

## That Tender Light

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## That Tender Light

by [Beatrice Otter](#)

### Summary

Spock and Nyota are colleagues and friends, nothing more. But now that Spock's bond with T'Pol has been broken, he can't help noticing Nyota in new ways.

### Notes

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Thank you to phnelt for much help betaing.

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

## Amok Time

Nyota was sitting at her desk playing games on her PADD while she waited for Christine. They'd been on opposite schedules for a couple of weeks and hadn't gotten a chance to talk. But now they were on the same shift again, so they could get together for tea and games, and given the rumors flying around the ship, Nyota wanted to check in to see that Christine was alright.

Half the rumors painted Spock as some sort of cave-man sexist pig throwing a temper tantrum. Half of them painted Christine as some sort of sex-crazed nymphomaniac. *All* of them had Christine as the subject of a *brutal* dressing-down.

None of it made any *sense*. Spock was unfailingly courteous and respectful in the best sense, and, like Captain Kirk, never failed to support the female officers and crew under his command when the situation called for it. Nor was he prone to viciousness of any kind. Sardonic was as bad as he got. Christine was a professional and would never sexually harass anyone, but *especially* not a patient.

And none of that even took into account what came *after*, with Spock countermanding the Admiralty's orders, the back-and-forth to Vulcan or not, Spock having a *wife* no one knew about (with poor Christine being right there when the surprise was sprung, which hadn't exactly quieted the rumors down any), and then the captain coming back to the ship unconscious. From *Vulcan*, of all places! One of the safest planets in the Federation! Nyota was confused and upset, and she didn't like either feeling.

The door chime rang. "Enter!" Nyota said.

It was Christine, impeccably groomed and styled as always, but still visibly worn.

"Christine!" Nyota said, tossing her PADD aside. She got up and hugged her friend. "How are you holding up?"

"Oh, please, Nyota, not you too," Christine said with a groan, sinking into one of the chairs. She buried her face in her hands. "Spock was ill and not himself, and anything else is bound up in patient confidentiality."

Nyota took the other chair across from her friend. Christine was so obviously disturbed by the whole thing that that *couldn't* be the whole story even without considering the rumors. "Must have been some illness," she observed carefully.

Christine snorted. "You don't even know the *half* of it, and that's all I'm going to say. But I *can* tell you that if Vulcan actually gave Starfleet Medical details on certain aspects of Vulcan biology, along with the cultural issues surrounding them, this whole *mess* would have been handled quite differently. And that's all I'm going to say. Frankly, this whole week has been hellish and I don't want to think about it *one minute longer*."

"All right," Nyota said quietly, taking her curiosity and locking it away for now. She wouldn't want to challenge Christine's professional ethics, and in any case, supporting her friend was more important than Nyota's questions getting answered. "What are you up for tonight? Game? Movie? Do you want distraction or just relaxation?"

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Two days later, Spock asked her if she would like to resume their weekly jam sessions. He'd skipped the last two without notifying her; looking back, Nyota wondered if that missed session had been the first sign something was wrong.

She had to think about it; she'd always enjoyed playing with Spock, he was the only musician on the ship who could really keep up with her. And she considered him a friend (although, given Vulcan emotional reticence, she had no idea whether *he* considered *her* a friend). But that had been before he'd said ... whatever he'd said to Christine. Before she'd been so forcefully reminded that he was *alien*, and that there was a lot about Vulcans that nobody knew because Vulcans just didn't talk about themselves.

Nyota got along just fine with people of many different races; you had to, as a communications officer. But she didn't like how he'd treated Christine, and she didn't like realizing she understood him less well than she'd believed she did. They'd never been close, but they'd been *comfortable* in each others' presence, and Nyota was decidedly *uncomfortable* now.

In the end, she went; whatever had happened between him and Christine, he'd been ill at the time and Christine didn't seem to be holding a grudge. If Christine wasn't, then it would be unreasonable of Nyota to do so when she didn't even know what had happened. And it was in one of the private gathering spaces on the rec deck, which was neutral territory if anything was.

Besides, the underlying problem was that Nyota had thought she'd understood Spock, and realized she was wrong, and a lack of understanding wasn't a problem that could be solved by avoidance.

"I apologize for missing our last two sessions without notifying you," Spock said as he tuned his lyre and she soaked the reed of her *algaita*.

"Apology accepted, Mister Spock," Nyota said. "I understand you weren't yourself." *That* she was not holding against him. The inconvenience was minor, and it was likely a symptom of his illness. It didn't make her any more comfortable about the rest of the situation, but she appreciated the courtesy.

"I was not," Spock said briefly. Was she imagining things, or was he uncomfortable? Sometimes Spock was surprisingly easy to read, for a Vulcan; sometimes he was perfectly opaque.

"Can I ask if you've apologized to Christine?"

*That* stopped him. His head shot up and he frowned slightly. "What should I be apologizing for?"

"What should you be apologizing for?" Nyota was incensed. "I don't know *what* happened because the rumor mill has gone crazy and she

won't tell me because of confidentiality issues—although how you can claim confidentiality when it was in a public corridor with multiple crew members walking past is beyond me—but you tore a bloody strip off of her in public, and started a *lot* of very nasty rumors about both you *and* her, and you're the first officer and you've been mostly off duty since then so you may not have gotten any grief for it yet, but *she* has had no such protection."

He was very nearly green. "I did not—there are a number of substantial gaps in my memory of the last week. And there were occasional hallucinations and a number of very odd and lifelike dreams. I do not remember any such exchange, but that means little; and I cannot give you any idea of what my mental state was at that particular moment."

"Then why weren't you in sickbay?" Nyota demanded. "You were even still on the duty roster at that point, and if what you say is true you were *certainly* not competent to be giving orders for lunch, much less anything else."

"Unfortunately," Spock said, "when one's mind is imbalanced, rational judgment is often an early casualty. By the time the symptoms were undeniable, I was not capable of formulating a logical response to them." He hesitated. "May I ask what the rumors are?"

Nyota summarized them briefly for him, not going into the gory details but giving him the broad strokes of the main rumors.

"I see," he said, when she had finished. His shoulders were drooping, and he would not meet her eyes. His hands were clasped tightly in his lap. She had rarely seen him this discomposed. "Yes. I shall have to apologize. The altercation, whatever it was, was undoubtedly my fault, as was the public nature of it." He looked troubled, and slightly folded in on himself, and Nyota felt sorry for him. The whole thing must have been a nightmare—possibly literally.

"But you are better now?" Nyota said. "And Doctor McCoy knows what he needs to know should it happen again?" She was dying to know the whole story, but it wasn't her business as long as it didn't interfere with the running of the ship.

"Correct on both counts," Spock said, "although the chances of it recurring during the rest of *Enterprise's* five-year mission are miniscule."

