

His Soul Lingers

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His Soul Lingers

by [spacedogfromspace](#)

Summary

Spock moves into an apartment in San Francisco during his tenure at Starfleet Academy. The apartment, however, is already occupied.

Notes

Written for K/S Spring Fever 2023 in response to a prompt by... me.

Everything Spock had to his name was in a suitcase that he hauled up the stairs. He was out of breath by the time he reached his destination on the ninth floor, wishing that the lift had been functioning to save him the effort. It hardly mattered now. Lift or no, he had arrived at his new quarters on the top floor of the apartment complex. Entering an eight-digit access code at a door marked with the number 903, the door hissed open. Spock dragged his suitcase inside, sighing with relief when the door closed behind him, finally isolating him from the outside world. He stood with his back against the door for a good minute, closing his eyes to gather himself. The journey here was a hassle, but at least now it was over.

When he opened his eyes again and took in the apartment for the first time, he groaned inwardly. The apartment was as advertised. One bedroom, one bath, spacious living area with a full kitchen, and fully furnished. But it was also *very* dusty, as if nobody had been in the suite for a long time, and there were other debris scattered around that suggested that the previous tenant had left in a hurry.

Spock checked the time. He was exhausted, but he figured that if he started now, he could have the place clean in time for his evening meditations. Realizing that he would have to go out and purchase cleaning supplies, he grimaced inwardly, suddenly feeling less inclined to tidy up. But, he grimaced outwardly at the thought of meditating or sleeping in such a neglected environment, so with a sigh, he left his belongings in the entryway and stepped back out into the hallway.

Despite the dust, he instantly regretted leaving the sanctity of his private space when he came face to face with his neighbour from across the hall, a stout old human man who was just arriving home, presumably from a day of work. Unfortunately for Spock, he looked the friendly type.

"Oh! Hello, I didn't realize nine-oh-three had a new tenant. I'm Bernard," he said, extending a hand to Spock, who stayed perfectly still, eyes boring into the elderly human's face. Bernard's already pale complexion paled a bit more, his skin nearly matching his sparse white hair. Awkwardly withdrawing his hand, he said, "You must have moved in recently."

Not wanting to be impolite, Spock resigned himself to the small talk, hoping he could escape quickly. "Indeed, just today," Spock replied. There was an awkward pause as Spock said nothing else, the old man clearly expecting him to be more conversational.

"What's your name?" Bernard asked, breaking the silence. "I'm Bernard."

Spock resisted the urge to inform Bernard that he had already given his name, and instead answered him. "I am Spock."

"It's nice to meet you, Spock," Bernard said, looking satisfied, before leaning in conspiratorially. "Do you know about the... *condition* of nine-oh-three?" He asked in a lowered voice. Unnecessary, as they were the only people in the hallway to hear, but Spock didn't point that out.

"It is incredibly dirty," Spock answered, internally cursing the *condition* of the apartment for sending him out for cleaning supplies, and by extension, into this painful interaction.

Bernard let out a strange croaking laugh. "Well that doesn't surprise me. Nobody's lived there in a year, and management has been hard-pressed to find someone willing to go in there and clean it."

Spock's eyes narrowed in suspicion. "Why is that?"

"Well, I don't want to alarm you," Bernard said, seeming a bit jovial about informing Spock of something that was potentially '*alarming*.' "But nine-oh-three is haunted. Has been for the past five years. I've seen sixteen people move in and out in that time. Nobody stayed more than a month or two. Longest made it for six. Poor fella. He got the worst of the scare. Looked like a ghost himself by the time he moved out."

Spock resisted the urge to roll his eyes, instead blinking slowly and taking a breath to gather himself. "There is no such thing as ghosts," he said levelly. "I must be going now," he added before Bernard could reply, and pivoted toward the stairwell.

Bernard was chuckling behind him. "That's what the other sixteen said! But you'll see soon enough."

Spock continued on as if he didn't hear. When the stairwell door closed behind him, he allowed himself a loud sigh of exasperation and a well-deserved eye-roll. He hoped that all humans weren't as obnoxious as Bernard.

When Spock returned to his apartment with a bag of cleaning supplies, he found a note taped to his door. On it in a messy scrawl was Bernard's name and comm ID. With a sigh, he snatched the paper off the door, crumpling it in his fist before punching in his security code and stepping back into the apartment. He once again felt relief when the door closed behind him, promising him peace and quiet, though he was not enthused about having to spend the next few hours cleaning. Not one for wasting any time though, he decided to start on the bedroom, taking one step in that direction before stopping short as something caught his eye. On the floor by his feet, there were some distinctive markings in the thick layer of dust, as if someone had used a finger to write in a message in the grime.

Hello, it read. There was a smiley face beside it. With a frown, he dragged a foot over it, erasing it. He didn't recall seeing the message there before, and wondered if perhaps it was Bernard's doing. He changed the security code before pushing the incident out of his mind, setting himself to the task of scrubbing away the grime from his new apartment.

