

## it only takes two lonely people

Posted originally on the [Ad Astra :: Star Trek Fanfiction Archive](http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1776) at <http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1776>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Mature</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">No Archive Warnings Apply</a>
Category:	<a href="#">F/M</a> , <a href="#">Gen</a> , <a href="#">M/M</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">Star Trek: Alternate Original Series</a>
Relationship:	<a href="#">James T. Kirk (AOS)/Spock (AOS)</a> , <a href="#">James T. Kirk (AOS) &amp; Gaila (AOS)</a> , <a href="#">Leonard "Bones" McCoy (AOS)/Gaila (AOS)</a>
Character:	<a href="#">James T. Kirk (AOS)</a> , <a href="#">Leonard "Bones" McCoy (AOS)</a> , <a href="#">Gaila (AOS)</a> , <a href="#">Winona Kirk (AOS)</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Alternate Universe - Soulmates</a> , <a href="#">Friendship</a> , <a href="#">Wedding(s)</a> , <a href="#">Parent-Child Relationship(s)</a> , <a href="#">Recovery</a>
Language:	English
Series:	Part 4 of <a href="#">the ever-fixed mark</a>
Stats:	Published: 2024-09-07 Words: 10,745 Chapters: 1/2

## it only takes two lonely people

by [meriwethersays](#)

### Summary

Bones arrives the next morning while Jim and Sam are arguing over where the other beds should go—"I told you it was a stupid idea, having it here," Sam yells, and Jim yells back, "Okay, you were right, what the fuck do you want me to do about it now." Gaila is sitting out on the front porch drinking coffee, and when Bones shows up, she grabs him and pulls him down onto the porch next to her.

"*You have to save me,*" she hisses. "You missed the first *three days* of this, you traitor—"

---

Jim and Spock get married at the old Kirk house.

### Notes

Takes place roughly a year after [pedal to the metal of your heart](#). Pervasive but non-explicit references to Jim and Gaila's respective traumatic histories mentioned there.

Gaila has never seen an emptier home than the Kirk family house. Oh, it's been kept up—the porch doesn't sag, the windows are intact, the roof is in the right shape. But the windows feel *vacant* like the eye sockets of a skull, and inside, there are stasis fields covering all of the walls and the furniture. "When Frank died, it was just—preserved," Jim tells her. His steps are uneasy on the wooden floors, as though the house might swallow them down. "For the inevitable Kirk Museum, I guess, but no one got around to that."

She thinks it would be a very sad museum. There are no pictures on the walls, nothing to say that Jim ever lived here—let alone the storied Winona Kirk. "Why did you want to have the wedding here, then?"

He winces. "Don't call it that, for the love of god."

"You've been—committed to him for a year, Jim. It's a little late to change your mind."

"Ha." Jim takes a deep breath and switches off the stasis field. An overwhelming smell of tobacco cigarette smoke wafts from the walls, and she sees Jim pale a little. "I want everything about Frank out of it. Mom would kill me if I burned it down, so the only other option is to clean it out—and the only way I'll ever do it is if—"

"Three hundred people are going to arrive in a week?" Gaila suspects this isn't a standard part of her duties as a groomsman. "What do we do first?"

He passes her a spray can. "Cover the walls with it," he says. "Scotty made it for me. It'll bond with the cigarette smoke particles and pull them out of the wallpaper." He demonstrates with his own, and Gaila watches, fascinated, as a viscous grey liquid oozes out of the blue-and-white wallpaper, only to solidify and fall to the floor.

"How long is this going to take?" She's not going to point out that he could have paid people to do this. This is one of Jim's tender spots, one of the empty places that he curls around to keep safe, and it's a mark of how close they are that he would even let her inside it. "I'm guessing there are quite a few other things to do."

“Not more than a day,” Jim promises. “And I’m going to fix the environmental controls today, before we go to bed.”

Gaila had been starting to imagine that this warm wet air was going to be their constant companion. Starship air is dry, no matter how much humidity they try to pump into the biology labs, and she’s been sweating since the moment they beamed down. “That would be nice,” she admits. It’s triggering memories that she tries to keep buried, and no matter how much she works with counselors, she wants some things kept in the depths of her mind forever. They work in near-silence for almost an hour, going from room to room, which is very ominous. Jim is rarely silent. She finally asks, “What are you so worried about?”

He hesitates, then says, “You know, if I got the environmentals going, we could probably turn this into an aerosol and just spray it through the entire house in a single go.”

“Jim.” She follows him down to the basement, which is cool and damp instead. The environmental unit looks almost out of place in between crumbling boxes and a grimy square sink. “It’s me.”

He opens one of the tubes and carefully pours his container of solvent into it. Then he taps a few buttons, scowls, and taps a few more. There’s a hiss as the air begins to flow. “We should be fine down here,” he says. “No vents. We’ll let it settle up there and then keep going.”

“*Jim.* If you weren’t so distracted, you’d have thought of that first thing. Tell me.”

Jim rubs one hand over his face. It leaves a streak of grime. “I haven’t seen my mom in person since Frank’s funeral, while I was halfway through the Academy.” He sees her expression. “Yeah, you remember.” He’d been away from San Francisco for less than 36 hours and, as far as Gaila had been able to tell, had been drunk the entire time. “It—wasn’t the greatest encounter.”

“But you’re close with her,” Gaila says. “She must have forgiven you—you write to her, you talk over the communicator. And Frank was awful.”

“Yeah, but Sam and I never told her, you know that. And Sam had his shit together at the funeral.” Jim rolls his shoulders awkwardly. “We’ve been planetside at the same time, a couple times, and we never saw each other.”

“Well, you know I know absolutely nothing about Human family dynamics, but she’s probably looking forward to seeing you.” It sounds like the platitude that it is. She pats his back. “What are you worried will happen?”

“Oh, you know.” Jim’s voice is thick. “That she’ll be cold and tell me she never loved me and that I deserved whatever happened with Frank, probably in front of everyone. Something like that.”

“That seems unlikely,” Gaila says. “I can’t imagine she wouldn’t at least wait to do it until you’re in private.”

That startles a laugh out of him. “She grew up in this house, you know? She and my dad lived here—stayed here, when they weren’t out there.” He gestures up at the ceiling, probably to indicate the expanse of space. “And then he died and she married Frank and I don’t think she ever spent more than a single month at once in this house again. Maybe two.” He shrugs. “I don’t know why I’m doing this. She probably doesn’t even want to be here.”

She kisses his cheek, because she doesn’t have a good answer to that. “Come on, the air is probably clear upstairs. Or we’re about to inhale that solvent and end up with some strange lung diseases.”

