Always On My Mind

by iknewaman

Summary

The *U.S.S. Enterprise* has set off on its virgin journey into deep space, with the hugely lauded command team of S’chn T’gai Spock and James T. Kirk at the helm. Starfleet has high hopes for the *Enterprise* and its crew, believing it will become the shining beacon of light that will pave the way for future space travel.

It's just such a shame Spock holds such intense dislike for his captain.

Notes

I do not nor will I ever own Star Trek.
Spock does not like Jim Kirk at all.

He had disliked the man from the moment Spock found out he had cheated on his Kobayashi Maru test, he had disliked him and his attitude at the academic tribunal, and even though necessity forced them to work together, Spock had disliked the man during the Nero incident.

It was therefore incredibly unfortunate that they had been assigned to the same ship as first officer and captain, respectively. Spock harbours nothing but antipathy towards Kirk, but he would not let his emotions sway him into declining a position aboard Starfleet’s prestigious flagship, the *U.S.S Enterprise*.

Even though Jim Kirk had somehow fooled Starfleet Command into thinking he was capable of handling the role of captain aboard the ship, Spock would not be deluded.

He had accessed Kirk’s profile on Starfleet academy’s database, and found that the man had a criminal record which indeed confirmed Spock’s suspicions about Jim Kirk being an untrustworthy character. What was surprising, however, was that the documents containing Kirk’s academic achievements were extensive, showcasing marks and psych evaluations that were beyond commendable. Spock managed to access several electronic essays and reports Kirk had written, and was frankly astounded by the work and analytical evidence presented. They were extremely well-written and showed an uncanny grasp of the subject, so much so that Spock tracked the source of the documents to ensure that they were not plagiarised from elsewhere. They were not.

Still, Kirk possessing remarkably high intelligence did not erase the fact that he had a history of felonies, several which included physical altercations and domestic disturbances. He had heard from Nyota as well that Kirk had quite the reputation on campus, one of the biggest rumours being that he was someone who easily went to bed with others, looking no further than a pretty and willing being. It would be a problematic habit for a starship captain to indulge in as it could lead to him possibly being lured away by enemies and used as ransom, or manipulated into revealing top secret Starfleet information.

No, Kirk would make for a risky captain. That Spock was sure of.

Still, he could not keep himself from looking further into the man’s history, digging through every file he could get his hands on and unearthing every bit of information in connection to a Jim Tiberius Kirk. There was simultaneously both too much about the man as well as not enough. There was plenty of information about Kirk’s origins, about his family and his early life, but after the age of seventeen the material became patchy and from questionable sources. Ages twelve to sixteen appeared to be missing entirely.

Spock was poring over Kirk’s personal statement and application documents for Starfleet academy when someone came knocking on his door. The sound pulled him out of his intensive research, and it took him a second to realise that he had been so deep in his task that he had not noticed evening had arrived.

Spock stood up from the kitchen table, leaving the PADDs where they were spread out, and went to open his door. Pike was on the other side, dressed in his Starfleet uniform with a black coat thrown
over it.

“Pike.” Spock greeted.

“Hey, Spock. Hope you’re doing well.”

“I am adequate.”

“Good, good. Mind if I come in?”

“Not at all.” Spock said, stepping aside to allow the man entrance. Pike thanked him with a nod, and rolled inside. He seemed to be handling the wheelchair easier now as opposed to the first few times Spock had met him after the Nero incident. The man had been holed up in his hospital room for days on end, the surgeries to restore the nerve endings in his legs dragging on longer and longer until hope dwindled off and it was eventually announced that he would not be able to walk again. Pike had accepted the news with a grim expression, but Spock could see it was a façade to cover up his true feelings. What they were, Spock couldn’t tell, but he knew they were not positive.

During the few instances they had time to spend together before the five-year mission was announced, Spock had seen how Pike struggled with his new life. The wheelchair caused him far more tribulations than the man had expected. When they were are Pike’s house and the man would go prepare tea for Spock, he would catch the man reaching for the box on the shelf before realising that he couldn’t stand up. Something in Pike’s expression would tighten, and Spock saw how the man clenched his fists before turning to Spock with a false smile, asking, ‘Mind if you could get it for me? I seem to be having some trouble.’

One time Spock had reached for the tea before Pike had, and the man had slammed his hands down on his chair so hard it had startled Spock into jumping.

“For fuck’s sake, Spock. At least let me try reaching for it before you help the invalid.” He growled, fingers clenched around his armrests.

Spock realised he was gripping the box of tea tightly in his hands, and eased it. He had spent years being comfortable around Pike that the outburst had surprised him into physically reacting.

“That would be illogical and serve no purpose.” Spock stated quietly.

“It would make me feel better.” Pike muttered darkly.

Spock had no reply to those words, and so he continued to stare at the man, uncertain whether he should move or not. The silence that had settled over them was suffocating, and even though Spock wished to dissuade it, he was afraid any involvement on his part would only exacerbate the situation.

Eventually Pike let out a loud sigh and shut his eyes. “Just make the damn tea.” He said, rolling away. Their meeting that time had been strained, and Spock left much earlier than he had intended.

He knew Pike hadn’t fully come to terms with what his life was now, and privately he wasn’t sure the man would ever accept it. Pike may be a respected Starfleet captain with years of experience under his belt, but now that he was constrained to Earth instead of the stars Spock didn’t know how the man would cope.

“How’re you feeling about your upcoming trip?” Pike asked, turning his chair to face Spock. He had chosen to forego the electric wheelchair the doctors at the hospital had offered him, and settled on one that needed to be steered manually. Spock believed it was so that Pike could feel as if he had some semblance of control over his situation.
“I have no concerns about the trip itself, however I am grateful at being given this opportunity.” He admitted.

“The scientific potential, is it?” Pike prompted, a tender smile gracing his lips.

“Indeed.”

“Sometimes I think that’s all you care about.” Pike chuckled.

“It is an important aspect of the five-year mission, as well as my occupation.”

“I’m not knocking it, Spock, just think it’s amusing how that’s always your top priority with everything.” He said, smile still in place. “Just… science.”

Spock didn’t understand the humour in the statement, but he nodded anyway. “What are your plans from now onwards?”

Up until recently Pike had been at his home recovering, sometimes visiting friends when he got antsy from being cooped up too long. The doctors still advised him to take it easy when recovering, but it was no easy task holding down a man who loved to explore.

“Well, not many prospects for me now. Will most likely stay here on Earth, get an office job, which is good because I can bring my own chair.” Pike said proudly, briefly rubbing the handles of his wheelchair.

“Most fortunate, indeed.” Spock agreed, knowing the man often used his sense of humour as a coping mechanism.

Pike continued to gently rub his thumb over the handle. “Might look into some PT exercises just for the hell of it.”

Spock felt himself deflate slightly at the words. He knew it would be a trying task getting Pike to adapt to his new situation, but he had hoped it would go by without the man falling back onto his hope once more. It was an awful thing to think, but if medicine and science both proved that walking would no longer be an option for him, then it was a fact. It would be useless for the man to attempt any activity where he could fool himself into thinking he could walk again.

“Oh, don’t look like that, Spock.” Pike complained, grimacing. “I know you don’t approve, but I just want to try it out. No harm in that.”

Spock wasn’t surprised Pike could read his expression so accurately; they had been lovers in the past for almost two years and friends for even longer. Their years of knowing each other had eased Spock into a level of comfort where he could openly speak his mind around Pike without worrying about being interpreted incorrectly. However, this time he believed it would be best if he kept his disbelief to himself. He knew there would be harm to Pike if he attempted to engage in PT exercises, and it would be caused by the man himself. But Spock would cause even more harm if he thwarted the man’s wishes when he was at his most fragile, and so he kept silent.

“I am not one to judge your decisions.” Spock told him, and before Pike could reply asked, “Will you be remaining at Starfleet?”

“Of course. Nowhere else I’d rather be.” Pike answered immediately.

That was a relief to hear. Even though Pike was one of the strongest personalities he knew, Spock was worried about the man. His confidence laid in his ability to perform, and if he were to remain at
Starfleet hopefully he would maintain that confidence. His words and ideas were what had fascinated Spock at the start, and if he kept those traits he was sure Pike would continue to succeed.

Spock inclined his head, and offered, “Would you like a beverage?”

“Have you got Argentinian coffee?”

“I can have the replicator recreate some.”

The man’s face split into a wide grin. “That’d be great, thanks.”

Spock walked into the kitchen, removing two cups and his box of Vulcan tea before heading to the replicator. Pike rolled in after him, watching as Spock moved about the kitchen, filling up the kettle and getting the water boiling. His eyes suddenly fell to the PADDs on the kitchen table, and Spock felt himself tense as he watched the man made his way over to them. He leaned over, and after a moment said, “What’s this?”

“I am conducting research.” Spock told him.

Pike looked back at Spock. “On Jim?”

“Affirmative.”

“Why?” The man asked, eyebrows furrowing.

“I simply wish to know the kind of being that is to be my future captain.”

“You could just talk to him, you know.” Pike commented, turning away from the PADDs. “I’m sure he’d be happy to talk to his future crew as well, get to know them a little. Unless it’s just his credentials you’re looking for.” Pike hummed, throwing Spock a knowing look.

“I would prefer to get my information through unbiased means.”

Pike shook his head with a sigh. “Sure. Just try not to be too hard on the kid, will you, Spock? He’s a good one, that Jim. I recruited him myself, you know? He’s a bit rough around the edges and can be a curveball sometimes, but he’s worth giving a shot.”

Pike came around to Spock and clapped him on the lower back, the closest he could reach to his shoulder. “I’m glad you guys got assigned to the same starship. I think you guys could be something great.”

Spock looked at Pike, feeling the genuineness that flowed through the man as he said the words. To Spock, they were ridiculous. He already had his opinions on Kirk formed, and despite his former lover’s belief that the two of them would be successful as a team, Spock was unwilling to change them. He still trusted Pike, as both a friend and a mentor, but this time he would not take the man’s words to heart.

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Cameras flashed in Kirk’s face, the shutters sounding as if they were going off ten times every second. Spock didn’t understand why it was necessary to take so many photos of the same thing, but the media seemed intent on capturing every moment and angle with Kirk. It was big news, the announcement that Jim Kirk had been appointed starship captain of the *U.S.S. Enterprise*, making him the youngest captain ever in the history of Starfleet. It was necessary to thoroughly document this event, and Kirk, for his part, seemed to stand still and smile at the cameras, letting them get their
fill. He looked every inch the poster boy Starfleet could have wished for.

Spock watched the entire event unfold from his room, taking care to carefully pack up his belongings so that they could be transferred to his quarters on the Enterprise. Soon the media would divert some of their attention to the crew of the starship, asking them an infinite amount of questions about their five-year mission and their virgin journey into deep space. It wasn’t an event he was looking forward.

“Make sure you get my good side.” Kirk’s voice travelled through the speakers, a hint of amusement lacing his tone. Spock looked up and saw a close up of the man’s face on the screen, his blue eyes clear with all the light directed at him. Spock had seen old holos of Lieutenant George Kirk, and he had to admit that there was an eerie resemblance between him and Kirk’s features. They looked to be almost identical copies of one another.

It was odd to think how the son had followed in the footsteps of his father. Two heroes from the same family. The media would have a field day with that.

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The five-year mission had not gone off to a great start.

There had been a huge ceremony held for them with all of the remaining Starfleet cadets present, along with the higher-ups and media. The cameras had follow every member of the crew as they boarded the Enterprise, a newsreader running a continuous commentary until all four hundred of them were safely on board. There had been special attention placed on Kirk, of course, and even some on Spock which he did not care for at all.

The crew had all been on the bridge when they shipped out, watching as the crowds of people grew smaller, and smaller, and smaller the further out they went, until finally they disappeared completely. Spock watched as the city of San Francisco shrunk until it was gone, leaving in its place large lands of forest, until that too diminished and it became the country, which became the sea, which became Earth, which finally became a small sphere held up in the darkness of space. Finally they were gone, and they would not be returning for another five years.

Following that departure, the trouble had started.

Spock still held an immense dislike for Kirk and distrusted the man’s character. He could not rid himself of the image he held of the being he’d met during the academic tribunal, and it didn’t help that Kirk seemed to actively display many traits Spock considered negative. The man was extremely cocky, jesting with the alpha shift crew when on duty and unnecessarily loud in Spock’s opinion. He led the crew with blind confidence, acting as if he was aware what was expected him as a starship captain even though Spock knew he had no prior experience past the Kobayashi Maru test.

There was a severe lack of communication between the command team which was evident to everyone from the bridge crew to janitorial. Their inability to properly communicate lead to a lot of mistakes during away missions, and stilted arguments on the bridge. Kirk looked to be growing more frustrated with Spock as they clashed on what seemed to be every issue they spoke about, and Spock echoed those sentiments towards the captain.

He attempted to keep his interactions with the man to a minimum, but unfortunately his application to transfer to beta shift was denied, meaning he was forced to stay on alpha shift with the captain. Spock knew it had been a long shot since he was both the science officer and first officer of the ship, but he had hoped to be able to get at least a few hours more away from the captain.
It was when Spock and Kirk returned from an away mission where Spock had been almost shot in the arm when trying to protect ensign Kurokawa that Kirk took him aside and gave him a proper talking to.

The captain dragged the both of them into one of the turbolifts, and immediately slammed his hand over the ‘stop’ button once it was in motion.

“Captain, that is—“ Spock began, but was swiftly cut off.

“Look, I know you don’t like me,” Kirk began tersely, his eyes hard. “But you have to help me out here, man.”

“I do not understand why you would seek my help, Captain.” Spock told him.

“You and I both know I have no experience in this whole ‘captain’ area.” Kirk argued, using air quotations to make his point. “I’m new here, the crew rely on me to know what I’m doing, and as much as I wish it I’m not going to magically suddenly know everything about running a starship just because I’m now the captain of one.”

The man sighed, then looked Spock straight in the eyes. His gaze was piercing. “You’ve got to help me out here. Show me, teach me the ropes. I’m fresh out of Starfleet, you’re an experienced officer, and we can’t let our antagonism towards each other affect the workings of the ship. It’ll just lead to mistakes or the endangerment of the crew’s lives.”

Spock was certain the man was alluding to the incident in their latest away mission, but chose to remain quiet.

“Look. You and I… we don’t get along, that’s obvious to anyone with eyes, and some without. But we need to do our best to work together. We need to learn how to do that and yield some goddamn good results so that Starfleet doesn’t regret sending us out here. We’re the first starship to ever be given such a long mission, and I don’t know about you, but I do not want to cut short such a great opportunity of exploring new worlds just because we don’t get along.” He concluded, voice softening.

Silence stretched between the two of them, Spock keeping his eyes firmly on the man before him. Kirk swallowed once, and his gaze turned pleading. “So will you please, just… help me.”

A few moments of silence trickled by before Spock reluctantly agreed. “Your statement holds some logic.”


It was true.

Kirk had been correct in relation to what he had said, and Spock had been unreasonable in letting his personal disapproval of the man interfere with the good of the mission. It was an honour and rare opportunity to be offered such a mission, and if Spock didn’t make use of it then Starfleet Command would deem him to have been a poor fit.

Spock told himself that he would attempt to do more during his shifts with Kirk, offering his help and ensuring the man was aware of his tasks. If the captain of the starship did a poor job, then inevitably
the crew would follow suit, and Spock would not allow that to happen. It was up to him to make sure Kirk grew into his position as captain, because only then would the Enterprise succeed as a whole.

Spock entered his quarters, entertaining ideas on how he could best improve communications between him and Kirk. He wished to better their working relationship as a command team, but he still didn’t want to spend more time with the man than was absolutely necessary. Kirk was clearly willing to work hard in order to better their teamwork, and so it was up to Spock to match that readiness.

Spock had been on a mission into space only once before, and that was when he’d been stationed aboard the U.S.S. Redemption with Pike as his captain. Their working relationship had been excellent, but that could have been due to the fact that they were close friends. Spock wished to yield similar results between his time aboard the U.S.S. Redemption and the U.S.S. Enterprise, but he was uncertain as to how to approach the problem. He decided that it would be best if he asked Pike, as someone who was his former captain and current friend, for advice.

He sat down at his desk and brought his PADD out of the drawer, turning it on and opening up his e-mails. He had received several from Starfleet Command which included brief overviews of what they expected from Spock during the mission, as well as an e-mail from his admirer. The sender, who used the pseudonym of Semaj Ton, had been regularly sending Spock e-mails which detailed their admiration for him, asking his opinion on several subjects and wishing to discuss them further. He had believed the sender to be a student of his, but oddly enough the e-mails would not allow him to respond, and when he attempted to track the sender’s IP address he found himself blocked from searching any further.

Since the e-mails had been harmless, Spock had simply disregarded them whenever he received them. This recent e-mail, however, had been sent today. Spock wondered if they were aware of his departure into deep space— they most likely were if they lived in San Francisco. There had been little news other than the Enterprise’s upcoming virgin journey, and everyone in the city must have known.

Clicking on the e-mail, Spock read the message.

**Dear Mr. Spock,**

*I saw you boarding the U.S.S. Enterprise today, and I have to say that you didn’t look that excited. I’d like to think that I know what you’re thinking by your facial expressions, but I think I need to practice some more. Still, in my opinion you didn’t look that excited, which is a shame, because you’ve accepted a great mission. The five-year mission is a great chance for anyone (congratulations on getting it, by the way!), and since you’ve always preached about exploring new worlds and ideas, I’m hoping you’ll become more excited about it. I know you’ll do a brilliant job as the Science Officer and First Officer. I don’t think the crew realise how lucky they are to have gotten you, but just like I already know they too will soon enough.*

*I just wanted to say that I hope your time on the five-year mission will be a good one (great even), and I hope you’ll learn to love it. There’s a lot of things on board to love, you just need to give them a chance.*

**All the best,**

*Semaj Ton*

Spock appreciated the kind words of their admirer. They sounded heartfelt and genuine as opposed to the usual messages of kindness people received. He silently wished them a good future, and opened up a new e-mail and began constructing his e-mail to Pike.
It took him far longer than he expected to write out a message to the man, and Spock found himself deleting and re-writing several bits ten times over. He didn’t understand why he was struggling asking Pike about the simplest thing, but whenever he wrote something down he’d re-read it and deem it incorrect. After almost twenty minutes he had put together a message he felt was appropriate, and immediately sent it off before he could change his mind.

Thankfully he wasn’t able to dwell on it for long either, since not a moment later there was a beep at his door. Spock turned to the sound and called out, “Enter.”

The door slid open and Nyota walked into the room, looking as stunning as ever. How she managed to look so pristine even when on duty was a mystery Spock was certain he would never be able to solve.

She threw him a warm smile. “Am I interrupting something?”

“Not at all,” Spock told her, and switched off his PADD. “I was simply looking through my e-mails.”

“Anything interesting?” She asked, gracefully sitting down on the edge of his bed.

“Nothing of import.”

Nyota nodded. “They should be coming in soon enough, like their responses to your reports about the away missions and such.”

“Indeed.”

“Looking forward to it?”

“Not even a little.”

Nyota snorted, her eyes thinning in amusement. “Honestly, I thought you of all people would appreciate some feedback.”

Usually it was true, since Spock would often receive excellent remarks on his work. However, this time he was disinclined to accept feedback as he was aware his and Kirk’s relationship had been poor, and it was clear during away missions. He was curious as to what Starfleet Command had to say in reply to his report, and simultaneously did not wish to hear it at all.

“How are you faring, Nyota?” He asked her.

Nyota shrugged. “Can’t complain. Not much has happened. I’m still stuck in that trying to get to know people stage and it’s pretty slow-moving.”

“I see.”

“What about you?” She asked, crossing her legs.

“I prefer to stick to my work.”

Nyota rolled her eyes. “Which means you’re just avoiding people.”

“I am not.”

“Okay, maybe not people,” She conceded. “But you are avoiding Kirk.”
There was no point in Spock arguing against that since Nyota was keenly aware of his dislike for the man. He had shared with her his suspicions about the man in extreme detail, and even though Nyota did not actively agree with his opinions, she didn’t discredit them either. He believed she had her own pre-conceived perceptions about Kirk, but they differed slightly from his own.

“I will attempt to familiarise further with my science department once I have gotten accustomed to my positions aboard the ship.”

“And how long are you planning to drag that out?” She asked him, lifting an unimpressed brow.

Spock chose not to answer her question, and instead said. “There is an issue I have been meaning to talk to you about.”

“Yeah?” Nyota asked, perking up in curiosity.

“I wish to apologise for not deterring our kiss on the transporter pad.”

“Oh, that.” Nyota said, rolling her eyes.

“Indeed. My mind was preoccupied with the matter of—”

“Listen, Spock.” Nyota interrupted. “It’s fine. I don’t blame you for not pushing me away right then, there was a lot going on and turning me down kindly wasn’t exactly top priority at the time. You were probably still in a bit of shock.”

Spock quenched the instinctive urge to protest. He knew she was likely accurate in her statement, but still he felt somewhat insulted in having an emotion so easily assigned to him.

“Still, I believe an apology is in order.”

“It’s accepted.” She replied, her smile exasperated. “You really do this so formally, you know?”

“I do not know how to do it any other way.”

“Which is why you’re so adorable.” She laughed, dragging her hand down her ponytail. Spock watched as the strands twisted around her fingers. “You just gotta show that side to the people on board now.”

Spock immediately stiffened. “I would prefer not to.”

Nyota chuckled. “I’m not saying you have to force yourself to do it, I’m just saying that you shouldn’t shy away from them. You’ll be sharing the next five years of your life with them, you shouldn’t stay so closed off.” Her hand suddenly dropped and she sighed. “Five years. Fucking hell. It’s still not really sitting right with me.”

Spock frowned lightly. “Are you displaying regrets over your acceptance of the Communications Officer position?”

“No, no,” She assured him quickly. “It’s just… five years is a long time, you know?” At Spock’s blank stare she corrected, “For Humans five years is a long time anyway. It’s just weird for me to think that I’ll have to work straight for that many years.”

“It will of course be interspersed with other activities and shore leaves.”

Nyota shook her head fondly. “Yes, of course. But still, it…” She broke off with a sigh. “I can’t explain it. It’s just a weird feeling. I’m just hoping I get used to it eventually.”
“I am certain it will happen. There is no situation which you cannot adapt to.”

Nyota peered up at him, her smirk teasing. “You’re so sweet, Spock. I’d even dare say emotional, right now.”

“Do not be insulting.” He told her immediately, displeased with the words.

Nyota laughed, the sound a light tingle. “I’m sorry, did I hurt your precious feelings?”

“Cease this.”

Nyota laughed harder, her shoulders shaking from the force. “Aw, Spock. I’m so glad I have you here. It’d be tough taking this on all on my own.”

“I must admit to sharing your sentiments.” He revealed slowly. It would indeed have been much more trying adapting to life aboard the Enterprise had he been on his own. It would have been possible, but Spock found he preferred having a friend with him.

They spent some time talking, catching up with one another after they had been separated following the Nero incident. Nyota apparently had visited her grandmother before their departure, spending her last moments on Earth with her. Nyota had always been extremely fond of her grandmother, and Spock understood to some level why she was finding it so difficult to cope with the five-year mission. As she had said, five years was a long time for a Human, and her grandmother may not necessarily still be on Earth once they returned.

They talked some more about their expectations on the Enterprise, before Nyota excused herself. “I want to head to the gym and get a session in before dinner. You up for eating together?”

“That would be acceptable.” Spock told her.

“Great.” She smiled at him and turned to leave. However, she quickly looked back at him. “And do try to sort your differences with Kirk. I know he’s not the easiest guy to get along with, but we need you two working together.”

“I will attempt to do so.” Spock reluctantly told her.

Nyota nodded and then strode out of the room, the door sliding shut behind her.

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys! :)

Started a new fic here, and my idea was that it'll be kind of a crossover of AOS and TOS. So like the characters will be borrowed from the AOS movies, but they will go through the adventures the TOS crew went through (+ some more).

I hope this makes sense, and I hope you'll enjoy this fic :)

The sound of the metal door grinding shut echoed loudly in the holding cell, followed by heavy footsteps as their captors left.

Spock felt the muscles spasm in his shoulders from where his hands were still shackled above his head. He peered sideways to where Jim was strung up similarly to him, and found the man to be intently staring at the cell door.

They would not have been in this predicament had Spock been anyone else.

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Since Vulcan’s destruction, the number of Vulcans in the galaxy had dropped drastically to less than 6% of their home planet’s original population. Due to this Vulcans had been red alerted as an endangered race, and though universally acknowledged as a distressing situation, to some the rarity of Vulcans was a gold mine. Specifically, for creatures working in the trafficking business. There had already been two reported incidents of Vulcan children being abducted and not seen again, and it had been cause for much concern in the Vulcan community. It was a difficult notion to grasp, that there were beings out in the galaxy who thought of the destruction as Vulcan as something of worth, but they existed.

They existed, and they had taken Spock and Jim hostage.

They had been aboard the Enterprise which hovered over a planet where scans had showed there were no lifeforms of any sort. The planet was small in size, barely a twelfth the size of Earth, and so the captain hadn’t deemed it necessary to send down an entire landing party. Instead, it was decided that he and Spock would beam down to the planet to gather some preliminary data which would not take more than an hour.

Spock would have preferred to stay on board, but he understood that Jim was still unsure of his role as captain and so he required Spock’s help to steer him in the right direction. They had not been on an away mission since their argument in the turbolift, and so this would gauge if they truly were capable of working together if they both set their minds to it.

He and Jim stepped onto the transporter pads, and the captain gave the transporter chief the go-ahead.

“Energise.”

The familiar surge of energy washed over Spock, the tingling sensation of his molecules deconstructing coursing through his body.

When they materialised down on the planet, the first thing Spock saw was that the environment seemed to predominantly consist of rocks and little else. The second thing he saw was the sight of several lifeforms stood around them in a circle. They looked to be humanoid in origin, except they were almost two metres tall and their limbs were far more elongated than any other humanoid Spock had encountered. Their fingers were no thicker than twigs, looking to be extremely brittle and easily breakable.
The beings all had their gazes locked onto Jim and Spock, their dark, beady eyes never wavering nor blinking.

“Spock, are you seeing what I’m seeing?” Jim asked him, gaze flickering around them.

“It seems there indeed are lifeforms on this planet.” Spock observed.

“I don’t get it, why didn’t they show up on the tricorder readings?”

Spock looked down at the tricorder in his hand. He adjusted the knobs slightly before bringing them back to the previous frequency, but the readings didn’t change. “They still do not show.”

Spock angled the tricorder at Jim, allowing the man to see the evidence. The captain frowned, then turned look around them again. “Why are they just staring at us? Why aren’t they doing anything?”

“Perhaps it is their custom for the visitor to initiate contact.” Spock offered, just as perplexed. The beings had not moved from their positions since their arrival, and Spock had to privately admit that their stillness was unnerving.

Jim took a step forward and lightly cleared his throat. “Greetings. My name is James T. Kirk, captain of the starship Enterprise. We apologise for our sudden arrival. We were not aware there were sentient beings on this planet, if we did we would have warned you of our landing. Our tricorder seems to be malfunctioning somewhat.”

“The tricorder is completely functional, Captain.” Spock interjected.

Jim threw Spock a dirty look, “Yes, well. Thank you, Mr. Spock.” He plastered on a false smile before turning to the crowd once more. “May I ask if there is anyone we could speak to?”

The creatures remained unmoving, and a deathly silence stretched out. Spock wasn’t certain the beings understood Standard or had developed their own form of translator to understand visitors, but from the lack of reaction Jim received it seemed as if communication would be impossible.

All of a sudden the beings turned their heads, looking to their left. Spock wasn’t certain the beings understood Standard or had developed their own form of translator to understand visitors, but from the lack of reaction Jim received it seemed as if communication would be impossible.

Jim took a step forward and lightly cleared his throat. “Greetings. My name is James T. Kirk, captain of the starship Enterprise. We apologise for our sudden arrival. We were not aware there were sentient beings on this planet, if we did we would have warned you of our landing. Our tricorder seems to be malfunctioning somewhat.”

“The tricorder is completely functional, Captain.” Spock interjected.

Jim threw Spock a dirty look, “Yes, well. Thank you, Mr. Spock.” He plastered on a false smile before turning to the crowd once more. “May I ask if there is anyone we could speak to?”

The creatures remained unmoving, and a deathly silence stretched out. Spock wasn’t certain the beings understood Standard or had developed their own form of translator to understand visitors, but from the lack of reaction Jim received it seemed as if communication would be impossible.

All of a sudden the beings turned their heads, looking to their left. Spock raised a brow. It was a most curious behaviour. All of the creatures now mimicked each other’s stance, creating a circle of heads turned to the left.

“What’s going on?” Jim asked Spock, never tearing his eyes away from the creatures.

“I am as clueless to their actions as you are, Captain.”

“Great.” Jim muttered.

They watched in total silence as the creatures then turned their heads to the right, and almost thirty seconds passed before they once more looked ahead at Jim and Spock. One of the beings stepped forward, making to approach them, and Spock saw as the others fell into line behind them. They slowly ambled forward, the circle breaking off until it was a long line of them walking together, heading straight for Jim and Spock.

They came to a halt in front of Spock, towering over the man like a tree. The creature at the very front of the line bowed their body halfway, and Spock noted that even then they were taller than him. The being straightened back up and stared down at Spock, their deep, black eyes void of any light.

Spock glanced over at Jim, who shrugged in response. Spock decided the safest course of action would be to return the gesture in case it was some form of cultural greeting on the planet. It was
reminiscent of old Earth greetings in some Southeast Asian countries. Spock bent his head and bowed down, gracefully pulling himself back up once he had deemed enough time had passed.

The creature did not change its expression, but held out its hand with slim fingers stretching out, palm facing up. Spock stared at the limb, unable to comprehend the meaning behind it. Several long seconds passed where Spock did not move, keeping his hands on his tricorder. He had surmised this must have been some further form of their greeting, but he was agitated as to how to proceed. If it was similar to a Human handshake he would find it troubling to return the gesture, as for Vulcans touching another creature’s body was extremely indecent behaviour.

“Go on, Spock.” Jim urged. Spock looked to his captain and saw him nodding at the creature. “Don’t be rude.”

Indeed, Jim must have surmised the same thing as Spock. It was a shame the creature had not chosen to approach the captain first in this scenario, as it would have smoothed the introductions considerably. Spock looked back at the creature and saw that their eyes were entirely focused on him. It truly was unsettling the manner in which they seemed to never blink.

Carefully, Spock held out his own hand and gently placed it in the palm of the being.

A sudden shock coursed through his body as if he’d been electrocuted, and swiftly after Spock’s vision went black.

Truly, had Spock been anyone else they would not be in the predicament they found themselves in.

Upon stringing him and Jim up by their shackles, the beings had revealed in extremely broken Standard their pleasure at having captured a Vulcan. Spock had tensed at the comment, uncomfortable with their beady eyes directed at him as they spoke. It had been further mentioned that they intended to create a special holding cell for Spock that would cater to his needs, and from what little he’d picked up following that statement it sounded as if the beings wished to create a menagerie of some form. If that was the case, it could mean that he was only one of many they intended to capture. The thought was cause for extreme worry.

Thankfully the creatures had left them with what they had come with, their communicators, Spock’s tricorder, and the clothes on their back. It was of little consolidation, but if they were able to somehow break out perhaps they could make use of the communicators or tricorder to reach the Enterprise. Spock looked sideways at Jim again, seeing how the man’s pupils seemed to flow in and out of focus. It was an unsettling image.

“Captain.” Spock said, and Jim tiredly looked to him. “I believe when they next return they intend to take me with them.”

“That means we’ll be separated.” The captain bit out grimly. Spock could see the distress in his eyes. “We can’t be separated, Spock.”

“As circumstances stand now, that is the possibility that is most likely to occur.”

“There’ll be less chance of us getting out if that happens.” Jim retorted.

“I am certain you will figure out an escape route, Captain.”

Jim huffed. “Odd time for compliments, Mr. Spock, but I’m not leaving you behind.” Spock saw him turn to stare at the holding cell door once more, and so Spock returned to his own thoughts, struggling to figure out an escape route before their captors returned.
It had been nearly twenty minutes of silence where Spock had attempted to focus on a devising an escape plan while the sound of Jim sighing and his shackles moving interrupted Spock’s thought process. The man clearly had never experienced this type of torture before.

To be fair, neither had Spock, but he had managed to create a simulation which mimicked the effects of different types of torture. He had even gone so far as to propose it to Starfleet Command, thinking it would be useful to incorporate into the academy’s curriculum, but it had been denied on the basis of being too dangerous.

He didn’t understand why they would claim ‘danger’ as a cause for not implementing the simulation. It was tantamount that the academy gave all of their cadets the proper education required in preparation for a career in space, and unfortunately potential torture was a part of it. Space exploration did not consist solely of new worlds and discovery.

“Hey, Spock?” Jim asked suddenly, pulling the man out of his thoughts.

“Yes, Captain?”

“What’re the odds of you being able to toss me the cuff on your sleeve?”

Spock craned his neck so that he could look up at the cuff. It was a simple gold cuff, slim and no larger than the bobby pins Nyota would use to style her hair. “It depends entirely on your ability to catch it, Captain.”

“I’ll catch it.” Jim promised firmly.

“There is a 72.4% chance of me being able to successfully throw you the cuff.”

“Do it.”

Spock gathered his strength, and with utmost focus carefully placed his fingers over the cuff and slid it off of his sleeve. It came off without a hitch. Looking to the captain, Spock calculated the distance and momentum required to successfully toss the cuff to him. Spock craned his neck to the side which would allow him to better his aim, and threw it over.

Miraculously Jim managed to just barely catch the end of it between his pinky finger and ring finger. Jim breathed out a sigh of relief, and Spock watched intently as the man gingerly manoeuvred the cuff to be held between his index finger and thumb.

“Your past of crime is becoming of use.” Spock commented.

Jim’s eyes flickered over to him briefly. “So you looked into my documents, huh?”

“Affirmative.”

Jim inserted the cuff into the lock of his shackles and shakily fiddled about inside it, most likely trying to dismantle the laser that would release them. “Find anything interesting?”

“Evidence of your intelligence.”


Spock watched as the captain intently worked on the task at hand, keeping a keen ear open and listening out for the hiss of the laser disappearing. After a few more moments of Jim tampering with the lock, he turned the cuff just so and the lock emitted a sharp hss before the shackles popped open.
Jim dropped to the floor heavily, his knees making a loud sound as they knocked against the concrete.

“That feels so good.” He groaned lowly, rubbing at his wrists.

“Captain, if you would please release me.” Spock urged, eager to be let out of his hold.

Jim struggled to pull himself up, but after two attempts managed to get onto his feet. He stumbled over to Spock and reached up to unlock his shackles, fiddling with the lock until they too let out the hss sound and popped open. Spock fell to the ground more gracefully than Jim, somehow managing to land on his feet, and his muscles sung with relief at finally being able to move freely.

The two of them spent several moments slowly rotating their arms to get the blood flowing, and working out the kinks in their backs and shoulders. Spock saw how the captain tilted his head to each side until it cricked, the sound reverberating through the holding cell. Indeed, the ordeal of being shackled for such a long period of time must have been extremely arduous for a Human.

Jim pulled his communicator off his belt and held down the ‘call’ button. “Scotty, come in.”

They both waited in tense silence for a response, but nothing came through.

Jim tried contacting the Enterprise once more. “Scotty, come in.” He stressed, fingers tightening on the device.

Again, there was no reply.

Jim sighed, his shoulders sagging. Spock watched the man, feeling a sense of defeat crawl over him as the seconds trickled by. He himself had been unable to think of an escape plan yet, and time was of the essence.

Jim looked to Spock with fierce eyes. “Alright, listen closely, Spock.” He began, “When those creatures took us in, I wasn’t actually knocked out like you. I think they just did it so that they could show me what happened if I didn’t cooperate. You were essentially used as leverage.”

“You know the way out.” Spock deduced.

“…Kind of.” Jim revealed, biting his lip.

Spock quirked a brow.

“They blindfolded me before bringing us here, so I didn’t actually see where we went. For all I know this place could be a maze, I don’t know. But what I do remember is taking a lot of stairs that went down, so that means that our main direction is up.”

Jim gingerly stepped past Spock and looked through the bars of the cell door, peering out into the hallways and angling himself to better see the exit. “I’m not sure if the hallways have sensory radars or not, but going by their technology I think they do. For now, let’s just assume they do. That means we’ll need to haul ass— run really quickly—” Jim clarified. “to get all the way back up to the surface.”

“And how do you propose we avoid any of the creatures who may be alerted to our escape?” Spock asked, flexing his fingers. They, too, had suffered from going without any access to proper blood flow for so long.

“You see those sticks there?” Jim asked, pointing somewhere near the exit. Spock walked up beside
Jim and saw that he was pointing at two long, rods which looked to be made of some sort of metal. At Spock’s nod, Jim explained, “Those’ll be our weapons.”

“Quite barbaric, Captain.” Spock intoned.

“You’re free to stay, Mr. Spock, but if I need to bludgeon aliens with a metal rod in order to get out of here alive, then that’s what I’ll do.” Jim returned, gaze locked on the exit.

Though the captain’s words were crass, Spock found himself agreeing with the sentiment. It would be much more preferable to return to their ship in one piece as opposed to spending the remainder of his life locked up in a holding cell. If he were forced to physically attack another being in order to do so, he would personally consider it another form of natural selection.

Jim faced Spock. “Now, as soon as we get out, I’m going to try and comm the Enterprise. Thankfully they didn’t take our communicators so we can still get in touch with them.”

“Neither did they account for your history of crime.” Spock added.

Jim shook his head. “I don’t know if you’re insulting me or complimenting me.”

Spock wasn’t sure either.

“So, as soon as we get in touch with the ship, we beam out, and set course for as far away from this planet as we can. We don’t know what kind of technology they have, so we don’t know to what extent they could reach out to us even if we’re on the Enterprise.” He finished.

Spock nodded along to Jim’s explanation. He had devised far ahead, accounting for possible mishaps and countering them with doable solutions. Spock found himself reluctantly impressed with the amount of thought the man had put into the escape plan.

“Shocked by even more evidence of my intelligence?” Jim was looking at him with a smirk and raised brow. Spock wondered how he had deduced his thoughts. “You said that you were impressed with my plan.” Jim explained, clearing up Spock’s confusion. He must have been feeling more fatigued than he believed. “Anyway, you follow?”

“Follow where, Captain?”

“Do you understand the plan, Spock.” Jim muttered, rolling his eyes.

“I understand, Captain.”

“Good. Come along.”

Jim picked up the cuff once more and delicately inserted it into the holding cell’s lock, careful not to set off any sensory radar on the outside. For the third time that day, Spock heard the familiar hss sound of the laser being deactivated, and the lock on the door clicked open. Jim placed his hand on the door and glanced at Spock.

“You ready to run?” He asked.

Spock nodded. “Affirmative.”

“Good. On the count of three we leg it. One… two… three!” Jim threw the door open, and immediately a shrill alarm went off.

Jim and Spock ran as fast they could, grabbing the metal rods before rushing towards the exit. Jim
swiftly fell to his knees and got to work on the lock, dismantling the laser in just under twenty seconds. Spock pushed the door open and Jim fell through, scrambling to his feet with a curse before shooting off once more, Spock hot on his heels.

Jim pulled out his communicator as they paced down a hallway. “Scotty, come in.” There was no immediate reply, and Jim cursed.

“We need to get to a higher level.” Spock realised. If Jim’s description of the holding cell being underground was true, then it made sense that there was no possibility of contacting the Enterprise at this moment.

“There!” Jim called, pointing to a set of stairs that veered off to the right. They ran up them and came to a second hallway, another set of stairs at the other end. Just as they neared them two of the creatures appeared, coming down the very steps they were heading for.

Jim increased his speed and pummelled one of them into the wall, using his head of all things. Spock swiftly took on the second being, kneeing them in the shin and nerve-pinching them when they doubled over. The creature fell to the ground with a loud thud, and Spock turned in time to see Jim get thrown down.

The creature stood over him, looking impossibly tall and intimidating. Spock once more kneed the being, this time in the back of the knees, which caused them to crumble atop of Jim. Before they could get up Spock reached forward and nerve-pinched them from behind. The body slumped over, and Jim pushed them off of him before getting to his feet.

“Let’s get the hell out of here.” He hissed.

He and Spock set back onto their path, hurrying up the stairs. Thankfully the establishment they were currently in was not a maze, and the two of them kept following whichever route that led them further up. Once they reached the top of their last set of stairs they came to a large room which looked to be made entirely of natural rock. Wasting no time they dashed across it, heading for the opening on the other side.

Once more Jim attempted to contact the Enterprise. “Scotty, come in.”

“Scott here, Captain.” Came the familiar, Scottish brogue.

Spock felt a surge of relief course through his body.

“Scotty! I need you to beam me and Spock up immediately!” He told the man.

Suddenly rapid flashes of blue shot at them from an above angle. Spock swiftly pressed Jim back against the wall who let out a pained ’oof!’

Spock glanced up at the direction of the shots, and saw that there were holes littering the ceiling. Several creatures dropped from them onto the ledges of the rocks, aiming what could only be their weapons at them. A quick look around revealed there were no safe spaces for them to hide.

“Captain, there is nowhere we can protect ourselves.” Spock stressed, keeping a vigilant eye on the creatures’ activity. A few shots soared over their heads right before Spock managed to push the captain down.

“Now, Scotty!” Jim grit out.

They were fired at once more, and this time Jim and Spock jumped into action, diving in opposite
directions and barely managing to avoid the discharge. Spock felt his muscles tingle as the tell-tale effects of the transporter took place.

The last thing he saw before being beamed aboard the Enterprise was a bright blue laser heading straight for his face.

*  
As soon as they materialised on board the ship, both Spock and Jim collapsed onto the transporter pad.

“Captain!” A voice called, and engineer Scott was immediately at their sides.

“Take us away from the planet immediately.” Jim hissed, cradling his elbow where it had collided heavily with the floor.

“Captain?”

“I said ‘immediately.’”

Engineer Scott hastily reached for his communicator, pulling it out and relaying the captain’s orders to Sulu on the bridge. Jim rubbed at his elbow, grimacing as he did so. “Well done, Mr. Spock.”

It took Spock a moment to realise that the captain was complimenting him on their escape. “It was you who orchestrated our escape, Captain, not I.”

“Couldn’t have done it on my own.” He returned, gingerly sitting up.

Spock was certain Jim could have done it entirely on his own, but chose to remain silent. He didn’t feel like getting into an argument with the captain just now. He was still feeling riled up from seeing the laser shot come so close to his face.

“Excuse me, Captain, but I must go meditate.” He announced.

Jim nodded, clearly not caring that it was extremely unprofessional of Spock to depart right after the conclusion of a mission. “Of course, but make sure you go to Sickbay first so Bones can clear you for duty.”

Spock didn’t think it necessary to do so, but nodded in reply. He got up to his feet and made for the exit, leaving the captain and engineer Scott behind. He knew there was nothing amiss with him medically, but his current situation did require a few hours of meditation in order to regain some semblance of control.

*  
Spock was in his quarters, writing up the report for their latest away mission. He had concluded that the creatures on the planet had somehow managed to implement a reality distortion field, confusing the technology of his tricorder in order to convince any beings travelling over it that the planet was deserted. It was a most unusual method, and he was curious as to how they had managed to shield an entire planet from any starships. However, their actions down on the planet and ability to cloak their presence was cause for concern, and Spock added in a bit at the end that translated his worry. He highlighted it, and then marked the report as priority-2, hoping whoever received it at Starfleet Command would take care to look into the planet’s situation.

He started in on the events that occurred, fleshing out the captain’s decisions from the time they
landed to their successful escape aboard the *Enterprise*. Mid-way through Spock recalled what Jim had told him when they were shackled in the holding cell, about how he would not escape on his own and leave Spock behind. The decision had been bold, one which could have potentially forced Jim to be locked up with Spock or resulted in his death. Personally, Spock appreciated the captain’s efforts to save him too, as he believed he would only cope for so long in a menagerie before insanity took him down. However, from a Vulcan perspective, the choice had been an illogical one and extremely unprofessional, which is what Spock sent in to Starfleet Command, detailing the regulations Jim had broken during the away mission.

He had just sent off his report when his communicator informed him that he had received a new e-mail in his inbox. Spock saw it was from his secret admirer.

*Dear Mr. Spock,*

*I hope you’re enjoying yourself on your mission. I know the start of something new is always difficult to get to terms with, but you just need to power through. It helps if you look around yourself and try to seek enjoyment from things other than your job, like new activities, or new people. I’m sure if you gave it a go you’d really like it.*

*I do really admire your dedication to your job, but sometimes you get too involved in it. Don’t get me wrong, I don’t think it’s bad since your work ethic is part of who you are and has gotten you where you are today, but I think it’d be good to relax sometimes. Maybe not always work, but do something purely for fun. When I was younger, my parents worked a lot, but they always made sure that I knew the importance of doing things purely for myself. Things like running, writing, or just basking in the sun. They’re simple pleasures, but they’re just for me. Do you have anything that you do that’s just for your enjoyment? I imagine you’d say reading academic journals, but I’m wondering if there’s anything outside of that?*  

*You really should try talking to others on the ship, they could help you loosen up a little. Sorry if it keeps coming across as being insulting, but I really do think people should get to know you. They’re missing out because they don’t know you like I do, and do want them to get to know you. Does it make sense? I can’t really explain it. What I want you to know though is please be more social, and try starting conversations and talking to others. I promise you, they’ll be more than receptive and you’ll be surprised by how many people will like you. It’s what happened to me.*

*Anyway, hope you’re doing well and the best of luck to you,*

*Semaj Ton*

*Outside of their shifts and away missions, Spock and Jim generally stayed clear of one another. The captain attempted to stay civil towards Spock whenever their paths crossed, and Spock would do the same. He would see how Jim interacted with the rest of the crew, acting jovial and trading barbs with them, but when it came to Spock he kept a safe distance away, a decision Spock was immensely pleased with.*

*However, there were still some instances where they would meet.*

*One day Spock had headed to the gym to partake in two hours of upper body training only to find Jim and McCoy sparring on one of the open mats. From the looks of it, McCoy was losing spectacularly when faced with the captain’s speed and strength. Spock watched as Jim quickly grabbed McCoy by the arm, then turned around while simultaneously bending over, and threw the man over his shoulder.*
McCoy let out a deep hiss followed by a string of insults Spock could not decipher.

“Well, well, well…” Jim tutted, leisurely circling McCoy. “Can’t say I’m surprised at how things turned out. Really now, Bones, you should know better than to take me on. Prime example here of survival of the fittest. The young taking out the weak. Natural selection at play—“

McCoy suddenly turned onto his side, hugged around Jim’s knees tightly and tackled him to the ground. The man let out a loud ‘oof’ on impact, then strangely enough erupted into laughter.

“That’s cheating!” He pushed at McCoy, trying to dislodge the man.

“I'll break every rule if it means I get to beat your ass into submission.” McCoy growled.

Jim’s laughter doubled, and he smacked at McCoy until the man let up. He sat back on his haunches and stood up fully, looking down at the captain who was still chuckling on the mat.

“Get up, you’re dirtying the floor.” He huffed.

The words made the captain laugh harder, and he was forced to reach down and help Jim up as he seemed incapable of doing so on his own. The captain gave McCoy a good-natured slap on the chest, smile still in place.

He turned to get back into position but spotted Spock stood a bit away from the exit, and called out, “Mr. Spock! Fancy seeing you here.”

Spock inclined his head in reply. “It is not unusual as this is the sole training area on the ship.”

Jim rolled his eyes and looked to McCoy. “So technical.” His gaze then fell back on Spock. “Hey, while you’re here, how about a sparring session, eh?”

Spock found himself immediately uncomfortable with the suggestion. “I must decline. You would be at a distinct disadvantage as Vulcans are three times stronger than Humans.”

The captain chuckled and rubbed his hands together. “Come now, Mr. Spock. No need to hold back. I can handle whatever you dish out.” The man stepped back and fell into position on the mat, raising his hands in defence.

“I decline your offer, Captain.” Spock said more firmly.

Jim waved away his comment. “Don’t be like that. Let loose a little, would you?”

Spock found himself bristling at the man’s blatant dismissal of his refusal. “Captain—“

“Jim, leave him.” McCoy interrupted, throwing Jim a significant look.

Spock watched as the two men locked gazes, and some sort of silent conversation occurred before his very eyes. It had always been a source of fascination to Spock, the ability Humans had to use body language in order to decipher their meanings. They could be saying a certain set of words, but their body language would indicate their true intentions.

The captain then turned back to Spock and raised his hands in humble defeat. “Alright, then.” He conceded.

Jim turned his back on Spock and began conversing with McCoy in low tones. Spock could have picked up on what they were saying, but that had not been his objective when he had entered the gym. He walked off, leaving Jim and McCoy to whisper among themselves.
The first thing Spock saw when opening his eyes were the blinding lights that caused instant pain to his retinas. He squinted, and allowed his eyes to adjust to their environment before slowly opening them once more. He turned his head, taking in his surroundings which consisted of a brightly lit room, entirely white in colour and with several biobeds set up against the walls. Spock recognised the room as Sickbay.

“Rise and shine, sleeping beauty.” A voice drawled.

Spock slowly turned his head and saw McCoy approaching him, a stern expression in place. Spock marvelled over how the man managed to constantly inject such levels of surliness into his voice.

“Doctor, why am I in Sickbay?” He croaked. His throat felt dry, as if it hadn’t been in use for some time.

“Why?” The man repeated incredulously. “You don’t even remember?”

Spock was hard pressed to admit it, but he didn’t have any memory of how he came to be in Sickbay. He admitted, “The last thing I recall was the captain getting into a physical altercation with the natives on Merle.”

McCoy shook his head and muttered something under his breath that sounded suspiciously like ‘typical Jim’, then went on to explain, “It was an ambush, Spock. The second-class citizens on Merle, known as the Murians, had gotten a hold of the official communications channel and called you down, hoping to use you as leverage against the Mylise. It didn’t work out too well because Jim put up a fight, but you got caught in the crossfire. One of the Murians shot you by mistake, Spock. They immediately allowed you guys to beam aboard since violence wasn’t their intention, but the Mylise got an earful of Jim yelling about them having a society that was split into first and second-class citizens. According to Federation law, that goes against the Individual Rights Act.”

Spock blinked up at the man, unable to process the events that had apparently occurred during his absence. It seemed an awful lot, and he had most likely missed out on very important interactions which he would now need to hear second-hand in order to include it in his report.

“I see.” He uttered.

“Thankfully your Vulcan biology took care of the majority of the healing process, and lucky for you I knew something about the Vulcan trance and could tell Jim about it. Kid would not stop freaking out all over my Sickbay. He’s a hazard of the highest order.” McCoy grumbled.

“The captain was concerned?”

“Of course he was.” McCoy looked at him as if he were stupid. “You’re his First Officer and a member of his crew. Every loss to Jim hits him hard.”

Spock thought it to be an admirable trait for a starship captain to possess, loyalty and dedication to caring for their crew equally.

“For how long have I been recovering?”

“How long?”

“Two days now.”

Spock nodded in acknowledgement. Two days was not a lot of time, and he was positive he could catch up on his work in just over a day. “Thank you for your assistance.” He told the doctor.
Spock proceeded to sit up, but McCoy pushed him back. “Woah, now. You’re not going anywhere.”

Spock raised his eyebrow. “I must return to my duties—“

“Absolutely not.” McCoy interrupted swiftly, eyes hard. “You are off duty until I deem you fit to return, and I’m also assigning you two days of bedrest.” He informed Spock, writing something down on his PADD.

“That is preposterous. I am perfectly capable of completing my tasks—”

McCoy didn’t even look up from his typing when he cut Spock off with, “That’s doctor’s and Captain’s orders.”

*

Despite McCoy’s orders, Spock knew the workings of his body much better than the doctor. It was not necessary for him to stay confined to bed for two days, and so he sought to return to his duties as quickly as possible.

He had to wait several hours until he was given a chance to escape, which occurred when another patient had been brought into Sickbay with injuries. Spock caught a muted explanation about some sort of accident happening in the engineering department, but did not focus too closely on it as he carefully attempted to sneak out.

He was several steps away from the door when he was forced to stop. There was no sound in the room, which meant that if he left now the sound of the doors sliding open would give him away to McCoy. Spock looked back at the room where McCoy and the patient were hidden in, and caught the eyes of the patient. They offered Spock a smile and waved at them. Spock did not offer anything in return.

“Well, now…” Began McCoy’s voice, stepping forward and blocking Spock’s view of the patient. “Looks like that’s some nasty burns you’ve got there. Nothing the dermal regenerator can’t fix up—“

Spock quickly headed towards the door during McCoy’s explanation, the sound of the doors swooshing upon drowned out by the man’s voice.

Once outside Spock immediately headed in the direction of the bridge, intent on having a word with the captain about his orders. He made sure not to stop for anyone on the way, rushing past them and straight into the turbolift which brought him to the floor of the bridge.

The swish of the doors sliding open announced his presence. The crew were all at their stations, attentively working on their respective tasks.

It was Nyota who noticed his presence first. “Spock.”

Jim turned around at her voice, his eyes widening as he took in the figure stood at the door. “Mr. Spock? I thought you were assigned to bed rest.”

“That is precisely the reason as to why I am here, Captain.” Spock announced, and walked down until he was stood beside the captain’s chair. “Why have you restricted me to bed rest without checking whether I am fit for work or not?”

The captain frowned up at Spock. “Mr. Spock, I’m sure doctor McCoy has explained to you what exactly occurred down on the planet.”
“Indeed, he has. However, we are no longer on the planet.” Spock informed him. He was aware he was causing what could be considered ‘a scene’ as Nyota liked to tell him, which often made people uncomfortable, but he could not bring himself to care.

“That doesn’t change the fact that you took a severe hit.” Jim argued, rising from his chair. Spock saw the man’s frown deepen and slowly shift into irritation.

“Did doctor McCoy not inform you of my Vulcan healing trance which would put me into a trance-like state as my body healed my wounds?” He asked tersely.

“He did.” Jim admitted, crossing his arms over his chest.

“Then you can infer that as I am awake, I am no longer in any danger.” Spock reasoned.

“I can’t be certain of that.” Jim countered.

“Doctor McCoy can.” As soon as the words were out of Spock’s mouth he regretted them. He was fully aware that McCoy had not deemed him adequate enough to return to his work, as he was in fact supposed to be in Sickbay at this very moment.

Spock saw something dangerous flash in Jim’s eyes, and the man’s voice was suddenly much calmer than before. “That’s true, Mr. Spock. How ignorant of me.” He reached down to his belt and pulled off the comm unit. “Let’s just check with the good, old doctor, shall we?”

Spock watched in growing horror as Jim brought the communicator up to his mouth and pressed the ‘call’ button on the side.

“McCoy, come in.”

McCoy’s voice floated through the device. “McCoy here.”

“Bones, did you give our dear Vulcan First Officer here the go ahead to be released from Sickbay?” Jim asked, keeping his eyes on Spock.

“Absolutely not.” McCoy answered immediately, and the speed at which the doctor replied told Spock he was not pleased. “That pain in the ass snuck out of his bed when I was taking care of another patient. I specifically told him that he was assigned to bed rest for the next two days at least.”

“Is that right?” Jim drawled, gaze still locked on Spock. “Thank you, Bones. That’ll be all.”

“Sure.”

Jim hooked the comm unit back on his belt. “Well, we seem to have our answer.” He stated calmly.

“I oppose Doctor McCoy’s orders.” Spock disputed.

“I’m sorry? You’re going against the CMO’s decision?” Jim asked incredulously.

“The man clearly does not possess enough knowledge about Vulcan biology to make an informed medical decision.”

Spock saw as something suddenly changed in Jim, his stance turning rigid and his eyes blazing. “I don’t care what you think about his medical expertise. What I care about, and know, is that he is the best damn CMO in Starfleet and we were fortunate enough to get him on this ship, and if the man says that your ass is restricted to bed, then your ass is restricted to bed.” He grit out lowly.
Jim raised his voice and firmly stated, “That is an order, Commander.”

The hush that followed those last words was deafening. They kept their gazes firmly locked on one another, never straying away. Spock was aware that everyone on the bridge was struggling to keep their attention anywhere else but on the two of them. The various noises of the machinery around them were the only things to fill the silence.

Finally, Spock conceded. He lowered his head and turned on his heel, swiftly exiting the bridge in quick, stiff steps.

He quickly made his way back to his quarters, avoiding making eye contact with any being who crossed his path. Once he was safely in his rooms, he immediately pulled out his meditation mat and rolled it out on the floor. He was so tense he chose to forego the incense sticks, wanting to immediately get started on his meditation in order to regain his mental control. Spock got into position on the mat and let his eyes slide shut, attempting to fall into his mind.

Once more Jim had proven that Spock’s perception of him was correct. The man was abominable.

Chapter End Notes

I'm catching my plane in just under half an hour so I'll reply to your comments when I'm free to do so once more :)
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Spock used the basic tools at hand to lightly twist the knob of the computer aid to his desired frequency, wondering once again how he had managed to find himself in this predicament.

*

Several days prior the Enterprise had been flying over an unknown planet when the ship went through some mild turbulence, which quickly escalated to such an intensity that everyone was forced to grab onto their stations in order to not get hurled about the bridge. Lieutenant Sulu had suddenly fallen to the ground, seemingly unconscious, and doctor McCoy was immediately called to the bridge. He had given the lieutenant a few drops of cordrazine medicine, which had awakened Sulu despite the captain’s misgivings.

Suddenly another strong bout of turbulence hit the ship, and McCoy accidentally jabbed himself with his own hypo. The cordrazine injected was far more than the recommended dosage, and it sent the doctor into a fit of madness. He escaped to the transporter room, incapacitating the transporter chief and beaming himself down to the surface of the current planet.

Jim had swiftly put together a landing party consisting of himself, Nyota, engineer Scott, two ensigns, and Spock, who would all be beamed down to the planet in search of McCoy. Once planetside, however, they had immediately come across a strange rock, shaped in a circular form, resembling a large ring. Spock’s tricorder readings couldn’t make sense of it, and he informed Jim of this, saying that it was impossible to explain by any science he could understand.

It was revealed a few moments later that the rock formation was a sentient being when it announced itself in a strong, booming voice, as ‘The Guardian of Forever’.

“Since before your sun burned hot in space, since before your race was born, I have awaited… a question.” It declared, lighting up with every word.

Spock had been entirely perplexed by the statement, but it was quickly drowned out by his curiosity when the rock began showing flashes of images, of history, of the past tricking through its open mouth. Spock’s keen eyes saw flickers of Andorian generals leading their armies against their nemesis, of Klingons who embarked upon the path of destruction, and even a brief glimpse of Vulcan in the ages pre-Surak. The sight had a feeling of shame shoot through him.

“Killers! I won’t let you get me!”

Spock startled out of his trance and turned to the sudden noise. McCoy was being cornered by several members of the landing party, clearly still under the effects of the cordrazine and struggling against the hands that were gripping him. Spock approached the man as he attempted to break free from his hold, and administered a Vulcan nerve pinch. McCoy’s body suddenly drooped, and the ensigns had to struggle to deal with the sudden dead weight. They carefully lowered him to the ground, propping him up against one of the rocks.

Now that they had finally apprehended the man they came for, they could return aboard the Enterprise. Spock looked back to the captain, noticing that instead of tending to McCoy the man had turned back to the rock formation once more, looking contemplative.
The shifting moments of the past continued to flash before their eyes, times from ancient history up until very recent events Spock remembered reading about in holo papers. He approached Jim, stopping before the images and watching them shutter past. He caught bursts of holos, constantly changing, constantly surprising Spock with how much had happened in the past.

“Strangely compelling, isn’t it?” Jim murmured. “To step through there and lose oneself in another world…”

Spock had to agree the words resonated with him, his inane curiosity at the forefront of his mind as he watched the events unfold. He silently turned on his tricorder once more, wishing to document the images for future study. This phenomenon truly was incredible. It did not feel as if he were watching them like holos in the cinema, but as if he were a being present during that very time in history.

Truly fascinating.

Suddenly a flash of colour rushed past them, and Spock watched in horror as McCoy leapt through the mouth of the rock formation, and just as suddenly the shifting images ceased, leaving in its wake nothing but emptiness.

A brief hush followed the doctor’s departure, then Jim immediately stepped forward and fiercely asked, “Where is he?”

“He has passed into… what was.” The Guardian of Forever replied, their deep voice echoing around their surroundings.

Nyota stepped forward, catching Jim’s attention. “Captain… I’ve lost contact with the ship.” She handed the communicator over to him, a frown marring her face. “I was talking to them and suddenly it went dead. No static. Just… nothing.”

Jim peered down at the communicator, then held down the ‘call’ button and lifted it to his mouth. “Kirk to Enterprise.” There was a long moment with no response, then Jim held the communicator out to engineer Scott. “Scotty.”

The man accepted the device, tweaking it slightly before announcing with a grimace, “Nothing wrong with the communicator, sir.”

The Guardian of Forever’s thundering voice interrupted them. “Your vessel… your beginning. All that you knew… is gone.”

Jim’s eyebrows furrowed, a look of intense concentration taking over his face. “McCoy has somehow changed history.” He surmised slowly.

“With no past. No future.” Spock added, attempting to grapple with the truth of the situation.

Nyota’s voice was brittle as she spoke. “Captain… I’m frightened.”

“Earth’s not there.” Jim breathed, looking groggy. “At least not the Earth we know. We’re… totally alone.”

There had been a moment where the silence that engulfed them was so powerful Spock had thought he had ceased to exist. If the Guardian of Forever’s words were true, then the feeling made sense.
What they had known to be no longer was, would never be, and here they were, stuck on an unknown planet for what could only be the rest of eternity.

Jim suddenly squared his shoulders, and Spock saw the determination in the man’s eyes before he loudly announced, “No. We’re not going to be stranded here.” He turned to the crew with his hands on his hips. “I won’t let that happen. Spock and I will be following after McCoy and attempt to set right whatever it is that he’s changed, and then we’ll get out of here. I promise.”

Nobody went against the captain’s words, and Spock wondered if it was due to the blind confidence Jim was so familiar with displaying, or their own wishful thinking of escaping the reality. He would have contended the captain’s choice had he not deemed the solution to be the best course of action. Spock looked to the rock formation and saw that the memories had once more begun flashing through its mouth.

“Captain,” Spock announced all of a sudden, bringing up his tricorder. “I was recording images at the time McCoy left.”

Jim’s eyes flashed with understanding and he came to stand next to Spock, watching as he worked on attuning the tricorder.

“A rather barbaric period in your American history.” Spock mused. “I believe I can approximate just when to jump. Perhaps within a month of the correct time. A week, if we are fortunate.”

“Make sure we arrive before McCoy got there.” Jim told him. “It’s vital we stop before he does whatever it was that changed all history.” He then looked to the rock formation, and asked, “Guardian, if we are successful?”

“Then you will be returned.” It revealed, its circular form flashing with light in rhythm with its speech. “It will be as though none of you had gone.”

Jim nodded and slowly turned to the landing party.

“Captain, it seems impossible. Even if you’re able to find the right date…” Nyota ventured, worry colouring her voice.

Engineer Scott chimed in with his own words of concern. “Then even finding McCoy would be a miracle.”

“There is no alternative.” Spock informed them, keeping his gaze strictly on the mouth of the rock formation. He wished to care for his friend and assuage Nyota’s worries, but he had to focus on the task at hand. Spock continued to twist the knobs on the tricorder, but it was a difficult task adjusting the readings to find the exact moment McCoy had departed. He wasn’t certain he would be able to find the precise time.

He heard Jim talking to the rest of the landing party, his voice soft but firm. “Scotty… when you think you’ve waited long enough, each one of you will have to try it. Even if you fail at least you’ll be alive in some past world somehow.”

“Aye.” Engineer Scott replied grimly.

“Seconds now, sir. Stand by.” Spock cautioned the captain, gaze still on the images rushing through the mouth of the rock formation.

“Good luck, gentlemen.” Scotty told them.
Spock heard footsteps kick at the dirt, and then he felt Jim near and stop at his side. Spock looked down at the tricorder in his hands, his eyes intently following the readings that fluctuated across the screen.

“And…” He began, looking down at the tricorder to keenly follow the readings until—there—he saw it, the period in time McCoy had left. He immediately dropped his tricorder. “Now.”

They jumped.

* 

Once they landed in the time period, they had the misfortune of being apprehended immediately. Or, perhaps ‘immediately’ was an erroneous use of the word.

He and Jim had arrived only to realise that their attires sorely stood out in comparison to the fashion of that century. The people wore long, billowy coats and trilby hats in dark or beige colours, not brightly coloured Starfleet uniforms that stuck to their bodies like second skins.

Spock was unsure as to how to go about blending in with the population, but Jim’s hand on his elbow stole his attention. He looked to the man and saw that he was looking up somewhere. Spock followed his gaze and spotted several clothes hanging off the fire escape of a building, presumably left out to dry.

Spock turned back to Jim. “Theft, Captain?”

“Well, we’ll steal from the rich and give back to the poor… later.” Jim justified weakly.

Spock watched as the man climbed up the fire escape of the building and tore down several of the clothing items, then returned down to Spock, arms full of stolen garments and a bright grin in place.

“I think I’m gonna like this century.” He proclaimed as they began heading away from the scene of the crime. “Simple, easier to manage. We’re not gonna have any difficulty explaining…”

A sudden harrumph caught their attention, and they both looked up to see a police officer dressed entirely in black with a cap atop of their head.

Jim and Spock both froze in their steps.

A beat of silence passed, then the officer inquired, “Well?”

“You’re a police officer.” Jim said, noting the obvious. “I, uh, recognise the traditional accoutrements.” He looked to Spock then, and his eyes caught on Spock’s ears. Indeed, Spock too had forgotten to keep his ears hidden in this environment, and now he was uncertain as to how to proceed.

“You were saying you’ll have no trouble explaining it.” Spock said, handing the responsibility over to the captain.

Jim opened his mouth, possibly to insult Spock in some manner as he was prone to do sometimes, but then glanced back at the police officer. “My friend is obviously Chinese.”

Spock lifted an eyebrow at that explanation.

Interesting.

The police officer tilted his head in mild disbelief.
“I see you’ve noticed the ears.” Jim ploughed on. “They’re actually easy to explain. Uhh…” Jim gave Spock a significant look which he interpreted as one of the captain’s ‘help me’ looks. He had a large variety of those.

“Perhaps the unfortunate accident I had as a child.” Spock offered.

“The unfortunate accident he had as a child.” Jim agreed swiftly. “He caught his head in a mechanical… rice picker.” He finished weakly.

Spock looked to the captain, amazed at the man’s poor attempts at bending the truth as well as his rather racist remark. He would have to discuss this incident with Jim at a later time, perhaps even organise a cultural sensitivity training for him and the crew.

The captain continued to speak, every word sounding more uncertain than the next. “But fortunately there was an American… missionary living close by who was actually a, uh, skilled, uh, plastic surgeon in civilian life.”

“Alright, alright.” The police officer interrupted, raising his hands, one of which held a period-specific baton. Clearly he had heard enough of the captain’s lies, and Spock could not blame the man for reacting with such utter disbelief. Jim was an abysmal liar. “Drop those bundles and put your hands on that wall there. Come on!”

The police officer manhandled the both of them against the wall, and Jim dropped the clothes in defeat, sharing a look with Spock. The officer had just proceeded to frisk the captain when Jim turned around. “Oh, how careless of your wife to ley you got out that way.” He said, and pointed at a spot on the officer's uniform.

“What?” The man glanced down at the spot.

“Oh, yes,” Spock agreed quickly. “It’s quite untidy. Here, let me help you.” He placed his fingers over the officer’s shoulder and administered the Vulcan nerve pinch, catching the man as he crumbled in his arms.

Jim and Spock hurriedly propped the police officer up against the wall of the building. A crowd had gathered since their arrest and they were curiously watching their every move. This was not ideal. Spock and Jim picked up the discarded clothes and immediately made a run for it in the opposite direction.

The sound of a police whistle followed after them as they ran, and they were forced to increase their speed in order to avoid being caught. They headed into unfamiliar streets and Spock was forced to trust that Jim knew where to go as he trailed after him, rounding one of the buildings into an alleyway. There they encountered a set of stairs which they escaped down, and through a door which turned out to lead to a basement. Once inside, Spock firmly shut the door behind them.

The room was shrouded in darkness, the only light coming from a small window that looked out into the streets, catching people’s feet as they walked past. Cobwebs stuck to several of the furniture present, most of it old and battered. Jim silently paced toward a staircase that lead up to another floor and peered up, but there looked to be no incoming danger.

He walked over to one of the old desks and disposed the bundle of clothes on it. “You were actually enjoying my predicament back there.” He told Spock in an accusing tone. “At times, you seem quite Human.”

Spock looked to the man with barely contained annoyance, then reached to pick out several pieces of
clothing for himself. “Captain, I hardly believe that insults are within your prerogative as my commanding officer.”

“Sorry.” Jim muttered, clearly not meaning it.

It was as they were getting dressed in the stolen garments that Spock began thinking about how they would go about their mission now. They had landed in the specific time period McCoy would arrive in, they had acquired the proper garments that would allow them to blend in with their surroundings, but what now? What would be their starting point?

Spock picked up his tricorder, pressing about on the buttons until it brought up the readings he had recorded prior to their jump through the Guardian of Forever’s mouth. By analysing the data he would be able to calculate when McCoy had, or would, arrive at their specific time location. Indeed, after adjusting the tricorder slightly Spock found that they had landed several days before McCoy was due to arrive, meaning they had enough time to prepare for the man’s appearance.

“Time we faced the unpleasant facts.” Jim announced suddenly. Spock looked to the man, and saw he had finished dressing. He wore a loose red and black checkered shirt, along with a pair of grey trousers which emphasised the man’s thighs. The captain had a desirable physique, and the attire he wore undoubtedly highlighted it.

“First, I believe we have about a week before McCoy arrives, but we can’t be certain.” Spock placed the tricorder on the table and adjusted the buttons on his sleeves. They were causing some irritation to his wrists.


“There is a theory.” Spock revealed, struggling to insert the tails of his shirt into his trousers. “There could be some logic to the belief that time is fluid, like a river with currents, eddies, backwash.”

“And the same currents that swept McCoy to a certain time and place might sweep us there too.”

“Unless that is true, Captain, we have no hope.” Spock picked up his tricorder once more and followed after Jim as he paced around the room, exploring every crook and cranny. “Frustrating. Locked in here is the exact place and moment of his arrival. Even the images of what he did. If only I could tie this tricorder in with the ship’s computers for just a few moments.”

“Couldn’t you build some form of computer aid here?” Jim asked.

“In this zinc-plated, vacuum-tubed culture?” Spock countered, unable to keep the incredulity out of his voice.

Jim nodded. “Yes, well. It would pose an extremely complex problem in logic, Mr. Spock.”

Spock heard an underlying current of challenge in the man’s voice, and felt himself bristle.

“Excuse me. I sometimes expect too much of you.” Jim apologised.

Indeed, it had been a challenge.

Spock lifted a delicate eyebrow, about to counter the captain’s words, when a female voice called out, “Who’s there?” at which point he rushed to put on the wool hat Jim had stolen and pulled it down over his ears.
The female voice had belonged to a woman named Edith Keeler, and she ran a homeless mission in the city. When Jim had blatantly lied about their whereabouts, saying they were cold and strangers in need of someplace to sleep, Miss Keeler had immediately taken them under her wing. She offered to pay the two of them fifteen cents an hour for ten hours of work in a day, and in exchange she would receive some help around the mission.

Miss Keeler turned out to be an exceptionally sweet woman, greatly kind and caring with a giving nature. She was well-versed in the arts, often providing entertainment on the piano for the homeless who came in for their meals. She was soft-spoken, principled and always offered her hand to those in need. In short, she was a rather remarkable human being.

Spock found her to be especially curious during one instance during suppertime, when she had just finished a bout on the piano and turned to speak to the hall at large.

“One day soon man is going to be able to harness incredible energies.” She announced slowly, growing more confident with every word she spoke.” Maybe even the atom. Energies that could ultimately hurl us towards other worlds in… in some sort of spaceship. And the men that reach out into space will be able to find ways to feed the hungry millions of the world and to cure their diseases. They will be able to find a way to give each man hope and a common future.”

Not many in the hall paid her any mind, but her speech had piqued both his and the captain’s interest.

“Development of atomic power is years away. Space flight, years after that.” Jim observed, turning to Spock.

Spock nodded slowly, keeping his eyes on the woman. “Speculation. Gifted insight.”

Jim looked to Miss Keeler on the stage, a fond smile gracing his lips. “I find her… most uncommon, Mr. Spock.”

* 

They had ended up staying at the same lodgings Miss Keeler stayed at, which cost only two dollars a week for a room. Spock was uncertain as to how much two dollars amounted to during this period in comparison to credits during his own time, but it left them with some leftover money from their jobs, and so he accepted the stay.

In between their shifts at the mission, Spock would use his off hours to work on the computer aid he was determined to create, regardless of Jim’s faith in his abilities. It took him considerably longer to construct the device with the meagre selection of tools he had at hand, and he silently cursed McCoy for jumping through the time portal.

This would not do. In order to complete the computer aid Spock would need for some platinum, 5 or 6 pounds, which was required so as to pass certain circuits through the computer aid he was currently working on in order to be used as a duo-dynetic field core.

When he had shared this with Jim, the man had promptly told him it was impossible to acquire the items with the salary they received, and Spock found himself growing irritated with the man. The captain was essentially asking Spock to work with material which was hardly very far ahead of stone knives and bearskins. No being could work in his conditions.

It was only through luck that Spock spotted two men at the shelter as he was cleaning, working with delicate tools used to make cuckoo clocks.
And so it came to be that Spock had to resort to stealing the tools, delicately breaking into the safe they were kept in. He worked quietly and efficiently at working the lock upon, twisting the sensitive dial around until he heard the telltale ‘click’ of it opening. Once he had the tools, he smuggled them back to their room, depositing them on the desk and immediately getting to work on the computer aid.