By the time he had thoroughly removed the dust and debris from his living space, it was well into the evening. Spock changed into a comfortable set of robes, and set up for his meditation, lighting several candles, burning some incense, and laying out his well worn meditation mat.

He hadn't been meditating for long when he was interrupted. There wasn't a sound, or anything obvious to capture his attention, but he had the oddest feeling that someone was there. He opened his eyes, looking around, and saw nobody. His candles, however, had all gone out. Strange. A draft perhaps? He hadn't felt a draft.

Spock shook his head at himself for imagining things, lit his candles again, and resumed his meditations, ignoring any strange sensations, and eventually forgetting about the incident.

When he ended his meditation to go to bed for the night, he found his candles had gone out once again. Their wicks were still long and they had enough wax that they shouldn't have burned out on their own, which was curious. Perhaps *one* candle spontaneously going out would be of no concern, but all of them? Spock figured there must have been a draft after all, and held his hands over the candles to test that theory. He detected not even the slightest draft.

Deciding that there was some rational reason for the candles to have gone out, and that such a small incident was not worth expending energy in solving, Spock adjusted himself in the unfamiliar bed and went to sleep.

Spock left early in the morning, not wanting to arrive late for his first day on the job as an academy instructor. After his classes were finished, he stayed on campus well into the evening, working on lesson plans in his office. He had relied on his PADD the entire day and it had presented no issues, so it puzzled Spock when he returned to his apartment later that evening for his PADD to start acting haywire suddenly. The screen would glitch and cycle between different documents and net pages, sometimes combining them like a collage. The battery had sufficient charge still, and the classic fix of turning it off and turning it on again had no effect. The malfunction didn't seem to have any determinable cause.

Giving up on his PADD for the time being, Spock decided to finish scrubbing down his apartment. There were still a few nooks and crannies that he hadn't gotten to the night before, and the thick dust and grime that lingered plagued his mind. So, he got to work. Curious about what kind of radio might be available, Spock switched the radio on to listen to as he worked, hoping to discover something that he liked.

The radio worked fine for a while, introducing Spock to some strange sounding Earth music. However, like with his PADD, odd malfunctions soon took the radio over. It seemed to speed up and slow down the audio at random, flipped through frequencies, and dialed up the volume obnoxiously high. Unable to find a way to stop it, Spock switched off the radio, and continued to work in silence.

Once he had finished up the last bits of cleaning, Spock decided that it was time for meditation. The malfunctioning of his electronics had annoyed him - unsettled him, even - though he couldn't determine the reasoning behind the latter feeling. Meditation would ease these feelings, and allow him to process them so he wouldn't have to feel them anymore.

Or at least, he had hoped that it would. He found himself uncharacteristically restless. Something was keeping him from entering his meditative state. Realizing that he was feeling on edge, he considered the feeling and tried to determine the root of it. He noticed that he had the strangest sensation that he was being watched. An odd and illogical sensation, he brushed it away, but he couldn't deny the presence he felt standing over his shoulder.

He stood up with a start, spinning around to confront... no one. His brow furrowed. He had been *certain* that he felt someone there. And yet... He shook his head, dismissing the experience as a hallucination. He was tired from the long day, not to mention the travelling and the move in

the days before. He was simply exhausted, and the mind did not work well in such a state.

Pushing all that out of his mind, Spock returned to his meditation mat, freezing in place when he noticed that once again, every single candle had gone out, apparently on its own. And *that* certainly wasn't a hallucination.

Deciding to forego meditation that evening in favour of some extra (and apparently much needed) sleep, Spock prepared to retreat to his bed, putting on some loose, comfortable sleeping garments and padding through the dark apartment to fill a glass of water at the kitchen sink.

He jumped in alarm as a dark figure moved in the shadows at the edge of his vision, but when he turned, nothing was there. He stared at the open bathroom door, room unlit, wondering if whoever it was had simply stepped into the room out of his view. With caution, he approached the bathroom, reaching to turn the light on before stepping inside. The room was small with few places to hide, and Spock did not immediately see anyone or anything unusual, but he felt a chill as he eyed up the closed shower curtain.

Taking a breath, he gripped the curtain and yanked it open quickly, half expecting to catch an intruder hiding behind it. But again, there was nothing. Spock shook his head again, muttering about hallucinations, and went to bed.

The strange occurrences continued. While unexplained oddities didn't happen every day, they were frequent enough that it was impossible to ignore. His meditation candles would suddenly blow out, or sometimes he would open his eyes to discover the flames wavering in a non-existent breeze. Some days his radio would malfunction, or his PADD, but only ever when he was in his apartment. And despite dismissing it as a hallucination, Spock continued to sense a presence close by, and continued to see movement out of the corner of his eye.

He lived with it all for two weeks without complaint, but when he stepped out of the shower one morning to find a message written in the foggy mirror, he decided it was high time to put his foot down and get to the bottom of it. He started by doing a thorough sweep of the apartment, searching for hidden cameras or anything that would allow someone to monitor his activities. Remembering Bernard's cheerful warning about the supposed haunting of suite 903, Spock had the suspicion that someone - probably Bernard himself - was responsible for the strange occurrences. The idea of someone breaking into his apartment to write him messages or sabotage his radio in some twisted notion of a joke unsettled Spock as much as it angered him.

