Of Empire Lines and Pointed Ears

by AquitaineQueen24

Summary

Amanda Grayson is a feisty young lady who's deeply unimpressed by arrogant alien ambassadors. Sarek is a proud, reserved Vulcan wearing silk stockings under duress, who secretly adores her.

Really, this doesn't remind you of anything?

AU Regency-esque Sci Fi, wherein in Pride and Prejudice is not precisely retold in the Star Trek universe, but you don't even have to squint to see where I'm coming from.
Chapter 1

It was Lydia who first found out the news that there would be Vulcans present at the coming ball. She was disappointed to discover that her roommates did not find the news nearly as thrilling as she certainly did, or that they merely looked up from their books one second, exclaimed at the news with far more calm than they had any right to, and went back to their reading the next second.

"And are you not more curious than that?" she cried, flinging herself down upon the sofa between the two, in order to jolt them both out of their books again.

"Lyds, dear-" Jane was always most polite when she was most annoyed, and never was she more annoyed than when she was interrupted doing something she loved - "please have no doubt that we share your intrigue. But please, do also remember that Vulcans are not exactly a novelty. You've seen more than your fair share of them yourself; I'm surprised they don't put up a restraining order to stop you lurking around their embassy."

"But never up close, and I have never talked with a single one of them! Only Mandy's had that particular honour."

"Say, rather, that I've stood in the presence of one two or three times at the most," Amanda retorted, "and had perhaps two or three words directed at me specifically, namely greetings and farewell. After all, Lyds, people like me do not talk to such people as they."

"Nonsense! I have never known you to be quiet on any subject when you have wanted to be heard!"

"Believe me, Lydia, I can stay very quiet indeed when my appointment to a particular role is at stake; and being a temporary guide to an honoured visitor to our planet was not a chance to be thrown away."

But eventually Jane and Amanda were forced to concede that it would certainly be an experience to actually see some of the Earth's beauteous saviour race in the flesh and very near to them, even if it was impossible that Lydia would have the chance to dance with any of them. "For all the dances that you like involve much touching of hands, Lyds, and you know that they can't stand that."

To which Lydia replied, "Oh, I don't care about that, as long as I can look at them!" They all laughed over her obsession with the aesthetic, before they began to discuss with varying degrees of enthusiasm what they would wear to this highly anticipated event.

Over the next few days the university campus came alive with expectancy as more information became known; that the Vulcans were attending as a mark of respect to Earth's new ambassador whose instalment the ball celebrated; that one of the Vulcans would be the race's own ambassador; that the ambassadors of Earth and Vulcan were old acquaintances; that besides the ambassador himself there would be another male and two females. That last piece of knowledge made all who were interested in the matter more excited than ever, for it was rare that female Vulcans made the journey to their own humble world. All this news drove Lydia herself near insane with joy and into a frenzy to choose the gown that would catch the eye of the visitors and might – just might – incite them to talk with her. Perhaps even at length.

Even Jane and Amanda's interest was peaked; they sent their best gowns off to be mended of whatever mishaps may or may not have befallen them, showing them off in the privacy of their
rooms and declared to each other than they 'would do'.

The day of the ball dawned, and when evening arrived the students were ferried to the hall commissioned for the occasion. The anticipation of the young people was high as they engaged in dances that they had no heart for, waiting for the arrival of those which they had been promised that they would see.

They did not have too long to wait, for Vulcans are always punctual. At eight of the clock precisely the ambassadors and their various parties made their entrances, accompanied by many whispers on the part of their human watchers. The excitement soon faded a little; while Ambassador Byng wore his outfit with all the panache of a cultured and sophisticated gentleman, the Vulcan party was something of a disappointment when it came to fashion. The ambassador's aide, Soran, wore his coat and britches very ill and looked as uncomfortable as it was possible for a Vulcan to look throughout the evening; the ladies, while wearing their gowns with far more flair and ease, looked so quietly put out by the whole business that it quite spoiled their loveliness, which might otherwise have been enough to capture the hearts (and other parts) of nearly all the young men in the room.

Only the ambassador himself made a truly acceptable figure, resplendent as he was in his dark blue coat and with hair quite unlike the combed normality of his species, a curling not-quite mane that only enhanced his handsome and alien features. But this Ambassador Sarek and his entourage were soon avoided by all but the most assiduous of guests. It was as Amanda had predicted; none of them would deign to dance -not even the dances where no touching was required! - and they spoke very little to those who were persistent and even less to those who were not.

Quite soon the novelty wore off, and the students and the others who had been invited to the event were wondering why they had been so excited at all, when all these supposed saviours did was merely stand there and watch while taking no part in anything. Lydia was perfectly disenchanted - at least with these particular specimens, for all that one of them was the Ambassador - and declared at least once, and quite loudly, that she hated to think what balls were like on Vulcan, if indeed they had such things.

Amanda was less disappointed than the rest, namely because she had not expected much from a race that showed little emotion and even less inclination to socialize, and she meanwhile had the pleasure of seeing Jane catch the attention of Ambassador Byng and hold it for much of the evening. Byng herself she liked, as he carried out his duty and attempted to make a bridge between the two peoples.

Though really, she could not help but wonder, you would think that, considering his job, this new ambassador of theirs would at least make an effort such as his so-called friend does! She condemned the ambassador in her own small way: not for failing to behave with simple human courtesy as any decent man would, she could not expect that from such a being as he, but for not even making effort to understand this human event.

This condemnation became more personal, however, when while passing by Byng and Sarek to reach Jane on the other side of the room, she overheard this snatch of conversation:

"Could you not attempt to dance, Sarek, at least once?"

"You know the answer to that, Byng?"

"You would not even make the effort with that young lady over there, the one in the blue dress?"

"Byng, I agreed to come to this…gathering. I did not, however, agree to subject myself to the business of entertaining and putting myself at the mercy of the whims and emotions of a mere
child. Save your breath, I will have no part of this." And with that Byng obviously had to be content.

This of course left Amanda feeling even less generous towards the ambassador – no young woman of three and twenty who feels she has gained her adulthood and independence likes to be called a child, after all. Furthermore, she suspected that it was not only she who was labelled as a child but all in this room, in this city, on this world.

Still, she had heard worse in her time and, after all, he probably did not mean it as an insult. To him, it was logical and true. But it came into her head to turn and smile at the two of them as she went on her way, and so she did. Byng looked uncomfortable but smiled in return and inclined his head in reply. Sarek, of course, made no such acknowledgement, though if she had paid any more attention to the ambassador she would have noticed that his eyes – brown at first glance, but green when you looked closer – stayed mostly upon her through the rest of the evening.
Bing had taken his leave of them at the embassy door, as they provided him with thanks that were sincere – even the ladies of the party approved of him, if of no other human.

"But I wish you could have found more entertainment," Bing bemoaned, as Sarek walked him back to his carriage. "I feel quite guilty that I had such a splendid time when you did not. I had hoped you might find this gathering more acceptable than others that will be inflicted upon you, in the days to come."

Sarek made certain to assure his companion that the evening had been most adequate; Bing laughed as he stepped up into his transport. "If only you could have found a partner like mine; if not to dance with, then to converse with! Ah, Sarek, Janet is an angel!"

Sarek resisted the urge to note that he had not noticed any wings sprouting from Miss Rand's back, or that she possessed any extra eyes - he had familiarized himself with several of Terra's religions after several of Bing's remarks about 'devil ears', and a part of sarek's vast intellect felt that he owed Bing a few - most logical! - ribbings in return. But he reigned in the urge smoothly as he bade his friend farewell, until the morrow.

Only once the sanctuary of the embassy had been gained could the Vulcans relax; certainly not a word they themselves would have used, but it is true nonetheless. They could also, at last, divest themselves of the outfits that they had been obliged to wear for that evening's - for want of a better want - entertainment.

"How is it logical," T'Jin asked her bondmate, pulling what would be her favourite tunic if she admitted to having such thing as a favourite article of clothing, "for these Earth women to wear such revealing gowns? So much flesh on display, and so tight about the chest; I wonder that they manage to breathe even in this most oxygen rich atmosphere! Or how they do not freeze!"