The following day, after their work shifts had ended, Edith Keeler approached Jim and Spock with a severe expression.

“That toolbox was locked with a combination lock, and you opened it like a real pro.” She told Spock accusingly. She stepped up to him, coming to a stop an arms’ length away. “Why did you do it?”

“I needed the fine tools for my radio work. They’d have been returned in the morning.” Spock told her honestly.

Miss Keeler shook her head. “No, I’m sorry. I can’t—“

“If Mr. Spock says he needs the tools and that they’d be returned by tomorrow morning, you can bet your reputation on that, Miss Keeler.” Jim interrupted, looking to the woman with a slow smile.

Spock watched as Miss Keeler gazed at Jim, then slowly crossed her arms and ambled over to him. “Walk me home? I still have a few questions I’d like to ask about you two.” Jim put on an innocent face, but Miss Keeler was having none of it. “Oh, and don’t give me that “questions-about-little-old-us?” look. You know as well as I do how out of place you two are around here.”

Spock felt himself perk up at those words. “Interesting. Where would you estimate we belong, Miss Keeler?” He asked, stepping closer.

“You?” She asked Spock with a raised brow, then nodded at Jim. “At his side. As if you’ve always been there and always will.”

The words caused Spock to still. They were baseless and entirely untrue, inferred from what little she had seen of Jim and Spock. It would make sense that she would assume such as they did not veer far from one another during their time in this period, but it was only because they were on a mission and had to stick together as the command team.

Miss Keeler was totally incorrect in her assumptions.

He looked to Jim, wanting to gauge the other man’s reaction to the words, but he was entirely focused on Miss Keeler who in turn was looking at him. “And you…” She said slowly. “You belong… in another place. I don’t know where or how. I’ll figure it out eventually.”

Spock watched as Jim’s lips stretched into a slow smile, his eyes thinning slightly. Miss Keeler too seemed to be enraptured by the captain, the two of them silently staring at each other for an inordinate amount of time. The exchange seemed to be highly intimate, and Spock sought to remove himself from the situation immediately.

“I’ll finish with the furnace.” He declared, then walked over to the object.

From the corner of his eye he saw as Miss Keeler left the room, walking up the stairs. Jim stared after her for just a moment, then followed in her footsteps, leaving Spock to his own devices.

*
It was a peculiar few days.

Spock and Jim both worked hard at their jobs, sweeping, chopping vegetables, ladling out food, and any other odd jobs that needed to be done. They were simple but repetitive tasks, offering Spock none of the mental stimulation he was used to experiencing when working at his station aboard the Enterprise. He felt restless, unable to settle himself, and the closest thing he had to a distraction was developing the computer aid.

Jim, on the other hand, seemed to be enjoying himself immensely. He spent much of his time working happily humming tunes Spock was unfamiliar with, taking on the tasks with gusto and a smile for the homeless who came for food. He acted completely at odds with the way Spock felt, and he was certain this behaviour had to do with a certain Miss Edith Keeler.

Spock had been under the impression that Jim partook mostly in ill-advised sexual relations that held little meaning, and so it was all the more disconcerting watching the man’s emotions at play whenever encountered with Miss Keeler.

His face would transform somehow, from a bright smile, to an even brighter grin. He was attuned to Miss Keeler’s every word, offering his own thoughts in return, and they would converse with one another at length whenever Miss Keeler would drop by during their working hours. Whenever the woman entered the room, Jim seemed to know, and he would turn to her in the same manner an Earth sunflower opened up to the sun.

He reminded Spock of young Earth children who experienced their first romantic interest, bashful and innocent in his actions. It was, simply put, odd to see the captain’s humanity displayed so openly.

* 

The computer aid had finally been completed.

Spock was overjoyed that his long hours of work had finally paid off. He immediately turned it on, proceeding to connect it with his tricorder in order to transfer the information to the computer aid and cross-reference the readings to estimate McCoy’s arrival.

It should have been a simple task, taking no longer than a few minutes, but what Spock found instead was a shock.

He had come across an article during the tricorder readings’ transfer, detailing certain information about Miss Keeler. He zoomed in on the first paragraph of the article, intending to read it through, but just as he got past the third paragraph the screen of the computer aid went static. Spock heard a buzzing coming from the wires where they were plugged into the powerpoint, followed by a light stench of burning. He hastily went to switch off the powerpoint, then returned to his seat.

He stared at the screen of the computer aid, attempting to process the information he had just discovered. If what he had read was true, then that meant that possibly, just possibly, he had found the prime focus that would aid them in completing their mission.

The door suddenly opened, and Jim walked into the room.

“How’re the stone knives and bearskins?” He asked, a thread of amusement in his voice.

Spock hesitated, then revealed, “I may have found our focal point in time.”

“I think you may also find you have a connection burning someplace.” Jim said, peeling off his
“Yes, I’m overloading those lines.” Spock confirmed. “I believe we’ll have our answer on this screen.”

“Good.” Jim nodded, then went off to fetch a chair for himself.

“And, Captain…you may find this a bit distressing.” Spock cautioned.

“Alright. Let’s see what you have.” Jim responded casually, paying no heed to his warning.

There was little else Spock could do to prepare the man for the truth. He switched the computer aid back on, willing it to work. “I’ve slowed down the recording we made from the time vortex.”

The screen lit up, showing an article entitled, ‘F.D.R. Confers With Slum “Angel”’, with a large photo of Miss Edith Keeler on the page.

“February 23, 1936. Six years from now.” Jim read off. “The president and Edith Keeler conferred for some time today—’”

Suddenly another bout of static fell over the computer aid, the device emitting strange noises as the screen shifted before erupting into flames. Spock immediately removed the cable from the computer aid, and the flames died down, leaving traces of nothing but smoke curling up into the air.

Jim peered down at the wires. “How bad?”

“Bad enough.” Spock confirmed.

Jim brought his hand to his chin, eyebrows furrowing in concentration. He began ambling around the room, speaking openly. “The president… and Edith Keeler…”

“It would seem unlikely, Jim.” Spock interrupted him, hoping the usage of his name would gain the man’s full attention.

It did not, and Spock had to reveal the truth he had found to his captain’s back. “Few moments ago, I read a 1930 newspaper article. I saw her obituary.” Jim looked shocked at the information, his eyebrows furrowing further. Spock elaborated, “Some sort of traffic accident.”

“You must be mistaken.” Jim said slowly, confusion marring his face. “They both can’t be true.”

“Captain, Edith Keeler is the focal point in time we’ve been looking for. The point in time both we and doctor McCoy have been drawn to.” Spock explained.

He saw as understanding dawned over the captain. “She has two possible futures then.” Jim deduced, expression grim. “And depending on whether she lives or dies all of history will be changed. And McCoy…”

“Is the random element.” Spock finished.

Finally, the harsh reality was out. Spock watched as several emotions played out over the captain’s face, his expression shifting as he came to terms with the facts.

“In his condition, what does he do? Does he kill her?” Jim wondered aloud.

“Or perhaps he prevents her from being killed. We don’t know which.”
A stretch of silence passed between the two of them, filling up the room. Jim and Spock stared at each other, never letting their gazes break for what seemed like hours.

Finally, Jim ordered, “Get this thing fixed.” His words were stilted as he spoke. “We must find out before McCoy arrives.”

He made as if to leave the room, clearly losing control of his emotions. There was still something Spock wished to ascertain, and before Jim could leave he quickly inquired, “Captain. Suppose we discover that in order to set things straight again, Edith Keeler must die?”

Jim froze in place, a distraught expression crossing his face. Spock suddenly wished he had never asked.

* 

Spock was in their room, working on tweaking the computer aid once more when Jim entered the room, shutting the door more harshly than necessary.

“How long before we can get an answer?” He demanded, moving about the room tersely. He had drifted through various stages of emotions since he found out about Edith Keeler’s possible death, going from despair, to grief, anger, resentment, and powerlessness, until he had finally settled on this; agitation.

“I will need at least two more days before I dare make another attempt.” Spock responded, keeping his eyes on his work. He had been trying relentlessly to get the computer aid back into working order, increasing his efficiency by 16%, the fastest he could work without making any mistakes.

“McCoy could have been in the city a week now, for all we know. And whatever he does that affects her changes history, could happen tonight, tomorrow morning.” Jim was pacing about the room, his pent-up energy evident in every move he made.

Spock struggled to keep his exasperation under control, and calmly stated, “Captain, our last bit of information was obtained at the expense of 30 hours’ work in fused and burned circuits.”

Jim turned to look at Spock, his eyes serious. His tone was desperate. “I must know whether she lives or dies, Spock. I must know what to do.”

* 

Finally, the computer aid had been repaired, and the first thing Jim ordered was that they continue their research on what would happen in the case of Miss Edith Keeler’s death or long life. They were sat by the device once more, Spock operating the knobs in order to work it, and Jim sat next to him, focus directed on the screen as Spock spoke.

“This is how history went after McCoy changed it.” They watched as the screen flipped through images of a courtroom with people arguing passionately at the stand, their voices perished due to lack of audio. “Here, in the late 1930s, a growing pacifist movement whose influence delayed the United Stated entry into the Second World War. While peace negotiations dragged on, Germany had time to complete its heavy-water experiments.”

Jim’s voice was detached. “Germany. Fascism. Hitler.” The images on the screen showed a large sea of people marching about, raising their hands over their heads and shouting, ‘Sieg… Heil!’ “Won the Second World War.”

Spock nodded. “Because all this lets them develop the A-bomb first.” He peered at Jim from the
corner of his eyes, and saw the man looking extremely bleak. He looked back at the screen. “There’s no mistake, Captain. Let me run it again.”

Spock reached for the computer aid and worked with some of the wires, sitting back once he was done. Again, they watched the images and words flash across the screen, same as before, never-changing. They sifted through several articles in connection to Edith Keeler and her actions, and Spock read off one of them.

“Edith Keeler. Founder of the peace movement.”

“But she was right. Peace was the way.” Jim argued.

“She was right. But at the wrong time.” Spock admitted. “With the A-bomb and with their V-2 rockets to carry them Germany captured the world.”

“No.” Jim sighed.

“And all this because McCoy came back and somehow kept her from dying in a street accident as she was meant to.” Spock caught the captain’s eyes. “We must stop him, Jim.”

Jim rose from his seat, and Spock watched as the man slowly paced around the room, his gaze locked on the floor. “How did she die? What day?”

“We can estimate general happenings from these images but I can’t trace down precise actions at exact moments, Captain.” Spock revealed. “I’m sorry.”

The sudden quietness that overcame them seemed to last much longer than it was. The captain continued to be deep in thought, and Spock patiently waited, unsure of what to say.

Jim finally looked at Spock, and softly disclosed, “Spock… I believe I’m in love with Edith Keeler.”

Spock would like to say he was surprised at the confession, but it would have been a lie. He had deduced from the manner Jim had acted around Miss Keeler that he held her in high esteem, as well as some strong emotions. It was what he had feared about having Jim Kirk as his captain. The man had been emotionally compromised.

“Jim, Edith Keeler must die.” Spock insisted to him, hoping to get across the severity of the situation.

Whether he was successful or not, Spock didn’t know, because Jim’s only response was deep silence.

*

In the end, finding McCoy turned out to require much less searching than either of them had predicted.

The doctor had told them about how he had been brought to Miss Keeler’s homeless mission by a man on the streets, and how she had nursed him back to health, flushing the cordrazine right out of his body. She had allowed him to stay at the mission until he recovered, and McCoy had gracefully accepted the good woman’s help.

On that same night, Jim and Miss Keeler had planned to attend the cinema together to catch a Clark Gable film— some famed actor from that time— when during their walk she had revealed information on her latest patient, a man named McCoy. Jim had jumped in recognition at the name, and yelled for Spock, who heard the man from where he was heading home on the streets.
The two of them had stopped right outside the door of the mission, and not a moment later the door
opened and out stepped Leonard McCoy himself.

Jim pounced on the man, engulfing him in a tight hug, and McCoy returned the embrace with similar
fervour. Spock watched as the two of them gripped onto one another, laughing brightly at finally
being reunited. Spock had not been aware of the doctor’s presence in the city, but he had to admit to
feeling a surge of delight at having finally found the man.

He caught a sudden movement in the corner of his eye, and looked up just in time to see Miss Keeler
crossing the street, completely unaware of the oncoming vehicle.

“Edith.” A voice breathed.

The captain broke free from McCoy’s hug and ran to the edge of the pavement, but stopped short of
interfering with what was about to occur.

What had to occur.

Spock saw McCoy take note of the situation and made to dash past Jim, intending to rescue Miss
Keeler himself, but Jim grabbed onto him, holding the doctor tightly in his arms as he averted his
own gaze from the scene.

And so it happened that Miss Keeler’s future came true.

The sound of flesh colliding with metal echoed throughout the street. Time seemed to be suspended,
movements slowing down, noises eradicated with nothing but the sound of the body heavily hitting
the ground.

As soon as it happened, the street erupted into a flurry of noise, people rushing toward the scene of
the incident, yelling, yapping, talking over one another as they all congregated around the lifeless
form of a once great woman.

“You deliberately stopped me, Jim.” McCoy whispered with contained anger, watching the scene
unfold before his very eyes. “I could have saved her. Do you know what you just did?”

Spock watched Jim push away from McCoy, his expression one of extreme anguish as he stumbled
owards the wall. His body was shaking, eyes wide and unfocused.

Spock decided the captain was incapable of answering McCoy’s question, and so he answered for
him.

“He knows, Doctor.” Spock’s eyes flickered to where Jim was leaning, his forehead resting against
the wall. “He knows.”

Edith Keeler’s death seemed to have taken quite the drastic toll on Jim.

He still tended to his duties as captain of the starship, but there was a significant lack of energy to
him. The usual jovialness that the crew had grown accustomed to was nowhere to be found on the
bridge, replaced instead with quietude. It had worsened to such a degree that the crew members
taken care to steer clear of Jim, uncomfortable with how they would handle the man in his current
state.

Spock had even overheard McCoy complaining, but Nyota had informed him that it was rooted in
worry.

“Best friend duties,” She’d told him, then grimaced. “Except for him it’s not duties. He genuinely
cares about how Kirk feels, even if he doesn’t show it.”

Spock had to agree that there must have been some truth to her words, as McCoy looked to be the
only being on the ship who actively sought Jim out in order to spend time with him. Spock ignored
the fact that the man seemed to always be carrying a bottle of alcohol with him lately.

He would sometimes catch the captain on shift, looking far into the distance as if he were somewhere
else entirely. His eyes would glaze over, and Spock would immediately interrupt him with some
mundane question or alert about the ships’ ongoings. Each and every time Jim would offer an
appropriate response, albeit in a despondent tone. It was highly unsettling.

Spock had postponed handing in his copy of the report from the away mission until the captain was
deemed better, but the man’s behaviour had continued on for so long that it was unseemly to delay it
any further. He was uncertain as to whether Jim still regularly checked his e-mail, and so he decided
it would be best to hand it over in person to ensure that Jim indeed received the report. He did not
wish to be scolded by Starfleet command for having unsuccessfully handed in his report when the
responsibility to hand it all in laid in the captain’s hands; this way Spock was able to confirm that he
indeed had done his bit and was blameless.

He exited his quarters and turned to the door on his left, the room belonging to Jim. The two of them
shared a bathroom and shower, but so far they had yet to cross paths. Thankfully.

Spock reached up and buzzed the intercom. It took precisely 6.3 seconds for Jim’s voice to call out,
“Enter.”

The door slid open and Spock stepped inside. Jim looked to him from where he was sat at his desk, a
PADD open in front of him. Well, it seemed the captain did at least attempt to complete his work.

“What can I do for you, Mr. Spock?” Jim asked, his voice tired.

Spock stepped forward and held out the PADD to Jim. “My copy of the report on our latest away
mission.”

Jim accepted the PADD with a nod. “Yes… I’ve been waiting to receive this from you.”

“I did not wish to hand it in when you were in such a… delicate situation.” Spock said in way of
explanation, clasping his hands behind his back.

Jim offered him a ghost of a smile, then set the PADD down on his desk. “You and everybody else it
seems.”

“I believe the crew are worried about you.” Spock offered. There was no need for him to stay any
longer. He had completed his task and handed in his report, and it was not required of him to remain
in the captain’s quarters any longer.

But Jim looked despondent, and weary. Spock had not known the man for long, but from their
interactions he had learned that Jim’s natural state was anything but that. He was boisterous, exuded
false confidence, and was highly emotional. That was the Jim Kirk he knew of, not this fatigued
replica of the man.

“Well, Mr. Spock, they’re going to have to stay worried some more. Feelings like this don’t just pass
in the blink of an eye.” Jim said faintly.
Spock saw the captain let out a soft sigh, and his eyes fell to the PADD in front of him. Spock briefly observed the man, taking in his drooping shoulders, the bags under his eyes and slow movements. From what Spock had gauged of Jim since their return from the away mission, the captain was displaying the most common symptoms of what Humans were fond of dubbing as a ‘broken heart’.

Having loved someone so deeply, and then experiencing their loss. The aftermath of a broken relationship. It was surprising for Spock to see that the captain was going through this as he had never heard of him holding deep affections for any being before, only rumours of his conquests. “I must admit, I did not think Edith Keeler’s death would affect you so, Captain, as I was under the impression it was no hardship to get you engaged in sexual activities.” Spock confessed.

There was a beat of silence, then all of sudden Jim whirled around on Spock, body tense and anger burning in his eyes. “Get out.” He hissed through clenched teeth.

Spock straightened up. He sensed he’d made a mistake of some sort. “Captain—“

“I said get out!” Jim snarled, rising from his chair.

Spock deemed the current situation too fickle to properly predict the outcome of, and so he followed the captain’s orders and promptly left.

* *

If the past weeks had taught the crew of the starship Enterprise anything, it was that whenever there was tension on the bridge or trouble planetside, it could more often than not be attributed to the ship’s captain and first officer.

The following shifts on the bridge were filled with heavy tension, and every single being on duty was aware of it whenever they clocked in for work. It was very clear from their behaviour, and the manner in which they either keep their attention solely on their tasks, or openly looked back and forth between Spock and Jim, that the current standoff made for an extremely difficult working environment.

Under any other circumstances Spock would have scolded them for showing unnecessary interest in a situation that was not their own, but on some level he didn’t wish to speak out on the bridge. The tension was so high that Spock feared that if he said any words at all, let his voice be heard even once, the captain would whirl on him in very much the same manner he had done in his quarters. The memory was still one that brought unease over Spock.

Usually he would not care about candidly engaging in verbal sparring with Jim, as they had experience in doing so several times before, but this time around he hesitated. He had a strange feeling that the fault lay somewhat with him, and he was uncertain as to how he should go about resolving the situation.

Thankfully he found some relief in the fact that Jim had changed some of his own shifts so that they did not coincide with Spock’s, but it did nothing to change the atmosphere on the bridge which continued to be very much taut and silent.

It had reached such high levels of staleness that Nyota cornered him one time after their shifts and confronted him about what was happening on the bridge.

“Tell me what happened word for word, Spock.” She demanded, hands on her hips.

“I am unsure I can recall—”
“Don’t give me that bullshit.” She snapped. “You have an eidetic memory, I’ve seen it in action. Tell. Me. What. Happened.”

Spock took a deep breath and prepared himself for the incoming reprimand he would receive. Indeed, it had been wise to prepare himself, because once he had finished reiterating the happenings that occurred during the away mission, he felt as if he had reduced himself to nothing more than a child. If Spock had thought Nyota was moved by anger earlier, he had been sorely mistaken. His friend looked as if she could burn a hole in his head simply from glaring at him, and Spock did not think it entirely impossible.

“What the hell is wrong with you?!” She yelled, taking up space in the room. “You don’t just bring up someone’s sexual past when they’re mourning the death of someone they loved! That’s so fucking— ‘rude’ doesn’t even begin to cover it, Spock, not even ‘insincere’ or ‘inconsiderate’. No, what you did was a straight up dick move! Hell, Spock, what you did to Kirk was almost like Kirk goading you into punching him after your mom died.”

“It was nothing like that.” Spock argued fiercely, his eyes hard.

“I… yeah, it wasn’t, sorry.” Nyota faltered briefly, but quickly got back on track. “But do you see my point? You can’t just insinuate that he shouldn’t be sad when someone he loved died. You don’t get to dictate how people feel about things, it’s not your emotions and it’s not your place to say anything. It’s not right, Spock. It’s so not right. And Kirk is Human, we struggle way more to control our emotions and keep them in check compared to Vulcans. What you said must have…” She let out a frustrated sigh. “I can’t even begin to imagine what he’s feeling right now.”

“In hindsight, my actions were grave.”

Nyota snorted. “Yeah, no shit, Spock. Imagine if someone did the same thing to you? If someone you loved died, and someone told you not to be sad because there’s plenty of other people in the galaxy.”

“You are aware that scenario has come true for me.” Spock said darkly.

“I know. Now imagine how you felt and apply it to Jim, but multiply the emotions by like twenty.”

Spock fell silent at her words. He had no appropriate reply.

“You need to apologise to him, Spock.” Nyota pressed on. “What you did was an awful thing, but maybe, just maybe an apology could get you back into his good graces.”

“I do not believe I ever was under his, as you say, ‘good graces’. ”

Nyota shook her head. “Doesn’t matter. It’s still the right thing to do, and you know it.”

“I had no intention to offend—“ Spock began, but was roughly cut off.

“Spock, no, you do not pull that ‘I didn’t mean to offend’ bullshit. You said something, he took offense, and no matter your meaning you need to own up to the fact that what you did was wrong. Now, go apologise to your captain right now.”

* 

Spock was uncomfortable with Nyota’s insistence that he apologise, but he understood it was the proper course of action in a case such as this one.
Once she had left his quarters, parting with a few more words of reprimand, Spock accessed the ship’s computer.

“Computer, locate Captain Kirk for me.”

“Captain Kirk is currently in the mess hall.” The computer responded in a steely voice.

Spock briefly gathered himself, then left his quarters, heading to where Jim was. It was of utmost importance that he did this now, not only because if he did so sooner then he would be able to steer his and the captain’s working relationship back towards professionalism, but also because if Spock did not do it now he was unsure whether he would ever get around to doing it.

It was distressing to admit, but he felt out of his element.

He had previously insulted beings by accident, be it through a lack of knowledge in cultural norms on his part, or simply because his logic clashed with another being’s emotions. By no means was this his first time apologising, but it was the first time where Spock felt inclined by his own emotions to do so.

The doors to the mess hall slid open, and Spock stepped inside. There were several crew members present, most of them sat with workmates and loudly conversing with one another. The general atmosphere of the hall was jovial, the rumble of noise interspersed with a laugh here and there.

Spock scanned the room, his eyes trailing over the various crew members until they finally landed on a figure sat alone with their meal. Without allowing himself to think about his actions, Spock walked up to Jim’s table and took a seat opposite the man.

The captain blinked at the sudden intrusion, but his expression immediately changed when he realised who it was. Jim threw him a tired look and returned to picking at his food.

“I really don’t feel like talking to you right now.”

“I understand.” Spock said. “But, please, Captain. It is not necessary for you to speak, as I am the one who will be doing the talking.”

Jim was clearly unhappy with Spock sitting down, but he didn’t yell at him to leave. Spock saw the man’s eyes dart to the side, and he realised the reason as to why Jim was acting so civilly was because they were in public. He was still struggling between remaining likeable to the crew and being the captain of the Enterprise.

Jim sighed deeply and shovelled a forkful of rice into his mouth, chewing slowly. He kept his gaze directed on his place, ignoring Spock.

“I would like to apologise for my behaviour on our last mission.” Spock began. He saw Jim freeze up at the words, but swiftly melted back into ignoring Spock.

“It’s fine. You’re Vulcan, I shouldn’t have expected you to show a shred of empathy.” He returned in a detached tone.

Spock found himself overcome with a sense of shame at the reply.

“It is true I am primarily Vulcan, but I am also Human. As you are aware, my mother was Human.” A beat of silence passed where neither of them spoke, then Spock added, “She was Canadian.”

Jim let out a snort. “Alright.” He drawled, as if he couldn’t fathom why Spock would tell him that.
“When my mother died, I... was overcome by feelings of turmoil.” He confessed slowly. “I felt distraught. And helpless. I felt as if what had occurred had not in fact happened, and I was in deep denial. The combination of those emotions mixed in with your goading at the time is what caused me to act the way I did.”

“Actually, in that case, I rightly deserved that. I was a huge asshole to you.” Jim interjected. He had abandoned his meal and was sitting with his arms crossed. Spock counted it as a victory that he had managed to catch the man’s full attention.

Spock dismissed Jim’s remark and ploughed on, afraid he would not be able to complete his apology if he stopped now. “Following my outburst I attempted to reign in my emotions once more, but it was a difficult task. That, in turn, caused me further dismay. I believed my loss of control showed how inferior I was in comparison to my fellow Vulcans, a flaw I had spent my entire childhood and adulthood trying to make up for.”

“Let me interrupt you right there, Spock.” Jim said, halting Spock’s apology once again. “That— what you just said— that is so not healthy. You’re half Human— or, a little less than half, but still. You need to let your emotions out every once in a while, need to let them breathe. If you let your Vulcan side constantly steer you, and you quench down your Human side, it’s going to be mayhem on the inside. You need to learn to cope with both and give due attention to both sides equally, because if you favour just one of them it’ll severely affect you.”

Spock was uncomfortable at the accuracy of Jim’s words, as they were thoughts he had entertained himself following his outburst where he had physically assaulted the man. It was unnerving that a being that was entirely one race could so precisely identify the struggles that Spock, as a mixed-race being, experienced.

He nodded in reply. “I will take your suggestion into consideration. However, I would like to return to my attempt at an apology. What I wish for you to understand is that... I am aware of what it feels like to have someone I cared for die. And I am aware of what it feels like to have your affections in regards to the being questioned. I should not have insinuated that you felt no pain over the death of Edith Keeler, and for that I apologise. It was insensitive, and I should have treated the situation with more delicacy. After all, it is... difficult, realising someone you love has ceased to exist. Forever.”

Jim was staring at him, looking introspective. The silence between them was drowned out by the sounds of the mess hall around them, but Spock still felt it wrap around him.

Finally, Jim inclined his head. “I accept your apology.” Spock felt himself relax. He had not realised he had yearned for the man’s acceptance. “But if you don’t mind, I’d like to finish my meal in peace.”

“Understood, Captain.” Spock acknowledged, and stood up.

Jim returned to his meal, which was most likely cold at this point. Spock did not comment on it and turned to leave, making his way from the boisterous mess hall out into the silent corridor. He headed towards the turbolift, intending to return to his quarters and meditate.

The interaction with Jim had left Spock feeling physically drained, and he would need to regather his strength. The captain had indeed been correct in his explanation of letting his Human emotions out once in a while, but it was still a practice Spock was reluctant to engage in.

Chapter End Notes
A famous—if not the most famous Star Trek episode (along with Amok Time ayyyy)
Since Jim had beamed down to the planet below to negotiate with the Halkan Council not even twenty minutes earlier, it was quite the surprise when Spock ran into the man in the ships’ corridor. He had been on his way to the botany labs, intending to check on the progress on both his and lieutenant Sulu’s plants. The lieutenant was slowly becoming someone Spock considered to be more than a co-worker though not quite a friend. If he would put a label on their relationship, he would say they were ‘acquaintances’.

Lieutenant Sulu and he were vastly different in an array of ways, but they both possessed quiet, calm demeanours as well as a shared interest in botany. Spock had seen the man shed his tranquillity when in the presence of other shipmates, perhaps friends of his, but his natural state was one of aloofness. Spock appreciated that lieutenant Sulu did not consider it necessary to be constantly engaging in conversation like many others aboard the ship, and deemed him to be more than proficient at botany. The lieutenant had once revealed that he grew his own garden back home, but now that he was on the Enterprise he was forced to leave it in the hands of his husband and daughter.

“They don’t have my green fingers, but I’m sure they’ll do well.” He’d smiled.

The plants they had sown were Cyrellian beans, a gift they had been given during their latest diplomatic mission by the Cyrellian High Council as an act of trust. The captain had gracefully accepted it as was expected of him, but once back aboard the Enterprise seemed flummoxed with what to do with them. Thankfully Spock and Lieutenant Sulu had taken the seeds off of the captain’s hands, informing him that they would sow and grow the seeds themselves so as to not unnecessarily waste the botany department’s precious time when they had more important things to tend to. Jim had accepted their offer with relief, relinquishing the seeds and returning the duties he knew best.

And so it came to be that Spock and Lieutenant Sulu were in charge of growing the Cyrellian beans, documenting their progress over the next few weeks. Often they would embark on the activity together, however, since Lieutenant Sulu was currently on active duty he was unable to check up on his own beans, which meant Spock had to so in his place.

He was just about to head into the turbolift when a voice called out, “Mr. Spock!”

Spock turned around only to see the captain, his face alight with joy as he quickly approached with sure steps.

“Am I glad to see you. Listen, why is everyone on the ship…” The man trailed off, his expression suddenly shifting from one of elation to one of confusion. He slowed as he neared Spock and finally came to a careful stop, a frown in place as he seemed to be looking directly around Spock’s mouth.

“Captain, I see you have returned already.” Spock commented. “Did the meeting conclude early?”

“What meeting?” Jim asked, still staring intently at Spock’s mouth.

“Your meeting with the Halkan Council. It was an extremely important engagement that involved the securing of the planet’s dilithium crystals.” Spock clarified. How odd that the captain was not aware of a meeting he himself had personally attended.
“Yeah, I…” Jim trailed off, eyes catching on Spock’s. “What happened to the…” He gestured vaguely at his own face.

“Captain?” Spock asked, quirking an eyebrow. The captain’s behaviour was growing more and more peculiar, and Spock wondered if perhaps Jim had fallen ill. He would need to contact doctor McCoy immediately to see whether this was the case or not, since it would not do to have a disordered captain in the chair.

“The goatee.” Jim clarified.

Spock’s second eyebrow joined his first, a look of mild surprise clear on his face. “I have never had facial hair, Captain.”

“You sure?”

“I am certain.” Spock confirmed.

Jim’s eyes narrowed. “I see.”

Suddenly his hand lashed out and grabbed a hold of Spock’s neck, thumb pressing onto his trachea. The move was so unpredicted that Spock was unable to block it properly, stumbling back as the pressure on his throat increased.

The second instinct that followed was one of fight or flight.

And Spock fought.

He immediately grabbed a hold of the captain’s arm, digging his fingers into the flesh and tearing his hand away.

Jim grunted something obscene, and instantly reached up with his free hand, intending to finish off what he had started. Spock saw the incoming move and grabbed a hold of that arm too, gripping it tightly and keeping it in place. He quickly brought Jim’s hands together, strengthening his mental shields before encircling the man’s wrists in one hand. Jim attempted to furiously pull away, but he was no match for Spock’s Vulcan strength.

Spock pulled out his communicator and paged security, trying his best to keep the captain from breaking free of his grip. It was a difficult task, not because Jim possessed such high amounts of strength, but because he was constantly struggling, kicking at Spock in order to tear himself away. The captain had powerful legs and it was a hardship avoiding his blows, but Spock managed to keep the man detained up until security’s arrival.

Before any of the security team had a chance to ask what was happening, Spock took one of the captain’s arms into each of his hands and held him out to the team.

“Take the captain to the brig.” He ordered.

“No!” Jim shouted, surging forward with little success. “He’s fooling you!”

“I am doing no such thing.” Spock countered strictly.

Security Chief Giotto nodded in acknowledgement. “Take the Captain to the brig.”

His team instantly jumped on the task at hand, two of his men taking hold of Jim. With each of them holding one arm they began leading him down the hallway. Spock watched as Jim attempted to dig
his feet into the ground, continuing to yell as he was dragged away.

“I order you!” He hollered. “Let me go!”

Spock followed after, Giotto at his side. His eyes briefly flickered over to the man, wondering why he had listened to Spock when Jim, as captain of the ship, had the highest authority out of all of them.

“Security Chief Giotto, why did you follow my orders without question?”

Giotto looked to Spock, and there was a grim expression on his face. “He’s not the only one who’s acting strangely, sir.”

“What do you mean?” Spock inquired.

“Just a minute,” Giotto replied, turning back to his men. “I want you to put the Captain in with the others, is that understood?”

The two security ensigns voiced their understanding, and then stepped into the turbolift, the door quickly swishing closed after them.

Giotto turned back to Spock once more. “Like I said, the captain isn’t the only person to be acting so strangely on the ship. We got reports about Doctor McCoy, Lieutenant Uhura and Chief Engineer Scott also behaving in ways that were out of order.”

“How curious.” Spock murmured. “That is the entire away team that were due to visit the Halkan Council.”

The door of the turbolift opened up once more, and both Spock and Giotto stepped into it.

“I know,” Giotto replied, looking severe. “But we have no idea what happened, and since McCoy is one of the ones affected we don’t know if we will find out.”

Spock nodded, but offered, “Doctor M’Benga is currently on board, and I am certain he could aid us in discerning what has occurred.”

“I suppose so, but that’s only considering whatever happened to them was medical.”

The door swooshed open and they both exited onto the floor. Immediately Spock’s eyes caught on the captain, still with the two ensigns holding him down as he attempted to break free.

“Traitors!” Jim yelled, writhing in their grips. His gaze flicked back and he caught Spock’s eyes. “Spock, get these men off me!”

Spock watched as the ensigns pulled the captain up to the entrance of the brig, momentarily turning off the electric protective field so that they could throw him inside. Spock strolled up to the brig and saw that Giotto had been correct, as the entire away team were currently locked inside. As soon as Jim had been tossed in with them their voices erupted in a rush, all of them speaking over one another in what Spock could only presume were complaints about their current situation.

“What do you think you’re doing, Spock?” McCoy spit out, glaring at him.

Jim walked up to the edge of the brig, eyes locked on Spock and face turning red as he shouted, “You traitorous pig! I’ll hang you up by our Vulcan ears. I’ll have you all executed!”

Spock looked to the captain. He took in the feral eyes, locked onto Spock like a sniper taking aim at
its target. His face was growing redder the more he yelled, his rage loud and promise for violence palpable.

Spock did not recognise the man before him.

His voice was calm and easy when he stated, “I think not. Your authority on this ship is extremely limited, Captain. The four of you will remain here in the brig, and in custody, until I discover how to return you to wherever it is you belong.”

“Has the whole galaxy gone crazy?” Jim hissed, eyes darting up and down Spock’s body. “What kind of uniform is this? Where’s your beard? What’s going on? Where’s my personal guard?” He growled, baring his teeth.

“I can answer none of your questions at this time.” Spock replied in a cool tone.

He watched the rage play out over the captain’s face, the man practically vibrating from overwhelming anger. All of sudden he blinked at Spock, then his face transformed into a sly smile.

“Alright, Spock.” Jim chuckled deeply.” Whatever your game is, I’ll play it. You want credits? I’ll give them to you. You’ll be a rich man. A command of your own? I can swing that too.”

The offers had Spock lifting a delicate eyebrow. Astounding. “Apparently, some kind of transposition has taken place. I find it extremely interesting.”

Spock nodded at Giotto who returned the gesture, and motioned for his men to take guard at each side of the brig.

Spock turned to leave, but Jim hurriedly interjected. “Spock, what is it that will buy you?”

Spock halted in his steps, awaiting the captain to answer his own question.

A beat of silence passed, then Jim quietly asked, “Power?”

Indeed, this was not his captain.

Spock slowly shook his head, quirking his eyebrow. “Fascinating.”

He walked out of the brig, the sound of Jim’s voice calling after him and making all sorts of promises Spock wasn’t interested in, following him out.

He stepped into the turbolift, and the door swiftly shut behind him, leaving Spock alone with his thoughts.

This was most distressing.

The captain and the others had clearly been affected somehow, but in what way he couldn’t tell. Not without further investigation. Spock hoped that M’Benga’s examinations— if he was able to get access to the patients— would prove fruitful, but until then Spock couldn’t do much more than wait.

It was extremely irksome. Nyota, and Jim, as well as doctor McCoy and engineer Scott— they were all behaving unbearably barbaric. They were not acting as they usually did, which was with a high degree of civility. He had known Nyota for several years now, and not once had he seen her act in such a manner. He couldn’t think of a single instance where she would turn into the vicious woman he’d seen in the brig. He couldn’t say much for McCoy or engineer Scott, but even though he didn’t know Jim on a highly personal level, he know that this was not how his captain behaved.
He was emotional, and flakey, and determined, but not savage.

Spock couldn’t shake the uneasy feeling that was hovering over him. He felt restless, not being able to help. Perhaps he could offer aid somehow… in his own way. There were no rules against personal investigations, at least not on the Enterprise, and Spock couldn’t simply stand by when his friend and crew were clearly unwell.

He decided that he’d see what he could do, and if after some research he came up empty-handed, he would abandon his cause and leave it to doctor M’Benga. Spock recalled Giotti mentioning that certain crewmembers had reported that the captives’ behaviours had been unusual. There were over four hundred officers aboard the ship, but Spock chose to begin with the one being who must have greeted the captives as they came aboard the ship: the transporter chief.

*  

As it were, the transporter chief had not paid much attention to captives’ return since at the time there had been an apparent surge of power that briefly interfered with the beam up. She said she’d figured that the transporter lock had been affected by the ion storm, but didn’t think much of it since she managed to successfully beam the away team back onto the ship.

Spock nodded along to her explanation, tucking every bit of information in the back of his mind for later review. This was indeed very unusual activity, and it was highly possible that the ion storm had somehow affected the away team’s behaviour.

Spock couldn’t get it out of his head; the way they behaved had been extremely worrisome. They had been so different, so unlike themselves.

They were acting… different. Extremely so.

It was as if they were…

Parallel.

A sudden thought struck Spock, and he immediately bid his goodbye to the transporter chief, leaving her in a daze. He took the turbolift down to quarters, then went to switch on the ship’s computer.

Taking a seat, he announced, “Computer.”

There was brief period of silence before the computer responded. “Ready.”

“This is Commander Spock. Produce all data relevant to the recent ion storm, and correlate the following hypothesis: could a storm of such magnitude cause a power surge in the transporter circuits, creating a momentary interdimensional contact with a parallel universe?”

The familiar sound of the computer analysing data filled the room. “Affirmative.”

So there was a possibility.

Spock recalled the transporter chief’s words, and how she had mentioned that the transporter lock might have been affected by the ion storm. That bit of information, along with the feeling Spock couldn’t shake about the captives’ being… different, prompted him to ask the following question

“At such a moment, could persons in each universe, in the act of beaming, transpose with their counterparts in the other universe?”
There was another period where the computer rapidly calculated the possibility. “Affirmative.”

It was confirmed then. It was entirely plausible that the power surge, which had been the result of the ion storm interfering with the transporter lock, had created an exchange of sorts.

A switch. The *U.S.S. Enterprise* had received their current captives, and in return the away team they knew had materialised elsewhere.

Not this universe, not this ship, but somewhere parallel. A parallel universe, coexisting with their own on another dimensional plane.

Though highly unlikely, it was the only solution that made sense.

Going by the captain’s— the Jim currently in the brig— by his lack of reaction to the starship, Spock surmised that in essence the two universes must be the same. The starship, the five-year mission in space, the wish for exploration into deep space. Everything would be almost identical.

Almost.

It was still another *Enterprise*, another captain Kirk, another doctor McCoy, another Nyota, another engineer Scott, and…

Another Spock.

The thought was incredibly disconcerting, since from what Spock had ascertained from the current captives’ demeanours, they seemed to be nothing short of barbarians. He wondered if his counterpart too behaved in a similar manner.

Spock discarded the thought and returned to the problem at hand. If this universe’s away team had switched with the alternate universe’s away team, then it meant that their counterparts must have been transporting up at the exact same time. There must have been similar storms in both universes that disrupted the circuits.

The question was, how would each party get back to their own universe?

“Could conditions necessary to such an event be created artificially, using the ship’s power?” Spock asked the computer.

Once more, it answered, “Affirmative.”

Spock felt relief course through his body. It was possible. Their away team would not be lost to them forever.

He reached forward and pressed a button on the computer. “Record procedure.”

It took several minutes for the computer to finish the task, but once it was done it spit out a small chip the size of a pea. Spock gingerly picked up the chip and inserted it into his PADD. Immediately a long list of coding appeared on a page on the screen, and Spock scrolled through it, carefully scouring it.

It looked to be coherent enough, and he understood the procedure, but in order to mimic the power surge mentioned in the coding he would require help.

*Spock hadn’t spent much time in the engineer department, mainly because he had no cause to be
there. Until now.

He had calculated that if he wished to recreate the power surge that the computer had given him, he would require aid from the engineering department. However, since Spock hadn’t spent much time down there, he didn’t recognise many—or truth be told, any—of the crewmembers. They all seemed to know of him, as they kept throwing him curt nods and respectful ‘Commanders’ as he walked through, but he was ashamed to say he did not recognise any of them.

That is, until a small creature no taller than his mid-thigh hurried across his path.

“Keenser,” Spock acknowledged, and the Roylan stopped in their tracks. They turned to look at him, their dark goggles perched high on their forehead.

Spock knelt down in front of them. “I require your help in an important ship matter.”

Keenser blinked at Spock, then garbled some noise.

Spock nodded, and pulled out the microchip from his pocket. He held it out to Keenser who peered down at the item in his hand. “This is a microchip with all the necessary coding required to mimic a power surge in the ship.”

Keenser snapped their head up, beady eyes locked onto Spock.

“Do not fret,” Spock assured them. “I in no way mean to use it in a manner that would endanger the Enterprise. The away team that were beamed down to the planet not long ago have returned to the ship, but they are different. In essence, they are the same, but I believe them to be counterparts from a parallel universe.”

Keenser tilted their head, indicating suspicion.

“I am aware the idea sounds far-fetched, however my research has shown that this is the only plausible solution.”

Keenser tilted their head in the opposite direction.

“Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.” Spock told them.

Keenser righted their head, and emitted a low sound.

“I spoke with the transporter chief who mentioned that at the time of beam up, there was a surge of power created by the ion storm outside the ship. I then asked the ship’s computer to calculate if there was a possibility of the storm causing a power surge in the circuits, thus causing an interdimensional contact with a parallel universe, and it confirmed my suspicions. This chip here contains directions on how to artificially reproduce such a power surge, which I hope to use in order to beam out our current away team in exchange for our original away team.”

Keenser let out a low noise.

“I apologise. I should indeed have started with the facts in order to convince you of my honesty.”

Keenser reached forward and gently took the chip from Spock’s hand. They looked down at it, then garbled something.

“I will of course assist you.” Spock promised them.
“As will I.” A foreign voice spoke up. Spock looked towards the source and saw that it was another 
engineer, dressed in the customary red uniform. They looked to be humanoid, had dark brown hair 
pulled back into a ponytail, and a visor covering their eyes. The being placed their hand against their 
forehead and introduced themselves. “Engineer Jean Mots, sir.”

Spock rose from his kneeling position and offered a curt nod in return. “Engineer.”

He felt as if he vaguely recognised the being, but then again, he vaguely recognised most people on 
the Enterprise. It was bound to happen if one lived on the same starship for two months, let alone the 
five years Spock had agreed to.

Keenser rubbed at their chin, looking to engineer Mots. They then emitted a sharp sound.

Engineer Mots looked to Spock and nodded. “He’s right. We’ll have to tap the power needed from 
the warp engines and balance it for the four of them. It is just the four of them, right?”

Spock nodded, “It is.”

Keenser gave a short snort, then suddenly headed off at a rapid speed.

“Let’s get started then.” Engineer Mots repeated, following after the Roylan. Spock immediately 
follow suit, and spared a thought to how the Nyota and Jim from this universe were faring in the 
parallel one.

* 

As Keenser had explained it, the two-way matter transmission would affect the local field density 
between the two universes which would continue to increase, meaning they would have to work fast 
if they wished to return their universe’s away team. Spock calculated they had at most half an hour to 
finish their repairs before they had to attempt the beam up.

If they missed their slot by even a second they would not be able to remove their counterparts out of 
the parallel universe for another century.

They had worked relentlessly since Spock came down to the engineering department and sought 
their help, and as he observed the speed and agility at which they operated, he felt he had made the 
right choice. Though Spock considered himself proficient at computing and engineering in theory, he 
was clearly no match to two actual engineers of the starship.

Keenser moved at incredible speeds, rushing back and forth between areas of the engine that needed 
to be tweaked in order to recreate the power surge. Similarly, engineer Mots proved to be an 
undeniably valuable crew member, seemingly attuned to the tempers of the more sensitive materials. 
Were Spock alone, he was certain he would never have finished in time.

They worked ruthlessly, hurrying to meet the deadline, and suddenly the time had come for them to 
bridge power from the engines to the transporter. They were still a few computations shy of being 
ready, and so Spock ceased his work and turned to both Keenser and engineer Mots.

“I will go clear the boards in the transporter room,” He informed them.

Keenser emitted a trilling sound in reply, and the engineer threw Spock a shy smile and a wave with 
the wrench. It seemed they were more than capable of finishing this work on their own.

*
Several minutes later the door to the transporter room slid open, and Spock stepped inside. He had commed security chief Giotto on his way over, informing him to bring the captives in the brig to the transporter room. Giotti had defied nor questions his orders, simply giving an ‘affirmative’ in response before hanging up, and Spock made a note to himself to commend the man on his ability to follow orders.

Standing around in the transporter room, awaiting the captives’ arrival, Spock had to admit he was eager to attempt the beam up. He hoped the procedure would prove successful, and that they would be able to return Nyota, McCoy, Scott and Jim to their respective universe.

All of a sudden the doors slid open, and Spock watched as several members of the security team pushed the shouting captives into the room.

“What do we do with them now, sir?” One of the ensigns asked over the yelling.

“Deposit them on the transporter pads. However, do not release them until I instruct you to do so.” The ensign nodded in acknowledgement, and together all of them dragged the captives up to the transporter pads.

Spock took his position behind the transporter board, and announced, “On my order, you will release the captives and jump off of the transporter pads. Failure to do so will result in your being beamed to a parallel universe which we will be unable of returning you from for at least another century.”

The ensigns all blinked at him, clearly shocked, but what was even more surprising was that the captives had fallen silent.

“You’re pulling my leg, aren’t you, Spock?” McCoy from the parallel universe drawled.

“I can assure you, I never jest.” Spock told him, then placing his hand on the transporter board’s knob announced, “Release them... now.”

At that precise moment, the security ensigns all jumped back, leaving in their wake the sound of the captives’ shouting as they de-materialised. Spock watched as the shimmering beam of the transporter pads clouded their bodies, and when he turned to knob just so, continued to watch as four beings took their place.

Spock turned off the transporter beams.

Stood on the pads where none other than Nyota, Jim, McCoy and engineer Scott. But whether they were this universe’s counterparts, Spock could not yet tell. The people looked around the room, their eyes wide as they took in their surroundings.

It was Jim’s eyes who first fell upon Spock, and he slowly halted forward and off the transported pad, never breaking their gaze. The others followed suit, trailing after the captain as he slowly approached Spock.

Jim looked him up and down, his eyes stopping at his mouth, at which point he caught Spock’s eyes with a warm smile. “Spock.”

Spock inclined his head. “Welcome home, Captain.”

* 

After having encountered the Jim Kirk of the parallel universe, Spock secretly admitted to himself that he had, as the Terran term went, ‘lucked out’ with this universe’s Jim Kirk.
“What I don’t understand is how you were able to identify our counterparts so quickly.” Jim told Spock, taking his seat in the captain’s chair. It was rather comforting to see this Jim back in his own chair.

“It was far easier for you, as civilised men, to behave like barbarians than it was for them, as barbarians, to behave like civilised men.” Spock explained. “I assume they returned to their Enterprise at the same time you appeared here?”

“Probably. However, that Jim Kirk will find a few changes, if I read my Spocks correctly.” Jim replied, smiling as if he held a secret.

Next to him McCoy let out a snort.

Both Spock and Jim looked to the man. It took the doctor a few seconds to realise that he was the focus of their gazes.

“Nothing. I just had some extra air in my nose.”

Jim shook his head, clearly perplexed by the doctor’s antics. Spock found himself echoing his captain’s sentiments.

“Well, I hope you enjoyed having them over while you had the chance.” Jim told Spock, leaning back.

“I did indeed have the opportunity to observe your counterparts here quite closely. They were brutal, savage, unprincipled, uncivilised, treacherous. In every way splendid examples of homo sapiens, the very flower of humanity. I found them quite refreshing.” Spock revealed.

Jim opened his mouth as if to reply, then snapped it shut. He tilted his head, a look of amused confusion coming over his face. “I’m not sure, but I think we’ve been insulted.”

McCoy huffed out, “I’m sure.”

“May I ask how the parallel universe you found yourself was like in comparison to our own?” Spock inquired, hoping to find out some more details on it. He wished to know whether his counterpart too displayed savage behaviour, but didn’t ask it straight out as he didn’t want to come across as egotistical.

“It was scary, man.” Jim uttered, turning to Spock with a wild look in his eyes. “You had a goatee.”

There was a brief moment of silence, then McCoy suddenly hunched over in raucous laughter. His outburst had caught the attention of several bridge crewmembers who kept shooting the man fearful glances.

“A most unusual fashion choice.” Spock observed, ignoring McCoy.

Jim laughed, a grin spreading across his lips. “Damn right. Please be sensible when making beard choices.”

“I will take your advice into consideration, Captain.”

Jim’s grin broadened and he turned to the bridge at large. “What’ve you got for me today, guys?”

* 

It had been a week since the parallel universe incident which had been put quickly behind
everyone’s minds in favour of their current mission: exploring an M planet that had been recently discovered not even a month ago.

The ship to have found it, the *U.S.S. Altegro*, had been a small cargo vessel which had chosen to forego its usual path in favour of a shortcut, and on its way found the M planet. However, due to the *U.S.S. Altegro* being a cargo vessel, Starfleet Command had denied the crew permission to beam down to the planet, instead sending the *U.S.S. Enterprise* to take on the mission.

So it came to be that an away team consisting of eight crew members, Spock and Jim included, beamed down to the planet’s surface. It was a fortunate mission to be given, as the reason many of the crewmembers had accepted their position aboard the *Enterprise* was to explore new worlds. Spock, too, was a part of this group. Once the away team had beamed down to the planet Jim had immediately ordered for them to split into teams of three, with him and Spock being the one exception. The captain had then assigned each team a task to complete; ensign O’oco’s team were to see if they could find any bodies of water on the planet, ensign Kurokawa’s team were to investigate the planet’s material makeup, and he and Spock were to analyse the planet’s flora.

As Spock listened to Jim delegate the tasks, he had to admit that the man was slowly coming into his role as captain. His authoritative figure was becoming less false and more genuine in how he held himself and made decisions, even though Spock more often than not found himself disagreeing with those choices. Nevertheless, it was a relief to witness this small amount of progress in Jim, as Spock would sometimes doubt the man would be able to handle all the responsibilities of a captain.

Every journey began with one step, after all.

Once the teams had been set their tasks, they split up, each getting straight to work. Spock and Jim had decided to begin their assignment a few metres away from where they beamed down, and soon enough they were carefully treading around with their tricorders out and recording data. Spock noted that the planet was unusually small, barely bigger than two Earth moons, and consisted mainly of flora similar to Earth’s deciduous forests. The air was cold and sharp, occasionally causing Spock’s nose twitching from displeasure. As a desert-dweller he, nor his body, reacted favourably to tundra, though technically this environment was not a tundra—it was simply cool. Jim on the other hand seemed unbothered by the temperatures, even though Spock was certain that even by Earth standards the planet would have been considered brisk.

Perhaps it was the constant movement that kept the man warm. Spock hoped that was the case, and that his body would follow suit soon enough.

They had been analysing the planet’s flora for sixteen minutes now, and all they had found was that it was in no way dissimilar to the plants fond on Earth. It was a shocking revelation, not only because it was unheard of to have found a planet so similar to an already existing one, but because it meant that it had the possibility of becoming yet another colony.

Spock saved the readings on his tricorder, reminding himself to take with him several physical samples of a few plants that he could further analyse when back aboard the *Enterprise*.

“Perhaps we should move further, Mr. Spock.” Jim announced.

Spock slowly nodded, his gaze still locked on his tricorder. “I could do with some more variety in samples.”

Jim hummed in reply and began heading further into the woods, Spock following closely at his heels with his trusted tricorder in hand. He and Jim had been slowly trudging along for several seconds, attempting to pass through the thicket when suddenly a harsh gust of wind slapped into the two of
them and knocked them to the ground. It took Spock entirely by surprise and he didn’t have time enough to protect himself from impact, but thankfully the soft grass did not cause any injury.

The sharp wind was still roiling up around them, shaking the leaves of the trees something vicious. Spock looked up at the sky and saw a humongous creature fly above them, large wings spread wide and glistening scales coverings its body. The creature suddenly flapped its wings, causing another strong gust of wind to hit them, shaking the flora all around.

Spock could not help himself. His eyes were locked on the creature, staring after it as it seemed to grow further and further in the distance, heading down the forest.

In its departure the creature left behind soft winds and the plants settling back down, along with an eerie silence. Spock looked to the captain, and saw that he too was staring wide-eyed in the direction of the creature.

Slowly, he uttered, “Mr. Spock… Please tell me we did not just see a dragon.”

Spock continued to look at Jim, and replied, “Understood, Captain.”

A long moment passed between the two of them, not a single sound filling the silence.

Finally, Jim sighed. “Goddamn it.”

He struggled to get back onto his feet, and Spock followed suit, wiping down any dirt on his torso and trousers. He could hear Jim muttering darkly, “Does the universe really have to be this weird.”

Spock found himself sympathising with the captain’s words. This was… a unique ordeal. If the creature they had just seen indeed was a dragon, they may have found themselves in a rather peculiar situation, one Spock could not begin to explain.

Jim flipped out his communicator and lifted it up to his mouth. “Come in Ensign O’oco.”

There was a pause, then through the unit came, “O’oco here.”

Jim faltered, then hesitantly asked, “Did your party just see a dragon fly above you?”

There was a brief hush, then the ensign replied, clearly perplexed. “Uhh… no.” Jim looked to Spock with defeat in his eyes. Probably the captain thought he must be losing himself to insanity. “But…”

“But what, Ensign?” Jim prompted. Spock could hear talking in the background, most likely ensign O’oco conversing with their partners. “Ensign.”

“Sorry, Captain.” Ensign O’oco apologised, having returned to the conversation at hand. “No, we didn’t see a dragon, but um… we did see a gnome.”

Spock blinked. Surely he must have heard incorrectly.

“I’m sorry, could you please repeat that?” Jim asked slowly, his eyes having slipped shut. He looked as if he were attempting to contain his disbelief.

“Well, we think saw a gnome, sir.” Ensign O’oco said, and no, they had not heard incorrectly. She had indeed said their team saw a gnome. How odd that Spock and Jim should see a dragon when analysing flora, and ensign O’oco and her team saw a gnome— another creature thought to be imaginary— while completing their assignment.

Clearly, this planet held some secrets.
“…Right. Just a moment.” Jim hit the switch button on his comm unit. “Ensign Kurokawa, come in.”

“Ensign Kurokawa here.” Came the clear reply.

“Have you or any of your party witnessed any mythical creatures in your area?” Jim asked firmly.

Uncomfortable laughter rolled out through the comm unit. “Funny you should ask, Captain. We’ve not seen any mythical creatures exactly, but er, we saw a big wolf prowling through the forest. Dressed in old woman’s clothing.”

“What.”

“Um, yeah, that was a thing we saw. All three of us.” There was the addition of more voices, this time in the background, and a moment later ensign Kurokawa added, “Oh, yeah, and then we uh, we saw a girl in a red hood with a picnic basket skip past.”

Jim slowly rubbed at his temple.

“Sir, we… we think it may have been Little Red Riding Hood.”

“Of course it was.” Jim sighed, dragging a hand down his face. “Because that seems to be the only logical answer.”

“I may have a theory about this planet, Captain.” Spock announced suddenly.

He had been grappling with disbelief and amazement since ensign O’oco had shared that she and her team had seen a gnome in their paths, but ensign Kurokawa’s report had cemented his opinion on their current situation. Her reiteration reminded him of a tale he had occasionally heard when young.

Jim looked at Spock as if he were his saviour, and roughly muttered, “I’m glad I’ve got you, Spock.”

Spock felt a sudden flip in his stomach at the words, but he was still able to respond to Jim with his customary raised eyebrow. Perhaps he had come down with a stomach illness of sorts, but Spock couldn’t remember having consumed anything hazardous or unfamiliar.

He waited patiently as Jim informed ensign Kurokawa and her crew to stay vigilant and on guard, then commed ensign O’oco and related the same orders. Once done, the man turned to Spock and crossed his arms over his chest.

“Go on, then. Tell us your theory.” He encouraged.

Spock clasped his hands behind his back and started in on his conjecture. “I believe this planet may be fuelled by the imagination.”

Jim’s face took on a sudden fearful look. “This isn’t like the time we were on that pleasure planet that granted all our wishes and Sulu dreamt of a samurai, is it?”

“I do not believe so, Captain.” Spock assured him.

Jim breathed a sigh of relief, muttering, “Goddamn Sulu and his swords. You know, now that I think about it, it was pretty weird that he didn’t think of his husband or daughter. Or even some exotic plant.”

“Humans are indeed highly illogical.” Spock commented.

“If that isn’t your answer to fucking everything.” Jim chuckled. “Sorry, I don’t believe you were
finished with your explanation.”

“Indeed I was not. As I was saying, I believe it to be a planet which is fuelled by imagination, although it is not our own. I am not certain as to whose, but I would hedge that it is an omnipotent being of sorts controlling what we are encountering, and from what we have heard I believe we are experiencing so-called ‘fairytales’ from Old Earth.”

“What would be the point of that?”

“Entertainment?” Spock suggested. “Though there are of course an array of possibilities which have yet to occur to us.”

Jim’s eyebrows furrowed, and he began to slowly rub at his chin. “If it’s entertainment, then… a child, perhaps?”

“As I said, I am not certain. It is merely speculation on my part.”

Jim hummed in reply, looking thoughtful. “If that were the case, then it would mean that we’ve all been given individual stories. I’ll bet that ensign O’oco and their crew got one with a gnome, though I can’t think of one now.”

“They said they believed it to be a gnome.” Spock corrected.

Jim nodded once. “Exactly… so it is possible that it could be something else. Ensign Kurokawa without a doubt got the story of Little Red Riding Hood.”

“I believe so.” Spock agreed. “I am vaguely familiar with the tale.” His mother had once said that it was her great grandmother’s favourite story growing up, and that she in turn had reiterated it to his mother when she was a young child. Spock didn’t really understand the appeal of it, as it was a physically, medically, and generally impossible experience.

“Then that leaves us with… well, with one that has a dragon.” Jim mused aloud.

“I do not personally know of any such fairytales, nor much about fairytales in general.” Spock revealed.

“That’s okay, Mr. Spock. This time around it’ll be my expertise that saves the day.” The captain quipped with a teasing smile.

Spock wanted to argue that there had been several occasions where Jim’s expertise had gotten them out of harm’s way, but he did not have the opportunity to do so as Jim rubbed his hand over his chin and continued thinking aloud.

“I know some stories, but they don’t exactly revolve around dragons… They just sort of make an appearance as the villain.”

“I am assuming you have extensive knowledge in stories with dragons then, Captain?”

“I may know a thing or two.” Jim chuckled, then all of a sudden stopped. His eyes slowly widened in realisation.

“Jim?” Spock prompted.

“Oh no.”
They had been walking in the direction where the dragon had disappeared off to for nearly half an hour now, Jim huffing and grumbling under his breath as they trudged along through the forest. The captain was clearly displeased with the situation they found themselves currently in, and from his explanation Spock thought he was warranted to feel as such.

“If I’m right— and I think I am—” Jim began, tone displeased. “We’ve been given the most generic fairytale of them all.”

“What is what, Captain?” Spock inquired, making sure to trail closely after the man.

Jim peered over his shoulder at Spock, and with a grim expression revealed, “We’ll be rescuing a princess from a tower.”

Spock’s eyebrows rose high on his forehead. “Fascinating.”

“Not really.” Jim sighed, stepping over a rather large rock in his pathway. “It’s the typical tale of a princess being held prisoner in a tower that’s guarded by a dragon, the prince comes in to rescue her, slay the dragon, and then together they ride off into the sunset.”

“How did the princess come to be trapped in the tower?”

Jim shrugged. “No one knows.”

“That is preposterous.”

Jim looked back at Spock with an incredulous expression. “Are you seriously going to argue the semantics of a fairytale with me?”

“If the princess somehow found their way up the tower, then they must be able to come down the same way.” Spock argued, ignoring his captain’s expression.

“Maybe someone locked the door behind her. I don’t know the details of it all, Spock; it’s a ‘generic’ fairytale, meaning that there are different variations of it, and I have no idea which one we’ve got.”

Spock supposed that was an adequate reason for the captain not knowing the details of the apparent fairytale they’d been given. Still, he would have preferred it if he at least could answer the few simple questions Spock had.

“I must ask, do you believe it to be necessary to rescue the princess?”

Jim halted in his steps, then turned to Spock. A pensive look came across his face, as if he had not thought of doing anything but that.

“I’m not sure.” He admitted after a moment. “But that’s how the fairytale ends. By saving the princess.”

The captain was on to a possible solution.

“Do you think there is a chance we will be thrown out of this illusion if we complete the task as the fairytale is to be told?”

“I don’t know.” Jim said slowly. “But it’s the only option I can think of right now. Unless you’ve got an idea?”

Spock briefly thought of other potential solutions to their present predicament, but none of them had any higher probability of success than Jim’s. “I do not.”
“Shame.” The captain frowned. “Guess we’ll have to continue with this then.”

They continued on their trek in amiable silence, the trees surrounding them slowly withering out until finally they reached an open plain. There, across the grassy field, Spock saw a large building in the distance.

“Well, there it is.” Jim announced, gaze directed ahead. “The old castle and tower.”

All of a sudden his comm beeped, startling the two of them. Jim frowned, but still reached to answer it. “Kirk here.”

“Jim! Where in the blazes are you?”

“Bones?” Jim uttered, glancing at Spock with a curious look. Spock returned it with his own blank gaze. “What do you mean? We’ve been planetside all along.”

The doctor’s voice was tight with worry and anger. “I’ve tried reaching you nearly ten goddamn times now and this is the first I’ve been able to reach you!”

Jim’s eyebrows jumped, and his tone turned suddenly serious. “Bones, what’s going on?”

There was a cut off curse on the other end of the line which caused Spock and Jim to look to one another. “Ensign O’oco and her team beamed up not half an hour ago, and they were sputtering some crazy talk the amounts I’ve never heard of before. Rattling on about some gnome, yelling ‘Rumplestiltskin! It was Rumplestiltskin!’ as if they were possessed. Seriously, Jim; what the hell is going on down there and why did you send up ensign O’oco’s team on their own?”

Jim and Spock shared another look, and Spock could see worry etched into the captain’s face.

“Perhaps it would be useful for the doctor to know of our current predicament.” He offered.

Jim seemed to hesitate, then nodded once. “Yes, I believe so. Listen in Bones; we’re not entirely sure, but we think we may be trapped in an Old Earth fairytale inspired world. While Spock and I were out analysing the flora we saw a dragon—“ Spock heard the doctor’s spluttering on the other end of the line, but the captain ploughed on. “It was such a strange sight we had to call the others to make sure that we weren’t hallucinating. Both ensign O’oco and ensign Kurokawa’s teams reported having seen creatures associated with Old Earth fairytales. Spock thankfully came to this conclusion much faster than I did, and together we’re attempting to complete the fairytale in order to break the illusion. Going by your call just now, that indeed seems to be the only solution.”

“Jim, I don’t need you needlessly endangering yourself.” The doctor retorted harshly. “If what you say is true, it’ll be a real nasty situation you’ll be putting yourself in. Now ensign O’oco and her team thankfully only had to deal with this ‘Rumplestiltskin’ character, but if you have to deal with a… a dragon of all things, I’m going to need you to wait so I can come down there.”

“Absolutely not.” Jim denied immediately. “You are to stay on board the ship and not leave it until I tell you so.”

“Jim—“

“That is captain’s orders.” Jim concluded with finality, and Spock had to admit he was rather impressed with the firm manner in which he was handling the doctor.

“Damn it, Jim! If you get eaten by a dragon of all things, the Enterprise won’t have a captain. I won’t have a friend!”
“Nothing will happen to me, Bones, I’ll make sure of it. And you really should make more friends, it’s not good to have just the one.” The captain returned, a teasing lilt to his voice.

A tense silence passed, then the doctor’s quiet voice came through the comm. “You don’t do anything stupid now, you hear me?”

“Don’t worry, Bones. I’ve got this.” Jim assured him, then hung up. Immediately after he turned to Spock with a beseeching look. “I’ve totally not got this, you’ve got to help me, Spock.”

Spock despaired the captain’s ability to fool others into thinking he had control over a situation, even more ashamed at himself for having been deceived by it. Holding back a sigh, Spock nodded once.

“Of course, Captain.”

*  

Spock had followed after Jim as he made his way straight for the castle, cutting through the plain with grass no higher than to their knees. As they’d approached, Spock had been able to make out more details about the castle, such as the materials used to build it and the pattern of the battlements. It appeared every bit as mighty as he had pictured it from the holos he’d looked up of old castles on Earth, primarily in Scotland, courtesy of engineer Scott’s loud ranting in the mess hall. The walls looked sturdy and impenetrable, the tower lying beyond it stretching up to the blue skies above.

Jim had informed him beforehand that the plan was to silently creep through the castle so as to make their way around unawares, keeping to the walls and as they stealthily snuck around. Since they didn’t know where the dragon was, whether it was inside the establishment or circling about outside or elsewhere on the planet, it was to stay safe. They made it a point to stick together, Spock trailing after Jim as he snuck through the castle, seemingly knowing where everything was. Perhaps the man had not been entirely truthful about how much he knew about fairytales involving dragons, though it was just as likely that Jim’s sense of direction was simply extremely adept.

After much creeping about they finally made it to the base of the tower which was erected in the back of the square, very little surrounding the building. Spock and Jim were forced to tilt their heads far back in order to take in the entirety of the column, the tip so far away that even Spock’s superior vision could only make out the open window and nothing more.

Jim placed his hands on his hips, and murmured, “I think we scale it now. Or wait… is that Rapunzel?” He rubbed at his forehead and grimaced. “I can’t remember.”

Spock’s eyes trailed down the tower once more, taking in the mortar bricks used to build it, a very basic material. He stepped around the structure, surveying the base for a point of entrance. He truly believed that if the princess had to come down from the tower, then surely there must have been a way for her to get up. Spock kept perusing the base until finally he spotted something.

“Jim, there is a door.” He announced. The captain joined Spock where he was stood staring at the door. He carefully reached out to press against it, but to no avail. It was locked.

Jim’s fingers trailed down the lock, then he turned to look back at Spock who had already begun to remove the cuff from his sleeve. He then handed it over to the captain who proceeded to input it into the door’s lock, and began gently fiddling about. Spock watched as Jim attempted to unlock the door, the scene reminiscent of their first escape together. It took no longer than a mere few seconds before the ‘click’ sound sounded, and when Jim again gently pushed against the door it swung open.

The two of them went inside and hurriedly began pacing up the stairs, following the endless amounts of steps that circled all the way up to the top of the tower. There was no shortage of despairing on
Jim’s part, the man clearly unaccustomed to this type of exercise, but eventually they managed to reach their destination. Once at the top they came upon a second door, and when Jim gingerly pressed down on the handle it revealed itself to be unlocked.

They had barely taken two steps into the room before Jim was ambushed by arms around his neck, and the captain fell backwards with a startled yelp. Fortunately Spock was there to catch him, holding the man up as they both attempted to ascertain what was currently hugging him close.

“Oh, I’m so glad you’re here!” A light voice chirped.

“Y-yes,” Jim began uncertainly, throwing Spock an imploring glance. “We’re glad to be here too… princess?”

The arms latched around Jim suddenly fell off, and the being took a step back, allowing Spock a full view of them. It was a young woman, wearing a large, frilly dress with dark brown hair cascading down her shoulders. She had a sweet face, heart-shaped, and dark brown eyes which bore a striking resemblance to his mother’s. The sight had Spock freezing.

The woman pressed her hands to her chest, her eyebrows furrowing with concern. “I’m so sorry, that’s incredibly rude of me. Please, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Sabina Rosaro Guen.” The woman then curtsied, holding the ends of her dress in each delicate hand. “It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

Both Spock and Jim stared at the woman, puzzled expressions slowly morphing into ones of understanding. It was Jim who acted first, falling back into his own brand of familiarity.

“It’s a pleasure to be met by you, my dear.” He smiled, stepping forward. “My name is James T. Kirk, and this here is my First Officer… Spock.”

“S’chn T’gai Spock.” Spock offered, since it seemed the captain was incapable of pronouncing his full name.

“Yes, thank you, Mr. Spock.” Jim smiled back at him, then returned to Sabina. “I’m sorry to hurry you, Miss Sabina, but would you be so kind as to follow us down? We kind of need to—”

“You’ve come to rescue me, yes?” Sabina interrupted cheerily.

“We… yes.” Jim confirmed, clearly taken aback by the woman’s jovial demeanour. Spock did not blame him, as he too, found himself oddly thrown off, though for entirely different reasons.

“Excellent! I’ve been waiting for years for someone to come and rescue me.” She grinned. “Where’re we going?”

“We are going downstairs.” Spock finished. He didn’t understand why Jim would constantly look to him for help since he had as little understanding of their situation as Jim did. He had after all told Jim earlier, his knowledge of fairytales was minimal.

“Right. That’s right.” Jim agreed, turning back to Sabina. “We’re going to go downstairs, and then… away from here.”

“Excellent!” Sabina grinned, her dark eyes dancing with delight. “Please, lead the way.”

It seemed the princess’ approval was all they needed, because in the next moment both Jim and
Spock turned towards the door they came through and hurried down the stairs. Sabina had been lodged in between them, Jim taking up the rear and Spock leading at the front. He noticed that this time around the captain didn’t complain, and he wondered if it was due to the princess’ presence or simply because they were pacing down the steps as opposed to up.

Spock had just reached the bottom of the steps, Jim and Sabina close behind, and intended to step outside when a sudden shot of flames flashed before him. He immediately jumped back, knocking into the two behind him. Jim leaned forward and peered past Spock, then bit back a curse.

“It’s the dragon.” He hissed. “It’s outside.”

Spock stretched forward in an attempt to catch sight of the dragon, and indeed, saw that Jim was right. The creature was sat outside the doorway, large scales glistening in the sunlight and its jaw widening as the beginnings of another bout of fire swirled in its mouth. Jim instantly pulled Spock back, shoving him behind with Sabina, then backed them both towards the stairs again. Spock felt the dragon’s roar shake the very core of the tower, the sound causing his eardrums to ring.

“Captain.” Spock gasped, grabbing at his head. He felt a hand on his arm gripping him tightly.

“What’s wrong, Spock?”

There was another loud roar from outside which shook the ground, and Spock squeezed his eyes shut, unable to force the ringing out of his head. He could feel the heat from the flames engulfing them and knew that soon enough the stones of the tower would grow hot, slowly roasting them from the inside unless they escaped.

The dragon emitted another piercing roar, and Spock’s fingers tightened where they were wrapped around his head. He couldn’t understand why the creature was yelling so; they were doing it no harm staying hidden inside of the tower, and if it truly wished to devour them then logic dictated that it would have come for them already.

So why was it doing nothing more than guarding their one escape route? Spock’s mind was racing with scenarios, desperately wishing for a way in which they could communicate with it somehow.

A sudden thought occurred to him in the midst of a second fire, the heat around them increasing. He could hear Sabina gasp as she attached herself to Jim’s side, the captain’s breathing coming in short.

Perhaps it was the direness of the situation that propelled Spock into acting, or perhaps he had been on too many away missions with Jim, but as soon as the dragon’s burst of flames died down he shot out of the tower, ignoring Jim’s shouts. He ran straight for the creature, avoiding its large gaping mouth with rows of teeth like sharpened swords, and placed his hands on its clawed paws.

Spock had never instigated a mind meld faster in his entire life.

He was suddenly thrust into the dragon’s mind, an array of vague emotions and feelings as opposed to other mind melds he’d engaged in with other Humanoids. Spock felt impressions of what the creature was experiencing, felt the fear swirling around at the forefront of its consciousness. It was a peculiar emotion, especially in this situation where Spock had thought that he was the one to rightfully feel fear. He delved deeper into the emotion, pulling forth the cause behind it.

Spock felt strong flashes of protectiveness accompanied with terror— for the princess?

No. For something else. For…

Oh. Of its eggs. The creature held its eggs within the tower’s structure.
It was fearing their destruction. It feared its children’s death.

The dragon was a parent.

Spock hurriedly focused on the task at hand, sending back placating thoughts to the dragon and assuring it that their sole intention was to rescue the princess and nothing else. He felt doubt and disbelief bat at his senses, the creature clearly mistrusting their objectives.

Once more Spock gathered his strength and directed calamity at the creature, even lending an offer of going back inside and retrieving the eggs for them. He felt a strong sense of denial thrust against his mind, the dragon clearly unhappy with the offer. They wished for their eggs to remain unmoved, needing them to hatch before it could take its younglings elsewhere. Somewhere safer.

Spock sent along thoughts of approval, ensuring the creature once more that they meant no harm to itself or its eggs. He took a deep breath and sent forth further impressions, asking it if he and his friends were allowed to peacefully leave the premises with the princess in tow.

A sense of a calm came over Spock, the feeling of the dragon contemplating his suggestion allowing him a brief moment of quietude. A slow emotion washed over him, the creature doubting Spock’s companions, doubting that they would not secretly smuggle the eggs away like all the others before them had attempted. The thought caused Spock to pause, and he realised the creature meant that there were beings who had come before them.

