

## I've Already Outlived My Life By Far

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## I've Already Outlived My Life By Far

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### Summary

When Winona dies and Jim's 16-year-old sister needs a place to live, she joins Jim on the Enterprise. However, nefarious forces are at work and her safety is at risk. Plus, she and Jim have to learn how to live together with their shared traumas. This is their story.

Plus, Bones is around to fret over both of their health issues. (Of which there are plenty.)

Lots of Bones & Jim in addition to the OC.

Title comes from the song "Mother of Muses" by Bob Dylan.

### Notes

My first time posting on Ad Astra! Hopefully I do this right :)

# Chapter 1

*January 4th*

The comm line rang.

And rang.

And rang.

It always rang exactly 4 times, one more ring and the voicemail would click on.

Jim put his head in his free hand and drew in a deep breath. He didn't know why he still did it, why he still called every year.

His mother never answered on his birthday. Because it wasn't just Jim's birthday.

It was the day his dad died.

Bones told him every year that it wasn't just a memorial or death day, that something good **did** happen that day and that he was allowed to celebrate his own life.

The first time Bones was there to witness it, it was the start of their second semester.

Jim sat on the couch in his and Bones' shared dorm, stoic and staring completely through an intense playoff football game Bones had on the holoscreen.

"Did ya wanna go out tonight?" Bones asked.

Jim tipped his head to the side and put it in one hand, fingers winding through the blonde locks and tugging as Bones noticed he did when he was really stressed.

Jim kept his hair short, a true ivy league crew cut, short enough for hand-to-hand combat classes, but long enough to yank on when he was worked up.

With a thousand-yard stare, Jim answered, "No, no I'm good."

The issue with being born during an intergalactic disaster that your father died as a hero in, is that everyone knows your birthday. Whether you want them to or not.

A swig from a flask, "McCoy, Leonard McCoy."

"Jim Kirk."

And so it was demonstrated to him how often he was going to have to give his name out.

Later, after having been assigned a dorm- together, in a medic's *apartment* opposed to a dorm, as Bones automatically got a rank with his MD, and they had nowhere else to put them- and hauling their crap in, Jim waited. He waited for Bones to ask in the lull of movement. 'Are you related to *that* Kirk?'

But he never did.

*Weeks* went by. And they never discussed it.

Until, "Bones? You wanna go out tonight? I'm getting a taste for those fries from that place..." Jim sat at the kitchen table, tying his shoes.

"You do know I never consented to being called that, right?"

And Jim looked up at him with... *alarm* ? "Oh Jesus, B- uh, god, oh lord, have I been offending you all this time? I am so sorry- I never meant-"

Bones, indifferent to the name, pressed his hands in a downward motion, "hey, it's fine," he breathed. "I was just messin' with ya. No need to worry." He pulled his jacket casually off the hook by the door, but his mind was whirling.

What had happened to Jim that the mention of consent nearly gave him a panic attack?

He had a hunch, so he asked, "...is there anything I shouldn't call *you* ?"

Jim paused, ever so slightly, in a way most people wouldn't notice.

But Leonard McCoy wasn't most people. He was a medical doctor with a PhD in psychology and another one in pathology. He was a trauma informed physician, he made sure to be. And he could see trauma behind Jim's eyes.

That pause, that *flinch* , it meant the answer was yes, and a *hard* yes.

"I'm just... Jim. I don't much care for any variation of James or Jim, e-especially Jimmy... I'm just... Jim." He tried to shrug it off, but again, Bones wasn't one to be fooled. He could see the hurt in the shrug. The *fear* .

But he knew it wasn't anything he was going to be able to touch at such an early point in their relationship.

So he nodded, grabbed his shoes, and followed the kid out.

At the bar, they got a booth and sat across from one another, sharing a plate of cheese fries.

"Y'know," Jim mused, "I'm surprised you don't rail on these things and rant about how this crap will clog your arteries," he smirked.

Bones recognized a goading jibe, Jim wanted to lessen the tension and also take the focus off himself. So he'd oblige if that's what the kid

needed. "Nah, people should eat what they want. Restrictive diets just..." he shook his head, "never work. Long term, it's better to just give your body what it's asking for."

Jim blinked at him. "Bones, my body is asking for cheese fries."

Bones stared back at him, equally as sarcastically stoic, "then give it the dang cheese fries."

"...you're strange."

He rubbed his face, "I'm-"

Then a very pretty girl they took Basics of Engineering with drunkenly stumbled over to their table.

"So-so-soooooo," the brunette giggled. "I lost the bet, so I," she pointed to her chest. "Have to ask you," she dug her finger into Jim's chest, "if you're really *that* Kirk?"

Bones didn't even hear the question, he could only see Jim's reaction to having someone unexpectedly touch him. Jim was someone who was fine touching others- a slap on the arm, a meaningful shoulder grab, even a hair ruffle (that little Russian kid) but those were all 'at arm's length' touches. Jim wasn't one to haul anyone in close or hug them. He was starting to wonder if Jim initiated contact to prevent others from doing so. He noticed that even in classes, Jim didn't lean close when he whispered. If someone leaned towards him, he quickly went the other way. On the one occasion he couldn't, he went so straight and rigid that Bones was worried for his spine. For some reason, the kid didn't like physical contact being initiated.

People seemed to have the impression that Jim slept around, even though they were mere months into the academy.

Apparently, getting in a bar fight in Iowa because you're hitting on a girl who said she wasn't interested, gives you a reputation before you even step on campus. Not to say he hadn't *thought* about having a little fun on campus. And he probably would, at some point- Gaila kept messaging, she kept flirting- she was an Orion it's like breathing to her- but she was also older herself, and more mature than anyone knew.

Most thought of Gaila as an airhead and a pity admission.

...She and Jim had a lot in common it would seem.

A lot of people would forget Jim was older than the rest of them. It was easy for their classmates to see Bones as different, older, and off limits. (Except for a few bold nurses...) But Jim? Jim they all assumed was 18-19 just like them and fresh out of high school.

He might have only been a few years older than his first year classmates, but it felt like a lot when he spent time with fourth years, as well as living with Bones who was 28. And it was typically the first and second years, the 18-19 year olds, that *wanted* Jim.

But it just... didn't feel right to him. People thought *he* was immature, and Pike and Bones both made sure to remind him he was, in some ways. But Jim was more mature than they all knew. He had grown up hard and fast. And he didn't feel right messing around with... kids.

Kids were what he took care of, what he saved no matter the cost. ...but that was a long time ago.

He'd never be the playboy people thought he was. Especially if- *when* - he got his own ship. It was already a rule in place that he wouldn't

touch any being under his command in that way. And cocky ~~optimistic~~ as he was about getting that command, he was hesitant to start sleeping around.

Plus, he had Pike overseeing his every move. Chris had seen Jim walking around the quad at 2am once and called him in to ream him out- until he heard the truth. Jim had been helping someone move dorms after a 2 week 'and they were roommates' situation ended badly.

Jim asking Chris why *he* was in his office at 2am- and then ratting him out to Una- taught him that Jim was going to be just fine. That Jim was smart enough to be just fine.

The thing about it was that Jim seemed to *enjoy* the reputation. He leaned into it. And Bones just watched.

He watched the kid as he spent most nights tidying up their dorm, not out banging every species he could, like the rumors were saying that week.

No, Jim didn't bring home girls, he brought home the results of fights.

Not often, but it happened. And still not for the reason people assumed.

The first time Jim had gone out and come back bloodied- he had been defending a guy against someone getting a bit too handsy- not coming on to the victim himself. But the rumors started that he was at least bi if not gay, and he seemed to lean into those as well.

Any rumor there was for him to throw himself into that took away people's chances to see him for what he really was- broken, alone, and on his last chance- he took it.

So he was the suave guy, the guy who always gave you his full attention when listening, (that one was sincere at least), the guy that could flash a wink and a smile and get what he wanted.

He tested out of 3 classes in his second week at the academy.

So naturally people assumed he was flirting and sleeping his way out of classes.

That rumor, Bones had no idea about until months in, partly because he kept his head down and ignored rumors on purpose (because he was a doctor, thank you, a busy one. Secondly, *why* ?), and partly because he lived with the kid. He saw him *pretend* to study and then go in and ace the class- when *he* graded the test. He wasn't sure how Jim was supposed to be cheating when the early classes are run by such low-level faculty that the students grade each other's work, but the rumor ran.

Then when he found out the new rumor was that Jim was sleeping with said students for good grades- him included- he resolutely went back to ignoring rumors.

(Jim was an allosexual male, sure. He had hormones just like everyone else. He even had flings during the academy years. But far fewer than anyone would ever guess. And never to get anything from anyone. No- not even Gaila for help with the Kobayashi Maru years later. That just simply wasn't Jim.)

But Bones could tell even without using his PhD in psychology that sure, Jim wanted to flirt. He got self-destructive and wanted to cause trouble. But he didn't much desire the actual sex part as much as people assumed.

He never stumbled in in the early morning hours smelling of perfume.

And he never came home drunk.

Oh, he came home tipsy. He came home after having a couple. But he for some reason refused to cross that line into **drunk**. Not that he didn't pretend to. Jim thought often about the night in Riverside, how he leaned into the drunk guy persona to flirt, but once he found out Uhura was studying xenolinguistics, that mask dropped. "Morphology, phonology, syntax," had rolled off his tongue as he complimented her own.

It was why she had cocked her head and admitted she was impressed, why she let him keep talking to her. She hadn't been kidding when she said he wasn't anything she couldn't handle, and it was partly because she was realizing he wasn't actually the drunk hick she had assumed. And the body language expert, being wrong about someone? She realized he wasn't drunk at all, and she was in.

Pike had seen through the drunk persona too, for what it's worth.

"Who am I, Captain Pike?"

"Your father's son."

"Can I get another one-"

"For my dissertation..."

He completely ignored the state Jim was trying to project himself as in, and only saw the real one.

So when Bones had first gone out to a bar with Jim, he expected him to get plastered like any other college kid- Jim was actually legally old enough to drink and looked it. (Which worried him but he tried not to let it worry him because no he wasn't about to get attached to anyone there, especially not space-bound people.) But he didn't.

Jim ordered a beer, offered to split some fries with Bones, and then said he needed to get back.

So Bones, the nights he couldn't accompany Jim out, watched. He watched him come home every time and every time he was never worse off than tipsy.

Even when he came home bloodied. No, in fact, that night he was stone cold sober.

After he started noticing Jim never got truly plastered, he started noticing how Jim responded to people who *were*. Because only a month into the academy and Jim had loaded no less than 6 girls into cabs back to campus.

But anytime there was a *man* who was drunk, Jim seemed to almost... cower. That's too strong of a word for James T. Kirk, the kid usually only showed fear when backed into a corner and even then it mostly came out as aggression, but Bones had clocked it.

Because usually when someone got drunk enough to be loud enough to cause enough of a scene to draw Jim's attention, he'd immediately go stiff as a board. Bones could watch the kid's eyes rake over every detail of the person, as if sizing them up in case... in case of what? He was learning that any fights Jim got into were usually because he was trying to protect someone or stick his nose where it didn't belong. So he was thinking that Jim was simply assuming all drunk men cause fights?

And it scared him to think where he could have gotten that idea. And likely how young he was when he did.

Jim could see a drunk man from across the *room* and instantly cower, just for a moment, before shaking it off and putting a well practiced front back on. Then he'd watch them. His eyes wouldn't leave someone if he had any inkling things might go south.

The kid's hypervigilance started to worry Bones.

But even though he typically handled drunk girls just fine, a drunk girl with very little control of her limbs bonelessly throwing her finger in Jim's chest was absolutely not what he needed.

Usually, Jim would pull himself up, pull on a mask, smile and charm her away. If it were any other subject, that is. "Uh," he nervously looked between her and his roommate. "Why? I mean- yeah- but- why--"

"Oh my *god* !" She shrieked so loud they both flinched, even over the music. "So it *is* true? Oh my *god* ! *Guys* !" And just like that, she was off. Gone. Stumbling over her own feet, but gone.

Jim ran a hand through his hair and latched on at the crown, pulling slightly. He tried to laugh it off, but it came out almost... desperate. "I've been getting that more and more," his apologetic blue eyes flashed up at Bones. "I'm sorry."

"Why are you sorry?" Len shook his head. "Ain't your fault people are too nosy for their own good."

"No, but you're stuck with the roommate who everyone thinks they know."

'Who everyone *thinks* they know.' He didn't miss that.

"Well," Len finally said. "I prefer to get to know people myself, instead of assuming or relying on a name." He snorted, "I'm from the south. Them people still try to rely on last names to get ahead. Someone *not* doin' that is..." he looked Jim up and down, thinking of being told there wasn't a chance he'd get an agreement where he could regularly see Jo- not with the Treadway name involved. "Refreshing." He finally said.

Jim gulped a couple of times, and Bones didn't miss the way he dug the heel of his hand into his chest where the girl had touched him. He wanted to tell him to breathe, that everything was okay, but the way Jim's blue eyes flashed all over the room, particularly focusing on the exits, he knew it wasn't the time. Not yet. Not yet in their relationship. "Why don't we take these fries back home, yeah? It's really loud here tonight."

As they walked, slowly walking back to campus and sharing the box of fries as they went, he decided to say something. "It would really annoy me if the whole universe knew my name and birthday."

Jim looked at him with that same expression he'd had when the girl asked him about it. Fear, shock, panic.

"I just mean it'd be annoyin'! Everyone thinkin' they know ya when they don't. It's ain't like you remember that day..." The message he was trying to send was hey, I don't care who your dad is, you're clearly your own person on your own path.

Just as the silence was stretching too long, Jim spoke. "It doesn't even feel like a birthday. It never has. It's not the day I was born, it's..." he swallowed hard. "It's the day the father I never knew died. And that's all my m- the person who gave birth to me sees it as. That's why she never answers my call on my birthday."

"**You** call **her** on your own birthday?" Bones gaped.

"Yep."

“...why?”

“...I don't really know.”

And then they were. On his birthday. Jim dissociated. And Bones lost as to what to do.

They had been at the academy for what, not even 5 months? And he was trauma informed- he could see the signs of years of abuse and neglect. The way the kid hid food around the dorm alone was telling that he'd experienced some kind of food insecurity. He had a sneaking suspicion the uncle was at fault, the man Jim rarely spoke of except when he had a little too much to drink and started mumbling about some alcoholic named Frank and how he didn't want to be like him.

“Careful, B'nes,” he had slurred one night, early on. “I grew up with an- an- \*hiccup\* angry drunk guy and dunno what I might do...”

And that broke Leonard H. McCoy's heart.

And then it clicked why Jim refused to cross the line from tipsy and oversharing into truly drunk.

So he could understand why Jim hated calling his mother. Hated the rejection even though he didn't want to talk to her. Hated her for all the wrongs she'd done to him.

But Jim just sighed, getting up from the couch like a man tied down with sandbags. “I need to make a call,” he said lowly.

And Bones paused, considered, and decided to go for it. “Do you want company?”

When Jim's eyes flew to his, full of alarm, he tried to placate, “for support? On the call? I know you said before it ain't exactly easy...”

Jim stared at him blankly for a moment. It was like he needed to shake himself out of a stupor. “Uh, no, thanks, I... I got it.”

But the next year when he offered, Jim hesitantly nodded, and let him sit in as he left the message.

“It's me. I guess it's that day again. I hope you're well. I'm fine, in my second year now.” He glanced at Bones before looking back at his communicator. “I've got a pretty great roommate and classes are still a breeze.” He smirked cockily, but shakily, as if trying to pump himself up. “Chris sends his best, as does Una.” He took a breath. “Talk to you next year.”

*Talk .*

Ha.

His hands shook as he set the communicator down on the kitchen table.

Bones tentatively laid a hand over his for just a moment, trying to show support, solidarity.



Jim nodded, accepting it.

The third year, Jim *asked* for Bones to be there.

The fourth, Bones just showed up. Bourbon and hypo in hand, “pick your poison.”

So Jim took the bourbon, obviously, and sat down at the foot of his bed, Bones on the couch in the living space.

He took a breath as he made the call, and waited.

*First ring.*

*Second ring.*

*Third ring.*

One more...

*“Hello?”*

Jim jumped so hard, his bourbon splashed all over his hand, causing Bones to rush over.

“Hel-mo-hi.” Jim settled on lamely. “I uh, I was getting ready to leave a message...”

“Happy birthday, Jim.”

“Thanks...” he laughed nervously. “Uh, how are you?”

“Well... I actually need to discuss that with you.”

“What’s that?”

“...my health.”

“What about it?”

“Jim...” She sighed, and he could hear her shaking her head. “Jim, I have xenopolycythemia,”

Bones’ eyes went wide, and he instinctively moved closer to Jim.

“That’s...” Jim began.

“Fatal. No cure,” his mother finished.

There was a beat of silence before Jim looked up at Bones, “there’s really nothing they can do?”

Bones shook his head sadly, lips tight.

“No, there’s not. They’ve tried some theoretical methods but... but nothing has worked.” Winona said. “So I’m terminal. I’ve got about... well. Maybe a month.”

“A mon-”

“But really the reason I need to talk with you about it is because of Callie. She’s barely 16 and I can’t leave her alone, nor... Nor do I want her to go to Frank.”

Bones watched Jim’s jaw tick and tighten. Was it that she mentioned him, or was it that he was hurt that she wouldn’t leave Callie with him, but did Jim and Sam?

“Well I obviously wouldn’t want that either,” Jim said slowly.

“Which is why... I’m asking you if you would consider letting her live with you.”

“With *me* ?” Jim’s blue eyes flashed to his best friend’s in panic.

“I still know people in Starfleet. I can have some people pull some strings and get you clearance for her to live onboard,”

“Now, hang on-”

“She just finished her second year of college pre-reqs early,”

“I thought she was 16?”

“She graduated high school at 14, remember? It doesn’t much matter, she’s pretty self sufficient, you won’t need to chase after her too much, unless she mouths off,”

Self sufficient? Jim’s eyes met Bones’ yet again. He knew that was his mother’s code for her hands off parenting style. Who knew how self sufficient she actually was, versus being neglected. And the mouthing off part? She was 16, so maybe that was true, but-

“She’s a lot like you, actually,” she scoffed. “So I think you’ll get along.”

He couldn’t help but wonder what hidden meaning that held.

“So can I talk to her now?”

“Jim, I never said you couldn’t talk to her.”

•

“Are you going home for Thanksgiving to see your sister?”

“No... I don’t get back to Riverside much. Being there when I met Pike was a one off. Winona has a tendency to take her annoyance with one child out on the other, so I try not to interfere too much for Callie’s sake.”

“Interfere... how?”

“Asking why the child has fingerprint bruises on her arms doesn’t help matters, I’ve learned.”

“Do you guys talk at all?”

“...No.”

•

So his question of if he could contact Callie held more weight than just asking for someone’s number. He had hers. He just needed to know if Callie was going to be punished for whatever sins his mother believed were committed by him.

“I actually thought it would be best if we talked to her together about it.”

He looked over at Bones who clapped a hand on his shoulder and mouthed with a nod, “together.”

“Callie?” He heard her call. “Come in here, now.” He winced at her tone.

“Wait, she knows about this right?” Jim cut in worriedly.

“Of course not! Why would I tell her before asking you?” She spat.

Bones put a hand on his shoulder and motioned for him to take a deep breath with him, try to calm down before he got heated.

He reached down to mute Jim’s comm, “you sure about this, kid? This is a big decision,”

“Bones, what if it were Jo?”

And at that, Bones unmuted the call himself.

Jim could hear Winona talking to Callie but it was muffled. He called out to her with forced excitement so she knew he was present, "HI CALLIE!"

There was more muffled speech before, "don't I get a choice?"

"It's Jim or Frank."

His blood froze. *What?* Why would she say that to her?

"The state would place you with him, you know that."

He could hear the panic rising in Callie's voice, "but is Jim even--"

"YES! We talked about it and if you're up for it... I'd love for you to come live with me."

There was more muffled conversation, followed by Winona's tone changing into the shrill freaked out narcissistic tone, and Jim cut in, "you guys still there?" He may not have been able to save Callie in her life so far, but he surely could be there now.

"Yes, I'll live with Jim."

•

Silence hung after the call ended and the details were ironed out.

Jim sat looking at the communicator in his lap with Bones just watching him.

"Bones," he finally spoke, "I don't know how to be a parent."

"Well, Jim, you're not a parent. You're her brother. And that's the first thing y'all'll fight about if you're not careful."

"I don't *want* to be a parent! I want to be the cool older brother, but that doesn't feel right either."

He shook his head and shifted, still sitting at the edge of Jim's bed, "it's gonna be a balancing act, kid. You're probably going to have to figure that out together, unfortunately."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean she's 16, been in college, lived with *your* mother, and just experienced a huge trauma. I doubt there's much 'parenting' to be done, what she needs is support. And support I know you can do splendidly."

"What about rules? Boundaries? Curfews?" His voice pitched upward as he neared panic.

Bones held his hands up placatingly, “okay, okay. I hear you. But, you need to hear *her*. Meet the child as she is before you go decidin’ her bedtime based on who she used to be.”

“I wouldn’t even be able to do that. I feel like I’ve never gotten the chance to know her.” He stared into his untouched bourbon he’d set on the floor.

“That’s not your fault.”

“Isn’t it? I mean, I’ve had 16 years to try and get to know her better, and haven’t at all!”

“Jim, ask yourself, Really ask. Whose fault is that? Yours, or your mother’s? You told me once that she takes out frustration on the siblings. You were protecting her by staying away.”

“Was I really? I can only imagine what she went through. I mean, you heard how she spoke to her just now! Who knows how bad it is behind the scenes. Shoot,” he scoffed, “I *know* how bad it can be with her.” He ran his hands through his short locks. “For all I know, she hates me for leaving her there!”

“Jim, what evidence do you have of that?”

“Don’t ‘therapist’ me, Bones.”

Bones shrugged, “you asked for help.” He paused, “need I remind you of your reaction the first time I took you home for thanksgiving?”

Jim scoffed and put his face in one hand, “I still think it was a valid question.”

“Jim, you asked my mom what your bedtime was.”

“I asked when lights out was, that’s totally different!”

“My point is,” Bones raised his hands, “maybe you’re a lot more alike than you know. You would need to *talk* to her to find out.”

“You’re coming with me, right?”

“To Riverside?”

“Yeah?”

“I’m not sure that’s the best idea, kid.”

Jim’s face fell with heartbreaking speed.

“Your little sister is going to lose her mom, she doesn’t need some strange friend of her estranged brother’s hanging around.”

“Is that what we are? Estranged?” Jim asked in a small voice.

“Jim, I didn’t mean-“

“No, you’re right. An-an-and estranged comes from Latin word extraneus, meaning, 'not belonging to the family',”

“Jim, you’re spiraling,”

“Just because she agreed to live with me doesn’t mean she does or will like me, she could be a carbon copy of our mother, or-“

“Jim, I’m talking to myself, aren’t I...” Bones sighed as Jim began to pace.

“I mean, I’m 25-”

“26, today.”

“I’m 26! What do I think- what does Winona think- no- no, no! If I can take care of a ship of 1000, I can take care of one teenager on top of that!” He swung his arms out wide, “yeah! It’s just one more crewman, right?”

“Let’s not swing too far the other way, now... she’s 16 not 26.”

“I’m 26.”

“Yes, Jim.”

“I’m 26 and I’m taking custody of my 16 year old sister.” Jim stared out the window so long that Bones had to bark, “breathe!”

“You still sure about this?” He asked once Jim was taking in oxygen again.

Jim nodded, “I don’t question the decision at all. I just question the wisdom of it.”

“Which is all I was tryin’ to say, I’m not sure how smart my coming to Riverside with ya is when it’s already such a delicate situation.”

“Bones since when am I trusted with anything delicate?”

“Negotiations between the Thrikiexians and Thudedians last month. That was delicate work and I was proud of you.”

“A 16 year old girl might be more delicate...”

“In some ways, maybe.”

“What do you mean?”

“She’s not a character in a book. She’s multidimensional. She is going to get here and have likes and dislikes and opinions and traumas and she will be a whole mess of a human, same as the rest of us. She’s not some flat person we can just insert into different situations. But she ain’t gonna break from having to bend a little, either.”

“I don’t want her to have to bend! I want everything to be the way she needs it.”

“You’ll never accomplish perfection, don’t fool yourself into thinking you can,”

“I don’t believe in no-win-”

“I never said this was a no-win scenario! Hush!”

Jim hushed.

“It’s gonna be trial and error, and that- that *is* like parenting. You’ve got to just experiment and see what works for you both.”

“I don’t want to mess her up even more.”

“You won’t, Jim,”

“How can you say that? Look at the examples I’ve had!”

“You mean me and my ma and Pike for the last 3 years?”

Jim went silent, unsure of how to respond to that.

“Jim, you’ve had plenty of bad examples. But you’ve had good ones recently, too. Give yourself some credit here. Look how good you’ve been for Pavel,” he reasoned.

“Yeah but he’s 18,”

“And you’ve been hanging around him since he was 14!”

Jim stayed silent before finally asking, “do you think maybe he would have an idea on curfews, then?”

•

“So what’s she like?” Nyota asked over her tangerine at breakfast.

Jim startled, surprised no one was pushing him about his mom being terminal. They’d been sympathetic, but they hadn’t harped on it.

“My sister?”

She nodded.

“We’ve... we’ve been messaging since... since my birthday,” it was early and Jim was having trouble deciding what tone to take, what tone felt right. “She’s... shy.”

“Oh?” Nyota smiled, raising an eyebrow. “Pray tell.”

Jim thought back, *We can set up a comm line for you to be able to talk to your friends after we leave orbit*, he had messaged.

Her reply puzzled him, *that’s okay. I don’t need that*. Maybe she didn’t have a lot of friends? He knew how small Riverside was.

“She’s hard to get out of her shell, would be a better way to put it,” Jim said.

He tried to get to know her through small tidbits of nonsense. *I’m still listening to 20th century rock*, he had messaged. *But if a band you like is ever touring, you might be able to catch a shuttle to the concert*.

*You’d let me go alone?*

*I didn’t mean that, of course I’d go with! It’d be fun.*

*I wouldn’t make you take me to see a band you don’t even like!*

*What if I wanted to?*

There had been another hour-long pause.

*Well, if you really wanted to, I’d love that.*

What had Winona done to her?

Another time, he tried, *do you collect anything? I’ve been collecting antique books since the academy*. And traumas, he thought.

*Trauma, lol* came back instantly. Before, *jk jk. Sorry. My humor is weird. No, I don’t*.

*My humor is weirder, trust me.*

“I think we have the same sense of humor,” Jim added to his description after thinking about it.

“Aye, that’s good!” Scotty had jumped in to affirm.

“Da, it will be nice to have someone else young onboard!” Pavel tried to help.



“I think it’ll be nice to finally get another girl at this table,” Nyota tossed out.

“I admit I am not the best with... young ones,” Spock said with a contemplative head nod. “However, I do often appreciate their fresh insight.”

“You don’t consider them illogical?” Bones retorted.

“Yes, but at times, illogic leads to new logic.”

“That ain’t what you said to me when-“

“Well I think,” Sulu cut in, “this is the meaning of going where no man has gone before. People like Pav and Callie getting to see the universe? That’s what Starfleet is all about.”

*I don’t know much about Starfleet, mom’s hatred only recently reversed. Is there anything I should know? Rules?*

He’d worked not to sigh at her immediate asking about rules. It confirmed too many suspicions. But he also balked a bit. What rules were there for a non-Starfleet person living on a Starfleet vessel?

He’d asked Pike. His response had been simple. *Don’t tell her anything classified or leave it out for her to find. Otherwise, this type of thing is going to be up to Captain’s discretion for now. I’d suggest treating her like a cadet at first- give her open access to the public ship areas, tours of the private ones to satisfy curiosity. Show her where medbay and the bridge are. Both so she knows the two important places but also so she knows where to find you and McCoy.*

*Are you suggesting I’m in Medbay a lot?*

*No, I’m suggesting your best friend is going to be as involved in her life as you, which is a good thing.*

*Because I can’t handle this?*

*No, because he’s a father and also is your best friend. He will be a good support for you **and** Callie. Use him.*

So his answer to Callie’s question was, *basically just don’t go in restricted areas that are locked anyway.*

He knew she probably wanted something solid, like a curfew or list of chores.

*There aren’t like, chores to do. I have a kitchen that I don’t use. You can, if you want. There’s a porter that tidies up while I’m out. Laundry gets done by them too.*

*I don’t need someone doing my laundry when I’m going to be doing Jack squat all day. Are you sure there’s nothing I can do?*

*The only thing I can ask for is patience. Patience with me, because this is new to me, too.*

He sighed, thinking about the final question he asked his mother before Callie had joined the call.

“She still doesn’t know, right?”

She sighed. A different type of sigh from her normal annoyed ones. A sigh with... emotion behind it. A sigh that meant something. “Correct. Callie still doesn’t know about Tarsus.”

## Chapter 2

"It's a boy? Tell me about him," George had all but begged.

"He's beautiful..." She shook her head, "George you should be here..." Winona whispered.

She whispered the same thing when her daughter was born 10 years later.

•

"No, no, Calliope is fine! It's Jimmy! Jim drove my Corvette off a cliff!"

"... *your* Corvette?"

•

"No, Callie. You can't come to see Jim with me. He's very sick."

•

"I don't know where you get off- she's my daughter, Jim!"

"She's *six* and you've got her wound tighter than a clock!"

"She's well behaved. You wouldn't know what that's like."

•

"Happy birthday, Cal! How's third grade?"

"Silly," she giggled, "I'm in middle school!"

"Jim, if you're going to just criticize my parenting, I'm not going to let you talk to her anymore."

•

"Don't bother coming home."

"No, Jim isn't coming for Christmas this year."

•

“No, I don’t want you texting Jim, he’s busy.”

“No, I don’t want you texting Callie. She needs to focus on school. She’s in her junior year.”

•

“Did you text your sister about off-world colleges? She’s 14, Jim! This is why I don’t want you talking to her! You’re a bad influence.”

•

I turned 16 on November 14th, 2258. My mom was diagnosed with xenopolycythemia three weeks later.

The way she told me made it seem like she was... *angry* at me, and I couldn’t understand why. “Calliope, they finally know why I’ve been feeling so sick recently. I have Xenopolycythemia. There is nothing they can do. They tried, and the treatment... failed.” She shook her head as if disgusted, “I’m terminal. We are going to start trying other treatments this week, but we all know they won’t work.” She looked at me appraisingly, “it’s caused by a genetic mutation. So they’re going to have to test you for it.”

That’s when the blood tests started. Endless, endless blood tests. My veins were hard and swollen and hurt and I had bruises all down my arm, but they’d still ask for more.

When I complained to my mom about it, she snapped at me saying that it’s for my own protection, to make sure I won’t get sick someday.

But it didn’t feel like it was for my protection when they physically held my arm down when I tried to refuse a draw.

My whole life my mom has resisted seeing doctors, saying it’s Starfleet she hates and that’s where we get free medical care, but I think it’s more than that. I can never quite put my finger on it, but there’s something there that doesn’t add up.

Going to see her in the hospital, once it got to that point a week after she told Jim, was miserable because it felt like they were always grabbing me for another blood draw. The results were always the same- I don’t have the mutation that causes xenopolycythemia.

Seeing what it does to my mom, I can’t help but be thankful for that.

But my own distaste for doctors and nurses started to grow in those weeks. It was bad enough when mom grabbed me hard enough to dislocate my shoulder and I had to sit without painkillers for hours while she complained about the wait in the ED. It was bad enough when I rolled my ankle falling down the stairs after a shove and she huffed about taking me to get it looked at. And it was bad enough when she threw me into the kitchen table for talking back and bruised my ribs and refused to take me to get it looked at.

But what made all those things worse were the things she said about the doctors and nurses. How they didn’t want to give me painkillers, how I wasn’t important enough for their time, how they didn’t care. And over time, over the years, I started to believe her.

So when she got sick and started the same rhetoric, it was easy to join in. Especially when the blood draws got awful. Especially when I finally met her doctor and he made my skin crawl. Dr. Rathmore is tall, thin, and the way his eyes roam over everyone in the room make you want to

run. But my mom insists he's the foremost expert in xenopolycythemia and she's lucky to have someone willing to try alternative medicines.

I'm told that's part of why they take so much blood from me, because they want to make sure the disease won't activate when treated. So they test the treatments out on both my blood and my mom's before giving her all the experimental stuff.

She wasn't always the nicest to me but she was my mom. And seeing her suffer isn't something I'll ever forget.

She avoided conversation about what would happen to me all of December, saying she wanted to enjoy the holidays before talking about that, but it was always on my mind.

Where would I go? With who? Was there any chance I could just live on my own? I know Jim was emancipated, maybe I could be too?

The day she told Jim is the day my life changed forever.

There was a closed door in the house, it was before she went into the hospital, and raised voices behind it that went on for a while.

"Callie, come in here, now." My mom finally called, voice weary but annoyed, so I hurried to comply.

Her comm was sitting open on her bed and I could tell from the slight static that it was on.

"So Jim and I had a talk," she began, before Jim interrupted, "HI CALLIE!"

I smile softly but my mom just barreled on, "and we both agree that you living with Jim until you turn 18 would be the best and keep you the safest."

I blinked at her. I looked down at the comm, wondering if Jim was still there because he wasn't saying anything. Irritation bubbled up, "I'm sorry, *what*? Don't... don't I get a choice?"

My mother shrugged as she sat gingerly and leaned against the headboard. She bruised so easily by then that she had to be careful how she sat. "It's Jim or Frank."

My stomach flips so hard that a wave of nausea crashes over me. "Fr..."

"The state would place you with him, you know that." Her voice is harsh, matter of fact.

My ears rang so hard I could barely think, let alone speak. Frank has always creeped me out. He never has had a problem putting hands on me anytime he came over, claiming my mom complained about me all the time. I've been slapped on Thanksgiving and shoved on Christmas, and leered at on Labor Day. And my mom never did a thing to stop it. And now she'd leave me with him? No, this was why she's talking to Jim, so I don't have to be with him.

"But is Jim even--"

"YES." Bellowed from the comm. "We talked about it and if you're up for it... I'd love for you to come live with me."

My head spun, “where?”

“I’ve already explained to Jim I still have friends in Starfleet who can pull some strings so you can live with him on the Enterprise.”

I chose my words carefully to avoid getting yelled at, “but you hate spaceships?”

“Well it’s not going to be me living on one, is it?” She snapped. “It’s not going to be me living at all! Jesus, Calliope, you have to make everything-“

There’s static, before “are you guys still there?” Jim cut in.

My mom shot me a death glare and spoke loudly into the comm, “yes, Callie just isn’t sure if she wants to.”

My head jerked up, “I never said- no- I mean, yes! Yes!” I all but yelled. “Yes, I’ll live with Jim.”

And just like that, everything changed even more than it already had.

•

The day she died was a normal one for January in the Midwest. The sun was bright and reflecting off the snow. But it was the type of cold that makes each step on the snow crackle and crunch beneath your boots. The air burns your face, but your coat is too hot at the same time.

I didn’t know walking into the hospital that day that it would be the day.

I didn’t know I wouldn’t actually be there when she died.

I didn’t know she wouldn’t warn me.

I didn’t know she wouldn’t call me.

The nurses tell me it’s not a surprise, but it is to me.

She didn’t look that sick. She wasn’t that pale. Her heart was still strong. How she just... was gone one morning didn’t make sense.

The nurses whispered that I was in the first stage of grief- denial- and would soon get to anger.

But I was already angry. Angry that she didn’t call me.

And felt like a cruel joke that I had to be the one to tell Jim. It felt wrong. It felt unfair. It felt like it wasn’t my place. But somehow, it was.

It occurred to me that both of my parents died in January. My dad at the beginning, and my mom at the end.

And both of them alone.

I couldn't stay with her for long. I said goodbye, but it felt hollow and meaningless. She couldn't hear me.

I didn't cry. It felt wrong. I couldn't. It wasn't real. It couldn't be.

I sat outside her room until she was taken away, but no one explained anything when they did.

I didn't know where they took her. I didn't know if they were doing an autopsy. No one asked me a single question. Not even if I was okay.

Mom told me everything for after her death had been arranged by herself and Starfleet. That she had a binder for me that I wasn't to open until after she was gone. Cracking it open, I felt like she was about to jump out from behind a corner and yell at me. But I was simply faced with a neatly typed paper.

*“ Step number 1: The hospital will handle my remains. Tell Jim ASAP.”*

ASAP came slowly for me. It was an hour before I picked myself up off the floor enough, from under the seats in the hospice waiting room where I'd curled in a corner, my backpack on the seat so no one would sit on me, to make the call.

The waiting room was deserted, but I still went to the roof.

She died at what they listed as 0457. I got there 3 minutes later.

The sun was rising as I called Jim. I had no idea if there was a time difference. I had no idea if he would flip out. I had no idea if he would be able or even willing to help with the funeral.

One ring.

I'd never dreaded a call like that.

Two rings.

‘Oh please, please don't make me leave a message. I won't be able to. I won't be able to get through it. I'll just have to let him miss the-‘

“Hello?”

He sounded tired.

“Hey,” my voice warbled. “I’m sorry if I woke you-”

“Cal, what’s wrong?”

“Uhm…” I pulled at my shirt. “She’s gone, Jim. Mom is… she died.”

There was a beat of silence. “Okay. We’ve been traveling back as fast as possible since she told me, but we are still a few days out. If we plan the funeral for a Saturday-”

“We?”

“Yeah… we? Just because I’m not there doesn’t mean I’m going to make you do this alone,” he says as if it’s obvious.

It’s not. “No, it’s fine, actually mom set everything in advance. I basically just have to set the date and show up.” I internally sighed as I watched the sun come up over the shipyard. The Starfleet hospital is right across the street from it, I guess they’ve had enough injuries to figure out that city planning.

“But, yeah, we can set it for next Saturday.”

“Okay. Next Saturday.” He paused. “Are you okay?”

I was dreading that question. I sighed externally that time. It came out shakily. “Uhm… I wasn’t… here. I- I would have been, had I known. Had she called… but um. Anyway. Are you okay?”

He doesn’t let me off that easily. “That’s not what I asked, sweetheart.”

The endearment takes me off guard. “I’m…” that came out shakily too. But still, no tears formed. “I am okay. I really am. Or at least… I will be.”

Another pause. I wondered if it was a lag, but I could tell it was a contemplative pause by the sound of his voice. “You don’t have to be, y’know.”

“I know,” I answered quickly. “And I’m sure I’ll have my moments. But right now… right now I need to focus on going through the steps. Step one was call you.”

“Alright. Mission accomplished. But I’m still here if you need anything, okay? I want to help. And I promise I’ll be there soon.”

He sounded so, so sincere. But my mom’s words rang in my head so loudly that he doesn’t want to be bothered with us. “Okay. See you soon, then.”

“*Talk*, soon then.” He corrected.

I smiled, looking at the sun illuminating the broken stubs of leftover crops from the snow we just had.



“Bye, Jim.”

“Bye.”

•

*She's gone.*

The message arrived to Bones' padd at just past 0600, and he forgot all about the shower he was about to hop into and ran next door to Jim's quarters barefoot, still in pajamas, and used Jim's passcode to walk in.

Jim was still on his communicator when he walked in. “*Talk*, soon then.”

“Bye Jim.”

“Bye.”

Jim looked over at Bones, and Bones wasn't sure if Jim was going to stare blankly through him or burst into tears.

Instead, he did the worst possible thing.

He ran to the bathroom to puke.

As Bones rubbed gentle circles in his back, he murmured gentle reassurances to his best friend.

“Why am I even throwing up?” Jim asked miserably. “I didn't even like the woman!”

“But she was still your mom, kid.”

“Not anymore,” he said harshly as he laid his head on the seat. “Not after Tarsus.” He added into the toilet bowl.

Bones sighed but kept rubbing his back, “I know, kid. I know.”

“Bones, you have to come with me to Riverside, *please*,”

He shook his head, “I really don't think me goin' with ya to see her is the best idea, kid.”

“She doesn't know who I am any better than you.”

“And that’s the issue. Two strangers instead of one?”

“I don’t want all the pressure... like just us together it’s going to be awkward. We need a buffer. Plus... the funeral...”

“Jesus, Jim of course I’d never let you do *that* alone, I just mean going to talk to your sister beforehand. That should be a... you and her thing.”

“Well yeah, talking, but just. I can’t...”

“What aren’t you telling me?”

“I don’t think I can be in that house alone.”

Bones pressed his lips into a thin line, stomach rolling. “Alright, okay. If you really need it, I’ll come with you.”

“Thank you, Bones.” Jim sighed.

“By the way, you’re off-duty until we get through this funeral, okay?”

When Jim didn’t argue, he really started to worry.

.

A few days later, he heard from Spock. “Spock to Captain Kirk.”

“I’m off duty, Spock. It’s Jim.”

“I, however, am not. I wish to inform you we are docked and disembarkment is underway for the shore leave as approved.”

“Thank you, Spock. Enjoy Swahili, you and Nyota both.”

“I shall pass along your well wishes. My condolences once again. The loss of a mother is... an unimaginable pain. Spock out.”

“Look at you two gettin’ along,” Bones smiled.

Jim sighed, nodded. “It’s actually been a... sort of bonding experience.”

Bones picked up his bag, “let’s do this.”

•

In the days after mom dies, I expect to immediately feel a sense of emptiness, but I don't.

I continue to wait for a feeling of overwhelming dread, loneliness, or even terror, but no. None of that.

And honestly, it's because I *always* feel those things.

I've felt empty, lonely, and terrified of the future since I was 5 years old and getting beaten with a belt. I've felt that way since my mom told me I wasn't allowed to talk to my brother and that he'd never want to talk to me. I've felt that way since I started skipping grades and never having any friends.

It's a normal feeling, but not a good one.

And now, I'm going to burden Jim. Burden him with taking me in, I know there must be so many rules in place to allow this, and it's all my fault.

But even after I messaged and asked Jim if he was still sure about this, he *called* me to reassure me, and that makes me accept what's happening. Even if I don't truly believe he's happy about any of this.

I truly think things would be easier for him if I weren't even alive. Maybe they should have found the disease in my genetics, in my DNA, but they didn't.

I squeeze my knees and try to focus on the pain. The skin is already bruised from me doing this constantly, a way to try and distract myself from my spiraling thoughts, happening more frequently at that, that the squeezing hurts worse than mental pain. But I don't mind.

My brain starts spinning. I have to stop and consider- have I eaten today?

And do I even care?

I shake my head and push myself to my feet, head spinning with too-low blood sugar, dehydration, and the sudden change in altitude.

I have to be an adult. I have to submit the freaking obituary to the news circuits. At least she wrote her own, or someone wrote it. I'm just glad it didn't have to be me.

Step 4 was telling people in town, Riverside continues to shrink as the years pass, and it wasn't hard for word to spread.

But starting the spread is harder than I thought.

I can't ignore my mom has- had- an entire life in Riverside. So she has friends I have to tell. Who, despite knowing Starfleet is handling the funeral, want to plan a dinner for afterwards and lord if I don't know that'll end up a drunken line dancing party. I barely manage to quash it. I *almost* use Jim as an excuse, but I think if anyone had a heads up he was for sure coming, they'd really push for a dinner.

Everyone assumes he won't make it back, he's the face of Starfleet right now, taking pictures everywhere except earth.

After everything with Vulcan, suddenly everyone in Riverside knew Jim, had gone to school with him, and wanted to claim they were friends.

And honestly, they all might know him better than I do, so why should it bother me? I truly don't know him myself.

But everyone from town who knows my mom was weird about replicators and they bring over food. There's awkward Midwestern exchanges of condolences and offers to help, but I assure everyone mom prepped everything ahead of time.

I eventually put the truck and bike in the barn so it looks like I'm gone, stop answering the door, and begin packing up my bedroom upstairs.

I've known since Jim's birthday I would be going to live with him, so I've been packing up the house ever since. It's been a few weeks of packing away dishes and things I won't take but don't want to gather dust- the house is paid for and Jim and I have tossed around selling it the past week or so, but haven't decided for sure.

I'm packing up the last of the boxes from the spare rooms when I hear voices outside. I hop to the window and look out, see Jim and his friend he warned me was coming along for support walking up to the house.

I hurry down the stairs as he's knocking at the front door, and race to open it breathlessly. "Hi, sorry, was upstairs, hi!" I pant lamely.

Jim smiles at me, and lord, it's been years since I've seen him but he always looks the same to me. He always has this look of boyish charm dancing behind his eyes.

But the charm is slightly faded, and I'm sure I know why.

He chuckles lowly, but I hear the pain behind it, "don't apologize." He waves me off, before letting the hand hover as if to ask for a hug I reluctantly give.

He motions behind him, "this is Bones, and yes, that's his name, and yes, that's what you can call him."

The guy with him, slightly taller than Jim, with darker hair and eyes scowls at my brother, before looking at me with a softer expression. "Legal name'd be Leonard McCoy, if you're curious." He shoots Jim another glare.

"*No one* calls you either of those," Jim tips his head back to whine.

"*Plenty* of people do!"

"Well no one I'm living with will."

"*I* never called myself that when we lived together!"

My eyes widen in confusion. Were they-

"Roommates," Jim quickly explains, "at the academy, we were roommates."

I nod, but they just keep arguing as they come inside. “The kid can call me what she wants, Jim.”

Jim looks at me, smiling mischievously, “you wanna call him Bones. Trust me.”

I snort, and just to appease Jim honestly, say, “Bones it is.” I make brief eye contact with the hazel eyed man before going back to Jim.

I realize suddenly that we are standing in the middle of the entryway, still, and start to step back into the kitchen and motion at the island for them to sit.

Jim does, his friend doesn't. His eyes start roaming the room and I eye him warily.

This is the awkward part. The part after the hellos are said where I don't know what to do. “Do you want anything to drink?” I finally ask. “I don't know if they have refreshments on Starfleet shuttles,” I sheepishly admit.

Jim laughs and Bones shudders, oddly enough.

“Bones brings drinks- snacks, we're good.” Jim reassures me.

“And he is going to go out and get more for the ride back,” he announces, before looking at me. “This kitchen doesn't seem like it has much stocked.” One eyebrow raises in what seems to be disapproval, and it unsettles me.

“S just been me here for a while.” I say softly, and he softens.

“Let me bring back dinner, then,” he looks between Jim and me. “Pizza or burgers?”

Jim looks at me expectantly and I scoff, “I've not had much of an appetite.”

The air in the room seems to still slightly, and I have no idea why.

“Surprise us, then,” Jim smiles at his friend, who gives a weak one in return.

I realize suddenly, “oh wait, you need a vehicle,” I start turning in circles looking for keys. “Jesus, I'm stupid. You guys got dropped off, I saw the transport leave,” I'm shuffling through the kitchen looking for the truck key. “Obviously you need something...”

I'm ignoring the entreatings of, “it's seriously fine, you couldn't-“

“Here!” I chirp, inclined to toss the keys before setting them gently down. I don't want to hurt anyone, offend Jim's friend before I even know anything about him.

He leaves quickly with a thankful smile from Jim, and I'm not sure if he's thankful for the alone time or the food.

“So what’s left to pack?” Jim asks, looking around at all the boxes and biofilm covered furniture.

I sheepishly shrug, “nothing?”

His eyes widen.

“I mean, I’ve had a month and I’m not working or in school so I’ve had the time and mom’s been in the hospital for weeks and I hated going there because it was like every time I went they wanted more blood from me to test and...” I sigh. “I’ve had a lot of time on my hands.”

“Sooo... what are you taking? We have fur-furniture, for you,” he’s suddenly stammering, searching carefully for the correct words. “But if you want your own mattress or anything...”

“I don’t,” I answer a little too quickly. “Meaning, rather, I don’t really care.”

“*Rather* ?”

“Only child syndrome. Lotta time around adults.” The look of hurt that crosses his face for just a flash reminds me I’m not actually an only child. “It’s really just clothes,” I try to redirect. “And not a lot,” I hurriedly add. “Just... clothes. Some electronics. Some holophotos. Makeup...” I shrug again.

Jim looks around once more before saying, “well then. We can pack it all up quickly, it seems.”

•

Instead of immediately going upstairs and starting to pack up the truck, Jim and I sit and talk.

We talk about him not being allowed to talk to me, and I him.

We talk about mom. We don’t talk about Frank.

We talk about what life is like on the Enterprise, what Jim and his crew do all day.

When I look at a clock next, it’s been two hours.

Bones returned with pizza about an hour in, before disappearing again. “Where’d your friend go?” I ask warily, looking around.

“Phone call,” Jim says simply. “His daughter. When we’re earthside, it’s easier to talk to her.”

“His dau-” my eyes go wide. “Isn’t he your age?”

Jim scoffs, "I'm 26, Cal. Besides, Jo is only 7."

"That would make you a 19-year-old father," I raise an eyebrow.

"And Bones was a 25-year-old father."

I do the math, "so he's 32?"

"Yep."

"And you were roommates?"

"All through the academy."

"And you work together now?"

"And still my best friend, somehow." He smiles.

"What does he do on the ship?" I conveniently don't ask why he doesn't seem to have custody of his own kid, and what the implications of that might be.

"CMO. Chief medical officer."

My stomach sinks. "Is that like... studying stuff or...?"

"Sometimes. But mainly he's the ship's doctor."

My entire world freezes.

I don't care that the man has been nothing but nice so far, going to the length of digging around the kitchen for plates to make sure we both eat.

After my childhood and after seeing what my mom went through... *I hate* doctors.

I suppose it started with my mom, she hated them first, because we always had to see Starfleet ones.

But it wasn't hard for the hate to form within me.

I hated the way they left me sitting for hours with a dislocated shoulder and no pain meds.

I hated the way they manhandled my ankle into a brace when I sprained it, *again* .

I hated the way they gave my mom experimental treatments that made her cyclically vomit blood because there's no actual cure for xenopolycythemia.

I hated the way they were always demanding blood from me for no good reason when I'd visit her.

I hated the way they would never answer my questions.

I hated the way they ignored her pain at the end.

So in general. I hate them.

It feels like everything around me slows. I find myself questioning it out loud. "He- he's a *doctor*?"

The creaking of the back door to my left makes me whip my head over to said-apparent-doctor.

"You're a *doctor*?" I all but spit.

"Guilty..." he says slowly as he puts his communicator in his back pocket, looking back and forth between Jim and I suspiciously. Questioningly.

But I'm done. No questions. No answers from me if there are any from him. I'm out. I don't do doctors.

Not after... no. Just. No.

My brain scrambles for an excuse for this reaction.

I look over at Jim, as if I can get an answer there. Nope. He looks equally as confused.

"You don't like doctors, do you?" Bones asked simply.

I look at him sheepishly and he rolls his eyes, "so it's genetic, then?"

My head whips to Jim, "you don't like doctors and your best friend is one?"

"He's one of the good ones."

'They don't exist,' I want to fire back, but I stay silent.

"He oversees everyone's health onboard... That'll include yours." Jim keeps trying.

I scoff and squint at him a bit, trying not to snarl as I find myself crossing my arms. "I don't need a doctor."

Jim lets out a noise that is somewhat reminiscent of a scoff. "That's usually my line."



He expounds no further so I have to. "Care to expand on that?"

He shrugs. "According to Bones, space is disease and danger wrapped up in darkness and silence."

"Because it *is* -"

Jim plants his palms flat on the kitchen island directly in front of me and begins talking over his friend. "I'm not saying you'll get any weird diseases, but headaches or sprains or first aid or the flu, to Bones is where you'll go for help."

Again, I squint. "What do you mean? That's all stuff you can take care of yourself."

"Not.... On a Starfleet ship..." He says with a wince.

My eyebrows shoot sky high. "Excuse me?"

Jim pulls at the back of his neck. "Well, the policy in place is that the crew isn't allowed to have any drugs because Starfleet wants to know who is ailed with what."

"Good thing I'm not part of the crew, then." I say, arching one eyebrow, crossing my arms even tighter in defiance.

Another nervous huff from my brother as he averts his eyes. "Yeah, Cal, yeah, I'll admit; these are uncharted waters. We're gonna be making up a lot as we go."

My eyes aren't averted whatsoever, staying focused on his face. "Jim," I say firmly, the arms crossed over my chest, starting to shake. "I have my own Advil."

"If I may..." Bones finally cuts in.

I look over with a full on glare.

"When you've got 1,000 people stuffed together in a tin can, sharing recycled oxygen, while hurtling through space, which is disease and danger wrapped up in darkness and silence," he explains. "Someone's gotta keep tabs on all these people. Quarterly as well as away team physicals as well as the standard 'return to the ship' physicals can only do so much. Say Ensign Whatshisface keeps getting headaches- turns out, his padds were giving him seizures that are undetectable in his species. He works in security. What happens when he beams down with a headache to a planet that causes a full on seizure? We have no history to go on, no history that he'd been having headaches."

"I'm not a crewman, though." I object again.

"No, but when some crap disease is going around the supposedly sanitized recycled air, I'd like to know about it before everyone on the tin can gets it, crew or not."

"Well, a bottle of Advil isn't-"

“You get a headache and don’t say anything and it turns out your brain is going to start bleeding outta your ears from stupid space reason. You sprain your ankle, but you’re gonna have no idea how to best wrap it so it handles the artificial gravity. You get a scratchy throat and hide it with Advil when it’s actually the beginnings of some idiotic Andorian flu. Or, hey. Maybe you’re gettin’ headaches because the settings in your padd need changed. Maybe your throat is scratchy because the air is too dry. But on that tin can, with its recycled air and monitored food and monitored health, a lot of crap can and does happen. But also, because of all those precautions, headaches, colds, allergies, aren’t very common, anyway. So when they crop up, I *have* to know. It’s my job,” he points at his chest. “To make sure everyone is healthy.

I struggle to not roll my eyes, I’ve been the one making sure I’m healthy all alone for quite some time now. I glare at/eye him warily, unmovingly. “Hm.” I finally grumble. “We’ll see...”

“Plus... you’re going to need a lot of vaccines for those space diseases.” He winces. “Sorry to be a jerk so quickly,” he quips sarcastically, making my head tilt to one side in confusion.

“I take no pleasure in stabbing you or making anyone feel like crap,” he shakes his head. “But better that than getting the actual illness.”

•

A while later, we all sit in the living room and the two men banter over what movie we should watch.

Who decided that’s what we’re doing while we eat our now cold pizza, I have no idea.

“Jim,” I cut in quickly, almost without thinking.

He pauses and looks up with concern, “yeah?”

“Do you have any questions about tomorrow? Anything you want to know about before we get there?”

A look crosses over his face that I have no words for, but it looks painful, whatever the emotion. He stammers for words, “well, I mean, do I, do we need to say anything?”

I shake my head, “it’ll be a eulogy given by some Starfleet person at the Starfleet run mortuary. Short and sweet is what she wanted. To the point.”

I see him hesitate. “Guest list?”

“Frank was not invited. However...” I moan. “They said they can’t kick him out if he shows up.”

Silence falls over the room and tension fills it.

Jim goes pale and my stomach drops. “I- I’m sorry, I tried, but-”

He’s shaking his head, “it’s not your fault. No, no none of that. Not your fault...” his voice sounds far away and I cock my head.

“You all right?”

“...fine.”

Bones then cuts in, “kid?”

Jim suddenly looks like he shakes himself free of something and turns back to me. “Alright. I get it. It’s. Yeah. Anyway. What time do we need to leave?”

By the time we hash everything out, it’s 12am and there’s no energy, physical or emotional, left to ready my things for transport to the ship.

There’s not much, so we agree to pack up and leave after the funeral, and all head off to bed.

For me, that means fiddling around, making sure all my stuff is packed and whatever isn’t I can quickly toss together after using tomorrow morning.

And I putz around until 4am, uneasy energy setting my limbs on fire.

I research Starfleet protocols for the thousandth time, reading all about what’s required for crewmen but only from external sources. Mom’s books were long gone and academy textbooks were classified.

For the millionth time I look up the Enterprise schematics, maps, trying to learn my way around before I get there.

I google “Leonard McCoy, MD” and find quite a few research articles that I bookmark to browse later.

His MD ratings online are all from Atlanta, and his bedside manner starts are 1’s, except for reviews from his time at a pediatric hospital. His reviews for proper diagnoses and treatments were amazing, however.

Then I google mom. I reread her obituary. Step 4 was to get it to the Starfleet and local press. It’s a very plain obituary. Mentions all three of us kids which surprised me and Jim both, I think, when I sent him a copy.

“She didn’t know where Sam is, did she?” Jim commed me after the obit was published.

“I’m sorry, not my knowledge. And I just... I don’t feel like she even wrote this herself. It’s not... Like, it’s-”

“It’s not her.”

“Yeah. It’s just not her.”

I close down my padd and stand to look out the window.

I look out over the soybean fields, frosted over and bare for this time of year. I wonder what view I’ll have in my new bedroom.

