

## Seven Days on Starbase Twelve

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## Seven Days on Starbase Twelve

by [BeatriceEagle](#)

### Summary

La'an takes Jim out for a drink.

Well, she takes *a* Jim out for a drink. Whether it's *her* Jim remains to be seen.

### Notes

I love these two and their stupid angsty faces. Please, join me in shipping this incredibly doomed, incredibly bad idea.

This is in no way a sequel, and it references basically zero of the events, but because *The Big Cheat* is basically just my treatise on Jim Kirk's character and personality, this fic is sort of vaguely set in that universe. (Except for all the bits that got jossed.)

**Warnings** for fairly graphic sex that is fully consensual but also pretty clearly a bad idea, and all the warnings that come along with these two characters' canon backstories.

Thanks to the discord for encouraging this fic and helping me sort out some of the plot!

### Day One

It's not as hard as La'an thought it would be, taking Jim out for that drink. There's a shock, of course, when she sees his face again—that same smile, that same posture—but he's not really the same man. He's more serious, less sarcastic. More idealistic, she finds, after they get to talking philosophy a few drinks in. Less pushy.

Or maybe it's none of those things. Maybe the real difference is that this James Kirk knows who she is. Of course he does. He doesn't say anything, doesn't even really react at all when she says her last name, but La'an sees the recognition in his eyes.

Maybe that really was the whole draw of Jim, that entire time. Maybe she's built that connection up to much more than it truly was. She only knew him for two days, after all.

And yet. At the end of the night, when he says, "La'an, it's been a pleasure. How long are you on base for, again?"

She says, "One weeks' leave." And then pauses for a very long time, and adds, "If you want to meet again tomorrow."

"Maybe somewhere other than a bar," Jim says. He looks her up and down, obviously sizing her up. "The rec center has a chess table, if you play."

Her stomach lurches.

### Day Two

La'an has never been much of a chess player. She knows the rules, and she has a good head for strategy in real life, but she never had the patience to learn complicated opening moves or sacrifice gambits. It's all so artificial.

Jim wins their first game in nine moves. She expects him to gloat or rib her, and even has a riposte prepared. (“I guess I’ve been too busy winning real battles to prepare for fake ones.”) But instead, he casts a somewhat concerned look at her, and says, “We don’t have to play chess, if you don’t want to. There’s plenty to do at this base.”

It’s so genuine that it irks her. If he’d gloated good-naturedly, she’d have sniped back and argued that they should do some real sparring instead. If he’d been an asshole about it, she’d just have left. This, though, this obvious, sincere caring, is a challenge.

“No,” she says. “Show me my mistake.”

They play five more games that night, and by the end, La’an is protecting her king and paying attention to pawn structure. It takes her seventeen moves to lose their last game.

Afterwards they walk the promenade, taking in the endless star-flecked night alongside half a dozen other couples on dates. It makes La’an uncomfortable. They never called this a date, but it is one, clearly. The two Andorian women down the hall are holding hands. Should she and Jim hold hands? She’d rather not.

“You can ask me, you know,” she says, because when she’s uncomfortable she always retreats into confrontation.

“Ask you what?”

“About my last name.”

“Do you want me to?” Jim says calmly.

“I want to know what you think, and not have to guess.”

Jim takes a long moment to look her right in the eyes. “I think,” he says, “that it must be hard living with that name. I think people must make a lot of assumptions about you, most of them wrong. I think you must have a really good reason to keep it.”

La’an keeps her name for the same reason that her father and her father’s father and her father’s father’s father kept it: a strain of defiance bordering on the pathological. Defiance of the assumptions people make; defiance of Khan’s attempts to define his legacy.

And she also keeps it because it *was* her father’s, and that name and that defiance are all she has left of him.

She thinks she could have put that all into words for her Jim. For this one, all she can come up with is, “Do you ever wonder what the world would be like if the worst thing had never happened?”

Jim’s eyes slide away from hers, towards the stars outside. But he’s not looking at them, she can tell. He’s looking at something far away in the past, something that’s not there anymore.

Just for a second, La’an sees her Jim.

“I try not to,” he says.

She almost asks. What is this thing that Jim is seeing? It can’t be his brother, because Sam is alive and well on the *Enterprise*. Is it something else, something that he shares with the man she knew?