"All right then," Nyota said, reassured that things would return to normal between them. She checked to see if her reed was ready. "Since the last time we met, I finished transcribing the next duet in the sequence into European musical notation, would you like to try it?"

"Certainly," Spock said, sitting up straighter so that he was a model of Vulcan stoicism. Nyota tucked her curiosity away and turned her attention to the music.

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Spock took his time putting his lyre back in its case, so that Uhura left the practice room before him. He very carefully and deliberately did not watch her go, focusing instead on asserting his biophysical control so that he could stand and walk back to his quarters with no outward sign of his arousal.

He had always known that Uhura was a beautiful woman; that was obvious to anyone with eyes. But he'd never reacted so viscerally to her or any woman before, save T'Pring at the wedding-that-was-not.

Her hands as she'd trilled! The dance of her fingers over the instrument! So precise, so graceful! He had not been able to tear his eyes away, and felt ashamed at how he had gawked at her. She, of course, had not noticed; hands were not generally a major part of human visual erotic stimulation, and Vulcans certainly did not spread the details of their own sexuality around. Spock could not quite decide whether it was better that she had been unaware of his gaze (thus sparing him embarrassment) or if would have been better had she had known (thus being able to decide whether or not she wanted to be so gazed at).

Spock walked quickly to his quarters and took out the medical tricorder Doctor McCoy had given him for self-monitoring. His endocrine system was within normal tolerances, and none of the secondary symptoms of Pon Farr were showing. He was merely aroused.

He should have expected something like this. Vulcans matured differently than humans did, with two puberties, one in adolescence and the other at first Pon Farr. He was now fully adult, not subadult, and sexual responses were stronger in this stage of life. Moreover, he was no longer married; his bond with T'Pring had ever been tenuous, but it had curbed and absorbed some of what little sexual drive he had had as a subadult. Now, he needed a new mate, and every fiber of his body and brain knew it.

Nyota Uhura was beautiful, intelligent, competent, compassionate, and musical, and he respected her a great deal. Moreover, she was the woman he spent the most time with both in public and in private. It was only natural that he should find her alluring. If she were Vulcan, and not his subordinate, she would have been very nearly the perfect woman for him.

Alas, even if he wished to have a human mate (and after T'Pring, the idea had a certain appeal regardless of Nyo—of *Uhura's*—personal attractions), she was still his subordinate, and the regulations concerning such relationships were stringent, for very good reason.

This would require a great deal of meditation.

## The Changeling

Nyota was cursing Nomad and going through all the drawers in her cabin, trying to learn as much about herself as she could, when the door chime sounded.

"Come," she said, walking from the bedchamber into the living room/office.

It was the ship's first officer, Commander Spock. The only time she could remember meeting him was when he administered the professional tests so that she could be re-certified as an officer. He had been somber, but without the hesitation or pity that marked virtually all of her interactions these days, and pronounced her 'Remarkably proficient as always, Lieutenant.'

She didn't know if he was a friend. But his presence had been easier to bear than all the friends who stopped in to hover awkwardly and tried to bond over reminiscences of things that were forever lost to her.

"Lieutenant Uhura," Spock said. "How are you settling in?" He was tall, the impression enhanced by his perfect posture. His face showed no emotion, but he didn't feel cold, merely still. He was very attractive, but somewhat intimidating. He entered her room with a catlike grace she couldn't help appreciating.

"Some moments better than others, Commander," she said. "Re-learning the academics is—well, not *easy*, but in some ways it was more of a refresher course than anything else. But anything personal—it feels like I'm a ghost in my own life. Some things I can piece together on my own from my records and the ship's log and conversations I've had since Nomad wiped my brain; other things, I really can't."

"I would be happy to help in any way I can," the Commander said. He had a nice voice, she noted, and wondered if he sang. "We regularly gathered to play music together, which you called our 'jam sessions.'"

"Ah!" Nyota said, brightening. "Then you can *definitely* help." She went to her bedroom and took out an instrument case. "What is this? It's obviously a double reed instrument of some sort, and it's not an oboe or one of the instruments in an Earth orchestra, and I haven't had time to dig through the computer's music database and figure out what it is."

"That is an algaita, an instrument from West Africa, especially prevalent among the Hausa and Kanuri peoples. You brought it because of all the African instruments you play, it was the smallest and thus easiest to fit in your mass allowance, thus serving double duty as a reminder of home and a musical instrument."

"But I'm not a Hausa, or Kanuri, am I?" Nyota said, frowning. "My file says I'm from Kenya in East Africa, part Kikuyu and part Luhya." And, judging from the items in her quarters, very proud of her heritage ... which she no longer remembered anything about. Her insides twisted at another reminder of all that she had lost, and she carefully focused on keeping her breathing steady. She'd cried enough over her state, in the last few days; she was tired of feeling sorry for herself.

"That is true," said Spock, and she turned her attention back to him. "You never told me the story of how you came to learn that particular instrument."

"What other instruments do I play?" Nyota asked. Focusing on concrete things she could re-learn was much better than wallowing in grief.

"Your primary instrument is your voice," Spock said. "As for other instruments, you are competent on a wide variety of Terran stringed instruments, both African and other; most recently, I had been teaching you the Vulcan Lyre. You are apparently accomplished on the marimba, although I have never had the pleasure of hearing you play, for the Enterprise does not have one, nor any xylophones or other similar instrument."

"That's ... a lot," Nyota said, dismayed. There was still *so much to learn*. Would she ever be back to what she had been?

"As with your hand-to-hand combat re-training and the operation of your station, muscle memory should make it easier to re-learn than it was to learn in the first place," Spock said.

"Yeah," Nyota said with a sigh. Well, start with the ones she had available on *Enterprise*, and the rest she could choose to re-learn—or not—at some later time when she had them available. She shook her head. "I'm sorry, where are my manners. Please, sit," she said, gesturing at one of the two chairs in the living room. "Would you like something to drink? I've got water and tea and some dehydrated drink mixes of various kinds."

"Tea would be appreciated," Spock said, taking the offered chair. He was easy on the eyes, and enjoyable to watch move, and she indulged in that for a second before getting out the tea caddy. She'd been through enough she deserved a bit of harmless pleasure.

Nyota let him choose what type of tea he wanted, and set the "hot" tap in the bathroom sink to the correct temperature for that type of tea. (Thankfully, it was labelled on the package, so she didn't have to look it up.)

"Well, Mister Spock, here you are," Nyota said when the tea was ready. She handed him one mug and sat down with her own, blowing on it to cool it. "I'm sorry, I don't know if there are any cultural things about hospitality I should be doing."