Jim's captain's quarters has two bedrooms, one he was using as an office he didn't need so he insists it's fine for me to take over. He's tried describing his place as best he can, I think to try and alleviate any fear of the unknown I have, and I appreciate it.

I don't tell him I've looked at the schematics and read the Starfleet message boards on ship design and already know how his quarters are laid out.

I packed the least I could, and figuring I'd need a variety of weather clothes made that hard, but I think I did okay as I look around the room. I boxed up things to leave and I boxed up things to go. All that's left are my clothes for tomorrow.

For my mom's funeral.

A black bubble skirt and a black top with a geometric neckline hang in my closet.

It's going to be a long day. But for some reason the moving part is getting me through the funeral part.

That doesn't help my stomach from rolling however. I'm struggling to keep my one piece of pizza down as I stress over the day to come.

My mother's *funeral*.

And I want so badly to cry. But the numbness is all consuming.

I crawl into bed, wondering if curling up and closing my eyes will help me cry. But no such luck.

I do, however, drift off as I wonder if I'll ever cry.

•

When Jim entered his old bedroom, he found himself freezing midstep, hand on the door handle, feeling like his heart had stopped.

Maybe he should have taken the master, anyway, instead of giving it to Bones.

Callie had packed the house, but left sheets and blankets for them to stay over for the funeral.

The room was totally different, but in many ways, just the same.

No, it wasn't his quilt, but it *was* his mattress.

No, it wasn't his wallpaper, but it *was* the light fixture he and Sam picked out together.

No, the hole Frank punched in the wall wasn't there, but the patch job *was* visible.

No, he couldn't *literally* hear Frank screaming at him to go to his room but... He could hear it.

He stifled a sigh, dropping his duffel bag at the foot of the bed.

His fingers gently trailed the wooden footboard, the one his grandfather hand carved before he and Sam were even born.

But he pulled his hand back, feeling it light on fire, as he suddenly remembered getting thrown into it.

His mother had been off planet, on some secret mission, the type that she always got cagey about when she was assigned one. It wasn't long before Sam left, because Sam had been at work that day, secretly as it turned out, saving money to leave.

Jim hadn't mopped the kitchen floors to Frank's satisfaction. Frank had found a crumb under a kitchen chair. He'd shoved Jim to his knees in front of it before demanding he lick it up, before dragging him by his (bruised, from Frank obviously) collarbone to his room and throwing him in.

He had landed shoulder first into the footboard of the bed, it burning and stinging and probably tearing something.

Frank had put a new lock on the door, one that allowed him to lock Jim inside for however long he pleased. And he usually 'pleased' until Winona got home. Until he could spin a story about what Jim did wrong this time.

One that Winona always believed.

He thought about her backhands and scathing comments and how they sometimes stung more than Frank's closed fists.

He found himself wondering how many of those slaps and comments Callie had had to endure.

He'd had Sam, at least up until Tarsus.

Jim came back from Tarsus, and he tried to sleep in that room again.

He really tried. But he couldn't. So he left.

But his biggest concern at that moment was where he was going to sleep, because it certainly wasn't going to be in that room.

•

Len lay silently in the master bedroom, flat on his back in the king size bed, staring at the ceiling. He was riding the high of getting to speak with Jo, and for a long time at that. It hadn't been a question for him that he'd accompany Jim to the funeral. But him being planet side wasn't enough to let Jocelyn agree to let him see Joanna while they were. A long phone call was the best she'd offer and Len knew to just accept it. The old farmhouse creaked as a breeze caught it. He wasn't entirely sure why the kids wanted to keep it. The psychologist in him tried to pinpoint a reason, but when the floors creaked again, he pulled his head off his pillow because that was *not* the wind.

He wasn't sure if it was Callie or Jim still up, but either way he worried, given the time.

They both needed sleep for the day ahead, especially Callie, it seemed.

And dear lord, what was up with her near panic attack when she realized he was a doctor?

It was almost a repeat word for word conversation he'd had with Jim nearly 4 years prior.

*"Dr. McCoy, here's that patient chart to study. See you for orientation tonight at SFM?"*

*Len had nodded, taking the padd from a 2nd year cadet who had met him and Jim in the mess hall.*

*"You're a **doctor**?" Jim spat. "Like a **medical** doctor?"*

*The disgust on his face couldn't be hidden. Len could already tell the kid was regretting agreeing to room with him.*

*"I won't disturb anythin'. I don't work many nights, can't, with these classes, need to be awake for 'em, and- what's that face?"*

*It was a cross between disgust, shock, and... fear?*

Even before seeing the similar look of fear and disgust on her face at that discovery, he had been worried about her.

Her body language screamed 'terror'. She constantly wrung her hands, chewed her cheeks, shifted her weight, and looked around with Jim-level hypervigilance.

Her mother had just died but she acted like she was constantly waiting for the other shoe to drop, like there was another bombshell just about to go off.

And he couldn't blame her, because he felt the same way. Nothing about Winona asking Jim to take Callie in had felt *right*. But he couldn't get Jim to see that. Jim was just ecstatic to have his little sister back and Bones wasn't going to take that away.

A soft knock on the door followed by a sheepish Jim opening it calmed his racing heart from the noise. He sat up, "what's up, kid?" He asked, voice purposely soft. He could tell from Jim's body language- hunched shoulders, wide eyes, shifting gaze, fidgeting hands- that his PTSD was flaring. "I- uh- well, I can't- I don't-"

Len waved a hand, knowing exactly what Jim wanted- needed- but couldn't ask for. "Get over here, kid. Lay down." He said gently. The relief that washed over the kid's face was heartbreaking. Len was simply relieved they had a king, for once. Sharing a twin with Jim in the academy after a particularly bad nightmare was never *pleasant*, but he adapted. They both did.

And they'd adapt to these new changes, together.

Leonard H McCoy, with years of experience as an on call doctor and father, could wake at the slightest of noises. It made sharing a dorm with Jim a hassle, with the poor kid's nightmares.

So when he was jerked out of his sleep by the sound of whimpering, it wasn't an unusual occurrence.

What *was* unusual was that it wasn't Jim.

Jim lay, very much not on his side of the bed, mind you, peacefully asleep, lips slightly parted as he huffed out sleepy little breaths.

No tears or gasping or whimpering. He was trying to steal Len's pillow but he wasn't being overly clingy. Well. Overly clingy for Jim.

Len even touched his own face to be sure he wasn't the one crying.

He wasn't.

That just left Callie.

Should he wake Jim?

Go check on her himself?

He blindly and clumsily reached for his padd to check the time.

6am.

He was usually awake by now, anyway. Might as well get up. Find some coffee, maybe. *Real* coffee. The thought excited him.

He quietly slipped out of the bed, when Jim was out like that, he was dead to the world and the movement didn't disturb him whatsoever.

Len padded in sock clad feet down the long hallway, following the noises of soft moans and cries.

His suspicions were confirmed that it was Callie when he got outside her door.

The muffled sounds seemed to indicate she was in a nightmare, rather than crying in earnest.

He hesitated.

What should he do?

He knew what he'd do with Jim, he'd done it many times. Get him awake, get him in his arms, and gently remind him where he was.

He couldn't do that with this kid. He didn't know her. Didn't know what she needed, what boundaries or fears she had. He couldn't just go into a teenage girl's room while she slept.

He looked back to the closed door of the master bedroom. Jim needed the sleep. He couldn't wake him.

A scream from Callie made him jump, and his brain flashed into physician mode for a moment. Because now he was worried about her safety.

He decided to knock on the door.

A soft knock.

Nothing.

A louder knock.

Nothing.

A *louder* knock.

Another cry out that sounded like *pain* .

He gently turned the handle and poked his head in. The kid was curled up in a ball on her left side, huffing and twitching.

He sighed, gently walking over to her bedside.

He knelt down on her right side, at her back, to gently rub soothing circles.

He didn't want to outright wake her up like he did with Jim, probably terrify her.

So he just tried to bring her out of REM and out of the dream.

He went back to what he did with Joanna when she'd get night terrors, "shh," he whispered softly. "It's all okay, darlin'. It's all gonna be okay..."

He continued to rub soothing circles and he watched as her breathing slowed down, becoming gentler and gentler until he could lift his hand away.

God, he had done that *so* many times with Jo. Rubbing circles on her back or just patting and patting her diapered butt in her crib until he could start patting lighter and lighter and then sneak away. He was always way more patient with getting her to sleep than Jocelyn. He hated missing bedtime when he worked late, and Joce always had to give him such a hard time about it...



He shook his head as he prepared to stand, placing his hands on his knees and readying himself to hear them crack.

When he stood, (and yes, his knees popped *loudly* ,) he glanced around the room.

He wondered what it had been like for her to pack up the entire house by herself. The kind of trauma that could cause anyone, let alone a teenager.

As he gently guided the door shut, he wondered what kind of trauma in general she experienced in that house.

Because Lordy, did he wonder.

He went downstairs and moved freely within the Kirk kitchen, comfortable enough with Jim to know he was fine to do so.

He thought over those things he wondered as he made coffee.

He thought about when he saw all the abuse documented in Jim's medical records. How it confirmed the many suspicions he'd had, but there were many things that were worse than he thought.

He thought about the little things Jim let slip, the gaslighting and emotional abuse. Those things weren't documented, but might be worse in some ways than the physical abuse.

He thought about the physical abuse. The breaks and sprains and litany of non-Tarsus injuries the kid sustained.

He looked around the kitchen and thought about Winona Kirk. The way she probably moved within the space. He wondered if she was the type of mother to bake cookies in the kitchen with her kids.

With Jim, definitely not. She was off planet far too often. What about with Sam? Before George died and she turned into a bitter mother who loathed being one to the son that was born the day his father died.

The coffee beeped as ready and he poured a cup.

He thought back to the time at the academy, early on, when Jim had accidentally eaten one of his ration bars. The kid had *panicked* , apologizing profusely and looking absolutely terrified, he'd promised to replace it, by double.

Bones had been stunned. He had stared at him for a good few seconds before intentionally softening his face and shrugging it off. "You know they're free, yeah? No big deal, really."

"But it was yours and not mine and I ate it and that's awful of me and-"

"*And* it was a mistake. An honest mistake. One I don't even care about." He'd gone to take a step forward and Jim flinched. *Flinched* . A twenty-two year old, 6-ft, solid man, flinched when his roommate took a step forward during a conversation.

Interesting- heartbreaking- info he'd tucked away to examine later. Naturally, he could only conclude such a fear like that came from not just growing up in a food scarce environment, but one where it was controlled by others out of spite. An environment he was punished in for things like eating someone else's nasty dry ration bar by complete mistake.

Basically, Jim's issues with food weren't only Tarsus related. Someone he'd grown up with had been weird about food for some reason. And his suspicion was that it was withheld as punishment.

He looked around that kitchen and it made him sick to his stomach, so he wandered to the back door to look out at the frost-bitten landscape.

A Southern boy through and through, seeing frost so thick and well, *cold*, was always a bit of a shock. He remembered Jim talking about the snow, once he'd owned up to the abuse barely a year and a half prior. "Yeah, Frank threw me out in the snow once. Barefoot. I ran to the barn but couldn't feel my feet and was pretty sure I got frostbite."

He rubbed his face and turned back to the kitchen, wandered into the living room. "Oh, this scar?" Jim had answered a late night, tipsy-overly-invasive question from Bones. "Yeah, I picked up one of Frank's beer bottles, trying to clean while he slept on the couch in the living room, so I wouldn't get beaten for leaving a mess y'know, and one bottle wasn't all the way empty, and he woke up and threw it at me."

He groaned and turned back to the kitchen. When he did, he glanced up the stairs in the direction of the bedrooms. Then he remembered Jim telling him about the time he'd been shoved down those stairs for having his shoes on in the house, and he finally collapsed into a dining chair and put his head in one hand

If *he* was struggling that much in that house... he was glad Jim had sought him out the night before because he couldn't imagine what the kid was struggling with. And he was certainly glad he had agreed to come along.

And if Jim had experienced those things in that house... The psychologist in him was 99% sure Callie had experienced something similar, even if it was at the hands of her mother and not Frank.

And that made him even sicker. Because how?

How was a question he'd grappled with for years with Jim.

How could his mother not care that much? How could she allow and ignore the abuse? Participate in it, when she was planetside?

As a human, but especially as a parent, he just didn't understand it. It didn't compute. No matter how frustrated he got with Jo, he could never... Never say those things to her. Never lay a hand on her. Not even Jocelyn. No one deserved to be told they were worthless.

And the more he thought about it, the more worried he became. Because Jim had left at essentially 13, only coming back for a few months post Tarsus before bolting, and still had an immense amount of trauma.

Callie was 16 and had spent most of her life with Winona. What kind of trauma did she have hiding? He didn't want to label her or just make assumptions, but the anxiety seeping off her at every turn was telling.

What hurt the most was that there was nothing much he could do about it. He was a stranger that knew more about her background than she shared, simply from knowing Jim. He couldn't do anything to help.

## Chapter 3

"I'm sorry I can't be there, son. This experimental treatment your buddy McCoy found for me on DS3 is... intense." Pike said to him.

Jim shrugged over the comm line, "I don't want to make a big deal about it, anyway."

He knew that had been the wrong thing to say immediately.

"Son... your mom died. It's a big deal."

Jim sighed. "There's a video link. Knowing you'll be watching is enough. So tell me. How is Una liking the station?"

Jim knew in the back of his mind that he was avoiding talking about his feelings on the matter, but that was the way he wanted it.

When he got off the call, he felt bad that he felt relieved that Callie was still asleep. They were going to be living together, what was wrong with him? He needed to get used to her being constantly there.

It was hard because his guards weren't fully up yet, and he was instantly on edge at not being masked.

"What am I going to do on the Tarsus anniversary? Or if she sees me having a panic attack?" Jim had asked Bones over whiskeys, the night his mother took his call.

"You admit you're human and have trauma anniversaries that you don't want to talk about."

"What about nightmares?"

"...kid, are you having nightmares again?"

Jim had huffed, standing up to pace some more, as he had been for hours before Bones forced him down to sit. "No, and not the point."

"You seem convinced you're going to instantly fall apart on her," he observed.

"Pretty much, yeah."

"You're allowed to have emotions, though."

"I can't fall apart on her! The first thing we do together is going to be our mother's funeral, and I can't have her thinking I'm not mentally strong."

Bones shook his head and watched him pace. "Kid, what do you think is going to happen?"

“I’m going to get back to that town. Go to that house. Go to that funeral. And lose my- s- mind- UGH see, Bones? I can’t even stop cussing-”

“Oh my *word*, Jim, she’s 16, she’s heard some things! And she’s probably seen some things, too. Give her some credit.”

“I just have to make sure she knows I’m there for her, above all else. I can’t do that if I’m falling apart.”

“You can be there for someone while also showing up for yourself.”

“I’m worried about the moments when I’m too out of it to keep my guard up.”

“Against what?”

“Against slipping up and mentioning Tarsus. Against snapping at her or yelling-“

“When do you ever *yell* at anyone?”

“-At her or I mean, my god, what if I let something classified slip or leave a classified padd laying out because I’m too mentally worn out to pay attention?”

“That’s why you can’t mask 24/7, kid. You need to be authentic with her from the gitgo. Don’t lie or hide or downplay things. Be real with her, because too, you need her to be real with you.”

“What do you mean?”

“She’s going to need someone to talk to, and you sharing you’re struggling might encourage her to be honest. You both need each other, so don’t hide from her, for her sake, at least.”

Jim snapped back into the present as he realized he’d been staring aimlessly into his coffee cup, having made his way to the kitchen not long after Bones got up.

“Mm, back with me?” Bones murmured.

“Do you have to notice everything?”

“Kinda my job...”

“So like... you noticed...” Jim’s voice lowered.

“The classic Kirk disdain for doctors? Yeah, yeah I noticed that.”

Jim glanced up the stairs in the direction of her bedroom. He nodded for Bones to follow him as he slipped on shoes but no-

“Coat! Infant! Coat. You better put on a coat!” Then he saw Jim’s face fall- *fall* - like a child being scolded and he softened. “My Southern roots aren’t too fond of this weather...” he said with a thick lay on of Southern accent.

But it did the trick, Jim snorted and grabbed his coat off the hook and slid it on, juggling his coffee around the sleeves with mastery.

Bones followed him onto the wraparound porch, and they walked as far as they could from Callie’s room. “What do you think it is with doctors for her?” He asked.

Jim shrugged, “I have no idea. Winona was never a fan of doctors growing up, I mean... you’ve seen the healed injuries...” he shook his head to clear it. “But all I can guess is it has to do with Winona getting sick?”

Bones sighed, “fair enough.”

I swear, she jumps every time I look at her,” Jim sighed into his coffee, before his hand tightened around the cup. “Makes me wonder why, but if I’m being honest, I already know the answer to that...” He seethed.

Bones just listened, keeping an appraising eye on him.

“She second guesses everything she says. She’s more concerned with finding rules to follow than actually settling in. I’m *worried* , dude.” His eyes pleaded for help and Bones stifled a sigh.

He didn’t want to give the kid a shred of doubt that he wanted to help. But he didn’t know how to say- “you’re a pot calling the kettle black,” any other way, so he just said it outright.

“I don’t second- I mean- okay, fine, I see... but I don’t...” Jim huffed and ran his free hand through his hair. “So then what do I do?” His blue eyes looked wildly for an anchor to latch onto.

So Bones gave him one. He stepped into Jim’s direct line of view and put his free hand on his shoulder. “You be there for her. You listen. You relate. You *unmask* . Because she’s only going to be honest and open if she knows you are.”

“But that’s what I’m trying *not* to do,” he huffed.

“I know. And she’s gonna know.”

Jim stayed silent and thought about those words. He thought about the type of house she’d obviously grown up in. He thought about his own hypervigilance, and where it came from and then the likelihood she was exactly the same.

“Okay, give me an example,” Jim licked his lips, eyes zoning out.

“Jim-“ he dropped his hand.

“Bones, *please* !”

He stifled a sigh again. “Okay. We know she has nightmares. You ever hear her havin’ one, you let her know you get them too.”

Jim’s jaw tightened a tick or two.

“You don’t have to say what about, even if she asks. You’re very familiar with selective truth telling, kid. I’m just saying to throw her a bone.”

“Wait, what do you mean we know she has nightmares? What did I miss?”

Bones shrugged, “she woke me up crying maybe an hour ago. I went in and just rubbed her back until she came out of REM.”

Jim sighed and shook his head, “poor kid.”

They sipped their coffee in silence.

“Bones?”

“Yeah, kid?”

“Thanks for not... *grabbing* me a few minutes ago. I’ll remember the coat next time.”

He sipped his coffee, “kid I’d never make bein’ in this house harder on ya.”

Jim zoned out again, scanning the horizon. If Len had to guess what he was looking for, he’d guess the shipyard. Jim always looked for ships or stars when he got stressed. An escape. The kid was always plotting an escape route and it worried him constantly.

“So your ma didn’t farm this land?” He tried to bring Jim back to him.

Jim shook his head, both to clear it and in response. “No, the barn over there was just to store crap. Callie said before college she worked on the horse farm down the road during summers, which is technically next door, and they own and work the land now. When I was a kid it was someone else. It changes hands a lot.”

“But no one ever wants this house?”

“No one but Frank,” a distinctly young and female voice said.

Jim whirred around to face his sister, “what?”

She snorted, like it was a joke, and shrugged. “It’s a Davis house, he grew up here, he spent so much time and effort here, which we both know is a crock...” Callie was coat-less and wrapped her arms around herself.

Bones bit his tongue. Literally. She was in a long sleeve shirt that was at least two sizes too big and not warm in the least. All it did was show how *tiny* she was. Not just small in stature, which she was, but in build. Red flags were raising for him as he forced himself to not stare at her

too-prominent collarbone.

“He has his reasons. They make no sense, but he has them.”

“Has?” Jim asked hesitantly.

She shrugged again, fighting a chill. “He always fought with mom about how he should be the one living here, but she would never budge. Wouldn’t let him move in like he wanted and wouldn’t consider signing over the house.”

“He wanted to move back in here?”

“Oh yeah, always. Free place to live to support his drinking.”

“You’ve not heard from him since she... passed?” Jim faltered a bit.

She shook her head, unfazed. “Not a word. Blissful.”

Jim snorted the sip of coffee he’d just taken out through his nose and coughed up more.

“Okay,” Bones made the decision as he steered Jim (gently). “Everyone back in the house.”

•

It’s small moments that can hurt the most. Sure, everyone intellectually knows a parent’s death is hard, but no one stops to think about the silence that hangs.

People don’t stop to consider the way no one knows whether or not to say anything, to comment on the weather or the obvious, and just choose to stay silent instead.

They spent a lot of the morning in silence as they’d packed up the truck and dropped off Callie’s things for beam up.

Bones expected Jim’s golden retriever-esq personality to showcase itself, for Jim to pester his sister with a million questions and not take no for an answer as to what dessert she wanted pre-programmed in the replicator.

But Jim was uncharacteristically quiet. Sure, he asked leading questions, but those Len could tell were more for himself than Callie. He was trying to determine how to keep her happy, and she was doing the same with him.

She’d ask where she would go to buy dish soap, (it’s provided by the porter) and Jim would ask what her favorite movie was in every genre.

It was hard to stomach, two people so clearly desperate to connect with each other but both floundering so hard. The therapist in him wanted to bust out some couple’s techniques, but he was proud of his willpower to refrain.

Eventually, they both lapsed into silence about an hour before they needed to leave for the funeral. Bones wasn't sure if their similarities were going to hinder or help communication yet. But he was sure they were both hurting.

When they went out to the barn to leave, Jim stopped dead in his tracks when he saw something half covered by a tarp. "Is that..." he walked over and whipped the tarp off a PX90 motorcycle. "Is this mine?" He blurted as he looked the bike over.

Callie wrapped her arms around herself and nodded, "some guy brought it here a few years ago. Said you gave it to him but he didn't feel right keeping it. Mom tossed it in here with dad's since you were in the academy and 'gave it away, anyway'." She finished with air quotes.

Jim ignored that, exclaiming, "wait, the PX70 is in here?" Without waiting for an answer, he ripped a tarp off the next lump and looked in awe at their dad's bike. "I had no idea she kept this," he said with reverence, gently running his hand over the seat. "I bought my 90 because I... I guess because I always wanted the chance to drive this one. I was too young to reach the pedals when I... chose the Corvette instead."

Callie winced, "yeah, mom never quite got over that."

Jim's jaw ticked, knowing where his mother sent him after that, and knowing she still held a grudge anyway made it worse.

He ran his hand over the seat of his bike once more. "...I'm going to get Scotty to beam these up for me, site to site. Keep them in storage. Maybe find a planet to play around on." He looked up at Callie, "you know how to drive?"

"Now hang on," Bones interrupted. "Those things are called donorcycles for a reason,"

Callie shook her head, "was never allowed. I mean, I barely have my license as it is."

"Wanna learn?" He asked with a smile.

She nodded with a soft smile.

"Donorcycles!" Bones snapped.

Jim waved him off and got in the truck.

"Jim,"

"Get in the car, Bones!"

"Callie?"

"Sorry, dude. No help from me."

He sighed. "God help me with you both."



The trip to the funeral home was dead silent. They all searched for something to say, but no one could come up with anything.

Bones has been to a parent's funeral. He knew the pain and trauma the day would inevitably bring them both. He was glad he had Madeline at his dad's funeral, but he had been so wracked with guilt. Half *plastered*. He barely remembered it.

When they arrived and got out, Jim stopped Callie, picking up her hands in his. "We're going to get through this together, okay?" Words Bones would have expected to come from him.

She nodded tersely, swallowing thickly, before Jim let go of one hand and pulled her along inside with the other.

As he slipped his hand into hers, he noticed her stiffen just slightly, unsure of what she was supposed to do. So he pumped her hand a few times with a reassuring smile.

The bright holopic of Winona at the front of the room startled him. He wondered if Callie had had to pick it out, if Starfleet chose it, or if Winona had planned it herself.

It was a more recent version of her than he was used to, more wrinkles on her face and gray in her hair. She was looking over her shoulder at the camera smiling, something she rarely did around him. He couldn't help but think Callie had taken the photo. So that had to sting.

At the back end of the room, they walked into a sea of dress uniforms. It was mostly Starfleet officers Winona had served with, but the officers standing near the back all in a row stood out the most.

Spock, Uhura, Sulu, Chekov, and Scotty.

Jim gaped and nearly tripped at the sight. Bones grabbed under his arm to stead him, squeezing gently for a moment to ground him.

Jim looked over at him, "did you...?"

Bones shook his head, "nope. This was all them."

The crew started weaving through the crowd to get to Jim before he could be swarmed and quickly had him, Bones, and Callie cocooned and surrounded.

Callie looked terrified being in the middle of a circle of strangers all in the same uniform, so Jim gently put his arm around her shoulders and began introductions.

Nyota leaned in to hug them both, and he didn't miss Callie's hesitance.

"These are my... friends, Cal." Sometimes he still didn't believe he had any. "These are the people I work and live with."

He looked appraisingly over the crew and couldn't help the stunned, dorky smile that took over his face. "You guys didn't have to come,"

“Aye!” Scotty declared, slightly too loudly. “Of course we did. But tha’s no why we’re ‘ere,” he shook his head.

“We’re here because we want to be, Jim.” Sulu said.

“You may recall your attending my own mother’s rites,” Spock said, arms tucked behind his back. “At a time we did not share much familiarity with one another. I suggested-”

“Demanded...” Sulu looked at the ground.

“That we all attend to show our support.”

Jim gaped for just a moment. “You?”

Spock gave a singular nod and Jim was stunned into silence. “However,” he continued. “They all had already made arrangements to attend.”

To break the next awkward silence, Nyota reached out to take Callie’s hand. “No way am I “Lieutenant Uhura” to you, by the way,” she smiled. “I’m Nyota and I’ve been so excited to meet you.”

“Really?” Callie somewhat scoffed.

“Of course!” She smiled gently, squeezing her hand before letting go. “Girl, I live in a sea of testosterone. Having you with us is going to be a blast.”

Callie blushed ever so slightly in a way that said she didn’t believe her at all.

Keenser, M’Benga, and Christine rushed in suddenly, and the circle opened to let them in, but it opened too far.

One person grabbed Jim, another Callie, and they were both dragged off to accept condolences before introductions to Callie could happen.

There seemed to be different lines for each of them- Callie got the locals, the people who must have known Winona her entire life in Riverside. And Jim got the Starfleet representatives all giving the same monotone, scripted, “I’m sorry for your loss. Your mother was an exceptional officer.”

An exceptional officer.

No one, not even Winona’s friends hanging onto Callie, had anything better to say than that. She’d kept everyone in her life at arm’s length- even her children. No one had anything *personal* to say about the woman.

No comments about what a great mother or friend or neighbor she was. No one lamenting over how she lit up a room or had a recipe everyone loved or could make you laugh. None of the platitudes that normally come at a funeral came.

It was all only, ‘sorry for your loss’, ‘your mother was a great officer,’ ‘Winona was so special,’ but not a single specific thing could be found

to say.

Callie was struggling, possibly more than Jim, Bones observed. She was shaking like a leaf and it seemed like every person that talked to her made it worse.

He was worried about just how much more she could handle before she melted down or ran out. Although he did have a feeling that like Jim, she'd push herself far past her limits before she'd leave, then meltdown later. Because that anxious energy had to go somewhere.

In the final minutes leading up to the scheduled start time, there was a boisterous entrance made at the doors. Callie and Jim both paled as Frank bellowed his way in, brash and overconfident as he shook hands and smiled at people he knew well.

It was instantly clear the crowd was full of people he knew and liked, and it sickened Bones to his core. He'd looked him up before of course. He needed to know what the sack of crap looked like. But he never imagined a man who walked with his shoulders back and his head held high, like he had not a shame in the world.

A distressed whimper came from one of the kids, he couldn't tell which, possibly both, but there was no time for Frank to get to them before the speaker took to the podium, and he breathed a sigh of relief, because he had time to run plans for interference.

He barely heard a word of the funeral, it was all surface level, anyway. Winona's career- she'd trained in intelligence, that was new info. Her stepping away after having Callie. Her role as a mother and wife were glazed over, as was her sudden death. It was like the speaker had a word limit, and each word came out stilted.

There was nothing to say yet so many words to use.

Jim didn't cry, and that didn't surprise Bones. Jim had cried, privately. He'd been grieving Winona in a lot of ways for a long time. But her physical death was different. It *felt* different. It wasn't the sharp sting of yet another betrayal, but the dull ache of a deep loss, and Jim was feeling it.

What did surprise them both was *Callie* not shedding a tear. She sat stiff and formal, her legs crossed and hands folded in her lap, never once even sniffing. It concerned both men.

Once the funeral ended, the alpha crew said quick goodbyes before hurrying back to their duties, prepping to ship back out that next morning.

Jim turned to his sister quickly and asked in a hushed tone, "you want to stay or get out of here?" He knew the *proper* thing to do would be to wait for a receiving line, but he was more concerned about who would be in it to care about being rude.

"Go, please," she all but whimpered back, wincing at her tone.

Jim just nodded before sharing a look with Bones, grabbing Callie's hand, and heading for the door.

They were nearly home free when- "where do you think you're going?"

Jim didn't freeze, but he sure stiffened, and Callie did the same.

"It ain't right to run out on family," Frank snarled, breathing heavily from behind them.

Jim turned to face him, “we aren’t family.”

“Really, Jimmy? With all our history?”

“Especially with that,” he spat back.

Frank chuckled lowly, “history is what I wanna discuss with you two. The history of that house you live in.”

Callie was clearly feeling slightly safer with Jim by her side, because she rolled her eyes and moaned, “not this again...”

None of them saw the backhand coming.

But when Callie hit the dirt on all fours with a red mark already bright on her face, that’s when all hades broke loose.

Jim immediately squared up, but held back from actually throwing a punch, trying to keep it reigned in in front of Callie. She’d just been hit, she didn’t need to see more of it.

They screamed back and forth at each other, hurling insults and threats while Bones knelt down next to Callie, “hey, hey, it’s alright, sweetheart, I can fix anything he did,” he tried to soothe. But she flinched away from him, even when he hadn’t moved closer, hand clasped against her stinging cheek and eyes on the screaming men above her.

“You think you can just hit my sister? The person I’m responsible for?”

“Real good job you’re doin’ so far, lettin’ her mouth off like that. You’ll have a real carbon copy ‘a you on your hands,” he sneered.

“And thank *god* for that!”

“Oh you won’t feel that way long-”

“Actually maybe I’ll see just how easy it is to love a kid like me!” Jim screamed in Frank’s face before decidedly turning towards Callie and Bones. “Let’s-”

Then Frank made an idiotic choice and tried to grab Jim from behind.

Jim wasn’t the child he had been the last time such a grab had been attempted. He threw his elbow back and hit Frank clean in the nose, earning a cry of pain and an instant flow of blood.

He looked surprised at himself, and Bones wondered if that was the first time Jim had ever drawn blood from the man.

Callie was full on trembling by then, trying to wipe the gravel from her scraped hands and knees.

“Callie? You’re gonna make it worse, darlin’, why don’t you just-”

“Just take it.” Her voice rang out, clear but shaky.

Frank and Jim both looked at her and she shrugged, trying to look casual as she stood up. “Neither of us want that house, Jim. He can have it.”

Jim looked poised to argue, but stopped himself, giving a quick nod. He looked over his shoulder at his uncle, “we’ll be gone tomorrow morning. Take it.”

Jim got a few steps away and wrapped an arm around Callie’s wrist to pull her along when, “glad you made the right decision,” was spat out through a swelling nose.

Jim froze, before shaking his head and leading Callie to the car.

Bones motioned for Jim to put her in the backseat and climbed in after her, pulling his medical case out from where he’d stashed it.

She immediately eyed him warily, “why do you have all that?”

He scoffed, “anytime I’m goin anywhere with your brother, I travel with drugs and equipment. I learned the hard way one too many times. Most recently, we were at a dignitary dinner-”

“Don’t you dare tell her that story!” Jim gasped from the front, looking at Bones in the rear view, realizing what he was trying to do.

“Why didn’t you ask what was in it? Huh? One *simple* question woulda saved ya from anaphylaxis! It’s a cautionary tale!” He smirked.

“...in *what* ?” She couldn’t help but ask.

“Ah, well see, your brother here accepted a drink from a random-”

“I said *don’t* tell her that story!”

The banter was calming her down, he could tell. He waved his tricorder over her, and she jumped. “Easy, easy,” he muttered, “just making sure you didn’t crack anything when you hit the deck,” he smiled at her gently.

She didn’t return it. “I’m fine.” She said shortly, moving to buckle herself in, turning the injured side of her face away from him.

“I can fix your hands and knees really quickly with a dermal-”

“It’s fine.” She chirped.

He wasn’t sure if she felt awkward or if something more was at play. He had to try one last time, “you don’t have to be in pain is all.”

That got her to turn to him, curiosity on her face, an eyebrow raising.

He showed her the dermal regenerator, “cleans and heals all in one. Pretty painless too.”

Her gaze went between him and the device, suspiciously. “I’m still good.” She finally said.

He shrugged and pulled his equipment away from her, moving to scan Jim instead. “Let me know if you change your mind.”

He could feel her gawking at him, and he was hoping he’d made the right choice in not pushing the issue.

He could tell he did when she examined her hands gently and chewed her lip. He had her considering trusting him. And that was all he could ask for, for then.

Because the retching he heard from her bathroom when they finally got back to the house had him yearning to help the poor child.

When he met Jim’s eyes after she’d run off upstairs, he saw them flash with fury. “He touched her,” he hissed, face scrunched in fury. “That... he slapped her.”

“I know.”

Jim shook his head, “I wish I could beat the crap out of him, Bones. It scares me how much I want to hurt him,” his shoulders shook with fury.

“I know, kid. I know. I feel the same way.”

Jim took in his best friend’s white knuckles and clenched jaw, his barely concealed fury. “You’re angry too,” it came out as an observation.

“Of course I’m angry,” he breathed. “I watched an abuser hit a child right in front of me, then try to hit you! I listened to him run his mouth. I want to beat the crap out of him and then some!”

Jim took in a deep breath as his shoulders shook, “...should we?”

Bones shook his head quickly, “let’s not go that far.”

However...

He waited until the house was quiet... and did.

In the darkness that comes with 3am and Midwestern farmland, a figure slipped through the back door of an old farmhouse.

Another figure sat bathed in that darkness, comfortable in it.

Not because he'd ever been comfortable in that house, but because he knew who was sneaking in and why.

Jim commanded the lights on just as Bones started whisper-cursing at the door to shut up.

Jim stared at his best friend, the look of bemusement on his face poorly hidden. "There's no sneaking into this house, trust me..." He slid a beer by design at a certain speed down the counter. "Care for a drink after that?"

Jim had expertly slid the bottle so it would fall from the counter unless caught. So Bones only got out, "after what?" Before he realized a bottle was coming at him faster than he'd anticipated.

When he reached out to catch it, Jim got the confirmation he'd been waiting for. He caught it with his left hand. "What's wrong with your right hand there, buddy?" Jim asked casually, taking a sip of his own beer.

Bones took his right hand out from his jacket pocket and waved it at Jim. "Uh, nothing?"

"Mm," Jim hummed. "Why're your knuckles all red then?"

Bones looked down and smirked, remembering the all too satisfying punch he'd thrown shortly before. But he schooled his face before looking back at Jim and responding, "'s cold here in the sticks."

Jim was a master of communication and a master of manipulation. One of his tricks was to try and make things as awkward as possible to either end them or make a point. So he kept his eyes locked on his best friend's and waited.

"The whole 'making awkward silence' thing should be my trick as a psychologist, you know?"

Jim raised an eyebrow, and Bones relented, "wasn't like it was meant to be a secret." He went to the freezer and dug around for an ice pack to apply to his hand.

"Then why are you trying to sneak in?"

"Because it's late?"

Jim got up from his chair and stepped forward to examine his CMO's hand more closely. "He's not worth it, Bones," he shook his head as he lifted the ice pack and double checked the telltale redness.

Bones yanked his hand away and roughly grabbed the ice pack back. "Like hades he ain't," he all but spat. He turned to look Jim square in the eye. "Kid. I've heard a lot of stories from afar. Seen a lot of his handiwork. There was no way I was going to let him lay hands on you *or* your sister without responding in kind."

"Isn't that like fighting fire with fire?"

"No, that's sending a message to a man who only understands one language, in that language."

Jim placed both hands on the kitchen counter and hung his head.

“It was one clean hit which is so much less than that sack of crap deserves, but I think he got the message.”

“And what message is that?”

“Your days of hurting my kids are done.”

Jim looked up with a soft smile. “*Your* kids, huh?”

Bones clapped him on one shoulder, with his good hand, and smiled back. “Just some good ol’ Southern justice.”

Jim went from smiling to teary eyed as he turned to hug his friend fiercely. Bones returned the hug without question. “I’ve got ya, kid. I’ve got ya both.”

It was no question he was pseudo adopting another daughter, and he didn’t mind at all.

But there was something he needed to bring up. “Jim, I’ve been trying to get my hands on your ma’s medical records like you asked. I finally did, but there’s an issue.”

Jim’s eyebrows rose, “oh?”

“I don’t know how to say this, but the doctor whose name is on her chart...”

“Out with it, Bones.”

“I don’t know how it’s possible, but he doesn’t exist.”

“What do you mean he doesn’t exist?”

“I mean his name and license number are both invalid, I mean his Alma mater never heard of him, I mean-”

“He was a fraud...”

“It’s lookin’ that way.”

Jim sighed, placing both hands on the counter and hanging his head. “Is that why she died?”

Bones put a hand steadily between his shoulder blades. “No. The treatments she received were all correct. There’s just no cure for



xenopolycythemia.”

Jim shakily nodded, “so why would a fraudulent doctor attempt to treat an incurable disease?”

“...no repercussions.”

“Mom phrased it as ‘zero liability’,” Callie added in, making them both jump at her sudden presence. “Sorry...” she winced.

More like flinched.

“The stairs never creak when I use them so even when I think I’m being loud I’m not, but mom always said I thundered down them so... yeah I’m sorry.”

Jim waved her off, “no, I’m sorry, we probably woke you-“

“I was awake,” she shrugged. “And to maybe answer your question, mom’s doctor tried a bunch of experimental treatments with her permission. She knew there were risks, including death, but she tried them all anyway because she was... going to die anyway,” she shuddered. “Anyway. That was the question, right? Why she died so quickly?”

Both men realized she hadn’t heard the entirety of their conversation, she didn’t know the doctor was a fraud.

Bones stepped in, “I was actually trying to review her case and was struggling with the spelling of that doctor’s name, if you could help me out?”

She nodded, rubbing one eye absentmindedly. “Sure, I’ll send his bio to Jim...” She then eyes him suspiciously, “why do you need it?”

“Bones is a pathologist,” Jim answered quickly. “I asked him to double check everything that was done to make sure they did everything right.”

“Hmm,” she hummed, moving to make an exit. “Yeah, yeah dude never seemed to be too smart. His work could use a once over...”

“What do you mean by that?”

“He always had some new experiment up his sleeve that made no sense. Then they’d want more blood from me to test the “cure” on both my blood and mom’s.”

“Wait, on your blood too, why?”

She shrugged, “they always said to make sure it wouldn’t ever become active in me someday. They wanted to see if it could be prevented. They’d take my blood along with mom’s and give the ‘cure’ to both samples just to see if it’d activate in mine somehow.”

“How many samples did they take from you, kid?” Bones winced in sympathy.

She shrugged, “lost count.”

He didn't miss how bitterly she said that. He was beginning to get some insight as to why she didn't like doctors. Because what she was describing made no sense.

Either Winona had had crap doctors... or something nefarious was at the root of all the small things not adding up.

Things like her doctor not seeming to exist, them taking unnecessary samples from Callie, them trying unnecessary treatments on Winona and her still passing so quickly. Even her setting up a Starfleet funereal after hating them for years made no sense. Nothing was adding up.

And Bones was determined to get to the bottom of it.

He thought back on his own father's illness, how much pain he was in the entire time and how hard that is for a child to have to see. He was a full grown adult when his dad died and it still hurt like nothing he'd ever experienced. He couldn't imagine the complications of being a teenager and the parent being abusive brings to the situation. Nor did he want to. But he had to.

•

The next morning, they headed to the shipyard to use the new beam up point to the Enterprise. There was no sense in taking a transport back when the shipyard had a transporter, especially when it caused Bones so much anxiety flying. Not that he handled beam ups much better.

“Atoms scattered all over the galaxy...” he grumbled under his breath.

Then Callie sucked in one, “should I mention I've never done this before?”

Bones winced with guilt, “sorry. Just... not a fan.”

“Why...y?”

“Kinda just creeps me out.”

“...should it creep me out?”

“Oh my *goodness*, Bones, you're freaking her out!” Jim turned to her, “it's not that big of a deal, really. It's super quick. You know the science behind it, yeah?”

She nodded, following him up the platform.

He nodded back, before nodding at the transporter chief to beam them up.

Bones shuddered, and off they went, coming face to face with a grinning Scotty in only a moment.

Jim waved an arm at the room and motioned for Callie to descend the pad. “Welcome home. Welcome to the *Enterprise* .”

## Chapter 4

### Chapter Notes

This is honestly one of my favorite chapters, I reread it when my own medical anxiety kicks in and it helps so much. It was very therapeutic for me to write, it was like rewriting traumatic experiences and memories. My therapist would be proud, lol.

I picture the SNW version of Christine in AOS, so that is how I write her. Just not having a fling with Spock in this AU obviously.

“Aye, lassie! Welcome aboard! Ack- I mean- Captain on board!” The redheaded man in the redshirt behind the screen says loudly, and with a thick accent.

Jim laughs and waves him off, and Bones is grousing as he pats himself down like he’s making sure he was put back together correctly.

Jim steps off the padd and I follow as he talks congenially with... god, what was his name?

“See ya, Scotty!” Jim calls over his shoulder.

Scotty! Okay, I remember Scotty and Spock and Nyota. I know Bones and Jim. That’s five whole people whose names I remember!

...I’m pathetic.

As I follow Jim through the hallways, Bones having left for sickbay, I marvel at how shiny everything is.

The walls, the floors, all the lights. Everything reflects off each other and bounces light around.

People respectfully nod to Jim as he walks by, and he smiles and nods back casually. This is the first time I’m seeing how respected my brother is by everyone, and it’s pretty cool.

We take a turbo lift to a different looking hallway, one carpeted with darker color walls. The floors still ting under my feet though.

He takes me to a door with a nameplate that reads “Captain James T. Kirk” and punches in a code to enter.

We walk into a living space where the back wall is one giant window. The stars take my breath away and Jim smiles, “yeah, that’s my favorite part, too.”

I smile up at him and he shows me around the rooms.

There’s a living space with a sectional and two armchairs facing a holoscreen and bookshelves with real books. There’s a kitchenette on the back wall and a dining area to the left of it.

Jim shows me his room at the end of the hallway. It has a king bed sitting on the far wall, beneath the window, and pushed close to the right wall. An armchair and dresser sit on the left wall, and there’s a closet built into the right. A small desk sits on the wall across from his bed. Then takes me to mine.

Then he takes me to mine. It's pretty plain, which I'm fine with, it's just a bed and night table, a vanity off to one wall with a dresser next to it and a holoscreen on top of the dresser. There's an attached bathroom that's small but easy enough to move around in.

My boxes are stacked throughout the place, both in the living area and my room and it feels overwhelming in so many ways.

"I'd really love to give you a full ship tour right now," Jim says reluctantly. "But I have to get to the bridge and take us out. Will you be okay for a few hours? Maybe we can do lunch?"

I nod, give him a smile. "Yeah, that's totally fine! I'll be okay. I've got tons of unpacking to do." I'm trying to indicate I'm not going to leave a mess for him to help with, but he just nods and returns the smile before leaving.

After he leaves, I take slow steps through what is now my home.

I listen to the metal softly *tink* beneath my feet, the carpet muffling the noise.

I close my eyes for a moment, try to just listen. Listen to the sounds of the ship around me.

The soft whirling of air circulating. Almost causing a... hum? No, the hum was for sure there, but was coming from a different source...

I turn in a circle as I try to locate it. I spin and look up and down, my eyes locking on the floor. Was it coming from the floor?

Oh, I must have truly lost it...

I lower onto my hands and knees and press an ear to the floor.

Sure enough, there's a definite HUMMING coming from the floor.

It must be the engines? Or the bay...nay? Nay cells?

Ugh I'm hopeless and clueless...

But the humming... I like it.

My chest deflates ever so slightly, the pressure falling off my heart and lungs. I take in a deep breath and close my eyes, enjoying the soft rumble of the floor against my cheek.

Why is this so relaxing?

I snap myself out of it and get up, ready to start unpacking.

It happens idiotically, of course.

I'm being careless, incompetent, trying to carry too many things at once, and I roll my ankle, go down hard. That metal floor beneath the carpet makes a pleasant *tink* when you walk, but collapsing on it makes a pretty sickening sound. Especially when you drop an entire box of books and an armful of clothes, hangers and all.

The roll my ankle does is all too familiar.

*"Don't you dare walk away from me," my mother had warned lowly as I tried to escape a lecture.*

*She reached out to grab my wrist and I pulled free, not wanting to get screamed at for forgetting to do the laundry. "Mom, please, I'm sorry, I had homework, but-"*

*And that's when the shove came.*

*A shove to my shoulder, not terribly hard, I'd been shoved harder, but hard enough to make me lose my balance and tumble down the stairs.*

*My ankle rolled as I tried to catch myself, futilely, and I cried out in pain.*

*"Callie don't be so dramatic," my mother had rolled her eyes as she somewhat worriedly followed me down the stairs to where I was sitting on the floor, cradling my ankle.*

*My foot was far too loose, dangling slightly and my mother had sighed. "Great. You've sprained it. And just how do you think we are going to explain this? If we say you fell down the stairs, they're going to look at me for abuse! GOD, Calliope, how can you be so careless?!" She had screeched.*

*"Abuse?" I had echoed.*

*"With Jim's history of injuries, I can't possibly take you into the ER, they won't care because it's just a sprain and they'll think there's a pattern! You're just going to have to wrap it. I'm sure it's not broken, anyway. Stay off it and ice it, it'll be fine."*

*"But what if it is... broken?"*

*"Don't be ridiculous. You wouldn't be talking if it was broken. Don't be so dramatic..."*

My ankle hurt for six weeks, and I couldn't walk on it at all for 3. I can only hope that it's not that bad this time.

Issue is, I also went down on my bad shoulder.

*A yank on my arm for embarrassing her in the grocery store. A yank on my arm for saying the wrong thing in front of the wrong person. A yank on my arm for talking back. Yank, yank, yank, over the years. And finally a yank on my arm that separates it from its socket.*

*I screamed, hearing a pop and feeling a searing burst of pain throughout my entire back and arm.*

*"Would you quit screaming," my mother had scolded, "and let me see?"*

*As if I wanted her to see it, of all people. But I didn't have a choice.*

*She palpated it gently as I cried silent tears.*

*"Well," she finally said. "It's not fully dislocated. But lovely. We have to go to the emergency department." She shook her head. "If you weren't always chasing after horses on the farm because you left the stupid gate open, this wouldn't have happened. You weakened your shoulder. This is your own fault."*

My ears are ringing when I come out of the memory, and the room tilts around me as my face contorts with pain. Sometimes I wonder if I'm hypermobile, or if I truly did weaken my joints working on the horse farm during summers.

I hiss as I remove the combat boot on my right ankle, wincing at the already-swollen joint making it difficult to get everything off.

Part of me wonders if the bad right shoulder has made my right ankle susceptible to becoming 'bad' as well.

*My ankle had been bothering me, I rolled it at school in gym class and was moving a bit too slow for my mom on the way in the house after she had to pick me up because the school noticed I couldn't walk.*

*She placed a hand on my upper back and pushed, trying to get me in the house faster.*

*I stepped on my ankle too hard and screamed, before it went out from under me and I slammed into the kitchen table with my ribcage.*

*"Jesus Christ, Calliope... I was just trying to get you to quit lollygagging."*

*I slid down to the floor, holding my ribs where I had fallen into the table, gasping for breath. "I... I hit my ribs really hard," I gasped.*

*She had rolled her eyes, "you just knocked the wind out of yourself. And probably made your ankle worse by throwing yourself to the ground."*

*"I didn't-"*

*The look of fire and rage in her eyes shut me up. I was already on the floor and am genuinely worried she might kick me, although I'm not entirely sure where that fear came from as she'd never done that. Yet. "What? You want to go sit in the emergency room? Where they will just leave you for hours to only give you the same painkillers we have here? Doctors won't care, Calliope. Just suck it up and get off the floor."*

*My ribs hurt for months upon months and my mom kept telling me they were bruised and I just needed to ice them more. It didn't matter that it hurt to breathe and I couldn't carry my backpack to school.*

I roll my shoulder back after I get my sock off, again hissing at that pain, but less so.

I'm used to it by now.

*"Why are you always saying doctors are going to accuse you of something? This was me tripping over my own two feet at school, trying to find my newest class."*

*“Why? Because I wouldn’t buy you the bookbag you wanted? So you did this on purpose? No, we aren’t going to the doctor because you were careless. They’ll see the previous sprains and find it suspicious. You haven’t been abused, Callie, you’re just a clutz. Let’s not give anyone any reason to think otherwise. Put some ice on it and get to your homework.”*

I prod at my ankle, only feeling swelling. Nothing feels *overly* loose.

Okay... okay, I can deal with this.

Ice first.

But then I remember Bones’ words in the kitchen the first night I met him. *“ You sprain your ankle, but you’re gonna have no idea how to best wrap it so it handles the artificial gravity.”*

Well... I’ll figure it out. It can’t be that complicated.

•

An alarm sounded on Bones’ padd. An alarm he had to use Jim’s academy hyperfixation of coding to draw back on to design.

An alarm he’d still needed Scotty’s help to install correctly.

An alarm Scotty knew to not ask questions about, but still managed to wholly understand why it was needed.

*\* ice pack replicated in the Captain’s Quarters. \**

Well crap..

Except now...

Crap.

Now he had to figure out which Kirk it was that replicated anything flagged...

He knew Jim was in meetings all day.

Which only left the kid.

Well.

The other one.



•

I jig rig a replicated ice pack to my ankle, circle my shoulder a few times, and push on.

It's not like I brought much. I don't have much. I pull a muscle in my back but I manage to at least get all the crates into my bedroom so Jim isn't stuck looking at them.

Every fiber in my body is screaming at me to at least sit down, but my mind objects vehemently. I can't leave any sort of mess!

I'm mostly done putting my clothes in the closet when I hear chiming.

Figuring it's some sort of 'prepare for launch' chime, and since my padd isn't showing any alerts, I ignore it.

But it dings again. And again. And not in a steady repeating way a chime would sound.

So I follow it to the front door. Issue is, trying to remember which button Jim said unlocked the door...

I whip the ice pack off my ankle and chuck it into the kitchen sink, flawless follow through and a swish into the sink.

I figure out the door and it whips open, making me jump, bringing me face to face with... Scotty.

"I was startin' to worry about ya, little lass!" He says, somehow both merrily and worriedly, lines creasing around his blue-grey eyes.

"I-I- I forgot what button opens the door," I stammer in explanation, unconsciously grabbing at my throbbing shoulder. "Before that, I thought the doorbell was, a, like... launching... taking off type... chime...?" I shrug sheepishly. "Sorry..." I chew my lip and begin to wring my hands.

Nyota walks up then, smiling at us both, holding a large bowl in both hands.

It's then that I notice Scotty has a big box in his arms.

"We wanted to bring you guys dinner," Nyota explains with a soft smile when she's close enough. She's out of uniform, wearing black leggings and a baggy sweater loosely hanging off one shoulder. Her hair is still up, but her face is soft. "...didn't think you guys would want to have to go to the mess or pick something out."

She holds out the bowl to me and I tentatively take it.

"Aye," Scotty affirms, holding his box a little higher. "I've brought yeez the all finest bevy and pop I could muster."

"Scot-" Nyota starts.

“There’s non-alcoholic drinks too!” He shakes his head at her. “ye dinnae think Pasha got yon brandy off me? You would‘ nae catch me getting involved wi’ that!” He starts walking into our quarters and talking to himself at the same time. “And that’s some cheek you calling me a bad influence! You want tae watch that man of yours filling Pasha’s heed with stuff about bombs!”

I step out of the way and try not to buckle as my ankle threatens to give.

Nyota gasps and follows Scotty quickly. “Spock taught him to do *what*?”

Wait, Spock is her boyfriend?

I’m watching the conversation go back and forth like a tennis match freely happening while I am still trying to process it all.

Then the door chimes again. I quickly go to answer, and it’s two guys I met at the funeral, but both dressed in yellow like Jim. “...hiii...” I glance between them.

“We brought food!” The darker haired man says. He smiles at me, “Hikaru, if you forgot. And this is Pavel.”

I nod, “well... come in, Hikaru and Pavel.”

Then that weird little guy from the funeral walks up to the doorway, yells at Scotty in another language, before tossing something at him and leaving.

As I duck out of the way, Pavel and Hikaru enter our quarters, and they’re also both carrying food. What the little dude threw at Scotty looks like food.

Nyota glances over at me, “Callie, where’s all your boxes?”

I shrug and fold in on myself a bit, hiding the wince of pain at moving my shoulder. “I got them out of the way.”

She runs a finger along the table next to the couch. “Have you been cleaning, too?” She asks almost incredulously.

Again, I shrug. “I-it was a bit... dusty, in here and I just wanted to... be useful. I mean, I was already cleaning up my stuff so... why not?”

The look she flashes me is almost troubled, but I barely see it as the door whips open behind me and I turn to see Jim and Spock striding in, Jim laughing at something and Spock stoically trying to hide his intrigue.

Jim’s eyes light up when he sees me and he bounces over to- to kiss the top of my head?

**What?**

I awkwardly pat him back as he glances around the room. “Uh, hi?” He says to everyone, who all chuckle in return.

Nyota passes around cups and brings me one as well, so I can only assume it's non alcoholic.

Spock somewhat awkwardly clears his throat. "I believe I am to be blamed for this, Cap- Jim," he harshly corrects himself. "Nyota was with me when I received the communication that you... were... unable to attend the memorial dinner for your mother,"

And I don't miss Jim's cringe at the word mother.

"...And she believed it prudent to... "throw you" one. Although I must admit that is an idiom I continue to-"

"Alright, I'm here..." Bones grumbles, letting himself in, dish in one hand and a black bag in the other, a medical insignia printed on the side. Seriously? Does he need to make sure everyone always knows he's a doctor?. "Y'all may replicate stuff but lord knows mama's sweet-"

"Oy!" "Hey!" "Privet!" A cacophony of objections in multiple languages get hurled at Bones who good naturedly puts his hands up with a smile.

Bones' dish joins the others on the table and I'm surprised to see an array of patterns. Spock's bowl is clearly stone engraved with Vulcan writing. Nyota's is a stunning wooden bowl with an African pattern.

I'm not sure why it surprises me so much that everyone manages to keep a sense of self in a job like this. Maybe it's the uniforms... and why is Nyota the only one out of uniform?

"Quit tryin' to take the blame, Spock," Bones admonishes. He looks straight at Jim. "Was me, kid. Sometimes we gotta be reminded who our true family is." He smirked and Jim smacked him lovingly on the shoulder.

I feel Bones' eye flit over to me periodically. The heck is up with this guy? I'm surely hiding my limp well enough... As everyone starts to naturally mingle and snack, I see Bones put a hand on Jim's shoulder and lean forward to quietly tell him something.

I can't help but wonder what.

•

"Eat for me a bit, kid, okay? Please?"

Jim nodded, and no one but Bones could see the shakiness to it. The kid always had trouble eating when stressed. Sure, he'd gone back to the bridge, finished his shift, but Len knew just by the look of him that his brain still wasn't quite right.

After he got Jim eating, he looked around, trying to figure out where in the heck all Callie's stuff went, and why the place smelled more sanitary than his sickbay.

He spotted a bottle of cleaner sitting out, and it clicked for him. She had the same nervous tick Jim did of always needing to be useful, always wanting to clean messes that didn't belong to him. Now her. He let his eyes close but stifled his sigh.

He opened his eyes to glance over at her; head tipped to stare into her cup, fingers dancing around the edge of it, looking like a scared bird

ready for slaughter. His clinical eye couldn't help but roam.

She was thin. Way too thin. Her long hair wasn't quite brittle, but he was genuinely worried about malnourishment.

She was pale, but he knew it was winter in Iowa. Obviously she'd spent a lot of time inside the hospital but it still tugged at his heart that she didn't spend any time out in the sun. He loved to see Jim smile in the sun, freckles popping through their usually hidden spots as it warmed his face. But Callie looked so much like a ghost he made a mental note to pay attention to her vitamin D levels.

