

House-Building

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House-Building

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Summary

When choosing a spouse, there are many things to consider.

Notes

Betaed by Laura JV

The idea of chi`pain was taken from Macedon's excellent DS9 series [Jeu-Parti](#).

"They're messing with us, aren't they?" Nyota said after reading the document.

"Given the low percentage of women who remain unmarried and the small total numbers of Keshta'shivau's population—" Spock said, but he didn't sound very certain. More like what he really meant was 'yes, but in a way that gives them plausible deniability.'

"They're totally messing with us," Nyota said. When they'd gotten the news that Enterprise would be close enough to Keshta'shivau, the new Vulcan homeworld, for them to take leave there, and contacted Lady V'Lar, Spock's Eldest Mother, they had been given detailed dossiers on eight women. All of the prospective brides were of above-average in intelligence, accomplishments, and clan connections. Most of whom had been beautiful. When none of them had worked out, they had been given another four, almost equally prestigious. When none of the second batch remained in consideration, they had been given one name. Of a woman who was, from her dossier, the most perfectly average Vulcan alive. "Would it have been an insult to the House of Surak to suggest someone below-average in any way?"

Spock considered. "Prior to the Destruction, merely suggesting an average person would have been considered an insult," he said. "Given the reduction in population and therefore choice—and given how late we have left it—it is difficult to say."

"In other words, they may think they're being insulting by suggesting *her*," Nyota said, waving the PADD around. "But there's just enough camouflage they can't be called on it."

"It is quite likely," Spock admitted.

"Well, at least she probably hasn't remained unmarried this long because she wants your clan connections," Nyota said. Two of those they'd rejected had done that.

"I see nothing objectionable about her," Spock said. Of course, the same had been true—on paper—with most of the women who had been suggested up to this point.

"She's a singer," Nyota said. "I like that."

"I will arrange an in-person meeting," Spock said.

Sevakis was deep in a meditative trance when the message came through. She had, in the four years since the Devastation, recorded everything she could consciously remember about her clan's history, heritage, lore, language, customs, domains, politics, allegiances, fashions, and personalities, but there was a limit to what the mind could consciously recall. Now she spent her limited free time seeking what fragments her unconscious mind might yet have stored. It was time-consuming and largely fruitless, but there was nothing of greater importance to fill her

resting hours.

It was late when she roused herself, having found nothing new that evening. She had been tempted to stay in the trance all night. But while meditation might take the place of sleep for some time, it could not completely replace it, and it would be self-indulgent in the extreme to allow her work to suffer while she pursued the ghosts of her psyche. She opened her eyes to the same sight that had greeted her after every such occasion. A room, small but adequate, with everything she required and nothing she wanted, for anything she could want was dead. One room in a dormitory filled with similar rooms, all filled with strangers thus bereft.

She checked her messages before readying herself for bed, and saw that there had been a message from Lady T'Lauw, requesting a meeting at her earliest convenience. Sevakis attached her calendar for the next week, highlighting times in between practices, classes, and lessons that would be best, noting which appointments Sevakis could skip or move if T'Lauw required it. Then she firmly put the matter from her mind (although it didn't quite *stay* out) and went to bed.

When she woke, T'Lauw had replied. Sevakis would need to find someone to cover her third class of the day. She did not regret *that*; teaching classes in the theory and history of Vulcan music was her least favorite duty. But she was curious as to the urgency of the matter. Given that there were only a few reasons for T'Lauw to summon her, the haste was ... suggestive.

At the theater complex, she found Toval in one of the practice rooms, readying himself for a lesson.

"Will you be able to cover my History of Music class?" Sevakis asked him. "We are covering the S'Heikla Period."

Toval inclined his head graciously. "Of course," he said. "Is anything amiss?"

"Lady T'Lauw has summoned me," Sevakis said, studying her friend. He was tall and stocky, with the effeminate features and resonant voice typical of his kind, and she knew him to be intelligent, witty, and very well suited to her. If he were not a *chi`pah*, they would probably have married, after her betrothed and his wife died in the Devastation. Though, if he were not a *chi`pah*, they probably would never have met as they would not have sung together, and he would probably have been on Vulcan when Nero came instead of touring with their company.

"With such urgency?" Toval asked, raising an eyebrow. "Is there one in dire need?"

Sevakis sighed. "She did not see fit to share anything with me besides an urgent need for my presence." If there was a man going into *pon farr*, whom they hoped she would marry, it would require at least a week off from her normal duties, if one included recovery time. More, if one included time necessary to make arrangements with her new husband for things like living space.