Spock's search was thorough and methodical, and when he was finished he was certain that there were no bugs of any kind in his apartment. He stood thinking for a minute before digging Bernard's crumpled note from the wastebasket, hoping the message written in the fog of the mirror was still there. Perhaps the handwriting would match.

The message was still there. *'Good morning,'* it read. But there was something else - a second message that hadn't been there before. *'You're late for work.'*

Spock stared at the second message. He was *certain* that it wasn't there earlier, but how else would it have appeared? Nobody had entered his apartment while he was searching the place for hidden cameras, or he certainly would have seen them. Perhaps the second message *was* there earlier, and he missed it. But he doubted it, based on the message's contents. In any case, whoever had written it was correct. Spock hastily collected his things and slung on a coat before rushing off to the academy.

Spock returned later than his class schedule would suggest, as he had stopped to purchase some small cameras on his way back. He didn't know who was responsible for this nonsense, or how they were doing it, but he was going to find out. He set up the cameras carefully, prioritizing their area of coverage over how hidden they were. Only after double and triple checking to ensure that the cameras had no blind spots - and had especial views of the door and windows - was Spock satisfied with his work. Linking them all to his PADD, he set them all to record.

There were no new messages, technology glitches, or mysteriously blown out candles for a few days. Nor did Spock see movement in his peripherals that vanished the moment he turned to look at it. Even the sense that someone was watching him, or looking over his shoulder was absent. He reviewed the footage, fast forwarding through the shots of the door and windows, thinking that perhaps the culprit had walked in, spotted the cameras, and left without touching anything. When Spock saw nothing but his own comings and goings over the past five days, he started to think that maybe he had just been paranoid. Maybe sense had returned to him only after installing the cameras. He wasn't very convinced by this hypothesis, though.

When Spock returned from work on a particularly chilly day, he turned up the heat and switched on the kettle for tea, eager to warm himself after the cold transit home. The windows quickly fogged from the change in temperature, but Spock cared more about being warm than having a view. While he waited for the kettle to boil, Spock retreated to his bedroom to change his instructor greys out for a comfortable - and warm - set of robes.

As he paced back towards the kitchen to tend to the whistling kettle, something in the fogged window caught his eye. The fog blurred the view of what was outside the window, but there were a few slivers where the outside world was clear to the eye, as if someone had wiped away the fog. Or wrote a message in it. Whatever it said was half obscured by the partially open curtains, so Spock ignored the kettle and strode forward, whipping them open. All that was there was the message left behind in the fog. *'Please don't be afraid of me, I mean you no harm.'*

Spock snatched his PADD from the table and accessed the cameras to review the footage, stepping into the kitchen to remove the screaming kettle from the stove without even looking at it. He found the camera that had an excellent view of the window in question, and reversed the footage a few minutes at a time, playing it back forward once the writing was no longer visible.

He watched impatiently, resisting the urge to speed up the footage. Any moment now, he would find out exactly who was responsible for the supposed haunting of his apartment. But when he saw it, he didn't quite process it, and played the clip over again. And again, and again, until he had to admit to himself that he was seeing correctly. In the footage, the curtains swished, as if caught by a breeze, and letters appeared on the window one by one. The curtains swished once more, before the room was still again. All of this happened, yet nobody was there.

Ghosts aren't real, they're only human superstition, Spock thought- no, he *knew*. Or at least he thought he knew. He was running out of any plausible ideas to explain otherwise, and the leading theory of someone using personal cloaking technology the likes that even the Romulans had never seen, just to pull tricks on him, wasn't seeming very likely.

So, Spock decided to find out. He sat down at the kitchen table with a cup of tea, and started reading the papers his students had submitted earlier that day. That was all he did that evening, and it was all he did the next day, a Saturday, when he had no scheduled classes to attend to. Nothing out of the ordinary happened. At least until dusk on Saturday night.

The familiar sense that he was being watched returned to Spock, but he didn't stir, continuing to read until he noticed movement out of the corner of his eye, in the shadow of the entryway. Without looking towards it, or making any movement at all, Spock spoke to it. "I know that you're there. Please reveal yourself, if you can." It was easy for him to not sound angry, but he had also made the effort to sound friendly, which was more difficult. Hopefully the sentiment was received.

Spock continued to keep still, and kept his eyes on his PADD, not wanting to startle whoever - or whatever - it was back into hiding. He waited patiently, and was rewarded for it, as the lurker eventually stepped out of the shadows into the dim light of the kitchen, and waited. Spock sensed a nervous air about it, and looked up at it slowly, taking care not to move too suddenly or look too threatening.

What he saw was a visage of a young man, standing awkwardly in the kitchen. Or, not *standing*, exactly. The man had no weight or substance, and his image faded out far above where his feet should have been. He appeared to be made of smoke, grey and translucent, giving a shimmering effect to the room behind him. He waited nervously, fiddling with the cuffs of a smokey jacket, avoiding eye contact.

