

## That Which You Have Sown

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## That Which You Have Sown

by [Planxty](#)

### Summary

After a civilian science vessel makes an emergency landing on a seemingly uninhabited planet, Kirk is forced to once again face an old adversary who he has not so much as thought about in years.

## Any port in a storm

### Chapter Summary

The civilian science vessels Toyotomi crash lands on a seemingly uninhabited planet and receives a surprising welcome.

By now, Captain Tanaka had learned to block out the blaring sounds of the emergency sirens and the flashing lights. It was his only hope of trying to keep a cool head in the midst of a desperate emergency. Still, his head was spinning, hands shaking, and stomach uneasy. His ship was falling apart around, though at least the life support systems were functioning normally. Any small comfort where he could find it.

“Captain.” Even though the voice came in low and static, Captain Tanaka could recognize the distressed voice of the engineer. “Nothing is working, I can’t bring the engine back online.”

Tanaka hung his head. They were worryingly close to the planet’s gravitational pull, and with no engines they would be falling hard and fast.

“Understood,” he replied with a heavy sigh. “That planet is Class M. We’re going to have to make an emergency landing.”

“Captain, this vessel isn’t designed to go planetside. She might not survive entering the atmosphere.”

“I know, but we have no choice. Prepare for impact.” Tanaka hung his head and took a deep breath to brace himself. “Computer, send a distress call on all frequencies. The civilian ship Toyotomi has experienced catastrophic engine failure and is forced to make an emergency landing on the planet Ceti Alpha V. Send rescue crew immediately.” He could only hope that those rescuers would find any survivors.

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Maya was gasping for air by the time they reached for wreckage. She had been able to keep up with the frantic speed with which the others raced to the wreck by sheer willpower alone, pushing forward at full speed even though she felt like she could collapse at any moment. In a way that was like any day in her life: working twice as hard to accomplish half as much, and going to great lengths to hide her shortcomings. Her mother used to tell her that on Earth she would shine brilliantly, but that was little comfort.

The ship’s hull was a scorched, twisted mess. The vessel looked massive to Maya, but she was also aware that with her limited experience she was in no place to judge whether a star ship was large or small. Her father’s primary interest was in survivors...hostages, but Maya doubted if anyone could have lived through this crash. All she cared about was the salvage. She had spent most of her life repairing and tinkering with what little worn out tech that they had been left with. It was the only thing she had ever felt good at, the only thing that made her feel useful.

There were nine others in the search party, including her father and her half brother, Arjun. The three of them went to the bridge as the others searched the ship. Inside the wreck, the air was hot and heavy (which didn’t help Maya to catch her breath), and the interior was dark save for a few dim, flickering lights. On the bridge, Maya spotted a console that appeared to be (barely) functional even though the screen was cracked and the display dim.

“This one’s still online.” Maya said as she approached the console, but her heart sank once she saw a clearer view of the display. “It’s set to Japanese.”

“You studied Japanese,” Her father replied, impatiently.

“I’m sure I can understand it with no trouble at all,” Arjun interjected, smugly.

“No, it’s fine. I remember enough.” Truthfully, Maya felt as though she had forgotten more Japanese than she remembered, but she wasn’t about to let Arjun steal the spotlight from her again. With some concentration she was able to recall just enough to switch the language settings and access recent logs. “They called for help before the ship went down...and they got a response. Starfleet is on the way already.”

Her father let out a soft, sly chuckle the likes of which Maya had never heard before. “Open a channel. I would hate to leave them awaiting a response.”

Maya went to work on the console. Even with the damage it was still a more advanced piece of technology than she had ever seen before, but she found it intuitive.

“Captain Tanaka, do you copy?” The voice that came in was soft and warbled.

Another sly chuckle from her father before he responded “Captain Tanaka is unable to respond, but fear not. The Toyotomi has landed, and your rescue party is no longer necessary.”

“I don’t understand. To whom am I speaking?”

“Just think of me as the leader of a local welcome committee.”

“I still don’t understand. Ceti Alpha V is uninhabited.”

“Are Starfleet’s records really kept so poorly? This planet has been colonized for twenty five years. Call off the rescue mission and tell your superiors that the Toyotomi’s survivors will only return home if James T. Kirk comes to collect them himself.”

“What does Admiral Kirk have to do with any of this.”

”Tell him Khan sends his regards. End transmission.”

## An unexpected invitation

### Chapter Summary

En route to rescue the survivors from the wreckage, the captain of the USS Portland must consult with an admiral who knows their common enemy.

“Open a channel to Starfleet command.” Captain Albrecht spoke with urgency, yet she remained calm and easy. The recent communication from Ceti Alpha V was concerning and confusing to say the least. Still, nothing had gone wrong just yet.

“Channel open, Captain,” the communication officer replied, and a moment later the image of Admiral James T. Kirk’s face appeared in the view screen.

”Admiral, this is Captain Albrecht from the USS Portland. We are en route to rescue the crew of the Toyotomi, and we just received an alarming transmission. My understanding is that they crash landed on an uninhabited planet, but a man who claims to have lived there for twenty five years has climbed about the wreckage and taken hostages.

”Well, that certainly is alarming. Tell me the location of the Toyotomi. I don’t have the location of every colony and outpost, but I can check our records.”

”Ceti Alpha V, Sir.”

The color drained from Kirk’s face. He fell silent and looked down as he took a long, deep breath.

”Sir?”

”Tell me about the transmission. Who sent it?” Kirk still looked away as he spoke, and his voice shook as though he was trying to hold back both rage and panic.

”It was a man named Khan. He took the survivors hostage, and he said he won’t release them unless he speaks to you.”

Kirk looked up, his tone low and grave when he spoke again. “I won’t lie, I’m tempted to order you to abandon the rescue mission.”

”Admiral! You can’t be serious, these are civilian lives at stake.” Captain Albrecht’s eyes were wide with shock.

”I only want for you to understand the gravity of the situation, Captain. Khan is arguably the most dangerous man in the galaxy. If he says he’s going to do something, you can damn well bet he’s going to do it. And that means if he says he’s going to kill every hostage if he doesn’t speak to me directly, then if he sees a landing party that doesn’t include me, the lives of those hostages as well as your crew will be in even more danger. I’m sending over more information for you to review privately, then maybe you’ll understand why this whole situation is so deeply disturbing.”

“Understood admiral. No choice feels like the right one here, but I can’t turn my back on those civilians.”

”I don’t know about you, Captain, but I’ve never believed in no-win scenarios. I’ll leave for Ceti Alpha V as soon as possible. I only hope it won’t be too late. End transmission.”

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After the screen went dark, Kirk leaned back in his seat and took a moment to gather his thoughts. If he was going to face Khan again he would need Bones and Spock by his side.

# **Ships and guns**

## Chapter Summary

Kirk, Spock and McCoy need a ship to get to Ceti Alpha V and rescue the hostages. Of course, there is no better choice than the Enterprise

“Dammit, Jim, when are you going to tell me what exactly is going on?” Dr. McCoy had spent the entire shuttle ride so far either pacing anxiously or standing with his arms crossed as a sour look on his face as he stared out the window.

“But Bones, I did explain everything.” Even though he felt so much weight on his shoulders (and more so as he had to keep his intentions secret) Kirk did let a hint of a teasing lilt creep into his voice. Besides, he knew that no matter how much his friend liked to huff and puff not much would stir him to true anger. “We’re to rendezvous with the Enterprise for an inspection, and I wanted assistance from my two best friends and most trusted colleagues.”

“And you also said to drop everything because this was the most important favor that you could ask. That doesn’t quite add up to a nice little joy ride around in the Enterprise.”

“I must agree with Dr. McCoy.” In contrast, Spock had spent the journey calm and quiet, sitting leaned slightly back in his chair with his fingertips pressed together. “I suspect that you are concealing something. However, as I trust your judgment, I have no doubt that your reasoning is sound.”

“All will be clear in due time.” Kirk fell silent and looked wistfully out the window. Somehow mixed in with the anger and fear he felt... excitement. Oh, to be commanding a starship again, racing through the galaxy, saving lives! If only it were under kinder circumstances.

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The current Captain of the Enterprise was a Québécois man named Benoit LeFevre. Kirk had never met the man in his life, which would make convincing him all the more difficult. As he waited in the captain’s ready room Kirk thought through over and over what he would say to convince LeFevre to help him on this desperate mission, but everything sounded ridiculous in his head. To explain to another person would surely make him sound like a madman.

“Admiral Kirk.” When the captain entered, he exuded friendly warmth. What a relief, a person in high spirits would be easier to persuade than someone already in a rotten mood. “A pleasure to meet you, or at least as much as a pleasure as can be expected from a surprise inspection. Is there anything you’d like to discuss before we begin?”

“About that...I know this is abrupt, but we have no time to spare. I need to borrow your ship.”

Captain LeFevre’s eyes widened. “Well...That was the last thing I expected to hear. I’ll indulge you, Admiral. Why do you need my ship?”

Kirk took a deep breath. Where to even begin with this mess. “Recently, the civilian vessel the Toyotomi crash landed on Ceti Alpha V.”

“Ceti Alpha V?!” McCoy shouted. Even Spock showed signs of shock, in the form of a raised eyebrow. “Why didn’t you include that little detail?”

“Doctor, please, let me finish explaining without interruption. As I was saying, a civilian ship landed on Ceti Alpha V. The USS Portland is en route to rescue the survivors, but the crew of that is also just as likely to find themselves in great danger.”

“So, you want to rescue the rescue?” LeFevre’s warmth had faded. He wasn’t hostile, only skeptical. “I’m sorry, Admiral but I still don’t understand why this is necessary.”

Spock was the first to speak up, ignore Kirk’s request for no interruption. “Captain, are you familiar with the name Khan Noonien Snigh?”

“Only if you mean that tyrant from centuries ago,” LeFevre answered with a shrug.

“The same,” Spock answered. “I am aware that the situation I’m about to explain will sound far fetched, but Khan is still alive on Ceti Alpha V where he leads a colony of genetically engineered augments, and he has taken the survivors of the Toyotomi as hostages. The series of events that led to Khan’s current situation requires a lengthy and nuanced explanation, which I can provide in great detail.”

“Maybe later,” LeFevre looked from Spock to Kirk. “You’re right, that is far fetched, but I’ll indulge you again. Are you saying that you doubt if the crew of the Portland can get the hostages to safety?”

“It’s more than that.” Kirk answered. “Khan will only negotiate with me...our involvement is a thread in the long story Mr. Spock offered to share. If he doesn’t get to speak to me, I have no doubt that he will kill each of those survivors and try his damndest to kill the crew of the Portland too.” Kirk was desperate and couldn’t keep himself from sounding defensive and heated.

“Admiral.” LeFevre sighed and shook his head. “You’re still talking about a handful of people against a starship.”

“Captain, don’t you get it?” McCoy was tired of sitting by quietly, and he raised his voice. “Twenty five years ago Khan and a few dozen of his closest friends nearly took over the Enterprise and killed her entire crew. We barely made it out. He’ll do it again.”

Kirk took a deep breath, now it was his turn to be a steady, calming presence. “Captain. The Portland is speeding toward Ceti Alpha V and a real-world Kobayashi Maru, if I can be there to speak with Khan, if the Enterprise can be there as backup, then her crew and all those civilians might have a fighting chance.”

“Fascinating, admiral,” Spock answered as LeFevre sat back and weighed the options. “I recall that you had an unconventional solution to that simulation as well.”

LeFevre shook his head. “I’m still not convinced. I’ll give you request a bit more consideration, but...”

Kirk hung his head and sighed. He had a feeling that LeFevre was only speaking politely and that his mind was already made up.

“I understand, Captain. Thank you for your time, I know this was a tall order.” Kirk spoke gently, but beneath this calm demeanor his blood boiled and his mind raced to think up a backup plan.

“And I presume there’s really no need for that surprise inspection?” LeFevre allowed himself a slight smile.

“Officially? No, but if you’ll allow it I would like to take some time to look around, just for the sake of nostalgia.”

“Now that I can accommodate. If there’s nothing else you’d like to discuss, then we can talk again once I’ve made up my mind.”

“Of course, and thank you once again for your time.” Kirk, Spock, and McCoy all stood up, but while Kirk and McCoy turned to go, Spock lingered a moment.

“Captain. Before you come to your final decision, I would like to request a few more minute of your time to speak privately, to share a detailed account of our last encounter with Khan Noonien Singh, and to provide a logical assessment of the situation at hand.”

“That I can also accommodate.”

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“What’s come over you, Jim, giving up so easily?” McCoy spoke just above a whisper as they walked through the Enterprise’s corridors, as to not be overheard, but there was still a sharpness in his voice.

“I haven’t given up, I’m regrouping.” Kirk matched McCoy’s hushed tones. “One way or another, the Enterprise is going to Ceti Alpha V, and right now my hope is that Spock’s appeal to logic can sway Captain LeFevre.”

“Then I hope you have a good back up plan, because if that doesn’t work...look, all I know is that Khan can’t take the Portland...a man like that with an armed, warp capable ship...”

“Bones, I know. There may be much more at stake than we imagined. I’m sure Spock has considered all of the grimmest possibilities and the probability that they will come to pass. For now, let’s just try to enjoy being back on the Enterprise.”

Kirk could not, however, take his own advice. Every moment his mind was full and heavy: itching to hear any news from Captain LeFevre, planning out the next move for any possible outcome, and all the while keenly aware that every minute took them further from Ceti Alpha V. The tension was eventually broken by the chime of his communicator.

“Captain LeFevre to Admiral Kirk.”

“Go ahead.”

“You and Doctor McCoy are required on the bridge.”

“On our way.”

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On the bridge, the Captain rose from his seat to greet his guests. “Well, Admiral, the story that Spock told me seemed too strange to be made up, certainly too strange to be made up by a Vulcan. I also took the liberty of contacting the Portland, and they confirmed that they spoke with Khan, that he insisted on speaking to you, and that their ability to negotiate the release of those hostages will be at a severe disadvantage without your assistance.”

“And?”

“And we are ready to turn around and head to Ceti Alpha V as soon as you give the word.”

“Then let’s not waste another moment. Set in a course for Ceti Alpha V, and get back in touch with the Portland. Tell them we’re following right behind”

# Your Obedient Servant

## Chapter Summary

Khan and Kirk speak to each other for the first time in twenty five years, Admiral Kirk and Captain Albrecht begin to navigate the delicate hostage situation, and Captain Albrecht finds an unlikely ally

Back on the Toyotomi, the wrecked ship was buzzing back to life, though in a very different way. Khan's search party swarmed around the wreckage like flies on a corpse. The bridge, however was still quiet and dark, occupied only by Khan, his two children, and Captain Tanaka. The captain was restrained and beginning to regain consciousness.

"I trust the viewscreen will be operational shortly." The frustration in Kahn's voice was thinly veiled, yet still plain to hear.

Maya didn't look up from her work. Hearing that shift in her father's voice made a knot form in her stomach. "A little grace would be appreciated. I've never seen one of these before, much less repaired one."

"No one has ever been interested in hearing your excuses," Arjun snapped.

Maya tried to block out the both of them. Getting flustered wouldn't help her work any faster. A few more adjustments, and a soft electric hum began. What a sweet sound that was! "It should be functional now."

"Best to not leave Starfleet waiting any longer." The frustration had left Khan's voice, replaced with cool confidence. "Computer, contact the USS Portland. Visuals on."

Moments later the screen came on the show the interior of the Portland's bridge. The image was blurry and uneven, but (just as Maya had said) it was functioning.

"Captain. The repairs to our visual system took longer than anticipated, but the delay should have allowed you ample time to turn around and send Kirk in your place."

"Admiral Kirk has been contacted and is on his way." Captain Albrecht's response may have been calm and terse, but she held tension in her neck and shoulders that could be seen even in the blurry image.

"He's an Admiral now?" Khan answered with a tone of mock surprise. "What a shame I won't be able to open a bottle of champagne to celebrate when he arrives. But about that...." No more teasing. Now he spoke with the commanding gravitas of a conqueror and tyrant. "The only proof I have is your word, and I'm not one to trust the word of an adversary."

"Of course." There was the slightest waver in Albrecht's voice. "I'll get in touch with Admiral Kirk right away and give him the information to contact you himself."

"Five minutes. If I am not speaking to Admiral Kirk in five minutes, the first hostage dies. It would behoove you to act with haste, this ship's crew was small to begin with, and many did not survive the crash. End transmission."

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Captain Albrecht clenched her jaw and curled her hand into a tight fist. Remaining calm under pressure was always something she struggled with, and this rescue mission was already a test of her resolve.

"Well, we can't afford to waste any time. Get me Admiral Kirk on the Enterprise."

Every moment that passed felt like an eternity, and once Albrecht finally saw the Admiral's face on screen the tension snapped so suddenly that she forgot all protocol.

"Admiral! You have...well by now three minutes to speak to Khan before he starts killing hostages." She had worked herself into such a panic that she was nearly shouting.

"Captain, take a deep breath and try to remain calm." Kirk was steady, yet lines of worry showed around his eyes. "Working yourself into a frenzy won't solve anything."

"Apologies, Admiral. It's out of my system, I feel better now." She didn't. "I'm having the Toyotomi's information sent to you so you can contact them. I only hope Khan was bluffing."

"At the risk of sending you back into a panic, Captain, Khan doesn't bluff. He makes promises."

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"Hail the Toyotomi, we should get in contact just long enough to save that civilian's life."

Kirk stared down the blank viewscreen until a familiar face appeared onscreen. Or, at least as familiar as a person could be after twenty five years. Khan's hair may have gone gray, and his face was worn with wrinkles and scars, but this was still the same powerful man who had tried to take his ship so many years ago. There were three others on the bridge with him, one was clearly a hostage, and the other two Kirk couldn't place. They looked much too young to have been aboard the Botany Bay.

“Admiral Kirk.” Khan spoke with easy confidence and had the demeanor of a shark circling its prey. “If you had taken twenty more seconds, this conversation would be very different.”

“What a relief, I half expected you to kill the man anyway.”

“Not at all, Admiral, these hostages are more valuable to me alive.”

“I’m relieved no one has been killed yet, but that notion give me no comfort. Khan...what is it you want from me?”

“That discussion will be saved for when we meet face to face. We are gentlemen with many grievances, which are best aired face to face.”

Kirk looked down and felt the tension rising from the base of his spine up through his neck. “The Enterprise is still a long way from Ceti Alpha V. If I check in with regular communications, will that be enough to ensure the safety of the civilian hostages?”

“I will expect an update every six standard hours, with your ship’s coordinates and ETA.”

“Reasonable enough, especially coming from you. We’ll talk again in six hours. End transmission.”

Maybe he should have been firmer to insist that the Portland turn around and give up the rescue mission. They would beat the Enterprise to Ceti Alpha V, and anyone who came planet side was sure to be met with ruthless hostility.

Maya didn’t waste a moment in making sure her own interests were met. The screen had not been dark for a second before she spoke.

“Father, if I am no longer needed I would like to explore the wreck for salvage.”

“Of course, whatever you need.” Khan dismissed her with a wave of his hand, and Maya was off with speed and a sense of purpose that seemed unusual for someone who only wanted to salvage a wreck.

She mental prepared herself for what she might encounter rooting her way through the wreckage: darkness, obstacles, unstable ground, fires. What she didn’t prepare herself for was who she might encounter. After seeing the badly injured ship’s captain, Maya made the mistake of assuming that any other survivors would be I just as bad shape.

She was caught off her guard when a woman lunged out of the shadows. After a struggle that made her bad left shoulder sear in pain, Maya caught the other woman in a choke hold.

“I’m not here to hurt you, but I’ll do what I have to do. I need to send a transmission privately. Where is the best place I can do that?”

“There’s a laboratory on this deck...aft on the port side.”

“That’s all I needed, and since I don’t believe in getting something for nothing, let me pass on some advice. I’ve lived my whole life with your captors. Keep you head down and your mouth shut, go along with whatever is asked of you.” The other woman nodded, and the moment Maya let her go she sprinted away. Maya didn’t care where she went so long as she had that laboratory to herself.

She felt as though she had hit a rare stroke of luck to see that the laboratory had suffered minimal damage, as she activated the communication console she realized she she had a choice to make. There were two starships she could contact. One was under the command of a man who was unlikely to ever listen to the concerns of someone who carried the surname Noonien Singh. The other, she was uncertain if it was still heading in the right direction or if they had given up to send Kirk. Still, she chose the latter. She could make no progress speaking to someone who would not listen.

“Computer, hail the USS Portland.”

Once again, Captain Albrecht appeared on screen. The Captain’s face looked uncertain and confused, but Maya jumped in to explain herself before any questions could be asked.

“Captain, I’ll admit I don’t know whether the first person from Starfleet I interact with will be you, or Admiral Kirk, or someone else entirely, but I want to make a deal.”

“Who are you? I saw you on the bridge.”

“My name is Maya Noonien Singh. Khan is my father. You can tell Admiral Kirk that he knew my mother, her name was Marla McGivers.”

“And what about this deal you have in mind?”

“All I want to get off of this planet. Having half of my genetics from my mother’s unaltered genome has always put me dead last against my peers.” Maya could feel her eyes tear up. She coped by finding the few ways in which she felt useful, but to speak her heart to a stranger felt painfully vulnerable. “I don’t belong amount the augments. I was told on Earth I would be brilliant, but I would give everything just to be average,”

Captain Albrecht leaned in and her face softened. “Again, what is your deal?”

“Get me shipside as soon as possible as soon as possible and I will give you all the inside information you need to take down Khan and this entire colony.”

“How do I know I can trust this information?”

“I sealed my fate by sending this transmission. Khan might be my father, but open defiance is still a crime punishable by death.”



“Very well. The Portland is still en route. I look forward to welcoming you on board. End transmission.”

Maya couldn't help but throw her head back and laugh. For once the unfortunate circumstances of her genetic background had been an advantage, earning not only confirmation that the original rescue ship was still on the way, but also earning herself a ticket onboard. In the mean time, she had to dive headlong into that salvage. The more she understood about the workings of 23rd century ships the more covert havoc she could wreck.

If this couldn't make her father proud, nothing could.

## Shadows from the past

### Chapter Summary

Kirk realizes that Khan might not be the only person from his past living on Ceti Alpha V

Somehow Captain Albrecht was calmer, more ready to face the desperate situation that her ship was racing toward. Maybe she had taken Admiral Kirk's advice to heart, or maybe she had made peace with fact that she faced a scenario that was likely to end horribly for everyone involved.

"Hail the Enterprise, I want to check back in with Admiral Kirk."

Moments later the bridge of the Enterprise appeared on the screen. The admiral's face showed lines of worry that threatened to ruin Albrecht's new sense of calm.

"Admiral Kirk..." Her throat tightened up, and she had to stop to re-think how to phrase the question on her mind. "Did you speak with Khan?"

Kirk nodded. "I did, and the hostages are still unharmed, and if Khan keeps his word..." That was a big if. "...then they will remain unharmed so long as I'm in regular contact."

Albrecht breathed a sigh of relief. "Best outcome we could hope for. Our ETA to Ceti Alpha V is nineteen standard hours. I would appreciate any advice or guidance you can give."

"Nineteen? That puts you well ahead of the Enterprise." Kirk's worry lines deepened as he considered the options.

"Admiral, I know you said that Khan is liable to kill every hostage if he sees a landing party arrive without you, but what are we supposed to do, wait in orbit until the Enterprise arrives?"

"Actually, Captain, that was going to be my preliminary recommendation. The situation is constantly changing, however, so be prepared to pivot."

"Admiral, if the Toyotomi's sensors are online, Khan will know we're in orbit."

"And if that's the case, there's nothing he can do from the planet's surface. If the Toyotomi was capable of doing anything more than sitting there, he would have set out to the stars by now."

"Fair point, Admiral. Any final pieces of advice?"

Kirk leaned in and lowered his voice. "Captain, whatever you do, you cannot let any of the augments onto your ship. You haven't yet seen what they are capable of."

Captain Albrecht's face went pale. "Understood." Her heart ached, thinking of the young woman who seemed so desperate to get off that planet.

"Captain? You look upset. Is something wrong?"

"A young woman reached out to me, desperate to get off of the planet. She said her mother was a normal human, and that put her at enough of a disadvantage to make her life miserable. She offered to help, and she said you knew her mother."

"Marla McGivers." Kirk's tone was soft and wistful.

"Yes, that was the name she gave."

Kirk opened his mouth to speak, but paused, as if to abandon the thought he had nearly put to words. "I still advise against trusting any of them"

"Understood, Admiral. End transmission."

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Marla McGivers. He may have hardly thought of her, and looking back—by his own admission under appreciated her—before that fateful day twenty five years ago, but now her name and face were seared into his memory: the way she was enamored with (and in his opinion manipulated by) Khan, her betrayal, her choice to stay with her lover on a harsh planet.

"Captain LeFevre, I need to use your ready room to speak privately to Spock and McCoy."

"Of course, Admiral."

Inside the ready room, the scene was much like the shuttle ride that brought them to the Enterprise. McCoy paced anxiously, Spock quietly contemplated the circumstances, and Kirk tried to keep control.

“Jim...this information changes things.”

“Does it? McGivers made her loyalties clear.”

“To be fair, I don’t think she was making decisions freely and willingly, but I wasn’t talking about her. This is about more than Khan and his little band of genetically engineered friends. They’ve gone and had kids, the oldest of them are practically still kids. And so far as we know they’ve committed no greater crime than being born to parents with a nasty personal history.”

“So far as we know, doctor.” Spock added, still steady and calm as ever. “Each individual should be judged according to their own personal choices.”

“All I’m saying is this isn’t a clear cut case of good guy, bad guy.” McCoy held up his hands in a defensive stance. “There could be others just as unhappy with their lot as the McGivers girl...there could be young children.”

“Bones, our priority is the hostages. Once they are safe, then we can discuss that possibility. To be frank, though, I fully expect that Khan would go to great lengths to indoctrinate anyone born on his colony.”

“You both make valid points, but Kirk is right. The hostages are our focus. Once their safety is assured, then we will be in a better position to assess whether or not any of the augments’ descendants should be granted asylum.”

Kirk sighed. “I was so focused on confronting Khan again it hadn’t occurred to me that I might be seeing McGivers too. I can’t help but feel responsible for what happened to her. Maybe if I had made her feel more valued...”

