

The Jim in the dream did not hear him say it. He raised the green fruit to his lips, opened them, bit.

Spock yanked his hand away before he could take a mouthful, the tips of his teeth stained red with the juice.

“Hey!” Kirk protested. “How dare you?”

He made a grab for the oversized berry now in Spock’s possession.

Refusing to let him have it, Spock squeezed. The outer layers of the fruit crushed and crunched under his fingers, imploding inwards and outwards. Black-red juice ran down his hand, over his wrist, up his arm to the elbow, spattered the floor, spattered Jim. More than could possibly fit in
one berry. He wiped his hand and it stained his blue shirt, but the hand came back no cleaner. He was marked.

Next to him, Jim blinked before reaching for an intact fruit on top of a sack.

There were ten thousand fruits in that room.

How was Spock to crush every one?

The universe of the dream swam out of existence, only to be replaced by yet another of Jim’s conception.

He was himself again, Jim again. His limbs, his temperature, his perception of colour.

There was no fruit.

There was a bed though, with wine-red sheets and there was Spock, naked on it.

“Why are you here?” He asked.

Spock looked at him, almost sceptical with an eyebrow raised. “You know why.”

Of course. Of course. Why had he doubted it?

He looked down at his clothes. Plain black boxers. Nothing else. They would have to go.

Spock stretched out like a work of art, limbs taking up most of the bed. He was stoic and confident and not at all ashamed.

Jim knelt on the bed hands going to stroke the soft angles of Spock’s ribs and belly and hips. He wanted to taste him, bite him, fuck him. He settled for pushing his thighs apart, nibbling at the soft inner skin. Bland, a little spicy. Very Vulcan.

The real, semi-conscious Spock now sprawled on the floor of a bedroom that was not his own, in a house that wasn’t his, dreaming dreams that he had no right to be in with an erection that, given he was watching himself have sex with himself, it was illogical and quite possibly vein to have, was painfully aware that he should not be doing this. It was invasive, immoral, illogical. Illegal in nine member states of the Federation. But, he reflected as he gave in, it was only his nature. The bond between partners was there to ensure a mate during times of sexual need. Was it so unsurprising that he was so easily sucked into Jim’s sexual fantasies? Or was he, in fact, responsible for them?

Spock watch himself roll over on top of him – on top of Jim – kisses rough with need and skin
glowing green with extra blood flow in a profoundly human way. This Spock was inhumanly hot, Plak Tow heat seeping out through his skin and burning Jim with tangible desire.

Spock forced his knees apart and rutted against him, bit his neck and shoulders, scratched his chest, making him jump when he rubbed over a nipple. He was marked in red as Spock pressed his dental records into soft flesh, thrusting against him hard to distract him from the pain.

Then Spock was sliding down his stomach with a scrape of teeth and a brush of his lips below his navel.

Spock watched his own mouth open around Jim’s cock to swallow it in, hot and wet and hungry, hitting the back of his throat. He tried to thrust and Spock suppressed it, gripping his hips firmly, nails breaking the skin. He groaned as Spock slid off again, until just the head was between his lips, and moaned loudly when Spock began to suck, tongue worrying the sensitive frenulum and then sweeping over the slit. The Commander hollowed his cheeks and sucked until it seemed like he was about to – Spock pulled off with the obscenely sloppy noise of a vacuum being broken.

He tried to sit up, reaching for Spock with a protest caught in his throat, but the Vulcan’s hand hit the centre of his chest, forced him back against the bed, straddling him.

Spock’s eyes pierced him, made him feel vulnerable. He savoured it, even as the dream Spock mounted him and pressed down on his spit-slick dick. He choked back a whine. Spock was pulsing and tight and unforgivably wet, almost too warm. He was pinned beneath the weight of his ultra-dense bones, quivering on the bed making noises in languages he did not understand.

The dream Spock rode him with a dignity that the real Spock would envy in such a position. His cock was gripped and milked by Vulcan-strong muscles, overstimulated by friction. His human hearing picked up the slap-slide-slap of flesh on flesh, and Spock’s weight on his chest crushed the air out of him. He couldn’t breathe in the oppressive heat of Spock’s breaths coming out just a bare centimetre from his own mouth, could feel his gasps dying in his chest as Spock spasmed around him and growled, thumping him into the headboard, scratching his chest and shoulders.

His orgasm built and washed up through his abdomen, emptying into Spock’s body with a shudder and a cry.

Spock kissed him, tasting of Jim, soft, damp lips and tongue parting his, needing something deeper.

If the dream continued, Spock was not aware because his eyes snapped open to a sound within him room, the feeling of being watched jolting him to reality. They focussed on another pair of eyes, glowing in the dark.
After several long seconds of what, in a human, might have been blind panic, Spock remained mortified on the bedroom floor.

Spock had been in many a bizarre situation in his life, and the majority he bore with dignity. Now as he lost that dignity, his only comfort was that, as far as he was aware, the only observer was non-sentient.

Indeed, Spock had walked in on the licentious affairs of other, had his fair share of cultural misunderstandings with strange cultures, and endured stranger punishments for those trespasses still. He had met himself. He had brought a friend back to life. He had made general faux pas associate with human society. None of this made him feel any better about having been caught masturbating to another’s fantasy of himself by somebody else’s cat.

The animal watched him with illogically accusatory eyes. Well. Slightly crossed eyes. Then she walked past him and jumped up onto the bed, settling in the dead centre.

Spock was suddenly extremely grateful to be on a different floor to Jim; he did not want to encounter him on his newly scheduled trip to the bathroom to rinse off the only pair of trousers he had with him.

It was not rational to be too embarrassed to face this small Earth mammal, but this did not stop Spock from spending the rest of the evening meditating on the floor, facing away from her, careful to keep his mind to himself this time.

Jim winced slightly as he exited his room and discovered Spock already awake in his kitchen with an array of odd vegetarian foodstuffs before him, as though the dream he’d had the night before was somehow visible to the Vulcan. His head pounded softly, but at least his First Officer was dressed in dark colours that were not overly reflective of the light streaming through the window.

“What are you doing up?” He asked, yawning and attempting to look less fundamentally confused than he felt with his hazy recollection of the content of his sleeping brain.

“It is twelve minutes past ten.” Spock said simply, as though this were an adequate explanation for being awake at such an hour on a Saturday on shore leave.

Kirk eyed the food. There was an abundance of greenery and fruit he found suspicious. “Did you get up early to buy this stuff? How come?”

“Vulcan’s need less sleep than humans,” Spock sidestepped the fact that he had not slept at all. “It is a custom among us that a guest prepares breakfast for the host in the morning.”

Jim sobered slightly, and decided to eat whatever it was in deference to Spock’s attempts to regain some of his obliterated culture. “Thanks.”

He sat at the table. It was weird to be in this particular seat, but Spock was in his usual one and he didn’t want to ask him to switch.
“None is necessary. Are you suffering cephalalgia or nausea due to dehydration caused by excessive ethanol metabolism?” Spock’s tone was mildly accusatory, but his words more than mildly confusing.

“What?” He took a bite out of a soft fruity-carbohydrate thing, trying to assure himself it wasn’t poisoned. He was correct, of course, Spock would never feed him something a human couldn’t eat, but whatever it was was horrendously bitter. He swallowed the soft pinkish substance without chewing, desperate to take the taste away, and poured himself some juice in an unfortunate shade of green. It tasted of gingery spinach, but somehow was bearable.

“Do you have a hangover?” Spock said plainly, a pointed eyebrow hovering half a centimetre above its usual positioning.

“A bit,” He said between sips of the juice. “I’ve had worse.”

“If Doctor McCoy is to be believed, you have indeed. What are your plans for the remainder of today?” Spock watched him eat a dried fig with his hands, his own perched on his fork.

Jim shrugged, mouth full of a brownish red paste, which was heavily spiced and was mercifully saltier than the other items on the table, though not by much. “Not a lot. Was just gonna relax here.”

“That is a condiment,” Spock could not resist saying as Kirk ate a second spoonful directly from the bowl. The fact that some of Jim’s saliva had doubtlessly made the transfer did not stop him eating some later.

“Oh,” Jim did not seemed to comprehend his admonishment. “Hey V!”

Spock followed his gaze to a spot near the door, where a small tabby and white cat was rubbing against it, arching her back.

“That’s Violetta. She sorta lives here. I mean, she used to be ours, but now the neighbour feeds her, she still comes and goes, though.”

“We have met,” Spock told his spinach juice.

Jim laughed lightly. “I forgot to say, you kinda stole her room. I mean, you’re welcome to kick her out if you want, but when you’re not here that’s where she sleeps.”

“I see.” The cat looked relatively inoffensive in the sun, her slightly crossed eyes less frightening without the backing of their reflective retinas. She squeaked at the closed door until Jim stood to open it.

“So, wanna hang out?”

Spock cocked his head. He supressed a lingering sense of embarrassment from the night before with considerable effort. “What does that entail?”

Uhura stood on the crumpled deck of the hangar bay waiting for the cadets she’d brought up to give the repair crew a hand to come back to their meeting point. Instead she looked up to see Scotty pushing a hovercart of supplies.
“What’re ye doin’ here lass?” He called from behind his load.

“Just brought a few cadets up. You know how they’ll do anything to impress someone higher up, they’ll work way harder than anyone paid to work in their final year before ship assignment. And we’re going to need a lot of new recruits. Thought I’d give them a spin.” She felt good in her uniform on the Enterprise, crisp and clean and in her proper place.

Scotty ruined her cleanliness by giving her a greasy hug, but she made no complaint. “Aye that’s a sad fact. I s’pose we’ll end up wi’ a lot of enlisted crew as well. Not used te having people around who rank lower than Ensign.”

“It’ll be a change. What’re you doing down here?” She asked, eyeing the supplies as he pushed them to a shuttle named Warren.

“Funny that,” Scotty said, brow furrowed. “Commander Spock commed me yesterday te ask if I could ready a shuttle. Full supplies. Medical, food, everything. He wants warp five! On a shuttlecraft!”

“How fast does this thing go?”

He patted the hull with pride. “Warp six an a wee bit, thanks te yours truly! I’ve had people on this’n all day.” He gestured to the gleaming shuttle, stark white against the oiled and damaged deck. “And the strangest part? He asked for layout E.” He sounded horrified, or confused. Something like that. Scotty was an odd one.

“That means nothing to me, what’s layout E?” She asked. Presumably, this was part of the course material for command or science track cadets.

“Take a look fer yerself.” He led her up to the ramp where various engineering staff were scuttling about.

As she climbed it, the cause of his concern became apparent. The interior had been divided into living and working quarters, behind the cockpit an area for scientific or perhaps medical procedures to take place shone with spotless work surfaces and equipment. A biobed folded up against the wall.

The aft section of the vessel contained only a table, four bunks and a food replicator. All other space was storage. “Looks like he’s in for the long haul,” She murmured.

“Aye, but why?” Scotty looked at the biobed in consternation.

“I think I have a pretty good idea. Look, I gotta go, but first I’ve got a few requests for this thing myself…”

“You know, for a doctor, you sure make a terrible patient!” Chapel swiped his leg out from under him, forcing him to sit on the sofa in the lobby.

“Hey!” He growled. “Tha’s an assault!”

“Not in a military hospital it isn’t. Keep your ass in your chair whilst I finish these scans.”
“There’s nothing physically wrong with me!” He protested, but stayed seated nonetheless.

Chapel sighed a sigh that Bones himself did for difficult patients. “When you got back here you had a broken collar bone and two cracked ribs!”

The truth was that this was all a pretence between them. Bones was physically fine, and psychologically, well, he wasn’t great, but he didn’t need to be an inpatient. The problem was, he couldn’t handle being alone, and there was no one out there for him to go to. So he maintained the appearance of a reluctant patient whilst she kept failing his exams.

“I’ve had worse.” He told her, feeling resentful of her charity.

“I can tell,” she replied without missing a beat. “Your scans show a total of twenty six healed breaks, and there’s scarring on your internal organs a phaser couldn’t cut through! Whoever the hell’s been healing you has the motor skills of a seven year old!” She played her script well, accusatory finger pointing at him with every other syllable.

“I’ll tell Captain Kirk you said that.”

“Jim’s been healing your broken bones? Why?” She surprised him by using Jim’s first name, as though she already knew him. He’d ask when he got back, but for now he was late.

“Desperate times,” He shrugged. “Now if you please, I’ve gotta go or Uhura’ll be waiting for ages.”

He stood from the couch and smoothed his shirt out, but Christine didn’t take the expected step back.

Instead she said; “Nyota Uhura?”

“One and the same. How many Uhuras you know of?”

“Just the one,” she clucked, conceding him the space he needed to make his escape. “Tell her I said hi.”

Uhura chose a Tunisian restaurant tucked away on a backstreet twenty minutes’ walk or so from Starfleet Medical. It was easy for Bones to lull himself into a sense of student domesticity, to imagine that he was there to study and not as a patient. He felt comforted and disappointed in alternation.

She was at a table near the back eating muhammara with some non-descript flatbread. She looked good in civies, a yellow summer dress that was very slightly inappropriate for the weather outside.

“Hey,” She greeted him after she’d swallowed her mouthful.

“Hi,” He said, a little awkward. “How’re you doin’?”

Uhura shrugged. “Alright. Been home too long, itchy feet. Yourself?”

The Doctor found he didn’t want to answer, so he simply mirrored her movement. “So, what’s all this about?”
“Can’t I just have missed you or something?” He raised an eyebrow. One did not send an urgent message to someone’s PADD on a secure channel with dinner in mind. “Okay, fine. I think Spock is up to something.”

Bones furrowed his brow, genuinely unsure what to make of this. “What? How come?”

She poured him a glass of water. “I dunno. He’s barely talked to me, not that he’s the best at initiating conversations at the best of times, but, you know, even he gets lonely. And I went with some of our potential new recruits up to the Enterprise today to have them help with repairs, and he’s had Scotty focussing on a shuttlecraft for the last day and a half instead of the ship itself.”

“A shuttlecraft? Why?”

They paused whilst the waiter took his order.

“I don’t know. There’s bunks in there, and a tiny sickbay. I don’t like it. It looks like it’s meant for a long journey, and he ordered that shuttle to have warp five!” She bit off too much bread and chewed it aggressively.

“You think he’s going somewhere?”

She struggled to swallow and washed her food down with a gulp of water. She resisted Jim’s bad influence in all things but table manners, it seemed. Maybe she was just enjoying the freedom of slobbery that not dating a Vulcan afforded.

“I think he’s going to take Jim somewhere.” She said at last. “I think he still thinks we’re under attack.”

Leonard digested the information for a long moment. His home-brand neuroticism was inclined to agree. “He might be right. But what’s to protect him out in space in a dingy?”

