

One New Message

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One New Message

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Summary

When Chris decides to try out some erotic roleplay on Starfleet's anonymous messaging system, he doesn't expect to make a connection, or for his messages with 'Ty' to become a long-term arrangement. And he definitely doesn't expect what happens when the two of them finally meet face to face...

Notes

Written for the 2022 Unconventional Courtship fest, which involves using romance novel summaries as prompts. The summary I chose is from Virtually Perfect by Samantha Hunter:

He's just one click away...

Raine Covington has found the perfect lover – online. When Jack's sexy words fly across the computer screen, he can seduce her in a heartbeat. The hot, detailed images of them together feed her sexual fantasies. The best part? Raine doesn't have to make a commitment or even cook dinner for Jack. No fuss, no muss. She can switch him off at any time. So why is she feeling unsatisfied?

Jack's ready for the next step – to meet in person. He wants to make it real with Raine. Their virtual relationship has left him in a constantly aroused state, hungry for a taste of her lips and the touch of her skin. He wants to make love – all night long – to the woman who's captured his heart sight unseen.

Except, once Raine and Jack meet face-to-face, both are surprised at the outcome...

Written before Strange New Worlds. Originally posted on AO3.

Chris yawns and stretches, blinking into the darkness of his quarters. "Computer, time?"

"The current time is 0854."

On most days, that answer would mean he's hideously late for his shift, but not today, Chris thinks. Today is his Day Off. And not just a regular day off, where he gets a few hours to himself before someone needs him for *just a few minutes*, *Captain*. He's cleared it with Una, disabled his door chime, and blocked off his comm to anyone but her. Unless the ship actively comes under attack (a possibility that he has not completely ruled out) he has the next twenty-three hours entirely to himself.

He spends the day doing all kinds of things he doesn't usually have the chance to do. He has a real water shower followed by a leisurely breakfast, writes a few messages to friends back home (not that there's much he can actually tell them that isn't classified, but it's the principle of the thing), watches a couple of movies and even manages to finish a novel that he's been trying to get through for about two months now. Then, as the day draws to a close, he sits down at his computer and connects himself to the Network, having finally gotten up the courage to try something else he's been thinking about.

The Network is well known across all of Starfleet. Unofficial and anonymous – users are only known by randomly-assigned numbers – it's the preferred hangout for anyone who wants to interact with others without revealing who they are. People go there for many reasons, but right now Chris is only interested in one.

Without giving himself time to think, he clicks through to the section that will allow him to be paired randomly with another user for...

intimate discussion. There are an impressive array of options – his eyebrows go up at one labelled 'male human seeking female Saurian' – but he decides to play it safe and go for the basic 'male human seeking male human'.

Chris is no stranger to sex messaging, but before now it's only been with people he was seeing in real life. This is... different.

The first guy he gets matched with jumps straight into asking him how big his dick is without so much as a hello. Chris wasn't exactly expecting romance, but he needs a little more build up than that, and he immediately clicks the button to find someone else.

The second one at least manages a couple of lines of conversation before dropping the news that his partner's here, too, and is it okay if they make it a threesome? Chris points out frostily that there's an entire 'couple seeking third' section and this isn't it, and hits the button for a fresh match before they can reply.

The third avoids giving off red flags long enough for them to actually get somewhere, but he insists on using humiliating dirty talk even after Chris tells him he isn't into that, and his obvious lack of respect for Chris's comfort ruins things enough that he can't continue.

At that point he considers giving up, but decides to give it one more try.

28159907: Come here often?

56549774: Not before tonight. And to be honest, I'm not sure I'll be back.

28159907: Ran into some of the creeps, did you?

Chris frowns, eyebrows raising.

56549774: I'd say you have no idea, but from your question I'm guessing you do.

28159907: Unfortunately. Anonymity brings out the worst in some people. But they're not everyone.

Something in Chris's chest untwists a fraction. There's still plenty of time for things to go wrong, but this is different enough from his previous tries for him to want to continue.

56549774: I don't like threesomes or humiliation. Just putting that out there.

28159907: Good to know. I don't like bondage or rimming, and I won't do any kind of nonconsensual roleplay. It's a hard limit.

56549774: Understood. So, if we were in the same place right now, what would you be doing to me?