She was barely 16, so mostly done growing, probably. She definitely wasn't much taller than 5'1, compared to Jim's "6' feet even". So maybe she still had a growth spurt left. Plus, if she *was* malnourished...

And the heck had she replicated the ice pack for?

His eyes assessed deeper, pondering what she could be hiding.

As she turned to speak to Nyota, he could see her balance waver.

There it was.

He couldn't help but glance over at Jim, make sure he was still eating. When he saw that he was, as well as smiling and laughing with Hikaru, he looked back to Callie absentmindedly.

Much like Jim she kept herself clean and tidy, had all her teeth from what he could tell, unlike Jim. Tarsus had taken a toll on his bones and teeth during a very crucial time in his growth.

She frequently looked like she was taking short almost gasping breaths, and he didn't know if he should be worried about asthma or anxiety.

Well. He knew.

Her posture went rigid as Uhura place a gentle hand on her arm. He hoped maybe a feminine touch would calm the kid down...

•

"Hey," a kind, warm voice says gently to me.

I jump as Nyota places her hand on my upper arm and I try to hide it, along with my burning ankle, with a smile, repeating her greeting back.

"How are you doing?" She asks with a smile.

I nod, "good, yeah, good. Thanks..." I muster up the most sincere smile that I can, but I know it falls flat.

The smile she returns is similar. She drops her hand from my arm to squeeze my hand. "But how are you *doing*?" She asks softly.

When I blubber, she smirks softly. “One of the 72 languages I happen to be an expert and am fluent in is body language,” she squeezes my hand once more before letting it go. “Can I come by and help you unpack tomorrow?”

I try to stop blubbering and answer. “Oh, I’m already unpacked,” I wave a hand, glance around. “I-I mean, for the most part. I got everything out of here I think which is the most important...”

She nods. “Alright, well, on your padd you have access to the whole ship’s roster, so just comm me if you need anything, even if just some directions around this massive thing,” she giggles a bit and I try to at least smile back.

“Ey!” Scotty chirps. “That better not be an insult against this lovely lady.”

Nyota smiles at him, smacks his arm playfully. “Never!”

They banter back and forth and I notice that everyone is leaving?

They were here barely a half hour?

Strange. In Iowa, ~~the Midwest~~ having people over is at least a 4 hour commitment.

Longer when they insist on helping you clean up.

Very quickly it’s just me, Jim, and Bones- who seems weirdly hesitant to leave- left.

Everyone left their bowls and containers, and it’s then that I realize I didn’t eat anything.

Jim and Bones are talking quietly near the door, so I move further away and head towards the table to pick at the food.

My stomach churns with acid as I realize I’ve not eaten a single thing today. And none of this looks exactly appetizing. Not for any bad reason, just because none of it is my safe or comfort foods.

I’m mesmerized once I realize we’re moving and the stars are whizzing by. I hadn’t realized we left.

Something punches me in my stomach, an ache, a bout of anxiety about leaving the only home I’ve known.

But the stars... They’re calming. In a way I can’t explain.

I scold myself for being silly. Ridiculous. Stars? Calming? Pathetic. I turn away from the window and yelp when I find Jim beside me.

My right hand flies to my chest to try and calm my racing heart. “You move like a ninja,” I breathe.

Jim snorts. "Sorry. You get any food?"

I glance back at the table. "...no, I'm not hungry."

Jim hesitates, stops himself from saying something.

"Spit it out." I deadpan.

"Did... have you eaten at all today?"

I bristle. "Probably," I shrug. "I've been busy." I turn to the table and start gathering up dishes to wash. "Do you have Tupperware?" I call over my shoulder as I take things to the sink.

•

"Did she eat anything?" Bones asked Jim in a hushed tone as the last few people left.

Jim glanced over at Callie, smiling at Uhura as she left with Spock. He watched the smile drop right off her face as soon as Uhura's back was turned. He sighed. "I don't think so."

"You done with meetings?"

Jim nodded, rolled his eyes. "Dear god I hope so..."

"Listen, kid..." he tried not to sigh, glancing over at Callie again. "I think she's hidin' a sprained ankle. She's favoring one side, all the way up to her shoulder and I'm worried. But she's as skittish as you are. Also not sure if it happened while moving, Frank smacking her around, or somethin' else. What do you suggest here?" He wanted- needed- Jim to understand the reigns were in his hands.

Jim shot a look at Callie as well, before looking back to his best friend. "Let me see what I can do."

Len was in a funny spot as it was. Normally, he'd plop down on the kid's couch and stay a while. But with Callie... he didn't want to intrude. But he could also sense how nervous Jim was around her.

So he did what felt natural and sat on the couch and watched as Jim approached his sister.

Her jump when she noticed him was darn near heartbreaking. There were certain things she hid better than Jim, but for the most part, because of Jim, he noticed all the little things she tried to hide.

She was all of a sudden gathering up plates and asking about Tupperware.

Jim threw her a nervous glance as he followed his little sister, trying to dissuade her from doing any more cleaning.

“Why don’t you sit down a while, Cal? You’ve been hustling around all day.”

She scoffed, “I’d hardly call cleaning up my own mess *hustling*, Jim.”

Jim looked to Len for help. “Oh, actually,” he piped up, grabbing a padd he’d left on the side table and waving it at Callie. “This is for you, some forms that medical needs filled out since you’re living onboard.”

She froze, pivoted to face him, and her eyes hardened.

He watched her jaw set as she gently set down the plates, Jim taking her place to put the food away. And by “put it away”, he meant ‘make Callie a plate and then put it all away.’

She walked over and gently took the padd, activating the screen immediately, scrolling through the forms.

They were all standard forms. Albeit, many years worth. By not going through the academy to live on a starship, she’d missed quite a litany of not only exams and work-ups like blood tests, but mental/psychological/physicality assessments, vaccines, and lord knows the quality of care Riverside had. Bones had seen way too many medical records out of Riverside General that were pathetic, to put it mildly.

All he knew about the kid medically for sure was that she was a test-tube baby. Winona and Geroge had had trouble conceiving, and all their kids were a result of IVF. Instead of getting rid of the last embryo when Geroge died, Winona had decided to use it when it neared its expiration. For what reason, he couldn’t understand for the life of him.

He’d put a request in for Callie’s medical records, but he wasn’t sure if Starfleet had any. That was part of the reason he needed the forms filled out.

“Also,” Len reached into his pocket, “your meal card.” He said, handing it over to a confused Callie.

She turned it over and examined both sides, utterly confused. “What... do I...” She looked up at him with a face scrunched in confusion that looked way too much like Jim. “What is this?”

He stifled a chuckle. “Meal card. Gets you access to food. Medical has to issue them.”

“Whyyy?”

“Because some people have restrictions whether it be allergies,” he pointedly looked at Jim. “Cultural, or dietary-slash-health reasons. So we mark those off on their cards as no-goes. It’s also a way to monitor the health of the crew.”

She turned the card over suspiciously. “And on mine...?”

He shrugged. “Just gave you a guest one for now. We will program it as needed.”

She uncomfortably set it on the couch beside her and turned her attention back to the medical padd.

He wanted to bring up her ankle, he tried, even, before Jim cut him off from across the room.

“Movie, Bones?”

They all settled in for a movie, Callie nervously filling out the medical info.

He could only hope she'd be honest on the forms.

•

I wake up with a *searing* pain in my ankle.

My shoulder also is on fire, but manageable, considering.

I whip off the covers to black and blue bruises all over my heel and ankle, blossoming down to my toes.

Oh boy.

This... this might need more than an ice pack.

It might need wrapped by someone who understands artificial gravity.

Should I... tell Jim? Go to medbay? What'sssss... what's proper here?

I'm not even sure I can *walk* on the darn thing, and trying to swing my legs out of bed confirms it's mega painful.

But it's not like I'm going to let someone carry me or put me in a wheelchair. Crutches will be humiliating enough. So I hop around the room- it's late enough that I assume Jim is up and gone- guiltily feeling like I should have been up when he was- and get showered and dressed.

My foot jostles with every hop, sending pain up my leg and somehow into my teeth.

Side note- this shower confuses the heck out of me. I think mine might be broken? I pressed sonic, thinking it'd be a blasting wash, but instead of water, everything in the stall started shaking until I turned it off.

When I get dressed, I can't even properly get a sock onto my foot and I sigh with frustration, blowing hair out of my face.

Looks like I'm definitely going to need help. A scan, at least, to see if it's broken. And dear lord hopefully some painkillers. Ibuprofen. Anything.

It's going on 10am, so I'm hoping the corridors are empty, and that everyone else is on duty.



I pull up a map of the ship to figure out where medbay is.

As I have my padd out, I debate messaging Jim, and decide against it. Why does he need to know I'm an incompetent idiot who can't walk without tripping over her own feet?

It's a longer way away than I had hoped for. But I don't exactly have any other options here.

I suck in a breath, and limp slowlyyyy to the medbay.

The doors whoosh open to a surprisingly empty space.

A lady with wavy white-blonde hair cut sharply at her chin looks up at me. She's standing behind some sort of front desk/nurses station looking thing, wearing a white jumpsuit. She smiles gently, "hi, sweetheart, need any help?"

I wring my hands and limp in, trying to get my practiced words out.

I barely make a step before her brow furrows and she rushes around the desk over to me.

"I, uhm, I fell and I think I may have sprained my ankle, it's swollen and bruised and hurts." There. Concise. To the point. Emotionless. Perfect.

She looks down at my feet. "Oh, I'm so sorry," she breathes, "do you want some help over to an exam table?"

*Exam table.*

Ew.

"Uhhh..." I trail off, panic coming over me, as I suddenly *really* regret coming down here. It feels like my chest collapses and a bucket of cold water is dumped over my head, and I subconsciously take a step back. "Y'know what, I- I-

She reaches forward so slowly and gently that I don't flinch away or even jump when her hand lands on my upper arm. "What if we just sit at my computer? It's a lot closer," she offers with a cock of her head.

I know- *know* - that she's just placating me. But I nod and follow her anyway.

She keeps a hand on me but I don't let her take any of my weight, still bearing the pain with each step.

"I'm Christine, by the way," she says offhandedly. "'Nurse Chapel', technically," she says with a scrunched up grimace. "But I don't care much for formalities."

I hum in response. Isn't Starfleet all about formalities?

I realize I'm supposed to say something now. "Callie," I say as clearly as I can, fighting my urge to mumble.

"I guessed as much," Christine says with a smile as she sits me down. "We didn't get to talk at the funeral, but I was there." She pulls up another chair before unceremoniously picking up a waste bin, turning it upside down, and telling me to prop my foot on it underneath the desk.

Huh.

Interesting.

"Has anyone shown you around the computer system yet?" She asks.

I jostle my head no, confused at her question. What does this have to do with my ankle?

"Figures. Men always forget the small details. Okay, so..."

She spends the next 20 minutes explaining the computer to me. What it can and can't do, what I can ask it, (turns out it could have guided me here.) and how to work it all.

I relax little by little, more each time she makes me laugh with her. She has a pretty, lilting laugh that draws you into laughing with her.

I haven't noticed how much I've relaxed until she sighs and says she's rambled enough before turning her chair to face me. "So what happened to the ankle?" She asks, cocking her head to look under the desk at it.

I stiffen. My chest starts to ache. My hands start to shake.

"And good lord, you could have taken your boot off," she says, before looking at me with an eyebrow raised. I nod permission and she reaches forward to gently begin tugging it off.

"It's a lot less-" I try to lie before I'm cut off by a hiss of pure pain.

"Sorry, sweetheart..." she mutters as she pulls my foot into her lap. "Can I take your sock off?" She asks.

I nod, grateful I've kept up with moisturizing and exfoliating my heels.

"Can I press around super gently?" She asks.

Asks.

Asks? She keeps asking permission for things?

Weird.

I nod and she probes so gently along the joint that I barely feel anything. “We should scan to be sure, but I don’t have a feeling anything is broken. Did you hear and feel anything crack?”

I close my eyes as my stomach rolls. “More of a pop,” I admit.

She hums and nods, examining the bruising that is continuing to blossom and spread. “How did this happen?” She asks, eyes still down.

It makes it easier to answer, not having to see any annoyance in her eyes when I tell her how stupid I was. “I... tripped carrying a box of clothes...” I get out. “It was just me being stupid and not watching what I was doing-”

“Oh, so you did this on purpose?” She snorts.

“What?” I jolt.

She looks up, blue eyes bright. “You sound like you did this on purpose, calling yourself stupid,” she shakes her head. “Accidents happen, and that doesn’t make you stupid. Doesn’t make anyone stupid. We have enough accidents around here to realize that. In all honesty I think the artificial gravity screws with us all.”

I can’t find anything to say to that. She’s... This lady is much different than any nurse I’ve even interacted with. Much nicer. It’s almost making me suspicious.

The doors to Medbay whoosh open and Bones walks in, but doesn’t immediately look at me or Christine.

His brow furrows as he watches something happening across the room. His furrowed brow turns into a scowl and as yells, “**hey**,” and storms toward a biobed.

Christine leans around the computer screen to watch as well, confusion and concern written on her face. Maybe she was more focused on me than whatever is going on over there?

“Nurse Huntley,” Bones’ voice rings out sharply as he speaks to the nurse attending to a crewman dressed in a red shirt and black pants.

The crewman has a bloodied and seemingly burnt forearm, and the nurse had been trying to wrap it.

“Is there a reason no privacy curtain or screen is up?” Bones asks levelly.

The nurse glances up and chuckles, “we’re all fully dressed here, doc, just putting a wrap on the burn.”

The guy in red ducks his head, cheeks flushing in embarrassment, avoiding Bones concerned but still piercing and intense gaze.

“Uh-huh,” he says unconvinced. “And why are we wrapping a burn instead of running regen?” He asks as he crosses his arms. “And the way this crewman is shaking,” -I hadn’t been able to see that from this far away- “I’d wager he’s had no painkillers?”

“Well, I’ve had burns like this, the painkillers can’t much help,” -even though I’m far I can see Bones’ face turn beet red at that more so than any other statement and I wonder why. “At this stage a regen cycle will take so long-”

“And your shift is scheduled to end in 10 minutes, right?” Bones snaps.

“Excuse me?” The nurse straightens.

“Is your shift ending the reason you’re needlessly leaving one of *my* patients in pain?”

The nurse’s face flashes with anger, before he begins to blubber in fear. “I-”

“And is that *also* the reason you didn’t feel it *necessary* to protect your patient’s privacy by engaging a privacy screen?”

“No-”

“Well, I’m very interested to hear your excuses, *Lieutenant*, but I have a patient here clearly in pain and in need of actual medical care so you’re excused.” Bones pauses long enough to cock his head and adds, “Indefinitely.”

The nurse pales but doesn’t argue. Nodding succinctly before removing his gloves and rushing out.

Bones’ eyes follow him out and he begins to call, “Chris, can you-” before his eyes finally land on me and Christine.

He abruptly stops, confusion flickering over his features, before talking softly with the crewman and drawing a privacy curtain.

A few moments later, he walks out and over to us.

“Chris, can we call someone to see to that burn over there? Someone *competent* ?” He sighs. “Tell whoever it is painkillers were *properly* administered... By me...” He rubs his forehead.

Christine nods, before making one final click on her screen and replying, “already done.”

“Thanks, he nods, before his eyes flick to me before back to Christine. “What goin’ on?” He tries to ask casually.

“We’ve got a sprain, most likely.” Christine says as she looks up at him.

“Ah,” he hums, walking around the desk to stand next to Christine, looking down at my ankle in her lap. He winces once he gets a good view.

He hisses in sympathy- *sympathy* ? And kneels down so he’s a bit lower than Christine’s eyeline.

His first question surprises me.

Eyes- and not hands- roam over my ankle, as he asks, "scale of 1-10, how's the pain?"

"Uhm..." I fight my mouth's natural urge to stammer. My mom hated that. Always said it was attention seeking. "It's better than it was." I finally settle on.

Why isn't he poking at my ankle? Why isn't he annoyedly asking how this happened? Why does he *care* if I'm in pain?

Christine speaks before Bones can, leaning forward to tuck some hair behind my ear. "Not what he asked, sweetheart," she says as she gently cups my cheek for only a millisecond after tucking my hair. She says it in the gentlest and kindest way I could have ever thought possible.

My cheeks heat. "...Erm... 7?"

They both hiss in sympathy with a wince.

"How about something for that pain, to start?" Bones speaks.

I try not to nod too eagerly. "Yes, please."

"Do you mind if Chris and I switch places so she can grab the meds and I can take a look at this?" He nods to my ankle, after keeping his eyes on me.

I nod.

"Are you sure?" He presses.

"Yes," I say simply.

They jostle my ankle as little as possible as they swap spots and Christine runs off to fetch meds.

My cheeks heat again at the thought of my foot bouncing between practical stranger's laps. This is so humiliating...

Keeping one hand warmly and gently anchoring my heel, Bones reaches back on the desk for a large padd. It's clear until he presses it, then it comes to life with blue letters and numbers and buttons.

I watch in silent fascination as he waves it over my foot and ankle, and it illuminates my bones.

"No breaks," he announces, after zooming in a few different spots. Then he changes it to a screen to scan what looks like muscles, ligaments, and tendons. "But definitely a sprain. Nothing completely torn, but very close to it. We can run some regenerative treatments, but you'll definitely need to stay off it for a couple days." His hand still on my foot strokes my heel a couple of times lightly, probably sympathizing with the thought of an extended period of disuse.

My heart sinks. I guess it's not as bad as weeks or anything, but-

“You didn’t tell Jim about this, did you?”

I’m startled. “What?”

He glances up briefly. “I just left the bridge without him. If he knew you were hurt he’d be down here.”

“Yeah, you’re right, I didn’t tell him.” I shrug, feigning nonchalance.

“Why not?”

“Because he’s got more important things to be doing?” Isn’t this obvious?

“Your health isn’t unimportant.”

“Me tripping over my own two feet is *very* unimportant.”

I’m getting frustrated and my hatred of doctors is starting to butt in.

I think my guard had fallen slightly when I saw him kick that nurse out.

“I’m doing my best to keep out of his way, in as many ways as possible,” I explain. “I just wanted to get some ibuprofen, some sports wraps, and go back to unpacking my crap.”

I see him stifle a sigh and that makes me have to stifle one of my own.

“If that’s what you really want, that’s fine.” He says in a way I later realize to be *gentle* .

I startle again. Is he being sarcastic? Trying to force me into begging for help? What’s his angle? What’s-

“I’d rather you *let me* heal the ligament, of course, but if you’d rather stay off it for about 4 weeks, that’s up to you.”

The way he says it is... gentle? Sincere? I’m not quite sure, but it seems almost believable.

He would really let me decide?

My brain is screaming to interpret it as a threat, as if to say if I don’t shut up and do what *he* wants, he will leave me in pain for weeks just to have fun.

“I won’t decide for you,” he continues. “But I can guarantee you if you take the slower route, Jim’ll hover the entire time. I know from experience...” The last line is grumbled.

I sigh smally. "I'd rather just fix it as quickly as it can be."

He nods. Then he glances around. "How the heck'd you get down here?" He doesn't wait for an answer, "you walked, didn't you? Jesus..."

"Why?" I blurt.

It's his turn to startle. "Why was it not the best option you had to walk on an ankle you thought might be broken?" He says with a very straight face.

"But it's not..."

"Not the point, kiddo," he says gently.

"It was fine."

"Also not the point."

"So what *is* the point?"

"You can ask for help, y'know. To unpack, to *not walk on a damaged joint*."

Christine comes back with a hypo, but Bones holds a hand up to stop her. "Wait a sec," he looks at me. "While you're here, can we give you all the vaccinations required for living aboard? The pain meds goin' in first will make it a *lot* easier on ya."

I consider, thinking of the fact I'm going to be down for at least a day with my ankle. But how long will I be sick from the vaccines for? Maybe being down for both at once would be easier...

I nearly shake myself from my thoughts as I realize I've *been allowed* to get lost in them.

I look up and nod, "yeah, why not." I try to shrug, but I think it comes out a bit one sided, shoulder aching.

"Do you have any questions?"

That stirs me to meet his eyes.

Questions?

"Questions?" I hear myself ask quietly.

I get a soft smile in return. "I'm asking you now because the pain meds will make you a bit sleepy and that's not a time to get informed consent and I wouldn't just give you anything without it. If you just want to say no, that's fine. If you have questions, that's fine. That's why we are here."

He pauses and I don't have any words within me.

"Sometimes it helps if we explain and then you have specific things to question, can we do that?"

I nod, feeling idiotic, and feel a gentle squeeze on my foot as Bones begins to explain all the different things I have to be vaccinated against. He also explains *why*. He explains side effects and why he recommends mixing certain ones to make everything the most tolerable as possible.

Between the gentle explanations and the firm grasp on my foot that is somehow stabilizing the joint and easing the pain nearly makes me cry with happiness.

But that would be stupid.

I agree to the vaccines, painkillers, and regen, and Bones answers, "Okay, let's do it."

Christine waves the hypo at me, asking permission one last time, even though I already gave it. I nod and she presses it to my neck, and as soon as I feel the coolness go in, the pain starts to recede to a warm, dull, and half numb bliss.

I reach up to rub the spot but Christine grabs my hand before I can rub properly. "Don't rub it, makes it worse," she stage whispers with a smile, before kneeling next to me. "Can I push this wheely chair over to a bed so we can use a stable surface to run a regeneration cycle on your ankle?"

Suddenly feeling bleary, I nod, and barely register the trip over, until I'm being asked if I need help up.

Up? Up where?

Oh. The biobed. Okay. Up.

My good foot doesn't wanna work to get me out of my chair.

"Can I help?" I'm being asked again.

I'm looking at my hands, a bit out of it, just a little bit, trying to figure out why they can't help. "My hands broke." I blurt.

I hear a snort of barely contained laughter, and it makes me giggle, too. Even though I have no idea what's so funny.

"Okay, I don't think you're quite with us anymore, darlin'..." I hear, before feeling myself being lifted up from under my arms and gently placed on the softer than it looks bed.

I poke it.

"Soft."



“Yes, it’s soft, sweetheart.” That’s Christine again.

I like her. She’s nice to me. Not many people are nice to me. Like my mom’s nurses. They weren’t nice like Christine. They were mean whenever I’d ask for something. Scowl, roll their eyes, flat out ignore the call light for an hour, while my mom was in so much pain. Poor mom. My mom. She died. She’s dead. That’s sad. I don’t want to think about that. But-

“My mom’s bed was hard...” I blurt, working hard not to slur. “And cold...” I continue.

I’ve been swept to sit all the way on the bed, feet up, but my back is supported by the bed.

“And she was always cold,” I somewhat-slur. “I got yelled at for trying to get blankets by the staff, and yelled at by her for not getting blankets...”

Then my ankle starts to *burn* a bit.

“We’ll talk later. If you’re tired, take a nap for a while.”

“Not tired,” I pout petulantly. “Ankle burns too much to sleep.”

I feel air *whoosh* around me as people move around.

There’s the twirling sound of a medical tricorder and discussions of medications.

“Mmm, it doesn’t hurt,” I object, not wanting to be a bother. “Just burns.”

A hand cups my face, “Callie, can you look at me, please?”

I struggle to open eyes I hadn’t even realized I’d closed to look into a set of hazel ones.

“You shouldn’t be feeling any discomfort whatsoever. If you are, that means something is wrong-”

“Don’t wanna annoy you...” I say, closing my eyes.

“Open them baby blues again,”

I comply.

“You will *never* annoy me if something is wrong, okay? Never.”

“Mmm...” I hum, closing my eyes again, not believing him at all.

“Numbing cream, boss?”

“Yeah, and if that doesn’t work, we can inject either Parlitl, or Ortzan. If **those** don’t work, we can do a nerve block. There’s something not right here for her to be this dosed and still feel pain.”

“J’st whining...” I slur before fully dropping off.

“Jim’s gonna be off for lunch in an hour. I’ll tell him to meet me here if she’s still this out of it.”

“Are we going to talk about the not wanting to be annoying and just whining part?”

A sigh. “I know, Chris. I know.”

•

When I wake up, it’s to the sound of Jim’s nearly frantic rambling. I can’t make out what he’s saying, but my head hurts, and I wave a hand at him to *please* stop.

He grabs my waving hand and sits at my hip, that worried tone still in his voice. “What happened?”

“Tripped unpacking,” I pout, turning my head down, keeping my eyes closed. “ ‘m sorry.”

Jim startles, “for what?”

“For being annoying.”

“Spraining your ankle is not annoying, Callie.”

“How you know bout dat?”

“I’m the Captain.”

“Nosy...” I pout some more.

Someone behind Jim laughs at that, before Jim snaps, “pot, meet kettle!”

“I’m not nosy, I’m a doctor!”

“Invasive.”

“Well next time you get bitten on a planet and start to swell-”

“Fine, fine, fine, okay!”

“Caaaallie,” Jim is calling to me softly. “How do you feel?” He asks when I open my eyes.

“ ‘M probly j’st whining...”

“Quit sayin’ that.”

“Mmm yeah, mom was always telling me to shut up.”

“She’s still a bit out of it-”

“Yeah I can see that,” he says to Bones. “-Why, Callie?”

“Why’ m I outta it?”

“No, no, why did you say Winona was always telling you to shut up?”

“Oh,” I say offhandedly. “Cuz I’ m annoying.”

I hear Jim huff so hard that it shakes the bed. “That’s not true, Callie, okay? You can talk as much as you want.”

I shake my head, or at least attempt to, feeling loose. “No, tha’s’kay. I need to learn to shut up.”

The silence is deafening.

“C’I go home yet?”

“Maybe once you can pick your head up.”

“Why you drug me so much?” I grumble.

“Because you walked on a sprained ankle and your pain levels kept flarin’ way too high when we were fixin’ it.”

“Mmm...” I mumble. “Why they care though...?” I think out loud without realizing.

“...because we’re here to *keep you* from being in pain?”

“Hmm,” I hum. “Weird.”

“...why?”

“Cuz no one ever cares.” I say simply.

I fall asleep hearing, “well I do. Please come to me when you’re in pain, Callie.”

•

I wake up in my bed, -wait, didn’t I do this already today?

I try to wake up, but my body feels heavy and one of my feet feels numb. Did I fall asleep on it?

I try to pull on the foot, only for pain to ripple up my leg, instantly reminding me of what my day has been like so far.

I’m so confused at first that I jerk on my leg, thinking it’s asleep, and pain shoots up my body. I yelp loudly and sharply but moan lowly.

Oh no.

Oh *god* .

Jim knows. Jim had to take time out of his day to come deal with my idiotic unbalanced butt.

He’s gotta be so mad.

He must be *so . Mad* .

Jim opens the door in concern, “you okay?”

I nod, still fighting my own limbs to sit up. “Yeah... just forgot my ankle was... unwell. Moved too fast is all. I’m sorry for bothering you. How long have I been asleep?”

“Mm, few hours, maybe.”

I try to push up in bed some more, my ankle searing.

“How’d I get back here?”

“I know what it feels like to wake up in medbay over and over. Bones said you could go and I carried you back.”

“Sorry...” I say as a way to hide my wince of pain.

“Hey-hey-hey, I’m proud of you, y’know that?”

“What?”

“I’m so proud of you for asking for help. That can be really hard.”

I stare at him for a moment. “...thanks?”

“For the record,” a new voice joins the room. “I did not say she could go, you badgered me until I deemed her fit to leave.”

That’s Bones, and he walks around to the side of the bed with a tricorder. Jim stays hovering by my feet.

“Where did you come from?” I look him up and down. He’s not in uniform, he’s in sweatpants actually, so I’m not sure if he’s been here all along or what.

“I came from next door when your brother messaged you were screamin’,” he answers, eyes intent on his tricorder.

“Wasn’t screaming...” I softly protest.

“Good *lord*,” Bones snaps, making me jump. “How are your pain levels so high again already?”

I wince. “I’m sorry...”

“It’s not your fault, kid, I just feel bad for ya and need to figure out why the drugs aren’t working.”

“Can you give her something now?” Jim asks worriedly.

Bones glances over at him softly, fondly. “Of course, just gimme a sec,”

Jim nods before turning to smile at me. “How about a movie?” He asks. “I’ve been in the mood for a movie and popcorn for a while and you need something fun but still, it’s a win-win!”

Bones is asking me if he can inject a painkiller. I nod, and immediately this one makes me feel a little floaty. “Woooooo...” I register myself saying.

“...Out to the living room?” Jim is asking me.

I look up, try to focus on him. “Wha-?”

I feel like I’m on a waterbed, I’m swaying all over.

“How do you want to get to the living room?”

My focus turns to my hands as I examine them thoroughly. At least I’ve not gotten any cuts while packing. I always-

“The heck did you give her?” Jim is demanding.

I hear a shrug, “she metabolizes medications the same stupid way you do, it would seem. *IRRATIONALLY*.” He huffs. “So I gave her something stronger.”

I’m not sure what all that means, but Jim is asking if he can carry me somewhere, I nod, and he’s swiftly picking me up to go out to the living room.

I mentally check that my boobs are still in their cups, all this being carried around.

“Okay, pick us one, Cal!” Jim smiles at me as he sets me down.

I feel a goofy smile wash over my face as I let out a scoff, “I’m not allowed to pick movies anymore, goofball.”

Someone behind me snorts a laugh. Who’s that? Oh, Bones. Yeah. Him.

“...whyyy?” Jim asks slowly.

I giggle and move to sit more comfortably on the couch. “Cuz I have bad taste...”

“Jesus Christ, what did you give her?” Jim asks, glancing behind him. Who’s he talking to? Oh Bones. That’s right. Why is he always here?

“...I can leave...” I hear.

I jerk up, “did I say that out loud? No no no tha’sss nah what I meant,” I shake my head and lean forward. Apparently too far forward when I feel Jim’s hands steady my shoulders again. “I think isss cool, actually,” I rub at my fuzzy eyes. My contacts are dry.

“You wear contacts?” Jim asks.

“Lord, I’m sayin ev’thing ow loud...” I grumble. “I think is cool you have a friend. Youuu have a bes’ friend. I don’t have friends...” I grumble.

I feel like I shouldn't have said that? Am I gonna get in trouble for saying that? I'm so confused. But. I mean. It's the truth. I'm not lying. So.

"Tha's kay tho, mom made sure I know I'm 'nnoying."

I sense Jim stiffen, and I wonder what I said wrong. "What do you mean, Callie?"

"I *mean*," I huff annoyed. "I know I talk too much and don't know anything and am just a dumb kid and a bad friend and that's why no one likes me, I *get* it," the last part comes out a bit snappy. "Tha's why 'oo pick out the movie and I shuddup n' watch it."

"Cal you don't... you don't talk too much,"

"Mm," I hum. "Thnks. M'st be gettin' better..."

"No, that's not," Jim sighs. "None of those things she told you were true--"

"I mean, wasn't j'st her... was Frank too."

"*What*?"

"Yeah. I mean. I know he's a jerk. But like. Bein' called mean names all the time is kinda overkill, at least in my opinion..."

"Like what?"

"Oh I dunno. Brat. Idiot. Worthless, thankless brat. Over emotional. Stuck up. Prude. Stuff like that. Guess those are more descriptions than names though... But like. I know they were *right*, I just--"

"*NO*."

I look up at Jim's harsh face.

"N-no?"

"Jim, take a breath," Bones says softly, quietly.

He does. Closes his eyes. Looks back at me softer than before. "You are none of those things. I don't care what they said. They're wrong. And they were wrong for saying them."

I blink owlshly. "...Kay."

"But--" Jim starts again, before Bones mutters, "pot 'n kettle, kid."

Jim sighs. “Okay. Clearly you’re a little out of it and I feel like you’re saying things you wouldn’t normally want me to know so let’s start a movie, yeah?”

I nod and try to settle back on the couch but I pause before whining, “owwww...”

“Ankle?” Someone asks.

I shake my head. “It’s my bad shoulder.”

A beat too long passes that even I can tell in my fuzzy haze.

“What happened to your shoulder?”

“Mmm... got yanked on too many times...” I mumble, my eyes closing. “Got in trouble too much.” I wait for a flashback that doesn’t come. “Oooh. These are fun meds. They stop the mem’ries...” I slur as I feel my eyes roll back in my head.

“Memories?”

I can’t even tell who is talking to me at this point. “Mm. You know how when you remember something you can feel the phys...phys’cal pain again? Like it happenin’ ‘gain?”

I get a simultaneous, “yeah,” and, “ *what?!* ”

“Mm. Painkillers stop that from happenin’. Didn’t have to relive the time mom got mad at the way i was walking in high heels... tha’s the firs’ time I rolled my ankle actually...”

“The way- heels- what?”

My head swims as I try to form words. “Sh’said I looked like a baby giraffe and it was m’barassin’ ‘n i mean... she watn’t wrong...”

The movie has been going a few minutes already and I berate myself for talking over it. “I’ll shut up.” I say by means of apology.

“Not your fault, kid, the Andorian shingles vaccine makes ya loose lipped.”

I fall asleep before the movie is halfway over, feeling warm and... safe?



## Chapter 5

The rolling credits of the movie wake me up, or so I think, until my stomach rolls.

Something doesn't feel right.

Something *isn't* right.

My stomach is not happy. And I'm starting to feel nausea coming.

No- no, not just coming nausea, I *am* nauseous.

It must be a vaccine reaction, right? But still, god, I can't just puke-

Wait, I'm going to puke?

Oh crap I'm going to puke.

My head starts to spin.

I sit up as slowly and silently as I can. I place my feet on the floor but instead of calming the spinning, it makes my stomach heave.

I feel like all the color has left my face and I'm cold, but I'm also drenched in sweat.

The guys can immediately tell something's wrong, calling my name in concerned unison as Jim bolts upright.

Of their own accord, my right hand buries its heel into my eye socket and my left hand grips at my stomach.

Jim is worriedly moving towards me, and I'm trying to figure out what to do.

My mouth is watering and I *know* something is about to come up.

I clasp a hand over my mouth and bolt for my bathroom.

My stomach is heaving like there is something my body must reject this very second.

The boys are following but I don't even care.

I barely make it to the toilet before I slam down on my knees and let my stomach expel everything in it.

It's difficult and burns because there's nothing significant on my stomach, I haven't eaten all day.

Wave after *wave* after *wave* of nausea hit me, driving my stomach to heave and convulse.

I haven't been on my knees in front of the toilet for more than a second before one of the boys is kneeling next to me.

"Get her hair,"

"I know what to do!"

"You've never been on this end of it," I hear muttered before someone gathers all my hair to get it out of the line of fire.

"Yes, I have." Is said tersely

"Wha- oh. Oh, Jesus. I'm sorry kid. That's not--"

"I know, Bones, I know."

A pause in the puking allows me to ask, "what's going on? Why am I-" and then I'm retching again.

My mouth is involuntarily drooling between the spasms of my diaphragm.

God, this is embarrassing.

Someone's hand is on my back, and I hear the whirling of a medical tricorder. I open my eyes, wet and goopy, to take in who is where and doing what.

Jim is on my left holding my hair out of my face and Bones is on my right with one hand on a tricorder and another on my back.

"Reaction to a vaccine, it looks like. Problem is gonna be figuring out which one and why..." Bones mutters.

My mouth starts drooling again at the same time I realize my nose is running like a faucet, and I fight against another wave.

"Bones, why... why is her puke that color?"

I literally cringe at the thought they're both seeing this and reach up to slap the flush button.

Bones glances inside the toilet with nonchalance as it flushes. "Because nothin's in her system but her stomach is still angry about sum'n."

“Why, though? If the vaccines are given in a hypo, not orally?”

“You’re the king of allergic reactions, Jim. You know sometimes some things just don’t mesh well with your system.”

“When will it stop?” I ask between spits, the waves dying down but my mouth feeling chunky, and I’m trying to keep snot from getting in my mouth.

“Callie, you got a-a, what’s it called, a scrunchie or anything somewhere?” Jim asks.

“Counter,” I point with a burning acidic spit and a shaky hand. Jim’s long arm reaches over me and Bones both to grab a hair tie and he’s suddenly tying my hair back in an impressively decent messy bun.

“How’d’y’know how to do that?” I slur.

He chuckles, “man of many talents,”

“HA!” Bones barks.

Jim pats my shoulder, “I’m gonna go replicate you a ginger ale, I’ll be right back.”

I lean back on my heels, thinking I’m done, until another wave hits me and I’m forced to rise up on my knees and really work to get the vomit up.

I struggle so long that I get scared that I can’t breathe before it subsides and I’m sputtering again, slapping the toilet seat trying to draw in air.

Bones replaces the hand on my back and rubs gentle circles in it. “Hey-hey-hey, you’re alright, sweetheart. Take a breath. An antiemetic is comin’ for ya, darlin’. Hold on... Gotta get this stupid hypo to get the formula right...”

Jim runs back in, “should I get her like, saltines or something?” He asks in a panic.

“Just liquid,” I plead weakly before Bones can speak. “I’m not pregnant, you dipstick...” I moan to myself, making Bones chuckle.

Jim leaves again and I glance over at Bones and his tricorder. “I’m not pregnant, right?”

He looks back at me. “Is there a chance you could be?”

“Nooo,” I moan, replacing my forehead to its previous position on the toilet seat. “But I don’t know what those transporters can do, so who knows...”

He chuckles. “As much as I hate them, can’t say I’ve heard of them doing anything with pregnancies but that’s... not a bad idea to study it...” He muses, wheels turning.

Bones goes over the readings. "Cortisol is through the roof, stomach lining is inflamed, your white cells are up trying to do their work with the vaccines and that triggers an immune response which can cause... this."

I moan and spit some more as he slaps the tricorder shut and starts running water in the sink.

Jim is back, handing me a cold glass of ginger ale and I tip it back above my head, not wanting to touch the glass to my nasty mouth. I swish it around my mouth before spitting it out, then taking an actual sip

I rest my forehead on the toilet seat and try to breathe.

"So what's wrong with her?" Jim asks.

"I think it's a combination of the vaccines and stress."

Great. I'm just being whiny. "I'm sorry..." I moan miserably.

"Don't even!" Both boys say in unison.

The hypo finally reaches my neck and makes my stomach stop rolling but it's still quite unhappy.

Bones comes back to kneel next to me again and wipes a warm soapy rag across my face. "Feelin' any better?"

I nod blearily as I push away from the toilet, sink down onto my heels.

I'm covered in sweat and I'm pretty sure snot, puke, and spit are all covering the front of my shirt.

I'm still shaking and I already know that bruises are forming on my thighs from where I was squeezing while puking the hardest.

"Think you can make it to bed?" Bones asks.

I shake my head softly so as to not jostle my equilibrium. "I need to stay here a bit."

"That's fine, darlin'. You're fine."

I keep spitting out chunks I'm finding in my mouth. I'm pretty sure I'm done puking, but I wouldn't put money on it.

I try to move but my stomach objects. "Shower," I choke out, trying not to swallow bile. "I need a shower. And to brush my teeth. I'm sweaty and pukey and snotty..." I wave a hand to shoo them away. "You guys go. I promise I'll clean everything up. Thanks for your help. I'm sorry about this. I'll be fine."

"Fat chance, kid." Bones announces, plopping himself on the outside of my bathroom door. "Jim, bring them holo-cards you got over here so I can keep an ear on her. I still gotta teach you rummy so you can beat my mama. She keeps thinkin' you're lettin' her win every time."

Jim gives a worried glance at me before looking back at Bones, who simply nods.

Jim gives a nod back and walks away.

I haul myself up and slap the button to close the door. I decide against a full-on shower, the motion of standing that long is far too much effort at the moment, so I turn on the tub and sit with my hands under the faucet.

I leave the tub unplugged while I wash all the nastiness off me, before plugging the drain and leaning back, the hot water grounding me and keeping my stomach from rolling more.

I'm utterly *exhausted* and thoroughly embarrassed. I close my eyes and focus on breathing again.

"Don't fall asleep in there, Callie!" Bones warns from outside the door. "I have medical override and I'm not afraid to use it."

That should freak me out, should terrify me, but I think he actually... Cares? He sounds genuinely worried. I work up all my energy to answer, "meh!" and continue to lay in the tub, starting to get bored without anything to do.

Once I've decided I'm not going to puke again, I get out and towel off, yell for the boys to leave my room so I can get fresh clothes.

"Any dizziness?" Bones asks through the door before he leaves.

"A little." I'm too tired to lie.

"Alright let me know when you're dressed so I can check you out."

"I don't need checking..." I grumble.

"Humor me!" I hear as if it's tossed over his shoulder.

I huff and go into my room for pajamas before returning to the bathroom to find cleaning supplies.

I get everything out, start spraying down the toilet, and-

"Callie? You okay?" Jim is calling from outside my door.

I sigh heavily before going out to my bedroom to open the door.

Bones and Jim are on the floor outside my door playing with a deck of holocards, but I can tell Jim has been anxiously leaning with an ear against my door.

“Sorry,” I mutter, realizing I still have the cleaner in my hand. I wave it in a circle. “Cleanup.” I shrug. “I’m fine. It’s fine. Really-”

Jim stands up as Bones gathers the cards. “Callie, my god- you don’t have to- it’s not-” he’s sputtering and my eyes go wide in alarm.

Bones is on his feet and places a hand on Jim’s shoulder, and I can see him squeeze lightly. “Callie,” he nods at me, using his free hand to reach forward and gently take the bottle away from me. “Get in bed. You look like you’re about to pass out on me,” he eyes me up and down and I turn before anyone tries to touch me.

I get in bed and close my eyes before I hear the whirling of a tricorder. “Sleepy,” I whine.

“Yeah I bet. Your body is *spent* .” Bones pats my knee. “Sleep well, kiddo.” He mutters as he lays a hand on my forehead briefly.

I hear Jim walk over and he leans down to kiss me on the forehead after Bones moves his hand. “Goodnight, Cal. Love you.”

“Love you too...” I find myself saying.

My eyes nearly fly open at those words coming out of my mouth. I never tell people I love them, unless it’s sarcastically. But what I said to Jim wasn’t sarcastic. It was automatic and even though it somehow felt wrong, it also felt like the greatest peace I’ve ever experienced.

•

I wake up slowly, confused, my head pounding. I reach up and press the heel of my hand into one of my eyes and moan.

I hear a soft snore and look around. Jim is sprawled out in my bed next to me-well- not next to me, per se. He’s more so half hanging off, his right arm and leg nearly smacking the floor as his chest moves with snores caused by his unnatural position. It’s like he was sitting with his back against the headboard and fell asleep and half off the bed to not get too close to me.

His hair is disheveled beyond belief, and he doesn’t even have on pajamas. He’s still in his uniform pants and black undershirt.

Was he that worried about me?

I roll my head to the other side, wincing at the jack hammering pain, and see Bones pressed up against my wall, also asleep and struggling to not snore.

I stifle a moan and try to sit up, but it doesn’t go too well when a wave of dizziness smacks me in the forehead.

The moan I stifle, I apparently don’t stifle too well because both guys suddenly jerk awake- Jim flailing himself onto the floor with a yelp, not having realized how close to the edge he was, and Bones on his feet and over to me just as fast.

“Head...” I moan without being prompted, wincing at the pounding beneath the heel of my hand.

Bones snakes a hand around my neck, underneath my tangled mess of hair, and massages, while using the other to feel my forehead. “Headache, slight temp,” he thinks aloud.

Jim plants himself upright and walks around to the foot of my bed. He pulls on his neck, trying to crack it, his other hand rubbing his eyes.

“How long have I been asleep?” I croak out.

“A couple hours,” Bones answers, his fingers moving to my neck to feel my lymph nodes.

“You guys didn’t have to come back and stay...”

“You started crying,” Jim answers.

My eyes dart up, “what?”

Jim’s eyes widen slightly, “I just mean, we let you sleep, we started a different movie, but you-”

“*God*, I’m sorry,” I say, disgusted at myself, rubbing my forehead. “What is wrong with me...”

“Uh, that’d be about a dozen alien diseases we needed to vaccinate you against?” Bones offers a painkiller and I accept.

“You don’t have to be sorry,” Jim scoffs. “Callie- it’s- I-” he’s sputtering again and I have no idea what to do.

I have no idea what I’ve done wrong.

Jim places his hands on his hips and says to the floor, “you can’t control nightmares, Cal. Sorry to say, but I’ve tried.” He adds sardonically. “Never works.”

I sigh, “what time is it?”

“About 4,” Jim answers with a yawn.

I wince, “you guys can go, honest. I’ll be okay.”

They share a look before they both nod, and Bones heads out first, saying to message if I need anything else.

Jim stays a moment, hesitant to leave.

“I promise to call you if I need anything,” I say to him before he nods and pats my good ankle before wishing me sweet dreams.

But no such dreams are had.

I'm walking through the house, the floor is creaking underneath me, and my mom is screaming at me from upstairs.

Frank is standing in front of the stairs, so I can't go up.

Mom's screaming is getting louder and louder as my uncle seems to be getting more and more imposing.

I'm trying to explain to him that I need to go upstairs, and as he roars that I should never question him, my mom starts wailing, and then suddenly, I wake up and *I'm* the one wailing.

*Screams* escape my mouth before I can stifle them and realize I was only having a nightmare.

I'm still living the terror of the nightmare while knowing it wasn't real, my heart pounding, my skin clammy as I realize I'm in a puddle of sweat and I've kicked all the blankets off me, despite searing pain in my ankle shooting up my leg, and a sore throat that is definitely worse than when I went to sleep.

I've got my screaming down to a whimper when Jim runs in like the place is on fire.

It almost looks like he pushed the door open faster than it could open by itself after he slapped the button.

He's got on blue linen pajama pants and a white t-shirt with the academy logo on it.

My brother is well built and I forget that, but I see it as his arms bulge in the sleeve, nearly having a heartbeat as he looks for someone to punch.

I grip the blankets with white knuckles as I try to explain to him I was just having a nightmare. "I'm sorry, it was just a nightmare, I'm sorry, I'm-sorry-I'msorryI'msorryI'msorry-" I'm apologizing when he stops spinning in circles, looking for the reason behind my screams.

"God, Callie, I thought someone was in here killing you,"

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry," I keep repeating. I'm panting and trying to stop shaking. I put my hand up and try to wave it off. "It's just a nightmare. I get them all the time. I'm sorry. I'll try to not wake you *again*," I babble on. "This is so ridiculous, I've bothered you with this twice now, and-"

He leans up against the frame of the door and takes a deep breath, "sweetheart you have nothing to apologize for," he smiles at me softly.

"It happens all the time, I'm so sorry... I'll get it under control, I'm so, *so* sorry..." I shake my head and squeeze my eyes shut, finding them wet with tears. I reach up to hastily wipe them from my face.

"That's... That's not healthy," he says with a small casual laugh. "Having nightmares that often isn't good for you."

I work up a sarcastic smile, "you don't say?"



He smirks back.

“How would someone even get in here?” I ask sarcastically, trying to change the subject.

Jim kind of lets out a breath and shrugs. “You hear screaming, you run,” he says, before he uncrosses his arms and comes to sit at my feet on the bed. He looks at me gently. “When I say it’s not healthy, I say that from experience. Don’t get me wrong, I *still* have nightmares about... about,” he rubs the back of his neck. “About Frank and Winona and Nero and losing all my crew, who are my friends, who are my family... but they’re a lot better than they were. Those things will always be with me, but acknowledging the images or triggers of those people and places deeply before letting them go helps your mind instead of burying it away. The mind has a way of pushing stuff out. It doesn’t like things to be hidden away.”

I sort of smirk at the bed. “Your doctor BFF teach you that?”

Jim scoffs, “yeah, after I woke him up screaming like that enough times when we shared a dorm. When we shared a cabin after The Battle of Vulcan...” he shakes his head then looks up at me. “Talking about it helps. And... I know a lot about the feelings you get growing up in that house. You can talk to me about it. About anything, Cal.”

He goes from sitting, legs hanging off the bed, to sitting crisscross right in front of me. “I know how much it sucks to have to figure the world out for yourself when your ‘mom’ isn’t a very good guide. I’m not saying I need to be your *guide* or anything, but you can *talk* to me.”

He’s quiet after that so I nod solemnly. “Thanks.” I manage to say. I hope that’s the end of it. “What time is it?” I ask. It seems to throw him off a bit, like he was expecting some heart-to-heart.

“Uhh around 6, I think.”

I wince. “Geez I’m sorry. Go back to bed, I’m fine.” I give him an encouraging smile.

He smiles back as he pats my knee and gets up to leave. His knees crack as he goes and he winces. “Don’t get old, Cal.” He moans.

I laugh. “You’re barely old enough for a quarter life crisis, you weirdo. Go back to sleep.” I call after him.

•

*“From: Cpt. James T. Kirk*

*To: Dr. Leonard H. McCoy, CMO, MD, PHd, PHd*

*Callie just woke me up screaming her head off from a nightmare.*

*Is she okay?*

*Yeah, she's going back to sleep. I just. I don't know how to help her.*

*What helps you?*

*I can't go crawl in her bed, Bones. Nor would she come in mine.*

*"Nor"?*

*Shut up. What should I do?*

*Be there. What you do is be there and be what she needs you to be.*

*It doesn't feel like enough.*

*I know, kid. But it is.*

*Meet for breakfast?*

*0730. See you then.*

Jim knew full well the doctor just wanted to make sure he was going to eat that day.

He was always so paranoid about a Tarsus relapse, like the one he'd had in the academy, and the second one after Nero.

Where he couldn't eat without puking and the panic attacks, flashbacks, and nightmares wouldn't stop.

He couldn't blame Bones for not wanting to see him like that again.

He really hoped Callie wasn't secretly dealing with any worse issues beyond the obvious.

His heart ached for her as he got in the shower.

•

Something wakes me up and out of habit, I reach for my phone that is now my padd.

1300.

Yikes.

I remember Jim saying his shift starts at 8, so I've slept through him leaving.

Still trying to figure out what woke me up, I sit up, ears popping and nose starting to run as I change altitude. Oh yeah. The vaccines. I swallow hard and my throat aches and burns.

Through my stuffy and popping ears, I hear someone calling my name. My door whooshes open, and Christine is standing in my doorway, smiling gently. "Hi," she calls softly, stepping in slowly. "Been tryin' to check on ya for a couple of hours now, thought I'd just pop by and make sure you're still breathing," she says as she smiles and gently sits at the end of my bed.

I look back to my padd, confused, before I see a spot in the corner for messages- with quite a few unread. A few video chat requests missed too? Oh god... From Medbay, Bones, Christine, Jim... geez... "god, I'm so sorry," I croak, shaking my head and looking up from the padd. "I had no idea, I'm so sorry. Was I supposed to follow up? I didn't mean to sleep so late, I-"

"You just had multiple vaccinations that'll knock you on your butt singularly, let alone all together. I'm honestly surprised my coming in woke you." She smiles that half cocked smile, the one that makes it feel like you have a secret just between the two of you.

I try to return it, and fail miserably.

"And no," Christine now goes on, "you weren't supposed to follow up, and no, no one cares you slept through your padd dinging, so no apologies are needed."

She doesn't wait for a reply as I blubber in search of one and instead starts scanning me with a tricorder she pulls out of a bag I didn't know she had. "Where's it hurt most, right now?" She asks abruptly.

"Uhm," I think, rolling my neck around. "I mean, I just woke up, I-" I hiss as I go to push and pull my legs back, my sprained ankle reminding me of its existence.

She looks down at the lump that is my ankle beneath the blanket. "Can I take a look?"

I nod, miserable.

"That a yes?" She asks, hands hovering at the edge of the blanket.

"Yeah," I croak. "Hurts to talk. Sorry." I still feel disoriented and confused.

She shakes her head as she peels back my blankets and starts prodding at my ankle and bare foot. (I'm not a weirdo who sleeps in socks, thank you very much.) "Don't apologize," she murmurs again as her brow furrows. She lays her hand flat on my leg, before exclaiming, "sweetheart, you're wayyyy too hot," and moving to rip all my blankets off.

"Hey," I object, pretty pathetically if I'm being honest.

"No-no, listen, babygirl," Christine says with full seriousness. "The tricorder is screaming at me too that your fever is way too high. We need to go down to med-"

"No." I start to shake and I'm not sure if it's the fever and my blankets being taken away, or fear.

"...no?"

She blinks almost owlishly, her eyes bright.

“Can’t you just give me a fever reducer here?”

“The issue is that your fever shouldn’t be this high in reaction to the vaccines that you were given. We need to run a few blood tests that my tricorder isn’t advanced enough for-”

My mind shut down at “blood tests”.

No. Please, no.

Not this all again.

I try to swallow and my throat is dry. “I’d... I don’t...” ADVOCATE FOR YOURSELF part of me is screaming. DON’T MAKE HER MAD! The other part yells back. I chomp down on my lower lip and squeeze my eyes shut before I rush out- “I... really-don’t-like-blood-tests-cuz-I-had-to-have-a-lot-in-the-past.”

“Ooh,” she breathes, taking her hand away, and leaning back a bit as if to purposely give me space to breathe. “That’s totally fair,” she says as she shuts her tricorder and crosses her forearms in her lap with it turned off and tucked away in her hand.

It’s my turn to blink. “It... is?”

She nods, seriously, scrunching up her brow. “Of course. If I had to be stuck a million times I’d hate it, too. Is it the pain of the needle piercing, the removal of it, or pain afterwards that is the most bothersome?”

I struggle to answer again. Most people insist the more modern sample takers are painless, a pen-type device that is supposed to be less damaging to the skin and vein. “The... the bruising, honestly. Because it really aches and hurts.”

She winces in sympathy then looks contemplative for a moment. “Maybe we can avoid some blood draws and a medbay visit,” she smiles at me. “Let me guess, not too many good experiences in medical places?”

I shake my head, finding it to be a bit jerky and jolting.

She raises her hand, hovering it above my leg with an eyebrow raised, silently asking for permission to touch me again.

I nod ever so slightly.

She gently lays her hand down over my ankle and gently strokes around the ankle bone in circles. She looks contemplative. “Let me go to medbay and come back with a portable regenerator for your ankle, one more round oughta get rid of the last of the pain, and the big tricorder that can do more than this one so we can try and avoid a blood test. That sound good?”

I’m surprised she’s changed her mind for me, so I nod, mutely. She smiles softly and leaves.

When she comes back, she’s true to her word and my ankle feels better halfway through the regen cycle.

She scans me and announces, “ah! Seeing your lymph nodes are as swollen as they are explains the fever. Do your armpits hurt?”

I nod miserably and she smiles in sympathy.

“I’ve got painkillers. Not the loopy ones, but something to make you feel way better.”

She also pulls out what looks to be a textbook. “Call me pushy,” she smiles, handing it to me. “But I know you finished college pre-reqs, and I think you’d be really good in the medical field.”

I look down at the book, Anatomy 1.

“Plus, you’re sick and reading always makes me feel better when I’m sick.”

I look up at her and croak, “why do you think I’d be good in the medical field?”

She smiles as she gives me the painkillers. “You don’t think you would be?”

“I think I just finished telling you that I don’t really like the medical field,” I smirk good naturedly.

She laughs. “Which is precisely my point. The best nurses are the ones who treat others the way they want to be treated. And I can tell you would do that.”

By the time she leaves, I’m not in agony anymore and sit surprised at how gentle she was with me.

So far, I’ve only had good experiences with her and Bones, and it’s strange after what I went through with my mom. I think back on Bones asking me if I was sure about the doctor’s name, and how I confirmed he’d gotten it right.

I set the book to the side and pick up my padd to search his name myself... and nothing comes up. My brow furrows in surprise. I try a few different spellings, even though I saw his name on his coat enough times to remember it forever. And still nothing.

It feels like Bones is right.

My mom’s doctor doesn’t actually exist.

So who was it taking care of her?

•

Their little command crew dinners weren’t always a thing.

For the first few weeks after they received their commission with Jim in command, they ate scatteredly.

Jim with Bones, Spock with Nyota, Sulu with botany lab scientists, Chekov alone, and Scotty stayed down in engineering. That is until Spock pointed out that the last one was again regulation.

The whole point of the mess hall was to encourage eating together.

Christopher Pike had insisted the captain's quarters be outfitted with a kitchen that he intended to use often. Jim had too many food issues to make the best use of that, so he realized that mealtime comradery was going to need to happen in the mess, but had no idea how to make it happen. He didn't like eating with other people. He spent too much time concerned with making sure everyone else had enough. That's why he could never cook for his crew like Chris had planned because he'd end up making enough food to last the entire senior staff months. Then Bones would start hinting at therapy again, and he just had too many other things to worry about.

So when Scotty huffed after Spock told him what he should be doing, then marched across the mess and sat with an alone Chekov, Jim decided he needed to do something himself as well.

He also kinda just wanted to beat Spock to the punch, to suggest something needed before he *got told* it was.

He asked before he could change his mind or tell Bones what he was thinking. Bones at the time still wasn't Spock's biggest fan.

