

With a Broken Wing

By Mary A Milan 2021©

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Chapter 1

She wore a black, fitted evening gown with a low back and a V-cut front that emphasized her smooth, tan skin and womanly curves. The dress flowed to the floor as she stood erect next to the piano. Her dark hair draped into her face as her painted lips parted in song. The room, which had been a bustling mass of diplomacy moments earlier, fell silent as she sang a haunting Terran melody from centuries ago.

Oh, my love, my darling, I hunger for your touch, a long, lonely time.

And time goes by so slowly, and time can do so much. Are you still mine?

I need your love, I need your love, God speed your love to me.

Lonely rivers flow to the sea, to the sea, to the open arms of sea,

Lonely rivers cry 'wait for me, wait for me, I'll be coming home, wait for me!'

"Beautiful," Doctor Leonard McCoy murmured.

"The woman or the song, Doctor?" Commander Spock asked.

"Both," Captain James T. Kirk answered softly, before McCoy could. McCoy smiled at Spock, who raised an eyebrow.

The three of them stood together in the crowded room as the woman finished singing. As the applause resounded, she softly spoke to the piano player and stepped down from the dais. She was swallowed up in the crowd and the three men soon lost sight of her. An ambassador approached and started a conversation with Kirk, distracting him enough to put the entertainer out of his mind for the time being.

Eventually, McCoy excused himself from the crowd and loosened the collar of his dress uniform as he stepped out onto a patio that led into the garden of the large palace to get air. Walking down the steps from the patio into the garden, he noticed the singer standing alone in the cool air with a wrap around her shoulders. He moved forward and offered a smile as he spoke. "Kind of cool out here, isn't it?"

She turned and looked at him for a moment as if assessing the threat he might pose. Then she smiled and looked back at the night. "Yes, but it's nice."

"The view makes it even better."

She nodded, then looked at him, looking at her and smiled an embarrassed smile. She cleared her throat. "I haven't been on a planet without a bio dome in months. Transports, starbases, bio domes, but no real weather. This breeze is bracing, and the view of the stars is beautiful. It kind of reminds me of winter at home."

He smiled. "Where's home?"

"Florida, NorthAm, Earth."

"No kiddin'," he chuckled. "I'm from Georgia."

She smiled. "Small universe." She pulled the wrap closer around her shoulders.

McCoy frowned then. "Are you sure you're not too cold?"

She shook her head. "Just right, actually."

"Well, the gentlemanly thing for me to do would be to offer you my jacket, but..."

She chuckled. "But you're not exactly wearing the kind of jacket you can easily loan me. I know. It's okay, really."

"We could go back inside..."

"Not yet." She frowned, slightly. "If you were in there, you know what I'm doing here. And I can see you're in Starfleet—science specialty? Is that the blue color?"

"How rude of me, Doctor Leonard McCoy, ma'am." He said, his Southern drawl coming to the fore. "Chief Medical Officer on the USS *Enterprise*."

"A doctor," she raised her eyebrows. "Impressive. What made you decide to join Starfleet? Isn't it kind of antithetical to Hippocrates?"

McCoy frowned. "The story behind me joining Starfleet is a long one I'd be happy to tell you some other time, but why would you think Starfleet is 'antithetical to Hippocrates'?"

"Isn't it a large war machine? You always hear about conflicts with the Romulans and Klingons."

McCoy smiled. "There are those, but Starfleet's primary mission is one of scientific exploration. For every conflict you hear about there are hundreds of discoveries made." He took a deep breath. "I can't believe I'm about to say this, but you should talk to Spock. He's the Chief Science Officer on the *Enterprise* and he'd be more equipped to give you the statistics on it.

Is Starfleet 'antithetical to Hippocrates'? No, I think it follows the first tenet: 'First, do no harm' as much as possible, given the risks out there."

She placed her hand on his arm with a gentle smile. "I don't think I need to speak to your friend. You did a wonderful job explaining it. Thank you for your patience."

He paused, looking down at her green eyes, surrounded by thick black lashes. "My pleasure, ma'am." He put his free hand over hers, holding it on his arm.

She seemed to blush, again. "I'm so sorry, now I'm being rude. My name is Elise Jean-Marie."

He smiled. "I know. I heard you sing."

She laughed. "I almost forgot."

A male cleared his throat behind them, and they turned toward it to see a tall, older man with a beard standing at the rail of the patio above them. "They're looking for you, Ms. Jean-Marie," he said.

She released McCoy's arm as if she'd gotten caught doing something she wasn't supposed to, and he released her hand. "I'm on my way."

McCoy offered the crook of his arm to her, and she glanced in the direction of the now gone, older man, then smiled, just tad shakily, as she took it. "Are you okay, my dear?" he asked, softly.

Her smile solidified but no longer reached her eyes. "How can I be anything else when in the presence of a real gentleman?"

Together they walked back inside where the hostess of the party whisked her away to prepare for her next song. McCoy watched the tall man take her elbow as she walked and speak to her in her ear. He frowned as she seemed to stiffen, wondering who the man was.

"Bones, where have you been?" Kirk was suddenly at his side.

"Went out to get some air," he answered, turning away from Ms. Jean-Marie.

#

Spock entered the dining room of the large palace late that evening to check in with the ship. While he recognized the necessity for official functions, they were not anything he enjoyed. He was looking forward to returning to the ship and his duties as first officer. His other reason for taking refuge in this room was to escape the growing intoxication of the humans in the other room. When humans became intoxicated, he'd found, they became more overtly emotional and physically familiar.

After checking in on the ship, his keen hearing picked up a sound from behind him. Curious, he moved to the back of the room to locate the noise. He pushed open a door in the back of the room and found a woman, with long black hair wearing a black evening gown that exposed much of her back, standing, holding her head back with a handkerchief over her nose.

"Are you unwell?" Spock inquired.

The woman jumped and spun on her heel to face him. He recognized her, then, as the singer, though her eyes were now red and swollen, rimmed with smudged make-up. "I didn't know anyone was in here," she said, softly.

Spock had surmised that by her reaction but did not comment on it. "Do you require assistance?" he asked, quietly.

Still holding the handkerchief to her nose, she shook her head. "No. I'll be fine."

He inclined his head and was about to turn away when he noticed a deep red stain on the handkerchief and a matching spot on her chest. "You are bleeding. I will get medical assistance."

"No!" She reached out to him desperately with her free hand. Then she pulled back. "No, please," she said, in a calmer voice. "It's just a nosebleed. I'll be fine."

Spock took the moment then to examine her more closely. There was an angry red mark on her cheek and two matching marks on her upper arms. "Someone has assaulted you. Perhaps you wish to report the attack...?"

She shook her head. "No, really. I'll be fine. I would appreciate your discretion."

Spock's frown deepened. "Ms. Jean-Marie," he said, recalling her name from her numerous introductions that evening as she prepared to perform. "Is it logical to allow your attacker to be free to assault another person? Or to refuse medical treatment when you are obviously injured?"

Her eyes became moist, but she smiled. Spock recognized there was no joy in the smile, though. "No, sir. It is not logical at all. There is little chance that anyone else will be attacked and my nose has already stopped bleeding," she pulled the handkerchief away from her nose. "See? I'll be fine. No reason for concern." Spock gazed at her impassively.

Her green eyes met his brown ones, then looked away. "Please don't look at me like that," she whispered.

His eyebrow rose. "I am merely trying to decipher the reason you would choose to accept an assault without the very human desire for retribution – or the logical desire for justice."

She shook her head. "Sometimes, people do things for odd reasons, sir. Please don't trouble yourself further. I will be fine."

Spock inclined his head. "As you wish. I will, however, escort you to wherever you wish to go. I would be negligent in my duties as a Starfleet officer if I left you alone and your attacker returned. Perhaps you would wish to return to your residence?"

Ms. Jean-Marie swallowed visibly and blinked several times, as if she had something in her eye she was trying to dislodge. "Thank you. I would appreciate that."

Spock waited patiently for her to gather her wrap around her and led her through a door of the dining room that did not lead directly into the crowded ballroom. They walked in silence through the corridors of the palace and up the grand staircase to the second level where the quarters were for the dignitaries who were staying for the night. They passed a few people—some acknowledged them with nods or murmured greetings, others did not—as they walked silently. Spock noticed Ms. Jean-Marie turned her head to his direction, strategically using her hair to refrain from eye contact each time they encountered someone. When they arrived at her quarters, Spock insisted on entering first to ensure no one was waiting for her.

When he emerged, she placed her hand on his arm and looked up at him. "Thank you for being so kind."

He nodded, slowly, with a slight bow. She, then, removed her hand and walked into the room. When the door closed behind her, he turned on his heel and returned to the ballroom, determined to excuse himself from further "festivities".

#

Kirk and McCoy greeted Spock as he returned to the ballroom.

"Where've you been?" McCoy asked.

"I took a moment to check in with the ship," Spock decided to omit the rest.

Kirk nodded. "We're returning anyway. I've spoken to Jordan Von Cleef, the manager for Ms. Jean-Marie, and he's agreed to use the *Enterprise* as transportation to their next port of call and grace us with a couple of performances while en route."

Spock nodded. "I'm sure the crew will enjoy the diversion." McCoy smiled. "They should. She's very talented."

Kirk nodded. "Absolutely," he seemed to be congratulating himself on the arrangements he'd made.

"He said they'll be coming aboard tomorrow morning; that Ms. Jean-Marie had already turned in for the night."

Spock's eyebrow rose in the nearest thing to surprise he would allow himself to show.

Recognizing the look in his friend, McCoy asked. "Something wrong, Spock?" His eyebrows arched to match Spock's.

"Unknown, Doctor. I escorted Ms. Jean-Marie to her quarters after seeing her in the dining room. She had been slightly injured in an altercation."

McCoy's eyebrows arched. "What?! And you didn't come and get me?!"

"She specifically asked me not to, Doctor. Her injuries did not appear to be severe, so I did not press it." He continued. "She refused, also, to report the incident. I, therefore, escorted her to her quarters."

"Maybe she told Von Cleef she was returning to her quarters and met up with someone instead," Kirk offered, thoughtfully.

"Perhaps."