Then Jim’s eyes clear, and he snaps back into place. Like that lost look was just a trick of the light.

### Day Three

La’an has now known this Jim Kirk for longer than she knew the other one. It’s not that big of a deal. It’s been six months since her Jim died. He’s been dead for approximately 90 times as long as she ever knew him alive.

They spend the whole day together. Laps around the promenade at 0600, breakfast in the mess, chess until lunch, sparring in the afternoon. She pins him at least once for every time he checkmated her.

Maybe it shouldn’t surprise her as much as it does when one of the pins turns into a kiss. After all, she’s the one who starts it. Face inches from Jim’s, breath still catching from the hip throw that took him down, their eyes meet—and it’s like she’s not even in control. She doesn’t think about it at all.

The kiss deepens quickly. It’s hot, sweaty, claustrophobic, chest pressed against chest, hands tangled around hair. Ten seconds, twenty, and then La’an thinks, *Now I’ve kissed him for longer than my Jim too.*

She pulls back. Jim’s lips follow her for a few centimeters, then his eyes blink open as La’an sits up.

“La’an?” he says.

La’an wants the not-thinking back. She’s so tired of always thinking.

“We should go to my quarters,” she says.

Jim is up and out the door so quick that La’an could believe he’s an Augment.

La’an isn’t a virgin, but she can count the number of people she’s had sex with on two fingers. Rafael, when she was 17—he wasn’t a bad guy, but she had been actively chasing the worst possible decisions at the time, and sex with him was one of them. And Stasia, her one real Academy romance, who broke up with her after three months because she felt like La’an wasn’t willing to be “emotionally vulnerable.”

If Sam Kirk is to be believed—so, maybe—Jim is very *much* not a virgin. In the interest of not having to think, and not letting her thinking screw anything up, La'an lets him take the lead.

He takes a moment to check in with her when the door to the quarters shuts behind them—just a glance, a tilt of his head that she answers with a nod. Then he yanks his shirt off, getting a little caught at the top of his shoulders, just like—

La'an pulls off her own shirt, and when she re-emerges from the cloth, Jim is bare-chested. He cups a hand around her shoulder and kisses her, softer this time than last, and together they back up onto the compact bunk. They're sitting down, lips mostly brushing each other now, and Jim's fingers drift towards her bra—"Yeah?" he whispers, and La'an nods urgently—her breasts are free and his mouth is on her nipple—her nails dig into the space between his shoulders—he looks up at her, and his eyes are so familiar—their trousers are off, his fingers grazing over her briefs—she rocks her hips up into his hand—blood seeps through his shirt—no, no, he's naked, his mouth is wet where he was eating her out—she slides onto his cock and he reaches down again, fingering her—"Like that? Is that good?"—she rocks harder and his voice gives out—orgasm.

They lie next to each other afterward, her head on his chest, his fingers stroking through her hair. She thinks idly about where the fingers have been. But she was going to have to shower after this anyway.

Jim's fingers stop at her temple. "Are you okay?"

"Of course," she says, a little snappish.

"You're crying."

Oh. So she is. As soon as she realizes, the tears start in earnest. She squeezes her eyes shut and tries to stop them, but they won't stop.

"Hey, La'an. Hey. Talk to me. Do you want me to leave? Call someone?"

She shakes her head, trying to shut out his voice. If she could just forget who he is, just for a moment, she could put herself back together. She just needs a minute.

"Are you hurt?"

"Just shut *up* for a second!"

A soft inhale. The weight on the bed lifts. La'an can still feel him nearby, but her eyes are closed, and there's just enough space for her to pretend she's alone.

She uses a trick Manu taught her on the nursery planet: she holds her breath and imagines her emotions living inside her lungs. The longer she goes without breathing, the more it feels like something's fighting to get out, like her emotions actually *want* to escape, to leave her empty and calm. She fights them and fights them and fights them, until finally they win, bursting out of her mouth in a gasp of air.

She inhales, and she's no longer crying.

