

## Nirak and Nova Paint the Town

Posted originally on the [Ad Astra :: Star Trek Fanfiction Archive](http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1324) at <http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1324>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Mature</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings</a>
Category:	<a href="#">F/M</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">Star Trek: The Original Series</a>
Relationship:	<a href="#">Nyota Uhura/Spock</a>
Character:	<a href="#">Spock</a> , <a href="#">Nyota Uhura</a> , <a href="#">Original Character(s)</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Mission Fic</a> , <a href="#">Sexual Tension</a>
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2024-02-03 Updated: 2024-05-22 Words: 7,855 Chapters: 3/?

## Nirak and Nova Paint the Town

by [kalima](#)

### Summary

Hallmark Movie Mystery TOS version: Spock and Uhura are snarky marrieds who solve crimes. He's logical and by-the-book. She relies on charm and gut instinct. Together they're unstoppable.

Mostly though? They're doing the best they can on a mission gone wrong.

## Lyonuma

“This is the antithesis of ‘low-profile’ Lieutenant,” Spock mutters into his glass – a glass noisy with chunks of ice. He does not care for ice in gin. Or ice. Or gin.

Uhura laughs, a sparkling arpeggio drawing appreciative glances. She taps his right biceps in a playful manner, and exclaims, *loudly*, “Oh, *you*.”

As a response to his statement, it’s nonsensical. He raises a brow in silent demand for clarification. Her answering smile is the gregarious, flirtatious crowd-pleaser she’s taken to using so often of late.

“We haven’t been low profile for weeks,” she singsongs at him. Someone waves at her. She waves back. “Besides,” she says, taking a sip of her own beverage, “low-profile got us nowhere. *This* got us invited to a party.”

She sweeps a hand over her astonishing ensemble.

The green lame gown flows over her form like viscous liquid and pools on the floor, a dangerous tripping hazard around her equally dangerous shoes. A flower of the same fabric dangling a tassel made of gold chains is perched between her breasts. Rising from the diadem in her hair sits a golden disc, angled back so it frames her head and illuminates her face like a halo in paintings of Earth’s venerated gods and saints. Her fingernails are painted bright shimmering pink, as are her eyelids.

He’d had no opportunity to ask how, when, or by what means she’d acquired the ensemble before she’d grabbed his arm and swept him into this suite of rooms where the party was well underway.

His own clothing – ubiquitous Vulcan blacks and grays – stand in stark contrast against the dazzling canvas that is Lt. Uhura.

Across the hall, a shout, “Nova! *Nova!* Look everyone, it’s Nova Fanchon.”

“Nova” blows a kiss, then turns to him, running the tasseled chains idly through her fingers. “Trust me.”

He has no other option. It’s too late to leave. The host has spotted them.

^^^

### ***96 days earlier.***

Uhura sat on the bed watching Spock lay each item out on the table.

With his back to her, only the set of his shoulders clued her into his mood. For some reason (exhaustion probably) her mind wandered into anatomy lessons from primary school as she followed the rounded hunch of deltoids, the bunch and shift of subscapularis just below.

Only a colleague with a long association to the man would recognize this careful, clipped precision as an indicator of just how pissed off he was.

### ***Kerthunk***

One metal token, possibly for a complimentary buffet.

### ***Thwip thwip***

Two foil packets, probably condoms.

### ***Clack Clack C-LACK***

Three candy-colored data sticks.

### ***Flupflupflupflup***

Four strips of local currency.

Scarcely a fraction of the tribute tossed at her feet by an enthusiastic audience and all she’d managed to grab before he’d whisked her off the stage and away from the clamoring crowd.

She heard him sigh (though he would never call it such), a longitudinal *wave* pushing terrified air particles out of the way, and he spun in its wake to confront her, almost comically *j’accuse*.

Pinched between a thumb and forefinger, its wrapper crinkling ominously, dangled a small something.

Her best guess was a cough lozenge. Or an edible intoxicant made to resemble one.

Spock did not care for guesses, best or otherwise.

Adrenalin fueled giddiness threatened a fit of the giggles, but she dared not laugh. Best to address the true cause of this...logical tantrum.

"I'm sorry sir, but the opportunity arose to solve one of our problems and I took it. An executive decision if you will—"

"You made a unilateral decision without consulting me. *I* am the executive officer. I am also *your* commanding officer, responsible for your safety and security on this mission."

He conveniently left out the part where the purpose of their mission was *long* gone. Cleared out. Out of scanning range figuratively and literally. Eodetti Voch, their *contact*, had scarpered to who-knew-where with all their tech – communicators, tricorders, emergency beacon, medkit, not to mention money and travel IDs.

As Lyonuma was not a Federation world nor a member of the Planetary Trade alliance, this was a pretty big problem. Just because they were currently in a city with a multi-species population and working infrastructure didn't mean it wasn't a hostile environment. The night before this they'd spent behind a dumpster in an alley, and tonight they were in a comfortable room in an okay hotel with funds for at least one meal.

She gazed out the window watching the sky brighten through narrow passages between buildings. The one that cozied up next to theirs had brick threaded with light-emitting diodes that reconfigured at set intervals for various advertisements. The pale green glow of burgeoning daylight couldn't compete. But at least they could lower the blinds.

