

## Phantom Pain

Posted originally on the [Ad Astra :: Star Trek Fanfiction Archive](http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1063) at <http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1063>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Teen And Up Audiences</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">No Archive Warnings Apply</a>
Category:	<a href="#">M/M</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">Star Trek: Alternate Original Series</a>
Relationship:	<a href="#">James T. Kirk (AOS)/Spock (AOS)</a>
Character:	<a href="#">James T. Kirk (AOS)</a> , <a href="#">Spock (AOS)</a> , <a href="#">Leonard "Bones" McCoy (AOS)</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Permanent Injury</a> , <a href="#">Major Character Injury</a> , <a href="#">Hurt/Comfort</a> , <a href="#">Angst</a> , <a href="#">One Shot</a>
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2023-03-26 Words: 3,559 Chapters: 1/1

## Phantom Pain

by [spacedogfromspace](#)

### Summary

Jim wakes up in sickbay with no memory of how he got there, and discovers that he has lost a limb. Fortunately, Spock is there to provide much needed emotional support.

### Notes

Written for K/S Spring Fever 2023 for slightlycrunchy on AO3.

*He's waking up*, Spock realized, jolting to alertness in his seat next to the bio-bed as Jim's breathing shifted into a waking pattern. Blue eyes fluttered open, darting around unseeing for a moment before landing on Spock, taking a few slow blinks to focus his eyes on Spock's.

"Spock?" Jim breathed anxiously, voice hoarse from being intubated during surgery, and tense from waking up in a place he did not recall falling asleep in.

"I'm here, Jim," Spock said, reaching out to place a comforting hand on Jim's wrist.

Jim nodded, allowing the tension to drop from his body, and tiredly letting himself melt into the bio-bed as he looked around. "Sickbay?" He asked, and when Spock nodded he added, "What happened to me this time?" Spock pursed his lips together, reluctant to tell him, unsure how to even go about telling him what had happened to him. Jim must have picked up on Spock's hesitation, because he frowned. "That bad, huh?"

Spock sighed. "It could have been worse," he said, for what small comfort that would bring, if any at all. "What do you remember?" He asked, partly to stall, and partly to lead Jim smoothly into the answers he was looking for, but certainly would not like.

Jim took in a deep breath, eyes studying the blank ceiling as he searched through his memory, trying his best to remember. "There was... the cave survey, on Altair Five," he said, eyes flicking back to Spock for confirmation.

Spock dipped his head in a small nod. "Yes," he said. "What else?"

Jim thought for a moment more, then shook his head with a huff. "Nothing," he said. Then, only a moment later, "Wait, no. I remember the cave starting to collapse. Well, I didn't *see* it, but I could hear the sounds of it, and the team shouting. But I'm guessing I got hit on the head because I've got nothing after that."

Spock winced, but nodded. "There was a cave-in while you and your survey team were on a subterranean expedition. Thankfully, it didn't block the exit, but..."

"The survey team," Jim blinked, sudden concern writ over his face. "What happened to them? Are they hurt?"

"Minor injuries," Spock said quickly, to put Jim at ease. It was true. While the survey team was close enough to the affected area at the time of collapse, everyone - save Jim - only suffered minor scrapes and bruises. "You however, took the worst of the damage."

"What is the damage?" Jim asked. Spock looked down at his hands, folded neatly in his lap, avoiding eye contact. "Spock. Tell me." When Spock still didn't answer, Jim got impatient, deciding to see for himself what Spock was so reluctant to tell him. In one swift motion, he sat up, pivoting away from Spock and swinging his legs over the side of the bed, freeing them from the light sheet that covered him.

"Jim-" Spock reached out, trying to stop him, but Jim didn't even hear him. He was staring, transfixed, on the long white cast that covered his left leg from his upper thigh to just below his knee. At first, he thought that he had done some significant damage to his knee. But then he realized that his leg ended where the cast did, the cast rounded over the unnatural end of his limb.

"Oh," Jim breathed, unable to look away. He struggled to accept what he was seeing at first. It wasn't just denial, though that was part of it, but the cognitive dissonance of waking up short half a limb with no recollection of what had happened to it was making it particularly difficult to compute.

The double doors of the sickbay hissed open, followed by the sound of footsteps that stopped abruptly just inside the doorway. "Dammit, Spock, I told you to come get me if he started to wake up!" Doctor McCoy snapped, striding further into the room with PADD in hand and a scowl on his face, which softened as he approached Jim, kneeling in front of him and gently grasping him by the shoulders. "Jim," he said quietly, and Jim's eyes rose to meet his gaze, shocked expression still painted across his face. "Let's lay you back down, get you comfortable, okay?" He suggested, gently. Jim nodded, almost imperceptibly, and allowed McCoy to help him swing his legs - what was left of them, anyway - back onto the bed, and lower his head to his pillow. McCoy sat on the edge of the bio-bed, giving Jim a look of pity.