"If there *is* such a one, the forewarning to clear your schedule would be ... beneficial," Toval said.

"Indeed it would," Sevakis said. Her own Eldest Mother—before the Devastation, when she had *had* a true Eldest Mother, and not merely an elderly woman of a foreign clan who had contracted with many newfound orphans to fill that role until the time, some decades hence, when they might have one of their own. Her own Eldest Mother, a distant cousin four generations removed, would have given her that courtesy. Then again, her own Eldest Mother had known her all her life, and her parents all *their* lives, and so on. There was a level of trust and familiarity that it was illogical to resent the lack of with a woman Sevakis had only met in person four times.

Being illogical, however, did not make it untrue. It merely made the resentment a burden for Sevakis to subdue.

"Have you reached any conclusions as to your own future decisions?" Sevakis asked. It was indelicate of her, but with her own future thus abruptly in motion, she desired to know.

Toval sighed. "I am in no rush. They can create gametes for me at any time, and surrogates will always be available." *Chi`pain* were those whose males whose voices as children were deemed so extraordinary that their gonads were surgically removed just prior to puberty, so that their unchanged voices might be preserved as they aged. They did not typically reproduce, and when they did (as all Vulcans now must, for the preservation of their species), required medical help. "It would be better, I think, to wait until the settlements on this world are more ... established." He hesitated. "And ... I find my grief still ... I do not trust myself, yet, to be fully attentive as a child requires. Particularly alone."

"A logical decision," Sevakis said. She would not be alone, of course, not as he was. She could offer no reciprocation, for she could have no plans until she knew whom she would marry. In all probability, it would not be long even if T'Lauw did not have a match for her at this time. Over sixty percent of the other surviving Vulcan women had already married, and the remainder, herself included, were fast approaching that state.

But she needed to prepare for her first class of the day. She left her friend sitting at the *ka'athyra*, waiting for his pupil.

At the appointed time, Sevakis approached the house T'Lauw lived in. It was large, for *Keshta'shivau*; on Vulcan, it would have been a minor building, too small for a House or Clan. But it was illogical to build residences of the size that they would eventually need, when it would be some generations before there would be people to fill them.

Sevakis paused to take an inventory of herself before she knocked on the door. Her mind was fairly calm, and her shields were solid; her clothes and hair were neat and presentable and befitting her station. There was nothing else to be done.

She was shown into the antechamber and asked to wait for a few minutes. The room was still sparsely decorated, but a mural had been sketched in on one wall. Sevakis did not recognize the subject; it undoubtedly related to T'Lauw 's clan's history.

There was no telling how long it might be before she was called; while the business itself might be urgent, Sevakis was hardly the greatest of T'Lauw 's concerns. Not of her clan, nor of any clan allied to her clan before the Destruction; one woman, of no particular importance. T'Lauw,

on the other hand, was one of only four Eldest Mothers left. She was a very busy woman, even by the standards of Keshta'shivau, on which there were few people who were not doing what would have been, on Vulcan, the work of at least three people.

The wait was not long. Sevakis was shown in to T'Lauw's office and given a glass of juice, which she sipped at politely.

T'Lauw was a short, plump woman, her graying hair sleekly swept up in an elegant and traditional style that added at least ten centimeters to her height. She waited for Sevakis to take her first sip and then said, briskly, "You are being considered as a prospective bride for the son of the House of Surak, Spock son of Sarek son of Skon."

Sevakis almost dropped her glass in shock. "He is not already married?" The House of Surak was the greatest and most prestigious House of all, and not merely for its ancient history. T'Pau, the hero of the Second Reformation, had been its Eldest Mother. If Spock's bondmate had died with Vulcan, surely the surviving Eldest Mothers would have seen Spock's re-marriage as a priority. He should have bonded long since.

T'Lauw gave Sevakis a withering glance for asking the obvious question. "He has been quite busy with his Starfleet career, and there are ... complications," she said, answering the question Sevakis *should* have asked, which was *why* T'Pau's only surviving great-grandson remained unmarried. "Spock has a paramour, a Human woman he serves with. She does not wish to leave Starfleet and settle on Vulcan. He did not wish to marry a Vulcan while there was still a chance she would choose the Vulcan way, as his mother did."

"You speak in the present tense," Sevakis observed. "The relationship will be continuing?"

"Yes," T'Lauw said. "Now that they have made their decision, they wish to have him marry as soon as may be practical. Their ship is in the vicinity, and they are here on shore leave for the next eleven days; after that, Spock will likely not return to Vulcan for another 1.8 years."

