

she's the one that they call old whatsername

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she's the one that they call old whatsername

by [kaydeefalls](#)

Summary

"You gotta plant your flag in the dirt and declare victory on your own terms. The winner is whoever survives long enough to write the history books." (Always-a-girl!Kirk.)

Notes

Trigger warnings: non-graphic past emotional and sexual abuse; very brief suicidal ideation.

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As far as Starfleet regulation uniforms go, she generally prefers the trousers. Sure, you can kick ass, take names, and run through alien forests in a miniskirt, but brambles are a real bitch on the calves, and when all's said and done, Jimmy's always gonna be more comfortable wearing the pants in any given scenario, figurative or literal. But there's something to be said for a short, short skirt. With a certain sort of diplomacy, a flash of thigh does more than the most skilled negotiations.

Plus, Admiral Marcus really fucking hates seeing a pair of tits in the captain's seat. She always makes sure to keep a gold skirt set one size too small for when his name rolls around on the Command roster, just to push the misogynistic old asshole that much closer to a coronary every time she crosses her legs.

"That is not strictly regulation," Spock informs her, eyebrow arched.

She grins and very deliberately slouches back in her chair, knees parting. Below her, Chekov coughs adorably as Sulu grins widely. Uhura just rolls her eyes. "Gee, I guess it must've shrunk in the wash."

"The facilities on the *Enterprise* utilize a standard sonic cleansing procedure which has no detrimental effect upon the structural proportions of the fabrics from which Starfleet uniforms are constructed. Unless there has been a gross malfunction in the ship's laundry systems, it is highly improbable any article of clothing could conceivably 'shrink.'"

"Huh," Jimmy says cheerfully. "You don't say."

"Let's name her after your dad," George Kirk said, scant seconds before the destruction of the USS *Kelvin*. "Let's call her Jim."

The name on her birth certificate is Jamie Tiberia Kirk, but fuck that, she's always just been Jimmy. Once, a kid in her kindergarten class informed her that Jim was a boy's name. She kicked the shit out of him during recess. Got a split lip and a trip to the principal's office out of it, but she wore both like a badge of honor. Her name's the only thing her daddy ever gave her, and it's *hers*, all right?

"You're not going to have some kind of existential crisis over this, are you?" Winona asked when she came to fetch her home. "Because Starfleet has some really exciting gender identity pamphlets, if you want to talk about it."

Jimmy rolled her eyes. "I'm a *girl*," she said. "And my name's Jim. So that makes it a girl's name."

"Damn straight," Winona agreed.

Winona was kind of an awesome mom when she was around. Problem was, that wasn't much.

Admiral Marcus's craggy face comes into unfortunate focus on the viewscreen, and Jimmy grins widely, rolling her shoulders back. Her boobs are definitely threatening the structural integrity of the too-small uniform. Marcus greets her with a ferocious scowl, and below her, Sulu grimaces and glares at Chekov, who beams.

("There's no way you could possibly know beforehand who from Starfleet Command is hailing us," Sulu grumbles afterward, transferring an undisclosed amount of credits from his account to Chekov's as part of their ongoing betting pool that Jimmy absolutely does not know about. "One of these days, it's going to be Pike on the viewscreen instead, and he's going to *yell*, and I will laugh at you forever.")

"*Never* bet against the Captain," Chekov advises sunnily, and Jimmy rewards him with a good hair-ruffle.)

"Admiral Marcus," Jimmy purrs, leaning forward. She will forever mourn the high neckline of the uniform, but still, a little gravity goes a long way. She may or may not be wearing a bra right now. "How can we be of service today?"

"Captain Kirk," Marcus says stiffly. He always manages to make her title sound like an insult. "Surveyors on the *Urania* have detected the possibility of valuable mineral deposits on an M-class planet near the edge of the Romulan Neutral Zone. The *Enterprise* will send a science team to the planet's surface and obtain samples for further analysis. The planet itself is called Nibiru by the primitive race inhabiting it; the Prime Directive is of course in effect. Tread carefully, Kirk. You should be receiving full orders as well as the planet's coordinates momentarily."

Jimmy scratches her ear, considering. The *Urania* is a smallish science vessel, but if they'd gotten close enough to do that sort of scan on the planet, they should've been able to get the samples themselves. Why send the *Enterprise* instead? Sure, sneaking around a pre-warp civilization requires finesse, but that's no reason to throw the Federation's flagship at it. "Just how close to the Neutral Zone are we talking about, sir?"

Marcus's scowl deepens, which means her hunch is probably right. "Your navigator should have the coordinates."

"Coming through now, Captain," Chekov chirps.

Jimmy smiles agreeably. "All right, we'll check it out. I assume you're sending all the science-y specs, too? Not that I can tell one rock from another, but Commander Spock probably wants to know exactly what he's scanning for before beaming down. Vulcans are finicky like that."

One of these days, she's gonna catch Spock actually rolling his eyes at her antics, and it will be a glorious day indeed. For now, she contents herself with the faint tightening at the edges of his mouth. She gives him a wink before recrossing her legs for Marcus's benefit. A blood vessel right in the middle of the Admiral's forehead is ready to pop any second now.

"All the relevant details can be found in your orders," Marcus says coldly and cuts the transmission without so much as a fare-thee-well. Asshole.

Jimmy rolls her neck, feeling her spine crack, and gets to her feet. "Well, this should be fun. Chekov, please set a course to Nibiru. Full bridge staff meeting in my ready room in one hour. I'm gonna go put some damn pants on."

Captain Pike yanked her out of a bar brawl by the scruff of her neck and then tried to recruit her based on, like, her aptitude tests and her last name or something. It was kind of a weird night.

"You know, I tried to recruit your older brother once," Pike said abruptly, about halfway through his otherwise monotonous spiel. Honor, glory, do-the-right-thing, blah blah blah. "He told me I had the wrong Kirk. I think he was right. You really are your father's daughter."

Jimmy glared at him, swiping her shirtsleeve across her bloody nose. "All due respect, sir, I'm my *mother's* daughter. Never had the chance to be my dad's."

He acknowledged the point with a wry smile. "Winona's a hell of an engineer, and judging by your test scores in the applied sciences, you've got her knack for it, all right. But I think that'd be a criminal waste of your potential. I want you on the command track, Jimmy. You could be an officer in four years. You could have your own ship in eight."

