**Finding Spock- Part 1**

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/) at [http://archiveofourown.org/works/9820079](http://archiveofourown.org/works/9820079).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Mature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archive Warning:</td>
<td>Graphic Depictions Of Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category:</td>
<td>Gen, F/M, M/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fandom:</td>
<td>Star Trek: Alternate Original Series (Movies), Star Trek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship:</td>
<td>Spock/Nyota Uhura, Spock/T'Pring, Spock/Other(s), James T. Kirk &amp; Spock, James T. Kirk/Spock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character:</td>
<td>Leonard &quot;Bones&quot; McCoy, James T. Kirk, Spock (Star Trek), Original Male Character(s), Nyota Uhura, Amanda Grayson, Sarek (Star Trek), Christopher Pike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Tags:</td>
<td>Hurt/Comfort, Hurt Spock, Angst, Violence, Bullying, Injured Spock, Sick Spock, Protective Kirk, Protective Bones, Telepathic Amanda, BAMF Sarek, Poor Spock, Young Spock, Protective Spock, BAMF Spock, bamf amanda, kirk/spock friendship - Freeform, Leonard &quot;Bones&quot; McCoy &amp; Spock Friendship, Xenophobia, Past Torture, Past Abuse, Child Abuse, Non-Sexual Slavery, Slavery, Vulcans, Vulcan Culture, Vulcan Language, Vulcan Biology, Pre-Reform Vulcan, Pre-Canon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Series:</td>
<td>Part 1 of Finding Spock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stats:</td>
<td>Published: 2017-02-19 Completed: 2017-12-06 Chapters: 91/91 Words: 199758</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Finding Spock- Part 1**

by [CarminaVulcana](http://www.carminavulcana.com/)

**Summary**

Spock is as Vulcan as they come. Or not. Struggling with isolation, his natural emotions and his need to be a true Vulcan, he somehow builds a life at Starfleet Academy. Follow his life from his childhood to his spiritual homecoming on the Enterprise. See him find his lost self in this story.

This story is basically Kirk/Spock friendship which can be interpreted as pre-slash. They will share a bond unlike any other. It may eventually develop into slash as well. However, there is no Jim Kirk in the first part. Since we begin with Spock’s childhood and academy days, there is lots of Sarek, Amanda, and Captain Pike. Jim Kirk will make an appearance in the second story which you can read as it is being written. The first chapter for that will be up soon. It isn’t strictly important to read the first one to understand the second one but it is highly, highly recommended.

I do not own Star Trek or any of its characters. The OCs are all mine, though.

Feel free to comment and engage with the work. I'd love to hear from you about what you
think of the story. Enjoy!

Follow my blog for other creative work: www.deltavie.com. I also have a Tumblr now. My username is CarminaVulcana.
Vulcans do not get awed. That’s what he told himself. And while he wasn’t the perfect Vulcan his father wanted him to be, he was certainly Vulcan enough to not give in to the awe that was clearly reflected in his eyes as he forced himself to look away. His passenger ship from Vulcan to Earth had already shown him sights he had known existed, but never truly appreciated. And now, he couldn’t help but experience a strange wanderlust.

The very emotion that had brought him here, without even giving him an opportunity to say farewell to his father.

Spock sighed and closed his eyes. It was uncharacteristic of him to do so, but he was still young and half-human, as the elders at the Science Academy had informed him none too kindly.

“That is illogical. Kindness is an emotion,” he told himself.

But then he knew better than everybody that Vulcans abhorred emotion or any display of it, which was in itself a corollary. Was abhorrence not an emotion?

Spock was a strong being. Mentally and physically; and while he had decided not to complete the Kolinahr, he had not expected to feel the way he was feeling now. His father’s forcible muting of the connection between them had cut him deeply. But it wasn’t something he was prepared to even think about, let alone come to terms with it.

“Spock, it is only logical that you complete the ritual of Kolinahr before you join the Vulcan Science Academy. Your intelligence may surpass that of others your age, but you cannot devote yourself to the disciplines of enquiry unless you are prepared to embrace complete impartiality of thought,” Sarek said, hoping that his only son would see the truth in his words.

“Father, I cannot. My emotionalism has not yet been an obstacle to my education. I endeavor to continue controlling it with the strict discipline that our philosophies have taught us. However, fear is an emotion. And I do not wish to give into the fear of my own emotionalism,” Spock said with a stoic face that would have made the older man proud at any other time.

Spock often wondered what it was about emotionalism that Vulcans everywhere avoided it like something they wished didn’t exist. To Spock, it was irrational that something naturally occurring was almost feared rather than studied, understood, and mastered. And while their society liked to believe that they had mastered emotion, to Spock, it seemed odd that something that had apparently been mastered was still influential enough that it needed to be shut away and not simply molded for when it might be beneficial or pragmatic. Of course, despite being as Vulcan as could be, Spock carried Amanda’s morality within him. Her lessons in compassion and love, and the ways of caring for life; no Vulcan would see the logic in the emotions that made these things possible. But then few understood that logic came from a place of morality. What was logical to one race of beings would be illogical to another race of beings.

However, Spock was Vulcan and hence, he continued to remain true to the conception of logic as Vulcans had evolved it since the times of Surak.

Despite the relative comfort of the journey, Spock had been unable to meditate on the ship. For one,
his quarters had been shared with three other beings, a human and two Andorians. He had not bothered to find out their names and he wasn’t inclined to really make acquaintance with anyone just yet.

“Earth is a very different planet and humans are emotional beings. How will you ensure a successful term at Starfleet Academy, if you are so disinclined to make polite conversation,” Spock asked himself for the umpteenth time.

But he couldn’t. Despite all of Amanda’s guidance, he still felt inadequate as far as his knowledge about humanity went. He didn’t do ‘small talk.’ It seemed illogical to talk about the weather or the scenery when both of those things were clearly visible and explained through the use of one’s senses or a PADD, or both.

“Hey man, you wanna come to the dining hall?” the human in the cabin asked Spock, like he had asked him for the last four days.

And every day Spock had declined politely, with the same sentence. “Negative. I do not wish to engage in communal meals. Please do not wait on my behalf.”

However, he decided to accept the human’s offer today. After all they were about to reach Earth in 1.6 Terran days. It would be rational to at least familiarize himself with how to take communal meals with members of different species.

“Very well. I shall accompany you today. My name is Spock. May I enquire as to how you would wish me to address you?” he asked.

The human looked bewildered for a few moments. But then he smiled uneasily and responded with a lopsided smile. “My name is Tim. Nice to meet you Spock. Let’s go get lunch.”

Feeling slightly out of place but not uncomfortable, Spock walked a few paces behind the human, lost in his thoughts, and an apprehension he didn’t even know existed inside him.
Tired. He was feeling tired. Which was odd, because Vulcans should not feel such exhaustion from something as basic as a journey through space. But here he was, exhausted and not entirely comfortable. The density of the terran air was the first thing he had noticed when he set his foot on the surface of the planet.

A cocktail of smells assaulted his keen senses, while a brilliant array of colors made his eyes almost hurt. Coming from a rocky, harsh, desert planet, he had never really seen such lush green trees nor the sheer number of colors that seemed to adorn them. And despite being slightly disoriented by it all, he couldn’t help but be taken in by the beauty of his mother’s home world.

“Move mister, there’s other people waiting to beam down,” an angry voice cut through Spock’s musings.

“I apologize,” he mumbled and swiftly stepped aside, his lone trunk in his right hand.

San Francisco. The city that would be his home for the next four years, maybe longer. Spock wasn’t yet thinking so far, but he did feel a little overwhelmed by not only the sight and feel of this new planet but also an uncertain future. While Vulcans were members of the federation and maintained cordial relations with Earth, he would be the first to join Starfleet.

Needless to say, he was nervous even though he had constantly reminded himself that such a feeling was illogical. Following the directions on his Starfleet registration, he slowly made his way out of the spaceport.

At first, he wasn’t sure where to go.

On his either side, people were hurrying to their destinations, not stopping to talk to anyone. For a species that was supposed to be laid back, these humans seemed unnaturally purposeful to Spock. But then again, Spock didn’t really know any humans to make such an assumption. As a budding scientist, he completely understood that behavior wasn’t an exact science. It was a subject in which exception was the norm, which basically meant that any notions he had about humans would be wrong because different humans would behave differently.

At least that was keeping in line with the unpredictability many associated with terrans. Vulcans everywhere were predictable because, despite differing personalities and opinions, their adherence to a common code of logic ensured that they would value the same things and behave similarly to each other. Terrans were much more diverse.

Spock’s research had told him that as many as 200 different civilizations resided on earth. And while all of them consisted of terrans, they each had different cultures and customs and languages. Historically, they had even fought each other over fundamentally differing beliefs. To Spock’s inquisitive mind, that was fascinating. It was like an entire galaxy existed within this tiny planet.

But his wonderings would have to wait. He glanced at his registration again and tried to look for a hovercab station. And sure enough, he saw an arrow sign that pointed him towards the left. Promptly, he turned and walked to the sign listing the hovercabs about to depart.

“I need transportation to Starfleet Academy,” he told the bored looking woman sitting at the counter.

“Can I have your credit chip Sonny? She asked him in a voice that felt like she had gargled with
“Gravel in the morning.”

“My name is not Sonny. I am Spock,” he said passing his credit chip to the woman.

“Strange sense of humor you got,” she said, rolling her eyes as she handed him his credit chip. “Go through gate number 2, the hovercab will be waiting there. I daresay I’ve seen more of you Starfleet kids today than I’ve seen in my entire career here.”

Spock stiffened at her referring to him and presumably the other new cadets as ‘kids.’ However, he let it pass. He had a hovercab to catch and he knew that humans had strange speech patterns. He was sure he’d learn how to decipher them soon. If he hoped to make it in Starfleet, he’d have to.

Walking with a steady gait, the Vulcan reached the hovercab well before it was scheduled to depart. But he did not mind, as it gave him enough time and peace to load his luggage into the cab’s cargo. As he did so, he couldn’t help noticing another cadet who had just taken seat next to the driver.

“Aw man, the West Coast is warm. Why did no one warn us that San Francisco feels like a fucking furnace?” the cadet said, not bothering to keep his voice down.

Spock finished locking his trunk in the cargo and straightened himself. He sat as far away as he could from the cadet, not wanting to listen to any more of the human’s puzzling speech. For one, Spock didn’t think the city was particularly warm. And two, the cadet’s use of the term ‘fucking’ had made no sense in that particular sentence. While he could somewhat appreciate the clever use of a metaphor in comparing an apparently warm city to a furnace, Spock could not understand how a furnace could be engaging in carnal activities. Because that is what this ‘fucking’ meant. Or was it one of those words that meant more than one things? Standard was a confusing and frustrating language. But Spock was just curious. It was just another thing he had to acclimate himself to.

Slowly and steadily, the hovercab began to fill up. Passengers of all shapes and sizes and species filed into the cabin. An Orion mother came in with a small child that shared her features but was a much paler skin tone than his mother. To Spock’s sharp observation, the child was clearly a human-Orion hybrid. An unexpected wave of protectiveness surged through him.

Quite illogically, he wished that the child would stay on Earth and not taken away into the galaxy or to Orion. For a civilization that had attained any sort of contact with sentient and intelligent alien life only two centuries ago, Earth was remarkably accepting of different species. This hovercab was proof of that. On Vulcan, Spock’s expressive, human eyes had brought him much heartache even though he had never admitted it to anyone. Somehow, he felt that it was because despite its scientific advancements, Vulcan was a largely homogenous and private society.

Earth on the other hand, was vibrant and brimming with life from all corners of the federation. In this cabin alone, there were two Orions, one half-Orion, three Tristolites, two Andorians, one human, one Tellarite, two Soroniths and a half-Vulcan. Such a sight would be a marvel to behold on Vulcan, he thought errantly.

Not wishing to engage in more reflection, Spock forced himself to think about the people he had left behind on his home world. He felt a longing for his mother, but was reassured by her calming presence in her head. He felt remorse at being unable to bid farewell to his father. Unlike most children, Spock had always craved Sarek’s attention and approval. That craving itself though, had been his undoing. In wanting to, desiring to prove his worth, he had exhibited his inability to suppress want and desire, emotions Sarek did not appreciate in his son.

In the back of his mind, Spock also felt an iota of guilt, thinking about T’Pring, his betrothed, who he had not informed of his decision to leave the planet.
“She will find fulfilment with Stonn,” his mind supplied. He knew that T’Pring would soon seek out a mind healer and have him sever the bond between herself and him. It would be agonizing, but it would happen. What he had done, was unforgivable and she would not allow herself to bond with a mate who had made his intent clear to leave Vulcan, permanently if possible.

And that somber thought brought him to the image of Stonn, a child’s memory of his worst fears and shames. Spock sighed again. It was going to be a longer journey than he would have preferred.
Destiny's Child

“Look at those eyes. Spock, how do you observe objectively through those human eyes?” Stonn asked the eight-year-old in front of him. Some may have considered it a perfectly logical question considering that Stonn sounded genuinely confused. However, a barely detectable inflection in the older boy’s voice gave away the malice and the arrogance hidden in the question.

“I will not grace your inane question with a reply,” answered the younger child with a perfectly calm voice.

“Why Spock? We are studying to be scientists. Do the drawbacks of your hybrid biology not concern you even academically? You are after all an experiment,” Stonn said coldly.

“I am not an experiment. As for my eyes, they have a cornea, an iris, an optic lens, an optic nerve and rod cells of a structure entirely similar to yours. I fail to see what you are implying about my ‘human eyes’?

“I see. Maybe the inadequacy is in your mind. And it does not permit you to process information the Vulcan way. You are nearly human Spock. You should inform your parents that Shi’kahr seminary is no place for an experimental hybrid like yourself.” He finished, with a rather smug look on his face.

By this time, a small crowd of children had gathered around the two. While most children were simply curious, many secretly agreed with Stonn, though they refrained from voicing their opinions out loud. To these children, Spock’s very existence was illogical. It was still scandalous to think that Sarek had married a human woman of all things. A human?

Fragile and frail, humans were passionate and backward beings. Their history was still too young to compare with Vulcan’s stellar scientific past. Moreover, they died too soon. Why Sarek married a human woman, was beyond the comprehension of most Vulcans and these children were no exception.

“Stonn, you will cease talking about myself. Since you do not know me well, nor my biology, you must quit spreading falsehoods,” Spock finished in a trembling voice he was trying so hard to control and failing miserably.

There. They had gotten an emotional response out of him. After that exchange, Stonn and the other students had turned and left, while Spock had been unable to stop himself from falling to his knees in the middle of the hallway.

He hated how the older children made him feel; like he did not belong. He did not yet understand why he was not completely Vulcan, like them. He did not understand yet why he let them affect him so much. And sometimes he hated Sarek and Amanda for bringing him into the world.

“What couldn’t they have had a Vulcan child,” he wondered to himself for the hundredth time. And like always, the answer came to him almost instantly. “Because Mother is human. She could not have borne a Vulcan child.”

However, that did not make it any easier.

Spock silently shuffled into his learning chamber.

“Computer, begin the lesson for the afternoon,” he demanded.
“Emotional inflections detected,” the computer said monotonously. Spock’s heart sank. This meant that he would be reported and will have to meet with one of the Instructors.

“Inflection present,” he replied equally tonelessly this time. Satisfied that the student wasn’t distressed or emotionally compromised anymore, the computer proceeded with the day’s lesson.

“What is the expansion of the sum of cubes?” the computer asked.

“a³+b³+a²b+ab²”

“What is the expansion of the square of a sum of two numbers?”

“a²+b²+2ab”

And on and on it went. Spock’s lesson that day progressed from simple algebraic identities to quadratic equations in multiple variables. It calmed Spock’s raging emotions and he found refuge in the simple, unshakeable logic of numbers, devoid of normative judgment, that somehow came with the logically infallible Vulcans like Stonn.

XXXXX

“Hey, you okay? Sir, you need to wake up, your stop’s here…..I think he’s sick…hey..”

Voices sounded faraway to Spock. Clearly someone was shaking his shoulders but he was still a little disoriented. Was that a dream?

Of course it was, he realized sardonically. He was being shaken awake by that Orion mother, wasn’t he?

“Thank You for taking the trouble of rousing me. But I must ask you to please quit shaking my shoulders,” Spock said, now awake.

The woman stepped back, alarmed at his sudden awakening and toneless declaration of his wellbeing.

“Are you sure,” she asked, with a hint of concern in her voice. She adjusted her sleeping baby over her left shoulder and looked at Spock with eyes that seemed to know something he couldn’t quite fathom.

“I am functional,” Spock said, getting up to retrieve his trunk. The Orion child gurgled in his sleep. And Spock couldn’t help but feel warmth spread through his whole being.

“You have a beautiful child,” he said, in his characteristic stoic voice, but the woman’s eyes crinkled in warmth as she took in his compliment.

“Oh thank you. Dahail is a good boy. He’s only eight months old and he makes me so proud,” she said fondly, smoothening the strawberry curls on the baby’s head.

Spock found it odd that the woman was proud of an eight moth old child. Surely such a small child could not have done anything to make the mother proud. But then she wasn’t Vulcan. Humans and Orions were different in how they observed things. Hadn’t Spock’s own mother said that she was proud of him, just before his Science academy interview. And he hadn’t done anything yet for her to be proud of him. Yet, she had said she was.

“Are you going to Starfleet?” the woman asked.
“Affirmative.” Spock replied, not understanding why the woman laughed at his response.

“I am going there too. Let us walk together,” she said, picking up her luggage with her free hand. It seemed heavy.

“I find that agreeable. Would you prefer me to take your luggage? You appear to be having trouble maneuvering it along with your child,” he asked, unsure of why he was even offering such a thing to a woman he didn’t know.

“Oh that would be so kind of you. Thank you so much,” she said, sighing in relief as she placed her trunk on the ground and adjusted the child more comfortably on her bosom.

To Spock it was no trouble. He simply lifted both the trunks and started walking, making sure to keep his pace easy for the sake of the woman with the child.

Starfleet was only a few feet away now. The imposing buildings before him were nothing like anything he had seen before. Determination, apprehension, and a thirst for knowledge had brought him here. Tightening his resolve to find his place in the universe, Spock continued walking, glancing every few seconds at the sleeping child, wondering if this child would stand here two decades later, going through the same thoughts that Spock was currently having.

“Not if he stays on Earth,” a voice replied inside his mind.

“Indeed.” And he hurried along, not wishing to waste more time and energy on things that would be revealed to him soon enough.
“Thank you…Mister…er, I’m sorry I don’t know your name. I’m Alysi, by the way,” the Orion woman said, thanking Spock for his help.

“It was no trouble. My name is Spock,” supplied the Vulcan, setting Alysi’s bags down in the turbo lift that would take her to the officers’ housing area.

“Why, thank you Mister Spock. You should come upstairs for a cup of tea. I take it you are a new cadet. Maybe you should meet my husband, he’s an officer and an instructor at the academy,” she said.

Spock wondered how to answer the woman. He was unaccustomed to being asked to consume beverages with people. Even though his mother and Tim had taught him that this is what humans did. However, Alysi was an Orion. Her very human hospitality was puzzling to him.

“I must decline Lady Alysi. I would not be proper of me to accept your hospitality,” he said, hoping that she’d understand.

“Nonsense. I want you to have something for your trouble. As your superior’s wife, I insist that you come and have a cup of tea with us,” she said, making her invitation sound like an order.

This was even more curious. Spock had no idea why this Orion woman was behaving so uncharacteristically. But now her request was phrased like a command. And it wouldn’t look good for him to start upsetting his superiors on his first day.

“Very well, Lady Alysi. I accept your invitation to take tea with you and your husband,” he said, resigning himself to an afternoon that he was sure would prove to be most educative.

“That’s like a good cadet,” she laughed and motioned him to follow her.

Spock straightened his clothing and picked up his own trunk and hers, and followed her to her quarters.

XXXXX

The turbo lift was packed with students. Spock stood at the far corner of the cabin, trying to remain as inconspicuous as possible. He wasn’t sure he could take any more of the older students’ jibes and remarks. So far, he had kept his emotions in check. He had spent the art and culture hour huddled in a corner of the history section of the library. He had read hungrily, desperate to make sense of the source of the emotions that seemed to follow him everywhere.

And he had come to a rather interesting concept; the Kolinahr, a ritual that would cleanse him of all emotion.

But according to the book, he wasn’t ready for it yet. He needed to be older and stronger before he could go to Gol and carry out the ritual. It was one of the strictest cleanings a Vulcan could go through. And even though a part of Spock was apprehensive due to his half-human biology, the Vulcan-part of him was ready to purge himself of all weaknesses.

He had only twelve more years to go before he could go to Gol. And till then, he would work on himself. The tears that came naturally from his tear ducts, a vestigial organ in full-blooded Vulcans, but not him, would not be allowed to shed any longer. He would learn to control his anger and his humiliation even if Stonn called his mother the most dishonorable of names.
With a fierce determination burning like fire inside him, he stood taller in the turbo lift, willing himself to not hide and shrink. Kaiidth. He would master whatever came his way.

XXXXX

That had been a long time ago. And Lady Alysi was nothing like the young Vulcans he had shared the lift with that day. Her warm laugh, ready smile and obvious affection for her husband and child actually reminded Spock of his mother.

Another pang of longing hit him. He quashed it mercilessly, not bothering that he’d need even his own love for his mother, to sustain him on this strange new planet.


However, before he had a chance to delve deeper, the turbo lift had arrived at the seventeenth floor, their destination.

“Here we are Mister Spock, the first quarters on the left,” she said and rang the doorbell.

Spock stood behind her awkwardly, as a young man with dark brown hair and intelligent grey eyes, answered the door.

“Welcome home sweetheart,” He said, not noticing Spock yet. He kissed the top of the baby’s head and drew Lady Alysi’s lips into a passionate kiss, the sounds of which were threatening to make the Vulcan bolt from the spot.

“Oh Jon, I’ve missed you,” she said, in between labored gasps as she kissed her husband passionately.

Spock wondered if he should leave her luggage and quietly leave. But just then the couple broke off, breathless but strangely satiated, from the look in their eyes.

That was when the man called Jon noticed Spock.

“And you would be?” he asked in his stern officer’s voice.

“Jon don’t be that way. This is mister Spock. He is a new cadet at the academy and he helped me carry my trunk. I invited him over for tea. It must have been a long trip from home, wasn’t it Spock?” she asked the Vulcan, encouraging him to not be intimidated.

“Affirmative, Sir. It was indeed a long journey from Vulcan to Earth,” he replied.

“You’re the Vulcan cadet, then? He asked, slightly dumbstruck.

“Affirmative.”

“But…but, your eyes and ears…Oh wait, sorry. Of course your hat covered your features. Alysi, you knew he was Vulcan,” Jonathan asked his wife, who was now setting the table for tea.

“Well, I wasn’t certain but he sure seemed Vulcan, with his endearingly computerized way of speaking, and will you invite him in Jon? Where are your manners?” she chastised her husband playfully.

“Oh yes, come in. Sorry Spock, I was just a little surprised. Come in,” he said. “So, you are in the command track, huh! Interesting, don’t all you Vulcans want to be scientists?”
Spock found Alysia’s hospitality a little overwhelming. His first instinct was to run away. Not literally run away, but to politely tell her again that he didn’t want to drink tea with her. However, she had made her request sound like a command ultimately.

And now Spock was sitting in the living room of Lieutenant Jonathan Adams, communications officer on the USS- Victoria, one of the larger exploration vessels of Starfleet. He was also an instructor for applied xenolinguistics and language pedagogy.

“It was a joke Spock. I know Vulcans are into all kinds of different professions,” Jonathan chuckled.

“I do not understand, Professor,” said Spock, genuinely confused as to how an incorrect assumption to possibly be humorous.

The captain sighed.

“It’s okay. Let it be Spock. So, what have your first few hours on Earth been like?” he asked.

“Earth is a fascinating planet. The range of colors visible to the naked eye is tremendous. Sounds and smells and textures can be overwhelming to one’s senses,” Spock said. “But even more curious is how people communicate with each other. They say things they do not mean. And sometimes, the meanings of two related sentences is so vastly different from each other’s that I cannot help but wonder, if these speech patterns are inherently meant to be confusing, or is it simply the Terran way.”

Jonathan laughed at Spock’s long-winded explanation of why he found Earth strange. As a xenolinguist, it was even more funny to him that Spock, a Vulcan child prodigy, should have such trouble with metaphorical human speech.

But on second thoughts, it actually wasn’t that surprising. In a flash of brilliant clarity, Jonathan realized that he was being an ass. Of course Spock was confused by how humans spoke. Wasn’t he, Jonathan, equally unnerved by Spock’s way of talking which sounded so much like that of an android.

“I understand this is all a lot to take in. But it will get better,” he said reassuringly to Spock, hoping that the younger man would understand.

All through the exchange, Alysi had stayed quiet. But she was glad for her husband’s backhanded apology. At least now Spock wouldn’t think that he was going to have to deal with insensitive, ignorant people on Earth.

Spock felt different when he finally got to his own quarters in the student housing area. As he had expected, the student quarters were a lot smaller and under furnished than those of the officers.

The little apartment was divided into three rooms; two bedrooms, and a living area. There was no kitchen, but a small attached kitchenette with a basic replicator was built into the living area. The bathroom looked cramped and dingy, but it would have to do.

The two beds, two dressers and two desks kept in each of the bedrooms told Spock that the apartment would be shared by four cadets.
While Spock didn’t think he was a difficult person to live with, he wasn’t sure what it would be like to live with so many people in a tiny space. Furthermore, he was a little apprehensive about the person he would be sharing his room with. What if they were xenophobic? Or did not like Vulcans?

“That is illogical. Starfleet works in space. Surely all cadets joining the academy know that they cannot be xenophobic if they hope to serve on a starship someday,” he told himself.

But then he had also once thought that Vulcans were incapable of deliberate cruelty. And he had paid dearly for that assumption. His hands shook with phantom pain. He willed the trembling to stop. But he could not stop the memories that barged into his mind at that very moment.

XXXXX

“Get up, Son of Sarek. You cannot be weak and Vulcan,” Sulok taunted him.

“I…I cannot. Please,” Spock said, through pained gasps. His lips were split and blood was starting to gather at the corners of his mouth.

“You must not beg. Rise Spock, or do you not wish to master yourself?” Sulok commanded again.

Rolling painfully to his side, Spock pulled himself to his knees. His ten-year-old body unaccustomed to such strain.

“Lift the boulder in your left hand,” the older man said.

“Please. I am injured,” Spock tried again, cradling his bruised and bloodied fingers protectively in his less injured right hand. But Sulok would have none of it.

“And your injuries will increase if you do not do as you are told. Lift the boulder,” Sulok said sternly. If he didn’t know better, Spock would have said that Sulok was being illogical. However, the young Vulcan understood that this was all his preparation for Kolinahr. And Sulok was the best person to aid him in his efforts. The older boy was training to be a warrior and a guardsman. He had to know about strengthening the body for such a rigorous discipline of the mind. And if he felt that Spock needed to master his pain and discomfort, then he would do it.

It never crossed his young mind that one of the most common and accepted ways to master the mind, was through meditation.

XXXXX

Spock clenched his eyes shut, willing himself to stop thinking about Sulok. The man had been banished from Vulcan for his rejection of Surakian philosophy, but not soon enough for Spock to be saved from his brutal methods of teaching how to control his emotions. Of course he had been too young to realize that Sulok had been as disdainful of him as Stonn, albeit for far more personal reasons. It had bothered Sulok that Sarek had been able to get away with marrying a non-Vulcan female, but not he, even though he had promised himself to a gentle Andorian noblewoman. This was his revenge on Sarek’s hybrid son, a reminder of what he had been denied simply because he had been from a common house and not a royal one.

Unfortunately for Spock, the damage had only worsened his situation with his peers and his father. Only Amanda had understood. But unlike other times, she hadn’t approved.

And even though he still had trouble admitting it to himself, the days of arguments that had followed after Sulok’s banishment had hurt Spock’s mind and katra. His mother had never screamed at Sarek like that. And Sarek’s emotionalism had been terrible to behold. Spock had been unable to shut out
his mind to his parents’ never-ceasing fights. And the connections he shared with them in his head, had contantly demanded that he nurture one over the other.

His inability to choose had led to days of physical and mental agony.

And unsurprisingly, Stonn, like always, had not been sympathetic.
“Look at the human’s weak hands,” Stonn said to his classmates, Satok, and Saban. “If I were capable of being disgusted, I would be disgusted by you Spock.”

“If you are not capable of feeling disgust, then why are you expressing such a possibility?” Spock asked, not quite tonelessly but calmly enough that the boys didn’t realize how badly he wanted to get away from this conversation.

“Your belief that you could ever complete the Kolinahr, is a myth. Only a true Vulcan could ever complete that ritual,” Stonn said.

“I am a true Vulcan,” Spock replied, heat flooding his ears and making him blush green.

“You are a disgrace Spock; Except for that green in the flush on your face, everything about you is weak and unworthy like your human mother,” Stonn finished in a smug, self-satisfied tone.

“Don’t talk like that about my mother,” Spock said, the façade of being calm lost.

“I will talk about your mother the way I want. I speak only the truth. Your father dishonored Vulcan and the house of Surak by marrying a mere human concubine,” Stonn retorted.

Spock’s hands were shaking. His bandaged fingers should not have moved, but in a second, he had punched Stonn right in his face. And even though the older boys were a lot bigger than him, Spock had not stopped to consider the consequences.

In a rare display of emotion, Stonn clutched his now bleeding nose and blinked at Spock owlishly.

“You need to be taught Spock. Logic dictates that one should not engage in a confrontation with those stronger than oneself. It is imperative that we give you that vital lesson today,” Stonn said dangerously.

Before Spock could calm his frazzled nerves, the two other boys had dragged him to the center of the room and were holding him tightly with his arms stretched back behind him.

“One should also refrain from physical altercations, when one is injured,” said Satok, as he took Spock’s left hand and crushed the broken fingers together, eliciting an earth shattering scream from the younger boy.

“I am not…scared…o..of you,” Spock said between his tearful gasps and groans of pain. He could feel his wounds reopening and bleeding afresh, but Satok took no mercy on him. He dropped Spock’s left hand, only to start on his right, similarly twisting the injured fingers in a cruel 180 degree motion. Spock screamed again, but this time, Stonn withdrew his fist and hit him square in the face. Spock reeled under the blow, but was able to only choke on the blinding pain that was now coursing through him.

However, the boys were not done yet.

Stonn hit Spock again, this time in his stomach. He cried out and would have doubled over, had the other two boys not been holding him up.

Even though he just wanted to curl up and protect himself from Stonn’s brutality, he was unable to. But worse than the hits, Spock was unable to block out the older boy’s biting words.
“I have read that concubines on Earth are seldom loyal to...any...one...,” he said, between his punches to Spock’s ribs.

“I am at a loss to rationalize why a successful diplomat like Sarek, was taken in by the viles of a common Earth woman,” he said, delivering another savage blow to Spock’s lower belly.

“My mother is not a...a...concu...conco...concubine,” Spock said, not entirely sure what the word meant, but aware that it was referring to her honor.

“Disbelief will not change the facts. But believe what brings peace to your weak human mind,” Stonn said, kicking Spock in the groin.

He moved back and looked at the younger boy’s bleeding and broken form.

“Let us leave,” he commanded Satok and Saban. “We have done our duty towards our younger peer.”

The boys left Spock lying alone in a corner of the room. He was in such terrible pain that he was unable to pull his hands from under his back. And that in itself was sending stabbing pains to his shattered phalanges.

“Mother....why am I so human?” Spock wept under his breath, fearful that someone else would see him in his compromised state and again remind him of what a disgrace he was.

With excruciating slowness, he raised himself awkwardly to a sitting positng, his hands useless with fire coursing through them. He raised one bloody arm to his face, to clear the blood on his nose and lips. A wave of lightheadedness came over him. But he refused to fall back to the ground.

“I must be strong. I will complete Kolinahr someday. I must be strong,” Spock chanted to himself as he pushed through his pain and slowly tried to stand. His legs threatened to buckle under him, but he wasn’t about to give in.

Finally, after several minutes, Spock managed to get himself on his feet. And while he wanted to do nothing else but go home to his mother, he dared not do that. The last time Stonn had humiliated him, his mother had come marching to the seminary to talk to his instructors.

She had said that on Earth, this kind of behavior was outlawed. She had called it bullying. But instead of doing any good, it had made Spock look weak. The teasing and rebukes had only increased since then.

No, Spock could not go home.

And thus, he began the slow walk back to his learning chamber.

XXXXX

Spock’s head hurt even thinking about that memory. And that had only been the beginning of his misery.

But it was over now. He was on Earth, in Starfleet. And to his dismay, most humans had found him too Vulcan to be human. But at least they weren’t openly hostile. Surely if Orions, Andorians and all kinds of other beings had found their place here, he would too.

He couldn’t help thinking about Lady Alysi and her husband and their child.
Lieutenant Adams was one of the youngest instructors in the academy. And while he was very typically human, the fact that he was a xenolinguist reminded Spock of his mother. Stonn and the others had never let him explain.

Amanda Grayson had never been a concubine. She had been a celebrated xenolinguist at Starfleet. And her area of specialization had been Vulcano-Romulic languages. She had served alongside his father in a number of diplomatic missions. She had been a communications officer for the federation’s peacekeeping missions.

But she had been human. And that had been enough for Vulcan to forever deny her the honor that Vulcan ladies were given.

But to Spock, his mother would always be Lady Amanda. Even if no one else saw it fit to give her that regard and respect.

His thoughts about his mother took him to his memories of his father. Now these were not something Spock remembered fondly. Even with the vitriolic emotions that often accompanied the memories, longing and a need for acceptance always hit him like a force of nature. And strangely enough, in some memories, there was a weak undercurrent of love and caring…and perhaps remorse?

Spock had never taken too much time to examine the tumultuous emotions that resided in his memories of his father. But the simple presence of these inexplicable feelings and thoughts, was enough to tell Spock that Sarek was disappointed more in himself than in his son.

What Spock wasn’t sure of yet, was if Sarek’s remorse was in his failure as a father or in his failure as a Vulcan who had chosen an inappropriate mate. The answer terrified Spock. And illogically, he couldn’t help hoping that it would be the former. Even though a dark voice inside him told him otherwise.
We run and we hide

Spock sat on the bed for a few more minutes before getting up to unpack his few belongings.

He opened the dresser’s cupboard and hung his few clothes. Two pairs of black uniform trousers, two red cadet tunics, two formal white shirts, three pair of black slacks, two sweaters, three long-sleeved plain tunics, his Vulcan outer robe, a pair of loose Vulcan pants, and a pair of pajamas with little sehlats and terran dogs on it, the only whimsical item in in otherwise drab and severe wardrobe.

It wasn’t the kind of sleepwear one could find on Vulcan even for children, but his mother had made it herself, and even though he liked to think that it was nothing but comfortable attire to wear to bed, he could not help but smile inwardly at his mother’s insistence that he would find terran canines to be agreeable.

He had yet to see an actual dog, but when he did, he would be sure to tell his mother what he thought of them. However, he was fairly certain that they did not have eyes so much disproportionately bigger than the rest of their faces, like on the fabric his mother had made.

Next, Spock spread a plain blue bedsheets on the bed, and lay his gray comforter on it. He proceeded to line other little knick-knacks from Vulcan on the two shelves fixed on the wall above his desk.

His lyre and his incense stand were placed on the top shelf, while his PADD, his scientific tricorder, and his comm. unit were placed on the lower shelf.

He changed from his uncomfortable and outdated terran clothing into one of his slacks and a long-sleeved plain tunic. While he knew he needed to take a sonic shower, he wasn’t sure he wanted to do so just yet. He was not unclean. He had fastidiously looked after his hygiene on the ship that had brought him to Earth.

Deciding to familiarize himself with the other utilities available in the apartment, he made his way to the kitchenette and the replicator.

He had read a little about terran foods, but he knew that he would be unable to consume most of them. Terrans were partial to foods containing additional complex sugars, animal protein, and low quantities of fiber.

As a vegetarian, he could not consume animal products. And as a Vulcan, processed sugars would not agree with his system. He looked at the replicator menu to see what his options were. Unfortunately, there were severely limited, because the replicator had not been connected with the deep freeze. Also, the deep freeze did not really have any vegetables or grains or even meat in it. The only option that Spock could use was the one for instant soup, in the broccoli and chickpea flavor.

Spock fed the code for his chosen dish into the replicator and waited for the food to be ready.

Thirty seconds later, the machine dinged and Spock collected his soup into a simple porcelain bowl.

He had never tasted broccoli or chickpeas before. And he wasn’t too concerned about the taste. Food was meant to be a source of sustenance. But he couldn’t grimace at the strange texture of the mushy gruel. Maybe the replicator had made it thicker than it should be, he wondered.

After finishing his unappetizing meal, Spock cleaned the replicator and his utensils, also realizing that the apartment needed cleaning supplies and equipment. For now, his personal supplies from Vulcan had sufficed, but they wouldn’t last more than a few days when shared with the other cadets who he
knew would be arriving later in the day.

He didn’t know if it was custom for residents to purchase supplies for all the other residents or if each person bought their own.

Had Spock been human, he would have known that it would be better to wait for his roommates before buying anything. But he was Vulcan and he had time at his hands. He decided to go ahead and purchase whatever was needed. After all, how difficult could it be. It wasn’t as if Spock had not been to other planets for short periods of time. He had managed just fine there, and there was no reason for him to worried now.

He located the nearest grocery store on his PADD and walked out, fully intending to find out just how self-sufficient he could be on Earth. After Quinark, it should be uncomplicated.

XXXXX

Spock knew his mother would worry. He knew he was being supremely illogical. But after what had happened at the seminary, he could not go back home. Not anytime soon. His misshapen face would not go unnoticed. And between her emotionalism and his father’s cold, unemotional disapproval, Spock was certain he would go insane.

Had he been older, he would have known that such a thing was not possible. At least not in such simple terms. But at ten years of age, he did not know any better.

He had no credits that would help him pay for a passenger ship to another part of the galaxy. He also did not know anyone who would be able to help him figure out a way to stay away from home for a few days.

With his options severely limited, he decided to walk to the outskirts of the city.

He waited for the day at the seminary to end. Thankfully, no one had noticed that he was hurt. Or if they had, they had not elected to not ask him. The instructors almost never worried themselves about these things. After all Vulcan children were prone to bursts of emotionalism, considering how hard they were working to contain it. Ordinarily, someone like Stonn would be reprimanded for his less than logical behavior towards a fellow student. But Spock was not a full-blooded Vulcan. It was accepted that he had a degree of instability and provocativeness in him, which is why Stonn was always chastised lightly.

However, if they were actually fair, Spock’s alleged provocativeness should have had no bearing on the older, full-blooded Vulcan’s emotions. But that aspect of logic went ignored always.

Spock quietly slipped out of the seminary. He began walking in the direction of the wilderness that separated Shi’kahr from the city of K’ahar. At first, it had seemed like the wisest thing to do. But now that he had walked a few miles, his injuries were starting to make themselves known in ways he wasn’t aware was possible.

Everything hurt. The dull throbbing in his fingers had turned into a raging inferno. The ache in his lower ribs was now a grating pain that threatened to bring tears to his eyes with each breath. He was unable to form even a grimace of pain on his face because the tiniest of movements sent agony shooting through his skull. He was hungry, thirsty and unbelievably tired.

But he could not return home.

He took short, weary steps., stopping every few minutes to catch his breath. Thanks to his agonizingly slow pace, he had only just reached the edge of the city when the night started falling.
And Vulcan did not have a moon. Spock knew the night would be pitch dark. While he could see a little bit under the illumination of the stars, he would have to rely on his ears if he wanted to continue making his journey through the night.

A part of him wanted to wait the night out. But where would he go? There wasn’t a shack in sight, under which he could lay down and rest his sore little body. Another part of him was subconsciously calculating how long it would take for him to walk back home.

Ignoring both these urges, Spock plowed on for a few more paces, getting colder and more and more dehydrated with each passing hour. After a while, his pain grew to such an extent that he couldn’t help but lay himself down.

The cooling sand felt uncomfortably grainy under his robes. His hands ached fiercely. And his mouth felt as dry as the sand under his exposed neck. Spock promised himself that he would wake up exactly at the crack of dawn.

He closed his eyes, sighing in blessed relief, oblivious to the sand crucks moving about in their sandy burrows. Their sharp stings did not rouse him while he slept. And in his slumber, he saw his mother’s tear-stained face, pleading with his father to find him and bring him home.
Lost

“I knew something was wrong, I should have gone to the seminary,” Amanda sobbed into Sarek’s shoulder.

“Please Amanda, keep a check on your emotions. Your crying will not aid us in finding Spock,” Sarek said tiredly, while rubbing awkward circles on his wife's back.

Both parents had searched everywhere for Spock. The child hadn’t returned from the seminary even four hours after his last lesson. That’s when Amanda had known that something had gone horribly amiss.

She concentrated deeply, trying to feel for her son, but she only sensed a certain degree of pain from the child. While Spock’s shields weren’t very strong yet, they were stronger than those of the average Vulcan child. This was both disturbing and comforting. Disturbing because whatever was hurting him was terrible enough that it had affected him through his shields. And comforting because if they were still functioning, that meant that he was relatively unharmed.

However, it did little to quell her worries. Spock was still a child. And even though Vulcan was not known for its criminal elements, they were there. And many were hostile towards Spock simply because of his unique biological heritage.

Sarek also tried to reach for his son in his mind, but he too was unable to find him. There was pain, physical and emotional. And exhaustion. However, his heart seemed calm. His brain seemed relatively inactive. That meant the child was sleeping, presumably comfortably. Or he was unconscious.

But Sarek refrained from voicing that possibility to Amanda.

XXXXX

A sudden jolt shook him awake.

Spock groaned. Another bump jostled his injuries painfully. Blearily, Spock opened his eyes. His eyelids felt exceedingly heavy.

He squinted in the dark, and blinked the mist from his eyes twice. And then it dawned on him that he was not in the desert where he had fallen asleep. By the feel of it, he was in some kind of transport. And his hands were bound in front of him. Since there was no light in the box in which he was locked, he could not see anything. He knew it was a box because of how cramped his legs were, folded against his torso and pressing against his injured hands.

It was also very cold. His breath seemed unnaturally loud and heavy. The pain in his wounds had only worsened. And he was still tired. If he could, he would have gone back to sleep. But his head was pounding with vertigo, as his box toppled over again and again.

He hissed in pain, when his broken fingers collided with the solid metal wall of the box. And now his limbs were tangled into themselves awkwardly. But he could not do anything to straighten them out.

Fear was taking root in the pit of his stomach. He did not know who had picked him up from the desert. And now, Spock was regretting his impulsiveness and his unwise decision to sleep out in the open in the wilderness.
His head bumped against the metal wall again, compounding his vertigo.

“Mother, I’m scared,” he whimpered to himself.

But there was no one. The connection wasn’t responding. He could feel his mother’s worry, but he was unable to reach out to her.

Feeling totally alone and helpless, Spock steeled himself to face whatever was coming his way. He closed his eyes and started meditating, forcing himself to focus on a sense of security that didn’t exist.

XXXXX

Spock did not know how much time had passed when his box was opened. A large lid was lifted and Spock had to look away to shield his eyes from the brightness.

Two large hands lifted him out. He bit back a cry of pain. His muscles spasmed at finally getting room to stretch after being cramped in unnatural positions for such a long duration.

“Whe..e..where a.a.m…I?” Spock asked, his voice hoarse from the cold and the pain.

“You will know. Don’t ask questions,” the man with the large hands snapped. He was clearly Vulcanoid, but he wasn’t Vulcan. “Maybe he’s Romulan,” he wondered.

The man pulled the child to his feet and connected a chain to the shackles binding his hands.

“You are coming with me, boy. What is your name?” he asked.

“My name is Spock. I must ask you to release me,” Spock said. "There has been some error. I cannot be the one you seek" Spock figured he was definitely not on Vulcan anymore. He was on a cold, barren planet with sparse vegetation that mostly consisted of grasses and shrubs and brambles. He shivered involuntarily at the sharp chill in their air that smelled faintly of rooting meat and sulfur.

“There has been no mistake. You obviously have no home. You would have died in that desert. Be grateful that we brought you here. At least you will be clothed and fed,” the man said. “And don’t ask more questions. That smart mouth of yours will get you into trouble, and I can promise you it will not be pleasant.”

Spock stayed quiet after that. But he was terrified. He hadn’t meant to run away permanently. He had only wanted to get away for a short time, in order to clear his mind and sufficiently heal his body so that his mother wouldn’t know what had happened to him at the seminary.

In hindsight, Spock grimaced at his utter stupidity.

A few minutes later, Spock was forced to enter a small crowded room, where a number of other children, of different species and ages, were kept. All of their hands were bound in front of them. Most of them were quiet. But some were talking to each other in muted tones.

Spock found a tiny spot in the corner of the room and tried awkwardly to sit down.

“Did I tell you to sit?” asked the Romulan man waspishly.

“No..But I am fatigued and I need to rest,” Spock said with a degree of defiance in his young voice.

“You will only rest when I allow it,” said the Romulan, jerking Spock roughly to his feet. Spock gritted his teeth, unwilling to let the man know that this was hurting him. But he couldn’t keep the fear from his eyes. Spock desperately wanted to see his parents.
“Please, I will never complain again. I just want to go back home,” Spock said to no one in particular. But the Romulan heard him anyway.

“You should have thought of that before laying your ungrateful carcass in the sand,” he said.

A lone tear slipped out from Spock’s left eye.

He tried to call upon the memory of Amanda’s voice, as he braced himself to face whatever the Romulan was about to do to him.

XXXXXX

“Your fingers are broken,” the Romulan remarked angrily when he opened Spock’s shackles.

“I got injured a few days ago,” Spock said, not elaborating on how the few days old injury had worsened even after treatment.

“Vulcan and disfigured, this is such a joke,” the man said under his breath while pacing up and down.

“I assure you I am not a humorous anecdote. I am a person and I insist that I be allowed to return home,” Spock said in all seriousness.

“Don’t get smart with me Vulcan. I know your kind. Just shut your mouth, or I will do it for you,” the Romulan said, glaring at Spock.

However, this time, the older man quit his pacing and came close to Spock. He touched Spock lightly on the side of his neck. And moved to trace his calloused fingers across the child’s smooth jawline.

“You are very pretty for a Vulcan,” the Romulan said, in a far gentler tone than he had used with Spock so far. “I wonder what you will be used for once you are bought.”

“Bought…..? I do not understand,” Spock blurted out.

“You didn’t think I was going to keep you here with me. I am only a trader. You will be bought by someone to be their slave, child, whore…whatever they want you for. That is how it is,” the Romulan responded, without meeting Spock’s eyes.

Spock closed his eyes, terrified yet again. He frantically sought out his connection with his parents, and to his utter relief and surprise, he was able to reach them.

“Mother, Father, I am going to be sold to be slave. Please save me. I do not want to be sold, I am..sc…”

Before he could complete his thoughts to his parents, restraints were being slapped on his wrists again. And the minute the metal touched his skin, his mind went almost completely quiet.

“Something in these shackles is suppressing my connection with my parents,” Spock realized. He knew the bonds would be removed again. He only wished it would happen soon and before he was sold to someone from the other side of the galaxy.

XXXXXX

“Amanda, did you experience that?” Sarek asked, ecstatic that Spock had managed to contact them.
“I did. I did. Sarek, he has been taken by slavers. He said he will be sold soon. Please hurry and do something,” she all but screamed at her husband.

“I am going to the high council right now,” he told Amanda. “If you receive further communication from Spock, attempt to scan his message for details of his location.

Amanda nodded tearfully, placing all her love and faith in her husband’s promise to bring their son back.

And then, illogically, she prayed. To a terran deity called God, hoping that something would pull her child away from the dangers he was dangling over.
“We will pay no more than 1,400 credits for the Vulcan,” the Dafar said arrogantly to Babuk, the Romulan who had kidnapped Spock from the Vulcan desert.

“And like always, you will sell him back to me whether or not I want him back, right,” he spat at the regal Zarmalian.

Babuk had been doing business for many years with the Dafar of the Zarmal planet. And it was never pleasant. Slaves were purchased by the royal household for odd purposes, ranging from helping in the royal kitchens to performing acrobatics for the Dafar’s entertainment. Babuk could never understand why the slaves were sold back to him a few months later. Even stranger was the fact that many of the returned slaves came back with gruesome injuries and scars on their bodies. This made it impossible for him to sell them again and many had to simply be put down.

“Look Dafar, I don’t care that you practically own your planet. This is Quinark. And there are any number of kings and rulers and commanders from around the galaxy, who would like to purchase this Vulcan. You will pay be 2,500 credits for him or I cannot give him to you,” Babuk said heatedly.

The Dafar thought for a moment.

“What do you need him for? You can buy a cheaper slave. Leave the Vulcan for someone who will appreciate his worth,” Babuk said, hoping this would help the Dafar made a decision in his favor.

“You don’t understand Babuk. My son turns 12 in two days. I need a whipping boy, to educate him and to punish him,” the Zarmalian said in a strained whisper.

“A whipping boy? Your planet buys slaves specifically to whip them, Is that what happened to all the others you purchased from me?” Babuk yelled.

“Keep your voice down please. And no, those slaves were simply not strong enough for some of the more aggressive routine punishments that were handed out to them for everyday transgressions. Only the royal heir is allowed an actual whipping boy,” the larger man finished regally.

“Whatever. 2,000 credits. Not even half a credit less,” Babuk said, determined to get a good price for the Vulcan.

“I am willing to pay that much,” the Dafar said. “Prepare the Vulcan, we must depart immediately.”

XXXXXX

Spock was in an uneasy slumber, when Babuk and the Dafar opened the door to his holding shack.

“Wake up Vulcan, You need to leave,” Babuk said gently, shaking Spock’s right shoulder.

Slowly, without making a sound, Spock opened his eyes.

He saw a man with a pale pink skin tone, standing behind the Romulan. The man was nearly a head and a half taller than the slaver, and had ridges in his otherwise smooth, hairless skull.

“I do not wish to go with this man,” Spock said, with barely a hint of fear in his young voice.

“You don’t have a choice, young Vulcan. You have been purchased. Serve the Dafar well. Maybe
life wouldn’t be so bad under him,” Babuk said, surprising even himself with his gentleness.

“I will wait outside, Babuk. Dress the Vulcan in royal clothing. I cannot take him in his rags and tatters,” the Dafar said and left, closing the door behind him.

Babuk gently helped Spock to his feet. With a pair of pincers, he cut away Spock’s torn student robes. And inspected his smooth, unmarked flesh, only marred by the superficial bruises laid there by Stonn.

“Do these hurt?” He asked Spock, touching a nasty looking bruise just above his heart.

Spock nodded, unwilling to say anything for fear that his voice would come out as a croak.

Babub sighed. He didn’t like selling children but he didn’t really have an option. At least not a viable one, as far as he was concerned. And this young Vulcan’s fear and torment were so palpable in the air. He could only wish that the child would last long enough to reach manhood and be of other use to the Dafar, than just as a whipping boy.

XXXXX

Spock was led into a luxury starship. His hands were still shackled in front of him. His wrists ached and burned and he was starting to lose sensation in his crooked and twisted fingers. This worried him, but he was terrified of saying anything to the Dafar.

He slowly shuffled in, behind the Zarmalian man. He turned his head a last time, only to see Babuk lift up his hand in traditional Vulcan greeting.

“Live long and Prosper, Babuk,” Spock said under his breath, certain that he would probably never see anyone or anything familiar again.

“I will not cry,” he told himself, even as a lump formed in his throat. “I will not cry. I am Vulcan. Vulcans do not cry,” he repeated in his mind.

“Your shackles need to be changed. From now on, you will not wear these lowly chains. You will be bound with wire ropes made out of Tarnum.

Spock would have snorted if he were capable of mirthless humor. To him, it made no difference, if they bound him with the most expensive metal in the galaxy or the cheap psi-numbing chains used by slavers like Babuk.

However, the minute the shackles were removed, Spock’s head exploded in pain. His mother’s frantic worry and psi-messages tore through his mind.

“Spock, can you hear me son? Spock, are you not getting my messages?” Her ongoing worry was cutting through Spock’s consciousness at an alarming speed.

“Mother, stop,” he screamed inside.

And all went quiet for a moment.

“My baby, can you tell mother where you are. We are coming to take you?” She said to Spock gently, fighting to keep the worry and the urgency out of her voice.

“This is a planet called Quinark. A Romulan called Babuk found me outside shi’kahr and brought me here. I am being taken away on a luxury starship but I do not know where,” Spock finished, striving for a calm he did not feel.
His hands were being bound again. This time, the minute wires of the tarnum bit into his skin in numerous places, and a hundred different points of agony seemed to come alive in his sore wrists.

“Mother, please find me. It hurts,” he whispered, scared that he would come across as weak. “But don’t tell father that I am scared.”

Amanda’s heart broke at her son’s admission of fear and at his insistence that Sarek not be told. As the older Vulcan’s wife, she was aware that Sarek loved his son very much. But the strained relationship between father and son, had robbed Spock of the trust that most other children had with both their parents.

“Can you give me any other images Spock, so that I may try and ascertain where you are being taken?” she coaxed gently.

Spock looked at the Dafar, straining to project the Zarmalian’s face into his mind so that his mother would see it.

She gasped.

“What happened mother?” Spock asked.

“Nothing son. You be careful and do not anger the man in front of you. We are coming to take you. I am with you always,” Amanda said and stopped speaking. She kept her connection open with Spock but sternly told herself to stop communicating.

If Spock was going to survive being on a Zarmalian ship, he would need all his focus, and that would never happen if he was conversing with someone in his mind.

XXXXX

Just as Amanda finished communicating with Spock, Sarek returned. The pained lines around his eyes told Amanda that he did not have welcome news.

“The council will not help us. They do not want to expend resources in searching for a child that ran away willingly, even if he has now been taken by slavers,” he said in a rare emotional display of anguish.

“Sarek, he has been purchased by Zarmalian royalty,” Amanda told her husband without beating around the bush.

Sarek looked at his wife for a long moment, and then buried his head in his hands. For a few minutes, the couple remained quiet, trying to draw comfort from each other’s presence.

And then Sarek’s Vulcan mask slipped back into place.

“Then I must go to Zarmal and retrieve our child before further harm comes to him,” he said in a hard, icy voice. “I must leave post-haste.”

“I will come with you, husband. Our child is hurt, he will need me,” said Amanda, pleading with her husband to let her come along.

The debate going on in Sarek’s mind was clearly visible to Amanda. He was scared that she would get hurt. And while he was determined to bring Spock back, he wasn’t prepared to let Amanda come to harm in the process. But he had not married any ordinary human woman. Amanda’s heart was like that of mountain lioness. And even Sarek, of the house of Surak, could not fight with a force of
nature.

“Very well Amanda. We must leave now. I must alert my guard that I shall need them to be fully armed, in case I am unable to extract Spock through diplomatic channels.”
The underside of the sky

Spock shivered under the gaze of the Dafar.

“Do not be afraid. You do not know who I am. But I want you to know that I don’t intend to harm you,” the Dafar said, not unkindly, but in a tone that left no doubt in Spock’s mind that he was entirely under the Zarmalian’s control.

“I am Gurokh, the Dafar of the Zarmalian people. You may think of me as the supreme ruler of all of Zarmal,” he said. “Do you understand?”

Spock nodded, unsure of the best way of communicating with this strange being.

“You do not seem to have manners, boy. You will learn soon enough. But I want to first inform you of your station in my imperial household. Do you know what is a whipping boy?” Gurokh asked conversationally, ignoring the veil of desolation that had descended into the young of the young Vulcan.

“I do not understand Sir. But I will endeavor to comprehend if you would explain it to me,” Spock said, praying that the Dafar would not be offended by his Vulcan tone. Babuk had said he had a smart mouth. He didn’t. It was just how he spoke. He desperately wished that this being would understand.

Gurokh laughed; a high, humorless laugh that chilled Spock’s bones.

“I wonder what you will sound like, bound to the whipping post,” he mused. “Well, young one, you are to be whipped for my son’s transgressions. And for him to practice on you. A prince’s flesh cannot be marked. A prince must learn to control his compassion. And a prince must be able to cause pain even to innocents when the situation demands it. You will be the subject of his lessons.”

Spock did not want to feel fear at the older man’s monologue. But he couldn’t help but wonder what the next few hours would bring.

“My son will formally begin his training as my successor in two days, when he turns twelve years of age. One of his first lessons will be to become acquainted with you, and then find it in himself to watch you be hurt,” Gurokh said nonchalantly. “He is a gentle child. I hate to influence him this way and turn him towards violence, but he is my only son. His gentleness will not allow him to be a successful Dafar.”

“Please, I do not want to do this. I wish to return home to my parents. I have not consented to this,” Spock pleaded, naively thinking that maybe the Dafar was unaware of how he had been taken against his will.

“I understand your discomfort. It pains me to do this to you,” he responded. “But my son’s future is more important to me than the grief your parents must be experiencing. Consider this your sacrifice for the good of Zarmal.”

An unwilling sob escaped Spock’s tightly pressed lips.

He forced his pain and his fear to stay rooted in his own mind, unwilling to let his mother know that there was no hope.

XXXXX
“ETA 3.4 days, Ambassador Sarek,” the helmsman of Sarek’s personal ship gave his status report.

An inaudible sigh escaped him. Of course, his son had been taken in a much larger and advanced royal vessel. Sarek’s personal craft was not meant for such long and arduous journeys. But right now, logic was the last thing on the man’s mind. The Zarmalians were a mercenary race, whose reputation for cold cruelty was legendary throughout the galaxy. Sarek refused to think why his son might have been purchased by the Zarmalian royalty.

Amanda was thankfully resting in their quarters. The worrying and the crying had taken a lot out of her. And she knew as well as Sarek that she would need all her strength when they reached Zarmal. As a matter of duty, she had forced herself to go and sleep for a few hours. Which reminded Sarek, that he needed to go and meditate in order to calm his own mind as well.

XXXXX

Spock was kept in a small room for the remainder of the one-day journey. He held his bound hands close to his chest, unable to feel the tips of his fingers, even though liquid agony was still coursing through his wrists and knuckles. He dared not close his fists, because every time he tried, fire shot through his fingers, reminding him of the existence of nerves that were dormant only till they were absolutely still.

As a result of his injury, he was unable to eat the small amount of food that had been pushed into his room later in the day.

He was hungry and thirsty, but his desire to avoid hurting his digits, took precedence over his desire for sustenance.

The gentle hum of the ship’s engines lulled him into a troubled sleep. For once he did not dream of anything. And that was a relief. Because his dreams would have only been unkind and falsely hopeful.

XXXXX

The loud creak of a door opening, woke Spock from his sleep. Even though he had slept for close to fourteen hours, he did not feel adequately rested.

A Zarmalian guard came to escort him out of the ship. This guard looked similar to Gurokh, but he was shorter and his clothes were of a plain yellow material, unlike the Dafar’s richly embroidered robe.

Spock got to his feet with a little difficulty. But he managed to stand without assistance.

The guard looked at him sympathetically, before motioning him to follow.

Spock obeyed without question, having given up hope. It wasn’t that he was a coward. As a child with no practical knowledge of the galaxy, his bravery would lie in enduring his fate with dignity. Kaidth. What is, is. He would endure like a true Vulcan.

XXXXX

The young prince looked like the very image of his father, albeit younger. The only marked difference was in his eyes. They seemed to radiate warmth. Spock thought that in a strange way, Gurokh was committing a grave injustice upon his son, by forcing him to turn into an unfeeling being simply for a political purpose.
“Welcome to Zarmal, Vulcan,” the prince said. “My name is Ishok. What are you called?”

Spock did not let his anger control him, and he made a valiant effort to show respect to the prince. It wasn’t the boy’s fault that his father wanted him to be someone he was not. But then another thought crossed his mind.

Hadn’t Gurokh said that his son would form a friendship with Spock and then see him whipped. Supposedly, it would harden his heart to something akin to that of a future Dafar’s.

Spock knew by this time that his suffering was guaranteed. But that did not mean the young prince had to suffer too. He would not let the older boy form an attachment with himself.

“I am Spock, of Vulcan. And you cannot welcome me to a planet where I have been brought against my wishes,” Spock said, removing all traces of emotion from his speech.

The boy’s eyes instantly widened.

“Don’t you want to be my friend?” The prince asked earnestly. “My father said you were an orphan and you needed a family. He said you’d love to be my friend.”

Spock wasn’t sure what to make of this. His hands were still bound and the prince had not thought anything of it, before assuming that Spock had been brought in to be the prince’s companion.

“Maybe they force slave children to provide companionship to free children,” Spock thought.

“I have no desire to be your friend, young prince. Please do not force me to make your acquaintance when I do not wish to,” he said.

A few minutes later, a servant dressed in a plain white garb came in and unbound Spock’s hands.

“Gurokh requires the prince and his new companion to come and take meals with the royal family,” he said, bowing to them.

The prince looked at Spock with pity in his eyes.

“It is okay if you do not want to be my friend. At least come and eat. You must be hungry, Spock,” the prince said to him.

At that moment, Spock’s stomach grumbled audibly. Ishok’s lips turned up in a smile, as if saying “I knew it”.

Spock agreed reluctantly.

“Very well. Please lead the way,” he said and followed the prince into the palace.

XXXXX

Spock was made to sit next to Ishok in the dining hall. The Dafar sat at the head of the table. The Dafaya, his wife, sat on a chair beside him.

The table was covered in a vast array of splendid looking dishes, most of whose origin was unknown to Spock.

He tried to discern the ones that looked plant based. After a few moments, he glanced at two bowls that clearly contained a fruit salad, and some kind of a porridge.
He tried to put food on his plate, but his broken fingers made the task excruciatingly painful. Ishok noticed his awkwardness.

“Let me do that, Spock,” he said and ladled portions of both dishes onto the Vulcan’s plate.

Spock saw from the corner of his eye that the king was following Ishok’s interactions with him very minutely.

“Son, how do you like Spock as a friend?” he asked the prince.

Ishok hesitated for a moment, perhaps wondering if he should enlighten his father of Spock’s refusal to be his friend. However, Gurokh smiled at his son encouragingly, and all traces of hesitation vanished from the boy’s face.

“We are not friends yet Father. Spock is new here and I believe he needs some time before he can call me a friend, isn’t that right Spock?” Ishok asked, uncertainty in his eyes.

“Negative, Prince of Zarmal, I do not wish to be your friend as I have already informed you,” Spock said, feeling the Dafar’s scorching glare on himself.

Gurokh’s demeanor underwent an instant change.

“Finish your meals quickly. This matter needs urgent attention,” he said.

Awkwardly, Spock ate some of the fruit and the porridge, unable to maneuver cutlery with his swollen fingers.

Ishok looked like he wanted to help, but under his father’s icy gaze, he did not say anything.

A few minutes later, Gurokh stood up and motioned to his guards to bind Spock.

Ishok gasped. “What are you doing father…where are you taking Spock?”

“You are coming along as well,” he replied. “Consider this your first lesson in your future Dafari duties.”
The cool air of Zarmal worsened Spock’s trembling. He tried to stay steady, even as his thin frame occasionally shook with the cold.

The guards holding his arms were uncaring in their handling of him. Their tight grip left large finger-shaped bruises on his shoulders.

Once again, his hands were bound. But this time, they were bound by the same anti-telepathic metal cuffs that had been used on him by Babuk. The long chain connected to his handcuffs was wound around the whipping post and connected to a collar that he was forced to wear on his neck.

The metal ring sat heavily at the base of his throat. While it wasn’t suffocating him yet, it was uncomfortably tight and did not allow him to move his head much. His legs were spread apart to an uncomfortable extent with a spreader bar that was locked in place by ankle-cuffs.

Spock felt horribly exposed and vulnerable. Apprehension and fear thudded through his heart.

“I will not scream. I am Vulcan. I will not scream. I am Vulcan,” Spock chanted under his breath.

But he couldn’t hold his gasp in, when suddenly the flimsy robe was ripped from his back.

In a final act of indignity, one of the guards roughly pulled off his loincloth as well.

“Pain is a thing of the mind. The body is not the katra,” he repeated frantically, trying his hardest to steel himself for what was inevitably about to happen to him.

A moment later, he heard the sharp swish of something moving quickly through the air. And his world exploded in pain.

XXXXX

“Father, what is going to happen to Spock?” Ishok asked desolately.

Gurokh did not like distressing his child. And he had hoped to spare him this unpleasant spectacle for at least another day. But Spock’s insubordination to his son could not have been allowed to go unpunished. And if that meant that the young heir’s education had to begin early, so be it.

“He is to be whipped for disobeying the future Dafar of Zarmal,” he told his son.

“Disobeyed? Father, he did not disobey me. I don’t understand,” the young prince retorted.

Gurokh had known his compassionate son would fight against this arrangement. But there was no other way for him to learn.

“Look my son, the Vulcan is your slave. He must obey you. For that matter, even this planet’s free men and women must obey you without question,” he said. “Besides, he is not your friend or your equal. He is a whipping boy for now. At this moment, he is being punished for refusing to be your companion. And he will also be punished for your refusal to obey my decision of having him punished. Do you understand?” he asked his son, feeling like a demon from the deepest depths of hell.

“Yes father. I do not wish to see him hurt more,” the prince said, his voice choked with emotion.
He looked away as another lash laid Spock’s flesh open. The nausea bubbling in his throat threatened to rise. He turned around to avoid the savagery taking place before him. But Gurokh stopped him.

“You cannot turn away son. Someday you will have to order these punishments yourself. You must watch without losing your lunch. For every time you flinch, look away, retch, or worse, vomit, he will be given an extra lash. Watch. And find the strength to control your compassion towards the slave,” Gurokh said to his son, turning back to Spock.

Ishok forced himself to take deep breaths. He forced himself to tune out and muffle the sickening sounds of the beating. But he wasn’t entirely successful as he wasn’t sure of how long this would go on for.

“Father, how long will Spock be beaten?” he asked.

“As long as it takes for him to lose consciousness,” he said, not looking away from the sight.

XXXXX

Spock had never known such pain. The first lash drew blood. Spock’s mouth opened involuntarily to scream. At the last moment, he managed to force his throat to not make a noise. His broken hands jerked frantically in a bid to escape their bonds, but that further jarred the injury on his back.

Before he had time to recover, he was hit again, this time directly over the heart, where a healing bruise from Stonn’s beating lay.

Spock hissed in pain. He bit his lip hard enough to draw blood.

Another lash came down on him, slicing through his lower back and halfway across his buttocks.

More tears leaked out from his clenched eyes and his lips trembled with the effort of staying tightly pressed.

When the fourth lash came down, Spock cried out in agony. His voice sounded foreign to his ears.

“Please. Please…” He was unable to form a coherent sentence, because another lash came down, followed by two more in quick succession, making him howl like a wounded animal.

Spock lost count of how many times he was hit. He tried to take his mind away from the pain in a number of ways. He tried to recall the exact properties of all the elements in the Periodic Table. He tried to recite Vulcan poetry backwards. He tried to go over multiplication tables. But he was unable to focus for too long.

It was as if they would feel him spacing out, and hit him with renewed vigor. Green blood ran down his legs in numerous rivulets. Sweat covered his brow and soaked his hair.

He did not feel himself slipping away. And with a savage hit just above his liver, merciful blackness claimed him.

XXXXX

One hundred and twenty-three. That was the number of stripes that had been laid on Spock’s body.

Like a statue, Ishok had forced himself to stay quiet throughout Spock’s torture. He had watched and felt every single whiplash. And like a coward, he had been unable to do anything.
He had sighed with relief inside, when Spock had passed out.

And his father had been proud.

But now, in the privacy of his room, he allowed himself to vomit and break down. He wept like a baby, hurting so badly for Spock, that he felt as if he would never be whole again.

And he wondered where the Vulcan child was now.

The guards had picked him up unceremoniously and taken him away. There had been so much blood. Surely no one could survive such a beating without assistance.

“I need to see if he’s alright,” Ishok muttered to himself. He knew the palace well enough, to know that Spock would be in one of the spare servant rooms.

Without wasting time, he walked out of his room, worried deeply about Spock and hoping to give the younger boy some comfort after his ordeal.

XXXXX

Ishok arrived at the servants’ area in record time. As the prince and the future Dafar, he was easily able to find out the whereabouts of the new whipping boy.

But when he reached Spock’s room, his elation at finding the Vulcan changed into uncertainty. He wasn’t sure he’d be able to bear the sight of the younger boy’s injuries.

“I wasn’t beaten. Spock was. I need to do this for him,” he told himself. But his resolve shattered when he actually saw him.

Spock lay in a jumbled heap on the bed. A cheap healing salve had hastily been applied to his cuts but Ishok knew it was nearly not enough treatment for these injuries.

On closer inspection, he saw that the Vulcan’s back looked almost entirely green. There were only a few slivers of pale flesh where an expanse of smooth skin had been before the beating.

And the damage went down to his upper thighs. No wonder Spock was still unconscious. Such a beating would have brought grown men to their knees. And Spock was only a child.

Ishok felt his eyes well up. He so desperately wanted to apologize for his father’s cruelty. But there was nothing he could say or do to change what had happened.

He noticed that Spock’s hands were still bound and positioned awkwardly under his chin. He remembered how the Vulcan had been unable to feed himself easily at lunch.

Seeing the hands more minutely, the prince realized that the younger boy’s hands were broken most horrifically.

With great care and gentleness, he straightened his arms and positioned the hands away from his prone body, trying his best to ensure that the Vulcan’s fingers wouldn’t get damaged any further.

And then he sat down on the bed and cradled the injured boy’s head in his lap, grateful that he had already bid his father farewell for the night and wouldn’t be missed until the next morning.
The T'Paari warped through space, pushing her engines beyond her capabilities. Helmsman Sunak was aware of how important it was to get to Zarmal as hastily as they could.

He would have liked to take the ship more safely, but the ambassador had been explicit in his orders that time was of the essence.

While Sunak charted the remaining course of the journey, the other helmsman, Sabar, returned to the bridge, to relieve Sunak.

“Was your rest rejuvenating Sabar?” Sarek asked the returning helmsman.

“Yes ambassador, I rested adequately. Are you feeling quite well?” He asked the ambassador, rather uncharacteristically, because Vulcans did not ask each other how they were ‘feeling.’

Just as Sarek opened his lips to answer, a sharp gasp escaped him.

His knees buckled under him and he would have fallen, had Sabar not been there to hold him.

Sunak witnessed the entire spectacle and rushed to aid the ambassador.

Sarek closed his eyes and took a long, labored breath. His eyes opened and closed several times.

“What ails him?” Sunak asked.

“I do not know,” he said. “Ambassador, I need to escort you to yours and Lady Amanda’s quarters. You are unwell.”

Sarek felt another stab of pain in his skull. But with years of stringent Vulcan control, he took control of his mind and body.

“That will not be necessary, Helmsman. I am adequate,” He said in a tired voice. “My son is experiencing unpleasant sensations. And something is inhibiting his ability to clearly communicate with us, but the strength of the sensations is such that I am able to experience a degree of what he is suffering. I must see to Lady Amanda.”

Without another word, Sarek turned on his heel and left.

The two helmsmen exchanged blank looks, wary of what they would find on Zarmal and apprehensive of the sufferings of young Spock.

Sarek was right in assuming that Spock’s torment would affect Amanda worse. While she was not psi-null, she wasn’t Vulcan and therefore did not have the constitution required to handle such a strong onslaught of telepathic distress.

He found her writhing and twisting on the bed, awake, but unable to move.

Sarek moved close to her and gently placed his fingers on her meld points.

He closed his eyes and slowly, with great care, made his way into his wife’s consciousness. Her maternal pain was heart-wrenching. And he could sense that she was also experiencing Spock’s
trauma. Every few moments, agony blazed through, as if someone was methodically slashing their minds to ribbons.

He fortified his shields with much effort and extended their reach to Amanda’s mind. A few minutes later, her breathing calmed down.

“Thank You Sarek,” her mind said. “But...our son is hurting,” she continued brokenly.

Sarek wanted to soothe her ache, but he couldn’t. All he could do was to wait for Spock’s agony to cease. And that was not in his control. He did not respond to Amanda. He didn’t need to. She was wise enough to understand why they were entirely powerless to help their son in this moment.

The husband and wife sat together for hours; minds touching, sending comfort to each other, while Sarek shielded them both from the worst of Spock’s ordeal.

After what seemed like an eternity, the pressure on Sarek’s shields ceased. He sighed in relief. And withdrew gently from Amanda’s mind.

He opened his eyes and saw Amanda’s lovely face, eyes swollen and rimmed red after her weeping.

“Please Sarek….Can you hold me?” she asked, vulnerable like she had not been in a very long time.

Sarek did not trust himself to speak. He extended his arms and drew Amanda into an embrace, for once not rebuking her with the illogic of hugs.

XXXXX

Ishok drifted into sleep while caressing Spock’s hair. For a few hours, he had been lost in thought, guilt eating away at him.

While he refused to acknowledge it, the day had been taxing on him as well. And the soothing, repetitive motion of caressing Spock’s head lulled him into sleep.

When he woke up, the feeble rays of Zarmal’s distant sun were pouring to the room, through the narrow slit in the curtains.

He gently moved Spock’s head from his lap, and placed it on the comforter. The boy looked much younger in his sleep. It was hard to believe that this very child had been beaten to within an inch of his life just yesterday.

Heart swelling up with devotion, Ishok touched the younger boy’s cheek, only to pull away a moment later. Spock was burning up with a fever.

“Spock, Spock…wake up…” Ishok said loudly. He didn’t want to shake Spock awake for fear of irritating his injuries. But he did not know what else to do.

He shook Spock gently first. But when the child did not move a muscle, Ishok shook him violently, hitting him on his back unintentionally. And just then Spock opened his eyes.

His eyes were unfocused. It looked like he did not yet know where he was.

“Spock, are you alright?” Ishok asked in a tiny voice.

The Vulcan tried to lift himself from the bed, but he winced and groaned, his voice hoarse after all the screaming he had done yesterday.
“I…I..wat..wa..er” Spock finished, falling back on his side, unable to move without crying out and too weak to even form complete words.

Ishok understood.

He crossed the room and filled a bowl with water from the pitcher kept on a settee in the corner.

He lifted Spock’s head slowly and put the bowl to his lips, tilting it slightly for his ease.

The injured boy was only able to take a few sips, before the effort of even swallowing became too much for him. He closed his eyes, as if slipping into a slumber again.

“No Spock, you cannot sleep……You need a healer. If you sleep now, you may not wake up,” Ishok said, hoping desperately that Spock would understand.

Spock looked at the prince through half-lidded eyes, fighting against the urge to close his eyes. Rationally he knew he had just been forced out of a sleep that would have turned into a healing trance in a few hours. But he didn’t have the heart to tell Ishok that he had inadvertently delayed Spock’s healing.

Instead, he made an effort to rouse himself completely. But the action did not come without its consequences. Pain crackled over his back. And his fingers throbbed with renewed agony as they forced him to remove the pressure he was exerting on them in his effort to get up.

Spock gritted his teeth and ignored his body’s protests.

At a snail’s pace, he placed his shaking legs on the ground. He rose unsteadily but remained standing, refusing to allow his legs to collapse under him.

Oblivious to him, Ishok was watching him, admiration shining his unveiled eyes, marveling at the bravery of the young Vulcan whipping boy.
Tin soldier

Gurokh had spent a rather contemplative night. He hadn’t found any perverse pleasure in forcing his son through such a macabre spectacle as a child’s whipping. But he had had to harden his heart in the interest of Zarmal and its future Dafar.

A part of him wanted to return the Vulcan child to his home. But another part wanted him to stay on and teach his son, the things that can only be taught by suffering and sacrifice.

Hoping to make up to his son, for what he had put him through yesterday, Gurokh made his way to the prince’s bedchamber.

XXXXX

“I cannot go out without clothes, Prince Ishok,” Spock said, mortified at his state of undress.

The older boy agreed with the Vulcan, but he could not see Spock’s clothes anywhere in the room. He took off his own outer robe and moved to drape it around his shoulders.

“This would be large for you, but it will protect you from the wind and the other servants’ stares,” Ishok said, tightening the cord of the robe at Spock’s waist.

Spock looked at Ishok gratefully. “Thank you, Sir, you are most kind,” he said genuinely.

The prince however only looked away, as if he’d been slapped by Spock’s gratitude. He took several deep breaths to compose himself. After a few minutes, he looked at Spock again and smiled warmly.

“Let us go to the palace, before I am missed. Father doesn’t know that I’m here with you,” he said, and offered Spock his arm.

The injured boy threaded his arm through the prince’s for support, careful to keep his fingers still and away from contact with any surface.

Slowly, the duo started walking towards the palace. They did not know what to do with the bloodstained sheets in the room so they left them there, even though a part of Spock wondered if he was supposed to clean them. He was a slave technically, certainly no better than any other servant.

But Ishok did not allow him to wonder about it too much. He urged Spock to walk quickly through the crowd of the servants hurrying to and from their daily tasks.

The Zarmalian’s ears were perhaps not as sharp as Spock’s, which is why he did not realize that no amount of hurrying would protect Spock from the knowing gazes and pitying looks of the other servants and slaves.

“He was beaten pretty badly,” a girl with deep mauve skin said to another Zarmalian.

“Is he some sort of criminal?” one of the males asked his Frolian companion.

“Whipping boy…. he will look like a melted statue after the Dafar is through with him,” another said with undisguised glee.

Spock forced himself to tune out the voices.

The pace at which Ishok was forcing him to walk was also uncomfortable to him. He was still
drained and disoriented, and it was taking every ounce of his will to walk without shaking like a leaf. But he was grateful that he hadn’t had to wake up alone. It was decidedly illogical, but Spock was glad to have had someone wake him up a lot more gently than the guards would have.

His relief did not last long, though.

In the distance, he could see Gurokh marching towards them, the royal guardsmen behind him.

There was fury in the cadence of the little procession. And with an instinct that every sentient being possesses, Spock knew that he was the reason Gurokh’s anger.

But not more than his own son.

XXXXX

Ishok stopped short when he saw his father coming towards them, with his entire guard with him.

He did not need Spock’s telepathy to know what the younger boy was thinking. The slight tightening of muscles was enough to tell him that the Vulcan was bracing himself for another ordeal like yesterday’s.

If Ishok had been older, he would have either known to be more discreet in helping Spock, or he would have stood up to this father. But a twelve-year-old was hardly a man yet, even though Gurokh wanted his son to turn into one sooner than it was naturally possible.

The two boys remained rooted to the ground. And subconsciously, Spock stepped closer to Ishok, slightly to the front, ready to shield the prince from his father’s wrath. A part of him reminded him that even if the Dafar was angry with his son, Spock would be the one to be punished. But the more conscious part of Spock was unwilling to take a risk. What if Gurokh was a temperamental man? What if he decided to hurt his own son, like he had hurt Spock yesterday?

No. He could not let harm come to the young prince who had shown him more compassion in barely ten hours, than most adults had shown him in his entire ten years of life so far.

A few moments later, the Dafar stood towering before the boys.

XXXXX

“It wasn’t his fault, father…Please…punish me. Don’t hurt him. He will die, father..please,” Ishok wailed and wept, clutching at his father’s ankles as the guards seized Spock.

A deep shadow of fear crossed the Vulcan’s face, but for Ishok’s sake, he masked it almost instantaneously. Unfortunately, the older boy saw it and begged his father in the humblest and most wretched of ways.

“Father, I will do whatever you ask. I will be a good Dafar. If I disappoint you, you can disown me, and mother and you will be blessed with another heir,” He said, hardly caring what was falling from his lips. “Don’t hurt Spock, father……he will die.”

His pleas fell on deaf ears.

“He was beaten for you to strengthen and harden yourself,” Gurokh thundered. “You failed, Ishok. And he must be punished for your failure. And he will be hurt again. And as many times as it takes, for you to cease helping him, even if he is being burnt alive and screaming for you to help him.”
Ishok turned a violent shade of green at his father’s murderous words. He tried to control himself desperately, but a minute later, he vomited all over his father’s expensive sandals.

“You disgust me, son. I wanted to raise a ruler for Zarmal’s people. And I have been cursed with a weakling like you,” he said, in a voice overcome with anger and disappointment.

Ishok stopped crying. He looked at Spock, hoping to gauge the state of his mind. But the Vulcan only looked at him blankly, as if he hadn’t heard or seen anything.

“Very well father. I will do as you instruct. Please punish the boy as you see fit. I will not aid him. I will not react to his screams. I will close my mind to his suffering,” Ishok said in a voice icier than the iciest mountain peaks on Zarmal’s surface.

He stole a surreptitious glance at Spock. And to his relief, he found the blank mask still in place. Maybe Spock would also become more Vulcan under this treatment, the prince mused. After all, weren’t Vulcans supposed to be completely unfeeling and devoid of all emotion.

XXXXXXXX

Ishok was wrong. It did not get easier to watch the suffering of another being, least of all a child younger than himself.

Spock flinched as his cut and bruised back was once again exposed to the planet’s cold air.

Ishok closed his eyes, as if expecting a whiplash to come down on his own back any minute.

And sure enough, a moment later, the unmistakable swish of the razor sharp whip was followed by a sickening thwack, that elicited a muffled grunt from the bound child.

Spock was making a herculean effort to control his pain, even as his already injured back was laid open once again, one wound at a time.

But like the day before, he was unable to bear his agony silently. After the sixteenth lash, he sobbed out loudly, looking pathetic and beaten like no Vulcan ever should.

But at no point did he actually scream. He simply didn’t have the energy to. Like a broken toy, he jerked and bucked with every strike. And when he lost consciousness after the eighty-ninth blow, Ishok simply turned and made to walk back to his room.

But Gurokh stopped him in his tracks.

“I need proof of your learning, son. What mark will you lay on the slave to show me that you have learned the lesson of necessary evils?” the older man asked his son.

“What would you have me do, father?” the prince asked, with no inflections in his voice.

“Brand the slave. Mark him as the property of the royal household,” Gurokh said. “Where will you place the mark?”

Ishok swallowed. Some of his unfeelingness was real, but most of it was a bluff of the sorts. However, if he didn’t do this, he knew Spock would be hurt worse. And the poor boy could not take more. And that did not matter to his father in the least.

“He will just purchase another slave, if Spock dies,” Ishok thought to himself bitterly.

“I will mark him where you’d like him to be marked, father. As a future Dafar, I will submit to your
good judgment,” he said.

Gurokh looked surprised. But then a look of genuine affection and warmth entered his otherwise cold, dark eyes.

“Yes, my son. I am so proud of you. Mark the slave just above his heart, right under the left side of his ribcage,” Gurokh said, holding a pinch of smelling salts under Spock’s nose. The Vulcan child opened his eyes, hissing in pain, not completely coherent yet.

The Dafar handed the red-hot branding iron to his twelve-year-old son.

“Go ahead son, claim your first slave,” he said.

Ishok moved close to Spock. For a moment that felt frozen in time, Ishok looked deeply into his fathomless eyes. And suddenly like that, a flash of an alien emotion passed through the prince’s mind.

“I forgive you, young prince. Do what you need to do,” the familiar pain-filled voice said clearly in Ishok’s mind. Almost immediately after that surreal exchange, the Vulcan looked away and closed his eyes again.

The prince steeled his nerves and without any warning, pressed the glowing brand to Spock’s bruised side, burning through skin, and muscle, and injuries old and new.

Spock let out an unearthly sound of anguish.

And then all went quiet.
When they released him from the whipping post, his broken body hit the hard ground with an audible thud. His broken fingers, now swollen and twisted beyond recognition got crumpled under his weight, but he was unable to do anything to control his ungraceful fall.

His vision swam and his throat refused to make a sound. Blood leaked from the corner of his lacerated lips. Tears mingled with sweat ran down his face, further blurring the haze that had descended upon his eyes.

The fire in his back, buttocks, and upper thighs felt like acid corroding his skin. And the brand on his side that marked him as something even less than property, consistently forced more tears to leak out from his tired eyes. It was as if there was nothing left in his body to leak out. Yet, he bled and he wept, having lost his control over himself almost completely.

He allowed himself to feel the cool ground under his cheek, hoping it would provide some respite to the new wound in his side. But the cold only acted as his enemy, unlike Ishok, who Spock did not blame in the least for what had happened.

A large, calloused pair of hands roughly pulled his hands from under him. The movement made Spock want to black out, but somehow, that blessed relief did not come to him. A moment later, he was dragged away from the whipping post, broken hands now nothing more than bloated bags of torn muscles, clotting blood and shattered bones.

Spock let out a wet cough. And had he been more himself, the sight of green specks coming out of his mouth would have concerned him.

But at this moment, his only thought was to reign in the uncontrollable hacking, in order to stop his torn back muscles from shaking so much.

They paid no heed to his discomfort. It looked like the Dafar did not care if the Vulcan died. And as long as he wasn’t worried, the guards had no reason to bother about the strange alien child.

They dragged him down to a basement under the palace, where the air was much colder.

Spock’s toes and knees were aching from every time he was dragged over stairs. At long last, they dragged him into a tiny room, which would have been a cell, were it not for the fire burning in the grate and the two blankets laid on the floor.

“The Dafar wanted to give you better hospitality, whipping boy. But the prince’s kindness to you cannot go unpunished. You will be kept here. And should the prince choose to find you again, he will learn that your suffering is due to his actions,” the guard said, pity dripping through his words.

Spock was too far gone to respond. He simply jerked his head, hoping the guard would understand it to be a nod.

The guard understood.

He turned to leave. But a moment later, he turned back. From a pouch sewn into his robe, he brought out a small canteen of water and a tiny bottle of a healing salve. He placed these near to Spock, and then proceeded to cover the Vulcan with the softer of the two blankets.

“It is not much, but when you feel slightly better, drink the water and apply the salve to your wounds. That brand on your side will need it,” he said. “I would have done it myself, but I will be
missed soon, and I do not wish to rouse suspicion.

At first the guard thought Spock had fallen asleep.

But then a tiny, childlike voice whispered brokenly, “Tha…tha..nk You.”

The guard’s heart squeezed painfully. He wanted to hit something. A part of him wanted to hit the child hard enough to knock him out, or better, knock him dead. Another wanted to kill the Dafar for brutalizing a mere boy.

However, he could do neither. He had children, a son and a daughter, probably close to the young Vulcan’s age.

And he did not even want to think about what would be done to them if he were caught engaging in an act of defiance against the Dafar.

He did not say anything to Spock. What could he say to a child who had been treated so unfairly. He wondered if the Vulcan had a family. His eyes went to Spock’s bound hands, now resting awkwardly in front of him. The hands looked so painful. The guard regretted the amount of force he had used to drag the kid.

But then he had resolutely refused to look at his face until now.

And that had been a wise decision. Because after putting a face to the disgraced whipping boy, he could not think of the child as just a tool for the prince’s education.

He wished he could open Spock’s bonds. Surely that would allow him to place his arms on his sides, which would be a lot more comfortable. But the Dafar had not said if that was allowed. If he remembered correctly, the boy had been brought to the whipping post with his hands bound in front of him.

And that meant that his bonds had not been released since yesterday.

Another surge of emotion passed through him, beseeching him to be a better man.

But in the end, his cowardice and his love for his own children got the better of him. And that is when he realized that being a parent demanded sacrifices. Even immoral ones like those of his conscience and compassion.

XXXXX

Ishok walked back with his father to the dining hall. He felt oddly detached from his body. Gurokh pretended as if nothing had happened. As if they hadn’t just beaten a helpless, injured boy to a bloody pulp. As if they hadn’t just sold their soul to the God of demons, in order to continue holding Zarmal in their suffocating royal grip.

No. Gurokh sat at the table, joined by his wife at his side. And Ishok sat at his regular place, refusing to let his eyes stray to the seat where Spock had sat yesterday at lunch.

“He hadn’t eaten much. And he wasn’t allowed to eat after yesterday’s beating,” Ishok thought to himself, wanting nothing more than to grab the large bowl of fruit, and find Spock to feed him with his own hands.

And while the urge to do so was strong, Ishok wasn’t sure he would. He didn’t dare be caught helping Spock again. He wasn’t sure Spock would survive what had been done to him today, but he
knew that he definitely won’t make it through another torture session.

In that moment, he hated his compassion. He hated every little animal he had petted in front of his father. He hated every beggar he had ever given credits to, under the disapproving gaze of the Dafar. But more than that, he hated himself for not realizing that he needed to hide himself from his father. He wished he could go back in time and warn his younger self that these little acts of kindness that filled his heart with joy, would have to be entirely discreet, invisible to the Dafar’s keen eyes.

But that was a useless thought. It wasn’t as if he could actually go back in time and change anything.

So he sat down to eat, his thoughts with Spock, willing his love and warmth to reach the child who he knew was alone, freezing, in pain, and possibly dying slowly in unimaginable agony.

“What is our ETA, helmsman?” Sarek asked, not bothering to waste time in courtesies.

Sabar took a few moments to check the status, before responding to the ambassador.

“We shall arrive at Zarmal in 1.8 days Sir.”

Sarek nodded, disappointed that they would not arrive sooner. If his bond with his son was anything to go by, they were losing precious time. And that had become more clear than ever after what had happened exactly three hours ago.

Sarek had felt the sharp pain of his son’s renewed torment. And this time, he had been prepared. A part of him had wanted to experience every single fiber of the pain his son was being subjected to.

But that would have been illogical. And potentially disastrous for this rescue mission.

He could not afford to have been weakened by such a stressful telepathic experience, particularly when the channel was being suppressed by something. And he could not have allowed Amanda to suffer through it either.

Before she had been able to connect the dots, he had sat down to meditate beside her, fortifying his shields again and extending them to her mind.

“He’s being hurt again,” she had said, her voice barely above a whisper. He hadn’t responded. He had taken her soft hand in his and waited for this new test in his child’s never ending list of trials, to end.
Spock shivered relentlessly. His muscles constantly spasmed with the cold…and the pain.

“I am Vulcan, I can bear it,” he told himself again and again, as if the words were his only talisman. And the two blankets were wrapped tightly around him, even though they irritated his injuries. If he could have, he would have taken the blankets off and sat next to the fire in order to find warmth and a measure of comfort.

But he had been unable to rise. Every effort to move had only flared up his agony. And after the sixth unsuccessful attempt, he had given up.

Spock, like all Vulcan children, had been learning to meditate and control his emotions, particularly the negative ones.

He desperately wanted to meditate now, but his contorted, jumbled up position on the cell’s floor was not conducive to such a demanding mental rigor.

He closed his eyes and tried to recall Amanda’s face. It had never been difficult before. He had often thought about his mother while trying to shield himself from Stonn’s taunts and biting remarks. And thinking about Stonn, Spock couldn’t help but wonder how things might have been different had he not provoked the older boy into physically attacking him.

But those thoughts were of no use. Spock had been captured and enslaved. And this was to be his existence.

To be beaten day after day, hungry and cold, unable to move, unable to will his mind to master his body’s ills.

He felt himself slipping into a sleep. For a few moments, he basked in the relief of the blackness, as the numerous points of pain in his body dulled to distant echoes. However, a small voice in his mind jerked him back.

“No Spock, you cannot fall asleep,” it said.

“No Spock, you cannot fall asleep,” it said.

“It’s no use. I am tired and I do not have the energy to stay functional in my condition,” he responded out loud.

“No Spock, you must not sleep. There is no one to wake you up,” the voice again said, gently but urgently.

It sounded strangely like Ishok’s but Spock knew that was impossible. The Zarmalians were not a telepathic race. And Ishok did not have any kind of bond with Spock, in order to communicate with him so freely through his mind. Besides, the chains he was wearing were suppressing his telepathy to a severe degree. Otherwise, he would have attempted to reach out to Amanda.

But that did not mean that the voice’s observation was incorrect. Spock had never had to undergo a healing trance before. He was scared of doing it all alone. And he knew that most people needed a strong external stimulus to be brought back, otherwise their katra simply released its hold on the physical body.

No, Spock could not risk falling into a healing trance. If he did, he would be unable to come back. Illogically he wished Ishok was here with him, helping him like he had done last time.
But he did not linger on that thought. Because Ishok’s gentle touch had led them both to the whipping post. And while Spock had been the one to suffer the merciless blows of the whip, the prince had been forced to watch. And sometimes, witnessing such brutality left stains on the soul. Spock did not wish that on someone as clean and pure as the young prince.

It was getting increasingly difficult for Spock to stay awake. He needed to find a way to fight his body’s urge to go into a trance. With great determination, he turned on his back and forced himself to lie on his injuries, hoping that the pain would be too great to keep him from getting comfortable. And in order to keep the blackness at bay, he started reciting the laws of Surak to himself, trying to master the very pain that would keep him from leaving the world forever.

XXXXX

Gurokh had not anticipated that this would be the outcome of getting a whipping boy. He had wanted his son to form a relationship with the slave, only to learn how to master that relationship for the good of Zarmal.

But he had not thought that the relationship would become so deep.

It had been more than half day since the slave child had been beaten for a second time.

It had been unpleasant and horrifying, even to himself. But with the supreme self-control of the Dafar, he had let the torture go on until the boy could not take anymore.

He grudgingly admired the young Vulcan’s courage. But that courage was also his undoing. He could have given up a lot earlier than he had. And he would have suffered less. But no, despite his screams and thrashing, he had remained awake and aware; not something commonly seen even among grown men undergoing the torment of the Dafar’s royal whip.

However, the Vulcan child was not important. It was Ishok’s condition that concerned Gurokh. His son had been withdrawn and pale ever since the second beating. He had not smiled at his mother even. And while it seemed like he was understanding the need for tightly reigned emotions, it hadn’t meant that he needed to give up on simple things like laughter and jest.

But he had.

And contrary to common belief, the Dafar was not a tyrant. He was not trying to take away his son’s compassion. He was only trying to take away the excessive kindness that radiated from every fiber of Ishok’s being. Had he been a slightly selfish child, there would have been no need for a whipping boy.

But Gurokh did not have anyone to explain these things to. Even Ishok refused to understand.

Be as that may, it could not be denied that Ishok would be declared the formal heir of Zarmal in less than a day. And for that, the Vulcan’s suffering could not have been avoided.

At least now the prince knew that being a Dafar was not just about compassion and caring, it was also about tough decisions that would sometimes alienate him from even his loved ones.

XXXXX

Ishok was in the worship hall of the royal family, being anointed with scented oils and perfumes. His body had been massaged with the essence of twenty-nine types of flowers from all over the galaxy. His eyes were now being lined with Tristoli kohl. And his robe was being fitted with an armor made from the finest tarnum mined on Zarmal.
A royal green sash was draped around his waist and his arms, as he was made to sit in the center of the Suvarnic circle, the spiritual center of Zarmal’s existential power.

And the priests from all the nine temples of the planet circled the would-be heir, chanting blessings and pouring the milk of the Shahun on him. The said Shahun stood outside the circle, waiting for the prince to come and kiss her feet, for the blessing of nourishment for the kingdom.

After a several minutes, the head priest broke the circle and helped Ishok stand to his feet.

He led him to the Shahun, whose snow-white fur and deep, gentle eyes reminded the young prince of a pure and gentle Vulcan, being held somewhere in the bowels of the palace.

“I thank you for nourishing Zarmal,” Ishok said, bowing down and kissing the forefeet of the Shahun. “May our generations prosper under our sun and find greatness in the stars of the galaxy,” he said, emotion choking his words.

And then, the priests dressed up the young prince in his armored royal robe. And in that moment, there wasn’t a more magnificent looking twelve-year old in all of Zarmal.

XXXXX

“Sarek, you must let me talk. Zarmal is not a federation planet. Your diplomatic efforts may not work,” Amanda said to her husband, as they neared their destination. “But I understand Zarmal’s culture. Maybe we can persuade them to return Spock to us. They are a violently aggressive race, but they are not needlessly cruel. If we can refute their reasoning, there may be a chance to bring our boy back without added complications.”

Sarek did not like the plan Amanda was proposing. She would be placing herself in imminent danger, and while he was prepared to do anything to rescue his son, sacrificing his wife in the process was not on his list of options.

“Amanda, I am not entirely convinced that your proposal is logical,” He said. “You could be harmed. And we are both aware that Spock will need you when we find him. He will perhaps need you more than he will need me,” he finished sadly, unwilling to dwell on the thought that he did not know his son well enough to care for him in his grave state.

Amanda looked at her husband, understanding clearly reflected in her eyes. But she also knew that Sarek was not entirely correct in his reasoning. He did not know much about Zarmal’s diplomatic avenues to offer anything of value to the planet’s royalty.

And while there was every chance that Amanda’s vague plan of reasoning with them might not work, at this point they did not have much to work with anyway.

“Sarek, we are struggling with a lack of knowledge in this case. And were it not for the nature of this mission, it would have been like the many others that we have undertaken together,” she said gently, placing her hand on her husband’s shoulder. “Let us reach the surface and see what we can find out. I am eager to get our child back, but I want to make it as clean and non-violent as possible. His safety is at risk. We cannot make mistakes in our haste,” she finished.

Sarek would have been thoroughly amused by his wife’s impeccable use of Vulcan logic, had the situation not been so precarious. And he couldn’t argue that her logic was unsound.

“Very well, my wife…Let us prepare to land on Zarmal. What must we do to not draw attention to ourselves?”
For the love of a son

The cell felt unnaturally cold. The dim light of the embers glowing in the grate was weak and ineffective. A cold meal sat untouched and unnoticed beside the shivering figure on the ground, now coughing uncontrollably.

Spock’s cough had worsened in the long hours he had spent trying to stay awake. The fire had gone out at some point. And Spock only noticed it now, because the effort of staying awake and still despite the cough, had left him perspiring profusely. His skin felt flushed and chills crawled on his skin like a thousand ants.

He had been suffering from a fever even before the second beating. However, now he was practically on fire. His head was too heavy and his breaths were coming in short, labored gasps. Something was blocking his airway. It could have been phlegm. He wasn’t sure. And as far as he was concerned, it wasn’t the biggest problem at his hands. Staying awake was a much bigger priority. And if the discomfort could keep him awake, he would take it, even though all his tired body wanted to do was to sleep for a very long time.

It did not cross his mind that by not going into a healing trance, he could die of exposure and infection, and it would be a much more painful death than the one offered by the trance.

XXXXX

“Father, will Spock be brought in for the ceremony?” Ishok asked meekly, careful to disguise his concern for the Vulcan.

Gurokh had thought about it long and hard, and had finally decided against it.

“No son. We cannot have a whipping boy attend your investiture ceremony,” he said. “If he harbors hatred towards your or the planet, his ill-wishes could cast an evil shadow on your future.”

Ishok did not argue. He knew Spock harbored no negative feelings for him or for Zarmal. But he wasn’t about to say that to his father. Who knew what effect that would have on the Dafar.

And with this thought, Ishok made a startling discovery. He had lost the trust he had always placed in his father. And the respect he had always given to him, as the Dafar and as his sire.

It was understandable.

Gurokh’s blatant disregard for Spock’s life and wellbeing had opened the young prince’s eyes towards the injustices his father had probably committed against other innocent people as well.

And today, he was to formally become the heir to his father’s throne.

He vowed to himself to be a better ruler; a kinder, fairer, and more compassionate Dafar than Zarmal had ever seen before. All for the sake of a young boy, who should not have been brought here in the first place.

XXXXX

Amanda worked busily on the T’Paari’s communication console. While she wasn’t entirely familiar with the Vulcan ship’s systems, she knew enough to intercept a large amount of sub-space communication from Zarmal, most of it essentially useless prattle, but some of it gave her key points
of information.

She used the vast majority of the messages to try and program the intricacies of the Zarmalian language into the universal translators she and Sarek were going to use. There was some basic syntax already programmed into it, but with such volume of messages, the computer was able to create a much more accurate algorithm. Considering the sensitivity of the situation, Amanda was determined to plug as many holes in her plan as she could.

Meanwhile, Sarek contacted the Vulcan embassy on the nearby planet of Artois, which was just at the edge of federation space, not too far away from Zarmal. However, the two planets did not have any diplomatic ties.

Sarek could not have communicated with the embassy at Artois earlier, for fear that Lady T’Pau would forbid them to help the ambassador in his solitary mission. But now that he was here, he could request their assistance in keeping track of them while they were on Zarmal’s surface.

“Greetings Ambassador Sarek,” the warm, perfectly controlled voice of Ambassador Samik said. “How may we aid you? Your communique stated that you were going to Zarmal on a classified mission.”

Sarek took a deep breath before revealing the whole truth to Samik.

“It is indeed a highly classified mission, but it is not one sanctioned by Vulcan,” Sarek said.

“We do not understand, Ambassador Sarek,” asked Samik, still calm but with an eyebrow quirked up in surprise.

“My son was kidnapped and sold to the Zarmalian royalty by slavers, and while the infiltration by slavers is being investigated by Vulcan, they have refused to provide a rescue mission for my son,” Sarek finished, wondering if Samik would ask why the high council had refused to help a young Vulcan citizen.

And he did. The illogic of several things not adding up did not work well with Vulcan diplomats at all, particularly when the matter was as grave as venturing illegally onto a planet with which they had no established contact.

“Ambassador Sarek, your son, while half human, is still a Vulcan citizen. Why did the high council refuse to aid you?” Samik asked.

With a voice that sounded like steel and gravel, Sarek answered, trying not to let the other ambassador know just how guilty and upset he was about his son’s misfortune. “My son was experiencing undue cruelty from his peers at the seminary. They often humiliated him with crude words. It seems he was emotionally compromised by their provocation, and hence decided to desert the seminary and his home.”

There was no response to that. Even Sarek’s helmsmen had not been given this much detail. And while their expressions remained neutral, Sarek knew they were judging Spock as weak and emotional. And there was no doubt that Samik was arriving at the same conclusion.

“Ambassador Sarek, we cannot aid you in your mission, but we are willing to track your movements while you are on Zarmal’s surface. We shall track you by your bio signature,” he said. “And your ship’s communication console will have to remain connected to ours.”

“I am grateful for your aid, Ambassador Samik,” Sarek said, relieved immensely that he would be in some form of contact with the Vulcan authorities. The high council may not care for Spock and
Amanda, but they cared about him. And for now, it would have to be enough.

XXXXX

Amanda’s preparations did not take too long.

They were to reach within beaming distance in exactly 42.3 minutes.

Sarek alerted his guard on the lower levels of the ship, that they were to track himself and Amanda minutely, while staying in communication with the embassy on Artois. Also, they had to be ready to beam down at a moment’s notice in the case of an eventuality.

Amanda wrapped a tight headscarf around Sarek’s head, mostly to hide his ears.

She covered her own hair with a loose scarf that was strangely a common fixture across many cultures on a number of planets. With plain, long robes covering their Vulcan clothing, the couple looked unassuming and ordinary, easily able to blend in with the xenodiverse population of Zarmal.

They made their way to the transporter room, readying themselves for what would be the most important thing they’d ever do in their lives.

The entire guard stood at attention. Helmsman Sunak prepared the function control on the keypad.

“Live long and prosper, Ambassador Sarek and Lady Amanda,” he said solemnly.

“We will be okay,” she said to her husband tenderly, squeezing his fingers in reassurance.

Sarek wanted to say that it was illogical of her to have such conviction before they had even begun their mission. But he could not find it in himself to crush her hopes. A part of him even wanted to believe in her optimism.

With their eyes looking deeply into each other’s they beamed down to the planet where somewhere their son was waiting for them.
A matter of faith and cunning

Zarmal’s air was as different from Vulcan as could be, and not in a good way. Or maybe it felt like that to Sarek, because this place had brought such untold sorrow to his son.

The streets of this particular city seemed extremely narrow. A number of makeshift tents housed shops that sold all kinds of odds and ends. Open air stalls sold beverages and food items, some of which were being consumed by people sitting on stools placed on the corners of the streets.

Amanda took Sarek’s hand in her own.

“Let me talk. They mustn’t know that you are Vulcan,” she said.

Sarek nodded and followed his wife.

Amanda looked around for a few minutes, trying to figure out which was the best stall to visit.

A few seconds later, she heard snatches of a conversation taking place in a food stall a few feet away.

“Yes… Prince Ishok….and that beautiful armored gown made of tarnum threads…..”

“And he was gifted a personal slave….he is too young……”

“Exotic ears…maybe the prince needed a playmate……his beautiful new shahun…”

Amanda wanted to follow the conversation more closely.

She stepped into the stall, pretending to be another shopper.

“Karufeet,” she greeted in the traditional Zarmalian language. “Do you have something that can be bought under fifteen credits, for both me and my husband?” she asked.

The shopkeeper looked at her, almost bored. “Dorun Bread with Zarooki wine, one portion will be enough for two people. Six credits,” he said, moving to procure the items, without bothering to ask Amanda if she actually wanted to buy them.

Pretending that she was a tourist, she sat down on a stool and motioned Sarek to sit on the one behind her.

“Korufti,” she said, thanking the shopkeeper for the bread and the wine. She passed the food back to her husband, holding on to the glass of wine, looking interested in the gossip session unfolding on the next table.

“And it will be so grand, there will be a hundred thousand people, all dressed richly,” an old woman said.

“Excuse me, Atsuren,” said Amanda, purposefully using the archaic greeting for the old woman, in order to gain her attention and to establish herself as a naïve, wide-eyed tourist.

“What event are you talking about?”

“Oh, you don’t know?” the woman asked, quite bewildered. As far as she was concerned, everybody should have known that Zarmal was getting its new heir today.

“Today, Prince Ishok will be declared as the new heir of Zarmal. There will be a lavish feast. And such beautiful dances,” she said dreamily. “And our prince will fulfill a wish from a person that
comes to him first. Anything they ask for will be given if it is in the prince’s power.”

Amanda felt Sarek tense in his seat. This was the opportunity they were looking for.

“Oh…that sounds like an experience of a lifetime. Can anyone go and ask for a wish?” Amanda asked, hoping she sounded just as greedy as any other citizen or tourist on the planet, but not overly much so as to rouse suspicion.

“Oh course. They don’t allow anyone to come before the ceremony. But one can wait nearby so that they are at least in the running to be the first person. You have a particular wish to make, young woman?” she asked.

“Oh yes, I am so poor. I was wondering if the Prince would give me a million credits, or coins made of tarnum….” Amanda trailed off, blushing.

The old woman laughed.

“Then you’re out of luck. The prince only fulfills wishes that have some significance. Money and tarnum are not allowed to be asked for in the ceremony. It is against custom,” she said. “It is fortunate that I told you before you went ahead and made this huge mistake.”

“Oh…” Amanda finished dejectedly, looking miserable, even though inside her mind, she was elated because now she knew that she wouldn’t have to compete with people greedy for money. Which meant that the crowd would be significantly less violent in the waiting area.

“I must get going. We have much to see and do, before we return to our home world,” Amanda said to the old woman, getting up and putting her things together. “Korufti, Atsuren.”

“Don’t mention it. And oh, if you do end up going to ask for another wish, take an offering with you…the rarer your offering, the higher your chances of having your wish granted,” she called out, already turning back to her glass of wine.

XXXXX

“Amanda, we do not have an offering to make,” Sarek said, worried that they might not get their son back through this method.

“I have a plan, husband. Let me see if this will work. I only ask you to trust me,” she said, making sure to always stay close to the door of the waiting area. She wanted to be the lucky person whose wishes would be heard. Her instinct said that if she played her cards right, she would be able to get the prince to return her son. If she played her cards right…..

A few minutes later, a long, straight note was played on a sonorous trumpet. The single note was monotonous in itsaloneness, not sounding out of tune or flat, and not in a melody where it would be easy to tell if it were indeed off-key.

Speakers installed all across the sound carried the announcement that followed the solitary music note.

“Citizens of Zarmal…..Today we gather in our prayers and good faith to crown the heir of the planet. Come and bless the future Dafar with your love and trust. We pray to the spirit of the great shahun mother that her milk nourishes our fields and our children.”

The voice kept speaking, but Amanda was out of the door, Sarek behind her. And before she knew it, she was standing right in front of the gate, the first in line. Other people were coming close and
she was scared that they would push her away and take away the spot. But Sarek stood behind her like a guardsman. His intimidating stare scared a number of people away.

“That lady needs to move. I am dying of a lung disease. I need the prince to fund my treatment,” the man said aggressively, trying to get to Amanda. Sarek blocked him.

“You will stay away from her. I shall oblige you with one thousand credits, which shall be sufficient for your treatment. But you will stay away,” Sarek said in a voice that would have cut through titanium.

The man looked flustered. “Okay, first my credits then……” he said in a small voice, trying to inject his earlier strength into it, but failing. Sarek paid him the sum without question.

“Your wish must be something crazy,” he said. “I’ll tell the others to stay away,”

“You will do that. And we will not offer credits to anyone else. This is a matter of life and death,” Sarek said. The man nodded.

XXXXX

Amanda’s heart was pounding. She was so stressed about going in front of the Prince and begging for Spock’s life and safe return to her. Sarek sensed her turmoil. He brought his hand to her face and placed it on her meld points, sending the calm and peace and love he felt when he was around her. Immediately, she felt her pulse returning to a normal rhythm.

“Thank you, dear husband,” she said.

A few minutes later, the prince was brought onto the stage on a large gilded platform. He looked regal and formidable in his royal attire. The nine head priests of the temples stood behind him and chanted prayers in the ancient dialect of Zarmali. The would-be heir surveyed the crowd politely. At the end of the chants, he came forward to address the gathered people.

“Subjects of the crown, and visitors to the planet. I am honored to be your heir. I promise to do everything in my power to ensure your wellbeing and safety on our world. And on the honor I have for my mother, I assure you that your needs will always take precedence over mine. I will be your Dafar. I will be your father. I will be your son. I will be your servant. And I will be you guard,” he finished. And the crowd dropped to its knees in order to show the prince that they believed him.

“And now, I wish to grant the deepest desire of one person, subject or alien. I will not reject your request if it is earnest. And I will fulfil it to the full extent of my power,” he said.

With those words, he motioned the first person in the crowd to rise. Amanda stood up, trepidation written clearly across her face.

XXXXX

Gurokh could not have been a prouder father. Ishok looked completely like the heir he was. Today, he was left in no doubt that his son would make an excellent Dafar, and that he would lead Zarmal to the heights of greatness.

He heard his son’s devotion to the people as he gave his speech. His maturity and genuineness shone through his words. The older man only hoped that all the unpleasant business with the Vulcan slave would keep his son aware of the tougher parts of the Dafar’s duties. However, today, that aspect was not needed. Today, his graciousness and humility would be appreciated by the people. And so, Gurokh watched the ceremony with pride, unaware of the anguished Vulcan couple in the crowd.
that would soon put Ishok to his first test of royal honor.

“Gentle woman, pray what can I grant you?” Ishok asked, looking at Amanda with his deep, caring eyes.

The woman held her arms closely to her bosom. Her attire covered her body and obscured her hair. She looked high-bred but poor.

“O majestic heir of Zarmal, I seek from you, a gift of your honor on your mother. I seek from you, my cherished, my dearly loved, my missing child. A child of Vulcan. A child of my eyes and his father’s people. A child of human and Vulcan blood. My child, who is here on Zarmal, and separation from whom has caused me great agony. I have travelled across the galaxy to come and ask you, for my life’s dearest labor and my greatest joy,” Amanda said, her voice shaking with emotion.

There was a stunned silence for a moment. And then murmurs broke out in the crowd.

“I request silence,” Ishok said, flinching inwardly at how foreign his voice sounded to him. So this was Spock’s mother. And she had come for him. How would he return her badly damaged child to her? And what would she think of Zarmal when she saw how terribly Spock had been treated on the planet? As he took a few moments to ponder upon these questions, Gurokh walked up to him and turned to the crowd in a cold, tightly controlled authoritarian rage.

“This request cannot be…” he said, but Ishok interrupted him.

“Dafar, I request you to let me carry out my first heirly duty. The people need to know that I can be a just decision maker,” he said, effectively taking charge of the situation once again.

“Human woman, what offering do you have for Zarmal, in order for me to grant your wish?” he asked.

Amanda’s heart was beating extremely fast. It looked like the prince would grant her request after all.

“I bring with myself the rarest of all Ophira crystals from Vulcan. Set in bracelets made with Terran gold, these are symbols of my bonding with the oldest and noblest house on Vulcan, the house of Surak. I offer to you the best and finest of Vulcan’s history and heritage. I offer you the thing less dear to me only in relation to the child I seek,” she said, calmly but with pleading humility in her sweet voice.

The prince was moved to the core by the woman’s devotion to Spock. Did his own mother love him so much, he wondered, a little envious of Spock suddenly. But then he forced himself to remember that after what had been done to Spock, he would need all the love he could get in order to heal from this nightmare.

“Very well, human woman. I shall personally escort you to your son,” he said, praying that Spock’s condition would not be as bad as he thought it was.

“Subjects, and visitors, I thank you for coming to my investiture. I am honored and humbled to be your future Dafar. I will strive to gather the knowledge of the known galaxies, of statecraft, and of your needs, so that I may rule well, so that I may serve you through my leadership.”

Ishok’s concluding speech was met with a loud applause. He bowed to the crowd with a polite smile.
And then he stepped down from the stage, waiting to escort Amanda to Spock. But before that, he needed to talk to his father.

“Father, where has Spock been kept these last two days?” he asked Gurokh.

The Dafar looked angry, but his rage was so great that his mouth was drawn into a tight, thin line.

“This is not the way of the Dafar, young prince. But what is done, is done. The young Vulcan may not even be alive anymore,” he said, eliciting a shocked gasp from his son. “Yes, and if that is the case, I pray that woman doesn’t completely lose her mind when she sees his beaten and dead form. Something tells me this is going to go very badly.”
A mother and a father

“How may I address you, Human woman?” Ishok asked Amanda when she came to Ishok, who was waiting for her at the side entrance of the stage.

Amanda was flanked by two royal guards. And Sarek was directly behind her, though he hadn’t been allowed to be close to her.

“My name is Amanda, gentle prince,” she responded. “And behind me is my husband, Sarek of Vulcan, ambassador of the Vulcan High Council to the United Federation of Planets. He is also the father of Spock of Vulcan. And I request that he be allowed to accompany us as you take me to my child.”

Before Ishok could respond, Gurokh stepped forward, his eyes wide with panic.

“Did you say federation? That the slave sold to the Dafar of Zarmal, is a child of one of the federation’s ambassadors?” he asked, wanting to wring the neck of the Romulan who had sold him the Vulcan child.

Amanda’s eyes blazed at that.

“You shouldn’t have been buying slaves in the first place,” she said coldly.

“Do not tell me what I should have done, human,” Gurokh said equally icily. “We do not accept your federation and we do not agree with it. I could have you and your husband thrown into the same cell as your son.”

“Father, stop,” Ishok said to his father heatedly. And then he turned to Spock’s mother “Please Amanda, follow me.”

He motioned the guards to allow Sarek to come forward.

With carefully measured steps, the older Vulcan came close to Amanda.

“Prince, I thank you for your generosity,” he said. And then he turned to Gurokh. “Dafar, I assure you that we have no intent to harm you, my status as a diplomat of the federation notwithstanding. I am here only for my son. I desire nothing more than to have him back with me, safe and sound.”

Sarek’s quiet, humble words seemed to calm the Dafar’s anger to some extent. Amanda felt ashamed of herself for losing her control. But her nerves were stretched thin with her worry over Spock and the stress of pretending to be just another tourist. Now that she had allowed her true intent to come through, it was becoming difficult for her to hold on to the air-headed aloofness of her false persona.

She allowed Sarek to take the lead and walked just half a pace behind him. In her introspection, she did not pay attention to the dazzling beauty of the palace, nor to the adornments that would have spurned her intellectual curiosity at any other time.

After walking for what seemed to be a long time, they reached a metal door that had to be opened by the guards with a great degree of physical force.

The steps leading down from the door were poorly lit. The draft of air that came with the opening of the door was stale-smelling and much colder than the palace’s atmosphere.
Sarek shivered involuntarily.

Ishok felt the apprehension of the Vulcan couple behind him.

He swallowed audibly.

“I...I think you need to steel yourself for what we are about to find,” he said. And then he turned to Gurokh. “Father, could you arrange for a healer to be brought to the cell.”

By this time, the Dafar had resigned himself to the fact that Spock was going to be reunited with his parents. He was terrified that the child would be dead or dying. And at this point, there was nothing he could do about it.

“Armain,” he addressed his bodyguard by his name. “Please fetch Healer Enaria from the royal apothecary. Tell her it is a matter of life and death. Have her beam down to the Vulcan slave’s cell,” he said, not bothering to call Spock by his proper name even in front of his parents.

Ishok took a deep calming breath, feeling like he had been forced to age by years in a span of days. All he wanted to do was to curl up in his mother’s lap and sleep. But no, the new heir had not been allowed to see his mother before his ceremony. And he would be allowed only after the last ritual of the investiture was completed. In this case, it would be to deliver Spock to his mother.