“What indeed…” She looked pensively at some houmous and murmured. “…I asked Chekov to look into that weapon Section 31 had.”

“The parasite?” Bones wanted to know.

“Eat something,” she gestured at the bread. “No. The weird thing that stopped us dead in space. Nothing should be able to slow something traveling at a quarter light-speed in real, unwarped space in that time. I asked him to speculate on the technology – energy consumption, whether there was some kind of refectory period on it, whether it could be used from a ship at warp. You know.”

“Make sure there’s some kinda automatic alert for if that thing takes off. I’m not having him draggin’ Jim across the galaxy in the state they’re in without a goddamn doctor!”

“Already done. I ordered double rations on board too. You never know.”

They sat in companionable silence for a few minutes until their main meal was placed before them.

“Do you happen to know a nurse named Christine…?” He asked as he filled his plate.
Jim watched Spock correct the cashier’s diction for the second time in a row, trying to place exactly when the Commander’s harsh look had lost its severity. The teenager cowered beneath his level voice. For Jim, that offensively sharp hairline had somehow become an endearing feature; the geometric points of his ears sensitive and delicate instruments for hearing and not a terrifying folly to a cold outer hull.

“No, Plumeek not plumik.” Spock said emphatically at the unfortunate civilian who had dared to attempt to read the label off the fruit sticker.

The kid clearly recognised them, the hands shaking slightly worse than the voice as Jim received the change. “Yes sir, plowmeek, sorry sir.”

Spock opened his mouth but Kirk closed it by dragging him bodily from the till and loading him up with shopping. “Don’t. Just.”

He smiled unavoidably at the idea of Spock doing chores with him. It was odd, how naturally they’d fallen straight from one situation to another, how they were able to get along without the hierarchy or the mission or the danger. They stood outside the store for a minute to decide where to go next, settling on home due to the overcast sky.

He realised that he was still touching Spock’s bicep. He knew he ought to let the hand fall, but for some reason he didn’t, deciding instead to test and see how long it would take before Spock actually chose to act and gain back some of his lost personal space, thumb running circles over the muscle through his own jumper that Spock was wearing.

“I used to work tills in that store,” He said. “You got some really weird customers. A guy once tried to pay me in gum collected off old style stamps and envelopes- like a whole block of it, with his spit on.” Where on Earth had this anecdote come from?

In the moment of recklessness in which one realises it is possible to simply jump from a high place, he let his hand trail slowly down the arm, talking as they walked. He squeezed his First Officer’s elbow, just barely kneading the flesh, stroking as absently as he could down the arm to the wrist, as though it was only moving out of consideration for gravity.

“And another one, this woman came in with a baby and tried to give it to me to hold as a deposit on her shopping while she went to get her purse from home.”

The words came out of him in torrents as his fingertips brushed the bottom of Spock’s palm. He could feel the shudder running up it. Suddenly the sky opened and he let go automatically to protect his head as a huge water droplet fell directly on top of it.

He ran and Spock walked briskly to the bridge over the English River and scrambled down the bank under it for shelter.

Jim stood and looked out at the rain falling on the grey water, rippling and disturbing its surface. He could still feel the slight heat of Spock’s palm against the tips of his fingers.

A crunch to his right had him spinning around to check for the disturbance, but as his eyes adjusted to the gloom under the bridge they made out only Spock retracting his foot from having stepped on
a particularly crunchy leaf.

He did not meet Jim’s eyes to acknowledge his illogical behaviour, and Kirk opened his mouth to comment before shutting it with a clack of teeth. This, he realised, was what Spock looked like when he was safe. Under a bridge with just the two of them he could indulge something so frivolously human without inspecting it further. Perhaps that was what he’d had with Uhura; the freedom to be illogical without it being picked at or highlighted by others in the only moments he allowed himself to be free of the impossible standards he held himself to.

Jim reached out again, obviously deliberate this time, and caught Spock’s arm at the elbow. Body heat transferred easily through the damp jumper Spock had donned, even in the absence of predicted rainfall to protect against the usually mild Iowan early fall.

“Cold?” He asked, his voice taking on a pleading edge without meaning it.

Spock did not answer, focussing instead on suppressing any physiological responses that might indicate his current state.

“Come on, you’re allowed to shiver at least. It’s not a sign of weakness to get cold when you’re soaked through.” He scoffed, taking advantage of the excuse to rub both of Spock’s arms briskly through his sleeves. The half-Vulcan in question stood mutely frozen to the spot in cold or indecision for several moments.

Jim’s hotter breath condensed in the chilled air around Spock’s face in puffs that cycled through their lungs a second and third time before dissipating. Moisture from the human’s lungs hung on Spock’s cheeks and lips, cold then hot from the circulation of air between them, his upper arms warmed where Jim’s fingers rested. It was the most intimate position Spock had willingly allowed himself to become involved in in a very long time. He gripped his Captain’s forearms and permitted the hairs on his own to raise and insulate him in trapped air.

“I am cold.” He admitted.

Jim looked searchingly at him, close enough for Spock’s breath to hitch slightly as he opened his mouth. “Let’s get a cab.” He said, treading on the moment.

The Commander’s hands immediately fell away from Jim, shivering almost imperceptibly as he reached for his communicator.

“That would be wise.”

Christine clucked her tongue at him. Technically her shift had ended half an hour ago.

Bones rubbed at his forehead and waved his hand around as though holding a sword.

“How has that got two words?” She asked.

“How has that got two words?” He demanded.

“Well how am I meant to know what it is if you can’t mime? Why would you even ask to play Charades if this is your standard of play?”
“What? I’ll have you know in college I came second in the Charades championships.” He feigned offense.

“Second of two, apparently. You’re crap at this. What even was that?” She laughed mercilessly at his attempt to mime riding a broomstick. “Look, I dunno what pornos you’ve been watching but…”

“It’s Harry fucking Potter.” He gestured out to the room as though it contained a tangible token of her ignorance.

She looked incredulous. “I don’t ever remember that last scene in Harry Potter…”

“You wouldn’t,” He sat heavily in the chair next to hers. “But if you wanna re-watch it some time you can come back to my Chamber of Secrets and I’ll re-enact the bit where they drink from the Goblet of Fire…”

Her amusement was laced with disgust but she still looked at him fondly. “Well look at that, we found something you suck at worse than Charades, flirting. I think that might literally be the worse chat-up line I ever heard, you know that?”

They both laughed. It was good to do this, muck around with someone who at least technically didn’t have to be there. He understood Jim not visiting – the man hated hospitals and he could tell that Kirk didn’t deal well with the idea of his friends being hurt, but that didn’t do anything to stop him getting lonely.

“So, how is Nyota?” Chapel scraped her chair around to face him.

“She’s doing okay, I think.” Leonard told her. “I mean, there’s only so well one can do, but as her doctor I think she’ll be fine, provided nothing goes to hell in the next couple of months.”

Christine saw straight through him like his thoughts were suspended in Perspex and not flesh. “You don’t sound very confident that that won’t happen. What are you worried about?”

He sealed his lips tightly.

The Nurse sighed, crossing one knee over the other. “Off the record.”

Every day, Bones had to make massive, important life-or-death decisions. Whether to operate; what dosages to administer; whether it was worth trying to get Jim to do a full physical. He was woefully ill-equipped to decide who to trust with sensitive information when someone’s personal privacy was not involved.

“Come on Leo, as a friend.” She impeached. God only knew how much he needed a friend.

“…Uhura thinks we’re still in the shit… With someone high up in Section 31. We’re not sure who even heads the organisation, but Spock seems weary and something’s just not right.”

Christine watched him, her mind working almost loud enough to hear. “I might be able to get hold of that kind of information.” She said at length.
Apologies

Spock would have liked to ask about Jim’s dream last night, but his experience of human society told him this would be impolitic. Also, he was certain Jim had nearly held his hand. He was very confused.

Holding hands had very different connotations among humans than Vulcans. However, from what he could tell, it was still an intimate gesture that he had observed Jim doing with another male precisely seven times. Twice of those were with Bones when one seemed in peril, and once had been in a similar situation with him. One of the remainder had been to comfort a dying Ensign, and another when giving a Lieutenant the news that his father had suddenly died. The rest were even more confusing and made Spock very uncomfortable by their inherent ambiguity.

Spock thought that they were having a pleasant time; the “fire” was electric but not out of place and its warmth was an enjoyable contrast to the cold and wet outside. The food was a little over-salted, as sodium-rich beings like humans were wont to do, but good, and the chess game they had just played had been well-matched, the conversation stimulating.

It threw him that Jim was considering him with an expression a lot like he had recently affixed the board, despite his move being over. He kept his silence for an unusually long period of time, holding it over both of them as though he were about to fill it. Humans, Spock had been duly informed, tended to view such silences as a weakness in the conversation or those having them, but he was prevented from speaking by the feeling that Jim did indeed have something he wanted to say.

Spock moved his queen out of danger from the discovered attack Jim’s rooks had formed, like Jim knew he would; and Jim took his bishop like Spock had known Jim would. They each had a their and their opponents next moves fully planned out, perhaps all the way through to check mate if the other made a mistake in the next few turns.

Despite his anticipation, Jim’s voice still startled the Vulcan sitting across from him on the worn-out sofa. “What do you feel about what we did?” He asked, not even glancing up from the board. The intensity of his expression was not lost on Spock, even if it was wasted on his queen.

“Clarify?” Spock demanded as he blocked Jim’s rook with a pawn he was fully prepared to sacrifice in the exchange. The queen would protect it anyway, probably.

Jim slid a pawn diagonally into the space Spock’s blocking pawn had just vacated.

“En passant,” He claimed distractedly, stealing his opponent’s pawn away. “On Tau Ceti. When you were, you know… In your thing.”

Spock used his remaining knight to take the pawn before it could be swapped for a queen, progressing them into the endgame, and willing his own obtuseness into being. “I do not know.”

If his First Officer wanted to play stupid, clearly Kirk was going to match him and pretend not to notice his disinclination to talk on the subject, even if it meant talking about the uncomfortable things himself. “Your Pon Farr. How do you feel about what we did about it?”

Spock paused, until Jim was no longer certain he was going to answer. The room was quiet except for the workings of the Vulcan’s throat.

“It was the logical solution.” He said at last, feeling Jim’s gaze piercing his skull.
“That’s an answer to a different question than I asked,” His Captain replied as though correcting a small child. *You know what you were meant to say.*

Spock lost his bishop. “I feel… Ashamed.” He knew he was saying the wrong thing, but he was also unwilling to lie and unwilling to keep the truth from Jim in a matter that concerned him so specifically. He was ashamed, for any number of reasons.

He could see Jim struggling to reconcile disappointment with a genuine desire to support Spock in whatever he did feel, and it made the shame all the worse. He felt the need to elaborate, contrary to his own intentions. “I hurt you.” He said simply, hoping his meaning would somehow come through.

*Yeah, you did.* Jim knew he couldn’t say it out loud. No one had ever been ashamed of sleeping with him before. *Don’t ask questions if you don’t wanna know the answer.* His own mother echoed in his head. Spock didn’t look ashamed; he looked meek and in control, an odd combination that he maintained almost unfailingly.

“I’m not sorry I did it.” He told Spock, because what else could he tell him?

“I know,” Spock managed, fingerling his remaining pawn a little absentely. “Neither am I.”

It felt good being Bones again. Not that Jim was here, but sickbay was, and that was what mattered right now. The juxtaposition of brand new sparkling equipment and the battered, worn pieces cheek-by-jowl of machinery which had inexplicably survived intact enough to remain in use felt wholesome and lived in, like a place of recuperation should.

And if supervising the refit of sickbay gave Leonard the opportunity to have some custom upgrades made to a certain shuttlecraft, what of it? And why shouldn’t he be talking to one Christine Chapel about giving her the tour, when as his nurse she was meant to check up on him now and then? Surely she should see him in his native environment?

“What the hell is this?” He demanded of an engineer carrying a sheet of pastel pink plasteel.

“It’s for the women’s bathroom...” The man stammered.

“It’s disgusting, get it out o’ my sickbay. I need those bathrooms clean, how’s anyone meant to see bits of blood and skin against… Against *salmon*?” He gestured wildly. Really it was a repulsive shade.

“It’s more *rose*...” The man muttered. He backed out of sickbay at the look on Bones’ face.

His fowl mood was broken at the sight of a familiar face. Sulu shuffled in around a technician coming to fit some new and oddly orange piece of equipment. Honestly, what was it with medical companies and pastel colours?

“Hey there Sulu,” McCoy reached out to pat his back, thought better of it, and drew him into a brief hug.

“Hey Doc,” Sulu looked a little worse for wear, ragged around the edges despite his clean shave. Still, he looked far better than he had on their last meeting. “What brings you up here?”
“I could say the same thing! I’m just making sure no one fucks up my sickbay. Yourself?”

Hikaru sighed. “I just… I don’t know. I wanted to have one last look… I’m thinking I might resign…”

“Oh Christ,” Bones pulled him back into a one armed hug. “What’s Pavel say to that?”

Sulu smiled, bittersweet. “I haven’t told him. But I can’t watch another crop of kids die up here…”

Leonard wondered when he’d become complacent with the idea himself, so much so that he’d not even considered not coming back, that being on the ship preparing for the next round was part of his recovery from the last one. He squeezed Hikaru’s shoulder, trying to feel his body heat as though remembering for the first time to be grateful that the Pilot was alive when so many of his graduating class hadn’t even made to the actual graduation. He felt resentful on Sulu’s behalf; the man was practically born to be either a pilot or a captain. It was a waste to see him doing ground work.

“I’m sorry,” He said in his best Doctor voice, meaning it. “I’ll look out for him.”

Sulu pursed his lips tightly. “Thanks. Thank you. I’m sorry too.”

“Nyota!” Christine shouted over the buzz of the café. Uhura looked up from her table and cracked a smile.

“Hey! You’re early!” She looked at the clock, despite having obviously been early herself.

Chapel squashed herself between the other customers and fell heavily into the free chair at Uhura’s table. “Long time no see.”

“A long time indeed,” Christine agreed. “Two years at least.”

They chatted leisurely about Life whilst waiting for their coffees, Uhura having ordered her usual from memory without her.

“So,” Nyota snapped her fingers against the edge of the table. “Down to business. What did you manage to find out?”

Christine pulled out her PADD and pressed her finger tip to it for analysis to open a secure, unlabeled document. She looked about herself, checking for other nosey customers or security cameras, but there were none of either with a clear line of sight.

“Well. The man you’re looking for is one Ellis Jonston, whose name I think is an adopted name for the job. I couldn’t find a picture of him, but I could pull up his psych reports. I have two, one from six months before his promotion to head of Section 31, and one from two months after. He was meant to have one last June and he was probably due for one in February or March this year, but there’s nothing on the files. Either he was a no show or got out of it, or the records were wiped.”