Her flush of post-performance adrenalin was starting to fade now, exhaustion creeping in. He needed to see her logic so she could get some sleep.

"Look. I have a skillset uniquely suited to our circumstances—"

"I cannot not allow you to sell your...*self* to assure our well-being, Lieutenant."

"Mr. Spock, for heaven's sake, it's not sex work. I'm singing and dancing in a club. It's Variety Theater, really. I don't even take off my clothes." She wouldn't be wearing many clothes, but no need to bring that up right now. "I have an excellent singing voice as you know. And I teach a dance class once a week on the ship."

"I am aware," he said, but the tense line of his mouth showed he was still unconvinced.

She tried another tack. "You think Voch is still on the planet, right?" He dipped his chin. "Well then, if we have any chance of finding him we'll need to network, gather information the old-fashioned way. There's no better place to start than a nightclub frequented by couriers."

"Intoxicated people are often indiscreet," he acknowledged.

Thinking the matter settled for the time being, she gave the mattress a test bounce. One bed. They'd take turns—

"What is my role then?"

His plaintive tone startled her. Startled him too it seemed. He couldn't quite look her in the eye.

"That is to say, the social communication and emotional intelligence required to glean information in the manner you suggest is—" He paused, graced her with a rueful expression, "not where I shine."

Uhura gave a soft snort and fell back on the bed, her knees still hooked over the edge. "True enough. But grim and taciturn? You've got that down to a science."

"Grim and taciturn will not benefit our efforts at intelligence gathering, Ms Uhura. Moreover, what reason can I possibly have for spending time in this nightclub? Without funds to purchase even a beverage I doubt my presence would be tolerated for long."

"Uh...*that*... should not be a problem. I told the club's owner that you're my manager. And, also, uh, my husband."

The silence that followed was the loud kind, and after a few seconds she propped herself up on her elbows to see if he was still breathing.

"To be clear, I said 'husband' first because Mr. Zeeza was getting a little too chummy, but then 'manager' seemed like a smarter lie. So now you're both. It's quite common in the business."

"I bow to your superior understanding of the business then."

She toe-d off her shoes and scootched up toward the pillows to curl into a comfortable ball. One hand slipped beneath her cheek, her mouth slackened and words were sticky on her tongue. "D'you mind if I get the bed tonight, sir? You can have it tomorrow I promise. We'll take turns."

"You can have the bed every night, Ms. Uhura. Though, technically, it is morning."

"Such is the life of a chanteuse."

A minute later she was asleep.

Spock manipulated the bed cover out from under her and drew it over her shoulders. She'd squinted at him a moment when he'd lifted her hip but then rolled over to her left side and was soon snoring softly. He took the blanket at the end of the bed for himself, arranging it on the floor near the window.

He felt well past the need for sleep, which he knew from experience was a warning sign, but there was little he could do except acknowledge it. Meditation would have to do – he'd run on nothing but fumes and *tal t'li* before – so he knelt on the blanket, tucked his heels under his buttocks, closed his eyes, and proceeded to examine events of the past two days.

Spock believed Eodetti Voch was still on the planet somewhere. Uhura was not so sure. And yet she proceeded to secure not only their comfortable survival, but a potential means by which to determine if his theory was correct.

She seemed to assume her performance was the cause of his somewhat forceful response. That he disapproved of her behavior, perhaps. In retrospect this was likely because of how stridently he'd hustled her off the stage and away from the crowd. But that was only out of concern for her safety. The ephemera being pelted at the stage wasn't all coins and candy.

A mildly provocative performance would hardly cause him discomfort or offense. And under their current circumstances it wasn't cause for professional censure either. They'd served together for ten years. She knew him better than that.

There persisted, however, a concept of Vulcan people as prudish and sexually repressed. Vulcans did little to allay the impression, of course. And, as no sapient species with phenomenal qualia had escaped being immortalized in pornography, Vulcans were wide open to creative interpretation. Factual realism was not a featured quality in entertainment of that nature.

In truth, he hadn't seen Uhura's performance at all. He'd been on his way to the alley where they were to meet and passed the club just as the door opened. The last notes of her song rang out, sustained, and amplified, followed by an uproar of whoops and shouts and whistles, fists pounding tabletops, waves of applause.

He *knew* that voice and *that* song, neither of which should be on the other side of *that* particular door. Those belonged to another world altogether – to the Enterprise among friends and colleagues, teasing flirtations in sly portamentos, swoops and vibratos as he played a crew favorite but still *their* song.

This cognitive dissociation faded replaced by reason. Lt. Uhura was inside. Lt. Uhura had sung for a room full of strangers. *Why* was a question that could only be answered by going inside himself.

The bouncer had not been at their post. If they had Spock would never have gotten past the threshold. As it was, he found himself pushing through a crush of "standing room only" and into the main room and luckier clientele at tables and banquettes and these clientele were busy throwing things at her. Technically, they were throwing things onto the stage, but as she was crawling around trying to snatch up as many of the items as she could it amounted to the same thing. From his perspective she was being pelted with debris.