"Hello," Spock said, curiosity piqued. Despite the quiet calm of his voice, the figure jumped in alarm, but didn't flee.

"Uh... Hi," he said meekly, his voice lacking the resonance of that of a corporeal being. He met Spock's eyes anxiously, and tried to smile. It appeared as more of a grimace. Spock wasn't certain, but he thought that the human spectre's behaviour resembled someone who was feared they were about to be attacked.

"I am Spock," Spock said. From his understanding of humans, they felt less afraid of a stranger if they knew their name. As an added touch, Spock gestured to the empty chair opposite him, though he regretted it when he realized that chairs were probably not of much use to the incorporeal.

Nonetheless, the man walked - no, drifted - over to the table, lowering himself to float over the chair, making him appear to be seated. Now that he was closer to him, Spock was able to take more detailed observation of his appearance. While he was grey, the colouration wasn't uniform. Some vague semblance of colour still touched him. Spock almost wouldn't have noticed if it weren't for the man's eyes, which were considerably less grey than the rest of him, instead a grey-tinged blue. From there, Spock could make out the warm tones of his skin, and noted that his tousled hair was likely blonde. The spectre continued to fidget, avoiding direct eye contact. He was shy. Spock waited patiently, not wanting to press him. He knew that asking questions sometimes made humans feel threatened.

Eventually, the spectre worked himself up to speak, again in that quiet, thin voice. "James T Kirk," he stuttered out. "Call me Jim."

"Alright. Jim," Spock nodded. The human name rolled off his tongue differently than Vulcan names did, though not in a bad way.

Another moment of silence - patient on Spock's part and awkward on Jim's - passed before Jim suddenly looked Spock in the eye, blue eyes coming alive as he blurted out, "You aren't afraid of me." It was a question and an observation all at once, as if he couldn't decide which he wanted to use.

Spock raised his eyebrows. "I am not afraid of you," he confirmed, and watched curiously as Jim blinked in surprise, leaning back in his chair. Or leaning back *into* the chair, literally, as part of his torso faded through the back of the chair. Finally, he said, stunned expression still on his face, "Nobody's ever *not* been afraid of me, before." He let out a halfhearted laugh and smiled sadly at Spock. "Usually when they see me they shout at me and throw things at me. If they haven't already been frightened off by my activities, that is."

"You mean, the messages?" Spock asked.

Jim shrugged. "Yeah. And the rest. I know you've noticed. It's my way of testing the waters. If all the weirdness doesn't scare someone off, then maybe showing myself won't scare them either." He sighed. "It's never worked out though. Not until now. Why aren't you afraid of me?" He asked, tilting his head curiously.

"You've given me no reason to fear you," Spock said, simply.

"Oh," Jim said, looking down at his hands, seeming embarrassed. "It's just that I thought maybe... when you put up those cameras," he waved his hands nebulously, filling in the blanks.

Spock shook his head. "I set up the cameras thinking that..." He trailed off. There were bigger things to address. "Pardon my asking, but... what are you, exactly?"

Jim blinked with surprise. "A ghost?" He said, voice inflecting a question as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

"I apologize, I did not wish to offend," Spock said. "But I did not think that ghosts were anything more than a myth entertained by impressionable humans."

Jim smiled at him. Spock couldn't help but notice despite his drab colouring, his smile seemed to brighten the room. "No offence taken," Jim said. "But, yeah... Ghost," he shrugged, gesturing at himself.

"You... reside in this apartment?" Spock asked, carefully avoiding using the word 'live.'

"Yeah, for a few years," Jim answered. "A bunch of people have moved in since I showed up, but none have stayed very long." He had a melancholy air to him as he said this.

"I intend to stay," he said cautiously. "If you don't mind the company, that is."

Jim lit up at this, to Spock's relief. He had worried that he might offend the ghost. "I would *love* the company," Jim said, enthusiasm unrestrained. "Being a ghost is so *lonely*, I haven't had anyone to talk to in years!"

Spock was beginning to wonder what he had gotten himself into. He was a very solitary person without much of a social battery or inclination. Now he worried that he had just signed on to make up for several years of a ghost's social needs.

As if he sensed Spock's concerns, Jim said, "I'm glad to see that you're not really into the San Fran nightlife. I can only come out in the twilight hours," he gestured to himself. "Like this, at least. Visible and talking."

Spock relaxed at this. At least he wouldn't be expected to talk to Jim every moment that he spent in the apartment. But he remembered the interference with his radio and PADD, and the messages written in the windows and mirrors and dust. Those had happened during broad daylight.

"Of course, I can still cause a bit of trouble the rest of the time," Jim grinned mischievously. "As you know."

"Yes, I do," Spock said, starting to wonder if Jim could read minds. He certainly hoped that he just had good intuition.

When the twilight hours started to fade, Jim gave Spock a fond smile. "Hey, thanks for not throwing things at me and yelling at me and running away and moving out," he said. "I really was lonely. I hope we can become good friends."

"So do I," Spock said, and was surprised to find that he had meant it.