"Either way, I should examine her. Make sure she's okay," McCoy said.

"If she didn't want medical assistance when it happened, Bones, I'm sure she wouldn't appreciate your knock on her door right now. She'll be on ship tomorrow. Maybe you can get your chance then...say, under the guise of making sure our guests are in the best health possible?" Kirk suggested.

McCoy grumbled. "Fine, but it goes against my better judgment."

#

James T. Kirk stood in the transporter room with Dr. Leonard McCoy awaiting the singer and her manager.

When Kevin Riley, the transporter tech on duty, indicated that they were ready to come aboard, Kirk said, "Energize."

The lights on the transporter coalesced to form two pillars, which then solidified into the feminine form of the singer and the masculine form of the manager. When the process was finished, the tall, gray-haired man McCoy recognized from the garden stepped forward. Ms. Jean-Marie followed a step behind.

"Welcome to the *Enterprise*, Ms. Jean-Marie, Mr. Von Cleef," Kirk smiled.

"Thank you for agreeing to take us to our next port of call, Captain," Von Cleef said with a disarming smile.

"My pleasure. Thank you, Ms. Jean-Marie, for agreeing to perform for us. I enjoyed your singing at the party last night."

Ms. Jean-Marie smiled and nodded to him. "I am always happy to perform for those serving the Federation through exploration and science," she smiled at McCoy, who smiled back.

Kirk saw the exchange and made a mental note to ask McCoy about it later. Then he noticed that Von Cleef saw it as well and was scowling. Kirk was careful to keep his face neutral.

"As a standard procedure, Doctor McCoy, our ship's Chief Medical Officer, would like to conduct a quick health scan of you both, if you'll follow him."

"What health scan? I assure you, Captain, we are both in excellent health." Von Cleef seemed suspicious.

"But you've been travelling quite a bit," McCoy smiled his most disarming smile. "It's just to make sure you haven't been exposed to any little viruses that could mutate and harm the crew."

"Wouldn't contaminants be filtered out by the transporter?"

"Normally, but we have found that some nasty little bugs have gotten by the filters in the past. It's my responsibility to ensure the medical safety of this crew and, as such, on this ship, all visitors report to sickbay first."

Jean-Marie smiled. "I'm sure it won't do any harm, Jordan," she said, softly. "They're just doing their jobs."

Von Cleef's face softened, though his eyes remained hard. "Of course, my dear."

Kirk left them to attend to the *Enterprise*'s departure, inviting them to dinner that evening with the ship's officers. The doctor and his two guests then continued to the sickbay.

Chapter 2

Spock was on the bridge with Kirk when McCoy entered the bridge and walked to the captain's chair. "I need to speak to the two of you," the doctor's words, caused Spock to straighten and turn.

The three of them entered the turbolift and descended to Deck Five and followed Kirk to his quarters.

Upon entering, Kirk went to his desk. "So?"

"Both of our guests are in excellent health."

"But?" Kirk asked.

"But Elise—that is Ms. Jean-Marie—seems to have some old injuries that haven't been attended to properly. For example, her arm shows an old fracture—like someone who lives on a planet without modern medical care. But she told me she's from Earth."

Kirk frowned. "Why would she say she's from Earth, if she's not?"

"Perhaps it is a public persona for the sake of her career," Spock offered.

"Maybe she was injured during her travels and was not able to get proper medical care," Kirk said, thoughtfully.

McCoy frowned. "Maybe, for one injury, but she has a least a dozen. She would have had to fall down a mine shaft to get that many injuries in one location and not receive proper medical care. But then she probably wouldn't have survived that kind of hack job."

"Do you have a theory?"

McCoy shook his head. "I can't think of anything."

Spock did. "She refused medical care last evening. Perhaps it is her habit."

"Are you trying to say that she doesn't like doctors, Spock?!" McCoy shook his head in disbelief.

"You've both experienced a broken arm; would either one of you walk around with that pain rather than go to a doctor?"

Kirk shook his head. "I get your point, Bones. Is there any reason to think that Ms. Jean-Marie's hiding something that may endanger the ship?"

"Not necessarily," Bones started.

"Perhaps, Captain," Spock interrupted. "If she is hiding something about her past, then it is an unknown factor that may leave the *Enterprise* exposed."

Kirk took a deep breath. "I'll talk to her. See if she'll open up about anything in her past."

"Just keep in mind that she told me she was from Florida, on Earth," McCoy said.

Kirk nodded. "Will do."

#

On the second evening of her voyage on the *Enterprise*, Elise Jean-Marie arrived at the Officers' Dining Room at the time requested. She didn't see anyone but the galley staff there and wondered if she'd gotten the time wrong. There was one table set for two near the observation window, but nothing to indicate an official function. She opened her mouth to ask one of the staff members as the door opened and Captain James T. Kirk entered.

He was dressed in a green wrap-around uniform tunic and black uniform pants and boots. She was dressed in a blue-green, knee-length dress. She wondered if she'd misunderstood the message.

"Hello, Captain?" she said, cautiously.

"You're early," he smiled a disarming smile.

"Am I?"

"Well, it's not often my dinner guest beats me to the dining room. I apologize for making you wait."

"I'm confused, actually. I thought this was a dinner for your staff, like last night."

Kirk continued to smile as he approached her. In two strides, he was close enough to smell her perfume. "Would you have come if I'd said it was only the two of us?"

She blushed at the way he looked at her. "Perhaps. You are, after all, the captain."

He smiled, clearly amused. "I am, at that," he chuckled. Then he looked over at the set table and waved a hand in that direction. "Shall we?" He took her elbow gently and guided her to a chair that placed her back to the door.

She frowned for a moment. "Would you mind, terribly, if I moved my chair to that side?"

Since moving her chair would put her next to him, instead of across from him, Kirk smiled. "Absolutely not."

She smiled. "I'm sorry. I just have a thing about having my back to the door. Call it nosiness—I like to see who's coming and going."

"I understand," he said, making a mental note. "But we should remain undisturbed."

She nodded as the galley staff rearranged the table accordingly. "I'm so sorry to be a pest."

"Not at all," Kirk smiled. "I never object to a beautiful woman being close to me."

She smiled as a blush warmed her cheeks, again. "Thank you for the compliment."

They sat and as the staff began serving their meal, he asked her about herself. She shook her head. "I'd much rather hear about you," she said, with a smile. "It must be exciting to be a starship captain."

He smiled. "How about we take turns? I tell you something about me, you tell me something about you?"

She nodded. "Okay."

"Where are you from?"

"A small town called Apalachicola, Florida. It's in the panhandle on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Where are you from?"

"Riverside, Iowa, right in the middle of the NorthAm continent."

"Wow, what are the odds that I should meet two people from NorthAm this far away from Earth? Your Doctor McCoy says he's from Georgia."

"Georgia's real close to you, isn't it?"

"Not far. About two hours by shuttle, depending on which part of Georgia you want to go to."

Kirk smiled. "So, what led you to singing professionally?"

"When I was young, I loved to sing, and my father saw that I had a gift. So, he pushed and pushed until I was accepted to audition at a school, I was far too young for. When I started having trouble there, he pulled me out, signed me with Jordan and I've been working with him ever since." She looked down at the straight-lines of embroidery on the napkins when she finished. Then she brightened. "How did you enter Starfleet?"

Kirk told her about his dad and Starfleet Academy. Finally, Kirk stopped trying to get information about her and just began to enjoy their evening together. For her part, Jean-Marie started to relax more, smiling more openly and laughing with him. By the end of dinner, they were on a first name basis.

After dinner, he walked her back to her quarters. They were a respectable distance apart but smiling and laughing when her manager appeared at the door of his quarters.

"Captain?" Von Cleef asked, frowning.

"Mr. Von Cleef," Kirk smiled. "I hope you're finding everything to your liking."

Von Cleef smiled then. "Of course." He moved to stand next to Elise, placing a possessive hand on her back.

"Is everything okay with your quarters, Elise?"

Her smile was still in place, but it seemed different to Kirk. "Absolutely," she assured him. "The Captain was inquiring if we could have our first performance at a staff dinner tomorrow evening."

"Sounds perfect," Von Cleef smiled. "Then perhaps we can give one performance per shift for the next two days?"

Kirk noticed a fraction of a second's disbelief, then the smile was back in place on Jean-Marie's face. He tilted his head thoughtfully. "No need to push all the performances into two days. There's plenty of time before we get to your next port of call. I'll have Yeoman Rand contact you tomorrow to work out a schedule," he looked at his dinner companion and smiled. "Have a good evening, Elise. I look forward to your performance tomorrow."

"Thank you, Captain. I do too."

As Kirk turned away, something started to nag at him about Elise's relationship with her manager. Then he realized that she stopped using his first name when Von Cleef showed up. He decided he'd have to keep an eye on the pair.

#

Leonard McCoy, after speaking to Jim Kirk about his evening, decided to stop by Elise's quarters to discuss her test results and ask her to come by Sickbay for a follow up. He pushed the button to alert her to his presence and paused for a moment, then pushed the button again. There was still no answer, and he frowned. Finally, he moved over to a communication panel and paged the bridge.

"Bridge, here."

"Uhura, could you locate Elise Jean-Marie?"

"Yes, sir." There was a pause. "She is in her quarters, Doctor." Another pause. "She's not answering the comms."

"Use my medical clearance to scan her quarters. Something turned up on her test results and I need to make sure she's okay."

After a moment, Uhura's voice returned with more urgency. "The medical scanners are reporting that she's unconscious!"

"Override the locks on her door on my authority," McCoy ordered and rushed back to her door, which then slid open. He moved into her room and found her lying, face down, prone on the floor, next to an overturned table.

He quickly tapped on the comm panel inside the door and snapped. "Medical emergency, VIP quarters!"

He rushed to her side and began his assessment of his new patient. "Elise?" he called to her gently. After quickly scanning her with his medical tricorder, he determined that she did not have a broken neck or back or any internal injuries. He turned her over as Jordan Von Cleef entered the room. McCoy frowned as he saw a split lip and swollen eye.

"Elise?!" the taller, older man stormed in. "Doctor, what are you doing here? What happened?!"