By which time, the pool of unmarried Vulcan women would be much smaller. "May I ask why I am being considered?" Sevakis was a woman of average intelligence, average genotype, and average phenotype, from an insignificant clan in a backwater area. The only noteworthy thing about her was her voice, which, since she did not come from a family noted for its musical talents, might not breed true. Even now, after several years of remarriages, there had to be many single women more worthy of marrying one of the House of Surak than she. As for common interests, she had never been interested in science or space exploration.

"Spock has found several of the women suggested to him ... unsuitable," T'Lauw said. "Others objected to the Human paramour. You have travelled extensively throughout the Federation in the course of your career, and have experience with Humans."

Sevakis considered this. It could not be the entire answer; she had mostly toured as part of a company, and so spent most of her time offworld with other Vulcans. She had, on two occasions, been part of a Human production, and had not found it onerous, but had formed no lasting acquaintance among them. There were many Humans on Keshta'shivau, to help with the rebuilding and fill critical roles, and those who had survived the Devastation were mostly those who had been offworld at the time of Nero's attack. Her experience with Humans was neither extensive nor unique.

Which led to the critical question. It was an honor to be considered for the spouse of one of Surak's House, but was that worth sharing her home with a Human? Even if the paramour in question spent most of her time in space, Sevakis' home would be the Human's home base. Humans were ... loud. Their rampant emotionalism was annoying and occasionally difficult when she had private, Human-free quarters to retreat into; Sevakis was not sure she wished to share a home with one. Especially a home which would, of necessity, be smaller than the sprawling clansteads of Vulcan.

Still. Generalities could be true and useful for dealing with groups; they were utterly inadequate when dealing with individuals. There was no point in making a decision without even meeting the Human in question. "When are we to meet?" she asked.

"You are not required at this evening's rehearsal," T'Lauw said.

That was not *quite* the case; her part was required, but there were others who could cover for her, and the session would be recorded so that she could know what had been done. Sevakis held her silence. It was clear that T'Lauw valued neither her time nor her work, but as she was (technically) Sevakis' Eldest Mother, it was not Sevakis' place to say otherwise.

"I will have Spock's dossier sent to you, along with his address," T'Lauw said, making a gesture to dismiss her and picking up a padd.

"And does his paramour have a dossier?" Sevakis asked. If she was the sticking point, it would be logical to include information about her.

"I am sure you can get her public file from Starfleet," T'Lauw said, not looking up.

Sevakis pressed her lips together, but required herself to bow with the proper respect, even if T'Lauw couldn't see it.

This Sevakis was punctual, but then one expected that in a Vulcan. She appeared at the meeting room Spock's Eldest Mother had arranged for them at precisely the appointed time. Unlike the other women they had seen, she was not accompanied by an Eldest Mother or other matron, but came alone. Nyota would have to ask Spock what the significance of that was, if it was a class difference or something else.

Spock offered her juice, and once the ritual of greeting was completed, they sat. There were four chairs. (The first woman they'd met with, she and Spock had made the mistake of thinking that V'Lar would take Nyota into account in the arrangements. She had not. There had been three chairs: one for Spock, one for his prospective bride, one for her chaperone, and no place for Nyota. They had had to wait while another chair was procured, and the disapproval had been palpable. Both for the wait, and that Nyota expected to be present.)

"Sevakis, thank you for coming on such short notice," Nyota said. She didn't smile, as she might have with a Human, but the words were most definitely a Human greeting ritual, and not a Vulcan one.

"You are welcome," Sevakis said.

At that, Nyota *did* smile. One the previous women had been discounted because, at Nyota's greeting, she had launched into a lecture on proper Vulcan forms of communication and why it would be important to eliminate any deviation from them. "I hope it was not too disruptive to your schedule."

Sevakis considered this. "There are few times that would not have been. Even my so-called open periods are filled with grading and planning. Especially given the short timeframe available. Did you choose this particular time slot?"

Spock shook his head. "No. Given that we are on leave, the matching process is our only obligation at the moment."

"Then it was Lady T'Lauw who set it. I would have chosen differently, but she did not consult me."

"I'm sorry to hear that," Nyota said. "I have a question, though—can't the computer grade for you? I wouldn't imagine that, as a musician, you assign many essays."

"There are some, in my history of music class," Sevakis said. "As for my composition class, the computer can grade how closely they followed the rules of the style they are learning, but it cannot assess artistic merit."