The first few evenings with Jim were awkward. Spock wasn't much of a conversationalist, and Jim, not having been witness to much in half a decade, had nothing to lead with. Spock dispelled the awkwardness of their meetings one evening by presenting a 3D chess set, asking Jim if he would be amenable to a game. Jim was happy to play, though he admitted that he would be a bit rusty after not having played for so long. The game made them both more comfortable as it gave them something to do together that didn't rely entirely on conversation. Their chess games became a nightly ritual.

Something that Spock decided after a few weeks was that the ghost of Jim Kirk was obnoxious. Jim played chess in a way so illogical that Spock actually lost to him simply by not being able to predict what stupid move Jim would make next. Spock was also certain that if Jim could move the pieces himself, he would cheat. Even outside of the twilight hours when Jim could appear, he continually made his presence known to Spock. Any time Spock turned the radio to baroque music (which he discovered he rather liked), he could almost certainly count on the music *mysteriously* switching to some very loud Beastie Boys. And sometimes he picked up his PADD only to find that Jim had written '*Boo*' on whatever document Spock had been working on. Jim Kirk was obnoxious. Spock wouldn't have it any other way.

Spock had also been doing his research on ghosts. Despite the apparent fact that ghosts *did* exist, anything to be found written about them was pseudo-scientific, and for all Spock knew, *all* of it could be incorrect. Jim would likely correct any misconceptions while reading over Spock's shoulder - if Spock did his research at home. Precisely because of Jim's habit of snooping on Spock all the time, Spock only did his ghost research in his office at work.

Strangely, not to mention illogically, Spock began to realize that he felt guilty whenever he left the apartment to go to work, and felt more guilty any time he stayed at the academy longer than he needed to. Even though Jim could only come out during the twilight hours, he seemed to get very lonely and bored whenever Spock wasn't around. Spock felt bad for Jim, of course. The ghost couldn't leave the apartment, nor could he really do anything to entertain himself while Spock was away. Well, Spock couldn't abandon his duties to his students at the academy to keep Jim company all day, but he *did* come up with something to help Jim pass the time.

"I have a gift for you," Spock said one evening after destroying Jim at a game of chess.

"Oh?" Jim said, eyebrows raised in surprise. After all, what gift would anyone ever give to a ghost? Regardless, his bitterness over losing the game was replaced by intrigue.

Spock placed a PADD on the table, one that was not his own. He turned it on and slid it across the table towards Jim. "You have proven on numerous occasions that despite being incorporeal, you can manipulate technology," he said when Jim gave him a questioning look. "I've loaded a large selection of books onto this PADD for you. Something for you to read and keep you busy while I am at the academy. I know you have a fondness for Earth classics," Spock added, having picked up on this from how much Jim liked to reference and quote them, "so I've made sure to include as many of them as I could find."

Jim didn't respond. He just blinked at Spock with his big blue eyes for a long, long moment. Something strange was happening in the shimmering smoke of his eyes, and Spock felt a shock when he realized what it was. He hadn't thought that ghosts could cry.

"I'm sorry," Spock said. "I didn't mean to upset you."

Jim laughed suddenly, even as he wiped at his incorporeal eyes with a ghostly sleeve. "Upset? No... No, Spock," he grinned. "I'm just... I'm so happy," he said, the strange tears of smoke welling up in his eyes again. "Thank you," he said, voice barely a whisper. "This is... the nicest thing anyone's done for me in a while. Maybe ever," he admitted.

Spock relaxed. "It is unnecessary to thank me. I only wish for you to be happy."

Jim smiled at him. "You're really something, you know that?"

Spock raised an eyebrow. "What kind of something?" He asked, unsure what Jim meant.

Jim grinned, leaning forward on the table. "Something wonderful."

Spock's heart beat just a little faster in his chest.

Spock became troubled as he continued his research into ghosts. Of course, everything he read he took with a grain of salt, but almost every source mentioned the same thing, and he started to worry that perhaps it applied to Jim. According to the self-proclaimed 'experts,' ghosts were souls trapped between worlds because they had unfinished business in the mortal realm. They were unable to pass on until their business had been fulfilled. Souls that lingered in the realm of mortals were often in misery - agony even - wanting nothing more than to finally pass on. Was Jim in pain, trapped on this plane? He certainly didn't seem like he was. But then again, Spock had known many people to keep their true feelings well under wraps, himself included.

What unfinished business did Jim have? As the common denominator among all the sources Spock had read from, it seemed likely that there was some truth behind it. But Jim had never mentioned anything of the like to him. Jim didn't seem to be on any quest, and in fact, he never mentioned anything from when he was alive. Spock decided that he would ask Jim about it, regardless of how personal the subject was. If Jim was trapped in this realm and wanted to pass on, Spock wanted to help him do so.

"Queen takes rook A6," Jim said that evening, over a chess game that he was clearly winning. Spock was rather off his game.

Spock absently moved the pieces for him, then quietly contemplated.

After a few moments of Spock spacing out turned into a few minutes, Jim started to think that Spock wasn't contemplating his next move. "Spock?" He asked, waking his friend from his trance. "Are you okay?"