"Don't look at me like that, Bones," Jim rasped, shaking his head, blinking rapidly a few times before closing his eyes and taking a deep, shuddering breath. It was too much to process all at once.

"I'm sorry, kid. The cave collapsed right over you," McCoy explained with a tired sigh. "I think we're all lucky you're alive, to be honest with you. You took a big rock to the head, might have a bit of a concussion still. And, well, you know," He said, nodding towards Jim's leg, the damage now concealed by the bio-bed sheet that Spock pulled back over him. "There are a lot of things I can fix, but such extensive crushing... There's nothing I can do about that, as much as I'd like there to be." McCoy shook his head, looking down at his fidgeting hands. "I'm sorry."

"It's okay, Bones," Jim said absently. His mind was still reeling, desperately trying to process what had happened while being unable to believe any of it. With dread and anxiety bubbling up inside him, Jim reverted to humour, his automated coping strategy. "So, am I cleared for duty now?" He asked, forcing a goofy idiot grin onto his face and ignoring Spock's confused eyebrow raise at his sudden shift in mood.

McCoy's grim demeanour broke as he shook his head in bemusement. It wasn't much, but the small smile he let past made Jim feel a little better. "We're docking at Starbase 18 for a couple weeks," McCoy told him.

Jim frowned. "I don't think that's necessary," he said. "Not on my account."

"The *Enterprise* is due for several repairs and tune-ups," Spock explained. "It's as good a time as any, and a hiatus in our operations will aid your recovery."

"Recovery," Jim echoed, knowing that this was something he would never be able to recover from. Not completely. "Right. How far out are we from Starbase 18?"

"Three days," Spock said, uncharacteristically unspecific. Apparently, he decided to spare Jim the exact figure. "More or less."

Jim looked at McCoy. "I suppose you're going to keep me locked up in sickbay until then?" He meant to sound lighthearted, but ended up sounding absolutely miserable at the prospect.

McCoy hesitated a moment. He *had* intended for Jim to stay in sickbay, at least for a couple of days so he could keep an eye on him. But it occurred to him now that maybe that course of action wasn't the best for Jim, in terms of his mental health. He sighed. "If you don't want to stay in sickbay, I won't force you to," he relented, perhaps against his better judgement. Jim seemed to perk up. McCoy added quickly, "But I don't want you doing anything stupid. You're to be strictly on bed-rest."

"Well, it's not like I'll be running around anytime soon," Jim said with a comical shrug. "So if I can't get into too much trouble anyway, I may as well wait it out the next three days in my own quarters, right?"

McCoy rolled his eyes. "I mean it, Jim, if you do anything stupid you'll be right back in here."

"Okay, okay," Jim showed his palms in mock surrender. "I promise I won't be stupid." McCoy grumbled something about making promises you can't keep, but Jim ignored him, asking, "Can I go now? To my quarters?"

McCoy sighed, reluctant to discharge a patient who had just woken up from anaesthesia, but also wanting to give Jim that small bit of freedom to help cheer him up. "I suppose," he decided, though clearly not very happy about it.

Spock stood up. "I can escort Jim to his quarters," he offered.

McCoy nodded. "Fine. Give me a minute," he said, standing and stepping into his office out of sight. He returned a minute later, pushing a plain black hospital wheelchair in front of him.

A look of horror crossed Jim's face at the sight of the wheelchair, and started to shake his head in the vigorous protestations of a child. "No, no, no. I am *not* going anywhere in that," he said, adamantly.

McCoy sighed, exasperated. "What, you think you're going to *walk* out of sickbay?" He winced, instantly regretting his choice of words.

Jim didn't even flinch, maybe he hadn't registered what was said. "Crutches, Bones!" Jim argued, making it sound obvious. "I'll go on crutches, I'm not going anywhere in *that* where my crew can see me." He said, gesturing disdainfully at the wheelchair.

"Dammit Jim, you *just* lost a leg. Everyone will understand if you go about on wheels for a bit," Bones argued. "You'll strain yourself on crutches right now."

Jim glared at him. "I'll crawl if I have to. I'm not using that thing."

McCoy took in a breath to argue, but stopped when Spock reached out to put a hand on Jim's shoulder. McCoy would let Spock reason with Jim. He was probably the only one on the ship who could out-stubborn the captain. McCoy huffed, spinning on his heel and retreating to his office.

"Jim," Spock said gently. "Doctor McCoy is right. You aren't strong enough right now to try crutches."

Sighing, Jim closed his eyes and thudded his head back against his pillow. "I know," he said, deflated. "But I'm the captain. I can't let the crew see me being weak."