"It is perhaps not logical, my wife, but it is traditional; these have been the fashions for many decades," Soran called from his adjoining dressing room. He had most willingly if not gladly divested himself of the tight coat, the waist coat, the breeches, the stockings, the neck scarf that the humans called a cravat and the shirt and had attired himself in more suitable clothing, wrapping up warm even as he turned the heating up and up further to take the chill of the assembly room right out of his bones.

"Come, my wife," he added, stepping out of his dressing room as she stepped out of hers, "Sarek and T'Pen will be in the reading room by now. Let us meet them there."

Sarek and T'Pen were indeed seated in the reading room, also attired in preferred clothing. As soon as Soran and T'Jin joined them the ambassador's sister began to speak. She was rather more talkative about what she thought of the gathering than T'Jin had been, if quieter in tone. The humans' thoughts had been loud and distracting, she commented, and their voices more so, their music lacked refinement, their actions were harsh and driven with un-tempered emotion. Her control had been sorely tested in the midst of such people. And this was the foremost species with which Vulcan had chosen to ally itself! Were there not indeed other worlds that had more control, more discipline? Betazed, or Trill?

T'Jin inclined her head in agreement as T'Pen went on: And how could a planet that was part of the Federation be so lacking in technology? Why, when they had travelled to that place where the humans danced she had looked out and seen vehicles drawn by animals, even if others had been drawn by machines! They had comm units and the basics of any Standard Federation world, but-
"On Vulcan technology is used but sparingly," Sarek said from where he stood by the window and looked out upon the harbour of San Francisco. "We have formed a way of life that does not depend upon machines, holding on to our traditions. The tunic I wear now is newly made, but it is of a cut that has remained prominent in the clothing of our race for more than one thousand years. The Terrans do as we do. Is it logical to condemn another civilization when it follows the same tenents as our own?"

T'Pen somewhat chastened by the words of her brother, made no reply. T'Jin, more bold now, attempted to salvage their side of the debate: "However, it does not excuse their behaviour, Sarek. They are as undisciplined as the youngest of our children, so many years after contact has been made. Even if the wisest of their race at that time accepted the advice of our elders and held their people back to protect them, have they learned at all?"

"They have learned to temper their tendencies, if not their emotions," the ambassador of Vulcan replied. "Recall what this world had endured by the time that they were discovered. They had torn their species apart with war, and yet in order to heal they were prepared to recall and reinstate their past in order to attempt it again. What other species can boast such force of will, such determination?"

"And it was they that founded the Federation, and they that founded Starfleet." T'Pen had found her stride again, but one look at her brother's face meant that there would be no more talk of Starfleet.

T'Jin, having had her say, had considered her words and was now inclined to be more generous. "But some of the young female students that were present this night were satisfying to engage in conversation. Some of them are very learned indeed; the one named Amanda Grayson I have heard described as being at the very top of her class. What say you, Sarek?"

The ambassador had more than something to say, and debated at length with his sister, his aide and his aide's wife on the various merits and observable faults that they had witnessed in the city's young students that had attended that evening; focusing of course on their wits and deportment and dismissing physical appearance as immaterial.

Physical appearance, however, perhaps mattered more to the ambassador than he would deem acceptable to admit. In the days before they inevitably met again, he did not recall Miss Amanda Grayson's various academic achievements nearly so much as the movement of her figure in the blue dress that had first caught his eye. And it was not the nature of her university degree that came to him so much as he sought for sleep that very night, but rather the face that she had shown him over her near bare shoulder, her dark eyes bright and a wholly illogical smile upon her lips.
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The people of Terra did not often have the chance or at least they did not often get the chance to, as most of the ambassadors from Vulcan were high born and had no reason to mingle with the lesser born of any planet. And, while a fair number of peoples from other worlds attended the Star Fleet academy that supplied so many of the officers and soldiers of the militia that was the force and might of the great Federation, Vulcans were certainly not one of those peoples, never choosing to wear the red of the cadets or the bright colours of the commanding ranks. Though all native to Earth knew of the species that had helped to save them, many who did not join the Starfleet and stayed planet side could go all their lives without seeing a Vulcan in person, much less speaking to one.

Amanda was more fortunate - if you could call a Terran fortunate who had to spend any great amount of time in such company. Still, she did not expect to see the Vulcan guests from the ball again, or at least not up close; as she had said to Lydia, people such as her did not talk to people such as them. She said as much to her father when she made her thrice weekly visit to their blissfully near home on the day after the ball. He, of course, protested that his darling girl was good enough to talk to anybody and that if any thought themselves too good to talk to her, they were not worth speaking to in the first place.

"And truly, Mandy," Mr. Grayson said to his daughter in conclusion, "they do not sound like the sort that you would wish to meet again. Surely an ambassador would know how to behave at the gathering of a culture whose planet he was specifically assigned to, and to do his job. Another time, Mandy - and I am certain that there will be another, which may be your good luck or your bad - I would not dance with him even if he should ask you."

Amanda laughed when she heard that, and said then and there to Mr. Grayson that she believed she could make the both of them a safe promise never to dance with Ambassador Sarek.

After that Miss Grayson rather forgot the ambassador - although in her defence, it must be said that she had plenty of duties in the next few weeks which quickly drove all thoughts of a proud and rude (if admittedly very handsome) alien straight out of her head.

While it was the beginning of summer holidays, she was still bound up in the comings and goings of her university. She threw herself into everything university life had to offer, even if that stock was rather depleted, preparing for a convention on languages that would take place on the university grounds and welcoming visitors. Instead of seeing parties of tourists being lead past her as she made her way to lectures or tutorials and occasionally taking on the role of leading them about, she was now doing that almost constantly, smiling and practising her languages depending on who had come to look.

In the evenings she would go out to taverns with Jane and Lydia and have one glass of wine and then water for the rest of the night, and very occasionally she would be entreated to dance with one of the few Starfleet cadets that were left in the city now that the summer was here. She did this last thing only sparingly; those who were left behind were usually too young and green as yet to go into the great ocean of space, or had done something that meant they had not been assigned to a ship. Both sorts were usually not too happy about their failings, and it showed and managed to spoil any fun that Amanda cared to have.

In stark contrast, Lydia would dance with any man available, and indeed any woman or any
gender that might have found its curious way into such a Terran establishment; she was a certain type of generous soul and cared not a fig who or indeed what she stepped out onto the floor, with as long as they stepped well.

That was in itself another task that Amanda and Jane shared between them: to keep Lydia out of trouble. While they had no doubts that the girl could take care of herself, there was a limit to how far she could take that care once she had had more than a little wine inside her. In the next few weeks this particular task became more strenuous Amanda, as Jane began to beg off going out at all for reasons that had a lot to do with certain assignations with a person she tried in vain to keep secret from her roommates.

Without this aid Amanda soon found herself begging off too in order to spend the evenings in their rooms. Lydia naturally had fits of temper at this, since by way of a complicated agreement between her mother and her roommates, she could not go out without their especial accompaniment, and she generally made the rooms so unpleasant with her sulking that Amanda found it a welcome excuse to escape to her home and spend more time with her father, and that seemed to her not hard at all.

It gave her, among other things, a chance to discuss her future prospects with him; whether she should continue to teach languages, as she had done in the summers before this one - or whether she should perhaps, with her brains and abilities, join the Starfleet and journey to the stars, which she admitted to her father she had a fierce desire to see.

Mr. Grayson was not overly fond of such an idea. While she would indeed get to see her stars and might go far in more than just distance, she would also be in danger's way a great deal of the time; there were Klingons and Orions and Romulans out there in their birds of prey! Nothing she could say would convince him that their enemies were (for the moment) at peace or at least neutral, for who truly knew when neutrality would be broken?