McCoy growled at the man. "Get out of my way, Von Cleef, and let me find out."

The emergency medical techs showed up at that moment and they lifted her unconscious form onto a hovercot. She groaned as they moved it to the door.

"Stop!" McCoy moved to her side. "Elise, it's Leonard McCoy. Can you hear me?"

"What happened?" she murmured weakly, through swollen lips.

"Don't talk, we'll find out. Don't worry."

#

Kirk showed up in Sickbay to find that McCoy was alone with Nurse Chapel and Elise Jean-Marie. Von Cleef was scowling and stalking back and forth in McCoy's office, furious to be kept away from his ward.

"Can't you talk to him?!" Van Cleef pointed in the direction of the med-bay.

Kirk shook his head. "The CMO is actually the only person on a starship that outranks the captain." He smiled, attempting to charm the manager out of his anger.

"And I wouldn't think of second-guessing Dr. McCoy. Don't worry. He's an excellent doctor. He's put me back together more times than I care to think about."

Von Cleef took a deep breath. "Of course, Captain. He must be well qualified to be CMO in the first place, right? I suppose part of my concern is

how did he come to be in her quarters in the first place? Perhaps this was something he caused?"

"Doctor McCoy only entered the room when he suspected something was wrong," Kirk felt his hackles rise at the not-so-veiled accusation. "When she's able, I'm sure Elise will tell us what happened."

Von Cleef took a deep breath and ran his hands through his close-cropped grey hair. His ice blue eyes closed, then opened. "I'm sorry, Captain. Of course, you're right."

Spock entered. "There does not seem to be evidence of an intruder or foul play within her quarters."

Kirk nodded. "There is, at least, that."

McCoy emerged from the room, finally. Von Cleef stepped forward.

"How is she?" he demanded. "Did she tell you what happened? Why were you in her quarters?"

McCoy held up his hands. "I went into her quarters on a hunch when she didn't answer the door. And be grateful I did. God knows how long she might have lain there, unconscious and hurt if I hadn't." He took a deep breath and turned to Kirk. "She'll be fine. One of the small bones in her face, near her eye socket was fractured, but I've mended it. Nurse Chapel is finishing the tissue regeneration therapy. Then I'm ordering her to stay here for the night, so I can monitor her concussion."

Kirk nodded, but Von Cleef questioned, further. "Will she be able to perform tomorrow evening?"

"We can postpone the performance," Kirk cut in. "It's not as important as her full recovery."

Von Cleef started to say something else, but something stopped him. Kirk looked to his left and saw Spock there, impassively standing to his full height—equal to Von Cleef—but something about his demeanor took the wind out of Von Cleef's sails. The older man narrowed his eyes briefly, then turned back to McCoy. "I want to see her."

McCoy shook his head. "She's sedated and will stay that way until morning."

Kirk held up his hands. "Why don't you turn in, Mr. Von Cleef?"

Von Cleef threw his hands in the air, turned on his heel and left the sickbay.

McCoy shook his head. "Something about that man just *bugs* me." Kirk took a deep breath, but did not comment. "Report, Bones." The older man shook his head. "She said that she tripped." "Tripped?"

"It is possible, Captain. The table in her quarters was overturned," Spock reported.

"If she hit it on her way down, it could account for her injuries and for her being unconscious when I got there. It was right next to her." McCoy frowned, thoughtfully, then. "And you found no evidence of anyone else being in the room?"

"None," Spock affirmed.

Kirk shook his head. "Okay. My gut says there's something fishy going on here, but if the evidence doesn't seem to support it..." He pressed his lips together under furrowed eyebrows. "Let me know if either of you find anything else."

#

Elise Jean-Marie was out of bed when McCoy walked in after breakfast.

"Where do you think you're going, young lady?" he asked, with a smile.

She looked decidedly embarrassed. "Back to my quarters. I'm so embarrassed for being such a klutz."

He put his arm around her shoulders. "You don't have anything to be embarrassed about, my dear. I just want to make sure you're one hundred percent before you go. It won't do any good for you to pass out in the middle of a performance."

She stiffened under his arm, but smiled. "You're right, Doctor."

"Call me Leonard," he smiled his most disarming smile. "And let me run a scanner over you one more time before you go."

She regarded him for a moment.

"I really just want to make sure you're fully healed, my dear. For your sake, not for any other ulterior motive."

She relaxed again. "Okay," she nodded.

"How are you feeling?"

"Other than embarrassed?"

He chuckled, "Other than embarrassed."

"I'm fine." She touched her face. "You're a great doctor, Leonard."

He shrugged with a smile. "Now I'm embarrassed."

She smiled.

McCoy looked at her and smiled widely. "Oh, I see." He tried to look upset but couldn't muster more than pursed lips. "Embarrass me to reduce your own embarrassment?"

She shrugged, still smiling. "Misery loves company?"

"You." He wagged a finger at her with a chuckle. "Come on, let me give you the once over and I'll walk you back to your quarters."

She nodded.

As he conducted his scan, he asked nonchalantly.

"Do you recall how you fell?"

She frowned. "I tripped trying to get out of my shoes."

"I mean, how did you hit the table? Do you remember?"

She narrowed her eyes. "Why?

"I'm running over the scene in my head and the table that was knocked over was on your left, yet it was your right eye that was injured."

She shook her head. "I don't know, maybe my head was turned as I fell."

"And you didn't think to catch yourself with your hands?"

She smiled, sheepishly. "I did call myself a klutz, Leonard. Are you trying to emphasize the fact?"

He forced a smile. "Not at all, my dear. You seem to be all better." He looked at her directly. "You let me know if you feel any dizziness at any point, okay?"

She nodded. "I promise."

"Let's get you to your quarters," he said, then helping her off the diagnostic bed. "We'll stop and get you some breakfast on the way."

Chapter 3

It was late. Spock entered the arboretum to find his private meditation spot. Most of the time he meditated in his quarters, but he'd come to realize that the crew left a certain area of the arboretum alone in the late evening hours. He often wondered if someone had discovered him meditating there once and sent the word around, but he never found any evidence of it.

Tonight, he needed to meditate in a more natural surrounding after the events of the past twenty-four hours. Ms. Jean-Marie's sudden accident, then the nearly overwhelming emotionalism displayed by the senior staff as she performed, followed by Mr. Von Cleef's announcement that Ms. Jean-Marie would perform for each shift for the next two days and Jim Kirk's anger, though held in check with a forced smile, at the announcement which went against his explicit instructions.

He set the meditation lantern on the ground and prepared to sit when his keen ears heard a noise from behind the nearby plants. He straightened his meditation robes and moved silently toward the noise. He came around a bush to find Ms. Jean-Marie there, sitting in the lotus position with her face in her hands as she wept.

"Are you unwell?" he asked, as he had the last time he'd found her in a similar state.

She looked up, then looked back down. "You again?" She sniffled and tried to muster a smile. "We've got to stop meeting like this."

Spock raised an eyebrow. "Indeed."

She looked up at his expectant face. "I'm fine, Mr. Spock. I just needed an emotional release. Forgive me if I disturbed you."

Spock tilted his head, curiously. "Do you not find emotional release when you sing? Your songs seem to bring it out in your audience."

She sighed. "At times, I think I'm numb to it, actually. It's been a long time since singing..." she shook her head.

Spock's eyebrows rose. "Then why do you do it?"

"Won't you sit down? You're very tall standing there while I'm sitting here."

Spock nodded and sat on the ground, facing her. Then he waited for her to answer the question.

Once she realized that he wasn't going to let it go, she smiled half-heartedly and took a breath. "It once brought me joy. Now it just brings in

money and notoriety," she sniffled. "It's a lonely life, Mr. Spock. The only person I see, sometimes, is Jordan, and he..."

"Treats you like a commodity."

Her eyes snapped up. "No!"

Spock's eyebrow rose.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. "I didn't mean to snap at you. It's just that Jordan really cares about me. He's been there for me since I was fourteen when my father signed over custody to him."

Spock did not comment.

She cocked her head at him. "I imagine it must be lonely for you, too, being the only Vulcan on this whole ship."

Spock raised an eyebrow at her. "I have noticed that you have a tendency to deflect. When Lt. Uhura asked you about your family, you gave an inconsequential response, then asked her about hers."

She bowed her head, slightly. "I've had years of practice. I was taught that people are happier talking about themselves than about anything else. I simply want to make people happy."

"And what of your happiness?"

Her eyebrows rose. "I find it ironic that a Vulcan should be asking me about happiness."

"You have deflected again."

She smiled, then. "Am I wrong?"

Spock raised an eyebrow again. "No. Perhaps it may be ironic. It is no less valid a question."

She thought for a moment. "I have no answer. I haven't thought about my own happiness in a long time. It is 'inconsequential'."

Spock frowned. "It is not often a human being considers her own happiness 'inconsequential'."

"I dare say, it is not often a Vulcan will spend so much time trying to get a human being to examine her happiness."

Spock considered her for a moment. "You are, of course, correct."

They sat in silence for a few minutes. After a while she sighed. "So are you."

Spock raised his eyebrow. "Explain."

"I shouldn't be doing this if it doesn't make me happy. Singing always makes me feel free, though, like the stage is a safety zone. And I've done it all my life. What else would I do? And how do I know that anything else will make me feel as alive, as free, and as *happy* as singing used to?"

Spock tilted his head slightly. "Perhaps you need only return to a point where it is not about only money and notoriety. Perhaps it is possible to feel that happiness again."

She smiled. "That'd be great. Any idea how to do that?"

"Perhaps speaking to Mr. Von Cleef about letting you set your own performance schedule."

The smile faded. "He won't."

"Then perhaps you should become your own manager."

Her eyes widened. Spock was disturbed by the fear he saw there, if only for a moment. Then she dipped her head. "I couldn't. There's more to being a manager than just scheduling dates."

"Is it something you are unable to learn?"

"I...I don't know."

Spock nodded, curtly. "I am confident that you are capable."

Her eyes met his again, this time with defiance. "And exactly what do you base that confidence on?"

Spock paused for a moment. Finally, he said with his upswept eyebrows knitted together. "You've said you like to 'make people happy'. I have seen your audience respond to you on an emotional level. Do you think this 'makes them happy'?"