Spock sighed. "I... have been meaning to talk to you about something," he said.

"Okay," Jim said with a shrug. "What is it?"

After a moment of hesitation, Spock took a breath. "I was wondering why you haven't passed on after all these years," he said, hoping that he wouldn't offend Jim in saying so.

"Oh," Jim said, seeming surprised. He thought for a moment. "I don't really know," he admitted. "I just... haven't been able to pass on."

"Is it because you have some sort of unfinished business to attend to before you can?" Spock asked. Jim looked down at his hands. Frowning, Spock added, "Jim, if there is something you've been unable to do, I'm more than willing to help you. You only have to ask."

"What, trying to get rid of me already?" Jim asked, flashing a smile to signal that it was a joke. Spock noticed that the smile didn't quite reach his eyes.

"Of course not," Spock said softly. "But doesn't it hurt you, being trapped here?"

"Yeah," Jim answered. He rested his arms on the tabletop, and they sunk into the surface a bit without him noticing. "Until recently," he said, giving Spock a pointed look. Spock nodded, understanding. "As for my unfinished business," Jim continued. "I have no idea what it might be."

Spock's brow furrowed. "But how can something you aren't aware of be keeping you here?"

Jim shrugged and let out a breath of a laugh. "Who knows? Sometimes it seems like there's no rules when it comes to the dead."

That brought Spock to his next question. "Jim, if you don't mind me asking..." he trailed off, suddenly unsure if this was a question he wanted to ask. Or one that he wanted an answer to.

Jim looked at him expectantly, waiting for Spock to continue. But he didn't. "I don't mind," Jim said, giving a nod for Spock to go on.

Spock took a breath. "How did you die?"

"Oh," Jim raised his eyebrows in surprise. Apparently he did not expect that question. He scrubbed a hand through his hair absently. "You know, I really don't remember," he admitted, sheepishly.

Spock tilted his head to the side, studying Jim curiously. The ghost fidgeted uncomfortably, and wouldn't meet his eyes in a way that made Spock wonder if Jim truly didn't remember, or if he just didn't want to answer the question. The expression on Spock's face must have been one of skepticism, because Jim shook his head when he finally looked up and caught Spock watching him.

"No, *really*," he said. "I can't remember. Maybe I knew once. Maybe I even knew what my unfinished business was. But I've been lingering for so long that I've lost my memory of... well, pretty much everything from before I died. All but my name, really," he admitted. "Maybe that's for the best." Jim smiled, but his eyes were sad, and Spock felt a stab of guilt.

"Knight E4," Spock said while moving his piece, signalling to Jim that the topic was dropped. Jim relaxed.

Spock's contract at the academy was coming to an end, and in a mere couple of months he was to leave Earth, embarking on a five year mission into deep space.

Jim knew from early on that Spock would eventually be leaving, and they had spoken about it casually, mostly Jim taking an interest in what ship Spock would serve on, and under which captain. But as the departure date grew nearer, Spock began to avoid the topic all together. He

felt bad for Jim, knowing that once Spock left he would be all alone again. Jim never said so, but Spock knew that being alone again would be unbearable for him.

Sitting in his office at the academy one morning, Spock tried to think of some solutions to Jim's loneliness for when it was time for him to return to space. There had to be something that could be done. Perhaps Spock could plug Jim's PADD into a wall outlet before he left, and they could keep in touch through subspace. But that was too fragile a solution. Inevitably, someone would move into the apartment and remove the PADD, or the PADD would need replacing, and Jim would suddenly be alone again anyways. Maybe Spock could seek out a replacement for himself. Surely if he explained well enough, he could find a new friend for Jim that wouldn't be afraid of him. But Spock's lack-lustre people skills made this idea a dud, too. He didn't even know how to approach humans, let alone determine if they would be a good friend to Jim.

The list of solutions that were both valid and long-term had zero items on it, and Spock sighed heavily, feeling discouraged. But there was one more option, Spock realized. He had a choice to make.

Spock decided to take his mother's advice about making important decisions, which was to sleep on it. Of course, he adjusted that advice a little, instead choosing to meditate on it, because decisions couldn't very well be weighed during sleep. So, he went home, played chess with Jim, and meditated. He thought about his decision all through the next day, trying not to let it distract him during his classes, and by the time twilight came around again, Spock felt that he was confident in his choice.

Informing Jim of his decision was more difficult than he imagined it would be, oddly enough. Though he was sure that Jim would be happy about it, something was holding his tongue, keeping him from speaking.

Jim took notice. He turned his attention away from the chess board, giving Spock a curious look, tinged with a bit of anxiety. Because of the proximity of Spock's departure date, he probably had a good idea of what this was about. "There's something you want to talk to me about?" Jim asked, wanting to get it over with.

Spock sighed. "Indeed," he admitted. He was still struggling with finding the words, but having delayed enough already, he decided to just let it out. "As you know, my tenure at the academy is at its end, and I am scheduled to depart for a five year mission aboard the *Enterprise*," he started.