So she managed to spend the weeks after the ball quite pleasantly. When she was told that she would be guiding a special party about the university the next day, her normally sharp mind made no connection to those ill invited guests. It was not until Jane made a now somewhat rare appearance in their rooms, and told her of how Bing had been so interested in what she had told him of what her friends had been doing, and that he had booked a grounds tour to take his friends on, that Amanda realised what a trial she was in for.

"You are in luck, Mandy, to have a chance to speak to a Vulcan yet again; don't you think, Lyds?"

Lydia, still greatly annoyed with the two of them, made her no answer, while Amanda replied, "I would not call it luck, exactly, Jane."

Still, she was there prompt the next morning in blue and white and forget-me-nots adorning her bonnet and a smile to complete her appearance, pretty for the pleasure of precisely no one but herself on this occasion (or so she thought).

At length Bing arrived with his companions, greeting her with the smile that he seemed to have for everyone, while the Vulcans greeted her with the somewhat dour look they seemed to have for everyone as well, and the tour began. She showed them the many green university grounds where the students could sit and read or play various sports during the warmer months. She showed them the lecture theatres and the study rooms. She showed them the great library, the holding place of thousands upon thousands of texts both digital and paper – though more paper, for diligence was near as important to the university as the end result, and one of the mottos to be found about the place was 'The end crowns the work'. She showed them the science labs and the stables where horses both living and mechanical were housed and where she had placed her own horse, Nelly,
upon her arrival. Nelly was very pleased to see her, and the Vulcans watched with what appeared to be at least some curiosity as Amanda scratched the horse's neck and stroked her nose.

She showed them the pool as well, and here they showed some more well-disguised but still present curiosity at the notion of such a large body of water indoors, not for drinking or for any purpose at all except to splash about in. Amanda caught herself wondering if any of the four aliens could even swim.

And there was another curiosity, for her to puzzle over this time. Out of all the Vulcans in the little group the ambassador's aide, Soran - wearing his outfit rather better and with more practise than he had done the night of the ball - was the only one who asked any questions of her, or indeed even spoke to her for much of the tour. That was well and good; she had expected little else, and she found some pleasure in giving this one Vulcan who took the initiative more information to the best of her ability. But as the morning wore on, she realised that the aide was not asking his various questions for his own benefit so much as for the benefit of his superior. He certainly was not so obvious as to say 'Ambassador Sarek wishes to know so and so', but she took to watching out of the corner of her eye for Soran to glance at the Ambassador, for some sign that he should ask another question, and the sign was usually a tilt of the head even as Sarek looked in another direction.

She wondered why the ambassador would want more information from her if he could not even bother to ask her himself...but most likely he was not of the same opinion as her father and believed that while he was good enough to talk to, she was not one who was good enough to do it.

No matter. She carried out what she had been assigned to do without complaint or resentment and actually quite enjoyed herself, as Bing and Soran were pleasant to a degree and the latter seemed to develop a genuine interest in what she had to say, asking questions for his own apparent benefit as well as that of his ambassador. It allowed her to practise her Vulcanur - she had started the tour in Terran Standard, assuming that her guests would scorn her pronunciation of their language, but as they seemed to take no offense she switched to the dialect soon enough. If the Vulcan ladies paid little attention to her then at least they did not show the scorn that people whispered Vulcan women held for much of the universe, since their heightened sense of smell made them turn their noses up at so much.

And whenever she saw the ambassador looking at her she smiled at him as she had done on the night when he had called she and her race mere emotional children; if she were emotional and if that made her a child, she welcomed it!

She ended the tour in one of the greater courtyards where a large fountain spouted out clean and cold water, and after Bing and Soran had made their thanks on the behalf of their companions for her help she replied in as clear and correct a manner as she could, "Live long and prosper." Only Bing gave her any reply, but again she was not surprised.

As the party walked away she could at last let out a sigh, sit down on the edge of the fountain, pull off her bonnet and shake out her ringlets, as her head had grown quite hot under the straw. She had just scooped up some water from the fountain and was drinking it from her cupped palms when a movement caught her eye, and she turned her head to see the ambassador standing in the archway his party had left by, gazing at her. She thought to stare at him, thought better of it and looked away, dabbing water on her hot neck and face until she saw him leave.

She saved her nervous giggles until she was fairly certain that he was out of earshot; there was a limit to how childlike she was willing to be.

Despite her thoughts that she would surely not see them again after this encounter, Amanda was
again proved wrong. As she led Nelly out of the stables in order to begin the journey back to her house, she was passed by the carriage carrying the group back to their embassy, pulled by some of the most splendid mechanical horses she had ever seen. She fancied that she saw a certain pair of dark eyes in a handsome face stay upon her for as long as that face was visible - but she soon forgot it, for Nelly was fretting and there were clouds on the horizon that might be rain, and she had no desire for them to be caught in the storm.

Chapter End Notes

Everyone who's ever seen a film or tv production set in the Regency period (all the various Jane Austens, Vanity Fair, Sharpe, you name it) will know that the soldiers and officers of the British army wore rather fetching bright red coats that stood out a mile in any background that wasn't red. Which consisted of precisely all of Europe. Yes, they were more concerned about showing up on cloudy battlefields than about little things like camouflage - which to be fair was a valid concern; battlefields were often covered with smoke from all the cannon - and besides, all the girls seemed to like those red coats. Plus Napoleon's men wore blue, so it wasn't as if the Frenchies exactly had the up on them. (Don't kill me, please, I do like the French!)

I nicked that whole bit of Amanda safely promising her daddy never to dance with Sarek from the 1995 BBC version of P & P, which is still my favourite production of the book, even if I refused to watch it at the very first and my sister eventually had to sit on my legs to keep me in one place until I got engrossed in it. Where is Jennifer Ehle now, anyway?
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Let it not for an instant be said that Ambassador Sarek took but one glance at Miss Grayson and was instantly lost, knowing that in this small but powerful human he had found his heart mate and his soul's companion. Such an occurrence is unlikely enough to be near impossible, even when one of the races concerned is telepathic, and this story is not impossible but merely unexpected. What caught and held his attention was an appreciation of the aesthetic that Vulcans could be capable of as readily as any other race - though for Vulcans, it could come in such a strength that it could distract and do far worse.

Such urges came rarely to the ambassador. He would not have been assigned to a place so far away from the security of his own planet if they had been common, and when they did he had more than enough control to quell them so that they faded quickly. He assumed – not without some justification, though with just a little, naturally unacknowledged, arrogance – that this dwelling upon the human girl would soon fade with as little trouble as all his other few, minor fixations.

So it was that Sarek found himself some days later frustrated by the fact that his thoughts of Miss Grayson had not become less, but rather more. Where on the night after the ball he had merely recalled the blue of her dress, the brown of her hair and her smile as she looked over her shoulder at him, now his eidetic memory showed remarkable illogic as it brought back images that he had only half glimpsed and had dismissed before as unimportant. He mused on her arms as they stretched out while dancing and the colour of her delicate shoes when they became visible. He recalled how her hair had tossed upon her head when she leapt into the air and how her skirt moved against the solidity of her legs. And of all things what came to him most was her smile – or rather (now that he thought deeply on the matter whether he wished to or not, and most often not) her smiles, for his aforementioned eidetic memory had captured many of them, no one smile being exactly the same.

When these images did not go away as he expected and soon desired, he turned to that staple of survival in such an illogical world that existed in the space outside Vulcan: meditation. And through a long process of trial and error that is best left in the mind of the ambassador, he emerged at the end of several long sessions with his head as fertile a ground for mental pictures of the lovely young Terran as ever.

He was most displeased with himself even if he, of course, did not show it. When Bing invited him to participate in a tour of the local university with dear Jane's charming young friend as a guide he agreed, in order to prove to his undisciplined mind that, while Miss Grayson was aesthetically pleasing to a degree, she was hardly remarkable and certainly not worth taking up thoughts that could be put to far better use. He went along to end this situation, to show whatever part of his brain that insisted on distracting him in such a manner that he could not, would not allow himself to be manipulated in such a manner.

It might have been the very worst thing he could have done, or the very best.