Loud and lewd invitations combined with an aggressive enthusiasm from those standing at the back, prompted Spock to leap onto the stage with only one goal – get her and get out.

Uhura, still thanking the audience, hands full of hodgepodge, let out a squeal of startled protest as he locked his arms around her, lifted her up and carried her out of harm's way.

Which presaged his abrupt introduction to the club's Nausicaan bouncer. It was only due to Uhura's interference that Spock escaped being bludgeoned.

"No, no, no, Sluka, *Sluka*, stop, *stop!* I'm all right. He's not going to hurt me."

"You sure, Mees Nova? I can break him. Vulcan males get crazy, you gotta put 'em down—"

"Don't break him. I'm fine. *We're* fine. This is Nirak, my— this is Nirak."

*Nirak*. A common name, though Spock could only wonder if Uhura knew the literal meaning when she chose it.

Nirak. Fool.

# The Hotel Chetopa

## Chapter Summary

Spock and Uhura keep their worries to themselves in true Hallmark Movie Mystery fashion.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The manager of Hotel Chetopa has her back to the lobby doors. Spock hurries to the elevator, gambling on quickness rather than stealth—

“Good morning, Mr. Nirak!”

*More stealth next time.*

“Miss Birdee,” he acknowledges, stabbing the call button with his right elbow – the only convenient part of him unencumbered with bags and parcels.

Miss Birdee’s nictitating membranes flicker over huge gray eyes. She presses a clawed hand to the center of her downy chest, presumably where her heart resides. “And you’ve done the shopping, you jewel! I’d kill for a husband half as obliging as you.”

With a squawk of protest Mr. Birdee pops out from the back room wiping digits on an already grimy rag. He tips his head, one eye aimed in weary commiseration – husband-to-husband, as it were – “If I end up dead under mysterious circumstances you’ll bear witness, will you not sir?”

Struggling to determine if this is humor or sincere request, Spock gives no response.

When they’d first taken residence at the Chetopa Hotel, Uhura explained that “Birdee” was a common surname chosen by many persons seeking a fresh start in the urban centers of Lyonuma. “It means ‘welcome,’” she’d said, her smile overly friendly, fingers digging into his biceps. “Isn’t that lovely?”

“Should they not have adopted a different surname? Considering?”

He couldn’t understand why she kept goading him with her fingernails, (he was not as attuned to her non-verbal signals back then). But now, having lived in the city long enough to grasp certain social mechanisms, he thinks the name “Birdee” was likely a prank played on naïve avian immigrants by Federation expats. Probably charged an exorbitant sum for it too.

Mr. Birdee holds the rag aloft as evidence of some task performed at his wife’s behest. Miss Birdee begrudges her husband a softer expression, “You could stand to do more.”

She swivels her head in Spock’s direction, looking for agreement. Thankfully the elevator gong spares him the need to engage further.

As the cage rattles upward, he meditates. Measured breathing primarily. He’s learned that if he wishes to practice *any* sort of meditation, he must take what opportunities circumstances afford him. Twenty-four seconds to the sixth floor will have to do. He has groceries to put away.

A week into Uhura’s employment at the club, she managed to negotiate a larger room for them though Spock had disputed the necessity of a larger room as the rent was taken from her earnings.

Mr. Zeeza owned not only Zeeza’s Palace but also this adjacent hotel and several other businesses where his employees ran tabs against their earnings.

But Spock has come to appreciate the extra space. With two beds they have no need to sleep in shifts, and her ever-expanding collection of sequins and wigs stays mostly on her side of the room.

He keys the door, winces as a shopping bag hits the jamb, his gaze darting to the hump of her form in a bed. But she’s cocooned, muffled from disruption by a fluffy duvet, earplugs, and a sleeping mask. The pink silk scarf wrapped turban style around her head is the only thing showing.

The scarf had been the first item she purchased the day after her impromptu performance. He’d protested such wasteful frivolity and been promptly and *thoroughly* schooled. He now knows far more about essential hair care than he ever dreamed necessary – which is why one of his errands this morning was to obtain products essential to it. That parcel (among others for her needs alone) he deposits on her dressing table then heads for the alcove whimsically dubbed a “kitchenette.”

It barely qualifies as such. The glass mat of the induction cooker is warped, and the chiller hovers around 6 Celsius no matter how many times he adjusts it – though it has, *so far*, kept the cream for Uhura’s coffee from spoiling. The fruits and vegetables from the grower’s market will

be eaten too quickly to spoil. The rest of the groceries (a jar of local nut butter, a sugared pastry for when she awakens, a bag of ground coffee) he leaves on the counter.

When the coffee has brewed he pours himself a cup. He drinks coffee now (because she insisted the only way he'd be able to justify the expense of the coffee was if they *both* drank coffee). The cup and the last of his purchases he carries to the table next to the window.

This is where *his* collection accumulates. On the ship he might have argued the comparative value (to the mission) of his collection to her collection, but he is a wiser man now.

From a large canvas bag, he wrangles out the small chunky computer found at the bazaar this morning. Worse for wear but an especially fortuitous find if it proves to be what he hopes. He sets it aside for the moment in order to pry staples from another bag and upends the contents onto the table. Colorful data sticks skitter across the surface. He catches one before it can hit the floor.