28159907: I'd push you down onto the bed, still fully clothed, and unfasten your pants. I'd pull them down just enough to reveal your cock, which is already hard and desperate for me.

Chris leans forward in his chair, his heart speeding up. Now *this* is the kind of thing he was looking for.

56549774: Are you going to suck me?

28159907: Just a little, until you're worked up and practically begging me. Then I pull away. I start to undress. You start to do the same, but I stop you.

56549774: That a fantasy of yours? Your partner being fully clothed while you're naked?

28159907: That's right, and tonight it's coming true. I leave my clothes on the floor and climb on top of you.

56549774: I stroke you all over. Your skin is warm and soft.

28159907: You grab my ass, enjoying the way it feels in your hands. You trail your fingers down towards my hole and press inside, coaxing me open for you.

Chris is hard inside his trousers, and he reaches down to rub himself through the material. He isn't planning to get off right now – if nothing else he needs his hands for typing – but a little teasing can't hurt.

56549774: You feel amazing, so ready for me.

28159907: You finger me slowly, getting me worked up. I push your hand away and line myself up on your cock. It fills me up as I sink down, my body stretching to take you.

56549774: You take me so well. You start to move, and it feels incredible. I grip your hips hard.

He almost mentions leaving bruises, but wonders if that would be going too far. The response tells him he needn't have worried.

28159907: You dig your fingers into me, marking me so everyone will know I'm yours.

56549774: I try to make it last, but you're too good. I know I'm close, so I take your cock in my hand and stroke you, wanting to make you come.

28159907: You know just how to touch me. I push your shirt up to stroke your chest and stomach, squeezing myself around you in a race to see who'll break first.

56549774: *You're too good. I can't hold on. I come hard.*

28159907: *I'm so close. Your hand's still moving on my cock as you spill yourself deep inside me, and the combination pushes me over the edge.*

56549774: *I stroke you through it, your cum splashing across my chest. My other hand brushes your hip, touching the marks I've left on you. Knowing that you're mine.*

There's no response to that for several minutes, long enough for Chris to wonder if the other man is still there.

56549774: *You okay?*

28159907: *Yeah, just processing. That was... wow.*

56549774: *Good?*

28159907: *Better than good. I might be using this in future fantasies.*

56549774: *You're not the only one. You really have a way with words.*

28159907: *No one's ever said that before, but I'll take it.*

Chris is still typing his response when another message comes through.

28159907: *I have to go, it's almost two in the morning here. Listen, I know this is unusual, but do you want to do this again sometime?*

Chris blinks, then erases his message and starts again.

56549774: *You mean write porn together?*

28159907: *I prefer the term erotica, but sure.*

56549774: *Yeah, I guess. I'm not sure when I'll be free, though. My schedule's pretty chaotic.*

28159907: *Mine too. Hold on, I've got an idea.*

Another several-minute break follows.

28159907: *Okay, I've set up a burner inbox on Fleetnet. It'll be easier than trying to find each other on here.*

Chris notes down the address – the same string of numbers followed by a Fleetnet assignment code.

56549774: *Got it, thanks. I'll message you when I can.*

28159907: *I'll be waiting.*

With that, Chris is kicked back to the main screen, his mysterious conversation partner clearly having closed the connection on his end.

Chris shuts down his computer slowly, fragments of their conversation running through his mind. His cock presses insistently at his trousers, and he gives in, unfastening them and taking himself in hand. It only takes a few strokes before he's coming, mind filled with images of being held down and taken apart.

Yeah, he thinks, a little dazed. *Definitely going to have to do this again.*

* * *

As is the way of things, Chris pays for his day off with several days of utter chaos. They stumble into an unexpected first contact situation with a not-especially-friendly race, and in the process of trying to smooth things over any thoughts of picking up his conversation with the anonymous stranger goes completely out of his head.

It's the evening of the third day by the time he finally remembers, crisis over and disaster averted (at least for now), and by then it's been long enough that he considers just chalking it up to a loss. The other man probably didn't even really mean it, after all, just an idle offer thrown out in a moment of emotion.

But if he doesn't ask, he'll never know, so he takes a deep breath and sends a short message.

Hi, it's me, from the Network. I meant to get in contact earlier, but work kind of exploded. I don't know if you're still interested, but I want you to know I enjoyed our time together, and I'm still up for a repeat performance if you are.

