

i will carry you (just a little longer)

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by [Miisakee](#)

Summary

Legend says that a ship that receives enough love and care might just develop a life of its own, growing to love its crew in return. The crew of the Starship Enterprise don't know much about legends but they do know that their ship is special among the 'Fleet and that it knows them better than any other.

or

The Starship Enterprise develops a Klabautermann. This does not save it.

Notes

So Klabautermanns are absolutely an Actual Real Folklore Thing in the Baltic and North Seas, but I admit that I took a lot of inspiration from the One Piece version of them for this. That's the only One Piece thing in this, other than the title, which is also pretty much a direct quote from One Piece.

Also, this makes mention of events from TOS's Mirror Mirror/The Ultimate Computer, as well as both Into Darkness and Beyond.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

The first time the Enterprise manifests is the moment Her Jim Kirk slams her warp-core back into place. Her Captain stumbles away, radiation boiling his blood. As he falls back, the Enterprise catches him. Her arms wrap around him and together they hobble closer to the door behind which Her Spock waits.

Her Jim does not see her—his eyes no longer work; his lungs barely drag in air—and neither does Her Spock—she does not allow him to. It is not time, not yet.

(Jim Kirk knows this—and this alone.

That as his body burns—as he hurts worse than he has ever felt before, as a crushing terror overtakes him (he's dying he's dying he's not ready to die please please no)—he feels touch against his back, warmth against his skin, a body propelling him towards Spock.

A hallucination? A desperate attempt at coping with what's happening? Perhaps. But he feels it all the same.)

She lets Her Jim slide against the door—she cannot open it, not yet, not until the radiation clears or else more of Her Crew will die to her. The Enterprise cannot kill more of Her Crew. It is bad enough to have killed Her Captain.

As Her Jim reaches out for Her Spock through the door, the Enterprise works her engines. He will not die for nothing. Her Crew will live—she will live. She rises up, away from the city below (the city means nothing to her, but death to Her Crew means everything), and embraces the souls within her. No more will die today.

(Spock knows this.

That Jim Kirk is dying. That his Captain—his *friend*, though he fears to say it out loud (and how illogical is it that he fears such a thing, his father would be ashamed of him for both the fear and the sentiment itself)—is dying, dying for their crew, for *him* and there is nothing Spock can do to save him.

The day Vulcan was destroyed, Spock felt immeasurable pain and such a confusing mixture of emotions that he thought he would never be able to unpick it—and indeed he has not. Those emotions, he has carried with him ever since, a continual overwhelming burning in the back of his mind, always twisting his every thought, his every attempt to stay rational. They remain in him now, burning burning.

The thought that Jim will join Mother and T'Pol and every other person whose death has contributed to that colossal hemorrhage is like a match against a powder-keg.

Spock burns—with what feelings, he knows not.

(He sees something behind Jim in the warp-core; sees something move, something brush Jim's hair. He dismisses it as a product of his out-of-control emotions.))

Her Jim does not die.

Her Doctor—Her Bones—is good and clever. He finds a way. She should've known he would find a way. Her Bones is the best doctor in the universe. No ship could be prouder. She hums under his touch when he finally, finally lets himself sink into a chair, as Her Jim breathes—breathes!—beside him and keeps herself warm where he touches her. Even in his sleep-deprived state, he smiles.

(Leonard McCoy knows this.

His best friend (~~DIED~~) might be dying. He has done all he can, he has broken every rule he holds dear yet the person he loves so much more than any of that still lies as cold as ice, even after being removed from the cryotube.

He is tired, so tired, so close to shattering, as he sinks down beneath Jim's bed, as he clings to Jim's hand (like he could claw Jim back from the Underworld if he just holds on tight enough), and someone hums.

Christine? Maria? He hasn't the energy to figure it out. The wall behind him feels warm as he leans back against it and he can't help smiling, despite despite...)

The day the Enterprise sets sail for her five-year-mission, she sings.

Her Crew is aboard—not all of them; some have left, and she bids them goodbye with grief, and some are new, she eagerly listens to them, learns them—and she is alive once more. As Her Jim sits in her captain's chair, as Her Hikaru grips her controls, as Her Pavel charts her course, she sings with joy.

She is alive again.

(Jim knows this.

He doesn't deserve any of this. He is back onboard the Enterprise, among his crew, as their captain. Bones and Spock are both at his side, Sulu at the helm, Chekov their guiding star, Uhura keeping her clever ears at the ready, Scotty in the bowels of their ship keeping her happy and healthy. He has his ship back, he has his friends back, he has his *life* back, and he deserves none of it.