“Jim.” Spock spoke with a firm sense of kindness. “Recently you advised Captain Albrecht that to panic does nothing to change one’s circumstances. While your emotional state is not one of panic, I think it would still serve you well to follow your own advice.”

Kirk forced a slight smile. “Nothing like having a Vulcan around to keep you from getting too deep in your feelings.”

## One step forward, three steps back

### Chapter Summary

Khan puts the pressure on Kirk, and Maya tries to strike a deal

Seventeen hours, fifty seven minutes, and forty three seconds had passed since he had first spoken to Kirk, and the Admiral had been true to his word, with communications ever six hours. However, Khan was growing impatient. He had no trouble to delay food or sleep to pursue his prey, but all the waiting left him itching for action. It had been too long since he had felt the feeling of power that one can only feel from taking a life, and he was hungry for it.

The viewscreen came on, once again Kirk was right on time. His commitment to protecting these people's lives was commendable to say the least.

"Admiral. So, we speak again, and as you can see Captain Tanaka is still unharmed...at least not by my hand, he was badly injured in the crash."

"And once again I have no changes to report, and our updated coordinates and ETA are being sent as we speak." Kirk was tired and beleaguered, dreading the thought of how many more times they'd have to go through this song and dance before he arrived at Ceti Alpha V, and how worn down he might end up feeling before he even faced the real challenges. "Khan. What is it exactly that you hope to accomplish? You've been cagey every time we spoke."

"I would hate to spoil the surprise. Everything will be made clear when we speak face to face in..." Khan looked down at the console. "Three days? I thought you cared about these civilians, yet you're taking your time to come to their rescue."

"Ceti Alpha V is still a long way from us." Kirk's voice was strained, as if he was fighting not to lose his composure.

"Be that as it may, the Enterprise is capable of covering that distance in only one day. I've done the calculations, which your ship's computer can confirm."

"At maximum speed, theoretically, maybe." Kirk was beginning to sound uneasy. "That kind of speed isn't sustainable for a long haul."

"You have one day, Admiral Kirk."

---

Aside from a handful, most of the hostages had been taken to the colony, and the wreckage of the Toyotomi was quiet and calm. Maya remained behind, tearing open consoles and reading service manuals at a frantic pace to try to learn as much about the ship as she could. She had to admire the design of the ship. While the hull was scrap metal and the engines were shot, many of the systems survived the crash.

She worked until she couldn't stay awake anymore and dozed off on the floor, making the mistake of falling asleep on top of her bad left arm. As she woke up, she tried to shake out the numbness as she got back on her feet, but the whole limb felt like it was barely attached to her body.

There was still work to get done, Maya went over to the console, and on the display she saw something that gave her a burst of excitement that chased away any remaining sense of drowsiness from her unplanned nap. They had visitors.

Maya tapped a few buttons on the console to get in contact with the ship...audio only no need to show off the mess she had made in the laboratory.

"Toyotomi to Portland, this is Maya Noonien Singh. Welcome to Ceti Alpha V."

"This is Captain Albrecht speaking. I suppose this means your sensors are online."

"Captain, you almost sound like you weren't expecting that, but it doesn't matter. You're here, I'm here, and I'm ready to discuss how I may be of assistance...as soon as I am safely aboard your ship."

"I'm sorry, Maya, but I've had to reconsider some of the details of your offer. I'm happy to accept any help you have to offer, and I will help you get somewhere safe when everything is resolved, but for security reasons we'll need to do all communication remotely."

Dammit. Apparently Maya had been mistaken to think that Albrecht had more compassion than brain cells.

"That's too risky for me, Captain." She paused to reconsider her strategy. "I hope you understand what you have done to me. If it's discovered that we had this conversation..."

"If you've already put yourself in such great danger, why not find some way to help? You said you were miserable living among the augments, this could be a chance for you to have revenge, to prove that you're a better person."

"Captain, if I am not aboard that ship then we have no deal. End transmission."

# Putting out the fire

## Chapter Summary

The Enterprise races toward Ceti Alpha V, and Maya goes to extremes to make a deal with Captain Albrecht

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Kirk rubbed his temples. A headache was coming on, and he was exhausted but there was no time to rest. Even if things hadn't become so suddenly dire, he would only be able to steal a few short hours of sleep before he would have to get back in touch with Khan anyway.

"Hail the Portland. Captain Albrecht needs to know about how our circumstances have changed," The bridge of the Portland appeared on screen. "Captain, what is your status."

"In orbit over Ceti Alpha V. The Toyotomi's sensors are operational, they know we're here. Do you still recommend we wait quietly until the Enterprise arrives?"

Kirk rubbed his temple again. "For the moment, yes, but things have changed. Khan has figured out how quickly we can make the journey at maximum speed, and expects the Enterprise to arrive in that time frame. We're at full speed, and if everything goes perfectly, maybe we can make it."

"And if not?" Captain Albrecht almost read his mind.

"Khan gave us one standard day to reach Ceti Alpha V. I'll have a better estimate if we can make it in time in eighteen standard hours. If not...my recommendation will be to send a landing party of the toughest, most battle ready of your crew, prepared for extreme hostility."

"Understood, Admiral."

"End transmission."

"I'm too tired for this, I need to rest," Kirk said with a groan.

"And I'm too old for this. I need a drink." McCoy added with an even heavier groan.

"Well, gentlemen." Captain LeFevre interjected. "I keep a bottle of maple whiskey in my ready room for these sorts of emergencies."

"A Canadian if ever I met one!" McCoy teased.

"Canadien, doctor," LeFevre teased back, exaggerating the French pronunciation. "And if anyone might be comforted by stress eating, I'd be happy to serve up a big platter of poutine."

"Whiskey and comfort food, I'd be a fool to turn down either." McCoy answered with enthusiasm. "What about you, Jim? Spock?"

"Well, if you're the one suggesting it, I can't turn town doctor's orders." Kirk replied, with a bit of brightness coming back to his voice and into his eyes.

"While I feel no need to partake, I would be both pleased and honored to join you for companionship." Spock added.

"Not even a little poutine?" LeFevre asked "My mother had a vegetarian recipe that's almost as good as the real thing."

"In that case, I would be glad to enjoy a meal offered by a gracious host."

---

Maya hadn't given up yet, but she had become desperate. Her words alone hadn't been enough to convince Albrecht that she was in dire need of getting onto that ship. She knew what she had to do, and the thought terrified her.

At a brisk pace, Maya raced through the dark corridors of the Toyotomi. The last place she had seen her half brother was on the bridge, but that was hours ago.

As luck would have it, she crossed paths with Arjun in the corridor.

"Still tinkering and scavenging around the wreckage?" He asked. "Your sense of urgency doesn't seem to match the task at hand."

"Not quite. I spoke with the captain, I think I can convince her to let me on board the ship, but only if she thinks I'm in immediate danger."

"And how do you intend to do that?"

"I need your help." This had better work, Maya was beginning to realize how completely unhinged her plan must seem. "She need to believe I've been in a struggle, which means I need you to hit me in the face...and don't hold back it has to be convincing."

Arjun gave her a look of confusion and disgust. "Do you hear yourself? You're making less sense than usual." He began to walk away.

Damn. She wouldn't get what she wanted unless she kicked the hornet's nest.

"What, are you afraid?" She taunted. Maya was still terrified, but rage began bubble up inside of her as she recalled a memory she would rather forget forever, "Because you weren't scared when you nearly tore my arm off after Katya Mikhailovna turned you down because she wanted to be with me."

Arjun stopped and turned back to look at her. Maya's heart raced, and she took a deep breath and looked her brother dead in the eye.

"Do you remember what she called you? I think it was...a self absorbed worm? Does that sound right?"

Arjun lunged at her, and the next moments were a blur of adrenaline and pain that rushed by too fast for Maya to process, but the next thing she knew she was kicked to the ground with her jaw and nose throbbing. Arjun was already walking away by the time she began to pick herself up off the floor. Already, she regretted this course of action. She could feel blood running from her nose, taste it in her mouth, and (this really made her heart sink) could feel the jagged points in her mouth where a tooth had been broken.

Her head was spinning as she stumbled back to the laboratory. If Albrecht saw her in this stated and didn't feel a tug at her heartstrings, then she truly had no compassion.

Before reaching out, Maya had a few more finishing touches. She tore the collar of her shirt and started to take rapid, shallow breaths until heart raced, and then doubled over and braced herself against the console as if she couldn't stay steady on her feet.

"Computer, hail the Portland. Visuals on." A few more quick, shallow breaths.

"Captain Albrecht! I hope might reconsider our deal."

"Maya? What happened to you?" The Captain's voice was frantic and worried, just as Maya hoped it would be.

Maya spat out the mouthful of blood she had been saving for the right moment. "Probably just a taste of what I have in store as a known defector." She made a desperate look toward the door. "I'm sorry, I don't think I have any more time to talk."

"Wait..stay put, we can get a lock on your life sign and beam you out of there."

"Captain!" The first officer interjected. "Are you sure that's a good idea? Admiral Kirk's warning was clear."

"I remember his warning, but our first purpose is to save innocent lives. Now, I want you to look at that girl and tell me you don't think she's in danger too." The bridge fell silent. "Have the transporter room prepare to beam up one, and to escort her to sickbay."

## Chapter End Notes

Please understand that the French Canadian things are from a place of love, for my friends from Montreal who love to drink, feed everyone, and argue about hockey

## Behind the wire

Maya had faced things objectively more dangerous than this on a regular basis, but already heightened and full of adrenaline the idea of having every atom in her body scrambled was enough to make her reconsider everything. She braced herself, feeling as though she stood at the edge of a cliff, about to jump.

The actual experience, however, was instantaneous. Maya had to temper any sense of wonder she felt. To be honest she hadn't planned much further than this because she didn't think she would make it this far.

The transporter room of the USS Portland appeared before her, and in it a team of medical personnel swarmed around her to escort her to sickbay. No one had ever made so fuss over her before. It hardly seemed worthwhile for what was really just some blood and bruises.

The doctor on the USS Portland was a Vulcan woman with a stern face and long hair coiled into a tight bun. Not the sort of person to whom she'd be able to make a desperate emotional appeal the way she had to Captain Albrecht's, but everyone had their uses.

"To be honest, I had expected worse," The Vulcan doctor said, matter-of-factly. "Our reports stated that the augments could possess strength up to five times that of a typical human."

"Believe me, he was holding back. I'm lucky to just have gotten away with nothing worse than a swollen face."

"As well as two broken teeth and a mild concussion," the doctor added.

"Still less of a concern than an old injury I was hoping you could help me with. It's my left shoulder."

The Vulcan doctor examined Maya's shoulder with her tricorder. "Nerve damage, excessive scar tissue...what happened?"

Maya's heart sank, that was not an emotional wound she wanted to dig back into so soon, but then she realized that the doctor was probably more concerned with a mechanism of injury than any personal history. "I'm sure you know that it's easy to dislocate a shoulder, but challenging to put it back correctly. It might not be such a bother if I wasn't left handed."

The doctor nodded. "The kinesiology of the human shoulder favors range of motion over stability."

A moment of silence as Maya considered her strategy.

"Doctor, may I ask you a few questions?"

"You may."

"My apologies, this may be outside your area of expertise, but in the short time I've been on this ship, I've seen so much that surpasses my wildest Imagination." Playing the angle of innocent curiosity and wonder might not do much to sway a Vulcan, but it would at least justify the string of questions she had in mind.

"Go on."

"I'm most intrigued with the transporter, how does it work?"

"The simplest explanation I can give is that it converts matter into energy, transmits the energy, and converts the energy back to matter."

"I understand that much, but out of an entire planet, how were you able to find me and beam out the right person?"

"The ship's sensors are able to detect life forms and their locations."

"Then what's stopping you from simply beaming out the hostages?"

The doctor paused.

"You're beginning to ask questions that I am not at liberty to answer, but what I can tell you is that one great challenge is, as you put it, beaming out the right person. Every hostage as well as the entire population of Ceti Alpha V is human, and because the Toyotomi was a civilian ship, we have no records with which to compare their life signs."

"Is augmented DNA not different enough to help differentiate?" Maya spoke softly, trying to maintain that she was simply curious.

"I have no way of knowing."

"If you'd like to find out, I consent to giving a blood sample." Maya's heart was racing. So many wisps of plans that she was trying to grasp, something would have to come together.

---

Eighteen hours had passed since Khan gave his new ultimatum. The Enterprise had been rushing along at full speed. So far they were making good time, but anything could happen in those final hours. The engines were running hot, and even in the best case scenario they would barely reach Ceti Alpha V in time. Captain LeFevre's whiskey and Québécois cuisine had been a small comfort for a short while, but now exhaustion and a creeping sense of dread took their toll.

"Hail the Portland. I need to speak to Captain Albrecht again."

Kirk felt his throat close up when the interior of the Portland's bridge appeared on screen. The conversation he was about to have would not be easy.

"Captain Albrecht. There's still a chance we can make Ceti Alpha V, but our margins are razor thin. I don't feel comfortable relying on our reaching the planet in time."

"Understood." Albrecht seemed tense, and was more soft spoken than usual.

"Captain, I need you to prepare your away team and have them stand by. With enough luck they won't be needed, but...I'm not sure we'll be that lucky."

"Understood, Admiral. I have my short list of personnel, and they should be ready to stand by soon.

Kirk leaned closer. Something felt off. "Captain, is everything alright?"

"Yes, Admiral, my mind is just full right now, planning out the next steps."

"Understandable. End transmission."

---

"Permission to speak freely, Captain." The Portland's first officer spoke moments after the screen went blank.

"Permission granted." Albrecht answered with a heavy sigh. She already knew what this was going to be about."

"Permission to speak freely and privately, Captain."

"Meet me in my ready room."

Standing next to one another, the Portland's Captain and first officer looked comically contrasting. Captain Vivienne Albrecht was tall and lean, almost willowy, while Commander Anthony Tift was short and built like a brick wall.

"Captain, I think there's something you forgot to mention to Admiral Kirk." Tift crossed his arms.

"I know." Her voice was soft and distant.

"I'm not here to question your choice to bring the augment on board, but it you really should have come clean to Admiral Kirk."

"I have my reasons for concealing that information," she snapped, but then she paused and took a deep breath to steady herself. "I don't want to make any judgments about the Admiral's moral character, but everything he said was so black and white. He spoke as if each and everyone of them were unspeakable monsters."

"The history books were clear on that one, Captain...."

"I didn't see a monster. I saw a person, a girl who was scared and hurt and has probably been scared and hurt for much of her life, I couldn't in good conscience ignore her cry for help."

"I want to trust that you're making the right choice, Captain, I really do."

"If it makes you feel any better, Doctor T'Rallia said she's been perfectly agreeable, and I'm taking all the necessary precautions to be sure she's closely monitored."

"And I hope none of those precautions will end up being necessary."



## When luck comes

Maya found herself on a short leash: confined to quarters with a guard outside the door, it turned out Captain Albrecht had at least a little more sense than she had initially thought. This situation was a challenge to be sure, but no means a cause to give up. If the computer systems on this vessel were close enough to what she studied on the Toyotomi, then there was a chance she could find her way into some restricted programs.

“Computer, play music...” What was the name of that composer her mother used to talk about? “Tchaikovsky.”

“Playing Eugene Onegin by Pyotr Illich Tchaikovsky.”

“Computer, increase volume.” The sounds of classic Russian opera would have to be a bit bolder to drown out the sound of the work she was about to do.

Maya began to investigate the computer console, first getting a sense of what limited functionality she had access to: temperature control, limited communication within the ship, library access. Her first goal was to find a way to open a line of communication to the Toyotomi, and ideally to also find a way to conceal said communication.

Her concentration (and a very lovely aria) were interrupted by the sound of the door chime.

“One moment,” Maya answered. Quickly, she grabbed a PADD, opened it to an old Earth novel, and flung herself on the bed as if she had been reading the entire time (while also listening to very loud music). “Come in.”

The door slid open, and Captain Albrecht stepped inside. The expression on the captain’s face was soft yet stern. “Computer, stop music. I’m amazed you can focus on reading through all that.”

“It’s not a terribly complex piece of literature,” Maya answered as she set the PADD to the side. “The Old Man and the Sea.”

“I remember that one from school.” Albrecht smiled and sat on the foot of the bed. “Anyway, I wanted to ask for your guidance. I honored my end of our bargain, after all.”

Maya sat up. “Of course Captain.” Here it goes, time to survive the delicately dangerous balancing act of playing a double agent.

“We’re going to have to send down a landing team to rescue the hostages. Admiral Kirk warned that we’re likely to be met with extreme hostility, that Khan is ready to start killing hostages, and that there will be no reasoning with him. Any insights would be appreciated, we need every advantage we can get.”

Maya considered her response carefully. “I think the Admiral’s personal distaste for my father may have skewed his perception. He has no charitable feelings toward Kirk, or Starfleet, or the Federation, but I don’t think the real animosity runs so deep.” A bold faced lie. Her whole life Maya had been told that there was one clear reason why she was struggling to survive on a harsh planet, and that reason was a man named James Tiberius Kirk. “He’s an intelligent man. He can be reasoned with, so long as you’re firm.”

Albrecht smiled. “That’s a relief. I was afraid we were running headlong into certain death.”

“Are you always so pessimistic, Captain? Even if things take a turn for the worse, you’re the ones with phasers. The Toyotomi was a civilian vessel, there was nothing in the salvage that would give any tactical advantage. You’re still only up against improvised weapons, and they aren’t expecting anyone until Kirk arrives.”

“Thank you, Maya. I appreciate your assistance.” Albrecht stood up, but she paused before she turned to go. “You know, most of my crew doesn’t trust you.”

“Yet you do.” Maya already felt a pang of remorse. No one had ever had so much faith in her before, and yet she was using that to lure them into a trap.

“The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them.”

“What an elegant way to put it.”

“Don’t give me any credit for it, Ernest Hemingway said it. You should read A Farewell To Arms next, it’s a much better book.” Captain Albrecht stepped back out through the door.

Maya stayed still and silent after the doors closed, counting down exactly five seconds before she leaped off the bed and rushed back to the computer console. Her priorities had shifted, opening a line of communication was still the top of her list, but there was no time to make a fuss over keeping it secret and private...consequences be damned.

She worked quickly and frantically, finding that the added pressure helped her mind to focus all the better. She had to stop herself from letting out a laugh when she managed to break through. It wasn’t much of a breakthrough, though. No video, no audio, the connection was only strong enough for a few lines of text that she could only hope would be read in time.

“Portland landing party en route, prepare to greet them”

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Two hours would have changed everything. Two hours and the Enterprise would be here, which put them barely overdue and meant the crew of the Portland had to leap into action before everything fell apart.

The landing party consisted of Captain Albrecht herself (she could never in good conscience send someone else toward danger in her place), Commander Tift, Doctor T'Rallia in case any of the hostages needed urgent medical care, and Ensign Micheal Conroy, someone Albrecht hadn't worked closely with before, but whose martial arts experience would make him a valuable asset.

"Captain, you seem a bit more at ease," Tift commented as the landing party stepped onto the transporter pads.

"That's because I feel a bit more optimistic. We're still following Admiral Kirk's advice to expect extreme hostility, but I feel better about the odds."

"Captain, you would be wise to take anything the augment says with a grain of salt,"

"And I would advise you to stop speaking about her as if she wasn't a person. Phasers ready. Energize."

The landing party materialized on what remained of the transporter room of the Toyotomi and were met with a more aggressive welcome party than they imagined. Five augments were already waiting for them. Conroy didn't hesitate, immediately firing his phaser to take out one of them. That meant their numbers were matched, but the scales shifted again as an augment overpowered Albrecht and took her phaser.

"Stand down or she dies." The augment held the phaser to Albrecht's head, but Albrecht gave a desperate look to her crew, caught between the will to stay alive and the sense of duty that compelled her to forfeit her life. Everyone stood tense and frozen until Albrecht's communicator chimed.

"Portland to away team. Status update. The Enterprise is in orbit over Ceti Alpha V."

The augment took the communicator off of Albrecht's belt and shoved it in her face. "Answer it."

"We are currently on the planet's surface and in negotiations. All is well." She strained her eyes to glance at the face of the man who held her, and he still didn't seem satisfied with her response. "Admiral Kirk's presence is still expected."

## To reign in hell

Something wasn't right. At the twenty four hour mark, Kirk had hailed the Toyotomi, expecting to witness gruesome bloodshed as he had narrowly missed the deadline, but there was no response. That wasn't like the man he knew. The man knew would have been thrilled to gloat about his little victory and to finally have an excuse to take a person's life. Equally as troubling was the communication with the Portland. It had been terse and sudden, quite out of the ordinary.

"Hail the Toyotomi again," Kirk ordered. "We may be expected, but the last thing I want to do is surprise Khan."

A response this time. The bridge of the Toyotomi appeared onscreen, and to Kirk's great relief Captain Tanaka was still alive. "Please, forgive the delay, Admiral." Khan said with acid in his voice, particularly sharp and taunting in the way he pronounced 'admiral.' "We had a slight interruption. Admiral...I thought you were a man of honor, yet you sent your friends to do your dirty work for you."

"Where is the landing party from the Portland?" Kirk demanded.

"Our esteemed guests are quite safe, I assure you." Khan had a slight smile like a cat toying with its prey. "But our more pressing concern is with our deal."

"I'm here, I can beam down momentarily. I've kept up my end of the bargain."

"Have you, Admiral?" Khan stepped closer to Tanaka, and the hostage's eyes grew wide with fear. This was not a Starfleet captain who had to make peace with the fact that their life could be on the line. This was just a man who wanted to take a group of eager scientists out to research the stars. "Our conversation may be delayed, but the deadline we agreed on has passed."

Kirk leaped out of his seat and shouted. "Khan, no! Be reasonable!"

"Admiral." Khan grabbed Tanaka by the upper arm and forcefully yanked the man to his feet. "I am being perfectly reasonable." With one arm Khan held his captive still, and with the other he violently jerked the man's head to the side. The sound of a human neck snapping was sickeningly unmistakable. "I expect to see you in five minutes."

"Khan! What have you done?"

"Wasting time is against your best interest, Admiral. You will come alone."

"We never agreed to that, I need a landing party of five." More than he knew he would get, but that gave him something to work with.

"Two escorts is the most I will allow."

"That I can work with. End transmission." The screen went blank, and Kirk wasted no more time. "Spock, Bones, meet me in the transporter room."

"Admiral, wait." LeFevre called. "Before you go I just wanted to say, give 'em hell. You know, Wayne Gretzky said that you miss 100% of the shots you don't take."

"I like that. Who was Wayne Gretzky? A philosopher?"

"No, sir. A hockey player."

---

"Jim, has it occurred to you that we're walking right into a trap," Even as the trio entered the transporter room, McCoy found some new grievances to air.

"Of course it has, Bones, but Khan's made it clear that he's going to keep killing hostages until I'm standing right in front of him."

McCoy looked toward Spock. "You've been awfully quiet. What's your logical take?"

"I agree with Admiral Kirk's assessment." Spock replied in his usual calm manner. "We are assuming a great personal risk and are likely to be killed or to become hostages ourselves. However, there is no alternative that would not place undue risk on civilian life. Logic dictates that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few, doctor."

"Nothing like Vulcan optimism to improve your mood," McCoy grumbled as he stepped onto the transporter pad.

"We can't afford to waste any more time," Kirk said as he and Spock stepped into place. "Energize."

By the time the trio beamed aboard the Toyotomi, the wreckage looked like a carcass that was beginning to get picked over by scavengers. They were greeted by a gang of augments, and while Kirk was tempted to show them that sometimes the best negotiation strategy was a smile and a phaser set to kill, this situation was too delicate with too many lives caught in the balance to go in with phasers firing. Instead he held his hands open in front of himself as a universal sign to show that he meant no harm...yet.

"Follow me," one of the augments commanded in a gruff voice before leading the trio silently through the wreckage.

The bridge of the Toyotomi was still more intact than the rest of the wreckage, Khan sat in the captain's chair as if he owned the place, and Captain Tanaka's body still laid lifeless on the floor.

“Admiral Kirk. Welcome. What a pleasure to see you again after one quarter of a century.” In stark contrast to Khan’s polite words was the way he carried himself like a circling shark.

“I’m not in the mood for this, Khan. I’ve waited long enough, what is it you want?”

“Only that to which I am rightfully entitled.” It was unsettling, the way that Khan spoke so calmly.

“And what, may I ask, the hell is that?” McCoy snapped. One of the augments raised his arm as if he meant to strike the doctor, but after Khan shot him a knowing look he stood down.

“A less ambitious man might have found a way to be satisfied with the hand I have been dealt.” Khan mused. “We have learned how to thrive on this planet, raised families....but at a great cost. This planet is not an easy place to live. I’ve lost several dear friends along the way, and also my beloved wife.”

A shiver went down Kirk’s spine. Marla McGivers was dead. “And that’s what this is about?”

“Only in part.” Khan continued “You denied me that which I deserve: an empire that reaches beyond the stars.”

“If I may join the discussion....” Spock paused to look around. Neither Khan nor any of the augments seemed to protest. “You chose exile on Ceti Alpha V, quoting Milton to state that it is better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven. By my own observation, you seemed almost excited to face the challenge of taming a planet.”

Khan seethed, but managed to keep control of himself, clenching his jaw and drumming his fingertips on the arm of his chair to keep his rage in check. “Is that the story you’ve been telling yourselves all these years? Don’t lie to me about what happened, I remember it well. You backed me into a corner where I had no choice but to accept your terms. I assure you that anything else you may have perceived was only grace in the face of defeat. But of course your real intentions were always to sweep us under the rug never to be thought of again.”

“Khan...I promise that isn’t true.” Kirk spoke softly, doing what little he could to deescalate a situation that could easily spiral out of control.

“Isn’t it? Twenty five years with no communication, and I only recently learned that Starfleet has no records of our existence.”

“Khan...” Kirk still spoke softly, but with the boldness of a man who wasn’t going to back down easily. “You have my condolences for Marla’s death, but I need to know what exactly it is you want.”

“Were you not listening? I made myself quite clear.”

“Khan, I can’t give you ‘an empire that reaches beyond the stars.’”

“No, but you can give me what I need to set it into motion.”

“I can’t do that either.”