Jim nods and picks up one of the boxes. They climb the narrow stairs up into the house, where the floor is now covered in grey lumps of solidified smoke. The walls are already brighter with all the smoke leached out. Jim sets the box atop the kitchen table, which is still covered by a stasis field, and opens it. Inside, it’s full of hologram frames, each gone dark. “We could hang pictures,” he says, and he seems a little lost. “Do you think she’ll want to see pictures?”

Gaila’s heart hurts for him. “Yes,” she says, even though she has no idea. “Make it look like a normal Human house.”

“Yeah. Sam and Aurelan will be here in a couple days,” Jim says. “He can tell me if it’s wrong.”

They go through the frames and switch on the holograms. Gaila’s breath catches at the first one—George and Winona Kirk, smiling with their heads tilted together. There’s a little blond boy clinging to George’s leg, and for the briefest second, Gaila thinks it’s Jim—but no, of course not, Jim’s life overlapped with his father’s for only a few minutes. Winona is pregnant, just enough to show, and it makes Gaila’s spine crawl to see. There are plenty of things that Gaila has learned to cope with, but her instinctive reaction to a pregnant woman isn’t one of them.

“Here,” Jim says, and exchanges it for another one.

“Sorry.”

He shakes his head. “I know it’s hard for you. Look at that—you think I looked like him?” This one is a standard one, a Starfleet graduation hologram. George Kirk in his formal uniform, his lieutenant junior grade badge at a slightly crooked angle. “I hated that picture, as a kid. Frank would put it away whenever my mom was gone and then put it back up if she was home. One of the only good things he did.”

Maybe they look alike superficially—certainly, the same genetics—but not more than that. George Kirk’s smile is open, untroubled, as though nothing truly bad has happened and he doesn’t really expect it to. He’s confident that the universe will be good to him. There’s none of the fierceness that she sees in Jim’s face, the shadow of anger and false bravado that’s always lurking there. Gaila investigates the cupboard and locates a bottle of whiskey. “Will this help?” she asks.

“Thank god.” Jim screws the top off and takes a long swig—Gaila watches his Adam’s apple bob as he swallows at least twice—before she plucks it from his fingers.

“Don’t get too drunk,” she warns. “You made it sound like there was a lot more to do here.” The whiskey, when she tastes it, is strangely stale.

“Come on,” he says, and beckons her toward the stairs. “I know the best place to drink in the whole house.” He leads them up to the third floor, a slope-ceilinged attic with windows at the front and back. “Sam and I slept up here when we were kids. When we got older, we used to come up here when Frank was really drunk, because he couldn’t get up the stairs very steadily—we used to come up here and lock the staircase door and then climb out the window.” He unlatches one of the windows, an old-fashioned glass one, and swings it open.

Gaila follows him out onto the sloping roof and settles herself next to him. Night hasn’t quite fallen, but she can see the glint of Venus in the open sky. “It must’ve been quite the adventure. Human children are a lot less durable than Orions,” she says. “Much clumsier too.”

Jim grins and snags the whiskey bottle back from her hand. “Yeah, I fell off once. Broke my arm and my leg in two places. Sam had to take me to the hospital.”

“How old were you?” Gaila rarely wishes that she were Human, but even knowing various Humans, sometimes it’s hard for her to tell when something should be particularly upsetting. The injuries he’s describing are relatively minor, easily dealt with. Painful, she supposes, but not an uncommon result of discipline, at least among Orion traders.

“Twelve,” Jim says. “It was just before Sam ran away for good. Frank was—” He stops. They’ve talked, both obliquely and explicitly, about Tarsus—about Kodos—and she thinks Frank was a little like the Kodos of Jim’s childhood, but she and Jim don’t push each other about things like this. Jim’s had enough whiskey to say, “Frank was pissed at Sam for doing it. Said it made him look bad.” He shrugs. “We never told my mom about it either way.”

“You thought she’d be angry?” The sky is darkening slowly, the air cooling just a little. Down below, there are tiny darting lights in the grass. She doesn’t blame Jim for staying with Frank, not when he still had other ties here, but there’s so much space on Earth, so many places to run to. If Gaila had been born here instead of a ship, she would’ve run away as soon as she could walk.

Jim’s shirt scrapes against the roof shingle as he shrugs. “What would’ve been the point? She couldn’t take us out there with her. If we’d’ve told her what he was like—either she’d have left him, and then she’d have had to stay dirtside and would blame us, or she’d have stayed with him and we would blame her.” He passes Gaila the whiskey and raises an eyebrow. Spock is wearing off on him. “You think we should have told her—everything, about what he was like?”

Gaila accepts the whiskey and considers. “No,” she says honestly. “I believe you about what would’ve happened.” And that it would have been intolerable to Jim to see his mother miserable, more intolerable than his own childhood with Frank must have been. “Are you going to tell her now?” She takes a long drink. It helps, she thinks, that this is all so entirely foreign to her. It’s easier to stay detached. Gaila had no mother, no father, no one but her sisters—certainly no childhood the way that Jim remembers his own.

“What would be the point? It would only make her feel bad now.” He takes the whiskey back and she sees the glint of the starry sky reflected in his eyes. “Do you think I should?”

“Bones would probably tell you that you should.” She jabs him with an elbow. “Did you ask Spock?”

Jim laughs a little. “He can feel it through the bond, all my—complex Human emotions about it. He sees the logic in giving her all of the information. Do you?”

“You know I have no idea,” Gaila says. “It’s not going to change anything that happened.” He wants to tell his mother, though—she can hear it in his voice. “You want to tell her and you want her to be sorry and to tell you that, and you want all of that to magically turn Frank into the loving stepfather that your mom thought he was. It won’t.”

They don’t sweeten painful truths for each other. “I know that.” There’s some kind of bug chirping out there, almost raucous. “Every time I talked to her, I thought it was going to be the last,” he says very quietly. “She disappeared for two years after Tarsus—*two years*. And then called me up like it was nothing and got mad at me for having a black eye that Frank had given me the night before.”

They stare up at the sky for a little while, passing the whiskey back and forth. “Are you all right?” she asks, finally.

“Can’t drink like I used to.” Jim starts to rise onto his knees. “Don’t let me fall off the roof, okay?”

“Kirk.”

“Gaila.” He scrunches his face into a frown. “Not fair, you still don’t have a last name.”

“I’ve had enough surnames,” she reminds him. He’d thought it was funny, when they first met, to try to get her to tell him them—before she made it clear what it meant for an Orion slave to have a surname. “I don’t want one, even if I choose it myself.” Her first counselor had suggested that it might help, when Gaila was first sent to Starfleet’s trauma treatment program after—escaping. Choosing a surname for herself. But it would only be one in a series, and the only constant she has is *Gaila*, unchanging from buyer to buyer, and she refuses to assign another one to herself.