The little party walked through a number of tunnels and down two more flights of stairs, before reaching the hallway where Spock’s cell was situated.

“You said my son was a slave. Why is he being held in this place. It looks like where one would imprison deadly criminals, not household slaves?” Amanda asked, wondering just how much she and Sarek had missed thanks to whatever was suppressing the telepathic bonds they shared with their child.

“It was to ensure I would not be able to find Spock again,” the prince said, glaring daggers at his father. Gurokh maintained a stony silence throughout the exchange as he led them all to Spock’s cell.

Amanda had a number of other questions, but she could feel the misery radiating from a cell in the far right corner of the hallway. A part of her wanted to scream and run to the cell. Another wanted to turn back and not have to face whatever was waiting for her in there.

But her maternal instinct, and years of learned Vulcan control, kept her walking sedately.

Inside, her heart was threatening to burst. And no one but Sarek knew this.

Because while he was unfazed to the outside world, his own emotions felt patched and frayed as well. But unlike Amanda, no part of him wanted to turn away. His most Vulcan instincts were telling him that his son would require extensive healing. And not all of it physical.

Inside, he was only praying to whatever power was listening, that he would be able to put his disdain for his son’s humanness aside and help him. Because he knew that whatever ordeal his child had been put through, had been bad enough that Spock’s control would have slipped, leaving only human frailty in its wake.

He sometimes wondered at the illogic that made him fall in love with Amanda. He wondered why Amanda’s humanity was endearing to him, while Spock’s was unacceptable.

He wondered why his logic made him an inadequate father.
Because while emotions could be brushed aside as being irrational, the fact that his son had come to harm again and again, was telling of his failures as a parent. And while he wanted to fix his mistakes, he wasn’t even sure where to begin.

XXXXX

At long last, they arrived at the dimly illuminated cell. A figure bundled up in blankets heavily stained by a green liquid, lay in a corner of the tiny room.

Gurokh opened the door to the cell and entered inside. Amanda and Sarek followed him, their nervousness palpable and thick. Ishok was the last to enter.

The prone figure was lying face down on its stomach, a large dark stain drying under its outstretched hands, that resembled no recognizable humanoid or Vulcanoid appendages.

Gingerly, Amanda sat down beside the figure. She knew it was Spock, but something inside her was refusing to acknowledge that this wretched person was her little boy.

Sarek knelt down beside her, his hand on her shoulder.

Gently, she turned her son. Slowly, inch by tiny inch, afraid of hurting him.

And then she saw his pale, ashen face, cold as ice.

A choked sob escaped her lips, and she collapsed into Sarek’s arms, sinking into a shocked unconsciousness.
Grieving for a child

Sarek watched with growing fear as Amanda turned Spock over. The green stains on the blanket were making him nauseated with the thought of how much his son had been hurt.

And the next minute, everything slowed down just for a moment. Amanda caressed Spock’s pale face, before letting out a strangled sob. The next thing he knew was that she was felling into his arms, faint and unresponsive.

He experienced a brief flash of pure panic. He wanted to touch his son, check how badly he was damaged. But Amanda’s reaction to the shock of finding Spock was extremely worrying, since she hadn’t been ill at all, these last few days. This sudden fainting spell was unexpected and Sarek was terrified that along with his son, he was going to lose his wife too.

With supreme self-control, he forced himself to ignore the bewildered Zarmalians in the room. He shifted his focus from Spock’s still form and gently melded with Amanda, trying to reach her through their bond.

“Amanda, I know this is difficult. But you need to be strong for a few more moments,” He said to her telepathically. “We cannot be weak now. We have found him. And he needs us.”

Amanda whimpered pitifully. “He is not there, Sarek. I cannot feel him in my mind anymore. I could not feel him yesterday, but I didn’t notice. And his face…so still. I….he is..not,” she wept, her grief bleeding into Sarek’s ravaged mind.

Sarek had also not been able to feel Spock after the second time they had experienced his suffering. But he had blamed it on the telepathy suppressant that must have been on Spock’s person. However, he had not noticed that Spock had simply vanished altogether from their minds.

He felt guilty that in their frantic efforts to find Spock, they had not bothered to check if there was anything of their connection with him that could help them.

But one thing puzzled him. How had they not felt him slipping away, if he had indeed passed on? Bonds severed by untimely deaths caused unimaginable pain to loved ones. And he and Amanda had not felt anything. Was it because of the suppressant? Or was something else happening to Spock?

“Amanda, Spock may not be gone yet. We must make haste” he said urgently.

“Can you pull me out from here?” she asked, her demeanor entirely changing in less than a nanosecond.

“Affirmative,” he said, and pulled them both into the land of the living.

XXXXX

Ishok and Gurokh watched Sarek close his eyes and place his fingers on the human woman’s face. They would have thought he had fainted as well, were it not for the subtle changes in his expression.

“Are they communicating, father? Ishok asked, suddenly feeling like a twelve-year-old again.

“I don’t know, son. I don’t know anything anymore,” Gurokh said, defeated.
The Vulcan child looked dead to him.

He did not have the heart to stop Ishok from touching the boy’s face with feather light caresses. He felt remorse and grief, and for the first time since he had purchased Spock, he was regretful for the sorrow he had brought to the boy and to his parents.

However, his heart completely broke at what he saw next.

XXXXX

“Spock…hey Spock. Your mother has come,” Ishok said, tapping Spock on one of the few uninjured spots on his shoulder. “Spock, you need to wake up. I had told you not to sleep, but you didn’t listen to me,” his voice cracked towards the end.

“Father, is he…he…dead?” he asked Gurokh, desperate for his father to say otherwise.

Gurokh did not say anything for a few moments. His regal air was nowhere to be seen. In that moment, he looked like a father who had just realized that he was unworthy of his child’s love and trust.

“So, he is gone…gone, and he didn’t know his mother and father came to take him back,” he said. “He went, thinking they wouldn’t come. He didn’t know I cared about him…he went away, not knowing anything.”

And Ishok cried.

For the first time in as long as he could remember, he cried like a baby in front of his father. And he felt so alone. The child in him needed the security and warmth of his father’s embrace. But the person he was inside, felt betrayed and cheated by this man.

Spock was dead. And it was the fault of Zarmal’s Dafar.

Ishok stood up shakily and moved to sit closer to Spock.

Like he had done two days ago, he took the Vulcan boy’s head and placed it in his lap, wondering if he could provide comfort to his friend in death, even though it had been denied to him in the last hours of his life.

Something screamed inside the prince.

He cursed himself for everything he had wanted to do, and had not done. He had been scared that if he went after Spock again, the Vulcan would be beaten again.

But he had died anyway, even without being beaten again.

And he had died alone. Cold. In pain.

Ishok did not want to think of what might have been Spock’s final thoughts, but he couldn’t help wondering if he had thought of Ishok? If he had forgiven him for his part in his suffering? If the end had come swiftly? If Spock had screamed when it had happened? If he had expected someone to come, and no one had?
These torturous thoughts raged through his young mind and ate away at his soul.

And he did not know what was happening between Amanda and Sarek; they were still locked in a meld, eyes closed as if in sleep.

“They just lost their child,” Ishok thought to himself. “Maybe they are trying to leave as well.”

He should have cared if that were the case. But how could he blame them? He wanted to go away too. He had killed Spock. He had stained his own soul beyond repair. And he had committed a grave sin against a pure, innocent child.

Something within him was threatening to give up. And he was in no state to stop it anymore. He simply closed his eyes and stroked Spock’s hair. It was unbearable having to wait for the Vulcans’ parents to wake up and say something.

But he wasn’t about to disturb them. He had desecrated their family’s peace. He wasn’t about to defile their mourning too.
When the mind breaks the spirit of the soul

Sarek knew it was taking too much time to bring himself and Amanda back to the physical world. And every moment was costing Spock. But he could not harm Amanda’s body by jolting her into wakefulness. He had to soothe the short-circuiting that had happened to her neural synapses thanks to the shock of seeing Spock in such wretched condition.

“Sarek…” Amanda started, but he cut her off.

“Shh….do not communicate, my wife. I need to rouse you gently, or else your body might suffer damage,” he said.

After that there were no more interruptions.

XXXXX

Ishok did not know how long he had been sitting with Spock’s head in his lap. At some point, the healer Enaria had beamed into the cell. She was now talking to Gurokh. But he had not allowed her to touch Spock. No. Only the Vulcan’s parents would decide if the Zarmalian woman could touch him. And while he wasn’t particularly interested in the conversation taking place between Enaria and his father, he heard everything with an odd sense of detachment.

XXXXX

“O Dafar, you have been a negligent father,” she said. “I had told you at the boy’s birth that he was an empath. But you did not listen to me. You would not agree to dedicate him to learning the art of healing. And I’m afraid to say this, but your son suffered with this young Vulcan.”

Gurokh looked appalled. He did not want to contemplate the horrific thought, that his son had felt the whipping boy’s torture.

“He felt the whippings?” Gurokh asked, in a voice uncharacteristically high for a man in his position.

“No, Dafar. Empathy is not such a simplistic or crude gift,” she said haughtily. “What I mean is that your son felt the echoes of the slave’s emotional misery, his weakness, his helplessness, and his fear…..all the emotions that came as a result of the physical pain you inflicted on him.”

“Can he…Is there a way to make him better again?” the mighty Dafar asked, now reduced to utter fatherly worry.

“Maybe. But that will depend on what happens to the slave child,” she said. “To me, he appears dead. But as an empath, I cannot feel the emotional void of nonbeing from his body. I do not understand Vulcans. But I assure you that their telepathic powers have something to do with this.”

She glanced mournfully at Sarek and Amanda, sensing their despair as it rolled off in waves from their embracing bodies.

XXXXX

Slowly Amanda opened her eyes. Sarek’s warm hand was still on her face, while his other arm was curled protectively around her. She could feel his heartbeat just under the top of her own midsection. A moment later, his hand moved from her face, in the process wiping the stray tear that had just fallen from her soaked eyelashes.
“Sarek….” she whispered, unwilling to let go of her husband.

“I am here, Amanda. We must see to our son now,” he said.

He moved close to Spock and gently placed his hand on his son’s face.

“Please help him….” Ishok said in a voice exhausted by guilt. He still held the younger boy’s head in his lap and continued to play absentmindedly with his hair. Sarek noticed every nuance of the young prince’s behavior. But he did not comment. He only nodded reassuringly, his hand never leaving Spock’s meld points.

Amanda sat beside Spock and waited for Sarek to finish examining him. She did not acknowledge Gurokh, nor the Zarmalian woman sitting next to him.

And out of respect for the Vulcans, Enaria made no move to draw attention to herself.

Though she was extremely curious about what was happening through these telepathic exchanges. It was such an intriguing medical mystery. But she also understood that her questions would have to wait, perhaps indefinitely. And so, she observed in silence.

After nearly ten minutes, Sarek withdrew from Spock’s meld points. A part of Ishok had been hoping that Sarek’s mind magic would awaken Spock like it had awakened Amanda. But another part of him had known that Spock was a lot further away than Amanda had been.

“I’m sorry…I could not keep him alive…” Ishok said to himself, under his breath, almost wishing that Sarek would scream and rage at him, do something to punish him for what had happened to his son.

However, to his absolute wonder, Sarek sighed tiredly but revealed something startling and unexpected.

XXXXX

This had to be the hardest meld he had ever performed on anyone. Sarek hoped he would never have to do it again. His emotions were threatening to burst. And while some of it was foreign, some of it belonged to his son. He was surprised that he had not felt it all through the bond. And that reminded him that the suppressor still needed to be removed.

His son’s emotions were in an absolutely chaotic state. His fragile shields had given up on protecting his mind and were working harder than they ever had, to shield his body, which had been fighting to shut itself down for the past two days.

This wasn’t a healing trance. This was a healing trance gone very, very wrong; improperly achieved, broken, taken again, forced to stop, and then slowed down to the point where it had been unable to do any actual healing.

The only saving grace was that it had strengthened the efforts of the shields and kept his son’s body alive so that his katra would not be lost with his physical death.

Sarek wanted to scream in grief. There was a slim possibility that with medical attention, his body could be healed enough that his katra would not have to be released from it. But that needed to happen fast. And it needed to happen now.

Also, Sarek tried to find Spock’s consciousness. But he couldn’t. Spock had retreated into a locked space somewhere, and Sarek could not reach him without tearing through multiple layers of opaque
psycho-space.

He might have attempted to do so gently if Spock had been a full-blooded Vulcan. However, his human heritage meant that it was only Vulcan discipline that kept his mind ordered.

Besides that, the sheer scale of unorganized, whimsical information; thought, emotion, and memory....was so great that no one could hope to telepathically walk through it without causing harm to themselves and to Spock.

“He has such immense mental potential,” Sarek thought. But it would all have to wait. The first thing that needed to be done was to save Spock, even if there was only a very small chance of doing it.

Amanda took one of Spock’s hands into her own. She could not believe her child had been put through so much abuse. Did they not know that attacking a Vulcan’s hands was akin to the heinous crime of rape? To Vulcans, that is exactly how it was. Their touch telepathy and the thousands of nerve endings in their hands, made such mutilation an incredibly intimate crime.

“Why his hands?” she asked brokenly. She looked at the Dafar, utterly defeated.

Gurokh would have maintained his silence, but this was a question he could answer without feeling the heaviness of absolute contrition.

“We did not hurt his hands. When I purchased him, his hands were already mutilated. His struggles during his...his punishments here, worsened those injuries,” he finished, in a voice dry like sand.

A moment later, Sarek emerged from the meld.

His hand dropped ungracefully from Spock’s face. Lines of pain and fatigue crinkled his otherwise impassive visage. He slumped against the wall, before gathering his bearings in order to speak of what he had found. But before that, he needed these cuffs off Spock’s wrists and neck.

“Dafar, could you please have these cuffs removed from my son’s person?” he asked.

Gurokh nodded, wondering impatiently if there was any hope for the young Vulcan. But the older man was a damned Vulcan through and through. His expression gave nothing away that he hadn’t already known.

With two short strides, he crossed to Spock’s side. He fished out a master key from the pocket of his royal robe, and used it to unlock Spock’s manacles.

Immediately, Amanda cried out in pain, her hands automatically clutching at her temples.

Sarek was better prepared. He flinched with the uninhibited misery that his link with Spock was now radiating like a fire alarm. He quickly mastered his discomfort and helped Amanda do the same.

It was a blessing that she shared these links only with himself and their son. And hopefully, after the end of this nightmare, she would never have to experience the intensity of echoed emotion that these bonds were capable of communicating.

By this time, the Zarmalian woman was on her feet and rummaging through her little box of medical supplies.

“What is wrong with him, Sarek?” Amanda asked, sounding weak and fearful.
“He has locked himself in the deepest recesses of his mind, a place I cannot access unless he allows me to,” he replied. “I could force my way in, but I cannot in good conscience, do that to my child. His body has slowed down considerably, and at this point, he is getting worse even as we speak. All that this trance has been doing for the last two days, has been to keep Spock from physically dying. We have two options. We can either extract his katra and respectfully send him into a katric arc, or we can try and revive him medically.”

For Amanda, this wasn’t a choice. Despite having lived on Vulcan all these years, her human spirit was very much intact. And it would not allow her to give up on her son.

“We cannot let him go, Sarek,” she said. For a moment, the man looked like he was about to argue. But then he only said: - “No, we must not.”
Make me a child again

There was a disturbance. He wouldn’t even have detected it, were it not for a strange, comforting warmth now emanating from the little keyhole situated high up on the door of his dark room.

He had been sitting here for a while, and even though he had realized fairly early that he needed to leave the room, he had been unable to. Oddly enough, his back wasn’t on fire anymore, and his hands were whole. It did not hurt to breath. And he wanted to get up. But whatever was holding him to the inky black floor wouldn’t let him.

He heard a commotion outside. There were too many sounds, all layered atop each other, too confusing to make any coherence. There was the sound of his mother’s singing. But under that, he could hear Stonn taunting him. He could also hear Ishok’s heated voice arguing with the Dafar. But he wasn’t able to actually make out what was being said by any of them.

And the warmth from the keyhole felt weighted down by something. He wanted to touch it. But again, he couldn’t. He tried to call out to it, to say that he didn’t have the key to the room, but his vocal cords seemed unwilling to cooperate.

He gave up after a few moments. He sighed and tried to bask in the warmth, afraid that it would leave any minute.

Sure it did. And along with, the voices also stopped. He tried to recall what his mother had been singing. The words wouldn’t come to him, but he could remember the melody. He tried to hum, but he couldn’t. The sensory deprivation of the room was terrifying. He wanted to desperately do something about the silence. He tried to shuffle his feet. It did not work.

Finally, he decided to watch the keyhole. Focus on the psychedelic lights flashing sporadically from behind it.

He watched, as if mesmerized. He was fascinated that he could associate each vibrant flash with a stray memory or a person. It was an anchor in this otherwise inert room, floating away in nothingness.

And time stood still inside, as the flashes of color started getting brighter. A moment later, something obscured the keyhole and all the light behind it. It rendered Spock dumb, mute, and blind momentarily. But before he could ponder upon it, the room exploded into a million shreds of darkness, plunging him into a seemingly endless pit of images and sounds. His head pounded furiously and his heart threatened to burst out of his body. And then he hit something soft. And everything went dark again.

XXXXX

Amanda had been watching the Zarmalian prince. She was touched at how devoted he was towards Spock. And her motherly instincts called out to her, to soothe his aches, the same as she would soothe her own son’s.

But first they needed to examine Spock properly.

“Atsuren,” she addressed the healer. “We need to ascertain the extent of damage that he has taken. Do you have a medical tricorder?”

Enaria rummaged through her supplies and brought out a small tricorder.
“Yes, human woman,” she said, handing the tricorder to Sarek, who was gently prying Spock away from Ishok’s awkward embrace.

“Young prince,” the healer said. “You need to let the child go. His parents know his biology better than we do. Don’t you wish him to get better?” Enaria pried Ishok’s fingers apart, gently pulling them away from where they were wrapped around Spock’s head.

Ishok looked thoroughly shaken. He did not protest. A moment later, the healer’s eyes closed. Something dark flitted across her face.

She smiled reassuringly at the prince and turned to Gurokh. “Can you please escort the prince to the Dafaya? Your child’s last ritual for the investiture has been completed. He should be resting in his mother’s arms,” she said.

She had sensed Ishok’s emotional and physical exhaustion. And it needed to be remembered that he was as much a child as Spock. And his wellbeing was equally important.

Her empathic instinct told her that it was time for him to rest. And to not have to witness Spock’s condition under the soiled blankets.

Gurokh nodded to Enaria. Wordlessly, he picked up his son in his arms.

“Let me carry you to Armine. She has been waiting to meet her little crown prince impatiently,” he said to Ishok, in a voice so tender that it was hard to believe this was the same man who had ordered the torture of the Vulcan child.

Ishok snuggled into his father’s shoulder, relieved at last that Spock was in good hands and would be safe. His eyes closed in exhaustion. He was asleep before Gurokh had even climbed the first set of stairs leading up to the main palace.

********

Sarek’s face paled at the readings displayed on the tricorder screen.

“Amada, we need to take him back to Vulcan post-haste,” Sarek said, his voice tinged with defeat.

However, Amanda wasn’t listening. She was busy peeling the blankets off her son’s mutilated back. She had wondered briefly about how he had survived all that bleeding. Turned out the blankets were stuck to his injuries with the crusted blood.

And she was afraid of pulling the blankets off, because that would reopen his wounds and leave them bleeding anew.

She looked up a moment later.

Sarek quietly handed her the tricorder.

‘Hairline fracture on the right side of the clavicle, hairline fracture on the bridge of the nose, four cracked ribs on the right side, two simple fractures on the left side, bruised heart muscle, bruised kidneys, compound fractures in the right thumb, left index finger, right ring finger, and left middle finger.’

Amanda found it incredibly difficult to continue reading. Her hands were shaking and she wanted to simply turn off the little device. But in order to help her son, she needed to know what all was wrong with him. So forced herself to continue reading.
Comminuted fractures in all the other phalanges. Compound fractures in the carpals and the metacarpals of both hands. Dislocated wrists. Heavy blood loss. Lacerations on the back, buttocks, and back of the upper thighs. Contusions over 60% of the body surface. Body temperature dangerously low. Mild blunt trauma to the head.’

Amanda’s eyes were completely blurred by this point. Sarek also looked visibly shaken.

Neither said anything when Enaria came forward and picked up the tricorder.

She read the list of injuries with a cold, professional mask on her face. But inside her gut was twisting at how horribly this child had been treated on Zarmal. However, she could tell that some injuries were older than the almost three days that he had spent on the planet.

“Vulcan man, some of your son’s injuries are older than his stay on our planet. Did something happen to him while he was on your home world? She asked. “Or did the slavers do this?” She asked.

Sarek looked away.

“We have reason to believe that he was hurt by some of his peers on our planet, before he decided to run away. That was how the slavers caught him,” Amanda said, still finding it hard to digest that the instructors at the seminary had seen Spock walking in a direction opposite to their home and had not said anything.

“We do not interfere in matters other than the academic,” T’Pemal had said emotionlessly when Sarek had asked her why she hadn’t informed them of Spock’s decision to walk towards the outskirts of the city.

“We did not know he was escaping” she had replied, unaffected that a child under her care had been brought to such harm.

“He would have had a logical reason to walk in that direction. It would have been unnecessary of me to inquire based on an illogical assumption that he was distressed. Vulcans do not get distressed,” she had added, implying that Spock’s human half, his illogical human half had been responsible for his fate.

For once, Sarek had admitted that maybe trying to raise Spock as a Vulcan had been a mistake.

But then where would he go? He looked too alien to be accepted among humans. Even his seemingly underdeveloped Vulcan emotionlessness was too unacceptable for humans. Amanda had said so before, when he had asked her if she wanted to raise Spock on Earth.

“No Sarek, they will tear him apart there,” she had said, knowing that bullies on Earth would be ten times worse than Stonn and his lackeys. “You have to teach him to be Vulcan. But we both know we cannot wish his humanity away. Maybe he could learn how to balance his two natures?”

That had been two years ago, when Spock had had his first confrontation with Stonn. But never had Amanda and Sarek imagined that the incessant bullying would lead to this. To their child fighting for his life, beaten and bloodied, cold and humiliated beyond any sentient being should be.

Enaria could sense the guilt and the tension that was slicing through the Vulcan child’s parents. She was an empath. It was her gift, and her curse, to feel everything deeply.

But she was an ordinary healer. And while she could doctor the breaks of the body, she could not mend the ailments of the soul.
An hour before dawn

“Could you arrange for a stretcher please?” Sarek asked Enaria. “We need to remove Spock from this cell. It is unnaturally cold for his physiology. And we need to reach the surface so that we can take him to the medical bay on our ship.”

Enaria thought for a moment before responding.

“I can get you a stretcher. But you cannot beam out from our planet without the Dafar’s permission. Besides, even though I am no expert on Vulcan biology, I can see that he requires first aid before you can beam him up to your ship,” she said.

Amanda and Sarek considered this.

“Is there a room perhaps, where we can provide him with the required first aid?” Sarek asked.

“There is, Vulcan man,” she responded, before sending a comm. to one of her assistant healers. A few minutes later, two men materialized into the cell with a stretcher held between them.

“Gently, please. He is hurt,” Amanda said, as they picked Spock up and laid him upon the stretcher. Sarek rolled a part of the blanket under Spock, to prop him up at 45 degrees, in order to minimize the pressure on both, his ribs and his back.

“Take him to the guest room in the Royal physician’s suite,” Enaria ordered the two men. “We will beam in after you.”

The orderlies nodded. One of them commed the transporter operator to beam them to the designated room. A golden glow surrounded them before they vanished. A second later, the healer, Amanda, and Sarek were beamed out too.

The cell suddenly felt cold again, and even in its emptiness, an echo of misery remained.

XXXXX

Amanda sighed with relief when she saw that Spock had already been placed on the bed.

Enaria was preparing a hypo for him when Sarek walked towards her and watched her preparations.

“What are you preparing?” he asked politely.

“It is a cocktail of anti-biotics and a basic sustenance compound,” she said, not taking her eyes off the hypo.

“His physiology might reject Zarmalian antibiotics,” Sarek stated, wondering how the healer was so confident in her ministrations.

“Yes, I am unfamiliar with Vulcan biology, but these are standard antibiotics that react only with the bacteria specific to our planet,” she said.

“They function very differently from other antibiotics which attack the cell walls of bacteria. Zarmalian microbes have cell walls, cell membranes, and a pseudo shell made of dead spores. This medication will attack all of the three layers but only on bacteria that also have the pseudo shell. As I said before, I am only patching up your child. He will need a much more intensive treatment even to completely fight the infection. This will only help him fight the effects of what happened to him

XXXXX
here,” she said. “And they will buy him some time.”

Sarek appreciated her expertise and asked no further questions.

Enaria gently swabbed Spock’s neck and administered the hypo. The metal ring he had been forced to wear around his neck had left a large angry bruise. She applied a healing salve to it, shaking her head sympathetically at the inflamed skin.

“We need to see to his back,” she said to Amanda, who was massaging her son’s cold feet, trying to rub warmth into them.

“And his hands?” Amanda asked.

Enaria shook her head. “I’m sorry Human woman, but your child’s hands are damaged too badly. He requires very delicate surgery for those. It would be best if that was performed by your own healers,” she said apologetically.

Amanda nodded, disappointed that this would require more time.

Slowly, she and the healer turned Spock to his side, carefully maneuvering around his injured ribs.

Enaria used a washcloth and lukewarm water to soften the blankets stuck to Spock’s back. After several agonizing minutes, she was able to peel the blankets off.

The sight wasn’t pretty.

A number of welts had been torn open again and were bleeding profusely. In one spot, the whip had cut so deeply that a gleam of bone was visible. In a number of other places, torn muscles could be seen.

Amanda turned a nasty shade of green when she saw the extent of Spock’s mutilation. Sarek gasped, but controlled his nausea better than his wife.

“Breathe Amanda. He needs us,” he said, holding Amanda’s shoulders from behind, in a gesture of support, comfort, and camaraderie.

Amanda steeled herself and forced her throat to swallow the bile that had risen up. She switched her emotions off in a way that would have impressed the most conservative of Vulcans; all in an effort to be the strength that Spock needed to get through this ordeal.

Sarek and Amanda held Spock while Enaria cleaned the whip injuries. It took a while because there were so many.

Mercifully, Spock did not wake up. And thanks to the medicines that the healer had given him, he was now only asleep. The trance had been broken along with the infection. For now, Spock was out of immediate danger.

But to continue to keep him stable, Sarek knew that they needed to get him to a Vulcan healer on Artois.

“Can you please request the Dafar to allow us to leave. You have yourself implied that our son needs a healer from his own people,” Sarek said to Enaria sounding slightly impatient.

“I have notified the Dafar of your request. He will come to you soon and discuss the terms of your departure,” she replied evenly.
Just at that moment the doors of the room opened, and the Dafar walked in flanked by two of his
guardsmen.

Gurokh was relieved that this entire mess was about to end. He was regretful that he had ignored his
son’s empathic gifts. He was filled with guilt for what he had done to the Vulcan child. And while he
wanted it all to be over, he needed to ensure that this little episode would not leave the atmosphere of
Zarmal.

He walked to the guest room in Enaria’s suite. A part of him was wary of what he’d find. But he was
the Dafar. Dealing with unpleasant business was unavoidable. And he steadied his nerves as he
arrived at his destination.

The doors opened wide to admit him and his guards.

The sight that greeted him was tragic.

The Vulcan man looked several years older than he had seemed when Gurokh had first seen him.
There were lines of fatigue and pain around his smooth, expressionless eyes. It was a testimony of
how much he was hurting for his son, and what it was costing him to maintain his Vulcan calm.

The human woman looked nothing like her husband. She looked as if she had been flogged
alongside her son. Her eyes were rimmed red and her scarf was now loosely hanging around her
neck. Her hair was in a state of disarray and she looked utterly exhausted.

And then his eyes traveled to where the Vulcan child was resting.

“Had he been that small when I purchased him?” Gurokh asked himself, hardly able to believe that
the Vulcan slave he had bought for one of the harshest things a slave could be used for, was such a
young child. In that moment, the mighty Dafar hated himself. A powerful surge of disgust tore at him
from his own mind.

He let out an angry and pained growl that sounded nothing like the voice of a cultured being.

“Take that child away from here. Just take him away. I cannot bear the sight of him,” Gurokh said,
brokenly; tears streamed down his face as he thought about his own son lying in his wife’s arms,
curled protectively in a fetal position.

Had he wrecked so much damage on these children? Why had it been so important to teach his son
to be harsh” And why had he selected such a method that was so unethical, even by his own
ruthlessly strategic moral code?

However, he could not afford to go to pieces. He composed himself in less than a minute. And then
he turned to Spock’s parents, looking as regal as he ever had.

“I apologize that I did this to your son……,” he said to Sarek and Amanda. “But I want you to
understand that this incident must not become a diplomatic issue. We still do not accept your
federation. And we do not want to start an altercation with it,” he said.

And then he turned to Sarek. “Ambassador, you must let this matter end here,” he finished in voice
that clearly suggested that this was the older Vulcan’s only option.

In another situation Sarek might have cared about the regulations and the rules concerning such
things. But right now, his son was a priority. And he couldn’t care less about what happened to
“I assure you Dafar of Zarmal that this incident will not see any diplomatic or legal action,” he said. “However, as a father I consider it my duty to say this. Your child has been given a great gift, of empathy and of morality. It is rare in one so young. Since you wish your child to be a just and able ruler, I humbly suggest that you allow him to learn how to use his gifts for the purpose of skilled statecraft. A loved king can sometimes be more effective than a feared one.”

Gurokh had not expected such a gesture from the ambassador, but he was grateful for his poise and his willingness to forgive.

Behind them, Amanda contacted their ship and requested the transporter room to beam them up.

“Please convey our regards to the young prince. We do not wish to distress him or disturb his rest with an emotional farewell,” she said, placing her comm. unit back into her pocket. “Your son cares deeply for Spock. I would be grateful to you if you would let him know that he was a good friend to my child. And he will always be remembered with fondness and regard.”

Gurokh said nothing. What could he say.

However, moments before the family beamed out from the room, he held up the Vulcan salute to them, hoping it would convey what he was incapable of saying through words.

Amanda smiled at him, and returned his salute.

A moment later, the two Vulcans and the human woman dissolved into golden shimmers.
Safe with me

Chapter Notes

This chapter mentions a song that I think echoes beautifully with the mood of the story; specifically the faith and strength Spock's parents display through this entire mess. The meaning of the words pertain to Christianity (I am not a Christian, so there is nothing religious about it) but the melody itself is VERY, VERY beautiful. I am also not French, so I enjoy the song even though I don't understand most of the song. I sang it with my choir just a few days ago and thought about it the whole time while writing some of these chapters. As you can tell from the story, I am partial to the lower voice types and I particularly love the bass and alto lines.

Here is the link to the song on Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzUMfVpugq4

When Sarek and Amanda beamed into the T'Paari’s transporter room with Spock, an astounding sight greeted them.

All of the ship’s crew members were waiting for them; with a stretcher for Spock, a number of blankets and medical supplies, warming robes for both Amanda and Sarek, and a drink of mineral water.

Such thoughtful service from a Vulcan ship’s crew was unexpected to say the least. And Sarek did not know how to react.

“Ambassador, we were monitoring yours and Lady Amanda’s movements,” Helmsman Sunak said. “We knew at all times what was transpiring between yourself and the natives of the planet. We also received the tricorder readings of Master Spock, and hence deemed it necessary to make preparations for your return.”

Sarek was touched, and it showed only in a slight inflection of his voice as he replied. “I deeply appreciate your devotion to the House of Surak,” he said formally. But that was about as close as a Vulcan could come to showing gratitude to another Vulcan.

“Ambassador, you can lay the young master on this stretcher. We have prepared a bed for him in the medical bay,” Sabar added, bringing the stretcher close to where the older Vulcan was standing.

Sarek gently laid Spock on the stretcher. Sabar wheeled him out. Sunak nodded respectfully towards Sarek and Amanda, and returned to the bridge.

“Now what? Are we taking him back home, or do you wish to make a stop at the Vulcan embassy on Artois?” Amanda asked, the adrenalin finally wearing off.

Sarek did not hesitate in responding to her. He had already decided that the trip to Vulcan was too long for his son to make, particularly without any proper medical attention.

“Affirmative, my wife,” he said. “I will go and make arrangements with Ambassador Samik within the next few hours.”
Amanda agreed with him.

“Okay. I think I will go and sit with Spock till then,” she said tiredly.

Sarek’s eyes softened just a tiny bit.

“Amanda, you need to rest as well,” he said tenderly. “Our son is safe now. Why don’t you make use of the sonic shower and the replicators in our personal quarters to refresh yourself? Spock will be fine by himself for a few hours.”

Amanda wanted to take Sarek’s advice. But even the thought of being separated from her son seemed to cause her physical agony.

“I can’t, husband,” she responded. “I am so fearful that someone will take him away again.”

“That is most illogical,” Sarek said, once again the cold, rational Vulcan ambassador. “The T’Paari is warping through space. It is not possible for anyone to take Spock away from this vessel.”

“You know what I mean, husband,” she said a little icily. “Of course I know that he is safe here, but I am his mother. I worry about him, particularly after what has happened.”

“I am his father, Amanda,” he said, a degree of hurt in his voice. “I am Vulcan. I do not give in to emotions like a human, but I share a deep bond with my son as well. And I do not wish to see him harmed again. But I care for you as well. My bond with you runs as deep as any bond can. You do not think I wish you to rest and regain your strength simply because I am uncaring of Spock’s wellbeing?”

Amanda was stunned. Sarek never talked so much. And certainly not with such a depth of emotion. It was a testimony to the fact that he was still suffering from the strain that had been put on his bond with Spock. Not to mention that it was natural for a parent to feel hurt and fear when their child had been forced to cheat death after the most horrific of ordeals.

“I’m sorry, my love,” Amanda said, coming close to Sarek. She placed her arms around his neck. “I did not mean to imply that you did not care about our son or myself. I think we could both use a period of rest. Would you like to meditate? Perhaps we could eat a light meal and then meditate lightly while sitting next to Spock?”

Sarek rubbed his temples as if his head was aching.

“Very well, my wife,” he said. “I shall contact Ambassador Samik, and then we shall take our meals.”

XXXXX

“Greetings, Ambassador Sarek,” the Vulcan ambassador to Artois said. “We tracked your mission most carefully. We are pleased that you were able to rescue your son.”

Sarek swallowed audibly, not entirely hopeful that Samik would agree to his new request.

“I am grateful, Ambassador, for your aid to us in this mission,” he said. “However, there is another request I wish to put before you.”

Samik’s face remained expressionless.

“My son was gravely injured by the slavers that kidnapped him,” Sarek said, fighting to keep his
voice steady. “And by the beings who purchased him. He needs a Vulcan surgeon. His condition is critical.”

Samik took a few moments to respond. Sarek kept his own expression neutral, though his insides were twisting at the idea that the other man might refuse.

“Ambassador, it is highly unusual to provide such assistance to persons on a private vessel,” Samik said. “However, your son is a citizen of Vulcan and we cannot refuse him medical aid if his condition is as grave as you say it is. We have a surgeon at the embassy’s clinic. And you are welcome to bring your son here.”

Sarek let out a breath he wasn’t aware he had been holding.

“I appreciate your willingness to help, Ambassador Samik,” he said. Then he turned to Helmsman Sunak. “How long will it take us to reach Artois?”

“Approximately four hours and eight minutes, sir,” the helmsman responded confidently.

Sarek turned to the screen again. “Ambassador Samik, we shall arrive at the embassy in a little over four hours. I once again express my gratitude to you for agreeing to aid my son in his recovery.”

“Your gratitude is appreciated, Ambassador Sarek,” Samik responded. “We await your arrival.”

Sarek entered his and Amanda’s quarters quietly.

His wife had just stepped out of the shower. Her long light brown hair was unbound, and it rippled along her back like a cascade of water colored by the earth under it. She looked exquisite even as she went about the mundane task of dressing herself.

It had been so long since Sarek had experienced desire and tenderness towards his wife. A part of him wanted to turn back and leave her to her routine. Another wanted to be close to her, to seek the warmth of her soft flesh, and to reassure himself that she was real and that all was right with the world.

“Sarek,” Amanda said in a voice so soft that at first he thought he had imagined it.

“I am refreshed by the shower. Would you like to cleanse yourself as well?” she asked, slipping into the role of the Vulcan wife effortlessly.

“Negative, my wife. I was only admiring your form,” he admitted shyly, not that anyone else would have noticed that. Only Amanda was skilled enough to know the minutest nuances of her husband’s expressions.

“Then come, let us partake of a meal of soup and bread,” she said, gesturing to the replicator which had already been set to preparing the said meal.

“Very well. Let us eat,” he said. And sat down on the chair as Amanda served him, a smile playing at her lips, and her mind calm in the wake of going through the motions of the everyday.

“Amanda, I may not say this often, but I am deeply appreciative of the fact that you are my bondmate,” Sarek said, in the middle of taking a bite of his bread.

“I love you too, Sarek,” she said, not meeting his eyes.
But he could see that her smile had broken free of its Vulcan-ness and was now as human as it had been the day he had decided to make her his wife, against all traditions and norms that were the pillars of Vulcan society.

XXX

When Amanda and Sarek reached the medical bay, they saw Spock sleeping peacefully.

“I had to sedate him, ambassador,” General Healer Sefan said. “He was starting to awaken, but his state remains fragile. I have injected him with antibiotics and I wish to start an intravenous feeding line in order to treat the lack of nourishment his body is exhibiting.”

“We shall be receiving further aid at the Vulcan embassy on Artois, Healer Sefan,” Sarek said. “However it is acceptable that you do what you deem necessary to keep Spock stable through the journey.”

Sarek and Amanda took a seat on the chairs kept beside Spock’s bio-bed. Sefan took Spock’s left hand and tried to look for a vein. He examined the mangled appendage for several minutes before laying it down.

“I shall have to place the cannula through his upper arm,” Sefan said. “However, I require that one of you hold his arm elevated while I fix the cannula to the inner side of the upper arm.”

“I shall aid you,” Sarek said, lifting Spock’s arm gently.

The healer swabbed the skin carefully and patted the flesh there a number of times, before finding a viable vein.

A brief look of discomfort flashed across Spock’s otherwise still face when Sefan pushed the needle through his skin. Sarek held his son’s arm steady, waiting patiently for the healer to complete his task.

“He should be stable for a few hours, ambassador,” the healer said. “In the event that we are delayed in our arrival to the embassy on Artois, I shall change Master Spock’s bandages. But I would not wish to take the risk of renewed bleeding if we can get to a more sophisticated medical facility in time.”

Sarek nodded and placed his son’s arm back on the bed. Amanda moved closer to Spock and placed her hand on his fevered forehead. He was not burning up any more. But his skin still felt too warm, even for a Vulcan.

In a soft voice, she started singing to her son, wondering if he could hear her. The song was old; a hymn called ‘Cantique de Jean Racine’ written by a 19th century composer called Faure.

It had been years since she had sung with a choir. And it had been longer still since she had spoken French. Much of what she sang was a jumble of the bass, tenor, and alto harmonies, the soprano line lost to her. However, it did not matter. The words were there, even if a little mispronounced, and the innate serenity of the music was still present in these incomplete harmonies.

She sang for her son, hoping that the peaceful rhythms of the music would soothe his hurts and let him know that he was back in his mother’s arms.

‘Verbe égal au Très-Haut, notre unique espérance,
Jour éternel de la terre et des cieux;
De la paisible nuit nous rompons le silence,
Divin Sauveur, jette sur nous les yeux!

Répands sur nous le feu de ta grâce puissante,
Que tout l'enfer fuie au son de ta voix;
Dissipe le sommeil d'une âme languissante,
Qui la conduit à l'oubli de tes lois!

O Christ, sois favorable à ce peuple fidèle
Pour te bénir maintenant rassemblé.
Reçois les chants qu'il offre à ta gloire immortelle,
Et de tes dons qu'il retourne comblé!
“Sarek……,” Amanda said gently, tapping him on his shoulder to wake him up. “Husband, you need to wake up. We shall arrive at Artois in less than half an hour”

Sarek opened his eyes. He looked a little disoriented.

“I apologize, my wife,” Sarek said, his voice slightly gravelly. “I am unsure when I slipped into sleep. If I recall correctly, I was meditating.”

“You were meditating,” She responded. “But soon you drifted into sleep and I thought it best to let you rest. You may be Vulcan but the stress of these last few days has been too much, even for you.”

He did not want to agree with Amanda, but she was right. It was a myth that Vulcans did not need to sleep. Meditation was a discipline that allowed them to forego sleep for long durations. But actual slumber was also needed in order to allow the body to rejuvenate itself, particularly after taxing experiences.

XXXXX

Unlike the constitution class ships of Starfleet, the T'Paari was capable of landing efficiently on plain, even surfaces. Healer Sefan was of the opinion that Spock should not be subjected to a transporter beam in his condition.

That was how the small private vessel found itself on the Space dock of the Vulcan embassy on Artois.

When the main door of the vessel opened, Sarek was pleased to see that Ambassador Samik had actually made sound preparations for their arrival.

“Greetings, Ambassador Sarek,” Samik said. “I welcome you to our embassy on Artois.”

“Your greetings are well received, Ambassador Samik,” Sarek responded formally.

Samik’s wife, T'Perla came forward and greeted Amanda with the Vulcan ta’al pressed close to her chest, right in the center. Amanda returned the greeting in a similar fashion. Neither woman said anything as it was considered improper for wives of important officials to share spoken greetings in the presence of their husbands.

Behind them, Sefan wheeled Spock out on a stretcher.

“Ambassador, Lady Amanda, it is best if we proceed inside,” Samik said. “Your son shall be brought behind us to the embassy’s clinic. The surgeon and the general healer have been notified of his condition,” he finished, gesturing to Sarek and Amanda to follow him.

“Very well, Ambassador,” Sarek responded.
They walked exactly three paces behind Samik and his wife. Every few minutes, Amanda glanced behind to ensure that Spock’s stretcher was always behind them. Illogical as it was, she was still scared that something would come and snatch their son away from them again.

“These are Kashor flowers, Ambassador Sarek,” Samik said, pointing towards tiny saffron and mauve flowers shaped like wine glasses. “They release a nectar so sweet and intoxicating that traders from all across the galaxy come to Artois to buy them.”
Sarek and Amanda nodded politely, pretending to listen but not really interested.

“And these are the Asabirt fish,” T’Perla pointed to a small pond in the circular garden surrounding the main walkway to the clinic. “They cleanse the water of all impurities and during their mating season, release a powerful natural antibiotic into the pond. The medicinal value of that is great and it must be collected with scientific precision at a very specific time.”

Amanda wanted them to be quiet. She was unable to focus on what they were saying. Her thoughts were entirely with her son. And while she was grateful that these people were helping them, she felt they needed to understand that this was definitely not the time for their Vulcan enthusiasm for knowledge and science.

Sure, it was custom for one ambassador to show a visiting diplomat all the wondrous things that the planet had to offer. But this was not a diplomatic mission for heaven’s sake.

Amanda wanted to say something.

But she stayed quiet, aware that they needed to follow protocol even at a time like this.

Sarek and Samik were diplomats. And she was a diplomat’s wife. And they had sought help from a diplomatic institution.

She forced herself to listen to whatever the ambassador and his wife were saying. And while she did not pay complete attention, she nodded at all the right places, expressed perfectly controlled awe, and managed to get away with not really registering any of the nuggets of knowledge that had been shared with them.

XXXXX

Spock looked ashen and pale against the clean white sheet of the examination table. He seemed thin and weak. And his temperature had dropped to a dangerous level again.

“It is taxing him greatly to have his body go through such extreme variations in internal temperature,” Healer Sikal said. “And we need to stabilize him by first controlling the infection.”

“Can we stay with him while you work?” Sarek asked, worried again about Spock’s deteriorating condition.

“You may stay while I stabilize him and prepare him for surgery,” the healer responded. “But after that you must wait outside. You cannot be allowed to witness the surgical procedure itself.”

Sarek nodded.

He and Amanda watched silently as Spock was stripped completely. The full extent of the damage was unbearable to look at. The contusions and bruises on Spock’s torso and stomach had turned a deep shade of blue. There was heavy discoloration, and pus-filled sores around many of the open welts left by the whip. The brand on his side had swelled up around the edges and the blisters looked ready to burst.

However, the healer’s attention was focused on his hands, the subjects of the surgery.

Sikal took a number of readings with micro-tricorders and made detailed notes on his PADD about the condition of Spock’s hands.

Then he turned to Sarek and Amanda.
“I need to inform you of a few medical decisions that we must take,” he said tonelessly. “Your son is extremely weak. And because he is so young and his injuries are so deep, we cannot use a dermal regenerator on him. Also, a bone knitter would work on his ribs, but we shall have to work on his hands manually. There will be extensive scarring over numerous regions of his body.”

Amanda felt her gut tighten all over again. She hated to think that her son would be marked perhaps permanently by these undeserved scars.

“Do what you must, Healer Sikal,” Sarek said. “His physiological recovery is more important than the cosmetic damages that cannot be healed adequately just yet.”

“Affirmative Ambassador,” Sikal replied. “I shall take your son to the procedure room. Surgeon T’Pina is ready for him.”

As Sikal got the various hypo sprays and instruments ready for the procedure, Amanda looked at her son with an expression of such deep devotion that Sarek’s heart squeezed painfully at the thought of how all of this had affected his wife.

“Oh Spock,” Amanda whispered softly. She leaned over and gently kissed her son on the forehead. “Get better for mommy. You are so special to me.”

Amanda had taught Spock to call her ‘Mommy’ like human children did. Of course, he never actually addressed her that way, but she knew that he felt special when she shared these little things about his human heritage with him. It made his uniqueness feel like something to be celebrated rather than lamented.

And right now, Amanda felt that her son needed to know just how wonderful he was in himself. He needed to feel her love and her deep desire to see him back with her. He needed to find the will to fight against death one more time.

And that is why she reminded him of the bond she shared with him, something that no other human or Vulcan child would ever have.

XXXXX

“I must admit I had not foreseen this complication,” the surgeon said to Sikal when she read his report on the condition of Spock’s hands. “Anesthesia will not keep him oblivious to the sensations of the surgery. It is possible to induce a uniform degree of numbness through medicinal means on almost any other organ, but not the hands.”

Sikal thought for a few minutes. It was imperative that they operate upon Spock’s hands if he was to ever have any use of them again. But he was already weak. And the shock of such a surgery with inconsistent anesthesia was not a favorable prospect.

“But we cannot delay the procedure any longer either,” he responded to the surgeon. “The infection has already flared up. If we do not operate immediately, gangrene shall set in.”

“It seems we do not have an option,” she said. “We might as well begin.”

XXXXX

Spock had been in surgery for a little over half an hour, when a horrible scream was heard from the procedure room. Amanda had been dozing lightly against Sarek’s shoulder. On hearing that terrible sound, she jerked awake.
“What’s happening, Sarek?” she asked, frightened by the sound that had woken her up.

“I do not know, Amanda,” Sarek said, looking equally shaken.

“Can you feel what is happening, through the link?” she asked, because she was unable to make out much, except for that her son was in a lot of pain.

“He is….unconscious,” Sarek said, after feeling for something in his mind for a few moments. “But the anesthesia has not completely deadened his pain. It is perhaps expected. A Vulcan’s hands are the most sensitive parts of his body and are capable of much, physically and telepathically.”

He looked deeply upset by the realization, and was about to say something, when another shriek rang through the halls.

“Oh God, Sarek..No” Amanda cried. “We cannot let him be hurt anymore.”

Sarek wanted to agree with her so badly, but something told him that this was Spock’s only chance to get better.

“We must bear this Amanda,” Sarek said unsteadily. “Spock may be making his discomfort known, but he is bearing it well. I can feel him forcing himself to remain unconscious. It is just that he is unable to completely control the signals that his hands are sending to his brain through his damaged telepathic synapses.”

“And so the couple sat huddled together, drawing strength and comfort from each other. Every few minutes, they heard Spock scream or sob out in agony. And they could do nothing about it. They waited in silence.

Ambassador Samik and his wife came in to check on them. They even sent refreshments for them. But neither Sarek nor Amanda were able to engage in polite conversation, or eat even a small bite of the food that had been sent to them.

They just waited desperately for the surgery to be over.

XXXXX

After what seemed like an eternity, Spock was wheeled out. The surgeon looked absolutely spent.

Sikal settled Spock into a bio-bed with utmost care, and Amanda and Sarek rushed to his side. He looked tired and ill. There were tear tracks on his cheeks and his eyelashes were still wet with unshed tears.

T’Pina allowed the couple a few moments before politely drawing attention to herself.

“Ambassador Sarek, Lady Amanda,” she began. “I wish to speak to you for a few minutes.”

They turned around to face the good surgeon.

“Your son is out of danger now.” She said, not unkindly. “I apologize that he had to suffer through such agony even after being given anesthesia. But his hands will heal. And with sufficient physical therapy, he shall regain their full use. I have also debrided and drained some of the toxic wounds on the rest of his body. His ribs have been healed completely. It is most unfortunate that I cannot treat
his flesh wounds and hands for the inevitable scarring.”

“Surgeon T’Pina, you have our deepest gratitude for aiding our son” Sarek said. “It is a great relief to us, that now he shall be on the path to a full recovery.”

“Will he always carry these scars?” Amanda asked, heartbroken for her son even though she was relieved that the surgery had been successful.

“He may have them removed once he attains manhood,” T’Pina explained. “Until then he will have to carry them. And even in adulthood, it may not be possible to remove the scars completely. The markings are too many and too deep for a full reversal. But there is no reason to not attempt it should he wish to. Though I would not advise any scar removal on his hands. That could potentially further damage his telepathic nerves, which have already been put through a large amount of strain,” she added.

“We understand,” Sarek said.

“Live long and prosper, Ambassador Sarek and Lady Amanda,” T’Pina replied. “We must leave now, as our shifts have come to a close. However, Spock needs to rest for at least another hour before you can take him back to your ship.

“Live Long and Prosper, Surgeon T’Pina and Healer Sikal,” Amanda responded to their greeting. “We are grateful for everything you have done for us.”

The two Vulcan medics simply nodded and proceeded to walk out of the room. This left Sarek and Amanda alone with Spock.

Sarek came close to his wife and embraced her.

“It is over, dear wife….we can go home now,” he whispered.

She clung to him tightly, and sobbed tears of blessed relief into his shoulder.
The first few hours after Spock’s surgery were blurred in Amanda’s mind. She functioned on auto-pilot. And she had little re-collection of everything that had taken place on Artois after the procedure.

Now they were back on the T’Paari, warping through space to Vulcan.

Even though it was unusual, she was sitting on Spock’s bio-bed with his head in her lap. Her son was still asleep. He looked a lot better now. She just hoped that he would be able to put this ordeal behind him. But she knew it wasn’t going to be easy.

Spock’s eyelashes twitched. Amanda did not notice at first.

A moment later, a low, keening sound came from his throat.

“Spock,” Amanda asked tentatively, wondering if her son was supposed to come out of sedation now. She pressed the button beside the bed to alert Healer Sefan.

“Mo..Mot..Mothe…r,” His words were slurred, and his voice raspy; from screaming probably. Amanda shuddered to think that for the last few days, that was all he had done in his rare lucid moments.

“I am here, Spock. You are safe now,” she gently whispered.

For the longest time he had felt that he was floating away in vacuum. It had been a frightening sensation, even more terrifying than being locked in that room with just a keyhole for company.

Now the sensations were very different. It felt like the real, material world. He could feel fabric under him. He could tell that his head was slightly elevated and that it was resting in someone’s lap. He was also aware of dull throbbing in his back, buttocks, thighs, and hands. He was exhausted. And it was a struggle to even open his eyes. His eyelids felt too heavy. And a part of him just wanted to sleep indefinitely.

But the dull throbbing was starting to turn into a simmering fire. And it wasn’t letting him slip back into slumber.

He wondered if the person whose lap his head was resting on, was his mother.

He tried to form the words.

They were there in his head, but frustratingly, nothing came out of his mouth. His jaw felt like cotton wool. And that’s when a sense of panic set in. What if he was actually back in the dark room? There was no way for him to know that this wasn’t another elaborate trapping of his mind.

He tried harder.

Something came out. It was garbled and messy. Not quite what he had wanted to say.

He was about to try again, when a familiar feminine voice responded.

Who was she? Was this how his mother spoke?
It took Spock a moment to realize that this was indeed his mother.

But then, how?

Where was the young prince? Had something happened?

The last thing he clearly remembered was a brand that was pressed to his side.

Just then, the said injury twinged painfully.

He winced at the memory. And he tried to grab onto the numerous disconnected thoughts swimming in his mind.

But everything felt scattered. And it felt like too much effort to hold onto any one thought.

“Ishok, that was the name of the other child,” he thought.

Spock made another sound in his throat. Suddenly, he felt a sharp, stinging pain in the back of his head.

And suddenly, he could feel bright light behind his eyelids.

XXXXX

He opened his eyes slowly. At first they seemed glassy and unfocused. A minute or so later, awareness seeped into him.

“Spock, my baby,” Amanda said, her words completely choked because she was so overwhelmed. The last time she had seen her child awake, had been when she had seen him off to the seminary on that fateful morning almost a week ago.

And between then and now, he had been forced to endure unspeakable terrors; to experience the savage brutality some beings were capable of for the most illogical reasons.

“Mo…mother,” his voice sounded clearer and stronger now.

“What…ha…ha…happen…happened? Ishok?” Spock asked haltingly, tired after speaking even two sentences.

“Ishok was crowned the heir of his planet,” Amanda responded. “He tried to take care of you as much as he could. And when we came for you, his father said he was sorry. Everything is okay now, Spock. Don’t worry about anything.”

“I wish I could have said… said farewell. He wanted to be my friend. I did not let him. But he was my friend,” Spock said, his voice so very human in its childlike uncertainties.

Amanda’s heart broke on seeing her son hurting. But she needed to ensure that he wouldn’t tax himself.

She glanced towards the door, only to notice that Sefan was standing there. He had probably witnessed the entire exchange.

“Lady Amanda, Spock must consume a meal,” he said. “Do you wish me to bring you a serving of Plomeek soup?”

“No. I shall get it,” she said, placing Spock’s head on the pillow. She got up and made her way
towards the replicator.

She could sense Sefan’s disapproval at the fact that she wasn’t discouraging of her son’s occasional human emotionalism. However, the man was a healer for a reason. He knew that this was not the time or the place to talk about this matter.

She took the bowl of soup back to the room, hoping that things would get better now. Her family had seen too much in too short a time, and they all needed some time to find their equilibrium again.

XXXXX

Sarek was on the bridge when he received Sefan’s message.

“Helmsman Sabar, I need to attend to some business in the medical bay,” Sarek said as he turned to leave.

He was apprehensive about meeting his son. He hadn’t spoken to him in days, even before he had gone missing. And now he was awake.

Sarek did not want to wonder about it, but it bothered him that he did not have the easy, comforting manner of Amanda when it came to Spock.

Sure, the child looked very Vulcan. He was certainly much less emotional than a human. But it was in his mother’s love that he found comfort, not in the severe disciplines of logic that were the very basis of the average Vulcan’s life.

His feet carried him to the medical bay subconsciously.

He had been so lost in thoughts that he did not remember reaching his destination.

Slowly, he entered inside.

He took a deep breath before surveying the room.

His son’s bed was obscured by a curtain. He could see Amanda’s silhouette. It looked like she was feeding Spock.

A tiny bit of disgust came over him. How low had his child been brought that he couldn’t even feed himself?

Sarek wanted to hit something, as illogical as that was. And he was determined to do everything in his power to ensure that the students who had hurt Spock’s already injured hands would be punished.

A flicker of anger also came into his mind.

Why couldn’t his son just be more Vulcan? Why did he have to react to them? Why did he impulsively seek the services of Sulok to teach him to master emotion? Why did Sulok take his revenge on a small child? Why did T’Pemal not inform them of Spock’s constant harassment?

Why was it such a crime to bond with a human woman?

“You are being illogical,” a harsh voice commanded him inside. Sarek stiffened and quickly closed his mind to the jumbled questions.

He made his way to Spock’s bio-bed. He could hear Amanda’s laughter and Spock’s quiet giggles. It
seemed like she was entertaining their child with terran stories again.

The minute he opened the curtain, all the sound stopped. Spock’s smile vanished in an instant. He shrank within himself.

“Greetings, Father,” he said formally. There was no trace of humor in his voice. The Vulcan in Sarek was impressed with his son’s ability to compose himself so quickly. However, the father in him ached to listen to the innocent and carefree sounds of his child’s laughter.

The quiet, unemotional, and resigned way seemed unnatural almost, considering that only now Spock was starting to recover from the effects of his captivity.

“Are you well, my son?” Sarek asked.

“I am functional,” Spock replied. “I shall be adequate in three weeks, two days, five hours, and nine minutes according to healer Sefan.”

It was eerie hearing Spock talk like an adult Vulcan. Sarek was surprised, because Spock never spoke with such precision. Most Vulcan children never spoke with such precision at this age.

This ordeal had obviously changed him greatly.

“Do you wish me to get you something, son?” Sarek asked, hoping he would exhibit a normal, childlike desire like other Vulcan children occasionally did.

“Negative, father,” he said. “I have everything I require. I thank you for rescuing me and for all the effort you had to make in this endeavor.”

“Son, you do not need to thank me,” Sarek said roughly, unable to keep the emotion from his voice this time. “I am your father. And you are very dear to me. Rescuing you was not just a matter of my duty.”

“I thank you all the same,” Spock said, still not betraying any emotion.

“Very well, Spock. I must return to the bridge,” Sarek said.

He nodded to Amanda, who had been silent through the entire conversation between father and son. He knew she would wish to discuss it later. It was clear that she was as alarmed as he was by the change in Spock.

And it looked like it was something she hadn’t seen earlier. Maybe it was going to be a longer road to recovery. And Sarek hated to admit it, but Amanda’s wisdom was proving to be correct again. Wounded relationships were a lot harder to heal than wounded bodies.
An empty house

Vulcan seemed too alien. And he had been gone just a week.

Before Zarmal, before Quinark, before the unwise escape… before the humiliation at Stonn’s hands, Vulcan had been home.

An unwelcoming home. But still home.

And now he was an outcast; where the stable hum of polite, rational voices surrounded his world, but inside he felt like he was less than a person.

Besides, his shameful story was painted on his back and his hands.

Mercifully, he wasn’t going back to the seminary just yet. He could hide for a few more days. Rest his sore body and rebuild his defensive walls before he again went back to the insults and the otherness of his being.

To Spock, it did not matter that they had been back for nearly three days. The familiar smell of home often made him panic internally.

And sometimes he wanted to escape all over again.

Because while his parents had found strength and comfort in each other while searching for him, now they fought all the time. It was unbearable to be around them.

Sometimes the silence was exceedingly heavy and oppressive. His father had never been a talkative individual. Vulcans seldom were.

But his mother had always had the easy habit of keeping up a constant stream of conversation. And Spock knew his father had liked it too.

Even through the impenetrable mask that the Vulcans wore.

And even though Sarek’s eyes were nowhere as expressive as Spock’s or Amanda’s, they were honest enough that Spock could tell what was happening behind them, even without tapping into the bond that he shared with him.

These days, those eyes were blank. And the bond was always stretched tight. Because even though Sarek didn’t admit it, he missed Amanda’s vivaciousness.

But he was unwilling to give to Amanda what she was demanding of him.

Sarek could not fight for Spock against the council. He could not force action against the seminary. He could not erase the disgrace Spock had brought upon his name by escaping.

All he could do was to request the seminary to take action against Stonn and the bullies who had hurt his son. But for that, Spock would have to testify. He would have to face them. And tell everyone what had happened all these years. He would have to expose himself to cold questioning. And he would have to allow himself to be judged.

He wasn’t ready. Even the thought of saying anything made him want to curl up into a tight ball and go to sleep.
Which wasn’t very far from what he was doing anyway. He only slept. And sometimes he watched the world from his window.

He ate a few mouthfuls of food every day just to humor his mother. But even she wasn’t fooled.

And that was what they were currently arguing about. He wished they would stop. But they never did. They loved him too much to stop fighting over his wellbeing.

XXXXX

“He needs a mind healer, Sarek,” Amanda said impatiently. “Can’t you see? He is not getting better.”

Sarek was aware of his wife’s arguments. And while he agreed with her in part, he also knew that a Vulcan mind healer would not help Spock completely.

“He needs to control the human part of himself, first,” he said. “They will force it into him otherwise, because they do not know how else he might come to a measure of peace.”

“I’d like to see them hurt like him and then talk so high and mighty,” Amanda said coldly.

She could see the logic in her husband’s arguments. She knew that Spock’s recovery would not come through a mind healer. But she was also getting desperate.

Her son was depressed and it was killing her.

“He barely eats anything,” Amanda said quietly. “Did you know that? I can sense it that he eats only because I ask him to.”

Sarek did not know what to say.

“I know this is difficult on him,” he said. “And I do not know what we can do to aid him. But I do have a request, my wife. If Stonn, Satok, and Saban are to be brought to justice, Spock will have to appear before the disciplinary council at the seminary.”

Now it was Amanda’s turn to be quiet.

“He’s not going to do it,” she murmured, knowing fully well that this conversation was over.

XXXXX

Baking was a hard thing to do on Vulcan.

For one, their version of the classic terran oven was seriously lacking.

Thanks to her prowess with technology, Amanda had managed to make adjustments to it and use it normally for the most part.

Plus, it wasn’t like she used her oven for fancy things like croissants or quiches. No, she baked bread… and sometimes cake.

Though her cakes were unique. They tasted nothing like the cakes her own mother used to make. These cakes were sweetened only slightly, and that too with the natural flavors of Vulcan fruits.

Spock liked it when she baked. And so did Sarek.
Though neither of them said a word to anyone else. No self-respecting Vulcan would even try to understand why this was such a special thing.

But then most self-respecting Vulcans weren’t half-human or married to humans or parents to half-human children.

Today she was baking a cake with T’Kiri juice. This fruit was a lot like the lychees one found on Earth during the warm summer months. The sweet, nectar-like syrup was rich in nutrients. She hoped that this gesture of hers would bring a shred of normalcy back into their lives.

She couldn’t bear to see her son just stare into nothingness all day.

She focused her mind on the methodical tasks required to prepare the cake.

Each little cup of flour was measured with the utmost care. The juice of the t’kiri fruits was pressed into a clean jug lined with nuts and herbs.

Amanda worked busily for a while, lost in the repetitive, soothing, and somewhat hypnotic motions of the baking process.

Soon, a wonderful smell wafted from the kitchen.

Amanda waited anxiously to see if Spock would come out like he usually did. And ask her in a semi-controlled voice if her cake was ready, trying to hide just how pleased he was by this little thing.

She waited, hopeful that the smell of a familiar and happy memory would encourage him to come out of that soulless bedroom.

He didn’t.

She wondered if she was pushing him too soon.

And that might have been the case had he been older.

But he was a child. And children were supposed to bounce back.

She forced herself to go into his room. She wanted to appear happy and carefree around her son. She wanted him to feel safe and secure. But she also knew that the problems between her and Sarek were causing him great discomfort.

And it was a human weakness that she was unable to rid herself off.

“Spock, I made the t’kiri cake for us,” she said, a little smile on her face that didn’t quite reach her eyes.

“My olfactory senses are functional, mother,” Spock said tonelessly. “I am aware of your culinary labors.”

“Then won’t you come out and try some?” she asked, her voice hoarse and heavy with the tears that were threatening to come out and shatter her control.

“I must decline,” he responded. “I do not require sustenance at this moment.”

And with that, he started turning from his side onto his stomach, as if he couldn’t bear to look at his mother. His movements were awkward, jilted, and pained. The slight tightening of his lips told Amanda that he wanted to say something or let out a sound to express his discomfort, but he
wouldn’t do it. He was trying to be Vulcan. He was trying to be strong.

“Let me help you, Spock,” she said and rushed to support his shoulders.

“Negative. I am capable of changing my position under my own capacity,” he said, and finally managed to lay down on his belly.

“Oh Spock…oh my baby,” Amanda could not say anything. She felt old and spent, like something had consumed her from the inside and drained away all her zest for life.

Spock did not respond.

Resigned, she walked out of his room.

She did not dare step into the kitchen again. The smell of the t’kiri cake was suddenly too overwhelming, too mocking.

She rushed to the bathroom and broke down in tears.
The man and the child

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“I’m sorry Spock, I know this hurts,” Amanda said as she peeled away the bandages from her son’s back. For the most part, Spock had been still so far except for letting out an occasional hiss of pain, when she tugged a little too hard in some places.

“This is a very primitive method of doing things, but this is the best the surgeon could do in your case, sweetie,” she said, hoping it would take his mind off the pain.

“I am not in any discomfort, mother,” Spock said stoically, his voice strained.

Amanda smiled humorlessly.

“Is that so, son? I thought Vulcans do not lie,” she teased him good-naturedly.

“But I’m half human,” he replied with slight amusement.

“That you are,” Amanda agreed, feeling a real smile tugging at her lips.

It took her several more minutes to get all the bandages off his back.

“Your injuries are healing well, Spock,” she said. “I am going to apply the antibiotic ointment now. This will sting some.”

Spock tensed, bracing himself.

“I am sorry, son,” Amanda said, as she lightly touched an angry looking slash just below the nape of his neck.

“Do not apologize, mother,” he said. “I am feeling no discomfort.”

“And you are half human,” Amanda said dryly.

“Indeed,” he responded, gritting his teeth even as his mother worked on his injuries as gently as she could.

XXXXX

Sarek did not like returning home these days. Spock’s blank face, his listless eyes, and his body’s obvious frailness was more than he could handle.

Even as a Vulcan, there was only so much he could repress. His son’s continued suffering wasn’t something he could process logically.

“He should never have been hurt,” he thought to himself. “There is no logic to be found in the accidental abduction and the subsequent torture of one’s child.”

He envied Amanda’s humanity in these moments. Some days he wanted to be like her and do the things she did for Spock. She made it look easy to smile at him all the time. She made it seem effortless to read to him. Her devotion seemed more natural than even that of a Vulcan mother.
“She is human,” a voice spoke inside his head. “And that is why you married her, and not your betrothed.”

Sarek was still lost in thought when Lady T’Pau approached him in the council’s antechamber.

“Sarek, is your son well?” she asked with an uncharacteristic kindness in her eyes.

He stood up respectfully and waited for T’Pau to take a seat.

“He is recovering,” he said neutrally, unsure if Spock could be called ‘well’ yet.

“I understand. We have been investigating the matter of these abductions by Romulan slavers who disguise themselves as Vulcans,” T’Pau said. “Will Spock be willing to bear witness?” she asked conversationally.

Sarek looked at the older woman with a degree of shock in his eyes. Whatever he had been expecting, it hadn’t been this.

“Lady T’Pau, my son is still gravely injured,” he began. “He is not yet functional enough to attend even his lessons at the seminary. I do not believe that he is in a state to bear witness in a slavery investigation.”

“I request you to consider it, Ambassador,” she said in a much more formal tone, without any trace of her earlier kindness. “I have also been asked to convey to you the regards of Solen. He wishes to have T’Pring meet Spock and give him her regards on his safe return.”

Sarek had not anticipated this turn of events. And he wasn’t sure how to respond to the older woman. So he did what any Vulcan would do.

He hid behind a curtain of formalities.

“My regards, Lady T’Pau,” he said. “I shall do what can be done.”

XXXXX

Sarek returned home late in the evening. The house seemed rather quiet. Usually he could hear Amanda humming softly, or the sounds of cooking from the kitchen. But everything seemed silent tonight.

He entered the house, a little worried, though he refused to admit it.

The parlor was empty. The greeting room was empty as well. The kitchen was dark. The only light he could see was coming from the gap between the floor and the door to Spock’s room.

He walked towards the room and was about to knock, when he heard Amanda reading something aloud.

He swallowed audibly, and decided to wait for her to finish.

It hurt him that there seemed to be no place for him in the little sanctuary that mother and son had created for themselves.

Sarek wondered if this was loneliness. He had never experienced anything like it before.

He did not know how to process these extremely foreign emotions of rejection.
Suddenly he knew something about what Spock felt like at the seminary.

Maybe in addition to the teasing and the beating, this is what they did to him. Isolation. Complete isolation from themselves. Making him an outcast, someone who wasn’t invited to be one of them.

Sarek wondered how he hadn’t seen it before.

But he wasn’t allowed to think for too long. Amanda opened the door and stepped out, saying something to Spock as she wore her slippers.

“Give me a few minutes, Spock, “she was saying. “I just need to warm the evening meal. Your father must be on his way. I promise we will read the last poem together.”

Amanda was not yet aware of Sarek’s presence in the house.

“Wife,” he began. Amanda turned, pleasantly surprised at the sound of his voice. “I could read the last poem with him, if it is not disagreeable to you,” Sarek said, astonished at his boldness.

Amanda’s eyebrows quirked up in a comical imitation of the popular Vulcan gesture.

“I..I..Uh! Sure. I’m sure Spock would like that, isn’t it, son?” she asked Spock, a little flustered.

“Affirmative, mother,” Spock replied, slipping back into the blank, robotic manner of speaking that he now employed with everyone other than Amanda. “However, father does not need to read to me if he is exhausted after the day’s labors.”

“No Spock,” Sarek quickly said. “I am not exhausted. I wish to read with you.”

Spock thought for a moment. “Very well, father,” he said, still not meeting the eyes of the older man. Sarek sat on the stool vacated by Amanda. He picked up the book and turned to the next poem.

“Spock, I do not have the expertise of your mother in human expression,” he said. “However, I will endeavor to recite to you in a way that I hope will sound poetic and not Vulcan.”

Spock smiled faintly at the implied humor in his father’s words.

“I shall be honored to hear your recitation,” he said.

In his deepest, most dramatic, but still very Vulcan way, Sarek started reading.

“Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.”

By the time Sarek finished reading, Spock’s lips were trembling. He looked overcome by emotion. And Sarek could not blame him, because his own control was stretched thin as well.

“Son, talk to me,” he said rather hoarsely.

“Father, I did not mean to be so weak,” Spock said. “I did not mean to cause such grief to you and mother.”

Sarek’s heart broke at his son’s whispered confession.

“You were not weak, my son,” he responded. “What happened to you, should never have happened at all. It was our failure as parents that we were unable to protect you.”

“I did not have the courage, father,” Spock said. “I did not have the strength to look beyond the obvious. I allowed their cruel words to cut deeply. I allowed them to bring out my weakest, most human failings. I was punished for my faults father…. And yet… and yet, I do not feel cleansed. I do not feel forgiven.”

Sarek did not know what to say. And this seemed to be happening a lot nowadays. Often he had no idea how to deal with such complex emotional matters.

“There is nothing to forgive, my child,” he said quietly. “There is nothing that needs to be cleansed.”

Spock let out a single, choked sob.

“I wish I could believe that, father,” he said. “I wish.”

Chapter End Notes

The poem is called 'Do not go gentle into that good night', by Dylan Thomas.
Spock had never thought that a bath, of all the things would make him so uncomfortable. But then he had never thought he’d have injuries on all of his back, buttocks and upper thighs. Sitting in the bath was difficult. But it had to be done. A sonic shower was not going to be enough today. He needed to look presentable enough for Solen and his daughter. One simply could not meet their betrothed without being groomed properly.

Mercifully, Sarek was willing to help him in his bathing process. However, it was mortifying to have his father soap and lather him. But there was no choice. His hands were still extremely tender, and there wasn’t much he could do with them yet.

“I apologize, son,” Sarek said, noticing how tense Spock’s posture was. “But T’Pring has been concerned about your welfare. It is imperative that she meets you and puts her mind at ease.”

Spock understood. And even though he did not yet share a particularly strong bond with her, he knew he would be expected to bond with her at maturity. And that wasn’t very far away.

“I am aware of the importance of this visit, father,” he replied. “Do not apologize for something that must be done.”

Sarek did not comment. He finished bathing Spock in a companionable silence.

“You mother is waiting outside with a traditional garb that you must wear to greet Solen and his daughter,” he said while gently drying his son with a warm towel.

Spock nodded. Sarek helped him get out of the bath. He was still very weak. And he needed help in getting around since he was still shaky on his feet.

Sarek supported Spock using his left arm as they walked back to the bedroom. He was apprehensive of how his son’s injuries would be perceived by Solen. T’Pau’s concern had not entirely been genuine and there were many in the council and in the city who held Spock responsible for his ordeal.

And that was unfortunate. Because while Sarek would have been satisfied to pin the blame on his son like everyone else, the father in him was aware of the many things that had gone wrong in order to put Spock in such a precarious position. And with that knowledge, he could not see his child through the sieve of Vulcan logic, even if he tried to.

Amanda looked up when they entered the room.

“You are going to look so smart, my little prince,” she said indulgently as she unfolded Spock’s new clothes.

“Mother, your implication that I am the son of a king, is incorrect, unless you have a second husband that we are unaware of or if father has a secret kingdom away from Vulcan” Spock said mechanically. But Amanda knew he was teasing her. He knew her well enough to know that this was just one of her illogical human things.

“Whatever, your majesty,” she joked.

It took an excruciatingly long time to get dressed. Spock felt drained after the task, and frustration licked at the corners of his mind.
“So weak.. cannot dress myself without mother’s aid…not a true Vulcan,” Spock thought, completely oblivious to his mother’s constant chatter about the time she spent on embroidering his cravat.

“You are all ready, Spock,” Amanda said, beaming at him. “You should sit and wait in the greeting room for T’Pring.”

Spock wanted to tell his mother that he was not looking forward to meeting T’Pring. He was unsure of how she would react. And she did not like him any better than Stonn and the others. She ignored him like everyone else did at the seminary.

“Yes, Mother. I shall go and wait in the greeting room.”

“Here, let me help you,” she said, extending her arm towards him to support him.

“No, Mother. I can do this without your aid,” he said making his way to the sitting room. It was not easy but he was determined to make it under his own strength without anyone’s help.

Usually, getting to the greeting room from the bedroom would take no more than 14.24 seconds. But today it took far longer. Spock had to stop a few times to catch his breath and steady his trembling legs.

Unbeknownst him, Amanda was watching through the door. She desperately wanted to hold him each time he faltered or stopped or grabbed onto something for support. But she didn’t. This seemed important to her son. She allowed him to feel his independence. At this point, she was praying for his mental and emotional recovery as much as his physical healing.

And if it was going to get him a few additional scrapes in the process… well, she didn’t like it, but her boy had been so strong in the face of something much worse. She was not about to let him fail only because she was worried that he couldn’t handle just a tiny fraction more.

“What a horrible thought for a mother to have,” she mumbled to herself. “It is true. Getting through this was never going to be easy. If a few more bruises can guide him back to himself, who am I to object?”

Amanda sighed, wishing to whatever power might be listening, to bring her son home completely.

XXXXX

Spock sat on the cushioned floor seating in a dignified manner. It was uncomfortable and painful to be sitting in such a posture, but he wanted to appear in control. The only one allowed to see him in pain and in discomfort was his mother…. And now, perhaps his father as well.

Precisely at 1300 hours, Solen arrived with T’Pring.

“Welcome, Solen, son of Sukan. Welcome, T’Pring, daughter of Solen and T’Plin,” Sarek said formally, as he gestured to them to come in.

“We are grateful for this audience, Sarek,” Solen said. T’Pring stood a pace behind her father and kept her head bowed like a dutiful Vulcan daughter.

Amanda stood behind Sarek and bowed to Solen in greeting.

“Your journey was well, I presume,” Sarek remarked conversationally. This was Amanda’s cue to disappear into the kitchen and allow her husband to speak freely with the other man.
“It was satisfactory,” Solen responded. “I am most pleased that the Lady T’Pau was able to convey my message to you.”

It was absurd in some ways that despite all of Vulcan’s technological advancements, they were determined to stick to arcane practices like having elders deliver messages of a personal and sensitive nature. It was particularly common in matters pertaining to the betrothal and bonding of children.

“Is your son well?” Solen asked, without any preamble.

“He is recovering,” Sarek said, just like he had answered T’Pau. There was no logic in pretending that Spock was better than he actually was.

“May I see him?” T’Pring’s high pitched voice quipped from behind her father.

Solen looked at her and gave her what some would consider the equivalent of an admonishing glare.

“I apologize,” she said and went back to observing the floor.

“You may see Spock, young T’Pring,” Sarek said gently. “He is waiting to greet you in the greeting room. If you and your father would follow me?”

Sarek glanced respectfully at the other man and nodded.

He saw agreement in Solen’s eyes.

A moment later, the little party of three made their way to the greeting room.

Spock’s heart was thundering under his skin. He was afraid of something he couldn’t quite place yet, but he was resolute that he would make this meeting as smooth as he possibly could.

Just then his father walked in, with Solen and T’Pring behind him.

XXXXX

Spock raised himself with some difficulty. With a herculean effort, he masked his discomfort and appeared completely unfazed to Solen, and to his betrothed.

“Greetings, father-in-law,” he said respectfully. “Greetings, T’Pring”

Solen took his time scrutinizing Spock head to toe, almost daring him to display something of his unease. Spock did not give in, even though he could literally feel sweat beading at his temples.. and his legs were threatening to buckle under him any minute.

“Greetings, young Spock,” Solen said at last. Spock sighed inaudibly in relief.

“And I trust you remember my daughter, T’Pring, your betrothed,” he added, motioning the young girl to come forward and say her courtesies to her would-be-bondmate.

“Greetings, Spock,” she said, bending her knees a little in a show of regard. “Are you well?”

Spock wasn’t sure how to respond to this gesture of politeness. He was used to indifference and cold disdain from her. This new behavior was disconcerting. But he maintained his composure.

“I am functional,” he responded. “Are you well?” he asked, not quite sure if it was appropriate to do so.
“I am adequate,” she said shyly, settling herself on the seat beside her father.

Spock sat down gingerly, making sure to not let anyone know that he was any less functional than he had been before his foolish escape.

“Father, if you allow, I wish to speak with Spock alone,” T’Pring suggested boldly.

Sarek and Solen looked at each other, wondering if this was an acceptable request.

Sarek broke the awkward silence.

“You may, daughter-in-law,” he said and stood up. Solen stood up as well.

“We shall partake of our refreshments in the parlor,” Sarek said gesturing towards another room diagonally across from this one. “Solen and I shall wait there for the both of you.”

T’Pring waited for the older men to leave before speaking.

When she heard the door of the parlor close, she came to Spock and sat down next to him.

“This is highly unusual, Spock,” she began in a tiny, breathy voice unlike her otherwise strong tone. “I am deeply regretful that you were harmed in your captivity. But I wish to know something more from you?”

Spock steeled himself. He didn’t know what she was about to ask him, but he knew he would be honest with her.

“Why did you try and escape?” she asked, sounding very vulnerable and un-Vulcan.

He did not respond for several moments. And then, he started talking in a monotone.

“I escaped due to the illogic of emotion,” he said, fighting hard to keep his words devoid of emotion. “My hands were already injured due to my ill-fated training under Sulok. Stonn, Satok, and Saban injured me further. They.. they crushed the digits of both my hands,” Spock swallowed before continuing. “And they injured me otherwise as well. I did not wish to face my parents after such a shameful encounter.”

Spock was purposefully staring at his hands, unwilling to gauge T’Pring’s reaction to his answer. He waited for her to say something. He didn’t have to wait long.

“I…I ..,” She swallowed audibly, as if mustering all her courage to say her next sentence. “I do not wish you to implicate Stonn in the seminary’s inquiry pertaining to your injuries and your escape.”
There. She’d said it.

Spock was taken aback.

“May I know why?” he asked in a tiny voice.

“He will be banished from the seminary for at least seven years,” she said. “And he will have to put his learning on a hiatus while serving under the masters of discipline at the Akh’meen penitentiary. They will teach him again the rules and principles of our ethics and to enforce stricter discipline on his mind. I do not think those are detrimental for him, but I am concerned that they would delay the course he has laid down for his life.”

Spock wanted to know why she was concerned about Stonn. And he would have. But the answer came to him before he could ask.

She was his betrothed. But there was no real connection between them. And while Vulcan children did not exactly make friends with each other, they did socialize during the recreational hours at the seminary. And Stonn often spent his recreational hours with T’Pring and certain other children, most of whom never even acknowledged Spock.

“I will honor your request,” Spock said, not knowing what else to say. But she was his betrothed. And perhaps this was his first duty towards her. He would not fail. Not this time.
In the service of justice

It was considered custom for Vulcan guests to prepare meals for their hosts. However, in Sarek’s house things were a little different. Solen and T’Pring were shown a great degree of terran hospitality by Amanda, who insisted that T’Pring was as dear to her as Spock and that she did not want her to be working in the kitchen when it was her time to play and study and simply be a child.

“Growing up without a mother can be difficult,” Amanda said, ladling more soup into T’Pring’s bowl. “She has a lifetime of adulthood to look forward to. I do not wish her to engage in such work at this young age, Solen. Besides, as my son’s bondmate, she is a member of the family and no longer a guest.”

Solen was unable to find a flaw with Amanda’s reasoning.

“Your logic is sound, Lady Amanda,” he said, sounding impressed. “It is most fortunate that T’Pring is your son’s betrothed.”

Spock stiffened at that statement. His mind was still in turmoil from the promise he had made to the young girl.

“How do you wish me to address you, Lady Amanda?” T’Pring asked, the word ‘lady’ sounding foreign on her tongue when used with the terran name, since she had never accorded such respect to the human woman before.

“You can call me ‘mother’ if you so wish,” Amanda said warmly. “Or you can refer to me as ‘mother-in-law’ the way Vulcan custom demands you do.”

T’Pring nodded, not yet sure of which option she’d pick. Though Spock was fairly certain that she would not choose to address Amanda as mother. No, she would pick ‘mother-in-law’ because she did not believe in Amanda’s right to live on Vulcan as an equal of herself.

As young as she was, she also harbored the same ideas as most other children at the seminary. It was a miracle that she was honoring the betrothal that had been arranged by their parents three years ago.

“Sarek, I am aware this is not the ideal time or location to address this, but we must talk about it,” Solen started. “Is Spock willing to bear witness in the slavery investigation being carried out by the high council?”

Sarek opened his mouth to answer, but Spock beat him to it.

“I am willing to bear witness, father-in-law,” Spock said tonelessly.

Amanda looked surprised. “But Spock… didn’t you say…”

“Mother, I am adequate enough to engage in the processes that will aid Vulcan in fortifying itself against the danger of slavers,” Spock said, pretty much lying through his teeth. “I apologize for my earlier apprehensions.”

“If you are sure, my son,” Amanda said, still not convinced that Spock was being honest with her.

Sarek exchanged a meaningful glance with his wife.

“Son, we also need to discuss your testimony for the inquiry of the seminary,” he said, wondering if
Spock had readied himself for that as well.

“I am agreeable to testifying father,” Spock said. “However, it would be but a formality. I do not have anyone to testify against.”

Now Sarek was unable to hide his surprise. However, he quickly schooled his features into a mask of impassivity again.

But the bond between him and Spock was vibrating in tension. They both knew that this was definitely going to need a conversation. And knowing what had just happened, it was going to be a confrontational one.

“Spock, what is the meaning of this?” Sarek asked, with barely concealed ire in his voice. “Your mother informed me that you were still indisposed and thus unable to present yourself for a testimony. She did not mention that you had no intent of testifying against Stonn, Satok, and Saban.”

Spock did not want to lie to his father. But even at this young age, he knew that he could not tell him about T’Pring’s request. To do so would bring dishonor upon her name. And as his betrothed, it was his duty to protect her from that. Spock’s mind was bitter, though, because while he did not want to testify at all, now he was about to testify with lies, which was going to be infinitely harder on him.

“Father, I cannot share with you, my reasons,” Spock said solemnly, unable to meet his father’s eyes.

“Amanda, could you possibly find out from him, the reason for this illogic?” Sarek asked his wife exasperatedly.

“Son, you know you can tell us anything, right?” Amanda started. “It is okay if you do not wish to testify against them. But at least tell us why.”

“Because I must go back to the seminary,” Spock replied. “Because even if they are punished, it will only get worse for me. The other students do not approve of me anymore than those three.”

Amanda sighed, crushed at her son’s admission.

“I told you, father, I am weak,” Spock said. “I wish you would simply believe me and let me be.”

“Get dressed, Spock,” Sarek responded. “If you are to bear witness in the slavery investigation, we must do so now. Lady T’pau informed me that the council would convene at any hours convenient for us. Now is a good time as any.”

Amanda looked aghast.

“But Sarek, he is not prepared,” she blurted out.

“He says he is. I see no reason why it must not be done sooner rather than later.”

Spock did not need to look up to see his mother’s tear-stained face. He knew he had just caused immense agony to his parents.

“Yes, father,” he said. “Let us leave for the high council.”

Sarek commed the high council’s secretary to let them know that Spock was ready to bear witness. As the Lady T’Pau had promised, the council convened for a special hearing with a team of legal
experts, security officers, and high ranking law enforcement members of the federation. It was eerie how even the federation officials had been called to Vulcan to investigate this matter, but aid for Spock’s rescue had been refused.

And to think that the investigation had been stalled all this while because Spock had been unavailable to bear witness. One would imagine that for that alone they would have made efforts to get him back, but no, that duty had fallen squarely upon Sarek and Amanda.

“The high council has convened today to have Spock, son of Sarek, bear witness to the assertion that Romulan citizens have been illegally abducting Vulcan citizens to sell into slavery,” T’Pau announced regally into the megaphone placed in front of her seat.

“All rise,” one of the transcribers broadcasted through the speakers placed around the special audience chamber.

Everyone present in the room stood at attention, except for Spock, whose struggle was evident on his face. His back was killing him. And he was unsure if this was an entirely physical sensation. Something was niggling at the back of his mind, telling him that this was going to be a very unpleasant experience.

“Spock, son of Sarek, you will now be asked seven questions,” T’Pau said, directly addressing him. “Do you comprehend and assent to answer as truthfully as you can?”

“I do, Honorable Lady T’Pau,” Spock said, his voice feeling scratchy as if someone had poured bucketfuls of sand down his throat.

“When did you escape from the seminary?”

“On stardate 2240.71, at 1600 hours.”

“Did you encounter the Romulan slaver on Vulcan’s surface?”

“No.”

“How were you abducted?”

“I was unconscious at the time I was taken.”

“How do you know you were taken by a Romulan?”

“He said he was a Romulan. I am unsure. I simply knew he was a Romulan. His name was Babuk.”

Sarek was disturbed by this. For his son to not remember how he knew that his slaver was a Romulan, was a big deal. Spock had an eidetic memory. It spoke volumes about just how damaging his experience had been that some details were unclear in his otherwise brilliant mind.

“Who were you purchased by?”

“The ruler of the planet Zarmal.”

“What were your duties as a slave?”

Spock looked blankly at Lady T’Pau. He did not know how to answer this question.

“What were your duties as a slave?” the question was repeated.
“I was a … I was a whipping boy.”

A collective gasp of shock was heard throughout the room. But within seconds order was restored as the Vulcans realized that their response had been dangerously close to emotional.

“Were you harmed in the performance of your duties?”

Spock looked at his father helplessly. He did not want to do this.

Sarek looked at him stonily, feeling a surge of regret at having subjected his son to this without sufficient preparation

“I was harmed.”

At this point, the questioning stopped.

“Spock, son of Sarek, you will need to answer some additional questions that the council may have,” T’Pau stated.

“I shall endeavor to answer to the best of my capability,” Spock said, forgetting to address her by her title this time. She looked at him for a moment, but she let it pass. Maybe his mask wasn’t functioning as well as he wanted it to.

Council member Sofik was the first to address him next.

“What was the nature of the harm you suffered?”

“I was subjected to a beating with the whip, and kept in isolation, in order to educate the heir of the planet in the harsher methods of their law enforcement. The father of the heir believed his son to be overly compassionate for a crown prince,” he responded, in a voice that sounded adult and foreign to his own ears.

“What can you tell us about the Romulan called Babuk?”

“He was… I… I do not know much about him. He was…. …” Spock stopped mid-sentence. His breathing felt constricted. He tried to stand up to control his body’s urge to curl into itself, but he was unable to. “Please… I need a moment,” he managed to say through tightly clenched teeth.

Most of the people gathered in the room looked completely repulsed by his panic attack. Only the non-Vulcan officials from the federation, and Sarek seemed horrified by the spectacle unfolding in front of them.

Sarek rushed to his son.

“Spock… Spock, it is okay,” Sarek said soothingly into his son’s ears. “You are safe. You are entirely safe now,”

A minute later, Spock managed to regain his composure.

“I apologize, for my weakness,” he said, very embarrassed by the emotionalism he had just displayed.

Sofik continued with his interrogation as if nothing had happened.

“You will allow a mind healer to look into your mind and confirm what you have borne witness to,” he said dispassionately.
“Affirmative,” Spock responded, looking at his feet. The mind healer, an old man called Suvin came to Spock’s seat in the witness box and placed his hands on the meld points of his face.

Images, thoughts, sounds, and sensations flooded through his mind. The onslaught of information was so intense that the healer’s mind could feel the strain as if he himself had been subjected to Spock’s ordeal.

On the other hand, Spock held on stoically. His head was hurting, but he could handle it. If anything, his mind was completely his own place and he controlled it fully, even if his emotions sometimes got the better of him.

After several long moments, the healer withdrew from his mind.

No one said anything for a while. After gathering himself, Suvin broke the silence.

“I have seen everything in the young one’s mind,” he said gently, compassion underlining his words. “He speaks the truth. I shall submit my report on the details that I found, within the next two hours.”

“Does anyone else wish to question the witness?” T’Pau asked the room at large.

When no one said anything, she closed the questioning.

“Spock, son of Sarek, the council is grateful to you for submitting yourself for this audience. You are no longer required here. Should a need arise for you to bear witness again, you shall be informed,” she said.

Spock did not respond. He was lost in thought, too far away to make out what was being said.

Sarek came to his son to help him get out of the witness box.

“Father, will they try and persecute the Dafar and his son?” Spock asked, feeling guilty for telling the council about what had happened to him on Zarmal and the circumstances surrounding it.

“No, my son,” Sarek said. “Zarmal has no diplomatic ties with Vulcan. Nor with the federation. They cannot be booked for any offences.”

Spock felt a little relieved.

Now he just had to face the inquiry at the seminary.

All would be well after that.

And while that might not be true, there was nothing else Spock could consider. Logically, it was his duty to ensure that justice was carried out wherever it could, particularly if he had influence over it.

But as a Vulcan, his more immediate duty was towards his betrothed. His own right to justice came second to his duties towards T’Pring.

That was just how it was. And Spock would do his best to honor his promise to his betrothed.

Little did he realize that the seminary’s inquiry was going to be much harsher than this audience with the high council.
“He is so quiet, what happened at the council?” Amanda asked Sarek. Her son had simply shut himself in his room after coming back home.

“The hearing was intense,” Sarek replied. “He was subjected to a number of tough questions. And to a mind meld. It did not help matters that he suffered a small panic attack during questioning.”

Amanda looked dejected.

“I just want him to get better. This has gone long enough,” she said tiredly.

Sarek looked at her with something akin to pity in his eyes.

“It would be easier on him if he were to master the Vulcan disciplines of logic,” he said.

“Do not start that again, Sarek,” Amanda retorted. “We both know that he is trying. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I need to go and change his bandages.”

She turned and left in a huff. Sarek was left standing in the middle of the hallway. Once again he had been inadequate as a father.

He decided to go and meditate. Maybe that would help him clear his mind.

XXXXX

Amanda untied her son’s bandages. Thanks to the strain he’d been putting on his wounded back, a number of injuries had reopened and were bleeding afresh.

“This will hurt,” she said, in a bid to allow Spock to brace himself. He did not respond.

Amanda carefully cleaned the blood and applied the antibiotic on his cuts, surprised that he was so still and silent through the process.

“Mother, I am afraid of what will happen at the inquiry,” he said quietly.

Amanda knew that. And she still had the feeling that he was hiding something.

“Is there something that you wish to tell me, Spock?” She asked. “I will not tell Sarek if that is what you’re worried about.”

“No, mother. There is nothing,” Spock said, even though something inside him wanted to confide in his mother. But the thought of T’Pring’s honor kept his lips sealed.

“Rest some, my son. It has been a long day,” Amanda said, putting away the medical supplies. “Soon you will begin physical therapy for your hands.”

“Yes mother,” he responded. “Though I would like to testify in the inquiry before undergoing further treatment.”

Amanda understood. This bureaucratic mess was causing a lot of stress for Spock. It was logical that he’d want to put it all behind him before focusing all his efforts towards getting better.
“I shall speak to your father,” she promised.

“I thank you, mother,” Spock said, riddled with guilt over all the sorrow he had brought to his parents.

Sarek was not convinced of Spock’s readiness for the inquiry. Certainly not after what had happened at the high council.

“But he needs to move on, Sarek…. I am starting to see the logic in just getting it over with,” Amanda reasoned with her husband.

“It may not be the best thing for him, dear wife,” Sarek tried to explain. “You did not see him at the high council. I was there. Our son is not even close to recovered yet.”

“But you said he held himself admirably during the meld,” she asked.

“He did. And we know that Spock’s mental prowess is vast,” Sarek replied. “But it is also true that he is still a child. And his body has been put through much over the last 17 days.”

“He said he wishes to begin the physical therapy for his hands only after the inquiry,” Amanda said. “In any case, it is to be nothing more than a formal affair.”

Sarek sighed. “Very well, my wife. But I can tell you that it is going to be a lot more than simply a formal affair, no matter what Spock has to say.”

Spock tried to push himself to a sitting position. His wounds were stinging like a thousand nettles. And like always, his hands were useless. He couldn’t use them to support himself. Nevertheless, he tried; only to be rewarded with shooting pains through both his arms.

“Aaargh..” Spock tried his best to not make a sound. But it wasn’t easy. He needed to meditate, in order to make sure that he would be ready for the inquiry. He could not allow himself to break down like he had in front of the high council.

After several agonizing moments, he managed to sit cross-legged on the bed. Ideally, he should have been able to sit on the floor. But it would be considerably more painful to sit on the floor with all his cuts. So he compromised. Slowly, he calmed his raging pulse.

He took a deep breath. And released it in exactly eight beats. He repeated the process a few times, each time increasing the number of beats in which he released his breath.

Slowly he was able to converge all of his focus and consciousness to the center of his forehead. A quiet serenity filled him.

And for the first time since his escape, he felt a degree of tranquility. He bathed in it. And finally, he started to stitch back pieces of himself that had been torn away from him by the violence and the hatred that had shaped his existence for such a long time.

“Spock, I still do not know what your reasons are for not telling the truth about Stonn and his bullies,
but I want you know that no matter what happens today, we will face it together,” Amanda said, kissing her son on his forehead.

“Mother, I have given you my reasons,” Spock said half-heartedly.

“And we both know that those are untrue,” she said.

“I apologize that I cannot do better to put your mind at ease,” Spock said, wondering if his mother would read the underlying meaning of his words.

She did.

“You are doing your best,” she responded. “It is not your fault that as your mother, I can always tell when something is not quite right.”

Mercifully, she did not press him to tell her his reasons. He was already stressed out from keeping his bond with Sarek relaxed and calm.

“Shall we proceed?” Sarek asked Amanda. She nodded.

Spock walked slowly to the hovercar, lagging a few paces behind his mother.

“Spock, let me help you climb in,” she said. She expected Spock to protest. But he didn’t. It was a little alarming, because so far he had been insisting on doing everything as independently as he could.

Wordlessly, she helped him get in.

The atmosphere inside the vehicle was tense. One did not need to be a genius to figure out that all three members of the family were worried, even if two of them were hiding it behind their masks of Vulcan impassivity.

All too soon, the ride came to an end. Amanda helped Spock climb out. She hoped that now that they were at the seminary, Spock would try and be a little more like his older self.

In some ways he did. He held himself stiffly, walked straight even though Amanda’s sharp motherly eyes could tell that it wasn’t easy. But for the most part, anyone could tell that Spock had changed greatly. His eyes looked blank and dull. The usual spark of inquisitiveness was missing from them.

And surrounded by all these other children, he looked more out of place than he ever had.

Occasional whispers about his humanity, his disgraceful escape and his supposed handicap could be heard as they made their way to the disciplinary hearing. She ignored them.

However, Amanda knew that they needed to address this issue with Spock. It definitely was not healthy for him to be listening to these remarks and bottling them inside him. He may be more Vulcan than human, but he was still less Vulcan than Vulcan. It was a sad reality. And for the first time, Amanda was coming to terms with all the negative implications of it.

XXXXX

“This council is meeting to discuss the reasons for the escape attempt made by S’chn T’Gai Spock, son of Sarek of Vulcan, on stardate 2240.71 at 1600 hours” Head Instructress T’Pihu announced.

“The allegations put forth by the student’s parents state that Stonn, son of Sepak, Satok, son of Sorin, and Saban, son of Sinik, have harassed their junior peer, Spock and mentally tormented him to force
such extreme actions on his part. The allegations also state, that Stonn, Satok, and Saban aggravated the injuries received by Spock in an earlier incident. The nature of the aggravated harm includes crushing of the phalanges, and fractures in the nasal cavity, and in the rib cage. Evidence has been submitted by Surgeon T’Pina, stationed at the Vulcan embassy on the planet Artois.”

Spock heard the list of allegations his parents had made against the three older boys. Unfortunately, they had made the complaint soon after returning to Vulcan. And he had been too depressed to care about what they were doing. He was worried that with his testimony, he would bring shame upon his parents’ words also.

Either he, or they would be seen as liars.

Why could things never be simple in his life, he wondered errantly.

The strong voice of T’Pihu cut into his musings.

“Spock, what can you tell us about your association with your three peers, who have been accused of causing you mental and physical harm?” she asked crisply.

He took a moment before answering. He could feel his mother’s eyes on him. He resolutely refused to look at her, worried that her disapproving gaze would make him change his answer.

“Instructress T’Pihu, our relationship is non-existent,” Spock said. “We have not had much opportunity to interact.”

Murmurs broke out across the room.

The parents of Stonn, Satok, and Saban remained silent, though their expression gave away some of their surprise.

“Is that your answer, Spock..... Why did you then escape if this was not the reason for your distress?” T’Pihu asked, a little surprised.

“Yes,” he replied. "This is my answer, Instructress. I escaped because I was experiencing guilt over my own illogic at being unable to emulate the other students at the seminary."

“Very well,” she said, clearly unbelieving of him. “Why did your parents allege that you were harmed by them?”

Spock swallowed audibly before answering. His palms were sweaty. And he wanted to say something else. But this was the best he was able to come up with.

“I believe I said something erroneous in my delirium, after my experiences on the planet Zarmal,” Spock said. “I may have dreamt something incorrect in my fevered state.”

“But Vulcans do not dream,” the voice of Spock’s immediate supervisor T’Pemal rang out.

“As I am half-Vulcan, I have the ability to dream,” Spock said, extremely humiliated by this turn of events.

“Would you say that you lied, Spock?” T’Pihu asked.

“I was incapable of giving an accurate account to my parents in my condition. I was also incapable of actively lying, so I do not believe that I lied,” he said, trying to keep his voice strong.

“Why did you not reveal this earlier?” she asked, clearly displeased with Spock and his parents.
“I am still recovering, Lady T’Pihu,” he said. “I can only apologize for my failings.”

The head instructress looked disturbed.

“Does anyone in the hearing wish to add to the proceedings?” she asked.

Spock was hoping for this to end quickly. His heart sank when Stonn’s father stood up.

“Sepak, son of Serat, father of Stonn, do you wish to address the council?” T’Pihu asked formally.

“Affirmative,” he answered. “My son and his peers were not at fault. They have been disgraced unjustly due to the inaccurate account given by Spock to his parents. I am of the opinion that this undermines the learning for all the children at the seminary. I propose that Spock not be allowed to attend the seminary till he completes his Kahs’wan. Until he proves his maturity, he must not be allowed to endanger the honor and reputation of other children.”

Spock’s eyes widened at what he was hearing. He had not expected this outcome. His bond with his mother gave an uncomfortable tug in his head.

Before anything more was said, Sarek stood up. “Lady T’Pihu, I object to Sepak’s suggestion.”

“Go on, Sarek, son of Skon,” she said.

“My son’s injuries were truly grave,” he said. “His delirium was not the result of a human frailty, but that of abject cruelty inflicted upon him by the ruler of the planet Zarmal. I do not support the proposal that Spock complete his Kahs’wan before being allowed back to the seminary.”

The head instructress looked torn. It looked like she believed Sarek. And as if she even knew that Spock was lying about not having been hurt by Stonn and his peers. But she was powerless to really do anything.

“Very well, Sarek.” She said. “I shall see what we can do after we take a vote.”

With that, she turned to the other instructors and members of the disciplinary council.

“All in favor of clearing Stonn, Satok, and Saban of the accusations?”

All seven members of the jury raised their hands.

“All in favor of allowing Stonn, Satok, and Saban to return to the seminary?”

Again, all of them raised their hands.

“All in favor of allowing Spock back into the seminary without the Kahs’wan”

Two jury members raised their hands.

“All in favor of allowing Spock back into the seminary after successful completion of the Kahs’wan?”

All the hands went up.

She did not look completely pleased with the outcome, but there wasn’t much she could do.

“Sarek, I believe the jury has spoken,” she said, and then she turned to Spock. “You must complete your Kahs’wan in order to return to the seminary to continue your education. And according to the
rules, no student can be allowed more than a month’s leave even due to medical reasons. One would have to re-enroll if they wanted to start again at the seminary, but the procedure is complex and often leads to wastage of time and resources. In your case, I am willing to make an exception. You may have an additional ten days in order to complete your Kahs’wan and return to your lessons without losing time.”

Spock did not want to break down in front of the head instructress. But he felt so drained and tired that he could not keep his face completely blank.

However, he maintained his dignity.

“I understand, Lady T’Pihu,” he said. “I am most grateful for your kindness.”

She nodded at him, and then at Sarek before leaving the room.

Slowly, everyone else also filed out, without sparing a second glance for the Vulcan-Human family standing in the corner of the room. Nobody noticed the ill-disguised elation written plainly on Stonn’s face.

And nobody noticed the misery of the half-human boy who had already been through so much.

Chapter End Notes

I am overjoyed when I get reviews. If you are still reading the story, I’d love to hear from you and know what you think. Feedback is important to me. I am relatively new to trek fandom. And I am here not only to read and write stories, but also to know more people from the fandom itself :)
Children without a childhood

Chapter Notes

This chapter means a lot to me. I wonder if you can tell why. This chapter a song. The song called 'The Seal Lullaby' is one of my favorite pieces in choral music. I performed it with my old choir last year. Here is the link for a version available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxTghSZupv8

And this is what Sarek played for Amanda: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUJ03WOH59Y (the tiny Erhu solo- It is truly otherworldly)

“I had warned you that this would happen,” Sarek said in the hover car. Amanda was still in shock over the decision. Spock had not spoken a word since the end of the inquiry.

“He cannot complete the Kahs’wan within the time he has been given,” Amanda said, her voice completely broken, devoid of any optimism.

Sarek did not want to agree with her, but for once they both were thinking alike. Spock was still too weak to undertake even basic tasks. To even consider the possibility of him undergoing the maturity ritual, was a waste of time.

“We shall have to re-enroll him in the seminary for the next session,” Sarek said. “It might be time to call in the favors I am owed.”

“You shall not have to do so, father,” Spock said in a voice so timid, that they had to strain their ears to hear him. “I will complete the Kahs’wan.”

Before Sarek could respond, Amanda intervened.

“No, Spock,” she said. “That is not a possibility. Are you even aware of what the ritual entails?”

“Affirmative, mother,” he replied. “I must survive alone in the desert without food, water, or a weapon for ten days.”

“And you believe that is logically viable, considering your present condition?” Sarek asked with a hint of incredulity in his voice. “You are unable to even use your hands, my son. And the Kahs’wan will require you to be as functional as possible in order to survive.”

“I shall begin working on my hands today, father,” Spock said. “I have brought enough shame upon our house. This may be the only way to erase some of the stains.”

“I find it incredibly difficult to believe you,” Sarek said. “You did not care about the honor of our house when you engaged in an altercation with those students. You did not consider the reputation of our house when you lied about the entire matter today.”

Sarek’s words felt like shards of ice on his soul.

Amanda would have stopped Sarek normally, but today she was at the end of her wits. It was almost like she didn’t know her own family anymore.
“I apologize, father,” Spock said dejectedly. “But I am honor-bound to keep my reasons to myself.”

“Honor-bound to whom, Spock?” Amanda yelled, losing control of her anger for the first time in years.

Spock flinched.

“Please do not scream, mother…,” He said, suddenly feeling as if he was all alone in the universe. “I cannot say.”

“Very well, Spock,” she said, coldly like a true Vulcan mother. “I am sorry I screamed at you, but know this that whatever your reasons are, they have tainted your reputation, as well as the honor of the house of Surak, for generations to come.”

Spock did not know how to respond to her anger. His mother had never been angry with him before.

“But you said, whatever happens today, we shall get through it together,” he began. “Did you not mean what you said, mother?”

Sarek looked at Amanda, wondering if she had actually said that to their son.

“Yes, Spock,” she replied, ignoring her husband’s eyes boring into the back of her head. “We shall still get through this together. But it will not be easy, and it will not be without its consequences, as you have already seen.”

“And son,” Sarek chimed in. “It is not a disgrace to fail the Kah’swan once… at least not for others. But for you, there is no room for another attempt. You must complete it the first time. And I still do not believe that it is logical for you to try, while still so injured.”

Spock knew that Sarek was telling the truth. He knew he wasn’t prepared for another ordeal so soon after his rescue from Zarmal. But he did not see a choice. He was not about to allow his parents to suffer on his behalf. And he did not want his father to call in any favors for him. He had already done so much damage to his career, all for him, particularly by requesting aid from the embassy on Artois.

“Mother, Father, if I do not survive the Kah’swan, or if I require your assistance before the ten days are over, I request you to let me go,” Spock said earnestly. “I do not wish to live a life of indignity and disgrace. I hope you can understand.”

Amanda opened her mouth to say something. But Sarek beat her to it.

“I understand you, son,” he said. “Perhaps not as well as your mother… but I do know that it is difficult for you to be yourself. However, I am requesting you to understand our position as your parents. Do you believe that we can allow you to simply abandon this life, because of a ritual like Kah’swan? It is important to us that you find respect and regard among our people. However, the way of cowards, is as far from the Vulcan way as terran snow from the hot sands of our planet.”

“I am unclear, father,” Spock admitted with great difficulty.

“I am aware of your turmoil, my son, but even if you do attempt the Kahs’wan now, you must do so with the will to survive it…. That is all I ask of you.”

Spock nodded.

Sarek did not say anything more. He went back to observing the sky from the window next to his
A few minutes later, they landed outside their house.

Nothing was said as they went inside.

But all three of them could feel the gloom that had descended upon their family after the seminary’s inquiry.

Spock was reading one of his mother’s old novels, when Sarek came to his room.

His face wasn’t blank like it usually was.

There were so many emotions written clearly across his features. There was regret, sadness, guilt, love…. And something the younger Vulcan was unable to place.

For a long moment, father and son said nothing.

For the first time, Sarek gazed deeply into his son’s eyes, noticing how deep the brown of his irises was.

Spock wanted to look away, but he was unable to. He wanted to reach out and embrace his father, no matter how un-Vulcan the gesture would be.

The faint sound of Amanda’s humming came from outside. The spell of silence passed as quietly as it had come.

“Do you recognize the melody, son?” Sarek asked. It wasn’t a conversation starter. He genuinely wanted to know. Even though it was just a hum, there was something about the music that seemed to envelope him in a warm hug, the kind he had forgotten in his efforts to combat the rejection Vulcan continuously heaped upon him and his family.

“Yes father,” Spock said, unafraid to show how deeply he was affected by the last few moments. “It is an old terran tune, called ‘the Seal Lullaby’, by a composer named Eric Whitacre. Mother taught me to play it a few years ago on her piano.”

Sarek closed his eyes, saddened by the thought that he had never cared to listen to his son play, or to hear his wife sing.

He wondered what had changed so much between his bonding with Amanda, and now. He had no answer, except for his own failures as a man of strength.

“Will you play for me, my son, once your hands have healed?” Sarek asked, a little scared that maybe Spock would refuse.

“I will, father,” Spock said. “It would be an honor. Mother told me that you once played something for her on a Vulcan lyre.”

Sarek smiled slightly at the memory. It had been so long ago, that he had almost forgotten about it.

“I did play for your mother once,” he said. “It was an old Vulcan song, from the days before the reform. That is the only music left to us that is still invigorating, primal, calling out to something within us. Most Vulcans do not appreciate it.”
Spock could understand that. Music that opened their heart could never be controlled by their mind. And something that could not be commanded by the logical disciplines of the mind, had no place in Vulcan life.

“I should like to learn the Vulcan lyre, father,” Spock said to Sarek.

“It would be a pleasure to teach you, my son,” he responded. “I will instruct you myself.”

“I look forward to it,” Spock said, his voice stronger than before. “After I successfully complete the Kahs’wan.”

“If that is what you have decided,” Sarek replied, and laid his hand on his son’s cheek like he had often seen Amanda do. The gesture felt awkward to both, him and Spock. But it was the depth of its meaning that carried all the weight, instead of the ease of the touch.

XXXXX

A few hours later, Amanda came to call Spock for dinner. She also brought some surprising news for him.

“Spock, you need to come out to eat,” she said.

Like all other times, Spock said that he was too tired to come out. Strangely enough, it had become a recurring pattern. Sometimes Amanda suspected that daylight stole her son’s hopes and dreams every day at dusk, and returned them to him every morning. He seemed withdrawn and mournful every night. And each morning, he exhibited something of his older, happier self. It was an odd puzzle for Amanda, one that she was unable to solve, because her love for Spock always came in between.

Normally she’d let him be. She would bring him a light salad and some soup in the bedroom itself. But today, they had unanticipated guests.

“Solen and T’Pring are here,” she said. “They wished to see how you were faring after the inquiry.”

Spock looked up at his mother. He did not want to meet T’Pring. Not so soon after the lies he had spoken in order to grant her request.

But it was expected of him to go out and greet them.

“As you say, mother,” he replied. “I shall come out. Could you help me stand? I do not feel very well.”

Amanda helped her son get out of bed. There was a distance between them. She could feel it. And she knew that he could feel it too.

But she knew they’d have to give it time.

Wordlessly, mother and son left the bedroom to go and greet their guests.

XXXXX

“Spock, Are you well?” Solen asked, concern evident in his tone.

“I am adequate, father-in-law,” Spock said simply. He did not feel the need to tell them that he was not okay. And that Vulcan was choking him slowly with its blatant disregard for his well-being, just because he was not entirely the same as them all.
Sarek continued to eat his meal in silence. He was unsure of why Solen had turned up unexpectedly along with his daughter. This was very uncharacteristic of Vulcan families, even those whose children were to bond together.

The dinner passed smoothly after that. And no one said anything to indicate the real reasons for this unannounced and somber visit.

Just as they were leaving, T'Pring asked her father if she could say her farewell to Spock privately.

Solen gave her his permission.

“It seems that your daughter requested this impromptu visit, is it Solen,” Sarek asked, amused that T'Pring was taking such great interest in Spock all of a sudden.

“Perhaps my daughter is growing up faster than I had thought,” Solen responded, wondering if T'Pring was experiencing deeper emotions for Spock than he had expected.

If only they knew how far they were from the truth.

XXXXX

“I simply came to express my gratitude to you, Spock,” T'Pring said apologetically. She had heard about the condition that had been placed upon him due to Sepak’s suggestion. “I wish you to know that I am now devoted to you in every way, for what you have done for me.”

Spock was young. But he was not ignorant. He knew what she was trying to tell him. And he was aware that she was lying even to herself.

“T'Pring, you are not devoted to me,” he said. “You know that as well as I do. You are devoted to Stonn, even though you are not betrothed to him. What you feel for me is gratitude, as you yourself expressed a few moments ago. I only wish to inform you that I do not expect devotion from you.”

T'Pring did not meet his eyes. He continued speaking, hoping to put her mind at ease.

“It would be unjust of me to ask you for something that you cannot give,” he said. “I only honored your request because I was able to. And it was my duty. I believe, that should the occasion present itself, you shall perform your duties admirably as well.”

She did not know how to answer that. So she said what was going through her mind, as ineloquent as it was.

“They do not know you, Spock,” she said. “You do not need to complete the Kahs’wan in order to prove your maturity. And if you do not wish to ask me for my devotion, I shall freely give you my respect.”

Understanding washed between them as their nascent bond came alive for a brief moment.

And it was enough. Even as they both knew that they would never share with each other what they could, in another lifetime, in another plane of existence away from the complexities that demanded so much from them at this tender age.
Spock’s first day of physical therapy was extremely trying.

Sarek had commissioned a physiotherapist by the name of Sobik to aid Spock. He was young, accomplished, and most importantly, not judgmental. He knew Spock needed to prepare for his Kahs’wan, which was to take place in exactly a week’s time.

The odds had not looked very good, but Sobik had been determined to not give up before trying.

He had decided to make his assessment based on Spock’s condition.

And now that he was here and in the middle of their first session, he was unsure of what was going to happen. Not because Spock lacked dedication or courage, but because the damage to his hands was still extensive. And the kind of strain they were about to experience was unhealthy, even without undergoing the actual Kahs’wan yet.

“But I must not give up,” Spock said stubbornly through his clenched teeth.

“You might cause yourself irreparable injuries, Spock,” Sobik tried to reason with him. “Surely you do not wish to be an invalid for the rest of your life, simply in order to perform the ritual.”

“You do not understand,” Spock responded softly.

Sobik would have given up at this point and told the parents that their son was being highly illogical. But something in Spock’s face told him that he was indeed not understanding.

He did not wish to place so much faith in one so young. But unlike other Vulcans, Sobik trusted his instincts almost as much as his telepathy. Instincts were most useful sometimes when he was dealing with patients of physical and mental damage.

And while Spock was not mentally damaged, he seemed to know things without really knowing what they were. And Sobik highly respected that, because of the child’s half-human heritage. He did not believe humans to be inferior to Vulcans. And that is why he saw unique strength in Spock, given to him by the gifts of Vulcan telepathy and the nature of human instincts.

And that was also why he was worried so deeply about Spock’s long term wellbeing.

“As you wish, young Spock,” he said in an approving, encouraging tone. “Do not be afraid of expressing discomfort if you need to. The Vulcan hands are very sensitive. I expect there to be
considerable stiffness and pain before you can truly use them with your earlier dexterity.”

Spock nodded and placed his right hand into Sobik’s left hand.

Slowly, the therapist started applying pressure on Spock’s still healing fingers. A moment later, Spock swallowed audibly. Sobik could see that his other hand was trembling. He ignored it and continued to increase the pressure, moving to his knuckles.

Just at that moment, a droplet of something fell on his hand. He looked up to see that tears were starting to roll down Spock’s cheeks.

“No…” Spock said in a choked but strong voice before Sobik could say anything. “Please continue. This needs to happen.”

Sobik nodded and gradually moved the pressure to the younger boy’s palm. Spock let out a pained sob that turned into a coughing fit.

“We must take a short break now, Spock,” the therapist said. He settled Spock back into bed and brought him a glass of cold water.

“Drink it,” he said, tilting Spock’s head. “You did very well today. I am most pleased with your progress. We shall do more advanced exercises tomorrow. I shall come at the same hour as today.”

Spock just nodded. His head was pounding. And even though he wished to thank Sobik with thoughtful words, he did not have the energy to do so.

He rested his head against the pillow gingerly, careful to avoid lying on his back. The therapy session had drained him more than he had thought it would. Suddenly he could feel the aches and pains of all the injuries he had received on Zarmal.

A part of him was terrified of the Kahs’wan. He wondered if it would be so terrible to take the rest of the academic year off and enroll again next year.

But then he sternly put a lid on these thoughts. He was going to complete the maturity test, no matter what it took.

XXXXX

The next five days of therapy were unpredictable, to say the least. Some days Spock was able to control his pain, and even perform relatively complex tasks like managing cutlery, opening knobs, writing with a pen etc. On other days he was unable to even close his fingers completely.

Sometimes the exercises made him scream in pain. Other times, he struggled to feel sensations in certain areas of his hands.

The only thing was that Sobik was as stubborn as Spock, if not more.

Sarek and Amanda tried to ignore the bad days as much as they could. They took comfort in the successes of the good days.

And they made a pact with each other to support their son completely through this; irrespective of their own fears and worries over his mental state and the upcoming ritual.

