

Summary: McCoy makes a deal with an advanced race of aliens visiting on the Enterprise, one that doesn't quite work out the way he expected. Nor the quite way aliens meant it to either.

Categories: [Star Trek - 2009/Reboot](#) Characters: Amanda Grayson, Chekov, Hikaru Sulu, James T. Kirk, Leonard "Bones" McCoy, Montgomery "Scotty" Scott, Mr. Spock, Original Character(s), Pavel Chekov, Sarek, Sarek/Amanda Grayson, Spock Prime, Spock Prime/ McCoy Prime, Spock/McCoy, Spock/Uhura

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Warnings: Adult Situations, Alien Conception, Angst, Artwork, AU, Birth - Implied, Coercion, Complete, Dubious Consent, Forced Conception, Friendship, m/f, m/m, Mind Meld

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Story Notes:

I came across this story on the internet and tried to contact the author. As of this time, I've heard nothing. If the author comes to this site and objects, I will remove this story. But I hope this will not be necessary as this is a great read.

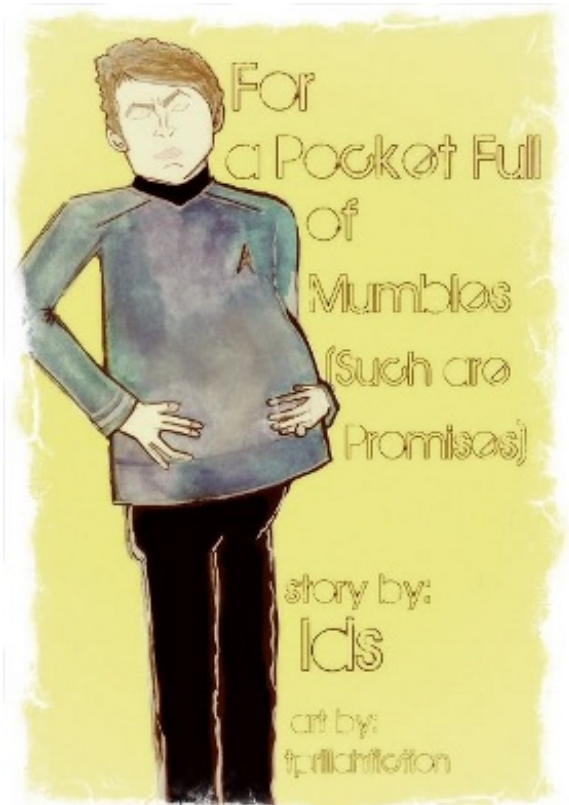
1. [Chapter 1](#) by ids
2. [Chapter 2](#) by ids
3. [Chapter 3](#) by ids
4. [Chapter 4](#) by ids
5. [Chapter 5](#) by ids
6. [Chapter 6](#) by ids
7. [Chapter 7](#) by ids
8. [Chapter 8](#) by ids
9. [Chapter 9](#) by ids
10. [Chapter 10](#) by ids
11. [Chapter 11](#) by ids
12. [Chapter 12](#) by ids
13. [Chapter 13](#) by ids
14. [Chapter 14](#) by ids
15. [Chapter 15](#) by ids
16. [Chapter 16](#) by ids
17. [Chapter 17](#) by ids
18. [Chapter 18](#) by ids
19. [Chapter 19](#) by ids

Chapter 1 by ids

Author's Notes:

Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.

- Arthur C. Clarke's Third Law



It was easy to understand why many of the species who have encountered the people of Abrbon liken them to the divine. They are the embodiment of an angel (or the alien equivalent) with their slim, statuesque appearance and luminous skin. Many an individual has half expected to see a set of wings securely folded on their backs. They were appendages of gossamer- not the feathered kind- as only they would suit the delicate, ethereal nature that the Abrbonians convey. Of course, there are those who would argue that, despite their appearance, their personalities and practises would suggest something along the opposite end of the scale. However, their supporters greatly outnumber their detractors, leaving Starfleet Command confident enough to offer up one of its premier ships when assistance was requested. Nevertheless, given that ship's propensity for trouble, and the possibility that the Abrbonians might want to stir up some of the same, it might not have been the best decision Command ever made.

Two Abrbonians, twins named Te'Bora and Ge'Ha, had taken quite a liking to one of the crew members, much to the amusement of some and the chagrin of others. A naysayer, if present, would have warned that the Abrbon taking a liking to you was wrought with danger, but, as none were aboard, the crew member in question was merely aggravated by the attention - more so when the two nearly bowled him over with their exuberant greeting as he entered the mess area. Brimming with excitement, they dragged him back to the table they had been occupying when he entered and sat him down so his back was to the other crew members before reseating themselves.

"Dr. McCoy," Ge'Ha greeted the man in question, her formal tone at odds with her bright smile. "We have a proposal for you."

"Or is it a proposition?" Te'Bora asked, his head tilted slightly in contemplation.

Ge'Ha flashed her brother a look of irritation over being interrupted; they had agreed that she would be the one to approach the man regarding their idea. Before she was able to continue; however, Leonard McCoy held up his hand to prevent her from speaking. This train of thought needed to be nipped in the bud. "No. Doesn't matter, just no," he said with a shake of his head.

Ge'Ha went from beaming to forlorn in an instant. "But we have not even told you what our idea is yet. How can you say no?"

A sad Abrbonian could move even the hardest of hearts, and Leonard, though gruff on the outside, was anything but hard on the inside. Pressing his hand against his temple as he this was happening to him, Leonard expanded on his refusal. "Look, not that you aren't both attractive, but this sort of thing is more up the Captain's alley. Alien princesses and" Leonard paused as he gestured between the two. "Princes. Maybe you should go ask him."

Te'Bora and Ge'Ha shared a knowing look, having become well aware of Captain Kirk's playboy reputation, even if they had yet to witness it. Turning back to the doctor with a slight nod, Te'Bora explained. "We did not mean that kind of offer. Had we not recognized that you are the type who is loyal to a partner and, therefore, would reject any overtures, we would have been making those already." There was a tone of disappointment in his voice.

"Our proposal does, however, involve your partner," Ge'Ha informed him before Leonard could make any denials about his alleged partner. The twins then leaned to either side of Leonard, to better see the individual assigned that role as he was sitting with the Captain and a few other officers at the very next table. Feeling their gaze on him, First Officer Spock turned his head to look directly at the two Abrbonians, raising his eyebrow in query to their actions. The twins, embarrassed to be caught despite the blatancy of their actions, snapped back to a more proper seating position. Both looked a little sheepish as they continued presenting their plan to their new friend.

"Partner?" Leonard finally asked, figuring it was worth a try to deny it. The relationship, if one could call it that, was being conducted in secret. There was no one to tell the Abrbonians, so it had to be a guess.

"Do not attempt to deny it as we are both aware of your understanding with the Vulcan and that he has encouraged you to be less than forthcoming about it," Ge'Ha said while Leonard rolled his eyes at her unwillingness to actually refer to Spock by name. The twins stubbornly referred to him as "the Vulcan" if forced to refer to him at all. They made his own early interactions with the guy seem downright friendly in comparison.

"He lost both a home planet and his mother in only the space of a few moments," Leonard explained. "That, along with one failed relationship with a fellow crew member, has made him the object of a lot of gossip: something he would like to avoid for the time being. I can't really blame him. I'd just as soon not have people talking about me either."

Not that Leonard had been able to avoid being the topic of discussion as of late. Thanks to the two individuals currently sitting at the table with him, he was starring in most of the scuttlebutt currently circulating around Enterprise.

"It is sad, what happened," Te'Bora conceded with a shrug, "But after such losses, it becomes more important to celebrate when some happiness enters one's life. He should not hide it away as though it were shameful."

"And though you defend him, you are saddened to have to withhold such information from your friends," Ge'Ha added with a little huff. "But you want him to be happy, so you comply with his wishes."

Leonard started to speak, but Te'Bora held up his hand and continued the twins' case. "We have spent enough time with you to understand how important his happiness is to you and we are saddened that the same cannot be said about him."

"You've never spent any time with him," Leonard sputtered angrily, using their words against

them. "How the hell would you know what can or can't be said about him?"

Ge'Ha shook her head sadly before continuing with the idea that they wished to present to the doctor. It was taking much longer than expected to put forward their suggestion. "If we were to give him his mother back, then he would be happier."

"And you're going to do that? Bring his mother back from the dead?" Leonard scoffed, his disbelief clearly written across his face.

"You are a doctor. Have you not brought people back from the dead?" Te'Bora asked.

"Yes, but we are talking death that lasted a few seconds or minutes, not months," Leonard reasoned. "And there is no body. It kind of went the way of the planet, into nothing."

"That could pose a problem," Ge'Ha admitted, referring to the lack of a corpse not the passage of time. "In this case, it would be more a matter of us preventing her from dying, not bringing her back."

Leonard snorted at the confidence in which this little change of plan was outlined. "And that would be no problem, even though this all happened months ago"

"Despite having fought enemies from the future, it is interesting that humans, most species, actually, still see time as a linear concept," Te'Bora mused, scratching his chin as he considered the contradiction. "Yet, such an event should prove that time is actually very malleable, and exploiting this flexibility will allow us to do just that."

Ge'Ha simply nodded to express her agreement.

"And the cost of such an undertaking?" Leonard asked, not really believing they could deliver, but curious to know why they would even offer to do so.

"Oh, a sacrifice will have to be made," Ge'Ha admitted. "But sacrifices come with rewards. It is something you should bear in mind when deciding whether or not to accept."

"I should? So I'm the one to make this sacrifice?" Leonard couldn't seem to stop himself from continuing the ludicrous conversation.

"Unfortunately, yes," Ge'Ha said with a little frown. "There must be a trade."

"A trade? What the hell? Am I dead?" Leonard tried to wrap his head around what the two aliens were saying.

"Do not be so literal." Ge'Ha chastened the human with a slight slap on the arm. "We have no wish for anyone's death, least of all yours. It is simply that he may have you in his life the way he does now, or he may have his mother back. You will still be known to each other, but only you would know what once was."

"So I don't get to forget?" Leonard sounded disappointed. He couldn't help but hope that, among other things, he could simply forget this conversation ever happened. He pressed the heel of his hand into his eyes. The topic was giving him a headache. He really should have gone with his first instinct and returned to his quarters after his shift, or stayed in his office to get caught up on reports for once.

"There would not be much of a sacrifice if no one remembers," Te'Bora asserted, puzzled by the doctor's tone. "But as Ge'Ha has said, the choice will not be without its rewards."

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 2 by ids

On entering Doctor McCoy's quarters, Spock found the man standing at the edge of his bed. In his hand, Leonard held his tunic as though he was getting ready to turn in, but, in reality, he was simply staring blankly at the wall, lost in thought. Neither the swish of the door as it opened and closed nor the near silent footfalls alerted him to his visitor's arrival. However, the soft touch of a kiss to the back of his neck did jerk him out of his dreamlike state.

"You appear perplexed," Spock's all too familiar monotone offered from behind him.

And you appear to be stating the obvious again," Leonard retorted, rolling his eyes as he turned to face his lover. "I'm just trying to figure out what I may or may not have agreed to tonight with those crazy Abrbonians."

Spock's eyebrows rose slightly. "Are you unsure of the terms of your agreement or are you unsure if you entered an agreement?"

"Both," Leonard admitted with a shrug, his expression still showing his distracted state. "I think at one point, I had a grasp on the whole conversation, but the more I tried to get things clarified the more confusing it got. Not unlike chatting with you on occasion."

"I communicate in a logical and concise manner. I highly doubt the Abrbonians do the same." Spock uttered this statement haughtily, holding himself stiffly, feeling a little insulted at Leonard's dig. Not that he would admit to such a thing if questioned about his tone.

"You, my friend, are rarely concise," Leonard laughed as he tried to focus more on the here and now and shake off his earlier thoughts. He gave Spock a pat on the shoulder as he spoke, then held it for balance as he leaned over and planted a quick kiss on those tightly drawn lips, trying to get the other man to relax a little. "You are definitely more of why say it with one word when you can use three kind of guy. However, I am starting to understand why they don't like you with that comment."

Spock, standing rigidly with his hands folded and tucked behind his back, gave a little sniff before saying, "It is more probable that the Abrbonians dislike me because they have discerned that I am an obstacle to acquiring your affections than due to any observations I may have made regarding their ability to converse effectively."

"If that don't beat all, anyway, them fixating on me," the doctor scoffed, eyeing his companion warily. It paid to be cautious when accusing a Vulcan of letting his emotions get the better of him, but Spock was not usually this uptight during his visits. "Not jealous, are you?"

"Jealousy is an..." That was as far as Spock got before a hand clamped tightly across his mouth and he found his lover glaring at him.

"Dammit," Leonard growled, suddenly very much in the room. "This is where you make a nice little compliment about how I just might be attractive enough to deserve a little attention now and then, even if you aren't jealous, not where you go on yet another little rant about how Vulcans don't do emotions."

Spock muttered something unintelligible and then stared down at the hand still covering his mouth, while Leonard looked at him questioningly. Feeling a little sheepish, the doctor removed his hand to allow the other man to speak. Straightening out what could only be an imagined wrinkle in his tunic, Spock repeated what he had said while gagged. "You are not receptive to hearing me state the obvious, so stating that you are aesthetically pleasing to the eye would serve no purpose but to aggravate you."

Leonard simply ran his hand down his face in frustration and shook his head. It was hard to argue

the point with someone who appeared to think that your attractiveness just was. Even if Leonard himself would, in fact, disagree with the assertion, it was still flattering. "Any particular reason you stopped by this late? Other than to engage in odd conversation? Because I have to admit I'm kind of chatted out at the moment. Hanging out with Ge'Ha and Te'Bora can do that to a person." With that, the doctor flopped haphazardly across his bed.

Spock raised his eyebrow as he took in his lover's unusual position and attitude. Usually their time together had as much to do with conversation or debates (not arguments no matter what the captain claimed) as other activities. "I was desiring your company, but if you find yourself overly weary I will leave you to rest."

Leonard's foot snaked out, hooking itself around the Vulcan's knee to prevent him from leaving, then slid the same suggestively up his lover's leg. "I didn't mean to imply that you should leave, just that we should stop talking."

Spock's mouth curved slightly upwards, as close to a smile as the Vulcan usually allowed, as he moved towards the bed. Leonard pulled himself back up into a seated position to watch as Spock sat at the edge of the bed to remove his boots. With a soft chuckle, Leonard observed, "It's best to shed those right away. It's almost as though they were designed to discourage fraternization."

"I am doubtful that Starfleet gave any consideration to such concerns while designing uniforms," Spock reflected as he shucked off the articles being speculated on.

"True enough." Leonard said, twitching his eyebrows in a suggestive manner. "They wouldn't make those dresses so short if that were the case."

"I would prefer you not to be considering the hem lengths of female uniforms while preparing to partake in sexual congress with me," Spock advised as he pushed the other man back on the bed. Any smart retort that may have been made was lost in the bruising kiss that followed. After that, there was no real conversation, just the grunts and groans that accompany the fumbling of clothing removal and foreplay. Neither was locked into a particular role when it came to sex, but tonight, tonight Leonard needed to feel Spock inside him, a need expressed more in actions than words. He needed to fill an emptiness he was suddenly feeling. He blamed it on the Ahrbonians for putting the idea into his head that he wouldn't have anything with Spock come morning, so he was grasping at what he could get. What he could hold on to. It was probably why the hurt felt a little more acute when Spock refused to stay long after it was all over. The Vulcan was correct, of course. It was impractical for him to stay the night. But Leonard wanted Spock to do the impractical, the illogical for him once in a while. Not all the time, just every now and then. He sighed to himself as he knew that would never happen. The Ahrbonians were more likely to pull off their promises than Spock was to meet that need.

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 3 by ids

The next morning found a crotchety Leonard McCoy setting out for his shift. It had taken him a long time to fall asleep, resulting in him getting up late. He didn't have time for breakfast and a shower, so eating fell by the wayside. The lack of food didn't help the throbbing headache behind his eyes or his mood. Grabbing a protein bar from his nightstand and hoping not to run into Jim on his way to sickbay, so his friend wouldn't find out and hold such actions against him whenever he attempted to lecture the younger man on skipping meals, Leonard exited his quarters and walked straight into Ge'Ha and Te'Bora. He had not noticed the two lingering in the corridor. In his defence, his mind was elsewhere and he still hadn't had any coffee, making it possible to miss a mountain, never mind two slender young aliens. He blinked at them confusedly, trying to figure out why the hell they were standing in front of his quarters in the first place.