Even at the beginning of the tour it was not yet impossible for Sarek to ignore what he was quickly coming to regard as the treacherous side of his mind that was obsessed with the potential of the woman who led the group about this place of learning. He allowed himself to acknowledge that she was pleasing to a certain type of eye, and then expected to be able to dismiss the matter. But with very little distraction other than far off distant voices he could focus on the voice of the
one closest to him, and that was a key that opened a door. He had not heard her speak before, he had had no way to sort out which of the many voices in the ball room had been hers, and now that it was the only voice speaking he was unable to prevent himself from gaining understanding of the mind behind it.

He found that she had a genuine interest in the history of her place of study, that she felt it important that they should know all that was relevant about the place but also all that she considered amusing, that she answered all questions without a trace of annoyance or being resigned to her fate that seemed so common in humans assigned to various tasks. While she might or might not be happy to be here, she had determined to do her best and make no complaint and perhaps to enjoy herself. Not entirely illogical.

He watched as she joked with Bing and managed to draw Soran into a near constant stream of questions and well thought out, well informed answers. He found himself desiring for her to speak to him, rather than simply to his aide. Was he not more highly placed in Vulcan society, more important, more worthy of her attention and her time? But it was unthinkable that the ambassador ask such questions; he had agreed that with Soran, before they had come.

He had to remind himself of this several times.

Then came that moment in the stables when she introduced them to the animal she habitually rode about the city and sometimes out into the countryside beyond it. The creature, which she called 'Nelly', reminded him of his sehlat I-Chaya though there was no physical resemblance between the two; as they had entered the stables she had looked up and made a noise just as his pet did before the beast bounded up and knocked him off his feet. He watched as the human held out her hand to 'Nelly', let the lips trace over her palm, and then began to caress the creature's neck.

It was his undoing. As soon as he witnessed this simple act between mistress and steed his eyes became fixed upon her hands and the task they undertook, and he was reminded of just why it was that his people so rarely touched. Where his mind before had only appreciated the aesthetic value of Miss Grayson, now something else entirely came into play. Seeing her using her hands in such a manner sparked a certain small type of lust peculiar to Vulcans - not any full blown mating surge or indulgent desire but a primal instinct that lurks in the brains of even the most controlled un-bonded Vulcan males, and in quite a few of the bonded as well: 'Look well; she is young, she is healthy, she is intelligent, she is fertile, she is strong, she is unclaimed; she will bear you fine children and defend them well. Go to it, man, and enjoy her!'

The illogic of this, the sheer crudity, such humiliation that a being such as the ambassador should think it! Sarek could not banish this thought fast enough but alas, too late, far too late. His imagination was now fully awake, and he could not look at Miss Grayson's hair without wondering how soft his might feel upon his fingers, he could not look at Miss Grayson's arms without remembering the skin, so white though speckled with brown, that lay beneath the cloth. He certainly could not look at her hands without longing to know what they would feel like in his own, and upon his own, and upon the rest of himself.

By all this do not think for an instant that Ambassador Sarek was concerned only with the physical and neglected the intellectual; he was very concerned in some small part of his mind that Miss Grayson should know how very aware he was of her intellect.

The rest of the trip was spent in a frantic struggle of control, so that he could not have asked Miss Grayson any questions even though he greatly wished it. To hear her voice and actually have to reply to it would be a test that he did not think that he could face. Not yet. As it was his control nearly broke when she bid them farewell in their own tongue.

When he returned to the embassy he set himself at once to meditation. All that can be said
of that is that he was marginally less successful than he was in his first attempts to remedy what he now considered as a crisis of the first order.

One other thing may be said as well; his now much cursed memory brought to the surface the last encounter he had had with a female, one of the priestesses that tended to unbonded males during times when they were most needed. He recalled how the priestess had clutched his shoulders and risen above him, how her hair had fallen down so far in front and in back that he had been aware, oh so dimly, of how it brushed where they met, and how she had brought him relief and cool and peace.

But his mind, in some wisdom or foolishness, had replaced the shadowed face of the priestess and her dark waterfall with the brown wealth and face of Amanda, her eyes looking only to him and her hands his alone as she dug them into his shoulders.

Chapter End Notes

Vulcans being a rather touch oriented species, I imagine many fantasies that Sarek is going to have about Amanda are going to involve what's at the ends of her arms, and also what's at the end of her hands. Not that I don't believe that Vulcans don't kiss – the mouth is rather a sensitive spot too, and after thousands of years of experimentation I think that everything's been tried at least once – they just do it in private and probably not during pon farr, or at least not much, if the male's in a biting mood.

Ouch.

Also, if you think this reaction is a bit much for a Vulcan all at once you're probably right, but remember that no one else can see it. Sarek has the perfect poker face. And the perfect poker mind, really.
Chapter 5

There were few balls in this season, but there had begun a dance where the two participants came face to face but sparingly. And one of the pair was unaware of her partner, of her own position in the dance, or even that there was such a dance at all.

Once again Amanda thought far less of the ambassador than he did of her in the next fortnight; the tour being over he had faded from her mind and she had no wish to meet him again, a wish quite opposite to his own grudging conclusion. She kept no close watch upon his movements and no tracks upon where he went and what he did. It was always news to her if he should happen to be in the same building as her, to say nothing of the same room.

What an unacknowledged frustration it was for Sarek! He who was so used to having his will obeyed, who only had to order a thing and it was done! Now he had now to turn his unrivalled logic to finding some way to further meetings, with a particular setting that would ensure his path and that of Miss Grayson would, if not cross, at least be parallel! And after each encounter he attempted to make certain that it would be the last time that they met, believing that to control this unnatural desire they must not meet again.

And yet when an opportunity was presented he would seize it, illogical though it might or might not be.

It was very hard. Miss Grayson was after all merely a student, if an exceptional one. She would not normally attend the gatherings to which the ambassador of Vulcan was welcome, or if she did then he was not free to merely approach her and engage her in conversation...or if he was able then she was talking to her companions of things that he could not possibly speak of. She talked with her friends of France - to which he had never been - and of their lessons - which included things he had never before heard, of let alone studied himself - and of dresses and new bonnets and ribbons.

He was understandably gratified that at least in conversations about such strange garments she was not very interested, showing that while she took care with her presentation she had a mind fixed on higher things than her continuous appearance. It would have been even more mortifying than it currently was to become fixated on a superficial human girl.

She spoke of other things as well, on occasions when Bing was present and, out of obligation to Jane and because of his own amiability, asked her questions to know her more. Through his friend as an unwitting avatar, Sarek learned in pieces of Miss Grayson's upbringing: how her father had raised her on everything that he loved best of music, literature, science, philosophy and outdoor activity. Of her mother she made no mention. Curious, in a society where each gender learned so much from their corresponding parent.

She talked of the places she had visited on other continents and asked Bing of the places that he had gone to, not merely on other continents but on other worlds. And then one evening - and by some means contriving to look at him while her face was turned to Bing and Jane - she began to speak about her desire to go beyond the confines of her world, to see other planets and speak with other peoples. She spoke of these things, and yet she spoke nothing of how they would be achieved! At least she did not mention the Starfleet as a method of her entry into space, as so many of this planet now chose without espousing the patience that rewarded those who waited. She was not willing to go the easy and poisoned way, and so his esteem for her grew.

"I have had opportunity to meet some of those peoples," she said, gesturing with hands covered in gloves that reached up to her elbows, "but our planet, while lovely, is a poor replacement for that
of anyone who comes from elsewhere; and as for getting up there—” She smiled in a way that his people occasionally used; one corner of her mouth curling upward. “—well! It is a task akin to a Herculean Labour, as all we here well know! But I would dearly like to see other worlds of the Federation. Ever since I was a small girl sitting under a tree at midnight and looking to the sky, I have longed to go to the stars that I have looked up at for all of my life.”