"Oh, of course," Nyota said. "I love to sing, myself, though obviously it is only a hobby, and Spock is also musical."

"Is that, then, a particular desire of yours?" Sevakis asked Spock. "A musical wife?"

"No," Spock said. "Or rather, if I were to list off every quality of my ideal spouse, it would be there; but there are many qualities I value above it. Only some of which are essential."

"May I enquire as to which ones? I am told that you have rejected several potential matches," Sevakis said. She glanced back to Nyota. "Or that you have. Would it not be logical to tell the Eldest Mothers, so that they may factor them in?"

"We have," Nyota said. "*Believe* me, we have. Some of it ... I don't know whether they just aren't listening, or if they don't understand, or if there genuinely *aren't* any Vulcan women who fit. And then of course there are some who sound good on paper but just don't work in person. And then there was one who was just perfect, but chose someone else at the last minute." She and V'Ryla had gotten along excellently, but then V'Ryla's friend had gone into pon farr unexpectedly and not found a mate, and Nyota couldn't blame her for choosing him over Spock.

She shook her head. "Anyway. We want someone who accepts that I'm going to be part of this family, and that Spock himself is half-Human, and that while our kids are going to be raised Vulcan, they're also going to have at least some Human heritage along with it. Someone we can work with."

"And someone who is aware of the ... prejudices and barriers that hybrids face in Vulcan society," Spock said carefully. "I have experienced them myself, and while the high number of exogamous marriages will create a large number of hybrid children in the next generation, I still have ... concerns. There were several things that were handled poorly, by the adults around me, and I do not wish my own children to suffer from them as well. In some cases it was not done out of malice, but it was still ... less than optimal."

Nyota's lips tightened. In most cases, it *had* been done out of malice. And that was one of the *many* things she'd had to wrestle with, over the years since Spock had first set her down and explained what he needed, and what her choices were. Could she take the chance, that her children would go through the same things he had? She'd made her choices, and here they were.

Sevakis waited after he spoke, glancing back and forth between them when it was clear they were both finished. "In other words, you want someone who will work with you as you are, protect your children from possible threats, and raise them in the manner you wish them to be raised. These do not seem to be unrealistic expectations. In fact, they seem to be the most minimum requirements for a functional family unit."

"Absolutely," Nyota said. *That* was promising. That was *very* promising. "You can see why I'm not about to lower my expectations."

"Have you been asked to?" Sevakis asked.

"Not directly," Spock said.

Sevakis pressed her lips together, taking in the implications of this. "And there it is. The reason why *I* was selected. And given such a bare minimum of courtesy, information, and time to prepare. They hope you will reject me, or perhaps I you, and then perhaps you will look more favorably on one of the women they have already suggested."

"Or others like them," Nyota said. "But I really don't give a damn about clan connections, and they're not that important for Spock either. As to intelligence and accomplishments, I think compassion and acceptance are far more important to a relationship. We're not picking an employee, we're picking a *wife*. And the mother of our kids."

"Are you, then, seriously considering me as a prospective spouse?" she asked Spock. "Or am I merely someone to get through before returning to the better candidates?"

"You have already shown yourself more suitable than most of the others my Eldest Mother has provided," Spock said.

"I agree," Nyota said. "And while I'm not going to make life-changing decisions based on what would make the old bats unhappy, I have to admit it doesn't *hurt* to know they'd fume if we actually chose you."

Sevakis blinked. "We have no relation to Terran winged mammals—"

"Sorry," Nyota said. "It's a colloquial term for an annoying and unpleasant older woman."

"I feel that I should defend the honor of the institution of matriarch," Sevakis said, "and yet I find I cannot disagree with you. With only four

left, acting for many thousands of now-clanless people they scarcely know, they have grown manipulative and callous in their decisions." She thought for a bit. "I would also agree that while discommoding them is not a primary factor in my decision-making process, nor even a secondary one, the idea does bring an unworthy amount of satisfaction."

"There you have it, then," Nyota said, pleased. They were getting along quite well—they might become friends, which would be a benefit.

"May I enquire as to your own criteria?" Spock asked.

Sevakis thought it over before responding. "Someone I would not regret as a companion for the rest of my life," she said. "Someone I can live comfortably with—especially while the children are young, residing together in the same household is far preferable. I miss being part of a larger household. The hostel for unmarried people is not the same. I am quite content with finding external sources of companionship and support, but the household should be comfortable."

"But you must have some hopes," Nyota said. "Even if it's unrealistic."