“Sorry, I know.” He’s instantly contrite, and in fairness, she knows that he hates it when she calls him Kirk. That’s why she only does it when he’s bullshitting her. “I have no idea.” She helps him back through the open window and closes it behind her. The blast of cold air in the house stuns her. “I’m—look, you know how I feel about Spock, he knows how I feel about him. This place just has—a lot of bad memories, and I wanted to have a celebration and come *home* to it, but it doesn’t feel like home. If it ever did.”

“Enterprise is home.” She startles herself by saying it, but there’s nowhere else she ever would have called home. “This place doesn’t have to feel like home, Jim. It can be just another place, just a place where you’re having a celebration.”

“No,” he says, and in the dim light, his smile is sad. “No, it can’t.”

\* \* \* \* \*

In the daylight, Jim and Gaila take a pair of riding mowers out into the pastures by the house and chase each other around, pushing the ancient antigrav systems almost beyond their limits, before settling down and cutting the overgrown pasture evenly. “We’re going to set up chairs out here,” Jim shouts over the sound of the engines. “Or tables, maybe.” He jerks his head at the old barn. “Store it in there until we’re ready.”

“Jim, has anyone *planned* this wedding?” Because under no circumstances is she doing anything more than physical labor for this celebration of Jim and Spock’s everlasting love. And emotional support. A lot of emotional support.

“I mean, what’s to plan,” Jim says, as they pull the mowers back into the nearby shed. “Food, drink, general carousing.” He brushes bits of grass off the back of his neck, and she recognizes that nervous gesture, the way his fingers go to his mark. He’s wearing a floppy wide-brimmed hat, but his face is already turning red from the sun. “I’m kidding, Gaila. There are blueprints, meticulous designs, all kinds of stuff. Preprogrammed replicators. All we have to do is make the place fit for Human—and nonhuman—presence.”

Gaila considers. Last night they’d just fallen into the beds in the attic and slept there. “How many people are staying at the house?”

“Me and Spock, obviously—you, Bones, my mom, Sarek.” Something passes over Jim’s face. “Sam said he wasn’t sleeping under that roof ever again. He and Aurelan are staying nearby.”

“I’m surprised Sarek is willing to sleep in a Human house.”

Jim laughs. “T’Pau certainly couldn’t decline fast enough.” Then he frowns. “Do you think the house is going to be too empty? I could invite more of the crew—”

Gaila is already somewhere near hysteria at the idea of sitting at the breakfast table with Captain Winona Kirk, Ambassador Sarek, and Bones. “There’s certainly no uncomfortable situation that can’t be made worse by adding Scotty.”

“Hey!” Jim barely holds back the laugh. “Look, it won’t be terrible, I promise.” He appears to be fumbling for something more to say to reassure her. “There’ll be a lot of alcohol,” as though that doesn’t increase the chance of disaster. She stares at him. “It’s only a few nights all together. You love me, remember?”

“This is the one big favor for the rest of your life,” Gaila tells him. “Jim, it’s the start of a bad joke. A widow, a widower, a divorcé and an Orion slave girl sit down to breakfast together...” She stops then, because she can see the deep panic bubbling up in him. “...and they all have a pleasant and relaxing meal.”

“Yeah,” he says. “Yeah, I think I’ve heard that joke before. But keep your hands off Bones, he’ll be emotionally vulnerable.”

“Ugh. Maybe you should make some friends who aren’t so fucked up.” It was *once*, and she and Bones had woken up the next morning, looked at each other, and said, hmm, maybe some other time.

“I was going to give you the attic,” Jim says. “You’ll be able to escape if worst comes to worst.” He puts an arm around her shoulder. Jim has always been tactile, and he never willfully misinterprets an affectionate touch as something more. She appreciates that about him.

“All right, all right.” Gaila ducks out from under his arm. “It’s too hot out here, come on. Bones is going to have to spend an hour with the dermal regenerator on you if you don’t want to be bright red for your wedding.” This time, he doesn’t object to the word.

They drag beds around, hang pictures and curtains. Jim keeps darting glances at the biggest bedroom, the one that his mother shared with Frank, and Gaila says, “I can do that one, if you want.”

Jim’s mouth is tight, but he shakes his head. “No. Just—give me a minute.” He touches the doorknob gingerly, between his thumb and two fingers, and swings the door open. Gaila stays outside and keeps her eyes politely averted until Jim says, “Gaila?” and his voice sounds bad.

“Hey.” She walks in, brushes her shoulder against his very gently so that he knows she’s here. His entire body is tense. “Jim.”

His fists are clenched. The room is almost empty, nothing but a big wooden bed and red-and-white checked curtains. “The funny thing is, most of the time he didn’t sleep in here, not unless my mom was home, and that was almost never. He would be too drunk to get up the stairs, so he mostly just passed out on the couch downstairs, or the porch once or twice.” Jim shakes his head. “I never even understood why he wanted to marry my mom. She was never around, and he hated me and Sam and he always let us know it.”

“He’s dead,” Gaila says. She finds it comforting to think about all the people she’s hated who are dead now.

“Yeah.” Jim unclenches his fists. She can see the crescent imprints where he’s dug his fingernails into the meat of his palm. “You think it would be bad if I put Sarek in here instead?”

Gaila looks around the room and tries to envision Sarek sleeping here. Then she tries to envision Jim’s emotional state if his mom slept in the room. “That would be polite,” she tells him. “It’s the biggest room in the house. We can change the decoration a little to make it more Vulcan-friendly.”

“Right,” Jim says. “Being a good host.” By the time they’re done, you’d never know a Human had ever slept in this room.

They find another room for Winona Kirk, at the back of the house, with a full-sized bed that occupies most of the floor space and a carved wooden dresser tucked into a corner. Jim carries in an antique holo-frame and hangs it almost reverently on the wall above the bed. Gaila can guess about its occupants, but she lets Jim tell her anyway. “The little girl, that’s my mom, obviously, and then that’s her mom and—she used to call them the grandmothers, because it was too complicated to list off all the ‘greats’ individually.” There are four of them, increasingly old, staring down the holo lens, and the family resemblance is unmistakable. “My great-great-great-grandma, she’s over 100 in that picture. She’d

lived almost half her life before the Federation even existed.”

Winona must have loved them very much, Gaila thinks. There’s the same kind of fierceness in each of their faces, a defiance that calls to Gaila. She sees Jim in their eyes. “I can’t imagine.”

“Yeah, well.” Jim steps back abruptly. “I never knew any of them.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Sam Kirk and his wife, Aurelan, are the first of the family to arrive. Sam is tall, almost lanky, with a mustache that Jim immediately mocks. “Hey, Sam, there’s something on your face,” he says. Sam rolls his eyes. “He’s been growing that mustache since he was fifteen years old,” he tells Gaila.

“Yeah, it’s good to see you too.” Sam hugs Jim and there’s a tentativeness in the way they touch, an awkwardness, like they don’t quite remember how they fit together as brothers. Sam was at Frank’s funeral too, she knows, but she doesn’t think they’ve seen each other since then. “Look, don’t mention it to Mom, but we’ve got some news.”