Good morning, doctor, "Ge'Ha said, greeting him with her usual bright smile, "though is it really morning on a spaceship? It's not as if there are actual days."

"Try not to get off topic sister," Te'Bora scolded her. "He looks confused as it is."

"True," Ge'Ha agreed, giving Leonard a comforting little pat on the arm. "We just wanted to remind you that you are the only one who knows the original history of what happened on Vulcan. The others now have a new history."

'Huh,' Leonard thought to himself as he continued to stare at the two in a bewildered manner. 'Are they saying they actually pulled it off?'

"You might want to remind yourself of that from time to time to keep yourself from saying or doing something that will only end up upsetting you," Te'Bora offered as one who had witnessed such in the past.

"Not that there is too much risk of that happening in this case since the whole relationship was only known to the two of you," Ge'Ha sneered, allowing her disdain for the arrangement Leonard had with Spock to come through in her tone.

"And most other slip-ups could be written off as simply remembering incorrectly," Te'Bora noted with a shrug, "though it is a pity we will be departing today or we could have helped with the adjustment in your personal history."

"Unfortunately, we did not realize the best course of action until yesterday," Ge'Ha lamented, a slight frown momentarily crossing her usually cheerful face.

Leonard, who had been following the conversation much like one watched a tennis match, was about to ask what exactly she meant by that when he caught movement out of the corner of his eye. Turning in the direction of the distraction, he spotted someone he could snap at, something he desperately needed at this moment. "I know damn well my quarters are not along the way to anywhere you need to be this morning."

Jim Kirk smiled cheerfully at his best friend and the two very lovely besotted aliens he was standing with just outside his quarters. There was no doubt from the grin what conclusions the Captain had jumped to and not without some justification. The circumstances were incriminating, which did not help improve Leonard's already bad mood, nor did the words that his friend spoke in answer to his snappishness. "Hey, Bones, came to find out why you left me at the mercy of the cold front. I mean, I like Spock and Uhura, but they are not a fun start to the morning. But I can see you were otherwise occupied." Jim gave his friend what could only be described as a leer.

Leonard shot the two Abrbonians a hostile look before taking a deep breath and handling a changed life, one with a little more change or, maybe he should say, a little less change than he was expecting. Spock and Nyota had had a friendly enough break up, but they hadn't both shared breakfast with the Captain since it had happened, not unless the entire senior staff was present. Of course, Leonard hadn't really believed there would be any change, but it would seem that the Abrbonians might actually be able to do what they claimed. He really should have known, even after a relatively short time in space, that if any aliens could change history they would find the Enterprise. Pressing his fingers into the bridge of his nose to hold off the looming migraine, the doctor ignored the implications of it being Jim and only those two at the table and simply grumbled, "I am not your trained monkey, there to get your morning off to an entertaining start. Learn to amuse your damn self."

Jim laughed at the image of Leonard as a "trained monkey" that floated through his head before nodding in the direction of the twins and snickering. "But you're the one with the interesting tales to tell these days."

Leonard rolled his eyes at that. "There is no story, asshole. They, like you, just got here." Of course, they, unlike Jim, had put in a busy night of changing what was. And, oh,

"Yeah, yeah," Jim said with a wave, clearly not believing in his friend's innocence. As he turned to leave, Jim called back, "Try not to be late for your shift. Hate to have you reported to the Captain for being derelict in your duties."

Leonard muttered incomprehensibly for a few moments before redirecting his crappy mood at the two aliens who were at the root of most, if not all, of it, though, in fairness, he may have actually agreed with the actions taken. He was still a little fuzzy on that. In a voice dripping with anger, Leonard started in on the two. "I don't remember anything about getting his girlfriend back. It was his deceased mother. What the hell is that all about? Plus, there was the small matter of her dating someone else, though at least neither of them remembers that, right?"

Neither Abrbonian was perturbed by the outburst. They had experienced much worse in reaction to their assistance. Most species needed time to adjust to the changes, and they had not expected humans to be any different.

"And while we're on the topic of your changes, what did you mean by 'best course of action' anyway?" Leonard demanded. That phrasing was highly suspicious. "I thought this was about bringing happiness back into Spock's life. And how do I even know you actually did that? Bring back his mother, I mean. You're not exactly fond of him, so why do something nice?"

"The fact his mother did not die will be confirmed soon enough," Ge'Ha said as she rubbed the doctor's arm in a soothing motion. "You are the one who is undertaking an act of kindness for your friend. We were simply offering a way to correct a wrongness."

"A wrongness?" Leonard raised an eyebrow up to his hairline at that word. "And who decided there was a damn wrongness needing to be righted?"

"We did, of course," Te'Bora replied with a surety in what they had decided.

"And may I say you've done a peachy job so far," Leonard snarled, the sarcasm unmistakable, even to two aliens not overly familiar with the concept. Turning on his heel, he stormed away from the two Abrbonians, who, despite their long legs, had to jog a little to catch up with him.

"There is always a little pain after such changes," Ge'Ha explained. "It was a sacrifice on your part, and sacrifices hurt or it would not be much of one."

"Oh, I got the pain part down pat," Leonard snapped as he headed to sickbay with the two aliens in tow. "I mastered that long before you two popped up in my life to help."

"This way allowed you to perform an act of kindness for a friend, not just experience the pain," Te'Bora reminded him.

The comment brought Leonard to an abrupt halt. The twins kept going for several steps before they realized he was no longer with them. Turning to look at the doctor, they saw eyes with raw pain shining through. "I may not have lost a whole planet, but I am down two parents, one marriage and have a daughter I never get to actually see. I think I deserve a little act of kindness myself. Did you ever think of that during your plotting?"

"Of course we did," Ge'Ha informed him as she stepped forward and placed her hand on his cheek. "Now that the events have been put into motion, you do not want to try to prevent them. The ramifications of interference are not pleasant. Accept things as they are and will be, and true happiness will come to you."

"Really? True happiness?" Leonard honestly couldn't see how their actions could lead to any such thing. He had lost one lover, even though he had had doubts about how long their relationship would last. Meanwhile, the other party in all of this not only got his mother back but

was happily involved once again, or, more accurately in the minds of everyone else, still happily involved with someone who wasn't him. As Leonard resumed his short trip to sickbay, Ge'Ha and Te'Bora continued to inform him of the changes. Their comments were laced with vague warnings about the outcome of failing to accept what was now his reality.

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 4 by ids

For several evenings after the Abrbonians departed, Leonard stuck to hanging out in his own quarters when off duty. The best plan of action was inaction as he absorbed the mostly subtle changes to his world. Not that a woman coming back from the dead wasn't a big change, but the overall impact on the day-to-day workings of life on the Enterprise was minor. The bigger change was the reunion of Spock and Nyota Uhura, though he tried to think of it as a continuation of the relationship as no one else was aware there had ever been a break up.

Leonard acting more hermit-like than usual did not escape the notice of his best friend and Captain. It had been too much to hope that it would escape Jim's notice considering that the Enterprise was between assignments and little was happening on the ship. Also, most of the crew was staying healthy and out of harm's way, removing any reason Leonard had to hover in his office till as late as possible. He had no out when cornered and commandeered for an evening meal and socializing with his friends. Before the recent changes in reality, Leonard would not object to such an invitation. However, such evenings now would involve spending time with the one person he didn't want to face.

Leonard leaned against the wall with his forehead on his arm, staring at the controls to Jim's quarters, trying to decide whether he wanted to announce his arrival or not. The decision was taken away from him, however, when the door suddenly slid open and he caught a glimpse of his friend's smug grin. It would seem spending time with Spock had honed Jim's own sixth sense.

"Hey, Bones, was starting to think I was going to have to send out a search party or you. Or turn a request into an order," Jim offered as a greeting, while ushering his friend inside. "As you can see, food is here, as are Spock and Nyota. All that was missing was you."

Leonard's eyebrows shot up as he listened to Jim. Nyota was here as well? Was this something new? Leonard gave his head a little shake as he headed towards the small dining table that had been set up in the Captain's quarters for the occasion. 'Obviously it was new,' Leonard chastised himself, 'but was it new or something that the Abrbonians had planted in the history they created?' He should have demanded background documentation from Te'Bora and Ge'Ha because he found himself with no idea of how to react. This wasn't the first time this had happened since the delegation had left, but it could definitely be the most awkward. It would not be easy to dismiss any discrepancies if he misspoke as he should have been more than aware of who attended these little get-togethers in this altered time. Opting to simply nod to the couple seated at the table, he walked over and took the only seat where nothing set out had been used, assuming it was his place. Nyota was sitting in his usual spot.

Jim followed Leonard to the table, filling in the silence with a short explanation of what he had missed. "We're just chatting about some of the new policies being put in place on New Vulcan as they attempt to rebuild."

"New policies?" Leonard parroted as he wracked his brains for information relating to New Vulcan. He took a few bites from the food sitting in front of him. Jim had ordered his favourite from the mess hall.

"You know, the ones regarding rebuilding the Vulcan species," the Captain continued as he apprised his friend of the ongoing dinner conversation. He had his hands interlaced in front of him, showing poor manners as he'd placed his elbows on the table.

"They are xenophobic, if you ask me," Nyota huffed, her disapproval showing through the stiff

way she was seated.

"Oh, those policies," Leonard said with some relief. Those he knew about as they had been reported during the Abrbonian visit and weren't related in any way to the recent tampering of New Vulcan history. "The whole actively discouraging Vulcans from bonding with non-Vulcans thing. Yeah, that makes sense. After all, they are left with very small numbers and are trying to rebuild."

"Really?" Nyota glared at the doctor seated across from her, skewering an innocent olive with her fork as she spoke.

"Yes," Leonard reiterated. "From a genetic perspective, they want to rebuild the Vulcan race, not a Vulcan-like race, and, with such a small population, they do need pretty much everyone to contribute to that goal. It's not like they are making Vulcans who currently have non-Vulcan spouses get divorced or anything." Leonard paused and turned to Spock. "They aren't, are they? I didn't miss that part, right?"

"My parents' bond is still considered valid. The laws do not require them to separate," Spock responded with a slight nod of the head before returning his attention to his meal. And with that comment, it was also confirmed that Amanda, Spock's mother, was, indeed, alive.

"But they could require Sarek to provide 'genetic material' under the current laws," Nyota informed the table.

"Beats trying to force him to leave his wife to mate with a female Vulcan solely for procreation," Leonard stated, giving a little shrug. "Though I can more than understand how it might be stressful for Spock's parents, his father having to cough up semen."

"A Vulcan male would ejaculate not cough up semen." Spock's voice sounded too prim given the words he was speaking. Leonard shot him a wry look, but let the comment slide.

Jim, on the other hand, let his mouth get a little ahead of the filters in his brain and joked, "Depends on what he was doing right before he coughed."

All heads snapped in the Captain's direction as the words he spoke sunk in. With a sheepish grin, he continued. "I guess that's not the best thing to say when discussing parents, huh?"

"I believe that a conversation incorporating the sexual conduct of one's parents is inappropriate without the added suggestion that one's father may have performed fellatio," Spock stated in a matter of fact tone, though all three of his dinner companions were able to detect a hint of embarrassment.

"True enough," Jim admitted, then once again apologized for his comment. "Not that I meant to imply anything of the sort about Sarek."

"I am sure you did not," Spock conceded.

"How about we change the topic and get Bones here to spill the beans about his night with the Abrbonian twins?" Jim shot his friend a leer and a wink.

Nyota jumped in on the teasing, smiling at Leonard and Jim before saying suggestively, "But that isn't really a change of subject now, is it? Just a change of players."

Leonard snorted. "Contrary to the gossip and any comments from our fine Captain, nothing happened."

"So you keep claiming," Jim snickered. Pointing accusingly at his friend, he said, "But you're

probably just being all gentlemanlike and simply refusing to kiss and tell. Those two were completely into you."

"Whether they were into me or not means nothing," Leonard objected. "I'm too old for that one night stand shit."

"I thought you were only five or six years older than these two?" Nyota laughed as she waved her hand between Spock and Jim. "That hardly constitutes old."

"Though illogical given the average life span of a human, Doctor McCoy does consistently refer to himself as old," Spock observed. "And the Captain encourages this odd behaviour by referring to him as an old man."

"I like to think of it as retaliation after he constantly called me 'kid' when we were at the Academy," Jim replied with a little bob of his head. "Plus, he complains like an old man."

"You're thinking chronological age, where as I am thinking in more psychological terms. The last ten years felt more like twenty," Leonard reasoned. Then he snapped, "And, I'm older than any one of you. Now how about we change the topic again." He was getting more than a little irritated at being the focus of attention.

Turning towards Jim, Leonard added in a cross tone, his deteriorating mood putting him on roll, "And, you! Give me my bourbon back. You borrowed it because No'Tatop wanted to try it and you didn't return it. Or did you drink it all on me?"

No'Tatop was the head of the Abrbonian group that had been on board of the Enterprise and, somehow, he and the Captain had gotten on to the topic of Terran alcoholic beverages. The Abrbonian had expressed an interest in sampling several different types that Jim had brought up. Leonard had no objection to sharing his beloved bourbon with one so curious.

Jim was the one to roll his eyes this time as he got up to fetch the bottle of alcohol he had forgotten to return to his friend. "No, I didn't drink your precious Booker's. You told me I wasn't allowed to have any, and I did actually follow your instructions, stingy though they may have been. Didn't your mother ever teach you about sharing?"

"I did share," Leonard pointed out. "Just with No'Tatop, not you. You just gulp the damn stuff down."

"Oh, you should never do that," Nyota stated with a shake of her head as the Captain placed the bottle in front of Leonard. "You are supposed to sip and savour a fine bourbon like Booker's."

"Listen to your Communications Officer. She clearly knows what she's talking about," Leonard ordered Jim. If the consequences of his actions weren't so raw, he would have made a little joke about Nyota being the perfect woman, but, instead, he just opened the bottle to pour himself a glass. That action didn't go as expected, though, as Leonard turned pale and almost knocked the bottle over in his rush to screw the top back on.

"Are you not feeling well?" Spock asked, taking in the suddenly ashen face of the man seated next to him.

Jim looked at the bottle of bourbon and then back at his friend, concerned about the reaction he had just witnessed. "It's not like the stuff can go bad, so what the hell was that?"

"That" Leonard groaned. He wondered if this was some twisted Abrbonian idea of a gift. "That was me getting nauseated by the mere smell of my favourite beverage, that's what that was."

"Seriously? I never heard of someone developing a sudden reaction to alcohol," Jim replied, casting quick glances at Nyota and Spock, both of whom shook their heads, indicating that they had not either.

"Dammit," Leonard swore before sniping, "What I need is a drink to deal with not being able to have a drink."

"Maybe it's just the bourbon," Nyota suggested.

"Yeah, I was going to have a beer tonight, anyway, so let's see what happens with that," Jim added, jumping on the idea and running with it. He went and got the bottle of ale in question, opened it and brought it back to the table. Leonard once again blanched as the alcoholic beverage got within smelling distance, causing the Captain to quip, "Well, it's definitely not just bourbon then."

Still feeling a little queasy, Leonard muttered, "I think I need to lie down for a while. If you would excuse me, I'm going to call it an early night."

As Leonard stood up, a little shaky on his feet, his friends looked on with concern. Jim reached over to offer a steadying hand and stated, "I'm going to walk you back to your quarters, Bones. Make sure you actually get there."

Leonard wasn't going to refuse the offer. He wasn't actually sure he would make it back to his room on his own either. Before the two of them set out, however, he placed his hand on Nyota's shoulder and said with a small smile, "You realize that the whole Vulcan-Human hybrid thing with your boyfriend works in your favour. Genetically speaking, Spock isn't a full-blooded Vulcan, no matter how much he looks and acts like one and, therefore, shouldn't be affected."

He felt he had to say something. Since he had given up his chance with the Vulcan in order for Spock to be happy, he was going to make damn sure the man was happy. As the Abarbonians had seen fit to include a reunion with his former girlfriend then that included Leonard offering comfort to help the two over a potential stumbling block.