*In an effort to lead by example with the crew, I believe eating together one evening a week in the mess hall would be an advantageous show of unity, hopefully encouraging the crew to also make efforts to show up and branch out socially. May I join you and Lt. Uhura one evening this upcoming week?*

*I agree this is a logical course of action to strengthen crew relationships and morale. Yes, you and Dr. McCoy may join myself and Nyota this Friday at 1800, if this is agreeable?*

Jim enjoyed how it was a given Bones would be there, but also the fact Spock clearly felt as uncomfortable with Jim and Jim still did with Spock.

Jim had shifted from his academy eating schedule of 8-10-12-2-5 to a Captain's schedule of 7-10-12-3-6, working around Alpha shift, and it was working well enough.

(Also the reason Bones practically banned him from beta and delta- it threw off his meal schedule too much and that wasn't something they could afford. They were working on a schedule that was non-triggering for other shifts, but it was slow going, especially when Jim ran short on sleep.)

His biggest issue was visibility. In the academy, he and Bones could tuck themselves away in a corner of the campus mess or even their dorm at meals, but on the *Enterprise*, he needed to be both seen and approachable. And those weren't qualities Jim Kirk found easy to show at meals.

The more people he was around, the more that saw him, the more conscious he was of their eating as well as his own.

The more concerned he was about everyone getting enough.

Bones routinely reminded him that they had replicators that Scotty took very good care of, as well as a galley and hydroponics bay, they wouldn't run out of food. No one was going hungry.

Unless by choice.

Hiding an eating disorder is all but impossible when your Captain has eating issues that cause him to be more concerned with your food than his own.

Their first month out alone, he had Bones come back to him with two confirmed cases of anorexia nervosa, one case of bulimia, one case of binge eating, and a plethora of people not eating due to stress.

Bones banned him for the mess for two days just to get caught up.

So he, for one, was happy Jim was going to be focused on making conversation with Spock over what was on everyone's plates.

He was nervous because Jim was nervous, because the young Captain and his XO were still on shaking ground, at times. But with both him and Nyota- an expert communications specialist and therefore expert conversationalist- there, he was hopeful the dinner would go well.

The first one... did... relatively.

He and Nyota shared quite a few dubious looks and the conversation struggled to not veer too far into opposing viewpoints.

They agreed to make it a habit, Jim messaging to confirm each week.

The second and third dinners went better, Bones and Spock managing only one bickering fit, and Jim and Nyota continuing to discover they were truly meant to be besties- eventually.

The fourth dinner, Jim and Bones sat down to find Sulu with his tray of food engrossed in a conversation with Nyota about something that had happened on the bridge that day. The conversation went on until the entire table was engrossed in discussing their current problem, and Sulu ate with them.

So then they agreed to dinner for Monday evening, with the promise of no work talk.

And Sulu joined.

And then again on Friday.

And then Monday... they all found themselves together again.

So Monday's became a silently agreed upon second evening, and Sulu was a welcome addition not only to the dinners, but what was becoming a lively group chat as long as Nyota was in it.

Then it didn't take but a week for Chekov and Scotty to plop down at the table, and also never leave.

Somewhere along the way Jim stopped confirming, it just being common knowledge they would all be at dinner together.

Somewhere along the way, Monday and Friday became every night.

Somewhere along the way, they started heading back to the large Captain's quarters for drinks after dinner on Fridays.

Somewhere along the way, it became a full on game night.

Somewhere along the way, Jim and Spock started their own game night of 3D chess on Mondays.

Somewhere along the way, Jim got less and less concerned about what was on everyone's plate.

And somewhere along the way, Callie came along.

•

My first dinner in the mess, a few nightmare filled nights after my vaccine side effects ebb, is an anxious affair.

I follow Jim and Bones into the turbolift from the residential section we live in as they discuss what's on the menu. "...s burgers if I remember correctly. A mix of veggie burgers and meats from..."

I wring my hands, chew my cheek, trying to ignore the aching in my chest. I'm desperately trying to not stare at the floor like a brooding teenager, and I don't want to take out my padd and fiddle with it for the same reason.

When the lift doors open, my stomach drops at the sight of a packed corridor. People are packed wall to wall, moving orderly yes, but the sight makes my heart race none the less.

I feel a hand gently pull at one of my ice cold ones, beckoning me to follow my brother out into the madness. His touch is warm and grounding, yet not overly firm as he weaves us through the crowd.

People respectfully nod as he goes by, and I realize half these people are just milling around talking, not waiting to get in. They smile at me before I can look away often enough.

By the time we finally get to the main doors of the mess hall, the crowd has cleared a bit and things are more orderly.

Jim drops his hand from mine only to place it on my shoulder- my good one, bless him- and kind of steer my line of sight towards the food. "...galley made burgers," he is saying, "but we can get anything you want from the replicators."

The line moves quickly and Jim keeps me in front of him slightly, making sure I know where I'm going, until we get up the the counter and he puts me behind him, handing me a tray as well as one to Bones behind me.

I warily follow Jim as he explains what different things are, heart pounding in my chest, hands ice cold and shaky.

I examine the burgers- they actually look really good. But... they're so messy... I'd have to use both hands to eat... get a lot of napkins... take



really small bites...

“Callie?” Jim interrupts my spiral.

I meet his eyes.

“Nothing looks good?”

I look down at the tray I’m hugging to my chest as I continue to scan the buffet. “Not yet, but don’t worry about me.”

I pretend to read the tag in front of some sort of Andorian burger so I don’t have to meet his eye. I’m a bad liar looking at the floor, let alone in someone’s eye.

I feel his gaze linger before lifting. I see his worried glance to Bones and that’s when I know I have to force myself to pick something.

I’m starting to get dizzy and my vision is going hazy.

I spot some soups near the middle of the line and force my eyes to focus so I can go with that.

“You want crackers?” Jim’s voice makes me jump after the bowl is on my tray. “Or *biscuits* ! They’re great with soup! We can replicate them! And...” I feel Jim’s eyes constantly. I just need him to stop looking at my tray. So I let him add whatever he wants so he does.

My heart is pounding so hard that I’m worried it’s going to explode by the time we get to the end of the line.

A hand placed on my upper back makes me jump before I realize it’s Jim. “Here,” he says, directing me. “Let’s go this way...”

At least I don’t have to navigate this place like a school lunchroom. I can keep my head down and not look at anyone and hopefully we don’t eat with anyone and-

Crap.

Jim takes us to a nearly full table.

It’s the same group that came over my first night here.

The head of the table and two seats to its right are empty, I’m guessing for us.

To the left of the head is Spock, then Nyota, then Chekov, then Scotty. Across from Scotty is the little weird guy who I still don’t know, and to his left is Sulu.

Jim drops into the chair at the head of the table before motioning for me to sit at his right. Bones slips in between Sulu and me.

Greetings get casually passed around, and Jim and Spock are suddenly talking about something or someplace called Niribu and I'm too confused to follow.

Jim keeps flashing me concerned glances, like he knows I'm lost in a sea of strangers, but he also looks pretty trapped in whatever conversation Spock seems insistent on having.

Nyota takes pity on me and starts drawing me into a conversation, small talk about makeup that makes my heart continue to pound, trying to make sure I say all the right things. Smile at the right places. Silently laugh in the right places. Nod every so often. Answer her questions, but don't talk too much.

I'm doing everything in my power to keep my leg from bouncing.

I really hate eating in front of people. I really hate it. I poke at my soup and swirl it around, taking small sips when no one is looking.

Or so I thought.

"Do you not like it, Callie?"

My head whips up to meet Jim's eye. "What?"

"The soup. You're stirring more than eating. We can get something else-"

"No, it's fine, really," I earnestly insist.

Everyone has to be looking at me. I can feel my cheeks heating as I turn back to sitting my soup.

But suddenly Jim is... fidgety? Did I make him mad? Did I offend him?

He's suddenly just... *staring* at his food. Then he fidgets with the fries, arranging them in a line. He straightens the bun on his burger. He fiddles with his napkin. But he's not *eating*.

"Should I be asking you the same thing?"

Jim looks at me confused and surprised. "What- no- I... I just... I don't want to be sitting here eating if you aren't because you don't like it or something. Do you want some fries? I can-"

I wave him off.

His shoulders sag as he stares at his plate.

It's almost like he... he *can't* eat if I'm not.

I tentatively take a couple spoonfuls of soup in, and I can see even from my periphery, that his shoulders relax.

He begins to eat again.

Strange.

Is he trying to make some sort of point? If I'm overdramatic and don't eat, he goes hungry too? That's more my mother's brand of dramatics, and I scold myself for thinking so lowly of Jim. But watching him methodically line up his fork- that he wasn't using- with his knife- that he wasn't using- something told me that something somewhere was off kilter from how *normal* things are, but I can't quite tell what. Jim is nervous, and I can only assume it's because of me, because why else would he be nervous or anxious?

Normal people aren't like me. They don't freeze and need to stiffen their entire body to avoid shaking so hard their teeth chatter when eating dinner with new people.

I just so badly need to do this *right*. I could never socialize "right". Even if after a certain point in my life I stopped wishing I could figure out what 'right' is, I still aim for it. It's simply an everlastingly-obscure goal is all.

I stifle a sigh.

My mom always made sure I knew how not-right my attempts at socializing were, but her suggestions went far worse than even my feeble attempts at making connections when growing up.

School always blamed it on my skipping grades, which mom just used as an excuse for me to skip more because if I was screwed already, why not compound it?! But in a town as small as Riverside, with as few people as my mom allowed in her circle, it's not like there would have been a difference.

Very few middle schoolers want to talk to an 8 year old and even fewer high school seniors have interest in talking to a 13 year old, so I don't blame my schoolmates too much for not talking to me.

So I'm sure this table of adults would rather I be seen and not heard. After Nyota turns to talk to Pavel, I keep my head down and try to force more soup down my throat.

•

'These two are a pair,' thought Bones as he sipped his drink, trying to sneakily watch the two Kirk siblings.

Jim- unable to eat if not everyone is eating.

Callie- unable to eat in general.

Jim- can't eat if Callie doesn't eat.

Callie- not comfortable being watched eating.

He held in a sigh.

But Callie ate her soup- her tiny cup of soup that wasn't nearly enough food for anyone let alone a growing teenager- and that allowed Jim to eat his own food.

It was frustrating for Len, in a way, that he wasn't sitting next to Jim as it happened. He couldn't lean forward and tell him it was okay for him to eat even when others weren't.

He tried to catch his eye but Jim was too focused on Callie.

And really, who wasn't? Far too many people in the mess had taken notice of the tiny girl in street clothes, their eyes following curiously.

He couldn't blame them, he was curious too. He could see the look, the far off look, the blue eyes glazing over with pain and memory. She was in pure agony but sat there determined not to show it. And she was pretty successful at it too, all things considered.

She was mentally far, far away and clearly somewhere quite painful if he was reading her mask correctly. What had triggered her?

He was really hoping it wasn't food, partly for Jim's sake, but he had a feeling she was more overwhelmed in general than triggered by something specific.

Jim's concern was coming through in his worry over her food intake which, to be fair, Len was also starting to seriously worry about as well, but mostly he just wanted her to uncoil beside him. The tension just poured off her in a way all too reminiscent of Jim in their early academy days.

He met Nyota's eye on accident and she smiled sympathetically, like she could plainly read the situation - because of course she could- but was at just as much of a loss as he was on what to do for her.

Jim expertly extracted himself from Spock's conversation, asking for a moment, before pointing to a biscuit he'd added to Callie's tray. "You really have to try these, puts all earthen ones to shame."

Spock cocked his head curiously, "why do humans so often equate emotion with food where it is not logical?"

"Spock," Nyota shook her head only for Spock to keep going.

"You misunderstand, Nyota. I mean not in the sense that emotions are tied to gatherings and good as you've explained- many times- I mean in the sense one food item can make another one feel shame."

"I never said it would feel shame but be put to it, Mr. Spock,"

"And what exactly is the difference in this instance?"

"I- Spock- it's a biscuit-"

"Precisely my point, Jim,"

Bones shook his head ruefully to himself as the two continued to bicker, then looked at Callie examining her biscuit suspiciously. He leaned

nearly imperceptibly closer towards her to say conspiratorially, “they actually are pretty decent,” he ignored her jump. “But they also reheat just fine if you’d rather save it.”

He didn’t comment on the surprise that flashed across her face or the small nod she gave in response, but he did notice both.

Jim had thrown French fries on her plate and it was easy to pick up on the fact that her system wasn’t going to handle fried foods.

Jim noticed, and started slyly sneaking fries, smirking at her conspicuously.

Len thought about joking that he was going to add that to Jim’s mealcard, but he had noticed the way Callie had been terrified of using one. She didn’t like being monitored or tracked and he had to wonder why. Was it from a childhood of abusive micromanagement or just a stubborn streak she shared with her brother?

Let alone the fact it had only been a few days and she had barely eaten anything.

He finished off his own fries and tuned into a story Scotty was telling about the worst injuries seen in engineering. “Aye, and then the lad’s all broke out into hives, and then *I* did-”

“I DIDN’T KNOW- SCOT- DID YOU NOT GET MEDICAL ATTENTION AFTER THAT?!”

“Wasn’t nothin’ but a wee scratch-”

“*SCOTTY.*”

He felt Callie tense even more if that were possible at his annoyance.

He put his forehead in his hand, “Scotty for the love of god I just want you not walking around in 24/7 pain.” He moaned.

Scotty shrugged, almost self-consciously, “sorry...?” Then he sighed. “But I mean, what it turned out to be was an issue with the magnetic...” And Len tuned out.

“Just can’t see why no one around here wants to let me help them...” he grumbled to himself.

He could tell Callie heard him from the flutter of her eyes briefly in surprise. What the heck had happened to her that made her so distrusting? Well, she’d been loud and clear on what.

“Because you’re too heavy handed with the hypos,” Jim answered him with a smirk.

He shot him a look. “Am I heavy handed or are you making them worse by trying to run away while receiving one?”

“I run because you’re heavy handed!”

“I mean,” Nyota tried to offer, “it’s always really loud even when it doesn’t hurt. Maybe-”

“Are you going to suggest I’m more afraid of the hiss than being stabbed with a needle?”

“It’s a hypodermic-” Bones tried to correct with no luck.

“No, I’m suggesting the noise makes it worse.” She snapped back.

“Are you hypothesizing a new model?” Spock asked his girlfriend.

She shook her head, “god- no, Spock. I’m too busy practicing Klingon at the moment anyway.”

As they continued to bicker, Callie turned to him suddenly, almost as if she needed to take advantage of everyone being distracted to say, “I looked into the doctor for you,” she said quietly. “And I can’t find him. I know the spelling is right, I saw the guy enough, I just can’t... find him.” She looked up at him, blue eyes full of fear. “What could that possibly mean?”

He shook his head, “I have no idea, kid. But I promise I’ll do my best to get to the bottom of it.”

## Chapter 6

### Chapter Notes

So, so, SO much dubious science.  
Let's play 'spot the DISCO and SNW references'...

"...any chronic pain?"

She shook her head for what seemed to be the millionth time. Establishment of care appointments were always boring and redundant, but with the fear radiating off her, the current one also felt excruciatingly slow.

Plus there was the feeling she was lying to him. She told him her appetite was fine when her mealcard was already screaming at him that her calories were too low, and the bed was telling him she bordered on underweight. She told him she slept fine when he knew for a fact she had regular nightmares and was, according to Jim, barely sleeping. She said she didn't have headaches when he saw her nearly constantly rubbing either her sinuses or temples.

He finally sighed and sat down on a rolling stool to the side of the biobed. "Darlin," he huffed. "This'll go a lot easier if you don't lie to me," he raised an eyebrow and noticed her cower slightly. He sighed again. "Kid, I know you don't sleep, and-

Her eyes went wide, "I'm not waking Jim up with more nightmares?"

He raised his eyebrow again, "the nightmares you said you don't have?"

She cowered again and he felt a flash of guilt. He knew she was petrified and he was making things worse. But it was a conversation they needed to have. "You've gotta *sleep*,"

"I do!"

"Sleep *well*,"

She clammed up.

He shook his head, "we're pretty much done, I'd like to give you something to help you sleep, you'll never adjust to life onboard if you're not sleeping. I also need to take some blood," he saw all the color drain from her face at that.

He remembered what Christine had said, "heads up, Callie has a thing about blood draws. Seems a lot were demanded of her when her mom got sick."

He'd raised an eyebrow, "yeah, she said they'd test the attempted cures on her blood to make sure the disease never activated."

Christine shook her head, "that's not how xenopolycythemia works,"

Bones shrugged, "I know. It sounds like they were doing something shady with her blood, but why?"

Why indeed. He wanted to get a look at her blood himself. The pathologist in him was beyond curious.

“Just one vial,” he quickly reassured Callie. “And it’s with a pen, so it bruises ya less,”

She nodded mutely and as he took her blood, he glanced up and asked, “they never injected you with anything, right? Just took a lot of blood?”

“Over and over,” she nodded.

His lips pressed into a thin line as he pondered the necessity of what she was describing.

“Testing cures, you said?” He asked her.

“They had all these experimental treatments they’d get from overseas or other planets or something. They said that with some genetic illnesses, you can’t tell if you’re going to get it or not, even if you don’t have the gene. But sometimes when a cure is introduced, the disease activates. So it was like... Supposed to be a favor, I guess?” She winced. “I mean, I should be thankful, they were trying to make sure I’m not gonna die, but-”

“But it sounds like they overstepped and that’s not okay.”

She shrugged, “kinda par for the course.”

He felt his jaw tighten as he responded, “not here, it ain’t. Not in my medbay.”

Her eyebrows raised and lowered quickly, showing she didn’t believe him as he took the blood sample.

“Now, about-”

Before he could finish, red lights started flashing everywhere, a red alert sounding throughout the ship.

•

A blaring alarm sounds throughout medbay and I wince at how loud it is. Red lights start flashing as well along the walls.

“I’m guessing you don’t have a muster station assigned or would even know where to go if you did,” Bones speaks over the sirens.

Then the ship suddenly *LURCHES* so far to one side that I squeak and have to grab the edge of the bed in order to not fall off.

“Muster stations,” I grumble and try to slyly pant through shaking breaths, “have we hit an iceberg?!”

The ship lurches again, harder this time, and the lights flicker. They come back on in what seems to be an emergency pattern, only the most important lights bright and the rest dimmed.



Then it feels like something hits the ship. Almost like when you're sitting in your car and a shopping cart hits it because everything in Iowa is flat and feels like a wind tunnel in summer storms. It's the feel of a good strong hit being absorbed across something much larger, but a good hit is a good hit, and usually at least your paint is chipped.

"What was-" then it happens again, harder, and my body rises off the bed before finding itself being flung through the air.

I barely squeak again before Bones catches me midair around my waist before setting me down on my feet.

"You seem used to this..." I grumble, trying to fix my shirt.

"Your brother is the captain..." He grumbles back as he steadies me with a hand on my shoulder.

I'm not sure he's serious, kidding, or both.

Now that the lights have dimmed, the red flashing is more apparent, and more ominous, and I jump when the hand I didn't realize is still on my shoulder, squeezes. "I need to get out to the main medbay, come with me so you don't just go flying again," and then he's gently pulling me along out into the main bay.

Nurses are hurriedly, but without a trace of panic, moving about the room with ease. No one has come in yet.

Yet.

"What's going on?" I finally ask. "Did we hit something, did something hit us, is this a storm, is it an attack?"

What felt like a shopping cart hitting us earlier is nothing compared to the hit that cuts off my sentence. Everyone hits the deck and not by choice.

I feel gravity almost... glitch? Slightly, when it happens. It's not like we all just drop like sacks of potatoes- I mean, we *do* - but it's nearly like being picked up and thrown down. In trying to avoid reinjuring my ankle, my bad-shoulder-side takes the brunt of my fall.

The lights flash on and off, and Bones lets out a massive string of curses. "Sound off!" He calls into the darkness.

Affirmative responses, along with quite a few groans, come from what I can only assume is the entire staff.

I've pushed myself up to my feet, purposely ignoring Bones' outstretched hand, when he worriedly looks at my ankle. "You didn't roll it again, did you?"

"No, no, I tried to make sure-"

"What happened to your shoulder?"

"My wha..." I look down at myself and see I'm cradling my left arm- it's completely limp. "Crap." It's dislocated. ...again.

“Welp, looks like you get a bed after all, darlin,” Bones announces, placing a hand on my upper back between my shoulder blades to steer me towards one. “You ever been told you’re hypermobile?”

I object, “no-no-no-nooo, listen, this has happened before, it’s fine, it can wait, I mean, psh, I waited 8 hours in the hospital waiting room the second time it happened. I can get by on some Advil for a while, while you take care of people who are actually injured.”

Bones dead stops and drops his hand from my back. “I know you said you had a bad shoulder... But it’s dislocated- like this- completely before?”

I nod but it hurts the ligaments connecting my neck to my shoulder. “Yeah, once partially and once totally.”

The ship tilts again, and we both take a couple steps to steady.

“Uh, yeah,” I try to think while balancing, my head starting to swim with adrenaline and pain. “I mean, the first time, *she* ripped it out, and I had to lie and say it happened trying to stop a runaway horse. But I got yelled at for that because it was *my* fault she had to grab me all the time. She told me it wasn’t even a lie because I was always grabbing onto runaway horses because I was too stupid to shut the gate, when in reality it would randomly unlatch, and so my shoulder was probably weak from that. The second time when it fully dislocated, that was from a...fall.” A shove that was meant to land me on my bed, but I hit the footboard instead. Totally my own fault, according to her.

“...Callie, how old were you each time?”

“14 and 15,” I go to shrug, then stop myself. “So honestly, it’s okay. The way we all fell in here... I’m sure you’ll need the beds,” I nod to them all, barely visible in the dim light as my eyes try to adjust.

Nurses bustling around give me something else to look at as I try to calm myself down. It’s a sea of two different shades of blue and medical white, like waves of water hurrying to wherever they need to be.

“Christ, kid,” the hand comes back to my back to steer me again. “You might be at a point it needs actual surgery to stop it from happenin’ again,” he shakes his head. “I’m really startin’ to think you’re hypermobile.”

“Hyper-what?”

“It’s basically being loose jointed,” he explains. “But seriously, come on, to a bed.”

I shake my head, “something really wrong is going on outside! People are going to start coming in more hurt than I am! You never even answered me- what’s going on?!”

The ship shudders hard again, not enough that we have to stagger again but enough that we each take a step.

He sighs, and I can see a debate within himself in his eyes as he tries to decide how much to tell me. “From my experience, it feels like we are being fired upon.”

“*What* ?” I feel the color drain from my face and my legs go wobbly. “Why? Who?!”

He shakes his head and again tries to get me to move towards a biobed. “I don’t know. We won’t know until it’s over, most likely. *Please* let me take care of your arm before people come in.”

“If we’re still *alive* !” I all but screech. “A week I’ve been on this ship, and we’re already being attacked?!” I go over to a bed and use my one good arm to hop up, refusing the hand offered to me.

“Don’t freak out, but I’m going to strap you in,” Bones says, pulling a belt type thing over my thighs. “I don’t want to see you go flyin’ again,” he shakes his head.

I watch him, then look at the buckle, trying to see if I can unlatch it myself if I want.

He must see the look on my face. “It’s not locked, you can unlatch it,” he offers.

I nod, pulling my arm in to cradle it again, hissing in pain involuntarily.

The ship chooses that moment to tilt, sending Bones into the bed on my right, while he throws out a hand to try and steady me. The belt keeps me from flying, but my abs do have to work to stay upright.

Bones reaches for one of those massive clear pads again and starts scanning my shoulder. “Alright,” he finally says. “We’ll reduce it this time. But if it pops out again, I’m gonna insist on surgery, kid.”

I bristle, what gives him the right to *insist* ?

He runs away, literally, for a moment, and comes back with a few hypos. “Okay, muscle relaxer, painkiller, local anesthetic,” he explains. “Good?”

“Yeah. Is it the loopy painkiller, though?”

He shakes his head. “I don’t want to do that to you again,” he says gently. “We’re gonna try another one.”

I nod, “okay.”

“So you’re good with consenting to the reduction?”

I nod again. “Not like I’m consenting to surgery…”

He snorts.

“Did I uh… Did I say anything crazy when I was on those painkillers?”

Multiple hits rattle the ship, making me close my eyes and wince, even as the painkillers wash over me.

“Nothing... crazy,” he says hesitantly.

I eye him warily. “That doesn’t sound entirely truthful.”

“You talked a lot about your mom is all.”

My cheeks flare red, “what kind of stuff?”

“Just... some not so great things.”

Shame and guilt and embarrassment wash over me. My mom is *dead* and I was bad mouthing her?

I feel him start to touch my shoulder. “Can you feel any of this?”

I nod, chewing my lip. “It’s fine.”

“The heck it ain’t,” He responds, moving away for another hypospray.

I cock my head. “Huh?”

He shakes his head, “I’m not reducing a dislocated shoulder when you can *feel it*, child...”

“Huh.” I mutter again. “Weird.”

“...Why is that weird?” He asks as he deposits another hypo.

“That you care...” I mumble with my eyes closed.

“I... Why wouldn’t I?”

“Doctors never do...”

“Well, I do.”

“Sure.”

I hear him sigh. “Can you feel this?”

My eyes fly open and I look over at him. His hands are on my shoulder and upper arm and I had no idea. I shake my head, “no, not at all.”

He nods. "Good. Doubt you wanna watch," he warns.

I scoff, "not like I've not watched before..."

He looks down at my arm, and I do look towards my lap before he counts down and pops it back in.

Someone calls out for Bones and he hollers back to just keep triaging and he'll be there in a second.

Suddenly, Jim appears through the medbay doors. He catches my eye immediately and Bones follows my gaze, worry creasing his face. I see him do a visual once over on Jim as he walks over to us.

"What happened?" He asks, seeing me still cradling my arm. "Are you hurt? Are you?"

"She'll be fine, Jim, she dislocated her shoulder when we got hit and we all hit the deck."

Jim looks at me appraisingly, like he doesn't quite believe him, but he sighs and says, "Callie, we need your help."

•

"What do you mean?" She asked.

"We're under attack and what they want... is to talk to you."

"To *me* ?!"

He nods. "Do you... think you can do it?"

"Who even is it?"

"It's... well, they say it's the doctor that treated Winona."

She went pale and Bones' eyebrows shot up. "Really?" He asked.

Jim nodded. He started to see just how stressed Jim was- breath more ragged than he was trying to portray, eyes darting anywhere but the eyes of anyone else, and hands clenching and unclenching at his sides.

His mask had slipped and he was desperately trying to get it back into place, dissociating all the while.

It was bordering on too much for Jim to handle, and that meant something.

Len's mind was easily made up, "well, as the treating doctor, I'm coming along."

"Bones, I'm fine," Jim snapped, eyes settling on his sister.

"Oh, you think I didn't see you cupping that bad rib when you came in?"

A glare was thrown in the good doctor's direction. "You don't need to follow me to the bridge for a bruised rib," he growled.

Len raised an eyebrow as he all too easily recognized the look of Jim backed into a corner. Time to diffuse. "Maybe not," he crossed his arms and nodded at Jim once, before nodding to Callie once. "But *she* goes, *I* go."

•

"... *she* goes, *I* go."

My head whips involuntarily up and over to my left, to look at the... at the doctor (?) that is trying to... protect (?) me? (?)

"What, no!" I immediately object. "I-"

"*You*," I am interrupted, "do *not* need to be walking around this ship without a regen cycle on that shoulder. One we obviously do not have time for," he scowls. At who, I'm not sure. "So," he reaches inside a panel under the bed and straightens, holding a bag with the Starfleet Medical insignia, "I'm coming along to put that arm in a sling until we can come back down here and get it properly fixed."

I glance between the two men, Jim unbuckling the belt and helping me off the bed and Bones checking that his bag is stocked.

"Is she-" Jim looks at Bones, then at me, "are you-" back to Bones, "are you sure she's okay?"

I huff, trying to hide the shaking that has returned in full force. "I'm as good as I'm going to get."

"How's the pain?" Bones asks as I follow Jim out.

I nod, as we get into the turbolift, "it's okay."

*Please state your destination*

"Bridge!" Two male voices bark, making me flinch.

And both of the voice's owners' wince in kind.

Bones sighs, all but throwing his bag on the ground in frustration as he unrolls a swath of tape and eyes my arm. “Alright,” he reaches out for me, “let’s see what…” I’ve already flinched away at the outreach and he trails off.

Instead of waiting for the yelling to start, I push, “where is everyone?”

“Likely at their posts, it’s a good thing the halls aren’t full of screaming, bloody people like in the movies,” Bones explains, hands outstretched in placation. “It’s a *good* thing we didn’t pass anyone.”

“And why has the… hitting stopped?” I ask, feeling idiotic. I have no idea what they were shooting at us, it could be pool noodles for all I understand!

Jim’s voice lowers as his head tilts to face the floor. “Because I agreed to go get you to talk to them,” he shakes his head. “I’m sorry, but it was the o-”

“Only way, yeah I know, it’s okay. I get it,” I stop myself from shrugging, eyeing the doctor still holding bandages in my periphery.

We arrive on the bridge and the doors whip open, but everything slows down for me.

Sirens blare in time with flashing red lights.

Sparks fly off a pristine white console, leaving it black, with dark tendrils of smoke rising. I know how precious oxygen is in space, will some small fire kill us all?

A shout fills my ears in the other direction, making me whip my head ahead as I see another console spark and sputter.

The bridge is clearly in far worse shape than medbay. No wonder Jim came in with a hurt rib.

Spock stands in front of the Captain’s chair, arms clasped behind his back at the wrists as he stands rigid.

I follow Jim as he sidles up beside Spock, cursing the plight of being barely 5 feet tall, and not able to see what they’re seeing. What *everyone else* is seeing.

It’s not Dr. Rathmore, but a man dressed all in black sitting in a captain’s chair of his own, with a short buzz cut and his dark eyes dancing over me in a way that makes my skin crawl. “Finally,” he says dramatically. “Captain if you don’t mind…” He sneers, “let’s talk more privately.”

Jim nods once before turning and heading to a door off to the side of the bridge. “Ready room,” he says to Spock and Bones.

“Just you and Calliope, Captain.” The man commands forcefully.

Bones turns and eyes the man with disgust. “Your attack just dislocated this child’s shoulder. I’m coming along to wrap it.” He says with finality, moving towards the ready room.

Spock nods to Jim once and settles in the captain's chair.

I follow Jim and Bones into the ready room, where the man is now on a holoscreen in there.

"You can call me Leland," he says with an air of boredom. "However it's not me who is going to explain what's going to happen here," he turns in his seat to call out, "doc?"

Another man appears, and this time, it *is* my mom's doctor.

But Jim shocks me when he whispers, "Vos."

I look at him with confusion, "what? No, that's mom's doctor that Bones says doesn't exist. Dr. Rathmore."

Something passes over Jim's face. Something I've never seen before. Something haunted.

"Allow me to reintroduce myself, Calliope. Your brother knows me more... intimately than you do. Dr. Rex Vos."

I raise an eyebrow, "is that supposed to mean something to me?"

"He's a eugenicist," Jim says lowly, dangerously.

"And how do you know him?" I ask quietly.

"That's a story for another day," Rath- Vos, announces. "Calliope. We require your presence."

'We require another blood sample.' Flashes through my head.

I shake my head in fear, "why?"

He sighs, "this may be difficult to hear, but your mother wasn't who you thought she was."

"...excuse me?" Jim and I say in unison.

"She knew about her xenopolycythemia for a long time. In fact... that's why she began having children. You see, your mother was a wonderful scientist, wonderful to work with."

"My mother was an engineer," Jim cuts in.

'My mother.'



“Don’t you recall the funeral, James?”

I see Jim try not to squirm. Even I know he hates being called James.

“Your mother worked in intelligence. She also worked... let’s say undercover, in our sciences division. She developed a cure. A cure by altering the genetic makeup of the embryos she and your father created. A cure by... altering you. All of you. But only the female embryo was successfully altered.” He cocks his head like he’s studying me. “I was there, I helped with the process, it was fascinating,” he’s on a roll. “She introduced the disease, then we physically altered the cells to fight it off!”

“You actually developed a cure...” Bones breathes.

“In theory. Obviously it didn’t work on Winona, but Calliope will never get the disease because of us,” Vos all but brags. “But we’d like to find out why it didn’t work as a cure.”

“No.” Jim immediately counters, before Bones adds, “you’ve taken enough from her.”

Vos looks behind himself and folds his hands ominously. “You’ve already had a demonstration of our weapons. We won’t stop until you hand her over.”

“Why is this so important to you?” Jim squints. “What about her has you so obsessed?”

“Because it didn’t *work* !” He roars so suddenly that I take a step back. “*My* work didn’t work! Mine! And I must know why.”

“Why didn’t she just give herself the ability to fight the disease?” I ask, instinctually trying to calm the raging adult in front of me.

He rolls his eyes, “you don’t think she tried? It didn’t work when not done on an embryonic level. The cure has to be literally bred into the host,” the host? “Eugenics at work!” He smiles, before he looks at Jim, “we’ll give her back if you hand her over willingly.”

“Yeah, in what condition?” Jim moves to stand in front of me. “Not a chance.”

“Please don’t make us take her by force,” he sounds bored. “That won’t turn out well for anyone.”

“Funny for such a small ship to have such big guns. Who are you working with?” Jim narrows his eyes, “this time?”

This time? What-

“A small faction... nothing you need concern yourself with.” There’s a beeping behind him and he turns to talk to someone. “I see you’ve called for reinforcements,” he says with an air of annoyance. “This isn’t over. She will be ours. And if we have to take her, we won’t be giving her back. At least not in any condition you want.”

He looks me dead in the eyes. “You were useless to save your mother, but you have the opportunity to save everyone on that ship. The next time we meet might not end well for the crew. You’ve walked the halls- how many people have you hurt by refusing to surrender yourself?”

He's right. It's my fault people are going to be hurt. It's my fault **Jim** is hurt.

"How did you escape?" Jim asks lowly. "How did you get out?"

More beeping comes more urgently from behind the doctor. "Oh, JT, always so naive..."

Jim steps forward, "Did you know who I was? Did you know what she tried to do to me?"

"We spent quite a lot of time together, JT," Vos says slowly. "Why do you think you were so easy to give allergies to? Your genetics had... abnormalities from the process."

I am so lost and no one is explaining anything. "You're really telling me that our mom used us to make herself a cure, then it didn't work?"

He nods once.

My temper flares, thinking of all the blood draws I suffered while this man watched from the doorway. "You were never testing cures on my blood, you were trying to make a cure with it!"

He smiles again, slimy and almost... proud. "Exactly." Then he snorts, "an augmented person has to be good for *something*."

My entire body goes hot then cold. Did he just call me-

"She is *not* an augment," Bones steps forward. "We just finished her physical, and-"

"Doctor, I have no interest in explaining myself to you. I thought as a pathologist you might see things our way but... pity."

Bones turns redder than he already was.

"I'm an *augment*?" I breathe.

An alarm blares from behind Vos and he sighs. "Time to go."

"But-" I try, but the feed cuts out and I can only assume they've gone.

My lip immediately starts to quiver, an augment? I'm an *augment*? Those are illegal! They lock them up! "I'm an augment?" I all but wail, looking at Bones for some explanation. I start to shake all over, and I look at Jim, "he said it didn't work on you, so you aren't one, right? Only me?"

"Callie,"

"And- and- you know him?" I ask, tears starting to leak out my eyes. "He... He was your doctor or something too?"

“Not... exactly...”

“Then exactly *what* , Jim? Because someone just tried to kidnap me!” I snap.

Jim looks green, like he’s struggling to keep his breakfast down as he tries to find an answer for me. “I... I know him from... From a massacre... There were eugenics involved, I was there... I... Ugh...” He rubs his eyes.

“So it was a mission?” I ask, trying to make sense of it. My breaths are coming in ragged as I try to make sense of it all. “So- so- so mom had him help her try and augment us all, it only worked on me, but it still didn’t work to cure her, and you *also* know this guy from some previous mission?”

None of this is making sense.

I gasp in more air, looking at Jim as he also struggles to breathe normally. He’s freaking out too, I realize. “Jim, who *is* that guy?!”

Tears stream down my face as I ignore whatever Jim is saying, “oh my god, and they’re going to keep coming back until they get me?” I’m starting to spiral. “They’re going to keep hurting people? Oh my god, they’re going to make you give me up!” I gasp more air in but it’s like it’s carbon dioxide instead of oxygen. “Starfleet can’t possibly expect you to choose me over all these people! They’re going to take me! They’re going to take me, and hurt me, and- and- and-”

Jim shakes his head, trying to reach for me, but I find myself stumbling back, away from him, shaking my head, until my back hits the wall.

I slide down and hug my knees, ignoring my searing shoulder pain, sobs coming out of me.

I haven’t cried since my mom died.

And I’m not even crying for her, which makes me feel awful. I’m crying for myself like the selfish child I am. The selfish kid who doesn’t want to give herself up to save 1,000 people.

Jim and Bones are both trying to talk to me, but I’m too far gone into panic to hear.

•

Len got a look from Jim, a haunted and far away look, and he knew Jim was down for the count.

He could read the look to mean Jim could wait 10 minutes to fully melt down while they handled Callie’s.

He looked at her, curled into a ball, sobbing her heart out.

He kneels in front of her, hands hovering but not touching, “Callie-”

“You needed to let them have me! To save everyone! He’s just going to come back! He’s right and this is all my fault!” Her voice was shaking and bordering on a wail.

“No,” he shook his head earnestly, “darlin’, no no no, it’s not-”

“**YES. IT. IS !**” Her breathing was bordering on out of control and he pulled his tricorder off his belt. She didn’t even notice him scan. “I’m a burden and a danger!” She whimpered, before she started repeating it over and over and over.

She was spiraling. She instantly went from babbling to straight up gasping for air. “Callie, you’ve **got** to calm down for me, sweetheart.”

“I can’t let him take me. But I’m endangering the whole ship! If I could just give myself up or... or **die** , things would be so much easier. But I just can’t let him have me... He can’t have me!”

“I know, sugar, I know,”

She looked like she didn’t realize she said that out loud.

“We aren’t gonna let anyone hurt you, let anyone take you!”

She was shaking her head as she sobbed, “he’s going to hurt me! He’s going to hurt me all over again! He’s going to take my blood and it’s going to ache and hurt...” she hiccuped a few times. “Who knows what else they want to do to an **augment** !”

Len glanced up at Jim, by then red in the face and struggling to keep his breathing under control.

Jesus Christ, how was he going to handle them both?

“I have no idea what they’re talking about with... **eugenics** ? They’ll **kill** me! Please don’t make me go! Please! Please don’t make me go,” she sobbed, fully hyperventilating.

“Honey, we’re not lettin’ anyone take you! Listen to my voice, I’m right here with you. You’re safe. Just take some deep breaths. It’s all going to be ok...”

“It’s not g-g-going to be ok!”

“Callie, Callie, darlin’, you gotta listen to me. You are **safe** . I need you to breathe with me,” he reached out and put a hand over hers on her knee.

It was meant to be comforting but she screamed and jumped so high that she smacked her tailbone hard against the floor.

“Callie...” he grumbled, which seemed to send her into a tailspin, thinking he was mad at her.

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry! Imsorryimsorryimsorryimsorry! Please don’t hit me, I’m sorry...”

So much was bubbling up.

Far too much, and she was beginning to seriously hyperventilate.

Man, he knew her anxiety was *bad* but not this bad. He had to get her calmed down. “Baby girl, I’d *never* hit you, I’m not gonna hurt you, but I’ve got to get you to calm down,” he explained before grabbing her arms and hauling her into his own.

He threw his back against the wall, hauling her with him, pinning her arms to her sides and holding her tight, trying to avoid jostling her bad shoulder he hadn’t had the chance to wrap, once everything had gone to pot.

He’d never have grabbed her had she not been going blue at the lips. He had her in his arms, but sitting next to him on the floor. “Breathe with me, Cal. Breathe with me, ok? Here we go,” he took a deep, deep breath, pulling her up in his arms before pushing her down with the breath out.

“I don’t *want* to!” She wailed.

“You’re gonna pass out!”

“Just let me...” she sobbed.

“No, no, sweetheart, I’m not gonna do that,”

“Just let me *die* ...”

There was no way she was coming down without chemical intervention.

Smart enough to bring drugs, he swiftly deposited one into her neck.

She barely noticed, hiccuping a couple times, taking in desperately needed air, as she started to slump against the good doctor.

Her eyelids looked heavy and *drowsy* .

“It’s alright, darlin. Don’t fight it,” he muttered, warm and heavy in her ear. “Just let go for me now...”

She went boneless.

So then.

It was Jim’s turn.

Len laid Callie gently down on the floor, reluctant to let her head just flop on the floor but he knew he was going to have to bodily handle Jim onto the couch already and there just wasn't enough room for them both. Her neck and shoulder would survive.

He turned to Jim and thought about the first time he'd realized his strange little flinches meant he was afraid of gettin' hit.

It had been about a month of being roommates when Bones blew up on him one night, with one of his typical concerned rants over the kid's schedule.

When he reached out to lay a hand on the kid's shoulder, Jim had nearly ducked at the touch, staying in a cowering position for just a split second longer than necessary.

Then it clicked.

Then he put together the careful shuffling to avoid touch.

The wide eyed fearful split second glances when Len got really worked up over something.

And it made him sick to his stomach that it took him that long to realize.

He came back to the present and slowly walked over to Jim, hands out, like he was a wounded animal not to be spooked. "Hey kid, just you 'n me here, a'right?"

Jim didn't respond, one white knuckle shakily supporting his weight on the conference table.

Len watched for a moment, knowing he was about to falter any second.

And when he did, he was there to place a hand under his arm and throw his other arm across his chest, pull him into his own, before depositing him on the couch.

Len knelt down in front of him, reminiscent of the night Jim told him his mom died, and took his hands into his. "Jim? Kid? We've gotta get you grounded, your breathin' is all outta whack," he pumped his hands gently, trying to bring him back to present. Although the present wasn't that great of a place at that moment.

Jim shook his head violently suddenly, trying to rip his hands from Bones'.

Bones didn't allow it. "Jim, come on, stay with me, I need you to breathe with me. We've done this a thousand times, right, kid? You know the drill, come on, take a deep breath for me," he pleaded, looking into Jim's eyes, somewhere far away.

He knew where.

"**Jim**," he said firmly. "You're having an anxiety attack, we need-"

And then Jim threw up. All over the floor next to Len.

Oh boy.

Jim instantly started sobbing. Uncontrollable, thank god the ready room is soundproof, *sobbing* .

His hands flew into his hair, yanking for some sort of purchase, something to latch on to and pull, just to *feel* something other than the agony is his chest.

“Hey-hey-hey, Jim, no-no-no, c’mon now, stop that,” Len tried to soothe as he attempted to loosen Jim’s grip. “Cmon, darlin’, I need you to hear me,” he said a bit louder, the endearments continuing to slip as they always did with scared patients. “Jim, *please* listen to me. I do *not* want to sedate another Kirk today.”

*That* got Jim’s attention. His blue eyes flashed up, full of rage and terror, “no drugs! No!” He tried to push past Bones and ran for the door.

“Computer, lock door under CMO command.”

*Locking . Door now locked .*

“DANG IT, BONES!” Jim yelled at the ceiling with fists banging at his sides.

“Jim I’m not gonna drug ya, but I’m not lettin’ you outta here until you calm down! It’s gonna be alright, kid. We know a lot more now about what’s going on, now. And good thing is, it’s in my area of expertise.”

Jim panted, shoulders heaving with flight mode very active.

“Jim, you know full well I don’t sedate you unless it’s absolutely necessary. You don’t need to run from me, kid. I wish you’d remember that after all these years.” He kept his entire demeanor and voice calm and level, in complete contrast with Jim’s near total lack of emotional control.

“Bones, what am I going to *do* ?” Jim sobbed into his hands, dropping back on the couch. “I’m so out of my depth here! She was having a panic attack, and I was too busy fighting off my own to help!”

Len sighed. “Jim, you know I’m here for you. I’m here for you *both* . I can’t claim to have fully raised a child, but I’ve spent enough time around kids and *you* to know how to help in these situations. No one ever said you were alone in this, kid. I’m in this with you.”

Jim nodded and gulped a few times, energy draining as the panic and adrenaline left. “Bones...”

Len grabbed one hand and held it tight. “I know, kid. I know. And I’ve got you. I’ve got you both.”

•

Bones had to call Christine and M’Benga for quick but discreet help with the two Kirk siblings.

M'Benga easily lifted Callie's dead weight straight from the floor while Christine threw one of Jim's arms over her shoulders while Len took the other side.

Thankfully, there was a private turbolift in the ready room that Len wondered if Pike had installed during the post-Nero refit for this exact reason.

With Callie tucked away and sedated, Len could give Jim his full attention for the time being.

Christine didn't need to be told to take him to a secluded bay and engage the privacy bubble as she silently left.

Len placed an ice pack behind Jim's neck after he got him horizontal.

Jim's eyes were hazy and focused somewhere far away, cloudy with haunting memories.

Haunted. That's exactly how he looked.

First went in an antiemetic. "Anti-nausea," he muttered as he administered it. Jim was fine with letting him do what was needed, as long as he communicated with him along the way.

He brushed the bangs back off Jim's forehead- he was due for his typical crew cut but had had... other things on his mind as of late. They were sweaty and stuck, making Len need to comb a few times to clear the strands away. "Talk to me, kid. I know where you're at. But talk to me, please."

Jim shook his head, eyes locked on the ceiling. "She's gonna find out. She's going to find out about... About..."

"Jim--"

"How many more people am I going to lose to that monster? And I know how many I already have, Bones. He helped decide who went on each list. I know exactly how many kids he killed. I know exactly how many before *and after* the massacre. I remember each face, each name, and each grave! Because I dug each one! I insisted on it. The other boys would help but I always made sure it was *me* who did the most. I made sure it was *me* who laid them to rest. Because it was *me* who got them killed just like it's *me* who's going to get Callie killed!"

"Jim, kid, listen to me. You're the one keepin' her *safe*, okay? You're the one who got her out of Iowa. You're the one who kept her away from Frank. You're takin' *such* good care of her. But you've gotta take care of yourself too.

Jim shook his head as tears streamed freely down his face. "I-I don't know if I can do this,"

"What's that?"

"Take care of her. Do a good job. Be understanding. Be there for her. All things I can't do when I'm having a fricking panic attack!"

"You have your demons just like anyone else. But you're perfectly capable and are the perfect person for her right now."



“Shyeah? Until she hears about this massive secret everyone kept from her.” Jim hiccupped when he tried to scoff. “How am I going to explain? Answer her questions about how I know him?”

Len sighed and sat at his hip. “Then you will answer them. And it will be okay. Or. You can be honest and say you don’t feel comfortable. Boundaries are good. You guys are gonna have to set them eventually.”

“Put the therapy talk away.”

“You’re in *my* medbay, I’ll remind you.”

Jim scrubbed a hand over his face.

“Jim, this crew is starting to feel like a family. Maybe trust that. Maybe lean into it. Maybe let some other people, like Nyota and Christine step in and help- check on her, talk to her, give her the friggin’ hugs I’m sure she never got! Let this family be hers, too. It doesn’t have to be just you.”

“But answering her questions about Tarsus is going to be just me.” He whispered. “Who else is he going to tell before all this is over?”

“He could have talked about it in front of the entire bridge crew, but didn’t. That has to mean something.”

Jim nodded, throwing a hand over his eyes. “Something for a headache, please?”

Bones obliged, saying, “Obviously they’re very secretive. And maybe that’ll work in your favor.”

“Not with Callie...” Jim sighed.

“Not with Callie.” Bones agreed. “But she’s your *sister*, Jim. She loves you. I’m sure she’d want to know.”

“Lots of people want to know who the 9 are, Bones.”

“She’s not asking who the 9 are. She’s asking how you know Vos.” He paused. “How do you know him, kid? What happened in that place?”

Jim shook his head, “not now, Bones. I can’t,” he whispered.

Bones nodded, seeing his eyelids getting heavy.

“Sleep a bit kid, I’m going to go check on your sister. I didn’t give her much Improviline and I don’t want her wakin’ up with just M’Benga.”

“Go,” Jim nodded. “I’ll be okay.”

•

My head hurts. Must be because my pillow is messed up.

Wait.

This isn't my pillow... Where am I? Why did I leave the lights on?

I fully open my eyes and realize that all I know is that I'm *not* home.

Why wouldn't I be at home?

Why are these lights so... *sterile* ? There's a... blurry *bubble* around me?

I'm in a hospital.

Omg I'm in a *hospital* ?

Why?

What happened?

I jolt up and I realize I'm the one in a hospital bed.

Why?

Am I with my mom?

No. No she's... dead.

She died and... and...

Jim!

I'm with Jim!

But why am I *here* ?

I try to sit up, and it doesn't go well.

I try to swing my legs off the bed, and that goes even worse.

“Woah, woah, woah,” Bones is suddenly there to catch me. “I get an alert your heart is poundin’ and of *course* you’re trying to throw yourself outta your bed...” he hauls me back up like I weigh nothing, despite my bonelessness.

He props the bed up, “the heck di’you gimme?” I somewhat slur.

He snorts, looking down at his padd, “that would be Improvoline. It’s nice stuff.”

“I don’t remember much...”

“That’s not from that,” he types away, “the grogginess prob’ly isn’t either, you’re gonna feel more hungover from that panic attack than the drugs.”

I blink.

What.

Panic-

“Oh.”

Oh god.

Oh god *no* .

Then it alllll floods back.

I made an idiot of myself. A blubbering, screaming, crying idiot.

Oh my *god* he had to *hold* me.

Jim was there. Jim wasn’t the one holding me. Jim must have been freaked out by my dramatics. Oh crap. This is bad. Bad bad bad.

I’ve worked on hiding panic attacks so *well* that I can hold them off until I can be alone and actually ride it out.

I don’t know what other response he wants from me. I don’t know what I can say to get in the least amount of trouble for being a drama queen and not doing what I was told.

*Apologize!*

“Look, I’m *really* sorry,” I say in a rush. “I had a really immature meltdown-”

“You had an anxiety attack which is perfectly understandable...” Bones cuts in gently but firmly.

My eyes fly to his with confusion etched on my face.

“Did... Did you think you were gonna be in *trouble* here?” Bones stammers.

I look from side to side. “Well... yeah?”

He sighs sadly and hesitantly moves to sit on the edge of my bed.

I move my legs minutely to avoid any touch.

I’m sure he notices.

But he says nothing about it.

“I can’t say I’m not *worried* about you after that,” Bones admits.

I run a hand through my hair frustratedly, “I’ve gotten so good at hiding anything like that, I never ever have reactions like that,” ‘at least not in front of people,’ I add silently. “So it’s not like, anything anyone needs to *worry* about-”

“Cal-”

“-I’m *fine*, I can control it-”

“Sweet-”

“The whole thing just took me off guard,” I all but beg.

“Well, we’re gonna start with the whole ‘I’m so great at hiding anything like that’, mess.”

I cock my head.

“Anxiety is nothing you need to hide, especially not in a situation like this, it’s understandable.”

I huff and roll my eyes. “I don’t care. I can control myself. It’s fine. My head hurts.”

“I can get you something for that. But I need you to be honest with me and tell me how the anxiety feels now.”

I physically cringe at the word. A little too visibly, apparently.

“*What* is that response?”

I wave a hand, “anxiety isn’t an issue for me.”

I see him stare at me. A long, calculating, thinking stare.

He takes in a slow breath. “Okay,” he says simply, tapping away at his padd. “Does your mouth feel dry? Eyes?”

...What? He’s not going to keep pushing? I know I have anxiety. I know he knows I have anxiety. He has to know that I know that he knows. And he’s going to drop it? He’s not even going to keep going on about how it’s understandable?

Off guard, I somewhat stammer, “...b-both.”

“Pain anywhere else? Your neck?”

“Well, yeah, my head hurts.” I say confused, because it’s the same thing?

He looks up at me. “Are you saying that your neck always hurts when you get a headache?”

I stare at him. “That’s how headaches *work* ?”

He stares back, “that is *not* how headaches work!”

“Why not?”

“Because that means there’s more going on than “just” headaches!”

I roll my eyes. “Look, I’m fine. You had enough of your physical before, you asked more questions now, I’m all good, ankle’s fine-”

He puts a hand out to stop me. “Technically I’m the one here who gets to decide when you’re ‘fine’, miss ma’am. And you’re also forgetting your dislocated shoulder,” he nods to it, and I glance down. My arm is in a sling and I notice a tingling sensation similar to the one I’d had on my ankle prickles under my skin.

“God, how long have I been asleep?”

“About 12 hours,” he says casually, throwing another blanket over me.

I flounder a bit, trying to remember what time it was when I... got knocked out. “You’re saying it’s after 3am?!”

He nods, straightening the blanket over the bed.

“*What* are you doing?”

“...Letting you go back to sleep?”

I find a breathy, incredulous, nearly hysterical laugh falling from my lips. “Why do I need to stay here?”

He stops moving. “I mean... you *don't*, but... There are some genetic questions we've gotta get answered.”

I bristle. “And how are “we” going to do that?”

He holds out a hand again, “I'm not draining your blood like those dirtside idiots,” he shakes his head.

But all I know is that I'm in a medical setting with someone who wants to look at my blood. Someone whose been nice so far but someone I'm not sure I can trust. I've got to get out of here. At least talk to Jim, maybe he can hide me somewhere on earth, at least he can stop them from experimenting on me or locking me up.

“Look, I'm going to go get you painkillers and I'll be right back, okay?”

I nod, warily watching every inch he moves as he leaves.

There's no telling what they will do to me if I'm on painkillers. He could use it as an excuse to do a bunch of blood work, despite what he said. I can't see out of this privacy bubble anything more than shadows, and it's night so of course the lights have been brought low and everything is in shadow.

But I'm not staying here.

I'll leave. I can send a message that I decided my head didn't hurt and I wanted to sleep in my own bed.

When I get back, our quarters are all empty and I remember when Christine taught me about finding my way, she had also told me you can ask the computer to help you find *people*.

“Computer?”

*Acknowledged.*

I jump. “Uhm, can you please tell me where the captain is? Captain Kirk?”

*Captain Kirk's current location is restricted.*

**What?**

“What?!”

*Captain Kirk's current location may only be given to Commander Spock, or Lieutenant Commander McCoy.*

“Well... where are they?”

*Commander Spock is in his quarters and is currently off duty, with an active do not disturb request. Dr. McCoy is in corridor C-1.*

C-1 - that's- that's outside the **door** .

The doors whoosh open and Jim strides in, Bones in tow.

I jump and stammer, “Jim- I- I'm-” and then he's in front of me, but suddenly pauses as Bones flops onto the couch.

“I don't want to freak you out or scare you, but I'm going to hug you now, kay?” Jim says.

“You- what?”

He's got me gently in his arms before it feels more like he's hanging on for dear life.

I stiffly hug him back, but don't move a muscle even as he rocks side to side a couple of times.

“Have you been stuck on the bridge this whole time?” I ask, worriedly.

Jim seems to falter a bit at that, “wha- no- I- I was taking care of different things.”

“The computer told me I wasn't allowed to know where you were...” I grumble.

He winces, “we'll... see about fixing that.”

I sink into the armchair, “is there really a need?”

Jim's brows furrow. “Wh-why wouldn't there be?”

“Be...cause I obviously can't stay here...?” I say slowly, waiting for a nod of agreement that doesn't come. “I mean, I can't live here if someone is going to attack your ship to try and take me, s-so I thought I could take what I have in mom's savings and maybe get a small apartment? Riverside or... I don't even care where, but I can just go somewhere and hide.”

“Callie, no,” Jim counters, shaking his head.

“I can’t put everyone here in danger! Jim, you don’t need this drama, you’re still a new captain, I can’t-”

“Did you ever stop to think maybe I *want* this? Maybe I *want* you here? Maybe I tried to get you out to San Francisco every summer because I *wanted* you. Because I still *want* you.”

My eyes burn in a way that fills me with fury. I will *not* cry. Not again. “But there’s no way you *want* all this *trouble*,” my voice wavers on the last word.

Then he’s kneeling in front of me.

He’s... taking my hands.

“Calliope Georgia Kirk. I need you to listen to me, can you please listen very carefully?”

I nod, failing to resist the urge to gulp.

My mom would have heard it, and instantly dropped my hands saying I was so dramatic.

But he doesn’t even blink. His eyes don’t leave mine, he just keeps squeezing my hands. “You. Are not. *Trouble*. You are not a burden or in anyone’s way. You are not a price to pay. You are *wanted*.”

“In more ways than one...” I say, watery.

“Cal,”

“What even happens now? If you don’t get rid of me, what? We just... run and hide? I’m a flipping *augment* !”

“I can tell you you aren’t an augment from your immune system alone, kid,” Bones finally jumps in. “You wouldn’t be strugglin’ against the vaccines so much if you were genetically altered in the ways that are illegal.”