Jim nodded, knowingly. He had known that this was coming, and he had promised himself that he would be brave about it. "Yeah, I know," he said quietly, pretending to study the chess board to avoid Spock's eyes.

Spock took a deep breath. "I've decided to reject my assignment on the *Enterprise* and extend my contract at the academy," he said, quickly, as if tearing off a band-aid.

Jim blinked up at him in surprise. That was the last place he thought this conversation would go. "What? Why?" He asked.

It was Spock's turn to blink in surprise. He had thought it was obvious. "So I could stay here, with you," he said. "So you wouldn't have to be alone."

Jim just stared at him. A million emotions flashed across Jim's face, too fast for Spock to identify any one of them. A couple of those emotions lingered as Jim processed what Spock had told him. Shock, Spock realized, was one of them. And... could that be horror?

"I... I need a moment," Jim said quickly, and vanished as if a sudden wind had blown into the room, dispersing his smoky visage.

"Jim-" Spock started, but Jim was already gone. He knew that if he spoke Jim would hear him, but Jim said that he needed a moment, and Spock knew that he should give him that time. As much as he hated it, he waited.

Spock was generally a patient person, but he found that waiting for Jim to reappear was most difficult. He was anxious, he realized. He didn't know what was going through Jim's head. Did Jim not want him to stick around after all? What if Jim had only let him stay in the apartment to be nice, and he actually would have preferred being here alone? Had Spock just been infringing on his space the whole time, and Jim was upset that he was proposing that he continue to do so? But Jim had always said he was so lonely before Spock had come along. So what was bothering him?

Jim reappeared a while later, standing awkwardly by the table and looking nervous, but other than that Spock couldn't read anything more from his face. The ghost ran a hand through his hair, leaving it sticking up more than usual. "So... is it official yet, or...?" He asked, awkwardly.

Spock shook his head. "No," he said. "I haven't yet informed Starfleet of my change in plans."

Jim relaxed at this, and sat down in his chair across from Spock, placing his elbows on the table and propping his chin on his hands. He floated a few inches above the chair, and his elbows didn't quite connect with the table's surface, but Jim didn't care much about that. "You can't stay here, Spock," he said softly.

Spock studied him. "Why not?" He asked, when Jim didn't elaborate.

"Because you have a *life*, Spock!" Jim exclaimed. He almost sounded angry. "You can't just drop your whole career to keep me company, that's crazy!"

"Jim, I don't want you to have to suffer here all alone. I *want* to stay here with you. I care about you."

Jim shook his head. "Spock, I'm *dead*. You can't put your life on hold for some dead guy in a banged up apartment. I won't let you." Spock was about to argue, but Jim put a hand up, silencing him. "Look, I can't talk to you right now, this is insane," he said. As his smokey form dispersed, he jabbed a threatening finger at Spock. "If you go through with this I'll never speak to you again," he said sharply, and then he was gone.

"Jim," Spock sighed, stopping himself from begging Jim to come back and talk to him. Instead he just put his face in his hands for a few long minutes. When it was clear that Jim had no intention of returning that night, Spock retreated to his bedroom to meditate. His candles remained unplayfully lit.

Jim didn't reveal himself for a few days after that conversation. Or was it an argument? Spock wasn't sure. Jim certainly seemed angry with him. He hadn't even interfered with Spock's electronics, or put out his meditation candles as he usually did. Nor did he even touch his own PADD to read any of the books on it. It seemed that Jim had vanished completely from the apartment, but Spock knew Jim's soul well enough by now that he could still sense his presence lurking through the apartment, avoiding him. He could feel Jim's glare boring into the back of his head sometimes. Though it was difficult for him, Spock avoided calling out for Jim during these days of silence. He knew that Jim needed his space, and he respected that. But it was difficult, nonetheless.

It was surprising to Spock how lonely he felt in Jim's absence, despite him still able to feel Jim's presence in the apartment. Spock had always preferred to be alone, but he had never felt lonely before. It was strange to him, and he started to fall behind in his grading of final papers and exams, too preoccupied with Jim to focus.

That evening, Spock was grading exams at his kitchen table, when he felt Jim's presence behind him.

"Hey," Jim said, sounding tired.

Spock turned his head, looking at him over his shoulder. "Hello, Jim," he said, making sure his voice didn't carry any animosity.

"Can we talk?"

"Of course."

Jim floated around the table and perched in his usual spot above the chair opposite Spock. He sighed. "I'm sorry I ghosted you," he said, then let out a small laugh under his breath, apparently having made a joke that Spock didn't understand. "I just panicked, you know," he said, serious again. "I care about you, Spock. And you know as well as I do that you don't belong here, teaching at the academy. You belong out *there*," he gestured nebulously out the window, "doing something great. I can't let you take that away from yourself on my account."

Spock nodded. "I understand, Jim, but what about-"

"I wasn't finished," Jim interrupted, though gently. Spock dipped his head in acknowledgement, and gestured for him to go on. "Something... Something changed since the last time we talked," Jim continued. "It's taken me a few days to process it. But I think... I think I figured out what my unfinished business is, or whatever you want to call it. I think I've figured out why my soul has been lingering here all these years."