Nyota gave a little nod of acknowledgment as she watched Jim cautiously escort the still unsteady doctor out the door.

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 5 by ids

Life after the alcohol incident had become even odder. He was starting to have reactions to other items. The most noticeable had been caffeine, of course, as Leonard was dependent on that to get his day off to a good start. Some who debated that his days didn't start off all that well when he did have his coffee had learnt the difference since Leonard had found out that he could no longer consume coffee in any form. A switch to teas allowed him to handle a limited amount of caffeine each day, but it was much lower than his previous consumption had been. Then there were the different foods. Some he had previously enjoyed and others were items he had never really cared for, but now they all had something in common as he could not only eat them but had trouble being around them if someone else who was indulging.

Leonard found himself skipping meals altogether or barely touching his food when he did bother. The change in his eating habits did not go unnoticed, though no one had commented on the situation to him directly. Instead, Leonard found himself being dragged to the Captain's dining room at an even more frequent rate than before. Adjustments were being made by Spock and Jim in regards to what was being eaten in his presence. The two seemed to stick to whatever it was that Leonard was having when he did eat with his friends, or, at least, Jim did. Most of Spock's meals did not disturb Leonard's equilibrium to begin with. Spock would probably have attributed this phenomenon to his diet being of a healthier nature, if they had ever talked about the situation, so it's probably just as well that they hadn't.

On days when Leonard didn't go to the dining room and didn't show up at the mess hall at all, he usually found a meal being delivered courtesy of the cook. Normally, it was something simple like a soup or a platter of vegetables or fruits. If he didn't know any better, he'd swear that Spock was reading his mind regarding what his stomach could handle that day. And he knew it was Spock. After a brief interrogation of the kitchen staff, he could put the blame squarely on the Vulcan.

He had to admit that it was a little surprising to find out that Spock was the one behind it. He had thought the changes brought about by the Abruonians had turned them back into the civil adversaries they had started out as. It was kind of nice that Spock was being a good enough friend to take the time to have meals sent when he noticed that Leonard hadn't turned up on his own to the mess hall or had bowed out of dining with the Captain. Leonard missed being with the Vulcan as it was; it was good that they at least had a friendship after everything that had happened.

Of course, it was important that he figure out what the hell was going on. Leonard had run a few tests on the medical tricorder, trying to come up with the cause for the various reactions he was having to foods and his beloved coffee, but the darn thing was proving to be as useless as its reputation. It told him he was suffering from mild malnutrition and dehydration, two things he could have figured out for himself without any help from technology. It didn't supply any useful information about why this was happening to him.

To make matters worse, he was getting nauseous after eating, even though the food itself would go down fine at mealtime. And there was an onset of dizziness at unexpected times. Sometimes, it was so bad that he had to lie down and try not to move. He had a little cot in his office for when he had patients he wanted to keep an eye on (mostly Jim) during treatments. Now, he found he needed to use it because the world would spin like he was suffering from vertigo. However, tests indicated that he was not suffering from that condition, leaving the dizziness as unexplained as the rest of his symptoms. As a result, Leonard had felt it necessary to remove himself from any surgical duties, as the last thing he needed was to have an attack mid-operation, something he was sure his potential patients would appreciate. Other medical procedures could easily be handed over should an attack occur during treatment.

As he had no idea what was going on, he was hesitant to bring the problem up using official lines. Leonard wanted to have a basic grip on the problem before talking to others, though some off-the-record consultations had been taking place with more trusted members of the medical staff. The change of diet was one thing, but his inability to carry out one of his primary functions as Chief Medical Officer was another. It might surprise some people, but the idea of getting transferred off the ship because he couldn't fulfill his role as a surgical doctor actually depressed him as so much of his life was currently tied up with the people on Enterprise.

It was the notion of how his current ailment might negatively impact his life that had Leonard distracted as he sat quietly in the corner of the mess hall using a tortilla chip to push around a Vulcan vegetable-based paste he couldn't remember the name of, and likely wouldn't be able to pronounce if he did, around a small bowl. The scowl on his face had discouraged most from approaching him. Unfortunately, it didn't ward all off as he heard the scrap of a chair being pulled back.

"Are you planning on eating any of that?" Nyota asked as she sat down across the table from Leonard. "Or are you just playing with it?"

His head snapped up in surprise as Nyota was the last person Leonard had expected to join him. Make that the second last as it appeared that Spock was avoiding him when he was on his own, only joining him when he had company. Or maybe he was avoiding Spock, as he was a little embarrassed on how much effort the other was putting into making sure he ate. It was getting

hard to tell.

Nyota flashed him a little smile as she leaned her chin into her folded hands. "Well?" she asked. "Which is it?"

"I don't play with my food," Leonard groused.

Nyota gave a little chuckle. "You could have fooled me. I've been sitting over there for a while," she said, waving a hand to one of the tables near the door to the mess hall, "and I haven't seen you eat a bite."

"You got nothing better to do than watch me not eat?" Leonard had to ask, an eyebrow raised. "That is a sad commentary on the state of your life, not mine."

Nyota just laughed and said, "Doesn't change the fact that I haven't seen you take a single bite."

Leonard felt the need to defend himself, even though he knew that what she was saying was accurate. "Maybe I took a few bites when you weren't looking."

This time, it was Nyota arching an eyebrow in disbelief. "Based on how soggy it has gotten, I am betting that's the same chip you started with when you sat down," she scoffed.

Leonard looked back down at the bowl. The chip he had in his hand had no crunch left to it and was losing the battle with the paste on what was moving what. It was possible that he hadn't eaten anything at all yet. It would be on a day that he was simply distracted and not one where he couldn't eat what was in front of him that he'd get called on his haphazard approach to dining.

"You could be right," Leonard admitted as he took a bite of the chip that was now so soggy it had lost what flavour it had possessed at the start. "But I'm eating it now if that is why you sat here."

Nyota rolled her eyes at the man. "I thought I'd see if you'd like a little company," she explained as she sat back in her chair. "You looked a little confused and maybe could use someone to talk to."

"Thanks for the offer," Leonard replied with a little smile, "but I need a little more than a sympathetic ear."

"Another doctor be better?" Nyota asked. "To possibly address the recent weight loss? Because you should have that looked into."

"Which one of us is the doctor again?" Leonard snapped, a little embarrassed that the weight loss had been brought up. Up to that moment, it had been the elephant in any room he was in. "I think I have a better idea of what I would or would not need to look into."

"I hate to break it to you," Nyota said, "but if you thought that that was going unnoticed then you are in for a big surprise. There isn't a soul on this ship who isn't aware of the weight loss."

Leonard rubbed his temple in frustration. He didn't think that the weight loss had gone unnoticed, but he really hoped that she was exaggerating. He didn't like the idea that everyone was aware of his problems on at least on some level.

"I'm sure not everyone has noticed," Leonard stated expectantly, vocalizing his hopes.

"I'm not kidding," Nyota insisted. "There have been more than a few conversations on this ship about what's going on with you."

Leonard groaned. "Gossiping, you mean."

"That too," Nyota admitted with a small shrug. "You know what being in space is like."

"Pretty much like being planet-side," Leonard said. "Where there are people, there is gossip, I get that. I just don't like being the topic of it is all."

"I don't either," Nyota agreed with a little nod, "but it would seem people are more interested in your problems than my break up. You should be flattered. Break ups usually dominate the gossip world."

Leonard almost retorted that it was because it was the second time it had happened, but caught himself at the last moment. Instead, he said, "Glad to be of help, I guess."

"Not going to ask why?" Nyota inquired. "I am fairly sure anyone else would be pouncing on it considering that I voluntarily brought it up. We both know the Captain would be bugging me for details."

"Lack of curiosity, I guess." Leonard shrugged. "Jim's got more than enough for most of the ship. Plus, he's probably wormed the whole story out of Spock by now, and I'll be hearing about it soon enough."

Nyota gave a small burst of laughter before shaking her head. "I highly doubt that Spock has told the Captain. However, on the remote chance he actually has, I can guarantee that he'll be heading straight to you to share, unless Spock demands that it be kept in confidence. Even then, the Captain would probably be smirking a lot."

Leonard had to admit his curiosity had been piqued by her implications. His eyebrows rose in query as he waited for her to say more. Before she could, they were joined by more crew members.

"Looking cozy here," Jim commented as he sat down next to Leonard. Spock and Scotty were with him, but both remained standing. "Hope we aren't interrupting anything?"

"Speak of the devil," Nyota muttered under her breath before leaning across the table to address the Captain directly. "Did you notice how your companions are waiting to be invited to take a seat?"

Jim just gave a little snort in response as Leonard looked up at the two men standing behind Nyota and stated, "You might as well sit down too. Jim looks like he's settling in for a while."

With a slight nod, Spock took the seat next to Nyota. The break-up had been amicable, and the two still appeared to be close friends. It had definitely gone better than the first time, in Leonard's opinion. Of course, he was the only one who knew that, but, still, he didn't have to feel too guilty about how he had felt when first hearing of the split. He had worried about the Abronians' actions and had wanted Spock to be happy, or, at least, as happy as Spock would allow himself to be since happiness did involve emotion.

Scotty took the chair on the other side of Leonard and eyed the food sitting in front of the doctor. "Are you planning on eating that?" Scotty asked.

Why? Would you like some?" Leonard glanced at the other man curiously.

"No," Scotty replied. "I was just waiting to see you eat something. Given the number of stone you've dropped lately, I'm not sure you do that anymore."

Jim stifled a laugh, while Nyota shot Leonard a "told you so" look, though Leonard didn't think Scotty noticing proved much at all. Scotty, after all, was a good friend and, as such, was more likely to notice if something was off.

"Seriously, Bones..." Jim tried to avoid expressing his amusement at the way Scotty had broached the topic. He wasn't having much luck given the way Leonard was scowling at him.

"Seriously what?" the now flustered doctor demanded.

"The Captain is attempting to express his concern over your recent weight loss," Spock explained in a tone that reminded Leonard of a parent trying to placate a child. "The situation is not amusing and is becoming one of concern, as being significantly underweight can negatively impact your performance."

Leonard rolled his eyes. "Glad to know you're concerned about me."

"Of course we are concerned about you, Bones," Jim said, chastising him. "And I am including Spock in that 'we'. It's not just about how you perform your duties, but also about, well, you. It's just more likely you'd be co-operative about it if we tied that concern to your job."

It's not like I'm ignoring the problem," Leonard explained, giving a frustrated wave of his hands as he spoke. "I've run the damn tricorder a few times, but it keeps giving me non-answers. It's kind of hard to treat a problem when you don't really know what is going on."

"It may be necessary to expand the search criteria of the tricorder when attempting a diagnosis," Spock suggested in a tone that communicated a degree of concern and forethought into the situation. "You have stated, on occasion, that you consider the tool unreliable, so I would also recommend making use of the other diagnostic tools at your disposal as the Chief Medical Officer. You do have the ability to use those in an unofficial capacity if you are trying to keep you preliminary findings off the record."

"Maybe you've got a brand new spanking disease that they'll name after you," Scotty said as he gave the doctor a slap on the shoulder. His voice, Leonard felt, sounded too cheerful to be discussing ailments, new or otherwise. Scotty went on to add, "Not a fatal one, mind you, even if you do look a little like death warmed over."

"Just a little," Nyota said, confirming Scotty's description by holding up her thumb and forefinger to show a small space in between. "You do, however, seem to be carrying it off with a certain amount of oomph."

Leonard glared at the woman for a moment. He was starting to suspect that he had been set up for some sort of intervention. Wanting to redirect the conversation, he said, "But that isn't what we were talking about when you guys butted in. You interrupted Nyota dangling bait in hopes of getting me to bite. Not that I expected her to deliver."

"Which is basically what you are doing now in the hope of changing the subject." Nyota smirked as she folded her arms across her chest. Leonard assumed she was trying to give the impression that she didn't care if he told. He did have to wonder, however, how Spock would react to what she had been saying, though he still had no idea what she had been getting at with her cryptic comments.

"And I have to admit it's working," Jim said as he leaned forward so he was closer to Leonard. He was very curious as to what had happened to bring about the end of the relationship. "You going to tell us what she said, Bones, or are we going to have to guess?"

Leonard never got a chance to answer as Nyota provided the answer for him. "If you must know,"

she stated with a toss of her hair, "and we all know you must or the curiosity might drive you mad, I was simply trying to pique his interest in our break up." She waved her hand towards Spock as she spoke the last part.

"Did she tell you why?" Jim demanded. He had been trying to get details out of Spock, but the Vulcan was not being very forthcoming. He hadn't asked Nyota as he knew that would be a waste of time.

"No, she didn't because I didn't rise to the bait," Leonard retorted. "And, as I said, she's not likely to really deliver, anyway. Nyota's getting too much entertainment out of your desire to find out what is none of your business."

"Maybe I'm concerned," Jim claimed, his hand plastered across his heart. "I think it's sad to see two people who were good together split apart."

"We were all concerned as it was such a bad break up." Scotty chuckled as he winked at Nyota and added, "Surely, you could see that."

"I am deeply flattered, but there is no need." Nyota tried to keep her tone solemn while fighting back a laugh. "Spock and I are still best of friends. Right, Spock?"

"That is correct," Spock confirmed. "It is unlikely that the Captain's interest in the logic leading our separation is related to concern. However, his persistence in pursuing the reason does indicate an above average level of interest or a higher level of boredom. I have not yet determined which."

"It's just that the whole thing went so..." Jim flailed as he tried to get just the right word.

"Efficiently, unemotionally -" Leonard started to say, but Jim cut him off.

"Not exactly what I was going for," the Captain replied. "There was no mess; there is always a little mess."

"Maybe there was," Scotty pointed out. "If there are two people on board who could keep their messes private, it would be these two."

"True enough," Jim admitted. "However, I think that there was more to it, and you know how things can bubble up at inopportune times, so best to get it out now when there isn't anything happening."

"Are you that bored right now that you'd invite a Klingon attack?" Leonard asked, appearing as though he expected the ship to shake from a blast at any moment.

Jim made a face as Scotty agreed with Leonard. "Aye, Captain, I don't think it is wise for you to make comments like that. It does seem to bring on trouble."

"There is no statistical basis for observation, Mr. Scott," Spock pointed out.

"But no harm in avoiding the possibility," Nyota chimed in. They were all aware that the Enterprise appeared to attract more trouble than usual for a starship.

"There's the reason for the break up," Scotty asserted. "The two had very different takes on superstitions."

The ship didn't get shaken or get hit by anything, but before Jim could comment his presence was requested on the bridge. His three human companions shot him a variety of "told you so" looks.

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 6 by ids

It turned out that a couple of Abrbonians had turned up. Leonard was not sure of the reason for their sudden and definitely unexpected visit, but they appeared to be waiting for something to happen. They weren't volunteering any information about what it was they were waiting for, making it likely that the crew of the Enterprise wouldn't find out until whatever it was came to be.

Leonard was ignoring their presence. He had done a little personal research into the Abrbonians after they had departed the last time and found that they were less than kind to those who broke their word regarding the secrecy demanded of their pacts. If the Abrbonians were waiting around for him to start revealing the deal he had made, so that they could punish him accordingly, then they were in for a long wait. He'd be taking that tale to his grave. Or maybe they had already started the punishment with the expectation that he would crack and wanted to see the results firsthand. That would explain a lot. If that were the case then it was possible he wouldn't have to keep the secret very long, not with the way things were going.

He decided to follow Spock's advice and turn off some of the tricorder's existing controls to allow it to check for ailments outside the norm for the human male. Maybe he was unlucky enough to be the first to contract some alien disease humans were long thought to be immune to. It wouldn't surprise him at this point in his life. There wasn't much in regards to medicine that would. Taking the filters off left him waiting longer than usual for the tricorder to produce results. It was definitely less efficient without the standard configuration in place. He chuckled a little to himself at the thought that Spock was the one responsible for a piece of technology being at less than peak efficiency. When the tricorder finally gave a little beep indicating it was done, there was nothing that prepared Leonard for the shock of the results. So much for nothing surprising him anymore, he thought, as he stared at the screen, seeing the impossible. Finally, he had to conclude, filters or not, that there was no way that result could be right. Maybe he needed to add hallucinations to his list of symptoms.