She snorted. "Yeah, 'cause Starfleet has such an awesome track record allowing lady-parts anywhere near the captain's chair."

"We have had a few good women, but you're right, we could definitely do with a few more." His eyes were sharp on hers. "But we can't use you if you don't join up. You understand what the Federation is, don't you? It's important. It's a peacekeeping and humanitarian armada—"

—that had ignored the warning signs on Tarsus for months while children starved and "undesirables" were rounded up in barns and shot; that had stumbled into a warship so great and terrible that the best officers of her parents' generation were rendered utterly helpless. That was some Orwellian bullshit he was spouting, right there. She shoved her chair back with a harsh screech. "We done here?"

"Yeah," Pike said evenly, getting to his feet. "I'm done. Shuttle for new recruits leaves from Riverside Shipyard at 0800." He paused, then turned back. "Your father was captain of a starship for twelve minutes. He saved eight hundred lives, including yours and your mother's. I dare you to do better."

He fucking *had* to make it a dare. Asshole. Like she was some idiot boy hopped up on testosterone and big, stupid dreams. Any idealism Jimmy Kirk ever possessed had been strained out of her young. She knew better than that.

...still. Four years to make officer? Fuck that noise, she'd do it in three.

"Nibiru's got a natural hoard of dilithium crystals that the indigenous species has no use for, basically," Jimmy explains. She kind of wishes she had a big thick file of papers to slap down on the conference table for moments like this. Sure, digital files last a good deal longer and are more easily shared. But at what cost progress, she wonders mournfully. Throwing a note up from her PADD to the viewscreen is way less dramatic, and squiggly lines on a graph just aren't that sexy. Except maybe to Spock.

Spock cants his head to one side as he studies his own copy of the pertinent intel. "That would certainly account for the Federation's interest in the planet. No one has yet developed the means to synthesize dilithium. An untapped natural resource would be an invaluable discovery."

"Yeah, though it's gonna be hard to set up a mining colony right under the Nibirans' noses." Jimmy frowns. "Do the Nibirans *have* noses? Hey, actually, did you get any data on their species at all? It wasn't included in the orders, and I didn't feel like wading through the science packet." Mostly because it's more fun listening to Spock try to explain to her satisfaction. Yeah, she aced her xenobiology courses, and she knows he's accessed her full Academy record, but it's always entertaining to see how ridiculous her questions can get before he realizes she's just fucking with him.

"They are a pre-industrial society, humanoid in appearance, with a universally chalklike skin tone," Spock says calmly. "I have no further information at this time regarding the particulars of their facial protuberances."

She laughs and turns to Uhura. "Since we're a few millennia away from first contact, I won't need you in the landing party for this one. Keep your ear to the ground while we're down there. This planet's barely shouting distance from the Neutral Zone—if I were Romulan, I'd think I had good cause to get twitchy. I really don't want anyone knowing we're here."

Uhura nods. "Understood."

"Spock, you can take three science officers down with you, your call." Jimmy glances over at her CMO. "We'll take Bones, too, plus a couple of security personnel. Better safe than sorry."

The Admiralty as a whole seems to think that Captain Kirk is some kind of reckless daredevil, and okay, maybe out of context, her track record might look a little iffy. But Jimmy has only ever acted in the best interests of (in order of priority): her crew, the Federation, any local indigenous species, and finally, if necessary, herself. She knows a thing or two about survival.

Winona was off-planet ten months out of the year; she'd married Frank because they'd grown up together and because Frank got along real well with five-year-old Sam Kirk. Jimmy'd been way too young then for her own personality to be a factor in that equation. She wondered, later, if it would've made a difference.

Frank never called her Jim. To him, she was always *Jamie*, usually with a snarled curse attached, when he didn't just refer to her as That Little Shithead. As she got older, his names for her evolved in close conjunction with her bra size. Around age eleven, she realized that "whore" and "slut" were not, in fact, just synonymous for "shithead"; that kind of rocked her world, and not in a good way.

The first time she caught Frank ogling her developing chest, she went off to school and used her new vocabulary in a detailed description of Gary Mitchell's momma. She didn't fight back nearly as hard as she could've. She came home with two black eyes and abrasions all up and down her skinny legs, as ugly as she could possibly make herself, and let Frank's yelling wash over her like rain. Words she could handle. Womanhood she was less sure about.

The first time he tried to touch her, she was a few weeks shy of her thirteenth birthday. By then Sam was away at college, and Winona's starship was in a communications blackout somewhere in Beta Quadrant. So Jimmy hit him with a frying pan full of scrambled eggs. Should've been funny in retrospect. Wasn't.

Three weeks later she hitchhiked to San Francisco and stole enough credits to get aboard a transport to a new colony on Tarsus IV.

The rest of her bridge staff heads back out to their respective stations once they've finished the mission briefing, but Spock remains in his seat, tapping at his PADD. She waits until the door seals shut behind Uhura, then plops down into the chair next to him. "All right, what's your read on Marcus?"

"I am not sure to what you are referring," Spock says blandly, setting down his PADD. "I have never found the Admiral to resemble a work of literature."

Jimmy grins. And people think Vulcans have no sense of humor. "Yeah, me neither. But you know what I meant." He stuck around after the others left for a reason. It's been less than a year, but she's already developing a good working relationship with her first officer. Maybe that old version of Spock knew what he was talking about after all. Sometimes, she almost wonders if her First Officer is abusing his telepathy, he can read her so well already. Of course, Vulcans are touch-telepaths, and she'd definitely notice if Spock started touching her a lot. Which, come to think of it, would be *awesome*. Spock has really nice hands.

"I find it curious that any admiral—particularly one of Marcus's standing—would see fit to personally deliver our mission orders in such a way," Spock muses, and she drags her attention away from his long, elegant fingers. "It was unnecessary to initiate the transmission himself; an aide would have been the adequate and expected messenger in such matters. If the mission parameters were delicate enough to require the Admiral's voice, it would have been logical to send you a personal transmission to your own quarters, rather than initiate a shipwide broadcast."