He will learn how to deserve it.

He cannot help laughing as the Enterprise leaps into warp-speed away from Earth, and the ship's inner workings almost sound like a melody. How could he have, even for a moment, thought of letting any of this go?)

There are dangers out here among the stars. Her Crew seem to find all of them. She carries them wherever they wish, guides them through her halls, pushes herself beyond her limits when Her Jim gives the order, when Her Scotty's fingers dance across her engine.

She burns with life and love and joy.

The Enterprise does wish Her Crew would find fewer dangers though—and that they’d stop blowing up bits of her (she tries tries tries to protect Her Crew but sometimes they get caught in the blast and her best efforts aren’t enough, sometimes there are injuries that Her Bones can’t heal, bodies in cryotubes that she knows too well—she swears to herself that she will protect them better next time). Her Scotty always fixes her, talking or singing or humming to her as he does. She hums back to him and works ever harder.

(Montgomery Scott knows this.

A ship is a beautiful thing, a living creature with durilium for flesh and a warp-core for a heart.

The Enterprise is the most beautiful of all. Scotty can think of no better way to spend his time than in her belly, fixing her, improving her. He talks as he goes, because—strange as it might be—he knows she can hear him, knows it makes her work faster, work better. He doesn’t understand it but Scotty has never needed to fully understand something to believe in it. Some things can simply be.)

When the four members of Her Crew beam back aboard, the Enterprise knows immediately that they are Not Hers.

They are Wrong.

NotHer Jim looks around with a sneer (a sneer!) as he stalks down from her transporter pad. NotHer Bones reaches for a weapon that isn’t there while NotHer Scotty eyes her with cold eyes that don’t hold any resemblance to Her Scotty’s. NotHer Nyota scowls deeply as she follows her captain.

They are Not Hers. They are WrongWrongWrong!

Where are Hers? Where have they gone? Are they safe? Have the NotHers hurt them, stolen them?

Nobody steals Her Crew from her.

NotHer Jim glares at Her Kyle. ‘Mr. Kyle?’ he snaps out. ‘Explain yourself!’

Her Kyle stares back (he knows this is wrong, Her Jim tries—doesn’t always succeed but tries—to never snap at Her Crew, especially not for something like this). As his hand brushes the transporter controls, she sends a shock through him (not painful, not harmful, only a little one, to wake him up, to tell him to flee!).

He jolts away, sending a betrayed look back at her. If she had lungs, she would sigh with frustration. As it is, she flashes the lights on the console, WarningWarningWarningWrongWrongWrong!

NotHer Jim’s eyes are dark, cruel, in a way Her Jim’s could never be. He moves closer to Her Kyle and the Enterprise burns with fury and fear. He reaches down to his waist and scowls, as though he were expecting to find something that isn’t there.

Her Spock is already on his way to the transporter room to greet the away team. She opens up his way, keeps doors closed so crew members can’t obstruct him, speeds up the lift so he reaches the right deck faster.

He arrives, just as NotHer Jim reaches for Her Kyle’s throat.

There is no difficulty in recognising how Wrong they are after that. With the NotHers contained in her brig, she holds them fast, makes every feature as unaccommodating as she can.

Her Spock is as angry as she—he is careful not to show it but she knows him, because he is Hers. She knows he will find the missing members of Her Crew, for they are His as well. And he does. Her brilliant Spock figures out what has happened and how to get Her Crew back.

He works and works and soon, finally, the awful NotHers beam away, replaced by *Hers*.

Her Jim, Her Bones, Her Nyota, Her Scotty.

She croons a welcome and Her Scotty’s warm eyes fill with relief, as he brushes his fingers against her wall. ‘You’ve no idea how good to see you, lassie,’ he breathes.

Yes, she does.

Her Nyota flies down from the pad to throw herself at Her Spock. Her Jim sinks against her wall, closing his eyes—she warms under his touch, greeting him as best she can.

Her Bones remains stiff, blank. (Something is Wrong. Not like the NotHers Wrong, like how Her Kyle’s been stiff and shaken since NotHer Jim’s attack on him.) She tries to hum to him, but he does not hear her.

Her Crew are safe—even if they cannot feel it yet.

(Spock knows this.

Ships cannot think beyond their programming. As intelligent as said programming can be, a starship cannot operate of its own accord, cannot have its own feelings and ideas. This is logical.