“Not with those strict rules and moral codes to which you are so attached, no, but I am not asking for anything impossible. I leave the decision to you, Admiral. What matters more, your principles, or the lives of those civilians you came so far to save?”

# Master of puppets

## Chapter Notes

The first part is unhinged and I regret nothing

Whatever thoughts popped into her, Albrecht swore not to tell herself that things couldn't get any worse. They most certainly could get much worse. She found that her will to survive was enough to force her to keep the tsunami of panic she felt hidden safe inside. Keeping one's head down and not making a fuss was the best way to stay alive. Even Conroy seemed to understand that, and he was usually full of bravado.

Their captors led them on a lengthy hike through rocky terrain, and while there was plenty of plant life, small streams, and even a few reptiles lounging to warm themselves in the sun, it was clear than anything living here had evolved to survive in an inhospitable climate. Their plants grew low to the ground and were twisted with thorns, and those reptiles were covered in spikes and horns.

By the time they reached the settlement, the landing party was drenched with sweat and out of breath, but their genetically enhanced captors made the journey seem effortless. The settlement was nestled in between the hills and somehow seemed both very disorderly and very organized. At its heart were structures that seemed to be built from old containers and scrap metal, and branching out from that were stone buildings. The entire area was dotted with gardens, more greenery that could be seen anywhere else on the planet.

They were greeted by a tall young man armed with a long spear who had a sort of easy confidence about him that seemed out of place for a guard. "Great news," he spoke with a sense of twisted delight that made Albrecht deeply concerned. "Francesca is ready for you."

Albrecht did not want to know who the hell Francesca was.

The captors led the landing party to a small stone hut on the outskirts of the settlement. Inside a visibly pregnant waited, an annoyed look on her face. "I was told be ready as soon as that ship crashed, do you have any idea how long I've been waiting?"

"Just long enough to arrive at the best moment," one of the augments answered.

Francesca rolled her eyes. "No matter, just tell me who they are."

"They were meant to be the rescue crew," the same augment explained.

Francesca looked directly from one captive to another. "Funny how that didn't work out for you. Which of you is in charge?"

"I am." Captain Albrecht spoke up, a sense of courage in her voice that she hadn't felt in a while.

"Lovely." Francesca smiled. "Then you can be the first to meet the little bastards that keep tearing up my garden." She went to the shelf and took down a jar and a long pair of forceps. Albrecht couldn't make out what was in the jar. "If only tearing up the garden was all they did..." She sighed as she unscrewed the lid to the jar and used the forceps to pluck out a small, squirming slug. "You'll all see what else they're capable of very soon."

Slowly, gently, Francesca laid the slug on Albrecht's cheek. She had no idea what was happening, but something very deep and instinctual told her that something very wrong and very dangerous was happening as the tiny creature crawled toward her ear.

"Not to worry," Francesca cooed. "You'll be back safely on your little ship soon."

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"Khan, a moment, please, for the three of us to have a private consultation."

"Oh no, I'm afraid that anything you wish to be said must be said for the good of the group." Khan shifted his weight in his seat. "How are we to negotiate fairly if we can't maintain a certain degree of transparency?"

"Transparency my ass," McCoy mumbled.

"Admiral," Spock spoke up. "I only advise that you take to heart the Vulcan proverb I recently shared. The needs of the many outweighs the needs of the few." The way that Spock emphasized the word 'few' drew Kirk's attention. "And that sometimes this choice may be a more difficult choice than one would expect."

"Here we go, logic again when lives are at stake," McCoy grumbled.

"Gentlemen, thank you both for your input." He did truly mean to thank both of his friends, sometimes Spock's cool logic needed to be hit with a little piss and vinegar. "What you ask for is still so vague, I understand the big picture but not the first steps that will make it actionable." He could make a guess, though, because Khan had tried to take it once before: the Enterprise. "So, I propose another deal. I will listen with my full attention to your demands and give them the consideration they are due, so long as you release one hostage."

"Jim!" McCoy snapped. "Are you out of your mind?"

"Don't worry, Bones, I've only agreed to listen."

"Of course," Khan mused. "Your purpose is to free the hostages, so it's to be expected that you beg for their release at every turn. Instead, I

will allow the landing party from the Portland to return to their ship.”

“You have a deal. What exactly is it you want?”

“Nothing more than the means to leave this planet. All I want is a ship.”

“Technically you have a ship,” McCoy grumbled once again.

“Khan...I thought you were supposed to have the superior intellect, and now I’m supposed to believe that you expect me to hand over the Enterprise?”

“Oh no, your perception is so simplified,” Khan taunted. “I never specified that I needed your ship, as for what I expect you to do, I expect you to move to action when the lives of more hostages are on the line.”

## Fins

“Computer, resume music.” The bold tones of Eugene Onegin began again. The next selection was a lively waltz...that was the one, the one her mother used to hum. “Computer, increase volume.” Now Maya was less concerned with drowning out whatever noise she might be making, what she wanted was to fill her soul with music that gave her an uplifting sense of nostalgia, even if this was her first time hearing it as it was meant to be heard, with a full orchestra and in its entirety.

New priorities, new list. Purge any records of her recent communication, find a way out of this room, get to the transporter room, and hope that the Vulcan doctor had found a chance to make use of the DNA sample. In a way, she was glad to have done a quick read of that Hemingway novel. The giant marlin might be caught, but the sea was full of sharks.

Maya went straight back to work on the computer console, quickly searching for a way to erase or hide the evidence of what she had just done. She froze when she heard the sound of the door sliding open. No chime, just a blatant invasion of her privacy. Her heart jumped, and she looked up from the console to see a pair of Starfleet officers standing in the doorway. Here came the sharks.

“Maya.” The man spoke calmly, yet forcefully even though he had to raise his voice to be heard over the music. “I have a few questions.”

“Barging in and bringing a friend hardly seems necessary for just asking a few questions. Computer, decrease volume.”

“Precautions. There has been a report of unusual communications with the shipwreck.”

Damn. That was fast. Still, Maya remained calm. “All I’ve done here is listen to music and read. Go ahead and check the computer, I have nothing to hide.”

The man would be able to find the information he wanted without any trouble, this just gave Maya a few moments to think. She could take them both, easily could get one of their phasers. “Computer, increase volume.”

She lunged at the man who worked at the console to take advantage of the fact that he would be distracted. A swift blow to the ribs knocked him unsteady and gave Maya the opportunity to grab his weapon. The other man had drawn his weapon, but Maya was faster to fire and incapacitated him with a shot to the chest. The remaining man, however, wasn’t slowed down. He grabbed her from behind, and as they struggled an explosion of pain in her left shoulder. She bashed the back of her head into the man’s face, and as he recovered he loosened his hold enough that she could wiggle free and turn her phaser on him too.

She took a moment to catch her breath and evaluate the situation, reminding herself that this was probably the easy part. Maya looked down at the weapon in her hand. Damn. It was only set to stun, so those two would be back up soon. She took the jacket off of the smaller of the two unconscious officers and put it on herself, a poor disguise but it was all she had time for.

Time to dive into the shark tank.

Maya was on high alert as she moved through the Portland’s corridors, ready to use her phaser, but also well aware that one woman blasting her way through an entire ship was not a sustainable plan.

She had only made it around the corner when she first crossed paths with another officer. While she didn’t know just who this short, muscular man was, she recalled seeing him on the bridge in her early communications. Maya was ready to fire her phaser, but a few observations made her pause. He made no move to defend himself, showed no signs of surprise or concern over this encounter, and his eyes seemed dull and distant.

“Maya. I was just sent to retrieve you.” He spoke pleasantly, yet flatly. “Captain Albrecht wishes to speak with you in her ready room.”

The pieces all fit together, and Maya knew what had happened. “Of course,” she replied, not sure whether to be thrilled that everything was going to be much easier or disappointed to be robbed of the chance to take the ship with nothing but her own skill. “I look forward to speaking with her.”

## Chapter 13

“Enterprise to away team.” Captain LeFevre’s voice came in over Kirk’s communicator “What’s your status?”

“Answer it.” Khan demanded.

Kirk took the communicator off of his belt and held it to respond. “Currently in negotiations.” He kept a close watch on Khan, trying to get a read on the man, but he kept the same unchanging expression of arrogance and barely contained rage. “The Portland’s landing party has been allowed to return to the ship.”

“And the civilians?”

“I’m working on that. Kirk out.” That was all he dared to say. “Khan...about those civilians...”

“Admiral, you are in no position to ask for anything more. You asked for the return of one hostage, I generously returned four,”. Khan taunted

“Four Starfleet personnel, who knew they might find themselves in danger when they signed up for the job. As you already pointed out, my duty is to protect the civilians, and we’ve already lost one.” Kirk didn’t expect to get anything more simply from asking, but Wayne Gretzky’s words of wisdom rang in his head. If you don’t ask, you don’t get.

“We reached an agreement, which you accepted, I cannot be at fault if you regret your choice.” It was clear that Khan’s patience was beginning to wear thin.

“Then tell me what it would take to release just one hostage.” Kirk, too, was beginning to grow impatient.

“I won’t give you another just for listening this time.”

“Nor do I expect it.”

A slight, sly smile appeared on Khan’s face before he spoke again. “One of my men aboard the Enterprise.”

Damn. The one thing he asked for was the one thing that would get everyone killed. “You know I can’t allow that.” Kirk tried to think fast, well aware that if he said the wrong thing another person would die. “There’s nothing else? A compromise?”

“How tragic, Admiral, that you have such a poor estimation of the Enterprise’s crew that you think an entire ship could be overpowered by a single man.”

“That’s still not a chance I’m willing to take.” Kirk spoke with such unyielding firmness that made it clear nothing would change his mind.

“Then you leave me no choice.” Khan turned to speak to an augment. “Bring me another hostage.”

“Khan....no. We can work something out, just be reasonable.” Kirk begged, but Khan sat back and ignored his pleas.

The augment returned with a hostage, a young woman whose eyes were red and swollen as if she had been crying.

“Tell Admiral Kirk your name,” khan demanded.

“Yukari Sato.” Her voice was shaken and very audible.

“Very good,” Khan mused. “I think Admiral Kirk should know the name of each person whose death he is responsible for.”

Kirk couldn’t sit back and watch any longer. He put his hand on his phaser and lunged forward, but just as quickly as he sprung to action, Spock grabbed his arm and pulled him back. The Vulcan’s strength was too much for him to overcome.

“Exercise some self-control, Jim.” Spock spoke firmly to calm down his friend. “Escalation will only put the other hostages at greater risk.”

Spock’s words were not enough to dampen Kirk’s drive to do something to try to save that woman’s life. He struggled in vain to break free, and as he struggled he watched in horror as the augment broke Yukari’s neck.

“Take them away.” Khan gave a dismissive wave of his hand. “And take their phasers and communicators, I want the Enterprise to be kept in the dark about what has happened here.”

---

Inside Captain Albrecht’s ready room, Maya couldn’t help but feel a sense of unease. She should have relieved to know that the Portland was as good as seized, but instead the thoughts that dominated her mind was how Albrecht had been the gentlest, most trusting person she had ever spoken to, and now she was on a fast track to a very nasty end.

“Maya, I need to talk with you to determine where your loyalties lie.” Even with her mind taken over, Captain Albrecht still spoke so soft and easy, it would take a very careful observer to notice any change in demeanor, but Maya knew what to look for. She knew what Ceti eels could do to a person.

“Honestly I’m on my own side, but I can guess what happened to you down there, and many of our goals are going to be congruent.”

Silence. She would have to spell it out.



“Of all the things I told you, the only truth is that I wanted to get off that rock and that I’m tired of never being good enough, but my loyalty lies with my family.”

Albrecht nodded. “I appreciate your cooperation.”

“The best way to trust someone is to trust them. You told me that.”

“I did.” There was a twinge of desperate sadness in Albrecht’s voice that struck Maya to the marrow, that made her wonder if a part of the person Albrecht used to be was still in there and trying to fight it’s way out.

She didn’t want to give that feeling any chance to grow, so she abruptly moved on. “Your doctor has samples of my DNA. I had hoped that could be used to help differentiate between the augments and the hostages, to more easily beam some of my people aboard.”

Albrecht nodded. “Understood.”

## Blood in the water

Something wasn't right. LeFevre had just spoken with Captain Albrecht, who seemed entirely unfazed by her recent experience. Not that he doubted her resilience, but in the few interactions they had she proved to have a tender heart and be easily swayed to strong emotions. She didn't seem to be the sort of person to come straight out of being held hostage and come right back as if nothing happened with no signs of distress.

Being in the dark about the negotiations down on the planet made him anxious too. Some time had passed since he last spoke to Admiral Kirk, enough to make him wonder if he should begin to worry, but not yet enough to make it seem worth the risk of interrupting a delicate situation again. The waiting was dragging him down.

"Number one, I need to speak with you in my ready room." Maybe at least talking through the situation and hearing another perspective would help.

"Of course, Captain." They both stood and turned to go.

The executive officer, Katherine Dalton, was a short woman with a round face and curly dark hair who had an enduring sense of optimism that LeFevre couldn't help but admire.

LeFevre didn't plan on staying around long enough to get comfortable, but while he didn't bother to take a seat he did place both hands on the desk and leaned forward. "Look, I don't know what kind of a hunch I have or even what I should do with it, all I know is that I have a bad feeling about...all of this. Did anything seem strange about Captain Albrecht to you?" He asked.

"How so? I didn't notice anything unusual." Dalton's demeanor was still bright, such a contrast to the way LeFevre plainly wore all of the stress and tension he felt.

"It's just..." How to speak his mind without sounding overly paranoid, or like he doubted Albrecht's character or capabilities. "I don't know what happened down there, but I'm sure it was terrifying, yet Captain Albrecht was the calmest I've ever seen her."

"Captain, I'm not sure if that alone is cause for alarm. People process trauma differently, some people block things out." Dalton spoke with gentle empathy.

"It didn't seem like her, but I don't know. I've only spoken to her a few times." LeFevre shook his head.

"You don't think the Portland could be compromised, do you?"

"I don't know, and I don't have anything to go on other than this feeling that things seem off."

"Maybe more communication with the Portland?" Dalton suggested. "Checking in with Captain Albrecht often, might put your mind at ease, and also help insure that our two ships are working in harmony."

"Or give us more evidence if something is amiss," LeFevre added. "At any rate, that's exactly what I have in mind. I'm also going to check in with the landing party soon. It's been a while. I hate to interrupt, but it didn't seem to be a problem the last time I checked in."

---

"Enterprise to away team, status update."

"Negotiations are underway." An unfamiliar voice answered. "I advise against future interruption."

"Wait...who is this?" Captain LeFevre demanded. "Why isn't Admiral Kirk speaking?" The communicator cut out, and Captain LeFevre hung his head in defeat. His only hope is that he would be wrong about Captain Albrecht.

---

Kirk had never felt so exhausted. It was more than just the lack of sleep, but his very soul was weary. He couldn't even stay on his feet any longer and collapsed in the corner of their cell with his head in his hands.

"Spock...Spock. I could have saved her. I could have at least tried to something instead of sitting back and watching." Kirk's voice was weak and distant, a moment of vulnerability he would only dare show his two best friends.

"Jim..." Spock's voice was soft and gentle as he tried to comfort his friend, a contrast to the usual cold logic. He knelt on the floor next to Kirk and placed a hand on his friend's shoulder. "Such a brazen course of action would have had an extremely low outcome of success, but an extremely high chance of escalating the situation as to put even more lives at risk."

"I don't think that 'needs of the many' speech is going to be much comfort to that woman's family," McCoy added as he shook his head. "Or the family of that other man who Khan murdered."

"Nor do I expect it to," Spock agreed.

Kirk forced himself to get back on his feet even though his body felt like it was made of lead. He didn't like this feeling, so weak, helpless, and unable to take action. What he liked even less having to show it. He was glad to have picked himself up and put on a grave face when he did. Only moments later, an augment showed up to greet them.

"Khan wants to speak to the admiral alone," he said in a harsh voice.

“Can’t say I’m surprised.” Kirk answered with a sigh as he began to follow. Knots began to form in his stomach just thinking about what could happen. He was in no position to grant anything that Khan wanted, and had a terrible feeling this interaction would end with yet another dead civilian. “Here we go again.”

Already, the bridge of the Toyotomi was emptier than it was just a few minutes ago. Aside from himself, the only living people present were the augment who led him here and Khan himself. If he didn’t have first hand experience of the kind of raw strength these genetically engineered brutes had, he might have felt bold enough to lunge forward and attack the bastard himself.

“Well, Khan,” Kirk couldn’t help but taunt his enemy. It was the (relatively) safest way to satisfy the urges that made him want to go on the offensive. “I’m not sure what you’re hoping to accomplish. I’m still not willing to grant anything you’ve asked for.” There was no hostage presented like an animal to be slaughter, which did help Kirk to feel a little bolder in how he spoke.

“That’s not why I wanted to speak to you, Admiral. I don’t think you understand the devastation your actions have caused.” Khan’s voice was heavy and firm, not rage but the determination to drive home a point.

“You want to rule some kind of massive galactic empire, and I’ve been an obstacle. I’d hardly call that devastating.” Kirk wanted to roll his eyes at his adversary’s dramatics, but resisted for the sake of keeping the discussion civil.

“Koichi Tanaka, Yukari Sato…” Khan’s tone had changed, now low and solemn. “Two more people dead because of your actions.”

“Both killed by your hand!”

Khan ignored him and only continued to list names. “Mikhail Lensky, Marla McGivers, Ezra Salinero, Joaquin Lanzo, Georgiana Necchi…”

It was only because Marla McGivers was included on the list that Kirk understood that Khan was listing people who had died on the surface of Ceti Alpha V.

“They chose to live on this planet, and they knew the risk!” Kirk was getting defensive, but something about the way Khan spoke got under his skin, made him feel responsible. He tried to bury the feeling, knowing that this was the reaction Khan wanted him to had.

“And another one dozen of the crew of the Botany Bay who your doctor failed to revive.” Still, Khan ignored everything that Kirk had to say. “Elias Barrett, Fergus Laughton, Kirin Al Bassam”

“They had been dead for years by the time we found them!” Kirk couldn’t help but raise his voice, doing the only thing he could to defend his character as his enemy tried to blame him for so much death.

“So I was told, but I also recall that your doctor was in no rush to give my people the assistance they required.” Khan took a few swift steps toward Kirk and leaned closer. “All I want for the moment is for you to contemplate the blood that is already on your hands, and if your conscience can bear to have any more. We will speak again later, and I hope you will be ready to cooperate.”

---

Maya and Captain Albrecht stood by in the Portland’s transporter room, watching as the technician plugged in the information to beam aboard a group of three augments. He had openly spoke his mind about what he thought about those orders, but when both the captain and the first officer insisted that this was an essential step in negotiating the release of those hostages…well he felt as though his hands were tied.

Maya didn’t know who to expect to beam aboard, so when she saw that her half brother was among them she felt a wave of nausea. Of course he was going to be there. Arjun had no hesitation in taking command of the situation and letting everyone know that he was the one in charge.

“Captain, I need to speak with you in your ready room.” He spoke more to make a demand than a request. Captain Albrecht only gave a silent nod before she turned to lead the party away. Arjun did not so much as acknowledge his sister.

“Wait!” Maya called as she trailed behind. “I’m the reason why you were able to make it on this ship in the first place.”

Arjun turned abruptly. There was a fire in his eyes that made Maya regret saying anything at all, two years younger yet he always had power over her. “Minimal effort and minimal effect. Stay out of the way.”

Damned if she was going to sit back and let him steal her glory. The sharks were still circling around the prize marlin, only maybe she had been mistaken in who she thought they were.

## Chapter 15

“Enterprise to Kirk.” LeFevre’s spoke with force and urgency. Damn the warnings about interrupting the negotiations, if that wasn’t a sign that things had gone sideways down there, then nothing was. Still, he was met with only silence. “I need to speak with Admiral Kirk...” immediately.” Still no response.

LeFevre felt trapped in, none of the choices in front of him felt right, and he was in the dark. “Number One, I’d like to discuss the situation in my ready room. I have a feeling this won’t be the last time, either.”

“Of course, Captain.”

When they met in the ready room, Captain LeFevre immediately sank into a chair. His head was spinning, and he needed to do everything he could to try to feel grounded again.

“Kat...” LeFevre wasn’t usually the sort of captain to drop formalities, but this time it helped to ease some of the tension. “I’m not going to lie, I’m completely at as loss as to what to do.” He braced himself for another dose on unwavering optimism. Sometimes Commander Dalton’s perpetually positive outlook was comforting, but in a bleak situation it was hard to hear that everything was going to be alright. “Something happened down there, and I have every reason to believe that Kirk, Spock, and McCoy are either in danger or have already been harmed. I should sent down my own landing party, but every time someone touches down on that planet something terrible happens.”

“Captain, with all due respect, we don’t know that anything terrible happened to the landing party from the Portland,” Dalton answered

“They were held hostage, Kat, if just for a short while. Even if they made it back to the ship unharmed, that still counts as something terrible.”

“You’re right, Captain,” she agreed with a a solemn nod. “I think we should contact the Portland. They should know about those recent developments, and more communication with Captain Albrecht might help to dissuade any suspicion you might have.” Or confirm them.

“My thoughts exactly. Back to the bridge.”

Once he was back in the captain’s chair, LeFevre was ready to spring into action. “Hail the Portland. Captain Albrecht needs to know that the away team may be compromised.”

The bridge of the Portland appeared on screen, but the executive officer was sitting in the captain’s chair.

“I need Captain Albrecht on the bridge.” LeFevre began. “I’m afraid that something may have happened to the landing party, and I’d like to discuss it with everyone present.”

“The captain is in her ready room discussing an urgent matter.” Commander Conroy answered.

LeFevre didn’t have a good enough sense of Conroy’s character to judge if anything seemed off about him, but he didn’t like the answer regardless. What could possibly be more urgent? “Commander, I need to speak with her now,” he pressed.

“Understood.” Conroy flipped open his communicator. “Conroy to Albrecht. Your presence is required on the bridge. Captain LeFevre has an update about the landing party that he says is urgent.”

Silence. A pause long enough to make LeFevre worry before Albrecht’s voice could be heard. “On my way.”

LeFevre’s bad feeling was getting worse and turning into a sense of heaviness that grew and grew every moment until Captain Albrecht appeared on the bridge. He could help but study her closely, looking for any other signs of anything out of the ordinary. “Captain,” he began. I received some very alarming communications regarding the away team.”

“Troubling in what way?” Albrecht was still calm and steady, that alone was cause for concern for LeFevre.

“I tried to reach Admiral Kirk, but someone else answered...I don’t know who, presumably one of Khan’s men. He refused to let me speak to the Admiral and ignored any further attempts to communicate.

Captain Albrecht nodded. “I understand why that would seem troubling.”

“Is that...all you have to say?” LeFevre’s heart began to race. That wasn’t like Albrecht to have such a flat reaction.

“The situation down there is a delicate one, Captain.” Albrecht explained, flat as unbothered as ever. “I think it would be best not to be a disruption, and to wait until we have further communication from Admiral Kirk.”

“Understood.” LeFevre hid his real feelings and intentions. Technically he still had no more evidence than a little bit of unusual behavior, but he knew in his heart that something was wrong on the Portland, and he didn’t what to let on that he knew. “End transmission.”

“She doesn’t control me, and she doesn’t control my ship.” No more sitting by waiting, he needed to take action himself. “I’m going to prepare an away team. I need the toughest, strongest, smartest people on board this ship.

---

Maya had gone so suddenly from taking control to being shoved into the corner. She had no idea where the other two augments had gone or what their purpose was, and she tried to remind herself that she should at least be grateful that Arjun let her stay close to his side.

The two of them waited in silence in Albrecht’s ready room. Arjun had been nearly ready to set his plan in motion before the captain had been

called to the bridge and he allowed her to go. The moments that passed before her return dragged on at a glacial pace.

When Albrecht returned, Arjun leaned back in his seat and let a sly smile creep onto his face. After the door closed behind the captain, he spoke. “As I was saying before we were so rudely interrupted, you will shut off life support systems, beginning with the lowest decks. Any members of your crew who swear allegiance and willingness to submit to my father may be spared.”

Albrecht responded with only a simple, silent nod before she rose from her seat and went to work on the computer console. Arjun stood up as well and followed close behind her.

All Maya could do was sit still and seethe, afraid that if she moved a muscle or let herself think the wrong thing that she might burst with rage. Her brother’s back was turned to her, he was distracted, and she still had a phaser by her side. She tried to bury the thought, it would cause more problems than it would solve, but she would never have another chance like this.

After taking a deep breath, Maya drew her phaser and set it to kill. Her hands were shaking, so she took another steadying breath before she fired her weapon. After a burst of energy, she watched as her brother fell lifeless to the floor, and what she felt was...freedom. Damn whatever consequences may come, the person who had caused the most pain in her life was gone, she would enjoy it while she could.

“I’m in charge now.” Every inch of her body buzzed with frenetic energy. “Same orders, for now at least.

## Chapter 16

Khan was trying to play mind games, that much was clear. Well, you didn't need to have a genetically engineered brain to know how to say the right things to plant the right thoughts in a person's mind. It was a dirty way to fight, but the rules of engagement had already been thrown out. Kirk's window to act, however, was narrow.

He waited until the two augments led him away and he was well away from the bridge before he spoke, addressing both men. "Why do you follow him? And without question?" No response, that was about what he expected. "Seriously, I want to know. Out of several dozen supermen, no one has stopped to wonder if he really is the best among you the way he claims? Or is your unyielding loyalty simply born of tradition?"

More silence, this might be harder than he thought. Kirk addressed the larger of the two directly. "You know I bet you could take him in a fair fight. You're bigger and younger. What's your name?"

"Huy Nguyen."

Finally, something! "Huy Nguyen." Kirk repeated, "Huy Nguyen the man who usurped Khan Noonien Singh...has a nice ring, doesn't it."

The other augment chuckled at the idea. "You'd need brains too, and Huy's head there is practically empty." For a moment Huy looked like he was about to attack his companion, but Kirk intervened.

"Gentlemen, there's no need for any of that," Kirk pleaded. "Why fight each other when you could work together and make the most of both your strengths?" The two men gave each other a knowing look, just enough to give Kirk a glimmer of hope.