Deciding that the tricorder had to be defective, Leonard worked his way down to sickbay to run the tests again. The fact that the tricorder had gotten a result, even one as incorrect as the one he had received, meant that there was likely something going on. Of course, Leonard never really trusted the damn things to do much other than guide you. Tricorders were notoriously famous for coming up with some off the wall diagnoses. This was just the first time that such a bizarre one had applied to him.

Nodding at those on duty, Leonard grabbed another tricorder off the counter and headed to his office. If he was going to run tests on himself, he preferred to do it in privacy. He once again removed any limitations on the diagnosis program and ran the tricorder over his body. He waited patiently for the results, only to get the exact same message.

Leonard contemplated the possibility of two tricorders coming up with the same defective diagnosis for a moment before going out to get another to try. When he returned to sickbay to get a third one, Leonard was definitely getting funny looks from his staff, and, for some strange reason, Christine Chapel was there, even though she was working the same shifts as him. That puzzling development was quickly solved once she spoke. It turned out that his sickbay was staffed by a bunch of cowards.

"Everything okay, Leonard?" Christine asked with a friendly smile. "You appear to be hogging the medical tricorders for some reason."

"Because none of the damn contraptions actually work," he muttered. Jabbing a finger in her direction, he said, "Since you are here, follow me. I want to try something."

Christine just gave a little nod and followed her boss into his office. Leonard knew she was interested in finding out what he was doing. Otherwise, she would have simply told whoever

asked her to come down to sickbay to handle it themselves. Christine had been tiptoeing around the idea of Leonard having someone do an exam on him for a while now and was probably relieved that he was at least doing one himself. The woman could be such a mother hen sometimes, not that he could talk.

"So which of those crazy people talked you into coming in here?" Leonard had to ask as he grabbed one of the tricorders he had used on himself.

"I'm not telling you that," Christine retorted with a puzzled look on her face as she watched Leonard run the tricorder over her.

"Your answer is not going to get anyone into trouble," Leonard told her. "I'm just wondering."

"Wondering and never going to let them live it down if you find out." Christine gave a little laugh. "You want to tell me why I'm being tested."

"You aren't being tested for anything in particular," he explained as he ran the tricorder over her. "I just wanted to see what results we get with you."

Once he finished, Christine peered over his shoulder and watched the little tricorder chugging along with the data it had been feed. "And why do we want to know that?"

"Because it was giving me very strange results, and I wanted to see if it was because it's a piece of crap or if maybe, just maybe, it actually got the diagnosis right and there is something that incredibly weird wrong with me," Leonard griped as he stared at the screen as if it had offended him, even though it hadn't returned a diagnosis yet.

"I hope it doesn't come back with anything too serious," Christine murmured. "Hate to find out I'm dying just because you couldn't decide if a tricorder was working or not. Are you getting the same results each time?"

"One, it would be better to find out now if you were dying: that way we could start treatment, maybe even find a cure if you did have a fatal disease," Leonard stated patiently. "Two, the previous diagnoses had to be bogus, but I want to see if it works otherwise."

"What you really mean is that you got the same results every time and you just don't want to believe them," Christine retorted and then a disconcerting thought hit her. "You're not dying, are you?"

Leonard gave a little snort. "Sorry to disappoint you, but I didn't get a death sentence from any of these things."

Christine hit him on the shoulder. "Like I'd want you to get sick and die. You're not getting the chance to leave me here in this madhouse alone. Who's going to keep them in line?"

That got a full chuckle out of Leonard. "You could always take over the task should I die. It's not like anyone really listens to me. You'd probably have better luck."

"Believe me, I don't want to be the one keeping everyone in line," Christine asserted. "At least, not yet."

The tricorder in his hand gave a little beep, which prevented Leonard from responding to her little rejoinder. Instead, he studied the screen for a few moments, only looking up when Christine finally asked, "What's the bad news, Doc?"

Giving a little shake of his head, he replied, "No bad news. You're as healthy as a horse

according to this."

"I guess it depends on the horse, then, whether or not it's good news," Christine said, sounding deadpan. "Now that I've been your lab rat are you going to tell me what this is all about, or do I have to start guessing the diagnosis?"

Leonard reached behind him for one of the medical tricorders he had used earlier while keeping his eyes trained on Christine. "I'm not sure if I want to show this to you or not, but I am going to need some assistance in follow up testing as it would appear I can't write off the findings of the damn things."

"Hey, doctor-patient confidentiality," Christine quipped as Leonard frowned at her. "Or, in my case, nurse-patient. Same rules, really."

"Secrecy is not the issue," Leonard stated. "Embarrassment that I thought even for a minute that this might be true and followed up is."

"How bad could it be?" Christine exclaimed. Getting a little frustrated, she made an outrageous suggestion, hoping Leonard wouldn't find reality quite as bad and pass her the tricorder to read. "Jeez, did the damn thing tell you you were pregnant?"

Leonard gave her a choked laugh as he tossed the tricorder, with its diagnosis, to her. "Actually, yes, that's exactly what it told me."

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 7 by ids

Leonard found himself sitting in the briefing room glaring at the two Abrbonians sitting across the large table from him. He was feeling more than a little hostile towards the entire Abrbonian race because he knew they had to have had something to do with his current predicament. He hadn't figured out yet exactly what that role was, but it was just too big a coincidence that they showed up right before he found out about his condition and then managed to have him called to a meeting right after he finally admitted the tricorders were right. It didn't sound all that far-fetched given that he knew these people could bring someone back from the dead, or whatever the hell it was they had done for Spock's mother. Of course, he couldn't really share any of his theory since he and the Abrbonians were the only ones in the room who knew that particular truth.

Also present at the meeting were Jim and Spock, who were currently eyeing their Chief Medical Officer as though he was a threat or, possibly, just plain crazy. The waves of hostility were simply pouring off of Leonard, who had no need for special empathic skills to sense them. The mood did not lighten any when the monitor chirped and Admiral Pike's face appeared.

"I would like to thank Starfleet for their patience upon our return to the Enterprise," No'Tatop stated once the formalities of greetings were out of the way. "I have to admit I did not expect to have to see all of you again so soon. However, M'Potbope, who, of course, was not with us on our first visit, discovered something which hastened our return."

As he'd spoken, he had nodded to the elder Abrbonian woman who sat next to him. He and M'Potbope had been accompanied by the twins, Te'Bora and Ge'Ha, but they weren't in attendance. It was just as well since Leonard wasn't sure if he could be held responsible for his actions had they been there.

"And this, I assume, has something to do with the Federation?" Pike asked. As the highest ranking officer, it was considered his place, according to Abrbonian customs, to address the senior officials.

"It has to do with a crew member of the Enterprise," M'Potbope informed them in a crisp voice as she stood, allowing her wings to become unfettered as though preparing for flight, though it was

more likely that she was making herself a little more comfortable. After all, how far could she fly while on a spaceship. "It would seem that some of our youngsters had put something into motion, and when their plan failed, a plan, I might add, that would not have been sanctioned in the first place -"

"Wait, you're saying that it failed?" Leonard snapped. As far he knew, everything had worked out right. There had been some unexpected twists, he'd give them that, but Amanda was alive and Spock had a sense of peace about him that had not been present before she had been brought back.

The interruption had earned him looks of censure and surprise from his fellow Starfleet officers and a stern order from the Admiral to allow the woman to finish. Leonard surmised that none of them had expected him to have any more clue as to what she was talking about than they did. As he had already given more away than he had intended, Leonard merely nodded at the Abrbonian woman to continue as way of apology. Once again, everyone was focused on the graceful moves of the woman as she spoke.

"There is no need to scold the man for his outburst, Admiral. I do believe that Doctor McCoy has a right to anger as he is the crew member in question," M'Potbope stated, causing all eyes to swing back to Leonard. "Ge'Ha and Te'Bora wished to give him a surprise for lack of an equivalent in Earth terms, though to do so without his knowledge and consent would be considered wrong by your kind and, therefore, should not have been undertaken by them."

"You're referring to..." Leonard snapped and then stopped himself. Now was not exactly the time to be blurting out his newly discovered condition. This time, his interruption was not commented on at all. The words being spoken by the Abrbonian had caused a rising concern among the other men, especially given Leonard's recent changes.

"Yes, doctor," M'Potbope confirmed and somehow managed to convey that the conversation would include nothing about the deal he did make with the twins. He'd like to know how they were going to handle having one secret out there without surrendering the other. After all, there was the small matter of the baby's parentage to be explained.

"Would someone like to tell us what you're talking about?" Jim interjected, sounding a little exasperated. Pike calmly seconded the idea.

M'Potbope, on the other hand, did not appear ready to allow that portion of the conversation to begin. Instead, she echoed words that the twins had spoken to him regarding the changes the deal had brought on. Or, at least, Leonard assumed that was what they had meant at the time.

"Now that the privilege has been bestowed, you do need to see it through to its natural conclusion," M'Potbope informed the doctor.

"And by natural conclusion, you mean?" Leonard had to ask. "Because I've sprouted enough extra parts already."

"As a male, surgery is to be expected, but only allowable at an appropriate time," No'Tatop said, while Jim sputtered, "What extra parts?"

Leonard leaned over in his chair, his face in his hands. It was too much. He could feel a dizzy spell coming upon him. He had tried so hard not to be around people whenever he felt an attack. It made him feel much too vulnerable, but the day had already been too much for him. He wanted to go, to hide in his quarters until it all went away.

After eyeing the man's reactions with sympathy, M'Potbope turned to the remaining Starfleet officers and informed them of the news in a very matter-of-fact tone. "He is referring to the

addition of a womb. Doctor McCoy is with child."

Jim's mouth dropped open, but nothing came out: a picture Leonard would have enjoyed if he had been able to see it. As it was, he had to rely on later descriptions provided by Admiral Pike, who at least managed to utter some sort of reaction, even if it was a simple "Excuse me?" Spock may or may not have blinked; this act was never confirmed.

At this point, Leonard decided that maybe lying on the floor was the best answer and found himself looking up at the alien woman, who was taking in the expressions around her. She was gifted in reading the face of Vulcans, Leonard guessed, based on the next words she uttered. "You all appear confused. Did I not phrase it correctly?"

"Oh, you got it right," Leonard groaned.

"It is not an announcement made in association with the human male," Spock explained as both Admiral Pike and the Captain were a little lost for words.

Jim stuck his head under the table to take in his best friend lying on the floor. "You okay there, Bones?"

Trying to focus on the voice speaking to him as the room continued to spin, Leonard answered Jim, sounding lost. "I'm pregnant. What do you think?"

"Yeah," Jim muttered as he sat up straight again. "A valid point if there ever was one."

"While there are concerns to be addressed," Spock stated, trying to maintain a level of dignity as he peeked over the table to take in the doctor's distress, "our first priority should be to obtain assistance for Doctor McCoy."

"I should alert Command of the matter, not to mention starting prep for the oncoming shit storm this should fire up," Pike muttered, more to himself than to the room at large. "I have no idea how we'll address this whole mess."

"What is a shit storm?" No'Tatop asked. "And what does weather involving feces have to do with this situation?"

Spock arched an eyebrow as Jim said, "Think you should field that one, Spock. I've got a best friend to tend to."

"As it is an idiom of the human language, it would be best explained by a human," Spock argued, but to no avail. Not bothering to comm sickbay, the Captain had gotten his friend up off the floor, and pretty much out the door, before the Vulcan had finished speaking.

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 8 by ids

Leonard didn't really remember the trip to sickbay. It was mostly a swirl of concerned faces and difficulty remembering where the floor was in regards to the ceiling, or maybe it was the other way around. He was too dizzy to contemplate which was more accurate. And while it did feel good to be lying on the biobed instead of the floor, he would have preferred his own bed in his own quarters. Fortunately, whatever Doctor Geoff M'Benga had given him was making him care a little less about where he was and was also keeping the damn ceiling in its place.

"Geoff?" Leonard asked quietly as he grabbed the sleeve of his colleague's uniform. It had occurred to him that maybe the medication wasn't such a good idea. "Did anyone tell you I was pregnant?"

"Yes," the other doctor answered. "Both Christine and the Captain. It would explain why you are

suffering from Hyperemesis Gravidarum. I applied the usual treatment."

"Hyperemesis Gravidarum?" Jim questioned. He was sitting on the biobed next to Leonard's, his eyes focused on his friend. "Is that as bad as it sounds?"

"It's not going to kill him," Geoff answered. "But it doesn't exactly make pregnancy a pleasant thing. And I can't believe I just uttered those words in regard to a male colleague."

"You will need to become accustomed to such statements," Spock informed the doctor, causing the little group around Leonard to start as no one had heard him approach. Leonard was tempted to suggest they put a bell on the Vulcan, but the medication didn't quite have him so far gone that he couldn't hold his tongue. "The Ahrbonians were quite clear regarding the need for the pregnancy to go to full term."

"I still can't believe they did this to him," Christine fumed. As she and Geoff had already been aware of Leonard's condition when they arrived in sickbay, Jim only needed to fill them in on what the Ahrbonians had said. They were going to be the ones overseeing his care; they needed to be in the know.

"I'm still working out why they said it failed," Jim admitted, "unless they already knew about this Hyperemesis Gravidarum."

"I did suggest that it was abnormal for an individual to lose a significant amount of weight when pregnant," Spock informed them.

"That your way of telling them they screwed up?" Leonard asked as he struggled to sit up. Christine moved forward to help him better position himself on the bed. He probably should remain lying down, but she seemed to accept that it wasn't worth the argument to keep him that way.

"There is a great deal wrong with what they did," Jim stated, his irritation showing in his voice. "I'm not sure where to start."

"I concur that there are multiple issues on which the Ahrbonians must be consulted," Spock said with a little nod. "However, I drew attention to those issues that were most immediate to Doctor McCoy's health."

"Did they supply any information that would be of any help?" Geoff asked, ever the doctor.

"It would seem that they include protection for the child," Spock explained. "In some species, the protection can have adverse effects on the child bearer."

"Guess they can add humans to that list," Leonard growled. Now that the world had stopped spinning, he was back to being angry at his situation. "Though where they get off pulling this type of crap is beyond me."

"M'Potbope has stated that she can assist in alleviating the impact of those protections. If, of course, Doctor McCoy will allow her to do so," Spock continued, choosing not to address the legitimate point raised by Leonard. The Vulcan kept to his assertion to speak to health issues first.

"Oh, now they ask for permission," Leonard grumbled. "Where was all that politeness a few months ago?"

"Not that I wish to defend the Ahrbonians," Spock resumed, rocking slightly on the balls his feet as he spoke, "but M'Potbope did state during the meeting that she would not have sanctioned

such actions. And they did come voluntarily to confess the misdeeds of the twins."

"But they are not going to put an end to the pregnancy nor will they allow us to," Geoff guessed, based on what he had been told so far.

"They will not explain how they achieved this medical feat nor will they clarify why it is impossible to terminate the pregnancy prematurely, other than to say it would be hazardous to Doctor McCoy to do so." And, with that, Spock had finished reporting what he had learnt from the Abrbonians.

"I've got to ask because that was quite a bit of information you got there." Jim had a smirk spread across his face as he spoke. "How did you manage to squeeze in the explanation of shit storm?"

"I did not," Spock answered with a slight twist of his head. "I left that in the capable hands of Nyota."

Leonard gave a snort and said, "So much for the friendly break up. Don't suppose you asked why the hell they classified this as a failure?"

"Didn't I ask that already?" Jim queried, looking at Christine, who gave a little nod.

"But Spock didn't answer," Leonard retorted as he leaned forward, putting his head against his arms, which, in turn, were folded over his propped up knees.

"They did not say," Spock admitted. "They did imply that Doctor McCoy had the answer to that, and that it was his choice whether or not to reveal it."

Leonard's head snapped back up, which brought back some slight dizziness, but he managed to snarl, "I didn't even know until earlier today that I was pregnant, and they think I have the answer to that...?"

He snapped his mouth shut as an idea skittered across his mind. He remembered how much both Te'Bora and Ge'Ha disapproved of his relationship with Spock. There was no way they would have intended this situation. The two little bastards had probably planned for him to have an Abrbonian child. He tried to stand up, muttering half formed threats under his breath, but the action brought back the dizziness full force.

"I take it you figured out what they meant, or is the round of anger just a coincidence?" Jim asked as he jumped off the biobed he was on and helped Leonard lie back down on his own.

