

## If Ever Two Were One

Posted originally on the [Ad Astra :: Star Trek Fanfiction Archive](http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/431) at <http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/431>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Teen And Up Audiences</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">No Archive Warnings Apply</a>
Category:	<a href="#">F/M</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">Star Trek: The Original Series</a>
Relationship:	<a href="#">Nyota Uhura/Spock</a>
Character:	<a href="#">Spock</a> , <a href="#">Nyota Uhura</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Telepathy</a> , <a href="#">Telepathic Bonds</a> , <a href="#">Accidental Marriage</a> , <a href="#">Vulcan Culture(s)</a>
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2020-07-03 Words: 12,943 Chapters: 1/1

## If Ever Two Were One

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### Summary

Spock and Uhura establish a light, temporary, telepathic link for a mission. But there's a little complication when the mission is over ...

### Notes

Written for LittleRaven in Just Married Exchange 2020  
Title taken from "To My Dear And Loving Husband" by Anne Bradstreet  
Betaed by sixbeforelunch

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

Nyota had just made it out of the prisoner encampment and was beginning the delicate process of infiltrating the command center on the river side of the compound when it all went wrong. The pain in her head was so sharp that for a moment she thought that *she* had been the one hit in the head; but no, she realized after a moment, it wasn't *her* head; it was Spock's.

The sensation of being hurt/unhurt was quite possibly the strangest thing she'd ever experienced, which for a Starfleet officer serving on a starship on an exploratory mission, was saying quite a lot. It took her a few moments of concentrating to separate out what was *her* from what was *Spock*—which was worrying in and of itself. The link was supposed to be a small thing, just enough to sense but not enough to be intrusive, just enough so that they could coordinate the timing on their mission even after being stripped of their communicators.

This ... this was not small, or unintrusive. This was *massive*, and it was taking everything Nyota had to hang on to her sense of who she was and where and why, and she was deeply afraid for Spock.

But she had more immediate concerns. He had been found out; he must have been. Found, and hurt, either by a guard or by a fellow prisoner. The whole place would be up in arms soon, and even if it wasn't, their captors were deeply paranoid. One person by themselves could not activate the communications system and call for help. It required *two* people, one at each communications center on opposite sides of the compound, activating the system at roughly the same time. Without Spock doing *his* part, there was no point in Nyota doing *hers*.

Better to return to her bunk and hope their captors did not figure out she'd been missing.

It was much harder to break *in* to the prison than *out* of it, though that said more about Nyota's mental state than the security systems. She couldn't concentrate, and waves of pain came and went, and nausea with them. It was nightmarish.

Still, she made it, and by the time they came to check on the prisoners in her cell block, she was right where she was supposed to be, and pretending to be asleep. She concentrated on keeping her breathing slow and even, and using what few meditative techniques she knew, in the vain hope that they would allow her some peace or distance from the onslaught.

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Spock lay on the cold, hard floor and tried his best to focus on the sensation underneath him. It was the only verifiable and unthreatening sensation he could feel at the moment. If he opened his eyes, the room spun around him and the light made his headache worse. His ears were assaulted by a chaotic stream of senseless noise, although he could not be sure whether that was indicative of the true reality or merely the misfiring of abused neurons. But the floor, cold and hard as it was, was reassuringly stable and unthreatening.

He quelled the incipient anxiety prompted by his situation, or tried to; but such techniques required a concentration he was incapable of mustering. His mind cast out in distress; why was no one responding? Why was his mate silent? No, there was no one *to* respond; he was light-

years from any Vulcan, including his mate. But she was there. His mind was not alone. But she was different. He could not think why, but something was wrong.

Still, her mind was calm, and restful, and he latched on to it in gratitude, synchronizing his breaths with hers. In this state he could not put himself into a trance, but with her soothing, he escaped gratefully into sleep.

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The next two days were only slightly better than the failed escape attempt had been. Spock's presence loomed large in her mind, and she could feel how hurt he was, how his brain and body were betraying him and how distressed it made him. Nyota's heart ached for him, but his disorientation was sometimes catching—she could almost see the ghost of what he was looking at sometimes, overlaid over her own perceptions for a fraction of a second, enough to walk into someone or something if she wasn't careful. And the occasional flare of pain or nausea could make her trip over her own two feet. It made it harder for her to be inconspicuous among her fellow prisoners.

They weren't forced to work or *do* anything, thank God; but neither were they allowed to remain in their bunkroom all day, or Nyota would probably have just stayed on her pallet. Instead, she spent her days wandering the yard, listening to her fellow prisoners talk and trying to piece together as much of their language as she could. (The guards didn't come into the prisoner enclosure, merely watching from above. She hoped they spoke the same language. She wasn't quite sure whether they were the same species, the guards and the prisoners; the differences were small enough that they might be ethnic differences, but large enough they could well have been separate species.)

By the third day, Spock was feeling enough better that his sensations no longer overwhelmed her. Even when she could feel that *he* had a sudden spike of pain or nausea, he kept it from bleeding through to her.

*Thank you*, she thought, wondering if he could perceive her as clearly as she could him.

His response came in feelings, not words, and she wondered if that was how he 'heard' her. Or ... feelings wasn't quite the right word, but they certainly weren't *words*. Concepts? Ideas? He was apologizing for letting his distress bleed through to her, which made her pinch her lips together.

*You were injured, and couldn't help it*, she sent back. *If you want to make it up to me, focus on getting better so we can send a distress call.*

Spock acknowledged the sense in this, and turned his attention away from her, and inward. Nyota turned *her* attention back to her work. Now that his pain wasn't overwhelming her, the link between them wasn't any more distressing or distracting her than when it had been set.

That night, she lay on her pallet and worried about how long it would take him to recover enough for another attempt. They had been sucked off-course by an unidentified stellar phenomena, their shuttlecraft badly damaged and with subspace communications inoperable. *Enterprise* would look for them, of course, but wouldn't know *where* to look. And much though Captain Kirk would hate to abandon them, without proof of life there was a limit to how long he could keep a full starship searching for two officers. If Spock didn't recover enough to try again soon, it wouldn't matter, because *Enterprise* would be too far out of range to hear their transmission.

If Mister Spock were with her, instead of in the men's portion of the prison, and if he were in his right mind, he'd probably point out that worrying over things one could not control was illogical. And he would be right to do so. That didn't make it easier.

She reached out to him; he was asleep, but even in sleep his unconscious mind roused at her touch and responded by reaching back. It was entirely different from cuddling with a loved one, but that was the only analogy she could think of. Sleep came easier that night than it had since they had been captured.

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It took Spock some time—given the state of his brain, he could not ascertain exactly how long, which was troubling—to realize that the mind supporting his was not, as he had assumed, T'Pring. T'Pring was too far away for conscious communication, and was well-trained in the Disciplines; this person was near, and practiced neither emotional mastery nor the telepathic arts.

It was, in fact, Lieutenant Uhura, and with that knowledge came a memory of how he came to be in this place. They had been drawn off-course by an unexplained phenomena, and had found this planet—inhabited by only a single settlement—shortly before their life-support failed. Instead of help, they had been shot down; he and the lieutenant had managed to evade the patrols for long enough to ascertain that they could not reach the prison complex without being detected and captured, and that once inside the prison complex they would need to be able to operate the communications equipment roughly simultaneously, and that there was no chance they would be allowed to keep their communicators to coordinate. Spock had suggested a light, temporary, telepathic link, Uhura had agreed, and they had allowed themselves to be captured.

Once captured, they had attempted to reach the communications centers, and he presumed that he had been discovered in the act, though he had no memory of it. Which was disturbing, as without the memory of it he would not be able to avoid whatever flaw in their plan he had missed.