The locals refer to these as emblematics or embees – a kind of trade currency providing the bearer with access to experiences or specialty services. They have no cash value in Lyonuma's legal tender (or so their initial efforts to exchange them for cash would have them believe) and seem to be an entirely separate, distinct system of exchange. Not illegal but not overtly traded either.

Spock knows there will be nothing of real value in this "surprise" grab bag. The vendor had *almost* suggested he take something else (she still owed him for reprogramming safety protocols on her grandchild's scholastic pod), but his intention is to gain a better understanding of how the embee system works.

He hasn't handled much physical currency in his life. The plastic clatter is oddly satisfying. He rolls his hands over the pile, rifles through it. Then, aware of the noise he's making, glances over his shoulder.

Uhura hasn't stirred. He swallows a soft disappointment.

^^^

Repetitive snicks and clicks work their way out of a dream. The spongy stopper in Uhura's left ear has slipped out. Still, she clings to ignorance, snuffles farther down into the bedding. But the heat and rattle of the day won't allow for a languid awakening. Soon enough the aroma of coffee has her stretching one arm from beneath the covers, wiggling her fingers in desire. The muffled clink of Spock's cup lifted from a saucer and replaced seconds later is his answer to her wordless demand.

No help there.

She imagines the cup instead filled with dark aromatic liquid turning café au lait as she pours the cream.

The cup with its black scrolled rim and matching saucer is part of a set left by previous occupants. "*Jack and Jonny*," Miss Birdee had reminisced, "*Such a lovely couple. Performed together at Darcelle's for twenty years. Together forever now.*"

This tender description of former tenants strikes her now as ominous. What if they're stuck here forever, what if she's forced to spend the next twenty years dragging her ass onto the stage at Zeeza's Palace? Side-stepping tawdry "offers" and dodging grabby hands. Living in this room with—

What is he doing anyway? She extends her awareness, picks up a frisson of excitement... or its Vulcan analog.

"I can hear you thinking," she grumbles. The words leave a moist cloud against her face under the duvet.

"Highly unlikely," he replies. "Even without the earplugs."

"I can." She pries out the right earplug with a fingernail. It disappears under her pillow. "It's so *loud*."

A palpable pause. He's wondering if his dismissal of her uncanny ability was premature. A moment later, with grave assurance, he tells her, "My *activities* disturbed your sleep. I apologize."

The apology is a social formality. He's not sorry, at all, she's almost certain. He wanted her awake and now she's awake.

She throws back the covers, reaches for her robe. But before he can launch into a summary of said "activities" she puts her palm up, quelling him.

"I know you're anxious to share but if we could delay the presser until after I use the facilities, I'd appreciate it—"

She bites back the "Sir" on the tip of her tongue and hightails it to the bathroom.

They avoid using their real names in private for the risk they'll slip up in public, (it's not particularly difficult; they are known quantities to each other, after all), but the habitual use of rank signifiers is somehow harder. And lately, she longs to have her identity reconfirmed, to hear him say *Lieutenant. Uhura. Nyota*.

This is what she thinks about while relieving her bladder. How nice it would be to hear her name come out of his mouth.

She washes up, splashes water on her face. It is what it is. *Kaiidh* as the Vulcans say.

But in the mirror, all the anxiety she's been keeping at bay crimps the corners of her eyes, mocks the dimples in her cheeks. Without the bold stage makeup, she feels naked, soul exposed. Even a Vulcan is bound to notice something amiss. A worry she's worrying. Sadly, she's left all her magic paints and powders on the dressing table in the other room. Nothing to rely on but moisturizer, brains, and attitude.

Uhura knew, abstractly (through historical fiction, old films, and a stream of salacious celebrity gossip), that Stagedoor Johnnies, and assorted wealthy, would-be "patrons" were potential hazards for a chanteuse. And honestly, if she had a quatloo for every entitled personage in a position of power that she's had to coddle and cajole in the line of duty...

Well, she'd have a lot of useless currency.

She tugs the knot of her headscarf firmer, manipulates the ends so they stand out like pink bunny ears, then gives her cheeks a hard pat. Opens the door.

Spock is sitting at the window, his chair angled so a strip of sunlight cast between the buildings across the alley falls across his left side and over the edge of the table.

She's caught him once or twice before with his head back, eyes closed, basking in the light and heat. Lyonuma's star is similar to Vulcan's. Same quality of light. Dry heat and pewter skies. Shocking sunsets. Though he's spent much of his adult life out in the black between stars she imagines his skin gets hungry for the UV rays of home.

He sees her looking and gives the slow blink of a cat.

She snaps a smile at him like a rubber band. Opens the fridge—

*A cat who got the cream apparently. And a donut!*

She takes her coffee and breakfast treat to the table, carves a patch out of the chaos big enough for her pretty cup and saucer. With the donut on a napkin in her lap, she slides a bare foot into his ray of sunshine. His gaze flicks sideways, lingers briefly on her silk charmeuse covered knee, then returns to his task – inserting emblematics into a device he's Frankenstein'd together.