Leonard opened his mouth to answer, but realized he couldn't. If he explained, it would lead to more questions, ones he couldn't answer over other dire threats. The Abrbonians acted like they were doing good things, but the truth of the situation was very much to the contrary. If he didn't explain, the questions would still come, but, maybe this way, he could delay most of them. In the long run, Leonard just couldn't win. "I don't know. They used the wrong genetic material, maybe?"

"So the child is not part Abrbonian?" Spock asked. "I had not anticipated that. From the information that M'Potbope and No'Tatop provided regarding the impregnation that would be a highly unusual occurrence."

"A failure," Jim added as he situated himself on the other biobed again.

"But if they were the ones implanting the uterus, how did they manage to get it wrong?" Christine found the idea quite puzzling.

"You are assuming that the pregnancy itself happened via a medical procedure of some sort," Jim stated as he turned towards Christine. Giving a suggestive waggle of the eyebrows, he said, "What if that wasn't the case?"

"But there has only an addition of a uterus. No birth canal provided to allow impregnation to occur in a more natural manner," Geoff pointed out. "Not that there is anything natural about this situation."

"Ah, there is only a uterus now," Jim continued getting quite caught up in his idea. "What if that wasn't always the case?"

"That would be kind of disgusting considering where that would have to be connected," Christine muttered. "I mean, think about it."

"Trying hard not to," Leonard groaned. "Already not feeling all that great."

"But is it possible?" Jim demanded in a quiet tone, wanting to see if his theory was feasible without overwhelming his friend. "I mean, is the other parent even someone who has had sex with Bones?"

Leonard rolled over in an attempt to bury his head in the small pillow on the biobed. Unfortunately, it wasn't nearly large enough for the effect he was hoping for. His only comment to Jim's question was a grumbled "Fuck my life" that the Captain, and everyone else present, elected to take as a yes.

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 9 by ids

Leonard had been torn about whether or not he wanted to speak any further with the Abrbonians. Nothing they had said had so far had helped him in any way, and he honestly hadn't needed them to confess in order work out who was responsible for his current predicament. On the other hand, he wasn't exactly sure how the whole pact he had made with Ge'Ha and Te'Bora would continue to hold as the identity of the other father was likely to be obvious once the child was born, and that would lead to a hell of a lot of questions. Add to that the fact that Leonard had no idea how to even begin explaining a child that was one quarter Vulcan without referring to what else the Abrbonians had done for him. It would be necessary to talk to them, if only to see if any of the rules had changed regarding what he could or could not say. Leonard felt there would need to be some leeway given the mess they had made, but doubted they saw it the same way. He definitely didn't want to end up being on their bad side, given how being on their good side had turned out. With that in mind, he decided that he should at least meet with M'Potbope and No'Tatop again.

It was with some trepidation that Leonard entered the room where he had arranged to meet the Abrbonians. He was a surprised to see all four Abrbonians in attendance and not just the two he had requested. He did not want to speak the twins. Leonard wasn't sure if he'd ever be ready for that conversation. But once again, it would appear that the Abrbonians had taken the decision away from him. He regretted not being able to have anyone from the Enterprise with him for this discussion, but that would have made it impossible to bring up what needed to be discussed. Both Jim and Spock had objected to him coming alone and convincing them otherwise had been difficult. It wasn't as if he could give them a reason for why he had to go alone, other than telling them that it was simply how he needed it to be done.

"I wasn't expecting all of you," Leonard stated with a soft sigh as he came to a stop just inside the door.

"I do understand," No'Tatop said as he stood and gestured towards the empty chair that sat on one side of the table. All four Abrbonians were sitting on the other side. The configuration was unnerving to say the least. "It is necessary for the twins to be here. It is their duty to formally

apologize for not correctly approaching the pregnancy."

Leonard sat in the chair and leaned forward, with his forearms on the table. He growled, "I don't need an apology. I need to have this put right. How am I supposed to explain the child's parentage, especially to the other parent? And he will ask; you can be assured of that. Vulcans love asking questions and expect logical answers."

"There is no need for concern," No'Tatop reassured the man as he too took his seat. "The blame may be laid at our feet. You are no wiser to our motives than anyone else."

"You're not kidding," Leonard muttered to himself before saying, with a sinking feeling, "While that would have worked yesterday, it's not going to work today."

M'Potbope tilted her head slightly to the side, pondering the doctor's words. "May I ask why not?"

"Because the Captain is evil," Leonard snapped and rubbed his temple at the headache he was already feeling. This was not good as the conversation had just started. "He goes asking questions when I'm not up to being surreptitious, and I may have revealed the possibility that I had slept with the other parent, or, at least, answered the question in such a way that made those listening believe that I had, including the other parent, I might add."

"You were quite unwell, so it is understandable that you may have slipped," No'Tatop admitted. "However, the pregnancy cannot change the rules of the agreement. You mustn't reveal what Ge'Ha and Te'Bora did, or what you had to forfeit for them to take the actions that they did."

"Great," Leonard griped. "When the baby comes out with Vulcan features, there are going to be tons of questions, and I don't care if its only one quarter Vulcan: there will be features."

No'Tatop gave a little shake of his head. "You cannot know that for certain, doctor. It is possible that the child will appear completely human. You are borrowing trouble."

"I am not," Leonard snapped back. "It's a very real possibility. Also, bear in mind, there are those who already know the other parent's identity. I am not treating myself and I can tell you that they are going to believe that the best thing for me to do is tell him. Combine that with the pressure I know is going to come from Command and my other friends... I will not be able to maintain secrecy."

"You do not need to keep the other parent secret," M'Potbope reminded him.

"I know that," Leonard growled. "What you do not seem to be getting is that the people who know about the other father are among those who are also convinced that I have slept with that father and are trying to figure out how that is possible given that those two," Leonard waved his hand in the general direction of the twins, "put the man back with his ex-girlfriend when they reworked history. Therefore, there is no way any of this could have happened, whether the other father remembers it or not."

"Not all of this is our doing," M'Potbope stated. She folded her hands in front of her on the table and stared primly at the doctor. She was not as forgiving as No'Tatop had been that the slip had occurred during an attack brought on by the pregnancy. "You revealed something that created that awkwardness. You should not have mentioned the possibility of there having been a sexual relationship."

Leonard jabbed his finger at the twins as his voice rose in agitation. "There wouldn't have been a situation where I could accidentally reveal that if those two hadn't decided to do the whole pregnancy thing. I never asked for, nor did I want, any such thing. As such, I think I should be cut a little slack."

"If someone else were to work out what had happened then you would be able to admit the truth," No'Tatop stated, looking at M'Potbope for confirmation. When she gave a slight inclination of her head, he continued. "This does not allow you to give obvious clues to the situation. You should continue to provide as little information as possible."

Leonard stood up quickly, knocking over the chair he had been sitting on in the process. "If that's all you have to offer in the way of assistance in dealing with the insane circumstances you've put me in, that I be allowed to confirm the truth if someone else works it out, then you are useless to me from this point forward. Thanks for nothing."

"Doctor McCoy," No'Tatop stated in a voice that brooked no argument. "It is essential that Ge'Ha and Te'Bora be allowed to apologize for the mishap."

"Yeah, and I'd like to get through this so-called mishap with my friendships, not to mention my sanity, intact," Leonard growled menacingly. "I've got a funny feeling neither of us is going to get what we want."

On that note, he turned on his heel and stormed out of the room. The effect was slightly spoiled when he ploughed into Spock, who was hovering just outside the door. The two end up sprawling across the floor of the corridor.

"Dammit," Leonard snapped as he looked down at Spock, who was lying beneath him. Not that having someone waiting outside the meeting room came as a surprise to Leonard. However, the fact that it was Spock did startle him a little. He had been expecting the more agitated form known as James T. Kirk. Full body contact with a touch telepath was not a good idea when you didn't have secrets to hide: having it occur when you did have something to conceal was just asking for trouble. More trouble was not something Leonard needed.

"My apologies, doctor," Spock murmured. "I did not expect you to depart at the speed you did."

"Nor did I," No'Tatop stated from above the two, giving Leonard another start. It also snapped him out of his inaction, as he rolled to the side to get a better look at the Abrbonian. It was likely that the man had followed Leonard out of the room with the intention of making him listen to that all-important apology from the twins. That was not going to happen. If they weren't going to be cooperative about the situation, he was going to be just as unhelpful in return. He didn't care if it was childish. If anyone called him on it, he'd claim it was hormones.

Ignoring the Abrbonian, Spock sat up and looked over at Leonard with traces of concern in his features. "Are you unharmed?"

Leonard rolled his eyes at the query and just plain forgot that they were in a hallway and, therefore, could potentially be overheard by anyone passing by as he snapped, "Pregnancy doesn't make me fragile, Spock. I can handle a fall, especially since you were kind enough to break it. I should be asking you, not the other way round."

"Doctor McCoy -" No'Tatop started saying, but Leonard interrupted with a "Not happening."

Spock finally took in the presence of the Abrbonian. His expression was less than friendly as he stood up and brushed himself off, not once taking his eyes off No'Tatop. "Do you have further need of Doctor McCoy? I believe he had declared the meeting closed in the manner in which he departed."

Reaching down to the doctor, the Vulcan helped Leonard up off the floor. "Doctor McCoy, I am aware that you are not fragile. However, you are overly stressed, which, I understand, can increase the chance of injury. I was in a more relaxed condition and, therefore, at lower risk."

Allowing Spock to help him up, Leonard replied, "I guess I should be grateful you aren't spouting statistics on each of our chances of injury. I am perfectly fine, but, as you so nicely pointed out, I am not in the mood to deal with this shit anymore." Turning to look No'Tatop in the eye, Leonard continued. "I have no intention of listening to anything else the twins have to say. I have serious regrets as it is that I ever allowed them to do so much as talk to me, given the situation I now find myself in. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going back to my quarters before I have another bout of dizziness and end up on the floor for, yet, another reason."

Straightening out his uniform, Leonard elected to simply stroll away this time instead of storming off. He was accompanied by Spock, who was apparently a great Abrbonian deterrent.

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 10 by ids

Leonard realized that he had only himself to blame, but that did not make the fact that everyone on the ship now knew he was pregnant any easier to swallow. Of course, someone had happened to be walking nearby when he'd made that comment to Spock. Why should things start going right in his life now? He did wonder how much longer it would be before the story made it off the ship, but, as of this moment, the whole tale appeared to be contained. So far, no one had come up to him to speak directly about the situation, for which Leonard was grateful. He wasn't really ready to start hearing the opinions of others, supportive or otherwise. He had caught some of the looks being sent his way. He knew not all opinions were friendly.

He was also aware of the nature of the scuttlebutt. It wasn't that hard for the crew to work out that the Abrbonians had something to do with the unique state Leonard had found himself in, so mostly the rumours had focused on the child itself. According to Scotty, there was a betting pool regarding the child's DNA contributors and it covered everything from a McCoy clone to multiple donors, none of which were the doctor. Under normal circumstances, Scotty would be the likely culprit behind the pool, but as the engineer denied it before Leonard even had a chance to ask, it was highly unlikely that it was the case this time. He did admit to being offered a chance to place a bet, but, given what he knew about how it had all come about, Scotty found himself less than comfortable doing so and gave it a miss.

Leonard didn't need to ask his friend how he came to know so much; tracking the flow of information was really quite easy. Spock was in the know and he would have given enough information to Nyota, whom he was indebted to after the whole shit storm incident, that she could piece the remainder of the story together. She and Scotty had been spending a significant amount of time in each other's company, life resettling into the pattern that had existed before the Abrbonian visit to Enterprise. Leonard wasn't surprised that Nyota had shared the story, not that Leonard wouldn't have eventually told the two of them anyway. He considered them both good friends and would have taken their inquiries as concern for his well-being, not the need to spread more gossip.

Despite being the focus of gossip, thanks, once again, to the departed Abrbonians, Leonard found himself sitting in a fairly busy mess hall. True to her word, M'Potbope had corrected some of the issues that had arisen from the protections put in place when preparing for the pregnancy. These protections hadn't been intended to completely turn the man off of food, even though that had been the final effect. Leonard's diet was still more restrictive than would normally be necessary for someone in his condition, but he could handle being around foods he couldn't eat, something that wasn't the case before. And, while he still had some trouble keeping what he ate down, thanks to the Hyperemesis Gravidarum, he had stopped losing weight.

On this particular day, Leonard found himself joined at the table by Pavel Chekov and Hikaru Sulu. He suspected they had drawn guard duty for the evening meal, as he had yet to on his own since the news had broken. What he hadn't worked out yet was whether they were guarding him from nosy crew members or protecting those same nosy individuals from his temper. It was a toss-up, especially as he suspected that Spock was behind the idea. Pavel was discussing a

dream or something of that nature with Hikaru. Leonard wasn't really listening as he munched on the sandwich he had ordered with his soup. It was too much of a pleasure to be able to enjoy a simple meal for him to take the time to track the conversations around him as well.

"Hey, doctor," Hikaru said, earning the lieutenant an arched eyebrow. Normally, at least off duty, the man addressed Leonard by his name not his title. "You have a degree in psychology, right?"

"I do," Leonard confirmed between bites.

"So, you'd probably be able to explain why Pavel keeps having this dream?" Hikaru asked.

Leonard rolled his eyes at the request, but he put his sandwich down and spoke more directly to the two men. "Not exactly my speciality, dream analysis, but go ahead and tell me and I'll give it a shot."

Pavel shrugged and clarified the situation. "It's not one of those symbolic dreams you hear people talking about when they are hunting for meaning, or anything like that. It's just this scene that plays out, like a memory, except I'm not recalling the facts correctly in my dreams. I mean, I know what happened in reality..."

Leonard had to admit he was a bit intrigued by what the ensign was saying. Settling back in his chair and crossing his arms over his chest, he prompted the young man to continue with a slight nod. "Probably just as well as I don't have a couch to offer as part of the counselling, since this is well out of my usual area of counselling, but maybe I can help you understand why you are remembering it differently in your dreams."

The next words out of Pavel's mouth definitely captured Leonard's full attention.

"It's actually about the day that Vulcan got destroyed," Pavel explained. "I was the one on the transporter. I had gone there because I knew how to get it locked on to Hikaru and the Captain -"

"Something I am eternally grateful for," Hikaru said to his friend as he gave him a friendly pat on the upper arm. "And I am sure the doctor is glad you were there too."

Leonard gave a nod of agreement. Jim, hell Earth, might not be here now if Pavel hadn't known how to get the transporter locked on the two men.

Pavel continued as though he hadn't been interrupted. "Not that the Captain was the Captain at the time, but that isn't the part that I am remembering incorrectly. If it were, I think I'd know why." Pavel blushed slightly as he spoke these last words.

Leonard realized then what part it was that Pavel was getting wrong in his dreams, or, more accurately, what part he was remembering correctly. After all, the Abrbonians only changed the memories of everyone, not the actual events. He remembered that pivotal piece of information coming up when Ge'Ha and Te'Bora had made the offer. No actual change in the timeline had occurred. They were not going to alter the events that happened, just ensure that people didn't remember them. Leonard's mind starting racing, trying to come up with plausible reasons for the dreams, as there was no way he could tell the truth.

"It's when I am returning Commander Spock from the planet, along with the Vulcan elders, that the facts start to change," Pavel informed the doctor after the ensign collected his thoughts. Leonard groaned internally for being right as he listened to the younger man. "Instead of getting everyone up safely, I failed to save the Commander's mother. And it never changes. It is always her, not one of the others. It seems odd that it never varies."

Leonard sat there quietly, his mind still trying to formulate an answer that would make sense to

the younger man, while not blurting out that that was exactly what had happened that day.

"So any ideas?" Hikaru prompted when Leonard continued to simply stare at the two men.

"I have to admit I'm interested in hearing the answer myself," Nyota chipped in, causing Leonard to turn and glare at his friend when she sat down next to him. He was really getting tired of people standing behind him, listening into conversations. Nyota quickly understood the reason behind the less than friendly greeting. "Sorry. I happened to catch the part about the destruction of Vulcan and blatantly eavesdropped after that."

"Of course you did." Leonard shook his head. Turning back to Pavel and Hikaru, he started on the only theory he could come up with on the spot. "Reminding you once again that this is not my speciality, it is possible that the reason you always fail to save Spock's mother is because she's human -"

"And that would be significant, why?" Nyota asked.

