

Let Me Help

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Summary

Spock Prime's attempts to help his younger self deal with the loss of Vulcan do not go entirely according to plan.

Notes

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Spock sips at his tea, feeling troubled. When he first learned that the *Enterprise* was to convey him to the conference on Andoria, he worried that being so close to the alternate versions of his friends would be a strain on his self-control, but so far that has not been the case. The people of this timeline are so different to those he knew that it is relatively easy to treat them as entirely new to him. Even Jim (perhaps especially Jim) has far too many differences from his counterpart for Spock to think of them as the same person.

No, the problem is not with his friends, or their alternates. The problem is with himself.

During his work at the colony, Spock has seen many Vulcans in varying stages of grief for their loved ones, for their planet, for the life they knew. And he sees that same grief now in his counterpart.

Grief is natural, of course, after an event such as the one that has transpired, but it is the way his younger self is dealing with it that concerns Spock. That is, he doesn't seem to be dealing with it at all. He has shoved the pain far down inside himself and is trying to pretend it is not there. It is a technique Spock is intimately familiar with, and he is just as intimately familiar with its downsides. Pain suppressed that way will not stay suppressed forever, and will be twice as hard to cope with when it eventually surfaces.

His counterpart may tell himself that his emotions are completely under control, but one day that control will break, and the consequences will be dire. Unless something is done.

Spock finishes his tea, then turns on the computer – so primitive compared to what he is used to – and sends a message. After that, there is little to do but wait.

* * *

The door chimes exactly thirty-eight minutes later. "Come in," Spock calls, and is not surprised when the door slides open to reveal his counterpart.

"You wished to see me?" the younger Spock asks. His hands are folded behind his back in an outward display of calm, but Spock doesn't miss the tension in his shoulders, the faint lines of stress around his eyes.

"Yes," Spock replies. "Please, sit down." He indicates the chair opposite.

His counterpart hesitates, but sits. He looks uncomfortable. Spock wonders how much of that is due to the strain he is under, and how much is due to conversing with an alternate version of himself. He would not blame him for the latter – even Spock himself sometimes finds the truth of their unique relationship somewhat... difficult to deal with.

He studies the younger man silently for a moment, then says firmly, "You are suffering."

Young Spock looks at him sharply, his eyes wide. "I-

Spock interrupts him, continuing, "You may be able to hide it from your crewmates, but you cannot hide from me." He softens his expression and adds, "Let me help."

He sees the briefest flash of vulnerability in his younger self's eyes before it is snuffed out and he says tonelessly, "I am fine."

"No, you are not," Spock tells him. "You cannot be. You have lost your planet, your people, your mother. You must grieve this loss, or it will destroy you."

His counterpart's expression remains blank for a long moment, before it cracks. "How?" he asks, looking lost. "I have tried, but it is too big. I cannot..."

"Let me help," Spock repeats. He reaches out and touches his counterpart's temple, feeling him lean into the touch for a second before he pulls away sharply.

"I cannot," he says firmly. "It is *my* pain. I do not wish to share it."

"Even with yourself?"

He can see the comment hit home. His counterpart's gaze meets his, and behind the pain in his eyes there is a shred of hope. Spock presses his advantage. "Whatever happens will stay between us," he promises.

His younger self fidgets in his seat, glancing away. "Can you stop the nightmares?" he asks, barely audible.

Spock's heart aches for him. "I can try," he says.

The younger Spock takes a long breath and nods. "Do it."

Spock leans forward and arranges his fingers carefully against his counterpart's face. He can feel the hum of telepathic energy, different for every being. Different even from his own, though only just.

He takes a fortifying breath, then presses forward, into his counterpart's mind.

He is not a healer, but he has melded with a few of the members of the Vulcan colony in an attempt to help. In every case their soul-deep grief was almost overwhelming, and it is here as well. The younger Spock's mind resonates with grief beyond measure for his mother, his planet, his people. His home, though he would not have called it that. All that is familiar, but there is something else there, hidden under the grief.

Spock probes further and uncovers it. Loneliness. His counterpart feels *isolated*, even here on the *Enterprise* surrounded by people who would be his friends. If he let them.