"So...what happened?" McCoy spoke solemnly yet with a sense of urgency.

"Nothing terrible, surprisingly." Kirk had a bit more confidence and grounding now. "No more hostages have been killed. Khan's trying to break me down, to convince me that I'm solely responsible for the deaths of those two hostages and his companions who died trying to survive on this planet. Maybe I've played a bigger part in it all that I thought."

"Come on, Jim, you know he can't actually believe that himself, he's just trying to manipulate you."

"Bones...sometimes people live with a distorted sense of the truth, but that's not what matters now." Kirk almost sounded excited to explain the new development. "I said some things that, with a bit of luck, could lead to some nasty infighting."

McCoy smiled. Not much they could do locked up, so anything in their favor felt like a little victory. "A planet full of people with more ambition and ability than anyone has a right to, I'm surprised they haven't spent the past quarter of a century vying for power and murdering one another."

"Presumably because they are also intelligent enough to understand that internal conflict works against the shared goal of survival," Spock added, another logical take.

"Well, the men I spoke to seemed more interested in asserting their dominance than anything. We'll wait and see where this goes."

---

Captain LeFevre worked in his ready room, pouring over personnel files to select the best, bravest, and strongest to send down to the planet. He already had his short list, but he had to make his choice with great care. Two away teams had failed, he wouldn't add a third.

"Bridge to Captain LeFevre. The Portland just hailed us.

"Tell Captain Albrecht she's going to have to wait." LeFevre replied. He didn't have time for this.

"It's not Albrecht, it's someone from their medical department. She says it's urgent."

Medical? That was unusual. "I'll speak to her in my ready room."

A moment later the Portland's sickbay appeared on screen, a Vulcan woman in frame. "Captain LeFevre. This is Doctor T'Ralia. I have information regarding the Portland."

"Make it quick, Doctor. I don't have much time." LeFevre answered brusquely.

"Of course, Captain. The Portland has been compromised."

Just as he suspected. He sighed heavily, things were looking bleak. "Compromised in what way? And how do you know?"

"I was part of Captain Albrecht's away team when we were taken hostage."

LeFevre nodded. "Go on."

"On the planet's surface an augment infected each of us with a creature that enters the brain and affects the host's free will."

"Yet you seem to have recovered." LeFevre's head was spinning trying to process this new information and all of its implications. Compromised wasn't a strong enough word, this made it sound like the Portland was under enemy control.

"Aside from a headache and dizziness, yes captain. I was not affected for long, it seemed that the creature did not find the Vulcan brain to be

a favorable environment. I have gone to great lengths, however to conceal the fact that I am of sound mind, and..." T'Ralia reached just of screen to pick up a sealed specimen jar with what appeared to be a large slug inside. "...I saved it for further study."

"So one of those is inside Albrecht's head?" LeFevre sounded shocked and looked disgusted.

"Yes, and first officer Conroy as well. My goal is to find a way to kill the creature while leaving the host unharmed."

"And you would need a covert way to administer the cure,"

LeFevre pointed out. "Well, you've got your work cut out for you, and I've got a lot to consider. I'm sorry that I can't share my plans, but I can't risk having the wrong people on your end overhear."

"Understood. End transmission."

Well, LeFevre had his mind made up on one thing, he sure as hell wasn't going to be a part of that away team himself. If the Portland was lost, she was liable to turn hostile, and if that happened he needed to be on board his ship.

## Chapter 17

That wonderful sense of freedom and release faded nearly as quickly as it had come on. Tension crept up Maya's spine as she watched Albrecht input codes into the computer console. With each passing moment she became increasingly aware that she had no idea what she was doing and truly had never had the chance to be in charge of anything. Even more troubling was the fact her brothers dear friends were on board somewhere and she was going to have to answer for his death.

"Go back to the bridge," Maya ordered. "Let them think the life support failure is accidental at first."

---

Without another word, Captain Albrecht left to return to the bridge. As soon as she was gone, Maya rushed to the computer console to do some investigating. If the ship's sensors were sensitive enough to detect augmented DNA on the planet, then there were probably able to find the location of those two augments.

"Captain, you've returned just in time. Life support in the lower decks is offline, and I can't determine the reason."

"Then do everything in your power to bring them back online." Albrecht was flat and dull, so unusual for a woman who was known to be quick to move to passion.

"I can't, it's been locked out manually."

Albrecht seemed to ignore that information. "Keep trying to find a workaround, and hail the Toyotomi."

"Captain, don't you think the life support failure is a more pressing issue?"

"This is equally as pressing. Hail the Toyotomi."

The bridge of the Toyotomi appeared on the screen. Khan was alone and seemed to have been expecting their communication.

"Captain Albrecht." Khan was practically purring, clearly pleased with himself and how everything was unfolding. "Your communication came later than I expected. I hoped. You have my permission to explain the situation."

"My allegiance lies with Khan." Albrecht was still flat and steady, unaffected by the gasps and looks of shock and horror from her crew. "And yours will too. I shut down the life support, and I am prepared to sacrifice the crew to ensure compliance."

"Captain!" The science officer was the first to speak up. "What the hell is going on?"

Albrecht drew her phaser and aimed it at the science officer. "Stand down." For the first time since the Ceti eel had infected her mind, Albrecht spoke with presence and boldness. "I am also prepared to use lethal force if necessary." Not another word from the bridge. "Send out a ship-wide announcement, the Portland is now operating under the authority of Khan Noonien Singh. Life support will be restored only when full cooperation has been secured. Three of Khan's best men are onboard, and more will be arriving shortly."

---

While working at the computer console, the first information Maya found was not the information she was looking for. A look at the lifesign readings aboard the ship told her just how many people it took to run a ship of this size, something she hadn't considered when the Toyotomi had been so much smaller. Nearly two hundred individuals, more than had ever lived on her home planet, and they were all likely to be dead in a few minutes. She couldn't stomach it, thinking about the one dead body she shared the room with and imagining that multiplied by two hundred. It seemed unnecessary, when they had control of the ship already. Well, if she was already going to be damned on both sides...

Maya tried to use the computer console to bring life support back online, but was unable. She needed voice authorization from the captain, and didn't have enough time to figure out a bypass. Maybe this was for the best. Frail body, weak mind, she couldn't allow herself to have a fragile heart too. Maya abandoned the idea and instead went back to work to locate those two augments. They were moving through the ship and...damn...seemed to be heading her way.

She took a deep breath, trying to quickly piece together a cover story, but nothing that came to mind would hold up under any scrutiny. Somehow time felt like it both slowed down and sped up at the same time until the door slid open to reveal the two augments on the other side. Maya's heart jumped. Whatever flimsy excuse she had in mind, she would have to make it work.

They entered the room with a commanding presence, but that soon shattered away when they noticed Arjun's lifeless body. "What happened here?" One demanded.

"Security personnel." Maya's terse answer came out quick and panicked, revealing not only revealing her lie but also her desperation.

"Is that so?" He continued as he stepped closer. "And they had no interest in you?"

"I've already been on board this ship for hours earning their trust. They think I'm on their side." Maya had regained some calm and confidence trying to think fast to get out of this mess. She had a phaser, but might not be fast enough to take out both of them and didn't want to have to explain two more deaths.

"And yet there is no sign of this security officer." Now the other augment spoke as he crouched down near the dead body. "No sign of a struggle, he was shot in the back...Maya, you're a terrible liar."

"Whatever it is you may be thinking..." she knew exactly what they were thinking, but she wasn't ready to admit any wrongdoing. "It would be in your best interest not to hurt me. I am the last of my line now. My father will not react well to losing his legacy."



“Is that so?” The first augment was speaking again and slowly stepping closer to Maya to back her into a corner. He towered over her, tall and broad even for an augment. “Because my understanding was that you were never meant to be part of that legacy, that you are too...” a look of disgust appeared on his face. “Contaminated, imperfect to be Khan’s successor. Meanwhile your replacement lies dead on the ground.”

“That isn’t true!” Maya was threatened and shouting, even though she knew in her heart that every word was true. She reached for her phaser, but wasn’t fast enough. The tall augment was close enough to grab her, and as Maya tried to break free another surge of pain hit her left shoulder, much stronger than the last time. The Vulcan doctor had warned that the new tissue would be delicate and vulnerable to re-injury, too bad she had only lasted a few hours.

“I don’t want to hurt you, but I do want you to answer for what you’ve done.” He held Maya still as he turned to speak to his friend. “I’m taking her back down to the planet. See to it that the crew cooperates, if they haven’t all suffocated by now.”

---

“Captain Albrecht,”. It was the science officer again, desperate panic in her voice. “If life support isn’t restored now...”

“Only if I have your complete and unyielding cooperation and a promise of loyalty to Khan Noonien Singh.” Albrecht was cold and harsh, unmoved by the fact that she could very well be the cause of so much death.

“You do,” the science officer’s voice was soft, defeated.

Albrecht looked out to address the entire bridge crew. “And everyone else?”

There was a heavy moment of silence before a young man, an ensign, spoke up. “Captain, you can’t do this...”

Albrecht didn't let him finish before she drew her phaser and fired, killing him instantly. “Are there any other objections?” Silence. “Very good. Computer, restore life support to the lower decks. And we’ll need to hail the Toyotomi again, I have a few updates.”

## Chapter 18

### Chapter Notes

Just a heads up for some uncomfy bits:

first section hints at super unhealthy, unsafe family relationships.

First paragraph of third section...not for people who think joint dislocation is icky.

His son was dead and his daughter poisoned against him. This ship was as good as his, but he was too fraught with grief and rage to appreciate his victory. His plan might be in motion with few real obstacles so far, and yet it felt as though everything was falling apart. When the man from the boarding party arrived on the bridge with Maya, he only glanced toward them briefly.

"I need to speak privately with Mays." Responding with only a nod the other augment left. "Captain Albrecht told me everything." His voice was low, but there were obvious signs of a struggle to contain his rage: twitching in his fingertips, tension in his neck. "And because she is incapable of deception in her current state, denying the truth will only waste time."

Maya opened her mouth to speak, but was at a loss as to what to say, whether to explain herself, or gamble on the hope that Albrecht had been vague on the details and spin a take to make it seem as though she had acted in self defense.

"Nothing to say for yourself?" Khan still didn't look at his daughter as he spoke. "Maya, to shoot a man in the back is a cowardly thing to do."

"I've wanted him out of my life for years, I thought that had always been obvious." Maya was shaking, partly from fear and partly from rage. "This was the first time I had a chance."

"My child, my heir, my legacy is gone, and why? Because you were jealous?" Khan still managed to contain his anger, but his control was slipping, his speech louder and more forceful.

"Because he made me fear for my life every time we had a disagreement!" Maya shouted.

"Cowardice again?" he shouted back, finally looking back at his only surviving child. "Still a poor justification for what you have done." He looked away again, pausing to try to regain control of himself. "Get away from me. The longer you are in my company the more likely I am to do something I will regret."

---

Maya didn't need a second warning, not another moment passed before she turned to leave the bridge. Where to, she had no idea.

Commander George McTavish: More combat experience than anyone else on the ship.

Ensign Somchai Theeravit: younger and less experienced, but a master at mixed martial arts and a few impressive competition titles to his name.

Lieutenant Saoirse Dougherty: experience in hostage negotiation

Lieutenant-Commander Torot: known for practicing a variety of martial arts for recreation, but mostly chosen for being a Vulcan. With the information from Doctor T'Rallia, LeFevre wanted to be sure to include someone with resistance to Ceti eels, and his increased Vulcan strength would also be an asset

Lieutenant-Commander Ishrissia Zh'izaolit: second only to McTavish in combat experience, and LeFevre had his hopes that her Andorian brain might also have some resistance to Ceti eels.

That was Captain LeFevre's landing party. Each of them the most qualified for the job, yet he still felt as though he was sending them to their deaths. The five of them were gathered with LeFevre in his ready room, along with Commanders Dalton. LeFevre had a grim look on his face.

"I'm not going to lie, I don't like the looks of this." His voice was stern, and he spoke slowly, careful to choose each word. "The five of you are the best I have to offer, but the odds are still stacked against us, staggeringly so, to be frank. The Augments took Albrecht and her crew with no trouble at all, and I'm afraid this may be the last time we speak. I hate that I'm sending you into danger, and that I won't be at your side, but I need to stay on the ship. The Portland...has been compromised, and I fear she may turn hostile."

A heavy moment of silence. Even Commander Dalton didn't have any encouraging morsel of optimistic wisdom. Torot was the first to speak in response. "Captain, based on my previous observations, we have reached the point in our briefing where you typically offer advice in the form of an ice hockey analogy."

LeFevre smiled, a welcome break in the tension. "Skate to where the puck is going, not to where it's been."

"Meaning?"

"Think three steps ahead and don't hesitate to act. Phasers set to kill, they're not going to hesitate to use lethal force, so neither should you."

Only exercise restraint if hostages are nearby.”

“Captain,” Dougherty spoke up this time. “Are you sure that’s necessary?”

LeFevre nodded. “Absolutely necessary. Admiral Kirk’s report stated that a hater set to stun has little effect.” A look toward Torot. “The same goes for the Vulcan nerve pinch. At any rate, we’re long past the point of diplomacy. They’ve forced our hand.”

---

Maya ducked down an empty corridor where she hoped she could be alone for a bit. She leaned her back against the wall to brace herself, and with her right hand she reached up to massage her injured shoulder, to work back into place the joint that was out of track, but fortunately not completely dislocated. It could have been worse. Pain she could handle, subluxation was an inconvenience, but it was all more favorable than the numbness and weakness she used to deal with.

The pain in her shoulder was insignificant compared to the pain in her heart. She felt torn apart, simultaneously wanting to disappear, to run far away, and to find something to keep herself busy enough to keep the uncomfortable thoughts from finding any room to grow.

She wandered the wreckage, hoping that moving around would clear her head, or distract her from her own feelings, or at least pass the time until she would meet whatever awful consequences she had in store. In time she found the place where a few of the hostages were held: three older men in Starfleet uniforms, one of them Vulcan. Maya kept her distance, even though she was the one who found them, for someone craving solitude just seeing other people felt like an intrusion.

“I suppose you’re here to tell me that Khan wants to speak to me again,” Kirk answered: tired and worried he would have no choice but to witness another death.

“I couldn’t tell you what my father wants,” Maya replied, still staying back. “And for now it’s in my best interest to stay away from him.” She paused to study the trio, piecing together who one of them had to be, the one who spoke. “You must be James Tiberius Kirk.”

“Lucky guess,” McCoy interjected, rolling his eyes.

“I was often told when I was little that I was meant to be a princess and that you were the only reason I wasn’t.” Maya sounded wistful, yet with a caustic edge.

“So, I guess that means you have the same vitriol toward me as your father and are just as eager to get on a starship and start taking over the galaxy?” Kirk asked, taunting a bit.

“Years ago I might have, but I came to realize that I even then I’ll never be good enough, and our relationship has been irreparably damaged. Besides, he has a ship now.” She reached a point where nothing seemed to matter anymore, where she regretted every one of her choices over the past few days, had no idea where she stood, and was sure her situation couldn’t get worse. Revealing some secrets to a few prisoners seemed small.

“What, this old wreck?” McCoy teased. Even in such a dire situation, he couldn’t help it.

“No, he has control of the Portland.”

“Are you sure?” Spock asked.

Maya nodded. “I was there.” A pause. “And I may have made choices that set it into motion.” She braced herself for condemnation and for looks of shock and anger and received exactly what she expected.

“So you came here to gloat?” McCoy accused.

“No, I wasn’t expecting to find you,” Maya explained. Her heart raced again, this was what she always tried to avoid, feeling so raw and vulnerable. “And I can’t stop talking because I have too many thoughts and feelings that are too big to keep inside my head. I’ve made a mess of things for both sides, and I can’t make sense of anything anymore.” A long pause. “I should go.” She turned and began to walk away, but stopped when she heard Kirk call her name.

“Maya. It is Maya, right?” Maya stopped and turned to look back at Kirk. “What exactly did you do?”

“It’s a long story,” she answered with a sigh. “It began when I thought finding my way on the Portland would make my father proud and ended when everything fell apart around me and I killed my own brother.”

“Even their sibling rivalry is enhanced,” McCoy muttered, but Kirk gave him a sharp glance to quiet him.

“Is that what you want?” Kirk tried to be gentle and soft as he spoke. “To make your father proud of you?”

Maya sighed and shook her head. “I don’t know what I want anymore....To be safe. To leave this place and not have to die on this rock.”

“Bold of you to try the tactic you tried with Captain Albrecht.” Kirk abandoned the sympathetic angle, speaking with an accusatory tone.

“I would willingly go with you as a prisoner, even though I’m sure I’ve done enough to be executed on your planet.”

“The Federation does not execute criminals,” Spock responded. “We rehabilitate them”

“I can’t consider this,” Kirk shook his head. “Not now. Not until after the remaining civilian hostages are safe and the three of us are back on the Enterprise, then I might be able to consider your case.”

“More blood on your hands, Kirk.” Again, Maya turned to go, but even after her back was turned she continued to speak. “I could have helped you. I could contact the Enterprise and get you out of here, but I don’t blame you for not trusting me. I wouldn’t trust myself either.”

## Chapter 19

Maya walked away from that interaction feeling unsatisfied, even though she went in with no expectations and no idea what she hoped to get out of it. Back to wandering the wreckage while guessing when and how she would eventually answer for her brother's murder. She went back to the laboratory where she first contacted the Portland, hoping at least for the solitude she craved.

Back at the same computer console from before, Maya skimmed through databases and records, more keeping herself busy than anything. It had occurred to her that there was nothing stopping her from contacting the Enterprise herself, but after having her plans dissolve in front of her, it didn't seem worth the trouble, only to get turned down again or create another disaster.

The sound of approaching footsteps sent a jolt of energy down Maya's spine. She stood upright and jerked her head to see, standing in the doorway, two men she knew well: Huy Nguyen and Xanti Vasquez. The pair of them were often seen together and claimed to be the best of friends, even though they never seemed to stop arguing with each other.

"Maya," Xanti spoke, softer than she had known him to be. "Word travels fast, we know what you did."

Panic set in. Maya had no way to defend herself, and even though she had never seen Huy moved to real anger, he was built like a human shaped battering ram. "If you're here to take justice into your own hands, I would advise against it." She spoke with force, well aware that her words might be her only means of preserving her life.

"We aren't interested in justice," Huy spoke this time. "We want your allegiance."

"I don't understand." Maya was interested, if confused. She was still on high alert, but at least didn't feel immediate danger.

"We've begun to question if Khan really is the best choice to lead," Huy continued. "And we intend to remove him."

An impossible scheme if ever she heard one, but she was still listening. "I hope you have a good plan."

"It's in its infancy," Xanti spoke this time. "What we need now is numbers."

Maya had to fight to stop herself from laughing, but the proposal still appealed to her. She didn't care about their goals, didn't think she had a chance of succeeding, but their allegiance meant their protection. "And I'd be thrilled to be rid of him. We have the same goals."

A goal was about all they had: no plan, no support, no weapons...well, they could do something about that last one. Maya began to search around the laboratory. "They we're doing astrophysical research, but there might be something here a little more deadly than blunt objects. Huy might be able to break bones with his bare hands, but I can't."

Only moments after they came to their agreement, the sound of footsteps coming down the corridor. All three froze, alert and ready when another augment stepped through the door. A shiver went down Maya's spine when she saw who it was: Katya Mikhailovna, an old sweetheart of hers and one of the few people to show her kindness that wasn't laced with pity.

She looked toward Maya. "Khan wants to speak to you again." Her tone was soft and distant, as if she didn't want any part of it.

Maya stepped forward, only willing to give herself up because of who was speaking to her, but Huy spoke first. "We don't take orders from him anymore." His voice was just as powerful as one would expect for a man of his size and strength. "And anyone who refuses to join us is our enemy."

"You know I can't do that." Katya still spoke softly, frail and frightened as she began to shrink away, but Huy lunged toward her,

"Huy, dammit, stop!" Maya shouted, rushing towards him, but she wasn't fast enough. Huy head Katya in his hold, and even though she struggled fiercely, her broke her neck with little effort and dropped her lifeless body on the ground.

The world was a blur. Huy and Xanti were arguing about something, but Maya didn't care enough to listen. The few people she knew who treated her with genuine kindness and dignity were all dead. All except for Captain Albrecht, but she wouldn't have much longer anyway.

---

The landing party beamed down to a section of the wreckage where the ship's sensors detected to life forms. They had their phasers at the ready—and set to kill as per Captain LeFevre's instructions—but the fewer augments they encountered the better.

"Move quickly and quietly," McTavish command. "We find the hostages and get out."

Carefully they moved through the wrecked ship, ready to spring into action. Before they left the Enterprise they had been able to study the layout of the Toyotomi, but there were limits to the usefulness of that knowledge. They didn't know where any augments might be lurking, where the hostages were, or where the wreck might have hazards or unsafe areas. Their first few minutes aboard were uneventful, with the team only encountering two augments along the way, who Zh'izaolit dispatched without hesitation.

The wreck was eerily quiet until the approached the ship's laboratory and they heard the voices of two men shouting. With his phaser ready McTavish inched toward the doorway. Inside he saw three young augments, the two men arguing. The moment he was spotted, they stopped and the larger of the two ran toward them, but McTavish was quick with his phaser and killed the man instantly with one shot.

"Where are the hostages?" He demanded. "Don't think about trying anything, I've got four more of my people around the corner, all with phasers set to kill, no matter what enhancements the two of you have, those odds don't look good for you."

The remaining man glared at McTavish as the rest of the party rounded the corner. "I have no more love for Khan, but I'm not inclined to help

the person who just killed my best friend.”

“I’m not giving you a choice.”

“Commander,” Dougherty spoke up, but she still had her phaser read. “This man isn’t acting with hostility.”

McTavish ignored her and fired his phaser anyway. “Still too much of a threat to keep alive.” He looked to the remaining survivor, a young woman. “And what about you?”

“I only know where three of the hostages are,” she answered, voice trembling. “I can tell you where they are if you accept my surrender.”

McTavish didn’t stand down yet. “Tell me your name.”

“Maya.”

“Your full name.”

“Maya Noonien Singh.”

“That makes me less inclined to trust you.”

“I can’t blame you for that.” Maya sounded defeated, pinned in on either side by people who wanted her dead. “But I’m exhausted, unarmed, injured, and have made my father into my enemy. I was led to believe that your Federation was known for treating people with compassion and dignity. Am I wrong?”

McTavish still did not back down, but Torot had something to say. “Commander. There is a way to know beyond a shadow of a doubt if she is trustworthy.”

“A mind meld?” Theeravit guessed, and Torot nodded.

“Only if she consents,” Torot added.

All eyes were on Maya, but even with phasers pointed at her she hesitated. “I need to know what’s involved,” she answered, choking on her own words, a bead of sweat forming on her brow.

“Why? Something to hide?” McTavish pressed.

“Have you never had memories and feelings you wanted to keep private?” Maya snapped.

“It is an intimate sharing of minds,” Torot explained, clinical as one would expect a Vulcan to be, yet clearly trying to instill a sense of trust and calm. “You have my word that anything not directly related to our mission will be kept in the strictest confidence.”

Maya nodded. “Then do it.”

Torot put his phaser away. “I must ask everyone to lower their weapons.” Everyone looked to McTavish, who made no move and stayed silent. “I will not perform a mind meld under duress.”

“Very well. Phasers down,” McTavish commanded, though he sounded annoyed, and his team complied.

Torot began to walk toward Maya, slow and calm. “Try not to put up any resistance.”

Maya chuckled to break the tension. “You’re saying that to someone who hates to even talk about her feelings.”

“Close your eyes and breath deeply.” Torot placed his fingertips on the side of Maya’s face. “Your mind to my mind, your thoughts to my thoughts.”

---

“LeFevre to Doctor T’Ralia.” He had his communication officer ensure that he would have secure and private communication with the the Portland’s sickbay, and he wasn’t in the mood to waste time on pleasantries. Good thing a Vulcan wouldn’t be bothered by getting straight to business.

The screen turned on. “Doctor T’Ralia here.”

“Any updates?”

“We have lost all control of the ship. Captain Albrecht is acting under control of Khan, and several augments are on board. I have no reason to believe anyone suspects that I am not similarly compromised. In fact, I believe the reason that I was also infected with Ceti eel was less to control me and more to ensure that I could be returned to the ship alive without risk of revealing what I witnessed.”

“Understood. And what about your research?”

“The eel is remarkably resilient. I may be able to synthesize a compound that could kill it, but it would be a neurotoxin to humans.”

“So we can’t regain the Portland without killing Captain Albrecht...”. LeFevre’s voice trailed off. A Starfleet ship full of Starfleet personnel, and now it looked as though the only option was to proceed as if it was an enemy ship.

“A precise dose would be effective yet non-lethal, but the neurological damage would be significant.”

That didn't sound much better. "Unless you can think up a better idea, that may be our only option. I have a team of my best people planetside to rescue the hostage by force. I'll feel a lot better once they're back to safety." That was still a big if, but sometimes it did feel better to adopt a little of Commander Dalton's positivity.

"I will send over some information that might help you," T'Ralia responded. "I have genetic samples from Khan's daughter. The augments have genetic markers that, when integrated into the ship's sensors, are enough to differentiate them from unmodified humans."

"Send it over. You know, this would be a lot easier if that might be enough to engineer a biological agent that only affects them."

"Captain...was that statement meant to be sarcastic?" The doctor looked perplexed. "Because if it was said in earnest, what you're suggesting would be genocide."

"Don't talk to me about genocide," LeFevre looked away as he spoke, his voice low and his jaw clenched. "I have First Nation ancestors who survived the atrocities committed by the Canadian government, and that pales in comparison to what Khan did in the past and what he plans to do if he gets his way. End transmission."

---

Maya was shaking and holding back tears, such a contrast to Torot who appeared to be unaffected by the experience.

"Well?" McTavish asked.

"She knows where Kirk, Spock, and McCoy are, and she was telling the truth about being injured and on hostile terms with Khan"

"Can she be trusted?"

"For now, I believe so."

"I thought looking into her mind was supposed to give you a definitive answer." McTavish's grip on his phaser tightened.

"Her motives and personal feelings are complex, Commander. She played a part in the takeover on the Portland, but was also driven to turn against her family."