“Huh.” Uhura hummed to herself. “Weird. You reckon he had something to hide?”

Christine raised her eyebrow. “Of course he has something to hide, he’s essentially head of the
secret service.”

“What about others in the Section 31 hierarchy?” Nyota ignored the admonishment.

“Well, that’s where it gets interesting – more interesting, that is. It seems like the second in command is missing. Her name is just listed as “Agent Hassing” – most of the personnel only have one name on their “public” medical file – And she’s been missing for almost two months now, no word from her. Looks like she was posted on a vessel which was destroyed or something, but her body was the only one not recovered. Best part is, she’s one of the few with a spouse – and as per their own regulations, they can’t marry someone outside Section 31 – And all married couples are accounted for in their records, except the ID of her spouse, and that of one Ellis Jonston.”

“Her husband?” Uhura nodded. “Reckon you could do some more digging for me?”
State Secrets

So in the end the pink plasteel had ended up as a slide-away privacy screen between the medical/science and the sleeping areas of the shuttle. Wouldn’t want it to go to waste, after all, even if it was obnoxiously pink. Bones surreptitiously stocked it with an unreasonable quantity of supplies, both medical and otherwise, and had a surgical lamp fitted to the ceiling above the fold-up biobed. And maybe it was true that he had co-opted enough equipment to run a tiny sickbay, but one could never be too careful. People often held Leonard up as an example and lied to the contrary, but Bones knew he was right. All those years of trying to be too careful (he always failed, but he put in a good effort) had paid off in the form of Jim’s on-going state of aliveness, despite the Captain’s best attempts discontinue his own existence.

“What are you doing?” Sulu asked. Pavel whirled to face him, slapping his PADD face down on the desk.

“Nozing important.” Chekov was a terrible liar, and an even worse one for the fact that he reluctantly turned the PADD back over and showed it to him, like a child caught stealing sweets.

“Ellis Jonston,” Hikaru read. “Is this a Starfleet Intelligence file? Tell me you didn’t hack this…” Pavel’s guilty face was answer enough.

“Uhura asked me to do it, I—“

“No.” Sulu knew he sounded stubborn. “Tell her no. Pasha these aren’t public files or even normal government info you’re hacking. These people don’t file law suits, they make people disappear. I can’t stand to see this—“

Pavel snatched the PADD back, standing so quickly the chair threatened to tip over backwards. “You do not beliewe I can do it. Zhank you for your wote of confidence, it’s always good to know you hawe faizh in me.”

Hikaru sighed and held both of Chekov’s arms loosely to prevent him from storming out. “You know that’s not what I meant or why I said it,” He sighed and sat heavily into the desk chair, pulling a reluctant Pavel down on top of him. He never had recovered enough to fuck him into that bulkhead. Now he supposed he never would. “Sorry. Sorry. I just… Know I can’t protect you, and I hate it.”

Chekov shifted so that they were comfortably chest to back and craned his neck round to watch him. “I know, Hikaru. But as my babushka used to say, it is better to take zhe risk and break zhan to just be ornamental.”

Sulu couldn’t help but laugh, stroking small circles onto the soft skin of an exposed hip where Chekov’s shirt had ridden up. “You told me she said that about that vase you broke.”

Pavel shrugged. “Mere technicality.”

“Technically,” Sulu said against Pavel’s neck, kissing between words, “You… Are… Hacking… State secrets. The least you can do is tell me what they are.”
Chekov made a noise of pleasure or complaint as Hikaru sucked a red mark onto the place below his ear, but started spilling the beans immediately. “Nngh… Zhere is a man name Ellis Jonston who is zhe head of Section thirty one. Uhura asked me to find his file.” Pavel squirmed until they were face to face and crotch to crotch, the chair rolling back across the room away from the offending PADD.

Sulu lost time as he realised what they were doing. He’d thought a lot about whether they’d have sex, and how they’d do it, and concluded it would happen one of two ways; either it would be something Pavel used to comfort him, or it would be angry, desperate sex just to try and feel something. Apparently Chekov had thought about this too, and decided that for his first time, he deserved something better. Sulu felt guilty.

He also felt horny, apparently, as some part of his mind chose to disabuse him from that train of thought to take note of the fact that they were up against his bedroom wall, and that he was sucking on the mark he’d made minutes ago in the study, lapping at Pavel’s neck and biting. When he pulled back he had to ask, “Do you want this?”

The boy grabbed his cock roughly through his jeans. “Do you?”

He began unbuttoning Pavel’s shirt. “We’re gonna need lube if you’re planning on losing the second half of your virginity tonight.”

A hand appeared by his ear, bottle in hand. “Already sorted.” Chekov smiled like he might be in trouble but didn’t care. It was cute, Hikaru thought a he kissed that smile right off his face. He stroked the milky skin the shirt revealed as it dropped to the floor, fingers dancing over freckles he’d mapped by heart.

He bent down and Pavel reached over him and pulled his t-shirt up over his head, aiming it for the laundry basket in the corner but succeeding in throwing it out of the window instead.

“I hawe finally got rid of zhat horrible shirt, Hikaru,” He giggled.

Oh well. He’d pick them up out the street later. “I’ll get rid of these awful pants and we’ll be even, then.” He wasn’t going to throw Chekov’s jeans out the window; they cupped his cock and ass too tightly and no way was Sulu going to give that up. Well, except for for the real thing, as he did now, pushing them down to Pavel’s ankles. The front of Pavel’s boxers sprung forward but they were disappointingly loose compared to the jeans. “And these terrible shorts have got to go.”

He didn’t remove them though, just held Chekov’s wrists away and nuzzled him through them, opening his mouth and sucking gently on the head through the fabric, tasting salt and desire. It was familiar territory, they’d got this far before.

“No!” Pavel pulled his wrist away and pushed Sulu’s head back. “Get on the bed.”

Despite it being Sulu who had Pavel pinned, he did as ordered. The Ensign yanked his pants down without undoing the fly so that his underwear was dragged with them.

Without knowing why, Hikaru froze. He pulled in his legs to cover himself and rolled over on his side. He wasn’t worthy. He didn’t deserve this. It would only hurt Pavel more.

The boy in question sat down on the bed and sighed. “Sorry Hikaru…”

And that was the worst of it; Pavel was apologising for things Sulu shouldn’t have done.

Eventually a blanket was placed over him and Chekov went back to the study to continue his
research. Sulu didn’t deserve to live.

It was an internal battle to keep Jim in Spock’s company for the rest of the day with the memory of their brief conversation bitter on the back of his tongue, but he owed it to Spock not to leave. He’d already begrudgingly accepted that he clearly wanted something from the other man, even if he wasn’t going to speculate on its precise nature. Now he just needed a way of extending his policy of not exploring latent desires to his unconscious mind, and he was set. He shuddered at the memory of waking up with Spock in his dream, that night before the advent of a certain Pon Farr.

Apparently he was doing terribly at ignoring the desires in question, because his mind had just gone straight to sex, sex with Spock watching and sex with Spock. Well it was hardly surprising given that the Spock in question had been relentlessly cock-blocking him, as far as he was concerned, even from imaginary sex. He couldn’t jerk off in the shower without the bastard knowing. Jim cringed inwardly at the idea that Spock might home in on his dreams, a paranoia he’d always had about dreaming of others, but one that seemed far more likely now than it had before.

“Could you read my mind if you wanted to?” He asked despite knowing the answer, after they’d finished their evening meal.

“Essentially that is within my capabilities, although the concept of mind-reading as you view it has a distinctly human bias.” Spock cocked his head curiously.

“What about without touching me?”

“You, at this distance, yes, I could intercept thoughts, feelings, experiences of your own. It is something I am generally able to block out.”

“Generally?”

“That is what I said.”

“Okay.” What else could Jim say? He couldn’t ask about dreams; the only thing worse than thinking Spock might know was knowing Spock knew; and if he asked, Spock would answer and then Spock would know that Jim knew that he knew and illicit knowledge would spiral endlessly into an ever-more awkward friendship. Probably. Better to live in ignorance and maintain plausible deniability.

“Spock,” He mumbled without really realising it.

“Captain?” The man in question

“Jim.” He sighed.

“Jim?”

“It’s nothing Spock.” He looked around for something to draw the focus away, already bottling out and feeling more than a little sick at what he’d resolved to ask next. “Urgh, screw it. Do you want to go out for dinner tomorrow?”

Seconds ticked away whilst Spock sought an appropriate response. “Provided I will not be a
hindrance to your plans for the evening, and the restaurant you intend to dine at serves vegetarian dishes I would not be against accompanying you.”

Kirk rubbed his eyelids, wondering whether Spock was being deliberately obtuse because he didn’t want to go out to dinner with him, or if he’d simply missed the implications completely. He rolled his eyes behind the closed lids. “Alright Spock. Do you like Italian?”

“No.”
“For god’s sake Spock, loosen up!” Jim groaned as an unnecessary 0600 hour wake-up was enforced. Later he would wonder when exactly Spock had become so familiar as to barge into his room and wake him, but right now, he just wanted a lie-in. “We’re on leave!”

“Maintaining a sleep pattern is invaluable for a human’s mental health. Also, your animal requires your attention.” Spock told him.

“My animal?” He peeked out through the covers.

“…Violetta. Requires you.” Spock held out the animal awkwardly as she made herself all arms and legs. When Jim failed to take her, he hugged her back to his body in an attempt to collate the mass of limbs and fur into a more portable cat.

Kirk sat up just to take in the sight of Spock holding the cat, who struggled weakly.

“Did she wake you up?” Jim asked.

Spock inclined his head. “She did. I believe that my occupation of her bedroom has come with conditions, however, I am unsure of how best to appease her.” He looked younger, less troubled, as if she and the tiny beads of green she had raised on his arms constituted his only problems in life.

“She wants food. There’s some dried stuff in the cupboard under the sink. Just put a bowl on the floor for her.” Jim wasn’t Bones; he had no reputation for southern hospitality to live up to.

Pavel tried to push Sulu’s strange behaviour to the back of his mind as he took his finds up to the Enterprise and walked the decks to Engineering, stepping around technicians and welders all working to get her back to ship-shape.

“Meester Scott, Keenser!” He greeted when he discovered the pair off to one side, the latter emerging from a Jeffries tube.

“Hello there laddy!” Scotty clapped a greasy hand to his shoulder, smelling of engines and chemicals. “What c’n ah do for ya?”

Chekov looked round, making sure no one was listening. “I hawe found somezhing very interesting I would like you to take a look at.”

“Aye, what is it?”

Pavel held out the PADD. “I beliewe it is zhe weapon which was used against zhe Enterprise.”

“Well fuck me…”

“This creature is fickle, but pleasing.” Spock told Jim as he entered the kitchen at around 7, unable
to get back to sleep after the disturbance. The half-Vulcan was sat in a meditative position on the floor as Violetta rubbed her face on his hand. Kirk felt a twinge of jealousy that even he knew was illogical at the sight of someone else – his own cat – getting closer to Spock than he ever could. Still, the sight was... Endearing.

“I think you’ve just about summed up the domestic cat there, Spock.” He replied, a little surprised that the other man hadn’t prepared breakfast as he had the last few days. Clearly Spock appreciated cats more than he’d let on.

“It is curious that you choose to feed her does that not detract from her purpose?” The Vulcan asked without taking his eyes off of the way the “creature” arched her back when he stroked it. Jim would totally arch his back like that if Spock stroked him there. He’d do a lot of things if Spock would stroke him there. “Jim?”

“Huh?” He snapped out of his fantasy, willing his blood to return to his brain when he found it was inclined to allow gravity to take it... Down.

“The purpose of this animal is to catch rodents who would otherwise decimate a harvest.” Spock informed him like a scholarly seven year old. Spock had probably been that scholarly seven year old.

“Her purpose? Spock, you’re underestimating human weakness for fluffy things with big eyes. Cats exist just to manipulate humans into giving them food without the extra effort. They’d rule the world if only they had opposable thumbs.”

Spock’s eyebrow rose almost lazily, as though it had expected this. “Unlikely. However, in many senses if what you say is correct they do appear to be the victor of your co-evolutionary history.”

Jim thought that perhaps he was the victim of Spock’s version of a joke. Laughing he pulled the other man up off the floor, realising too late that he had his hands on both of Spock’s arms and their faces inches from each other. As some form of punishment for Spock’s obtuseness the night before, he forced the moment well into its second minute, willing his First Officer to notice some of the tension if it killed him. Spock accepted the touch as he had beneath the bridge, as though three months ago he wouldn’t have recoiled, or a month ago stumbled awkwardly back. Jim searched his face, features relaxed into their usual blank positions. If there was tension in the room, there was none in Spock’s expression.

The cat wheedled her way between their legs, crying to go out and dissolving the intensity. Jim’s fingers brushed down Spock’s arms to the wrists as he turned to open the door.

“Mary’s minge, I never thought someone would be able to use anything like this!” Scotty exclaimed as the reality of the plans sank in. His fingers pressed rainbows into the screen of the PADD.

“Who is Mary and what is a-“ Chekov began to ask.

“Don’t ask.” Scott cut him off, looking around for a chair that wasn’t available. “It doesny even make sense te make a weapon like that, it’s completely counter-intuitive!”

Keenser peeped oddly in agreement.
“Maybe it was not designed as a weapon,” Pavel speculated. “Perhaps it was meant to do
something else.”

“Like what?” Scotty wanted to know, wiping his hand on a rag which, modern cleaning devices
considered, ought to have been obsolete.

“Maybe it is part of a more advanced warp drive… If one were to create negative gravity…”

“Then ye could increase the warp around the craft an’ go maybe even intergalactic…” Scotty
finished for him.

Spock turned from his observation of a peculiarly spotted rose at the sensation of someone
watching him, expecting to see the cat’s reflective yellow-green eyes, but instead it was Jim,
wearing a black denim jacket and jeans.

“Spock, I wanted to talk to you about dinner.” Jim’s Adam’s apple bobbed.

Spock stood and straightened his shirt self-conscious by the mere fact of Kirk’s apparent
nervousness. “About what did you wish to discuss?” He enquired.

Jim swung his weight from foot to foot, trying to decide what to say. “Two things, actually…”

The First Officer simply waited as Kirk stammered.

“I was thinking we’d go into Iowa City… There’s not really any good vegetarian restaurants in
Riverside, so it really depends what kinda food you want?”

It was not the kind of question he’d expected and he was at a loss to explain how this could make
Jim’s hands sweat enough for him to wipe them on his jeans.

“I am fond of spices and dishes which do not rely on eggs or dairy.” Was all he could offer.
“Perhaps something from your equatorial region?”

“Y-yeah, sure. I’ll find somewhere…” He turned and headed back towards the house.

“Jim? You said there were two matters to discuss.”