He didn’t wish to ponder too much on what had happened to them, instead focusing his energy on staying calm and soothing the dragon’s worries. Spock assured them that the same would not occur, even going so far as to offering them to personally sniff his companions in order to ascertain that they indeed were not smuggling the eggs.

He felt the soft impression of agreement from the creature, and with a slow push Spock was able to bring himself out of the meld and back into reality.

He felt his hands drop from the dragon’s paws, the ghost touch of the cold scales nothing more than a memory he had not paid close attention to. Carefully, Spock turned around so faced the tower. Jim was presently stood with his head sticking out of the entrance, staring at Spock with an open mouth.

“The dragon is harmless, Captain.” Spock announced loudly, and his voice must have snapped the man out of some kind of trance because his mouth immediately snapped shut and a dark expression came over his face.

“Let’s agree to disagree.” Jim snapped testily, huddled up against the threshold. Spock could see Sabina stood behind him, her eyebrows furrowed in worry.

“Captain, this is all simply a misunderstanding.” Spock began calmly. “The dragon has no intention to hurt us. It has stashed its eggs inside of the tower and mistakenly thought we were attempting to steal them as we made our escape. They had cause for concern as this has happened on previous occasions, during which she devoured the culprits. They simply assumed, incorrectly, that our intentions were the same.”

Jim stared at Spock with a bewildered expression, and his tone was exaggerated when he responded. “Oh, sure. Anyone can make that mistake.”

“You think?” Jim snapped.
Spock thought the captain was acting in an incredibly childish manner considering the severity of the situation. He straightened himself up and clasped his hands behind his back. “I have engaged in a mind meld with the dragon, during which they gave me their consent to leave with the princess, but only if they can ensure we are not smuggling their eggs. They will do this by sniffing us one by one.”

“You mean eat us.” Jim scowled.

“Jim.” Spock stated firmly, displeased with the captain’s behaviour. “You only act in this manner because you fear the unknown, yet now that you know the truth of the situation, you still display distrust. That is unbefitting of a captain.”

“But everyone knows that dragons eat people, Spock! I’m not just pulling these facts out of thin air.” The captain argued vehemently.

“Have you encountered many dragons, Captain?” Spock asked him plainly.

Jim opened his mouth to retort, then snapped it shut. He looked as if he were tasting something sour, his eyes hard and mouth turned down in a harsh line. After several moments he finally relented, hanging his head in defeat.

“Fine.”

“If it assuages your worries, I will go first.” Spock suggested.

Immediately Jim shouted out, “No!”

Spock was taken aback by the captain’s forcible reaction. In his denial Jim had stepped outside of the tower, his hand held up as if to halt Spock from proceeding with his suggestion.

He swallowed. “I… I’ll do it.”

Spock inclined his head. “As you wish, Captain.”

He watched as the captain hesitantly approached the dragon, his every move tense with distrust. The dragon however seemed unbothered by Jim’s scepticism, patiently waiting for him to approach. Eventually the captain stepped within sniffing range of the dragon, and it lowered its head to the top of Jim’s head. Spock saw the man stiffen, his fists clenching as he allowed the creature to run its snout over its head and slightly down its body.

There were several tense seconds of sniffing before the dragon reared its head back up and let out a short puff of smoke from its nostrils.

Jim flinched, and his eyes instantly jumped to Spock’s. “What does that mean?”

“Congratulations, Captain. You are not a thief.” Spock stated calmly.

Jim’s shoulder seemed to sag slightly with relief, but there was still some tension evident. Clearly he did not enjoy being in the presence of a dragon.

Spock looked to Sabina where she was stood in the tower’s entrance, staring at the scene that had just unfolded. “Sabina?”

The woman looked to Spock, her dark eyes catching on his own. “Yes?”

Spock nodded towards the dragon. “If you would, please.”
A light frown marred Sabina’s face, and she looked uncertain at the suggestion.

“It’s just…” Jim began, slowly stepping away from the dragon whilst keeping his gaze on them. “We just need the dragon to smell you to make sure you’ve not stolen its eggs. You haven’t, have you?”

Sabina shook her head. “No. I didn’t even know there were eggs in the tower.”

“Then you should be fine.” Jim assured her. Slowly holding out a hand, he said, “It’s okay. I’ll go with you.”

There was a brief moment where Sabina looked to hesitate, then she placed her delicate hand inside of Jim’s much larger one. Slowly they inched their way towards the dragon, keeping their movements small and unhurried. Once they were within distance, the creature once more leaned down, its large snout sniffing over the princess. It took just as long as it took for them to sniff Jim, and once they were done they lifted their head back up, and suddenly dissipated.

“Woah,” Jim breathed. Spock looked to the man and saw traces of smoke lingering next to him, right where Sabina had stood not a moment ago. “What the hell just happened?”

“I believe we have completed the fairytale, Captain.” Spock replied slowly, watching as the last bit of smoke curled in the air and disappeared.

Jim turned to Spock, his eyes catching on the other man’s as they stayed locked in a silence. Finally, Jim said, “You’re not too shabby, you know that, Mr. Spock?”

Spock inclined his head. “High words from you, I’m sure.”

Jim let out a snort, giving his head a quick shake. “Come on,” He sighed, pulling out his communicator. “Let’s get the hell out of here.”

* 

Once back on the ship both he and Jim had immediately been ushered into Sickbay under strict orders from doctor McCoy. Spock hated to admit it, but he felt a slight feeling of trepidation come over him as they walked into Sickbay, ready for the doctor that awaited them. McCoy had been very stern regarding his orders that they not do anything foolish while attempting to escape the fairytale illusion they had been caught in, but when there was such a creature as a dragon involved it was extremely difficult not to find oneself in a dangerous situation.

Thankfully Spock received a kinder treatment than the one he had anticipating, nothing more than a general check-up along with several scans and incessant questions about the away mission which he answered coolly before being declared ‘fit as a fiddle’. Usually Spock would point out to the good doctor that the phrase made no sense whatsoever, but he felt it was best if he did not press the issue right now. Instead he began to redress, listening as doctor McCoy stomped over to his next victim.

“My dear friend, Bones; it’s good to see you. How’s Sickbay treating you?” Jim greeted in a chipper voice.

“Are your ears bleeding, Jim?” The doctor asked slowly.

“No?” Jim replied, sounding confused.

“Then how come you can’t follow a simple instruction like ‘don’t do anything dangerous’, huh? Was that too much to ask, Jim?” McCoy pressed.
Spock heard Jim emit a sigh. “Everything turned out fine, Bones, don’t worry about it.”

“You were lucky everything turned out fine. If Spock hadn’t been there—”

“Thank you, Doctor.” Spock announced once fully dressed, rising up from the examination table. He saw both McCoy and Jim turn to him, frowns marring both of their faces. It seemed to be their customary expressions when dealing with one another.

“You’re welcome, Spock.” McCoy returned before whirling back on Jim. “If that goddamn Vulcan hadn’t been there, who knows what—”

Spock didn’t hear the end of the sentence as he had proceeded to walk out of Sickbay, the doors swishing shut behind him. He had no need of eavesdropping on the captain’s scolding.

*

Spock was sat in his quarters, completing the very last bit of his version of events for the report he’d be sending it in to Starfleet Command. It was tantamount that he finish it now, since he would be unable to do so at any point in the following eight to ten hours. He had planned on meeting Nyota once his next shift had concluded, as well as lieutenant Sulu, and together they had arranged to partake in a game of what they called ‘Pick-Up Sticks’.

Spock was unsure as to how well he would enjoy the activity, but Nyota had insisted he join as well as assuring him that the game was simple enough to understand. Since it was only her and lieutenant Sulu who would be in attendance, both of whom he deemed to be more than manageable, he’d accepted. After all, it was perhaps time he learnt to become better acquainted with the crew outside of Nyota.

He was typing up the conclusion in his report which entailed the reason as to why they were trapped on the fairytale planet—cause still unknown—when his comm pinged, indicating a new message had arrived. Spock set aside his PADD in order to swipe open his communicator, revealing an unread message from his secret admirer sitting in his inbox. Against his better judgement, Spock clicked on it.

Dear Mr. Spock,

I thought you almost died today. I really, truly did. I’m so, so glad to find out you’re okay, but man… it might not have turned out this way.

I would have died if you had been killed. Honestly, I would have felt like a part of me had died. I know it’s harsh and too strong but it’s the truth. I’ve followed you for so long, admired you from a distance, that finding out that you died when we’re so close would have killed me.

I’m sorry if this too creepy, but I had to be honest. Please, don’t let this scare you. I really do admire you and what you stand for, and I wouldn’t dream of having you fear me.

Please take care.

Semaj Ton

Spock arched an eyebrow. This was indeed strange. The wording of the message indicated that the secret admirer, whom Spock had previously believed to be planetside on Earth, was in reality on the Enterprise. That meant that his admirer had somehow managed to qualify onto the starship, making them one of over four hundred crewmembers aboard.
The thought was strangely distressing, as Spock was completely unaware as to who they were. They could be anyone, from one of the yeomen tending to the many menial tasks on the ship, to someone on the senior bridge crew. There were too many beings on the ship, the majority of which Spock had not yet to meet and was unsure of if he ever would fully meet.

The idea that there was someone aboard that seemed to admire him so strongly, and Spock had no idea who they were, was extremely unnerving.

He immediately deleted the message, uncomfortable with having it sitting in his inbox.

*

Spock was already at his station for the start of his shift when the doors slid open, permitting the captain inside. Spock turned and watched as Jim made his way down the stairs, his steps heavy, and slid into the captain’s chair with a happy sigh.

“It’s good to be back.” He hummed.

“Is good to have you back, Captain.” Chekov smiled, his face lighting up. Spock had noticed the navigator had a strong admiration for the captain, extending outside of professionalism and into their personal lives. Perhaps it was due to their closeness in age, Jim acting as an older brother figure to Chekov. It was not outside the realm of possibility.

“Thank you, Mr. Chekov,” Jim returned with a grin of his own. His eyes slide over to Spock, and his grin widened. “Well, what do you say, Mr. Spock?”

Spock tilted his head. “Captain?”

“What’s it like finally being back on the Enterprise?”

“It is pleasant.” Spock admitted.

Jim looked as if he was about to reply, but just then the doors slid open, revealing the tall form of doctor McCoy.

“How kind of you to bless us with your presence, Doctor.” Jim drawled, an amused glint in his eye.

“I do what I can to please the people.” McCoy returned, stepping onto the bridge and sidling up next to the captain’s chair.

Jim let out a chuckle. “Well, we’re all very happy about that. Aren’t we, guys?”

There were various responses from the bridge, ranging from uninterested grunts to aborted waves. Clearly, the doctor was well appreciated by the crew.

“Well, I love ya’ll too.” McCoy hummed. “I just wanted to make sure that you weren’t too seriously injured when down on that fairytale planet.”

Spock perked up. “You sustained injuries, Captain?”

Jim waved away his question. “Don’t worry, Mr. Spock, it was just some blisters from the heat of the tower. I accidentally touched the stones when you ran out to the dragon, but it didn’t occur to me until we were in Sickbay.”

“I really need to hear this story at some point.” Sulu announced loudly, getting several murmurs of agreement.
“Yes, yes, we can talk about it at our next poker night.” Jim assured him. “I’ve got to say though, there’s really nothing like fighting a dragon together as a good bonding session.”

“Indeed, I must concur, Captain.” Spock agreed.

“It’s definitely something you won’t forget.” Nyota added with a smirk. “Like something out of a fantasy novel.”

“I do like the sound of that.” Jim nodded. “Like Lord of the Rings.”

“Think you’ll need to work mighty hard if you want reach Lord of the Rings levels of epic. Not many stories measure up to that one. Although… there was this one story I always used to tell Joanna, and she absolutely loved it.” McCoy revealed.

“What story was it?” Nyota asked, turning away from her station.

“Just a little tale I’d made up myself.” McCoy said with a fond smile. “It starts with the words, ‘In the land of irreparable jackasses, James Tiberius Kirk is king’.”

“Shut up, Bones!” Jim yelled, flushing a deep red.

Nyota’s cackling laughter rang through the bridge, and it was soon joined by that of the rest of the senior crew. Even Spock found himself quirking his lips into a small smile.

Jim caught his eye at exactly that moment, and Spock saw how the man’s eyebrows jumped in surprise. He felt a brief flush of guilt come over him at having been caught smiling, but then Jim’s eyes seemed to melt into elation, and Spock thought that the sight was worth the stab at his dignity for showing a sliver of emotion.

Chapter End Notes

Finally done with this bitch of a chapter, phew! :’) Sorry it took so long guys, but I was just didn't like the writing and just loads of other stuff, but I've managed to bash it out into something I like so hallelujah

Anyway, hope you enjoy it, and I will get to answering your comments in the morning (really sorry for being slow with them!) since it's past midnight here. I know, I'm weak.
By no means had Spock attempted to try and socialise with Jim, but he didn’t go out of his way to avoid the man either. Outside of their shifts it would often happen that they would cross paths when on the ship, and before when Spock would ignore Jim and be ignored in return, they now had the decency to acknowledge each other in passing. Often it was a nod, but sometimes Jim would escalate it to a murmured ‘Commander’ and a nod, and Spock would return the sentiment, but with a clear ‘Captain’.

They hadn’t yet reached the point of exchanging pleasantries, and Spock wasn’t entirely sure that would happen, but he had hopes with the way their relationship had been steadying recently. He would prefer to stay on good terms with the captain, but not so much that he would be the one to initiate any further contact outside of their shifts. He would leave that decision entirely to Jim.

* 

Ensign Chekov was the youngest member of the Enterprise crew as well as the senior bridge crew, and Jim had decided that they should take the opportunity to properly teach him in close detail how they handled the processes of a mission. Since they currently had no missions to be completed, the practice was entirely theoretical, and the example used was that of Sherman’s Planet, the space quadrant they were currently in.

This was why Spock, Jim and Chekov found themselves in one of the ship’s conference rooms all on their own, sat around the table. Chekov seemed very eager about the meeting from the way he was bouncing in his seat, a bright grin plastered on his face. Spock had no doubt that the ensign was excited by the prospect of working so closely with the captain, and settled himself in for the man attempting to impress Jim with his vast knowledge of anything related to his home country of Russia.

Jim laced his fingers on the tables and began in a firm tone, “Mr. Chekov, this flight is supposed to provide experience and knowledge. Tell me, how close will we come to the nearest Klingon outpost if we continue on our present course?”

Chekov threw up a finger and exclaimed a soft ‘ah’ before revealing, “One parsec, sir. Close enough to smell them.”

“That is illogical, ensign. Odours cannot travel through the vacuum of space.” Spock corrected him.

Chekov’s eyes darted over to Spock, a miniscule creasing of his forehead. “I was making a little joke, sir.”

“Extremely little, ensign.” Spock agreed.

Chekov averted his eyes, looking properly chastised. Perhaps Spock had been a bit harsh.

Jim caught the ensign’s attention once more when he turned to Spock and declared, “Mr. Spock, immediate past history of the quadrant.”

Spock looked to the captain, reciting a summarisation of the information he had read up on prior to this meeting. “Under dispute between the two parties since initial contact. The battle of Donatu V was fought near here 23 solar years ago. Inconclusive.”
“Analysis of disputed area.” Jim pressed.

“Undeveloped. Sherman’s Planet is claimed by both sides, our Federation and the Klingon Empire. We do have the better claim.”

Chekov nodded along to Spock’s words, a knowing smirk stretching across his lips. “The area was first mapped by the famous Russian astronomer, Ivan Burkoff, almost 200—“

“John Burke.” The captain corrected with the beginnings of smile. Spock glanced at Jim, impressed with the captain’s knowledge. It had indeed been John Burke who had first mapped the area surrounding and including Sherman’s Planet, but it was a bit of history that was not avidly taught in schools. The only way to know such information was if you either researched the subject yourself, took an advanced History course, or studied the accelerated course at Starfleet academy, which Jim indeed had. Truly this hinted at the captain’s academic smarts which Spock so often forgot existed.

Chekov frowned. “Burke, sir?”

Jim nodded slowly, smile widening.

“I don’t think so. I’m sure it was—“

“John Burke was the chief astronomer at the Royal Academy in Old Britain at the time.” Spock interrupted, not wishing to waste much time debating Chekov’s inaccuracies. The number of times the ensign had proclaimed something had ties to Russia when in reality it did not was getting out of hand.

Chekov’s eyes widened as he obviously pretended to realise the truth. “Oh! Royal Academy, oh, well.”

Jim had continued to look amused throughout the entire exchange, struggling to keep the smile at the corner of his lips from erupting into a grin. He quirked an eyebrow, and humoured Chekov by asking him, “Is the rest of your history that faulty, ensign?”

Once more, the ensign looked as if he had been terribly scolded, dropping his eyes to the table. Jim, however, the good-natured man that he was, offered Chekov a chance to redeem himself. “Key points of dispute?”

Chekov’s gaze flickered up to Jim, and he seemed to have recovered enough of his confidence to answer the question. “Under the terms of the Organian Peace Treaty, one side or the other must prove it can develop the planet most efficiently.”

Jim nodded in approval. “And unfortunately, though the Klingons are brutal and aggressive, they are most efficient.”

“I remember once Peter the Great had a problem like that. He—“

Chekov was interrupted once more, this time by the whistle of the intercom. All three men turned to the noise, listening in as Nyota’s familiar voice floated through the device. “Captain.”

Jim turned on the screen and Nyota flickered into view, dressed in her red Starfleet uniform and earpiece. “Kirk here.”

“Captain, I’m picking up a subspace distress call, priority channel. It’s from Space Station K-7.”

Jim locked eyes with Spock, both of them having immediately realised what that meant. The priority
channel being used indicated a code 1 emergency; a disaster call.

“Go to warp factor 6.” The captain told Nyota before rising from his seat, Chekov and Spock instantly following suit.

* 

They had immediately been ordered to their stations, Chekov sliding in next to lieutenant Sulu as Spock took his place at his own station. From the distress call they could only assume that the Klingons at the nearest Klingon outpost had attacked the space station, and thus breaking the area’s treaty of twenty-five years. The crew hurriedly prepared the ship’s weapons, armed and ready for battle against these vicious warriors who had a history of deception and cruelty, meaning all of the Enterprise’s phaser banks were set aside and ready to be used.

They soon approached Space Station K-7, but once the screen turned on to show their path it revealed the space station innocently floating in place, not a single Klingon cruiser in sight. It was as clear as all the rest of space, twinkling stars spread out on a blanket of darkness. Spock thought the sight most peculiar and briefly debated whether there was some illusion being played on them. It wouldn’t be his first.

He looked back at the captain and saw that the man was scowling, narrowed eyes directed at the screen ahead. He indeed looked as perplexed as Spock was feeling. He wondered if the rest of the crew were experiencing similar states of confusion.

“Lieutenant Uhura, break subspace silence.” Jim instructed.

“Aye, sir.” Nyota responded, then set about doing just that. A second later she announced, “Channel’s open, sir.”

“Space Station K-7, this is Captain Kirk of the Enterprise. What is your emergency?”

The screen switched to show the correspondent of the space station, an older man wearing a high-coloured orange jumpsuit with his silver hair gelled back. “Captain Kirk, this is Mr. Lurry, manager of K-7. I must apologise for the distress call.” He began, bowing his head slightly.

The captain placed one hand on his hips, his stance wide. “Mr. Lurry, you issued a priority-1 distress call. State the nature of your emergency.”

“Well, perhaps you better beam over. I’ll try to explain.” Mr. Lurry replied. Spock found the answer to be strangely vague.

“You’ll try to explain?” Jim echoed in a stern tone. He clearly did not appreciate Mr. Lurry’s need to withhold information, something which Spock found himself feeling similarly about. “You’d better be prepared to do more than that. Kirk out.”

The screen switched off, and Jim immediately paced towards the exit, pointing at Spock as he passed. “Mr. Spock, I’ll need your help. Chekov, maintain battle readiness. Lieutenant Uhura, see that the transporter room is standing by.”

Spock rose from his station and strode after Jim, the last thing he heard before the doors slid shut behind them being Nyota doing her job perfectly, as always.

* 

Spock and Jim beamed down to Space Station K-7 and were greeted right away by Mr. Lurry
himself, as well as two other men. The taller of the two was introduced as Nilz Baris, an Earth man in charge of the development of Sherman’s Planet, and the person who had issued the priority-1 distress call. Spock noted he also sported a very clean suit in a colour unbefitting of him.

The second man, this one shorter but wearing an equally pressed suit in a not so abysmal shade, informed them that Mr. Baris was the Federation undersecretary in charge of agricultural affairs in the current quadrant which was why he had put it on defence alert. This man had been introduced as Mr. Baris’ assistant, Arne Darvin, and suddenly the two men’s immaculate appearance made sense to Spock.

Due to Mr. Baris’ title and position, he was indeed allowed to put an entire quadrant on defence alert, despite Jim’s obvious disbelief. Mr. Baris had revealed that he wanted all available security guards aboard the Enterprise to be immediately posted around all storage compartments containing something called quadrotriticale, which turned out be…

“Wheat?” Jim’s eyes jumped to the man, tone incredulous.

“Quadrotriticale is not wheat, Captain.” Baris corrected primly, taking back the green vial of quadrotriticale from the captain. “Of course, I wouldn’t expect you or Mr. Spock to know about such things, but quadrotriticale is rather—“

“Quadrotriticale is a high-yield grain, a four-lobed hybrid of wheat and rye. A perennial also, if I’m not mistaken.” Spock inserted himself into the conversation coolly, not caring for the man’s cavalier attitude. The captain remained suspicious of their circumstances, but Spock saw something akin to pride shine through with the curve of his lips. “Its root grain, triticale, can traces its ancestry all the way back to 20th century Canada, where—”

“Mr. Spock, you’ve made your point.” The captain interrupted, a thread of amusement lacing his voice.

Mr. Lurry, who had at this point remained quiet, abruptly added in, “Quadrotriticale is the only Earth grain that will grow on Sherman’s Planet. Now we have several tons of it here on the station and it’s very important that the grain gets to Sherman’s Planet safely. Mr. Baris thinks that Klingon agents may try to sabotage it.”

Jim whirled on Mr. Baris, incredulity evident in every move he made. “You issued a priority-1 distress call over a couple of tons of wheat?”

“Quadrotriticale.” Mr. Darin rectified immediately. Jim turned to the man with an annoyed looked.

“Of course, Captain, I realise that we—“ Mr. Baris began, but was effectively interrupted by Jim’s stern tone.

“Mr. Baris, you summoned the Enterprise without an emergency. You’ll take full responsibility for it.” He asserted, then turned as if to leave.

“What do you mean?” Mr. Baris scowled.

It seemed the man didn’t understand the transgression he had committed by calling in a false alarm, and so Spock saw it fit to inform him in Jim’s stead. “Misuse of the priority-1 channel is a Federation offence.”

“I did not misuse the priority-1 channel.” Mr. Baris denied snootily. “I want that grain protected.”

Sensing a dispute getting out of hand, Mr. Lurry interjected himself into the conversation once more
by asking Jim, “Captain, couldn’t you at least post a couple of your guards? We do have a large number of ships passing through.”

Spock’s eyes flickered over to the captain, and he could see him inhaling in order to fuel his most likely negative response. Spock deemed it necessary to interfere by informing him, “It would seem a logical precaution, Captain. The Sherman’s Planet affair is of extreme importance to the Federation.”

Jim looked as if he were contemplating between being either mugged or burgled, two very unappealing options which he sadly, as the captain, had to decide on. He peered at Spock, hoping to get some sort of affirmation that it was acceptable to ignore both options, but the stern look he received in response quenched that hope. Jim reached back into his pocket and pulled out his communicator, opening up a channel to the communications station.

“Kirk to Enterprise.” He mumbled, and the manner in which he was behaving reminded Spock of a petulant child, not a captain of a prestigious starship.

“Enterprise here.” Nyota responded.

“Secure from general quarters… and beam down two, and only two, security guards.” He announced loudly, locking eyes with Mr. Baris whose smarmy smile slipped off his face. “Have them report to Mr. Lurry. Authorise shore leave for all off-duty personnel.”

“Yes, Captain.”

“Kirk out.” Jim muttered, finishing the call.

Immediately Mr. Baris burst into a rage, livid at the orders given. “Captain Kirk, how dare you authorise a mere two men for a project of this importance! Starfleet Command will hear about this—”

“I have never questioned the orders or the intelligence of any representative of Starfleet.” The captain proclaimed firmly, speaking over the man. He turned as if to leave, but quickly whirled back to add, “Until now.”

*

Unfortunately, Chekov’s theoretical learning practices had to be cut short due to their new mission. Since they were dealing with a priority-1 distress call the ensign was not permitted to shadow them, and so he had returned to his usual duty. As soon as Spock and Jim had beamed back aboard the ship the captain had erupted into loud complaining and moaning, livid with the incident that had taken place on the space station. He had immediately stomped over to the nearest intercom and proceeded to leave a very strongly worded message for Starfleet Command.

Spock had merely stood a few paces away, listening to the captain harshly hissing into the intercom. Indeed, he did agree that this mission was ridiculous in comparison to the previous ones they had received, but it was a mission nonetheless. Once the captain had finished his message, hanging up with an unnecessarily hard press to the button, he spun around to face Spock with an extremely displeased expression.

“I need coffee.”

Spock gave a nod in return. “Of course, Captain.”

*

With Jim’s cup of coffee safe in hand, he and Spock had decided to seek refuge in the conference
room where they earlier on had intended to teach ensign Chekov.

Spock was stood against the wall in his usual taut position, watching as Jim pressed the palm of his hand to his forehead, eyebrows creased in pain. Spock felt as if he could see the migraine forming in the captain’s head, so painfully expressive was the man’s face. Jim walked over to the conference table and perched himself on the edge, long legs hanging off of the side. Spock’s eyes roamed over the man’s body, taking in his relaxed manner. He felt slightly honoured that the captain displayed such carefree behaviour when around him.

Despite being known for his easy-going attitude, Spock had observed that Jim had started to act more professionally and even holding himself with more dignity when amongst the crew. Certainly he shed this severity in situations where was surrounded by friends, which happened to consist of most of the senior bridge crew, but in general his behaviour was slowly shifting into sophistication. Perhaps Jim had learned that he couldn’t be everyone’s friend, and even though it was truly important to be kind and compassionate, as a starship captain it was eminent that he be respected in order to get work done.

“Wheat, Spock.” Jim muttered in a disbelieving tone. “We’re here to guard wheat.”

“An important wheat, Captain.”

“Yes, but wheat nonetheless.” He retorted, glancing at Spock. “This wasn’t what I expected when I signed up for Starfleet. Where’re the big adventures, the new experiences and discoveries?”

“Though I appreciate your desire to experience the unknown with open arms, you should have been aware when accepting your position as captain that there would be fascinating missions as well as tedious ones. None more or less important than the other.” Spock added at the end.

Jim sighed and hung his head, clearly not appreciative of the truth told. The sound of the intercom alerted them to an incoming call, and Jim swiftly jumped off the table to accept it.

“Yes, what is it?”

“Message from Starfleet, Captain, priority channel. Admiral Fitzpatrick speaking.” Nyota informed them.

Spock and Jim locked eyes. The reply had come much sooner than either of them expected. “Put it on visual, Lieutenant.”

The screen flickered on to display the image of Admiral Fitzpatrick, a fairly aged man with blistered skin, wearing a gold Command tunic and a stern gaze directed straight ahead.

“Captain Kirk.” The admiral greeted.

“Kirk here.” Jim acknowledged.

The admiral immediately started speaking in a no-nonsense tone, allowing no interruptions. “Captain, it is not necessary to remind you of the importance to the Federation of Sherman’s Planet. They key to our winning of this planet is the grain, quadrotriticale. The shipment of it must be protected. Effective immediately, you will render any aid and assistance which Undersecretary Baris may require. The safety of the grain and project is your responsibility. Starfleet out.”

The screen turned dark. That had been a rather forceful and abrupt message, but Starfleet had made their intentions very clear. Spock chanced a glance at Jim, and saw the man had his hands placed firmly on his hips with a despairing look in his eyes.
“Well, that’s just lovely.” He exclaimed haltingly.

“But not totally unexpected.” Spock pointed out, unable to refrain.

Jim emitted a deep sigh, tiredness seeping into his very being. The sound of the whistle coming in again had him snapping his head up, and he reached forward to accept it on the intercom.

Nyota’s frenzied voice came through the unit. “Captain Kirk, Captain Kirk!”

Spock and Jim were immediately on high alert, Jim having shed his previous weariness in favour of focussing on Nyota. “Yes, Lieutenant, what is it?”

“Sensors are picking up a Klingon battle cruiser rapidly closing on the station.” She revealed.

Spock and Jim exchanged glances, some sort of unspoken message sent between them. Spock was already marching towards the door when Jim spoke his orders.

“Go to red alert, notify Mr. Lurry, we’ll be right up.”

*  

It seemed it was the norm on Space Station K-7 to alert random distress calls which turned out to be false.

Spock felt himself irked by this habit. Once he and Jim had beamed down onto the space station and directly into Mr. Lurry’s office, they had found that the there was no harm or cause for distress at all. Mr. Lurry had been present in the room, along with the Klingon cruiser’s captain, a man by the name of Koloth who Jim apparently knew from previous interactions. How a Klingon and a man who had spent the entirety of his life on Earth had met, Spock was clueless to, but that didn’t stop him from wondering. Koloth had explained to both Jim and Spock that his crew had beamed down to the space station to enjoy some simple R&R, simple as that. There was nothing insidious going on beyond a good captain granting his crew some well-deserved shore leave.

Jim had smiled sweetly at Koloth, though perhaps the more proper term would be ‘baring his teeth’, and told the man in no uncertain terms that it was completely fine for his crew to enjoy their shore leave on the space station. But, they should be warned, that for every man Koloth brought down Jim would make sure to bring down a security guard to match them, and with that he left Mr. Lurry’s office, the thinly veiled threat hanging in the air.

Spock followed after the captain, caught in his own thoughts. He understood the Jim’s caution where the Klingons were concerned, but he felt the man was handling the situation harsher than was called for. But, Spock wasn’t the captain, and even though he questioned the severe actions Jim had promised Koloth, he found that it was an appropriate precaution.

He had thought with the false alarm having been settled, they would be able to return to some sort of normalcy once about the ship, but that was not the case. They had beamed aboard, Jim intending to partake in a few games of pool to relieve himself of the stress he was feeling, and Spock had thought the idea wasn’t unappealing, so he joined Jim.

But, when they stepped into the recreational activity room they were greeted with the sight of several of the crew, Nyota and doctor McCoy included, gathered around the main table and petting a bunch of fuzzy balls. They were in various sizes and colours, brown seeming to be the most dominant, and Spock’s ears picked up on some sort of noise from them. Were they sentient beings?

Spock and Jim quietly stepped up beside the table, the members unaware of their presence in favour
of the… yes, creatures. They were indeed sentient, Spock could hear that from the sound they were emitting when touched.

“How long have you had that thing, Lieutenant?” McCoy directed his question at Nyota, but his gaze was fondly kept on the being in her hands.

“Since yesterday, Doctor. This morning I woke up to find that they had had babies.” She replied, petting the creature softly.

“Well, I’d say in that case you got a bargain.”

Their trilling continued to fill the room, and Spock leaned over Nyota’s seat to get a closer look at the fuzzy creature in her hands. It was much larger than the others on the table, which made him think that this one must have been the parent of them all.

Jim cautiously surveyed the table. “You running a nursery, Lieutenant?”

Nyota jumped in surprise at the captain’s voice. “Oh, Captain. Well, I hadn’t intended to, sir, but the tribble had other plans.”

Spock leaned further forward, their trilling causing his ears to twitch, though not in an unwelcome manner. Nyota finally noticed his presence, and she held up one of the creatures with a smile. This particular one was covered in white fur, and was small enough to fit in the palm of his hand. Spock slowly began stroking it, enjoying the feeling of its incredibly soft fuzz.

“A most curious creature, Captain.” Spock commented, carefully holding the creature up to his ear. “Its trilling seems to have a tranquilizing effect on the Human nervous system.” He returned to gently stroking the being, its cooing increasing in response to his touch. “Fortunately, of course, I am immune to its effect.”

Spock continued to pet the little fuzz ball, wholly unaware of the heated gazes directed at him until he looked up not a moment later. Everyone at the table was staring at him, Jim included with an amused smirk playing at his lips. Spock dared a glance down and saw Nyota too was smiling secretly at him, mirth glimmering in her dark eyes.

He immediately set the creature back down on the table and clasped his hands behind his back, though the tittering that followed that action made it very clear that he had been unsuccessful in hiding his reaction.

*

Jim and Spock had exited the recreational activity room shortly afterwards, Spock choosing to meditate for a few hours while Jim decided he would much rather read in his own quarters, mumbling something under his breath about ‘trilling headaches’. Spock had cocked an eyebrow at the words, but said nothing. They were heading down the hallway to their respective quarters when one of the intercoms in the wall emitted a whistle, followed by Chekov’s voice announcing, ‘Bridge to Captain Kirk’. Jim had halted in his steps and approached the intercom, pressing the ‘call’ button so that he could forward his reply.

“Kirk here.”

“Mr. Baris is waiting on channel A to speak to you, sir.” The ensign informed him, and Spock saw how Jim instantly stiffened and crossed his arms. He glanced at Spock with an agitated look, then returned to the intercom.
“Pipe it down here, will you Mr. Chekov?”

“Aye, sir. Mr. Baris is coming on.”

There was the sound of buttons being clicked, then Jim sighed deeply before leaning into the intercom and proclaiming with false cheeriness, “Yes, Mr. Baris, what can I do for you?”

Mr. Baris’ reply was as brash as the man himself. He immediately jumped into a diatribe regarding the Klingons currently enjoying their shore leave on the space station, and Spock felt deep empathy for what the captain had to endure. In this sense, he did not envy him. Mr. Baris went on to give strict orders that the quadrotriticale stay protected, and Spock saw how Jim geared himself up for an argument. However, one stern look from Spock stopped the man from saying something insulting most likely, and he ended the call on a falsely bright note and terse ‘goodbye’.

Immediately afterwards Jim turned on his heel and strode down the hallway. Spock blinked after the man, not expecting such a sudden reaction.

“Captain, may I ask where you’ll be?” He called after Jim.

The man stopped, turned to Spock with exhaustion clear in his eyes, and motioned to his head.

“Sickbay, with a headache.”

*

It seemed Spock had missed quite a bit while meditating in his rooms.

Apparently during the few hours he had been preoccupied with balancing his state of mind, Nyota had given all of the young of her creature— which Spock found was called a ‘tribble’— to several crewmembers, including doctor McCoy. This had resulted in many crewmembers tending to their tribbles, caring for them and feeding them, which over the next few hours led to a massive influx of the creatures. The entire starship was littered with them, from the hallways, to the turbolifts, to the Jeffries tubes, to even Sickbay.

It was an extremely odd takeover, being surrounded by small, soothing beings softer than a cat’s fur. Spock was unsure as to how to handle the situation, but fortunately some form of steps had been taken by none other than doctor McCoy. Whereas the rest of the crew had taken on the tribbles as their own personal pets, the doctor had performed several tests and exams on the creatures, and what he had found was most curious.

Doctor McCoy revealed to Spock that 50% of a tribble consisted simply of metabolism, something which had caused him some pause. Interesting. Apparently if you fed a tribble too much, it would result in even more tribbles, though the reason was yet unknown.

This, was why, Spock was currently collecting the tribbles littered all over Sickbay in an effort to help doctor McCoy further analyse the creatures. They were plentiful and seemed to be residing in every crevice of the ship, meaning there was no shortage of test subjects, but a whole lot of more work for Spock.

Spock picked up another tribble and placed it in his arm amongst the others, their trilling increasing as another member was added to their bunch. He walked over the where doctor McCoy was working at his operating table, depositing the tribbles into a large circular container built specifically as a holding cell for them.

“There’s something disquieting about these creatures.” Spock commented, placing the last of the tribbles inside before closing the lid of the container.
The doctor’s eyes flashed to him briefly. “Don’t tell me you’ve got a feeling.”

Spock shot McCoy and affronted look. “Don’t be insulting, Doctor. They remind me of the lilies of the field. ‘They toil not, neither do they spin.’ But they seem to eat a great deal. I see no practical use for them.” Spock commented, picking up his PADD on the table and sent off a message to Nyota about whether she wished to dine together after their next shift.

“Does everything have to have a practical use for you?” McCoy griped, tenderly stroking one of the tribbles on the operating table. His voice softened as he went on. “They’re nice, they’re soft, and they’re furry, and they make a pleasant sound.”

“So would an ermine violin, Doctor, but I see no advantage in having one.” Spock replied, not looking up from his PADD.

“It’s a Human characteristic to love little animals, especially if they’re attractive in some way.” McCoy muttered, absently petting another one of the tribbles on the table.

“Doctor, I am well aware of Human characteristics, I am frequently inundated by them, but I have trained myself to put up with practically anything.” Spock stated coolly.

A bout of silence followed shortly after his words, but a small beep from his PADD drew Spock’s attention away from the doctor. He saw he’d received a reply from Nyota who cited previous engagements, but said that Spock was more than free to join them. Spock instantly began typing out his decline.

“Spock, I don’t know much about these little tribbles yet but there is one thing I have discovered.” The doctor drawled.

That prompted Spock to look up at McCoy, his curiosity making itself known. “What is that, Doctor?”

“I like them.” The man declared proudly, his hazel-green eyes flashing. Spock held back a sigh and returned to his PADD. How foolish of him to have thought the doctor would be making an intelligent remark. “Better than I like you.”

At that Spock’s gaze flitted back to McCoy who had turned back to his testing on the tribbles. Spock straightened up, looking at the man with a calculating gaze. “Doctor.”

“Yes?”

“They do, indeed, have one redeeming characteristic.”

McCoy ceased handling the tribble, glancing at Spock with a curious expression. “What’s that?”

“They do not talk too much.” Spock announced, and he took some perverse pleasure in the manner McCoy jerked back suddenly, offence painted clear across his face. Spock tucked the PADD under his arm and offered the man a curt nod. “If you’ll excuse me.”

He exited the room, leaving the good doctor to presumably direct his displeasure at Spock’s retreating form.

* 

Surprisingly when out in the hallway Spock ran into the captain, the man dressed in workout gear and a towel slung over his arm. Evidently he was intending to pay the ship’s gym a visit. Since they
were both heading in the direction of the same turbolift, Jim suggested they walk together, and Spock thought it prudent to accept. This would be the first time they had foregone the simple nods in exchange for something else, another step towards improving their relationship.

Spock was well aware it was simply a three minute stroll through the ship, but one had to appreciate the small victories.

“There seems to be a substantial amount of crewmembers who have chosen to remain aboard this shore leave.” Spock noted idly, nodding at a passing ensign. The fourth ensign they had encountered in the hallway, and they had yet to make it to the turbolift.

Jim shook his head and shot Spock a smile. “They’re not here of their own volition, Mr. Spock. I had to cancel shore leave.”

Spock blinked at him. “Whatever for, Captain?”

Jim heaved a sigh. “There was a fight down on the space station between the Enterprise crew and the Klingons. Due to the altercation I was forced to cancel their shore leave; need to do my captainly duties after all, no matter the cause.”

“And what was the cause?”

Jim threw Spock a withering look. “One of the Klingons insulted the Enterprise and Scotty took a swing at them.”

Spock’s eyebrows rose high on his forehead. “That is most unusual. Though admittedly not a bizarre outcome considering the scenario you explained. Engineer Scott does seem to have great affections for the ship.”

“Yeah, no shit.” Jim huffed. “Funny thing is he held the others back when the Klingons were trash talking me, but when it came to the ship,” He chortled, shaking his head. “Ho boy, it’s gloves off!”

“Interesting priorities.” Spock mused aloud, causing the captain to snigger.

“Yeah. Interesting, alright. I must admit I’m a little bummed Scotty held back the others when they were about to, you know, ‘defend’ my honour, but hey—at least I know the crew have my back.”

It was curious how Jim didn’t seem to realise that the crew already were very much fond of him. Despite his newfound sense of professionalism, the beings aboard the Enterprise were very much loyal to the captain, but still the man’s self-confidence was oddly lacking.

This was not the same Jim Spock had heard rumours about, not the one who had been described as being so sure in himself and overtly sociable that there wasn’t a single person on campus who hadn’t heard of him. True, the majority of Starfleet academy had known of— and most definitely knew of now— Jim Kirk, flirtatious pansexual with brains and good looks in buckets it could only be that he had robbed others of it. Though, the more time Spock spent in the captain’s company, the more he thought that perhaps the reputation preceded the man himself.

Regardless of rumours, it was definite that at the start of the five year mission Jim had been lost and helpless as to how to handle his positon as captain of four hundred crewmen, yet now he was steadily growing into himself. He handled decisions and diplomatic briefings with a serious attitude and approached them from a professional perspective— although there were always exceptions, such as their current mission.

But, it was evident the crew appreciated Jim and his efforts, be it both professionally and privately.
The man had indeed managed to insinuate himself into several occasions with the crew, enjoying his time off getting to know them better and generally paying attention to their wants and needs. It was... extremely compassionate of him. Jim was very loyal of his crew, and in return they were extremely protective of the captain. It was a good relationship based on trust, and Spock predicted that it would only get stronger as the five year missions progressed.

*

Jim didn’t seem to like tribbles.

Perhaps Spock’s prior impression of him had been incorrect. After all, who could not feel any form of calm when listening to the soothing trilling of these fluffy creatures?

Though of course they had no impact on him.

Since there was nothing of interest for him down on Space Station K-7, Spock had decided to extend his time on shift, allowing for ensign Ma’arika’a, who was to take over after him, to further enjoy her shore leave. As they were hovering over the space station with nothing of important occurring as of the moment, Spock had decided to look over the results McCoy had sent him on the tribbles.

The data that the doctor had produced seemed to be inconclusive despite all of his arduous testing, the numbers and observations completely muddled and incoherent. Spock found himself scowling down at the PADD, the data causing him some concern. Perhaps McCoy had conducted his tests incorrectly.

Spock halted that train of thought. No, the doctor was a licensed medical professional. He was one of the best in his field, though his bedside manners often had Spock questioning that. McCoy certainly had carried out the tests correctly, and Spock shouldn’t doubt him. It was more likely that the tribbles were simply problematic to analyse. After all, they were still uncertain as to their makeup; all they knew were that they were harmless fuzzy beings that had inflicted a sense of calm over all of the crewmembers.

Well... almost all crewmembers.

“Uhura, please call McCoy to the bridge.” Jim ordered Nyota, picking up yet another tribble to add to the growing bundle in his arms.

“Yes, Captain.” Nyota replied, and went about doing just that.

Spock watched as the captain walked around the bridge, collecting tribble, after tribble, after tribble. It was rather hypnotising to watch, Jim’s face erupting into one of agonising pain whenever he found another creature buried somewhere in the room. Several moments later the door swept open and the doctor himself stepped onto the bridge.

“You wanted to see me, Jim?” He opened, looking to the captain.

Jim responded by thrusting a handful of tribbles into the man’s face.

McCoy’s eyebrows jumped. “Well, don’t look at me; it’s the tribbles who are breeding. And if we don’t get them off this ship we’ll be hip-deep in them.”

Jim slowly lowered the handful of tribbles, dubious gaze locked on McCoy. “What do you mean?”

“Well, the nearest thing I can figure out is that they’re born pregnant, which seems to be quite a time saver. And from my observations, it seems they’re able to reproduce at will.” McCoy surveyed the
room, taking in the frankly worrying number of tribbles still left on the bridge. “And brother, do they have a lot of will.”

Spock swivelled around in his chair and inserted himself into the conversation. “Captain, I am forced to agree with the doctor. I’ve been running computations on their rate of reproduction. They are consuming our supplies and returning nothing.”

“Oh, but they do give us something, Spock!” Nyota interrupted, turning from her station. “They give us love.”

All three of them looked to Nyota with various looks of scepticism.

Nyota felt herself flush, shaking her head in dismissal as she went on. “Well, Cyrano Jones says that a tribble is the only love that money can buy.”

Spock quirked a brow at that. That was a very unusual thing to say, especially coming from Nyota. She was usually so level-headed and in control of her sense, it seemed the exposure to the tribbles must have impaired her judgement somewhat. After all, it was… difficult, to show resentment towards the calming creatures.

For Jim, apparently, it proved to be no hardship.

“Too much of anything, Lieutenant, even love isn’t necessarily a good thing!” He despaired, shoving the tribbles into Nyota’s arm. The sudden movement had the creatures erupting into distressed trilling, and Spock watched as Nyota attempted to juggle them in her hold.

He rose from his seat, intending to help her, when Jim began puttering around their station and plucking tribbles off the ground. “Get a maintenance crew to clean up the entire ship, and then contact Mr. Lurry and tell him I’m beaming down.”

Jim continued to reach down and gather as many tribbles as he could hold, and well, Spock saw it fit to only help him. Besides, he didn’t wish to be scolded by Nyota afterwards about how he stood idly by while she and the captain tackled the tribble troubles.

“Have him find Cyrano Jones and hold him…” Jim stated, striding over to the doors. He then paused, and turned around, his eyes slowly dragging across the bridge. “And get these tribbles off the bridge.”

* 

Mr. Lurry had indeed done as he was asked, taking the so-called Cyrano Jones, the man solely responsible for the tribble infestation, into custody. Jim and Spock arrived in Mr. Lurry’s office with Mr. Jones already seated, awaiting only them. They proceeded to interrogate the man thoroughly, asking him about his motives and thought-process behind selling these creatures, but they turned out to be harmless. The man simply sold them because they were likeable, and he was allowed to sell them because there was no law in place against the breeding of inoffensive animals.

Dangerous? Sure. But tribbles were anything but.

“They’re soft, make a nice sound, and they like everybody! Besides, how can you deny wanting to cuddle such a precious creature?” Mr. Jones cooed, taking out a tribble from the inside of his coat and handing it over to the captain.

“Very easily.” Jim muttered, staring down at the tribble in his hands. He clearly had no desire to keep it, but Spock couldn’t suggest holding it for him without revealing himself as someone who found
the creatures to be calming. Which was clearly an untruth.

Jim sighed heavily as he sent Mr. Jones on his way, the man jovially bouncing off with an obvious spring in his step. If Mr. Jones were anyone else, Spock would have thought this suspicious behaviour, showing such open glee at having been declared innocent of any crimes, but instead Spock just thought him to be quite a character. Just as Mr. Jones exited the room, Mr. Baris and his assistant came pacing inside. Jim did a double-take of the two men, and Spock physically saw the effort it took for Jim not to drop to the ground in defeat.

“Captain Kirk, I consider your security measures a disgrace.” Mr. Baris started, looking for a reason to complain as always. “In my opinion you have taken this entire very important project too lightly.”

“On the contrary, sir, I think of this project as very important. It is you I take lightly.” The captain quipped easily, eyes tired.

Mr. Baris’ gaze hardened, and he waved a cautioning finger at Jim. “I am going to report fully to the proper authorities that you have given free and complete access to this station to a man who is quite probably a Klingon agent.”

“That’s a very serious charge.” Jim returned, falling into a more serious tone. “To whom are you referring?”

“Cyrano Jones.”


“You heard me.” Mr. Baris nodded confidently.

“I heard you.” Jim muttered.

Spock intervened and added, “He simply could not believe his ears.”

Jim threw Spock a look over his shoulder, a flicker of approval in those blue eyes, but it disappeared just as quickly as it had come when he turned back to Mr. Baris. “What evidence do you have against Mr. Jones?”

The man glanced back at his assistant, Mr. Darin, and explained, “My assistant here has kept Mr. Jones under close surveillance for quite some time, and his actions have been most suspicious. I believe he was involved in that little altercation between your men—”

“Yes, yes, go on.” Jim interrupted, clearly not wishing to endure the man’s laborious ranting. “What else do you have?”

At this point it was Mr. Darin who replied. “Well, Captain, I checked his ship’s log and it seems he was within the Klingon’s sphere of influence less than four months ago.”

“The man is an independent scout, Captain. It’s quite possible he is also a Klingon spy.” Mr. Baris suggested confidently.

Jim held back a sigh and looked to Spock, a clear indication that he was allowing him to do the honours. And so Spock did. “We have already checked on the background of Mr. Cyrano Jones. He is a licensed asteroid locator and prospector. He’s never broken the law, at least not severely, and for the past seven years with his one-man spaceship he has obtained a marginal living by engaging in the buying and selling of rare merchandise, including, unfortunately, tribbles.”
“But he is after my grain!” Mr. Baris burst out, face reddening.

“Do you have any proof of that?” Jim asked sharply.

“You can’t deny he’s disrupted this station.” Mr. Darvin retorted, equally sharply.

“People have disrupted stations before without being Klingon agents. Sometimes all they need is a title, Mr. Baris.” Jim said, handing the tribble over to Spock who tried to tamp down on his excitement. His hands began to gently stroke the creature, its cooing immediately starting up.

“Unfortunately, disrupting a space station is not an offence. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have a ship to tend to.”

Jim headed towards the exit, entirely done with wasting his time squabbling with these men about protecting wheat of all things. Spock felt a dash of disappointment shoot through him at the captain’s quick departure, but he was forced to follow. Handing the tribble over to Mr. Baris Spock trailed after Jim, adamant to prove that he had no desire to keep one of the creatures as his own, no matter how soothing their trilling.

*

“My chicken sandwich and coffee.” Jim exclaimed in a dazed tone, staring at his cup in confusion. The cup he had recently removed from the replicator, and which currently held a brown, fat, tribble in it. He slowly turned to Spock, who similarly was holding a tray full of tribbles on a plate which should have held his Plomeek soup. Jim held up his cup for show. “This is my chicken sandwich and coffee.”

“Fascinating.” Spock commented.

Jim’s gaze travelled back to the creature in his cup, staring down at it as if it were the bane of his existence. “I want these things off the ship. I don’t care if it takes every man we’ve got, I want them off the ship.”

The door to the mess hall slid open, and in strode engineer Scott with his very own armful of chirping tribbles. “Aye, they’re into the machinery, alright.” He announced.

Jim scowled, eyes darting over the creatures in the engineer’s arms. “How?”

“Probably through one of the air vents.” Engineer Scott suggested before ambling away, presumably to dispose of the tribbles somewhere safe. Perhaps a container of some sorts.

Spock turned to Jim, a sudden thought having struck him. “Captain, there are vents of that type on the space station.”

Jim’s scowl quickly cleared up as he understood Spock’s meaning. “And in the storage compartments.”

*

Spock and Jim had beamed back down to Space Station K-7 for what seemed like the hundredth occasion, but this time it wasn’t due to complaints. Jim had asked that Mr. Lurry and Mr. Baris meet them near the storage compartments that held the quadrotriticale, set on revealing to them what he and Spock had realised on the Enterprise. If they indeed were correct, it would prove why the tribbles were producing at such an alarming rate, as well as uncover the main perpetrator that could potentially harm Mr. Baris’ precious grain.
Once all men had arrived at the storage compartments as instructed, Jim ordered the security guard to open them up. One of the guards attempted to do so, but seemed to be struggling with it. Apparently the lock was stuck, and so Jim ushered them away and gave a hand at it himself, but to no avail. Instead, the captain proceeded to open the compartment above, and that turned out to be both successful and a surprise. The lock opened up easily enough and a whole avalanche of tribbles fell out, seemingly never-ending with how they fell for what felt like ages. However, it was due to finish at some point, and once the last tribble dropped out of the compartment Jim was sat in a mountain of them, surrounded by tribble of various sizes and colours, looking for all the world as if he had given up on life itself.

One of tribbles rolled to Spock’s feet, and he bent down to pick it up. “They seem to be gorged.”

“Gorged?” Mr. Baris exclaimed, a persistent blight in the galaxy if there ever was one. “On my grain! Kirk, I am going to hold you responsible.”

Jim looked as if he didn’t care what happened to him anymore. He was beyond corporal punishment or any other sort. Spock found himself extremely riveted by the captain’s facial expressions, even more excited with himself for being able to read the man so well. Truly, Jim was an expressive being of the highest order.

Another tribble rolled down the mountain and towards Mr. Baris who quickly stepped aside. “There must be thousands of them.”


Another tribble fell out of the top compartment, hitting the captain on the head. Spock arched a delicate eyebrow and eyeballed the mountain, then revealed, “1,771,561.”

Jim’s head slowly turned around, eyes landing on him. If Spock were able to label every one of Jim’s expressions, he would entitle this one the ‘you’re dead to me’ look.

“That’s assuming one tribble, multiplying with an average litter of ten, producing a new generation every twelve hours, over a period of three days.” Spock added.

“And that’s assuming that they got here three days ago.” Jim said in a drained tone.

“And allowing for the amount of grain consumed and the volume of the storage compartment.”

Mr. Baris once more waved his familiar warning finger, a tool Spock thought he was overly attached to. “Kirk, you should have known! You are responsible for turning the development project into a total disaster!”

“Mr. Baris…” Jim started calmly, but was cut off.

“And I am through being intimidated, Kirk! Now you have insulted me, you have ignored me, you’ve walked all over me! You have abused your authority, and you have rejected my requests. And this!” Mr. Baris motioned at the tribbles surrounding his feet. “This is the result! I am going to hold you responsible, Kirk.”

“Mr. Baris, I’ll hold you in irons if you don’t shut up.” Jim declared loudly, his voice brooking no arguments, though the effect was lessened somewhat by a tribble hitting his head from the compartment above.

Another tribble dislodged itself from the mountain the captain was currently buried in and fell at Spock’s feet. He bent down and picked up the creature just as doctor McCoy suddenly rushed into
“Jim!” He exclaimed with a gleeful smile. “I think I’ve got it. All we have to do is quit feeding them. We quit feeding them, they stop breeding.” He announced, as if it were the revelation of the century.

Jim got a far off look in his eyes, and Spock could see the man shutting down into the ‘I don’t care if I live or die anymore’ mode. It was a new expression that Spock had never seen before, but he recognised it as being such. He began to gently pet the tribble in his hands, irrationally hoping its trilling might calm the tension in the room somewhat, but it was oddly quiet.

“How he tells me.” Jim muttered, voice monotone.

“Captain, this tribble is dead.” Spock exclaimed, looking down at the tribble in his hands, feeling the heavy weight of it in his palms. Heavy, but not warm. He held up the tribble for Jim to see, then realised that for the amount of tribbles there were present, the trilling was extremely subdued. McCoy seemed to have come to the same conclusion, or perhaps he was simply curious, because he extracted his tricorder and immediately ran it over the mountain of tribbles.

“A lot of them are dead.” He concluded. “A lot of them are alive, but they won’t be for long.”

“A logical assumption is that there is something in the grain.” Spock declared, holding the dead tribble to his chest. The creature was entirely too small, and he felt slightly upset that it did not live long enough to grow bigger.

Jim’s eyes flashed to McCoy, and he nodded firmly. “Yes. Bones, I want the tribbles, the grain, everything analysed. I want to know what killed these tribbles.”

“I haven’t figured out what keeps them alive yet.” McCoy argued.

Jim’s gaze changed suddenly, and Spock was very much reminded of a saying his mother was fond of using: if looks could kill, they’d be dead a thousand times over. He very much thought it to be applicable to the current situation.

McCoy, too, seemed to have realised the weight of that stare, because he complied with Jim’s orders. “Alright, if I find out anything I’ll let you know.”

As soon as the doctor left Mr. Baris whirled on the captain. “That isn’t gonna do you any good, Kirk. This project is ruined and Starfleet is going to hear about it, and when they do, they will have a board of inquiry and they will roast you alive. And I am gonna be there, Kirk, to enjoy every moment of it.”

Jim’s gaze hardened, and his voice was tight as he spoke. “Until that board of inquiry, I’m still the captain, and as captain I want two things done: First, find Cyrano Jones, and second…” He looked up at the overhead storage compartment with imploring eyes. “Close that door.”

* *

And so Once more Cyrano Jones had been brought into Mr. Lurry’s office for another bout of questioning, Mr. Baris unfortunately wishing to be present for it. Spock hadn’t expected to glean much more from Mr. Jones than they already had from their previous interrogation, but when the man was hauled in, two security guards on each side and hands full of tribbles, he realised there had been some substantial changes of sorts.

They had just gotten Mr. Jones seated, about to begin the questioning, when captain Koloth burst into the room with one of his men at his side.
Jim’s hand clenched at his sides and he slowly turned around, sounding bored as he asked, “What do you want?”

“An official apology, addressed to the Klingon High Command.” Koloth replied proudly, his chest puffing up. “I expect you to assume full responsibility for the persecution of Klingon nationals in this quadrant.”

Jim blinked repeatedly at the man. “An apology?”

“Yes. You’ve harassed my men. You’ve treated them like criminals. You’ve been must uncourteous, Captain Kirk. Now, if you wish to avoid a diplomatic incident—”

Mr. Baris immediately jumped in with a worried shout of, “No, Kirk! You can’t let him. That will give them the wedge they need to claim Sherman’s Planet.”

“I believe that more than the word of an aggrieved Klingon commander would be necessary for that, Mr. Baris.” Spock pointed out coolly, truly tiring of the man’s bursts of emotionalism. How he accomplished anything between throwing tantrums was a mystery Spock would never understand.

Koloth placed his hands on his hips and smiled sweetly, his teeth slightly bared. “Mr. Spock, as far as Sherman’s Planet is concerned Captain Kirk has already given it to us.”

Jim raised his head in return, pulling himself up to his full height. “Well, we’ll see about that. But before I take any official action, I’d like to know what just happened.” He spun around, focus on Mr. Jones, but spoke to the whole group at large. “Who put the tribbles in the quadrotriticale, and what was in the grain that killed them?”

“Captain Kirk, before you go on, may I make a request?” Koloth interrupted.

Jim frowned, but gave a curt nod. “Yes.”

Koloth motioned at the trilling tribbles in Cyrano’s arms with a disgusted look. “Can you get those things out of here?” He said darkly.

Spock was surprised at the request, unsure as to why the man found fault with a creature so tranquilising. Jim was clearly struggling to keep his exasperation at bay, but he complied with Koloth’s wishes. He caught the security guards’ eyes and gestured towards Mr. Jones, indicating that they should remove the creatures from his person. The security guards marched towards the door with the tribbles in hand, but just as they were about to step outside the doors swept open and Arne Darvin, Mr. Baris’ assistant, walked into the room. Immediately the tribbles emitted a high-pitched screeching, causing Mr. Darvin to startle and glare down at the creatures with his shoulders hunched.

Spock cocked an eyebrow. “Remarkable.”

“Hold on a minute.” Jim called to the security guards when they made for the door once more. He turned to Mr. Jones, confusion marring his face. “I thought you said tribbles liked everybody.”

Mr. Jones swiftly rose from his chair and joyously exclaimed, “Well, they do. I can’t understand it. The last time I saw one act this way was at the bar.”

“What was at the bar?” Jim prompted.

“Klingons.” Mr. Cyrano said, then pointed at captain Koloth. “Him, for one.”

Spock was unsure as to what the man meant in terms of detail, but the last time Spock had heard of
an incident that involved Klingons at a bar it unfortunately involved a fistfight with the crew of the prestigious *U.S.S. Enterprise*. Was this by any chance the same situation Mr. Jones was speaking of?

Jim ambled over to the security guards and took the tribbles into his own hands, holding them before him as he casually strode back towards Spock. On the way he passed Koloth who flinched back when the tribbles suddenly emitted the same distressed screeching from earlier.

Jim locked eyes with Mr. Jones, a slow smile forming on his lips. “You’re right, Mr. Jones. They don’t like Klingons.”

The door swished open once more, and this time doctor McCoy stepped into the room, though no one paid him any mind. They were all entirely focused on Jim who slowly strolled forward, this time heading towards Spock. He came to a stop next to the man, but there was no reaction from the tribbles, not even their customary cooing. Clearly, they were spooked.

“But they do like Vulcans.” Jim murmured, catching Spock’s eyes. “Why, Mr. Spock, I didn’t know you had it in you.”

“Obviously, tribbles are very perceptive creatures, Captain.” Spock returned calmly, his fingers itching to pet the fuzzy creatures. But he did not. He was in control.

Jim’s lips tilted up into a smile, and there was some fondness present there. Spock’s insides warmed at the sight; he felt as if he hadn’t seen the captain smile for quite some time.

“Obviously.” Jim repeated, leisurely drifting along.

Next he approached Mr. Baris, the man following the captain’s stroll with a curious gaze. Jim came to a stop next to the man and looked down at the tribbles, but there was no response from them.

“Mr. Baris, they like you.” He exclaimed in surprise, but then shrugged and moved on. “Well, there’s no accounting for taste.”

Next Jim neared Mr. Davrin, who was still stood a few metres away from the rest of them. As soon as Jim was but a few paces away the tribbles began screeching once more, and Mr. Darvin recoiled, guilty eyes flickering up to the captain’s.

“They don’t like you, Mr. Darvin. I wonder why.” Jim drawled, then turning to McCoy with a cocked brow. “Bones?”

The doctor understood the command disguised as a question and walked over to Jim, already extracting his tricorder. He came to a stop before the captain and Mr. Darvin, running his device over the man.

“Heartbeat is all wrong.” McCoy commented with a frown, continuing to scan the man while simultaneously commenting his observations. “His body temperature is…”

All of a sudden his eyes widened and jumped up to the captain’s.

“Jim! This man is a Klingon.”

*  

As it turned out, the grain had been thoroughly poisoned. McCoy’s tricorder scans revealed the truth, showing that the quadrotriticale had been impregnated with a virus which turned into an inert material in the bloodstream. The more an organism consumed it, the more the inert matter was built
up, and eventually after a few days would reach a point where the organism could no longer be able to take in enough nourishment to survive, thus starving to death. A truly hideous way to meet one’s end.

The perpetrator, of course, had been Mr. Darvin, an undercover Klingon agent who had acted as Mr. Baris’ assistant without the man knowing it. Though it was illogical, Spock took some delight in the fact that for all of Mr. Baris’ accusations of Spock and Jim not doing their jobs properly, it turned out that the culprit who had sabotaged his precious quadrotriticale had been under his watch all along. Truly, it made no sense to feel delight, but Spock allowed himself this one instance of pettiness, only because he was sure Jim would be celebrating it much more loudly himself, most likely via the Enterprise’s speakers.

Speaking of the captain; following the revelation of the undercover Klingon agent, he had informed Koloth that he had six hours to get his men and his ship out of Federation territory, a threat which he promised he would love to see become a reality. Koloth had scurried away, taking the words to heart, and Spock saw how Jim beamed with pride. Though it came at the hands of someone else’s humiliation, Spock had to admit it was good to see the captain fall back into his usual, brazen self.

Mr. Cyrano Jones had not come out of the interrogation entirely absolved of his previous actions, Jim instructing the man that his penalty was to personally collect every single tribble on Space Station K-7. The man had made to argue, but with a sharp glare from the captain he had chosen to stay quiet, a most wise choice if you were to ask Spock. Once back aboard the Enterprise Jim had immediately strode onto the bridge, instructing everyone to beam all of the remaining tribbles on the ship onto the Klingon vessel as a final act of revenge. Spock informed him that it was a childish act, and Jim had promptly told Spock that his face was a childish act, a comment which made no sense whatsoever.

Finally, after all the tribbles had been removed from the ship and onto the unsuspecting vessel of the Klingons, Jim settled back in his seat and let out a deep sigh. “So glad that’s over with. If I never see another tribble in my life it’ll have been too soon.”

“The tribbles were well liked by many on the ship, Captain. I believe they found the trilling noise they emitted to be soothing.” Spock commented idly, sparing a last thought for the soft creatures. It had been an arduous journey of denial, but Spock had finally accepted the truth. He had liked the tribbles.

“Soothing my ass, the little furry things from the seventh level of hell.” The man groused.

“It is unusual they did not affect you.” Spock observed.

“If I wanted a calming pet, I would’ve gotten a cat. Much nicer.” Jim said, then turned to Nyota’s station when she let out a giggle. “What?”

“I just always imagined you as dog person, is all.” She explained, still smiling.

Jim contemplated her words, then nodded once. “Dogs are great too, to be honest, but I prefer a cat’s mood. And they’re really nice to hold and cuddle with, especially when they purr. I’m telling you Mr. Spock, if you want an animal that’ll calm you with the noise they make, go for a cat.”

“I must admit I find myself strangely drawn to the creatures, though I do not think my ancestry is entirely blameless for doing so.” Spock shared, turning to his station.

Kirk frowned. “What do you mean?”

“I simply meant that as modern Vulcans evolved from a creature very similar to Earth’s housecat, I
find them much more pleasing in comparison to other animals.” Spock clarified.

At Spock’s words Jim eyes suddenly alighted with delight, and Spock could practically hear his excitement as he slowly asked, “Are you telling me that Vulcans evolved from little pitty kitty cats?”

“Not the Terran cat you know, but a similar feline, only larger and with more teeth.” Spock pointed out, hoping the captain understood that there was a distinction.

Jim’s laughter tore through his body, his very being practically vibrating with joy. Spock stayed calm at his station, enduring being openly mocked only because the captain had not had the opportunity to laugh so freely in quite some time.

*  

Much to the relief of the crew, the captain had announced one day and night of proper shore leave at their next destination coming up, which was not even a days’ travel away. All he asked of the crew was that they not instigate any more fights with Klingons, though he jested that any other being was acceptable. Spock shot him a displeased look, but Jim simply chuckled in reply, and Spock couldn’t bring himself to care too much as he welcomed the man’s snickering. It was odd, but ever since their previous mission where Jim had looked as if the universe had been out to make his life as miserable as possible, Spock paid a lot closer attention to the instances where the man laughed.

They had pulled into the docking station of their next destination, Marbo, eighteen hours later, the lights of the planet below competing with the stars in the sky in terms of brightness. It was clear from the view that it was a planet that remained constantly alive, making it a satisfying location for shore leave. Spock locked down his station in preparation of leaving it unattended for the duration of the shore leave, intending to sequester himself in his quarters and read over some science journals he had been meaning to get around to. He recalled engineer Scott had done similarly when they were at Space Station K-7, and he thought that perhaps the man would be the next being Spock attempted to approach in hopes of forming some sort of friendship. It was still a hardship for him to initiate first contact with crewmembers, but he was trying.

Spock had just stepped out of the turbolift and was heading down the hallway towards his rooms when the doors to the captain’s quarters, situated right next to Spock’s own, opened up to reveal both Jim and doctor McCoy. The two men were grinning widely at each other, and Spock was struck by how the captain’s face changed so drastically when he smiled. He had been paying it a lot more noticed lately, along with any instance of laughter.

The two men turned down the hallway, heading in Spock’s direction, and he saw Jim’s eyes brighten when he spotted his first officer. “Mr. Spock! Fancy meeting you here. Getting ready for your shore leave are you?”

Spock came to a slow halt, Jim and McCoy doing the same as they stopped somewhere in the middle. “Indeed, Captain. I plan on spending my time reading through several journal articles I have wished to view for quite some time now.”

Jim’s face shifted into a frown. “Journal articles?”

“That’s no way to spend your shore leave.” McCoy commented, his permanent scowl seeming to get deeper.

“Though you may not deem it be a valuable usage of your time, for me, Doctor, it is.”

“Peculiar priorities, Mr. Spock, but I’m not one to judge.” Jim smiled, then suddenly it stretched
wider. “Hey, why don’t you come down with us?”

“Captain?” Spock uttered, confused.

“With me and Bones, Spock. Come down to Marbo and join us during shore leave. We’re going to a pub, so it’s not like we’ll be doing a hell of a lot except relaxing.” He grinned.

“I am… uncertain as to my welcome.” Spock began uncomfortably, unsure as to how to proceed. He was pleased the captain had asked him to join him and doctor McCoy during their shore leave, but Spock wasn’t exactly someone who belonged in an establishment such as a pub. They had never appealed to him before, and beyond the few quiz nights Nyota had dragged him to back at the academy, he had no interest in them.

Jim waved away his worries with that ever-present smile of his. “Nonsense! Join us, Mr. Spock; it’d do well for us to do some bonding outside of work.”

The manner in which Jim was behaving had Spock thinking that perhaps the man was slightly inebriated. He was more relaxed and open with his gestures, but that could very likely be due to doctor McCoy’s presence. He and Jim were after all notorious for being the loudest and most argumentative pair of friends on the Enterprise, and Spock often saw evidence of it on the bridge and during away missions.

However, Jim had cited bonding as a reason for Spock to join, which was an adequate cause. Spock he mulled over it, thinking that perhaps that could convince him to accept the captain’s offer. He was usually reluctant to partake in social engagements of any form, but this came from Jim himself, and if Jim had offered for Spock to join him and McCoy during shore leave, surely it meant that he had an interest in bettering their relationship. It was exactly what Spock had wished for, but was too uncomfortable to initiate.

It took him another few moments of deliberation, but in the end Spock accepted Jim’s offer with a nod of the head and a, ‘Thank you, Captain.’

*

Indeed, Spock had not been incorrect in his assumption that Jim was a loyal captain to the crew.

It looked as if quite a few members of the Enterprise were currently in the pub, ensigns Spock had seen in passing on the ship roaming around the pub or sitting at tables as they loudly chattered with their friends. The temperature in the establishment was warm, though not overbearing, and the lighting was dim as to encourage people to relax. Spock observed as Jim passed around to each person, greeting them with a grin and a clap on the back, taking the time to interact with each and every crewmember in the place.

Truly, it seemed as if the man took every opportunity he had to socialise with the crew, approaching the mingling as if he were a man on a mission. Spock only wished that Jim devoted as much attention towards paperwork as he did when jostling about with crewmembers, trading barbs and jokes. The captain tried— and Spock put a great deal of emphasis on the word ‘tried’— to complete his paperwork in a timely fashion, but often he would get restless when sitting in one place for too long, and got easily distracted by anything around him.

Often this behaviour could be managed by Spock sitting in with the captain in order to offer some extra focus, but eventually he would have to allow Jim an hour or two of freedom to get rid of his restlessness before directing him back to his work. Spock had noticed though that whenever he was present to steer the captain towards doing his job, his productivity would increase by as much as
23%. The number was high enough that Spock contemplated doing it more often, perhaps scheduling times where they could tend to their individual work. It would also help strengthen their professional relationship which was a definite positive, and something Spock had planned on working on when they beamed down to Marbo. However, as soon as they entered the pub and realised that several of the members of the Enterprise were also present, they had slowly begun to split up, wading through different groups and talking to different people.

Well, McCoy and Jim had done so. Spock had ordered himself one Altair water, which he had been surprised to find the bar stocked, and secreted himself at a table near the wall. Thankfully it was a high table without any chairs, meaning no one approached him, though that could be due to his hostile look. Nyota had once described to him how for many beings having slanted eyebrows turned down over one’s eyes indicated anger or displeasure, and it had cleared up much of his confusion as to why people often avoided his path. She had joked and said that was due to his presence, which was apparently strong, and he accepted the compliment with a nod of the head.

“You alright, Spock?” A voice asked suddenly, and Spock turned to find Jim standing at his side, bottle of beer in hand and a grin in place.

“I apologise, Captain, I was not paying attention to a single word you were saying.”

Jim chortled, throwing Spock an amused look. “Harsh. But it’s okay, I was just checking that you were doing alright.”

“I am well, Captain.” Spock assured him.

“Please, call me Jim. We’re off-duty after all. ‘Captain’ is only for when we’re on hours.” He said, taking a sip of his beer.

Spock gave a small nod. “Jim, then.”

Jim grinned at him, and Spock was reminded just how much the man’s face changed when he did so. It made him look younger somehow, which was odd, because when the man smiled it added more wrinkles to his face. Spock tilted his head, curious as to how that was possible.

“What?” Jim asked, arching a brow.

“I am simply contemplating your facial structure.” Spock told him plainly.


“It is adequate.”

Again, Jim laughed, and Spock hadn’t realised how often he did so. It made the man’s behaviour on Space Station K-7 all that more drastic in comparison.

“Hey, Spock, I was wondering about Vulcans actually.” Jim began, but Spock noticed his eyes narrowed. “I, um… Yeah, I was wondering about your dedication to logic.”

“I presume you mean our teachings of Surak?”

“Yeah, that.” Jim nodded, but again, his eyes seemed to dart to something behind Spock. “At what point did you guys decide you should follow the path of logic? Because if I’ve…” He trailed off.

“Are you well, Jim?” Spock inquired.
Jim’s eyes snapped back to him, and he nodded fervently. “Yeah, yeah, I’m just fine. I was just thinking, you know, Vulcan history does state that you used to be really savage and barbaric as a race, and I was wondering if you knew how all of Vulcan suddenly decided... decided to...”

It was immensely frustrating, but Jim’s gaze kept flashing to something behind him as he spoke. It was a bit difficult for Spock to keep his curiosity at bay when he kept acting as such.

“Jim—”

“I’m sorry, Spock,” Jim interrupted, giving him an apologetic look. “I gotta go... I gotta go take care of something.”

Spock watched as Jim walked away, passing two tables and leaving his beer on one of them as he approached the bar’s counter.

Or more specifically, a young woman sat at the counter.

Spock recognised her as being ensign Kurokawa, one of the people in charge of the away teams when they had been stuck on the fairytale planet. The man invading her space, however, Spock was sure he had never seen before.

He saw how Jim stepped up beside the two of them, showing obvious delight when he locked eyes with ensign Kurokawa and throwing his arms around her. Belatedly the ensign returned Jim’s hug, wrapping her own arms around the captain’s larger form. The two separated after a long moment, but they still held onto each other, gazes locked and grins wide as they kept talking, although Spock couldn’t hear a word they were saying.

The din in the establishment prohibited him from piecing out individual conversations, but he didn’t need to hear what ensign Kurokawa and the captain were saying to know that they were involved romantically. It was evident in their lingering touches and closeness, their interest so blatant that even the man who had previously been with ensign Kurokawa jerked back with a frown.