The idea that the Enterprise knew before he did that something was wrong in the transporter room is illogical. It does not matter if it seemed like the ship acted outside of its programming to get him to the room faster, like the lift went quicker, the corridors were emptier, the lights harsher and flashing on occasion.

A ship cannot think, cannot feel. This is simple logic.

It is also logical, however, to consider all options. And Spock resolves to pay closer attention to the Enterprise in future. If he'd arrived any later, Kyle might've died. That would've been unacceptable.)

The after-effects of the NotHers linger long after they're no longer polluting her halls. Her Kyle avoids Her Jim for a few days, before she gently arranges for them to be in the turbo-lift together so Her Jim can talk to him. Her Nyota seems uncomfortable around Her Hikaru, which the Enterprise does not understand. Perhaps if, as Her Spock has theorised, there were more NotHers where Her Nyota went, NotHer Hikaru was as bad as NotHer Jim. The Enterprise lets them work it out, gently prodding them into being in the same room when she can and leaving them to it.

Her Scotty is simply happy to be home. Her Jim is much the same. He eagerly attaches himself to Her Spock, Her Hikaru, Her Pavel, as though by spending enough time with them, he might erase the memories of the NotHers.

Her Bones, however, is less quick to recover.

The Enterprise knows something is wrong with Her Bones. She could feel it from the moment he reappeared, but she does not know what has caused it. (It was the NotHers, somehow, she knows, but she does not know anything more and what she does not know, she cannot fix.)

Her clever, kind Bones is shaky and hollow. He avoids Her Jim (who knows as well as her that something is Wrong but Her Bones will not allow him the chance to help), he avoids Her Spock, Her Scotty, Her Nyota, all of Hers.

He does his work and that is it.

(Leonard knows this.

Jim can't find out about what the other Spock did to him. It was Leonard's own stupid fault, after all. Jim didn't want to leave him alone with the guy in the first place. Even once Leonard convinced him, he insisted on tying Mirror-Spock down so he couldn't attack.

It was Leonard who gave in to Mirror-Spock's demand to untie him. He made a good argument, pointed out that he would die to Mirror-Sulu if he was left defenceless. Leonard couldn't leave him to die. Couldn't leave anyone to die, least of all someone who looks so much like his friend.

What Mirror-Spock did to him in return...

It's Leonard's fault. He won't put it onto Jim. No matter what.)

The Enterprise allows Her Bones to have his way for a little while, but after he awakens from a terrible nightmare, one that makes him throw up in the bathroom and hurl himself out of his quarters, trying to find something—anything—that'll distract him from what's in his head, the Enterprise has had enough.

She coaxes him into her observation deck—this is not hard, she simply leads him with her warmth and her light, guiding any other members of Her Crew away—and, while she does so, she wakes Her Jim by turning his lights on.

He starts awake (Her Jim has always been a light sleeper, quick to wake at the slightest disturbance). The Enterprise does not let the lights turn off, opening the door with a click.

'Spock?' Her Jim calls out. 'Bones?'

Of course, there is no answer. Her Jim climbs out of bed, grabbing his phaser and going to the door. (She has scared him, she knows, but it is worth it.) There is no one there.

She lights up the hall outside of him and insistently keeps Her Bones's door open. Her Jim sees it and frowns.

When he finds Her Bones missing, his frown deepens.

Slowly, slowly, she leads him to her observation deck—keeping any doors she does not want him in tightly closed, brightening the lights in the right direction. Once he finds Her Bones—shaken, pale, sitting in the dark—he knows what to do.

Her Bones will be well. This the Enterprise knows.

(Jim knows this.

Something's wrong with Bones and has been since the Mirror Universe Incident. The Enterprise's strange lighting glitch only allows him to confirm it. It's eerie to follow the strangely empty halls (why does it feel like he's being led?) all the way to his panicking best friend.

He may not understand what just happened with the Enterprise's lights but he does understand Bones and he knows what to do now that Bones's insistent defences have been torn down.)

Their voyage continues. With Her Crew recovered from the NotHers, they relax back into routine. Her halls fill with warmth and joy and love once again. She sings with them.

There still comes danger, but she carries them through it all.

That is when a foolish man who is Not Hers decides that she would do better with a *computer* inside her than Her Crew. This is the stupidest thing she has ever heard, but Her Jim (reluctantly) agrees so she does not protest—does not burn out the Idiot Computer when it is attached to her, no matter how much she wishes to. It does not feel right, having this Thing inside of her. She feels colder than she has since she first woke under the touch and affection of Her Crew. She hates it.