Spock tilted his head. "I cannot speak to your cultural practices, as I have never socialized with you in your quarters before. Were we on Vulcan, in a formal setting, the etiquette for serving refreshments is quite intricate. But we are not on Vulcan, we are not in a formal setting, and under the circumstances you have many other more important things to learn."

Nyota groaned. "I know. It's all so overwhelming and there is so much that I'll never get back. I want to take a break from thinking about it, and yet there's really nothing else I *can* think about." In a way, that first day or so had been the easy part. Everything had been so confusing,

but she hadn't had any idea of just how much she needed to re-learn.

"As you know, I have been consulting with Doctor McCoy about your condition," Spock said.

"Yes," Nyota said, nodding. "Because Doctor McCoy knows the neurology, but if he were able to find a way of fixing my brain, he'd need some sort of specialized equipment and he's 'a doctor, dammit, not an engineer.'" She was quite proud of her mimicry of Doctor McCoy's irascible tone of voice.

"As you know, the chances are negligible that we shall find a technological solution at this point," Spock said. "However, from what scans have been able to determine, the majority of your memories are still *there*; Nomad did not erase the entire contents of your brain, merely severed the linkages necessary to access them."

"Yes, I know," Nyota said, a little irritated. "I *have* been paying attention to my own medical condition, Mister Spock."

"Of course," Spock said. "But while it is impossible at this time to build a device sensitive enough to physically rebuild those linkages, it has recently occurred to me that a sufficiently gifted and trained telepath might be able to do so."

"Really?" Nyota asked, feeling her heart begin to pound. "Where's the nearest telepath?"

Spock twitched, a little. "Vulcans are touch telepaths, however—"

"When can you do it?" she demanded. "Now?"

"No," Spock said. "I am not a trained healer. The nearest such is on Vulcan, a two week journey from here by shuttle."

"Shuttle?" Nyota sagged. "I'd have to leave *Enterprise*?" She had only a little over a week's worth of memories in her entire life, at least memories that she could access at the moment. The majority of that time, she'd been in sickbay. She had no memories of any place other than this ship. Something in her gut twisted at the thought.

"Possibly," Spock said. "I have not yet discussed this possible course of treatment with Doctor McCoy, and I would need to contact experts on Vulcan to make arrangements. But I wished for your consent before anything was done. Many humans would have qualms about allowing an alien telepath such intimate access to their mind; in order to work, the telepathic healer would have to have access to even the most personal of your thoughts and memories."

"Mister Spock, if it would get my memories back, I'd agree to have my memories broadcast across the quadrant!"

"Fortunately, that will not be necessary," Spock said, raising an eyebrow. "Very well. I will begin making arrangements."

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Spock, Uhura, and Doctor McCoy had gathered in the Doctor's office to consult with a Vulcan healer over subspace. Spock was anxious to hear the verdict, for he very much hoped that the lieutenant's brain might be healed. It was more than the compassion he might feel for any sentient so injured, and more than the concern of a superior for one under his command. Uhura had handled her situation with a grace and courage and tenacity that Spock deeply admired. It spoke to the strength of her character, and his admiration for her had only increased.

He did not have long to dwell on this, however, as Healer T'Vyr was admirably prompt, and once the call had connected, wasted little time on pleasantries before sharing her conclusions. "While there is only a 29.4% chance of *complete* memory re-acquisition, your hypothesis is probably correct that a majority of the still-extant memories could be made accessible," Healer T'Vyr said over subspace.

"That's wonderful!" Uhura said. Indeed it was; Spock had to exert some control to keep his relief from showing.

"Indeed," T'Vyr said. "However, there remains a significant problem: no Vulcan mind-healer I have contacted has any experience with Human neural architecture. None have ever even mind-melded with a Human. Ideally, the healer would have melded with Lieutenant Uhura prior to the Nomad's attack, but failing that, they would need to have melded with multiple humans prior to the meld with the Lieutenant, so that they might know what a healthy human mind feels like."

"Where are we gonna find telepathic healers with that much experience, if there aren't any Vulcans?" Doctor McCoy asked. "Are there other species in the Federation with telepathic healers?"

"Possibly," Healer T'Vyr said. "However, there may be a simpler solution. This will require delicacy, but if Human brains are anything like Vulcan brains, the telepath will not be the one performing the re-association; the Lieutenant will be. Vulcan brains, and indeed those of most sapient species, make such connections easily so that memories may be formed in the first place."

"That's true of Human brains, too, ma'am," Doctor McCoy said. "Unless there's trauma of some sort involved."

Spock was filled with a sense of foreboding that was most illogical. He could predict the solution the healer was about to suggest, and it would be efficient and logical. While it would require him to reveal certain personal issues to the lieutenant, his privacy was not more important than her health.

"Spock, having studied your school records, I know that you melded with two humans over the course of your telepathic training, your mother and your foster-sister," Healer T'Vyr said. "Your instructors note that you have a delicate telepathic touch, and your instructor in telepathic ethics gave you a satisfactory report."

"I am not a healer," Spock noted.

"You may still be more qualified to help the Lieutenant than any Vulcan with healer training," T'Vyr said, "provided the Lieutenant is comfortable with accepting your help. In any case, as long as you do not try and force any connections, there should be no harm in trying. If

you do not succeed, there would be nothing to stop the Lieutenant from travelling to Vulcan and being seen by a healer here. Or finding telepathic mind-healers elsewhere in the Federation."

"Well, that sounds like something we need to discuss on our end," Doctor McCoy said. "Thank you for your help. Lieutenant, you have any more questions?"

"I thought you didn't have any healers who had melded with humans on Vulcan," Uhura said. "Yet you still think I should come if Spock can't do it?"

"Lack of experience with Human brains is a solvable issue," T'Pol said. "Although there are not many Humans on Vulcan, there are some, and the chances are very good that we would be able to find several who were willing to meld with your Healer to give them experience. It is not, however, ideal; mind-melds are, by their very nature, extremely intimate, and it is an enormous thing to ask of someone, to meld with a stranger, when they themselves have no medical or other need."

"I see," Uhura said.

There were no further questions, and so the communication was ended.

"Well, Spock, why didn't you say you could do it in the first place?" McCoy said.

"I am not a healer," Spock said. "If there were some sort of time pressure, and we could not wait to get Uhura to Vulcan or a healer here, then I would have volunteered."

"But—"

"If an away-team member had an injury requiring surgery," Spock said, "it would be appropriate for me to perform any emergency first-aid necessary, but *not* to perform the surgery myself, unless the landing party was cut off from the ship and the crew member would die without an immediate operation. The brain is a very delicate organ. Non-healers are taught to communicate through melds and regulate our own telepathy, not make adjustments in other peoples' minds."

"Point taken, Spock," McCoy said, crossing his arms. "But the Healer thinks you'd be capable, and I agree with her reasoning. What do you say, Nyota? Want to give Spock's magic fingers a try?"