"Or just recall us to Starfleet and bring me in for private chat," Jimmy adds. "Granted, that would've been a bit out of our way, since we were already closer to Nibiru than Earth, but admirals don't normally worry about petty inconveniences. I'd say it's a time sensitive mission, which

explains the rush to get the *Enterprise* there ASAP, but there's no kind of deadline mentioned anywhere in the orders. Believe me, I checked."

"If the reports of dilithium deposits are indeed accurate, it will take approximately two point six years before an established mining colony would yield any effective product. The delay caused by recalling the *Enterprise* to Earth before then sending us to Nibiru is relatively insignificant."

"Right, but other factors could be at play." Jimmy drums her fingers on the table, thinking it through. "Maybe they're worried the Romulans might get there first? That'd be just what we need, duking it out over a pre-warp civilization."

"Any incursion from the Romulan Empire into or beyond the Neutral Zone would be treated as an act of war," Spock points out. "Although the proximity of Nibiru to the Neutral Zone is less than optimal, it would appear to be even less so from a Romulan standpoint."

"Hmph. I still feel like I'm missing something here." She shoves her chair back as she stands. "Whatever, I guess we'll figure it out when we get there. Which won't be for another couple of days, so unless something urgent comes up, I'm gonna go harass Scotty for a while." She likes messing around in Engineering. It helps her think.

Spock refrains from commenting, his face impassive as ever, but she'd swear on her father's empty grave that his eyes are hiding a smile.

First time she met Spock was, of course, at that clusterfuck of an academic hearing after she did some creative reprogramming on the Kobayashi Maru.

"The test itself is a cheat, isn't it?" she said, feet planted squarely, hips canted just enough to imply she had the biggest cock in the room, actual genitalia aside. She smirked at her Vulcan accuser. "I mean, you program it to be unwinnable."

His dark eyes were unreadable. "Your argument precludes the possibility of a no-win scenario."

Jimmy Kirk's been stuck in a no-win scenario since approximately thirty seconds after her birth. If she actually gave two fucks about *winning*, she'd have packed it in and gone right over that cliff with Frank's antique Corvette years ago.

"Depends on your definition of 'winning,'" she retorted. "I didn't like the parameters of the test, so I redefined them."

"So you freely admit to violating the rules of the examination." For all his religious devotion to rules and regulations, he almost seemed to be *enjoying* their debate. Did Vulcans even have the capacity for fun?

Her grin was all teeth. "An ancient Terran tradition. You gotta plant your flag in the dirt and declare victory on your own terms. The winner is whoever survives long enough to write the history books."

The Vulcan's expression didn't change, but he tilted his head ever so slightly to one side, as though reevaluating his opinion of her. The stick up his ass must've slipped out a bit, because for just an instant, she thought she glimpsed another person entirely beneath the uber-Vulcan mask.

"Fascinating," he murmured. And pissed off though she was, she had to admit that the feeling was entirely mutual.

Three things help clear Jimmy's head like nothing else: fucking, fighting, and tinkering with anything electronic or mechanical. The engineering crap she learned from Winona, honed by years of working part-time at Riverside's only autobody shop. Fucking and fighting are all her own.

Problem is, captains of starships really can't get away with brawling with random crewmembers, so when her ship's in transit, she doesn't get much in the way of a physical outlet. Sometimes she bullies Sulu into sparring with her in the gym, but although they're fairly well-matched, she can't really let loose. She doesn't want to actually hurt her best helmsman. Spock could probably wipe the floor with her, if anything she's read about Vulcan physiology is true, but he always politely declines whenever she asks, and she's never actually seen him step foot in the gym.

Fucking is similarly off the books at the moment, which sucks monkey balls. It's not that she actually gives two fucks for Starfleet fraternization regs—let's be real, her parents were totally space married, and no one ever raised a stink about it—but there's a fine line between the fun kind of sexual harassment and the rape-y kind, and she has no interest in any form of sex that isn't 100% enthusiastic and consensual. And command structure being what it is, it's kind of hard to tell if any given subordinate is *actually* consenting. She really, really doesn't want to unintentionally pressure anyone into sex. So while she's more than happy to get her rocks off planetside (alien chicks are totally bangin'), again, that doesn't leave her with much of an outlet while onboard the *Enterprise*.

So tinkering it is. She trash-talks Scotty until he shoves a toolkit and a malfunctioning console at her, then loses herself in the soothing, repetitive task of searching out the faulty wiring. With her body thus appropriately occupied, her mind is free to wander.

Nibiru. Dilithium crystals. Romulan Neutral Zone. Pre-industrial civilization. The *Urania*. Admiral Marcus.

Something isn't adding up. Dilithium is valuable stuff, but it's not *that* rare. Does Marcus *want* to provoke the Romulans? He'd love the chance to blame a war on Starfleet's new golden girl. But for all her reputation, Jimmy's not actually egotistical enough to think Marcus would risk starting a war just to discredit her.

What if she's looking at it all wrong? What if this has nothing to do with Nibiru's proximity to the Neutral Zone? What else could be worth the risk for a couple of lousy dilithium samples?

What's more valuable than dilithium?

When the crops on Tarsus began to fail, the governor decided the colony could only support half its existing population. He drew up two lists.

She was on the good list. The desirable list. At fourteen years old, Jimmy Kirk was young, healthy, athletic, and female. Vibrant young women with her physical qualities would be crucial to the colony's future, Kodos informed her kindly. She was a valuable asset.

It was the first time in her life she'd ever been accorded higher status due to her gender, and all so that she could serve as a glorified broodmare for a neo-Nazi's eugenics experiment.

Late that night, she killed three guards with a stolen phaser and broke seventeen children out of one of Kodos's camps, leading them out into the dying forests.

Weeks later, starving and shaking and terrified, living off the wasted land with her wretched brood of "undesirable" orphans—they were down to twelve, the youngest with limbs like twigs and swollen bellies—she spared a moment to wonder which list she'd have been on if she'd been born male. Would she have been Kodos's prized stallion? Or would he have seen *that* Jim Kirk as the threat he was?

It wouldn't have changed a thing in the end, she thought bleakly, leading a granary guard away with a swish of her skinny hips and a smile that never touched her eyes. She'd likely have wound up right here all the same, dropping to her bony knees in the dirt in exchange for another insufficient handful of grain.