"Yes."

"And do you think that, perhaps, if you were happier yourself, more 'free and alive', your music would reach your audience at an even deeper level? Would this not make your audience happier?"

She gave him a sidelong look. After a moment she smiled. "You make a good argument, considering—and I hate to keep bringing this up—that you're a Vulcan speaking of emotions." Then she tossed her hair. "But you still haven't explained what makes you think I would be capable of being my own manager."

"You seem intelligent and willing to learn. You have a personal interest in the future of the client. What more is necessary?"

She took a deep breath. "I..." she paused. "I'm going to have to think about all this."

Spock nodded. "I will leave you to do so." He rose and she jumped to her feet as well.

"I...thank you, Mr. Spock."

"One does not thank logic," he responded.

She smiled. "Of course one does -if one is thankful for it."

Spock raised both eyebrows. Then he gave a nodded bow and finally excused himself.

#

Von Cleef stormed past Kirk as soon as the captain opened the door. "Captain, I want you to keep that Vulcan away from my client!" he demanded.

Kirk blinked, raising his eyes with surprise. "That Vulcan', Mr. Von Cleef? I assume you mean Mr. Spock, my first officer?"

"You know, damned well, who I'm talking about! I want him to stay away from Elise. He's filling her head with all sorts of nonsense!"

Kirk frowned. "Spock?" He tilted his head thoughtfully, and couldn't help the smile that played at his lips. "I've never known Spock to indulge in 'nonsense', let alone influence someone else to."

"Yeah? Well, maybe you don't know him as well as you think. If I see him near her again..."

Kirk stiffened. "I don't think you want to finish that sentence, Mr. Von Cleef. I'm not that little singer you can bully around. None of my officers answer to you. They answer to me. If Mr. Spock sees it necessary to speak to Ms. Jean-Marie, then he is free to do so—unless *she* objects."

Von Cleef took a deep breath. "It is because he answers to you that I am making my request to you, Captain. I apologize if I'm out of line. Elise was just talking about firing me!"

Kirk looked intrigued. "Really?"

"You don't know what she means to me, Captain," Von Cleef continued. "I've built my life around her. Her father signed custody of her to me when she was fourteen and I've loved her since she was eighteen years old. I have spent the past sixteen years protecting her from every possible danger. What would she do without me?"

Kirk shrugged with his face. "Perhaps the question is more 'what would *you* do without *her*?"

Von Cleef paused to look at Kirk in the eye. After a moment, he said, with a hard edge to his voice. "I'm warning you, Captain. If that pointy-eared son-of-a-bitch comes near her again, I will protest to the Federation President, himself!"

Kirk stepped forward, fighting to control his anger.

"Feel free, Mr. Von Cleef, to report anything you want to anyone you want. As for my officers, they are free to speak to whomever they wish,

whenever they wish and I will not interfere. If Elise has an objection, *she* can bring it to me. Good day." Kirk indicated to the door.

Seeing that he was not going to get his way, Von Cleef turned on his heel and left.

#

Leonard McCoy arrived at the VIP quarters quickly after a tearful Elise called him: "Leonard?" her whispered voice came over the comms.

"Elise? Are you okay?"

"Could you come to my room, please?" she sobbed. "I-I need help." "I'll be right there!"

He touched her door chime, and the door slid open.

He stepped in cautiously. "Elise?"

"Leonard."

He followed her voice into her bathroom where he found her kneeling against the vanity. He couldn't see her face, but her hair was a mess and her clothes were disheveled. He approached her. "I'm here, my dear." She slowly raised her head.

He gasped. "Oh, my god! Elise, what happened to you?!"

Her left eye was blackened and swollen. The right side of her mouth was swollen, and her bottom lip was cut. She had a bruise on her forehead and an angry red mark on her throat. She began to sob as soon as she saw him.

He caught her before she collapsed and walked her out of the lavatory to her bed, where he got her to lay down. He pulled his scanner out and ran it over her. In addition to her face, she had three broken ribs and a dislocated shoulder. He worked quietly to assess her injuries.

"Tell me what happened," he instructed softly while he worked.

"I told Jordan I wanted more control over my schedule. He went crazy. My fault...I shouldn't have said..." She sobbed. "It was too much. I couldn't fix it..."

For the first time, McCoy saw the portable tissue regenerator in her hand. He took it from her and looked at it. Then he put it to the side and said, "I need to get you to sickbay."

"No!" she seemed to try to shout, but the pain made it come out like a gasp. "You can't tell anyone. Please! Please..." the last word came out as a whimper.

"Elise, I don't have the equipment I need to properly treat you. You have broken ribs and a dislocated shoulder. There are other things I need to help you."

She shook her head, tears running out of the corners of her eyes, looking away. "Then just go. Give me the tissue regenerator and I'll do what I can." She tried to push herself up.

He restrained her as gently as he could. "I'm going to go and get a field medikit. Don't move."

"Don't tell..." she reminded him as she lay back.

"I'm not going to tell anyone," he assured her as he left her side. As soon as he was out of the room, he finished his thought with a growl. "Yet."

She was unconscious when he returned. He quickly reassessed her, then started treating her, mending her cracked ribs first, then regenerating the tissues that were swollen and bleeding in her face. He finally got to her shoulder and gave her a pain killer as he woke her.

"Honey, I'm going to have to do this the old-fashioned way. I need for you to hold on to this," he put a makeshift fabric sling in her hand that was tied to a part of the bed. "And don't let go until I tell you."

She nodded.

"I gave you a pain killer, but it may still hurt because I have to pull and twist your arm back into the socket."

She nodded again, wrapping her hand into the sling and holding tight. "Go ahead," she whispered.

He grabbed her wrist, took a deep breath and pulled.

It bothered him that she didn't cry out when he knew it was painful. When it was done, she let go and collapsed back into the bed, with a soft groan.

McCoy was close to her again, using the tissue regenerator to heal the tears in the shoulder ligaments and adjoining muscles. "Elise, let me take you to sickbay, where I can help you properly," he pleaded. "What I've done will heal, but you'll have scars—" Suddenly something snapped into place, and he stopped short.

"No. Just let me rest," she murmured, tears forming in her eyes again and she turned her head away from him. "I'll be okay, really."

He decided not to pursue it further without some research. "Okay, my dear, but I'm not going to leave until you're sleeping." To emphasize his point, he pulled a chair close to her bed and took the hand of her non-injured arm in his while she faced away from him and quietly wept, which tore at his heart.

When she finally slept, McCoy ran the scanner over her sleeping form one more time to make sure he hadn't missed anything. Satisfied she was on the mend, but still wishing she'd go to Sickbay, he rose and left, making sure to lock her door behind him.

#

When Leonard McCoy entered Sickbay, he went immediately to his desk and started his research.

"Computer, how many times has Elise Jean-Marie cancelled or postponed performances? Can you find any records of injuries in your databases?"

Working.

Kirk entered then. He went straight to what he called "Bones' medicine cabinet" and poured himself a short glass of Kentucky bourbon. Then he moved to McCoy's desk and sat down.

"What's the matter with you?" McCoy asked.

"That Von Cleef has a lot of nerve," Kirk stated. "I almost punched him in the mouth for the way he talked about Spock." Kirk took a drink. "He called Spock a 'pointy-eared son-of-a-bitch'!"

McCoy raised an eyebrow. "I've called him worse."

"Yes, but you're his friend. You may be pissed sometimes, but there's still love there."

McCoy frowned and tilted his head thoughtfully. "Doesn't make it right," he said with a voice of realization. "Damn it, Jim, Von Cleef *needs* to be thrown in the brig!"

Kirk's eyebrows rose. "What? Bones, that seems extreme, doesn't it?" *Results accumulated*. The computer interrupted them.

"Report," McCoy told the computer.

Singer Elise Jean-Marie has cancelled or postponed performances 63 times in her 16-year career. There are 27 records of injuries in the database from various sources.

"Download them to disk," McCoy instructed.

Kirk frowned. "Bones?"

Spock entered McCoy's office and reported that Von Cleef had notified Yeoman Rand that the next performance would need to be postponed until tomorrow.

"I should think so!" McCoy yelled, surprising both Captain and First Officer. "Damn it!" he yelled and slammed his fist into his desk. "Doctor-

patient confidentiality be damned," he said, finally. "Jim, do you know what Von Cleef did just before going to see you?"

"I know he'd spoken to Elise, and she'd threatened to fire him as her manager," Kirk said. "He said Spock put her up to it."

"Yeah, he 'spoke' to her. If you can 'speak' someone into three broken ribs, a dislocated shoulder, two fat lips, a black eye, and various other cuts and bruises."

Kirk frowned. "What?!" He stood. "What are you saying, Bones?"

"He beat her up, Jim. And, unless I miss my guess, I don't think it's the first time."

"I concur," Spock spoke, softly. "She and I had a conversation about her taking a more active role in her management, but I am surprised that she actually mentioned it to Von Cleef. She is clearly afraid of him."

"Oh, and she owns an old, refurbished tissue regenerator and said that she couldn't 'fix it'. She refused to come to Sickbay, begged me not to say anything." He frowned. "And, come to think of it, that night on the planet... Von Cleef interrupted our conversation in the garden, and she acted like a child caught doing something wrong. Later, Spock found her injured. She goes to dinner with you, Jim, then she 'trips' over some furniture and is injured."

"Von Cleef did meet us as I was walking her back to her quarters," Kirk frowned.

"I think he's hitting her, Jim," McCoy's voice was hard. "And I don't think it's something new. I think that he's hit her frequently enough that she's had to postpone or cancel performances 63 times and bad enough that she's had to seek medical attention 27 times."

"But it can't be, Bones! No woman would stay with a man who acts like that!"

"Computer," Spock said. "Can you postulate a reason a woman would stay in a relationship where someone is hitting her?"

Working. In the late 20th century, Dr. Martin Seligman postulated that if a person is exposed to violence that seems unescapable over a period of time, that person develops 'learned helplessness' or the inability to attempt to help him or herself. This study was the basis of Dr. Leonore Walker's explanation of 'Battered Woman Syndrome', a syndrome related to 'Cycle Theory of Violence', in which a spouse experiences battery at the hands of a dominant mate over time.