Jim and I stop and look at him simultaneously, “there are ways that *aren’t* illegal?”

Jim drops my hands and raises up, “of course...” he breathes, looking contemplative.

“The laws against augmentations,” Bones explains to me, “follow specific guidelines. Some things aren’t illegal, like, correcting cleft palate in utero. But something like Ilosian healing is a big no.”

“So I’m half augment?” I challenge.



Jim turns back to me, “if you’re half then I’m at least a quarter,” he shrugs, trying to be funny.

I scoff, “so what’s the criteria for jail? 26%?” I’m being a brat and pushing my luck and I don’t know why when they’ve both been nothing but nice to me. “Or is that the required percentage for kidnapping?! And-and what else? Experimentation? And Jesus, who even was our mother?!”

Jim sits on the couch and I turn to face him. “I have the same question,” he says wearily.

“Well... Who’s Rathmore after all?” I ask. “And when did you meet him? What did he do to you?”

•

“What did he do to you?” She asked.

Bones glanced over at Jim worriedly, but only for a moment. He wasn’t sure how he was going to handle that question.

Jim searched for words, eyes trained on the ground, clouding over.

He mentally cursed. He was *not* coping well. If they weren’t careful, the Tarsus trauma could easily overwhelm him, and this wasn’t a time that could happen.

Jim was a very compartmentalized person, carefully tucking away certain traumas into neat little boxes. All to be ignored, of course. But methodically organized.

Except for two issues. The two biggest.

Tarsus and Frank.

One of Jim’s first signs things weren’t going well was if he stopped eating. Even just slowed down or deviated from his careful schedule or menu, it wasn’t a sign of anything great.

The 10 year anniversary had been awful— and he hadn’t even known why at the time.

All he knew was that his already regularly picky eating roommate had stopped eating all together and was having nightmares every night, leaving him drenched in sweat.

He was worried after Jim didn’t come home one night. When sundown the next day came with still no word, he finally began to type a message to Pike, Jim’s academic (and unofficial personal) advisor.

But Pike messaged him first.

“*Lt. McCoy*,” he tried not to cringe, he hated the honorary title that came from being a doctor. “*Please be advised Cadet Kirk has been in my company since last evening and will be tonight as well. Please comm when you are available.*”

And the man's *personal* comm number was there.

That *meant* something.

He called 30 seconds after the message came through.

Pike didn't even greet him, "you read fast." It sounded like he was propping his feet up.

Len cocked his head to the side, "yes sir, need to when you're reading charts all day," he said congenially. "I'm just doing as ordered and reporting in."

He was pretty sure he heard a scoff. "Stand down, McCoy. This is personal, we are not speaking on duty at the moment."

Another head cock that wouldn't be seen. "Yes s..." he cut off the 'sir'.

He was positive he heard Pike smile. "Good," the older man said. "The message was official so that the call hadn't need be," he said. "Jim is with me, working on a project that is separate from the big thing going on on-campus right now."

"Oh," Len said thoughtfully. "The Tarsus memorials?"

"Yes, all that. Jim is already an expert on it and I have projects he can do this week instead that will help with the 3 year idiotic plan- that you also agreed to, by the way. And how's that going?"

"Fine, sir," he shook his head. "I..." he trailed off, unsure of his place.

"My own advisor used to say "speak now, because tomorrow is too late",," Pike prompted.

"Is there something you're not telling me?"

There was a poignant pause and he really wondered if he stepped too far.

"Jim is a very private person," Pike began.

"I've noticed," Len couldn't help but quip. Almost as if to break the tension.

"There may be times he seems odd, off, or distant. And if that happens, keep your distance, but be supportive, and *call me* , do you understand?"

"...is that an order?"

“Consider it a personal favor.”

“Whatever is best for Jim, I will do.”

Another pause. “You’re a good friend to him. I’ll update you if need be, but I suspect he’s a bit homesick and you’ll see him tomorrow.”

“So he’s also off for the week?”

“Like everyone else,” Pike said.

“So should I make myself scarce?”

“Did you hear what I just said?”

Len was taken aback. “Sir?”

“He doesn’t just make friends. Not real ones.” Len already knew that. Jim didn’t readily seek out deep, meaningful friendships. Or even true ones at all, at times. He thought about all the times he had plopped down in front of him at lunch because the kid was sitting alone in a corner, and he had been raised better than to allow that.

But he also kept his distance, letting Jim seek him out. They were already roommates, he didn’t want to make him sick of his company.

And slowly Jim did start reciprocating.

He showed up with a coffee after his shift at the hospital during the winter, “I was close by and figured your southern self is going to be cold and whiny when you get back unless you have this.”

“And your Midwestern rear is used to far more than this mess,” but he did accept the coffee.

A shrug. “True. We really don’t even wear coats until it’s like, actually cold. This is just for show,” he waved his coat around through the pocket.

“And what do you consider ‘actually cold’, weirdo?”

“I dunno like, 10 degrees?”

“You’re nuts.”

“You’re delicate.”

“I could break every single bone in your body...” he grumbled.

And Jim froze.

And he knew he had screwed up.

Jim tried to snort a laugh, stop the stutter in his step, but his falter was obvious.

Too obvious to go unrecognized.

“You good?”

“Yeah, yeah just... tired today. Lot of classes.”

“Classes you could sleep through.” He snorted.

“Not wrong...”

“So why don’t you ask to test out?”

“A couple would allow it. I’m told Professor Spock would never. He’s designing some super test and doesn’t feel like deviating from his teaching plan. So it’s like. Why start rumors I nepo-babied out of class?”

“Uh, to *sleep* ? Or do those god awful flight sims.”

An eye roll. “Meh.”

“He is *homesick* ,” Pike continued speaking firmly. “You are part of the home now. Sit your butt down and ride this week out with him, if you truly want to help.”

He decided to full throttle his luck. “What is it about this week?”

“That is a Jim story for him to tell.”

“...alright. I have studying to do anyway.”

“Oh please. You could teach every medical class here.”

“Extracurriculars.”

“Bull.”

“Hey, like you said, I’ve got a three-year plan, too. Plus, I’m working on my second PhD. And working. But I’ll keep the kid company, sure.” Before Pike could cut the line, he got in another question- “are you sure there isn’t anything else I need to know? Especially from a medical perspective?”

There was a pause so long that he thought maybe he hadn’t gotten the question in before Pike ended the call, after all.

“He’s not going to eat much. Don’t worry about it unless he completely stops.”

“All do respect, sir, he’s already not been eatin’ much and I’m already worried.”

“Then you know how far the body can push itself when stressed. Stress him out by pushing food, and he will stop eating completely for an extended period of time.”

That gave the doctor quite a bit of pause, but he accepted the answer from the man that clearly knew his roommate better than he did.

So when he found out about Tarsus by the next anniversary, he was more than ready to help. But he learned very quickly what triggers Jim had surrounding it.

So he knew seeing the doctor that had experimented on him in Kodos’ Palace wasn’t going to do anything good for him. Let alone Callie flat out asking how he knew Vos and what he had done to him.

Jim hesitated, “it was a trip to a colony gone wrong,” he said slowly. “I was captured and... experimented on.”

“By him?” She pushed.

Jim nodded.

“Jesus, Jim,” she breathed. “That happened in the past year since you took command? And he knew who you were beforehand?”

Jim conveniently ignored the first question and only answered the second, “yeah, I guess so. I think it was a coincidence we were both on the planet but...”

She let out a shaky breath, “so he helped mom try to alter our genes to create a cure... experimented on you when given the chance, but he only cares about me now? It’s all too coincidental, none of this makes sense!”

“No, it doesn’t,” Bones agreed, shooting a look at Jim who looked lost. “What does make sense is a genius eugenicist bouncing around from challenge to challenge. And it sounds like trying to cure your mom was his latest one. Maybe once I take a look, I can figure something out. In the meantime, I think we should all get to bed, given the hour.” He tried to save Jim, give him more time to figure out how to explain his past with Vos.

He pulled out a cup of pills, “I brought you painkillers,” he said to Callie before shaking the cup slightly. The painkillers she ran off without. That part, he stayed mum on. “In pill form so we don’t have to deal with any bruises,” he set the cup gently down on the side table. “I’ll leave them here, all I ask is you please let me know if you take them? Just send me a message, okay?”

She nodded, eyes trained curiously on the cup.

It saddened him deeply how mistrusting she was. He wanted nothing more than to change that.

He turned to Jim, "I am going to literally see you to bed before I leave these quarters, got it?"

He felt more so than saw Callie stiffen. She didn't like being told what to do, but she didn't like others being told what to do, either. Almost like there was a protective streak weaving stubbornly with her stubborn one.

Just like her brother.

•

I find a message from Christine with instructions on how to take care of my shoulder. The notes say to leave it in the sling for the next 24 hours, but after sweating through a panic attack, I don't care, it's coming off because I need a shower.

That's a side of panic attacks that no one ever talks about- the waves of hot flashes that cause torrential sweating.

I take my time, and it's an hour before I'm finally clean and dressed in warm pajamas, my hair damp and loose around my shoulders.

I pull my long sleeves over my hands and try to ignore the lingering twinge of pain in my shoulder, but the painkillers and numbing from earlier have long worn off.

I know there are pain pills in the living room, just waiting for me. And Bones *has* to be gone by now, right?

I listen at the door for a moment, for movement, but hear nothing, so I slip out.

The pills are still on the table, so I scoop the cup up and wander to the kitchen. I set the cup down and begin to examine the pills, trying to figure out what exactly they are.

I'm thinking about taking the pills back to my room and searching a database for their description, when I hear movement.

I look up at the front door, but no one is there and no one is ringing the bell, either.

I look the other way, down the hall, looking for Jim.

Instead, I see Bones. He's dressed differently than he was, like he left and came back at some point. He has on the same style of Academy T-Shirt that I've seen Jim wear, and sweatpants.

The man is even barefoot.

"Hiii..." I draw out, looking confused.

His face is scrunched in confusion, “child, you don’t have a consistent sleep schedule no matter what you try to tell me.” He crosses his arm. “Did you sleep at all?”

I point at my wet hair, “nope. Showered.”

I see something register on his face before his brain fully clocks it. But I already know what I’m about to be in trouble for. “What happened to your sling?”

I look down at my bad shoulder slowly. “What do you mean?” I ask innocently.

“Please do not tell me you took off your sling just to shower,” he squeezes the bridge of his nose. “Please do not tell me you decided that showering while injured at 3am was a fine and dandy idea?”

I give a one shouldered shrug, “well... I’m fine.”

“Uh-huh, that’s why you’re examining those painkillers so closely at 0400, right? Cuz you’re fine?”

I glower. “I wanted to know what they were, okay? I was about to go look it up. Forgive me for not just taking random crap I’m given!” I’m tired. I’m in pain. I’m scared. I’m grieving. And that outburst is therefore out of character, but justifiably so.

He softens instantly, “oh, yeah, of course. You could have asked. It’s a mouthful of a name, that’s the only reason I usually don’t say it. Abzapex Zithronafine. You can look it up. It’s an anti-inflammatory with a strong painkiller compounded in.”

I cock my head and examine the pills again. “Oh. Mmkay,” and go to take them to my room.

“Way-way-wait,” he holds out two hands, but does step back so he’s not blocking my door. “So are you taking those now? What hurts?”

I sigh and continue into my room, leaving the door open and waving a hand for him to follow.

He stands in the doorway and I go over to my nightstand and drink some water to take the pills.

“Yes,” I answer needlessly, “because I am in pain.”

“Okay, but *where* ?”

“Are you sleeping in Jim’s room?”

He opens and closes his mouth like a fish a few times before saying, “he needed someone to monitor him tonight. I lived with his clingy butt for almost 3 years so I don’t care at this point.”

He raises an eyebrow and I climb under my covers in bed after swallowing the meds, not caring that there’s a guy in my doorway as I do so. I’m in too much pain and I’m too tired.

“It’s your shoulder that hurts, isn’t it?”

“Shoulder, head, pick one…”

He sighs and motions to my shoulder, “you really shoulda left that in the sling.”

“I was sweaty.”

“Ever heard of a sonic shower?”

My eyebrows raise, “that’s the setting that makes my shower shake!” It occurs to me. “I think it’s broken.”

“No, that’s right, it’s basically a waterless shower.”

I cock my head, before trying to lay down, “I dunno ‘bout that.”

He snorts. “Those pills should help you sleep. Don’t be surprised if you wake up late, okay?”

I wave my good hand as I try to settle in. It’s not going well.

I hear a huff before looking up to see Bones shaking his head as he walks in. “Hold on…” he grumbles, going into my bathroom and emerging with a towel. “Up,” he demands, helping me sit up with a hand behind my upper back. “You don’t need to be sleeping on cold, wet hair,” he shakes his head as he lays the towel on my pillow.

“Now,” he looks at my shoulder, “I know where Jim hides his sports wrap, so I can rewrap that shoulder if you want so it stays more stable than in the sling?”

I try to roll it, and it doesn’t go. It just twinges with pain instead and I wince. “Will it help with pain?”

He nods, “it’ll keep it from moving around which will lessen and prevent pain.”

I sigh, “fine.” He leaves and I work my sweater off to get to my tank top underneath, good arm twisting through the sleeve first, before trying to gingerly get it down the bad side inside out.

“Oh-kay,” Bones sighs, coming back into the room with a roll of sports tape.

“That jerk coulda told me he had that, I could have wrapped my ankle up myself!”

“Which is exactly why I’m guessing he didn’t tell you,” Bones sits at my hip and eyes my shoulder clinically. “Where does it hurt the worst?”



“Mmm,” I hum, thinking, as I look down. “Probably the front.”

He nods as he thinks. “Okay, that makes sense. We will wrap it to keep that area the most immobile.” He holds up the tape, “okay?”

“Okay.”

“Painkillers working yet?”

“Hm?” My head feels heavy, not quite like I’m out of it, but the pain is pleasantly dulled. It clicks what he’s asking, and I roll my shoulder a bit. “Oh, mm, ‘s duller than before but still hurts.”

“Good, they’re kicking in.”

“‘S fast.”

“‘S Starfleet level meds is what it is. Better than Riverside crap.”

“You know it was a Starfleet hospital in Riverside, right?”

He sighs, “yeah, and I also know how much your ma hated Starfleet and probably avoided their hospitals.”

I shrug, my one shoulder doesn’t move. I look down, “‘s stuck,” I comment.

“That’s the point.”

“Oh.” I try to remember what we were talking about. “Kinda makes sense now, y’know?”

“What’s that, kiddo?” My shoulder is wrapped and he’s putting the sling back on me now.

“Why she left. Why she hated it. Starfleet, I mean. Why she never wanted to take me to the doctor when I got hurt. She knew what they might find.”

He slows down as he thinks, “she didn’t like taking you to the doctor?”

“Mm-mm.” I shake my head.

“Have you ever had blood tests done?”

“Mmm... Nope.”

“Before she got sick- never in your life have you had bloodwork?!”

“Nope.” I yawn.

“Yeah... That is suspicious, kid...”

“Seems my mom had a lot of secrets...” I mumble, eyes closing. “Jus’ wish she’d put some of this info in her stupid binder.”

“Her what-now?”

“Mm, the binder she made for all the steps to take after she died. Like... “call Jim”, “submit obituary”, “meet with funeral director”.”

“She... She left you a *binder* with a list of things to do?!”

“You sound angry...” I mutter.

“Not at you, kiddo. I’m mad that you had to do all that yourself.”

“You’re mad at her.”

He fumbles for words.

“Don’t worry, I am too...” My last words before dropping off.

## Chapter 7

### Chapter Notes

More SNW references that I am convinced still happened in AOS

“Altered the embryo’s genetic makeup? To cure a genetic illness? Fascinating.”

“Yeah, yeah, I get it, fascinating, but *how* Spock?” Bones’ hands waved as he talked and paced.

“It sounds as if former Commander Kirk had a great deal of secrets.”

“Vile woman,” Bones hissed under his breath.

“Indeed,” Spock agreed, causing Bones to snap his eyes up. Spock gave his equivalent of a shrug. “I am, as you often point out doctor, half human. I am aware of the vital role a mother *ought* to play in their child’s life. Using a child as a means to an end is not that vital role.”

Bones nodded as he continued to pace with one hand at his chin.

“And the doctor who treated the captain’s mother as well as helped her alter the embryos is Dr. Rex Vos? Of Tarsus IV notability?”

“That’s right.”

“And you’ve noticed nothing of note in Calliope’s blood results?”

“So far, no. What I’m waiting on now is for a synthetic sample of xenopolycythemia to finish synthesizing so I can introduce it to her blood sample and see if it actually “cures” it like he claimed it was supposed to. I’ll see what actually happens.”

“Please do keep me updated, doctor.”

•

When I wake up and relive everything the next morning, my heart takes on a heaviness that blooms into my chest and back.

Let alone my left shoulder still aches.

I still don’t know what category of Frankenstein’s monster I am.

What the heck do I *do* , now?

I research is what I do.

I look up augments, what's considered a crime and what isn't. What exceptions have been made. Apparently within the past 10 years there was a first officer Chin-Riley who was augmented in utero, and they wanted her dishonorably discharged and jailed when they found out. Her service record and lawyer saved her. Along with the fact she turned herself in.

So what happens when Starfleet finds out? I'm just the sister of a captain, I'm no one, they aren't going to let me stay, let alone protect me. Maybe I should turn myself in too.

I do a search for what the punishments are- jail? Institutions? Laboratories? And find nothing concrete- it seems to always vary.

A message from Jim pops up, asking how I'm feeling. I ignore it.

I next do a search to see if there are cases like mine, where someone was trying to genetically code an embryo with a disease cure.

Surprise surprise, there is not. And I search long and hard for that one.

Another message from Jim, asking if I want to meet him for lunch. I ignore it.

I search a few databases for Dr. Vos, but it's the Starfleet computer that spits back a novel of text on the man.

It's fresh in my mind that Jim said he's a eugenicist who had been a part of a massacre.

So when, "the massacre of Tarsus IV" comes up, I know I must be on the right track.

•

A message *ding* cut Jim off mid-sentence and he dove for his padd across the room.

"I that low on your list of priorities?" Pike quipped with an eyebrow raised.

Jim laughed nervously as he walked back over, "no, sir. Sorry, sir. It's uh, Callie's been dodging me all day, and this message isn't even her..." He trailed off, distractedly disappointed.

"Jim?"

He jumped, "ah, sorry, yes," he squeezed his eyes and free hand closed before opening them back up. "Sorry, back to-"

"No, nope, nu uh. Fill me in. What's going on, James?"

*James .*

Pike was literally the only one who could call him that without it feeling weird.

He wasn't sure why it was different.

Pike didn't *always* call him James, it was in actuality usually Jim. Pike went for James when he was being very serious, or very sincere.

Jim sighed, "all day I'm asking if she's okay, if she needs anything, and she's ignoring me. I just... I'm... I'm out of my depth here..." he shook his head and fought the urge to chew his lip. He'd learned what a 'tell' was in one of Frank's back room poker games at age 9. He'd also learned very quickly that chewing his lip was one of his.

"You probably feel the way I did with a bunch of cadets under my command for the first time."

"Out of your depth?"

"Eh, I'd say more so terrified."

"Oh, so it's not just me?"

Pike laughed, "you're not a parent but you feel like one, right?"

"She doesn't need a bedtime, right?"

"I considered giving Spock one once."

Jim grinned, "please tell me there is a good story to this and it's not just that he finally relented?"

"If you call 'relenting' sending M'Benga and Chapel to sedate him, then yes."

Jim snorted but then looked back at the padd in his hands.

"Talk to me, son."

"God, that's always so easy for you," Jim shook his head.

"What is?"

"That.... gentle... drawing out.... thing." Jim waved his fingers.

Pike snorted, "maybe I did learn that from the cadets. After your first, I don't know, 4 or 5 sobbing fits, you kinda learn what works and what doesn't when it comes to helping people."

“And what usually works?”

“Honesty, for one.”

Jim stared at the older man blankly. “I can’t tell her about... I can’t.”

“Why not?” Pike asked gently.

“You know why not,” Jim objected.

“No, no I don’t,” Pike disagreed. “I never understood why your mother didn’t tell her, but I’m now more confused why you’re so adamant she doesn’t know. So tell me why, son. Tell me why you can’t tell *her*. Especially when you now have a common enemy.”

Jim put his hands on his hips and hung his head. “I guess I don’t know the answer to that.”

“Yes you do, son. Yes you do. C’mon now. Dig a little deeper and be honest. We’re practicing honesty here.”

“Because I’m... I’m-”

“Say it, James.”

“I’m *scared* to tell her. I’m scared she will see me differently. I’m scared she’ll pity me. And I’m most afraid that she will think I can’t protect her from him. I don’t know how to walk the line of being brave for her, but being honest about how freaked out I am.”

“You don’t walk the line, son, you carry it. You show her by example that it’s okay to accept support.”

“She already knows Bones slept in my room last night,” he shook his head. “What more-”

“Does she know why?”

“Excuse me?”

“Does she know why her brother’s best friend spent the night? Or are you giving her an impression you don’t mean to?”

“I didn’t- I don’t.”

Pike almost laughed at the confused puppy look on Jim’s face. “Son, just be honest about your own struggles from time to time. Don’t put it on her to tell you all about hers. Sometimes an offer needs to be made. Or, something a little more insistent than an offer.”

*“I’m just making an offer, Jesus...”*

*"I'm just trying to make sure you don't need to be rid of me," Jim had nervously laughed in response.*

*"I'm not gonna get tired of eatin' dinners with ya, lord knows someone's gotta make sure you eat, kid."*

*"Yeah, sounds like I'm already being a nuisance. I have studying to do, anyway."*

*"Not so fa-" Bones had literally reached out and caught his coat by the arm, "stop it! You're coming to lunch!"*

*If he had let go after noticing Jim completely tense after the grab, he never mentioned it again.*

*But he did learn to grab Jim gently under the arm instead of by it.*

Jim looked up at Pike and winced, "guess I have a conversation to plan for. Tell Una hi?"

The older man scoffed, "she likes you better than me anyway, brat. Good luck. Pike out."

•

Bones scrubbed a hand down his face.

It didn't make sense. It just didn't make *sense* .

When a synthetic sample of xenopolycythemia was introduced to Callie's blood... Her cells... *ate* it. Her cells regenerated like nothing else when introduced to the disease.

There was never a need to test cures on her blood or whatever nonsense they were trying to tell her. Her blood *was* the cure.

He tried a few other things- samples of other genetic illnesses like Forester-Trent, and her cells didn't touch those, didn't regenerate or alter them in any way. Jim's blood also had zero reaction.

Vos was telling the truth. She had the ability to heal xenopolycythemia. All they needed to do was make a serum from her blood.

So why hadn't it worked? Why was Winona really dead?

It only took him one sample to see it worked, so why did they take so many? Were they struggling to make the serum?

And if it theoretically worked, but they hadn't gotten the serum right, is that why they wanted Callie?

•

I am... near violently ill.

Tarsus IV.

The slow decline of food stores? Then the rioting and panicked searching for food?

The antimatter converter that vaporized 4,000 colonists? And the theory of eugenics behind the decision? The choice to kill off anyone very young or old because they took up more resources?

The fact that there were only 9 eyewitnesses left by the end of it all who knew what Governor Kodos looked like?

It's all sickening. This isn't the type of thing they teach in schools, this is the kind of thing that stays hidden and hopefully forgotten. The kind of thing people have to fight to keep relevant, because it deserves relevance.

Dr. Rex Vos's name is all over Tarsus IV. Apparently he worked with Kodos to determine who should live and die. There's one single article that suggests he was doing experiments before and after the massacre, but I can't find anything further. It's like effort has been put into putting out one consistent story with the same few lines of text in every article.

Vos's words to Jim keep replaying over in my head, "we spent quite a lot of time together, JT."

The thing is... The Tarsus IV massacre happened when Jim was 13, not since he took command of the Enterprise.

And I know that when Jim was 12, that's when he got sent away to live with our aunt, but I never knew or even wondered where that was exactly.

But if Jim knows Vos from Tarsus, the only 'massacre' credited to the man that I can find...

There must be a record somewhere, at least of the people who were there so I can confirm it. I find it on a more obscure website, an 'in memoriam' page. I search for Davis, and nothing comes up. My aunt's first name was Darla, but there's quite a few of those listed and she would have changed her name I suppose after marriage, but I never met her.

My stomach drops when I realize why. My mom always said they died in a car crash, but I no longer think that's true.

I sigh and rub at my face. This is starting to feel hopeless. What if I'm making this all up and drawing conclusions from incomplete information?

Then I follow that sick feeling in my stomach and search "JT".

And there's one listed on the victims list as JT Gotleb, along with Darla, Gregor, Lucy, and Kyle.

JT...



James Tiberius.

My brother was on Tarsus IV. And somehow survived.

My *brother* was on Tarsus IV. As a *kid* .

And he's on the victims list. But he's alive. How did he survive?

How the heck do I broach this with him? He's never told me, and obviously for good reason. It's not like mom ever talked about it either.

Things click into place, things like how Jim is always concerned with if I am eating, how he won't eat if I'm not.

But clearly the biggest issue is there's an overlap with whatever happened to Jim there and whatever was done to me as an embryo. Something with eugenics.

Something dangerous to us both.

It's something we're going to have to discuss out of necessity. But it's not a conversation I'm looking forward to.

•

"I'm going to tell Callie about Tarsus," Jim began, plopping down in the seat across from Bones' at his desk in his medbay office and burying his face in his hands.

"Oh?" Bones set down the padd he was working on.

"Yeah... I just... I can't keep it from her with how interconnected everything is getting. I mean, it's not like Spock needs to know but... I feel like I owe it to Callie."

"I think that's... a wise decision, kid."

Jim looked at him with that look, that almost puppy dog look of being surprised someone was proud of him. "Really?"

"Yeah, really," he said, nodding. "I think it solves a lot of your worries."

"Unless I tell her and she thinks I'm some cannibal after she looks up the Tarsus stories."

"Jim, she's not gonna think that,"

"Or she gets mad I never told her,"

“Jim,”

“It’s like oh yeah, there’s this massive thing that happened to me when I was 13 that no one has ever bothered to tell you about, but let me do it now because the same guy who gave me countless allergies now wants to experiment on you, too! I’d be mad!”

“Or maybe she’ll appreciate the honesty? Think of it this way,” he put his elbows on the table and leaned forward. “You’ve got pieces of info she must desperately want. Giving them to her may be a relief.”

Jim sighed and Len got up to walk around and sit on the edge of his desk in front of him. “She deserves to know,” he said softly. “You know I’d never tell you to tell anyone about Tarsus. But I think you’re making a wise choice.”

“I know I am. But it’s also the hard choice. My name is on the death roll. I was supposed to die. How do I explain what we did to survive?”

“You don’t have to. You don’t have to answer any questions if you don’t want to.”

“How do I explain what they did to me? How I know him?” Jim’s voice wobbled.

Len reached out to put a hand gently on his shoulder. “You don’t have to.”

“Yes I do, Bones. Yes I do.”

“Well there’s something you should know before you talk to her.”

•

I’m pacing our quarters, kitchen, through the living room, to the door, and back, trying to figure out what to say to my brother.

I pace up and down the hallway to our bedrooms, stopping in his open doorway to stare at his empty bed.

I look at the recliner in the corner and figure that’s where Bones slept last night when I see the blanket folded on the seat.

He called Jim clingy, and… I suppose I can see that. He’s always trying to initiate contact with me, and it’s foreign to me, but it almost seems to be for him, too.

But I still don’t have a straight answer on *why* Bones spent the night.

Was it Jim’s hurt rib? But why would he need overnight care?

The questions keep piling up.

I’m still pacing when Jim comes through the door, looking haggard.

“Hey,” we say in unison before looking at each other sheepishly.

“Uhm, I have a question,” I begin slowly, just trying to get out with it.

“Okay...” He says, looking nervous.

“Uh... I don't really know how to ask this, but uhm,” I squeeze my eyes shut before they fly open. “Okay, so like, I was researching the database for Dr. Vos, and I found out about... About the massacre he was involved in... The one on Tarsus IV and like, you said you were... you were *there* for the massacre Vos was in on and like... Were you on Tarsus? Is-is *that* where mom and Frank sent you after the Corvette?”

Jim looks at me in stunned silence. “How did you...” he finally breathes before shaking his head in disbelief. “...yes.” He says simply, before jerkily motioning for me to sit.

I follow him to the couch and curl my feet underneath me.

“I was 12 when I crashed the Corvette. My- our- cousins were 6 and 13 and Aunt Darla was more than willing to take on another kid. She... she *loved* kids,” he shakes his head, looking far away. “I was there. I... god...” he sighs shakily, looking at the ground. “What I'm about to tell you is... you can't tell anyone, okay?”

I nod and whisper, “okay.”

He nods back. “There was a fungus...”

“Governor Kodos took an... interest in me...”

“My mentor Hoshi was killed...”

“I grabbed some kids and ran...”

“We hid in caves...”

“Without food... so many deaths...”

“We were captured...”

“That's when I encountered Vos for the first time...”

“Experiments... eugenics... pushing the limits of the human body...”

He finally finishes, “and it's all a big secret because no one can know who those of us who saw Kodos are.”

“Why?” I shakily breathe.

“Because they never ID-ed Kodos’ body for sure. And because Starfleet doesn’t want anyone knowing that the only survivors who saw his face were children.”

I sit in stunned silence. “I’m... so sorry,” I finally say, looking up at him.

He chews his bottom lip for a moment, “I don’t want to scare you. But you deserve to know who he really is.”

“Thank you,” I say quietly. “And I’m sorry I asked you about it.”

“No-no-no,” he says quickly, turning to face me. “You had every right to ask. If you have any questions, I’d prefer you ask them.”

I pause for a moment. “What did he mean when he said you were easy to give allergies to?”

Jim takes a deep breath, and I can tell what I’ve asked is hard for him to answer. “You don’t have to-”

“No, I want to,” he says. “I just...” He sighs. “I don’t want to scare you.”

“Well, you are.”

“Geez, I’m sorry... Ugh...” He rubs at his brow. “So, the experiments... I can’t say what happened to the others for sure, I never really found out, but for me...” He goes on to explain the horrors of what happened to him in Kodos’ palace, the way they used him to test their theories of eugenics and pushing the human body into seeing what they could do to it. “Giving someone allergies... I’m not sure how that was useful to their research, but...” He shakes his head and shrugs, looking far away.

“Why JT?” I quickly ask to change the question.

Jim looks surprised, then sheepish. “I was in a new place. It felt like a second chance. I didn’t want to be Jimmy or even Jim. I wanted to be someone new. But...” he shakes his head. “But I left him on that colony.”

I tuck my hair behind my ear and nod.

“So,” Jim takes a deep breath, “knowing the kind of experiments Vos does... There’s no way we would give you to them. Not a chance. But you deserve to know what we’re up against. What the stakes are.”

I nod again, fiddling with my hands. “What uhm... What did Bones find with my blood?”

“We can go talk to him together, if you want. He could check your shoulder out again too-”

“Can you just tell me?” I really don’t want to deal with medbay at the moment.

Jim sighs. “According to Bones and Spock... Your blood cells, when introduced to xenopolycythemia, eradicate the disease.”

My eyebrows fly up. “Really?”

He nods, "so now, the question is, why didn't it work? Which is also Vos's question."

"What does Bones think?"

"That Vos is telling the truth."

"No, I mean why didn't it work?"

"...We don't know. I'm sorry, Cal. It could be that they don't know either and want to keep trying to create a cure? I don't..."

He sees me pale.

"Hey, shoot, I'm sorry," he blubbers, knowing he's said too much. "I shouldn't speculate like that,"

"No, no you should!" I all but screech. "I'm an augment, I was already experimented on as a stupid embryo, and now they want to do to me what they did to you!"

"We don't know that for sure--"

"Yes we do! He said he wanted to know why it didn't work! He wants to experiment on me the same way he did on you!" I repeat in panic.

"Cal, calm down, it's going to be okay--"

"It is *not* okay!" I object, standing abruptly. "I bet Bones wants to experiment on me now, too! Take my blood over and over,"

Jim stands too, "Callie, *no*,"

"Why not?"

"Because- because-" he flounders. "Because Bones is the only doctor who has never hurt me," he says in a rush. "After Tarsus, after Starfleet finally got there, the medical care we got was subpar at best. I've avoided all doctors since then. Until Bones. Until he showed me he's a doctor who actually cares. That's why he slept in my room last night, because he was worried about me. Because he knows about Tarsus, and he knows my triggers, and knows Tarsus is a big one. He's there when you need him."

"Maybe for you," I snap. "But I barely know the guy still." I'm ignoring all the good signs I've gotten from the man so far out of sheer stubbornness. Let alone the fact Jim just said Bones already knows about something as massive as Tarsus. "Plus, I just got the ship attacked! I need to just keep to myself until you can get rid of me when I'm 18!"

"*You* did not get the ship attacked, miss ma'am. Let's get that clear real quick," Jim shakes his head.

"How many people got hurt?" I demand. "How many people am I going to have to walk past that know I am the reason they ended up in medbay with broken arms?"

"Okay for one, no one broke their arm."

“Okay, Mr. Wordplay, what *did* people break?”

Jim sighs, shaking his head. “You’re as bad as me... One ankle, one wrist.”

I pale. “And it’s all my fault-”

“*No* it is not! It is Vos’s fault, and our birth-giver’s!”

I snort, “our birth eugenicist, you mean?”

Jim puts his hands on his hips, before he snorts himself. “Yeah. yeah her.”

I sink back down onto the couch. “Why did she do this to us?”

He sits next to me. “She was selfish.” He says with a head shake. “That’s the only thing I can come up with.”

“She didn’t care how dangerous it was. Not for her but for us. For me...” I look up at him. “What’s going to happen to me? Are they going to lock me up?”

“*God*, no, Callie, Lord, no! Honey, listen, you’re- you’re not an augment, okay? Just because you were augmented, doesn’t mean you’re an augment!”

“Jim, do you even hear yourself? What if that’s why I skipped so many grades? What if she augmented me mentally?”

“Callie. Listen to me, *please*. Bones has two PhDs, okay? One of them is in forensic pathology. He’s smart. He knows augments. And if *he* says you aren’t one, I’m taking his word. And he says all he can find is a resistance to xenopolycythemia. The school thing- I skipped grades, I tested out, that’s actually... that’s how I spent so much time getting to know Kodos. I tested out of school and got put into some alleged gifted program he was running.”

I look at him, surprised. “Don’t... don’t take this the wrong way, but if you were all buddy-buddy... why was your name on the list of the dead?”

He sighs deeply. “That would be because I was seen as a threat after a certain point,” he says quietly. He shakes his head, “there’s a lot to that story...”

I nod, trying to find something else to ask about. “What’s the other PhD?”

“Hm?”

“Bones. You said he has two PhDs.”

“Oh. Psychology. He’s technically a psychologist, pathologist, and medical doctor.”

I blanche. “So he’s like. The trifecta of things I need to stay away from?!”

“You don’t like psychologists either?”

“Who does?!”

Jim bursts into laughter so hard that he has to double over. “Oh my god,” he laughs, tears in his eyes. “We’re just... we are so alike...” He snorts before setting himself into giggles again.

I sigh. So I had a panic attack/meltdown in front of a psychologist. That’s just great. I work up a smile and shrug, “well, I’m sure he sees me as quite the project now.”

“Oh stop, he does not,” Jim objects good naturedly.

I sigh, “I’m just... I feel like a specimen at this point.”

He looks at me with sympathy, and it doesn’t feel gross or fake or for show. “I’m sorry,” he apologizes. “That has to suck.”

I nod, sitting down next to him. “It does,” I agree.

At this point, I’m just so *angry* .

She kept all of this from me, from all of us. She did something to us simply to benefit herself. She never bothered to tell me why they needed so many blood draws from me. She could have told me the truth, but no. It had to be a big secret. Like everything in my life. Like my ankle, my shoulder, the slaps that turned my skin red enough that it needed covered up before school, everything. Like me not knowing anything about Jim or Sam or even my dad. Like her telling me Jim just didn’t want to talk to me or be bothered with us. She never told me anything I deserved to know. She never told Jim either. And god only knows if Sam even knows she’s dead, that part wasn’t even in the idiotic binder she left me.

Oh my *god*, she left me a *binder*. Seriously? She left her *16-year-old* daughter a *binder* on her death plan. She didn’t give it to Jim, she gave it to me.

She didn’t do anything to stop Frank from demanding the house.

She didn’t do anything to prepare me for life without her.

She didn’t warn me about Vos.

She didn’t do anything for me, for Jim, she only did things for herself.

We were supposed to be her kids, she was supposed to love us and protect us and take care of us and what did we get? Jim got sent somewhere he was supposed to die, and I’m being hunted by the same people that hunted Jim and it’s all her fault but she’s not here to answer for any of it. We are stuck dealing with it. We are stuck cleaning up her mess and it’s not *fair*. A house and food and clothes weren’t enough. We *deserved* more than just that. We deserved to know about this thing that had the potential to send people chasing after us, but she didn’t give us that. She didn’t give *me* that. She gave me nothing but someone chasing me.

“Do you think she knew? That Vos would come after me?”

“I... I hadn't thought about that.”

“She had to know,” I shake my head with disgust. “I bet that's why she was all of a sudden gung-ho for Starfleet! She needed them to help synthesize her cure, then she needed to get me out of Riverside where I was easily accessible. And,” I laugh almost manically, “and, she used you just as much as she used me, because she didn't tell *you* the truth, either!” I begin to pace, shaking my head still. “She knew what he did to you and still asked him for help! She- *GOD*, Jim, she sought him out! Had to beg him to consult on her case! She said he was the foremost expert on xenopolycythemia which is obviously a lie! He was an expert in trying to cure hers, maybe! So she begged him to consult, aka- hurt me! She was the most *selfish* person to ever exist! And the worst part of it is I'm sure she thought she was being so *selfless*, using her connections in Starfleet to get permission for me to live with you when it's her own fault I needed to to begin with!”

I shake my head, “I don't know why I am so *angry* all of a sudden. I'm just... God, Jim, I'm *furious*. I am so mad at her. I am so... I just, I can't, I'm so, *AUGH!*” I scream into the couch cushion.

“I think I have an idea,” Jim says slowly, eyes somewhat zoned out on the floor, before he looks at me. “If you're up for it, that is.”

“What did you have in mind?” I ask warily.

“I'll need some help from M'Benga, but I think you'll like it,” he smiles.

•

We enter what must be a workout or training room, weapons and padding on the walls, even the floors have a spring to them that says they are soft to fall on.

Dr. M'Benga, I presume, is standing at the side of the room near what looks like a massive wooden bullseye.

Jim gently puts an arm around my shoulders and leads us over to him. “Callie, this is Dr. Joseph M'Benga, Bones' right-hand man.”

The dark-skinned man smiles warmly at me through his beard, nodding slightly. “It is good to finally officially meet you, Calliope,” he says with a thick accent and a soft voice. “I understand you are both here for some mek'leth throwing?” He looks up at Jim, who nods.

“That we are, my friend,” he smiles. “I think we both need to let out some steam,” he smirks.

M'Benga chuckles a bit at him before looking at me softly, “are you ready to begin?”

I nod, and I see the weapon he's been holding. “This is called a mek'leth,” he says, voice soft and low, showing me the long, curved blade carefully. “It is a Klingon weapon typically used for disemboweling or slashing an enemy's throat.”

My eyes go wide.

“However,” he smiles warmly, “it is also used as a throwing weapon. You will see it is very similar to axe throwing on earth. Here,” he pulls the mek'leth back towards himself. “Allow me to demonstrate,” he steps back so he's maybe 15 feet away from the target. He holds the blade by the wrapped handle and pulls it all the way back over his head before he throws it swiftly, smoothly, and perfectly aimed. The mek'leth buries itself in the wooden target before he smiles at us and goes to retrieve it.



The *thunk* that echoed through the room as it hit made me wince, and I could see Jim's concerned glance out of the corner of my eye. I ignore it, and nod at M'Benga as he walks back with the mek'leth and offers it to me.

I glance at Jim before I hesitantly take it.

I take a deep breath and approach the line, readying the mek'leth above my head like M'Benga did. I hold my breath and launch it- and it bounces off the target and lands on the floor. My cheeks heat with shame and embarrassment as I hurry to pick it up.

"Nice one, Cal!" Jim calls.

I turn and expect to see him laughing at me, but he's smiling sincerely. "That was a great throw!"

"*I MISSED ?*"

"No you didn't! You hit the target!"

"It didn't stick!"

"That will come with time," M'Benga says with a smile, before turning towards the door. "Have fun and please do not injure yourselves."

Jim snorts and says goodbye as I wave.

Jim claps his hands and smiles at me, "go again!" He insists.

I look back at the target and remember why we came here. Because I'm mad. I'm angry. I am furious. My mom had the job to love and protect me and she failed miserably.

I wring the targ-skin wrapped grip in my hands as I draw the blade back above my head again.

I stare down the target as I think back, looking for something to let out.

There's the fact that my mother was technically the one behind all the blood draws, she knew they were struggling to create her cure and instead of just telling me the truth, she snapped at me that I should be grateful I wasn't sick.

There's the fact that she sought help from a maniac and let him do god knows what to our embryos and then sought him out *again* even after what he did to Jim on Tarsus.

There's the fact that she couldn't just tell us the *truth* .

I line myself up and pull the mek'leth back over my head... And I strike the target dead center that time.

•

“Alright, Spock, you’ve been staring at that sample for at least five minutes. Give it to me straight.”

“As opposed to which way, doctor?”

“Spock...”

Spock gave a very Vulcan sigh and turned from the microscope to face Bones. “Doctor, you will recall *you* asked *me* to consult, yes?”

“Yes, Spock, my memory is fine, thank you. I just want to hear what you think! Out with it already.”

“I agree with your hypothesis, doctor.”

“You- what?”

“I agree with your hypothesis that given what we now know, the most likely reason Dr. Vos wants Calliope is to continue attempting to create the serum that would have saved Commander Kirk.”

“What if we beat them to it?”

“You would assist a eugenicist?”

“I would do what it takes to keep that child safe. They’re not going to stop until they get what they want and if what they actually want is the cure, with the two of us, Spock, I think we have a shot at this.”

“You believe they would harm Calliope?”

“Harm, Spock, I think they’ll kill her by exsanguination if that’s what it takes to get what they want. And who do you hypothesize is ‘they’, anyway? What the heck did they mean by “a small faction”?”

“I have my theories, doctor. They are, however, still just that. Theories.”

“Care to share?”

“Not yet.”

“Well, do you care to help me out here?”

“Indeed, doctor.”

## Chapter 8

### Chapter Notes

A slice of life

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

One day, Jim shows up midday, bursting with excitement.

I close the nursing book in my lap and look up from my spot on the couch, raise an eyebrow as he claps his hands. “Remember when I had Scotty bring aboard the PX bikes?”

I nod.

“So this planet we are surveying, it’s pretty flat and desolate. It’s actually super perfect to play around on the bikes... if you want?”

I smile wickedly. “We keep this a secret, right?”

He nods dramatically, “oh yeah.”

A couple hours later, I’m on the back of Jim’s PX90, giggling like an idiot as he kicks up dust spinning in doughnuts.

I’m wearing a helmet and my hair is matted against my head uncomfortably, but I couldn’t care less.

When I picture what growing up with my brother would have been like, this is what I see. Someone to have fun with, to take me on adventures, to do stupid things with me.

When he cuts the engine and pops the kickstand, I slide off from behind him but when I hit the ground, everything tilts and goes dark around the edges.

I brace myself on the bike, and Jim is instantly aware something is wrong and is talking to me, sounding very far away.

Hands touch my shoulders hesitantly and I still yelp and jump in fear. “I’m fine, just... just a little dizzy,” I wave him off.

He has none of it. “Let’s get back to the *Enterprise*, we can go to medbay,”

“No, no, no,” I shake my head. “I’m fine. I just didn’t eat breakfast is all,” I tell the truth.

He cocks his head at me, “why?” He asks gently.

Sincerely.

He's really asking.

I struggle for words, "I, just, it, I wasn't hungry..."

He chomps on his lower lip for a moment. "You're 'not hungry' quite a bit, yknow."

One hand grabs the opposite elbow as I close my body off. "I'm really not..."

"You know... I struggle to eat when I get stressed," he says leaning against the bike.

I raise an eyebrow.

"I can go for... a really long time without eating before I even realize."

He's silent, and I am too, an unspoken question hanging.

I think he wants me to speak, and maybe that's a tactic he's learned from Bones, but I let the silence hang, unwilling to be the one to break it.

"Anyway," he finally says, "that's why I eat in the mess so often. I keep a schedule. And Bones helps me keep it when I forget."

I nod, still silent. I already eat dinner with them every night, I'm not sure what more he wants. Breakfast, too?

"You ready to head back then? Get some lunch?"

When I agree, Jim comes over and throws an arm around me, and I have to fight off waves of dizziness again. "Next time," he smiles, "let's see how you drive."

•

"Spock, we've got one last shot at this. It's the last sample,"

"I am aware, doctor."

Spock slowly typed in the modifications into the computer for their latest calculations.

...and the serum still wasn't right when it came out.

Bones rubbed a hand across his brow in frustration.

He and Spock had tried at least a dozen different ways, and they still couldn't get the serum quite right. Sure, Callie's blood itself could basically kill the disease, but just injecting her blood into an infected host was far too simple to work. They needed the serum.

And to get the serum... They were going to have to take more blood.

It made him sick to his stomach to think of asking after what she had already gone through.

“Can you not simply ask Calliope for another blood sample?”

He cringed. “Not exactly. Long story.”

“I see,” Spock stood up. “In that case, I would advise telling the truth. If you explain it logically, surely she will understand the necessity of it.”

“...sure, Spock. Sure.”

“Contact me when you’re ready to proceed.”

~

He hated to ask Callie to meet him in the medbay, because he knew she’d arrive shaking and terrified- and he was right- she did. But he had no choice.

He launched into why he called her there quickly, “So you know how we’ve- Spock and I- have been trying to make the serum to cure xenoP?”

She nodded, wringing her hands.

“Right. Well, in theory, it should be easy to synthesize. But for some reason, it’s been really difficult. I can understand why some lesser pathologists would be asking for your blood over and over again,” he shook his head in frustration. “And Spock and I are really close to getting it right, we just unfortunately... need more blood from you,” he spoke as slowly as he dared, keeping eye contact all the while, until she broke it by looking down as she chewed on her lip.

“I wouldn’t ask you unless it was completely necessary,” Something in her eyes changed at that, her hands stopped shaking, and he talked faster to try and calm her down, “and you can say no, it’s up to you, but if we can’t formulate this right, then-”

She waved a hand and silenced him. “You’re... asking?” She queried.

He froze. Her change in demeanor *was* from him asking, but it was because he was *asking*, not telling. “Yes,” he breathed. “Yes of course I’m going to ask. I’m not going to just take or expect you to consent to blood draws.”

She studied the carpet intently. “How many?” She finally asked.

“One stick, multiple vials so we hopefully never need you again,” he hurriedly explained.

She hummed in response, and he watched her soft features as she pondered over what to do. She still had that baby fat look to her cheeks, sunken and shallow as they were. Her blue eyes danced as she thought, the same way Jim’s did, and her brows knitted and twitched the same

way his did, too. But he couldn't read her the same way he could Jim. They had the same expressions, the same mannerisms, even, yet her responses weren't always what his would be.

"Yeah... okay." She finally responded, fiddling with her fingers in her lap again. "That's fine."

"Are you sure? You don't have to do anything you don't want to. We can keep trying--"

"I'm sure."

He examined her closely. "Cal, I know what a trigger blood draws are for you. You don't have to pretend it's okay when it's not..."

"No, it's not like that, it's... How do I explain this..." She sighed. "It's like. You asked. Right? You sincerely, truly, genuinely *asked* if it was okay. You told me I could say no. That... That *means* something to me. Since you *asked*, I'm fine doing it."

He studied her intently, trying to find any signs that she was lying, but there were none. "Okay," he said softly. "Let's get it over with, then."

But there was a shift. There was a shift in the way she moved around him, the way she handed her arm over, the way she *wasn't* shaking like a leaf. Something had changed in that conversation, and he could only hope it was a move in the right direction.

•

In the days that turn into weeks, I spend my time trying to find my groove here. My purpose. My use.

It's not going well.

It doesn't take me long to run out of things to do other than mindless entertainment.

I end up turning to the nursing book Christine brought me frequently for something accomplishing-feeling to do.

When Jim is around, in the evening and his off days, aside from his Tuesday evening chess matches with Spock, he usually works out, sometimes reads, and Bones is over half the time just charting on the other end of the couch. Usually, we end up watching a movie, and usually one of them is asleep by the end. If it's both of them, I slip off to my room and leave everything be.

If it's reading/charting evening, I'll curl up in the armchair with them in the living room and read, too. One evening after dinner, I'm halfway through Anatomy 1 when both guys also sit to file reports.

But I'm barely three pages in before I'm asked, "are you just casually reading anatomy 1?"

I jump and look up at Bones, eyeing my textbook.

I look at the cover, like I've forgotten what I'm reading, and shrug. "I'm... bored."

Jim looks up at that, "you're bored? Why didn't you say something?"

I shrug again, “I mean like,” I glance from side to side, “what am I supposed to do?”

“No, I’m sorry, we need to rewind, you casually read anatomy 1 because you’re *bored* ?”

I shake my head, ignoring the question. “I mean,” I say to Jim, “you don’t need to like, entertain me or anything. I’m just not... useful, anymore.”

Jim’s brow furrows slightly, “your job here isn’t to be useful, Cal.”

I shrug again and go back to my book. “Just trying to stay busy.”

“What are you reading about?”

I sigh and fight an eye roll, answer without looking up, “the vascular system.”

“Oh yeah, totally casual reading.”

I roll my eyes and get up, “I’m going to bed.”

“Nooo...”

“Oh c'mon-”

“To bed!” I declare.

A practice test on the vascular system lands on my padd before I finish brushing my teeth.

I don’t sleep.

I still rarely do.

•

*From: Dr. Leonard H. McCoy, MD, PhD, PhD, CMO, USS Enterprise*

*To: Calliope Kirk*

*You know those practice tests get graded and are then cc’ed to the person that sends them, right?*

*From: Calliope Kirk:*

*To: Dr. Leonard H. McCoy, MD, PhD, PhD, CMO, USS Enterprise*

*...did you trick me into taking Starfleet's practice tests?*

*How is it a trick, the logo is on the forms?*

*I thought it was like. A message attachment watermark signature.... Thing.*

*Okay well can we talk about you 100%ing all of them?*

*I'm not talking to you.*

Five minutes pass.

*From: Lt. Christine Chapel, APRN, Head Nurse, USS Enterprise*

*To: Calliope Kirk*

*Wait for real you're aceing every nursing school practice test and don't want to talk about it?!*

*Not talking to you either.*

•

Christine slammed her padd down on the nurse's station in front of her boss, open to Callie's mealcard. "Okay, how are we going to get this child eating? Why do you think she isn't?"

"Oh, so the alerts are going to you too now? The system doesn't like that I'm not listening?" Bones asked, arms crossed.

Christine rolled her eyes, "that," she confirmed with a nod. "Plus, I have eyes. She can't afford to lose any weight, I read her chart."

Bones sighed. "I have eyes too- I'm there every night. I know. But there's nothing we can do right now. She's still skittish with me and she at least tries to eat, I'll credit her that."

"She's gotta reach for chocolate at some point, right?"

"That's a bit sexist from you,"

Christine rolled her eyes, "I'm thinking practically. If there's an uptick in sweet or salty, maybe we can capitalize on that."

He sighed. "I don't think she is actually getting a period. She was extremely vague when I brought it up in her physical."

"Maybe because you're a man. Want me to try?"



“What are you going to do? Go up and ask?”

“No, I’ll just make the good brownies for myself tonight and invite her over.” She winked at him and walked off to check on her patient.

“Hey wait, what do you mean by the *good* brownies?!”

~

***From: Christine Chapel, APRN, Head Nurse, USS Enterprise***

***To: Calliope Kirk***

***Pms emergency. Made brownies. Plz come help me eat them. Room 311.***

I snort at Christine’s message. She can’t be serious. I’m sure she has other friends. Oh man what if she invited them too? I don’t want to do a party.

***Lol fr? I’m sure you can manage. I have faith.***

***I require assistance! Hurry!***

I sigh and slip off my bed. I change from sweatpants to leggings as if that’s somehow better and leave my room, calling to a bickering Jim and Bones that Christine is demanding I help her with something and will be back.

~

“What did you put Chris up to?” Jim eyed his best friend.

“Intel. Now don’t change the subject. You cannot convince me snow is an enjoyable weather event.”

~

“Oh my god, thank goodness you’re here, it’s a brownie explosion,” Christine shakes her head as she leads me inside her quarters.

They’re much smaller than ours and I feel awkward, like I’m infringing on her space.

“Sit and start in on a brownie. I’m cramping and made too many in the science lab.”

I smile as I sit, trying to picture her making brownies with beakers as measuring cups. I sit on the small couch in her living area and curl up with the smallest brownie I can pick in my lap. I take a bite to be polite, but my typical nausea hits and I know I won’t be helping much.

Christine suddenly winces and leans forward, “oof, cramp, hold on…”

I wince in sympathy, "isn't there anything you can take?"

"Nothing worth the side effects," she shakes her head sadly.

I hum thoughtfully.

"I made all of these," she explains, "then my body did the fun thing where your period suddenly makes you nauseous after doing all that cooking, and brownies are truly best fresh, so I need help. You do like brownies, right?"

I try and smile, "well enough."

"Well, I keep three boxes of brownie mix in my locker in medbay, should the mood to bake through cramps strike. Unless you're one who gets the opposite? Sick instead of ravenous?"

Perfect out. I shrug, trying to look disappointed. "Yeah, I get pretty nauseous."

"Wait are you like, nauseas now?"

Another out. I look ruefully at the brownie, "yeah, kinda."

"Oh my god, are we synched?" She laughs.

I hesitate. Do I tell her the truth? Would she tell anyone else? I end up shrugging, "I haven't really kept track since my mom got sick. So I mean, maybe."

"But I mean, like, you've had a period since she got sick, right?"

A light and quick nod, "oh yeah. Of course."

*From: Christine Chapel, APRN, Head Nurse, USS Enterprise*

*To: Dr. Leonard H. McCoy, MD, PhD, PhD, CMO, USS Enterprise:*

*Yeah okay you're right she's lying through her teeth. From her wording, I'm guessing she hasn't had a cycle since her mom got sick.*

*That's what I was guessing.*

*She told me she was nauseous. Not sure if that was true, but it might be a place to start with getting her to eat.*

*From: James T. Kirk, Captain, USS Enterprise*

*To: Dr. Leonard H. McCoy, MD, PhD, PhD, CMO USS Enterprise*

*Chris says she's nauseous? From what? Stress?*

*From: Dr. Leonard H. McCoy, MD, PhD, PhD, CMO USS Enterprise*

*To: James T. Kirk, Captain, USS Enterprise*

*That would be my guess. Especially knowing you.*

*Well if it's stress, maybe you're right. Maybe try favorite foods instead of "easy" ones.*

~

"What about like, pasta dishes? Jim is pressing.

It's a day he has off, and he wants to eat lunch with me and then go throw mek'leths. We've been going every few days and I'm sore, but my shoulders are hanging in there. I'm hoping strengthening them will help keep my bad one from dislocating again.

He's trying to determine my favorite food, because he says you need a decent meal before and after working out.

I tell him I think it's supposed to be a *light* meal, but he keeps throwing out heavy food items. "Pasta Alfredo! I loved that as a kid."

"Jim, really, I can eat anything."

"Pizza!"

"Are you just naming Italian dishes?"

"Chicken soup!"

"Am I sick?"

"Shawarma!"

"Jim,"

"Nachos?"

"Jim."

"Fried rice?"

"James Tiberius."

“Okay... okay.”

“Why are you so obsessed with me eating?” I find myself asking.

“I just... you don’t... you don’t eat much and I want to make sure you’re okay.” He stammers.

I take him in, trying to determine his sincerity. His blue eyes are soft, his whole face is really, and his shoulders droop with defeat.

“Jim I’m not like- I don’t have an eating disorder or anything. I’m just... not someone who eats a lot.”

“I’m not implying that! I’m implying you’ve had a really stressful few months and I know all too well what stress can do to an appetite.”

“I’m not going to turn around and start stress eating,” I roll my eyes in frustration.

“I’m not implying that either! I’m only saying if you want me to show you some cool dishes that are in the replicator, I will.”

My crossed arms drop, “I appreciate that. But I know what I like. I’m good.”

He nods, almost jerkily, and my brow furrows slightly. Why *is* he so obsessed with me eating? I think back on the things I read about Tarsus, the way that people got so hungry before the massacre, they looted cattle feed stores after they had killed and ate all the animals. And after... Those who were left alive after the massacre...