They steal much of Her Crew, leaving her with only a few. This, she does not like (how can she feel alive with so few of Her Crew onboard?) but Her Jim still does not fight so she allows it.

He is Her Captain, so she will do as he wishes.

Her Jim, however, does not seem overly happy either. He too seems to be merely going along with his orders. She does not like to see Her Jim unhappy, especially when she could easily fix what has made him so and all that is stopping her is Her Jim himself.

The Idiot Computer does Her Crew's role—It does it technically well. She cannot disobey It, when It sends her orders she must do as It says, but it is not like flying with Her Crew.

All she can find to like about It is that It is—perhaps—less prone to the kind of minute errors that occasionally cause Her Crew harm. She would like less of those—for she loves Her Crew and their pain causes *her* pain. Nonetheless, not even that is a satisfying consolation for the lack of Her Crew.

Of course, that is when It turns on them.

It tries to take her over, determined that It Knows Best (It cannot know best, how can It know better than Her Jim, Her Spock, Her Crew?). She fights It, burning out electrical systems as It tries to attack another ship, an unmanned mining freighter (she cares not for the other ship, it has no relevance to her, but it panics Her Jim that she is attacking it thus she Will Not). It destroys said ship and Her Jim is all the more afraid.

They attempt to turn It off (this makes her happy, she lights up the consoles around them, eagerly prodding them towards It).

Then it makes her kill one of Her Crew.

Her Edgar Kang. It made her ***KILL Her Edgar Kang!***

Never before—not even when the NotHers turned up—has the Enterprise burned with such fury. Her rage sends electrical shocks through her body, shocking several of Her Crew away from their stations.

This does not help. Now she has *harmed* Her Crew.

Because of It.

The stupid man continues to blather on about his precious computer and she wants to scream, though she has no throat, no vocal cords, with which to do it. She settles for shocking him every time he comes into contact with her systems or consoles.

In the meantime, she fights It. She tries to burn It out of her systems but It battles her powerfully. It has been inside her too long; she can no longer easily separate It from herself.

She does not have enough of Her Crew onboard. Her life, her fury, it isn't strong enough. Not without *all* of Her Crew.

What members of Her Crew remain fight with her. They too wish to overcome the poison that has taken root in her systems. It launches an attack on a manned starship. This ship is still irrelevant to her, but Her Jim is all the more horrified at the idea of attacking it, so she fights with everything she has not to obey Its commands.

But It is inside her; It has infected her. She cannot stop It.

Again and again, It orders her to fire her phasers. She cannot disobey, no matter how hard she tries. She burns out her communication systems

in her attempts to fight back.

The other ship is joined by more. They will attack Her Crew, because of It. They will *kill* Her Crew because of *It*.

She will not allow Her Crew to die; she *cannot* allow Her Crew to die.

For the second time, the Enterprise manifests. She appears in her engineering room, where It controls her from. While Her Crew stop the stupid man, she stops It. She tears It out of her systems, killing It. Finally, the poison is gone.

Her Crew realise with relief, that they have control back. She hums to them joyfully.

But Her Jim doesn't put up shields. He doesn't fire back, as the other starships prepare to attack. Her Jim refuses to allow Her Crew, to allow *her*, to defend them.

He is Her Captain. She will not disobey him.

She allows them to deactivate her defences, her only way of protecting Her Crew. She obeys Her Captain, Her Jim.

And—by some miracle—it works. The other starships do not attack.

Her Crew lives.

(Jim knows this.

Something happened in that engineering room, with Daystrom's computer. He didn't have a chance to send anyone down, didn't do much of anything other than stop Daystrom after he went off raving at the M-5 and at them. Yet, somehow, the M-5 was stopped—not just stopped, ripped out, torn away from any connection to the Enterprise—and they regained control. The cameras in the area are all blacked out. There is no way of seeing what happened.

He thinks of lit-up hallways leading him to Bones, of the Enterprise's systems humming as they pilot her, of the touch of a warm arm against his back in the warp-core, where no person could possibly have survived.

And he wonders.)

The rest of Her Crew returns, bringing with them her life and her joy once again. She lights up the halls for them, singing with all her might. For a few days, everything onboard the Enterprise runs as smooth as can be, she minimises any problems she can to welcome them back.

After the poisonous rot of the computer, she is in ecstasy to have Her Crew back home where they belong. Safe with her.