"If I were choosing solely on my own preferences, I would choose Toval," Sevakis said. "He is the closest friend I have alive, and he is just as alone as I am. But he is *chi`pain*, and I am not selfish enough to remove myself from the pool of those who will most have need of a wife."

"*Chi`pain*," Nyota said. She'd learned some about them in basic Vulcan grammar; Vulcan had multiple gender pronoun systems, the more esoteric of which didn't translate well into Standard. "They're the male singers who are castrated right before puberty so their voices will not change, right? I guess that means they don't burn?"

"You are correct," Sevakis said.

Nyota wondered how that worked, if they were married to women who *did* go through *pon farr*, but that would be taking prurient curiosity a step too far. "Are you in love with him?"

"Vulcans do not—"

"I, of all people, know that Vulcans *do* in fact fall in love," Nyota said. "It's not just Spock, because he's half-Human, either; he wouldn't *exist* if Vulcans didn't fall in love. And I understand that the culture is different, that you don't consider it a primary consideration in marriage. Or even a secondary consideration. Or any kind of consideration at all, really. I'm certainly not saying that if you are in love with Toval—or anyone else—that it would be an impediment here if you honestly don't consider it to be one. But I would like to know."

Sevakis studied her for a few moments. "As I understand the term, no, I am not 'in love' with Toval, or anyone else. Nor have I ever been."

"Thank you for your honesty." It sounded a bit bleak, to Nyota, but it was obvious Sevakis didn't find it so.

Spock redirected the conversation. "What reservations do you have about this particular prospective match?"

"Humans are very ... loud," Sevakis said promptly. "Physically, vocally, and mentally. In every way possible. It is wearing, and I do not care for it. While you are gone, it will not be an issue; but when you are on Vulcan, I will require some consideration. Expecting you to follow every Vulcan norm in your own home would be unreasonable, but a compromise would not be. And I would need spaces where I do not have to guard against the possibility of Lieutenant Uhura's presence."

"Quite reasonable, and easily done," Spock said, nodding.

"Children are loud," Nyota said. "What will you do about that?"

"It is the nature of children to be loud," Sevakis said. "But they do grow out of it. At least, Vulcan children do. And even when they are very young, there are respite carers available. When they are older, there is school." She paused, considering. "I do not dislike children, but neither do I have any particular attraction to them. But it is my duty, now, to bear children, or else my House—and, indeed, my whole clan—will be forever extinguished. I have helped care for children before, it was a standard chore for adolescents and young adults in my clan. I know I can do it competently, even though I do not find it fulfilling, as some do. In any case, some things may be avoided, and others may not be. The noise of children is of the latter, and the volume of an adult Human is of the former."

"Spock has taught me how to shield," Nyota said, a bit defensively. "And I've never been prone to tempers or mood swings. I doubt he'd have given me a second glance, if I were."

"In that you are correct." Spock nodded to her, before turning to Sevakis. "I would describe Nyota as determined. Fierce, when called for, but I doubt that aspect of her character shall be often required on Vulcan. She is fairly calm, for a Human, and her resting emotional state tends toward warm and affectionate. Provided she maintains her shielding, I should think that a separate bedroom and office space for you would be adequate for privacy and respite."

"Quite possibly," Sevakis agreed. "I have encountered many louder Humans."

The rest of the interview was, well, not *boring*, but fairly routine. Enquiries into each other's history, personal life, goals, and expectations. All in all, it really was more like a business interview than a preparation for marriage, in Nyota's view. But it was very like Vulcans to do so.

"What further information do you require?" Sevakis asked at last.

By this point, Nyota was not surprised at how blunt and businesslike everyone was treating this. She glanced over at Spock.

"I believe that we would all benefit from time to consider what we have learned today," Spock said. "At which point, if we are all in favor of going forward, I would like a *meld* before the final decision is made."

Sevakis frowned. "Before the bonding? Why?"

She sounded honestly baffled by such a thing, which Nyota didn't understand. If Nyota were going to be marrying a stranger and forming a telepathic bond with them that would last for the rest of her life, she'd damn well want a trial run ahead of time to test mental compatibility. She supposed it was different if you were used to such things being arranged by others when you were still a child.

"Is your neurology or psychology so different from Vulcan standard that it might be an issue?" Sevakis asked.

"No," Spock said. "However, I have found that full-Vulcans, however much they listen, cannot truly understand what it was like to experience the type and duration of bullying and exclusion that I did as a child simply from hearing me speak about it. Given that my children will likely experience the same, I wish to know what your reaction might be before any commitments are made."

