

## How hard is forgiveness

by mazaher

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Ship's night. Spock is in his quarters, sitting at the desk in the dark, an orderly sequence of right angles: chin to neck to shoulders to back to thighs to shins to feet. His hands are folded in his lap. His eyes are wide open and unblinking.

*Breathe in.*

It should have been an easy mission. Mu Lyrae VI is a class M planet, but it is devoid of any form of life. The surface is rough, semitransparent vetrified silica, through which vast masses of underground water can be dimly seen. Just a couple of hours of taking samples and gathering data, then transport back to the ship in time for dinner.

It should have been easy.

Safe.

But it wasn't.

*Breathe out.*

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Spock was in charge of the small team: Ensign Yooo-a from Physics, Lieutenant Chavoy from Chemistry, Lieutenant Grosk from Security, and Dr. McCoy who said he needed some fresh air. The ship's sensors, Spock had said, showed that the ground was solid, the thickness of the glass crust ranging from 0.70 to 1.90m. But the sensors had been fooled by the metal grit trapped in the silica, producing a false hyperechoic feedback. The crust was as thin as half a millimeter in places. Lt. Chavoy found out herself when she suddenly crashed through feet first, landing with a blue-green splash in a shallow lake of scalding water.

By the time the team organized a human chain, dispersing the weight on the widest possible surface, and she was pulled out to safety without the ground collapsing further, she had second and third degree burns on her legs and chest, and the water of the steaming pool was lazily swirling with red from the deep cuts left by the broken, razor-sharp glass edges of the cave-in.

The wounded and the Doctor had been beamed up directly to Sickbay. When the Lieutenant had woken up, faint and aching, on a biobed after four and a half hours on the operating table for suturing and implants and two more in the Regen tank, the first thing she'd seen had been the haunted eyes of the First Officer.

Spock had immediately turned away, calling for assistance, and had stood silently in the background while the Doctor checked on her, adjusted the IV of fluids and painkillers, and finally left, exhausted, to get a couple of hours' sleep before the next shift.

"Lieutenant, may I inquire about the level of discomfort you are currently feeling?"

The voice is cool, clipped... faintly shaking.

"N... Not too bad. Morphine plus benzoxazocine-- it's good stuff. As long as they keep me on it, I'll feel great... enough."

"Is my continued presence here an inconvenience to you?"

"No, stay. I'll sleep later, but not just yet."

"I want to offer my apologies for my error in interpreting the sensor data. There were precedents for such false readings, but I did not check the archives. Your mishap is a fault of mine. My words are inadequate to redress your injuries. What is done is done. Yet I would readily take the opportunity to reverse the events if only I could."

She tightens her lips in a frown.

"You know what, I didn't expect \*you\* to make a blunder. Before I went under with anesthesia, I quite frankly had been sending you straight to hell. But now-- No, these things happen, and you're human after all. Half-human, whatever. No-one is perfect. Next time it may be me who makes a mistake."

"But..."

"Don't fret over it, Commander. It will pass." She closes her eyes. "Now I want to sleep."

Spock has compiled his report. Has left the bridge at the shift's end. Has walked to his quarters. Has not left them since.

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*Breathe in.*

*/She has forgiven me./*

*Breathe out.*

*/She will heal soon./*

*Breathe in.*

*/It was my fault./*

*Breathe out.*

*/It could happen again./*

*Breathe in.*

*/I have been inadequate to my responsibilities./*

*Breathe out.*

*/I have failed./*

*Breathe in.*

*/My choice of a profession.../*

A knock on the door. A soft voice from the corridor. Jim.

"Spock. Are you in there? Spock, may I come in?"

Spock exhales, hard. He tries to shake the numbness which freezes him on the chair, but in vain. He wants to answer, but no words come.

"Spock, please."

He opens his mouth, but only a muffled sound comes out. It is doubtful that it can be heard through the closed door.

"Spock."

Silence. Then a shuffling of feet, a hasty step.

Silence again.

Spock tries to settle himself for meditation, and he can't. His fingers are so tense he can't fold them properly. He tries once more, but another sound and a shaft of light come from behind, the bathroom door opening.

Jim stops on the threshold, uncertain, while his eyes get used to semi-darkness.

"Spock, are you all right?"

Spock doesn't turn. He nods, an almost imperceptible gesture of total defeat.

Jim steps in, comes closer. Spock feels the flush of heat of Jim's body on his back, of his hands raised as if to touch his shoulders, then stopping, falling at Jim's sides.

Then Jim's soft voice, concern seeping through the tentative tease.

"I have heard you teach, I have heard you preach, I have heard you chat up smokescreens thick enough to fool Romulans, and I have even heard you say outright lies. But the one time I saw you wordless, next thing I knew you were strangling me. It takes a whole damn lot to leave you wordless."

He steps even closer.

"Can you try to tell me what it is that's hurting you so?"

Spock can't. He opens his hands, shrugging, a minute gesture of surrender.

Jim takes a chair, comes to sit at Spock's side.

"May I touch you?"

Another nod. Curious how the same movement can speak in turn of defeat, or of hope.

Jim takes Spock's hands in his own. They are chilled. He just holds them, and begins to speak. His words are hushed.

"Lt. Chavoy is better. She can move her legs, the burns are healing well, and she has slept and eaten, although she is still under painkillers."

Spock's hands are getting fractionally warmer. Jim begins to slowly stroke them, from wrist to fingertips, the pressure light.

"She received visits. I was there half an hour ago. Tomorrow she will be released to rest in her own quarters."

The tension in Spock's hands is relaxing. Jim can almost feel the pulse of the blood flowing again through the constricted bloodvessels.

"She said to bring you her greetings."

"She has forgiven me."

It is a sob.

"So she has. It's so difficult to accept forgiveness from another when you don't forgive yourself."

He keeps stroking, allows his own fingers to run along each one of Spock's.

"Especially when there *\*is\** something to forgive."

He brings Spock's hands to his lips, lightly kisses the tip of each finger. Then resumes the stroking.

"We make mistakes. You less than others. Less than me. But you do. It is a good thing you have been forgiven. Know what? You deserve to be forgiven."

"I do not."

"You do. There is not a single living, sentient soul in the whole universe who doesn't, whatever their faults. You more than most, because you are the first to forgive."

"I am uncertain..."

"You forgave *\*me\**."

Spock turns, finally turns and looks at Jim, brown eyes round with surprise fixed in blue eyes sparkling with affection.

Jim smiles.

Spock sighs.

*Breathe in.*

*Breathe out.*

*Breathe together.*

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