

## Desert Heat

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## Desert Heat

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### Summary

On a visit to Vulcan, Kirk and Spock set out to explore the mountains that were Spock's refuge as a child, only for Kirk to become ill from the heat.

### Notes

Written for thehunter in the 2014 Trick or Treat exchange. Originally posted on AO3.

Kirk steps out onto the patio, clutching a cup of coffee. It's still early, but already the air is beginning to heat up, and he knows that it won't be long before it passes 'hot' and goes straight to 'stifling'. Still, for now it's quite pleasant, and it's nice to have the chance to experience Vulcan without the side effect of being nearly killed. (Not that he's expressed that thought to Spock. His friend already carries far too much guilt over the incident, and the last thing Kirk wants to do is inadvertently add to it.)

The rest of their crew are taking shore leave on Starbase ten, a little under a day's travel away, but Kirk doesn't regret taking up Spock's offer to come to Vulcan. Sarek and Amanda are away on an ambassadorial mission, so they have the house to themselves, just the two of them.

There's a noise behind him and he turns to see the subject of his thoughts standing in the doorway. "Good morning," he greets warmly, before sitting down in a conveniently placed chair and gesturing to Spock to join him.

Spock sits down obediently. "Did you sleep well?" he asks.

Kirk nods. "Like a log." He takes a sip of coffee and smiles into it when Spock doesn't question the idiom. He's long suspected that Spock often pretends ignorance of figures of speech to annoy McCoy, but he isn't about to call him on it.

He lowers his cup to his lap and gestures out at the view. "The mountains are amazing," he says. "We didn't have anything like that back in Iowa. I think the highest point in town was the school roof."

Spock follows his gaze to the mountains in question. "They are quite majestic," he agrees. "When I was young, I frequently travelled there to... I believe you would say 'get away from it all'."

"Really?" Kirk asks, raising his eyebrows. He studies the mountains with new eyes, imagining a child version of Spock scaling their heights in the hope of finding a place to be himself. The words fall out before he can stop them. "Can you show me?"

Spock doesn't respond for a moment, his expression unreadable, and Kirk grips his cup a little tighter. The last thing he wants to do is make Spock uncomfortable, or bring up bad memories. "It was just a thought," he says. "You don't have to."

"No," Spock replies. "No, I would like to." His expression softens as he adds, "When I was young, exploring the mountains, I often wished for a friend to share the experience. I would be remiss to waste the opportunity now that I have one."

Warmth spreads through Kirk's chest, and he can't keep the smile off his face. Spock's eyes crease in response, his own version of a smile. They stare at each other silently for a few seconds before Spock turns away, looking back at the mountains.

"We should leave as soon as possible," he says. "Before it gets too warm."

Kirk nods, then drains the rest of his coffee and stands. "I'll go get my things."

When he gets back downstairs, he finds Spock packing a bag with food, water, a first-aid kit, and various other essentials. "I suggest we take the air-car at least part of the way," Spock tells him. "It will allow us to get there more quickly."

Kirk shrugs. "Fine by me."

It proves to be a good move. The mountains are further away than he thought, and even flying it takes them almost fifteen minutes to get there.

Spock sets them down as close to the mountains as possible, and the two of them climb out of the car. Spock slings the bag with their supplies over his back, and they set off.

Fortunately, centuries worth of Vulcan feet have worn a path into the mountain, so the climb is not too arduous. Which is good, because it isn't long before Kirk is sweating from the heat.

As they climb, Spock points out specific items of interest, such as a plant that can be harvested for emergency water, and a particular type of rock that is one of the hardest on Vulcan. Kirk listens avidly, not just because he's interested in learning more about Vulcan, although he is, but because he's always liked the way Spock's voice and expression change when he's explaining things. He seems almost to light up, and the passion in his voice always makes Kirk smile.

As time goes on, the heat increases, and Kirk's pace grows slower and slower. "How much further is it to the caves?" he asks, trying not to let on how tired he is.

"At this speed, I estimate another ten point five minutes," Spock replies.