"If you have the information you need from her, I think she's still too much of a liability." McTavish raised his weapon, forgetting Torot's request from earlier.

"Commander, if I may." It was Dougherty again, speaking more assertively than before. "She won't be a liability in the brig on the Enterprise. I can escort her. Since we began taking a more forceful approach, I feel as though I have less to offer here."

McTavish paused to consider this, then nodded. "Very well."

Dougherty took out her communicator. "Dougherty to Enterprise. Two to beam up. Have security prepare to receive a prisoner."

---

Torot led the way to the location he had learned from Maya's mind. It wasn't far to go, and the only resistance they met was one more augment, a middle aged woman who tried to attack before they could fire their phasers. McTavish was troubled by the stillness aboard the wreck, he couldn't but wonder if the reason why so few people were on board was because more of them had beamed aboard the Portland.

A massive grin appeared on McCoy's face when Torot came into view. "Never thought I'd be so thrilled to see a Vulcan face!" Spock offered a silent response by raising one eyebrow.

"I would advise against celebrating just yet," Torot answered as he punched in the controls to open the door. "Our situation is dire."

"He's right. The Augments have taken control of the Portland." McTavish explained. "Captain LeFevre sent us."

"Wait..." Kirk spoke up. "Take Bones and Spock back to the Enterprise. Khan will only negotiate with me, if I'm not here..."

"No way, Jim!" McCoy interrupted. "Either we're going together, or we're staying behind together. Besides, if any of those augments see that two of us have disappeared, they're going to know what's going on."

"We're here to free the civilians too," McTavish continued. "Negotiation isn't an option any more, Khan isn't playing fair."

"I don't think he's capable of playing fair," Kirk replied. "I can't say I envy you, rushing head on into a den of angry, aggressive superhuman."

McTavish shrugged, "As it would turn out, genetic enhancements still can't beat a phaser set to kill."

Kirk smiled "I like the way you think. I want nothing more than to accompany you, but they took our phasers, I'm afraid I would only be in the way."

"You belong on the Enterprise, Admiral. Any idea where the civilians are being held?"

Kirk shook his head. "No, but it must be near the bridge."

"Right into the lion's den. Don't worry, Admiral, we'll speak again soon." McTavish took out his communicator. "McTavish to Enterprise. We haven't found the civilians yet, but we are here with Kirk, Spock, and McCoy, ready to beam them up."

## Chapter 20

Three hostages were safe, but their priority was always to save the civilians. McTavish and his team began to head toward the bridge, grateful that the ship was small but they still had no idea what to expect on this final push.

“Enterprise to away team,” LeFevre’s voice came in over the communicator.

“Go ahead,” McTavish answered.

“We have new information that may allow us to simply beam up the hostages.”

“That would have made everything much easier if we had known a little while ago.”

“We still need you down there, it’s not so simple. The sensors can differentiate them from the augments, but there are too many to beam up at once. We need you to secure the area to prevent a massacre once hostages start to vanish.”

“Understood. Can you tell how many there are, and their location?”

“Thirty human lifesigns, on the deck directly above you.” Damn. There were originally forty crew aboard the Toyotomi. “And eight augments.” Double damn, outnumbered two to one.

“I can’t say I like those odds, but at least we aren’t wandering around clueless in the dark. We’ll talk again soon, that’s a promise. McTavish out.”

McTavish looked at his team. Even though Dougherty had the least combat experience amount them, her presence would be missed. “Well, you all heard the captain. They’ve got the advantage of numbers, we’ve got better weapons and can take them by surprise. I don’t like the idea of setting phasers to kill when so many civilians are around, but we don’t have a choice. Perfect precision is a necessity.”

“Commander, are you open to suggestions for strategies?” Theeravit asked.

“Of course. No one of us is smarter than all of us.”

“What if we lured them away from the hostages?”

McTavish nodded. “That was going to be my plan, for two to go out ahead and engage, then retreat to encourage the augments to chose where the rest of us will be waiting.”

“Commander, I want to lead the advance,” Theeravit suggested, eagerly. “And I would like Lieutenant-Commander Zh’izaolit to accompany me, but I trust your judgment if you think another choice would be better.”

“Very good. We’ll all go up together, and the two of you can take the lead.”

The party moved slowly and quietly up to the next deck, well aware of the enhanced senses of the augments and of the fact that if they were seen or heard too soon they would lose the element of surprise. All four paused together at they’d of a long corridor before McTavish spoke. “This is where we split. I wish I had a few encouraging hockey analogies to share. Just keep your eye on the ball...or puck.”

With a smile and a nod, Theeravit and Zh’izaolit continued on, still slow, careful, and quiet until they passed the door. Two augments stood on the other side, and Theeravit greeted them with a shot from his phaser, but he missed. As planned, Theeravit and Zh’izaolit turned to sprint back to where McTavish and Torot were ready for them. What they hadn’t planned for was the speed with which the augments could move, and the two of them were close enough to overtake Theeravit and Zh’izaolit. Theeravit was quick enough to turn around and fire his phaser, killing one. The other, however, got close enough to Zh’izaolit to tackle her to the ground. Theeravit aimed his phaser at the assailant but hesitated, not trusting his aim when the two of them were so close. His hesitation proved to be a mistake, however, when the augment jerked Zh’izaolit’s head to break her neck. No reason to hesitate anymore, Theeravit took lethal aim. Now six remained.

Three more augments began to follow them down the corridor, and these were armed with phasers.

“How in the hell did they get phasers?!” McTavish shouted as he fired. A miss.

“Presumably, those are the weapons taken from Kirk, Spock, and McCoy.” Even when literally under fire, Torot was calm and steady.

Theeravit fired his weapon, a hit, but their advantage didn’t stay for long. One of the armed augments fired his own weapon and killed Theeravit instantly.

Two to five, two of whom were armed. There was no good way out of this. McTavish ducked behind cover and pulled out his communicator.

“McTavish to Enterprise. Start beaming out those civilians now.”

“Is the area secure?”

“It isn’t, and it’s not going to be, but the augments are more interested in killing us, so get those people out of here!”

Perhaps it had been a mistake to send Katya to retrieve Maya, Khan’s reasoning had been that his daughter might be more receptive to someone she trusted, but Katya had always been too gentle. It was a very real possibility that they had run away together, but in a way that could be its own form of justice. The two of them could not survive on their own.



He was ready to give the order to send someone else to go find them, someone with a stronger heart and a clearer head, when he heard the sound of phaser fire nearby. Khan sprung out of the captain's chair and to his feet, ready to take action, but only a moment passed before he regained his calm. He had his ship, everything here was now just a means to make Kirk feel the sting of remorse for his actions: non-essential no matter how satisfying it felt. He went to the computer console and hailed the Portland. "Khan to Portland. I need to be onboard. Now."

---

"Enterprise to McTavish."

The civilian hostages were all safely onboard the Enterprise, but no one from the landing party was responding.

"Enterprise to Theeravit."

still no response

"Enterprise to Zh'izaolit."

Nothing. They had come to rescue the hostages, the hostages were safe, yet their challenges were only just beginning.

"Enterprise to Torot."

Silence again. Even the non-responsive away team seemed like a small problem next to the fact that the Portland was under control of the augments.

"Captain..." Kirk was the first to speak, his voice soft and heavy with pity. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be, Admiral, not yet." LeFevre spoke with desperate determination. "I haven't given up on them yet, even though we have other priorities for now."

"Captain, the Portland is hailing us."

"On screen." LeFevre sounded annoyed, not wanting to be interrupted and also lacking the patience for another conversation with Albrecht in her compromised state.

Instead of Albrecht sitting in the captain's chair it was none other than Khan Noonien Singh. LeFevre's heart jumped, but it was Kirk who spoke first.

"Khan!" Kirk shouted. "What have you done with Captain Albrecht?"

"Not to worry, Admiral." Khan was cool and confident as ever. "This is still her ship, so it serves my interests to keep her alive...for now. But it seems we all have what we want. I have my ship, you are back aboard yours, you have the surviving hostages safe and sound. I will only make one more request, to be allowed to leave this place quietly, and you will never hear from me again."

"We have your daughter."

Khan paused, conflicted, but the moment passed. "You can keep her. End transmission."

## Chapter 21

### Chapter Notes

Content notes:

More references to unhealthy/unsafe family life

A single use of an F bomb. If Pg-13 movies get three, surely I can have one.

“Captain, the Portland’s impulse engines are powering on. They’ve raised their shields.”

“We can’t let them get away, Captain!” Kirk spoke with the same sense of urgency.

“I know, Admiral, and we won’t. Go to red alert” LeFevre knew what he had to do, but it still felt like a kick in the gut. To fire on a Starfleet ship full of Starfleet crew, it felt like a betrayal even though he knew it was necessary. “Fire phasers, target the pylons below the starboard warp nacelle, let’s cut them off at the knees. And raise our shields, I don’t think Khan will react calmly to being fired upon.”

His crew acted quickly. LeFevre and Kirk kept their eyes fixed on the viewscreen, watching closely as the ray of energy rushed through space toward the Portland.

“Their shields have been reduced to ninety percent, and they’ve targeted us.”

“Of course they targeted us. Evasive maneuvers, and keep wearing down those shields. I only want to disable the Portland, for the sake of the crew who got caught up in all of this.”

“Captain,” Admiral Kirk spoke up, firm yet calm. “As much as I’d hate to put the crew in the way of undue harm, Khan won’t show that kind of restraint.”

“Understood.” LeFevre still had his eyes fixed in the screen, it gave him a sense of control, even though he knew by the time he saw anything on screen it would be too late to react. The Portland launched a photon torpedo, and just as soon as LeFevre saw it on screen the ship felt a massive rumble.

“Torpedo deflected, our shields are at eighty seven percent.”

Damn. This was going to take a while.

After the last strike, the Portland re-engaged her impulse engines and began to move away.

“Follow as closely as possible, and keep firing, we need to break through the shields and disable them before they can engage warp engines.”

“Captain, there’s a faster way.” Kirk again, just as firm but with more urgency.

“Enlighten me, Admiral.” LeFevre had not looked at Kirk during this exchange, eyes still locked on screen.

“Access codes, Captain.” Kirk explained. “One Starfleet ship against another, we have the codes in our database to access the Portland’s computers and gain some control.”

“Perfect, get on it, but my order to keep wearing down those shields in the mean time still stands.” LeFevre wanted to ensure he had contingencies for his contingencies.

Kirk moved toward the communications officer and stood nearby to guide her through the process. They had nearly broken through when the communications officer ran into an obstacle.

“Admiral, we can’t simply take control. This needs to be sent as a data transmission, which they have to accept.”

“Hail them,” Kirk commanded. “I can handle this.”

The bridge of the Portland appeared on screen. “A strange time to choose to talk, Admiral, after you have fired on my ship.”

“Please forgive our initial aggression. This is Captain LeFevre’s ship, and that was his call. We’ve spoken and come to an agreement, there will be less loss of life if you simply take your ship and leave.”

“Such a sudden and extreme change of heart,” Khan replied, lingering over each word like a cat toying with its prey. “You’ll understand if I am reluctant to trust you.”

“Of course, and that’s why, as a show of good faith I’ve compiled a list of nearby pre-warp planets. With your enhanced abilities and advanced technology, they might think of you as a god.” Kirk gave a knowing look to the communication officer. “Go ahead and send it.”

As the communications officer worked, Kirk turned to watch the viewscreen, prepared to witness a violent outburst and grateful to be far away and safely on his own ship.

“Sir” a frantic voice could be heard from the Portland’s bridge, but the speaker was just off screen. “Our shields and weapons have been disabled.”

Khan look confused, frantic, and frustrated. He turned his head to shout an order. “Then bring them back online.”

“I can’t, we’ve been locked out!”

“I don’t have time for this,” Khan shouted back. “Get us out of here!”

“Engines are offline.”

“Get Albrecht back here to regain control of her ship.”

Kirk had to admit that he found a sense of satisfaction in watching Khan scrambling and desperate. “Good luck cleaning up that mess, Khan. End transmission.”

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Maya’s accommodations aboard the Enterprise were considerably less comfortable, but that was the difference between being a guest and being a prisoner. No computer console, no PADD, not even a paperback novel. Nothing to pass the time except her own thoughts, and Maya hated getting lost inside her own head in the best of times, let alone when she was drowning in fear and grief. She laid on her back on the floor of her cell, desperate to find some sense of grounding when it felt as though the world crumbled around her.

The sound of approaching footsteps yanked her back to reality. She buried those uncomfortable thoughts and got back to her feet, not wanting to appear weak. Outside her cell she saw one of the men who had been held with Kirk.

“What do want?” She tried to sound bold and forceful, but could hide the fact that she was frightened and exhausted.

“I’m a doctor, you’re injured. I want to do my job.” His voice was gruff, but there was a soft kindness in his eyes.

“Your ship is under attack, I imagine there are people who need medical attention more than I do.”

“Not just yet, our shields are still holding strong, and we’ve got an entire medical team in sickbay. If I’m needed, they’ll call for me.” He entered a code in the panel on the wall to disable the force field. “Besides, I’d like to talk to you. You’ve made an enemy of your father, and the enemy of my enemy is my friend. I think you might be able to help us.”

“I’ve already helped, and I don’t believe in giving something for nothing.” Still, she tried to hide her fear, and still she did a poor job of it.

“And I’m here to give you medical attention, so you are getting something in return.” Any of the harshness he had when he first spoke was gone, replaced with gentle patience. “Sit.”

Maya complied, perching on the edge of the cot, her back straight and tense. “I never got your name, and I haven’t been able to guess it. The same goes for the Vulcan who was with you,”

“That was Spock,” McCoy answered as he used his tricorder to examine Maya’s shoulder. “And I’m Doctor McCoy. How old is this injury?”

“Initially?” Maya had to pause to think. She and Katya had been nineteen, Arjun only seventeen. Just a bunch of teenagers fighting over something trivial. “Five years ago. The doctor on the Portland did most of the work to fix the nerve damage and scar tissue, but warned that the new tissue would be susceptible to re-injury, and that happened...recently. Hours ago.”

“Delicate new tissues and five years of muscular atrophy, a weak joint is an unstable one,” McCoy thought out loud as he worked. “You’ve also got some anatomical quirks that make injury more likely.”

“Wonderful.” Maya’s voice was heavy with sarcasm. “Add it to my list of imperfections.”

“Don’t beat yourself up about it, no one’s perfect.”

“Everyone I’ve ever known has been pretty damn close.” Maya spoke softly and looked away.

“Everyone?” McCoy sat beside her, his own voice growing just as soft and gentle. “What about your mother? Your brother?”

“My mother died when I was very young, and Arjun had a different mother.” She couldn’t look at McCoy as she spoke. These were those twisty feelings that she tried so hard to bury, and over the past day they kept getting pulled up to the surface.

“Sorry I brought it up,” McCoy answered as he shook his head. “Anyway, I was hoping to talk to you about your motives and where you stand in all this.”

Maya inched away, feeling threatened and backed into a corner. “I already gave all that information in excruciating detail to the Vulcan who performed the mind meld, I suggest you consult with him.”

“Unfortunately,” the harshness was back in his voice, stringer and with an acidic bite. “Torot hasn’t been responding to any communication and is presumed to be dead. The whole landing party is presumed dead, except for Dougherty who got out early.”

Maya’s head was spinning. Why did she feel pity for people who had tried to kill her? “If you were planning on bringing Spock down here, I won’t consent to another mind meld.”

“And I wouldn’t dare suggest it.” His voice was soft and gentle again. “I’d rather do this the human way, just talking.”

Maya leaned back, silent as she tried to sort through her thoughts, but they all raced by too fast for her to keep up. “I don’t know where to begin. I don’t even know what my own motives are. Nothing makes sense.”

She looked back toward McCoy. His expression was sympathetic and encouraging.

“Only a few days ago, my goals were to earn my father’s approval and to get off of Ceti Alpha V, not to conquer worlds but only to live somewhere where I might feel normal.” She struggled to get out each word, but to finally put her thoughts out into the world felt like an immense release. “I was willing to achieve those goals by any means necessary.”

“Not unreasonable, it’s just that the way you set about it was more than a little extreme.”

“It had to be extreme, Doctor. I’ve never been good at anything no matter how hard I try.” She leaned her head back to stare at the ceiling, not matter how vulnerable she felt, Maya was determined to put in a brave face. “All Captain Albrecht did was take pity on me and trust me, and she’s going to die a horrible death, and I’m just as responsible for any deaths among the Portland’s crew.”

Silence fell as both parties took time to process. McCoy was the first to break the silence, speaking barely above a whisper. “Maya, look at me.” Another heavy moment of silence before Maya turned her head to face the doctor. “I can think of one way that you’re better than your father and the rest of the augments, at least the ones I’ve dealt with. You’ve got a sense of compassion.”

“Reminding me of my flaws, again, Doctor?” Maya sighed and looked away again. “I was taught that compassion is a weakness.”

“Maybe if you’re the kind of person who commits genocide and conquers planets, but you’re not that kind of person.”

“I am the kind of person to try to take a ship by force and to kill their brother.” Maya looked straight ahead now, shoulders slumped, trying to avoid McCoy’s gaze.

“Yet you have remorse, that alone shows you aren’t entirely morally bankrupt. It’s not too late to start making the right choices, and choices are what defines a person.”

“I have no remorse for killing my brother,” Maya snapped.

“I’m not even going to try to make sense of your family dynamics.” McCoy shook his head. “But I do know for certain that you’re better than them.”

“How are you so sure? You barely know me.” She looked back at McCoy, no longer trying to hide her fear and pain.

“Let me put it this way, when I revived your father the first thing he did was put a knife to my throat. Meanwhile, that forcefield has been down the entire time I’ve been here and you haven’t made a move to escape.” A sly smile. “Don’t get any ideas.” McCoy stood up. “I should go, but I’m sure we’ll talk again soon. We’re going to need any help you can offer.”

“Doctor, if you ask for anything more from me, remember that I don’t give anything without receiving something in return.” Maya tried to sound a little bolder, tried of feeling vulnerable.

“One piece of advice. Stop looking at everything as a transaction.”

---

Captain Albrecht had no words to describe her state of mind since she returned from Ceti Alpha V. She acted without thinking and felt as if she was in a daze. Her mind was empty, no thoughts or ideas of her own, and any instructions she was given filled her head. Yet, there was one small voice that felt as if everything was wrong, but it wasn’t strong enough to do anything other than feel.

She was unaware of what was happening aboard the Portland since Khan came onboard, her only instructions were to wait in her ready room until she was needed, if she was needed. Her best guess was that they were under attack, based to the turbulence she felt, but truly she was numb and unbothered by it.

The door opened, an augment stood on her other side. “You’re needed on the bridge.” Without thought or question she followed.

“Direct hit to starboard pylons. Extensive hull damage...they’re trying to knock off the nacelle.”

Albrecht was equally as unbothered to hear about the damage done to her ship.

“Captain Albrecht,” Khan addressed her without looking at her. “Enterprise is trying to take control of my ship, I trust you have the authorizations to regain control. Shields, weapons, and engines in that order.”

Albrecht simply nodded. She had the codes to bypass the external control, but it was a process that had a few complex steps.”

“Quickly, Captain,” Khan continued as Albrecht worked. “And I trust you know how to perform the same maneuver on Enterprise.”

Albrecht nodded. Shields up...and then she froze, hands shaking violently, stomach tied into knots.

*This isn’t his fucking ship.*

She collapsed to the floor, shaking and dry heaving. The same augment who had come to her ready room rushed toward her and grabbed her by the upper arm. Albrecht’s reaction was like a threatened animal: kicking, screaming, and scratching. Still, it was not enough to overcome the strength of the man who tried to hold her still.

“Don’t kill her, we still might need her,” Khan ordered. “Take her to sickbay and have the Vulcan doctor sedate her.”

---

Doctor T'Ralia had been busy ever since the augments began taking control of the ship. Her priority had been to the injured, and even though life support systems had been restored before mass devastation, there were still people who needed treatment after surviving low oxygen conditions. Any spare moment she stole to work on that compound that would kill the Ceti eel but leave the host alive. Even the minimum effective dose would cause further brain damage to a human.

Her work was interrupted when an augment entered sickbay with Captain Albrecht. He had her restrained, but she put up a spirited fight. The augment had bloody scratches on his face and neck.

"She's become unstable. Sedate her. Heavily."

"Of course." T'Ralia still had to act as if she was under the influence of the Ceti eel, but the hypospray she grabbed did not contain a sedative, but the neurotoxin. She still didn't have the dosage worked out precisely, but this might be her only opportunity to act. It would be illogical to not take the chance while she had it. She injected the neurotoxin into the side of Albrecht's neck, and the effect was immediate. Albrecht stopped struggling, and went limp for a moment before she began to shake again. The augment dropped her, and she collapsed to the ground in a trembling mess.

"What's going on?" The augment demanded.

"A side effect," T'Ralia answered, plain and flat. Technically she was telling the truth, she only choice not to state what caused the side effect.

"You're lying...you shouldn't be able to lie, I was told they put a Ceti eel in you too." He came closer, stepped over Albrecht as if she was a pile of trash.

As soon as she saw him moving toward her, T'Ralia sprang to action. She grabbed his upper arm and pinched the nerve where his neck met his shoulder, but it had no more effect than restraining him. That at least gave her the chance to take the only weapon she had in reach, the hypo spray full of neurotoxin, and inject the remaining amount. That would have been enough to kill four humans, hopefully it would be enough to disable one augment.

The augment collapsed instantly to the ground, and T'Ralia gave her full attention to Captain Albrecht. She lifted the captain's still shaking body from the ground and placed her in a bio bed. Timing was crucial. She needed to give the treatment enough time to work before administering antitoxin, but waiting too long would cause irreparable brain damage. Her eyes were fixed on her tricorder, waiting to the exact moment when the Ceti eel's lifesign was too faint to register before injecting the antitoxin.

Albrecht groaned, a welcome sign, it mean she was alive and responsive. "What happened?" Her speech was slurred and slow. She tried to sit up but couldn't control her body.

"Try not to move. You've suffered some brain and nerve damage. Some of it may be reversible."

"No. No." Albrecht tried to shake her head, but with her lack of control instead her head flopped from side to side. "Before that. I remember everything I did...why?"

"I can better explain when you are in a more stable condition and better able to understand." T'Ralia explained as she worked. "For now, the best words of comfort I can give is that you have not been in control of yourself since we returned from the planet. All of your choices and actions were done at the behest of Khan Noonien Singh."

"That doesn't help, Doctor." Tears began to well in Albrecht's eyes. "That doesn't help."

## Chapter 22

The Portland had no shields, no engines, and no weapons, and with one solid hit they were surely only moments away from fully disabling the Portland's engines and moving on to what would be the final and probably greatest challenge: getting rid of the augments while keeping the crew safe.

"Fire on the starboard pylon again, and be ready to come around to reach the port side too." LeFevre ordered. This must be what it felt like to prepare to take the final shot in the Stanley Cup.

A ray of energy soared through space, another direct hit of the Starboard nacelle. Captain LeFevre's heart began to race, this time from excitement. After so many struggles, it felt like things were finally turning around. "One more for safety." He leaned forward in his seat, eyes locked on the screen, and tried to remind himself that it was too early to start feeling a sense of victory.

"Captain, their shields are back online."

"What?!" It felt like a punch in the stomach to go in an instant from having victory in his grasp only to have it knocked away. "How is that possible?" As soon as he spoke, LeFevre was able to answer his own question. Albrecht must have something to do with it. "Never mind, at least we got in two good hits. We're back to wearing down the shields. Be ready, they should have weapons and engines back any minute now."

Another burst of energy from the Enterprise's phasers. The Portland hadn't yet made any move to evade the attacks or fire back. Something was off, but because it worked in his advantage, LeFevre didn't stop to question it. What the hell was going on over there?

"Captain," It was the communication officer again. "There's been an update from the medical department which requires your attention at your earliest convenience."

"Then they will be waiting a while, I can't exactly step away. I'm sure they'll be fine without me, I'm no doctor."

"It's about their research on augment DNA, and methods that could be used to defeat the augments aboard the Portland."

LeFevre stared at the image on the viewscreen. The Portland hadn't made any action toward evasion or defense, which made LeFevre want to assume that they hadn't been able to get their weapons and engines back online, but if that assumption was wrong...

"Arrange for Doctor Kimani to meet me in my ready room. I want Kirk, Spock, and McCoy to join us for this consultation." Any time he could have the wisdom and advice from people who had dealt with these augments, he welcomed it.

"Of course. Doctor Kimani is also requesting the presence of the prisoner."

Dammit. LeFevre didn't like that one of the augments was on his ship in the first place and wasn't eager to keep company with her, but he did trust that Kimani had her reasons. "Only if she's restrained and has an armed security escort. I'm not moving my ass from this chair until everyone else is ready, and even then don't hesitate to interrupt with updates. Number one, I trust your judgment, but advise you to temper your usual optimism."

---

It felt wrong to leave the bridge, but in the time it took to assemble everyone for the meeting, little had changed. The Portland still had no weapons or engines, but her shields held strong. Rarely did LeFevre meet with more than two or three people in his ready room, but now it was crowded to capacity: himself, Kirk, Spock, McCoy, Kimani, Maya Noonien Singh, and her escort Amberg.

"As per your suggestions, Captain, we have been researching the genetic markers that differentiate augments from normal humans, and how these might be used to target them with biological weapons." Doctor Kimani explained. "We have some leads, but need to have an ethical review before moving forward."

"Do we really? Because I doubt our enemies would pause for ethical review before acting, and we don't have any time to spare." LeFevre gave a look to Kirk, sure that out of everyone in his ready room, he would be the most likely to agree.

"You're right," Kirk answered "They won't stop to think about ethics, but the fact that we will is what makes us better than them. We need to make this quick, however."

"Of course," Doctor Kimani replied. For a human, she had such a cold, dry demeanor. "We can use genetic samples to create a virus that targets genetic markers that only the augments have. Biological warfare is banned by the Federation, and, Captain, I understand that the doctor from the Portland had concerns that such measures seemed close to genocide, but I don't know what other options we have that could spare the Portland's crew."

LeFevre nodded. "I've thought about this. Create the virus, target the augments aboard the Portland. Any objections?"

"None from me," Kirk answered, "That would have been my course of action."