Jim froze, still facing the front door, jaw working itself. “Dinner is a date.” He told the door.

Spock’s brain jarred momentarily while he formulated a response, but before the time he could
think of anything to say, Jim had already disappeared into the house.

Sulu was not the computer genius Chekov was, but he knew how to hack his own boyfriend’s
PADDs. It was barely an invasion of privacy on Pavel’s person, he consoled himself, and more a
criminal act against Starfleet Intelligence and the Federation. No worries, then; he typed the
necessary code and unlocked all of Pavel’s secret files.

That had been four hours ago. Now he sat pensively on the floor of his own kitchen, tea in one
hand and hard copies of various threatening machines and stellar cartography maps in the other. The damn kid couldn’t keep out of trouble (he could sympathise very much with one Leonard H. McCoy at this stage in the proceedings). The thought of Pavel ever coming close to Ellis Jonston or the weird and terrifying experiments the man was running ever again made Hikaru feel physically sick. The initial shake had left his hands now and been replaced by a need to understand as much of what was going on as possible. There was so much encrypted information in front of him that even Chekov couldn’t have read all of these files, and Sulu was digging up things he wished he’d never seen: Massacres and entire small towns ceasing to exist; new agents blackmailed and press-ganged into existence after the losses in the destruction of the London HQ; ships with entirely sealed, inescapable prison cells that could be released into space to let their occupants die of dehydration or the eventual cold; experiments in weaponising animals and children; diseases that targeted only one sentient species and that only Section 31 held the cure for.

Then he cracked the encryption for one last document and immediately regretted seeing it in the way that one hopes covering one’s eyes will provide protection from an oncoming danger.

At first, he thought he was reading the order that had brought them running back to Tau Ceti in the first place. The subject line read “Assassination of Captain and the Crew Enterprise”, orders given by Ellis Jonston. Everything seemed just as he expected it, until he read the timestamp. September 28th 2260. September 28th. Eight days ago.

Sulu scrambled against the floor, heart pounding in his throat.

The door banged open and he jumped backwards, only to see Pavel’s bewildered features on the other side.
Awkward First Dates

There ought to be universal rules for personal relationships, Spock thought, with recommended scripts and wordings to ensure no disparity or ambiguity of meaning. Perhaps the word date could have a mandatory subject and object so as to make absolutely clear who the date was for. Or whether it was a more casual affair, such as a play date between human children, which he was reliably informed had no romantic or sexual connotations. Perhaps Jim was going on a date and inviting Spock along as an additional guest out of some kind of obligation. Spock did not know.

Well. Spock did know. But he was not as certain as he wished to be, and this was an area in which he was particularly resistant to assumption.

Either way, Jim and he were on a shuttle to Iowa city, dressed in what Spock considered to be vaguely more formal attire than usual – he was aware of such things as semi-formal and smart-casual but the distinctions eluded him. Jim seemed nervous, bouncing on the balls of his feet as they waited to board, tapping his feet whilst they sat down. He heard the human’s stomach growl, but by virtue of the bond and proximity could tell that he wasn’t as hungry as one going to dinner usually was. When his communicator pipped he jumped but did not answer. Spock was grateful for Jim’s choice of public transportation, even if it meant putting up with the smell of sweat, greasy food, urine and poorly chosen perfume from the other passengers. It was less intimate than a taxi or private transport, and there was less room for him to have to make incorrect assumptions.

The shuttle was so loud, in fact, by virtue of what Jim informed him was a “hen night” setting out, that they barely managed to converse at all, and Spock was left to his own thoughts on the matter.

And if he did think about it, it was very much up to Spock to decide what he wanted to happen; he was unfettered by other relationships; his only break-up was without misgivings, and he was not on active duty and would not be for a minimum of two and a half months, until the Enterprise’s final checks.

Bones kept his eyes locked ahead, barely able to see Christine in his peripheral vision as she looked out of the transparent aluminium of the observation deck onto the night sky. They were actually getting a pretty good blast of the old Sol, but without the cloak of atmosphere the sun’s light was bright and intense but concentrated even through the shielded metal, not diffused throughout the view screen so that it was possible to observe the other stars. Their orbit held them closer to Venus than Earth ever strayed, and even though the close in distance was a drop in the ocean, the Morning and Evening star still seemed brighter.

Or it would have, if you weren’t an aviophobe shitting yourself about being on a space ship, let alone an observation deck in space, with your back to the cosmos and your eyes trained on the door to the bulkhead across. This was a failure of a romantic gesture.

“It’s so beautiful!” Chris exclaimed in awe. “I’ve been up here before, but it gets me every time. When you can see the sun like this it just hits you that it’s all really there, stars, in 3D – you can go to those other worlds and see those other suns. It just makes your heart beat that bit faster, just for being alive…”

“Feels like palpitations to me, nurse.” McCoy wasn’t going to have a panic attack. That would be
stupid. He’d been fine on the Enterprise for years, it was just that the words “bordering on structurally unsound” had definitely been said in a subspace broadcast. He was traumatised. He couldn’t be expected to be one hundred per cent fine, could he?”

“Head between your legs.” She said blandly without looking away from Ursa Major, harder to pick out now the stars and galaxies in between weren’t blotted out by the stratosphere.

“Thanks, I am a doctor you know.”

“I do know. What I’m surprised about is that you’re technically an astronaut.” She spared him a sceptical but mirthful glance.

“That makes two of us.”

Jim fidgeted under the intensity of Spock’s undivided attention. The Commander was looking at him as though he were about to announce whether an unstoppable asteroid was on a collision course with their current location. He was certain the Vulcan could smell the nervousness on him, aftershave be damned. You didn’t need telepathy to that Kirk was shitting bricks.

Several times he tried to start the important conversation that he knew they needed to have, but he always bottled out; after Spock began picking through his appetizer – flatbread of some kind – with a fork, their conversation about whether an organisation like the Federation was inherently colonial died a miserable death, leaving them trapped in the kind of awkward silence they hadn’t had for the last two years before Tau Ceti.

After five minutes of careful mastication, Spock looked up at him with those piercing eyes, seeming to notice that the silence was not the companionable one he’d originally thought.

“Nyota,” He began tangentially, “Told me upon the termination of our romantic entanglement that I do not discuss things properly with those they concern.”

He offered no more and Jim was forced to ask, licking his suddenly dry lips. “And you’re concerned with me?”

Spock gave him a considered nod. “Indeed, you are most… Yourself.”

“Is that a good thing?”

“History would say so. You have done many a remarkable thing.”

Jim scoffed at his sincerity. Captain or no, he couldn’t have done half of what he did without Spock, much less the rest of the crew. “And what would you say?”

Spock sliced a pinkish beetroot-like vegetable into several small but geometrically perfect tetrahedrons and a larger number of smaller shavings as he paused, not stalling but thinking.

“You are already aware that I harbour great affection for you. You doubtlessly deduced as much from my distress upon your death.”

“But?” Jim urged.

“I did not say ‘but’.” An eyebrow twitched just a little.
“You’re about to.” A part of Kirk sighed inwardly. “But” had always been his least favourite word, and even here when it could mean something positive, he felt the risk in the single syllable.

“…However,” At least Spock still had his stubbornness. “You are also of course aware of a rather drastic change in our situation. It would be illogical to deny that the nature of my affection towards you has changed somewhat as a result.”

Jim’s pulse juddered in his throat even as Spock looked no more nervous than usual, except for the little pyramids on the edge of his plate. His gaze was concentrated on a point just to Kirk’s left, but again he seemed to be thinking rather than avoiding.

Spock seemed to expect a reply. “I guess that’s true for me as well.”

His First Officer’s voice slipped into a tone that Kirk wished he’d drawn upon at their not inconsiderable disciplinary hearings, but which apparently was reserved for dates. “Jim, if I might speak plainly, I am beginning to realise the truth to another issue raised by Lieutenant Uhura on the nature of my relationships. They are, by virtue of poor communication, equivocal. Clearly, you have invited me here this evening for the purpose of clarifying certain aspects of my feelings for you and vice versa.”

Their main meal was plopped down in front of them, but Jim no longer felt like eating. Spock didn’t allow him time to interject after thanking the waitress before he carried on speaking. “I will not obfuscate the matter further by talking about non-specific changes to emotion. The bond between Vulcans who have mated or been bonded as children is strong. It need not be permanent. It is not in this case like the human tradition of marriage, as the ceremony involved was not performed. If you wish, we may go to New Vulcan and my father or my counterpart can surely arrange for us to begin the process of disengaging from one another. There is time as the crew is in recovery, and the next batch of recruits to make up our numbers will not graduate until January, which is the earliest time we can expect to take on early graduates to make up our numbers. Alternatively, the bond, as we have been calling it, is more specifically a mental link which if kept could prove us-”

“Spock!” Jim clutched at the air for him to shut up, reeling from the torrent of information. “Thank you. You’re right about me wanting us to be here to talk about relationships, but to be honest the only question I want the answer to is do you want to be in one with me? D’you really think Uhura was talking about logistics when she said you didn’t talk enough? Because seriously, if there’s one thing you’ve got covered is the practicalities.”

Spock’s mouth finally seemed to stop working and he lapsed into a minute of silence borrowed from earlier, looking sternly at his untouched tagine as though it held the answers. He bit back a response about how regardless of its nature, they had “a relationship”, and settled instead on turning the question around. “If I did wish a romantic relationship with you, would you return my inclination?”

Jim’s mouth felt like he’d been eating anti-perspirent and he took a mouthful of his food to delay answering. He wasn’t sure exactly what it was, although it was definitely based on chicken. His fingers were unhappy about having to hold the fork and he dropped it, slumping back in his chair to look helplessly at it where it lay on the floor, a metaphor for how the last few months had made him feel. Spock picked it up and requested a clean one from a teenager in an apron.

Since their conversation had devolved into a question-and-question session, Kirk covered himself that way. “Do Vulcans kiss like humans do? Or is it too illogical?”

Spock’s eyes darkened for a moment, as though Jim had said something wrong. Then he reached
out over the table. Kirk looked down at them distrustfully. “You just hold hands?”

“Not precisely. Both human and Vulcan hands contain many nerve endings, but those in Vulcans are both extremely capable of generating extremely strong action potentials that can pass from partner to partner, it is what allows us to mind meld. It is stimulating.” He took Jim’s hand from the table in one of his own, and reached out with the index and middle finger of the other to stroke it.

For a second, electricity danced up the inside of Kirk’s finger, making the muscle curl slightly of its own volition, but before he could truly identify the sensation Spock’s hands withdrew.

“Why did you stop?” Jim asked before he could clamp his jaw shut.

“Such interactions are considered lewd in public. It is improper to kiss more than just the fingertips in public.” Spock recounted the information dispassionately like a third person observer.

“Oh.” Jim wished he hadn’t said that. Spock’s impassiveness slipped into mild distress for a millisecond before his face set, a little more tight lipped than before. “I mean, that makes sense. Not that I didn’t like it, or… Anything. God, why is this conversation so difficult?”

Spock turned back to his food and finally managed to eat a mouthful before replying. “Things that are important usually are.”

They let the conversation drift as they ate, talking about nothing in particular. When the teenager returned to offer the dessert menu it became obvious that the decision was less to do with wanting sweets and entirely a matter of whether they were going to continue their discussion.

“I’ll come back in a minute…” The girl told their indecisive expressions, smiling awkwardly.

“Jim, are you still hungry? Vulcans require less food, and thus I need not eat any more.”

“Okay so firstly, I don’t intend on leaving here without having said what I came here to say, and secondly, I always have a whole separate stomach for dessert.” Actually, they’d taken so long to eat their food that he still was kind of hungry.

“I am accustomed to human anatomy. Humans have only one stomach.” Spock told him confidently.

“Only adults. All children have a savoury stomach and a sweet stomach. I just still have mine.” He chuckled at the Vulcan’s serious face, but Spock mulled it over for a further moment.

“Are you teasing me? I do not understand why a separate stomach would be required for sugared foods in childhood and not in adulthood when none of your recent ancestors or close relatives possess such an organ.”

“It’s a lie children tell their parents when they say they are too full for their food, but they still want dessert.”

“I see. And you do want dessert?”

Jim knew he was delaying now, having conversations about food related idioms and human biology. “I don’t want to get rid of the bond thing with you. I don’t want this to be the last time we ever go on a date. I like you.”

Spock’s lips twitched. “That is agreeable. I like you a great deal, Jim. I further propose that we
accept the menu and you may decide whether to order anything once it is here, as our waitress is returning.”

Kirk grinned stupidly as the girl came back. She looked at him remedially and with more than a hint of discomfort before offering the menu again.

“Are we going out?” He was now too distracted to read about cakes.

A familiar eyebrow rose. “As the phrase generally pertains to dating and we are, according to your own earlier admission, on a date, then I believe we are indeed “going out.”

“Do I get a kiss?” Jim knew he looked lecherous and he didn’t care; Spock expected no less of him.

Nonetheless, he still stared Kirk down for pride’s sake before offering his first two fingers.

“I believe it is the custom to do such a thing when dating.”

“Hey, first base isn’t so bad for a first date!”

“Jim,” Spock said, wryly pressing the tips of their fingers together briefly. “This hardly counts as what is commonly referred to as “first base”.”
It was late by the time they left the shuttlestop at Riverside, and definitely far too cold for Spock to be comfortable. Still, his body tingled with substances analogous to oxytocin and although he knew it to be an untruth, he felt as though he could happily – no, happiness was a human emotion. Uncompromisedly – stay out all night if Jim desired it. It was not enough to stop his body trying to shiver when the rain came down.

He let his Captain duck them under the bridge, air humid and thick with the scent of Jim and rain and something sweet.

Jim took both his hands without thinking, trying to rub the warmth back into his fingers. The contrast of heat and cool was more than a little painful, but as the temperature gradient lessened, the discomfort was replaced by a tiny thrill at doing something so illicit in public. Spock banished a blush when Kirk exhaled on their joint hands to warm them, hot gushes of air that condensed into mist. Then he blinked, seeming to realise the significance and tried to drop Spock’s hands; they did not fall.

“We could call another cab.” Jim proffered.

“Unnecessary,” Spock said, as unwilling to have someone witness their intimacy as he was to relinquish it. “It is forecast only to be a light shower, and we are less than a mile from home.”

Jim’s home. Not Spock’s home. He’d only been there a few days. Purely metaphorical.

He pulled himself slightly closer, and Jim closed the gap, breathing warm air down the collar of Spock’s shirt. Spock slid their fingers together and allowing a small current to flow between their tips.

“Jim.” He whispered, paranoid that some third party might be observing them.

“Spock?”

“I believe,” Spock’s lips barely moved as he spoke, as though to do so would give something away. “That by Vulcan standards we have reached and perhaps exceeded first base according to your chosen rounders metaphor.”