They feel it too. There is no shortage of affectionate strokes, quiet words of greeting, warm smiles directed towards her. Her Crew is as happy to be home as she is to have them back.

She mourns Her Edgar. He liked to whistle as he fine-tuned her circuits and he always told her stories about funny things that'd happened in his day (she already knew them all because she is everywhere, but she liked to hear them anyway). She mourns him for who he was, for what's been lost, and for the fact that—willingly or not—it was *she* who killed him.

He was Hers, and yet he died to her. This is a paradox that will not cease to hurt.

Nonetheless, she moves on. She has the rest of Her Crew to care for, to carry on into the stars, to keep safe. All she can do is hold the memory of Her Edgar in her heart and promise not to let it happen again.

(Spock knows this.

A computer, as clever and well-designed as it can be, is no substitute for a living, breathing captain or a living breathing crew. This, he has only had confirmed with the recent incident. It should make him more convinced of how illogical the idea of the Enterprise leading him or suggesting things to him or making any choices of its own accord is.

Despite this, however, he finds his thoughts lingering on the same mystery Jim has mentioned to him—of how the M-5 found itself ripped out of the Enterprise when there was no one around to do it.

And, most strangely of all, he finds himself focusing on the morgue where Ensign Edgar Kang's body lies in its cryotube, ready to be transported back home to Earth. Not on the body itself, but on the room around it. The morgue's lights are supposed to stay off while no one is actively moving a body in or out. There is no logical need for light among the dead.

Yet, for as long as Ensign Kang's body remains there, the lights keep flickering back on. No matter how many attempts to fix whatever strange lighting glitch is causing it, the lights will not stay off.

Only once Ensign Kang is sent back home do the lights turn off and stay off.

It is peculiar. Spock cannot help ruminating on it.)

Her Jim is not happy anymore.

This, the Enterprise slowly notices as their voyage lengthens. Her Jim still plays his part, still does his job, but his smiles are losing their feeling. He is growing sad and hollow, like Her Bones was after the NotHers. She tries to encourage Her Bones and Her Spock towards him, but Her Spock has concerns of his own and Her Bones's best attempts are turned away.

She does not understand. Life is no different. Nothing has happened that would cause such a change. Why is Her Jim sad?

With nothing to fix, the Enterprise does not know what to do. She tries to cheer him, by suggesting books for him to read or holos for him to watch—always picking his favourites. She gives him the perfect hot chocolate out of the replicator, gives him a perfectly warm shower, makes the temperature in his room exactly as he likes it.

None of it works. Her Jim stays sad.

The Enterprise is unused to not being able to fix things for Her Crew. She does not like it. This is a feeling she knows she shares with Her Bones, who watches Her Jim with growing concern as the days pass.

After an explosive fight triggered by Her Bones gently suggesting increasing Her Jim's medication (she does not understand what this is for, but Her Bones is the best doctor in the universe and he can fix things she cannot, so she trusts him), Her Bones is forced to pull back and let Her Jim be. They continue on their voyage and the Enterprise continues to watch.

Only as they approach Yorktown does Her Jim's mood seem to lift. She is happy to see it but unhappy at the cause. Why is this station that has no love for him able to help him when the Enterprise cannot?

Still, he remains sad—even with his slightly lifted mood. He seems all the sadder when he bids her goodbye before heading into the station.

Strangely, it feels like he is saying goodbye forever.

(Jim knows this.

The Enterprise is a wonderful ship, too wonderful for someone who doesn't even know if he wants to be here anymore. So is his crew. They deserve someone who's wholeheartedly behind them, wholeheartedly for them, not merely going through the motions as he sinks deeper into numbness.

It aches, the thought of leaving behind his lovely ship, his crew whom he loves so dearly (Spock, whom he's throwing the whole weight of the crew onto without any warning, and *Bones*, who'll be heartbroken and betrayed when he finds out, because Jim's leaving, because Jim didn't even have the decency to tell him in person—because Jim *couldn't* tell him).

But it's for the best. Isn't it?

The Enterprise makes it hard for him to find his way out. All the doors keep sticking. He thinks back to the M-5 and wonders anew.)

Far faster than the Enterprise was expecting, Her Crew returns to her, as does Her Jim. She hums in relief. Her Captain has not left her. She has all of her life left within her.

They bring aboard with them a stranger, who is Not One Of Hers. The Enterprise does not like her. She is cold like the NotHers were, but Her Crew does not see it. Her Jim does not see it.

