

Kal-if-fee

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Summary

T'Pring chooses not to challenge the marriage, and everyone loses.

Notes

Written for Allekha in the 2017 Trick or Treat exchange. Originally posted on AO3.

If your Captain were victor, he would not want me, and so I would have Stonn. If you were victor you would free me because I had dared to challenge, and again I would have Stonn. But if you did not free me, it would be the same. For you would be gone, and I would have your name and your property, and Stonn would still be there.

-T'Pring, Amok Time

When the time comes, she considers the challenge. It is her right, and Stonn is willing to fight for her, but in the end she decides against it. The kal-if-fee is to the death, and she cannot bear the thought of losing him. So when Spock comes for her, with his strange dress and human companions, she stays silent and keeps her peace.

She is not sure Stonn ever forgives her for that.

The ceremony is brief, over almost as soon as it has begun. A necessity, of course, given the state of things. She and Spock are ushered to the marriage chamber and then left alone to do what they must.

Her memories of Spock are of a quiet boy who kept to himself, intelligent but always a little apart, as if he wasn't sure where he fit. But the pon farr has consumed him, and she sees nothing of that boy in the man that stands before her now.

She undresses quickly, lying down on the bed and forcing herself to relax. Her mother and sister have told her what to expect, and she closes her eyes and waits for the inevitable.

He is not gentle as he enters her, but she is Vulcan. She will endure.

* * *

The fever has barely broken when he turns away from her, cleaning himself quickly before beginning to dress. Tradition dictates that the newly bonded bathe together, once the burning is over, but she doesn't mention it. The sooner he is gone, the better it will be for all of them.

"What happens now?" he asks, still not looking at her.

"You leave," she says simply.

"And in seven years' time?"

T'Pring's skin crawls, but she forces the feeling back. "Then you will return."

He turns to her, finally, and there's something in his eyes; a pain that matches her own. For a moment she wonders if she has made the wrong choice. Perhaps if she had gone to him before all this, discussed it... perhaps things could have turned out differently. But she doesn't ask. What is, is, and they will both have to live with the consequences.

Spock raises his hand in the ta'al. "Farewell, T'Pring."

Her answering "Farewell" is almost silent. He calls his ship to beam him up, and then he is gone.

Alone, T'Pring searches out the betrothal link, now deepened into a bond, and puts all her energy into blocking it out.

* * *

The situation is bearable, for a time. The bond is an ever-present presence in the back of her mind, but she blocks it as best she can, and Spock does the same on his end. She goes back to Stonn, and her life, and her work, and tries to convince herself that nothing has changed. Spock is gone, and how she lives her life should not affect him.

But it does. During intimacy with Stonn her concentration wavers, and suddenly Spock is there, in her head. Shock and dismay rush through her – she isn't sure whose – before his shields slam down hard enough to hurt.

Of course, it is difficult to continue after that. Later, after she has sent Stonn home, Spock makes contact, cautiously. He explains that, while he does not object to her activities, he would appreciate if she could shield her feelings better, or, failing that, at least give him some warning.

Such a distraction in a crisis situation could prove catastrophic, he tells her, with a hint of condescension. *And, in any case, I have no desire to be a voyeur.*

Then stay out of my mind, T'Pring thinks, and clamps her shields down tight.

She and Stonn soldier on for several more months, in spite of the trials, but the constant fear of Spock's presence makes intimacy difficult, and eventually they begin to drift apart.

T'Pring throws herself into her work, but even that isn't without difficulty. The effort it takes to keep her shields fully up and her mind separate from Spock's is exhausting, and twice she nearly makes costly mistakes due to weariness.

She confides in her mother about how difficult she is finding it, hoping for advice. Her mother tells her that her problems come from fighting the bond, and she must accept it and try to find the good in it.

So for a while she tries, but the only good she can see in her bond with Spock is that he hates it as much as she does.

He is better at shielding than she is, but she still gets glimpses sometimes. She feels his passion for his work with Starfleet, his affection for the humans he works with. And she feels him chafing at the edges of the bond, just as she is. He rarely thinks of her, but when he does it is tinged with pain and frustration.

Sometimes, in the very dead of night, she wonders if shoving a knife through her heart would kill him too. Sometimes she wonders if it matters.

One morning she is working with some very delicate components when she feels a sharp pain in her side. She controls it long enough to set down the particular component she is working with, and is easing herself into a chair when the pain in her side is dwarfed by one in her head. Something is breaking inside her, ripping and tearing.

The bond. *Spock.*

The last thing she feels before she loses consciousness is relief.

* * *

The human captain is upset when he calls her, his anger and sadness plainly visible. She knows humans do not bother to control their emotions, but the sight of it still surprises her. It is indecent, grotesque, and she wonders how Spock could have borne it, living among them for all those years.

But then, Spock has never been an ordinary Vulcan.

"You did this," Kirk tells her. "I don't know how, but ever since you two bonded he's been different. Distant. He told me everything was fine, but I could see him getting weaker and then when that bullet hit him..." His eyes grow wet, and he blinks rapidly. "It's like he just gave up."

"That was not my doing," T'Pring says, because she's never been able to make Spock do anything, least of all this. "All I ever wanted was my freedom."

Kirk barks a laugh. It is an unpleasant sound. "Well, congratulations, you've got it. And it only cost Spock his life."

He ends the connection before she can respond.

* * *

The words echo through her head over the next days. She cannot quite find it in herself to grieve for Spock, but part of her grieves for herself. Yes, she is free now, but what has it got her? A dead bondmate, a broken bond, and the man she wanted to be with now in the arms of another.

She cannot help but wonder what would have happened if she'd chosen the challenge all those months ago, let Stonn take on Spock. Perhaps he would have won. Perhaps they would still be together. Perhaps everything would be different. But such musings are worthless – the past is the past, and does not change.

So she does her work, and visits her family, and goes home at night to an empty house to lie in bed alone.

It isn't the life she planned for herself, but it is hers, and she is Vulcan.

She will endure.

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