He can't remember the exact number he was assigned for their conversation, so his Fleetnet account ends up as a random string of digits. Hopefully Mr Anonymous will remember him, but if he doesn't at least Chris will have his answer.

He doesn't realise how much he was expecting it to come to nothing until he checks his messages the next morning and finds a response.

Hey

No problem, my job has a habit of eating people too. Ask me about my days off! Or don't actually, it's depressing.

I don't know about you, but I don't exactly keep regular hours, and it seems like we're in pretty different time zones (are you ship-based or planet-based?) so scheduling might be difficult. I'll mark myself as available on here whenever I'm free to talk, but I might have to rush off if something happens. Otherwise feel free to message me, but I might not respond immediately.

Random thought to bring this back on topic – how do you like your dick sucked? I have some ideas, but I'd like to hear it from you.

According to the account icon, the other man is currently not available, but Chris figures that's a good thing – the last thing he needs is to get himself worked up right before he's due for an eight-hour shift on the bridge.

One doesn't get to be captain of a starship without becoming fairly good at compartmentalising, so Chris puts the situation with Mr Anonymous firmly out of his mind for the duration of his shift. Thankfully things have calmed down after their last bout of excitement, and the shift is mostly taken up with meetings and paperwork. Not the most exciting, but right now Chris is glad of the break. Sometimes, he thinks, it's possible to have too much excitement.

The icon still says 'unavailable' when he goes back to his account that evening, but he sends off a message anyway.

Hi

I'm ship-based, you? Yeah, scheduling is a definite issue, unless we give up on the real-time idea and just send messages like this? Not really the same, but it'll be easier.

On that note, I like to be taken deep. Can you do that? Swallow me down right to the base? I bet you could, and I bet you'd look good doing it.

What about you? How do you like it?

By the way, do you have a name I can call you? Not your real name, just something easier to remember than 28159907. If it helps, you can call me Robin.

Till next time.

Robin

He briefly considers using his real name – it's not like 'Chris' is exactly rare – but something about it feels too personal. He snorts at the thought – sure, writing porn with the guy is fine, but exchanging names is a bridge too far. But that's what he wanted, isn't it? Anonymity?

There's another message in his inbox the next morning.

Robin, huh? I like it. You can call me Ty.

I'm planet-based. Earth, specifically. Well, most of the time. Your idea about ditching the real-time thing is probably a good one. We'll just have to be erotic pen pals, I guess.

Oh, you like it like that, huh? Well, you're right, I'd take you deep, right down to the root. You'd smell great, all sweat and musk, and I'd swallow you down again and again until you're a panting mess, begging me to finish it. And you'd love every second of it.

You'd want to reciprocate, of course. You'd drop to your knees in front of me and take me in, wrapping your lips around me. I like a lot of focus on the head – but you'd know that, and you'd bring me off expertly, using your tongue and lips until I come so hard I see stars.

Your turn. Think you can top that?

Ty

* * *

As the weeks go by, Chris continues to exchange messages with 'Ty'. He's scrupulous about making sure their... relationship... doesn't interfere with his job, but he can't deny he gets a thrill in his stomach whenever another message lands in his inbox.

The vast majority of their correspondence is conducted one message at a time, their fantasies and scenarios laid out in text for each other to read. The rare occasions when the stars align enough for them to talk in real time inevitably end with one or both of them having to break off part way through to attend to something – a red alert for Chris, or some kind of unspecified emergency on Ty's part. Chris can't deny it's frustrating, at times, but it helps to know they're both in the same boat.

Apart from the scheduling difficulties, in many ways it's an almost perfect arrangement. No strings, no commitments, no expectations. He doesn't know Ty, so there's no chance of getting attached, and if he wants to end things it's as easy as sending a message.

(It can't give him the feeling of someone else's arms around him, of course, or someone else's hand on his cock, but Chris is used to that. His crew has been off-limits since before he became captain, and casual sex on shore leaves has never been his style. He'd be stuck with his own hand no matter what happens, so why not have some fun with it?)

Both of them are careful about keeping their real life identities secret, but Chris does learn a few things about his mostly-anonymous confidant. Ty is tall, with dark hair and a beard (a fact that has featured in more than a few of Chris's recent fantasies). In the spirit of equality, Ty knows that Chris in his mid forties, with hair that used to be black but is now mostly grey. Ty has also claimed semi-seriously to have a 20 centimetre dick, but Chris is taking that with a pinch of salt. (He may or may not have added a centimetre or so to his own measurement, but he figures everyone exaggerates in porn.)