Kirk swallows down a groan. Normally that would be nothing, but right now it feels like his legs are made of lead. Determinedly he takes another step forward, just as a wave of dizziness hits him. He stumbles and feels Spock take hold of his arms, steadying him.

"Jim?" Spock asks, his voice tinged with concern.

Kirk opens his mouth to answer, but shuts it as his stomach lurches unpleasantly. He leans heavily against Spock as he fights the urge to vomit.

"You are unwell," Spock says. Kirk is still focused on not throwing up or he'd make a remark about stating the obvious. Spock helps him to a sitting position and Kirk leans against a rock, feeling weak and miserable. Spock kneels beside him, examining him.

"How long have you been feeling ill?" Spock asks.

"It just happened suddenly," Kirk says, but it dawns on him that that's not exactly true. The nausea and tiredness has been building for a while, it's just that he was ignoring it. "I think I might have overestimated my resistance to the heat," he says.

Spock hands him his canteen. "Have some water."

Kirk's stomach does a backflip at the thought of drinking anything, but he manages to force down a few sips. "We should get to the cave," he suggests.

Spock gives him an assessing look, frowning. "Will you be able to walk that far?"

"I don't know," Kirk admits. "But we have to try. I can't sit here all day."

With Spock's help he manages to get upright, but only makes it a few steps before his stomach suddenly rebels, sending water splashing onto the dirt. He wipes a trembling hand over his mouth, willing his legs not to give out.

"You cannot make it to the cave like this," Spock says, his voice sounding like it's coming from very far away. "Let me help you."

Kirk feels an arm go round him, steadying him, just as everything goes black.

\* \* \*

He wakes up to find himself lying on his back on something hard, with Spock kneeling beside him, watching him. There's a cool pack across his forehead, and he removes it before sitting up and glancing around. From his surroundings he determines this must be the cave they were aiming for.

"How did I get here?" he asks, wincing at the dryness in his throat. "Last I remember we were out on the mountain."

"I carried you," Spock says. He holds out a canteen of water and Kirk takes it gratefully. "How are you feeling?"

"Better," Kirk says, suddenly realising he's not wearing a shirt. Or shoes or socks. "What happened to my shirt?"

"I removed some of your clothing in an attempt to cool you down," Spock explains. "You were quite badly overheated." He indicates the shirt in question, folded neatly in a pile with Kirk's boots and socks.

Kirk takes a cautious sip of water, but the nausea thankfully seems to have vanished. He drains half the canteen before handing it back to Spock, who is watching him carefully. "How long was I out?"

"Approximately ten minutes," Spock replies. He hesitates, then adds, "Jim, I wish to apologise. I should never have taken you on such a strenuous journey. I knew you were not used to the heat, but allowed my desire to share this with you to overcome my reservations. For that, I am sorry."

Kirk stares at him. "Don't be ridiculous," he says. "It wasn't your fault. It was my idea for us to come up here. And I was enjoying it until I got ill."

Spock shakes his head, looking down at the ground. "This is the second time you have come to harm while visiting my world. I should have been more responsible."

It dawns on Kirk that this is about more than him becoming overheated. "Hey," he says, reaching out and touching Spock's shoulder. "You know I don't blame you for last time, right? I thought we talked about this."

Spock's eyes meet his briefly, then flicker away again. "Yes," he says, "You made your feelings clear. But it does not change the fact that I was responsible for harming you. I cannot forgive myself for that."

"You weren't yourself," Kirk replies. "I know you, Spock, and I know you'd never hurt me. I won't blame you for something you did while not in control of your actions."

He takes a deep breath and dares to place a hand over Spock's. Spock looks up at him in surprise and Kirk meets his eyes squarely. "I'm fine," he says. "Nothing happened. And I don't regret coming here. I'm just glad you asked me."

For a moment they just stare at each other, then Spock nods slowly, his eyes seeming to clear. "In that case," he says, "if you are feeling better, perhaps you would like to explore? There are some interesting rock formations down this passageway."

Kirk smiles. "I'd like that."

He pulls on his discarded clothing while Spock gathers their belongings. Then, side by side, they set off into the cave.

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