McCoy shook his head, "Sorry, Captain. I understand where the Portland's doctor is coming from. It's an easy way to pick off our enemies, but to target people and kill them off because of a biological difference...well, people on earth were doing that long before the eugenics wars, that was just when they had the technology to make it easier. Every augment aboard the Portland should be treated as a violent enemy, but I don't like the idea that we've got a small sub-population of humanity that we can easily get rid of."

LeFevre glanced toward Spock, who raised one eyebrow before he spoke. "This is a difficult decision. In any other circumstances, biological

warfare is difficult to justify. I agree that an attack targeted strictly toward those aboard the Portland could be justified, but I also agree with Doctor McCoy, that the ability to target a sub-group of humans sets an upsetting precedent, especially when at least one individual who carries the genetic markers of Khan Noonien Singh serves Starfleet, is deeply problematic.”

“Wait..what?!” Maya had tried to sit quietly and wait her turn, but after hearing that piece of information she couldn’t hold back.

“La’an Noonien Singh,” Spock answered, “Your niece by some order of generations, the former chief of security aboard the Enterprise, and currently an instructor at Starfleet Academy.”

“So I’ve had siblings who lived and died centuries ago.” Maya mused. “I have a feeling that’s not why you want me here,”

“We have to decide what to do with the colony,” LeFevre answered. “However unlikely it may be, we cannot risk a repeat of what happened to the Toyotomi! any augments left on Ceti Alpha V are too great of a liability. You’re the only one who’s been down there, so your insights would be appreciated.”

Maya took a moment to look at each person in the room. Kirk and LeFevre looked irritated, frustrated to be having this conversation in the first place. “You want to use your virus to kill everyone I have ever known, and you’re asking me for my insight?” Her tone was sharp and defensive.

“Nobody is suggesting that.” LeFevre was firm, impatient.

“But you’re capable of it,” Maya accused.

“Only as an absolute last resort, under the most extreme circumstances.” Kirk explained. He was just as firm as LeFevre.

“Admiral, how often do ships like that crash?” Maya raised her voice, her escort gave her a sharp look, but she didn’t notice.

“It’s an exceedingly rare occurrence,” Kirk admitted, still calm yet firm.

“And out of all the planets in the galaxy, what are the odds that another crashes on Ceti Alpha V?”

“I do not have data on shipwrecks committed to memory, but with the relevant information I could calculate the exact probability,” Spock offered.

“That won’t be necessary,” LeFevre snapped.

“Jim...” McCoy spoke this time, almost pleading. “Are you really considering this? Killing everyone in case of some impossibly small chance that the same damn thing happens again? We don’t even know how they’re going to react once their leader is gone, maybe some of them are perfectly happy with subsistence living.”

“I’m not in favor of it unless we have no other option.” Kirk spoke to defend himself.

“And you, Captain?”

“I honestly have a hard time believing that people who tried to conquer the earth would be content to live peacefully.”

“What about the people born there?” McCoy looked toward Maya. “How many?”

She thought for a moment before responding. “At least thirty, including young children.”

“Thirty people, Captain, under the age of twenty-five,” McCoy continued .

“They aren’t all guiltless,” Maya added, her voice growing soft and distant. “Some might be aboard the Portland.”

“And we have to consider that there is still a warp capable ship on the planet’s surface.” LeFevre evaded the ethical issues that McCoy mentioned. “With enough time and working together, I wouldn’t be surprised if those enhanced minds could make it back into something functional.”

“Captain,” Maya spoke again, still soft and low. “When that ship crashed, most of us were more excited to salvage building materials and medical supplies.”

“Bridge to LeFevre.” Commander Dalton’s voice came through on the communicator.

“Go ahead.” LeFevre almost sounded relieved to have an interruption.

“The Portland’s shields are down to thirty percent. I suggest you find a stopping point and return to the bridge.”

“On my way. LeFevre out.” He shook his head as he stood up. “I don’t have time for any of this. I’ve made up my mind about the Portland, go ahead and create the virus and come up with a way to get it onboard. We can figure out what do the about the people down on the planet later, Before we can do anything, though, we need to get those shields back down. It’s time I got back to the bridge.”

“Captain,” Kirk stood up as well. “It’s time we got back to the bridge.”

LeFevre offered a slight smile. “Of course, Admiral.”

## Chapter 23

“Hurry, now! Find a way to bypass the block on our weapons.” Khan shouted, frantic and desperate. Fear was an emotion he would never admit to feeling, not even to himself, so it came out sideways, looking more like rage to the outside observer. However, being stuck motionless and defensive less was enough to make anyone feel like a trapped animal.

“I need voice authorization from the captain, there’s no way around it.”

“There is always a way around an obstacle, with enough ingenuity and determination, which I was lead to believe you had in droves.” Time was the factor working against them. Khan had the greatest minds on his side, who could learn any computer system and bend it to their will with enough patience, but in the heat of battle no one could afford to be patient.

Another hit from Enterprise’s phasers rocked the ship. “Shields at twenty-five percent, and the vibrations caused further hull damage.”

“I don’t have time for this!” Khan shouted, giving a fierce look to the augment who worked desperately to bring the weapons back online. “Get Albrecht back here, let’s hope she isn’t so heavy sedated that she can’t follow simple directions.”

“Bridge to sickbay.”

“Go ahead.” Doctor T’Ralia replied as she monitored Captain Albrecht. The antitoxin had prevented further damage to her nervous system, but recovery would be a long, hard road.

“Albrecht is needed on the bridge again.”

“The captain has experienced an extreme adverse reaction to the sedative. She is in an unstable condition and cannot safely be moved from sickbay.” Some people thought Vulcans were incapable of lying, but this was one of those rare, extreme situations where concealing the truth was the most logical course of action.

“We’ll take our chances. Bring her now.”

“I’m afraid I cannot compromise my patient’s safety. End transmission.”

Defying a direct order, they would realize that something was wrong and that T’Ralia was no longer under the influence of the Ceti eel. She moved to secure the area, entering commands into the computer to lock the doors from the inside.

---

“Captain, the Portland’s shields are down to twenty five percent, and they’ve suffered further hull deterioration from the previous hit.”

“Keep firing phasers, we’re almost there.” Finally, a glimmer of hope could be heard in Captain LeFevre’s voice.

“Captain,” Kirk spoke up. “Photon torpedoes would be more effective.” Since they had returned to the bridge, Kirk had been inching closer to LeFevre and by how was practically breathing down his neck.

“Not at at this range, and with their shields already so low.” LeFevre insisted, defending his choice. “If we break through too soon with a photon torpedo, the resulting explosion could damage our own ship and pose a greater risk to the Portland’s crew.”

Kirk was silent for a moment before he responded, quiet and frustrated. “Very well, Captain.” He conceded reluctantly.

“Not to worry Admiral. They’ve got no weapons, no engines, and soon no shields. No need to rush.”

---

If you weren’t on the bridge this hardly seemed like a battle at all; it was more like shooting at a stationary target. McCoy was hardly needed in sickbay, so he was able to steal a few minutes to speak with the prisoner again.

This time she seemed in better spirits, lounging on the cot instead of lying on the floor in a crumpled mess. She sat up when she saw him, and McCoy simply stood holding his hands behind his back. No need to lower the forcefield. While he might have a bit more trust for the young augment, there was no need to throw caution to the wind,

“How’s the shoulder?” That wasn’t why he was here, but it seemed impolite to dive right into the topic on his mind.

“Better than I could have hoped. I had almost forgotten how it feels to have the full use of both my arms.”

“Glad to hear it. I thought you might like to know the compromise we reached regarding our ethical dilemma.” McCoy tried to sound easy and approachable. He knew he could come off harsh but wanted to show a bit more discretion with this delicate topic.

“That’s surprising. No one seemed to value my opinion.” She was prickly and rough, trying to push the doctor away.

“We’re going ahead and creating the virus, but with a few stipulations. It’s not lethal, just enough to weaken the augments and level the playing field.” A pause. McCoy felt like he was speaking with more confidence than maybe he had the right to. “Theoretically, at least. There’s more uncertainty than I like, as to whether it’s effective enough, or too affective, and there’s no way to test it.”

“Doctor.” Maya stood and walked closer, standing only inches from the forcefield. “You do have a way to test it.”

“Absolutely not!” McCoy shouted. He pieced together what she was suggesting, and was determined to chase away whatever impulse popped



in her head. “I didn’t come down here to try to convince you be a Guinea pig.”

“I don’t need convincing, I volunteer.”

“As a doctor I vowed to do no harm, I don’t care if you’re willing, what you’re suggesting is out of the question.” He took a breath to calm himself. “Besides, we still don’t have a plan as to how to get the virus onto the Portland and into the bodies of the augments.”

“Again, I volunteer.” She was firm and forceful, more than he had her be before. “When we spoke last you said I need to stop viewing favors as transactions, and now when I want to do something selfless, you deny me?”

“Look, even if I agreed with your idea. It’s not that simple. The transporter has bio filters that weed out any pathogens. Captain LeFevre seems sure that there’s some kind of work around, but I’m not convinced.”

“Fine. Come back and talk to me again when you realize you don’t have any better ideas.”

## Chapter 24

Kimani had her virus, she just didn't yet know what to do with it. She had a moment to sit at her desk and sort through her thoughts, leaning back in her seat and tilting her head back. The only idea she had would require the cooperation of Doctor T'Ralia, and given the Vulcan's opposition to the idea, Kimani was not optimistic. Of all the people to try to find compassion for a bunch of genetically engineered tyrants, a Vulcan seemed an odd choice. Then again, if you dealt in cold, hard logic ethical bright lines were bound to be more rigid.

She heard footsteps and felt a sense of relief to see that Doctor McCoy had returned. Hopefully talking things through with him would help them find a solution. "I hope you have some insights, because I'm completely stumped."

"I do have one idea," McCoy sat in the chair across from her. "But I don't like it." Kimani leaned forward, attentive and ready to listen. "I dislike it so much that I'm hesitant to share it."

"And what if it's our only option?"

"Then we'll have another ethical problem to untangle." McCoy paused, regretting bringing it up in the first place. "Khan's daughter volunteered to be Typhoid Mary."

"If she gives informed consent, I don't see the issue." Kimani's response was cold and distant. "We'll have a detailed consultation about the risks involved, but honestly I think the bigger issue is whether she can be trusted. She's been changing sides like a tennis ball."

McCoy shook his head. "Does everyone on this ship talk in sports analogies? Never mind. Look, I'll indulge you just for the sake of argument, but there's no good way to get her over there. The bio filters..."

"Can be temporarily disabled. And Doctor T'Ralia can disable the filters in the emergency transport in the Portland's sickbay."

"Don't think she'll go for it, she seemed to have her mind made up about biological weapons, and I know from personal experience how hard it is to change the mind of a Vulcan." McCoy stood up and sighed. "At any rate, I'm not going to be the one to try to convince her."

Kimani opened a line of communication with Doctor T'Ralia, taking advantage of the secure channel Captain LeFevre had been using to speak with the Portland's doctor.

"Doctor Kimani." T'Ralia began as soon as she appeared on screen. "Apologies, this is not an ideal time for a discussion. The augments have become aware that I am not under their control. I suspect I may be under attack soon." Flat and calm even in a situation where she was in danger.

Damn. Doctor T'Ralia was their link to the Portland, everything would be much more complicated without her. "This is important, I don't want to miss the opportunity to talk to you. I'll try to be brief." Not ideal. Such a delicate discussion could not be rushed.

"Doctor." A pause as Kimani sorted through her thoughts. "I know you had reservations about using a biological agent against the augments."

"Am I correct to assume that you have chosen to go forward despite my hesitation?"

"No final decision has been made, but yes that's what we're leaning toward." Kimani tried to get a read on Doctor T'Ralia, but the Vulcan's face was as stoic and unchanging as ever. "What we're considering isn't so extreme as what Captain LeFevre first suggested. It's a non-lethal virus..." Theoretically. "It should make for a more fair fight, nothing more."

T'Ralia considered this, but Kimani still could guess what kind of thoughts were hidden behind that unreadable face. "While I cannot deny the ethical implications of biogenic weapons, I must concede that ours is an exceptional case. The augments do not abide by the rules of engagement, so one could argue that they have forfeit the protection those rules might offer."

Kimani blinked. "Didn't expect you to come around so easily."

"This course of action is not ideal, by any means. However, without a suitable alternative, it is the only logical choice. Am I correct I to assume that you require my assistance?"

Kimani nodded. "Once the Portland's shields are down, I'm going to need you to disable the bio filters on your sickbay's emergency transport to receive the agent."

"Understood. How will the virus be transmitted throughout the ship?"

"Well...that's still under consideration. It might be in vivo."

"You mean within a living host?"

Kimani nodded, and T'Ralia raised an eyebrow.

"Understood. Is there anything else?"

"Not now, no. Stay safe out there. End transmission."

---

The Portland's shields were almost worn down. One obstacle was nearly behind them, and maybe soon this nightmare would come to an end.

“Put me through to sickbay.”

“Yes, Captain.”

“Bridge to sickbay.”

“McCoy here. Go ahead”

“The Portland’s shields will be down soon, is the virus ready?”

“Yes, but another ethical dilemma came up. We need to talk through this.” McCoy spoke with urgency.

“Bones,” Kirk spoke up before Captain LeFevre had the chance to answer. “We’re in the middle of battle, we can’t keep stepping aside to have meetings.”

“I have to agree with Admiral Kirk,” LeFevre added. “I trust your discretion.”

“This one would require your direct approval. Kirk and Spock need to be present too.”

“I’ll take this in my ready room. Make it quick.”

“Bones, surely you understand how ridiculous this sounds. She can’t be sent back to the Portland. I don’t even like the idea that she’s down in our brig. Captain Albrecht trusted her, and we saw how that turned out.”

“Jim, if it were up to me, we wouldn’t have given it this much consideration.” Both McCoy and Kimani appeared on screen. They had been civil and professional to each other despite their opposing views.

“However,” Spock commended. “If an alternative is not reached quickly, this may be the only logical choice to pursue. Currently the Portland is a defenseless, stationary target, but if they were able to restore shields, we must assume that they might be capable of restoring weapons. Against a hostile ship, we would be unable to lower our own shields long enough to beam anything to the Portland.”

“No.” Already LeFevre stood up, ready to leave and get back to the bridge. “I don’t like this. I don’t like any of it. Find another way, and fast.”

---

Kimani had no choice but to take matters into her own hands, even though the risks she faced were extreme: court martial, the end of her career in Starfleet, the end of her medical career...there was no good way around it. They needed a vector to get the virus onto the Portland and spread the virus, and they had one.

She had invented an excuse to leave sickbay, making up her plan as she went. By the time she reached the brig, Kimani knew what she needed to do to get the prisoner to sickbay, but beyond that she was still uncertain. Still, it was enough that she could approach the security officer with the bold confidence of someone who knew they were in exactly the right place.

“Lieutenant.” Kimani was firm, but not forceful. “I need to transfer the prisoner to sickbay.”

“Doctor McCoy was just here and didn’t say anything about that.”

Kimani expected resistance. She stood her ground, crossing her arms and looking the man dead in the eye. “I know. We just finished discussing her condition and determined that she needs medical attention that cannot be given here.”

Still, the security officer did not back down. “What’s wrong with her? She looks healthy to me.”

“Sir, let me remind you that the strictest confidentiality applies to all of my patients, so regulation and ethical standards prevent me from sharing any information.”

The pair stood in silence, staring each other down for a moment that seemed to last for hours until the security office gave in. “Only with an escort.”

“Of course.” That would complicate things, but she couldn’t refuse.

The pair moved towards Maya’s cell. Kimani dropped all other harshness she had used only moments before. She wore a look of concern on her face and spoke in a maternal coo. “Maya, I’m so sorry...I tried to come sooner.” Maya said nothing and only offered a perplexed look. Kimani shook her head and looked to the security officer. “See? She’s very disoriented.”

They got to sickbay without incident, and every passing moment made Kimani’s heart race with more and more adrenaline. The closer she moved toward her goal, the more real and dangerous it all seemed. Kimani didn’t address the security officer again until after Maya (still visibly confused) had been rushed to a bio bed.

“My patient needs privacy.” Her harshness was back, and stronger than before.

“I can’t let her out of my sight.”

Kimani took a different approach this time, soft and gentle. “Please, just for a minute. She’s young, she’s had a hard life, I think she still deserves to be treated with a little dignity.”

Another, long slow pause before the security officer responded. “Make it quick.”

Once he was gone, Kimani leaned in close to speak to Maya. Her voice was hushed, yet sharp and full of frenetic energy. “The captain and the admiral turned down my plan, but I am prepared to move forward if you’re still willing.”

“I had gathered as much,” Maya answered, also speaking barely above a whisper. “But it was my idea.”

“It doesn’t matter...” There was no time for this. “I don’t have the time to discuss every risk as thoroughly as I’d like, understand that even though this is supposed to be non-lethal, this is still an untested substance. I can’t guarantee that it won’t lead to death, disability, or long term health effects.”

“I understand, and I still wish to proceed. What kind of symptoms can I expect?”

“Respiratory, mostly, and systemic, and it should come on within a matter of hours. I wish I had an accurate prediction as to the severity, or if being only half augment might offer any kind of protection.”

“My mind is already made up. Do it.”

Kimani nodded before she picked up the hypospray and gave Maya the injection. “I’m also going to give you a heavy dose of analgesics and fever reducers to help mask symptoms. Doctor T’Ralia will give you more guidance when you’re aboard the Portland...she isn’t aware that we’re going behind the Captain’s back.”

They were nearly there, it was only a matter of convincing Captain LeFevre that the alternative vector was ready so he could lower the shields, but as Kimani reached for her communicator Doctor McCoy returned. He stared at the two of them, eyes wide with shock.

“I was about to ask why the hell there’s an armed guard outside of sickbay, but this explains it.” He looked directly toward Kimani. There was anger in his eyes, not the sort of anger that caused a person to lash out in rage, but outrage over injustice. “Tell me you haven’t done anything that can’t be undone.”

“I’m afraid so, Doctor,” Maya answered as she stood. “Save your anger, it was my choice.”

McCoy ignored her, still shocked and angry over what Kimani had done. “I can’t believe you. I can’t believe someone like you ever became a doctor.”

“Yelling about it won’t change what happened.” Kimani spoke with just as much passion and fury to defend herself. “It’s set in motion, at least beam her over to the Portland so if she dies or has some complication at least it won’t have been for nothing.”

“No...” McCoy had calmed a bit, but the outrage could still be seen in his eyes. “Captain LeFevre has his orders, I can’t disobey them.” McCoy took out his communicator. “Sickbay to bridge.”

“LeFevre here. Go ahead.”

“There’s been a complication. Doctor Kimani disobeyed your orders and has already inoculated Maya.”

“I want her detained.” Frustration could be heard in LeFevre’s voice. “Can you develop that alternative vector without her?”

“Yes, Captain, but it will take hours. This entire project was her brain child.”

A long pause. When LeFevre spoke, he sounded broken and defeated. “We don’t have hours. Send her over.”

McCoy shook his head. “I’ll do it, but I’m going to complain the entire time. End transmission.”

Maya took a step toward McCoy. “This isn’t the first time I’ve walked into a situation I might not walk out of.” She spoke softly but with a sense of confidence that she hadn’t shown in a while. “This isn’t even the first time today. If anything happens, in my eyes you are guiltless.”

“Too bad a few pretty words won’t make me feel guiltless in my own eyes.” He sighed. “Just give them hell for me, I mean licking computer consoles and spitting in faces and shedding virus like it’s your job.”

“It is my job, and I’m sure there are many faces on that ship into which I would love to spit.”

## Chapter 25

### Chapter Notes

Content warning: mention of internalized homophobia

This wouldn't have happened on his Enterprise. Kirk and LeFevre had agreed on most fronts so far, so keeping professional and civil was easy, even though he envied the man who currently commanded the Enterprise. Now, though, envy began to morph into resentment as he watched LeFevre make choice not only that he disagreed with but which also seemed senseless.

"Once more on the starboard pylon, this should finally do it." As LeFevre gave the order, Kirk tried to be present and not dwell on things that had already been done or on the unpleasant thoughts in his head. Much like the advice he had both given and received recently, worrying changed nothing.

"Firing phasers."

Kirk focused on the screen to watch the beam of energy race toward the the Portland. With no shields, no ability to evade the direct hit an explosive blast burned through the already damaged pylon.

"Starboard nacelle detached." The status update was only a matter of protocol. Anyone could see what happened.

"About time. Bring us around to the other side."

"Captain," Despite his turbulent feelings, Kirk tried to sound professional and impartial. He felt as though he would have a better chance of getting through to LeFevre if it at least seemed like he was thinking with his head and not his heart...even if thinking with his heart had been the right choice on more than one occasion. "If I might offer some advice, given...the recent changes to our circumstances a more assertive strategy might be better."

"Allow me to respectfully disagree, Admiral." LeFevre responded, irritated. "They have no shields, and for now no weapons and no ability to control the only remaining warp nacelle. It's like taking a penalty shot when the goalie isn't paying attention. Not to mention that the surviving members of the crew are onboard that ship. Further aggression is unnecessary and an undue risk at this time."

Kirk considered his options. He could pull rank and take control of his ship, and with his past experience dealing with Khan he'd be well justified. However, no matter how much it hurt to admit it, he knew in his heart that LeFevre was right. This was no time to let his ego get the better of him. "Of course Captain," he conceded. "Carry on."

---

Maya materialized in the Portland's sickbay and once again was face to face with Doctor T'Ralia. She found it unsettling, to see that plain, unreadable Vulcan face. It made her feel uncertain, like she didn't know where she stood, a clear reaction of shock, anger, fear, or disgust would have been more comforting.

"Doctor T'Ralia," Maya began, not sure if she should if she should ignore their recent history or not. "I'm...surprised you trust me."

"Your actions have made your motives difficult to evaluate, but in our situation we are left with no other choice. It is not ideal, but it is logical."

"Doctor Kimani said you would have more instructions for me?"

"Yes. I trust you familiarized yourself with the ship's layout when you were last on board." T'Ralia began to walk toward a computer console, and Maya followed.

"I did..." she froze when she passed the bio bed where Captain Albrecht lay. Maya's eyes grew wide with shock, her heart raced, and her face felt hot. She wasn't sure if what she was experiencing was an overwhelming sense of remorse, symptoms showing up well before the were supposed to, or some combination of the two. "Is she still alive?"

T'Ralia nodded. "Alive and free from the influence of the Ceti eel, but she has suffered significant brain damage." Even through all that Vulcan logic, Maya swore she could hear an accusatory tone.

Now T'Ralia stood by the computer console and gave Maya an impatient look, but Maya lingered by Albrecht's side. "If she survives with any sense of herself intact, then that's a kinder fate. I want everyone to know that, especially if she has any family."

"If I survive I will inform her wife myself."

"Her...wife?" Maya blurted out, only a moment later realizing that she had committed the faux pas of being scandalized by something that must be commonplace. "I'm sorry, I always thought, well, was always told that there's nothing wrong with...dalliances with whomever you please, anything serious must be saved for someone who can continue your genetic legacy."

"Lessons learned from tyrants who fought wars in the name of genetic superiority and cruelly subjugated those who did not share the same advantages." T'Ralia replied as she worked at the computer console. "You would do well to unlearn said lessons."

“I’m trying...but do you really think it’s...logical for her to be married to another woman?”

“Humans are not governed by logic. However, it is not logical to become overly concerned with another person’s private life.” T’Ralia did not acknowledge Maya’s response any further. “Our sensors detect forty augment life signs on board, ten of them are on the bridge. Close contact will be required for viral transmission, as the ship’s life support systems include rapid air purification.”

“You can’t disable it?”

“I lack the proper authorization.”

Maya looked toward Albrecht. “Would she be lucid enough if you woke her up?”

T’Ralia nodded. “With assistance, yes.”

---

New plan (yet again): get to the bridge without getting killed or seriously injured. Most had enough forbearance not to act out in anger against their leader’s only surviving child, but some of Arjun’s closest friends had more rage than self control, and Maya could not predict who she would encounter.

For the second time she walked the corridors of the Portland, this time though she felt much more at ease. Any crew who resisted the hostile takeover were surely...subdued by now, and as for her own kin, Maya was confident that with the right strategy she could avoid disaster...or at least spit in a few faces on the way out, like McCoy suggested.

The first augment she encountered as she turned a corner, and she was relieved at who she saw. Suzette Ling was one of the more level headed ones, more likely to solve problems with her brain than with her fists. It was in that moment that Maya realized she would be responsible for the deaths of people with whom she had no personal grievance. Even though the virus was no supposed to be non-lethal, they wouldn’t surrender.

“How did you get here? And why?” Suzette demanded, keeping her distance. Even the least mercurial of the augments seemed to have a healthy amount of distrust for a traitor with a recent history of fratricide.

“I found my own way on this ship before, do you think I’m incapable of doing it twice?” A pause, Maya took that moment to study Suzette’s response. She was only slightly easier to read than the Vulcan, but at least seemed receptive. “I came to surrender. I have seen the error of my ways.”

Suzette’s eyes narrowed. “I don’t believe you.”

“Your opinion doesn’t matter nearly as much as my father’s. If you take me to him, he can pass his own judgment.” After a lifetime of fear and never feeling good enough, Maya finally found the sense of purpose and direction that let her speak with a little of the gravitas and conviction that her father and brother always had.

Suzette relented. “Very well.”

---

Of all the the terrifying things Maya had done over the course of the past day, stepping onto the bridge and confronting her father should have been the worst, but instead of fear she felt a rush of excitement and adrenaline all rooted in the sense that she was in the right place for the right reason. She also felt lightheaded, unsure if that was from the frenetic energy or an early symptom. Just as T’Ralia had said, there were ten augments in the bridge, but there were also five Starfleet personnel: people who feared death more than abandoning their principles.

“Khan, sir,” Suzette announced. “Your daughter has returned to us.”

Khan rose from the command chair and turned to face his daughter. Maya saw anger in his eyes, but also a glimmer of fear. No, she had to be mistaken. Khan Noonien Singh was incapable of feeling fear.

“And what, may I ask, is your purpose?” He asked, exasperated. Maya had been kept mostly in the dark about how the battle was unfolding, but she had a sudden feeling that things were not going in her father’s favor.