Kirk frowned. "Explain 'Battered Woman Syndrome'."

The term "battered woman syndrome" was coined by American feminist and psychologist Lenore Walker. She concluded that the violence goes in cycles. Each cycle consists of 3 stages:

Tension building stage, when a victim suffers verbal abuse or minor physical violence, like slaps. At this stage, the victim may attempt to pacify the abuser. However, the victim's passivity may reinforce the abuser's violent tendencies.

Acute battering incident. At this stage, both perceived and real danger (of being killed or seriously injured) is maximal.

Loving contrition. After the abuser discharged his tension by battering the victim, his attitude changes. He may apologize for the incident and promise to change his behaviour in the future.

Walker used the Martin Seligman's theory of learned helplessness to explain why many battered women do not leave their abusers. In Seligman's experiments, dogs repeatedly suffered electric shocks without being able to escape them. After this, they did not attempt to escape a shock even if they had such a possibility. According to Walker, females who are repeatedly battered produce similar psychological responses.

Kirk ran his hand through his hair, in disbelief. "Animal experimentation?"

"Barbaric!" McCoy frowned. "Computer, is this a common disorder?"

Working. The computer processed for a moment. Negative. In the early twenty-first century Earth, a genetic aberration was found that was linked to an inability to deal with negative emotions which led a person to become a batterer. A genetic treatment was introduced and the number of domestic violence cases decreased to less than one percent of the population. At the same time, psychologists discovered a treatment to combat 'learned helplessness'. By the time genetic manipulation was banned, upon the conclusion of the Eugenics Wars, domestic violence and battered spouse syndrome virtually disappeared. It is now seen as a random aberration in psychological behaviors.

"That explains why I've never heard of it," McCoy said, shaking his head.

"Who would do that to a woman?" Kirk sounded as if he were in shock. Then he walked over to the comms with a stride that was purposeful, despite his apparent shock, and pressed the button. "Security."

"Security, here."

"I want a guard posted outside Elise Jean-Marie's quarters. No one is to go in or out without my orders, understand? The only one able to see her is Dr. McCoy."

"Understood, sir. What shall we tell Ms. Jean-Marie?"

Kirk thought for a moment. "Tell her nothing. She can call me if she wants answers. If she wants to go anywhere, a detail goes with her—after contacting either myself or Doctor McCoy for clearance."

"Jim," McCoy frowned. "I know you want to protect her, but is making her a prisoner on this ship the best course of action?"

"Maybe not, Bones," Kirk frowned. "Let's just see where it leads."

#

Kirk and McCoy approached the VIP quarters to see two security guards holding Von Cleef back.

As soon as he saw Kirk, he turned on him. "Why won't you let me see her? How dare you try to keep me from her? I thought—"

Kirk couldn't help the almost irrational anger he felt when he saw Von Cleef. "Mr. Von Cleef, you can return to your quarters or be escorted to the brig. Make your choice," his voice was calm, low, but clearly angry.

Passing them, McCoy depressed the button to Elise's quarters. When the door opened, he knew she was awake. He stepped in. "Elise?"

He found her in the same place he found her in before: standing in front of the vanity in the bathroom, this time putting on the finishing touches of her make-up. She smiled at him through the mirror. "Hello, Leonard."

"What are you doing up?"

"You really are an excellent doctor, Leonard. I'm getting ready for my performance this evening."

"Has Von Cleef contacted you at all?"

Her hand paused and she glanced down. "He must be really furious with me. Usually, when we argue, he's fairly quick to apologize."

"When you argue? Is that what you call what he did to you?"

"Oh, that was an extreme situation. I had challenged his authority and his livelihood. No man will allow that..."

"No ma—" He shook his head and moved closer. "It doesn't excuse what he did," McCoy said, softly.

"I'm sure he'll apologize when he cools down," she smiled, again, returning to her makeup.

"He cancelled tonight's performance."

"Really?" She frowned. "Of course," she murmured. "He wouldn't have expected me to call you for help." Then she smiled again. "See? It's probably the reason he hasn't come to apologize yet. He probably thinks I'm still sleeping."

McCoy couldn't believe the excuses she was making. Finally, he decided to try something. "How about you go ahead and do a performance tonight? Don't tell him, just do it."

She turned to look at him full on. "What are you talking about?"

McCoy moved closer to her, gently touching her shoulders. "He won't hurt you again, Elise. I can promise you that."

She narrowed her eyes and tilted her head. "But...how? How can you make such a promise?"

"Because he threatened Mr. Spock and the Captain is keeping a guard on him. He won't be allowed to be alone with you."

Elise seemed relieved, but only for a moment. "But we won't be on this ship forever..."

McCoy smiled at her, his best country doctor smile. "Now, why don't we cross that bridge when we get to it? Do you want to perform tonight?"

Elise thought for a moment, then nodded. "I wouldn't want to disappoint the crew."

McCoy frowned. "It's not about the crew, Elise. This performance is about *you*. Do *you* want to perform tonight? The crew will understand if you're not up to it." Elise looked puzzled and turned away from him to her reflection in the mirror. After a moment, she nodded, hesitantly. "Yes. Yes, I think I do."

McCoy smiled. "If you change your mind, you let me know. Now, come over here so that I can examine you and make sure you're mending properly."

#

Kirk sat at a table to the side of the recreation deck with Spock and McCoy as Elise Jean-Marie finished her set for the Beta shift. Her music was as lovely and as haunting as it had been in every previous performance they had witnessed. Kirk leaned toward across their table to talk, lowly, to his friends. "I still can't believe that someone, anyone, would treat a woman like that."

Bones smiled. "That's part of your charm, Jim," he said. "You love women—all women. And you can't imagine anyone treating any woman with anything other than respect."

He waved this off. "Regardless of how I treat women, Bones, no one should be permitted to treat anyone like that."

Spock raised an eyebrow. "It violates our basic tenants of civilized behavior," he said. "The fact that Ms. Jean-Marie has allowed herself to be victimized in this way multiple times, speaks to some aberration of socialization."

"Perhaps," Bones postulated. "The root has to do with her father signing over custody to Von Cleef when she was only fourteen. Being abandoned by her father might have caused her to be more dependent on a surrogate, which, in turn, could have encouraged her to put up with things she might not have otherwise."

Jim looked up and smiled. "Elise," he said to the woman who had been slowly approaching and was now at their table. "Once again, a stirring, soul-touching performance!" He stood as did Spock and McCoy.

She smiled. "Thank you, Cap—Jim."

"How are you feeling, my dear?" McCoy asked.

Elise nodded. "Good. In fact," she looked at Spock as if to share some hidden meaning. "Better than I have in a long time."

Spock nodded his understanding with an almost imperceptible movement of his head.

"Join us, my dear," McCoy said, pulling a chair out for her.

She smiled and nodded, taking the proffered chair.

One of the Recreation crew came over and asked them if they would like anything to eat or drink. McCoy and Kirk deferred to Elise, who requested only water with lemon. Kirk and McCoy ordered brandy and Spock declined.

When their drinks were delivered, Elise tilted her head. "Perhaps I should have ordered something else," she murmured.

McCoy's eyebrows rose and he smiled. "And what would you have?"

She shook her head. "I don't know," she looked around. "Jordan would never permit anything other than water or tea. He says it's bad for my throat."

"Would you like a sip of my brandy? Just to try it?"

She looked at Spock and Kirk as if to get their opinion.

Kirk smiled. "If you never try it, you will never know if you like it. If you don't like it, we can get you something else."

McCoy offered his drink with a smile. "Go ahead, my dear."

She bit her lip for a moment, then with a timid smile, she took his cup from him and took a sip. Her eyebrows came together, and she blinked several times as her lips puckered. Shaking her head, she handed the cup back to the doctor and touched her lips with her other hand. "Oh, no!" she blinked at him. "And you drink that on purpose?"

Kirk and McCoy both chuckled. "I guess it's an acquired taste," Kirk said. "There are other options, though. You could spend hours trying them all—if you really wanted."

She sipped her water. "Perhaps another time."

McCoy reached out and patted her hand amicably. "Whenever you are ready."

Elise smiled at him. "Thank you," she looked up, opening her mouth to say something else, but the words didn't come as her eyes widened, and she shrank back in her chair.

The men at her table turned to see what had captured her attention. Jordan Von Cleef, with his Security detail, entered the Recreation Area.

McCoy placed his hand over hers, in an act of reassurance, as Kirk and Spock stood to meet him.

Von Cleef looked at Kirk, but his words were not addressed to him. "Elise, you've openly defied my counsel. Have you decided to take this *Vulcan's* counsel and dismiss me?"

Elise refused to even look at him.

McCoy squeezed her hand, lightly, to reassure her.

"Maybe this isn't the time or place for this conversation," Kirk responded, his voice soft even as his eyes held a dark warning.

When Elise's breathing seemed to change, McCoy took her hand in both of his and murmured a reassurance to her.

Jordan's eyes dipped. "Fine." He said, finally. "I'd like to meet with you tomorrow, Elise. To discuss our future business arrangements—if nothing else." Then he turned and was escorted back to his quarters.

Kirk glanced at Spock, who raised a single eyebrow in response. The two then turned and sat back down.

"Are you okay, my dear?" McCoy asked, still holding her hand.

Elise swallowed and nodded. "Thank you," she whispered.

"We can all be with you tomorrow, if you'd like."

Elise shook her head. "No. I'm sure it'll be fine. After all, your security guy will be there."

McCoy leaned forward. "Are you willing to try another experiment? Or do you want to return to your quarters?"

Elise looked into his blue eyes, examining them for a moment. Finding only a gentle smile, she smiled in return and whispered. "I think...I would be willing to try another experiment."

He patted her hands. "I'll be right back."

"Thank you, Captain, Mr. Spock," Elise looked at the other gentlemen at her table. "For coming to my defense."

Kirk smiled. "It was absolutely my pleasure."

"Should you require anything further from us, as long as you are on board," Spock said. "I do not believe I would be out of line to say that you may reach out to any of us at any time."