He could feel Uhura's anxiety about the time, and he shared it; but given his current mental and physical state, he would certainly fail to evade their captors long enough to reach the communications center. Even an extra day to recuperate would materially increase their chances of success.

He shared this thought with her, and she agreed.

Though the link did not pass on words, it was ... far easier to communicate with her than it had been when he first formed the link; far easier than it should have been.

But if something was wrong, he could not fix it until they were together physically, and *that* would likely not happen until and unless they were rescued. It was illogical to dwell on what could not be changed, so he put it from his mind and focused on healing.

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In her time at the Academy, as a Communications major, Uhura had been sent three times to planets with no languages or cultures she was familiar with, left adrift with no access to any materials in languages she understood, and evaluated at how well she picked up the language and culture, both how much she learned and how accurate her knowledge was.

Then later, before her first assignment to a starship, she'd had an intensive course in how to deal with a variety of unpleasant scenarios, being captured and imprisoned among them.

In her time in Starfleet she'd put both sets of training to use many different times in different ways.

This was the first time she'd had *both* a linguistic puzzle *and* an unpleasant scenario at the same time, and it was harder to deal with than either alone, harder than she would have imagined.

It was also the first time she'd been imprisoned alone for any length of time.

That was taking its toll, too. Her fears and anxieties were becoming harder to control. She wouldn't have wished one of her friends or colleagues in here with her, of course, but she dearly wished she had someone to talk to, someone to sit with. She wished she were not so alone.

Only, she wasn't alone, was she? She reached out to Spock, hesitantly, and the presence in the back of her mind flowed open. Spock was somehow more *present* with her, or at least she was more conscious of him with her.

*I hope I'm not bothering you*, she thought at him, and was met with blank incomprehension. Apparently that didn't translate, somehow.

One might have expected a Vulcan mind to feel like a machine, a computer, all hard-edged precision, but that wasn't Spock. His mind was precise, of course, but precise like a cat, delicately putting each paw precisely where it meant to. At least, as much as he was *capable* of with his brain injured the way it was.

Nyota focused on his presence for a while, on the companionship; it was like sitting in quiet contentment with an old friend. And she had the strangest feeling that his mind was, sort of, *cuddling* hers. That couldn't be right, but it was the only metaphor she could think of.

Eventually she turned her attention back to the words of the aliens around her, feeling better for the rest and companionship.

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They were pushing it awfully close by the time Spock judged himself ready for a second attempt, and although Nyota trusted his self-judgment, she couldn't help but worry. He'd been perfectly fine the first time, and look what had happened. But they couldn't afford to wait any longer, and he was much better than he had been.

This time, when she re-wired the electrified fences and fooled the motion sensors, Spock's mind was not a feather-light tickle niggling at her attention. He was a solid, warm weight, and if she closed her eyes she could have almost seen through his, he was so present in her head. Feeling her distraction, Spock ... retreated from her in some way. But she grabbed at him and kept him; his absence would be more worrying (and thus distracting) than his presence. Spock acknowledged this and remained.

Once she was in the communications room and had secured the door, there was the difficulty of figuring out the alien equipment without a translator; but between the language she'd picked up from their captors in the last week, Spock's computer expertise, and her knowledge of subspace transmitters, they were able to figure it out.

"This is Lieutenant Uhura, calling *Enterprise*," she said into the transmitter. "Commander Spock and I have been captured by an unknown alien race and are being held prisoner." She gave their last known coordinates and as much of their situation as she could before their captors destroyed the door. She raised her hands and backed away from the equipment when the door burst open; there was no sense in getting herself killed *now*, when there was hope of rescue.

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Lieutenant Uhura was recaptured shortly before Spock himself was, and they were both escorted to separate cells to await their fate. Spock received bruises along the way, although not, fortunately, any blows to the head.

Uhura sent him a thought which seemed to be a question, but he could not quite figure out what she was trying to ask. Perhaps she wanted to know the likelihood of rescue at this point? Spock could not think with enough clarity to calculate the odds, but once contact was established the likelihood of *Enterprise* finding them rose dramatically. Unfortunately, the odds of their captors becoming aggressive out of anger or fear *also* rose dramatically. In any case, at this point there was little to do but wait. He sat on the floor (there was no furniture in the room) and wished he was well enough to meditate.

It was some hours before anything happened, and Spock took the opportunity to sleep. It was not as if he could do anything else productive, and he did need it. He could not tell how long he had been asleep—and lacking a concrete sense of time was more disorienting than he would have imagined—but he was awake again when the transporter engaged, and beamed him up to the *Enterprise*.

On the transporter pad, he looked over at her and she smiled at him. It was the first time they had seen one another since their capture. It gave him no special relief, for the link between them was a far deeper and more visceral proof of her good health. Still, it was agreeable to see her.

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"Well, you're over the worst of your concussion, but we can give you some medication to help with some of the symptoms," Doctor McCoy said, looking at the readouts on the wall above the biobed where Spock lay. "Don't Vulcans have some sort of healing trance to deal with serious injuries? Why didn't you use it?"

"It requires fine neurological control which I was not capable of," Spock said. "Also, the healing trance can be dangerous when one does not have someone to monitor it from the outside."

"And since you and the Lieutenant were kept in separate parts of the prison, she couldn't help," McCoy said. "Any idea who these people were?"

"Neither our captors nor any of the other prisoners belong to species I am familiar with," Spock said. "Hopefully, future contact can be achieved through more peaceful means."

McCoy harrumphed irritably at this, and asked some more questions about how his head was feeling, and ran a tissue regenerator over his scalp. It was not a magic wand, but it *did* improve his neural function by a noticeable amount. "You'll need to keep coming in every day for treatment, and I want you off duty for the next two weeks at least, but you should be fine."

"Thank you, Doctor," Spock said. "It is always pleasing when one's injuries are within even your capability of healing."

McCoy harrumphed again, and glanced towards the door. "How long is that debrief going to take, anyway?" he grumbled. "Lieutenant Uhura's in better shape than you, but I have to examine her, too."

"She is on her way now," Spock said, for he had been listening to the pattern of her mind, as had become his habit since his injury.

"How the blazes do you know that?" McCoy demanded.

"In order to coordinate our infiltration of the communications equipment, the Lieutenant and I established a minor telepathic link for the duration of our time in the prison camp," Spock said. "I have not yet had time to dissolve it."

"You were telepathically linked when you got your concussion?" McCoy said. "You should have told me right away—I'd have insisted on examining her immediately instead of waiting until after she'd given her report to the Captain."

"She has not been injured," Spock said. "Nor is she in any discomfort." He would know, if either were the case. Indeed, she had regularly reached out to him, and when he had attempted to lessen their contact, she had not wished him to.

"I'm the doctor, I'll be the judge of that," McCoy said.

When Uhura entered sickbay, McCoy fussed over her like a mother hen, asking questions about her experiences while running several diagnostic scans. On the fourth one he paused, frowned at his readouts, recalibrated his machine, and ran it again.

"Doctor?" Uhura asked, "Is everything okay?"

"Your brain scans have a significant deviation from your previously recorded patterns, Lieutenant," McCoy said. "There is a great deal of psionic energy rattling around in there, more than I'd expect from a light, temporary touch. Spock, is this within what norms you would expect?"

Spock rose from his biobed and walked to the one Uhura was lying on. He studied the readings. "No," he said, controlling his astonishment.

Not well enough, evidently, for Uhura felt it. "Is it a problem? Is it serious?" she asked.

"Did she get some second-hand effects from your concussion?" McCoy asked.

"It is similar to a pattern I have seen once before," Spock said, "although I have spent little time studying technological readouts of telepathic phenomena. I do not believe it to be dangerous, or a sign of any damage to you, Lieutenant Uhura. However, I would like to consult someone with greater experience in the matter than myself. May I have your permission to share your scans with a Vulcan healer?"