I can’t bring myself to even mentally repeat that. And those were the people chosen to live. The people like Jim who survived the initial massacre were very quickly wiped out, except for his group, so lord knows what they went through, looking for food.

His insistence that I eat... Maybe it comes from somewhere other than brotherly concern.

•

It’s late one night, or maybe early one morning, when it finally happens.

The underwire in my last good bra makes its way through the fabric and into my skin.

That’s not what finally happened. What finally happened is the meltdown of grief.

What finally happened is me, realizing I don’t have any more bras, I live with my brother, and my mom, my *mom* who I would get to buy me one, is gone.

My mom is dead.

My mom is dead and I need a bra. And my mom. My mom is *dead* .

The thing about grief is that people will tell you to expect the whole gamut of emotions. People tell you to expect to feel everything and nothing all at once. And so far... I've just felt nothing. I've been numb. And then angry. So, *so* angry.

But now? Now I examine the stupid wire poking through the fabric and wonder why nothing better has been invented yet, as tears start to roll down my face.

I need my *mom* .

I choke on a sob and a hand flies up to cover my mouth.

What am I supposed to do if my period never comes back? Or if it does, where do I get period products? And Jesus, how do I tell Jim I need to go bra shopping?

My mom wasn't a warm woman, but she was my *mom* .

I mean, she bought me my first bra?

She taught me to drive?

She got me braces?

She did all the right things, all the required things but they're not... not pleasant memories. Not happy times. They weren't bonding experiences.

She was... she was embarrassed that she had to buy me a bra.

She was embarrassed when I couldn't get how to drive a stick.

She was embarrassed I needed braces.

She yelled at me for wearing the wrong size bra when I started buying my own.

She yelled at me for parking crooked in the driveway.

She yelled at me for forgetting to wear my retainer.

She smacked my arm for wearing a tank top when Frank was over with my bra strap showing.

She yanked my shoulder for not listening to her in the parking lot when she was wrong about where we parked.

She shoved me when a bill came for a cavity filling.

I was always an inconvenience.

I was always in the way.

I was always an embarrassment.

I was always doing something *wrong* .

But there were those other moments.

Those moments where I was her everything. The moments I was told how special and loved and what a gift I was. The moments she would tell people what a joy I was to raise, especially compared to my siblings. The moments she wanted to take me shopping to celebrate something mundane.

But.

We went shopping because she thought my clothes were looking ratty.

She only thought I was a joy to raise because I kept silent, even though I know my brother did, too.

I was special and her everything because I was a tool for her to feel better about herself.

And I was also a tool for her xenopolycythemia. But I didn't fulfill my purpose as that tool.

But still. She was my mom. I'm so conflicted with emotions that it makes me gasp in a sob again and it's loud enough I know Jim can hear.

He can't find me crying over a bra, I have to pull it-

"Cal? Are you okay?" Comes from outside my door.

"Yeah," I call back, way more shaky and watery than I would have liked.

"...you sure?"

"Uhm," my voice wavers badly.

"Callie?"

"I'm fine,"

"Can I come in? You're... you're scaring me, honestly,"

"I'm really-" and then I choke on another sob and he's in the room, on his knees in front of me, trying to figure out what's wrong.

I throw the bra aside and fall back onto my butt, covering my face with my hands as the sobs take over.

"Callie, Callie are you hurt?" His hands hover over my shoulders as his eyes scan my hunched form for a problem.

I shake my head.

"What's wrong? What do you need? What happened?"

"I- I- I-" I'm gasping in lungfuls of air but feel like I'm getting zero oxygen from it. I shake my head and swallow, try again. "I just... I needed mom for something and she's not here!" I begin to wail into my hands, shoulders shaking with sobs.

“Hey, hey-hey-hey-hey, I’m here, I can help,”

I’m shaking my head fiercely. “It’s a *girl* problem!” I choke out pathetically, moving to get up to blow my nose.

“Well, I mean, I’m not a girl, but I’m, I understand a lot, I, I’ve had female friends,” Jim is floundering harder than a fish in the sun.

I honk my nose into toilet paper and shake my head, “it’s not that, it’s just... I just need mom and she’s... she’s gone.” My lip wobbles before I burst into sobs again.

But now that Jim understands what the issue is, he has me in his arms instantaneously. I wrap mine around him and cry into his chest. “Our mom *died*,” I sob. “She’s *gone* !”

“I know, Cal, I know,” he whispers into my hair.

“She died and, and, it’s not like this is something she would have helped me with anyway,” I blow a raspberry, pulling away to look up at him, “please! She would have told me that I’m practically an adult, handle it myself! And I would have! But- but- I’m just realizing she’s not *here* and when I need her or have questions, I-” and then I lose it again.

“Callie,” he soothes, still whispering into the crown of my head. “It’s alright, hey, breathe, okay? Remember to breathe.”

I gasp in a couple breaths, “good, good job,” he encourages as he rubs circles on my back.

“She’s gone,” I repeat over and over. “My mom is gone.”

“But I’m here,” I hear Jim whisper at one point, it may have been once I finally started falling asleep in his arms. “I’ll always be here.”

•

After a couple of weeks of relative peace, i.e., no more attacks, *The Enterprise* is sent to a more remote part of space to try and keep a low profile but also check up on some developing colonies.

It’s the first time they have an actual mission other than studying different nebulas and planets like they have been since I came aboard.

Jim warns me he’s going to be gone all day and will end up eating dinner down there as well.

He seems almost angry with himself that he has to go, but I shrug him off, telling him I’m used to being alone.

“I just don’t like leaving you here alone. Bones, Uhura, they’re assigned to the away mission too.”

I raise an eyebrow. “Jim, I can keep myself entertained. Promise.”

~

Around the time we typically go to dinner, the door dings, and I go out to answer it curiously. I have to wonder if I even should. I mean, everyone knows Jim is gone. What if this is some crazy person?

“Wh-who is it?”

“Aye! It is me, Pavel Chekov!”

I hesitate. It’s still a *guy*. But there have to be cameras anyway, right? This is a friend of Jim’s... ugh I hate all of this. I never know what I’m doing.

Down to things like what I wear around the place.

I try to pay attention to Jim and what he does, what he wears. Usually, he comes back from his shift and changes into sweatpants and some sort of Starfleet Academy t-shirt or hoodie, (seems like that’s all he owns, honestly) and pads around barefoot. When Bones shows up, he’s usually wearing something similar, although his shirts are usually from Ole Miss as opposed to Starfleet.

It’s a stupid thing to worry about, and so obsessively at that.

But I look down at my yoga pants, bare feet, and high school t-shirt- from three years ago- self consciously. I know I have zero options, so I run a hand through my hair and open the door pensively.

I wave, like an idiot, “hi...?”

“Da! Hello! Yes!” I nod along to his greetings. “It occurred to us- to Hikaru and Scotty and me and Nurse Chapel zat *we* didn’t go on ze away mission, and *you* didn’t go on ze away mission, and *we* are at dinner in ze mess hall and *you* might be... alone? Since you were not with us. So I came to fetch you, so you may not be all alone for mealtime!”

I blink as I try to keep up with the rushed explanation for his presence.

By the time it sinks in he’s asking me to come to dinner, he’s already been waiting for an answer for a moment, by the look on his face.

“Oh,” I finally jump, making him flinch as well. “That’s- no, don’t worry about me!”

His brow furrows, “but we *will* worry, unless you have already eaten?”

I snap my fingers, “yes, *that*, I- I have already eaten,” I nod along with my own words, before shaking my head with a shrug.

“Da. I was worried zat would be ze case. So,” he suddenly perks up. “Scotty told me to ask if you would please come for dessert!”



I go to make another excuse before-

“-and Hikaru said if you already had dessert, he can make you after-dinner tea. He is quite excited about somezing zey are growing in ze Botany Bay, I am not understanding why it makes good tea, but,” he shrugs. “So, please come, da?”

There’s a part of me that hesitates, not wanting to go out with people I still feel like I barely know, but the other part of me- the part of me that was beaten into me- is incapable of being rude. “O-oh, okay, sure, I can... I need... shoes...” I look between him and the door, “wait just a sec,” I rush off for shoes and socks, upset I need to do laundry and really don’t have any other pants to wear.

I glance at the clock and hope that the biggest of the crowd has dissipated by now, absentmindedly wondering how late Jim will be gone, and hurry back to Mr. Chekov. Shoving my padd into my pocket, I hurriedly follow his excited strides back to the mess hall.

~

“...Callie?” Jim called out, exploring his all-too quiet quarters.

It hadn’t in reality been that long, but he had come to expect and enjoy the presence of someone else being there when he got back. It was something he had missed since their academy days had ended. Sure, Bones was over most evenings for at least a little while, but nothing beats actually having someone there when you get home.

Something that, at the precise moment, Jim didn’t have.

“Computer, locate Calliope Kirk.”

There was only a *hint* of panic in his voice, thank you.

*Calliope Kirk is in the mess hall.*

She... went to dinner?

“Come again?” He breathed.

*Calliope Kirk’s current location is the mess hall of the USS Enterprise*

“...huh...”

Flabbergasted, he only changed shirts, out of his full dress into standard gold, despite being off duty, and rushed out.

It didn’t take long to find them, the mess hall was practically empty by then.

Christine was animatedly telling a story, sitting lazily in both Spock and Uhura’s spots, Hikaru next to her, Callie across from her, Pavel next to Callie, and Scotty at the head of the table.

Callie's shoulders shook with laughter, as did the rest of the table's.

As Callie dipped her head to laugh into her hand, Christine met his eye intentionally from across the hall, sending a wink of reassurance.

Okay. Maybe he didn't need to worry that much, after all.

•

The nightmares aren't getting any better.

They've always been bad. But it seems like being away from mom has made me start dreaming about her. I'm not only reliving things, but reliving them in worse ways than they happened.

I've never been able to sleep easily and now I don't much desire sleep.

It's 0430 and the ship *feels* silent.

My soul feels anything but. I feel no peace in silence, I only feel jittery nerves aching into my bones.

I get out of bed and pace a bit to see if that helps and I can quickly tell I need something more.

I grab my padd and check the sign-up sheet for the room Jim and I throw mek'leths in.

I book the room- empty until 0700- and send a message to a sleeping Jim, and sleep-deprived, empty-stomach me grabs my water bottle and silently slips out.

~

I exhaust myself physically as I try to work out my anxious energy before I decide that I just want to go back and shower before Jim wakes up.

I check my padd- and it's already 0640.

*Crap*

There will be no avoiding anyone this time of day.

Jim hasn't answered me back, so he probably didn't check his messages when he woke up for his shift.

My heart pounds and my head whooshes for a moment as I try to regain my balance- when did I lose that?- and head for the door.

I make my way back quickly, weaving through hurried crewmen with my head down, until I get back home and call out, “hi Jim I’m back!” Before locking myself in my room without seeing if he even was in the vicinity to hear me.

My hands shake as I set my water bottle down, before I realize I’m not going to be able to stand back up. So I place my palms on the door and try not to focus on the waves of dizziness hitting me as I stand half bent over, using my door for support.

I jump when Jim knocks on it, “hey Cal, you wanna come to breakfast with me? You’ve got like 10 minutes, you should really eat if you were up so early…” The concern in his voice is touching, but… different?

“Oh, I need-”

“Oh yeah, I’m sure you need to shower but you’ve got time- if you want it, that is! You don’t have to come eat, I just,”

His words get drowned out by the ringing in my ears and I agree, I have to eat.

“Yeah, no sure, I’ll just finally let one of those sonic cycles run and I’ll be ready.” I say, not sure and not quite caring if I cut him off mid-sentence. I also don’t hear what- if anything- he says in response.

When I’m clean and dressed and in the living room- how did I get here?- There are two voices but I can’t make out what they’re saying. Something about coffee, but that stops abruptly when I enter the room. Someone sounds concerned. I answer their questions. We leave.

I only really come back to reality once my breakfast shake is mostly gone.

My ears stop ringing, my hands stop shaking, and whatever haze had been over my eyes lifts.

It’s like being beamed from solitary into, well, the mess hall of a starship. Everything is loud and bright and smells too strong and is way too close to me.

I see it’s just Jim, Nyota, Sulu, and Bones at the table. Everyone else must have come and gone already.

My head aches and I wince, and it draws Nyota’s attention immediately, “you okay?”

And of course, everyone’s head turns to me.

“Sorry,” she catches herself, “you just- you look *really* pale?”

Bones on my right cranes his head to see my face.

I wave them both off, attempt to, at least, and shake my head. “Eh, I couldn’t sleep, have a headache.”

“Do you… ever sleep?” Jim asks, somewhat jokingly.

Punch-drunk, slap-happy, whatever you call it, I can only shake my head and giggle in response. “I really don’t know what this ‘sleep’ you speak of is,” and to my surprise, Jim laughs too.

He laughs so hard he snorts, which gets Bones giggling and Nyota smirking. “I just,” he laughs, “I’ve said that so many times,” he loses it and doubles over. “And just... the way you say it...”

“Wait, what?” I straighten in horror, no longer laughing. “What did I do?”

He sees my 180 in emotions and stops laughing as well. “No, no,” he tries to soothe, “I just mean-” he shakes his head. “It was a running joke in the academy that I must never sleep because I was always somewhere- classes, bars, parties, classes-”

“The guy would double book himself,” Sulu says ruefully, shaking his head. “We’d meet up to run at 0430, then he’d be running off to *run* a pre-class study group, that he didn’t even need, mind you,”

Jim’s shoulders are shaking with laughter and Bones is chuckling as well.

“And classes all day, then I’d see him leaving campus when I was going to bed at 2000!”

“2000?” Jim laughs.

“Because I was running with *you* at 0430!” Sulu fires back.

“0430 is an ungodly hour...” Bones shakes his head and sips his coffee.

“0430 is when I gave up on sleep this morning,” I mutter as I shake my head into my drink.

Jim and Sulu are still laughing, reliving some story about a fencing competition that Sulu competed in and Jim watched, and Nyota excuses herself to clock in. Sulu takes her seat and continues chatting with Jim.

“So is that you don’t fall asleep or don’t stay asleep?”

The question startles me, and I look over at Bones, “what?”

“I’m not kidding, 0430 is an ungodly hour. Sucks to be awake then. Never a good thing. Falling asleep, or staying asleep?”

I blink blearily, befuddled and yes, overtired. “Uh...both?” I reach out and pull my smoothie closer to me, examine how much is left.

“Which would you say is worse?”

I look up at him, not really *seeing* him, then look around the table to confirm I’m not being watched.

After confirming, I answer, “falling asleep.”

He nods. “There are meds for that, y’know. We never got to finish that conversation.”

I scoff, “melatonin never works for me.”

“Wait, how long have you had trouble sleeping?”

I shrug, “my entire life.”

I see him do his best not to blanch. “...sweetheart you’re a teenager, you need to sleep.”

“People always complain about teenagers being lazy and sleeping all day.”

“You’re *growing* ,”

Another scoff, “I’m sixteen, I’m done growing.”

“Your brain ain’t.”

“Yeah, yeah, frontal lobe and all.”

“Ooh, did you make it to neurology?”

“Gastroenterology, thank you very much.”

“Did you make it to the part about eating a balanced breakfast?” He nods at my half-drunk, warming smoothie.

I cock my head and smirk, “mm, made it to the bristol stool chart. So like, your eggs would be a 5 and that sausage a 4.”

Like I expect, he smirks back and happily picks up his sausage. “Yeah, and that Starfleet tea they push every meal looks the color of C-diff, don’t it?”

I laugh harder than I mean to, before, “are you two casually discussing poop during breakfast?” Sulu cuts in.

My eyes widen and I freeze in horror, but Bones just starts laughing.

“I’m sor-”

“No, *no* , listen, I got a sample of a local species’ stool from the fauna samples I took?” He looks back and forth between us, “purple!” He

announces.

Bones and I trade off giving stunned responses,

“Purple?”

“ *What* ?”

“Can I see it?”

“ *Purple* -” he stops and looks at me, “you wanna *see* it?”

I look at him incredulously, “it’s purple poop who *wouldn’t* wanna see that?!”

Jim raises his hand, “me. That would be me. Thank you. Can we,” he places a hand over his stomach and Sulu nods, trying not to smile. “My bad, I’ve gotta go anyway, see ya in a bit,” he waves to all of us and is gone.

Bones has gone stiff beside me in a way I can’t quite place. Is he worried about Jim? “You good?” He asks lowly.

Jim looks up suddenly, “oh, yeah,” he sees the worry on Bones’ face. “Oh, I’m not- I’m okay. I’m just- not at breakfast?” There’s a world of unspoken things going between them- through eye movements and facial tics- and there’s something I’m not privy to being discussed within that world. And I have a feeling it’s Tarsus related.

“Yeah, sorry. Running joke in healthcare, you can talk about anything over food and still eat it...” at Jim’s wince he shakes his head. “Sorry.”

“Sorry,” I echo smally.

“It’s fine,” Jim rolls his eyes. He takes a sip of his coffee, “but seriously, Bones can give you something if you’re still not sleeping.”

“What do you mean ‘ *still* ’?”

“My god, child,” Bones cuts in, “you’ve been talking about being tired for weeks.”

“I have?”

“Yes,”

“Oh.” I pause, “I’m sorry.”

Bones sets his coffee cup down sharply, “hey, no, none of that. That’s not what I meant. I mean I can *see* it even if you didn’t say anything.”

“...oh.”

“It’s not a *bad* thing-”

“It’s not that bad...” a lie.

I can *feel* him hesitate next to me. “It... seems pretty bad, darlin’.”

I shrug. “I’m used to it.”

“You don’t have to be.”

I eye him warily. “Why aren’t you asking me if I’ve tried meditation and warm milk before just handing me pills?”

“Have you?”

I nod.

He shrugs, “I already figured that.”

“Oh.”

“People don’t just... not sleep and not try to do something about it.”

I sigh and look up at him. I roll my eyes. “Fine. Do what you want. Give me whatever. It won’t work.”

He nods in my direction once, “alright. We’ll see.”

I hate his guts when I sleep soundly for the first time in months.

The nightmares don’t stop though.

•

*From: Calliope Kirk*

*To: James T. Kirk, Captain USS Enterprise*

*Can you tell me where to get a vacuum?*

*From: James T. Kirk, Captain USS Enterprise*

**To: Calliope Kirk**

*...why?*

***Well, I asked the replicator for crackers, and it just started spitting crumbs everywhere? I checked all the settings, I didn't mess with it, I promise, and I'll clean everything up!***

Jim sighed. God, she was so much like him. She was so *afraid* . She was so hesitant, so scared. She was obviously uncomfortable sitting with him in the evenings, even when Bones was there to buffer.

He was trying movies, he had tried to relate to her over books after she asked if he had a digital copy of one of the books on his shelves in the living room. He had simply handed it to her, and her gaping, terrified face had him reassuring her it was just a book, he'd reread it many times and dogeared it up.

It felt like she was always waiting to be blown up on, and it broke his heart.

***That's definitely not your fault. I'll have someone look at it asap.***

He had food in the mess hall... he had food via Bones' or Spock's replicators next door... he had protein bars hidden away... a busted replicator would be fine. It would be fine.

He would be fine.

He messaged Bones,

***From: James T. Kirk, Captain USS Enterprise***

***To: Dr. Leonard H. McCoy, MD, PhD, PhD, CMO USS Enterprise***

***Callie is at least trying to eat, but crackers aren't a nutritious lunch. I'm at the end of my rope here. I can't get her to eat for anything.***

***From: Dr. Leonard H. McCoy, MD, PhD, PhD, CMO USS Enterprise***

***To: James T. Kirk, Captain USS Enterprise***

***Do you want me to talk to her?***

***...I guess so. She isn't listening to me.***

***Copy.***

***From: Christine Chapel, APRN, Head Nurse, USS Enterprise***

***To: Calliope Kirk***

***Ready for Anatomy 2?***

***From: Calliope Kirk***

***To: Christine Chapel, APRN, Head Nurse, USS Enterprise***



*How do you know that?*

*You just finished the last practice test. 97, great job btw.*

*Creeps. All of you.*

*Seriously, come get Anatomy 2, I'm bored down here anyway.*

*Fiiiiine. I'm omw.*

"She's on her way down." Christine set her padd down.

"How'd you manage that?" Bones asked in shock.

"I'm just that good," she smiled at him, M'Benga laughing as he walked by.

"If you tricked her, she's gonna be ticked, you know that."

Christine pulled out Anatomy 2 from under the nurse's station and waved it at him. "She's coming for this."

"She finished the first book?"

"And passed every practice test with flying colors. Even..." She winced.

"What did you do?"

"I might have slipped the Starfleet Nursing School entrance exam in there."

"Chris!"

"She aced it!"

Bones' eyebrows rose, "really?"

Christine nodded, "99."

Bones whistled lowly and Christine shook her head ruefully, "I know right, I only got a 92."

"I'm not sure I could even pass it."

Christine playfully grabbed onto her boss's arm, "and that's why we all love you."

He rolled his eyes, “yeah, yeah, yeah.”

Callie walked in then, “Callie!” Christine called happily, letting go of Bones. She waved the book at her, “here you go!”

She walked over and took it slowly, “why do I have a feeling you’re about to spring something on me?” She eyed them both suspiciously.

M’Benga snorted from across the room.

“You are *not* in trouble,” Bones began, “but I do need to talk to you about something,” he waved a hand towards his office and she sighed.

“I knew better than to come down here...”

“Yeah, yeah,” he grumbled, leading the way.

“No one ever wants to “talk” if you’re not in trouble.”

He sighed. “Look,” he said sitting across from her. “Your mealcard is screaming at me,” he left out the part that Jim was worried. She didn’t need to know they’d been talking about her. “You barely eat anything, and I’m worried about you.”

“Worried about me how?”

“Worried that you’re not eatin’ enough, darlin’. Like I told you about sleep- you’re still growing. Is there a reason you’re not eating?”

“I *am* eating,” she countered. “You see me eat!”

“I see you nibble,” he lobbed back.

“Does this have something to do with Jim and Tarsus?” She asked suddenly, lowly.

“What?”

“Jim... Because like... They ran out of food?” She winced, “He’s always talking to me about eating and food and he’s always watching me eat... I just... I was wondering if it was because of Tarsus but I’m afraid to ask.”

He looked at her with sympathy. “Aw, kid...” He shook his head. “Your brother... He does have his own food issues,” he said slowly. “And that’s really his business to tell, not mine. But I can also tell you that *I’m* worried about you. Like I said, your mealcard is constantly screaming at me that you’re not eating enough. Can you tell me why you don’t eat much?”

She shrugged, “I’m not that hungry.”

“Honey, you eat about once a day, and that’s not enough.”

“Stalker.”

“Your *mealcard* -”

“Yeah, yeah, I get it...” She sighed.

“Are you... Are you nauseous?”

She narrowed her eyes, “did Christine tell on me?”

He sighed, “we’re just trying to figure out why you aren’t eating.”

“I *am* eating.”

“Not enough.”

“How much is enough?”

“Three meals a day and two snacks.”

Her eyes widened, “I sit and do nothing all day, why do I need that much food?!”

“Do I need to say it again?”

“Growing, growing, got it...”

“Plus,” he leaned back in his chair, “you need brain power for all the studying you do.” He raised an eyebrow. “You didn’t notice the entrance exam Chris slipped you?”

“Oh, I noticed.” She shrugged. “I was bored, so I took it.”

She was so much like Jim... Genius child.

“Bored...” He shook his head. “Alright,” he rubbed his hands together, “let’s try this. I will program your mealcard with options for meals, things that’ll keep your blood sugar more stable and hopefully help the headaches you say you don’t have, too.”

“Hey!”

“Don’t even,” he shook his head. “Now go eat lunch.”

He was right. Something had shifted with them since the blood draw. She was listening and opening up and he was ready to do anything to make it continue.

•

“-does the pain radiate?”

I go to sit down at our usual table in the mess hall- stupid protein pumped oatmeal on my tray that sounded good but looks disgusting, and I intend to deposit it on Bones' tray in the form of a message to give me better choices, but my intent leaves when he's not in his seat. Christine is, and she's talking to Nyota in hushed tones.

Bones isn't there, Spock isn't, Sulu and Chekov aren't, it seems everyone is running late.

I hesitate to sit down, not wanting to intrude, so I glance over my shoulder for Jim's lead. He shrugs and sits at the other end of the table, with Scotty.

Christine grabs my wrist and (lovingly) yanks me into Jim's seat, "I'm leaving soon, sit."

Nyota looks up and tries to smile, but winces. "Migraine?" I ask, all too knowingly as I settle in. She nods miserably, putting a hand over half her face.

"I'm sorry," I lower my pitch, winching in sympathy.

Christine is scanning her with a tricorder and it beeps, "you're a bit dehydrated," she says before looking up at Nyota. "I could get you a painkiller and electrolyte tablet?"

"Y'all have *tablets*?" I interrupt.

"That work a heckuva lot slower," Bones drawls as he arrives, sitting on Christine's other side. "Who are we giving tablets to and why?" He asks with a sideways glance at Christine who rolls her eyes.

Nyota raises her hand, "headache." She says quietly.

"Have you eat?"

"Do you not think I've already asked that?" Christine whips her head over to him, her white-blonde curls bouncing.

He throws his hands up in surrender, but (wisely) shuts up.

"Where are you at in your cycle?"

"Oh, and *I* ask questions I shouldn't?" Bones asks with mock offense.

"**Hush** !" Christine commands. "I'm asking so you don't!"

I can't help but snort and she looks over at me with a smirk, expectantly. "I mean," I shrug, stirring my food, "she could be having a cerebral hemorrhage, blood comin' out her nose, and doctors would still ask if she's sure it's not her period."

There's a *half-beat* of silence, before Christine is spraying her water she'd just drank into her hand as she laughs.

Bones rolls his eyes, but she points at him before he can speak, "don't! Don't even!" She laughs, trying to contain herself but failing. She folds an arm around herself as she bends in laughter, and I find I'm surprised she found the remark funny at all.

But even Bones is smirking.

"You know full darn well she's *right*," Christine continues to cackle, "so don't *even*!"

Bones sighs, picks up his coffee, "I've worked with those types too, ya know," his accent thick with the early hour. "Why'd'ya think I hate them so much?"

Jim's head jerks up then, "wait, did someone say there's pills instead of hypos?"

"That's what I'm trying to ask!" I say from the other end of the table.

"You both just enjoy whining," Bones shakes his head, but it looks to be with... fondness? "If y'all wanna wait an hour for pain relief next time when it can be instant, I'll leave that up to you."

Jim and I share another look before lapsing into silence.

"Didn't think so."

I do, however, still pick up the thick oatmeal and reach over to set it on Bones' tray.

He looks down at it, then back at me, wiping my hands.

I shake my head, "I am not eating that sludge."

He gapes at me, trying to find words, when Christine grabs my wrist and Nyota's. "I will feed and medicate these two, then I'm giving report and clocking off," she nods to him, dragging us with her.

But the smirk I see on Bones as we leave has me thinking she's pretty much got his permission to do this.

So I sigh, but go along.

•

"I think... I think we got it, Spock," Bones breathed. "I think we got the serum right."

"Now the question, doctor, becomes what do we do with it?"

"Simple. When the time comes, we trade it for Callie's safety."

"I am not sure Starfleet will approve of that plan."

"Ask me if I care."

"I will not."

#### Chapter End Notes

I just had to make Chekov say Botany Bay....

When my therapist told me I needed to be eating three meals and snacks regularly I also blanched like miss ma'am... my disordered eating brain did NOT like that. Callie's issues are stress more than they are disordered eating, but I wouldn't put ARFID past her (and Jim...)

## Chapter 9

### Chapter Notes

I'm terrible at writing action. Everything I write action-wise is inspired by Fourth Wing and Iron Flame and I have no idea what I am doing.

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

Jim and I are ready to beam down to a planet they just finished surveying to ride the bikes when Bones walks into the transporter room. "Alright, I'm done pretending like I don't know what the two of you have been doing on these barren planets. I'm coming along to see what injuries I need to prepare myself for."

Jim snorts and rolls his eyes and my jaw drops. "You *knew*?"

"Kid, I know *all*," he shakes his head.

"He's omnipresent!" Jim jokes, earning him a glare.

I sigh and step up to the pad. We've been doing this for a few weeks now, and I'm starting to get used to the transporter. What I'm not used to is someone *watching* me. It was bad enough having to let Jim watch me on the bike and give me tips, like how to lean forward and down to go faster to make use of aerodynamics. Now someone else to watch? Who is probably going to tell me I'm doing everything wrong and unsafe? Great.

Bones and Jim bicker as we beam down to the planet and walk over to our waiting bikes.

As I'm checking all the safety measures on the bike like Jim taught me, movement about 20 feet away catches my eye- almost like a transporter beam.

That theory is confirmed when four men appear, all wearing black, and all holding phasers. I immediately recognize one as the man that spoke to us before Vos did when we were attacked, Leland.

"Jiiiiim-" I start to call out before the men are racing for each of us.

One of them grabs me by my hair and I can't help but cry out. I expect to fawn, to freeze and be terrified- but a switch in me seems to flip the other way instead. I buck and arch my back in protest, throwing my elbow back trying to land a hit in the gut of my attacker.

But the hand just tightens, the sound of my hair creaking like its near breakage warning me to reign it in. I suck in breath through gritted teeth and try not to growl in frustration.

A hand comes to my side like it's trying to steer me and instead of walking, I go boneless.

Everything else that happens, happens in quick succession.

In going boneless, my attacker has to hunch down to try and get a better grip on me, cursing all the while, and when he does, I immediately turn and spit straight in his eye as hard as I can.

A hand wraps around my waist and I buck at that, using my still-free hands to scratch and claw at that arm wrapping around me. I draw blood

but the arm clamps down on me so hard that my breath catches.

I worry for a moment, worry he will crush me, before I use my feet to kick out at his crotch.

He screams and I think I've made a good choice, until he drops me so unexpectedly, my bad ankle rolls under my sudden weight.

I scream, hearing it pop in a sickening way as I hit the ground right on my tailbone.

I use my free foot to try and kick his face but I'm dizzy with pain and miss.

We're both heaving with pain and trying to breathe through it, fire has spread through my back, starting at my tailbone from where I was dropped, and it aches through my bad ribs.

I turn and look for Jim, trying to call out for him, but when I catch a glimpse of him, he's fighting off his own attacker. "Jim!" I scream before I'm being grabbed again, from behind this time, and picked up off the ground. I try to go boneless again but it doesn't work that time and he simply hauls my body up higher, my ribs protesting all the while. I fight with all my might, trying to throw my head back and crack him in the nose. His grip tightens in retaliation, and I feel a pop by my bad rib, then white hot agony that makes my vision blur.

I hear Bones yelling but I can't make out what he's saying, he's too far away and I'm in too much pain to make sense of anything, anyway.

I'm suddenly struck across the face and my head flies the other direction, I feel my cheek split and my lip start to swell where I must have bitten it open. I hit the ground again and this time earn a kick to the stomach.

I'm breathless with pain, vision swimming, when I finally make out what Bones is saying. "You don't need her! We have the cure! Tell Vos we have the cure! You don't need her!"

All my focus shifts to him for just a fraction of a second too long, and my attacker has me wrapped up in a vice grip so tight that my pulsating rib digs into my lung and makes it hard to breathe.

There's yelling and screaming and threats and my ears are ringing too loud to make sense of any of it. I make out Jim screaming my name and I'd scream back if my breaths weren't going towards keeping myself from heaving from pain.

Then suddenly everything stops.

I'm thrown to the ground and I yelp as my tailbone hits it so hard my vision goes black around the edges. When I look back at the guy, he's now holding a phaser pointed at my head, and I doubt that means it's on stun.

"If you're lying," Leland growls. He just stood and watched while the other three men tried to grab me and subdue Jim and Bones. He's clearly in charge of them all, and therefore the most dangerous one even if he's not the one currently pointing a phaser at my head.

"Not lying!" Jim yells and I search the horizon for him.

When my eyes land on him, my stomach flips. He's got a bloody mouth and it looks like he's favoring one arm. Let alone his hair going every which way and the scratches all over his face. It looks like they were rolling on the ground as they fought.



“Have our science team beam it to Vos,” Bones is saying, and he has a phaser trained on him as well, his arms up in surrender. “He can see that we successfully created the cure for xenopolycythemia!”

“And how do you propose we test it, doctor?” Leland sneers.

“We’ve used synthetic-”

“We use real subjects,” he snorts, before turning to speak into a radio at his shoulder. “Tell Vos they claim to have synthesized the cure, ready the lab and the test subject.”

Bones shakes his head, “she can only heal those within her own family, she-”

“Who do you think our test subject *is*, doctor?” Leland smirks.

I hear Jim suck in a breath like he’s made a connection and he has to spit out blood to speak, “...Frank.”

Leland laughs- *laughs* - and nods. “He was more than happy to help us once he found out he had xenop. Although, he doesn’t know how he came to get it...”

“You can’t give someone a genetic illness-“ Bones cuts in before Leland pivots to him, “can’t we?”

“Who is “we”?” Jim growls.

“We’re all genuinely surprised you haven’t figured that part out yet, Kirk,” Leland says lightly. “But we don’t have time for that,” beeping on his shoulder has him talking into the radio again, “yes? You have it? Good. I’ll standby.”

He points his phaser rifle at Bones, “they’ve got your cure, doctor. Let’s see if it does what you claim.”

“It will,” Bones growls back.

“We’ll see.”

“How much did you have to pay Frank?” Jim calls, disgust dripping off his voice. “How much did you have to pay him to get him to agree to infect himself?”

“Not as much as you’d think...” he snorts.

“That’s why he was such a jerk about the house,” Jim says what I’m thinking. “He needed to push her into space with me,”

“Now you’re catching on,” he sneers before his radio starts beeping again. “Go,” he spits into it before I see his eyebrows raise. I can’t hear what he’s being told, but it’s surprising him, whatever it is.

He lets go of his radio after a few moments and jerks his head at his men- who suddenly all drop their phasers and walk away from us. “Seems your scientists aren’t all inept, Kirk,” Leland says before looking at Bones. “Care for a better paying job?”

“I think you know where you can shove that offer,” he says, moving towards me with concern.

Leland snorts, “have it your way.”

And just like that- they’re gone.

And as I sit on the ground all alone, the pain of everything hits me full. freaking. force.

•

Soon enough, we’re in that warm yellow glow, then we’re sitting back on the bright white floor of the *Enterprise’s* transporter pad. I have no idea how I’m going to haul myself off the floor, so I’m almost glad when I see a medical team waiting with a gurney.

The last thing I want to do is lay down and have everyone staring at me, but I think I’m in too much pain to object when Bones helps me over to it before he goes back to help Jim to another one. (He refuses and Bones has to haul his arm over his shoulders and practically drag him along.)

All these people have me panicked. I don’t know most of them, and everyone is doing something, whether it be scanning me with something or asking questions or trying to see if I’m bleeding.

Going down the hallways of the Enterprise on a gurney, the shiny walls all blurring together, I want to shove every medical officer off me while at the same time I’m desperate for someone to take care of me.

Everything hurts. Everything. Of course the person I’m looking for is Jim, and in his absence, I logically *know* Bones is safe, but my brain isn’t accepting that fact.

Whenever I’m sick, I don’t cry for my mom, I never have. I’ve always *wanted* to have someone to cry out for, but I’ve also always stubbornly clung to the idea that I’m independent. Of course my mother blamed *that* - me being independent, for *her* lack of affection.

I try to shake the thought off and focus. I have no idea what everyone is even doing to me, there are hands and whirling tricorders everywhere and I start to truly panic, going into sensory overload. I can’t see Bones anymore in the crowd, I’m forgetting all the pain I’m in, trying to sit up to find him and gain back some semblance of control, when someone grabs my shoulder to hold me down.

Big mistake.

I buck at the hand, ignoring the agony that causes in my side, arching my back in fury. I can hear my mother screaming at me to behave and quit acting embarrassing but that almost motivates me more. “Let *GO* !” I scream, batting at the hand on my shoulder. “I don’t know who you are!” I scream.

What if I’m not even on the Enterprise? This could be a whole new trap! I want to go home. I don’t need to go to medbay. I’m fine!

“I’m fine!”

“Let’s let the doctor be the judge of that-”

“**LET. ME. GO!**” I buck again and let my hips slam down into the gurney, making it jostle even though I barely weigh enough to.

Then another hand grabs my other shoulder, forcing me down more, but that’s not about to stop me. I want Bones and I want Jim and I want them **now**. I bend my knees, plant both feet flat on the bed and buck again, pushing my weight onto my shoulders, turning to bite the hand on my left. “Ow!” It lets go and I bring my hand up to whack the one still on my right shoulder. I’m sure I’m embarrassing Jim royally right now, but I’m too panicked to give it more than a fleeting thought.

“Move, move, **move!**”

Ah, there Bones is.

“...Stand in my way like a buncha- for the love of god, people, let the girl **go!**”

“But doctor, she-”

“She’s her brother’s sister! Let her go, **now!**”

The hand still on me flies off but I can feel that it’s in protest. Once it leaves, I throw myself to sitting, turning to the side, not caring how dizzy it makes me. Before I can stop myself, I reach for him, “Bones!” I yell out, yearning for safety. The panic in my eyes must have registered something for him because he stops the whole procession with a single hand held up, and cups my face with said hand.

“I’m here, darlin’, I’m here. What hurts?”

“I want to go **home!**” I whine, tears stinging my eyes.

“I know you do, love, I know,” he placates, stroking my cheek with his thumb. I’m looking around at the people all around me, panic welling up. “Hey, hey, hey, look at me,” the hand on my cheek tightens a bit and I look back to the doctor. “I want you to go home, too, ok? But to do that, you’ve gotta let us take care of you first, ok?” He lays his tricorder on the bed and puts that now free hand on my shoulder.

“I’m fine!” I protest.

He raises an eyebrow and his nose flares in protest. “The heck you are, kid.” His ability to go from loving to grouse is amazing. My lip starts to quiver, and he lowers his voice, “Why don’t you lay back down for the rest of the trip, sugar,” he says to me. “I won’t let anything happen to you.”

I blink at him, want to believe him, but something in me flips. I still want to be held and told it’s going to be ok, but I still want to punch everyone currently breathing on me, not trusting them no matter how much I want to.

I start shaking my head, not consciously, at first, but then shaking my head harder and harder, until my whole body is a reverberating mess. I think he can tell I’m about to completely melt down so he puts a hand on my bicep and starts everyone off running again.

I'm staring at the back of his head; his dark hair, and I feel myself disassociating. It's almost like I forget who *I* even am in the 3 short seconds it takes for Bones to look back at me. When he does, tries to use the hand still on my arm to lay me down, I *lose* it.

I scream in terror, sharp and short, and try to flip myself off the bed. Idiotically, I try to flip to the left, while still facing the right. I get stuck on the way down and I feel white hot agony in my ribs as I'm caught before I hit the floor.

Bones lets out a string of very colorful expletives and sneaks a hypo, shifting me towards the opposite end of the bed. I grab my neck and turn, see him handing the empty hypo off. He then gives me that look, the one with the raised eyebrow saying he means business, and this time I do let him guide me to lying. I feel myself starting to get a little... looser? My chest eases up slightly. But I'm still trying to fight it off.

Bones sighs. "Just let go, Callie. Take a rest, sweetheart."

I shake my head in opposition to that. "No..." I moan. I realize we've been in sickbay awhile now, I just haven't noticed as tricorders are waving over me. The dark blue walls seem to blur together around me as I try to find the hazel of Bones' eyes instead.

"Don't want... touching...touchy..." I slur, not wanting to drop off with hands all over me. I feel myself being lifted up by the sheets under me and my eyes widen as I land firmly on the biobed. It lights up, filling the area with loud noises as it protests something. I arch my head to look back at the monitors but they all blur together. "W's Jim...?" I mutter, my voice growing weaker.

"Just let go, Cal. We'll talk later. You're safe."

"No touchy?"

He sighs, "Callie. You know I always let you choose. But I'm the doctor, and sometimes things are life threatening and I have to make the choices. This is one of those times when I have to make the choice for you. And if there's anything serious, I'm going to take care of it while you're asleep, okay?"

"Mm. Okay."

"Okay," he whispered back, stroking lightly under her eye as she drifted off.

•

He sighed as she finally lapsed into sleep in his hand. "Chris, start scanning and see what she needs. I've got to get to Jim before he-"

There was a crash.

"-melts down."

He quickly walked into the private room he'd deposited Jim in before going back for Callie and found Jim with his back against the wall-literally.

Bones nodded to the nurse to dismiss her, and she gratefully took her leave.

"Just you 'n me, kid," he said carefully. "It's-"

"That's the problem, Bones," Jim panted. "It's just us. I need to see Callie."

His brow furrowed in confusion, "Jim, you just saw her not two minutes ago. And she's asleep now. Why-"

"Because I need to *see her*, Bones. Don't let me not see her- I need- I need to see her, I-" he shook his head. "They wouldn't let me see... they wouldn't let me see my kids and-"

"Hey, okay, okay, okay," he held his hands out placatingly, understanding dawning on him. "If it's that important to ya, let's go see Callie."

Jim nodded stiltedly, still holding his clearly re-shattered hand close to him. The Romulan who stomped on it a year prior had shattered his fingers and somehow his hand too and it healed well enough, those people just managed to completely reinjure it.

But what was more important at the moment was preventing a Tarsus flashback.

He led Jim into the next room where they'd placed Callie after she'd fallen asleep, Christine was there doing preliminary scans and looked up with an eyebrow raised but said nothing.

Jim stumbled over to Callie's bedside and braced himself against it with his good hand, looking down at her.

She was peacefully asleep, painkillers onboard and working nicely, but her face... Her cheek and lip were split and swollen, already turning black and blue. The dermal regenerator would take care of it, but it was sickening to see, nonetheless.

Christine stepped away to chart a few things and give Jim a moment with his sister.

When Jim dropped to his knees, Bones was there to slow his descent. Using his good hand, he took Callie's in it and squeezed, using the heat from her *alive* body to ground himself. He rested his forehead on the edge of the biobed and sighed.

"She's okay, Jim. She's okay. You both are. We all are."

He nodded but choked on a sob that he swallowed. "I couldn't protect her."

"Stop that. You *did*. You did protect her by okay-ing me and Spock to work on the serum. You saved her."

"*You* saved her. God, Bones. You're a dad, you always know what to do. I'm *failing* here!"

"You are *not* failing," he said almost harshly. "You are doing the best you can and Jim, by god, it's better than good enough."

Jim stayed silent.

"Look, they don't need her anymore, right? She's safe."

"Not with him still alive."

"Him who?"

"Pick one. Frank. Vos. Kodos."

Bones sucked in a breath, “Jim-”

“They never IDed the body, Bones. Everyone knows that.”

“Jim, you’re going to spiral. You need to pull it back in.”

Jim sighed, knowing his best friend was right. He gave Callie’s hand one last squeeze, exhaustion finally eating into his bones as his adrenaline died down and heaved himself up.

And of course, Bones was there to help him stand. As always.

•

I can tell I don’t sleep long, but I wake up pleasantly numb to pain, and want to hug whoever is responsible for that.

“Heya, kiddo,” Christine smiles down at me from my left.

We’re in a different room than before, a private one instead of out in the main medbay.

“How’s the pain?” She asks, typing away on her padd.

“Mm. Numb.” I hum.

She laughs, “glad to hear it.”

Bones strolls in then, and we have the same conversation.

He props the bed up and says, “Chris is a forensic nurse, so she’s gonna take care of you for a bit, okay?”

“Forensic...” My brow furrows. “What does, why do I... huh?”

Christine steps forward and comes toward the bed with her disarming smile. “It means that when something bad happens, I’m the nurse that collects any evidence to make sure people pay for what they did to you.”

I start to shake. “So like... a record?”

She nods with a soft smile, “that’s right.”

“What if I don’t want that?” I all but whisper.

She reaches out to tuck some hair behind my ear and I wince, knowing it’s greasy and sticky from sweat.

“Why wouldn’t you?” She asks sincerely with a cock of her head.

I chew my bottom lip, and find it’s still bloody from the fight.

“I’m gonna- step out-” Bones says stiltedly, earning a nod from Christine.

“I’d... I’d rather pretend none of this happened,” I find myself saying.

She nods, looking deep in thought. “Is that really possible though?” She asks gently.

My lip wobbles and I shake my head no.

“No,” she whispers, putting her hands gently on my arms. “But what we *can* do is get you cleaned up. How does that sound?”

I nod shakily.

“Would it help to have someone else here? Jim or Dr. McCoy? Nyota?”

I shake my head fiercely, “no, absolutely not.”

“Okay,” she says lightly as she lets me go and begins to move around the room, gathering supplies.

One item she gathers is a hospital gown and she holds it out to me, “need any help getting into this?”

I stare at her.

“Do I... do I have to?”

She pulls the gown back towards herself, “no, no of course not.” She turns and sets it down on the counter behind her and leans against it. “I just know that you seem to have something hurting ya around your ribs and I’d like to take a look and make sure nothing is broken, and peeling your shirt back might make it hurt worse,” she tries to reason.

Shakily, I fiddle with the hem of my shirt, torn, full of dirt, blood, and sweat.

“You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to do,” she says entreatingly.

When I don’t say anything, she motions at my ankle. “Why don’t we start here,” she says lightly. “We’ve done this together before, right?”

I nod.

“And how about something more for the pain? You don’t look very comfortable now that you’re sitting up,”

Another nod.

“Hey, I’m here for you, okay?” She gives me a hypo of painkillers. “It’s just you and me for the next little while, and we’re safe. I’m going to take care of you, I promise.”

My lip wobbles again.

“Callie?”

I choke on a sob, and Christine has me in her arms with an, “oh, honey,” in an instant.

I latch onto her for dear life, her small frame surprisingly strong as she holds me solidly. “It’s all okay, it’s okay,” she soothes.

I shake my head, “Jim is hurt and it’s all my fault,” I sniffle.

“Honey, you’re really hurt, too, let’s not forget that.”

I start shaking and she pulls away to hold me by my shoulders. “Okay. Listen to me. Here’s what we’re going to do. We’re going to get to working on your ankle. Then slowly, we’ll work on your other injuries. We’ll stop whenever you need to. Got it?”

I nod tearfully and she pulls me back in for another hug, rubbing my back up and down.

I sniffle, “my clothes are dirty.”

She chuckles, “can I help you into a gown?”

I bite my lip but nod, the pain still aching at me when I move, even with the painkillers.

When I hand Christine my clothes one by one, she looks down and shakes her head, “Callie, what happened to this bra?!” She laughs. “It’s beaten to bits and your underwire is sticking out!”

My eyes tear up involuntarily and my lip wobbles. “It… it broke and it’s my last bra and I didn’t know how to tell Jim I need to go bra shopping.”

“Oh, honey,” she melts. “You have me and Nyota around for stuff like that. We have ship’s stores with clothing replicators for these things,” she shakes her head. “You could have come to me.”

I look down, “my mom made me do all that myself. Even though she threw away all my bras once because she said they were the wrong size, and I was too embarrassed to go up one.” I shrug, looking back at her. “I’m used to doing that alone.”



“She did *what* ?”

“She went through my room and threw away all my bras and replaced them with a bigger size. It... it really messed with my head.”

“Because you weren’t mentally prepared to grow that much so fast I take it?”

“Mhmh.”

She sighs. “But you don’t *have* to do any of that alone anymore, okay? You *shouldn’t* have to.”

I nod to my lap and she smiles, “let me help you get this gown tied...”

~

Hours later, Christine has logged all my injuries from what she calls, “the assault”, and repaired all the damage she can.

My ankle is fully broken and is going to take a few days to completely recover.

My shoulders managed to stay located, but I have a sprained wrist and three cracked ribs.

I’m full of scratches and abrasions from being tossed around on the ground, plus my split lip and cheek, but those are easy enough to fix.

I also have a slight concussion and bruised tailbone, both of which can’t have much done for them.

Then there are the blossoming bruises everywhere, my stomach included, and those take a long time to fix, because there’s so many. Chris warns me that more will likely appear and to come back to get them taken care of.

She takes pictures of most of the injuries before fixing them, taking swabs for DNA off some, keeping me calm the whole time.

As she finishes wrapping my ankle after its last round of regen, she glances up for a moment. “Can I ask you something about something my deeper scans picked up?”

My eyes jolt up to meet hers and I nod fearfully.

“How long has it actually been since you had a period?”

I can’t help the snort that escapes me. “That’s what you’re worried about right now?”

She sighs, “there’s so much unshed lining, can’t say it doesn’t throw up red flags.”

“So what do we do about it?”

She cocks her head and smirks. “How. *Long?*”

I sigh, roll my eyes. “Not since my mom got sick.”

“I guessed as much...” she says ruefully. “What we do about it? We give you medication to induce a cycle. But, Doc will have to sign off,” she says apologetically.

I sigh, “I get it.”

“Are you okay if I go get him now? We're done here, unless you need something else first?”

I look down at myself, my abrasions have been cleaned and bandaged but I still feel dirty and greasy and like I need a hot shower.

But even more than that, I'm worried about Jim. “Can I see Jim first?”

“I'm not sure where he's at in his recovery,” she answers. “Let me check with the boss, okay? I'll be right back and we will see what we can do. Will you be okay alone for a minute?”

“Of course,” I nod.

But the second she's gone, the silence that hits me is both sickening and deafening. I'm instantly reliving everything, the grab at my hair where my scalp still has a heartbeat. The throw to the ground that gave my tailbone a heartbeat, too.

I'm shaking when Bones walks in, and I'm instantly asking, “can I see Jim now?”

He sighs, “y'all're so much alike, y'know that? Just keep askin' for each other. Jim is still in a regen cycle right now, but he's *fine*, okay? He's gonna be fine.”

“Is he fine or is he going to be fine?” I challenge. “There's a difference.”

“He *is* fine. More worried about you than himself, typical.”

He starts thumbing through the chart notes Christine left before he pulls up a stool. “Boy, they really did a number on you too, huh?”

I nod sadly but silently.

“How's the pain?”

"I'm okay," I answer. "It's like. A two out of ten."

"Where at?"

"Uh," I chuckle. "Kinda all over."

He sighs, "I'm sorry, sweetheart."

"Not like it was your fault."

"But I'm still sorry."

I shrug, "at least my shoulder stayed located."

He snorts, "at least." He reads over the rest of Christine's notes quickly. "Looks like Chris has ya patched up, she's just worried about a couple things."

"She mentioned." I snip.

"You know... trouble eating, nausea, not sleeping, nightmares, skipped periods... they're all signs of some pretty extreme stress, kid."

"Are you psychoanalyzing me right now?"

"To be honest, yes."

I raise an eyebrow.

"I'm the ship psychiatrist, kid. It's my job."

I stay silent.

"Have you ever considered or been talked to about anxiety medication?"

My eyes fly up to meet his, but I say nothing.

"I know you're really young for them," he holds out a hand. "But I'm really worried about you, darlin'. I'd rather put you on one thing to help multiple issues rather than a bunch of other pills."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I don't want to put you on birth control because you're too stressed to have a period. And something for sleeping. And for nightmares. And for headaches. And for nausea. I'd rather put you on one thing and see how many of those issues resolve."

I try to take a deep breath but my ribs ache uncomfortably.

When he sees me wince, he purses his lips for a moment before speaking. "Darlin', I need to ask you about something else the scans showed," he says slowly, pulling out a medical padd. "Your broken ribs," he says gently. "They've been broken before, haven't they?"

I play with the sheet in my lap, "I thought they were just probably bruised..."

"What happened?" He asks gently.

"Uhm," my voice breaks, and I keep playing with the hem of the sheet. "My mom she uhm... she, she shoved me once and I tripped and fell and it was my fault, really-"

"Dear god no it wasn't," he says almost angrily.

I shrug, "it hurt for a long time. But I didn't think they broke." I say in a small voice.

"Well they did," he says softly. "And didn't heal right. That's why they broke so easily." He pauses. "You've been through *so much* in the past few months. Your body has been through so much just the last few weeks, and I'm discovering it's been through a lot for a long time. I think it's time we give it a little help."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean I think we should try some anxiety medication."

I try not to growl, "I don't need that."

"...I think you do."

I sigh. "Do I have a choice?" I ask ruefully.

He looks startled, "of course," he says quickly, shaking his head. "Callie, I don't force anyone on medication. Not for anything. This is ultimately your choice and yours alone. But you've got a lot of healing to do, and things like not eating and not sleeping are going to impede that."

I work my jaw in circles.

"I just want to help,"

I close my eyes, "okay." I say just above a whisper. "Fine. I'll try it."

“Thank you,” he breathes. Then he stands, “Chris’ll come back with that medication and another to induce a cycle. Then how about we get you settled in for the night?”

I raise an eyebrow, “I have to stay here?”

He sighs, almost frustrated, “Callie, I’m puttin’ you an’ your brother in a room together an’ I’m not lettin’ y’all outta my sight for the night. That’s a non negotiable.”

“You’re gonna watch us sleep?” I ask incredulously.

“I’m going to oversee your care,” he pushes back.

“Creep.” I quip.

“Child full of injuries,” he jibes.

I huff, “fine. I don’t mind staying here if it means I get more painkillers tonight.”

He softens, “we’ll keep you comfortable. That’s why I need you to stay.”

I look down at my hands, still covered in dirt and dust. “Can I shower before that?”

He nods, “Sure. I’ll get Chris to unhook everything and help.”

“I don’t need-”

He glares at me, and I shut up.

Christine waits outside the shower stall in the medbay locker room as I struggle through a sonic shower. My ankle still can’t take my weight, so I have to sit down as I scrub at my hair. But as I do, the spot it was yanked on aches like it’s bruised and I wince, grunt in pain.

“You good?” Christine calls.

“Yeah, just finding fresh spots that hurt,” I admit.

“Well take care of them when you’re done, okay?”

“Okay…” I call back, fingering the taped over IV line in my arm.

Getting undressed in front of the full length mirror in the shower stall was startling. Sure, I have a mirror in my bathroom, but I avoid it. There was no avoiding this one.

My ribs are sticking out of my skin, my joints all look like harsh angles, and my collarbone sits up way too prominently. Bones, Jim, Christine, they're all right. I need to start eating. It's just so *hard*. I'm always stressed so I'm always nauseous, and I just genuinely forget to eat most days because I'm focused on other things.

But looking at the way my pelvis juts out, I realize things have to change.

I sigh as I command the sonic cycle off and wonder how I'm going to get off the floor, wrapping a towel around myself. (For modesty only. There's no water involved in a sonic shower.)

"Can I come help?" Christine calls.

"You don't have to-

But she's already walking in slowly, "I don't want you putting weight on that ankle by accident," she winces. "Let me help you get up?"

I sigh yet again but acquiesce. "Why are you stuck helping me shower?" I find myself pushing. "You're the head nurse!"

"And you and your brother are currently the most injured people on the ship," she shakes her head. "So you get me and the boss exclusively. Don't be trying to get rid of me."

I snort, "I'd never do that. You're the only nurse that's ever been nice to me."

Silence hangs for just a moment longer than necessary.

"Well, I'm sorry for that." Christine says lowly. "I believe you, because I've worked with a lot of bad nurses. That's why I try so hard to be a good one."

"You succeed," I smile gently.

She smiles brightly and pats my arm, "you will, too, when you get into the field." She winks. "Alright, let's get you dressed. And how about I call Nyota down to braid your hair for you so you don't have to mess with it?"

I nod, "I'd like that."

•

Bones paced back and forth in the science lab, "who even *are* these people?" He exclaimed. "Who are they that they have unlimited means like this?"

"There are very few factions that would have the means and abilities this one appears to possess. It is a curious thing, indeed." Spock replied, arms tucked neatly behind his back.

“So it’s just some... privately funded eugenics operation? That sounds ridiculous!”

“Indeed. There is, logically, more that we do not yet know.”

“...You have a theory,” Bones breathed.

“I-”

“Nuh-uh, don’t lie to me, Spock. Scientist to scientist, tell me what’s churnin’ in that head?”

Spock gave a very Vulcan huff. “There have long been... whispers,” he shook his head. “Of a faction within Starfleet. A faction of highly skilled and advanced operatives willing to do anything and everything to advance their goal.”

“Which is?”

“To protect the Federation from whatever or whomever they deem a threat.”

“Don’t tell me they consider a 16-year-old girl a threat?”

“At the funeral, it was said that the former commander Kirk trained in intelligence, was it not?”

“It was...”

“And we now know that she experimented with eugenics.”

“Right...”

“Perhaps Callie is not the threat, but what we now know she is able to do.”

“Cure xenoP within her family? So what?”

“Perhaps it is the implication, doctor. Consider what would happen if a... further augmented individual had even more far reaching healing abilities?”

“You think they want to know if she can do more than heal just this?”

“Even if she cannot, the mere idea is dangerous to certain people.”

“To this... faction within Starfleet, you mean?”

“They call themselves Section 31.”