This... was problematic.

Ensign Kurokawa was a subordinate, and as such she and Jim’s relationship fell under the Starfleet regulations which forbade fraternization between superiors and those of lower rank. If Starfleet Command found out about their relationship, ensign Kurokawa could suffer drastic consequences, and Jim could be court-martialed and stripped of his position as captain of the Enterprise.

But perhaps Spock was in the wrong. Perhaps there wasn’t anything of a romantic nature occurring between Jim and the ensign. It could simply be that they were both fond of physical touches, something Spock had noticed many Humans enjoyed, especially among friends. There was a possibility that both the captain and ensign Kurokawa were of that ilk, and soon they would be separating and moving on to conversing with the rest of their friends. Spock decided to observe their behaviour from afar, wanting to see whether his speculations were true or false.

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Jim and ensign Kurokawa did not remove themselves from each other for the remainder of the night.

*

“Captain, I wish to speak with you.” Spock told Jim once they got off their shift.

It had been precisely eleven hours since shore leave had ended, and Spock had spent the majority of
those hours working his shift. For the other few he had been near constantly contemplating what should be done regarding the issue of Jim and ensign Kurokawa’s relationship.

It was only by chance that he had discovered their affair, although Spock did question their inability to keep it under wraps when in a public establishment such as the pub. There had been several eyewitnesses, both from the Enterprise crew and locals of Marbo, but none of them had seemed to have taken an interest in the scandalous interactions between the captain and his subordinate. It had confused Spock to no end, but if they didn’t report the incident then it gave him the power to make the final decision.

Jim and ensign Kurokawa had been found out, and due to their positions as ensign and captain the ramifications they suffered would be devastating.

Or, they would be, if Spock had decided to inform Starfleet Command of their relationship. But he had not.

Spock had observed Jim closely for over three months now, watching as the man grew from an obstinate and insecure individual into a constantly improving being well on his way to becoming a remarkable starship captain. He and Spock had shown extreme hostility and resentment towards each other at the start of the five year mission, but with each shift and away mission gone awry they had slowly learned to work together in order to bring out the best of one another. It still wasn’t always successful, and there was definite room for improvement, but Spock had to admit that Jim was quickly surpassing his expectations. He was curious to see as to what could become of Jim Kirk.

It was for that reason, and that reason only, that he chose to confront Jim about his relationship with ensign Kurokawa before taking any further action.

They had recently finished their shifts and just stepped out through the doors when Spock had asked his question.

Jim had turned to him with a small smile. “Sure thing, Spock. What’s up?”

Spock’s eyes darted to the door they had recently come through, uncomfortable with having this conversation out in the open hallway. “Perhaps it would be best if we relocated to your quarters.”

Jim’s eyebrows creased, interest clear in his eyes. He nodded slowly, and together they headed for the turbolift. The ride down was entirely uneventful, neither Spock nor Jim offering to make small talk in order to fill the silence. The door opened up to their floor, and it was Jim who stepped out first, leading the way towards his quarters with Spock trailing closely after. He entered his code into the key, and the door suddenly swept open to permit them entrance.

“After you.” Jim said, gesturing inside.

Spock offered him a nod as thanks and walked inside, Jim following after. Once the door slid shut again Spock spun around, facing the captain head on with his hands clasped behind his back. Jim’s eyes slowly travelled down and up Spock’s body, curiosity obvious in his gaze.

Spock gathered his strength and immediately stated, “Captain. Last evening at the pub I witnessed you and ensign Kurokawa locked in an embrace which I initially presumed to be of a romantic nature.”

“Oh okay?” Jim replied, arching an eyebrow.

“I thought perhaps it must have been a mistake of sorts, but you proved me wrong as for the remainder of the night both you and ensign Kurokawa stayed in close contact. The manner in which
you conducted yourselves was inappropriate between a captain and ensign, which I may point out is your subordinate, and under Starfleet regulations could get you court-martialed.”

Jim’s second eyebrow joined his first, and he slowly crossed his arms over his chest.

“I have yet to inform Starfleet Command of your and ensign Kurokawa’s affair because I wish to know whether you plan on maintaining it. If you uncouple now there will be no cause for worry in regards to your individual professional careers; however, if you do not, I will be forced to report the both of you.”

A heavy silence fell once Spock had finished his explanation, Jim staring at Spock with an indecipherable look in his eyes. Several moments tricked by, and the atmosphere in the room was taut with anticipation of Jim’s answer. It felt as if the prolonged silence was slowly suffocating Spock, but he ignored the feeling in favour of remaining upright and rigid, awaiting the captain’s decision.

All of a sudden Jim burst into guffaws, hunching over as his loud laughter echoed throughout the quarters.

Spock was taken aback by this reaction. This was not what he had expected.

“Captain?” He ventured, eyebrows furrowing slightly.

“Just…” Jim gasped in between bouts of laughter. “Just give— oh God— give me a moment, Spock. Oh my God.” He wheezed, arms curling around his stomach.

Spock waited with impatience for Jim to recover from his laughing fit, curiosity clawing at his insides, stunned and perplexed by the captain’s unusual reaction to his declaration. He had believed Jim would be overcome with either huge amounts of guilt at having been caught, or pride, thus cementing the rumours Spock had heard regarding him and his prowess. He was becoming slightly obsessed with these rumours, as they were so vastly known by students on campus yet so at odds with the Jim Spock had grown to know.

Finally the captain’s laughs tapered off, the occasional bout of snorts still coming through as he straightened back up again. Jim looked to Spock, lop-sided smirk in place and eyes glimmering with amusement.

“So me and ensign Kurokawa, you say?”

“It is what I have observed.” Spock stated confidently, though he felt anything but. Not after that reaction.

Jim nodded, accepting Spock’s words. “True. But uh… you’ve kind of really got it wrong there, Spock.”

Spock’s cocked an eyebrow. “Captain?”

“You said me and ensign Kurokawa— whose first name is Haruho, by the way— were attached to each other all night.”

“Which is true.”

“It is true.” Jim agreed, his smirk widening. “But the reason behind that is not at all what you deduced. You see, when I was talking to you during shore leave, asking you about the teachings of Surak, I saw Haruho from the corner of my eye. She was sat at the bar, and this guy was pestering
her. Or, I didn’t know if he was, but I kept my attention on her just so I could see how she was reacting to him. She apparently did not like this guy ‘cause she was throwing nervous gazes all around her, and that’s when I broke away from our conversation.”

“I do not understand.” Spock murmured, frowning lightly.

Jim shook his head with a smile. “The guy was bothering Haruho, Spock, so I went up to them and acted as if I was her partner. I hugged her all close and even whispered in her ear what my plan was, which was to trick they guy into thinking I was her boyfriend, and then maybe he’d go away. But no, this guy was real persistent. Stuck around all night, which meant that I had to stick to Haruho’s side all night.” Jim concluded, looking at Spock expectantly.

“I… see.” Spock said, having finally understood. Yes. With what Jim had just explained, last night’s actions made clear sense. It was simply an attempt at dissuading someone from pursuing an individual who did not desire their attention. It was not, fortunately, a reason to contact Starfleet Command about illicit behaviour. “How very noble of you, Captain.”

Jim rolled his eyes. “Spock, you really shouldn’t congratulate that. It should be common sense for everyone to help a friend in need, especially when it’s clear they can’t do much about the situation they’re in themselves.”

“Indeed.” Spock agreed. Now that he knew the truth behind last night’s activities, he felt ashamed of his previous announcement where he had essentially accused Jim of breaking Starfleet regulations. “Then I must apologise for my prior assumptions; I extrapolated incorrectly and insulted you in the process, and for that I am sorry. However, I am relieved I will not have to report you to Starfleet Command.”

Jim nodded at him, a tight smile on his face. “It’s good to know you’re always on the side of the law. Makes it easier to know where you stand in certain situations.”

“I thought it prudent to discuss the matter with you before I acted accordingly. I believe you are developing into a capable starship captain, and did not wish for this newfound affair to have hindered you from doing so. It would have been highly unfortunate if your previous reputation attached itself to your current one.”

“You always seem to think the worst of me, Mr. Spock.” Jim said with a laugh, but it sounded bitter.

Spock perked up at that. “I assure you, I do no—“

“It’s okay, everyone has their opinions.” Jim waved away his comment. “Though, if you don’t mind, I’d really like to get some shuteye right now. Though our shift was uneventful, I did spend all of last night trying to protect one of my crewmembers from unwanted advances.”

Spock didn’t wish to conclude their conversation so soon, but he understood Jim’s need for rest. It was of the utmost importance that the captain of the Enterprise stay healthy and functioning in order to successfully run the ship.

“Of course, Captain.”

Spock turned on his heel and headed towards the exit, the door to the captain’s quarters swishing open as he approached. Just as he was about to depart in the direction of his own rooms, the door began to slide shut, and the last thing Spock heard was Jim muttering, “So much for progress.”
I LOVE ‘Trouble with Tribbles’ and I’m so glad I got to work it into one of my fics. Jim’s entire ‘so done with this attitude’ throughout the whole episode is just gold, and it’s brilliant because it’s one of the missions where you see him slipping from that constant professionalism to ‘I hate my job’, something I’m sure we’ve all experienced at one point or another. Anyway, enjoy this chapter, and see you guys at the next one!

P.S. This will be updated irregularly because I sometimes have trouble getting Spock's voice right in this. Hope that won't deter you from following this story :)
My dearest Spock,

You’re so far away and I feel like you’re going to stay that way forever. I never get to see you where I am and I never get to go with you wherever you go. It kills me. I want to be where you are. I want to be with you. You need to be closer I need to be closer or I’ll lose my mind. I can’t enjoy just the snippets of passing or hearing about you or a simple look my way. I need more. I need to listen to you talking about the latest science journal you’ve read, I need to make food for you to eat, I need to play chess or Othello or kal-toh or anything just so I can see you and watch your great mind at work. I need more than what I have. I need more. Please. Please.

My love.

Semaj Ton

Spock frowned at the screen.

The e-mails from his admirer had increased, and they were a cause for worry. Whereas previously he’d received messages perhaps thrice a month, they had now escalated to six or seven times a month; more than once a week and twice that of the previous amounts. Not only had the number grown, but with each new message the content had become significantly more frantic. The grammar, which had previously been adequate, switched into something frenzied which read as if they had been written in a hurry, and Spock predicted it would only get worse. The words in the messages too, was alarming, as with each sentence Spock read he became more confident that the admirer was stationed aboard the Enterprise. Not only that, but the e-mails suggested that they possessed a shocking amount of personal information regarding Spock, a discovery which made him experience a certain amount of fear. He was not comfortable having a stranger know so much about him which he did not personally divest.

He’d attempted to trace the IP address, but had encountered a tangle of technical difficulties that he couldn’t get past. Spock had a high level of experience in programming, having successfully created the Kobayashi Maru among other things, but he was more well-versed with simulations than anything else. His technological competence did not extend to breaking down what he presumed to be firewalls, nor steering himself around spam traps that would set off every time he clicked something. It was frustrating, but nothing he couldn’t read up on. Once he’d researched how to properly trace an IP address he’d attempted the task again, but this time found that the secret admirer had hidden their steps with traps that could solely be dismantled manually. It was extremely odd the lengths the sender had gone through to keep their identity hidden, and Spock wondered why they would take such precautions.

All of a sudden his comm beeped, and Spock absently picked it up, his gaze still locked on the screen of his PADD.

“Spock here.”

“Spock, it’s McCoy.” Came the doctor’s gruff voice. “We’ve got a little problem here.”

“What seems to be the matter, Doctor?” Spock asked, setting down his PADD.
“Well uh, we seem to have a very, very little problem.” The man said uncertainly. There was a brief pause, then he quietly added, “I think you’d best come down to Sickbay and see for yourself. McCoy out.”

Spock stared down at his communicator unit, lifting one delicate eyebrow. Those had been some ominous parting words.

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The doors to the turbolift opened and Spock stepped out, striding through the hallway in the direction of Sickbay. He had spent the past few minutes of his journey contemplating what doctor McCoy could have possibly meant by his very short, very concise call. The man very rarely contacted Spock outside of active missions, having done so on only two occasions in the past, and even then he had prefaced his calls with insults in regards to Spock’s genetic makeup.

This time, however, the doctor had been entirely civil, which Spock thought warranted some degree of concern.

“Go away!” A voice shouted in the distance. Spock’s ears pricked up at the sound, then in the next moment he heard just as clearly, “I don’t know you!”

Spock increased his pace, walking purposefully towards its source. He hadn’t recognised the voice, and he would have thought it belonged to one of the many crewmembers aboard if only it hadn’t sounded so light. Too light. Almost as if it belonged to a child.

Turning into Sickbay, Spock’s suspicions were confirmed.

There was a child stood in the centre of the room, a few steps away from McCoy and looking very much like they were facing off with the man. The doctor himself was sporting his customary scowl, hazel eyes narrowed at the boy before him.

“Who’re you?” Snapped the child. “Where’s mom?”

McCoy’s mouth opened as if to retort with something equally snappish, but at Spock’s entrance his gaze flickered over, and he deflated with relief.

“Thank God you’re here.” He breathed.

At McCoy’s announcement the boy had taken a step backward, spinning partly around until his eyes landed on Spock. He was dressed in a red jumper far too large for him along with beige trousers, his cheeks stained red and with a mop of blond hair. Spock would have thought the child belonged to one of the crewmembers who had brought their family onto the ship it if weren’t for one small detail.

It was the clear, blue eyes that gave him pause.

“Jim.” Spock uttered, eyes widening perceptively.

Jim whirled around fully, his gaze dubiously travelling down and up Spock’s form. “Who the hell are you?”

“Sch’n T’gai Spock.” He responded, still stunned.

Jim’s young face scrunched up in confusion. “What?”

Clearly he hadn’t understood that the first bit was part of Spock’s name, and so Spock repeated
himself, but this time a bit differently.

“My name is Spock.” He said slowly, his throat feeling constricted. The captain was before him. A miniature version of him, but nonetheless, it was the captain.

“You…” Jim’s eyes jumped up to his face, scrutinizing him. They darted across his features, taking in his eyebrows, his nose, and his hair before finally landing on his ears. Jim’s frown deepened.

“Why’re your ears so funny?”

Spock blinked down at the child, taking mild offense at the question. “They are not humorous.”

“They don’t look like Human ears.” Jim murmured, still peering at Spock with dubiousness.

“That is because they are not. They are Vulcan ears.”

All of sudden Jim’s eyes alighted and his mouth dropped open. “Vulcan…? You’re an alien?”

“To you, I am one, just as to me, you are the alien.” Spock told him evenly. He watched as Jim seemed to lean slightly forward, attempting to get a better look at his ears. Spock spared him the effort and turned his head sideways, allowing Jim to properly examine them.

“That’s so cool.” Jim breathed in awe. “We never get aliens here.”

McCoy and Spock suddenly looked to one another, the same question flitting through their minds.

“Here?” McCoy repeated.

Jim’s gaze darted back to the doctor, suspicion returning. “Yeah, here.”

“Where exactly do you think here is, Jim?” McCoy asked slowly. Spock was certain the doctor knew what the answer would be, just as Spock was 99.8% certain as to what the answer would be. The remaining 0.2% was simply his irrational hope that he was incorrect.

Jim’s lips turned down in a grimace, and he said, “Riverside.”

Riverside. Indeed, Spock had been correct.

“Ho boy.” McCoy huffed, a hand rubbing at his forehead.

Jim looked between him and Spock, eyebrows creasing. “Is… is this not Riverside?”

Spock was uncertain as to how to reveal the current situation to the captain. He clearly believed himself to be residing in his hometown back on Earth, and from the brief conversation they had Spock inferred that he didn’t remember anything beyond his current age. Jim did not remember attending Starfleet, nor the Nero incident, nor becoming the captain of the starship they were presently stationed on.

“Listen, kid—“ McCoy began, dropping his hand, but Spock interrupted him before he could get another word in.

“Captain, I believe it would be best if we explained the current situation to you once you have taken a seat.”

Jim tilted his head, frowning at Spock. “Why’re you calling me ‘Captain’?”

“I will reveal the reason behind me using this title to address you if you would simply take a seat.”
Spock haggled.

Jim’s eyes narrowed further, and he slowly took a gander around the room, noticing for the first time the rows of biobeds surrounding him. “Where are we?”

“We are in the medical bay.” Spock explained succinctly, leaving out the small fact that they were on a starship floating through deep space. It might cause Jim to lose his composure, throwing him into a state of panic.

Jim’s eyes flashed back to Spock. “Why?”

“Jim, if you would simply take a sea—“

“I’d rather stand.” Jim responded sharply, crossing his arms over his chest.

Spock fought to keep down a sigh, and was rather impressed with himself for managing. The situation certainly wasn’t one he was accustomed to dealing with on a regular basis, but as first officer he supposed he was liable for the captain’s safety to some extent.

Spock took a moment to consider his words, then started in on his explanation. “The year is currently 2258 and we have embarked upon a five-year exploratory mission into deep space, one which you are at the helm of as captain. Though you have now taken on the appearance of a child, you are in actuality a twenty-six year old Human male. Prior to this transformation you had been planetside while undergoing peaceful negotiations with the natives, and though I do not know the cause as I was not present for the meeting, something occurred which changed you into your current form.”

Jim blinked up at Spock. Clearly it had been too much information for him to process.

McCoy stepped in, providing some further explanation. “You accidentally got sprayed by one of their flowers while we were being shown their botanical gardens. Apparently the flower sprays when it feels like it, and even though it hasn’t done so in years, it now of all times chooses to do so.” He finished with a grumble.

Jim stared at the two of them, still wide-eyed. “You’re joking, right?”

“Unfortunately not.” Spock informed him, then looked to McCoy. “Doctor, do you by any chance happen to have the captain’s medical chart on hand?”

McCoy nodded. “Sure do.”

Spock kept a close watch of Jim who remained unmoving and extremely sceptical of his current situation, and waited for the doctor to return with the medical chart. Once McCoy returned he held out a PADD out to Jim, who immediately snatched it from him and then stepped back until he was a few paces away. Once he deemed the distance to be safe he began reading the information on the device, McCoy and Spock patiently waiting in apprehensive silence.

Spock took the opportunity to truly look over Jim’s current form, unable to stop himself from drawing comparisons between this version and his older counterpart. If Spock had to guess, he would say that the captain was in his pre-teens, his main reasoning being that his voice was still light yet his appearance was that of a boy experiencing puberty. There were obvious pimples on the side of his face near his cheekbones and eyebrows, and a very sparse dusting of hair on his upper lip.

The fluff of blond hair was very much Jim Kirk, the blue of his eyes even more so, but he had yet to grow into his nose. His cheeks were naturally rosier than that of the adult Jim, and his ears were comically large in comparison to his head. Surprisingly Jim looked far more austere now than he had
ever seen him as an adult, but perhaps that could be attributed to the frown marring his face. Indeed, Spock could see how the child before him could one day grow up to be the man Spock knew today.

Jim looked up at them, defeat clear in his eyes.

“Holy shit.” He breathed.

“Don’t curse, kid.” McCoy chided.

“Holy shit.” Jim repeated, deliberately catching the doctor’s gaze.

“Well, if there was any doubt in my mind that this wasn’t Jim, that disproves it.” McCoy grumbled, glancing at Spock. Indeed, that seemed to be rather definite proof.

“So I’m… I’m seriously a starship captain?” Jim asked in an awed tone.

“Indeed.” Spock affirmed.

Jim sucked on his lower lip, eyebrows creasing in consternation. After a moment he looked to Spock.

“Am I a good one?”

Spock’s chest tightened at the uncertainty behind those words, and his own voice softened when he replied, “You are emerging as one of the best captains I have had the privilege of working for.”

Jim’s head jerked back in shock, his eyes widening. He opened his mouth, then seemed to think better of it before closing it once more. A wide grin suddenly broke across his face.

“Awesome.”

Spock quickly glanced over to McCoy who was solely focused on Jim, his face set in that familiar scowl. He wondered what the doctor was thinking concerning the captain’s present predicament.

“What do you continue to display misgivings towards the authenticity of your current situation, Captain?”

“Umm…” Jim began, eyes widening perceptively.

“He’s asking if you still think we’re lying to you, kid?” McCoy filled in. “Don’t worry, you’re not the only one who struggles with ‘Spock speak’.”

Spock had wished to contend with the doctor on his explanation regarding ‘Spock speak’, but it would have to wait for a later date. His gaze followed Jim’s actions closely, watching as the captain looked down at the PADD in his hands, eyebrows creasing further.

“Oh. Well, I… I guess not. This looks pretty legit.” He held up the PADD for show.

“That is because it is legitimate.” Spock told him.

Jim nodded in reply, looking to him. “Yeah… though what’s really convinced me is you.”

“Me?” Spock repeated, one of his eyebrows hiking up.

“Yeah. Everyone knows Vulcans can’t lie.” Jim said casually.

The statement was, in fact, a false truth, and one that Spock had heard several times over his years on
Earth. He would occasionally correct this misconception, informing whoever had said it that Vulcans could choose to not reveal the truth or imply something other than the truth, both of which fell under the category of lying. This time, however, he believed it wise to keep the explanation to himself.

“Hey, Jim.” McCoy began suddenly, then pointed between himself and Spock. “Which one of us do you like more?”

Jim’s eyes immediately darted to Spock, clearly giving away his answer, but he pretended to shrug nonchalantly.

“I dunno.”

“Right. Just give us a moment then.” McCoy said, gently placing his hand on Spock’s arm. “Why don’t you play around on the PADD in the meantime, I think Nurse Chapel downloaded some word game apps on it.”

The doctor dragged Spock off to the side, huddling close to the Vulcan and lowering his voice to a near-whisper. “Alright, Spock. Looks like you’re watching over him.”

Spock quirked an eyebrow in reply. “Pardon me, Doctor?”

“Someone needs to watch over Jim while he’s in this state, and he clearly favours you, not that I’m surprised.” The doctor explained, very poorly if you asked Spock.

“I do not believe that is the best course of action.”

“Course it is. You watch over Jim since he’s the most comfortable with you, and I go down to Narete and figure out what the hell happened here.”

“What did happen?” Spock inquired. “You have yet to explain the situation to me.”

“Right. I didn’t, did I?” McCoy realised, mouth turning down. “Well, it was a simple mission really. We headed down for the negotiations— and by ‘we’ I mean myself, Jim and ensign Arabzadeh— where we were immediately given a warm welcome. Real nice folks on the welcome team. We then returned to their base to start the diplomatic talks which lasted about an hour, hour and fifteen minutes, after which we were given this real gorgeous meal. All vegetables, which usually I’m not a fan of, but they’d done this dish all sorts of right. Anyway, once we finished a few of the members of the welcoming party said we should take a stroll through their back gardens. Apparently it’s something they’re real proud of, and they’ve every right to be. I’ve never seen such beautiful nature.” The doctor trailed off, his mind seemingly falling back to the memory.

“And what followed?” Spock prompted.

“Right, Jim’s thing. Well, we were just walking through the gardens, take our sweet time, when out of nowhere one of the flowers just sneezes at Jim— yes, I know flowers don’t sneeze, don’t give me that look— and not a moment after he hit the ground.” McCoy finished grimly.

Spock’s eyebrows rose high on his forehead. “I presume this is when the transformation took place.”

“You presume correctly. Guy just changes right before my very eyes, and it seems he’s stuck like this until I head down to the planet again and talk to the natives.”

Spock gave a single nod. “I am curious as to how you managed to return the captain back aboard the ship without causing him to panic.”
“He was out cold for the better part of an hour, Spock. By the time I got some sort of muddled explanation from the natives, as well as a set of clothes and hauled his ass back up to Sickbay, the kid had woken up. That’s when I commed you.”

“You should have secured a detailed explanation of the occurrence on Narete V before returning.” Spock admonished.

“Sorry, I was kind of busy prioritising Jim’s life.” McCoy replied snarkily.

“I see.” Spock mused, realising that in this case the doctor had indeed acted accordingly. “Regardless, I still do not believe I would be the ideal choice to care for the captain.”

McCoy scoffed. “You absolutely are.”

“You seem to be under some sort of fraudulent impression, Doctor.”

“Come on, Spock, I can’t do it.” McCoy argued, levelling him with a stern look. “I gotta run some medical tests on Jim to make sure he’s all good on the inside, and then I’ve got to head planetside again to figure out how to change him back. No one else knows what happened to Jim apart from me and Ensign Arabzadeh, and she’s not qualified enough to take care of him.”

“Must I remind you that neither am I.” Spock pointed out.

“You’re the First Officer of the ship, Spock, if something happens to Jim you’ve got to make sure he recovers alright.”

“If that were the case your occupation aboard the ship would be redundant.” Spock delivered swiftly, and he saw the doctor quickly pinch the bridge of his nose before crossing his arms.

“Would you not say that logically, this is the best way to find out how to get Jim back to his real, adult self, while also making sure that Jim in this form is well looked after? He’d be in your custody where you could keep a constant eyes on him, which the kid would love since he’s already taken a liking to you— though that’s no surprise— and in the meantime I’d be working towards figuring out a solution.”

Spock found it difficult to argue when the doctor offered such a reasonable argument as to why they should divide up the tasks, though it didn’t quench Spock’s instinctual desire to disagree with the man. Though Spock wasn’t qualified in childcare in any way or form, it was preferable that he watch over Jim so as to not alert the rest of the crew what to what had occurred on Narete. It would also allow for McCoy to investigate the current predicament without worrying about Jim’s whereabouts, which was important since he was the CMO of the ship as well as one of the people who had been present during Jim’s transformation.

“I suppose you are correct.” Spock admitted reluctantly.

“Damn right, I am.” McCoy nodded, uncrossing his arms. “Now, come on. We need to tell Jim you’ll be taking care of him while he’s on this ship, and hopefully we can convince him to endure some medical tests… Also we gotta get him a proper set of clothes, the kid looks like a damn runaway with the way he’s dressed.”

They both swung around to inform Jim of the recent developments, namely that from now onwards he would be under Spock’s watch, but when they looked back at where the captain had previously stood, he was gone. Spock browsed the room, thinking that perhaps Jim had wandered off to sit on one of the biobeds, but he was nowhere to be seen.
Spock peered at McCoy, and saw the man’s jaw clench.

“Son of a bitch.”

*

Obviously it couldn’t be announced over the ship’s speakers that they were searching for the captain, since they would then need to also reveal that the leading man on the Enterprise had been regressed back into a child. However, doctor McCoy had no qualms over twisting the truth, and he very seriously intended to inform the starship that a crewmember’s child had been lost. However, before he could do so, Spock intercepted him, revealing he thought it best if they instead sent out a mass e-mail to all crewmembers. His reasoning had been that Jim would hear the announcement and most definitely attempt to hide somewhere or shed his clothes in order to not get caught.

McCoy stared at Spock for a long time and then nodded, seemingly having come to the same conclusion as Spock. The captain absolutely wouldn’t hesitate to strip naked if it meant he could escape their clutches. The doctor composed an e-mail which detailed a description of Jim, though in this he was referred to as ‘a crewmember’s child’, along with an order to contact either doctor McCoy or Spock if he was spotted.

It took twenty-two minutes before someone finally called in with a report, saying that the child had been seen in the recreation hall. Spock immediately made his way towards the location, leaving McCoy to handle his own business of eliciting a proper explanation from the Naretenes. Midway through his trek Spock’s communicator beeped, and another crewman reported that they had seen Jim running past the mess hall. Spock then changed his course once more, only to careen down another route when in the next moment he received another call saying that the captain had in fact just stepped off the turbolift on deck 2.

Spock switched directions almost fifteen times before an ensign from engineering contacted him and relayed information about having spotted Jim climbing inside the Jeffries tube near their department. Spock immediately set off towards the engineering department, hurrying his steps. If he was quick he could prevent Jim from relocating further, though there was also the possibility that Jim had now chosen to hide instead of run which would explain why he had secret himself inside of the Jeffries tubes.

He exited the turbolift onto the engineering deck, his footfalls loud in the silence of the hallway. Not much activity occurred in this area what with the engineering department being located on the other side of the ship, this end containing nothing more than Jeffries tubes and a storage facility. Spock had to admit that Jim had chosen an adequate hiding place, if that now was his wish, and it had only been by chance that he had been seen by the ensign who called in his whereabouts.

Spock came to a halt before the aforementioned Jeffries tubes, peering through their entrances until finally he found the one Jim was concealed in. He could barely see the tips of the captain’s feet, but could hear his soft breathing.

“Jim, why do you insist on evading me?” Spock inquired.

“Because you’re ugly.” Jim replied simply, his voice echoing through the tube.

Spock felt the beginnings of a sigh come over him, but managed to hold it back. “This is not proper conduct of a starship captain.”

“’M not a captain.” Jim mumbled.
“You are.”

“Am not.”

“Captain.” Spock chided.

Jim let out a deep whine. “Stop calling me that.”

“What would you wish for me to call you if not ‘Captain’?”

“Sir Dicks-A-Lot.”

This time Spock could not prevent the sigh that escaped him. “Jim, would you please come down from the Jeffries tube?”

“No.” He drawled.

“Please.”

“I don’t wanna.” Jim mumbled, acting every bit the petulant child that he was.

It seemed the captain was firm in his decision, and no amount of persuading from Spock could convince him otherwise. It was therefore only logical that he remain with Jim until hopefully tiredness forced him to abandon his current position. Spock slumped down on the floor, leaning back against the wall and settled himself in for a long wait. He couldn’t climb up the Jeffries tube to go after Jim, as he was certain it would only prompt him to make his escape through the ducts spiralling all throughout the starship.

Spock unlatched his communicator from his trousers and pressed the ‘call’ button. “Engineer Scott, come in.”

“Scott, here.” Came the man’s immediate reply.

“The captain and I are currently occupied with matters of huge import away from the bridge, and therefore hand over control of the ship to you for the time being.”

“Understood, sir.”

“Spock out.” With that he ended the call, attaching the communicator back on his trousers.

Spock sat at the base of the Jeffries tube for hours, patiently waiting for Jim to creep out of his hiding place. Occasionally he would pick up on movement coming from above, but it would settle as quickly as it had begun. For over three long hours Spock waited, not speaking himself nor prompting Jim to do so. The silence didn’t bother him, simply hanging in the air like a comfortable weight. Eventually though, Spock had to break it.

“Do you not require nutrition?” He asked out of the blue.

It took a few seconds before Jim replied, possibly not having expected him to speak. “I’ve gone longer than this without food.”

“That is worrying.” Spock frowned lightly.

There came no response from Jim, and the lull returned. Several more minutes passed before Spock stood up, his joints creaking loudly after having remained stationary for so long.
“I will retrieve two sets of meals for us. Is there anything in particular you desire?”

Again, there was no reply from Jim’s end.

“I believe your older counterpart has a preference for lasagne.” Spock announced, then turned on his heel.

*

The mess hall contained a throng of people when Spock arrived, an unusual sight compared to when he usually took his meals. It would be him and Nyota sat at a table, with Sulu recently joining them when he could, enjoying their dishes as they allowed for easy conversation to flow between them. Spock never found it a hardship being in Nyota’s presence, nor did he deem it necessary to fill every minute of their company with chatter. He found her to be an extremely calming individual, providing him with stimulating conversation as well as comfortable silence when he needed it.

Spock manoeuvred his way through the crowd, avoiding any bodily contact as he headed for the replicators. The din in the mess hall was loud, crewmembers constantly moving around as they deposited their trays or changed tables to sit with friends. Spock inputted two sets of dishes into the replicator; a plate of kreyla for himself, and a plate of lasagne for Jim. Not even a moment later the replicator beeped, indicating it had completed its task, and Spock removed the meals from the machine before shuffling along.

He firmly held onto the trays, one in each hand, and let his gaze travel over the field of crewmembers as he assessed the safest route towards the exit without spilling the meals.

“Hey, Mr. Spock.” A voice greeted from behind, and Spock turned to find an ensign dressed in Starfleet red beaming at him. It took him a moment before he recognised the being stood before him.

“Ensign Mots.” Spock acknowledged, then noticed the person who had sidled up next to him.

“Ensign Kurokawa.”

Kurokawa offered him a curt nod in return, though there was a lack of a smile. “Mr. Spock.”

“That’s a lot of food you’ve got.” Mots observed, eying Spock’s trays.

“It is for the captain and myself.” He explained.

“Oh, are you guys eating now? Why don’t you join our table then?” Mots nodded towards a table in the corner of the mess hall, already partly full.

“I am afraid I must decline your offer. I am presently preoccupied with other matters.” Spock excused. Namely caring for a regressed child that was their captain, but which they could never know about.

“Oh. Well that’s a shame…” The ensign murmured, looking disappointed. “Maybe next time, then. Just know that you’re always welcome to sit with us, Mr. Spock.”

Ensign Kurokawa, who had until then stood quietly by his side, faltered briefly before giving Spock a tiny smile. “Yeah, it’d be nice sitting together. After all, our paths don’t really cross that often outside of work.”

She sounded uncertain, and Spock wondered if it was due to the fact that she disliked him, or because she shared his inability to properly go about forming friendships. He was unsure whether he would share a meal with ensign Kurokawa any time in the near future, but he didn’t rule out dining
with ensign Mots. The man had seemed genuine enough when making his offer, and Spock thought he should perhaps attempt to socialise with crewmembers outside of his own department. They could discuss the last time they worked together when attempting to pull the away team back to their own universe, a subject Spock was confident he could make last for an entire meal, and if not, deliberating the ship’s business would have to do.

“Thank you, ensigns. It is a very generous offer.” He told them, already stepping back in preparation for his departure. “I think I will accept it in the future. For now though you will have to excuse me, as I must take my leave.”

*

Spock was halfway down the corridor when he realised that by leaving his post beneath the Jeffries tubes, he had given Jim a time frame to escape elsewhere. As soon as the thought hit him Spock increased his pace, rushing into the turbolift and impatiently waiting for it to open up to the bottom deck. Once the doors slid open he hurried towards the Jeffries tubes, coming to a stop outside the one Jim had been secreted in for the past few hours.

“Jim, I have brought you your meal.” Spock announced, his voice carrying through the tube.

There was no response, and Spock peered up, attempting to sight Jim. Nothing. Spock’s grip on the trays tightened, and he felt annoyance swell up in him. Annoyance at himself for not possessing the hindsight to not abandon his post when he was fully aware that the captain had previously been on the run from him. It was a poor decision, and he blamed himself entirely for not considering what would occur in his absence.

“Jim.” Spock repeated, desperately wishing for a reply. Several moments passed with no answer, and the annoyance in Spock grew even more. He had become so accustomed to Jim being comfortable in his presence that he had forgotten that this version of the captain was not the same one. They didn’t share the same memories, hadn’t experienced the same missions, and couldn’t remember their times together with Spock. The times that had helped shape and mould their initial dislike for each other into something akin to respect and a shaky friendship. He had let memories of the past cloud his judgement, and for that he was immensely displeased with himself.

“Leave it on the floor.” Came a detached voice.

All of a sudden Spock’s chest eased with relief. Jim hadn’t left his location. Spock let out a small breath, allowing himself this one small act of Human expression away from peering eyes. He had been fortunate the captain had remained where they were, but he had to remind himself not to leave Jim’s side anymore. Next time he might not be as lucky.

Jim’s request had Spock scowling slightly, and he decided he would ignore it in favour of personally delivering the food to the captain. He placed his own tray on the floor and held Jim’s up as high as he could, standing on his tiptoes to elongate his height.

“Take the tray.”

Jim peeked down the tube, spotting Spock’s offering of food close enough for him to easily reach, and so he did. Once Spock felt the weight of tray removed from his hands, he fell back down on his heels, then situated himself below the Jeffries tube. He pulled his own tray onto his own lap and began eating his kreyla, using his fork and knife to deftly cut into the bread-like sustenance. Spock and Jim ate their respective meals in silence, chewing languidly as the minutes rolled past.

After Spock had consumed about half of his dish, Jim asked, “What’re you eating?”
Spock’s gaze flashed up and he saw the boy propped up against the wall of the Jeffries tube with his meal in his lap, feet dangling over the edge.

“It is kreyla,” Spock replied, popping another small piece into his mouth. “It is a dish common on Vulcan.”

Jim made a face. “It looks weird.”

“For a Human, it is not an enjoyable meal.”

“Why not?”

“Vulcan food as a whole possesses little flavour, and so it is considered bland by Human standards.” Spock recalled his mother disliking most Vulcan dishes due to this quality, and so she would often make separate meals when it was her turn to cook. Vulcan cuisine for his father, Human food for herself, and either or depending on what Spock fancied at the time. Since he grew up experiencing the flavoured dishes his mother created he could stomach various Human meals, but sometimes he’d prefer blander ones like kreyla or Plomeek soup.

“Can I try some?” Jim asked around a mouthful of lasagne.

“You may.”

Spock cut off a piece of kreyla and speared it on his fork, then stood up and held it out for Jim to take. He frowned as he watched Jim remove the bite with his fingers, the idea of eating one’s meal with their fingers still not sitting well with him despite having witnessed it on several occasions during mealtimes. Jim popped the kreyla into his mouth, chewing slowly and looking as if he were mulling over its taste.

“I don’t like it.” He declared finally.

It was no surprise to Spock, and he simply nodded before sitting back down on the floor. He returned to his meal, quietly cutting up pieces of his food and chewing.

“This isn’t bad.” Jim commented, probably referring to his lasagne.

“The replicator synthesises close variants of the meals programmed into it, though it is never exactly the same as the original.”

Jim hummed in reply. “Yeah, my mom’s is better.”

“Does she cook often?”

“She likes it, but doesn’t really have time for it. She’s usually off on missions or something important so it’s just me and Sam left at home.”

“Your brother.”

A sudden silence followed Spock’s statement, the easy exchange they had been working towards disappearing.

After another few seconds Jim carefully asked, “You know about him?”

Spock hadn’t specifically been told by Jim about his brother, nor anyone else for that matter, but he had discovered this bit of information when he’d been scouring through Jim’s Starfleet profile before the start of their mission. There was little information in regards to Samuel Kirk, originally christened
George Kirk Jr., but he knew that the man was older than Jim by 3.6 years.

“I read about him.” Spock offered elusively, taking another bite of his kreyla.

A hush fell over them once more, the sound of their cutlery scraping against the plates inordinately loud. Spock wondered if Jim was aware he’d hacked his files, or if he simply assumed something had happened to his brother in the future which warranted people being able to read about him freely. Perhaps he had become a scientist of sorts, or an academic, and contributed to sought-after journals. It was a frivolous thought.

Spock finished his meal not soon after, and he gingerly placed his cutlery in the middle of the plate. “Jim, how many years of age are you currently?”

Jim snorted. “You mean how old I am?”

“That is what I inquired.”

“You speak weird.” He huffed, but after a few moments answered, “I’m thirteen.”

Thirteen. Five years ensign Chekov’s junior. It really put into perspective how young their navigator truly was.

“There is a thirteen year difference between you and the Jim I know.” Spock shared.

“…Is he nice?”

“Incredibly.”

It was not an untruth. Jim was kind to everyone he came across until they gave him a reason not to be, at which point his sentimentalism would make itself known. Spock’s ears pricked up all of a sudden when he heard muffled shifting coming from above, and when he glanced up he saw Jim climbing down the Jeffries tube. Spock stayed seated, not wanting to spook the captain by making any sudden movements. Jim dropped down, his bare feet slapping against the floor, and looked at Spock.

“I’m tired.” He announced. “I want to sleep.”

Spock acknowledged the request with a nod, and began pulling himself up. “I will take you to your quarters.”

*  

Spock had thought Jim would sleep for several hours, allowing him some time to tackle his datawork before it could pile up, but after an hour the captain was up again and ready to wreak havoc. There was a restless energy about him, simmering beneath his skin and causing his fingers to twitch, to move, to touch anything and everything within sight. Every single item in his room that Jim reached for had anxiety soaring in Spock, and so he decided that it was unwise to keep the captain restricted to a room.

Instead Spock took him on a tour of the starship, providing commentary as they ambled along. He noted that whenever he referred to the Enterprise as ‘your ship’, Jim’s eyes would alight with excitement. Jim was a born explorer, that much was evident from the way he unabashedly touched every inch of the ship as they meandered through its hallways. He’d babbled on about what he knew about starships, much of it surprisingly accurate, though there were some errors in his knowledge which Spock corrected. Jim took them all in good stride, seemingly overjoyed at learning more and
asking Spock if they could visit different parts of the ship. Unfortunately it wasn’t possible for Spock to take a child with him to certain areas, even if it was a younger version of the captain, citing safety hazards as his main concern. Jim had frowned at the reasoning, but settled for Spock reiterating every single detail of the *Enterprise* which he had studied extensively before accepting his position as first officer.

Oddly enough they get stopped several times by passing ensigns who inquire about the child with Spock, and he has to succumb to lying and tell them he’s caring for another crewmember’s son while they’re occupied. It’s fortunate the *Enterprise* was created as a starship that could bring on families of the crew, or else Spock wouldn’t know how he would have explained Jim’s presence aboard the ship. It’s clear from the surprise on some of the ensigns’ faces that they didn’t think Spock capable of volunteering for such a thing, and Spock doesn’t blame them since he had initially been against this task when it was proffered to him.

For the most part Jim stuck close to Spock’s side, though on occasion something particularly fascinating would pull him away for a few moments before he returned. It was comforting to know the captain considered Spock to be a solid point of reference, someone who he could sway away from and then return to once he’d filled his curiosity. It was if Jim was a yo-yo and Spock was the hand delicately tossing it. Sometimes Jim would go into a description of something that the starship reminded him of, and more often than not it was something Spock was highly unfamiliar with. However, Jim had no objection against going into further detail about what Spock didn’t understand, and even seemed to take delight in doing so. He was more open with his body, gesturing freely and ensuring he gave Spock his full attention when talking to him. It was fascinating to see the habits the adult Jim had clearly retained from his younger counterpart, allowing Spock to draw even more similarities between the two versions.

He’d messaged McCoy earlier on asking about his progress, and the man had informed Spock that he was presently discussing the incident with the natives, and would keep him updated. The doctor kept to his word, and every hour Spock would receive a new message, the latest informing him that the Naretenes had contacted one of their senior botanist who specialised in the flora that sprayed the captain, though unfortunately they lived two hours away from the capital city.

Spock relayed the message to Jim, who had shrugged and told Spock he was hungry again. It didn’t surprise him as Human children at this age consumed a substantial amount of nourishment, and so Spock led Jim towards the mess hall. He hadn’t been there before, but Spock thought it preferable to dine there as opposed to his own quarters. He was uncertain whether Jim’s restlessness would strike again, and he would prefer to keep his Vulcan artefacts in tact.

They had taken up seats at a small two-person table, Jim with a large plate of mashed potatoes and meatballs with gravy, and Spock with a small bowl of fresh fruit. He hadn’t intended on consuming something at this time, but Jim had insisted, citing his wish to not be the only one eating. They ate their meals in an unhurried manner as a mutual silence settled between them. Spock attempted to focus on consuming his fruit bowl, but it was challenging when they were periodically receiving several odd looks from the other beings in the mess hall. Their unsubtle glances were so prominent that eventually Jim turned to them and stuck out his tongue, causing some of them to flush and look away.

“Why’re they all staring?” Jim frowned. “Don’t they know it’s rude.”

“I believe they are surprised at me being seen with a child. It is not company I usually entertain.”

Jim snorted. “You talk like a dictionary, you know that?”

“I am utilising Standard to the best of my ability.” Spock responded, feeling slightly miffed at the
Jim’s expression softened, and he leaned forward a stretch. “I didn’t mean to say that it’s bad. Just
different.”

Spock looked at the boy, the blue of those eyes eerily familiar set in such a young face. “Jim, you do
not seem to display any panicked behaviour at your current situation?”

“What situation?”

“You awoke with no prior memories of how you came to be here, yet you seem unfazed by your
surroundings or the situation in general.” Spock had originally chalked up Jim’s indifference to his
whereabouts to his excitement taking over, leaving no room for worrying, but it was strange that
there hadn’t been a stronger reaction from the captain.

“Ahhh, the *situation*.” Jim drawled with a wide smile. “I see what you mean. I don’t know, I guess
it’s not that big of a surprise to me.”

“How so?”

Jim shrugged. “I always felt like I belonged amongst the stars. It’s good to know it came true.”

The words caused Spock pause, his mind conjuring up images of a young Jim dreaming of exploring
outer space. How lucky he was to have realised that dream. He wondered if Jim had any interests
outside of star wishing, though from what he knew of the captain, it seemed very unlikely. He had
always been fond of the stars, his mind, body and soul set on exploring them to his heart’s desire.
Truly, the *Enterprise* was fortune its captain had such a love for outer space.

“Do you engage in other recreational activities?” Spock inquired. Jim chuckled at that, shaking his
head fondly. Apparently the phrasing of his question was amusing to the boy.

“Well, my latest obsession,” Jim smiled cheekily. “Kissing boys.”

Spock’s hold on his bowl tightened, and his eyes slowly slipped shut. Why was Jim like this?

* * *

“Spock, come in.” McCoy’s deep voice called out.

Spock instantly reached for his communicator. “Spock here.”

“Is Jim with you?”

“Indeed, the captain is currently with me.” Spock responded, eyes flickering over to where Jim
was stretched out on the bed with a PADD in hand. They had been hidden in his quarters for the past two
hours playing a game of chess, but once it had ended Spock had informed Jim he needed to complete
some datawork. He didn’t want to lose sight of Jim, and so he’d handed him a PADD and instructed
him to download a game while Spock tended to his own business. He hoped the PADD would keep
Jim distracted for at most fifteen minutes, giving him enough time to read through two documents
and sign off on them.

7.4 minutes had passed when McCoy called.

“Good. Could you bring him down to the Sickbay? I’ve got Hen Xer from Narete here, and they say
they’ve got a cure for Jim’s transformation.”
“I will bring the captain down immediately.” Spock informed McCoy, then ended the call with a, “Spock out.”

He looked over to Jim who was still locked in battle with his PADD, his fingers flying across the screen. He had a determined expression in place, and his tongue was stuck out in concentration.

“Let me just finish this real quick.” Jim bargained. Spock allowed him to do so, waiting patiently as he listened to the sound of air chimes coming from the PADD. After another few seconds Jim threw the PADD down on the bed and exclaimed, “Yes! Now we can go.”

*

“Jim, Spock; I want you to meet Hen Xer.” McCoy announced as soon as the two of them had stepped into Sickbay, gesturing at the being stood next to him.

They were Humanoid in appearance, their skin tinged blue and with rows of bulb piercings lining their skin. Like the majority of Humanoids Hen had hair on their head, which was curled upwards in a strange fashion and held up by a gold band. Their eyes were pitch black, and they wore a billowy garment that exposed their shoulders. Hen laced their hands and pressed them under their chin, a formal greeting in Narate culture. Spock returned it with his own, and Jim must have realised it was a greeting because he readily copied him.

“Is this the affected?” Hen asked, looking down at Jim.

“That’s him, alright.” McCoy replied, crossing his arms over his chest.

Hen sat down on their knees, falling down to Jim’s height so that they could look directly into his eyes. “You have no memories beyond your current age?”

Jim’s cheeks reddened slightly, and he shook his head. “No.”

“I was told you possessed the cure.” Spock commented, catching Hen’s attention. Their gaze was all consuming, drawing him in like a black hole.

“Right here.” McCoy said, stepping towards hi desk and grabbing a small vial. He held it out to Spock who accepted it immediately, cradling the tiny magenta flask in his hand.

Hen rose from their kneeling position and turned to look directly at Spock. “This is Loréin, a concoction my people have used for centuries to reverse the changes prompted by the Annléí plant.”

“If Jim consumes this, he will transform back to his adult self?” Spock inquired, keeping his eyes locked on the vial. He felt oddly flustered by Hen’s look and could not return their gaze.

“Yes. I have already informed Doctor Leonard of this, but my people and I offer our deepest apologies for the situation our Annléí plant has caused.”

“I am to understand that you had no means of knowing when the plant would dispel its pollen.”

“That is true.” Hen answered. “Annléí sprays when it wishes to, and we are not in control of its moods.”

Spock inclined his head in understanding, then looked down at the vial in his hand. He hadn’t thought the solution would be so simple, but it was extremely fortunate. Though Spock no longer had any qualms about caring for Jim while in his current state, he would prefer it if things returned to how they were before this entire incident took place.
“I don’t want to drink it.”

All three adults in the room turned to Jim, and the defiant look on his face clearly spoke volumes about how he felt about the concoction.

“Oh, for the love of—” McCoy bit out, looking heavenwards before catching Jim’s gaze. “Too bad. You’re drinking it.”

“No, I’m not.” Jim returned testily, raising his chin.

“Jim, this will cure you of your current dilemma.” Spock told him calmly.

Jim frowned at the vial in his hand. “I don’t trust it.”

“It is a harmless blend.”

“If it’s so harmless then you drink it.”

Spock blinked down at Jim. “Me?”

“Yeah.” He nodded. “I’ll drink it if you do it first.”

Spock glanced over at Hen, conveying his question with just a raise of the brow.

“The brew was created to age whoever consumes it by several years. If you were to drink it, it would cause you to age drastically.” They explained plainly.

Then by no means was Spock permitted to drink the concoction, not unless he wished to age significantly. He glanced back at Jim and told him in a gentle tone, “I apologise, but I cannot consume the blend.”

Jim crossed his arms over his chest in a huff. “Then neither will I.”

“Jim, stop being a damn brat and just drink the blend.” McCoy groused, his temper worsening.

“Such words used against a child are not appropriate, doctor McCoy.” Spock retorted snappily. He saw the doctor’s eyebrows jump in surprise. “The captain has made his decision and we must respect it.”

McCoy shot him an incredulous look. “Are you crazy, Spock? He’s putting off returning to his adult self just because he doesn’t trust it.”

“I am aware.”

The man emitted a disbelieving scoff. “Can’t you see how dumb that reasoning is?”

“It may be ludicrous, however the decision for the captain to consume the concoction is not ours to make.” Spock spun around to face Hen. “Thank you for aiding us in obtaining the cure for the captain’s current predicament, and please relay the words to the rest of the beings who offered their time and effort to do the same.”

“It is my pleasure.” Hen replied easily, lacing their fingers and placing them under their chin. Spock immediately returned it, followed by Jim. The captain clearly held no ill will towards Hen, politely partaking in their planets’ greeting, though Spock wasn’t sure the same could be said of McCoy at the moment.
“Now, Spock—“ The man began, but was swiftly cut off.

“And thank you, doctor, for your tremendous efforts in helping Jim. It is unfortunate that we could not solve the matter simply, but worry not that eventually the captain will return to his adult self.”

“And pray tell, how’re you going to manage that?” McCoy drawled, the twitch of his eyebrow making itself known.

Spock hesitated momentarily, then confidently answered, “I do not know.”

It was clear by the doctor’s expression that he thought Spock to be particularly foolish for giving such an answer, but it was the only one he felt comfortable enough to give. He had no intention of lying to the man, no matter how much he was grating at his nerves.

“If you’ll excuse me, Doctor.” Spock ducked his head and turned on his heel, heading out of Sickbay with Jim trailing closely after.

* 

“Hey, you’re not upset are you?” Jim inquired, nervously peering at Spock.

Spock had returned to his rooms immediately following the events that took place in Sickbay, and Jim, for lack of anything better to do, followed after him. He had stuck close to Spock, not straying far even when they were in his rooms. On some level it was a relief to see the captain not making a mess, but on the other hand, he was uncharacteristically subdued. Spock had asked if there was anything that was bothering Jim, to which he had shaken his head. The captain was clearly reluctant to share, because it was evident something was indeed bothering him, but Spock didn’t possess the energy to gently pry it out of him. He instead asked Jim what he wished to do, and the captain had answered by shrugging and mumbling something about a card game. Spock hadn’t been sure of it, but when he’d asked for a further explanation Jim had simply repeated that he wished to play a card game. There had been a moment of silence where Spock had stared at him, noting how Jim resolutely kept his gaze on the floor, before he nodded.

Spock had retrieved a deck of cards from his desk, a gift from Nyota, and handed them over to Jim who began explaining in a quiet voice what the rules of the game were. The game was Iranian in origin, and the name had been lost over time, but it was still an enjoyable one that required some maths. The aim of the game was to use the five cards in your hand to gather up cards that amounted to eleven points, the number on each card representing the points. The one who at the end of the game had the most elevens, won the game. The rules were easy enough to follow, though they made no sense whatsoever to Spock. Still, Jim continued to remain mellow, and so he’d indulged in the captain’s request. The game had gotten off to a quiet start, and it hadn’t been until their second round that Jim asked the question.

“Why would I be upset, Jim?” Spock asked, placing down an eight and snatching it up together with the three of diamonds.

“Because I didn’t drink the potion.” Jim said in a small voice.

Spock’s gaze flickered up to him, and he noticed exactly how subdued Jim was. It was entirely at odds with his behaviour from a few hours prior, and strangely enough it put Spock on edge.

“I would never force you to do something you are not comfortable with.” Spock told him kindly.

A smile prickled at the corner of Jim’s lips, and he ducked his head shyly. “Thanks.”
Spock awoke from his slumber when he felt himself tilt slightly. He immediately blinked awake, sitting up and noticing there was a shift of weight on his mattress. It took his eyes a few seconds to get adjusted to the dark, but once they did he spotted a figure perched on the edge of his bed.

“Jim?” Spock mumbled, his mind still rushing to wake up.

Jim was dressed in pyjamas Spock had synthesized for him, these ones black with spaceships printed all across them. He drew his knee up to his chest and propped up his chin, gaze directed at Spock. Jim didn’t respond to his question, instead letting silence fall over them.

“What seems to be the matter?” Spock pressed, perplexed at the captain’s presence.

Jim tilted his head to the side. “Tell me about Vulcan.”

Spock quirked an eyebrow at the request. “Perhaps now is not an ideal time to do so.”

“Please.”

Spock stared at Jim, contemplating whether he should steer the captain back to his own bed or simply tell him about Vulcan. Eventually, he gave in. “What do you wish to know?”

“I don’t know. You decide.”

Spock took a moment to ponder what he should share about Vulcan. Jim hadn’t specified anything, but he wanted the captain to come away from the conversation thinking positively of his home planet. There were many interesting aspects to Vulcan and its culture, but perhaps Jim wouldn’t find them to be so.

“It was… extremely dry.” Spock began slowly. “Vulcan was a desert planet and had no large bodies of water. Any liquid we used was pumped out from the ground through a complicated set of ducts.”

Jim’s eyebrows furrowed. “What happened to it?”

“It…” Spock trailed off. He’d forgotten Jim didn’t know about the destruction of Vulcan, the event having taken place mere months ago. He hastily weighed up his two options of either telling Jim the truth or continuing on with his description of the planet. After a beat, Spock said, “It is not something I can reveal to you.”

Jim frowned, but didn’t press matters further.

“As I was saying… Vulcan’s sun was intensely bright, and helped contribute to Vulcans evolving an inner eyelid to help protect us from the sun’s rays.”


“Evolution is always fascinating.”

Jim huffed out a laugh. “Vulcan sounds very different from Riverside.”

“I would not know, as I have never been.”

“It’s shit.”

“Jim.” Spock said in a scolding tone.

*
Jim shrugged. “It’s true.”

Spock lifted an unimpressed eyebrow in reply.

“But let’s not talk about Riverside.” Jim waved off, leaning forward. “Tell me, how am I as a captain?”

“Surprisingly good.” Spock confessed.

“Did people think I would be bad?”

“I cannot speak for others, but I myself had my doubts in regards to your skills as a captain.” Those doubts would flare up again from time to time, but on the whole Jim continued to prove himself to be drastically different from the being Spock had originally painted him out to be.

“But I changed that, right?” Jim prompted with a raise of the brow.

“Indeed.” Spock confirmed. “And you continue to do so.”

“Cool.” His smile was soft, and Spock was sad to see it drop all of a sudden. Jim bit his lip, looking as if he were contemplating something. “Do people like me?”

Spock felt his chest clench at the anxiousness hidden beneath Jim’s tone. “You are immensely valued by all of the crew.”

Jim’s face erupted into a relieved smile, the corners of his lips pulling into his rosy cheeks. Spock often enjoyed seeing the man’s expression transform into one of happiness, but this time he felt strangely bereft. The captain’s words had him thinking deeply, and he was once again reminded of the man’s inability to see how admired he was by all. As an adult Jim would occasionally drift between confidently between taking charge of situations with a strong hand, to questioning whether he was adequately caring for his crew. Spock had seen the shift many times, and although he felt privileged that he was allowed to witness the captain’s more introspective moments, he couldn’t help but feel disheartened at the lack of certainty the man had in himself.

His younger counterpart, too, seemed to be displaying similar habits. He would transition from a frank and brazen child to a quietly asking whether others considered him to be of worth. It brought up questions about Jim’s childhood, and whether he had had a past of people not liking him, or if it was an intrinsic part of him. Spock didn’t know which answer he would find preferable.

“Tell me about the stars.” Jim murmured, pulling Spock out from his thoughts.

Spock lifted a delicate eyebrow. “They exist.”

A sudden bark of laughter escaped Jim, and he beamed. “I mean the stars, Spock. Where have we gone? What have we seen? Tell me everything, I want to know.”

Spock briefly pondered whether it was wise to reveal their missions together, but in the end thought there would be no harm in revealing a few inconsequential ones. He would simply approach this scenario in the same manner as reading a story to a young child, much like his mother used to do him when he was younger. Spock reiterated the tale of their mission to Risa, the pleasure planet, and the crews’ escapades which led to Jim having a serious conversation with lieutenant Sulu. He told the story of their encounter with the dragon on a fairytale world, and how Jim had been entirely too hostile against the creature who had simply been concerned for its young. He also described the Enterprise’s antics on Space Station K-7, drawing several laughs from Jim when he walked through the situation with Mr. Baris, the Klingons, and the tribbles. By the end of the tale Jim was wracked
by giggles and wiping at the corner of his eyes, his smile seemingly ingrained onto his face.

“We’ve gone through some weird stuff, huh?”

“Indeed we have.” Spock affirmed. The captain clearly found the stories to be highly amusing, and Spock hadn’t even revealed all of their strangest missions to him.

Jim’s smile widened. “So are you my best friend or what?”

“I believe the title would go to doctor McCoy.” Spock answered evenly.

Jim’s forehead creased at the reply, a dubious look coming over his face. “I’d rather have you as my best friend.”

Spock could only imagine the reaction McCoy would have if he had heard those words come out of the captain’s mouth. He wasn’t entirely certain he wouldn’t reveal them to the doctor at a later date simply so that he could witness the man’s response.

“McCoy has known you for longer, and been at your side through some of your best and worst times.” Spock explained.

Jim’s disbelieving expression deepened. “Really, now? So how long have we known each other then? Doc and I?”

“Several years. I believe you met aboard the shuttle to Starfleet academy.” Spock responded.

Jim’s eyes seemed to darken at the mention of Starfleet. “Uh-huh. And how long have we known each other?”

“We met only a few months prior.”

“Seriously?” Jim exclaimed in surprise, and at Spock’s nod argued, “That can’t be right. I think I should have known you longer.”

“How so?”

Jim opened his mouth as if to retort, then shut it again. A curious look came over him, and he shrugged. “I kinda feel comfortable around you.”

“I am pleased I can elicit such a feeling in you, but it does not change the fact that we have not known each other for very long.”

“So how did we meet then?” The question had Spock freezing up momentarily. The captain seemed to notice his reaction because he asked, “What?”

“I am unsure of how much I am able to reveal.” Spock said carefully.

“Give me the summary of it, then.”

“We came together during an academic tribunal…” Spock began slowly, then stopped.

“…And?” Jim prompted.

“I am sorry, Jim. I am not certain how much I can reveal to you.”

Jim sighed, dropping his head. “That sucks.”
Spock didn’t enjoy disappointing Jim, but in this matter he absolutely knew that there were certain things he couldn’t disclose to the captain. If he excluded those elements when telling Jim about the time they met, it would not only leave large gaps in the story, but also possibly help make connections as to what had occurred.

“So Doc and I are really best friends, huh?” Jim inquired.

“Affirmative.”

“How ‘best’?”

“What do you mean?”

“Like, how close are we?” Jim clarified.

“Despite your constant bickering, you hold each other in high regard.” Spock said truthfully.

Jim grinned. “Alright, that kind of sounds like fun.”

Spock wasn’t the slightest bit surprised by the answer.

“And hey, don’t worry; Doc may be my best friend, but there’s no rule saying I can’t have two.” Jim assured him.

Spock found the comment to be curious, but inclined his head. “As you wish.”

*

Spock placed his tray down and claimed the seat next to Jim. The captain was glaring down at his meal, looking as if he were attempting to make it combust from sheer will alone.

“Quit frowning at it.” McCoy told Jim. It had been the doctor’s choice to serve the captain porridge, claiming that ‘the kid needs to eat something healthy, damn it,’ before he’d gone off to fetch him his meal. Spock had chosen not to comment on the choice of breakfast, resolutely sticking to his bowl of fruit salad.

“Eugh.” Jim grimaced, picking at the porridge. “It looks like puss.”

Spock stilled.

“Jim.” He said in a lightly scolding tone. “Do not be vulgar during mealtime.”

“What? It does.” Jim defended, dragging his spoon through bowl.

“It is a nutritious meal.”

“There’s cinnamon in it.” McCoy added, taking a sip of his coffee.

Jim rolled his eyes. “Whatever.”

Spock watched as the captain scraped a tiny bit of porridge onto his spoon, holding it up in front of his face with a grimace. He tentatively brought it towards his mouth and took his first bite. Spock saw how Jim’s expression slowly shifted from a scowl to reluctantly inquisitive.

“Good?” McCoy asked with a raised eyebrow.
Jim flinched, then put on shrug. “’S alright.”

McCoy caught Spock’s eye, mutual exasperation coming over the both of them. Spock returned to consuming his own fruit salad, enjoying the freshness so soon after waking up. He hadn’t had time to meditate this time around since Jim had clung to him all night, making it impossible for Spock to extricate himself from the captain to tend to his own morning routine. Instead he had been forced to lay in silence until Jim blinked away, yawning wide before releasing Spock from his grip.

All of a sudden there was movement next to Spock, and when he looked to his side he was greeted with the sight of Jim in his adult form.

“Woah, what the fuck!” Exclaimed Jim, and Spock very much mirrored that reaction.

“Fucking finally,” McCoy muttered into his coffee.

Jim’s eyes jumped up to the man. “Bones?”

“Jim.” He returned calmly.

Jim’s eyes narrowed. “Care to explain what just happened?”

“You mean curing your dumb ass? Why, not at all.” He drawled, setting down his cup. “Well, let me just start by saying it’s good to have you back, you pain in the ass.”

Jim’s eyes flashed with irritation at the comment, but McCoy seemed to pay it no mind. Spock was still trying to comprehend how the captain had suddenly come to be in his fully adult form so suddenly, but he was drawing blanks. He slowly turned to face McCoy, hoping the man could shed some light on the bizarre turn of events.

“Now, as to how I helped,” And he made sure to put strong emphasis on the word. “You see, after I worked very hard to get the lead botanist of Narete to come up to the ship with a cure for you, your dumb ass said ‘no’. As you can understand, I was beyond pissed, and wanted to tear my goddamn hair out after Spock here defended your right to not take the cure. However, after you guys left, I got speaking with Hen, and I found out that the cure could be consumed in other ways, such as with food, or drink. So that’s what I did.” McCoy finished with a drawl.

“You drugged me?” Jim asked, disbelief seeping into his voice.

“It wasn’t drugging. It was the old ‘feeding the kid disgusting medicine by disguising it in something good’ trick.” The doctor defended.

“I swear to God, Bones, that has got to be an ethical violation of some sort.” Jim hissed. “Aren’t doctors supposed to care for their patients? You know, make sure no unnecessary harm comes to them?”

“I didn’t act as your doctor this time, I acted as your friend.” McCoy pointed out calmly.

There was a long moment of silence where Jim glared at the doctor, tension evident in his entire body. At long last, he said, “You are such a dick, Bones.”

McCoy acknowledged the insult with a nod of the head. “Eat your porridge, Jim.”

It was moments like this where Spock thought that he could live for a thousand years and more, yet he would never understand the relationship that was Jim and McCoy’s friendship.
The door chime sounded through his quarters, and Spock looked up from where he was at his desk. “Enter.”

The door swept open, and the captain himself walked in, a small smile already in place. He inclined his head with a muttered ‘Mr. Spock’, and Spock returned it with his own greeting of ‘Captain’.

“Hope I’m not interrupting anything.” The man mentioned, coming to a stop before the desk.

“Not at all. I was simply in the middle of reading a scientific journal.” Spock explained, swivelling around in his chair to face the captain.

Jim’s lips quirked up. “You sure do seem to like those.”

“I find them immensely fascinating.” He admitted.

“I wouldn’t expect anything less from you, Mr. Spock.” Jim smiled at him, then suddenly seemed to sober up, falling out of his relaxed posture into a more straightened one. “There was actually a point to my visit. I am… Listen, I wanted to thank you. For what you did when I was, you know… a kid.”

“I am to understand Human children all act in the manner which you did.” Spock shared.

Jim huffed out a laugh, ducking his head before gazing at him again. “Yeah, but still, it was good of you. I know I was quite the handful.”

“Doctor McCoy told you of your antics?”

“No, no;” Jim chuckled, his cheeks reddening slightly. “I, uh, I actually remembered it. I remember everything that happened.”

One of Spock’s eyebrows hiked up his forehead. “How peculiar.”

“That’s certainly one way to put it.” Jim said with a sharp nod.

The confession had Spock asking himself a slew of questions, many of which revolved around the captain’s memory when he had been stranded in his younger state. Why, for example, had the memories remained, when Jim’s younger counterpart had said they’d no recollection of their time as an adult? Perhaps the experiences they had gone through was now saved in the adult Jim’s mind alongside their original memories from that age? It was certainly a curious scenario to look into, but Spock had no idea how he’d go about even approaching it.

Jim shook his head. “Anyway, just wanted to say thank you.” The words came out stiltedly, the captain’s lips twisting into an awkward smile.

“You are welcome.” Spock acknowledged absently, his mind still reeling with the possible scenarios.

If Jim indeed retained all of his memories from his time as a child, then plenty of them included Spock. He would have the memory of Spock attempting to coax Jim out from the Jeffries tube, only to concede defeat and plant himself below its opening. He would recall the rather short-tempered manner in which doctor McCoy had tried to coerce him into drinking the cure despite him mistrusting it. He would remember when he snuck into Spock’s room and sat quietly as Spock told him all about Vulcan and their adventures. Things Spock had told Jim because he had seen him as a child, and not an adult. As someone who needed a companion, and not a captain. Had Spock known Jim would keep the memories from those events, he wasn’t sure he would have divulged such tales
to the captain.

It was odd how troubling the thought was, that Jim now knew how he could open himself up to vulnerability when the situation called for it. He felt cheated somehow, as he had not been aware the captain would have kept the memories of that event to himself. However, the rational part of him informed him that he had no way of knowing this would be the outcome. He had acted as he should have in that situation, and he had seen its worth when Jim as a child has remained close to him throughout his stay. It was a job well done, and one that the captain clearly was grateful for. It would then, Spock reasoned, be foolish for him to view Jim inadvertently and unknowingly retaining his memories as something negative. The man now knew that Spock was capable of taking on a task he was uncomfortable with, as well as displaying slight emotional tendencies when the case called for it, and he had thanked Spock instead of mocking him.

Spock was so caught up in his thoughts he almost missed Jim’s stiff nod and subsequent departure. He watched as the captain stalked away, the door opening his way into the hallway then firmly shutting behind him. It now left Spock entirely to himself. Himself, and his musings that was.

Spock steepled his fingers together and brought them up to his chin. It was true that he felt unsettled by the captain being having seen a closed off part of himself, but it was not by any means dire. Jim was a good man, and still growing into himself. There were many things to admire about him, such as his perdurable loyalty to the crew, and his sheer determination when it came to completing his missions. He had also proved time and time again that he possessed a keen intelligence, both academically and in term of street smarts, making Jim a formidable captain.

Indeed, of all the beings who could have seen Spock in his more nurturing state, Jim certainly wasn’t the worst. If anything, he was one of the best.

*

It was a slow day on the bridge with little activity when Jim suddenly exclaimed, “Don’t you guys think it’s weird we keep experiencing things like this?”

A silence followed his statement, a few crewmembers glancing over from their stations.

“What do you mean, Captain?” Uhura asked, glancing over her shoulder.

“I mean… this. Getting mixed up in a parallel universe. Experiencing a fairytale planet. Guarding… wheat. Isn’t that all kind of weird?” He asked, catching her gaze. “I mean, I think it’s weird, but we’ve just kind of accepted that these things happen.”

“Don’t they happen to all starships?” Sulu piped up from the helm.

A beat of silence passed before Jim replied, “I don’t think quite as often… I spoke to Pike earlier, and he said that we experience a shocking amount of, well, I suppose we can refer to them as adventures, compared to the reports he reads from other starships.”

An unusual silence stretched throughout the bridge, none of the crewmembers speaking up.

“No? We’re not going to address that?” Jim’s eyes travelled around the bridge, taking in all the officers caught in thought. His question was answered with more silence, and one awkward cough courtesy of ensign Lulea. Jim bit the inside of his cheek, then conceded. “Alright. That’s fine.”

“Captain, we’re being hailed.” Uhura announced suddenly, her hand flying up to her headset.

“It is…” Chekov started, then whirled around with wide eyes. “Sir, it is Abraham Lincoln!”
Jim’s eyes slipped shut in resignation “Of course it is. Put them on the viewscreen, Mr. Chekov.”

*
I just want to point out that I know nothing about programming and anything I wrote is just bullshit. All bullshit. As opposed to the rest of the story which is all fiction. Fabulous fiction.

Just a few sketches of Jim for your pleasure
When the away team materialised on Ai’lei the first thing they noticed was the pink skies blended with purple undertones and spots of yellow, creating the most magnificent shades that only appeared on Earth’s skies during summer evenings. It was a thing of beauty, which probably explained why the natives who had come to greet them were the second thing the away team noticed.

The Ai’leis themselves were tall beings covered entirely in orange fur, their black, beady eyes extremely large on their small craniums. They stood on their hind legs like Humans, though their appearance more closely resembled that of Vulcan sehlats, the most obvious differences being that they were much slimmer and possessed a long, furry tail almost as tall as the natives themselves. The Ai’lies were, all in all, tremendously different from what the away team had encountered on earlier missions, yet the skies were so stunningly gorgeous that they had been the second thing taken account of after beam down.

The *Enterprise* had never before visited Ai’lei, but they were fortunate enough to be the second Starfleet issued starship to do so. The first had been an exploratory Ferengi vessel that had discovered the planet, and they had initiated First Contact entirely by accident. They had thought Ai’lei to be bereft of any life, but soon after beam down they found that the natives simply did not show up on their sensors. Lucky for them, the Ai’leis as a race were such cordial and friendly beings, that together with the Ferengi they had quickly formed the beginnings of a friendship. The captain of the exploratory vessel had then contacted the Federation Headquarters and relayed their mission gone awry to them, and asked that the Federation continue negotiations with Ai’lei, revealing that the natives were entirely peaceful and more than willing to host outsiders at their home.

It was extremely rare that vessels received such warm welcomes from unknown planets, and even rarer that an invitation was extended to them and others that they knew. Starfleet had immediately been given the task to pursue this potential relationship further, and they’d instructed the *Enterprise*, as their newest flagship, to be the ones to approach the Ai’leis with open arms. Thankfully the Ferengi had provided them with a basic list of phrases they’d exchanged with the Ai’leis, as well as their translations into Standard, and although the list was incomplete it would allow the away team to communicate with the natives to some extent. They had also been reliably informed that the Ai’leis themselves had learnt some key expressions in Standard, and had gotten a good grasp of the language’s basic rules. Spock was pleased by this information, as had Jim, though he still made it a point to closely go over the Ai’lei language list provided by the Ferengi in order to show the natives that he respected their culture. Spock thought it fitting that their crew be the one to handle negotiating an amiable relationship with the natives of the planet, as there was no one more amiable than the captain himself.

As soon as he spotted the Ai’leis waiting for them, Jim had instantly donned his customary smile and stepped towards the congregation. “Greetings. My name is Captain Kirk of the U.S.S Enterprise.”

Strangely enough there was no response from the Ai’leis apart from blatant staring. It was odd, since from what meagre information Spock had read of the Ferengi vessel’s reports, the Ai’leis were highly expressive and affable beings. This reaction was definitely curious, and when their tails began to lazily swish back and forth Spock’s confusion deepened.

Not one to be deterred by the lack of verbal reaction, Jim ploughed on, still beaming kindly. “What is your name?”
All of a sudden the natives started cooing gently at Jim, their tails moving in a wider range as they flicked from side to side. One of Spock’s eyebrows rose high on his forehead. He didn’t know what to make of this behaviour.

“Uhh… okay,” Jim started, his smile slowly slipping into a frown. “That’s… I’m sorry, what are you saying?”

The Ai’leis kept on with their soft cooing, taking a careful step forward with their paws stretched out. The entire away team seemed to collectively step back at the approach, which caused the natives pause. A beat of silence passed, then two of the Ai’leis stretched out their paws once more, attempting to appear non-threatening while reaching for the away team.

“What the hell are they doing?” Sulu wondered aloud.

“It seems they are attempting to lull you into a sense of calm.” Spock replied haltingly, attempting to parse out the Ai’leis conduct.

“Why?” The lieutenant asked with a grimace, which only increased the natives’ cooing.

“I believe they find us, or perhaps more specifically Humans, to be… pretty.”

“What?” Jim turned to look at him. “How do you mean?”

“To them you resemble infants they are accustomed to presumably seeing in their fauna.” Spock explained, having picked out the words ‘little baby’ and ‘adorable’. “It seems to be a universal constant that the young of other species are more charming than our own.”

Jim looked boggled at the information. “But they are aware we’re adults.”

