

## Starship Voice

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### Summary

Chief engineer and Captain, and the ship's voice.

He wasn't sure why he was awake. Coming awake in the middle of the night, before the computer started slowly bringing up the light that simulated dawn, meant waking in nearly complete darkness. Falling asleep was a struggle and always had been, but he had learned long ago to trust himself when he blinked awake.

There was something just slightly off in the harmonics. Could be the hull; could be the core; could be the coolant system. Could be something else. Trousers, boots, undershirt, red duty tunic and out the door—he was in Engineering less than a minute after waking.

The third shift duty officer glanced up when he walked in the door. "Chief," she acknowledged, half greeting, half question.

He tapped his ear. "Just checkin' somethin'," he said, and she nodded.

The controls were smooth under his fingers; not the flat control panels that seemed to be the fad on private ships, but stoutly and reliably mechanical. Touched, now, thousands of times, and his eyes flicked over the data across the screens.

The door to main engineering opened again, and he still half expected to see Pike, awakened by the same sounds that had roused him. It wasn't Pike; couldn't be, would never be again. The finest Captain he'd known was on full life support, being held in a medically induced coma to try to spare him the agonizing pain. Spock had told him, yesterday, his face twisted in grief that few would see.

And so it was *not* Pike who walked in, but Kirk. He was slowly coming to forgive the man for not being Chris Pike, slowly coming to understand his way of thinking, slowly coming to trust his occasional chaos. Or, at least, trust that *Spock* was coming to trust their new commanding officer.

"Ah, Mr. Scott," Kirk said pleasantly. A little carefully. "You heard it too then? I apologize for barging in. I heard something odd and couldn't go back to sleep."

He was—pleased, probably. Pleased that Kirk could hear it at all; the change was subtle. Pleased that he wouldn't and couldn't just roll over and go to sleep, even if there was some insult in the idea that the engineers wouldn't catch it. But better to be insulted than dead. And it meant that the ship was speaking to her new master. And if that hurt, today—for her to whisper in the night to Kirk when Pike was worse than dead—he couldn't begrudge the way that Kirk clearly adored *Enterprise*. And if she returned it, he couldn't quite begrudge that either.

"*Give him a chance, Chief.*" Those had been the last words Pike had spoken to him. And so, in the middle of the night, surrounded by ship and space, aching from not enough sleep and too much sorrow, and looking at a Captain who would jump out of bed at the faintest hint that something was wrong, Scotty did.

"It's cavitation in the coolant system," Scotty explained. "Not an emergency, but needs to be balanced. Good ear, sir."

Kirk nodded, and glanced up and around the room, like a man besotted. "You can really hear her down here, can't you?" he said. "Is it ridiculous of me to confess that I love her entirely?"

"She's panels and circuits, metal and conduits," Scotty said with a shrug, and took the Captain's look of sad disappointment before continuing. "But she has soul too, aye. Maybe it's her own. But I think it's the memory of everyone who has ever served aboard her."

The Captain pursed his lips. "That may be. I'll leave her in your capable hands, Mr. Scott, and will do better not to come charging in next time."

Scotty smiled faintly. “Captain Pike always came charging in, sir. Makin’ me crazy, and Chief Barry before me. She’s your ship, Captain. And if you or I ever ignored her voice, we’d deserve what she’d do to us.”

Kirk nodded slowly. “I think you’re right. Good night, Scotty,” he said, patting him on the shoulder, and turned away.

“Good night, sir,” Scotty answered. “I’ll have her singing again by morning.”

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