An understandable desire, but illogical. What good did it do to dwell on an immature wish from childhood, when plans and aspirations changed with age? The infant Amanda was not the Amanda of now, and the Amanda of now had duties and responsibilities upon her own planet that belied her boasts of what she would do and see. He could remain silent no longer. "An intriguing aspiration, Miss Grayson but a nonsensical one. The wishes of a small child are hardly those of an adult. Is it logical to retain them thus?"

Bing winced for some reason he could not ascertain; Miss Grayson’s companion smiled, and Miss Grayson herself turned about to look at him with her brows raised. She did not look angry. She looked amused, as if the night of their first encounter was still playing out. "That is true, Ambassador. If ever I did travel my accent would be such that I would surely sound like an ignorant child, aping my betters. But a child always dreams of more than what they are at present, and if so, are we not all children?" She gestured to the crowded ballroom where her species danced and skipped and talked and whispered. "How tedious it must be, to be the only adult in a world of infants."

"And how perilous it would be to be a child in a world of adults, as any would be if they ventured from what is familiar with no plan of what to achieve when they reach the unknown."

"As of course you would know, Ambassador."

He had not intended for her to do so, but she excused herself, professing her hunger, and her friend followed suit. As soon as they had departed for the food table T'Pen was there at her side, making her opinion known. "She behaves in a very conceited manner, despite her intelligence, does she not? Her disregard for such a simple fact?"

"T'Pen, you miss the point; and so do you, Sarek." He had overlooked something that Bing had recognised? While he respected his friend, the fact remained that the Vulcan brain worked and analysed faster than any Terran one could, unless that Terran was exceptional. Perhaps it was some Terran code of conduct that he had breached.

"Would you explain, Bing?"

"Sarek, very few of my species like to have their aspirations dismissed, simply because they were children when they decided upon them! My own sister declared at the tender age of five that she would be a scientist when she grew up, and even now she is researching new ways to increase crop production on colony planets. The dreams of infants are not merely fancies, my friends, they can drive those who have them to achieve greatness."

On the other side of the room Amanda explained to Jane the other point that the ambassador had missed. "That is the second time he has referred to me as a child while in my hearing, Jane; perhaps even three times! Do you think it his response to everything? Or merely his slight of choice?"

"My dear Mandy, please do not distress yourself. I am sure the Ambassador does not mean it as an insult; remember that to him we are all basically children."

"Oh, I know all about the Vulcan life span, Jane! And I am not distressed, I am amused. I could hardly keep my countenance. Did he think to impress me by reiterating that he believes my species
immature? Those less generous might think him a fool."

"And what do you think of him?"

"I think he is a Vulcan, and that I can expect no less from him." And Amanda led her friend into another dance and did not look at the Vulcan Ambassador again that evening, and enjoyed herself as the man who watched her could not.
Sarek might have been gratified to know that Amanda did not proceed to forget about him once more after their latest encounter. Rather, she thought of him on occasion as the proud friend of the man that her friend loved, a person whom she might regretfully meet again, little though she looked forward to it. While his conversation might at times be enjoyable, many more times it had been fairly damning; and she could not forget the slights that he had directed towards her – or rather, what she perceived to be slights, for in truth Amanda Grayson had some share of pride as well, and woe betide any who bruised it!

She made up her mind that she would not go to any more balls or gatherings, or anything of the sort if she knew in advance that the Ambassador was attending. They could not seem to meet without her temper being piqued by his arrogance - and besides which, their clash of that particular night had upset both Jane and Bing. She would not harm her friend's chances with Earth's ambassador for all the worlds in the quadrant. What was it to her if she missed a few chances to dance and gossip and giggle? It would give Bing all the more chance to woo the one who had caught his eye and perhaps his heart, without her friend in tow.

Never had she seen Jane so attracted to a gentleman, and if she secured him then they would both be very happy together – or at least so Amanda hoped; nothing in this life was certain, save eventual death and taxation.

Amanda began to decline Jane's invitations to accompany her when it was appropriate. It often was, for Bing was introducing Sarek to everyone he presumed his friend should know...not just in the city but on every single continent of the world, it seemed. The periodicals showed the Vulcan's face nearly every day; Amanda was soon to grow quite tired of it. She also grew to worry about Jane's wellbeing, as rumours were beginning to abound about the fair young woman who appeared to be always near Earth's ambassador at every thing he attended, and who sometimes did so without a chaperone if she could not get one of their other friends to accompany her. At least Bing had not attempted to invite her off the planet just yet.

Still, Amanda felt she could trust Jane's good judgement, and her ability to catch whatever man she wished for, without causing too much scandal.

There was also Lydia to contend with, who had the tendency to think of this business - as she thought of nearly everything else - as a joke, and an enormous one at that. "Fancy," she would say, as she perused the latest news report at the girls' breakfast table, "of Jane reeling in such a man as Bing! I wonder if she has anything to show for it yet, aside from exhaustion?" When Amanda chided her for such rudeness she would laugh, quietly so as not to wake their housemate, who was indeed at that moment still fast asleep at a rather late hour after a late party. When Jane was awake and present Lydia could hardly stop teasing her, albeit never with malice.

And, since for all her immaturity and childishness she had a sharp eye and a quick wit, she would bait Amanda on the subject of the Ambassador, when Jane was gone to yet another assembly.

"So, you dislike the man because he disagrees with you, Mandy?"

"I do not dislike him, Lyds. I simply find no reason to continue to attract his criticism. Do you remember Professor Duncan, back in our first term?"
"Of course! Le Misanthrope!"

"Do you remember what he said, about how women should never be allowed into the higher tiers of the Star Fleet, because the female sex is 'simply not suited to war fare'?

"I remember, the pig! Poor Jane was crushed until we told her he didn't know what he was talking about."

"Well, Duncan is of that type of mind that is too set in its beliefs to ever be changed, and I suspect that Ambassador Sarek is of the same mould. I cannot change his opinions towards me or my species, so I simply choose not to venture into his company."

She was rather pleased with her explanation, but Lydia only scoffed. "For once you are giving up far too easily! You could persuade anyone to change his mind about anything, Mandy!"

"In this case, I prefer not to try. It is a good thing that I am not an ambassador."

So she slipped from the ambassador's sight, and do what he could – and what he could do was surprisingly little, considering the suspicions that might be aroused – he could not find where she might be.

Once again, the depth of his frustrations shall be left in his own mind, amusing though they might be.

Then, one evening when Amanda and Lydia settled down to cards after dinner, they heard the sound of an explosion from not too far away.

Rushing to the window and looking out onto the street, they saw all manner of people running about in no particular order and pointing at a not too far off glow. They threw up the sash and cried to the people to tell them what was going on; the people cried back that a certain assembly room had been bombed. Amanda felt sick and clutched at Lydia; it was the assembly room that Jane was at right now.

They attempted to contact Jane on her communication device. They received no reply. They tried to reassure themselves, reminding each other that Jane was often not to be reached, that she certainly would have taken steps to ensure she was not interrupted while dancing. Still: "We must go and find her," Amanda said, searching for her cloak and bonnet. Lydia's immaturity had quite fled as she agreed and raced for her own things, but their flight was halted when the console beeped with a missive from Lydia's mother. She did not want the girls staying in the house alone; she had sent around a coach for them to convey them to her home directly. They thanked her but Amanda at first refused to await its arrival, she was so eager to be off.

Lydia was, for once, the voice of prudence. "It will be safer upon the streets if we are in a group; and besides, the weather looks as if it will turn to thunder. You cannot walk alone in a storm."

With this Amanda was forced to agree, but when Lydia was absorbed in fitting her bonnet on her head, the older girl slipped her pistol into her muff.

The coach arrived; the two piled into it. Lydia directed it not towards her mother's house, however, but to where whatever part of the assembly room might be left.

The mechanical horses and the burden they drew were soon forcing their way through the seething ocean of people that had gathered around the remnants of the building, though the girls were happy to note that most of the assembly room was still standing. They could not get near enough to the security forces to ask them what they knew, they sent one of the coach men to ask after Jane. He came back with the information that the ambassadors of both worlds had decamped.
to the Vulcan embassy, and nothing could be found out about Bing’s pretty young companion.