Spock sighed and sat down on the edge of the bed. "Jim, using a wheelchair does not make you look weak. You know this. It's your mind that matters to your crew, not your method of mobility. So you should use whatever method is the safest and most comfortable."

"Yeah," Jim said. "You're right. I know you're right, but it's this... wall that I can't seem to get around. I can't stand being pitied, and I *know* I'm going to be pitied." He huffed. "Well, I suppose I'll be pitied regardless of whether I'm in a chair or on crutches, right?"

Spock shook his head. "Nobody is going to pity you. You underestimate your crew. Assuming that they would place pity on you or treat you any different because of your disability is, frankly, an insult to the crew. They are good people. Their respect for you will not waver merely by seeing you making appropriate use of a mobility aid." There was a long silence. "Would you like to move to your quarters, or would you prefer to stay in sickbay?"

"Ugh. I'm sick of sickbay, let's get out of here," Jim said, then more hesitantly, "And just get this over with. I'm wheeling myself, though."

"As you wish," Spock nodded.

Under his own power, but with a little assistance from Spock to aid his balance, Jim moved himself from the bio-bed into the wheelchair. He grimaced as he settled in. "If this is going to be a long term thing I'm going to need a better chair," he grumbled to himself, before starting to slowly and awkwardly push himself through sickbay, Spock following behind patiently.

McCoy looked up from his computer as Jim and Spock stopped in the open doorway of his office, a look of surprise followed by relief crossing his face. He shot Spock a grateful look. "So, on your way out, then?" He asked Jim.

"Guess so," Jim said, as if there was any doubt. His face, however, showed that he was unsure.

"Remember, Jim," McCoy said, giving him a pointed look. "No shenanigans. You're on bed-rest and I'm trusting you to hold yourself to that."

"No shenanigans," Jim agreed, nodding.

Standing up from his desk to rifle through a cabinet, McCoy added, "I'll give you a couple hypos for pain relief, in case it starts bugging you," he said, pulling a handful of hypos out of a drawer and double checking the labels. "Spock," he said, holding the hypos out over the desk, in Spock's direction. Spock stepped forward, in between McCoy and Jim, to take the hypos, and McCoy used the window where Jim couldn't see him as an opportunity to whisper to Spock, "Keep an eye on him, okay?" Spock gave a small nod, taking the hypos and following Jim out of the office, then out of sickbay into the corridors of G deck.

Jim was relieved to discover that Spock was right about their crew. They passed a number of personnel on their way to Jim's quarters, and not a single one gave him a pitying look, avoided eye-contact all together, or worst of all, expressed condolences. In fact, quite the opposite. Most of the crew's eyes lit up when they saw him, reassured by his presence in the halls. Many of them expressed that they were glad to see him doing so well so soon after the accident, and that they wished him a speedy recovery so they could see him back in the action soon.

When they were in the final stretch between the turbo-lift and Jim's quarters, Jim began to feel the strain of pushing himself in the wheelchair. While he was physically fit, his body had been under a lot of strain in the short time since the accident and surgery, and the motion of turning the wheels was unpractised. The hospital-style chair didn't help either, the wide, tall back restricting his arm movements, the heavy and bulky chair difficult to maneuver.

When Jim stopped to take a break, rubbing his sore hands together and wincing at the knowledge that he didn't yet possess the calluses to prevent blisters from forming, Spock asked, "Can I offer assistance, Captain?"

Jim was about to say no, that he would power through it, but he stopped himself. He was out of breath, his arms burned and his hands hurt. While yes, he *could* continue on his own, he also knew there was no shame in receiving help when he needed it. It was a tough pill for him to swallow, but swallow he did. "Thanks, Spock," he said, and let Spock push him the rest of the way to his quarters.

"Would you be amenable to a game of chess?" Spock asked.

Jim smiled at him. "Of course," he said, then added, "But only if you drag the table over to the bed. This chair is killing me."

Jim only lasted one game (which he lost) before the exhaustion kicked in. Spock left him to get some rest, returning to his own quarters to meditate, as he had been relieved of duties during their journey to Starbase 18 to keep Jim company. Doctor's orders.

Spock's meditation was interrupted late in the night when his keen hearing picked up sounds from within Jim's quarters. Abandoning his meditation, he crossed through his and Jim's shared bathroom and entered Jim's quarters through the unlocked door on the other side. The room was dark, but Spock's eyes were already adjusted due to the dim lighting in his own quarters, and he could see that Jim was sitting up in his bed, hunched over his crossed legs, grasping at the cast where his left leg ended prematurely. He was breathing deep, shaky breaths, hissing in pain with each exhale, cursing under his breath and occasionally letting a whimper slip past his lips.