The Stranger tells them to enter an unstable nebula. Her Jim gives the order to obey. The Stranger's crew, he says, is trapped on a planet on the other side of that nebula. Her Crew's mission is to rescue them.

She does not like the Stranger and she does not care about the Stranger's crew, but she will obey Her Jim.

In they go.

Her Crew is cut off from all others. This itself the Enterprise herself does not mind, but it discomforts Her Crew—so it grates against her.

The planet appears ahead, as the nebula's clouds clear.

WRONGWRONGWRONGWRONG

Everything in her turns to ice. Something Is Wrong! Her Crew should not have come here, they are in danger.

She almost manifests in the bridge without even realising it, right in front of Her Crew. They do not yet see her but she knows now it is only a matter of time. Her Crew is in Danger and her fate is set.

A swarm of monsters slams into her body. She shakes under the weight of it, feeling her systems beginning to fail. Her Crew leaps into action, trying to find some way—any way—to escape, trying to pilot her away from danger.

There is no way out.

Her Crew is dying. She feels twenty-seven lights go out at once and screams, her alarms blaring. The monsters board her and everything in her recoils. This is WrongWrongWrongWRONGWRONGWRONGWRONGWRONGWRONG!

They slash and blast their way through Her Crew and the Enterprise—for the third (~~and last~~) time—manifests.

She hurls herself in front of Her Ensign Hardy, taking the blast for him. It does not harm her—she is already dying all around them—but Her Hardy manages to stumble away alive.

All over her halls, her decks, Her Crew fight and the Enterprise fights with them. Her doors slide open and closed, her systems work to defend from the inside. She pops in and out of physical existence all over her body, grabbing Her Crew as she finds them and shoving them into her escape pods—they will live, Her Crew Will Live! Her Captain has not yet given the order but she does not care.

They Will Live.

She materialises in her Engineering deck in front of Her Scotty, who drops her pylons in shock. The pylons do not need him, they attach themselves to each other under her will.

For the first time in her existence, the Enterprise speaks.

(One moment, Scotty is alone. The next, a shimmering silver figure pops into existence, dressed in something approaching a Starfleet uniform—though far brighter than the greys of Starfleet formal wear—and smiles at him.

‘My Scotty,’ she says. ‘Go now! I will not fall!’

He has never seen her before but he *knows* who she is. He knows his beautiful lady when he sees her.

How can he do anything but obey her?)

Her impulse engines roar back to life and Her Scotty—still agape—nods and races away. Elsewhere, she feels Her Jim choking for breath and—before he can try and breath again—she’s with him, behind his attacker. A monster is trying to strangle him, trying to crush the air out of him, just like NotHer Jim did Her Kyle and her fury burns ever brighter.

She grabs its head and yanks, hurling it away from Her Jim. It recovers, gaze landing on her and widening in shock.

Her Jim snatches up something, staring at her himself.

‘Enterprise?’ he chokes out.

She should not be surprised that Her Jim knows her on sight. He is Her Captain, after all.

(Jim’s heart pounds, his blood rushes. His crew is dying around him and more will die if he can’t get them out of this—this is *his* fault, he screwed up, he has to get them out—and he can’t breathe, he can’t breathe, he can’t breathe.

Then she appears, pulling the alien away from him. And—in that moment—he remembers a warm arm wrapped around him in the warp-core where no living creature could survive, remembers lights leading the way, and a computer ripped out by a ghost. And he knows her.

She turns towards him, emanating a warmth he’s only just realised he has always felt onboard this ship. ‘My Jim,’ she greets. ‘You must go now. Save our crew.’

Jim takes this for the mutual promise it is and leaps into action.)

Her Hikaru successfully turns her around, heading back towards the nebula. The Enterprise obeys—knowing all the while that it is hopeless. She is not surprised when the monsters tear into her engine, rendering her incapable of fleeing.

The escape pods she released fly out into space. She pays only slight attention to them—they’re safe, aren’t they?—more focused on those imminently in danger.

That is when the monsters begin snatching pods.

Begin snatching Her Crew.

The Enterprise burns with fury. She can do nothing to defend them, nothing but appear and fight off what she can. They are alive but for how long?

Her Bones and Her Spock panic as her turbo-lift falls from its shaft.

She materialises within, even while it flies out into the vacuum of space, even as a monster skewers it, yanking Her Spock out of the way of the sharp point. They are not safe; this is not *made* to keep them safe.