This was far from good enough for Amanda. She descended from the coach herself and sought out a medical attendant, and was eventually able to learn that yes, Ambassador Bing had taken a young lady back with him to the Vulcan embassy saying that he would call his own physician to attend her, a foolish action if you asked him…

She cursed Bing in a fairly unladylike manner for a fool and an idiot for preventing Jane from being tended to right away, and struggled back to the coach. "I must go to the Vulcan embassy, Lyds. It isn't too far; you go along to your mother's and I will walk there."

"Walk?!" Lydia clutched at her arm. "Mandy, it will start raining at any moment, I am sure of it, and besides it will not be safe. We will all go to the embassy and the coach will wait for us."

"No, Lydia!" Amanda gently shook herself free. "I would not have your mother worried any longer. The streets are crowded, it would take far too long to travel there by carriage, and they may make us wait at the embassy for some time. Your mother will be frantic! Besides, I have this," and she showed the pistol for an instant. "Go quickly, Lyds."

Lydia was absolutely correct in her surety. It did begin to rain quite hard in short order, and Amanda was very grateful for her thick cloak and bonnet as she hurried through the streets, all the while doubting that she was heading in the right direction. The cloak and bonnet soon offered her little protection, though, as she was drenched by the wheels of carriages more than once; the rain, combined with her haste, caused several parts of her hair to shake free and tumble about her face. By the time she reached the gates of the embassy she could have wept in frustration. There was very little chance that she would be allowed admittance, spattered with mud and dishevelled as she was.

Still, she was determined to try, and there were few enough in the rather smaller crowd that she could go up to the guards and request admission directly. "I have come to inquire after my friend, Jane Rand."

She was rather surprised when they did let her pass, if after some consultation. She was even more surprised to be met by Soran himself in the main hall, dressed in such robes she wondered how he did not swelter in the heat that pervaded the whole building and made her fairly steam.

"I have come to inquire after Jane," she said again. "Would you be so kind as to take me to her?"

And he was so kind - or rather obliging. He did not even remark on the wet trail she left behind her on the pristine floors as he led her up a flight of stairs, nor commented upon the pistol handle sticking out of her muff that he surely must have noticed. And then he opened a door and there was Jane, poor Jane, awake and sitting in bed with a cast upon her leg, being served a cup of something by a Vulcan woman who did not look at all pleased to be doing it.

"Oh, Jane!" Amanda would have rushed to embrace her, save that she was not in a state to embrace anyone. She contented herself with hurrying to the side of the bed and taking her friend's hand in her rather damp one. "Jane, your leg, is it broken?"

"It is; I am afraid I will not be dancing any more for some time. But Bing's physician-"

"Oh, that man!" Amanda cried, all her irritation at Bing flooding back. "What was he thinking of, to bring you straight here without any medical attention?"

"But he wanted to make sure I was treated without the clamour of other casualties! They have all been very kind to me, Mandy. If it hadn't been for Bing and him, in the assembly room-"
"You must be still," the Vulcan woman said in a clipped manner, still holding the cup for Jane to take. "The healer said that you must rest from your injury, and stay warm." At this last word she looked now at Amanda, as if she would force their hands apart with her glare. Amanda returned her stare, and as another lock of hair tumbled down she decided to have done with it. She pulled off her bonnet and put both her hands to her head, removing the last of the pins and shaking her mane out as if she were a dog. Jane laughed as her face was speckled, and the woman shied away like a cat to Amanda's hound, as if she feared to be covered with illogic as well as water.

"But how did you come to be so wet, Mandy? Surely you did not walk all the way here?"

"No, indeed! I ran all the way here from the assembly room. I rather regret refusing Lydia's offer of taking the carriage, now."

Soran eventually returned with Bing and Sarek, to find the friends talking and Amanda still soaked despite the heat of the surroundings, and the female servant watching them both in clear disapproval. Bing was profuse in his gladness to see the newest arrival, enough to make her partly forgive his putting her friend in such a perilous situation. Sarek and Soran acknowledged her but remained silent throughout the greeting. The former was torn between sheer admiration of the dripping apparition that stood before him, alarm at what flared in him when he saw her unbound hair, and doubt at the illogic of her coming here in such circumstances. The latter was thinking mostly of summoning a cleaning crew to dispose of the watery trail that she had left behind her, and which he had most ungracefully slipped in.

"You must stay here, of course," Bing said, looking to Sarek for acknowledgement. Sarek, of course, was not so certain that Amanda should stay, but he could think of no reason why she should be sent to the abode of her friend other than his own problems concerning her, and he was certain they could be controlled. But as Amanda was shown out of Jane's temporary room and he watched water fall from the ends of her hair that could fall to her hips and to where two bodies might meet, he knew he would regret his choice with fervor close to blood fever.

Chapter End Notes

Two of the lines in this are adapted directly from P & P, because I thought the originals were just so funny, and I felt I had to warp at least one line from the novel and perhaps more – just not the first line of all, because everyone does that one. I also adapted a teensy bit from the BBC version, because I love that scene too.

Le Misanthrope the play is truth in packaging, and also very funny. Try it.
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

T'Jin and T'Pen insisted on providing clothes for the embassy's newest guest and even guided her to the nearest sonic shower - not so much out of concern for her as out of concern for their own noses.

"I could hardly concentrate," T'Pen said later, "the odor from her garments was so objectionable. What does she mean by running about the city, in such rain no less, and risking her own health and safety, merely because her friend might have been injured? It would have been more appropriate for her to go to the house of her other friend's mother."

Bing shook his head in amusement at how ignorant his companions could be. "How could she not come? Jane is like a sister to her, and Amanda a sister to Jane! If Sarek were injured – heaven forbid! - would you not hurry to his side, T'Pen, regardless of wind or weather or other obstacles in your path?"

"How could the atmosphere above your world prevent physical injury upon its surface? And I would trust that my brother would be in good and capable hands should he come by that physical injury, thereby not necessitating my immediate presence."

Blushing at the compliment T'Pen had paid him – for it was clear she implied those good and capable hands would be his own – Bing still pressed his case. "But truly you would not rush to his side at all, T'Pen? You would not risk your life to be with him, should he need you?"

"But that is not my task, Bing; and let us speak no more of it." T'Pen and T'Jin moved on to discuss the item that they had discovered in Amanda's muff, namely the phase pistol, which had alarmed them to a certain degree. "We were not aware that females of the species carried such weapons. She should not have brought such a thing within these walls, and even less hidden."

"Come now!" said Bing, beginning to be concerned for Miss Grayson's wellbeing under such censorship. Perhaps he was also thinking that his suit to Miss Rand might suffer if he allowed her friend to be deported from the embassy and charged with bearing in a weapon, which the ladies might well do if left to themselves on the matter. "Young Terran ladies may freely acquaint themselves with practise in firearms, and own one. As to why she carried it now…no doubt she feared being accosted on the streets, by those who might have been the cause of the explosion."

The two Vulcan ladies considered this and were satisfied, but still when Amanda came into the room that was used for intellectual stimulation, as warm and dry as toast if a little swamped in T'Pen's gown, none of the Vulcans did anything to break the silence. The married pair and T'Pen and Bing played 3D chess amongst themselves, and even if Bing would have been inclined to include Amanda, the other three were too absorbed in their games to even notice her. Sarek was apparently just as absorbed in writing letters, and so Amanda walked to the settee with only Bing's acknowledgement. She felt half inclined to go back to Jane's room – her friend would be better company than this, even if she was asleep! – but on arrival she found a book nestled upon the cushions, and since no one seemed inclined to stop her she picked it up and settled down with it, admiring the strange clothes that her hosts wore even as she felt rather stifled in what she had borrowed.

Very soon it became clear that the book was Bing's property; surely none of the Vulcans would read such a delightfully comical farce! She could forget all the pain and worry of the last few
hours and immerse herself in the ridiculously witty plot, and she did not even realise she had
laughed softly until she felt eyes upon her and looked up to see T'Pen's eyebrow rise as she looked
over from her game.

