

Lasagna

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Summary

Christopher Pike, whose creative outlet was cooking, preferred to learn about a people through their cuisine.

Notes

Spock is mentioned, but does not make an appearance.

Most Federation citizens could claim some general knowledge of other member species. But as most of those citizens never left their home worlds, it usually boiled down to hearsay, broad stereotypes, and perceptions likely viewed through the cultural lens of their own entertainment media.

Christopher Pike, whose creative outlet was cooking, preferred to learn about a people through their cuisine. That was how he discovered the Tellurites, known for being verbally combative, began each shared family meal with a savory pastry called “harmony cake.” And how surprised and delighted he was to learn that one of Andor’s biggest imports was honey from Ariolo which was used for a preserved meat delicacy called *shola talnietha ahrasath defta* – which roughly translated as Sweetest Death – or perhaps more accurately, “meat to die for.”

Take plomeek soup for example. Commonly served at breakfast, it was also Vulcan’s version of chicken soup – comfort food, a cure for what ails you, protein rich and packed with essential electrolytes that helped to maintain hydration throughout the day. But preparation techniques and flavor profiles varied dramatically from region to region.

The first version of the dish Chris ever had was at a diplomatic state dinner at the Vulcan Embassy in San Francisco. He’d been filling in as aide de camp for Vice Admiral Prashad whose flag officer was on maternity leave. Unfortunately, Prashad was called away at the last moment for a personal emergency right before seating began. Chris was advised to keep a low profile, field questions if necessary and, for the love of god, try not to smile too much.

After dessert, when everyone was milling around, conversations meandering into politics, he folded himself into a corner with an unobstructed view and nursed a glass of ruby colored wine. Which was when a human woman in a blue silk gown approached and asked what he thought of the soup.

A weird question since the soup course had been served hours ago. The fact that she was attractive made it even weirder.

“Ah. The soup. Yes. It was...” Purple. Bland. Slightly gummy. Not quite turnip, not quite taro, not quite anything. *Don't say interesting, don't say interesting*— “You know, I’m not sure my palate is refined enough to judge.”

Her half-snorted peal of laughter had a few of the Vulcans raising their brows. She didn’t seem to notice. Or, perhaps, care.

“That is some top tier diplomatic restraint, sir. Kudos.” She raised her glass to him, “The soup was awful.”

He shrugged, erring on the side of diplomatic caution. “Could have used a little salt maybe.”

“Not surprising, considering it’s a soup usually given to weaning infants.”

“What? Seriously? No.”

“Even that would’ve had the addition of breastmilk to give it a little oompf.”

He knew the Vulcan consensus was that humans were infantile, but, come on.

She looked out over the reception hall, “I’ve assured them many times that we can handle a little spice. I know the chefs would be grateful to do something else. I mean, what chef, Vulcan or otherwise, wants to serve soup that tastes like baby formula? But the diplomatic staff won’t risk it.”

“Wait. Sorry. I was pulled in at the last minute. Still playing catch-up here. Are you one of the cultural advisors on staff?”

“Not anymore. Not in any official capacity anyway. My husband is currently Ambassador ad interim.” The Vulcan man in question locked gazes with her briefly. She gave him a sultry smile over the rim of her wine glass, before turning her attention to Chris again. “Vulcan protocols prevent me from making any changes, not even to the menus. Not until he’s formally instated. Which, thank god, is next month.”

Oh shit. Shit. How could he not have recognized her? The new ambassador’s wife. Human. From Seattle. Seattle *on this planet*. But then again, he’d only seen the PR images and she’d been covered head to toe in all that overly tailored Vulcan clothing – not this daring evening gown with just... sooo much bare skin exposed.

He looked up, away, anywhere but at her. Had he been flirting? Would it look like he’d been flirting? Was she flirting with him? Was the ambassador watching? Was he about to cause a diplomatic incident?

“I see,” he ventured, stopped to clear his throat of the high-pitched squeak that came out. “How is it usually prepared, then? Plomeek soup for grown-ups?”

“Where we live, it’s seasoned with a spice similar to black pepper... or maybe closer to Szechuan peppercorns, if you’ve ever had those?” He nodded. “Still, not as fiery as in they make it in parts of Shi’al province. The coastal regions of Raal tend towards herbaceous rather than peppery, very light and delicate. Really lovely. Kel favors chunky stews with lots of other vegetables added. Also, there are dozens of varieties of the root plant itself. One in particular is used to make a pressed curd so close to fresh mozzarella you couldn’t tell the difference. It’s the reason I spent six years getting tomatoes to grow in our garden at home.”