“Affirmative. It is simply our appearances that deceive them.”

“This is…” Jim began, rubbing a hand through his hair. “This was not included in the debriefing report.”

“Perhaps the Ferengi did not experience such a response upon their initial meeting due to your vastly different images.” Spock offered.

Jim paused. “…Maybe.”

“Hey, that one just took a holo of me!” An ensign accused, pointing at one of the natives who was holding a device. The congregation increased their cooing, their attention seemingly having switched focus to the outraged ensign in particular.

“It will do you no good getting upset, ensign.” Spock told them austerely. “They find your rise in emotion to be charming.”

“Man, this is so weird.” Sulu complained, rubbing at his eyes.

Jim nodded along absently, still staring at the Ai’leis with a look of bewilderment.

“What do we do now?” One of the ensigns asked.

“We continue to greet them.” Spock replied evenly.

“Do we have to?”
At the question all members of the away team instantly glanced at their captain, hoping with varying degrees of hope that they could avoid this mission somehow. However, those hopes were quickly dashed.

“Yup.” Jim nodded, letting out a restrained sigh. “We have to.”

*

Spock had to admit the captain had handled the diplomatic negotiations remarkably well despite being constantly cooed at by the Ai’leis. It could be argued that their reaction to the Enterprise crew was condescending, but Jim, ever the captain, was well aware that there was a culture difference and was therefore not offended by the natives’ antics. However, it didn’t mean that the meetings weren’t draining, which was very obvious by the way Jim sagged as soon as they were beamed back aboard the starship.

“I need some time to unwind.” Jim sighed, rolling his shoulders. He stepped off the transporter pads and dismissed the away team, thanking them for their work, before going to converse with engineer Scott at the transporter station. All ensigns left the room as a crowd, the only remaining member being Sulu who quickly asked Spock if he was free to dine in half an hours’ time. Spock affirmed that he was available, and they made plans to meet in the mess hall.

As soon as the doors slid shut behind Sulu, Jim ambled up to Spock, tiredness hanging off of him like a veil. “Waiting for something?”

“I recommend the botanical gardens if you wish for some peace and quiet for yourself.” Spock offered.

Jim blinked at him. “What?”

“You mentioned earlier that you wished to unwind following the completion of our mission. The botanical gardens are an ideal location for relaxation purposes.” Spock clarified.

Jim shook his head with a small smile. “That’s a very good suggestion, Mr. Spock, but I think I’ll watch a holovid. Something mindless where I don’t have to focus on it entirely. Or maybe something I’ve watched a hundred times over I’ve practically got it memorised.”

“Surely that must be a hyperbole.” Spock replied, not able to believe the man’s words.

Jim chuckled and started towards the exit, shooting engineer Scott a quick wave. “Nope. There actually are holos that I hold dear to me and know word for word. Like Kussaru’s Castle, or Star Wars.”

“I am not familiar with either of those holos.”

Jim came to a halt and turned to him with a wild expression. “You’re joking, right?”

“About what, Captain?”

“Star Wars.” Jim repeated. “You’ve never seen Star Wars?”

“I have not.” Spock admitted slowly, a feeling of unease settling into him. The captain was looking at him as if Spock had betrayed him.

“…but Star Wars.” Jim echoed.
“I am certain I am not the only being who has not seen it.” Spock told him in an effort to defend himself. All it did however was cause the captain to shake his head and place his hands on his hips.

“Okay, that settles it. I’m organising a holovid screening in the rec room and everyone is coming to watch Star Wars.”

“The recreation room cannot hold all four hundred crewmembers.” Spock pointed out.

Jim thought for a moment, then amended, “As many beings as can fit into the room are coming to watch Star Wars.”

*

It turned out that the number of beings who wished to watch the holovid were more than Spock had expected. The recreation room was filled to the brim, people having migrated around for a while until finally settling in on the floor due to a lack of spaces to sit. An ensign had collected several pillows from the couches and distributed them among the crewmembers dwelling on the ground, ensuring that no one was uncomfortable during the screening. Spock saw how groups of friends were laying haphazardly over one another, reminding him very much of how Earth cats would bundle up in order to preserve warmth. It was oddly charming.

Jim had thankfully saved Spock a seat on one of the couches, meaning he wasn’t banished to the floor like a lot of the other crew who were still tricking in. He didn’t know what to expect from the holovid. He hadn’t done a preliminary search on it because he hadn’t deemed it necessary, but with how many beings were in the recreation room he regretted not having done so. He’d overheard several ensigns, who were clearly fans of the holovid, chattering about how they were looking forward to seeing it again. A few others had shared that they were excited to see it for the first time, and Spock had found out that apparently the holovid was a renowned classic on Earth. Perhaps he should have paid closer attention to popular culture during his stay, but he hadn’t deemed it as important as focusing on his job and what it entailed.

An ensign excused themselves before stepping over Spock’s legs, tiptoeing carefully through the beings spread out on the floor until they reached their ring of friends. Everyone was finally settling in, the murmurs dying down as one of the ensigns pulled up the vidscreen and began tapping away on their PADD. Truly, everyone appeared eager to watch the holovid.

Well, almost everyone.

“Star Wars?” McCoy exclaimed incredulously. “God, you’re so pretentious, Jim.”

“What? It’s a classic.” The captain argued.

“Yeah, from like two hundred years ago. You couldn’t have chosen a more recent one?” The doctor groused.

“Spock’s never seen it.” Was all Jim chose to say in reply, as if that explained his decision.

“Of course.” McCoy rolled his eyes, then seated himself next to Spock. He leaned in just a tad as if sharing a secret and said, “Be prepared for some awful shoddy special effects.”

McCoy had indeed been correct. The visual effects were abysmal, the storyline tattered, the characters unlikeable and highly illogical, and Spock had no idea how any of these Stormtroopers had been hired when they were incapable of successfully shooting their target. Yet despite all the inaccuracies, Jim was captivated, eyes glued on the vidscreen for the entirety of the film’s length. He was just as engrossed when the first holovid transitioned into the second, the title sequence appearing
on screen once more. Spock sat in silence, contemplating the necessity of introducing new characters at this point in the film and occasionally gauging the captain’s reaction.

As the holovid neared its end, Jim leaned over McCoy, who grumbled at the action, and whispered to Spock, “This is my favourite part.”

Spock paid close attention to the vidscreen, watching the scene before him unfold. Princess Leia was looking at Han Solo, yearning clear in her brown eyes.

“I love you.” She uttered.

Han gazed back at her for a moment, then gave a small nod. ”I know.”

Jim grinned broadly and looked at Spock. “Pretty cool, right?”

Spock didn’t answer, instead remaining quiet as he wondered how emotionally stunted this Han Solo must be to have those be the last words towards someone he clearly loved.

* The next mission they were to embark upon was to locate the whereabouts of one John Gill, a historian who had been deployed to Ekos and later lost contact with Starfleet Command six months ago. McCoy had presumed the man to be dead after so long without a response, but the captain was adamant they attempt to search for him. Jim had revealed that John Gill had taught briefly at the academy during his attendance, and his memories of the man were positive. Spock, too, had the fortune of meeting Mr. Gill himself, as well as having read some of his works on Earth History. He had to admit they were rather fascinating pieces of writing, the aspect that impressed him the most being the man’s treatment of Earth history as causes and motivations, not dates and events.

They had been steadily nearing in on the planet of Ekos when all of a sudden a spacecraft appeared on the Enterprise’s vidscreen. Spock had quickly identified it as being Zeon in origin, basing his findings on the planet’s crude interplanetary capability. The device itself turned out to be a small, reaction-powered rocket, and was surprisingly currently on an intercept course, meaning that it had sophisticated detection devices which neither Zeon nor Ekos should have. It was an unmanned probe which seemed to be carrying a warhead, and on the captain’s orders lieutenant Chekov had prepared the phasers and fired them at the spacecraft, obliterating it completely. The explosion reminded Spock very much of a star dying in the sky; very large, very powerful, yet perfectly silent.

As soon as the spacecraft had been destroyed, the bridge of the Enterprise descended into furious discussion. The nuclear warhead was generations ahead of where the beings of Ekos should currently supposed to be. How had they managed to create such a device? According to their known records that John Gill had submitted, the Ekosians were a primitive, warlike people in a state of anarchy, whereas their neighbouring planet, Zeon, possessed a relatively high technology as well as a peaceful population. Spock couldn’t offer a single logical explanation for this rapid development of weaponry, and neither could anyone else on the bridge. This, it seemed, was a far more serious problem than the mysterious disappearance of John Gill.

* Jim had decided that he and Spock were to be the ones beamed down to Ekos and assess the situation, after which they would report back to the Enterprise. He had instructed doctor McCoy to prepare two subcutaneous transponders in the event they couldn’t use their communicators. The tiny microchips were injected into their inner forearms, one in Spock’s dominant hand, the left, and the second in Jim’s dominant hand, the right. The captain had then ordered engineer Scott to call them in
three hours’ time, and if they failed to make contact at the appointed time he should take their
coordinates from the subcutaneous transponders and beam them aboard the ship, no matter what their
condition may be.

Spock had donned clothing similar to that of their time stuck in Edith Keeler’s era, along with the
addition of a warm jumper to combat the slight chilliness of Ekos. Jim himself had worn an ensemble
of long trousers, a long-sleeved shirt, and his Starfleet issued black boots; a very simply attire, yet on
the captain it looked stylish. It seemed there was no apparel the man could put on and wear as
naturally as breathing.

The location they’d been beamed down to contained architecture similar to that of Old Earth, though
there was a significant lack of life around them. It was cause for slight worry, and Jim and Spock had
immediately taken it upon themselves to explore the streets in search of any beings. They’d barely
taken a few steps from their original beam down coordinates when there was the sound of movement
from behind them. Spock and Jim had instantly whirled around and spotted a dishevelled man lying
on the ground, clothes ripped at the seams.

As soon as the man spotted them he began shouting fiercely. “Hide! They’re right behind me! Hide!
Hide!”

Jim and Spock frowned at the man, confusion colouring their expressions. The sudden sound of
voices closing in spurred them into action, heeding the man’s words as they ran. They ducked behind
a close by pillar which obstructed their view, but still allowed them to hear what was occurring
beyond their hiding place. Spock’s ears picked up on more than one additional voice, all of them
simultaneously cursing and spitting out phrases such as ‘Zeon pig’ and ‘Scum of this earth’. He
ventured a glance at the scene, and saw that the extra voices belonged to three uniformed men.
Spock caught one of the men hauling the dishevelled man up, though his eyes caught on assailant’s
sleeve.

More specifically, on the armband wrapped around their sleeve. It was red, with a simple symbol in
black which Spock had only before seen in Earth history books; the ones describing the horrors of
the planet’s past.

More loud shouts echoed from behind the pillar, and Spock saw how Jim’s face tensed up. Another
yelp prompted the captain into action, and he leaned past their hiding place, face set with
determination and clearly intent on jumping in. Spock’s hand on his arm stopped that.

“Captain, the Non-Interference Directive.” He reminded Jim.

The captain’s gaze fell to Spock’s hand, then back up to look him straight in the eyes, his expression
contorting into one of frustration. A sudden shout pulled their attention back to the scene, and they
watched in stiff silence as the man was pushed up against the wall with a bat to his throat. The
uniformed men were loud enough for Spock and Jim to catch snippets of the conversation.

“Hands about your head, Zeon. Higher. Keep your hands in the air so you don’t touch anything
Ekosian.” Jim and Spock locked eyes at that, a crinkle forming between the captain’s eyebrows.
“You swine have defiled us for the last time. But that’s now ended. Move.”

There was the sound of something hard hitting flesh, followed by a grunt of pain. Jim clenched his
fists, and Spock felt the muscles in the man’s arm tensing fiercely where his hand was still resting.
He could only imagine what was occurring beyond the pillar. There was the sound of shuffling feet
heading in their direction, and he and Jim instantly pressed themselves back against the pillar. They
were stowed away in the dark, silently staring after the uniformed men as they strode further and
further away with their captive.
“Unbelievable.” Jim murmured, gaze still locked on the group. “Do you recognise those uniforms?”

“Mid-20th century Earth. The nation-state called Nazi Germany.” Spock recited tonelessly, staring after the men alongside the captain. The hairs on the back of his neck stood on end as he watched them depart.

A sudden booming voice tore through the air, startling the two of them from their trance. “Attention. Attention. Attention. An announcement from Führer Headquarters.”

Spock and Jim quickly locked gazes, then quietly followed the source of the announcement. It hadn’t come far off from their current position, and when they reached the destination they found the voice was coming from a vidscreen hanging from a near building. Flashes of images switched through in greyscale, showing lines of tanks slowly rolling down a street, armed forces marching in longs rows, and close ups of beings Spock didn’t recognise waving at large crowds. The pictures confounded him, showing an uncanny resemblance to Earth’s past history of Nazi Germany, a time that had deeply scarred the planet’s population.

Spock intently watched the pictures flickering through as in the background the booming voice continued to speak, a commentary attached to the changing images. “Today, the Führer has ordered our glorious capital to be made Zeon-free. Starting at dawn, our heroic troops began flushing out the Zeon monsters who’ve been poisoning our planet.”

“How could this have happened?” Jim muttered, eyes focused on the screen. “The chances of another planet developing a culture like Nazi Germany, using the forms, the symbols, the uniforms of 20th century Earth, are so fantastically slim.”

Spock had to agree with Jim. The fact that they were presently observing a culture resembling that of Earth’s Nazi period inconceivable, yet his eyes did not deceive him. Unfortunately. “Virtually impossible, captain. Yet the evidence is quite clear.”

They continued to watch the screen as it changed to another image of people marching, the sound of their footfalls falling as they echoed through the speakers. “The Führer’s headquarters reports repulsing an attack by Zeon spacecraft. Our missiles utterly destroyed the enemy.” The voice declared.

Spock’s eyebrows rose high on his forehead. They were speaking of the Enterprise. The starship which was very much in one piece and hovering peacefully over the planet. The vidscreen was reporting lies. It was blatant propaganda being aired to the public.

Jim looked over to him, and Spock felt the captain’s eyes travelling over his body. “You look uh, quite well for a man who’s been utterly destroyed, Mr. Spock.” He commented.

Spock raised an eyebrow at that, surmising that this was one of the captain’s poor attempts at injecting humour into the situation. It did nothing to alleviate or change the reality of their current condition. This planet, Ekos, was harbouring a culture so eerily similar to Earth’s distant, horrid past that even Spock was having trouble believing it. When presented with facts, it was impossible for him to think the opposite, but in their current circumstances he deeply wished they were incorrect.

His focus was brought back to the vidscreen as the camera panned over rows of people raising their hands straight into air, loudly chanting, ‘Sieg heil!’. The parallels of that image caused a shiver of fear to run through Spock, his mind conjuring up excerpts of history textbooks he had read. It was an ominous coincidence that some of those works belonged to John Gill.

The voice disrupted Spock’s thoughts, dragging him back to the present. “At this patriotic
demonstration Deputy Führer Melakon presented the Iron Cross, second class, to Daras, hero of the Fatherland.” The screen showed a light-haired woman being pinned with a medal by a man, both in identical uniforms, after which they both stretched their arms into the air. “Everywhere preparations for forward toward the final decision: Death to Zeon.”

The image suddenly switched to a man in uniform who was sat at a desk, and staring relentlessly into the camera with a large nazi flag swinging in the background. The man raised his hand into the air, replicating that of the previous two people. His voice was dark when he spoke, the camera slowly panning past him to a portrait of a man hanging on the wall. “Long live the Fatherland. Long live the Führer.”


Spock’s eyebrows creased, and a moment later eased when he realised that it truly was a portrait of the man. It was as the captain had said, John Gill, the man they had come to retrieve.

“Fascinating.”

“You. Zeons.” A gruff voice barked, and Jim and Spock simultaneously whirled around to see a man in uniform aiming his weapon at them. By the looks of it Spock determined it to be something similar to an old Earth gun. He and Jim locked eyes, conveying a mutual understanding that they’d follow the man’s orders.

They slowly approached the man, coming to a slow halt before him. He sneered at them both. “What kind of monsters are the Zeons sending against us?”

Jim suddenly swung around and hurriedly pushed Spock away, his face contorting in disgust as he snarled, “You’re right! He’s not one of us!”

“What do you mean ‘us’?” The man echoed, turning towards Jim with a frown.

“Look at him.” Jim bit out harshly.

The man did so, and as soon as his back was turned Jim landed a blow to the back of his head. The man instantly crumbled to the ground, and Spock wasted no time in retrieving his weapon.

Jim took the gun from him and instructed, “Spock, take his uniform.”

Right away Spock picked up on the ulterior motive behind the order. “You propose we pass ourselves off as Nazis, captain?”

“If John Gill is the Führer, it would seem the logical approach.” Jim had become very adept at using logic to his advantage when it fit him. Spock thought it to be a very beneficial growth in character, although sometimes a hindrance against his personal wishes.

“That’s very well taken, captain.” He replied, then removed his hat and began stripping the unconscious man of his helmet and apparel.

*  

As soon as Spock was fully dressed Jim had pulled him close and revealed a vague plan he’d conjured up. They would pretend that Jim was a Zeon Spock had taken prisoner, and together would be able to freely walk into the Nazi headquarters and explore it as they pleased. However, they were having trouble locating the centre of operations. There were no buildings that stood out where they were ambling about, and further down the street promised nothing but the same nondescript
construction. It was during their lost exploration that a second man in a uniform found them. Spock
seized the opportunity to find out where the headquarters lay, offering the man to take Jim, the Zeon
spy, to the Führer in his place. The man had readily accepted, and together they’d headed down an
intricate set of roads until in the far distance Spock noticed a building which very obviously had the
Nazi flag raised.

He exchanged a quick glance with Jim, and just as quickly Spock had incapacitated the uniformed
man accompanying them by administering the Vulcan nerve pinch. He fell to the ground with a loud
‘thump’, and Jim was on him in an instant, pulling at his attire. This time, their time plan had changed
for the better. With the both of them now in possession of uniforms, they would be able to easily
waltz into the building without raising any concerns. The strategy, however, was once again
intercepted when they passed an older gentleman also dressed in a uniform, and Jim flashed him a
fumbled greeting.

The action caused the man to halt in his steps and harshly admonish, “Lieutenant. Have you
forgotten how to salute?”

The two of them froze in place, then slowly turned to face the man. He was scowling at them, clearly
displeased. Spock’s mind raced with options on how to successfully extract themselves from this
situation, since they couldn’t revealed themselves as not being true Nazis or they would suffer the
consequences. He didn’t know what they were, but he knew he didn’t want to find out. At long last
he swiftly attempted to raise his hand in a vague gesture he hoped passed as a salute. He must’ve
been unsuccessful, because the man’s face turned stern.

“Your papers.” He demanded coldly.

Spock peeked at Jim, who immediately came to his rescue. “Your orders, lieutenant. He wants to see
your orders in the jacket.” Spock’s hands jumped up to his chest, patting down the pockets and
pulling out a small pass which he presumed were his papers. Jim kept up the chatter, lying through
his teeth with ease. “The lieutenant’s a little dazed. He captured several Zeons single-handed. “One
of the pigs struck him before he dropped. I promise you, that pig will never get up again.”

Spock handed the pass over to the man who accepted it without so much as cracking a smile. A tense
moment passed where he slowly flipped through the pass with a calculating gaze, until finally his
eyes flickered up to Spock. “Good work, lieutenant.”

He handed the pass back to Spock who accepted it gracefully with a muttered, “Hail to the Führer.”

Jim repeated it a smidgen louder, and the man acknowledged the words by repeating them. His
presence had grown large and imposing, and Spock deduced that he must be someone of high rank.
Going by the medals lining his chest he was most likely a major, head held high and back straight.

Jim placed a hand on Spock’s arm and began pulling him away towards the building, parting on the
words, “This is a day to remember, sir.”

They then proceeded to step up the stairs towards the entrance, two armed guards on each side
carrying large weapons in their hands.

“Lieutenant.”

Both Jim and Spock glanced back at the man, and they saw that he was staring at them with cold,
emotionless eyes. Spock felt himself tense up with fear, a feeling so foreign he was unsure how to
juggle it.
“Better see a doctor.” The man said in a slow drawl, aiming the comment at Spock. “You don’t look well. Your colour.”

“Yes, I shall tend to it, sir.” Spock replied haltingly, feeling his throat grow dry. He immediately turned on his heel, intending to flee into the building and away from the man’s chilling gaze.

He was not allowed such an escape though.

“Lieutenant.” The man called tonelessly, stepping forward, and his next words struck a chord within Spock. “Your helmet. Remove it.”

Spock felt as if his heart would burst out of his side, his heart rate having increased tremendously. He felt completely transparent, not having a single clue as to what he should say in response. Thankfully he was spared having to think of something when Jim jumped in.

“We have urgent business with the Führer.” He retorted firmly, then whirled around in an attempt to hurry away from the situation.

They’d just made it to the top of the stairs, no more than a few paces from the inside of the building, when the man’s voice repeated in a clipped tone, “Lieutenant. Remove your helmet.”

All of a sudden the guards were blocking their path, their weapons aimed directly at them. Spock stared down the nozzle of a primitive gun, one that if triggered, would harm him significantly without killing him. He felt alarm swell in him at the mere thought of such pain, blood oozing from him as he lay half-dead on the ground, unable to move. Spock felt the man’s eyes boring into him as the seconds dragged, rendering him wholly speechless.

With shaking hands, Spock reached up to his head and carefully removed his helmet. The man’s gaze instantly fell on his pointed ears.

* Spock held back a wince as another lash hit Jim’s back, the sharp crack echoing through the dungeons they were in. The soldier raised his hand and brought down the whip again, administering another lash, and another, and another. Jim was shaking from the force of them, his bare flesh littered with welts and bleedings wounds. The sight was so ghastly it had bile rising in the back of Spock’s throat, and he had to tear his gaze away before the urge became a reality. He wasn’t without injuries either, but the soldier had taken a break from whipping him in favour of Jim. Spock privately believed his lack of vocal pain was what caused the man to set his focus on the captain instead.

The major had been stood by idly this entire time, closely watching as the whip fell over them and tore up their skin. He’d remained completely silent during the act, hanging behind them like a mere shadow. There was a second soldier positioned next to the major, his weapon aimed on Spock and Jim in case either of them attempted an escape. The thought was laughable. As if Jim, whose loyalty to his crewmembers ran deeper than his blood, would abandon his first officer. Spock still recalled the first time they had been taken prisoner together, Jim’s firm promise that he wouldn’t abandon Spock staying with him after all this time. Their relationship at the time had been one of necessity for the greater good of the crew, even though both of them had possessed a mutual dislike for one another. It was a massive change from where they were at now, with Spock finding himself entertaining notions of not seizing a chance to escape unless the captain was at his side.

Another blow cracked against Jim’s back, and he grunted in pain. Spock resolutely kept his gaze on the stone wall before him. This method of barbaric torture was exactly why he had feared being captured.
All of a sudden the major’s voice announced, “Enough.”

The man ceased his whipping, and Jim deflated with relief. His panting was loud in the ensuing silence. The major leisurely stalked around the two of them like a predator circling their prey, cold gaze never straying. Jim’s breathing had receded somewhat, but he still wore that ever present defiant expression, eyes meeting the major’s in challenge. Spock was unable to do the same, standing stiff and stony-faced at the captain’s side.

“What do you wish to speak now?” The major rumbled, coming to a stop. His only response was elongated silence, after which he resumed his slow circling. Several seconds passed, when suddenly the man came to a halt and barked, “Tell me your orders! You were sent here to kill our Führer. Confess!” He then leaned in close to Jim, almost touching his ear, and hissed, “Or do you want some more persuasion?”

Much to Spock’s chagrin, Jim responded with as much snark as he usually reserved for people who he disliked immensely, and the fact that they were currently held in a torture chamber did not change his tone in the slightest. “You’re making this a rather one-sided conversation, major.”

Predictably the major did not take kindly to the captain’s attitude. “Do not joke with me, Zeon pig!” He roared. His eyes flashed to Spock, and his voice dropped to low growl. “Who is this alien?”

Spock chanced a look at the man, and instantly chose to divert his gaze when he took note of the dull eyes. It was disconcerting how negatively it was affecting Spock, spiking waves of fear in him.

“Things might go easier for you if you tell me about him.” The major suggested, promise hidden in his tone.

Jim took a deep breath and avoided the man’s gaze. “Let me speak to your Führer. I’ll tell him everything he wants to know.”

The man jerked back, and he returned to lowly growling. “You’ll be glad to talk to me before I’m through with you.”

“Major.” A new voice declared.

It caught the major’s attention and he looked to the newcomer. His eyes suddenly brightened before he exclaimed with a salute, “Chairman Eneg.”

Spock listened out as the major’s footsteps headed away and came to a slow halt. “Your Excellency, I am honoured. I have been interrogating these two spies captured in—“

“I’ve had a full report.” The man dismissed carelessly. Spock heard footsteps near slowly, the clacking echoing through the dungeons. A man appeared within his and Jim’s line of sight, then turned to Spock with a tilt of his head. The man was dressed immaculately in a uniform similar to the major’s, only with slightly different lapels, and his dark hair was slicked to the side.

“You are not from Zeon.” He observed.

“Obviously.” Spock said flatly.

The man lazily paced over to Jim, his gaze hard. “Where do you come from?”

“I’ll explain when I see the Führer.” Jim told him, unrelenting in his request.

The man’s voice was collected when he inquired, “What is your business with the Führer?”
“I’ll discuss that only with him.” Jim repeated firmly.

All of a sudden the major whacked the captain in the side and he hunched over, emitting a grunt of pain.

“Pig! You’re speaking to the chairman of the party.” The major hissed.

“That’s enough, major.” The man ordered. He slowly stepped around Jim until he was stood at his left, then lowered his voice to a quiet whisper. “What were the weapons found on you? What design?” Spock heard the man move behind them, his words carrying clearly through the silence in the dungeons. “Our S.S. laboratories have been unable to discover how the weapons work.”

The major spoke up, his voice full of promise. “Excellency, give me a few minutes with them. I promise you I’ll have them—”

“You had a few minutes without result.” The man shot down the suggestion sharply. “The trouble with you S.S. is that you don’t realise that punishment becomes ineffective after a certain point. Men become insensitive.”

There was a brief silence, then the major acknowledged in a defeated tone, “Yes, Excellency.”

“Lock them up.” The man ordered suddenly. “Let their pain argue with them. Then I will question them.”

“Excellency, the standing order is interrogate and execute.” The major argued. “The interrogation is finished, therefore—”

“Finished?” The man asked in a hush. “What have you learned?” When the only response to his question was loud silence, the man reiterated his demand. “Hold them for an hour.”

“Excellency, the order—”

“That is my order, major.” The man interrupted, raising his voice considerably. “I suggest you do not disobey it.”

Spock heard the quiet in the room louder than his own heartbeat, a feat that was frankly miraculous with the way panic was causing it to race. Each second seemed longer than the last, and with each one Spock felt trepidation rising within him, making it that much harder to keep his breathing even in an effort not give away his unease.

At long last, the major answered in a lifeless voice. “Yes, Excellency.”

* 

They’d been subsequently locked up in a holding cell, and as soon as the soldiers departed the dungeon Jim let out his defiant persona drop. There was a board hanging off the wall with chains holding it up, presumably acting as a cot going by the dirty mattress, and Jim gingerly lowered himself onto it.

Spock’s eyes swept around the holding cell and took in their surroundings. It was extremely sparse, with nothing more than the cot Jim was currently sat on and a weak lightbulb to light up the room. Fortunately they’d been put in together which meant they could immediately get working on an escape. The downside, however, was that their uniforms had not been returned to them, and so Spock couldn’t make use of the cuffs on his sleeves as they had during similar previous incidents.
“John Gill was the kindest, gentlest man I ever knew. For him to be a Nazi—“ Jim broke off on a
hiss, face tensing with pain before easing a second later. “Is impossible.”

Spock wondered how closely Jim really knew John Gill. He seemed extremely reluctant to believe
that the man was currently the Führer on Ekos despite all evidence corroborating it as being the truth.
Perhaps the captain held a strong admiration for Mr. Gill, one that he was either denying or unaware
of. Spock personally believed it to be the latter.

“Why did they take you?”

Spock was brought out of his musings by the new voice, and he looked towards its source. In the cell
next to theirs, pressed right up against the bars, was a dark-haired man dressed in a leather jacket and
face beaten bloody. It was painful to look at him, and Spock wondered if he and Jim were also in
such poor states.

The man’s eyes flickered between Spock and Jim. “You’re not a Zeon. And he certainly isn’t one.
Why do the Nazis treat you as enemies?”

Spock blinked at the man. Finding himself unable to answer his question properly without revealing
their true mission, he offered one of his own. “Why do the Nazis hate Zeons?”

The man stilled, his dark gaze falling on Spock. “Why? Because without nothing to hate there’d be
nothing to hold them together. So the party has built us into a threat, a disease to be wiped out.”

A light frown marred Spock’s face. “Is Zeon a threat to them?”

The man’s eyebrows creased, incredulity lacing his tone. “Where did you come from? Our warlike
period ended dozens of generations ago. We came here, we thought we were civilising the
Ekosians.”

At the revelation Spock glanced at Jim. “It would seem the assumption was premature.”

The captain was frowning at the man, his face set in that expression that came over him whenever he
was deeply ruminating a problem. “Were they like this when you first came here?”

The man gave a stiff nod. “Warlike, yes. But not vicious. That started when the Nazi movement
began. It was only a few years ago.”

“That would coincide with the time of John Gill’s arrival.” Spock realised aloud. Jim nodded slowly
in agreement.

The man wrapped his hands tighter around the bars of the holding cell. “When they’ve destroyed us
here, they’ll attack our planet. They’ll use the technology we gave them. The danger is that taking
life is so repugnant to our people I’m afraid we’ll go down without a struggle.” The man paused, and
an emotion Spock couldn’t accurately decipher flitted across his face. “But after what I saw in the
street today, I think I could kill.”

A sudden hush fell over the three of them in the wake of the man’s words. Spock quietly
contemplated them, and although he had no personal experience attempting to survive for years
during an authoritarian regime, he had read intensively about them. He knew how prisoners were
treated by their guards, how the powerless were beaten by the powerful, and how too many beings
had perished at the hands of those who believed their truth to be the universal reality. From a
completely logical standpoint it would make sense for a captive to show animosity towards their
captor, but Spock couldn’t understand the degree of hatred held towards them, and so he could not
sympathise with the man’s words.
The atmosphere in the holding cell had grown stifling, and after a moment Jim stood up, and, looked around the room and loudly asked, “Do you know the plan of this building?”

“Why?” The man frowned.

“If we can get to the S.S. Weapons Laboratory, get our weapons back, we might be able to stop the slaughter of the Zeons.” Jim approached Spock with purpose. “We must get our communicators and contact the ship.”

“I must point out, captain, the flaw in the plan is this locked door and the guard beyond it. To the logical mind, the outlook is somewhat gloomy.”

In response Jim held up his bound wrists. “The transponders.”

Spock’s eyes dawned with realisation. “Yes…”

The captain then looked to light bulb in their cell. “And the way to shed some light on the gloom, Mr. Spock.”

“Of course. The rubindium crystals in the transponders.” Spock murmured, having caught up Jim’s rapid mind process. Another dazzling display of the man’s intelligence. Spock was positive he would never cease to be amazed by it in action, regardless of his doubts before their many missions together.

Jim removed the mattress from the makeshift cot and pulled out one of the thin, malleable metals laced together to create the base. Using the piece he slit a small opening in Spock’s forearm and eased out the transponder, and when done Spock repeated the action on the captain. Jim took both transponders and gently placed them on each end of the thin metal, firmly pressing them in so that they wouldn’t shift.

“You have the figures computed, Mr. Spock?” He asked, having expected Spock to have already figured out the range they’d need to succeed with their plan. He was not incorrect.

“Yes. It will be necessary to hold the crystals rigidly at a specific distance which I believe should be 27.2 millimetres.” Spock took the metal piece from the captain and held it as calculated the measurement. “27.2 millimetres would be approximately… there. That is, of course, a crude estimation.”

“What is it you’re making there, some kind of radio?” The man interrupted curiously.

“No, not a radio.” Jim murmured, going to stand under the lightbulb. “The power from that light is very low.”

“Yes, to reach that light I will require some sort of platform.” Spock noted.

“I would be honoured, Mr. Spock.” Jim said in an exaggerated voice. He then dropped to his knees and offered Spock his back as purchase. Spock spared a thought for the still open wound son Jim’s back, then gingerly stepped up, careful to avoid the cuts so as to not hurt the captain. His legs were shaky as he attempted to get a good grip on his balance.

“Now, the rubindium crystals should find enough power here to achieve a necessary stimulus. As I recall from the history of physics the ancient lasers were able to achieve the necessary excitation even using crude natural crystals.”

“Oh, Mr. Spock,” Jim bit out tersely. “The guard did a very professional job on my back, I would
appreciate it if you would hurry.”

“Yes, of course, captain.” Spock apologised. He was about to proceed, but faltered as he felt it necessary to inform Jim, “You realise that the aim will, of course, be very crude.”

Spock felt the man’s body trembling beneath his foot holding. “I don’t care if you hit the broad side of a barn.” Jim said through clenched teeth.

Spock frowned. “Captain, why should I aim at such a structure?”

“Never mind, Spock, just get on with the job.” The captain bit out in a hurried hiss.

Spock moved quickly, bending the metal piece until the measurement was as precise as could be, then positioned it by the lightbulb. He attempted to aim it exactly at the cell door’s look, and after mere moments the light from the bulb bounced off from the rubindium crystals in the metal bit and burst open the lock.

“Beautiful.” Jim breathed, then suddenly winced. “Spock, get off me, get off me now.”

Spock felt the captain falter beneath him and hastily jumped off the man’s back. Jim pulled himself up on shaky legs, breathing erratic as sweat dripped from his forehead and chest. It appeared that holding up Spock’s weight had been more of a struggle than the man had let on, and Spock felt guilt burgeoning up in him. His reaction was quickly pushed aside however when Jim pointed at a direction beyond the cell door, and Spock instantly followed the silent order. They had reached a certain level of their relationship where they could communicate with one another without many exchanges of words, which was extremely efficient in situations like this. Spock pushed through the cell door and plastered himself against the wall on the other side, out of sight from anyone who passed through the dungeons’ one entrance and exit.

“I’ll cause a commotion.” Jim explained, then cleared his throat before bellowing, “Help! Help! I’ll talk! I can’t stand it anymore! I’ll talk! Guard!”

The guard rushed into the room, and just as soon as he passed Spock’s hiding place Spock reached out and Vulcan nerve pinched them. The soldier toppled to the ground, and Spock immediately set about undressing them.

“Take me with you!” The man from the neighbouring cell declared, catching their attention. “Give me a chance to fight them.”

Spock saw revenge simmering in those dark eyes, the wish to harm others just as they’d harmed him clearly at the forefront of the man’s mind. It was a treacherous emotion, revenge; almost as dangerous as hope.

“Captain, I remind you, we did not intend to fight.” Spock told Jim, willing the man to pick up on the severity of their situation. The captain looked to him, worry evident in his expression.

“Take me with you or you’ll never find the laboratory.” The man threatened, effectively dismissing Spock’s comment.

Spock saw how Jim’s expression shifted into one of consideration, internally weighing up his options. After a moment he came to a decision and he looked to Spock. “Take him with us, Mr. Spock. He’s got a point. He’s our guide.”

Jim snatched the keys off of the unconscious guard and handed it over to Spock. Their hands touched during the exchange, a spark of electricity passing between them, but Spock didn’t pay it
much thought. His mind was preoccupied on how he could best defer their new guide from obstructing their escape, if such a scenario came to be.

*

Jim had donned the uniform and promptly ushered Spock and the Zeon man— whose name was Isak— out of the dungeons, pretending that they were his hostages. Isak had led them to the laboratory as promised, and just as soon as the door had shut behind them they began looking around the room for their weapons. They had found the communicators on a workbench, completely disassembled, but there was no sign of the phasers. Spock had begun to re-assemble the communicators as Jim continued his search for the weapons, searching every crook and crevice of the room. He hadn’t been able to locate the phasers, but what he’d found instead was a chart on the wall that described the weapons had been sent to the Gestapo Command Headquarters.

They’d almost been caught by a guard who had walked in during their search, but Isak had knocked them out from behind. He’d proceeded to remove the guard’s uniform, stating that with this disguise they would be able to steal a car and get out of the capital. Spock thought that for someone who claimed his people and planet was entirely peaceful, Isak was an extremely cunning individual.

Spock had been the one to put on the guard’s uniform, and together with Jim they stole a stretcher from the infirmary which they placed Isak onto. This allowed them to freely waltz past the guards stationed at the buildings entrance, using the excuse that Isak was a Zeon spy whose dead body they were going to dump in a wasteland. Spock felt the guards’ eyes on him as they walked off, and he sincerely hoped they wouldn’t be suddenly replaced by bullets. The primitive weaponry of this age truly frightened him.

Thankfully it hadn’t been long until they found a car, and Isak led them to a part of the city that was practically abandoned. He took care to note his surroundings before opening up the lid of a sewer and climbing down, instructing Jim and Spock to follow him. With a quick glance to one another, they did just that. They’d trailed after Isak as he silently slid down the ladder until he reached the base of the sewer, then headed off further until reaching a tube large enough for a grown man to crawl through. Spock and Jim had been hot on Isak’s heel through the tube, and once they emerged through the other side it was only to be faced with the barrel of a gun. Spock immediately froze, his muscles seizing up in terror.

Isak’s hand suddenly shoved the gun away. “It’s okay, Davod. They helped me escape from the prison. I owe them my life.”

The individual holding the gun slowly lowered their weapon, though suspicion remained in their light eyes. Spock and Jim got up from their where they were still on all fours, carefully dusting off the dirt on their uniforms.

“Isak, what is all this?” A voice asked from behind, and all four of them whirled around to find an older, blond man dressed in khaki trousers and a blue pullover. His skin was tanned, but his face weathered, indicating he had spent far more time under the sun’s rays than was appropriate. Isak strode up to the man and enveloped him in strong hug, and Spock quickly glanced at Jim. Apparently it was another ally. Hopefully.

“Abrom, thank God you’re well.” He whispered reverently, then pulled the man back towards Jim and Spock. He gestured towards the blond man and told them, “This is my brother, Abrom. And these men, they were in the prison with me, beaten as I was.”

Spock saw Abrom fully look at them, an assessing glance travelling over him and Jim. “Why were you in that prison?”
Jim was the one to answer truthfully. “I was trying to see the Führer.”

“The Führer?” Abrom repeated, eyebrows furrowing. Clearly the captain’s words hadn’t filled him with any sense of calm. If anything, it had fanned his suspicion of them.

“If I can see him there may be a way of stopping this insanity.” Jim explained.

Isak turned to his brother with an imploring look. “Abrom, I owe them my life.”

Abrom’s eyes hadn’t strayed from Jim since he’d spoken, his gaze roaming over the captain for a second time. Spock thought he would have felt the same anxiousness from when they were confronted by the Nazi soldiers, but that didn’t seem to be the case. Whereas in the presence of the Nazis he had feared for his life, unsure what the outcome of he and Jim’s actions would be, in this situation he felt calmer. Perhaps it was somewhat due to Isak who vouched for them even though they were strangers, whereas the Nazis had specifically persecuted them because they were strangers. How intriguing that two planets so close to one another could have such different mind sets.

After a long moment Abrom glanced at Isak, and something in his expression changed. “Isak… Uletta is dead.”

The kind look on Isak’s face instantly melted away, his entire being falling numb. “No…”

Abrom gave a nod, his eyes hardening. “She lived for five hours while they walked past her and spat on her. Our own people were unable to help her. Now you ask me to help strangers.” He finished with a pointed look at Spock and Jim.

Abrom’s distrust was understandable, but this was one of the few times where Spock didn’t wish to see circumstances from another’s point of view. If he and Jim were ordered to be forcibly removed from this hideout, Spock would refuse and dig his heels into the ground. Above them there were Nazis patrolling the streets of the city, ostracizing anyone different from and dragging them to the dungeons to be tortured, and Spock would not abandon the safety of these sewers if it meant he would be back amongst such a vicious race.

The intensity of alarm was surprising even to himself. Spock had experienced simulated torture techniques before at the hands of his own creation, and knew in vast detail the horrid methods used by Klingon soldiers as documented by surviving Starfleet officers. However, there was an indescribable quality about the Nazis that frightened him to his deepest core. It lay in their ideology, in their pursuits, and their complete and utter trust to follow a leader. Not a leader who preached unity, or the hope for a brighter future for all, but one who spoke of a single superior species, and wished to eradicate all races that weren’t their own. The fact that none of the followers from Old Earth’s history had thought to stop and question the ethicalness in their leader’s words, had thought to look into their motives and ask whether this hatred that was being spewed was right or not, shook Spock greatly.

How he hated witnessing history repeat itself.

His internal panic was interrupted by Isak’s toneless voice. “They saved my life. Such a deed has to be repaid.”

Spock’s eyes darted over the man as he took account him, noticing the drooping of his shoulders and sudden lifeless energy. It was clear Isak was tremendously affected by the death of this Uletta person, yet despite his grief he was gracious enough to offer them, mere strangers, sanctuary. It was very much at odds with the Isak Spock had witnessed in the holding cell, one who yearned for revenge for being so brutally beaten by his captors.
But he couldn’t waste much time debating the ongoing shifts in Isak’s behaviour, not when there were more important matters at hand to tend to. Spock turned to Jim and whispered, “Captain. I suggest the most profitable use of our time would be to reassemble our communicators. May I work undisturbed somewhere?”

The silence hanging around them had done little to ensure that Spock’s words reached Jim’s ears only, Abrom glancing over at him at the question. There was a tense moment where nobody spoke, then Abrom quietly announced, “This way.”

* *

Abrom had lent them a small table with tools to use, and Spock made sure to bow his head deeply as he paid the man his thanks. Abrom had given him and Jim a last glance before walking off, his footsteps echoing in the hideout. He and the captain had been left in complete silence, and the atmosphere persisted as they went about working together to repair the communicators. With hard and meticulous work they had managed to use their two devices to forge a single, functional communicator, capable of reaching the Enterprise once it was within range, which was just over an hour from now.

They had just been about to test out its features when all of a sudden three soldiers with guns had shown up, herding with them Abrom, Davod and Isak who had their arms raised above their heads. The weapons were aimed at their backs, and the grim expressions on their faces told Spock exactly what had occurred.

They had been caught.

His heartbeat soared suddenly, thumping against his side so loudly he was honestly shocked no one else appeared to hear it. He had never before been as aware of his heartbeat as he was now. This mission was definitely taking a toll on him, driving him weary from all these bursts of negative emotions.

One of the individuals holding a pistol was a blonde lady rounding the back of the captives, and it took Spock a split second to recognise her.

“The woman on the viewscreen.” He uttered, locking eyes with Jim. “The one receiving the medal.”

Daras.

“Hands in the air, Zeon swine.” The woman barked, aiming her weapon at them. Jim and Spock acted accordingly, slowly raising their arms over their heads. Daras’ eyes darted between the two of them. “So you’re the three who escaped from the Chancellery Detention Centre. What was your plan? Speak. It’s the last chance you’ll get.”

Jim’s expression tightened, and he told the woman the same words he’d told everyone else who’d asked. “I must see the Führer. It’s urgent.”

“Urgent?” Daras repeated in a deceptively sweet tone. “I’ll bet it is.”

Abrom roughly slid into the exchange. “I alone am responsible for what happens here.”

Daras peered over her shoulder, eyes cold and calculating. “Do you know what we do to responsible Zeons?”

There was a beat of silence, then she whirled around and shot Abrom in the chest. Isak let out a shout as his brother dropped to the ground, head falling back as he fell limp. Spock’s heart was
suddenly in his throat, but Jim wasted no time being shocked by the turn of events. He lunged forward in an attempt to break the pistol away from her, but one of her accomplices pressed their gun against him. Jim froze up, then carefully stepped back, frustration clear on his face.

“Now we finish the job.” Daras hummed, moving closer to Jim. A small smile curled at the edge of her lips.

“Where do you stop, you Nazis?” Isak bit out through clenched teeth, rage emanating from every inch of his being. Daras slowly turned around to face him, and Spock and Jim instantly locked eyes, an unvoiced plan brewing between them. “After you’ve killed the last of us, what do you do? Turn the guns against yourselves?”

Quicker than lightning Jim grabbed a hold of Daras’ arm and pulled it sharply behind her back, bracing his other arm over her front. Spock followed the captain’s cue and fluidly extract pistol from her hand only to aim it at the side of her temple.

All of a sudden the power hold had been flipped, and they were the ones in control. Daras’ accomplices stilled, all of them sporting similar looks of horror. This turn of events was very much in their favour, and Spock was certain that if they bargained Daras’ life correctly, he and Jim, along with the Zeons, would be able to escape with their lives intact. It was therefore a great surprise when Isak was the one to dart forward with his hands raised in a placating manner.

“No, don’t shoot, please.” He pleaded. His entire demeanour had changed. Gone was the tense, angry man who was spitting piercing words at Daras not a moment ago, and in his place was… this.

Spock chanced a quick peek at Jim and saw that he looked just as perplexed as Spock felt.

He was startled out of his confusion by the deep voice hailing from Abrom’s dead body. “No, wait.”

Spock watched in bewilderment as the man carefully rose from the ground until finally he was stood fully on his two feet. The man appeared just the same as Spock remembered from their initial meeting, but the stained blood soaking into his shirt was also very much present.

Abrom’s gaze drifted over to Isak, and he declared, “You’ve proved they’re on our side.”

* It had been a test. They had needed to be absolutely certain that Jim and Spock weren’t Nazis, or would betray them during any circumstance. Daras, an Ekosian, was apparently a part of the Zeon underground rebellion movement. She had explained that she was rewarded a medal for turning her father, who used to be close to the Führer, in to the Nazi party. The idea had not been her own, but her father’s. He had seen early on signs of the rising Nazi regime, and turned against the party which lead to his imprisonment, and then his death by the orders of Melakon, the Deputy Führer. Before his passing her father had publicly denounced Daras, making it appear as though she had betrayed him, and that was the only reason she was still arrive today. Her father had stood up for something he believed in, and in the process sacrificed his own life to save that of his daughter.

Upon hearing the story Jim had shook his head, wondering how all of this could have possibly seemed right to John Gill. The Zeons had inquired as to who the man Jim spoke of was, to which the captain had explained it was the Führer, and accidentally let slip that the man was ‘one of their people’. The phrase had of course prompted another series of questions, and Jim was forced to reveal to the group the reason behind his and Spock’s presence on Ekos. During the captain’s reiteration Spock noticed that the man put strong emphasis on the fact that John Gill had come to the planet as a culture observer, and not to interfere. It seemed Jim was subconsciously attempting to put his past
teacher in a positive light, though considering his current situation on Ekos, Spock thought it to be a futile effort.

When Jim segued into his need to meet the Führer he had been told by Daras that it was impossible since he was under maximum security, and saw no one else but his trusted Melakon. However, he was set to make a speech tonight from the Chancellery, an event to which all the top party officials would be present at, including Daras. That, and that only, would be their only chance to get to meet the Führer.

*

It felt as if all their time on Ekos had been them performing one deceitful plan after another, and their way of skulking into the Chancellery event was no different. He, Jim, and Isak had all donned Nazi uniforms once more, Isak having borrowed one from Daras’ men in order to join them in infiltrating the event. Despite Abrom’s wishes that he remain behind in the underground, Isak had insisted he be a part of the mission. Spock had a hunch the man was still fuelled by his need for revenge, but hoped that with the combined presence of him, Jim, Daras, and an entire building full of Nazi soldiers, Isak would curb his vindictiveness.

The three men had armed themselves with video camera equipment, and proceeded to follow Daras’ every move around the building, informing those that asked that they were cameramen for the Führer’s Special Documentary Corps, and Daras was to be the subject of their most recent creation. The explanation had allowed them to sneak around the event undisturbed, the majority of attendees ignoring them in favour of mingling with the others. There were a few who had cast curious glances their way, but once their curiosity had been sated they’d return to the event once more.

“Captain, I’m beginning to understand why you Earthmen enjoy gambling.” Spock had whispered to Jim, pretending to angle the moonlight on Daras. “No matter how carefully one computes the odds of success, there is still a certain exhilaration in the risk.”

Jim had peered back at Spock, and muttered in an amused tone. “Very good, Spock. We may make a Human of you yet.”

Spock frowned. “I hope not.”

Jim let out a huff of laughter, but forewent starting up a bout of playful banter between them in favour of following Daras into a large room. It was filled to the brim of people dressed in the same drab uniforms, huddled up in groups and chattering away with one another. The sight was entirely at odds with the bright, colourful Starfleet issued uniforms on the Enterprise, and Spock suddenly felt himself longing to be back on the ship. His stomach tightened as he browsed the room, realising that they were now in the deep midst of the event. With trembling hands Spock trailed after Daras as she slowly walked around the edge of the room, attempting to convincingly play his role as a camera crewmember.

“Where does the Führer enter?” Jim asked Daras in a hushed tone.

“He doesn’t.” Daras said through a false smile. “They watch him on the big screen. There, at the end of the room.” She finished with a nod towards the end of the room with drawn curtains. “He broadcasts from the booth for security.”

One of the attendees looked as if they were approaching them, and so Jim acted accordingly by stepping back and loudly ordering, “Bring that light to the side of her face.” He then pretended to zoom in on Daras face, and lowered his voice to a hush. “Where’s the entrance to the broadcast booth?”
Daras smiled sweetly directly into Jim’s camera. “There, at the end of the corridor.”

Jim stepped around Daras, angling his camera under the false pretence of getting a good shot when in actuality he was assessing the area she had motioned towards. There, at the end of the corridor, was the entrance to the broadcast booth, two guards posted at each side with guns in their hands. A shudder passed through Spock. Every time he saw those savage weapons an uneasy feeling would come over him.

“You’re not actually going to get into the broadcast booth.” Daras spoke out of the corner of her mouth.

“We’re gonna try.” Jim murmured.

“Sir, is this light a little higher, better here?” Isak announced as he lifted his monolight a little higher, then leaned in to mutter, “If we distract the guard, I can get a machine gun. It’s a small booth, I can shoot through the door.”

Jim’s tone brooked no arguments when he responded. “We’re here to get John Gill, and alive, not for your personal satisfaction. Is that clear?” With that he turned to Daras with a smile and loudly announced, “Let’s try down there.”

The group made their way towards the guards posted at the entrance, and Jim aimed his camera right into their faces. “Gentlemen, this is for the record of the Führer’s Final Solution speech.”

It was a decent distraction, as the guards seemed to split their focus between the sudden lights in their faces and Daras who engaged them in conversation. Spock took the opportunity to surreptitiously peer through the hinges of the door. There, inside the room, he spotted the very man they were seeking. John Gill was sat at his desk looking unnaturally stiff, almost unmoving. Even his eyes were shut, and his head was hanging forward. It was most curious.

Spock glanced at Jim, conveying his meaning that he had seen enough, and the captain immediately began to usher Isak and Daras away. “Let’s get a moving shot down the hall.”

They walked off until all of them had rounded the corner, at which Spock instantly turned to Jim and informed him, “Captain, it was John Gill. But he never moved nor never once looked up.”

“Yes, that may be part of the plan, the semi-divine detachment.” Jim mused, eyebrows furrowing.

Spock hesitated for a second, then revealed, “I believe he may be in a deep psychosis.”

Jim looked at him for a moment, then pursed his lips. “It may be simpler than that. He may be drugged. We need McCoy.” He turned to Daras. “Is there a place, a room we can be alone for a few minutes? I’m going to send for help.”

“Send for?” She echoed.

Jim waved away her question. “It takes too long to explain. Any place will do.”

“The cloak room?” Isak suggested.

*  

Spock had used the makeshift communicator to contact the Enterprise, and although it took several tries they eventually managed once the starship came into close enough range. Jim had instructed Uhura to have McCoy outfitted as a Gestapo doctor from Nazi Germany around Old Earth date 1944
and have him beamed down to their coordinates immediately. They had just finished the transmission when Daras rushed into the room, firmly shutting the door behind her and warning them that Isak had overheard two security men pick up on their broadcast; they had apparently pinpointed that it came from within the building and had begun their search.

Jim and Spock locked eyes, but just at that moment the familiar sound of the transporter beam sounded in the cloakroom, and in the next doctor McCoy was present with them, half-dressed and with his permanent scowl in place. Jim breathed a sigh of relief, and Spock felt the emotion echo deep within him too. Now that the doctor was present, they could proceed with their plan of accosting John Gill.

All of a sudden the door to the cloakroom burst open, and in stormed two soldiers holding guns, as well as the Chariman himself, Eneg.

Spock had frozen up in panic, unable to conjure up a single word or thought at being cornered like an animal by the enemy. Thankfully though, Jim came to his rescue as he was prone to do. The captain flawlessly made up a lie regarding doctor McCoy having had too much to drink, and that they had simple taken him aside into the cloakroom so as to spare the Führer any embarrassment by having a drunkard interrupt his important speech. Eneg’s gaze had slithered over the four of them, causing the hair on the back of Spock’s neck to stand on end, before he told them that they had been right to conceal McCoy. The tension in Spock had eased minutely, but remained until Eneg explained that they were conducting a search for a spy in the building, then left the cloakroom with a ‘hail the Führer’. As soon as the door shut behind them Spock breathed out a sigh of relief, one which did not go unnoticed by the captain.

After a beat of silence Spock ventured, “Well, captain, I do not understand how he failed to recognise us.”

“Nor do I.” Jim murmured, staring at the door with a contemplative expression. “But luck is also something you fail to recognise, Mr. Spock.”


A sudden beeping echoed around their surroundings, and all of the occupants in the room looked around.

“The Führer’s speech.” Daras exclaimed.

* *

The room they found themselves in was akin to a large sea, except that instead of water it was filled with uniformed Ekosians chanting ‘hail the führer’ while raising their hands in the direction of the booth. Spock felt trepidation sink into his bones at hearing their eagerness, but he had to put it aside in favour of following the happenings around him. He scanned the room, and his eyes fell on a giant viewscreen that displayed the image of John Gill at his desk, the quality clear and in colour. There were two Nazi flags behind him, and three microphones set on his desk, one of them strategically placed in front of his mouth so that you couldn’t see it move. That small detail, more than anything, convinced Spock that the man was not in control of himself.

A voice flowed out from the speakers, gravelly and extremely languid. “Ekosians… Ekosians… the job ahead is difficult. It requires courage and dedication. It requires faith.”

The room erupted into loud applause. Spock was shaken by the reaction. He had never seen such pure hatred in play, all the beings in the room actively congratulating a job well done— their job well
done—towards executing genocide. It was deplorable. The claps died down, and Spock forced himself to re-focus on the screen, swallowing around a dry throat.

Spock saw Jim inch towards McCoy and catch his whisper. “Watch his mouth.”

Once more John Gill’s deep voice echoed through the room. “The Zeon colony has existed for nearly half a century. If we fulfil our own greatness that will all be ended. Working together—“

“Captain, the speech follows no logical pattern.” Spock realised suddenly.

“Random sentences strung together.” Jim added, having coming to the same conclusion.

“He looks drugged, Jim.” McCoy voiced. “Almost in a cataleptic state.”

Applause tore through the room again, and the doctor leaned towards Jim and mumbled out of the corner of his mouth, “I’d like to have a close look at him.”

The group quietly weaved their way through the crowd towards the exit, leaving behind the sound of John Gill’s voice resonating through the air as once more applause tore through the room. It was a hardship for Spock to remain focused on getting out of the room, his very being attuned to the danger in the room in form of uniforms. He hurried his steps, finally making it out through the exit and into the hallway where the others were already gathered. Jim threw him a concerned look, but Spock ignored it in favour of steeling himself for the next step. They couldn’t afford any distractions, personal or otherwise.

Still, Jim got close enough to him to ask in a hushed tone, “How’re you feeling, Spock?”

Spock briefly glanced at the captain. “I am well enough to proceed with the mission, Captain.”

A light frown came over Jim’s face, but he didn’t say anything. Instead he turned to the rest of the group and motioned for them to following him. Spock trailed closely behind as the captain strode towards the guards at the booth’s entrance, a wide smile already in place.

“Gentlemen, I want a picture of you two with the hero of the Fatherland listening to the stirring Führer’s speech.” He promptly instructed Spock and Isak to hold their lights in specific ways, then aimed his camera at the guards as Daras stepped in between them.

Jim grinned broadly at them. “Smile, gentlemen, smile.”

In the next instant both men fell to the ground, Spock stood behind them with his fingers expertly clenched on their shoulders.

“Excellent work, Mr. Spock.” Jim complimented, then reached down to procure the keys from one of the guards. He inserted it into the lock and expertly opened it up, the entered the room, the rest of them sneaking after. Spock immediately noticed the viewscreen was curtained once more which meant they were free to move as they pleased.

Chants of ‘Death to Zeon’ filtered through from the other room. The Ekosians sounded devoted, and proud, and Spock wondered if they were at all aware that they were advocating the annihilation of an entire race. Genocide.

McCoy was instantly at John Gill’s side, and when Spock approached he saw that the man was indeed unmoving.

“Definitely drugged. Almost comatose.” McCoy revealed with a stern expression.
“What drug?” Spock prompted.

“I can’t identify it without a medi-comp. Without knowing an antidote might be dangerous.”

Jim walked up behind the doctor. “Is there anything you can do?”

“I can give him a general stimulant, but it would be risky.”

“Take the risk.” Jim ordered immediately.

Spock watched closely as McCoy prepared his hypo and injected the stimulant into John Gill’s arm, the hissing of the hypo overpowered by the muffled words from the other room.

“...but despite our best efforts, they remain like a cancer eating away at our state.”

Spock heard spikes of cheers and jubilant cries, and his stomach clenched. Such unabashed hatred. It was dangerous. It was unnerving. It filled him with fear and a smidgen of rage.

All the occupants in the room watched John Gill closely, awaiting the man to awaken. However, when after several seconds nothing occurred, Isak was the first to speak up.

“There’s no reaction. Whatever you gave him isn’t working.”

“Bones, increase the dosage.” Jim commanded.

“I’m working in the dark. I could kill him.” McCoy snapped back.

Spock picked up on ‘Hail sieg’ erupting through the room again, and he desperately wished to cover his ears.

“If they find us here we’ll all be killed.” Daras shared, worry leaking into her tone.

The dark voice from the other room started up again, speaking slowly so as to enunciate their every word. “Ten minutes ago, on our Führer’s orders, our troops began their historic mission. In the cities, the eliminations have started. Within an hour, the Zeon blight will forever be removed from Ekos.”

Again, cheers of ‘Heil sieg’ tore through the audience. The atmosphere in the office was stifling, a cold feeling of unease settling into them all.

“It’s begun.” Daras said in a quiet voice. “It’s finally begun.”

“He’s reaching a light consciousness.” McCoy noted lowly, and when Spock looked to John Gill he saw the man’s eyes fluttering. “It’s almost like he’s in a light sleep. That’s as much as I dare do.”

“Our entire solar system will forever be rid of the disease that was Zeon.”

Jim looked to Spock and desperately pleaded, “Spock, try to get through to him with the mind probe. If you can’t, Bones, you’ll have to use a stronger stimulant no matter what it does.”

Spock immediately handed over his light equipment to the doctor, then leaned down next to Mr. Gill and placed his fingers on his meld points. He initiated the mind probe as quickly as he dared without damaging either him or Gill in the process, hurriedly moving things around until he could access the language centre of his brain. He made a few quick adjustments that would allow the man to hear and comprehend Standard, as well as reply to the best of his ability with the drugs in his system. Spock then came out of the mind probe, his head rushing from the speed of it.
“Captain.” He uttered the one word, and Jim was instantly at his side. “I’ve created a condition in which Gill cannot initiate speech or any other action, but he can reply to questions.”

“Well done, Spock,” Jim complimented with a grateful smile thrown his way. It was short-lived, however, as in the next moment it eased into a worried look directed at John Gill. “They’ve kept what’s left of him as a figurehead.”

“Quite correct. For the last few years, the real power has been Melakon.” Spock shared.

Jim didn’t appear to be entirely surprised by the information. He crouched down in front of John Gill, staring up at the man as his head drooped forward. “Gill. Gill, why did you abandon your mission? Why did you interfere with this culture?”

The anticipation in the room was palpable, and after a brief moment of silence, the man answered in breathed responses. “Planet… fragmented… divided… Took lesson from… Earth history…”

Jim inched forward, his frown deepening. “But why Nazi Germany? You studied history. You knew what the Nazis were.”

“Most efficient… state… Earth ever knew.”

“Quite true, captain.” Spock interjected, gaze focused on John Gill’s form. “That tiny country, beaten, bankrupt, defeated, rose in a few years to stand only one step away from global domination.”

“But it was brutal. Perverted.” Jim spat out harshly. “It had to be destroyed at a terrible cost. Why that example?”

Spock had no concrete reply for the captain, and so he settled on speculation. “Perhaps Gill felt that such a state, run benignly, could accomplish its efficiency without sadism.”

“Worked.” Jim’s attention jumped back to John Gill. His eyes remained closed, but his mouth moved slowly. “At first… it worked… then Melakon… began takeover… used… gave me the drug.”

Gradually the man’s head began to tip back, and Jim was instantly on his feet. “Gill.” When there was no immediate reply, the captain shook the chair lightly, attempting to wake the man. “Gill, can you hear me? You’ve got to tell those people what happened. You’re the only one who can prevent the slaughter! Gill!”

McCoy pulled Jim away from the man and took his place. “He’s still alive, but the drug they used is too strong. If I give him another shot—“

“Bones, give him another shot.”

“I don’t dare!” McCoy growled back.

Something dark set in Jim’s face, but before he could act any further Isak broke up the tense atmosphere by hastily announcing, “Guards.”

Jim grabbed the doctor by the sleeve and dragged him up to his face. Spock was shocked at the sudden violent act, and it was furthered when the captain snarled into his CMO’s face, “Bones, give him another shot.”

“I don’t dare!” McCoy growled back.

Jim’s gaze darted to the door, and there was something wild in those blue eyes. “We’ve run out of time, Bones.” He dropped the doctor and picked up the gun, traipsing towards the door before swirling around and instead thrusting the weapon into Daras’ hands. “Aim it at Spock. Spock, take off your helmet.”
Spock did as he was instructed, caught between feeling alarm at the captain’s current state, and rising fear at the prospect of guards. Jim startled Spock when he suddenly reached forward and grabbed him by the lapels, but he didn’t have time to react as just that moment the door opened, and in stepped Eneg flanked by two soldiers.

“For the second time in one day, Daras is a hero to the Fatherland.” Isak declared loudly, catching their attention.

“She captured a Zeon spy that was attempting to assassinate the Führer.” Jim added on, his gaze boring into Spock. Eneg wasted no time instruct his guards to seize Spock, grabbing him by the arm on each side. The captain stepped back and allowed the soldiers to tend to their business, eyes never leaving his first officer’s. “We’ll make a present of him to Eneg.”

Isak faced the chairman and urged, “Chairman Eneg, this spy must be taken to Melakon.”

A tense silence descended over the room as Eneg looked considering, and with every second that passed Spock was become more and more convinced the request would be denied. Eventually though, Eneg declared, “Pass them on my responsibility.”

Spock was led out of the Führer’s office and dragged back into the room filled with the soldiers, the attendees in high spirits after Melokan’s speech. He was thrust before the man himself, who turned to look Spock over with a lazy gaze.

“What is this?” He asked.

“A spy, Excellency.” A voice replied, and Spock identified it as belonging to Isak. So he was not entirely alone in facing the Deputy Führer. In the next second Daras stepped into view, smiling at Melokan before drifting over to Spock.

“A rare prize.” She announced charmingly. “The Deputy Führer can see this is not ordinary Zeon.”

Melokan frowned at Spock, and his eyes trailed over his form until they landed on his pointed ears. “Not a Zeon, definitely not.”

“The Deputy Führer is an authority on the genetics of racial purity.” Daras said, then turned to Spock. “How would you classify this one?”

“Very difficult.” Melokan hummed. He slowly began circling Spock, his gaze travelling over every inch of him. It was an extremely uncomfortable sensation, and Spock was having trouble not twitching where he stood. “Note the sinister eyes… and the malformed ears. Definitely an inferior race.”

One of Spock’s eyebrows rose at the comments. The man’s tone had a pretentious edge to it, one which he did not care for. It grated on Spock’s nerves, but the man was entirely clueless to his thoughts as he continued to step around him.

“The dull look of a trapped animal.” Melokan noted. Spock had to admit the man was not fully wrong in that instance. He did feel trapped, but he was nowhere near dull. Melokan came to a halt before him, his light eyes staring straight at Spock. “You may take him now for interrogation.”

Once more hands grabbed at his arms, holding him so tightly it was near painful. The soldiers began to drag Spock away, but they faltered in their steps when Melokan called after them, “But I want his body saved for the Cultural Museum. He’ll make an interesting display.”

All of a sudden a deep voice floated out the speakers and echoed through the room. “People…
people… of Ekos.”

The attendees in the room looked around until their gazes landed on the source, the now active viewscreen where John Gill was currently displayed on. Spock noticed the man was holding the microphone in his hand, unlike last time where it had obstructed his mouth. His eyes continued to flutter, and his speech was still sluggish, but he had recovered greatly from his catatonic state.

Melokan’s eyes were glued on the screen, clearly not having expected the Führer he played like a puppet to appear. His tone was short and abrupt as he ordered, “Go to the booth. See to the Führer at once, he’s ill.” The guard made as if to go, but Melokan quickly grabbed him by the shirt and added, “Turn off that camera.”

“Hear me.” Gill’s breathy voice spoke.

Melokan’s eyes frantically darted around the room, fear clearly settling into him. Still, he attempted to handle the situation with false bravado, and announced to the room, “I suggest we leave and let our Führer rest.”

He motioned towards the exit, and Spock saw people leave their drinks on tables as they made to follow the Deputy Führer. However, Gill’s voice caused them to pause.

“We were betrayed by a self-seeking adventurer who has led us all to the very brink of disaster. I order the immediate recall of the space fleet. This attack must stop.”

The attendees looked to each other in confusion. Their leader’s words had shaken their confidence. How blindly they had followed a figure they admired, and now, how quickly they reconsidered when said figure instructed them to. They only thought whatever their leader told them to think. It was a terrifying notion.

“All units are to return to base.” Gill went on, and after a moment’s hesitation people began leaving the room, presumably obeying the man’s orders. Spock saw Melokan bite his lip, frustration colouring his face. “To Zeon, I promise… this was not an aggression of the Ekosian people, only one evil man.”

Spock was aware of what the next words would be before they were uttered.

Gill’s voice reverberated through the room, loud and clear. “Melakon is a traitor to his own people, and all that we stand for.”

Suddenly all eyes in the room were directed at the Deputy Führer.

Spock felt as if he could physically see the calculations taking place in their heads, their opinions being changed and formed; so malleable were they to their leader’s words.

Gill’s voice lazily drawled on, announcing, “To the Zeon people… I promise reparation.”

It was those final words that caused Melokan to break. Spock saw it in the sudden flinch, then resignation, followed by the man reaching out and grabbing a gun from a close by guard. Spock knew what was coming, but he was too slow to act. Melokan aimed the weapon at the viewscreen and fired, the bullet splintering the glass, and all of a sudden the transmission ended.

Spock stared at the screen, taking in the image of John Gill’s body stretched back in the chair, limp and lifeless. He could already see the red of his blood seep into his uniform, colouring it a rich, deep shade. He had been killed. But the Führer’s death wouldn’t save Melokan.
He had already been outed, labelled a traitor of Ekos, and the leader’s last words had been that he receive judgement at the hands of the people he betrayed.

Inwardly, Spock felt a smidgen of empathy for Isak, and how he wouldn’t be the one to take his torturer’s life on behalf of his lost, fellow Zeons.

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Spock may not have been paying close attention to Jim during their mission. He’d thought the man was controlled and displaying his leadership skills brilliantly, but once they’d beamed back onto the Enterprise he realised that he hadn’t been very attentive on Ekos.

As soon as they materialised back on the starship, Spock felt his entire body sing with relief. All that time planetside he’d been coiled with tension, the events of the mission not bringing him a single minute of relaxation. Now, however, aboard the Enterprise, he knew he was safe from any harm. He knew he could fall back into his normal schedule as naturally as breathing. He was at ease now.

Jim was not at ease. Ever since their return he’d been a bit different. He held himself with stiffness, his replies were curter and his smiles didn’t quite reach his eyes. Sometimes Spock would catch the captain staring at him, but as soon as he looked back Jim would avert his gaze. Spock had asked if the captain was unwell on several occasions, and each time he’d firmly assured Spock there was nothing wrong with him. It was very difficult to take his words as anything other than a lie when his body language betrayed him, but Spock had to accept Jim’s answers. The man was clearly reluctant to talk about himself, and Spock could never predict Jim’s emotional reactions whenever they attempted a personal discussion.

The captain had also become more irritable and short with those around him, but would always immediately apologise for his behaviour. Although many ensigns and crewmembers accepted Jim’s words, they were, like Spock, extremely curious about the man’s change in attitude. As far as they knew, nothing had off put the man recently, and when they asked Spock if anything had upset Jim on Ekos, he couldn’t offer them a solid answer.

It was entirely possible that Jim had been affected by the events down on Ekos and he simply hadn’t noticed, but he’d like to think he was more observant than that. Surely he would’ve known if the captain had begun behaving stranger than usual when they were on their mission. In all honesty, Spock didn’t know. He’d been so bundled up in his own fear that he couldn’t recall in great detail how Jim had acted on Ekos. He remembered he had taken the lead on many of their plans, had thought on his feet, and had… had been tortured.

The memory still bothered Spock, more than he thought it would. He’d never been tortured in that manner before, and neither had Jim. He wondered if perhaps that was the reason behind the captain’s change in behaviour. Spock didn’t know the captain near well enough to decipher what was bothering him, but he did know of a certain doctor who might be willing to share some details if in a good mood.

Of course, McCoy was more than happy to have Spock in his office.

“What the hell are you doing here?”

“I am well, Doctor. How are you faring?”

McCoy leaned back in his chair and emitted a sigh. “Mountains and mountains of datawork to get through. I spy a fun few hours in my near future.”
Unable to give a suitable reply, Spock simply nodded. “I wish to speak to you regarding the captain.”

“Jim? What about him?”

“He has been acting… unusual.”

“No shit.” McCoy huffed. “He’s been damn reserved lately, always keeping to himself.”

“Why is that?” Spock inquired, his curiosity making itself known.

“Why’d you want to know?” McCoy shot back with narrowed eyes.

“I am…” Spock trailed off, unsure as to how to go on.

McCoy raised an eyebrow in return. “You are…?” He prompted.

Spock straightened himself up. “I simply wish to know what the cause behind his change in behaviour is, and if I can in any way aid him in recovery.”

“I see.” McCoy drawled, peering at Spock through his green-brown eyes. “That’s mighty kind of you, Spock.”

“As first officer it is my duty to ensure the captain is functioning at optimum capacity.” Spock told him primly.

“Sure,” McCoy returned. “As if you’ll fool me with that Vulcan remix of ‘I care about Jim’.” Spock opened his mouth to retort the man’s accusation, but was cut off before he’d even begun. “I can’t tell you personally what the guy’s going through since it’s not my story to tell, but if you were to show up on his doorstep with a bottle of Romulan ale he might be inclined to talk.”

Spock frowned. “You mean for me to manipulate the captain into revealing information while he is inebriated?”

McCoy rolled his eyes. “Why’d you have to make everything sound so damn illegal. No, you’re not going to take advantage of him, you’re just going to offer him a gift. If he asks you to stay, which I’m pretty sure he will, you stay. Jim won’t be doing it because he feels he needs to extend an invitation because you brought him ale, but because he wants company. Even if that company can’t get drunk on alcohol in the same way Humans can.”

“I see.” Spock murmured. “Unfortunately your plan has a flaw, as I am not currently in possession of any Romulan ale.”

At this the doctor held up a single finger, then reached beneath his desk and pulled out a bottle. He held it out for Spock to take, a smirk playing at his lips.

“Ah. Thank you.” Spock uttered, carefully taking the bottle. He turned it over and saw that it was Romulan ale. He wasn’t sure he wished to know why the doctor had one so close at hand, and especially not why he had one hidden directly below his desk.

The man lips stretched into a toothy smile. “You’re welcome. Now get out, I need to finish this damn datawork.”

* 

As soon as Jim saw Spock was the one behind his door his eyebrows rose high on his forehead.
“Uh…” He said intelligently. Clearly he hadn’t been expecting Spock’s presence.

“I have brought alcohol.” Spock said without preamble, holding out the bottle McCoy had gifted him. He saw Jim’s eyes jump down to the bottle, then a moment later he huffed out a laugh.

“Thanks?” He said, accepting the bottle. “This is really nice of you, Spock?”

“It was doctor McCoy’s suggestion that I gift you it.” Spock explained, and Jim’s face cleared with understanding.

“Bones set you up to this, huh?” His lips quirked up, but yet again, the smile didn’t reach his eyes. It bothered Spock immensely, and he didn’t know why. Jim should be smiling all the time.

“It is a gift from the both of us.” He wasn’t sure if it was, but he didn’t want to eliminate McCoy’s involvement. It had indeed been successful in getting Jim to converse with him, and as of yet he hadn’t been snappish or rude.

“Well, thank you both very much.” Jim said with a small nod. Silence descended over them and stretched out. The atmosphere in the room became slightly awkward, and Spock thought now would be a good time to initiate the second part of the doctor’s plan.

“I hope you will enjoy your gift, Captain.” Spock nodded, and turned on his heels, slowly making his way towards the exit.

He was three paces away from the door when Jim called out. “Spock.”

Spock faltered in his steps and turned to Jim. “Yes, Captain?”

Jim looked hesitant, worry evident in the crease of his forehead. After a moment he quietly asked, “Would you mind staying?”