Gaila sees the expression on his face, sees the way that he takes his wife’s hand, and abruptly leaves the room. She can hear the congratulatory tones through the closed door, and she’s happy for them—and Jim—in an abstract kind of way. But she was taught—she saw—for so many years, that once an Orion woman was pregnant, she had no hope of escape, no hope of anything but seeing the same thing happen to her daughters. It’s an instinctive kind of recoil that she’s learned, the way that others might recoil from a dead body. She waits until the tone of their voices changes, and then returns with a smile on her face. “Sorry about that,” she says, and no one presses her for information. Aurelan gives her a cautious friendly smile and says, “It’s nice to meet you, Gaila.”

She and Jim lie out on the roof again that night, this time drinking some kind of Denevan liquor that Sam brought with him. It’s syrupier than the whiskey they’ve been drinking, strangely bitter. “He’s nearly older than my dad was when he died,” Jim says. “Can you imagine that? Sam and me, we’re basically still kids and he’s nearly older than my dad, and soon I will be too.” The air is heavy tonight, clouds covering the sky, and there’s a hum of energy out there. He laughs. “And soon he’ll have—sorry about—I didn’t know.”

“It’s not your fault,” Gaila tells him. “I’ll get used to it with her, the same way I did with the others. I’m just—not good at finding out.”

“I know.” He elbows her gently. “Maybe we’ll get a thunderstorm tonight. The weather’s right for it.”

“I thought they didn’t have those here anymore.” Extreme weather on other worlds is one thing, but here, in the heart of the Federation, Gaila expects it to be safer.

“Nah, if it starts to turn into a tornado, the local authorities will trigger the environmental countermeasures, no harm, no foul. But unless it gets dangerous, no one likes to mess with the weather much. They’re not about to terraform Iowa.” She can hear the laugh in his voice.

“How did Sam feel about the Vulcanization we did?” It drives Scotty crazy when she refers to making things Vulcan-like as Vulcanization, so she does it whenever possible, even when he’s not there.

“He thought it was a little crazy, but he didn’t tell me to put it back. I think he came here assuming I’d be a little nuts about it all.”

“To be fair,” Gaila says, “you’re a little nuts about everything.”

He flashes a smile at her.

\* \* \* \* \*

Bones arrives the next morning while Jim and Sam are arguing over where the other beds should go—“I told you it was a stupid idea, having it here,” Sam yells, and Jim yells back, “Okay, you were right, what the fuck do you want me to do about it now.” Gaila is sitting out on the front porch drinking coffee, and when Bones shows up, she grabs him and pulls him down onto the porch next to her.

“*You have to save me,*” she hisses. “You missed the first *three days* of this, you traitor—”

Bones grimaces. “I told you both, it was an important medical conference, I couldn’t get out of it. Besides, I’m not exactly a wedding planner—” He stops when he sees Gaila’s glare. “But I can patch them back up when they’re done fighting?”

“Did he tell you who’s staying at the house with us?” Gaila smiles with all her teeth. “Sam and Aurelan were smart enough to find somewhere else to stay.”

He blanches. “I assumed Jim and Spock—”

“*And the parents.*” She’s enjoying being a little melodramatic about this, because Bones is an excellent partner in melodrama.

Bones doesn’t disappoint. “Winona and the Ambassador?” She wonders which one he’s more unhappy about. “Just them and us and the—lovebirds?”

“Jim says we can be drunk for at least seventy-five percent of the meals.” That’s sort of what he’d said, anyway.

“Speaking of—” Bones pulls out his ever-present flask and takes a swig, then offers it to Gaila. She holds out her coffee for him to doctor instead. “How much longer do we have?”

“Bachelor party tonight,” she says. “I did some reading on the ship.”

“You’d think Jim’s time at the Academy would be enough of a bachelor party for a couple lifetimes. No offense,” he grunts.

It hadn’t occurred to her to take offense. “Riverside doesn’t have many options. I figured we’d just drink at a bar in town instead of drinking at the house.”

“Neither of them are even bachelors,” Bones grumbles. “No one’s making *Spock* have a bachelor party.”

“It could be worse. He could be Klingon. We could be having a *kal’Hyah* instead.” Bones raises his eyebrow. “It’s their version of a pre-wedding male bonding event. But it’s Klingon, so it’s all about six trials—deprivation, blood, pain, sacrifice, anguish, and death.” Klingons liked to hire Orions to satisfy their appetites, after the deprivation of the *kal’Hyah*. “*Four days* of fasting, too.”

“Sounds like my marriage.” There’s always that note of pain in Bones’s voice when he talks about it. “Except the fasting.”

“I understand that naked women are often part of the rituals, but since both Jim and Sam have devoted themselves to monogamy, it’s a little late for them.” Not for her and Bones, though. She doesn’t know if Bones dreams of finding that for himself, again. She feels like she can’t breathe whenever she thinks about it for herself.

There’s more yelling inside, followed by a loud crash. Bones raises an eyebrow. “Has it been like that this whole time?”

Gaila considers what to say. Bones is the only other person—or was, until Spock—who knows something about what Frank was like and something about Tarsus. “Being here is bringing up a lot of bad memories. You know.” He’s not quite like the two of them, but Bones knows something about the pain that lurks in the back of a person’s mind. “We turned his mom and Frank’s room into a Vulcan guest room for Sarek. That’s about how it’s been.”

“Lord help us all,” Bones says, just in time for Jim to bound out onto the front porch.

“Are those the dulcet tones of Doctor Leonard McCoy?” He yanks Bones up and pulls him into a hug. His energy is a little manic, but aside from some mussed hair, it doesn’t look like he and Sam actually got into any kind of fight.

“Get off, you’re filthy,” Bones says, but he doesn’t release Jim until Jim actually steps back. “Sounds like you’ve got it all under control in there, Jim.”

“I think Sam’s about to kill me,” Jim admits. “I broke a holo frame by throwing it at him.”

“Dare I ask—no.” Bones hefts his bag, a battered-looking thing that’s definitely not Starfleet-issue. “Where am I posting up, Jim? And don’t tell me it’s across the hall from the Ambassador or your mother.”

“Don’t worry, you’re at the back of the house, second floor,” Jim says, as though that’s going to mean anything to Bones. “I’m gonna—take a breather out here. Gaila, mind showing him?”

What an unexpectedly healthy choice. “C’mon, Bones.”

Bones whistles as they climb the stairs. “You’d never know it was shut up the last few years.”

Gaila looks at the polished wooden floors, the light pouring in from the windows. “We did a lot of cleaning,” she says. “Even stasis fields couldn’t keep it all up.” When she reaches his room, she can’t help saying, “Oh, shit.”

“Don’t you tell me—” The room is, indeed, across the hall from the room they’ve chosen for Winona Kirk. “I know that look.”