In the latest hilarious twist of events, it turns out that Nibiru has a natural magnetic field so strong that it wreaks merry havoc on their transporters.

"We've got to get a direct line of sight, basically, and even that's chancy," Scotty says with a ferocious scowl. "We're gonna have to break atmo before beaming anyone anywhere, otherwise you'll be lucky to end up as so much stardust."

Uhura frowns thoughtfully. "On the one hand, if we land the *Enterprise* properly, the magnetic field will as good as cloak us from any potential traffic. We'll fly right under the radar. But on the other hand—aren't we dealing with a pre-warp civilization?"

"Not just pre-warp, pre-anything-more-advanced-than-bows-and-arrows," Jimmy confirms. She scrubs her hand across her face, trying to ward off a headache. "They catch sight of the *Enterprise*, we're blowing the Prime Directive right out of the water. No wonder the *Urania* balked at obtaining any samples herself. So where can we land her that won't raise all kind of exciting primitive alarms amongst the natives?"

"Class M planet, right?" Sulu asks. "That should mean oceans, or at least very large lakes. Can't we park her underwater?"

"And pray the Nibirans aren't a nautical society," Bones grumbles.

"Once we're on Nibiru's surface, we'll be within the planet's magnetic field, right?" Jimmy presses on. "So our transporter will be functional again? No matter *where* planetside we happen to be parked?"

"Aye, theoretically, as long as there's nothing else down there contributing to the interference—but *underwater*?" Scotty sputters. "Are you out of your bloody mind? What kind of 'ship' d'you think my girl is? She'll get ocean bilge all up in her nacelles—"

Jimmy rolls her eyes. "Relax, Scotty. We'll only be there long enough to get the dilithium samples and get out. This isn't an exploratory mission, just a quickie. And if she can handle the vacuum of space, how much worse can a little water be?"

Okay, yeah, she's not a complete idiot, thanks, but the speechless outrage on Scotty's face is totally worth it.

"Can it be done?" Spock asks Scotty, while he's still gaping like a fish.

"Aye, but—"

"Awesome!" Jimmy says blithely. "Of course, that still leaves us the problem of actually making planetfall without being spotted."

"Pre-industrial means they've likely only got natural sources of light," Sulu says. "Fire. No electricity or any equivalents. So unless they've evolved into a nocturnal species, they won't be particularly active at night. Wait until we've got a good cloud cover, kill any external lights, sneak in under cover of darkness."

Uhura sighs. "We're making an awful lot of assumptions about Nibiran racial and social characteristics right now."

"Well, we can't learn more about them while we're up here, and we can't beam down, so either we call this a failed mission and go home now, or we take a few risks," Jimmy says. "And I'm not running back to Marcus with my tail between my legs just because the planet's making our sensors a little glitchy." She looks over at Spock, who's been uncharacteristically quiet for most of the discussion. "Spock, thoughts?"

"Given the data currently available, Mr. Sulu's suggested course of action has an 84.3% probability of successfully avoiding detection by the Nibiran species." Spock meets Jimmy's eyes levelly. "I believe that is an acceptable risk within our mission parameters."

"Great," Jimmy says decisively. "Break out the scuba gear, we're going deep-sea diving." She glances back over at Uhura. "Looks like you're coming down with us after all."

First time she met Uhura, Jimmy tried to pick her up in a bar. It could've gone disastrously, but somehow they worked out as friends. Maybe 'cause Jimmy was smart enough to see the Starfleet uniform and the sharpness in her eyes, and decided to try chatting her up with intelligent conversation instead of just making a crude pass and assuming she'd be so gratified by the attention that she'd fall right into her arms. Jimmy has seen way too many assholes make that mistake (usually with her), and she may be an alcoholic repeat offender with a shitty part-time job

as a car mechanic in a nowhere town, but she damn well knows how to treat a lady right.

Uhura was wary at first, but she warmed up to the discussion (xenolinguistics, who knew?) and when a couple of knuckle-draggers in matching red uniforms tried to impress her by mouthing off at Jimmy, she totally got right up in their faces in Jimmy's defense, which was a sight to be seen. Also, super hot.

Of course, Jimmy never met a bar brawl she didn't like, so Uhura's interference didn't keep her from getting twelve kinds of shit beat out of her that night, but again, fucking and fighting, they're all about the same to Jimmy. She was sorry not to get personally acquainted with Uhura's talented tongue, though.

Once Pike broke up the fight and recruited her to Starfleet, she managed to deliberately throw herself in Uhura's path on a regular basis until the other woman resigned herself to Jimmy's continued presence. They never did sleep together, sadly, but it was nice to have a friend for a change. And Uhura eventually introduced Jimmy to Gaila, so that all worked out to everyone's satisfaction, because Gaila was easily one of the top five fucks of Jimmy's entire life to date. Uhura was the best wingwoman *ever*.

Jimmy always did her best to return the favor, but when Uhura started waxing rhapsodic about her devastatingly logical Vulcan instructor, she had to draw the line.

"Jimmy Kirk is actually trying to talk me *out* of sleeping with someone?" Uhura said in disbelief, while they shared a bowl of popcorn and a bottle of vodka on her living room floor and totally ignored the holovid playing. "I never thought I'd live to see the day."

"I'm just saying, wait until you've completed the course," Jimmy pushed on doggedly. "Which, okay, granted, that means waiting until we've graduated, but seriously. Graduation day, I will personally see to it that you climb him like an extremely logical tree. I will bring you cupcakes and condoms. But not before then."

"Oh, come on, like you've never screwed any of your instructors," Uhura scoffed.

Jimmy smiled in fond reminiscence. "I have indeed. Four of them. But only *after* they filed my final grades." She rolled over onto her stomach, propping her chin up on her hands to look Uhura right in the eye. "Look, we're gonna be officers, and we're gonna kick ridiculous amounts of ass on our own merits. The last thing you want is for some douchebag to claim that you fucked your way into a uniform."

Uhura's expression sobered. "You know some of them will say that anyway," she said quietly.

She didn't need to tell Jimmy that. Jimmy had been hearing that sort of shit since she was about eleven years old. "I know. But if you start up a relationship with this Vulcan now, they'll have even more ammo to use against you. You're way too smart for that bullshit. It's only a couple more months—if you really like the guy, you can wait a little longer to bone him."