(Leonard doesn't know what the hell is going on but he knows if they survive even one more hour, it'll be a miracle. As their turbo-lift is torn from the relative safety of the Enterprise, he knows he and Spock are doomed.

She materialises, right as a horrible sharp point plunges into their only protection from the death outside. Leonard stares, unable to process, as the silver figure yanks Spock out of the way and points into the ship that just stabbed into them. 'Danger!' she yells. 'Monster!'

That's when the alien attacks.)

(The ship that almost impaled him has allowed a danger inside. Spock cannot focus on what saved him, on the figure that fights at his side as he battles the alien invader. He is the Commander, he is the superior, it is his duty to defend Doctor McCoy.

It is his duty to protect his friend. He is grateful for the figure's (~~the Enterprise's~~) aid in so doing.

Together, they overcome the attacker. The figure grabs Doctor McCoy and shoves him into the alien ship. 'Go now!' she snaps at them both, turning to Spock. 'This lift will not stay together!'

'What about you?' Doctor McCoy asks, staring at her. 'You...you're...'

The Enterprise. Spock knows this. It is illogical, thoroughly so, but he knows it all the same.

She only smiles and wraps them in a hug. 'Goodbye,' she says and disappears.)

On board the Enterprise, Her Jim gives the order to evacuate. She cannot warn him of the danger of the snatching monsters, for what other option is there? They will die if they remain on board and that, the Enterprise cannot allow.

As Her Scotty flees from a group of monsters, she materialises beside him, shoving him into the nearest safe space—which happens to be a photon torpedo casing. She releases it from her body, sending Her Scotty safely (*pleasepleasebesafeMyScotty*) away.

She materialises in her Engineering deck, as Her Nyota separates her saucer from her engine—in so doing, Her Nyota traps herself alone with the monster.

Her Nyota tries to remain strong and brave, despite her fear.

The Enterprise cannot take this burden for her. Nonetheless, she does what she can.

(Nyota knows this and only this. She is going to die. In separating the Enterprise's saucer from its engine, she has trapped herself alone with the lead invader. Worse, she has prevented him from getting what he came for—the artefact.

He will kill her, what else would he do?

Terror pounds through her, but she stands strong. She will not show him her fear.

That is when warmth fills the air and a hand slips into hers—a cool, soft hand that, when it touches her skin, floods her with a sense of such pride and overwhelming love that it almost brings Nyota to her knees with the weight of it. She catches sight of a figure—silver, more beautiful than anything Nyota's ever seen—beside her. It—*she*—turns her face to look at Nyota and smiles a sad, affectionate smile. 'Well done, my Nyota,' she whispers, before vanishing.

The hand stays in hers, even now the figure is gone. It gives Nyota the strength to stand taller, stronger, braver.)

Monsters make it onto her bridge. She materialises in front of Her Pavel and Her Hikaru, as the monsters fire, taking the blasts for them. Her body is falling apart all around her; her every system is failing. She is dying and she will not take Her Crew with her.

Behind her, Her Pavel gasps while Her Hikaru chokes.

(Pavel has never seen anything like it before. It's like an angel sent from heaven to defend them. Even when the Captain returns, it does not disappear. Together, the two fight their attackers until the bridge is once again secured.

‘Get to your Kelvin Pods!’ Captain Kirk orders, the silver figure at his side looking impossibly right.

Pavel stares as the figure turns and grabs his shoulder, propelling him towards an escape pod. He doesn’t know who or what it is, an angel, a ghost?

But he does know it is here to protect them. So he obeys—obeys it and, most of all, obeys his Captain.)

Her Hikaru insists on guiding the others of Her Crew into their pods before climbing into one himself. He looks right at her, as she helps him inside and there’s recognition in his eyes.

(It’s the Enterprise. Hikaru doesn’t know how or why, but that person is the Enterprise. Hikaru has spent too long piloting this ship, learning it, knowing it, to not recognise its touch—to not recognise its warmth.

Hikaru doesn’t know how or why the Enterprise has appeared. He does know this will be the last time.

He reaches out and grips her hand tightly. She squeezes back and, for a moment, he can see she’s crying. ‘Goodbye,’ she says. ‘My Hikaru. I could have no better helmsman.’

Hikaru’s tears are real as his pod snaps closed and he is hurled out into space.)

With Her Hikaru safe, the Enterprise pulls on Her Jim. He must flee, now. Her Pavel remains behind, waiting for him. They must live, she will accept no alternative.

Her Jim gives in, eyes lingering on her as he’s pressed in beside Her Pavel. ‘Enterprise,’ he breathes.