“I doubt she’ll be bringing anyone back with her after the party.” Gaila gives him a wicked grin. “Just keep quiet and maybe she won’t notice you.”

Bones looks somewhere between outraged and horrified. “Forget that, you think I want to risk running into Captain Winona Kirk in my pajamas when I go to brush my teeth in the morning?”

“Do you think she wears Starfleet pajamas like Jim does?” The thought is unaccountably funny to Gaila. “Do *you* wear those pajamas?”

“You know what I wear to bed,” Bones says, and there’s the littlest hint of heat in his words. His tone changes entirely, though, when he adds, “If I’m across the hall from her, it’ll be an entire goddamn dress uniform.” He frowns at Gaila. “Where’re you sleeping? Why don’t you take this room, and I’ll take that one?”

She snorts. “I was here first, Bones. Jim gave me the attic.” Gaila nods toward the little door next to his bedroom. “Stop whining, leave your stuff and let’s get back downstairs before they kill each other.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Bones spends the afternoon cooking a big pot of beans, with a couple hunks of pig meat—pork—tossed in, and every time Gaila or Jim checks on him, he’s adding another healthy dose of whiskey to it. He serves up bowls to each of them alongside freshly-replicated bread rolls, and says, “The famous McCoy family baked beans are well-known preparation for a long night out.”

Gaila reflexively starts to scoop the beans out of the bowl with her hand, catches herself and does it with a roll instead, even though she’s probably supposed to use the silverware that Bones has scavenged out of the kitchen drawers and set at the table for each of them. For all she’s been trained in table manners, there’s something primal in her, something that goes as far back as she can remember, that tells her to get food like this into her stomach as quickly as she can. Hands can get more food much faster than a fork or a spoon. It’s one of the differences between her and Jim, she knows. Gaila’s early hunger came from competition with the other children; Jim’s was due to simple scarcity. So she eats fast to get it all and he eats slow to make it last; she takes as much as she can, and he doles out exactly even portions. Not that they do that

anymore, of course, because they're healthy adults who've dealt with their youthful trauma.

Ha.

Between the four of them—Aurelan has spent most of the time at her and Sam's hotel, she's working on a dissertation and undoubtedly finds the Kirk house a distracting place—they put away all the beans and a heap of bread, enough that McCoy has to program another bowl of rolls into the replicator. These are just as hot as the last, hot enough that they scorch Gaila's fingers a little, but she breaks them open anyway and uses them to wipe out her own bowl. She and Jim are both darting glances at the cookpot. "There's plenty," she tells Jim, as much as herself. "There's enough for everyone to eat." It's easier when the food comes from a replicator, when there's no question of what might be wasted in the pot and who might eat it.

"I'll make another damn batch for dinner tomorrow, if everyone's so eager for them," Bones says, but Sam just goes over to the stove and gets the nearly-empty pot and brings it back to the table. He tears up a couple rolls and tosses them in, then offers up the pot. Gaila meets his eyes across the table and she remembers, Sam was there after Tarsus. Sam isn't some half-stranger, some Academy buddy. He knows the shape and weight of Jim's burdens.

When the pot is well and truly empty, as empty as it can get without one of them sticking their head in it and licking it out, Gaila says, "Is everyone ready for tonight's festivities? I've identified a list of drinking establishments, out of Riverside's—limited selection."

Jim hesitates. "I know you hate when I ask this," he says, and then, obnoxiously, doesn't ask it, as though she doesn't know what he's about to say.

"There aren't a lot of Orions walking around this town," Bones says. *You might as well walk around wearing a sign that says 'She wants it,'* neither of them says.

"You don't think everyone will ignore me once I show them that I've been neutered?" Gaila flashes the sunlight off her Starfleet pin into Jim's eyes.

"*Gaila,*" Jim says, as Sam looks horrified.

"I know, I know, that's not the technical term for when they take out the pheromone glands." It's still marked on her badge, like a pet animal that's been fixed. Starfleet doesn't *require* the procedure for an Orion woman to join, technically, but the unspoken assumption is that any Orion woman who hasn't had it done will only ever rise through the ranks by seducing men. "Scotty gave me an image generator." She shows off the old-fashioned chronometer on her wrist, then taps the button on the device and the air ripples in front of her. "It'll make me look human unless someone is right up close to me."

Jim and Bones exchange glances, and Gaila is familiar enough with both of them to know what those looks mean—it's the *fuck it, someone's probably getting arrested tonight* look. "Unless you think we should stay in because men won't be able to control themselves around me."

"Not at all," Jim says. "Not at all." Sam looks a little terrified. Gaila doesn't blame him.

The first bar they go to is named, uncreatively, the Yard, and it's mostly full of shipyard workers drinking beers. It's dim, with a chalkboard drinks list instead of a holographic one, and when Jim goes to order, the bartender says, "Hey, Jimmy! Been awhile since you showed up for a shift."

"That's *Captain* Jimmy to you," Jim says, but he's beaming as the bartender passes a tray of shots to him.

"He's getting married in a few days," Gaila announces. The only thing the image generator changes is the color of her skin, which doesn't really reduce the number of men examining the amount of cleavage revealed by her shirt. Fuck them, she'll do what she wants. "To his soulmate." Jim offers them the tray of shots and she plucks one off the tray.

"To soulmates!" Sam cries aloud, and they all down their shots. She admires his attempt to fit in with the particular strange energy that she and Jim and Bones have between them.

"Here," the bartender says, and takes out a bottle of blue with the distinctive pearly sheen of Romulan ale. "On the house—just the first one!" He refills the shot glasses.

"To hobgoblins!" Bones shouts, and Gaila throws back her shot with the rest of them. It sends a warm rush through her entire body.

This time, when Jim attempts to order drinks for all of them, the bartender pours gently smoking cocktails and the four of them find their way to a table near the back of the bar—near a back door, Gaila notes, because Jim is always good at having an exit strategy. They sprawl into the wooden chairs, which have low rounded backs and turn from side to side, and Sam says, "Remember the first time we snuck in here?"

"The bartender made us the weakest drinks I've ever tasted and had us drink them at the bar, because we were George Kirk's boys." Jim gazes at the bar top. "You were what, fifteen?"

Sam laughs. "There was no alcohol in those drinks, Jim." He knocks his own glass gently against Jim's, and Gaila wonders if it bothers Sam, that Jim wasn't there for his wedding. Gaila has dozens of sisters, but siblings like this are—more complicated. "He just didn't want us running around causing trouble."

She sees Jim's throat work, as though he's about to say something that he knows will cause trouble, and so she lifts her glass in a toast. "To bartenders!"