"Of course, Mister Spock," Uhura said.

"Is this something that will go away on its own, or is it gonna need some sort of intervention?" McCoy asked.

"I would prefer not to speculate in advance of necessary data," Spock said. He was probably wrong, he reassured himself; the chances were quite small.

"Well, can't we break the link now, and see if that does the trick?" Uhura said. "We haven't had time, since the rescue, but we do now."

McCoy folded his arms. "If it's not an emergency, I'd prefer to wait until his brain is healed. Especially if his concussion is what gave you this ... whatever it is, it's better not to have him go rummaging around until his concussion is all gone."

"Astonishingly logical, Doctor," Spock said; though he himself was too distracted by his hypothesis to care, McCoy would notice a lack of their usual banter. And Spock very badly wanted his suspicions confirmed or (hopefully) denied before he had to explain anything.

Experimentally, he sent his thoughts out to T'Pring, and received nothing but silence. Hardly unusual, given the distance and their lack of intimacy; but it seemed the silence was ... emptier than he was used to. "I will go and consult with a Vulcan healer," he said, tapping instructions into the console to send the scan to his inbox.

"Why can't you call them from here?" Uhura said.

"It is night-time in Shi'kahr, where the healer I wish to consult lives," Spock said. "As it is not an emergency, it would be rude to wake her. I would prefer to wait in my quarters."

"Surely there's a healer we could consult *somewhere* that it's daytime," McCoy said.

"There are healers all over Vulcan," Spock said. "However, there is no physician more familiar with the effect of Vulcan telepathy on a Human

brain than my mother's physician." And given that Lieutenant Uhura's scans very closely resembled those of his mother, Healer T'Sotu was undoubtedly the one who should examine them.

"All right," Doctor McCoy said. "But mind you *rest* while you're waiting, and don't spend too long looking at the screen!"

"Doctor, computer screens exacerbate the symptoms of a Human concussion, but not a Vulcan one," Spock said. "I will, however, rest. Please let me know if you find any other anomalies."

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Once alone in the solitude of his quarters, he neither rested nor called Healer T'Sotu. Instead, he placed a priority-one call to T'Pring. Her clan lived several time zones away from Shi'Kahr, and so if she were at home she would likely be awake.

"Spock," she said, blinking, once the call connected. "When our bond snapped, I concluded you must have died. It is gratifying to see this is not the case."

She had thought him dead? It was a logical extrapolation of what he surmised had happened, but he had not considered it. Clearly, his concussion was still affecting him more than he had thought. "Did you inform my parents?"

"Of course," she said.

"I see." He should call them immediately.

"I am curious. May I ask what happened?" she asked.

"You are entitled to know," Spock said, startled at her wording.

She raised an eyebrow. "With our bond broken, you are no longer my husband."

Spock paused, and it was only with some effort that he kept his mouth from dropping in shock. That, too, was an entirely logical consequence he had failed to consider. "I was captured on a hostile planet, along with an officer of this ship. As we had no communication devices, and our only hope of calling for help required simultaneous actions in separate buildings some distance apart, I established a light, temporary link between us. While attempting to carry out our plan, I received a concussion."

"And, naturally, your mind reached out for support from your bondmate," T'Pring said, expressionlessly. "And, when that was not possible due to the distance between us, turned to the closest available substitute, and formed a bond with *her* instead. Thus breaking the bond between you and I."

"That is my hypothesis," Spock said. He had hoped that T'Pring would confirm that their bond was intact, and that his inability to sense anything of her was due solely to his concussion.

"It is quite convenient," T'Pring said.

"How so?" Spock asked.

"Our families desire a closer link, but you and I are ... less compatible than one would wish for in a bonded couple." She tilted her head. "Do you not agree?"

Spock frowned in thought. It had been one of the great certainties in his life since the age of seven: T'Pring was his bondmate and one day they would consummate their marriage. Yet their minds were only minimally compatible. In addition, they had few interests in common and fewer acquaintances, and that had been true even as children. He did not dislike her company, nor she his, but he had never felt any desire to be closer to her; he thought little of her, and did not doubt the reverse was also true. Marriage to her would not be onerous; but neither would it be a benefit. "I suppose," he said slowly.

"I do not dislike you, but I have long thought that a more compatible partner would be agreeable," T'Pring said. "If divorce before the first Pon Farr were easier, I would already have asked for one. But now, we are divorced through happenstance. No blame or shame can attach to either of us. We are both free to seek out spouses more congenial to us."

"I suppose you are correct," Spock said slowly, still reeling from the thought that they were no longer married.

She raised her hand in the ta'al. "Live long and prosper, Spock. I intend to."

He returned the salute. After she signed off, he sat there staring at nothing, in shock. After a few minutes he raised an eyebrow and collected his thoughts. However much this disrupted the course of his life in the long term, in the *short* term, his next few actions were clear. He entered the code to his parents' home. His mother would be asleep, but under the circumstances she would undoubtedly prefer to be awoken immediately.

It took a short time for his parents to accept the call and turn on the screen; both were informally attired, his mother in a dressing gown and with a scarf thrown haphazardly over hair that was undoubtedly undone for the night. Her face was drawn and weary, but when she saw him, she lit up with a smile.

"Spock! Oh, my dear boy, T'Pring told us you were dead!"

"It was a logical inference on her part," Spock said, "though not, as you can see, correct."

"It is gratifying to see you alive, my son," Sarek said, more emotion in his voice than Spock could ever remember hearing.

Spock blinked at his effusiveness, and surreptitiously set the computer to record. With his brain functioning at a suboptimal level, he did not trust his memory, and he would wish to analyze his father's reaction at a later time. The few times he had seen his father's control slip, it had been in anger—when he had run away to try his kahs-wan early and unsupported, for example, his father had been quite irate. This was not that, and the novelty was distracting.

"But, Spock, what *happened*?" his mother asked.

Spock recollected himself and told the story once more. His mother was, as usual, as emotional as one would expect a Human to be; his father was grave and solemn, but he could not forget that first well of emotion. He set the knowledge aside, to ponder when he had the time and energy and his brain was fully functional.

"So, tell us more about your new wife," his mother asked. "What's her first name? Where's she from? Do you like her? Does she like you? Are you going to stay married, or have the bond broken?"

Spock could do nothing but blink and stare at the screen, and be grateful that he had recovered at least enough that his outer mien did not reflect his bafflement. He had barely managed to bring himself to know that T'Pring was no longer his wife, and even *that* did not feel quite real yet; the next logical step, that Lieutenant Uhura now *was*, had escaped him.

"Spock," his father said, frowning at him, "are you still suffering the effects of your recent injuries?"

"Yes," Spock said, grateful for the change of subject. "I am much better, and require only rest and time to heal fully. I am supposed to be resting," he said, to head off his mother's inevitable inquiry as to why he was not in Sickbay if he was still injured.

"I'm sorry, Spock, I should have known," his mother said with some chagrin. "All of this can wait until you're feeling better. Thank you for letting us know you're alright, and get some rest."

"I will, mother," Spock said, "as soon as I have consulted with Healer T'Sotu about Lieutenant Uhura's brain scans."

"Shouldn't your doctor be doing that?" Mother asked, raising her eyebrows.

Spock shifted uncomfortably. "Possibly. However, despite the fact that her scans bore a striking similarity to yours, I did not think it possible that we had formed a bond without my realizing it. So I did not tell her or Doctor McCoy what it might be. I thought I would be ruling a bond out, not confirming it."

His mother stared at him. "Spock, you really *are* out of it, aren't you? Because that sort of wishful thinking isn't like you at all."