So that's the epic story of how Jimmy Kirk cockblocked Spock months before she ever actually met him.

Later, immediately after the destruction of Vulcan, she almost wished she hadn't. It might've been good for Spock to have someone like Uhura: someone who could break all his rigid cultural taboos about personal space and just fucking *hold* him for a while, let him break apart a little so that he could go on performing admirably or whatever with his load lightened ever so slightly. But with everything that happened, Uhura never did get her rocks off with Spock, and a tiny, guilty part of Jimmy is secretly glad.

Nibiru spreads before them in waves upon waves of red. Chlorophyll apparently never really took off on this planet. Jimmy *loves* this kind of random shit. Space exploration is awesome.

They beam from their underwater ship to the shoreline, where a series of natural caves are carved into the cliff's face. Spock waves his tricorder around with a faintly satisfied expression that would be pure bliss on anyone else and leads his science team deeper within the caverns in search of the source of the dilithium. Jimmy sends one of the security officers with them while she and Bones find a route up to the ruby-red forest that blankets much of this continent. Narrow but distinct pathways cut through the vegetation—possibly this planet's equivalent of deer trails, or maybe the Nibirans' work. They all seem to lead toward a large mountain, which is the defining geological feature of this part of the continent. Through her binoculars, she can see hard evidence of Nibiran civilization: an exquisitely designed structure, likely a temple or of similar religious significance. She'd love to get a closer look, but they're not making a social call.

"Too bad we can't spend more time here," she remarks, tucking her binoculars back away and examining their immediate surroundings instead. The dominant vegetation here is like a cross between a birch and a bamboo stalk, with dense undergrowth, all crimson. Like human blood running through the veins, she muses, studying the leaf. Is that what Vulcans thought of Terran plants? Blood-green dye staining the forests of Earth. But no, they'd never admit to such whimsical thoughts. How terribly illogical of her. She grins to herself.

Bones's mouth twists in that judgey way of his. "Longer we stay, the more likely it is you'll incite some natives into a homicidal rage," he grumbles. "That's what always happens. The sooner Spock gets his damn samples, the better for everyone."

"That was *one time!*"

"*One...?* It's almost *every* time, with every species, including your own! Jesus, lady, have you never met yourself?"

Memories of the alternate, older version of Spock flash through her head, and not all of them are her own. She shrugs. "Dunno. Could be interesting." For starters, she apparently had a dick in *that* universe. Wacky fun.

Of course, that's when the ground shakes ominously under their feet, and then Spock's on the comm babbling something about seismic activity and the dilithium samples and—well, okay, Spock has probably never "babbled" in his life, Jimmy might be projecting a bit there. Point is, they look up, and that mountain dominating the landscape is not so much a mountain as a no-longer-dormant volcano.

"God damnit, Jimmy!" Bones yells, as they hastily prepare to beam back onto the *Enterprise*, "I swear to God, you are a goddamn *albatross!*"

She doesn't know what the fuck he's talking about, but that doesn't really matter right now, because she has a sinking feeling that she knows exactly why Marcus was so keen to hurry them over to Nibiru.

Look, the thing with McCoy wasn't even a thing. He'd just gone through a particularly acrimonious divorce, so it was understandable that he wasn't reacting well to anyone of the female persuasion. Plus the hangover, plus the whole fear of flying thing, and being crammed onto a claustrophobic shuttle with a bunch of cadets a decade his junior. And she'd been a wiseass new recruit with last night's bar brawl writ large all across her face—it was always gonna be a volatile combination. There were pretty much two ways a first meeting like that could go: they'd either become lifelong friends, or they'd hate each other on sight.

Bit of both, it turned out. She kinda liked that he was an asshole, to be honest, but the way he talked about his ex-wife left a sour taste in her mouth. He was the sort of guy who saw the tits first and the *person* second. She could always tell. Over the course of the shuttle ride to San Francisco, she needed him into the sort of blazing argument that probably would've ended in grievous bodily harm if they hadn't been literally strapped into their seats.

At the end of it, though, he just slapped her on the back hard enough that she almost saw stars and said gruffly that she was all right, kid, and the next time any mouth-breather took a swing at her, she should give him a call and he'd sort them both out. Somehow she'd ended up a surrogate daughter for him instead of standing in for the ex-wife. And it was kind of fucking annoying.

Bones turned out to be a good friend, really, and she always enjoyed drinking him under the table. But he had a chivalrous streak a mile wide that was only half a step removed from outright chauvinism. Every time she gave him an order, she always wondered if this would be the one he'd ignore because he thought he knew better. Still, he was a damn good doctor, and he had her back, and as far as Jimmy's relationships with men went, it could've been way worse.

If that volcano erupts, it'll wipe out most of the life on its continent. It's large enough that the resultant ash cloud might well tip the entire planet into an ice age that would destroy the ecosystem for generations, including the sentient Nibiran species. It's shaping up to be an ecological disaster of truly epic proportions unless the *Enterprise* intervenes. And they're damn well going to intervene.

The science department has a really nifty cold fusion device that should do the trick—now they've just got to get someone in a suit down into the volcano itself to set it off. And, oh yeah, as if the magnetic field weren't bad enough, Scotty tells them the seismic activity of a volcanic eruption would doubly fuck up any attempts to transport directly in, so they've got to pilot a shuttle right up to the mouth of the damn volcano to do it. What a staggering spectacular shitshow this mission's become.

And if she's understanding Spock correctly, saving the planet may not be their actual mission here at all.

Jimmy pinches the bridge of her nose, dread rising. "So you're telling me that the volcanic activity is somehow altering the chemistry of the dilithium crystals to create an entirely new compound—"

"Not *new*, precisely," Spock says. "Until now, *trilithium* has been a strictly theoretical concept. There are reports that the Klingons have been running extensive experiments in an attempt to create a stable form of trilithium, but to no avail. It is highly improbable that it could ever exist as a naturally-occurring ore in most parts of the galaxy. However, the added heat brought to the surface by the volcano has melted the unusually abundant erratium deposits that lie in close proximity to the dilithium, which has also partially melted. The combination has reformed in a stable ore of trilithium. If it were not for the samples we collected, I would have calculated less than a .0001% chance of such a resource existing anywhere within the known galaxies."