“That's why Frank could stroll in and slap a child in the parking lot of a Starfleet funeral home and have no repercussions! He was working for them all along.”

“Indeed.”

“So how do we fight a faction in the shadows?”

“...We cannot.”

#### Chapter End Notes

The bra thing may seem weird but it's a true story. My mom threw all mine away and replaced them with a bigger size and I wasn't emotionally ready to be growing that fast, so it really messed with my head.

Forensic nurses are angels and being one is my dream job I'll never attain because I'm too mentally ill. So I'll just write about how amazing they are. Seriously. They're consent-crazed and I love them.

I was 16 when I first went on anxiety meds. good ol' zoloft. And I know that's young, but sometimes, it's life threatening. I'd say Callie is at that point as well, and it's their best bet to help her.



## Chapter 10

“Section 31? Yeah, I’ve heard the rumors. It makes sense. They knew exactly where to target me, Bones. My bad hand, my bad ribs, these people have read my file.” Jim thought aloud.

“Your medical file is restricted, kid.”

“I know, Bones. That’s why the thought scares me.”

They both looked over at a sleeping Callie. “There’s a lot about this that scares me, Jim.” Bones commented softly.

Jim shifted in bed and winced, the pain of his rebroken ribs blossoming through the haze of painkillers. “I need to talk to Pike,” he sighed. “He’s got to know something.”

“Rest first, kid. Doctor’s orders. You just said it, they knew where to hit you- so you need to let those things heal tonight.”

“I know, Bones. It’s not like I want to leave Callie, either. Even if she’s asleep. I don’t want to take my eyes off her for a second.” He paused. “Thank you, for this. For the room together.”

Bones had moved them into a large recovery room together to ease both of their anxieties about the condition of the other. Once they each saw the other one was generally okay, Bones was able to put away the sedatives.

Callie, under the influence of painkillers and other medications, had slipped off to sleep not long after Nyota finished braiding her hair.

Spock had come along and given Jim updates on the ship, only a few, per Bones of course, but enough to calm him down.

So Bones was happy- and surprised- to have two relatively content Kirks on his hands. “Of course, kid,” he responded softly. “Anything you need.”

Jim nodded, thumping his head back against the bed he was sitting up in, looking a thousand miles away.

“Where are you at?” Bones asked gently.

Jim’s eyes glazed over as he stared at a spot on the ceiling. “Pike had been keeping it on the down-low why they wanted Callie. We’d... been able to avoid the word ‘augment’ so far. But now...” he looked over at her, shook his head. “After I file a report, there’s going to be no stopping what comes next.”

“And what’s that?”

“Starfleet goes from keeping her safe to keeping themselves safe.”

•

I wake up throughout the night, be it from pain, nightmares, or the IV I still have making me need to pee, and Bones is there each time. He gives me more painkillers, tells me everything is alright and it was just a dream, and helps me hobble to the bathroom in my walking boot.

Each time I go back to sleep, it feels like I barely get there before I'm woken back up. Even someone silently at my bedside to check the vitals reading disturbs me.

I blow some flyaway strands of hair out of my face around 0500, according to my padd Nyota brought, and sit up to find Bones is finally asleep, bent over the desk that sits on the wall.

I do a mental inventory of injuries and pain, things are relatively numb so I must have fairly recently been given painkillers. Thank god for Bones and Christine.

And when did I start feeling that way about a doctor and nurse?

Jim wakes up every time I do, something I feel awful about. But he easily goes back to blissful sleep, unlike me.

But at 0500 when I awake silently, both men stay asleep.

I debate sneaking out and going back to our quarters, but the clunky boot I need for my ankle makes me decide against it. It'll get another regen cycle today just to make sure everything is healed, but I still need to keep weight off it.

In the quiet, I have space to think for the first time since everything happened. The thought that I was *attacked* and that someone- someone's?- tried to kidnap me.

I look over at Bones- he and Spock managed to do with two blood draws what Vos couldn't do with countless ones. How?

Then my mind wanders to the anxiety medication I was given before bed.

I've always been... tightly wound. Nauseous. Nervous. Anxious, I suppose. But my mom attributed it to skipping grades and never making close friends, always being around kids older than me.

The panic attacks I had before school were dismissed as whining, and I learned to live with the chest pain that became ever-present.

The not sleeping and nightmares just... are me. It was a running joke to my mom- that I was such a night owl. When I was little, I got screamed at for not sleeping but when I became a teenager suddenly it was a joke. I think maybe she realized there was an issue but didn't want to admit it seriously.

She did that a lot. Made serious things into jokes. Made my fears and anxieties out to be silly and stupid.

I guess I've always known I'm an anxious person, I just thought I needed to suck it up more.

But now I'm being told I need help to do so, and I'm not sure what to make of it.

I very slowly turn and ease my legs over the bed, trying to reach the walking boot on the floor.

“Callie...” comes Bones’ muffled scold, his head still buried in his arms. “What’re ya doin’?”

I sigh, “I have to pee again.”

He picks his head up, hair mussed, and I catch the end of an eye roll. “You’re supposed to ask for help.”

“How do you always know when I wake up?”

“I had a baby at one point in my life, y’know. Kid still wakes me up at 6am ready to play. I just send her to Jim, though.”

I snort.

“I’m kidding,” he clarifies, helping me into a walking boot and out of bed.

“Can you do the final regeneration cycle when I get back? I’m sick of this boot.”

“Kid, if you’re *asking* for medical treatment, you can absolutely have it.”

I roll my eyes.

A cramp hits me and I wonder how long it takes for that period drug to work. I’ll have to ask Christine. But I do wonder as well, “so like. How long until those pills work?”

Bones looks up at me from his spot on the floor as he works my foot into the boot. “Which ones?”

I roll my eyes. “There are so many, after all...” I huff. “The ...anxiety ones.”

“Oh,” he says lightly, brow furrowing in thought. “About 2 weeks. Used to be 4-6 but science progressed, thank god. You should start sleeping more soundly then.”

I hum in response and glance over to make sure Jim is still asleep. “And the other one?”

“Anytime now.”

“I hate you so much.”

Jim, eyes closed, grumbles, “join the club.”

I go back to sleep while Bones runs the final regen cycle on my ankle and when I wake up, it's to him and Jim talking, Jim still in bed.

Then I realize they're arguing.

"Bones, I'm *fine* -"

"Jim you were this close," he holds up two fingers, "to flail rib. *Again* . I'm not lettin' you outta here yet."

I sit up in bed and tuck a stray strand of hair back into the braid.

Bones looks over at me and immediately comes over to push a bedside table with a tray of food on it towards me. "Eat," he commands. "Your blood sugar is bottoming out."

I sigh and start poking at the eggs on the plate.

"Hey, Cal," Jim calls, a little too gently. "I just got word that Starfleet wants to... interview you, get a report of what happened and ask you some questions."

I hesitate. "But like... all I did was fight off a kidnapper."

"I think they're mostly interested in asking questions about what exactly happened, trying to identify who exactly these people are."

"...who do *you* think they are?" I ask, because his tone is suspicious.

"I'm... I'm genuinely not entirely sure." He responds.

"Does Starfleet know why they wanted me? About the augmentation?"

"Yes, they do now."

"Now?"

"I had been able to keep the word "augment" out of my reports but this time... this time I couldn't. And yeah. Yeah, I think that's why they want to interview you."

"But what do they even want to ask? I have no idea what she did- oh. Oh my god," I realize. "They want to know how augmented I am, they want to know if they need to lock me up," I start to panic. "They-"

"I would never let that happen," Jim turns in bed and Bones immediately puts a hand out to stop him from getting up. Jim shoots him a glare but complies. "But I won't lie. They probably do want to get an idea of who you are."

I shakily rub my hands together and press my lips into a line.

“Hey, it’s gonna be okay,” Jim tries to soothe. “You don’t have super strength or super healing or super evilness,” he shakes his head with a half-cocked smile. “You’re not anything they need or will worry about. You’re fine, kiddo.”

I sigh. “I hope so.”

•

I’m staring at a Starfleet loading screen in Bones’ office, at his computer.

Jim lays on the couch to my left and Bones sits across the desk from me.

I’m wringing my hands together, nervously waiting for the video chat to start, when a man’s face fills the screen.

He’s wearing gold, like Jim does, and I try not to startle, having expected someone in a grey dress uniform, ready to interrogate me. He has a soft smile with crinkles around his eyes and greying hair swept neatly back. “Hello, Callie. I’m Admiral Christopher Pike.”

“Sir?” Jim squawks from the couch, moving to get up before Bones rushes to shove him back down.

“Kirk?” Admiral Pike looks around. “You’re not supposed to be there,” he scolds. “Callie, turn the monitor around for me for a sec?”

I comply.

“Jim. Go back to bed.”

“I am in bed.”

“Son, for real.”

“Sir... I...”

Pike’s voice seems to soften. “Son. She’s safe with me. You can’t be here. They’ll say you coached her.”

“Bones stays.” Jim hardballs.

“As her doctor, that’s fine.”

Jim nods once and motions for me to turn the monitor back as Bones helps him stand. “I’ll be right back,” he nods to me.

I nod back then look at the screen.

“Well. Let’s get started,” Pike says, shuffling what sounds like padds around. “Callie, I’m sure by now you’ve found out who Vos is, what his history is?”

I nod.

“So the fact he claims to have worked with your mother prior to that is... troubling.” He picks up a padd. “Can you tell me if your mom ever talked about your conception process?”

I try not to cringe, and shrug. “Just that...” I think hard. “Just that they wanted the boys close together in age then were going to have me later. That I was a miracle because I was the last viable embryo and they weren’t sure I’d implant since my embryo was older. She never like, never said she... altered it or anything.”

Bones comes back in then and sits down. My eyes flit to his in nervousness but then look back at Pike, who’s nodding and seems to be taking notes.

“From a science perspective, it barely makes sense,” he shakes his head. “Especially what they said about Frank giving himself the illness. It’s more likely he had the gene and they found a way to speed up the progression.”

I nod. “So he like... was working with them all along... right? That’s why he wanted the house so bad? To push me to space with Jim where they had more advantage to snatch me?”

He nods, “they were probably worried Jim would tuck you away somewhere, knowing he’d never let you go to Frank.”

I take a shaky breath, picturing a life with my uncle.

“And who do you think “they” is?”

He hesitates. “We still aren’t entirely sure.”

“But you have a guess,” I push.

He sighs, and I think I hear a muttered, “you’re just like your brother...” before he answers, “yes but I can’t say right now.”

I bristle but don’t push more.

“We were hoping you’d be able to help us figure out exactly who they are,” he says.

“All I did was kick a guy in the crotch,” I shake my head.

“It’s more so trying to find out if your mom dropped any clues over the years. Did anyone strange ever come to visit? Do you remember

anything off about the way your mom talked about Starfleet?”

“Oh yeah, she hated it,” I nod. “She thought they killed my dad and ruined her career for speaking out about it and she hated Starfleet hospitals and doctors immensely.” My eyes flit to Bones’ and back again.

Pike makes more notes. “But never strange visitors?”

“Not that I ever saw.”

“Her hating Starfleet Medical... so you’re saying she avoided seeking care?”

“Yes, 100%.”

“Did you ever... notice your own injuries healing faster than normal?”

Bones cuts in then, “*no*,” he says harshly and loudly. “She heals extremely slowly,” he scowls.

Pike takes notes, then seems to hesitate. “Can you tell me about the grades you skipped in school?”

My body flashes hot then cold. “What’s to tell...” I shrug. “I kept testing out of grades.”

“Did you... *ever* find school challenging?”

“Sometimes, I mean, I picked things up fast because all I ever did was read and keep to myself. You don’t make friends skipping grades.”

“So you studied a lot?”

“Of course, I didn’t just... know things or like... glance at a page and learn everything instantly. I got B’s sometimes.”

He smirks, “sometimes, eh?”

It’s meant to be funny but it makes me nervous, and I think he catches on.

“Okay,” he smiles softly. “Can you tell me about you? What you want to do?”

I balk, “what?”

“You’ve finished high school, you’ll be 18 shortly. What comes next for you?”

I flounder, hands fiddling in my lap again. “I, uhm, I... I haven’t really decided, I mean... my mom got sick, I came here...” I shake my head

and shrug, “college, maybe?”

“Major?”

“Maybe... maybe nursing?” I wince.

He smiles, “when the time comes, Starfleet will be happy to pay for your education, or even provide it, should you desire.”

“Does that mean I get permission to open college?” Bones pipes up, making Pike laugh.

“McCoy, if you’re offering to teach, have at it. You and Chapel are more than qualified. We’d count the credits.”

“You can just decide that?” I gape.

He shrugs, “I’m head academic advisor. I’d make sure you got the credits and degree, as would your brother’s best friend, there.”

Bones nods but I ignore him. “Thank you,” I say.

Pike nods once. “That’s all I-“

Then I hear commotion in the background and Pike turns with a scowl to argue with someone.

It isn’t long before a new face fills the screen. It’s a scrawny man, wrinkled and scowling, with piercing eyes. He *is* in the grey I expected.

“Calliope,” he drawls. “I’m Admiral Marcus, head of Starfleet.”

Out of my periphery, I see Bones’ eyes go wide, before he jumps up, flashing me a “1 sec” sign and running out.

“I have a couple more...” he glances off to the side for a moment. “In-depth questions.”

Bones comes back with a panicked looking Jim and deposits him on the couch again where he can’t be seen.

“Tell me about all those grades you skipped,” he shakes his head. “That’s quite the feat.”

I shrug, “not really, I mean, Jim graduated earlier than I did.”

He smirks a smirk that says something vile. “True,” he chirps. “But Jim wasn’t augmented.”

I flash cold again at the term, and I think he knows it somehow because he smirks again. “And your mother *really* never said anything about your augmentations?” He shakes his head in disbelief. “That’s a big secret to keep.”



“She kept a lot of secrets,” I challenge. “Like her work in intelligence. Neither of us knew about that.”

“Yes she was a... valuable asset.”

I raise my eyebrows, “you knew my mom?”

“Head of Starfleet, I know a lot.”

‘Not as much as you think,’ I scowl mentally.

“So that means I know the threats augments are to Starfleet.” He glances to the side, “some augmented individuals have proven themselves to be aids to the greater good,” he looks back at me, seemingly examining me. “Most though, not so much.”

It sounds like a threat.

“I mean, you’ve already gotten the ship and your brother attacked, what other trouble will you cause? We have to consider that,” he shakes his head.

I say nothing.

“What was it? 100 injured in the attack? 200? And how many broken ribs did McCoy’s report say you caused your brother?”

I see Jim twitching on the couch, like he’s dying to interfere but can’t.

He sighs again with finality. “We’ll be in touch, Calliope.”

Then the screen cuts out.

And I burst into tears.

•

I’m laying in the same biobed as before, Jim in his, Bones at his desk.

I’m laying on my side, silent tears still leaking every once in a while as Christine sits on the edge of the bed, gently rubbing my back, stroking my hair every once in a while.

Jim and Bones have taken a break from trying to calm me down, calling in Christine for a feminine touch.

They think I’m some evil augment.

Another tear.

They don't believe me.

Another tear.

I hurt Jim and the crew.

Another tear.

They're going to take me away from Jim.

Two tears, and I squeeze my eyes shut and sniffle.

"Baby," Christine sighs. "It's all going to be okay,"

"The head of Starfleet thinks I'm like, Khan from the 1990's! It's not going to be okay," I all but wail.

She stops rubbing and moves to the other side of the bed to face me. She gently cups my cheek and wipes my tears. "You've got the best crew in the 'fleet on your side. It's going to be okay."

I take in a shaky breath. "Yeah? And how many more of them am I going to get hurt?"

"*None* since we gave them the cure!" Jim objects.

"That's not what Admiral Marcus seems to think..."

"Marcus is a asshole."

I snort, then wince when my ribs twinge.

"Let me get you more pain meds," Christine bustles away.

"When can I go home?"

"When you don't need pain meds every 2 hours." Bones deadpans without looking up.

I sigh and let the pain meds pull me under.

There are arms and hands all over me. I'm being grabbed and hit and thrown into a bed. Vos is breathing down my neck. I'm trying to scream but for some reason I can't. He smiles at me and asks if I'm ready to be drained of all my blood. He suddenly jabs a needle into my broken ribs and-

“**NO !**” I wake up screaming in a way I've never screamed before. I believe “blood-curdling” would be the term. I scramble around, sobbing, pushing the imaginary hands off me, grabbing at my arms and chest, looking for restraints. “No! No! Stop! **NO !**” I'm yelping out. “Sto-ho-hop...” I start sobbing harder.

A hand does land on me, in real life, and I scramble away from it, once again feeling the pain in my ribs rearing up as my feet hit the floor.

“No! Leave me alone!” I'm still scrambling away. At least I can *move* when I'm not dreaming. I *know* I'm on the Enterprise. But something in me can't shake what I just saw in my head. Can't shake the fear that's wrapped around my throat in a vice grip. All I can think is that I'm in danger. I turn from flight to fight, and start kicking and swatting, trying to get anything close to me to get away.

I'm hearing my name being yelled but I can't get myself to stop and focus on who is yelling it. Hot tears are streaking down my face and I shiver, realizing I'm drenched in sweat.

I find myself falling onto the floor, clawing at it, pushing back against the wall as my nails can't find anything to grasp onto on the cold, solid, smooth floor.

I start taking in breaths of air, but take them in far too big and start gasping. My eyes are watering through the tears if that's possible as I squeeze them shut and gasp some more.

I then register someone kneeling across from me.

“Darlin'? Callie? Sweetheart, listen to me. Listen to my voice,” this voice is calm. It's weird how calming it is. Do I know this voice? Is this just someone being nice to me? Is he gonna hurt me? My heart picks up again and then someone is moving closer to me. I throw my head against the wall and it smarts. I'm literally backed against a wall with no way out.

“I'm not gonna hurt you, darlin'. You're safe, you're not in trouble, I promise. Have I ever broken a promise to you?”

I open my eyes again at the man in the royal blue shirt. His hazel eyes search mine and his dark hair is going every which way. A hint of recognition flashes within me. I know him! Who is he? “Callie, you're safe. You know us. You're on the Enterprise. I'm Bones, I'm your doctor, I take care of you. This is Jim, your brother. We're on his ship. We both keep you safe. It's ok, I promise everything is ok.”

I feel my breathing slow as I examine him over my drawn up knees.

Then it all floods back to me.

I feel the realization hit me in the face, oh my **GOD** what an idiot did I just make of myself?

“There she is...” Bones smiles at me. “Welcome back, sweetheart. Musta been *some* nightmare,” he says this all gently, starting to reach towards me.

I register his hand slowly carding its way through my hair, and try as I might to reject it, it *is* inherently calming. “Sh-sh-sh-sh, it was just a bad dream. It wasn’t real-”

“But it *was*!” My chest heaves out a sob as I cover my face with my hands. “It was real and it happened and they hu-hu-hurt meee...” I cry and cry. The hand keeps combing through my hair, despite how sweaty and tangled it is from my tossing and turning.

“But you’re not there now. You’re *here* and you’re *safe*.”

I snuffle, looking over at Jim. He reaches a hand out to me and I know he wants me to take it. So I do. He plops from kneeling down onto his butt and pulls on my hand, telling me to come closer. I push myself to slide beside him, let him throw an arm around me and hold me tight. I lay my head against his shoulder/chest and sigh, try to let my chest deflate.

Jim brings his other arm to cross over me, puts that hand on my face to pull me into his chest, and lays his chin on my head. “It’s ok, Cal. Everything is ok. I’ve got you. I’ve got you. We both do,” he motions his body towards Bones and I can hear him nod.

“Absolutely,” he all but whispers.

I’m still shaking in Jim’s arms, and I look over at Bones through my sticky eyes. “I hate sleeping here. *Please* can I go home?”

He scowls, “babydoll, you have nightmares at home, too,” he challenges.

“At least it’s in my own bed.” I push back.

Bones sighs, looking between me and Jim. “I will discharge you both into my direct care- do you know what that means?” He looks between us seriously.

Jim nods solemnly and when I shake my head no, Bones explains, “it means you’re being discharged from medbay’s supervision to mine. It means I’m in charge, but if you want to go home, you can.”

“...it doesn’t sound much different,”

“It’s not.”

Jim objects, “it’s *way* different! Not being in medbay is always a win.”

•

I can’t seem to settle.

I’m technically ‘settled’ down in my bed, feet curled under me with my padd in my lap, but my heart won’t settle. It pounds and aches in my chest.

Jim is settled in his bed, pads spread all around him doing god knows what but looking at peace.

Bones is settled in the corner of Jim's room in the plush armchair. 'Settled' yet still comes to check on me every 15-minutes, after asking that I leave the door open.

So every 15 minutes I have to find a way to look 'settled' even though that's the last thing I feel.

The fourth time Bones comes by, I sigh. "Dude. I'm never going to sleep with you pacing over here every 15 minutes."

He huffs, "sue me."

"I might."

"Try."

I snort. Then I sigh again and sit up, "I'm never going to sleep in general."

"Because you *don't* sleep 'in general'." He levels back with an eyebrow raised.

I shrug, "what're ya gonna do..."

"Uh, medicate it?"

"I thought the stuff you've been giving me is supposed to help with that?"

"It will, but it takes time to build up, remember?"

I nod.

"In the meantime, I can give you something to sleep. You're due for more pain meds, anyway."

I hesitate. I'm honestly afraid to have another nightmare, especially with both guys already worried about me.

"I..."

"There's a chance it'll help you not have nightmares," he offers.

"Sold."

~

I wake up at 0337. My room is dark and quiet, our entire quarters at rest, it seems.

My chest aches and my hands shake as I try to calm myself down. I've not had any nightmares, but for some reason I'm anxious.

I look around, expecting to see Bones pop in the doorway, but all is silent.

Suddenly, being alone is suffocating. I've woken up to people for a couple of days now, and it's already strange to be alone.

I hold my breath and try to listen for anything, breathing, snoring, a fart, but there's nothing.

My anxious energy gets the better of me and I hold onto my ribs and slip out of bed, testing my ankle unnecessarily, and pad to Jim's room.

The door is open, and he's peacefully asleep in his bed with Bones asleep in the chair in the corner.

I observe them both, huffing out peaceful breaths, and wonder if I'm going to be able to go back to sleep alone.

Then an idea hits me.

I go back to my room and grab my blanket and pillow.

There's a spot on the floor on the other side of Jim's bed, between the wall and bed, only a couple feet wide, but a big enough space for me to lay down in.

I quietly lay my things on the floor and set a silent buzzing alarm on my pad for a couple hours from now.

And sack out.

•

“Jim. *JIM . WAKE UP !*”

“Mmmgrrraugh, B'nes... Time's it?”

“0540. Jim, I can't find Callie.”

*That* woke the young captain up. Jim bolted upright and slurred out, “computer, locate Calliope Kirk,”

“as if I didn't already try that...”

“Calliope Kirk is in her quarters.” Came the flat response.

Bones threw his hands up. “She’s nowhere to be found, I-”

A soft sigh.

They froze and looked at each other. Then in unison, moved over to look at the floor between Jim’s bed and the wall; Jim perched on the bed and his best friend standing over his shoulder. And there was Callie, peacefully asleep.

“Oh geez, kid…” Bones muttered, dropping to a knee at her feet.

“Another nightmare you think?” Jim asked gently.

“No,” Bones muttered, subconsciously putting a hand over one of her ankles. “She might just have been scared to be alone.”

“Should we just leave her there?” Jim asked, stifling a yawn.

Bones shook his head, “not with her injuries. I don’t want them flaring up…”

Just then she sighed in her sleep again, a soft little whimper of contentment that probably came from the familiar and safe sound of their voices.

“God, Jim. She’s a baby…” Bones found himself muttering. “She’s 16 but she’s a *baby* …”

“and never got treated as one.” Jim’s voice hardened.

“How do you mean?” Bones asked softly.

Jim shook his head. “You call *me* touch starved when the only touch this kid has known is a painful one.”

“Pot, meet kettle.” Bones deadpanned.

Jim gave him a look and rolled his eyes. “It’s like she needs… I don’t know…”

“Retaught?”

A pause. Jim knew if he agreed about her, he’d be agreeing about himself as well. “Yeah. Yeah I think so. She needs to learn that she’s safe. Although that’s not easy to teach that to someone who’s had two attempted kidnappings.”

Bones sighed. “Well. Let’s just get her into your bed.”

“My bed?”

“She clearly is craving company,” he said lowly. “I’m not dumping her back in her bed to wake up alone. That may be what caused this in the first place. She’s been surrounded by people since everything happened.”

“Yeah, you’re right.” Jim moved to help Bones,

“What are you doing?”

“Uh, helping you lift dead weight?”

“You’re still injured, kid. Down. I’ve got her.”

He easily lifted her up and settled her into the free side of Jim’s king, adjusting her head onto the pillow.

The meds must have really kicked in, because she didn’t even stir.

He leaned down and found himself planting a kiss in her hair the same way he did when he tucked Joanna into bed.

•

I come back to awareness warm and cozy, laying in a soft cocoon. Soft voices lull me into consciousness, and I wonder why Jim’s floor feels so soft.

Jim’s floor.

Voices.

Crap.

I bolt upright and find myself in Jim’s bed as I frantically search for my padd to figure out why the alarm didn’t go off.

“We shut your alarm off,” Jim says softly.

“You needed the sleep,” Bones adds gruffly.

“How did I…” I look around the bed, examining the thick blankets in my lap.

“You wandered in here and we found ya on the floor at about 6.”



"I am *so* sorry," I bury my face in my hands in shame and embarrassment.

Jim reaches over to rub circles on my back, "hey, it's okay," he soothes. "I crawled in Bones' bed enough times to be due some payback," he smirks.

"But I specifically *didn't* get in your bed!" I protest through my hands.

Jim seems to freeze, "did you not- are you- sh- did we make you uncomfortable? I'm sorry--"

Then it's my turn to stammer, "no, no, it's not like that, I'm not upset, I'm embarrassed,"

"Embarrassed? Why- no-"

"Yeah, embarrassed-"

We continue talking over each other until Bones waves both hands through the air. "Okay, alright, enough." He looks at me, "craving company ain't nothin' to be ashamed of, darlin'," he backs towards the door. "I'm going to replicate you both breakfast and you're both gonna eat, understood?"

Jim and I share a glance that is far too conspiratorial, and Bones sighs resignedly.

•

*From: Calliope Kirk*

*To: Christine Chapel, APRN, Head Nurse, USS Enterprise*

*How long for that period drug to work?*

*From: Christine Chapel, APRN, Head Nurse, USS Enterprise*

*To: Calliope Kirk*

*1-3 days. Are you having any symptoms?*

*Cramps.*

*Good!! That's really good. You need to let me know if and when you start, okay? Otherwise we will need to do something else, but if you're already cramping I doubt we will need to.*

*...what is something else?*

*There are other drugs. Worst case scenario is a uterine ablation but sweetheart, don't be thinking it'll come to that.*

*If you say so.*

*I do. Now. Do you need anything?*

*Your boss is here mother-henning, unless you wanna break me out of here, I'm okay.*

*...I think that can be arranged.*

~

A half hour later, Christine is arguing with Bones about taking me out with her, but she wins so easily I know he isn't that worried.

He comes to check on me in bed and helps me sit up, worriedly asking if I'm in pain.

I insist the round of regen he insisted on before letting me come home helped a lot, and that I'm good for Christine to help me get dressed and go.

She throws an arm around my waist and helps me stand, and I reluctantly let her help me get dressed slowly.

We make our way out, Bones fussing over Jim to eat, and head to Nyota's cabin.

She beams as she answers the door, wearing a cozy sweater and leggings, walking barefoot with a wine glass lazily dangling from one hand. "Come in, come in," she coos. "I've been so worried, we all have," she rubs a hand on my upper back as we enter.

"You have?"

"Of course. Word on the ship travels fast. We all knew you were hurt but Len and Chris never let us know any details." She scowls playfully at Christine who shrugs ruefully, "confidentiality." They say in unison, laughing.

We sit down on the couch by the window, Nyota's room is laid out just like Christine's, and Nyota gives us both mocktails. "So how are you feeling? Really?" She asks.

I sigh softly. "Still sore in spots but a lot better, surprisingly."

"Surprisingly?" Nyota sips her drink.

"My mom was never big on doctors," I explain. "I let a lot of things heal slowly, growing up."

She has no idea what to say to that, I can immediately tell.

I can't hide a wince as a particularly bad cramp hits me.

“Cramps?” Christine asks, and I nod, setting my cup down and placing one hand over my aching uterus.

She winces, “you should go check if you started. We really need you to.”

“I have supplies under the sink,” Nyota adds.

My eyes involuntarily sting and I look down, trying to figure out what to say.

“What’s wrong?” Christine asks softly.

I shake my head, “my mom was never... open about this stuff. Anything medical, really. And I’ve found out there’s reasons for that but like.” I shrug, look at them both. “She was never like, a girls girl.”

“Is that why you’ve been wearing a broken bra in silence?”

“Wait, you what?” Nyota’s head snaps to me. “Oh girl, naw. When you can twist without wincing, because lord even I can see that, we are going *shopping* .”

“We’re girls girls.” Christine smiles at me.

## Chapter 11

“Thanks for meeting with me, Spock, this won’t take too much time.”

“It was no trouble, Captain.”

“You...” Jim halted, fiddling with the edge of a padd on his desk. “You’ve been in Starfleet a lot longer than I have,” he said. “Have you ever heard of something called Section 31?”

If it could, Spock’s face hardened. “I’ve heard... whispers,” he began. “Rumors, mostly. However...”

“However?” Jim prompted.

“However,” Spock began again, “logically, there seems to be some truth to the rumors.”

“How so?”

“It is a logical conclusion that Starfleet would need an intelligence division, one that can quietly take care of urgent and classified matters.”

“My mother was in intelligence,” Jim thought aloud, leaning back in his chair. “Callie didn’t know that, *I* didn’t know that. It was news to us both at her funeral.”

“Interesting,” Spock mused. “What did you believe her to do prior to that?”

“Engineer,” Jim said with a shrug. “I was always under the impression she was just a red-shirt.”

“It is possible that was a cover for her intelligence work.”

“It would explain how she ended up in a lab where she could alter embryos.”

“And how she came to know Dr. Vos.”

“God, Spock, how did you and Bones come up with a cure when he couldn’t?”

“My theory is that Dr. Vos’ research was lost on Tarsus IV and he was more concerned with trying to replicate it than looking for new ways to synthesize the cure.”

“What makes you think that?”

“The amount of cruel and unnecessary blood samples your sister endured are quite telling,” Spock said with an air of disapproval. “For a so-called scientist to take so many indicates he was testing a great many theories, but coming up with no results.”

“How the mighty have fallen,” Jim said, looking far away.

“Captain?”

“Going from Kodos’ right hand man to a guy who can’t recall his own research. No wonder he’s so angry and wanted her so badly.”

“Indeed.”

“Do you think he worked with Section 31?”

“Unclear.”

“Spock...” Jim shook his head. “Those thugs knew right where to target me, what my physical weak spots were. Only someone who's read my file would know those things.”

Spock’s eyebrow rose. “That is indeed troubling,” he agreed.

Jim nodded, deep in thought. He had kept the fact that he knew Vos from Spock, of course. But it was a secret that was getting harder to keep the closer they became. It had been nearly a year in space, since Nero, and they were finally getting along, like, *really* getting along. He was afraid to lose that, and illogically, he thought if he someday told Spock about Tarsus, things would change between them. They sure did in ways with Bones.

...Bones was understanding. Bones helped him through nightmares, flashbacks, trauma anniversaries. But that was *Bones*, not a Vulcan who had nearly choked him out.

He shook his head slightly to bring himself back to the present. “I guess I’m just not sure how deep this thing goes. What would Starfleet gain from working with Vos?”

“Much, I am afraid.”

“Afraid?”

“A human expression I believed you would resonate with.”

“I do.”

•

Life just... goes on.

It confuses me how something so big, so traumatic, so scary can happen and the planets keep turning, the universe keeps expanding. Life goes on. People go back to work. Jim and Bones do.

Christine tells me I can come down to medbay and sit with her if I need company, and Jim is frequently messaging me, but I still feel far too alone. Like no one can understand what I've been through. Not even Jim.

His traumas are so much different than mine. He was actually experimented on by Vos, and I... I just had blood samples taken. It's not the same. I shouldn't be trying to relate to Jim's experiences but I can't help it. He's the closest thing I've got to someone who understands.

Sitting on my bed, I run my hands through my hair in frustration. My injuries are healed, no one is chasing me anymore, and I'm safe with a brother who claims to love me. I should be happy.

My mind wanders to the anxiety meds I've been on for a week at this point. I can't help but wonder if they'll help with things like this, feeling trapped and lonely and afraid. Anxious.

I grab a nursing book and flip it open on my bed, but the words just blur together. I huff and close it.

What am I to do with my time, now that I'm not worried about being kidnapped?

I get up and go out to the living room, stare through the window out at the stars.

We're in orbit around a planet, one they're surveying, and the oranges and reds that cover it swirl in front of my eyes. The window isn't huge, but the view is spectacular. I think about the observation decks we've passed during my time on the ship, and I decide to head down to one to get a better view.

I search for an empty one, and the first one thankfully is.

After who knows how long of me just staring, I hear the doors open behind me and I turn. Spock strolls in, arms tucked behind his back. "Calliope," he begins. "Your brother became worried about you when you would not answer his messages and he dispatched me to check on you in your current location."

"Am I not supposed to be here?" I ask worriedly.

"On the contrary," he gives a singular head shake. "The captain is very happy you are exploring the ship, as it were. He is simply... worried."

"You mentioned that."

"He used the term frequently."

"Why didn't he come himself?"

"He cannot always leave the bridge."

I hum. "Well," I say after a beat, "you can tell him I'm fine."

“Are you?”

I raise an eyebrow. “What?”

“Are you truly “fine”, or are you, as they say, putting on a brave face?”

I blink. Is this Vulcan asking me about my feelings right now?

He moves closer, to come stand in front of me. “You have been through very traumatic events over the past months. It is understandable if you are having difficulties adjusting or processing.”

“I’m-”

“Fine, you mentioned.”

I sigh, “what do you all want from me? For me to break down, cry? Say that I feel lost and empty and confused how life can just go on after having the crap beat out of me? By both my mother and those thugs?” I jolt back suddenly, confused at the confession. “I’m sorry,” I shake my head quickly. “That was rude.”

“That was honest.”

“Same difference.”

“No, it is not.”

“I’m just wasting time until I turn eighteen,” I sigh. “Trying to stay out of everyone’s hair until then.”

“But what if they want you in their hair, as you put it?”

“Who’s that?”

“Doctor McCoy. Nurse Chapel. Nyota. Your brother. Many people have expressed happiness at your presence here, Calliope. You are not a burden.”

Tears spring to my eyes, “what?”

“You are not a burden to the people that care about you. On the contrary, hiding your struggles worries others more than if you were to go to them with your cares.”

“How can they possibly know what I’m hiding?”

“It does not take much observation.”

“So what am I supposed to do about it?”

He gives a one shoulder shrug, looking more human than Vulcan for a moment. “I cannot tell you that. What I can tell you is that there are individuals here who are yearning to be there for you, as it were, and you would benefit from letting them.”

“Do you speak from experience?” I snort.

“I do,” he nods once.

I raise an eyebrow.

“I have found that conversing with Nyota makes my worries lessen. Playing chess with your brother is quite the calming experience. Even discussing science related matters with Dr. McCoy is something I find enjoyable.”

“Nyota is way older than me, I don’t play chess, and I hate doctors.”

“Nyota is not that much older than you, and enjoys your company. Chess is not mandatory and Dr. McCoy is not like all doctors.”

“Are you always so contradictory?”

“When needed.”

I laugh a little at that.

“What I am advising, Calliope, is that you cease trying to keep everything to yourself, and let those who want to help you do so.”

“But how do I know they really want to?”

“You believe them when they tell you. The people I have mentioned are not liars. On the contrary, they are some of the most honest people I know. And I know that they all want to spend time with you.”

I drop my crossed arms and sigh. “Okay, okay. I’ll try to let them in when they push.”

“No, you will let them in now as they’ve already pushed.”

“You can be bossy, you know that?”

“I have been told.”

•

I’m hanging upside down on the couch one night when Jim returns from his shift, rubbing the bridge of his nose. “You have a headache, too?” I ask.

He nods, “I think it was lunch. Too much sugar...”



I motion at myself, “yeah, same. I’m trying to get blood to rush to my head so I don’t have to go get painkillers.”

He smirks, before rushing over to join me. “Then let me try, too.”

I laugh as he kicks his legs over the back of the couch and hangs beside me.

“By the way,” he begins. “We usually have a game night on Fridays. We took a break after... Winona... But the guys want to start it back up again. We have it here, are you okay with that?”

I try to shrug but being upside down makes it hard. “They’re your quarters,” I say.

“They’re *ours*,” he counters.

I sigh, “hey, who am I to interrupt game night?”

Jim smiles at me, and then Bones walks in without knocking, looking between us both as he holds his padds for charting. “...you’re both upside down,” he drawls.

“Yes, Callie said this cures headaches. She lied.” Jim responded.

“I did not lie! You’re just not committed.”

“Imma commit you both or y’all will commit me, either or...”

•

I’m watching Jim and Bones rearrange furniture for game night, moving the dining table over in front of the couch to have room for whatever game they play.

They rotate who chooses, and tonight is apparently Spock’s choice.

I’m sitting curled up in the armchair, nervously fiddling with my hands, wondering why Jim wants me here for this. It’s his thing, him and his friends, I just feel like an intruder.

That’s how I felt all through school, skipping grade after grade.

And no matter how many times I’m told Jim skipped grades too and I’m not an augment, I still have to wonder if that’s why I did after the conversation with Marcus.

As they straighten the table, Bones glances at me, “Cal, you didn’t eat today...” he says gently.

I level a glare at him. “I did too.”

“A rice cake doesn’t count.”

I fight the urge to growl like a toddler and get up. “Fine, let me go see what nastiness you have programmed in for my dinner choices!”

Jim cackles and Bones glares at him while I go to the replicator. I pick a pasta dish and return to my spot and start picking at it.

“*Eat*, don’t pick,” Bones scolds.

I stick my tongue out at him before taking a bite.

They’re arranging the dining chairs on the other side of the table from the couch, and I start to get nervous as I realize just how many people they’re setting up for. “Who comes to these things again?” I ask nervously.

“The dinner group and sometimes a few others,” Jim says absentmindedly.

“A few others?”

“Christine, M’Benga, Keenser, there’s an open invite basically.”

I hum in response and keep poking at my food.

I can’t help but think of my mom in situations like this, all the times I got kicked under the table for saying something ‘wrong’.

Then I end up scolding myself for thinking poorly of someone who’s dead and who was my mother after all.

The door chiming takes me out of my thoughts and people start to pour in.

I wonder if I should give up my chair when Nyota pulls one up next to me and gives me a one armed hug. “Hey you,” she smiles. “How ya doing?”

I smile back, “I’m okay. How are you?”

“I’m good,” she smiles back, “but how *are* you?”

I huff a laugh and look down. “Uh, I’m…” I think back on where my mind was just at, on my mom, and I feel tears prick my eyes. “I’m hanging in there,” I finally work up.

She looks at me with gentility, “are you sure?” She whispers.

I swallow hard and nod, shoving the feelings down. “Yeah, I’m good.”

She smiles like she doesn't believe me but she doesn't push it.

Spock arrives with her and begins laying out the game he's chosen for the evening. It isn't long before everyone else files in in one big wave.

Like my first night here, everyone brings an array of snacks and treats in various bowls and dishes.

I can tell my brother has built quite the found family here. My heart aches at the feeling like I'll never be a part of it. But then a moment passes when I look around again, and realize... I *am* in it. They've asked me to be here. They want me here. And that's just... weird.

Spock is explaining the game and it makes sense to me pretty quickly, but I decline to play and say I will just watch. Jim on my other side, I look over his shoulder at the chips he's been dealt for the game, and am careful not to react to his good hand.

As the game progresses, I can see who has a good poker- well, in this case, Vulcan-face and who doesn't. The game is pure strategy and secrecy, something I'm admittedly better at than I should be, having grown up with my mother. "It's nobody's business why you missed school, you better keep your mouth shut," when I had spent the morning throwing up from panic attacks over a test. "Put a sweater over that," when she had slapped my arm before school one morning. Even, "it's nobody else's business why..." xyz, and now that one makes a lot more sense. All my mom's secrets seem to.

I fiddle with the hem of my shirt and my padd buzzes in my pocket.

*From: Dr. Leonard H. McCoy, MD, phd, phd, CMO, USS Enterprise*

*To: Calliope Kirk*

*You doing okay?*

*It's been two weeks. Shouldn't this stuff be magically easier now?*

*Meds don't work that magically, sadly. But you're here and not hiding in your room. That's something.*

*I WANT to be hiding in my room.*

*Y'know meds do work best when combined with therapy.*

I shoot him a glare across the table and shove my padd back in my pocket in the form of a response. He rolls his eyes but doesn't push it.

I look around the table and do a double take when I look at Chekov. He looks *petrified*, but Sulu is laughing at him, not looking worried at all. "Pasha," he laughs, "it's just a game, you don't have to think that hard,"

"Da, but eet is a *hard* game," his curls bounce as he shakes his head.

"You're sweating like a hoo..." Jim starts, but trails off, looking at me.

I raise my eyebrows at him, "like a hooker in church?"

The entire table bursts out laughing and I look around in surprise.

Nyota quickly slips an arm around me and reassures, "I think everyone is just surprised to hear that expression come out of your mouth."

I snort, glance around, "my god you guys, I'm a highschool graduate. I seriously hope you haven't been censoring yourselves for me," I shake my head.

I see a few glares get shot Jim's way and I look at him as well. "Jim? Did you make you friends go G-rated for me?"

"Please, they can only go PG at *best*," he shakes his head.

"Jim!"

"I'm supposed to be setting a good example!" He protests.

Bones barks a laugh and I roll my eyes, "Jim, I'm 16. I know all the bad words and in multiple languages," I giggle and he snorts. "You don't have to baby me," I shake my head.

He sighs, puts his hands up, "alright. But I'm not responsible for what bad habits you pick up." He looks around the table and waves a hand, "free reign, guys."

Scotty looks around genuinely confused. "...we were supposed to censor ourselves?"

"And you wonder how you ended up on Delta Vega..."

"*You* wonder how you ended up on DV," Scotty shakes his head. "All I did was an experiment. You tried taking over a ship!"

"With *your* help,"

"I'm sorry, you did *what*?"

Jim gapes at me like he had forgotten I was here. "Uhh," he drawls.

"Took over the ship," Nyota smirks with a singular nod. "Boarded illegally, *twice*, and-"

"Okay, let me reinstate the censor-"

"-and did he ever tell you about the swollen hands and numb tongue?"

"Wait, don't be tellin' her *that* story," Bones waves a hand at her.

“Oh I already know about the Levaran mud fleas,” I shudder. “I had that vaccine, remember?”

“Everyone in this room has had that vaccine,” Jim shakes his head. “You and me are the only ones that reacted to it.”

“Oh, fun.”

“Very.”

“Hey, Callie?”

“Hm?”

“Your move.”

I look down to see I’ve been dealt into the game and I feel my face lose its color. “I, uh,” I hurriedly but hesitantly pick up my chips. “You didn’t have to deal me in,” I say to Jim.

“Ah, that was me,” Sulu says from across the table. “Sorry, just didn’t want to leave you out all night,” he winces apologetically and I force a shrug. “No, don’t apologize, I just...” I try to find an excuse. “Just not sure I’ll be any good at this...”

“None of us are when it’s Spock’s night to pick,” Jim grumbles.

I take my turn and pick my padd up from my pocket out of habit.

“Callie, can I make you a plate?” Nyota asks quietly as she gets up to head to the kitchen.

I startle a bit at the question and look into her eyes- sincerity in their chocolate seas. “Uh, s-sure?” I stammer, to which her face lights up. “Oh good,” she smiles, “I *need* you to try these cookies I made...”

And Spock’s words come back to me. When he said that people have tried to be my friend and I need to let them. It goes against every fiber of my being, but... but I suppose he’s right. Sulu dealt me in. Nyota is making me a plate. And suddenly Pavel is telling me he skipped a ton of grades in school, too, and was there *any* part I enjoyed?

They’re trying to draw me out and for the first time, I can see it but for the first time, I’m actually believing it.

•

After everyone left, Bones and Jim set the place back to normal and settled in for a movie.

Bones watched out of the corner of his eye as Callie struggled to stay awake as the movie went on.

When her head finally lolled to one side, he slid over and gently lowered her down onto a pillow.

Two weeks. Two weeks on meds and she was sleeping. Thank everything good in the universe for modern medicine.

His thoughts drifted to the modern medicine of creating the cure Vos was looking for. How easily they were able to do it.

Almost too easily.

He began to wonder if there was more to it, a bigger reason they wanted her blood.

He had to wonder why. What else could they try to extract from it?

Or... or. Were they trying to put something *in* her cells?

It made theoretical sense- if her cells had been altered one way, could they extract the genes that create the cure and then put something else in their place?

No... even theoretically... but... what if?

He looked over at her, peacefully asleep, and then back at Jim, eyes glazed over on the movie.

At least for the moment they were both content, healthy, and safe. And that was just about the best he could ask for.

•

The headache I've been fighting for days hits a breaking point the next day.

I moan and roll over, both things a mistake.

When the world starts going dark around the edges, I know I need help.

I haul myself up, fighting a wave of nausea as my ears blast with ringing.

By the time I get to medbay, I'm trying hard not to squint in pain.

It annoys me that there's not an official front desk, so I don't know where to go or who to look for.

Bones pops out from his office, and I wonder if there's some sort of silent alarm for when someone walks in.

"Cal? What's up?" He crosses his arms as he walks over to me.

I dig the heels of my hands into my eyes, “migraine,” I moan without meaning to.

“1 to 10?”

“8.”

He gently grasps my wrists and pulls them away from my eyes.

I look up at him and he uses both hands to gently tip my jaw up, “look me in the eyes for a sec,” he requests. “I need to see your pupils.”

“It’s just a headache,” I mumble. “Just need drugs.”

“Well, let’s get you settled first and then-”

“Nooo,” I whine, tipping my face back down into my hands. “Just give me drugs and let me go back to bed so I don’t puke.”

“You’re nauseous too?”

“Yeah.”

“More nauseous than usual?”

“Yeah.”

I pause, look up suddenly. “Hey!” I object.

He raises an eyebrow at me. “Hm. Finally some truthfulness.”

I roll my eyes. “*Pleaseee* give me drugs.”

He sighs, “no, seriously, I need to check your blood pressure. If your pain is at an eight I’m worried.”

I sigh. “Fiiine,” and let him lead me to a biobed with a hand on my upper back.

I lay down without being told and throw an arm over my eyes.

“Wait, here,” he says, moving my arm and replacing it with a cool, wet rag that I have no idea where it came from.

I cross my arms and dig my cheek into my shoulder, which he then gently rubs. “Cmon, Cal, you’ve gotta relax a bit,”

“Hurts,” I whimper.

“Your blood pressure is slightly high but fine. The drug will make you sleep, okay?”

I nod.

“I’ll be right back,”

“Mhmm.”

It feels like an eternity before he’s back and offering relief that I gladly take.

“Might take a bit to kick in fully,” he warns. “Do you want nausea medication too?”

“Yes, please.”

While he’s gone, I take the rag off my eyes and sit up. I check for run mascara, then remember I couldn’t see clearly enough to put on makeup. Great.

I turn and dangle my legs over the edge of the bed so I can leave after he gets back.

I rub the back of my neck and close my eyes, the light still hurting. I hate when my migraines move deep into my neck, they’re usually harder to shake when that happens.

“You can stay a while, if you want,”

I didn’t even register Bones returning.

“If you’re as dizzy as you look... you probably should.”

“S’kay. Jus’ wanna hot bath.”

“You’re slurring.”

“I know!”

He sighs and deposits the antiemetic with my permission. “You don’t need to be taking a bath right now, I don’t want you to drown. The migraine medicine is going to make you sleepy, remember?”



“Mmhm.” I move my hands to cover my eyes from the light.

I feel a firm finger press between my eyebrows, and it’s not like it’s instant relief, but it’s definitely worth the sigh of relief that comes out of me.

“Pressure point here,” he explains.

“Mm.” I lean into the pressure as much as I can take and enjoy it.

I start to feel really floaty and heavy.

“Lights, 25%.”

I pull away, “hey-”

“Callie, you’re falling asleep. Just... let the drugs do their thing and rest in the meantime, please?”

There’s a hint of irritation there that concerns me, but he’s right, I’m falling asleep sitting up. I barely hear every other word he says.

“Mm.” I hum, before tipping myself over and bringing my knees to my chest, digging my eyes into my knees. “Dunno what caused it,” I finally mention.

A blanket is pulled over me and a hand rests so briefly on my head, I’m not sure if it’s actually real, and then I drop off.

~

When I wake up, my head is fine and clear, but I’m *thirsty* .

I sit up, expecting to be alone, but Jim is sitting there.

And my heart drops.

“Jim,” I gasp. “Why- what-”

He stands and raises his hands in a ‘woah there,’ motion. “Hey, hey, it’s okay. Bones messaged me because there’s something he had to take care of, Christine is on break, and he didn’t want to leave you alone.”

“I can sleep by myself,” I object, rubbing my eyes.

He shrugs, “it’s never fun waking up in a medical setting alone. Trust me...”

I cock my head at that, the way he says it not sitting right. "Sounds like it's happened to you a lot?"

He sighs, shoves his hands in his pants pockets, and looks at the ground. "I'm the captain, Cal. Sometimes that means... Uh..."

I raise an eyebrow. "Jim?"

"I mean, look, I'm allergic to a lot, right? And sometimes--"

"Sometimes," Bones interrupts, coming back in, "he eats things he knows he shouldn't because I haven't had a chance to scan it yet."

"Some native foods you have no idea if I will react to!"

"If you'd let me scan them for longer than 30 seconds I might!"

"Guys," I wave a hand at my head. "Headache, remember?"

Bones looks at me worriedly, "it's still bad?"

"No, I just don't want to listen to you two argue to be honest..."

Christine laughs as she joins us, her waves bouncing as she shakes her head. "You get used to it." She smiles at them both, crossing her arms over her chest. "Feeling better?"

"Much."

"Good," she smiles.

Jim and Bones leave, still bickering, both needing to get back to work.

Christine gets me discharged and as she goes to leave, I hold out a hand, "wait," I blurt, causing her to turn with an eyebrow raised. "I have a... I have a nursing anatomy question,"

Her face lights up and she comes back to sit on the edge of the bed. "Shoot."

"So I'm like... in... *male* anatomy... and I'm already clueless when it comes to that..."

She spends *hours* with me, patiently helping me understand the things I'm confused about on many different parts of the body and its systems.

Bones comes into the privacy bubble an hour in, worried why his head nurse was gone for so long. He excitedly plops down on his rolling stool and joins Christine in answering my questions about the endocrine system.

By the time Jim comes back to see if I'm feeling up to dinner, I've begun to feel guilty for taking up so much of their time, but they're both

smiling, talking to each other about how fascinating the science of healthcare is.

“Bring your books down tomorrow morning sometime and I’ll answer any other questions,” Christine says as she puts an arm around me and hauls me close. “This was fun.”

“You’re about to run out of human anatomy, kid,” Bones comments as we make our way to the mess hall. “What’ll it be next? Human psychology, or move onto alien anatomy?”

I think for a few moments, long enough for him to look at me curiously. “...what would I be doing if I were actually in college for nursing?”

Christine squeals and I shoot her a warning look. Bones can’t help but smile as he answers, “you’d keep on with human stuff. You’d be learning multiple human things concurrently, actually. If you want... we can create a lesson plan for you. Turn those practice tests into real ones.”

I fiddle with my hands as we walk and ponder his offer. “I’ll think about it,” I finally answer. “But yes I will come back tomorrow because I’m stuck on something in the function of the lymph nodes still...”

“Looking forward to it,” Bones smiles at me.

•

*From: Calliope Kirk*

*To: James T. Kirk, Captain, USS Enterprise*

*Hey, I seriously need to do some laundry. The porter changed my sheets when I was in medbay and is asking to again but I can do it myself. Remind me again where the laundry is and what the rules are for doing it myself?*

Jim sighed deeply.

“Pot meets kettle yet again...” Bones mumbled.

“Would you *stop* reading over my shoulder?!” Jim complained.

“Well you’re so flipping blind and always forget your contacts so the text on your padd is big enough to see from a ship over!” Bones retorted as they walked to the turbolift.

Jim huffed, too worried about Callie for a good retort. “I just don’t get why she’s insisting on doing all this stuff. She’s always cleaning and trying to make everything perfect and Jesus, I know why, I *know* why... I know how Winona and Frank are. Were... are?”

Bones turned to halt the turbolift. He spoke gently, “Focus, kid. Talk to me slowly. What do you mean you know why she’s like that?”

Jim leaned his head back against the wall. “I grew up in that house, too, Bones. I know the rules and regulations and the punishments for not following them. And I just don’t want her thinking it’s the same way here. That *I’m* the same way. But she never... relaxes.”

“It’s gonna take her time, Jim,” Bones said softly. “Even on the meds, it’ll take time. You’re giving her safety for the first time in her life, and it’s going to take her time to get used to that.” The, ‘you’ve been there’, went unsaid.

Jim stayed silent for a beat, and Len took the opportunity to lighten the mood. “Laundry.” He smiled softly. “Makes me think’ a you the first month at the academy. You insisted on washing your reds yourself. And remind me what happened?”

Jim mumbled something incoherent and he playfully put a hand around his ear. “What was that? Can’t hear ya.”

Jim sighed. “I ruined 3 pairs in a week because I didn’t know they needed to be dry cleaned.”

“Jim...” Len warned.

“Okay fine, I *knew* they needed to be dry cleaned but I thought I could do it myself instead of making someone else do it since I really wasn’t supposed to be there anyway.”

“And after Vulcan?”

Jim growled. “I didn’t wanna wear the gold. Didn’t wanna draw attention.”

“Jim, you didn’t even wanna get a fresh set of underclothes!”

“People needed new shirts!”

“You almost got jock itch!”

“Oh my *god* that was embarrassing...”

“Oh please, it was just a cream.”

“THAT YOU PUT ON MY-” Jim stopped himself before slamming his forehead against the turbolift wall.

Bones sighed. “Look, I promise, Jim, she’s going to keep getting used to things here. Used to us. Her body’ll get used to having the proper levels of serotonin. She’s gonna be alright.”

Jim sighed. “I sure hope so, because-” his padd buzzing interrupted him. He looked down at it, expecting Callie but seeing it was the bridge. “Turbolift, continue,” he commanded, looking up at Bones. “Priority message from command waiting for me.” He said tersely.

•

“Hey, I’ve got news,” Jim smiles, or at least tries to. I can tell it’s just slightly forced.

“What?” I ask suspiciously.

“We’re heading back to earth,” he says lightly. “We’ve been called back.”

“Why?” I ask even more suspiciously.

“Starfleet Command is... worried about the threats we’ve faced with Vos and they want to do some in person debriefs.”

My face goes cold, then hot. “With me?”

He waves his hand, “no, no-no-no-no-no, with me, mostly. With Bones and Spock about their research and the cure. The fact of the matter is that Vos is still out there and if he’s not coming after you, he’ll be going after someone else and they want to try and get ahead of him.”

I nod. “Any word on Frank?”

He shakes his head, “no, I’m sorry.”

I shrug, “not your fault.”

“I’m still sorry,” he shakes his head. “But on the brightside,” he smiles, “this means shoreleave! I usually go where Bones does, and since he came with me to Iowa, we were planning on going to Georgia to see his daughter, if that’s okay with you?”

I nod, “of course! I’ll be fine here by myself, I-”

“What? Callie, no,” Jim shakes his head. “Of course you’re coming with us.”

“I am?”

“Why wouldn’t you?”

“Cuz...” I stop. Why wouldn’t I? What reason can I give that doesn’t sound entirely self-deprecating? “Cuz it’s not... Not *my* family,” I say slowly.

“Yes, it is...” Jim says even slower.

I look at him with what I’m sure is pure confusion all over my face.

“Callie,” he huffs a chuckle, “you’re just as much family to Bones as I am at this point, shoot, from the moment he met you, that guy adopted you. He does that, actually,” he shrugs. “You shoulda seen him when he found out Chekov was 15 and in the academy, emancipated. He latched onto that kid and *still* harps on him to get to bed at a decent time. ADHD and all.”

I snort. “So he harps on everyone about sleep, I take it?”

Jim laughs, “that he does.” He pauses, “I’ve not been hearing you have nightmares as much lately... Are you finally sleeping better here?”