“It’s baseball, but okay.” Jim chuckled and scraped his nails lazily along the inside of Spock’s left palm. The Vulcan closed his eyes, keeping his face slack and his voice steady by force of will.

“Wanna meet it by human standards as well?”

The kiss was not as graceful as something he might have orchestrated with Nyota. Their noses bumped clumsily, and Jim was needier, nibbling his bottom lip against Spock’s efforts to chasten the kiss. The different density of human muscle and the alien texture of a human tongue somehow shocked him all over again. He’d known it with Nyota, intellectually he remembered that he had even kissed Kirk before, but the taste was entirely unfamiliar. It was definitely, Jim, exactly what Jim tasted like, but the experience was fresh and all the more illicit for their location and the way the pads of Jim’s fingers were caressing his.

His mouth was soft but not overly pliant, and he trapped Spock’s bottom lip between his own, biting and sucking. Jim’s saliva tasted sweet and slightly salty, and it carried the scent of rosewater from the dessert he’d eventually decided to order.

“It’s like being a teenager again,” Jim laughed.
“It is like being a Terran teenager for the first time,” Spock corroborated. Vulcan teenagers would have shunned them for such behaviour outside of the *Pon Farr*.

Although they weren’t quite close enough for Spock to feel Jim’s erection through touch, he could verify its presence through the thoughts and emotions bleeding into his lips and fingers. Spock himself wasn’t in such a state; he did not intend to pursue sexual intercourse this evening. It was still pleasant, though, and he could imagine himself giving over to it and basking in the shared stimulation.

They kissed until their lips were bruised and the rain had subsided into a pitter-patter of drizzle.

“Looks like it’s only just subsiding,” Jim told him breathily, pupils blown with arousal. “We should go before the weather forecast turns out to be wrong again.”

Jim’s flip-up communicator pipped as they dragged themselves inside, soaked from a second deluge, but he tossed it onto the table in the kitchen, replicating hot chocolate for the pair of them and taking clean towels out of a cupboard above the sink. The house smelled foreign and sweet.

“It’s near the boiler, keeps ‘em warm.” He explained.

“That much is evident,” Spock accepted the towel but held it at arm’s length, still dripping.

“I’m not gonna jump you, just take that wet crap off and we can put it in the wash before it goes mildewy.” He rolled his eyes. “Fine, stay here and I’ll go get you some spare clothes.”

Alone in the kitchen Spock pealed off his outer layers and, on second thoughts, his borrowed underwear, bundling them into the washer and huddling beneath the towel.

He looked down to a familiar chirrup to see Violetta rubbing herself in figures of eight around his damp ankles, covering them in coarse little hairs from her thick coat.

“Good thing I bought you some boxers,” Kirk huffed a little laugh on re-entry, already dressing in pyjamas.

“Brought,” Spock corrected, taking the clothes and pulling them on without giving anything away. “And I could have made do without.”

The statement made Jim swallow and Spock experience an unwarranted degree of self-satisfaction. He often did go without, and the idea of wearing both underwear and pyjamas seemed a little odd to a Vulcan, for whom both items were often considered an unnecessary addenda to the wardrobe.

Jim herded him through to the living room and placed a mug in his hand, fingers brushing sensually if not obscenely, like they had earlier.

“Chocolate is an intoxicant to Vulcans.” He said to the contents of his cup.

“Relax, we’re off duty and there’s like five grams of actual chocolate in there.” Kirk sat them a slightly awkward distance apart on his couch, about five centimetres of air filling the gap between them.

“Very well.” Spock was struck by a need to move closer or further away, but he banished it in
favour of maintaining Jim’s chosen proximity. Luckily for him, the cat followed them through and sandwiched herself into the slot of available space, settling in for the purpose of absorbing body heat. “This beverage is… Pleasant.”

Jim didn’t comment, instead reaching out over the back of the couch with one hand rubbing lazy circles on the back of Spock’s scalp, carding through his hair. “Thanks. For coming today. I had it in my head that you’d shoot me down or something.”

Spock leaned into the touch, letting his human’s relief tingle through his skull. “I presume you mean metaphorically. I would not have done so, even if my feelings for you were purely platonic in nature. They aren’t.” He clarified.

“I know,” Jim sighed as though he were the one receiving a head massage. “But I thought you’d think it was too… illogical.”

Because Vulcans do not smile, Spock didn’t. “To suppress one’s emotions are one thing; to deny them when they are there however, is quite illogical. I have reconciled myself to liking you.”

“But Starfleet…” Jim murmured his concerns for him, twisting silky black hair around his fingers. “Can and has permitted intimate relations between senior crew members before. You were never going to follow regulations when I was in danger before we engaged in sexual and romantic relations. It would be naïve to imagine that changing the nature of love would in any way diminish its influence.” Having struck the L word he was forced to carry on to detract from its emphasis before either of them could panic. “Any crew who did not feel at least a strong affection for one another would prove irresponsible and would lack the cohesion to function effectively. Therefore, whether a relationship is platonic or not is not a factor, so long as it exists.”

“You’ve had this argument with yourself before and lost haven’t you?” Jim smiled, pulling him closer at the risk of squashing the cat.

“I have meditated on the matter at length.” The chocolate was making him wordy. “I have concluded that the best course of action would be for us to remain in our relationship regardless of regulation. There is none that explicitly prohibits our interactions and—“

He was distracted by Violetta’s desperate scrambling to get out from between them, scratching his leg and bolting out the open window with a hiss.

“For god’s sake did she hurt you?” Jim cursed.

“I have suffered worse—“ Spock was cut off for the second time that evening. A high pitched whine he was not even certain he could truly hear, growing more and more audible as time went on. He recognised it with a sense of alarm that he should have been able to control. “We must get out! Your phaser is overloading!”

“I don’t have one here!” Kirk yelled back, but he had evidently internalised the sense of urgency because he was almost to the door by the time the sound reached human hearing range.

They bolted through it, running down the steps just as the flash blinded any wildlife unfortunate enough to be looking at the house. A second later the shockwave blew out the windows, throwing them down to the dirt ground before the fireball passed overhead.

Spock choked, reaching for Jim. His ears rang and his eyes and nostrils were full of smoke and fumes from burning plastic, but he found Kirk nonetheless. He was breathing heavily, and the smoke cleared to reveal a piece of wood lodge between his ribs in his side.
A familiar beep sounded just a few feet away and Spock scrabbled for the communicator. The plastic of the back had melted and it seared into his palm, but the device seemed to work nonetheless.

“Spock to Enterprise, request immediate beam up and medical assista—“

Because the universe was determined not to let Spock finish his sentences that evening, he began to swirl into points of white light before even finishing his transmission. He gripped Jim’s unconscious body with the hand that wasn’t fused to the communicator casing and watched the world dematerialise around them.
“Meester Scott,” Pavel stage whispered into his communicator. Sulu bolted the door behind him.

There was a list of Scottish expletives and some he was certain were made up. There was a commotion in the background.

“Is it about Spock?” The Chief Engineer huffed, like he’d been running.

“What? No, is Hikaru, he finds a paper-“

“Ah don’t have time for articles now Pavel!” It was unlike Scotty to snap, but he did so now.

Sulu snatched the earpiece out of Pavel’s head and jammed it into his own. “Section 31 is planning on killing off the entire crew. I know it’s insane and it’ll get notice, but you have to beli-“

“Ah worked that’n out on me own! Spock just called in five minutes ago requesting immediate beam up, but there was no Mr Spock to lock onto! No Kirk neither!”

They stood listening to a minor argument between Scotty and a repair technician, and were startled by a knock on the door.

“Who is it?” Pavel shouted softly, visibly shaken.

“It’s me lad!” A cheerful voice said on the other side of the door.

Sulu caught his eye in alarm. “Scotty you’re not by any chance outside our door are you? Cos if not I’m gonna have to request an immediate beam up for me and Pavel as well.” He whispered uneasily.

“Shit. I’m on it.” He wished Scotty were fitter; he could hear him getting out of puff as he ran for the turbolift.

“One minute… I am – I am – I am… I am masturbating.” Chekov stammered.

“What?” Sulu hissed.

“Sorry…”

“Why did you say that?”

“I could not zhink of anyzhing…” He said rather pathetically, jiggling with nerves.

“Chekov, ye don’t sound so well,” Said the too-cheerful Scotsman in the hallway. “D’ye need a hand?”

“N-no!” If it weren’t so frightening this would be amusing. At least maybe they might die laughing. “Is private!”

“Are you sure you’re okay? It’s nothin’ ta be embarrassed about. Let me in, I’ll give ye a hand.”
“I do not need hand, I have two!” Pavel argued with their would be assassin.

“Now would be a good time…” Sulu laughed nervously into the mic.

“I’m comin’ in!” The fake Scotty hollered, banging on the door, hard.

They backed away into the bedroom and locked the door.

“Locking on…”

The front door gave with a crack and “Scotty” came to the bedroom door, trying the knob.

“Scotty now!” Hikaru shouted as phaser fire sounded and the lock to their bedroom exploded.

For a moment Spock looked around, his eyes seeing the room around him but his brain unable to process it when it failed to meet his expectations.

“Doctor McCoy?” He called in confusion.

There was, of course, no doctor McCoy. There was no Scotty; nor was the a transporter pad or indeed an Enterprise.

There was only a 4-metre cube of aluminium, with no doors, windows, or any seam at all. There was atmosphere, but as far as Spock in his state of alarm was concerned, there was no obvious vent for it to be maintained.

“Jim!” His voice was distinctly panicked now as the fingers on his good hand slipped and slid over broken skin, working out small pieces of debris. Jim was slumped on his front, unconscious. Spock’s right hand was completely useless, and he deliberately refused to look at it and assess the damage, already certain that the result would be disheartening at best.

“Jim!” He cried again, rolling his lover onto his back and lifting one of his eyelids to watch the pupil. It reacted to the sourceless ambient lighting.

His Captain breathed in small, wet pants, and Spock could feel his consciousness fading to black through the contact. Having assessed Jim’s condition to be severe but not life threatening, he looked around for an escape.

It quickly became apparent that there was none. There were no obvious vents, no lights despite the ambient glow, no replicator panels. They’d been beamed directly into the container; they’d have to be beamed out. The wall he was slumped against was strong without a hint of give, and even if it had, the faint vibrations it gave off told him they were at warp. If he managed to find a way to break through one, they might encounter either an armed guard or the cold vacuum central to all of one Leonard McCoy’s worst nightmares presented neatly in one four by four box.

Having exhausted his limited options, Spock had nothing to do but to look down at his own hand in the hope that the attached communicator was still working.

The black plasteel had lost its shape and fused entirely to the similarly blackened flesh of his palm. The front of the communicator had melted into the mesh covering, buttons and dials now part of a
single disfigured face of plastic and overstressed metal. The muscles underneath it had contracted before the heat destroyed them completely leaving the hand curled as though afflicted with severe arthritis, and the cracks in the brittle burnt plastic where the muscles in the back of his hand had tried to straighten it went straight through cooked meat to burned bone. He could not feel it.

Like a Terran child noticing an injury for the first time, he reacted physically, leaning to the side and vomiting the spiced vegetables and hot chocolate onto the aluminium floor.

Before he could register that the floor remained clean, he was unconscious.
When they stepped off the pad, the Enterprise was suspiciously busy.

“What the?” Sulu asked no one in particular.

“There’s no time to explain, I’ve got to beam up all these people before an can do anythin’ about our missin’ Captain an’ ‘is absentee XO because I cannae leave all these lot on Earth wi’ a bunch o’ government terrorists out on a witch hunt! Been goin’ through the alphabet and pilin’ em into shuttles three te a bed! Had all hands workin’ te get the lot ready ah have!”

Scotty was too flustered to notice the awkward way Pavel jumped when he gripped his arm to drag them from the room.

“What can we do to help?” Hikaru found himself asking.

“You can deal wi’ Doctor McCoy, that’s what you’ll do. Or at least ye can deal wi’ ‘is nurse!”

Before they could question this, they were abandoned at the entrance to sickbay.

“Calm down, Doctor!”

“Calm down? I AM calm, my best friend an’ the hobgoblin jus’ been kidnapped or killed or God doesn’t even know and we’re evacuatin’ our damn crew off our home planet! This whole government is irresponsible, after that goddamn mess that Marcus left behind, that whole damn thing should’ve been disbanded!”

“Doctor, you’re having an episode—“

“I am not havin’ an episode I’m having a normal reaction to a ridiculous fuckin’ situation , that’s what I’m doin’!”

“This is not normal behaviour.”

“Actually, is always like this,” Pavel stepped in through the door ahead of Sulu. “Says zhat Keptain Kirk will be death of him. Maybe will be death of all of us if Section 31 is powerful for too long.”

Bones gestured wildly with his arms. “See? We’re bein’ hounded from our own damn planet by a bunch of lunatics, Jim—“

He cut off abruptly and went very quiet, leaning heavily on a biobed, fingers splayed over his own closed mouth.

“Now is not normal behawior.” Chekov filled for the nurse’s benefit.

“What happened to Kirk and Spock?” Sulu dared to ask.

Jim’s side was hot and infected, the skin tight and weeping around the long splinter of wood, red and damp with blood. It hurt to breathe and movement was entirely out of the question. Which was a shame, because his legs were cramping badly enough to be noticeable above the punctured lung
and his left arm had gone to sleep. The rest of his torso felt like it was covered in little scabs and scrapes where other bits of shrapnel had hit and been removed by the rather heavy Vulcan pinning him to the floor.

Too dazed to be panicked, he cracked an eyelid to see Spock’s unconscious face inches from his.

*You don’t look so good.* He tried to say. “Yyaklllkkkk,” He said. There was dried blood cloying the back of his throat. It mixed with the scant saliva in his mouth and glued everything together.

He hadn’t been very loud, but the vibrations roused his First Officer anyway, brown eyes blinking blearily through lashes gummed together in a very unSpock-like way.

“Jim,” Spock was hot, ill, his voice weak.

Where are we? He thought.

“I do not know. I do not believe we are on Earth.”

His confused brain failed to comprehend the situation. *Are you psychic?*

“I am not. I am telepathic, which you know.” Spock’s expression slipped temporarily to a grimace of pain.

*You’re hurt?* Spock didn’t reply, which meant he didn’t want to admit to an injury but he also didn’t want to lie. “Go to sleep, Jim.”

“No,” He finally managed, although it sounded more like a choice exhalation of air. He strained against his infected wound and Spock’s solid body to sit up. *Let me see.*

Spock curled back and away around his own hand. “It is insignificant.”

Free of Spock’s mass, Kirk made it to a sitting position. He shook his head. “C’mon. Lemme see. If’s no’ that bad I’ll let it go. Jus’…”

He reached out and Spock reluctantly released the limb. Jim stared down at it in incomprehension. “Where’s your han’ gone?” He asked stupidly.