"Sorry," she says, drying her eyes on the back of her hand and turning to Jim, who's hovering somewhere between fear and concern halfway between the bunk and the door. "I'm okay, it's fine, I just..." She pauses, considers her options, and goes with something near enough to the truth that it's not a lie, but distant enough that it's actually understandable. "I lost someone, last year. This was my first time since then."

Jim's face clears, and she knows she made the right call. Grief is difficult, but comprehensible. Everyone's lost someone. Everyone thinks they know how that works. "I'm so sorry," he says. It sounds sincere, but maybe not as much as it would if he weren't naked.

"Don't be." She sits up, reaches for what she thinks are her underwear only to realize that they're Jim's, and tosses them to him casually.

They get dressed without looking at each other, and then Jim hangs by the doorway, not quite staying and not quite leaving.

"La'an," he says, gently, "would you rather just be friends?"

That hurts. Which is stupid, because it's not like—this isn't *her Jim* even if she's technically known him longer, they haven't saved the future together, they haven't had each other's backs and sacrificed for each other. He's just a guy she's had some drinks with.

*See, Stasia?* she thinks viciously. *This is what being emotionally vulnerable gets you.*

"If you're too weak to handle a woman crying, then sure. Maybe just friends is better."

"I can handle a woman in any state she likes," Jim says, in a tone that somehow balances banter and double entendre and simple statement of fact. "But when she cries after having sex with me, you can't blame me for wondering if she really wants to be there."

La'an wants this. She wants to want this. She wants to know whether she wants this. In the end, she just says nothing.

"Okay," Jim says. "No hard feelings. I've really enjoyed our time together, and if you did too, well... you know where to find me."

#### Days Four and Five

La'an does know where to find Jim, and she spends the next two days avoiding those places. She steers clear of the rec room with its chess board, and the promenade with its silly lovers. It's a big starbase; there are other things to do.

Nyota, who is also on leave and knows absolutely nothing about how La'an has been spending her time, tries to be friendly when she realizes

La'an is suddenly adrift. She takes her to some sort of painfully modernist opera, and then to a lecture on advances in universal translator technology. La'an appreciates the overtures, but she doesn't know Nyota well and doesn't seem to have much in common with her; she doesn't know how to have the kind of strong opinions on music and linguistics that Nyota does, and can't help feeling that Nyota must find the few comments she *does* make hopelessly dull.

*I fucked a dead man*, La'an thinks, as she half-listens to Nyota's deconstruction of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. *How's that for opera?*

How strange it is that Nyota is the only other person she knows whose entire family has died, and yet even here, in a world where James Kirk spent his childhood in an idyllic farm town with two still-living parents and a breathing brother, La'an feels more similar to him than to the woman in front of her.

## Day Six

La'an hasn't felt truly safe for a single moment since she was 10 years old. But she must have slipped into distraction, because somehow she's surprised when, during her morning run, the starbase jolts and shudders like an earthquake, and emergency lights start to flash. The security officer in her immediately jumps to attention, ready to take charge, but a canned voice plays over the speakers: "All nonessential personnel, report to the nearest emergency area."

Right. Not her ship, not her job. As much as La'an would love to put the adrenaline in her blood to good use, the best way for her to help is to follow the emergency protocols. She reverses course and starts sprinting towards the Level C Containment Unit. Running grows more difficult the closer she gets. By the time she reaches the containment unit, the tables in the food court below the promenade are tumbling across the floor, and panicked civilians are piling up at the staircases and exits. Something is seriously wrong with the starbase.

She punches into the airlock of the containment unit, waits thirty seconds for the decon to run, and then enters the unit proper: a room approximately 200 square decimeters in area, with seating built into the walls for 50 people, radiation and oxygen level sensors prominently displayed, tricorder and first aid kits hanging from every wall, emergency rations for 24 hours, and a self-contained generator and air replacement unit.

It's empty except for one person. Jim, in the back corner, wearing his running clothes.

La'an nearly turns on the spot to leave, but she's a security officer, and she *will* follow safety protocol. She takes a seat as far away from Jim as possible and waits for more people to arrive. Surely more people will arrive.

Nobody else arrives. Apparently early-morning runs on the promenade aren't hugely popular.

"How've you been?" Jim says eventually.

"We don't have to talk."