Meanwhile, Sarek contacted the high priest at the temple of Amonak to oversee the start and the end of the Kahs’wan. Initially, there were difficulties, because they were unsure of the parameters of the
ritual for a hybrid like Spock.

But then they agreed. If the boy wanted to live like a Vulcan, he needed to undergo the maturity test. There was no other way.

“We wish the best for all of Vulcan, Ambassador Sarek,” High Priest S’Phiroah said, after registering Spock for the ritual. “You say your son’s need to complete the Kahs’wan is great. We wish him success in his endeavor. And we give you our word that his performance in the ritual will be judged exactly as he performs.”

Sarek was grateful for the neutrality of the priest. Too many times in the recent past, his son had been made to suffer injustice because of his unique biology. At least in this test, he would be given a fair chance to prove his mettle.

He refused to think about the fact that Spock’s physical condition was still not right for a demanding ritual such as this. And that in itself was a disadvantage.

XXXXX

On the last day of therapy before the Kahs’wan, Amanda did something that no Vulcan would ever approve of.

She heard her son scream twice during the exercises. It broke her heart, and also drove home the very real possibility that he might not survive this.

She had prayed for a miracle almost a month ago. She had prayed for the safe return of her son, whole, and well. And he had been returned to her; Not completely whole, and certainly not well. But still fixable.

And she wanted to believe that her basket of miracles hadn’t completely been emptied yet. But it was hard to hold on to that faith. The very existence of her precious child, was a miracle; a gentle being, the product of two worlds, of a love that had defied tradition, logic, nature, and a distance of tens of light years. How could she have any more miracles left.

But she still had her faith. And her love for her child. It would have to be enough.

And so, she decided to baptize him. No church, no priest, no congregation. A baptism that would be completed in the backyard of their house, using a gardening can ordinarily used for watering Vulcan’s cactus-like plants occasionally.

She went inside to fetch Spock. He was getting up to escort Sobik out.

“Therapist Sobik,” Spock began. “I wish to let you know that you have healed me of my lack of faith in myself and my lack of belief that I can complete this ritual. I am forever indebted to you. Live Long and Prosper.”

Sobik smiled warmly.

“Survive, young Spock,” he replied. “That would be your debt repaid to me. Live Long and prosper.”

Amanda was glad that there were people on Vulcan, like Sobik, who were willing to see the person her son was, instead of the fact that his body was slightly different from their own.

She swallowed her tears before telling Spock what she intended to do.
And then she gathered her strength, her love, and her faith in miracles, in order to ensure that her son was baptized and given the strings of the belief that anchored her to her own roots even light years away from Earth.

“But mother, I do not believe in your deity,” Spock said, not understanding why his mother was insistent upon this.

Amanda knew Spock did not understand her irrational faith in a terran deity, nor her relatively illogical belief in Christianity, a religious doctrine that no longer could be held true in light of all the discoveries science had made.

“But we still do not know where we came from,” Amanda told her son. “Not the very first beings to attain life, nor the first star that was ever formed, and certainly not the first atom that appeared in the emptiness and nothingness of space.”

Spock looked at her with uncertainty in eyes. She could not see disbelief, only a lack of comprehension. And that was okay. The most celebrated saints in history had been unable to find the truth about creation and existence. It was natural that an inquisitive child like Spock would have his questions.

“It is not wrong to ask questions, my son,” Amanda said to him. “It is only wrong to assume that the truth has been found, because there is no such thing as the absolute truth. To believe so would be against the spirit of discovery and scientific inquiry. It is also against the very nature of faith. Just believe that there is always a bigger picture than you can see. And then, everything will be bearable. Always know that something caused us to be here. And that nothing in the universe is an accident. That is what I am baptizing you for.”

Amanda stopped to take a deep breath. Her eyes were full of unshed tears. There wasn’t much more she could say to her son, who would tomorrow face an ordeal that no mother should have to send her child to.

Without saying anything more, she proceeded to mark her son’s forehead with the oil of the Sinofi flower. She made the sign of the cross, her hands shaking and her vision blurred by the flood of tears that refused to stop.

She recited her chosen verse from the Bible for her son. It was a short, beautiful one from the book of Isaiah.

“Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.”

“Mother….” Spock started to say something, but he was unable to. There was such pure, unadulterated strength and warmth resonating in his bond with his mother.

Amanda cupped her son’s face in her hands, before sprinkling a few drops of water on his head.

“I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.” She said softly, so glad that she was able to do this for Spock. “Will you hold a candle for me, son?” she asked.

Spock nodded, his face conveying a wealth of emotions to his mother.

She lit a green votive candle, symbolizing the element of soil, firm and humble beneath their feet, the
same on Vulcan as on Earth.

“Shine as a light in the world, to the glory of the creator of all things,” she concluded the strange little ceremony at last, under the wan light and the all-encompassing warmth of Eridani 40, so different from Sol and yet similar in all the ways that mattered.

“Mother, I am at a loss for words,” Spock said, his voice tiny and unusually low.

“You do not need to say anything, son,” she comforted him. “I understand.”

And then she pulled him into an embrace, channeling everything that had brought her this far, into her son, willing him to emerge victorious on the other side of the Kahs’wan.
A child's dream

Chapter Summary

This chapter is an important milestone in the story. It also lays the foundations for Spock's decision to join Starfleet. The chant featured in the ritual is a short poem that I wrote. If you'd like to read more of my poems, you can visit my blog: www.deltavie.com

This is the exact link to the poetry section in case you do not wish to look through the entire website: https://deltavie.com/category/writing/poetry/

Please review and leave feedback on this chapter. I love hearing from you :)

The opening ceremony of the Kahs’wan was spectacular. The priests from the temple of Amonak sat down with Spock and taught him the old, pre-Surakian mantras that would see him through the more difficult parts of the ritual.

He was only allowed to wear a sash and a loin cloth for the next ten days. Amanda and Sarek were now resigned to the fact that this was really happening. But they were worried all the same, for their son.

However, a calm serenity seemed to have descended upon Spock, whose fear and apprehensions were nowhere to be seen (or felt, in the case of his parents.)

"From Aryssa flows the blood of the sword,
and the philosopher weeps in despair.
The warrior and the guard are owed,
Vulcan’s blessings and dreams all rare.

So as the wind in the bushes blows,
The guardsman stops its mighty tracks.
So as the Mother’s lullaby goes,
Hacking stray nightmares with melody’s axe.

And the gushing of draining rivers is heard,
When Vulcan mourns her brave,
The vision of truth is burned and blurred,
By grief so great and grave.

We sing the songs of an old home world,
When our minds were ruled by the heart,
We let up for once and let fury unfurl,
For Kahs’wan, with grace, I play my part.”

Spock recited his chant in a deep, adult like voice that rang sonorously through the ceremonial chamber.

For a moment, there was complete silence.
And then S’Phiroah stood up and came close to Spock who was kneeling at the threshold of the door that would lead him outside.

“I must establish a temporary link with you, Spock, son of Sarek,” he said solemnly. “I need to be able to monitor you throughout the ritual.”

Spock nodded and obediently brought his face near to the priest’s raised hand.

S’phiroah placed his fingers on the meld points of Spock’s face and closed his eyes. Spock felt cool blue tendrils reaching out to him. He allowed them through his shields and did not even flinch when they rooted themselves in a corner of the deepest part of his consciousness.

A few minutes later, the older Vulcan opened his eyes and removed his hands from Spock’s face.

“You are ready, young Spock, but before you step out, your parents can say farewell to you,” he said. “And in the event that you are in grave danger or mortally wounded, do you wish me to relay it to them?” And do you wish to be rescued in such circumstances?”

Spock looked at his parents. He knew they wanted him to say yes. But they knew better. And they could not do anything in front of the priests to change his mind.

“No, High Priest,” he responded. “I do not wish to be rescued in the event of my failure.”

The priest nodded at him.

“You may give your son your blessings now,” he said to Amanda and Sarek.

“Is he permitted a small amount of medical supplies, in light of his existing injuries?” Amanda asked the priest.

“Normally he wouldn’t be, Lady Amanda,” the priest answered. “But in his state, to make his Kahs’wan fair, he may carry a minimal amount of medical supplies. Only a healing salve and a role of bandages can be allowed to him. And as we have already informed you, his current injuries cannot be bandaged. I apologize for the discomfort this will surely bring upon him.”

They knew there was no point to any of this. The whole logic behind the ritual was to test a young Vulcan’s mettle. And in Spock’s case it was expected to be harder, and why wouldn’t it be? He was half-human and therefore needed to prove himself in a greater number of ways than other Vulcans.

His parents came close to him.

Amanda knelt down to his level and slung the tiny first-aid kit diagonally across his left shoulder.

“Come back to me safe, my son,” Amanda said, not daring to say anything more for the fear of losing her composure.

Spock stood up and placed his fingers on his mother’s wrist in order to reassure her. Then he turned to his father. Sarek’s eyes softened as his gaze met his son’s.

“Do us proud, Spock,” he said with great love in his voice. “Remember, to be truly Vulcan, is to always survive.”

Spock nodded. He did not need to say anything.

With a last look at his parents’ faces, he stepped out into the wilderneses of Vulcan’s Forge.
At first Spock could not decide which direction to take. The desert was seemingly endless and as far as his eyes could see, there was nothing in the distance but sand, rocks, bushes, and brambles.

He also needed to figure out how he was going to keep himself mentally stimulated through the coming ten days. He was not particularly worried about hunger and thirst; they would come, but he would meditate and keep them at bay.

In order to plan in an educated way for the duration of the ritual, he needed to do a recce of the forge.

And so, he started walking straight, careful to observe everything closely.

The first few miles were completely uneventful. There wasn’t much to see. And the afternoon sun was beating down uncomfortably on his back. The terrible heat was making him sweat, and the salty liquid was trickling over his torn skin and making his injuries burn.

Spock decided that he needed to find a cave.

A few more minutes of searching brought him to a small cave hidden behind a tangled mess of dead branches spilling over from an overgrown bramble whose roots he couldn’t see.

The cave was difficult to get into since its entrance was partially blocked by the branches. But that also meant that he would be safe inside the cave from wild animals like the le-matyas, and from the elements at nightfall.

Being a desert planet, Vulcan witnessed an extreme difference in its daytime and nighttime temperatures. The cave would no doubt shield him sufficiently from the cold at night.

Spock found it tough to maneuver through the branches despite his slim and wiry frame. He managed well though. A few forceful tugs and a couple of scratches later, he was able to create a small entrance for his use.

He sighed in contentment and crawled through the little hole. As expected, the cave was dark and stale smelling. The air had a musty quality to it that made the breath in his lungs freeze momentarily.

He took several deep breaths to acclimatize his body to the cave’s environment. A few minutes later, it became easier to breathe, and to see in the dark.

The first thing he noticed was that the walls of the cave were relatively smooth.

This gave him an idea. He decided to recreate a piece of terran artwork on the wall. Needless to say, he would require some form of pigment in order to accomplish his task. He would start searching for flowers and berries tomorrow.

If that did not work out, he would carve.

His mind was set on recreating Vincent Van Gogh’s ‘Starry Night.’ He had seen it in a space encyclopedia his mother had been gifted on her sixth birthday. According to the book, this painting represented the fascination human beings had for the stars, the questions they had wondered about before coming into contact with the other intelligent life forms of the universe.

To his young mind, that questioning spirit was still commendable and still relevant, never mind that the painting itself had been created more than three centuries ago, almost a 100 years before humans had even landed on their own moon.
With his mind focused on this task that he had chosen for himself, Spock sat down to meditate. The effort of creating something on the wall would greatly tax his healing hands. But he was not about to give up. He simply decided to engage in meditation to prepare himself for the next day.

He sat cross-legged on the dusty and damp floor of the cave. It wasn’t very comfortable. But the Kahs’wan was not about comfort.

He closed his eyes and tried to focus on the select points of light in the image of the painting imprinted in his mind.

Slowly, every dash of color dissolved into the gentle, tapering light of a shooting star. His old heartache came back to him. The spirit to discover what was beyond Vulcan’s star, to find star systems at the edge of the known universe; the imagined sight of birthing nebulae filled his young mind.

And the cave did not feel cold anymore. It couldn’t; not when Spock’s heart was bursting with excitement at the limitless universe open to him, and the wondrousness of all creation known and unknown.
Spock did not know when he slipped from meditation into a much deeper trance. The atmosphere of the cave felt much colder than before. But he continued to keep his trance-like state.

Something strange was happening to his mind. There were flashes of images he did not recognize. He could see other humans… humans? That was illogical. Spock did not know any humans other than his own mother. The humans in his mind were not like her.

The image was vague and they all seemed to be on some kind of ship; the large observation deck window displayed streaking space-time, confirming that this was indeed a starship. He tried to latch on to the image, but with another flash, it was gone.

He wondered if this was something he had conjured up based on his mother’s books and his father’s accounts of all the missions he had conducted for the federation.

He was unable to think about it for too long, because the cold was getting to him. His body’s self-preservation instincts were forcing him to pull out from the trance and return to the aware, lightly meditative state he had been in earlier.

Grudgingly Spock extracted himself from his trance. He felt clammy and a little disoriented. He was unable to focus his energies on the center of his forehead. After two unsuccessful attempts at continuing his meditation, he gave up.

He opened his eyes to see that it was long past midnight. If the sky’s deep turquoise shade was anything to go by, it was going to be daylight in exactly 4.2 hours.

And sure enough, a Cha’atik starting calling out in the distance. The call sounded desperate and mournful. Many Vulcans refused to believe in the legend of the Cha’atik. But Amanda always said that it was because they could not logically explain it.

In their defense though, the legend was quite fantastic. It was said that the Cha’atik only quenched their thirst with rain water. And they waited all year, sometimes more than even a year, for a rainfall. It was their way of reaffirming that whatever spirit protected and preserved the lifeforms of Vulcan, was also listening to them. Some older Vulcans still held on to the superstition that the day the Cha’atik stopped calling, that would be the day of Vulcan’s demise.

Spock did not believe in these stories. Neither did most other Vulcans. But that did not mean that the formidable bird’s cry was any less fascinating to him.

And for these ten days, he was no different from the Cha’atik. Their respite from the thirst would come with the rain. His would come with the end of the Kahs’wan. And wasn’t rain supposed to wash and cleanse the planet, just as the ritual would wash and cleanse his tarnished katra?

The next few days of the Kahs’wan were relatively easy. Spock figured out a stable routine for himself. He meditated diligently through the night in order to keep his hunger and thirst at bay. In the day time, he collected berries, and soil of different shades, for his painting. He also practiced the physiotherapy exercises for his hands. That wasn’t the easiest thing to do, but it was required to
prevent stiffness of the joints.

Sometimes it was a most painful endeavor. And he longed to apply the healing salve on them after some of the harder exercises. But he didn’t. Sure, his mother had given him supplies, but he wanted to try and complete the ritual without having to use them.

Other than that, he walked long distances to collect samples of plants that he found interesting. On some nights, he gazed at the stars, trying to identify their names and ages based on their position in the night sky.

On the third day, he started working on his painting. He carved dedicatedly with a jagged rock, careful to be true to the forms present in the original painting. He had to take a number of breaks in between because closing his fist around the rock was impossible for extended periods of time.

Sometimes, in a foolish bid to prove something to himself, he ignored the protests of his aching fingers and continued working anyway. On those nights, the pain from his fingers radiated into his head and throbbed like a raging migraine.

However, he continued to work through it all, using meditation as his shield. Some of the mental discipline he enforced upon his mind was too rigorous even by Vulcan standards. He examined each strand of agony separately, allowed himself to feel it fully, before forcing it into a dim point of information and storing it in a corner of his methodically disorganized mind.

Spock was changing. He did not realize it completely yet, but he was discovering something powerful, which would only become apparent to him many years later.

XXXXXXXX

The next two days were spent in wandering around and looking for materials to create more colors in his painting. He walked a little far in a direction that he had not explored before… and in the process of carefully perusing the ground for wild berries and pigmented fungi, he found a nest of crucks.

It was a complete oddity. Because sand crucks never came out in the day. They only made themselves visible at night, and that too in order to feed upon the blood and the dead epidermal tissue of sleeping animals.

It did not take long for him to figure out the cause for this unnatural behavior. Their nest had caught fire, thanks to the excessive dry heat of the last two days.

It had been uncomfortable even for Spock, whose own body was now covered in a thin layer of sand. Sometimes the sand was most uncomfortable on his wounds, especially when it got clogged in the open folds of the healing lacerations on his back.

And as he could see, these unfortunate insects had also become victims of the unforgiving weather.

Normally, it would be logical to leave the animals to their devices. It was incorrect to interfere with the order of nature.

But Spock could not do that to this entire colony of crucks. So many of them were already dead. And he could not rebuild their nest for them, since that could only be accomplished by the crucks’ own sharp little appendages specifically suited to shredding blades of drying grass a certain way.

However, he could provide them with shade. So he sat down a few feet away from what was left of the nest and took a look at the burnt remains. He painstakingly separated out the less burnt pieces of grass from the otherwise charred mess.
All in all, they were not enough. He looked around for more pieces of grass, making sure to not take more than the required amount. He did not want to take away the supplies that the crucks would need for their actual nest.

And then he started weaving a little shade. In reality it was more of a basket with little holes in it for light and ventilation, but it would allow the crucks some respite from the weather as they worked on building a new nest from scratch.

Meticulously, he braided the bits of grass like a master craftsman. Every few minutes, the braiding motion hurt his slowly discoloring fingers, but he never stopped. In about two hours, he had created for them a little shelter that would allow them easy passage to the outside and also protect them from the heat. Before covering them with the basket, he placed a large amount of grass close to the site of the original nest, in order to provide for them the material to build a new one. And then he placed the shade over them, trying to send reassuring vibrations to them, just to let them know that he meant them no harm with this contraption.

It would have been a strange sight to watch. But in Spock’s belief, all sentient life was interconnected. Sending telepathic comfort through the natural vibrations of the planet’s surface was his way of doing his duty to the sacredness of life, a belief that would become his main guiding principle in his adulthood.

XXXXX

Talking about telepathic vibrations, the sixth day of the Kahs’wan established Spock as the animal whisperer of the forge.

He had been resting inside the cave after his day's exertions when he heard a low, keening moan in the distance.

His first response was fear.

He tried to listen for it again, to ascertain if this was a wild animal.

For a few moments, there was complete silence.

And then again, a pitiful howl was heard.

This confirmed two things for Spock; one, that this was some kind of wild animal and two, it was in pain.

Logically, Spock should not have gone out in the dark. The light of stars was beautiful to behold, and excellent for the observation of space. But it wasn’t suitable for illuminating a sleeping planet.

However, he could not simply ignore what he had now heard twice.

Spock left his cave and strained his ears in the dark. His night vision was sound and while he could not see much, he could clearly make out distinct shapes and forms. Combined with his hearing, it would have to be enough.

A moment later, the wind rose and the next moan of the distressed animal was almost absorbed by the roaring of the air current.

But Spock’s ears caught enough to know the general direction of the creature.

Cautiously, he began walking.
For a few paces, he saw nothing. And suddenly, a pained grunt came from somewhere very close.

Spock turned and focused his eyes on the direction from where the sound had come. A minute later, he saw the wounded animal.

It was a young sehlat. The poor creature was not yet an adult. But he was also not a cub.

Spock came close to it, wary of its long, sharp canines. The animal seemed to be in too much misery to notice.

Spock gently knelt beside it on the ground and tried to reassure it like he had done with the crucks.

The sehlat’s ears pricked a moment later. He growled at the unfamiliar sensation.

But then a gradual calm came over him and he stopped with the aggressive sounds. But the pain was still there. It moaned again.

Spock’s heart squeezed at the animal’s discomfort.

“Little friend, let me aid you,” he murmured, aware of how illogical he was being by pretending that the sehlat could understand him.

But he continued nonetheless. He placed his hand on the face of the animal, and tried to create a very light meld. He had never actively melded with anyone before. And he was scared of attempting it now without any guidance or safety net. But in order to locate the source of the sehlat’s discomfort, he needed to do this.

He closed his eyes and gently made his way into the primitive mind of the sehlat. For the most part, its mind was simple and unorganized. Thoughts were mostly about nourishment, sleep, the sun’s oppressive heat, and the coolness of the sand at night. But then there were two sets of thoughts that Spock found most relevant, and intriguing.

The sehlat had been wounded by other young sehlates during a playful game of tag. They had wounded it by biting it a little too hard in its left hind leg. And somehow, they had known that this was no longer a playful game. Spock was fascinated at how even primitive animals had social norms, particularly among the young that played with each other for the sake of socialization for adulthood. Sehlats lived in clusters. It was no surprise that they familiarized themselves with each other as children. Spock had even read somewhere that the female sehlates of a cluster were able to time their heat cycles and births in synchronization with each other’s in order to bear offspring at the same time.

And this brought him to the second thing he found in the sehlat’s mind. It was pining for its mother. Being young still, it wasn’t able to reach its own hind leg to lick the wound. And its mother would have done so had she been here. But his playmates had left him behind. And he had been unable to move, and unable to follow them.

Spock wondered if there was anything he could do to help the animal. The wound in its leg was still bleeding and no doubt, it would endanger its life and risk its discovery by other animals.

Spock made his decision in less than a second. He opened the little medical kit his mother had sent with him.

He unscrewed the bottle of the sanitizing liquid and applied it gently to the exposed wound. It stung the sehlat and it howled in pain loudly.
“Shhh….gentle one, you will soon feel no pain,” Spock said to it, in a voice his mother often used with him while dressing his wounds.

The sehlat seemed to calm down a little. Spock then applied the healing salve to the injury and bandaged it tightly. The wounded creature made a small sound of relief. But the relief was clearly tinged with fright, Spock could tell.

He settled down beside the young beast, and started combing his fingers through its fur. Within moments, the sehlat fell asleep.

Spock would have liked to meditate. It had been a tiring day after all. But he couldn’t. Not until daylight. Tomorrow, he would find a way to move the animal to his cave. And then he would find his own rest.

Chapter End Notes

I absolutely loved writing this chapter. I love animals. And I do believe that Spock is an amazing, gentle individual. This chapter sets the stage for the climax of the Kahs’wan. And it also takes us a little deeper into the psyche of our beloved future Science Officer.

Please leave a review if you are enjoying the story (or even if you aren’t.) I love feedback and I would love to discuss anything else you might want to talk about.
Finding our rhythms

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It had not been the wisest decision to spend the night outside.

Spock’s chest felt congested, he was coughing badly, and to top it all, he was running a fever. It was not normal for Vulcans to get sick, but exposure to the harsh climate of the desert was unadvisable in general.

However, Spock had not had a choice. It would have been impossible to move the sehlat to any measure of safety in the night. And so, he had had to stay with the animal through the night.

And in order to ensure their safety, he had stayed awake the entire time.

Now, at the crack of dawn, he could feel a deep ache in his limbs. The sehlat was still asleep.

Spock stood up gingerly. His fingers were extremely stiff. It was excruciating to even close his hands halfway.

Plus, the injuries from Zarmal were throbbing again.

He tried to ignore all this. His first task now, was to wake the sehlat up, and to reach the cave.

Spock gently nudged the animal just below the crown of its head. The sleeping creature made a contented noise in its throat and refused to open its eyes. Spock sighed. He nudged a little harder. This time the sehlat woke up, but lazily pushed his head back into Spock’s hand.

“It is an adoring being,” Spock thought to himself, smiling inwardly.

And he needed to stop referring to the sehlat as an ‘it’ because he was clearly a male.

Spock decided to call him I-Chaya.

He placed his fingers on I-Chaya’s meld points and sent certain basic things his way, like the fact that they really needed to move, and that he would call him I-Chaya.

The sehlat gave a short bark of understanding. And Spock withdrew from his mind.

I-Chaya stood up with some difficulty. The first time, his injured leg collapsed under him and he let out a pained howl.

“Shhh…You are capable of balancing your weight on your other legs, I-Chaya,” Spock said to his new companion. He wasn’t sure if he was understanding any of this, but a moment later the animal stood up with a slightly right-leaning posture as if he had heard and understood Spock’s suggestion. Slowly, the odd pair started limping towards the cave. Spock’s head was heavy with the fever and there were painful, dry spots behind his eyes that seemed to stab at his nasal cavity and throat directly.

He refused to take stock of his discomfort.

The cave was about a mile away, which would normally not be a lot of distance, but for the wounded sehlat, it was proving to be a very steep task.
A moment later, his leg buckled under him and he fell down with loud, agonized grunt.

Spock felt dejected. Now they are in the middle of the desert with no cover. It was expected that there would be other animals around. Leaving I-Chaya here was not an option. So he decided to do the one thing that came to his mind.

He would carry the young sehlat. Which, when one considered it practically, was a wholly illogical idea. But Spock did not have any other answer to their rather unique situation.

“It is okay, I-Chaya,” Spock said. “I know you are in pain. I shall carry you back to the cave.”

Thankfully, even young Vulcans were very strong. Despite not being at his one hundred percent, Spock managed to lift I-Chaya on his back. It was a horribly painful thing to do. He hissed when the rough fur of the animal touch his raw back.

But as he had already deduced, there were no other options, Spock reminded himself sternly. He could not carry the sehlat any other way. And he would simply have to endure the liquid agony now coursing through him.

I-Chaya seemed to know that they were in a far from ideal situation. He wanted to help the young Vulcan. But he did not know how.

He licked the side of Spock’s face to show him his affection, and his gratitude.

Spock did not really like the sensation, but he understood that this was I-Chaya’s way of displaying his emotions. And he was not bound by the same disciplines of logic that Spock was. So he was of course free to show adoration to him in any way he liked.

“Thank You, I-Chaya,” Spock said to the sehlat in response to the lick. “I shall endeavor to ensure your safety and your recovery. Your adoration is appreciated, but your gratitude is unnecessary.”

Spock was amused at himself. Like a fool he was conversing with a sehlat, as if he could understand his speech.

“The Kahs’wan is perhaps a test of my sanity,” Spock mused to himself.

He continued to walk slowly, stopping a few times to catch his breath and to control the pain from the wounds on his back, some of which were starting to bleed again.

This had happened so many times over the last few weeks. His recovery had been stunted on numerous occasions due to various reasons, and every time it had taken him right back to where he had started immediately after being rescued from Zarmal.

He was ready for it all to just end.

While he was occupied by his thoughts, the sehlat’s ears pricked.

A faint growl was coming from somewhere.

I-Chaya growled back. Spock tried to shush him.

“No, I-Chaya,” he said. “You must be quiet….” But he did not finish his sentence, because the growl of the other animal came louder this time. Spock realized that I-Chaya had heard it before him.

The young Vulcan quickened his pace, not caring that the motion was extremely jarring on his injuries. When the growl sounded closer, Spock all but ran. His face was bathed in sweat, and his
breathing becoming increasingly choppy. He was overcome by a coughing fit that brought tears to his eyes, and his lungs burned with exertion.

But he knew there was absolutely no other way. He still ran as fast as he could without throwing I-Chaya off his back. The growl of the other animal seemed to be following them. But he didn’t dare stop to look.

He hadn’t seen it yet, but he was fairly certain that this was a le-matya.

A few seconds later, the cave came into view.

For once uncaring of I-Chaya’s wound, Spock pushed the sehlat through the tiny opening he had originally created for himself. The animal grunted in discomfort, and Spock silently apologized but there was no time nor the luxury, to make it easier on him. Spock jumped immediately after and landed in a jumbled heap on the cave’s cold, hard floor.

The branches and brambles covering the cave would protect them for some time, but not for long. But there was no way he was leaving. Their chances of survival were marginally higher if they remained hidden, than if they were out in the desert trying to outrun the le-matya. Not to mention that in their wounded states, neither Spock nor I-Chaya would be any good in a fight if it came to that.

And a Vulcan fighting with a le-matya would be laughable, if Spock could actually laugh at irony.

His sore body was longing to pull itself into a healing sleep. But he could not.

So he did what was expected of him out of duty. He decided to check on I-Chaya and make sure that he was unharmed.

He pushed himself of the floor, not bothering to hold his groan in this time. Slowly, he half walked, half crawled to the sehlat.

The bandage he had tied on the wound was soaked green completely.

“I apologize, I-Chaya,” Spock said, regretful that the young animal had been put through such discomfort in his wounded state. “I shall try and dress your injury again. It shall provide you a degree of relief.”

I-Chaya moaned tiredly and lay his head on the ground. As if knowing what Spock was about to do, he stuck his injured leg out.

With great tenderness, Spock opened the old bandage. Repeating last night’s procedure, he cleaned the wound with sanitizing liquid before applying more salve and a new bandage on it.

He noted with apprehension that the medical supplies were also running out. His own injuries were begging for attention. But there was barely enough in the bottles to dress the sehlat’s injury one more time. Going by the condition of the wound, Spock knew that the dressing would have to be changed latest by tomorrow night or the morning after.

Mustering all his strength of will, he placed the medical supplies back in the bag. His hunger and thirst were gnawing at his insides today, clearly because he had not meditated to control them.

But he was too exhausted to do so now. He curled up on his side next to I-Chaya’s warm, furry body and closed his eyes. Against his better judgement, he decided to risk a few hours of sleep.

If they had to fight to survive the next few days, his body needed to find some rest while it could.
Spock was aware that he had slept a lot longer than he should have.

He opened his eyes blearily, wondering if it was the next day yet.

And it was, only that there was no daylight yet. He was grateful for that.

The le-matya were not nocturnal. Which meant that he could leave the cave for now without worrying about becoming the predator’s next meal.

Also, even if he wasn’t allowed to eat, he needed to find nourishment for I-Chaya. Even for a young sehlat, he was big and he needed a large amount of food in order to create energy for his body’s consumption.

Spock was almost certain that there was no way to meet I-Chaya’s dietary needs completely, but he could make an effort to keep the animal from starvation.

He sat up slowly. But even with all the extra care, his head spun and he saw stars in front of his eyes.

It took a moment for his vision to clear.

He stood up and made his way to the opening in the branches. It took some doing, but he managed to climb out without making too much noise. The injuries on his back protested at the uncalled for brutality, but Spock deliberately ignored them.

He started walking purposefully towards the cacti grave he had seen about 500 meters away from the cave.

Cacti were not supposed to be food. They were certainly not a staple item in the diet of sehlat. But they were rich in nutrients, and filled with an electrolyte-heavy juice that would provide nutrition and maintain the hydration levels of the animal.

Spock’s only task would be to cut the thorns off.

He knew how to do that. The jagged rock he had been using to carve on the wall would work well as a tool to cut away thorns.

Determinedly, Spock walked to the cacti grave. To his immense relief, he did not encounter any obstacles in this task.

Half an hour later, he was back in the cave, making the cacti edible for I-Chaya.

The rest of the day passed in relative peace. Spock went out in the daytime to check on the crucks. He was pleased to see that they were in the process of rebuilding their nest and that they were using his basket for its intended purpose.

He also gathered more berries for his painting, and collected a few more cacti for I-Chaya. He even found some reeds that he would be able to weave into bandages for I-Chaya. And maybe the liquid from the cacti could be used as a cleanser when the sanitizer got over.

Spock worked busily through the day, making all these preparations. But in the back of his mind, he was always aware that there was a le-matya prowling around somewhere.
And that was his main motivation to get back as soon as he could.

When he returned to the cave, he was relieved to see that the I-Chaya was eating the cacti with relish. His own stomach growled loudly, reminding him that he needed to meditate. He licked his lips to rehydrate himself; but it wasn’t enough by a long shot.

Spock sat down and tried to meditate. He managed to enter into a very light trance, with his ears still at the entrance of the cave. The improper rest did not do much for him, but it did calm his ravenous hunger and thirst. Had he had more time, and none of the stress of the le-matya, he would have tried to bring down his fever and ease the fire in his injuries. But as it was, that luxury was not available to him.

After a short period of meditation, he came back to his conscious state and resumed the tasks he had begun earlier.

He mashed some of the blue berries together, in order to continue his painting.

His hands were still painful, but in order to calm his frayed nerves, he needed to paint. Without realizing, this had become his main grounding mechanism through the Kahs’wan. And right now, his need to regain his control on the situation was greater than his desire to ease his aching hands.

He started painting with his fingers deftly, never altering the uniformity of his strokes. As he worked, the waves of his mind started to fall back into a seamless ocean, closing haphazardly opened boxes of thoughts; organizing hopes, fears, dreams, and insecurities into their own little vault hidden behind a wall of mummified hurts.

XXXXX

I-Chaya watched the young boy paint. The patterns he was creating on the wall did not make much sense to him. He could smell the berries though and he wanted to go closer to the sweet smell and investigate. He was sure that they would be better tasting than the cacti the boy had brought for him. But he could not really move.

Besides, the boy was rubbing the berries on the wall. It did not seem smart to the sehlat that such perfectly eatable things were being used in this way, but he did not have any way of questioning the boy.

For a while, I-Chaya just watched. But the sweet smell was constantly in his nose and he really wanted to eat those berries.

After a few minutes, he lifted himself up and leaned on his right side like the boy had suggested earlier. He limped close to the berries and sniffed deeply.

The boy was still absorbed in rubbing the wall. He didn’t even notice him.

To the sehlat, that just meant that the berries were his to take. He used his right front paw to scoop some of the berries into his mouth.

With a loud, satisfied slurp he ate the berries. The noise startled the boy. He turned and looked at the blue juice smeared over I-Chaya’s long canines. And then he looked at the berries.

“Those were not for you to consume, I-Chaya,” Spock said with an inflection of annoyance in his voice. The scolding tone was only barely detectable, but the sehlat was intelligent enough to realize that he had done something to displease the Vulcan.
He looked at Spock with eyes soaked with guilt.

Had Spock been in the best of his condition, his reaction would have been different, but even after the meditation and the painting, he was too exhausted and in too much pain.

He sternly pointed I-Chaya to the back of the cave. The sehlat looked down at the berries, clearly tempted to eat some more, but Spock was having none of it.

With drooping ears, the animal made a sad little sound in the back of his throat and went back to his corner.

He didn’t disturb Spock after that. He watched him paint, still puzzled over the odd patterns he was creating on the wall.

What a waste of perfectly good berries!

Chapter End Notes

I apologize for updating this chapter so late. I was down with fever and that's impeded my ability to write. So apologize for any mistakes. I will proofread the chapter again later at night. This chapter is relatively light but the next one has a degree of angst.

Also, I am looking to join a community of other Trekkies where I can meet other people to talk to. I’d love suggestions if you have any.

Lastly, here is a playlist for part 1 of this story. It will also be posted on my profile. But I am putting it here as well :)  

Please read and review. As I've said before, I love feedback and I love hearing from you; thoughts, concerns, criticisms, words of love... I'll take it all happily :)

Playlist:

1. Amanda’s Lament: Smaointe by Enya
2. Yearning for past- Sarek: The First Year by Tajdar Junaid
3. Spock’s dreams: Celtic Violin - Down by the Sally Gardens - Strings, Harp and Tin Whistle
4. A Father’s wishes- Sarek and Spock: The Seal Lullaby by Eric Whitacre
5. Amanda’s faith: Cantique De Jean Racine by Faure
6. The plight of T’Pring: I am not yours by Z. Randall Stroope
7. Gurokh and Ishok- Parallel Lines: Sonbahar by Yansimalar
8. Ishok’s torment: My Immortal instrumental cover by Lindsey Stirling
9. Spock’s heart: Moonlight by Yiruma
10. Amanda’s lullaby: You are Mine by David Haas
11. Sarek’s love: River flows in you by Yiruma
12. Spock’s Destiny: Aldebaran by Enya
13. The forgotten- Sarek and Amanda: A Proud Mother, from the Star Trek 2009 OST

Playlist Link: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLTbSdeFoWLL0utTfzJpt1Rlj3f0wC-vdl
Buds that do not blossom

Chapter Summary

Please Scroll to the bottom for warnings! I could not post the warnings here without giving away major spoilers. Sorry.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The next day brought a pleasant respite from the heat for the creatures of Vulcan. Spock and I-Chaya awoke to the sweet music of the rain as it fell through the branches that covered their cave.

Their cave was cold and it became colder still without the sun, but an illogical urge to go outside came over Spock. For some strange reason, he wanted to feel the rain. Perhaps, it was a deeper desire that he was unable to articulate consciously.

But he could not let I-Chaya go out. No, the sehlat’s wound could not be exposed to the water. It was already difficult to dress it thanks to all the fur surrounding it; adding water to the mess would only result in increased chances of an infection.

Spock wondered if he was being a little selfish by going out, and maybe he was. But his body gave another uncomfortable twinge at having been denied a bath and medical attention for so long. It really could not be denied this also.

“I will be back, I-Chaya,” Spock said to his new friend. “Do not come out.”

With that, Spock climbed out of the cave.

The initial shock of the cold water sent a shudder through Spock’s spine. For a moment, he almost considered going back. But then the shock wore off and the coolness of the rain enveloped him, washing off days of grime and sand, cleaning away the dried blood and the various unidentifiable materials stuck inside his open wounds.

Spock looked up at the sky, wondering if this was how the Cha’atik felt every time it rained.

The fragrance of the moist sand was making him think about things he had not thought about in a while. A part of him wanted to go and embrace his mother and tell her that he loved her so very much. He wanted to go to his father and ask him all about when he had been a boy not much older than Spock himself.

And he wanted to go and apologize to I-Chaya for not allowing him to eat the berries yesterday. Spock promised himself that once the rain ceased, he would go and collect berries only for I-Chaya’s consumption.

He stood under the showers for a few more minutes, before going back to the cave.

XXXXX

I-Chaya felt loyalty for Spock. Of course, the sehlat’s thoughts were not that concise, but in essence,
that his what he felt for this Vulcan. In the last two days that he had spent in this cave with the boy, he had not thought much about his mother or about his playmates.

And he knew without a doubt that he would do anything for him. And hadn’t he? He had left those berries alone last night.

He would leave berries, and more if it meant that the boy would be pleased with him.

A warm, fuzzy feeling came over the young sehlat. It felt good. He also wanted to go out in the rain with the boy, but he had been told not to, so he didn’t.

With his eyes constantly on the opening of the cave, he waited for the young Vulcan to return.

XXXXX

Spock felt a change in the sehlat when he returned to the cave. There was an air of devotion that had not been there before. Spock could not deny that he felt affection and protectiveness towards the animal as well. He wondered if he would be allowed to keep him after the Kahs’wan. It wasn’t as if he had anyone else except for his parents.

And they could not put their lives on hold indefinitely, for him. Soon they would be expected to travel to missions again. And Spock hated to admit it, but having I-Chaya would be preferable to having no one at all, particularly since he would still be subjected to the taunts and the hateful remarks from his agemates.

And after everything that had happened, he wasn’t sure he had the strength to just take everything that was thrown at him, and pretend like it did not bother him.

He would try and keep I-Chaya, unless of course, I-Chaya decided that he didn’t want to go with Spock.

XXXXX

The rainfall went on for longer than Spock would have liked. While the change in the weather had been welcome, the sheer duration of the rain now meant that he had very little daylight to work with. And he had no other option. He needed to get a few more cacti and the berries. Tomorrow was the last day of the Kahs’wan. And he wanted it to go without incident.

“I-Chaya, do not leave the cave,” Spock said. The sehlat whined. “I know you need exercise. Just wait until tomorrow. And then we shall go home, and you can have as much exercise as you wish.”

I-Chaya made what humans would call the saddest puppy dog eyes ever. Spock had heard the expression from his mother, but only now did it make any sort of sense to him.

“No, I-Chaya, this would not work on me,” he said with a tiny bit of humor in his voice. “I assure you it is for the best, though.”

I-Chaya recognized a lost game of tag when he saw one. He went back to his corner obediently, eyes still looking extremely hopeful and mournful.

Spock simply shook his head and left the cave.

XXXXX

While he was out, Spock also made it a point to check on the colony of the crucks. He was relieved
to see that they had apparently used the basket as a shelter from the rain as well. And that their new nest was undamaged and almost complete.

Spock walked to the cacti grove and gathered a few small plants, making sure to pick tender, juicy ones for I-Chaya’s meal. And then he collected a large number of berries. A feast fit for a king, Spock thought, amused at having found such an apt use for the old terran metaphor.

He began walking back, thinking about everything in general and nothing in particular, when he heard the panting of an animal somewhere close by.

All other thoughts fled his mind. He wondered if this was the le-matya that had almost gotten them the day before.

He really did not want to find out. He continued walking steadily, increasing his pace, but not yet running for the fear that he would rouse the hunting instinct in the predator.

It was no use.

When he was barely twenty meters away from the cave, a huge emerald form leaped at him from the side and tackled him to the ground, scattering his supplies and crushing his entire right side under its weight.

Spock screamed in pain as blinding agony ripped through him. He could feel his ribs breaking under the weight of the le-matya. The funny thing was that even though all of this happened in the fraction of a second, it felt like several minutes to Spock. Perhaps it was the sheer shock of the attack.

But he wasn’t going to go down without a fight. Spock used his hands to try and push the animal off his body. It was incredibly hard.

The creature was about to tear into his neck, when at the last minute Spock jerked away violently. The le-matya missed. It ended up tearing away a large chunk of flesh and muscle from his shoulder.

Spock’s vision blocked out momentarily.

But with a strength he didn’t know he had, he managed to throw the le-matya off himself. He stood up shakily but he knew there was no time to even catch his breath. He wanted to run and take shelter in the cave, but he was bleeding heavily from his shoulder. He was sure that the creature would tear through the flimsy cover of the branches and then not only he but even I-Chaya would have no chance of survival.

His decision made, Spock started running in the direction opposite to the cave. But in his state he did not get very far when the le-matya charged again. It ran after Spock with astonishing Speed and Spock was almost ready to resign himself to his fate when another growl came from behind him.

“No….No…” Spock said desperately. His worst fears were confirmed when he turned around and saw that I-Chaya had come to his rescue. It was a formidable sight. Even at his young age, the sehlat was much bigger than the le-matya. But I-Chaya was injured. And the le-matya’s claws were poisonous. Miraculously, Spock had only been bitten by the creature. But there was no way of being sure that I-Chaya would be spared as well.

Against his better judgment, Spock went back to try and pull I-Chaya away from the le-matya. It was nigh impossible, and Spock knew it. But he was not going to abandon his friend.

Needless to say, Spock was unable to do much. But he managed to divert the le-matya’s attention towards himself.
The le-matya gave a mighty roar and shook the sehlat off like a rag doll. He jumped at Spock and pinned him to the ground by the neck. Spock could not breathe. The le-matya opened its mouth wide and positioned itself atop Spock’s belly. The young Vulcan felt something give under the weight. The pain was horrendous. But he could not black out.

A nanosecond before the le-matya could sink its fangs into Spock’s face, he forced his good arm towards the creature’s neck. He applied the nerve pinch to the beast, desperately willing it to work.

For a heartbeat, time stood still.

And then the le-matya collapsed sideways in a dead heap. The neck pinch had been stronger than it should have been. Instead of simply rendering the creature unconscious, Spock had accidentally killed it. And for someone like Spock, to take a life was unthinkable. If there would be time, he would mourn. If there would be time…..

He coughed up blood. His body had taken too much damage. And he was ready to simply give up.

But he needed to check on I-Chaya.

He crawled at a snail’s pace to the sehlat, who was lying motionless a few feet away.

He was alive. Spock could see his chest rising up and down. At first, he felt insurmountable relief. And then he saw it. A large gash in the center of I-Chaya’s belly. There wasn’t too much blood. But the edges of the wound were already turning black.

His young friend hadn’t been spared then.

I-Chaya made a low sound in his throat and lethargically leaned his head into Spock’s hands.

“You cannot leave me, I-Chaya,” Spock said to the sehlat brokenly. This was not fair. This was just not fair. “Please, my dear friend.”

If I-Chaya had been capable of speech, he would have told the Vulcan boy that he was glad to have been able to help. But he couldn’t speak. And it was getting cold. And there was a strange blurriness at the edges of his vision.

Spock was too weak to meld with anyone, but he placed his fingers on his friend’s face anyway.

He sensed pain, loss, a rush of adrenaline…. And contentment. He felt loyalty, and a distorted image of himself bathed in warm, golden light. Spock was touched.

Through the meld, he also realized that the poor sehlat was in agony. And that he would not live through the night. Spock was old enough to know that there was no cure for a le-matya’s poison.

But knowing something in theory, was very different from actually experiencing it. Spock had never seen anyone die. And he had no idea how to deal with this. Life was slowly slipping away from I-Chaya’s injured body, and he was helpless to do anything.

And he had been unable to feed him the berries.

“I-Chaya, would you…would you like to eat some berries?” Spock asked, his words stilted even in telepathy. I-Chaya’s mind reflected that he was too hurt to even contemplate eating. But then an image of the painting in the cave flashed in front of Spock. The painting came with a deluge of feelings; amusement, safety, warmth, love, reverence.
Spock was completely overwhelmed. "I will complete the painting, I-Chaya," Spock whispered softly. "I will."

Just then, a sharp stab of agony radiated from the sehlat’s belly and forced Spock to come out of his reverie.

He wanted to do something to ease this being's pain. Anything.

So he did the one thing he thought he could. He deepened the meld, and used his very young and simple shields to protect the sehlat from the pain of his wound. Of course, it meant that some of the pain bled into Spock’s side of the shields, but at least I-Chaya was a little more comfortable.

A few minutes later, Spock’s newest friend closed his eyes and went to sleep.

He did not wake up.

"Do not stand at my grave and weep
I am not there. I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow.
I am the diamond glints on snow.
I am the sunlight on ripened grain.
I am the gentle autumn rain.
When you awaken in the morning's hush
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circled flight.
I am the soft stars that shine at night.
Do not stand at my grave and cry;
I am not there. I did not die. "

Chapter End Notes

Warning: Character death, description of injuries

Author's note after you've read the chapter.

I apologize for this. It was very difficult for me to write and I really did not want to do this. But in order for Spock to be who he is in the present, this needed to happen. We are telling this story because there is something to be told. His life has been hard and painful. And that is why there are so many things that need resolution. And that's why this story exists. I am sorry if this was hard on you. Please do forgive me.

End Poem by: Mary Elizabeth Frye
Chapter Summary

This is a relatively short chapter. It is the second last in this part of the story. After one more chapter, we will return to Spock's present life at the academy. I hope you have enjoyed the story so far.

Please leave a review if you're still here. I love hearing from you. It is always a pleasure.

Spock cradled I-Chaya’s cooling body for hours without moving. He tried to find succor and comfort in his still warm fur, not bothered by the fact that the katra of the animal had passed on.

A number of thoughts swirled in his mind like a whirlpool of accusations. And he was unable to grasp even one of them.

Spock had become adept at dealing with physical wounds. It was never easy, nor pleasant. But he had been taught by years of bullying, and now his experiences on Zarmal. However, he did not have any idea how to plug this invisible bleeding wound inside, where I-Chaya had made his home only two days ago.

He did not know how to get up. He did not where to lay down his friend for his final rest. He did not know any of this. And guilt was eating away at him. Around him, he could see the scattered berries and the cacti he had collected earlier. He wanted to vomit at the sight of them. They filled him with such a powerful sense of despair that he could not help but scream and yell in an agony so savage, that it threatened to rip his heart out.

And he wept. Into the dead sehlat’s fur, wondering why Vulcans did not believe in mythical terran creatures like the phoenix. Why couldn’t his own tears have such wondrous, magical properties. What use was his logic and rationality when they could not serve him in this time of need. And really, is this why Vulcans did not like emotion? Because it simply hurt too much.

These bitter thoughts tormented Spock through the night. And he did not pay mind to his own rapidly deteriorating condition. He was still slowly bleeding from his shoulder. The le-matya seemed to have missed his major arteries, but that did not mean that the injury was any less serious. Spock could feel his cracked bones in his shoulder and in his side. He also knew that something inside his stomach had been torn in his last encounter with the beast. But he could not bring himself to get up. He was unable to let go of I-Chaya. An irrational desire to keep the sehlat safe was still strong in his disoriented mind.

Spock’s exhaustion eventually got the better of him. And he fell asleep with his nose buried in I-Chaya’s neck. The sleep numbed him to the cold and the pain. He welcomed the darkness and hoped he’d see his friend again.

XXXXX

This place did not look anything like Vulcan. They were on a strange planet with a brilliantly colorful rainforest, and mountains that looked too symmetrical to be natural. And yet, his tricorder readings were saying something else.
“Captain, the azure metallic sheen of the rocks is due to a high concentration of cobalt in their internal structure,” an older Vulcan man was saying to a human dressed in a golden shirt. The Vulcan himself was wearing a blue tunic.

“Cobalt, huh!” The human muttered thoughtfully. “Could that be the reason behind this unusual symmetry, Mister Spock?”

“Negative, Captain,” the Vulcan responded. “It stands to reason that the smooth surface of the mountains is due to a now extinct phenomenon on this planet. It appears that this planet was once covered by water bodies whose tides were high enough to beat at the mountains. This phenomenon has been observed commonly on pebbles and stones present in the river beds of rivers with a high velocity current.”

XXXXX

Spock woke up with a start. He had seen that human in the other dream also. And this time there had been a Vulcan in the dream. And hadn’t the human addressed the Vulcan as “Mister Spock?”

He swallowed audibly.

I-Chaya’s body was now completely cold. And it was late afternoon. He needed to start walking back to the temple. His Kahs’wan was almost over. He did not have time to mull over the weird dream.

But before that, he needed to figure out what to do with I-Chaya’s body.

A part of him wanted to bury him. It was such a human thing to do, something that his mother’s culture in particular emphasized.

But another part of him knew that burying the sehlat was not the correct option. I-Chaya belonged to the desert. He belonged to Vulcan’s biosphere. And he needed to return to it in order for the cycle of life to go on.

There were scavengers about that would satisfy their hunger by eating I-Chaya’s flesh. And while it was not the most pleasing thought to Spock, it was a strangely comforting one. Simply because this was the best way to let his friend find his rest in the desert. A desert that could never be civilized and tamed by human or Vulcan customs. To even attempt such a thing would be sacrilegious, and an erroneous expression of ego that was often the folly of sentient, intelligent life.

Even at his young age, Spock was aware that nature needed to take its course. And the best way to honor the sacredness of life, was to allow its cycle to work uninterrupted by traditions that did not belong in the wildernesses.

Spock leaned down and hugged I-Chaya’s body close one last time. And then, with a strength of will he hadn’t known he possessed, he walked away from him.

XXXXX

The cave’s coldness was biting in its frigidity today. The void inside Spock deepened with every passing minute, as he tried in vain to complete the painting he had so enthusiastically begun at the beginning of the Kahs’wan. The blue berries that he had been using as a source of pigment were unbearable to even look at, let alone touch.

In the last hours of his test Spock was failing, due to the grief that was drowning him under waves of misery.
“I cannot do this,” Spock whispered into the emptiness.

He sat down tiredly on the floor of the cave. It bothered him that he was so crippled by the events of last night.

But a part of him was glad for the sorrow. He was relieved that he could feel love for I-Chaya, and that he would remember his short friendship with fondness and affection till the end of his days. That would have been impossible had Spock been devoid of emotions.

And just like that he knew that he would never undertake the Kolinahr. To complete that ritual would mean running away from emotion. It would be a representation of his fear. It would leave him unable to feel anything. And wasn’t the fear of emotion as emotional as emotion itself?

If there was one thing this Kahs’wan had taught him, it was that there was a difference in mastering emotion and fearing emotion. I-Chaya had been brave for the sake of his loyalty towards Spock. He would honor it by mastering his emotions and cherishing them. He would never give in to them. But he would also not give up on them.

With this, he promised to himself that he would return to this cave and complete his painting only after finding this equilibrium that would define him for the rest of his life.

XXXXX

Spock’s walk back to the temple was exhausting and draining. His physical condition was not conducive to trekking through the desert. But he needed to do this.

His shoulder wound was throbbing, and the area surrounding it was burning with fevered heat. Spock’s stomach was hurting, and the urge to throw up was constantly present. Many of his older injuries had been exacerbated by his fight with the le-matya.

“I can...not..” Spock coughed as he sagged against the sharp, hot wind of the desert. His throat felt raw and only now the shock of I-Chaya’s death was starting to hit him. His head hurt. The last thoughts of the sehlat, his pain, his terror, his last breath; everything was beating at Spock’s battered shields, forcing him to openly sob in pain every few minutes.

He really just wanted to lie down for a few minutes.

But he knew he couldn’t. His bleeding wounds would attract the attention of wild creatures if he lay down to rest. And then I-Chaya’s sacrifice would be in vain.

Spock whimpered, unsure of the cause. Was it psychic pain, or was it physical?

It was an unholy combination of both.

And Spock had nothing left in his arsenal to combat even an iota of it.

For the last two miles of the journey, he couldn’t help but crawl. And even that was an uphill task.

At last, the temple came into view.

He could see that his parents and the priest were waiting for him at the gate.

He was close to collapse, he knew it. But at least now he had washed the stains of disgrace off his father’s name. No one would say that the house of Surak was tainted. No more.

Spock reached the gate in what felt like hours to him.
He tried to stand, but the minute he lifted his arms from the ground, his trembling legs buckled under him and he lost consciousness.

He did not see the tear-stained face of his mother.

Nor did he see the lines of pain and remorse around the eyes of the priest S’Phiroah, who had helplessly watched every second of Spock’s tragic and torturous Kahs’wan, and marveled at his bravery with an admiration that he had only felt for very few people in his very long life.
Towards a new destiny

Chapter Summary

This is the last chapter in this part. The next chapter will continue Spock's story from the present.

Also, Ommallaredpanda, thank you for your review. I am sorry I got you upset with I-Chaya's death. But it had to happen. Also, there is a reason for him being in the command track. You will see why. Lastly, he hasn't really met someone for him he'd lose control. There is a lot planned for this part of the story. I will try my best to not disappoint. :)

Please leave feedback if you are enjoying this story. Or even if you aren't. I love reading what you have to say about the whole thing so far. And what are your expectations from the rest of it.

The years between Spock’s Kahs’wan, and his acceptance to Starfleet were kind to him in some ways, and unkind in others. He grew up by decades rather than years. And while his body slowly overcame the trauma it had been subjected to, his mind changed in ways he couldn’t even begin to understand.

His humanity shaped the Vulcan he became. His devotion to logic came without concessions, because his morality dictated that hypocrisy had no place in rational thought. And if life was sacred, then it deserved compassion in every form possible.

Spock never quite lost his innocent faith in the idea that people were but products of their circumstances. However, he learned that irrespective of circumstances, it was possible to make the right choices. And while he held on to that notion strictly in his own life, he refused to judge anyone else for their actions.

Losing I-Chaya had taught Spock to accept and endure, in a way he had not been forced to in his young life. Physical wounds healed. Taunts and remarks were momentary. But death was final. There was no coming back from it. And the void was permanent, always gaping, always grotesque in its misshapen, mocking memory of a happier time.

Sobik

Spock returned to the seminary today. Nothing really marked the occasion. He simply picked up from where he had left. Algebra, molecular biology, calculus, quantum physics, intergalactic governance, history of Vulcan, history of the Milky Way, history of Andromeda, Astronomy, Computer Aided Design, Three-dimensional geometry; these became his best friends. There was no place for anything else.

Only one thing changed, though. While the recreation hour had once been a time to brace himself for rebuke and assault, now it was nothing more than an hour to read a little more. Spock learned as much as he could. He read books on theology and religion, he taught himself the nuances of various alien languages, and he reflected deeply upon the historical events that caught his attention.
Stonn stayed away from him for the most part. Occasionally, someone said something insulting, but Spock ignored it. It still stung, but he was a different person now. There was nothing he could do to change someone’s thinking. So he focused on improving the lives of those who needed and deserved his efforts more.

On long days when his parents were out on missions, he assisted therapist Sobik at his hospice. He was not trained to help patients with the actual physical exercises. But he did other things to ease Sobik’s workload. He repaired machinery for free, upgraded computers, designed learning aids and mobility devices, supervised patients suffering from mental damage, and sometimes, he worked in the kitchens, manually chopping vegetables and preparing dishes for the patients’ meals. Like Amanda, Sobik was also not too fond of replicated meals. And he endeavored to serve organically prepared food to all the people he cared for at his center.

In return, he offered Spock the opportunity to talk. But Spock never took him up on it. Some might think that he chose to suffer in silence.

But for him, there was no suffering, only serene acceptance.

And yet, every time he stayed for the evening meal, Sobik made it a point to sit with him, even without saying anything. The therapist was much more like a human than the average Vulcan.

Perhaps that was why, even his silence spoke of peace and comfort to the half-Vulcan, who was only now starting to find his way.

**T’pring**

He was now bonded to T’Pring.

It did not feel terribly different. Just that there was another presence in his mind. From what he had read, the presence of one’s spouse was supposed to be like a second awareness of one’s own consciousness.

Spock would have really liked to have that. But he also knew that it was not a possibility for him and the daughter of Solen. This was a matter of duty and nothing more.

The ceremony itself had not been particularly enthralling. They had been joined by a mind healer and had been given blessings by the elders of both the families.

Mercifully, they were not yet supposed to stay together. That time would come after his first Pon Farr. And Spock was only fifteen yet. There was no reason for him to undergo that particular experience anytime soon.

To give her credit, T’Pring was a good bondmate. She had promised Spock her respect all those years ago and she was honoring her word even today.

She addressed Amanda with regard, even if she didn’t really wish to. She did not join the bullies when they occasionally picked on him. And she did not look at him with disdain anymore.

But she still belonged to Stonn in her mind. Her duty to Spock was more about honoring her promise than anything else.

She still believed in Symmetrism. And the only reason she accepted Spock, was because he had shown her kindness and understanding even in the light of her inexcusable request after his rescue from Zarmal.
Spock could live with this. What he had now was better than anything he had ever hoped for as a child.

And he would do his duty towards T’Pring, just the way he had always done.

**Sarek**

The first few months after the Kahs’wan were positive for Sarek’s relationship with his son.

As he had promised, the ambassador taught Spock to play the Vulcan lyre.

And Spock really did have a great talent for music. Even in the seamless, logical flow of modern Vulcan music, he was able to inject a flavor of the primal nature that was still present in the deepest part of every Vulcan’s katra.

Sarek went a step further and trained his son in the ancient martial art of Suus Mahna as well. Seeing Spock hurt had shaken the older man to the core. And so, he taught his boy how to fight.

Like a diligent student, Spock learned everything his father taught him. His joy was great at having the opportunity to know Sarek better. And while both father and son were rediscovering their bond, they were also realizing that there would be fundamental conflict of thought between them in the future. And despite their differences, they both agreed that a storm was brewing on the horizon.

In Sarek’s opinion, Spock’s successful completion of the Kahs’wan meant that he was now fully welcome to integrate and immerse himself into mainstream Vulcan society. For Spock, this was not the only viable option.

He wanted to explore the galaxy, serve the populations on planets that needed external aid. Science was one endeavor that he certainly wished to engage in. But his idea for doing the same was vastly different from that of Sarek’s.

It did not help that he already did not completely approve of the Vulcan Science Academy’s monochromatic approach to science. While Spock believed in following established rules, he also believed in exploring avenues for innovation through legitimate means.

Unfortunately, his half-human status demanded that in order to do so, he needed to yet again prove himself. Sarek had been appointed to the High Council a few years ago. And it had improved Amanda’s position in their society, but she was still an outcast for the most part, outwardly respected only because she was married to Sarek.

The final straw came with Spock’s conditional acceptance to the Vulcan Science Academy. They did not openly state the condition. But it was understood that in order to enroll, he would have to complete the Kolinahr.

Spock wasn’t going to do that. And if the academy did not want him without the ritual, they would not have him at all.

He understood his father’s concern. He knew that Sarek wished the very best for him. But he could not understand why the decision to join Starfleet had been treated so harshly.

The forcible muting of his father’s bond with him had cut Spock deeply. He wanted to go and beg Sarek to reopen the channel.

But something told him that this move would not be received well. It was perhaps best to leave quietly.
He knew he was not welcome back home. Soon, T’Pring would also know. And then she would also have their bond severed.

He was betraying her in the worst way a bondmate could. But it would be okay.

She would be dishonored for a time. But in the long run, she would only benefit by not having to bear the stain of being a half-breed’s bondmate.

She had endured much for Stonn. If he had any sense of honor, he would adorn her with the name of his house.

Amanda

Mother…. The only word that comforted Spock through the difficult years that slowly pulled him apart from his father’s love and acceptance.

He saw what it did to Amanda. But he was powerless to change anything.

And while she silently watched her family fall apart, Spock stoically stood between her and the world, defending her from the worst that the Vulcan society had to offer.

That was partly the reason he did not even consider completing the Kolinahr. He remembered asking her just before his audience with the High Council, if she would disapprove of his choice to complete the Kolinahr, were he to make that decision.

She had responded with a calm, reassuring smile that no matter what he chose, he would always have a proud mother.

Her open acceptance only strengthened his resolve to not turn into the being that Vulcan wanted him to be.

He was as much Amanda’s son as Sarek’s. And he had been accepted by Starfleet. Maybe this was the galaxy’s way of calling him to his destiny.

The universe did not begin and end with Vulcan.
Strange Beginnings

Chapter Summary

I had a lot of trouble with this chapter. I am still in the headspace of Spock's childhood. Please forgive me if this chapter reads a little strange. Also, I would appreciate feedback and I want to know from you what you think of the beginning of this new arc. It is very important to me, and it would help me tell the story in a better way if I know how it feels to you.

Spock was amazed at the variety of goods one could purchase at a terran grocery. And according to his PADD, this wasn’t even a supermarket. Suddenly, he felt very foolish for even thinking that he could buy the necessary provisions for the apartment.

Perhaps he should have waited for his human flatmates to arrive.

But now he was here. It would be illogical to not complete the task he had set for himself. Following everyone’s lead, Spock picked a shopping assistant android from the front of the store. This was a relief; at least he would have a guide to aid him in this process.

“Good Day, I am Ollie,” The android introduced itself to Spock in its flat, monotonous voice. Spock activated the machine and set it to following him and stopping with him through the UBS (Unique Bio Signature) system installed in the machine.

It was fascinating how humans had evolved humanoid robots for simple domestic tasks like these.

After that he walked around the store, carefully looking for the things he deemed necessary. The bot dutifully stayed behind him, with the lid of the attached basket open at all times.

It took Spock about half an hour to pick everything that he needed. It wasn’t much. He bought a loaf of bread, lettuce, black beans, tomatoes, penne pasta, onions, carrots, lentils, cleaning liquid, an electric mop, and sanitizing liquid for his personal use. He wasn’t completely sure of all the vegetables that he had bought, but his mother had told him before leaving that would never go wrong with these.

And so, here he was at the checkout counter, paying for things he’d taste for the very first time in his life. Had he been human, he would have been excited or apprehensive about trying a completely unfamiliar cuisine. But he was least bothered about it. He had used Ollie to check the nutritional information about all the vegetables. He was satisfied with what he had found.

Though he knew he would need to buy copper supplements since his blood was copper based, and most of these vegetables were rich in iron, as required by the human physiology.

The walk back to the apartment was leisurely and comfortable. Spock made it a point to take in as much as he could of his surroundings.

He hated to admit it even to himself but some of the houses were truly magnificent. It helped matters that the season was autumn and the leaves on almost all the trees were colored in brilliant shades of red, saffron, golden, and yellow.
Spock focused on all the sounds that came from the trees; he could hear the soft rustle of the leaves, among other sounds which he identified as those made by birds. He couldn’t see them, but he knew they were there. He was able to distinguish the chirping patterns of at least three different species. And he would have liked very much to see them, but he could not stand on the sidewalk to watch. So he continued on his way.

XXXXX

Once back at the apartment, Spock put everything in its proper place, mimicking the actions he had often see his mother do around the kitchen in their house on Vulcan.

And then, he sat down to read the literature Starfleet had made available to all new cadets. He had to make the final decision for his subjects. And even he wasn’t completely sure if the command track was right for him.

But he had good reasons for making that choice. His experiences over the last few years had made him aware of the problems that plagued a number of worlds in the federation, and even outside of it. Spock wasn’t driven by ambition, as much as by his desire to help in a more direct way than he could as a scientist.

But that did not mean that he was not taking the coursework for the science track. Spock was perhaps the only cadet in the batch who would have to complete 168 credits by the end of the course as opposed to the 96 that everyone else was required to do.

Spock did not consider this to be a challenge. While someone on the command would graduate with a general Bachelors of Arts in Intergalactic Service degree, he would graduate with that and an additional science degree in Xenoanthropology and Applied Scientific Programming.

Spock felt as close to excited as he could. He was making a fresh start in life. Earth was a strange place. He was not certain what his experiences would be like. But if life had taught him anything, it was that beauty existed even within the most shadowed surfaces. He would take everything in his stride.

And he would find his anchor somewhere in the universe.

XXXXX

“You’re a what?” The brown haired boy asked Spock quite incredulously.

“I am a Vulcan, Mr. Gallagher,” Spock repeated patiently for the benefit of his new roommate, Mike.

“Er…Sorry, I was rude,” the young man replied, looking mortified when he realized that his reaction had been childish and immature.

“Apologies accepted,” Spock replied. It appeared as if the human wanted him to say something more, but he did not have anything more to say.

Mike looked at Spock, but quickly averted his gaze when he saw that the other man had a rather piercing, bold gaze that did not have the human tendency to look away when matched.

“Um, well, I’ll just go and put my things away,” he mumbled, slowly shuffling away.

Spock could sense Mike’s discomfort, but he did not know its cause. Had he done something to make the human so ill at ease? He searched his mind and replayed the last ten minutes in his head. He was unable to detect anything that might have been inappropriate.
Or maybe it was just one of those odd things that he was still trying to understand. It was strange that despite understanding poetic metaphors that terran literature often used, Spock was terribly lacking when it came to colloquial language.

He had no idea what to do at this point. So he decided to wait and see who his other two flatmates were. Perhaps the three humans would find camaraderie with each other and leave him be. That would certainly be preferable to awkward interactions like the one he had just had.

Or maybe, eventually, he would become better at communicating with them.

XXXXX

Spock did not have to wait too long to discover who the other two residents of their apartment were. They were not very different from Mike in their mannerisms, but they certainly seemed older. One of them was from New York, and his name was Damien Harper. He was in the command track as well, as opposed to Mike who was an undeclared major. The other boy was a doctor and therefore on a different ranking system altogether. His name was Hamid Sheikh. He did not even look like the other two boys, and his accent suggested that he was not an American like them.

Mercifully, their reaction to Spock was better controlled than Mike’s but they too seemed wary of him.

Damien extended his hand towards Spock. When he did not respond, the human slowly lowered his arm, tension and confusion radiating from him.

Again, Spock did not know what was expected of him.

The two boys did not say anything and went to find their beds. Only then did he realize that he was to share the room with one of them.

An illogical hunch said that he’d end up sharing his room with the doctor.

And sure enough, the older man emerged from the other bedroom with all his things still in hand.

“Looks like we are sharing,” He said with a nervous little laugh.

“Indeed,” Spock responded. “The other bed in this room is unoccupied. I presume that is the only option available to you if the other cadet has chosen to take one of the beds in the other room.”

Hamid looked at him blankly, clearly unsure of how to respond. The Vulcan’s way of talking was very much like that of a computer. How did one communicate casually with a computer?

Wordlessly, he placed his things on the floor beside the empty bed and began unpacking.
Chapter Summary

The story is a little slow for now. I promise that it will pick up. We need to understand that Spock is discovering Earth literally one peculiarity at a time. And I am basing much of his awe, on my own experiences as an international student in America. Even if things would have changed greatly by the 23rd century, much would remain unchanged, like it has for the last few hundred years.

I hope you are still enjoying this story.

And Ommallaredpanda, I have responded to your comments in the comments’ thread. I really like talking to you and other people here about this story and Star trek, and life in general. If you’d like to talk more, say so in the comments, and I will provide you with an email ID. Honestly, I am an introvert, but I am trying to change that. So I consider this practice.

The next day Spock woke up much earlier than everyone else in the apartment. He was awake before the crack of dawn. He did not wish to disturb the others so he moved about as quietly as he could.

He did not take too much time in getting dressed, but he made sure he was perfectly put together. He also decided to not wear the gloves he’d worn the entire time yesterday. Gloves were not a part of Starfleet uniform, so they were not required today.

By the time everyone else woke up, he was already getting himself a cup of carrot juice and a slice of bread for breakfast.

“Good Morning, Spock” Hamid said to him, brightly.

Spock lingered for a moment but he knew these basic human courtesies were expected of him.

“Good morning, Dr. Sheikh,” Spock responded. The other man stared at him with a rather befuddled expression on his face.

“Er….you can call me Hamid,” He said in a rather tiny voice. “I guess you are not too familiar with Earth’s culture. We don’t use titles and surnames with our friends, colleagues, and flat mates once we get to know them.”

Spock would have argued that he did not know them yet, and that they did not know him either. But something told him that just by the fact of living together, they were all expected to behave like acquaintances instead of academic peers in the same institution.

“Very well, Hamid,” Spock responded. “I shall endeavor to address you by your given name.”

By this time, the other two boys were also dressed and getting their breakfast.

“There is no meat, nor eggs,” Damien complained. “Why did these Starfleet guys not put any other
supplies in the deep freeze. Much good they did to us by dumping fucking rabbit food here.”

Spock realized that the boy had assumed that the groceries had been provided by Starfleet. He needed to correct this misperception.

“Pardon me, Mr. Harper, but these supplies were purchased by myself yesterday,” he explained. “There were no foodstuffs in the deep freeze when I arrived. I presumed that purchasing basic supplies would be a wise thing to do.”

“And you bought no meat?” Damien asked. “Look, I appreciate the gesture. I just can’t eat any of this crap so early in the morning.”

Spock was confused by this.

“I do not understand,” he said, truthfully.

The boy rolled his eyes in irritation.

“Man, you’re freaky,” he whined “It’s gonna be bloody tough living with you.”

Spock did not respond to that. He did not know how to.

Hamid and Mike just watched. It looked like even though Mike did not have the guts to say anything, he did agree with Damien.

But Hamid felt bad for the Vulcan. In his opinion, it had been rather nice of Spock to buy groceries for all of them. It wasn’t his fault that he hadn’t known what all to purchase. He was completely new here. It was commendable that he had even tried to be of help even before any of them had arrived.

And groceries weren’t particularly cheap. Mike and Damien were young enough that their shopping lists would include all kinds of unhealthy things like soda, candy bars, processed meat, and TV Meals. Spock, on the other hand, had stocked their deep freeze with vegetables, fruits, and legumes; things that were nutritious and not cheap at all.

If anything, he deserved to be thanked for being considerate.

“It is okay, Spock,” Hamid began. “Don’t worry about it. In fact, thank you for stocking the deep freeze up on nutritious stuff. And you shouldn’t have to pay for all the groceries. I will pay you half of what you spent right now.”

Spock could sense that this human was upset by the outburst of the boy called Damien. But he did not need to placate Spock.

“You do not have to reimburse me, Hamid,” he said, still getting used to addressing the man by his first name.

Hamid decided not to debate with him. “Okay, no issues,” he said with a smile. “But next time, I will buy the groceries.” And then he turned to their other two flat mates, who’d been watching them closely all this time.

“Give him a break, guys,” Hamid said. “He is still new here. It was sweet of him to get all these things for the apartment. Let’s just go to the grocery again later and buy whatever else you need, okay?”

Spock had just been called sweet.
He was most unclear on how a sentient being could be sweet. Edible materials exhibited taste, not living beings. Again, Spock wanted to ask Hamid to clarify this. But he didn’t. Humans were illogical, as he had established already. And standard was a very convoluted language.

The four cadets walked to the academy in silence. For the most part, Spock could tell that his flat mates were either afraid of him or distressed by him, except for perhaps Hamid, who also seemed to be wary of him but had a greater degree of sensitivity to his alien-ness.

The orientation for the incoming class was to be conducted in the Armstrong Hall, which had been named so in the honor of the first human to have ever set a foot on the Earth’s moon.

Spock found it fascinating that despite their short historical memory, humans still held their earliest astronauts in such high regard.

The hall itself was decorated tastefully; And on one side of the hall, a large flag of United Earth hung. The other wall was adorned with flags of the other 200 nation states that were members of the United Earth government.

And right above the podium were flags and insignias from all the planetary governments that were a part of the United Federation of Planets.

The cadets around Spock were also taking in their surroundings with varying degrees of awe.

While they were all dressed in their uniforms, there was much diversity in their numbers. Spock realized that humans not only differed racially like Vulcans, but that they were also expressive of personal preferences in how they wore their hair and accessories, particularly human females. Most of them wore color on their lips and distinctive jewelry in their ears.

Human males on the other hand mostly sported a similar hairstyle. And many of them were not wearing any accessories.

Spock made his way towards the section of the auditorium that was labeled as reserved for the cadets of the command track.

He sat down beside a female cadet with dark, bushy hair and smooth, pale skin. She smiled at him.

He did not respond with a smile, but he managed a little nod.

He did not find out if it was enough, because just then, Admiral Komack took the stage, and thus began the orientation.

It had been long-winded. And Spock was not the only one to have felt that way. Thanks to his rather sharp hearing, he heard many of the cadets complain over lunch that the speeches had been nothing more than flowery expositions of things they all already knew from Starfleet’s literature.

In Spock’s opinion, the orientation had not been inspiring either, but it did not matter. The admiral’s speech had been nothing more than a matter of annual tradition. It was illogical to expect it to be any different from how it was every other year. Not that new cadets knew about the previous years’ speeches.

Options in lunch were limited for Spock. And ultimately he only helped himself to some green salad.
and a cup of apple juice. The rest of the spread was made up of various dishes containing meat and dairy.

He could not stand to be near some of the platters, particularly the ones serving seafood. However, all the other cadets seemed rather pleased with the arrangements. The entire dining hall was crowded and most tables were occupied by cadets who had either known each other from before coming here, or those who were on their way to becoming friends with each other.

A number of small groups had been formed, thanks to the tendency of humans to gravitate towards people similar to themselves. The relatively small number of non-human cadets were also grouped into little corners with other cadets of their own race and sometimes senior cadets and student representatives from the academy.

Spock was the only Vulcan in the batch, and in the entire academy as well. He surveyed the room and found a quiet spot right at the back. There was just one chair next to a table where platefuls of discarded food were carelessly kept, almost as if the people who had left them there had found the food too distasteful.

He sat down to eat his meal. And while eating, he observed the room, wondering if this mass of humanity only lightly punctuated by non-humans, would ever welcome him into their midst.

Spock was not looking for friendship, or even companionship. He was looking to fill the space inside himself that constantly made him doubt the adequacy of Vulcan logic. He did not know what he was looking for, in order to attain such fulfilment; but surely, the first step would be to find acceptance and validity among all these people.

No one noticed Spock. After finishing his meal, he tried to locate his flat mates. As expected, they were all engaged in conversations with various groups of cadets. He did not wish to interrupt them.

So he simply decided to walk back alone. It had been a fairly straightforward day. The challenges of this place would only be revealed tomorrow with the first hour of classes.
The atmosphere in the apartment was strained in the evening.

And unsurprisingly, Damien was the source of the stress.

“What do you mean you won’t pay for the groceries?” Damien asked Spock heatedly.

He and Mike had gone to the supermarket after the orientation to buy other essentials that Spock had not bought yesterday.

“I am even not asking you to pay the entire split, ‘cause you bought some stuff yesterday, but you gotta pay the remainder,” he said. “You can’t just NOT pay.”

Spock did not wish to argue with him. But he was unwilling to listen to the human’s illogic. There was no reason for him to pay anything because he was not going to be using any of the purchases that the humans had made. Once again, Spock tried to explain himself.

“Mr. Harper, I will not consume the meat you have bought because I am a vegetarian,” Spock said. “I have also explained to you that I do not require the snack items that you have purchased. They hold no temptation for me. I do not understand your reasons for disbelieving me.”

And once again Damien proved himself to be a bit of a knucklehead.

“Yeah, you’re saying this now, but I’ve had roomies who loved reminding me that sharing is caring shit, but refused to pay up,” he said. “Look Vulcan, you are new here, but if you live with roomies, you share stuff and you split costs, unless you’re gonna keep your stuff totally separate from ours.”

“Oh then I shall do that,” Spock said obstinately. He might have just paid Damien to get the guy to shut up, but he was not about to let anyone walk all over him. He was not a ten-year-old anymore. He wasn’t on Vulcan. And this wasn’t Stonn.

“Whatever, prissy mofo,” the irate human mumbled.

Spock did not know what that insult meant, and even if he had, he wouldn’t have responded to it. He went back to his room, but not before he taught a little snippet of conversation that made things a lot clearer in his head.

“You really were being too much,” Mike said to Damien.

“That Vulcan sucks ass,” Damien replied. “I have nothing against other aliens, but man, I can’t stand these uptight assholes. And just look at my luck, stuck with this arrogant bastard for a roomie.”

“After today, he might just change his apartment,” Mike said under his breath, not looking too happy with the open xenophobia that the other boy was displaying.

“I fucking don’t care,” Damien said. “Fucking coward can bitch and moan and change his room if he can’t learn.”

At this point, Spock tuned him out. He admitted to himself that just moments ago he had been considering changing his apartment. But now he was not going to do that.

For one, he wasn’t a coward. And two, he was not going to give in, to xenophobia. If this human was unwilling to change his discriminatory ways, Spock was equally unwilling to let him get away
“I’m sorry I did not come out to help you,” Hamid said to Spock.

The doctor had retired soon after returning home. And the other two boys had not come home yet, so he hadn’t had to deal with them when they returned.

Unfortunately, Spock had gotten pulled into a rather childish and meaningless argument.

And Hamid had heard it all, but he had been suffering from a headache and he just wasn’t in the mood to argue with two idiots practically half his age.

“It is of no consequence,” Spock replied. “You do not need to aid me in maneuvering through these altercations. It is natural for humans to exhibit disdain for that which they do not comprehend.”

The Vulcan’s words stung Hamid.

“No Spock,” he said emphatically. “All of us are not like that. Come on…I’d never be nasty to you.”

Spock did not reply. He sat down on his bed and started removing his shoes.

And just then, Hamid noticed.

The other man’s hands looked like human hands, but there were a number of faint, ridged scars that marred them. The length of the fingers of both hands was more uneven than usual, and the knuckles on both hands were misaligned. The doctor could tell that this was not how Spock’s hands were supposed to look. The jagged ridges did not have the symmetry of naturally occurring features. No... someone, somewhere had hurt Mister Spock.

And the young Vulcan had obviously survived. Because he was here now, ready to make proverbial mincemeat out of racist jerks like Damien.

Hamid wasn’t sure how he felt at the moment. But he was certain that there was a lot more to the aloof, enigmatic Vulcan who wanted to pretend like there was nothing even remotely human about him.

Classes began on time the very next day.

Spock’s very first class was Research Methodology. Their professor was a middle-aged woman called Patricia Cleere. She seemed to know her subject, but her movements were awkward and nervous. It did not help matters that she was thin and reedy looking. Her hair was tied in a messy knot at the base of her neck. And she was adjunct faculty, which meant that she was not a Starfleet officer. But her voice was strong and confident. And she did not believe in lectures. Her idea of a good class was to have discussions and dialogues that would force her students to think.

“As I was saying, we must be well versed with qualitative techniques, particularly for cases where we are making the first contact,” she said to the class. “Anyone knows how we might engage in qualitative research prior to the first contact?”

No one raised their hand.

“Anyone?” she asked again. “There are no right or wrong answers. There can be any number of
approaches to this.”

A young boy with dark hair raised his hand.

The instructor nodded at him to answer.

“We could go to the planet in disguise, and discreetly conduct research, without them knowing,” he said. “We could also observe through the use of long range telescopes if our exploration vessel is stationed in the orbit of the planet.”

The professor smiled. “That is partially correct, Mr. Driscoll,” she said. “But the disguise idea would only be viable in a holoval. The reality is very different from what one sees in works of fiction and fantasy. Your second option, though, is a viable one, but not without severe limitations. Would anyone else like to add anything?” she asked the class.

A moment later, Spock raised his hand.

“Yes, Cadet Spock, please tell us,” she said.

“As you mentioned, there are multiple ways to establish certain non-numerical, substantive facts about a society prior to the first contact. Though these would differ depending upon the context of the first contact. In the case where the society has never interacted with alien civilizations, it would be best to introduce data-gathering nanobots into their atmosphere in order to record communications among the natives of the planet. The other thing to consider might be to scan any definitive communication that they may have directed at potential alien lifeforms based on their own speculations and curiosity. In cases where the alien civilization is aware of other existing civilizations and has had contact with them, it might be a possibility to conduct secondary research through the study of primary research conducted by the planets that have had contact with said civilization.”

Professor Cleere looked very pleased.

“Full marks, cadet Spock,” she said. “And are you the son of Ambassador Sarek and Amanda Greyson?”


“No wonder,” she laughed. “I’m going to write to old Amanda today and tell her that her son is exactly like her. Your sharpness is certainly no surprise to me anymore. Class dismissed.”

XXXXX

“You’re smart,” said one of his classmates as they left the classroom. It was a very pretty girl with short, hot pink hair.

“It is not an act of intelligence to deduce conclusions from available facts and hypotheses,” Spock said.

“Jeez, even that sounded smart, though I am not sure of what it means,” she said. “I’m Erica, by the way. And you are Spock.”

“Indeed, I am,” he replied, feeling extremely inadequate in the presence of this female whose exuberant emotions were highly palpable even though he was not touching her.

“Will you help me with homework?” she asked without preamble.
It took Spock a moment to figure out what she had asked.

“Do you wish me to aid you in comprehending course material?” He asked, a little dumbfounded.

“Duh, obviously,” she said, rolling her eyes. “Like I know it is the first day and we don’t have homework yet, but you bet your ass, this woman’s homework will be on the academic portal before the day is done. And I know I will suck at it unless you help me.”

She looked at Spock, grinning like the Cheshire cat.

“I do not think that is appropriate,” he said evenly. “It would impede your learning to seek my aid instead of attempting to complete the assignment yourself.”

“I would date you, if you weren’t so odd,” she said, obviously upset that he had refused to help her. “But I expected it. You smart kids are always kinda highbrow.”

She did not allow Spock to answer and promptly started walking the other way.

XXXXX

“I heard you turned some chick away today,” Damien said to Spock in the evening. Spock was working on the Research Methodology assignment while the others were just sitting and talking. He had wanted to sit inside and work, but Hamid had dragged him out saying that even Vulcans needed to spend time with friends. Spock did not bother to enlighten the doctor about one of their supposed friends’ controversial views about Vulcans.

Right now, Hamid was outside, trying to fiddle with the cables that would connect his antique and battered PADD to the satellite in order to stream live holovids instead of recorded ones.

“I presume you are referring to a human female named Erica Gomez, and not the young one of a hen?” Spock asked Damien without looking up from his work.

Mike burst into laughter before Damien could respond. “Your sense of humor is lame, Spock, but it works…” he said, before starting to giggle again.

“I was not attempting to be humorous,” Spock said, thoroughly confused by this time.

Mike opened his mouth to respond, but Damien beat him to it.

“Shut up Mike, this is serious, the Vulcan turned down a fuck buddy,” he said in apparent seriousness.

“Wait, what?” Mike yelled. ”She offered you sex?”

“She did not,” Spock said coldly, glaring at Damien with a frozen, intimidating expression on his face.

“You really think she wanted homework help?” the boy asked, clearly enjoying this.

“I do not know,” the Vulcan responded. “But I was not offered conjugal services by Ms. Gomez and you will cease speaking of her in such a baser manner.”

“Someone’s protective of the pink skank,” Damien said amidst the sound of renewed laughter from Mike.

Spock wished to strike the human. But he willed himself not to.
He gathered his PADD and his things and went back to the room. He did not wait to explain himself to Hamid who had just entered the house again, clearly unaware of what had just transpired in the living room.
The first two weeks at the academy weren’t very eventful. In order to deal with the situation at the
apartment, Spock often left the house at an extremely early hour and returned home much later.
Usually, he had enough work in the labs that kept him busy and isolated.

For the most part, Spock was finding his classes almost too easy. He had much to learn in the classes
specifically meant for the command track, but he was rather advanced for the science track classes he
was enrolled in.

In fact, most of the teachers in the science track were equal parts impressed and equal parts scared of
him.

The professor who taught Advanced Nanobot Programming had started allowing Spock to forego
the lecture classes and spend all the class time in the lab. The professor for Coding Languages had
given Spock a much more advanced graduate level project to work on as opposed to the basic
programming that the rest of the class was doing.

In Nuclear Chemistry, he was already working on an independent paper for an upcoming conference
that was being hosted by the Intergalactic Council of Nuclear Technology. His research was about
how radioactive substances like Uranium and Plutonium could be used to create artificial back-up
power in starships, so that the dilithium could be used exclusively for warp drive. Unlike most other
research, Spock’s paper also dealt with his rather unconventional theory of how nuclear waste could
be recycled. If this paper was accepted, he would seek permission to carry out practical experiments
to test his theory and write a full paper on the recycling process itself.

However, the real treat came for Spock in the form of a project for Xenoarchaeology. Professor
Dave Jackson, also an ex-science officer of the USS Ptolemy, offered Spock an opportunity to intern
with Captain Pike, on a short exploratory mission to an ancient and now uninhabited planet in a
slightly distant part of the galaxy.

“Spock, it is my absolute pleasure to offer you this opportunity,” Jackson said while handing Spock
the packet containing all the details of the internship. “Captain Pike’s science officer is otherwise
engaged these days. He cannot go for this mission because the last mission of the Enterprise returned
with a wealth of Konarian technology that is priceless for converting Lithium into Dilithium
artificially in the lab. Of course, you understand the meaning of something so monumental. And
while there is another officer who will act as the science officer for the mission, Pike thinks that there
is a need for someone more brilliant. And if I may say so myself, you have proven yourself more
than just brilliant.”

Spock did understand. And even though he didn’t quite show it, he was thrilled to have been chosen
for this. But that raised a number of questions about his academic track.

“I am grateful, professor,” he said. “But I am at a loss to understand how this would affect my
graduation from from the academy.”

The older man smiled at Spock. “And that is why, young man, you are to meet Admiral Komack
right now. You’ve been here no more than two weeks and you’re already the talk of the whole damn
town.”

“Yes, professor,” Spock replied, not batting an eyelid at the compliment. “I shall go and meet
Admiral Komack.”
Any other cadet would have been extremely nervous at being called to Komack’s office. But not Spock. He was there for a perfectly logical reason, worthy even.

He walked up to the secretary’s desk in order to let the admiral know that he was here.

“Excuse me, I am here to meet Admiral Komack,” Spock said politely.

“And you are?” the woman asked, without bothering to look up.

“My name is Spock. Registration no. 88349-8904,” he said.

“Wait here,” she said, before sending an alert to Komack. A moment later, he responded and asked her to send the visitor in.

Spock entered Komack’s office with an easy confidence, unlike the hesitation that many new cadets tended to display. The office itself was large and richly decorated. There were three shelves dedicated to awards and honors. Yet another shelf held leather-bound books that were now considered antiques.

“Welcome Spock,” the admiral said in his gruff, hearty voice. “We have much to discuss, Mr. Whiz Kid.”

The expression was lost on Spock, but Komack did not say anything.

“Lieutenant Commander Jackson has already told you about the project we wish to offer to you, Captain Pike actually specifically asked for you,” Komack said. “He was told great things about your capabilities by Professor Cleere. I believe her exact words were that your flair for research is like that of tarnum for a lady’s wrists. We did not argue with that because all of your professors have very favorable things to say about you.”

“I am deeply appreciative of the approval,” Spock said. “However, I am unclear on what this amounts to in terms of my graduation.”

“Good things only, Mister Spock,” the admiral replied. “We believe that instead of pursuing a dual undergraduate degree, it makes sense for one of your degrees to be notched up into a graduate one. That way you would earn a Bachelors degree in Intergalactic Service and a Masters in Xenoanthropology and Applied Research.”

Spock was left speechless for a moment. This scenario had not even crossed his mind. And before he was able to ask a question, the admiral started talking again.

“Also, you seem to know enough about command in terms of what is taught in the first three semesters,” he added. “It would be best for you to take the exams for those semesters within the next few weeks and prepare to take the rest of the semester off to accompany Captain Pike on his next mission. When you return, you will join the fourth semester class for practical training in combat, diplomacy, flight, strategy, and navigation. Technically you are an intern on the Enterprise and not his science officer. But the fact that Pike specifically wanted you says a lot. Of course, this is not a dangerous mission at all, so there was no reason to really worry about other things.”

Spock was able to keep his composure only because he was a Vulcan. Fortunately, Komack did not need him to say anything.

“I know it’s a lot, sleep on it for now, but take those exams soon so that we can formalize your
“changed status in the command track,” Komack said. “And don’t worry about the science track. By the end of today, you will show up as a graduate student on the academic portal.”

“I am most thankful, Admiral,” Spock managed to say, still a little shocked by the day’s rather unusual turn of events.

But he was not about to complain. Being considered worthy could only be a good thing. And while most other cadets were still figuring out where the various classrooms were, he had been offered a mission, a seemingly simple and uncomplicated mission, but a mission nonetheless.

There had to be more to it. Things weren’t quite adding up in Spock’s head and he intended to speak to Captain Pike about it at the first opportunity.

XXXXX

And the opportunity presented itself soon enough. The next day, Captain Pike directly contacted Spock on his comm. unit.

“Cadet Spock, Captain Pike here,” came the confident voice of the man. “How are you?”

“I am adequate, Captain,” Spock responded, not sure if he could be bold and simply ask when he could meet him. He didn’t have to wonder for long. Pike’s next sentence made everything a lot easier.

“I’d like to see you in my office, cadet,” he said. “In about three hours if you don’t have class at that time.”

“I do not,” Spock responded. “I shall be in your office in exactly three hours.”

XXXXX

Christopher Pike was one of the most decorated officers of the fleet. He was honest, tough, creative, and brave. And everyone who knew him, was aware that he always had a very good reason for his actions.

And while Spock was absolutely brilliant, that was not the reason why he had been offered this internship. Yes, the cover story was that they needed a good xenoarchaeologist for the mission to Fardour, but that was not the whole truth.

Unknown to many, Fardour was not an uninhabited world. It was an ancient planet that was home to an isolationist Vulcanoid species who called themselves the Farhanssu. And they were powerful telepaths. So great was their telepathic cloaking ability, that for centuries it had been thought that the only Vulcanoid species in the galaxy were the Vulcans and the Romulans. The presence of this civilization was a very astonishing discovery. There were exactly eight people in the entire fleet who knew this. Pike, his first officer Tabitha Owens, his communications officer Zoya Khan, and his science officer Amish Goldtein, Admiral Komack, Professor Jackson, Ambassador Sarek, and Admiral Marcus. And Spock would be the ninth.

Unknowingly, the Enterprise had made contact with the Farhanssu due to a telepathic malfunction in the planet’s shields. The reason for the anomaly had been revealed to them by none other than Hashmak, the wizened high priest of the planet, who had had no choice but to approach them for help using an antique subspace messaging technology with great difficulty. Apparently, Fardour’s core was emitting such strong radiation that it had destabilized the planet’s population physiologically, which in turn had affected their telepathy. To the dismay of the Enterprise’s crew, they had not been able to get close to the planet at all, and the element generating the radioactivity
was so far unidentified on the periodic table.

From everything that Pike had gathered, the planet’s sudden radioactivity was not natural. There was an external, possibly malevolent factor behind it. And they needed to get to the bottom of it. And considering the peculiarities of the planet, a Vulcanoid needed to be there for on-ground investigation. A Vulcanoid would also be helpful in identifying the nuances of the telepathic malfunction, as Hashmak had explained in his extremely messed up and broken standard, because Fardour was a pre-warp society by choice and did not engage in technology if they could help it.

That was also why they were unable to communicate properly with the federation or with their distant cousins, the Vulcans. And right now they were at risk, because they were uncomfortably close to the Romulan neutral zone. And without their telepathic cover, they were exposed and very vulnerable. Soon the Romulans would know of their existence. And they would savor the chance to plunder them. Unlike Vulcans, who would perhaps welcome them back to the visible plane of existence.

Unfortunately, Ambassador Sarek had refused to help, saying that the Farhanssu were little more than myth and legend on Vulcan. And that while as a federation ambassador he could have helped them, he was not in a position to do since he was on the high council now.

But that did not mean that the ambassador was out of ideas. He had suggested to Pike to approach his son, who was in Starfleet now. But on the condition that no one would ever know that Sarek had even spoken of Spock to anyone.

Pike did not know what the issue was between father and son. He would find out eventually. But for now, he was simply glad that a Vulcan had chosen to attend Starfleet finally. And that the said Vulcan was none other than the shrewd diplomat Sarek’s son.
Amanda did not know who she was more upset with, her husband or her son. Damned pigheaded Vulcans.

Spock had been gone for nearly three weeks now and he had not bothered to send his mother more than one subspace message. And this is what it had said- “Reached Earth. Hope you are well.”

Clearly, she had not managed to teach her son that this was honestly not the best way to let your mom know that you were okay.

And now he was off to his first mission. Mission. Barely two weeks into the academy. One would think that Starfleet was smarter than that, but no. Apparently the low number of recruits, the sheer amount of work, and the conspicuous lack of Vulcans had painted a bright little target on her son’s forehead.

But whose fault was that? Surprisingly, her husband Sarek’s, the very person who had refused to even look at Spock after that fiasco at the Vulcan Science Academy.

Amanda was livid. And Sarek was going to bear the brunt of it. She marched into his study like a disgruntled lioness.

“Sarek, what the hell were you thinking?” she asked without preamble. “Who in their right mind would send Spock for a mission to an obscure planet we didn’t even know about, up until like yesterday?”

In her anger, Amanda had forgotten to address her husband in the correct Vulcan way, but he did not correct her. He was too stunned to say anything.

“May I ask what the reason for your ire is, dear wife?” asked Sarek, trying to feign ignorance though he knew exactly what she was talking about. “I did not commission Spock for any diplomatic mission,” he added, trying to worm his way through this by a technicality.

Unfortunately for him, one could not do that with Amanda Greyson, one of the best communications officers and xenolinguists to have ever served in Starfleet. And she was a diplomat’s wife. She knew a slimy loophole when she saw one.

“Well, technically you didn’t,” she said, a little too sweetly. “But Captain Pike got that suggestion from you right in front of my eyes. And both of us know what a suggestion from you would mean, particularly since said suggestion is really just a permission. YOU ARE HIS FATHER. HOW COULD YOU?” Amanda roared, shaking with anger.

“Control your emotions, Amanda,” Sarek said sternly, seemingly unfazed by her fury. “The needs of the many outweigh those of the few. Fardour will not receive help from our planet. It is logical that
the only Vulcan in Starfleet should be made available for this task.”

“And it doesn’t bother you that he has been in the academy for just two weeks?” she asked incredulously.

“He is a brilliant young Vulcan,” Sarek said. “I protested his decision to join Starfleet for one reason alone. I care about his safety. I did not reveal this to him because I do not wish him to think that I see him as weak. After what happened to him all those years ago, it simply unsettles me that he shall be in such situations on hostile planets every now and then. But it is what he has chosen. I do not agree with him. But now that he has made that choice, it is logical for him to fulfill the duties that come with it. His mission to Fardour is just an instance of this. It is wholly unfortunate that he must do it without having had much training. But we cannot deny the fact that he is the best option available to the mission.”

Amanda understood what her husband was saying. And she was glad to know that he didn’t actually hate their son for having rejected the offer from the academy. But it also disturbed her that after all this time, Sarek had still not completely come to terms with what had happened to Spock on Zarmal.

She wanted to remain angry with him. But the pained lines around his eyes melted her heart. She went close to him and cupped his face in her hands. Normally, such a gesture would have been met with a very Vulcan reprimand from her husband. But today he seemed to sink into her touch, as if seeking comfort from it.

“I am unsure of what I have sent Spock to, but I have more faith in him that he thinks I do,” Sarek said. “I believe he will be successful in doing his duty towards our Farhanssu brethren. If after centuries of seclusion they have requested aid, there must be a valid cause for it.”

“You do know that it could be dangerous,” Amanda said softly, wondering if her husband had thought this through properly.

“I am aware,” he replied. “But I am a Vulcan ambassador, a citizen of the federation, and a member of the house of Surak. If duty dictates that this is my only option to accomplish the task, I cannot hesitate even in the face of peril to my own son.”

Amanda understood. She did not like it. But she understood.

“He will come out on top,” she said, patting Sarek’s head as if reassuring a child.

“Have you received communication from him yet,” he asked.

“Yes, I have,” she responded dryly. “In a most impressively Vulcan way. Six words and not one extra conjunction.”

Sarek did not reply. Obviously, the humor was lost on him. Just another day in the fascinating life of Amanda Greyson.

XXXXX

Spock was amazed and dismayed by the outcome of his meeting with Captain Pike. He was grateful and humbled to have been chosen for this mission. But he was also highly apprehensive.

This was not a routine exploratory mission at all. It was a classified, dangerous, investigative, and diplomatic mission. And it could even involve components of rescue and recovery if the planet’s surface was unstable and rapidly deteriorating.
But he felt thoroughly unprepared. Sure, he was willing to apply all of his training and education to the scientific investigation required by the situation. But he had a strange hunch that there was going to be a lot more to this.

Also, he had no idea what the language of the Farhanssu was like. Just the fact that they called themselves ‘Farhanssu’ told him that it was definitely still close to Vulcan. But he was not about to assume much more.

He knew languages could be deceptive. For instance, a medieval South Asian language called Urdu had many words and grammar rules in common with the ancient Indian language, Sanskrit. But both languages were actually very dissimilar. Urdu was much closer to Semitic languages and Sanskrit was the mother of an entire class of tongues collectively known as the Indo-European languages. For all he knew, Fardour’s tongue could be vastly different from Vulcan, thanks to these common peculiarities that languages often tended to display.

He would enjoy the challenge of programming the new language into the universal language database. But he was worried about the time factor. Everything would have to go as fast as it possibly could. An irradiated planet could mean any number of things and all of them grave.

This also meant that he did not have weeks to take all the exams for the undergraduate level courses in the science track. He needed to complete everything within the next few days.

He could do it. And he would also take the command exams for the first three semesters. He needed to find confidence in his abilities if he wanted to be successful in this mission. And on such a short notice, these aptitude tests and exams were his best way of assessing his preparedness.

“Did you hear that, Doc?” Damien asked Hamid belligerently. “The Vulcan bitch has gotten a fucking leap in his career. Any idea who he slept with?”

Hamid was sick and tired of the bratty command track student.

“Can you stop?” Hamid asked, irritated beyond his limits.

“Stop what, Sheikh?” Damien yelled. “Oh wait, I know. He’s blowing you too, isn’t it? I know your culture. You guys would hump anything; camels, little boys, ass-licking Vulcans?”

This was too much. Hamid let out an angry shout and before the younger boy could react, he punched him in the face.

“I will kill you if you say another word,” he said dangerously, pinning Damien to the edge of the wall. “I will fucking kill you. Not.Another.Word.”

Something dark flitted across the young cadet’s eyes. The doctor shook his head to clear it, and as he jerked back as if he’d been burned by his contact with the boy.

“IT is okay, Doctor,” Damien said smoothly, getting up from the floor. “You feel for the Vulcan. And that’s fine. I’m no homophobe. You can fuck him till he screams with pleasure. But he is a Vulcan. An uptight, holier-than-though, arrogant Vulcan. And he will show his true colors to us soon enough. And you will cry, doctor. He will make you cry like the little wimp you are.”

Hamid was extremely distressed by Damien’s increasing boldness in his xenophobic attitude towards Spock. But he was painfully coming to the realization that the younger man did not like him any
better. Clearly, Arab and Muslim was just a little better than Vulcan, but not enough to matter.

Thankfully Spock wasn’t home yet. Hamid did not want to think how he would have felt on hearing the highly offensive remarks that Damien had just made about his character.

XXXXX

Captain Pike was relieved after meeting Spock. The young Vulcan was self-assured, cool, logical (duh!), and determined. He was unpretentious, and that was perhaps the best thing about him in his opinion.

“He could be a permanent fixture on the Enterprise,” he mused. But then he had to remind himself that Spock was only a cadet, and just two weeks old at that.

Well, that would get fixed soon enough. He would take all his exams for the science track before leaving. And that would certainly qualify him for a legitimate position in the science department of the ship.

But Pike saw more than that in the Vulcan. He was certainly not like the other students in the command track. However, he was invaluable even there. His calm, calculative rationality would be an asset to any ship, even tactically.

The young captain was apprehensive about the mission to Fardour, but he was excited about working with Spock. He wanted to see how much of a diplomat Sarek’s son was. It wasn’t common knowledge, but Spock’s own history was rather interesting when it came to diplomacy. Surely, his dramatic abduction, captivity, and rescue had taught him something.

They called it baptism by fire, here on Earth. And while Fardour’s mission was going to be another one of those for Spock, something told Pike that there would be fewer surprises in it for him than for the rest of the ship’s crew.

It was a bit of a gamble to include such a young, non-human cadet into a precarious expedition like this one. But there was no other alternative.

There were a lot of strange things out there in the galaxy. And Pike’s adventurous style of exploration had shown him most of those. Spock was an enigma, alright. But he could not be any stranger than some of the other beings Pike had come into contact with.
Chapter Summary

So sorry for the late update guys, but I was pretty sad yesterday. I had to leave my choir and I am just not in a good headspace. Sorry. Also, it was Leonard Nimoy's birthday the day before. I wrote a little piece on my blog. Here it is if you wish to read it:


There is also a video featuring Nimoy's cover of 'I walk the line' and a bunch of his rare photographs if you wish to watch it:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Py1bhTi665I

Please leave a review and let me know what you think

Spock was required to take a total of 33 theory and practical assessments in order to be cleared for the mission; 24 for the entire four years of the science track and another nine for the first three semesters of the command track.

Ideally, he should have had at least a month to take all the tests. But he set a punishing schedule for himself, and despite Admiral Komack’s reassurances that he could have at least 15 days, Spock decided to try and finish all the exams within four days, less if he could help it.

Thankfully, he was not required to attend classes anymore. And while teachers like Patricia Cleere were sorry to see him go, they were happy for his exciting career jump.

The first exams that Spock took were a piece of cake. On the first day of his exam schedule, he breezed through Research Methodology, Coding Languages, Advanced Nanobot Programming, Nuclear Chemistry, Xenoarchaeology, Statistics and Probability, Fluid Mechanics, Propulsion Science, Basic Astrophysics, Advanced Astrophysics, Advanced Gravity, and Magnetic Methods. His expertise in science was astounding. He was a natural.

Admiral Komack and Captain Pike oversaw some of the exams he took and they could not have been more pleased with the result.

However, everything had been going smoothly. Too smoothly, actually.

And the Vulcan’s first challenge came in his exam for Cryogenics.

XXXXX

It was way too cold for Spock in the Cryogenics testing chamber. And even though he was wearing protective gear and gloves, he was cold.

His exam was in two parts. The first would deal with Cryobiology and conservation of animal genetic material at extremely low temperatures. The second part would be Cryoelectronics pertaining to superconductivity at very low temperatures.
For his first part, he had been put in this lab to simulate a frozen planet. And while he knew that he’d be required to conduct research on such cold surfaces, he was not looking forward to it.

He began extracting the frozen animal tissue from under the surface of the frozen lab floor. It was not an easy task. His bulky gloves were not suited to such delicate work. And while he was sorely tempted to keep them on, he knew he could not if he wanted to complete his task properly.

So he removed them gingerly and put them in a small compartment built into his protective suit. His hands immediately spasmed with the shock of being exposed to such cold. He clamped down on it and continued to focus on his work.

It took him several minutes to extract the stubborn tissue from under the artificial permafrost, but after some very careful scraping, he was able to get most of the tissue out in an intact condition.

Next, he placed it in a small specimen bag containing cryogenic liquid. He was glad to have completed the first phase of the test. The next phase was going to be a lot trickier.

He had been given a number of unidentified metals and he needed to plot their resistance in this environment while also manipulating them cryogenically. It was complex work because most metals worked as superconductors at higher temperatures.

And a number of tests needed to be conducted on each of the five metals to determine their potential for cryogenic superconductivity. To be sure, he was to repeat each test thrice and take an average of the readings.

It was not easy to work without protective gloves. But the gloves themselves were bulky and cumbersome. Spock vowed to himself that he would design protective gear for delicate work like this. It was odd that Starfleet hadn’t already done so.

By the time Spock finished all the tests, his hands were stiff and numb.

“This is really good, Cadet Spock,” said the professor after seeing Spock’s work. “Do you have much experience with metallurgy?”

“No, Professor,” Spock replied. “I am not experienced with metal analysis, but I was trained in experimental research while on my home planet.”

“How old are you?” the professor asked in awe.

“Twenty-two years, eight months, sixteen days, thirteen hours, twelve minutes, and seventeen seconds.”

The scientist looked at him for a long moment and then burst into laughter.

“You are hilarious, Cadet,” he said.

Spock did not understand what was so funny. And he did not ask because something told him this was another human peculiarity; they found him funny because they thought he sounded like an android. He knew why they felt so, but he did not know what was so humorous about it. People did not routinely laugh at androids. Why they laughed at him then, was a mystery to him.

And he was exhausted. He had taken twelve out of his required 33 exams today. And most have them had been heavy-duty because of the attached practical components and the rigorous mathematical requirements. But he still believed that he could take an additional two tests. However, they would not allow him to do so.
As expected, Captain Pike was waiting outside for him when he was finally allowed to leave after returning his gear and submitting his official report and log entry for the Cryogenics work.

“You must be dead on your feet, young man,” Pike said, noticing the barely visible lines of fatigue around Spock’s eyes.

“Negative Captain,” he replied. “I am functional. And I would have preferred to take two more exams today.”

Pike regarded him closely. He liked the Vulcan’s dedication and work ethic but he also wanted the kid to understand that an officer needed his rest and could not afford to burn out due to overwork just because he could.

“Spock, you do know that we have eight-hour shifts on a starship?” he asked, almost rhetorically, though that was lost on Spock.

“Of course, Captain,” Spock said, not quite sure where this was going.

“And you’ve done sixteen hours of assessments and tests today? Did you take a break to eat or drink or to even use the restroom?” he asked.

“Negative, Sir,” Spock said. “As a Vulcan, I do not need frequent periods of rest in order to acquire nourishment and hydration, or to attend to personal needs.”

This presented a rather unique problem to Pike; an officer willing to overwork himself. It wasn’t something that happened too often. And if Pike could help it, it wouldn’t start happening now.

“Well, Spock,” he began gently. “In an academic environment, you could totally pull more than the required hours. But as an officer, you will have to lead by example. And that means that you would have to take breaks, honor routine, and engage in recreation. Your crew is not going to be Vulcan. For their sake, if not your own, you will need to do some of these things.”

That seemed highly illogical to Spock.

“Captain, with due respect, I do not understand,” he said. “I would not expect my crew to adhere to the same schedule as myself.”

“But they would always strive to match up to your standards, Spock,” Pike replied, afraid that he was not making sense to the highly logical Vulcan.

On the other hand, Spock was perplexed. “It is irrational to lower my efficacy simply because my human crewmates function at different efficiency levels.”

“Look, Spock, I don’t expect you to understand just yet,” Pike said, resigned to the fact that these were things one sometimes learned on the job. “It is okay. Just go home for now and get some rest. Eat something. And that’s an order,” he added, half-jokingly.

Spock did not know how to respond. “Farewell, Captain. I shall see you tomorrow,” he said and started walking towards the locker room.

XXXXX

Spock wanted a shower after the long day he’d had. And while the student apartment had a sonic shower, it did not work very well always. Usually, Spock simply took a water shower, but right now he was cold and he really did not want to feel water on his skin.
So he stripped and carefully folded his uniform before entering one of the stalls. He had no choice but to take his boxers off since he did not have another pair here.

It did not take him long to shower. But just as he was about to get out of the stall, he heard voices of other people.

They were probably cadets, and they all seemed to know each other since the conversation sounded easy and was punctuated by laughter. Spock did not wish to come out of the stall in front of all these men.

He knew it was normal for human men to be in a state of nudity around each other, particularly in locker rooms of gymnasiums, but he was Vulcan and he just wasn’t comfortable with looking at a nude person or being nude himself in front of anyone.

For a few seconds, he stayed inside his stall. But when he realized that the other boys were not about to leave anytime soon, he decided to get out and dress as quietly as he could. Maybe he could keep their attention off himself.

Carefully, he wrapped a towel around his torso, making sure that he was covered from collarbone to knees before coming out.

The minute he stepped out, though, his desire to not be noticed went into the drain. One of the boys saw him and let out a bark of amusement.

Spock did not know what was the reason for this.

He wondered if he should confront the boy or ignore him entirely.

He didn’t have to make the decision. Within moments, the other boys were also staring at him, some of them clearly entertained.

Spock wasn’t sure why, but he felt thoroughly exposed and vulnerable…. even humiliated.

Subconsciously he counted that there were eight of them.

“You’re the Vulcan whiz-kid, aren’t you?” One of the boys asked, a spark of mischief in his eyes.

“I am the Vulcan cadet, if that is what you are asking,” Spock replied calmly.

“Man, he don’t get it,” another boy guffawed, clearly enjoying this.

“We are your seniors, Vulcan,” the first boy said. “And you should have known that this is our locker room. We don’t allow newbies like you to come here. And now you must pay for using that sonic shower.”

Spock did not understand. “I am unclear. This is a Starfleet facility meant for the use of cadets. I have been assigned a locker in this locker room. I was not made aware that it belonged to you.”

More laughter from the boys greeted Spock’s answer.

“You have so much to learn, Pointy,” the first boy said. “And I must say that towel looks so pretty around you like that. So do you have boobs that you are hiding under there?”

The other boys tittered at that, making obscene gestures with their hands, though Spock did not understand them.
“I am a male of my species,” he replied. “As a result of which, I do not possess mammilated breasts.”

“Do not possess what breasts?” someone yelled.

“He is a fucking textbook,” another voice called out.

“We will decide that, Vulcan,” the leader of the group said. “And you will show us. Take that towel off.”

Spock was horrified at the request. For a moment he wondered if he’d heard correctly.

“No. I cannot comply with that request,” he said sternly.

“Oh but you will,” the other boy said nonchalantly. “You see, no newbie uses this locker room without our permission, even if he has an assigned locker here. And you will be the example that must be made for the others. This will be painless. Just remove that towel.”

Spock was not about to do that. He really did not want to fight, but he did not want to remove his towel at any cost. And he could nerve pinch these boys if it came to that. Though eight against one were pretty bad odds even if the one happened to be a Vulcan with superior strength and endurance.

“I cannot,” Spock said again. “And you will let me pass if you wish to avoid an altercation.”

“And what if we don’t,” the other boy said with a cold, cruel look in his eyes. “Let us see his tits, boys,” he called out to the rest of the group.

Within seconds, a fight broke out, and Spock was pinned to the ground. He struggled against the eight boys mightily. He did not wish to injure anyone grievously. But he was not going to be subjected to this. He managed to send two of his assailants to the floor by using the nerve pinch through the barest contact with their necks.

In the next few minutes, he was punched in his stomach multiple times and he could feel a heavy weight pressing on his back as if someone was sitting on it. With the desperation of a cornered animal, Spock raised himself and threw the person off. He let out an angry shout and nerve pinched the boy coming at him from the side.

It was a very strange sight. Spock was completely naked. His now torn towel was lying a few feet away and he had managed to render three of his attackers unconscious.

“You will not touch me,” he said in a low, dangerous voice to the other five, who were clearly spooked by the crazed Vulcan.

For a minute, nobody said anything.

“What did you do to them, you mad bastard?” the leader asked. “What if you’ve killed them?”

Spock knew he had not harmed them. “They are unconscious, and they will awaken in approximately 3.2 hours.”

“You may have won today, asshole, but you will regret this,” the other boy said, clearly determined to carry out his threat and punish Spock for this humiliating incident.

Spock did not respond.

He walked towards his locker and retrieved his clothes. It was unfortunate that they had seen him nude, and while he wanted to literally run from here, he needed to wear his clothes.
“You will leave,” he said, not bothering to even raise his voice.

The boys did not argue. They lifted their unconscious friends and left, but not before glaring at him murderously. One of them even found the courage to taunt him. “You are pathetic, Vulcan, judging by those ugly ass scars carved all over you. Don’t think we won’t do the same to you. Count your days, motherfucker.”

Spock held himself rigidly as he watched them leave.

Only after he heard their footsteps fading into the distance, did he dress himself. His hands shook as the adrenaline started wearing off.

But the physical effects of what had just happened could not even begin to compare with the turmoil he was grappling with in his mind.

He had come to earth to find a place for himself. He was dejected to know that it was going to be harder here perhaps than it was on Vulcan after all.

On Vulcan, he knew why he was hated. He was completely confused about why humans had a problem with him when they welcomed other beings quite openly.

Or was it all a farce? Did beings of all races face such abuse? Was xenophobia a norm in the galaxy then? Spock did not know the answer. But he wasn’t particularly pleased with the possible answers either.

His only comfort was that soon he would complete all the exams and then he would be off to a mission, where these petty things would cease to matter.
This is a relatively short chapter, guys. But I did not want to add to it and make it jarring.

Please leave a review and let me know what you think. I live for your feedback.

Spock walked back to the apartment in a daze. He hardly noticed what was happening around him on the street. Mercifully, he did not bump into anyone, but several people barely managed to avoid walking right into him.

“Watch where you’re going, Mister”
“Are you fucking blind?”
“Are you alright, son?”

He stumbled on his feet when someone pushed him aside roughly. The person was probably in a hurry and did not care who he knocked over in his haste.

Spock did not register anything. His mind was still reeling under the effects of what had happened in the locker room.

And that was why he was quite surprised to find himself outside his apartment a few minutes later. He was disturbed that his concentration had been so shaken by this experience.

He was also a little angry with himself for having naively thought that he’d be free of bullying and bigotry on earth.

It was late, and he could not stand on the sidewalk all night. Without much further deliberation, he entered in.

Unsurprisingly, he was greeted by Damien’s scowling visage.

“Congrats asshole,” he said just as Spock closed the door behind him. “Heard the big news. Sounds like all that slutting around did get you somewhere. Maybe you should offer fucking tips to everyone. It would up your popularity with the class. Cause everyone hates your guts right now.”

Spock did not respond. He was really not ready to deal with this.

“What? are you too good for us, old humans, eh?” Damien asked, clearly trying to bait Spock.

But the Vulcan knew how to control his emotions. Gone were the days when insults and words could rouse his temper.

Still refusing to speak, he walked straight to the room he shared with Hamid, without sparring even a glance at Damien.

“Yeah, go suck the doc’s dick,” the man yelled from the living room. “I bet it is good practice for all the shit you did to leap ahead of everyone else.”
“I’m sorry you had to listen to all that, Spock,” Hamid said, feeling sick that even getting punched in
the face had done nothing to shut Damien’s foul mouth.

Spock let out an inaudible sigh.

“Please do not apologize,” he replied. “It is not your fault that Mr. Harper treats me the way he
does.”

“You’re right,” the older man replied. “It is not my fault. But it makes me feel shameful that I am
unable to do anything to get him to shut up.”

Spock looked at him; really looked at him with his sharp eyes completely focused on the Arab’s face.

“I wish to comprehend something, that I am unable to explain logically,” Spock said. “It would be
helpful if you could explain to me why hostile humans choose to insult me with words that are
sexually explicit. And why do they imply that I am either a female, or that I am engaging in intimacy
with my superiors and acquaintances?

Hamid looked a little shocked. He did not know how to answer that question. And while Spock’s
query made sense, because clearly the Vulcan was not used to the very human tendency to curse, he
did not remember when Damien had implied that Spock was a girl.

“Did something happen, Spock?” he asked.

“I just require an answer, Mr. Sheikh,” Spock said. “A few other people said something along the
lines of comparing me to a female today. Is it common for humans to sexualize each other in this
manner?”

He did not elaborate upon the fact that he had been beaten, and that he had lost his control and
harmed the humans, even if not very seriously.

“Unfortunately, it is,” the doctor responded. “And while most cuss words are sexual in nature, they
are usually just meaningless expressions. And some humans like to pretend that others are better than
themselves only because they are sleeping around with people to gain favor. They can't believe that it
is possible for others to be genuinely more talented or smarter. No, they’d much rather think that
everyone else is doing better because they are doing something questionable. And I am not sure how
to answer the rest of your question, but I think you are insulted with these gendered remarks because
you have rather delicate facial features for a man.”

Spock started to say something.

“Wait, Spock, I am not saying you look like a girl,” Hamid said. “All I’m saying is that your bone
structure lends softness to your face, and most human men hold these weird notions of masculinity.
And according to those messed-up ideas, “real men” don’t have such “pretty” features.”

Spock looked at the doctor with a clear look of confusion in his eyes, even though the rest of his face
remained blank.

“Fascinating,” Spock said. This was clearly something he had not anticipated at all.