McCoy’s plan had been successful. Spock had achieved his end goal, and it took less than five minutes. Indeed, the doctor was a lot more perceptive to human behaviour than his grumpy persona let on.

Spock inclined his head. “Of course, Captain.”

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“You ever heard of Tarsus, Spock?” Jim inquired lazily.

Spock’s gaze flickered up to the captain, then back to the board. They’d spent their time together playing games of chess while Jim had made full use of his gift. He didn’t consume the alcohol rapidly as Spock had seen him do with other beverages, but sipped on it while leisurely keeping up his end of the conversation. Jim provided more than half of the chat between them, Spock still finding himself out of depths when it came to recreational alone time with the captain, but occasionally he would find himself drawn into some interesting debates.

Jim was by no means unintelligent, even if Spock had been entirely of a different belief prior to the five-year mission. It was comforting in a sense, to sit back and simply talk with Jim outside of their work. There was a sense of safety when they were on shift, knowing exactly how to work with one another, but in situations like this they were still feeling each other out. It was a learning process, and even though Spock didn’t agree with everything Jim had to say, he found the man to be entertaining.

It had been quite the surprise when he found out that Jim owned a chessboard, and even more so
when the man revealed his love for the game began early on in his childhood. Spock, too, had discovered his passion for the game at a young age, and he had asked Jim if he wished to play. The captain had pounced on the offer, promising to utterly obliterate Spock with his wild strategies. Spock hadn’t paid heed to the warnings, thinking them to be empty talk, but soon after they’d begun their game he realised that Jim hadn’t been spouting nonsense. He was a strong player, but an unexpected one. His strategies were non-existent, and he moved about the board in such a haphazard manner that it constantly kept Spock on his toes. It was a struggle to stay two steps ahead of the man, though granted, extremely exhilarating.

Spock had lost the first game by a small margin, and had right away asked the captain for a rematch which he’d accepted with a wide grin. Their second game wasn’t as thrilling as their first due the alcohol making Jim more loose-limbed and impulsive. He’d been steadily sipping at the Romulan ale while keeping up the bulk of the conversation, periodically refilling his glass whenever it emptied. His words would sometimes slur together, but it wasn’t so incoherent that Spock was unable to comprehend what Jim was saying.

They’d been midway through their second game when Spock realised that the alcohol was affecting Jim more than he thought. His posture was more lax and open, and he would occasionally hum a tune while contemplating his next move. Spock had irrationally believed that even under the influence of alcohol Jim might continue to be an extremely proficient player, but that notion was quickly dashed as they played on. The more Jim drank the more he ignored the game, leading Spock to an easy victory. The captain had congratulated him on his win, and although Spock had thanked him, the success hadn’t felt very satisfying.

Still, he’d accepted the offer for a third game when Jim requested it, finding himself enjoying their time together despite the lack of conversation on his part. It was simple, and Spock eased himself further into a state of calm as Jim executed terrible move after terrible move on the chessboard. Fifteen minutes of their game had passed when Jim asked the question.

Spock attempted to calculate the repercussions of his next move while steadily answering Jim’s inquiry. “Tarsus is a planet located in the Molian Galaxy, and is the third in line from the—“

“No, no. I mean Tarsus IV.” Jim corrected, then hiccupped. “Sorry.”

Spock paused and looked at him fully. “I know of it.”

“The massacre too?” The captain asked, tilting his head to the side.

Everyone knew of the massacre on Tarsus IV. It had been an outrage when the details had been revealed, shocking everyone in the Federation and outside of it. It smeared their name, and they lost massive credibility for not having acted sooner against Kodos, the man who sought to eliminate half of Tarsus IV’s population. Kodos had vehemently defended his actions in the way only a madman could defend their murdering ways. He’d reiterated his belief that what he’d done was for the greater good, and that he’d saved countless lives. He blamed his choices on the virus that poisoned the planet’s grain, making it impossible to sustain any life.

He’d realised only half of the colony would be able to survive, and in order for that to happen the other half would need to die. He had been the one to make the crucial decision of which ones lived, and which ones died; and in his logical mind, the poor had to perish. Not once had it occurred to Kodos to contact the Federation and ask for assistance, and that act, that reluctance to show even the slightest bit of vulnerability and ask for help, scared Spock more than he would admit.

“It is a notable incident in Federation history.” Spock said, not going into a lengthy explanation of the horrendous events.
Jim let out a high-pitched laugh. “It was so awful.”

Spock frowned. “Captain?”

“I was there, Spock.” Jim said, gaze snapping over to him. Spock felt as if he were pinned in place by those icy blue eyes, and he saw hidden alarm swimming to the surface. “I was there during the massacre.”

“Jim…” Spock uttered, shocked.

Jim buried his head in his hands and groaned loudly. “It was so awful!”

The spike in loudness startled Spock, and he immediately sat up straight, game abandoned. “Captain, you are under the influence and revealing personal information you would not originally do under normal circumstances. Please cease this.”

Jim shook his head furiously. “I gotta tell someone. I can’t let it fester inside of me, I gotta, I gotta—Spock!” He looked to Spock with frantic eyes, and his voice quietened to a whisper. “You have no idea the hell that reigned on that planet.”

“It is not necessary to reveal—“

“It was war, mayhem, the people against the government. People died. So many people, Spock.” Jim threw back his drink and let out a deep hiss. “God, that burns. It was—fuck, it was so goddamn sick. So repugnant. So…such a nightmare come to life.”

Spock felt his heart ache with sympathy at the captain’s admittance, and his voice softened to a hush. “I am sorry you had to experience such hardship, Jim. No being should ever have to experience what you did.”

Jim slowly shook his head from side to side and pressed the palm of his hand to his forehead. “War is terrible, Spock. Know there’s nothing good in war except its ending.”

Spock listened to the captain sniffing for several moments, remaining entirely silent in case he wished to share more. However, it seemed the man had spoken as much as he wished, and Spock was secretly grateful for it. He’d thought he wanted to know why Jim was behaving so oddly, but not in this manner. He didn’t want the captain to spill out his past without realising what he was saying. It would most likely lead to awkward future interactions between them, which would not only make working together difficult, but would affect the crew too.

Spock would be lying if he said he didn’t want to know why Jim had been so rigid since their return from Ekos, but he’d wanted to know purely based on trust. Now he felt as if he had betrayed their relationship somehow. It was an awful feeling.

Spock watched as Jim lapsed into unconsciousness before waking up and pressing the palm of his hand to his forehead. “It was so awful!”

Spock quietly snuck towards the adjoining bathroom, but Jim’s mumbling gave him pause. He wavered for a few seconds, then returned to the captain’s side. Placing his fingers on Jim’s meld point, Spock made it a point to push calm and positive thoughts into Jim’s mind, hoping that they would aid in keeping any nightmares at bay.

*
Predictably, their next bridge shift together was icy. The atmosphere was tense, and not a single officer looked away from their station or started up casual chatter with their neighbour. Even Sulu and ensign Chekov, who often spoke openly and amiably with one another, were obstinately keeping their attention on their boards. A glance at Nyota revealed her to be hunched over her station, shoulders stiff and silent. It wasn’t unusual that she kept to herself since her station was more isolated than a few others, but Spock noticed that her fingers hadn’t removed for over five minutes now.

She had remarked once that she never particularly enjoyed shifts where he and Jim had clearly been arguing, stating that it negatively affected her performance as well as the bridge crew’s. Spock and Jim hadn’t fought this time, but with the way the captain was behaving the crew probably thought they had. Spock needed to rectify this misconception immediately in order to improve the Enterprise’s proficiency as well as set the crew’s mind to rest.

Since the start of the shift Jim had been steadfastly staring at the viewscreen ahead, only uttering words to Yeoman Rand when she brought him some datawork to sign. For the remainder of the time though, he was quiet, and it frustrated Spock to no end. He’d already decided that he would confront Jim about the situation on the bridge once their shift was over, but he wasn’t certain how to go about it. All he knew was that he’d experienced his fair share of uncomfortable silences on the bridge due to his and Jim’s issues, and he’d thought they were behind him. Now that they were resurfacing again, he was adamant on cutting them off before they bloomed beyond one shift.

That thought was at the forefront of Spock’s mind for the next few hours as he patiently and meticulously tended to his work. Nothing of import was occurring, and so he focused entirely on the datawork he had, aiming to complete them all so that he could at least feel as if he had been productive instead of mentally scripting his confrontation with Jim. Finally, the end of the shift rolled around, and everyone quietly gave up their stations for the next crew that were to come in.

Spock didn’t even exchange greetings with ensign Kueili as per procedure, but instantly strode after Jim as he attempted his very poor escape into the turbolift. Just as the door began to slide shut, Spock inserted himself in next to Jim. The captain jumped in surprise, eyes darting over Spock as if taking him in for the first time.

“Captain.” Spock greeted, turning to face Jim.

“Mr. Spock.” Jim swallowed, averting his gaze.

“Captain, if may I converse with you in private?”

Jim’s eyes widened and darted around the turbolift, obviously looking for an escape. “Um, I’m actually kind of busy right now.”

Spock took a deep breath. “Please.”

Silence followed that single word, and Jim resolutely kept his gaze on the turbolift’s door. After a moment his shoulders sagged, and he emitted a sigh. “Alright. Let’s talk.”

“It will not take much of your time.” Spock promised him. “We can converse in the hallway.”

“The hallway?” Jim repeated, lifting a single brow. “That’s not very private.”

“I am aware, Captain. However, I have reflected on what I wish to say to you, and realise that it is not necessary to do so in private. As I said, it will only take a moment of your time.”

A crease formed between Jim’s eyebrows, and he nodded slowly. “If you say so.”
The turbolift came to a smooth halt, and the door slid open, permitting them entrance to their floor. Jim was the first to step out, and as always Spock followed after. As soon as they'd gone a few paces Jim stopped, then turned around. He looked at Spock full on, but unease was evident in the lines of his face. Jim looked as if he were awaiting the worse news of his life, his body language signalling discomfort from top to toe.

Spock clasped his hands behind his back, and announced in a soft tone, “I appreciate that you trusted me well enough to confide about a personal issue of such importance.”

Jim instantly averted his gaze, tension seemingly taking over him even more. It was astounding how expressive the captain was, and Spock briefly wondered if he was even capable of keeping his emotions at bay.

“Jim.” Spock murmured. “Please look at me.”

A beat of silence passed, but eventually Jim hesitantly peeked at Spock.

Spock held his gaze, and with as much sincerity as he could muster said, “I will keep your confession with me until the day I die.”

Jim blinked at him, clearly taken aback by the comment. He stared at Spock for several moments, waiting for something to follow the remark, but nothing came. The silence drew longer, engulfing them like a blanket.

After a long while Spock repeated, “I promise.”

Suddenly the tension in Jim’s body seeped out, and Spock witnessed first-hand how Jim’s eyes turned tender. He looked at Spock as if seeing him for the first time, his blue eyes warming at the sight before him.

Slowly, his lips curled up into a shy smile. “You’re a good friend, Mr. Spock.”

Spock was startled by the remark. Friend. Jim considered them to be friends. It was… not uncomfortable revelation. No. In fact, it was rather pleasing, and left a warm feeling in his chest.

Spock gave a small nod in return. “As are you, Jim.”

Chapter End Notes

I’m shoving this chapter out like a parent throwing out their 50 year old leeching child. I just can’t deal with it anymore.

Even though I found the chapter to be super difficult to write, this episode is one of my favourite ones, and I’m honestly having trouble comprehending that this shit is actually kind of relevant today. What the fuck is going on???

Also can someone help me out here: He then dropped to his knees and offered Spock his back as purchase. Is that sentence right?? Is purchase used correctly in this example or is it another word?

P.S. First bit of fic inspired by a tumblr post (http://tkingfisher.tumblr.com/post/150833154123/morebadbookcovers-
“Fuck you.” Jim muttered darkly, frowning down at the chessboard.

It took a tremendous amount of effort for Spock not to smirk. He knew Jim only uttered those words when he had been well and truly cornered, and Spock inwardly preened at having once more elicited them from his captain.

“It seems all you do is lose, man.” Sulu remarked.

Nyota and Chekov nodded along, clearly agreeing with the statement. All of them were sat in the recreation hall around the same large table, Jim and Spock locked in an online game of chess whereas the other three were playing a Terran trivia board game. It was... a new situation for Spock to find himself in. Certainly there were more people than he was used to surrounding himself with during his spare time, but they were not unwelcome company.

Recently he and Jim had been getting along better, and it was evident not only from how well they worked together as a command team, but also by how they had begun to spend more of their free time together. It wasn’t a displeasing development, especially since through Jim Spock had become better acquainted with several other members of the crew; more specifically doctor McCoy and ensign Chekov. He and McCoy still maintained their relationship of reluctantly withstanding each other’s presence whilst trading barbs, but as of late Spock could admit that despite the man’s rampant emotionalism he was a rather brilliant doctor. Even though Starfleet was known for its diversity, it lacked medical doctors who could aptly care for all species from the Federation, and the Enterprise had truly been fortunate to have had McCoy stationed aboard.

Spock observed that ensign Chekov still showcased an undue amount of admiration towards the captain, but it had grown somewhat subdued since the mission’s start. He personally thought it was due to the fact that the ensign had started to see Jim as a person rather than a hero whom he put on a pedestal, and because of that their camaraderie had grown significantly stronger. It was interesting to observe how well Jim could strike the line between a respectable starship captain and a jovial friend to his crew.

Jim shot Sulu an irritated look. “I’m not always losing, Spock’s just really good at winning.”

Nyota huffed out a laugh. “That’s the same thing.”

“Nyota is correct.” Spock added, sharing a sly look with her. Despite finding himself in a small group of people, Nyota was always the first person he sought out to reaffirm he was not out of his depth. If she were present at his side, he felt more confident attempting to socialise with others.

“No, it’s—I mean, yes, it is the same, but the way I meant it was that if I was playing anyone else I would be winning a lot more.” Jim argued.

“Bullshit.” Sulu snorted.

“Yes, is nonsense.” Chekov concurred.

Spock, however, tilted his head to the side in thought, then admitted, “I believe there is some truth to your explanation.”
The corner of Jim’s lips curled up into a tender smile. “At least you agree with me, Spock.”

“And that’s the only affirmation that matters.” Sulu murmured. Nyota and Chekov let out twin snorts, and Jim’s cheeks flushed pink.

Spock didn’t comprehend the meaning behind the words, and so he asked, “What do you mean, Sulu?”

“It’s nothing,” Jim dismissed before the man could even open his mouth to reply. “Just Sulu telling his usual terrible jokes no one laughs at.”

“My husband laughs at them.”

“No one but his husband who only offers pity laughs.” Jim amended, moving his knight.

Spock instantly pushed his queen diagonally then sat back. “Check mate.”

“Fuck.”

*

The Enterprise’s next orders had been to evacuate a research station on Minara II before its sun, Minara, went into a full nova. Jim had put together an away team consisting solely of himself, Spock, and doctor McCoy, then had the three of them beam down to the planet equipped with just the essential equipment required for an evacuation. As soon as they’d landed on solid ground they’d located the research station which was hidden beneath Minara II’s surface, and descended down to its heart.

However, once inside they found it to be completely barren of life. There had been nothing but empty chairs and desks, leftover PADDs haphazardly covering them with not a single being in sight. A closer examination of the research station revealed a layer of dust covering the floor and tables which indicated the area had been uninhabited for quite some time. Their only explanation as to what had occurred were held in the record tapes scattered across the desks, all of which belonged to the security cameras.

Before they could get to the tapes, however, they had been swiftly interrupted by an incoming call from engineer Scott, who alerted them of an imminent solar flare with high levels of cosmic rays that would affect Minara II. Jim had instantly taken the warning to heart and ordered the man to steer the Enterprise out of orbit, assuring him that the planet’s atmosphere would keep the away team protected for the 74.1 solar hours it would take for the flare to subside. Engineer Scott had reluctantly agreed to the captain’s command, and as soon as the call ended Jim turned to his away team and instructed them to converge around one of the computers to see what the record tapes revealed.

It had been astounding. Truly.

The visual recording from three months prior had shown that two of the researchers stationed on Minara II, Dr. Ozaba and Dr. Linke, had mysteriously disappeared into thin air. Not in the figurative sense, but the very literal. One moment Spock watched them on the vidscreen tending to their work, and in the next moment a deafening noise had erupted which was followed by the two researchers having vanished in the blink of an eye. Spock was utterly baffled by the events which had taken place on the vidscreen, and when he’d looked to both Jim and McCoy, he saw they shared his bewilderment, frowning intently at the computer.

Spock had switched off the device once the visual recording ended, but right afterwards a similar ringing to what they’d just heard in the tape started up. It began at a low volume, and rapidly
increased into something that was so harsh Spock was forced to cover his ears. Jim had immediately been on him, concern etched onto his face, but it swiftly shifted into one of agitation as the ringing seemed to reach his Human ears too. He and McCoy had both mimicked Spock and protected their ears from the sheer increase of noise, desperately running around the research station in an effort to locate the source, but to no avail. Spock had attempted to use his tricorder to help their search, but as soon as he’d uncapped his ears the ringing slammed through his eardrums harder than before, and he was forced to instantly cover them again. He’d felt entirely useless, unable to understand the situation, or what the incessant ringing was, or where it even belonged— but it hadn’t mattered. From one second to the next his worries had quickly been eliminated as his sight shuttered, and slowly he’d faded into black.

When Spock next awoke it was to find himself on a cold floor with Jim and McCoy on either side of him. He’d been the first to regain consciousness, and had slowly pulled himself up to a sitting position before taking in his surroundings. There had been nothing that could help Spock identify his current location, the shrouded darkness covering everything around him and infinitely further. Even the ringing from previously had disappeared, and in its place was nothing but the sound of silence.

The eerie circumstances however did nothing to deter Spock from trying to determine their position, and when Jim and McCoy awoke mere moments later he’d already extracted his tricorder and was getting started on procuring a proper analysis of their surroundings. He’d promptly announced the readings as they appeared on the device, informing Jim and McCoy that they were at present 121.32 metres below Minara II’s surface in an unknown location, and had been transported here using a matter-energy scrambler similar to the Enterprise’s transporter technology. The tricorder then made a sudden beeping noise, and Spock’s eyebrows rose high on his forehead as he took in the readings. The device had picked up on a life matter form not far from their location. It was apparently humanoid, but not Homo sapiens. Beyond that, the tricorder couldn’t detect anything more.

Spock revealed the news to the away team, and following the announcement all three of them locked eyes. A tense silence crept into the circle. Seconds trickled by until eventually Jim quietly ordered them to take out their phasers and set them to stun. Spock and McCoy immediately adhered to the command, removing their weapons from their belts in complete silence. It was a wise precaution to have their weapons on the ready, especially since they had no way of knowing what this humanoid being held in store for them. Spock had to admit he was rather curious as to what they would find. From what he’d surmised based on their surroundings it appeared to be entirely barren. The fact that a life form resided in this environment should have been impossible. It really begged the question; what kind of creature would they encounter?

Together all three of them trudged in the direction the readings indicated there was life, Spock at the helm with Jim and McCoy flanking him on either side. They strode along in absolute silence, the screen of Spock’s tricorder the only light to guide them. Eventually, after having wandered through the darkness for quite some time, they came upon their target. There, before them, they saw a creature reclined on a cross-shaped couch. Indeed it was humanoid in appearance, and from what Spock could see it wore a billowy, purple dress and a head full of brown hair.

McCoy was the first to make a move, starting forward towards the couch, but Jim held him back with an outstretched arm. “Be careful.”
The doctor levelled him with an incredulous look. “Well, they seem harmless enough.”

“The sand bats of Manark IV appear to be inanimate rock crystals, doctor, until they attack.” Spock supplied, eyes never straying from the being on the couch.

Jim lowered his arm and carefully approached the creature. Spock’s gaze snapped over to the captain, watching as he rounded the couch until he came to stand by its side. Jim gazed down at the being, a look of awe on his face, when all of a sudden the creature rose, stretching its limbs above its head in a style very similar to that of an Earth snake. However, as soon as it spotted Jim it cowered in fear. The captain instantly took a step back and raised his free hand in a placating manner.

“We’re not gonna hurt you.” He murmured, keeping his voice low and calm. “Is this your home? Do you live here?”

The being remained silent, but the tension in its shoulders appeared to ease up slightly. It continued to stare at Jim, its brown, doe-like eyes drawing Spock in even though he wasn’t currently in the creature’s line of sight.

Jim stared right back at it with a curious gaze, one eyebrow slowly hiking up. “What about it, Spock? Analysis.”

Spock dragged his gaze away from the creature, and instead looked down at the tricorder in his hands. “From what we know of the specific gravity and other environmental factors of this planet, a life form such as hers could not evolve here.”

Jim gave a nod and slowly hooked his phaser back onto his belt, then gingerly knelt before the creature. “Are you responsible for bringing us here?”

The being suddenly flinched back, and Jim instinctively reached forward before restraining himself and pulling back his hand. He looked frustrated at being unable to offer comfort in the only way he knew how, but it was quickly pushed aside as his obvious concern for the creature took over.

“Don’t be afraid…” He murmured, gaze briefly flashing to McCoy. “Bones, what’s wrong with them?”

The doctor quickly took out his medical tricorder, and, from a distance so as to not spook the creature, ran it over them until he’d successfully recorded their vitals. He looked down at the results displayed and declared, “She’s a mute, Jim. No vocal chords. Not even vestigial. And I don’t think it’s a pathological condition.”

Spock looked back at the creature, going over their features once more but this time applying the information he’d just learnt. McCoy’s tricorder had rendered her as being biologically similar to that of an Earth female, and indeed her appearance was rather typical for beings who identified themselves as such. Not only that, but they had been revealed to be mute as well, which would make their attempts at conversing with her more troublesome. However, she didn’t seem to be deaf as Spock had noticed she’d paid close attention to Jim whenever he spoke. Perhaps despite her inability to speak, they would be able to communicate somehow.

Jim’s brows creased. “Explain.”

“Well,” McCoy began, still gazing down at his medical tricorder. “She appears to be perfectly healthy. For the other, her lack of vocal chords could be physiologically normal for her species, whatever that is.”

“A race of mutes.” Jim uttered, looking contemplative. “Like the civilisation on Gamma Vertis IV.”
“That’s my observation for whatever it’s worth.”

Jim looked to McCoy. “Without speech, how’s she going to be able to understand us? …Unless she’s a telepath.”

“An unlikely possibility, captain,” Spock spoke up. “Since over 98% of the known telepathic species sends thoughts as well as receive them. She’s made no attempt to contact our minds.”

If that had been the case, it would have been a lot simpler for them to communicate with the woman, or at least for Spock. As it stood none of them were experienced enough to successfully converse with a mute being, their only hope laying in the woman’s ability to properly utilise body language in a manner both Humans and Vulcans could understand.

“Well, we can’t keep referring to her as ‘she’ as if she weren’t here.” McCoy said.

Jim rose from his kneeling position and walked over to them. “Do you have any ideas?”

McCoy shrugged. “Well, I don’t know about you but I’m gonna call her Gem.”

“Gem, doctor?” Spock repeated.

“That’s better than ‘hey, you’.” McCoy retorted in a slightly defensive tone. Spock’s only response was to simply blink at him.

Jim glanced back at the creature— Gem— who kept her gaze on them, the deep brown eyes invoking a strong sense of serenity. Spock himself was unable to break away from its pull, her soft features lulling him into security. It was rather fascinating how as a Vulcan who kept his emotions tightly guarded, Gem was able to make him feel so tenderly. He could only imagine how Jim and McCoy must feel when faced with this creature.

He watched as the captain ambled back to the couch and carefully seated himself on the edge of it. His tone was low, rumbling even, as he spoke. “I wanna know why we’re here. I wanna know what’s going on… and she knows.”

All of a sudden Spock felt a foreign presence appear behind him. He immediately spun around and fell back into a defensive stance, eyes seeking. His gaze landed on two beings, humanoid in appearance and dressed in silver robes with engorged heads. Jim and McCoy too had noticed their sudden appearance, and turned around with twin looks of confusion. The beings gazed intently at the away team, their dark eyes bereft of any light. They were each holding devices that Spock didn’t recognise, and were aiming them directly at them.

Jim instantly rose from his seat and started in on an introduction in order to diffuse the charged situation. “I’m Captain—”

“We are aware of your identity, captain.” A voice interrupted. It reminded Spock very much of the computer aboard the Enterprise.

Jim came to a halt, a frown gracing his features. “Who are you? Why did you bring us here?”

“We are Vians. Do not interfere.” One of the creatures replied impassively.

The admission sparked Spock’s curiosity. Vians. He had never heard of the species before. From the report the away team had been given regarding Minara II, there shouldn’t have been any natives on the planet— on or below its surface. This was most intriguing.
“What do you intend to do with us?” Jim asked.

“Delay us no longer.” The Vian announced, ignoring the captain’s inquiry.

Jim’s frown deepened and he took a step forward. “We come in—“

In a flash one of the Vians lifed their gun and a sharp noise tore through the air. Spock watched in shock as an invisible force thrust Jim several metres back, and tore a grunt from the man as he hit the ground. Spock immediately concluded that the Vians’ devices were weapons, and he was about to dart forward and attempt to incapacitate them when he saw the captain rise back to his feet. Jim was instantly on alert, his eyes narrowing at the beings as he reached for his phaser.

Slowly, he stepped into line next to Spock and McCoy, his gaze never straying from the Vians. “Since you apparently already know who we are, then you must also know that we come in peace. Our Prime Directive specifically prohibits us from any interference—“

This time both Vians shot at Jim, but the invisible force Spock was expecting didn’t appear. No, instead the captain remained exactly where his was, but his phaser had disappeared right out of his hand. Spock blinked at the empty space, then sharply looked to McCoy who appeared just as stunned as he was. Jim stared down at his hand in shocked silence. It took only a split second before his expression morphed into displeasure, and he started forward. He barely took two steps before the Vians shot at him a third time.

All of a sudden time seemed to slow down considerably, and everything was moving at a glacial pace.

Or rather, Spock’s body was entirely lethargic. He was incapable of advancing at the speed he wished. Although he could feel himself pushing his arm to reach for his phaser, it would do so at a painstakingly sluggish rate. His eyes drifted to the side, and he saw McCoy was in a similar state, the man’s fingers gripped tightly around his medical tricorder as he slowly attempted to press the buttons. Spock could only conclude that Jim must have been in a similar state. It must have been the Vians’ weapons— they acted as force field of sorts which impacted their movement.

Spock watched with dismay as Vians easily strolled past them and towards Gem, seating themselves on the couch and began running their weapons over her. Their ministrations must’ve been painful for her, because she instantly fell back onto the couch and began writhing in pain, her mouth falling open in a wordless cry. Spock felt his insides churn at the sight. He attempted to use more of his strength in order to force himself to move, but all it seemed to do was slow him down further.

“Don’t fight the force field.” McCoy grit out. “There’s something about it that upsets the body metabolism.”

“Not quite, doctor.” One of the Vians remarked absently as they continued their treatment of Gem. “The field draws its energy from your bodies; the more you resist, the stronger the force field becomes.”

Spock instantly slowed his actions, allowing his body to fall into an idle state. The revelation caused him huge concern. If he moved, he would receive resistance from the force field as he needlessly expended energy, yet if he remained still he would save his strength but stay stuck in the force field. It was, all in all, a most unfortunate situation.

“Sufficient.” One of the Vians declared in a sonorous tone, and they both dropped their weapons. Gem’s body immediately deflated, her arms falling limply at her sides.
“Fuck.” Jim hissed, and Spock could hear the anger burning in his voice.

All three of them watched as the Vians rose from the couch and looked to one another. Then, in the blink of an eye, they disappeared out of plain sight, and just as quickly the force field around them disappeared, causing all three of them to fall to the ground with groans of pain. Spock tried to pull himself up to his knees, but his arms shook something vicious. It seemed the force field’s effects remained in the body and bones for some time after it had been dissolved.

“Spock,” Jim panted, fierce eyes flashing over to him. “There must be an exit other than the one we just saw.”

“Correct, captain.” Spock agreed, attempting to even his breathing. He then shakily got to his knees, and pushed himself up to his full height. Spock took a moment to balance himself using the couch as leverage, and once certain he wouldn’t topple to the ground he released his grip on it. A quick glance at Jim and McCoy showed they were still recovering, their bodies trembling and breathing harsh. It looked as if the force field’s effects was worse on Humans.

Taking a steadying breath, Spock carefully lifted up his tricorder and switched it on. He began to gingerly amble around the room as the tricorder continuously spit out readings about their surroundings. It was exceptionally loud in the quiet of the vast, empty location, rivaled only by that of Jim and McCoy’s murmured conversation behind him. Suddenly the readings of the tricorder changed, and Spock saw it picked up on something new. It appeared to be… electronic instruments of some sort.

Spock frowned down at the device in his hand. That was odd. The last time he’d gotten a reading of their location none of these had shown up on the tricorder. It incited a slight worry in him, though as to why he couldn’t tell. All he knew was that it would be ill-advised to pursue the new discovery on his own, and so he returned back to the couch where the rest of the away team were. As he neared he noticed Jim kneeled on the floor before Gem, who was now awake, and staring up at her tenderly.

“Thank you.” Jim murmured, transfixed.

The sight had Spock feeling suddenly uncomfortable, and he was overcome with the strong urge to interrupt whatever this was. Because he needed to inform the team of the results he’d gathered, and not at all because the way Jim was looking at Gem made him prickle with something akin to envy.

“Captain.” All three of them turned their attention to Spock, but kept his gaze on the captain only. “In that direction, my tricorder is now picking up a substantial collection of objects.”

“Details?” Jim prompted.

“Electronically sophisticated devices. I fail to understand why my tricorder previously gave no indication of them being out there.”

“Well, they’re there now.” Jim sighed, rising to his feet. “Let’s go check them out.”

They all followed Spock’s lead as he headed in the direction his tricorder had picked up on the electronic devices, not a whisper of conversation between them. Jim had gently convinced Gem to follow them, most likely not comfortable leaving her on her own in case the Vians returned. Spock wondered what their intention with Gem was. It must have been important since they’d deemed it necessary to freeze the Enterprise team in order to stop them from interfering. She appeared to have recovered from whatever it was the Vians had done to her, but Spock suspected that wasn’t the case. Most likely the residual impacts were internal.
Finally, after a few minutes of trekking silently through the dark, they reached their destination. Spock took note of the change in surroundings, the shadows fading as they ambled into the light of an illustrious laboratory of sorts.

“Look at this stuff.” McCoy murmured, turning slowly where he stood. Gem had broken off from the group, quietly exploring their new location, and after just a moment Jim and Spock followed suit. Every single being split from the other, curiously making their way around the laboratory and occasionally probing one of the gadgets. Spock made sure to keep his tricorder switched on for the entirety of the investigation, wanting to have a solid copy of the readings which he could analyse once back aboard the Enterprise. All around him were highly advanced equipment he’d never seen before, nor knew the use for. The instruments were sleek and chrome-coloured, with smatterings of blinking lights spread across them in a minimalist fashion. Unlike most of the Enterprise’s work stations, no noise was emitted from any of the machines. It was, simply put, fascinating.


Spock’s ears pricked up. The captain’s voice had sounded shaky. Scared. A tone Spock had never before heard Jim use, and it immediately raised alarm bells in his head. Before he’d known it Spock was at Jim’s side, staring at what the man himself was currently looking at.

Right before his very eyes were two cylindrical tubes, and inside them, frozen in mid-movement, were Dr. Linke and Dr. Ozaba.

Spock’s insides froze at the sight. His gaze darted over their forms, taking in their open mouths, their wide eyes, and their twin expressions of perpetual shock. They had clearly been caught unguarded. Spock’s mouth felt suddenly dry as he attempted to swallow. He quickly averted his gaze away from the doctors, but by doing so he caught on something else. There, right beside Dr. Linke and Dr. Ozaba, were three more tubes with name tags plastered on the front, and with a daunting realisation Spock read each name.

James Kirk.
Leonard McCoy.
S’chn T’gai Spock.

They were to be next.

“You’re on schedule.”

In an instant all three members of the away team had whirled around to face the new voice. Before them stood one of the Vians, their penetrating gaze directed at them.

“Some further sample tests are necessary.” They droned on.

McCoy’s hands clenched into fists, and he tightly bit out, “We’ve just seen the results of some of your tests.”

The Vian paid the doctor no mind, continuing to stare at the group as a whole. Spock was worried McCoy would allow his rampant emotionalism to take over and attack the Vian, but his concern was discarded when Jim was the one to step forward, contained fury evident in every line of his body.

“I found our missing men. Dead. This another one of your experiments?”

“You’re wrong.” The Vian replied tonelessly. “Their own imperfections killed them. They were
unfit subjects.” They then raised their hand and gently motioned behind them. “Come. Time is short.”

“Yes,” Jim started, purposefully stalking around the Vian like a predator closing in on their prey. The Vian's gaze followed the captain closely, slowly turning as the man continued to circle him. The two were locked in a tense stand off, neither one of them breaking away from their staring. Suddenly Jim’s eyes briefly flashed over to Spock, and it took only that one split second for Spock to understand the hidden meaning behind the gesture. “*Your* time is running out. Your sun is about to Nova, and when it does it’ll destroy you, this planet, and this insane torture chamber.”

Jim was stood almost completely opposite Spock now, with the Vian being the only thing blocking his path. The captain took two more steps, and the Vian followed, fully facing him with their back to the rest of the group.

Spock wasted no time. He swooped in and landed his hand on their shoulder, quickly administering the Vulcan nerve pinch and sending the Vian crumbling to the ground. He spared them a glance before looking to Jim, who immediately picked up the Vian's discarded weapon off the floor and shoved it into Spock’s hands.

“Let’s get out of here.”

*

With the help of the tricorder they’d managed to locate an exit point not far from the laboratory and headed towards it, leaving the unconscious Vian behind in the dark. They’d had to make their way through a seemingly endless cave, but had quickly come out at the mouth and onto the planet’s surface. As soon as they’d stepped out they’d been accosted by powerful winds, tousling Spock’s usually immaculate hair and forcing him to hold it down with both hands. He’d listened closely as Jim attempted to contact the *Enterprise*, but unfortunately it appeared to be out of range. So, once more, the away team had to rely on Spock’s tricorder to aid them in their escape. Thankfully it took but a moment for the device to pick up on a research station six kilometres from their present position, and they wasted no time hurrying towards it. If the *Enterprise* had decided to beam down a search party for them, it would most definitely be there.

Their trek was far, and the winds harsh, but they pushed through. The air was sharply cold, digging into Spock’s body like claws and causing goosebumps to erupt over his arms and nape. Even the tips of his ears were turning green from the powerful gusts.

“It’s Scotty!” McCoy yelled all of a sudden. Spock looked to where the doctor was pointing, and indeed, he was right. In the distance he spotted engineer Scott waving at them with a grin, several other members of the crew stood around him. Spock had immediately increased his pace, directing his focus at reaching the safe haven that was his crew. McCoy was just a few steps ahead of him, and a glance back showed that Jim was trailing behind them with Gem, although it seemed she had some trouble making her way through the rough terrain. All of a sudden she tripped, but Jim’s hand gripping her arm stopped her from hitting the ground.

Suddenly the captain froze. He looked somewhere to his right, and a look of confusion came over his face. Spock saw his gaze was stuck on something beyond, but when he followed the captain’s line of sight found his vision to be obstructed by the mountains.

“Come along, Spock!” McCoy urged, heading towards the search party.

“The captain…” Spock uttered, but his words were swallowed up by the howling winds.
“Where did they go?” McCoy shouted over the gale.

Spock dragged his gaze away from Jim despite his curiosity roaring at him not to. He turned to McCoy and saw the man had come to a sudden stop. A quick look ahead explained the reason for his abrupt halt.

The search party had disappeared.

“I believe they were never actually present, doctor.” Spock admitted slowly. “It was a mirage.”

Suddenly Gem rushed past and latched herself onto McCoy’s arm, startling both Spock and the man himself. She looked between him and Spock, her face scrunched up with worry and eyes imploring as she pulled on McCoy’s arm, almost as if wanting to drag them away. The doctor threw Spock a bewildered look, but still allowed himself to be hauled away by Gem. She steered them away from the research station and back from where they’d come, then pointed forward.

Spock narrowed his eyes, trying his best to ignore the winds assaulting his eyes. There, in the distance, he spotted a figure laying on the ground.

Jim.

He immediately started ahead, McCoy’s shouts erased up by the wind whipping around them. Spock swiftly rushed to Jim’s side and knelt down beside him, and not a minute later he was joined by both McCoy and Gem.

Spock placed a hand on Jim’s shoulder, and his head immediately lifted up. He stared at the three of them, eyes wild and confused. “What’re you doing here? Where’s Scotty?”

“Captain, it was a mirage.” Spock replied loudly.

“Captain Kirk.”

Spock didn’t even have to turn around to know who that voice belonged to. The Vians. It took tremendous effort for him to tear his eyes away from Jim. The Vians who were stood on a rock ledge slightly above them, looking down with dark eyes.

“We have decided that one specimen will be sufficient.” One of them announced. “You will come with us.”

Spock heard Jim’s response through the whistling of the gales. “What about the others?”

“We have no interest in them. They may go.”

There was a beat of silence, then Jim yelled, “Very well!”

“You can’t go back there.” McCoy pounded on Jim in a fierce tone, and for once Spock wholeheartedly agreed with the doctor. “You’ll end up like the other two.”

Indeed. A specimen. A science experiment.

Dead.

Not if Spock could help it. “Captain, I request permission to be—“

“Denied.” Jim cut off. Spock’s eyebrows rose high on his forehead. He was startled at the captain’s unyielding tone. McCoy’s scowl deepened, and he opened his mouth as if to argue, but Jim didn’t
allow him to get a word in either. “You have your orders.”

McCoy’s jaw clenched, and he stared at Jim with hard eyes. The captain stared right back, unwavering in his decision. A frigid silence stretched between the two men locked in their standoff. The winds continued to whip around them, tearing the sand from the ground and making it dance around their feet.

Spock didn’t understand why Jim was doing this. Why was he sacrificing himself? As the captain he was the person of utmost importance, and logically, should have been prioritised as the being they should save during missions gone awry. Much like this one. Much like every other missions they had been on, and Jim had foolishly thrown himself headfirst into danger if only for the possibility to save another. It was a trait that ran through the captain as strongly as the blood in his veins, and one Spock had on countless occasions tried to curb and failed. It was a major fault of the captain, he worried far more about others than he did himself.

After what seemed like an eternity, McCoy gave one, single nod. What had transpired between the doctor and the captain Spock did not know, but he did know that McCoy looked as if he had come to a final decision. McCoy spared Jim one last glance, then gently took Gem’s hand in his own and began steering her away. Spock’s heart clenched at the realisation that he too had to depart with the doctor. Had to leave and abandon Jim with their captors. It was captain’s orders.

Jim’s gaze flashed over to him, his blue eyes determined, and for one brief moment Spock felt his worry ease slightly. It was irrational, to think that because the captain looked confident in his choices he would be fine. Yet, for just one moment, he felt calm.

“Go, Spock.” Jim instructed, gaze locked on him.

And with those words, Spock’s serenity was shattered. Back came the reality of the situation, crashing down onto him and reminding him just exactly where he was.

He stared at Jim for a long time. The gales kept swirling around them, the harsh cuts digging into Spock’s skin. Finally, he took a step back, and with one last nod at Jim turned on his heel. It would be irrational of him to wish the captain ‘good luck’, and so he refrains from doing so. Instead, he silently trudges after McCoy and Gem, feeling the heat of Jim’s gaze on his back as he goes.

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“Come on, Spock, the passageway was there before. It’s gotta be there.” McCoy pressed for the umpteenth time.

Indeed, it had been there. And it should have been there. But, it wasn’t.

One second they’d been lifelessly ambling back in the direction of the research station, and in the next they’d appeared back at the very first location they’d found Gem. Except, this time, neither she nor Jim were present. It had taken Spock precisely 2.7 seconds to figure out where they were, after which he’d exchanged dazed looks with McCoy before whipping out his tricorder and getting to work on finding a way to escape. They had been caught in this mission for far too long to speculate on the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of their current situation. All they knew was that their team of four had been halved, and their primary concern was to find a way out.

Spock had been at that task for almost fifteen minutes now, but to no avail. He was growing frustrated with his inability to locate an exit, and McCoy’s constant muttered curses telling Spock to do better weren’t helping.
“Doctor, I’m unable to lock in on the previous readings.” Spock revealed tightly, dropping his tricorder. “I can find no exit out of here.”

McCoy whipped around to face him, his eyebrows ticking with barely contained fury. If Spock were a more fearful man he’d be hiding behind the couch as to avoid the doctor’s intense gaze. It almost felt as if it could bore a hole through him. McCoy opened his mouth to most likely spit some further curses at Spock, but just then a sudden noise caught their attention. They both looked to the source and for a split second saw a speck of light before it quickly changed. There, a few steps away from them, stood Gem, tall and graceful, with Jim crumbled next to her on the floor.

Spock was immediately on his feet. “Captain!”

All of a sudden a force field appeared around him and the doctor, meaning only one thing: their captors were present. Spock’s eyes darted from side to side, but he couldn’t see any other beings besides the four of them. It seemed the Vians were capable of operating their instruments even while out of sight. It was most vexing.

Spock watched in pained silence as Jim slowly dragged himself towards the couch, his entire body trembling. The man’s breath came in short pants, and his wrists and cheekbones looked to be burned.

“Jim, what is it? What have they done to you?” McCoy pressed, concern evident in his tone.

Jim faintly shook his head, then shakily pulled himself up and onto the couch. He looked drained. Hurt. None of the warm jovialness Spock was used to. It was arduous to watch. Gem cautiously approached the couch, looking as if she might bolt at any moment. Jim’s eyes flickered up to her, and Spock saw the dimness of those usually bright blue eyes. Suddenly, Jim’s head lolled back, and with all the strength Spock could muster, he attempted to push forward. But nothing.

Thankfully Gem was quick to catch Jim before he fell, and carefully eased him onto his back. Spock saw her abruptly let go of him and jerk back, staring at the captain with wide eyes. Fear. Pure, unadulterated fear. She turned on her heel and ran in the opposite direction— away from Jim, away from them, away from their prison.

It was McCoy’s words that stopped her. “Help him!”

Gem faltered in her steps.

“Don’t be afraid to help him.” McCoy pled.

Spock saw her shoulders hunch in on herself. She peeked over her shoulder, brown eyes glimmering with emotion. They dropped to Jim where he lay panting on the couch, and Spock silently urged with all her might that she would return. She had to. She was the only one who could tend to Jim’s injuries.

Slowly, Gem turned around and approached the couch with hesitant steps. Spock’s gaze keenly followed her every move, watching as she seated herself next to Jim. Gently, she lifted his head and rested it on her lap, then softly ran her hands over his shoulders. She stroked his face several times before trailing them down Jim’s arms and taking his hands into her own. Spock barely had time to feel a sting of jealousy before Gem’s face suddenly contorted with pain, and something unbelievable happened.

Spock watched with rapid fascination as Gem’s mouth fell open in a silent scream, and the burn marks he’d seen on Jim not a second ago faded only to appear on her skin. It was… transferred somehow. Erased. Gem had taken Jim’s scars. Spock was transfixed by the interaction, and his
curiosity soared even more when a short moment later the marks on Gem’s skin disappeared completely. Spock did not by any stretch of the mind believe in miracles, but he felt as he’d just witnessed one.

Suddenly Gem toppled off the couch and splayed on the ground, and the force field around Spock and McCoy vanished. Spock didn’t even take the time to question why that was before he and McCoy had rushed forward.

The doctor immediately took out his medical tricorder and ran it over Gem. It took barely a moment, and as soon as he was done he knelt at Jim’s side and repeated the process.

“Will she live?” Jim asked in a scratched voice. It made the hair on Spock’s arms rise. He must have been severely damaged to sound so rough.

“She seems fine now.” McCoy assured him, reading the results off his tricorder.

Jim lifted his head, eyebrows furrowed. “Can you explain what happened?”

“Complete empathy.” McCoy declared. “She must be a totally functional empath.”

Spock made as if to pick Gem up off the ground, but McCoy stopped him. “Leave her, Spock. She can’t be moved for a few minutes yet. She needs time to recover.” He then looked to Jim with an explanation at the ready. “Her nervous system actually connected to yours to counteract the worst of your symptoms, and with her strength she virtually sustained your body’s physiological reactions.”

The line between Jim’s eyebrows deepened. “But she weakened. I could feel it. Is her life in danger?”

McCoy looked considering. “Well, it’s impossible to say yet, but supplying your body with life support did drain her.”

“Her withdrawal seemed to suggest the fear of death, doctor.” Spock added, gingerly seating himself on the edge of the couch near Jim’s head. He didn’t understand why, but he felt he had to personally keep a close eye on the captain in order to assuage his own rampant worry. “Only your urging her on caused her to continue.”

“Well, that’s true. Fear would naturally be a first reaction. Perhaps she doesn’t know our captain well enough yet to offer up her life for him.” McCoy said softly.

Jim lifted himself up on his elbows and frowned at the doctor. “Could the strain really have killed her?”

“Well, yes. However, I would assume that her instinct for self-preservation would take over to prevent it. Jim, are you… how do you feel?”

The captain attempted to sit up, a cough escaping him. Before Spock knew it he was reaching out to help, but McCoy beat him to it. Spock guiltily retracted his hands, hoping neither of them had noticed how fast he’d reacted.

“I’m tired.” Jim mumbled, eyes falling half-lidded.

“Can you recall what happened, captain?” Spock inquired quietly.

A light frown marred his face. “I remember… the laboratory. And they wanted to know something.” Jim’s eyebrows creased further as he attempted to think back, but after a moment he deflated with
defeat. “I can’t remember.”

“It’s alright. You take it easy.” McCoy said, and placed a comforting hand on Jim’s shoulder. Spock had never so intensely lamented coming from a culture where giving physical reassurance so freely was taboo. He couldn’t aid Jim in the form he was most used to. He couldn’t comfort him with touches.

“What’s the matter with me?” Jim muttered in frustration.

“You have all the symptoms of the bends. Nitrogen bubbles in your blood cause the pain.” McCoy told him, face scrunched up in its customary scowl. “Now, how would one get the bends down here?”

“You’ll have to ask the Vians.” Jim replied weakly. His eyes flickered over to the doctor. “Will I live?”

Spock’s heart stuttered at the question.

“Well, you could use some time in a decompression chamber, but otherwise I’d say your recovery’s just about miraculous.” McCoy replied softly. He cast his eyes to the ground where Gem still lay on the ground. “I wish I could take the credit for it, but she did the work.”

“Captain, I noted that a light preceded you at the moment you were returned here from the Vian’s laboratory.” Spock said suddenly.

It caused the doctor to sigh in exasperation. “Spock, why’d you have to get so analytical at a tim—“

“No, he’s right.” Jim cut off. He caught Spock’s eyes, the small gesture causing a strange, warm feeling to spread through Spock’s chest. “Continue.”

Spock hesitated for barely a moment before doing as told. “I conclude that such a light is an energy-transfer point linking this device to the power source.” He held up the device he had been working on prior to Jim and Gem’s sudden appearance: the Vian’s weapon.

Jim’s eyes fell to the device. “Can you tap into it?”

“If I can determine the frequency at which this device operates, I might be able to cause it to function for us.”

“And get us out of here the same way they brought us in.” Jim finished, easily following Spock’s explanation.

“I would say so.”

“And I would say proceed.” Jim said, throwing him a cheeky grin. It amazed Spock how he was able to do so despite his current dire condition. Still, he would never give up an opportunity to see the captain smiling.

His good mood was quickly dashed when all of a sudden the Vians appeared before them— Spock had barely blinked before they were there, tall and imposing. All three members of the away team got to their feet, their hackles instinctively raised.

“You are called ‘captain’.” One of the Vians said slowly. “You are responsible for the lives of your crew. Is this correct?”
“It is.” Jim responded carefully.

“We find it necessary to have the cooperation of one of your men in our efforts.” The second Vian stepped in.

Jim’s eyes narrowed, and his voice had a steely edge to it when he replied, “We will not cooperate.”

“When we resume our interrogations, you will decide which of your men we shall use. It is essential.” The Vian ploughed on, ignoring the captain. “There is an 87% chance that the doctor will die. And while Commander Spock’s life is not in danger, the possibility is 93% that he will suffer brain damage resulting in permanent insanity.”

A burst of emotion tore through Spock at the words. Insanity. His mind, shred to pieces. Never to be used again. Outrage and panic thrummed through him at the prospect, the foreign emotions capturing so much of his attention that he didn’t hear the Vians’ parting words. All he knew was that one moment they were stood before him with their long robes and stoic expressions, and then, in the blink of an eye, they’d disappeared, leaving the away team and a still unconscious Gem to fester in dark thought.

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Jim leaned down and looked over his shoulder. “How’s it coming, Spock?”

Spock was once again back at his earlier task, running his tricorder over the Vians’ weapon. He’d been intently focused on the readings for the past ten minutes, attempting to parse out some coherency from the fluctuating waves that seemed to change every time he dragged the tricorder over the weapon. He wouldn’t admit it aloud, but he had never before been so fascinated yet irritated with something as he was with this device. It was almost as if it had a mind of its own, like a sentient being, except it was entirely mechanical.

“I do not know, captain. I begin to understand its operating principles, but that is all.” Spock informed him.

“Spock, it won’t be too long before the Vians come back.” McCoy said, stepping in close next to him. “You’d better find out how that thing works, and soon.”

Jim laid a placating hand on the doctor’s shoulder. “Take it easy, Bones.”

McCoy had been in an obviously agitated state ever since the Vians’ departure, and it seemed with every passing minute he got even more so. His eyes roamed around their surroundings in an attempt to rid himself of his nervous energy. “Men weren’t intended to live this far underground. It’s just not natural.”

“And space travel is?” Jim asked with a hint of humour.

“Some men spend the majority of their lives in mines beneath the surface.” Spock added, never taking his eyes off the weapon in his hands. The tricorder had almost gathered enough information off of it that if Spock were to hand it over to another being, even someone who was not of a scientifically inclined mind like himself, they would after a certain amount of time be able to unlock the weapon’s workings.

McCoy frowned at him. “I’m a doctor, not a coal miner.”

Jim gave his head a dismissive shake, but there was an evident smile on his lips. Crossing his arms over his chest the captain began to aimlessly wander around, the echoes of his boots filling the vast
area. Spock could hear the man as he went further into the distance. Once he was satisfied that the man was far enough to not overhear his voice, he rose up from the couch.

He turned to McCoy who watched him approach. “I’ve recorded my principles and theories on the tricorder, doctor. Should the Vians return there is sufficient data for you and the captain to complete the adjustments.”

He held out the device. McCoy’s eyes flickered down to the proffered weapon. “I’m not a mechanic. I couldn’t get that thing to work, no matter how many notes you left.”

“Yes, possibly not.” Spock agreed. “But you and the captain together will be able to do so.”

McCoy shook his head. “In any case, Spock, you are the logical one to leave with the captain.”

Spock was about to retort with his own superior words of logic when a voice from behind them cut him off.

“The decision is mine.”

Spock and McCoy both turned to look at Jim. The captain gazed at them with an unreadable expression, his face betraying nothing. The man must have crept up on them while they were in conversation. Spock hadn’t heard the click of his boots at all.

“If there are any decisions to be made, I’ll make them. If and when it becomes necessary.” Jim said firmly.

He made as if to sit on the couch, but as soon as he bent down his hand flew to clutch at his stomach. McCoy started forward, but Jim instantly raised his hand in a reassuring gesture. The doctor begrudgingly stepped back and watched as the captain carefully levered himself onto the couch. He didn’t look pained, although there was a thin sheen of sweat covering his forehead. Spock noted that Gem had remained unmoving where she was sat on the end of the couch. He had almost forgotten she was present the way she sat in silence, simply watching them with her soulful eyes.

Spock returned his focus to the Vians’ weapon, turning it idly in his hands if only to have something to keep himself occupied. For some reason he preferred this to being on the receiving end of Gem’s gaze. From the corner of his eye he saw McCoy reach into his bag and quietly rummage about. A moment later the man he pulled out a hypo, and Spock froze. He watched very carefully as the doctor stepped up behind Jim, the man in question hunched over on the couch, and firmly injected the needle into his arm.

Jim flinched back. “What is it? I don’t need any—“

“I’m still CMO of the Enterprise, and I’ll tell you what you need and when you need it.” McCoy cut off fiercely. “Would you rather have the bends?”

Jim frowned at his friend. He opened his mouth as if to argue, but a dopey glaze came over his expression, dimming his usually bright eyes. Spock couldn’t help but stare at the scene before him. Jim, with his eyes fluttering shut, and McCoy, easing him down onto the couch.

“That’s it.” The doctor encouraged. “Just lie down and relax.”

Spock watched as Jim nodded slowly, unconsciousness swiftly dropping down over him. It was strange to see how quickly the captain succumbed to sleep. The hypo most have been extremely potent.
“How long will he be asleep, doctor?” Spock inquired, eyes never straying from Jim.

McCoy peered sideways at him. “Between the emotional strain and that attack of bends, he’s in pretty bad shape.”

“I’m not criticising your action, doctor. On the contrary.” Spock approached the couch, eyes locked on Jim’s unconscious form. “I’m quite grateful for it. The captain will be spared the strain of so difficult a decision. You simplified the situation considerably.”

There was a brief moment of silence, then McCoy’s voice, laced with suspicion, filled the air. “How?”

“While the captain is asleep, I am in command. When the Vians return, I shall go with them.”

McCoy’s eyes widened. “You mean if I hadn’t given him that shot—”

“Precisely. The choice would have been the captain’s. Now, it is mine.”

With those words of finality, Spock tore his gaze from the captain and turned to look at the doctor fully. The man was already glaring at him, his body stiff with tension. It was clear he was furious with Spock for what he intended to do, but could not propel himself to do anything. Spock’s expression remained cool and impassive, his eyes never straying from the doctor’s own. After several long seconds McCoy turned on his heel and stomped off in a huff. Whether his anger was directed at Spock or himself, Spock couldn’t tell.

He waited until McCoy was several steps away before he allowed himself to sit down on the edge of the couch. He was careful not to stir Jim from his sleep, although he knew there was no chance of that occurring with McCoy’s hypo still coursing through his body. Spock briefly glanced at Gem and saw she was already looking at him. Her deep, brown eyes invoked something deep within him, an emotion he couldn’t identify. It was… uncomfortable. Spock returned to dragging his tricorder over the Vians’ weapon, if only to avoid that penetrating gaze.

Suddenly Gem’s hand landed on his shoulder, and Spock looked up in shock. He felt his pain and discomfort from the mission’s events slowly growing smaller, receding, and pulling away, until the last of it flitted out and vanished entirely. Spock’s eyes trailed over Gem’s face, taking in her kind smile and vacant eyes aimed at nothing. It was… Had she…

He felt a sudden jab in his back and immediately propelled up. He stood on surprisingly unsteady feet, exhaustion rapidly rushing through him.

He already knew who the perpetrator behind this was.

“Your action is highly unethical. My decision stands.” He uttered, his words heavy on his tongue. He felt fatigued. The substance was acting fast, and he felt control of his body slipping through his fingers. He had no idea how to fight this.

Spock’s last thought before he descended into darkness was how much of a fool McCoy was for acting on his emotions.

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“Why did you let him do it?” Jim hissed through clenched teeth, anger rolling off him in waves.

“I was convinced in the same way you were, captain; by the good doctor’s hypo.” Spock commented idly, running his tricorder over the Vians’ weapon. The amount of times he had found
himself in this very position was not humorous.

Jim emitted an aggravated sigh. “Anything?”

In all honesty, Spock had made some significant progress with analysing the device since his first try. Previously he’d settled on only gathering enough information for McCoy and Jim to possibly use the weapon in an attempt to escape. However, with the good doctor having destroyed Spock’s former plan, he had returned to his first aim: figuring out the use of the weapon. And what he had found was truly fascinating.

“A most unusual device.” Spock shared. "It is a control unit, but not a control mechanism. In fact, it is not a mechanical device.”

“What exactly is it?”

“This control is attuned to only one electrical pattern of energy: the pattern produced by the mental impulses of the person who possesses it. It is activated solely by mental commands.”

Spock wasn't looking at the captain, but he could practically feel his mind churning in thought. “Can you adapt it— re-attune it— to fit out brain patterns?”

“I shall attempt to do so.” Spock hesitated just a second before continuing, "However, it is not possible to adjust the control to fit more than one pattern at a time. I am, of course, most familiar with my own pattern. Therefore, with your permission, I—”

Jim tiredly waved off his explanation. “Do whatever you have to do to make it work, Spock.”

With his captain’s permission given to him, Spock returned to the weapon and set about adjusting it to his mental impulses. He was already highly familiar with his own mind, both personally and from an experimental standpoint that he could aptly feed those brainwaves into the device. His only doubt was how successfully the weapon would meld with his mind.

Jim began casually striding around, speaking aloud as went. "What disturbs me is why the Vians let us keep it.”

“Inde.” Spock agreed. "They must have known we were capable of comprehending this control and making use of it.”

“And that we would use it to escape.”

Spock halted his ministrations and glanced at Jim. “The only logical assumption is that they wish to let us go.”

“...And they keep McCoy.” Jim finished.

“That is evidently their intention, captain.” He said, returning to adjusting the device’s settings.

He heard Jim's footsteps echo as he went along, each step growing fainter. “Somehow, you’re the crux, the focal point of all this.”

It took Spock a second to realise Jim must be speaking with Gem. Her mute state often made him forget she was even present. His focus remained on the device in his hands. He was making headway and didn't wish to lose it simply because he was distracted by other thoughts. Still, he kept an ear open for the single-sided conversation the captain was creating.
“Even before we got here, she was a prisoner. They didn’t hurt her, they didn’t even threaten her.”

No, this time the words were definitely pitched for Spock’s ears. “Indeed. The facts would indicate that she is essential to their purpose.”

“Yes, there is a purpose… but what is it?” Spock heard the footfalls again before they came to a stop. “Has all the pain and terror happened, or been made to happen, for you?”

Spock smoothed out the final fixture on the device, and with a snap of a button the weapon’s transmission waves changed from their previous static lines to the now muddled ones displayed on its screen.

“Completed, captain.” Spock announced, rising from the couch. He headed over to Jim and angled the device at him. “The adjustments are delicate. They may not survive more than even one use. However, there should be sufficient energy to transfer us to the Enterprise.”

Jim's eyes jumped up to meet Spock's own. “Will it take us to McCoy?”

Spock kept his gaze as he replied, “If you so desire.”

Gem suddenly rushed forward, stepping between them and lifting McCoy’s medical tricorder from where it lay discarded on the couch. She held it up and looked between the two imploringly, her soft features shifting into concern.

Jim offered her a nod, a small smile working its way onto his lips. “The best defence is a strong offence, and I intend to start offending right now.” He looked to Spock. “Aim for the lab.”

Spock held the device firmly in his hand and procured up an image of the laboratory; sleek panels, blinking lights, utter silence. With that picture in mind he pressed the button on the weapon, and in the next instant all three of them found themselves transported to that place exactly. Spock had exactly one second to marvel at the success of the device before he was stricken with horror at the sight before him.

It was McCoy— strung from the ceiling in chains with his feet dangling. His eyes wide open, unblinking, and his uniform tattered with purple bruises and scars littered all over his face.

He looked completely and utterly broken.

“Bones.” Jim breathed.

Spock was too shocked to act of his own accord. It was only when Jim rushed forward, hands reaching up for the doctor that he was propelled into action. Immediately he was at the man’s side, helping unshackle McCoy’s wrists. He noticed they were irreparably damaged, the sleeve of the doctor’s uniform singed to pieces. Spock managed to undo the shackles and slowly hoisted the man down into Jim’s waiting arms. The captain carefully lifted McCoy up and carried him bridal style to a nearby couch, laying him down with the utmost care. The manner in which he handled McCoy reminded Spock of a first time parent treating their young infant— with deep tenderness and fear of breaking them.

As soon as McCoy was safely stretched on the couch, Jim instantly sat down on the edge of it and leaned over his friend, worry evident in his expression and every move. Jim’s fingers jumped to McCoy’s wrist, presumably checking for a pulse. Spock could feel the palpable fear in the air as he pick up McCoy's own medical tricorder and turned it on.

“His pulse is almost gone.” Jim whispered.
Spock believed it was best to remain silent, and instead began running the tricorder over McCoy's body.

“How is he?” Jim inquired barely two seconds after. There was an edge of desperation to his voice, something raw Spock had never heard before.

He made it a point to avoid eye contact as he revealed, "Severe heart damage. Signs of congestion in both lungs. Evidence of massive circulatory collapse.”

He continued to read off the diagnostics, realising something very important— torture was awful. Of course he’d known it was a despicable practice before, but he’d never been so closely affected by it. Not even when he had been in the position of being the one who was tortured. No, it was far worse seeing someone he knew endure it.

A pained noise tore from Jim’s throat. Spock froze momentarily before forcing himself to continue with the medical tricorder. He could only imagine the torment Jim must be experiencing at seeing his close friend— no, best friend— in such a state.

McCoy’s lips quivered slightly, and Spock heard the man attempt whispered words. Jim must have picked up on it too, for he instantly cradled the doctor’s head close to his lap. His touch was soft and gentle, yet incredibly loving. Spock almost felt ashamed for witnessing such a private moment.

“Don’t talk.” Jim instructed, then almost immediately after dropped his voice to a soft murmur. “Don’t speak. Take it easy until we get you back to the ship.”

A spike in the tricorder readings stole Spock’s attention away from the scene taking place. Looking down at the fluctuating lines he felt dread settle over him. He hated to disrupt such a tender moment, but he was certain Jim wanted to know about the good doctor’s status. Needed to know.

“Jim.”

The man spared Spock a glance. The fragile expression on his face made Spock’s task all that more difficult. With a quiet nod of his head, he slowly rose from the couch. Jim, the clever being that he was, understood the gesture for what it was. Although he looked immensely reluctant to part from McCoy, he gave his friend a lingering glance and gentle squeeze of the hand before carefully extracting himself from the man.

“What is it? What’s the matter?” He asked as he stepped into Spock’s space. His tone was hurried. Concerned.

*He is afraid,* Spock realised. It was something he was aware of, but still, it didn’t make it any more bearable to witness.

Spock prepared himself for the reaction his words would invoke, and as gently as he could revealed, “He’s dying, Jim.”

Jim flinched back, his eyes turning big. Spock found it extremely difficult to plough on when the captain wore such a distraught expression, but he had to.

“We can make him comfortable, but that is all.”

“You don’t know, you’re not a doctor.” Jim accused fiercely. It was obvious he was scared. Scared for his friend. Scared of what would happen. Spock felt a deep pain on Jim’s behalf, but above all else he felt useless. His captain, usually so bright, so grounded, so agile in dire situations— was terrified, and there was nothing Spock could do to help.
“I am.” McCoy’s lazy voice interrupted. The two of them whirled around to the man still laid out on the couch, his hazel eyes attempting to focus in on them. His voice was rough. Torn. “Go on.”

Spock was stood close enough to Jim that he could feel the waves of nausea and distress coming off of him. He knew the captain was a highly emotional being, but he hadn’t thought he would be so sentimental that even Spock, who was a mere touch telepath, would be able to pick up on his intense worry. With his feet dragging the captain returned to his seat on the couch, Spock silently trailing after with the medical tricorder still in hand. He returned to running it over the good doctor, and quietly revealed every new reading as it appeared.

“Internal injuries. Bleeding in the chest and abdomen. Haemorrhage of the spleen and liver. Seventy percent kidney failure.”

With that final announcement Spock pulled the tricorder away. Jim’s expression contorted into one of such pain that one would believe he was the one suffering at the hands of near death.

“He’s right, Jim.” McCoy’s breathing had slowed considerably. As it was now it was almost inaudible, like a whisper in the wind. “Being a doctor has its drawbacks. I… always wondered why I —” He erupted into a coughing fit.

Jim’s hands instantly darted for him, holding his face carefully as to not hurt him. He stared down at McCoy, worrying his bottom lip between his teeth. When he turned to look at Spock, there was a noticeable wetness in his eyes.

“How long?” He asked, voice coming out in a thin whisper.

“It could happen any time.” Spock said quietly.

McCoy’s lips tilted up into a lazy, half-formed smile. “The correct medical phrase, eh, Spock?”

Spock opened his mouth as if to respond, but the words were caught in his throat. He couldn’t believe how even now, when he was mere moments away from death, McCoy could remain sharp-tongued. In an odd way it was valiant. Spock imagined he could have become close friends with the doctor given enough time.

McCoy’s eyes slammed shut, and he began to writhe in pain for just a moment before settling back down. Jim stared on, his grip on the man having travelled from his face down to his blistered hand. Jim held it tightly in his own, rubbing his thumb over damaged the skin. For some unknown reason Spock too reached forward, and began to gently stroke McCoy’s hair.

The man's breathing was coming in weaker than before, his chest barely rising and falling to indicate that he was still alive. Barely. McCoy’s eyelids flickered, the weight of them seemingly too heavy for him to bear. “You’ve got a… good bedside manner, Spock.”

Spock barely had time to process the words before McCoy’s eyes slipped shut, and with a final breathe, his head lolled to the side.

The silence that fell over them could have been shattered by a mere needle; so cold and quiet was it. Jim continued to stare at McCoy’s now lifeless form, the tendons in his neck standing out and his shoulders quivering.

His voice was shaky as he asked in a hushed tone, “Can’t we do something?”

He sounded so incredibly fragile Spock was scared his reply would break the man.
“I’m afraid not.”

His deep baritone voice was a strange contrast. Jim unsteadily rose to his feet and stepped away from the couch. Spock thought it best not to interfere. He’d never witnessed the captain in such a shaky state and didn’t want to accidentally propel him further into misery. And so, Spock chose to remain where he was stood, simply waiting. For what, he wasn’t certain.

He’d expected Jim to take his time mourning the death of his close friend, and so he was surprised when not a moment later the man stepped in front of him with a spark in his eyes.

“Gem might be able to help him the way she helped me.” He suggested in a low voice.

Spock barely managed to suppress the shock on his face. Just a minute ago he had seen Jim on the brink of despair, and now there was a renewed purpose growing in him. **Hope**, Spock realised.

Jim froze just then, hesitancy clear in his eyes. “But… could nearness to death also kill her?”

Spock glanced around and spotted the being in question curled on the floor. She was staring at McCoy’s body with a devastated expression, her lower lip quivering. Like all the previous times, Spock hadn’t noticed her presence until the topic fell on her.

“Uncertain, captain.” He said slowly. “Doctor McCoy’s analysis of her reaction assumes that her instinct for self-preservation would prevent it. However, we cannot be positive.”

Jim let out a frustrated sigh. “If she could just strengthen him and keep him from sinking further into death, we might be able to save him.”

They exchanged looks, something wordless transpiring between them, then together turned to face Gem. They had barely taken two steps when a force field enveloped them, halting their actions. The reaction was Pavlovian by now, Spock’s eyes instantly darting around the space to seek out the familiar silver robes an engorged heads. His gaze landed on them standing several paces away from McCoy. Like all other times they simply looked on with aloof expressions.

It was Jim who broke the eerie silence with his hissed plea. “She can save his life. Let us help her to go to him.”

“She must not be urged or forced to take action.” One of the Vians replied with the utmost calm. Had it been any other time Spock would have admired the beings’ ability to remain detached in such an emotionally charged situation. But as it was now their indifference caused nothing but annoyance to swell up in him.

“All must proceed without interference.” The Vian went on. “The purpose that brought us together —”

“What purpose can this serve except for the fulfilment of some need of yours?” Jim yelled sharply, his face quickly turning red.

“We have but one need left in life, and that is to see the completion of the final moment of our test. Be patient.”

“Patient?” Jim's voice was seething with fury. "Our friend is dying!”

The Vian allowed a small nod. “Perhaps.”

Spock could sense a shouting match in the very near future, one which lead nowhere except to
infuriate Jim further, and so he intercepted. “What purpose can be served by the death of our friend except to bring you pleasure? Surely, beings as advanced as yourselves know that your star system will soon be extinct. Your sun will nova.”

“We know.” The Vians confirmed.

“Then you also know that the millions of inhabitants on its planets are doomed.”

“That is why we are here.”

“This arena of death that you’ve devised for your pleasure, will it prevent this catastrophe?” Jim demanded.

“No, it will not.” One of the Vians revealed. “But it may save Gem’s planet. Of all the planets of Minara, we have the power to transport the inhabitants of only one to safety.”

“If Gem’s planet is the one that will be saved then we must make certain, beyond any doubt whatsoever, they are worthy of survival.” The second Vian added.

“How will the death of our friend serve this purpose?” It didn’t escape Spock’s notice how Jim tripped over the words ‘death of our friend’. This conversation was too raw for him.

“His death will not serve it, but her willingness to give her life for him will. You were her teachers.”

Jim’s eyebrows jumped in surprise. “We were? What could she learn from us?”

The Vians’ gaze bore into them. “Your will to survive. Your love of life. Your passion to know. They are recorded in her being.”

A sudden realisation hit Spock. Of course. Whenever Gem took in their pain, she also took in other things. Other emotions, other feelings. Anything the pain was associated with, even the cause behind it. It was, dare Spock say, very clever in a manipulative way.

“Her planet will be fortunate.” The Vian continued. “Each of you was willing to give his life for the others. We must now find out whether that instinct has been transmitted to Gem.”

A sudden rumble tore through the laboratory, and Spock felt the ground beneath his feet shake.

“Time grows short.” The Vian observed.

“You were correct, captain.” Spock admitted quietly. “Everything that has occurred here has been caused to happen by them. This has all been a great laboratory, and we have been the subjects of the test.”

“No.” The Vian interrupted. “We only created the circumstances. That was necessary.”

Spock caught sight of Gem out of the corner of his eye, her curled form trembling. He saw as her eyes darted between them and McCoy, her mind running a mile a minute. Slowly, she rose from her position, and took a hesitant step forward. A second tremor ran through the laboratory, and Gem came to an instant halt. Her tiny hands curled into fists at her side, and she looked as if she were struggling to continue.

“Your actions were spontaneous. Everything that is truest and best in all species of beings has been revealed by you. Those are the qualities that make a civilisation worthy to survive.”

Gem seemed to have steeled herself, for she strode towards McCoy once more. There was little
confidence in her form, but she didn’t stop until she finally came to stand by the couch. She gazed down at McCoy’s limp body, and even from this distance Spock could feel the heavy weight of those deep eyes.

The second Vian gestured towards Gem who carefully seated herself on the couch. “Behold.”

Gem looked hesitant, but then seemed to have made up her mind as she placed her delicate hands over McCoy’s own larger ones. She began running them over him, trailing them over his arms and up to his shoulders, his neck and his face.

Spock overheard the Vians whispering to each other. “This is most significant. An instinct new to the essence of her being is generating.”

“Compassion for another is becoming part of her functioning life system.”

Gem suddenly dropped her hand, and Spock felt a spike of fear. Time seemed to slow considerably, and it was not due to the effects of the force field. Spock’s mind was so focused on Gem that he didn’t pay attention to anything else. All he wished to see was what she would do.

Gem wrung her hands in her dress, looking distinctly nervous. Her eyes flickered back to McCoy, and she must have come to some sort of realisation for she brought her hands back up and once more hovered them over the doctor’s face. Finally, she placed them onto his skin, and her eyes fell shut. Slowly, the bruises that covered McCoy faded, and in the next instant appeared on Gem. She was absorbing his pain. Spock watched in fascination as next the cuts littering the doctor’s face were removed and transferred the Gem, tears streaming down her cheeks as she accepted the pain. Spock silently begged her to carry on with her healing, to erase any trace of harm done on the doctor’s body.

Suddenly Gem’s head hung forward and her shoulders began shaking, then, in the next moment, she fell to ground. Her mouth fell open in a silent shout, and Spock felt his heart stutter.

“She is afraid.” One of the Vians noted.

“She is saving herself.” The second one said with a hint of disappointment. "She does not yet have the instinct to save her people.”

Spock continued to watch Gem writhing on the floor, her eyelashes wet from tears. Any hope he had of McCoy being saved quickly trickled away.

One of the Vians turned to their colleague. “We have failed?”

“No. Not yet.” The second Vian assured.

It was said with such calamity, nothing out of the ordinary for these two beings, but their words had Spock thinking. They spoke of failure, not in regards to Gem, but themselves. That could mean that…

“Captain,” Spock began, his voice pitched low enough that only Jim could hear him. “Doctor McCoy’s life is not solely dependent on Gem. The Vians, too, must be capable of saving his life.”

“True.” One of the Vians admitted openly, turning to look at them. It seemed Spock had miscalculated how evolved their hearing was. These beings turned out to be far more advanced than him in every aspect.

“Then you can’t let him die.” Jim spit out fiercely. His ire had not died down since the appearance of
the Vians, but it was more controlled.

The Vian let their gaze lazily run along Jim’s form before they turned back to watching Gem. “His death is not important. We must wait to see whether her instinct for self-sacrifice has become stronger than her instinct for self-preservation.”

A fresh wave of anger hit Spock, and he tensed up instinctively. The emotion was not his own. Jim must have been incredibly enraged by the Vians’ behaviour. Spock didn’t blame him.

He continued to watch Gem writhing on the floor, hugging her arms around herself as she rocked from side to side. A dash of hope erupted in Spock when he saw McCoy’s head lift off the couch, but it quickly vanished when the man erupted into a coughing fit. The sound seemed to have caught Gem’s attention, for she stopped her trembling. She looked to the source, her expression wrought with doubt. Spock’s mind urged her to go forth, to return to McCoy’s side and help him. Heal him. Gem carefully pulled herself into a sitting position, and with shaking hands reached up to McCoy once more.

The doctor turned his head slightly and gazed down at her through drooping eyelids. His voice was barely a whisper. “Don’t touch me. Stay away.”