"You will need to consult with Healer T'Sotu and inform Lieutenant Uhura and Doctor McCoy of the situation," Sarek said. "But you need to *rest*, my son. I will inform the family of your survival, and you may discuss the details of your new bonding with T'Pau when you are more recovered."

"And please let me know how things are going," his mother said. "And don't hesitate to ask if you need advice about dealing with a Human woman."

What sort of advice would he need? Spock couldn't imagine that Uhura would want to stay bonded to him any longer than she had to. In which case, their professional relationship was already quite stable and productive, and no other relationship would be necessary. "I will keep that offer in mind," he said. He raised his hand in the ta'al. "Live long, and prosper."

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Nyota paced her quarters. Doctor McCoy had sent her back to her quarters with a neural monitor. Given Spock's assurance that the excess telepathic energy was not dangerous, and the fact that she felt fine, she would much rather recuperate from their ordeal in the comfort of her bedroom than in sickbay. But Spock was upset. He had *been* upset since shortly after leaving sickbay.

He was supposed to be resting. So was she. But this was not restful for either of them, and this affected *her* brain too.

She headed out the door and towards his quarters. He knew she was coming, of course, and his door opened as she arrived.

He stood waiting for her, hands clasped behind his back, and he bowed as she entered.

"Mister Spock, I'm sorry to disturb you," she said, "but neither of us were resting and I wanted to know what you've found out. Have you had time to call that Vulcan doctor?"

"You are not disturbing me," Spock said. He looked calm enough, but Uhura could tell that was merely a façade over raging turmoil. "I have not yet spoken with her; however, I believe I know what she is going to say. We are bonded."

Nyota raised her eyebrows. "And how is that different from the telepathic link you were supposed to create?"

"It is extremely different," Spock said. He hesitated, then gestured to the chair at his desk. "Please, have a seat." He filled a pitcher with water from the tap in the bathroom, and set it on the desk, getting out two cups as well before sitting at the desk across from her. He filled both of the cups with slow, deliberate motions before offering one to her.

She took it from him, noting how solemn and intent his mind was. "This is some sort of ritual, isn't it?"

"Yes," Spock said. He lifted his cup in salute to her and drank.

Nyota followed suit, trusting that whatever it was he would tell her in due time.

"What do you know," he asked, "of Vulcan telepathic links?"

"That something went wrong with the one you set between us," Nyota said.

"Although for most purposes Vulcan telepathy requires physical touch, we are capable of forming a few different types of telepathic link between two or more minds, which do *not* require physical touch once the initial link is set. For example, parents and children form strong telepathic bonds in the womb, which weaken as the child develops, fading away usually around age seven. There are a few types of temporary links that may be established between adults, for a variety of purposes, such as the one I set between us." He paused, gathering his courage.

Nyota tensed. If it was something *Spock* had to gather his courage for ... "So what's a 'bond'?" She expected the worst.

"The deepest and most permanent link is a bond between spouses," Spock said. "Although it *can* be severed, it is a difficult procedure requiring an adept such as a priestess of Seleya. Usually, such bonds last until death."

"So we'll have to go to Mount Seleya to get this taken care of?" Nyota asked.

"Possibly," Spock said.

Nyota raised an eyebrow, because she could tell he didn't mean it.

"Given that the bond was created on instinct, and not consciously, and that you are a Human with no innate telepathic abilities of your own, I *might* be able to break it once I am recovered."

"But you don't think that's likely," Nyota said.

"I ... am unable to calculate probabilities at this time," Spock said. "I have not consulted Healer T'Sotu, yet. And I have recently experienced several instances of being unable to make basic deductions."

Nyota thought about that. So far, their bond hadn't been onerous; it had been a comfort, when they were in separate prison blocks, to feel his presence and know she was not alone. His mind could be a little distracting, sometimes, but not in a bad way. "Well, we'll hope that you can, and if not, we can take a trip to Vulcan when *Enterprise* heads back towards Federation space."

Spock tilted his head and his mind ... felt resigned, frustrated.

"What did I miss?" she asked.

"In *practical* terms, nothing," Spock said. "However, under Vulcan law and custom, we are married, and will be until the bond is broken."

"Married?" Nyota said, incredulous. "Mister Spock, that can't be right. Neither of us chose this, and we haven't made any vows or anything of the sort."

"Under Vulcan law and custom, that is irrelevant," Spock said. "Consent is the foundation of *Human* marriage customs, not Vulcan ones. There is no word for marriage, in any Vulcan language, that does not literally mean 'bonded.' Without a bond, no vows or choices are of any weight. With a bond, they are unnecessary."

That said disturbing things about Vulcan culture. But at the moment, what Nyota was most interested in was how all this affected her, specifically. "So what you're saying is, in literal terms, what we need is a severing of the bond, but in *cultural* terms what we need is a divorce?"

"Yes," Spock said.

"And will we have any trouble *getting* a divorce and having the bond severed?"

"Under these circumstances, no," Spock said. "Accidental bonds may be severed at will if the couple wishes to do so. Deliberate bonds ... are generally only severed for cause."

"I see." Nyota sipped her water and considered all of this. "How did it happen?" she asked. "The bond between us, I mean. Was it just the concussion?"

"To be bonded is a primal need, for the Vulcan psyche," Spock said. "Especially in distress. My bondmate—my former bondmate, I should say—and I were never close, and the distance between us had attenuated our bond until it was very 'thin'. This is supposition, but ... when I was injured, I undoubtedly reached out to draw strength and comfort from the bond. Given the rudimentary nature of my bond with T'Pring and the distance between us, there would have been little help from that source."

"And I was close, and we already had a link, so your mind reached out to me, instead," Nyota said.

"Very likely," Spock said. He felt ashamed about it, she could tell, though it only showed as a slight unease in his body language. "In the process, snapping my bond with T'Pring and replacing it with a bond with you. This is only a hypothesis, but a logical one, and it fits the observed facts."

"But if you could break the bond with your wife by accident, surely you could break the one between us on purpose," Nyota said.

"Ex-wife," Spock said. "And that does not necessarily follow. A fitting analogy might be a case of hysterical strength, where someone in a state of hyper-arousal in a case of life-or-death may perform feats of strength far beyond their usual capacity, or, indeed, beyond the capacity of any human not in such an extreme situation."

"Oh," Nyota slumped in disappointment. "Wait a minute—*ex-wife*?" Five minutes ago, she hadn't known he was married. Now he was divorced?

"As I said, the bond is the sole requirement of a marriage," Spock said. "We were divorced from the moment our bond was destroyed."

"I'm so sorry, Mister Spock," Nyota said. Oddly enough, he felt more embarrassed than grieved. "Will you be re-marrying once the bond between us has been taken care of?"

"No," Spock said. "We were not well suited, and T'Pring believed it very convenient, as she had been considering asking for a divorce."

"Oh," Nyota said. She could sense many things from him—pain, shame, and concern being the largest—but little grief over the loss of his wife. Maybe Vulcans were different, but she would have expected even a Vulcan would feel more. She shook her head. There would be time for these sorts of discussions later. "How long until your mother's healer will be in their office? I'm assuming they'll have some insight that will help."

"Given average work schedules in Shi'Kahr, approximately fourteen minutes," Spock said. "I have sent her both our scans, along with an explanation of the circumstances, flagged as high-priority, and a request that she contact us once she has reviewed them."

"It should be just enough time to update Doctor McCoy," Nyota said.

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"Spock! You look worse than when you left. I thought you were going to rest," Doctor McCoy said when they returned to sickbay.

"He didn't," Nyota said. "But he thinks he knows what's wrong, and I thought you should be here when we talk to the healer."

Doctor McCoy ran a scanner over Spock and scowled at the results, but whatever he saw wasn't bad enough for him to interrupt Spock's explanation of the bond. "And you're *sure* that you couldn't just repeat whatever it was that broke your first bond?" he asked, skeptically, when Spock had finished.