“Have you eaten anything today?” Hamid asked, partly to change the topic, and partly because a
hunch told him that Spock’s day had been very hectic. “You left pretty early this morning,” he added,
wondering if Spock's crazy routine had anything to do with his desire to avoid Damien's bullshit.
“Negative,” I did not find the time to take a meal,” Spock said. “But I will do so tomorrow. I do not desire to go out and engage in a confrontation with Mr. Harper. I wish to conserve my energy for the tests that await me tomorrow.”

Hamid ached for Spock. Stupid Damien; why was he such a douchebag. The Vulcan was obviously tired. And whether or not he admitted it, he needed to eat. And he could not go to the kitchenette without having another argument with the racist idiot outside.

I have some food in my closet which I think you will like,” Hamid offered. “It is vegan. Have you ever had hummus with pita?”

Spock had not. His experience with terran food was pretty limited. He only knew about dishes that his mother had sometimes cooked, but those occasions had been rare.

“I have not tried hummus, but if it is a vegan food item, I am willing to taste it,” Spock said. He was hungry and not only for food. Just the fact that he was being offered something as normal as an invitation to share food was a big deal for him.

“You will do more than just taste it, Spock,” Hamid said jovially. “It is the BEST thing to eat for breakfast, lunch, AND dinner.”

"Your opinion could be biased, Dr. Sheikh," Spock said, with a measure of amusement in his voice. "Your taste buds will get bored of this food like it happens with everything in human culture. Aren't all things transient according to dominant terran philosophy?"

Hamid looked at Spock with a very comical expression of awe mixed with hilarity. "You did not just make a joke?"

"I did, Hamid," Spock replied. "But I do not seem to have an affinity for humor. Perhaps it can be an intellectual pursuit to engage in. Or perhaps it is not meant for the Vulcan mind."

"Only you can make a conversation about jokes sound so intelligent," Hamid said, still wearing his weirded out expression. "Let's eat."

A few minutes later, both men were digging into a simple but special meal of homemade hummus from Hamid’s home in Damascus, and store-bought pita bread from the academy’s convenience store.

“This is exquisite,” Spock remarked, at the nutty, creamy texture of slightly tart hummus. “Is this a common terran delicacy?” he asked Hamid.

“Nope,” he replied. “You can buy it in cartons from the groceries and you can program a recipe for it in the replicator, but the real deal still comes from the Middle-East, the part of the world I’m from.”

Spock continued to eat and it gave a lot of satisfaction to Hamid to simply watch the Vulcan taking a meal without the stress and negativity that was often thrown at him in the living room.

And as he observed, the older man noticed that Spock’s fingers seemed a little stiff and that his knuckles were slightly inflamed. He did not want to interrupt him in the middle of dinner so he waited for him to finish.

A few minutes later, Spock set his cutlery down.

“I am grateful to you for sharing your food with me,” Spock said sincerely. And even though his expression did not say much, his eyes conveyed his gratitude to Hamid in excruciating detail.
“Friends do not thank each other, Spock,” he replied. “And wouldn’t you have shared your food with me if I was hungry?”

For once Spock recognized that the question was a rhetorical one. And of course, he would share food with anyone who was hungry. But it was striking to him that the good doctor had called him a friend. Such a small word; six letters that packed such a wealth of loyalty and warmth... and made all the difference between being unwanted and being cherished.

There was no such thing as friendship on Vulcan. But there were bonds that came close to the emotion of friendship. Spock shared one with his old therapist, Sobik. This human relationship was new to him.

“I do not know how to be a friend,” Spock said to Hamid, in a voice barely above a whisper.

Hamid only smiled.

“You know how to be a friend, Spock,” he replied. “Even if in your strange Vulcan way. And now let me take a look at your hands. I know you are in pain.”

Spock was surprised at the doctor’s astute observation. A part of him wanted to deny Hamid’s aid. But a greater part of him was wonderstruck by the kindness and acceptance he was being shown by the man.

“I will not ask you anything if you don’t wish to tell me,” the older man said. “But at least let me treat the stiffness and the inflammation. It will also be better for all the exams you have to take tomorrow.”

Spock could see the logic in that.

“I agree with your reasoning, doctor,” he said evenly. “And I am thankful to you for offering me your medical expertise.”

“Good boy,” Hamid said. “Now I need you to lie down on your side so that you can rest while I work on your hands.”

Spock did as he was told. The doctor took his right hand and started to rub the softer parts of his palm. Spock let out an involuntary hiss.

“I’m sorry, Spock,” Hamid said. “I promise it will stop hurting in a few minutes.”

“Do not pay attention to any sounds of discomfort I make, doctor,” Spock said in a slightly strained voice. “However, I shall try and keep quiet.”

For the next half an hour, Hamid gently massaged Spock’s hands, while the Vulcan reclined on the bed with his eyes closed. His long lashes cast a soft shadow on his cheekbones, and that made him look very much like a child. Hamid knew that Vulcan hands were extremely sensitive and were considered a major erogenous zone. He tried to keep his ministrations completely professional. He applied an anti-inflammatory cream to the joints and massaged the stiffness out even as they stubbornly refused to relax.

Slowly, the pain in his hands decreased and without realizing it, Spock drifted into sleep.

Hamid couldn’t help smiling at the peaceful look on the Vulcan’s sleeping face. After massaging his fingers for a few more minutes, he placed his patient’s hands on a raised cushion beside his sleeping form. Like a loving parent, he covered Spock with a warm blanket, feeling a powerful surge of
protection for the younger man.

“Goodnight, Spock,” he said softly. “Hopefully, tomorrow will be a better day.”
The next morning Spock woke up a little later than usual. His heart sank because now he would inevitably have to see Damien when he went outside. It wasn’t that he was scared of the boy, but his tendency to be offensive was not something Spock wanted to put up with.

The bed opposite to his was also empty. Which meant that Hamid was up. And sure enough, Spock could hear the sound of the water running in the bathroom.

A few minutes later, the doctor came out, his hair dripping wet and with a towel around his waist.

“Good Morning, Spock,” he greeted the Vulcan cheerily. “I’m sorry if I took kinda long in the bathroom. You can go right ahead.”

“Good Morning, Hamid,” Spock replied. “What time are you expected in class?”

Hamid thought for a second before answering. “In about two hours, like at 9:00 am,” he said. “We could grab a bite in the academy’s cafeteria before my class if you’re up for it. I’ve heard the replicators there are super sophisticated and have a much larger menu to choose from.”

The menu wasn’t the reason why Spock agreed, though. He wanted to be out of the house quickly. And the doctor needed his breakfast even if Spock did not.

“That is acceptable,” he replied. “I shall be dressed in a few minutes.”

Ten minutes later, the two friends left their room. The idea was to avoid Damien if possible. Thankfully, he was still asleep.

The day outside was absolutely beautiful. Hamid’s face broke into a large smile at the sound of the birds chirping from the Honeysuckle shrubs.

“Do you ever paint, Spock?” he asked his companion. “Or take photographs?”

“I have studied the art of painting, doctor,” Spock replied. “But I see no logic in taking photographs unless it is for the purposes of keeping records of scientific observations.”

Hamid sighed.

“I’ll just ignore that,” he said. “Do you want to spend the weekend painting. The fall is a beautiful season. And I have never been able to capture all the colors in one picture.”

Spock had to admit that it seemed like a good idea. But the weekend was only two days away. And in all likelihood, he would spend it preparing for the mission to Fardour, for which he was scheduled to depart on Monday.

“I would like that very much,” he said. “However, whether or not I engage in the activity, will depend upon the instructions I receive from Captain Pike for the preparations I must make prior to the mission.”

“I understand, Spock,” the doctor said. “But if you’re free, we will paint.”

The two continued walking in silence after that. Spock marveled at his friend’s ability to find wonder and excitement in the littlest of things. And the infectious smile of the doctor caused his lips to stretch into a smile as well. It was indeed a heartwarming sight to see little animals at work; birds, bees,
squirrels…. But, Spock had still not seen a dog.

And that was a problem; because his mother was still waiting for him to tell her if the puppy dogs she had embroidered on his pajamas were accurate in his opinion.

XXXXX

The bonhomie vanished as soon as they reached the cafeteria. The minute they entered, everyone stopped talking. The room fell so silent that one could hear a pin drop.

Several minutes passed and nobody said a word. The silence was uncomfortable at best, and downright oppressive at worst.

“What? Do we have red noses or something?” Hamid yelled, not even caring that it was a lame thing to say.

“It is you..... It is you in the picture,” a petite girl with dark brown hair said, pointing at Spock. Her voice was high-pitched with excitement and tension. But she was not making much sense so far. “Is it true that you were caught fucking in the locker room?” she asked, looking intently at Spock.

And then it hit him.

There. On the PADD lying on the table nearest to him. The screen showed a horrid image of Spock lying on his stomach, on the floor of the locker room with someone sitting atop him. He was nauseated at what the picture implied. If one did not know better, it would be easy to imagine that he was being penetrated by another male. He remembered the moment. It was just before he had nerve pinched the person who was sitting on his back. But he did not remember anyone taking a picture.

“I…. Spock did not know what to say. “I was not engaging in sexual congress with anyone.”

“But it is you,” another voice yelled. “No one else in the academy has pointed ears. And this is your face.”

Spock did not respond.

He simply turned around and started walking in the other direction. He could not be in the cafeteria. Mercifully, the angle of the image was such that his scarred back was not visible. But like they said, his face could be seen clearly. And his unique ears left no room for doubt. Spock was numb.

“Breathe, Spock,” he heard Hamid’s faraway voice say to him. But everything seemed scattered and strange, as if he was not here and this had not happened.

XXXXX

Hamid could not believe his eyes.

So this was why Spock had been so shaken last night.

He wasn’t sure. He didn’t think his friend had been raped. But the other alternative was that he was actually having sex with someone.

Spock hadn’t seemed the type. But looks could be deceptive. Still, it was his duty as a friend to make sure that the younger man was okay. Irrespective of the story behind the picture, he was sure that Spock was distressed by the fact that the image had been circulated among all the cadets.

“Breathe, Spock,” he said to the Vulcan, who was on his knees now. Hamid did not want anyone to
see Spock in this condition in the hallway. But he did not know what he could do to help.

“It is just a picture, Spock,” he said, cursing himself for saying something so stupidly insensitive. “It doesn’t matter. They will forget about it by tomorrow when a new scandal catches their eye.”

Spock’s own eyes were tightly shut.

For a few minutes, nothing happened.

And then Spock opened his eyes and slowly stood up. He turned to Hamid.

“I have never known carnal knowledge,” he began. “That image was of the physical altercation that I had with eight senior cadets in the locker room last night. It is degrading to me that the image has been used to spread such humiliating misinformation about me. It may not be a matter of importance among humans, but Vulcans are a private people. And we do not engage in sexual relations with anyone else but our bondmate. My bondmate is on my homeworld. She and my family’s name have been sullied by the implications of that image.”

There was a quiet desperation in his voice that was pleading with the human to understand.

“This is the 23rd century Spock,” Hamid said in earnest. “No one cares about these things except for as a juicy little bit of gossip.”

That was true. On Earth. For Vulcans, it was unthinkable to even touch someone else sexually if they were not bonded to them.

“I do not wish for my parents and my bondmate to know of this,” Spock said in a rough voice, though he knew that there was always a chance of that happening.

“Well, I can’t say much to comfort you, Spock,” Hamid responded. “But most probably, this will die its own death like all scandals and rumors do. You should eat something before you report for your next set of exams.”

Spock was not hungry. He just wanted to get to the labs and start working. It would help in taking his mind off this whole mess.

“I must decline, Hamid,” he said. “I am already behind schedule. I shall take a meal later in the day.”

With that, he took leave of the doctor. And Hamid knew that there would be no food for Spock that day as well.

Why did things have to be such a mess, he mused. But there were no answers. Only questions. And so, he started walking to his own classes, his worry for Spock increasing with every passing minute.

XXXXX

Today, Spock’s schedule was evenly divided between theoretical subjects and practical subjects.

He wrote seven exams in the first half of the day, Applied Xenoanthropology, Intergalactic Civilizations, Advanced Xenolinguistics, Thermodynamics, Advanced Mathematics, Applied Genetics, and Weapon Systems.

Throughout the process of testing, Spock found himself making mistakes; grammar, spelling, syntax, even fact errors. The scene in the cafeteria kept playing in his mind. The girl's voice kept cutting through his concentration, forcing him to see, again and again, the degrading image of himself that
almost all the cadets in the academy must have seen by now.

Spock was extremely angry with himself. It was bad enough that he had lost his temper yesterday. It was mortifying that his privacy had being torn to pieces by the offending picture. But it was nerve-wracking that he was experiencing this maelstrom of emotions that were threatening to throw his control into a black hole. He desperately needed to meditate. It had been a mistake to not do so yesterday. He would not repeat the same error today.

Bit by bit, he regained control of himself. He breathed in and out several times, focusing on the elements of the periodic table. It was an odd thing to focus on. But the certainty that the elements' steady, unchangeable atomic configurations gave him, was soothing to his mind.

After finishing the first part, he was given a short break. He remembered that he had promised Hamid that he would eat something. He wondered if it would be safe to go to the cafeteria now. He wasn’t particularly hungry, but he also did not want Hamid to worry unnecessarily. From his experiences with his mother, he knew that humans had a tendency to stay worried even after being reassured, particularly if said reassurance did not agree with their point of view.

Thankfully, the cafeteria was mostly empty. Everyone was in their classes and the few students who were there, had the decency to not stare at him. Quietly he made his way to the replicator and got himself a bowl of carrot soup. He found a solitary table situated right at the back of the room. To further keep people’s attention away from himself, he sat with his back towards them. It was probably rude, and even a little cowardly. But Spock had no time for figuring out the finer nuances of human behavior and the appropriate response he should have in various situations.

After finishing his bland meal, he quickly returned his utensils to the recycler and walked right past the same girl who had boldly asked him in the morning if he was the person in the picture.

Spock did not realize it consciously, but he was proud of himself for having reigned in his stormy emotions. As long as he could do that, he would be fine. A part of him was even surprised that he had reacted so strongly earlier. It was just a picture, and one with untrue implications. He would still very much prefer for the picture to never reach his parents or T’Pring, but even if it did, he had no reason to fear.

It was illogical to be afraid of falsehoods.

In the second half of the day, he took practical exams in Radioactive Chemistry, Astrophotography, Intergalactic Mapping Technology, and Warp Mechanics.

He enjoyed taking these exams and in the rhythm of the testing, he was able to relax completely and find his center all over again. For some people, the pace of the tests might have been too grueling, but not for Spock, whose first love was science.

He had been exempted from taking exams in Federation History, History of the Milky Way, and History of Andromeda because he had already completed those courses on Vulcan at the Shi’kahr Seminary. And that was a welcome surprise, because now he only needed to take six more exams tomorrow for his command track coursework.

He wasn’t particularly apprehensive about the exams for any of those subjects, except for the ones in Strategy, and basic Hand-to-Hand Combat. He was reasonably sure of his Suus Mahna training, but he had almost never had to engage in a fisticuff unless he counted what had happened last night. And fighting a le-matya was very different from fighting human beings in a controlled situation.

The other thing was that he had been trained by his father, a Vulcan. Human beings were a lot more
fragile than Vulcans, and Spock’s strength was formidable. So much so that he was more worried about grievously injuring his opponent tomorrow, than he was of not clearing the exam.

But then again, there wasn’t much he could do about it. He would just have to take the test and try his best to assess the exact amount of force needed to clear the exam without causing serious harm to his examiner.

XXXXX

Hamid finished class at 5 pm like all the other freshmen. He was tired after the day’s rigorous schedule, but he wanted to wait for Spock. He knew that the Vulcan would not be done till almost 8:30 pm. And while he longed to go home and take a hot shower, he did not want to leave Spock alone, not after what had happened last night.

He sat in the waiting area and worked on his homework, while Spock completed his exams inside. He hoped Spock would pass everything with flying colors. The Vulcan was brilliant, everyone knew that. If only they could respect him for it, instead of being so jealous and petty.

A few hours had passed by the time Spock came out of the Examination building. Captain Pike was with him.

“Dr. Sheikh,” Spock exclaimed, on seeing his roommate waiting for him. “I did not expect to see you here.”

Hamid felt a little intimidated. Not so much by Spock, but by Captain Pike, who seemed to exude confidence and strength and all kinds of officer-like qualities.

“Captain Pike, I introduce you to my flatmate, Dr. Hamid Sheikh, from the Medical Corps.” Spock said to the senior officer. “And Dr. Sheikh, this is Captain Pike, my commanding officer on the upcoming mission.”

“Nice to meet you, Dr. Sheikh,” Pike said, extending his hand towards Hamid. He shook it limply, feeling very nervous. He did not say anything. He had never met the legendary Captain Pike before, but like everyone else, he had heard stories about the man’s valor and all the awards he had been honored with for his successful completion of some of toughest missions in recent history. If anything, the man enjoyed a status similar to that of Captain George Kirk, the officer who had sacrificed his own life and saved the 800 people who had been aboard the USS Kelvin 17 years ago.

“I must leave you here, Spock,” Pike said, breaking into Hamid’s train of thoughts. “And it was good to meet you, Doctor. I hope I shall see you again sometime soon.”

He walked away briskly, without waiting for Hamid’s response.

“Let us walk to the apartment, doctor,” Spock said to his friend. “Was there a reason for you being here?” he asked, as they started on their way.

“Uh.. no..I just needed to access the reference section of the library on my PADD,” Hamid said, still gathering his bearings after that totally unexpected meeting with THE Captain Pike. Besides, he did not want Spock to know that he had been waiting here only for him. So he settled for a harmless little lie. “And as you know, we can’t do that from the apartment, so I decided to do it here… and then I thought we can just go home together,” Hamid babbled.

Spock gave him a rare, knowing smile.

“It is fascinating, that you would stay late simply to access the library,” he said. “But I appreciate it
all the same.”

The older man could only blush in response.
Chapter Summary

So sorry for the late update. But work and school were driving me crazy. I hope you are enjoying this story. And as always, I'd love to hear from you. I shamefully admit, that I am often tempted to update a lot more slowly because then I'd have more time to do my professional projects. I update fast because I feel like a terrible person for leaving you guys hanging. But I am always happy to see that you are engaging with the story. And that makes up for the lost sleep. Hehehe. Let me know what you think. Comments, Questions, and Criticisms are all welcome.

The walk back to the apartment was leisurely. The night was cool and pleasant, even if it was a little on the colder side for Spock. Hamid was glad that he had stayed back to walk home with the Vulcan.

And even though neither of them had said it, it was clear that both of them were worried that they would have to deal with Damien’s nasty, gloating remarks on the image. It was laughable to even hope that it wouldn’t happen.

Hamid desperately wanted to do something to ensure that Spock wouldn’t go through that. But it was late, and he had no clue what they could do to kill time and go home a little later, past the usual bedtime of the boys.

“Spock,” he began. “I’m kinda hungry. Do you want to grab dinner before we head home?”

Spock looked at Hamid before answering. “I do not understand,” he said. “Taking a detour to purchase a meal would not only delay your mealtime but also cost you credits. It would be logical to replicate a meal at the apartment.”

“Yes, Spock,” Hamid replied. “But replicated meals just don’t taste as good as those made by hand. Come one, I really want to make you try Indian food.”

“If you insist doctor,” the Vulcan responded uncertainly.

Hamid took Spock to an ancient-looking Indian restaurant tucked away in one of the older neighborhoods in San Francisco. The eatery was called ‘Little Delhi’ and it was situated on Eddy Street.

The décor of the place was quaint and old Bollywood songs were playing in the background. Hand-painted posters of Indian movie stars adorned the walls and on each table, a small old fashioned steel spice box was kept. Inside it, were three compartments, holding mint sauce, tamarind sauce, and onions soaked in spiced vinegar.

“This is an amazing place, Spock,” Hamid exclaimed happily. “Isn’t it.”

The Vulcan was not yet sure if he liked it. But he didn’t want to offend Hamid. Besides, it was definitely an interesting place. The array of colors, the distinct style of the music, the sweet
inflections in the language of the songs; so far, Spock had found much here that was of intellectual value to him.

Of course, he was not going to admit that he was thrilled like a little kid in a new amusement park. Theoretically, he knew that Earth had many different cultures. And that India had been a regional power in South Asia for many years before ultimately reuniting with its neighbors, Pakistan and Bangladesh, against the common economic and military threat they faced from the various terrorist organizations of the region. But that had been almost a century ago. Most terrorist organizations had ceased to operate on a planet-wide scale. The few that refused to give up on the religious fundamentalism existed only because they were small-minded enough to believe that even alien life forms were unwelcome on Earth.

Apparently, because alien life forms were not the creation of their God, and were not meant to inhabit their Earth, which had been gifted solely to believing humans.

Spock could not help but be morbidly fascinated by such illogic.

Now India was an important member of the United Earth government and it was a major contributor of cadets and trained personnel to the Starfleet Peacekeeping Corps. It was interesting to see that this restaurant boasted of those statistics by displaying them proudly on the wall next to the holovision.

“Spock… don’t look so lost, just sit down,” Hamid said, pulling him away from his thoughts.

“Now do you want to look at the menu and order food, or am I going to starve?” he asked Spock jokingly.

Spock looked at his menu, but he was completely unfamiliar with the dishes. Also, he wasn’t sure what was suitable for him.

“You are aware that I am vegan,” he said. “If you could guide me on what to order, that would be most appropriate, since you know this cuisine better than I do.”

Hamid scanned the menu for a few minutes.

“Okay, Spock,” he responded. “I think I know what we are getting.”

He ordered a Vegetable Biryani for Spock and Lamb curry with rice for himself. He also ordered a side of Tandoori Mushrooms and a green salad.

“Hamid, I am not sure Indian food is compatible with the Vulcan palate,” Spock said conversationally.

“Er… do you have an issue with spices?” Hamid asked.

“Negative,” Spock responded. “But Indian food is an acquired taste, I believe.”

“It is, but I think you’ll like it,” the doctor said, reclining in his ornate wooden chair.

A few minutes later, their food arrived.

Spock put small portions of the Biryani, the mushrooms, and the salad on his plate.

Hamid did pretty much the same, except that he traded in the biryani for the lamb curry and the steamed rice.

Spock’s apprehension about the food’s spiciness was put to rest with his first bite.
The biryani was textured perfectly with the rice and the vegetables complementing each other in a delicious blend of flavors. The mushrooms tasted exotic. Spock had never tasted mushrooms before. It was a good thing that he was trying them for the first time in this avatar. The combination of smoky, crunchy, and juicy was riveting, to say the least.

“This is a compelling meal, Hamid,” Spock said. “I thank you for introducing me to Indian cuisine.”

“Don’t mention it, my dear Vulcan,” he responded. “You are vegan. That severely limits your options. And eating something which has authentic vegan options is better than eating fake meat made to imitate classic American foods.”

The two men ate in silence. Spock also observed the other people in the restaurant. Two tables away, a family of four was sitting. Their skin tone suggested that they were from the same part of the world as Hamid.

“Hamid, I wish to inquire about something,” he asked.

“Fire away, Spock,” Hamid responded, not taking his eyes off his plate.

“That family sitting there,” he said, gesturing towards them with this eyes. “Are they Middle-Eastern like you?”

Hamid turned to look at them.

The woman was wearing a pair of jeans with a richly embroidered kurta. Her husband and children were dressed in regular, everyday attire; shirts and pants. They were all olive skinned and the woman was wearing a red dot in the center of her forehead.

“No, they are Indians,” Hamid said. “I understand why you are kinda confused. Their skin is like mine, and if you could hear them, their accent would be similar to mine as well. But they are too far away for us to eavesdrop. Besides your Vulcan ethics won’t allow that.”

“That is incorrect,” Spock said. “I can hear them. Vulcan hearing is sharper than human hearing. I am not actively listening to their conversation. But I was unable to prevent some of their words and sentences from registering. And that is why I questioned if they were Middle-Eastern.”

Hamid had no idea how to respond to that.

They continued to eat.

“Do you want dessert?” Hamid asked after the server cleared their dishes.

“Negative,” he responded. “Processed sugars have a detrimental effect on my physiology.”

The older man understood. He summoned the server. He had an idea of what Spock could have for a dessert, but he wanted to be sure that this place had it.

“Do you have Aamras?” he asked.

“We do,” the server answered. “But I would recommend you to try our Gulab Jamun and our Kulfi. They are our specialty.”

“I am aware of that,” Hamid said. “But my friend here prefers stuff without added sugar. It would be awesome if you could get him a serving of unsweetened Aamras. And I’d like the saffron kulfi please.”
The server sent their orders to the kitchen. But before leaving, he turned to Spock.

“Are you a patient of diabetes?” he asked quite seriously.

Spock looked totally bewildered.

“Er…” Hamid started to respond.

But the server asked a follow-up question without waiting for a response.

“My mother knows an Ayurvedic doctor in India who can cure diabetes completely,” he said. “If you like, leave your details with me and I will arrange the medicine for you.”

“I do not understand,” Spock said blankly. “There is no logic in the continuity of this conversation. What is the relation between our order of dessert, and diabetes?”

Hamid could see that this was going to end badly. He had to save the situation. He quickly turned to the server.

“Look, Spock doesn’t like sweet things, but he is okay with fruits,” he said with a big, fake grin on his face. “He is not diabetic, no, not at all.”

“My apologies,” the server said, thoroughly embarrassed.

Thankfully, he did not say anything else and left.

Spock looked at Hamid questioningly, clearly puzzled about what had just happened.

Hamid rolled his eyes and launched into an explanation of how it was considered okay in non-western cultures to deduce information from innocuous conversations and to make subtle suggestions based on those deductions.

“There’s lots of room for error,” he said with an amused smile. “But it is a form of communication we have perfected over more than two millennia. But you’ll not get it. It is just not meant for talking to a scientific person, and if anything, it would be highly entertaining to watch you try and make sense of it.”

In the meantime, their Aamras arrived. Spock was relieved to see that it was nothing but mango pulp without any added sugar.

“This, my friend, is the best thing Earth has to offer,” Hamid said, in an exaggeratedly dramatic voice. “Made from the finest Alphonso mangoes, straight from the west coast of India.”

For once, Spock agreed. The dessert tasted wonderful.

And it was something to be sharing a dessert with a friend. He had never imagined that his experience on Earth would include something so delightfully human even though he considered himself very Vulcan for any sort of humanity.

He wanted to voice his gratitude to Hamid.

But the other man was already asking him another question.

“Do you want to stargaze, Spock?”

XXXXX
Spock did not understand Hamid’s fascination with the stars, but he was willing to go with it. It was strange to him that even after knowing so much about space and having relations with other planets, Hamid still insisted that stargazing the old-fashioned way was something special.

The two men lay on the grass in a companionable silence.

“Spock, tell me about your family,” Hamid said softly. “And your life on Vulcan.”

“Vulcan is a hot, desert planet,” Spock began. “6 billion people live on its surface. Ours is an old civilization. Our most revered philosopher was Surak, whose teachings we continue to follow in our pursuit of a logical, peaceful way of life. Prior to his teachings, we were a violent, highly emotional race….”

“You guys were emotional?” Hamid asked, quite surprised.

“Affirmative, doctor,” Spock replied. “And bloodshed was common on our planet. But that was thousands of years ago.”

“What about your family?” the older man asked, trying to point towards the location of Vulcan in the night sky with his right index finger.

“My father is a federation diplomat, Sarek, son of Skon. And my mother is Amanda Greyson, former communications officer in Starfleet. Now she is a teacher at the Vulcan Academy of Diplomacy. She trains diplomats for missions to Earth and other similar planets that are inhabited by intelligent life that is highly emotional.”

Hamid wanted to know more about Spock. He wanted to ask about his childhood, about his growing up on Vulcan, about his half-human heritage.

“What was it like, growing up on Vulcan?” he asked. “Did you have other friends? And what are other half-human, half-Vulcan people like? Do they behave differently than full-blooded Vulcans?”

“I cannot provide an answer to that question, doctor,” Spock said. “I am the only human-Vulcan hybrid in existence. And I grew up like other Vulcan children. We do not form friendships. We focus our energies towards the acquisition of knowledge.”

Spock did not talk about Stonn and the bullies. He did not say anything about the horrors of Zarmal and the ordeal of the Kahs’wan. He hated thinking about those memories. And while they had attacked him with a vengeance on his first day on Earth, he had kept a strict hold on them ever since. He did not want to deal with the emotional baggage that came with those thoughts.

And so, it was for the best, in his opinion to not talk about those things.

“What about you, Hamid?” Spock asked. “What is your home like?”

For several moments, there was silence.

And then Hamid started talking.

“I grew up in Damascus. I think I’ve told you, it is in a country called Syria. So, I am not a particularly religious person, but my mother is. And oh, I come from a Muslim family. So, yeah.. my family, well let’s see.”

Hamid’s words were jumbled up. His discomfort was obvious. Spock wondered if he had touched a raw nerve. But before he could say anything, the older man started speaking again.
“I had a twin sister, Hafada. She and I grew up together, obviously. And we were practically inseparable. But then she enlisted in Syria’s military academy, and I joined medical school. We were still close and we met every now and then. But that changed when she graduated. She was brilliant, Spock. And so smart. She met her husband, Ammar, at the academy and got married to him soon after graduation. It was a beautiful ceremony. I will never forget how radiant she looked that day; and she pretended to be a shy, coy bride. But we all knew she was mischievous. I felt sorry for her husband. That poor bastard… he had no idea what he was getting into. They were both assigned to this peacekeeping mission soon after marriage, to this fringe planet called Abilex-IV. They had a messed up situation on that planet, but it wasn’t supposed to be too bad. A few months later, she told us that she was expecting a baby. Imagine our elation. We were about to get a new baby in the family. It was wonderful. And we knew that she’d be given a short maternity leave after the baby’s birth. We started preparing a little nursery. We bought rattles and baby clothes, and diapers. It was super special. And then everything changed. A few months later, Starfleet personnel came to our house. And I have no idea why they thought that was a good idea. Just like that, they told us that Hafada and her husband had been killed in a terror attack carried out by a group of rogue Abilexians. But miraculously, her son had survived. Her injury had been too severe. And had the pregnancy been in its earlier stages, she would have miscarried. However, due to the fact that she was already eight months along, she gave birth to him in the middle of the fighting. And they found the baby in the arms of her dead body. Ammar’s body was found lying atop hers partially. He had probably tried to shield them.”

Hamid had to stop talking. He had no idea why he had decided to share all this with Spock. But he had. And he needed to tell him the complete story. Unknown to him, Spock’s own emotions were in overdrive. He remembered how much it had hurt to lose I-Chaya. He could not even begin to comprehend how much it must have hurt Hamid to lose his sister and her husband.

“This was almost six years ago, and my mother and I, we took the baby in,” Hamid said, in a voice so spent that it sounded like he had been hauling stone all day. “We called him Aimar Hafid, in honor of both his parents. And now he lives with my partner, Zain. My mother hates it that I am gay, but she is too old to look after Aimar now. And so he is with us. Zain did not want me to join Starfleet. But Hafada had asked me so many times before her death. And I think she’d approve. Though Zain has a point. Aimar doesn’t deserve to lose anyone else.”

Spock wanted to comfort Hamid. So far, the two men had lain under the canopy of the stars and talked, with nothing separating them from the grief that they had both known in their lives. Spock admired Hamid’s courage. And his respect for the doctor had grown immensely in the last half an hour. He turned his head towards him, only to see that silent tears were rolling down the human’s face.

“I grieve with thee, my dear friend,” Spock whispered softly, his own voice choked with emotion.

Neither of them said anything after that. For a long time, they lay there, watching the night sky; tranquil and quiet in the distance, deceptively innocent, and beautiful despite the horrors hidden within it that both men were intimately acquainted with.

Somewhere among those millions of points of light, were Zarmal, Abilex-IV, and Vulcan. But that was a fact that did not need to be stated tonight.
Damn, the Vulcan was good at this, thought Pike as he watched Spock spar with Ronnie, the hand-to-hand combat instructor.

Spock moved with a fluid grace that could be considered almost feminine, were it not for the hits and strikes that came from nowhere, shattering all illusions of traditional femininity. Ronnie was sweating and panting, trying to challenge the Vulcan. But pushing Spock’s limits, also meant pushing his own.

And unsurprisingly, Spock passed the exam with flying colors, without breaking a sweat. Command track coursework was proving to be entirely manageable. It was not half as complex as the science track coursework. He had already taken the exams for Strategy, Federation Culture, Navigation Systems, and Command Ethics earlier in the morning.

Now he was only left with Basic Life Support and Endurance.

The Basic Life Support exam was almost too easy. First, he was made to clean and dress a number of different injuries in a virtual reality simulation. That was not difficult. The setting of the test was a starship’s engineering deck. In the next set, he had to resuscitate a crewman who had stopped breathing after a mission gone wrong on a water planet. Spock did not like how real the water in the VR felt, but he managed to take the test without freaking out.

It was the last exam that took the most out of him.

He should have expected it. But it came as a surprise when his third simulation was that of an alien prison cell, where his test was to clean and dress interrogation-related injuries on his subject. Unlike the previous simulations, his need for supplies was far greater than what had been made available to him.

Spock was distressed that he only had a cup of water and torn strips of cloth from his crewmate’s uniform to act as bandages. Even though logically he knew this was unreal, the cell felt too much like the cell in which he had been kept on Zarmal. Phantom pain ghosted over the raised scars on his back and Spock had to clamp down on the involuntary shudder of fear and nausea that passed through him.

It was difficult to even think about the pain, the hopelessness, and the chilling darkness of that cell.

“Cadet, you are running out of time,” a disembodied voice echoed through the cell. At this, Spock jumped into action. He quickly started dressing the injuries on the subject’s face. And he swiftly worked his way down. He had to swallow uncomfortably when he reached the subject’s back.

He wondered why so many cultures across the galaxy used the whip as an implement of torture. How did such vastly different civilizations all come up with the same technique of torment?

But this was not the time for such thoughts. This is was an exam and the subject was not real. He simply needed to clear this simulation in order to move further on his career path. It was in such moments of emotional overload that he felt grateful for the control and calm that came with Surak’s teachings of logic. He continued to hold the overwhelming onslaught of memories and sensations at bay, all the while working on his subject with the professional distance that doctors and nurses often employed while dealing with particularly bad cases.
Unknown to him, Captain Pike was watching his face closely as he worked through the simulation presented to him by the headset.

The cadet’s usually stoic face was open and vulnerable under the VR gear. His lips trembled every now and then. His hands shook as they reached for things inside the simulation. And all through this, Pike watched like a hawk. It had been a cruel thing to do, but he had deliberately inserted the last scenario in the Vulcan’s test.

He needed to see if the young man could work through scenarios that were too close to his own trauma. It was important because every Starfleet officer needed to get past their own problem areas if they wanted to work in the organization successfully.

And even though Spock’s discomfort at being thrust into a childhood nightmare was clearly written all over his face, he was doing an admirable job of working through it. Not once did his deft fingers stop working.

And at long last, the test came to an end.

Pike was proud of his newest crewmember. And he was ready to let Spock take the rest of the day off, but the Vulcan emerged from the VR chamber, looking as serene as he always did.

Again, it was supremely impressive that he could compose himself in such a short time.

Next, he was to go in for the Endurance exam.

Pike wanted to talk to Spock before the test. But he did not make eye contact with him. He entered the Endurance chamber minutes after exiting the VR chamber.

And even though he should have let the young cadet take this exam privately, Pike realized he could not. With a clear, calculative gaze, he watched as the lights in the room dimmed to a single source illumination from a blue LED.

This was a test Spock was not worried about. The exam had been modified for him. But he was stronger and fitter than most Vulcans. The first phase of test required him to do 200 pushups.

Spock managed this with no difficulty. It was easy to do these exercises. In the next phase, he was asked to run. In order to pass, he needed to run 6 miles in 18 minutes. Spock managed to do it in 15, though it left him slightly drained.

The third phase of the test asked him to lift and hold weights, first in his hands, and then on his back. Spock lifted a total of 60 pounds in his hands for the first section of the test. And then he lifted 100 pounds on his back.

Spock was pretty worn out after this. But the exam was in two parts.

The second part of the exam required him to repeat the same exercises in sub-zero temperatures, wearing nothing but regulation issued uniform.

Spock was very unsure of this part. He had a lot of faith in his abilities, but he really did not know how he would fare against the cold.
He did not have to wait for too long to find out.

And find out he did.

It was probably one of the hardest things he had ever done. For one, the pushups and the running were moved to the second and the third slot. It was upsetting that he would be unable to use the activity to warm himself.

No, standing with weights in his hands and on his back for straight seven minutes, was the true trial of Spock’s determination and limits.

He had to work extra hard to control the shivering in his legs. He had to forcibly suppress the shudders that threatened to destabilize him throughout the seven minutes.

When the alarm sounded to let him know that it was over, he almost sighed in relief. But before he could completely unwind, the floor beneath him was already vibrating in preparation for the running test.

Still panting slightly after all that exertion, Spock started running. This time, he was forced to use the entire 18 minutes available to him. He ran with his usual even pace, but his body was exhausted and he was aching all over.

And that feeling only intensified when he started on the pushups, that were now to be performed on the frozen floor.

200. That seemed too much. Spock was worried that he’d be unable to complete them. The first 50 were relatively doable. But after that, it became progressively harder with each pushup. He could feel the sweat in his hair and the strain his arms were experiencing. His limbs felt like lead and it was taking too much effort to even lift himself off the floor.

He barely managed to finish the test within the stipulated 10 minutes. He felt an intense surge of relief. He pushed his arms one last time to support himself and stand up. But before he knew it, the floor was rising up to him.

He felt the world tilting around him before he collapsed on the ground, unconscious.

XXXXX

Pike didn’t think he could have been any more impressed with Spock, but he was. The kid was smart, strong, and had the body of a martial artist. The routine of the Endurance test was brutal.

He didn’t think any human could complete even a fourth of what was being asked of the Vulcan. But it made sense, since Vulcans were a superior race in terms of physical strength and some would argue, even in terms of intellect. But still, he knew that Spock’s test was harder than it would usually be even for a Vulcan.

He hadn’t wanted to do this. But Komack had been adamant. If Spock was getting such a major mission and a leap in his career, he needed to be a cut above the other Vulcans as well.

So this test that the cadet was being put through, was basically the Vulcan Peacekeeping Academy’s test on steroids. And the second part of the exam where the whole thing had to be repeated in freezing temperatures, was a tough innovation in the exam that had only been added in order to push Spock past his limits.

And of course, it had worked. The Vulcan had looked ready to drop after the first part. Pike could
bet that the second part would be a show of adrenalin rather than actual strength.

He was worried if he’d be able to go through with the second part. He wondered if he would press the buzzer and end the test without completing it.

He was wrong. Despite the tight lines of pain and fatigue around his eyes and mouth, Spock continued with the tasks. Even from a distance, from behind a two-way mirror, Pike could see the sweat dripping from Spock's body in steady rivulets.

True to everything that he had heard about Spock, the Vulcan completed the exam. Pike wanted to run inside and congratulate him. He was now an officer. And he was definitely going on the mission.

But the moment it was over, Spock keeled over in a dead faint.

For a moment, Pike did not know what happened. And then a loud alarm started blaring from the Endurance chamber, signaling a medical emergency.

And he ran towards the chamber. He was closely followed by medical personnel.

The Vulcan was pale and unmoving. His skin was flushed green and he was drenched in perspiration.

“His temperature is dangerously low,” a medic yelled. “We need thermal blankets.”

“His heart rhythm is irregular, Sir,” a nurse said, based on the readings of the cardiac tricorder. “And his heart rate is spiking every 36 beats.”

Pike was not good with medical jargon. He understood very little of it, but he was always respectful of the medical officers’ advice and commands.

“What is wrong with him, Dr. Puri?” he asked.

Dr. Puri was busy trying to start an IV. He didn’t hear the captain’s question at first.

“He has overexerted himself,” the nurse responded. “And because he is Vulcan, perspiring is not good for him. The sweat coupled with the cold atmosphere of the examination chamber has caused his body’s temperature to drop way below the acceptable levels. But we will be able to stabilize him. He will be alright in a few hours.”

Pike just nodded.

Though inside, he was seething. Komack was an idiot. And he, himself was an even bigger idiot. How had neither of them thought to have these new additions to the exams cleared by the medical department?

Spock was taken away on a stretcher a few moments later. Pike followed them to the basic medical facility of the command building. Thankfully, Spock did not need advanced care.

About half an hour later, Puri came to talk to Pike.

“He is okay,” the doctor said. “You will have your cadet in time for the mission.”

“He is an officer now, Rajneesh,” Pike said, correcting the doctor. “He is joining me as a lieutenant.”

Puri looked impressed.
“That is quite something,” he said. “But there is something you ought to know. I will conduct his psych evaluation when he wakes up. But I took the liberty of conducting the physical exam while he was out. And I am troubled by some of the things I saw on his body.”

Pike knew this conversation had been coming. He was glad that it was Puri, his own ship’s CMO, instead of some other doctor that he had never met.

He raised his hand to stop the doctor.

"Shhh..Inside your office," he said.

"You know about this?" Puri asked loudly.

"Why don't you take a loudspeaker and announce it for the whole building?" Pike whispered, thoroughly irritated at the doctor.

"Sorry," he said in an exaggerated whisper. "But what do you know. I wonder if we are talking about the same thing. Something tells me we are, but I'd like to confirm it."

“This is confidential, doctor,” he began. “I mean, I know you take patient confidence very seriously, but I cannot stress this enough. What I am about to tell you, is information that I gathered through very unofficial and somewhat dubiously ethical channels. But it was important."

Puri looked as if his captain had slapped him. "Seriously, Pike?" he said, sounding very annoyed. "After all these years that we have served together, you have to tell me this? Seems like you need your memory refreshed about that outbreak of genital herpes that I treated almost the whole crew for, without telling anyone. Or the time when you came in with that black mercy strapped to your chest, as functional as a bunch of carrots..."

"I get it, doctor, but I needed to say it, okay?" Pike said, exasperated that his CMO was being so difficult. "This is different and you know it. Can I now say what I have been trying to tell you for the last ten minutes?"

"Go on," the doctor replied, tonelessly. But his glaring eyes said everything about how mad he was at Pike for even suggesting that there could ever be even an accidental problem with his moral compass.

"It is there in Ambassador Sarek’s record that he once requested urgent medical aid for his son from the Vulcan embassy on a fringe planet called Artois. Spock was ten years old at that time. And it struck me as very strange that Spock’s injuries in that file were listed as trauma wounds. Also, according to his record, he was suspended from their version of high school soon after this incident, and was allowed to return only after completing a certain Vulcan ritual. These details were extremely sketchy in the formal documents that I was able to obtain legally. But I had to know why these smidges on Spock’s records appeared at such a young age." 

"And what did you find out?" Puri asked, dreading the answer. He wanted to know why the unconscious kid in the sickbay looked like someone had put him through a meat grinder and then hung him out to dry.

"Spock was captured and sold into slavery at the age of ten, and due to some cultural norm, he was tortured on a non-federation world called Zarmal. There is no record of this information. Like I said, I know it only because I dug this information out from a black hole."

Puri listened to his captain patiently. The scars on his patient’s body made a lot more sense now. But it gave him the chills to think that such terrible damage had been inflicted upon him at the tender age
of ten. His annoyance with Pike evaporated. He completely understood the captain's reasons for wanting to safeguard this information.

However, he did decide to do a more detailed psych evaluation of the Vulcan. He was reasonably sure that Spock would clear the exam easily-- simply because he was Vulcan, and they dealt with trauma differently than humans did. But it couldn’t hurt to be sure, just in case.

For now, there was only one thing he could say to Pike.

“I sincerely hope you never have to actually see your newest officer naked,” he said bitterly. "It suffices to see that the scarring itself is bad enough that in my 20 years of practice, I have never seen anything like this. But to know that he was just a kid,” the doctor shook his head. “Pike, there are some things that just don’t belong in the universe, not even in its underbelly. And this is one of them.”

Pike did not know how to respond to that. He wondered for the first time if Spock was indeed ready for this mission. If Puri was so shaken after the cadet’s physical exam, then there had to be a damn good reason for it.

But then he scolded himself. Trauma was not something to judge an individual by. Unfortunate things happened to people. And if they refused to be broken by their experiences, then what right did the world have to do so.

And this was a brilliant young Vulcan who had mastered challenges that people thrice his age could not even begin contemplate, even in the admiralty.

What could possibly be more formidable than a Starfleet officer called Spock?

Chapter End Notes

Hey, Everyone. Sorry about the late update. But I had to take a day off and focus on my professional work. I hope you like this chapter. Please review and let me know what you think. I absolutely love hearing from you. It makes my day (And it inspires me to write and update fast!)
“You are driving me nuts with that mad pacing,” Damien said angrily. Hamid ignored him and continued pacing, all the while trying to reach Spock on his comm. unit.

“You deaf, asshole?” the younger boy asked again, almost yelling this time.

Hamid looked at him coldly.

“He should have been home hours ago,” he said. “And I have no idea where he might be. I don’t even know the location for his today’s exams. So excuse me for being rightfully worried about my friend.”

Damien smirked. “You shouldn’t be worried about your bitch,” he said maliciously. “He’s probably out whoring himself to someone. I saw that picture. His poker face actually had emotion on it. Tell me, doctor, does he scrunch up his face when you give it to him hard? Or does he like it gentle and slow?”

Hamid could feel his temper rising again.

And Mike saw it. He intervened before things could get too out of hand.

“Damien, let us go inside,” he said. “It is getting late.”

“But tomorrow is Saturday,” he retorted. “I want to stay awake and finish this game. You go on. Besides, I want to see a freshly fucked Vulcan, so I’m gonna wait here.”

“You bastard….” Hamid roared and flew at Damien.

However, Damien was ready. He moved out of Hamid’s way moments before the doctor reached him.

“Don’t even think about it, fag,” He said. “Just don’t.”

The argument would have escalated anyway, had Hamid’s comm. unit not beeped just then.

He glared at his bratty flatmate before answering.

“Sheikh speaking,” he answered.

For a moment, his face was blank. But then his expression grew worried.

“I’ll be there in 15 minutes,” he said and rushed out.

Mike and Damien did not stop him. It sounded like something had happened to Spock. Mike was a little concerned. But he didn’t dare say anything in front of Damien. And as for Damien himself, he couldn’t care less. In fact, if the Vulcan was injured or better yet, dead, then that was for the best. He just hoped it had been painful as fuck.

XXXXX
Captain Pike was glad that Hamid had responded so quickly. It was upsetting that Spock had not listed anyone on Earth as his emergency contact. It would have been logical to have someone from the Vulcan embassy as his emergency contact, but Pike understood why his favorite cadet might not have chosen that option.

“Cadet Sheikh, how are you?” Pike began.

“How’s Spock,” he asked, not bothering to engage in pleasantries with the captain.

“Ahh..He’s okay,” the older man replied. “But he’s still shaky on his feet. The command tests were a little demanding. And they weakened him somewhat.”

Hamid thought about this for a moment. He was a doctor. Even though he was not a Vulcan specialist, he knew enough about medicine to be able to help Spock if he was given more specific information.

“Can you give me more details, captain?” he asked.

Pike handed him Spock’s reports, hoping that Hamid would know how to care for Spock at home.

Hamid looked through the information closely, reading every word carefully, in order to be sure that he didn’t miss anything. Spock was okay, but he had actually been put through a pretty heavily demanding test. And while the tests had only tired him out and strained his muscles a little bit, it was the hypothermia that had caused him to collapse. And in his weakened state, he was now running a fever.

“Can I take him home?” he asked meekly.

“You can,” Pike said. “Spock is waiting for you in the doctor’s office. He just completed his psych evaluation for the mission. He should be ready to leave now.”

As if on cue, Spock walked out, looking as regal and unfazed as ever.

The only lingering signs of his discomfort were the bruises around his eyes and the fine sheen of sweat around his brow and temples. He looked surprised to see Hamid.

“I took the liberty of asking your friend to pick you up, Spock,” Pike said jovially. “I hope you don’t mind.”

“Negative, captain,” Spock said. “I appreciate your consideration.”

Hamid looked at them before clearing his throat.

“Er... Um., Spock...I think I should request a hover cab,” he said. “I guess that would be the better option since you aren’t feeling so good.”

Spock did not believe in wasting credits where it wasn’t required. But it was true. He was still a little weak and unsteady on his feet. And he was unbelievably tired. While he was sure he could force himself to walk all the way to the apartment, he definitely preferred to have a transport just this once.

“That won’t be necessary, Cadet Sheikh,” Pike interrupted. “I can drop you both to the apartment in my own vehicle.”

Hamid and Spock looked at each other, unsure of whether they should accept the offer or not. Pike sensed their hesitation.
“Boys, it is not big deal,” he said reassuringly. “And Spock, you are to be an officer on my ship. I’m even grooming you to take on bigger responsibilities eventually. If I am to be your captain, you need to stop behaving like a cadet.”

“Yes Sir,” Spock replied.

“Good,” the captain said. “Now, let’s get you both home.”

The ride to their apartment was short and uneventful, except for when Pike asked Hamid a little about himself.

“You are Hafada Sheikh’s brother?” he asked midway through the conversation, surprised at that piece of information.

“Yes sir,” Hamid said, not sure how to respond in a better way.

Pike looked contemplative for a moment and then he answered.

“I knew her,” He began. “She was deployed to our peacekeeping forces by the Syrian military, I believe. But the number of times she was asked to enlist into Starfleet fulltime… It was amusing how there was such a battle between Captain Edwards and Captain Kobasa because they both wanted her on their mission. Finally, she chose to serve aboard the USS Atlantis with her husband, under Captain Feocco. Caused a mini-scandal, because Edwards accused Kobasa of having a thing for women officers… but of course, that was just nonsense.”

There a faraway look in Pike’s eyes, and a fond smile on his face as he remembered the young woman who had come to mean so much to the entire peacekeeping department seven years ago.

Hesitantly, he turned to Hamid. “I… I was told her son survived… How is the child?”

Hamid gave a small smile to the captain, completely understanding his hesitation at asking the question.

“He is doing well,” he replied. “And he is the naughtiest little kid in the neighborhood. He lives with my partner in Damascus.”

“What is his name?” Pike asked softly.

“Aimar Hafid… after his parent’s first names,” Hamid answered.

“There are so many young people in all the departments of the fleet,” Pike said. “And I have lost count of how many such conversations I’ve had with relatives who come back to join the fleet, even after losing someone to a mission. I can only marvel at your courage, Hamid.”

“I…thank you, captain,” he replied in a quiet voice.

The rest of the ride passed in silence.

If only the peace could have accompanied them into the apartment.

“You didn’t die?” Damien asked Spock the minute they entered in.
“Obviously,” Spock answered in a cool voice devoid of any emotion.

Damien went back to his replicated pasta.

“Pity,” he said. “The doctor looked like something really bad had happened to you when that call came. I knew you were probably not dead. But I couldn’t help hoping now, could I?”

That was so blatant, rude, and direct, that even Hamid was left speechless.

“Come on, Spock, you don’t need to deal with this,” Hamid said, pulling the Vulcan into the bedroom.

“Yeah, yeah…ride him hard, doc… make your bitch moan, I bet he didn’t get any up his ass from his boyfriends in the locker room…” Damien yelled.

Spock stopped at that. He looked directly into the younger boy's eyes, wondering if his ears had deceived him.

“I heard all about it, Vulcan,” Damien said, his eyes menacingly wide. “And they said they will get you again. And again. And as many times as they want.”

“You do not know anything,” Spock said through gritted teeth, fighting hard to control his expression.

“Don’t I?” Damien asked rhetorically. “I know you got away that day, Spock, but that image was not just a way to humiliate you in front of everyone else. It was a message. A warning. For you. That is what is coming to you, mighty asshole.”

Hamid’s throat dried up at the implications of what Damien was saying. He could see the fear behind the blank mask Spock was struggling to hold in place.”

With a strength he didn’t know he had, he wordlessly pulled Spock into the room.

XXXXX

“Why does he always insult me with such sexually explicit phrases?” Spock asked once they were inside.

Hamid sighed.

“I’ve told you, Spock,” he said. “I am gay, and it is very obvious that I am gay. People make fun of me all the time. And because you are my friend, they think you are gay too.”

Spock did not say anything.

“I can tell that you are having a headache,” Hamid said gently. “Let me give you something for the pain.”

“No, Hamid,” Spock said. “Dr. Puri gave me medication, I do not require more.”

The older man only sighed in response.

“Did you eat anything?” he asked. Spock again did not answer.

“I knew it,” Hamid said, reaching into his bag for a small, insulated tin of soup. “At least have this. It will help with your headache as well. Your sugar levels are probably low.”
Spock accepted the tin and opened it. Immediately, a warm, pleasant smell of tomato soup filled the room.

“Will you not have some, doctor?” Spock asked.

“No,” Hamid replied. “I ate dinner before I came to get you.”

Spock ate his soup, which was delicious, at least by his standards. But on the other hand, there was too much corn flour in it, which made him feel full even though he had only consumed a third of the tin’s contents.

“I cannot consume any more,” he said. “I am going to store the remaining soup in the refrigerator.”

“Be careful,” Hamid said, but Spock had already closed the door behind him.

Spock was walking back to his room when Mike stopped him.

“Mr. Spock, your mother left a message on the apartment’s vidcom earlier in the evening,” he said.

Spock thanked the younger boy and walked to the video communicator installed in the living area. Damien was still sitting there. Thankfully he did not pay him any attention for once. He was sipping a can of bear and seemed to be rather engrossed in his PADD.

Spock wondered why his mother had left a message on the communicator instead of his comm. unit. Perhaps there had been an interference with the signal. He didn’t know.

He opened the message.

“Spock, I wish you would keep in touch with me… but no. How does it matter to you that an old woman is waiting to hear from her son? And while I wait for your news impatiently, from now on, I am not going to be able to do that either. Because I received news about you informing me that you had collapsed during a test. Do you have any idea how worried I was? I left 16 messages on your comm. unit. I wonder if you received any of them. And then I received another message a few minutes ago that you had been discharged. And you still didn’t respond to my messages. I am worried, son. It is okay if you don’t want to talk to me. But please, please let me know if you’re alright. I’ll be next to the vidcom for another two hours. If you wish to speak with me, call me.”

Spock did not want to engage in in video call with Amanda while Damien was around. But he did not want to disappoint his mother either. Sighing inwardly, he placed the earpiece in his left ear and called his mother.

A moment later, Amanda’s lovely face filled the screen. She looked worried.

“Thank God, Spock… I was so worried…Jesus Christ…”

Spock interrupted her babble. “Mother, are you well?” he asked.

Amanda let out a humorless laugh. “Leave it to my Vulcan son, to ask me if I’m well, barely hours after he collapsed during an exam.”

“It was not major, mother,” Spock said, irritated that they had informed Amanda of his brief bout of illness.

“Anyhow, did you eat something?” she asked, noticing how tired Spock looked.
“I did,” he answered. “My roommate is most kind. He gave me a can of soup.”

Amanda looked relieved to know that there was someone in that apartment who cared about her child.

Spock did not notice when Damien got up from the couch and left the room. A few minutes later, the temperature in the room dropped drastically. He was puzzled by this. Had the thermostat just malfunctioned? He shivered as the residual warmth of the room quickly dissipated. Thanks to this, he paid no attention to what Amanda said next.

“Spock, are you even listening to me?” she asked, sounding thoroughly annoyed with her son.

“I am exhausted after the day’s labors, mother,” he said abruptly, hating the fact that he had to cut the conversation with his mother short. But he was starting to shiver violently. And his legs were threatening to buckle under his weight.

“Oh.. Alright, son. Take care of yourself,” Amanda said. Spock did not say anything more and ended the call.

And then he took stock of the situation.

As he had expected, the thermostat settings of the room had been changed. From an optimum 95 degrees, the temperature had been lowered to a freezing 32 degrees. He was sure he knew the culprit.

He started walking out of the room, in order to first reset the thermostat. But it was hard. In his fevered and tired state, he just wanted to go back to his room and sleep. But it was necessary to raise the temperature of the room. He was reasonably sure that only the living room temperature had been changed. And he was right.

The moment he reached the door to the balcony where the thermostat was installed, Damien pushed him in roughly.

Spock stumbled back.

He could smell alcohol on the human’s breath.

“You fucker,” he snarled. “You think you are so much better than all of us. I will teach you, you pig.” He punched Spock in the face. Spock raised his arm to defend himself, but Damien punched him again, this time directly on the nose. Spock did not want to fight. But Damien was out of control. He punched him twice more.

His nose started bleeding after the fourth punch.

Sure, he was sick and drained. But this was not happening. With a mighty effort, Spock flipped Damien onto his back.

Even though his voice was hoarse with the cold, he managed to make himself clear to the younger boy.

“I have put up with your immaturity for too long,” he said in a voice completely devoid of emotion. “You will cease in these pranks of yours. They do not scare me. And they do not hinder me. I do not wish to waste any more time and energy in dealing with you. You will cease your antics.”

“Fuck off, asshole,” Damien yelled, struggling to pull Spock off himself. “I will make you hurt, you
Spock was having none of it. He did not loosen his grip on the human, but he picked him up almost effortlessly and carried him to his room.

Mike’s eyes almost popped out of their sockets when he saw Damien being carried into the room like a sack of potatoes.

“Mr. Gallagher, I implore you to keep Mr. Harper here until he has sobered up,” Spock said, laying Damien on the bed.

“I will get you, you bastard,” Damien yelled again.

Spock paid no heed to him as he left the room.

“Why do you hate him so much?” Mike asked his roommate once he was sure that Spock was out of earshot, truly worried for the first time that this whole issue was becoming much bigger than the average flatmate problems that everyone had.

“Because a pointy-eared dickhead like him took away everything from me last year,” Damien answered. “I was all set to join the Academy for Intergalactic Politics, and it was an uppity Vulcan who came in at the last minute and took my position. And this one is no different. This fucker is the same. They all are.”

Damien was almost weeping at this point. “And do you know who was heading the fucking jury for the incoming class?” A damned Vulcan. A pointy-eared old freak, who told me in that sadistic way of his that I could “attempt to reapply next year.” Can you believe that shit, Mike? Can you fucking believe that?” Damien was yelling and screaming now, calling the Vulcans all kinds of nasty, bigoted things.

But Mike was not sure why this was such a big deal. People got rejected from colleges all the time. Why was Damien making such an issue out of it?

“Er..Damien,” he began awkwardly. “I understand why you are upset. But you got into Starfleet. Isn’t that good enough?”

“No… NO, IT ISN’T,” He screamed, still crying. “I will be a fucking guard and nothing more while my father and brother head the fucking federation. Do you know how the fuck that feels?”

“Your dad and brother are on the federation’s high council?” Mike asked stupidly, still not sure if that was what Damien had just said.

“Yes, they are….” He responded bitterly, a bit more composed now. “And before them, so were both my grandfathers. And they expected me to make it as well. But no. These Vulcans will have it all. It wasn’t enough that they took away the academy of politics from me. They had to take Starfleet also.”

“But you are in Starfleet,” Mike said, quite bravely. “Spock is just another cadet.”

“Just another cadet?” the distraught boy asked incredulously. “He is a fucking snake. That’s what he is. You saw how he has climbed up the ladder in two fucking weeks. Watch how he makes life miserable for us and fills the fleet with snooty little Vulcans like himself.”

Mike did not say anything. He personally thought that Damien’s reasoning was extremely faulty. But he had to agree with him on one thing. It was certainly very suspicious that Spock had been allowed
to progress literally at warp speed. He was willing to bet that there were other cadets who were smart enough to make similar progress at such a fast pace, if only they were given a chance. Spock had gotten it only because he was Vulcan. The others would never get it because they weren’t. It was unfair. And he understood where Damien was coming from. He was just glad that he, himself came from a simple family, where expectations weren’t so high.

XXXXX

After resetting the thermostat, Spock staggered into his bedroom.

“What the hell happened to you? Hamid demanded as he saw the Vulcan’s bleeding nose and bruised cheek.

“Nothing, doctor,” he said in a voice thick with pain. “It was a minor altercation with Mr. Harper.”

“Those bruises look a lot worse than minor, Spock.” He replied. “Here, let me apply some antiseptic ointment on them.”

Spock did not protest. When the doctor touched his face, he pulled back as if burned.

“Yallah, Spock,” he almost shouted. “You are cold as ice. What the hell happened?”

Spock clutched his head tiredly, desperately massaging his temples. “Please do not shout, Hamid.”

“I’m sorry, Spock,” the older man responded, guilty that he had caused Spock’s migraine to flare up. “You just suffered an episode of hypothermia. What did you do to get your skin to be so cold again?”

“The thermostat in the living room malfunctioned,” he lied.

Hamid nodded, not quite sure if he believed Spock. But he let it pass.

“Come, let us get you into bed,” He said gently. “It has been a very long day. You should get some sleep.”

Spock couldn’t have agreed more. He climbed into his bed and almost groaned in relief when his back hit the bed. Before he knew it, his eyes fluttered close and he drifted into sleep.

Hamid sat beside Spock for a long time, just watching him sleep. In two days, the Vulcan would leave for the mission. He wondered if Starfleet had thought this through. It seemed highly unusual to send such a young and inexperienced cadet for a mission. Everyone knew there was more to it. But only Hamid seemed to be mature enough in the entire batch, to know that the reason had to be more than just Spock’s alleged skills in the bedroom. What wouldn't he give for people to stop spreading those particular rumors? Perhaps the success of this mission would do it, and everyone would finally see Spock for his actual brilliant self.

Hamid had no idea when the Vulcan had become so dear to him. But now he cared for the man with everything he had. Owing to his sexual preferences, he might have once thought that he loved Spock. But that wasn’t true. He loved Zain. What he felt for Spock was a deep friendship that reminded him of his childhood with Hafada. After all, he hadn't just lost a sister when she died. He had lost his only best friend. And that was why perhaps, he was so protective of Spock. It felt good to have a best friend again. And he was not going to lose him like he had lost Hafada.

Chapter End Notes
Hey guys. I hope you are enjoying the story so far. I started this fic also to improve as a writer. Like I've said before, I love hearing from you and reading what comments, suggestions, and criticisms you may have. Please leave a review. It makes me very, very happy.
Hamid woke up early the next morning. Spock was still asleep. The first thing he did after waking up was to scan Spock with his tricorder. He was relieved that the Vulcan was not suffering from a fever anymore. Though unfortunately, the bruise on his cheek had swelled up and darkened considerably. Hamid wanted to kill Damien for being such an asshole.

He went to the kitchen hoping and praying that he wouldn’t meet anyone. It was only 6:00 am and there were no classes. With any luck, both Mike and Damien would still be in bed.

Hamid was met with disappointment when he saw that Mike was already up. And that he was using the replicator to get himself a plate of pancakes. He was about to turn around and go back to his room when Mike called out to him.

“Er..do you want pancakes? I’m getting some with bananas and hazelnut spread.” He asked.

Hamid stopped in his tracks, wondering if Mike actually meant it or if he was just being polite. But pancakes did sound delicious. And he could bet anything that Spock had never had pancakes.

“Can you request vegan pancakes for Spock and myself?” he asked.

Mike looked at him with a pensive expression. But he said nothing and punched in an order for two portions of vegan pancakes with strawberry and mint jelly.

“I wanted to apologize for Damien’s behavior last night,” he began awkwardly. “He is not actually a bad guy. He just doesn’t like Vulcans much.”

Hamid wanted to laugh. As if dislike could ever be a viable excuse.

“You do realize that Hitler also simply didn’t like Jews,” he said. “Maybe he wasn’t a bad person either. Makes sense?”

The younger boy looked thoroughly embarrassed by this analogy.

“I’ll take my breakfast inside,” he mumbled.

“No, you’re welcome to sit here and eat,” Hamid said to him. “I have nothing against you. In fact, I have nothing against Damien either. But it would do you a world of good to understand that not liking someone is not an excuse for being nasty to them. We are all Starfleet cadets. We can be mature about our personal feelings. If Damien cannot handle it then he should quit.”

“I won’t quit, asshole,” Damien yelled from the doorway. Unknown to Mike and Hamid, he had woken up a few minutes ago and had heard most of their conversation. “That Vulcan bitch will quit.”

Hamid sighed. It was too early in the morning to be having this argument. He simply picked up his and Spock’s breakfast and left the living room.

Mike looked unsure of what to say. Even if he didn’t really agree with Damien, it was evident that he wasn’t about to get on the bad side of the guy. They were roommates after all. And even though he
wasn’t as hateful of the Vulcan as Damien, he didn’t particularly like Spock.

He decided to stay out of it and focus on his pancakes. Unfortunately, they just weren’t as tasty as they had been a few minutes ago.

XXXXX

Spock was in the bathroom when Hamid came inside with their food. He set the tray on one of their shared settees and sat down to wait. It had been ages since he had spoken to his son.

He took out an old-fashioned wallet from his pocket and studied the frayed, print photograph of Aimar, giggling away in Zain’s strong arms. He wondered if the child would like Spock if they were to meet. Maybe someday. He wondered if Spock would make a good father if and when he had children.

Just at that moment, Spock came out of the bathroom. He looked much better than he had last night.

“Do you want children, someday?” Hamid asked him.

Spock looked at him curiously before answering.

“I do,” he said. “It is what is expected of me as a Vulcan.”

Hamid rolled his eyes. “Oh come on, Spock,” he said. “Do you guys do everything cause it’s logical? Like you guys don’t fall in love?” he asked dreamily.

“No, doctor,” Spock answered. “We do not ‘fall in love’ but we bond for life and our spousal bonds are very strong.”

Hamid remembered just then that Spock had mentioned that he already had a bondmate on Vulcan.

“You are married, aren’t you?” he asked.

“I believe you could call it that,” Spock replied. “Though a Vulcan bonding is more than a simple, human marriage.”

Hamid ignored that bit of information.

“What’s your wife like? Is she pretty?” he asked.

Spock sat down on his bed before responding. He wasn’t sure how he felt about T’Pring. Like a coward, he had refrained from talking to her after coming to Earth. He was almost certain that she was with Stonn, even though they weren’t formally bonded. And since he had not had his Pon Farr, he had not yet been able to form a deep mental link with her. But if Stonn had experienced his Pon Farr, then T’Pring would have been there for him. And he had no desire to pull her away from her chosen. He had sacrificed much for her happiness even as a child. It would be illogical to try and pull her away from Stonn after all this time. If anything, her devotion to his old tormentor came rather close to what humans called love.

This did not really bother Spock. And as strange as this was, he did have a deep degree of respect for T’Pring. At least she was doing what was dictated to her by her emotions in a most logical way. In her own way, she had mastered the balance between being human and being Vulcan even though she had no need to do so. Spock wondered if she was consciously aware of that fact.

“My wife is a remarkable woman,” Spock said. “She is beautiful, intelligent, logical. She is a
children’s healer.”

“So she is a doctor. Tell me more about her,” Hamid pressed Spock. “Did you guys have a courtship? What was it like?”

“There isn’t much to tell, Hamid,” Spock said. “Vulcan bondings are different. I was betrothed to T’Pring when we were seven years of age. And we were formally bonded when we were fifteen years of age. We do not have courtships on Vulcan. But we were allowed to spend time in each other’s company in order to know each other better. We spoke of the medicinal properties of the plants found in the forges of our planet’s vast deserts. We debated upon the ethics of using animal products to enhance certain properties of topical salves. She is highly knowledgeable in her area of expertise.”

Hamid pretended to snore loudly, before doing a dramatic impersonation of someone waking with a start.

“That was so interesting,” He said sarcastically. “Spock, that is such a dry account of your wife, the woman you love.”

Spock’s eyes bored into Hamid’s. “Vulcans do not love, doctor, as I have already informed you,” he said. “For a man of science, you sometimes behave in a rather unintelligent manner. In any case, you seem to have much to say on the subject of love. It would be enlightening to know what your relationship with your partner entails.”

“Aha Spock,” Hamid said almost jumping with excitement. “How did you know I wanted to tell you all about Zain?”

“I did not,” Spock deadpanned.

“And here I was getting excited, that you have somehow turned into a mind-reader,” Hamid mock grumbled. “But I will tell you all about my sweetheart. Zain is awesome. He is hot and…”

“He is of a high temperature?” Spock interrupted, sounding genuinely confused.

“Lol, no Spock,” Hamid explained. “Hot is a human way of saying that he is .. um.. sexually desirable. And he is so good with Aimar. He cooks super well, and he sings like an angel.”

“What does he do for a profession?” Spock asked.

“He is an Imam at the local mosque in our neighborhood,” Hamid answered. “He leads the prayers and offers classes in religion and theology to young people.”

Spock was very intrigued by all this.

“But, did not tell me that your mother is highly religious, and does not approve of your relationship? And that it is so because according to the tenets of your faith, homosexuality is a sin?” he asked.

“She is very conservative, and she doesn’t approve,” Hamid agreed. “But she is old and does not understand that the religion itself is changing and undergoing a transformation of thought and ideology. And I am so proud of Zain for being a part of this movement in Damascus. We have already come a very, very long way from where we were about two centuries ago. Back then, our country was practically razed to the ground by this extremist group called the ISIS. And it took our ancestors decades to rebuild everything. And then you are aware of the third world war that happened, thanks to the rivalry between the United States and China that got out of hand eventually. Billions of lives lost, and for what? And we were again plunged into a strange sort of cold war. Of
course, it is all ancient history as far as I’m concerned. But it didn’t help that these political events forced a number of countries like Syria to assert their sovereignty. Unfortunately, many did so by the use of religion. And that included interpreting scriptures in a very, very strict manner. That meant crackdowns on free speech, personal liberties, and many other things that we take for granted today. It has taken us a very long time to undo all that damage. And we are still working. When great power causes terrible things to happen, the consequences are exponential, Spock. And it is those aftershocks that Zain is still fighting against. Someday, hopefully, humans will become smart enough to understand that even though we aren’t alone in the galaxy, this Earth is pretty much all we really have.”

Spock couldn’t disagree with that. Even Vulcans, with their commitment to the IDIC, were unable to accept him simply because of his human heritage. He knew for sure that full-blooded humans would never truly be welcome anywhere else but on Earth. His mother was living proof of that unfortunate fact.

“We have spent too much time discussing these sad things, Spock,” Hamid said, obviously trying to change the topic. “Let us go out. It is a beautiful day. I have sketch pads and pencils for both of us.”

“That sounds good, doctor,” Spock said if only to indulge his human friend, though he, himself wasn’t sure if he wanted to draw and paint.

And Hamid knew this. But he wanted Spock to just relax and take part in a hobby with him. The Vulcan had had a couple of very stressful days. And this was therapy for all that stress, in Hamid's medical opinion.

XXXXX

The day really was beautiful. And Spock did not want to admit it, but he was definitely very pleased to have so much time to simply sit and admire the colors of the fall leaves. It was a pity that Hamid had only brought sketching pencils with himself. It would be so much more rewarding to be able to capture this beauty in color.

The two men sat on a bench on the sidewalk and sketched. Spock’s style was markedly different from Hamid’s. While Hamid liked to focus on broad shapes and big ideas, for Spock, the magic was in the tiny details. Be it a beetle walking precariously on the edge of a leaf, or a rare example of genetic co-dominance seen in a single half-pink, half-white flower hidden among hundreds of singularly white or pink flowers. Of course, Spock could not flesh out the phenomenon without colored pencils. But he could use shade and shadow to get the idea across and that is exactly what he did.

They drew in peace for a few hours, when Hamid’s stomach growled loudly.

“Want lunch?” he asked Spock, putting his pad and pencil down.

“I shall purchase our lunch today, if it is acceptable to you,” Spock said, getting up.

Hamid wondered if it was wise to let Spock go by himself to buy them a meal. But then he chastised himself for being an overprotective idiot. Technically, Spock was his superior officer now. And he was about to leave on a mission in one day. Of course, he could buy lunch.

“Sure Spock,” Hamid accepted with a smile. “Get whatever you think is good. And I’ll have something vegan as well.”

“You do not have to change your dietary habits on my account,” Spock said.
But Hamid was having none of it.

“Vegan food tastes awesome,” he said. “Just get us something nice. And oh, I want a soda too. Coke, if you will please.”

Spock nodded and walked to the nearby deli to buy them lunch.

At first, he was overwhelmed by all the choices available to him. But then he spotted an entrée that looked promising. Quinoa in sour mango sauce with almonds. It came with a slice of hot, toasted ciabatta bread drizzled with olive oil. Spock didn’t know what ciabatta bread was. But he figured it couldn’t be very different from regular bread.

Spock placed an order for two portions of the quinoa salad and for a can of coke for Hamid. For himself, he got a cup of hot herbal tea.

“He have a good one,” the lady at the counter wished him as she handed him the bag of food.

He wondered if it would be appropriate to ask her what the ‘one’ referred to? But he ultimately decided against it. It sounded like a greeting. And one he was probably not obligated to respond to since she did not wait for him to return it. Almost as soon as he collected his bag, she moved on the next customer.

Spock walked back to their bench, musing about the strangeness of human customs, wondering for the hundredth time since he had landed on Earth, if he would ever understand them well enough to fit in even to a small degree.

He probably would, if he were surrounded by more people like Hamid and Captain Pike. But he was also aware that it took all kinds to make the world. There were any number of Damiens out there who detested him for simply being who he was.

But he did not dwell on that for too long.

It had been a rare, restful day so far for him. And he had enjoyed every minute of it. He was determined to not ruin it. And for that, he needed to keep these troubling matters aside for today.

Chapter End Notes

I love writing little snippets from Spock's everyday life. In the next chapter, we embark upon the mission to Fardour. I hope you are enjoying this story. I love hearing from you, and your support and feedback means everything to me. If you have suggestions, ideas, or even questions about the story (or even other things) please don't hesitate to ask me in the comments section. I love the little reviews you leave for me.
The last few hours before Spock’s departure were a strange mix of calm and haphazard. Needless to say, Spock personified the calm, and Hamid outdid even his own mother hen tendencies by his haphazard hovering over Spock’s tiny duffel bag.

“You should carry some of these copper supplements, Spock,” he said, willing the younger man to understand. “Otherwise you will suffer from cyaneia. And it will turn into Menkes disease. It is NOT a genetic disorder among Vulcans. It happens if you are low on copper.”

Spock did not know how to explain to Hamid that a starship was well-equipped and fully stocked with everything that the crew could possibly need during the mission.

“Doctor,” Spock began yet again. “I have told you, that you do not need to worry about me. I shall take proper nourishment through the use of the replicators the same as I have done here on Earth.”

Spock did have a point, but not entirely. Despite not having served aboard a starship, Hamid knew just how anthropocentric an organization Starfleet was. He knew that it would not have even crossed their minds to program Vulcan food into the replicators. Spock had had to make those adjustments in their apartment’s replicator himself, and it hadn’t been particularly successful.

“Be as that may, Spock, just humor me and carry two bottles of these,” Hamid pleaded.

The Vulcan did not say anything. He quietly placed the bottles in his bag.

But the doctor wasn’t done. Next, he almost bullied Spock into carrying 12 vegan nutrition bars with most of the nutrients that were necessary for the Vulcan physiology.

“You forget to eat all the time- You cannot afford to collapse of hunger on that ship,” he scolded, as he carefully packed them into a side pocket.

By this time Spock had given up. He let Hamid do whatever he wanted. Thankfully, he did not need to carry any clothes or toiletries, except for two pairs of casuals. The rest was to be provided by the fleet. That allowed Hamid to stuff the Vulcan’s bag with all kinds of knick-knacks; pain hyposprays, a portable dermal regenerator, an antibiotic cocktail meant for fighting at least 27 common space-related infections, warming pads for Spock’s hands, a vaccum-packed thermal blanket.

“Are you quite done, doctor?” Spock asked after what seemed like hours, irritation evident in his voice.

“Yes, finally,” Hamid replied unapologetically. “Let’s go out for a while Spock. Pike’s not gonna be here to pick you up for another three hours. How about we stargaze like we did a few days ago?”

Spock was in agreement with that idea. He had enjoyed their conversation that night, even if it had turned a little emotional and disconcerting. Plus it would drag Hamid from his duffel bag.

“I would like that very much, doctor,” he said.

Hamid smiled and practically flew out of the door, with Spock following him. There was a tiny smile on the Vulcan’s lips that no one would have recognized for what it was.
But in time, Hamid would.

The stars didn’t look particularly different tonight. If anything, the sky just looked a little more brilliant than it had in many days. And Spock was happy to lose himself in the vastness of the shimmer that seemed to stretch across the galaxy, millions of years into the past, shrouded by stars whose births were so distant, that they might not be visible even after their deaths.

It was odd that someone as literal as Spock could find such metaphoric poetry in his observations. Of course, he never shared it with anyone. But he was intelligent enough to know that there were at least two people in his life who could pretty much see right through it. One was his mother. The other was Hamid, surprisingly since he had only just met him. And if he really thought about it, perhaps Sobik could be added to that group as well.

But never Sarek, even though he longed for it.

He wasn’t sure why the sight of the stars was reminding him of his father. But it was. Spock longed for a reassuring message from Sarek. He missed his father’s deep, resonant voice, his calm logic in the face of distress. And even now, he wished for his approval.

He wondered errantly what he would be doing tomorrow at the same time. He’d be on a ship, warping through the stars to rendezvous with his people separated from him by time, hurled away from conscious memory by a split in history.

“Spock, you are leaving in a few hours,” Hamid cut into his musings.

“I am aware, doctor,” Spock answered, wondering if he should have given a smarter response.

“Spock, don’t get hurt,” the doctor said, determinedly staring at the sky. “And come back,” he added almost inaudibly.

“Why do you worry about me, Hamid?” Spock asked. He was grateful to have the man’s friendship. But he had absolutely no idea what he had done to earn it.

“Does it matter?” Hamid asked. “But if you do need an answer- you remind me of my sister. Only that your quirks are different, and your life has probably been a lot lonelier than hers was.”

Spock sat up at the remark. He wondered if Hamid knew more than he let on. And the older man plainly saw the questions in his Vulcan friend’s eyes.

“I am a doctor, Spock,” he said gently. “It is my job to observe things. And the scars on your hands are an unspoken testimony of everything your life has shown you so far.”

“What makes you say that I am lonely?” Spock asked, his tone icy and clipped.

“It doesn’t take a genius to know that if a 22-year-old has marks of deliberate cruelty that are clearly at least a decade old, then he obviously didn’t have friends to watch his back,” Hamid answered.

“That is not sound logic, nor is it a rational deduction,” the Vulcan replied calmly, even though he could feel his heart thudding in his chest.

“It is called instinct, Spock,” the doctor said. “Your wife would have it too. All doctors do. And I am a damn good doctor, only because my instincts have always been on point. But you don’t need to tell me anything that makes you uncomfortable. They are your scars, your memories, and more
importantly, your stories to tell…. Or not tell. I am not interrogating you. Just asking you to come back safe and sound.”

“I will endeavor to do so, Hamid,” Spock said, not knowing what else to say.

“That is all I ask,” Hamid said, hoping that this promise would carry the strength that Hafada’s was unable to hold on to in the end.

XXXXX

Spock was mildly surprised to see the amount of paperwork Captain Pike had to fill before embarking on their mission. And Spock wasn’t spared either. He had to sit through a briefing with Admiral Komack first, who did not exude the same kind of confidence today as he had when he had first offered this mission to him.

“Just do well, Son,” He finished quietly, as if uncertain about Spock’s capabilities. Whether that was due to his young age or his status as the first ever Vulcan in Starfleet, was unclear.

Lieutenant Commander Sugiyama from Engineering walked Spock through the ship’s engine room, the warp control section, the science labs, and power station.

Spock had a number of questions for him, but it became clear after the first question itself that the engineer was intimidated of Spock despite being his superior officer technically.

“I will leave all the literature about impulse power in your personal mailbox,” Sugiyama said hurriedly when Spock asked him what was the life of the ship’s operations on impulse power in the case of an emergency.

How curious, that even as a junior officer, people were scared that he’d say something insulting to them. Spock was surprised to note that Vulcans were considered rude and arrogant by most humans.

It was puzzling, because Spock could not, for the life of him, understand how logical reasoning could ever be considered rude or arrogant. How could truth, the bare facts, ever have an emotional value of rudeness or arrogance. It was unnerving to him, that he would not have Hamid here to help him answer these questions.

After a few more meetings with commodores from specific divisions, the crew of the Enterprise was invited to board the ship.

Spock was excited and apprehensive at the same time. The human half of his being which was determined to prove his mettle was warring against his Vulcan half, whose argument was that this was a job no different from any other, except for in the scale at which it would affect people other than himself.

A few minutes later, Spock made his way to the bridge of the ship.

XXXXX

The Enterprise was a beauty; even Spock had to admit that. There was a reason why it was the flagship of Starfleet; the most modern, state-of-the-art vessel, all set to comb the lengths of the universe in search of the unknown.

The ship’s bridge was a clean, gleaming white, with various stations and consoles being customized by their officers for the mission. Pike was in deep conversation with his helmsman, Lieutenant Kevin Smith. The navigator, Lieutenant Benito Rossini was already plotting the milestones for the course
While Spock was still looking around, the first officer, Tabitha Owens, came to greet him.

“Welcome to the Enterprise, Mr. Spock,” she said warmly. “We are ready to leave. That is the station of the science officer,” she pointed towards a console with the name plate bearing the name of one Amish Goldstein.

“I am not sure if you were appraised of the situation, but Lieutenant Commander Goldstein cannot accompany us on this mission,” she said. “But I am more than qualified to handle both, the science department and my duties as a first officer. However, I am hoping that you would take on most of my duties in the sciences. Captain Pike assured me that you were the reason why he wasn’t appointing a full-time acting science officer from the existing science crew.”

Spock was humbled by the faith these people were showing in him. But he was also unclear on why. And he had asked this question any number of times in the last few weeks.

“I assure you that I will endeavor to perform to the best of my abilities,” he responded sincerely.

“I know you will, Spock,” she agreed. “And I think it would be best if you were to sit at the science officer’s station on the bridge instead of the labs for now. There is no real work happening in the labs at this point. So it would be a waste for you to be there, when you can be here and learn more about the ship and how it goes about its duties.”

There was logic in that statement. Spock nodded to the commander and followed her to the science station. He was seated adjacent to the station of Lieutenant Commander Zoya Khan, the communications officer. She gave him a little smile when he looked at her.

“Zoya, I trust you to explain the work he must do along with you when we are hailing other ships and planets,” Tabitha said. “I would do it myself, but I really need to go down to engineering and speak to Nick about what is expected of us when we enter the telepathic field of Fardour.”

“Gotcha,” Zoya said. And then she turned to Spock. “So here’s the thing. It is my job to open hailing frequencies in order to communicate with the ships and planets we come across. Most times, it is a simple, uncomplicated exercise. But in the event that we do come across an unidentified vessel or a planet with which we or the federation has never had any contact, we not only hail them but also scan them. And that, Mr. Spock, is your job. I suggest that you get hold of the course that had been plotted for our mission and check in the databases for any known planets along the way. That way you will know when you need to scan. Also, it is a good idea to go over the various ships from other civilizations that we have come across. That information is in a classified file for which you need Tabitha’s or the Captain’s access codes. I would give you mine but that would be a breach of protocol.”

“Are you teaching our newest member to break rules, Ms. Khan?” the voice of the captain came from behind them.

Zoya turned around, her eyes wide with mock panic.

“Oh yes captain, the corruption of our Vulcan has begun,” she said professionally. “He shall join us in a mutiny against you soon.”

Spock was most puzzled by this exchange. In addition, he did not notice the lines of laughter around Pike’s eyes.

“Captain, I must interrupt,” he began in earnest. “I do not know what the officer means, but I assure
you that she was only attempting to explain to me how I might access the information about non-
 federation warships which…."

“Relax, Spock,” Pike said, smiling fondly at him. “We are joking. Do you know what that is?”

Spock knew what a joke was. But this was a little odd. Humans joked in the middle of professional
 situations?

“I do not understand,” he said, thoroughly embarrassed. “Why would you and the communications
 officer tell each other humorous stories while on the bridge.”

Zoya burst into laughter at his phrasing.

“I swear Spock, you are going to be very entertaining to all of us,” she said, wiping tears of mirth
 from her eyes.

Spock looked even more confused if possible.

“Spock, let it be,” Pike said gently. “You are still very new to all this. You will learn in no time and
 trust me, eventually, you will even join us in our banter.”

Spock did not believe that. But he saw no reason to voice that assertion out loud.

Pike returned to his chair and made an announcement for the ship.

“Enterprise, this is your captain speaking,” he said in a loud, clear voice. “We are ready to depart for
 our mission to Fardour, the sole planet in the Palician star system at the edge of the Delta quadrant.
 This is a research mission. Godspeed and good luck.”

With that, the enterprise started its ignition. For a few minutes, the night sky seemed to reach closer
to them, as if falling to the ground. However, within moments, they were in space. The same
wanderlust that had brought Spock to Starfleet surged again.

In the space of a heartbeat, Spock knew that this was where he belonged.

Chapter End Notes

I am extremely sorry for updating so late. Usually, I am a lot more prompt. But I have
 been working very hard on my projects for school and work. I wondered if I should
 upload a filler chapter. But that seems like cheating. So I didn’t. Please read and let me
 know what you think. I could really use some feedback now. I am only a few months
 old in the Star Trek fandom. So it would be a huge help if you could tell me what you
 think, now that we are off to an actual mission. Also, as always, I’d love to talk if you
 have any questions, concerns, or criticisms.
Spock’s time on the Enterprise was proving to be a great learning experience. He had never imagined that even traveling through space without actually encountering anything could be so exciting.

To him, every new star they came across, every asteroid belt, every scrap of matter floating in the nothingness was exciting.

Of course, the other officers on the bridge didn’t quite share his enthusiasm. They had been doing this for a while. And most of them smiled good-naturedly at Spock’s controlled wide-eyed look as he stared out of the view screen pretty much the whole time.

Only Captain Pike had an inkling that Spock’s fascination with stars would go beyond his initial wonder. It was sweet. And Pike was happy to see his youngest crew member’s inquisitiveness shining through.

Spock spent most of his time on the bridge, taking in conversations and discussions while also perusing the material that the archives had on alien warships. Commander Owens had been happy to allow Spock the access to all the classified files pertaining to not only ships, but also the various penal colonies, civilizations, and undercover missions that the Enterprise had dealt with.

Spock was so enamored by the preparations for the mission that he didn’t even take the time to go to his quarters.

It was quite late in the evening when he retired to his room. The others had gone down to the mess hall. But he wasn’t particularly hungry. Besides, he needed to unpack. Everyone else had been serving on the Enterprise for a few years. So even when the ship underwent repairs, their quarters usually remained untouched.

Spock decided to use this time to sort through his things. He was not yet permanent crew. So there was no need to really personalize anything. But he wanted to have easy access to everything. He placed all the medical supplies that Hamid had given him into a drawer. He hung his three sets of everyday use Class-B uniform, and the special occasions Class-A uniform in the wardrobe. He placed the casuals and the pajamas on a shelf in the closet. There wasn’t much else that he needed to unpack. His bag of toiletries would remain unpacked as he was to use the common washroom in the living space designated for junior officers of the ship.

Just as he was preparing to meditate, the comm. unit buzzed with a message from the ship’s CMO.

“Mr. Spock, you need to come down to the mess hall and take your dinner,” Puri’s authoritative voice said.

Spock wondered if it was a part of medical training to teach doctors to be so fussy and overprotective. He was pretty sure that the CMO was not supposed to interfere with the crew’s personal dietary habits as long as it wasn’t related to their health.

Dr. Puri was clearly behaving like Hamid.

But Spock wasn’t really irritated. Thinking about the doctor in such a way only reminded him fondly...
of his roommate on Earth.

Spock smiled to himself and made his way to the mess hall.

XXXXX

By the time he arrived, the hall was almost empty. Most people had left. Only a few members of the security department were there. And even they were almost finished with their meal.

Dr. Puri was sitting at a corner table, with a cup of tea in front of him. Spock figured that now that he was here, he should probably get himself some food. As he had known, the replicators were not programmed for Vulcan dishes. But he now understood enough about terran cuisine to order things that were both, nutritionally sound and agreeable in flavor.

He collected his portions of garden salad and cold cucumber soup and took the seat opposite to that of the doctor’s.

For a while, neither of them said anything. Spock ate his meal in silence, while Dr. Puri sipped his tea.

“I am glad you decided to accept my suggestion, Lt. Spock,” the older man said warmly. “My name is Sanjeev, by the way.”

“Your suggestion was sound, doctor,” Spock said. “Taking meals at the proper time is important for Starfleet personnel to maintain an optimum level of well-being in order to be prepared for duty at all times.”

Puri smiled at Spock.

“That is logical, young Vulcan,” he said. “But I insist upon eating properly at a given hour also because it is good for the crew to socialize with each other during mealtimes. These are your friends, Spock. And if you serve with the Enterprise on a more permanent basis, you will have to rely upon these very men and women to not only have your back during a mission, but also to be your anchor on the lonelier days on the ship. And trust me, son, those happen every now and then.”

Spock understood what the doctor was saying. However, he wanted to counter him by telling him that Vulcans were not the same as humans. They did not require socialization and friends. But then he heard Hamid’s voice in his head, chastising him for even thinking a lie.

Dr. Puri did not say anything more for a few minutes. He watched Spock eat, almost as if making sure that the Vulcan would finish his meal.

“Spock, you can come and talk to me about anything at all,” he said at last. “Don’t hesitate.”

Spock looked at him, puzzled by this.

“I.. I.. saw your.. um.. back during the physical examination,” the doctor said, suddenly lost for words. He wasn’t sure anymore if he knew anything about how Vulcans processed trauma. Maybe he was making a complete fool of himself by even offering this to Spock. But as the ship’s CMO, he had to give all crew members that option.

And more than that, he had a feeling that the kid had never really spoken about it. That was why this was nowhere even on his medical record. It was almost as if the Vulcan healers who had certified him fit for Starfleet had also chosen to ignore the fact that there was more to Spock’s well-being than the run-of-the-mill blood work and the usual height-weight-BMI.
“Look, son,” he tried again. “I don’t want to make you uncomfortable. But if you ever decide that you need to process what happened to you, feel free to drop by my office.”

Spock had no idea how to respond to that. It was odd that just before the mission, Hamid had said something along similar lines. What was it with doctors and their powers of observation?

Spock did not lie to himself. It was true that what had happened on Zarmal had changed him greatly as an individual. His younger years had been hard on him; the bullying, the Kahs’wan, the loneliness- all of it had made for a very tough childhood. But as far as he was concerned, those things were behind him. He did not think about them often. And even when he did, he knew how to control his emotions. He knew how to discipline his mind.

“I assure you, doctor,” Spock said in a respectful but firm voice. “that I do not require medical assistance, as you would have ascertained during your examination. And as a Vulcan, I do not require counseling in order to deal with the emotional consequences of a physical injury.”

The CMO only nodded. It was clear to him that no matter what Spock was saying, there was more to it all. But he did not say anything. He had told Spock that he would be willing to listen whenever he decided that he was ready to talk.

And that was all he could do for the moment.

XXXXX

Spock spent some of his time down in the labs. He was aware that the situation they were going to deal with had to do with a breakdown of Fardour’s telepathic shields thanks to a radioactive attack on the planet’s atmosphere.

It was unclear so far, if the attack was deliberate and artificially orchestrated or the result of a natural phenomenon.

For this reason, Spock spent a lot of time reading and researching all the existing literature on naturally occurring radioactive phenomena. He also paid particular attention to the alien radioactive substances not found on Earth or Vulcan.

Tabitha was pleased to see that Spock was taking the mission so seriously. In order to help him sift through as much material as he could, she assigned two scientists from the particle physics division to assist him.

One of them was a young ensign by the name of Raul Vince. The other was a senior scientist from the Federation Office of Particle Physics. Her name was Dr. Caledonia Kohen.

Ensign Vince was a quiet man. He studied the material and reported his findings to Spock through detailed data files that he submitted electronically. Caledonia, on the other hand, was argumentative, inquisitive, and not bound by the Starfleet hierarchy. The only reason she had been allowed to come for this otherwise highly secretive mission was because of her exceptional thesis on the effect of prolonged exposure of radioactivity on telepathy. In reality, she was a last-minute addition to the crew, because Komack had been jittery about not having Goldstein on the ship.

Spock valued her brilliance. But he had quite a few differences with her on the question of research ethics. Her doctoral thesis had used test results of an experiment that did not sit well with Spock’s moral code.

Said experiment had included the exposure of Tristolian marquians to high-grade dilithium. Marquians were highly intelligent, telepathically gifted felines native to the planet Tristol. According
to the footnotes of Caledonia’s thesis, the animals had died soon after the experiment thanks to the shattering of their telepathic controls which had already been instinctual, to begin with. The animals had been unable to protect themselves from the harmful effects of undiluted dilithium.

She wanted to repeat a similar experiment in the labs of the Enterprise, however under simulated conditions of Fardour, based on the limited data they had about the planet’s surface and atmosphere.

Spock refused to allow it.

“You do not understand, Mr. Spock,” she said desperately. “I am not getting some kind of kick by torturing these animals. This is just an unfortunate part of the larger research.”

Spock raised his left eyebrow at her, somewhat surprised and irritated by her utter lack of compassion for the marquians.

“Ms. Kohen, I have the greatest respect for your expertise in the field,” he began. “But I cannot allow you to conduct cruel experiments on sentient beings, at least on this ship. You have been requested to read through the assigned material and make suggestions based on your reading and inference. I believe that is all that is required of you.”

Caledonia’s eyes flashed angrily.

“I will seek permission from Commander Owens,” she said. “You are so smart, Mr. Spock. But I wonder what kind of a scientist you’d make if the idea of experimenting on cats makes you so queasy.”

She stormed past him and towards the Commander’s office, presumably to seek permission for her experiments and to complain about Spock.

“She won’t get permission, sir,” the voice of Raul Vince whispered. Spock turned around.

“She won’t be allowed to do her experiments,” the ensign repeated. “Commander Owens values your opinion too much to let an outsider do something that you don’t agree with.”

Spock considered this for a moment.

“But Dr. Kohen is a senior scientist,” he said. “Her academic opinion carries more weight than mine.”

“But this is about principles, sir,” Vince said and returned to his reading.

Spock wondered just how many more surprises were waiting to be discovered on this ship.

XXXXX

As Vince had predicted, Caledonia Kohen was not allowed to conduct experiments on living creatures. It left her seething and even a little humiliated, but she was made to understand that despite not holding the same level of academic authority as her, Spock was her senior on the ship. And while Tabitha could overrule his orders, she had no desire to do so.

It was evident that she was grooming the young Vulcan for a much more extensive role on the ship.

And while Caledonia wanted to scream at the first officer, she knew better than to do that. She vowed to never take another research assignment with Starfleet again. They could keep their damned titles and protocols and make slow love to them, for all she cared. She would stick to her intellectual
pursuits at the FOPP and the esteemed conferences that invited her every year for academic discussion.

She read the material that had been assigned to her. But her assessment of everything was superficial and uninspired. Spock clearly saw it, but he didn’t say anything. He was just glad that there was going to be no murder of animals in the labs.

And if that meant that he had to re-read everything she read, he’d do it without complaint.

A few hours before they were scheduled to arrive on Fardour, Captain Pike summoned Spock to a conference room.

“Spock, this mission is very delicate,” he began. “And most of the crew has not been told of its exact nature. How strong is your telepathy?”

“It is strong, sir,” Spock answered, not sure where Pike was going with this.

“So here’s the thing,” Pike said. “We will rendezvous with a vessel from Fardour about two hours away from the planet. We know that the crisis is ecological and telepathic in nature. Do you think you might be affected by whatever caused the shields to collapse?”

Spock had wondered about the same thing numerous times. He thought for a moment before responding.

“It is a possibility,” he replied. “However, without knowing how different the Farhannsu are from Vulcans, it is not possible to tell accurately.”

“I know that, Spock,” the captain said. “But you were also brought on this mission because you’re probably the only Vulcanoid telepath the fleet has at present. We are counting on you. From what we know, humans don’t stand a chance on Fardour’s surface. We have protective gear. And we are working 24/7 to gather intelligence. But we are flying blind here, Spock. For all intents and purposes, this mission is your baby.”

Spock was stunned at this.

“Captain, I have no experience,” he said, more than a little apprehensive about the situation. He had known that as a telepath, his services would be required. But he hadn’t been prepared for this much responsibility.

“But you are their only hope, son,” Pike said, his deep eyes begging Spock to understand.

The Vulcan could not refuse. If there was no real choice for the Farhannsu, then he would do it. And like always, failure was not an option.

Just as he turned to leave, Pike stopped him.

“And oh, Spock,” he said. “Admiral Komack wanted me to tell you that the program you created for the simulation design section of the programming exam, the Kobayashi Maru- that has been incorporated into the actual exam for the command-track cadets. Don’t worry, they will have you take a separate test when you reach that stage. But congratulations!”

“Thank you, sir,” Spock said, surprised that a code that he had written for an exam had been deemed as actually useful by his instructors.
It was odd.

All the approval that he had sought from his instructors at the seminary on Vulcan, was coming to him in Starfleet.

Life was strange. And stranger so for a Vulcan, because there was no logical way of explaining these things.

Chapter End Notes

A reviewer on another site wrote to me that she found my descriptions of violence gratuitous. I know it is not easy for Spock in this story, but really! Do you think I just tortured him for the fun of it? :(
Friends or foes?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“We shall meet with the Akishi in about 45 minutes,” Lt. Kevin Smith announced to the bridge crew.

“Status report, Mr. Spock,” Pike asked when he reached the science station.

“We have conducted long-range sensor scanning and concluded that the “poisoning” that we have been told of is indeed radioactive in nature,” Spock said. “Any claims that the atmosphere is otherwise polluted is unfounded. Furthermore, the radioactivity is caused by the presence of certain unidentifiable compounds in the atmosphere of the planet. One part of the compound is clearly dilithium. Other parts are water and oxygen. But one element remains unidentified. It is unclear if the radioactivity is dilithium related or also exacerbated by the unidentified substance.”

“Hmmm,” Pike nodded and moved to seek the status report from his communications officer. For a while, they all continued working on their stations quietly.

“Sir, we will not be able to beam onto the Akishi,” Zoya said after some time. It had taken her the better part of an hour to establish contact with the aged Farhannsu ship which was clearing falling apart. It was a miracle that they had managed to station it for this long just outside the planet’s atmosphere.

“Then we shall take a shuttle,” Pike said. “My landing party will include myself, Lt. Spock, Dr. Puri, and a four-man security detail. Lt.-Cmdr. Khan, please send a message to security to get that team ready. Ask them to give me men whose psi-ratings were positive. Commander Owens, you have the con.”

“Aye, sir,” she said and promptly got to work. Meanwhile, Zoya dispatched the captain’s orders to the security department. The minutes seemed to stretch into hours. Even though the mission had not really begun yet, everyone was tense. They had finally reached the Akishi; it was time to get to work.

The landing party took the shuttle Copernicus to the Farhannsu ship. It was a pretty short ride. And because the size of the landing party was small, Pike decided to pilot the ship himself.

It didn’t help that even docking into the Akishi’s shuttle bay was a challenge.

To his utter dismay, the shuttle bay of the old ship did not come with an automatic Interlocking mechanism. The crew of that ship could only do two things to allow the Copernicus in. They would either need to manually open the ship’s shuttle bay or mechanically open it but be unable to offer guidance to the shuttle for a smooth entry. Their communication systems were so rudimentary that Pike was unable to explain the problem to them. And clearly, it was understood that the mechanical route would be the best since the Farhannsu crew did not have protective and anchored gear to wear while exposing themselves to naked space.

Spock could see why things were so difficult.

“Captain, if you would allow me,” he politely asked. He was no pilot, but he had a much better understanding of basic gravitational systems of a ship. He also understood better than most people,
how to dock a shuttle without an automatic interlocking system, thanks to his expertise in kinematics and motion.

Pike nodded and gave the pilot’s seat to Spock.

It was challenging to say that least, to try and land smoothly in the Akishi’s makeshift shuttle bay. Spock was worried that due to the lack of controlled friction, the landing itself would be hard and possibly dangerous for the Farhannsu ship.

“Akishi, come in please, this is the Copernicus,” Spock said, hailing the ship.

A burst of static was all they received in the way of a response.


Another burst of static came through. But then a broken message was received.

“Mec----ch---anic---cal shu----t--tle e---n—t--ry act----i---vated, Cop—ni—i—us.”

The message was fragmented and full of static disturbance, but Spock was relieved to know that they had understood his request and accepted it.

“Copernicus crew, please buckle your seat belts,” he said calmly. “Our landing could be rough.”

With an extra spurt of power, he shot the little craft into the open mouth of the Akishi’s shuttle bay. Detecting the entry of the shuttle, the ship’s airlock closed nanoseconds after the entry of the Copernicus. Spock had to cut off the engine with a hard, manual shut-down of the shuttle’s main power which caused the landing to be so harsh that several people’s seat belts came undone, his own included. Dr. Puri tumbled out of his seat and onto the floor. He hit something with a sharp edge and acquired a nasty looking gash just above his left eye.

Most other crew members were also bruised a little bit.

“Spock, you have a gift for understatement,” Pike said, gasping to catch his breath. He had lurched forward and hit the blunt edge of the co-pilot’s console. He side was clearly bruised. He could feel a dull ache just below his left rib-cage. “Rough landing? Indeed.”

"Could have lost my eye," the CMO mumbled as he tried to press his handerchief to his injury. "And poof goes the medical career....."

Spock did not answer. He was also quietly trying to regain his composure. He had hit his head on something; he wasn’t sure what.

But all in all, no one was seriously hurt. While the crew was still groaning (Dr. Puri was now grumbling rather loudly), members of the Akishi’s crew were patiently waiting for them to open their shuttle doors.

“Captain, the shuttle doors are jammed,” Spock said. “And I cannot open them electronically. The console is damaged.”

“I’ll do it manually,” Pike said and motioned a security officer to come and help him push the door open.

It took some huffing and puffing, but finally, they were able to open the door.
And that was how the crew of the Enterprise made their first real contact with the long lost race of
the Farhannsu.

They did not look very different from Vulcans. The same slanted eyebrows, the same pointed ears.
The only things different about them were the three horizontal ridges on their foreheads, and the
open expression on their faces, not at all blank like that of Vulcans.

However, these two things had separated them enough from their Vulcan brethren that now they
were little more than myth and legend on their ancestral planet.

They also dressed differently. The crew members' uniforms (if you could call them that) were unlike
any military garb worn by other alien races. The Farhannsu crewmen wore loose pants with a wide
ankle-length tunic. They had long hair tied into numerous tight braids. And their beard was cropped
close to their face, with a single long braid of facial hair extending past their knees.

This was a very impractical military uniform, if that was what it was.

They were clearly a very different people from the Romulans also. There was no air of hostility
around them. If anything, their aura seemed calm and peaceful.

“Welcome, Earth children,” one of the Farhannsu said as he bowed slightly towards the Captain.

The disheveled and still shaken crew slowly stumbled out of the shuttle. Spock was the last one to
come out.

“You of Subakya’een of Sha Ka Ree?” the Farhannsu enquired when he took in Spock’s upswept
eyebrows and pointed ears.

“I am, Farhannsu brother,” Spock said.

Sha Ka Ree, according to Vulcan mythology was the source of all creation. And each element of
creation had its own deity that was bestowed upon them by the Sha Ka Ree. Subakya’een was
apparently the deity of all Vulcanoids. And while it was no more than an old, pre-Surakian myth on
Vulcan, it was clearly a living belief on Fardour.

“Hashmak is wait you in ship room,” the other Farhannsu said, in haltingly spoken standard.

The crew of the Copernicus followed them to the inside of the Akishi.

The ship looked old even from the inside. The metal was discolored, dented and even rusted in
places. The glass was permanently fogged over and stained with generations of accumulated grime.

The floor was rough, dirty, and uncarpeted. A constant hum of machinery was present everywhere.
It was loud enough that even minor and routine electrical disturbances could be heard easily even by
the humans.

“I wonder if this ship is held together by glue,” one of the Enterprise’s security officers joked. “It
makes me feel unsafe just being on it. What if it just came apart and we all floated into space. Some
suspended animation, eh!”

The thought was terrifying and the joke was in poor taste. Normally, Spock would have gently
chastised the officer. But despite his difference of opinion on the humor, Spock himself was
somewhat in agreement with the man’s observation.
It was indeed nothing short of a mystery that such an ancient, outdated, and battered ship had been able to maintain itself in orbit for nearly 3 months, particularly when they were outside of the planet’s inner exosphere. The gravity of the planet was doing nothing to anchor them to itself like an artificial satellite. This was a feat that had been performed by the ship itself.

Spock’s train of thought was interrupted as they were brought to the chambers of the High Priest.

“Welcome, Earth children,” he greeted them warmly in the same way as the two other crewmen had.

His eyes were sunken in with age and paper white skin hung off his face in loose, wispy folds. The ridges on his forehead were slightly darker than the rest of his skin. His long hair was tied back in a high bun on the back of his head. His long beard was knotted into three separate braids.

“I offer you food,” he said.

Two women with long, dark hair and deep, black eyes placed bowls containing a hot liquid in front of each of them. They also placed tiny goblets in front of them and poured an electric blue liquid into them. The liquid itself was cold to touch, but smoke seemed to rise from the glasses.

“Please eat refreshment now,” the priest said. “Then we talk of help. We grateful for help of Earth children.”

Most of the crew seemed very uncomfortable with the Farhannsu brand of hospitality. They had been led straight from their shuttle to the dining hall. All of them were in varying states of shabbiness. And they had no idea how to respond to the abrupt offering of food and drink. Though technically speaking, the soup was not food either. It just looked like hot water.

Pike did not want to screw up. He smiled at Hashmak.

“We thank you for your hospitality, High Priest,” he said and raised his goblet to his lips.

Just as he was about to take a sip, Spock stopped him.

“Captain,” he said in a low voice. “I am uncertain of the contents of the drink. The soup in the bowls is similar to terran vegetable stock. It should be safe to consume. But I do not know if the drink would agree with human physiology.”

Pike considered this. He did not want to consume something that he did not know the contents of. But he also did not want to reject Farhannsu hospitality. It might come across as insulting. As it was, communication was tough because of the limited understanding of standard on the part of the Farhannsu and the lack of computerized universal translation of their language.

“Spock, can you try and see if any of our theories are correct?” Pike asked. “Is it possible that these guys can speak and understand ancient Vulcan?”

“I shall make an attempt to find out, Captain,” Spock said and turned to the high priest.

“O, holy one, do you still speak the ancient tongue of the gods of Gol?” Spock asked in flawless classical Vulitra, a language considered ancient and pre-Surakian by most people on Vulcan now.

The priest’s face transformed in a matter of seconds. His expression held equal parts anger and equal parts awe.

“You speak the tongue your people called us disgraceful for?” he asked bitterly, wondering if the young Vulcan had any idea about the history of the language.
“I do not believe it to be disgraceful, holy one,” Spock replied. “It is ancient, and therefore a part of my heritage.”

“Heritage…heritage,” the old priest scoffed at the word. “The same heritage that condemned us after logic reformed the smooth ones like yourself.”

Spock was genuinely confused. He had no idea what the priest was talking about.

“I do not understand,” he said with complete honesty.

“And that is perhaps why you have agreed to help a people you ought to hold in contempt,” Hashmak answered. “More will be revealed to you in time. But this is not an hour for reliving olden days and scabbed-over hurts. Please ask your captain to partake of the sacred wine.”

Spock was torn. On the one hand, he desperately wanted to know why the priest’s attitude had been so bitter and resigned. On the other, he was unsure of how to tell him that the wine could potentially be harmful for the humans.

“O holy one, I have a supplication for you,” he said.

“Say it,” Hashmak all but spat.

“My captain is human,” Spock began politely. “The wine could be detrimental to him and to the other crewmembers, as we have not been able to identify its contents.”

“Then you must consume it, Vulcahnnsu child,” the priest answered. “The wine is sacred. No partnership can be forged without the blessings of the Subakya’een of the Sha Ka Ree.”

“I thank you, for your kindness,” Spock said and raised his goblet to take a sip.

“What are you doing, Spock?” Pike asked, clearly having understood none of the exchange between Spock and Hashmak.

“Trust me, captain,” Spock said calmly and drained his goblet.

For a moment, he looked at the captain serenely.

And then suddenly, his eyes rolled back into his head and without a sound, he collapsed sideways in a dead faint.
Hey guys. This is kinda a tough chapter. But it is important for the story, and you will find out in the next chapter, why. Please read and review. I haven't heard from many of you lately, and I'm wondering if the newer chapters are weird. This is my first Star Trek fic, so I am rather unsure if I'm doing it right.

“SPOCK,” Pike screamed. He shook the Vulcan to rouse him, but he was unresponsive and limp.

“What did you do to him?” he asked the high priest angrily.

Hashmak looked at them dispassionately. Dr. Puri came forward and checked Spock’s pulse.

“His heart rate is much slower than it should be,” the doctor whispered pensively.

“The sacred wine not dangerous,” Hashmak said. “But for protect our people, we add poison that only hurt Vulcahnnsu and Rihannsu. But Vulcahnnsu boy right. We not know how wine affect Earth children. He loyal to you, so he drink first.”

“But you knew it would hurt him?” Pike asked accusingly.

“He Vulcahnnsu,” the priest retorted. “We not trust him. We question him before he get better.”

Pike looked flabbergasted. This was absolutely unbelievable.

“YOU asked us for help,” he said. “You literally begged us to help you. And now you want to interrogate my officer. You have no idea of how much trouble your planet is in, I think.”

The priest’s face darkened.

“We die with dignity,” he thundered. “We never be slave to Vulcahnnsu again. You allow us questioning him. Or you go back. And he dead in some hours without medicine to kill poison.”

This mission was already going south. Pike was terrified of sending Spock for questioning; especially since Spock was more vulnerable because of what had happened to him as a child. Simulating a test was one thing. But this was real. Pike had no way of knowing that the Farhannsu would not mistreat Spock.

“You need to send him with them,” Puri said to his captain. “Otherwise he won’t make it. If they have an antidote for whatever they have poisoned him with, then he needs it. My tricorder cannot identify the poison. Neither could his, and that is why he didn't let you drink that wine. You have to let him go.”

Pike had been on so many missions in his almost 20 years of service. He had had to make tough decisions. He had even dealt with similar situations where his officers had been held hostage.
But they had all had years of training to guide them through it all. They had served on starships for years before being assigned to away missions.

And Spock, for all his brilliance, was actually just a freshman.

Pike shuddered to think that Spock had no training in resisting violent interrogation. He had no knowledge of what was considered classified information and what wasn’t. It did not help that they also knew next to nothing about the Farhannsu and their methods of extracting information.

And yet, if the Vulcan was to survive, he would have to go through with the questioning. If he succeeded in placating the fears and suspicions of these people, maybe they’d still be able to complete the mission. Though at this point, a part of Pike couldn’t care less about Fardour. These people were crazy, socially primitive, and paranoid. And maybe that wasn’t how a Starfleet officer should think. But they had poisoned Spock.

Sighing, he let go of Spock.

“You can take him for questioning,” he said. “But if you harm him in any way, you will have to answer to the federation. And there will be no help for your imploding planet if even one hair on his head is missing.”

“We have big respect for your worry,” the priest answered. “We not do damage if he easily submit.”

With that ominous reassurance, he motioned his two guards to take Spock away.

Pike could only hope and pray that his youngest officer would emerge unscathed from this too.

The carried Spock to the lowest levels of the ship.

“He is Vulcahnnsu,” one of the guards said. “Do you think they have come back for us?”

“He has humans with him,” the other guard said. “Surely the Vulcahnnsu haven’t become so humble. They didn’t see us as equal. What chance do psi-null humans have against them?”

“You saw the captain? He seemed to be the master of this one,” the first guard said.

“Yes, but this could be an elaborate trap,” the second guard answered. “This wouldn’t be the first time that the Vulcahnnsu have woven clever, manipulative schemes to trap unsuspecting people.”

They stripped Spock of his shirt and lowered him into a tiny, metal chair which was too small for him. His hands were chained to the arms of the chair and tight bracelets with finger rings were forced on his hands. His ankles were bound together by chains and hooked to the front legs of the chair. They placed a dark, inky cloth on his eyes and shut his ears completely with deep, insulating earbuds. They parted his lips and placed a large gag in his mouth, which was tied and fastened at the back of his head. Lastly, they placed a tight metal helmet on his head, which was fastened with clasps reaching under his chin.

“What will happen to him?” the first guard asked, surveying the Vulcan. “Is it true that this won’t hurt him?”

“That depends on him,” the second guard answered as he closed the door of the interrogation room.

The carried Spock to the lowest levels of the ship.

“He is Vulcahnnsu,” one of the guards said. “Do you think they have come back for us?”

“He has humans with him,” the other guard said. “Surely the Vulcahnnsu haven’t become so humble. They didn’t see us as equal. What chance do psi-null humans have against them?”

“You saw the captain? He seemed to be the master of this one,” the first guard said.

“Yes, but this could be an elaborate trap,” the second guard answered. “This wouldn’t be the first time that the Vulcahnnsu have woven clever, manipulative schemes to trap unsuspecting people.”

They stripped Spock of his shirt and lowered him into a tiny, metal chair which was too small for him. His hands were chained to the arms of the chair and tight bracelets with finger rings were forced on his hands. His ankles were bound together by chains and hooked to the front legs of the chair. They placed a dark, inky cloth on his eyes and shut his ears completely with deep, insulating earbuds. They parted his lips and placed a large gag in his mouth, which was tied and fastened at the back of his head. Lastly, they placed a tight metal helmet on his head, which was fastened with clasps reaching under his chin.

“What will happen to him?” the first guard asked, surveying the Vulcan. “Is it true that this won’t hurt him?”

“That depends on him,” the second guard answered as he closed the door of the interrogation room.
Everything was black.

There was a physical stiffness somewhere far away. He couldn’t move. It was cold.

He panicked. He tried to strain his ears.

Nothing. It was almost like he wasn’t there.

Or as if everything else didn’t exist.

That was illogical. Spock remembered that the last thing he had done was to drink the sacred wine. Whatever was happening to him now, was related to that.

But it did not make his situation any less terrifying.

“Focus,” he commanded himself. With slow, calming breaths, he started taking stock of his physical body. He felt the restraints on his hands and feet. He felt the helmet on his head and the gag in his mouth. And while it was slightly comforting to him that he knew what his physical state was, he was still very much unnerved by the loss of his senses.

A few minutes later, he felt fingers on the meld points of his face.

His anxiety levels skyrocketed.

A pulsating thrum filled his ears. But the physical sensation of a material earbud was still there. Spock was confused.

Suddenly, he felt a sharp tug at his metal shields. He resisted.

The thrum in his ears flared, and a high-pitched keening sound joined it. The sound hurt his sensitive ears.

With great effort, he tried to control the pain.

A more forceful assault battered at his shields.

“Whatnnhhghhh,” Spock tried to say no, but the gag in his mouth prevented him from saying anything.

Suddenly, an overwhelming fear enveloped him, and… and a deep, horrifying sense of despair, as if he was drowning in it.

Spock was certain these were not his emotions. He made another brave attempt at shielding himself further, but a violent tug at his shields shattered his focus.

Suddenly, he felt a sharp electric shock on his wrists and fingers, and the restraints tightened to an even greater degree, cutting off circulation.

Spock did not know what was happening. Was he a prisoner? Was he a hostage? Had this mission been some kind of a trap all along?

A loud metallic clanging like that of a bell started ringing in his ears, entirely dissonant from the already existing thrum and the keening.

His eardrums threatened to burst.

Or did they? The earbuds were still there.
Suddenly, light flooded his eyes and he saw Captain Pike.

To his absolute horror, the captain was being beaten. He was tied up and two faceless Farhannsu were beating him.

But there was something wrong with the image.

Spock’s mind was working hard to protect its master from the sensory, emotional, and telepathic assault. It took a few moments for it to process what was wrong with the image.

The captain was bleeding green! Like a Vulcanoid.

Spock was enraged. Clearly, he was dealing with a masterful telepath. He struggled to break his bonds.

But it seemed like his captors were aware of his strength. The chains refused to budge.

They only tightened further and delivered another powerful shock to his hands.

Being extremely sensitive, his fingers reacted to the electricity as predicted. They jerked and twisted violently. The pain was so great that Spock desperately wanted to pull his hands close to his chest to protect them.

But the cursed bonds wouldn’t allow it.

For a few blissful moments, there was complete calm.

But there was something sinister about it. Spock could feel it.

And sure enough, a mighty jolt of electricity slammed into his skull and his hands, and the sound in his ears blared into his eardrums, tearing through the delicate membranes.

Spock screamed into his gag, unable to hold onto his shields.