They tease each other sometimes, setting little challenges like trying not to come for a week or doing paperwork while wearing a sex toy.

There are ground rules, of course – nothing that leaves their quarters or involves other people – but it still brings an extra level of thrill to the arrangement as they think up new ways to one-up each other.

Sometimes I wonder what it'd be like to touch you like this for real, Ty tells him once, thrown in at the end of a long message involving a fantasy he has of taking 'Robin' in the shower. *Do you ever think about that?*

You mean meeting in real life? Chris sends back. *Sometimes, but I like the way we are now. Meeting would complicate things.*

It's a true answer, the only one he can give, and Ty doesn't argue with it.

Chris tells himself he's relieved about that.

* * *

They've been corresponding for about four months when Ty abruptly disappears.

It isn't unusual for them to go a few days without messaging – they're both very busy, after all, and Chris being on a ship means their messages are sometimes fighting subspace lag to get to each other – but when four days go by with no explanation, Chris starts to get concerned. By the time a week has gone by, he's downright worried. They've never gone this long without speaking, at least not without a quick 'Gotta go, work exploded' explanation beforehand, and the worry gnaws at him, filling his head with all kinds of unpleasant explanations as to why Ty isn't answering him. Of the two of them, Ty should be the safer one – he's stationed on Earth, after all, with no risk of hull breaches or warp core malfunctions or landing party disasters. Chris has imagined, once or twice, how Ty might react if something happened, if Chris were to be captured or injured or worse – but the idea that he might be the one stuck waiting for news honestly never entered his mind.

He's careful not to let the situation interfere with his work, but he's restless enough that Una notices and corners him in his quarters one evening to ask if he's okay. He tells her he's worried about a friend, which is true enough – and much easier to explain than being upset that the guy he exchanges erotic messages with hasn't contacted him in a while.

The worst part is knowing that he'll never know why. If this is it and he never hears from Ty again, he'll spend the rest of his life wondering, questioning if Ty just got bored one day and decided to ghost him, or if... if something happened. He doesn't even know the man's real name.

The relief he feels when he turns on his computer after thirteen long, unhappy days to find a message from Ty waiting in his inbox is almost overwhelming. In that moment Chris thinks he doesn't care if Ty says he never wants to speak to Chris again, just as long as he's okay.

Hey

Sorry I disappeared on you. Work... well, I can't really explain much because it's classified, but long story short I had to go off planet suddenly. As in, 'pulled out of bed in the middle of the night' suddenly. It's been chaos, and I wanted to contact you, but well. Classified. At least I've earned a week off for my troubles, so I'll be available if you want to chat in real time.

I'll write more after I get some sleep, but I wanted you to know I'm okay, and I didn't intentionally abandon you. (As if I could.)

*Yours,
Ty*

The relief that washes over Chris as he reads the message is overwhelming, and a little frightening. When they started all this, he'd thought it would be a bit of fun, something he could give up at any time, but Ty's message (and the days of misery leading up to it) is a giant glaring sign that that's no longer true. If it ever was.

He doesn't know how it happened, how a man he's never even met has become so important to him, but he has, and Chris can't help but remember Ty's question from a few weeks ago. *Do you ever think about meeting in person?*

The idea still kind of terrifies him, but if the last two weeks have shown him anything, it's that he can't go on like this, with nothing of Ty but words. *Maybe*, he thinks. *Maybe it's time.*

* * *

Ty: Hey. Long time no see, I guess.

Robin: I'm glad you're okay.

Ty: Me too. What about you? Anything in your life explode recently?

Robin: Just the usual. Listen, I've been thinking, what you said a while back about meeting in person? I want to. I mean, if that's still what you want too.

Ty: Really?

Ty: I mean, yeah, I still want that.

Robin: Yeah. It'll probably be a while, since I don't know when we'll be coming back to Earth, but in theory, yeah. I'd like to see you.

Ty: You don't have to come to Earth. I can come to you.

Robin: You'd do that?