“Contrition,” she began. Fear tried to creep in, but Maya tempered it by reminded herself that every moment she was here—talking, breathing, existing—the more she did to set things right. “I have erred and would rather face the consequences than remain a prisoner.”

“I find it hard to believe you, after you have done so much to wound me.”

“I excepted as much.”

“Then prove to me that you are, in fact, contrite. I understand that you have the advantage of having spent time on board this ship, studying it. Put that knowledge to use and bypass the block that Enterprise has in our weapons.”

All of her confidence was gone, and all of the fear she should have felt hit her at once. She felt small and powerless, and it showed in her voice. “That’s beyond the scope of my experience.”

“Always so quick with excuses.”

Maya ha no choice but to comply. She walked, slowly, to the console and began to work, hoping that what was being asked of her truly was impossible or at least would take long enough that it wouldn’t make much difference. Her head was spinning, fingertips shaking, and stomach tied into knots...another case where she wasn’t sure if she felt fear or illness. She tried to block it out and work, her safety could only be assured if she seemed to be marking an earnest effort.

What she was trying to accomplish was theoretically impossible, but there was always another way around, and some of the initial work was already done. When she was a guest aboard this ship—which felt like another lifetime, she should have only been able to access music and novels but managed to get past those restrictions.

The ship lurched, and Maya felt a wave of nausea that she struggled to keep down and sudden tightness in her chest. That...wasn't normal.

“Direct hit on the the port nacelle. Without shields, it can only withstand a few hits.”

“Faster, Maya!”

She said nothing in response as she made a few final keystrokes, afraid that if she tried to speak she might start dry heaving or cough. It wasn't supposed to happen this fast, she was supposed to have a few hours to covertly spread disease, but she was rushing headlong to the point past which she could not hope to hide her condition.

“Weapons online.”

“Fire photon torpedo!”

The room began to spin. Maya couldn't stay upright any longer. She doubled over coughing and gasping for air. Khan sprang from the command chair and rushed to her side, grabbing her by the shoulders to pull her to her feet. “Tell me what happened.” He spoke through gritted teeth. Maya knew her father was capable of incredible rage, but it had never been directed toward her before. “The truth, Maya.”

“They turned me into a weapon.” No one needed to know that she had volunteered. She coughed again, instinctively turning her head away despite her promise to McCoy to spit in faces. “I should have ten hours left.” They also didn't need to know that this wasn't supposed to be fatal. “Maybe a little longer if Mother's genes can offer me any protection.”

Khan released his grip, and Maya collapsed on the floor gasping for air. “You,” he looked toward one of the Starfleet personnel. “Get her out here...the ready room.” He took a few deep breaths to steady himself before returning to the command chair, seething as he stared to the image of the Enterprise on the viewscreen. “Another death you have to answer for, Admiral Kirk. Flawed though she is, she is all I have left.”

## Chapter 26

“Once again, fire on the port pylon.” If LeFevre had learned on lesson today, it was that one should never celebrate a victory too early, but it was impossible to not feel a sense of hopeful relief. One more good hit and the port nacelle would be knocked out too, which would only leave the final challenge of evacuating the crew and blasting Khan to hell where he belonged.

“Captain, the Portland’s weapons are back online.”

Well, shit.

A sudden jolt as the shields deflected a photon torpedo.

“Shields at seventy percent. Vibrational damage to hull on decks nine and ten.”

“Captain, they’re hailing us.”

“On screen.” LeFevre tried to remind himself that everything was still in his favor, and that a moment to talk would provide some respite from the battle.

Once again the Portland’s bridge appeared on screen, now with more augments in view than the last time. “I wish to speak with Admiral Kirk.” Khan was alarmingly cool and calm.

“What is it this time, Khan?” Kirk pressed. He liked it better when they were firing at each other, at least then it felt like progress was being made.

“I have only questions and seek only answers.”

“Go on.”

“Admiral...” Khan said it as if it was an insult. “When we first met you took sure pride in your ship, and now you let another man command it. Why is that?”

“Don’t let him get to you,”. LeFevre spoke in a low voice so only Kirk could hear. “He wants to get you angry.”

“I hope you have other questions, Khan, because I won’t indulge that one.” Try as he did to follow LeFevre’s advice, the acerbic bite in his voice revealed that Khan had hit a nerve.

“Only one. You have taken so much from me and showed no sign of remorse even when I have plainly spelled out the consequences of your actions, and still you continue to take and take and take. My wife, my friends, my children.”

“I had nothing to do with the death of your son, and your daughter is still alive.”

“But for how much longer, Admiral? I know what you have done,”

Kirk opened his mouth to speak, but reconsidered his words. This was a difficult balancing act. If he allowed Khan continue to believe that the virus was deadly, his adversary was a desperate man on the verge of losing everything, but it also made him a man who, after a lifetime of feeling invincible might finally realize that one day he was going to die just like anyone else.

“An unfortunate but necessary sacrifice. You haven’t been playing by the rules, so we were left with no choice.”

Before Khan spoke again, he had a momentary lapse, a fleeting look of concern before he forcefully cleared his throat. “I at least can take comfort in knowing that your cruelty has caused her to come willingly back to my side. She did a tremendous favor by restoring our weapons.” The screen went dark.

“This is your fault!” Kirk accused, struggling not to shout and pointing a finger at LeFevre.

“Not now, Admiral. I take the blame. This is my mess, I can clean it up.”

“Can you?”

LeFevre ignored him. “Fire on the port pylon, we’re almost there.” One more beam of energy hit the Portland with a glorious blast.

“Port nacelle severed.”

Perfect. As long as they could get to where the couldn’t be reached, they would be safe to wait and plan.

“Go around to the other side of that moon,” LeFevre ordered. “We’ll be able to breathe soon.”

---

Maya couldn’t stand any longer, couldn’t sit up any longer. She laid in the floor on her back, trying to calm herself down. That was part of the problem, as her heart raced, she breathed faster and shallower, and she was in no state to handle any amount of excitement. Oddly enough what gave her comfort was making peace with the fact that she would probably die here, in the same room where she killed her brother, whether it was from this supposedly “non-lethal” virus or because she was stuck on a crippled ship under the command of a man with nothing left to lose. Born on Ceti Alpha V, lived on Ceti Alpha V, but least she wasn’t going to die there.



When the spinning in her head seemed to slow, she carefully tried to sit up. She paused there, realizing that she wasn't going to feel any better, she simply had to endure it. Walking seemed impossible, but she was able to crawl to the computer console and pull herself upright to use it. All she needed was communication within this ship, a less complicated maneuver than trying to reach another ship, but still a challenge for her feverish brain.

"Doctor T'Ralia." Another coughing fit. Even speaking was painful. "It's Maya. I was on the bridge, briefly, but I don't think it was long enough."

"What is your current location?" T'Ralis spoke with a sense of urgency that Maya hadn't heard before.

"Locked in the ready room. I couldn't hide my symptoms any longer. I need you to beam me back to sickbay."

"I can no longer guarantee your safety in sickbay."

Maya's heart dropped and another wave of nausea hit her. "Why not?"

"The augments are aware that Captain Albrecht and myself are no longer under their influence and seem to be taking action. One is currently outside the door attempting to forcibly gain entry. I should be able to defend myself, as I have Captain Albrecht's phaser."

"Doctor, I don't want to die here."

"While I am not aware of its precise location, there should be an easily removable wall panel which will allow access to the Jeffries tubes. There is still a way out."

"Understood."

Maya let herself slide back down to the floor. She could hardly stand, and now her only choices were to admit defeat or start tearing apart the wall and crawling through secret tunnels. Her body felt like it was falling apart, but her mind was stronger. She hadn't come this far to give up.

## Chapter 27

“Captain, I need to speak to you. Alone.” Given that they had an entire moon between them and their motionless opponents, he saw no issue in the two of them stepping away for a discussion, no matter how long it took.

“Of course, Admiral.” As LeFevre rose from the command chair he seemed small and defeated, like a child who knew he had done something wrong. “Number one, you have the bridge.”

In his ready room, LeFevre sat across the table from Kirk, his posture tense and rigid. Kirk had both his hands resting on the table and leaned forward in his seat.

“You know, I’m beginning to think that maybe I should have taken command of the Enterprise from the beginning.” Kirk still fought to remain collected and professional.

“I admit I made a mistake.” LeFevre was humble and quiet, yet ready to defend his choices. “I thought I had made the right choice, but the outcome proved otherwise.”

“I’m surprised you can remain so calm.” Kirk shook his head. “But this goes deeper than the recent developments on the Portland. You lost a dangerous prisoner. You have no authority over your crew, and they have no sense of unity...”

“Admiral, please.” It wasn’t quite in line with protocol and decorum to interrupt an Admiral, but LeFevre couldn’t stand to hear any more. “Question my judgment as much as you see fit, but don’t bring my crew into this, not when I just lost four of my best people.”

Kirk paused and leaned back before taking a deep breath to calm himself. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to bring them into this.” In a way he did, though. Back aboard his old ship he couldn’t help but compare every unfamiliar face he saw to someone from his own crew. This ship used to be his home, but now he felt out of place. “Everything else I said still stands. At first, I thought I agreed with your approach and was willing to step aside to let you command, but I just don’t think we see eye to eye anymore.”

“Understood, Admiral,” LeFevre conceded.

“Captain.” Kirk could sense the blow he had dealt to LeFevre’s ego and tried not to let it affect him. “I have a history with these people. This fight was always meant to be mine.”

“Permission to speak freely.”

Why ask now? “Granted.”

“I misjudged by trusting an augment. I hope you might be more understanding, as you once made a similar misstep.”

Kirk’s spine straightened. Such an accusation was both perplexing and alarming. “I don’t understand.”

“A few dozen tyrants and war criminals from the darkest chapter of Earth’s history, and you simply let them go off and live on their own planet with no consequences.”

That felt like an attack. Kirk’s heart jumped. He clenched his jaw and the muscles in his neck tensed, anything to try to stop himself from having an outburst. “You weren’t there. You don’t know what led to my decision.”

“No, Admiral, I wasn’t, and I don’t.” LeFevre spoke with warmth and respect, like someone who wanted an earnest conversation rather than to accuse. “But I have to trust that you thought you were doing the right thing, even if, frankly, it sounded ridiculous to an outside observer. I thought I had made the right choice too.”

Kirk shook his head as he stood up. “Sorry, I don’t think it’s the same, but you are right that this did all begin with me. My responsibility, my mess to clean up, my fight, and my ship.”

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Maya’s heart raced again, so again she laid on the floor to calm herself and tried to think through exactly how she could manage this impossible task in her weakened state: break it down into the simplest steps, any attempt was better than doing nothing. She sat up, head still spinning and another wave of nausea bubbling up inside her. She tried to take a deep breath, but it caught in her chest and caused another coughing fit. This time she worked through it, tapping on the nearest wall panel and listening. Solid, so that one couldn’t be it, but eliminating an option was still progress. And that was how she went, inching her way around the room to test each panel, stopping to rest when she needed.

Maya was halfway around the room and starting to think about giving up when she heard the sound that let her know her effort had been worthwhile: this one was hollow. The sense of hope that washed over her gave her a burst of energy that let her find the strength to tear the panel off the wall, but she needed another short break, staring right down the opening to a vertical tube and wondering if she could find the strength to continue on.

Exhausted, dizzy, short of breath, and sore, but also damn determined. If she didn’t fall to her death, or get hopelessly lost she was going to die in this room doing nothing, and with that thought she began to climb down. She didn’t need to be in here long, just enough to get down one more deck. Though she wanted to get out as soon as she could, Maya moved slowly and carefully. Her hands shook, but she needed to be sure of her grip and her footing.

Soon she saw a door, but had already exerted herself too far. Her hands were clumsy and weak, but with more effort that seemed necessary

she opened the door, crawled out into a corridor, and promptly lost her balance and fell to the ground. The climb took too much out of her, and she had to stay on the ground to catch her breath. She had no idea where she was, but that didn't matter.

Wherever this place was, there had been a struggle. Three dead bodies in Starfleet uniforms littered the ground. Earlier this ship's surrender seemed so clean and straightforward, it hadn't occurred to her that some of the crew might rather fight back against impossible odds than surrender. Another wave of nausea crept up, but Maya kept it back.

She tried to take a slow, calming breath, but it did little to help because her chest was tight and still hungry for air. Still, she forced herself to stand semi-upright: on her feet but still crouched low. Now that she was up off the ground and better able to observe the surroundings she noticed that one of the dead bodies hadn't been completely picked clean: he still had his phaser and communicator. Maya took those for herself and set the phaser to stun. If she crossed paths with more of the crew (ones who were currently still living) they were unlikely to have a warm welcome for an augment.

A burst of adrenaline was enough to help work through her illness. Maya was still in pain and short of breath, but it didn't bother her as much. She crept along the corridor, close to the wall, phaser ready, and moving at a gentle pace to avoid exerting herself.

Around the first corner she turned, Maya encountered a pair of unarmed young women in Starfleet uniforms. "I don't want to hurt you. I came from the Enterprise, and I'm on your side now." Her voice came out hoarse and breathless.

"I don't believe you."

"Does that matter when I'm the one with the weapon?" She tried to sound forceful and bold, but still sounded clearly unwell. "All I need to know is where I am."

"Deck two, guest quarters." one answered.

That didn't seem a very likely place for her kin to be (which might explain why these two were still alive). "And I take it you haven't seen any augments recently?" They both shook their heads. This was hopeless, she didn't have the strength and energy to wander the entire ship to get close enough to someone to breathe on them. "That's all I needed. Go." They dashed away without hesitation.

Maya kept herself together until the two of them were gone. She had pushed herself too far and could no longer fight through the dizziness and the pain. Another coughing fit came on, this one so violent that she collapsed to the ground gasping for air. She did not hear the sound of approaching footsteps, and still thought she was alone until she heard a familiar voice.

"An impressive escape for a dying woman."

Maya looked up to see Suzette Ling. "If you don't keep your distance, you'll be just as sick as I am."

"I have reason to believe I've already been infected."

A glimmer of hope, so her short time on the bridge had been long enough after all. Now that she knew what to look for, Maya saw the signs of well hidden illness. Suzette looked tired and took shallow breaths.

"Come. Your father has had a change of heart and wants to spend your final hours together." Suzette extended a hand, offering to help Maya get back to her feet.

"I'm not going." Maya barely got her words out between coughs.

"Be reasonable. You're in no state to resist."

Maya's hands were shaking and clumsy, but she was still able to reach for her phaser, aim, and fire. Suzette was knocked back, off her balance, unsteady, and confused. If Maya had been in any state to run away this would have given her an opportunity to escape, but so long as there was a chance that Suzette might recover she was in danger.

If this was anyone else, Maya would not have hesitated, but Suzette was one of the few people to treat her with kindness and respect. In a way Maya had thought of her as family, but now she was a threat. Another wave of nausea came over her as she set her phaser to kill, and she had to close her eyes as she fired her weapon. The dull thud of a body falling to the ground told her that Suzette Ling was dead.

## Chapter 28

“Maya to sickbay.” Her hand shook as she held her communicator, fear and remorse twisted up with her feverish symptoms.

“Doctor T’Ralia here.” What a relief to hear that plain, calm Vulcan voice.

“Are you safe?”

“For the moment.”

“I had an...altercation with someone who was on the bridge. She was beginning to show symptoms.”

“Can you describe the symptoms?”

“We didn’t interact for long before...” Maya coughed again. “She looked tired, sounded hoarse.”

“Did she seem at all impaired by her illness?”

“Not yet. Can you beam me to sickbay?”

“Of course.”

Once she materialized in sickbay, T’Ralia rushed over with another heavy dose of analgesics. The signs of a recent struggle could be seen: scorch marks where the door had been blasted through, the bodies of two dead augments on the floor. It looked like T’Ralia had made quick work of them.

“We are safe here for now, but I expect that to change,” T’Ralia explained. “Once the virus has spread and taken full effect, Captain Albrecht is ready to give the order to evacuate the ship.”

“She’s awake?” Maya looked over to the nearest bio bed and was able to answer her own question. Captain Albrecht still laid there, but now her eyes were open and she seemed more aware of her surroundings. For one uncomfortable moment the two shared eye contact, and a shiver went down Maya’s spine. Seeing Albrecht aware and lucid struck her down to the marrow in a way seeing her unconscious hadn’t. She felt compelled to say something, but how do you apologize to someone whose brain and body were broken because of your actions. “I...I’m sorry. In a way this is my fault. I’m trying to set things right.”

Captain Albrecht tried to sit up, but she had poor control of her body and was only able to prop herself up on her elbows. “So I’ve been told.” With her slurred speech and slack face she was nearly as hard to read as the Vulcan.

“And yet you still trust me?”

“No, but I have no choice.” Albrecht hung her head, but it was unclear if this was from a feeling of defeat or from poor motor control. “I’m going to give the order to evacuate the ship as soon as enough of your friends are infected and weakened enough to give my people a chance.” Even through her slurred speech, there was an acidic bite in her words,

Doctor T’Ralia continued on as if that exchange hadn’t happened. “The sensors are reading two augment bio signs on this deck, presumably on their way to complete what the last two did not. The rest, unfortunately, are scattered throughout the ship, mostly on the upper decks. Five on deck six, Nine on deck eight, three on deck eleven...”

“I get the idea.”

“Try to move efficiently and to work through your symptoms. I have already exceeded the safe dosage of analgesic for an ordinary human.”

“I’m not an ordinary human.”

---

“Admiral, the Portland is hailing us.”

“Ignore it. I’m not interested in speaking to Khan again.” Kirk was back in the command chair (where he belonged) but something still felt off. He had taken command of the ship because he knew he could exercise better judgment and because he knew that their situation required more direct action instead of hiding behind a moon and waiting, but to try to form a more effective plan that wouldn’t put the surviving crew at undue risk...that was a delicate balancing act.

“Sir, it isn’t Khan. It’s Doctor T’Ralia.”

Unexpected, but still welcome news. “On screen.”

“Admiral, I have an update regarding the bioweapon.”

“Go ahead.”

“At least one of the augments has been infected and is symptomatic. In a few hours time, they should be weakened enough to allow the safe evacuation of the crew, and at that time we will need support from the Enterprise.”

Technically, this was good news, but Kirk still didn’t like to hear it. Was he meant to wait on the dark side of the moon until some unknown, theoretical point when he could spring into action? “Any idea as to how long that could take?”

“No, Admiral.” She explained “Symptom onset occurs rapidly, but the initial spread will be slow.”

“Understood, Doctor. End transmission.” Kirk considered his options for a moment. While he did give T’Ralia’s words the consideration they were due, he knew in his heart what needed to be done. “Bring us out from this hiding place, we can help with the evacuation when the time comes, but I’m not about to sit back and do nothing in the mean time.”

---

Fear was an unfamiliar feeling for Khan, that could only be expected for a man who had no weaknesses and had never known defeat. His flight from Earth and his exile on Ceti Alpha V were not defeat. Those were carefully calculated retreats so he could come back stronger. This situation, however, was undeniably bleak. Kirk was hiding like a frightened rat, yet he was stuck in a ship that wouldn’t let him pursue his prey, and there was also the supposed invisible threat onboard. He had his doubts about how effective this biological weapon might be—what sort of pathogen could stand a chance against a carefully engineered immune system?—but for a man who had never had so much as a head cold, feeling a tight scratch in the back of his throat was alarming. His only hope was to lure Enterprise out of hiding.

“Hail the Enterprise.” He commanded.

“I’m trying, sir, they’re ignoring us.”

Kahn leaned back in his seat, just beginning to formulate another plan when something on the viewscreen caught his eye. Enterprise was coming out of hiding with no coaxing needed at all.

“How nice of you to decide to join us, Admiral.” Khan purred. “Fire photon torpedoes, target the port pylon, let’s give Enterprise the same treatment they gave us and show them how it feels to be trapped in a ship with no engines.”

## Chapter 29

Maya had made it to the turbo lift without encountering another soul, which meant that once again T'Ralia would be defending herself and Captain Albrecht against a pair of augments. The second dose of analgesics made for a marked improvement in her condition. She still felt like breathing too deeply or too quickly would make her lungs turn against her, and her head was still in a fog, but she at least had some respite from the pain.

Deck eight was her destination, not only because this was where she could have the greatest impact but also because of what she remembered from her study of the ship. Auxiliary control was on this deck, which would let her invent a reason to be there if her presence was met with hostility.

There were no lock, no security measures to prevent her from entering the auxiliary control room, a show of arrogance from a group of people who thought their foes posed no real threat. However, she was still met with shock. All nine of the augments T'Ralia told her to expect were present, and all nine of them had their eyes fixed on her.

"You weren't in the boarding party," one accused.

"Not initially." Her voice was still hoarse and soft no matter how hard she tried to speak with the bold gravitas she had earlier. "I was a later addition." No matter how well she could sell the lies she was about to spin, everything was contingent on the hope that there had been minimal communication from the bridge.

No change in expression in the nine augments who stood before her, they were all still hostile and suspicious.

"I was on the bridge with my father." She paused to read the room. Still suspicious, but more receptive. "I brought the weapons back online. I've been trying to bring back the impulse engines, but was unable to do so from the bridge."

"And you think you can do it from here?"

Maya had to hold back another coughing fit, which came out as an awkward spasm in her throat. "Maybe."

"Very little to gain, when we very literally have no warp engines."

"A great deal to gain, actually, when the ability to move and evade could be essential to our survival."

A moment passed while he considered this. "Very well. Get to work, but I've got my eye on you."

He kept his promise, keeping only a few feet back and staring over her shoulder as she worked. Once again, Maya was not sure that what she promised to do could be done, but what matter what to give a convincing attempt and spend enough time breathing the same air as these nine augments.

She flipped from one screen to the next, looking for that bypass but not sure what she would do once she found it.

"It says the restrictions can only be bypassed from the bridge." The man standing behind her spoke, practically breathing down the back of her neck.

Another wave of nausea tried to bubble up before she responded. "And the technical manual I read said that such a bypass could only be completed from auxiliary."

"Then keep working, and quickly."

---

As the Enterprise came out from behind the moon, the Portland came back into view on the screen. Even if Kirk wanted to take a more aggressive approach than LeFevre, he still had to exercise caution to protect the crew.

"Admiral, they've targeted us!"

That didn't take long, but Kirk had expected Khan to spring to action at once. The torpedo raced toward the Enterprise and detonated as it hit the ship's shields. Having shields still somewhat intact was an advantage that Kirk appreciated but knew not to take for granted. As long as Portland still had weapons, they would keep trying to wear those shields down.

"Shields at seventy percent. Minor vibrational damage, but hull integrity remains strong."

What he wanted to do would require the utmost precision, a move he might not be so bold to take on a ship that had the ability to move out of position. "Target as close as you can to the torpedo launcher, and fire phasers," Kirk commanded. "We're going to create a physical obstruction." Taking out their weapons would also give them an advantage when the time came to evacuate the Portland.

"Admiral, the margin of error on such a maneuver is exceedingly small, and if the torpedo bay was hit by mistake, the resulting explosion..."

"Lieutenant, if you doubt your ability to aim at a stationary target, or if you doubt my judgment, then you don't belong on my bridge."

"I don't doubt my ability, Admiral."

"Then fire the phasers."

A beam of energy hit the Portland, just a hair above the torpedo launcher. A few of the officers on the bridge breathed a sigh of relief to see that they had only hit the ship and not blown everything to pieces.

“Extensive hull damage, but we have no way of knowing if that was enough to create an obstruction.”

“It’s still progress.” Kirk responded. “And now that you know that you’re capable of such precision, I’m going to ask you to repeat it, just to the left. We’re going to make a ring around the torpedo launcher, just to be sure.”

Another beam of energy, and another direct hit. A few minutes had passed already since Khan tried to fire torpedoes, maybe that alone was a hopeful sign.

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This was a game of patience, like digging a grave with a teaspoon, and Khan’s patience was growing thin. They could break down Enterprise’s shields given enough time, but with Enterprise firing on them their time to act was limited. However, Admiral Kirk’s unwavering sense of Starfleet morality was working to Khan’s own advantage. It would be so easy for him to annihilate a defenseless ship, but just the potential of innocent lives on board stopped him from taking such extreme action.

“Again, fire torpedoes.” Khan was exasperated, and he sounded more exasperated than he felt. He couldn’t hide the hoarseness in his voice, yet in his heart he still tried to deny that anything was wrong.

“Sir, they won’t fire.”

Khan’s blood began to boil, rage threatening to erupt. No outbursts yet, but the wild look in his eyes suggested that he could barely keep control. “All this work to bring the weapons back online, and you mean to tell me they’ve gone off again?” His throat and chest spasmed, and he couldn’t help but let out a cough. That wasn’t normal.

“Just the torpedoes. The computer says there’s an obstruction, and they can’t fire.”

“Phasers, then!” Slower work than the torpedoes, but capable of wearing down the shields all the same.

## Chapter 30

Screen after screen, one failed workaround after another, and Maya was beginning to wonder if maybe she couldn't control the impulsive engines from here. That was actually a relief, it would prevent her from (again) taking a step too far and helping the ship she was supposed to hinder. However, it complicated matters by making it more difficult to take her time and seem like she was still making a genuine effort.

The man who was looking over her shoulder leaned in and narrowed his eyes. "I think you may have misunderstood those technical manuals."

"No...no I almost have it." Maya coughed once and then remembered the words of advice that Doctor McCoy had given. She took rapid, shallow breaths that made her chest burn and tighten so sharply that it brought on a coughing fit more violent and sudden than she had expected. While she was doubled over and gasping for air, the man who had been standing behind her stood still and stared, shocked. Maya took advantage to the diversion she created, finding the strength to draw her phaser and fire upon him.

Adrenaline and the raw, primal urge to survive were all Maya had to move forward, fight through the pain, and run as fast as her weary legs would carry her until she reached the safety of the turbo lift and collapsed on the floor gasping for air. Time to do it all again on deck six.

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"They're targeting their phasers."

Another hit, deflected by their shields. The Portland was not yet defenseless, but the phasers wouldn't pack the same punch as the torpedos, and it would be a less delicate job to disable them.

"Shields at sixty five percent."

"Fire on the forward phaser banks." Not much longer now, just a few more direct hits should do it, and with the Portland unable to move, each phaser bank they destroyed would create a larger and larger blind spot.