"Good morning," she says.

"It's afternoon."

"My morning."

A small huff of mild exasperation, but he doesn't argue her point. She lets the coffee's odor swirl into her nostrils a moment before she takes a sip. Then another.

It's not actually chaos on the table. His usual preference for well-ordered spaces is evident, the embees he's already catalogued grouped in piles by color or symbol. She knows what *some* of the colors mean. She often receives these as gifts after a performance – box seats, driver service or a night in a posh hotel suite. But in general, they remain an abstruse and perplexing currency. Some are like pawn shop tickets, others like raffle tickets, but somehow never *ever* like lottery tickets. Sometimes they're discount coupons, and other times, lifetime supplies. And the value can often vanish in an instant based on seemingly arbitrary metrics and timeframes neither of them has worked out yet.

They've learned to redeem the ones for food or clothing as quickly as possible. A couple of very nice restaurants (leftovers for days). A platinum blonde wig. A bespoke suit in the Vulcan fashion.

She takes a contemplative bite of her donut. wondering if there's anything that'll get her that fabulous green dress at Coperni's. A bit of sugar flies off in a breath. His hand shoots out, protecting blobs of transmitter jelly and tiny IC wafers she now sees are on the very plates she couldn't find for her donut. His look is stern, admonishing but she just pushes errant sugar granules from the corners of her mouth back into it with a fingertip... then slowly licks that finger.

He breaks first. He always does. His attention firmly refocused on his task. Whatever that is.

Many mornings while she's abed, he's out combing the flea markets, yard sales, and weekend bazaars looking for useable tech. Their equipment has not shown up thus far so he's trying to build something that will punch through Lyonuma's communications blockade.

The ancient, stumpy computer he's got hooked up to their in-room interface looks like it came off a rubbish heap – and probably did. It's the sort of compact, sturdy device once used by office administration staff everywhere.

She leans in, squinting at a narrow strip of etched matrix code on the back.

*Wait. Is that...?*

"That looks remarkably like a designation for the Federation Diplomatic Corps."

He smooths his thumb over the pattern. "Because it is."

Her heart gives a hopeful little gallop before reality jerks the reins. Anything of use to them would have been removed, transferred, or destroyed long before it was consigned to surplus or salvage.

Even so, why is an old admin computer for the Federation Diplomatic Corps on Lyonuma?

"I have a theory," he says to the question she didn't ask out loud.

“I’ll need more coffee then.”

She grabs the pot, the cream and nectar packets, and returns to the table. Gestures at his empty cup on the windowsill. He holds it out for her to fill. His eyes, looking up at her, are the color of the coffee.

Outside, the city soundscape underscores this new domestic scene like incidental music for a romantic comedy. Two people pretending to be married who are starting to think maybe it wouldn’t be so bad if they were—

He hisses suddenly, hand spasming as hot liquid spills over the rim onto his fingers.

“Oh my god! Sorry, sorry.”

She rushes the pot back to the kitchenette and returns with a towel, starts dabbing at rivulets. He takes it from her, not trusting her efforts to protect his work. As he squats down to clean what dribbled onto the floor, she notes the outer edge of his thumb and the crook between it and his forefinger are dark bronze color where the hot coffee spilled over.

“Do we have anything for that?” she asks. She has no idea. He does most of the shopping.

He glances at his hand. “No. But the injury is mild.”

“Still. You should put something on it. Ice—”

He makes a soft scoffing sound. “I would have to go out and purchase it.”

“I can go—”

“Unnecessary.” He stands up again, holds out his hand to show her the mottled color already beginning to fade then goes to the kitchenette and starts rinsing out the towel. She wouldn’t have bothered.

“I’m sorry,” she says again. “I’m a little distracted.”

“Indeed. You have seemed distracted often of late.”

“Have I?”

*Right, she thinks, this is the point at which one party in the romantic fiction has an opportunity to be honest with the other party and thus save them both much misunderstanding and drama going forward...*

“We’ve been rehearsing a new show,” she lies.

“Ah,” he says, and mentally moves on.

Caught in a kind of rudderless yearning, she sips her coffee, stares out the window, tracking the motion of his hands from the corner of her eye. The ease and steadiness of his concentration reminds her of those times on the bridge when it was him in the captain’s chair, calm center in a wheeling vortex.

She wants to sit in *that* man’s lap, her bottom cradled by his thighs, feel his arms around her, feel his breath hot behind her ear. She wants—

“Uhura?”

She gasps, blinks at him. He’s got one eyebrow up.

Dear god, did she just broadcast all that weakness and desire into the ether for anyone to pick up?

*Is this too hard for you, honey? Do you need a big strong Commander to take charge?*

Yes?

Maybe.

But there’s nothing in his expression except mild concern.

“Nova,” she snaps back suddenly, like he’s the needy one. His eyes flare at her tone. Then he dips his chin in acknowledgement and mentally shrugs off her behavior as the usual incomprehensible human sort.

Oh, but following orders would be so soothing right now, a comforting respite from the plethora of hazards, both mundane and menacing, she must navigate each night while earning the bulk of their income.