Ty: *Sure. I've got months of leave saved up, they can spare me for a few days. Tell me the next time you stop by a starbase and I'll come meet you.*

Robin: *Wow. Yeah, okay, I'll definitely do that.*

Ty: *It's a date.*

Ty: *Can't wait to get my hands on you. Want me to fuck you in the shower? Or hold you down and make you beg for me?*

Robin: *Hmm, tempting, tempting. Tell me more?*

* * *

As it turns out, they don't have to wait long. It's around three weeks later when Chris gets a message from Starfleet Command with new orders. He reacts entirely professionally, ordering the course change and informing the crew of their new destination before getting started on the necessary paperwork. Then, when lunch break rolls around, he goes straight to his quarters and sends a message to Ty.

You don't have to wait for a starbase. We've been called back to Earth, should be there in about eight days. See you soon!

Ty's response is a string of exclamation points, followed by, *You're not joking, right? Because that would just be mean.*

Not joking. It's happening. I'll let you know when we have a more precise ETA and we can figure out where to meet.

* * *

They decide on a bar on the outskirts of San Francisco, far enough away from Starfleet headquarters to – hopefully – avoid awkward interruptions.

Chris arrives a few minutes before their agreed meeting time. It's 2000 hours on a weekday, so the bar is only about half-full; mostly couples and groups of friends, but with a few single patrons scattered here and there. He's wearing his lucky shirt – a blue button-down that he's been told brings out his eyes – and he tugs absently at the cuffs as he looks around for someone who might be Ty. According to their messages, he should be wearing a grey shirt and carrying a small model sailboat.

(They had a fairly spirited discussion about how, exactly, they were going to recognise each other. Pictures would've been easiest, but they both agreed that would have ruined the mystery of it all. They finally decided that Ty would bring his model sailboat, and Chris a tiny figurine of a robin he managed to coax from the replicator.)

A flash of dark hair in the corner catches his eye, and Chris goes still as he recognises the person sitting there. His first thought is a kind of exhausted frustration that he picked this place specifically to minimise the chances of running into someone who knows him, and yet goddamn Ash Tyler manages to show up and complicate things.

He's changed slightly since the last time Chris saw him – hair cut shorter, beard neatly trimmed – but it's definitely him, and Chris curses inwardly. He doesn't dislike Tyler; on another day he might even be happy to see him. But not now, not like this.

The only saving grace is that Tyler doesn't seem to have noticed him yet, too focused on his communicator. Chris moves carefully out of his eyeline, debating the benefits of brazening it out versus trying to reschedule, but then Tyler sits back in his seat and Chris freezes, attention fixed on the table in front of him.

There, set between a glass and a Starfleet communicator, is a small red sailboat.

Chris's mouth goes dry, realisation crashing over him all at once. Tall, dark hair, beard, grey shirt... *shit*. Suddenly five months' worth of conversations are painted in an entirely new light, and his first thought is *Should I have known?* followed quickly by *Does he know?*

Part of him wants to just turn and run, but he forces himself to move forwards, one foot in front of the other until he's standing at Tyler's table. Tyler – Ash, Chris tells himself, given the circumstances he should probably call him Ash – looks up at him, surprise turning quickly to a kind of bland politeness. If this was some kind of set-up, he's a much better actor than Chris gave him credit for.

"Captain Pike," he greets. "I wasn't expecting to see you here. How's the *Enterprise*?"

"Fine," Chris tells him. "We've been called back for a few days while we wait for new orders."

Ash raises an eyebrow. "And you've decided to celebrate with a drink?"

"Not exactly," Chris says. "I'm supposed to be meeting someone."

He watches Ash carefully, but all he does is shrug and say, "Huh. Me too, actually."

He glances around at the room, and Chris figures that's his cue. "Yeah," he says. "I know." He reaches into his pocket and pulls out the robin figurine, placing it gently on the table next to Ash's sailboat.

The series of expressions that pass over Ash's face would be amusing in other circumstances. "Okay..." he says slowly, "I didn't expect that."

"That makes two of us," Chris replies. He slips into the seat opposite Ash, and Ash's eyes flicker to him briefly before settling back on the figurine.

"Drink?" he suggests.

"Please."

* * *

"Did you know?" Ash asks, after they've both fortified themselves with a glass of Saurian brandy and are moving on to their second.

"Not a clue," Chris replies. "You?"

Ash shakes his head. "You're kinkier than I would've expected," he says.