"There are still many unknown or unconfirmed factors, but if my hypothesis is correct, it is doubtful," Spock said. "Vulcans devote much effort to controlling and suppressing our instinctive responses so that we may live lives of pure logic. The conscious mind is quite powerful when used in a disciplined manner. However, there are some instincts that run too deeply to eradicate."

"You mean the instinct to be bonded, don't you?" Nyota said, thinking over what he had told her so far. "When you broke your bond with T'Pring, you were trading an almost nonexistent bond with a distant partner for a much stronger bond with someone right there. It was driven by instinct. But to break the bond with me, when you don't have someone else right there to bond with instead ... the very same instinct would be working against your best efforts."

"Very astute, Lieutenant," Spock said. He wasn't surprised that she had figured that out, but she could feel his approval of her quick wits.

"Spock, you sound like you *want* to be bonded to Uhura," McCoy said. "Besides the fact that *she* didn't ask for this, I can't imagine you'd want to have an illogical Human in your head all the time."

"I would not have chosen to bond with *anyone* who did not choose to bind themselves to me," Spock said. "But it was *not* a choice I made; I was not even aware it had *happened* until two point four hours ago. Nor would I choose to continue in a bond with an unwilling mate. However, breaking the bond at this point will most likely require either a Vulcan healer-adept or a priestess, neither of which are available to us until we are closer to Federation space."

"And having a Human in your head?" McCoy pressed.

Spock tilted his head. "Doctor, the bond is a far older instinct than the Disciplines, or the tenets of Surak. Indeed, it predated our sapience, and is still to this day found in a number of related animal species. Furthermore, the Lieutenant's mind is pleasingly disciplined, for a Human. If my conscious or subconscious mind found *her* mind repulsive, I doubt my instincts would have bonded us."

Nyota frowned. Regardless of what he said, regardless of whether or not this was something he would have chosen, she was pretty sure that he liked being bonded to her. His inner turmoil had risen as they discussed severing the bond. Was it that he liked *her* or was it that he liked *being bonded*?

She wasn't sure how she felt about that.

But at the same time, she remembered what a comfort it had been, in that prison, to not be alone. To have him with her, in mind if not in body. They had taken comfort from each other, and supported each other, and it would have been much harder to endure alone. The bond, so far, had been more than worth it.

But she didn't have time to contemplate this, because the computer alerted them to an incoming call. Doctor McCoy gestured them in to his office and accepted it.

Healer T'Sotu had skin darker than Nyota's own, and wore her hair in an elaborate crown of braids.

"Spock," she said. "It is gratifying to see that reports of your death were incorrect."

"It is gratifying to be alive," Spock replied. "Healer T'Sotu, this is Lieutenant Nyota Uhura, and Doctor Leonard McCoy."

"It's a pleasure to meet you, ma'am," Doctor McCoy said.

"I greet you," she said in reply, before looking back at Spock. "Your hypothesis was correct, Spock," she said. "While a telepathic assessment



will be required to register the bonding with the clan authorities, that is a formality. Both of your scans show the bond *very* markedly. I would assume that your sense of one another is quite strong."

"Certainly, it is stronger than my bond with T'Pring," Spock said.

"If you can tell from the scans that we're bonded, why do you need a telepathic assessment?" Nyota asked.

"The scans show activity in the bonding cortex—and the closest a Human brain can come, in your case, Lieutenant—which proves that both of you are bonded. A scan cannot, however, identify the bonded mind, so it does not by itself prove that you are bonded *to each other*."

"Ah," Nyota said. "But why would you need to prove it, if we intend to dissolve the bond when we're close enough to take leave on Vulcan?"

Healer T'Sotu raised an eyebrow. "Even as a temporary state—perhaps especially as a temporary state—there are many legal and cultural aspects of your marriage. And clan bureaucracies are very thorough about seeing that everything is recorded and handled properly."

"That's all well and good, ma'am, but I'm more worried about the neurological implications of this," Doctor McCoy said. "Spock's brain is designed to be bonded; Uhura's isn't. What's the likelihood of damage?"

"Very small," T'Sotu replied. "Given the paucity of data on Vulcan/Human bonding, the odds of detrimental side effects cannot be calculated with any certainty. However, none of the known cases have resulted in any neurological damage to the Human involved."

"Out of how many cases?" Nyota asked.

"Six," T'Sotu replied. "One of which was accidental, and which was accordingly severed. Neither the creation nor the dissolution of the bond caused any damage."

"Good to know," McCoy said.

"I shall send you a summary of my findings regarding the bond of Spock's parents, and the available literature on the other cross-species bonds," T'Sotu said.

"Thank you, I appreciate that," Doctor McCoy said.

"Meanwhile, I have some questions about the circumstances under which the bond was formed," T'Sotu said, and proceeded to interrogate both Spock and Nyota about their memories of the event, from the formation of the first light link to their rescue.

"Did anything I do make the bond stronger or more permanent?" Nyota asked, after T'Sotu's inquiries had been answered. "We were very open, between us, and I tried to support him as much as possible, especially during the first part of his recovery."

T'Sotu raised an eyebrow. "'Strength' is entirely an inadequate metaphor, and dependent on many factors, some of them intangible. As to permanence—bonds are permanent by their very nature. One either is bonded, or one is not, and once the bond has been created there is nothing either partner can do to make the bond more or less permanent than it is by its own nature. However, Spock's recovery was undoubtedly hastened by your support."

"Really?" Nyota said in surprise.

"Indubitably," T'Sotu said. "Bonds measurably increase the speed of healing, especially for neurological injuries. Close physical proximity and a free flow of connection between spouses enhances the effect."

"*Enterprise* had found no trace of us before we were able to send our call, and was very close to being ordered to give up the search and go on to its next mission," Nyota said. "If Spock hadn't recovered well enough to do his part of the transmission, we might not have been able to make contact. If I sped his healing, then we might not have been rescued without our bond." She thought back to those horrible, hopeless days in the prison. It was good to know that even while she could do little but study and wait, she had been effectively increasing their odds of rescue.

Nyota felt Spock's attention, and looked over to see him watching her.

"I thank you for your assistance," he said gravely. "And the comfort, especially when I could not govern my own mind."

"You're welcome, Spock," she said. There was something troubling him, she could tell, and she sent a query along the bond.

Spock gave her a mental acknowledgement and turned back to the screen. "Healer T'Sotu. Was there anything in my thoughts or preferences that contributed to the formation bond?"

T'Sotu stared at him, nonplussed. "Obviously. Your instinctive need for a bond capable of supporting you in your time of need was what snapped your existing bond and created a new one in its place."

Spock's discomfort grew. "I apologize for my lack of clarity. Would any preference for the Lieutenant have had an effect on my instinctive actions?"

Nyota froze. *That* put a whole new spin on things. If he was attracted to her—had a preference for her—why had he never responded when she tried to flirt with him? But of course, she realized; he'd been married, and Spock was not the type to be unfaithful.

T'Sotu sighed. "Spock, there are a great many factors that went into the breaking of your old bond and establishing a new one. Most of them are impossible to determine or measure with any accuracy. In any case, speculation is illogical. You did not choose to do this; your instinctive reaction while unconscious and severely injured is not something that *anyone* could have controlled or predicted. And what is, is. There is no

blame or shame in any of this, and attempting to discern the exact reasons why your subconscious acted as it did can only distract you from moving forward in whatever actions you and Lieutenant Uhura choose to take."

"I'm not so sure I agree, ma'am," Doctor McCoy put in. "What happens if it happens again, and Spock gets injured and subconsciously breaks this bond to form a new one? We'd feel pretty foolish if we hadn't at least tried to look into it this time."