Performing at Zeeza’s is hard. Sure, she makes it look effortless; making the difficult look easy is her superpower. *And*, if it was only performing, she’d be fine with the blistered heels and the fear of wig-induced traction alopecia. But performing onstage is only a part of her act.

Though she isn’t expected to be at the theater until an hour before the show, she always goes in earlier, to sift through the detritus of gossip and overheard conversations while eating a free meal. Looking for Information. Leads. Clues.



Then after the show she blesses certain tables with her presence and chats up regulars at the bar. Or she and Spock go to a different club to do the same thing. She's become...popular. A novel attraction. And rather quickly too.

But the constant requirements to flatter, fend off, schmooze, side-step, flirt, network, promise and perpetually delay without insulting anyone is exhausting. The alertness required to maintain this persona is exhausting. The need to be Spock's interpreter of all things social and cultural is exhausting. She falls into bed in the wee hours only to jerk awake in a panic, wondering what essential tidbit she might have missed while asleep.

Mr. Zeeza gave her another bonus last night. (He knows who's been sniffing around. *Everyone* knows.) He's worried she'll take a better offer. Which, she realizes, was probably why he'd been so obliging about her demand for a bigger room after only one week.

This room.

She glances at the two beds – Spock's neat (perhaps not even slept in), and hers a sprawl and tangle with the pillow still dented from her head and the lumpy hills of duvet kicked to the far end. The other mess – the disordered jumble of her pretend life strewn across the dressing table, falling out of drawers and hanging by one strap from a bent hanger – she just *cannot* deal with now. She is not by nature a messy person. Environmental chaos makes her uncomfortable and yet she can't seem to keep it all organized. She closes her eyes, tries to breathe it all away, but the thought comes, her daily mantra of mea culpa...

*No one even knows we're here.*

She never got the chance to transmit coordinates before Voch scarpered with their equipment.

Swallowing a lump of dread, she notes how he's watching her and rallies an insouciant show, stretching her forearm along the windowsill as she leans back to cross one leg over the other. Hums as the silk slides over bare flesh.

“All right, *Nicky*,” she says, relishing his wince at her use of the diminutive, “what's this theory you've got?”

#### Chapter End Notes

I'm going for a kind of 1940s/50s vibe with 1980's version of futuristic sci-fi technology.

## Chapter Summary

“All right, Nicky,” she says, relishing his wince at her use of the diminutive, “what’s this theory you’ve got?”

Spock doesn't know how to trust his gut. Uhura makes a questionable decision.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Nicky” is not a dignified name. (Even less so when she appends it with “darling.”) But Spock knows it’s part of the act they’re playing publicly. As uncomfortable as he finds “Nicky, darling” it is far preferable to Nirak.

When he’d first questioned her about why she chose Nirak, she’d put her hands on her hips and said, “You do understand I was fabricating our backstory on the fly, right?” Exasperation melted into contrition, and she sheepishly added, “It just popped into my head. I liked the way it sounded with Nova.”

A pleasant, percussive alliteration might have contributed subconsciously to the choice of assumed names – Uhura is musically inclined and a skilled linguist after all – but he can think of other names that would have worked with Nova just as well. Nevran. N’Keth. Nuval. (And yes, she is perfectly aware Nirak is both a proper name and a lower-case insult.)

But it was only after an incident at Macko’s Market that she understood why the name was... problematic.

They’d been in the produce section – she at one end of the aisle and he at the other – when she picked up an odd fruit and turned towards him. He could almost see his real name sliding over the back of her tongue before she caught herself.

“*Nirak*,” she cried, holding the fruit aloft, “Look! They’re calling *this* an apple.”

It was louder than necessary for the distance between them (overcompensating for her near misstep he supposed), and a few of the other shoppers glanced over amused, or in some cases, annoyed. But the two Vulcan women picking through a bin of root vegetables stopped what they were doing and swung around to rudely gape. Worse, they did not correct their rudeness by doing the polite thing, the *Vulcan* thing (pretend he was invisible) but rather, gave him a slow once over, from his head to his boots and back up again.

Vulgans don’t consider their tendency towards speculative hypothesizing to be the same as the human tendency to gossip, but as soon as the pair turned away and bent their heads together, he knew the “hypothesizing” had commenced.

Why would one of their own kind allow a noisy human female to pronounce him a fool so blatantly and in a public setting no less, they wondered? Loud enough for one of their own kind to overhear.

Out of the side of her mouth the older offered the younger a reasonable explanation. “*Ozhika t’lok*.”

An astonished bark of laughter rang out. Uhura clapped a hand over her mouth immediately, but her eyes were wide with a kind of involuntary, appalled *glee*.

Alerted not only to his companion’s keen sense of hearing, but her language comprehension as well, the pair quickly decided the vegetables in their baskets were satisfactory and hurried towards the POS systems.

As they disappeared around a corner, Uhura came over to him still holding the Not-Apple. She didn’t even try to meet his eyes. “Did they just accuse you of thinking with your dick?”

Soon after that incident she stopped using Nirak and started calling him Nicky.

Right now however, her pointed emphasis on the name sounds an alarm in his hindbrain. Something is...off. Which, all things considered, is a fallacious, inexact, and completely useless conclusion. *Something* might as well be *nothing*.