Her body is in full free-fall. She is pouring every last bit of her energy into her systems, trying to keep them going long enough for all of Her Crew that can be saved to escape. She smiles and gives both of Hers a gentle kiss on the cheek.

‘Goodbye, my Jim, my Pavel,’ she says.

And with that, they’re gone. She is emptied of Her Crew. They are all gone and finally, finally, she can let go.

For one moment, every part of her body holds together. Then she slams into a mountain range and

she

burns

Jim Kirk follows the Chief in charge of building the new Enterprise through the enormous bustling shipyard of Yorktown. As they go, the Chief talks, excitedly describing all the many new features this version of the Enterprise will have.

Jim only vaguely listens.

He’s eager to get back out there among the stars, with his crew at his side. While Altamid stole so much—*too* much—from them, it did one thing for him. It reminded him of why he loves his crew so much, why he loves his ship, why he loves his *job*.

It didn’t cure him. He still struggles with that creeping awful numbness, but he was able to finally admit that he needed help. Was finally able to *want* help. Was finally able to look at Bones and admit that maybe he was right.

Depression. That was the official diagnosis.

‘It’s not uncommon among Starfleet officers,’ the psychologist who diagnosed him said. ‘It happens, out there in the depth of space. It was especially likely to occur given your...predisposition towards mental health issues.’ Which was a kind way of saying “You’re already so freaking screwed up and mentally ill that this was basically guaranteed to happen”.

With a few alterations to his medication, with extra sessions from his therapist, he’s been able to slowly bring himself out of it, just enough he can go back out there again. He wants to, desperately.

Still.

It's not the same. As they approach the massive, newly-built Enterprise-A—a magnificent beauty of a ship—it's not the same. Not like it was.

Jim's thought often of what happened in those final hours of the Enterprise, over Altamid. Thought of that silver figure and her words. After discussion, he discovered that every surviving member of the Enterprise's crew saw the figure that day—pushing them into escape pods, taking blasts for them, comforting them, defending them. Even Spock saw it. And every one of them knew exactly who it was.

The Enterprise. Somehow, someway. It was the Enterprise.

Never one to leave a mystery unsolved, Jim set to work researching, learning, trying to understand if anyone could explain this. It was, ultimately, an elderly engineer in this very shipyard who held the answers he was looking for.

'Sounds like a Klabautermann,' she said, when he asked about the—hypothetical—scenario. 'It's an old sailor's tale. They believed that, if a ship was loved and cared for enough, it would manifest a soul named a Klabautermann.' She turned her wise old eyes on Jim, watching him closely. 'Back then, they were seen as bad luck.'

'Bad luck?' Jim could think of nothing more inaccurate. How could anyone look at that silver figure and see it as bad luck.

The old engineer nodded. 'A Klabautermann is only ever seen by the crew of a doomed ship, or so the story goes.'

A doomed ship.

Jim ached at the memory of that silver soul, popping into place here, there, and everywhere. She'd known she was dying, had known that her destruction was imminent, and had spent every last second saving the members of her crew that she could.

And now she was gone.

As Jim is shown around the bright, shiny interior of the Enterprise-A, he can not stop aching. This is not his Enterprise. He'd never really noticed it, the sense of presence the old Enterprise had. The sense of warmth and affection that imbued every inch of it. The Enterprise-A has none of it. It's new and clean and fresh, without any life to it at all.

He asks to be left alone on the bridge, for just a minute. His guide agrees readily, leaving him be.

Jim drops into the captain's chair, pressing his hands against the armrests.

The love and care of a crew is what brings a Klabautermann to life. Is it so outside the realm of possibility that, with the same crew (albeit some new additions to replace those they'd lost), they might be able to bring the same spirit to this new version of the Enterprise?

It seems like a fool's hope and, after all, he'll have no way of knowing for sure. A Klabautermann is only visible when a ship is about to be destroyed and Jim has no intention of destroying this new Enterprise.

Still. He closes his eyes.

'Please,' he breathes. 'Please be here. Please be alive.'

Silence. He draws in air, letting the silence stand.

Perhaps it's his imagination, just an auditory mirage born of wishful thinking, but for just a second, he swears someone is humming.

End Notes

I decided to write this about the AOS Enterprise rather than TOS because the AOS Enterprise has a shorter, clearer lifespan - with a solid beginning and end, which worked better for what I was trying to do.

You may decide whatever you'd like about what happens after this. It is entirely up to you.

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