Whether Gem heard him or chose not to no one knew, but she continued to run her hands over his face.

McCoy’s eyes slid shut, and he asked in a louder voice, “Jim. Spock. Are you here?”

Jim’s reply was immediate. “Yes, Bones. We’re here.”

McCoy’s chest rose slowly with every word he uttered. “Don’t let her touch me. She’ll die.”

There were various emotions fighting for attention inside of Spock, but he couldn’t settle on just one. Helplessness. Irritation. Incredulousness at the doctor’s words. But none of them could compare to how Jim was feeling at hearing his friend’s request. Of that, Spock was sure. The captain didn’t utter a single word, but a glance to the side revealed sweat beading the side of his head and his lips pressed together.

McCoy’s eyes flitted open and looked around the room until finally they landed on the captain. “Jim… please. I can’t destroy life, even if it’s to save my own.”

There was a brief moment of silence where one could have heard a pin drop, then Jim was suddenly furiously trying to move.

“I can’t. You know that.” McCoy went on, weakly gripping Gem’s wrist. “I can’t… let you… do it.” And with those words, he threw her off him.

She landed on the floor with a thump. The noise stopped Jim dead in his tracks, and when he saw the cause behind it he began to move even more.

“Captain.” Spock said in an urgent tone, but it did nothing to halt Jim.

“What is it?” He asked tersely, still struggling.

“The intensity of emotion is draining us and building up the force field.”

“Yes, I know.” Jim snapped.
Spock wanted to flinch at the reply, but forced himself to remain calm. “It draws its energy from us, captain. In spite of what we see, all emotion must be suppressed. That might weaken the field.”

The words must have reached some sensible part of Jim, because he ceased his struggling and hung his head with a huff. He swallowed once, then said, “I’ll try.”

Spock should have been pleased that the captain had taken his advice to heart, but he wasn’t. Jim was an incredibly emotional man, and no matter how much he attempted to suppress his feelings it would take him years to even possibly be able to escape this contraption they were caught in. There would be no chance that Jim would be able to escape the force field, but the same couldn’t be said for Spock. He was after all a Vulcan, and as a Vulcan he was exceedingly experienced at subduing his emotions.

As a child Spock had struggled with controlling his feelings, his Human half reigning supreme in both body and mind. It had taken extensive training and practice, much more so than the other Vulcan children, for him to be able to discipline himself and gain command of his emotions. He had felt inadequate and damaged when younger, but fortunately the training had succeeded not only in giving him more confidence, but also aiding him in mastering his emotions even better than his peers.

Spock focused his entire mind and body on hushing his emotions, bringing them down to a simmer and stilling them entirely. It took several seconds, but eventually they fell flat, and in their wake left emptiness. Spock’s iron control over his feelings enabled him to slowly move inside of the force field, shifting himself forward at a painstakingly easy pace until finally he took his first step into freedom. He was quiet, holding his emotions down tightly until he was stood right behind the Vians. Neither of them seemed to notice his presence. His control was impeccable.

As fast as lightning Spock’s hands darted forward and disarmed the Vians, twisting their wrists in such a way that they were forced drop their weapons. Immediately the force field around Jim flickered out of existence, and he rushed towards McCoy. His eyes darted over his friend’s face, taking in every miniscule change.

Jim suddenly stiffened. He looked back at the Vians, then approached them with purposeful steps. He picked up one of the weapons off the floor, and held it out to them in a wordless plea.

It was futile.

“You cannot use our powers to change what is happening.” The Vian told him.

“You must save the life of our friend.” Jim insisted. Both his voice and the hand holding the weapon were trembling.

The Vians’ dark gaze bore into Jim. “No.”

Jim’s expression darkened. “You must.” He hissed through clenched teeth.

The Vian’s voice was infuriatingly measured as they replied, “We will not. Her instinct must be developed to the fullest. The test must be complete.”

Jim’s hand dropped to his side. The weapon toppled out of his hold and to the ground with a clatter. He swayed slightly where he stood, looking utterly crestfallen.

“It is complete. Gem has earned the right of survival for her planet. She offered her life.” Spock reasoned.

The Vians looked over their shoulders at him. “To offer is not proof enough.”
Spock wished to retort, but Jim lifting his head caught his attention. The captain gazed at him with a barren expression, yet to Spock it spoke volumes. How odd it was that Jim could be a muddle of mystery to him at times, yet in the direst of situations Spock could read him like an open book.

“If death is all you understand…” Jim said in a small voice, kneeling down to pick up the discarded weapon. Spock, too, picked up the second one, and handed it over to the captain. He came to stand by Jim’s side and watched as Jim held out the weapons to the Vians. “Here are four lives for you.”

The Vians didn’t hesitate for even a moment before accepting the offer.

“We will not leave our friend. You’ve lost the capacity to feel the emotions you brought Gem here to experience.” His voice had begun in a quietly firm tone, but now it was rising, righteous anger seeping into it. “You don’t understand what it is to live. Love and compassion are dead in you. You’re nothing but intellect!”

The ensuing silence that followed Jim’s announcement was so heavy Spock could feel the weight of it hanging off his shoulders, like fingers digging into his flesh. He felt deeply uncomfortable. The words had been aimed at the Vians, but they had hit a little too close to home. He had heard such words before, similar ones, said to himself many times over. It was eerie to hear them being said now and not be directed at himself.

The Vians continued to stare right ahead at Jim, their expressions never shifting. Seconds trickled by with nobody speaking. The silence kept growing thicker and more stifling. Spock felt he could very well suffocate in the quietude, so severe was it.

Finally, after what felt like eons, one of the Vians held up their weapon and took aim.

* 

Jim had not stopped crying even when they safely made it back onto the Enterprise.

He kept clutching at McCoy’s chest, fresh tears seeping into the man’s uniform and making him distinctly uncomfortable. Or that is what Spock assumed going by his grimace. He didn’t understand why the man would care about his uniform being stained when it was already tattered beyond all repair.

The Vians had saved McCoy in the end. One press of the button and the man had awoken, sitting up and looking every bit as healthy as a Human could look. The sight had Jim stumbling towards his friend and falling to his knees, hugging every part of McCoy he could get his hands, tears streaming down his face and a litany of ‘thank you’s falling from his lips.

Despite the highly emotional scene the Vians had remained detached, simply staring on as if nothing out of the ordinary was happening. But something odd had happened. They had defied their experiment. Gone against it. Even though it meant they would never know the results of their test, they had done the honourable and righteous thing; they had saved McCoy.

Spock wondered if Jim’s words had struck a chord in them as it had in him.

McCoy had hugged Jim back, held him tightly in his arms as if he never wished to let go. Spock just about had time to think that he should turn around in order to give them some privacy when McCoy had caught his eye. They’d stared at each other for longer than was necessary, Jim’s wracked sobs filling up the strange silence.

Eventually, for lack of something to do, Spock had simply said, “I am pleased to have you back, doctor.”
And McCoy, surprisingly, had quirked his lips up into a smile and replied, “Thank you, Mr. Spock. It’s good to be back.”

Not long after the Vians had bid them farewell, taking Gem with them. Spock wondered whether she had earned her people their lives, but found he’d rather not know. With the Vians’ departure the away team found themselves returned to the research station they first arrived in, the room in just as much disarray as when they had left.

Jim had managed to ask engineer Scott to beam them aboard the ship, sniffing out his command in a strangely endearing manner. Once aboard the engineer had been shocked to see the captain still weeping, although it was more subdued now. McCoy had immediately ushered Jim off the platform and towards the exit, assuring the captain that everything was ‘just fine now, Jim. It’s all fine.’

Spock left them to it. He thought it was important that they be alone together right now. It was difficult to watch Jim leave with tears still in his eyes, but Spock knew McCoy was the one only who could erase them at this time.

As he approached the transporter control panel he saw engineer Scott following the captain and doctor McCoy’s departure with a frown. It was clear he wished to inquire into the happenings of the mission. But Spock offered the man no explanation as to what had occurred, and instead instructed him to conduct the regular procedures that came with the completion of a mission. He did, however, insist that Jim and doctor McCoy be given forty-eight hours to hand in their individual reports. He’d originally thought twenty-four hours would be enough for the two of them to recover, but in the end decided two full days would be better. The mission had really taken a toll on them, especially the captain.

Jim continued to remain incredibly mystifying, Spock thought as he exited the transporter room. He had seen many sides of the man during their acquaintance, but this mission seemed to bring out the most hidden parts of him. The vulnerable ones.

Spock’s image of Jim was constantly changing; the man was strong in spirit and steadfast in his morals. He was bright in many ways and the crew thought of him as a reliable captain. He was capable of being humorous, angry, scared, even insecure, which oddly enough still bothered. Jim was many things, had an amazing slew of emotions roiling beneath him, and Spock couldn’t help but think of the man as an iridescent sky. Bright, and free, and all encompassing.

On this mission he’d been given not just a glimpse, but a front seat view of the sadness Jim was capable of feeling. McCoy’s temporary death had wrought such pain from the captain that Spock had felt himself hurting on Jim’s behalf. He’d never thought it would be possible for him to do so, but it seemed where Jim was concerned, anything was. The man was an extremely emotive being, and much, much more empathetic than Spock had thought. It had him wondering how someone like Jim could be friends with Spock. Even chose to be his friend. All he knew was that regardless of the incredible being Jim was, Spock hoped the man would never seek to remove Spock from his life.

With that final thought Spock slid open the door to his quarters and stepped inside, only to find a gift in the middle of his neatly made bed.

Chapter End Notes

Personally I think the issue with the Vians was resolved too quickly, but that’s TOS for ya
Managed to get some free time and finish off this chapter, though I really am sorry for being so slow with my updates compared to how I used to be! I'll also get to replying to all of your lovely comments (both regulars and newbies) by the end of today :) Thank you for sticking with this story so long, you're all angels!
Spock hadn’t so much as gotten within a two metre radius of the parcel on his bed since he entered his quarters. All he’d done was lean close enough to get a better look at it. It was no bigger than the size of his palm, red paper with yellow ribbon wrapped around it, along with a tiny card with one sentence scribbled on it: ‘To my love’.

This was extremely disconcerting. As far as Spock was aware he was the only being who had regular access to his quarters, and only chief engineer Scott and the captain had the authorization code to override entry into his quarters. He was certain the captain wasn’t the culprit behind the intrusion into his personal space, and he did not believe engineer Scott had a reason to leave something in his quarters. Neither of them should. However, Spock decided it best to comm them both before he surmised anything further.

Lifting his comm unit to his lips, Spock called out, “Engineer Scott, come in.”

Not even a moment later there was a reply. “Scott here.”

“Mr. Scott, have you recently used the override key in order to access my quarters?”

“No, sir, I’ve not left engineering since yesterday night.” There was a brief pause, then the man slowly went on. “Or this morning. I’m not entirely sure, I usually muddle them up. One of the downfalls of living in space.” He chuckled.

Spock felt unease rising within him. If Mr. Scott hadn’t accessed his quarters, it meant that the sole remaining suspect was the captain.

“Thank you, Mr. Scott.” He ended the call and looked at the package on his bed. He had not touched it since he had entered his quarters, and looking at it now he felt even more unwilling to do so.

It wasn’t impossible that Jim had been the one to leave the parcel, but it was highly improbable. Spock was certain the man wouldn’t intrude into his quarters unless there was a legitimate reason for it, and even if he did he would have informed Spock of his entry either before or after it had occurred. Doing neither was simply out of character for Jim. However, with Mr. Scott having disappeared from the list of potential suspects, it left no one else but the captain. Unless…

Spock hesitated momentarily, then walked over to the computer and turned it on. It came alive within a second, humming to life.

“Computer, please summarise the whereabouts of engineer Montgomery Scott in the past 12 hours.” He ordered.

A moment passed, then the computer’s animatronic voice loudly announced its findings. “Engineer Montgomery Scott has been stationed in Engineering for the past 12 hours.”

So the man hadn’t been lying then. Spock didn’t have cause to think he had, but the alternative was so absurd he had to check to be certain. In fact, he still felt rather suspicious about it, and so he added, “Computer, extend the hours from 12 to 24.”

“Engineer Montgomery Scott has been stationed in Engineering for the past 24 hours.”
“Computer, please summarise the whereabouts of captain James T. Kirk for the past 24 hours.”

“Captain James T. Kirk has remained in Sickbay for the past 10 minutes. His whereabouts for the 4 hours prior to that are unknown. In the hours prior to that he was in the recreation hall and his quarters.”

That made sense. They had been off-planet for the past several hours, and before that they’d been together in the recreation hall. Spock himself had been in close contact with Jim for the past 12 hours, both on and off shift. As he was currently in Sickbay it meant he was most definitely still with doctor McCoy who had met them as soon as they arrived back on the Enterprise. That disqualified the two of them as suspects, and left Spock in a state of confusion.

“Computer, at what time was the latest entry into my quarters? Count it back by the hour, please.”

“The latest entry into Commander Spock’s quarters were 6 minutes ago.”

Spock blinked. He must be more dishevelled from the mission than he thought if he forgot to exclude his own entry as being the latest one.

“And the latest entry prior to that?” He amended.

“4.3 hours ago.”

Spock’s brows furrowed. That couldn’t be right. By his calculations, 4.3 hours ago should have been when he entered his quarters in preparation for their mission. “Computer, please double-check your records.”

“4.3 hours ago.” The computer repeated.

Spock felt unease settle into his body. The computer could not identify a time of entry before or after his own entrances, yet there on his neatly made bed was the clear evidence that someone else had accessed his quarters. Like a ghost they had slipped in and out, without his knowledge. Without the computer’s knowledge.

Spock would not admit it aloud, but he felt his blood run cold. There had been a serious breach of privacy and he felt unsettled. He felt unsafe.

He needed help.

*

Spock barely managed to catch Security Officer Giotto as he headed out of the security department, speedily walking towards the turbolift. He reiterated the events regarding the parcel on his bed, sharing only the important facts such as the computer’s inability to identify the culprit when it had documented his own entrances. Throughout his story Giotto’s eyebrows rose higher and higher on his forehead, disbelief colouring his face. Spock could understand the man’s reaction, having internally experienced the same mere minutes before.

By the end of it Giotto’s expression had changed into one of determination, his shoulders squared and standing tall.

“That is beyond bizarre, Commander Spock. The computers should be able to identify any and all entrances or exits on the starship, your room shouldn’t be an exception— really, it should be one of the most closely observed and guarded rooms on the ship. Your room should be impenetrable. The only ones with access to it are only you, the captain, or in dire situations, Scotty.”
Spock gave a single nod. He had assumed as much. Not because he believed he required the high security, but because his role as Commander granted him it. It was after all an important position, the second-highest rank right after the captain.

“I have already contacted Engineer Scott and confirmed his whereabouts for the past 24 hours. I have taken similar measures with the captain, and neither of them are the culprit.”

Giotto frowned. “That is…” He shook his head. “That’s very helpful, Commander, thank you. But you do understand that since the only two possible suspects who could have entered your room are innocent, it means you may be in danger.”

A chill ran through Spock. “I understand.”

“I’ll look into it, I swear. I’ll make it my top priority, actually, I’ll just send one of my guys to deal with the situation down in Engineering first.”

Usually Spock would have insisted that Giotto focus his efforts on his first task, but his situation was far too risky to delay looking into. “Thank you, Officer Giotto.”

“It’s my job, Commander Spock.” Giotto said with a small smile. “Of course I’m going to take it seriously. All I ask is that in the meantime you stay out of your quarters.”

“Understood.” Spock acknowledged.

“I don’t know how long it’ll take, so I can’t guarantee you’ll be able to get back inside before I’ve figured out who the culprit is. My suggestion is that you stay with someone else in the meantime.”

Spock nodded. That sounded reasonable and like the safest course of action. “Am I permitted to gather supplies from my quarters?”

Giotto grimaced. “I’d rather you didn’t. I don’t know what’s going on in there, the situation you described sounds quite shady. Maybe there was some trap set up in there, maybe there wasn’t, but I’d feel safer if you stayed out of it until we’re absolutely, 100% sure there’s nothing going on in there.”

“Of course.” It was a slight inconvenience that he wouldn’t be able to retrieve any supplies, but Spock understood the logic behind Giotto’s words. “Again, thank you for your help, Officer Giotto.”

Giotto opened his mouth, then shut it again. He gave a firm nod. “You’re welcome, Commander Spock. I actually forgot to ask, but do you have anyone’s you can stay at? If not we can arrange something for you, probably near Security or Sickbay so someone can always keep an eye on you.”

“That will not be necessary.” Spock informed him, thoughts already landing on the one person who would be able to calm him during this time. “I believe Nyota will be more than willing to take me into her own quarters.”

* 

“Are you fucking serious?” Nyota asked tensely.

Spock was sat cross-legged on her floor, dressed in an exercise shirt and leggings she had lent him. They weren’t his size, but they sufficed. He had sought out Nyota’s company right after his conversation with Security Officer Giotto, luckily finding her already in her quarters. She’d immediately invited him inside, but with a curious look. Spock rarely, if ever, dropped by unannounced. Once inside he had steeled himself before asking her if he could meditate in his room,
assuring her that he would explain his presence once he was less unsettled.

Nyota had looked him dead in the eye at the proclamation, stared at him for several long moments, then given a nod before going to rummage through her wardrobe, cementing herself as the true friend Spock needed at this time. Spock began meticulously undressing, the focus on removing his garments somewhat helping him stay calm. Or at least as calm as he could be in his agitated state of mind.

As he'd folded his clothes and donned Nyota’s own, he'd began telling her about the incident with the parcel in his quarters, the computer’s inability to identify the intruder, and Giotto’s promise that he would make Spock’s case his number one priority. All throughout the story Nyota had remained silent, the only action betraying her thoughts being the thinning of her lips. She was worried. She was angry. She felt fear for her friend. Spock could identify all those emotions from that one simple act, an ability he had earned from several years’ of friendship.

Spock’s eyes flitted to the ground. “Unfortunately. It is not a situation I willingly put myself into.”

Nyota scoffed. “Of course not, Spock! Who’d want to— you know what, never mind. You know you’re free to stay here as long as you need, right?”

“I am aware.” Spock confirmed.

“Good. And we can replicate some clothes for you as well. And Vulcan dishes too. And whatever else you need.”

“Thank you.” Spock said, feeling safer already. Being in the presence of a friend reduced his anxiety remarkably, especially remaining in close quarters with someone as fierce and powerful as Nyota.

“I just…” Nyota shook her her. “I can’t believe it. What happened was a serious breach of privacy. And if the computers didn’t pick up on who it was that means that the intruder themselves must have erased themselves from the system.”

It had not occurred Spock that that may have been the case. In his agitated state he had spared little thought for anything other than getting himself away from the danger. The idea of seeking Giotto out had hit him only when he was in the turbolift, heading away from his room.

“I had not thought of that.” He admitted.

“I mean, it has to be that.” Nyota said firmly. “It’s the only logical explanation. Sure, there may be some other way the intruder didn’t show up on the system— God knows some weird shit happens to us out here— but that’s got to be the most likely.”

“You are not incorrect.” Spock said, thoughts starting to run. He felt himself returning back to his usual ways, his previous fear gradually receding. “Perhaps I should inform Security Officer Giotto of this suspicion.”

“I’m sure he’s already thought of it, Spock.” Her eyebrows knitted together. “The fact that you didn’t think of it first must mean you were really rattled…”

“I was rather… concerned.” He admitted, catching her gaze.

Her eyes softened. “We’ll figure this out, Spock. Don’t you worry, we’ll find whoever the culprit is. I mean this is some sick, weird….” She broke off with a heavy sigh. “I just don’t understand why they’d break into your quarters to leave a parcel. Why couldn’t they have given it to you in person?”
Spock’s mind flashed briefly to the e-mails he’d received for the past few months. *Semaj Ton*. The increasingly worrisome words he’d been sent. The devotion in the e-mails, the proclamations. He fully intended to tell Nyota of them, but when he opened his mouth she beat him to it with her own query.

“Have you told Jim?”

Spock’s mouth fell closed, and he averted his gaze. “I have not.”

Nyota sat down next to him, keeping her distance enough so as to not get into his personal space. “Spock, you have to tell him. He’s the captain, he needs to know that something’s happened to his first officer, and on his ship too.”

“I believe I will wait.” He informed her. “When I last checked the captain’s whereabouts the computer showed him to still be in Sickbay. I believe he is still spending some much needed time with doctor McCoy.”

Nyota frowned.

“The last mission was… strenuous for them.” He revealed. It had been for him too, but he doesn’t deem it necessary to voice.

Nyota looked as if she wanted to press on, eyes narrowed and directed at Spock. However, instead she nodded and sat back on her haunches. “Alright. Whatever you feel is best. I won’t keep you from your meditation any longer.” She got up on her feet, dusting off her skirt. “I need to head to my next shift in a bit, but feel free to make yourself at home. And also, I want to know what happened on that mission later, okay? Seems like I need to catch up on a few events.”

Spock inclined his head, letting his hands fall onto his knees and his eyes slip shut. He heard the sound of Nyota’s boots clicking along the floor, moving around her room and shuffling about. Before long the sound of the doors sliding open echoed through the room, then shut, signalling her departure.

Spock’s eyes flew open. His hands gathered in between his thighs, fingers lightly running over his knuckles in worry. It was one of the few habits he had picked up on from his mother, one he couldn’t seem to get rid of. Oddly enough, it was rather comforting despite his current turmoil. His eyes flew to Nyota’s bed, taking in the well-made covers and three pillows decorating the top. Why she required three pillows he didn’t know. He peered around the room, taking in the familiar sight of his friend’s quarters. The decorations she had hung on the wall. The bright orange vase she had received from her grandmother prior to her departure on the *U.S.S. Enterprise*. A selection of flowers Lieutenant Sulu had arranged for her sat inside. Her desk, clear of anything but her PADD. Evidently her quarters, but she was nowhere to be seen.

Spock cleared his throat, dropping his chin to his chest. He closed his eyes, attempting to centre himself, but all he saw was darkness. He immediately blinked open his eyes. Fear clawed at his insides once more. He was completely and utterly alone. Spock shook his head in an attempt to rid himself of such thoughts. Preposterous. He wasn’t alone. He was in the quarters of his friend, safely kept away from any danger. Spock gazed around the room again. Wall decorations. Bright orange vase. Flowers from Sulu. PADD. The silence in the room felt heavy, nothing but the gentle hum of the ship’s engines reaching his ears. Spock flattened his hands against his thighs. He ran them up and down a few times before getting to his feet. He looked to the neatly made bed once more. He didn’t understand why, but his instincts were telling him to curl under the sheets. To hide himself away, surrounded by his closest friend’s scent. In her home. He was safe in her home.
Spock took a step towards the bed, hesitated, and then strode the rest of the way without stopping. He pulled back the duvet and crawled inside, burrowing himself inside the warmth amongst the three pillows. He still believed it to be far too many pillows for one being, but didn’t wish to disorganise Nyota’s decorative efforts. He settled into bed properly, pulling the duvet up to his chin. The warmth that surrounded him calmed his mind. The scent of Nyota wafting into his nostrils made him feel safe. He allowed his eyes to slip shut. The darkness that greeted him this time around didn’t feel as unnerving as previously. Spock inhaled deeply and pulled the duvet tighter around himself. Perhaps, he thought, allowing himself a moment’s rest would better ease his mind than a few hours’ meditation could. With that final thought, Spock drifted off to sleep.

* 

Indeed, the rest he enjoyed in Nyota’s bed proved far more rewarding than any meditative session he would have embarked upon. He had awoken in a cocoon of Nyota’s scent, the smell clinging to him and lulling him into a sense of security. Only an hour had passed since Spock had fallen asleep, yet he chose to remain beneath the duvet for another thirty minutes. As to why, he could not say. It simply felt comfortable.

Eventually though, he had removed himself from her bed, smoothing out the duvet to its original state. He wasn’t ashamed of leaving behind evidence of his sleep, but rather thought it rude to leave his friend’s bed in a mess. He was positive Nyota would be delighted to know he had been relaxed enough to allow himself to get a few hours’ sleep in her quarters.

Spock rearranged the pillows a final time before deeming them acceptable, then headed to the replicator situated in the corner of the room. He debated whether he should replicate a meal for himself, a pair of clothes for comfort, or contact Security Officer Giotto first and inquire about any progress regarding his case. The decision was taken from him as suddenly his communicator beeped loudly, pulling his attention to the device.

“Mr. Spock, come in.” Jim’s voice floated through the room.

With nimble fingers Spock picked up his communicator from where it was set on Nyota’s nightstand.

“Spock, here.”

“Are you well-rested?” Jim asked.

Spock blinked down at the communicator. What a peculiar question. Did the captain know of Spock’s situation? He couldn’t have. Spock hadn’t told him, and he knew Nyota would not reveal such sensitive information without his consent. Not unless there was reason for it.

“Indeed, I am, captain.” Spock replied.

“Good, good.” Jim murmured, then lapsed into silence. Spock waited for the man to continue, but when nothing came he decided to inquire further.

“Captain—”

“Spock, could you please make your way to the transporter room in half an hour.” He sounded tired. Drained.

“Captain?”

“Starfleet Command have just issued us with a mission and it’s been labelled highly urgent.”
Ah. That would explain the man’s voice. Spock gave a nod, though no one was there to witness it. “Indeed, captain. I will congregate with you in the transporter room in half an hour’s time.”

“Don’t be late.” Jim quipped good-humouredly. With those final words the transmission ended, and Spock was left to his own. He looked down at the communicator in his hand. The reflection in the screen stared back at him, expressionless.

This was good. This was needed. A mission would help keep his thoughts from straying towards the other matter that occupied his mind. Spock couldn’t approach the issue himself, not with the possibility of his safety being jeopardized. No, it wasn’t of his concern anymore. It was all in Security Officer Giotto’s hands now, and Spock was positive the man would be more than capable of handling it. For now, he would focus his attention elsewhere.

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Spock was surprised that the away team once more consisted of him, McCoy and Jim, and made sure to tell the captain so. Jim, had quickly pointed out that the mission had been labelled as urgent, and as it would be too time-consuming to gather a new away team and debrief them on the mission, the task fell to the three of them. Spock accepted the explanation as being reasonable, knowing that Jim would quickly run him through the details once they were planetside. He seemed to be quite stressed as of the moment, hurriedly taking his position on the transporter pad without so much as a joke or smile.

Spock had briefly caught McCoy’s eyes, the same question he had reflected in the other's gaze. Peculiar. The two men joined their captain on the transporter pads, standing on either side of him. With a nod to the ensign, the familiar sounds of the transporter beam erupted throughout the room, and in the next moment they materialised inside an unfamiliar room.

Instantly Jim had turned to face his two companions, arms crossed over his chest and a look of determination on his face. His explanation was swift and concise. They were currently near a star called Beta Niobe. It would be expected to go into nova in precisely 3.5 hours. Its only satellite, Sarpeidon, was an M-class planet. It was inhabited by civilised humanoid species. The U.S.S. Enterprise’s instruments had showed that no intelligent life remained on the planet, but there had been a power source detected in the building they had beamed down into. Starfleet Command had demanded they execute a final sweep just in case there were any stragglers hidden. With those final words Jim turned on his heel and strode down the hallway, leaving McCoy and Spock to their own.

Spock’s gaze once more flitted to the side, landing on the good doctor. The man's focus was entirely on Jim, his jaw clenched in displeasure. Or so Spock assumed. For as long he’d known the man, he’d constantly been in a foul mood of some sorts. Perhaps this was just another one of his natural expressions.

Deciding to take on the task at hand, Spock removed his tricorder from its confines and walked down the stretch of hallway. He switched it on and held it a small distance ahead of himself, watching the screen closely for any sudden readings. He heard the delayed sound of McCoy heading after him at a slower speed. His steps echoed through the hallway, absurdly loud in the vast silence. Spock could see Jim having come to a stop ahead of him. He was looking around the room with a focused gaze, his eyes wandering across the chrome interior of the room. There were shelves stacked with what appeared to be thin, colourful packages of sorts. Spock couldn’t decipher what they were from appearance alone, but whatever they were they lined rows and rows of their surroundings.

“How can a whole planet full of people just disappear?” McCoy wondered aloud, his voice carrying through the hallway.
“If they knew that the sun was dying it could be anything up to mass suicide.” Jim offered, slowly dragging his gaze across the shelves.

“Reports deny that they have any space-flight capability.” Spock offered, hovering the tricorder over the rows of packages. The tricorder readings jumped slightly. “This appears to be an archive or library of some kind.”

Jim nodded. “Then we’re certainly in the right place to find out what happened, where the inhabitants are, and if there are any left now.”

“Well, that’s fine.” McCoy said, looking to the captain. “Where do we start?”

“May I help you?”

All three men turned to the sudden voice. Spock spotted a humanoid-looking being staring at them a fair distance away. They were bald, save for the white hair on the sides of their head, had a large nose and wore a patterned grey robe.

The being raised a single eyebrow, then took a steps towards them. “I am the librarian. May I be of assistance?”

Spock’s gaze travelled over the man’s appearance once more. He didn’t look to be of harm, but looks could be deceiving. Spock remained on his guard, but still politely replied, “Perhaps you can…?”

“Mr. Atoz.” The being answered kindly. He looked between the three men with a tilt of his brow. “I confess that I’m a little surprised to see you. I had thought that everyone had long since gone. But the surprise is a pleasant one. After all, a library serves no purpose unless someone is using it.”

What a curious choice of words, Spock pondered to himself. Jim took a step forward, brows deepening. “You said everyone had gone. Where’d they go?”

“It depended on the individual, of course.” Mr. Atoz answered good-naturedly. “If you wish to trace a specific person, I’m sorry, but that information is confidential.”

McCoy shook his head. “No, no particular person, just people in general. Where did they go?”

Mr. Atoz smiled. “Ah, you find it difficult to choose, is that it? Yes, a wide range of alternatives is a mixed blessing, but perhaps I can help. Would you step this way, please?”

The being motioned them back towards the shelves. The three men shared a look, curious, yet unsure.

“Come along, then. There’s no need to be shy.” Mr. Atoz pushed.

Jim, naturally, was the first to head in the direction the man was gesturing. Despite their obvious hesitations McCoy and Spock followed closely behind. Sticking together would be the wisest form of action. After all, they still had no idea where Mr. Atoz was herding them.

Suddenly an exact copy of the librarian stepped out from between the shelves, a smile already adorning his face.

“May I help you?” The being asked, stepping past the shocked trio and towards another shelf. “You may select from more than 20,000 verisim tapes, several hundred of which have only recently been added to the collection. I’m sure you’ll find something here that pleases you.” They looked to Kirk.
“You, sir. What is your particular field of interest?”

Jim swallowed once, his eyes never leaving the being before him. He was obviously concerned at
the sudden appearance of this second Mr. Atoz, but this one seemed just as harmless as the first. It
was extremely perplexing. “What about… what about recent history?”

“Really? That’s too bad.” The librarian responded, sounding apologetic. “We have so little on recent
history. There was no demand for it.”

Jim seemed to recover somewhat, his answer more sure. “It doesn’t have to be extensive, just the
answers to a few questions.”

“Of course. Reference service is available at the desk.” The being pointed down the hall of shelves,
beyond it to an alcove shrouded in darkness. Jim spared a glance back at his friends, and when he
received no obvious sign on what to do, he gave the copy of Mr. Atoz a smile and began heading in
the direction they’d pointed out.

The trek through the shelves was quick, and when they emerged into the alcove they were greeted
with the sight of a being sat at a desk tinkering with something. At their entrance the being looked
up, and all three men froze at the sight.

Mr. Atoz. Again.

Spock’s eyebrows furrowed. How was this possible?

Mr. Atoz- if this truly was the real Mr. Atoz- stood up with a frown. “You’re very late. Where have
you been?”

Jim let out a huff of laughter. Whether it was from amusement or confusion, Spock could not tell.
“You’re a very agile being, Mr. Atoz. Just how many of you are there?”

There was no reply from Mr. Atoz, silence filling up the space where words would be.

Jim gave his head a shake but went on. “We came as soon as we knew what was happening.”

“Forgive me, sir. It is my fault. I must have miscalculated.” Spock admitted aloud, causing Jim to
glance over at his first officer with surprise. “Our readings indicated that there was no one here at
all.”

“Of course I know.” Mr. Atoz replied. “Everyone on this planet was warned of the coming nova
long ago. They followed instructions and are now safe, and you had better do the same.”

“Did you say they were safe?” Jim pressed.

Mr. Atoz nodded. “Absolutely. Every single one.”

Jim looked further bewildered. “Where did they go?”

“Wherever they wanted to go, of course. It is strictly up to the individual’s choice.”

“I see.” Jim said slowly, feeling the words out on his tongue. “And you personally send all these
people on the planet to safety?”

“Yes, yes, yes,” Mr. Atoz confirmed with impatience. “They are all gone, except you three. Of
course, I had to delegate the simple tasks to my replicas.”

Replicas. That would explain the previous Mr. Atozes they had encountered. Spock spotted doctor
McCoy extracting his own tricorder and turning it on discreetly. The man’s eyes flitted between his
You are the real one, Mr. Atoz?” Jim repeated, suspicion in his tone. Spock didn’t blame him. He, too, was unsure whether the being stood before them was indeed the real Mr. Atoz or another, more advanced, replica.

The man huffed. “Of course. I am the real Mr. Atoz.”

“As a matter of fact, he’s quite real, Jim.” McCoy added, showing Jim the tricorder readings he’d just taken. Spock angled his body so that he could view the readings himself. The doctor wasn’t lying. The being was very real, indeed.

Jim looked back at Mr. Atoz, seemingly having accepted them as the real version. “I see. Then, let us take you with us to a place of safety.”

“No, thank you.” Mr. Atoz denied quickly, rising from his seat. “I plan to join my wife and family when the time comes. Now, don’t be concerned about me. Think of yourselves. I warn you most urgently. Make your escape before it’s too late.”

The being walked around his desk and past the trio, heading towards the shelves behind them. All three men stared after Mr. Atoz, and really, there was little else they could besides follow. Spock briefly caught Jim’s eyes, and they seemed to share the same sentiment. This situation was rather confusing, though perhaps not more so than their past missions.

“The library is at your complete service.” Mr. Atoz announced as he searched the shelves. “I will gladly supply you with all reference material to help you. History of the planet is available in every detail. Just choose what interests you the most. The millennium, the century, the date, the moment. The library is your key.”

He extracted a blue crystal from one of the files and inserted it into a device in the wall. The crystal flashed bright blue and emitted a high pitched noise, startling McCoy. Mr. Atoz hurriedly removed the crystal with a huff.

“Oh! It’s in the wrong file. Well, make your own selection, but remember you’re very late.” Mr. Atoz brushed past them to another shelf. Spock surmised it was to place the blue crystal in its correct location.

Jim’s eyes ran over the coloured shelves before him, his eyebrows pinched into a look of impatience. “Yes, we’ll choose it as quick as we can. How long till nova?”

“3 hours, 13 minutes.” Spock supplied.

Jim shook his head with a sigh. “This gentleman is not—“

At that moment Mr. Atoz chose to make his reappearance, waltzing into the room with his large robes swaying. He instantly headed for Jim and gently touched his arm. “Hey, you, sir. I think you’ll find something interesting over here.”

Spock watched as Jim was dragged away back into the room they’d found the original Mr. Atoz, the two disappearing from sight. He contemplated following them, but it sounded as if Mr. Atoz had found something specifically for the captain himself.

Spock looked around the room, gaze landing on doctor McCoy. The man was perusing the shelves at a leisurely pace, hands at his sides and eyes wandering over the many coloured discs. Spock decided to join him and stepped up to a random shelf. His eyes fell on the first title he could decipher:
Hayand the Gifted. Spock raised a single brow. He was not familiar with the title. Spock looked to the disc next to it and read, Zor Khan the Tyrant. No, he did not recognise any of these titles in the slightest.

A sudden noise pierced the room, catching Spock’s attention. He turned to its source and saw Mr. Atoz stood at a large device with a white circle on it. It looked to be something akin to a mirror, except it only showed a shadow. Spock abandoned his spot at the shelves and walked up behind Mr. Atoz, coming to a stop behind them. He peered over the being’s shoulder, wanting to get a closer look at the device. Mr. Atoz turned to look at him. “Have you made your selection, sir?” He inquired with a kind smile.

“Exactly what is it that I’m expected to select?”

Mr. Atoz’s brows furrowed slightly. “I’m sure I was clear. The period in which you’re interested.”

“I see.” Spock said. He didn’t, but wasn’t bothered about the explan as of right now. His focus lay with the device which was now emitting a soft, humming noise. “This is a fascinating machine. What is it?”

Mr. Atoz glanced back at the device, a wide smile stretching from ear to ear. “Ahh. This is the atavachron.”

“Interesting nomenclature.” Spock mused, hovering closer. “Now, how does it work? May I—”

Mr. Atoz immediately threw his hands up, stopping Spock from taking another step further. “Oh, no, sir. No. I must ask you not to touch the controlling mechanism. Return and make your selection. When you have chosen I will prepare you through the atavachron.”

Spock shied back, slightly scolded. Recovering quickly he gave a stiff nod and murmured, “Thank you, Mr. Atoz.”

He stepped back, leaving Mr. Atoz to his ministrations. He decided instead to return to the library's shelves and resume his browsing. On his way back, however, he noticed McCoy staring at him with an amused lilt to his lips.

“Got told off, did you?” The doctor asked.

Spock felt his cheeks heat up, and was about to contest the man’s jibe with his own scathing remark, but was interrupted when a sudden scream tore through the room. Both Spock and McCoy turned towards the sound. Spock saw Jim look in the same direction, and before he could ascertain where the sound had come from, Jim had sprinted off. Like he always did. Without a single thought.

“Wait!” Mr. Atoz called out. “I haven’t prepared you!”

Spock watched as if seeing time slowed down, watched as a sudden purple flash circled the door Jim stepped through, his image flickering in the opening, and then, in the blink of an eye, disappeared. Silence didn’t even have time to settle before Spock and McCoy had run after their captain.

The last thing Spock heard was Mr. Atoz’s voice shouting after them, “No! You must be prepared!”

* 

Spock couldn’t remember what happened between one step and the next. He had gone from running through the hallway of the library, running through the same door Jim had disappeared through, and was now standing somewhere completely foreign. The first thing Spock noticed about this bew
environment was the absolutely arctic temperature, the cold instantly latching onto him and seeping into his bones. He instinctively wrapped his arms around himself, trying to preserve any warmth he had in him and create heat by friction. His eyes snapped around, taking in the darkened skies, the white flakes whipping around him, the gusts shaking him to his very core. He didn’t understand.

An elbow knocked into him, and Spock turned to face the source. McCoy. Doctor McCoy was still with him. He was shivering, face tight with fury, but he was still with him.

“What is this place?” The man yelled over the howling winds. Indeed, they were so loud Spock could have believed them to be a live creature.

“Yes, and where is the captain?” He shouted back.

The two men looked behind them and saw nothing but towering mountains covered in pure, white substance. Snow. It was snow. Spock couldn't recall the last time he had seen snow. With shaking fingers McCoy attempted to press into the mountain, most likely seeking out a way of getting them back. If they came from the same direction, surely they could return in the same manner. Sadly, it looked as if that wasn’t the case.

“Damn it.” McCoy cursed, wrapping his arms around himself much like Spock had. His shoulders shook from the cold, teeth gnashing as a particularly powerful gust of wind almost bowled him over. “God damn it!”

Spock took in his surroundings once more, noticing the boulders littered around the base of the mountain. He pointed a shaking finger at one of them. “Heating this boulder may provide some temporary heat.”

It took all of Spock’s efforts, but he managed to remove his phaser from his belt and roughly aimed it at the boulder. He fire for several seconds, attempting to heat up the rock, but it simply wouldn’t. Spock tried again. Still nothing. His hand fell limp at his side.

McCoy looked from the boulder back to Spock. “What’s wrong?”

“Something’s preventing my phaser from operating.” Spock responded. It had barely been five minutes and already he could feel himself lose some of the sensation in his fingers. He glanced around, feeling confused and the first inklings of fear.

“Where’s the captain, Spock? We were right behind him.” McCoy yelled.

“I don’t know, Doctor. I am just as perplexed as to our current whereabouts as you are.”

McCoy turned where he was stood, shouting at the top of his lungs, “Jim! Jim! Can you hear us, Jim? Jim!”

Suddenly a voice erupted from the void.

“Bones? Spock?”

Spock straightened. “Captain?”

“Spock!”

“Captain!” Spock turned on the spot, looking all around him. “Where are you? We hear you but we cannot see you! Are you alright?”
“We must have missed each other somehow.”

A shiver ran through Spock’s shoulders. “Agreed. It would seem this is how inhabitants of Sarpeidon escaped the destruction of their world; by retreating into its past.”

Jim's voice echoed through the winds. “Spock, are you in the library?”

“Indeed not. We’re in a wilderness of arctic characteristics.”

“He means it’s cold!” McCoy supplied helpfully. Spock threw the man a disdainful look, but it wasn’t his best.

“Can you get back to the library?”

Spock’s fingers dug into his arms. He couldn’t feel the tips. They were numb from the cold. “There is no library, Captain. At least not that we can see. We are at the base of an ice cliff.”

“Explain.”

“Just before you disappeared, captain, I discovered a machine which Mr. Atoz called the atavachron.”

There was a moment of silence, then Jim spoke. “It must have been tied into the tape viewer somehow.”

Tape viewer? Why would there be a tape viewer...

The discs. The tape viewer allowed you to view what was on the discs. That was how all of Sarpeidon’s inhabitants had chosen their destinations.

“Opening time portals to the past.” Spock added, their situation rapidly making sense to him now. “You crossed through into the period which you were viewing.”

“I was looking over some material about their ice age.” McCoy admitted guiltily.

Spock’s gaze briefly flickered to the doctor. “And I am here, evidently because I stepped through at the same instant as Doctor McCoy.”

Another burst of icy coldness tore through the air, knocking into Spock and McCoy.

The doctor shivered something violent. “Shit.”

“Captain, you must be close to the portal!” Spock yelled into the void.

There was the distant sounds of scuffling. Spock frowned into the emptiness.

“Jim, what’s the matter?” McCoy asked, looking concerned.

There was no response for almost thirty seconds; thirty painful seconds where Spock and McCoy stood shivering amongst the snow. Finally the doctor looked to Spock.

“Jim sounded like he was in trouble.”

Spock wondered when their captain was ever not in trouble. He chose to keep the comment to himself, however, and instead said, “We may be in trouble ourselves. We must find shelter.”
Spock couldn't remember much of their trek. He recalled abandoning the mountains where they had heard Jim’s voice calling out to them. He recalled their mission to seek out warmth in the tundra. He recalled attempting to re-trace their steps in the likelihood they would need to return to the mountain portal once more.

But now, with his body frozen almost solid and his mind at a near standstill, he couldn’t remember much of anything. McCoy was trudging along next to him, the snow whirling around them blurring the man’s image. If Spock didn’t stay close to him he was sure he would lose the man to the wilderness. The environment was harsher than anything he’d experienced before. His body was shutting down in self-defense, attempting to preserve any heat that remained. He couldn’t do it though. What would happen to McCoy? Spock needed to get him to safety before the man caught hypothermia or something similar. He may have been a doctor, but it did not exempt him from falling ill.

All of a sudden the man fell to the ground with a heavy thud. Spock stumbled towards him, legs weak. He fell to his knees beside the doctor, his entire body shivering. He couldn’t feel his feet. He couldn’t feel his hands. He couldn’t feel his lips, his nose, his thighs, anything. Spock reached out towards the doctor with shaking hands, pulling the man onto his lap. His teeth chattered loudly.

“In this severe cold we cannot survive much longer.” Spock said, hauling the doctor further up.

“Leave me here, Spock.” McCoy murmured, head lolling back. He sounded delirious.

“We go together or not at all.” Spock informed him tightly. The wind pressed harder around them, causing Spock to hunch over. It was too much. His body wouldn’t be able to handle it much longer.

McCoy weakly shook his head from side to side, the wind whipping his dark hair about. “Don’t be a fool. My hands and face are frostbitten. I can’t feel my feet. Alone you have a chance. Now do what I say; go try to find Jim!”

Spock held the doctor closer to his chest, and repeated, “We go together.”

“You stubborn, thickheaded Vulcan!” McCoy cried brokenly, and even in his crazed state attempted to swipe at Spock.

Spock’s eyes fell closed. He was drained. Fatigue nipped at his heels. He could feel himself succumbing to the cold, any trace of consciousness slipping from his mind.

No. He couldn’t do it. He wasn’t alone.

McCoy.

Spock’s eyes snapped open. He couldn’t give up. Not yet. He looked down at his lap, taking in the man laid across it. His skin was paling, his lips turning blue and teeth clacking violently. No. Spock couldn’t abandon this man. He couldn’t let the wilderness take him.

Suddenly a shadow fell over McCoy’s form. Spock’s gaze dragged up. It took every ounce of his energy to make out the image obscured by the persistent snow dancing around them, but before them, covered in grey fur, stood a creature.

Spock stared at the creature, mouth agape. Not from shock, but simply because he had lost control of his reactions. He couldn’t make out whether the creature was staring back at him or not, but after a moment it turned around and walked off.
Spock looked after the creature, watching as it grew smaller the further away it went. Spock pushed himself up to his knees, legs shaking from the effort. He looked after the creature, seeing it disappear over the horizon. Spock swallowed, and using the last bit of his strength hauled one of McCoy’s arms over his neck and stumbled after the creature, hoping with all his might that they’d be alright.

* 

The creature had led them to a cave not far from where they’d been discovered. Inside there were jagged rocks shooting out of the ground, their tips glistening with frozen water. Spock was careful to evade them. It was a struggle with his current lack of strength and the added weight of McCoy’s slumped body, but he managed. The creature had shown Spock to a horizontal plane with furs laid on it; a bed, most likely. Spock staggered past the being and deposited McCoy onto it, removing his tricorder and phaser with trembling fingers before draping the man in furs.

Spock stood over McCoy, taking in the doctor’s state. His skin was still sickly pale. His lips were still coloured blue. His teeth had stopped chattering. Spock counted it as a positive.

He could sense the creature stood behind him, idly watching. Spock glanced back at them.

“Suffering from the severity of your weather.” He explained. There were some spare furs at the foot of the bed, and Spock draped them over McCoy too. He made sure to tuck the edges under him like Spock’s mother had done on the rare occasion he contracted an illness. “Unfortunately, he is the doctor, not I.”

Spock sat himself on the edge of the bed. Picking up McCoy’s medical tricorder he switched it on and ran it over the man’s form. “I’ll avoid giving him any medication at this time. Perhaps if he’s kept quiet and warm, he may recover naturally. It is agreeably warm here.”

Spock set aside the tricorder and turned around, then stopped dead. The creature who had previously been cloaked in grey furs was no longer wearing them. No, instead they lay pooled on the ground, and in the midst of them stood a humanoid wrapped in another thick layer of fur. A rather… beautiful humanoid. They had a round face with deep blue eyes and reddish hair.

How very rare, Spock thought. Rare, but enticing. He’d never known he liked red hair.

The creature tilted their head to the side, and asked in a delicate voice, “What are you called?”

Spock couldn’t find his words. His mouth felt dry all of a sudden. He had to swallow once before replying, “I am called Spock.”

The creature’s lips curled up into a slow smile, dimples forming in their cheeks. “Even your name is strange. Forgive me, I’ve never seen anyone who looks like you.”

Spock quickly glanced back at McCoy’s form. He gently pressed two of his fingers against the man’s neck, feeling his pulse. It was weak, but it was present. Spock felt a sense of relief was through him. McCoy would recover.

From the corner of his eye Spock saw the creature approach and stand by McCoy’s head. They remained there for several seconds, yet it was obvious their focus was on Spock. He could feel their gaze like a warm caress.

“Why are you here?” They asked. “Are you prisoners too?”

Spock’s gaze darted up. “Prisoners?”
“This is one of the places Zor Khan sends people when he wants them to disappear. Didn’t you come in through the time portal?” The creature’s brows creased.

“Yes, we came through the time portal, but not as prisoners. We were sent here by mistake.”

“Oh.” The creature breathed, eyes alighting. “The \textit{atavachron} is far away, but I think you come from someplace farther than that.”

“That is true.” Spock confirmed. “I am not from the world you know at all. My home is a planet millions of light-years away.”

The creature erupted into a bright smile, stealing Spock’s breathe away. “How wonderful! I’ve always loved books about such possibilities.” All of a sudden their smile dropped, and confusion coloured their expression. “But they are only stories... this... this isn’t real.” Spock saw as they shook their heads with a grimace, fingers reaching up to tightly grip at their hair. "I must be imagining all this. I… I must be going mad!”

Spock suddenly rose from his seat and took the creature's hands into his own. He spoke at a slow pace, confidence lacing his every word. “Listen to me. I am firmly convinced that I do exist. I am substantial. You are not imagining this.”

The creature’s eyes flitted over Spock’s face, momentarily frozen. It looked as if they were seeking something, and whatever it was, they must have found it, for in the next breath their shoulders sagged slightly. “Oh… I’ve been here for so long. Alone. When I saw you out there, I couldn’t believe it.”

The words struck a chord within Spock, and without meaning to, his fingers wrapped tighter around the creature’s own. Spock looked down to where doctor McCoy laid. His chest rose and fell with each slow breathe. He was alive. He was weak, his body struggling to recover, but he was alive.

The creature’s gaze followed Spock’s. “Is he dying?”

Spock’s fingers tightened, and he heard a low ‘\textit{ow}’ uttered. That, Spock thought, was something he would ensure didn’t happen.

* 

Spock didn’t know how long he’d silently sat by McCoy’s side, staring off into the rocky walls of the cave. The creature had silently stayed by his side, ignoring the walls in favour of staring at Spock. It was not, Spock had to admit, a wholly galling feeling, being watched. His mind was split between the creature and McCoy, running between wanting to gaze back at the creature and wanting to watch McCoy closely for any signs. Of what, he wasn’t sure. Time seemed to trickle by, going both fast and incredibly slow at once. It lulled Spock into a sense of calm, a welcome state to counter his nervous wait.

It was only when the doctor began stirring from his sleep that Spock broke out of his reverie, attention immediately latching onto the man in bed. The doctor’s head began tilting from side to side, soft murmurs slipping from his lips.

Spock sat up straighter. “McCoy, wake up.”

It took another few seconds, but eventually the doctor opened his eyes. He blinked several times, sight most likely adjusting to his surroundings, then sought out something he recognised. His blue eyes fell to Spock, and he squinted. “Who are you?”
Spock frowned, then realised the man’s gaze was not aimed at himself, but at all something behind him. Or rather, someone.

The creature inclined their head in greeting. “My name is Zarabeth.”

Zarabeth. What a fitting name for such an amorous creature, Spock thought.

McCoy watched Zarabeth for several seconds more, then dropped his head back.

“Zarabeth.” He murmured, letting his eyes slip shut once more. “Spock, are we in the library?”

“No, we are still in the ice age, but safe for the moment.” Spock replied.

McCoy’s eyes shot open, and he suddenly sat up. “Jim… what about Jim?”

Spock placed two hands on the doctor’s shoulders, attempting to keep him from getting up. “Doctor, you’re in no condition to get up. You lie down and rest. I shall attempt to find the captain.”

“Well, you find him, Spock…” McCoy mumbled, allowing himself to be pushed back down onto the bed. “Don’t you worry about me. You just find him.” And with those final words, the man fell back into unconsciousness once more.

Spock watched the doctor’s chest rise and fall several times, matching each deep breathe with his own. It was ludicrous to do so, yet Spock found some level of comfort in it. He looked to the side and saw Zarabeth was eying him curiously. Spock felt heat simmer low in his stomach. Something foreign. Something… fierce.

He immediately stood up and walked away from where McCoy lay, heading to a separate area of the cave. He needed to be alone with his thoughts. Needed to sort them out. Footsteps echoed through the cave, and Spock could hear them nearing.

“Spock.”

The way they pronounced his name intensified the heat in Spock’s stomach. He slowly turned where he was stood. All of a sudden a bolt of lust shot through him. Zarabeth had further shed their fur garments, revealing more of their body. Their figure was reminiscent of that of a Vulcan female, and the shape of their hips and thighs pulled him in.

He barely paid attention to anything but the graceful movement of Zarabeth’s body as they placed their furs on a nearby boulder. They gently sat themselves atop of their furs and turned to Spock. Zarabeth looked at him with their head tilted to the side, their inquisitive blue eyes locked onto his own. How he adored blue eyes.

“Who is this Jim?” Zarabeth inquired curiously.

It took Spock a moment to acknowledge their words, mind still lingering elsewhere. “He’s our commanding officer. And our friend.”

“I saw only the two of you. I did not know there was another.”

“He did not come with us.” Spock revealed, averting his gaze. “He was sent through the time portal to another period in history much later than this one. If I am to find him, there’s only one possible avenue.”

Spock looked to Zarabeth, a sudden surge of something coursing through him. Determination?
Longing? He didn't know. All he knew was that it was powerful, propelling him into action. Spock took Zarabeth's hand into his own and urged them off the boulder, grabbing their furs as he spoke. “Zarabeth will you show me where the time portal is?”

Zarabeth halted, blinking up at Spock. “But your friend. He is ill.”

Spock’s gaze travelled to the corner of the room where McCoy still lay. “That is true. If I leave him, there’s a chance he may never regain the ship. He would then be marooned in this time period, but he is no longer in danger of death. So my primary duty to him has been discharged. And if I remain here, no one of our party would be able to aid captain Kirk.”

Zarabeth shook their head. “You make it sound like an equation.”

Spock dropped their hand suddenly and began pacing. “Well, it should be an equation.” He snapped, shoulders tight. “I should be able to resolve this problem logically.”

A warm hand landed on his arm, and Spock stopped dead in his tracks. He inhaled deeply, and let out a long breathe. Thoughts. He needed to gather his thoughts.

“Perhaps,” Spock began in a low voice. “It has something to do with the atavachron. If only I knew more about how it worked.”

“If only…” Zarabeth agreed, gently rubbing their hand over his arm.

A sudden idea occurred to Spock. He turned to look at Zarabeth. “Zarabeth. You said you were brought here as a prisoner. May I ask—”

“Why?” Zarabeth was smiling at him, but their eyes looked wistful. “My crime was in choosing my kinsmen unwisely.”

Zarabeth dropped their hand from his arm and walked back towards the boulder with furs on it. Spock watched them go, eyes tracing their form. He watched as Zarabeth bent down and began untangling the furs wrapped around their calves, depositing the garments amongst the rest of the fur. Spock’s eyes caught on their legs. Beautiful, smooth legs; unblemished and strong. This time he was certain of the emotion that rose in him. Desire, deep and dark, its claws digging into his very being.

“Two of them were involved in a conspiracy to kill Zor Khan.” Zarabeth shared. They still faced away from Spock, dropping the last of their furs onto the boulder.

The admittance ripped Spock from his distraction. “I…” He shut his mouth, and tried again. “I remember that name from the history tapes in the library. Zor Khan the tyrant.”

Zarabeth looked over their shoulder and draped their hair behind their ear, tucking it neatly aside. Spock was so taken by the gesture that he almost missed out on their next words. “It was not enough that he execute my kinsmen. Zor Khan determined to destroy our entire family. He used the atavachron to send us places no one could ever find us.”

Spock strode up to Zarabeth, urging, “Zarabeth, we must return to Mr. Atoz and the atavachron. We will carry Dr. McCoy, and you must come with us.” Zarabeth looked as if they wished to argue, but Spock cut them off. “I will send you and the doctor to the ship, and I shall search for captain Kirk.”

Zarabeth’s gaze dropped to the ground, and when they spoke it was with the same patience a parent would use when addressing their child. “I can’t go through the portal again. If I do, I will die.”

Spock felt his shoulders drop. “You cannot go back?”
Zarabeth shook their head. “None of us can go back. When we come through the portal we are changed by the *atavachron*. That is its function. Our basic cell structure is adjusted to the time we enter …You can’t go back. If you go through the portal again, you will die by the time you reach the other side.”

Spock stiffened. He couldn’t go back? No. *They* couldn’t go back. It couldn't be. Were they destined to stay trapped in this forsaken wasteland for the rest of eternity? Was what Zarabeth said the truth? It couldn’t be. It couldn’t…

“Spock.”

Spock’s attention snapped up at the sound of McCoy’s voice. He spotted the doctor leaning against one of the boulders not far from the bed. He was staring at them through sweaty brows. “Where are we?”

The man was very obviously still ill, his breathing ragged and posture hunched over as he attempted to keep himself on his feet. Spock walked around Zarabeth and up to the doctor, but they quickly followed at his heels.

“You are safe here McCoy.” Zarabeth said kindly, coming to a stop at Spock’s side. Their voice was truly wonderous.

McCoy ran an assessing glance over Zarabeth’s face. “Yes, I remember you.”

“Come doctor, back to bed.” Spock said, leading the man back. He clearly needed more rest if his flushed expression was anything to go by. Spock carefully set the man back into bed and draped the furs back over him.

McCoy glared at Spock, his words weak but holding an edge. “Why are you still here, Spock? Why aren’t you looking for Jim?”

Spock felt shame and despair pool in his gut. “It is impossible to look for him, doctor. We cannot go back.”

“What do you mean ‘impossible’? We’ve gotta get back.” McCoy insisted, attempting to sit up. Spock pushed him back down with one hand, keeping them man in place.

“Zarabeth explained it to me. When we came through the time portal it altered our physiological structure. If we attempt to return to the library we shall die.”

McCoy ceased struggling momentarily and gaped up at him. “Are you trying to tell me that we’re trapped here?”

“Yes, doctor.” Spock admitted, his anguish intensifying. “We are trapped.”

*It was difficult for Spock to keep track of his thoughts. They seemed to be evading him. Or rather, his emotions appeared to be reigning supreme.*

“Zarabeth, you are a beautiful cook. Have you ever been told that?” McCoy drawled, watching Zarabeth stir together a soup for all three of them.

Zarabeth chuckled. “Not recently.”
They emitted amusement. But Spock hadn’t elicited it. The doctor had, and for some reason jealousy reared its ugly head. On previous occasions Spock would have been able to push it down with ease, but now… for some reason, now he was incapable of doing so. Or rather, he didn’t want to.

McCoy shook his head fondly. “Oh, well, you’ll find that Spock is quite delinquent in those matters.”

Zarabeth’s blue eyes leapt up to catch Spock’s own brown ones, and they smiled. “I hadn’t noticed it.”

“Oh?” McCoy said, though Spock paid him no mind. He only had eyes for Zarabeth. Beautiful. Delicate. Warm. “Well, now that I’m feeling better you’ll notice a distinct difference in our approach.”


“It’s something to look forward to. I think you must be well enough, doctor, to try the few delicacies this climate has to offer.” Zarabeth hummed.

“Oh, not yet.” The doctor denied with a shake of the head.

Zarabeth righted themselves up, lifting the pot from the makeshift stove they had put together. Clever. Innovative. “At your rate of progress it will be soon, I can see.”

“Dr. McCoy is making excellent progress.” Spock said distractedly, staring after Zarabeth as they deposited the pot on a boulder with a flat surface.

McCoy snorted. “And Mr. Spock has been practicing medicine without a license now. Don’t let him doctor you. I’m the doctor around here.”

“And known as the worst patient in the entire crew of the Enterprise.” Spock quipped.

There was a brief silence, then McCoy murmured, “I wonder where she is.”

“Five thousand years in the future.” Spock replied plainly. Zarabeth knelt down and picked up the single bowl they had in the cave. The curve of their back had a shiver run through Spock, and he had to adjust his seating position. Yearning. Strong.

Zarabeth placed the bowl next to the pot, then walked off into the cave. Presumably to fetch some other utensils, but Spock didn’t like the idea of them straying too far. He found himself slowly trailing after Zarabeth, but stopped at the sound of McCoy’s voice.

“I wonder where Jim is.”

Spock’s eyes followed the vague shadow of Zarabeth further in the cave, rummaging about in the search of something. Even when shrouded in darkness they looked entirely too alluring.

“What do you think, Spock?”

“Who knows?” Spock replied absent-mindedly. “We can only hope that he is well, wherever he is.”

Several seconds passed, then McCoy asked in a stern tone, “What do you mean we can only hope? Haven’t you done anything about it?”

“What was there to do?” Was the man incapable of remaining silent for even a moment? He was distracting Spock from watching Zarabeth, ruining his view with his words.
“You could locate the portal. It can’t be too far.” The doctor sounded cross. It was irritating.

Spock turned to look at McCoy at length. “We’ve been through all that, doctor. What’s the point of rehashing that subject? We can’t get back. Wasn’t that clear to you?”

McCoy’s frown deepened. “Yes, that was clear to me.”

“Then perhaps you are too ill to understand what ‘can’t get back’ means.”

McCoy seemed taken aback by the remark, but quickly recovered with a sharp shake of the head. “I don’t believe it, Spock. It’s just not like you to give up trying.”

Spock’s gaze narrowed. He approached McCoy with sure, slow steps, like a predator stalking in on its prey. “Then I’ll repeat it for you. Get this through your head: we can’t get back. That means we are trapped here, in this planet’s past, just as we are. And we’ll stay here for the rest of our lives.” He quirked an eyebrow. “Now do you understand?”

The silence in the room was so thick it could be cut with a knife. McCoy stared at Spock with a look of surprise, clearly not expecting his powerful reaction. It almost looked as if McCoy would avert his gaze and admit defeat like the lowly creature he was, but suddenly the man’s eyes flashed, something indecipherable hidden beneath them.

“Yes, I understand.” He said in a low tone. “I never thought I’d hear it, but I understand.” His gaze sharpened with sudden determination. “You wanna stay here. As a matter of fact, you are highly motivated to stay in this forsaken waste.”

Spock’s lips tilted up into a small smile. “The prospect appeared quite attractive to you a moment ago.”

He looked back over his shoulder, his eyes automatically seeking out Zarabeth. They were returning, a smile forming on their lips when they locked eyes with Spock. He felt possessiveness roil deep in his gut. Mine. Mine.

McCoy snarled out something illegible. “Now you listen to me you pointed-eared Vulcan—”

All of a sudden Spock turned on his heel and hauled McCoy up by the front of his shirt, dangling him mere centimetres from his own face.

Spock’s voice was deep as he spoke. Dark. “I don’t like that. I don’t think I ever did, and now I’m sure.”

McCoy’s eyes widened in fear, the sight eliciting something primal and gratifying within Spock. The doctor was scared of Spock. Was afraid of him. Good. Good. He should be.

McCoy remained unmoving, his gaze running over Spock’s face until they landed back on his eyes. “What’s happening to you, Spock?”

“Nothing that shouldn’t have happened long ago.” Spock growled. He tossed McCoy back onto the bed, then walked off to greet Zarabeth upon their return. Every step he took filled him with pride. Filled him with power. Spock strode away from the doctor, walking with purpose and intent. Zarabeth.

*  

Spock couldn’t remember. He couldn’t remember much. Only bits and pieces. The ones he deemed
important. He couldn’t recall how much time had passed, but he recalled events. Words.

He remembered sharing his utmost feelings of loneliness with Zarabeth. Remembered them being echoed back.

He remembered eating animal flesh. Why? He couldn’t recall. There had been a reason. It had been logical. He had therefore eaten animal flesh.

He had called Zarabeth beautiful. But they were beautiful. Incredibly so. They were alluring. They elicited something deep in Spock. Something primal, and emotional, and possessive. He had kissed them. He had held them in his arms, but nothing beyond it. Why hadn’t they gone beyond it. Every fibre of his being was telling him to mate, to take, to make Zarabeth their own, but he hadn’t. His blood sung with pleasure as Zarabeth situated themselves in his arms, wrapping their own around him and clinging on tight. He had wished that they never be apart, that they spend the remainder of their existence together. He—

“Spock.”

Spock blinked. He turned to the source of the sound. McCoy. Doctor McCoy. He was stood staring down at him. Them. Spock and Zarabeth were huddled together on the ground and wrapped in furs. He… Spock didn’t wish to move.

McCoy’s blue eyes narrowed at him. “You’ve been dishonest with me, Spock, and that is also something new for you.”

It took Spock a few seconds to catch up, his mind not entirely present still. "I’ve given you the facts, doctor.”

"The facts as you know them. Or did you just accept Zarabeth’s word because it’s what you wanted to believe?” McCoy spat out.

"You were told the truth. If Zarabeth is the source, what difference does it make?” A frown marred Spock's face.

"Zarabeth is a being condemned to a terrible life of loneliness. They would do anything to anybody to change that. Wouln’t you, Zarabeth?” McCoy’s voice dropped to a low murmur, his fierce eyes now focussed on the being in Spock’s arms.

Zarabeth met the man’s steely gaze with their own. “I told you what I know.”

McCoy tilted his head to the side, a twisted smile gracing his features. “Did you? You said we can’t get back. But that’s not right, is it? The truth is you can’t get back.”

Spock instinctively laid a protective hand on Zarabeth’s shoulder. “They would not jeopardise other lives.”

McCoy’s eyes blazed with anger. “They would do anything to prevent that life of loneliness! They would lie. They would cheat. They would even murder me, the captain, the entire crew of the Enterprise, to keep you here with them.” His manic gaze landed on Zarabeth and his voice dropped to a low murmur. “Go ahead, Zarabeth. Tell Spock the truth.”

The doctor took a step closer, eyes never straying from the being in Spocks’s arms.

“Go ahead.”
His hand suddenly darted out and grabbed Zarabeth by the back of their head.

“Tell Spock you would kill!” He yelled, shaking them.

The next moment Spock had McCoy up against the wall, his arm pressed against the doctor’s throat. The man was breathing heavily, his nostrils flaring and teeth bared. Spock knew he was mirroring the man’s expressions, his chest heaving and anger boiling in his blood.

McCoy licked his lips, dark gaze drilling into Spock as he spoke. “Are you trying to kill me, Spock? Is that what you really want? Think. What are you feeling? Rage? Jealousy? Have you ever had those feelings before?”

The words struck a chord. He paused. Thought. Attempted to think, but couldn’t. He couldn’t think.

“No.” He uttered.

McCoy, the damned man, had the cheek to raise a single brow. Spock leaned back.

“This… this is impossible. Impossible.” He loosened his hold on McCoy. “I am a Vulcan.”

McCoy seemed to take care picking his next words, watching Spock closely. “The Vulcan you knew won’t exist for another 5,000 years. Think, man. What’s happening on your planet right now at this very moment?”

Spock thought. He attempted to think. It was difficult. Extremely so. He couldn’t think. No. Remember. He tried to remember. His past. His history. His species’ history.

Violence.

Irrationality.

Slaughter.

Illogical.

War.

Spock dropped his hand and McCoy slid to the floor. “My ancestors are barbarians. Warlike barbarians.” He whispered.

McCoy rubbed at his neck, grimacing at the remnants of pain there. “Who nearly killed themselves off with their own passions. Spock…” McCoy pulled himself up to his feet, steadying himself fully before looking Spock dead in the eye. “You’re reverting into your ancestors 5,000 years before you were born.”

Spock’s eyes flickered to the doctor. He swallowed. “I’ve… lost myself. I do not know who I am.”

His gaze fell on Zarabeth who still laid on the ground, staring at them with a worried crease between their brows. Zarabeth. Beautiful. Clever. Strong. Spock heaved a sigh and knelt down in front of them. Carefully, as if approaching a frightened animal, Spock reached out and lay his hand on Zarabeth’s knee.

“Can we go back?”

Zarabeth avoided his eyes, and it was all the answer Spock needed. “I… I don’t know. I only know that I can’t go back.”
They sounded pained. Spock would too if he had been exiled to a harsh environment, destined to live a life of loneliness until his death. He couldn’t imagine anything more torturous than living out the end of one’s days with nothing more than one’s own mind as company.

Still, Zarabeth had said that they couldn’t go back. They hadn’t confirmed whether Spock and McCoy could return. They had created reasonable doubt. They had created uncertainty within Spock. Within his mind. His thoughts.

That settled it. He could not remain.

*

Spock, McCoy and Zarabeth had all braved the icy cold outside the cave, huddled together as Zarabeth led them back to where they had first emerged. Spock had been unable to retrace their steps completely. The ever-changing state if the weather simply erased any paths or identifying markers around them, blurring it all into a slate of grey against white.

Upon reaching the mountain McCoy had stumbled forward, bracing himself against the solid rock wall and staring up into the distance. Spock watched for a moment as the man continued to tilt his head back, looking further and further up. He glanced at Zarabeth at his side.

“Are you certain it is here?” He shouted, attempting to make himself heard over the roaring wind.

“I’m positive!” Zarabeth replied.

Spock looked back at McCoy. The doctor had begun patting around the rock, moving from side to side as he felt along the mountain. Spock approached the man and placed a hand on his shoulder. The action startled McCoy and he instantly whipped around. He blinked at Spock, seemingly not noticing him there for the first time. His teeth had begun chattering and his lips were starting to turn blue again. The sight set of a sense of alarm in Spock.

“There’s no portal here, doctor, it’s hopeless!” Spock yelled.

McCoy looked as if he were to argue, his gaze turning fierce with that temper Spock had grown familiar with. However, the heated words never came. Instead, the man’s shoulder sagged. “I suppose you’re right.”

Spock felt a spike of pity at the sight. His usually indignant friend looked entirely too sorrowful for Spock’s comfort. “Come along, doctor. You’re too ill to remain out here any longer. Give it up.”

McCoy dragged his tired gaze up to Spock. He looked cold. He looked tired. He looked entirely defeated.

“Bones! Spock!”

McCoy’s head jerked up suddenly at the voice.

“It’s Jim.”

“Jim.” Spock echoed, eyes widening in realisation.

McCoy spun in place, looking around frantically. “Here we are, Jim!”

A distant voice called out, “Can you still hear me?”

Spock pulled himself out of his stupor and joined McCoy in his search. “We hear you perfectly,
“Follow my voice!”

Spock frowned. He looked to McCoy at the same time the man looked to Spock, and they both shared a look of confusion. It lasted only an instant as they simultaneously realised what Jim meant. McCoy’s instinct when they’d first been teleported to this world had been correct. The way back home was through the same way they arrived.

“Spock, McCoy!” Jim’s voice resonated through the air. “Follow my voice. Do you hear me? Keep following my voice! Spock! McCoy!”

The two men felt along the hard planes of the mountain, hard rock digging into the palms of their hands. They continued to press against the rock, touching everywhere their hands could reach until suddenly McCoy exclaimed, ‘Oh!

“Spock! McCoy! Can you hear me?”

“We hear you, Jim!” McCoy yelled back. He turned to Spock with a look of triumph. “This must be it.”

“What are you waiting for? Hurry!”

Spock glanced behind him and spotted Zarabeth waiting in the snow. The wind whirling and snowflakes dancing around them made Zarabeth look as if they were some mythical creature.

“We’re coming, Jim!” McCoy shouted.

“Just one moment, doctor.” Spock murmured, leaving his place by the man’s side. McCoy’s head whipped back.

“What?” He yelled incredulously. “Don’t be a fool, Spock! Get back here!”

Spock ignored the man’s shouts in favour Zarabeth, trudging up to them with purpose. He came to a halt before them and took their face into his hands. Zarabeth’s eyes fell shut, their brows knitted. They looked saddened. Spock rubbed his thumbs gently over their cheeks.

“Come on, Spock!” McCoy yelled, exasperated. His temperament had returned to him in full.

“You start ahead, doctor.” Spock yelled back, then softened his voice to a murmur when he spoke to Zarabeth. “I do not wish to part from you.”

Zarabeth shook their head and placed their hands over Spock’s. They were smaller than his own, but only fractionally so. Darker, which was fascinating considering the environment they lived in. They really were, truly, beautiful.

“I cannot come. If I go back, I will die.” Zarabeth whispered.

“What are you waiting for? Hurry!” Jim’s voice yelled.

“Come on, Spock, now!” McCoy joined in, clearly not pleased about having to wait.

Spock’s eyes flitted over Zarabeth’s face. He took in every detail he could afford to remember. The slope of their nose. Their slanted eyes. Their soft lips. Their entire being. Spock shivered. They were exquisite.
He took a step back, and then, with one final look at Zarabeth, strode up to McCoy and shoved him towards the portal. The man let out a yelp as he collided with solid rock. Spock felt fear spike in him.

McCoy, too, seemed to have sensed something was amiss. His eyes locked onto Spock’s. “Something’s wrong.”

“Spock, McCoy!” Came Jim’s distant voice. “You can’t get through unless you both come back at the same time.”

The fear settled into him fully. It was what he was afraid of. The thought he hadn’t entertained because he didn’t wish it to be true. Spock turned to look at Zarabeth, knowing for certain that this time would be the last time he could do so. Their hair. Their eyes. Their warmth. Their everything.

“Spock, McCoy, hurry through the portal! Time is running out!” Jim stressed, urgency in his tone.

With a final glance, Spock turned around and headed towards McCoy with heavy steps. He didn’t dare look back for fear of breaking his resolution. Spock had to give it all up. He couldn’t force McCoy to stay here due to his own selfish reasons. No. This was his last goodbye.

Spock took his place at McCoy’s side. They both stared up at looming mountain, its height and stature nowhere near as frightening as what lay ahead of them. With a final glance between them, the two men stepped through in unison.

Warmth.

Light.

Silence.

No harsh winds. No arctic temperatures. No thrashing snow. They were back in the library, safe and sound.

Just as Spock’s foot hit the library’s floor, Mr. Atoz ran past them and through the portal, the flash of purple encompassing his very being until final he flickered out of existence.

A hand fell on Spock’s shoulder. “He had his escape planned.”

Jim.

Spock turned back, like a sunflower seeking the sun. There was the captain, his familiar face and tired smile playing at his lips. He was safe. He was warm. He was whole.

“I’m glad he made it.” Jim continued, nodding at the portal. Spock looked in the same direction, watching the remnants of the portal as it slowly shrunk in size until eventually it disappeared into thin air. And with that, it erased everything that had happened. Had erased the possibility of anything that could have been. Had, simply put, erased everything.