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy," Jimmy murmurs. They're alone in her ready room, while the rest of her crew prepares for both the cold fusion adventure *and* the strong possibility of emergency departure from the planet's surface due to impending volcanic eruption.

She thinks of the Nibiran temple right at the base of the awakening volcano, and something sour twists in her stomach.

"Indeed," Spock says quietly, and she wonders if he's read Shakespeare. If he's surprised that *she* has. But then, Spock underestimates her intelligence with far less frequency than most. "A stable trilithium compound could be utilized as an explosive of tremendous power, if properly harnessed. This planet would appear to house a very valuable military resource indeed, Captain."

"No wonder Marcus wants it so badly." The sick feeling in her gut sharpens, turns icy. "But it's the volcanic activity that's altering the dilithium crystals? So you're telling me that if we stop the eruption—"

"Then not only do we risk exposure to the Nibirans, thereby violating the Prime Directive, we would also be unlikely to find any other way to create the trilithium compound from the planet's dilithium resource." Spock's voice is calm, as logical as ever, but she can see the faintest traces of some unreadable emotion in his eyes. "We could not have safely obtained these samples immediately following the eruption. They would be buried by 50 meters of hot ash, thus explaining Admiral Marcus's urgency in arranging for our prompt arrival. But Captain, I do not believe the admiral ever intended for us to interfere with the natural processes of this planet."

"You want me to let the volcano erupt," Jimmy says flatly. "To step aside and watch the Nibirans die. And then Starfleet can swoop in and harvest all the trilithium their shriveled, warmongering hearts desire, because hey, what's a little ice age when you've got Federation technology? That won't even slow 'em down. And hey, awesome, no worries about messing around with a pre-warp civilization anymore, because they'll *all be dead already!*"

Distantly, she realizes she's shouting. She doesn't care even a little bit.

"Captain—"

"Damn it, Spock, we're supposed to be *exploring* strange new worlds, not *raping* them!" she yells. "'To boldly go where no one has gone before'—but that doesn't count the people who already *live there*, I guess."

"The Prime Directive clearly states—"

"The Prime Directive is the Starfleet equivalent of hiding beneath your momma's skirts," she says bitterly. "Like sticking your fingers in your ears and singing *la la la, I can't hear you*—"

Spock watches her, his face devoid of expression. "What does the Captain order?"

She nearly punches him in the face, but the look in his eyes pulls her up short. There's something like compassion there, his distance deliberate, respectful rather than judgmental. He doesn't like this shit any more than she does.

"Fuck it," she says. "I don't like the rules of this game. We're gonna plant our flag in the dirt and declare a victory. Get the cold fusion device prepped—you're going into the volcano."

He salutes, and the not-smile on his face makes something abruptly lighten within her chest. "Yes, sir."

Thing was, she very nearly didn't make it onto the *Enterprise* at all. That fucking hearing, and then the transmission from Vulcan while everything was still up in the air—she was gonna be stuck dirtside in San Francisco while the rest of her class went out into the stars.

"Fuck," she said, punching the nearest hard surface while Uhura and Gaila watched her with some concern. "I mean—*fuck!*"

Gaila sighed and grabbed her chin, pulling her in for a swift kiss. "Look, I gotta go," she said. "USS *Farragut*. I'm real sorry, Jimmy, but you're not grounded forever, okay?"

"Okay," Jimmy muttered, jamming her hands in her pockets. Shit, this wasn't Gaila's fault, she didn't deserve this attitude. Jimmy plastered on what she hoped was a supportive smile. "Good luck, yeah? Take care of yourself."

"I always do," Gaila said, and with one last anxious glance back, she was gone. That was the last time Jimmy would ever see her, but she didn't know it then. She definitely would've made it a better kiss if she'd known. Or...fuck, no, she's not gonna think about that.

Anyway, Gaila left, but Uhura was still standing there watching her. And then something changed—her back straightened, her chin jutted forward, and she clasped Jimmy's shoulders tightly as though holding her in place.

"All right," Uhura said, determination in every grim line of her face. "Stay *right here*, okay? Don't you dare move. I'll be back in a minute."

Jimmy stayed, because where the fuck else was she going to go? She saw Uhura make a beeline for Commander Spock's tall, stiff form, saw her pull him aside. Jimmy stayed while a sea of red-clad cadets ebbed and flowed around her in waves, moving to their new assignments, ready to take on the universe while Jimmy was being left behind.

And then Uhura was back, grabbing Jimmy's arm and propelling her forward with a strength belied by her slender frame. "Okay," she said breathlessly. "You've been assigned with me, on the *Enterprise*. Let's go quick before he changes his mind."

"You—wait, *what?*" Jimmy demanded. "*Spock* changed the crew assignments? Spock, the asshole who brought a fucking academic trial down on my head like three hours ago?"

"In fairness, you kind of did that to yourself," Uhura pointed out.

"What the fuck did you *say* to him?"

"I pointed out that someone brilliant enough to be able to reprogram his own simulation is, logically, the sort of mind he should want aboard his ship in a crisis situation." She shot Jimmy a wry smile. "Well, that was the crux of it, anyway. He took a bit more convincing."

"Uhura," Jimmy breathed, "have I mentioned lately how devastatingly attractive I find you? And how much I long to worship your talented tongue?"

"In your dreams, Kirk," Uhura said, rolling her eyes as she shoved Jimmy up the ramp onto the *Enterprise*. "Don't you dare make me regret this."

Jimmy's said it before, but seriously, it bears repeating. Best. Wingwoman. *Ever*.

Of course, it's some kind of damn Nibiran holy day or whatever, because a truly stupid proportion of the native peoples are all clustered in the temple-thing that's about to become prime real estate for being fucking levelled by exploding volcano. And Sulu and Uhura can only get the shuttle into position so quickly to drop Spock into the boiling lava epicenter of hell with the cold fusion device. There's a good chance—"approximately 93.157% probability," according to Spock—that the temple and its worshippers will be wiped out by random volcanic shrapnel before the eruption can be stopped. And that's assuming the cold fusion device actually works the way it's supposed to, plus that the shuttle manages to fly in without being destroyed itself. Sulu's the best damn pilot Jimmy's ever met, but he's still only human.