Memories begin to play before him. Some he remembers for himself, some are different. *Being shunned by the other children. Being taunted and bullied. Bearing the judgement of the Vulcan Science Academy, and worse, the judgement of his father when he turns them down. Entering Starfleet Academy and ignoring his classmate's curiosity and reproach by throwing himself into his work. Continuing on as an instructor, respected but always a little apart. Hearing the news of a distress call from Vulcan and feeling a spark of fear even though it hasn't been his home for years. Watching his mother fall to her death and then feeling the death of billions more. Returning to the Enterprise after speaking with his older self, unsure if he has made the right decision. Waking up shaking after a nightmare, the wounds in his mind torn open once more. Trying to cope with it all alone, always alone, because no one else will understand.*

Every image is like a knife in Spock's heart. Their personal histories may differ, but he knows that loneliness, that isolation. It also explains why the younger Spock has not reached out to Jim or any of the others. The habits of a lifetime are hard to break.

Feeling an overwhelming sympathy, Spock cradles his counterpart's mind like a precious jewel and imbues it with thoughts of warmth and belonging and love. *You are not alone*, he tells him firmly. *I am here, and you will never be alone again.*

His younger self's mind soaks up the affection like a sponge, and the overwhelming pain and loneliness begins to fade. When Spock has done as much as he can, he pulls back and out of his counterpart's mind, letting his fingers linger on the still un-lined cheek.

He can still feel a faint pull in his mind, connecting him to his younger self. A link. In retrospect he should have expected it; the merging of compatible minds often results in such an outcome, and what mind could be more compatible than this?

The younger Spock is staring at him with something akin to wonder. "You..." he breathes, then grabs Spock's hand, holding it between both of his.

"I am with you," Spock tells him. "Your path is difficult, but you do not have to face it alone."

He returns the handclasp briefly, then pulls away. "You should rest," he says. "I believe the nightmares will be gone."

His counterpart nods, still looking at him in wonder. Then he seems to snap out of it, gathering control around him like a cloak as he rises to his feet. "Yes," he says. "I shall do that." His expression doesn't change, but his eyes grow soft briefly. "I am... grateful for your assistance."

"I could do nothing less," Spock replies, which is the truth. He gestures at the door. "My door is always open to you, Spock. You need only to ask."

His counterpart observes him for a moment more, before offering him the ta'al. Spock returns it and his counterpart turns on his heel and strides out the door.

Spock is struck by a sudden urge to go after him, but he pushes it down and settles himself on the floor to meditate. The meld with his counterpart was rewarding, but also difficult, and he has much to think about.

* * *

The next day Spock's counterpart invites him to his quarters to play chess. Spock has played many, *many* games of chess against computer systems he programmed himself, and he expects this will be much the same. On that note, he is pleasantly surprised. His counterpart's style of play is similar to his own, of course, but not identical, and their differences make the game both stimulating and intriguing.

In the end, Spock's weight of experience gives him the upper hand, and the younger Spock resigns with a respectful nod.

Spock helps him to clear away the pieces, then rises to leave, only for his counterpart to grab his hand to stop him.

"Stay," he says.

Spock looks at him, confused. "Do you wish another game? It is quite late."

His counterpart swallows, shaking his head. "No, I... I wish you to *stay*. With me. Tonight." His fingers brush against Spock's in an unmistakable gesture.

Spock stares at him, frozen. "I... do not..."

His younger self looks at him with wide eyes. "You love me," he says. "I saw it in the meld."

Not like this, Spock wants to argue, but his counterpart is still holding his hand, and it is difficult to think. Dimly, in the back of his mind, the part of his consciousness that always sounds a little like Jim begins to laugh.

"I had never felt anything like it before," the younger Spock continues. "And it made me think... there is so much I could learn from you." He runs two fingers over Spock's hand and Spock barely contains a gasp.

He should pull away, he thinks.

He does not.

"Please," his counterpart says quietly. "Stay?"

Yes, Spock thinks, *Jim is definitely laughing*. Still, if anyone would approve of engaging in intimate relations with an alternate version of oneself, it would be Jim Kirk.

He looks at his counterpart, still watching him with wide eyes, and remembers his words from the first time they met. *Do what feels right*.

"I will stay," Spock says. He takes a steadying breath, then meets his younger self's gaze squarely. "I will stay."

And he does.

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