So, he sets his nebulous concern aside. She has asked for his theory. It will require some background.

“Sixty years ago...” Unable to be more precise he adds, “or so” and rewarded with a smile, continues, “before Lyonuma became a haven for ex-patriates to conduct business while evading taxes, the Federation entered a phase of active evangelizing—”

“Evangelizing?” Uhura interrupts, “That’s a rather evocative word choice.”

“Recruiting then. They would establish temporary mission offices, install acting ambassadors with small staff and set about convincing warp-capable worlds of the benefits of becoming a member. There are well-established planetary embassies that began this way. The charter was not so robust as it is now of course. Articles in it from those early days still rankle applicants.”

She nods, but also rolls her hand impatiently to urge him to move the story along.

“It is possible the Lyonis and the Numanites would not agree to certain impositions on their authority. Add to that, two regime changes, political strife on both continents, and outside territorial disputes in this sector of space—”

“—and the acting ambassador is asked to leave.”

“Or stayed on in some other capacity. I regret I did not peruse records regarding Lyonuma’s interactions with the Federation prior to this mission. I did not anticipate needing them.”

“So, your theory is that some ambassador wannabe abandoned their office computer in order to...do what?”

“Profiteering seems likely. Or brokering for profiteers.”

She reaches out and pats the top of the computer. “Poor old thing. You weren’t worth much even in your prime, were you?”

Anthropomorphizing inanimate objects strikes him as indecorous. He responds with the reproach of a single raised eyebrow.

She launches out of the chair suddenly, bumping the table legs, startling him. Starts stacking their cups and saucers on top of each other with haphazard, misguided efficiency.

“That’s an awful lot of speculation on your part.” The tails of her robe fly out behind her as she carries the dishes, jostled and clinking, to the kitchen. “Quite unlike you, I have to say.

“I am extrapolating a plausible theory,” he ventures cautiously, “based on Federation history using this computer as a point of evidence.”

The dishes clatter in the sink. “How exactly does the origin of a useless piece of junk put us any closer to finding Eodetti Voch?”

It occurs to him that he has not become *at all* proficient in reading her emotional states, despite his earlier self-assurance. Sensing an urgency, as if their survival depends on it, he grasps at the smallest clue—

Her brows, furrowed, now arch upward. Her mouth is tight, then quirks to the side though not in amusement. She has one hand on her hip while the other grips the edge of the sink. She is... annoyed. Yes. And angry, but he thinks not with him. Anxious.

Afraid.

Recalling her gesture, he places his hand on the top of the computer and gives it a tap. “This piece of junk, with some minor adjustments, may enable us to locate our Starfleet communicators.”

She stares at him hard for a moment. Seems to swallow a harsher retort. “Alright. Good. Okay,” she says, starts the water and begins washing the cups.

The urge to direct her efforts towards more efficient methodology is strong. He closes his eyes briefly, takes a few meditative breaths in and out.

“Presuming it can do that, how long will it take do you suppose?”

“I cannot say definitively.” The dirty spoon she left behind he uses to poke at a glob of transmitter jelly. Wonders if he can salvage it or if he should attempt to obtain more.

“Make a list of what you need. I’ll ask around tonight.”

“That isn’t necessary. I have a source.”

“Do I want to know?”

“Best if you do not.”

“How much will it cost?”

“Again, I cannot say with any certainty.”

“Actual money though, right?”

“Probably.” He picks up an embee with rust colored hashmarks on a tan background. “Even so, perhaps you can inquire about this. A plot of land I think, or a share of it.”

She walks over to him, wiping damp hands with the hem of her robe. He laments her negligence. There is a dishtowel! Then remembers it’s still wet from the coffee spill.

“What’s on this one?” she asks, plucking an embee from the pile he’s set aside for further study. The psychedelic flower design has lost some vibrancy.

“I’m not sure what it was supposed to offer originally. The code that’s left is fractured, and there are patches of it missing, possibly the result of an attempt to transfer the contents to a micro-drive. In truth, the contents remind me of a logic game I played as a child.”

“Ooh, like Code Turtles?”

“Not remotely.”

She drops it back onto the pile with a dramatic sigh, declaring, “I’m going to have a very long bath. Do you need in there before I do?”

With the *no* on his tongue, he almost doesn’t look up to answer, but then he does and wishes he hadn’t.

Her robe’s untied, hanging open over her nightgown. The warm dark of her skin glows through the silk. His gaze slides from its fixed-point mid torso to the pucker of fabric at her navel, over the slope of abdomen and down to a triangular smoky smudge where pubis meets thighs.

There is ringing in his ears and the loud glug of him swallowing and swallowing again, and an echoing twitch between his own legs as the blood rushes south.

This is not—

He should not be—

Why is this—?

*Why?*

“*Spock?*”

It’s like she’s calling out to him from underground, his name muted by the thud of his heart. She says it again.

“Spock.”

He stares down at his hands, loosely clenched around an emblematic.

“It’s Nicky,” he says, hard, between his teeth.

^^^

Uhura asks around about the embee with the hash marks and mostly gets shrugs until she shows it to Lartelle.