"Very well," Sevakis said. "However, given the tight timetable and attendant disruptions to schedule, it would be most efficient to have the meld *now*, and then time to consider after."

"You do not require time to prepare?" Spock asked, with an eyebrow raised.

"No," Sevakis said.

"Very well," Spock said, and with little further ado they melded.

It was odd, to see it from the outside. Nyota knew that Spock had melded occasionally, in the course of his duties, but she had never been present. She had melded with him, on occasion, but had never witnessed it. It was quite boring, from out here. A few words, a touch, two people sitting motionless.

The most emotionally intimate thing two people could possibly do, and from the outside it looked ... boring. It could almost be a metaphor for the standard prejudices against Vulcans. If you didn't understand, they were boring and cold. But if you were allowed to see inside, the reality was quite different. She wondered what was inside Sevakis.

She didn't have long to wait, although from the inside it probably felt much longer, before Spock and Sevakis were dropping their hands and sitting back.

"Oh," Sevakis said, blinking rapidly.

Nyota looked away. She wanted—how she longed!—to study the other woman and see her reactions. But it would be insufferably rude, by Vulcan standards, to pay attention to the other woman's small lapses of control, and if Sevakis was indeed a suitable wife for Spock, the last thing she wanted now was to insult her and possibly drive her away. Besides, Spock would know Sevakis' character far better, now, than anything Nyota would be able to observe from the outside in such a short time.

It did not take Sevakis long to recover well enough to leave, and the customary farewells were short and simple. Nyota watched her go, then turned to Spock. "Well?" she asked as soon as the other woman was probably outside of even Vulcan earshot.

On the tram ride home, Sevakis put aside the problem of Spock and Nyota, and got out her PADD. Plugging in a hearing bud, she watched and listened to the rehearsal notes that had been sent to her account. It was all simple and required attention but no deep contemplation, which made it perfect for public transportation and a more efficient use of her time than replaying the whole interview in her mind.

The rehearsal notes were not quite boring, but as close to it as they possibly could be, Sevakis noted. Given the vastly-reduced circumstances, there were only a handful of full productions per year, and given the many threats to Vulcan culture, now much reduced in number and dependent on the importation of aliens for its survival, a certain reactionary traditionalism was only to be expected. And, certainly, Sevakis' own tastes had always tended to the conservative and customary.

It was, however, unfortunate that so many—even within the artistic community—seemed to equate "traditional" with "rigidly uncreative dogmatism" these days.

When Sevakis reached the hostel, she went through her evening routine as usual before sitting down to contemplate her choices.

Except her mind kept circling back to the meld, and what Spock had shown her. He was quite correct; being intellectually aware of the result of adverse experiences on developing brains was not the same as experiencing it. And knowing that would be critical if she were indeed to end up house-mother to children who would probably experience similarly hostile circumstances.

She would have to meditate on this, and integrate what she had learned, before making a decision.

"Well?" Nyota asked. "What do you think?"

Spock tilted his head. "I think we would work well together," he said. "She is quite pragmatic and willing to listen. And she has an honest desire to create and live in an environment that is suitable and comfortable for all concerned. Her ethics are sound, and she is not prone to indifference or self-justification. Indeed, her ability to accurately analyze her own mental state is remarkable, even for a Vulcan. Perhaps especially for a Vulcan—we are quite likely to use our powers of logic to justify our behavior and thoughts, rather than as a basis for them."

"So, what you're saying is, she's not a bigot," Nyota said.

"I ... am not quite sure that is the case," Spock said. "Her opinions about Humans in general and aliens in particular are quite typical. On the lesser end of what I would consider normal, for a Vulcan; but still present."

"Spock!" Nyota said. "If that's the case, what does it *matter* how great she is in other categories?"

"Her self-honesty, however, is remarkable," Spock said, "and in the end that may prove far more valuable. I do not know that there *are* any Vulcans who have no prejudices against Humans, or at least a sense of superiority. My own father has some, as my childhood will attest, and he is now on his *second* Human wife. He believes that he is quite neutral and unbiased, but he is not. He loved me, he loved my mother, this I now know ... but his unquestioned assumptions and biases prevented him from protecting me and advocating for me as he ought. Sevakis has those same assumptions and biases, but I believe she is more willing to examine them without assuming that she already knows the answer."

Nyota listened to this. He might be right. Prejudiced, but willing to work through it, might be the best they could find. If that were the case ... then what? Did she really want to have her children raised in that environment?