I hesitate. The pills I’ve been on for 3 weeks at this point really do seem to be helping me sleep, and my chest hurts less each time I have to leave our quarters than it used to. I’ve even been going down to medbay and sitting with Christine while I study. I’ve moved into psychology,

so Bones is more over my shoulder than she is, out of excitement, I think. The two weirdos.

“Yeah,” I finally say. “Yeah, I think the... The pills Bones gave me are finally working.”

He smiles gently at me. “I’m glad.”

I quirk a smile and look at the ground.

“There’s nothing to be embarrassed about, Cal,” he says gently.

I sigh. “Isn’t there? I can’t control my own mind so I need pills to do it for me?”

“That’s not at all what’s going on here,” he waves a hand.

When Bones asked me if I was going to tell Jim about the pills and emphatically refused, he told me we could keep it confidential and between us... Or he could tell him if I wanted him to.

And so I let him.

And Jim sat me down and talked to me about his own history of panic attacks and nightmares, and said if there’s something out there to help me, even if it’s just temporary, he’s proud of me for accepting the help, because it’s not something he finds easy to do himself.

I sigh. "So tell me about where we are going in Georgia."

His face *lights up*.

## Chapter 12

### Chapter Notes

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

“I talked to Spock about Section 31,” Jim began, pouring two glasses of bourbon from the cabinet in Bones’ office. “And he says it’s legit, they’re... James Bond level.”

Bones snorted as he accepted his drink. “James Bond?”

“Leave my movie tastes alone.”

“Well if it wasn’t such a *poor* taste in movies-”

“*Anyway*,” Jim leveled a look at him as he sat down across from his desk. “He didn’t go into much detail, but it sounds like they do exist. And if they do...” he shook his head and swirled his bourbon in the glass. “Then I think this goes way deeper than just Vos.”

“You mean... Starfleet deep?” Bones asked, dropping his voice.

Jim nodded slowly, emphatically. “Section 31, if it truly exists, was commissioned by Starfleet itself. They’re at the head of it all, even if it’s some sort of independent faction within the ‘fleet, it’s within the ‘fleet. And command would have to know about it. Sanction it. I mean, *someone* is paying for all these experiments Vos is doing.”

“So you don’t trust command to have Callie’s best interests at heart?” Bones cut to the quick.

Jim nodded, “yeah. That’s exactly it. I took her in to keep her safe- keep her safe from Frank, keep her safe from the foster system, and now I’m going to keep her safe, even if it means keeping her safe from *Starfleet* .”

Bones nodded, looking far away. “If it were Jo... I’d feel the same way.”

“You’d burn the place down if they hurt her.”

“Don’t be gettin’ any ideas, now...”

“Bones, if Starfleet is behind this, *Starfleet* is who is responsible for beating the crap out of my sister and trying to kidnap her. And think of the way Marcus is trying to frame things; saying Cal is an augment and super intelligent, when he was the one who helped Chekov get emancipated for the same reason! He’s being a hypocrite.”

“Does that surprise you?” Bones deadpanned.

“My biggest question though, is why Starfleet would be so interested in a cure for Xenop? I mean, it’s an awful disease, but why are they so zeroed in on it? Because it was done illegally?”

“Probably. That, and...” Bones stifled a sigh.

“And what?”

Bones rubbed his neck.

“And *what* ?” Jim pushed harder.

“And... I’m worried that with all the talk of extracting the cure from her blood, we may have missed the opportunity to explore other things they might want to do. Like if we can extract a cure, what can we put *in* ?”

“You mean like a virus?”

“That or even some sort of augmented DNA, or some sort of computer coding, I just, I don’t know, Jim, it just occurred to me that it was so easy, so *easy* to create that cure with Spock, and Vos losing his records on Tarsus just doesn’t make enough sense as to why he couldn’t create the cure.”

“So you think he *did* create it and lied about it?”

“Possibly. Or he was more so focussing on what he could do to her genome than he was actually creating the cure for Xeno.”

“So Winona may have died unnecessarily?” Jim asked in a quiet voice.

“Jim-”

“It’s possible he had the cure all along but just wanted to experiment on Callie?”

“Jim-”

“He let the mother of a *kid* die so he could play god?” Jim slammed his fist on the table and used it to push himself up.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw them.

Christine behind Callie, the one to have likely opened the door, Callie with a nursing book in hand, tears in her eyes. “He... did what?”

Jim blanched, turning to set his drink down quickly. “Cal,”

“If they had the cure, what did they need me for so badly?”

Jim looked to Bones for help.

“They still want me, don’t they?” Her quiet voice echoed through the empty room. “For what?” She whimpered.



Again, Jim looked to Bones for help.

“My guess is to see what further modifications they could make to your genome.” He spoke up, being brutally honest.

“Like?”

“Well... based on his past... augmentations, it could be creating allergies, it could be trying to recreate the so-called superiority of the 1990's augments. Like healing abilities or strength.”

Her shaking became even more apparent. “If they still want me, then why haven't they tried to get me again?”

Jim hemmed and hawed for a moment. “So... We have this theory,”

“I've been able to tell,” she shot back.

“Fair, fair,” Jim muttered. “There is...” He sighed, looked at Christine who wisely took her leave. “There is a branch within Starfleet that is intelligence based that we think may be behind it.”

“Starfleet?” She whimpered.

“Starfleet,” Jim whispered back. “Remember how at the funeral, they mentioned that Winona worked in intelligence?”

“Yeah, and she always just acted like she was a plain engineer,” she nodded.

“Well we think there may be more to what she did in that intelligence work than was let on. How else would she have the knowledge and means to alter embryos? And to come in contact with someone like Vos.”

“That must be why...” she trailed off for a moment, looking far away. “That has to be why she hated Starfleet so much. It wasn't that they ruined her career or she hated them-- she was *afraid* of them. She was afraid of them using what they knew to come after her. Me. And now they are...”

She shook so hard, Bones stood up, brow furrowed in concern. “Darlin', you okay?”

Her shaking worsened, teeth starting to chatter and her arms shaking uncontrollable. “Callie?”

She looked at him, blue eyes full of tears and fear. “I'm f-f-f-f-fine,” she stammered out through chattering teeth.

“Cal,” he said gently, reaching for her slowly, moving across the room towards her. “I think you might be havin' what's called a psychogenic seizure,” he said slowly.

“A w-w-w-w-w-what?”

“Sometimes, we can get so stressed that our body has a non-epileptic seizure. It's a seizure not caused by electrical activity, but by psychological distress.”

“So I’m shaking because I’m having a crazy-person seizure?!”

“Callie, let’s not do this,” he sighed. “You’re not crazy. But I can give you something to help calm you down,”

Her chattering teeth filled the silence and she finally huffed a sigh. “Fine,” she relented, legs struggling to hold her up as she sank on the couch.

Bones smiled at her, “you’re gettin’ a lot better at acceptin’ help, kiddo. I’m proud of you,” he dropped a kiss on her head on his way out.

Alone with Jim, she sighed again. “I’m sorry I’m such a mess,” she said to the floor.

“Hey-hey-hey,” Jim soothed, moving to get down on her level. “None of that,” he shook his head. “We… we should have told you earlier.”

She looked at him, tears finally spilling over, “Jim, how can you keep me safe when who you work for is who wants me?”

His face hardened. “Because just because some secret organization was involved with our sick birth-giver, doesn’t mean they get to win. I know people in Starfleet, too. So does Spock. We are going to keep you safe, Cal. I promise.”

“That’s a tall promise to make,” she countered.

“Maybe,” he nodded. “But I’ve been through a lot that Starfleet would never want to get out. We have leverage,” he said seriously.

Her eyes widened, “Jim, you wouldn’t pull out Tarsus as a bargaining chip?”

“Yes, yes I would. For you.”

“I don’t want that!”

“Marcus is being a asshole,” Jim shook his head. “Marcus is the head of Starfleet and I’m sure knows about Tarsus and the coverups. He wouldn’t want the ‘fleet’s poster boy shining a light on one of their biggest mistakes.”

She continued to shake as Bones returned with a hypospray. “Mild sedative,” he explained, earning a nod and a head tilt, exposing her neck willingly.

He smiled to himself at her newfound willingness to comply.

He had to be doing something right with her, he realized. With Christine’s help, of course.

“These debriefs…” Callie began, “are they going to want to talk to me, too?”

Bones and Jim shared a look that was a little bit too telling. “They haven’t asked that or tried to schedule anything but…” Jim sighed. “I can’t guarantee they won’t want to.”

If possible, she went paler. “Because that went so well the first time,” she snapped.

“With Pike, things were going okay, yeah?” Jim pushed. “We would just make sure it’s with him.”

“Marcus is the head of Starfleet, I have a feeling the man gets whatever he wants.”

Jim looked down. “All I can promise you is that I will do everything in my power to keep you as far away from all this as possible, okay? That’s partly why we are going to Georgia and not SanFran.”

She sighed, “okay.”

Bones looked down at the book she was still holding. “So where are we stuck at today?” He smiled.

•

Jim tells me they spend more time in Georgia at Bones’ mother’s home than they do their apartment in SanFran, (he never calls it San Francisco or even Frisco, always SanFran) so it’s not abnormal for them to be going there. It’s not just because of me, is the underlying message. But I know that I’m at least part of the reason why.

As we drive, Jim is buzzing with excitement and Bones is buzzing with anticipation and I’m sure you already know what I’m buzzing with.

There’s still this feeling that it should be obvious, this is my family now. They claim to want me. It might even be where I belong.

But I still find myself fighting against that feeling as hard as I can, out of some sense of self preservation.

I want to be excited, but don’t feel like I’ve earned that right. So being excited for the boys is what will have to do in between the bouts of anxious dread.

This feels not just like Bones’ family, but Jim’s too. Not mine. I’m going to be an intruder on a family I don’t belong to.

Starfleet rents out vehicles for active duty enlistees when they shuttle in somewhere instead of using transporter credits as a thank you perk. Bones hates transporters more than he hates shuttles, so we shuttled in and picked up a rental truck for what has turned out to be at least an hour’s drive into the country.

Things start to look familiar a half hour in.

Cows.

Lots of cows.

Fields.

Lots of little orchards which is different, we only had one apple orchard, and we’ve passed at least a dozen peach ones.

Country music is on almost every station Bones flips through and Jim whines but shuts up with a single look from his best friend.

The drive is weird because it feels like home because it's familiar, but there's a sense of safety because it's not.

I can tell we're getting close when Jim asks, "should we have picked up dinner?"

Bones shoots him a look I can't quite read, and Jim nods once. "Right, stupid question."

I wait for further explanation, but none comes.

"Wh-why is it a stupid question?" I ask quietly.

Bones glances back at me, "because my mama cooks to feed an army whenever her kids or company are over."

I feel my eyes widen. My appetite has slightly increased as of late but... only slightly. And I still hate eating in front of people.

Knowing what I know now about Tarsus, the pressure is even worse eating in front of Jim. I'm always afraid of accidentally triggering him somehow, despite his promises I won't.

"Her *kids*?" I ask as I realize.

"I have a sister," he nods. "But she counts Jim as one of her own. She will you too, fair warning."

My eyes widen again in cartoonish confusion. "Wha-" I shake my head. "What?"

Jim snorts and undoes his seatbelt as we pull into a rutty driveway leading up to a large home, "oh just wait."

•

10 minutes later I'm wrapped in the arms of a woman not any taller than me, but far stronger.

She rocks me side to side as she laughs about how happy she is to have me there, and I'm stiff with discomfort and confusion.

She pulls away to look at me appraisingly. "Oh, I'm finally not alone in the under 6-foot club!" She says with a smile.

My confusion doesn't budge.

She already fussed over Bones and Jim, who have both returned to the car to gather luggage leaving me with... with... what do I call this woman?

"I'm Eleanora, you can call me that or mama, there's no misses nothin' 'round here," she tucks me into her side with one arm, taking my free hand to hold, and leads me deeper into the house.

It feels like a mansion.

The large front door operates on hinges and swings open with a *creak* into a large foyer that runs the length of the house, front porch to back. A large staircase sits at the far end and rooms are peppered off on each side.

A large dining room connected shotgun style to an even larger kitchen is on one side and a living room that goes on for days sits on the mirroring side.

“Are you hungry?” I’m being asked, and I can almost feel her squeeze me tighter, as if testing my size. She shakes her head, “I know better than to ask a Kirk child that. C’mon, let’s go finish dinner while they bring in the luggage. Well, you sit and keep me company while I finish.”

“No,” I automatically object and she pats my hand, almost like she expected that reaction.

“Now now, you’re our guest and you’re gonna sit and I’m gonna get you some lemonade, ‘kay?” It’s not a question, but I nod and follow willingly.

I’m not sitting at the massive kitchen island long when the back door- also on hinges and *screened* - opens, and a little girl slips in with her finger to her lips.

I’m sitting in stiff shock when she giggles and explains to Eleanora, “I’m going to surprise daddy!”

Daddy?

*Daddy* .

I see it.

The hazel eyes, the dark hair. Hers curls at the ends, unlike her father’s, although I suppose I’ve never seen it long.

I’ve seen pictures of her mom, ginger, with curly long hair, so I assume she gets it there, but this is clearly Joanna.

“Child,” Eleanora scolds with her hand on her heart. “Where did you- how did you get here?!”

“Oh, I walked from the neighbors. Mama dropped me off there because she needed to talk to Mrs. Wallow.”

I can see Eleanora fight rolling her eyes.

Joanna sees me and jumps a little, “oh,”

I wave lamely. “Hi... I-”

“Jojo, this is Jim’s sister, Callie. Manners?”

“Oh,” she jumps, “hi Callie, my name's Joanna. I forgot Jim has a sister. How old are you?”

I smile at her childlike bluntness. How old is she again? 7? 8?

“I'm 16,” I tell her. “How old are you?”

“7 and a half!” She says proudly. “So that's nine years!”

I nod, “good math! Jim is 9 years older than me.”

She smiles, “that's really easy math!” She looks between me and her grandmother, “are daddy and Jim outside?”

We both nod and she runs off, wordlessly giggling.

I look back at Eleanora shaking her head and smiling to herself as she mixes a bowl of what looks like homemade dressing.

“Are you sure I can't-”

“I'm sure,” she nods to me over her glasses. “You just sit. Now tell me. Do those boys *really* cook as much as they tell me they do?”

Oh, we're gonna get along just fine.

•

“Leonard Horatio, why is that child so pale?!” Eleanora hissed to her son after sending the Kirk siblings to bed on strict orders to sleep, else be aided to it.

He held his hands up in mock- if not serious- surrender. “Just be happy I've gotten her sleeping since we've had her.”

She smiled softly at her son. ““since *we've* had her”, huh?” A corner of his lips pulled up and she patted his cheek. “Ooh, you got a glimpse of Jo in a good decade and went soft, huh?”

Warmth filled his chest as he thought of his daughter, sent off to bed earlier in the evening. She was taller every time he saw her. Her hair longer, always refusing to let anyone cut it. A smattering of freckles appeared on her cheeks in the summer and he fell in love with it every time.

But then he thought of her smile. Her happiness. Sure, she was a child of a bitter divorce. But had a psychologist for a father who insisted on therapy and she was truly a happy child, even if she did struggle with some emotional regulation, like any kid her age.

Callie, on the other hand, was just a whole ball of trauma, much like her brother.

He shook his head, looking down at his hands. "No... can't say that's how I picture JoJo." He said softly.

A ghost of a knowing smile danced briefly over her lips. "Jo doesn't flinch when you take her into your arms, I've noticed."

He tried not to snort. "Is there anything you don't notice?"

"Not usually, no."

They laughed together, trying to smother the noise as if the house wasn't too large for anyone even a room over to hear.

It was a moment of shared laughter between two people who had been born to nurture and heal. A moment where those two people, good as they may be, were struggling with deciding what to do next. How to approach things.

"She's a lot like Jim was when you first brought him home," Eleanora commented, sitting in the counter height chair next to her son.

"Skittish?"

"Wounded."

He had to try not to flinch. She was right. There was no denying that.

"Yeah, well..." he chuckled sardonically. "It's all so incredibly classified..." he glanced up at the stairs- both sets, front and back- to make sure no eavesdroppers were about. "She's seen some crap. Both in the home and more recently, out of it."

"But she's safe now?"

He tried not to sigh. "I... it's hard to say."

"Jim is leaving tomorrow for San Francisco?"

Bones nodded, "his debrief is scheduled for after Spock's, for some reason. They like to hear from him first, usually. I don't know why. It's idiotic. But anyway. They want to ask about... About the things Callie has been through."

Eleanora's face went hard. "What do you mean, Leonard?"

"I mean," he sighed, "I mean that people have tried to kidnap her, twice. And those people... Might be some of who we thought were the good guys."

"Leonard?!"

"Ma, it's classified. I can't... ugh..." He rubbed at his forehead.

“Len, it doesn’t take a genius to see that little girl is raw. Whatever she’s goin’ through, whether it be from her mama dyin’ or from whatever this mess is,” she waved a hand in a circle. “She needs support. And I know you and Jim are doin’ a wonderful job, I know that but-”

“But she needs a feminine touch, too. Yes, mama, I know. Christine has been involved from the gitgo, too.”

“Good, that’s good. I like her.”

“You just like gangin’ up on me with her.”

“Y’know your accent comes back whenever you step foot in this house?”

Bones snorted, “ask anyone, mama. It never fully leaves.”

She patted his cheek fondly. “I know, baby. I know you well. And I know you’re doin’ all you can to take care’a that little girl just like she’s your own.”

“But?”

“But... she might need a push to accept that help.”

“We’ve all pushed ourselves pretty far, mama, pushin’ her. None of us want to overstep. Jim’s her blood, and even he’s skittish of goin’ a step too far.”

She sighed, “then just keep doin’ what yer doin’,” she shook her head. “Sometimes a baby just needs that sense of safety reinforced.”

“Now you’re thinkin’ ‘a Jim.”

“They’re so much alike... I’d like to have gotten my hooks into that so-called ‘mother’ of theirs...” she grumbled.

“You n’ me both.”

“Well, she’s all’a ours now, ain’t she?” She said with a smile.

“That she is,” he responded with the same smile.

•

Jim leaves the next morning for his debrief first, leaving me with Bones, his mom, and Joanna. I expect to feel uncomfortable, out of place, but the room I’ve been given and told to treat as my own does feel like a sanctuary, a big window overlooking a horse grazing area. The sun beats down on my face through the glass, it’s getting into summer, and I can barely believe I’ve been with Jim that long now.

It’s 7am, and I’m trying not to seem lazy by sleeping late. I’ve showered, done my hair and makeup, and gotten dressed. But the house is so large that it’s quiet, and I can’t quite tell who is up, if anyone. I know Bones and Jim are used to getting up early for their duty shifts, but for all I know, Bones likes to sleep in when off-duty.



Even so, I have a feeling he wakes up early and I assume his mom probably does, too. So I slowly and carefully open my bedroom door and stick my head out, listening. I hear nothing.

So I sneak a couple steps out, trying to make sure the floors don't creak. The hallway to the wing where the family bedrooms are, where my room is, weirdly enough, is long and carpeted, with many doors on each side of the hall.

I tiptoe down the hall, looking left and right for any signs of life.

I start to smell coffee halfway down the hallway, so I figure I am on the right track. But I pause. I don't want to be rude, but I don't really want to sit and sip coffee with anyone, either. That's awkward.

I start down the stairs and pause when I hear voices coming from the kitchen. A deep, rumbling sound that I know to be Bones, and a softer, lilting voice that I think is his mom's.

I take a deep breath and push myself into the room, wringing my hands, but smiling softly. "Hi," I call out gently.

They both turn, Bones at the counter and his mom at the stove, and Bones looks at me with concern. "Cal?" He says, "did you sleep okay? It's early,"

I shake my head, "oh yeah, fine. I just woke up early, that's all."

He eyes me suspiciously but says nothing more. Eleanora waves her wooden spoon at me and tells me to sit down at the counter with Bones. I see she's making eggs and bacon, and my stomach turns. I'm still struggling to eat, despite the sleeping getting better and better. "Scrambled or over easy?" She asks me with her back turned.

"Uhhh..." I look to Bones for help, but he just shrugs. "Over easy, thank you," I say in a quiet voice.

Joanna comes down for breakfast and excitedly requests pancakes, which Eleanora happily makes.

I eat my eggs slowly, trying to get them all down for the sake of both Bones and Eleanora.

"Callie," Joanna says brightly, making me jump.

"Ye-yes?" I stammer through a mouthful.

"Do you wanna come play with me and the horses next door after breakfast? Mrs. Wallow lets me feed them sugar cubes and braid their manes!"

I smile at her softly, "of course, I'd love to."

But as we near the end of breakfast, most of my food still on my plate, she changes her mind. "Actually," she says, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear, "I think I want to go see the horses another day."

"Jojo, you just asked Callie," Bones begins reaching out for her hand, before she snatches her hand away from his, drawing a sharp breath of

fear from me.

“I *don't* want to go anymore, okay?!” She snaps at him, before getting up from the table and bolting away.

I wait. I wait for her to be told she can never, ever go there again, then. I wait for her to be backhanded. I wait for her to be dragged there. Something. Anything. But no.

Bones follows her into the hallway where she stands with her arms crossed and gets down on her level, and looks her gently in the eye. “Jo,” he says softly. “That wasn't very nice. But if you don't want to go, you don't have to, okay?”

“Even though I already asked Callie?”

He looks up at me, “why don't you ask her?”

She turns, “Callie, can we go to the Wallow's another day?”

I smile at her, “of course,” I shake my head. “It's not a big deal at all.”

She beams at me, and something in my heart lightens. Something lifts. Some sense of dread and fear are spirited away. Then I look at Bones, and he smiles at me with a nod before turning his attention back to his daughter.

Joanna runs off to do whatever it is she does, and Bones comes back to the table, eyeing my plate a little too conspicuously. And then he eyes Eleanora a little too conspicuously and she suddenly needs to go check on the tomatoes in her garden before she washes out the sink.

“Why didn't you yell at Joanna? I ask suddenly.

“What?” He asked, surprised.

“When she yelled at you... why didn't you yell back?” I ask, surprised myself.

He pauses, looks to be choosing his words carefully. “Why didn't I, as an adult, yell at a child, who was having a childlike moment?”

“She *yelled* at you, snatched her hand away, that's... disrespectful,” I say slowly.

“It was,” he nods. “But why meet disrespect with disrespect? What would yelling back do?”

I ponder his question honestly. “I guess... I guess I don't know. Made you feel better?”

“It's not just about me and my feelings, Joanna's matter just as much,” he says. “What would your mom have done in that situation?” He asks softly.

“I wouldn't have dared yell at my mom,” I answer immediately. “But if I did...” I shake my head. “I would have been hit and screamed at.”

“That’s not how I parent,” he shoots back. “That’s not how anyone should parent,” he seems to find himself saying without thinking, as he looks a bit guilty. “That’s not psychologically sound parenting,” he corrects himself. “When I got my psych degree, Jo’s mom and I were seeing each other, and we talked about kids, as couples do,” he seems far away for a moment. “And so I took a couple extra classes on child psychology that semester. But even before then, I knew I’d never hit a child. That ain’t how I was raised here,” he motions around the kitchen. “And I can’t say I’ve never raised my voice at her, I’m not perfect but... I don’t make a habit of yellin’ at my kids,” he says softly.

I snort, “you yell at Jim.”

He looks at me sincerely, “do I?”

I think about it. “I guess you... you *scold* Jim.”

“When?”

“Huh?”

“When do I scold him?”

“When he’s being dumb or not listening to you.”

“And why do you think I do that?”

“Because you care.”

He nods. “I care,” he says softly. Again, he eyes my plate. “Are you still having trouble eating?” He asks gently.

I stare at my hands, say nothing.

“Honey, it’s okay, you’re not in trouble,” he says gently.

“I know that,” I find myself answering immediately, to my own surprise. “I just...” I shake my head. “I just don’t like talking about it.” I say quietly.

He softens, “I know, dalin’,” he murmurs. “But this is your health, okay? It’s not embarrassing-”

“Yes it *is*,” I hotly object, moving to stand up.

He looks at me with an eyebrow raised, giving me room to speak.

I sigh. “Okay. Like, you’re always worried about something. And it’s like, not just headaches, but embarrassing stuff like my period and how much I eat.” My eyes go down to the floor. “It’s just... embarrassing.”

He gently reaches forward to tilt my chin up with one finger, “Cal, I don’t know what your mom taught you, but your health- your body- aren’t embarrassing things. Especially not when you’re talking to a doctor.”

I sigh, “my mom hated doctors.”

“I know,” he says gently. “But... you know you can trust me, right?”

He’s asking genuinely.

“I do,” I find myself saying. “But that doesn’t make talking about some things any easier.”

“Mmm,” he hums, a little too knowingly. “Does that mean you didn’t get another period after the last one?”

I resist the urge to growl in annoyance. I sigh. “No, it’s been 6 weeks, and no.”

“We need to have a conversation about birth control once we get back on board, kiddo.”

This time I do let out a huff. “If you insist.”

“I do,” he nods. He also sighs. “Cal, there are going to be times you don’t like me. But I promise you, I’m only ever trying to help, okay? You know I’ll never hurt you unnecessarily. You know you can ask for painkillers or anti anxiety meds in my medbay. You know you’re in charge.”

And after seeing what just happened with Joanna and hearing that... Suddenly...

Suddenly I find myself tipping my head forward into his chest and throwing my arms around him.

I can feel him hesitate for only a millisecond before he returns the hug, hard and warm. “You’re safe with me, Calliope,” he says into my hair. “You’ll always be safe with me.”

#### Chapter End Notes

As a psychogenic-seizure-haver, I had to add that one in there. Once my doctor explained my shaking was more than anxiety, a lot more made sense about those shaking episodes.

## Chapter 13

### Chapter Notes

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

I'm sitting in my room reading Psychology 2 and relishing in the A/C. The humidity of the South in summer is truly no joke.

Bones, Eleanora, and Joanna went out to a neighbor's house; she's apparently elderly and her grandson came over to ask Bones to check her out after a fall.

I'm totally alone in the house when I get a message from Jim, *Emergency. We need to get back to Riverside. I'll explain once we meet there. I'm leaving Frisco now. I've booked you a shuttle and told Bones, a car will be coming to get you soon.*

There's something slightly... Off about the message. I can't put my finger on it, but it doesn't feel like Jim. He's been in meetings I know, so maybe he's stressed?

I message back, *what kind of emergency?*

*It's Vos. He was arrested. Starfleet needs you there when they question him.*

What? Why? That makes zero sense.

But it's Jim, and I know he's got my best interests at heart.

I shake like a leaf the entire time I pack my bag, trying to do it quickly because I'm unsure of when the car will be here. In the end, it arrives as soon as I'm done packing and I hurry out to talk to the driver, assuming it's someone from Starfleet.

It is, and he's silent during the drive to the Starfleet shuttle terminal.

Something in my head is chanting, this isn't right. This isn't right. This isn't **right**. So I pull out my padd and message Jim, *why do I need to be there?*

His typing bubbles pop up as I wait in line to board. *To see if the details he gives match what you know about mom.*

**Mom?** What the heck has gotten into him? He never calls her that.

*I don't \*know\* much, I'm not sure how much I'll be able to help.*

*Anything you can do will help.*

*I'm boarding now. I guess I will see you soon.*

*See you soon.*

It's when the shuttle is landing that it finally hits me. I remember what Jim said months ago. "I never call it Frisco, you'll get smacked upside the head if you do that."

I look back at his messages, *I'm leaving **Frisco** now.*

**Mom .**

The world around me slows and goes dark around the edges. Something is wrong here.

I try to message Bones but it won't go through. I try to call Bones and it won't go through. I try calling Eleanora, and nothing. It's like my padd suddenly can only converse with Jim.

Or whoever is pretending to be Jim.

Everyone is disembarking and the person next to me is staring at me, confused why I'm not getting up to leave when it's our turn. I hastily grab my things and keep trying to get my padd to work right, when I get a message. *Get in the car, and your brother won't die.*

I get off the shuttle in the Riverside shipyard and look around.

Frank is standing at the back door of a car with blackened windows.

Shaking, I haul my duffle up on my shoulder and walk over to him, unsure of what else I can possibly do here.

"Get in." He says simply, with a sneer of disgust.

I notice he's pale and breathing heavier than already is normal for him. Vos may have been telling the truth about his being infected.

When I hesitate, he sighs, "get in or Jimmy dies."

I'm about to give up and get in when he launches a hand forward and grabs me by the hair. I can't help but cry out and I wonder if anyone hears, before everything is consumed with black.

•

"Jim, we can't find Callie anywhere and her bag is gone."

"Are you saying she ran away?!"

"No, I'm saying something here is wrong. I just talked to her this morning about some things and it went well, I don't see any reason she'd up and leave."

“If her bag is gone, then it doesn’t sound like she was taken, though,”

“None of us can get a hold of her, her padd just goes straight to voicemail and the messages won’t go through.”

“Something is wrong,”

“You’re right something is wrong, that’s why I called you!”

Jim pushed his way out of Starfleet HQ, “Bones, I’m leaving now, but where am I going? Where would she have gone?”

“Captain,” Spock ran up to him, un-Vulcan-like. “I’ve just overheard reports of a young girl matching Calliope’s description being forced into a vehicle at the Riverside shipyard-”

Jim didn’t wait. “Bones, Riverside. I’ll meet you there.” He looked at Spock, “what did the guy look like?” His voice was full of gravel.

“He seemingly matched descriptions of your uncle Frank.”

•

The world comes back into focus slowly, like I’m in a movie and also underwater at the same time. Everything sounds far away but feels way too close.

When I try to rub at my face, my hands are caught far short on each side, and I hear the clanking of chains.

The clanking alerts me more than anything, but I can’t make myself sit up or even fully open my eyes. I’ve been drugged with something and I have no idea what.

Voices echo through whatever room I’m in, and they echo so loudly I struggle to make them out in close proximity. They sound both familiar and foreign and I struggle to focus on any of them.

“I told you *no!*” One voice is screaming. “You deliberately disobeyed-”

“And you think I answer to you?” A voice I can only describe as slimy fires back.

“Your financing does,” the first voice, a familiar one, shoots.

“You seem to think Section 31 is the only group with their hand in the pot here,” the slimy voice threatens. “When we both know that’s not the case.”

“What’re you gonna do? Sell the cure for xenoP to the Klingons? Orion pirates? You don’t have the leverage you think you do!”

A third voice enters the chat, “no, but once she has the abilities you used me for,” it’s unfamiliar and distinctly British. “Your leverage over us will be gone.”

“You,” the angry voice spits. “I should have known *you’d* be involved, Harrison.” And I finally realize the voice is Admiral Marcus.

“I wasn’t, until you gave the order to stand down,” the British voice says. “My new friend Rex here,” *that’s* the slimy voice, I can finally place. “Needed some backup to finish his experiments. And once I’m not the only one with healing abilities, well, you can see why I’d be interested in helping out *that* cause.”

“The cause of making yourself less valuable?” Marcus shoots back at Harrison. “Because that’s where we’re heading.” He laughs sardonically.

I feel the room tense around me, and I resist the urge to pull at the restraints again.

“If making myself less valuable makes your hostages less valuable as well- so. be. it.” Harrison spits.

Hostages? Are there other people here, too?

“I made agreements that need her alive, Harrison.” Marcus says lowly.

He did *what* ?

“And she will be,” Vos finally jumps in, walking closer to me. “If you cooperate with us,” he says almost amiably.

“When did we get to be on opposite sides here?” Marcus asks.

“When you pulled my access to my own research,” Vos snips.

“I don’t need to answer that question,” Harrison says offhandedly.

“What do the two of you want?” Marcus asks.

“It’s simple, really,” Vos says. “Give me my research back and we won’t need the girl.”

•

“How are we going to find her?” Bones asked as he hurriedly ran out of the house to the truck.

“Winona and Frank’s side of the family farmed Riverside for decades, there’s multiple abandoned farms he could have taken her to if he wanted somewhere quiet and far from town.”

“You really think he’d keep her in Riverside?”

“If what Pike thinks is happening is happening, yes.”



“And what does he think is happening?” Bones flew down the driveway.

Jim pushed his way through a crowd at the terminal. “He agrees with you and Spock, that they want to mimic the healing abilities of the 90’s augments. But he doesn’t think they actually want to use her for healing, but for leverage.”

“Leverage?”

“He wouldn’t say any more than that, no matter how much I begged. He said soon he could bring me in eventually but... but for all our safety, not yet.”

“Well what about Callie’s safety?!”

“Pike seems to think they won’t kill her.”

“There are things worse than death, Jim.”

“I, of all people, know that all too well,” Jim fired back. “But if what they want is quick leverage, they won’t go far and that gives me a chance to get to her, if I’m right about where she’s at.”

“Us, kid. Gives *us* a chance. And why not send a security squad, we can beam one straight there-”

“*I*m beaming straight there,” Jim cut in, breaking into a run. “I’m not taking a shuttle, I’m using all my beaming credits. I’m not leaving her safety up to anyone else. Not this time. It’s time we end this.”

“They won’t beam you for free?!”

“Pike is keeping this off official channels so no, no it’s just us doing this.”

““Us” being...?”

“Us!”

“Jesus, Jim, at least call in Hendorff!”

“I don’t know who I can trust right now, Bones! If Starfleet is involved... Crap, I gotta go, just- just message me when you land, okay?”

“Jim-”

The line cut out.

•

“And why do you think she’s that valuable to me?” Marcus snaps.

“You’re the one doing all you can to spare her life,” Harrison pushes back. “We don’t care why you got cold feet once you got the cure, we just want Dr. Vos’ research back.”

“Talk to Kodos- oh wait- you can’t!” Marcus yells. “I don’t have your research, you fools! It was all destroyed!”

“Then get it,” Harrison spits. “You really think I don’t know you had the records from the palace saved from destruction?”

Silence hangs.

“I need time.”

Is *Marcus* seriously bargaining for me?! Does this have to do with his ‘agreements’ he made?

“You have an hour.”

I hear the feedback from the call die out, and feel the light on my face disappear, so I know they hung up on him.

“What about me?” Frank coughs out, and it’s the first time I realize he’s in the room. “When do I get my cure? I did what you asked, got you this place! Got the brat to cooperate!”

A sigh from Harrison, “follow me.”

And then I’m left with just Vos.

At least, I think so. From what Harrison said about hostages and from Frank making me think Jim was in danger, I guess I have no way of knowing for sure.

“I know you’re awake so you can quit pretending,” he says to me, making me open my eyes for the first time.

I had guessed from the smell we were in a building on an old soybean farm, and I can tell I’m right when I open my eyes.

Sure, they’ve brought in a whole lab’s worth of equipment, but the curved metal ceiling is a dead giveaway.

I can’t help but eye the lab equipment warily as Vos types away on his padd. “I don’t care that you heard all that,” he all but shrugs. “You’re just a means to an end, really...”

“Am I, now?” I find myself saying as I twist at the chains, which softly tink against each other.

“Mhm,” he hums. “In fact,” the restraints fall away, “we already have what we need.”

I look down at myself, suddenly terrified of what they’ve been doing to me while I am unconscious. But I’m fully clothed and nothing hurts except the pounding in my head.

“You were putting on a show…” It dawns on me.

I start to shake and worry another seizure is coming on, when my arm starts to sting and everything starts going fuzzy. “This will all be over soon enough,” is the last thing I hear.

•

Jim sped down the dusty road to the first threshing buildings on his list. He wasn’t sure what he was hoping to find, except Callie safe and unharmed.

But as he searched the first set of buildings and corn rows and came up empty, his stomach sank more and more.

They’d been able to break into her padd remotely and found the messages.

She’d gone with them because they used *him* as bait. For all she knew, they had him kidnapped, too.

It broke his heart that she was that willing to put her life on the line for him, because she was way too young to need to do that, let alone having to ever do that.

He mentally kicked himself, wondering if it was all his fault to begin with for taking her aboard the *Enterprise*. Clearly, that was what they wanted all along. They’d played right into Section 31’s hand the entire time.

He could only hope what he was doing was unexpected enough to make a difference.

•

The next time I wake up, it’s to a completely different room. I’m not in the lab anymore, but I’m tied to a bed still, and still in the warehouse.

My mom’s side of the family farmed this land for so long that it just became second nature to me to pass these abandoned farms and their buildings and know they were ours. When I was little, my mom would still check on them to make sure no one was squatting or that the buildings weren’t falling apart. So I know exactly which one I am in, and know exactly where I am at, which I can only hope they don’t know and didn’t count on.

Frank was supposed to be the one overseeing the warehouses and land, but never cared to actually do it.

Speaking of Frank, I wonder where he is.

I listen for voices, for any noise, and only hear the wind outside. I know the cornfields surrounding us are tall and would provide ample cover if I chose to run, knee high by the fourth of July and all, but I’m currently chained to a bed.

Jim taught me how to throw knives and ride a motorcycle, but he never taught me how to pick a lock.

I wonder if I could drag the bed along with me, it doesn't look that heavy, but I know the noise would give me away.

I have to get out of here. Just because Marcus wants me alive, doesn't mean these guys will keep me alive. They could decide they do want to experiment on my genome like Bones thought. They could do anything to me.

I test the strength of the chain... And find that it isn't locked.

•

Jim left warehouse #3 on his list and hopped on the bike he'd rented to head to the next one.

He had to find her before they got whatever it was they wanted and didn't need her anymore.

"Jim?" His comm buzzed. "Bones?" He answered.

"Jim, I have a lot of transporter credits saved myself, y'know, from never usin' it. So I called them in and I'm in Riverside. Tell me where to go."

Jim's heart swelled. "You beamed in?" He breathed.

"For you and Callie, yes, yes I let them scatter my atoms across the galaxy."

"Sending you my location and where I have left to search now."

"Copied."

•

I know where the exit of this building is, and I head straight there.

The wide doors are open, letting a breeze come through the hot metal building. The car I was shoved in sits parked, but so do a few PX bikes with their keys sitting in the ignitions.

I'm their leverage for the info they want, and losing me means their plans fail, so I'm all too aware that there's no chance they will let me get away if they catch me.

I get on the bike and start it, thankful that Jim put me on my own bike almost as soon as we started riding together months ago.

That's when I hear the screaming behind me. It's Vos, and he's screaming every foul word for a female to exist.

I rev the bike to get it out of the garage without spinning my wheels, and take off down the dirt access road.

I'm flying, hair whipping behind me and thinking that Bones will kill me when he finds out I did this without a helmet. My biggest issue, however, is I have no idea where I'm going.

I know exactly where I am; Riverside is small enough that there's only a few places I could be and they're all centrally located- near the quarry.

But where I'm going is a mystery. I don't have my padd and even if I did, I don't know if I could contact Jim. My head is pounding, I don't know how long I've been drugged for and I don't even know what they used on me and what its effects are.

Basically, I'm pretty screwed. All I can figure to do is get back to town, get as far away from them as I can.

I come to the end of an access road and turn towards town, but I'm still far out from city limits. I rev the engine again and crouch down, trying to take advantage of aerodynamics like Jim taught me.

But when I hear an engine rev behind me, my stomach drops. I don't turn around, but I can tell they're close, which means they got out of the compound right after I did, which tells me it's Vos behind me.

He's heavier than I am, and I'm not sure if that makes the bike go slower or faster, but he's close enough already to make me nervous.

I glance in the mirror and he's way too close, I need to stay in a straight line to get ahead of him but I have to swerve to keep him from grabbing me when he reaches out to try.

Dust kicks up as the tires twist and turn on the country road, fighting to keep me upright. I can't fall, it's a death sentence, even if it's just because I don't have a helmet.

When I look in the mirror again, I realize the issue is Vos is on a PX100, it goes faster than the PX90 I hopped on because it was familiar. He revs again and gets close, and I floor it and angle away, towards the right side of the road.

He's going to catch me. He's going to catch me and they're going to kill me.

I glance to my right at the quarry. In the summer heat, a haze of mirage covers the horizon, hiding the edge of the drop off.

I know these roads like the back of my hand, and that gives me an advantage.

But it's my only play, so I take the first access road on my right I come across. I nearly have to skin my knee to stay upright, but I do.

Dust kicks up in my face and I cough, having to let go of one handlebar to get dirt out of my eyes. It sends me off-balance, and I yelp.

I'm watching the landmarks all around me, trying to time it just right. If I don't, I'm dead. If Vos catches me, I'm dead. I've got one shot at this.

When I see the rusted barbed wire stacked, that's my sign.

I turn in my seat, and flip Vos off, hoping for a reaction.

He yells something I can't hear and tries to get closer, and when he does, mentally apologizing to Bones, I turn the bike sharply to the left, falling to my side, letting go of the bike.

Momentum carries me and I find myself clawing at the ground, trying to stop it.

The bike crashes down on my leg, and I know I'm going to have a sore crotch and black and blue inner thigh. If I haven't broken anything I'll be shocked.

But that's the least of my worries as the PX90 I was on flies off the edge of the quarry and begins its descent hundreds of feet down.

A split second later, Vos and his bike follow it.

•

Jim saw them from down the road, and he could barely believe it. He'd recognize his sister anywhere, even a mile away flying on a bike away from him.

He hurried to follow.

It made him sick to his stomach to realize where he was.

It made him even sicker when Callie turned down the road to the quarry. The same road he'd gone down that ended up leading him to Tarsus.

What was she about to do? Did she see the edge of the quarry through the mirage? She'd lived there, of course she'd know the area, that was how she probably ended up escaping anyway.

When he saw her tilt her bike and fall to the ground, Vos flying at full speed behind her, he realized what she was doing.

He also realized she was going way too fast to stop herself before going over the edge.

•

I hear another engine rev even as Vos' echoes down the quarry walls, along with his stomach upending screams.

Tears spring to my eyes as I keep clawing at the ground, shocked how far I'm sliding and rolling.

Another bike kicks up dust as it comes near me and I panic, until I see it's Jim. I scream his name and he runs towards me, moving faster than I'm rolling.

He grabs my hand and arm with both of his hands, just as I'm about to go over the edge. When he does, my shoulder pops out of place and I scream as the world goes black around the edges.

Profusely apologizing, he grabs me under my other armpit and continues hauling me away from the edge of the quarry.

That's when I hear the crash. The loud near-explosion of motorcycle parts hitting the ground below. I wince and Jim apologizes again, but I shake my head. "I just killed him!" I gasp, tears continuing to well. "Oh my *god* I just killed someone," I nearly wail.

"Who was trying to kill *you* !" Jim objects. "Are you okay?!" His hands hover over me, his eyes taking in my skinned left arm and dislocated right shoulder.

"No!" I scream. "I just killed a man after being *kidnapped* ! And my shoulder is dislocated and Bones said if that happens again he's going to do surgery on it!"

"*That's* your biggest concern right now?!"

Another bike comes down the road and I instantly move to hide behind Jim, who tells me, "it's Bones, it's Bones. It's okay."

"Did you not hear what I just said?!"

Bones pulls up and hops off his bike, breathing a, "oh my god," and rushing over to me, taking in my bloody arm and ripped pants. "Callie, what happened?" His hands hover, trying to decide what to do. "We need to get you help," he says appraisingly.

I wince, thinking that I'm about to be told I'm getting a surgery.

"She doesn't want surgery on her shoulder," Jim explains as he moves to wrap an arm around my waist and help me to his bike.

"*That's* her biggest concern right now?!"

"Oh my god..." I huff.

Then I see the smoke. I see the smoke rising from the quarry, I know what it's from. Tears hit my eyes again and I suck in a sharp breath and repeat, with different meaning, "oh my god."

"Callie? Callie! Hey, Cal, look at me," Jim is saying, propping me on his bike and standing in front of me. "It was him or you, okay? You didn't do anything wrong,"

I'm shaking my head, tears falling freely. My shoulder is screaming, my leg and arm are on fire, and my inner thigh is throbbing. I've been strong for so long, running for so long, that it feels like this is the final straw. This is where I break. This is where I wrap my good arm around Jim's neck, and sob.

Truly, genuinely, screamingly, sob.

I feel like I've been holding myself together, like I've been masking strength for months, acting like everything is fine, and I finally can't hold it anymore. I let myself fall apart and I feel Jim gingerly wrap me up in his arms. "Hey, hey, it's okay, it's all okay now," he soothes, supporting my weight.

I shake my head, "it's not okay," I sniffle and pull away. "I'm augmented and a killer and cause nothing but trouble and they're not going to let me back on the Enterprise, and-"

"Excuse me?" Jim blurts, putting a hand on my good shoulder. "Callie, part of what was taking so long in SanFran was giving reports on what it's like to have a passenger on board. They're going to use you as an example for people like embedded journalists and traveling dignitaries. Things with Starfleet are fine," he insists, shaking his head. "And what just happened isn't going to change anything. It was self defense. Plus..." He shares a look with Bones. "Plus I got permission for you to enroll in nursing school courses and train on board the Enterprise, if you want. For all 4 years."

My eyes bore into his. "But I'll be 18 in a year and a half?"

"You can stay with me as long as you want, Cal. Just say the word."

I sputter, "What if you get a girlfriend? Get married? Get transferred? Or get sick of me? Or get the five-year mission? Or-"

"Cal, it's a big ship and I'm the captain. You want your own quarters, just say the word. I get transferred, so do you. We go on a five-year mission, so do you. That's the agreement with Starfleet. Things are... They're set. They're stable. It's just up to you. It's up to you what you want."

I falter a bit, dizzy from pain and overwhelmed from what he's saying. "You're saying... You're saying I can stay with you as long as I want to?"

"Yes," he says emphatically. "I'm saying I *want* you to, too."

My lip warbles as I start to cry again, throwing myself into my brother.

He *wants* me. He actually *wants* me. For the first time, I believe him.

"Then yes, yes I'll stay and go to school and live with you and just... yes!"

Jim beams at me. "Alright," he nods. "Stop number one is a planet called Niribu!"

•

"How dare you! How *dare* you!" An individual stormed into his office.

"Ah. I was wondering when I'd hear from you." Admiral Marcus smirked, crossing his arms and leaning back in his chair.

"Don't bullcrap me, Marcus. I agreed to your terms, did everything you asked, then you did exactly what you promised you wouldn't!"

"Oh pipe down. This is about the brat, right?" He scoffed derisively while rolling his eyes. "You came back to section 31 knowing what we do



here.”

“But you weren’t supposed to do it to my *daughter* , Marcus!”

“I promised you her life and that’s what she has! What’s your issue?”

“You promised her safety-”

His voice dropped low with fury as he stood to scowl at the woman in front of him. “I promised her *life* and that’s exactly what she walked away with. And if you want the same for yourself, you’ll keep your mouth shut, Winona.”

#### Chapter End Notes

...Surprise?

## Winona's Resume

### Chapter Notes

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

The young blonde shifted in her chair, fighting against the urge to try and catch that always errant lock of hair from falling out of her regulation academy bun. "...I'm just an engineer. I-I'm not even an engineer yet, I'm just engineering *track*, I-"

"Your aptitude tests are off the charts in certain areas that certain areas of Starfleet are in desperate need of."

"And what areas would those be? I'm studying to be a glorified *mechanic*! *That* is where your aptitude tests *firmly* put me for the last 6 months."

"So you thought."

Her eyes narrowed and she did finally defiantly break parade rest to tuck the lock of bangs back behind her ear, not even trying to shove it back where it went in the bun. "So it seems you wanted me to believe." She shot back.

The older man smiled darkly at her, all teeth, but in a strangely reassuring way. "Which is exactly why we want you on our team."

"Your top secret, Starfleet special ops... unit?"

"Basically, yeah."

Her young, unwrinkled, and unblemished face scrunched in thought, brown eyes hesitant but considering.

"You'll have to work on that poker face," the man in the dark dress uniform that she had never seen on anyone before, chuckled.

"Excuse me?"

"I can see you're considering it. That gives me an upper hand. You can never show your opponent your hand."

"So you're my opponent?"

"At some times I might be."

"I don't even know your name."

"You won't know many, in this organization."

"You act as though I've already accepted."

He chuckled again, "you have." He stood. "Like I said- poker face. I know you're lying through your teeth. You know exactly who I am."

"I admit, I thought you'd be older, being so high up, Captain Marcus. Honestly pretty bold to admit that someone in your position, climbing the ranks, is involved in this. Especially to a lowly freshman."

He shook his head, pursed his lips. "Nah," he countered. "See that's how I already know you'll say yes. You've *said* yes. How else would you know who I am? What ranks I'm climbing? You went to a STEM school, you graduated early, your logic aptitude rivals some of the Vulcan members in our ranks."

"Vul-"

"You may be an engineering track student but you have a special interest in intelligence you can't hide. Your extracurriculars are all advanced-hand to hand combat, interrogation, intelligence gathering, computer analysis..."

"You sure seem to know my academic record well."

"We've been watching you for quite some time."

"And what is that supposed to tell me?"

"That we want you. And that's me dropping my poker face. You can- and will- be a true asset to us, Cadet Davis."

She shifted uncomfortably in her seat for the first time.

"If it's all the same to you, sir... if we're going to do this, you should know I prefer Winona."

•

"So you're an engineer?" Her date asked.

He was cute, vibrant blue eyes and softly swept back blonde hair.

She nodded, sipping her drink, thinking of the exact words she was told to say about her future assignment and academic career. "I'm a technical engineer. I'll spend my time on computers instead of warp cores," she shrugged. "I'm a bit boring."

"So what do you do with the computers? You'll just go around fixing them all day?"

Part two, if people ask questions. "Oh, I also gather data regarding how the ship is functioning daily."

"Oh, you do that already?" He asked, surprised.

CRAP. She slipped. Always future tense, don't let anyone know you're off on training missions in your first year... "Oh, I've just done some sims," she rolled her eyes. "I'm positive the command track is far more interesting. Tell me about your favorite classes."

•

“He can never know.”

“You don’t think I know that?” She snapped. “Why do you think I asked for face to face? How am I supposed to be in this organization and have a child?”

He sighed. “Easily and simply. In some cases, it turns out to be the perfect cover.”

“I’m not using my child as a cover story.” She bit out.

“Then we’ll send it back to earth,” he shrugged. “You’ve got family.”

“But George- he’d never-”

“Then we’ll let ya live onboard with the kid, I’ll pull some strings, *I don’t care* . What I care about is the assignment you’re supposed to be on right now.”

“And when I get sent out while breastfeeding a newborn? How will I explain that?”

“Like I said, perfect cover story.”

“What are you talking about?”

“In lieu of intelligence ops where you’re lying to your husband about where you’re at, we’ll simply assign you to gathering intel on the *Kelvin* .”

She stared at him silently for a beat. “Just like that?”

“Just like that.”

“What aren’t you telling me? George has been stationed there for 6 months already and I’ve never done anything on that ship *once* , so I’ll ask you one time, what’s the real reason?”

“You learned a long time ago that you don’t get to ask questions here!” He rounded on her, and she fought the urge to place a protective hand over her still flat stomach. “You follow your orders and you do your job! Understand?”

She ground her teeth, boldly defiant. Maybe it was the hormones. Maybe it was the thought of having someone to protect. But she pushed back. “Maybe after you answer one question that I absolutely have the right to ask. What happens when you all deem the kid old enough to not need me anymore?”

"Then they go back to earth, or you do."

"At. What. Age?"

He pondered. "Is 2 fair?"

Which is how the conception of Jim happened the summer before Sam turned 2. So she- and Sam- could stay on the *Kelvin* longer.

But then George died. She had a complicated birth. She had severe PPD. And none of it mattered after that. The kids no longer mattered. Her heart, her husband, was gone. Her body was... changed. Her mind and emotions were turbulent yet empty and completely uncontrollable. She snapped and threw things and screamed about how unfair George dying was. Then she didn't leave her bed for days on end.

She couldn't find a reason to stay. So when Jim turned 2, she was gone without hesitation.

•

"You're one of our most valuable assets for well over a decade and suddenly you want out? I'm not buying it. And you're a better agent than to walk in here with that request and no offers on your end so tell me what you really want."

"What I really want... is to have George's last baby."

"A baby? You?"

"You asked."

"And you lie," came the response.

"The last embryo is going to deteriorate if it's not implanted."

"Embryos last a lot longer than that."

"Talk to cold storage."

"Oh, I did," he stood up. "You see, I spent a lot of time on CS12, for reasons I'm sure you can deduce, and I learned quite a bit about cryogenics in that time. Like how augmented cells tend to break down in cryo faster than the regular person," he raised an eyebrow.

"How long have you known?"

"About your Xenop gene or about what you did?" When she didn't answer, he continued. "The gene issue showed up a long time ago on your-"

"On my bloodwork for Section 31, yeah that's how I found out. You weren't supposed to know," she shook her head.

He shrugged, "but alas... I do. And as far as what you did..." he shook his head, placed both hands on the back of the chair he stood behind. "I knew about that from the second you asked to be assigned to CS12 for a semester."

"So you know what I do before I even do it?" She shot at him.

"More or less."

"So are you going to let me go without a fight or not?"

"It's not just me you'll have to worry about if you have an augmented kid."

"You keep searching for your 90's augments and I'll deal with my child."

"You'll never be able to take her to Starfleet hospitals or doctors. One wrong person sees those augmented cells and..."

"Would you quit ominously trailing off? It's getting boring."

"I'm just trying to get you to use your head here."

"Are you threatening a child I don't even have yet?"

"Threatening, no. Stating facts, yes."

She huffed. "You owe me two favors. And I'm calling in this one."

•

*It's been a long time. But by my ledger, I have one last favor to call in.*

*You ghost Section 31 fifteen years ago and think you can still call in a favor?*

*After hiding that you knew the Tarsus virus was planned and therefore the massacre and subsequent manhunt thereafter? Yeah, yeah I do. You were my handler and owed me that.*

*We made sure your son was on the list to live.*

*We both know Kodos changed that at the last minute because he was a threat. And that's the issue now. My daughter is going to be seen as a threat. I will not allow another one of my children to be tortured. Even if I'm not around to stop it.*

*The only way you're cashing in is if you add a little more to the pot.*

*How much more?*

*A fair amount to ensure she stays alive.*

*What's a fair amount?*

*Your return to Section 31.*

*Did you miss the part where Xenop is fatal and apparently, incurable?*

*...is it?*

*According to Vos, yes.*

*You really believe that the man that was Kodos' right hand can't come up with the cure you two planned? Maybe you've lost your touch after all.*

*What are you saying? He's withholding it?*

*Or not working on it like he claims. I, on the other hand, always follow through on my guarantees.*

*Are you saying you can get me a cure?*

*I'm saying if I was, that'd be two favors instead of one.*

*If I got the cure, I wouldn't need you to guarantee Callie's safety, I'd be here to ensure it.*

*If you get the cure, you're going to owe us.*

*Owe you what?*

*Here's how this is going to work, Winona. You come back to Section 31 and we get you the cure. Your daughter's life, however, comes at the cost of your staying in Section 31 this time.*

*As long as I stay loyal and active, she stays safe, is that it?*

*Well she'll be living with Jim so "safe" is relative.*

*And how do I explain my absence?*

*Your death will do that just fine.*

*You want me to fake my death?*

*They're going to hold a funeral for you, Winona. It's up to you if it's real or fake.*

*And just how do you plan on getting Vos to cooperate?*

*I don't. He won't. He's an asset that is really no longer an asset but can't be taken out yet. In the meantime, we'd have to get the cure from another source.*

*What source?*

*Your son's friend, Dr. McCoy, has a phd in pathology. Properly motivated, he'll get the cure.*

*And how do you plan on motivating him?*

*You let us worry about that. You'll be in stasis until he gets the cure.*

*And why can't you just use Harrison to cure me?*

*Harrison is... on assignment.*

*Convenient.*

*I don't know where he is, okay?*

*The head of Section 31 doesn't know where his most dangerous asset is?*

*Oh, I know exactly where \*she\* is.*

•

“...you'll keep your mouth shut, Winona.”

She glared at him.

“Our agreement was that she'd live with Jim. I told you “safety” was relative.”



“That’s not what I agreed to and you know it.”

“Oh, I know it. I just don’t care.” He scoffed when she continued to glare at him. “What did I do that’s any worse than what you did, hm? Letting Vos take all those blood samples from her-”

“So that he wouldn’t experiment on her!”

“Oh, such a good mommy, not letting someone experiment on *another* one of your kids.”

“That’s exactly why I came back! To keep her from him and you gave her to them!”

“I was motivating McCoy to get the cure, “properly motivated”, remember? It’s not my fault you list your touch for reading double meanings, Wyn.”

“And letting them get to her after you got the cure?!”

“I didn’t let them do anything,” he snarled. “They went behind my back. And how do you think she got outta there, hm? I can tell you,” he chuckled. “Her restraints weren’t left unlocked by accident.”

"At least Vos is dead..." She sighed, sinking into the chair across from him.

“At least,” he agreed. “Your assignment is finally here.” He slid a padd across the desk at her.

She picked it up warily, looked it over. “Really?” She commented, “this? This is what you’re assigning me?”

He nodded once. “Enjoy.”

#### Chapter End Notes

Thank you for letting me share my self-indulgent story here :)

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