Uhura frowned, looking him up and down. "Yes," she said, "but I think the Commander has reservations?"

Spock nodded. "As the situation is not time-critical, some discussion of the issues involved is necessary."

"Of course," McCoy said. "You can use my office, I'll be in the general sickbay."

As soon as the door closed behind him, Uhura turned to him with a frown. "Commander Spock, would *you* be okay with melding with me? If it's so intimate?"

"Under the circumstances, the intimacy would largely be on your side," Spock pointed out. "There would undoubtedly be some sharing on my part, as I do not have a healer's training in clinical shields. However, I would have to go through every memory of yours that I could find and present it to you so that your mind could make the appropriate connections. You would have no secrets from me, quite literally."

"That would be true of any telepath I saw, though, whether you or a healer on Vulcan," Uhura pointed out. She got up and began to pace. "The difference is, I know you, and I'm in comfortable surroundings here. My other option is travel to a place I've never been, trusting strangers with the secrets locked inside my skull that even *I* don't know about."

"The benefit to strangers doing this would be that you would never have to face anyone with that intimate knowledge of you again," Spock pointed out. "If I did it, and discovered things about you that you would rather I not know, you would have to see me every day, unless you transferred off of the *Enterprise*."

"Do you think I *have* any secrets that embarrassing?" Uhura asked, pausing.

"Unknown," Spock said. "You have always seemed to me to be a remarkably transparent individual, but you are also quite competent at undercover missions and any deception required professionally. And, obviously, you did not confide in me if you had any secrets you did not want me to know."

"Obviously," Uhura said with a snort, resuming her pacing. "You seem reluctant. It's your choice, Mister Spock, but I'd rather have you; I don't want to leave *Enterprise* and put myself in the hands of strangers. And then there's all the other people who'd have to have melds to give the healers experience, if I go that route, it's not any fairer to expect that of them than it is for me to expect it of you, if you would find it unpleasant."

"On the contrary, I suspect I would find it a pleasant experience," Spock said. "That is why I hesitate."

She stopped again and frowned at him. "I don't understand, Mister Spock, why would finding it *nice* be a problem?"

Spock gathered his courage. He would not have chosen telling her this way; might never have chosen to inform her of his feelings. Hours of meditation in the time since his ... divorce ... had been insufficient to settle within himself what his long-term personal goals should be, and until and unless he had decided to pursue a relationship with her it would be unprofessional to burden her with the knowledge of his affections. But there was no help for it. "I have recently discovered myself attracted to you, Ms. Uhura," he said. "Not merely to your body, but to your intelligence and quick-wittedness and personality, as well. I had not said anything yet because it *was* new, and I recently experienced a major life transition and wished to reach a state of personal equilibrium before making any large changes. In addition, given our respective ranks and

positions in the ship's hierarchy, any relationship between us would require a great deal of care."

Uhura blinked several times, opening and closing her mouth before speaking. He studied her, and she returned the attention in kind. He could not trust himself to discern her reaction to his confession, but he hoped she was not offended. She did not seem to be.

"That's flattering, Mister Spock," she said at last, "but I don't know if I—"

"I am not asking for any reciprocity at this time, or even if such reciprocity might be possible in the future," Spock said. "If nothing else, your own mental state is such that you need time to recover and learn to stand on your own before making any serious relationship changes of your own. However, you needed to know before consenting to any mind-meld between us."

"Because I might find out during the meld?"

"Because if I wished to, I could almost certainly alter whatever feelings towards me you possess during the meld, and you would have no way of preventing it," Spock explained. "If nothing else, I could alter or create memories for you that would make you more disposed to accept my attentions, or simply prevent any memories critical of me from being remembered. I would never do any of those things because they would be an absolute violation of every ethical and moral standard, but I have the power to do them if I chose, and you have only my word and a week's acquaintance with me to base any decisions on."

"Oh," Uhura said, eyes wide. She swallowed. "But *any* telepath could do that, yes?"

"Yes," Spock said. "But a telepath who did not previously know you would have less motivation for such a crime, and tampering would be immediately obvious if, for example, you declared your undying love for someone you had only just met and wished to transfer to Space Central on Vulcan."

"Whereas you and I have served together for almost two years," Uhura said, thinking it through.

"And you have been known to flirt with me," Spock said. "As a sort of game, I believe, but an observer might not know that."

"And there's no one else here to double-check your work," Uhura said. Her body language was more closed off than it had been even thirty seconds earlier, and it grieved him to see, but it was better that she understand fully, and make an informed decision.

"Correct," Spock said. "I would never alter your thinking or your memories for my own benefit without your prior consent, but you have only my word for that. I can tell you that I would probably find exploring your mind to be a pleasurable experience, for I greatly admire you as a person and as an officer." He set aside his embarrassment to deal with later; right now, Uhura's future and mental health were the primary considerations.

Uhura made a face. "Would that be ... an erotic sort of pleasure?" she asked hesitantly.

"Not in the physically arousing sense," Spock said, "although Vulcan notions of the erotic are different. I assure you, your memories would not become part of any fantasy life on my part."

"But, again, I would have only your word for that," Uhura said.

"Correct," Spock said. "I hope you understand why it is important that you understand fully the range of possibilities before consenting to any meld between us."

"Or between myself and any healer on Vulcan." Uhura closed her eyes and shook her head. "Can I talk with someone about this?"

Spock ignored his initial wish to deny her so that his private feelings might remain so. It was a logical question; since she had so little experience of his character to draw on, consulting with others who knew him better was the only way to get enough information to base a decision on. "If they understand that it is a private matter not to be gossiped about, Doctor McCoy would probably have a valuable perspective." Also, he understood the importance of patient confidentiality and would probably not tease Spock excessively about feelings he learned of in such circumstances.

"What about Christine?" Uhura asked. "She's been such a help since I lost my memory, and I know we were friends before Nomad's attack."

Spock swallowed. "Nurse Chapel would be acceptable," he said slowly, "and given her position as a nurse she has certainly seen me at my worst, in circumstances few others have. However, I believe she has an unrequited crush on me. She is a professional, and would not let it color any advice she gave you, but—"

"—but she might be hurt to know you were attracted to me and not her," Uhura said with a nod. "All right, I'll think about it and let you know."

Spock bowed in acknowledgment.

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"You and Spock have a nice chat?" Doctor McCoy asked after Commander Spock had left.

"It was ... revealing," Nyota said wryly. Flattering—she doubted he was the type to fall in love lightly, or based on superficial things, so to know he was attracted to her was a compliment both to who she was now and who she had been before the memory wipe. How she felt about *him* was a question she simply didn't have the energy to think about right now. Not while she had such a momentous decision to make.

"And? When are you going to do it?"

"You're so sure we're going to meld," Nyota said.