"Jim?" Spock asked as he approached, alerting Jim to his presence so not to surprise him.

Jim looked up at him, the frustration writ across his face melting. He wiped a sleeve across his eyes. "Sorry, I didn't mean to bother you," he said, his voice slurred with exhaustion.

Spock shook his head, and perched on the edge of Jim's bed. "You are not a bother, Jim," he said. "You are in pain." Jim nodded. "You should use one of the hypo-sprays Doctor McCoy provided," Spock said, looking for them where he was sure he left them on the nightstand.

Jim shook his head. "I already took one. A little while ago."

Spock raised an eyebrow. "Its effects were insufficient?"

Jim shrugged weakly. "No, it worked. The... site doesn't hurt right now and the itching under the cast has gone away, at least for the moment."

"Then what still hurts?" Spock asked, confused.

Jim shook his head. "It's nothing, just... it's fine."

"We both know that it's not fine, Jim."

"It's stupid, alright?" Jim snapped, then sighed. Softly, he added, "I just don't want to waste your time."

Spock frowned. "You aren't bothered by the physical pain, but the emotional." He said, in his way of asking a question and making a statement simultaneously. When Jim didn't deny it, he continued. "You grieve the loss of limb. That's a normal and valid type of pain, and talking about it is never a waste of anyone's time."

Jim wiped at his eyes again, keeping his gaze downcast, slowly rubbing circles over the end of his cast, pressing down into it until he could feel the sensation in his leg. "Yeah, there's that. But there's something else too and... it's just not real."

"What do you mean?" Spock asked, pulling his legs up on the bed and turning to sit cross-legged, facing Jim.

Again, Jim shook his head. "No, it's stupid. Really. Just my stupid imagination."

"If it's bothering you as much as it is, I'd hardly consider it as trivial as you're trying to make it sound," Spock pointed out. He reached out and collected Jim's hands in his own, coaxing Jim to meet his eyes. "Please, Jim. Let me help."

Jim's shoulders sagged and he let out a long sigh of resignation. "It's stupid..." He repeated, his gaze dropping to their joined hands. Spock could feel his hesitation, his reluctance to explain. He tried to send encouragement through their touch, unsure whether Jim would be able to perceive it or not. After a couple moments of building the courage, it all came out in a rush. "I can still feel it there. My leg. It's like my brain hasn't registered that there's nothing there. But then I can pass my hand through the space, and... it's surprising. Even though I know..." He took a breath. "And it hurts, too. The part that's gone. I get these waves of stabbing pain, and when it isn't that, I'm getting pins and needles and there's nothing I can do to stop it because the part that hurts *isn't even there* and none of this is real!"

"Phantom limb pain," Spock murmured. The intensity of the frustration coursing through their contact from Jim to Spock was overwhelming, and he had to fight to keep focus. "Phantom limb pain is what you're describing, Jim. It's real. Real enough."

Jim stifled an exhausted and frustrated sob. "I just want to sleep," he said, his voice breaking. "I'm so tired, but if I close my eyes and try to sleep the only thing any of my senses can pick up is this horrible sensation affecting a part of my body that isn't even there, and being in the dark alone with it just amplifies it and amplifies it until it's *blinding*. It feels like torture." He took several shaking breaths. "I just want to sleep. I'm so tired."

Spock listened, gently running his thumbs over Jim's knuckles in an attempt to sooth him, trying his best to transmit feelings of calmness and comfort to him. "Would you like me to stay, Jim?" Spock asked when he was sure Jim was finished venting his frustrations and had regained what composure he could.

Jim hesitated, and Spock could feel guilt radiate from Jim that made his heart twinge in his side. He could tell that Jim so desperately wanted Spock to stay, but at the same time felt that he would be a burden if he asked him to, despite the fact that Spock made the offer.

"I'll stay, Jim," Spock answered for him. "I want to stay. Okay?"

Another sob wracked Jim's body, preventing him from answering, but he nodded aggressively.

"Lay down," Spock said gently, helping Jim find a comfortable position, or at least as comfortable as he could be given his discomfort. Spock laid down with him, pulling Jim close. "Close your eyes," Spock instructed, voice dropped to a whisper. "Focus on your breathing. Deep breaths." Jim rolled into Spock's chest, tucking his head under Spock's chin and wrapping his arms around him tightly, as if Spock was his only tether to the world. Spock traced slow, calming circles over Jim's back, continuing to speak to him in a low voice, sometimes in Standard and sometimes in Vulcan. It did not matter what he said, it was the low vibrations of his voice that provided comfort. After a time, Jim's shuddering breaths steadied and lengthened, and with Spock drowning out most of the pain he felt, he was finally able to drift into sleep.