

Being the Captain

Posted originally on the [Ad Astra :: Star Trek Fanfiction Archive](http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/837) at <http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/837>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	Gen
Fandom:	Star Trek: Strange New Worlds
Relationship:	Christopher Pike & Spock
Character:	Christopher Pike, Spock
Additional Tags:	SNW S01E10: A Quality of Mercy
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2023-08-14 Words: 1,594 Chapters: 1/1

Being the Captain

by [squireofgeekdom](#)

Summary

You must seek out the good in knowing your own death. Use it to be the man you most essentially are.
And who's that, Spock?
The Captain.
Episode 01.01, Strange New Worlds

Chris, Spock, and the aftermath of A Quality of Mercy, facing the weight of Number One's absence, multiple visions of darker futures... and what it means to be the Captain.

Notes

Cross-posted from AO3!

His quarters are painfully silent.

He had such a sense of - relief, of peace, just half an hour ago. Renewed joy in seeing his crews' faces.

And now one of his crew - his Number One - has been taken from them

Spock sits across the table from him, datapads piled at his side.

"Spock," he scrubs at his eyes. "Until - until we get Una reinstated, can I ask you to be my first officer? Would you -?"

"Of course, Captain." He hands Chris a datapad. "The paperwork should only require your signature."

Chris tilts his head. "Spock -"

"I did not mean to be presumptuous, Captain. But you had previously implied that in Number One's absence, you assumed I would serve as First Officer. And while Lieutenant Noonien-Singh has certainly come to be a valued member of this crew, under the current circumstances I believe that if Starfleet were again given the opportunity to decide who would fill the position -"

"- it would be someone who'd be keeping an eye on us to keep us from helping Una. Not someone like La'an." He sighs. He misses La'an now especially; he hasn't been able to contact her. "You're probably right."

He signs the datapad, swipes the file through to send to Starfleet Command.

He doesn't know what he'd do without Spock.

"I know these are terrible circumstances, but - you have earned this," he says. "And, personally, there's no one I'd rather have with me for this."

Spock pauses. "Thank you, Captain."

"And I know Una would agree that there's no one better to be on her defense."

"I do believe I have sufficient familiarity with Starfleet regulations to understand her case."

"There's no doubt of that, but," he adds, "you're also the one who can ask the right questions to show how obviously, incontrovertibly, logically incorrect this policy is."

Spock hums, looking lost in thought for a moment. "Number One did emphasize the importance of asking questions."

Chris grins. "I'm sure," he says, remembering Una's adage about asking questions for new officers on the ship. Then he adds. "I've never met anyone who asks more insightful and incisive questions than you."

"Captain," Spock clasps his hands together behind his back. "As someone who was only reinstated because of your willingness to act in defiance of Starfleet on my behalf when I had been deemed guilty of wrongdoing, and when I had violated Federation regulation, I believe I am well positioned to state from experience that you are entirely capable of ensuring Number One's reinstatement." He pauses, lowering his head a fraction. "You *can* do this, Chris."

As Spock speaks, it is as if something in his chest untangles itself from where it had been pulled into a painful knot. The way he steps through it with such apparent clarity, the conviction with which he states it as fact.

"Thank you, Spock."

He sits back, and takes a breath.

But there is still one frayed end troubling him.

Una had been in the penal colony for seven years in the timeline he had seen. He hadn't gotten her out.

His accident had been - would be - long after she would have been sent there, whether it happened or not shouldn't have affected his ability to help her. And contacting the cadets - how could that have interfered?

What had happened?

He didn't know the answer. He almost wishes he had asked his other future self.

But that would have opened the possibility of being told that was another inescapable fate. Someone else he couldn't save.

Spock looks up from a datapad. "Captain?"

Clearly, some of his troubled thoughts are showing on his face.

He leans forward, considers.

"Can I ask you a question?"

Spock nods.

"When I told you about the time crystal ...seeing that part of my future, that I knew..." He takes a breath. "You're no stranger to seeing the future. Or - a future. What Gabrielle Burnham showed you... you worked with us to change that. But when I told you that I knew my future, you accepted it." He looks up at Spock. "What changed?"