She wasn't the one getting married. She would never be the one getting married. She wasn't the one who was going to have a stranger sitting in the back of her head. She could walk away at any time. She could change her mind and choose not to have children with Spock; even after they were born, if she didn't like the way they were being treated, she could take up a post in the defense center here and raise them herself, or on one of the Vulcan colonies, or on any planet with a decent-sized Vulcan embassy. She had options, a lot more options than Spock had. That's the whole reason they were doing it this way, so that she would have as many options as possible.

She didn't like this, but then there wasn't much about the whole situation that she *did* like, truly, and she'd decided that Spock was worth it. And if she ever wanted to change her mind, she could.

"And you believe that Sevakis will shield our kids from the worst of the bigotry, and provide a safe and supportive environment for them to grow?" Nyota asked.

"I believe she is more likely to do so than my father did," Spock said.

"And you believe that she'll be willing to work with us to create a family home we can all live with?" Nyota asked.

"Yes," Spock said.

"And you think you won't mind being bonded to her?"

"I would not," Spock said.

"Then I have no objections," Nyota said. "If you think she's the one, it's your choice."

The next day Sevakis sought out Toval before classes again. With quick efficiency, he reported how the classes he had covered for her had gone. That done, he sat back and waited for her own story.

"I have been offered a potential match with Spock, son of Sarek, son of Skon, of the House of Surak."

Toval raised an eyebrow. "What an honor," he said flatly. He knew as well as anyone did, of course, that there must be *some* reason why she, of all women, had been offered it.

"He has a Human paramour," Sevakis said. "Whom he will *not* be marrying. But with whom he is planning to have children. Children who would then be raised by his wife." She suppressed the jealousy she felt at the Human woman's freedom. There was no point to it; their circumstances were much different, and it could only cloud Sevakis' judgment. Clearly, this was something she would need to meditate further on, particularly if she accepted the offer.

"How ... novel," Toval said. "And if he can find a Human he likes, why should he take one of the few Vulcan women left single? It seems greedy."

"I am not sure that marrying a Vulcan is his own desire," Sevakis admitted. It had not come up, even in the meld. "He is half-Human himself, you know. I am sure his father would prefer that the Vulcan heritage prevails in his son's line. Especially as Sarek has, yet again, married a Human woman himself."

Toval nodded judiciously. A generation of Human—or other alien—blood was something that many Vulcans now had to accept. Two might be too many. "A husband, a father-in-law and his wife, a paramour," he said. "That will be quite a large family." His tone was almost wistful. On Vulcan, before the Devastation, it would have been shocking in its smallness. But here, now, after Nero, it was an embarrassment of riches.

That, more than anything else, was what Sevakis wanted. And it was what Toval was most denied by his status and the shortage of Vulcan women. "If I marry the Surak heir, you will always be welcome in our home," Sevakis said.

"You cannot make that promise unilaterally," Toval said.

"There is nothing to object to in you," Sevakis said. "And ..." she thought about how the Human woman, Nyota Uhura, had been concerned about Sevakis' own desires. "And I think that they will wish for me to have as much contentment as I may."

"A good sign," Toval said.

"Yes," Sevakis said. She still didn't know if she could be an adequate mother and stepmother to hybrid children, given what she now knew. But was it really possible to know such a thing until you tried?

She had been alone for so long. She didn't want to be alone any longer. Spock was a good, intelligent man, and he came with a family ready-made. And his Human paramour seemed to be tolerable. Her decision was made, she realized.

Once they'd gotten Sevakis' reply through Lady V'Lar, Nyota steeled herself for the next task: discussing it with Sarek, who was on his way back to Vulcan after a diplomatic conference. They didn't have to tell him themselves, of course; V'Lar had handled that. But they did have to talk about it.

It was fairly simple to connect a call through to Sarek, although Spock took time to meditate first. Nyota didn't blame him; conversations with his father, especially held over subspace where they couldn't feel one another telepathically, tended to be ... fraught.

When the call connected, Nyota brightened. Kamala was there, sitting next to Sarek, glowing with pregnancy. Although Kamala was a point of friction (Spock was having trouble with the idea of a stepmother, however necessary), she was also levelheaded and quite willing to point out when people were being unreasonable, and Nyota liked her.

"I presume you have been informed of my upcoming betrothal?" Spock said, as soon as the greetings were out of the way.

"I have," Sarek said. "I do not question your logic or your choices, however ... I would appreciate an explication of them." Which was about as close to criticism as he could get without being outright rude, by Vulcan standards, and Nyota could feel from how Spock tensed up next to her that he was taking it as offensive anyway.