"I'll take that as a compliment," Chris tells him. He taps his fingers on the table absently, frowning as something occurs to him. "So that time you disappeared...?" He's hesitant to say the words 'Section 31' while they're surrounded by civilians, but fortunately Ash catches on to his meaning.

"Oh. Yeah. I meant what I said about it being classified, but basically one of our missions went to shit and I had to go deal with it."

"Don't you have people to do that kind of thing for you?"

Ash snorts. "Okay, one, I've read your mission reports and you're not in a position to lecture anyone else about delegating."

Chris has the good grace to admit there might be a grain of truth to that statement as Ash continues, "And two, it involved the Klingons, and I'm the only Klingon expert they have, so."

"They're lucky to have you," Chris says, because he knows how hard Ash has fought to get where he is.

Ash smiles briefly. "Not sure I'd go that far, but we did – eventually – manage to get out without anyone dead or seriously injured, so I'm calling it a win."

He gulps down a mouthful of brandy, then reaches out and brushes his fingers over the figurine. "Why 'Robin'?" he asks. "Was it just random, or...?"

Chris hesitates. "It's a little silly," he says, fiddling with the edge of his glass.

Ash raises his eyebrows in a 'go on' gesture, and Chris gives in. "Did you ever read the Winnie-the-Pooh books as a kid? One of the characters is a boy called-

"Christopher Robin," Ash finishes with a nod. "Cute."

Chris takes a sip of his brandy, enjoying the warmth as it goes down. The alcohol is starting to kick in fully now, making everything seem brighter and easier. "No prizes for guessing where you got your pseudonym from," he says, gesturing at Ash with his glass. "Didn't you worry someone would figure it out?"

"You didn't, and you actually know me," Ash points out, and Chris supposes he can't really argue with that.

Ash takes another drink from his glass, then frowns, staring down into the liquid. "Say you had figured it out," he says quietly, "That it was me. Would you have kept writing?"

"No," Chris replies honestly. He sees something shutter in Ash's expression and adds quickly, "Not because it was you specifically, just that... a lot of the stuff I said was because I thought I was talking to a stranger, and knowing it was someone I knew in real life would've ruined it."

"And has it? Ruined it?"

"I..." Chris swallows, trying to organise his thoughts. It feels like he's trying to slot two entirely different images into one; there's Ty, who has played a starring role in Chris's fantasies for months, and then there's Ash, who Chris has only ever thought about professionally; and neither his brain nor his libido is entirely sure how to combine them.

"I don't know," he says finally. "I'm kind of in uncharted waters here."

"Yeah," Ash replies, one corner of his mouth turning up briefly. "I know what you mean."

There's silence for a moment, before Ash speaks again. "What if we tried it?"

"Tried it?"

Ash stands up and shifts his chair around until he's sitting next to Chris. "Kiss me," he says. "Let's just try it."

It's remarkably tame when compared to the kind of things they've been writing about, but Chris supposes it's as good a place to start as any. He reaches up, laying a hand on Ash's shoulder before leaning in and brushing their lips together.

It's a little awkward at first, but then Ash tilts his head slightly and opens his mouth, and everything just clicks. Heat rushes through Chris as he deepens the kiss, one hand sliding up into Ash's hair to pull him closer.

He's half-hard by the time they break apart, both of them breathing heavily. "Okay," Chris says shakily. "Not ruined."

"I, uh," Ash begins. "My apartment isn't that far, if you want to-"

"Yes," Chris interrupts, because if they do anything more here they're going to get thrown out. And he really, *really* wants to do more.

Ash smiles suddenly, and it's like the sun coming out from behind clouds. "I'll order a taxi."

* * *

Objectively, it's probably only ten minutes or so to Ash's apartment, but it feels like eternity. Ash sets the sailboat down carefully on a table by the door – from the way he handles it, Chris thinks it must have some kind of sentimental value to him. A childhood toy, perhaps.

He doesn't have time to contemplate it for long, though, as Ash turns and pushes him against the wall, kissing him hard enough to leave him breathless before dropping to his knees and unfastening Chris's trousers. Chris lets his head fall back, fingers stroking into Ash's hair as Ash takes him into his mouth and sucks hard.