Doctor McCoy shrugged. "You heard Healer T'Vyr, he's the closest thing to an expert there is, and he'd make sure the job was done right. If you're not comfortable with him for some reason, you can go to Vulcan, of course, but I don't see why you'd spend that much time in a shuttle craft just to have a stranger poking at your brain."

"And I could trust him?"

"Yes," McCoy said without hesitation. "Absolutely. He drives me batty sometimes—and I do my best to return the favor—but his ethics are rock solid."

"Even when there's a lot of temptation?" Nyota asked. She was pretty sure she knew the answer.

"Yes," McCoy said. "That's when he tends to get the persnickiest about things. Mind if I ask what exactly is bothering you? It'd help me to answer any specific questions you might have."

"He's attracted to me," Nyota said. "And ... fairly deeply, if I was reading him right." His earnestness when he talked about all the things he saw in her, and the depth of his disquiet with confessing his feelings ... no, this was no passing fancy.

"Spock's in *love* with you?" McCoy said with a splutter, standing up straighter.

"He didn't *say* he was in love with me," Nyota said. His surprise confirmed that Spock's affections weren't lightly or easily given. "He said he was attracted to me."

"Given how strictly he controls his emotions, it would have to be a pretty strong 'attraction' to be worth mentioning," McCoy said. "Why'd he tell you?"

"He wanted me to know because he wanted me to know what I was agreeing to, and tried to scare me off by pointing out that he could rearrange my mind to *make* me love him back." Nyota paused and thought for a few seconds. "Of course, if he were planning on doing something like that, he wouldn't have warned me ahead of time."

"That's Spock all over, though," McCoy said. "Making sure everything is done the right way, making sure you know *exactly* what you're getting into. Well, I can see why you'd want to ask about things, but I'd sooner believe he could fly without antigrav boots than that he'd take advantage of anyone telepathically like that. Still, if you'd rather go to Vulcan and have someone who's not in love with you rummaging around in your brain, I'll make the arrangements."

Nyota sighed. "I don't know. The idea of what he *could* do is frightening, but then, *any* telepath could do that. And this way I wouldn't have to leave *Enterprise* and have a stranger rummaging around in my mind."

She thought back to his confession that he would probably find pleasure in melding with her. She didn't begrudge him that; he was not the type to be creepy about it, and better that he liked it than imposing something he found distasteful. "I think I want Mister Spock to do it," she decided.

"You can have as much time to think about it as you want," Doctor McCoy said.

"More time won't change the options," Nyota pointed out. "I don't have enough experience to make judgments on how trustworthy *any* telepath is. You say he's trustworthy; well, I believe you. And I like him, what I've seen of him. And I am tired of wondering who I was before and what I'm missing now."

"Fair enough," McCoy said.

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The meld was a success. When it was over, Spock left Uhura in McCoy's capable hands and retreated back to his cabin to meditate. He was in great need of it.

A deeper knowledge of Uhura's mind had only proven how fascinating a woman she was. His baser instincts were tempting him to dwell on what it might be like to have her in his mind always, but he had given her his word that he would not use what he had learned about her in the meld to fantasize about, and he intended to keep that word.

Still, he now knew first-hand that any bond with her would be completely different from that which he had shared with T'Pring, and only partially because she was human and T'Pring was Vulcan. T'Pring had isolated herself from him, responding in the most superficial way possible, and that only when ignoring him was not possible. Spock had responded in kind. But Uhura had welcomed him, in the meld, and he did not think merely because she desired his help. He doubted she would shut him out.

Of course, he acknowledged, the same might be said for any Vulcan woman who agreed to marry him. T'Pring had never desired to be his bondmate; it had been chosen for them, and her parents should have seen her reaction and found someone else for her. If he married now, it would be to a woman who had chosen him, and if T'Pau offered a potential match with a woman who was not compatible with him, it would be simple to decline. It was illogical to believe that because Uhura was the first eligible woman he had melded with who did not find his mental touch a burden, that she was the only such woman in existence.

It had been only a short time since T'Pring rejected him. Long-established research in both Vulcan and Human psychology clearly showed that making major decisions or changes too soon after a major loss such as a divorce or bereavement was likely to result in suboptimal results. Thus, as he had concluded from the beginning, it would be illogical to seriously consider a new relationship, either with Uhura or through the offices of T'Pau as matchmaker, until the debacle of his marriage was far enough in the past that he could view it with at least a degree of equanimity.

He turned his meditations to the now-familiar task of acknowledging and taming his feelings for Uhura.



Two days after the meld, Nyota laid on her bed in her quarters, staring up at the ceiling and trying to concentrate on the music she was listening to. It was completely different from any style of music in her personal playlists, and as far as she could tell she'd never heard anything like it before in her life. It was just what she needed: something unlikely to trigger any of the memories that she could now access, thanks to Spock.

Ironic, after spending a week digging for memories so frantically.

A lifetime of memories was a *lot* to go through, and the meld had been very intense. She felt like her brain was a dresser that had had its entire contents scattered about the room, examined, and then put back in place, and she wasn't quite sure there was *room* for everything. Her brain felt very ... full.

The door chimed. "Come in," she said, sitting up.

It was Christine. "How are you feeling?" she asked as she walked through the sitting area to the bed chamber. "And what *are* you listening to?"

"Sixty-year-old popular music from a non-aligned world called S'hrevlar," Nyota said. "It's very distracting."

"I can tell," Christine said wryly.

Nyota turned it off. "And are you asking as my nurse or my friend?"

"Both," Christine said. "The meld took a lot out of you and Spock both, but *he's* back on duty and you're not."

Nyota sighed. The meld had taken hours, and been very draining. And *then* had come all the work of putting the memories she could now access into some sort of coherent order and narrative. In the two nights since, her dreams had been eventful, and Doctor McCoy thought that REM sleep was probably the best thing for her, so she was trying to take naps in addition to her normal sleep cycle. But even while she was awake, she was constantly seeing things with new eyes and putting together the puzzle pieces of her mind. "It's getting better," she said. "It's definitely much better today than it was yesterday, and better this afternoon than it was this morning when I had my checkup. It's just ... it's just a lot, and I'm so tired. Not sleepy, just worn."

Christine hummed. "I can't even imagine."

"Hopefully, you won't ever have to," Nyota said, and changed the subject. She'd spent enough time dwelling on her own problems, recently, and not enough time just hanging out with her friend.

She and Christine had a nice chat, and after her friend left, Nyota flopped back on the bed. Now that she had (most of) her memories back, she was glad she hadn't told Christine about Spock's affections for her, when she'd asked Christine's opinion on Spock's ethics. *That* would have been awkward, and unnecessarily hurtful to Christine. (Reliving her memories of that mystery-shrouded trip to Vulcan had been one of the few times that Spock's own emotions had come through in the meld—he hadn't been able to hide how embarrassed he still was over the whole thing, how he'd treated Christine but also something deeper he hadn't shared with her. It felt like ages ago, but hadn't been all *that* long before the encounter with Nomad which had wiped her memories.)