"*That* is highly unlikely," T'Sotu said. "Breaking a bond to form a new one is something that happens only rarely, in extreme distress, and I am unaware of it happening twice to the same person at any time in Vulcan history. If for no other reason than that it only happens so that one can change from a non-supportive bond to an open and supportive one. If the new bond were closed off and of so little support to Spock that his instincts would seek a new bond during a time of distress, it would not have been strong enough to prove any enticement away from his original bond."

Doctor McCoy harrumphed. "If you say so, ma'am," he said.

"What about practical ways of dealing with the bond?" Nyota said. "I was grateful to have the connection when we were in prison, but how much privacy can one have?" Even if she'd *chosen* to bond with him, if she'd wanted to marry him, she would have still wanted privacy at least *sometimes*.

"A great deal, depending on how much privacy you wish," T'Sotu said. "There are techniques for lessening or curtailing the flow of information; Spock should be able to teach them to you."

"I'm not a telepath," Nyota said, "will that affect things?"

"As a non-telepath, you will likely not be able to completely block Spock's awareness of your mind," T'Sotu said. "However, you should be able to prevent him from perceiving any specifics of your thoughts or mood. Spock should be able to teach you the applicable techniques."

"Oh, that's good," Nyota said, relieved. There was a bit more discussion, but nothing of note was learned, and then they were allowed to go back to their quarters and rest.

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Spock was *badly* in need of meditation when he reached his quarters. He had not been able to since his injury, but he should now be able to achieve at least light meditation at this point, and organizing his thoughts would do him as much good as sleep. Certainly, the whirl that his thoughts were in—that they had been in ever since his call with T'Pring—was not restful at all, nor conducive to healing.

He began with a simple exercise he had first learned as a small child: to identify each emotion he felt, and the thoughts associated with them. Mastering them could come later; one could not master what one was not aware of.

There was pain, and anger at those who had imprisoned them and injured him.

There was shock and grief and anxiety over the ending of his bond with T'Pring and everything he had assumed his future would be, and shame that she had not wanted him.

There was desire for Uhura. She was gorgeous both physically and mentally. He had always known this, of course; but he knew it more viscerally now.

There was shame at having bonded with her without her consent. T'Sotu was right that it was illogical; he had been scarcely aware when it happened, and even had he chosen to do it he could never have done it through his conscious will. And even if he *had* intentionally chosen to do so, shame would do nothing to change their circumstances.

Knowing it was illogical was insufficient to master it, of course; and he was reaching the limits of his current stage of recuperation. What he had accomplished—a more thorough understanding of his own mind—was sufficient for now.

He lay down on his bed, intending to sleep. But though his thoughts were calmer than they had been, still they were not quiet enough for sleep. He began a visualization exercise, very simple, one he had used since childhood. An Earth exercise his mother had taught him: counting sheep.

His mind kept turning towards Uhura, reaching out for her. He was much recovered from what he had been; although the touch of her mind would be pleasant, he did not *need* it. They had not spoken, so he could not ascertain her wishes, and he would not impose upon her without knowing what she wanted.

Especially not when he was aroused, as he was now. *That* was something which would require clear discussion before any actions could be taken.

He set about regulating his body, but found it more difficult than he would have expected it.

Ah. It was not *his* arousal.

Well. *That* was something he was unused to. Whatever T'Pring's libido might have been, whatever *any* of her physical, emotional, or mental states might have been, she had always taken care to block his perceptions. He, in turn, had shielded himself from her. But Uhura did not know how to shield herself, and he was not yet recovered enough to teach her. Should he ignore whatever he felt? Should he reach out mentally so that she at least knew he was aware? Should he call her on the intercom?

As he was contemplating what, if anything, he should do about the situation, he felt her arousal turn to shame. Why, he did not know; humans were not, in his experience, given to shame about sexual matters. But it settled the question of what to do; he would ignore whatever he felt, at least until he could discuss it with her.

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Nyota debated whether or not she should tell her parents she was—temporarily, technically, according to Vulcan law and custom—married. On the one hand, marriage *was* usually considered a major life event that should be shared with family. On the other hand, this wasn't exactly your typical marriage.

The com system whistled. She went to her desk and toggled it on. "Yes?"

"Lieutenant, you have a call from Vulcan," said the com officer on duty.

Vulcan? What now? She wasn't in uniform but she looked presentable. "I'll take it here," she said, turning on the camera.

An elderly Vulcan woman with an ornate hairstyle appeared on the screen. She was seated, and behind her stood a middle-aged woman wearing simple robes and with her hair in a long braid. The room they were in wouldn't have looked out of place in a holodrama about pre-Reform Vulcan, splendid and austere.

"Nyota Uhura?" the elderly woman asked.

Nyota nodded. "Yes. To whom am I speaking?"

"I am T'Pau. I welcome you into the High Clan. Thank you for your service to Spock, son of Sarek."

Nyota's jaw dropped. She *couldn't* be, could she? But she was the right age, and it was the right clan.... "I'm sorry, are you the T'Pau who signed the Federation charter?"

"I am."

"It is *such* an honor, sir," Nyota said.

T'Pau inclined her head graciously.

They were speaking Standard, probably because T'Pau didn't know Nyota spoke Golic. Should she switch languages, out of respect? If she knew for certain Golic was T'Pau's native language, she would, but perhaps it was better to continue the conversation in the language T'Pau had chosen. She took a deep breath and sternly told herself to get a grip. T'Pau wouldn't be impressed by hero worship. "Thank you for your gracious welcome," Nyota said. "Really, it isn't necessary, this isn't a permanent arrangement and it's not something either of us did on *purpose*."

"I am aware of the circumstances surrounding your marriage," T'Pau said. "Irregularity and a lack of planning are all the more reason to do things properly after the fact, so that the interests of all involved may be protected. You did a great service for a child of my house, and your assistance was involuntary. Spock owes you. So do we, on his behalf. That is true regardless of how long the marriage lasts. If you have any need of assistance that I or my clan may provide, you have only to let us know and it will be done."

"Thank you," Nyota said, in awe. T'Pau of Vulcan, *the* T'Pau, offering her an unlimited favor? There were some concepts Vulcans had that, as far as Nyota knew had never been translated from *any* Vulcan language into any other language. Vulcan privacy taboos were extraordinarily strong. If she promised not to tell anyone, would T'Pau let someone explain them to her?

"This is T'Rili, a manager of our clan's interests," T'Pau said, indicating the woman behind her. T'Rili bowed her head in greeting. "She will be available at your convenience to explain to you the details of your position in the clan—temporary though it may be—and your rights and responsibilities. She will also establish the marriage settlements."

"I'm free all day, today," Nyota said. "But can I ask what marriage settlements are?"

"Marriage settlements," T'Rili said, "are the formal agreements about what the family of each spouse will contribute, financially, materially, practically, and in all other ways, to the marriage."

Nyota blinked. "Oh, thank you, but that's really not necessary," she said. "I didn't marry Spock for money, and by the time we're back in Federation space where it might be any use, we'll be getting divorced."

T'Pau's eyes narrowed. "You, outlander, can have no understanding of what is and is not necessary. The proprieties are, as I said, *more* important in irregular circumstances, not less so."

Nyota bowed her head in submission. She would have loved to say more—she didn't need to be *paid* for this whole charade like something out of a historical novel, good *God*—but at the same time, she knew there were cultural issues she was missing, and also, she couldn't quite bring herself to argue with T'Pau.

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By the time T'Rili had finished outlining all the rights, responsibilities, and privileges of being Spock's wife—including those which she would remain entitled to after the bond was severed—Nyota had been through a cycle of shock, disbelief, and bemusement so many times that she wondered what Spock was making of all of this. (If she thought too much about that, she'd go mad. Learning how to shield could not come fast enough!)