In Chris's experience, the first time with a new partner is rarely spectacular. It takes time to learn each other's likes and dislikes, what works and what doesn't. But this is different. Even if they didn't know it at the time, he and Ash have spent months telling each other their likes and dislikes, explaining in extensive detail exactly what they want to do to each other, and what they want done to them. Ash knows more about what Chris likes in bed than probably anyone else he's ever slept with, he just has to put it into practice.

He knows that Chris likes it when his partners use their hands as well as their mouth, how he likes his balls touched, even how he likes the feeling of a beard rubbing against his thighs. Every piece of information Chris has shared with him is used mercilessly, and it isn't long before Chris is close, digging his fingers into Ash's hair and mumbling, "M'gonna-"

Ash sucks harder, blunt nails running over Chris's balls, and Chris's climax rushes over him, his whole body alight with pleasure.

It's a few seconds before he can think again, and he's a little surprised to find himself still standing. Ash looks faintly smug as he tucks Chris back inside his trousers and rises to his feet, and Chris feels a flicker of competitiveness at the sight. Two can play at that game, he thinks, and he knows all of Ash's fantasies too.

He pulls Ash towards him, kissing him fiercely as he slips a hand down to cup the hardness in Ash's pants. Part of him wants to mirror Ash and just drop to his knees right here, but he knows his joints won't thank him for it. "I assume you have a bedroom around here somewhere?" he murmurs, pulling back enough to meet Ash's gaze.

Ash nods, his eyes dark with desire. "Yeah," he says, his voice rough. "It's this way."

Ash's bedroom is neat but bare, with few personal touches. Chris pushes him down onto the bed, rubbing against him for a moment before pulling back to focus on his mission. Ash shifts so Chris can pull his trousers and underwear down, his hard cock springing free. It's a good size, thick and long; probably not 20 centimetres, but closer than Chris had assumed.

It's not too big to fit in his mouth, though, and Chris swallows him down, determined to make this the best damn blow job of Ash's life. He knows Ash likes a lot of tongue action, especially around the head, and he focuses his attention there, licking and sucking and occasionally taking him deep, enjoying the moans and gasps Ash makes in response.

There's something else he knows Ash likes, and he trails a finger down behind Ash's balls to his entrance, circling it lightly before pushing in. He knows he's found the right spot when Ash jerks, his breathing hitching for a second.

"Chris," he says, and it's half pleasure and half warning. Chris takes him as deep as he can, swallowing around the head, and is rewarded by Ash coming hard down his throat.

Ash lies there silently afterwards, breathing heavily, pants still halfway down his thighs. Chris wipes his hands and moves to join him, reaching out and poking him in the shoulder. "You alive?"

"Ngh," Ash responds, throwing an arm over his eyes. "I think you broke me."

Chris tries not to feel smug, but he's not very successful at it. "Guess that's what more than five months of foreplay does to a person," he says, and Ash snorts.

He drops his arm back down and lets his head loll to the side, looking at Chris. "Are you disappointed?" he asks, and there's a hint of vulnerability in his eyes. "That it was me, I mean."

"No," Chris says. He reaches out to touch Ash's cheek, fingers brushing through the short hair. "Surprised, yes, but not disappointed."

His hand cups Ash's cheek as he leans in to kiss him, softly at first, then deeper, their tongues brushing together. Ash shifts closer, one hand slipping down and under Chris's shirt, then rolls them so he's on top and begins kissing down Chris's jaw to his neck.

Chris is surprised to feel himself getting hard again as Ash nuzzles at his neck – it usually takes him longer to recover after an orgasm, but then again he doesn't usually have this kind of inspiration to work with.

"There's so much I want to do with you," Ash murmurs against his neck.

"Yeah," Chris replies, hands gripping at Ash's sides. "Yeah, me too."

Ash pulls back to look at him, eyes dark and soft. "Tell me what you want," he says.

Everything, Chris thinks, swallowing against a sudden surge of emotion. *I want everything.*

* * *

Later, when they've finally worn each other out – at least for the moment – they curl up together under the covers, Chris's back to Ash's chest.

Chris drifts for a while, sleepy and sated, Ash's arm across his chest and Ash's beard brushing his shoulder.

"Were you attracted to me, back then?" Ash asks suddenly, bringing Chris back to reality. "When we worked together?"