Kirk looked slightly surprised at his first officer, then smiled. "You're absolutely correct, Spock."

McCoy returned then with two different cups. He smiled as he sat. "Okay, so the first is a mint julep—one of my favorite drinks—and the second is something called a piña colada."

Elise looked up at him surprised. "Which shall I try first?"

He smiled. "Well, if I'm right, you will like one better than the other. Here, try this one." He pushed the mint julep toward her.

She picked up the drink and took a sip. Her eyebrows rose. "Much better. I love the fragrance!"

McCoy smiled. "That's the mint." He pushed the other beverage toward her. "Try this one."

She lifted the other glass to her lips and took a sip. Her eyes widened. "Oh!" she whispered and smiled. "I *like* this one!"

Kirk chuckled. "Success, Bones!"

McCoy chuckled.

Elise smiled. "Thank you," she looked around. "All of you for indulging and protecting me."

Kirk nodded. "Absolutely."

Chapter 4

McCoy was in his office when he received an emergency summons to Sickbay. He moved quickly from his office to Sickbay as Elise Jean-Marie was brought in, badly battered and unconscious. "Elise!" he cried, gruffly. His ice blue eyes drilled into the security guard that brought her in.

"What happened?!"

"She and Von Cleef had a meeting. He told his security detachment to wait outside, and she agreed. When we heard her scream inside, we tried to get in, but the bastard had figured out how to lock the door! By the time we got inside, he had her neck in his hands. We had to stun him to get him off of her."

"And where is *he* now?"

"The brig. Petty Officer Dinalli is checking on him, medically, but Captain has ordered him confined."

McCoy told his orderlies to get her to a bio bed and dismissed the guard, muttering to Nurse Christine Chapel about the uselessness of a guard detail that doesn't actually guard. "Why in the world would you agree to be alone with him, girl?" McCoy's voice tightened as he examined her.

#

Captain James T. Kirk was mad enough to spit nails as he moved through the corridors of his ship from the bridge to the brig. He entered the Security Offices and could hear Security Chief Lieutenant Paul Freeman railing at Crewman First Class Barrett.

"You were the buffer between the girl and that monster! When you are assigned to watch someone, you, by God, *watch* them! You do not let your eyes off him unless you are ordered to do so! I don't care if he throws himself out of the airlock! You stand at the window and continue to watch him until his body is recovered! Do you understand?!"

"Yes, sir!"

As mad as he was, Kirk couldn't help but pause, amused, at the Chief's airlock instruction. He entered the office more fully. "Lieutenant?"

"Sir!" Freeman snapped to attention.

"I want to see Von Cleef."

Freeman looked at Barrett. "Don't you move one millimeter," he growled. He stepped past him to lead Kirk into the secured area containing

the brig. "Sir, I am mortified that this happened on my watch. I will, of course, accept any disciplinary action you wish—"

Kirk stopped and looked at Freeman. "I'm sure you're going to provide better training for your department in light of this. Von Cleef will remain in the brig until we reach Starbase 11 under 24-hour surveillance. Perhaps Barrett would find value in an extra shift."

Freeman nodded. "Understood, sir."

Von Cleef had dermoplast bandages on his face and hands as he paced in his cell like a caged animal.

"Captain! Is Elise okay? I need to see her."

Kirk's eyes narrowed. "How can you ask if she's okay?! You had your hands around her throat and were choking the life out of her! She could be dead for all you know! Is she okay?! I'd guess she hasn't been okay in several years!"

"Captain, you have to understand: I love her. I have loved her since she was a child. The thought of her leaving me...it was too much for me to bear! I went crazy!"

"And all the other times you've hit her? Were you crazy then, too?!"

Von Cleef stopped moving. His concern was replaced by stoicism. "I need to know if she's okay, Captain. Can you just find that out for me?"

Kirk pressed his lips together. "I'll..." he took a deep breath to calm his temper. "Think about it." He turned and took two steps away, then he turned, his back reed straight and his fists relaxing even as he wanted to use them to punch the other man's face in. "Thought about it: No. You have no need to know," then he turned and walked out, signaling to Freeman with nothing more than the jerk of his thumb over his shoulder.

It wasn't a far walk from the brig to Sickbay and when Kirk arrived, the Charge Nurse directed him to the area Dr. McCoy was in with Elise. He entered McCoy's office next to the exam room to find Spock standing with his hands behind his back, reading something on the computer terminal.

"Spock?"

"No word, yet."

Kirk frowned. "Von Cleef is asking about her," he muttered. "He tries to kill her and still claims to love her. What kind of sense does that make?!"

"Human emotion..."

"Don't give me some speech about emotions and logic, Spock!" he snapped. He held up a hand and waved it, dismissively. "There's nothing human about what he's done to her. No emotion that can explain it."

McCoy entered then. "Jim," he sounded tired. "I've mended four broken ribs, a punctured lung, a ruptured spleen, bruised kidneys, cuts and bruises. He nearly crushed her larynx and I've done what I can to fix it, but until the bruising goes down, I can't say if she'll ever get the full use of her vocal chords back."

Kirk's eyes widened. "Her voice...?"

Spock's eyebrows drew together. "Are you saying that she may not sing again?"

McCoy sighed and sat down. "I don't even know if she'll recover her former *speaking* voice."

Kirk turned away. His hands were clasped in a fist, and he hit the wall with the side of his right hand, his head bowed.

"Doctor," Christine Chapel entered the office. "She is waking up."

McCoy moved from his office. There were tears in her eyes when he arrived at her side. She brought her hands up to hide her face.

"Hey, there," he said, softly, placing his hand gently on her head, stroking her hair. "You're safe now. Captain put Von Cleef in the brig and there he'll stay until we get to Starbase, where he'll be turned over to authorities. You won't have to see him ever again."

He gently pulled her hands away from her face and looked in her eyes. "I'm so sorry, m'dear," he whispered. "That you weren't better protected. I promised he wouldn't hurt you again..."

She opened her mouth to speak, but McCoy stopped her. "You shouldn't speak."

Instead, she touched his cheek with tears in her eyes. "Not your fault," she whispered. "Thought I was dea—" her tears escaped her eyes.

"Ssh!" McCoy wiped a tear from her cheek. "Don't talk. Your larynx is swollen, and you have to give the swelling a chance to go down. I've done what I can do, for now, so you've gotta do your part, okay?" She nodded.

"Spock and the Captain are in the next room, concerned about you..."

Elise shook her head and turned to her side, away from him.

McCoy swore softly under his breath as he walked out, back to his office.

"Bones?" Kirk asked.

"Never in my life have I wanted to commit an act of violence like I do right now, Jim!" McCoy growled. "Throw my oath out the window and throw him out of an airlock!" He took a deep breath. He waved off his friends. "She's resting. Go on back to work. I'll let you know when she's ready for visitors."

#

In the weeks that followed, Elise worked with one of the yeomen Kirk assigned to help her to cancel the rest of her tour. She split her time between her quarters and Sickbay, staying away from almost everyone. The exceptions were McCoy, Christine Chapel and Spock.

She spent a lot of time with McCoy not just because he was her doctor. She enjoyed his company. She spent time with Christine because she was a woman who understood loss and was a great source of empathy.

With Spock, though, it was the absence of empathy or sympathy that drew her. He taught her to meditate, to use meditation to conquer the nightmares. He spoke quietly and was eminently patient with her. When her emotions got the better of her, he simply waited, silently, for her to work through them.

As they neared Starbase 11, Jim Kirk met with her, along with Bones and Spock. "We'll turn Von Cleef over to Starbase officials. Your written testimony and the testimony from the security guards who pulled him off you will be enough to send him to a rehab colony. But what do you want to do?"

Her voice was recovering so she could speak, but McCoy had advised her to keep to low tones. "The *Enterprise* isn't a passenger ship, Captain. You have been incredibly hospitable up to this point."

Kirk smiled. "My CMO doesn't want to relinquish your care yet. Right, Bones?"

"Absolutely not. I'd love to keep you around for a bit longer to monitor the progress in your throat," McCoy's Southern drawl was thick as he laid on the charm. "Besides, we have to continue your spirit education."

She smiled and shook her head. "I think I'd like to return to Earth for a while. It's been a very long time since I've been there. Perhaps you have a colleague back home that I can work with?" She looked at McCoy.

He nodded. "Of course. But we can get you a little closer to home than Starbase 11, can't we, Captain?"

Kirk tilted his head. "It depends on our orders when we get to Eleven, but I would love to have you onboard longer."

Elise frowned in thought, then nodded with a smile.

When the *Enterprise* reached Starbase 11, Kirk prepared to meet with Commodore Winton by stopping by Sickbay. He was looking at the PADD in his hand when the door to McCoy's office opened. He looked up when he heard McCoy's negotiating voice.

"C'mon, Elise! The Starbase promenade has all sorts of shops you could visit. It'd be so much better to have a pretty escort instead of the Captain or Scotty for once!"

Kirk smiled. "Bones! Are you saying I'm not pretty?"

Elise laughed as McCoy spun on his heel. surprised by his friend.

"No offense, Jim, but not compared to Elise."

Jim nodded. "Well, I can agree with that," he moved to her side and squeezed her hand, lightly. "How are you this morning?"

She nodded with a smile, the rolled her eyes to McCoy, who grinned.

"Good girl! We're trying a new treatment, but she is under strict orders to not speak for a maximum of four hours."

Kirk smiled and looked at her. "And how many hours do you have left?"

She held up two fingers with a look of chagrin.

"Halfway there! And in the meantime, Bones is trying to convince you to go shopping on the base?" She nodded.

"Well, you should go! Not because McCoy needs arm-candy, but it will give you a chance to consider what *you* like, not what someone else *chooses for you*. Remember?" Jim tilted his head to meet her eyes.

She took a deep breath and considered the captain, then the doctor. Then she pressed her lips together as if to try to hide the smile that played there and nodded.

"Is that a yes?" McCoy asked. "You'll go?" He smiled, widely, as she nodded. "Great! I'm gonna go change into civilian clothes—"

"Ah, before you do that, Bones, there's some ship's business to take care of," Kirk interrupted. "You requisition orders...?"

"Now, Jim! I sent those to you already!"