"All right, then. Don't have to tell me twice." Jim sounds perfectly unharmed, but La'an remembers his counterpart's sudden vulnerability, when he'd talked about the end of his world while eating a hot dog, and she thinks maybe this Jim, too, is good at putting a casual face on his troubles.

"No, I'm sorry," La'an says. "It's not you. I like you. It's..."

"Him."

"Pretty presumptuous, assuming they were a man." In another person's mouth, La'an thinks that might've been flirtatious, but it sounds honestly castigatory in her voice.

Jim nods, taking his licks. "Were they?"

"Does it matter?"

"Not at all. But I want to know more about you, and it seems like that means knowing more about them."

La'an barely knows anything about him, which is most of the problem. She can't say that, though, so she says something she can at least be honest about. "I want to know you, too."

"Ask me anything. I'm an open book."

He even seems like he means it—arms out, face soft, eyes forward. La'an searches desperately for a question, the *right* question, the one that will solve him for her.

Her thoughts are interrupted by a scream from outside.

La'an and Jim both rush for the airlock. Through the transparent aluminum window, the source of the scream is clear. A woman is trapped under one of the food court tables, which must have been dislodged by the shaking, and has landed on her leg.

Which would be bad enough, but the radiation sensor is in the red.

La'an is closer to the airlock controls, and that's the only reason she's able to catch Jim before he's out the door.

"You can't go out there."

"She's going to die!" Jim tries to yank his wrist out of her hand, and doesn't quite succeed.

“So could you.”

“No, I—”

La’an wrenches his wrist with about 70% of her strength. He cringes, and that gives her just enough time to push past him and out into the airlock.

Red zone means an LD50 of three minutes. 50 percent of humans exposed to that level of radiation for three minutes will die. No way to know how long the woman has been exposed, so La’an will just have to work as fast as she can and hope for the best.

For herself, too.

She doesn’t bother with the stairs down to the food court, just vaults over the railing of the promenade and bends her knees to absorb as much impact as possible. It rattles her bones anyway. No time to shake it off. She dashes to the overturned table and heaves it away from the woman, who screams again at the release of pressure. It’s a strange relief not to have time to go through the motions of calming her, checking her vitals, explaining what’s going on. La’an scoops her up and slings her over her shoulder, still screaming, and heads back for the containment unit. The woman is several inches taller than her, and going up the steps feels Sisiphean, but they make it. La’an pounds the airlock button with her shoulder, and they collapse inward, landing in a heap on the ground. The door slides closed behind them, and La’an hears the *whoosh* of the decon field kicking in.

La’an checks the clock on the control panel. Fifty-three seconds. She probably won’t die, then.

Jim opens the interior airlock door, and helps her carry the woman the rest of the way. She’s unconscious, now. They lay her across three empty seats, and Jim runs the in-unit tricorder over her and La’an both.”

“She’s at 1.5 sieverts. You’re at 0.9.” Jim thrusts a pill into La’an’s hand. “Take that. So you don’t die of thyroid cancer.”

La’an swallows it dry. “You can’t be mad at me for doing what you were going to do.”

“I can be mad at you for spraining my wrist.”

“Your wrist will recover. You might not have.”

“Point-nine sieverts is not a lethal dose,” Jim says. “I wouldn’t have died.”

“We didn’t know that! You might have...” La’an pauses, tries to get her breath under control, but her heart is still pounding from exertion and adrenaline, and she can’t stop imagining Jim on the floor of the food court, burning through from radiation. “You *can die*, Jim. You’re not immune. My family and I were captured by Gorn when I was a kid, taken to one of their nursery planets and hunted to death. I watched everyone I loved murdered, and do you know what was the last thing I saw on all of their faces?”

She pauses for effect only, but Jim steals her thunder.

“Surprise,” he says.

La’an has only told that anecdote a few times, but no one has *ever* known the answer. She stares at Jim, and in that moment suddenly sees it: the thing that he and her Jim have in common. The essential core that unites them and her.

They all are—were—intimately aware of their mortality.

“I’m sorry about your family,” Jim says.

“I’m sorry about your wrist.”

La’an knows it’s intrusive, knows exactly how much she would hate it if someone did the same to her, but she *has* to know. The questions are burning her up worse than radiation ever could.

“You said I could ask you anything,” La’an says.