Chris doesn't answer for a moment, trying to put his thoughts into words. "You're an attractive man," he says. "I noticed that. But you- even after I started seeing you as more than just a pain in my ass, you were part of my crew. Off-limits." He chews on his lip and adds, "It wouldn't have mattered anyway, would it? You were in love with Michael."

"Yeah," Ash replies quietly. "I was."

There's a brief silence after that, Chris considering and discarding potential responses, searching for something that won't feel trite and meaningless.

In the end it's Ash who speaks first. "After she... left, I figured that was it. I'd be alone. It wasn't bad, really," he adds, before Chris can say anything. "It's not like I would've had time to date with Section 31 and everything anyway. My own hand was good enough, and on nights when I needed... extra inspiration... I used the Network."

Chris twists to look at him. "When we first spoke, you said there were a lot of creeps."

Ash nods, a frown appearing between his eyebrows. "Yeah. They weren't the majority, but even the decent people could be kind of hit or miss. Mostly I just hoped for someone who didn't type like they were doing it one-handed." He holds Chris a little tighter, pressing a kiss to his shoulder. "And then I met you, and everything just... flowed, like we were on the same wavelength. I've never connected with someone like that before."

"Me neither," Chris admits.

"I gave up on anyone else after that. I tried a couple of times, but all I could think was how much I'd rather be talking to you, and it just didn't seem worth it." He gives a soft huff. "I haven't been back to the Network in months. Didn't need it."

A warm feeling blooms in Chris's chest and he shifts, twisting in Ash's arms until they're facing each other. He reaches up, tracing the shape of Ash's cheekbone with his fingers, then leans in and kisses him long and slow.

"I almost gave up, that first time," he says when they break apart. "The first few people I matched with were terrible, and I told myself I'd give it one more try, and that was you. And I am so, so glad that I gave it that one last shot."

Ash leans in and presses his forehead gently against Chris's, one hand stroking up and down his arm. "Yeah," he says. "Me too."

They lie there for a few moments, enjoying the closeness, before Chris pulls back, frowning as something occurs to him. "So what happens now?"

"Mmf," Ash replies, settling further into the mattress. "Don't know about you, but I'm leaning towards sleep."

Chris huffs and swats at his hip. "You know what I mean. We're only on Earth for a week or so, and then I'll be gone again. What happens when you're here and I'm hundreds of light years away?"

Ash shrugs. "I guess we continue on like we did before. Don't get me wrong, I'd rather be able to touch you, but messages and vid calls are better than nothing." He laces their fingers together as he adds, "And I meant what I said about coming to visit you. Just name the time and place."

Chris sighs, thumb running across the back of Ash's hand. "You make it sound so easy."

"I don't think it'll be easy," Ash tells him. "But I think it's worth trying. Don't you?"

Chris has never had much luck with long distance relationships – or really any relationships – but looking into Ash's eyes, there's only one answer he can give.

"Yeah," he says. "I really do."

* * *

Six months later...

Chris rubs at his wrist as he sits down at his computer. Phil may have – reluctantly – released him from sickbay, but even he has to admit he's far from fully healed, aching as he does in about a dozen different places.

Still, he's determined to look on the bright side as he navigates to the private account he still uses to communicate with Ash. They'd both decided it'd be easier that way, since their messages aren't exactly something they can use their personal accounts for. To his immense luck, Ash is available, and Chris opens a connection and begins to type.

Chris: How fast can you get to Wrigley's? I've been... well, let's say 'given' two weeks of leave.

Ash: Does this have anything to do with you nearly dying again?

Chris: You know about that?

Ash: I have spies everywhere, remember? Plus I know you, and you're pretty much keeping Starfleet Medical in business.

Chris: Yeah, yeah, Phil and Una already gave me the lecture. Point is, I have two weeks off and I'd like to spend them with you.

Ash: Having lots of sex.

Chris: I thought that was implied. Though I should warn you that anything particularly athletic will have to wait until my ankle heals.

Ash: Hmm. I'll have to move some stuff around, but I think I can find an opening in my schedule. See you in a few days?

Chris: I'll be waiting. On that note, how do you feel about sex outdoors? I've been working on a new fantasy.

Ash: Yeah?

Chris smiles, fingers stilling for a moment as he imagines Ash on the other side of the screen, hanging on his every word just as Chris does his.

Oh yeah. he types. Let me tell you about it.

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