And just like that, the telepath slammed into his mind and ripped his mental fortifications apart.

Emotions of anger, suspicion, frustration beat at him as the foreign consciousness probed roughly into his mind, poking and prodding through thoughts, slashing at carefully covered memories, digging through the darkest corners of his psyche.

Spock whimpered in pain.

The now constant flow of low-grade electricity continued to slowly burn through his fingers, and the sound in his ears was driving him mad.

The lack of shielding left him feeling exposed, vulnerable; like he was still a 10-year-old, unable to defend himself.

To his utter dismay, images of his captivity on Zarmal rose unbidden to the forefront of his thoughts.

He tried desperately to contain them and push them back into the little, protected box he had hidden behind his last shield, the oldest one that he had built as a child when he had first learned how to shield.

The telepath brutally pulled the memories back, replaying them in excruciating detail, refusing to mute the emotions of the horrific scenes.
Completely at the mercy of the telepath, Spock was forced to relive one of his worst childhood memories. He was sick and tired of it. Would he ever, EVER be free of it? The scars and the memories seemed to haunt him like a malevolent spirit gleefully feeding off a juicy prey.

Like always, Spock endured.

The telepath saw everything— The bullying he had endured at the hands of his peers, the humiliation and torture he had suffered on Zarmal, the disastrous Kahs’wan, the death of I-Chaya, the loneliness, the insults and isolation his mother braved on a daily basis, his estrangement with his father, the insults and taunts of Damien, the incident that had happened in the locker room, the image of him that had been circulated……

Spock was weeping by this time.

His control was shattered. Gone.

And he was so cold. For all of his logic, he felt as if he would never be warm again. As if he’d be trapped in this nightmare forever.

There was nothing he was able to do as the telepath turned some of the memories over and over again, zooming in on certain details, examining them from various angles, pulling them apart layer by layer.

Spock’s head was throbbing torturously. He wanted to beg for mercy.

But there was none to be had.

He stayed rooted to the corner where the telepath wanted him, immobile and paralyzed, totally vulnerable to the minutest components of his mind’s systematic destruction.

And Spock watched, wondering if this would kill him or simply drive him insane to the point of no return.

XXXXX

“He’s been gone for hours,” Pike said worriedly to his CMO. “I am scared, Sanjeev.”

The physician sighed. He was scared too. And he was regretting the fact that they had agreed to this mission at all.

“We can just hope that he will be unharmed when they return him to us,” he said. “And if it is possible, we should try and get out of here. I know this is not your way. But I don’t trust these people. I wonder if their questioning of Spock will make them trust us a little more.”

Pike did not say anything.

From what he understood, this whole mess had come about because the Farhannsu did not trust Vulcans, due to some ancient grudge. And he had been unable to ask the priest about it, because the language was a huge barrier to communication.

Programming a language into a universal translator was hard work. Technically, it was the work of his ship’s communication department. But Zoya was not as accomplished at ancient Vulcan as Spock. Pike wished he could go back in time and have Spock program the translator anyway.

Hindsight really was a curse.
The crew of the Copernicus was invited for a meal to the ship’s dining area. Hashmak welcomed them to sit at the table before taking his own seat.

The fare was slightly different this time.

The broth was a darker color. And there was bread.

The blue sacred wine was nowhere to be seen. Instead, plain water was served to them in tall glasses.

“How do we know you haven’t poisoned our food?” Pike asked sarcastically.

“I swear on Farhannsu honor,” the priest replied solemnly.

Dr. Puri snorted derisively.

“We respect and appreciate your hospitality, but we cannot eat without Lt. Spock,” Pike said, all traces of sarcasm gone from his voice.

The high priest nodded.

As if on cue, two guards half carried, half dragged Spock into the room.

At the first glance, he seemed okay, but then the captain looked at him closely.

The Vulcan’s eyes were half closed. There was dried and fresh blood on his face, most of it around his nostrils and his lips. He was bleeding from both his ears as well. And there were tear tracks on his cheeks. His mouth was hanging open, and a single thin stream of drool dripped from his lips and onto his crumpled shirt.

His hands were unbound, but his wrists were badly bruised and discolored. There were numerous little cuts and blackened burns on them. And there were burns and bruises on his fingers and his forehead as well.

He looked spent and battered. Pike’s stomach turned at what seemed to have happened to the Vulcan.

“What did you do?” he bellowed, furious beyond reason. “I had told you what would happen if he was harmed,” he said, burning with shame and guilt and anger.

There was regret in the priest’s eyes.

“He loyal,” he answered. “But we must need confirming. He not Vulcahnnsu spy, but need know it certain and sure.”

While the captain argued with Hashmak, Puri assessed Spock’s condition.

“Captain,” the doctor said loudly. Pike stopped speaking and turned to his CMO.

Puri gave his report. “He is in a bad way,” he said. But I am not sure I can do anything to help. He doesn’t seem to be suffering from poisoning anymore, but if he has been harmed mentally-- I can’t say anything till he wakes up.”

“We apology,” Hashmak said. “But we not be slave to Vulcahnnsu again. This wrong, but this important to protect Farhannsu people.”
Before Pike could respond, the doctor butted in.

“Can you give us a room where he can rest a little bit,” he asked. “This mission cannot be completed without him.”

The priest nodded.

“We give you room and send food and water there,” he responded. Then he turned to his servers and spoke to them.

After a few minutes, he addressed the crew of the Copernicus again. “Follow Angyika and Anisiya,” he said politely. ”They take care of you.”

The entire landing party turned to follow the two women.

Pike glared at Hashmak. “If you really wish us to help your planet, pray that Spock is alright after whatever questioning you have subjected him to,” he said angrily.

He hated feeling so helpless. They had taken so long to come here because they had needed a Vulcan for this mission. And now that they had brought a Vulcan, the Farhannsu had deliberately put him out of commission.

He was frustrated. Not only had they jeopardized their own chances of survival, but they had also harmed his newest officer, perhaps badly.

He wasn’t a religious man. But if there were any gods that were listening, he hoped they were in a charitable mood today.

Chapter End Notes

So... what do you think?
A night for revelations

Chapter Summary

So very sorry for such a late update. I was badly tied up with real life. Here is the big reveal on the history that the Vulcans and the Farhannsu share with each other. Please leave a review if you are enjoying the story, and particularly about what you think of the story between these two civilizations.

Dr. Puri was worried.

Spock was still incoherent, and he had not yet entered a healing trance. Physically, there was nothing wrong with him. But he had not yet regained lucidity after his ordeal at the hands of the Farhannsu telepath who had interrogated him.

“We need help, Captain,” he said yet again to Christopher Pike. “I am unable to do anything for him. We need someone to meld with him. I can’t keep him sedated the whole time.”

Pike shook his head. He was listening to the good doctor, but he did not want anyone to mess around in Spock’s head again. The Vulcan had been through enough already.

“I want to help him, Sanjeev,” Pike said. “But we have no way of knowing that they won’t hurt him more. They still haven’t told us what this whole thing is about. And I am not about to have them poke and prod Spock again, not when they clearly dislike him.”

Puri sighed. He could not dismiss the captain’s logic. But as a doctor, he was extremely worried about his patient.

They had been given comfortable rooms and the ship was now preparing to land on Fardour. But the Enterprise was standing by, to take them back in case the mission was compromised further.

For long hours, the crew simply sat and waited. The priest came and enquired about Spock. But when he saw that the Vulcan was still suffering from the aftereffects of the questioning, he had the decency to allow him his privacy.

“Please tell me when he alright,” he had said. “I wish not harm him. But questioning too harsh on mind. It hurt body.”

That had been almost six hours ago. Dr. Puri was sitting next to Spock, pressing cold cloths to his forehead trying to keep his fever under control. The hyposprays had helped, but Spock was still in a precarious condition.

“Any idea how long?” Pike asked tiredly.

“Not really, Sir,” Puri answered, hating this helpless feeling.

They waited, not sure of where this mission was going.

XXXXX
Everything was fuzzy when Spock finally came to. His head was hurting. And all his sensations seemed to be firing on all cylinders.

“Th…the.. lights…” he managed to croak.

“Spock,” Puri gasped and came running to his side. “Thank God you are awake. How do you feel? Where does it hurt?”

Spock couldn’t make out the doctor’s form clearly. And his voice sounded extremely far away and muffled, as if the earbuds were still stuck in his ears.

“Water, please,” he managed to say.

However, the doctor had a better idea. He spooned shaved ice chips into a spoon and tried to feed them to Spock. “It will ease the pain in your throat,” he said. Spock complied wordlessly.

After a few seconds, Puri helped Spock drink some water.

“Thank you, doctor,” Spock said sincerely. “I am unclear about what happened after I drank the wine. I would be highly obliged if you could fill me in on the details.”

Puri looked aghast. “You mean you don’t remember?” he asked in disbelief. “You were interrogated, Spock. Violently—If your condition was anything to go by when you were returned to us.”

Spock could not for the life of him remember any questioning. He had a faint memory of someone attacking his shields and roughly probing through his mind. But there was no sensory memory, except for an intense pain in his fingers, the back of his head, and his temples. Plus, he still couldn’t hear properly. Everything was too loud in his right ear, and everything was extremely faint in his left ear. And there was a constant ringing in both his ears, which was making it supremely difficult to filter individual sounds to process them separately.

“Spock, are you listening?” Dr. Puri asked worriedly. Vulcans did not zone out as a rule. For Spock to zone out on him was a disturbing sign.

“I apologize, doctor,” Spock said. “Could you please inform the captain that I am functional?”

Puri nodded and went to find Pike. He returned moments later with both, Pike and the high priest.

“How are you now, Spock?” Pike asked, relieved that the Vulcan was alright.

“I am well, sir,” he said.

“How are you now, Spock?” Pike asked, relieved that the Vulcan was alright.

“I am well, sir,” he said.

“Are you sure?” he asked, not quite confident that Spock was being completely honest.

“Affirmative, sir,” Spock replied.

He then looked at the high priest.

“O holy one, would he mind if I were to program my crewmates’ translators to understand our ancient and noble Vulitra?” he asked.

Hashmak looked at Spock for a long moment before nodding his consent.

“Captain, could I have the master translator, please?” Spock asked Pike. “I can program the translator to understand and translate Vulitra into standard.”

“How long will that take?” Pike asked.
“Approximately 7.8 minutes, sir,” Spock said.

“That is remarkable, Mister Spock,” Pike said, amazed. From what he understood, programming translators could take hours.

“It is not remarkable, captain,” Spock interjected. “I remember the code for modern Vulcan perfectly and hence, I do not need to go back and forth between files in order to write a fresh code.”

Pike did not ask any further questions. Spock was a genius and if he could work almost ten times faster than both science and communications departments, then who was anyone to say anything.

Spock worked busily for a few minutes. At the end of 7.2 minutes, he had programmed the master translator to translate Vulittra like a native.

“Captain, I believe it is time we got some answers,” he said almost dryly.


XXXXX

“Young Vulcan, you are a child of reformed times,” Hashmak began. “You are too young to know the ancient history of your home. Did you know that the Vulkahnnsu were not always worshippers of logic and reason?” he asked.

“I am aware, holy one,” Spock said respectfully. “Before Surak, ours was a warlike society, where emotions ran high, and blood was spilled for the most minor of reasons.”

Hashmak smiled humorlessly.

“Do you know what role we played in this pre-Surak society of the mighty Vulkahnnsu?” he asked.

“I do not,” Spock said honestly. “The Farhannsu are only myth and legend on Vulcan. And we do not speak of you.”

“Masters seldom speak of their slaves,” the priest said quietly. “We were slaves to your fathers, young Vulcan; Slaves with formidable powers of empathy and healing, telepathy more powerful than that of all the others. We were peaceable, kind people. And the Vulkahnnsu feared us. And they revered us.”

The room was silent. Everyone from the Enterprise crew was listening with rapt attention.

“As empaths, the violent ways of the Vulkahnnsu were hard on us,” Hashmak said. “We were always overburdened by the high emotions in the atmosphere, the pained screams of the victims of the victorious ones, the enraged wailings of orphaned women and children. And it was this that was used against us, to control us. Like the Vulkahnnsu, we formed bonds with our loved ones. But our bonds were more than just telepathic. And every time they sought to control us, they ripped our children away and threatened them with torture, overwhelming us with fear and uncertainty, sometimes even the actual suffering of our children. So we endured. We participated in every war, every skirmish, every feud, as the healers of this mad race. It was abhorrent to us to visit sites of such violent actions, but what choice did we have? We lived in constant misery. For centuries, young Vulcan, this was our reality.”

Spock did not know what to say. He was appalled that the Vulcans had ever been so cruel to do something so repulsive to their own Vulcanoid brethren.
“I can only apologize,” he said softly. “But I wish to assure you, that after the teachings of Surak, we….”

“I am coming to that,” Hashmak said, cutting Spock off. “Surak’s message of peace and logic, of light and reason; Not everyone believed in it. It was not just the Rihannsu who left Vulcan after Surak. We did too. The only difference was that the Rihannsu made a choice. The Farhannsu simply had no place on this new Vulcan. As empaths, emotions are central to our wellbeing. Our healing powers are fundamentally linked with our empathic ability. And on a Vulcan where the norm was now to be a complete suppression of emotion instead of control and moderation, we were not required. And slavery was not “logical” so they set us free. That kindness was more of a cruelty to us. We had known nothing but slavery for millennia. We did not know how to live as free men. We did not have any skills except for our healing abilities. And those were not needed on a cold, emotionless Vulcan. We eventually came to be seen as parasites, as the lesser people. And we chose to leave. We were not free. We had no dignity. And we could not rebuild ourselves in the shadow of our former masters. This, young Vulcan, is the reason we were forced to subject you to a most unpleasant telepathic interrogation. Social memory is a terrible thing. And when it is replete with darkness, it is impossible to forget.”

“Our telepathic shields did not always exist,” Hashmak went on. “Initially, we came here and started all over again like a new race. We re-learnt everything we knew in order to acclimatize ourselves to Fardour. As you already know, this planet is even harsher than Vulcan and further away from its central star.”

Dr. Puri was sobbing silently in the corner, overcome by strong emotions. Pike looked at him, but did not say anything. This was a horror story. But they had to keep listening.

“The early days of any civilization are difficult,” Hashmak continued. “But this was a strange time. We were a people who knew that we were not alone in the galaxy. We knew how to move through the stars. And yet, we were trying to find a way to build a fire on Fardour. We were vulnerable. There were others who knew of our history, of how we had been exploited and shamed on our older home. And they were unkind and uncaring. Fardour is a very rich world. It has an abundance of all kinds of minerals and elements. Multiple civilizations had already been mining the world illegally when we came here. We did not have an objection to them, but they had an objection to us. They did not want to allow us to make this our home. They were worried that we would take control of the planet and use the resources for ourselves. So they did to us what we had suffered on Vulcan. They captured us and enslaved us and sold us in cattle markets. Our daughters and sons were turned into breeding stock, pleasure slaves, farm labor, and domestic workers. In the first few decades, so many of us suffered at the hands of so many different alien races. It was open season on us. We were nobody’s people. Not even our own. And that is why we decided, that in order to preserve our remaining people, we had to isolate ourselves. We built strong telepathic shields all around our planet. It was extremely taxing work. But the one thing on our side was that we were still the most powerful telepaths in the galaxy. We did not violate our oath to never use our gifts to cause harm. We had always been so strong in our principles, that we never attacked telepathically even while defending ourselves, for fear that we’d cause harm. However, this was different. We were simply deflecting everyone away from our home. So we built these shields, so strong that no sensors could work around the planet. The sensors are also automatically manipulated to show the state of our harsh and hostile environment, but nothing about our mineral-rich ground, and nothing about our thriving race. Every child on Fardour learns how to fortify the shields and throughout our lifetimes, we dedicate a portion of our life-force to reinforce the shield. It lowers our lifespans by a few years, but that is a small sacrifice to make for the good of all our people.”

By now, everyone in the room was shaken. It was incredibly hard to believe that peaceful, logical Vulcans had been responsible for so much tragedy. And while Pike was still upset about how Spock
had been treated, he could understand it now.

“On behalf of the entire crew, I apologize for our earlier rudeness,” he said to Hashmak.

“There is no need for that, captain,” the priest replied. “You did not know our reasons. And we had taken your officer away for questioning. Your distrust was understandable. In fact, your loyalty to your crew is commendable.”

“O holy one, can you tell us more about the malfunction in your telepathic shields?” Spock asked, determined to help the people of Fardour. He was not consciously aware of this yet, but somewhere deep down, he was feeling a deep sense of guilt for what the ancient Vulcans had done to the Farhannsu. In helping them now, Spock wanted to atone for all those sins.

“The shields have been compromised due to a number of radioactive fields that have started springing up sporadically through the planet,” Hashmak answered. “We have not dedicated our studies to an extensive pursuit of science, so we are unable to find out the exact nature of the problem. We knew to contact the federation because, like all other alien civilizations, we also received the mass message and the general hailing frequencies for all federation vessels almost two centuries ago. We have known of the federation since its very first exploratory mission. But we chose to use those general frequencies only now because, without your aid, we will all perish. And that is a fate we wish to avoid if we can.”

Pike nodded. “Please be assured that we will do everything in our power to help your people,” he said.

“We are most grateful,” the priest answered.

With that, the crew of the Enterprise embarked on the mission that they had actually come to accomplish.

Spock was still not entirely well; his ears were still ringing, his hearing was still impaired, and his head still felt too heavy-- but there was a fire burning inside him. He just knew that there was no way he was going back without saving these people. He would do it, or he would die trying.
The Akishi reached Fardour relatively smoothly for a ship of her age. It was decided that Spock would accompany the high priest and his crew to the surface. And because the climate of the planet was entirely unsuitable for humans, Spock had requested Hashmak to lower the telepathic shields on the ship in order to allow the crew of the Enterprise to beam back to their ship.

“Captain, I am simply attempting to do a reconnaissance of the surface in order to be able to program the protective suits for Fardour’s geographic conditions,” Spock said to Pike.

The captain did not want to send Spock alone. But even he could not deny that this was what they had brought the Vulcan for.

It didn’t mean he had to be happy about it, though.

“You must check back with us every hour,” He said.

“What, Sir? I couldn’t hear you properly,” Spock said. “Can you please repeat that?

That was strange. A few minute ago Spock had been able to hear just fine. And before that, for a few minutes, everything had been way too loud. He had ignored it as an anomalous aftereffect of his interrogation. However, right now the buzz in his ears was similar to the one that had been present when he had just woken up after the questioning.

“He said that you need to check back every hour,” Dr. Puri said loudly.

Spock was thoroughly embarrassed but he still could not hear the doctor.

“I apologize but could you be louder still?” he asked bashfully.

“Spock, you could hear just fine earlier,” the doctor said in alarm.

“I beg your pardon, doctor,” Spock said, hating the constant buzz in his ears.

“YOU NEED TO CHECK BACK EVERY HOUR, SPOCK,” Puri yelled.

This was clear to Spock, but the decibel level was suddenly too much. He winced as his hearing was shocked back into its usual sensitivity.

“I understand, doctor,” he said.

“CAN YOU HEAR OKAY NOW?” Puri yelled again.

“Please do not shout doctor,” Spock said. “I seem to be experiencing consistency problems with my hearing.”
“Oh,” Puri did not know what to do about that.

“Spock, are you sure you will be okay on the surface with them,” Pike asked gently, clearly worried about the younger man.

“I do not see a choice, sir,” Spock replied serenely. “I assure you that I will perform to the best of my capabilities.”

Pike shook his head. It was so like Spock to simply assume that he was worried about his ability to perform his duty. It was also sad that he did not realize that people actually cared about him.

“I don’t have the slightest doubt, Mr. Spock, that you are capable of performing your duties,” Pike said. “I am concerned about your personal well-being.”

“I understand that,” Spock responded. “And I appreciate it, sir.”

“Comm. us if anything feels off,” Puri chimed in. “And don’t forget check back every hour.”

“I will, doctor,” Spock said as he watched the rest of the crew dematerialize.

In mere moments, they were gone.

Spock was apprehensive about being alone with the Farhannsu, but he quashed his fears with determination. He was on a mission here and it was important to focus only on that. In a few moments, they would enter the atmosphere of Fardour. And then, he’d be expected to do what any good science officer should do; conduct a thorough survey for the landing party in order to come up with the best solution to the problem at hand.

“Young Vulcan, you will follow us to the temple of the Subakya’een,” Hashmak said. “And then we shall let you study our home so that you may help us.”

“I will gladly do all in my power,” Spock said. “Please lead the way.”

XXXXX

It was an understatement to say that the surface of Fardour was harsh. The planet’s gravity was much higher than that of Vulcan’s and that was making it difficult for Spock to walk unhindered. He was forced to drag his feet across the surface. Besides, the air was much too thin, as a result of which, the amount of oxygen available to him was much lesser than he was used to. The thin atmosphere also meant that the surface was unevenly hot and cold, thanks to the unstable nature of the ultraviolet radiation of Fardour’s sun. The telepathic shields on the planet were messing with Spock’s head because the damaged state of his own shields was making it very tough for him to hold the psionic pressure exerted by millions of minds at bay.

And the Farhannsu were empaths.

On the ship, he had been able to tolerate their empathic influence, but here, most people were communicating with each other through a combination of emotions, thoughts, and impressions with very limited use of spoken language.

Unfortunately for him, he was being forced to not only take in bits and pieces of all the noise, but also experience the myriad of emotions that were heavy in the air. It did not help matters that he was Vulcan, and there was a mix of negativity, curiosity, anger, indifference, and hope—all directed at him from various on-ground personnel.
“Are you able to communicate telepathically at all?” Hashmak asked him.

“Only through a meld or a deliberate bond,” he responded.

The high priest sighed.

“Then you will find it a little difficult to communicate with people here,” he said. “Everyone does speak and understand Vulitra. Military personnel like crewmen of ships are expressly encouraged to communicate verbally with each other for the purposes of complete transparency. But people on the planet are not bound by these rules. Many of them have never spoken a word in their entire lives.”

Spock did not know what to make of that.

“I understand, o holy one,” he said. “But I do not wish to meld with multiple individuals simply in a bid to conduct simple conversations. Melding is a very private thing to my people. And… And the questioning has created holes in my shields. I do not have the luxury of time to heal myself from that damage.”

The priest looked apologetic at that admission. He hadn’t wanted to hurt the Vulcan child. But the fear and distrust his people harbored against the Vulcans, was very real. Besides, they did not know enough about Starfleet to trust their non-human officers.

This was going to be a problem. The priest knew that it would be wrong to expect Spock to allow the Farhannsu people to meld with him for every conversation. Not to mention that it was impractical. Only skilled Farhannsu mind-healers, interrogators, and priests knew how to meld the Vulcan way. Everyone else had the basic knowledge but not quite enough to perform a successful meld safely, and that too with a non-empathic Vulcan.

“We hope that verbal communication will be enough,” Hashmak said, not knowing what else to say.

Spock nodded.

After walking for a few more minutes, they arrived at the temple.

Spock had only ever heard stories of the Subakya’een. It was an almost surreal experience to be entering the temple of a deity that was considered nothing more than an ancient myth on his home world.

The gates of the temple were made of Arili, a rare non-terran, non-Vulcan noble metal that sparkled and shimmered like a gemstone at dawn and dusk. Numerous intricately carved coils of tarnum were embedded in the gilded stone floor. Men and women in white, unstitched dresses milled about in the courtyard. And while they all kept their heads down, their eyes were lifted just enough to make direct eye-contact with everyone from the Akishi, including the high priest.

Spock could feel their restraint in emotion. His head was relatively quiet, and that was a relief.

The inside of the temple was covered in ancient Vulitra calligraphy interspersed with images from Farhannsu history.

Spock recognized a number of scenes as depictions of some of the instances of discrimination that Hashmak had spoken about on the ship.

There was a tall statue of a Vulcanoid woman, presumably the feminine form of the Subakya’een, the Vulcanoid servant of the all-pervading, omnipresent, omnipotent, and genderless creator, Sha Ka Ree.
The eyes of the statue were detailed, with pupils made out of Ophira crystals.

Hashmak caught Spock looking at them.

“These crystals came from Andrinika, one of the wise women of our people who also left Vulcan and came here,” he said.

“Is she honored in the temple as well?” Spock asked.

“She is honored, but not here,” the priest replied. “She holds a sacred place in the oldest hall of martyrs. In her desperation, she gave these crystals to the last remaining priest after the first massacre. She was not very young but she was youthful. And she was captured by an Orion slaver’s ship and sold. But not before she aided the escape of 13 children to the safety of the underground. We do not know what became of her. But we are certain that she would not have survived her captivity very long. The last of her memory now lovingly watches over the children of Fardour through the eyes of the Subakya’een.”

Spock knelt down and placed his left hand on his right, and recited an old Vulcan blessing, praying for the salvation of Andrinika’s katra and for her sacrifice to forever nourish the now prosperous society of the Farhannsu.

Hashmak gave Spock a tour of the temple. It seemed as if the halls and memorials dedicated to martyrs were endless. There was only a tiny chamber where the other aspects of Farhannsu culture were represented.

Spock was grateful to Hashmak for showing him the other side of pre-Surakian history.

Somehow, it made him feel better about the fact that he was different from other Vulcans. Suddenly, he was a little less ashamed of his occasional human emotionalism.

But all too soon, he had to give up his musings and get to work. It was astonishing that the Farhannsu had shown such resilience in the face of absolutely terrifying circumstances. It was now up to Spock and the Enterprise to ensure that they would not be made homeless again.

XXXXX

Scientific study was very one-sided on Fardour. The Academy of Natural Studies had copious amounts of fascinating and detailed research in biology, anatomy, physiology, psychology, anthropology, medicine, zoology, and botany. There was also some basic research in chemistry and scientific alchemy. But there was nothing to help Spock understand the geological condition of the planet.

According to Spock’s tests, the problem was two-fold—One, the atmosphere had not always been so thin. It had been thinning steadily for centuries due to the formation of a harmful gas called Zalnite which was lighter than Oxygen. Two, the Zalnite was being formed due to an unstable reaction at the cusp of the planet’s mantle and its core. Zalnine, a highly reactive non-Terran, non-Vulcan element was reacting with extremely high-grade dilithium. And the explosion under the surface was creating bursts of radioactive clouds on the surface. After each explosion, the Zalnite gas would rise above and cool down and get mixed with water, falling to the surface as Zalnic acid, a corrosive, radioactive acid extremely detrimental to all life forms.

Mostly, people had been forced to stay indoors by the impending rains every time they saw clouds gather in the sky. But hundreds of people had been killed by the radioactive clouds on the surface. And some people had died due to acid burns after failing to find shelter from the rain.
Spock also deduced that a part of the problem had to do with the incessant mining that had caused the planet’s molten mantle to bleed into the solid core’s few empty pockets. Unfortunately, this meant that the problem at hand was basically an ongoing ecological disaster. He did not have the heart to tell Hashmak clearly what the problem was. But he needed to inform the captain.

The chances of saving Fardour were slim. And Spock was not sure if those odds were even worth anything. In his opinion, there was only one plausible way to prevent any further interaction between the core and the mantle. But it was risky, unconventional idea, and it had astronomically high chances of failure. But without it, there was no hope anyway. However, in order to take that step, he needed Pike’s approval and all the expertise of the engineering and the science departments.

He already knew that the first response of his captain would be a firm NO.
Chapter Summary

I apologize for all the science in this chapter. Most of it is fictional, but all of it is based on real principles of biology, chemistry, and physics. I don't want to go all nerdy on you, but this was important. Please let me know what you think. I really, really appreciate your feedback.

“Doctor, could you provide me with a self-adjusting hearing aid?” Spock asked Dr. Puri as he worked on programming the environmental controls for the protective suits. They had just finished another weird conversation which had lasted all of ten minutes but had utilized decibel levels ranging from 60 to 120. Needless to say, the doctor was very, very worried.

“I can get you a hearing aid, Spock,” he said. “But I can’t detect the reason behind the problem. According to my tricorder, everything is fine with your ears.”

Spock did not say anything.

The doctor was agitated that he hadn’t yet been able to find out what was wrong with Spock. Just then, he realized something. It was only a hunch, but one that needed to be investigated.

“Stay still for a minute,” he said and brought his tricorder close to Spock’s temple. A few moments later, he moved it towards his forehead.

Nothing was said, but the doctor’s frown was enough to tell Spock that something was grossly wrong.

“Can’t Vulcans assess their body’s condition?” Puri asked Spock, hoping that Spock would be able to give him some information.

“They can, sir,” the Vulcan answered. “But after the interrogation, I haven’t been able to use that ability to ascertain the nature of my injuries.”

Puri sighed. Of course. If Spock had been able to figure out what was wrong, he would have. And he would have probably looked into the matter. A brain injury was serious business. And in Spock’s case, there were three separate injuries, all of which were dangerous.

“Spock, have you been experiencing other symptoms? Like nausea, any kind of vision impairment, issues with your memory, any mood swings?” he asked.

Spock looked irritated.

“Does it matter?” he asked.

“I can’t believe you just said that,” Puri retorted incredulously. “Do you have any idea what a brain injury could mean?”

“It is a telepathic injury,” Spock said. “And after this mission, I will take the required amount of time
to heal myself.”

Puri knew that had been coming.

“And that would be great, Spock,” he said gently. “But both of us know that a telepathic injury also means that you can’t achieve a proper healing trance. Besides, these readings indicate that you have physical injuries on your brain.”

Spock almost sighed.

“Okay, doctor, here are my symptoms,” he said. “I am having to exert more effort into recalling visual stimuli and the emotional responses connected with them. I am experiencing difficulty in remembering uncommon words in both, standard and Vulitra. I am also unable to focus on the intervals in musical scales. And I cannot rely on auditory memory for reasoning because the fragments of auditory memories are disjointed from other accompanying stimuli that were originally a part of their makeup. I believe I am also finding it harder to rein in my emotions. I am feeling anger, remorse, guilt… depression. It has been an immensely long time since I have had to deal with emotions. It is unnerving. And yes, doctor, I am experiencing nausea and an excruciating headache that I am unable to suppress even with meditative techniques.”

Spock’s voice was extremely quiet by now.

Puri swallowed audibly.

“Then you know what is wrong, Spock,” he said. “You have severe frontotemporal injuries. Large areas of your temporal regions are compromised in varying degrees. And the telepathic center of your frontal lobe has also experienced acute shock. If these are left untreated, the symptoms will only worsen. I doubt any hearing aid could help you with this.”

“I understand,” Spock said and went back to programming the suits. Captain Pike would be there soon and then Spock would have to tell him about his solution to the instability of Fardour’s core and mantle. He needed to get on with his work as fast as he possibly could.

“But you could try a sensory aid,” Puri said after a few minutes of racking his brain. “It will artificially regulate auditory inputs and direct them to your frontal lobe for reasoning.”

“That would be welcome, doctor,” Spock responded without looking up from his work.

Puri got up and left for the sickbay, probably to get the sensory aid.

Spock refused to dwell on the doctor’s diagnosis. He had known something was wrong. And he had been ignoring it. Obviously, that hadn’t been the wisest thing to do. And he wasn’t even going to think about the possibility that his condition could worsen during the mission. He would take care of himself after Fardour was out of danger. He had a promise to keep to these people.

Errantly, he remembered an old terran saying. Sins of the fathers are visited upon the children. Spock was not big on metaphors. But just this once, the implications of the saying were simply too ironic to ignore.

XXXXX

The conference room was full.

The complete bridge crew was present. The entire science, communications, and medical departments were there. The chief of engineering, Nikolas Albescu was there with two of his junior
Dr. Puri had provided Spock with a sensory aid to help him deal with the auditory side-effects of his injuries. Thankfully, it was working.

Tabitha smiled at Spock, while Zoya winked at him flirtatiously.

“Okay everyone,” Pike called the room to order. “We need to listen to Lt. Spock’s report in order to figure out the best way to proceed. Based on his recon, Spock has fleshed out a potential plan-of-action. He has also programmed the controls on the protective suits to make the mission safe for the landing party. The basics of the ecological crisis are on your PADDs. I want you to take a few minutes to read the report before we hear Spock’s recommendations and findings in detail.”

Everyone pored over the observations and inferences on their screens. Some people looked confused. Others wore expressions of horror and defeat.

“This is A-grade work, Lieutenant,” Tabitha complimented Spock. She was impressed that he had managed to perform such detailed tests despite insufficient prerequisite knowledge. “But your findings are deeply unsettling. I don’t know what can be done for the planet short of evacuating all the people.”

A few people continued to read. It was not an easy report to understand, and not everyone was as competent in the sciences as Tabitha.

“Is there anyone who still needs some time to finish reading?” Pike asked after 20 minutes. When no one responded in the affirmative, Pike nodded to Spock to continue with his presentation.

“A certain degree of core-mantle interaction is natural, considering that in most Class-M planets, the mantle is molten," he said. "Like all solid planets, Fardour’s mantle and core are rich with minerals. Even though the Farhannsu refuse to interact with other warp-capable civilizations, they have a wealth of high-grade Dilithium which has been mined by multiple alien civilizations over centuries.”

Everyone nodded at that, particularly people who had accompanied them on the Akishi.

"In order to understand the nature of the problem, it is important to pay attention to the nature of Dilithium, which I shall endeavor to explain for the benefit of the non-science crew," Spock said, unaware that he had just sounded rather arrogant and condescending towards nearly half the people in the room. Of course, that was untrue, but it did not stop some security officers from making faces at the perceived insult. However, the Vulcan continued with his explanation.

"Dilithium is a radioactive element. It is an outlier isotope of the common terran element Lithium. Dilithium is basically Lithium-25, a highly stable, sophisticated, naturally occurring twin of all the other unstable and short-lived Lithium isotopes whose half-lives are often measured in microseconds. Dilithium was granted its own position in the periodic table alongside Francium, because despite not having the atomic number 87, it behaves exactly like Francium, which is why it cannot be replicated in a synthesizer. However, Francium cannot propel a warp drive, because of the missing subatomic particles that make Dilithium so different. Dilitrino, a relatively less-understood subatomic particle is joined to every one of the 25 neutrons in every single Dilithium atom. The lack of information on Dilitrinos is what makes Dilithium impossible to synthesize. The other additional property of Dilithium that makes it so valuable is its highly anomalous half-life of 4 billion years, which is the same as that of Uranium-238. Besides Dilithium, Fardour is also rich in precious non-terrann, non-Vulcan noble elements like Arili and Tarnum. Any questions so far?”

No one raised their hand. Spock did not say anything, but Pike wondered if there was a reason
behind the lack of questions. Either everyone was understanding everything perfectly. Or the ones who weren’t, were completely lost. He was confident that the bridge crew, the science crew, and the engineering departments were doing fine. He was not at all sure about security, communications, and medical.

Oblivious to Pike’s wonderings, Spock went on speaking.

“As you can see from the report, the Core-Mantle Boundary or the CMB of the planet has been compromised greatly due to centuries of ecologically irresponsible mining, and due to the subsequent increased rate of interaction between the elements that are present in the mantle and the core, namely Dilithium, and a toxic, highly reactive substance called Zalnine. Typically, there are multiple reactions taking place inside the planet all the time. A small degree of Dilithium reacts with certain isotopes of hydrogen and oxygen to create Dilithium Hydroxide (DiOh), which is a corrosive base. Normally, this would not pose a problem because the temperature of the inner mantle would neutralize the base in a very short amount of time. The excessively compromised state of the CMB has however changed that, by allowing the DiOh to react with Zalnous acid, an acid created in the core by the reaction between Zalnine and the afore-mentioned special isotopes of Hydrogen and Oxygen. These two resultant compounds are able to find sanctuary in the artificially created pockets in the core, where they interact to form the salt Dilithium Zalnite and water. The problem is that this reaction is so powerful, that it creates disturbances up to the outer surface and deep inside the inner core, creating serious geological instability. Furthermore, in the presence of independently existing Zalnic Acid in the middle mantle, a reaction occurs, which causes Dilithium-irradiated Zalnite gas to contaminate the surface during the explosion. Zalnite gas is lighter than the oxygen isotope which sustains life on Fardour. Therefore, soon after the explosion, it rises and in the correct humidity conditions, forms irradiated Zalnic acid, which causes acid rain and further irradiation of the planet’s surface. In order to halt this vicious cycle, we need to seal all the channels that allow core-mantle interaction and create isolated artificial chutes all over Fardour to allow the planet’s excessive internal heat and pressure to naturally dissipate. There will need to be separate chutes from the core and the mantle.”

For several minutes, there was a pin-drop silence in the room.

“That is a very detailed analysis, Lt. Spock,” Tabitha said finally. “But how do you propose we halt the core-mantle interaction? And what are your suggestions for fortifying the CMB to a vacuum-like degree?”

“That is the part where the solution can be slightly risky, but I have not been able to isolate another way,” he began. “We need to flood the CMB with two layers of distinct fast-solidifying inert compounds. They would create immovable barriers on both, the outer core side and the inner mantle side. Between these layers would be a vacuum, as they would be completely fused together. I propose that the first of the two substances should be Tutacarnium, an alloy of Tungsten, Tantalum, and industrial-grade diamond. Its melting point is 7,460 degrees Fahrenheit, which is nearly 1200 degrees hotter than the hottest part of Fardour’s core. The second substance should be a Titanium-dominant alloy of undiluted, high-grade Titanium and Chromium. This should be used along the mantle side. We will need to drill and seal six openings through each one of Fardour’s oceans in order to gain access to the inner regions of the planet’s geology. We will need to orchestrate the floodings from points in the middle mantle and the tubes delivering the molten alloys will need to maintain temperature right till the very end. Multiple floodings may be required in order to coat the boundary perfectly. I do not wish to create unnecessary disturbances, which is why only a single one-man probe should be sent through every point to oversee the reaction. If there were a way to be more certain, six individual probes could be sent in simultaneously, but considering the lack of equipment and time, our only option might be to work efficiently with a single drill and a single probe that would achieve the necessary results in relatively uniformly executed parts.”
“But, sir, can we not orchestrate a reaction from the core, which would achieve the objective through a single mega explosion?” a junior scientist asked nervously.

“That would have been a possibility if the core were not so brittle,” Spock answered. “An explosion of such magnitude could augment the problem exponentially. That is a risk which would be unwise to even consider.”

Pike had been listening closely all this while. He did not like Spock’s plan. It was too tedious, too unpredictable, and way too risky. But it was the only plan they had.

“We need to figure out who will take the one-man probe into the planet, among all the other things,” Pike mused out aloud, wondering if there would be volunteers for such a blind, precarious task, which could potentially be a suicide mission.

“No need for that, captain,” Spock said smoothly. “I will do it.”
“You really should eat something, Spock,” Tabitha said to her newest favorite officer. The entire bridge crew was eating lunch in the mess hall but Spock had only ordered a cup of tea for himself, hardly enough to be considered enough in any way.

“I would, Commander,” Spock said. “But I do not need nourishment at this point.”

Tabitha sighed. Spock was so stubborn. But she was even more stubborn. They were to beam down in exactly an hour. There was no way she was allowing Spock to go anywhere without eating something.

“Lieutenant,” She said in her most authoritative voice. “You will eat. Just this once I am bringing you a meal. Next time I expect you to procure an adequate meal for yourself before you come to the table.”

She turned and walked towards the replicator without waiting for an answer.

Within two minutes, she presented Spock with a large bowl of mushroom soup and two thick slices of hot bread smothered in paprika infused olive oil.

“Eat up,” she commanded in a no-nonsense tone.

Spock knew he had no choice. He could tell that this was an order.

“As you wish, commander,” he responded and took a bite of the bread.

Tabitha stayed at the table even as everyone else left to get ready for beaming down. She made sure that Spock finished his meal.

Puri had taken her into confidence and told her some of the medical issues that were plaguing Spock. He had made it completely clear that the Vulcan’s nutrition was as much a priority as the success of this mission.

What she couldn’t understand though, was why Spock was being so illogical about eating. After all, wasn’t he supposed to know that eating was important before the mission, particularly because they had no idea when they would return to the ship?

Unknown to her, Spock was already starting to feel his gorge rise. He had not told the doctor, but he had not been able to keep anything down after the interrogation. However, he also did not want to tell Commander Owens about his illness.

So he ate in silence, controlling his body’s urge to expel everything he was forcing down his throat.

After much effort, he finished the food.

“Officer, if you would allow, we should prepare to beam down,” he said.

“Of course, Spock,” Tabitha replied, smiling brightly at him.

Spock did not say anything. He simply turned around and made his way to his quarters. And the first
thing he did after reaching the washroom, was to throw up. It was unpleasant to be so violently sick. And he was most displeased that he was unable to eat even though he needed to. It had been almost four days since he had last eaten. But what choice did he have? He needed to meditate, to rest, and to deal with the injuries in his brain and in his shields. But he couldn’t. Not when there was so much work to be done.

He needed another way to keep himself nourished. He opened the portable medkit that Hamid had packed for him. In addition of all kinds of field dressing, pain medicines, and healing salves, there were six hyposprays of essential nutritional supplements.

Sighing with relief, Spock jammed one of them into his neck, fairly certain that this would keep the physiological effects of hunger at bay for at least the next 36 hours.

XXXXX

Pike decided to keep the landing party small. He chose Spock, Tabitha, Zoya, and engineering chief Nikolas to beam down with him.

“You understand Spock’s plan well, I hope,” Pike said to Nik as they waited on the transporter pad.

“I do, sir,” he replied. “Mr. Spock and I have been working tirelessly to identify problem areas, the finer details, and the equipment needed for the actual operation. I have also prepared a simple report for the Farhannsu leaders to read if they need to understand our solution in greater depth. Mr. Spock translated the report into Vulitra and has a copy of it on his PADD.”

“Good,” Pike said. He was sure of Spock’s skills and Nik’s capabilities. But he was also very jittery. Not only was the plan itself dangerous, they had no idea how it would be received by Hashmak and his people. He could only hope that they would understand the need for such drastic measures.

All too soon, they dissolved into shimmers. Pike’s last thought before rematerializing was that if they were unable to convince Hashmak, the consequences were going to be catastrophic in more ways than the most obvious.

XXXXX

“Even if I were to agree with your plan, my people won’t,” Hashmak said. “Drilling six massive holes through our oceans! I am willing to take the chance that your intent towards us is noble. But my people are not educated in the sciences like you. They will not understand these complex conditions that have brought us here.”

It was distressing that the high priest had such little faith in his people. And Spock was quick to point that out.

“But holy one, you are also implying that your people are incapable of understanding even after we explain the situation to them,” he said. “Are you telling us that the Farhannsu are an unintelligent race?”

Spock’s words had a ring of challenge in them.

“You have a very smart mouth, young Vulcan,” Hashmak retorted agitatedly. “Fine. The noble families and their guardians are to congregate in the hall of audiences in exactly an hour. I shall allow you to convince them.”

“But your people will not trust him, surely you know that,” Pike interjected.
“I do,” the priest said. “And I will address them before the young Vulcan. But after that, it is up to him.”

“Captain,” Spock said to Pike. “Do not intervene while I am attempting to explain. If there is irreconcilable hostility towards me, you and the rest of the crew might have to go ahead with the plan without me.”

“But Spock, this is crazy,” Pike said, clearly upset with the turn of events. “What happened between these guys and your people is centuries old.”

Spock only gave the captain a blank look.

“History is a terrible thing, sir,” he said. “And when presented over millennia, the villains of the story become the demons of a legend.”

XXXXX

Spock sat behind Hashmak as the priest gave his speech. The address was short, crisp, and heartfelt. It did not contain any new facts, but it reminded the people of the severity of the problem once again, though that was unnecessary. A radioactive blast had killed 17 people and injured another 54 just a few hours ago. If that did not lend credibility to the gravity of the situation, what did?

“And now, I wish for Spock of Vulcan to explain to you the solution to our planet’s current troubles,” he said and nodded towards Spock.

A collective gasp of surprise was heard throughout the hall. For several minutes, there was silence, but Spock could tell from the sudden emotional overload in the room, that protests had erupted within the gathering and people were frantically communicating with the priest and with each other through telepathic and empathic means.

“I know they are angry, but I wish to be able to communicate with them in order to allay their fears,” Spock said to Hashmak.

“My dear brothers and sisters, please speak overtly in Vulitra, so that our guests may understand your concerns.” The priest said the audience.

“He is Vulkahnnsu,” a woman shouted from the back of the hall.

“He could be a spy,” another woman screamed.

“They have come back for us,” a man shouted.

“We should kill him before he brings others like himself,” another voice called out.

“You have sold your soul to them, high priest,” someone else screamed

Suddenly, there was a pandemonium. People were screaming in anger and terror. Small children were crying, babies were wailing.

“Please, I implore you to calm down,” Spock said, trying to reach out to the people over the cacophony.

“Leave Fardour, Vulkahnnsu scum,” a man roared as he held his child protectively in his arms.

The toddler with bright blue eyes whimpered in fear.
Spock’s heart thudded in his chest. He was overwhelmed at the realization that even after all these years, the people of Fardour were terrified of Vulcans. The emotions in the room were very real. And they were strong enough to cause immense emotional and physical agony to him.

“I beseech you to hear me out,” Spock yelled. It was a foreign sensation for him to be yelling. But he had no option. For a moment, there was silence, and Spock took advantage of that to make his last, desperate pitch. “If I am unable to help your planet deal with this ecological disaster, Starfleet will evacuate all your people and relocate them to another world. And you can mete out justice against me as you see fit.”

“A Vulkahnnsu’s word is as good as that of a blood snake,” someone said from the audience.

“I can only give you my word,” Spock said. “The high priest has had me interrogated. He knows I mean no harm. I come in peace. Only to offer help.”

"We don't trust you," the first woman said. "We have no reason to."

"I understand that, my lady," Spock said softly. "But I beseech you to simply listen to what I have to say, before you pass a judgment upon the proposed solution."

“Begin, young Vulcan,” the priest said.

With a deep sigh, in his most monotonous, robotic tone, Spock began to explain the problem and its only possible solution, to the gathering.

No one interrupted him for the next half-an-hour.

“Any questions?” he asked at the end.

There were none.

But then one man stood up.

“Your plan is not sound,” he said calmly, but his barely controlled anger was palpable in his words. “Our planet could die. But for you, this is just a game of numbers and laws. No one can ask you anything because we do not understand your science. I only seek to warn our people that your promise holds no weight. Even if Starfleet were to evacuate us, it would never be able to evacuate all of us. And neither will you ever be punished nor will your punishment bring back everything that would have been lost by then thanks to our misplaced trust in you.”

There was a stunned silence at that.

A moment later, Spock felt a heavy pressure against his mind. He clutched his head and his face contorted with pain. He let out a small, strangled sob.

Doctor Puri, who had watched everything silently so far, tried to rush to Spock. But Pike stopped him.

“No, Sanjeev,” he said, hating himself for it. “They cannot know that the Vulcan officer means more to Starfleet than just an employee. Spock is right. If they decide not to trust him, then this mission is going to fall upon the rest of us without him.”

Spock’s hands twisted in his hair as he fell to his knees. It was clear that multiple people from the gathering were attacking him empathically. He writhed on the floor of the stage, unable to protect himself.
“Stop this,” Hashmak screamed when he realized what was happening. “You will kill him or disable him permanently.”

“It would still be kinder than what his people did to us,” the man with the toddler said.

“He is our last hope,” the priest said and sat down beside Spock. He placed his hands on the Vulcan’s meld points. His fingers burned at the sheer strength of the attack. He tried to shield him with his own abilities. But it was very difficult. There were too many people channeling raw emotion at him.

“AAAArrrrhhhh,” Spock groaned again. He had no defenses against this. He could subconsciously feel the strain this was putting on his heart.

“Stop,” the priest screamed telepathically at the audience. The unfettered power in the command put an abrupt end to Spock’s suffering. Shakily, he tried to stand up.

“Take it easy, young Vulcan,” Hashmak said, as he helped Spock to his feet.

“I am aware of your mistrust,” the priest said to the people as Spock straightened his rumpled uniform. “But I request you to give him a chance. He is not here as a representative of Vulcan. He is here as a junior officer in Starfleet. His commanding officer is Captain Christopher Pike, a human. And we have never been at war with humans.”

At this, Pike came to the stage.

“Dear People of Fardour,” he spoke into the amplifying translator. “We are here only to help your planet, to learn from your old and great civilization, and to offer you a place in the United Federation of Planets. We assure you that you will never be enslaved again by any civilization. In fact, Starfleet, the federation, and the United Earth government have been working against the ills of the intergalactic slave trade and the trafficking of sentient beings. In the last ten years, I have personally led rescue operations to Orion slave auctions and freed close to 3,000 sentient beings before they could be sold. We are committed to ideals of liberty and dignity. I request you to allow us to help your planet in this time of need.”

This time, the people remained silent. But like before, it was clear that multiple exchanges of thoughts and questions were taking place telepathically between the priest and the members of the audience.

A few minutes later, Hashmak turned to Pike and bowed.

“My people approve, Captain,” he said with a smile. “We are willing to have you aid us. And we are willing to consider your current scheme. Please tell us what you need from us in order to begin your operation.”

XXXXX

While the priest discussed the plan with the captain, he watched from the corners of his eyes. His child slept in his lap, peaceful and calm. The baby’s rosy cheeks spoke of the love and warmth he was accustomed to. As a father, Ashulat could not let that be taken away from his child.

He was certain that this was nothing more than an elaborate trap. The Farhannsu did not need the federation or the humans. And they certainly did not need the conniving, cruel, holier-than-thou Vulcans. If Fardour was dying, it was their fate. It was bothersome that the old priest couldn’t see it. Or maybe the priest had been sold to these people. That was a disturbing thought. But then again, maybe he was just going senile.
No. Ashulat was from a house of warriors. His gentle healer’s blood had been drained of its compassion centuries ago by the bloodthirsty Vulcans. His family had since served to protect the noble houses of the Farhannsu. It was his duty now to call upon the memories of those olden days, in order to fight this threat. He would do it for his brothers and sisters. And he would do it for his child. He was sure there were others like him out there who could see through this façade of peace and goodwill. He would find them and they would find a way to neutralize this threat.

And they would start with the Vulcan and his manipulative, lying captain.

Chapter End Notes

Hey everyone. We are inching closer to the actual operation. I hope you are enjoying this story so far. I should have updated two days ago, but I was unable to because it was the tenth anniversary of my mom's death. I wrote a little thing to commemorate my relationship with her.

You can read it here: https://deltavie.com/2017/05/05/50-things-i-miss-about-my-mother/

Also, I have been working on getting back to my music. This is slower, softer version of Auld Lang Syne. I sang this cause I think my mom would have liked it. My sister certainly does. My inspiration for this version is the wonderful Mairi Campbell.

Here is the link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b5tm5uo9LgY

Also, I apologize for the excessive problems that Spock is going through, but of course, the history between Vulcan and Fardour is complicated. Plus his solution entails drilling holes into the planet. Needless to say that the mistrust is clouding people's judgment. Besides, the interrogation injured him pretty badly. This mission is bumpy and full of obstacles. But it will get better. I promise.

Please let me know what you think of the story so far. I have missed your reviews!!
Chapter Summary

The plot starts thickening in this chapter. It's been a while since I heard from most of you. I'd love to know what you think about where the story is going. Let me know !!!! And a shoutout to Macywinstar for all the encouragement she sends my way for every chapter. You go, girl!

Hashmak allotted them an entire suite of offices and two of their most sophisticated workshops for the mission.

But, it was still far from ideal.

“This stuff is very basic, sir” Nik complained. “To use these tools and implements is going to be very hard. We need to have a team of workmen working on the ship.”

“How many men do we need in the ship’s workshop?” Pike asked.

“At least 12, sir,” the engineer responded. “The first drill should go in by next week. I estimate we have no more than 24 days to complete the entire mission. The planet’s radiation readings are worsening rapidly.”

“24 days? That’s it?” Pike asked, panicking.

“Aye sir, I do not know how the priest knew that they were reaching this critical point, but it is likely why he hailed us as a last resort,” Nik finished grimly.

“24 days… 24… days..” Pike repeated under his breath, reassessing the magnitude of the problem in light of the troubling events of the afternoon.

“Last thing, Nik… Have you seen Spock?” he asked.

“Aye, sir, he went with the priest. He wasn’t looking very good after that chaos in the hall,” Nik answered.

Pike made his way to the antechamber of the hall of audiences.

“I am functional, holy one,” Spock’s voice was saying when the captain entered the room.

“You are not, young Vulcan,” the priest said. “You are cold and clammy. I suggest you allow me to meld with you and ease some of that pain.”

“No. I cannot allow that,” Spock said. “I am Vulcan. Like all others of my race, I can control the pain.”

“Back to your arrogance, eh!” Hashmak said without any real malice.

“It is not arrogance,” Pike interjected quietly. “Spock has had enough people messing around in his mind for the last few days. Please do not force him to meld with you. I’m sure he can take care of
“You do not understand, Captain,” the priest retorted. “The ‘messing around in his mind’ as you put it, has medical consequences. And those need to be treated.”

Pike thought for a long moment. There was merit in what the priest was saying. It was not okay for Spock to be subjected to this much strain. And he knew something was wrong with him. But Puri would not say what.

“Spock, Sanjeev has not told me anything about your condition after the interrogation,” he began gently. “But I was there when you had problems hearing us. And I know you are not fully recovered. I can tell by the shadows under your eyes, the green flush to your skin. Maybe, the high priest can help you.”

“Captain, is that an order?” Spock asked tiredly.

“It is not, but consider it a weighted request,” Pike answered diplomatically.

“As you wish, sir,” Spock replied. And then he turned to the priest. “Please go ahead. I consent to a meld with you.”

The Vulcan closed his eyes as Hashmak placed his gnarled fingers on his meld points. Unconsciously, he braced himself for the pain that he had come to associate with any sort of mental contact with the Farhannsu.

But to his amazement, this meld was nothing like the interrogation or this afternoon’s ordeal.

A wave of utter calm settled over him and he longed to sigh in relief.

“Better?” the priest asked.

“I am,” Spock whispered.

“I can take you into a deeper trance if you’d like,” Hashmak offered.

"I... mmm...,” Spock was lost for words. The feeling was amazing. He had not been so pain-free and relaxed in a long time.

The priest only smiled. He delved further into Spock’s consciousness, staying away from his memories but soothing the swirling emotions one by one. For the first time in his long life, he was able to appreciate the discipline and logic of the reformed Vulcan mind. Spock’s mind was calm, organized, free of evil, and full of a bright, burning curiosity for objective knowledge.

But there was something else too. Something that didn’t quite add up.

It was …. some sort of a presence. But not quite. It was a part of the young man’s essence, but something was not quite Vulcan about it. There was love, warmth, sacrifice, laughter…. Spock was half human!

Hashmak was shocked.

When did Vulcans become so open to mating with other races?

“They are not,” Spock answered telepathically. “My father was the Vulcan ambassador to Earth. He says it was logical to marry a human woman in order to further cement relations between Earth and Vulcan.”
“What? He was given your mother from her father?” Hashmak asked, aghast that even reformed Vulcans fixed alliances through the exchange of daughters.

“No, holy one, you misunderstand,” Spock corrected gently. “My mother was a linguist, an anthropologist, and an officer in Starfleet. She was deployed with my father on a number of assignments through Starfleet. She claims that she fell in love with him.”

“And him? Did your father also fall in love?” the older man asked.

“I do not know,” Spock answered with a sigh. “But he says that he married her because it was the logical thing to do.”

“Does he love you, young Vulcan?” the priest asked quietly.

“He does… all parents love their children,” Spock said vaguely, not sure how to respond to that question with 100% honesty.

“I can’t heal the physical injuries on your brain even though they were caused by our telepathic and empathic powers,” Hashmak said, changing the topic abruptly. “But I can continue relieving your pain till you feel comfortable enough to attempt a healing trance.”

“No, holy one,” Spock shook his head. “A healing trance is not a possibility at this time. Your planet does not have long unless we repair the damage on the CMB.”

“You will worsen if you don’t take care of these issues,” the priest said, feeling terrible guilt for the unnecessary force and brutality of the interrogation.

"No, holy one," Spock said, this time with greater firmness. "I wish I could undergo a healing trance, but it is not a viable option at this point."

“Then allow me to ease your discomfort periodically,” the older man said. “I am humbled by the devotion you are showing my people. At least let me keep you on your feet till you are ready to undergo a healing trance.”

Spock was surprised at this turn of events. “That would be acceptable,” he said. “I am grateful for your aid.”

Hashmak only shook his head. Thanks were not needed. Not when he was responsible for the problem.

XXXXX

Spock was inspecting the work going on in the alpha workshop when it happened.

Nik was giving him a report on the length and strength of the drill required.

“The drill will need to first go through six kilometers of oceanic crust and…” he was cut off mid-sentence when an arrow whizzed past them.

Before they had a chance to react, another arrow came from nowhere and almost hit Spock.

“GET DOWN,” a young female voice bellowed. All the workers, Nik, and Spock knelt on the ground and covered their heads with their arms.

Spock was horrified to see six more arrows coming at them. However, they didn’t hit anybody.
A young Farhannsu woman cut all the arrows in half, mid-flight, with a bow-and-arrow of her own. Her skill and speed were astonishing.

“Face me, you coward,” she yelled.

But no one answered her challenge. For a few moments, she stared into the distance, eyes blazing with anger.

And then she turned around.

“Vulcan, I believe you were the target,” she said without preamble.

Even though she was clearly a female, the young woman was dressed androgynously. Her black hair was braided like the men’s and her clothing was neutral-colored and practical. Her bronze skin glistened with sweat, but she showed no signs of exhaustion.

“I believe you are correct,” Spock said as he stood up.

“Lieutenant, you are bleeding!” Nik exclaimed, horrified at the green stain rapidly spreading across Spock’s left shoulder.

“It is nothing, sir,” the Vulcan said. “Just a flesh wound. The arrow only grazed me.”

"Just a flesh wound! Look at all that blood, Spock," the engineer said, his voice an octave higher than its usual pitch.

“You should get that looked at,” the woman interjected. The two men looked at her.

“I am a guard here,” she introduced herself. “But I am also a trainee healer. If you would come with me, I will dress your injury so that you can continue with your work efficiently.”

Spock wasn’t sure if she was trustworthy. But something about her called to him. It wasn’t attraction. It was an odd sort of affinity. She was beautiful, but as a Vulcan, that was of no consequence to him. It was her eyes. There was something alluring about them.

“Lieutenant, the young woman offered you first aid,” Nik said to Spock. “I think you should take her up on that offer.” “Besides, she is very hot,” he added under his breath, just for Spock’s ears.

Spock looked rather offended at that.

“We do not judge people in that way,” he said coldly. “It is not proper,”

The chief engineer shook his head.

“Okay, Spock,” he said with an irritated sigh. “Just go with her and let her see to that injury. I was only having fun. Never mind my human guy talk!”

With a good-natured smile, he nodded towards the female, who looked perplexed by the strange exchange.

XXXXX

“So this isn’t the first time you’ve been hurt seriously,” the woman said as she took in all the scars on Spock’s shoulders and back while she cleaned and bandaged his injury. “You are fortunate. Like you said, it is just a flesh wound. Otherwise, you’d be dead right now. Typically, arrowheads contain poison, which releases itself into the bloodstream when it comes into contact with blood plasma.”
Spock did not say anything. His mind was elsewhere. He was troubled by the thought that not only was someone murderously opposed to their presence on Fardour, it seemed as if they did not care how many people they hurt in order to get to him. Or maybe, they did not care who they hurt anyway, as long as it was someone from the Enterprise crew.

“I know what you’re thinking,” the woman continued. “There are many from the noble houses and the houses of guardsmen that don’t approve of your presence here. And while you explained the problem to everyone in much clearer terms today, I want you to know there are people here also who have been working towards understanding the issue and finding a solution to it. It is sad that things were so slow till you arrived.”

“Who are these people?” Spock asked, wondering if they’d be willing to help the crew in this mission.

“They are twin sisters, Arulini and Amunishi,” she said. “They studied natural sciences as a discipline at the school, but they taught themselves some of the advanced topics in mathematics, computers, and physics. These subjects are not taught on our planet unless someone is going to work on a ship or a shuttle. And those are so few that not many people need to study such subjects. And then also, the instruction is relatively basic, just enough to build things that would be have been useful maybe on 20th-century Earth. By the way, these sisters also secretly follow the philosophy of Surak, though they haven’t started talking like robots yet.”

Spock was intrigued. Followers of Surakian philosophy! On Fardour!

“And where did they get exposed to these non-Farhannsu philosophies and sciences, and the history of 20th-century Earth?”

“Not difficult, when your father was a Vulcan,” said a new voice.

“T’Arul, at your service, sir,” she said with a smile. “Or Arulini, as my mother named me. And this soft-hearted sister of mine who’s bandaging your shoulder with such tenderness, she’s called T’Amun, but I prefer to call her Mu-Mu.”

"You are Amunishi, then,” Spock said, surprised but unfazed.

“Aru!” the other woman said, upset at being teased and at having their secret told to the Vulcan stranger so openly.

“Relax, sister,” she laughed. “We never thought we’d get to see a Vulcan. And here you are, bandaging the shoulder of one.”

“You said your father is Vulcan,” Spock interrupted their banter. "But you look Farhannsu?" He desperately wanted to know more about these girls. If there was any truth in the priest’s story, then Fardour had had no contact with Vulcan in centuries. And yet, these sisters claimed to be the children of a Vulcan man.

"It is a long story, and it begins with our maternal grandfather, who's also Farhannsu, by the way," T'Arul said.

“Yes, our grandfather was a trader of counterfeit goods,” T’Amun said. “And like all our people, he was sympathetic to the history of our race. But he was a businessman first and he knew that if he wanted to grow, he needed to capture the eyes of his clients with the most beautiful things they had ever seen. One woman once described a set of bangles he was selling as ‘other-worldly’ and that’s where he got the idea. He sneaked out of the planet multiple times in order to buy illegal Ophira
crystals, gold bars, silver jewelry, gemstones of all kinds. He had a basic ship to begin with, but eventually, he acquired enough knowledge to build himself a better ship with modern communication, the kind used by regular ships in the federation. And he often took our mother along, because she had a knack for spotting the best of the best when it came to precious metals and stones. They were very careful about disguises and the first few times they ventured off-planet, they simply did research on Vulcans and Romulans in order to be able to pass themselves off like them. They decided upon Vulcans since it was easier to go to federation planets that way. Our mother was so good at it that she actually managed to convince a Vulcan that she was one of his own. It may have had something to do with her incredible telepathic prowess. The next thing they knew was that he offered to bond with her, since his first bondmate had long since died. She thought he was so very handsome, she said yes and that’s what happened.”

“Fascinating,” Spock said. He had no other words to describe what he had just heard. But he did have questions. "How did he take it when he learned the truth about your mother?"

"He was shocked," T'Amun answered. "But he was logical enough to understand that it was a necessary deception in order for them to remain safe. No one could know about Fardour and its people.”

“Where is your father now?” he asked.

“Dead,” T’Arul answered monotonously.

“He knew that mother could not live on Vulcan, so he offered to live here with her. Grandfather was not too happy. He was scared that if anyone found out, there would be hell to pay. We don’t actually know how many people found out, but what we do know is that father was lynched empathically and killed through telepathic means. They left him hanging outside the temple. We don’t think they knew that he was bonded to our mother. They probably assumed that he had crash landed or something and that we had decided to take him in for the sake of hospitality. Our grandfather and grandmother claimed that we were their children. They could not have anyone know that we were part-Vulcan. And that is why, when we heard that a Vulcan was going to aid our people in dealing with this ecological problem, we knew we had to watch your back. Whatever knowledge we have, is from our father’s old books, recordings, and notes, all stored in two PADDs and one backup microdrive. He also left us instructions on the way of Surak, hoping that we’d choose that path. And we haven’t disappointed him. He passed on before our birth, but this is our way of connecting with his memory. However, like T’Amun said, we aren’t quite robotic like you, yet. Personally, I don’t want to be that robotic anyway. It is no fun. I wonder what you’re like when you lie with a woman. Mu-mu will find out soon enough if she’s lucky,” she finished cheekily.

“Aru, control your tongue!” T’Amun scolded her twin. And then she turned to Spock who was blushing even though it was obvious he was trying very hard not to. To give him credit, he maintained a straight face.

“Spock, we want to help you with this mission,” T’Amun said, steering the conversation back to more serious matters. “We have studied physics and mathematics enough to be of some help to your people. I am sure every extra pair of hands is needed at this point. Please don’t refuse,” she said earnestly.

“I do not intend to,” Spock responded, still not sure of how to comprehend everything that he had learned in the last half-an-hour. “We should go to the captain and seek his permission to allow you to assist,” he said, deciding to examine everything else at leisure, after the successful completion of the mission.

“That’s great,” T’Arul said. “Let’s go.”
“Certainly,” Spock agreed and stood up. It was time to get the crew two new recruits. With their knowledge of the planet, they were sure to speed things up considerably.
The fruit of knowledge

Chapter Summary

This chapter is very, very important to the story. It is also something that discusses a number of things that I feel deeply about. Let me know what you think. As always, I appreciate your feedback a lot. And it makes me happy when you consider my work worthy enough to leave me a comment or a review.

The next few days of the mission saw a massive increase in the output of the crew. The insights and contributions of the two sisters were invaluable. It was true that they were nowhere as well-trained in the sciences as the rest of the crew, but they had immense natural talent. T'Amun was a gifted mathematician. Her limited knowledge of computers was an impediment only on her first two days on the mission. She picked up the program first and thanks to her, the drill was already on its way to being programmed. T'Arul was very good at engineering. Nik was already in awe of her self-acquired skills. She worked faster than most of his crew and had a number of creative, non-conventional ideas that were far more fuel-efficient and time-saving than the ones they had been planning on earlier.

Spock suspected that it had something to do with the fact their father was a Vulcan. He was curious to know who the man was. But he didn’t ask. Also, he introduced the sisters as Arulini and Amunishi, keeping their Vulcan names to himself.

Even though they were twins, there were marked personality differences between the sisters. Arulini was mischievous, outgoing, and childlike. She flirted with the human men openly. She had a clearly defined fashion sense and she wore practical but feminine clothing that showed off her curves and accentuated her dark features.

Amunishi, on the other hand, was serious and quiet. Her clothing was like that of a man’s. Unlike her sister, she wore her braided hair in a severe bun. She wore no makeup except for the kohl that lined her dark eyes. She never flirted with anyone and spoke only when spoken to. However, no one was able to tell that the reserved woman had eyes for no one but the unattainable Vulcan whose injury she had bandaged.

His deep voice called out to something primal within her. She longed to run her hands over the hard planes of his body. She desired to touch his mind and find the sort of love her parents had been blessed with. But she did nothing to that effect. Like a woman of her people’s resilience, she only protected Spock. She always kept an eye out for any other attackers that might be about.

Unknown to her, Spock could sense some of her love and devotion. It made him uneasy, but he did not have the heart to say anything to her. Besides, even though it was illogical, it felt good to be desired and loved for himself.

And that is why, when she brought him a home-cooked meal, he did not refuse her offer to eat lunch with her. They sat in her quarters in the temple. As a guard, she had been allotted a two-room apartment in the workmen’s housing area. Mostly, she lived alone but sometimes she shared the space with Arulini who was not a guard but a seamstress in the temple’s tailoring workshop.

“This is exquisite,” he said after his first bite. The Farhannsu were also vegetarians like Vulcans. But
they seasoned their food a lot more liberally than Vulcans. And this vegetable stew was a lot like the Plomeek stir-fry that Amanda used to make sometimes at home back on Vulcan.

“Gacchi, this dish is called Gachhi,” she answered. “It is made with a type of mushroom that is only collected in the late evening from the hills surrounding the city. I picked some yesterday evening to make them for you today. That is also how my mother impressed my father. In one of the trades on Bajoran, she offered him some Gachhi.”

“Amunishi, would you be opposed to telling me a little more about your father?” he asked tentatively.

“No, I don’t mind,” She said. “But I like it when you call me T’Amun. That is who I am. Amunishi is only half of me.”

“T’Amun, then,” Spock said softly.

“My father was junior Vulcan ambassador,” T’Amun began. “He was sometimes assigned to basic research and information gathering on non-federation worlds. His name was Siras. I believe he was the subordinate of a senior ambassador called Sarek, who was also his distant uncle….”

Spock gasped. This was a lot to take in. He did not believe in providence, but how else could he explain this. T’Amun was related to him. She and her sister were also a part of the House of Surak!

“Pardon me for interrupting you,” he said. “But did your father leave behind information about your Vulcan clan?”

“Unfortunately, no,” she answered. “Mother says that he often hinted at being some kind of nobility. But that doesn’t make much sense because Vulcan doesn’t have nobles.”

Spock pondered her statement for a minute before choosing his words.

“I presume you are about 19-years-old,” he said.

“Why, yes, how do you know?” she asked, surprised.

“I know because the disappearance of Siras continues to be a mystery on Vulcan,” he answered. “Ambassador Siras disappeared from his diplomatic post nearly 20 years ago. My father is Ambassador Sarek. He was greatly distressed by the disappearance of his junior colleague. And after months of searching the galaxy, the young ambassador was declared missing presumed dead.”

“Well, they weren’t wrong,” T’Amun muttered under her breath.

“They weren’t,” he agreed quietly. “But there is more. This means that you are distantly related to me. You are from the same house as I am. And that you are also of the house of Surak, the philosopher who brought about the great reformation.”

At this, T’Amun’s eyes widened like saucers.

“What?” she gasped. “I am your cousin?”

“Not exactly,” Spock said. “You are of my house. Siras was related to my father by a marriage two generations prior. As his daughter, you are of the house of Surak and of the house of Sahus.”

“I am not sure what that means, Spock,” she said hesitatingly. “But… does that mean that my love for you is wrong?”
She looked deep into his eyes, searching for a truthful answer. She knew that Vulcans claimed that they couldn’t lie. However, she also knew that that in itself was a deception.

“Vulcans…. Vulcans do not love,” Spock said, tearing his eyes away from hers.

“You are lying, son of Sarek,” she said with a sad smile that didn’t quite reach her eyes.

“I have a bondmate on Vulcan,” Spock said. “T’Pring. I’ve been betrothed to her since I was seven. And were bonded at the age of 15.”

“Something tells me that you don’t really have a bond with her, Spock,” T’Amun challenged.

This time, Spock could not look away.

“You are correct,” he agreed shamefacedly. “I have a bond with her. But we keep each other shielded from our thoughts. She wishes to be the bondmate of another. However, her sense of duty dictates her to remain my bondmate.”

“Why don’t you set her free?” the young woman asked.

“I have offered her to have the bond severed,” he said, his eyes misted over, thinking back to a past he had not examined in a long time. “But she refused. Severing a bond is… unpleasant. Besides, she feels honor-bound to stay in our marriage.”

“And she doesn’t find her succor with this other man?” T’Amun asked boldly.

“She does,” Spock answered. “But it is not a true bond. She wishes it was, but it is not. Though she does share a link with him. I am aware of the link because I know her mind is calm, stable and has the stimulation and security that I am unable to give to her.”

“Do you not deserve the same?” she asked, her eyes ablaze with emotion.

“I do not know… I do not know…..,” Spock said more to himself than to her.

“Once, just once, allow me to comfort you,” she begged. “Allow me to be what this woman, this T’Pring can never be for you.”

“Vulcans do not seek carnal knowledge of anyone other than their bondmate,” Spock said gently. T’Amun was offering him so much more than sex. But he knew he couldn’t take it. She would find a man on Fardour who she would be able to share all of herself and her life with. She would bear him many beautiful children. And she would build a loving household with him. Spock was in no position to offer her anything.

“I am not asking you to,” she pleaded. “I need nothing from you except for yourself. I won’t stop you from going back to T’Pring. But at least I will have a memory of you to cherish, to love, and to worship. No man on Fardour can give me what you can.”

“I .. I have never done this,” Spock admitted shyly.

“Neither have I,” she smiled at him. “Come to bed with me, sweet Vulcan,” she whispered as she led him away from the dining area and towards the cot.

She fingered the hem of her shirt seductively, inviting Spock to undo the fastenings.

He did not disappoint.
His deft fingers worked sensuously as he freed her of her clothing. His touch sent her senses reeling.

“May I?” She asked, tugging at his blue tunic.

“You may,” he answered softly.

In the soft glow of the lamp, she drank in his maleness in all its glory. She admired his rippling musculature, lean and lithe, never intimidating, never hideous, never arrogant with obvious physical prowess.

“I apologize,” he said bashfully. “I am not pleasing to the eyes.”

“That is a lie, Spock,” she replied in Vulcans instead of Vulitra. “You are pleasing to my katra, ashayam. And to everything that is womanly about me, to the blood that sings in my veins when I look at you.”

T’Amun was a remarkable woman. She was unlike any human or Vulcan women Spock knew of. She was tall, sensuous, full-bodied. Her ample bosom and wide hips spoke of the fertility that defined her as a mother who would birth strong sons and daughters. The gentle curve of her belly was soft like a child’s. Her dark skin, like intoxicating chocolate, was smooth and unmarked, save for one battle scar across her right breast.

Spock gently touched the old scar.

“What happened?” he asked softly.

“A Farhannsu man happened,” she said cryptically. “A man who did not value the joy of oneness.”

Spock did not ask any further questions. He lowered his lips to her scar and kissed it. He touched her hard nipples with his hands, caressing her skin lovingly, igniting a fire of want in the pit of her stomach.

“I need you, Spock,” she breathed heavily, aroused by emotion and need. “Make me yours.”

It was a command. And one that Spock wanted to comply with.

His own blood was churning with desire and lust. He had never known the pleasures of the flesh. And now that he was so close to this wonderful being, he knew he could not deny her… and himself.

Their bodies moved in a faultless, fluid rhythm. He made love to her with a lovable unsureness. She responded in growls filled with a fevered yearning, pushing herself against him, taking him deep inside her body— all the while caressing his hands with her own, driving her wantonness into his now hungering body and mind.

Spock’s own movements turned frenzied as he inched closer to giving up his control voluntarily, for the very first time in his life.

With a mighty roar, he climaxed in perfect unison with her.

For several minutes, he lay atop her, utterly spent and satiated. While he breathed slowly to regain his control, she kissed the top of his head gently. Like a woman deeply in love, she moved her hand adoringly across Spock’s scarred back and ran her fingers through his glossy hair.

“You are glorious, ashayam,” she said with a touch of reverence in her voice.
“As are you,” he acknowledged tenderly.

“I have lain with a man before, my sweet Vulcan,” she began of her own volition. “But he left me with this scar on my breast and a hole in my katra. I have known carnal knowledge. But I had not known the beauty of the union before joining with you. I thank you for honoring my desecrated womanhood,” she finished with a wobble in her voice.

“No, T’Amun,” Spock said as he turned his face towards her. “Your womanhood is not desecrated. You are a celebration of femininity. You are beautiful inside and out. The one who injured you is the one with a desecrated honor. Do not ever denigrate yourself, for you are magnificent.”

“Am I so to you?” she asked, uncertainty dripping from her words.

“You are, ashayam,” he said, finally adorning her with a word that meant so much more than the poor standard translation of ‘beloved.’

They did not say anything after that. Spock wondered if he should feel a sense of remorse after betraying T’Pring this way. But he reasoned and came to a startling realization. He was bonded to her as a matter of duty. But his heart was free. And for the first time in his young life, he rejoiced for his humanity.
T’Amun’s happiness was visible on her face these days. She was radiant, warm, and almost always smiling. And while they hadn’t shared it with anyone yet, Spock knew that she was the one for him.

“Mother,” I have chosen my true bondmate,” he said to Amanda on a call about three days before the launch of the first drilling operation. “I am aware that I am bonded to T’Pring. But you are also aware that her chosen is Stonn. The sooner our bond is severed completely, the better it will be for the both of us.”

Amanda looked at her son. She was excited and glad that he had chosen to call. But she had certainly not been expecting a news like this.

“You father wouldn’t approve,” she began. “Besides, T’Pring has never said anything about wishing to have the bond severed.”

“Be as that may, mother,” Spock explained gently. “I am the one who shares a bond with her. I would never lie about a truth that I know in its entirety. And T’Amun shares an affinity with me like true spouses should. I never knew it was a possibility for someone like myself, mother. But she is real. And I wish to spend my lifetime with her.”

The older woman sighed.

“You will have to come to Vulcan in order for the bond to be severed,” she said. “And if you wish to be bonded with T’Amun, you will need to bring her with you.”

Spock did not know how to tell his mother that he had no plans of doing either of those things. Even though T’Amun was Part-Vulcan, she would still be considered Farhannsu, or worse, a half-breed like himself, and that would make it very difficult for her to find acceptance on Vulcan. Besides, he had no desire to try and live on Fardour and make the same mistakes as Siras.

“A severing does not require me to be present on Vulcan, mother,” Spock said evenly.

“Yes, but if your bond is broken from such a difference, you could suffer serious mental damage,” she said. “It is important that a mind healer be present during the procedure in order to cushion and seal the injuries that would come with such an unnatural severing. After all, spousal bonds are usually for life.”

“Mother, I am requesting you as a son,” Spock said, trying to appeal to the human side of his relationship with Amanda. “I have the cushioning I will require in the wake of the severed bond.”

“Okay, son,” Amanda said, not quite sure if it was the right thing to do. However, like always, Spock’s happiness came first. “When do you want to do this? And do you wish me to talk to T’Pring
about this?"

“I am grateful to you,” Spock said truthfully. “And I shall write to T’Pring and explain my reasons to
her. I wish you to arrange for the severing exactly a day after the end of this mission.”

“Very well,” Amanda said. “The things I do for you, kid!”

“Please do not tell anyone else about T’Amun,” Spock reminded her.

“Yes, Spock, I wasn’t born yesterday,” she answered, exasperated. “And look after yourself. And
think a little more about this whole thing. I’m still not sure if breaking your bond with T’Pring is the
right thing to do. So consider it some more before we decide to go ahead with it.”

“I have made my decision, mother,” he said.

“If you are sure, then I guess nothing I say will change your mind,” she said. “You have my
blessings, son,” she said.

“Thank you, mother,” he said.

And with that, they ended the call.

Spock knew that he was perhaps being a little impulsive and illogical. But he had felt the depth of
T’Amun’s love for him. And he could not deny that his own emotions were overwhelmed by how
much of himself he wanted to give to her.

Every day, since that wondrous afternoon five days ago, he had shared the bed with her in her
quarters. He had stopped going for his therapy with the high priest because T’Amun’s touch on his
mind was so much more soothing. And even though she worried about him because he was still
injured, she was never judgmental of his weaknesses. Besides, he still didn’t trust Hashmak
completely. And the last thing he needed, was for him to find out that Spock had lain with a
Farhannsu woman.

XXXXX

“Spock, do you know what kind of a father you will be?” she asked him as they lay in each other’s
arms.

“A logical one,” he said. “But not an unfeeling one.”

“And will T’Pring allow that?” T’Amun asked, turning her face towards him.

Spock looked deep into her eyes and gave her one of his small, rare smiles.

“I do not intend to bear children with her, ashayam,” he said. “I spoke to my mother today. It is best
if my bond with T’Pring were to be severed. She will be free to go to Stonn as his true bondmate.
And I will be free to find mine.”

T’Amun didn’t respond to that. She loved Spock. And in another lifetime, maybe she would have
been his chosen. But in this reality, she was beneath him. And he was an outcast to her people.

She looked as troubled as she felt. There was something she needed to say to him. But just as she
parted her lips to speak, he placed his warm, graceful hand on her cheek.

“Will you be my bondmate, T’Amun?” he asked reverently.
“I……” T’Amun was shocked. She had known that Spock also harbored feelings for her, but she hadn’t expected him to act on them this way.

“But… you are Vulcan,” she blurted out. “And I am only a half-breed.”

“As am I,” he said serenely. “I am half-human, ashayam.”

T’Amun looked ready to cry. She did not know how to respond.

“I have something to say to you,” she finally said in a wobbly, little voice.

“Say it,” Spock encouraged. “You do not need to hesitate before speaking your mind to me.”

“As an empath, I am very aware of myself, Spock,” she began. “And the telepathic gifts that all Farhannsu have, allow us to be much more in tune with our bodies than all other races. I have made a startling discovery.”

“Go on, I am listening, do not be afraid,” he said gently.

“I am with child,” she finished in a whisper. “It has been no more than five days since I first welcomed you into my being. And this morning, I felt the call of a little life inside me, the beginnings of a child, Spock. Its katra has found a womb for itself. I am to be a mother.”

Her voice broke at the last sentence. She was scared that Spock would be angry. She was afraid that history was repeating itself with terrifying accuracy. “I do not wish my father's fate upon you, ashayam,” she said. "And I did not wish you to burden you with the knowledge of this child. But oh, I could not lie to you, Spock. I could not lie to you."

For several moments, nothing happened. Spock’s mind reeled under this information. And he felt a stab of fear deep in his heart. But there was a surge of joy that came with it. A child. A little person.

He dropped to his knees and placed his hands upon the younger woman’s feet. The room was silent except for the sounds of T’Amun's quiet sobs.

“I thank you, drolmeya,” he said, his voice rough with emotion. “You have blessed me with fatherhood.”

“Drolmeya…. Mother of your most cherished…. Then…. Then, you are not angry with me,” she said in a voice that was dazed and filled with apprehension.

“No, ashayam,” Spock said. “I am far from displeased. I am joyous. I am grateful. And I will not lie to you, I am fearful. However, this is a grace that I had never expected to be given. I do not have words.”

“Neither do I,” T’Amun whispered. “I wish… I wish for you to be linked with me, and with the child, Spock.”

“As do I,” he answered as he placed his hands on the meld points of her face.

They were alone in the room and everything was quiet. There were no demons and no shadows.

But if someone were to walk in on them, they would have seen a most astounding sight. The young couple was bathed in a soft, golden light as they formed a link with each other and with the child growing inside the woman’s womb.

There was an aura of peace in the little space. And it was this inexplicable force that kept Ashulat out
of the quarters even though he was certain that he had seen the Vulcan man enter Amunishi’s rooms earlier in the evening.

“Is there something I should know, Spock,” Pike asked for the third time that morning. He could sense that something about Spock had changed. He was happy to note that the Vulcan looked healthier these days and seemed to be recovering nicely. But he had also noticed that Spock had stopped going for his therapy with the priest.

Besides, even though everyone else had missed it, he had seen the looks Spock and that Farhannsu girl, Amunishi, gave to each other. Had he not known better, he would have thought that Spock was sleeping with her. But of course, Vulcans did not do such things.

“Captain, there is indeed something that you should know,” Spock said finally. “But it has a matter of extremely sensitive nature. I require a private audience with you and Dr. Puri in order to discuss it.”

“Are you unwell, Spock?” Pike asked, concern evident in his voice.

“No, Sir,” Spock said. “I am adequate. However, you will understand after I reveal the information to you.”

Pike nodded.

“Dr. Puri, I need you to meet me in the conference room near the Alpha workshop,” he commed the doctor. “Mr. Spock will be joining us.”

“Is everything okay?” came Puri’s muffled reply.

“Yes, doctor,” Pike said. “However, it is a matter that requires a timely consultation.”

Ten minutes later, the three men were sitting in the conference room.

Spock looked ill at ease, or as much as he could look so for a Vulcan.

“Yes, Mr. Spock, what is it that you wish to tell us?” Pike asked.

“Captain, you may wish to reprimand me, or even give me dishonorable discharge from duty after what I am about to disclose to you,” Spock said. “But I wish to also say that I do not regret my actions.”

“Come to the point, Spock,” the older man said, his heart sinking with worry.

“Amunishi is pregnant with my child,” Spock answered without preamble.

“What?” Puri said, aghast. “Have you gone mad, Spock?”

“How could you compromise the mission this way?” Pike asked, recovering from the shock of hearing such news. “Do you have any idea how many regulations this violates?

“I am aware, sir,” he began. “But, she is Part-Vulcan, a distant member of the house of Surak, and therefore, already related to me.”

“Do these other Farhannsu know that?” Pike asked, intrigued by this bit of information.
“They do not,” the Vulcan said. “And for the sake of her safety, I request you to keep this information confidential.”

“I will, Spock, and while there is nothing I can do to legally charge you with misconduct, I want you to know that this was out of order,” Pike said, his words laced with disdain. “What are you planning to do?”

“I intend to bond with her after the mission,” Spock said.

“And what of your career at Starfleet?” Puri asked. “And do your parents know?”

“They do not know of the child,” Spock replied. “But my mother is aware of my affinity for Amunishi.”

Puri and Pike looked like they had aged by decades. Of all the things that could have happened, Spock…. Spock, of all people, had gotten a native woman pregnant on his very first away mission. It was the height of misconduct!

“How did this happen, though? Puri asked. “Don’t all these people hate your guts?”

“They do,” Spock said. “But Amunishi also felt the strength of the affinity between us. Ideally, that is how Vulcanoid spousal bonds are formed. On Vulcan, the affinity is tested for by mind healers and elders. On Fardour, passion and emotion dictate its direction.”

“I see,” Pike said. “Do you want Dr. Puri to examine her? And how far along is she? We haven’t been here even a fortnight. So it can’t be a lot.”

“It has only been six days,” Spock said. “But the Farhanssu gestation period is only seven months long as compared to the typical Vulcan gestation period of ten months. Since I am half-human, and Amunishi is half-Vulcan, we are in uncharted territory. But like all Vulcan and Farhanssu mothers, she is aware of her child’s katra right from conception.”

“Also, pardon me for asking this, Spock, but I gathered all the research on Vulcan physiology after you were assigned to the Enterprise,” Puri said. “And I was led to believe that Vulcan males are incapable of reproducing till they go through their first Pon Farr. How were you able to impregnate Amunishi?”

For this, Spock had no answer. As far as he had known, he was infertile. It was as much of a surprise to him as it was to the doctor that he had been able to get T’Amun pregnant. Furthermore, the doctor was right. He had not yet experienced Pon Farr.

“I do not know, doctor,” he answered with complete honesty. “But in the light of the natures of our hybrid biology, I would be grateful if you could look after Amunishi and care for her needs as we go through the pregnancy.”

“You have my word, Spock,” Puri said with a smile. “But I am still trying to come to terms with the fact that out of all the crew, you turned out to be the stud boy!”

“Personally, I had my bets on Nik,” the captain murmured as he got up from his chair. “But clearly, there are things I haven’t yet seen in the galaxy. Something tells me that the Vulcan dark horse is only the beginning.”

Puri laughed at that. And Spock blushed a deep shade of green.
Chapter Summary

This chapter is important to the rest of the story. It is from here that we delve deeper into the choices Spock will have to make in the coming few chapters. Please leave a review if you enjoyed this chapter. I love hearing from you.

“T’Pring, you have been an admirable bondmate to me despite the truth that our bond is not one of true bondmates. I appreciate your sense of duty and honor. Even though I do not understand why you would choose to remain by my side instead of bonding with Stonn, I am grateful all the same, for the regard you have shown for the name of my house. It is with some trepidation that I write to you about this matter. Just as your katra calls you to Stonn, mine calls me to T’Amun, a distant member of the house of Surak and of the house of Sahus. I desire to be released from our bond, so that we both may be free to be with those that we have freely chosen. In the past, you have been reluctant to do so because you wish not to dishonor me. However, the circumstances have changed. A bond broken through mutual consent will not bring disgrace upon either of our houses. T’Pring, this I ask of you, a plea for freedom, so that we may live fruitful lives with our true others.”

She never showed emotion. Unlike Spock. But she had never exactly felt numb. However, now she did. She would be free to go to Stonn. And Spock would move on, build a new life with whoever T’Amun was.

It was a favorable situation. But then why did she feel so unsettled. Why were her emotions dangerously oscillating between numbness and a deep sense of betrayal? Why was she hurting?

She did not want Spock even in the most basic of ways. For years, she had hoped and wished that as a hybrid, he would never experience the Plak-Tow. She had no wish to bear his children. She had no desire to be joined with him. She did not think him dirty or unworthy. She admired the person he was. But still, there was something about his natural impurity that repulsed her. She could not change that any more than she could change the color of her eyes.

Why then, was she in such turmoil? And who was T’Amun? How could any Vulcan woman do this? Had she demanded that Spock break his bond with her? Or did she know that Spock did not have a true bond with his wife?”

Questions. Questions. Those were the only things swirling around in T’Pring’s mind as she re-read Spock’s message a hundred times.

Would she release him?

She would.

After all, this was what she had always wanted. Spock was choosing to have the bond dissolved. It would bring no dishonor or blame upon her. She would have a graceful exit from this unhappy bonding and she would be free to go to Stonn.

It was perfect.
But, despite the flawless logic of the situation, sleep would not come to her this night.

““We are almost ready to take the probes in, sir,” Amunishi announced to Pike while Arulini recalibrated the Enterprise’s portable scanners for Fardour’s mantle and core.

“Lt. Spock is taking one of the probes, who is taking the second one?” Amunishi asked Pike.

“I’ll do it,” Tabitha offered, but Pike shook his head.

“No, commander,” he said. “You need to be here, on ground to coordinate the entire operation with Lt. Cdr. Albescu. I will take the second one.”

“But Captain….” she began.

“No ifs and buts, Tabitha,” he said. “I understand this is extremely dangerous. But I trust only you or myself to carry this out properly other than Mr. Spock. And I trust you to keep order among the crew and get them to safety should things go wrong. As a woman, you are seen as less of a threat on this planet. If the mission goes south, you stand a better chance of getting the crew out.”

“Yes, captain,” she acquiesced reluctantly.

T’Amun and T’Arul observed this exchange silently. They were amazed at the camaraderie of this group of humans. T’Arul in particular, had a mind to ask the captain if she could enroll in Starfleet once the mission was done. She was hopeful that if the mission went well, Fardour would join the federation. T’Amun, however, did not share her twin’s optimism.

The sisters went back to their work. Captain Pike and Dr. Puri had honored their word to Spock and refrained from telling anyone about T’Amun’s pregnancy. On the other hand, while she was working diligently, she had been advised by the doctor to take extra care of herself. While she was still keeping an eye out for any hostile Farhannsu, she was hoping that there would be none of those.

But, she had reason to be troubled.

This morning, she had accidentally been privy to a disturbing conversation between two of the guards from Nobleman Arvonek’s house. They hadn’t known that she was in their telepathic vicinity.

“The Vulcan will be dealt with, then they will think twice before sending federation scum our way.”

“Everything is going according to plan. We know how to get to him.”

“Who would have thought it would be this easy.”

“Not so fast, Arben, we don’t have him yet.”

And then they had moved out of the room and she hadn’t been able to hear them anymore.

She was worried. She now knew that there were people within the temple who were working against the crew of the Enterprise. She also knew from her casual conversations that despite the increase in explosions and acidic hailstorms, there were people who did not believe that the planet was in danger.

A part of her was glad that in a day, Spock would be underground, safe from those people who wanted to harm him. But she was also terrified because the operation itself was dangerous. And he
hadn’t lied to her. He had told her that there was a high possibility of him not making it back safely if there was even a slight error in the calculations. There was zero room for error.

She could only hope and pray that it would be okay. If this mission was unsuccessful, they were all doomed. All her people would die. Spock had to do this. For her people. For her. And for their unborn child.

XXXXX

“How sure are you about this news?” Ashulat asked Arben. If what the younger guard was saying, then this was worse than they had expected. That Vulcan had crossed all limits.

“What shall we do with the woman, sir?” Arben asked nervously. Amunishi had worked beside him in the temple. She had often even shared guard duties with him. And she had volunteered to care for his and other people’s combat wounds many a time. He felt like a sinner. But there was no other way.

“You say she is with child?” Ashulat asked.

“Yes sir,” Arben answered. “I know because I heard her talking to him about the child in the afternoon. He prefers to converse verbally instead of telepathically. It was not difficult to intercept what was being said.”

“I knew she was up to something,” the older man said more to himself than to his subordinate. “She is in league with the enemy.

Arben’s heartbeat quickened.

“With respect sir, I disagree,” he said. “I believe the Vulcan tricked her.”

That was a possibility Ashulat was ready to consider but one which seemed unlikely. He had seen the smitten looks she gave him from a distance. She was in full awareness of everything that the Vulcan was doing. She understood the scientific knowledge that was usually scarce among their people. Maybe she had an ulterior motive.

But what?

It was a mystery to Ashulat that a Farhannsu woman of such intellect would allow strangers to destroy their home. What had they promised her in return? Or was this about the child that she had so foolishly conceived with the Vulcan?

“We cannot harm a child, sir,” Arben said, surprising even himself with his boldness.

“But if we wish to preserve our way of life, we need to think of all our people,” he said coldly. “And it is not right to harm a woman with child, but she is a harbinger of catastrophe.”

Arben was not comfortable with this. The taking of life was abhorrent to him. And while the babe inside was yet no more than a clot of congealed blood, Amunishi was a living, breathing woman—one of their own!

“How do you wish us to do this, sir?” he asked with a heavy heart.

Ashulat did not look at him.

He looked out of the window. His own little boy was playing with his mother. There were other
young children in the garden as well. Such pure, sweet faces. Such unadulterated innocence. It was a
shame but Amunishi’s child could not be allowed to be born.

“Poison,” he said at long last. “That is the kindest way to do it. And she is fortunate that she is with
child. If she weren’t, she’d be lynched like the Vulcan we caught twenty years ago. A Farhannsu
traitor is worse than a Vulcan. And they deserve nothing better than the fury and scorn of our
people.”

XXXXX

T’Amun’s intuition was trying to tell her something. She could sense that something was about to
happen. And it was not a good feeling.

“I am worried, Spock,” she voiced her fear aloud to him. “Something bad is going to happen. I just
know it.”

Spock, for all his uncharacteristic sensitivity, was a complete Vulcan when it came to intuitions,
premonitions, and prophecies.

“Unfounded anxiety is a function of hormonal changes,” he said, not unkindly. “And as a pregnant
woman, you experiencing multiple physiological and hormonal changes simultaneously. I shall get
you a meal. You should care for your nutrition.”

As he turned to leave, Amunishi held his hand.

“Please, Spock,” she whispered. “Just stay with me. I know my anxiety seems illogical to you, but
trust me. I can tell that a tragedy is coming our way. I am scared, ashayam. And I was not certain if it
was the right thing to do. But I overheard a telepathic conversation between two other guards today.
It is improper to listen in on people’s conversations, but when I heard the word ‘Vulcan,’ I could not
stop myself. They are planning something, Spock. They want to hurt you. They said you will be
dealt with. I worry for your safety, my love. I just do not know what I would do if you were to come
to harm.”

The Vulcan would have normally scoffed at such illogic based on one vague, incompletely-
intercepted conversation. But he could not do that to T’Amun. He sat down next to her and held her
hand in his.

“T’Amun, you have aided me in reconciling my humanity with my Vulcan heritage,” he said with
great tenderness. “I have been alone all my life except for the bonds I share with my family, and
Sobik and Hamid, people I call friends. I know you have known sorrow, rejection, hurt, even the
forced solitude that is more than loneliness but less than desolate isolation. I understand your worry
that this newfound joy might not last. But I assure you, ashayam, that I will do everything in my
power to preserve our love and our child. Nobody will hurt us. As a Vulcan, violence is against my
code of ethics, but I have sworn to protect my kinsmen, my family, and my loved ones. You and our
child are as dear to me as the stars I look to, for comfort in my darkest moments. Without them.... and
without you, there is no light. I will not let them take my light away from me.”

T’Amun inched closer to her beloved and placed her head on his chest.

"I did not know Vulcans could speak in metaphors," she said humorously.

"They can," he answered. "When they speak in Vulitra, the ancient language of poetry and passion
that many of our people have abandoned. However, it thrives on your world. And hence, it calls to
the ancient Vulcan inside me -- a man who can be a warrior if he needs to be, a father who will love
his child even within the confines of logic, and a bondmate who would honor the emotion that makes our lives meaningful."

“I am so happy, that sometimes it terrifies me,” she whispered.

Spock graced her with one of his rare, little smiles. “That is most illogical,” he said, almost jokingly. “But even more curiously, I find myself agreeing with you.”
In the valley of echoes

Chapter Summary

Hey, I am back with another chapter. I hope my update speed is okay now. Please tell me what you think of the story. I haven't heard from most of you in a while now. Have I bored you all too much with this mission? I apologize if my writing is not interesting enough. But like I have said earlier, this is practice for me. Hopefully, I will get better at my craft. Let me know what you think. This story means a lot to me. And I value your feedback a lot. Shoutout to Macywinstar for always giving me feedback on the chapters.

The early morning sun spilled into the room, casting a soft light upon the two forms tangled between the silken sheets. The woman’s dark hair fanned out over the man’s muscular chest as they slept in each other’s arms.

There was a tiny, contented smile on T’Amun’s face. Spock, on the other hand, simply looked peaceful. And in the arms of sleep, he seemed somewhat like a child. Unconsciously, his hand came to rest upon the nape of her neck. She purred like a little cat and inched closer to him.

“I wish I could wake up like this, every day,” she mumbled, her eyes still closed, voice slurred with sleep.

Spock slept on. She smiled and shifted a little to get more comfortable.

She was glad that she had found Spock. In such a short time, she had been given so much. Spock loved her. He loved her with everything he had. And he had given her a child.

A child!

She was worried still, but she could not stop being happy. In her mind, she saw a cherubic baby boy, with her dark features and his father’s soft, brown eyes. The imagined giggles of her child echoed in her thoughts each time she looked at her beloved.

While she was only linked to Spock yet, her child was bonded to Spock and through him, even her link with the Vulcan was as strong as any bond could be. And the overprotective man that he was, Spock constantly held the baby’s still-developing consciousness close to his own, shielding from all foreign emotion, except for his own and T’Amun’s.

She wished he would stop doing that. In light of her pregnancy, Spock had not allowed her to ease his headaches in the last few days. And he had not gone to the priest either. She worried about him. But he refused to let her compromise herself in any way.

“Healing others is natural to my people, Spock,” she had said last night while he had been trying to meditate to alleviate his pain. But he had refused.

“My healing is in your wellbeing,” He had said. “Just keep yourself and our child safe from harm and hurt. My physical ills are of no consequence. I will allow my body to undergo a trance after our mission. I will recover. But you cannot do that for both yourself and the child, should the situation require it. Do not put yourself at risk, ashayam.”
And just like that, she had had no choice but to agree.

“You will come back to me, won’t you?” she had asked.

“I will,” he had said, before worshiping her like he did every night. His soft caresses on her skin, a loving massage delivered with a surge of strength and love in each stroke, the passionate touch of his hands in her most intimate places, with which he brought her to orgasmic bliss without ever taking anything for himself—T’Amun did not know what she had done to deserve this wonderful man.

But she wasn’t questioning her good fortune.

Spock was a blessing in her life. One simply did not question blessings.

But right now, he needed to wake up and get ready. For today, he would make good on his promise to save her planet.

“Spock, wake up, ashayam,” she said to him as she planted a kiss at the base of his throat.

He opened his eyes.

“It would be bliss to lie with you in this manner for an eternity,” he said.

“It would be,” she agreed, “And, it is a boy,” she whispered in his ear, caressing his left hand with her own. “We are going to have a son.”

“What will we call him?” he asked.

“Sivak, the one who serves for the sake of devotion,” she said. “Just like his father.”

“You are too kind, ashayam,” Spock said, unable to say much more. His eyes were alight with emotion. There was adoration and joy in them, and disbelief... and faith.

“Only because there is no other way I know to describe the man you are,” she said and pushed him back on the bed. “And I intend to memorize every inch of you before you leave. I cannot bear that thought of being separated from you even for a few hours.”

They were not due on the site for another two hours.

T’Amun would have liked more than two hours to say her very private, very thorough goodbye to Spock. But she made the best of what she had.

By the end of it, Spock knew he had no choice but to come back to her. He would return, or he would die trying.

XXXXX

The scene at the launch site could be described as one of organized chaos. There was much happening that would have made no sense to an outsider. However, the crew of the Enterprise, the workmen from Fardour who had been working with the crew, and Captain Pike, were immensely proud of all that they had accomplished in the way of preparation.

Engineer Albescu’s men had worked hard over many days and nights to ensure a smooth mission. Arulini was working the controls of the drill along with Ensign Vince. Amunishi was coordinating direction from the Gamma screen, watching everything and manipulating the semi-automated bots of the drill from a 120-degree field-of-vision.
First Officer Owens was overseeing the various tasks that were pre-requisites to the launch of the probes. And while she was still a little worried, she was confident that the captain and Spock would manage just fine.

One the other end of the field, Spock was being bullied by Dr. Puri into accepting nutrient hypos, a more powerful sensory aid, and a transmitter to be embedded into his skin that would keep sending his vitals back to the doctor.

“Doctor, I have a request to make,” he said as Puri emptied a vial of concentrated copper supplement into his neck.

“You don’t have to ask me, lieutenant, I will take care of her till you come back,” he said.

Spock was surprised but he did not let it show.

“How did you know that that was my request?” he asked.

“I am a doctor,” Puri said with a smile. “I know these things. Just do well on the mission, son. And come back in one piece, preferably without scratches. I don’t want to piece you back together in my sickbay. Messy business.”

Normally, Spock would have frowned at such humor. But he was starting to understand it better these days…

“I do not understand what you mean, doctor,” he said, amusement evident in his eyes even though his voice was calm like always. “I am not a piece of equipment that can be returned in multiple parts and repaired to be how it was prior to being dismembered.”

Dr. Puri looked at him incredulously. “I appreciate your attempt at humor, but that was a little morbid, don’t you think?” he asked.

“I will try and return in good health, sir,” the younger man said, realizing that while some jokes dissipated the tension in a situation, others stated gruesome outcomes in terrifying detail—Not exactly appropriate before a mission as risky as this. He decided to leave the humor to the humans for the time being.

“And look after Captain Pike,” the doctor added quietly. “He has a tendency for recklessness. He’s a fine captain, but sometimes he forgets that he’s human too.”

“I will,” Spock said and stood up to leave.

The doctor followed him with his eyes as he made his way to the briefing tent.

Once inside, Spock found himself a seat beside Captain Pike. Commander Owens was going over the final details of the mission.

"CMB first impact time single – 2.5 hours," she said.

"Acknowledged," Pike and Spock said in union.

"CMB subsequent impact times single -- 1.5 hours."

"Acknowledged."

"CMB total impact times combined -- 8 hours."
"Acknowledged."

"Return time – 2 hours to surface, then beam out."

"Acknowledged."

“Captain, Lieutenant, your mission will last ten hours if all goes smoothly,” Tabitha said. “You have details of your mission but they will be communicated again to you via radio once you are in your probes. In each of your suits, a portable replicating canteen is built in. Use it halfway to each contact point in order to consume water and an energy bar. At no point are you to turn off your radio. If at any point you lose contact with us or with each other or if we are unable to track you, you are to attempt a distress signal at least thrice before trying to turn back. If you are unable to reach the other and we are unable to do so as well, do not attempt to re-route to last known coordinate. Continue with your designated tasks for the mission. A rescue bot will be sent to the last known coordinate of the incommunicative probe and a rescue beam out will be attempted. Any questions or concerns?”

A young ensign from security raised his hand.

“What happens in case they are caught in the middle of an explosion?” he asked.

“We say our last prayers and hope that burning to death at core temperature is much quicker than burning to death in space,” Pike answered.

XXXXX

“You are cleared for entry Captain Pike, Lieutenant Spock,” Communication Officer Zoya Khan’s voice announced over the radio. “After the successful completion of your first CMB coating, you will receive coordinates for the second location. You will be able to employ the inbuilt propeller drill of the probe to create a temporary pathway through the inner mantle to reach your second impact point. You will be in contact with us and with each other at all times, and your location will constantly be monitored by the on-ground command and communications departments. Distress code is 089. I repeat, distress code is 089. Godspeed to the both of you. Khan out.”

Spock took a long, calming breath as the crane under the probe began elevating him. He closed his eyes and a flood of images accompanied the loud, mechanical whirring of the crane.

15 degrees

Hamid was watching the stars with him.

30 degrees

His mother was chopping up frozen apples imported from Earth for a pie.

45 degrees

T’Amun was braiding her hair.

60 degrees

He was carrying Lady Alyssi’s luggage for her on his first day at the academy.

75 degrees

Sarek did not speak to him even as he left the house for the spaceport.
90 degrees

“……explosion of such magnitude could augment the problem exponentially. That is a risk which would be unwise to even consider.”

Spock opened his eyes and spoke the command to start the drill.

“A-010”

With a loud roar, the probe’s propeller drill came to life and plunged itself into the hole created previously by the large drill. Within seconds, Spock was underground.

And what a different experience it was.

The first few minutes of the journey showed him things he had never expected to see. The viewing screen showed the innards of Fardour—minerals, precious rocks sedimented over centuries, calcified carcasses of dead animals, ossified remains of long-dead Farhannsu individuals, fossils of extinct creatures from Fardour’s distant past, uncut precious stones, ores for metals like nickel and iron.

It was amazing how easily the prospect of scientific study could transform Spock from a stoic Vulcan adult to a human child with a new toy.

As he took in everything that could be seen from the viewing screen, he realized that the color of the soil in the middle of the sub-soil layer was much darker than at the top soil layer. He paid closer attention to the fossils and remains of dead creatures only to realize something huge.

He quickly ordered the computer to start scanning the fossilized life forms constantly appearing on the view screen.

He compared the scans to existing records even though it was a short, superficial inquiry and did not reveal much.

But what it did reveal, raised a million other questions.

Whose humanoid fossils were these if they didn't match the basic bio-signature of the Farhannsu? Why did they not match up to any Vulcanoid bio-signatures? And most importantly, how had they been buried in so deep and that too at least 7,000 years ago if the age of the signature was anything to go by? How was any of this possible if the Farhannsu history on the planet was only about 2,500 years old?

Was it possible, then, that this was not the first time Fardour was facing such a catastrophe? Was this simply a repeat of the planet’s natural history? Was it in fact, a cycle? Had the Farhannsu people unknowingly chosen a home world that killed everything that lived on it, every few millennia?

Spock was lost deep in thought, when the captain’s voice chimed in.

“How’s it going, Spock?” he asked.

“The mission is proceeding smoothly, captain,” he answered. “And I have made some discoveries that are of significant scientific and archaeological interest.”

“That’s brilliant, young man.... you will go far,” Pike said, a smile evident in his voice. “I’d ask you to tell me what you have discovered, but we are minutes away from the first impact. We will discuss your findings once we are back on the surface. Meanwhile, good luck. See you on the other side of the first impact, son.”
“Yes, captain,” Spock said and reverted his focus back to the mission at hand.

They were indeed 6.83 minutes away from the impact. The industrial-grade replicator installed inside the propeller drill had been programmed to create the required alloys for coating the CMB. But in order to ensure that the production of the alloys would be continuous, in molten state, and uniform, Spock needed to be very precise with when he would start the replicator.

1.25 minutes away from impact, Spock pressed ‘enter’ on his console to begin the replicating process.

Exactly a minute later, he took control of the probe’s joystick and started the cumbersome and dangerous task of doing the first coating the 1,151.33 miles of the first of the six sectors of the CMB. This was the more precarious part of the task because the inner core was the starting point of the reaction which created the powerful explosions on the surface. Once the inner CMB was coated, the second coating could be done with relative safety.

Meticulously, Spock finished doing the first coating in about 28 minutes. He had 32 minutes to do the outer coating. Thankfully, this took a shorter time, and Spock finished in 30 minutes, leaving two minutes to spare, which he used to drink a few sips of water.

It was uncomfortably warm inside the probe despite the temperature controls and the insulation.

“Computer, lower inner atmospheric temperature by two degrees,” he commanded.

“What? Spock, you’re feeling hot?” Pike’s voice asked jokingly.

“Affirmative Captain, he answered, I presume you have completed your first task,” he replied.

“Of course, or did you think I couldn’t?” Pike asked.

“I would never make such an assumption about a superior officer, sir,” Spock answered.

“And here I thought that you respected me for my abilities,” Pike teased the Vulcan. “Turns out only my rank commands respect, even in your eyes.”

Before Spock could respond, Zoya Khan’s next set of instructions came through the radio.

“Captain Pike, Lieutenant Spock, you are cleared for departing to your next impact point. The coordinates have been transmitted and laid into your projected course. Please command your computer to begin the propeller drill for the second sector of your probe’s charted plan. Godspeed to the both of you. Khan out.”

“A-011,” Spock said and started his journey towards his second impact point.

XXXXX

T’Amun’s back was starting to hurt. She had been monitoring Spock’s probe for five hours now. She had been on duty for almost nine.

“Amunishi, this is it, I am relieving you from duty for the day,” Dr. Puri said in his most authoritative CMO’s voice. “As it is, I broke regulations by allowing you an extra hour beyond the stipulated eight.”

“But I will not be relieved till Spock is safely back on the surface,” she said in a hard, determined voice. “I am not going anywhere.”
“Yes you are, young lady,” the doctor said in an equally dangerous tone. “No one messes with the CMO and continues to serve on the ship unhindered.”

“We are not on a ship,” she argued.

“But you are a temporary member of the crew of the Starship Enterprise,” he said. "Star-SHIP."

Then he added softly. “Besides, Spock specifically told me to take care of you and the child. Please, eat something and take a short nap. You can come back in three hours and oversee the last two hours of the mission. Both, the captain and Spock, have completed the first two tasks with ease. They will be back in no time.”

“I am not sure I can bring myself to eat, doctor,” she said truthfully.

“I do understand that, Amunishi,” he said kindly. “But think about the baby. He needs his nutrition, doesn’t he?”

T’Amun smiled. Dr. Puri was right. She had to think like a mother also. Even though she was worried about Spock, there wasn’t anything she could do from here. And she was beyond exhausted. The mission had gone well so far. With the grace of the Sha Kaa Ree, Spock would return to her safe and sound.

“Okay, sir, I will retire to my quarters for a light meal and a rest of one hour,” she said. “And then I will return to my station.”

“Only if you want to,” Puri said. “Otherwise, Ensign Wilkis will do just fine. It is his first shift of the day.”

“I’d still prefer to come back,” T’Amun insisted.

“Okay, okay, then go before you lose any more of your precious three hours,” Puri said and shooed her away from the room.

XXXXX

“I don’t wish to do this,” Atirashi said to herself. “I don’t want to kill someone. It is wrong. Even if she is a traitor.”

Atirashi was one of the youngest serving women in the temple. She was a purist-- naïve, uncorrupted, and committed to the ways of her people. It was her job to take care of the needs of the women guards that were stationed at the temple. And as part of her duties, she was expected to prepare and deliver meals to them in their quarters if they so requested.

Amunishi usually never requested that her meals be brought to her room. But today, she had returned much later than usual. And hence, she had had to ask for her food to be sent to her.

And Atirashi had been in the middle of her preparations when Arben had come in and shown her the orders given by Ashulat. At first, she had refused to follow them. But then she had been told of Amunishi’s transgression.

“She is with child? That Vulcan's child?” Atirashi had asked, horrified that a woman could ever dishonor herself in such a way.

“And that is why she and her babe must die,” Arben had said with a profound sadness in his eyes. It had been clear that he was as uncomfortable as her with this situation.
But for the good of their people, they had to do this.

And that is how, Atirashi found herself carrying a tray of poisoned food up to Amunishi’s quarters.

Her heart squeezed with remorse when the innocent, happy face of the other woman greeted her at the door. She looked a little tired.

“I am grateful to you for doing this for me,” Amunishi said to Atirashi as she accepted the tray. “Mmmm. The aroma itself is delicious. Did you prepare the Oluv stew yourself?” she asked.

“I… I did,” the younger woman answered, deeply unsettled by the guileless aura of this woman who was supposedly in league with the Vulcan.

“You seem worried about something,” T’Amun asked her.

Quickly, Atirashi further shielded herself from Amunishi’s mind. “No… No, I am alright, just concerned about the mission the off-worlders are carrying out.”

T’Amun smiled at her.

“How do you know?” the question slipped out of Atirashi’s mouth before she could stop it.

“I just do,” T’Amun said simply and sent a warm wave of trust and reassurance towards her.

“I hope you like the food,” Atirashi said and quickly turned on her heels. She could not bear to look at the concern and confusion in Amunishi’s eyes.

She prayed to her gods to be pardoned for this crime. She wasn’t as heartless as Ashulat and his band of guards. Sure, she had had no choice but to do her part in this necessary sin. But she had used a different poison from the one that had been given to her by Arben.

For some strange reason, she wanted the woman to have a chance at being found. And maybe she would live, even if the babe was killed.

But if she wasn’t found in time, the end would come slowly and painfully for her. And for that, Atirashi would never be able to forgive herself.
The Mother of Chaos

Chapter Summary

I am so sorry for such a late update. Real life has been rather maddening, lately. This chapter is longer than usual and details a lot more than I was planning to in this chapter. But I figured you all deserved better for being so patient with me. Here it is and I apologize for all the insanity packed into this chapter. I hope you are enjoying the story. And thank you for all the encouragement. It means the world to me.

The journey from the second impact points to the final ones should have been easy and uncomplicated for both, Spock and Captain Pike. Unfortunately, that did not happen. Spock and Pike were in constant contact with each other, when a mighty explosion took place exactly 200 miles from the captain’s location, effectively blocking his path and freezing him in a spot from which there was no way forward or backward.

Static crackled over the communication channel.

“Captain Pike, come in please,” Zoya Khan’s disembodied voice boomed over the static clearly in Spock’s earpiece. “Captain Pike, come in,” she repeated. There was no response.

Just then, the two-way channel between his and Pike’s probe flared to life. A loud beeping accompanied by the flashing of the red bulb on the console alerted Spock to his captain’s efforts to contact him through the emergency intercom.

“Captain Pike, report your status, sir,” Spock said without preamble.

“Spock… Spock… Spock…” Pike’s message got stuck and a surge of static shut down communication again.

“Lieutenant Khan, I am in the process of establishing contact with Captain Pike’s probe,” Spock said to Zoya. “Should I attempt to reach the captain’s coordinates?” he asked even though he knew that they had been instructed not to do so, because that was the job of surface communications. However, in this case, there were going to be problems with that. Zoya was unable to get in touch with Pike.

He turned back to his communication console and tried to re-connect with the captain. A few minutes later, Pike’s weak voice spoke at the other end.

“Spock…” he rasped. “I… I…” He coughed weakly.

“Are you injured, captain?” Spock asked, not liking the wet, guttural sound of the older man’s voice at all.

“I am otherwise unhurt,” he said. “But… my probe’s temperature controls are malfunctioning. Seems like they were affected by the heat of the blast. And the temperature in the cabin is rising slowly but steadily.”

This was extremely concerning. Even though the probes were hardy and at safe distance from the actual CMB, rising internal temperature would kill the captain without causing any external damage to the body of the probe.
“Captain, permission to attempt an evacuation, sir,” Spock said.

“No, lieutenant,” Pike said without hesitation. “You need to proceed to your final impact point and then to the end point of my final impact point. You will need to complete my last task as well.”

Spock could see the logic in that. But he also knew that the captain was in mortal danger.

“Sir, Lieutenant Khan has been trying to contact you and she has not been able to,” he tried again to get through to Pike. “There is a 97% probability at this point that she would be unable to determine your exact location, which in turn, means that she will not be able to dispatch a rescue bot to your coordinates.”

For several seconds, there was complete silence.

Another wet cough sounded from the speaker.

“The temperature just fell drastically, Spock,” he said in a tiny voice. “I think it is close to 21 degrees here. Looks like I’m not going to get cooked to death, after all,” he made a weak attempt at humor.

“Captain….” Spock said even as he programmed his route to his next impact point, hating it that there was nothing he could do for Pike. It was no relief to him to know that the temperature had fallen. While it was a terrible thought that the captain could have been burnt to death from the inside, it was not comforting to think that hypothermia would be any less painful.

“You… you… ah..ah..are V’lcan,” Pike said to Spock through the barely controlled chattering of his teeth. “Th..thi..nk logically.”

“Yes, sir,” Spock resigned himself and started the propeller-drill for the third sector of his probe’s charted course.

And while he was decidedly focused on the mission, a part of Spock couldn’t help but be worried about Pike. He tried to recall what he knew of hypothermia from his studies and from his personal experience.

“Captain,” he ventured after a few moments.

“Ye…es..Sp…ohk,” came Pike’s weak reply.

“Sir, you cannot afford to fall asleep,” he said. “You must stay awake.”

A low, throaty chuckle was heard from Pike’s end before it dissolved into a hacking cough.

“Keep..kee..eep talk.. to me,” Pike managed to say. It was clear that in the cold, without an insulated suit to protect himself, he was losing lucidity. And while he may not know it, Spock was receiving the readings of his captain’s probe. And they were not good. Not only had the thermostat malfunctioned, but the cabin was slowly starting to decompress and the oxygen levels were also falling. It was most likely why the older officer was in such terrible shape despite not having been directly hit by the explosion.