Long story short, that's how Jimmy finds herself running hell for leather with the temple's prized Holy Thingamabob under her hopefully-concealing-enough robes with the entire fucking Nibiran population of the continent hot at her heels. How is this her life?

Oh, right, because she's *awesome*, that's how.

That part of her cunning plan goes off without a hitch, shockingly enough. Well, Bones might disagree, but he's always been a total buzzkill, so whatever. She mostly just feels smug that they packed their scuba gear after all.

Then they stagger back onto the bridge, still dripping, to discover that Spock's stuck in the fucking volcano. So that's abruptly way, way less awesome.

The thing is, Jimmy's not exactly unfamiliar with loss. Bad things happen to good people all the fucking time, and she can hate it as much as she wants but that doesn't change a damn thing. People always wind up either leaving her or disappointing her. Whatever. She's used to it.

So why should this be any different? She can't begin to explain it, but it *is*. So very, very different.

Not him.

"The shuttle was concealed under the ash cloud, but the *Enterprise* is too large," Spock says over the comm, voice perfectly level and emotionless. The bottom falls out of Jimmy's stomach. "To utilize it in a rescue effort would reveal it to the indigenous species."

She can hardly hear him through the faulty transmission. Or is that just the roaring in her own ears? She has to swallow hard before she can find her voice again. "Spock, nobody knows the rules better than you, but there has got to be an exception—"

"None. Such action violates the Prime Directive," he says, and she knows, she *knows* he's referring to her temper tantrum in the ready room. Was that only a couple of hours ago? Fuck. She of all people should know how quickly everything can go to shit.

Bones is shouting something, but the words are so much garbled static in her ears. The volcano is erupting. The cold fusion device will activate in less than a minute.

The connection to Spock sputters and dies, and although activity bustles all around her, the silence over the comm feels absolute.

She thinks of the expression in that older Spock's eyes when he'd recognized her on that godforsaken ice planet. How utterly *human* he'd suddenly appeared. She's been looking for that humanity in her Spock ever since. Maybe that's not fair of her, maybe it's xenophobic, but even before that alternate version of Spock had melded with her, she'd *known* him.

Jimmy has never once considered the possibility that her Spock might die before she recognized that look in his eyes, too.

She didn't know she was gonna bail out of the Corvette until she did it.

There was a moment, right on the brink, the heartbeat in which she realized that the car was going to go over the cliff, when she honestly considered going down with it. She just felt so *angry*, and vulnerable, and helpless. She was twelve years old. She could only beat the crap out of Gary Mitchell so many times before she got expelled, and that would mean being home alone with Frank *all the time*. Sooner or later the bruises would fade and he'd remember she was growing a woman's curves beneath Sam's hand-me-down T-shirts. She really wasn't sure what came next but she knew she wanted nothing to do with it, and it would be so damn easy to just—

At the last possible second, she jumped out of the car.

Huh, she remembers thinking. *So this is what flying feels like.*

It's a feeling she'll spend the rest of her life trying to recreate.

Spock chews her out for saving his life, of course. Right in front of Bones and Scotty, too. She expected nothing less. Actually, she kind of enjoys it. It's funny how extraordinarily *precise* his language becomes when he's royally pissed but trying like hell to repress the emotion.

Also, she'll gladly listen to him reprimand her all damn day if it means he's still here with her.

Later, after their shift has ended and the ship is safely back in warp en route to Earth—and, oh yeah, having saved an entire fucking planet while they're at it—she finds herself knocking lightly at the door to his quarters, spurred on by some impulse she doesn't yet understand. She's big on following her gut instincts, even when she's not sure where they're coming from. That's what got her out of Frank's house, got her through Tarsus, got her into Starfleet and onto the *Enterprise*. She's not gonna second-guess herself now.

Spock doesn't look even a little surprised to see her, just stands aside to let her in. The door whooshes gently shut behind them. It's not the first time she's been in here—they play chess, sometimes, and sometimes she just enjoys harassing him—but it feels different all the same. The room is a hair too warm to be comfortable. She briefly wishes she were wearing the miniskirt uniform today—better airflow—then dismisses the thought as irrelevant.

"You're writing everything up in your report, aren't you," she says abruptly. "All the gory details."

"It is the only responsible course of action." He quirks one eyebrow. "Surely you do not expect a Vulcan to lie."

She gives him a tight smile. "Hey, a girl can dream."

"Captain—"

"No, look, I'm not gonna ask you to falsify information in your report." She sighs and plops down in the nearest chair, squeezing her eyes shut while she thinks it through. "Make sure you dump full responsibility for interfering with the volcano on my lap while you're at it—if I'm going out, I may as well do it with style. I'll include your vociferous objections to my chosen course of action in the captain's log."

Spock is very nearly frowning now, his forehead creased. "It was I who originally brought the option of the cold fusion device to your attention."

"Christ, Spock, if you can't learn how to lie for me, at least learn how to cover your own ass," she snaps, exasperated. "The *Enterprise* and her crew need someone in the captain's chair who knows what they're doing. I'm surprised they let me fake it for this long already, but once I'm out, it's got to be you."

"I do not understand to what you are referring," Spock says slowly. He's staring at her like he's *really* itching to abuse his touch-telepathy right this very second. "Do you intend to resign your commission?"

"Nah, the Admiralty'll take care of that for me." The room is way too damn hot. She's starting to feel a little lightheaded. Or maybe that's the stress of the day finally catching up to her. "As you repeatedly pointed out while we were trying to haul your ass out of that volcano, I just violated the Prime Directive, Spock. In a couple of different ways. Admiral Marcus has been gunning for me right from the start. Why the hell did he send us to Nibiru at all? He could've just let the *Urania* monitor the planet from a distance until the volcano erupted, then ordered them to swoop in to harvest the trilitium. But he sent *me* here instead. If you think he's gonna pass up the opportunity to strip me of my rank, then you're even more of an idiot than I thought."

Spock stills, his face going deliberately blank. "I have done nothing to warrant being insulted."