Spock withdrew the mass of burnt flesh against his stomach, eyes distant.

There was nothing he could do but to drag himself over and lay down on his good side, arms around the Vulcan’s rigid body as he kept a fevered vigil across their tiny cell, trying not to cry or be sick. *I’m so sorry.*

“It is not your fault.”

How they managed to cobble a plan together was unclear, and why exactly Leonard’s mental health nurse was in on it even less so.

They seemed to be appropriating some attempt of Spock’s at preparation, but to what purpose no one seemed to know.

“Perhaps zhey were beamed up onto anozer wessel,” Pavel suggested as he slipped into the
cockpit of the shuttle beside Sulu. *Perhaps they were vaporised by phaser fire,* Said no one.

“Do you really need so much stuff?” Uhura asked McCoy in disbelief as he and the nurse, Christine, dragged in boxes of everything from anabolic protoplasers and laser scalpels to thirty kilograms of protein nibs.

“Probably not,” Christine answered for him, “But he seems to think we’re gonna need it.”

“I didn’t say I thought we needed it,” He groused, heart clearly not in it, eyes rimmed red with tiredness or tears. They’d evacuated everyone from Earth in just 24 minutes— a near record. Theirs was the last shuttle to leave. “I said I don’t wanna be caught without if we do.”

Both the women let it drop as Scotty shut the door behind him. “Ah’ve been lookin’ fer Keenser for fifteen minutes an ah check the damn records te find he’s got on the first shuttle out! So much fer stickin’ wi’ yer friends!”

The mood turned serious the moment Sulu turned on the thrusters. Their little vessel hummed with anxiety and the battering of atmosphere as they descended into the stratosphere, bound for Iowa.

Riverside itself was a lacklustre industrial town whose only claim to fame was the eighth largest shipyard on Earth, and now, the smoking remains of James Tiberius Kirk, hero of the Federation and son of former hero George Kirk’s flattened house, lit with floodlights from the police. Media was already swarming, and Starfleet Intelligence agents had already gathered.

Bones shuddered at the sight of Jim’s childhood home smouldering behind the cordon. He tried to keep his face as blank as possible as camera flashes and made black spots in his vision.

Komack was there. “What in the hell are you doing here?”

They were ushered into a hastily constructed marquee which was packed with forensics.

“I’ve just issued a statement about how everything is fine and no one panic and you all show up here?” Komack stage-whispered, shooting furtive glances at those working on analysis of debris.

“Well it ain’t fine,” McCoy elbowed Scotty out the way to say. “They were attacked, they were injured, and now they’re gone!”

“Do any of you listen to a word I say?” Komack crowed. “I been up to my neck in shit from you and Section 31! Secret files accessed, head missing, kidnapping this, bioweapon plot that! Can’t any of you just sit still long enough fer me to actually deal with it?”

Leonard ignored him, glaring into the indifferent features of Jim’s part-time cat, who had apparently survived the explosion.

“We got te get them back, sir;” Scotty said, as though he was attempting to persuade the man and not already leaning over the back of the woman tracing the transporter beam.

Realising that no one was listening to him anyway, the Admiral caved and changed tactics to the one he hoped would get them out fastest. “It was a phaser overload. Probably an accident.”

“Jim doesn’t keep a phaser in ‘is house.” Bones told Violette and whoever else was listening.
“Zhere was a man pretending to be Meester Scott who came for me and Hikaru,” Chekov interjected. “He was definitely zhere to kill us.”

Komack grew more and more agitated the more they talked; the second he looked about to explode, Scotty whistled at them.

“Got what ah need te know, we best get movin’.”

Back on the shuttle, they settled in for the long haul as Chekov and Scotty discussed trajectories and velocities and how the hell they’d chase anything with a max speed of warp 6, exasperating Sulu in the pilot’s seat.

Bones lay on a cot, exhausted an miserable, and Uhura sat across from him dealing cards.

“They’re okay,” She said to no one in particular.

“Yeah.” He agreed, not believing it one bit.

Christine sighed and sat heavily on his feet on the bunk, ignoring his indignant yelp. “Deal me in.”
The flesh on the back of Spock’s hand was necrotising. He could smell it, but he could not feel it, besides the burn and ache he’d felt since he’d injured it. The fingers were blackening and rotting. He was not certain, but he thought the disease was progressing quickly. He had no sense of time.

Jim was unconscious, again, and feverish against his own overheated body. Clammy with human sweat and sickness.

He was starting to sink back into the place he had been in the brig of the Section 31 vessel. Trapped, effectively alone, and subject to no small quantity of psychological trauma.

Meditating, he managed to come around from shock and fear and *disgust* to the kind of numbness that his infant self had occasionally mistaken for a sense of objective peace. He was not free of emotion; he was simply devoid of them.

He wondered if he ought to bite the hand off, but that would wake Jim, and detached or not, he didn’t want what could be his partner’s last waking moments to be spent watching him gnaw off a limb like a sehlat trapped in a fence. The likelihood of him surviving the trauma was about as strong as him surviving this situation itself – close to nil – so what would be the point in bleeding out in this container when he could be there for Jim a little longer?

No; he did not feel detached, he felt hopeless.

“We have us a course trajectory,” Scotty informed them, leaning over Sulu to tap in the coordinates.

“Where are we going?” Uhura asked, grateful that they’d not played for money. Chapel had beat both herself and McCoy hands down. She’d get the asshole back one day, when she wasn’t so distracted.

“Guess.” He proffered, looking tired.

“Paris?” Bones’ attempt at irony fell a little flat, but at least he’d tried.

“Close but no cigarette,” Pavel pulled up a map on the view-screen in the living compartment. “Zhe edge of zhe Tau Ceti system, near where we last encountered eweryone’s fawourite gowernment agency.”
“Great,” McCoy muttered. He chewed on protein nibs mechanically, wishing they were whiskey.

From the cockpit, Sulu said nothing, but he did not look well.

Comparatively, Christine was fine, if concerned. “Time to arrival?” She asked.

“There’s the problem,” Scotty pressed his thumb and forefinger into his eyes, massaging the lids. “Eleven point four days.”

“Zhe ship we zhink we are following is going at transwarp speeds. It would be like us travelling at Warp 8.5 all zhe way zhere – it will take zhem only four days to reach zhe planet and zhey hawe a head start of almost four hours…”

There was a tense silence in which no one dared to speak.

“Ready for warp,” Sulu announced. When he realised that no one seemed to be in command, he slammed forward on the lever. “Warp 2.6… 4.1… 4.9… 5.3… 5.9… 6… 6.1. That’s the best I can give us unless Scotty can pull something.” The silence persisted and he shifted, uncomfortable. “Sorry…”

Pavel went and took the navigation console. “Is not your fault, Hikaru.”

“It’s never anybody’s fault, Pavel.” Sulu sighed. “But here we are.”

Spock was not alone with Kirk; someone was standing behind him. A man, he thought. He could not see the man, and he did not turn to look, but he saw the swirl of the transporter beam reflected in the aluminium, and now he can see two pin-pricks of red light.

Jim would not wake up. Spock was not convinced that he ever would. He did not know how long they had been there.

Instead of turning to face the intruder, he looked down at Jim’s unconscious form. He looked peaceful and sweaty.

Next to his face was Spock’s hand, and on the floor nearby was his little finger. Spock wanted it to go away but did not have the energy to move it, nor a place to send it. His hand, what was left, was paralysed in agony that shot up his arm, burning at the wrist, an ache at the shoulder, with stabbing pains whenever he tried to make use of the nearly redundant limb.

“Hello, Captain Kirk, First Officer Spock!” The man behind him snarled. He had nothing to say, so he did not.

“I am so glad you come as a pair.”

The man limped into his peripheral vision; he looked bloated, skin purple and mottled. An IV, the old fashioned kind with a bag suspended from a hook on a stand, hung next to him and he leant on the pole heavily. He talked almost normally, but he salivated heavily and it dripped down his chin, foamy and moving.

“So selfish of me,” The man spat globs of spittle as he spoke. It was flecked with red, as though his teeth were in worse condition than Spock was. “Not to introduce myself. I am Ellis Jonston. I
believe you knew my wife.”

Chekov and Scotty were arguing about something. Usually McCoy erred on the side of caution, but after 28 hours trapped in this hunk of metal watching their quarry eat up spacetime three times faster than they, he’d given up. His job now was to dose up Sulu with stimulants to keep the man from crashing in the time it took whoever was doing the figuring out to figure it out.

Christine and Uhura were both somehow sleeping through the racket and the nerves. Well. Not somehow. He and a vial of sedatives may have had something to do with it. He was next in line for a nap.

“Are you insane?” Scotty said again. “They had years to develop that thing! Probably decades!”

“But we have their plans.” Chekov said, stubbornly. “We have their knowledge.”

“An’ no equipment! It would me nigh’ impossible to-”

“We are always do zhe nigh’ impossible.” It was the first time Bones had ever heard the young man shout. He looked at Sulu in alarm, but the pilot seemed to have seen it all before. “If you cannot even try and do it now zhen what is zhe point?”

“I feel like I’m witnessing a break-up,” McCoy said quietly to Sulu.

“I’d best not ever leave him then,” Sulu grinned humourlessly at the console.

“We can get there in 8 days if I get us to warp seven. It’s too dangerous-” Scotty kept his voice down, trying to placate, but it wasn’t working.

“In case you haven’t notices,” Pavel tripped on grammar in his rage, “Zhey are not intending to keep ze Keptain and Meester Spock aliwe for eight days, zhey were intending to kill zhem on zhe spot! We have zhe materials, we have zhe anti-matter and zhe anti-graw., and evvery second you do no use zhem you and increasing zheir chances of dying before we reach zhem. If you want zhat on your head, so be it but will not be on mine! Too dangerous? You coward!”

Scotty was silent. The noises the shuttle made were too loud.

“Jesus Christ,” Leonard muttered. Even Sulu looked shaken now. “How can someone so small be so goddamn terrifying?”

Sulu shook his head, wide eyed. “I don’t know. Shit.”

“Fine.” Scotty’s voice wavered in resignation and shame and he cleared it. “Fine.”

Pavel elbowed McCoy out the way to sit in the chair next to Sulu, righteous, angry, guilty tears puffing up his eyes and snot dripping from his nose. Leonard, wisely, left them to it.

No longer feeling enamoured by the prospect of sleep, he joined Scotty on the floor of the living area – the furthest place from where Chekov was.
“Got… Got quite a temper on ‘im that lad…” Scotty said after a moment.

“Yeah,” McCoy sat cross-legged across from him, looking at some printed paper schematics. “He has. You okay?”

“Yeah, yeah…” The man didn’t sound it.

“Can’t lie to your doctor.”

Scotty smiled a little. “Technically, M’Benga is me doctor.”

“And if I let you get away that easy he’d be CMO as well,” Leonard groused, but didn’t push it. They both knew a “no” when they heard one.

Scotty’s smile fell again. “I’m goin’ te need Chekov’s help if I’m te do this at all…”

McCoy sighed standing up. “I’ll get him. And when this is over, I’ll get you a drink.”
Spock either refused Jonston the satisfaction of eye contact and acknowledgement, or lacked the means to provide it. The fact that he no longer knew which suggested the latter.

“You crushed her skull and your… Captain and his quack doctor ejected her from an air lock.”

So he did. Spock had nothing to say. She would have died, anyway. She would have exposed Jim to that disease. That parasite. Any other time, his own indifference to her death disturbed him, but he felt a certain vicious surge of righteousness at his actions. He ought to have pitied this wretched man, driven mad by the product of his own experiments, but he did not; all he wanted was to be able to claim the same, to get some relief from the horrible ache and throb pulsing from shoulder to wrist and the worsening horror of their situation.

“It’s good to see your hands getting what they deserve, isn’t it?” Jonston spoke softly, spraying Spock with wriggling, living saliva. “And good to know I can make you feel like I felt. You ruined me!”

Jonston leaned into his ear, hissing wet air down it. “You ruined my career, you killed my wife all over some – stupid! – parasite.”

Spock was surprised to hear himself answer. “You… Were creating… A bioweapon.” His voice held more shuddering than accusation.

“The program would have saved Federation lives!” He yelled with the conviction of one who has a mantra. Something hit Spock’s face and fell to his lap, next to Jim’s head. When he looked down, it was a tooth, healthy except the root which was black and rotten.

“No… He saves lives.” Spock realised he was gesturing to Jim with a hand that no longer had a middle finger, either. He could not see where it had fallen. Jim did not stir when something dripped from his wound onto his cheek; brown, clear liquid that would not have been out of place in a 20th century refrigerator where vegetables were past their best.

“With luck! I ensured us a future! A tool to placate our enemies, not a weapon to kill them with!” The remaining teeth in Jonston’s bloody mouth worked up and down as he spoke, as though he were desperate to bite.

Finding energy from somewhere, Spock struck out. His burned hand swiped through the man’s belly like a dagger, despite the lack of real force behind the blow. The flesh was loose, wet, decaying, and the soft tissue smudged like an overripe blackberry on an industrial scale. He spilled, purple-black onto Spock and Kirk’s hair and the floor, crumpling down as though he no longer had enough muscles in his core to support him. Spock’s forefinger did not recoil from the blow with the rest of his hand, buried somewhere in the soft, soupy body.

“I do not need… to enquire… as to how that,” He borrowed a phrase from the Good Doctor; a send-off, perhaps, “is going for you.”

Jonston grinned beside him, putrefied meat dribbling down like thick Roman wine from the corner
of his lips. “I don’t suppose,” The words bubbled out with the syrupy effluent. “That it is going to go very well for you, either.”

Spock could not pinpoint when he died, and did not move over and close the eyes as he should have done. They glowed softly with the promise of something that excited and repulsed him in equal measure.

Tiny parasites were already burrowing into the decayed flesh of his palm, headed for a blood supply. In a few minutes they would begin to release opiates into his system. His spine could relax; he could forget the agony shooting up his arm, and escape into indifference to their situation.

“Sorry.” Chekov apologised again. Meek. Scotty huffed, hot from the heat of the welding iron that was clearly meant for minor repairs and not the refitting of a small antimatter reactor and all billion and a half components of the shuttlecraft.

“It's alright, lad.” It wasn't really, but what could they do? Chekov would need to learn to calm that temper if he was ever going to be promoted.

Bones bounced nervously on the balls of his feet next to them. He had no relevant expertise, but he was full of unhelpful questions.

“Half our crew was injured when they used that thing on us!” Bones grumbled. “How do we know it's not gonna kill Jim? Or Spock?” He added as an afterthought.