"Oh?" Spock asked cautiously, trying to keep his curiosity to himself.

"Yeah," Jim said quietly, suddenly more shy than he had been in months. "I think... I think it's you, Spock. All this time it's been you. I didn't know it, but all these years lingering, unable to pass on, were because I was waiting for *you*."

Spock blinked at him. "Waiting... for me? Why?"

Jim shrugged, pushing a hand through his hair, seeming embarrassed. "I don't know. Look, this is going to sound stupid, but I think I was *meant* to meet you. I feel like we're... I don't know, soulmates, or something. You don't seem the type to believe in destiny, though-"

"I wasn't the type to believe in ghosts, either," Spock pointed out, reassuring him.

Jim smiled at him. "What you said, the other day, about wanting to stay here just so I would be happy, even though it would put a hold on your life..." He looked down at his hands, searching for the words. Finally, he whispered, "I've never felt loved like that before."

It was Spock's turn to look down at his hands. He blinked quickly several times, trying to regain his composure. He thought about what Jim said, and the word 'loved' echoed through his head. Did he love Jim? Spock had never thought about it so directly. But his offer to stay here in San Francisco indefinitely was certainly an act of love, he supposed. Maybe he *did* feel deeper feelings for Jim than he had thought. Maybe he wanted to stay not only because Jim would be unable to bear Spock's absence, but also because Spock knew that he wouldn't be able to bear not having Jim as his constant companion. *Soulmates*, Jim had said. Spock gasped slightly as he realized. *T'hy'la*.

Spock looked up at Jim, finally meeting his gaze. "I truly do want to stay with you Jim," he said, ignoring the desperate tone his voice took. "I don't care if my life is best spent somewhere else, none of that matters if I can't spend that life with you. Let me stay," he begged.

Jim's smoky eyes shimmered. "Spock, you don't understand. I can *go* now. I can finally pass on."

Spock's breath caught in his throat. His vision blurred slightly as he stared at Jim in disbelief.

"Don't you see?" Jim asked. "You don't have to stay here, and I won't have to be lonely. You can go live your life, and I can go... well, wherever it is I'm being pulled to." Jim smiled, as if this were fantastic news.

"I don't want you to go," Spock said, his voice half a sob. He discovered that he was dangerously close to tears.

Jim's face fell as he understood. "Oh, Spock," he whispered. "I'm sorry, but... It's calling to me. I have to move on. And, you have to move on, too."

Spock pressed his face into his hands, trying to hide his emotions from Jim - from himself. He felt as if he were drowning. He had never lost this much control before, and found that he was unable to regain it.

"Spock, please," Jim said quietly, floating around the table to Spock's side, wishing that he were corporeal so he could pull Spock's hands from his face, hold them in his own. "I'm sorry, but it has to be this way. You know that, right?" He asked. Spock nodded, keeping his face buried in his hands. Jim agonized over being unable to comfort him. He stayed by Spock's side for a long while, hoping that his presence would be enough.

Finally, after a long time, Spock looked up at Jim, his face wet and his eyes red. Jim's heart ached, despite him not having one. "Will you stay?" Spock asked, voice hoarse. "Can you stay until I leave to rendezvous with the *Enterprise*?" He asked, eyes pleading. "I can't bear to be alone in this place."

Tears of smoke pricked at Jim's eyes. "Yeah, I can stay. I can stay until then."

The day came. They spent their remaining days together trying to ignore the looming inevitability of their parting, but it was hard for Spock to ignore, and with each day the draw of the realm of the dead grew stronger and became harder for Jim to resist. But resist he did, for Spock's sake. But now it was time. Spock was ready to leave the apartment, never to return, and Jim was ready to pass on to wherever it was ghosts went, for the rest of eternity.

"This is it, then," Spock said, when Jim appeared at twilight.

Jim nodded. "Yeah, I suppose it is."

"I'll miss you," Spock whispered. He had wanted to say more, but found that he couldn't. Not without breaking down.

Jim smiled softly. "I'll miss you too," he said. "Hey," he said soothingly as Spock's face began to crumple. "Live a good life, okay? For both of us." He smiled wider. "I'll wait for you on the other side. I'll wait as long as I have to." He held a hand up in a ta'al, something that Spock hadn't shown him. He must have done his own research. "Live long and prosper," Jim said.

Spock's breath caught in his throat and he scrubbed a sleeve across his eyes, which were now spilling over with tears. After all, Spock couldn't give the same farewell to one of the dead. Instead, he reached out a hand, also in a ta'al, pressing it up to Jim's ghostly salute. Despite Jim's incorporeal form, Spock could feel warmth through his hand, and a deep sense of calm flooded through him. Jim smiled at him, and stepped back. They didn't say anything, neither of them liked goodbyes. They just looked into each others' eyes, letting their gazes say all that needed to be said.

And then Jim was gone.

Spock took a deep, shuddering breath, picked up his suitcase, and then he was gone too.

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