By the time they get to the third bar, Sam and Jim are both struggling. She's unsurprised by Sam, but Jim—well, he doesn't carouse a lot anymore, certainly not as much as in her memory of their Academy years. Her metabolism is stronger, and she thinks Bones' bloodstream is

half whiskey at this point, but the two Humans are looking like the next few drinks might tip the night from enjoyable to nauseating, and Gaila doesn't want that. "We can go back," she offers, even though she doesn't want to, she wants to drink more and go somewhere that she can dance and find someone who will appreciate her green skin without turning it into something aggressive. "No shame in it." Bones cuts a glance at her that says he knows very well she doesn't want to go home.

"I gotta get back," Sam mumbles. "Sorry, Jimmy—too much for me."

Jim claps him on the back with an expansive motion. "Don't worry about it, old man." He's already punching in a taxi request on the bar's comm system. "Get home to Aurelan." But when Sam is gone, he turns to Gaila and Bones with something dangerous in his eyes and says, "I'm not calling it quits."

"Okay," Gaila agrees, because she may be more sober than he is but she's not *sober*, she's not gonna try to persuade him to be sensible. This week, she thinks, it's the last regression of James Tiberius Kirk, the time that he indulges in the worst feelings he has and tries to confront them, and she knows Spock worries but she appreciates his trust that she and Bones will keep Jim in one piece. "More shots?"

She thinks it's the fourth bar where they end up outside, lying in the grass, a little bit sprawled across each other. There's a hand across her face and she bites it lightly to find out who it belongs to. The outraged noise says Bones, as does the fact that he yanks his hand away. Jim would've laughed and left it. "Can you believe," she asks, and she's laughing, "that sometimes the fate of galaxy is in our hands?"

"Oh, no, no, no," Bones protests. "All I do is fix people, and all you do is fix computers. Sometimes the fate of the galaxy is in *Jim's* hands—"

"What a dire thought," Jim says, and all three of them laugh. Gaila doesn't mind the humid air like this, even when it's too hot to be tangled up together. It's friendly, somehow, gentle, and "Gaila, are you actually thinking that the air is friendly?"

When she flails a hand in the direction of Jim's critical voice, it's Bones who yelps. Whoops. She finds Jim instead and pokes him. "I can anthro—anthroporphorm? Fuck."

"Anthropomorphize," Bones supplies. He's not drunk enough if he can say five-syllable words right now.

"—anthropomorphize the weather if I want, Jim!" The sky is a little cloudy, but the clouds keep moving, and occasionally moonlight splashes out across their faces. "We could just sleep here," she says. "It's warm enough."

"For chrissakes," Bones says, "don't make me be the voice of reason here."

"Yeah, old man, don't be the voice of reason." Jim tries to nudge Bones and gets Gaila's stomach instead. When she laughs, he tickles her a little and she whoops and flails.

"When I was a kid," she says, and she's just drunk enough that it doesn't hurt, "I never would've imagined being here."

There's the obvious joke—*what, between two men?*—but instead Jim says, "I never would've imagined being back in Riverside getting married to a Vulcan," and they all crack up.

"Sure never imagined I would go into space." Gaila feels the vibration in Bones' chest as he speaks. "If not for the divorce, I never would have."

"What a weird fucking universe," Gaila says.

\* \* \* \* \*

They're sitting around the kitchen table, staring blearily into coffee mugs while Bones tries to coax the replicator into producing waffles, when Winona Kirk walks in. "Mom!" Jim exclaims, and promptly knocks over his coffee. "You're here already!"

All Gaila can think is that Winona Kirk is too much for this house. Was it always like this, even when she was a child? Did these narrow hallways open a little wider for her, the lights flicker as she passed? Winona Kirk's presence fills the small kitchen, with an edge of danger like a warp core on perpetual overload. Gaila squints reflexively, and then realizes that's silly. She's a Human woman, slight—shorter than Gaila—with corded muscles and short ash-blond hair, and she walks with such *intention* that Gaila can't imagine standing in her path. She isn't even in her captain's uniform and she looks like an admiral. There's something a little familiar about her, about her face and the way she carries herself, that Gaila can't quite place.

"Jim," she says, and suddenly she's a little more ordinary and Gaila can breathe. "It's good to see you."

"Mom." Jim walks to her and they hug so stiffly that Gaila winces in sympathy. He releases her quickly and gestures at the kitchen table. "Sit down—do you want anything? Some water? Something else?"

"Coffee," Winona says, and she takes a seat at the table across from Gaila. Gaila fights the urge to run away.

"When did you get in?" There's comfort in platitudes, in meaningless bits of conversation, because what does it matter when Captain Winona Kirk docked? There's a heaviness—a ghost—between Jim and his mother, and Gaila would flee if Jim wouldn't hate her for it.

"The Curie got into Jupiter Station a few hours ago, then brought me to Earth orbit so I could beam down." Winona accepts the cup of coffee from Jim—he's added sugar, no milk, and Gaila thinks that's how she must have taken it when he was a boy—and turns her gaze on Gaila. "Lieutenant Gaila?"

Gaila is suddenly sitting at attention, which she didn't even realize was possible. "Yes, Captain. It's an honor to meet you."

"You can call me Winona," she says. There's nothing in her eyes of the suspicion that new people tend to have when they meet Gaila, nothing



of the concern that a mother might have over her son's Orion friend. "It's only Captain when I'm on Starfleet property."

Gaila nods. It's hard to know what to say to this woman, who looms so large in Jim's life—larger, she thinks, than his dead father. "You beat the ambassador here," is all she can think of.

Winona laughs. "Yeah, that was my goal. I figured we'd get all the introductions and re-introductions and messy feelings out of the way before more Vulcans showed up. Is your brother around?" She directs the last question toward Jim, who's now helping Bones fiddle with the replicator.

"Sam's not staying at the house." There's the tension in Jim's voice, the undercurrent of pain and disappointment that the whole room is charged with. "He and Aurelan got a hotel."

Winona is silent for a moment, which means that Gaila can't help jumping in to say, "Jim's been working really hard getting the house ready for everyone." She winces after she's said it, because maybe Jim didn't want his mom to know that.

"It looks good," Winona says carefully. "Like the old days."

Jim breaks whatever he's fiddling with and Gaila can almost hear him swallowing back a curse. "We thought it'd be better to give the ambassador the—biggest room," he says. He still won't turn around.

"Makes sense."

Gaila wants to yell at Winona to be more—enthusiastic? Loving? Whatever Human mothers are supposed to be, when they see their sons for the first time in years. It's not as though they haven't talked in all this time, but now the air is heavy with everything that Jim can't say, or won't. She can't imagine spending another four days like this. "Jim found a bunch of old pictures in a box in the basement," she prompts. "After we pumped an aerosol through the house to pull all the tobacco smoke out of the walls." Winona gives her a sharp look, but Gaila is braced for it now. "Jim told me it's going to be the Kirk Family Museum someday."