Wait a minute. Nyota narrowed her eyes as something occurred to her. Spock was married! To that Vulcan woman who'd called them when they arrived at Vulcan! What was he doing falling in love with her if he was married? She'd thought Vulcans had better control over their feelings than *that*.

She rose, checked her appearance in the mirror to make sure she was presentable, and went to go ask him about it.

Spock was in his quarters and responded promptly when she pressed the door chime.

"Ms. Uhura," he said, inviting her to take a seat. "Would you care for some tea?"

"Thank you," she said, slightly taken aback. He'd never offered her tea before, but then, she'd never visited him in his quarters before.

"This is theris-na'na, which is more palatable to humans than most other Vulcan varieties of tea," Spock said, presenting her with a cup after a few minutes work.

"Thank you," she said, taking a sip. "It's good!" She didn't know how to describe it; it wasn't like any Earth tea she knew. But it didn't require sugar or milk or lemon or anything to make it drinkable.

"Kh'halwer nash-vey k'odu," Spock said. When Nyota hesitated, he went on. "The traditional response is th'i-oxolara kh'harwa."

She repeated it carefully. "I don't know that I've ever heard you speak Vulcan before."

"You still have not, as there is no single 'Vulcan' language."

Nyota felt her cheeks heat. She *knew* Vulcan, like most planets, had a plethora of languages; she so seldom fell prey to the common practice of labelling the most common language of a planet as the planet's *only* language. "Any language of Vulcan," she corrected herself. "What language were you speaking?"

"Shi'Kha'ri," Spock said.

Nyota raised an eyebrow at him. "You mean, the language that is most commonly called 'Vulcan' by offworlders?"

"Precision is important," he said severely, although she could tell he was amused.

"Are there any other cultural expectations?" Nyota asked.

Spock took a sip of his own tea. "Vulcans—at least, those following Shi'Kha'ri manners—do not typically speak when food or drink is being consumed. However, outsiders often find the silence to be ... oppressive, and I have never minded one way or the other."

"Ah," Nyota said. She'd lost the momentum she'd had when she came here, but she still wanted to know the answer. "Spock, when you told me you had feelings for me, you implied you were considering asking to start a romantic relationship with me."

"Yes. Although I am not ready for any such step, just yet, and may not be any time in the immediate future."

"But you're married!" Nyota burst out. "Your wife called the bridge, what was her name—"

"T'Pring," Spock said, somewhat harshly. "She divorced me."

"Oh." Nyota was taken aback. "I'm sorry." She thought about the timing. "Wait, she divorced you when you were *sick*? So sick you could only be treated on your homeworld?"

"Yes." Spock sighed. "To be fair to her, Vulcan divorces require both spouses to be present with a priest or healer, so that the telepathic bond may be severed. I had not been back to Vulcan in many years."

"And if she'd asked for a divorce, would you have taken leave and gone to visit?" Nyota asked.

"Yes," Spock said, "although it is considerably more complicated, and difficult, than obtaining a divorce on Earth."

"Still!" Nyota said. She paused. "I'm sorry for bringing it up, it must still be a sore spot."

"Yes," Spock said dryly. He looked aside. "Vulcans prize marriage very deeply, and while my relationship with T'Pring was never close, it was still—I have not been alone in my own skull since we were betrothed at age seven. It is ... more difficult than I would have thought, to adjust. A part of me would like to remarry immediately, merely so that I would not have to learn how to be ... solitary."

Was he trying to hint that he wanted a serious relationship with her? No, Spock wasn't the type to beat around the bush. But it did put his feelings in a different light. "I'm not opposed to marriage, eventually, but there are a few necessary steps first," Nyota said. Such as deciding if she felt more for him than just 'very attractive man she liked a great deal.'

Spock blinked and looked at her. "I did not mean to imply that I wish to marry you in the immediate future. My apologies for the imprecision. No, if I wished to marry quickly, I would ask my clan matriarch T'Pau and she would find an appropriate Vulcan woman for me to marry. Indeed, I have no doubt that she will soon begin presenting me with possible options whether I ask her to or not."

"So Vulcans go in for arranged marriages," Nyota said, wondering if the T'Pau he named was *the* T'Pau—if so, no wonder the admiralty hadn't punished the captain for the diversion to Vulcan. "I'm sure based on all sorts of logical criteria."

"Yes," Spock said. "Telepathic and mental compatibility being one of those criteria—which is one reason I should not have been so surprised when T'Pring ... did what she did. She and I were never close, even when we were first betrothed."

"And you were seven?" Nyota asked. That seemed terribly young. On a more personal note, the meld would have undoubtedly given him an idea of whether they were telepathically and mentally compatible. Now she was curious what *she* would have learned about *him*, if the meld had been more reciprocal.

"Yes," Spock said. "Seven is the customary age, in my clan."

"Why so young?"

"Vulcans are more psychologically stable when we have telepathic bonds, and that is around the age when our bonds with our parents begin to fade," Spock said. "And it is traditional. Not all clans bond their children, or do so that young, and not every House within every clan does it; but most do."

"And now you have no bond," Nyota said, softly, trying to imagine it. "What does that feel like to you? Do you miss it?"

"Like a missing limb," Spock said. "Understand, I do not wish T'Pring back; but I do wish to be bonded. However, the most expedient way to achieve that would be to marry whatever woman T'Pau suggests, and I do not know that marrying a stranger simply to be bonded would be an optimal long-term solution."

"Well, it's sure not the solution *I* would choose," Nyota said, shaking her head. "I suppose you don't know any unmarried Vulcan women?"

"No. I have spent most of my adult life in Starfleet, in majority-human environments, and approximately 90% of all adult Vulcans are married."

"*Ninety percent*?" Nyota said. "Wow!" She considered all that Spock had told her. "So when you said you were going through a major life change and needed to figure out what you wanted out of life before even considering whether to act on your feelings for me, you weren't exaggerating, were you?"

"I do not exaggerate," Spock said. "In addition, there is another critical consideration: *your* feelings and wishes, which you have never discussed with me. And the fact that you are currently recovering from a significant trauma. Your resilience is most impressive, and I wish to support you in whatever way you require. Requesting major life changes on your part at this time would be ... both selfish and thoughtless."

"Thank you, Spock," Nyota said, touched. "I do want to ... settle back in to my life, so to speak, and I hope things will go back to normal as

quickly as possible. Well," she said, correcting herself, "as normal as things ever get on *Enterprise*. I hope I didn't just jinx us."