"I know, Bones," the captain said in his most conciliatory tone. "I'm just being asked for a clarification..."

Chapter 5

An hour later, Leonard McCoy arrived at Elise's quarters dressed in a simple blue V-neck wrap-around shirt and grey trousers that showed his trim shape as well as his uniform ever did.

When she opened the door, she was dressed in a flowing blouse with a swirling black and green pattern over short-legged black slacks and black slippers. Her dark hair was draped over her shoulder much like the night they'd met.

"You, my dear, are the prettiest being in ten parsecs!" McCoy declared.

She bowed her head in a thank you manner with a smile and a blush. She pointed at him, moving her finger up and down, then fanning herself.

"Aw, shucks, ma'am," he chuckled at her unspoken compliment. "Ready to do some shopping?" he offered his arm to her.

She nodded and took his arm.

As they moved through the corridors to the transporter room, McCoy was pleased to notice the smiles the two of them received.

In the past few days, Elise had come out of her self-imposed isolation for meals and to mingle, recreationally, with the crew from time to time. She'd continued to share her gift of music with them by playing Spock's lyre or other instruments provided by the crew. She even encouraged Uhura to sing as she played, the two of them giving an impromptu mini-concert one night. She'd proven that she had a quiet but quick sense of humor that usually surprised people.

As a result, she'd gone from celebrity to family member for most.

"Ah, Spock!" McCoy smiled as they neared the transporter. "We're on our way to shopping on the Promenade."

"Would you like to come along?" Elise asked, her voice barely audible, so McCoy didn't scold her.

Spock tilted his head in her direction. "While that seems like an appropriate exercise in independence, my duties preclude my participation."

There was something in Spock's eyes that McCoy had seen before and he'd asked his friend about it: "Feelings?" Spock asked, in response. "Am I 'developing feelings'? Really, Doctor, have you forgotten to whom you're speaking?"

"Oh, don't give me that hooey about Vulcans not feeling emotions!"

Spock interrupted before McCoy could continue. "I find Ms. Jean-Marie to be an intelligent woman who has been mistreated much of her life. I find some...satisfaction, if you will, in her improvement. That is all."

McCoy thought there might be something more, but he let it go. Now, he saw it again, but, again, let it go. "Well," he said. "Your loss."

Elise looked at McCoy reproachfully, then smiled up at Spock again. "You're welcome to join us later, if you'd like."

Spock nodded. "Enjoy your day, Elise," he said.

She nodded back. She and McCoy continued to the transporter room where they beamed down to the Starbase Promenade.

#

Captain James T. Kirk sat in Commodore Winton's office. "My CMO believes it would be better for her recovery to stay on board the *Enterprise*. We could take her..."

Winton shook his head. "Don't think I'm not sympathetic, Jim, but there's been an outbreak of Verilean flu on Meles II and the *Enterprise* is needed to transport the vaccine and additional medical staff."

"Isn't the Constellation in the sector?" Kirk asked.

"Yes, but the *Enterprise* is actually here now."

The communication station on the Commodore's desk squealed loudly. "Excuse me," Winton said.

"Sir! The Enterprise prisoner Von Cleef escaped! He has a phaser!" Kirk jumped to his feet.

Winton stood as well. "Go!"

Kirk ran from the Commodore's office in the direction of the Promenade because he knew Elise and McCoy were there. He also knew that Von Cleef had no way of knowing that, but the Promenade would be the fastest way from the brig to the transporter station. He couldn't afford for Von Cleef to come across them on his way.

As he turned the first corner, he saw two members of base security and called them to follow him.

#

McCoy arranged for each purchase to be sent to the ship as she became more excited about shopping. After the first hour, he'd cleared her to speak, and their day became even more relaxed and enjoyable.

"Leonard, look at that dress!" Elise said in awe, indicating an evening gown with an almost holographic shimmer to it. They'd been shopping for several hours by this time.

"It would look breathtaking on you," he smiled down at her. "Want to go ask about it?"

She nodded and they moved to the door of the store.

"Elise!!"

Elise and McCoy turned to see Von Cleef approaching them, knocking over tables that were outside a nearby cafe. McCoy saw the phaser in his hand and pushed Elise into the shop and behind a rack, pulling out his communicator to call the ship.

#

Kirk was halfway to the promenade when his communicator squealed. He flipped it open. "Kirk, here!" he belted, still at a jog.

Sir! The voice of Uhura filtered through the device. I just received a message from Doctor McCoy. He and Elise are trapped in a clothing store near the central escalators with Von Cleef standing outside with a phaser!

Kirk looked at his security escort, who nodded and pointed. "Thank you, Uhura. I'm on my way with base security. Have our forces standing by. Kirk, out!"

#

"Come out! I know you're in there, Elise! Come out or I swear—" "I have to go—" she whispered to McCoy.

"No! Do you remember what he did to you the last time?! Security will be here soon..." the doctor's blue eyes were fierce as he looked back out at where Von Cleef was.

She reached over to touch McCoy's cheek, gently turning his face to look at her. "I *have* to go out," she whispered again. "I have to face him. Or..."

McCoy studied her face. He saw fear in her eyes, but something else: determination. He nodded, then, and stood. He put his arm around her shoulder and began to walk out with her.

"Leonard—" she started.

He looked down at her again with some ferocity.

"Don't you think for a second I would allow you to face him alone. It's just not in me, Elise," he said, firmly. Then, more gently, he added. "Please...don't ask me to."

Seeing her own determination reflected back at her as well as something else she couldn't name, she nodded.

"We're coming out, Von Cleef, but you need to put your weapon down!" McCoy called as they approached the door of the shop. "I'm not letting you near her if you have a weapon in your hand!"

They watched Von Cleef put the weapon on the waste receptacle next to where he stood and they emerged from the shop, McCoy holding Elise at an angle that put himself between them.

#

Kirk arrived at the Promenade with security forces to see Von Cleef put this weapon down, but McCoy and Elise moved into their line of sight, preventing them from firing on Von Cleef.

"What the hell is he doing?!" Kirk whispered.

"Good question, sir," the Starbase security accompanying him responded.

"Move to see if you can get a better line of sight," Kirk instructed. "Lieutenants!" he called out after them as they moved. "If you get a clear shot, *do not* hesitate."

"Aye, sir!" both men responded as they moved out.

#

"Elise," Von Cleef called. "Let me talk to you," he pleaded.

"You can say what you need from there, Jordan," she said, moving out of the protection of McCoy's arm, but grasping the doctor's hand instead as she stepped closer, but not past McCoy.

Von Cleef saw this and frowned. "Is this the reason you've left me?" "Why, you—!" McCoy started, furiously.

Elise touched McCoy's chest with her free hand, then looked at Jordan. "No, Jordan. Doctor McCoy had nothing to do with it."

"C'mon, Elise! You never wanted to leave before you met him!" Von Cleef shouted, angrily.

She stiffened. "You're wrong, Jordan," She kept her voice level and low. "I have wanted to leave for a long time. The officers of the *Enterprise* just helped me do what I wanted."

Von Cleef shook his head and stepped closer to her with the pleading tone in his voice again. "Don't you understand that I love you?!"

Elise shook her head. "No, Jordan, you don't. You look at me like Hikaru looks at his prized Denobulan roses, like Nyota looks at her favorite musical instrument, like Scotty...," she chuckled. "Well, no," she looked at McCoy.

"Can't include Scotty..." She looked back at Von Cleef.

"But the others, they don't look at those things with *love*. They look at them with *pride*. And that's how you look at me, Jordan. With pride of ownership. Not love."

Jordan's eyebrows furrowed. "How can you say that to me?"

Elise smiled, softly. "Because, in the past couple of weeks, I have seen what it looks like when someone looks at something or someone with *love*." She looked up at McCoy again and smiled as a hint of color entered her cheeks, then glanced downward.

Surprised, McCoy squeezed her hand in response.

She looked at Von Cleef and continued. "But it has never been that way with us. I know that. I have always known that." She tilted her head and held up her hand to stop his protests. "Oh, Jordan, just leave. You've made your escape. I'll drop the charges, and you can go about your life—"

McCoy protested, but she touched his chest again.

"I won't go without you!" Von Cleef protested.

Elise pulled herself to her full height and set her jaw. "Well, you certainly won't go with me."

Von Cleef straightened. His eyes moved from Elise to McCoy. "You!" he yelled. "You've turned her against me!"

McCoy turned, then, pulling Elise behind him, taking a step back even as he pointed a long finger at Von Cleef. "You listen here, you lily-livered coward! You've spent years using her as punching bag and you wonder why she doesn't love you?!" he growled. "You're lucky she doesn't hate you! It's because she so good-hearted that she's even talking to you!"

Suddenly, a sound to their left sounded and a pale light enveloped Von Cleef, causing him to crumple to the floor.

Elise gasped and grasped McCoy's shirt as he turned to pull her against him wrapping his free arm around her. "Is he—?"

"Just stunned, my dear," McCoy said, softly, as security ran up to take Von Cleef back into custody.

Kirk arrived. "Bones..."

"We're okay, Jim."

"What were you thinking?! You were behind cover!"

"He wouldn't let me come alone," Elise said, looking at McCoy. "I needed to talk to Jordan."

Kirk's eyebrows rose. He looked from her to McCoy, who shrugged his face, then he smiled. "Yes, I suppose you did."

McCoy looked around, then back down at her. "I don't suppose you want to keep shopping, do you? I'd understand if you want to return to the ship."

Elise took a deep breath, then looked up at him. "I never got the chance to ask about that dress...perhaps we could go back to the ship after?"

McCoy smiled down at her. "Of course, my dear."

"Would you like to join us, Jim?" Elise asked.

Kirk smiled. "I would love to, but I'm afraid I have to finish my meeting with the Commodore. Maybe we can get together for dinner later."

She nodded, then looked up at McCoy, who excused them to the captain and escorted her back to the shop, keeping his arm around her shoulder as they walked.

"By the way, my dear," McCoy asked as the shopkeeper packed up the dress a while later. "Why did you take Scotty off your list?"

She smiled. "Because Scotty truly *loves* his engines, don't you think?" McCoy laughed. "Oh, that's for certain."