A blast of energy hit the Portland, and the resulting signing and scoring on the hull stood as evidence that the forward phasers were in no state to be used.

"Bring us around so our port side faces away from them." Kirk's intention was to prevent further damage to the port pylons, if their warp nacelles got knocked off everyone—including those civilians they had come here to save—would be stranded in space. "And get into position to target the port phasers." Just like going around an old-fashioned clock.

Another beam of energy, another hit, and as long as they held this position Enterprise was safe. One thing did strike Kirk as unusual however. The Portland had not fired back, that didn't seem like Khan. Kirk had come to expect quick action with high risks, but because this unusual hesitation worked to his advantage Kirk didn't question it. Never interrupt your enemy when he is making a mistake.

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It was a calculated risk that T'Ralia considered, and one where none of the potential outcomes seemed safe or favorable. Based upon the time frame between Maya's initial infection and symptom severity reaching a point where it became debilitating, the augments on the bridge should be considerably weakened. The choices were between moving to action now or waiting while a slow stream healthy and increasingly agitated augments came after her and the captain while she had no way to secure the area. Action was the logical choice.

T'Ralia supported Albrecht by the waist, with one of Albrecht's arms draped over T'Ralia's shoulders, the only way to get the captain upright, and used the emergency medical transporter to send them both to the bridge.

When they materialized on the bridge, what they saw did not look like a group of ruthless superhumans but rather like people who were struggling to keep their composure and work through pain. Khan stood from the command chair and turned to face them. He was unsteady on his feet, and through the rage and shock in his eyes there was a glint of fear.

Though she couldn't stand in her own, with enough concentration and work she was able to control her arm enough to aim her phaser.

"This...is not your fucking ship." Even though her speech was slow and slurred, and even though she worked to get out each word out, her presence was still commanding and forceful. She fired her phaser but missed, instead hitting a computer console and igniting a flurry of sparks. The second shot, however, hit Khan in the chest, and his lifeless body collapsed on the floor.

Khan Noonien Singh. Genetically engineered superhuman. Ruler of one quarter of Earth. Bested by a woman with brain damage.

"If anyone wishes to surrender, please take this opportunity." T'Ralia spoke calmly, but she, too, had a commanding presence.

One young woman, probably no older than twenty, began to move, eyes wide and fearful.

"You will be safe in the ready room." T'Ralia explained. As the young woman moved to go, another Augment from the other side of the bridge rushed toward them, or rather tried to. He was disoriented and off balance, which gave T'Ralia enough time to snatch the phaser from Captain Albrecht and shot him dead.

Only six augments remained, and in this moment the five Starfleet personnel who were held hostage on the bridge realized that they might finally have a fighting chance. T'Ralia backed up against the wall and gently lowered Captain Albrecht to the ground so that she could better fight off their enemies. Another shot from her phaser instantly killed one more. A struggle broke out between the five crew and two of the augments. T'Ralia rushed over to give that conflict her attention. Even if the Vulcan nerve pinch was ineffective against augments, her Vulcan strength was still an advantage.



The crew held their own against the augments: five healthy individuals against two who (in spite of their enhanced strength) were gasping for air and could barely stand steady. T'Ralia was easily able to knock one and then the other to the ground and finish off each with a blast from her phaser. Two of the remaining three rushed toward T'Ralia, and she did not hesitate in turning her phaser on them too.

The final, a man at least as young as the first woman to surrender had made no move against them. He was doubled over on the ground, dry heaving and gasping for air. T'Ralia approached him, one hand on her phaser as a precaution, but a peaceful solution was her first goal.

"If you surrender, I can offer you medical attention at my earliest convenience, as well as the reassurance that this virus was not engineered to be lethal and that the Federation treats all, even the worst of criminals, with dignity and respect."

The young man could not catch his breath enough to speak and only nodded vigorously. He tried to move, but was shaky and unsteady. T'Ralia stepped toward him to offer help, but instead he found the strength to do it on his own.

As the conflict unfolded, Albrecht left her safe spot against the wall and crawled slowly to the command chair. She had begun to pull herself up into the seat by the time T'Ralia was at her side to help her the rest of the way.

"I thought Vulcans were supposed to be pacifists." Speech slurred, head heavy, but Albrecht still managed to crack a joke.

"The augments demonstrated earlier that they were willing to use lethal force. With that knowledge, it would be illogical to not react with the same intensity."

Albrecht had to take a moment to think and process this response. Something was lost between the Vulcan misinterpreting a comment made in jest and Albrecht still working through a brain fog, so instead she ignored it. "Hail the Enterprise. They need to know we'll be evacuating soon."

## Chapter 31

“Incoming transmission from the Portland.”

“Ignore it. I haven’t changed my mind, and I’m still not interested in whatever it is Khan has to say,” Kirk responded, irritated. With the victory so nearly clinched, Kirk had a hunch that anything Khan had to say would be part of some manipulative scheme designed to stall or to make Kirk question his own actions and judgement (Khan would certainly not be offering his surrender). Kirk wasn’t going to fall for it.

“It isn’t Khan, Admiral. It’s Captain Albrecht.”

Kirk paused to consider this new information. He wasn’t sure if he liked the idea of talking with Albrecht much more. He had been made aware of what happened while he was held captive of Ceti Alpha V: that she had been used by Khan to take control of the ship. Kirk wasn’t sure if he trusted her either, but it wouldn’t be right not to give a Starfleet captain the benefit of the doubt.

“On screen.” Kirk leaned back in his seat, shocked by what he saw on screen. The bridge was littered with the bodies of dead augments, Captain Albrecht sat in the command chair but looked as though she had poor control of her own body, and next to her stood Doctor T’Ralia. Kirk saw what he needed to know that he could trust Albrecht. The Portland was back under her control.

“Captain Albrecht, good to see you’re back to your old self.”

“I will never be my old self again.” Albrecht made a great effort to speak clearly but each word still came out slow and slurred. “But no one controls me.”

Kirk felt his heart grow heavy with pity and couldn’t help but feel somewhat responsible. LeFevre’s accusations resonated in his head. This whole mess was the result of choices he made twenty five years ago, but to dwell on the past wouldn’t change it.

“Still glad to hear it, Captain. I take it this isn’t the only update you have.”

“We will be ready to begin evacuation soon and need the Enterprise to be ready with support.”

Kirk nodded. “I understand you have a crew of one hundred and eighty seven who we will be welcoming on board.” With the civilians they rescued, that would double the occupancy of the Enterprise, but somehow they would have to make it work: housing people in cargo bays, guest quarters to capacity, extra roommates in officers’ quarters...

Albrecht fell silent and gave a concerned look to T’Ralia. “Admiral...” the doctor began her voice low. “Many of our crew were killed resisting the augments. Our sensors indicate one hundred and forty five life signs.”

Kirk felt as though he had been slapped in the face. That was more than the number of civilians they had saved. “Understood...I’m sorry.” His words felt so hollow and empty, but what else could he say? He was proud of their courage and commitment to their convictions, but that wasn’t the right thing to say when the sting of loss was so fresh.

T’Ralia continued. “When the order is given, we will need you to have your shields down and be ready to rapidly transfer our crew from escape pods and onto Enterprise.”

“Why rapidly?” Kirk had the feeling that he was missing a vital piece.

“For their safety,” Albrecht answered. she paused, finding it difficult to choose the right words. “I can’t leave Federation technology in the hands of the augments.”

Kirk opened his mouth, about to say something in protest, but he stopped himself, it sounded extreme, especially for a ship that was already crippled, but he knew Albrecht was right. “Of course. We’ll speak again when your people start coming off that ship.”

The transmission ended, and Albrecht’s last statement echoed in his head. “I need a scan of the planet...the life signs, how far they are from wreckage.”

“We’re detecting life signs twelve kilometers east of the wreck.”

Kirk nodded. That would make this an easy choice with no lingering ethical consequences. “Fire phasers on the wreckage. Make sure they won’t be able to get any more advanced tech off of that ship.”

T’Ralia went to the ready room. Alone the two young augments looked even more pitiable: sick, frightened, confused. “My name is Doctor T’Ralia,” she explained, plainly. “As promised I can offer medical attention, and I also have a favor to ask.” She knelt beside the young man and administered the analgesics, not so conservative with the dosage as she had been earlier with Maya. “Our crew will be able to reach the escape pods more safely and easily if more of your people are weakened in the way that you have been.” She paused to medicate the young woman as well. “If you are willing and able to move through the ship to spread the virus, I can give you communicators and use the ship’s sensors to tell you the approximate locations of the other augments.”

“I’ll do it,” the young man answered without hesitation. The young woman took a moment to consider before she nodded to give her consent.

“I appreciate your cooperation. I will also ensure that there will be a space for you in the escape pods when we evacuate the ship.”

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Maya was still gasping for air when she reached deck six. She stumbled out of the turbo lift, relieved to be alone for now so she could sit on the ground and try to catch her breath. Once she felt less starved for air, she took out her communicator. “Maya to T’Ralia.” Another cough,

even speaking was more effort than she wanted to exert.

“Go ahead.”

“I’m on deck six, but I don’t know how much longer I can carry on.”

“Try not to overexert yourself. You are no longer alone in your efforts, two augments from the bridge surrendered and agreed to help.”

The shock of that new information hit Maya with such intensity that she nearly stopped feeling the effects of her illness. “Who were they?” She pressed. It wasn’t lost in her that she was only still alive because someone trusted her enough to accept her surrender, but she seriously doubted if her father would allow anyone on his bridge if there was any question about their loyalty.

“Their names were Astrid Ericsson and Awais Patil.”

Damn. Two of her brother’s closest friends. “You should have spoken to me before setting them loose on your ship. I wouldn’t have trusted them.”

“If I made an error in judgment, the stakes have been lowered. The ship is back under our control, and they are both in a weakened state.”

Maya still didn’t feel comfortable with this, but she also didn’t feel like arguing. “Understood.”

She had no way of knowing how long she would be alone and undisturbed, but she planned to use as much time as she could afford to rest and recover. She closed her eyes and took slow, steady breaths but listened carefully for anyone who might come her way. Only a few brief minutes passed before she heard footsteps. They were approaching her but moving slowly. Maya fought to get back on her feet and opened her eyes. The person who approached was a middle aged man in a Starfleet uniform. He kept his distance by a few meters and made no move of aggression.

“I’m in no state to do you any harm, and I would want to anyway.” Maya barely managed to get out her words before she began to cough and wheeze again.

“I understand, the last augment I saw was sick too, but she hadn’t given up her fighting spirit yet.”

“You saw her on this deck?”

“Less than a minute ago.”

Maya felt a glimmer of hope that made her want to let out a triumphant laugh, but she held it back, not sure how the company she kept would respond to such an outburst, and unsure of how her weakened lungs could handle it. She hadn’t been on this deck yet, and not enough time had passed for Astrid and Awais to arrive. Unless someone she had encountered earlier had come here, it just might be that the virus was circulating through the air.

“Can you describe her?” There was an air of excitement as Maya spoke, but the man began to inch away. “Please, this information might help you and the crew to survive.”

“She was probably around my age.” Even as he answered he continued to slowly back away. “Dark skin, very short hair.”

No one she had encountered since she came aboard the Portland fit that description. Maya might have been able to hold back laughter, but she couldn’t help but smile, like a weight had been lifted. The man looked distressed and confused, backing away a little quicker.

“Go, but trust that the odds are tipping in your favor.” With that the man turned and ran away. Maya coughed before she took out her communicator. “Maya to T’Ralia.”

“Go ahead.”

“It’s spread to deck six already.”

“Faster than I anticipated. I will consult with Captain Albrecht, we may be able to begin evacuating the ship soon.”

## Chapter 32

“Captain,” T’Ralia began. “The augments throughout the ship have been weakened. Now would be the ideal time to give the evacuation order.”

Albrecht nodded, her movements slow and heavy.. “As soon as Enterprise is ready. Hail them.”

The bridge of the Enterprise appeared onscreen. “Admiral, are you ready to begin receiving my crew?”

“Momentarily, Captain. Just to confirm, we’re expecting one hundred and fort five, correct?”

“One hundred and forty eight, Admiral,” Albrecht corrected. “Including Maya Noonien Singh and two other augments who surrendered and have offered us their assistance.”

“Captain...” Kirk paused while he considered his words. “I don’t like the idea of giving space to any augments.”

“And I don’t like the idea of abandoning people who have helped me.” Albrecht was agitated and found it harder to speak clearly. She was well aware of how many problems arose the last time she was too trusting but still couldn’t stomach the thought of turning down a cry for help or leaving a person to die after they did you a favor.

Kirk had a hard time arguing with that. “In the end it’s your call who gets evacuated and who goes does with the ship, but any augments aboard my ship will be kept under the closest supervision.”

“Of course, Admiral.”

“I’m going to lower the shields and have transport rooms and sickbay ready. Contact me again when...” Kirk paused, his throat tight and his heart reluctant to consider the inevitable. “When you’ve begun the auto destruct sequence.”

Albrecht laughed softly. Sometimes in a situation so desperate and grim, one couldn’t help but see the absurdity of it all. “Not sure if I’ll be able to, Admiral. I can’t do it on my own, and my chain of command is broken. I might need you to destroy what’s left of my ship.”

“Understood. Keep me updated either way.”

---

Kirk leaned back in the command chair and kept his eyes on the screen, which displayed the Portland again: a sad, broken mess of what was once a lovely, proud ship. If he didn’t know what to look for, he might have missed it at first: one tiny speck that could have been mistaken for a distant star, if only it hadn’t started to move. Then another, and another.

“They’ve begun to evacuate. Have the transporter rooms lock on to the lifesigns aboard the escape pods and begin to beam them over.”

---

Maya had one, final, simple goal ahead of her before she could rest, recover, and have all of her recent hardships become nothing more than a memory. All she had to do was stay on her feet long enough to get into an escape pod. At first it seemed attainable, she was still close to the turbolift, escape would only be a matter of stepping back on and riding to safety. Once back inside, she sat on the ground and tried to slow her breath.

The lift stopped on the next deck, and the door slid open to reveal a trio of Starfleet personnel who looked at her with aggression. With a sinking feeling, Maya realized that out of everyone on this ship, only a handful knew her true purpose.

“I’m not your enemy,” she pleaded, desperate. “I’ve been working with Doctor T’Ralia and Captain Albrecht.” If only she knew the names of the other officers on the bridge. The trio did not yield, and for a moment Maya feared that in spite of all those talks about ethics and respect maybe they had meant to use her and leave her to die all along. The panic she felt made her heart race, which led to shallow, rapid breathing and another coughing fit. She managed to regain her composure enough to speak again, but her words were strained. “I’m the reason why you’re able to get off the ship.” Still no response. “I’m patient zero.”

One of the three stepped forward and crouched down in front of her. “I thought it seemed strange that every augment suddenly came down an illness that spared the rest of us, You can come along, but damned if you’re stepping foot on one of those escape pods if no one can confirm your story.”

Maya stepped out of the turbolift and into a scene of frenzied chaos. The three who rode with her left her behind to join the rush of people racing to the escape pods. Already weak and dizzy it was too much to process. She could barely keep her footing as so many people sped by or pushed her to the side. She had to close her eyes and lean against the wall. So close to safety yet the final obstacle seemed so impossible.

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When she opened her eyes again, she saw the face of the only person who could save her and insure that she found her way onto an escape pod: Doctor T’Ralia.

On the bridge the situation was calm, but Kirk could only imagine the turbulence that must be unfolding on the lower decks.

“Ninety seven.”

They were getting close, but in this final stretch Kirk had to make peace with the fact that some of those people might not make it to the escape pods.

“One hundred and eight.”

He watched the screen wide eyed and barely blinking, as if careful observation would be enough to effect the outcome.

“One hundred and twenty one.”

It was a massive draw of the ship’s energy too, to have every transporter running nearly continuously.

“One hundred thirty four.”

It was a risky process, so many steps where something could go wrong.

“One hundred forty.”

There might even be people who they were unable to beam out of the escape pods.

“One hundred forty two.”

He hated that the ‘acceptable risk’ topic popped into his head when lives were on the line, but to only lose six didn’t seem so terrible.

“One hundred forty seven.”

Kirk breathed a sigh of relief. All save one were safely aboard the Enterprise, and he knew who the last one was.

“Hail the Portland.” No response. There was no reason for Albrecht to ignore him. “Keep trying.”

When they finally got through, Kirk expect to see on screen Albrecht alone on the bridge, but she had unexpected company. An augment, who seemed healthy and unaffected by the virus that raged through the ship, stood on the bridge, holding up Captain Albrecht’s limp body.

“Captain!” Kirk shouted. “What have you done to her?”

“Nothing yet,” he answered, calm yet demanding. “But I could end her life easily.”

“I’m not giving in to any of your demands.”

“I don’t ask for much. Medical attention for my dying kinsmen and safe return to the surface of Ceti Alpha V.”

“I can’t accommodate that. Your lives were forfeit the moment you took control of the Portland.”

“And hers?”

“Captain...” he watched the screen, hoping to see some kind of a response.

Albrecht lifted her heavy head. “I’m ready to go down with my ship.”

“No...no!” Panic set in. There were few options and less time. “Kirk to transported room, get a lock on Captain Albrecht and beam her out of there!”

“I’m trying...there’s interference.”

As the crew of the Enterprise scrambled, the augment had enough time to act. With one arm he held the captain still, and with the other he violently turned her head to snap her neck and then let Albrecht’s lifeless body collapse in a heap on the floor.

No words. Only heavy silence, occasionally interrupted by the beeps and whirs of equipment as the screen went dark. The bridge of the Enterprise was still as if each person was frightened to move or speak. Kirk was the first to dare to say a word.

“Photon torpedos.” His voice was soft and weak. “Turn them into dust.”

## Chapter 33

It was over, yet Kirk felt more like they suffered a staggering defeat. He sat in LeFevre's ready room, along with Spock, McCoy, and LeFevre himself. The four men sat in silence for a moment, each knowing that they had a difficult conversation ahead of them but none wanted to be the one to initiate it.

"Captain LeFevre," Kirk began, his voice soft yet firm. "'Enterprise is yours again.'" He shook his head. "I should be relieved that the civilians are safe, but I'm finding it impossible to feel anything other than immense loss."

McCoy looked toward Spock. "I guess you can't explain about the 'needs of the many' this time." Even as he teased, his tone was sincere, just a little attempt to ease the tension.

"If one were only to consider numbers alone, perhaps not," Spock answered. "However, and I do not intend to imply that some lives are worth more than others, but the vast majority of the casualties were Starfleet personnel who knowingly assumed risks in the line of duty, while all but two of the civilians who survived the crash were safely rescued. One must also consider the potential lives saved by eliminating the threat posed by Khan and the augments."

"You're right," McCoy conceded. "But that doesn't make it hurt any less." He looked to LeFevre. "Any words of wisdom from ancient athletes?"

LeFevre shook his head. "I don't think The Great One ever found him in a situation like ours. Admiral, have you decided what to do about the surviving augments?" Right to business, that was one way to avoid the uncomfortable feelings.

Kirk nodded. "With the wreckage destroyed, as long as all ships are warned to stay away, the threat they pose is impossibly small. I think it's best to leave them be."

"Again, Admiral?" LeFevre pressed.

Kirk leaned forward, defensively, but McCoy spoke first.

"Captain!" McCoy snapped. "What would you do instead? Kill them all? We've been over this before, we're talking about more than a bunch of tyrants and war criminals from hundreds of years ago: there are families, children. In fact, I'd wager that the worst of them went down with the Portland."

"That's enough, Doctor." LeFevre countered. "I only meant that I don't like the idea of letting them off without any consequences, but I can't think of a better solution."

"Captain," Spock had something to add this time. "Their leader and a significant number of their kin have been killed. Some might consider that outcome a consequence."

"And the augments rescued from the Portland?" LeFevre continued.

"I want them sent back to the planet. Regardless of what they did to help, it's too much of a liability to keep them on the ship."

LeFevre nodded. "Something we can agree on."

---

Maya was back in the brig on the Enterprise, under even closer supervision than the last time with a guard who wouldn't give her a moment of privacy. The great irony is that she was the least likely to make an escape attempt. In sickbay she had been told that all traces of the virus were cleared from her body, yet she was still feverish, sore, and exhausted and only wanted to sleep.

She laid on the cot trying to sleep even though her head was spinning, and at first she ignored the sound of approaching footsteps. It was only the sound of a familiar voice that caught her attention.

"Maya? Are you awake?" Doctor McCoy asked.

"Despite my best efforts, yes." She replied as she sat up. "Any chance you have more of the medication that Doctor T'Ralia gave me?"

"Unfortunately too much of that drug would burn a hole in your liver."

"Is this what you meant, when you said there could be long term consequences?" She asked, desperate and frightened.

"Well, it's still too early to be talking about anything long term." He spoke as if he was trying to comfort himself too. "But I don't have an answer for you, no matter how much I wish I did. Anyway, I came to tell you that...well it's over. The crew of the Portland is safe, but the ship had to be destroyed."

"And Captain Albrecht? Do you think she might recover from the brain damage?"

McCoy didn't say a word, but he didn't need to, his face was an easy one to read. The look of pain and shock on his face, like he wanted to speak but didn't know what to say...that told her everything.

Maya's head was spinning, and she couldn't stay upright any longer. She laid back down. "She's dead, isn't she?" McCoy simply nodded.

"Maya...please don't blame yourself."

“How can I not?” Even though she was exhausted and lying down, Maya raised her voice and was practically shouting. “Everything that happened to her happened because she trusted me.”

“Then the best you can do is spend the rest of your life making choices you can look back at and be proud of.” He went quiet. “We’ll, as best you can, I also came to tell you that Kirk wants to have you, Astrid, and Awais sent back to the planet. Astrid and Awais are eager to return home, but I thought you might have a few objections.”

“Ceti Alpha V is not my home.” She sat back up, ignoring the spinning in her head because she wanted to feel a bit more dignified for this conversation.

“I don’t want to send you back there, but I don’t think that’s going to be enough to change his mind.”

“I wouldn’t be safe there.” A sudden realization came to mind, and it gave Maya such a strong sense of hope that she found the strength and energy she needed to get back to her feet. “Would he refuse me if I requested asylum?”

“I can tell you he wouldn’t like it, but you have a compelling case.”

Maya sat back down. “Then that’s what I want to do. What can I expect on earth?”

“Yours is a complicated case, and I’m a doctor, not a lawyer.”

“I’ve already had a complicated life.”

“Not this complicated. You’ve helped us, but you’ve also caused a lot of harm along the way. Then there’s also the federation’s strict ban on genetic engineering.”

“I wasn’t genetically engineered, Doctor, I was created in the same way you were.”

“Hence the complications. I can’t guess where you might fit in the world, but I can guarantee your safety.”

“I’m used to not fitting in, safety is all I want.”

“That can be accommodated.”

---

Kirk had to give condolences himself, in person. Gloria Albrecht lived in a remote corner of Southeastern Alaska, where the people preferred isolation to such an extent that they didn’t allow transporters except in emergencies. He had to beam in to Juneau, ride a ferry up the fjord, to a small town, and hike up a mountain. He couldn’t imagine the challenges of living here, but to visit? Nothing felt more invigorating, and he was sure this was the best time of year to visit. The air was cold, the leaves changing, and low mist hanging in the air.

The house looking like a little shack originally built centuries ago and gradually added to. Kirk knocked on the door, and was surprised by how soon Gloria opened the door to greet him. He had given her as much advance notice as he could manage, but it still seemed like she had been waiting by the door.

“Gloria.” He began. “A pleasure to meet you. I’m...”

“Admiral Kirk, I know.” She sounded irritated.

“If you don’t want to talk I can go. I don’t mind.”

“No. Come in.”

Kirk followed her inside. While the exterior of the house was...rustic the interior was as modern as could be, save for a few pieces of furniture and decor that looked to have celebrated at least one hundred birthdays. “You have a lovely home,” he began. A common piece of small talk, but he meant it.

“What, this old shack?”

“The house is something special, but to be honest I was talking more about the surrounding: the mountains, the trees.”

Gloria sat on an armchair that looked like might have been an original to the old home. “Make yourself at home, Admiral. You know, I like living out here because no one bothered me, but now that I want to be left alone and grieve, I have a visitor almost every day,”

“Again, I don’t have to stay.” Kirk stayed on his feet until a pleading look from Gloria urged him to sit on another ancient armchair.

“I’ve been mulling over for days what I should say, but I realized there’s probably nothing about your wife I could say that you don’t already know about her courage or her selfless heart. I thought it might be better to simply offer company, answer questions, or help around the house if you need anything.”

“Thank you, Admiral, I don’t need anything, but how long were you planning on staying?”

“I was planning on going back to Juneau on the overnight ferry this evening, but my plans are flexible.”

“No need for any of that, the favor I’m going to ask can be done from the ferry.”

“And what’s that?”

“You got lucky. You came to Alaska on a day when then sky is clear yet a solar storm is predicted.”

“Aurora borealis?” Kirk guessed with a sense of wonder.

Gloria nodded. “I’ve never been to space, but Vivienne said nothing she saw out there compared to seeing the Lights on a clear night.”

“Did she grow up here?”

“No, she grew up just outside of Alaska.”

“Northwestern Canada?” Kirk guessed.

“No, downtown Anchorage.” A smile appeared on Gloria’s face, slight, but just enough to reach her eyes.

Kirk returned her smile. “Well, if you’re sure there’s nothing else you need.”

“Just one more favor. Before you leave, spend as much time as you can outdoors. Hiking, exploring, getting your toes in the earth.”

“I can think of no other way I’d like to spend my time here.” Kirk stood, taking Gloria’s hand in his and looking down into her eyes. “I’m glad I had the change to know Vivienne.”

---

Kirk was a man of his word. By the time he boarded the ferry his legs ached from climbing uphill and his body was chilled to the core from working up a sweat in the cold air. His body begged for sleep, but he had a promise to keep. He waited out of the deck in the cold air until he saw the first faint flash of green dance across the sky, and then another, bolder and bolder. Of everything he had seen exploring space, maybe it wasn’t the most spectacular, but with the memory of Captain Albrecht in his heart, it was certainly the most special. He was reminded of an old poem that often came to mind when he was outdoors, words he always appreciated but never fully understood until now.

*I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,  
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.  
Missing me one place search another,I stop somewhere waiting for you.*

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