"Luck—and jinxes—are illogical, Lieutenant," Spock said. "Statistical analyses will always reveal that, when the observer's biases are corrected for, improbable things do not correlate in statistically significant ways to any individual, object, or vessel."

"Spock, two things," Nyota said. She was happy they'd had the conversation, happy to have learned more about him, but still, she was relieved to have the conversation turn lighter. "First, when we're off-duty, you can call me Nyota." After rummaging through her brain, he knew her more intimately than any other person ever had, and it seemed silly to stand on formality. She'd never offered her first name before, but then she'd always felt constrained by the gap in their ranks, but then again, he'd never been this candid with her, either. "Second, how else do you explain all the things that happen to this ship *without* luck, good and bad alike?"

"Even million-to-one chances occur with some regularity given a large enough sample size," Spock said. "And calculating the odds of any given happenstance is difficult when one is studying the unknown."

"True," Nyota said, "but *Enterprise* isn't the only Federation starship exploring the unknown, and I've spend enough time gossiping with my fellow communications officers to know that odd and improbable things happen to us at a *much* higher rate than they do to our sister ships. Do you have any statistical explanation for that that doesn't boil down to 'we're just lucky that way'?"

Spock opened his mouth, but hesitated before speaking.

"I thought not," Nyota said triumphantly. "I'm back on duty starting tomorrow. I'll see you on the bridge in the morning, Spock." She slipped out the door with a smile on her face. It wasn't often she got the last word in a debate with him without cheating in *some* way.

It wasn't until she was back in her quarters that she realized he very carefully hadn't asked what her feelings toward him might be. Which was considerate of him, given how unsettled she was right now, but still left the question: how *did* she feel about him? He was very attractive and compelling, of course; she'd always been *quite* aware of that. And she enjoyed the challenge of sparring verbally with him (and flirting with him when she could get away with it). And he was a friend. But she had always considered him unattainable, and so never put much serious thought into the question.

He was very intense, and that was a quality she appreciated in a partner. The thought of all that intensity focused on her ... she shivered, tingling a little. There was a reason she'd never let herself seriously consider his attractiveness. He'd been unapproachable, untouchable, and why open herself to that heartbreak? She'd had her fill of hopeless crushes as a teenager, thank you.

Except now he wasn't unapproachable.

Of course, part of that intensity meant that he wanted a serious relationship that might lead to marriage, and while Nyota had always thought she'd probably get married some day, it had always been something to set aside until some nebulous future after she was done with her adventuring. But a fellow officer on the same ship, *that* was a relationship she could have *while* adventuring. And once the *Enterprise's* five year mission was over, they could always ask to be posted together, if their relationship were still going strong then.

It was an appealing picture.

But what if they tried a relationship and it didn't work? He was much farther along in his attraction to her than she was to him. That might change, but it might not, and she didn't want to hurt him.

She laughed out loud at the absurdity of *that* thought. "Nobody knows how a relationship's going to end when they start it," she told herself. "And you never know, *he* might realize a relationship with a human is nicer in fantasy than reality and dump *me*."

Well. She wasn't ready for anything right this minute, but ... it might be an interesting thing to try in the future.

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Spock spent the rest of the evening working out a statistical analysis of the *Enterprise's* mission thus far, as compared to other starships on similar missions throughout Federation and pre-Federation history, and concluded that while the *Enterprise* was indeed (thus far) more likely to experience unusual events than other starships, it was not the only ship to experience such a pattern, and past performance was no indicator of future events, and so it was just as possible that *Enterprise* would soon experience no more than the normal unforeseen events that happened to any exploratory vessel, while some other ship would find itself experiencing a string of unusual events.

The analysis was not as convincing as he had hoped it might be, but he sent it to Nyota's inbox anyway.

The next morning on the bridge, she got it, sent him a wry look, and set to annotating it in between her attention to her work responsibilities. By the end of the shift she had sent it back to him with insightful comments at every weak point in his analysis, and a note. "*Still sounds like luck to me.—N*"

## Mirror, Mirror

Instead of allowing Nyota time to ease back into her life and work and Spock time to contemplate his wishes and priorities, the next mission was exactly the sort which happened to *Enterprise* more than other Starfleet vessels. The mission to Halka brought a dramatic twist and proof of alternate universes all at the same time. The scientific results were fascinating; the alternates of their crewmates were appalling.

It only took a brief interview with the alternates for a deep fear to plant itself in his gut: did his counterpart harbor similar feelings for the other Nyota, and, if so, what would such a man do to the object of his affections? It was illogical to dwell on the possibilities. Spock was certainly not responsible for the conduct of his alternate, and there was nothing he could do to protect Nyota except finding a way to retrieve the stranded away team, which he and the entire science and engineering teams were working on as quickly as they could. Meditation sufficed to keep his fear leashed, but could not relieve it.

It took a great deal of effort to maintain his control when the away team returned safe and sound, and Nyota showing no signs of trauma beyond that of a stressful undercover mission.

"Still don't believe in luck, Spock?" Nyota asked, after the debriefings were over and she'd had time to rest and write her report. "What other ship would have run into such a thing?" She proved quite immune to his logic and statistics, but the debate was entertaining anyway.

After that were a string of missions that, while noteworthy in themselves, were hardly out of the normal range of their experiences, and then came a mission Spock had been dreading since it was put on their schedule: a trip back into the Federation to pick up ambassadors and escort them to a neutral location for a summit. While he was grateful for the opportunity to see his mother, he could quite easily have gone another eighteen years without speaking to his father. But that was not an option as first officer of a ship his father was traveling on.

## Journey to Babel

Nyota got to their usual practice room before Spock, and was warming up on her *algaita* by playing a song that had been popular when she'd been a teenager. She was surprised when he walked in with a middle-aged Human woman wearing Vulcan robes. "Hello," Nyota said. "I'm Lieutenant Uhura. Spock, do you need to reschedule?" Maybe the woman was a diplomat and needed something.

"Oh, please don't on my account, I've been looking forward to hearing him play," the woman said with a fond look at Spock, patting him gently on the arm. Spock looked mildly embarrassed.

His mother, perhaps? Spock's mother was Human, though Nyota hadn't known his mother was a diplomat. And why had he brought her here? They weren't even dating yet, much less at the meet-the-parents stage. And wasn't *that* telling, she realized, that apparently her subconscious thought of dating Spock as a matter of 'when' and not 'if.'

"Lieutenant Uhura, this is my mother," Spock said, confirming her guess. "Doctor Amanda Grayson."

Nyota blinked. "The Doctor Grayson, who worked on the Universal Translator team? The first Human to teach at the Vulcan Science Academy?"

"I see my reputation precedes me," Doctor Grayson said with a smile.