"If you'd actually let me finish, you'd find out. If you don't like what I have to say then you can criticise it afterward. Now, as I was saying," Leonard stated, giving Nyota a pointed look, "it could be that Spock's mother, as the only human in the group, represents what would have been the loss of Earth, if Spock and Jim had failed. The mind doesn't always deal with your fears in a logical manner. Earth could have been lost in exactly the same manner as Vulcan if any in a series of events had turned out differently, including your actions, Pavel."

Nyota pursed her lips as she gave a little nod. "It is a plausible theory. If there had been more humans then he could substitute one for Amanda now and then, but, as it is, his brain only has her to work with. I could see that. It is a combination of the planet that was lost and the one that could have been represented in that group."

Leonard smirked and said, with only a hint of sarcasm, "I am so glad that you approve."

Nyota gave him a soft punch to the arm for the comment and then a slight inclination of the head towards Pavel, who was a little lost, despite what the doctor had said.

"But why would it start happening now?" The youngest at the table had to ask. "It was months ago. Shouldn't it have been happening back then?"

"Not necessarily," Leonard answered with a shrug. "It's not that unusual to experience delayed reactions to traumatic events. Sometimes, the subconscious can take years to deal with things, so several months isn't really that long."

"When is your subconscious going to start letting you deal with your recent traumatic events?" Nyota asked teasingly.

"My conscious mind has to deal with them every day," Leonard retorted. "My subconscious has no reason to be butting in."

"I'm going with when the kid is fully grown," Hikaru said. "He won't have time before then, anyway."

"There is truth in that," Pavel agreed with a vigorous nod. "It is not easy to be a single parent. Then you must add the fact that he takes on responsibility for so many of the crew, at levels that go well beyond the duty of the Chief Medical Officer. His subconscious has no time at all, even in his dreams, to deal with things."

"You guys better not give up your day jobs," Leonard said with a snort. "You really aren't funny at

all."

"I don't know," Nyota stated with a smile. "I'm amused."

"Yes, but you used to spend your free time with a Vulcan," Leonard pointed out. "That can significantly lower your entertainment threshold as I doubt any of them sit around cracking any kind of jokes at all."

Nyota snickered. "You spent quite a bit of time with him yourself, so maybe it's influenced what you think is funny as well."

"Yes, but when we're with Jim, who sometimes thinks everything is funny, I'm the one who actually balances out the humour scale," Leonard explained. "And if that's not a sad fact, I don't know what is."

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 11 by ids

Leonard lounged on his bed with knitting supplies as he had decided to make a blanket for the baby. He was also surreptitiously studying Spock while he worked, as the Vulcan had been acting a little weird as of late, even for him. Spock was currently sitting and chatting with Jim. Nothing unusual in that, Leonard had to admit. What was unusual, though, was how avidly Spock was watching him knit. His focus was completely riveted on the doctor's hands. Jim and Spock had brought their chess game to Leonard's quarters and had set it up on the small table there, as Leonard had not been feeling all that well. However, they had yet to play. Instead, they were discussing that day's shift.

Leonard finally broke down and said, "I thought you two were going to play chess. "You went to the trouble of bringing the damn game down here, which was totally unnecessary, by the way, as I wasn't in any desperate need of company, so the least you could do is play."

"Loads of time, Bones," Jim stated as he gave his shoulders a little roll, trying to ease away some of the tension of the day. "Had some interesting news from Command today."

"If you are referring to anything those nutcase groups are allegedly up to, I've already heard," Leonard growled. He was frustrated by the number of idiots that had surfaced after the story of his pregnancy broke and by the fact that so many people seemed to believe they had any right to weigh in on what was happening in his life. It didn't matter whether they were being supportive or hostile. They should have just kept their damn opinions to themselves as far as Leonard was concerned.

"While they did come up, as Command is concerned about some of them being a danger," Jim admitted, "that was not, in fact, the news I was referring to. It seems that our next mission will be taking us to an interesting location."

"As they have elected to keep me confined to the ship for the foreseeable future, which I am starting to suspect will be the rest of my life, and possibly that of the kid's, I'm not sure I want to hear about it," Leonard confessed. Getting off the ship shouldn't have been something he craved, especially when on a mission, but not being able to leave at all, particularly anywhere that some of the more hostile groups had connections, being cut off from the option altogether, had made it something he now wanted. It was all about wanting what he couldn't have, Leonard guessed. He had become an expert on that of late, which had him, once again, checking out Spock from the corner of his eye.

"This planet you will be able to visit," Jim informed his friend. "On this planet, your little bump won't look out of place at all among the inhabitants."

Leonard raised an eyebrow and, without missing a beat, asked, "They're all fat?"

"Possibly." Jim smirked as he reached over to give a little pat of the bump that had been alluded to with the fat comment. It had finally made an appearance now that Leonard's weight had increased and had become more typical of a pregnant person. "I was actually referring to the fact that male pregnancy is not something out of place."

"Oh, goodie. Someone to commiserate with." Leonard rolled his eyes at the thought. He glanced over at Spock, noting that Jim's actions had finally drawn the Vulcan's attention from his knitting. Leonard had to wonder what all that staring was about. Spock wasn't the type to assign gender to a particular task, at least not to one that an individual could learn, so it wasn't because knitting was typically thought of as a woman's hobby.

"The Federation are seeking a new treaty with the Mn'ha," Spock said with a hint of irritation in the look he was giving Jim. "As Command is aware, there are limited opportunities to interact with a species where male-based reproduction occurs naturally. It would be advantageous to send a starship with a crew that the Mn'ha may be willing to share information with in regards to the phenomenon. A chance to gather intelligence that the Mn'ha have been disinclined to reveal in the past."

"Ah, use the whole 'Hey, we've got a pregnant one ourselves' routine to break through that wall of secrecy," Leonard sneered. He turned his focus back to the knitting as he noticed that he had, in fact, stopped. The hobby was a useful one in that he could easily multitask when knitting less complex patterns, such as the one he was using for the blanket.

"Yeah, that's the basic idea," Jim laughingly admitted. Giving a little shrug, he added, "Doubt it would do any harm to relations if they don't take the bait."

Leonard shot a quick glance at Spock, half expecting the Vulcan to make a comment regarding Leonard's ability to disprove Jim's claim, but the Vulcan was back to staring at Leonard's hands as he knitted.

"May I ask, doctor," Spock said hesitantly, "why you took up the hobby of knitting?"

Leonard's eyebrows shot up at the almost shy nature of Spock's voice when he made his query. "No big secret there, Spock," Leonard said with a shrug. "It's actually not all that uncommon for a surgeon to take up a pastime that makes use of the hands."

Spock gave a slight nod of acknowledgement. "The practice would allow you to keep your fingers limber and flexible, a necessary trait for one in your position."

"Exactly," Leonard confirmed. "One of my teachers suggested knitting as it was a hobby of his. Keeps those muscles nice and loose in the fingers. Can't have them seizing up so that I can't hold a scalpel, now, can I? Plus, it offers the added bonus of actually producing something: in this case, a baby blanket."

"You're nesting, Bones," Jim joked. "Making a little cozy home for you and your expected bundle of joy."

Leonard made a face at the comment. He didn't think he was nesting, just being practical. There was no out. He had to have the child, though, if he were being honest, which he was being, at least to himself, even if there was a way out, he would have likely still gone ahead with the pregnancy. This way, he got to keep another little part of Spock with him, despite what he had given up so that the other man could have his mother back. Now, he had friendship, of a sort, and a child. It wasn't the most usual way for a man to cope with the feelings he had, but it was better than having nothing at all.

"I don't think he believes he is nesting," Jim said to Spock. "What do you think?"

"It is only logical that Doctor McCoy prepare for the upcoming child," Spock replied in a matter-of-fact tone. "It is a natural instinct."

"True enough," Jim replied. His eyes brightened, which was a sure sign that he had gotten an idea stuck in his head. The other two did not have to wait long to find out what it was. "I think we should throw the man a baby shower. It will help in the preparation."

Leonard groaned and Spock raised his eyebrows.

"It is the traditional thing for friends to do when one is expecting," Jim continued, outlining his plan. "And it would be fun to have a little party."

"You do remember that there would be no alcohol at this shindig of yours, right?" Leonard reminded him.

"There would be no alcohol for you, you mean," Jim shot back. "No reason for those of us not expecting to avoid imbibing, after all."

"Would it not be impolite to consume alcohol when the guest of honour cannot?" Spock queried, tilting his head slightly in thought as he spoke. Leonard was just grateful the intense stare was once again off of him.

"A good guest of honour wouldn't complain and would let the other guests enjoy themselves," was Jim's counterargument.

"We have met, right?" Leonard snorted as he shifted on the bed. His back was feeling a little sore. "I have a reputation to uphold. I can't go being nice and letting others enjoy booze."

"Cranky, Bones: your reputation is that you are cranky, not mean," Jim pointed out. "No one's going to change their minds about that just because you let them have a few drinks."

"Actually, I have a reputation for being a curmudgeon, Jim," Leonard shot back, "and I assure you that allowing others to drink when I can't will definitely harm that image."

Jim gave a hearty laugh at that. Turning to Spock, he said, "Now that's not really fair. However, you could still become intoxicated as I can assure you there is a way we could pull it off with chocolate."

"I'm sure that was Spock's big concern," Leonard drawled sarcastically. "Whether or not he could get drunk."

"Easiest way to survive any party with women cooing over baby stuff," Jim explained to Spock, "so it is something to consider."

"You are assuming that I would be present at this gathering, and I am not sure why," Spock admitted.

"Because if he's crazy enough to actually do this, Spock, I have no intention of suffering alone," Leonard informed the Vulcan. "I will be ensuring that many others suffer as well, so don't even think you're weaselling out of it."

Spock gave a little sniff, indicating his annoyance at the comment. "Vulcans do not weasel."

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 12 by ids

The Enterprise was on the way back from Mn'ha, where Leonard had done surprisingly well at getting the inhabitants to open up about how male pregnancy worked for them. He did, in fact, find people to commiserate with on the planet, and they were also aware of the somewhat dubious nature of the Abrbonians' helpfulness. An interesting coincidence, to say the least. The Mn'ha had shared the downside of what happened when one entered into a pact with the Abrbonians, as one of their communities had done just that and had later let the nature of that agreement slip out. It was not a pretty picture. The consequences of that indiscretion were not light and it reinforced Leonard's conviction to never let the true nature of his deal with the Abrbonians come to light.

Nyota had been present during the storytelling, as translators did not always handle the words of the elders well and were not fluent in standard the way the younger generations were. However, it was the duty of the elders to share the knowledge they had gathered, and to allow one of the youngers to be the one to tell the tale would be in violation of tradition and could simply not be allowed. It had struck Leonard that Nyota appeared to be taking even more interest in the action of the Abrbonians than he had, which was a little unexpected. After all, Leonard had a vested interest in how the Abrbonians worked that Nyota did not, unless she, too, had entered a pact with the aliens. It seemed strange, though, that the Abrbonians would enter into separate agreements with two individuals aboard the same ship. He would add that he didn't recall her having any close dealing with the individuals who had been aboard the Enterprise, but it was simply possible that he didn't remember her having any dealings with them. He could just remember the parts of the last several months that were directly related to his own agreement. There had been nothing to stop the Abrbonians from altering his memories, otherwise. Since Leonard was giving himself a headache as he considered all the possibilities, he finally just told himself that there was no way that a deal could have been struck with anyone else. He really hoped there was a one deal per group policy.

Now, back on the ship, awaiting the torture that was surely to arrive once Jim, who had recruited the assistance of Nyota and Christine, carried out his devious plans, Leonard tried to avoid certain individuals as much as possible. Not that it was all that easy as he did work directly with Christine. He had considered asking Spock to switch the shifts the two of them worked in order to escape the little looks of glee, but Spock would just tell him he was being illogical. Hard to argue with that as he knew damn well that he was. Maybe he should remind the planners that the point of a baby shower was to bestow gifts on the expectant parents, not a variant form of water torture, as they might be confused by the term 'shower'. If he could, Leonard would put a stop to the farce, but once Jim got a bee in his bonnet there was no stopping him (and Leonard still thinks Spock was perfectly aware of the fact that he didn't mean Jim was actually wearing a hat of any sort, bonnet or otherwise).

Interestingly enough, the doctor found that he was spending more time alone with Spock since Jim was off conspiring against him. Spock insisted that party planning was not conspiring, but Leonard just shook his head and told the Vulcan he would have to learn the hard way. After all, he had never had a party thrown for him courtesy of one James T. Kirk, but Spock did have a birthday in his future: one without Nyota to protect him. Leonard had learnt some new information about Spock in that time, such as the reason why the Vulcan had kept staring so much at his hands when he'd been knitting. Spock had never actually seen someone knitting in person before and had found the movements quite fascinating. It would appear that instructional videos did not capture the craft in quite the same way.

It was enjoyable hanging out with just Spock once again, capturing at least some of the camaraderie that they had come to share prior to the Abrbonians' first visit. Leonard had missed that. He also missed the romantic aspects of the previous relationship, but he was taking what he could get. When the Abrbonians had first left, there had been little left of anything from the prior months, barely a friendship at all, so Leonard was happy to be making any progress in that area. He might have had courage to push for more if not for the pregnancy. That had to be one of the most twisted parts of the whole thing, even more so than being pregnant, that Leonard couldn't try

to push further. He couldn't risk getting too close and having Spock find out via a slip of the mind, not that the Vulcan was going to find out anyway, given that Leonard might never get off the ship, but the longer he could put off that confrontation the better.

Speaking of the Vulcan, Spock had followed him back to his quarters, holding what Leonard assumed was food. The doctor rarely skipped meals anymore, but, this particular evening, he had decided it was worth it as he was tired and wanted rest more than nutrition. He figured he could munch on some power bar supplements. He must have mentioned something of his plan out loud without realizing it, probably around Christine, as someone had ratted him out, or, at least, he hoped so. Otherwise, Spock might just be a little too attuned to him for comfort.

As the door to his quarters opened, Leonard stood to one side and waved Spock and his tray in. "Since you've brought something, I guess you should put it on the table."

"You should not plan to skip meals, regardless of how tired you are," Spock replied as he carefully set the tray down. "It is ill-advised for a person in your condition. As you would know because you are a doctor, as you are so fond of reminding the crew."

"And you've appointed yourself my mother because I don't have one of my own anymore?" Leonard teased. "Are there beverages included in this service, or should I put on the kettle?"

"I assure you, Doctor McCoy, I have not appointed myself as your mother, nor would I want my actions mistaken for that of a parental figure," Spock said as he took the cover off the tray to show a simple meal of soup and sandwiches. It had become a favourite meal of Leonard's of late, especially tomato soup flavoured with Vulcan spices. The spices were a new touch, as the kid was already asserting that one quarter Vulcan side. Leonard was lost in thought, taking in the food on the table, and almost missed the rest of what Spock was saying. "If you would take a seat, I will prepare the tea."

"Huh?" Leonard gave his head a little shake to clear his thoughts and then gave a roll of his eyes as Spock's final comment sunk in. He did as he was told, but not without complaint. "Dammit, Spock, I'm pregnant not an invalid. I'm perfectly capable of making my own tea."

Spock glanced over at Leonard from where he was preparing two mugs of tea. "It is doubtful I would be able to forget as it is evident you need to remind someone of the exact nature of your situation every time he or she attempts to do something for you."

"I don't want people getting the idea that I've become helpless just because..." Leonard gestured toward the distension of his abdomen. "Treat a woman as being helpless the same way some people have been treating me, and these same people would be handed their asses, so I've been showing some constraint, all things considered."

"I do not consider you helpless," Spock said, correcting the man as he crossed the room with two cups of tea. He placed one in front of Leonard and took a sip out of the other, once he had taken a seat across from the doctor. "I understand that it is customary to do something considerate for those you consider friends once in a while, to demonstrate your appreciation for that relationship."

Leonard gave a quiet chuckle and stated, "One could argue that bringing a meal to me because you heard I wasn't going to bother was more than enough, and that I should have made the tea as a way of expressing my thanks."

"One could also argue that a beverage is part of a meal, and that my gesture would be incomplete if I allowed you to prepare it," Spock countered before moving his dinner off the tray to begin eating.