“I grew up in the Mojave desert so I appreciate the struggle involved.”

“I used one of the cultivars developed for growing in the Mojave!”

There followed a long, lively discussion about tomatoes, and hand-pollination, and heirloom varieties and then favorite recipes with tomatoes, and her promise to send him her own recipe for lasagna using fresh tomato sauce and plomeek mozzarella.

After four years of sporadic communication, usually involving recipes, she called him up out of the blue. He was grounded for a few months awaiting an Enterprise refit and another tour as Captain April’s XO. She was in San Francisco. Did he have time to meet her in person? He made the time.

“Spock’s a bright young man,” she said, folding and unfolding her napkin. She noticed him notice, laid it on her lap and smoothed it out. They were at a café near the waterfront. She’d already had two double espressos before he got there and seemed desperate that Chris should be predisposed to like her son, or at least be impressed, though he could only guess why.

“He’s brilliant, actually. And I’m not just saying that because I’m his mother. He scored the highest marks on the VSA entrance exams in recent history.” She pulled an edge off her croissant, popped it in her mouth, and tipped back the dregs of her coffee. “Apparently so high they asked that he take the exams all over again. Because, you know, if he’s my son he must have cheated somehow.”

Chris scoffed. “Don’t you have two PhDs?”

She shrugged, resigned. “He retook the exams and, surprise surprise, scored a percentage point higher. After which he told the academic committee he’d decided to attend Starfleet Academy instead.”

Ah, that’s why she wanted to see him. Hoping he’d sponsor the application, maybe.

“That’s a pretty effective screw you,” he said carefully.

“His father thought so. He has cut our son off from all support and communication.”

“Jesus.” Chris had plenty of issues with his own father through the years, but even when they’d been at their worst with each other, he always knew he could go home if he needed to. “Has Spock actually applied to Starfleet Academy yet?”

“He’s there right now. Apparently, he’d been meeting with recruiters and advisors for months before we even knew anything about it.”

Kid with a contingency plan. Chris liked him already. “You know, every cadet gets a free ride and a stipend, right? If he’s frugal, and doesn’t require a lot of extras, he’ll be fine.”

“I’m not being overprotective. He’s quite capable and self-reliant.”

“Then what are your concerns?”

“I’m the only human he regularly interacts with. And I don’t act like *this* when I’m on Vulcan.” With a jittery hand she waved at the empty espresso cup and brushed away flakes of croissant on the front of her blouse. “He won’t have any social support. I’m afraid he’ll be out of his depth here, no matter how capable he is.”

“Amanda. Every kid at the Academy is out of their depth when they start. Even the cocky ones who think they’ve got it all figured out.” He’d been one of those kids, so knew what he was talking about. “If recruiters were keen to get him here then they’re going to make damn sure he has everything he needs to succeed.”

“But what if he doesn’t know what to ask for? Or how to ask? It’s a very different culture from what he’s accustomed to.”

“Okay. Well, look, I’m teaching a couple of lecture courses this term. He may even be in one of them. I’d be happy to look in on him from time to time and assure you he’s thriving. Or at least not starving.”

“As long as he doesn’t suspect I’m mom-stalking him.”

“Our secret.”

“How long has he been doing this?”

“Lt. Kirk claims ‘forever’ but other people in the department say he’s been rotating time in the science labs through beta and gamma shifts for the past three days. It’s not a medical problem for him yet. With regular meditation he can go without sleep for about 150 hours before it starts affecting his cognitive functioning.”

“He’s done it before.”

“As long as he’s getting sufficient nutrition he’s not in physical peril. However,” M’Benga noted, “according to the matter synthesizer logs in the galley he hasn’t had anything to eat for the past week. And he hasn’t been seen in the Lounge for a long time now, so nothing from there either. I suppose he could have snacks stashed in his quarters...” The doctor’s tone suggested it was unlikely.

“Una would have mentioned it if any of this behavior was affecting his work performance. Other than driving his department crazy, he’s not breaking any rules and according to your own assessment not in peril.”

“Not yet.”

“Can’t force a broken heart to heal on a schedule. That’s what you told me once.”

“But you can feed the soul in the meantime.”

“Ah. Right. I’ll see what I can do.”

He checked the freeze storage in his pantry. Somewhere in there he still had four pieces of lasagna made from Amanda Grayson’s recipe.

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