Spock saw the logic in the captain’s request. Of course, it would be a lot easier for him to stay awake if there was an anchor to keep him attentive. But Spock was literally the last person who could “keep talking” for the sake of holding someone’s attention.

Besides, he really did not know anything that would keep the captain’s mind occupied.
“T..t…Am’n….tell me..’bout her,” Pike said, perhaps having sensed the reason for Spock’s silence. Despite the hopelessness of the situation, the mention of T’Amun made Spock smile inwardly.

“She is a wonderful person, captain,” Spock began. “Every day since we first committed ourselves to each other, we have shared a bed, our meals, our desires, and our aspirations. She has taught me to shoot an arrow skillfully. She has a bright but lilting, low voice like my mother’s. Two nights ago, she sang a traditional Farhannsu song to me, captain. And I was fascinated at how similar the melody was to an ancient Vulcan song that is now only remembered as a part of pre-Surakian history. I replicated terran strawberries for her three days ago as she was craving a sweet-tasting substance that she wasn’t able to describe. I deduced that she was asking for strawberries as she told me that she had seen pictures of the red, pock-marked terran fruit on the cups of yogurt that Commander Owens and Lieutenant Khan consume at every meal. She also regularly prepares a Farhannsu delicacy called Gachhi for me because it reminds me of my mother’s Plomeek stew. And she reads voraciously. From Klingon annals of historic battles to the Bajoran songs of lost love, she has read a vast variety of intergalactic literature. And while her sister T’Arul wishes to join Starfleet, T’Amun only wishes to raise a family and preferably curate and maintain an archive of select pieces of literature and philosophy that she deems worthy of either regard or for the sake of preservation. We are planning to be bonded, sir. I have spoken to my mother about this matter. Hopefully, T’Amun and I will be bonded soon. And then we shall be ready to welcome our son into the world.

“A.. son?” Pike asked?

“Yes sir, a son,” Spock said. “T’Amun wishes to call him Sivak, which means ‘the one who serves for the sake of devotion,' and I agree with her choice of the name.”

Spock continued talking as he coated the last of his third sector. Now he needed to complete the captain’s last sector and then, if possible, attempt a rescue.

Just then, Zoya’s voice chimed into his earpiece.

“Lieutenant Spock, you may proceed to sector Gamma II, the last sector allotted to Captain Pike,” she said. “You are to await instructions at the successful completion of that task. Based on your current location, you are being re-routed to your next and final location from the on-ground control room. Please do not re-route yourself. I repeat, do not re-route yourself. Await pre-programmed route. Await pre-programmed route.”

Spock waited while the instructions were fed into his computer from the top.

“Captain, they are re-routing me to your allotted impact point,” he said. There was no response from Pike. Only the faint sound of labored breathing could be heard.

“Captain, it is imperative that you rouse yourself,” he said with a quiet desperation in his voice.

“M’awake, Spock,” he mumbled incoherently. “Too hot, bones on fire… Burning…Hurts,”

Spock quickly checked the readings he was receiving from Pike’s probe. And sure enough, the malfunctioning thermostat was now maintaining an extremely high temperature of 131 degrees in the cabin. No wonder, the captain was in shock. Within seconds, his body had been subjected to an unacceptable change in extreme temperatures.

Through the next hour and a half, Spock was forced to hear Pike’s labored breathing and incomprehensible ramblings. Like a man on a death row, Spock kept pouring a litany of disjointed monologues to help the older man stay awake.
“…Her favorite color is crimson,” Spock said doggedly. “She says that it reminds her of how she imagines Eridani-40 looks like. That is the star Vulcan orbits. T’Amun wishes to raise our child as a Vulcan. She does not want Sivak to grow up in the shadow of the resentment that all Farhannsu people harbor against the rest of the universe. But she is apprehensive of how she and our son will be treated on Vulcan. Emotions are after all frowned upon and even though she is half-Vulcan, she looks like a Farhannsu female. There is a challenge in front of us, but we will attempt to get the approval of our elders on Vulcan and yet, raise our family on Earth.”


“Because despite the excessive emotionalism that humans exhibit, Earth is more welcoming to those different from the people who were first on it,” Spock said, his voice sounding faraway. “On my very first hover cab journey, I shared the space with Tellarites, Orions, Andorians, and humans. It was liberating to see that no one was claiming more space than they required in the cabin. All the passengers were aloof, and polite when they needed to interact for any reason. It may not seem to be significant but this level of tranquility is seldom found among beings traveling from distant planets and colonies on even connecting shuttle services. However, beings who have lived on earth find themselves to become more accepting of the diversity represented in the federation.”

Spock finally finished the outer coating of the last sector. Just as he terminated the program, Pike screamed. And his channel with spock got flooded with static The intercom beeped loudly and the new set of readings sent shivers down the Vulcan’s spine.

He wasted no time in activating his mic.

“The rescue bots cannot reach the captain’s location,” he said to whoever was receiving the transmission. “I am attempting a rescue. The CMB has been sealed. There will be no more eruptions. I have sealed the site of the last explosion which was 203.76 miles from the captain’s location. It shall take me a total of 11.9 minutes to get to his probe.”

“Lieutenant Spock, your probe is low on fuel supply,” Zoya’s carefully controlled voice came through the earpiece. Spock couldn’t tell but there was an unmistakable relief in her manner of speaking. Clearly, on the surface, the crew was worried about their captain, but they had been unable to do anything to save him because any kind of rescue other than one orchestrated by a bot would have jeopardized the mission.

“I am aware of that,” Spock said. “However, my standby supply remains unused. If required, the probe will switch to that. And as per the calculations, it would give us approximately 4.32 hours of optimum thrust and propeller power.”

“Very well, Spock,” Zoya said, dropping her professional façade. “Godspeed. Bring him back.”

And that was all the confirmation he needed. Without waiting for another word, he sped off in Pike’s direction.

XXXXX

T’Amun had been in her room for nearly two hours now. She sat on the cot in a daze. Her head was throbbing with a terrible migraine that she was entirely unable to explain. A nagging feeling was telling her that it had something to do with Spock or perhaps, with the terrible intuition that had been trying to make itself known to her for a few days.

Her meal sat cold and untouched beside her. But She could not bring herself to take even one bite of the stew.
It was illogical. She knew that was what Spock would say if he were around. Her baby needed the nutrition even if she wasn’t particularly hungry. She broke off a piece of the bread and brought it to her lips. But something about it repulsed her.

She was certain it had nothing to do with the food itself. She simply couldn’t eat. There was a ball of worry and fear twisting in her gut like a blood snake. And her head felt like it would split into two.

Maybe she could go back to the observatory. Maybe monitoring Spock’s location on a screen would help her feel better. Slowly, she stood up. However, she was dead on her feet. Her legs felt like lead and she felt dizzy. She hadn’t eaten anything for more than 11 hours. And her body needed the energy and the nourishment to stay upright.

With an effort that felt like too much, she forced herself to sit down again and eat. The bread, even soaked with the sauce of the stew felt like dry sandpaper in her mouth. But she forced her throat to swallow. She had to be logical, she reminded herself yet again. And it was only food, and that too, food prepared lovingly by Atirashi, one of the nicest serving women. Besides, no amount of worry or starvation was going to bring Spock back to her sooner. But yes, if she refused to eat, it would make her weaker and hurt her baby. Farhannsu metabolism was high and required a greater number of calories to allow a person to function properly. As an expecting mother, the consequences of not eating were going to be unpleasant for her and her child. She knew from her independent studies that Vulcan and Romulan women did not experience this.

But Fardour’s harsh environment and high gravity required her people to compensate with a greater number of calories to build a denser muscle mass despite the fact that they had been adapting naturally over generations.

T’Amun had eaten only a few bites of the bread and the stew when she felt a sharp stab of pain in her lower belly. She was about to take another bite, when the same shooting pain came at her again but this time from her lower back.

Her spoon clattered onto the floor.

“Unngh.. what’s happening to me?” she whispered out loud as a terrible heat spread from her belly to her feet. She tried to stay steady, but almost all of a sudden, her back stopped supporting her. She collapsed on the cot with a strangled groan.

And to her absolute horror, she felt a pooling wetness between her legs and her hands started trembling. A sweet, nauseating scent of copper filled the air and the first of the many green stains appeared on her sheets.

“SPOCK….” She screamed as pain ripped through her. Her missed intuitions came rushing at her. She clutched her belly desperately, as if trying to hold her child in. But the bleeding continued. And the pain and the heat only increased. She shivered involuntarily and her hands trembled as if jerking in response to an electric shock.

She felt even more lightheaded. And a terrible, terrible fear gripped her. Her child was going to die. And so was she. And Spock would not be beside her.

“I wan..wann.t t..to live,” she gasped in a slow agonized whisper. She tried to close her legs to stop the precious green liquid from escaping her body. But it was of no help. Her thighs hurt and they refused to move. A strange paralysis gripped her lower half and the crushing migraine strained at her consciousness to drag her under. She wondered if there was a foreign presence in her mind, trying to reach her. But she was way too exhausted to process anything that complex. She was literally swimming in a sea of pain. All she wanted to do was to sleep.
But she also wanted to live.

"...please...Spock...I...wa...." but coherence did not come to her.

At long last, her eyes fluttered close.

Extracting the captain from the slowly burning probe was a very tricky thing. The thermostat had finally exploded and started a fire in the engine which had blown off the entire front part of the probe.

Spock managed to drill a small passage through the rocks to get to the captain’s probe. His protective suit was not conducive to trekking through mantle rocks. But there was no other way. He had an additional portable oxygen tank strapped to his back for Pike.

It took a 6-minute snail-paced crawl to get to the now wrecked probe. And while technically, 6 minutes was record time for something like this, it was way too slow in this situation because the captain’s life was hanging by a thread.

When Spock finally did reach the probe, he was horrified at the condition of his superior officer.

The blast had injured Pike gravely. His entire left side was covered in burn injuries. There was too much blood. And the pulse thrumming at his neck was weak, unsteady, barely there.

With painstaking slowness, Spock extracted the unconscious man from the probe. And it was with a sigh of relief that he strapped him to a makeshift seat in the tiny hold of his own probe. The hold was not meant for a human. But it was their best option.

Just as Spock finished strapping the captain, a sudden phantom ache ghosted over his own lower belly. It was not particularly painful. But it was disconcerting. A moment later, a similar ache ghosted deeper into his stomach.

With a sinking realization, he figured out what was happening. He prayed that he was wrong.

Gently, he reached for his nascent link with T’Amun.

At first, there was no response.

The momentary lull was deafening.

Spock’s heart thudded loudly against his ribcage.

And then, a mighty scream drenched in pain, hammered at his mind.

"SPOCK..." The tortured female voice tore at him, the force of it made him stumble backward and nearly crash into the communications console of the probe.

T’Amun’s hurting body and consciousness reached for him, setting his own senses alight with every stab of agony that assaulted her.

But she wasn’t aware of it.

“T’amun.... T...” Spock rasped, trying to clutch at her fleeting, hyperventilating consciousness.

“Lieutenant, have you extracted the captain?” Zoya’s voice spoke in his earpiece.
“I… T’Amun….” Spock was unable to reply to the communications officer.

Just then, Dr. Puri’s voice came through the earpiece.

“Your heart rate is through the roof, are you okay, Spock?” he asked without preamble.

The Vulcan didn’t respond. The ominous silence was worrying to the doctor, but before he could say anything, the younger man’s voice came out in an anguished bellow.

“T’Amun?…… T’Amun……T’AMUN?” Spock screamed in pain, fury, and absolute blind panic.

A few seconds later, the pain receded from his body. At first, he relaxed, but when the ache in his lower belly intensified, his fears rose.

He reached for his bond with his son.

"Sivak.... Sivak.. my son," he whispered brokenly, his grief unfettered at the realization that there was nothing to reach for.

Just then, a terrified and confused presence fluttered across his shields. The presence was childlike and it brushed against Spock's mind, needing comfort and succor from the blackness and the void that was slowly pulling him apart from his mother.

Spock's heart broke at the depth of the torment that was being visited upon his son.

The child’s katra was clinging to its physical body, but only just.

T’Amun was losing their baby.

“Doctor…,” Spock gathered himself and mustered all the courage and steel he could in his voice. “T’Amun is miscarrying. Please attend to her immediately.”

“What?” Puri’s voice said at the other end.

“Make haste, please,” Spock said again as he tried to anchor the baby to his own mind. T’Amun was clearly in no condition to hold onto their child. She was losing him physically. But Spock would not let that happen to his katra. That was the worst thing to happen to a Vulcan. Spock was determined to make sure that his child would not be lost to the oblivion of the universe.

And it was not easy. Because the child was not yet grown enough to be able to fortify a bond even slightly. For all intents and purposes, his side of the bond was little more than simple sentient energy tied to a young, unmarked katra intertwined with the katas of two adults.

There was no understanding, no comprehension; just a basic, rudimentary sense of relief that the child experienced as Spock mentally reached out to hold him safe even as the mother steadily bled out.

It was not helping that Spock was exhausted after the mission and the rescue that he had had to make. And they were still inside the planet. He had yet to get back to the surface.

With a strength he did not know he had, he buckled himself into his seat and restarted the engine. The fiery throbbing in his head was only matched by the increasingly real phantom pain in his lower belly. T’Amun was deteriorating. The child was deteriorating.

And he was powerless to do anything.
“Doctor, what was Lieutenant Spock saying?” Zoya demanded of Puri.

“Now is not the time,” he said and rushed out.

He commed Nurse Chapel to meet him at the gate of the temple as he rushed to the quarters of the guards. Thankfully, he had had the foresight to find out in advance where they were, just in case.

A few minutes later, he reached the gates only to see the nurse materializing outside.

“Let’s rush, we have no time,” he said grimly and motioned her to follow him.

It took them less than 2 minutes to reach T’Amun’s quarters.

He knocked at her door. There was no response.

Without wasting a moment, he used his phaser to burn the lock away.

The sight that greeted them was straight from a horror movie. The cot’s originally white comforter was soaked in a sickening shade of green. And on it lay T’Amun, pale and unmoving.

“Fuck…fuck…fuck..” the doctor swore.

“Enterprise, three to beam up immediately to the medbay,” he practically screamed into his comm. unit.

“Aye, sir,” came the cool voice of the transporter room operator.

Puri cursed under his breath as precious seconds slipped by.

A moment later, he, the nurse, and T’Amun dissolved into golden shimmers.
Chapter Summary

Here is the next installment of this story. We are quickly nearing the end of the mission. In a few chapters, we will return to the academy. Let me know what you think. I hope you are enjoying this story. For warnings on this chapter, see the notes at the end of the chapter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dr. Puri was a relatively young but experienced doctor. Thanks to all his work in India, he had virtually seen every type of trauma there was to see in a doctor’s career. And despite all the advancements in medicine, miscarriages in the 23rd century were no different from miscarriages in the 16th century.

There was no way to stop them.

And while usually, the mother remained free from harm, certain cases tended to be complex. Such as T’Amun’s. Artificially induced miscarriages were absolutely bad news. And in this case, the inducement had been done by a poison brewed specifically to target the developing half-Vulcan fetus.

Had T’Amun been completely Farhannsu, she would have perhaps not suffered so much. But as a half-Vulcan herself, she had been affected by the poison too, as a result of which, the good doctor had been forced to dilate her in preparation for a Dilation and Curettage procedure. She was in no condition for a natural miscarriage aided by medication.

Two Misoprostol tablets sat in a Petri dish, ready to be dissolved into a hypospray before the actual procedure.

“Spock, I have no choice but to abort the fetus before I start flushing her stomach,” he said into his comm. unit. He knew Spock was holding onto the child’s katra with his own mind. And while that had miraculously slowed down T’Amun’s bleeding, it was not enough to save her life. The poison was still coursing through her body.

“Doctor, please,” Spock begged as he maneuvered his way out of the planet’s crust. “I am 3.5 minutes away from the surface. Commander Owens is standing by to beam us directly to the med bay. I should be there in no more than 5 minutes.”

“I’m doing what I can Spock,” Puri said dejectedly. “I am doing what I can.”

Spock was torn. He desperately wanted to do something to aid T’Amun’s survival. She was living. She could be saved. The child was beyond help. But for such a young katra to pass without an anchor, it would mean that it would forever be lost to its identity. The torment of its unborn existence would be great in the otherworld. And it would perhaps never find its way to another womb.

He could not let that happen to his child.
But T’Amun’s life was in danger. Every moment was precious.

If Spock had been fully human, he would have cursed the fates. But as a Vulcan, he only knew Kaidith. What is, is.

“Breaking surface in sixty seconds,” he spoke into his comm. unit. “Transporter on standby for direct beam-out to the Enterprise med bay.”

“Transporter room on standby, lieutenant,” said the strong voice of Engineer Albescu from the other end.

A moment later, the engineer reached out to Spock again.

“There are six lifeforms at your designated surface location,” he said. “You need to divert course, lieutenant. These lifeforms are Farhannsu and they are not authorized to be at your location.”

“We do not have time,” Spock said

“But sir…. Aaaaarhhh,” the engineer shouted suddenly. And the channel went blank.

“Engineer,” Spock said urgently. “Mr. Albescu, come in,” he repeated.

But there was no response.

Spock’s heart lurched.

In ten seconds they would reach the surface. And he had the most terrible feeling that something had gone wrong.

“Doctor,” he said into the other channel. “If I am not in the med bay in 70 seconds, please abort the fetus and do what you must to preserve T’Amun’s life.”

“Is something wrong, Spock?” the doctor asked worriedly.

But he got no response.

A moment later, a loud crash killed the communication channel entirely.

XXXXX

Engineer Albescu had been right.

The minute the probe broke the surface, a volley of arrowheads flew at them from all directions. Spock could not risk getting out and certainly not with the captain as injured as he was.

A few moments later, the probe was surrounded by soldiers wielding heavy metal clubs and spears.

A lone tear slipped down the Vulcan’s eye as he passed the 70-second mark. Even as the soldiers bashed the propeller drive with their clubs, time stood still for him. A moment later, an intense ache flared in his mind as he felt his child’s katra pass.

His whole body trembled uncontrollably. Pain wracked at him as his bond with Sivak was ripped from his own katra. He sucked in a dreep breath to keep himself from crying out.

“Be one with all that has been and all that will be, my son,” he whispered to his terrified child's spirit as it left the tiny physical body it had only just been given. "This is the Vulcan heart. This is the
Vulcan soul. This is the Vulcan way. As it was at the time of the beginning, so it is now.”

Spock’s murmured blessing provided little relief to the bleeding hole in his mind left behind by his child of only seven days.

But he could not grieve in peace. His captain was still living. He needed to get him to safety. It took some doing, but he was able to twist his body into the small space where he had strapped Captain Pike.

The probe shook dangerously and one of the clubs made a dent in its roof, missing Spock’s head by mere inches.

His body was exhausted and he was sick at heart. If he could have, he would have given up right there and then. But Spock was a fighter. He had been one all his life. So he did what he knew best. He fought to keep his superior officer alive. He covered the captain’s prone body with his own and reached into his pocket for his comm. unit.

“Enterprise, come in please,” he said hoarsely. “Transporter room, this is Lieutenant Spock. We are under attack from Farhannsu natives at the surface contact point. Two to beam out immediately. This is an emergency. I repeat, this is an emergency.”

There was no response.

A moment later, the top of the probe was blown away as a crude bomb went off. The impact rattled Spock’s bones. And the searing pain in his back accompanied by the nauseating smell of burning cloth told him that he had been injured by the blast.

At any other time, he would have been able to assess the extent of the damage and return phaser fire against the raining arrows. But he was unarmed, tired, and protecting his captain literally with the last of himself.

An arrow pierced his side.

A club came down on the small of his back.

He screamed in agony but refused to move from his position.

He could feel the end coming. From the corner of his blurring vision, he saw a soldier raising his club to deliver a death blow. He tensed himself to prepare for it. But it never came.

At first, he didn’t realize it but suddenly, a golden warmth engulfed him and the captain before everything went dark.

XXXXX

“Oh my dear God,” Ensign Raul Vince muttered as he took in the two forms that had materialized on the transporter.

Captain Pike’s body was still obscured by Lieutenant Spock lying atop him.

Gently, he lifted Spock onto one of the hover-stretchers and laid him on his uninjured side to avoid putting pressure on his burnt and bleeding back. Then, he placed the captain on the other one.

It was utter chaos in the med bay.
Barely minutes before the return of the probe, the launch site had been attacked by a large group of armed men. Engineer Albescu had been knocked out cold. Lieutenant Commander Khan was nursing several bruised ribs and a broken arm. Four security personnel had been left dead. Another 12 had been injured and were being given first aid by the nurses.

High Priest Hashmak, Commander Owens, and four members of the science department were missing. They had been taken hostage by the soldiers who had attacked the launch site.

Lieutenant Kevin Smith, the helmsman of the Enterprise was currently the senior most non-medic officer on active duty. Lieutenant Benito Rossini, the navigator, was acting as his first officer.

Dr. Elliot Lane was attending to the worst of the injuries while the nurses were dealing with the relatively minor scrapes and bruises. Dr. Puri was still in surgery with T’Amun. He was unaware that Spock and the captain had returned.

“Dr. Lane,” Ensign Vince called out as he rushed Pike and Spock into sickbay. “I just managed to beam them out from the surface contact point. They need urgent attention.”

Lane, who was stitching up a wound on a security officer’s forehead did not look up even as he motioned to the ensign to place the patients on any of the three empty biobeds.

Vince did so but with each passing minute, he could see the captain’s pallor worsening.

“Sir, the captain is deteriorating even as we speak,” he almost yelled at the doctor.

“What?” Dr. Lane finally looked up. “You have the captain?”

“And Lieutenant Spock,” Vince added. “Please, it looks like they were attacked by a party of soldiers as well.”

“Jesus Christ,” the doctor swore. “Nurse Stasko, two units of aprotinin at beds 8 and 9,” he shouted.

“I have never worked on a Vulcan,” he muttered under his breath. “We need Dr. Puri to treat the lieutenant.”

Vince turned to leave. He was extremely worried but did not want to come in the way of the medical crew. He hoped that the captain and Mr. Spock would be fine. This mission had quickly escalated into a nightmare. He only hoped it would end with all of them waking up in their quarters on the Enterprise, speeding away from Fardour at warp nine.

XXXXX

Dr. Puri pulled off his green-soaked gloves in a huff.

All that work, all those prayers, all those curses… for nothing.

T’Amun had slipped into a coma. And he had no idea whether it was some kind of a healing trance or just plain old coma; the kind from which most Vulcans did not wake up.

This was certainly not the most complex obstetrics surgery he had performed. Nor was T’Amun the first woman he had had to help through a miscarriage. But Dr. Puri was so heartsick that he was certain he would never be able to do it again.

The young woman had wanted her child to live. The child had been a part of her and Spock in ways that most humans couldn’t even begin to understand. He had no idea how he’d face Spock.
He knew little about Vulcan bonds, but he knew that a parental bond was one of the strongest. He had no doubt that Spock had felt his child die. And there wasn’t anything he could say to a man who had just lost his child and was possibly going to lose its mother as well.

Lost in thought, we walked out from the operation theater as Nurse Chapel cleaned up the young Farhannsu woman.

But just as he discarded his scrubs, a nurse came and handed him a fresh set.

“Dr. Lane needs your help with Lieutenant Spock,” she said. “His bleeding wouldn’t stop.”

“Bleeding? Spock?” the doctor asked stupidly.

But the nurse only asked him to follow her. Puri was tired after operating on T’Amun. Emotionally, he was not ready to deal with any more green blood. But as a doctor, he knew he could not give in to such irrational thoughts.

Within seconds he reached the other procedure room, where Dr. Lane was dressing the injuries of Captain Pike.

“Thank God, you are here,” Lane said with a sigh of relief. “Spock’s back is badly burnt, mostly second-degree burns, but a few third-degree burns as well. We managed to clean that up. It is the arrow wound we have been unable to close up. It has been bleeding steadily ever since we got rid of the arrow. We gave him two units of aprotinin but it didn’t help.”

“That’s because plain aprotinin only works on humans,” Puri said without preamble. “Nurse, give me a unit of Cuprolayse. That should do it.”

A few seconds after administering the medication, the bleeding slowed. Puri didn’t waste any time. He sutured the wound close before using a dermal regenerator on it.

“He will be fine,” he said. “Once his burns have healed some, we will try and use the regenerator on those as well. And then, the minute we get away from this hellhole, he needs to attempt a healing trance. The injuries on his brain have been aggravated by the broken bond with his child. He needs to fix this damage now or it will be too late.”

XXXXX

It took Spock an hour to regain consciousness. The first thing he saw as he opened his eyes, was the worried face of Dr. Puri.

“How do you feel, Spock?” he asked tentatively.

“I am adequate, doctor,” the younger man answered. “How is the Captain? ….And how is T’Amun? He asked softly.

Puri’s eyes softened at the tone of the Vulcan’s voice. He sounded like a lost child. If he were human, the doctor would have offered him a hug. But Vulcans did not do hugs. They were about logic, facts, and repressed emotion.

“The captain is healing well, thanks to you,” he answered. “If you hadn’t gotten to him in time or shielded him from the blast, he would not have survived. As for T’Amun…. Spock, I won’t lie to you. She… she is in a coma. And I don’t know if she will wake up.”

Spock looked at the doctor with glassy eyes.
“May I see her?” he asked quietly.

“You may, lieutenant,” Puri answered. “I will take you to her.”

Spock’s legs were shaky after all the abuse his body had taken. But considering all things, he was in relatively good health. He followed the doctor to the private room that had been given to his beloved.

Even though the urge to cry was overwhelmingly strong, years of carefully cultivated Vulcan control allowed Spock to keep his features schooled into an impassive mask. Out of respect for the couple, Dr. Puri stood outside the door while Spock went inside.

“I don’t know much about what is happening in her mind,” he said to the Vulcan just before he went in. “But if you can reach out to her, do that, son. And help me understand what is the best that we can do for her at this point.”

Even though Puri’s words did not sound particularly ominous, there was a ring of finality to them. Miscarriages were rare among women of Vulcanoid species. And when they did happen, they usually resulted in death for the mother due to the psychic shock of losing a child so intimately connected to her.

Spock could only wonder if T’Amun would be one of the very few to survive it. However, if the coma was anything to go by, that was a very slim possibility.

He entered the room.

It was illogical, but a part of him wanted to turn back and run as far as he could in the opposite direction. But a stronger voice inside him beckoned him towards his unconscious beloved.

Her long hair was piled atop her head in a messy bun. The kohl around her eyes was smudged. Her lips looked chapped. There was an odd lifelessness to her otherwise healthy, glowing skin.

And when Spock took her hand in his, it felt cold like ice.

“Ashayam,” he said softly, knowing that if she was still there, she could hear him. Slowly, he placed his shaking hand on the meld points on her face, dreading what he might find.

There was nothing to be found.

Spock’s own mind had felt empty and broken after the death of the child. But at least his link with T’Amun had still been there. Thanks to the coma, the link had fallen silent. He had hoped in the minutes after waking up that the silence was only temporary, but now that he was here, he knew that was unlikely.

“T... T’Amun?” he sobbed.

Nothing. Just the endless, fathomless void.

He tried to deepen the meld to see if there was anything at all of hers left. Clearly, her katra had been lost at some point between her slipping into the coma and now. But sometimes, even a body kept alive by machines latched onto to something of the departed spirit.

“Live for me, ashayam, do not grieve,” a voice, less than echo, less than the imprint of a whisper, ghosted against him-- warm, soothing…. Fleeting.

And then, like a light going out, the void fell silent, even more than it had been—signaling the final
passing of her essence that had held on to the last of her dying consciousness, only for Spock.

Spock did not say anything. He removed his hand from her face and wept.

Chapter End Notes

Warning: Character Death
Here is the next chapter, guys. It is a little long. And it is a little dark. Please leave a review and let me know what you think. This chapter is a bit of an experiment. I would really appreciate your feedback.

Dr. Puri did not have the heart to ask Spock to move from T’Amun’s side. It was frightening and heartbreaking to see the normally stoic Vulcan holding onto his dead beloved’s hand. It was not normal. And it was certainly not healthy. But Spock had already lost so much. It wasn’t as if there was anything the doctor could do to lessen his grief.

What was even more disconcerting, was the blank look on Spock’s face. A few times, he brushed his hand over T’Amun’s hair. It was difficult to tell if he was in denial or simply making an effort to memorize every detail of her face. Not once did his gaze waver from her features.

After what seemed like an eternity, Spock turned to Puri.

“Doctor, I appreciate you staying with me,” he said. “But you are needed in the med bay. It is not proper that I keep you here when your skills are required in order to care for the sick and the wounded from the attack on the launch site.”

Puri knew that Spock was right. But he also knew that Vulcans felt grief a lot more deeply than humans. He was sure that Spock’s mental condition was much more delicate than he was letting on.

“And has her family been informed of her passing?” the younger man asked softly.

Puri swallowed audibly.

“I have had a message sent to Arulini,” he answered. “I presume she will inform the others.”

“I wish to speak with Commander Owens as well,” Spock said more to himself than to Puri. Gently, he placed T’Amun’s hand back on the bed, letting go reluctantly. It almost looked like he was afraid that she would vanish if he left. But of course, such thoughts were illogical. The human part of him grappled with his logic. And like many times in his life, Spock found the logic inadequate.

But he also drew comfort from it.

A moment later, he turned sharply on his heel and made his way to the doctor.

“Where can I find the commander?” he asked.

Puri bit his lip.

“Er.. Spock, I am not sure if anyone told you this, but when the soldiers attacked the site, they took hostages,” he said. “And the commander, four members of the science department, and the high priest were abducted.”

“Abducted?” Spock asked in a steely voice. “To what purpose? Have we received any
communication stating their demands?"

“I don’t know,” Puri answered. “But Lieutenant Kevin Smith is acting captain right now. You should ask him. All the other senior officers are injured and off active duty.”

The Vulcan nodded and left the room.

```
```

“Where is Spock?” Captain Pike demanded the moment he woke up.

“He is okay, sir” Dr. Lane answered. “He is in a meeting with Lieutenant Smith and Lieutenant Rossini, plotting the next course of action.”

“Next course of action?” Pike asked. “Why don’t you tell me everything from the beginning.”

Dr. Lane began telling the captain everything that had transpired after his probe’s malfunction. With each terrible news, Pike grew more and more agitated.

“I need to be at that meeting,” he said as he started pulling off the IV.

“Stop, Captain,” Lane said as he held Pike’s hands to prevent Pike from injuring himself. “You are not on active duty. You are still in a precarious condition, sir. Please don’t force me to sedate you.”

“Five of my crewmen are in the hands of the same bastards that killed Spock’s partner and their unborn baby,” the captain said angrily. “You can’t expect me to sit in bed while we wait like sheep to receive news of the slaughter of our officers.”

“There will be no such news, sir,” a calm, controlled voice said smoothly.

Pike looked towards the door to see Spock coming in with the helmsman and the navigator of the ship.

“We have finally received notification of what the soldiers require from us,” Spock said. “They have not yet harmed the high priest. And the Starfleet personnel are relatively unharmed as well.”

“What do they want?” the older man asked.

“I think you should see it, sir,” Smith said grimly.

The demand had been sent to them in the form of an old-fashioned black and white video with bad audio quality. But the message itself was chilling and unmistakably clear.

“Federation of slaves, we are owned by no one. Leave our home and never come back. We don’t kill without reason. But when we do, we make sure we do it right. The traitor among us and her child of sin are only an example of how merciful our vengeance is. But rest assured that mercy is given when the sin is a result of ignorance. Amunishi, daughter of Avok and Asharita, was a victim of the sin committed by your Vulcan against our people. Justice for him shall be one of vengeance and retribution. It shall bring respite to the cherished parents of our sister slain for the sake of her honor and the collective safety of our home. Give us the Vulcan, and we shall release your comrades. After your Vulcan has served his sentence, he will also be returned to you. To kill off-worlders by our law, is not moral to us. But they must be taught to keep away from our people. And so, your Vulcan will be taught. If he is fortunate, he will survive and live to tell the tale. You have but two hours to send the Vulcan to us. He shall be expected no later than that at the gates of the temple.”
The video, while mostly still, showed the condition of the commander and the missing science officers. Two of them were clearly unconscious. And Tabitha was injured. Her otherwise lightly-colored tunic was covered in numerous dark patches which were easily identifiable as bloodstains.

The voiceover had been delivered in a cold, calculative tone. Pike could see that this group meant what they said.

“We don’t negotiate with terrorists,” he said, hating himself for it, knowing that he was condemning his first officer and almost the entire science department to a fate worse than death.

“No, captain, we don’t,” Spock said. “But these soldiers do not understand our concept of terrorism. To them, we are the intruders.”

Pike shook his head.

“Even if that is the case, Spock,” Pike began. “Their actions are the same as those of terrorists, even if that is not a term they know.”

“I request permission to go,” Spock said. “In the absence of all the other science officers, I am the science officer of the ship and it is my duty to ensure the safety and well-being of the department. I must go in order for them to be released from captivity.”

“Are you fucking nuts, Spock?” the captain bellowed, unable to believe his ears. He had never sworn at Spock before. But in his injured state, with sedatives and painkillers coursing through his system, he felt quite out of control in terms of his emotional state.

“I am the captain,” He said in a defeated tone. “You think I don’t want to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all my crew?”

A flash of shame passed through the Vulcan’s eyes but it was gone too soon for anyone to take notice.

“I am not doubting your concern for the crew, sir,” he said. “However, the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few. If turning myself over to the soldiers will bring the commander and the science crew back, then it is a risk I am prepared to take. Besides, the high priest is Fardour’s guide, spiritual head, father, and voice of reason. I may be able to save him from his execution.”

“You WANT to do this, don’t you?” Pike said in a deadly calm voice. “You are past the stage of grief. You want to follow her. Don’t you, son?”

Vulcans could not lie. Or at least, they preferred not to lie. And Spock hated lying to his captain. But while it was true that a part of him wanted to genuinely do this for the sake of the hostages, another part of him was being supremely selfish in making this choice. He did want this, if only to make the pain stop. It was illogical, but he could literally feel his heart splintering over and over again. The memory of his child’s essence and the cold, ashen deadness of T’Amun’s cooling body were driving a stake through his center with every single breath he took. And he wasn’t sure when he would lose his iron-willed control and dissolve into a mess of humiliating, heaving sobs.

“No, captain,” he said at last. “Your assumption is incorrect. You are evaluating my decision in the light of your knowledge of human psychology. I am not human. Therefore, the same rules do not apply to me.”

“If you say so, Spock,” Pike muttered. “If you say so.”

“Gentlemen, is there a way for us to track Mr. Spock and beam him out once Tabitha and the others
are back on the ship?” he asked his helmsman and his navigator.

“That is possible, sir,” Rossini answered. “I interned in the Farragut’s engineering and transportation department before being assigned to the Enterprise. I can certainly inject Mr. Spock with a biotransmitter and monitor his movements while he’s on the planet’s surface.”

“Can you also beam him out based on your readings from the biotransmitter?” the captain asked.

“Yes, sir,” the lieutenant answered.

“Spock, I don’t want this to be a suicide mission,” Pike said dangerously to his youngest officer. “I am warning you. If you die, I will personally come after you and kill you all over again. “

“That is illogic….”

“And don’t you dare tell me that is illogical,” the captain said in his bossiest voice. It would have been funny had the situation not been so serious.

“Yes, Captain,” Spock said softly, touched by Pike's concern but also ashamed of himself because he felt so undeserving of it.

XXXXX

“You can’t send him,” Puri said to the captain. “He isn’t showing it but he was injured in the attack on the probe. And he just lost his woman and his child, for god’s sake.”

Pike sighed. He had known he would have to face the doctor. But he hadn’t known it would be this hard.

“You think I don’t know that?” Pike said, exasperated. “I am allowing this only because five of my crew are on the line. Not to mention, the high priest of this planet.”

“Yes, but why does Spock have to be the sacrificial lamb all the time?” Puri almost yelled. “The kid’s had enough, sir. He will break under all this strain. It is a miracle he hasn’t already.”

“Well, he has,” Pike said in a completely different voice. “Doc, I want you to place him on suicide watch, but without letting it get out. Neither he nor anyone else on the ship should know.”

Puri looked shocked.

“Suicide watch?” he asked, dazed by the captain’s request.

“Yes, Sanjeev, suicide watch,” Pike answered. “He is a brilliant officer, talented, brave, selfless, but he is also acting reckless, particularly in the light of what happened. And while a certain amount of recklessness is good, I fear that his stems from utter disregard for his own life.”

“That’s a bit farfetched, Chris,” Puri said. “He is Vulcan. Surely he doesn’t think like that.”

“Don’t forget, he’s half-human as well,” Pike said. “I hate it but Fardour has tested all of us much beyond what we had expected. And I am not sure I want Spock as part of the crew permanently, provided we do make it home in one piece.”

“Christ man, show some gratitude, the guy saved your life,” Puri said, unable to understand what had come over Pike.

“Yes, and then he lost T’Amun and the baby in one fucking stroke,” Pike answered. “That is enough
to drive anyone over the edge. And Spock is only 22. I can bet my life’s savings that he is going to have some serious issues once the adrenalin has worn off.”

“And that is why we have a med bay on every starship,” the doctor challenged. “So that we can help injured officers recover and get back into shape for active duty. You can’t give up on the Vulcan just because he’s had a tougher time than everyone else. It wasn’t his fault. If anything, you and the top brass didn’t do your homework. Spock was shown open hostility on Fardour. Had we known that they didn’t like Vulcans, we would have kept him away. But what did we do? We ended up dragging him to the lion’s den.”

“And we had no way of knowing, Puri, you know that,” Pike said, his voice getting louder with each word.

“Then just stop,” the doctor answered calmly. “The mission was unpredictable from the beginning. You know that, Chris. You do. And you should give Spock another chance. Remember, he didn’t do anything wrong on the mission. He was wronged. And no officer should be punished for that. In fact, he is holding himself extremely well. I have seen older and better men than him break under half the strain that this boy has been put under.”


“Yes, Captain,” the doctor agreed as Pike sank back into the pillows of his biobed.

“Thank you, Lieutenant,” the Vulcan said softly as he stepped onto the transporter. A few seconds later, he materialized outside the temple. His heart thumped loudly under his ribs. Fear, sorrow, trepidation, determination…. acceptance. The cocktail of emotions assaulting him sent his senses into an overdrive.

However, outwardly, he remained as calm as ever.

He wondered if they were going to execute him right there and then or if they were yet unaware of his presence. That was unlikely but it couldn’t be completely ruled out.

Sure enough, a few minutes later, a large Farhannsu guard opened the gate.

“I come in peace,” Spock said and knelt down with his palms open and held flat in front of him.

The guard did not respond. He took the Vulcan’s unresisting hands and bound them in front of him. He then placed a tight metal collar on Spock’s neck. The chain connected to the manacles on his hands was then connected to a closed hook in the collar. The chain was not long and the position of the bindings forced Spock to lean forward by almost 4.5 inches. It made his neck and his upper back ache uncomfortably and it pulled at the still-healing burns on his back. But he did not say anything.

He had a duty to perform. Getting the commander and the science crew out of his was his only job. Besides, the discomfort wasn’t too much. He had felt worse.

He was led to the central chamber of the temple where Ashulat, Arben, a number of other guards, clan elders from various houses, and young warrior-princes sat. He was practically dragged to the middle of the room and forced to his knees. Even though Spock was cooperating completely, an
unnecessary amount of force was used on him. He understood that this was also meant to be punishment for him. It shouldn’t have surprised him, but clearly, even saving their planet from certain doom had done nothing to change their attitude towards him.

“Vulcan, what was your purpose for arriving on Fardour?” An elder in a deep red robe asked him.

“I came here as a part of the crew of the Starship Enterprise to aid your planet in averting an ecological catastrophe,” Spock answered.

“Why did you sully the honor of a Farhannsu woman? Was that a part of your mission?” the same elder asked with barely controlled rage.

Spock wasn’t sure how to answer this. There was no way he could reveal the actual story of the two sisters. That would jeopardize the safety of the entire family. He settled for a whitewashed version of the truth.

“I am part-human,” he said. “Therefore I was attracted to Amunishi. And due to my impure Vulcan heritage, she did not consider me a threat to the well-being and prosperity of her people.”

“If you are found guilty in this court of committing crimes against Fardour and of engaging in a conspiracy to disrupt the Farhannsu way of life, you will be executed telepathically,” the Farhannsu main said dispassionately.

“I understand,” Spock responded. “But I request in humility that the rest of the Enterprise crew be allowed to leave unharmed. They are human. They have never had prior contact with Fardour. They do not deserve to be punished for slights committed by my people against yours.”

“Slights, Vulcan?” a noble man shouted angrily. “Crimes… they were crimes. How dare you call them slights?”

Spock remained silent. He wasn’t sure what was going to happen. But he was afraid. He did not fear being executed. That would be a relief. But he did not want to be tortured. He had finally reached his limits of endurance. Of course, he could control physical pain to a great degree. But the Farhannsu were masterful telepaths. He could not bear the thought of being assaulted by their minds again.

But seeing the hatred evident in the eyes of everyone present in the room, Spock felt that he was in for a long night.

Strangely though, they refrained from hurting him like that. Instead, they did something else.

“Vulcan, we do not want to wage war against you or your federation,” an elder in a lilac robe said. “However, justice must be served. We are willing to show you mercy by allowing you to defend your actions to us. If found satisfactory, you and the others from your ship will be allowed to go in return for a small payment. Begin with your defense.”

“You can’t allow this,” a man shouted from the back of the room, refusing to use his telepathy to communicate. He wanted the Vulcan to know how much he was hated. “He must be executed.”

“Hold your rage at bay, Alpak,” the elder said. “The Vulcan has not waged a war against us. Nor has he caused bodily harm to one of our own. His crime is that he set foot on our home world and for that, he is to be punished. He will be executed if he is unable to defend himself against the charge of intent to disrupt the Farhannsu way of life.”
Then he turned to Spock. “Begin, Vulcan. Defend yourself with your truth.”

“I am half-human,” Spock said. “A lowly pariah, born of a high-bred Vulcan father, and a well-read human mother who was never accepted on my home world. I am an officer in Starfleet because it comforts my mind to be able serve the the diversity of life in the universe, an ideal that I cherish for reasons that are as personal as they are moralistic. I wished to bond with Amunishi as her katra called to the gaping, anchorless void of my own mind, festering since my childhood due to my status as an outlier. As a part-human, my emotions are not as tightly reigned in as those of a Vulcan. I was unable to resist the unconditional kindness she offered to my suffering being. I did not come to disrupt the Farhannsu way of life. I came here to investigate and find a solution to the ecological disturbances being experienced by your planet. Forming an attachment to Amunishi was a matter of coincidence.”

All through his speech, Spock felt a myriad of foreign emotions tugging at his shields, poking and prodding at his agonized mind. He knew that they were trying to put him under stress to ensure that he would make a mistake if he was indeed lying.

But he wasn’t. Not really. So he managed to say exactly what he had wanted to say.

“Do you have any other requests to make, other than the return of your crew that we have in our custody?” the elder asked.

“I request that the high priest be allowed to live,” Spock answered. “He was acting in the best interests of his people. He did not plan treachery with me. He has only ever been loyal to Fardour and to its children.”

“That is not for you to decide. They high priest will be executed for his refusal to concur with the elders and the nobles before allowing Starfleet on our sacred world. You can only request for your crewmen. And you must make an offering to us in return.” the elder said. “You are not to be executed. But only if you return now and never come back. In addition, you must give us something of yourself that you can never regain.”

“What would you ask of me?” Spock asked, resigned to whatever they were going to ask him for.

“We will have one of your fingers, Vulcan,” the older man replied. “We are aware of how Vulcans prize the sensitivity of their hands. We would ask for two of your fingers, one from each hand. But that would cripple you. So we ask for one finger of your choosing.”

Spock swallowed roughly. He had not expected things to go this way. Clearly, he had been wrong. Yes, they were out for his blood. But in an oddly twisted form of justice.

“The middle finger of my left hand,” Spock said hoarsely. “I offer you the middle finger of my left hand.”

“Good,” the elder said, giving his approval to Spock's choice. “Now, you must beg the people gathered in this room to perform the removal. You must convince one of them. And you will do what they ask of you in order to be convinced of the seriousness of your request.”

This was horrible. Clearly, the Farhannsu understood retributive justice. It was amazing how clearly they realized that executing him would not make an example out of him.

“I request you to remove the middle finger of my left hand,” Spock said to a man standing near the door.

“Lick the bottoms of my feet,” the man commanded.
Something pricked at the back of his eyes as Spock complied with the disgusting, degrading command. The next man asked him to hold his hands out in front of him as he beat them with a thin, sharp cane. By the end of that, his hands were covered in rivulets of bright green blood and ribbons of striped flesh. The third man forced a meld with him as he invaded Spock’s most private thoughts only in an attempt to make him relive the moment of his child’s death.

“That, Vulcan, is how it feels to lose a child,” he spat. “Just like our old mothers and fathers hurt, so you must hurt every day that you live.”

Spock was almost at the end of his rope by this time and he was so sure that he would break before they were ready to let him and his crewmen go.

But the fourth man took pity on him.

“Apologize to us, Vulcan,” he said. “Apologize for everything that your people did to ours. Place yourself at the feet of the elders and beg for forgiveness. Then, I shall relieve you of that finger.”

“I beg for forgiveness,” Spock said earnestly. “I beg that my people be forgiven. They committed the ultimate sin against your people. I beg that we be forgiven for our transgressions.”

“You are forgiven,” the elder in red said. “Go forth and give us your offering.”

Eagerly, Spock presented his cut and bleeding hand to the fourth man. With a swift stroke of the ceremonial knife, he slashed the Vulcan’s left-hand middle finger from its base.

“Aaaaarrrhhhh” Spock screamed in agony as he collapsed in a heap on the floor, cradling his injured hand close to his body as if to protect it from further harm. Within moments, a pool of green appeared on the floor as the stump bled uncontrollably.

"Let this be a lesson to your people and to your federation, the elder said. "Tell them that the Farhannsu have no need for external aid from anyone. And those who shall come to us uninvited, will share the same fate as you, young Vulcan. Tell them of your pain, of your torment, and of the terror that we brought upon you because you were unwelcome. Tell them and ask them to remember the stump of your finger, the child we took from you, and our own daughter that we sacrificed.”

Slowly, all the noblemen, elders, and guards filed out of the room, paying no attention to the quietly sobbing alien man. A few minutes later, Tabitha and the four missing science crewmen were brought into the room. They appeared drugged.

Spock longed to make sure that they were okay. But he knew that the logical thing to do was to leave Fardour as soon as possible.

“Sp..Spoh..ck to Ent..ent…prise,” he spoke into his comm. unit, gritting his teeth against the pain radiating from the site of amputation. “Six… to…be..e..e..am..up.”

Ten seconds later, he and the rescued officers were back on the ship and being carted off to the med bay by a very angry and worried Dr. Puri.

XXXXX

“We apologize, T’Arul, that things went so badly,” Spock said after getting his injured hands bandaged. “It would have been an honor to serve with you in Starfleet. But your planet has rejected membership to the federation. It is not safe or viable for you to join Starfleet under such circumstances.”
T'Arul sighed. She was still in shock after her sister’s death. And seeing how Spock and the other officers had been treated by the influential people of Fardour, she could see why it was a bad idea for her to try and go against them. Besides, she was needed at home. T'Amun was dead. And their mother was heartbroken. As were their grandparents.

“Do you… do you wish me to do something additional for her funeral? She asked Spock. “To honor her love for you or to celebrate the things she held dear?”

Spock shook his head.

“No, T’Arul,” he said solemnly. “Funerals are a means to find closure after the passing of a cherished one. Funerals are for the bereaved and not for the departed. This body is but the shell of T’Amun. And while I will always remember her in the image of this shell, I hold no illusions that this is her. However, your mother and your grandparents require that closure since they were not present in her last moments. Give her the funeral that will ease the burden of her passing on them.”

A tear escaped from T’Arul’s right eye as she took in the wisdom, the peace, and the finality of Spock’s words.

“Live long and prosper, my kinsman,” she said, knowing that the truth of her and T’Amun’s connection to Vulcan would slip into oblivion after today. It would be for the best. But the blessing would stay with her.

“Peace and long life to you,” Spock returned the greeting.

Without another word, T’Arul returned to the surface of Fardour with her sister’s dead form in her arms.
Learning to walk again

Chapter Summary

I apologize for the insanely long wait. I'm going through a case of serious writer's block. I think this chapter is pretty bad. I really wanted to make it longer and more substantial, but I am so sorry. Please let me know what you think. I really could do with some honest feedback and suggestions if you have them.

There was water beneath his feet. Cool, refreshing, allowing him to gently find his balance on the waves. He didn’t need to move. Not really. The waves were carrying him into the distance. And he could see the shore even though his vision was blurred at the edges. There was a sweet sound in his ears. It sounded like some kind of harp but he couldn’t be sure. Because there was also a ringing buzz that was distracting. His heart was trying to tell him something, but how could it? It was only a pumping organ. But the awareness was not intelligent enough to be from his own mind. He did not want to reach the shore. Something was waiting for him at the shore. And he did not want to see it. There was an inexplicable urge to turn back. It was almost like someone was pulling him back. But every time he tried to look behind him, he felt an intense pain in his middle finger on the left hand. And when he tried to examine the cause of the pain, a child’s laughter sent chills down his spine. He wanted to reach out to the child. He desperately wanted to do something to stop the humorless chuckles of the young voice. But there was no one around. The waves would not let him move. And he would keep inching closer to the shore. As he felt the wind rise, the shadows grew deeper. And strangely, the water beneath his feet dissolved into a whirl of quicksand. He tried to stop himself from sinking into it, but oh, he couldn’t. As he sank deeper, he felt his hands freeze as something slashed at them again and again. But when he opened his mouth to scream, a foot was thrust into it —foul, dirty, and covered in mud. He needed to move, to get away from the pain. But they wouldn’t let him. He was alone but the buzz in his ears was too loud and in the distance, a woman was screaming for him. But her terrified shouting was punctuated by pained whimpers of the same child who was laughing earlier. His head was going to burst. His head was going to burst. His head….

Breathing heavily, he woke up with a start to a startled Dr. Puri, looking at him with a mixture of shock and concern.

“Just a nightmare, Spock,” Puri murmured as he tried to calm the half-Vulcan down. “Just a bad dream.”

Spock sucked in a breath before responding to the doctor.

“Why are you here, Doctor?” he asked weakly, but in his usual blank tone.

“Your vitals,” Puri answered. “The sensors in the room detected an abnormal and abrupt increase in your heart rate. Since it is pretty much the middle of the night, I guessed what happened.”

The doctor was hedging a little bit. While sensors did monitor they basic vitals of the occupants of the rooms, only those who were injured, in intensive care, or on a suicide watch, were put on the alert system. But Spock didn’t know that. At least not yet.

“How is your hand?” the doctor asked.
“It is no longer painful,” Spock answered.

“Be honest, Spock,” Puri said sternly.

When Spock did not respond, he asked softly, “Please. Do you need stronger painkillers? Talk to me, kid. What happened to you was not easy. You won’t be any less Vulcan if you allowed yourself to just deal with all this normally”

“Vulcans do not require pain medication when they are conscious, doctor,” Spock answered smoothly, completely ignoring the second part of the doctor’s suggestion. “I shall meditate and suppress the discomfort as is the way of my people.”

Puri looked at Spock. He knew this was hardly the time to be having this conversation but it was important.

“Spock, you need to come down to the med bay and allow us to assess the cumulative damage you have sustained all through this mission,” he said. “And you need to let us help you. I am a doctor. And I am only trying to do my job.”

Spock understood that. But he wasn’t ready to go to med bay yet. He knew he couldn’t keep using the sensory aid. He certainly needed treatment for the brain injuries he had suffered during the interrogation. And now that he was missing a finger, he would need some physical therapy in order to maintain the earlier dexterity of his hands. If he was unable to do that, Starfleet would give him premature retirement or ground him permanently for medical reasons.

But he could not find it in himself to deal with anything just yet. He felt lethargic, dejected, hollow. There seemed to be a hard knot in his stomach which would not allow him to relax even for a moment.

“Do you want a mild sedative?” Puri offered quietly. “So that you can rest for a few hours. You can lie to me all you like. But I know you are not going to be able to meditate. Am I correct?”

For a moment, it looked like the doctor had caught him unawares. But Spock composed himself almost instantaneously.

“Your observation is most astute, sir,” he said. “But I do not require a sedative. I shall try and meditate again. My efforts have simply not been sincere enough.”

“Oh, if you say so,” Puri said finally. “But you know where to find me if you need me.”

Meditation did not come to him. Despite his strong mind, his usually steely control, Spock was powerless against the grief that consumed him each time he tried to process the deaths of T’Amun and Sivak. Besides, as a touch-telepath, his hands were major conduits and anchors for his thoughts. The mutilation his left hand had suffered was wreaking havoc with his connection with his own consciousness.

He could not rest. And he had nothing to hold on to in the way of a concrete, tangible memory of the short-lived love he had found on Fardour. Sure, he had memories of his time with T’Amun. But recalling the shade of her eyes, the curve of her smile, the lilt of her voice – these were cruelties he could not scourge himself with, no matter how much he wanted to. And the imagined voice of his child refused to leave his ears.

For hours, he sat staring at the votive candle, unable to focus his thoughts, unable to rein his raging
Defeated, he stood up and made his way to his vidcom. Maybe talking to his mother would help.

To his utter relief, Amanda answered almost instantly.

“Hello, Spock,” she said quietly. She had been notified of Spock’s injuries by the ship’s captain. But her little boy was all grown up now. She knew she would have to wait for him to call her instead of the other way around.

“Mother, are you well?” Spock asked.

Amanda let out a little sound that was half sob, half chuckle. Leave it to her hard-headed son to ask her if she was alright after getting himself practically killed.

“Yes, son, I am alright,” she humored him. “And I know you are hurting. Talk to me, baby.”

For a long moment, Spock did not say anything. And Amanda understood. Her son would talk when he was ready. For now, he needed her to sit with him in silence.

But Spock surprised her.

“How did you do it, mother? He asked.

“How did I do what?” she asked in turn.

“When… when I was on Zarmal,” Spock said. After his return from the kahs’wan, he had never spoken to his mother about what had happened to him. But now he needed to know. “I am aware that you briefly thought that I had passed on. How did you keep yourself functioning?”

Amanda could have given a hundred different answers to her son. But not one of them would suffice. However, she knew she had to say something. So she decided to stick to the truth.

“It hurt, Spock,” she said simply. “When I couldn’t feel you in my mind, it felt as if my whole world had come crashing down. There is nothing and no one more precious to me, baby. And to know that you had… that you had passed on and all the pain you had been put through, I… I’m sorry son, it is still so difficult to talk about it.”

“I understand, mother,” he answered dejectedly.

“But I was okay when I realized that there was a chance to save you yet,” Amanda said. “And I don’t want to lie to you, so I can tell you that the loss of your child will always hurt. And the loss of T’Amun will always remain in your heart. But the pain will eventually dull down. You will grow used to it. And then, you will begin to heal. Because the death of the body isn’t the death of the katra. You know that as well as I do. Perhaps better than I do, since you are the Vulcan between us at least,” she finished with a little laugh.

“Did you say that it will not hurt so much eventually?” he asked like a lost child, his voice so small that it was hard to believe that he was a grown man.

“Yes, my son,” she answered. “Eventually.”

Spock stared blankly at his mother.

It seemed as if Amanda wanted to say something, but she wasn’t sure if she should. Hesitation was evident in her eyes.
“Mother, is there something you wish to say?” he asked.

“I do, but it can wait,” she answered with a sigh.

“Why?” he asked. “Whatever needs to be said, should be said.” He stated as if quoting from a textbook.

“Well, do you still want the bond dissolved with T’Pring?” she asked. “I have not spoken to her personally, but as your wife, she was sent the news of your injury.”

“If she wishes to have the bond dissolved, then I agree to it,” he said.

“What about you, son? Do you want the bond? Or do you want to be freed from it?”

Spock didn’t answer at first. And Amanda could tell that he probably won’t. But he surprised her yet again.

“It doesn’t matter what I desire, mother,” he said. “it never has.”

XXXXX

The next morning, Spock did not go to the mess for breakfast. Without T’Amun’s help, his injuries from the interrogation were starting to affect him again. And thanks to the shock of everything that had happened the day before, Spock was able to keep the logic aside and stare at the flickering flame of the now almost completely melted candle.

“You need to extinguish that candle and come down for breakfast,” Dr. Puri’s voice came from behind him. “Don’t force me to make that a medical order, lieutenant.”

Spock swallowed audibly.

“Yes, sir,” he said and stood up to follow the older man.

“You haven’t gotten dressed for the day?” Puri said conversationally.

“Didn’t you say, doctor, that I was on medical leave for the next two days?” Spock asked, somewhat snappily.

“Well, yes, but I thought you Vulcans were a rather fastidious lot, aren’t you? The doctor supplied.

“We are,” Spock said and volunteered no more information.

It took them less than a minute to reach the mess hall but for Spock, the journey in the turbo lift seemed to stretch into infinity. He could feel the eyes of some of the science crew on him. There were even those whose eyes roamed further down his body and came to rest on his bandaged hands.

“Doctor, I wish to eat in my room,” he said suddenly. “I will take something from the replicator and go back.”

“No, Spock, you will do no such thing,” the doctor said sternly. “You are coming down with me for an examination. We need to start working on all your injuries. You wish to continue in Starfleet or no?”

“I do,” he answered softly. “But I am tired, sir.”

At this, the older man’s eyes softened. “I know you are, son, and that is why, please let me take care of you.”
“Yes, sir,” the Vulcan answered and followed Puri inside.

If the turbo lift was difficult, the mess hall was the toughest test of his stoicism. Whispers accompanied the stares. And while nothing that was said was particularly offensive, all of it forced him to relive the tragedy that had befallen him. He had not known that grown Vulcans could feel so… so pathetic. But that is the only adjective that came to his mind for himself.

“He got some woman pregnant down there…….”

“They killed her…. I heard they ripped the baby out of her….”

“Don’t be silly… she was on the ship in the med bay…”

“Yeah, but she was dead already….”

“Before passing out, she screamed for him….. I was near the med bay, I heard her…..”

“They took his finger?”

“No…they took two fingers….one from each hand…..”

“They fucked with his mind….. he can’t do the telepathy thing anymore…..”

“Did they castrate him…..”

“Shhhhh… he’ll hear you…..”

But Spock HAD heard enough.

“PLEASE STOP,” He thundered.

“My personal affairs should be of no consequence to you,” he said in a low, dangerous voice without even turning around. “If I hear you gossiping about what happened to me on Fardour, I will make sure that you know of it in intimate, painstaking detail. My telepathy is intact. Please, take note of that.”

There was pin drop silence in the hall.

Puri fully expected Spock to turn on his heel and march out. But he didn’t. The Vulcan calmly walked up to the replicator and got himself a tray of fruit salad and a cup of black tea.

“That is not enough…..” The doctor began.

“But that I all I require at this moment,” Spock said and walked out of the mess hall. Nobody dared to stop him. They had never seen the Vulcan so angry. And even though most people in the room were senior to him, they had no desire to thrust their rank into his face, not when they knew that it had obviously been wrong to gossip about what had been done to him on Fardour.

What Spock didn’t know was that the bridge crew was not among the gossiping herds. They were distressed and hurt, maybe not as much as him, but they were suffering. And even as Spock quietly broke down into sobs in his own room, Puri called a still-recovering Pike into his office to discuss what needed to be done in order to aid the healing of everyone who had been harmed by the cruelty of the Farhannsu.
The Captain's Solitude

Chapter Summary

This chapter sets the stage for the next set of events that are very important to the story. I wonder what you think of the direction the story is taking. I'd love to have your feedback.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It took some doing but Pike managed to convince Spock to come down to the med bay. Puri ran a battery of tests on the Vulcan in order to get a complete picture of his condition. And so far, the results were anything but comforting.

And so far, the results were anything but comforting.

“What do you need in order to go into a healing trance?” he asked an exhausted Spock who looked ready to keel over despite the fact that the only thing he had done all morning was to lie in a bio bed.

“And you’re running a fever again… this is really not good,” the doctor grumbled as he checked the younger man’s temperature again.

“I have been attempting to achieve a healing trance but I have not been successful yet,” Spock said weakly. “I believe it has to do with the damaged nerves on my left hand.”

“Dammit all to hell,” Puri muttered as he peered over another set of readings from the bio bed screen.

“Do you think it will help to see a mind healer?” he asked Spock. “Or do you want me to try another round with the dermal regenerator and see if that helps to seal the severed nerves. I am not sure if we should do that again. We have tried it twice and as you can see, it hasn’t worked properly.”

“I do not know, sir,” Spock said dejectedly. “You are the medical expert on the ship. However, I do not wish to go to Vulcan if it can be avoided.”

Puri took a minute to organize his thoughts before answering.

“Okay Spock, here’s what we will do,” he began. “I need you to try and sleep a little. You have not allowed me to give you a sedative so far, but I request you to take it now. Otherwise, these injuries on your frontal and temporal lobes will not heal. They will continue to worsen and there is no end to how many different things they can develop into. I believe you don’t want a tumor to add to your list of problems.”

“I do not,” Spock answered impassively. “And if you are so insistent upon the sedative, I will take it, but I still do not think it is the right option for me.”

Puri sighed. He knew Spock would not say it but he was scared of being unable to wake up from the nightmares that had prevented him from getting rest these last two days. For a human, a sedative would be the perfect answer for both, nightmares and the inability of the body to rest. But for the Enterprise’s Vulcan scientist, the effects would be totally different. After much coaxing, Spock had
revealed that even as a child, sedatives had kept him under but they had done nothing for his nightmares and for the pain. Medicated sleep would not be completely restful for Spock, even though it would allow his body to recuperate a little bit.

“It is still better than leaving you to suffer through this full force,” Puri answered.

“As a Vulcan, I can control my emotions and the pain while I am fully conscious,” the Vulcan said, trying to make one last argument against sedation. “While sedated, I would be at the mercy of my emotions and all the negative stimuli stemming from the happenings of the last few days.”

“Regardless, son,” the doctor said. “I need your body to be able to rest. Physiological fatigue can only be managed with sleep. And I’d rather have your body rested even if your mind is not as rested. Dealing with physical AND mental exhaustion at the same time is not smart.”

With that, Puri injected Spock with a strong dose of Diazepam, an old school sedative.

Within minutes, the Vulcan was fast asleep. For the first time in 56 hours, the tense lines on his face relaxed somewhat. The doctor only hoped that this forced rest would enable Spock to enter a healing trance at some point. Full-blooded Vulcans’ bodies had the ability to drag themselves into a trance automatically after a life-threatening injury. But Spock’s hybrid biology would not allow that. The half-Vulcan had to induce a trance actively in order to fight the damage. Puri was frustrated by the sheer range of complications that came with Spock’s uniqueness.

However, despite everything, he had a grudging respect for his young crewmate. He did not want the young Vulcan to be grounded. The kid had performed well on Fardour. Even though things had gone south eventually, the mission itself had been completed successfully. The ecological catastrophe that had been waiting to happen, had been averted. And really, it was nobody’s fault that the Farhannsu were a bunch of ungrateful assholes.

Speaking of ungrateful assholes, Puri had to admit that not all of them were like that. That girl, T’Amun, she had obviously loved Spock a lot. And while he was ready for everyone on the ship to leave Fardour and its people behind, there was something in his cupboard that belonged to no one but Spock.

The question, however, was if he should give it to Spock. T’Amun had been embroidering a shawl for him. But the poor woman had only been able to finish the work on the border. The designs and motifs in the center of the shawl were still marked with ink and a piece of scarlet thread was stuck in one of the flowers that she had started working on but never completed. Puri wouldn’t have known of it but T’Arul had brought the shawl to him, wondering if Spock would want it. After all, it was meant for him and T’Amun had been planning to give it to him on their bonding ceremony. But since that was not going to happen anymore, the unfinished shawl was now nothing more than a reminder of the love that didn’t meet its happy ending.

Puri did not wish to give the shawl to the Vulcan. In his compromised state, it would only hurt him more. But at the same time, rightfully, it belonged to Spock. Puri could not let it eat dust at the bottom of his own closet when its only remaining owner was on this very ship. What a strange predicament!

In any case, that decision could wait. The doctor had a lot of things to do before he could worry about the fate of the shawl. He had a meeting with the captain in less than five minutes, so he had to be on his way now.

XXXXX
Christopher Pike was recovering nicely. His burns had healed. His cracked bones were knit. And he was regaining his strength and stamina at an amazing pace. In another two days, he would be back on duty, thanks to Dr. Lane’s efforts.

Normally, Pike’s attending physician on the ship was always Sanjeev Puri. But Fardour’s casualties had been far too many and too complex for Lane alone to handle. And even though Puri had had his hands full all these days, right now, Pike was glad to finally have Puri all to himself. It was strange but on most starships, the closest relationship a captain shared was with his CMO and his first officer. In Pike’s case, there was a slight difference. While he was close to Tabitha, the camaraderie was strictly professional. She was not someone he drank with or played rummy with like he did with Sanjeev, Nick, Amish, and sometimes, Kevin and Benito.

Similarly, Zoya was often seen down in the security department when she wasn’t on her station. If rumors were to be believed, she was seeing Lieutenant Boris Kowalski, a young security officer who wanted to go back to the academy and get a graduate degree in communications so that he could join Zoya in her department.

It did not need to be said but this mission had taken its toll on everyone. Most of the bridge crew was tired and anxious to return to Earth. The science crew was shaken up after their abduction. And while Tabitha was the only one who had suffered a significant injury, the brutality of their methods had left the rest of the crew more nervous and terrified than the first officer herself. Even from her bio bed, she had requested Dr. Puri to schedule counseling sessions for everyone who had been captured along with her.

Ensign Vince had turned out to be a valuable and resourceful young man. Pike had a mind to recommend the guy for a promotion. And he needed to put in a request for the swift removal of Caledonia Kohen, who had still not forgiven Spock for refusing to allow animal testing in the labs. As a result of her petty grudge, she had contributed sordid details to the gossip that was now floating around the ship.

Some of the things that were being said were tasteless and ridiculous but other speculations were outright cruel. He had been told all about Spock’s outburst in the mess hall the other day. And while it was not okay for a junior crew member to threaten a whole table of senior crew, Pike was going to let it slide. The Vulcan deserved at least that much.

He was still lost in thought when Sanjeev walked in.

“Hey, old man,” Pike greeted his friend and confidante.

“Hey, yourself,” Puri answered, unfazed at the friendly insult.

For a few minutes, neither man said anything.

“So…. What are we doing this evening?” Pike asked.

Puri didn’t answer straight away. He reached into his medical bag and pulled out two miniature bottles of Oban, a 12-years-aged classic malt.

“What… you’re giving me single-malt whiskey?” Pike asked, surprised that his otherwise stern and serious physician was willing to give him alcohol even during his recovery period.

“You’ve earned it,” Puri said. “It is after missions like these that I am not sure whether I am glad that I never took the command track or if I am mad that I became a doctor. I think we both deserve a
drink.”

While Pike pondered over Sanjeev’s words, the doctor poured them the drinks.

“On the rocks for you?” he asked as he diluted his own with sparkling water.

“Yes, I can’t really tolerate that poison you drink,” Pike answered.

“I dilute the poison, sir,” Puri countered. “You’re the one who drinks concentrated toxin.”

“Don’t insult the single malt, please,” Pike said, taking his drink from Puri’s hands. “Sometimes, it is the only thing that allows me to remain sane.”

For a while, the two men sipped their drinks in silence.

“Do you want a snack?” Pike asked after a few minutes.

“I wouldn’t say no,” Puri answered.

Pike stood up and fetched a packet of salted peanuts from his little pantry.

“I wish we could do something to boost crew morale,” Pike said, his voice so defeated that it was hard to believe that this wasn’t the first mission that had gone south for his ship. “Thank God this isn’t one of those long deep space missions. It is bad enough that we are still almost a week away from home.”

Puri did not say anything.

“Do you think Spock should be taken off the command track?” Pike asked.

“No, Chris… I’ve told you that he would be a brilliant captain someday,” Puri answered, somewhat exasperatedly. They had had this conversation just before Spock had beamed down to rescue the hostages.

“Yes, but that was before he got crippled….” Pike murmured, almost unable to believe that he was saying this.

“He’s not crippled….” Puri snapped. “For heaven’s sake, try and get that into your head. He lost a finger. A finger, Pike. He will learn to compensate for its absence. It is not that deep.”

“What about his mind?” Pike asked. He knew he was coming across as a complete bastard right now. But he needed to think like a captain and like a mentor. If the command track was not going to be the right fit for Spock, then he needed to know now.

“He will recover,” Puri said. “Some of your own earliest missions were traumatizing too and you’ve done just fine. Why should Spock be any different?”

“Well, I never lost a child,” Pike said, rubbing his eyes tiredly. “I don’t even want to think what that shit feels like? Besides, I am not asking for him to be retired or anything. He can teach at the academy. Train people. That’ll be a better use of his talent than this running around in space and encountering unexpected dangers.”

“Are you saying he can’t handle it?” the doctor asked quietly.

“Maybe he can’t,” Pike answered, finally being completely honest. “I don’t doubt his brilliance. I don’t doubt his ability to lead. But I fear that this first mission has been so bad that it will affect his
command style for a long, long time to come. And Starfleet cannot give that kind of time to anyone. Not even Spock.”

“You are being unfair to him,” Puri said. “You are being very unfair to him, Chris. You, of all people, should stand by him and believe in him. I can’t even begin to understand your lack of faith. He saved your ass from being burnt to a crisp. Does that count for nothing?”

“It does… I am grateful to him,” Pike answered. “But I also need to think like a captain.”

“Think like a man, sir,” the older man said. “And then, you will know what to do as a captain.”

Admiral Komack had received Captain Pike’s report about the mission to Fardour. Unfortunately, while the core mission had been successful, overall, the whole thing had been nothing less than a spectacular disaster. It was a small mercy that the Farhannsu people wanted to maintain the secrecy and isolation of their home world, otherwise, the whole galaxy would have heard of it.

Not that Starfleet was actually at fault. The complicated history between the Farhannsu and their distant cousins, the Vulcans, had caused the friction on the mission. And the whole mess had gotten out of hand because they had chosen to send Spock, the son of the Vulcan ambassador Sarek, as the main emissary. It had been a bad move. But they had had no way of knowing that in advance. Damn these old pre-warp rivalries to hell!

He knew the Enterprise was due to return in less than a week. Both, the captain and the first officer of the ship were still on medical leave. It was not a good time to be assigning them any more duties. But there were no other ships in the Delta Quadrant currently.

Komack sighed. At most, it would be a one-day detour to Aldani-IV. Pike was an experienced officer. He would manage just fine. After all, it wasn’t particularly complicated to simply pick up a group of refugees from a planet's surface. There was a reason such things were called "milk runs."

The federation’s ambassador on the planet had sent in a frantic note just this morning, requesting transport for Orion refugees who had crash-landed there. Many of them were in critical condition after the crash. And the climate of Aldani-IV was not conducive to their bodies. The sub-zero temperatures had rendered many of them sick even while in the care of the best doctors the planet had.

There was simply no other option.

With another sigh, Komack sent a message to the Enterprise, ordering Pike to divert the ship to Aldani-IV.

“It was so cold. He shivered relentlessly. The throbbing in his left hand refused to cease. A finger that wasn’t there, continued to spasm incessantly, driving shards of pain through his aching body. His head hurt. As did his eyes. But a soft, warm hand moved lovingly through his hair. He would know that hand anywhere. Her rich voice sang softly to him as his body struggled to keep up with its various ills.

“Please, don’t go….” He mumbled. He was sure she could hear him, but she did not answer him. He turned to snuggle deeper into her bosom, but he felt only air when he tried to get closer to her.

“Drolmeya ?….I am cold…..” he whispered. "Hold me, please."
But she still didn’t answer. Instead, the hand in his hair pulled hard and yanked at his roots.

“Lick the bottoms of my feet,” a harsh, male voice commanded.

Spock whimpered. The hand tightened and reached lower. It came to rest on his face.

“No….Please…No….” he begged fearfully.

But the rough, calloused hand didn’t care. Instead, a flood of images bombarded him. A child’s body soaked in blood. An old woman lying broken and naked in a ditch. A man being beaten by a group of people he couldn’t see. A dark woman in a soldier’s uniform bleeding out while she struggled to stay awake. The terrifying sounds of her struggle as she continuously repeated his name….. Spock...Spock....Spo....

NO..... PLEASE.....AAAARRRGGHHH....”

“Chapel, I need two units of Nitrazepam...” Puri yelled as he worked the controls on Spock’s bio bed to secure the thrashing Vulcan with medical restraints.

“But doctor, two units are above the recommended...” she began worriedly.

“Just do it,” Puri cut her off.

Christine did as she was told and emptied the contents of the Nitrazepam hypospray into Spock’s neck.

A minute later, the Vulcan’s screams subsided into tiny, heartbreaking whimpers. His thrashing limbs went limp in their bonds and silence returned to the med bay.

“He needs a mind healer,” Puri said more to himself than to the nurse. “We must get to Vulcan. It is closer than Earth. And Spock needs intervention as soon as we can get help.”

“Yes sir,” Chapel said. “Do you want me to intimate the captain of this development?” she asked.

“No... I’ll just go and do it myself,” the doctor answered. “You keep an eye on Mr. Spock and get me everything we have in our archives on Vulcan psychology and neurology.”

Chapter End Notes

Two things: 1. Should Puri give him the shawl? Why? Why not?
2. Is Pike's reasoning sound? Does Spock not have it in him to continue? Could Pike's reasons for his lack of faith in Spock be valid?

Just things I've been wondering about because as I've said before, this story is literally writing itself. I have very little control over what happens. I am curious to know what you think?
Picking up the pieces

Chapter Summary

Anyone who has dealt with loss knows that there are okay days and bad days. This chapter sets the stage for the next set of events in the story. But it is also one of the okay days that Spock will have over the course of the next few chapters. Please let me know what you think. Your feedback keeps me motivated to write as often as I can. I love hearing from you. It makes my day like nothing else does.

“No, Pike, we can’t waste any time…. Komack knows as well as you do that the detour will take at least 3-4 days,” Puri said to the captain, extremely upset that they could not immediately get to Vulcan.

“I know… I know that, dammit,” Pike said, equally pissed off. “But those refugees need our help. And they need it now.”

“What about Spock?” the doctor asked.

“Can’t you do something and just keep him stable till we get to Vulcan?” Pike asked, pressing his temples tiredly.

“It is not that he is unstable or like in immediate danger,” Puri said, hesitant that his friend would not understand the gravity of the situation…. But… he will get sicker if he doesn’t get the kind of medical attention he needs. And I don’t need to tell you that he’s deteriorating fast. I am not a neurosurgeon, Chris. I can perform brain surgery if absolutely required. Hell, we have bots on board to help with that, but it is not something I am trained for. The last time I ever mucked around in someone’s skull was when I was an intern in India nearly 25 years ago. And that too on a human cadaver. Human. Cadaver.”

“What about that healing trance that these Vulcans are so famous for?” Pike asked, not looking up from the additional reports Komack had sent.

“He can’t do it,” the older man answered stiffly. “His hands are important conduits for the telepathic centers of his brain. The loss of his finger is playing havoc with it. I’m sure there are ways to treat him for that. But I am not a Vulcan. So I have no idea how to treat an injury with telepathic AND physiological consequences.”

“And you told me yesterday that he is not crippled,” the captain said with a sigh.

“I stand by what I said,” the doctor retorted. “Spock is not crippled. He is injured. Extensively. But nothing that can’t be treated. Commander Jeremiah on the USS Madinah lost two fingers and a toe to frostbite while setting up a research station on Delta Vega. After some therapy, he was allowed to return to active duty in space. Spock should be no different.”

“Yes, but Jeremiah wasn’t a touch telepath,” Pike said. “He is human. Losing his fingers didn’t mess with his brain.”

“Pike, I don’t know what your problem is but I have never known you to be this pigheaded,” Puri
said in utter disgust. “You have risked more for your crew before. Why wouldn’t you have a little more faith in Spock?”

“I am guilty. GUILTY…. Okay, Mr. Psychoanalyst,” Pike bellowed. “When Hashmak hailed our ship for help and told us that his people were related to Vulcans, that they had been trying to reach Vulcans and had been unable to, it never even crossed my mind that they might have problems with Vulcans. When Sarek suggested his own son’s name for the mission, I did not believe even for a moment that this would end so badly. The kid joined the academy about two months ago. Two months. And within that time, this is what we have done to him. You know something, Sanjeev? He rejected the offer from the Vulcan Science Academy to come to Starfleet. Within his first week at Starfleet, most professors were able to see that he was academically more advanced than even them. His precise understanding and solution to Fardour’s ecological problem—the kid is absolutely fucking brilliant. But what has that brought him? And all that in less than two whole months. Do you think anyone can keep a cool head after that? No, doc. It may have been the Farhannsu who injured him. But he will see them in the Romulans, the Klingons, and the Cardassians. He will never be free of what happened to him. And as much as I want to give him another chance, I don’t want to risk any ship that he is on. And I don’t want to risk Amanda’s and Sarek’s son.”

“You are emotionally compromised, captain,” Puri said calmly. “I understand the source of your fears but most of what you said is pure conjecture and does not have any basis in facts.”

“Great, now my CMO decides to go all Vulcan on me,” Pike said sarcastically. “Been spending a lot of time around him it seems.”

“Get some rest,” Puri said dismissively, refusing to respond to Pike’s insult. “And I will take care of Spock till we can get him some real help. I will have the med bay standing by to receive the refugees.”

“Now, we have a bit of a situation,” the older man began. “We have received orders from Starfleet Command to divert the ship towards Aldani-IV. A group of 28 refugees crash landed on it a few days ago. But the climate of the planet is not conducive to their wellbeing. They are already starting to get sick. And some of them were injured, to begin with. I am really sorry we can't go to Vulcan first.”

“I understand that,” Spock said, closing his eyes. “Please do not apologize, doctor. The needs of the
many outweigh the needs of the few.”

“Is there anything that might help you with that headache?” Puri asked. “Any medicine that might dull the pain?”

“I do not wish to take a painkiller,” the younger man said. “I believe I should be back on duty. I feel as adequate as one can under the circumstances.”

Puri wanted to keep Spock off duty for a while longer. But he also knew that the Vulcan did not need to be confined to his room when the forced rest would do nothing for him except giving him vast amounts of time to relive painful memories.

“Okay, son,” Puri acquiesced. “I suggest you go and tell the captain that you want to be involved in the mission to Aldani-IV. And I hate to do this, but you can have the sensory aid back. I think you will need it since we aren’t going to Vulcan immediately.”

“Thank you,” Spock said in response, genuinely grateful for the physician’s thoughtfulness.

“And here are some Tramadol pills,” Puri said, thrusting a little bottle into the Vulcan's hands. “I know you said no to painkillers. But if you are going to stay on duty, trust me on this, you will thank me for these.”

Spock did not say anything. The strange thing was that he was almost as sure as the doctor that these pills would be needed sooner rather than later. It was true that painkillers made him nauseous and dizzy. But sometimes, it was easier to choose those symptoms to get a respite from the pounding headaches that often left him tearing at his hair. Without a word, Spock accepted the bottle of pills. A quiet look of understanding passed between him and the doctor. They both knew that his Vulcan façade was not going to last for long. With a nod to Puri, Spock turned on his heel and left the med bay.

Ten minutes later, he was sitting opposite from Pike, trying to explain to the man that he was well enough for a simple mission like the upcoming one.

“But Spock, I can’t ignore what Dr. Puri has told me about your injuries,” Pike said, irritated at the stubborn Vulcan.

“Sir, with all due respect, Dr. Puri has also cleared me for duty since my injuries pose no immediate difficulties to my performance,” Spock answered in his calm cadence.

“Fine… fine, Mr. Spock,” Pike agreed dejectedly. “And while you’re at it, I would like you to take complete charge of the science department. Commander Owens is still in the med bay and she needs more time for her recovery. Her lungs suffered extensive damage and she has numerous ribs that were shattered. She won’t be back on her feet anytime soon.”

“Yes, Captain,” Spock said, turning to leave.

“And oh, Spock,” Pike called out. “I also need you to help Zoya with the reports she is preparing for our detour to Aldani-IV. Normally, she would manage fine by herself, but since she is also acting as my first officer, she could use your assistance.”

“Anything else, Captain?” Spock asked dutifully.

“No… that’s all for now,” Pike said and dismissed him.

He knew he was being harsh on Spock. It was true that piling this much work on the Vulcan was a
decidedly un-captainly thing to do. But he was so damn irritated with the kid’s bone-headedness. Sure, Puri had cleared him for duty, and honestly, Pike did not know what the doctor was playing at, but if Spock was so sick, then why was he asking for all these extra tasks. And if he wasn’t really that sick, then why was Puri being so overdramatic.

The truth was though, that Pike was still shaken by how badly things had gotten messed up on Fardour. Starfleet never negotiated with terrorists and yet, they had sent Spock down to rescue Tabitha and the others. A trained officer knew how to come out of a situation relatively unharmed. Spock hadn’t even tried! He had just let them take his finger and his dignity.

And at the same time, the idiot HAD saved his life. He HAD completed the fucking mission even while listening to T’Amun’s screams. He had felt his baby die while hauling his captain’s unconscious body into a harness.

Pike hated Spock. But he hated himself more. A part of him wanted to call the Vulcan back and relieve him of all the extra duties. Another part of him wanted Spock to try and take on all that work and fail. But yet another part of him was rooting for the young officer. Somewhere, deep down, he wanted to see Spock make it and say ‘fuck you’ to everything that had tried to break him.

XXXXX

Spock spent close to six hours in his room familiarizing himself with the refugee laws of the federation. He read some archival material on the Orion refugee crisis and his heart clenched in sympathy for the people escaping the Orion regime’s tyranny. According to the preliminary reports from Aldani-IV’s United Earth embassy, out of the 28 refugees, 11 were women, 3 were men, and 14 were children under the age of 12. It was painful to know that more than half of these children were orphans. And unfortunately, their basic medical data showed signs of abuse, neglect, and trauma.

Spock remembered from his conversations with Hamid that in the early years of the 21st century, a refugee crisis had torn through numerous terran states; Syria, South Sudan, Myanmar, Somalia, and Iraq. He knew that Hamid’s family still had old letters and artifacts from that period, a reminder of just how horrible sentient beings could be towards each other. Hamid’s own great-great-grandmother, Hasina Sheikh, had only been a 14-year-old child when she had been taken from her family and sold into sexual slavery. It had taken years for other terran states to take action. And by the time she had been freed, Hasina had borne six children with six different masters.

Spock wasn’t sure why Hamid’s tragic family history was coming back to him now. But he suspected it had much to do with these reports which bluntly listed the horrors that the 28 refugees had already seen. He couldn’t help but worry incessantly if those children would be in any condition to receive counseling. He wondered how many of the women would be in need for contraceptives. He mentally cataloged all the STDs that he knew Orions were susceptible to.

Absorbed in these thoughts and saddled with work, Spock’s own pain took the backseat. T’Amun’s voice was still in his ears and every now and then, a pang of longing and loss stabbed at him. But there were 28 people who could be spared that fate. 28 lives that could yet be saved. 28 people who could heal before it was too late.

Spock was not going to fail them. And that was why, he continued to read late into the night, even as Pike went to bed with his guilt, anger, and lack of faith eating away at him.

XXXXX

Ensign Vince was glad to see Lt. Spock in the labs. With most of the science crew on medical leave, he was stuck with Dr. Kohen and her nasty attitude. Even though he never actually said anything,
she forced him to listen to all of her wild theories about Lt. Spock and Commander Owens.

Caledonia Kohen had a sick, twisted mind and she made Raul cringe. But until now, he had had no hope of getting rid of her.

Predictably, her face turned an ugly shade of puce when Spock entered the lab.

“Good morning, Dr. Kohen, Ensign Vince,” Spock began politely. “I wished to discuss the experiments scheduled for the next two days with you.”

“We don’t need your help, Lieutenant,” Caledonia said crisply. “We have everything under control.”

“But Dr. Kohen…” Vince tried to cut in.

“We are working on the Farhannsu fungi samples that were gathered two weeks ago to isolate the gene which allows for the production of pure penicillin without employing artificial culture methods…” She continued, completely ignoring her junior colleague.

“Dr. Kohen, Lt. Spock should know about….” Vince again tried but was ignored like before.

“And yes, we have all the material we need for that research, except for subjects to test the results on,” she said. “But of course, you wouldn’t let us test on animals in this lab. I wonder how you intend to make sure though that the isolated compound is completely safe for humanoid life forms.” she asked smugly. “Or will you allow me to test on those Orions that we are picking up?”

Spock had so far heard her calmly but at this, he turned around and glared at her.

“Dr. Kohen, the federation’s refugee laws do not allow any testing on asylum seekers and refugees,” he said icily. “Furthermore, experimentation or testing of any nature is illegal on humanoid creatures.”

“Oh come on, Spock,” she said in an almost bored voice. “You don’t actually expect me to believe that, do you? How is it that you don’t know of the sheer scale of experimentation that is not only allowed but also encouraged on so-called humanoid species. It doesn’t happen to Vulcans. But have you ever cared to find out what happens to the numerous Klingons and Romulans and Betazoids languishing in the federation’s penal colonies? Really? You honestly believed that the Federation is a goody-two-shoes organization that runs a free-for-all food pantry?”

She laughed unpleasantly at the stunned expression on the Vulcan’s otherwise expressionless face.

“And this is why I am not intimidated by you, Spock,” she sneered. “Because for all your holier-than-though bullshit, you are naïve. You know nothing. And I’m sure, as a scientist, you are aware that knowledge is indeed power!”

“Regardless of what happens on penal colonies, the Enterprise will not tolerate such unethical practices, Dr. Kohen,” Spock said in his usual, controlled tone, though the anger and disdain for her ideas, was clear in his brown eyes.

“I know that…” she responded nonchalantly. “Your captain has already told me that I am never coming aboard the Enterprise again. And good riddance, I say. You are not a man of science if some stupid morals stop you from seeking knowledge. And what of these morals anyway? No one ever taught you that morality is relative? That absolute logic is a logically fallacious notion? You may think me evil, Spock. But I am no fool. And I hope you will wonder about these things. Because if you don’t, then there will always be doors that will remain locked to you. And remember, my friend, there is no such thing as forbidden knowledge, unless you believe in the fable of Adam and Eve.”
Caledonia did not wait for Spock to respond. With another mirthless chuckle, she hung up her lab coat and left for the guest quarters.

Ensign Vince stood next to him but he resolutely refused to say anything or even meet his eyes.

“What do you think of her ideas, Mr. Vince?” Spock asked the young man.

Vince looked up, half-terrified, half-excited at being asked for his opinion by the smartest person on the ship.

“Sir…. I….I…Um….” for a moment, he seemed to fumble for words. But a moment later, he managed to gather his thoughts.

“Her reasoning is flawed, sir,” he answered. “While I think she is right that sometimes, ethics and ideals can create obstacles in the path of scientific research, she is mostly ignoring the fact that there are only two motivations for research. Research for the sake of discovery. And research for the sake of furthering the goal of the universal good life. And in both cases, the fundamental rule would be to do no harm. Even when we undertake research for the sake of knowledge, by causing harm, we are interfering needlessly with our subject of study and that would only serve to alter the results, which is totally undesirable. In the second case, well, if the goal is to reach the good life for all sentient beings and ecosystems, one can’t get there by harming those very things.”

Spock listened to the ensign’s explanation with awe and respect in his eyes. For several long moments, he did not say anything.

“I’m sorry if you don’t agree with something that I said, sir,” Vince said, suddenly realizing that like a machine gun, he had thrown all of his thoughts at Spock in one fluid stroke.

“No… it is not that, Mr. Vince,” Spock said in an effort to reassure the man. “I agree with everything you have said. It is simply unexpected and pleasing to witness such depth of scientific wisdom in someone as young as yourself.”

Vince beamed with pride. Lieutenant Spock had just praised him. He wanted to fist-pump with triumph, but like a good academic and junior officer, he remained silent and waited for Spock to leave.

A minute later, the Vulcan pulled on vinyl gloves and entered the microbiology lab to personally check on the differentiated genetic code of the fungi. He did not notice the grin still plastered on the young ensign’s face.
Spock was still in the lab when Ensign Vince approached him with a request.

“Lieutenant, Dr. Puri has sent a message for you,” he said nervously.

“Read the message aloud please,” Spock said, not moving his eyes from the screen of his PADD.

“Are you sure, sir?” Vince asked, hesitant to read a message that was probably about the Vulcan’s health.

“Yes, Mr. Vince, please go ahead,” Spock said, still distracted by the numbers being generated through the sequencing program.

“It is time for lunch and I think I have an idea of what we need to do next. Come down to the med bay as soon as you’re done in the lab. And don’t make it later than 2:00 pm. I want you to eat with me in the mess hall.”

Spock sighed and looked up.

“It is 1:49 pm, sir,” Vince mumbled. “You probably need to leave now in order to get there in time.”

Spock nodded. “When is your lunch break?” he asked the younger man.

“I can replicate something in the rec room opposite to the lab, sir,” he answered. “Please don’t worry about me.”

“You will update me about the results when all the possible synthesizable sequences have been generated,” Spock said. Vince nodded vigorously.

“And under no circumstances, are you to share them with Dr. Kohen,” he added.

This time, Raul didn’t respond immediately.

“But sir, she is technically senior to me…,” he said, doubt and uncertainty coloring his words. “And she can override my codes if she wants to.”

This was going to be a problem. Spock was somewhat sure that the unscrupulous scientist won’t be back in the labs. But there was no way of being completely certain. And he could not allow her to see these codes. With her complete disregard for ethical research, there was no telling what she
would do with this valuable information.

“You will use an encrypted code that requires a bio-signature in order to be opened and the only bio-signature you will use to seal the program with, will be mine,” Spock said, giving a one-time authorization to his junior colleague.

“Again, just a cup of tea?” Dr. Puri grumbled as Spock took the seat opposite to him.

“Yes, doctor, this is all I require at the moment,” Spock said, squeezing a lemon wedge into his hot, black tea.

“This is not enough,” Puri said, worry clear in his voice. “Let me get you something more….”

Just as Spock opened his mouth to protest, his stomach rumbled audibly.

“See, even your body agrees with me,” the doctor said. “You need something more substantial, no ifs and buts.”

A few minutes later, he came back with a plate of rice and stir-fried vegetables for Spock and a cup of tea for himself as well.

“I cannot consume this,” Spock said, looking almost disgusted by the plate of food in front of him.

“You will eat,” Puri said firmly. “Don’t force me to make that a medical order.”

After taking a long look at the doctor's stern, determined face, Spock started eating.

It was not easy to spot it. But Puri’s eyes had been trained for things like these. Spock was eating a little too clumsily for a Vulcan. Of course, to everyone else, there would be nothing even remotely odd about the angle at which Spock was holding his spoon with his right, unmutilated hand.

But the doctor’s eyes saw it all.

The fine tremors in the sinewy, still-healing hands. The clearly visible cane injuries that the young man had had to suffer at the hands of the Farhannsu. The shaking he was unable to control. And while he could not be completely sure, he was relatively certain that some of the lack of control had to do with the pain Spock was clearly still in. But the knucklehead would sooner die than admit that he needed help!

Too absorbed in Spock’s injured hands, the doctor did not notice the nasty flush creeping over Spock’s cheeks.

With a herculean effort, the Vulcan shoveled another spoon of the food into his mouth, but his body had had enough.

Without warning, he stood up and practically ran from the mess hall.

“SPOCK,” Puri yelled and bolted after the younger officer at top speed.

Predictably, Spock rushed into the first common bathroom he came across. Without hesitation, Puri followed him inside.

It was an absolutely pathetic site to see the usually strong and graceful Vulcan bent over the toilet bowl, vomiting helplessly, shaking like a leaf from the exertion.
For ten long minutes, Spock retched and retched.

At long last, his stomach seemed to settle down. But he made no move to stand up.

The doctor took a tentative step towards him.

Spock’s eyes were closed and his cheeks were pale. There were specks of blood around his lips.

“You are vomiting blood,” Puri whispered frantically. “You are vomiting blood, Spock this is SERIOUS,” He almost screamed.

“Please do not scream, Doctor,” Spock said weakly. “This… this is why I did not wish to consume any of the main course meals offered by the replicator. My body has been unable to process such complex nutrition for the last 5.6 days.”

“How long has it been since you last ate properly?” the doctor asked, dreading the answer.

“I last ate with T’Amun,” Spock said in a small, quiet voice. “The night before the actual mission.”

Puri was horrified by the answer, but he was not exactly surprised. Spock had been sick even before things had gone wrong for T’Amun. And he had managed only because first, Hashmak, and then, T’Amun had started easing some of his symptoms through their empathic abilities.

But with them no longer here, and with the added stress of broken bonds, physical injuries, and such overpowering grief, Spock had undoubtedly worsened. And the idiot had hidden it from the ship’s CMO.

“Are you aware that hiding such serious medical complications is against regulations?” Puri asked angrily. “You can be court-martialed for this, Lieutenant.”

Spock did not even open his eyes.

“But you are not going to be,” the doctor added, somewhat gently. “I won’t say anything to anyone if you come with me to the med bay and allow me to give you an intravenous nutritional supplement.”

“Thank you, Dr. Puri,” Spock said as the older man helped him to his feet.

Together, they made their way to the med bay.

Once there, the doctor insisted on giving Spock another full scan.

“I do not believe that my refusal will truly stop you from conducting this examination,” Spock said, resigned to it as he reclined on the bio-bed.

Puri said nothing as he ran another range of tests on his patient.

“You are getting worse, Spock,” he said after almost half an hour. “Why didn’t you come to me sooner? These tests say that even with the sensory aid, your vision has blind spots, that there is a marked loss of hearing capability in your left ear. Plus, you have lost another four pounds in the last two days. This needs to stop. Or you WILL die, you idiot. Did you know that the swelling on your frontal and temporal lobes has deepened? Why.. oh why did you not tell me you were doing this badly?”

“I did not realize it…” Spock mumbled.
“What did you not realize?” Puri asked, frustrated with the Vulcan.

“I assumed that you would have known of my problems at the end of my last physical three days ago,” Spock answered.

“Yes, son,” Puri answered. “I normally would catch these things, but you are deteriorating at a pace that I have not seen before. Have you been able to sleep at all these last two days?”

Unable to answer honestly, Spock chose to remain silent and stared at his feet.

“I’m going to sedate you again,” the older man said and started preparing a hypospray but Spock caught his wrist.

“Please, sir,” he almost pleaded. “Do not sedate me.”

“But you need to sleep…”Puri started.

“I will attempt to meditate, but please, do not force me to sleep,” Spock interrupted, the floodgates of grief once again pouring fresh acid onto his wounds.

“The nightmares are still as bad?” the doctor asked softly.

The Vulcan only nodded shamefacedly in response. While the older man thought about the various implications of Spock’s situation, Spock sat up and bent down to put on his shoes again. The doctor’s lack of reaction to that told him that he was mercifully not spending the night in the med bay. It was a relief. He was miserable. But he wanted to be left alone in his misery. The med bay gave him no privacy. And he hated the feeling of being watched all the time.

“This is out of my hands,” Puri said after several minutes. “I feel useless in your case. And we cannot even divert to Vulcan until we have picked up the refugees. From what Nurse Chapel and I were able to gather, you need a mind healer to help you process everything that happened and until then, you can’t undergo a healing trance either. Am I correct?”

“Yes, sir,” Spock said, embarrassed that despite being stronger than humans, he was the one causing so much trouble to the doctor.

“Is there anyone who would be willing to meet us midway?” Puri asked. “We don’t have the time it will take for us to get to Vulcan. You need help now. Is there any Vulcan healer, who might be willing to meet us at a nearby Star Base?”

“No, doctor,” I do not believe I know of any mind healers who would be willing to undertake such a journey on my behalf. It is not logical. And it is certainly not viable.

“Okay, let me sleep on it,” the doctor said. “I’m sure there’s another way. You can return to your quarters now if you’d like. Here’s a packet of sleeping pills. Don’t refuse them, son. Just hear me out. They are not as strong as these injectable sedatives. They won’t knock you out, but they will help you rest. I’d be happy if you could take two of them once you get to your room.”

“Yes, Doctor,” Spock said and slowly walked out of the med bay.

XXXXX

The walk back to his room was one of the longest he had ever taken. Of course, the distance was practically negligible. But his feet felt too tired to cooperate with him. There was a deep ache in his shoulders and his lower back screamed in pain every time he tried to increase his pace to a light jog.
The lights in the corridors hurt his sensitive eyes. He could feel a pulsating headache starting to form behind his eyelids. But like always, he couldn’t do a thing about it.

As he reached closer to his room, he thought about taking a painkiller along with the sleeping aid, but he couldn’t bring himself to do it. Once inside, he flopped on his bed tiredly, without even taking off his uniform.

A minute later, he opened the bedside drawer to place the packet of the sleeping pills inside. At first, he decided that he didn't need the pills. But then he wondered if it would be so bad to simply dull the pain for a few hours and get the rest his body so desperately needed. He rolled over and opened the drawer again. He was also sorely tempted to take just one tablet of tramadol as well. But he closed the drawer without taking that out. For tonight, he would have to make do with the sleeping pills.

“If your performance has suffered as a result of physical discomfort, you must seek to control it as a Vulcan. Weakness will not be tolerated at the seminary....”

Instructress T’Pemal’s cool, impassive voice rang in his ears. He had not been allowed painkillers at the seminary after his return from the Kahs’wan. And illogically, the injustice of it and the shame was coming back to Spock now.

He downed the sleeping pills with a gulp of water and lay down on the bed, wondering if sleep would even come to him tonight. This seemed to be his daily routine—grappling with a dragging exhaustion through the day, being unable to nourish his body, holding the pain at bay with his mind, and giving in to hours of nightmares at the end of the long day... only to begin all over again every six hours.

He pulled the blanket closer to himself and curled up in a fetal position, glad that no one could see just how insecure and scared he was. To the world, he was the formidable Vulcan, brought low only by circumstances.

But he saw himself for what he was—a burden on everyone he came into contact with, fragmented and scattered in his thoughts and emotions. He had brought dishonor to his father, distress to his mother, and death to his beloved T’Amun and their child.

He did not deserve the care and concern the good doctor showed for him. He did not deserve the amount of responsibility the captain was willing to place on him. He did not deserve the warmth of this room and the comfort of the soft sheets beneath him.

Hot tears leaked out from his eyes as his battered heart wept for release. But there was nothing. No mother to hold him close and tell him that it would get better. No father to anchor him back to his center. No bond mate to join his mind with and seek comfort from.

As his loneliness hit him full force, the sleeping pills dragged him under, unbothered by the sorrow coursing through him even in the arms of sleep.

XXXXX

At 4:00 am in the morning, Lt. Ameris commed the captain. She was the navigator for the overnight shift and usually, she had no reason to call the captain during her hours but today, she needed to.

They were to reach Aldani-IV in less than four hours, almost two hours ahead of schedule.

The captain needed to be in the briefing room along with Lt.-Cmdr. Khan and with Lieutenant Spock. After comming the captain, she placed a call to Zoya’s quarters. In a voice thickly slurred by sleep, she answered her call and confirmed that she would be ready and waiting in the briefing room.
by 5:00 am.

The last call went to Lt. Spock. However, that call went unanswered. Ameris tried twice more before wondering if something was wrong.

“Computer, locate Lt. Spock,” she commanded the computer.

“Lt. Spock is in the library,” the blank voice of the computer stated.

This was strange. It was still too early for anyone to be ready for the Alpha shift. And she knew from the duty roster that Mr. Spock was technically not due on the bridge for at least another four hours.

She commed the lieutenant on his communicator. He answered at the first signal.

“Lt. Spock, you are expected in the briefing room at 5:00 am,” she said. “We shall arrive at our destination at 800 hours UEST, 2 hours ahead of schedule. The captain will meet with you in an hour to discuss the protocols that must be followed during the mission.”

“Affirmative,” Spock stated stonily and without another word, Lt. Ameris ended the call.

XXXXX

He had been in the library for more than three hours now. Despite the sleeping pills, he had been unable to rest. And for the first time in his life, he had felt such absolute claustrophobia that he had had no option but to leave his room. The illogic of his fear was astounding to him.

But it was easier to deal with the illogic than to work through the paralyzing fear of the walls moving too close to him, crushing him, sucking the air out of the room, suffocating him….

He jerked out of the terrifying memory as his comm. unit buzzed again. It was the CMO.

Spock was sure that he knew what this was about. He decided to ignore the call. He was in no state to deal with the irate doctor who was clearly not used to feeling so helpless.

With an almost inaudible sigh, Spock went to the beverage replicator and got himself a cup of strong black coffee. If he wanted to get through the day without sleep, maybe this harmless, human vice would help him. Without wasting any more time, he went back to his work. He was due to meet the captain in about 45 minutes. There was much that needed to be discussed in order to make sure that the Enterprise would be a sensitive and kind host to its Orion charges.
Hello, everyone, this chapter is not particularly action-packed but it is full of important, introspective detail. Please let me know what you think. I really love feedback and your reviews make my day like nothing else does. Love you all :)  

At 5:00 am sharp, the captain and the communications officer walked into the briefing room. Even though he had been recovering well, Pike still looked a little pale and tired. Zoya looked healthy, but even her face showed clear signs of sleep deprivation and exhaustion.

“Morning, Lieutenant,” Pike said, taking a seat at the head of the table.

“Greetings, Captain,” Spock answered as he powered up the holoprojector.

Zoya slipped into a chair next to the captain, fighting a wide yawn.

“Tired, Ms. Khan?” Pike asked.

“Yes, sir, I AM rather worn out despite the few hours of rest I was able to get,” she said, yawning again.

“Captain, Lieutenant Commander, based on all the background research that we have conducted over the last two days, we have a number of suggestions to make,” Spock began, interrupting the conversation of the senior officers.

“Go on, Mr. Spock,” Pike encouraged. “Do you have written documents for us to peruse as you take us through your report?”

“Certainly, sir,” the Vulcan said. “The notes for the presentation have been uploaded to the command drive, which you, and Ms. Khan, I presume, have access to.”

Spock waited patiently while Pike and Zoya pulled up the document on their respective PADDs.

“The Orion Refugee Crisis has been a concern for the Federation and the intergalactic community for the last three years,” he said, pointing towards the position of Orion on the star map. “The source of the crisis stems from the Orion government’s refusal to curtail the slave trade which is the chief occupation of 43.7% of the Orion population. Most of these slavers are males, who also trade in sentient beings from various worlds, both federation and non-federation. However, with the patrols tightening around the Federation space and greater emphasis on protection of individual planets, the supply of the trade has dwindled. As a result of this, they have taken to oppressing sections of their own people. While the Orions are largely a homogenous race, there are divisions of class and caste, which are determined at birth. Women, children, and increasingly men belonging to the lower castes —workers, prostitutes, laborers, dancers, whipping boys, maids, handmaidens—people born into these castes are engaged in exploitative professions by virtue of their birth. However, they are not slaves. They are free men and women who must be compensated for their services. With slavery on the decline, the resources required to maintain the society’s oppressive set-up are also declining. Due to this, certain slavers have taken to enslaving the more vulnerable members of the lower castes.
While a number of these people are sold at slave auctions every day, a large number of fertile women and men are forced to bear children in order to create an entirely new caste; a caste of Orions born into slavery. Most of the people enslaved in the last three years were first forced into brutal detention camps where they were subjected to somatic reconditioning through crude and sophisticated training methods that amount to torture under Federation law. The children born in these camps were separated from their mothers after no more than three months of nursing. The refugees we are about to take on board have been on the run from the establishment for 13 days. They escaped from the Ju’oul Training Camp in the city of Kalbara. The 28 refugees we are on our way to pick up are only 13% of the actual number of people that managed to escape. In this contingent, there are three men, 11 women, and 14 children. Of the children, 10 are male. One female child and seven male children are orphans. Almost all the children have been reported to have been sexually assaulted. Three of the male children report extensive injuries as a result of the assaults. The women as well have all been raped at some point during their captivity. While all the refugees will require medical attention for injuries acquired on Orion, they will also need to be treated for malnutrition, pneumonia, septicemia, and sexually transmitted diseases. The children will also require counseling and 24/7 monitoring."

“Jesus Christ,” Pike murmured, absolutely horrified by Spock’s report. Of course, he had known that the situation in the Orion system was bad but this was worse than what even he had expected.

“Have you sent a copy of your suggestions to Dr. Puri?” he asked.

“I have, Captain,” Spock replied. “The med bay is preparing private examination rooms and bio-beds in the guest rooms to accommodate all of the refugees. I do have one other suggestion, sir, but it must remain confidential.”

“What is it?” Pike asked, frowning as he signed the report and sent it to Starfleet Command.

“Dr. Caledonia Kohen has also been assigned guest quarters in the same section of the ship where the refugees will be staying,” he said with a slight pause. “And she is of the opinion that the refugees can be of scientific use to the Enterprise. I do not agree with her. But of course, as the captain, the final decision is yours, sir.”

Pike took a moment to take in the implications of what Spock was saying.

“Can you elaborate upon what you refer to as ‘scientific use’?” he asked.

“Permission to speak freely, sir?” the younger man asked in return.

“Zoya, I believe you have everything you need,” Pike said to his acting first officer. “I will join you on the bridge in a few minutes.” He waited for Zoya to leave and then he turned to Spock again. “Yes, Lieutenant, go ahead.”

“Dr. Kohen is of the opinion that scientific testing on Orions and perhaps other non-human humanoid forms of life is justified,” he answered. “And while I do not believe that she will engage in any such activities on the Enterprise, I am uncertain if she would be able to conceal her disregard for the refugees’ sentience. Such insensitivity could prove detrimental to the wellbeing of the 28 people who will shortly be under our care.”

Pike looked how he felt. Stunned.

“I see what you mean, Spock, and I will make arrangements for her to be moved to separate quarters, but do you know what you’re saying?” Pike asked almost rhetorically. “Experimentation on humanoid life forms is illegal. Saying that Dr. Kohen supports it is a serious allegation. She could lose her research license. And all the centers that she has worked in will be brought under
“That is true, Captain,” Spock answered bravely. “But Dr. Kohen also said to me and Ensign Vince, that there are Federation authorities that even encourage such experimentation which is otherwise illegal. And while she may have revealed this information to us because she is certain that our word would never be believed against hers, I thought it best to bring it to your notice.”

“That is a good thing you did, Spock,” Pike muttered. “But if there’s any truth in what she said then in all likelihood, even the higher-ups in Starfleet are unaware of this officially-sanctioned abuse of the law. We will look into it more once we get back. I want you to gather as much information as you can on this. And oh, for now, this stays between you and me. Tell Ensign Vince also that he is to never reveal Dr. Kohen’s Freudian slip to anyone. Is that clear?”

“Affirmative, Captain,” Spock said and opened the door of the briefing room. He waited for Pike to leave before depowering the holo-projector and making his way to the bridge.

XXXXXXXX

“Aldani-IV’s surface temperature was indeed brutal. Spock was from a hot, desert planet and this temperature was tough for him to handle even layered up. It hurt him to see the refugees shivering in their regulation-issued warmers. Clearly, the clothes were not warm enough.

Or maybe, their cold had less to do with the climate of the planet. Maybe they were cold inside, physically and mentally.

“They are not well, Captain Pike,” Ambassador Vasquez warned as he filled out the transfer paperwork. “And while none of them is violent, they need to be watched constantly. One of the women, G’Ahaila tried committing suicide two days ago. And one of the boys, Dolain, he hasn’t spoken a word since the crash. He is 11-years-old. Or at least that’s what the leader of the group, Suraina says. She is older than all of them and the children look up to her. Some of youngest ones refer to her as their maternal aunt. That’s what Marisi means. So if you hear them call her that, you know they are the ones who are also the least traumatized of the lot. Apparently, Suraina protected them from the worst of the abuse in the camp. Though, I assume you understand that no protection came without... erm... well, payment.”

Pike was sickened by this. Fardour’s history had been hard to digest and that had been almost ancient history. It was distressing to know that such abuse was still a reality in their universe.

“Anything else I should know?” the captain asked shakily, still trying to grasp the implications of everything he had just been told.

“Two of the women are pregnant,” he said bluntly. “And we don’t know if these pregnancies are a result of rape or if they are from their partners, husbands, whatever... They did not tell us. And we are also not sure if they want to keep their pregnancies... I mean, we have services in our medical center here to medically terminate pregnancies but they did not answer us when we asked if that was what they wanted.”

“Hmmmm...okay, well hopefully we won’t have to ask them that on our ship,” Pike said. “We will be on Earth in a few days and Starfleet Medical will be able to help them out either way.”

“All the best, captain,” Vasquez said. “I appreciate it that you came at such short notice. How did your mission go? I heard there was some new class-M planet in the Palician system? How was it? Can we expect more groundbreaking research from the legendary Enterprise? I remember your last research mission. I hear we are finally making breakthroughs in synthesizing dilithium in the lab.”
Pike scratched his head before answering that. He had forgotten all about the fact that Fardour was a classified mission. Every single person on the Enterprise (including the terrible Dr. Kohen) had signed a strict confidentiality contract. So they were definitely never going to reveal the details of the so-called “research” mission. But of course, everyone else had been fed a story about a research mission to a new planet.

“The research was mostly successful,” Pike answered cautiously. “But the planet isn’t truly class-M in terms of habitability. The surface is unstable and there is much Volcanic activity on it which is further exacerbated by the presence of radioactive elements in the makeup of the planet’s internal geography. So, it was not a complete success. Several of my crewmen were seriously injured due to a Volcanic eruption and the Earthquake that followed it.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Vasquez said sincerely. “Are you alright?”

“I am,” Pike said. “Thanks to my new officer in the science department. He saved my life when my probe got stuck at the base of a shifting volcano.”

“Wow….Is he alright?” the ambassador asked glancing towards the Vulcan who was now helping the medical department log each of the refugees’ information into the system.

“He was injured quite badly and he isn’t recovered properly yet, but he is an asset to the team,” the captain said, pride and remorse coloring his words. Even though Vasquez obviously couldn’t tell what it was, he realized that Pike was feeling a deep sense of guilt for something. But it wasn’t his place to ask.

“We must get going, sir,” Pike said at last. All the refugees were on the Enterprise now. Kohen’s things had been cleared out of the guest quarters and put in one of the Ambassadorial suites.

“Goodbye, Captain, let me know if there’s anything you require from me,” Vasquez said. “I’d be happy to help in any way I can.”

Once back on the Enterprise, Spock’s weariness hit him full force. He had spent five grueling hours on Aldani-IV’s surface. And while mostly, his work had been administrative in nature, he had seen the haunted look in the eyes of the adults and blank despair in the eyes of the children.

A 4-year-old girl with a shaved head had looked at him with frightened, sunken eyes.

“I will not hurt you,” Spock had said gently.

But the child had only whimpered quietly in response.

The oldest woman in the group, Suraina, had been in pretty bad shape, at least medically. But her presence was clearly comforting to the younger children. The girl with the shaved head and 4 little boys had clung desperately to her tattered skirt.

The pregnant women had refused to allow themselves to be examined. One of them, Rihaela, had snarled at the doctor, screaming obscenities that they wanted to take her baby away. The other one, Bani’al, had sobbed with grief because she didn’t want to have a child anymore. Both women had been kidnapped from their homes and their husbands had been murdered in front of their eyes for resisting capture. For Rihaela, her child was her last anchor to her husband. For Bani’al, the prospect of having a child without a partner was an extremely daunting one.

Spock was certain that they would be given the best medical care on board. But they needed to be in
a relatively stable state of mind before they could actually receive the counseling they needed before deciding upon what they wanted to do with their pregnancies.

As someone who had just lost a child, Spock wondered what it was like to be in the situation of Bani’al. Parenthood was a beautiful thing when it was desired. But what could someone do when they were carrying a child they didn’t want?

And then there was the boy who had refused to say anything. In some ways, it had been the easiest to examine him and log his details into the system. But his medical reports had indicated that his refusal to speak had more to do with psychological trauma rather than any physical impediment.

“He needs surgery for muscle tears,” Dr. Puri had said with a pained, embarrassed look on his face. And he had turned a deeper shade of red at Spock’s blank expression.

“From the rape, Spock, the kid’s injuries are from prolonged, systematic sexual abuse,” the doctor had had to explain.

And Spock had swallowed roughly, wondering if even facilities on Earth would be able to help the child deal with the emotional consequences of the trauma.

He shook his head to clear it. Safe and warm in his own room, it should have been easy for the Vulcan to let go of the tumultuous emotions raging through his mind. But he was unable to. Even though he was sitting on his mat, trying to focus his thoughts on the flickering flame of the candle, the peace and calm was saturated with a deep ache in his mind. He was still hurting for his own child, for T’Amun…. But a part of him hated himself for hurting for his own self. Today, he had seen people whose realities were much worse than his own, people who had been stripped from their sentience simply for the sake of monetary gains, people who had been taken away from their right to be men, women, and children.

His body was tired. He was sick. But he also knew that going to Vulcan was going to be tough in the light of the condition of the refugees. They needed to get to San Francisco as soon as the Enterprise could reach there.

So, for once, he took the doctor’s advice and placed a private call to Healer Sobik, wondering if his old therapist and friend would be willing to do him a favor once again.
Hello awesome people, here is the next installment in this story. But first, a few things. So, recently, a question came up on Tumblr that is it greedy or too much of authors to request for reviews on their story? Now, I often request feedback on my chapters but it never crossed my mind that it might be taken in this way. For me, I love writing, and reviews are my only connection to the people reading the story. Also, since this is fanfiction, naturally, I am as much a fan of Star Trek as my readers, so to me, my request for feedback is just my way of talking to fellow fans. What do you think? Does it annoy you when authors (including myself) request you for feedback?

Secondly, if you have Tumblr (general or focused on Star Trek) and are comfortable leaving your username/blog in the comments/PM, please do. I am learning how to use Tumblr and I am enjoying it a lot.

“Healer Sobik,

I wish I was writing to you under better circumstances. But recent events have forced me to contact you this way because there is no other recourse left to me. I do not know if you have yet been contacted by my mother yet. I am assuming that out of respect for me, she would have refrained from doing so. And I wouldn’t have either, but I do not have another option. I need your medical expertise once again, but this time, for ailments of the mind as much as ills of the body. My last mission did not go as planned. I have sustained injuries on my frontal and temporal lobes. My telepathy seems to have been affected. And I suffered physical injuries to my hands. The chief medical officer on the ship is of the opinion that I should travel to Vulcan in order to get the treatment I require. However, I would prefer to be treated away from Vulcan. Hence, this request. I am aware of the discomfort this might cause you, but I would be grateful to you if you could meet me at Starbase Siracusa in the DS-3 section of federation space. The Enterprise will dock at the Siracua spaceport on Stardate 2252.286 at 1400 hours UEST. Please respond to this message with your availability status.”

Live Long and Prosper,

S’chn T’Gai Spock”

XXXXX

Sobik was troubled. The message he had just received was plain and basic. But he could tell there was a lot more to it. He was certain that there were things Spock was not telling him. And even though it was going to be difficult getting to Siracusa, he already knew he was going.

But first, he needed to know more.

And it seemed like Lady Amanda was the person who could help him. Without wasting any time, he placed a call to her.

She took a few minutes to answer.
Even from the screen, he could tell that she was exhausted. There were bags under her eyes and a tired smile that didn’t reach her eyes, graced her lips.

“Greetings, Lady Amanda,” he said.

“Greetings, Healer Sobik,” she answered. “To what do I owe this pleasure?”

“I just received a note from Spock, requesting me to meet with him at Starbase Siracusa in 3.7 days,” Sobik said. “He wishes to see me because he requires my medical services. But his note was lacking in details. I wished to converse with you in order to gather more information about his condition.”

Amanda nodded politely before answering.

“I might be betraying his trust by telling you this but if you’re going to help my boy, I am willing to risk his anger,” she said earnestly. “It is true that my son was injured gravely at his last mission, the details of which I am not at liberty to share with you. But his injuries go beyond just the physical. Unexpectedly, he found love, Sobik, on his last mission. A woman who desired him, cared about him… and also almost became the mother of his child. But the natives of the planet were not happy about this. They killed the woman and the child she was carrying. Spock has spoken to me only once after that. And I know he is not coping well.”

Sobik was horrified by what he was hearing. A Vulcan father was bonded to his child almost since conception. Over time, the bond was nurtured, shaped, and molded. But for a raw, nascent bond to break in such a violent way….. he shuddered to think about Spock’s pain.

“And his brain injuries are from the abrupt breaking of the bond?” he asked, even though he was fairly certain that that was only part of it.

Amanda’s response confirmed this for him.