"Not because we asked," Jim hurries to add, and turns around. "I just meant—there's a lot of Kirk-worship around here. Not that there should be." Gaila sees the darkness in his face. Frank used to scream that at him and Sam, she knows. *Fucking worthless, never did anything yourselves and everyone treats you like you deserve it, I know the truth about you.*

Winona smiles shortly. "You know it was my mother's house, before a Kirk ever lived here?" Gaila has never been one to recognize energies, but even so, Winona's is strange, far more controlled than an ordinary Human's.

"Jim showed me one of the photos," Gaila says, when Jim doesn't answer. "Of you, and your mother, and your grandmothers. We hung it in your room."

The smile Winona gives her is a little more real. "That'll make it feel like home." Every word is dangerous, Gaila thinks. "They would've gotten such a kick out of this."

"What, holding a Human-Vulcan wedding at the ancestral house?" Jim sits gingerly back in his seat, as though he's ready to leap up at the slightest hint.

"Finally!" Bones sets a platter of waffles in front of them alongside a pitcher of syrup. "It took some doing, but there's breakfast for you."

"I suppose we'll keep you, then." Gaila flashes a very particular kind of smile at Bones and then remembers Winona at the table.

She doesn't know how it happens, the wandering course of conversation during breakfast, until Bones comments, "Jim's very committed to never leaving a crewman behind."

"That's the Starfleet way," Winona agrees, and there's something a little funny to the way that she says it, as though she's outside of Starfleet looking in.

"It's so strange." When Winona raises an eyebrow, Gaila adds, "The Starfleet training—fortify your position, dig in, wait for rescue."

"Gaila and Jim don't believe in waiting for rescue," Bones says. He takes the pitcher of coffee and refills all four cups, unbidden. Gaila wishes he would slip a little whiskey into hers. "Causes no end of trouble sometimes."

"You don't trust your crew to rescue you?"

Gaila waits for Jim to answer—he's the one Winona wants to hear from, he's her son—and then realizes that Jim is hoping she'll answer instead, because she knows that Jim is like her. They both know, deep down, that no one is coming to rescue them. "It's not about that," Gaila says. "When I—grew up—we knew, the only way to safety is to get yourself up—up and away. Not standing still. Not waiting for a rescue that never comes." She and her sisters knew the truth.

"I always come to the rescue," Jim says, and Gaila kicks his ankle under the table, gently. There's too much coming to the surface here, too many things too quickly. Is he going to come right out and say it, that he knows no one else will rescue him because no one ever did? "You know, Spock got me into trouble for reporting it when I came back to rescue him?"

Winona's mouth curves into another smile. "Guess that taught you a lesson."

Jim stiffens. Gaila knows it's another bad phrase. Frank used to shout *I'll teach you a lesson* when Jim got in his way as a kid, and then sometimes he did. How did Winona never see it, Gaila wonders. "Yeah," he says, and the atmosphere in the kitchen shifts again, back to the earlier tension. Bones catches Gaila's eye and at least she has that, the comfort of knowing that someone else is just as uncomfortable as she is right now. "But I'm marrying him anyway, so that probably says something about me."

Gaila's heart hurts for him. Later, they sit out on the roof and Gaila says, "She's the one who should feel uncomfortable."

"I wish." Jim pillows his head on his arms. They're tucked in close to the gable of the house so that Jim can huddle in the shade. "I can't help looking for some secret meaning in everything she says, you know?"

"Well," Gaila says, "Soon your future father-in-law will be here to complete the nightmares—Jim, when is *Spock* coming?" Jim, never too miserable for an innuendo, waggles his eyebrows, and she pokes him in the side with her bare toes. "You know what I mean."

"Morning of the wedding," Jim says. "He has some idea about it being important in human culture that the partners not see each other before the wedding day." There's something sweet and dopey about Jim's face when he talks about Spock like this, outside the context of life-or-death missions.

"I thought that in Human culture it was traditional to engage in a bout of energetic sex before the wedding ceremony," Gaila says. When Jim squints at her, she smiles. "Or I've been reading too many holo-novels."

\* \* \* \* \*

They spend the day on last-minute tasks, making sure that everything is in place, that the pattern enhancers are correctly spaced for everyone who'll be transporting down, that the energy relays for the preprogrammed replicators are secure. Winona takes over examining the energy relays, pointing out that she was a chief of engineering before she was a captain, and Gaila yields because how could she not? Tonight Sarek arrives and tomorrow is the wedding and Jim is growing increasingly manic. Gaila and Bones trade off trying to keep him tethered, and Gaila wishes passionately that Spock was there to anchor Jim to reality. She and Bones—especially she—do their best, but Spock is the solid one, the one who knows how Jim is feeling without having to read his face or his body language.

That evening, they all sit out in the shadow of the house and drink too much, gulping down glasses of cold lemonade laced with whiskey and trying to ignore the awkwardness lapping at the edges. Winona is the one to stand straight and greet Sarek when he beams down, the one to guide him to his room, and Jim blushes and stumbles over his greeting and then says, "He's never gonna let me marry Spock now," when Winona and Sarek are both out of earshot.

Even when they wander off to their respective bedrooms, there's an undercurrent of tension, something unsteady in the air. Gaila is a little drunk, which is the only excuse she can come up with for the fact that, on her way from the attic to the bathroom, she decides to confront Winona and say "Frank was a piece of shit and Jim suffered through it without ever telling you because he didn't want you to be upset." Damn it, she wishes the attic had a bathroom up there.

Winona looks abruptly weary, like every one of her fifty years is weighing on her. "I like you, Gaila," she says, "and I think you're a good friend to Jim, and I think you'll understand this so I'm going to tell it to you." Her shoulders sag a little. "I always thought George was going to be the one to stay planetside, once Jim was born. Become a recruiter, teach, work in admin, something. And then he was dead, and I had two babies and I had—and all I wanted was to be back out there." She rubs at her temples. "You think I didn't see it because I didn't want to."

"Am I wrong?"

"Hell if I know," Winona says. "I was practically a kid when I married George, I was practically a kid when he died. I didn't—find out about Tarsus until it was over." There are strange pauses, like missing sentences, between Winona's words.

"And then Starfleet was offering you your own ship." There's something cold and mean in Gaila, something that doesn't want to understand a single word of what Winona is saying because it hurt Jim.

Winona says, "Yes," too easily, and Gaila knows something is off here, knows that she's missing something, but she can't tell what it is. "I know I fucked up, not seeing it. I told myself Frank loved the kids—he did such a good job pretending when I was home." She shakes her head. "I don't even know if I didn't see it because I really didn't or because I didn't want to."

"You didn't have to have them if you didn't want them," Gaila says, and she's tiptoeing too close to her own heart when she says it. "You didn't have to—tie yourself to Earth like that."