#

James T. Kirk moved into the Italian restaurant on the Promenade of Starbase 11 wearing civilian clothes. He looked around and found McCoy and Elise sitting next to each other at a table for four. He smiled remembering his first meal alone with her, just as Elise waved at him. He waved back and moved toward them.

A young, lovely, blonde past him with a smile and an assessing look. His eyebrows rose and he grinned back at her, tilting his head in appreciation. Then he continued.

Elise smiled up at him. "Did you want to invite her over?" she asked. Kirk's eyebrows rose. "I don't even know her," he chuckled.

"Yet," McCoy chuckled.

Kirk sat down, next to her, across from McCoy. "Et tu, Brute?" He looked at Elise. "Is he rubbing off on you?"

She laughed, placing her hand over McCoy's.

"There are worse things, aren't there?"

"Spock would disagree."

"Oh, he has!" she put her hand to her chest and laughed, again, looking at McCoy, who tried to not be amused, but Kirk recognized the laughter in the doctor's eyes.

"Here, now," McCoy protested, his Georgia accent becoming more pronounced. "I'm not gonna sit here and be insulted."

Elise smiled at him. "You wouldn't leave me alone with Jim knowing all I've heard over the past couple of weeks..."

"Hey!" Kirk protested. "Now I want to leave!"

Elise smiled and shrugged. "Fine," she laughed. "You both leave, and I'll wait for the hordes of eligible, handsome men to run to my side."

Kirk and McCoy looked at each other. In unison, they said. "I'll stay," then enjoyed her peal of laughter.

The restaurant was fashioned after an Old Earth Italian restaurant with dark "woods" in the furniture and walls with red and white checkered tablecloths, dim lighting and actual waitresses who took your order on small PADDs that looked like "paper". When their waitress came with the wine McCoy had selected before Kirk's arrival, she allowed them all a taste to agree on it before filling their glasses and leaving the bottle in the wine bucket that was digitally set for seventeen degrees to maintain the best temperature for the wine to remain in.

Then they perused the menus and discussed the dishes. Elise had been to an Italian restaurant before and was able to tell them about the lighter dishes: chicken and veal in Marsala, Piccata and Francese sauces, for example.

"I've never had marinara or Alfredo sauces—Jordon always said they weren't good for my throat..."

McCoy covered her hand with his, quickly. "Well, why don't you try one of them, now?"

She looked at the menu. "There's a sample plate—lasagna, baked ziti and stuffed manicotti. Lots of cheese!" She smiled, widely.

He chuckled. "Well, I'm gonna try your favorite, the chicken Francese. Jim?"

"I'm thinking the chicken parmigiana," Kirk nodded.

"And, then we can all have tastes?" Elise ventured. "Since we're all getting something different?"

"Great idea!" Kirk nodded.

"Sounds good to me!" McCoy smiled from Kirk to Elise.

#

They had what remained of their entrees packed up to take with them and were sharing a tiramisu when McCoy looked at his best friend and asked, "What did Winton say about the next leg?"

Kirk straightened and put his fork down, his smile melting from his face as he looked at Elise.

"I'm sorry, Elise. We're headed to Meles II. It's in the opposite direction from Sol. But I've spoke to Commodore Winton, and he can secure you a transport from here to Sol with stops at Betazed, Risa and Vulcan."

"But Jim! Did you tell him about her treatments?"

Kirk held up his hand. "Yes, Bones. I explained it all, but there's nothing we can do."

Elise put her hand over McCoy's. He looked at her.

She smiled. "The *Enterprise* is not a cruise ship, Leonard. I know this. We spoke about it."

He stopped and looked at her. Then he took a deep breath and covered her hand to his other one. "You're right, of course."

She looked at Kirk. "Jim, I know you did your best and I understand completely. We're having a good evening, aren't we?" She looked at from Kirk to McCoy. "Let's not let it ruin our evening, okay?" she smiled.

Kirk looked at McCoy, who nodded, and nodded himself. "Of course." "So, we've eaten, what now, my dear?" McCoy asked.

"I don't know!" She smiled. "This is the first time I've ever been on a Starbase where I wasn't working or had all my time decided for me!"

"There is a lounge on the external Promenade. They play music..." Kirk stopped, then looked at Elise. He leaned to her and touched her hand. "Oh, Elise..."

She smiled. "Just because I can't sing, doesn't mean that I can't enjoy music. Surely you've noticed that! And listen, I have most of my speaking voice back, thanks to Leonard. I'll be singing again in no time. For now," she looked from him to McCoy and back. "Let's go to the lounge. We'll stay up late enough to regret it in the morning."

Kirk and McCoy smiled at her, then at each other.

As they left the restaurant, Jim Kirk held back with

his friend for a moment. "Bones, if you want me to, I'll excuse myself soon after—"

"I appreciate that, Jim, but no," McCoy smiled.

"She wants you there."

#

"You mustn't worry, Leonard," Elise said. "You've already sent the instructions for my treatment to the other doctor, haven't you?"

McCoy smiled down at Elise as she took his hands in hers. "Yes. And he's a good doctor. I don't know him personally, but I do know his reputation quite well." "Then there's nothing to worry about. I'm in good hands."

They stood in her quarters after her most recent treatment session had finished, and she was able to speak again. He was getting ready to escort her back to the Starbase where she would meet the captain of her new ship, which was departing today.

"Elise," McCoy said, frowning. "I wanted to ask you about what you said, yesterday, to Von Cleef."

Her eyebrows drew together. "What was it?"

"You said, you've seen what it looks like when someone has love in their eyes."

She blushed prettily, looking at his hand on hers. "Did I misspeak?" She looked up.

He touched her cheek. "I don't want you mistaking your feelings..." She reached up and place her finger on his lips.

"It's not the transference thing that Christine spoke about."

"Christine?"

She blushed and stepped away. "I may have spoken to Christine about you."

He smiled and placed his hands behind his back as he stepped closer to her. "Oh? About what, might I ask?"

"Oh, about, if you might be interested in...me."

"And she said?"

"To make sure that my affection didn't have something to do with the fact that you've helped me so much. She encouraged me to examine my feelings and be sure they weren't a transference from our patient-doctor relationship."

"And you did?" He put his hands on her shoulders and turned her to face him.

"I did," she breathed. "And I don't believe it is."

He touched her cheek with his fingertips. "What has convinced you?"

"Because..." she tilted her head into his touch. "I realized that I found you attractive and endearing that first evening in the garden. You weren't my doctor then, so how could my feelings be transference?"

He brought her chin upward, gently. "I'm glad."

"And you?" She asked, her green eyes searching his.

He smiled. "No," he said, softly. "This isn't transference."

She smiled. "I'm glad. So, what I'm seeing—"

McCoy nodded with a smile. His hand went into her hair as he pressed his lips to hers lightly.

Her hands went to his shoulders, and she returned his kiss as he pulled her into his arms.

When they pulled apart, he touched her lip with his fingertip. "And now I have to deliver you to another ship and say good-bye."

She smiled and touched his cheek. "But we don't have to say goodbye, Leonard. We can still talk from time to time."

He nodded. "True, but I wish—"

She touched his lip and shook her head. "No. No regrets. I want you to know what a wonderful gift you've given me."

He frowned and straightened. "What gift?"

She looked down. "When I came here, I had never known love. Not really. I know that. Now, I have, and I will know it again when I see it—if we can't keep in touch."

He smiled at her. "I would have loved to have shown you more."

She smiled. "When do we have to go to the other ship?"

He looked at the chronometer. "We have four hours."

"Then let's use that time wisely," she took his hands in hers and looked up at him with a smile. "Show me."

He chuckled and pulled her in his arms again.

#

Elise took Kirk's hand in both of hers in the Transporter Room. "Thank you, Jim, for everything. I shall never forget our friendship."

She looked at Spock, as well, but didn't reach out to him. "Nor ours, Spock. You have both become cherished pieces of my heart. I know we will see each other again."

Jim Kirk smiled at her and covered her hand with his own. "I'll make sure of it, Elise. I wish you all the happiness in the universe."

She smiled at him, then she moved in front of Spock.

"You have packed the meditation stone I gave vou."

She nodded. "I have and I thank you again for it, Spock."

He nodded. "I have reached out to my mother, Lady Amanda of Vulcan. She and my father will be expecting you when you arrive there."

Elise smiled. "I will look for them, then." She held up her hand in the Vulcan salute. "Live long and prosper, Spock."

"Peace and long life, Elise Jean-Marie."

She turned then to McCoy who offered his arm, and they ascended the transporter.

"Scotty, you take care of this ship, sir. So I can come back and visit," she said from the pad.

"Oh, aye, lass. To be sure."

"Bones, when is departure?"

"Roughly an hour from now, Captain."

"Make sure you don't return until then," Kirk ordered, trying not to smile, but smiling nonetheless.

McCoy looked at Elise. "I won't even think about returning one second before."

Elise reached over an took his hand, smiling.

"Scotty, energize."

Epilogue

"Jim!"

Kirk turned around from ordering his breakfast to see McCoy approaching with a breathless smile on his face. "Bones?"

McCoy took his arm. "Come!" he held up a data card. "You've got to see this!"

"Can I get my breakfast first?"

"What? Oh! Well, hurry up!" The tall, lanky doctor moved to their usual table and inserted the data disk, pressing the access point in the table to make the viewscreen pop up.

Kirk gathered his tray as Spock arrived. "Spock, Dr. McCoy has something rather urgent for me to see."

"Spock! You come, too!" McCoy yelled from across the room.

Spock's eyebrow rose and he moved with his captain to their usual table.

"What is it, Bones?"

McCoy hit a button, and the image came into view. It was a woman standing on a dais, wearing a formal dress with an almost holographic shine to it with her long dark hair draped over her shoulder. Her eyes closed and she took a deep breath. Her lips parted.

"Elise?" Kirk grinned.

"She sent this to me. Now hush!"

The officer's mess grew silent as the ancient song of distant love filled the room as hauntingly beautiful as the first time they'd heard it:

Oh, my love, my darling, I hunger for your touch, a long, lonely time.

And time goes by so slowly, and time can do so much. Are you still mine?