“No, he was also attacked telepathically on multiple occasions because they were a telepathic race,” she said. “And they cut off his left hand middle finger to punish him for his so-called transgressions.”

The healer was sickened by this piece of information.

“Why did they hate him so much?” he asked, nauseated by the details of Spock’s condition. “Was he on Romulus or Andoria?”

“No, Sobik,” Amanda answered dejectedly. “I know who they were but it is for Spock to decide if you can be told. Please don’t be offended. If I were to tell you without his permission, he could be in legal trouble with Starfleet for violating multiple confidentiality clauses.”

“I understand,” Sobik said softly. “Please do not apologize. And I will also write back to Spock and let him know that I will see him at Siracusa.”

“Can you call him?” the older woman asked.

“I would, but I have a sense that he wishes to avoid a verbal conversation before he can actually meet me,” Sobik said.

He knew Spock almost as well as Amanda did. But there were things about her son she didn’t completely understand. Spock’s tendency to withdraw was his way of holding himself together till he could find the correct time and place to fall apart by himself.

Sobik only hoped to get there and hold his young friend through the worst of it.
Contrary to his wife’s insults and taunts, Sarek was not indifferent to his child’s needs. Amanda had told him about Spock’s injuries when the communiqué had arrived from Starfleet. She had requested him to speak to their son. And like a fool, he had refused. She had seen it as his selfish pride. But he knew it was his fear that had held him back. He hadn’t spoken properly to Spock in years. He had not spoken to him at all since the debacle at the VSA. And he had not wished him farewell when he had left. Hard-hearted Vulcans he may be, but Sarek was a remorseful father who was wondering if it was time to lower his shields and reach his son again through their parental bond. He wanted to be there for Spock. He just didn’t know how.

What a strange thing. The formidable Ambassador Sarek was scared of talking to his own flesh and blood. A man who had stared down Klingons, put Tellarite diplomats in their place, sophistically negotiated border treaties with Andorians; he was scared of his own child. And this time, the boy was a lot older than he had been during his ordeal on Zarmal. A piece of poetry, a chord played on the lyre, a hesitant hug…. These would not be enough.

Amanda had later received a more detailed note from the CMO of the ship. But she had not chosen to share its contents with him. And now, he was aware that Healer Sobik was going to meet Spock at Starbase Siracusa but he had found out accidentally from a transport roster in the shuttle services office. It hurt him that his wife was not willing to share news of his son with him. He knew she held him responsible for what had happened to Spock on Fardour.

He had a report to file to the Federation about trade negotiations with the Barakun people. But his heart was not in it. If Spock had requested the good healer’s help, then his situation must truly be dire. Sarek longed to see his son and make sure that he was alright.

A minute later, he made his decision and walked out of his office and made his way to the administrative building.

“T’Lina, please request diplomatic quarters for me on shuttle Anubis,” he told his personal assistant without preamble.

“The Anubis is scheduled for departure in 24.6 hours, Ambassador,” she answered. “It will halt at Starbase Siracusa for exactly two days before returning to Vulcan. You are scheduled for a meeting with Lady T’Nesa of the house of Suk in 1.7 days. If you travel on the Anubis, you will miss the meeting.”

“Reschedule the meeting for after my return,” Sarek said, not bothered that T’Nesa was the matriarch of one of the most influential trading families on Vulcan. "Have you been able to secure a ticket for me?” he asked after a few minutes.

“Affirmative, sir,” T’Lina said and made arrangements for his travel. Normally, he would ask Amanda to accompany him. But in his heart he knew that this time, he needed to meet his son alone. This was probably his last chance to truly reconnect with his child.

“How are the examinations going, Doctor?” Spock asked as he sipped a cup of black coffee. The doctor was eating a hearty meal of gnocchi in some kind of suspicious pink sauce and it made Spock’s stomach turn.

“They are okay,” Puri answered, swallowing a mouthful of the mush on his plate. “But I can do very little to actually help them. Most of them need extensive, long-term counseling. And I can’t do that
on the ship, not when we are expected to be back on Earth in like 15 days. By the way, I’m glad you are meeting the Vulcan healer. Finally, you will be able to eat better. The cup of coffee is not food. Just watching you drink only that makes me want to eat a second helping of this gnocchi in marinara.”

“That does look appetizing,” Spock said dryly, just slightly wrinkling his nose at the pink sauce that was allegedly, marinara.

“Well, I have a cast iron stomach,” the doctor offered helpfully as he took another bite. “But I have something else to discuss with you. I need your help with some of the people we have on board.”

“Certainly, Doctor,” Spock said. “How can I help?”

“There’s Dolain, that 10-year-old who needs surgery,” Puri answered, finally placing his cutlery on the side. “He needs to give me some of his history in order for me to figure out his long-term treatment. I can, of course, operate on him like I would on an unconscious trauma patient in ER, but I don’t want to do that to him. I think you might be able to get to him, Spock. Nurse Chapel, I, Dr. Lane, Nurse Elina… we have all tried and failed.”

“What brings you to the assumption that I would fare any better?” Spock asked, perplexed by the doctor’s request.

“Well, there is no easy way to say it so I’ll just tell you how it is,” Puri said, sadness coloring his words. “He has scars like yours on his back. I know it isn’t something you would like to share with him. But maybe, you understand him better at some level, even though thankfully, you have never been raped.”

That was something to consider. It was uncommon for Vulcans who had been subjected to trauma to engage in conversations with fellow victims and survivors. But humans and Orions often used such trauma to build a kinship with each other and forge a camaraderie based on trust and empathy.

“I can only try,” Spock whispered. “I am uncertain if as a Vulcan, I am even capable of doing what you require of me. But for the sake of the boy’s wellbeing, I assure you that I will make an effort.”

“That is all I ask, Spock,” Puri said. “But he is not the only one who needs your help. I also want you to talk to G’Ahaila. She is a software designer by training and was kidnapped from the university campus. As you know, she tried to commit suicide a few days ago. Thankfully, she was unsuccessful.”

“She will require professional therapy,” Spock said, ready to say no to whatever the doctor was about to ask of him.

“Just listen to me, will you?” Puri said, irritated that Spock was ready to say no even without hearing him out fully.

The Vulcan sighed. “Go on, please,” he said.

“From what I have been able to gather, she was a leader of the resistance in the camp,” the older man continued.” Her current state of mind is a direct result of the fact that her companions killed themselves bare hours before the escape. Apparently, because they were G’Ahaila’s emotional anchors, they were treated far worse than even her. The guards often abused and humiliated them in front of her to make her comply. She never did. And finally, they had had enough. But instead of saying anything to their leader and friend, they chose to simply end their lives. G’Ahaila is not angry with them for this. But she feels as if she killed them with her own hands.”
“That is illogical…. But, I do understand why she feels this way,” Spock said contemplatively. He had spent every night since T’Amun’s death thinking the same thing. Even though the poison had been delivered by someone else’s hands, it had been her association with Spock that had made her a target in the first place. If anything, her poisoner had been nothing more than a vessel for the deed. In his mind, Spock was the executioner. Oh, he knew exactly how G’Ahaila was feeling.

“And that is why I cannot help her,” he said. “She requires someone devoid of guilt to ease her mind. Her situation was vastly different from mine. I was truly at fault, doctor. But she was not. And hence, I am not the right person to talk to her.”

“Please, son,” Puri begged. “You don’t have to tell her anything about what happened to you. It is okay if you don’t want to talk about what happened to her too. Just help her distract herself. She is a software designer. See if she can be given some simple tasks to keep her occupied, to help her connect with her older self.”

This had not occurred to Spock. But it was definitely a better idea than talking to her as a mismatched kindred spirit.

“I can do that,” Spock said finally. “If she is willing to take on work, I believe she would be a valuable asset to the research design lab on the ship.”
I am so very sorry for such a delayed update. I have been busy with things and a little bit unwell. So I could not update sooner. I know there is not much action in this chapter. But this is important to lay the ground for the next few chapters. Please leave a review if you are enjoying this story. I love hearing from you.

Healer Sobik was surprised to see Sarek in the shuttle. He was also curious as to why the ambassador had chosen to travel by a passenger shuttle instead of using his personal ship. But it was considered impolite to ask. Besides, he was almost sure that Sarek’s destination was also Siracusa. Obviously, he wanted to go and see his son. And for some reason, he had not told Amanda about it. By the time she would find out, he would be on his way.

“Greetings, Ambassador,” he said solemnly as Sarek took a seat beside the young healer.

“Greetings, healer,” the other man responded. “I thank you for coming to Spock’s aid yet again.”

“There is no need for gratitude where none is expected,” Sobik said. “I am a healer. My duty is towards those I must care for. And your son is one of them in his hour of need.”

The two men sat in silence as the shuttle got filled with more people. Several Vulcan traders, professors, scientists, some human officials of the federation, and two Hartitians boarded the little craft in the next ten minutes.

A flash of relief briefly crossed Sarek’s face when the doors were finally closed. The engine hummed under their feet and came to life with a single roar.

“Have you informed Spock of your impending arrival at the starbase?” Sobik asked after a while.

“I have not,” Sarek said, wondering if Spock would refuse to see him. It was not logical to hold grudges against one's own family. But Spock was half-human and therefore, like Amanda, he expected more from his father. Only, as a full-blooded Vulcan, it had taken Sarek too long to understand that his child’s needs were different... and still legitimate even if not completely Vulcan.

“He might not wish to see me,” he said after thinking for a few seconds.

“I believe you would be surprised,” Sobik said. “Spock is not angry with you. He is disappointed… scared… He does not know where he stands in his relationship with you. But he is not angry. He bears no grudge against you.”

“I’ve heard that he is gravely injured,” the older Vulcan said, swallowing roughly.

“He is,” the healer answered. “But he will heal. He was but ten-years-old when he was taken into slavery. He healed after that. He will heal from this as well.”

“Does my son talk to you often?” Sarek asked in a small, heartbroken whisper, carefully impassive but full of hidden emotion.
“He does not,” Sobik said. “Mercifully, it is only when he is injured, unwell, or otherwise indisposed, that he seeks me out. I am grateful that it is not often. I would gladly never hear from him if it means he has no need for my services.”

“I believe you speak of injuries and ailments that are of more than just physical,” the ambassador asked.

The healer only nodded in response.

After a few moments, he spoke. "Your child is young, Ambassador. He is no more than a youngling in our terms. But he has been forced to shoulder the burdens that come with manhood. I do not know how much has been shared with you. But if Spock is willing, he will tell you. I am hoping that even after all this time, your presence would be a source of comfort for him... Will it be so, Sarek?" Sobik asked, holding the older Vulcan's gaze with an intensity he seldom experienced.

"I hope it will be... I hope it will be..." Sarek said and closed his eyes, hoping to calm his mind before what was undoubtedly going to be one of the hardest things he would ever do.

XXXXX

Spock was extremely nervous.

He had never spoken to a child at length prior to this; much less a non-Vulcan child who had been brutalized systematically for months.

A part of him wanted to go to the med bay and tell Dr. Puri that he could not help Dolain. But a part of him was desperate to ease the young child’s pain.

Over the last 24 hours, he had watched the boy from the corner of his eyes. The young Orion was always withdrawn. He spoke to no one. His arms were always wrapped around himself. And he had an unhealthy habit of obsessively pinching and picking at his upper arms.

He sat away from the other refugees at mealtimes. And he shrank away from the men in the group. The only people he’d allow to get close were Suraina and Nivriti, the bald 4-year-old who skipped around him in circles, not bothered that he never responded to her playful antics.

He had tried approaching Suraina to try and properly understand what had happened to Dolain. But the Marisi had given him no real information.

“It is his story to tell,” she had said. “But one of such young blood should never be tainted by seed that will not sprout. He is the tainted one.”

Her description, while not useful at all, had made him curious about her. However, after reading a little more of Suraina’s file, he figured out why she spoke in metaphors. She had been a wise woman before being captured.

While Spock did not believe in things like divination and witchcraft, such practices were considered almost sacred on Orion. And Suraina had been one of the most respected shamans in the community. But even she had not been spared. Her ageless countenance, her obvious fertility, and her supposed skills in divination had made her a target for the slavers who had believed that she would fetch a very high price on the market.

It bothered him that she believed that the child was tainted. It was not that she was judging him for what had been done to him. It was more that she believed him beyond redemption. Spock sighed deeply, wondering if she was indeed right. But then, he was sure that there had been people who had
said the same things about him after Zarmal. But he had proven them all wrong. He had recovered, hadn't he?

"You were never raped," a little voice said inside him. "Be grateful that your innocence and virtue were spared."

But even if he had not been defiled that way, life had taken its toll on him. He had been the object of revenge for crimes he had never committed. And it showed. He wasn't one to engage in self-pity. But today, his hatred for it was even more. He was disgusted with himself for thinking about his own past, knowing fully well that what had happened to Dolain was so much worse than what had happened to him. He was terrified that he would be unable to help the young Orion because he was too selfish. He was afraid of his weaknesses. He was scared of his awareness of his own pain.

Spock never spent too much time in front of the mirror but today, for the first time, it seemed as if a stranger was staring back at him instead of his own reflection. The features were the same, but their otherness was startling.

His brown eyes were dulled with shadows. His cheeks were pale and sunken. There were circles under his eyes.

He swallowed roughly, wondering yet again if he was indeed the right person to try and help the Orion boy. But just as he was pulling his blue tunic over his head, his eyes went to the old, faded brand on his side; the brand that Ishok had been forced to give him.

For a moment, a searing pain flared up in the old scar but Spock did not move. It was only a memory. And memories could not harm him.

That was logical. But it was a lie.

Tearing his eyes from the mirror, he finished getting dressed. He was still not prepared to meet Dolain. But he had wasted enough time. He had no choice but to go and introduce himself to the child.

XXXXX

Dr. Puri felt as if he would need a therapist himself by the time this was over.

Thankfully, Rihaela had accepted the help of the med bay staff. She was relieved to finally know that her unborn child was doing well and that the crew meant her no harm. She had allowed herself to be examined and was on her way to a healthy second trimester.

But Bani’al was still under a lot of stress.

She needed an abortion. But she was terrified that she would be shunned by the rest of the refugees if she did so. Orions considered unborn children to be as alive as every other living being. To them, it was an act of murder to abort a fetus.

“But where will I go?” she sobbed loudly as she reclined on the couch looking absolutely wretched. Tears leaked out from her eyes constantly and her throat was raw and hoarse after so many hours of weeping.

“You will be safe on Earth,” Puri tried to reassure her. “No one should have a baby if they don’t want it. It is unfair to the child to bring it into the world but to not want it. If you know that you will be unable to even look at it, how can you even consider keeping this pregnancy.”
“But it is not his fault,” she choked out. “He is innocent.”

“And so are you,” the doctor said softly. “When you were having the baby with your husband, your family was intact. After being taken so violently from your home, after being hurt like that… you deserve to take the time you need in order to heal. It would be cruel to the child to have a mother who is not really there for him.”

“Am I a murderer?” she whispered brokenly. Her dull, wet eyes glistened with tears just waiting to fall. Her lips were puffy and swollen where she’d bitten them in her anger and grief. And a bruise from a recent beating at the camp could still be seen on her left cheek.

“No… you have rights over your body and your life…” Puri said, knowing that there were those on the ship who would certainly disagree with him. “And if you are not ready to be a mother, you should not have to be.”

“Can you…” she swallowed before continuing. “Can you give me… can you take him away from my body?” she managed to say before dissolving into tears again.

Puri shook his head in sympathy before answering.

“I can… but I need you to understand that your grief is normal…” he said. “You are giving up your child not because you are a murderer. You are simply not a mother yet. Don’t torture yourself like this. You will make things very difficult for yourself.”

“I can’t… I can’t…” she cried.

“Come, let me escort you to your quarters,” Puri said, helping the woman get up. “You should take some rest. We can continue this discussion in a few hours.”

“I don’t know what to do, doctor,” she said again, “Please don’t send me back to them. They will call me a murderer again. Please don’t send me back to them.”

The doctor closed his eyes for a moment as the woman’s despair washed over him.

“Nurse Chapel, please prepare a private bed for Ms. Bani’al,” he called out to Christine who was standing just outside his office, rearranging the scrubs and gowns in the shelf outside the examination room adjacent to the office.

“Should I list her as an OBG patient?” Chapel asked, sympathy and understanding evident in her voice.

“No, list her as a psychological trauma case for now,” Puri said, not sure if that was the best thing to do. He was fairly certain that she would eventually choose to not keep the baby. But regardless of what her decision was going to be, he needed her to take it in a relatively sound state of mind and away from the judging remarks of the other refugees.

XXXXX

“Dolain, may I come in?” Spock asked for the third time. He standing just outside the door to the boy’s cubicle in the dormitory. He had asked twice before and there had been no response. Unsurprisingly, there was none even now.

“Just go in,” a teenager in the adjacent cubicle said. “He doesn’t answer to anyone. It doesn’t matter to him if you ask him or not.”
Spock ignored this piece of advice. He knew Dolain cared. Even if the child was used to people not asking him for permission first, he needed to know that from now on, he would always be asked for permission before anyone could enter into his personal space. He needed to realize and believe that his wishes would be respected.

Besides, Spock was a Vulcan. He did not need to fidget or ask the same thing again and again. For him, silences were not uncomfortable. He stood perfectly still outside the boy’s cubicle. And he was willing to stay there for as long as required. His vast reserves of patience were going to be a gift in this situation.

But Dolain had no way of knowing that.

Dark eyes, somewhat obscured by an unruly mop of red hair, watched Spock intently. It was almost as if he was daring Spock to go ahead and tire of his own game. Sooner or later, the Vulcan would also give up this charade of being civil and respectful. Eventually, like all the others, he would come inside and take whatever he wanted.

However, the young Orion was not going to be a party to his own debasement again. If the Vulcan wanted something from him, he would have to take it by force. Kindness and fake displays of decency would not fool him again.

And so, he stared at Spock without blinking even once. One hour turned into two. And yet, his eyes did not move from Spock’s face.

In turn, Spock met his gaze and held it. But it was easy to see the concern, the regard, and the determination his eyes.

But perhaps Dolain was too young to comprehend the language of the eyes. Thankfully, Spock was willing to wait. In the two hours that he had spent staring at the child, he had already learned much about the kind of treatment Dolain had been subjected to.

His heart broke at the realization that the boy was waiting for Spock to go ahead and do his worst. But he was prepared to gain the young Orion’s trust the old fashioned way, no matter how long it took.

XXXXX

Amanda was upset. She had not expected Sarek to take such a drastic step and simply take the shuttle to Siracusa along with healer Sobik. She wondered if he had not told her because he was scared that she would stop him.

Well, if that was his reasoning, it was correct.

Amanda knew how badly Spock was hurt. She would have definitely stopped Sarek from going. After all, the man hadn’t spoken to his son properly in years. He had not even acknowledged Spock after he had refused the offer from the VSA.

How would he then offer any comfort or support to his son in this situation, where his very first mission with Starfleet had brought him so much pain. Moreover, he didn’t even know that it was his father who had suggested his name in the first place because Vulcan had refused to help Fardour, partly because the information was so limited and sketchy, but also because they hadn’t wanted to revisit such an obscure, forgotten part of their pre-reform history.

Now that it was all over, Amanda could see how remarkably stupid it had been to send Spock out for a mission even though he was just a freshman. People at Starfleet saw Spock’s potential and felt that
he was already so much ahead of the rest of his own class and even some of the senior classes. But skill could never be a replacement for experience. Maybe, had Sarek gone, things would have turned out differently. At the same time, though, she shuddered to think what might have happened to her husband had he agreed to go when he had first been approached. She had not been told much but it was clear that the Farhannsu had not forgotten their bitter history with the Vulcans. And she had taken it upon herself to research old, tattered manuscripts in order to find out the details. And she had to admit that their hatred was understandable.

It was also astounding that this dark part of pre-Surakian history was not taught to young Vulcans. Had Spock known in advance, maybe he would have been able to prepare better.

Hindsight was truly a terrible thing.

Besides, would Sarek tell Spock that he had suggested his name? Would he tell their son that the Vulcan elders and historians knew more about the Farhannsu than they let on? Would he apologize to him? Or would he hold his silence and simply offer support to their injured child? Amanda knew how much even Sarek was hurting. But she was also aware of how distant he could be when he was in pain.

It was so strange that a race like the Vulcans was inept at handling loss and grief. But in an odd way, it all made sense. They repressed their emotions in order to stay in control. But the shock of loss and trauma was hard to repress because one could never predict those. Tragedies were nature’s way of reminding intelligent beings of their humble, powerless position in the cosmos.

But even with such wisdom, there was often no peace.
Hey folks... it took me so long to write this chapter. I think it is kinda too bad. But I was unable to do better than this. Sorry. I will try and write a better one next time. Please let me know what you think. Is this one too terrible?

“You are wasting your time, sir,”

Spock turned around at the voice.

A middle-aged Orion man stood a few feet away. His light brown hair was cropped close to his scalp and there were lines of fatigue around his eyes.

“I am Dolain’s uncle,” the man said. “My name is Zuhair. I know you want to help him but he is beyond your help, sir. Suraina Asi is right. You should listen to her.”

“You say you are the child’s uncle,” Spock said softly. “Do you not wish to see him recover?”

“I believe it is an old terran saying, if wishes were horses, beggars would ride them,” the older man replied, unfazed by the accusation in Spock’s statement. “As his kin, I do think it would be kinder to let him go his way, whatever that may be.”

“You are not him,” Spock retorted. “Therefore, you do not have the power to make that decision.”

“You are not him, either,” Zuhair said and turned to his own cubicle without waiting for a response from Spock. All through this, the Orion boy watched silently, giving nothing away, his eyes stormy yet blank as they had been for as long as anyone who knew him, could remember.

The Vulcan came back to his waiting spot. He met Dolain’s eyes again, but this time, he saw indecision in the otherwise empty gaze.

He noticed the slight twitch of his jaw, the slight movement of the muscle just behind his lips.

But just as the child parted his lips to make a sound, Spock’s comm. unit beeped loudly. The sharp whistle of the device jerked Dolain out of his almost trance. The transformation was swift but Spock caught every emotion as it withdrew within the child. Within seconds, the parted lips went back to being closed. And with them, his eyes quietened to a resigned calmness; blank… uncaring… indifferent to the fate of their owner.

If Spock were human, he would have cursed out aloud. But thanks to his Vulcan discipline, he managed to answer the call politely.

“Spock, I need you on the bridge now,” Pike’s voice came from the speaker.

“I shall be there shortly, Sir,” Spock replied.

He sighed and turned to look at Dolain again. The child was still watching him. But whatever headway he had managed to make with him, was gone.
“I will come back later,” he said gently. “And even if you do not wish to talk to me, if you require anything at all, please do not hesitate to ask. I am leaving my personal comm. code with you. You shall be able to use your cubicle’s communicator to reach me directly if you so desire.” And with that, Spock placed a card with his contact information just inside the door.

Dolain didn’t even bat an eyelid. He stared into the distance like he had been doing since Spock’s comm. unit had gone off. Trying not to feel dejected, the Vulcan man left the dormitory.

It took him two minutes to reach the bridge.

Captain Pike was discussing with Engineer Albescu, the things they needed from Siracusa before getting back to Earth. To begin with, they needed more dilithium. And then, they needed a senior security officer from the star base’s migration affairs office to come and inspect the refugees that were going to be granted asylum through the fleet. It was unpleasant business but they had to follow protocol. Unfortunately, profiling was still an accepted security procedure.

And this was what Pike needed Spock for.

“You are aware that at this very moment, thousands of refugees mostly from Orion, but a few from Romulus and Qo’noS as well, are being hosted on Earth,” Pike said, turning to Spock as he took his place at the science station. “While the refugees from Romulus and Qo’noS are seen with suspicion, their usefulness as spies and technology experts has turned public opinion in their favor. On the other hand, the numbers from Orion are staggering. And most of them are civilians who are of no strategic value to the federation. We all know that the current council is somewhat exclusionary and puts federation citizens first. And unfortunately, the climate on Earth echoes that. In fact, many people believe that human beings should also be a notch above other federation citizens. But that is a whole different can of worms. Long story short, the council wants us to make this new bunch of refugees look useful. Otherwise, they would further lose face in the media. And possibly in the eyes of the public. What are your thoughts on this?”

“This is unethical, Captain,” Spock said bluntly. “The federation is a body meant to protect the rights of federation citizens, regardless of their species or race. Furthermore, if there are refugees from non-federation worlds, we are obligated to welcome them to acceptable federation planets under the Federation Charter of Universal Freedoms, item 62.”

“Right, Spock,” Pike said. “But, is there anyone in these 28 people who we might project as a talented and smart… and basically, good for the federation? And they will have to be good with sweet talk too. Their first test will be at the inspection. We need one representative from the group to handle the questioning.”

“According to regulation 178-C, the people must choose their group’s representative by democratic means, Captain,” Spock said. “We do not have the right to appoint anyone as the representative of the Orion people onboard the Enterprise.”

“Yes, I know that,” the captain said, exasperated by the situation. “But then again, discrimination and petty politics are also not a part of regulations. And yet, we are having to deal with that stuff. Trust me, if you have someone in mind who is good enough, appoint them as the representative. It is only going to help these people. With the wrong rep, they could be denied asylum over something as ridiculous as the rep’s thick accent.”

Spock thought about this for a minute. In his book, it was absolutely wrong to try and judge refugees in terms of their utility when basic decency demanded that their needs be prioritized. However, he was no stranger to federation politics. As a diplomat’s son, Spock had seen the lengths to which politicians could go in order to secure their positions.
“I have yet to speak with G’Ahaila,” Spock said thoughtfully. “Perhaps, she could be the right candidate for such an endeavor.”

“What makes you say that? Isn’t she the woman who tried to commit suicide?” Pike asked incredulously.

“She is, captain,” Spock answered. “But Dr. Puri believes that that was a symptom of survivor’s guilt. He has asked me to engage her in a project with the science department. He believes she would be able to overcome her depression if she was allowed to be productive in some way. She is a qualified software designer.”

“Is there no one else?” the captain asked, unconvinced that G’Ahaila was the right option for a task of this nature.

“It would seem so,” the Vulcan answered.

“Very well,” Pike sighed, hoping that G’Ahaila would take the challenge in her stride. “See what you can do with her, Spock. Tell her that if she accepts, she would be absorbed into Starfleet after four years of training in the academy. Also, let her know that the security inspection will have to be handled by her. They are thorough but they are subjective. She will be the representative for all the others when the time comes for questioning.”

G’Ahaila was calm and collected when Spock finally met with her.

“Do you want me to come out and talk?” she asked him politely, wondering if her cubicle was the right place to talk with the lieutenant.

“I believe that would be prudent,” Spock said.

G’Ahaila followed the officer to a conference room on deck 4.

“What can I do for you, sir?” she asked the Vulcan. Her voice was still as courteous as ever but there was steel in her tone as if she had already decided to say no to whatever it was.

“What is the level of your education in software design?” Spock asked without preamble.

At this, the Orion woman’s eyes widened.

“My education level?” she asked stupidly.

“Affirmative, Ms. G’Ahaila,” Spock said patiently.

“Erm… I have an A5 Computer Expert Classification, sir,” she answered with a certain amount of pride, though she was trying to be modest about it. “And I specialized in software design.”

“That is impressive,” Spock said, pleasantly surprised. But his face betrayed no signs of it. As someone who had an A7 classification, he was well aware of how tough it was to get any sort of classification above an A3, even for accomplished programmers and scientists.

“Would you consider joining Starfleet as an R&D specialist?” He asked.

“Starfleet?” she asked dumbly. “But don’t I have to be a federation citizen for that?"

“Long-term refugees in the federation are absorbed into it as citizens or permanent residents after a
period of seven solar years,” Spock explained to her. “However, if you join Starfleet, you would be granted citizenship upon admission to the academy.”

“On what grounds, though?” G’Ahaila asked sharply. “I get the feeling that I’m missing something.”

Spock was no diplomat. Nor had he ever been in a situation where he’d had to sell something to someone. So this was a unique situation for him as much as it was for the young woman sitting in front of him.

“I do not wish to hide the facts from you,” he began. “However, the federation is a diverse body with multiple elements, not all of whom subscribe to the same ideology. While compassion, justice, and liberty form the basis of the federation’s philosophy, there are those within it that don’t believe in offering aid to non-federation citizens unless there is an exchange involved.”

“I have nothing to offer,” G’Ahaila whispered through clenched teeth. “I don’t believe this. You want us to pay for asylum? If we had such means, we would never have come begging to you… do you have to humiliate us further?” she asked through the tears welling up in her eyes. “And what has my joining Starfleet got to do with this?”

Spock was dismayed by this turn of events.

“I suppose I did not phrase my request correctly,” he said softly. “We do not seek any payment for offering asylum to your people. We simply require you to be a goodwill ambassador of the Orions. By joining Starfleet and by exhibiting your intellect, you would be educating the uninformed members of the federation and undoing the negative stereotypes that many hold as true about Orions.”

“You want me to be a tool for PR,” she said simply. “I don’t mind. As long as it helps my people.”

“There is more,” Spock continued. “I asked you about your qualifications because I genuinely believe that your talents and skills would find an appropriate use in Starfleet. Of course, in order to become an officer, you must first undergo four years of specialized training at the academy.”

G’Ahaila considered Spock’s words before answering.

“I am willing to join,” she said at last. “What do I need to do?”

“Your prompt acceptance is appreciated,” the Vulcan said. “You will receive an admission letter from Starfleet in three days. But your first assignment will be much sooner. Join the captain and the communications officer in this very room at 18:00 hours.”

XXXXX

“Well done, Spock,” Pike said as he signed a special recommendation for G’Ahaila’s admission. “She has an A5 rating… wow… that is something. You got her do something yet?”

“Affirmative, captain,” Spock answered. “She is working in the research design lab even as we speak. Her task is to program our existing autospot system to perform basic analytics simultaneously with the mapping function.”

“That isn’t really necessary, though, is it?” Pike asked, wondering if this was even required.

“It may not be necessary, sir, but it will accelerate the pace of interstellar cartography on the ship’s automated charting system,” Spock said.
“Why hadn’t you done it so far?” Pike asked.

“I have been otherwise occupied,” the young scientist said. “Besides, as you mentioned, such a system is not necessary… but it is desirable.”

“Yeah, I guess,” the captain mumbled absentmindedly. “Zoya and I are meeting her at 6:00 pm. I think she should be able to handle everything just fine. We will be around the whole time, of course, but she still needs to receive some basic briefing. Would you like to join us, Spock?”

“Negative, Captain,” Spock said. “I wish to stay at my station.”

This was strange. The Vulcan usually never said no to anything. But just as he was about to voice this thought, Pike saw the lines of exhaustion and pain around Spock’s eyes and mouth.

Of course, he had forgotten. Spock was so good at hiding his discomfort that it had completely slipped from Pike’s mind that the young Vulcan was still seriously injured.

“Are you doing okay?” he asked gently.

“I am adequate, Sir,” Spock answered awkwardly, surprised by the sudden change in the demeanor of his superior officer.

“Please get some rest,” the older man said. “It is anyway rather slow around here today. You can turn in early today. You have a busy day tomorrow.”

“I…” Spock started to protest. But a sharp pain stabbed at the back of his head like it often did these days. “I thank you, Captain. You are most generous.”

“Don’t embarrass me,” Pike said and turned back to his PADD as the young science officer left the bridge.

XXXXX

“We shall arrive at Siracusa in 9 hours and 45 minutes,” Helmsman Smith announced.

“So Spock, you ready to go down there?” Dr. Puri asked as the voice of the helmsman came from the ship’s PA system.

“I am, Doctor,” Spock said, putting on his shirt again. The doctor had insisted on examining him one last time before his meeting with Healer Sobik. And even though they were to reach only in the morning, they both knew that the gamma shift was the best time to conduct these unscheduled check-ups.

“I am glad Chris asked you to get some rest,” the doctor said. “Was it a little better this time?”

Spock could not lie.

“The nightmares refuse to cease,” he said dejectedly. His eyes were still swollen and rimmed green. He could not admit it openly to Puri but the physician was aware that the Vulcan had probably woken up crying.

“I hope you get better, Spock,” Puri said sincerely. “I don’t need to tell you that your body has already been pushed past its limits. I have no idea how you are still on your feet. But I will not look a gift horse in the mouth. I hope tomorrow is a better day for all of us.”

“I share your hope,” the Vulcan said. “Even though hope is illogical. Needless to say, respite from
the constant pain would be welcome.”

XXXXX

Birds on Vulcan were not seen as symbols of romanticism. However, old myths of the ancient times often survive even when the people have no use for them anymore. No longer seen as representations of love and peace, these sky-bound beings continued to be harbingers of messages from beyond the material universe. And if a bird came to you in a dream, you were fortunate, because someone was waiting for you on the other side of the veil.

But Vulcans did not dream. Not unless they were half-human. Not unless they were S’chn T’Gai Spock, son of Sarek and Amanda.

And so, like a Vulcan not true to his heritage, he dreamt on.

His hands clenched at his sides, white sheets held tightly in his shaking fists… he slept a troubled sleep, trapped in his own nightmare…

Like every single time he closed his eyes, pain and misery and guilt attacked him from all sides, corroding his essence like acid. Would it finally be the last time? He unconsciously hoped that it would be.

Two decks below, Suraina woke up, panting hard, sweating as if she’d just seen a ghost.

But it wasn’t a ghost… The alarm that went off in the med bay sent the CMO panicking in his quarters as he realized just which alert was beeping. Still in his pajamas, he ran out of his office to get to the junior officers’ quarters.

“Spock…” Dr. Puri gasped as he rushed out of his room. Without even stopping, he commed the med bay, asking for an emergency resuscitation kit to be brought directly to Lieutenant Spock’s room.

In less than 30 seconds, he was outside the Vulcan’s room and using his medical override to get in.

“CHAPEL, I need a unit of dopamine and an oxygen mask,” he barked at the nurse, all the while running a frantic tricorder scan over the prone man’s body.

“Come on, kid…” the doctor murmured desperately. Spock’s temperature was dangerously low. He was pale and utterly unresponsive.

At that very moment, the tricorder beeped loudly.

“CHAPEL…..” Puri roared.

“Yes, Doctor… right here,” Christine rushed forward and placed an oxygen mask on Spock’s face before emptying the dopamine into his neck.

“We need to shift him to the sick bay now,” Puri said to the waiting orderlies who quickly came forward and loaded the patient onto the anti-grav stretcher.

“Comm. the captain and appraise him of the situation,” he said to the nurse before leaving to attend to Spock.

He shook his head as he practically sprinted to the med bay. The Vulcan had been doing relatively well these last few days. But the last examination had shown him how good Spock was at hiding
things. The man had been in pain all this time but he had never said a word. He had gone about his work as if nothing was wrong. As a doctor, while he had been worried, he had also been glad that Spock was still functioning normally.

He had been so, so very wrong.

He only hoped that he’d be able to pull Spock out of this jam so that he would have the fighting chance that the Vulcan healer could give him.
The Worst of Times

Hey all, I am back with a new chapter. Now this is a where we delve deeper into what really went wrong right at the beginning of the mission to Fardour. Please let me know what you think. Does it all seem like too much? I really, really appreciate feedback. I am also trying to improve as a writer. So any feedback, reviews, and criticisms are welcome.

Captain Pike sat restlessly in the waiting area of the med bay. The science officer had been in triage for nearly two hours now. He had consciously avoided talking to him or meeting his eyes these last few days. Of course, professionalism had required him to interact with Spock every now and then. But he had done everything in his power to keep those interactions to a bare minimum. He had not really asked Spock about his health. He had not even bothered to see how the Vulcan had been doing. And Puri had assured him that he was stable and that after meeting with the Vulcan healer, he’d be able to recover completely in a short period of time.

The Enterprise was due to reach Siracusa in another one hour. Shuttlecraft Anubis had already reached. Healer Sobik had already notified them that he and surprisingly, Ambassador Sarek, would be waiting for beam up from the Vulcan embassy.

For Spock to have collapsed like this…

Pike felt responsible for everything that had happened so far. He should have never asked such a young Vulcan to accompany the crew to Fardour. He shouldn't have listened to Sarek, no matter how logical the man’s suggestion had seemed at that point.

But there was nothing to be gained from his guilty wonderings.

Just then, the door of the emergency room opened and very tired looking Puri came out. “He is okay…” the doctor said. “For now.”

“For now? What do you mean?” Pike asked, his posture tense and stiff.

“Well, his heart stopped,” Puri answered. “I pulled him out of two cardiac arrests on the table. His telepathy is all haywire and something is shutting down his body's systems. If I didn’t know better, I’d have said he’s dying of a broken heart.”

“What if he is?” Pike asked. “Or is it that barbaric interrogation those people subjected him to?”

“It is a combination of many things, Captain,” the CMO said as he walked to his office. Without bothering to remove his scrubs, he sank in his chair, utterly spent. “The interrogation was obviously where he sustained the most serious brain injuries. But the rest of the mission didn’t help matters.”

“Tell me about it…” the younger man murmured, closing his eyes and leaning back into his chair. “I feel guilty about it all. He was hurt under my command, Sanjeev.”

“Don’t beat yourself over it,” the doctor said. “But yes, I do believe his luck has run out. Between the deaths of T’Amun and the baby, and the brutality they committed against him when he went
down to rescue Tabitha and her team… let’s just say, anyone would have crumbled under all that stress. I am surprised he was able to do so much for the Orions on board even after all that.”

“I heard you told him to be a shrink to one of the boys?” Pike interjected.

“Not exactly a shrink but yes, I was at my wit’s ends by then and I thought maybe Spock would be able to find common ground with the kid,” Puri answered thoughtfully. “And to be completely honest, I was hoping that this would help him too. I bet you my savings account, my retirement fund, and my wife’s wedding ring, that he has more issues than just those from Fardour that need to be dealt with.”

“Yeah, but what made you think that talking to a traumatized kid would help him?” the captain asked, not quite sure he understood Puri’s logic at all.

“Well, as a leader you should know this… people are either reactive or proactive,” the doctor said. “And Spock is not reactive at all. For him to work through his shit, he would have to help someone deal with theirs. The Vulcan mind is very strange, at least to us, humans. If Spock could logically explain to Dolain that he has nothing to be guilty about, that he can forgive and let go, that he can be whole… as a Vulcan, he would see the logic in applying the same things to himself as well.”

“Knowing something is very different from actually being able to accept it,” Pike said dismissively. “All captains know that on perilous missions, security personnel are at the greatest risk. And yet, every time I lose even one security officer, I can’t sleep for weeks, months even. I remember each face and it still hurts.”

“But you are still whole,” the physician pointed out. “I never said that dealing with the trauma magically gets rid of the pain. No. It just brings you some acceptance. And closure. Two things that everyone needs in order to move on from a tragedy.”

“Ambassador Sarek is here too,” Pike said. “He wants to see Spock. But he told us to not tell him yet.”

“Is he here to cause trouble?” Puri asked, suddenly feeling very protective of Spock.

“Why would you say that?” the captain asked, puzzled by his CMO’s abrupt change in demeanor.

“He doesn’t really have a relationship with his father anymore,” the doctor answered. “But I can’t tell you more than that.”

“Okay, don’t. But just one question. Did he tell you that?” Pike asked.

“Nah… I just know,” Puri answered, trying to sidestep the intrusive query.

“I can tell when you’re hiding something,” the captain said, even more determined to find out now.

“Look, it is a matter of doctor-patient confidentiality,” the doctor said stubbornly.

“Not when it might hold important answers to why Fardour was such a blunder,” Pike said, equally obstinate in his demand.

“I know from his psych evals,” Puri finally answered. “And we have officially flushed Medical Ethics Regulation 12-D and my Hippocratic Oath down the toilet with this.”

“What do you mean? Is there something wrong with him psychologically?” the captain asked, ignoring Puri’s agitation.
“Don’t be dramatic, Chris,” Puri said. “You remember when Sarek told you not to say anything to Spock about his involvement in getting him to go for this mission? Well, you did say you found that really weird. And it is. I just know that father and son don’t talk much because I asked Spock about his family and peers. He literally told me nothing about his relationship with his father. And from what little I could glean, they haven’t spoken ever since Spock rejected the offer from the VSA.”

“That doesn’t say much,” Pike said. “I mean, Vulcans are kinda quiet. Maybe it’s their thing to not talk to their family all that much?”

“I would have agreed with you had Spock not told me anything about his mother,” Puri answered. “Sure, he didn’t exactly sing like a canary when I asked about his mother. But he told me enough to tell me that his relationship with her is as healthy as can be and that I should use it as a baseline for the rest of the profile.”

“Wow, Vulcans can be dysfunctional too,” Pike mused out aloud.

“Please don’t say anything to anyone,” Puri said but hastened to add “I know you won’t, but still” when Pike gave him a very dirty glare, offended that such a thought had even crossed the doctor’s mind.

“Send Healer Sobik to the med bay when he arrives on board,” he called out as Pike made his way out of his office. “I’d like to keep Spock here in case something goes wrong during the Vulcan healer’s treatment.”

“Duly noted,” the captain said bleakly, without turning around. He waited for a few seconds before leaving. But the doctor didn’t say anything else.

XXXXX

Sobik was a talented teacher, a gifted healer, and a very understanding Vulcan. However, he was not a diplomat. So when he and Sarek were beamed onto the Enterprise, to his great surprise, he was as intimidated by the older Vulcan’s clout as the men operating the transporter.

“Greetings, Ambassador,” the captain of the vessel said warmly to Sarek. “Greetings, Healer,” he said, turning to him.

“Greetings, Captain of the Enterprise,” Sobik found himself answering formally, even as the ambassador simply nodded and stepped off the platform.

“How is my son doing?” Sarek asked without preamble.

The captain sighed deeply before answering.

“Not good, sir,” he said. “The ship’s CMO, Lieutenant Commander Dr. Sanjeev Puri is doing everything he can to help him. But as you have already been told, he collapsed last night due to a sudden heart failure. Um… Puri thinks it is because of the telepathic injuries he sustained in the line of duty.”

“Healer Sobik can aid Spock’s healing,” Sarek said. “Please take us to him.”

“Ambassador,” Sobik interrupted. “It would be unwise for you to accompany me. I would prefer to examine him in solitude before letting him know that you have come to see him.”

“If that is your medical judgment, I would adhere to it,” the older man said, though clearly, he wanted to go and see his son, no matter if he wasn’t a doctor and couldn’t actually do much for him.
To Pike, this situation was getting stranger by the minute. According to Puri, Sarek had not spoken to Spock in months. But here he was, clearly worried about his son and on the Enterprise only because he wanted to see him. And as far as he knew, just going somewhere to see someone was highly illogical by Vulcan standards.

Obviously, Sarek loved his son. But maybe, Vulcan suppression had made it hard for him to express it. What a shame!

“Let me show you to the guest quarters, sir,” Pike said, extending his hand to take the ambassador’s bag.

“I can carry my own luggage, Captain,” Sarek said. “Please lead the way to the guest quarters. I thank you for your hospitality.”

“There is no need for thanks, sir… we are only doing our duty,” the captain answered. “Ensign Graves, please escort Healer Sobik to the med bay. Dr. Puri is expecting him.”

“Yes sir,” the young, blond woman said. “Please follow me, Mr. Sobik,” she said, turning to the healer. “And welcome to the Enterprise.”

XXXXX

“Thank God, you are here,” Puri exclaimed in relief as he offered to shake Sobik’s hand.

“I appreciate your greetings, Doctor, but Vulcans do not shake hands,” Sobik said, with a touch of amusement in his voice.

“Right, sorry, I forgot,” Puri murmured, clearly embarrassed. “I should have realized it.”

“No harm done,” the Vulcan said, hoping to put the doctor at ease. “Now, let us discuss Spock’s case. According to the communiqué received by Amanda, and from the request he sent to me, I was able to deduce certain facts about his condition. However, I would be obliged if you could give me more details.”

Puri nodded and offered a seat to Sobik.

“Well, let me begin at the beginning….,” He said and started from the moment of their rather eventful landing on Fardour.

XXXXX

“Fascinating,” Sobik said an hour later.

“You could say that depending on how you see it,” Puri said dejectedly. “Horrifying, Petrifying, Monstrous, Disastrous… those are the words I’d choose, but well, my sensibilities are human and yours are… well, Vulcan.”

“Is he stable at this moment?” the Vulcan asked, his voice calm as ever but worry clearly reflected in his dark eyes.

“He is, but I don’t know for how long,” Puri said. “I hope for all our sakes that you can help him.”

“I can only make an attempt,” the healer said.

Dr. Puri then led Sobik out of his office and to Spock’s bio bed.
“This is it, I guess,” he said. “He’s all yours.”

Sobik nodded and sat down beside the unconscious Vulcan.

Slowly, he extended his hand towards the younger man’s face. His fingers found the meld points and with a tiny, inaudible sigh, he closed his eyes and focused his awareness towards Spock.

At first, everything seemed normal. Spock’s mind was organized like a Vulcan adult’s should be. His mindscape was serene and soothing.

But there were shadows. And jagged, unnatural formations where none should have been.

“Are you hiding something from me, young Spock?” Sobik asked softly.

There was no response. Instinctively, he knew that the serenity was little more than a smoke screen. It was Spock’s temporary shield against his own emotions.

It took some doing, but the healer was able to delve further into his patient’s mind. And what he found wasn’t comforting. He had never melded with Spock when he was a child.

And while he was reasonably sure that Spock’s mind would not have been like this even in his very difficult childhood, it was unnerving to see a possible distortion of what it might have been. The room he found himself in, looked like a child’s playroom. It didn’t even look like a Vulcan child’s playroom. It looked too human, too steeped in unhealthy emotion.

However, that was not the most disturbing thing.

The thing that left him utterly shaken was that the playroom was the mocking representation of a Katric Ark, only as imagined by a child. The toys littered about were not regular toys. In another place, they would have had no significance. But here, in the safest, farthest, most private space of Spock’s mind, every object had a meaning. There was a stuffed sehlat with a rip in his side and the off-white stuffing spilling out. Then, a dusky Vulcanoid doll with ridges on her forehead and long, dark braids sewn into her plastic scalp. She was a doll, so it was difficult to say if what Sobik was seeing was real. But even her glassy eyes seemed dead. Not inanimate, but dead. Next to her, a tiny lump of dry clay sat. It had no real form but it could have been a doll or an animal of some sort. However, its maker had abandoned it in its early stages.

There was something impossibly sad about these toys and the strange morbidity that seemed to emanate from them. The rest of the room felt more like a cross between a forsaken art workshop and a hastily discarded shrine. There was a half-finished painting of a pair of Churulias, tiny Vulcan finches that mated for life. There was a dusty meditation mat in the corner. The melted blue votive in front of it told the healer that someone had gotten up in the middle of their meditation and never returned. A few feet away, a broken lyre was kept. Sobik picked it up and plucked a few strings. Unsurprisingly, the instrument hadn’t been tuned in a long time. Even the neutral C major chord sounded more like its hauntingly dissonant melodic minor.

“Are you looking for something, Healer?” Spock’s deep baritone spoke from behind him.

“Greetings, young Spock,” Sobik said, taking in his young friend’s form. Telepathic images were not real. They were representations meant to facilitate mental communication through the re-creation of sensory memory. However, this image of Spock felt wrong. He looked more like an apparition than a true telepathic image.

“Are you well?” he asked.
“I am,” the younger Vulcan answered. “To what do I owe this pleasure?”

“You require my assistance in order to heal,” Sobik said. “I am here.”

“Your kindness is appreciated,” Spock said, an odd detachment coloring his voice. “But I am healed. You must return to yourself.”

“I will, but first, you need to will your body to start functioning at optimum levels again,” the healer said. “Your body is injured. It must undergo a healing trance. And if you are unable to facilitate it, I will aid you. That is why I am here.”

Spock smiled. And while it was a strange sight to see the young Vulcan smile to openly, this one was bone-chilling because the smile did not reach his eyes.

“You are correct, however, this body is but a shell,” he said. “And I have no need for it. Please, healer, you must leave so that I can leave as well.”

Sobik’s eyes widened at what he was hearing.

“No, Spock, son of Sarek, what you are proposing is a grave crime,” he said.

“I am liberating myself, healer,” Spock answered calmly. “It is not a crime to leave behind that which serves no purpose.”

Sobik didn’t say anything. There was something very wrong with this whole situation. He had known Spock for years. This was something very odd and he was decidedly uncomfortable at being unable to understand it.

And then, in a brilliant flash of clarity, it came to him.

“You are a phantom,” Sobik said, scared and angered and worried. But his voice didn’t betray anything.

“Incorrect,” the apparition said. “I am his guard. He must leave. I am only here so that he may do so uninterrupted by the sickness of his decaying shell.”

“He is not decaying yet. One must die in order to decay. And he lives. But who calls to him on the other side?” Sobik asked, unsure if his assumption was correct. He knew that certain katras called to other katras. He did not know enough about Farhannsu mysticism to know who or what had done this to Spock. But he was willing to make an educated guess. “Is it her?” he asked, terrified of the answer.

“Negative,” the apparition said. “It is the child.”


“Its mother has passed on to where all must return in order to be again,” the guard answered. “But the child is lost. And the father must guide the child back to the origin of all existence.

“No… that cannot be,” the healer said. But from the corner of his eyes, he saw a small, hunched figure walk into the room. Its face was obscured by the damp smog that hung heavy in the tiny space. But the tips of his ears left little doubt about his identity.

“Spock,” Sobik called to the child.

There was no response.
The child sat down next to the Vulcanoid doll and the lump of clay. For a long moment, he simply sat there. Sobik took a step towards him, but the guard took a step between them.

“You will not engage with him,” he said. The healer nodded.

To his absolute dismay, the child Spock picked up the misshapen lump of hardened clay and held it close to himself. His hands looked mangled again. There were deep welts and wounds on them. And one of his fingers was missing.

“He is injured,” Sobik said to the guard. “Allow me to aid him.”

“You cannot,” the apparition said. “And that is why he must leave this shell. You will let him pass. If you do not withdraw now, you will be unable to return to your own form. This dying shell cannot house you after he leaves.”

“I cannot withdraw without him,” the healer said, knowing fully well that he was risking his own life as well by doing this. “It is not his time yet.”

“You do not know that,” the guard said. “However, if you do not wish to listen, the truth will make itself known to you. I apologize for the inevitable.”

Can I get you something to drink, Ambassador?” Captain Pike asked Sarek. He had invited the Vulcan to the conference room for a discussion about the mission to Fardour.

“I would appreciate a cup of green tea,” Sarek said. Vulcans normally always refused the hospitality offered to them by Terran officials. But he was tired. And a slight migraine was starting to build up in his head. He could tell that Spock had worsened. And he was worried that even Sobik would be unable to help him.

“Sir, I wished to ask you a few things about our last mission,” Pike said.

“Go ahead, Captain,” the older man answered, taking a sip of the slightly bitter tea.

“Why did you suggest us to take Spock in your place?” the captain asked. “Does no one on Vulcan know the actual history of your people and the Farhannsu?”

Sarek took a few moments to compose his response.

“I advised you to take him on the suggestion of Elders Sorab and Talek. Lady T’Pau had refused to allow myself or any Vulcan official to go to Fardour. We were the same people before the reformation. However, they have not been seen or heard from in nearly two millennia. Elders Sorab and Talek disagreed with the Lady T’Pau. And they used one of Spock’s own technicalities to suggest his name?”

“What technicality?” Pike asked.

“As he is half-human, it can be argued, that legally, the Lady T’Pau’s injunction does not apply to him,” Sarek answered. “Her words were ‘No Vulcan must set foot on that planet. We do not know them. We must not speak of them. And we must not engage with them. The Federation and its peacekeepers must accept or reject their hails on their own discretion.’ She did not say ‘No Vulcan citizens.’ That was the technicality the two elders utilized.”

“And what was all that about needing a Vulcan because of telepathy?” the captain asked, intrigued
by this information.

“Your request to us mentioned that in their hails to your ship, the high priest of the planet had spoken of a malfunction of their planet’s telepathic shields,” the ambassador said. “As a human, this would be difficult for you to comprehend. However, if a planet is employing telepathic shields, then its inhabitants are a paranoid people who are also extremely powerful telepaths. For such large-scale outwardly projected telepathic shields to malfunction, the catastrophe must be enormous.”

“And yet, you were willing to send Spock into its midst?” Pike asked, wondering just what kind of a man Sarek was. Who sent their kid willingly into a landmine!

“The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few, Captain,” Sarek answered. “I did not wish to send Spock for this mission. However, Elders Sorab and Talek were correct in their logic that a telepath would be required on the planet to assess the damage. Correct me if I am wrong but I have been told that my son’s presence was indeed invaluable.”

Pike swallowed roughly before answering. “It was, sir,” he said. “But as you can see, the cost was too great.”

Just then, his comm. unit beeped.

“Pike here,” he answered. Sarek couldn’t hear what was being said at the other end if Pike’s expression was any indication, the news wasn’t good. “I will be there right now,” he said.

“I apologize, Ambassador,” he said. “But it seems like this whole mess just blew up in our faces.”

“I apologize, I do know understand that expression,” Sarek said, not liking the sinking feeling in his stomach.

“Fardour is in the Palician system,” the captain said grimly. “At the edge of the secondary space outside the Romulan Neutral Zone. What do you think just happened?”

Sarek’s face lost all color as he heard this. He didn’t say anything, but he had been a diplomat for far too long to not know what this meant.

“Exactly,” Pike said and rushed out of the conference room to take the emergency call from Admiral Marcus on the bridge.
So I have been re-reading chapters of Finding Spock to fix inadvertent continuity errors and grammatical mistakes. Of course, I am also re-examining the characters and what they do and how they interact with each other. Now, since I haven’t yet reached the part of Spock’s epic friendship with Jim Kirk, I can’t say I want a drawing of him with Jim.

But I really wish someone would draw me Spock and Ishok (like when Ishok looks after him) or Spock and Hamid (chilling, stargazing, hummus eating, h/c… your choice) or Spock and T’Amun. I know how to draw and stuff but I am more of an expressionist artist and I am unable to draw full scenes without completely going abstract. So if anyone wants to share some love with me, draw me this, pretty please :)

Next, thank you so much for all the wonderful reviews you leave me. I am always so humbled to read what you have to say. I love you all and I am glad, GLAD that you have chosen to read this story and to stay with it even though it is so long (and nowhere close to done yet.)

I also just got a tattoo in Vulcan language. It says 'Hakau' which is Vulcan for the word 'heal.' You can see it on my Tumblr--https://carminavulcana.tumblr.com/post/163429542542/hakau-heal

As always, I welcome your feedback and would love to know what you're thinking.

“Please eat something,” Zuhair said to his nephew. A part of him knew it was futile to try and help the boy but he loved him. There was no way he could actually give up on him even if that was exactly what he had told the Vulcan to do. However, even his strength and patience was starting to wane. Dolain had still not spoken a word to him. And he had not made an appearance in the common dining area. In addition to that, Suraina had been ill for the last few hours. No one had confirmed it yet, but apparently, she had sensed a powerful wave of impending death from somewhere on the ship. Considering her already delicate condition, the added strain had made her ill. No one other than Amahl, her only surviving handmaiden, had been allowed to see her yet.

“The Marisi is not well,” Zuhair tried again. “She will be unhappy to know that you refused your meals.”

The child remained silent.

His uncle sighed.

“I’m leaving the tray here,” he said, placing the food on the floor. “Please eat it... I won’t pretend that I understand what’s wrong with you but we have escaped. The nightmare is over. It is best to get on with our lives to the best of our abilities. And I... I know the Vulcan officer is trying to help you. I think you should take his help. They know tricks to heal the mind. Maybe he can help you get better.”

When Dolain didn't respond to this also, Zuhair got up. His shoulders were slumped in defeat.
Shaking his head at his uncommunicative nephew, he left the room.

However, he didn't know it, but despite his silence, Dolain had been observing, analyzing, and thinking about a lot of things these days. He was hurt. He was... not okay. But he wanted to get better. He just didn't know how. Maybe Zuhair was right. Maybe, the Vulcan could actually help him. Maybe the Vulcan was not like the other men.

The child watched his uncle leave. His eyes followed him for a few moments before coming to rest on the bowl containing the still hot stew and the soft, fresh bread kept beside it. Cautiously, he broke off a small piece of the bread and dipped it in the stew. The warmth of the food tasted like heaven on his tongue. He had been eating food from the ship’s replicator’s for the past few days now. But for some reason, he hadn’t really appreciated its richness and its goodness until this moment.

Like a hungry, little cat, he finished the entire meal in a matter of minutes, licking the bowl clean. With an energy he hadn’t experienced since his capture, he deposited his empty dishes into the common recycling chute of the guest quarters.

After that, he quickly rushed back inside and reached for the contact details that the Vulcan science officer had left for him.

"S..po..oh..k... Spouhk..." Dolain mouthed to himself, feeling the strange name on his tongue.

Without wasting another moment, he went out again to try and comm. the man.

There was no response at the first try. But he wasn’t disappointed. He wasn’t one to give up easily. He commed Spock again, but halfway through the unanswered call, he cut the connection. He knew he could contact someone else on the ship to get his message to the Vulcan. But he was suddenly not sure anymore. What did he want from the Vulcan anyway?

Slowly, the energy that had flooded his body in the last few minutes, left him. Without meaning to, he shuddered as the memory of gnarled fingers fondling him came back to him with heartbreaking clarity.

“Such a sweet, sugary thing…” The memory of drunken declarations of love, peppered with hard, unforgiving thrusts made his gorge rise.

He could not go to the Vulcan. He would never understand.

With his old hopelessness returning full force, he rushed back inside and sat down in a corner of his cubicle, wondering if the Vulcan would come back. I had been almost a day since he had last come. But he had promised.

But promises didn’t really mean anything, did they? The large man who had beaten him with his shoes had promised that if he opened his mouth obediently, he wouldn’t be beaten more. But he had been. The older man who had promised him bread in return for staying still while he… while he… well, he had not given him any bread. A snide little voice reminded him that after enduring that, he anyway wouldn’t have eaten the bread for fear of being unable to keep it down.

Lies were common. They were vulgar, shameful, mocking… but they were common. And even if they did say that Vulcans never lied, he had no way of knowing that.

He folded his knees close to his chest once again as images, voices, and emotions assailed him.

But something in the back of his mind wouldn’t let him forget about the odd, pointy-eared man. His
calm expression, the way he was willing to wait outside... it was so different from the angry impatience that everyone else had shown him throughout his months of captivity.

Restlessly, he stood up again. He needed to comm. him. He needed to see the Vulcan. He couldn’t explain it, but he needed to. He went out again, determined to stay on the line till it was answered.

“‘They have been like that for more than two hours,’” Dr. Puri said dejectedly to Sarek when he came to visit his son in the med bay. “‘Sobik’s vitals are starting to fluctuate and Spock’s were already on the lower side to begin with.’”

The ambassador looked at the impassive, closed-off visage of the healer. The captain had asked him to go down to the med bay and wait.

“He is unable to help my child,” he said. “Healer Sobik is unable to reach to reach Spock.”

“What does that mean?” Puri asked, panicking at the older Vulcan’s crestfallen expression.

“Something is wrong,” Sarek answered. “Spock does not wish to come back. My bond with him has been shielded for some time now. Under normal circumstances, I would choose to not experience my son’s thoughts and emotions. However, I have kept my link with him open and unshielded for the last many hours and despite Healer Sobik’s meld with him, the channel has remained silent. It does not bode well.”

“You can’t know these things for sure,” Puri huffed as he ushered the ambassador out. “He will recover. There is no reason why he shouldn’t.”

But Sarek did not respond. He allowed himself to be led out. Memories from years ago came back to him. He couldn’t help but think about how he and Amanda had sat outside the procedure room in the medical center of the Vulcan embassy on Artois. He remembered the long hours of surgery, therapy, and melds that Spock had needed after his Kahs’wan. It was unbelievable that after everything his son had been through, life was still testing him.

While he was still lost in thought, Spock’s comm. unit beeped. The doctor ignored it. A few minutes later, it beeped again.

“Nurse Amber, please switch off the lieutenant’s comm. unit,” Puri yelled. “Or at least put it on silent mode.”

“It might be an important message, Doctor,” Sarek said to the physician.

“I doubt it,” Puri said, rummaging in the file cabinet for a fresh pair of gloves. “I think I will have to operate upon him. He won’t survive the trip back to Earth if we don’t intervene now. Is there a way to draw Healer Sobik out of the meld?”

Sarek opened his mouth to respond but the nurse’s voice spoke first.

“Sir, the communication signal on Mister Spock’s unit is coming from Guest Quarters 3.”

“What?” Puri turned around. “Isn’t that the men’s dorm for the Orion refugees?”

“It is, sir,” Amber confirmed. Just at that moment, the comm. unit beeped again.

“I’ll answer that,” the CMO said and crossed the room to where the nurse was standing. “Hello?” he
spoke softly into the microphone.

At first, there was no response.

“Hello?” the doctor spoke again.

“Mister Spock?” A high, childlike whisper came from the other end.

Puri’s eyes widened as he quickly put two and two together.

“Dolain? Are you Dolain?” he asked.

"Are you Mister Spock?" the child asked again.

"I am not," Puri said. "But you can tell me why you commed Mister Spock."

“Mister Spock said I could call him if I needed something,” the child murmured. “I am sorry.”

Before the CMO could say anything more, Dolain cut the call.

“I need to go down,” Puri said to no one in particular.

“Who is asking to see my son?” Sarek asked. He had witnessed the entire exchange and he was worried because the expression on the human’s face was completely unreadable.

“This kid among the Orion refugees,” Puri answered. “Like all the others, he is suffering from a severe case of PTSD. I was hoping Spock would be able to help him.”

“Why would you assume that?” Sarek asked.

“Because he has dealt with trauma as a child,” the physician said without thinking.

“How do you know this?” the older Vulcan asked, surprised that the doctor had been made aware of Spock’s history.

“I am a doctor,” Puri said. “I am supposed to know these things about my patients.”

“What will you do with the child?” Sarek asked. “Spock is indisposed and in no condition to aid him.”

“Tell you what, maybe you can come along and help,” Puri said and rushed out of the med bay.

Ambassador Sarek followed him without question.

XXXXX

Captain Pike was considered a handsome man. And his cool, collected demeanor was a part of his charm. However, at this point, he looked like a stunned blowfish.

“No, sir, I don’t understand,” he said to Admiral Marcus. “The intelligence failure was on all fronts. Fardour was a mess for more reasons than one.”

“And Spock was at the center of it,” Marcus cut him off. “I know there was something to do with a woman. And that offended the natives.”

Pike’s mouth fell open.

“Who told you that?” he asked.
“Never mind that,” the admiral answered. “But I can guarantee you that many more will know about it by the end of the day. Independent research organizations, investigative reporters—they are all aware of the recent aggressive activity by the Romulan Star Empire in the Palician system. It is only a matter of time before they figure out the whole truth. They already know that the Enterprise was stationed in a planet’s orbit in that system for almost a month.”

“But they don’t know about the Farhannsu people yet,” Pike said.

“They will know soon,” Marcus answered. “There is a mole on your ship. And I don’t think you know who it is. But it doesn’t matter anymore. Fardour has fallen to the Romulans. It won’t be long before they expose these people to the galaxy.”

“Fuck…” Pike gasped, unable to believe his ears. “Can’t we do something?”

Marcus didn’t answer immediately.

“There are two things,” the admiral began slowly. “We are still deliberating if it is worth going to Fardour to deal with the Romulans. But we don’t have intel to take that decision….”

“No, sir,” Pike said, cutting off the admiral mid-sentence. “The Farhannsu people have made it very clear that they do not wish to be a part of the federation. They will not welcome Starfleet meddling in their affairs.

“Chris, I read your report,” Marcus said. “And I read Spock’s report too. I know the Farhannsu people don’t want us but this is not about them anymore. If the Romulans have dared to strike so soon after your ship’s departure from Farhannsu space, then they are getting bolder and we can’t just ignore that.”

“What was the other thing?” Pike asked.

“The Vulcan lieutenant,” Marcus answered.

“Er… what about him?” the captain asked.

“He screwed up,” the older man responded. “If not for him, the mission would have gone smoothly.”

Pike opened his mouth and closed it.

“This is not fair, sir,” he sputtered. “Spock was roped in for this mission because he is Vulcan. The suggestion came from Ambassador Sarek, who was the only other person we could have requested. The Vulcans are the only telepaths who work closely with the federation. And the crisis on Fardour…”

“Was an ecological one,” Marcus interrupted Pike. “Look, son, I am aware of the facts. But this is what you will say. The minute this whole mess gets out, there will be an inquiry. Even if this whole thing was an honest mistake and not a true intelligence failure, we will not be able to explain it that way. We need a less disastrous explanation in order to save the rest of the federation and the people’s faith in it. We need to project strength. We can’t show them any weakness, real or otherwise.”

“You need a fall guy,” Pike gasped, aghast at his mentor, senior, and friend.

“No… Chris, you’re not getting it… I mean, it isn’t like that…” Marcus fumbled for words.

“Please be honest with me,” Pike begged. He had had his moments of doubt about Spock. But the Vulcan had displayed a remarkable ability to heal. Pike was unwilling to pin the blame on his newest
"Okay, Pike, I will give you honesty," Marcus said in a steely voice. "We do need a fall guy, as you said. And it is to be your Vulcan officer."

“This is wrong, Admiral,” he said quietly. “And I cannot support you in this.”

“This is not your decision to make,” the older man said. “In fact, it is not just mine either. Admiral Giovani and Commodore Stiles also understand our situation. They agree that this is the best way. And as much as I hate to say this, Spock isn’t really innocent.”

“The only reason we got out of there is because Spock risked everything to save me and numerous other crew members,” Pike yelled, totally horrified by what he was hearing.

“We appreciate his bravery, but we can’t have officers wearing their hearts on their sleeves,” Marcus said in a tone that signaled finality.

“With all due respect,” Pike began icily. “The only thing we did wrong was to take him for the mission. And that was a mistake the high command made, his father made, I… I made.”

“But he is the only one who can take the blame and get away with simple but visible punishment which would satisfy everyone,” Marcus said ruthlessly. “And this was never supposed to be a discussion. I called to merely tell you.”

“Really now, sir,” Pike said, hurt at how easily his old teacher had switched to his superior officer mode, despite knowing that he was wrong.

“Yes, Captain Pike,” the admiral said impassively. “This is how it is. We shall discuss what to do with Lt. Spock once you are back on Earth.”

Pike did not respond. He switched the transmission off. His stomach hurt thinking about what was going to happen to Spock. But at this point, he was powerless. And to add to it all, he had not yet informed the high command that Spock was injured. Maybe they would be able to avert punishment by grounding Spock for medical reasons. Maybe that would be considered appropriate punishment for his supposed role in jeopardizing the mission.

XXXXX

“You are not him,” Dolain whispered when he saw the doctor and the unfamiliar, older Vulcan standing outside his cubicle.

“We are not, but he has sent us,” Dr. Puri said to the frightened child who was desperately trying to fit himself into a corner.

“I… don’t believe you,” the child said, still trying to shrink into himself. “Don’t hurt me. It is okay if he cannot come. I am fine here. I don’t need anything.”

“Hey, hey, kid…” Puri said gently, stepping back. “Relax. We aren’t here to hurt you. Spock is unwell. So he couldn’t come. But this gentleman behind me, his name is Sarek. He is Spock’s father.”

“Spock is unwell?” Dolain asked.

“He is,” Sarek answered this time. “And that is why I have come. Perhaps, you wish to visit Spock in the ship’s infirmiry?”
“No… I don’t know him,” Dolain murmured.

“And yet, you commed him,” Sarek challenged.

“I was just checking if he actually gave me his personal comm. ID,” the child said.

“As you can say, he did not lie to you, which is why we are here,” Puri interjected.

“Can I really see him?” the child asked.

“I believe you can,” Sarek said, “But he is still receiving therapy from a healer. You may see him but you may not disturb him.”

“I will not,” Dolain said. “He should not be unwell. He is a good person.”

“How do you know that?” Puri asked, with a tiny smile on his face.

“I don’t know,” the boy answered. A moment later, his head jerked up as if he’d just seen a ghost. “Please don’t bring me back here,” he said in a voice hoarse with pain. "I just don’t want to be alone in this room anymore. I am… scared… so scared.”

“Please do not be afraid,” Sarek said awkwardly, wondering if he was still capable of comforting a nervous, terrified child.

“Don’t let them take me back,” Dolain whispered almost inaudibly. But the ambassador heard it anyway. Instinctively, he placed a soft hand on the boy’s shoulder. And even though his touch was light, the gesture conveyed his concern and care to the traumatized child who had finally chosen to take a step towards recovery.
Hey, everyone. This is the next installment of Spock's story. I hope you are liking where it is going so far. Let me know what you think. I love hearing from you. Your feedback means everything to me.

Sarek and Dolain sat outside the med bay for an hour, waiting and hoping. The Orion boy had taken one look at Spock’s still form before bursting into tears.

“Everyone leaves,” He had sobbed. “Everyone always promises they will stay but then they leave.”

Distressed by the child’s grief, Sarek had let go of his stiff control. He had held the boy’s hand in an attempt to send him comforting and reassuring thoughts. It had helped for a while.

But now, Dolain was looking agitated again.

“Can’t you…” he whispered. “Can’t you hold his hand and help him too?” he asked through another choked sob. “He will leave otherwise.”

The older Vulcan closed his eyes and wondered once again about how quickly this alien child had formed such strong affection for Spock.

“You care very much about Spock,” Sarek said but Dolain interpreted that as a question.

“He just sat there for hours,” the Orion boy answered, a wistful longing in his voice. “Didn’t ask me to come out or to let him in. He just waited. As if it was important to him that I give permission… It was so strange. But I felt good. He asked me… he…he asked…” Dolain’s voiced cracked.

Sarek understood the child’s awe at being treated like a free being after everything he had been forced to endure. He opened his mouth to say something. But Dolain had something more to say.

“And he is nicer than uncle Zuhair and the others,” he said. “They don’t ask me anything useful. They don’t tell me anything worth knowing. And when I did talk to them when we were still in that place, they told me that they were sick and hurt. I was not special just because I was hurt too. That hurt…”

Fat tears were rolling down Dolain’s cheeks by this point.

“They think I will never be me again,” he said roughly. “But Mister Spock told my uncle that he doesn’t believe that. Mister Spock said it is my decision. Zuhair is no one to say anything.”

Sarek heard the child’s tormented outpour in total, respectful silence. Dolain told Sarek everything that had happened to him. The rapes, the beatings, the humiliation of it all, the unbearable pain that was visited upon him day after day, the cold nights that seemed to never end, the silence of the people who had always told him they’d keep him safe, the dull thud of his mother’s body hitting the dirty, stone floor after she’d been shot by the guards for hiding him behind herself.

“Will I ever forget?” Dolain asked finally, his voice hoarse with emotion and eyes soaked with tears.
Sarek debated with himself if it was wise to share with him, the story of Spock’s own brush with slavery as a child. As a parent, he wanted to forget that something so horrible had happened to his son. But at the same time, he wondered if the Orion boy would find comfort in knowing that just like Spock, he could also rise above his demons.

“Dolain,” he said gently. “Did Spock tell you about his own childhood?”

“No,” the child answered.

“It is his story to tell you,” the ambassador said. “But as his father, I can tell you this. My son was also abducted and taken into slavery at the age of ten.”

Dolain’s eyes widened.

But Sarek continued speaking.

“We rescued him soon enough but not before he had been tortured by the people who had abducted him. What happened to him, almost killed him. But he has gotten better as you have seen.”

“Is he completely alright now?” Dolain asked innocently.

Sarek wasn’t sure he knew the answer to that question. For one, what was ‘completely alright’? And then, even though Spock had recovered after Zarmal, life had not really been kind to him even after that.

“He is an officer in Starfleet,” Sarek answered, sidestepping the question. “Do you believe he would have been accepted had he not been alright?”

The rhetoric question was enough to satisfy Dolain. But it left Sarek even more troubled than before.

XXXXX

“I will not leave without you, Spock,” Sobik whispered. His own strength was faltering. But he had managed to get closer to the huddled, childlike figure holding the misshapen lump of clay.

The phantom guard watched silently, giving nothing away.

Sobik received an answer from neither the child nor the phantom.

However, he could feel the weakening of Spock’s body. It was now or never. If Spock refused to enter the healing trance, he would die in a matter of hours.

The healer had wanted to avoid taking drastic measures. But now, he had no options left.

With a daring that only lived in the recessive warrior genes of the Vulcan people, he placed his left hand on the meld points of the immobile, uncommunicative child’s face.

A moment later, he was plunged into an ocean of icy, burning pain.

XXXXX

A frantic beeping filled the med bay. Unsurprisingly, the alarm was coming from Spock’s bio bed.

Dr. Puri ran to the source of the commotion. He had been making preparations to move Spock for immediate surgery but clearly, something had just happened.
To his utter shock, Spock’s vitals were climbing rapidly.

The doctor ran a quick scan over the healer’s still form, only to note that Sobik’s heart rate was through the roof as well.

But before he could do anything, the sharp beeping of the monitors stopped. And slowly, gradually, the readings started to stabilize.

A few minutes later, Sobik’s hand fell off Spock’s face and he lurched to the side. But Puri caught him just in time.

“Hey, hey, are you okay?” he asked worriedly.

“I am exhausted but I am unharmed,” Sobik said calmly although his tiredness was apparent in his voice. “Spock is in a healing trance now. He will not awaken before tomorrow evening. However, the most serious of his injuries will be healed by then.”

The doctor breathed a sigh of relief.

“Thank you so much,” he said earnestly. “No you must get some rest as well,” he added as he helped Sobik into an anti-grav wheelchair.

“I am quite capable of walking under my own power,” the Vulcan said.

But Puri was having none of it.

“No sir,” he said. “Not in my med bay.”

Sobik wanted to argue back. But oh, he was rather tired.

“Will you please inform Ambassador Sarek that his son is out of danger?” he asked. “I also wish to place a call to Lady Amanda.”

Puri got Sobik settled into a bio bed before ordering him a bowl of simple, vegetable broth from the replicator.

“Here, please have some soup while I call the ambassador inside,” he said as he placed the bowl in front of the healer.

Then, he went out to get Sarek.

In the waiting area, an astonishing sight greeted him.

Ambassador Sarek was sitting with his back against the wall. And next him, Dolain was curled up, fast asleep. His head was resting in the Vulcan’s lap. And while the picture of the stern ambassador and his young, adorable companion was too cute, Puri had to disturb it.

“Ambassador Sir, Spock has successfully entered a healing trance,” he said, beaming at the older man. “Healer Sobik is obviously exhausted after all this time. But he asked me to let you know. You can come in now.”

“I must inform Amanda first,” Sarek said, closing his eyes to communicate with his wife through their bond. Her anxiety had been a constant, palpable presence in his mind for hours. He was relieved to be able to ease her worry at last.

And then, with great care, he picked up the sleeping Orion child in his arms and followed the doctor
inside.

Chris Pike was troubled. He had just received a message from the med bay, informing him of Spock’s success in achieving a healing trance. Needless to say, he was relieved. But this also meant that the Vulcan would make a full recovery and therefore, have no basis for being grounded for medical reasons.

Pike hated himself for even having that thought.

But what choice did he have?

Besides, he was relatively sure that his CMO would be least helpful in figuring out a solution to this whole mess.

However, for the most part, everything else was okay. Two levels below, federation officials were questioning the Orion refugees and he had to admit that G’Ahaila had been phenomenal so far. Soon, all the refugees would be transferred to another ship and taken to Earth. It had been the job of the Enterprise. But in the light of recent developments, another ship would have to take on this task.

For now, it had also been decided that there would be no altercation with the Romulans over the issue of Fardour. But the Enterprise would be sent back with a diplomatic emissary who would remind them that they were violating the minor clause 15-C of the Neutral Zone treaty. According to that particular clause, the Romulans were committing an intergalactic crime by annexing and colonizing non-federation planets outside the Romulan Star Empire. This was not something completely new or unheard of. But usually, if the federation had had any sort of contact with such a planet, the Romulans were required to stay away from it.

By taking over Fardour so soon after the departure of the Enterprise, Romulus had not only broken the law but also committed an act of subtle aggression.

Pike was rightly worried that the Enterprise was perhaps not the best candidate for being the emissary ship. But the top brass also had a valid point in not wanting to send other ships into such unfamiliar, potentially hostile territory.

He thought long and hard about his next course of action. In another 24 hours, the Enterprise would leave Siracusa. And then, they had to head back into the Palian system. The only problem was that Commander Owens and the rest of the science crew who had been abducted would have to remain behind on the star base for an extended recovery period before taking a shuttle back to Earth. Professor Kohen had already been escorted to the nearest chartered shuttle service. By now, she was probably on her way to her research institute. Also, the Vulcans would have to leave soon but Puri had already rejected Pike’s request to send Spock with them.

Where had this left him? No first officer. No telepath. No science department. No anthropologist. No one truly familiar with telepathic Vulcanoid races except for Spock. Pike wondered for a brief moment if he could ask him for one last favor. But his good sense told him that it would unwise. The Farhannsu hated him. Even Ambassador Sarek would be unwelcome on Fardour.

But then what was to be done? The only people who were able to successfully conduct any sort of diplomatic business with Romulus were Vulcan diplomats. Human diplomats had occasionally managed to broker agreements with the empire. But they had never had the success of the Vulcans.

But at the same time, after everything that had happened, Spock didn’t have a snowball’s chance in
hell to succeed in any sort of mission to Fardour, even a diplomatic one which had more to do with the Romulans than the Farhannsu. Besides, the Farhannsu people were probably not having a ball with their new masters. If anything, Romulans were infamous for their cruel, xenophobic behavior towards colonized peoples. In all likelihood, the Farhannsu were back to being slaves, as sad as that was.

In a few hours, Ambassador Jean St. Laurent would come aboard the Enterprise. He was a 50-year-old Frenchman with a ton of experience in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. But he had only ever worked in peacetime and post-conflict missions. Pre-conflict missions were the specialty of only certain diplomats. And at this point, none of them were available at such short notice, particularly because by protocol, there needed to be an interplanetary political or civil emergency for them to drop everything and report to the federation headquarters.

Since the Romulans had committed aggression only by a mere technicality yet, it was not feasible to declare an emergency. An action like that could potentially lead to war, which was to be avoided at all costs if possible.

Pike hated politics with a passion. And this was the reason why. As a man of duty, someone who believed Starfleet to be an armada of men and women committed to altruistic causes like peacekeeping, it bothered him that diplomacy was often a double-edged sword that did more harm than good.

He was not comfortable going back to Fardour with St. Laurent as their only hope of making it back in one piece. But he could not ask Spock or his father or any other Vulcan diplomat to come with them.

Sarek was in a light meditative state when Spock started showing signs of agitation.

“Son?” Sarek asked as soon as he noticed the twitching of a muscle in his son’s jaw.

Without hesitating, Sarek slapped him across the face.

In an instant, Spock’s eyes flew open.

“Thank you, father,” he said in his usual calm voice but a flicker of surprise was visible in his eyes.

“When did you arrive?” he asked.

“It has been two days,” Sarek answered formally. “I accompanied Healer Sobik on his journey to the star base.”

“Was there a particular reason for your journey?” the younger man asked stiffly.

“There was,” the ambassador answered. “I had to attend to certain affairs at the Vulcan embassy on Siracusa. It was most opportune that the dates of my official trip coincided with the dates of your ship’s shore leave.”

“Is the Enterprise’s hospitality satisfactory to you?” Spock asked, just to make polite conversation. Normally, he was perfectly comfortable with silences that would seem awkward to others. But when it came to his father, he was always ill at ease. Silences between father and son were often deafening.

“The Enterprise has been a generous host,” Sarek answered. “Not only to us but also the Orion refugees who are being transferred to the USS Endeavor even as we speak.”
“Why is that?” Spock asked, thoroughly confused.

“That is a matter that only the captain can speak about,” Sarek said. “I also had the honor of meeting Dolain. He wanted to greet you before leaving for the other ship. However, you were still in a trance. Dr. Puri has promised the child that you will see him once you are back on Earth.”

“I will visit him,” Spock said more to himself than to his father.

“You have been unwell, my son,” Sarek blurted out abruptly, his voice still perfectly controlled. But he couldn’t completely hide his worry and relief. “I had hoped to meet you in better health.”

“I am healed, father,” Spock answered. “I trust your business at the embassy was successful.”

“It was successful,” Sarek answered.

For several minutes, father and son said nothing to each other.

“I must leave now,” Sarek broke the silence. “Healer Sobik is in Dr. Puri’s office. Perhaps, you wish to see him before we leave.”

“Certainly,” Spock said and started to get out of bed. But his father’s firm hand pushed him back into the pillows.

“It is not advisable to engage in even simple exertion immediately after a healing trance,” Sarek said, masking his concern perfectly with the veneer of logic. “I shall go and request Sobik to come here.”

A few minutes later, Sarek returned with the healer and the CMO.

“Do you feel well, young Spock?” Sobik asked without preamble.

“I do,” Spock answered. “I thank you for aiding me.”

“Take care of your wellbeing,” the healer said gently. “It is only logical.”

“I will,” Spock said.

“Live long and prosper,” Sarek said in the way of goodbye, not quite meeting his son’s gaze.

Spock could only nod in response.
Hey everyone. So sorry for the insanely long wait for this chapter. It holds the key for the next part of the story and as you will see, this is where we start glimpsing the parts of Spock that eventually define the person we see in the movies. Secondly, I also want to use this note to make a small announcement. I suffer from a congenital heart condition for which I require an open heart valve replacement surgery. I will be going in for the operation in a day’s time. I am hopeful that it will be entirely successful. However, it may take me some time to get back on my feet. In fact, a part of the delay in putting this chapter out was caused by the hospital visits required prior to the procedure and running around to make sure my insurance is in place and that I have a place to stay after the surgery. I hope to be back soon. And if all goes well, you will hear from me in less than ten days again. But if not, well, I just want to say that it has been an honor being a part of the fandom. Finding Spock is very close to my heart and I am glad that you have given it so much of your time and emotion. As always, I love to hear from you and would be glad to have any questions, comments, or concerns. Until Next Time :)

Sarek sat stiffly in the seat. Healer Sobik still looked exhausted. His eyes were closed. It was obvious that he was sleeping and not meditating. Sarek did not know what had finally pulled his son out from his comatose state. But he was grateful. For the second time in 12 years, Sobik had saved Spock’s life.

The bond he shared with Spock was alive and healthy. But as he had expected, it was once again shielded. He had hoped that after all this time, things would improve between him and his child but clearly, he had failed in conveying his love and concern to Spock. Outwardly, he refused to show any signs of his distress, but inside, he was constantly cursing himself for not having taken the opportunity to tell Spock that he loved him and that he was worried about him.

“What are you thinking, Ambassador?” Sobik’s soft voice asked.

“You are awake,” Sarek responded, a little startled to see that Sobik had woken up so soon after leaving Siracusa. But to his credit, he masked his surprise perfectly. “Are you well?” He asked.

“I am,” the healer answered. “Are you?” There was a gentleness in his voice that was normally only reserved for patients.

Sarek realized that the question was asking him more than just that. And while it was unusual for Vulcans to engage in such conversations, Sarek needed to know what Sobik had done to bring Spock back.

“I am curious,” he said carefully. “How did you persuade Spock’s body into a healing trance when his mind was clearly so injured?”

Sobik took his time before answering. Truth be told, he wasn’t entirely sure he knew it properly himself. But he could not exactly lie to Sarek. So he decided to be as honest as possible.

“It was an act of supreme illogic,” he answered. “Spock’s illness was more than a physiological or
telepathic one. But tell me this first. Do you believe in the afterlife, Sarek?”

The use of the ambassador’s first name was telling. And Sarek caught on to it. Again, he knew this was a loaded question.

“I am uncertain,” he said. “Katras are a not a matter to be understood or explored through the aid of logical methods. The mysteries of the metaphysical forces of life continue to elude us despite the scientific advancements we have made through our dedication to science. I cannot say I am an unbeliever. However, I do not possess the knowledge to call myself a believer either.”

“Your son, however, does,” Sobik said. “He may not fully comprehend it ever, but he glimpsed the afterlife through the broken link he shared with his offspring….”

“His offspring?... His…” Sarek interrupted Sobik. He was unable to keep the shock out of his voice.

Sobik realized his mistake immediately. Obviously, Spock had only told his mother the entire story about himself and the Farhannsu woman. And like the friend and confidante she had always been to her son, Amanda had respected his privacy and not shared anything with her husband.

As a healer, Sobik was bound by an oath of confidentiality. He had no right to breach Spock’s privacy like that. And he had no right to tell anything to Sarek.

But the damage had been in done. In his exhaustion, he had blurted out something that should have remained hidden from the ambassador. But like an arrow released from the bow, his words could not be taken back.

“Yes, Ambassador,” he answered somberly. “Your son had formed a betrothal link with a Farhannsu woman named T’Amun. And she was carrying his child at the time of her passing. She was murdered in cold blood because of her relationship with Spock.”

“But he shares a betrothal bond with T’Pring,” Sarek said, dazed by the revelation and still trying to process what he was hearing.

“It is an inactive bond,” Sobik explained. “It is nothing more than a placeholder in Spock’s mindscape.”

“My son… oh my child,” Sarek swallowed roughly. Only now did he understand the magnitude of what had happened to Spock.

“Was his grief the cause of his coma?” he asked.

“Only in part,” Sobik said. “The injuries to his telepathic centers and to his frontal and temporal lobes were extensive. The severing of his finger worsened his condition and interfered with natural healing. But it was his link with his child that interrupted the imperfect healing trance his body was attempting to achieve. The child’s katra was trying to latch itself to his in order to save itself from being lost in the endless void of non-being.”

“I take it, the child… it did not succeed,” the older Vulcan said, defeat and pain evident in his gruff voice.

“No, Ambassador,” the healer said with a haunted look in his eyes. “I pried the child’s katra away from Spock’s and forced it into the blackness. I had to make a choice. I chose Spock.”

XXXXX
“We cannot return to Earth yet,” Chris Pike told an irate Dr. Puri for the tenth time. “I just told you what is happening.”

“You said that already,” Puri shot back.

“And I’m not throwing Spock under the bus,” Pike added.

“You said that too,” the CMO said. “But if you repeat a lie ten times, it doesn't become the truth.”

“Come on, Sanjeev,” Pike whined. “It is not really a punishment. Spock can’t be cleared for duty. Just confine him to his quarters or to sickbay. He can’t even be on the duty roster while we are on this mission. Just help me, okay? Or allow him to return to Earth on a shuttle.”

“You know I can’t do that, Captain,” Puri said coldly. “As his primary care provider, I cannot send him back to Earth on his own before the mandatory 48-hour observation period is over. I am bound by regulations.”

“You are the fucking CMO,” Pike yelled, frustrated and at the end of his patience. "And if you still need to observe him then he's obviously not fit for duty.”

"I'd concur with you if you were called Chris Pike, M.D.” the doctor said. "But since you didn't bust your ass in medical school, I'll stick to my diagnosis according to which Spock is fit to report to duty. The observation period is simply the standard operating procedure according to Starfleet Medical Code."

"You can override those regs," Pike said. "You.are.the.CMO."

“YES, I HEARD THAT,” Puri yelled. "But you treat me like your personal dancing monkey, Pike. And I cannot confine Spock to his quarters any more than I can mutiny and take this ship from you. You want to listen to Marcus and do his dirty work? Go right ahead. Just don’t demand my gloves for it. They come with the Hippocratic oath, a part of which is ‘DO NO HARM.’"

“‘You are the most insufferable man I know,” Pike said finally. He knew he would have no help from his CMO. He had expected this. But it still felt like betrayal. He was not happy about punishing Spock like this. He was unhappier still about what would be done to “discipline” Spock once they were back on Earth. But Jesus Christ, this was also about keeping the Vulcan out of harm’s way. Puri was such a knucklehead sometimes!

However, at the same time, Dr. Sanjeev Puri was one of the most upright men he had ever known. And while he was totally angry at his ship's surgeon, he also wanted to find it in himself to be proud of his old friend.

Besides, Spock needed someone on his side. Openly. And Pike knew he could not be that person.

XXXXX

Spock felt much better after undergoing the healing trance. He was pain free for the first time in weeks. Besides, his mind felt whole again. His shields were as impenetrable as ever. And even though he required greater concentration and strength to keep them steady, he was glad to once again have the peace and quiet he so valued in his mind.

But respite from the pain and the illness did not mean freedom from grief. Nor did it take away guilt.

He knew what healer Sobik had done to help him attain a healing trance. And he felt a pang of remorse and anger at himself for having let go of his child’s katra in order to save his own life. A part
of him was even angry with the healer. But logically, he knew there had been no other way.

And T’Amun. Her memory was still fresh in his mind. The smoothness of her skin under his own, her clean scent, her velvety voice... it was all still there. But she was not. And she would never be.

Spock had known grief before. He had touched it through I-Chaya’s cooling body in the forge. He had heard it in Hamid’s heartfelt nighttime confessions. He had seen it in Dolain’s shaking fingers.

But he had never known the heartbreak that came with it. Sure, he had seen tragedy closely. But he had never known just how much the loss of someone could hurt. Mercifully, until now, his body’s many ills had kept him from feeling the full brunt of the emotional anguish that always comes with the death of a dear one. But now, he was back to his old self, sensitive to everything his mind was subjected to, and no distractions from the needs of the body.

But he was still fighting to breathe.

The candle in front of him flickered merrily, oblivious to the turmoil raging in his heart. Something still felt broken inside. The warm light of the flame seemed to burn through his composure every time he tried to focus on it.

Meditation was difficult. He wondered errantly, if he was this affected because he was half-human. But this thought, like all others this evening, shattered into dust and debris within moments.

Bravely, he forced himself to face his last memory of T’Amun again. He knew he needed to find his center. He could not go on like this. And in order to function properly, he needed to examine his emotions and deal with them to the best of his abilities. He closed his eyes and found the images he had refused to see except for when they came to mock him in the form of nightmares.

He saw the final time he and T’Amun had made love. And he saw her cold, pale face... empty in death, devoid of emotion and expression.

Silently, he wept even as he gathered all the pieces of his broken heart into a box of cold, hard logic. Somewhere, something changed inside him. And he knew he would never again be the person he had been all these years.

XXXXX

Pike had finally managed to call Spock for the dreaded meeting. It had been one of the hardest things he had had to do. Sure, he had been on dangerous missions and countless space battles with hostile warships, but he had never had to sell his soul to the devil. There was a first time for everything. And today, it was Pike's turn to meet the darkness that lived inside him.

However, despite his hatred for such tactics, even he understood that sometimes, these gray-zone command decisions were the only option. Ambassador St. Laurent had to succeed. But in order for his talks to yield anything, Spock had to be sacrificed. There were only two possibly positive outcomes.

Either the Romulans would fall back and leave Fardour alone in order to avoid a confrontation with the Enterprise. Or the current Farhannsu leadership will have to be convinced that the Federation cared for them and had punished Spock for transgressing against them. If that happened, they could push for a plebiscite that would have to be honored by the Romulans if they wished to avoid declaring war on the sovereignty of independent neutral planets aligned with the Federation.

Protection by proxy and extended deterrence were not perfect strategies but they sometimes worked. However, everyone knew that while the Federation claimed to be just and equitable in its protection
for both Federation and neutral planets, the truth was very different.

In reality, it was plain stupid to expect the Federation to value Gabex Prime, Hitoria, or even Fardour as much as it valued Earth, Vulcan, Betazed and other such major members of the UFP.

Hopefully, Spock’s genius intellect would allow him to eat humble pie this time for the sake of logic. Sure, interplanetary politics didn’t ever seem all that logical. But logic had to come from a place of strategy and survival when one was dealing with illogical adversaries.

Pike was still thinking about the possible outcomes of the negotiations, when Spock walked in.

“Greetings, Captain,” he said in his usual formal tone.

“Evening, Spock,” Pike said with a large smile on his face that felt as fake as the stone cold replicated coffee in his mug. “How are you now?”

“I am well, sir” the Vulcan answered.

“Good to know that,” Pike said, stalling for time, even though he knew there was really no reason to delay the inevitable.

“Er… I had a few questions for you, son,” he said finally. “Care to chat for a few minutes?”

“I am here at your command, sir,” Spock answered blankly. “I will gladly answer any questions you wish to ask me to the best of my knowledge and abilities.”

“Okay….” Pike sighed. “So, why do you think the mission to Fardour failed so spectacularly?”

The question was so unexpected that it caught Spock off-guard. But he didn’t show it. However, his eyes scrutinized the captain closely. Pike squirmed in his seat, entirely uncomfortable at the feeling of being X-rayed right down to his soul by the Vulcan’s piercing eyes.

“The mission was a success,” Spock answered. “It did not fail.”

“Success?” Pike said incredulously. “We lost a dozen security officers down there, Spock. Not to mention the kidnapping of Tabitha and all those science crew members. And you. You were tortured, for heaven’s sake. And that too twice.”

“Irrespective of the secondary events that took place throughout the mission’s timeline, our actual task was simply to avert the ecological catastrophe facing the planet, which we managed to accomplish,” Spock answered. “Therefore, it would be incorrect to say that the mission was a failure.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” Pike said in a deadly voice.

“Vulcans do not “kid,” Spock said impassively.

“Okay, Spock, let me tell you something plainly,” the captain said after a moment. “In all the ways that count, the mission was a PR disaster. And I can’t stress this enough that a part of it had to do with you.”

“The approval of the public does not change the outcome of a mission that has already been completed,” the Vulcan responded calmly.

“Yes, but they don’t care,” Pike said savagely. “We lost officers and we were unable to bring Fardour into the Federation. We escaped from them with our tails between our legs and I hate to
break it to you, but it was all your fault. You are Vulcan. They hate you. And while we could have dealt with that, you just had to go and sleep with one of their women. Right? I thought Vulcans were above sex. Clearly not."

Pike knew he was being unfair. But this was unbelievable. Spock was giving him attitude instead of trying to understand his situation.

“Resorting to character assassination is a non-sequitur in this discussion,” Spock plowed on. He was hurt and disgusted by the captain’s remarks. But he refused to show it.

“This is not a non-sequitur, Mr. Spock,” Pike said. “In any case, your opinion on the mission to Fardour is of no consequence. I have called you to discuss another matter with you.”

Spock did not say anything. The older man took that as a cue to continue talking.

“I don’t think you are aware but we have been ordered back to Fardour,” he said.

He looked at Spock, wondering if the Vulcan would react. Unsurprisingly, Spock remained quiet.

“And the reason for that is rather serious,” Pike continued. “Soon after the Enterprise departed from Farhannsu space, Fardour was surrounded by Romulan ships that had been waiting and monitoring the situation the entire time from the inside of Romulan space, which as you know, is right at the edge of the Palician system, quite close to Fardour.”

“Why has the Enterprise been ordered to go back?” Spock asked. “This is a matter of diplomacy.”

“Yes and we are taking a diplomat to Fardour,” Pike said. “Besides, it is best if only we are exposed to the Farhannsu people again. No point putting any other ships and crew in danger.”

“Am I to continue in the capacity of the ship’s science officer in the absence of Commander Owens and Lieutenant Commander Goldstein?” Spock asked.

Now. Pike had to do it now. He was ashamed of himself for what he had been saying and doing for last 20 minutes or so. But it was now that he was going to become the kind of captain that he had vowed to never be.

“No, Mr. Spock,” he said softly, not meeting the eyes of the young Vulcan. “You will face disciplinary action when we return to Earth. For now, you are confined to your quarters.”

For a brief moment, something flashed in Spock’s eyes. But it was gone before Pike could register it. He thought he saw it.

But nothing in Spock’s voice confirmed it.

"Do you require me to report to the brig?" the younger man asked.

"No, just stay in your room," the captain said. "You have nothing to do with this mission. You are here for Dr. Puri’s 48-hour observation. Any questions?"

There were none.

A curt “Yes sir” later, Pike was once again all alone with his shredded dignity and the shroud of self-hatred he knew he would always wear for what he had just done.
Clowns and Ringmasters

Chapter Summary

Hey, everyone, I am back. And it feels so good to be writing again. You can skip straight to the chapter from here. But if you wish to know more about what happened during the surgery (It ultimately all went well, I'm alive :D), continue to read this note.

As you know, this was an open heart pulmonary valve replacement. I am 24 now but I was born with a congenital disease for which I had surgery at the age of one as well. I needed to have another one now because back then they weren't able to correct everything completely and as a result of that, the problem got a little out of hand as I grew older. Fast forward to the surgery, a few minutes after the surgery, my heart went into a cardiac arrest and I was clinically dead for a few minutes. They had to revive me and mercifully, they were fast enough to avoid serious brain damage. Unfortunately, there has been some problem with my temporal lobe which has caused some deterioration of my eyesight but I don't think it is major (and hopefully, not permanent). I am recovering well and I am extremely thankful to every single one of you for sending me prayers, blessings, and good wishes.

Sorry if this was too long. But my emotional controls are a little leaky.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ambassador St. Laurent was not what Captain Pike had expected him to be. Diplomats often had strange requests and demands. Sometimes, they came with an entourage grand enough to rival that of a king’s.

As a senior Starfleet captain, Pike had seen them all. But what he absolutely couldn’t tolerate, were officials with Saturn-sized egos.

Unfortunately, St. Laurent was turning out to be one of them.

And Pike had been considering speaking to Marcus about it when he found out something that made the ambassador’s ego a tiny irritant compared to what had just happened.

“Captain, have you seen this?” Lieutenant Commander Zoya Khan asked him, pointing to an article on her PADD. The masthead of the website read ‘Astro Daily.’

“This is today’s newspaper, sir,” she said. “And I have no idea how this happened.

Pike took the PADD from her and started reading.

“Novice Vulcan Cadet Wrecks Last Enterprise Mission”

The bold, black headline made his stomach drop.

“How did they find out?” he growled.
"Read it," Zoya said. "The headline is not the worst thing about this whole mess."

'Astro Daily has learned from sources close to Starfleet command, that there has been increased Romulan activity at the edge of the Romulan Neutral Zone in the Palician System.

"This is a matter of grave concern," Dr. Aaron Simpson, head of Politics and Diplomacy at the University of San Francisco said. "The neutral zone boundary in the Palician system has always been quiet. If the surge of activity has flared up there, there has to be more to it."

Simpson’s assumption is correct.

According to our sources, the last mission of the Starship Enterprise, the flagship of the federation was not a research mission to an uninhabited planet. It was a rescue-and-aid mission for a newly discovered Vulcanoid civilization who call themselves “Farhannsu” in their native tongue.

The Farhannsu, according to sources, managed to remain undetected for nearly two millennia due to the telepathic shields they created around their planet’s atmosphere. The planet itself is called Fardour.

However, this is not the cause of worry as much as why this new planet refused to join the federation after seeking help from it.

"The Farhannsu hate Vulcans," our source said. "And Starfleet sent a Vulcan cadet for the mission. The kid started an affair with a native woman. They killed her. What do you think happened next? Of course, they wanted nothing to do with the federation or its representatives. The Vulcan must be made to answer for what he did. This was the height of indiscipline."

The Vulcan cadet in question is Spock, the only son of Ambassador Sarek and Dr. Amanda Grayson. Astro Daily reports that Spock was asked to go for this mission owing to his telepathic abilities.

"They should have asked a Vulcan diplomat if they wanted a Vulcan," Frannie Lowe, former director of Starfleet HR said. "We never sent mere kids for such things. What was the admiralty thinking?"

The Vulcan embassy refused to comment on the situation. Admiral Alexander Marcus and Commodore Julie Stiles could not be reached for comments either. Currently, the Enterprise is still in space and scheduled to return sometime in the next three weeks."

“What nonsense is this?” Pike said in a low, enraged voice. “How the hell did they find out?”

“I don’t know, sir,” Zoya said, her face ashen. “I am surprised they didn’t try to get a comment from the ship. But this is completely out of order, I think.”

“I need to speak to Admiral Marcus right now,” the captain said. “I’ll take the call in my quarters. Also, block the ship’s general access to the internet. And disable Spock’s personal communication. His parents or the media might try to get in touch with him. I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

Zoya nodded.

Pike sighed. This thing had blown up in their faces after all. He wondered what damage control would look like.

XXXXX
“Did you see the article in Astro Daily?” Pike asked the admiral.

“What do you think?” Marcus said tiredly. “We were expecting something like this to happen. But we were also hopeful that the confidentiality clause would keep a lid on things for a bit. Apparently not. Any idea who this wonderful “source” might be?”

“Damned if I know,” Pike said. “But I intend to find out.”

“There’s a gag order on the entire Fleet right now,” the admiral said. “Hopefully, if they are unable to develop the story, they will drop it.”

“What about Spock’s parents?” the captain asked.

“They are sensible enough to stay quiet,” Marcus said. “But now you see why we need Spock to face disciplinary action. And don’t tell me otherwise. You know as well as I do that it cannot be anyone else.”

Pike did not say anything to that. He could see where Spock was to blame. But at the same time, he hadn’t technically done anything wrong. Besides, it was true. The actual mission had only been to avert Fardour’s ecological disaster, which they had accomplished.

But Marcus would listen to none of it.

Sometimes, Pike wondered if PR disasters were worse than all the actual crisis situations that cropped up in space all the time.

XXXXX

Zoya managed to block the general access of the ship to the internet. But even in the time it took her to do that, a number of people read the article and saved it offline. Mercifully, Spock was not one of them. And his self-imposed isolation ensured that he didn't hear about it from anyone else.

After being dismissed by the captain last night, he had come to his quarters and resumed his meditation. He was angry and hurt by Pike’s lack of faith in him. But he was also coming to realize that commanding officers in Starfleet were bound not only by rules and regulations but also the politics of the federation.

He did not like feeling so useless.

And he wondered if Dr. Puri’s mandatory observation period was the only reason why he had not been asked to leave with his father and Healer Sobik. None of it actually made sense.

Speaking of Dr. Puri, Spock decided to go downstairs and see the physician. He had requested him multiple times over the last few hours to join him for lunch. Since he wasn’t doing anything else, maybe having lunch with the doctor would not be such a bad idea.

Also, since he wasn’t on duty anymore, he decided to go downstairs in his plain black shirt and a comfortable pair of slacks. Normally, he liked wearing his uniform but today, it just didn’t feel right.

A few minutes later, just as he was about to leave, Dr. Puri knocked at his door.

“Jeez, Spock,” the doctor said when the Vulcan opened the door. “I’ve sent you like 16 messages today.
“You sent me six messages, doctor,” Spock said. “I apologize for not responding. However, I was coming down to the med bay in a few minutes to inform you that I accept your invitation for lunch.”

“Awesome, let us eat in my quarters,” Puri said, not meeting Spock’s eyes. There was a reason he wanted to see the Vulcan. Thanks to Nurse Chapel’s love for newspapers and magazines, he was also subscribed to all her favorite publications, apparently because it was cheaper if two people subscribed through one account. However, while Christine read all the fashion and health magazines, Puri was only interested in the film magazines and the news publications.

And today’s newspaper had carried an article he had never thought he’d read in a thousand years.

“So, what would you like?” he asked, fiddling with his personal replicator.

“I did not know that personal replicators are allowed on the ship?” Spock said.

“Normally they are not but I am the CMO so I can have one,” Puri answered. “Medics have irregular hours, what with all the emergencies and stuff. Besides, we don’t need to socialize like the rest of the crew. We see enough of everyone in the med bay unfortunately.”

Puri got a dish of lentils and rice for himself. And since Spock still hadn’t told him what he wanted, he got a bowl of Plomeek soup for him.

“Here, start with this,” he said, placing the bowl in front of the Vulcan.

“Thank you,” Spock said and started eating his soup.

Puri watched him for a few minutes, just happy to see the younger man eating peacefully.

“Is something the matter, doctor?” Spock asked when he noticed the physician staring at him.

“Nope,” Puri answered with a smile. “I’m just so relieved to see you eating properly. I’ve been worried about you for weeks.”

“It is good to eat again,” the younger man acknowledged.

For the next several minutes, neither of them said anything. The silence was only broken by the clattering of silverware against glass and china.

Puri didn’t think Spock had read the article. And judging by the connectivity problems he had been experiencing with his PADD, he was certain it had been the captain’s idea to disable ship wide access to the internet in order to minimize the damage.

However, he also knew that a number of crew members had read the article. And the whispers he had been hearing in the med bay had been disheartening, to say the least. Nobody knew who had spoken to the press.

But he had a theory; one that he intended to discuss with Chris as soon as possible.

However, for now, his worry was that Spock would not take it well if he found out. The article had been scathing in its accusations and it had painted the young Vulcan as the villain of the mission.

“So what are you doing in the evening?” Puri asked conversationally.

“I intend to study,” Spock answered. “I am expected to rejoin the classes of the command track in less than four weeks. I believe it would be prudent to read the course material beforehand.”
“Always two steps ahead, eh, Spock?” the doctor joked, glad to see that Spock was looking to the future and planning to continue in Starfleet. “What’s your thesis going to be on?”

“Interspecies ethics,” Spock answered promptly. “More specifically, implications for diplomacy in the dichotomy of federation ethics and cultural rights of non-federation planets.”

“That is interesting,” Puri said thoughtfully. “Do you have a case study in mind?”

“The Orion refugee crisis is my current area of interest,” Spock said.

“What was your science thesis on?” Puri asked, surprised to find himself genuinely interested in the younger man’s research.

“On Vulcan, my bachelor’s thesis was on the algebraic breakdown of major federation languages,” the Vulcan answered. “To prove the legitimacy of my calculations, I designed a self-programming universal translator for extinct terran and Vulcan dialects. I used the same principles to program the universal translator for Vulitra when we were on Fardour.”

“You’re a genius, kid, you know that,” Puri said fondly. “And I actually have a small request if it’s not too much?”

“What is the nature of the request?” Spock asked.

“Um… it is a little embarrassing,” the doctor said. “See, Aparna, my daughter, she is in grade 7 and she is really good at languages. Believe me, her French is excellent. Plus she knows two Indian languages, Hindi and Kannada, which is her mother’s tongue.”

“Your daughter must be exceptionally gifted,” Spock said, impressed by the child’s prowess in languages and confused by the nervous expression on the doctor’s face.

“Well, she is terrible at math,” Puri said shamefacedly. “And everyone in our family is either a doctor or an engineer. With her being so bad with numbers, these professions are going to be off-limits to her, which is not an option. Can you tutor her in math?”

Spock looked dumbfounded.

But the doctor was waiting for an answer with an expectant look on his face.

“I have no experience in tutoring,” Spock answered, not liking that he was having to turn the doctor down. He genuinely liked Dr. Puri.

“Please, Spock,” the older man said earnestly. “Let us try it for a month once we get back. If it doesn’t work, you can stop and I’ll look for another teacher for her.”

Spock opened his mouth to say something but then closed it without saying anything.

“Great,” Puri beamed at him. “Maybe you will be the miracle worker we’ve been looking for all these years.”

Spock barely nodded at that, very perplexed by the strange request he had just agreed to fulfill.

On his part, the CMO realized after coming back to the med bay that he had not spoken to Spock about the article in the Astro Daily. He was about to go back to the science officer’s quarters when Ensign McBride was rushed into the emergency with a severe allergic reaction.

Puri sighed and got to work immediately. Some idiot had thought it funny to lace his coffee with real
milk instead of soy milk. Between scolding the ensign’s roommate and administering medicine to the indisposed man, he was unable to get to Spock in time, though he wasn’t aware of it yet.

XXXXX

“I demand that Lt. Spock be told about the article,” Ambassador St. Laurent said to Captain Pike. “Look, I will need to talk to him to understand the issue between the Farhannsu and the Vulcans. It is best he knows just what all is at stake. Knowing he is also in the line of fire will ensure better results.”

“I cannot allow it,” Pike repeated for the third time. “Spock is off-duty at the moment. The last mission was incredibly stressful for him. I don’t believe it is in his best interests to be told about this media circus.”

“It isn’t a media circus,” St. Laurent countered.

“Yet,” Pike added. “It isn’t a media circus yet. But it will turn into one.”

“Only if you selfishly choose that Vulcan officer over the federation’s and Starfleet’s reputation,” the ambassador said. “Besides, how long can you block the ship’s access to the internet. Sooner or later he will know. And as his captain, he should hear it from you instead of anyone else.”

“Fine, fine,” Pike acceded. “I get your point, Sir. I will call Spock to the briefing room”

And with that, he sent a summon to Spock’s quarters, requesting him to come down to briefing room 8 in half an hour.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading. As always, I love hearing from you and would appreciate comments, criticisms, concerns, and questions. Don’t ever hesitate to tell/ask me if something doesn't make sense or feels off.
Hey all, I am back with the next chapter of this story. Sorry for the delay. I am still on the mend and so, everything is a lot slower than it should be. I hope you enjoy this chapter. Let me know what you think. Your comments and reviews are highly appreciated. They make my day.

Spock didn’t read fiction. He had read his mother’s novels extensively as a child. But now that he was an adult, he preferred philosophy, science, and nonfiction. The connectivity to the internet had been down all day. And while Vulcans did not experience boredom, they enjoyed mental stimulation. Spock had always kept up with the news and it annoyed him that he couldn’t read the day’s paper simply because connectivity was down. He was certain he could fix the problem if he was allowed on the bridge. But Captain Pike had told him to stay in his quarters.

So that’s what he did. And in order to productively pass the time, he opened the reading app that had come pre-programmed with his PADD. He opened a book titled *The Last Seven Months of Anne Frank*, curious that there was such a book. He wasn’t sure why one would document the last few months of someone’s life. But he also knew that Anne Frank was not just anyone. The 15-year-old girl had died in the Holocaust, a genocide that had claimed the lives of six million people between the years 1939 and 1945 in terran terms. Her diary had been found and published later by her father, giving a heartbreaking insight into the fear and confusion that ripped apart the family’s peace in the years before their capture.

What he read, chilled him to the bone. And while he tried to continue reading, he had to take a break after the first 20 pages. Theoretically, he had always known what had happened during Earth’s second world war. However, this naked account of the brutalities that were committed in those concentration camps—they were too close to what had been done to the Orion refugees and the Farhannsu people.

He closed the book and sat down on his meditation mat to regain his composure. At first, it was hard to concentrate. Images from the book refused to leave his mind. Anne Frank’s smiling face made his heart clench in sympathy. It took him more than an hour to deal with the tumultuous emotions that the book had forced to the forefront of his mind.

He was changing into his pajamas when the call came.

He was surprised that the captain wanted to see him. He had made it clear earlier that Spock would have nothing to do with the mission. So it was odd that he was being requested to come to a briefing room.

And even though this was confusing to him, Spock always tried to follow protocol.

He changed into his uniform and made his way down to the briefing room.

XXXXX

Ambassador Jean St. Laurent had read the article in the Astro Daily. He could tell the article was
one-sided and even slightly malicious. But he also understood there was no smoke without fire. It was astonishing to him that Spock, the Vulcan, was the source of controversy. Normally, Vulcans stayed far from that stuff. He would have been tempted to dismiss the whole thing as a scandal had the publication been a tabloid. But Astro Daily was a respected newspaper. They were thorough with their reporting and as objective as they could be. The malice in the story had to have come from the mysterious source that had betrayed the Enterprise's confidentiality. And while that was interesting in and of itself, St. Laurent was intrigued by something else. Spock was Sarek's son. The great, mighty Ambassador Sarek, who didn't give a damn about anyone other than himself and his superiors.

But here was the chink in his armor.

The great Ambassador Sarek’s wife had given him a son that was more human than Vulcan. How very amusing, thought Jean. For years, he had wanted to find a weakness, a failing in that Vulcan. No, it wasn’t because he was a bigot. He was not. But Sarek had always looked down upon him and all the other ambassadors, human and non-human.

How ironic that his own son was imperfect, just like the people Sarek had deemed inferior all these years. Maybe his son's court martial would teach him something about humility. Or maybe, his son's humiliation would.

Or maybe, it would be a bit of both.

St. Laurent was still thinking when Spock walked in.

Pike looked up from his PADD.

“Come in, Lieutenant,” he said, gesturing Spock to sit down.

The Vulcan resisted the urge to raise his eyebrow. He had thought he would be stripped of his rank and sent back to the academy as an ordinary cadet. But apparently, for now, he was still a ‘lieutenant.’

“How are you feeling?” the captain asked.

“I am well, sir,” Spock answered.

“That’s good,” Pike murmured. And then turning to Spock, “Well, there is a very specific reason why I have called you here. There is something you need to see.”

Pike handed him a PADD to read an offline copy of the article.

Spock started reading.

“….The kid started an affair with a native woman. They killed her. What do you think happened next? Of course, they wanted nothing to do with the federation or its representatives. The Vulcan must be made to answer for what he did. This was the height of indiscipline.”

Spock’s gut tightened when he read this. And every word felt like a knife twisting in his stomach.

But outwardly, he remained calm.

“I apologize, captain,” he said quietly. “to have brought such shame upon you, the Enterprise, and Starfleet.”
Pike took the PADD from Spock, hating himself for having to do this.

“You can be court-martialed, son,” he said, trying to ignore the pain in the Vulcan’s eyes. “But that may be avoided if you perform satisfactorily in the next few days.”

Spock’s eyes widened.

“But captain,” he said. “You asked me to confine myself to my quarters. Are you revoking that order?”

“I am, Spock,” Pike answered. “But unofficially. You are to help Ambassador St. Laurent in planning his next course of action. He needs to know everything about the Farhannsu that you can tell him. And if all goes well, we will try to ensure that you retain your rank and commission while simply being grounded.”

Spock’s heart sank when he heard this.

He had joined Starfleet because he wanted to sail through the stars, discover new civilizations, help planets that were in need.

But after everything that had happened, the best he could hope for was a ground job in the fleet; that is if he was able to avoid court martial.

A part of him wanted to reject Pike’s orders and hand in his resignation.

But he was Vulcan. He could not give in to such an impulse. He needed to perform to the best of his capabilities for as long as he was on the ship.

“I am willing to help in any capacity, captain,” he said respectfully, careful to keep all his emotions shielded.

“Good,” Pike answered, relief evident on his face. “I am going back to the bridge. You and Ambassador St. Laurent can use this briefing room. After that, please escort the ambassador to his quarters and take care of any needs he may have.”

“Is that agreeable to you, sir?” he asked St. Laurent.

“It is, captain,” the older man said. “I am sure Mr. Spock will be most helpful.”

“Right,” Pike said. “And Spock, come out for a moment please,” he added as he held the door open for the Vulcan.

The younger man stepped out.

“Erm… he is quick to anger and hard to please,” the captain said, embarrassed that he was having to instruct his crew to behave like servants for the ambassador. But what could he do? He and Zoya had been putting up with the insufferable man as well. “So, just do your best to keep him happy. To be honest, even the decision of what will happen to you, is in his hands. He knows it. So, massage his ego as much as you can.”

Spock was stunned.

He did not say anything as the captain took the turbolift to the bridge.

But he felt very ill-equipped to deal with an illogical, hard-to-please human ambassador.
If the captain’s words were anything to go by, then St. Laurent was going to be difficult to work with. Unfortunately, as a Vulcan, he was very inept at social interaction with humans. He was nervous that he would botch this up.

But he could not dwell on his fears for too long. He went back to the briefing room, knowing he could not keep the ambassador waiting for too long.

"Tell me everything from the beginning," St. Laurent said to Spock. "Down to every last detail."

Spock swallowed and started narrating the events of the mission to Fardour. His eidetic memory served him excellently and he was able to give a lot of useful information about Farhannsnu society, culture, and political intricacies to the older man. However, he glossed over his relationship with T’Amun.

But thanks to the article, St. Laurent knew that there had been a woman involved.

“What about that woman you slept with?” he asked nonchalantly. “Tell me about her.”

Hot anger flared up in Spock. He could not, would not talk about T’Amun.

“She was a trainee healer and a guard at the temple,” he answered, proud of himself for keeping his composure.

“That’s it?” the ambassador said, bemused. “Oh come on. I know what happened, alright? I need the details, starting with why in the name of God, did you even sleep with her?”

“I cannot share that information with you,” Spock said, knowing this would anger the ambassador.

“I need to know this, lieutenant,” St. Laurent said slowly. “It is not as if I’m asking you for the sake of some cheap thrills. Lives depend on what you can tell me. I thought Vulcans believed in the needs of the many and whatnot.”

To this, Spock had no answer.

He felt he had the right to keep his relationship with T’Amun private. But he could not deny that the diplomat had a point. Fardour’s nobility and the elders of the planet had taken T’Amun’s pregnancy and her relationship with a Vulcan, as the mark of ultimate betrayal. They had seen it as an unpardonable transgression.

If they were to save Fardour from the Romulans and reiterate the boundary of the neutral zone, the ambassador needed all the facts.

“I apologize, sir,” he said softly.