“The Enterprise's internal inertial dampeners were completely disabled, an' the external ones were disengaged to warp-capable levels. Despite the injuries we did sustain doc, we did well te come oot of it alive at all. If the external inertial dampeners had failed or been disabled completely we'd all be a liquid on the front o' the view screen! Or floatin' aboot in your favourite vacuum!”

McCoy just blinked at him, obviously too concerned for his friends for any real scientific knowledge to permeate. He did not have a favourite vacuum. All vacuums were his least favourite.

“We are not going to disable zheir power supply. Zhey will not be able to move but zhey should not suffer from zhe degree of inertia we experienced.” Chekov's explanation fell on deaf ears, but McCoy seemed mollified enough to slump down on the bunk above Uhura.

“Well I don't like it.” He said, stubbornly to the ceiling.

No one replied; nobody liked it.

From what McCoy could tell, they were no longer travelling at warp; their engines had been stripped down from the inside out, and repurposed for a machine the workings of which he simply couldn't fathom. There were sparks and the smell of metal and carbonisation and burning hair and nons-specific engineer smells.

Chekov was getting aggravated again, and he and Scotty bickered with each other. Since they were only on impulse, Uhura was in the pilot's seat and Sulu was valiantly attempting to catch some
shut-eye beneath the noise.

When Leonard had tried a second time to calm the debate, he'd been thoroughly dressed down by both Chekov and Scotty, so now he was lying face down on a free bunk with his fingers in his ears, ignoring the sight of the engineers cracking under stress.

“We are going to lose zhem if we wait any longer!” Chekov half accused and half complained to Scott.

“Ya think I don't know that already? Hold yer damn horses fer five seconds an' ah might actually have it configured!”

Christine's head bobbed into his line of sight over the edge of the bed.

“Any idea what they're talking about?” He asked.

“Something to do with using antimatter to generate significant distortions to space time so that they end up coming back at us instead of us going to them. The inverse square law means that if they can get a large enough mass of antimatter close enough to the kidnappers' ship—”

“You have no idea what the hell any of that really means, do you?” He asked, perhaps a little short tempered himself.

Christine smiled sweetly at him. It seemed like a threat. “Not a clue, Doctor.” And then she jabbed him in the neck with a hypo of sedative, and he was finally good to sleep over the racket.

Chapter End Notes

Another shortish and yucky chapter. Sorry it's been so long! Too much college!
The device, whatever it was, seemed to have worked. In eight and a half hours, they would intercept the vessel on the path in which it now appeared to be drifting. It was “only” thirty eight million kilometres away – a number that made Christine breathless and the doctor pretending to rest on the bunk next to her want to curl up and die – but whatever the Russian kid and the Scottish guy had cobbled together had apparently made use of the meagre warp core of the shuttlecraft, and they were moving on impulse.

Doctor McCoy had refused sedation on the grounds that he didn't need it, but now he was jiggling his leg in his “sleep”.

“Jesus Christ,” He muttered. “They could be dead a hundred times over in eight hours!”

“You're supposed to be asleep, Mister.” She scolded.

He cracked an eyelid. “Ya know, in the military, which is technically what this is, we call our superiors “Sir,” not “Mister”.”

She set her hypo to a moderately low dosage. “I'm not in the military, Mister.” She jabbed it into his neck and was done with it.

Uhura looked over from the tiny excuse for a communications console. “Nice.”

Chris smiled back at her, hoping it looked more cheerful than it did like a bearing of teeth, and went back to doing the exact same kind of fretting that the now unconscious Doctor had been doing only moments before.

Eight and a half hours crawled by; Sulu danced anxiously in the pilot's seat as the stars limped past at barely 47 million miles a second – really, a pathetic speed and a miracle of human Engineering – and the constant motion was adding exponentially to Chekov's throbbing headache.

“You should rest,” He said, at the exact same moment that Hikaru opened his mouth to say “You should get some sleep.”

Pavel shook his head. “No. Once we have zhem, you will need to pilot, but my work is finished. You rest, I will drive whilst journey is just straight ahead.”

There were bubbles of odd domesticity in space, on rescue mission, where conversations turned to who would drive and who should sleep. Without the Captain, though, no one was under the illusion that it would all be fine.
“There are no lifesigns on board!” Uhura threw up her hands in despair.

“No,” Sulu interjected, “The cube on the screen that looks like cargo is the cell. We have to beam straight in.”

She shook her head. “Even then we'd pick up some life signature. Even the engines and the generators on there are off, unless that things so well insulated that we can't scan it, it'll probably be minus a hundred centigrade in there by now.”

Bones shoved them both aside to get to the lone transporter pad. He didn't believe it; he couldn't. “Christine, prepare for... Everything.”

He materialised inside a pitch-black space and retched at the smell of death. Instead of moving to do something, to call for a light to be beamed over, to reach out and find Jim or Spock and see if either of them were still alive, the room was illuminated by a swirl of light as Uhura appeared beside him.

It cast horrible, long shadows over three figures slumped in the opposite corner.

Apparently Uhura was more prepared than he, because she snapped a light stick almost the second she solidified, allowing him a proper look at the carnage in front of them. Bones closed his eyes against the site for a second, cut himself off from whatever emotions he had about the situation and went to check lifesigns.

Uhura toed the corpse of an unknown male with her boot. “Ellis Jonston,” She choked around the smell. “Time of death... Like, a year ago...”

Both of them were reluctant to go to Jim or Spock, fearful of what they would find.

Spock was hunched over Jim's body, fingers locked onto his arm – or rather, one set of fingers. Bones swore when he pulled the Vulcan back by the shoulder and saw the burnt mess of plastic and rotting meat at the end of his other arm.

The scanner was calibrated for humans and seemed to think that Spock's pulse was fine – a bad sign most of the time, but at least he wasn't dead – yet. Leonard reached out and pulled one eyelid up. The second he did, he revealed a dull red glow and Spock's slack jaw snapped shut.

Reflexively, Bones jabbed him with the hypo of powerful sedatives he'd had at the ready – his preferred weapon against an assailant, Hippocratic Oath being what it was, and knocked him out, hopefully not for good. Jim was limp but warm.

“Enterprise,” He gasped into his earpiece, forgetting in the heat of the moment that the Enterprise was several light years away and in poor condition. “Get us the fuck out of here.”
Easier said than done, apparently – unable to detect them within the cube, Chekov couldn't get a fix.

“We will have to find a way to cut you out, it will take a while.” Chekov's voice told him.

“We don't have a while!” Bones all but screamed at him. It echoed loudly in the cell. “They don't have a goddamn while!”

There was a commotion in the background on the communicator, and then; “Please make sure you all are holding tight to each other, and do not hold your breath.”

Bones linked arms with Uhura and grabbed Jim while she looped an arm around Spock’s waist. “Okay, why?” He asked, a second before phaser fire blasted off the side of the cell and the change in pressure blew them out into the vacuum of space.

On exposure to hard vacuum, Leonard was pleased to note that his blood didn't boil and his eyes didn't burst; indeed, his skin held everything just as it was meant to. In fifteen seconds, completely anoxic blood would reach his brain and he would pass out. It wasn't cold; there were no molecules around him to take his heat away, but the moisture in his mouth vaporised as the air was sucked from his lungs, and his ears popped on a terrifying scale. It was Spock he was worried about, with that low blood pressure – the bastard might just boil off like in all those old movies, and all that would be left would be his dehydrated corpse floating about and clinking against other frozen space debris.

Before depressurisation could burst his eardrums or give them the bends, the shuttlecraft solidified around them and the four of them all crashed onto the same transporter pad.

Shock froze him temporarily, and then, “What the HELL WERE YOU THINKING?” He roared at Chekov from his horizontal position. Not because it was dangerous – it was dangerous, but a human could survive brief periods in space without severe repercussions – but because all of his worst nightmares had just converged in the form of one Russian protégée.

“Actually, Doctor,” Chris was already extricating them from the mass of battered flesh and limbs, “It was my idea. And you're fine.”

“They aren't. Pull the curtain across, I'm gonna have to operate.”

In the light, they could see that Jim was wounded and the cut was deep and infected, shiny flesh stretched over one huge, puss and blood filled cyst that had once been a puncture wound. His collar bone had a neat line of repeated imprints of Spock’s dental record, and his blood was filled with parasites. His eyes were clear, but it was only a matter of time.

Bones barely had time to insert a cannula or dose him with antibiotics and chemicals to repress the reproductive cycles of whatever he was already infected with, before Chapel had finished prepping Spock for surgery.

Leonard did not want to do it. Spock was strapped to the fold-down biobed, stripped of his
uniform. He was ghostly pale, except for his right arm, which was mottled green and red from the shoulder to the stumpy palm that remained of his hand; below the elbow, the flesh was yellow and bloodless. Bones wondered if the cut-off of blood supply was a physiological response or a conscious reaction to the situation before Spock had passed out; he didn't know which was worse and he did not have time to dwell on it.

McCoy looked over at Jim, still out cold on the antigrav stretcher, the only place there was to put him. He was hooked to IV saline, and Chapel had snatched time back from Jesus himself to put in a catheter which was already filling with suspiciously red liquid that he hadn't the time to dwell on.

“I'm gonna have to amputate,” He rasped at Christine, his mouth and throat still dry from the vacuum.

She nodded. “Sterilise,” she ordered the computer.

Leonard swallowed several times.

“Local anaesthetic.” To lessen blood flow to the healthy margin of arm he was going to have to cut through to ensure he got rid of all of the affected area. “Laser scalpel, 80 Watts.”

He held the scalpel in a shaking hand, and stared blankly at the dead flesh of Spock's wrist. His pulse rushed through his ears. All those years of teasing Spock about his Vulcan side, and now it seemed that he was literally about to cut it off. His own gloves were filling with sweat. “I can't do this.” He sounded incredulous for some reason. “I can't do it, I just can't do-”

A hypo was discharge subtly into his neck and he looked around in horror and disbelief, stepping back away from Chapel. He was a fool to trust her, she had wormed her way onto his ship when he was vulnerable and now –

“Don't look so shocked, that was forty milligrams methylphenidate.” She scolded, holding out two pairs of safety goggles.

He looked down at his hands obediently and noticed the steadiness. He didn't thank her. Just repeated the sterilisation cycle for good measure before putting on the safety goggles and activating the laser scalpel. The goggles polarised immediately under the intense light that was already slicing away at the flesh just at the join between hand and wrist.

It sliced too quickly, too easily, revealing tens of tiny channels burrowed into green meat where larval parasites had burrowed through. The smell was horrendous, the scent of rotting flesh cooking.

There was no point continuing the cut at this point – the flesh here was dead and necrotising and he couldn't afford to keep it. He moved further up, this time using a tourniquet and applying more local anaesthetic to prevent the larger veins and arteries from bleeding.

It bit deep into healthy pink-green muscles, just a few unaccounted for holes from those parasites who had yet to break a substantial blood vessel, down to yellow green bone. He sliced all the way around in one clean movement, the laser cutting clear to the bone and cauterising smaller vessels. Neat, textbook muscle flaps, perfect performance on the surgical simulator in medschool. Then, tugging back the edges of the skin and using the forcefield clamp to hold them, he turned off the laser. Chapel was already waiting with the 150 watt.

His gloves were dabbed lightly with green blood, not enough to cause it to slip in his grip, as he pointed it down into the healthy bone and turned on the brilliant red light. Even with the goggles,
he was dazzled for a second, long enough for it to burn into Spock's ulna almost to the midpoint. The cut was clean, the marrow neatly contained within the dense Vulcan nerve structure. The radius cut like butter under the razor, just like that.

“60 watts,” Bones heard himself saying. “I want to round off the edges, especially of that radius.”

Round the edges, draw in the flaps, pull forward major blood vessels and seal within reach for when a replacement limb could be provided. Autosuture. Dermal regenerator. Broad spectrum antibiotics.

The end of the limb looked smooth, overly perfect, like it was made of molten matt plastic, or like Spock had lived with it for decades.

Bones only wavered in his concentration for the barest second, methylphenidate buzzing through his veins and blocking out background noise, stimuli, unwanted emotion. Spock would be proud.

“On the count of three we're going to roll him onto his side, I need access to the internal carotid artery. One, two, three!”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the long wait! Damn this "real life" thing!
Chapter Notes

Despite the way things have been going, I will in fact be ending the gore soon.

For a while he just sat with his back to the divider between the main room and the cockpit, and Christine allowed it.

Jim's blood, mixed with generic replicated platelets, reconstituted artificial plasma and some of Chekov's precious O-negative, settled into the pores of his skin and dried there, sticky and clotted and red. Operating on Jim's brain with the equipment they had was not like operating on Spock's, whose blood pressure was so low that human-calibrated machines mistook him for dead and whose blood pumped around like it had all day to complete a circuit.

Spock ran through two stored units of T-negative from the medical replicators on the Enterprise, and about ten times that amount was pumped into Jim and then immediately back out onto the floor.

Chekov was sleeping, eating and generally recuperating from what amounted to about two full units donated. It would've been nice to give him some saline, but although the replicators could make sterile saline, there was no way to administer it but repeated hypos, and Chekov needed the rest.

Actually, he needed the rest, and so did Chapel. She had put what was left of Spock's hand into a container, as the air lock wasn't an option – all waste was recycled on the shuttle, and somehow Bones wasn't feeling the whole “eating Spock's diseased flesh” thing, even if it were rearranged on a molecular level.

Spock and Jim were both asleep in the way that Jim was “asleep” immediately after the transfusion from Khan – nearly dead, future uncertain. They needed a proper hospital, everyone needed a proper goddamn hospital here. This was meant to be a break.

“Come on Doctor,” Christine looked as tired as he felt. “Can have you hanging round here looking like you've walked off the set of a horror movie.”

He looked down; there was actually blood seeping under his gloves and staining his scrubs; but Jim had lost such a lot of it.

He let her drag him up off the floor and stumbled the four steps to the sonic shower. Christine slid the manual door shut behind him and he began the process of extricating himself from clothes that were stuck to his hair and skin with blood.

Sulu was pretty sure that no one would blame him for dozing in the pilot's chair, given that their maximum speed was equivalent to one quarter warp. The shuttle limped through a million million miles of empty space as though two critical patients added up to a road trip, and they were eighteen
months from even the smallest of outposts.

When he found that he'd fallen asleep on a discussion with Uhura about whether it would be best to break subspace silence or not, he handed the controls to Scotty and staggered through to the next compartment.

Kirk and Spock were both there, white as sheets, necks in stirrups to prevent them from moving under the regen units. Spock was on the biobed, and Jim only on an anti-grav gurney. The bleeping of the monitors was slow but regular.

Hikaru stood, looking, transfixed. He didn't want to be invasive, but he felt compelled to at least check them over, as though he might offer some insight that McCoy could not.

Then he noticed the smooth end of Spock's right limb, smooth and digitless under the regen unit.