Winona's face is too understanding now. "I know," she says, and Gaila doesn't even know if she means that she knows why Gaila is so upset by it or she knows that she didn't have to have Sam and Jim. "Look," she starts, and then falters. "I made—commitments. George was my soulmate, and I loved him, and he really wanted kids and I—" She stops. "After he died, if I'd been allowed to bring them along when I went out there, I would've done it in a heartbeat." There's a strange false note somewhere in her words, but Gaila can't tell what it is. Winona squints at Gaila in the dim light of the hallway. "Some people think this soulmate stuff is bullshit, you know."

"Yeah," Gaila says. "Some people."

"I'm glad it worked out for my kids—they're with people they love, with people who make them happy, people whose life goals line up with theirs. But not everyone gets that." Winona laughs. "You know the Vulcans call them bond-success predictor marks?"

"Yes."

"It's *hak'tyl* in Orion, isn't it? Not quite the same thing."

Gaila flinches. "Maybe a thousand years ago. I don't know a single Orion woman who has a mark that someone else didn't brand there. It's just another thing to be manipulated, to be controlled," she says. "You know that, or you wouldn't be telling me about how your soulmate wasn't really right for you."

"I didn't say that," Winona says, even though that's exactly what she's been saying, underneath everything.

"I'm not going to tell Jim. I only blame you for the pain that what you did caused Jim," she clarifies. "Not the rest of it."

"I've been gone for most of his life," Winona says slowly. "You think he'll ever forgive me?"

Oh, that hurts, because Gaila can't tell Winona that Jim has forgiven her, longs to forgive her, doesn't even think she needs forgiveness. All he wants is for it all to have been a mistake—for a guarantee that she never knew or even suspected. All he wants is for those long painful years with Frank as his only parent to have been a bad dream. "I think—he wants to have a mother and you're finally here and if you try to take that away from him, there won't be a corner of the galaxy I won't follow you to."

"I'm glad," Winona says. "I'm glad I didn't fuck him up too badly with—whatever I did, or didn't do, for him to find friends like you." Gaila thinks Winona would hug her, if they were somewhere other than awkwardly standing in the hallway just outside Winona's bedroom.

"What, an Orion? Don't give yourself too much credit. We're notoriously easy."

Winona fixes her with a steady gaze. "I can't imagine a better friend than you." It sounds like she wants to say something else, and abruptly Gaila knows.

"I've met you," she says. "Haven't I." Winona raises an eyebrow and waits, as though she's giving Gaila time to wave it off and say no, never mind, that's silly. Because Gaila's memory *is* silly, it's a younger woman with Winona's eyes and mouth on a viewscreen saying "Prepare to be boarded," it's a woman with long black hair and a leather jacket stalking aboard the ship with a Klingon disruptor in each hand, and a woman who didn't even notice Gaila until the Nausicaan pirate who'd bought her had handed over whatever device it was that the woman wanted, and then she'd glanced casually at Gaila and said, "I'll take her too."

"It would have been a long time ago, I'm sure," Winona says carefully. "Memory is a tricky thing."

"What were you doing there? You weren't there for me—you wanted something else." Winona tilts her head. Looking at her in the dim light of the hallway, Gaila is more confident than ever. "Your crew never told me you were Federation, let alone Starfleet."

"Gaila," Winona says. "I wouldn't have left Jim alone all that time without a very, very good reason." She waits a second for it to sink in and then turns her back and walks away.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the morning she and Winona don't mention it, don't even acknowledge that a conversation happened. Gaila shrivels a little inside when she thinks about how she spoke to a Starfleet captain, but Winona has been very clear about the boundaries between Captain Winona Kirk of the Curie and Winona Kirk, Jim's mom. This morning, Sarek is deep in meditation in his bedroom and Bones is trying to coax something called livermush out of the replicator. Just the name makes Gaila gag a little. "Why don't you just replicate bacon again?" she asks. "Or cook it yourself, you know how to cook."

"It's not something you just *cook* in a few minutes, damnit." Bones swears again as the replicator produces what appears to be an animal's liver. "Should've picked some up myself before I came here."

"Jim has never—" Winona starts, and then stops. "We never ate it. Grits and eggs should be fine, Leonard."

That's when Jim appears in the doorway, tousle-headed and sleepy in his Starfleet pajamas and Gaila's throat is very painful for a moment. For a minute it's like they're back at the Academy, convening in the kitchen after a long night. She sees the moment that Jim registers his mother's presence, the instant when all the ease disappears from his posture. *Ask what her good reason was*, Gaila wants to tell him. *Ask why she was out in the Neutral Zone ten years ago stealing from Nausicaans*. "There's coffee," Gaila says instead. Bones replicated a big carafe of it first thing, before he started messing around with the replicator.

Jim nods and shuffles to the cupboard that they've carefully re-stocked with dishes and selects a mug for himself, then slumps into the chair next to Gaila. It leaves the chairs on either side of Winona empty, but Winona doesn't react visibly. He fills his mug and drains it twice over before he says, "Jesus, the wedding is this evening."

Bones crows in triumph and presents them with a plate of—thick slices of something fried, next to a deep dish of grits, and then deposits fried eggs on each of their plates. For as grim as the livermush sounded, it's greasy and delicious. "I'm sure everyone on the Enterprise has their Sunday best all ready to go. I don't suppose you persuaded the hobgoblin to wear something a little more traditional for the occasion?"

"You know he's—oh. Very funny." Jim sandwiches a hefty spoonful of grits between two slices of livermush and wolfs it down in a few bites. Spock is planning to wear traditional formal Vulcan robes for the occasion—he's not about to appear in front of T'Pol herself in anything less. "Yeah, he said it would be best if only one of us wore a tux, and since we're doing this on Earth for me, it'd be illogical for him to be the one to wear it." He looks a little pale. "Shit, the tux—"

"It's in the closet in my room," Winona says. "You know, I threw up the morning of my wedding. *Not* on your father's tuxedo, thankfully. I think old Tiberius would've tried to put a stop to the wedding no matter what, if I had." Jim's eyes dart to her hand, to the tattoo of her old soul-mark on her palm.

"Well, if I puke on Spock, I'm pretty sure T'Pol will find a way to break the soulmate bond or something." Jim, Gaila notices, has recovered and has finished his livermush sandwich. "Where's Ambassador Sarek?"

"Meditating," Gaila says, even as Bones says, "I figured I'd do the meat before he came down for breakfast so we could air out the kitchen a little in between."

"That is considerate of you, Dr. McCoy, but unnecessary." Sarek looms in the doorway in his robes like a big black crow, and Jim jumps to his feet. "Although my people do not consume animal flesh, I am capable of differentiating between that which originated in an animal and that

which came from a replicator.”

“Ah—good. Glad to hear it.” Sarek always makes Gaila feel like she’s half-dressed, in a bad way.

Sarek frowns at the old-fashioned clock on the wall. “At what hour does the—celebration commence?”

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