And then, he told him everything that had happened, including his relationship with a certain half-Vulcan, half-Farhannsnu woman who had brought him so much joy for a short time. He tried to limit the information about her pregnancy and the finer points of their relationship. But mostly, he told the man everything honestly.

By the time he finished telling the story, his control was stretched thin. Like a flood, his grief was threatening to burst through his shields.

But thanks to an inner strength that had kept him alive and thriving all these years, he managed to
keep his face blank and impassive.

“I have all the information I need,” he said at last. “I will come up with a strategy for dealing with the Romulans. We have to try to convince them to go back so that they don't violate the treaty any more than they already have. If they choose to do so even after this diplomatic meeting, they will be committing an act of war. The other option is that the Farhannsu leadership agrees to join the Federation and we take away the loophole that they Romulans are currently using to avoid declaring war by a mere technicality.”

"That does seem like a logical course of action," Spock agreed, worried about Fardour. That planet had brought him so much heartache. And yet, he could not let go of the guilt he felt for what the Farhannsu had suffered at the hands of the ancient Vulcans. Besides, T'Amun had been half-Farhannsu. Their child would have been part-Farhannsu as well. And people he cared about, T'Arul and the rest of her family still lived there.

“Please let me know if you require anything else,” Spock said politely, getting up.

St. Laurent didn’t say anything for a few minutes.

“Was she good?” the ambassador asked abruptly, keeping his eyes on his PADD.

“I beg your pardon?” the Vulcan asked, wondering if he had heard the other man correctly.

“In bed,” St. Laurent said. “Was she good in bed?”

Spock didn’t know how to react at first.

“That is an inappropriate query… sir,” he said, taking deep breaths to keep himself calm.

“Okay, let me ask you something else, Vulcan,” the diplomat said, picking up his PADD and gathering his things. “Are you good in bed?”

“I will escort you to your quarters now,” Spock said, trying desperately to not show his anxiety at being asked such personal, uncalled-for questions.

“Yes, you will, lieutenant,” St. Laurent said. “I am sure you will also show me the best of your ship’s hospitality. Captain Pike is all praise for you.”

Spock had no idea where this was going. But a strange fear gripped his heart. It was illogical, but he could feel something nefarious from the ambassador.

But even though he wanted to get away from the situation as fast he could, protocol demanded that he follow orders. Like a good officer, he knew he would do exactly that.

He was simply scared of what those orders might entail.
Standing Up for You

Chapter Summary

Hey, everyone. I am back with another chapter. I hope it is up to your expectations. Let me know what you think. I absolutely love hearing from you.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Spock kept his demeanor cool and professional. He was courteous to the ambassador and unfailingly polite as he led the man down to his quarters.

Inside, however, his heart was thumping loudly. He was unable to shake the feeling that something bad was going to happen, no matter how illogical this fear was.

“Can you bring me a light meal, Mr. Spock,” St. Laurent asked him as he took off his blazer.

Spock nodded and went to get the food.

The mess hall was deserted. Normally, even at this late hour, some people could be found sitting on the tables, having a late night snack or a cup of coffee to help them stay awake through the gamma shift. But right now, there was no one. It was quiet and peaceful, and perhaps, even a little eerie.

Spock did not know what would entail a light meal for the diplomat. But he could try and make an educated guess. Normally, he would have asked for specifications. But he hadn’t because he had wanted to get away from the strange negativity that seemed to surround the ambassador.

He finally got a salad, a side of roast potatoes, and a bowl of clear vegetable soup for him.

It took him a few minutes to get back to the guest quarters. But illogically, he wished it would have taken longer.

“Here is your meal, sir,” he said, placing the tray on a side table.

“Smells good,” the ambassador said without looking at it. A minute later, he turned around to eat and his eyes widened.

“There is no meat,” he said.

“You asked me to bring you a light fare,” Spock said.

“Yes, but that doesn’t mean you’ll omit the meat, Spock,” St. Laurent answered. “Sure, I didn’t want ribs or steak. But you could have gotten me salmon or chicken.”

The Vulcan wasn’t sure how to respond to this. While he could tolerate the sight of people eating meat around him, he had no desire to touch it or even serve it himself.

“I apologize,” he said softly. “However, as a Vulcan, I do not consume or serve meat. If you so desire, you may go down to the replicators and get the dish you want.”
“Well, then what is the point of you being here,” St. Laurent said, irked by Spock’s seemingly condescending attitude. Just like his father, he thought.

“I am not hungry anymore,” he said coldly. “Please trash this mess.”

Spock would do that but he hated seeing such blatant disregard for food that someone else would kill for. He did not understand the human tendency to waste.

“It is improper to waste food,” he stated calmly, wondering if the other man would see his point of view.

“Who are you? My mother?” St. Laurent spat. “Just trash that tray.”

"There are hundreds of planets where people are starving," Spock tried again. "It is not only illogical but also immoral to waste food when one has no logical reason to do so."

"Just trash the damn tray, Vulcan," the diplomat said angrily. "I don't need you to teach me about morality. What do you even know about morals, you robot."

Spock trashed the tray without comment this time.

“Now Vulcan, let us get to business,” he said, eyeing the front of the science officer’s pants. “You have no idea how to serve dinner to a diplomat. I am hoping you will make up for it in… in other ways.”

“If you do not have any other requests, sir, I will now return to my quarters,” Spock said impassively, trying hard to ignore the sinking feeling in his stomach.

“Not so fast, Spock,” St. Laurent stood up. “I am not doing this for myself. I am doing this for you,” he said gently.

Normally, Spock could read people well. But he was still so unused to dealing with humans that he had no idea how to react.

The ambassador took Spock’s silence as his cue to continue speaking.

“That woman who died, you must really have loved her,” he said softly. “I know how that feels. I lost my wife two years ago. It was not easy. But it gets better.”

This was so awkward. A few minutes ago, Spock had sensed lust and domination from this man. But now, there was something else too. Something that Spock was unable to place.

“I grieve with thee, Ambassador,” he said as was the way of his people.

“As do I, Spock,” St. Laurent muttered. “As do I. But we can do more than just grieve to take the pain away. Allow me to help you.”

“I do not understand,” Spock answered, confused and dazed.

“Let me show you, I don’t mean you harm,” the older man said and placed his hand on Spock’s hips. The Vulcan jerked away as if burned by the touch.

“Your conduct is improper, sir,” he said and turned around to leave.

“You know you want me, Spock,” the ambassador said. “Besides, the door is closed with my bio-
signature. Of course, you are free to leave. But there is so much I can give you. That is why your captain assigned you to me. Why do you think he asked you to personally look after me when any yeoman could have done it.”

“I do not require your aid to process my grief,” Spock managed to grind out. “Even if these are the captain’s orders, I cannot follow them.”

“You will follow them or you will lose your commission,” the older man said dangerously. “What will your father think? An emotional son who slept with a native on his first mission, a disgraceful son who lost face in the press, a worthless son who got court-martialed within months of joining the academy.”

St. Laurent smiled and stepped closer to the young Vulcan. Unafraid, he placed one hand on Spock’s crotch and the other one on his hips again.

Spock tried to step out of the disgusting embrace but the ambassador fisted his hands in the fabric of his clothes.

“Let me make you feel good, Spock,” the ambassador said. “And you will never have to see Sarek’s disappointed face or the look on your dead woman. You are still here and that's what matters.” As he said this, he buried his face in Spock’s neck and nipped the side of his neck with his teeth.

The sudden contact with St. Laurent’s skin made his intentions abundantly clear to Spock.

“Please, do not compel me to injure you,” He said in hard, clipped tones, his breathing choppy and panicked.

“You injure me and you will be court-martialed, you know that” St. Laurent said, unwilling to let go of Spock. “Besides, I am not doing anything to you. You are young. You don’t know. What I’m about to give you is a gift…” he trailed off as he slipped his hand inside Spock’s pants and touched his bare hip.

Spock froze as the ambassador’s roaming hands came to rest on the old, raised scars from Zarmal.

“What is this, Vulcan?” he asked, a slight amount of shock evident in his voice. “Looks like someone got here before me,” he said, sick amusement dripping from his words.

But Spock was miles away.

A disgusting, sick touch. Someone cleaning his cuts. Someone spreading his cheeks apart, probing with a finger…

“Hahaha... so Vulcans are just like everyone else... what a tight, sugary ass...”

“Too bad we can’t have him... he belongs to the crown prince...”

“But look at that tightness,”

Another finger... a burning pain that had no end and no beginning.

“Shhh... someone will see you, let’s go...”

“What a shame...”

And then nothing. Cold blackness, the pain in the cuts dulled by the medicine, utter loneliness, and the hand that had probed him... gone, but ever present in the fear that seemed to clutch his heart.
How had he not remembered this?

He growled loudly in anger and nerve pinched the ambassador, who promptly fell to the floor like a sack of potatoes.

His rationality returned to him in bits and pieces. It took a few minutes for the fog to be completely gone from his mind.

And when he came to his senses, he was shocked to see the ambassador lying on the floor.

Immediately, he placed a call to the med bay.

“What’s up, Spock? Are you okay?” Puri’s cheerful voice spoke from the other end.

“Doctor,” Spock said softly. “Ambassador St. Laurent requires medical assistance in his quarters.

“Jesus, what happened?” Puri asked. “I’m on my way now.”

“He was attacked by a crew member,” the Vulcan answered.


“There is no need for caution,” Spock said. “It is illogical to be cautious of one’s own self.”

XXX

“What the hell, Spock?” Pike screamed. “I asked you to take care of the ambassador. You ended up injuring him? What happened?”

“The duties you required me to perform were reprehensible to me,” Spock answered, unfazed.

“Reprehensible?” Pike said, wondering if Spock had finally lost his marbles. “Serving him dinner, taking his laundry down to housekeeping, making sure he has access to the ship’s holovid library… why is that reprehensible?”

“I…” Spock felt incredibly stupid in that moment.

“Yes, you what?” Pike asked, fighting to check his anger.

“The ambassador implied that you intended me to serve his sexual needs,” Spock said, thoroughly embarrassed at having to explain something like this. “I could not do what he asked of me.”

“Wait, what?” Dr. Puri interjected. “Are you saying he wanted you to have sex with him?”

“I… I am unsure of what such an encounter might have entailed, but when he attempted to forcibly touch me, I had no choice but to render him unconscious,” Spock answered, smoothly omitting his moments of panic and the terrible flashback of a childhood memory he had repressed for all these years without even realizing it.

Captain Pike did not know what to say.

Now that Spock had explained himself, he felt like a total jerk.

The scumbag diplomat had tried to assault Spock.
Sexual harassment was taken very seriously in the fleet. And even if they really needed St. Laurent’s expertise to deal with the whole Romulan-Farhannsu situation, he could not let something so serious slide.

“When will he be fit enough to be escorted to the brig?” Pike asked Puri.

“In about six hours,” Puri said. St. Laurent was still out cold and would suffer from nausea, migraine, and an upset stomach for a few hours after waking up. The CMO had given him some basic medication to ease the symptoms to manageable levels. But he had no desire to make the man comfortable—not after what he had tried to do to Spock.

“Good,” Pike answered heavily. “Lt. Bar’tilie and Lt. McIntyre from security are waiting outside. I will inform them that they are to guard his quarters till he wakes up. And then, I will personally escort the bastard to the brig.”

And then he turned to Spock.

“I am so sorry,” he said quietly. “This was totally out of order. And as your superior officer, it is my fault that you had to face something so unpleasant.”

“You are not to blame, sir,” Spock said. “Besides, no damage was done.”

“Still,” Pike said, lost in thought. “It is very late. Get some rest. I will inform the top brass of this development. Don’t worry, I’ll keep you anonymous in my report. After the call, we will meet and discuss what to do next now that we don’t have a diplomat on the mission.”

“Yes, captain,” the Vulcan said and made his way to his quarters.

“And oh, you’re back on active duty,” Pike called out.

But when Spock turned around to acknowledge it, he only saw the doors of the turbolift closing.

XXXXX

“I know you are not sleeping,” Puri said. He had used his medical override to get into Spock’s quarters.

“I am exhausted, doctor,” Spock said, feigning sleepiness. “The alpha shift begins in less than four hours.

“I can request that you be given the beta shift for tomorrow,” the physician said. “Because you need to talk about what happened.”

“You assume that I have been traumatized by the ambassador’s improper advances,” Spock said, getting up. “I assure you that is not the case. I do not need to process an event that never occurred.”

“You misunderstand me,” Puri said. “Thank God, you were able to overpower him. But even getting groped is an unnerving experience.”

“I assure you I do not need to process this as humans do,” the Vulcan reiterated. “I am not human.”

Puri shook his head sadly and left the room.

Spock let out a deep sigh, unsure of why he had been so curt with the good doctor. He closed his eyes and waited for sleep to come to him.
“You did WHAT?” Marcus roared.

“I arrested him and threw him in the brig,” Pike said again.

“And what about the mission? This is damned irresponsible of you, Chris,” the admiral grumbled.

“I have training in diplomacy,” Pike answered. “I will take charge of the negotiations personally.”

“And that may not even work because as a Starfleet officer, you are a part of the federation’s fighting arm,” the man said from the screen. His face was murderous.

“We have no other option,” Pike said. “Unless you are willing to send us another ambassador.”

“It will take weeks,” Marcus said. “You know we don’t have that kind of time.”

“Then let me deal with this situation,” Pike answered. “I assure you that I will try my best to solve this.”

“Your best may not be enough, Chris,” Marcus said. “I know how serious sexual harassment is. But millions of lives are at stake. Surely you can see why we need an actual diplomat.”

“I understand,” Pike answered reluctantly. “But I have certain rules that I cannot break. I cannot let a sexual predator run free on my ship. I have dealt with tougher situations before this. I have faith that we will come out of this one too.”

“I wish I could share your hope,” the admiral mumbled. “But I can’t do anything while you’re so far out in space. If this goes south, Pike, I will not be able to save you. You and your entire crew will be court-martialed and tried for criminal conspiracy.”

The captain swallowed audibly at that. For a moment, his resolve faltered.

But then the pale, shadowed face of his Vulcan officer swam in front of his eyes.

And all he was able to say was, “I understand, sir, and I will take full responsibility for the consequences of the mission, no matter which way it goes.”

Chapter End Notes

In case it wasn't completely clear, sexual assault does not always come in the form of a strange man jumping at you from the bushes. It can take multiple forms and one of the most common type of perpetrators are people known to the victim. Many a time, in such cases, the assault is physically non-violent but highly manipulative and perhaps more damaging than the attack of a stranger. As someone who has experienced sexual assault at the hands of a teacher, I can tell you that manipulation is the ugliest thing someone in a position of power or trust can do to you. And this is usually how abuse sometimes continues for years.
The Moments in Between

Chapter Summary

Hello, everyone, I am back with another chapter. And I really enjoyed writing this. I'm sure some of you would categorize it as fluff. But I think we needed that. The last few chapters have been packed with action and occasionally, disaster with some hurt-comfort. I needed to write a "missing scene" if you will. But rest assured, this is not thoughtless fluff. It adds to the story and you will see why.

Besides, if you've been reading my new hurt!Spock story, Invisible, then you probably needed this chapter even more than everyone who's been reading only Finding Spock.

The song described in the chapter can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_jy83_YQjQ

Over the next two days, Spock, Captain Pike, and Zoya worked tirelessly to figure out the best way to proceed.

The loss of an experienced ambassador was a fairly severe blow to the mission but they had no choice now. Besides, even though Sarek could not be with them in person, numerous subspace calls were placed to him. And each time, they spoke to the Vulcan ambassador for hours, trying to put together a strong strategy.

Pike did not want anyone to know how scared he was.

But he also knew that if it came to an actual altercation with the Romulans, the whole situation would snowball into war. It would have been the best had Fardour agreed to join the Federation.

But as a non-federation world, technically, they were fair game. The only reason why the Enterprise had been ordered back was that Fardour was situated right between official federation space and the Romulan neutral zone.

“I presume you will not be beaming down to the surface of Fardour,” Sarek said to Spock during one of their calls. “Not only is it diplomatically unwise, it would also put you at risk.”

“Affirmative, father,” Spock answered. He knew that in all likelihood, he would be the least of the Farhannsu people’s problems. They were under Romulan occupation and nothing good could ever come of that. But even then, they were not taking any chances.

After several more hours of detailed discussion, Pike stood up and stretched.

“I am so tired,” he muttered. “What wouldn’t I give for a giant cup of hot chocolate and an actual bath.”

Zoya giggled. “You’re being a baby, Captain.”

Spock looked confused.

“Sir, I am afraid I do not understand,” he said slowly. “You have the facilities for bathing on the
ship. You can replicate the chocolate beverage from the replicators in the mess hall. And with all due respect, Lieutenant Commander,” he added turning to Zoya. “What has the captain’s desire for a bath and a beverage got to do with the impossibility of him being an infant at that age of 50 years, 5 months, and 3 days?”

Zoya’s eyebrows disappeared into her hairline and she snorted loudly while Pike threw his head back and laughed.

“Oh God, Spock,” Pike said after a few minutes of uncontrollable laughter. “You have no idea how good it is to see you joking again.

“I did not ask a humorous query, sir,” Spock reiterated. "Nor did I tell you a humorous story."

“Come on, kid,” the captain said, his disbelief evident. “You and I both know you understand our way of talking perfectly.”

“That is an incorrect assumption,” Spock said. "And it is immensely anthropocentric, therefore ignorant."

“In any case, you will learn, don’t worry.” Pike said running a hand through his hair, glad to see Spock being himself. “You hungry? We should go down to the mess hall for dinner. And then get some good amount of sleep before our big day tomorrow.”

“Certainly, captain,” Spock answered.

“I think I’ll…paaaaawws,” Zoya said, her last word incomprehensible because of a yawn. “Sorry, I meant pass. I am too tired.”

While the communications officer made her way to her quarters, Pike and Spock left for the mess hall. On the way, the captain commed Dr. Puri who said he couldn’t join because he was swamped with paperwork.

“What a shame!” Pike answered. "What kind of man chooses paperwork over dinner with friends? A stupid one," he muttered to himself. Then he turned to Spock. “So, kiddo, what are we eating?”

“I intend to consume my usual fare,” Spock said. “Vegetable broth and a garden salad.”

“That doesn’t sound like fun,” the captain said thoughtfully. “I know you are vegan. But that doesn’t mean you have to eat hospital food. We have a lot of delicious stuff you can eat from the replicators even with your… erm… limited options.”

Spock quirked an eyebrow at that.

“Food is meant for nourishing the body and maintaining it in a state of good health,” he said. “Taste is a secondary matter that Vulcans do not care for as long as the food is high in nutritional value.”

Pike thought for a minute before responding to Spock.

“Let me choose your dinner today,” He said. “Go to my quarters and wait for me. I’ll bring our food upstairs. The access code is CT#6048.

This was very strange. The captain had given him the access code to his quarters. After the aloofness and anger he had sensed from him since the end of the first Fardour mission, it was a little jarring to him that he would suddenly warm up to his Vulcan science officer who was being blamed by one and all for the apparent failure of the mission.
Regardless, he was obligated to go and wait in the captain’s quarters, so that’s what he did.

Unsurprisingly, Captain Pike’s quarters were much bigger than his own. There was a private attached bathroom, a sitting room, and a study. There was also a small oven for heating food and a refrigerator for storing food and drink. The room was furnished with pictures of the captain’s family. And a number of souvenirs from various places sat on the numerous shelves in the study.

Spock sat on the sofa in the sitting room and waited for Pike to return.

A few minutes later, he came to the room. He carried an enormous tray in his arms and the food smelled appetizing even to Spock who had claimed less than 15 minutes ago that Vulcans did not care for the concept of taste.

“So, kid, I got you spaghetti with vegan pesto and garlic bread,” Pike said triumphantly. “Even if you didn’t think much about taste before this, I am going to spoil you with this amazing dish. I mean it isn’t as amazing as fresh stuff cooked in a real Italian kitchen. But for you, it will be heaven compared to bland soup and salad, made blander still by the replicator, though I have no idea how that even works.”

“Thank you, captain,” Spock acknowledged, genuinely surprised and pleased by this change in his commander’s attitude towards him.

“Okay, let’s dig in,” Pike said and placed the food on the table. “Oh wait,” he said and got up. A minute later, he came back with a long, green glass bottle.

“The finest Sauvignon Blanc, straight from the vineyards of Sancerre, a white wine fit for French snobs, kings, and Starfleet officers” he exclaimed proudly as he opened the bottle.

“I understand that wine is an alcoholic beverage,” Spock said.

“Yes, but don’t tell me Vulcans don’t drink,” Pike answered playfully. “I know Sarek drinks socially whenever he’s out for diplomatic meetings and dinners and stuff.”

“As a matter of courtesy, perhaps,” Spock retorted, watching the captain pour the pale golden wine into goblets. “Vulcans are not affected by alcohol.”

“Yeah, I know that,” Pike answered and uncovered Spock’s plate for him. “That is why I didn’t get you whiskey. That’s what Puri and I drink. But if you’re not into it or not looking for a buzz, it tastes fairly nasty. Wine on the other hand… well, you will see what I mean.”

Gingerly, Spock took a tiny sip from his goblet, pleasantly surprised and fascinated at the odd, slightly fruity, delicately tart notes of the otherwise somewhat bitter-sweet liquid.

“So, what do you think?” Pike asked gleefully.

“It is… a complex concoction,” Spock answered.

“Concoction? You called my finest wine a concoction?” the captain feigned mock horror. “But I’ll forgive you. You are Vulcan after all. When we get back to earth, maybe on a weekend, you can try Canna Vine. Maybe you will show more respect to that beauty.”

“I do know not what that is,” Spock answered as he took the first bite of his pesto pasta.
It was delightful and even though the pure pleasure of the taste found expression on Spock’s face for less than a second, Pike caught it. And it made him feel like he had just won the Nobel prize.

“Canna vine is marijuana infused wine,” Pike began. But at the slightly alarmed, questioning look on Spock’s face, he hastened to explain. “It is non-psychoactive. I am NOT endorsing the consumption of marijuana for recreational purposes. Just the flavor of the wine is intense and rich.”

“But is it not a common practice among Terran youth to consume marijuana in its pure form?” the Vulcan asked.

“Well, I don’t know about the pure bit, but yeah, mostly it is unprocessed weed rolled into paper or tobacco leaves. And yes, it is a common practice... but I am neither gonna support it nor oppose it,” Pike answered, sidestepping the question a little.

For several minutes, the two men ate in silence. To show respect to Spock, Pike also stuck to a vegetarian meal for himself. After all, he had lived in Texas for many years. Bean burritos were his favorite, especially when served with salsa, sour cream, and fresh guacamole. Though it did bother him that the replicator’s version of guac tasted a lot like something you got from a mass produced, pre-packaged plastic cup in a supermarket.

“Captain, if I may ask,” Spock said placing his cutlery on the plate. “Your demeanor towards me… was less than forgiving. I do not understand why your behavior towards me has changed?”

Damn, thought Pike. He did not want to explain this one. For a diplomat’s son, Spock was way too blunt sometimes. And this was one of those times.

Pike took his time to gather his thoughts.

“I was a fool, Spock,” he said. “And I was very guilty after what happened to you on Fardour. I brought you along even though you had just joined the academy. I expected a lot from you. And you performed admirably. But then, in one damn stroke, you lost so much. So much.” He swallowed roughly before continuing. “I was guilty. Very guilty. And I hated you because you had done nothing wrong. Besides, even with everything that had happened to you, you saved my life and the lives of the crew members who had been taken hostage by the Farhannsu. And then you helped out with the Orion rescue. I… Had I suffered what you suffered, I would have broken a long time ago. And yet, you soldiered on. A part of me hated you for being you. But mostly, I hated myself for what I had done to you. It is true that the finest and best of a man shines through in the face of such adversity. But, as your commanding officer, it is my job to ensure that you are never in a situation where you have to find that part of yourself. I failed, Spock. And you know better than anyone else, perhaps, that the kind of bravery you showed… well, the situations that demand it never leave anyone unscathed.”

Pike’s long soliloquy touched Spock.

“I do not know how to respond, sir,” he said, his voice strained with an emotion he could not identify.

Pike smiled at the Vulcan before abruptly changing the topic.

So, Spock, what do you say to a game of scrabble?

Spock grinned inwardly at that. His mother had insisted on playing scrabble with him every week during his childhood years. And over the last few years, he had constantly defeated her. Well, if was good enough to beat a world renowned xenolinguist, he could certainly give Captain Pike a run for
his seniority.

“I say, affirmative,” he answered and received a giant smile from the older man who quickly went to his room to fetch his old and battered gameboard and tiles.

XXXXXXXX

“Chad is not a valid word, Spock, no way.” Pike said animatedly. He had already lost two games to the Vulcan. And he had no desire to lose the third one. “We decided no proper nouns. Chad is a country in Africa.”

“Chad is also a piece of waste material removed from card or tape by punching,” Spock answered smoothly.

“Oh God, not again” the captain groaned. “Did you a swallow a dictionary as a kid? Do all Vulcans know so many obscure words that an average person will never use in hundred lifetimes?”

“Captain, if you will pardon me, your flair for dramatics is unnerving,” Spock said with a hint of amusement in his voice. “Besides, to answer your query, no. Most Vulcans do not know the lesser-known words of the English language. However, those that played scrabble with their mother every week for fourteen years, they certainly do.”

Pike shook his head. “I should have known,” he said with a smile. “No son of Amanda Greyson could possibly be defeated in a vocabulary game.”

By this time, the wine bottle was mostly empty. Spock had taken only two drinks and that too on the captain’s insistence. But Pike could drink like a fish. Also, this fancy wine was nowhere close to as strong as his preferred whiskey.

Even then, there was a slight, pleasant buzz in his head. And funnily enough, he was glad that he had chosen to relax with Spock instead of drinking all alone.

“Do you want to listen to music?” he asked the Vulcan who was now meticulously packing up the game. “Do they have music on Vulcan? I think I saw a harp in your room once.”

“Vulcans do have music, captain,” Spock confirmed. “However, unlike Terran music, modern Vulcan music is one-dimensional. We do not make passionate music for fear of losing our grip on logic.”

“That’s a shame,” Pike answered. “I bet your mother hated that.”

“She did,” Spock said. “And that was why perhaps, she insisted on teaching me the nuances of Terran classical music. I believe she used to sing with a chorus while studying at the university. Hence, she ensured I learned the compositions of masters like Chopin, Debussy, Yiruma, Tchaikovsky, Faure, Pachelbel, and Wagner.”

Piked looked at Spock with a strange expression.

“That’s ancient, ancient music,” he said. “No one really listens to that stuff anymore. The oldest we go back is the early 21st century. At least for me, that is where I draw the line.”

“Have you ever heard these so-called ancient works?” Spock challenged subtly.

“Can’t say I ever bothered to,” the captain answered. “But if you’ll play something on that harp of yours, I will listen.”
Spock nodded and left to bring his lyre.

A few minutes later, he returned.

The captain had changed his position and was now sitting in his rocking chair.

“Play on, Mr. Spock,” he said warmly.

Spock began playing. It was a little awkward because of the missing middle finger on his left hand. But mercifully, this was a Vulcan lyre. The left hand was only needed to play the chords at the bottom of the instrument. On a bigger instrument, that would have been a challenge as his fingering would have to be changed. He knew he would probably never play the piano deftly again. But this, thankfully, wasn't lost to him. He decided to play the Canon in D by Pachelbel, a simple composition that he had learned as a very young child on the piano. It had taken him some time to figure out how to play it on the Vulcan lyre. And that had been hard. The Vulcan lyre was not meant to be a sweet instrument. It was severe and metallic just like the people of his homeworld. But his father had instructed him differently. And that is why he knew that even something cold and unfeeling could be forced to produce something deep and resonant.

The music washed over him as he lost himself to the coolness of the metal strings and the delicate sounds he was gently coaxing out of them. He closed his eyes and played, peaceful and lost in the notes of the melody. It felt as if time had come to a standstill. For those precious moments, Fardour and Romulus ceased to exist, the mission was forgotten, and years of emotional torment and loneliness were soothed.

Finally, his hands ghosted over the strings for the final time as he played the last chord with a perfect pianissimo.

The captain’s eyes were closed.

“Captain,” Spock said softly.

There was no response. Pike had fallen asleep.

Spock did not rouse him. He took a blanket from his bed and draped it over him. And then, quietly, he left the room.
Dear Readers,

This is highly unusual but I am writing this to you because it is important. So, a number of you have expressed concerns that this story, as well as Invisible are too dark. I understand where you are coming from. However, they are primarily hurt!Spock stories. In Finding Spock, I assure you, nothing is even remotely gratuitous. This story is very, very close to me. It started out as a project to improve my writing skills but then it became a way for me to deal with my personal issues. Now, however, it has taken on a life of its own. Normally, I would write all this to you in an author's note before a chapter, but since I haven't finished writing the next chapter, I decided to put this out in this way. Pardon me if you've all got notifications that the story has been updated. If you wish to discuss your concerns about Finding Spock or Invisible with me, you can follow me on Tumblr. My username is CarminaVulcana. Ask me anything you'd like through private messaging if that makes you comfortable. You can also email me at ankurdang93@gmail.com. I know it is highly unusual for me to be sharing my email like this. Most authors (at least in my experience don't) but I want you to have the chance to tell me if something is making you uncomfortable or bothering you.

Secondly, I got some fairly terrible news a few days ago. A student from my university committed suicide because he was lonely. I want to tell you that I am here to listen to you if no one else will. I have known loneliness. I know what it is like. The reason I write this is also because I know these stories can be triggering. So if you need to simply talk to someone, I will be right here. You have my Tumblr and my email. I will respond and if you want to even talk in a more personal way like phone, we can figure that out. Also, please don't worry about being judged. No matter who you are and what you've done or what you think you deserve, you will always find a listening ear in me.

Lots of love. And the new chapter should be up latest by Sunday.

Pardon me once again, if this was a bothersome notification for you. I hope you'll continue to read the story despite this even if you're annoyed :D

Carmina
Hey everyone, I am back with a new chapter. I am so very sorry it has taken me this long. Trust me, I am trying to make myself write faster. I am sure it will eventually happen. Anyway, let me know what you think. I will end this arc in the next five or six chapters. And then we will go back to seeing what Spock does with the rest of his time at the academy. As always, I love hearing from you and welcome your comments, criticisms, and concerns.

Spock and Captain Pike were in the briefing room discussing final plans. Zoya was keeping a close watch on all the channels that she could monitor from the ship. She had also set up a separate system to catch snatches of encrypted signals. Lieutenants Jessica Rosenbaum and Ensign Raul Vince from the science department were working on that system, careful to not let any leaked communication slip from their hands.

The atmosphere on the ship was tense. On the one hand, they knew they could not fail. Because if they did, they would all be court-martialed and tried for treason. On the other hand, failed negotiations would lead to war and they would be the first casualties. And everyone knew that being killed in battle would be a far more merciful outcome than being taken prisoners, especially on the brink of conflict.

The call was unexpected, to say the least. It had taken Zoya several minutes to figure out its origins and if it was safe to answer. Romulans were known for using unsuspecting communication channels to hack into and disable defense and life support systems on ships. And that is why, Lt. Cmdr. Khan could not afford to make a mistake. And she did not.

Their mysterious call was from a certain Farhannsu woman they all knew very well. Arulini. Or T’Arul when she acknowledged her Vulcan heritage.

“T’Arul?” Zoya gasped. “You… what?”

But they had no time for these things.

“Khan, tell Pike this is a trap,” T’Arul said. “There is no negotiation, no meeting. I repeat this is a trap.”

And abruptly the call got cut.

Without even wasting a moment, Zoya ran to the briefing room to relay T’Arul’s message to the captain.

“This changes things greatly,” Pike said, his voice full of stress and worry. “Inputs, Spock?”

The Vulcan had remained quiet all this time. But he knew as well as the captain that if T’Arul was speaking the truth (Which he believed she was), then war was inevitable. The diplomatic channel was useless. And there was no way to avoid what was coming.

Except for one.
“We must get the leadership of Fardour to join the federation post haste,” he answered.

“And how do you propose we do that?” the captain asked, recognizing that while that was the only other viable option available to them, it was an unlikely one. Besides, T’Arul could be mistaken. They had no way of knowing if this was indeed a trap. But in these circumstances, taking a chance could prove to be a fatal mistake.

“We need to ascertain the size of the Romulan fleet deployed to this part of the neutral zone,” Spock said. “And we need to meet with the leadership of Fardour.”

“I have tried but our long-range sensors and quantum beacons have proven to be useless so far,” Zoya answered, hating it that they were in such a terrible position.

Spock took a moment before answering.

“Then we need to move closer to the edge of the neutral zone and enable tracking mechanisms,” he said.

This was not the time for thinking such things but Pike was suddenly seeing a whole new side to Spock. And he was impressed. He finally knew that he had made the right decision in picking Spock to join a mission so early in his Starfleet career.

“Zoya, you have been acting as the first officer of the ship because of your seniority,” he began. “But I want you to focus on the communications completely. Even though Spock is merely a lieutenant at this point, I want him to be my acting first officer for this mission. For now, I am giving him a field promotion. It is not a field commission. But it is important if he is going to be at the frontline.”

Zoya understood. Spock was better versed with Fardour’s people and culture. Besides, it was true that the communication systems were invaluable in a situation of so many unknowns. She was glad to be able to go back to that.

“Thank you, captain,” Spock said softly. Outwardly he showed no emotion. But inside, he was grateful for the confidence Pike was showing in him once again.

“No need for that, lieutenant,” Pike said. “I believe we have another date with destiny to prepare for.”

XXXXX

The next few hours passed in a haze of activity. The Enterprise had halted itself just outside Fardour’s orbit, hiding behind its dark side for now. They knew that if Romulan sensors started looking for them, they would be found. But this was the best they could do while the captain and his second-in-command were figuring out what to do next in the face of this new information.

In the briefing room, things were already getting heated. Admiral Marcus was on the call. And needless to say, it was not going well.

“No, Pike, I need you to proceed with the meeting,” he said hotly. “The Romulans are aware that we are coming to negotiate and not fight. They don’t want a war any more than we do. But yes, if they are provoked, they would not even consider negotiation. And unlike us, they don’t believe in the concept of ceasefire.”

Pike was tired of arguing with Marcus. This had become a routine thing. It was almost like Marcus had forgotten what it was like being out in actual space.
“Sir, if there is any chance that Arulini is right, I am literally leading the Enterprise and her crew to their deaths and the rest of the federation to war,” the captain said.

“How do you know you can trust that woman? How do you know her information is accurate? What’s the evidence that she won’t double-cross you?” the older man asked.

Pike had no answer to that. He did not know Arulini well enough to trust her implicitly. It was possible that she held Spock and his crewmates responsible for what happened to her sister.

But Spock seemed to trust her. And Pike trusted Spock. Despite having been emotionally compromised over T’Amun, he had performed admirably earlier and for that reason alone, his decisions would be rational and logical even this time.

“Alex, you’re my superior and my friend,” Pike said gently. “I am worried about this mission as much as you. I know what is at stake. But I have been a good captain for 10 years now. You need to let me do this my way. Or else, we’ll just have to cut transmission now.”

“No, Chris, I forbid you fr…” But Pike closed the channel without waiting to hear the rest of whatever Marcus had wanted to say.

“We are on our own, Spock,” he said at last. There was a profound sadness on his face. And as much as he hated to say this, this mission was starting to feel like a suicide mission. But they had no choice anymore. It was either suicide for themselves or genocide for the federation.

Well, it was not a choice at all.

XXXXX

“Enterprise, this is your captain speaking,” Pike announced on the ship-wide communication system. “We have returned to Fardour to neutralize an unexpected yet dangerous and potentially, existential threat to the federation. If you have been reading the weekly reports, you are aware that Fardour has fallen under illegal Romulan occupation. And because Fardour is only slightly in our part of the Romulan neutral zone, we don’t have absolute authority to deal with this situation through regular diplomatic channels. The situation has been further complicated by the fact that Fardour is not a part of the federation. We were attempting to find a solution through negotiation. However, in the light of new intelligence, we have had to rethink our strategy. The Romulans are not looking for a diplomatic solution. Therefore, we must prepare for battle if it comes to that. I, along with acting first officer, Lieutenant Spock, will do everything in my power to avoid bloodshed. But at the same time, I expect every single one of you to be prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice if needed. We will fight to our last man and our last bullet. Godspeed.”

There was a stunned silence on the bridge for several minutes. But elsewhere on the ship, things were quite different. Some people were determinedly making sure their phasers were at full power while others were making their way to their respective departments. Within the next half an hour, all personal quarters, recreation rooms, and the cafeteria were cleared out. Every last person on the ship reported to their immediate supervisor.

Meanwhile, Dr. Puri heard the ominous undertones of the announcement. Just like last time, Chris and Spock would be in the thick of things. And while he was glad that the captain was finally showing faith in Spock again, he couldn’t help but we worried. But he had a sickbay to run. And that’s why, he reigned in his fears and like a true military medic and issued orders to his staff that would prepare them to deal with the inevitable casualties that would start coming in within the next few hours.
It took some doing, but finally, Zoya managed to re-establish contact with Arulini. And this time, she was able to get her on the screen.

“Arulini, we need more information,” Pike said to the haggard looking woman. She had changed greatly since the last time they had seen her only a few short weeks ago. Her hair was cropped close to her skull and there were dark circles under her eyes. Instead of the giant smile they all remembered as her trademark, there was a grimness to her which was chilling to behold.

“What do you want to know?” She asked without preamble.

“How did you know about the upcoming negotiation?” Pike asked.

“The resistance has its ways,” she answered. “And I can’t reveal those to you. This may not be a safe channel.”

“Does the resistance have a leader?” the captain asked the next question.

“It does,” she said.

“Has anyone from the original leadership survived? And are any of them in the resistance?” Pike asked, wondering yet again just how bad the on-ground situation was if Arulini was this scared.

“Yes but I cannot give you names,” Arulini said. “If it helps you any, we don’t recognize the Romulan occupation as legitimate.”

Pike took a moment to process that. And then he asked her the big question.

“Can you convince the leader of the resistance to send out a request to the federation for help?” he said slowly. “And can you also have him or her sign the copy of the federation charter we left with you, confirming that Fardour has agreed to join the federation?”

“That… may not be possible,” Arulini answered, despair evident on her face. She was an intelligent woman. She understood that this was perhaps the easiest way to legitimately deal with the Romulans but she had no idea if even in such a dire situation they would be willing to consider outside help.

“Can you try? Pike asked. “Otherwise, this situation could blow up into a full-scale intergalactic war, which would not only have serious consequences for members of the federation but also Fardour as the occupied territory at the edge of the neutral zone.”

“I will do my best,” she said after a long moment. “But you must remain prepared for war. The Farhannsu are a Vulcanoid people. But we don’t have the logic of Vulcans. Don’t pin your hopes on our decision. Regardless, I will let you know in about six hours.”

On that somber note, she ended the call.

Now, all they could do was wait.

Pike had chosen to leave the bridge and come to his room after the conversation with T’Arul. This wasn’t his first mission with such high stakes. But it was very different from every other mission he had ever been on.

He hated to admit it but he was scared.
He didn’t usually think of his family before such things. But today, he wasn’t sure he would come back from this. And he really did want to see his son. Phillip was now 15. And if Vina’s messages were anything to go by, their son was a talented actor and musician. It seemed unlikely that he would choose a career in Starfleet. But that was alright.

Considering where a career like this could sometimes take you, Chris was happy to think that his son would hopefully find success in Broadway. Just two weeks ago, he had received a holovid of him auditioning for the male lead in a play called *Les Misérables*. Of course, he had never seen it. But he could not deny his son was a natural. And if this was what he wanted to do, Pike would support it.

He went to his long-distance comm. unit but just as he was about to punch in the code, his fingers shook. No, he thought to himself. He needed to be in complete control of himself. And speaking to Vina or Phillip would send his emotions into overdrive. No, as much as he wanted to, he could not call them.

With a heavy heart, he settled for composing a message to his son.

“Hey kiddo,

What’s up, buddy? Your mom tells me you don’t attend Football practice anymore. And that all your time outside of class is spent in theatre rehearsals. Relax, I’m not going to scold you. I just want to tell you that I’m proud of you. Vina sent me a holovid of your singing in an audition. She never told me if you got the part. I sure hope you did. I am going for an away mission in a few hours. I am hoping you will have some pictures of yourself in costume by then. God knows I could do with a laugh! No, I’m just kidding. You’ve grown into a dashing young man and I’m sure the girls in your class make sure you know that. But remember, you’re only 15 and there’s a long way to go before you get interested in funny stuff like that.

I love you. And I will be home to attend your school play on the day it premieres.

Dad.”
Hello, everyone, sorry for the long wait. I hope you like it. The story is moving to its next phase soon. And I really would appreciate your feedback. I welcome your comments and they absolutely make my day. I hope you are still with this story and haven't lost interest.

T’Arul’s answer arrived in four hours instead of the six she had said would be needed. And to everyone’s utter relief and surprise, she had managed to get the leaders of the resistance to sign a legal petition requesting a place for Fardour in the federation. Along with that, they also sent a formal request to Captain Pike and to the Open Assembly of the Federation, to help them deal with the illegal Romulan occupation of their home.

“Well, that’s a wonderful development,” Captain Pike said as he prepared to use these to initiate a talk with the Romulans. So far, they had been unable to because Fardour had not been a federation planet.

Now, however…

“Zoya, hail the Romulan Commander-In-Chief,” Pike commanded his communications officer.

She immediately tried to establish contact.

It took a few minutes and a couple of unsuccessful tries, but it ultimately worked.

“Greetings, General Vakar,” she began her message. “This is the starship Enterprise, a diplomatic emissary of the United Federation of Planets. We have arrived for the diplomatic meetings scheduled to decide upon the future of the planet Fardour.”

A minute later, her message was acknowledged.

“Put it on screen,” Pike whispered.

And sure enough, within a few seconds, Vakar’s sneering face appeared on the screen. His cold black eyes gave nothing away even as the smirk on his face turned into a scowl.

“Greetings, Enterprise,” He said. “We welcome you to the Romulan colony on Fardour.”

A collective gasp was heard from the entire bridge crew.

“It is not yet a Romulan colony,” Pike corrected the military chief. “And if all goes according to the law, Fardour will retain its sovereignty.”

At this, Vakar simply shook his head.

For a moment, it seemed as if he was about to cut the call.

But then he spoke.
“Who is the ambassador accompanying you?” he asked.

“I will be engaging in the negotiations,” Pike answered. “My name is Christopher Pike.”

“You are not a neutral party,” Vakar said. “As a Starfleet officer, we do not accept you as a diplomat.”

Pike wondered if there was a way around this.

His eyes darted around the bridge crew to see if there was anyone he could relinquish command to. For a brief moment, he wondered if Spock could be that person. But he quickly quashed that thought. He would need Spock to liaison with the Farhannsu resistance on the planet.

His eyes met Zoya’s and he knew what he had to do.

“I have given up my command to another officer on the ship. At this present moment, I am a civilian and a diplomat of the federation. I do not represent Starfleet or any other military organization.

“Hmmmmm,” Vakar pretended to think. “It looks like Fardour isn’t all that important to the federation after all. They didn’t even send a proper diplomat.”

“That’s incorrect, General,” Pike retorted. “On the contrary, your violation of the neutral zone is so blatant and illegal, that it was deemed unnecessary to send a diplomat. High-order diplomacy is only required for truly complex situations. These talks are only supposed to remind you of the treaty you signed with the federation five decades ago.”

“We shall meet on our ship, The Kauravaki, in 15 minutes,” Vakar said. “We are transmitting the beaming coordinates to your ship. You may also bring two security personnel with yourself. But no one else.”

“I accept your terms,” Pike answered and motioned Zoya to end the transmission.

After that, he turned to Spock.

“I want you to beam down to the planet and meet Arulini,” he said. “I know it is not the safest thing to do but our options are limited. Seeing as they have agreed to join the federation, the Farhannsu will probably not be hostile towards you. They have enough problems to deal with without seeing you as a threat, which I’m sure they now realize you weren’t even last time.”

Spock nodded.

Zoya, who had been listening to the captain’s conversation with Spock, immediately placed a call to the last frequency Arulini had used to contact them.

And sure enough, barely seconds later, her voice filled the bridge.

“Captain Pike, what do you need now?” she asked, somewhat exasperated. “Please don’t keep calling me. You will give away our frequency.”

“This is a secure channel,” Zoya reassured her before Pike spoke to her.

“Arulini, we are going to help your planet out of this mess,” he said. “I am going to meet with the Romulan Commander-In-Chief in a few minutes. Spock will be beaming down to your location if you will send us the coordinates.”

“Spock? You’re sending Spock?” she asked, surprised that Pike was willing to send the Vulcan even
after what had happened not too long ago.

“Is it not safe for him even now?” the captain asked slowly.

She took a long moment before responding.

“It is as safe as it can possibly get under the circumstances,” she said with a resigned sigh. “At this point, any help is welcome.”

“Okay, then, he will beam down in less than ten minutes. Pike out.”

A minute later, both he and Spock, along with Lt. Alexia Mendoza and Lt. Rashid Ahmad from security found themselves in the med bay. They were injected with tiny bio-trackers that would monitor their vitals at all times and automatically request the Enterprise to beam them out if their adrenalin and heart rate went above a certain threshold.

“Godspeed Spock,” the captain said as he and his security officers stood on the transporter pad.

“May you be successful,” Spock responded as he watched the three humans disappear.

Soon after that, he made his way to the surface of Fardour. He knew he was going down there as a matter of duty. But he could not pretend it was as simple as that. Some wounds never healed. And Spock’s freshly-healed ones were about to bleed anew.

XXXXX

His breath caught in his throat.

The dry heat intermingling with the slight chill in the air. The smell of a distinct pine-like tree but not quite. The deep red color of the horizon. The sudden noise of a billion minds all conversing with each other.

Fardour felt embarrassingly familiar to him on this second visit.

But a keen sense of loss accompanied the strange emotions that he wasn’t able to name.

“Oh, you’re here,” T’Arul’s voice broke him out of his reverie.

“Come inside,” she whispered and pulled him into an underground bunker of the sorts.

“Is this where you have been hiding?” Spock asked, holding his hand delicately against his nose. The stench in the small, dark place was horrendous; like rotting meat, unwashed bodies, urine, feces, and… blood. Both, fresh and stale.

And it was so cold. He shivered under his regulation-issued uniform even though it was made out of fine wool and lined with a thick layer of thermafibers.

“Yes,” T’Arul answered dejectedly. “This is where most of our erstwhile leadership is. Or what is left of it. Some soldiers. A few noble families. Two priests. Our last healer died a week ago of lung fever. Everyone else is also going to die soon, I guess.”

“We could have brought a healer from the ship,” Spock said quietly. He was appalled at the condition of the people. Even Arulini looked a lot worse up close than she had on the screen. In addition to the dark circles under her eyes, her neck was mottled with dark finger-shaped bruises. There was a freshly-healed burn just above her collarbone.
“Phaser burn,” she said when she saw where his eyes were. “He missed, I lived. I killed.”

“What happened to your neck?” Spock whispered.

“Attempted rape,” she answered unfazed. “The Romulans sure like to play with their food before eating it. But it is not wise. Especially when the food is alive and just waiting for an opening. I killed him as well.”

“I apologize for what has happened to you and your people,” the Vulcan said, his eyes dimmed with pain.

“Don’t,” she answered. “There’s a lot of work to be done. Weeping is a luxury we can't afford. If we survive, we will indulge in it later.”

Spock opened his mouth to respond to that but she cut him off abruptly.

"T’Amun was a healer-in-training. She taught me some things and I am managing but it is a lot of work. You can help me and I will tell you everything while we work.”

The mention of T’Amun’s name sent a pang of longing and hurt through Spock but he steeled himself and followed the young woman deeper into the bunker.

XXXXXXXX

“You brought the Vulcan back,” A man coughed out when T’Arul bent down to change his bandages. “It is alright,” he added at the shadowed look on her face. “He can’t be worse than our Romulan cousins.”

T’Arul nodded.

“Most of us are unable to use our telepathy to communicate now,” she explained to Spock as she unwrapped the soiled bandage on the wounded man’s leg. "You injury is festering," she said to the man. The gaping, bleeding hole in his flesh looked like it was being eaten alive. Maggot-like creatures were stuck in the decaying flesh. And the smell was almost unbearable. "I might have to debride this. And if that doesn't work, I will have to amputate your leg."

The man let out a humorless laugh.

"Why don't you simply kill me," he said sincerely. "We both know I can't even shield the bunker anymore."

But T’Arul only shook her head sadly as she poured antiseptic over the wound and cut into it with a rusted scalpel. The man hissed in pain but held himself admirably while she patiently removed the dead and decaying tissue from his wound.

“We are shielding this bunker as much as we can,” she resumed her previous explanation about the telepathy. "And most of our empathic gifts are going towards keeping our bodies alive. So, when we communicate with your ship, one of us unshields and moves out of here to receive the call. Those Romulans know we exist. They knew about our resistance. And we are being hunted like animals.”

Spock heard T’Arul’s account of the desperate conditions in which the last of the noble houses and priests were living. Most ordinary civilians had been taken prisoners and pushed into labor camps. Those who had openly resisted had been shot dead immediately. And most children, pregnant women, and elderly people had been killed as well because they had been of no use to the Romulans.
“Here, hold this,” she said to Spock as she handed him the dirty scalpel and a fresh roll of bandages as they moved on to the next person.

“Abitik, I must sterilize the wound,” she said gently to a young man whose shoulder looked like a mess of shredded meat. With a jolt, Spock realized that this was the man who had whipped his hands.

The man quietly presented his shoulder to T’Amun and then his eyes traveled upwards to Spock’s face.

“You…YOU…It cannot be,” he said, terrified of Spock. “You are with them… I will… I… no… go away… GO AWAY,” he screamed, hyperventilating.

“CALM DOWN,” T’Arul almost yelled in order to be heard over the man’s screams. At her loud, angry tone, the injured man went utterly quiet.

T’Arul continued speaking. “Spock is not here to harm us. He is Vulcan. Not Romulan. He is here to help us throw the Romulans out.”

But Abitik only whimpered in response.

“I am sorry,” she said to Spock. “They can’t hurt you. But they are still scared of you. More so now because of what has happened to us after you left.”

“Apologies are unnecessary,” the Vulcan answered gently. “I understand. And I will endeavor to do everything I can to aid you and your people.”

“You’re a better man than I thought, brother,” T’Arul muttered. “After what we did to you, you would be justified in laughing at us as we burn in this hell.”

Vakar’s ship was nothing like the average Bird of Prey. The Kauravaki was at least three times larger than the biggest constitution class ships of Starfleet. Pike tried his best to not look intimidated. But this was his first time on a Romulan ship. And he had no idea what to expect.

The interiors of the ship itself were dark and gloomy. The artificial lighting was hued red. And almost every single door in the hallway leading from the transporter pad to the conference room was heavily guarded.

“Welcome, Diplomat Pike,” Vakar said in perfect but accented standard. “I hope you will find your brief stay on this ship pleasurable. Before we start talking, I offer you lunch and some light entertainment.”

“Let us just get this over with,” Pike all but growled. He had no desire to waste time. And he sure as hell did not want to eat with this man.

“I insist,” Vakar said. “This is how diplomatic meetings are conducted. I know this is your first tim. But you will learn.”

“Alright,” Pike acquiesced, hating the sense of dread that had settled into the pit of his stomach.

He and the two security officers were offered cushioned seats on the floor next to Vakar who was seated on a low, metal seat with no cushioning.
A few minutes later, an orderly brought them glasses of a clear, sharp-smelling wine and bowls of steaming hot stew with a loaf of soft white bread.

“We will have entertainment,” Vakar commanded. A second later, an almost nude woman walked onto the makeshift stage. Behind her, two almost nude men carried some kind of musical instruments although Pike could not remember their names. He was sure he had seen those instruments somewhere but he couldn’t be sure.

He looked closely to see what race these “entertainers” were. At first, it was hard to make out but then they stepped out of the shadows.

Pike’s gut twisted painfully when the woman turned out to be Farhannsu. The signs of abuse were not obvious but faded bruises along her arms and legs spoke of the kind of treatment she had been receiving at the hands of her “patrons.”

And then he looked at the men. Pike’s heart sank when he realized the men were Vulcan.

“You have Vulcan musicians?” he asked before he could stop himself. His tone was controlled but his anger was unmistakeable.

“Of course,” Vakar said calmly, not taking his eyes of the dancer’s body. “They are better respected on my ship. Their talents are truly appreciated here.”

But Pike knew how and why the Vulcans had come to be on Vakar’s ship. The dead look in their eyes, the soulless way they played their music—it all spoke of utter desolation and hopelessness.

Pike remembered from the research he had done on Spock that even he had been kidnapped as a child by a Romulan. He shuddered to think that had Sarek and Amanda not gone after their son, the brilliant, talented half-Vulcan would have eventually been sold to a ship like this, or worse, to someone like Vakar.

He could tell from the men’s sheer loincloths that they were as much attraction to these Romulans as the poor, unfortunate woman.

She danced listlessly to the slow, uninspired music. Her movements were awkward, jilted. Her feet could hardly move in time with the rhythm. Her hips jerked to-and-fro stiffly and only sometimes, the musicians tried to match their rhythm to hers.

But the Romulans were unbothered. Their leering eyes were glued to the lower halves of the performers’ bodies and they couldn’t care less that the entertainment was below average in terms of artistic value.

In that moment, Pike felt heartsick. One look at his security officers told him that they were as uncomfortable as he was.

But they were on a mission. And while they desperately wanted to stop this humiliating, degrading excuse for entertainment, they forced themselves to watch. There would be time later, for rescue. And for retribution.
Spock had assisted T’Arul with dressing the injuries of close to 30 people. And while he was not physically exhausted, he was heartsick.

“Do you not have other able-bodied people to help you?” he asked her as she mixed the extract of a dark yellow root with vitamin E oil to create a poultice.

“There are some people but everyone who can fight, is out there fighting,” she answered. “They come back only for brief amounts of time if they need rest or medicine or food.”

Spock watched her working for a few minutes but it was obvious that she was distracted. Even though they were in an enclosed room, from the other side of the wall, they could hear the loud cries of an infant.

“I swear sometimes I want to punch that kid,” T’Arul grumbled.

“You do not,” Spock said, aghast.

“Of course I don’t, not really,” she said uncharitably. “But his constant crying gives me an ungodly headache. I mean there’s enough work to be done without adding a screaming baby to the mix.”

“Children cry because it is natural for them to do so,” Spock said, trying to calm T’Arul down. “On most worlds, that is the only way they express their needs and requirements.”

“I bet Vulcan babies are logical right from birth,” she said sarcastically. “Don’t answer that. To be honest, Farhannsu babies are in telepathic contact with their parents right from the beginning too. But that kid lost both parents to a Romulan attack on their village.”

Familiar pain surged through Spock.

T’Arul probably didn’t realize it but Spock knew very well just how deeply a Farhannsu child was connected with his or her parents. The loss of Sivak and T’Amun was still a raw, bleeding wound in Spock’s heart.

But outwardly, he did not show any emotion. He wasn’t the one who needed help. These people needed help. And he would be doing them a gross disservice by wallowing in his own grief, even if every single thing about Fardour sent fresh stabs of agony through him.

“Perhaps I could assist with the care of infants while I am here,” he offered.

“You aren’t here for long,” T’Arul retorted. “Your captain will call you soon. And once I am finished up here, we need to regroup with our spies and the other soldiers. But yeah, some time
without that infernal noise would be welcome. ALIROPA,” She called out. “BRING THAT KID HERE.”

A light-haired woman with almost translucent skin came into the room.
“Give him to Spock,” T’Arul said, not taking her eye off the medicine she was mixing.

“You called the Vulcan back?” the woman said, her eyes wide with disbelief.

“Don’t waste time,” T’Arul snapped. “I think you can help in the kitchen by making another drum of soup. The third platoon will be returning shortly.”

Wordlessly, Aliropa handed the still crying baby to Spock. And without another backward glance, she left the room.

Spock looked at the child.

Deep set blue eyes, bronze skin, a smattering of black hair on the head. The baby’s puckered lips quivered as he got ready to let out another wail. Spock couldn’t sense fear from the child. But he did sense confusion. The baby was confused because this strange man who was holding him was not like everyone else. His forehead was smooth!

Finally, he let out a loud cry.

“Shut him up, Spock,” T’Arul said angrily. “You said you can.”

Shocked at how much she had changed in such a short time, Spock placed his right hand lightly on the baby’s meld points. He did not know what he could say or do to make the child comfortable. Besides, his mindscape was very basic. Hungry, thirsty, dirty, sleepy, happy, bored… there was no more to his thoughts yet. But in a corner, were the remnants of broken links; shriveled up, mangled, bleeding. The violent death of his parents was causing him immense pain; a pain he was too young to understand.

And so, he simply cried.

Spock gently tried to shield the broken bonds from the rest of the poor child’s mind. He was no mind healer. And his telepathy had been affected by the loss of his left middle finger. But by the mercy of a force he did not understand, his gifts were considerable and hence, there was still much he could do.

The child whimpered as Spock blocked the pain from his mind while he worked on extracting the remains of the dead bonds. It was grueling, nerve-wracking work. And because his subject was so young, he was unable to stop himself from feeling the emotional and physical unpleasantness of the task. Everything he tried to keep the child from feeling, he experienced it fully. And in the back of his mind, he saw the memories of his own nightmares from his last time on Fardour.

“How did you do it?” T’Arul asked him an hour later. The baby was sleeping peacefully in Spock’s arms and everything had been quiet and peaceful for a while now. “You look exhausted,” she remarked when she saw the lines around his eyes. “Anyways, it is time for us to go. You can put him down on the cot.”

“Has the platoon returned?” He asked as he wore his coat.

“Yes, and the spies,” she answered before leading him out. "Let's go and see what's on today's menu for disaster."
"I trust you enjoyed the entertainment," Vakar said. "Now, we can talk."

"You must leave Fardour," Pike said without preamble. "The Farhannsu leadership’s request to join the federation has been approved. You are provoking a war by violating the neutral zone treaty."

"Fardour was not a part of the federation until now," the Romulan answered. His eyes were cold and his charade of hospitality was nowhere to be seen anymore. "We were here first."

"You are also in gross violation of the universal rights accorded to all intelligent races," Pike continued to speak. "Farhannsu leadership demands that you leave the planet immediately and prepare for a round-table conference at the Intergalactic Court of Justice. Besides, your facts are incorrect. We were here before you to assist Fardour with an ecological catastrophe."

"The empire does not recognize Farhannsu leadership," Vakar said calmly. "Even if you were here first, you stayed without staking your claim. Fardour is ours. We have nothing to discuss. And if this is an act of war, so be it."

And with that, within a split second, two successive phaser shots were fired at the two security officers from the Enterprise, killing them instantly. Pike had no time to recover when three Romulan guards surrounded him.

"Your empire does not want a war," the now bound captain said through clenched teeth. "You are acting recklessly."

"You don’t get to tell me what the empire wants," Vakar said coolly. "Fardour is a Romulan colony. And your ship will be destroyed. It is old custom, isn’t it, to kill the messenger as a sign of failed diplomacy. Don’t worry, you will go down as well. But in the end, the last to die."

Pike was dragged off to the ship’s brig as Vakar ordered his helmsman to lock target on the Enterprise.

Lt. Cmdr. Khan and the rest of the bridge crew were monitoring the vital signs of the landing party most carefully. And that was why, when the life signs of the two security officers promptly disappeared, they sounded red alert and ordered the transporter room to beam Captain Pike out immediately.

"I am unable to do so," Engineer Albescu said, his voice panicked. "They are jamming the signal."

"Can you beam someone onto that ship?" Zoya asked.

But before Nick could answer, Helmsman Smith shouted. "They are locking target on us."

"Evasive maneuvers, now," Zoya ordered. "Hold on tight, everyone."

Smith and the navigator, Lt. Rossini swerved the ship sharply to avoid being hit. PADDs and other equipment fell to the floor with a loud clatter. The crew held onto their seats for dear life even as the angle of the maneuver caused their safety belts to dig into their necks.

However, despite their best efforts, the ship was unable to avoid a hit.

A powerful shockwave ripped through the Enterprise, pulling heavy objects from their positions and
causing people to lurch out of their seats. Zoya herself fell face first onto the navigation console while Rossini tried to get up from where he had fallen.

“They are about to hit again,” Smith yelled.

“Return fire,” Zoya ordered. “Command personnel report to battle stations, NOW,” she barked through bloodstained teeth. She had sustained injuries to her jaw and nose because of her fall. But she paid no mind to the mass of liquid agony that was her face.

“Shields, Mr. Smith?” she asked.

“At 64%”

“Damage report?”

“Deck 4, 7, and 9 report severe damage. Transporter capabilities are out. Right nacelle sustained damage as well.”

Zoya closed her eyes and took a moment before answering. She did not want to leave the captain and Spock behind. But she wasn’t sure of what to do. 400 lives depended on her decision.

“Captain,” Rossini’s pain-filled voice said softly, causing her eyes to snap open.

“I am not the captain,” she said.

“Right now, you are,” Rossini insisted. “There is a fleet of Romulan ships behind that one. We are outmatched and outnumbered.”

Zoya swallowed roughly before turning to Smith.

“Get us out of here,” she said softly. “Warp factor 4.”

“Aye, aye, Captain,” the helmsman answered solemnly before punching in the command that would leave Pike and Spock to fend for themselves.

“Spock is right, Aksil” T’Arul said softly. “Besides, we need all the help we can get. I know you lost eight men today. The most number of soldiers in any of the twelve platoons is no more than 50. And
each day, we lose more people than we can afford to.”

“Nine,” Aksil whispered, refusing to meet her eyes. “We lost nine men today. We must do their last rites before we do anything else.”

Logically, there was no time to hold a proper funeral for the fallen soldiers. But morale and hope were in short supply. Emotions were running high. It was important to take a quiet moment and bid farewell to their dead. The closure would bring them a measure of peace, which would enable them to think clearly the next day.

“I will prepare the ground while you perform your ablutions and take nourishment,” Spock said.

Aksil nodded to his men and they sat down to eat while Spock stepped out to start digging.

Spock was no stranger to hard work. As a Vulcan, he was strong enough to engage in manual labor without feeling too much strain. But it had been years since he had last worked the soil. As a young boy, he had often helped Amanda with her kitchen garden.

“That’s basil, kiddo,” she had said once. “It is absolutely my favorite herb.”

Boldly, Spock had taken two large leaves from the plant and stuck them in his mouth. The beginning of a mischievous smile hadugged at the corners of his mother’s mouth as if she had known what was coming.

And sure enough, a moment later, he had spat out the peculiar tasting leaves.

“I do not comprehend your illogical fondness for it,” he had managed to say, causing Amanda’s smile to break free. And then, she had explained to him that basil was always to be combined with certain other ingredients to bring out its flavor. That was also the first time she had cooked pizza at home. Of course, she had not used dairy cheese but it had been close enough, according to her.

After that, she had taught him to plant some basic terran herbs. She sometimes spiced their food with them. In fact, it had come as a surprise to him that the plomeek broth his mother cooked, contained lemon juice, coriander, and black pepper. He had found the soup served by most other Vulcan establishments to be very bland.

He wished he was working the soil now for something mundane like gardening. The fact that this hole he was digging would become the final resting place of fallen Farhannsu soldiers, was a very somber thought. Life was so precious. And this bloodshed, this insistence for domination, this pride that the Romulans fought for, this independence that meant everything to the Farhannsu—was any of it worth the cost?

“The hole is deep enough, brother,” Aksil said softly. He had crept up behind Spock without him noticing it.

“Do you indeed accept me as a brother?” Spock asked, not knowing what else to say.

“Yes,” the Farhannsu man answered. Spock took a moment to look at him. Really look at him. His face bore the marks of exhaustion. There was a pain in his deep, coal-black eyes that was hard to ignore. The rough stubble on his face was a testimony to that the fact that the fighting raged on unabated, leaving no time for even basic self-care.

Quietly, the other soldiers brought the wrapped bodies of their dead comrades and lowered them into the ground.
“Find salvation in the Sha Ka Ree,” Aksil said, his voice low and dangerously unsteady. “Be free from the clutches of comfort and the shackles of sorrow. Be well. Be eternal. Be one with the creator of all things.”

And while the soldiers knelt on the ground in silent tribute, Spock covered the grave with soil. “Do you desire to place a marker?” he asked.

“No,” Aksil answered, his eyes rimmed green but otherwise dry. “Let nature run her course.” Spock would have smiled ruefully had he been human. It was strange how Vulcans believed in the transient nature of the body and allowed it to become one with the ground as well. Separated by thousands of years and a bloody, gory history, there were some values that had refused to change.

And in a small way, it comforted Spock for reasons he did not understand.
Hey all, I am back with another chapter. It is packed with action and a lot of developments. And you will be mad at me for some of these. Please, don't be too angry. Pretty please! Do let me know what you think, though. I really love reading your comments and reviews. Honestly, it makes me sad when you guys don't review (illogical, needy, I know!!!). Stop reading the note now if you don't wish to know certain things about my personal life. But if you are interested, continue reading.

I write fanfiction because i want to improve my writing. And because I am lonely. There. I said it. I could choose to write a diary, I suppose. But writing fanfiction feels like I'm actually talking to someone instead of just to myself (which I also do. But why would I write to myself when I can simply talk!) In any case, I was mostly curious about why you read or write fanfiction. And I don't but sometimes, I feel better when I talk about what's bothering me but more often than not, I don't have anyone to talk to. Does it take away from your reading experience when an author does that through notes like these?

“They just warped out, sir,” the helmsman of the Kauravaki said.

Normally, Vakar would have been mildly upset at being denied the chance of an engaging battle with a Starfleet ship. But not today.

“We chased them away, sire,” one of the security men said jubilantly. But Vakar was not naïve enough to believe that.

“No,” he said softly, staring at the view screen. “They are planning something. They would not leave their captain behind.”

“What should our next course of action be?” the helmsman asked.

“Well, we need to find out what is their plan,” the commander answered. “Prepare the captain for interrogation. And scan the surface of the planet for any non-Farhanssu or non-Romulan life signs.”

XXXXX

Spock, T’Arul, and Aksil and his men returned to the bunker.

The walk back was slow because some of the soldiers were injured. Spock offered to carry some of their load, for which they were grateful. And as they walked, he took the time to really notice how much Fardour had changed since the Romulan invasion.

Every few miles, there were heaps of charred material. In most cases, it was impossible to tell what it might have been before the fire. But some partially burnt houses in the distance gave him a fairly good idea what the unrecognizable heaps were. In one instance, he was sickened to note the presence of partially burnt bones glistening morbidly in the otherwise black ash.

Further ahead, there were Romulan check posts. Romulan soldiers stood there with phasers and
disrupters in hand, ready to shoot anyone who might be suspicious. These, they avoided, by traveling through brambles and thickets. And much to his surprise, Aksil and his soldiers walked around him in a protective circle.

“You are easily recognizable as a Vulcan” Aksil said. He didn’t need to say anything more. They all knew that if Spock was discovered, they would all be dead. Mercifully, he had had the foresight to leave his blue science tunic behind. In plain black undershirt and slacks, he could be anyone.

It was excruciatingly difficult to walk through such a dense forest, especially while carrying almost 120 pounds on his back. But they had no other option. And with one eye on the check post, they continued to trek through the thorny, uneven path.

“WHO’S THERE?” A Romulan guard screamed from the distance. Apparently, despite their caution, their footfalls had not been quiet enough.

They stopped abruptly, their hearts in their mouths.

“It must be an animal,” another guard said.

“We need to be sure,” the first one said. “I’m going to fire in that direction. If it’s one of these Fardourati bastards, he will scream.”

With a ruthlessness that defied logic, he pointed his disruptor in their direction and fired.

Apek’s eyes went wide as he took a fatal hit to the abdomen. But before he could even gasp in pain, T’Arul placed her hand over his mouth and swiftly slit his throat with a pocket knife.

Spock controlled his nausea. And while he was completely unprepared for what he had just witnessed, he knew the Farhannsu were fighting to survive and their desperation had reached its limits. That's why he kept himself from making any disparaging remarks even later.

“There’s no one,” the second guard called out to the one who had fired. “Come, have some ale. You are getting paranoid on this planet of paranoid people. I swear, they are even worse than Vulcans. They choose to be pathetic. These are pathetic by birth.”

The first guard lowered his disruptor and continued to stare at the thicket, trying to detect movement. But when he saw nothing, he slowly turned around and walked back to the check post.

Wordlessly, T’Arul put Apek’s body down, taking utmost care to not make a noise. And only when they were completely sure that the guards were busy drinking, did they continue walking.

After a harrowing, anxious half-an-hour, they reached the bunker.

“We have to go back for his body,” Aksil said. “We can’t just leave him there. I promised I would never leave any of my men behind. I must go…” He was babbling and sobbing by this point. As battle-hardened and gruff as he was, he had no stomach for the sort of cold-blooded killing the Romulans were capable of. Sure, he too had killed soldiers before. But only in combat. To witness murder, to remain silent in the face of murder, to leave one’s comrade behind—these were against his principles.

“We can’t go back,” T’Arul said firmly. “Our numbers are dwindling. So many of our people are dying by the dozens in their labor camps. So many are wounded. We cannot afford to waste time over the dead.”

Aksil hung his head in misery but Arulini was right. They could not go back for a dead body whose
katra had already been lost.

“Spock, we need to disguise you,” she said, turning to the Vulcan. “I am going to shear your hair close to your scalp and use cosmetic sap to create ridges on your forehead. Hopefully, you’ll look close enough to us that they won’t notice the differences.”

Spock did not comment that the first time he had seen Farhannsu soldiers, he had been rather taken aback by their impractical dressing style and hair. Now of course, in the face of a real war, they had had no choice but to adopt more practical and understated attire.

“It is indeed logical to do so,” Spock said and sat down obediently.

T’Arul worked efficiently. It was strange for Spock to be getting his hair cut this short. Of course, he often cut his hair himself in order to maintain it as was proper among Vulcans. But he had never felt a razor so close to his scalp. He closed his eyes and meditated lightly while T’Arul gave him a makeover.

Almost an hour later, she brought him a drab olive and brown soldier’s uniform. It was loose and comfortable. But it wasn’t warm enough. Spock decided to wear it over his undershirt and slacks. Finally, he looked at himself in the mirror.

And he had to admire the woman’s artistry. He didn’t just look Farhannsu. He was Farhannsu.

“You cannot hold out much longer,” Vakar spat at Pike. “Tell me, what were your orders to your ship?”

Captain Pike was tired, sore, at the end of his rope. He had been beaten, electrocuted, and waterboarded. A part of him simply wanted to give them the information they wanted. But he was grateful that he couldn’t even if he wanted to; he had no idea why the Enterprise had left, other than to avoid being destroyed by the fleet of Romulan ships.

“My orders were to beam us out,” Pike said. “I don’t know why my ship left. It was most probably the acting captain’s decision to avoid your phasers.”

“Wrong. Answer,” the Romulan commander said. “You will talk,” he said and motioned his guards to double the current. A minute later, Captain Pike’s pain-filled cries filled the brig as the soles of his feet were once again subjected to electric shocks.

After almost 120 seconds, Vakar came closer to Pike.

“Look, Christopher, I have been very gentle with you so far,” he said, as if explaining something to a child. “You have no hope for rescue. We are a feared empire because we mercilessly crush our adversaries. You are an emissary so far. Don’t force me to mark you as an enemy. If that happens, it will be open season on you, for whatever my crew wants of you. Think. You have until tomorrow afternoon.”

After that, he and his guards exited the room. One of them unshackled the captain and placed a bottle of water and some bread next to his cot. Pike wasn’t hungry. But as he took a sip of the water, he
thought about Spock. He wondered if the Vulcan had been able to get back to the ship. He did not want to think otherwise.

But if there was one thing he knew about Spock, it was that he never did anything halfway.

XXXXX

“How could you do this?” Dr. Puri asked Zoya wretchedly. He couldn’t believe she had left Spock and the captain behind.

“He would never have done that,” he said, his worry and his anger obvious. “Please, we must go back.”

“We cannot, doctor,” Zoya answered. “They were locking target on us. And there were at least 30 ships in their fleet. We are not meant for that kind of engagement.”

“Have you contacted Starfleet for backup?” Puri asked.

“I have,” she answered. “It is on its way. But before we head back, we need to meet at Starbase Tev’Kehr. We need to have a plan.”

“We don’t have so much time,” the CMO yelled. “They could torture or kill the captain. We have to rescue him now. And what about Spock. We don’t even know if he’s okay down there.”

“If it is any consolation to you, we are still able to monitor their vitals,” Zoya said, trying to reassure the good doctor. “Spock seems to be doing fine. And barring a sharp spike in his readings for about 45 minutes, the captain seems to be doing okay as well.”

“He would have never left you behind,” Puri said again, accusation and hurt dripping from his words.

Zoya agreed with him. Captain Pike was not a coward. He would have never left her or any other crew member behind. But she wasn’t him. Her priority was to keep the Enterprise safe. And while she felt ashamed of herself as a person, she constantly repeated to herself that she was doing this for the needs of the many.

In fact, Mr. Spock would do the same. Didn’t he always say, the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few. or the one. Two, in this case. Zoya sighed. She felt like she had aged years in this one mission alone. She would be grateful after this mission, if she never, ever saw a Farhannsu again.

XXXXX

Spock and T’Arul ventured out in the evening to gather more herbs and supplies. They were running low on everything. But it was not safe to be out after dark. Well, to be honest, it was not safe in the daytime either. However, while the brutality during the day followed a pattern of legally-sanctioned abuse, there was no limit to what could happen during the night. That’s why T’Arul did not want to go out at such a late hour. But with the sixth and tenth platoons returning tomorrow, they had no choice but to take the risk. Spock had wondered why the numbers of the resistance were so small. Logically, considering the size and population of Fardour, there had to be more people in the resistance.

“There are,” she had answered simply. “The resistance is spread all over the planet, Spock. But we are limited by geography and our outdated, very basic knowledge of technology. The 12 platoons in our area cover about 500 square miles of area. There are a number of other groups. But they get
crushed all the time. New groups mushroom every day to take the place of the ones that were
destroyed the previous day. One would think we’d been fighting for years. To think it has barely
been two weeks. Two weeks and it feels like an eternity.”

“I empathize with your people,” Spock said.

“No point,” T’Arul answered. “But anyway, let’s get to work.”

“I request you to stay in the shadows,” he told her as they gathered herbs in their respective baskets.
“Your safety is of paramount importance.”

“What about you?” she asked, irritated by his protectiveness. “You’re made of titanium or what?”

“Negative,” he answered. “Like all other life forms, I am carbon-based. My vital signs are also being
monitored by the Enterprise. If I am in significant danger, instinctively, my body will send them the
signal that I must be beamed out.”

“That’s neat,” T’Arul acknowledged. “Maybe once all this is over, I could still go to Starfleet
Academy.”

“Will your family approve?” Spock asked.

She stiffened at that.

“My grandparents are in hiding,” she shrugged. “My mother was dragged off to a labor camp. If any
of them survive, I guess I will find out if they approve. Otherwise, I’ll just have to assume that I have
their blessings from beyond.”

To this, Spock had no response. In the last few weeks, he had seen so much destruction, such cruelty
that he had no idea what to say. First, it was T’Amun and Sivak, then, the Orion refugees, and now,
the Farhannsu.”

In some of his mother’s books, it was written that the 23rd century was as close to Utopia as
mankind could get. He had never really understood this phrase before, particularly because it used
the anthropocentric term ‘mankind.’ However, now he knew why. Earth had come a long way from
his bloody, barbaric history. But planets like Orion, Romulus, Qo’nos, Cardassia Prime, and many
others, had nothing to do with peace or egalitarianism.

“Spock,” T’Arul whispered urgently. “Someone’s coming. We must hide.” And she pulled him
closer to the ground in order to hide him in the long grass.

They stayed hidden for a few minutes while the patrolling Romulan soldiers inspected the area. Both
T’Arul and Spock had their ears sharply tuned to the sounds the soldiers were making. So far, it
seemed like a routine patrol.

But then, a high-pitched scream pierced the air.

“Oh no,” T’Arul groaned in despair. “They have got Abalika. We have already had this happen to
two other women from our bunker. They strayed too far. Oh my, why didn’t she stay inside like I
told them to.”

“Will they execute her?” Spock asked, crouched low, ready to defend the woman next to him if
needed.

“No,” she swallowed roughly. “They will take her away for entertainment.”
“Will they return her?” Spock asked, dread pooling in the pit of his stomach.

“No, Spock,” she answered gravely. “They will burn them after they are done. And leave their remains for us to find.”

“We must act now in that case,” he said and stood up before she could stop him. She wanted to shout and tell him to come back. But she didn’t dare do that. It was bad enough that he had rushed off to help the poor woman. If she gave her position away as well, their bunker would get endangered.

No, Spock had acted like an idiot, completely un-Vulcan. But he was on his own now. She would not risk her people for him. Besides, maybe his ship would beam him up. Any minute now.

But the golden shimmers she had learned to associate with the Enterprise never came.

And so, she watched through the blades of the grass, as Spock tried to overpower four Romulans at the same time, but was tackled to the ground. She watched as he covered the cowering woman with his own body as blows rained down on him. She watched as one of the guards pointed his phaser at his back.

And she looked away as the loud sound of a phaser blast rang out through the otherwise still and silent valley.
where my demons hide

Chapter Summary

Hey, all. I am back with another chapter. It has some dark elements so please proceed with caution. Scroll down to the bottom for additional warnings. As always, I'd love your comments and reviews. They absolutely make my day.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The concentrated heat of the phaser seared through Spock’s skin. But with a strength he hadn’t known he possessed, he managed to keep himself from crying out.

“You should have killed him,” one of the guards said as Spock tried unsuccessfully to reach behind himself to press his hand to the throbbing, burning wound on his shoulder.

“No, this one needs to be taught a lesson,” one of the other guards responded maliciously. “We’ll take him with us. The woman gets lucky today.”

“The chief does not like boys.”

“Yes, but we fuck women every day. There’s a lot more to be done with a man. He’s Fardourati. I wonder what his ass is like.”

“He’s a faggot, that’s what he’s like.”

“They all are. Bloody weakling cock suckers.”

They then pulled Spock roughly to his feet and started dragging him away. The mud and grit on the ground stuck to his blood-soaked shirt.

The woman he had just saved found herself frozen in fear and unable to get up.

T’Arul watched this scene from a distance, unable to do anything even as her desire to go and snatch Spock from the guards warred with her logic that required her to stay hidden.

After several tense minutes, Spock was dumped into the boot of the patrolling air car. And with a sinking feeling in her stomach, the half-Farhannsu woman watched them leave. She waited for the vehicle to move out of sight before abandoning her position. After several more tense minutes, she stood up.

“Are you okay?” she asked, rushing to the still shaking woman on the ground. “I told you and the others to stay indoors. Why did you come out?”

The woman did not answer immediately. Her kohl-lined eyes were still wide with shock. Her hands clutched the fabric of her stained skirt tightly. She was unsure of what to say. As one of the inmates of the bunker, she knew she had been saved by the actions of the Vulcan they had treated so harshly not too long ago. And yet, he had come to her aid, taken a phaser wound for her, would probably be found tomorrow raped and tortured and burned beyond recognition.
He probably didn’t even know her name.

“They will kill him,” she whispered miserably as T’Arul helped her to her feet.

“Or worse,” the other woman responded bitterly. “It is nighttime.”

The woman hung her head in shame and allowed herself to be led back to the shelter. Inside, she constantly chanted an ancient prayer, hoping for a miracle that would save Spock from the savagery of the Romulans.

XXXXX

“I thought you were bringing us a woman,” Orik, the inspecting officer of their check post said when he saw the prisoner his guards had brought. “I didn’t realize you wanted to sample a man.”

“There is no such thing as a Fardourati man” one of them sneered. “He tried to protect the woman we marked for taking. We fired at him, hit him in the shoulder and incapacitated him. We can have more fun with him. See if his ass is as tender as that of the bitch we took yesterday.”

“I don’t fuck men, not even these wormy excuses for men,” the officer said, as if disgusted by the very sight of their hapless victim. “You can have him.”

All through this, Spock’s mind was foggy. He was getting dizzy with the blood loss but he could sense that they were thinking of doing to him whatever had been planned for that poor woman.

He closed his eyes in desperation.

He had avoided the advances of Ambassador St. Laurent, only to land in this situation. A moment later, the guards dragged him away to a back room, away from the officer’s chamber. They dumped him on his stomach on the hard, stone floor which was too cold for him.

“You are bleeding like a bitch, Fardourati,” one of them said with mock concern. “You will die at this rate. How will we have our fun, then?” he asked.

Somewhat disoriented by the cold and the blood loss, Spock did not notice the sizzling sound that came from a corner of the room behind him.

Suddenly, an agonizing, burning pain blossomed in his injured, bleeding shoulder. He screamed as the terrible sensation took him by surprise. The guard had cauterized his wound with a heated dagger!

“There,” he said, admiring his grotesque handiwork. “That should keep you alive for what we have planned for you. Are you excited?” he asked. He caressed Spock’s rump almost lovingly before swiftly tearing his trousers and underwear in one stroke.

Spock froze. He felt horribly exposed as a draught of cold air ghosted over his now exposed backside. But he fought to retain his composure. He would not give this man the satisfaction of knowing how scared, how unnerved he was by what was happening.

“You’re used to being a slave, it seems,” the guard said, amused at the patchwork of scars on his captive’s buttocks. His words made Spock nauseous. St. Laurent had said something along similar lines. In that moment, illogically, he wished his parents had insisted on the removal of these scars that made him even more vulnerable in such precarious situations.

“A painslut, eh?” the Romulan smirked, slapping Spock's buttocks. “We can accommodate that. Oh,
you'll be so good. I can't wait to taste that delicious ass. Ready for some real manly cock, Fardourati? Come on, beg me for it. Beg me for what you need.”

“I request you to refrain from assaulting my person,” Spock said weakly. “However, I doubt my request will be taken into consideration.” The words felt inadequate and messy on his tongue. Also, he did not realize he had fallen back into his regular speech pattern. He realized his slip too late.

“What did you say?” the guard asked sharply, his demeanor completely different from what it had been moments ago. His hand paused its degrading exploration.

Spock stayed quiet.

“Go on,” the Romulan asked menacingly. “What did you just say?”

But he didn’t wait for a response.

“CLEREF,” he called out to another guard. “Didn’t we receive an order that asked us to be on the lookout for non-Romulan or non-Fardourati life signs?”

“We did,” the guard called Cleref confirmed. “But even the ship was scanning. It didn’t find anything. What happened, Payin?”

“I think I know why the ship didn’t find anything,” Payin said, gears turning in his brain. “He didn’t scream when he was hit by the phaser shot. And just now, he spoke like I have never heard any Fardourati speak. This one is a spy. A Vulcan spy.”

“Vulcan?” Cleref asked. “Are you mad? What would a Vulcan be doing on Fardour?”

“Alert the officer,” Payin said. “The Vulcan is our distant ancestor, and of these Fardourati vermin. That's why his life signs didn't pop up distinctly on the scanner. He is the secret that Starfleet captain has been keeping from our commander.”

Spock did not respond to what he heard. But if he was interpreting this correctly, then Captain Pike had been captured. This was not good at all. The odds were looking extremely bleak.

They left him alone for a few minutes. He took that time to get the pain under control. If he was going to find a way out of this mess, he needed all his wits about him. He also knew escape was not an option. If he ran away, there would be a witch hunt on Fardour and nobody would be spared till he was found.

No, he needed another plan.

Maybe, maybe they would turn him over to this commander that they spoke of. Maybe he would be reunited with the captain.

Ten minutes later, the two guards returned with their senior officer.

“Hmm… have you scanned him more closely?” he asked. “We don’t want to make a mistake. Lord Vakar will not forgive us if he turns out to be anything other than Vulcan.”

Payin left the room and came back with a more sophisticated scanner. The scanner whirred for a minute before giving its results.

“Half Vulcan,” he said, reading off from the screen. “And half human.”

and tell them what we have here. Meanwhile, I need to get better acquainted with this foolish Vulcan.”

XXXXX

“So, Vulcan, what is your name?” Orik asked the now tightly bound Spock. There was nothing but a businesslike ruthlessness in the Romulan's dark blue eyes. The aristocratic nose was turned up in distaste.

But Spock did not respond. He did not have enough information to know if his response would compromise the mission at hand.

“We can do this the easy way or the hard way,” the Romulan said almost gently. “I don’t want to harm you. I’d like to present you to our commander in one piece.”

Spock still didn’t say anything.

“Okay, no problem, don’t answer this question,” Orik said with a forced nonchalance. “Maybe you can tell me why you are on Fardour and who helped you with this disguise of yours.”

Still no answer.

Sighing, the Romulan got up from his chair and walked behind Spock. He placed his hand on Spock’s injured shoulder and squeezed lightly. numerous rivulets of dark green blood gushed out of the wound.

Even that slight pressure sent stabs of agony through Spock. It was with great difficulty that he maintained his silence.

“Definitely a Vulcan,” Orik said appreciatively. “These Fardourati start screaming the minute we touch them. You honor us by being difficult to break. I would have greatly enjoyed breaking you. But alas, you must be intact when our commander receives you.”

However, despite what he had just said, he pressed harder on Spock’s injury, this time, digging his fingers into the torn flesh.

The Vulcan let out a nearly inaudible grunt of discomfort. The pressure increased and the probing fingers twisted themselves to reach deeper. Spock clenched his teeth to keep himself from crying out. He was scared he would betray himself.

“Pain is a thing of the mind,” he told himself, holding onto his shields with every ounce of his strength.

Just then, the guards returned

“We can beam him up now,” Payin said. “They are eager to see if his presence will make the captain talk.”

“Excellent,” Orik said and with a final squeeze, he withdrew his fingers from the mess he had created out of Spock’s wounded shoulder.

"I hope we meet again, Vulcan," he said in the way of farewell. "Maybe I will break you in battle."

XXXXX

“Where is Spock?” Aksil asked when he saw T’Arul.
“Taken,” she answered. “Here, escort Abalika to the women’s area. She is a little dazed but fine otherwise. Tell Anisiya to give her a glass of the Togeltalim infusion. It will help her sleep peacefully. And the lamps at in the southern doorway are not working. They need to be changed. We also need more blankets.”

“What happened?” he asked again, ignoring the mundane tasks she was assigning him, disbelief and fear obvious in his voice.

T’Arul turned to face him.

“He saved Abalika from the patrolling guards,” she answered mechanically. “They decided to take him instead of her to teach him a lesson. Happy? Now please get on with the work.”

“We need to get him back,” Aksil said. "Oh God, they will tear him apart.”

“We cannot rescue him,” T'Arul said firmly. "We can only go and look for his remains tomorrow morning.”

Her emotionless tone seemed to convey indifference. But it was easy to tell she was trying very hard to stay in control. She could not bring herself to think about what could be happening to Spock right now. But the images her mind conjured up were so horrific that she had no way of blocking them.

Aksil stood there for several minutes, trying to digest everything he had just been told.

“Don’t just stand there,” T’Arul snapped at him. “There’s work to be done. We don’t have time to grieve.”

Finally, the man nodded shakily. And just then, something clicked.

"Where was exactly were you when he was taken?" he asked.

"About two miles away," she answered. "At the outer edge of Alban's old fields."

“We need to clear out this bunker,” Aksil whispered. “If they realize he’s not one of us, they will come searching for whoever helped him. And they will find us. We are too close to those fields.”

T’Arul’s eyes widened as she saw the wisdom in the Aksil’s words.

“Open the tunnels,” she ordered him and ran in the opposite direction to prepare weapons and medical supplies for their mass escape.

That had no time to waste. The guards would be upon them within the hour.

XXXXX

Captain Pike’s condition had worsened over the last two hours. He was tired and confused. They had been questioning him relentlessly for almost twelve hours now. And in that entire time, he had not been allowed to drink water or go to the toilet.

“Where is your ship?” Vakar asked him yet again. “Look, captain, I am not enjoying this any more than you are. I could easily turn you over to my junior officers for these interrogations. I assure you they will not show you the respect I am showing you. Their methods of extracting information are very brutal. I promise you, you will not like them.”

“I don’t know where the ship went,” Pike said for the hundredth time that day. Once again, he thanked his stars that he really didn’t know. Otherwise, maybe he would have babbled. His lips were
cracked and dry. He was tired. And his throat felt like sandpaper.

Vakar noticed the signs of dehydration.

“You can have this water if you talk,” he said and took a long sip from the glass. The ice in the goblet tinkled softly and the condensing droplets on the outside made Pike lick his lips with wretched need.

“You want it?” Vakar asked slowly.

Pike nodded, ashamed of his weakness.

The Romulan commander walked closer to his prisoner and placed the glass against his lips. With an agonizing slowness, he tipped the glass to allow a drop to fall into the poor man’s parched throat.

All too quickly, he pulled the glass away.

“You can have more,” Vakar said. “Just tell me where your ship went and why you sent it away.”

“I… I… do don’t know,” Pike answered shakily.

Vakar sighed and stood up to leave.

“We will try again tomorrow,” he said, not bothering to untie the captain.

He was almost at the door when his comm. unit beeped. He took the message and then turned around to face Pike again.

“Well, captain, seems like we will definitely try again tomorrow and succeed,” he said. “My officers on the planet have just caught a Vulcan. A half-Vulcan to be precise. How fortuitous, don’t you think? Maybe he will be able to jog your memory.”

Chapter End Notes

Warnings: Mild Torture, Attempted Rape
Hey all, I am back with another chapter. So, so sorry for such a long wait. But I am trying very hard to find a job. I will have to leave the country if I don't find work in two months. So I am super stressed.

But, if you miss me too much, find me on Tumblr. My username is CarminaVulcana and my blog is called 'The best of Spock.'

The sickening sounds of struggle assaulted Captain Pike’s ears. It didn’t help that the person bucking and jerking was his acting first officer, Spock.

Vulcans hated water. The Romulans knew that. And they were using it to their full advantage.

This was the fifth time they had pushed the Vulcan’s head into a trough full of ice-cold water mixed with acetic acid, the substance commonly known as vinegar. Before this, he had been subjected to a harsh beating with a leather switch on the soles of his feet and the back of his knees.

“Where is the Enterprise?” Vakar asked Spock angrily. “And what were you doing down on Fardour? You tell us and we will stop. You can be free from this water. And your captain will be allowed to drink some.”

“We do not know where our ship went,” Spock answered after a minute of uncontrollable coughing. His nostrils were burning after this harsh treatment. And he was shivering with cold.

“Useless, so useless,” the commander all but spat. Frustrated, he grabbed Spock’s hair and plunged his head into the trough again. The Vulcan’s hands were bound tightly in front of him and they struggled mightily to break the handcuffs but to no avail.

Almost a minute later, Vakar pulled his head out. By this point, Spock was breathing heavily and his eyes were half-lidded. Pain and exhaustion were plainly visible on his wet face.

“I can keep this up all night, captain,” the Romulan said to Pike. “If you don’t tell me where your ship went and what your orders were to this foolish Vulcan.”

“What must I do to make you believe we are telling the truth,” Pike shouted. His worry for Spock was messing with his ability to think clearly. And in the last two hours, he had been forced to witness the savagery the Romulans were capable of. To his credit, the Vulcan had maintained a stoic silence through his ordeal. But that did not mean his condition was any better than a human’s would be after such torture.

“Make him talk,” Vakar grunted, throwing Spock on the floor. “Or you talk. That’s what you can do to make me believe you.” He motioned his guards to untie the captain and walked out of the cell.

A moment later, one of the guards came forward and unchained Pike’s feet. There was a mixture of pity and horror in his eyes as he cut the leather bonds on his wrists. Wordlessly, he also placed a bottle of anti-inflammatory lotion on the floor and left.
“Spock, Spock,” Pike said desperately, drawing the dark head into his lap. “Are you okay?”

Pike knew that was a stupid question. He knew first-hand the effects of these interrogation techniques. He took stock of Spock’s injuries. As expected, the soles of his feet were raw and bloody. The backs of his knees were one giant wound.

“As if you needed any more scars,” Pike murmured darkly, glad that even though they had removed his torn pants in order to punish him, they had allowed him to keep the tunic on. He had no desire to see the rest of his first officer’s scars which Dr. Puri had only warned him about.

“I am adequate, captain,” Spock said, trying to sit up.

“Relax, you’re hurt,” Pike said and tried to get him to lie down again.

But the Vulcan was adamant.

“My injuries look more grave than they are,” he said bravely but he did not fool Pike.

Regardless, the older man sighed and allowed his stubborn junior to sit up.

Neither man said anything. They knew their movements and conversations were being recorded. They didn’t dare discuss anything sensitive.

Besides, neither of them had enough information from the other to know what they could be jeopardizing by talking. Spock was reasonably sure the ship had left on the orders of Lt. Cmdr. Khan. But he wasn’t completely sure. Maybe the captain had left classified orders with her that he had not been made privy to.

On the other hand, Pike had a lot of questions for Spock. But he could not ask him any of those. They could not compromise the resistance and if Spock had indeed spent time with Arulini and her fellow soldiers, then Spock knew their whereabouts and at least some of their plans. No, they could not take the risk of exchanging notes.

So they waited.

The long hours of the night passed slowly. Both men were tired and in pain. Mercifully, the captain was only a little dehydrated and bruised in places. Unlike him, Spock’s phaser injury was starting to get infected.

There was a fevered flush to his cheeks and he shifted several times in order to find a comfortable spot on the cold, metal floor of the cell. It was obvious, he had been unsuccessful so far.

“I can give you my shirt to keep behind your back,” Pike said to him. “It will be more comfortable.”

But Spock only shook his head in response.

“I hate this silence, Spock, talk to me,” Pike said, exasperated.

“I do not have anything worthwhile to say to you, sir,” the Vulcan answered tiredly. But then his eyes softened. “I do understand, however, that being human, the unnatural situation we are in is oppressive to you more so than it is me.”

It was Pike’s turn to keep quiet at that. He was certain Spock was only trying to make him feel better. But he suddenly felt worse about his human failings.

Several more hours passed.
Pike drifted into a light sleep listening to the sound of Spock’s breathing.

“WHAT IS THIS?” Vakar roared, waking them up from their uneasy sleep. In his hands, he held a blue Starfleet tunic and a pair of plain black pants.

“Now try lying to me Vulcan, and I will break every finger on both your hands,” he said murderously, crouching down to Spock’s level. “Tell me what I want to know and I will give you a quick, painless death.”

“What do you wish to know?” Spock asked calmly even though he was appalled that Vakar had gained possession of his science tunic. It was obvious that Arulini’s hideout had been raided. And he had no way of knowing if anyone had survived. He knew he would have to give him some information. But he wasn’t sure how much. He didn’t want to compromise the safety of the Farhannsu people he had come to see as kinsmen and friends.

“What were you doing down there?” the commander asked.

“I was captured by the Farhannsu,” Spock answered quickly. “You are aware they do not like Vulcans and Romulans. I managed to subdue the two men guarding me disguised myself in their clothing. I was trying to escape when I saw your soldiers accosting a young woman. I was honor-bound to come to her aid.”

“Hmmm… I don’t know if I believe you yet,” Vakar said. “Why were you on Fardour in the first place. What was your mission before you were captured?”

“I cannot tell you that in front of the captain,” he answered. “It was a task given only to me.”

Pike looked at Spock in the moment, utterly confused. He had a feeling in his gut that Spock was planning something, that he was bluffing. But then again, he had no idea if Spock had indeed received a separate set of instructions from someone higher up in the fleet. It was unlikely. But it wasn’t entirely improbable.

“Okay, you can come with me to my quarters,” the commander said. “We will talk there.” Then he turned to Pike.

“Good news, captain. If the Vulcan talks, no more torture for you. Hopefully, I will send a celebratory meal and a drink for you soon… How do the humans say it again? Oh yeah, a last supper. Enjoy your last six hours of life, sir.”

Spock was led through the long corridors to a much more luxuriously furnished and warm part of the ship.

“Leave us,” Vakar said to his bodyguards. “The Vulcan shall pose no threat to me.”

It was true. Spock’s hands were bound to his neck with a short chain. His shoulder was still injured. And his body was still sore from the interrogation he had had to endure last night.

Wordlessly, the commander’s personal security men left.

“Sit,” Vakar said to Spock. Then he proceeded to fasten one of the links in his chains to a hook under the table. This left Spock almost completely immobile and decidedly uncomfortable. He was
forced to hold his forearms awkwardly at the level of his collarbone.

“Your mission?” the Romulan asked.

“I was sent down there to ascertain if there were any factions of the Farhannsu loyal to the federation,” Spock answered, not exactly lying but somewhat hedging.

“And why was your captain not told of this classified mission of yours?”

“The captain was under orders to send me down with medical supplies for the planet’s natives. However, only I was given separate instructions to assess their political allegiances as well.”

“What did you find out?”

“I was unable to glean the information I sought. However, I saw much when I was captured.”

“So your mission failed then,” Vakar said more to himself than to his captive. “It looks like you are no use to me unless there are things about the Farhannsu resistance that you can tell me. I should kill you now. But my bosses want you live for some reason. Too bad they don’t want your captain.”

“I do have information that would be valuable to you,” Spock answered, wondering if he was doing the right thing here. The captain would surely be killed unless he bought them some time. “However, I do not believe I wish to share it with you. But I will give it to you if you give me something I require.”

“You’re funny, Vulcan,” Vakar said mockingly. “In case you haven’t noticed, you are in no position to bargain. But I guess your high and mighty ideals make you too loyal to the Farhannsu just because they are living things. I wonder what you want from me so badly that you’re willing to put your pathetic ethics aside for them.”

“I must correct you. My loyalty lies with the federation and with my captain” Spock said. “And as you put it yourself, my mission failed. I was under no orders to protect the Farhannsu people unless I chose to. I do not know if you have been made aware of this but when our ship came here seven weeks, two days, and 18 hours ago, I bonded with a native woman who was ultimately murdered by her people. Vulcans suppress their emotion. However, it does not mean we do not have them. I bear no loyalty to the Farhannsu people. I would gladly give up what I know if the captain would be spared the fate of death.”

“I find that very hard to believe,” Vakar said. “You were captured by my soldiers because you attempted to save a Farhannsu woman from them. And then you say you bear them no loyalty. Vulcans are not crafty. But they are by no means self-contradictory. I would accept it if you were human. But you are not.”

“I am half human,” Spock answered. “And I chose to aid the woman your soldiers had marked for themselves because she reminded me of my dead bondmate. As a half Vulcan, my mastery over my emotions is inadequate.”

It was taking every ounce of his courage and discipline to bluff like this with a straight face. But Spock knew this was his only option. And even then, there was one more thing that he needed to do. He needed an opening to execute the next part of his dangerously illogical plan.

“Interesting,” the commander said, trying to make sense of what Spock had just told him. Vulcans were known for not being able to lie. But this one had just admitted he was not a full-blooded Vulcan. But maybe it wouldn’t hurt to listen to what he had to say.
“Okay, Vulcan, go on… what do you want to tell me about this so-called resistance and I want details.”

Spock opened his mouth to speak but suddenly, his face paled and he seemed to struggle to breathe. The outward signs weren’t obvious but the sudden pallor to his skin was enough to tell Vakar that something was very, very wrong.

A moment later, Spock’s upper body pitched forward and landed on the table with a loud thud.

The commander rushed to Spock’s side and felt for a pulse. It was weak and thready.

“Wake up, Vulcan,” he shouted as he quickly started placed a call to the ship’s infirmary.

There was no response from the prone figure.

A few tense minutes later, a medic rushed into the room and scanned him with a tricorder.

“What’s wrong with him?” the commander demanded.

“You tortured him,” Bagol, the medic said. “His injuries are serious enough that they could cause him to collapse.”

“No no… he was fine,” Vakar said. “He was about to tell me something about the Farhannsu resistance. Before he could say anything at all, he went slack and then fainted.

“Most unusual,” Bagol said, racking his brains to find a reasonable explanation for what might have happened.

“How would he know anything about the resistance?” he asked.

“One of the factions captured him and he says he saw enough to doom them.”

Suddenly, everything clicked in place.

“They are much stronger telepaths than even Vulcans,” the medic said. “They probably recognized the threat he posed if he ever escaped. It is my hunch but they probably planted some kind of a failsafe mechanism in his mind that would make him faint if he tried to say anything.”

“What now?” Vakar asked.

“We need to take him to the infirmary. And I must loosen those shackles on his hands. His hands need to have full circulation considering he has probably suffered a brain injury.”

“Do it,” the Romulan said desperately. He had been given clear orders to keep the Vulcan alive. And if something happened to him now, it would be his own head on the line.

Bagol went ahead an undid the chains on Spock’s wrists.

The minute he unlocked the cuffs, everything moved as fast as lightning.

Both, the commander and the doctor were on the floor.

And Spock was massaging his wrists.

He hadn’t been sure it would work. But he had taken a desperate chance to get into the commander’s personal lair.
Miraculously, it had worked.

And bless the Vulcan mind disciplines. He had managed to feign sudden illness with ease. He could not believe it had all gone so smoothly. But he had no time to waste in congratulating himself.

Quickly, he found the main computer of the ship. It took him less than ten minutes to send a message to the Enterprise. He waited for a response. He knew there would be someone in communications at all times, receiving and answering every message as fast as possible.

And sure enough, ten seconds later he received the information that their ship was less than half an hour away from beaming distance.

Now all he needed to do was to get to the captain and keep him safe for the next thirty minutes.
Spock did not waste any time. He carefully made his way out of Vakar’s suite and hid behind a beam just inside the main doorway. There were guards there and he needed to be careful. Several tense minutes passed and nothing happened. It became clear to him that he would have to risk it.

He was a man of science and academics. Even though he was trained in hand-to-hand combat, he had no desire to fight these men. But he also knew he had to get to the captain as fast as he could.

He was in a quandary.

After a little more thinking, he decided to take the risk.

Stealthily, he managed to conceal himself in the shadows outside the door. The guards were just fifty feet away. He stayed perfectly still.

But just then, a powerful blast shook the floor of the ship.

And that was the opening he was looking for.

The guards rushed from their post, presumably to the bridge. And Spock took this opportunity to run as fast as he could to the cell where the captain was being held.

However, it wasn’t easy.

On the way, he was forced to nerve pinch three guards and maintain his balance in the face of another blast.

“Spock, where...” Pike began to say the moment he saw Spock burst into his cell. But just then, two things happened.

They were tossed right into the ceiling as the power to the brig was cut, also cutting off oxygen and temperature controls in addition to gravity. Within nanoseconds, the captain’s face started turning blue but Spock was helpless to do anything. Besides, his own body was starting to fight against the bone-chilling cold even though it would take a few more minutes for him to start feeling the effects of the lack of oxygen. But before that could happen, they were engulfed in the familiar warmth of a transporter beam.

“Thank God, you are safe,” Dr. Puri said as he motioned two orderlies to help Pike and Spock onto anti-grav stretchers. He looked like he had aged more than ten years in such a short time.

“We can walk,” Pike said weakly and pushed the orderly away. “I should be on the bridge.”

“Oh no, you don’t,” Puri said. “We are not doing this. The admiralty’s orders were clear. Get you guys out and leave. The military ships are here. They have to deal with this now, not us.”

Spock stayed quiet as Pike looked at him with a bewildered expression on his face.

“Spock, say something,” Pike said. It was obvious he didn’t know how to react. It felt like a slap on their face to be asked to flee from the battle. It stung worse because these were official orders from the admiralty.
But Spock felt otherwise.

"I find myself in agreement with the admiralty, Captain," he said. "The Enterprise is not equipped for battle."

"What, you too, Spock?" Pike said, shocked. "You know this was our mission. We can't abandon it at this stage."

"The admiralty has its reasons, Captain," Spock said. "There is perhaps a back-up plan that we have not been made privy to. Regardless of what we do ultimately, it would be wise to appraise ourselves with the exact orders of the command."

"And for that, we have to go to the bridge," Pike said. He turned to the CMO. "We will see you once we know what we're doing. Don't fuss."

But the CMO wound't budge. He again tried to make the captain see reason.

And while, the commanding crew of the Enterprise was engaged in this heated argument, on the Romulan ship, Vakar was starting to regain consciousness. In his weakened state, Spock's nerve pinch had not been particularly strong. Vakar was angry at having been duped so spectacularly.

And he was going to have his revenge.

Without glancing back at his still unconscious medical officer, he marched off the bridge, furious and desperate for retribution.

="Sir, the Enterprise is back," one of his subordinates reported to him.

He sat down in his chair, looking at the screen with a cold, calculated detachment.

"Scan it for Vulcan life signs," he ordered. Well, if that pacifist piece of filth was on that ship, he was going to be very sorry for his foolish and short-lived bravado.

XXXXX

"Puri, I get your concern, but we can’t just turn back like that," Pike said for the tenth time in two minutes. "Before I do anything, I need to confirm these orders and confer with Lt. Cmdr. Khan. It is protocol. Don't force me to confine you to the med bay."

And with that, he walked out with Spock right behind him.

The good doctor was seething. He could tell how seriously Spock was injured. The signs of torture were obvious on both men but one couldn’t argue with fools, especially not hardheaded ones.

"Well, let’s get back to the med bay," he said to the two orderlies still waiting for orders. "They will come back after establishing the ship’s next course of action." Though, of course, he knew that was a pile of BS. They were going to run themselves into the ground and he would be the one to put them back together again, if there was enough of them left in the end. These were irrational, morbid thoughts. But he couldn't shake the feeling of dread that had taken root in the pit of his stomach.

Meanwhile, on the Romulan ship, Vakar’s communications officer confirmed the presence of a Vulcan-Human hybrid on the Enterprise.

"Should we fire, sir?" he asked, fully aware of the fact that somehow, the Vulcan and his captain had escaped the ship through the commander’s carelessness. But he was wise enough to not say it. But at
the same time, he knew how angry Vakar was at being thwarted like that.

“No, put it on screen,” he said calmly. There was a steeliness in his voice that promised no mercy once he was done talking.

“Captain, you are back,” Zoya said and leaped out of his chair. “Are you alright?”

“I am,” Pike answered. “Spock, get to the science station. Zoya, Status report?”

“Sir, we are under orders to turn back immediately,” she answered. “We were told in no uncertain terms that we were to lead five Defiant-class warships, Ulysses, Kaali, Ticonderoga, Titania, and Poseidon safely to Farhannsu space and attempt a rescue of yourself and Lt. Spock, if possible. The Ulysses is here with us, providing cover fire from behind the planet. I don’t believe the Romulans have realized yet that there are two ships instead of one.”

“Well, where are the other warships?” Pike asked.

“They are currently hiding 750 miles away behind the T’Salok asteroid belt.”

“Hiding?” Pike asked incredulously. “What for? They need to be here.”

Zoya fidgeted before answering.

“Sir, we requested them to stay away till we could get you and Lt. Spock out of there. By ourselves, we had a better chance of staying hidden and when we received Spock’s message, we made the decision to have the warships lag behind us by 30 minutes. We asked the Ulysses to accompany us only for our protection. We are ready to warp out of here on your command.”

“You realize how much danger we are in?” Pike asked. “By now, they probably know the Enterprise is back in Fardour’s orbit. I am also assuming you retreated last time because the ship’s safety was being threatened. Even with protection, we are vulnerable. Even a Defiant-class ship is no match for a whole fleet of Romulan ships. So, what has changed?”

“We have you back sir,” Zoya said and then blushed furiously. She had not meant to say that. But last time, she had had to literally harden her heart to stone in order to protect the crew. But she had known they would come back for the captain. And they had. Sometimes, she was surprised by her own bravery.

At the same time, she harbored no machoism She was actually in favor of leaving and allowing the warships to handle this mess. They all knew diplomacy was not going to work. In fact, in her opinion, it had effectively failed.

“Lt. Cmdr. Khan,” the voice of the junior officer manning the communication station interrupted her internal monologue. “We are being hailed by the ship of the Romulan Commander.”

“Put it on screen,” Pike ordered.

A moment later, Vakar’s scowling face stared back at them from the giant screen.

“So, you managed to get away,” he said softly. “Very clever. Your Vulcan is a credit to your team.”

“Come to the point, commander,” Pike said. “I don’t think you have called to simply compliment me on my officer’s ingenuity.”
“No, you are right,” Vakar said. “I was simply trying to make small talk. You know that’s how I like to begin diplomatic conversations. Well, too bad I don’t get to kill you with my own hands. But a captain should go down with his ship. Farewell, Captain Pike.”

And with that, the transmission got cut.

“Shields, Mr. Smith?” Pike asked

“At 100%, captain.”

“The Ulysses’ shields, Spock?”

“At 92.44% and maintaining.”

“They are locking torpedoes at us.”

“Evasive Maneuvers, Helmsman. Contact the Ulysses, we are warping out now. Warp factor 7, Mr. Rossini.”

“Sir, the Ulysses is not responding.”

“They are launching, sir,”

“Get us out, Smith.”

“Can’t, captain, something is wrong.”

Moments later, the first torpedo hit. The shockwaves of the blast caused most of the bridge crew to topple out of their seats. Zoya hit her head on the back of a chair while both Smith and Rossini fell onto the floor.

“Shields, Spock?” Pike asked, panicking.

“73.09% and failing.”

“Keep trying to make contact with the Ulysses, and get me Engineering on the line,” Pike barked, concerned about his communications officer but also worried about their situation. “Nick, why are we unable to warp out?” he spoke into the communicator.

“Tractor beam, sir,” Engineer Albescu said. “And the blast damaged the right nacelle.

Tractor beam. How did the Romulans acquire the technology to generate tractor beams strong enough to hold constitution class starships?

But he had no time to ponder that question.

Helmsman Smith reported that another torpedo was being prepared.

“Fire at will, Mr. Smith,” Pike said, trying hard to stay calm. “Give them everything we’ve got.

“Aye, sir,” Smith said and transmitted the order to the weapon systems and science departments.

Finally, the Enterprise was retaliating and holding her own. They managed to deflect the second torpedo.

But not for long.
The third torpedo found its mark and punctured a hole into the ship’s power supply and warp core.

The automatic red alert sounded and alarms started blaring across all decks.

“Dammit, did the Ulysses respond?” Pike asked. But without waiting for an answer, he commed Nick again.

There was no response.

“Sir, the Ulysses is not responding,” Spock said. “And no life signs are being detected in the Engineering deck. The entire level is irradiated. Our warp core has been damaged. Life support will start failing within twenty minutes.”

“Do we still have transported capabilities?”

“Yes, sir,” Zoya answered. “But they are running on auxiliary power. We cannot beam out 400 people.”

“Escape pods?” Smith asked.

“Fully functional,” Spock answered, not looking up from his scanner.

“But they will never allow our escape pods to leave,” Pike said. “Each one will be shot down. How far are the other ships?”

Zoya sent transmissions to the other four warships. Within moments, they responded.

“They are within range, sir,” She said. After a long pause, she received another transmission from the Ticonderoga. “Sir, the USS Ticonderoga is also carrying 3 small freighter ships. They were meant for emergency evacuation purposes in case the shuttles or escape pods were destroyed. They are willing to beam our entire crew into those ships so that we can leave before they join the battle.”

“Sir, the Poseidon and the Titania are here, and they have engaged the Romulan fleet including the commander’s ship,” Spock said. “We should use this opportunity to get the enterprise crew to safety.”

In the next ten minutes, every last crewmember of the Enterprise was beamed onto the freighter ships, that is, except for Captain Pike, Lt. Cmdr. Khan, and Spock. Dr. Puri had almost thrown a hissy fit on realizing that they were not coming. But he had had little choice.

"If you've made it an order, captain, I will go," he said, his eyes dimmed with sorrow. "But if you don't come back, you sonovabitch, I will find you in hell and kill your myself."

Pike could only shake his head sadly at this expression of the friendship he shared with Sanjeev Puri, the warmest, sweetest, kindest man he had ever met.

“You should leave as well,” Captain Adam Mkwewa of the Ticonderoga told them. He was a gentle-faced man of 40 and it was obvious he agreed with Dr. Puri. And he had seen enough battles in his career to know that there was no way of knowing how this one would end. They were but five ships against an entire Romulan fleet. But at the same time, they were five of best warships in Starfleet. Originally from Tanzania, he had joined Starfleet at the age of 18. Over the last 22 years, he had heard so much about Captain Pike's legendary bravery. For some reason, he felt compelled to keep him safe. “You have done more than your share duty. Let us handle this now. Besides, they need you back home. We don't know how this battle will end.”
Your offer is very kind but we prefer to stay,” Pike said. “We started this whole story. We want to be here for its conclusion. Besides, we have been here a long time. You might need our help.”

Mkwewa nodded and led them to the ship’s med bay.

“I believe it will soon get crowded,” he said. “But your Vulcan officer looks like he needs medical attention. You don’t look so well, yourself. Get some first aid before this place gets flooded with battle casualties.”

On that somber note, he left.

And the three crewmembers of the Enterprise allowed the medical team of the warship to take care of them. If the doctors found Spock’s injuries and scars too gruesome, they didn’t mention it.

For a long time, there was only silence punctuated by the din of phasers and torpedo blasts. Several times, the ship rocked dangerously, flinging machinery and people across the room. By the second hour of the battle, injured crewmen started being brought in. The injuries themselves ranged from broken limbs to shattered skulls and lacerated internal organs. And when injured crewmen filled up all the wards of each of the 12 inter-connected med bays, the crew of the Enterprise was asked to wait in a conference room.

They didn’t use that time to talk. Zoya put her head back and tried to sleep. A few hours later, she woke up and sat down to pray in a corner of the room, using a regulation-issued wrap as a headscarf. Spock closed his eyes and meditated even as the fighting raged on outside. All was quiet in this little 10X8 room. But with every phaser shot, every torpedo, every round of retaliatory fighting, lives were being lost. And while Vulcans did not exactly pray for the peace of a departed soul, they did hope that every life that was taken from the universe, would find its way back to the origin from where it came. Such was the way of nature.

After almost eight hours, Captain Mkwewa came to see them.

“It is over.”

“What…” Pike said, daring to hope that finally, finally they would be able to go home.

“We won,” Mkwewa answered, a tired but triumphant smile tugging at his lips. “The Titania captured the Romulan commander. He is now a prisoner of war. And in light of Fardour’s joining the Federation, the Romulan leadership has agreed to a ceasefire. There will be a high-level roundtable conference next month on Fardour where diplomats from the Federation and the Farhannsu leadership will reestablish border laws with the Romulans. We lost the entire crew of the Ulysses, unfortunately. Soon after your crew was beamed onto our ship, the Enterprise exploded. And in total, we lost 678 men and women. There are several more critically injured. But, at least, it is over.”

“This is such welcome news,” Pike said, suddenly feeling more exhausted than he had ever felt. But even that dragging tiredness could not take away from the absolute relief he was experiencing.

“There is more,” Mkwewa said, turning to Spock. “The Farhannsu wanted to know if Lt. Spock had survived. We told him you were alive and aboard our ship. They wanted you to know that someone called Arulini and her comrades are safe. They send their thanks but they understand if you don’t wish to beam down to the planet’s surface to say goodbye. If you want though, we can beam you down for an hour or so.”

Spock thought about it for a moment.
A part of him wanted to go down, bid farewell to the people he had met. But he had said his goodbyes a month ago. He was at peace with the Farhannsu now. And he had no desire to go back to the planet that had caused him such grief.

Besides, Fardour was now a Federation world. T’Arul would be welcome in Starfleet if she chose to apply. No, he didn’t need to go back.

“I appreciate your offer, Captain,” he said respectfully. “However, I do not wish to beam down to Fardour. It is for the best.”

And with that, after a mission which had changed him so much, Spock was finally on his way back to Earth and to the next journey life would take him on.

Chapter End Notes

So, peeps. This is the last chapter of the first part of Finding Spock. I will start working on the next part tomorrow itself and in a few days, you should hopefully have the first chapter of that story. It has been an absolute honor and delight writing this. Please let me know what you think. I have received a lot of good and bad feedback, I have gone through a whole bunch of personal stuff while writing this. This story means a lot to me. And I plan on continuing it, as I just told you. But I wouldn’t mind if you shared your thoughts with me on this roller coaster journey you have undertaken with me. Also, I have an update. Sometime in the next part, we will also meet Jim. While Spock/Uhura is on the cards, I think this story will also develop into Kirk/Spock slash (or pre-slash at least.) Gene Roddenberry said they are T’hy’la. I am not about to argue with that. But my own conception of that rare bond is so much more spiritual metaphysical, and higher than a run-of-the-mill romance. I am excited to explore it. I hope you will stay with me for that as well.
The Journey Continues- Update on Part II

Dear All,

The first two chapters of the second part of this story are now up. Thank you if you're still with this story. I'd love to hear from you and your comments mean a lot to me.

Love,

Carmina

Works inspired by this one

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!