Spock tilts his head slightly. "I would not consider anything as having... changed," he says. "When Gabrielle Burnham showed me the future, it was as a danger she was fighting to avoid. And when I relayed that danger to you - and the importance of changing it - you believed me. When you told me the time crystal had allowed you to know a part of your future with certainty, I believed you."

He lets out a long breath.

"You had offered me an answer to what was troubling you, and a question that was clearly deeply important to you," Spock continues. "Sometimes it is valuable to question the premise of a question itself. However, at the time, I did not consider that to be the case." Spock says. "Was that an incorrect assumption?"

"No. No, I don't think so. That was - what I needed to hear."

Spock nods slowly.

After a long moment, Spock asks. "If I may ask a question in return, Chris?"

"Of course."

"Given your statements earlier, it seems you had not fully accepted the future you saw for yourself, as you had obtained new information regarding what would happen if that future was altered - information I assume you had cause to obtain. Is this correct?"

"... Yeah." He scrubs a hand across his face. "It wasn't ... wasn't just not accepting my fate, it was... the others that got caught up in it."

"That changed."

"More that ... I was reminded of it."

"And when you saw what happened if the future was altered... I faced your fate."

“Something like it.”

Spock pauses. “And the others -”

“I don’t know... specifically. But there was... things got much worse.” He shakes his head slightly. “And every time, I would...”

“I -” Spock clears his throat slightly. “I hope you know I would give my life for yours without hesitation. Not only because you are my captain, but because you are... you are very important to me.”

He smiles at the echo, even in its bittersweetness. “You’ve got a bigger future than that, Spock.”

“As I have never taken a time crystal, I believe I still have some say in that.”

He smiles wider at that. He doesn’t ask whether Spock thinks about Michael in the future, and how she may have seen for herself in the future’s histories of their time how his life unfolds, in the ‘fate of the galaxy’ ways his own future self had said.

He trusts that Spock will find his future, just by being ... Spock.

As long as he keeps Spock safe to do so.

“It’s okay, Spock,” he says at last. “I took the crystal willingly, and I wouldn’t change that. And now that I know the bigger picture... I really have accepted my fate. And,” he adds, “I meant what I said. Even if nothing else... got worse, even if it was only my fate or yours. You don’t owe me anything. I’d always choose it freely, because you are very important to me.”

“Then,” Spock pauses. “I would ask that you believe I would also choose to sacrifice for you freely, not out of debt or obligation. Simply because you are very important to me.”

“Spock -” He blinks back tears. After everything today, it feels like another word could shatter him. “I know it will never come to that. But - thank you.”

Spock tilts his head, pauses. “When you spoke of your fate ... your death. You referred to the death of the man you know yourself as. And,” he starts, setting his jaw in a way that Chris recognizes as a stubbornness from which Spock won’t be budged. “If there is a survivor after that ... kind of death, a survivor I recognize - that will be someone I will still freely sacrifice for.”

He takes a deep, shuddering breath. He’s cut himself off from thinking about *after*. “Recognize as who, Spock?” he asks, feeling the echo of desperation with which he had asked Spock who he most essentially was. “There won’t be much Captaining left in me, I’m afraid.”

He’s grit his teeth and given orders through a great deal of pain and injury, and commanded the ship from a powered wheelchair for several months after a nasty encounter with a neural parasite, but ... not like that. Not the way he’d felt, in that glimpse of the feelings of his future self, the deep impression of constant pain that clouded everything like a haze of smoke, the way his thoughts slipped away in the fog and fatigue, the will and concentration it had taken to move an inch, like steering a burning shuttle with his teeth.

Spock has paused, considering. “There is more to ... being the Captain than Captaining a Starship.”

“Yeah?” he says, with his best attempt at casual through the tightness in his chest, “You’ll have to explain that one to me.”

“It is...” Spock closes his eyes briefly. “Being the person who has earned my trust in their leadership. Who has trusted and stood by me as... Spock. Who I am glad to call my Captain. And - my friend.” Spock says. “If a part of that person survives... they will be very important to me.”

Something cracks, a small, hiccupping sob.

He takes a deep breath, tries to steady himself.

“What -” Spock hesitates. “What can I do?”

“Nothing, Spock. It’s ... it’s been a long day. I’m sorry.”

“Chris,” Spock says, “let me help.”

He takes a deep breath, and allows himself weakness for a moment. “Stay. Please.”

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!