"Do you read often, Miss Grayson?"

"Yes, I do, but I like doing it for pleasure even more than for study. I much prefer a novel to a text
book, even if I am required to read the latter more than the former."

Bing smiled over her now, and she could tell that she had found a kindred spirit. "Would you care
to play against me," he offered, "once this game is finished?" She found some small ungenerous
enjoyment at the look on T'Pen's face at the implication that her opposition was not good enough
for him, but kept her lips quite straight.

"I thank you, sir, but I am afraid you would beat me very quickly. My father's skill sadly passed
me by. However, if you had such a thing as a set of playing cards?" The question was quite
sincere; she loved to play cards even if she never gambled, and she was quite disappointed when
Bing regretfully shook his head.

"I am afraid I do not. My friends have no interest in loo, or any other game of that sort. But if you
will wait until this game is finished, you might face a player worse than you?"

"Perhaps, sir."

The players went back to their game and Amanda went back to the book. She only thought on the
other occupants of the room again when Bing once more spoke, perhaps to take his mind off the
atrocity of his game. "And who is it that you write to, Sarek?"

She thought it only her imagination that the ambassador hesitated before he replied. "I write to
Sybok." There was an extraordinary lack of emotion even for him; as she looked up by chance
she saw T'Pen near to stare at her brother as he carried on with his missive. Clearly there was
some trouble there, but she found that she simply did not care to know more, nor believed any
inquiries she might make would be answered, even if it were the height of good taste to ask.

She went on with her reading, and she did so fast enough that she soon finished the book and
looked about the room for another. Bing once again tore himself from his game to comment that
she was very quick at reading.

"It is a good gift to have, you should not deny it," he insisted, despite her protestations that it was
nothing. "With it you can culture patience, since you know that you can reach the end of anything
you choose to read. It's a trait that many people still lack, I'm afraid."

"That is true, though I admit I would think of my own enjourment or task before any lessons I
might learn."

"And I must admit that I did not think of it at all; it was Sarek who suggested it to me, and I who
agreed with him in turn."

Naturally, Amanda thought, but did not say so, nor showed her displeasure at having agreed with
Sarek about anything; she could hardly retract her words, so she might as well continue. "Patience
is indeed a virtue that we all should have more of, but so many vices lie in the ways to it. To have
just one way cleared is a great relief, I must say." She walked by the seated ambassador as she
spoke, and did not notice his nostrils flare so slightly at the wake of air she caused.

"It is not merely a relief but a necessity." The ambassador spoke without any apparent arrogance,
and so she listened even if she would not be drawn into a spar. "Without patience and logic, a
society cannot sustain itself. In the time since I have first arrived I have met but half a dozen Terrans who I truly perceive to fulfill the ideal Terra wishes for itself."

Perhaps this was arrogance yet again, but tempered with such an actual if unstated concern that Amanda could not find herself able to rebuke him this time. After all, a parent might disapprove of the actions his children but he cared for them too, and if the Vulcans were not in some way the foster parents of Earth, what race was? Still, there was something of an unintentional insult in there too, as there always seemed to be. She was determined to not let him get quite away with it.

"And what criteria, ambassador," she asked in all apparent innocence, "might that image require?"

Sarek, with T'Pen swiftly joining in proceeded to all but recite a list comprising the perfect sentient. Amanda found herself more than slightly incredulous at their expectations; she nodded with great politeness as they cited intelligence, various physical and mental accomplishments and temperamental characteristics - not least a complete control of emotion - all leading her to gain a near picture of a Vulcan rather than a member of her own species. When the two at last concluded she could only reply with, "I am no longer surprised at your knowing only six accomplished Terrans, ambassador; I rather wonder now at your knowing any."

She fancied she had surprised the ambassador with that, even if he did not show it. She did not quite dare look at T'Pen's face; she smiled for Sarek and crossed to the book shelf for another work.

If he were truly surprised, at least he had not lost his voice. "Are you so severe upon your own species, Miss Grayson?"

"I confess I have never met such a Terran," she replied, turning to face him once more, "with all of the qualities you claim that we should aspire to. Even if we were all of those things, we cannot be all of them all of the time. But," she mused now, "I have heard that monks of the Buddhist faith, and the Brahmans and fakirs of Hinduism, they manage to achieve what some might consider perfect harmony and control. And since those six accomplished Terrans are hopefully the leaders of our world, it is only to be expected that those they lead will, eventually, follow their example. I have little hope for myself, though."

She excused herself soon afterward, picking up her skirts to depart as she rarely had to do with her own gowns. She left her hosts in some confusion and debate as to whether she had been sincere or snide in her comments. T'Pen was most decidedly of the latter opinion, and disapproved of Amanda belittling her species...for all the world as if that task was particularly reserved for herself. Bing, who minded not whether he was among those half dozen Terrans, found the whole thing hilarious, and Sarek could not be drawn into the conversation. Instead he finished his letter, after a time excused himself as well, and when no eyes were upon him snatched up the book Amanda had so enjoyed, taking it with him to his chambers.

Chapter End Notes

You have to have this scene in a Pride and Prejudice story, no matter how sci-fi-y. You just have to. It's like a law or something.

Someone asked in a review of an earlier chapter what the rest of the world is doing in terms of lifestyle, considering that America and presumably England is pretty much cemented in the Regency (at least for now.) My answer is, because that period of history is not my strong point (except for what Napoleon was up to, and even then it's
patchy), whatever they were doing during the Austen timeframe, albeit with some changes. Russia's War and Peace without the war and the serfs, France has a President that people often refer to, as a joke, as 'the Emperor'. Africa's a country of united tribes and people there can chose to live traditionally or as people in other countries do, etc. Each continent has representatives that somehow come together to form a not quite central world authority, and I'll stop there because I'm even less proficient at modern politics. I'm sure more will emerge as we go along, even if I'm making it up as we do. I'm open to suggestions, by the by, especially as we might be going to Japan later in the story!
Chapter 8

Amanda passed a not unpleasant night in Jane's room on a settee that, while it looked uncomfortable, was a delight to rest on. She slept so happily that she felt only mildly vexed in the morning at the tangles in her hair, the feel of her skin and the taste of her mouth.

The night before she had helped to a sonic shower by the stone faced attendant. Now the only thing she desired was some sort of wash that hopefully involved water and soap, and just as hopefully did not involve that really rather remarkably ill tempered woman, strange though it might be to call a Vulcan of any sort ill tempered. She also hoped that her search for such a blessing would not include Jane; Amanda had taken one look at her friend as she slept so fitfully and knew she hadn't passed so pleasant a night, and should not be woken for such a trivial thing as the possibility of a shower.

She embarked on a search of the rooms that had been allotted to them. To her dismay, the only room that had looked as if it might have what she wanted in fact turned out to have precisely the opposite; she would have to suffice once more for a sonic shower rather than one of water.

That Amanda had barely attended to the operation of the shower she had been all but shoved into the night before did not in the least dampen her resolve. She glared at the controls as she stripped off her shift and bound up her hair, and choosing what was now, hopefully, the correct button to press.

Thankfully, it apparently was.

Standing under the sonics was not exactly a welcome sensation. It traced along her limbs and belly and face, seeming to grip and shake every surface she possessed and skim off what it shook away from her. It was a strange sight indeed, to see her skin crumble from her arm and fall to the floor, to see her hair float at the corners of her eyes as it had only done when she had gone sea bathing or swimming and submersed herself completely beneath the waves. She was not certain if she enjoyed it or not. And all the while there was a thread of irritation in her mind at the tremors and itches in her flesh and skin and bones.

When she believed that she was as clean as she could be with such apparatus she switched it off. She certainly felt clean, but at the same time not clean. Her skin felt so dry, even more dry than it was normally without cream – and there was no cream, she realised as she struggled back into her shift, no cream to soothe the place where her eyebrows met her nose and always flaked and scaled like a snake. More than that, there were no tongs or curlers for her hair or Jane's, and hers in particular had bloomed under the attention of the sonic and escaped its bonds and crackled about her head like a cloud.