Jim’s eyes slide slowly over to her, cautious. “I did.”

“What happened to you?”

She knows it’s the right question because Jim doesn’t ask her what she means. For a long time, he doesn’t say anything at all, just stares down at the splint he’s putting on the unconscious woman’s leg.

“I was on Tarsus IV,” he says, still not looking at her. “One of the ones marked for death.”

Maybe La’an is a bad person, because her first reaction isn’t horror or sympathy. It’s clinical: *Was Tarsus IV one of the planets Earth had colonized in the other timeline?*

She shakes herself out of it. This Jim, here and now, opened up to her. The least she can do is let her reaction be about *him*.

She takes his hand. He turns his palm up and threads his fingers through hers.

“The person you lost...” he says. “They died saving you, didn’t they?”

“No,” La’an says. “He died saving you.”

And then she tells him. The whole story. Maybe the Temporal Investigations people don't want her to, but this Jim is as real as the other one, and he deserves to know.

"Oh," he says, when she's done. "Oh."

"It's a lot to take in, I know." La'an has a trick that she uses sometimes when she's out of her depth socially, where she looks at a situation and pretends that she's Una. She made Una laugh so hard she sprayed synthehol from her nose, when she told her that. ("Not at you," Una had assured her. "I'm just not all that socially adept, actually.")

All the same, La'an likes her trick. She thinks, in this situation, Una would try not to make it about herself. Learning that you died in an alternate timeline is a lot, and Jim should have space to process it without worrying about La'an's feelings.

Her feelings are so *big*, though.

"I'm sorry for lying," she says. "Or for not telling you. I just... I cared a lot for him. And I had to see if you... If you were both..."

"You said his brother died?" Jim doesn't sound upset, just thoughtful. Sad, maybe

"Yes."

"We're different people," Jim says. "There's no world where Sam dies and I stay the same." He captures La'an's gaze in that careful way of his. "You know better than anyone that we're more than our DNA."

"We are," La'an says. "*You* are. But you're also like him, in a lot of ways. You both understand."

"We're more than the worst thing that ever happened to us, too," Jim says, somehow soft and stubborn all at once.

He is. She is. They are.

"I like you," she says. "Both of you. I don't know if it's your DNA or your history or just *you*, but whatever it is, I... I want to talk to you. I want to be near you. It's not just that I liked him and he died, it's... I like *you*."

"I like you too, La'an."

He reaches out a hand for her, and she takes it. They sit together until someone official comes to tell them that the emergency is over.

### Day Seven

They play chess in the morning. Twenty-two moves for La'an to lose.

"It was Sam who taught me to play," Jim says. "He regretted it when a year later I was wiping the floor with him."

He tells her more about Sam while they play three more games: how his brother used to read to him at night but tell the stories wrong on purpose, how he'd taught Jim to swim by taking him out on a lake in an inner tube and popping it with a pin, how after the family came home from Tarsus IV, Sam drank the nutrient shakes alongside Jim, even though he'd been away at the Academy for the whole thing, just so Jim wouldn't feel so strange.

La'an places the stories in her mind next to her memories of Maru.

After lunch, they spar. La'an wins four out of five matches, and tells Jim about Una. How she taught La'an to fight thoughtfully, with control and intent, not desperation. How she viewed her genetic modifications not as something that made her superior, but something to let her fit seamlessly into the world. How she tried to hide her weakness for silly old Earth musicals.

"Silly?" Jim says. "Gilbert and Sullivan are *classics*."

They get dinner and drinks and talk philosophy again. Less abstractly this time, more grounded—how does consequentialist ethics factor into the role of a security officer, what *is* the nature of identity, actually, when time can rewrite itself around you, the age-old question about transporters. They get into a loud debate about xenopostmodernism and are politely ushered out of the bar.

They kiss outside the door of La'an's quarters. That's all—just a kiss. But it's long and heartfelt, and La'an feels present for every moment of it.

"I leave at 0500," Jim says, face not far from hers, fingers still lightly brushing the shell of La'an's ear.

"Me too."

"I'd like to see you again. Do you mind if I call you?"

La'an smiles and puts her hand over his, cupping his fingers against her face. "Never," she says. "I'm so glad I met you."