"As I'd rather eat than argue," Leonard admitted, as his stomach rumbled a little from the tantalizing smell of the soup teasing his senses, "I am going to let the whole thing slide. I'm also not going to ask which little birdie sang, as I'm sure it would be like pulling teeth."

A flash of indecisiveness flickered across Spock's face, as though he could not determine what in that statement he most wanted to address. After a few moments, he uttered words that prompted a full out hearty laugh from Leonard. "I would not expect you to pull teeth as you are a doctor, not a dentist."

The negligible upturn of the corner of Spock's mouth was enough evidence for Leonard to know that the Vulcan was joking. With a slight shake of his head at the behaviour of his friend, Leonard too started in on the meal that had been brought for him. He found the soup as enjoyable as his other senses had promised, as the two men ate in a companionable silence.

Once finished, Leonard stood up and stretched. He found the chairs from the crew quarters and mess hall lacking in support and tried to avoid sitting in them for long periods of time. He strolled over to the small couch, more a love seat sized sofa, that offered its own set of challenges. Truth be told, Leonard would love to have his office chair, or one like it, in his quarters. It offered the best support of the choices on board. The Captain's chair might have better, but Jim would notice if he tried to sneak that down to his quarters.

"That hit the spot," Leonard admitted while settling on the sofa. He waved Spock over as the Vulcan started to gather the dishes. "Leave that unless you are planning to eat and run."

"If it is acceptable, there is a subject I would like to discuss," Spock stated as he finished putting the dishes, other than the mugs, which were Leonard's, on the tray. "I am uncertain as how to best broach it with you."

Leonard's head was tilted back against the edge of the couch, his cheek leaning on the crook of the arm he had spread out comfortably along the back, his eyelids drooping a little as the day caught up with him. Stifling a yawn, he replied, "I'm guessing it's not more of a lecture on nearly missing a meal, then. If you want to talk to me about something, I suggest you stop what you're doing and come sit. I'd rather not have to be twisting myself around to be able to see you."

Spock walked to the edge of the sofa and stared down at the other man. "You appear overtaxed. This would not be an appropriate time for my query."

Leonard rubbed his temple in frustration. He wanted to hear whatever it was Spock had to say. The Vulcan had been acting as though he'd had something on his mind for the last few days and, now that he'd admitted it, Leonard wasn't letting him leave until he found out what it was.

"Sit down," he growled.

Spock hovered indecisively for a few more moments before taking a seat next to Leonard. He then proceeded to simply sit and stare. Leonard shook his head and prompted. "Well?"

Spock's reply surprised the doctor. "I am still uncertain how to broach the subject."

Leonard's eyes narrowed suspiciously as he tried to figure out what could have made the normally forthright Vulcan hesitant. "Well, the direct approach generally works best."

Apparently, Spock's interpretation of that statement was to skip words completely and use actions instead as he leaned over and placed his lips against Leonard's. The doctor gave a surprised gasp, and Spock took advantage of the moment to deepen the kiss. It didn't take long for Leonard to become an active participant as well as he slid his hand up to the Vulcan's neck and gave as good as he got. This lasted for a few minutes until Leonard's brain caught up to the

rest of him. A panicked thought regarding how dangerous this was had him reluctantly pushing Spock away, exclaiming, "I can't do this!"

Spock looked confused and hurt, breaking Leonard's heart. He needed to say something, and it couldn't be to deny his interest, not after his reaction to the kiss. "I can't... I can't deal with this right now. It's too much," Leonard explained, hoping Spock would understand what he was trying to say.

The Vulcan looked away from Leonard, but gave a slight nod in acknowledgment of his statement, while saying nothing. Taking a deep breath, Leonard added, "You... Your friendship has been a great help. I just I just am not in a place to start anything with anyone. If I were, it would be with you." Leonard really wished he could say otherwise, but he knew that the Abruonians would not accept the fact that he had revealed the truth by accident because he was involved with a telepath as a legitimate excuse. They were not reasonable.

"Understood," Spock stated as he stood and straightened out his uniform. "I shall not delay your rest any longer."

Leonard watched him leave, fighting the urge to call him back and pick up at the point where he had interrupted. He also wanted to lie down and cry. He did neither, however. Instead, he crawled on to his bed and stared at the ceiling, cursing the unfairness of it all.

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 13 by ids

Sitting in his office, sorting through the various PADDs that had been dropped on his desk during the day, gave Leonard a chance to get off his feet. It was a sad statement on his life that paperwork had now developed a certain appeal. Christine wandered in to join him, pulling up a chair close to the desk and placing her coffee on top. Leonard gave her a glare as she took her seat and went back to sorting through the PADDs.

"I don't suppose you stopped by to help me go through all this," Leonard said as Christine picked up her cup and took a small sip.

"Nope. Just here to keep you company while I have a well-earned break. I don't know if you've heard, but my boss is a bit of a hard ass," Christine teased with a smile. "Even more so as of late because of this condition he has."

"Probably shouldn't be taking a break, then," Leonard said, grinning back. "Might get you into trouble with him."

"Yeah, I probably will, but I'll take my chances," Christine laughed. "He's in his office and won't notice that I stepped out."

Shoving aside the PADD he had been looking at when she'd arrived, Leonard said, "Take a look at this one since you're here."

"I believe I said I was on break," Christine reminded him as she picked up the PADD. "You're not getting me to proofread Ensign Harper's reports. I am not the Chief Medical Officer. And it's not even his job, come to think of it. You should just dump it back on him and get him to make the changes himself."

"I have every intention of doing that," Leonard replied as he reached over to grab her cup. Christine batted his hand away and moved the cup just beyond his reach. She made a tut-tut sound before saying, "No coffee for you. I could get you some tea if you like."

"No thanks," Leonard replied. "I'm all tea'd out at the moment."

"So, if you are going to pass the PADD back why do you want me to read it?" Christine asked as she blew on her coffee. It was still quite hot.

"To highlight a few of the mistakes," Leonard told her. "Make some notes if you have to, save me from having to do it all for the kid."

"You're being too nice," Christine stated as she took a sip of her coffee and started to read the page in front of her. "I am staggered by the number of mistakes I've seen. Are you sure that he actually made it through the Academy?"

"Maybe he's got some really good blackmail material." Leonard smirked as he grabbed another PADD to review. A moment later, the look that flickered across his face as he read the words on the small screen caused Christine to stop her own review and ask him if he was okay.

"I'm not sure if I am reading what I think I am reading," Leonard muttered distractedly in return. "I mean, how would this even get on my desk?"

Christine reached over and took the PADD in question out of his hand to have a look for herself. "Let me see that."

After briefly scanning the words, she stated firmly, "I'm going to call security. They absolutely need to know about this."

"Not like they're going to be able to do much about it," Leonard said, looking a little pale. "I have no idea where it came from, let alone how it got on my desk."

"Still," Christine replied, "they can take action. It can't be ignored."

"Maybe it can," Leonard offered feebly. "It could be someone's idea of a joke, you know."

"If it is then it's not a funny one," Christine stated.

"I guess I agree that it wasn't, at that," Leonard said. He rubbed a hand down his face. "I had better notify Jim," he muttered, more to himself than Christine. "If he gets wind of it via security, I'll never hear the end of it."

"This is not something to be taken lightly, Bones," Jim stated as he took in the PADD in front of him. "This has the potential to be a huge fucking deal, and you are being much too damn calm about the whole thing."

"Do I look like I am taking anything lightly?" Leonard demanded as he gestured towards his door where Lieutenant Andre "Red" Copoka from security was standing.

"You don't appear to be acting all that concerned," Jim shot back, struck by the lack of reaction from the normally volatile doctor.

"I could try cowering beneath the desk if it would make you feel better," Leonard snapped.

"That will not be necessary," Spock said, standing in the corner behind Leonard's desk, just out of view of the doctor. He was in his usual pose, standing ramrod straight with his hands folded neatly behind his back.

"And who invited him?" Leonard asked with a jerk of his head in the Vulcan's direction.

"No one," Spock stated calmly. "I was there when you contacted the Captain and accompanied him to your office. Any concerns over the safety of any member of this crew are as relevant to me

as they are to the Captain, after all."

"I don't think this is a time for arguing," Jim intervened before Leonard had a chance to respond. "I know you are looking for someone to take it out on, Bones, because that kind of message can hit hard, but Spock is not that person."

"I wasn't going to argue that," Leonard said defensively. He hadn't even raised his voice when asking. "I simply wondered why he had come. Shouldn't somebody be on the bridge, you know, commanding the ship?" He gave a general wave around the room as he finished his query.

"The Enterprise has been left in Commander Scott's more than capable hands," Spock informed the doctor.

"It's a wonder that he and the entire bridge didn't try to come down," Jim added. "Your comm got everyone's attention."

"Guess it's not every day a crew member contracts you during a shift to let you know that a threat against their life has been left on their desk," Christine said in a calm voice that had Jim spinning on his heel to look at her.

"I can't say that it does." Jim smirked, feeling a little calmer about the note now that it had had time to sink in.

"More accurately, the note is a threat against the unborn child," Spock pointed out, not letting the inaccuracy of the question slide. "There is no direct threat against Doctor McCoy. Harm to him would be incidental."

"Oh, great, I get to be collateral damage in a death threat," Leonard snapped. "Every boy's dream."

"There's no need for the sarcasm, Bones." Jim gave a little laugh. "I'm sure Spock didn't mean that in any way that downplays the harm that could come to you if this person were to actually follow through with their threat."

"Indeed, I did not," Spock said, rocking a little on the balls of his feet. "The note, itself, is a threat against the child. The wording does imply that there will at least be injury to the doctor, given that the author of the note is insistent that the child cannot be allowed to be born. It would be difficult to ensure that without Doctor McCoy coming to some sort of harm. "

"Please, Spock. Never go into any career that requires you to offer comfort to anyone," Leonard stated with a little shake of the head. "You suck at it."

The comment earned him a quirk of the eyebrow, but no argument.

"I am sure that all the Captain and Commander want is for you to be a little more circumspect in your conduct for a little while, until we have a chance to assess the validity of the threat," Lieutenant Copoka stated from his position closer to the door of the doctor's office. "It is the most prudent approach when we don't know who is behind the note."

"That is exactly what I meant," Jim said, folding his arms over his chest. "I may have just worded it a little differently."

"Given the abrupt end to the note itself, either the PADD was included by accident or the inclusion was deliberate, but done before the message could be completed satisfactorily. Perhaps an opportunity to leave the PADD in Doctor McCoy's office, without it being traceable, arose earlier than expected." Spock appeared to be trying to keep the conversation focused on

the threat itself. His familiarity with the two men probably made him aware of the potential for a long discussion on exactly what the Captain had said. "Cowardly," Leonard muttered as he leaned back in his chair. "Got an issue with me? Say it to my face."

"That would be less than ideal," Spock responded. "While it would allow us to know the identity of the individual making the threat, it would also give that person a chance to act out the same. It would have been helpful if they had signed the note."

"But those who make threats are rarely helpful like that," Jim added. "Let's hope that there is information on the PADD itself that will help identify the culprit."

"Hopefully, though one of the problems with being on a ship like this is the surprisingly large number of people who know how to wipe the things clean," Lieutenant Copoka said. "Doesn't work as well as it does for the general population."

"Hell, I even know how to do it," Leonard groaned. He was currently studying the ceiling and trying to avoid thinking too much about the whole situation.

"You do?" Jim asked, quite surprised to hear his friend admit that.

"Yes, moron," Leonard said with a roll of his eyes as he sat forward in his chair. "You insisted I needed to know, though you never did give a reason why."

"I did?" Jim was further surprised to learn that. "I assume that I was slightly inebriated at the time."

"Just a tad," Leonard replied with sarcasm dripping off of each word.

"Gentlemen, before this conversation gets off track, we need to address how to best keep Doctor McCoy secure," Lieutenant Copoka reminded them. He may not have spent as much time in the company of the Captain and the doctor, but he had heard of their reputation for arguments that got out of control. They were almost as bad as those between the doctor and the Commander.

"Well, you could just give me a phaser and I'll shoot anyone I think might pose a threat to me." Leonard spread his hands out in front of him in a non-threatening manner and adopted his most innocent expression. That earned a blink from Spock, a groan from Jim and a burst of laughter from Christine.

"Please tell me you mean to have it on stun," Christine snickered. "Otherwise, we could end up a crewless ship."

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 14 by ids

It wasn't that much of a surprise anymore to depart from his quarters and immediately run into Spock. It would appear that the Vulcan had appointed himself Leonard's security detail, whether Leonard liked it or not. It had been a while since the threat had been received and there had been no follow-ups to the original. Leonard had started to think that the whole thing was just a way to stir up some trouble as opposed to a credible threat against his well-being, or, more specifically, that of his child. He corrected himself frequently on that point. It was almost like having a little Spock in his head making sure he remembered the note accurately. It was a frightening thought.

"I do know the way to the sickbay, you know," Leonard stated in lieu of a greeting. "I've gotten there every single shift without getting lost once."

"You also know the way from sickbay to the bridge," Spock replied in his monotone, but Leonard detected a slight curve in the lips when he noted the Vulcan's reaction out of the corner of his eye. The closest he could usually get to a laugh at any attempt at humour. "And you insist on

continuing to make that journey on your own, mid-shift, even though you are discouraged from doing so."

"Discouraged because you don't want me on the bridge or discouraged because you don't think it's safe for me to be wandering around on my own?" Leonard had to ask as he knew that Spock had a problem with him being on the bridge at times. Logic would dictate that, as the Chief Medical Officer, he should be in sickbay, but Jim, especially during slower days, had made a habit of dragging Leonard up to the bridge, and the behaviour was now ingrained into both men. Not that most of the bridge crew minded as it provided the Captain with a new target when he was bored.

"Each is equally valid," Spock stated as the doors to the lift opened. He waved Leonard in before him.

"Are you sure?" Leonard asked. "Don't want to check for suspicious individuals first before letting me get on?"

The doctor's comment caused the ensign already in the lift to shift nervously. He said nothing and smiled hesitantly as both senior officers nodded at him in greeting.

Spock ignored Leonard's dig, saying, "I would be satisfied at this point if you would refrain from doing so while there is still a possible threat against you. We could address the other issue at a later date."

The ensign was intently listening to the exchange, Leonard noted, while desperately trying and failing to look like he wasn't doing just that. The doctor rolled his eyes at the poor attempt being made and resigned himself to another round of gossip. If nothing else, his predicament was entertaining the troops. They sure weren't going to track down the culprit based on his or her public reaction. Once the idea had been given a chance to sink in, most of the crew had been simultaneously amused and supportive. Even those who didn't fall into that category didn't appear to be overly hostile.

"I don't think this is the best place to be discussing this," Leonard warned.

Spock turned to the side, taking in the presence of the ensign standing slightly behind the doctor. "The crew has already been briefed on the situation, Doctor McCoy. We are not likely to reveal anything that is not already known."

"I realize the horse is already out of the gate, Spock," Leonard said, enunciating each word carefully, "but that doesn't mean we need to continue to feed the masses."

Spock simply raised his eyebrows at the other man and turned away. At the next level, the ensign slipped out of the lift, even though it wasn't his floor, and two more crew members joined the now silent occupants.

After Spock escorted him to sickbay, an event that always got grins out of the rest of the medical staff, even though it had been going on for a while now, Leonard decided to spend the morning in his office reviewing yet another batch of PADDs. He had been timorous for a while about reviewing the damn things, letting the whole incident get the better of him, but he had managed to push past it. In the intervening time, however, a backlog had developed that he needed to clear away. He hadn't been at his desk all that long when Christine made her way in as well.

"So," Christine said, briefly dragging Leonard's attention away from the PADD he was reading, "when are you going to tell him?"

"When am I going to tell who what?" Leonard asked distractedly as he went right back to reading

the PADD, giving the woman a cursory glance.

Taking the PADD out of his hand, Christine said, "You know who and what."

"I do, do I?" Leonard asked as he leaned back in his chair, running his fingers through his hair. "And you want to discuss this with me, do you?"

"Someone has to," Christine retorted. "I don't know if you've been looking all that closely at the scans, but there are certain dead giveaways as to who the other father is, and the kid is not staying in there forever. Either you do the right thing and tell him, or he'll figure it out quite quickly once she is born."