Spock barely heard Kirk flip open his communicator and command the Enterprise to beam them up. His gaze lingered on where the portal had been. How curious the universe was, to offer such wondrous hope, only to snatch it away just mere moments later. Spock felt a sigh building up in him, but McCoy’s eyes on him stopped him from doing so.

Spock straightened himself up and avoided eye contact with the man. “There’s no further need to observe me, doctor. As you can see, I’ve returned to the present in every sense.”
“But it did happen, Spock.” McCoy stated calmly.

“Yes, it happened.” Spock agreed, resolutely keeping his gaze away. “But that was 5,000 years ago. And they are dead now. Dead and buried. Long ago.”

*

Later on, when they were all back aboard the Enterprise and writing up their individual reports in the conference room, McCoy and Spock found out the string of events that occurred on Kirk’s end.

It turned out the captain had leapt through the portal in the first place because he had witnessed a certain period in history where a woman was being assaulted. Obviously he would rush to help the victim, Jim had said, and Spock secretly agreed that it would have been out of character for him not to do so. It so happened that when Jim had jumped through the portal, the image in the portal had switched to whatever period doctor McCoy was viewing, and so it explained why they had ended up in what was known as the ‘Sardinian Ice Age’.

A simple mistake which led to some very disastrous consequences.

“Still,” McCoy began, rubbing at his chin. “I don’t understand how we managed to get back. If what Zarabeth said was true about being ‘prepared’, then shouldn’t our bodies have disintegrated upon arrival back at the library?”

“I do not understand it myself, doctor.” Spock voiced, typing out the last of his report. The captain was still buried with his nose in his report, barely mid-way through the events. Apparently quite a lot more had happened on his end than Spock and McCoy’s.

“According to the man who helped me escape, it was because our minds had not been prepared by Mr. Atoz.” Jim shared, then after a moment looked up with a frown. “Who is Zarabeth?”

McCoy let out a huff. “This humanoid woman Spock nearly mated with and killed me in the process. He was thinking of staying behind with her, but since the time portal would only work if the two of us went through together, he had to leave her behind. Thank God I managed to appeal to logical side before he was completely gone.” Bones shivered. “Never thought I’d say I was thankful for your logic.”

“Likewise, Doctor.” Spock returned.

“Wait, Spock almost mated with a woman?” Kirk dropped his PADD on the table.

“And almost killed me, Jim. Just in case you missed that the first time around.”

“Hm? Right, sorry Bones, glad you’re okay.” Kirk absent-mindedly patted McCoy on the shoulder. The doctor did not look impressed.

“Thanks.” The man deadpanned.

“Mm… Well, at least you had some company, Mr. Spock.” Jim joked.

“It was my baser senses that deemed Miss Zarabeth desirable, not myself as I am now.” Spock explained.

“And if you had been in possession of your current faculties?” Kirk inquired, licking his lips. “What then?”
Spock’s gaze drifted over to the captain, catching the man’s eyes. Kirk’s attention was on him, those piercing blue eyes fully directed at him. For some odd reason it made Spock feel flustered. He hurriedly averted his gaze. “I am not certain, Captain. I did not have the time nor mentality to appropriately determine my opinions on Zarabeth.”

The room lapsed into a tense silence, on which McCoy broke a few seconds later as he gathered up his PADD and announced, “Remember you guys have check ups later, so please be ‘prepared’ for that. And don’t even try to get out of it. Here’s looking at you, kid.” McCoy told Kirk, throwing him a warning look. And with that he left the conference room, leaving Kirk and Spock behind to finish up their reports.

“Now that he’s gone…” Jim began, turning in his seat to face Spock. “I’d actually like to talk to you about something.”

“What is it you wish to discuss, Captain?”

“Please, Spock, call me ‘Jim’. We’re friends after all.” The man emitted a small sigh. “At least I thought we were friends.”

The words caused Spock to straighten up. The captain sounded… distressed?

Jim caught Spock’s gaze, frowning slightly. “Right before receiving the transmission from Starfleet Command regarding the evacuation of Sarpeidon, Security Officer Giotto approached me regarding a matter of security.”

Spock’s stomach dropped.

“Yours, to be precise.”

“Jim—”

“Why didn’t you tell me, Spock?” Jim looked genuinely hurt. “Fair enough if you didn’t want to tell me as a friend, but I’m your captain Spock. The captain of this starship, and if any of my people are under threat I need to know about it.”

“I apologise, Jim.” Spock lowered his head, feeling ashamed. It wasn’t that he hadn’t intended on not telling Jim, he simply hadn’t decided on a time to reveal the information to him.

Jim watched him in silence, neither of them saying a word for several moments. Eventually Jim let out another sigh. “I’m not mad at you, Spock. You did tell Giotto about your matter immediately after it happened. You sought out Uhura and stayed at her quarters. You took the appropriate steps and measures needed in a situation such as yours. I’m just… I’m kind of upset you didn’t tell me yourself.”

Spock kept avoiding the man’s gaze. He didn’t feel comfortable staring at the captain’s undoubtedly dejected face.

“To be fair, I had intended to tell you. Officer Giotto simply approached you before I was able to.” He argued.

“Yeah, but he said he’d been on the task for like an hour already. And it…” Jim stopped himself. “Yeah, fair enough. I couldn’t exactly have expected you to contact me immediately after the incident. You must have been pretty shook up. And don’t deny it, Spock, anyone would have been. You found out someone had entered your home without your permission, which would be a terrifying situation for anyone. You even sought out Uhura, and you only do that when you’re
deeply moved by something.”

Spock could feel heat rising in his cheeks. Was he so obvious that Jim had been able to extrapolate emotions from his behaviour?

“Which actually brings me to another matter.” Jim cleared his throat. “Uhura caught me right before I rang you up regarding Sarpeidon. She’d seen Giotto talking to me and figured out it was about you and your incident, so she explained to me how you were staying at her quarters for the time being. She had some worries about leaving you all on your own and asked if I could talk to you about maybe, you know, moving around and staying with people you feel comfortable with.”

“I do not believe I understand.” Spock said slowly.

“Basically, because Uhura might have different shifts from you now and again it’s not guaranteed that she’ll be with you at all times. Similarly you’ve got extracurricular activities you take part in, and she won’t always have the time to follow you to them. What she essentially asked was if you were alright with the both of us watching over you together.” Jim finished hesitantly, leaving the suggestion open so as to gauge Spock’s reaction.

Spock stared at the captain, his gaze piercing. “You expect me to be watched over like a child?”

Jim’s expression softened. “No, of course not. Not like that, Spock, we’d never treat you like that. It’s just… we’d feel better knowing you were with one of us. All of us, the gang. We all care about you, and if you could just stick close to any one of during your free time it’d really ease our minds. At least if you could do it until we find the intruder.”

Jim sounded entirely too genuine for Spock’s liking. He understood where the man’s sentiments were coming from. He also understood why Nyota had contacted Jim specifically in regards to this, though Spock wished she had spoken with him beforehand. They both cared for him, and wished to see him safe.

“How do you plan on ‘watching over me’ so to speak?”

Jim coughed into his fist and straightened up. “Well, basically, we’re worried that the intruder might figure out that you’ve moved out of your quarters and into someone else’s. Obviously they won’t know for a while because Giotto’s under strict orders to keep the details of the mission to himself and any other security officer involved, but when they don’t get a reaction from you after the parcel they left you, then they’ll know. Also, I’m quite worried about when Uhura’s on a shift, and you aren’t. What if the intruder figures out you’re staying at her quarters and breaks into it too? It’s just… I’d feel safer if someone was with you at all times.”

“That is understandable.” Spock said. It was understandable, it was simply not convenient for him.

“Yeah. So, uh, Uhura and I were gonna take turns having shifts with you, and then off shift the other person would take over. Sulu’s also volunteered to clock the same hours as you in the botany department, and Chekov and Bones both agreed to join us during recreation times. Scotty said he might pop by, but you know him, he’s basically living down in Engineering.” Jim chuckled.

“Indeed. The man’s fascination with engines could be deemed questionable.”

“Could be.” Jim repeated with a smile. “That’s the key words.” He seemed to sober up again, expression evening out. “So you don’t mind the arrangements?”

“It is bothersome, but I understand it is set out with my safety in mind. I understand your worry and know you raise some logical concerns regarding my current situation. I will attempt to follow your
instructions to the best of my ability until it is once more safe for me to return to my own quarters.”

Jim’s very being seemed to sag with relief. Apparently he had been far more tense about the subject than he’d let on. “That’s good to hear. I mean, we really do care about you and your safety right now is our utmost priority. We need eyes on you at all times until Giotto clears your quarters.”

Spock inclined his head in agreement. Jim averted his eyes and rubbed at his nose.

“So, um. Uhura’s still on shift, and she’s going to be for another 4 hours or so.”

“4.3 hours.” Spock corrected, causing Jim to chuckle.

“4.3 hours, my apologies. So Uhura’s going to be on shift for quite some time yet, and well, since our arrangement doesn’t allow you to be alone without any supervision…”

“The task to supervise me falls to you.” Spock finished for him.

“Exactly.” Jim nodded. “So…”

They both lapsed into silence. Spock aimed a questioning brow at Jim.

“So.” Jim repeated. “Guess the question is, my room or Uhura’s room?”

* *

Surprisingly, settling into Jim’s quarters had been a painless and smooth procedure. They had arrived at the man’s quarters shortly after they’d finished up and submitted their reports, and Jim had given him a quick tour of the room. Not that it was needed, as he had seen the interior of the captain’s room on several occasions when discussing ship matters with him. It was simple, a little cluttered, but neat. His walls were void of any decorations, and it was almost Spartan in appearance. Most definitely not the kind of room people would have imagined someone as bright as the captain as having.

Spock had asked Jim whether he could meditate before sleep, and the man had informed Spock that he could make use of his room as if it were Spock’s own. He even lent Spock clothes so that he wouldn’t have to meditate in his work uniform. He was very much like Nyota in that sense, and Spock inwardly smiled at the connection. Jim had also offered to bring out a mattress from one of the other spare bedrooms on the Enterprise, but that had only led to an argument between the two as to who should go and fetch it. Eventually the day’s events had caught up with Spock, and instead of contesting further he’d aimed for a compromise.

“I believe the most agreeable solution would be that we share your bed.”

Astonishingly the comment had Jim seizing up, and suddenly a blush took over his face.

“I don’t think that’s such a good idea…” He grumbled, looking anywhere but at Spock.

Spock quirked an eyebrow. Could it be that Jim had reservations about sharing a bed with someone. No, that couldn’t be. Spock knew Jim wasn’t the kind to be so squeamish about sharing their sleeping arrangements with someone. If it were any one of them two who would be apprehensive it would be Spock, but he was too tired to procure a second mattress. Could it be…

“Could it be that you are opposed to sharing a bed with me, Captain?”

“No, not at all. I just… um.” Jim cleared his throat. “How well do you shield when you sleep?”

Ah. So perhaps it was to some extent because of Spock that Jim was uncomfortable. “I usually do
not, but it is no hardship to alter my sleeping pattern so as to do so.” After all, he’d already done so previously, most notably during the instance that Jim had been regressed to a child and clung to him for the better part of his sleep.

“I don’t want to bother you or anything…” Jim murmured uncertainly.

“It is no bother.” Spock assured him.

The captain looked as if he were still hesitant, but after another moment conceded. “…Alright.”

“You are certain?” Spock asked again, wanting to make sure he hadn’t pressured the captain into sharing.

Jim nodded. “Yeah, it’s fine.” His lips tilted up into a smile. “It’s no worries.”

The night turned out to be remarkably ordinary, not that Spock had expected anything else. He was simply fascinated by how simple living in Jim’s presence was, living in his quarters was. They were together, yet they kept to themselves. Spock had decided to meditate briefly for half an hour during which Jim completed some of his own work. Afterwards they ate a quick dinner, obviously famished after their two missions in a row, and then finally forewent a game of chess (suggested by Jim with a yawn and declined by Spock) in favour of sleep.

It was… nothing extraordinary. They simply dressed in their sleeping garments, got beneath the covers, and turned their back to one another, making sure to keep some space in the middle of the bed. Jim had flicked the lights off and the room descended into darkness.

Spock lay unmoving in bed, breathing in and out. The smell of Jim’s sheets were different from Nyota’s. Not bad, not unfamiliar, but simply different. Even the setup of his room wasn’t the same as Nyota’s. Clearly the captain had rearranged the furniture in the room to his own liking. Why he would do such a thing Spock had no idea, but he assumed it was the same reasoning behind why Nyota had three pillows on her bed. Spock could hear noises in Jim’s room that were not present in his own either. He couldn’t hear the hum of the ship’s pipes as clearly, but could make out the sound of the engines. It was odd, he mused, that despite having their quarters be side by side, they could be so contrasting.

Spock snuggled deeper into the bed, getting himself comfortable. No, Jim’s room wasn’t displeasing at all, simply different. It was different, and Spock, oddly enough, found himself much safer than before.

Chapter End Notes

STILL ALIVE.

I am so, so, so, so sorry for the delay with this chapter!! Know that it's not been abandoned, I'm just really shitty with updating and have made some questionable decisions this semester. Word of warning, never have two jobs in your final year of uni whilst also juggling extracurricular activities. Just, a huge DO NOT, okay?

Anyway, apologies for the extremely late post, I'm still working on this story and will finish it! I've just been very busy with irl matters and also kind of fallen in love with the BNHA fandom (ha I'm also anime trash, I'm so cultured) so it's been difficult to
continue my ST streak. If this chapter doesn't flow as well as the previous ones, you know why.

But I'll let you get on with your lives now, sorry for the long explanation, and as always, hope you enjoy the read! :)}
Spock was sat at Nyota’s desk working on his bi-annual self-performance evaluation report when his comm unit chirped. He absent-mindedly reached for the device, eyes searching for any grammatical errors in his latest paragraph.

Bringing the communicator up to his mouth, Spock pressed down on the button. “Spock here.”

“Commander Spock, this is Security Officer Giotto.” The introduction caused Spock pause. “Just wanted to let you know that we’ve got some news regarding the ‘parcel incident’.”

Spock saw Nyota look up from where she was reading on her PADD, attention nabbed.

“What have you discovered?” Spock inquired, setting aside his report. A sudden urge to know burst from within, wanting to bring an end to this cautious living he had been forced into.

“I think it would be best if we spoke in person.” Giotto said. “Just in case any of our communication devices are being tapped.”

Reasonable. It was a valid fear and request considering the current situation, and Spock was already standing before he’d given his answer. “That is acceptable. I will congregate with you in the Security Department.”

“Sure thing.” Officer Giotto confirmed. “I’m already there, so I’ll see you in a bit.”

Officer Giotto disconnected the call, ending their conversation. Nyota rose from her seat on the floor, discarding her PADD on the bed and ambling over to him. “Do you want me to come with you?”

Spock took in the worried lines etched into her brow, brown eyes inquiring. He avoided her gaze as he hooked his comm unit back onto his belt.

“It is not required of you to attend.” He said, then as an afterthought added, “I will contact Jim instead. He is the captain and as such should be involved in any developments of my case.”

He looked up just in time to see Nyota visibly relax. Apparently it had been the correct thing to say to assuage her worries.

“That’s good. You’ll tell me about it later though, right?”

“Oh course.” Spock couldn’t even fathom leaving her out of his current situation, not when she was already beside herself with worry. Living in the same quarters for an extended period of time had been more than satisfactory, Spock and Nyota’s boundaries in friendship naturally transferring into their domestic life. However, Spock could tell that Nyota had been on guard ever since she had been put in charge of his well-being, and he was certain she had noticed him doing the same.

Spock inclined his head at her. “I will join you in the canteen prior to our next shift.”

Nyota smiled. “Sure thing. And make sure you comm Jim as soon as you leave this room.”

“I will do so.” Spock promised, and with those parting words he exited her quarters and stepped into the hallway. The Security Department was located above the current level, and would be a short trek
not long enough to put him in any danger. He was thankful Nyota permitted him more leeway than Jim when it came to freedom of movement, knowing fully well he required a few moments of independence while under constant watch. She trusted he would get to the Security Department safely and sent him off alone, something which the captain unlikely would have done.

Speaking of the captain.

Spock reached down to his communicator, unclipped the device and brought it up to his mouth. “Kirk, come in.”

The reply was instantaneous. “Kirk here.”

“Captain, Security Officer Giotto commed me most recently informing that there have been some developments regarding my case. He wishes to impart the news in person, and we are to converge in the Security Department immediately. I thought it prudent to pass on this notice to you in case you wished to join us.”

“Yeah, I’m already here.” Jim replied, panting. He sounded out of breathe. “Giotto commed me right after you.”

“Jim, are you feeling well?” Spock asked, brows furrowing. The captain was breathing harshly, each word sounding as if they had been forced out of him.

Jim chuckled. “I’m just fine, Mr. Spock.”

A sudden bout of coughing erupted through the comm unit, and Spock jerked the device back in surprise. He blinked at the communicator, then slowly brought it back to him.

“Jim, are you certain you are well?” He pressed.

“Why, Mr. Spock,” Jim’s voice floated through the comm unit, amusement colouring his tone. “Are you worried about me?”

“I am not.” Spock countered automatically, his mind already attempting to puzzle out why the captain sounded as if he had run a mara—

Spock paused. A sudden thought had occurred to him.

“Jim. Did you run to the security headquarters?”

There was a brief silence on the other end. “…No.”

Spock willed himself to hold back a sigh. It was becoming increasingly strenuous to do so as of late. “I will join you momentarily.”

Spock hung up before Jim could utter a reply, returning his comm unit to its hold just as he reached the turbolift. The doors swished open at his approach, permitting him entrance. Spock stepped inside and pushed the button to the next level, the doors shutting behind him. Not even a moment later they opened once again onto the desired level. Spock began striding down the empty hallway, the silence amplified by the rustling of his uniform as he moved.

His thoughts wandered back to the captain, lamenting his persistent behaviour when it came to keeping an eye on Spock. The man was either very caring or overly protective; either way it had caused Spock to go borderline insane.
He was glad of the protection, he truly was, but being around Jim at all times was starting to agitate him. He and Nyota’s friendship expanded over several years’ time, and she knew him almost as well as he knew himself. That, along with the fact that they were rather similar in personality and behaviour made living together easy for them.

Jim, however, was a different story. He was new to Spock’s life, new to the intimate bits he kept to himself and those extremely close to him. To suddenly be forced to get to know the man better in a more personal setting was an adjustment Spock was struggling with. He didn’t feel particularly antagonistic towards Jim, but neither was he wholly accepting of their living arrangements. He’d like to believe he didn’t mind, but the truth of the situation was that seeing someone at their most unguarded would change one’s opinion of them, and that’s exactly what was happening between him and Jim.

The captain hadn’t been revealed to be a bad person, he was just incredibly *Human*.

Jim had certain ticks that Spock had picked up on, and either the man was unaware of them or uncaring. Nevertheless, Spock had taken note, and against his better judgement started to attribute them the captain’s moods. When Jim was working on paperwork and had reached his limit, he would start bobbing his knee up and down, a signal which Spock interpreted as Jim’s restlessness. The captain would never voluntarily break off from his work once he had reached this stage, but if Spock were to offer him a distraction Jim would immediately jump on it, eager for a change.

If Jim was thinking he would rub at his nose, but if he was deep in thought he would frown in a random direction until the lines in his forehead smoothed out with understanding. When he was at ease he would slouch back in his seat or wherever he was standing. When he was curious he would tap his index finger against the seam of his lips, and when he was bored he would twirl his pencil in his hand. The fact that Jim even possessed a pencil in this day and age was mind-boggling to Spock. On one or two occasions where Jim had left his quarters to use the restroom, Spock had attempted to use the pencil on a piece of notepaper he’d swiped from Jim’s bin. That he also used notepaper further fuelled Spock’s disbelief, but he wrote it off as being something entirely ‘Jim’. Using a pencil on paper proved to be interesting and different, and once done Spock had immediately incinerated the piece of paper so as to not leave behind any evidence of his curiosity.

Jim had even gone so far as to adjust the temperature setting in his quarters to suit Spock’s needs. It was an extremely thoughtful act, but Spock couldn’t help but be irritated every time Jim would throw the duvet off himself because he was too hot. He would always do it when half-asleep, waking up just long enough to toss off the fabric, before falling back onto the bed with a sigh. Spock, who would more often than not be meditating at this time, would then need to cease his activity to throw the duvet back over the man as he proved too distracting.

On the very rare occasions their sleeping schedules coincided, Spock would turn the temperature down at night so that Jim was able to sleep comfortably with the duvet, but this would always result in Jim complaining that there was no need for Spock inconvenience himself for Jim’s sake. More often than not the statement would turn into an argument between the two, because for some reason Jim saw no problem with inconveniencing himself in order to accommodate Spock, but as soon as the tables were turned he made mountains out of molehills.

Spock had to admit that despite their arguing, Jim had been exceptionally easy to live with. He hadn’t been a particularly gracious host, but he hadn’t been wicked either. He had simply gone about his life as he did when alone and encouraged Spock to do the same. The flippant way Jim handled the situation helped ease Spock into their living arrangements and reduce his worry about the ‘parcel incident’, and for that he was grateful.
Spock had found out Jim wasn’t as extroverted as Spock had believed at first, but rather calm with an easy-going attitude. He was cordial when it was required of him, friendly and sociable with all the crewmembers, and still had his bouts of human vices such as anger or gluttony, though they were short-lived and usually in private. Jim often hung out in the recreation room when he had the time, socialising with friends, and Spock had joined him as the majority of their companions coincided. At the start Spock would retire to their quarters later than usual due to the fact that Jim looked to be enjoying himself, and he didn’t wish to drag the man away from his friends. However, Jim somehow seemed to sense whenever Spock was thinking of retiring to his room, because he would excuse them from the conversation and lead Spock towards their quarters despite his empty protests. Sometimes Spock would catch an approving look on Nyota’s face when Jim begged off from the group, and he wondered whether she had taught the captain any tells he had.

Once the two of them had returned to their quarters, it was common that they’d play a chess game or two before Jim retired to bed and Spock dealt with whatever business that needed to be taken care of. Often it was paperwork, self-research, or meditation, but on very rare occasions he would join Jim in bed. All in all it was very simple living. Spock still felt slightly contrite about Jim being forced to follow him wherever he went, but the man claimed he didn’t mind in the slightest. Nyota, too, had proclaimed the same, but Spock had less trouble believing her. Nyota had always been one to speak her mind, foregoing the subtleties of proper human manners in favour of direct communication. It had been one of the qualities that had first attracted Spock to her and continued to be one he highly valued in his friend.

He wasn’t sure how close he and Jim were in terms of friends.

Spock hadn’t known Jim long enough to know how he was as a being. He didn’t know whether his actions were truer than his words, or vice versa. He didn’t know whether volunteering to watch over Spock was done out of a sense of friendship or his duties as a captain? Spock didn’t know, and not knowing the reasons behind Jim’s behaviour is what bothered him the most. He hated being a burden to anyone, and if Jim were simply baby-sitting him because he didn’t trust anyone else aboard the ship to do a better job than he, Spock would be deeply irked. But, as far as Spock could tell, Jim seemed happy to have him around.

Spock’s shoulder dropped. He truly didn’t know what was happening in his life. He was tired, and confused, and desperately yearned for some time to himself away from anyone else. He sincerely hoped officer Giotto had some positive news to share at their meeting.

Spock came to a halt in front of the Security Department’s door. He placed his finger on the scanner, and a second later the doors slid open, granting him entrance. Spock was barely three steps inside when he noticed Jim and officer Giotto chatting amiably. Officer Giotto was sat at the single desk in the room, and Jim was leaning against it, arms crossed over his chest and a smile on his lips. He looked relaxed. At ease. Would explain his position. Upon Spock’s entrance the smile turned on him, and Spock’s insides did a flip.

“Spock!” Jim beamed, angling his body towards his first officer. “So good of you to join us.” His eyes flitted back to the door he’d just stepped through, eyebrow lifting. “Did Uhura not want to join? I thought she’d want to keep up to date with your situation.”

Jim didn’t know that Nyota permitted him certain freedoms under her watch, and he wasn’t going to reveal it to the man now. “She is currently preoccupied. I have, however, promised to inform her of the recent developments.” Spock turned his attention to officer Giotto and without preamble asked, “You had some news you wished to share, Officer?”

“That’s right.” Giotto nodded firmly, immediately jumping into professionalism. “Ever since you
brought your problem to me I’ve been going at it from all angles, firing at all cylinders and everything. I started by sealing off your room and screened it from the outside to make sure there were no harmful substances inside. Turned out there were none, and once cleared I went into your room and did the same to the parcel on your bed. That one also turned up safe.”

Jim and Spock let out twin breathes of relief.

“Yeah.” The corner of Giotto’s lips curved up. “That was my reaction too. Still, I made sure to run a scan on the parcel too just in case it was lined with lead or some other pure metal. If the culprit had done that then whatever was inside the parcel wouldn’t have been registered when running the scan. The second test was a safety precaution, and that checked out too.”

“So there was nothing wrong with the parcel.” Jim mused, face pinched in thought. “That still doesn’t explain how the culprit got into Spock’s quarters undetected. How did they pass the computer—the ship’s state of the art technology—without being noticed?”

“I don’t know.” Officer Giotto shook his head. “That’s the thing I’m still trying to figure out, and I have to admit it’s not easy. I’ve asked some of the ensigns in the computer labs to help look into the breach, but they’ve yet to discover anything. Don’t worry, I made sure not to reveal exactly why they were to look into the breach. Instead I implied we needed to their help to look into the reliability of our technology as there’ve been complaints about some general issues with the security systems.”

So, the situation remained unsolved as of yet. Disappointment latched itself into Spock’s core, but he tried not to let it show on his face. It was a difficult reality to come to terms with. When he had been called to the Security Department he had entertained hopes of finally having the issue settled, yet the truth of the matter was that it had not, and even worse, more mystery seemed to have been added to the situation.

The complications irritated Spock. He wished the process could speed up and the problem solved so that he could return to his old ways already. He didn’t know why, but he was itching to get back to them. To his own room, his own privacy, his own routines. If he got fully settled into this new change of migrating between Nyota and Jim’s room, he was positive he would feel unsettled returning to his own quarters where would be completely alone. No friends and no company save his own. The possibility agitated him more so than it ever would have/had in the past.

“That’s good.” Jim nodded slowly, brows knitted together in thought. “It’s a believable enough fib that they won’t ask questions and we’re able to keep the true matter of the issue between us.”

“Exactly.” Giotto agreed.

“Well done on handling the situation, Officer Giotto. Truly commendable work, and I trust you will be handle any further complications that arise. I must ask though, do you know what was in the parcel?”

“Well, it,” Officer Giotto paused, then wet his lips. “It was a picture frame.”

“A picture frame?” Spock repeated. “Such things still exist?”

“In certain places. Antique shops and such.” Jim answered, then resumed his questioning of Giotto. “Was it just the picture frame?”

“Well, that’s the strange thing.” Giotto murmured, looking between the two. “There wasn’t a picture in the frame. It was some pressed roses inside, and along with it was a… a letter.”

Spock and Jim’s gazes locked. A beat of silence passed, then Jim peered back at officer Giotto. “Do
you happen to have the letter at hand?"

“Of course, Captain.” Giotto nodded and turned around to the desk. He picked up the PADD lying prone on the surface and began swiping around on the screen. “Got a copy of it on here since the original is held in our evidence room.” In the next moment Giotto flipped the PADD over to showcase the screen to Spock and Jim. Both men crowded over the device. It showed an image of the letter Giotto spoke of, and as Spock’s eyes flitted across the screen, taking in the scrawled writing, his face paled.

*How could you treat me like this, my love. How could you remove yourself from my touch, my sight, and hide away.*


*I want to give you everything.*

*Please allow me to treat you better than anyone else has ever treated you. No one else could live up to the love I can give you. I love you more than anyone else ever has.*

*I love you. I love you.*

*Tell me you love me too. Tell me you love me. Please tell me you love me.*

*Love me.*

*Love me.*

*Love me, Spock.*

Fear clawed at Spock’s insides as he took in the echoed final words, their repetition far more daunting than the rest of the letter. He stiffly straightened himself up, Jim following suit just a beat after. An uncomfortable silence hung over the room, settling itself between the three occupants and wrapping around them.

Eventually Jim broke the silence. “Who…” He started, voice taut. “Who the *fuck* would ever do this to you, Spock?”

The usage of profanity had Spock jolting slightly, but he managed to reign in his reactions within the next second. He hesitated with his response, alarm skittering throughout his body and closing up his throat. He didn’t know how to proceed. He was afraid. Afraid of the culprit who not only broke into his room undetected, but was confirmed in Spock’s mind as being the same individual who had been barraging him with e-mails these past months. Fear of telling Jim the truth which was that he had had these e-mails in his possession since before the Enterprise’s journey and had kept it to himself. And for what?

Spock swallowed and wet his numb lips. “I… I must confess I harbour e-mails of… similar nature.”

Jim instantly whipped around to face at him. Giotto, too, turned to Spock, his expression morphed into one of confusion. “What do you mean, Commander?”

Spock drew his shoulders back and prepared himself to reveal his hidden truth. “I possess e-mails of similar nature to the letter you have just shown, and I believe it is related to the security breach into my personal quarters. I started receiving these e-mails a few days prior to the *Enterprise’s* journey and had written them off as being harmless adorations from a secret admirer. At least, at the time. I
continued to receive e-mails throughout the following months, and with each new e-mail the writing grew more and more frenzied, until it reached a point where I simply deleted each new one received. I now realise that there is a connection between the e-mails and the breach into my quarters, and if needed I am more than willing to provide you and the Security Department access to my personal e-mail in case it may help with the issue.”

Giotto’s eyes immediately lit up with excitement. “It’d definitely help!” He hurriedly swiped around on the PADD in his hand as he continued to speak, eagerness lacing his tone at the prospect of finally leading somewhere worthwhile with the situation. “It’s a shame that you deleted the most recent e-mails as they’d be the best to work off of, but I think the ensigns in the computer labs could possibly be able to retrieve them. If you’d permit it I can assign an ensign to your personal e-mail to root around and check whether there’s anything of substantial use there. The e-mails might be in your inbox somewhere, maybe in your ‘Deleted Files’ folder or somewhere backstage, and hopefully they’re fresh enough that they can help us. Really though, I have to ask why didn’t you share this information earlier?”

Officer Giotto’s giddy rambling was interrupted by Jim’s icy voice.

“Yes, Spock. Why didn’t you share it earlier?”

He wore a look of utter, contained fury. His face was tight, heavy brows drawn down over cold, blistering eyes aimed directly at Spock. The impact of that gaze bored deep into the Vulcan, inwardly unsettling him to such an extent that he could not make direct eye contact with Jim as he spoke.

“I did not deem them a danger to my person, Captain. They were simply e-mails I disregarded as being from an admirer.” Spock congratulated himself for being able to keep his voice so steady when he felt like crumbling on the spot.

“Spock, your very life could be in danger and you didn’t even think to alert someone about it.” Jim bit out tightly. He placed his fists on his hips and squared his shoulders, a posture Spock had never seen in the man and which reminded him far too much of his own mother when moved by anger.

“There is no need for me to worry, Captain.” Spock assured the man. Then, in an effort to appeal to Jim’s good side, added on, “As I am currently residing in your quarters I know that I am well protected.”

Jim’s grimace deepened. “Not good enough.” He turned to officer Giotto and commanded, “I want one— no, two security officers outside of my quarters and Lieutenant Uhura’s at all times until we can figure out who has been harassing Spock.”

“Understood, Captain.” Giotto nodded.

“And you,” Jim said, whirling on Spock. “You are to hand over every bit of possible evidence you have to Officer Giotto. It doesn’t matter if you think it may insignificant, if it pertains in any way to your stalker it is to go straight into the hands of Giotto. Understood, Commander?”

“Understood, Captain.” Spock replied, nodding stiffly. Jim’s use of title showed impersonality. Distance. Jim must be furious with him.

“Carry on.” Jim gently ordered Giotto, squeezing the man on the shoulder. He turned to face Spock and paused in his step. Spock could see the vein in his neck thrumming violently against the pale skin, the man’s expression still very much thunderous. His voice was low and demanding attention as he spoke. “Remind me to have a little talk with you later about your secrecy. You cannot solve every problem on your own, no matter how great you think you are.”
With that Jim strode past Spock and exited the room, Spock looking after him as the door slid open, then again slid shut, cutting off Jim’s retreating form.

The words incited shame in Spock, the emotion burning through him all the way up to his darkening cheeks. His gut felt heavy, like lead almost. His feet were rooted to the spot, unable and incapable of taking a step. He felt properly reprimanded. He had not felt such a way since he was a child and his mother had scolded him for his lack of empathy when it came to sharing his built models with his visiting cousins from Earth. Now was the same. The feeling was the same. Jim was treating him as if he were a child who needed to be chastised, and even though he would like to believe himself to be wholly beyond such petty reactions, it smarted Spock’s pride like nothing else.

Spock caught Giotto’s eyes and the man hurriedly averted his gaze. Spock’s embarrassment grew.

He stiffly inclined his chin at Giotto. “Good luck with your case, Officer.”

The man cleared his throat and managed an awkward nod back. “Good luck too, Commander. You know, with…” He trailed off, eyes falling to the door behind Spock. He quickly shook his head. “Just good luck.”

*

Spock had spent little time thinking about Jim’s sudden icy behaviour towards him, and an exceptional amount attempting to analyse how he could revert things back to how they used to be. He would have increased the extent to which he considered fixing the current problem, but fortunately they both Spock and the captain been called to the transporter room to partake in their next away mission; inspecting a planet which had called out to the starship with an SOS signal. Spock had hoped to seize this opportunity to make amends with the captain and explain his reasoning behind keeping quiet regarding the intrusive e-mails. He took his place to the left of the centre of the transporter pad, the spot Jim always stood on. Several ensigns had already gathered on the pad, all of them now waiting for the captain’s arrival.

Eventually Jim strode into the room, profusely apologising for his tardiness before making his way towards the rest of the group. He took one look at Spock, then stepped past the man, foregoing his usual spot in the centre in favour of the one to the back. No one thought it to be odd or out of character. No one but a single Commander.

Spock would have liked to think he wasn’t the cause for the captain’s relocation, but he knew better. The man was still sore from their previous discussion with Security Office Giotti. Rightfully so. But it did not mean Spock was accepting of their current situation. He did not enjoy the hostility he could feel radiate off of the captain. He had never experienced it before. From other beings; yes, of course. There were after all far too many creatures who found the Vulcan race to be impossible. But from Jim? Never. And he was finding it was a situation he never wished to find himself in.

Spock vowed to himself that he would seek out the captain as soon as they had landed below on the planet and attempt to explain himself. He was sure there would be some verbal combat, definitely some sort of aggression, but he would force himself through it. The sooner he dealt with this problem the sooner he would be released from this emotional prison he had forced himself into.

However, he isn’t allowed a single second to implement his plan, because as soon as the away crew land it is obvious something has gone horribly wrong.

The terrain all around them were smashed to bits. Rocks and sand grinding beneath their feet. Smoke wafted up from various cracks and spots around them, merging into the red sky flickering above them. Not a single soul nor dwelling in sight. It was completely barren.
“What happened?” Ensign Singh asked in a small voice.

Jim automatically turned to his number one problem-solver. “Spock—“

Spock was already on the task. He extracted his communicator from its confines and switched it on, the screen sparking to life with squiggles.

Spock peered down at the device for just a moment then aimed his next words at Jim. “The tricorder shows life readings.”

The man nodded absently. “Very well.” He then turned to the group at large and gestured for them all to step forward. “Everyone gather round.”

The crewmembers all flocked around Jim like moths to a flame, awaiting further orders from their captain.

Jim folded his arms across his chest and closely perused the beings stood in the circle. “Now, even though the ground we stand of is clearly completely barren, there are still beings alive on this planet and most likely in the area we’ve been beamed down to. It is— was the most populated city prior to…” He cast a glance at their surroundings, a grim frown pulling down the corner of his lips. “Whatever happened. We’re still not certain what’s out there, or if there are any dangers, but in the likelihood that there are any stragglers left behind I’m issuing orders to safely and securely beam them back aboard the Enterprise. Furthermore, you’ll all be split into groups of two for this recovery mission so that you are not alone.”

Everyone nodded along in understanding. Spock disposed of his tricorder and prepared to step over to Jim so that they could proceed with their exploration together.

Jim cleared his throat, eyes darting between the occupants of the circle. “Right then. Ensign Singh, you go with Ensign O’cc’o. Ensign Lund and Ensign Penti, you’re a unit. And Spock…” Jim’s eyes fell onto his first officer. Spock interpreted it as his cue to step forward. Jim’s gaze flashed away to the person stood next to Spock and finished his statement with, “and Ensign Kurokawa.”

Spock froze. What?

“That leaves you with me, Ensign Jaroni.” Jim beamed. Ensign Jaroni smiled sheepishly and scratched the back of her head.

“Hard to slack off when the boss is with me.”

Jim chuckled good-heartedly and clapped the woman on her shoulder. “Even more reason to put us together.” He glanced back at his crew. “You’ve all now been assigned into your teams. Break off into different directions and search for survivors. Remember to be on the guard for any dangers. If you find any live beings comm me immediately. That’s it.”

As soon as Jim finished his last sentence the entire group broke off into their individual teams. Spock, however, remained still as he continued to stare at the captain after his speech. More specifically, his back. The man looked to be engaged in conversation with ensign Jaroni, and going by the smile plastered on the ensign’s face it was a positive one. Spock felt something remarkably ugly dig itself into his chest.

The sound of crunching gravel nearing pulled Spock of out his stare. He turned to the side only to catch sight of Ensign Kurokawa sidling up to him with a shy smile. “Hope you don’t mind being saddled with me.”
Spock blinked at the ensign once, then twice, before quickly recovering. “You are more than satisfactory.”

Ensign Kurokawa beamed at him. “Thank you, sir.”

Spock hadn’t intended his words to be seen as a compliment. He must be very harsh in his role if she took it as such. “Well then,” He offers. “Shall we depart in this direction.”

“Yes, sir.” Ensign Kurokawa agreed readily. The two of them immediately set off on a path of their own, different from the other teams, just as instructed by the captain. It was difficult to tell from the remains left in the wake of whatever disaster struck the planet, but it looked as if the road they were currently walking used to be residential. Burned wood and shattered stone in large heaps on either side of them, crumbled objects unidentifiable at this point, and a clear-cut pavement leading far down this display of decay. The atmosphere was coloured in brown and grey tones, the almost smoke-like substance thickening the air.

Ensign Kurokawa coughed into her hand as she attempted to suppress a shiver. “Sorry, sir. It’s a bit difficult for me to breathe down here.”

“The air is polluted. Most likely residue from the event which took place here.” Spock let out a small cough himself. “It would be strenuous for any being to deal with.”

“Jean wouldn’t.” Kurokawa said around another cough. “Ensigns Mots, that is.” She corrected hastily. “He’d be able to handle this atmosphere. He grew up in the mines on Ardana.”

Spock raised a slanted brow. “He is a Troglodyte?”

“Yeah,” Ensign Kurokawa nodded. Her voice was muffled as she had taken to covering her mouth with her arm. “He grew up before they invoked lawful rights for the Troglodytes. You know that period where they were separated down in the mines from the Cloud Minders up in their fancy mansions.” She shook her head, tone taking on a biting edge. “I only read about it, but the stories he’s told me sound horrible. It was an extremely oxygen thin atmosphere in the mines, and if you grow up in such an environment it can completely mess up your head as it cuts off oxygen to the brain. Honestly, it’s a miracle he’s even alive today.”

Spock chose not to respond to the statement. He personally did think that it was only natural some beings survive despite their harsh environments; survival of the fittest, as it was commonly referred to. Just as Ensign Mots had survived their upbringing in the mines of Ardana, there surely would be survivors here on this desecrated planet.

A sudden noise interrupts their trek. Ensign Kurokawa instantly looked to Spock, and after a mere second the two of them rushed towards its source. It had sounded from one of the broken sites to the side, chipped wood and rubble precariously balanced to hold up a semi-effective dwelling. The closer the two of them got, the clearer the image became. There, huddled beneath the crumbled remains, sat a group of small beings. The rusted pipelines bent all around the site partly obstructed Spock’s view, but he was definite the shape of the being was Humanoid in nature. Small. Young.

“Children.” Ensign Kurokawa breathed.

Spock took a step forward. The being instantly shied back, fear evident from their expressions.

Spock halted. He watched them shiver together as a herd. They were spooked. Deciding to re-attempt his approach, Spock held his hand out as if approaching a wild animal and shuffled closer by
one step. “Do not be alarmed. We do not wish you any harm.”

“You say that.” One of the children spat out.

“I do mean it.” Spock assured.

“Prove it.” Another yelled, hiding away right after bravely yelling the challenge.

Spock hesitated for a brief moment, then acquiesced. He made sure both his hands were always in sight, and very gingerly removed his weapon from his belt before depositing it onto the ground. He then peered at ensign Kurokawa and encourages, “Ensign Kurokawa, please place your weapon on the ground.”

A look of uncertainty came over her. “The captain said we should comm him if we find survivors…”

“He did not say we were required to contact him immediately.” Spock reasoned.

He could see ensign was struggling with the command, her loyalty to the captain evident. Spock couldn’t help feeling slightly annoyed by it. He still felt rather sore by Jim’s behaviour from the incident earlier, and although he can rationalise that the fault is entirely his own, he simply cannot help but feel irrationally irked.

Eventually, ensign Kurokawa seemed to have reached a decision. Following Spock’s actions, she just as carefully unhooked her phaser from her belt and lay it down on the ground.

“You can still reach them.” One of the children pointed out.

Spock immediately kicked his weapon over to the children. Ensign Kurokawa copied him without having been told. As soon as they are out of their reach the group of children disband and grab at the weapons with urgency before retreating back to their hideout. They don’t the weapons onto Spock or Kurokawa, but simply hold them tightly against their chests. It is clear they were still terrified despite now being in possession of the phasers. They did not possess a shred of survival whatsoever, and the fact that they had all gathered together and sought comfort as a group meant they could not live alone.

“Do you believe us now?” Spock inquired calmly.

None of the children piped up.

As the silence extended Spock chose to press on. “Have you been living in this environment?”

This time a single being emitted a scoff. “Where else would we go?”

Well. Spock couldn’t refute that question.

Ensign Kurokawa’s brows knitted together. “Why?”

“What do you mean ‘why?’ We have nowhere else to go!”

“You could join us.” Spock suggested. The quiet he received in response told him more than enough what the children thought of that proposal. Steeling himself, for what, Spock couldn’t say, he continued. “My name is S’chn T’gai Spock, and I am the First Officer and Science Officer aboard the Starfleet-issued starship the U.S.S. Enterprise.” One of the older kids perked up, most likely having recognised Starfleet. “Eighteen hours ago we received a transmission from this planet by a being called Dewanni, stating they required aid.”
“Dewanni…” One of the younger kids mumbled.

“You know of them?” Spock felt curiosity rise within him like an oncoming wave but pushed down on it for the time being. The current situation called for high sensitivity, and he could not act in such a way if he were to follow his own interests. “We have arrived to help them. Are they present?”

The children suddenly exchanged glances. After a few seconds they broke apart and all looked to Spock. “…She’s dead.”

Spock gave a small nod. “I see.”

“She sent the transmission four months ago.” One of the older ones revealed. “She was tech-savvy, but she had a weak body.”

Spock absorbed the new information and took a moment to go over it all. There had been a child who initially called for help when the event had first occurred. What exactly it was still remains unknown. However, he is certain that the transmission most likely took time to travel through space and reach the closest ship— the Enterprise. Dewanni may have been tech-savvy, but they had not been a professional. Still, they had done their best in a bad situation, and now their efforts had led to the crew of the Enterprise landing on her barren home planet. She had helped them find the survivors. She had saved her friends.

“Why did it take you so long?” Another child accused out of nowhere.

The words dragged Spock out of his thoughts. He blinked at them as his mind returned, but thankfully ensign Kurokawa was able to respond in his place. “Well, from what we understand the transmission that your friend, Dewanni, sent out took a really long time to reach us. It also didn’t explain what had happened on the planet, and so we were unsure what to expect when we beamed down. We certainly didn’t expect… well, this.”

Following ensign Kurokawa’s explanation a heavy silence descended upon them. It stretched for several painful moments, until finally the being who looked to be the oldest of the bunch spoke up.

“There was an illness. We’re not exactly sure about the details, but they said it came from our tap water.”

“They told us not to drink it!” Another chimed in.

“Yeah, they told us not to drink it.” The oldest responded. “But somehow it still travelled through. I don’t know if it was air-born or not, but some people got infected, others were fine. Scientists and doctors tried to figure out how to cure it, but it was too fast-acting. They all died too. One by one.”

“And the state of the planet? What happened to it?” Ensign Kurokawa inquired softly.

The child shrugged. “We’re not sure. Some adults said that because our tap water was infected, that meant the core of the planet was too since that’s where we got our natural water from. One day the planet just started breaking apart and erupting gas from the cracks, but I don’t… we don’t really know why.”

Spock parsed through what he had just been told. It did not answer all of the questions pertaining to the planet and its destruction, but it did offer some insight. Through further conversation he was sure a logical explanation could be deduced. First and foremost, however, he were to follow his captain’s orders.

Spock pointed to the device sat on his belt. “This device attached at my hip is a communicator. You
are aware of what it does?”

All of the children threw him various degrees of nodding.

“If you permit me to, I will contact my captain and make him aware of your presence.” Instantly the fear returned to the children’s faces. Spock held up his hands in a non-threatening manner in order to better assuage their worries. “Do not be alarmed. Jim is a kind man and extremely thoughtful. He would personally ensure no harm came to you, even if it were at the cost of his own wellbeing. He is… far too sincere for his own good.”

“He really is.” Kurokawa concurs, who Spock had momentarily forgotten was present. “He’s saved our asses more time than I can count, and he’ll be more than willing to help you out. He’s a good egg.”

One of the children emitted a small giggle. “Egg.”

“If I were to comm the captain, would you all step aboard our starship where our resident doctor can help you.”

Another moment of tense silence hung over the group. It passed for several long moments, far longer than any previous silence. Eventually, after what felt like an eternity, the oldest child locked eyes with Spock. “Okay. You can call him.”

Spock offered the child a nod in return. He hoped it conveyed his gratitude. Careful not to startle the huddle further, Spock slowly unsnapped his comm unit from his belt and brought it up to his mouth. He pressed the button on its side and called out, “Captain Kirk, come in.”

There was a moment with no reply, then a sharp static before the rough voice of the captain answered, “Kirk here.”

“I require your assistance.” Spock looked to the crowd of children huddled together as a whole. They looked like fearful prey shivering in place, awaiting their imminent deaths at the hand of the mighty predator. Spock’s hold on his communicator tightened. “It is of a most urgent nature.”

* 

“They tell you all this?” McCoy asked as he rapidly typed away at his PADD.

As soon as the entire away team had been beamed back aboard the Enterprise Spock had swiftly summoned Dr. McCoy to the controller room. The man had arrived and been justifiably surprised by the huddle of children who had not disbanded for even a moment. Spock instantly exchanged words with the doctor, giving him a brief run down of the events that had occurred on the planet below, and in the next moment Dr. McCoy had made arrangements to have all the children taken down to Sickbay for a standard check-up.

The rest of the away crew had also scattered; some heading back to their stations, others following the children to Sickbay, and a select few logging their activities onto the controller room’s PADD. Jim and Spock had exited the room together with Dr. McCoy, who was typing away on his PADD like mad as he attempted to keep up with the information Spock was dropping on him.

“It is what I observed. They only revealed the past occurrences on the planet and little information regarding the illness.”

Jim inclined his head towards him. “Spock here’s the one who found them.”
“It was Ensign Kurokawa and I.” Spock corrected.

“Sorry, Ensign Kurokawa and you.” Jim amended. A thoughtful look fell onto his face. “It’s interesting how you seem to have such a way with children, what with being the very model of stoicism.”

“I do not understand it myself.” Spock admitted, remembering the time Jim had been reduced to a child and attached himself to Spock.

Bones let out a derivative snort. “It’s damn odd that children seem to flock to you of all beings. You’re not exactly the nurturing kind.”

“You’re just scared Joanna will take to Spock if she ever met him.” Jim quipped back. “Imagine that’d embarrass the hell out of you having someone of your bloodline actually like Spock.”

McCoy growled something unintelligible in return, but Jim had already stridden ahead and out of the hallway.

*

McCoy had shooed everyone out of Sickbay save for the children, and after donning a full protective gear, himself. He had taken his time conducting his tests to measure whether the children themselves were infected with the disease that had run over their home planet, and to what degree. Spock and Jim had waited outside the room, Jim striding up and down the hallway whilst Spock stood unmoving by the wall. After what felt like ages the doors to the Sickbay slid open to reveal Dr. McCoy. The man stepped out of the room, the doors shutting behind him, before turning to face both Jim and Spock.

His mouth was pulled down into a scowl. “They’ll have to be put in quarantine.” The man revealed grimly.


“You know exactly what’s wrong, Jim. They’ve all contracted the disease which wiped out their planet’s population. Luckily it takes a few hours to fully latch onto a new host, but as our crew had minimum exposure with the children and didn’t spend very long down below, they’ll be fine.”

Spock thought it to be a relief, but kept it to himself. It might be deemed too… heartless.

“So just inject these kids with some medicine and then we can eliminate the disease entirely.”

The doctor shook his head with a tired sigh. “That’s the bad news.”

At the words Jim went frightfully still. His voice was tight as a coil as he quietly asked, “What could possibly be worse?”

McCoy crossed his arms across his chest and levelled the captain with a contrite look. “We’re too far into deep space, three weeks away from the closest location that could provide us with antidote.”

Jim instantly began cursing up a storm.

*

Ever since the survivors from the planet below had been beamed aboard, Spock had made sure to remain completely and utterly mute. Why so? Because he knew his logical approach to the current
situations would be deemed too monstrous. Beings of all paths of life died constantly. There was nothing that singled out a being from escaping the jaws of death; neither status, nor wealth, nor past events, nothing. It was not up to anyone to decide who would get to die and at what time. It was simply up to nature. Sometimes it was the elderly who would die of old age, sometimes it was soldiers who would die in wars, or civilians who would die from an accident, and sometimes it would be children who died. That simply was the nature of being alive. Survival of the fittest.

In his mind it made perfect sense. But, to emotional humans, it was absolutely ruthless. Therefore, Spock kept his mouth shut.

However, it was not easy. Especially not when he received a comm from Dr. McCoy almost half a day after Spock’s return informing him that he had to ‘get his ass down to Sickbay and talk some goddamn sense into this kid’. Although there was suddenly an influx of children aboard the starship, Spock knew exactly which ‘kid’ the doctor was referring to.

As soon as Spock stepped into Sickbay panic began clawing at his insides. “Why is the Captain with the children?” He demanded as he walked up to the glass separating the Sickbay into two. “Why is he without protective gear?”

It had been said too emotionally. Spock is certain of it. But due to the urgent situation at hand McCoy either willfully or subconsciously ignored it in favour of directing his rage at the Captain sat across the other side of the glass. “Because he’s a fucking idiot. I didn’t even know he’d gone inside the quarantined area until Nurse Rand commed me! Apparently he’d snuck past her and had no idea how long he’s been in there!”

Spock whirled around to star the doctor down. “You do not know?”

“Oh, I know. Checked CCTV cameras, and…” McCoy let out a heavy sigh. “He’s been in there for six hours.”

Spock’s stomach dropped straight out. His throat began constricting, making it difficult for him to form any words. “How…”

Bones gripped at his hair. “He’s such a fucking idiot.”

Suddenly Jim looked up from where one of the children was playing on his lap. Their gazes locked onto one another. Neither of their expressions changed, yet it felt like a whiplash of anger was exchanged between the two. A moment later Jim looked back down at the child in his arms, lips curving upwards in a smile.

The sight did not sit right with Spock. “Does Jim still possess his communication device, Dr. McCoy?”

“Sure does.” The man affirms.

Spock instantly removed his communicator from his belt and dialled Jim. He could see him glance at this hip, then look back through the glass where Spock was holding the unit up to his mouth. The call continued to ring. And ring. And ring. Until eventually Jim let out an audible sigh and snapped his communicator up.

“What do you want?” He demanded gruffly.

“Jim, what are you doing?”
Spock watched the blond roll his eyes. “What does it look like I’m doing?”

“You do realise what the repercussions of your actions will be, do you not?”

Jim looked oddly determined, although the expression quickly melted away. Spock watched as he gently lifted the child on his lap up onto their feet, then instructed ‘why don’t you go play with Dev for a bit’ before rising up himself. “I know, Spock.”

“Then why do you do it?”

“Because the kids need it.” Jim snapped in a whisper. “They need it, Spock, and I won’t be leaving them all alone in their last moments al—” He broke off with a grind of the teeth. He looked pained. Tired.

Spock tuned his voice down to a whisper, attempting to take on a sympathetic tone. “Jim, I understand—"

A sharp laugh pierced through the line. “Do you, Spock? Do you really?”

Spock ignored the comment and ploughed on. “They are quarantined like animals. Surely they know something is amiss. They may be children, but they are not fools.” Spock caught sight of Jim swallowing., the accompanying sound traveling through the comm unit. “You know they can’t be released amongst the crew or else the crew would be struck with the disease. Would you rather the children live their last moments freely and give the disease to 400 crew members, or the crew members stay safe and the children live out their final moments in captivity?”

Jim shook his head, evidently frustrated and with angry tears welling up in the corners of his eyes. “You’re not making this easy, Spock.”

“My words did not intend to make your decision easier, Jim. I am simply laying out the facts and consequences your decision will have.” Spock stated in a softer tone. “It is the ethics dilemma which continues to plague mankind for eternity. Save one being and kill several, or kill several being and save one? You must be rational about this, Jim; the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few.

Jim instantly whipped his communicator against the corner of the room. The loud shatter of the pieces breaking apart echoed through the room and startled all occupants, Spock included. All eyes instantly landed onto Jim and traced the man’s every movement as he began pacing furiously, wiping at his eyes. The children appeared to have been scared back into their huddle again, most of them gathering together for protection.

Spock lowered his comm unit. He felt weary from the short interaction. Jim either didn’t realise how the manner in which he was acting was affecting the children, or he chose to ignore it. Either way, Spock had done as much as he could.

*

Spock heard the doors slide open behind him, yet he chose to remain unmoving, gaze focused straight ahead at the scene playing out before him. Footsteps approached from behind before coming to a halt beside him.

“Good, you’re already here.” McCoy’s voice rolled out.

Spock had been visiting the Sickbay where Jim and the children were kept apart from the rest of the crew for almost three entire days now. From the moment he had discovered the captain had sequestered himself away from his crew and ship, and instead chosen to accept impending death
amongst the children like the emotional fool he was. It was nonsensical. Ill-advised. It was the most
catastrophic decision out of all the potential options the situation offered, and unsurprisingly, Jim had
chosen it.

Spock had made sure he kept to his shift pattern. He had not neglected his duties as a First Officer.
However, as soon as his shifts had reached their end he had immediately strode down to Sickbay
where he continued to watch over Jim. He had abandoned his meals in the mess hall and instead had
them delivered to Sickbay. He had ignored writing up his paperwork although the deadline was
looming. He had foregone what little sleep he would usually take in favour of keeping an eye on the
captain and the children. He felt like an anthropologist. It stirred up some feelings of discomfort in
Spock, but as it was the closest he could get without crossing the barrier of quarantine, he
persevered.

“I have some good news and bad news.” McCoy shared.

“Again.” Spock commented without breaking his gaze. The statement meant nothing to him. The last
time the doctor had revealed there was bad news it had led them to the very situation they were
currently in.

McCoy’s eyes darted to Spock, then back to the scene beyond the glass. “Again.”

The man reached forward and loudly rapped his knuckles against the glass. The sound caught the
attention of several of the children—Jim included. For the first time in days Spock switched his
attention from the beings before him to the man stood at his side. He saw the doctor motion forth, to
Jim presumably. The captain looked dubious, and it only worsened when McCoy gestured for him to
come forward with more vigour. It was only when the doctor mouthed ‘good news’ that Jim finally
approached. Spock watched with bated breath as the man came closer, and closer, and closer, until
finally he was closer than Spock had ever seen him since his voluntary isolation.

McCoy wove behind Spock and headed towards the door which separated them from the infected.
Jim still appeared reluctant, yet shuffled towards the door just like his friend had. He spared a glance
back at the children who were watching him closely with curious eyes. His one moment of weakness
breaking gazes with the doctor was his downfall. As soon as the man was within arm’s reach McCoy
instantly threw the door open and yanked the captain in by the collar.

“Bones! What the fuck!” Jim yelped.

McCoy shoved the door shut whilst hauling the captain to the side, then jabbed the man with a hypo.

“Ow! Bones, seriously, what the fuck!”

“This here is an antidote,” The words immediately snagged Spock and Jim’s attention. The two of
them instantly relinquished all previous behaviour and crowded in around McCoy, completely
unaware of how it made the doctor instinctively step back. “Alright, easy there, you hyenas. Give a
man some space to breath.”

“Bones, what do you mean that’s the antidote?” Jim pushed, although he adhered to the doctor’s
request and remained put.

“What I said is exactly what I mean, Jim.” The man confirmed. “What I just injected you with is an
antidote which we managed to brew up down in Sickbay. As soon as it’s in your system your
symptoms should begin to recede almost instantaneously, and in just a few hours’ time you’ll be back
to your normal self.”
Jim’s hands shot up to grasp the doctor by the arms. “Bones.” The man murmured, awe clear in his tone. “Bones, this is incredible. This is huge news! The kids won’t die!”

“Not from this.” McCoy said solemnly.

Jim’s delight was short-lived. A frown immediately marred his face, and his tone took on a sudden icy edge. “Bones… what is it you’re not telling me?”

The doctor stared at the captain head on, not once breaking the connection. A moment passed, and eventually the man emitted a heavy sigh. “Some of the kids have been infected with the illness. Their immune systems aren’t strong enough to combat it, and we only have enough antidote aboard the ship for three of them.”

“Then make more.” Jim said tersely.

“I did. We originally had enough for two.”

Spock hadn’t realised it until just then, but he had been steadily keeping his breath as he’d intently watched the exchange between the two men. The air was heavy. With what, he could not tell, but he knew this—an explosion was about to take place.

“And you…” Jim seethed, that single word seeping with anger beyond belief. “You chose to waste one of the antidotes on me? When we’ve got a room full of kids quarantined up like fucking animals, you chose to inject me?! Are you out of your goddamn mind?!"

“Jim!” McCoy hissed through clenched teeth. His eyes darted to the side, then back to the captain. “Watch your behaviour. The kids are watching.”

“Let them watch!” Jim roared, throwing his hands up. His anger flared, his feet began pacing, and his voice rose and rose and rose without abandon. “Don’t you want them to see how well you’re taking care of them? Shouldn’t they see how the wonderful doctor aboard this ship is working hard and tirelessly to save one goddamn adult and throw the children to their deaths? I mean, one adult life, that should equal to three children! Three children saved, Bones! But instead you chose to save me! You saved me, and you sent three children to their deaths! Three! You could have saved them, but you didn’t! You could have done it, but you— you fucking— you killed them, Bones! How could you? How fucking could you?”

“I’m sorry, Jim.” The doctor stressed. “I’m sorry.”

“Like fuck you are.” The captain spat, shaking his head furiously. “Like fuck you are. You’re just… goddamn, you’re—”

“Captain.” Spock interrupted suddenly. “I would recommend you cease your current behaviour.”

Jim’s attention snapped to Spock, eyes narrowed in blazed anger. “What’s it to you, Spock? You stay out of this.”

“Captain.” Spock repeated, gaze steadfastly focused ahead. He had hoped he would not need to further elaborate on his interference, but with the state the captain was in, nothing short of bluntness would get through to the man. “They are watching.”

Jim’s brows furrowed at the comment. It took him a moment, but as soon as the words registered, he looked back. Spock saw as the man stared through the glass separating the adults from the children. The healthy from the ill. The emotional from the scared. The children had resorted back to huddling together as a protective group. It was a gesture Spock had not witnessed for the entirety of the time.
he had observed Jim amongst them. In fact, not since he had first encountered them down on the planet. They looked ever so much like the weak prey Spock had identified them as upon first contact. So small, so helpless, and so very afraid.

The image must have resonated the same feeling within the captain, because his stance suddenly deflated. It looked as if something had visibly broken in him. The man’s breathing remained heavy, and his eyes fierce, but the rage swirling around him had dissipated. Spock kept frighteningly still. He did not wish to interfere any further than he just had. This exchange was strictly between the captain and doctor McCoy, not himself. He was merely an observer.

After an extremely long, tense silence, the doctor heaved a sigh. His words which broke the quiet were whispered and tired. “It was the best I could do, Jim.”

Spock watched the captain with bated breath. His expression had not changed. He was levelling McCoy with an inscrutable look. Neither man nor being spoke for several moments.

Finally, after what felt like eons of silence, Jim gave a single terse nod. “How many of them have been infected?”

Spock could already sense the answer would not be what was needed.

“Five.”

Jim’s eyes slipped shut.

* * *

“We’ve really been saddled with one helluva task here, haven’t we, Spock?” The doctor said humourlessly, most likely a poor attempt at striking up conversation. Usually the man would never try to interact in small talk with Spock, but considering their current situation it made sense he would exert any means to keep his mind off the weight of the task.

“I agree it is not one many would accept willingly.” Spock replied, deciding to humour the good doctor.

“Yeah, well at least your logical side could help out in this situation.” McCoy began to reply, but his tone suddenly switched from faux calm to hash. He slammed his hands down onto the counter and hung his head with a hissed, “Goddamn it.”

This was the reason Jim had been voted out of helping with the decision. This exact reason. He was far too emotional and close to the situation at hand to make an unbiased choice. Instead, the task had fallen to doctor McCoy and Spock, who had sequestered themselves away from the rest of the starship down in Sickbay. Just the two of them. A fervid Human and a supposedly stoic Vulcan.

Spock stepped towards the man until he was stood by his side. “Choosing who gets to live and who gets to die is a difficult situation regardless of if one approaches it logically.” He stated into the quiet of the room.

A long silence fell over the two. Finally, the doctor emitted a low murmur. “I really hate this, Spock.”

“I am aware, Doctor.”

“So,” The man began, letting the word hang in the air for several moments. “How do you think we should go about it?”
It was evident McCoy did not want to lead the decision-making process. Take the reins, so to speak. Spock couldn’t fathom sharing the responsibility of choice with the man. It would destroy him. So instead, he suggested, “I believe it would be best if we picked names at random.”

The doctor barked out a laugh. “I’ll be damned.”

It was highly illogical behaviour. But then again, Humans were highly illogical when it came to dealing with certain areas of the emotional spectrum. Grief, Spock knew, was one such emotion which would be endlessly debated on how Humans dealt with, and one he believed there will never be a solid answer to.

“It is the most logical solution.” Spock explained. It earned him another wet snort from the doctor. The man was clearly disbelieving, but still smiling. “Obviously none of the children deserve to die, and as such a random selection would be the fairest.” There was no response from the man, audibly nor physically, and so Spock chose to plough through his reasoning. “I would suggest we write the names of the children onto separate pieces of paper, and then pick the from a bowl.”

“That is if you have any on hand.”

Spock wouldn’t have thought to suggest paper were he partaking in this task on his own, but for some reason he had felt that paper was the correct choice. It was… so very Human. He felt a bit odd. The situation made him feel odd. He hoped McCoy hadn’t picked up on his internal musings.

Spock’s behaviour was mercifully ignored as all the doctor said in reply was, “I have some.”

McCoy pulled himself away from the countertop in pursuit of some paper. He didn’t wander far, merely a few steps to a drawer which he pulled a notebook out of. Spock noticed it looked similar to the one Jim possessed. They must have bought them together. Or for each other. Or been issued them. There were countless possibilities as to how the two men had received their notebooks, but Spock chose to push them back in favour of the task at hand.

Doctor McCoy retrieved two pencils from the same drawer and handed one to Spock. “You know how to use one of these?”

Spock knew pencils existed. There had been and occasionally are mechanical versions of them for PADDs and other technology devices. He could have stated the truth, but instead he decided to humour the doctor in his own way. “I will figure it out.”

It did little to help. McCoy simply nodded and sat himself down in one of the many empty chairs in the room. Spock chose to stand.

They went about writing the names of the children onto the pieces of paper in mostly silence, only speaking up to announce which name they had jotted down. It was, without any argument, the darkest thing Spock had ever done. Although he did not show it, the act was testing his emotional strain.

Death was a natural part of life. It happened all the time. But Spock had never thought he’d ever have to choose the fate of beings. Beings who were innocent. Children. In all fairness, he didn’t know the children personally. He only knew as much about them as what had been noted during McCoy’s medical reports. But, he had been watching them for hours. Had peered at them from behind the glass separating Spock from the children. He had watched how often Cill would play a hand-slapping game with the other children, delighting in the intensity of the game. He had seen the way Shevlana would spend hours drawing on the PADD provided to the detainees. How Jim seemed to have a soft spot for Coraline. The way Aar, the oldest of the children, would constantly...
checking up on the others without noticing they were doing so. Even though they were a kid themselves. He had seen them all, and he knew they had unfortunately been cursed with growing up far too fast.

His thoughts were interrupted by McCoy’s murmuring. “If one of them were Joanna…”

“None of them are.” Spock disrupted swiftly, wanting to quench the doctor’s irrational attachments before they were able to bloom. The further he distanced himself from children the easier completing the task would be.

Eventually, they had finished writing the names and placed the folded-up pieces of paper into a bowl.

It was time for elimination.

“Would you like to pick first, doctor?” Spock inquired.

“I can’t do it.” McCoy shook his head viciously.

Spock did not argue. He simply nodded and reached into the hat.

Cill.

Shevlana.

And finally…

*

Two of the children died.

Terrance and Coraline.

It had been a quiet affair when McCoy injected the chosen survivors with the antidote. He made sure to separate them from the unfortunate two, and removed them from quarantine as soon as the antidote had been administered. One by one the survivors left the lives they had led from the past few days. Escaping from behind the glass back into civilian life. Spock wasn’t surprised when the doctor revealed he had told all of the children he tended to that everyone would receive the injection, and it was a matter of chance whether it proved successful or not. He thought it incredible that even in a situation like this the man could not help but lie to the children in order to help lessen their worries.

On some level he understood. They were young. Far too young to yet know the cruelties of life, even if they had been living in dystopia for a while now. There were still certain aspects of life adults wish to shield children from.

It seemed the sentiment extended itself to adults too. Nyota shared with Spock that Jim had asked she take over his shifts watching over Spock for the time being. Spock did not inquire further into the reasoning why, as he had his suspicions. Besides, Jim had managed to work out a way to rearrange his shifts so that they did not coincide with Spock’s, which told him more than enough about the captain’s current well-being.

It worried Spock. It really did. Just because he understood why the captain had undergone such drastic changes in his work life, as well as avoiding Spock during his free time, it did not mean his worried were assuaged. It felt empty on the bridge without Jim. It lacked warmth. Stability. Safety. Spock was not wholly comfortable with the changes, but he also didn’t dare approach Jim and
He knew Jim felt too strongly, was too emotional, was too *Human*. He could not handle all of it at its fullest. Not now when he was dealing with his own battling emotions rising to the surface. So far, he had managed to keep a lid on the feelings brewing inside of him like a Molotov cocktail, but he was unsure how much longer he could keep up the façade during working hours. Although he prided himself on his Vulcan rationality always steering him in the right direction, he was not immune to the consequences which came from said direction. And honestly, choosing which children get to live or die, held some dire consequences he had never thought he would need to deal with.

The children themselves played on as usual, taking the opportunity to explore all crooks and crannies of the ships now that they had been released from quarantine. They had eventually found out that Terrance and Coraline did survive, obviously, as they were missing from the group, and astonishingly enough recovered rather quickly from the news. Spock reasoned they had probably lost out on others in the past, and as such become accustomed to people near to them dying.

After two weeks the children were dropped off at the nearest starbase. They were all smiling, grinning from ear to ear as they shouted our their ‘thank yous’ and gave their favourite crewmembers partings hugs. McCoy and Jim got bombarded by the whole group in one go, receiving the brunt of their gratitude. McCoy, of course, grumbled his way through the whole ordeal, although he clearly appeared sore at seeing their passengers leave. Jim, surprisingly, smiled a smile that reached his eyes for the entirety of the farewell. Spock had thought the man would still be in mourning, but clearly he was wrong.

As soon as they pulled away from the base and peeled back into outer space, Spock deemed it finally safe to visit the captain’s quarters. He had been apart from the man for far too long, and he wished to check upon his friend and ensure things were as normal.

But it was not so easy.

Spock spent several minutes behind Jim’s doors, asking for entrance, but to no avail. Eventually, his impatience got the best of him and he turned his attention to the panel on the side of the door. “Computer, locate the Captain.”

The panel flashed once before announcing, “Captain James T. Kirk is in Sickbay.”

Spock thought it peculiar the man was down in Sickbay, but quickly amended the thought as there was no discernible reason as to why the captain couldn’t be in Sickbay. After all, his best friend worked in the department, and Spock knew from experience that after episodes of emotional strain the man would occasionally seek his friend’s guidance.

He was unsure if this was the case, and so he decided to simply check in on Sickbay to see if the two men were converging. If they were found to be locked in on one of their usual discussions over a bottle of alien alcohol the doctor always seemed to have an abundance of, Spock would leave them to it. He could then rest easy knowing the captain was in good hands.

* Spock stood by Sickbay’s entrance, watching the captain from afar. He did not wish to intrude. Jim was stood before two patient beds placed beside each other, peering down at twin white sheets draped over the figures on the beds. The sheets covered the figures entirely, but Spock knew who they were.
The authorities of the starbase they stopped off at had happily accepted helping the Enterprise crew take on the surviving children, but the same could not be said of the deceased. They claimed they did not have graveyards, nor proper cremation devices, nor any knowledge on how to dispose of bodies. As such, the Enterprise was forced to keep the bodies aboard the starship. They had been taken down to Sickbay where doctor McCoy had ordered them to be frozen for the time being. He was unsure of what to do with the deceased, most likely his emotions affecting his usually reasonable medical mind.

The silence in the room was deafening. No sound could be heard. Not even the whirr of the starship’s engines nor the protruding noises from any of the medical devices. They had all been switched off. The room was secluded. Cut off from the hubbub of the rest of the ship.

Spock continued to watch the captain’s back. The seconds fell by, each one lasting longer than the previous. It felt as if he were caught in limbo. Not present, but not gone either. Merely a presence overseeing the scene before him.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, the man turned around. He looked to Spock for a long moment. The man showed no resemblance to the person Spock had witnessed before, during the children’s farewell. He was an echo. A ghost. Several moments of silence trickled away, until Jim eventually turned his back on Spock once more.

“I don’t know what to do with them, Spock.” He uttered, voice softer than Spock had ever heard it.

“They will receive proper cremation.” He assured. He would ensure that it happened. As for what would be done with the ashes aboard a starship floating through space, he didn’t know. He hadn’t bothered thinking that far ahead.

“Why couldn’t I help them.” It was a question, but said as a statement.

“You did what you could.” Spock offered.

“But that wasn’t enough!” Jim slammed hand down on metal table, rattling its contents.

Spock tensed up at the action. Jim’s shoulders were drawn together tight, his arms quivering.

Spock forced himself to relax. Jim was emotional. He had every right to be. It was not right of Spock to be anxious about the man simply because he was acting different from what Spock was used to. Not smiling, not bitter, not like this. This was a side of Jim Spock has never seen.

Jim hung his head. “They were just kids.”

“Not even children are immune to life’s cruelties.”

“No, I suppose they aren’t.” The man replied in a dejected tone.

Even though this was the first time Spock had witnessed Jim so forlorn, he at heart knew he never wanted to see the man in such a state ever again. He understood that Humans undergo various emotions, far more frequently and intensely than any other creatures in the known galaxy. They were always susceptible to change, and unfortunately, he was learning the hard way that they could not always be calculated.

Jim’s loud sigh cut through his train of thought. “Why are you even here, Spock?”

Spock was unsure of how to word his current feelings. He did not possess the necessary words which he could weave together into a sentence which could convey his emotions. As such, he
attempted to keep it as simple as he could.

He strode through the room, footfalls silent, until he was stood beside his captain. He briefly hesitated, but then wet his lips and forced himself to speak. “You are of strong mind and strong will. You have experienced many atrocities, yet you have not broken.”

“Yet.”

“I believe you never will.” He hoped Jim would be able to pick up on his sincerity. “Sometimes something good must come to an end in order for something better to come along. A belief my mother was fond of sharing whenever I was struck with misfortune. I believe it was her way of helping me understand hardships happen sometimes, but it is not the end of the world.”

In one swift move Jim had turned on his heel and buried his face right into Spock’s chest. Two arms wound themselves around the Vulcan and held on tight. Although rightfully shocked at the movement Spock did not push the man away. No matter how much his instincts were flaring up about immediately extracting the being currently attached to him, he did no such thing. Instead, he let a shaking Jim freely weep into him, ignoring the tears staining his uniform.

The bravest beings wore their emotions on their sleeves, and Jim Kirk was one of the bravest Spock had ever had the honour of knowing.

Chapter End Notes

IT ONLY TOOK ME LIKE 2 YEARS YANNO :'D

I know this is suuuuper late and loads of people will have lost interest, and I am very sorry about that, but gosh! I am determined to see this through to the end! Even if it takes me like 20+ years, I want to finish this fic.

I've fallen out of the Star Trek writing fandom for now, but will have the occasional burst of productivity or inspiration which pushes me to write. I'm gonna rely on those until I finish up the last 5 chapters of this, and then we can all rest easy :’)

Again, sorry for the super late post, and enjoy the new chapter!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!