If she'd thought about it she would have realized that Vulcans wouldn't marry for love, but she hadn't. Apparently, they married for familial alliance, resource allocation, and to ensure a web of mutual obligations so that nobody would ever be left without help when they needed it. The list of contingencies T'Rili had walked her through spoke to millennia of precedent.

Nyota sat back in her chair and sighed. "You've said that accidentally breaking one bond to create another is rare, but you certainly have put a great deal of thought into how to handle it."

"It is exceedingly rare," T'Rili said dryly. "This is the only case I have ever encountered outside of a textbook. However, Vulcan currently has a population of approximately six billion, not including colony worlds, and our current legal system has roots that go back some twelve thousand years. Even exceedingly rare things have happened many times over the course of that history."

"I guess," Nyota said. She shook her head. "I doubt I'll ever need to know any of this, but thank you for taking the time to go over it with me."

T'Rili inclined her head. "It is only my duty. Do you have any questions I have not yet answered?"

"Not anything about the legal arrangements," Nyota said. "But something's been bothering me since Spock told me we were married, and I haven't had a chance to discuss it with him, and you'd know the answer."

"I am at your disposal, Lady Nyota," T'Rili said.

When she was ten, the idea that someone might someday call her that with all seriousness would have been very exciting. Nyota set that thought aside. "If Vulcan marriages are based on telepathic bonds ... what did you do when telepathic contact was outlawed?"

A pained look crossed T'Rili's face. "*That* political and sociological blunder caused chaos that we are *still* untangling," she said. "The High Command's 357-year rule was the only period in Vulcan's history in which marriage and bonds were not legally synonymous. Some continued to bond their children in secret, in defiance of the High Command's edicts, and which clans and houses were investigated and prosecuted for doing so was more due to political considerations than any other. But even where bonds were not formed on purpose, as you are aware, Vulcans will form bonds instinctively. Without the guidance of a purposefully constructed bond, bonds were formed according to subconscious preference instead of choice. Many people ended up bonded to those who were not their legal spouses, with no way of either dissolving unwanted bonds or acknowledging bonds they preferred to their legal marriage. Once telepathy was permitted again, it took decades to train enough mind-healers and priestesses to verify all marriages and correct any problems."

Nyota considered that. "It must have been terribly distressing to a lot of people."

"Yes," T'Rili said.

When it was clear she wasn't going to give any examples, Nyota changed the subject. "This whole marriage is a lot more complicated than I was expecting. You've been very clear about the legal and financial part of all of this, and if there are any telepathic issues I can ask Spock or Healer T'Sotu. Is there anything else I need to know about? I've been blindsided quite enough in the last day or two."

T'Rili pursed her lips. "If no one has explained it to you, ask either Spock or Healer T'Sotu about Pon Farr."

It wasn't a word Nyota had learned in her studies of Golic. "And that is?"

"Something out of my purview, as administrator for the clan," T'Rili said crisply.

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Nyota met Janice and Christine for dinner that evening in the mess hall. Their friendship was complicated—relationships between enlisted and officers always had to be carefully judged, and given their positions (head of a department, head nurse, Captain's assistant) all three regularly handled things they couldn't talk about. But it was a good friendship nonetheless, and Nyota was sure they'd been worried while she and Spock were missing.

Besides, she really needed a bit of normality in her life, and hopefully dinner with her friends would help.

"Nyota!" Janice gave her a hug when she saw her. "Christine told me you were okay, but I'm glad to see you."

"Likewise!" Nyota said. "It wasn't fun, but it wasn't *that* bad. Things could have been worse."

"They could have been better, too," Christine said. "I'm glad you came out of it in such good shape, but if you *do* have psychological symptoms, please reach out for help—it wouldn't be surprising at all if there were lingering effects."

"I know," Nyota said, firmly pushing down her annoyance. She was here to see her friends, not a medical professional.

"So what happened?" Janice asked.

Nyota hesitated. She wasn't sure she wanted to talk about the marriage, at least not until she'd figured out how she felt about it.

"You don't have to tell, if it's hard to talk about," Janice said, "but maybe talking will help?"

She could tell them about the link without saying what it meant according to Vulcan law and custom, Nyota realized. "No, it's fine," she said, and told them the story from start to finish. She'd already debriefed to the captain, and written her report, but it was different telling the story to friends.

"So what was it like, having Mister Spock in your head?" Janice asked. "Was it weird? Did you get used to it? Did he feel alien, or familiar?"

"Well, *any* telepathic contact feels a bit strange at first," Nyota said. "Until you get used to him. But I don't mind having him in my head; he's very considerate."

"You're speaking in present tense," Janice observed. "Do you mean you haven't broken the link yet?"

"No," Nyota said. "After he was injured, he reached out subconsciously for help, and I reached back. And it strengthened the link so much that Spock can't break it, we'll have to wait until we can go to Vulcan to get a healer or priestess to break it."

Christine froze, fork half-way to her lips.

"What?" Janice said, noticing her reaction. "I mean, if Nyota doesn't think it's unpleasant, what's the big deal?"

Christine set her fork carefully on her tray and stared at Nyota. "The first time Mister Spock used telepathy on a mission, I reviewed the information we have on Vulcan telepathy, just in case there was ever some sort of neurological problem. According to what I read, there's only *one* type of link so strong it needs a priestess to break."

Nyota sighed, and glanced around the mess hall. Nobody seemed to be paying attention, but gossip was serious business on a starship, even one as big as *Enterprise*. "Let's not talk about it here—I'll tell you about it in private after dinner."

Janice glanced between the two of them, wide-eyed. Christine gave a judicious nod and began eating quickly.

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Once in her quarters, Nyota poured all three of them drinks. She had a feeling they were going to need it.

"All right, so what's the big secret?" Janice asked, taking a sip of her vodka.

"The only type of link so strong that it can only be broken by a priestess or a healer-adept," Christine said, watching Nyota closely, "is a mate-bond. A *marriage bond*."

Janice raised her eyebrows. "So what does that mean?" she asked. "A marriage bond. Does it mean you're going to have an irresistible urge to have sex?"

"It means that according to Vulcan law and custom, we're married," Nyota said. "And his clan—and oh, by the way, T'Pau, *yes that T'Pau*, is his clan's Eldest Mother—is determined to do everything properly even if we're just going to get divorced and have the bond broken the next time we're close to Vulcan. Which is why she *called me this morning*. After which, I had a long call with one of the clan's administrators going over what my rights and responsibilities were and how to access the clan bank account and all of that."

"T'Pau? Really?" Christine asked. "You spoke with T'Pau of Vulcan?"

"She welcomed me as a daughter of her House," Nyota said with a nod.

Christine gave a soundless whistle and then took a swig of her ogogoro.

"That's fascinating, and we can talk about that later," Janice said. "But first. You're *married* to *Spock*?"

"Temporarily," Nyota said. She took a sip of her own ogogoro, taking comfort in the taste of home. She considered. "Probably."

"*Probably*?" Christine said. "You mean there's a chance it *isn't* temporary?"

"We haven't really had time to talk about it," Nyota said. "It was such a shock, and there's been so much to do ..."

"What do you want?" Janice asked. "Do you want to stay married to him? I mean, he *is* quite a catch. Handsome, intelligent, respectful, good career prospects ... no sense of humor—"

"If he didn't have a sense of humor, he wouldn't have such great banter with Doctor McCoy," Christine said.

"I stand corrected," Janice said. "Handsome, intelligent, respectful, good career prospects, *and* a sense of humor. I can see why you'd be tempted." She shot Nyota a sly grin.