She was grateful at least that her own gown and under things had been cleaned and dried and returned to her; beautiful as T'Pen's gown was – or as beautiful, her disgruntled mind whispered, as a Vulcan could bear to wear – it was far from ideal for venturing outside the room in the full heat of a simulated Vulcan day indoors, as she was preparing to do. Jane needed rest without disturbances, and Amanda really needed to contact Lydia and tell her they were safe and relatively well and needed their things. And to tell her father where they had spent the night as well, for she had neglected to contact him, she thought with a guilty lurch!

She dressed herself, looked for a hairbrush, failed to find one and had to content herself with
running her fingers through the cloud until it was as straight as it could be. It was a relief, she admitted, not to have curls today. Her hosts would not care in any case, for Bing was too generous and his friends too disinterested in anything that was human other than Bing. She tied it at the shoulder, pulled on her shoes and, with no small regret, woke Jane up enough to inform her of her departure and that she would soon return, and then left the room even as Jane's head hit the pillow once more.

Amanda passed a few embassy people in the corridors – probably servants, hard as it was to imagine Vulcans as servants! Somehow she managed to navigate her way to the entrance hall where she had been admitted and hoped to find a messenger to send missives to Lydia and Papa, or even a comm station if the situation became vital enough. She was looking around the echoing hall when she heard a growl to her left.

She looked about in time to see a sehlat make its padding way out of a side room.

Amanda had some experience with dogs, but she was keenly aware that a sehlat from the planet of Vulcan is most certainly not a Terran dog. Her heart began to beat quicker at the sight of those jaws, those teeth. She knew her safest bet would be to stay perfectly still and let him – for she sensed that this particular sehlat was a he – acknowledge her presence in his territory, and then wait to see what he would do next.

She did not have to wait for long. Almost immediately he stalked over to her and sniffed and snuffed at her thigh and hand - then, much to her surprise, proceeded to nuzzle her palm until she needs must stroke his nose and head. Not only that, but he made short work of encouraging the wondering lady to caress him, which she set to with growing enthusiasm.

Had she known that it was partly with the aid of the ambassador that she had received such a warm welcome from the creature she would have been mortified; as it was she was soon talking to the beast as she would to any friendly Terran dog, making remarks on what a good, clever, lovely lad he was.

The sehlat seemed to enjoy these attentions – attentions that he was normally starved for save when his particular Vulcan was present - on the part of this beguiling and interestingly scented new creature, so much so that he determined to return the favour. Amanda was brought to her knees so that her new acquaintance might sniff enthusiastically in her ear and she might scratch behind his, all the while keeping up a running stream of praises and endearments.

"Will you let me up?" she asked at length, half out of breath from laughing and keeping her friend from pushing her to the floor itself. "You're free to follow me, if so you wish!"

This appeared acceptable to the sehlat, and Amanda was allowed to regain her feet and set off once more, though this time with far wilder hair and an honour guard now in tow. The sight of a slight young woman shadowed so faithfully by such a large beast bordered on the ridiculous, and it truly was all she could do not to laugh when she passed more residents of the embassy and swore that one or two or them looked after her in something close to bewilderment. By this time she hardly thought on contacting the outside world, lost as she was in admiring the architecture, the art and the company she kept that occasionally reminded her of his presence with a lick on the hand.

By sheer chance she happened across a comm unit, and snatched the chance before it was driven out of her mind again. First she spoke to her father who was rather bewildered about the whole business and not at all approving of the situations surrounding the bombing of the embassy. Such trifles were nothing, however, compared to the monstrous beast he kept catching glimpses of, regardless of his daughter's reassurances that it meant her the least harm in the world; Amanda half believed he was of a mind to storm into the embassy with pistol and ball!
After quieting his fears she contacted Lydia and asked her to return to their rented accommodation, if it was at all possible, and obtain for her certain items that would become a necessity the longer she and Jane stayed at the embassy, as she had no intention of leaving until Jane was able to do so as well. Lydia was much recovered from the fear of the night before, making cheerful assurances that she would do so as quickly as possible.

Her duties done, Amanda was left to amuse herself. Or rather amuse the sehlat, as the animal very quickly decided she should, and so managed by some ingenious method to encourage her to chase him, and play with him in a tug of war with a fallen branch they came across in one of the embassy's sumptuous gardens. All this strenuous activity had the result that when Sarek came upon the pair Amanda's face was what a kind viewer would describe as 'beautifully flushed', and much of her hair had escaped the tie she had so carefully imprisoned it in. Her throat was sore from laughing and her face and mind so full of joy that, even when faced with the man she found objectionable above all things, she could not have put off her smile for the world.

Sarek, for his part, found himself most uncharacteristically grateful that he had given I-Chaya the scent of the embassy's newest guest to recognise, knowing that without his actions her reception might well have been far less pleasant. He also found himself most uncharacteristically mortified when his companion leapt over to him, leaving the Terran female seated on a bench and using her hands to smooth her face back into something acceptable, and nudged his hand and broadcast quite clearly across their mental link, *mate?*


*Female. Strong, nurturing. Attraction. Mate?*

*Negative.*

Amanda had by this time composed herself to address the ambassador: "I must ask your pardon, sir, for being so forward as to behave in such a way with your…pet?" A curious trait of many species and of this one in particular, although a trait not often found in this individual – saying one thing and meaning another. Did she then imply that she did not regret interacting with I-Chaya in such a manner?

*Mate?*

"It is no matter. Sehlats are naturally inclined towards physical interaction." He chose not to mention that even domesticated sehlats could also be extremely violent if they were not checked, and again how fortunate she was that he had ensured that this would not be the case.

*Mate?* I-Chaya broke the connection and walked back to her, seating himself so that his muzzle rested in her lap and he could enjoy the sensation of her touch upon his ears. Sarek had had cause before today to note that I-Chaya's intellect was not inconsiderable, but never before had he recognised the blatant satisfaction that his companion could exhibit as well.

He was not certain that it was acceptable in this case.

"I had not realised that sehlats could be so affectionate," Amanda remarked, keeping one eye on the animal and one eye on his supposed master all the while. The ambassador's eyes remained fixed on the beast, apparently engrossed. Well, no matter if he could not even bear to look at her; he was somewhat redeemed yet again in his choice of animal comrades. What a darling boy the sehlat was, and she even dared to tell him so in front of Sarek!

"Affection is not the correct word. Rather they seek physical contact and gratification with any living being that will provide it." Sarek could not understand why she smiled, yet again, and
requested clarification for this.

"Why, ambassador, you will find that to be a very succinct definition of affection upon this planet, and I believe upon many others as well."

He could not deny the…logic of her words. Even Vulcans recognised the importance of physical contact. Vulcan infants and young children were practically demanding when it came to reassurance and placation through touch. But as an individual grew older, surely the need would decrease? He built barriers against the sight of Amanda's hands, now petting his animal companion rather than her own.

Touch was not something that was required, it was not.

"Perhaps it is not a very succinct definition of love, though, I must admit." Sarek pulled himself back to what Miss Grayson was saying. "Love goes beyond touch, I fancy. Yet are the two inseparable? Can one love without contact? I know there can be contact without love." She looked up at him once more. "Forgive me, ambassador, I ramble on occasion, and of course I make comment only upon my own species. I do not know enough of others to comment, let alone pass judgement."

"Indeed." Perhaps she expected him to say more; when he did not she nodded her head and stood up again.

"I must go and see how Jane fares. Good morning to you, sir." And she walked away; I-Chaya might have followed but a sharp signal from Sarek brought him back to his side, tucking his nose into the ambassador's hand.

Mate?

Sarek's control worked furiously to suppress a groan.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, I confess. This whole bit was because of the BBC series. The part where Lizzie chases the dog and plays with it? Too damn cute. I'm so sorry. I left out Sarek watching from the window after having a bath, however.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!