

But, Jim...

by mazaher

February 12th, 2011

::

Let me count the ways how I love you...

It's like that air around me that holds me gently

Whispering strongly that you're always there, always for me

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

(Yoko Ono, "Let Me Count The Ways", in John Lennon & Yoko Ono, *Milk & Honey*, 1984)

::

The Captain has been out of sorts. It started after the last mission, a diplomatic assignment to Gamma Quadrant VII, complicated by an ongoing civil war among three sentient species and suspected genocide of a couple of religious minorities. Whole areas devastated, the threat of a famine, appalling sanitary conditions, martial law in force. Little that the Enterprise, her Captain or her crew could do, beside accomplishing the delivery of an offer to join the Federation and receive immediate help.

Bones has kept himself unofficially busy at the side, distributing first aid kits, pharmaceuticals and whatever know-how might turn out useful in such a low-tech situation. Grumbling all the time about having to teach how to wash hands, boil water, brew medicinal herbs and sew wounds up with thread, "like in the Dark Ages, dammit."

Then they had to go, leaving people dying behind them.

Their next assignment, mapping the expansion of a supernova nebula in the Hourglass sector. Slow days, drifting through empty space, gathering data.

The Captain sits throughout his shifts in silence, a slight frown on his face, tapping with his fingers on the armrests as though completely concentrated on something. But there is nothing to concentrate upon, and whenever one of the bridge crew addresses him, he seems to make a visible effort to pay attention.

He eats alone in his quarters, has left off his twice-weekly swimming sessions, sleeps more than usual, but does not look well-rested the morning after.

When 5 days, 18 hours, 34 minutes have elapsed since the Captain was last heard to laugh, Spock discovers he cannot stand the situation any longer.

It is the end of alpha shift, 19:00 ship's time. Spock stays usually on duty about a half-hour after shift, checking the protection status of the main computer's OS, but tonight he stands up one split second after the Captain, and follows him to the turbolift.

Bones watches them go, a line of worry on his brow, but he keeps his quiet and walks off to the mess hall. If there are going to be broken pieces to pick up later, he'll pick them up after dinner, and glue them back with bourbon. Or chocolate. Or both.

"Permission to ask for a private conversation, Captain" Spock says, standing at perfect attention in the lift, looking into the middle distance one inch above Kirk's head.

Kirk stands slumped against the lift wall, and doesn't even raise his eyes.

"It's 19:03, Spock. We're off duty. I am a person, not just a role, and I have a name, not just a grade. Remember? it's Jim" he answers tiredly. "My quarters ok for you?"

"Yes, ...Jim. Thank you.". Spock's voice softer. Concerned.

In silence they step out of the lift, march the short distance along the corridor. The quiet is such that the low whooshing of the door opening and closing sounds like a sigh.

Kirk doesn't even sit. He turns toward Spock, eyes down.

"Tell me."

"I wish to ask you the cause of your unusual behavior and attitude since our mission to Gamma Quadrant VII. You keep yourself apart from the crew, including those officers which are next to you in grade and whom you are known to find personally congenial. You do not share your meals, nor accept my invitations to further our chess practice. You engage in endless session of sack-boxing, but refuse to spar with your usual partners, or indeed any

other. You do not laugh. Dr. McCoy is worried about you." Then he adds, lower: "...I am worried about you."

Kirk draws a deep sigh, still looking down at the tips of his boots.

"You know what, Spock? I used to start every shift expecting I'd be able to do something worthwhile before the end of the day. But now I see it was just wishful thinking. There seems to be nothing I can really do and make a difference for the better, not even when I try my damndest. I, I, I... I'm sick and tired of being me."

He looks up finally, and the beaten look in his eyes makes Spock startle.

Before he even knows, he's taken a half step forward.

"Let me show you. Jim, let me show you how beautiful it is, being you."

Kirk opens his arms, like he's saying 'This is all that there is, and it's worth nothing'.

But Spock takes his right hand in one of his own, holds it up to his chest, and begins to stroke it, slowly, gently, with the other. It is not a Vulcan two-finger kiss; it is a human caress, one hand holding Kirk's, the other stroking, stroking, until Kirk closes his eyes and exhales, his lips moving silently like in prayer... or suckling.

"Come," and Spock leads him by the hand, unresisting, to his bunk. They sit side by side, and Spock begins to lightly massage Kirk's arms, then his shoulders, so that Kirk's head relaxes and drops forward. Carefully, slowly, reverently, Spock's fingers creep up the back of his neck, brushing through his cropped hair, pausing at every step as though asking permission to proceed.

Kirk melts under such unexpected tenderness, until...

Until thought returns in a flash, and he goes tense under Spock's hands.

Spock stops at once, letting his hands fall in his lap.

"Have I inadvertently done something wrong?"

"No, but, you see... I have some issues with being touched in this way."

"I beg your pardon, but according to the data at my disposal, you are usually amenable to rather more elevated levels of physical contact with persons of various sexes, belonging to a number of different sentient species."

"Ok, so you got the Captain Slut report," Kirk mutters with a grimace. "and it is in a measure correct, but... that's just about sex."

"Do you require or desire interaction of a sexual nature at this time?"

Kirk notices that Spock's eyes have gone round and dark.

"Do you?"

He leans over, licks his lips seductively. Spock sits taller, fractionally increasing the distance between them.

"Not at this juncture, no."

Kirk relaxes, switches off his practised charm.

"Sex can be done without intimacy. I like good sex, and I know I can give some in return... It's fun, and it doesn't require any more trust than, say, ordering take-away pizza. But this-- this is something else. I can't."

"Do you not trust me?"

Kirk hears the unspoken wound.

"I totally do. It's me I don't trust. You are here, doing this for me, making me feel better than I ever thought possible, and I *know* I can't do the same for you, however much I wish to. I just can't. It's not because you are a touch-telepath and I am not. It's been the same since I was small. I miss things, misread people, do or say the wrong thing. Too self-centered, they said I was. They were right."

"Are you implying that you do not ...deserve to feel pleasure?"

"No, I... I sit here, you are... I believe the only term is you are cuddling me, and I feel like a thief. I seem to give my best with dogs, you know, or at least they seem to enjoy it. With human relationships, I have problems. There is a reason why they all leave sooner or later."

"But, Jim... I am not human."

Kirk's eyes go wide, and bluer, as he turns to stare at Spock with a tentative smile.

Spock also smiles, a small curve forming at the corner of his lips. He lightly presses one hand up between Kirk's shoulder-blades, the other low on his belly, and begins to circle both softly, humming to himself.

"Allow me to enumerate the ways in which you make me experience a sense of self-satisfaction, only equaled by what my mother managed to convey to me. It happens when you

turn to look at me on the bridge, and you smile your half-smile which is as bright as T'Kuth rising behind the spires of Shi'Kahr. It happens when you ask my opinion about whom to include in an away team. It happens when you measure your swimming strokes to my slower ones, and stop before I do. It happens when you reassure me that I have not broken any of the numerous unspoken rules of human social interaction which I ignore."

Spock leans down, whispering in Kirk's ear.

"It happens when your efforts leave behind beings who are even fractionally happier, safer, more free than how you found them. It happens now, that you allow me to touch you. It happens especially now."

Kirk has relaxed against Spock's chest, his breathing long and smooth.

"So you say I should go on being me? Because I find I probably can, if it comes with **this**".

"Yes, Jim, I think you should. I hope you will."

And they fall silent.

::