"Yes, well, there's a *reason* I flirted with him when I was first assigned to the ship," Nyota said. "He never responded, though. And also, going from collegiality to married is a big step to make all at once. And divorces are harder for Vulcans to get, what if we try it and it doesn't work and then we can't get divorced for some reason?"

"That sounds like a question to ask Spock about, or that Vulcan bureaucrat," Christine pointed out. "If you *are* interested, and it sounds like you are, now's the perfect time to test things out. If he's interested as well, that is."

"What if it doesn't work out?" Nyota asked.

"Then you're no worse off than you are now," Janice said. "And besides, if there is anyone on the ship capable of setting aside hurt feelings and being professional even if things go wrong, it's Mister Spock."

"True," Nyota said, brightening a little.

"I wonder what he's like in bed," Christine mused, staring into her drink. "He has such lovely hands."

Janice made a shocked face. "Lieutenant *Chapel*," she said, "do you have a crush on a fellow officer's spouse?"

Christine made a face at her. "No. But I have eyes."

Nyota's cheeks were very warm, and it wasn't just the drink. She was glad they couldn't tell she was blushing.

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Spock opened the door for Lieutenant Uhura without waiting for her to use the door chime. He was unsurprised to see her; she had been unsettled since the day before, and he knew it had something to do with him, although he had not pried.

"Lieutenant Uhura," he said. "Welcome. Would you like tea, or another beverage?"

"Tea would be good, thank you," she said, "and you can call me Nyota."

"Nyota, then," he said.

"I didn't know you were related to T'Pol," Nyota said. "She called me, yesterday."

"Unsurprising, given the circumstances." Spock got out the box containing his tea supply, and handed it to Nyota.

"It was quite a shock to *me*," Nyota looked through it and selected one.

Spock selected the appropriate temperature at the water dispenser and filled the pot. "I apologize for not anticipating it, and informing you of the possibility."

She waved a hand to brush this off. "No apologies necessary, Spock, you were dealing with a lot, too, *and* you have a concussion on top of that. Anyway, she had someone talk me through all the legal ramifications of this. Marriage is a lot more complicated on Vulcan than it is on Earth."

"This is true," Spock said. "Do you have any questions about what you learned?" They sat down at his desk, the pot steeping between them.

"No," Nyota said. "Although, she did say I should ask you about something called Pon Farr."

Spock wished the tea were ready, so that he would have something to do with his hands, something else to look at, other than his wife. "Ah."

She raised her eyebrows. "And now I'm concerned," she said. "What is it?"

Spock wished, briefly, that he had a textbook to give her instead of explaining it himself, but he had no such reference material, and she did indeed need to know. "It is the time of mating," he said.

Nyota considered this. "You go into heat?"

"Yes," Spock said.

"Why are you so embarrassed?" Nyota said. "It's a biological function. Plenty of species have mating cycles of one kind or another."

"It is accompanied by a loss of all rational thought, all emotional control," Spock said, briefly. "It is a time of madness."

He could feel her sympathy. "That must be hard, for a Vulcan."

Spock nodded. "I have yet to experience it, and may never do so, because of my Human heritage. But if I do go into Pon Farr while we are bonded, I will be drawn to you. I will not be able to help myself."

Nyota shrugged. "I've been attracted to you since we met. Having sex with you won't be a hardship, unless you turn violent or something."

"Violence toward you is unlikely," Spock said. "It is one of the reasons for bonding. And should it happen, you will be able to ... influence me, to some degree, through the bond. Violence toward anyone I perceive as a rival—whether or not there is any rational basis to it—is a possibility, if we do not notice the symptoms early enough and seclude ourselves. And since irrationality is one of the early symptoms, I will likely not be competent to make such a decision."

"All right," Nyota said. "I'll be on the lookout."

She truly did not seem phased by the idea. To Spock, who dreaded the very idea of Pon Farr, it was a curiously reassuring reaction.

"I am curious, though," she said, "what your plan was *before* we were bonded. Your wife, what was her name—"

"T'Pol," Spock said.

"—T'Pol isn't on the ship. What were you planning to do?"

Spock cocked his head. "As I said, there is a chance that I will be spared Pon Farr due to my Human heritage. I have never yet experienced it, and the average age of first Pon Farr is twenty-six. With every passing year, the likelihood that I will suffer it diminishes. And although we are on an exploratory mission, we spend much of our time either within Federation borders or very close to them, such that I could return to Vulcan in time, if necessary."

"I see," Nyota said. "A managed risk."

"Yes." The tea was ready, and so Spock removed the tea strainer from the pot and set it aside. He poured two cups and gave one to Nyota.

"I am glad that the prospect does not distress you," Spock said. He found it hard to believe, but it was gratifying. He hesitated before continuing. "If I may ask, if you are not ashamed of sex, why were you ashamed to be aroused yesterday? You do not have to answer, of course, but I am ... curious."

Nyota was very uncomfortable, although she carried herself with her usual aplomb. "I'm not ashamed of sex," she said. "Why would I be? But, Spock, sex is usually *private*, only shared with a partner if you have one, and I don't know how to shield from you. I don't have an exhibitionist kink."

"Ah," Spock said, enlightened. "I apologize for not being able to block you better. I will, of course, teach you to shield as soon as I have sufficiently recovered from my concussion to do so safely, and will endeavor to ignore anything you do not wish to share until then."

"Thank you," Nyota said. She paused, gathering her courage. "While we're on the subject of sex and boundaries," she said, "what about you? Do Vulcans have a sex drive outside of Pon Farr?"

"Most do, including myself," Spock said.

"Do you find me attractive?" Nyota said. "Or is it just your mating drive that would make you want me?"

"I found both your body and your mind attractive from our first meeting," Spock said. "The bond, and a greater knowledge of your character, has only enhanced this."

"Then why didn't you respond when I flirted with you in our first few months aboard ship?" Nyota asked. "I wasn't exactly subtle."

"I find that most Humans who flirt with me are driven by sport more than sincerity," Spock said. "There are many offworlders who view our control over our emotions as a challenge to be overcome, rather than a difference to be respected. I have never desired to be a notch in anyone's bedpost."

"I'm sorry you've had bad experiences, Spock," Nyota said. "I'd never do that to you or anyone else."

"You would not," Spock said, "but by the time I understood your character sufficiently to be sure of that, your attentions had lessened and become more of a game, and I judged the opportunity had passed."

"Well," Nyota said, "it seems we have another opportunity."

Spock paused in surprise.

Nyota looked him up and down, and encouraged him to feel what she felt: attraction, friendship, respect, and a myriad of other emotions. And a visceral understanding that there could be more between them. "If you feel the way I do."

Spock returned the favor, focusing on how he felt about her, his own attraction (which up to this point he had been mostly ignoring or setting aside), his admiration, the frisson of anticipation he felt at the chance for something more with her.

She smiled in response. "I see we're in agreement there. I only have two questions left: why didn't you even suggest that we might *not* break the bond?"

"I did not wish to presume," Spock said.

"And second, if we try this and it *doesn't* work, will there be any problems breaking the bond later if we don't do it as soon as we can?"

"No," Spock said. "As to the bond itself, at this point there is nothing that would make it either easier or harder to break than it already is; as to Vulcan legality, an accidental bond will always be easier to prove in need of dissolution than a chosen bond."

"So there's no reason *not* to try, and see where it leads, is what you're saying?" Nyota was smiling at him.

"That is correct," Spock said, hope and eagerness rising within him.

She reached out and took his hand. He shivered in delight at the sensation, and he felt her surprise. She hadn't expected it to be that intense.

"Mm," she said, and stood, walking around the table. She didn't let go of his hand.

He watched her come, breathless with anticipation, arousal thrumming between them. She sat on his lap. "Let's see where this goes," she said, leaning in to kiss him.

## End Notes

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