"I don't want to take time away from you and Spock, because I'm sure it's been a while since you've seen one another, but I would love to talk with you about your work," Nyota gushed. "As head of Communications, so much of what I do uses your translator as a base."

"Not just my translator, I was one of a large team," Doctor Grayson said with a smile. "But I bet Spock would find the conversation interesting as well."

"Languages are a hobby for me, not a vocation," Spock said, "but I do have some interest in the field, and even more in the computer programming which undergirds the Universal Translator's work. I would be quite interested in such a conversation as well."

"Wonderful!" Doctor Grayson said, clapping her hands. "I'll listen to you practice—please don't mind me, or think you have to perform for me; I'm just interested to hear what my son is up to these days—and then we can go get some lunch and talk linguistics, as I know Spock won't mind talking during his meal."

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That lunch with Nyota and his mother was the pleasantest two hours Spock had spent in a long time. Of course his mother got along well with Nyota; they both were good people with excellent taste and similar interests. (He steadfastly did not contemplate how his father would react to learning his son wished to marry a human instead of a Vulcan woman of sufficient standing to make up for the alliance lost with T'Pol's challenge; in this, as in most things familial, Spock had no doubt that his father would be deeply hypocritical.)

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After the surgery which saved his father's life, Nyota came to visit Spock in his quarters while he recovered. He'd been lying in bed in his meditation robe when she chimed for admittance. The doctor had been forced to take a significant amount of blood, and Spock was on strict orders to rest and eat well for a day or two while his body replenished the supply.

"Come in," he said at the door's chime, rolling out of bed and wincing at the lingering light-headedness.

Nyota stepped in. She was beautiful as ever, and it was pleasant to see her in something other than a uniform. The colorful caftan suited her, as everything did. "I'm not much of a chess player," she said, "and I know that's your game, and I don't know any Vulcan games, but if you'd like to play a game I could learn. I know when I'm sick or injured, the boredom is almost the worst part and I can't imagine it's any better for you."

"An untaxing entertainment to pass the time would be appreciated," Spock said. "If there is a game you are fond of, I am sure I could learn well enough for our purposes."

"You're the one who's under the weather, so we'll play one of your games," Nyota said. "When I'm injured, you can return the favor."

"Very well," Spock said, and got out his *kal toh* set, putting it in the simplest mode. As both a musician and a linguist, Nyota's skill at pattern-recognition was significantly above average for a Human, and she might find the game interesting.

"I noticed your parents touched a great deal, just their fingertips," Nyota said, making conversation in the middle of their second game. "It surprised me, because Vulcans generally avoid touching other people."

"Being touch telepaths, touching others with bare skin can easily result in unwanted reading of surface thoughts," Spock said. "Given that the majority of nerves which carry telepathic information in Vulcans are in the hands, touching hands is far more intimate than any other part of the body. But Vulcan marriage includes not just physical and emotional intimacy, but mental and telepathic intimacy as well."

"And that touch was ... intimate?" Nyota asked.

Spock sighed. "As a child, I was often embarrassed by how visibly and frequently they touched in that manner."

Nyota laughed. "I was embarrassed by my parents kissing. But that didn't stop them—my dad would make their kisses noisier and more theatrical to tease me."

"My mother had that impulse as well, although my father would rarely indulge her outside our home," Spock said.

Nyota hummed and reached out to touch a piece.

"I would not advise that," Spock said.

"Why? No, no, don't tell me, I'll figure it out." Nyota frowned and studied the set for a few minutes, before her expression cleared and she made a much better move.

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Nyota sat in the rec deck chatting and laughing with Christine and a few other friends. Spock was sitting on the other side with the Captain, and she couldn't help sneaking looks at him. She had a very good view of him from here, long and lean and graceful, relaxed and content.

He really was very attractive. And she knew him much better now than she had a few months ago. They played kal-to regularly now, in addition to their jam sessions. Even their music had changed. Where once they had focused exclusively on the music, now it was a jumping off point for discussions about music theory, other musical experiences they'd had, and anything else that came up. They'd been growing closer, and she enjoyed spending time with him.

That internal slip she'd made when he introduced his mother really had been telling, she realized. It *was* a 'when' and not an 'if,' at least from her point of view. And she was ready to be done with waiting.

"What do you think, Nyota?" Christine asked, and Nyota turned her attention back to her friends.

She did make a point of rubbing her fingers together where Spock could see. And from the looks he was sending her way, he'd noticed. She smiled.

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Nyota left the rec room, headed for her quarters. "Lieutenant, may I speak with you?" Spock was always more formal in the corridors and other public spaces.

"Why, of course, Commander," she said, voice honeyed. She waited for him to catch up at the turbolift.

"May I ask the purpose of that display?" he asked, once they were inside. He was tense, every line of his body taut.

"I'm back to normal, and I'd be interested in trying a relationship if you are, Spock," Nyota said. "And I thought I'd give you incentive to make up your mind, one way or the other."

"I—you are sure?" he asked, hesitant in a way she'd never seen him be.

"Yes, Spock, I am," Nyota said. "I wouldn't tease about *that*." She shrugged. "Now, I know you have a lot of decisions to make, and this is probably a bigger deal for you than for me, as Vulcans don't date casually the way Humans do. I don't know if you want to actually try something, but I'm ready if you are."

"I am very unlikely to be content with casual anything," Spock said.

"I kind of figured," Nyota said. "I can't say I'd be willing to marry you right now, if you asked me, but I can't say I'd mind that as a direction to explore. And if we're going to start exploring in that direction, I'm as ready now as I'll ever be. You might need more time, and I respect that. But if all you need is a sign from me, well...." She held up two fingers, as she'd seen his parents do. His eyes widened and from this close she could see his pupils dilate.

Slowly he stretched out a hand to match, and his eyes closed.

Oh.

That—she hadn't expected to get anything out of the finger caress. But she could *feel* him, not as clearly as in the meld, no direct thoughts, but she could feel the pulse of them, and the arousal that had been thrumming through him since she started flirting in the rec room. Then he began stroking his fingers against hers, and that was even better.

She *really* wanted to kiss him, and she leaned in to do just that. He met her halfway; well, of course, he could feel what she wanted. And the kiss was even better, because he didn't let go of her hand and she could still feel him, and he her.

Most first kisses were just a little awkward as you got to know your partner's body, but not this one. Spock could tell *exactly* what she wanted, and the result was a kiss that made her toes curl and her knees go slightly weak.

The turbolift beeped as they arrived at their destination, and they disengaged. Fortunately, there weren't any people waiting for the turbolift, because if she looked as dazed as Spock did, and people saw them, the rumors would spread at lightspeed.

"Well, Mister Spock," Nyota said, "I call that a promising experiment. But I think it needs further testing, don't you?"

"Indeed," Spock intoned, following her down the corridor.

End Notes

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