"Come *on*, Spock, you expected me to just leave you there?" she demands, shoving herself up to her feet to really get in his face about it. She's relatively tall for a human female, but he's still got a few inches on her, so she glowers up at him. "After all we've been through—after all your future counterpart told me? Fuck, Spock, what kind of person would that make me? What kind of captain would leave her best goddamn officer to *die*?"

She knows she must be violating the hell out of his personal space—Vulcans are super touchy about that—but he doesn't give way before her. Not even an inch. She has always liked that about him. "One who understands that the needs of the many must always outweigh the needs of the few," he tells her gently.

She laughs, harshly and without mirth. "Then maybe it's a good thing I'm about to get demoted, because that's not the kind of captain I want to be," she says, and kisses him.

Okay, in fairness, she totally had not planned that in advance.

To her great surprise, he allows it. Possibly he's just in shock that she'd do such a thing. After a long, frozen moment, he leans into the kiss, catching one of her hands with his and tangling their fingers together. He pulls away before she can deepen the kiss properly, alas, but keeps their hands entwined, and she hasn't had much opportunity to learn about Vulcan erogenous zones but that much she *knows* is significant.

"When the transmission cut out," she says, deadly serious in a way she *never* is, "I asked Bones what he thought you'd've done. If I were in the volcano and you had the conn, would you have gone back for me?"

"Captain—" he starts.

"Oh *hell* no."

Maybe it's the telepathy or maybe he just knows her that well, because he immediately catches on to her meaning. "*Jimmy*," he says instead. "You violated the Prime Directive. The single tenet that Starfleet and, indeed, the entire Federation holds most dear. One life cannot be worth so much."

"Yes, it can," she says fiercely. "When it's yours, it *can*. It is." She tightens her clasp on his hand, willing her emotions through the physical link between them, trying to swamp his mind with the strength of her conviction. He has to understand this. "I get it, I do. I knew it then, too, even without Bones telling me. You would've let me die. And that's okay. That's why I need you here, because you're the one who can make the decisions that I can't—you're the captain the *Enterprise* needs. And you're gonna get her if I have to take on the entire Admiralty myself."

He doesn't seem to know what to say to that, for once. After a beat, she reluctantly releases him, stepping back. "Look, I'm sorry I kissed you, I don't know what came over me. This has nothing to do with that, okay? I mean, I know I've got kind of a reputation, and most of it is true, but seriously, this thing between you and me—the value I place in you as an officer, as a *person*—it has nothing to do with sex, I promise." She rubs the back of her neck awkwardly. "I just—I need you to know that you were worth it. Whatever happens to me next. It's worth it." When he still doesn't speak, his gaze dark and heavy on hers, she sighs and takes another step toward the door. "I'll leave you alone now. Excellent work today, Commander."

She's at the door when he finally speaks. "Jimmy."

Jimmy lets it whoosh closed again before turning back to him.

His facial expression is as controlled as ever, but his eyes, oh, they're so very, very human. "Doctor McCoy was incorrect in his assessment," he says, voice low and rough. "If our positions had been reversed earlier today, I... I do not know what I would have done."

This time, she's the one frozen in place, and he's the one who has to move forward to kiss her.

Everything she's read about Vulcan physiology is *totally* true, by the way. And it's fucking *awesome*.

Here's a secret: until Tarsus, she'd always hated the stars. The stars had taken her daddy away; the stars were what Winona seemed to love more than her own children. Late nights in Iowa with nothing around but cornstalks higher than her head, Jimmy would squint up at the vast expanse of the galaxy and hate it for being so distant, so uncaring, so unreachable. She kept her feet planted in the dirt, in everything solid and

hard and *real*. She wanted nothing to do with the skies.

"You ever hear Mom talk about a guy called Chris Pike?" Sam asked her once, before Tarsus. He'd just graduated high school. That summer was long and sticky-hot, sunshine turning her hair white-gold and her skin a rich lobster red before it finally faded into tan.

She kicked rocks around in their sad excuse for a backyard. "Dunno," she said. "Who's that?"

Sam shrugged, palming a piece of gravel about the size of his fist. "He came by my graduation. Said he knew Dad. I think he was trying to recruit me."

"Starfleet?"

"Yeah." They shared a sour grin. "I told him where he could shove it."

"Did you really?" she asked, delighted. She'd been flagrantly disrespecting authority figures since around age three, but Sam always liked to pretend he was the good kid.

"Nah," he admitted. "But I could've."

Jimmy snorted. "No, you couldn't."

"Besides, my test scores aren't anywhere near officer level, parentage aside," Sam went on, throwing a rock hard at the fence. He missed the post by a good six inches. "Told him he had the wrong Kirk."

"Starfleet's already got Mom."

Sam reached over and flicked her ear. "I meant *you*, squirt."

"Fuck you," she snapped and hit the post with her next rock so hard the wood splintered.

After Tarsus, on the shuttle back to Earth, she once snuck away from the army of medics and managed to find the ship's viewing platform. She curled up against the window, hugging her skinny knees to her chest, and stared out into the blackness of space. She lost track of time there, cheek pressed against the plexiglass, feeling utterly tiny and insignificant. It was a relief.

O that this too too solid flesh would melt, thaw and resolve itself into a dew, she thought, and imagined herself dissolving into stardust, blowing away into the soundless vacuum, scattering apart among the stars. For the first time in months, maybe years, she felt at peace.

Maybe Sam had had a point.

The morning after the *Enterprise* returns to Starfleet HQ, Jimmy wakes up to the dulcet tones of two comm units going off in glorious harmony.

"Fuck," she mutters into the bare skin of Spock's shoulder. "Don't wanna."

He's already in motion, of course, the bastard. "Admiral Pike requires our immediate presence. Your personal desires are irrelevant at this time." And then, illogically, he adds, "Unfortunately."

She doesn't bother hiding her smile.

Yeah, she's probably about to get slapped with an official reprimand, if not an outright demotion; Marcus will be furious and Pike will be *disappointed*. There's a good chance she's about to lose her ship. Nibiru may well have been her personal no-win scenario: let an entire civilization die versus losing Spock versus violating the Prime Directive. No good options to be found.

Fuck that game, though, seriously. She's always played by her own rules, and she's declaring this one a victory.

And if the Admiralty plans to change the game on her again, well, they can bring it on. She's Captain Jamie T. Kirk. Nothing's gonna drag her down today.

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