“What happened?” He asked Spock allowed, forgetting the Commander was quite unable to answer.

“Burns got infected,” McCoy startled him as he stepped out of the shower unit, wearing only boxers with a single round spot of red blood on one hip. “The flesh of his hand was already necrotised. I had to amputate.”

“Oh.” Sulu shifted, uncomfortable. “Will you be able to...?”

McCoy shrugged. “It's very rare to amputate these days, and usually if you do have to it's straightforward trauma or you get notice, and then you can prepare a new limb. It's not too difficult, but it means that there's not been too much research into methods of restoring Vulcan hands, because of all the specific nerve groups.”

The doctor cut himself off suddenly.

Hikaru had been awake longer, but Leonard had been doing the harder job. He only nodded, and they both headed back through to the sectioned off sleeping area. McCoy fell into one bunk, and Sulu crawled onto the top bunk opposite, pressing up against Pavel's back.

Pavel was floppy and weak from the blood loss and exhaustion, which had at least the silver lining of making him pliable and easy to sleep with, even in the confined space.

Hikaru kissed behind his ear. “Night night, sweetie.”

Eventually, Uhura managed to get Scotty as her superior officer to approve one of her distress calls.

“An' ye don't mention it's the Captain and Mr Spock we got here, ye hear me?”

“Yes, Scotty, I hear you.” She rolled her eyes.

She reeled off the usual formulaic nonsense and then sat uncomfortably in her chair rebroadcasting it on all protected and distress frequencies. There was no response, but that was to be expected. It might be a while. Still, they weren't unreasonably far from Earth, so presumably someone, even if it was just someone from Security or Dr M'Benga, ought to come for them within the next couple of days.
Christine had ushered her past Spock and the Captain without letting her stop to look at them properly, saying that they needed the rest. Uhura wanted to reply that she'd look with her eyes, not her alarm clock, but Chris looked exhausted, and she had the feeling she was being “protected” from seeing the full extent of her recent ex partner's injuries.

She checked the boards in front of her, grasping for a reply.

“Shit,” she moaned. “The receiver’s broken. Even if someone does reply, we won't know, and we won't be able to respond.”

Scotty looked guilty. “Ah may 'ave needed the parts...”

Like any well trained doctor about to have another in the great chain of mental breakdowns that was his life, Bones woke up at the first trill of irregularity on a biobed monitor, regardless of the fact that he'd slept only seven out of forty two hours.

Spock was regular as clockwork with no signs of any change in status, but Jim's pulse was fluctuating enough to set off the alarm just before Leonard got to his side, rousing everybody, including Christine, who scrambled into the room.

“Swap his saline out for 500mg of quinidine gluconate diluted to 30ml and push one ml per minute and then put him back on saline.” He ordered, scanning Jim's body for other symptoms.

His brain activity was irregular, unusual, as though he were already having a seizure.

“No, stop that. 4mg lorazepam, over two minutes. Now.”

“Yes sir.” Christine looked half asleep, but the dose was loaded and now going into Jim's arm. He trembled lightly.

The screaming of alarms and monitors behind him had Bones spinning around as Spock went rigid on the bed.

“No no no no!” He berated him, rushing to his side and loading a hypo with a lorazepam. Before he could get close enough to administer it, Spock jerked violently enough to tear the restraints from the bed, seizing and convulsing, frothing green bloody sputum from the mouth. He twisted and flailed until fresh skin broke, sending a spurt of green blood, not the usual slow seepage, out from his neck, spraying the wall and, unfortunately, Jim.

Leonard darted in and injected a half dosage directly into the femoral artery, and got a kick to the gut for his troubles that sent him flying back and into the flimsy divider between the medical and the living quarters of the shuttle, winded and in agony.

And like the good doctor that he was, he forced himself to get back up, to administer the rest of the dose as Spock's limbs began to slacken, rhythmically twitching, but no longer kicking and flailing.

Barely able to breath without doubling over in pain, he ran the auto suture over Spock's torn throat, ignoring the green soaking into the bedding and covering the walls and floor.

“No, you idiot!” He growled, as though it would help, as though Spock could hear. “I ain't got no more o' that green blood, you asshole! Why'd you have to go waste it?!”
There was more commotion from Scotty and Uhura, an unknown vessel approaching, and Bones bowed his head and groaned as he administered saline hypos into Spock's left arm. His handprint stained the pale flesh emerald. “You make yourself damn hard to save, you know that?”

“We're in a tractor beam!” Scotty shouted, but Bones wasn't listening.

The biobed alarm went off again as Spock stopped breathing.
“Wake up you bastard! Breathe!” McCoy rubbed Spock's chest and ribcage, trying to stimulate something.

As they passed into the hangar deck of the vessel that had caught them, the tilt of the shuttle relative to the ship caused them all to slide to the left, and Bones found himself pinning Spock to the bed with one hand and slapping his chest with the other. Percussive maintenance was always worth a try.

Christine slide up with a respirator and managed to get it onto Spock's face without somersaulting over him, an achievement in itself as the shuttle slammed down onto the floor of whatever hangar deck it was.

“Touchdown in an unknown Starfleet vessel.” Scotty announced.

There was a horrible sound, thumping and the reverberation of metal on one side of the shuttle.

Instinctively, everyone moved into the miniature sickbay as a phaser blast melted the metal panels around the door. The whole side of the shuttle groaned as the structure gave out, the wall containing it falling open like an ungodly mouth to reveal a familiar hangar deck.

For a second, Bones thinks he must be on the Enterprise.

A bizarre accent shatters the illusion. “Shit job you've done parking your vehicle.”

His mouth works silently for a second as his colleagues stutter around him. “We gotta get Spock to sickbay.”

Jim opened his eyes in sickbay. A sickbay, not Bones' sickbay, but the doctor was a fixture nonetheless.

“Mornin' sunshine.” The man in question said dryly, forcibly shoving an ice chip past his lips. “And for the record, yes, that is sarcasm, you look like shit. I'd give you a glass of water but you're not allowed to move you head for another day or so, so everything you have you gotta have horizontal.”

Jim let the cold ice dissolve before opening his mouth to reply. His voice was weak, but surprisingly clear. “How long have I been out?”

Bones huffed a breath as he prepped a hypo. “About four hours, since you last woke up. You have short term memory loss, you've actually been awake on and off for the last nine days.”

“Nine days?” Jim asked, trying weekly to sit up.
McCoy pushed him roughly back down and shoved an oversized ice chip into his mouth to buy time. “In the order you're gonna ask it: Spock's in the next room; your house is gone, but your cat isn't, we're on the Constellation, that weird Section 31 guy is dead, and no, you can't have any more morphenolog.”

“That's disappointing.” Jim groaned as he shifted; everything hurt. He closed his eyes. “I'm tired.”

“I know.”

“Mornin' Bones. How long've I been out?” The lights of the sickbay were too bright. There was a blond woman preparing hypos nearby.

“Nine and a half days, you're Vulcan's alive, the Section 31 guy isn't, your cat is, your house is flat, this is the Constellation and no drugs allowed. Your memory's shit.”

“I'm tired.”

“Of course you are.”

“Bones... Where are we?” Jim's head was fuzzy; he tried to sit up, but was rewarded with a firm weight on his chest.

“We're on the Constellation, and so is Spock, before you ask.” Bones barely looked up at him.

“How long have I been asleep?”

“Eleven years.”

“Eleven years?!” Jim sat bolt upright, dislodging McCoy's foot from his stomach.

“Or days. But it feels like years.” Bones is weirdly indifferent to his horror. “Don't look at me like that. You're not gonna remember this in an hour.”

“Where are we?” He repeated, and this got a reaction. Bones sat up and swore, whipping the scanner out.

“Shit. Your previous memory losses have only been after sleeping, it's getting worse.”

“I'm just fucking with you. I know we're on the Constellation.” Jim grinned at him, but he felt like he might have chipped one of his teeth.

“You're an asshole.” McCoy scowled and jabed a hypo hard into his arm.

“What, you're a doctor and you can't handle a taste of your own medicine?”

Bones grumbled, but his scowl didn't stick.

“Where actually is Spock? Why isn't he here?” Jim asked, and worry tugged at McCoy's mouth
“He's still out. We had you both in the same room, but you kept getting up with no memory and upsetting yourself. And like, prodding and poking him about.”

“Oh,” Jim swallowed the surprisingly thick air in his throat. “Is he gonna be okay?”

The doctor made a non-committal sound and shifted awkwardly. “He's not gonna die, and he's probably able to wake up.”

“But.” He had Bones' full attention now, and gripped his wrist as the tension in the room rose exponentially.

McCoy searched his face whilst he also searched for an appropriate answer. Eventually, as he always did when he admitted anything he felt guilty over, he settled for the plain, old fashioned, and heartbreakingly honest truth, resting his hand on Jim's shoulder to steady him. “I had to remove his hand.”

Jim stared at him. His voice suddenly does sound dry and unused. “Can you fix it?”

McCoy shakes his head minutely. “Maybe. I don't know. The entire arm suffered massive nerve damage. It's a case of regrowing every nerve, using stem cells and grafting them to a scaffold. It'll take month, at least, maybe as much as two years. We can give him a robotic arm in the mean time, but if he wants to control it he'll have to have a chip put in his head, and it won't feel like his other arm. It won't do all the Vulcan things his old hand did.”

Kirk sat in silence again, brain lagging behind the conversation sluggishly. “…I need to see him.”

“Jim...”

“Bones,” He pleaded. “I have to...”


As they approached, Spock looked… Fine. Someone, probably Uhura, Jim thought, had clearly taken over the maintenance of his hair, because it was freshly cut and smoothed into his usual Vulcan style. He gave every appearance of a model pretending to sleep in late twentieth century fashion publication, peaceful, face slack, smooth and expressionless, sharp lines and soft edges.

But when they got close enough to see his other arm, it was laid out next to him like its counterpart, only this arm simply ends two inches below the elbow.

The end was rounded, the skin healthy and even, belying the trauma of its conception, and it mad Jim whoosh out a sob that he hadn't felt coming, going weak at the knees so that Bones had to support him into the chair by the biobed.

Jim stared at Spock whilst McCoy stared at him, listening to the quiet bleeping of the monitors, disquieted by the calm in the room.

A young Orion man entered, blue-green skin blending oddly with his blue scrubs. He smiled kindly at Jim, who could not smile back. “Hello, Captain Kirk. I am Nurse Remm, you probably
don't remember me. I was about to give Spock a bath. If you like you can help me, or I can come back later when you're gone.”

Kirk looked at Spock, dignified even with a catheter clipped to the side of the bed, and shook his head. “He wouldn't want me to.”

The nurse nodded and ducked out of the room. “I will be back later.”

Jim turned to McCoy. “Can you go as well?”

Bones blinked in surprise, but then nodded, standing quickly to exit the room.

Jim rose with him, walking shakily around the biobed so that he could pick up Spock's remaining hand in his own.

His tongue felt thick and heavy in his mouth, and even though Spock wasn't awake to judge his words, he had no idea what to say. Instead, he just stroked the long, relaxed fingers, feeling the weight of them against his palm.

The sensation of being watched prickled the back of his neck, and he turned around at the sound of the door hissing closed and the following crunch.

T'Lay stood, leaning against the bulkhead, just out of range of the door sensor, holding a bowl in each hand. She spat a large mouthful of pulped exoskeleton into the smaller of the two. “He's been waitin' for you.” She said simply.

Jim shifted, uncomfortable under her almost indifferent gaze, trying to ignore as she placed another whole shrimp into her mouth and crushed it between her teeth. “Then why isn't he awake?”

She stood, finishing her mouthful without comment, before spitting the shell back out and placing the bowls onto a trolley carrying a defibrillator. She licked her lips, wiped her fingers on an alcohol wipe from the trolley and made her way leisurely over to the bedside.

And then she backhanded Spock across the face.

Jim squawked in alarm, but his reactions were too slow to prevent another blow, and Spock's head snapped round for a second time.

Before she could land a third blow or Jim could do anything to stop her, Spock disentangled his fingers from Kirk's and raised them to protect his face.

“Afternoon,” She said as Jim's mouth worked uselessly and Spock's eyes fluttered blearily open. Her hand print stood out on each of his cheeks and his eyes were unfocussed and full of sleep.

He merely made a throaty sound in reply.

T'Lay bustled off as though nothing had happened, picking up her bowls as she went. “I'm leavin' before your doctor comes back, he's always in a shit mood.”

Kirk ignored her as she left, watching Spock owl-eyed instead.

“Jim.” Spock murmured, voice raw and broken.

“Spock.” Jim stroked his smooth hairline, ran his fingers over too-strong cheek bones, and Spock allowed it, basking in the moment, craning his neck to kiss his palm and exposing fresh new skin there.
Then the moment shattered, when Spock reached out to take Jim's hand in his, and found that he had no hand to take it in. His expression didn't change; instead, a shriek, not of horror, but of pure, unadulterated shock forced its way up his throat and out, into the quiet room. He stared at the digitless stump of his arm in incomprehension as the monitors around him started beeping and screaming, and Doctor McCoy rushed in accompanied by various Constellation medical crew, separating the two of them and jamming a hypo into Spock's neck.

The Vulcan didn't fight it, just stared calmly at his wrist as though his pulse wasn't pushing 400 and his lungs spasming for tiny, fast breaths through his nose, until he slumped back in the bed, unconscious.

The commotion passed as quickly as it came, and suddenly all the medical staff who had swarmed around Spock were crowding around Jim. He stumbled away from them, head spinning, until someone caught his wrist and led him out the room.

“Bones?” He asked.

“It's time you got some rest, Jim.” Said a voice nearby.

Kirk shook his head. It was heavy and jerked at his neck awkwardly. “No, Spock.” He tried to insist.

But he was being pushed into his bed and his legs lifted onto it.

“-Is going to be out cold for at least an hour. You need to rest. Spock needs time to adjust.”

Jim struggled to get off the bed, and Bones doubted he was fully conscious; he was in some sort of sympathetic shock, and much like his seizure symptoms before, there was little to be done except for waiting it out and treating Spock.

He holds Jim's shoulders hard against the bed, trying to keep him in it. Jim kicks even as his eyes flutter open and closed.

“Jim, if you keep struggling I'm gonna have to use the restraints.” He says as Christine puts a heavy blanket over his legs, swaddling him slightly.

Jim's fingers are digging into his skin and drawing neat little crescents of blood to join those of the past fortnight's panicked realisations. “No, no, please...” He begs, so pitifully for someone who had even faced death with the grace and beauty Jim died.

“It's okay, it's alright.” He does his Best Doctor Voice, because it isn't okay, and he's not even sure what Jim is begging for. He doesn't strap him down; never did have the heart to.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the long wait. Too many exams this last two weeks. >:( 
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!