“Oh, *those*. Yeah. Unless you’re ready to invest, I wouldn’t bother. My friend Maize claimed a shoreline property in North Rersey and ended up owing twenty years of back taxes. Sometimes they try to stick you with development fees or fallow fees just for one itty bitty share. Not worth the risk for people like us.” Lartelle smiles, her teeth pearly against the dramatic blue lipstick. “We’ll never get ahead.”

Then she winks and goes off to wait in the wings for her cue.

Right before Uhura goes on for her solo set, the bouncer Sluka draws her aside. “You said to let you know if he’s in the house.”

She stiffens, so shaken she worries her vocal cords are going to seize up.

That won’t do.

*Get it together, woman! Shake it off.*

“Where’s he sitting?” she asks smoothly.

“Got the big banquette farthest from the kitchen. Usual goons with him, but no girl on his arm.” He gives her a significant look.

No girl means he’s looking for a new one.

She thanks him with a tenbit chit. Listens for her introduction then walks out to the opening chords of her signature song. As she grasps the microphone, she looks out over the audience but can’t make out her stalker in the recessed darkness.

*“Skylark. Have you anything to say to me? Won’t you tell me where my love can be? Is there a meadow in the mist? Where someone’s waiting to be kissed?”*

^^^

Fluto Barboza is not the sort of man who comes begging at the stage door, flowers in one hand, champagne in the other. That’s for crooked judges and politicians on the take. Or moon-eyed boys fresh off the farm.

Being above such things, he doesn’t so much *linger* outside the communal dressing room as encroach upon it; a conquering general granting its occupants the dignity of determining the conditions of their inevitable surrender. His enforcers stand far enough away to seem unobtrusive, but close enough to menace and knock some heads should it prove necessary.

Zeeza’s Palace is a good little money maker though not as classy as his club, The Eastside. He’ll fix that once he takes over in a year or two.

But he can't risk alienating anyone he might need down the road. Shadrach Zeeza, the miserable old bastard, has too many *significant* connections in the city. Turf wars are for chumps.

Doesn't mean he can't aggressively poach the talent.

A class act like Nova Fanchon shouldn't have to grind and shimmy with the rest of the chorus. She ought to be the *main* act, not just a featured act. Ought to have her *own* dressing room at the very least.

He knocks but is surprised when it's her that opens the door. She, on the other hand, doesn't seem surprised at all. Seems resigned if anything, which he takes as a small triumph. Then she smiles and his tongue feels too big for his mouth.

"Mr. Barboza. What can I do for you?"

"Have supper with me at my club tonight." Goddamn. He sounds like his balls just dropped.

"My husband might have some objections."

"I don't see him around, do you?"

A nervous dart of her big brown eyes toward the fire exit. In the dressing room behind her girls in stages of undress are giving her the stink-eye. Maybe because Miss Nova Fanchon has captured the attention of a bigwig like himself.

"Shut the goddamn door!"

Or maybe because the chill from the corridor is freezing their tits off.

Nova steps out, pulling the door closed. She's dressed in street clothes. Got a velvet coat over her arm. Looks nice, stylish, but he wishes she was still dolled up to serenade him – blue sequined mesh clinging to her curves, long white gloves and sparkly bracelets, lips drenched in a shade called Black Honey (from a certain *anonymous* admirer).

"If it's your husband you're worried about, don't. I mean no discourtesy to him, I assure you. He's your manager. This is business. He's welcome to join us. We can wrestle percentage of bar and box office over brandy and cigars."

"I have a contract with the Palace, Mr. Barboza."

"Eh. Me and old Shadrach can work something out. But I'd rather not discuss particulars here. Seems disrespectful." He signals Penchy to bring the car around. "You must be hungry. I've got Vulcan mollusks from the Vorothe sea sitting on ice back at my club. A nice crisp wine..."

She still seems chary but there's less hesitation.

"Look," he leans in to speak low, "there's something else. I know you been asking around, looking for a certain courier fella name of Voch."

She stiffens but doesn't pull away. "Is he a friend of yours?"

"I don't know him from Adam. But I'm not the only one who's noticed you're looking." A little growl comes out of her. He goes for the capper. "Some unsavory sorts are looking for him too. Or maybe they're helping him stay hid."

She flicks a gaze at him from under her lashes. He can almost see her mind whirring away, calculating the best next move—

"It's not my business *why* you're looking for him but—"

"He stole from me," she spits out, sharpish.

"—*but* I can assure you that when *I* go looking for someone, they get found."

*I'll bring him to you trussed like a bird for roasting.*

"Does that sweeten the pot any, Miss Fanchon?"

Her pretty lips go tight with resolve. When she starts pulling her gloves on, he knows he's got her.

Penchy catches his eye, nods at the fire door. The car's hovering outside.

She looks left down the corridor, then right, like she's giving her man one last chance to come round the corner and partner up or change her mind.

Fluto offers her his arm. They lock eyes a moment. Then she nods and slips her hand into the crook of his elbow.

## Chapter End Notes

I made this one up (but it is hilarious):  
Ozhika t'lok - basically "penis logic"

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!