"Sevakis is competent, respectable, and gifted in her field," Spock said, in that perfectly even tone he only used when he was angry, "and if her education and background are not as prestigious as some of the other candidates, her understanding of the situation and family dynamics are far greater."

"Of course," Sarek said, "but I find it curious V'Lar was not able to find anyone of a more suitable background whose understanding proved ... acceptable."

"Well, there was at least one," Nyota said, "but she chose someone else." She shrugged.

"We were quite open to the possibility that any of the candidates might prove suitable, Father," Spock said. "Unfortunately, the reverse did not often prove to be true."

"Nevertheless, there will probably be some ill-will resulting from your choice, which will affect my position in the High Council," Sarek said. "Lady V'Lar should have taken that into consideration in her suggestions. It does not reflect well on *her*, either." As a man, he had no say in the marriage of his child, though if Amanda had lived, she would have worked with V'Lar to vet potential brides. Apparently Sarek's thoughts were going in a similar direction, because he turned to Kamala. "We should have insisted that you participate," he said. "It is your right as matriarch of the House."

Nyota winced. Kamala *was*, technically, the matriarch of the house. She was also Human, under thirty years of age (if only barely), and still learning Vulcan culture. V'Lar would not have been happy, and Nyota shuddered to think how much harder she would have been to work with.

"The political ramifications will be temporary," Spock said sharply. Where Nyota saw a slight of V'Lar's ability, Spock apparently saw a dig at his own choices. "And while the shaping of the new homeworld is important, the stability of your grandchildren's home and the care of their guardians are of far greater significance."

Sarek opened his mouth to respond, but Kamala grabbed his hand. He looked at her.

"Sarek," she said. "Your son is getting married." She smiled, but it was a smile with teeth.

Sarek blinked several times before turning back to the screen. "May V'Haltrel bless your bonding, and may T'Pallek and S'kerhon bring harmony to the House."

Nyota and Spock made the appropriate ritual responses (she had been surprised, at first, to learn that there *were* appropriate ritual responses for the mistress to make in just about any situation). Nyota pushed down a slight uneasiness at the invoking of other gods. She hadn't been to a Quaker meeting since reaching adulthood, and she never prayed or read the Bible; it wasn't like she was much of a Christian, and in any case, this was part of the decision to have Vulcan children. They'd learn about Jesus, but as one household god among many. On an intellectual level, she had no problem with that. She needed to work on making sure it didn't stop at the intellectual level.

Sevakis wasn't the only one facing a conflict between gut reactions and what she needed to go forward as a part of the family.

"I am sure Sevakis has many admirable qualities, and will be a credit to our House," Sarek said.

"I believe she will," Spock said stiffly.

After a few more platitudes on both sides, Nyota stepped in with questions about how the summit had gone, which they were all interested in, and things flowed more easily from there.

Once the call was over, Spock got up and walked out. Nyota thought about talking to him, but she'd decided long ago that she wasn't going to get into the middle of the longstanding mess between him and his father. They could figure it out themselves, or not. They could definitely benefit from family counseling, she'd thought that for a while, but it would be hard to arrange with them so seldom on the same planet. And now they'd have another person to add to the mix, and children very shortly—first Sarek and Kamala's, then Spock's with Sevakis and Nyota.

Maybe things would go better. Maybe there would be more balance with more people to serve as a buffer. Or maybe things would get worse and they'd have to figure out the counselling thing long-distance.

Nyota sighed. Family was complicated.

Sevakis brought Toval when she went to meet her future father-in-law and see the house. It was not proper—she should have brought women

with her—but she had no close women friends left alive, and she would definitely need support to meet with the head of the House of Surak.

"You fret needlessly," Toval observed as they took time for Sevakis to gather herself before walking up to the door. "You are his son's choice, a match suggested by his Eldest Mother, and if he wishes a tranquil household he will not wish to cause trouble."

Sevakis narrowed her eyes at Toval. This was true, but it was hardly helpful. She had not had such trouble with the Disciplines since the first days and weeks after the Devastation. "I know," she said.

She stared at the building in front of her. She, Sevakis, daughter of Supar, daughter of V'Hal, last (for now) of the House of Tokel, was going to marry a son of the House of Surak; the heir, no less. Her parents would have been so proud.

If her parents were still alive, if the Devastation had never happened, it would never have happened. And she would give anything to have them back. But that was impossible, and it was illogical to dwell on might-have-beens. This was her future.

She took a slow breath, and let it out, one of the earliest disciplines a child learned. She walked forward.

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