"I suppose you have a point." Leonard sighed, sitting forward in his chair again. Resting his elbows on his desk, he covered his face with his hands. "It's going to be impossible, you know."

"Impossible to tell him?" Christine asked, sitting down in the seat across from him. She had been spending quite a bit of time in that chair as of late. "I think it's rather easy. I'll even give you the words."

"You going to give me the answers to his questions as well?" Leonard snapped. "Because there will be a shitload of them. Vulcans tend to specialize in torturous questions and demand logical answers."

"That could be problematic for you, Christine admitted. "I can't help you because you haven't exactly been forthcoming with any information on that front."

"There is nothing to provide," Leonard griped as he raised his head to look directly at her. "At least nothing that'll make any sense to anyone."

"How did it happen?" Christine asked. She held up her hand and gave a little warning when Leonard was about to answer. "And don't you dare start talking about the birds and the bees."

"Doesn't exactly apply now, does it?" Leonard reminded her. "Male humans aren't supposed to get pregnant in the first place. One of the perks of two men having sex."

"I have trouble believing that either you or Spock would be cheating behind Nyota's back, but you did say that sex couldn't be ruled out," Christine reminded him. "That an implant was not the only way."

"Actually, if I remember correctly, I said my life was fucked or something along those lines, which in no way constitutes admitting anything," Leonard stated defensively. "The rest of you decided to interpret that as the father being someone I slept with."

"If the father hadn't been someone you had slept with, you wouldn't have responded that way," Christine reasoned. "We all just know you well enough to understand that."

"Can we all pretend that I didn't and go from there?" Leonard pleaded, once again with his head in his hands. "It would eliminate all the more difficult questions, and we could write the whole thing off as some crazy Abrbonian plot."

"You could write off the two of you having sex in the first place as some crazy Abrbonian plot," Christine advised as she gave her boss's dilemma a little consideration. "Was it an Abrbonian plot? I still haven't worked out how the hell it happened."

"Gee, thanks," Leonard muttered. "I didn't think it was that incredible that someone might have slept with me."

"I didn't mean it like that and you know it," Christine said. "As I stated earlier, there's the fact that Spock and Nyota were still together when your little bundle of joy was conceived. Given the way he is following you around these days, sex now would be quite believable."

"He's not following me around," Leonard objected, "and he's being paranoid."

"He's being protective," Christine argued. "And it's really kind of sweet. Maybe the Ahrbonians knew something we didn't at the time? But that would only make sense if they had intended for Spock to be the father, which they did not, at least not according to what Spock reported."

"Please stop giving me ideas to work with, only to point out why those ideas will fail," Leonard said. "It's not helping."

"Sure it is," Christine smirked. Leaning forward, she shot Leonard a bright smile. "I'm eliminating all stories with the potential to explode right in your face."

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 15 by ids

When he got back to his quarters, Leonard sat down at the small desk to check his personal messages for the day. He suspected that he wasn't getting all of them, as Command had taken to filtering out all sorts of messages that could be potential threats. He had a few relatives that kept in touch who might write in such a way that their messages would easily get caught in such a filter. He didn't really care as long as anything and everything from Joanna got through.

He was a few messages in when he opened the one that would once again rock the peace he had managed to find, despite the insane turn his life had taken. The wording was much like the earlier threat he had received, only this message appeared to be complete and contained some of the rhetoric that one of the more vocal groups objecting to "this travesty," as they liked to refer to his pregnancy, often employed. Leonard thought the group calling itself "The Association For the Preservation of Human Normalcy" was more a travesty than anything going on with him.

This message did hit him a little harder. One time could easily be written off as an empty threat, but a second time made it much more real. Leonard quickly found himself on the comm demanding that someone from security be sent up immediately to review the message and investigate. He also contacted both Jim and Spock separately, knowing full well that he would likely never hear the end of it from either man if they weren't told directly.

This was how he found a gathering of the same people who had been present for the first threat, minus Christine, now occupying his former safe haven, known as his quarters.

"It would appear, based on the log records I'm seeing here, that the message was also sent from this terminal," Lieutenant Red Copoka stated.

"Are you suggesting that I sent it to myself?" Leonard asked. "Because I've got to tell you that the only reason someone would do something like this is to draw more attention to himself, and the last thing I want is more attention." In this agitation, his voice had risen steadily.

"No, doctor," Lieutenant Copoka said quickly. "Just that someone entered your quarters and sent the message. From the time stamp, I believe you would have been in the middle of your shift and still in sickbay."

"That would be a given considering that I get there at the start of my shift and can't leave till the end, even to get some damn food, because someone told my staff not to let me," Leonard informed the security officer, his irritation at these instructions evident in his voice. His glare was focused on Spock, who was unperturbed, and not at the security officer, something that Copoka was entirely grateful for.

"You did not follow the directions given," Spock stated. "The next course of action was to recruit others to ensure your safety."

"You are being one big pain in the butt. Do you know that?" Leonard demanded.

"A smart one," Jim reminded him, eyeing his friend with concern. "You did get another threat."

"Maybe all this paranoia around the first one is encouraging the nutcase. Did you ever think of that?" Leonard snapped back. He wasn't handling the idea of someone breaking into his quarters to send him a message very well. It added a whole new level of creepy to an already disturbing situation. He wanted, he needed, to believe that the threat was an empty one from some nutcase who was getting off watching them jump through hoops.

"That is a possibility," Lieutenant Copoka stated as he stood to leave. He would be able to investigate the system better elsewhere to see if the logging had been tampered with. Plus, there were security cameras in all the corridors, so if someone had entered the doctor's quarters illegally, he or she would have been caught on video. "I could send up someone to stand guard outside the door, if you like. I doubt the perpetrator will return tonight. They have to be aware of the strong interest the message will generate."

Both Spock and Jim agreed to the suggestion of a guard outside the door. Leonard, however, did not. His incensed "no" had everyone pivoting and staring at him. Leonard's face was flushed, and he could hear his blood rushing past his ears as he prepared to speak. A guard outside his quarters was just too much. It was like he was becoming a prisoner and he was not going to stand for it. But when he opened his mouth to make his point, everything went black.

Leonard opened his eyes and took in the sickbay ceiling above him. He knew it was sickbay because, staring back at him, were various diagnostic and treatment devices that would only be found in an infirmary. . He wasn't sure why he was there. He vaguely remembered getting worked up about something, but he wasn't sure what that was. His mind was a bit foggy at the moment.

Looking to one side, he saw Spock sitting in a chair next to his biobed and Jim sitting in the next biobed over. Both looked quite concerned, so Leonard decided that the reason he was in sickbay couldn't be good.

"You are awake, Doctor," Spock commented, his gaze fixed on Leonard's face.

"Jesus, Bones," Jim stated as he jumped down off the biobed and moved closer to his friend, "that was a hell of a fright you gave us."

"What happened?" Leonard asked. His voice was groggy to his ears, but he didn't feel all that tired. He wondered what the hell Geoff had given him. "I remember being in my quarters. You guys were there, right?"

"Yes," Spock said. "You had received another threat and were unhappy about the suggested security. However, before you were able to voice your objections in what I am certain would have been a very loud manner, you collapsed."

"Right in front of us," Jim added. "Right after you received a threat. And we had no idea what had just happened."

"I guess I could see how that might be a little unnerving," Leonard admitted in a quiet tone. "Sorry about that."

"You do not need to apologize," Spock stated. "You did not collapse on purpose and, therefore,

have nothing to be sorry for."

"Still, didn't mean to worry anyone," Leonard muttered.

"According to Doctor M'Benga, the reason for your collapse was due to your rising blood pressure, as you became agitated by the conversation," Spock explained. "Another example of the way in which the Ahrbionians elected an approach to protect the child, but not the child-bearer."

"You kind of hit your head on the desk as you went down, so you have a concussion," Jim said. "Having a person faint is not the best reaction to high blood pressure. You don't know where that person may be at the time and put them at risk."

"Which is, of course, exactly what happened to me," Leonard concluded for his friend. "Because that's just the way my damn luck rolls."

"Now that you are calmer, perhaps you could explain in a more rational manner why you objected to a security detail being posted outside your door." Spock said.

"Are you trying to upset my patient again?" Geoff asked as he returned to the biobed to check on his friend and colleague. "Because if you are, I am going to have to have you removed from sickbay. I don't care if you are the First Officer or the Captain." He looked pointedly at each man as he spoke. "Don't think I won't."

"Hey, there is no need to go kicking anybody out of sickbay," Jim reassured Geoff. "Bones doesn't have to answer anything he doesn't want to answer, and we'll just leave it at that."

"Bones has no problem answering the question, however," Leonard stated as he attempted to sit up on the biobed. The movement was ill-advised as he got a little dizzy, but he did manage to drag himself up, despite the look of disapproval from everyone around him. "I have no desire to feel any more like a prisoner than I already do being confined to the ship. Adding a security detail will exacerbate that feeling, so, no, I am not having it."

"An understandable reaction," Geoff said sympathetically. "However, I am sure that the Captain and Spock only have your best interest in mind."

Jim nodded emphatically. "See. That's all it's about: keeping you safe, not keeping you locked up."

"I know you just want to keep me safe. I just want to keep me safe." Leonard sighed. "However, there are lines I just can't bear to cross. I'd rather stick to having friends with me when I go anywhere and maybe have a safer code on my quarters. Hell, I promise not to be in my own office on my own, if it'll make you happy. Christine pops in there half the time, anyway. And don't think I don't know why she keeps doing it."

"We like to check up on you from time to time," Geoff admitted. "The threats have unnerved more people than just you. We'd like to keep our Chief Medical Officer around."

"I'm not arguing with these measures," Leonard said. "I am just drawing a line at being assigned actual security, like I'm the one guilty of something."

"Think of them as bodyguards," Jim suggested.

"No Starfleet doctor needs a bodyguard, and I'm not about to start a trend," Leonard snapped. "It doesn't feel normal, and I need as much normality as I can get in my life right now."

"And it's time to change topics, gentlemen," Geoff ordered in his quiet voice. "The patient is starting to get agitated, and we now know that the Abruonians have included an odd solution to dealing with the resulting symptoms."

"He is on a biobed," Jim pointed out. "A safe location should he faint again."

"There is that," Geoff agreed. "However, I would prefer he not need to have a safe location in which to faint."

"A point well taken," Jim said sheepishly. "We'll try switching to a more neutral subject."

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 16 by ids

"Hello there, boys," Nyota said as she approached the two men she'd spotted locked in an argument in the corridor. "I was wondering if I could borrow the doctor for a few minutes."

Spock raised an eyebrow at the request but said nothing.

"I don't see why not," Leonard responded with a smile. "I always enjoy a chat with a pretty lady, and I think Spock can agree that you aren't likely to be posing any threat to my continued existence. Right, Spock?"

"I am certain that Lieutenant Uhura means you no harm," Spock replied, giving his ex-girlfriend an assessing look. "I am unsure what she would wish to discuss with you that cannot be done in my presence, but, if it is necessary, then I would not object to postponing our discussion to a later time."

"Thanks, Spock," Nyota replied. "Nothing of any concern. Just wanted to run a few things by the doctor."

Her comment gave both Spock and Leonard the impression that she was more likely to discuss medical concerns as opposed to the ongoing situation that Leonard kept finding himself in between the pregnancy and threats. Taking Leonard by the arm, Nyota directed the doctor down the corridor to the nearest observation deck.

"I hope you don't mind," Nyota said as the door to the small room slid open. "I know you don't really like these rooms, but this is probably the most private place we could find without needing to head to one of our quarters or to your office. Those options are a little out of the way."

"That's okay," Leonard stated. "I'll simply keep my focus on the pretty lady in my company and not the more stressful view of space."

"Flattery isn't necessary, doctor," Nyota said with a smile. "Appreciated, but not necessary." She sat down where she had a view of the observation window, while gesturing for Leonard to take the chair across from her.

"What can I say," Leonard joked as he took the seat. "I am always gracious to those who rescue me from what is likely to turn into a rip-roaring fight."

"Doesn't that describe most of your conversations with Spock?" Nyota smirked, knowing full well that the two could get along if they avoided certain topics. Not that either put all that much work into avoiding these same topics, but, then, they did seem to enjoy arguing with each other.

"Not all but most," Leonard conceded, "but I don't think you dragged me away from our latest conversation just to discuss our tendency to argue, now, did you?"

"That is very true," Nyota admitted. "I wanted to talk to you about what you did."

"What I did?" Leonard asked, eyebrow raised in query as he had no idea what she could be referring to.

"Yes, what you did," Nyota reiterated. "You know. When you entered into an agreement with the Abrbonians."

"When I what?" Leonard gaped at her in surprise. That was the last thing he had expected Nyota to say. "What agreement is that? Because I am telling you right now, I in no way asked for this pregnancy, if that is what you're implying."

"I am implying nothing of the sort," Nyota retorted. She folded her arms over her chest and swung her leg a little in agitation at the accusation. "I am fully aware of how much the pregnancy has thrown you and, to be honest, you are just not that good of an actor, Doctor McCoy, for that to have been requested from the Abrbonians."

"Can't argue that," Leonard said sheepishly, giving a little shrug. "I didn't think I was particularly good at fooling anyone."

"Anyway, as I was saying before we went off on this little tangent," Nyota stated firmly, "I want to talk to you about what the Abrbonians did for their part of the agreement you made with them. And don't bother denying it. I know that you entered into an agreement with them. I have gathered and reviewed quite a bit of data and I'm more than aware of the results of that deal. You will only be kidding yourself if you think you can talk me out of believing otherwise. "

"Reviewed all the data, huh?" Leonard laughed at the phrasing. "You definitely have spent too much time with Spock."

"No trying to change the subject, doctor," Nyota warned Leonard. "But as you brought up Spock, I don't need to introduce him into the conversation. After all, the whole agreement revolves around him."

"So I'm making deals about Spock, am I?" Leonard was starting to think that maybe she really did have the situation worked out. He couldn't exactly add any input at this time, as it was clear he could only confirm it when someone did work out the pact. He couldn't do much else, leaving his hands tied at this point in the conversation.

"Yes, quite a sweet one I might add," Nyota said. "How often does one get to do something so nice for another living person? Emphasis on living because, as you already know, there is also a dead person involved, or, better put, a formerly dead person involved. And I mean that in a non-zombie sort of way."

'Well, shit,' Leonard thought to himself, 'she really does have the whole thing worked out.' He had no idea how, though. He guessed it probably related back to the conversations that had taken place on Mn'ha. He did recall how attentive Nyota had been during the storytelling by the elders. However, that alone did not explain how she would have worked it out. He needed to phrase the questions he wanted to ask carefully to ensure he didn't inadvertently violate the pact and get himself in trouble. Not with the truth being so close to being revealed without his input.

"So this data that you mentioned," Leonard said, "the data that led you to this very strange conclusion. Would you mind if I asked what exactly it consisted of?"

"I am not the least bit surprised you want to know how I worked it out," Nyota smirked. "I'm also not surprised that you're not confirming that you have a deal. I remember the consequences the Mn'ha faced when they violated their agreement with the Abrbonians and I don't expect you to put yourself in the same position. If you can restrain yourself from interrupting, I'll explain my

conclusions."

"Yes, ma'am," Leonard snorted as he leaned back in the comfortable seating of the observation deck and listened to what Nyota had to say.

"First, I noticed a problem recalling certain events clearly and, believe me, we could do a survey of everyone on this ship and find quite a few people who have fuzzy memories revolving around certain situations," Nyota said as she started her explanation. "Not that that alone would mean much of anything, but when more recent events are less focused than past ones it does seem a bit odd. Combine that with things that simply don't appear to add up and you have to start wondering if someone, or something, has been messing around with people's memories. Or at least you do if you're serving on this ship."

"Are you sure you aren't just talking about yourself and not everyone on the ship?" Leonard interrupted.

"Hush," Nyota ordered, leaning over and giving him a warning punch to the shoulder. "I said to let me explain. And, okay, it might be heavily based on my own personal experience, but I tried asking people about a few different things I was unclear on and no one else seemed to know any more than I did. I am extrapolating from that. I mean, try going out with someone when you feel like you are being compelled to date without the emotions that usually go with a relationship. It was like we had broken up, but had forgotten to tell each other."

"Small print," Leonard muttered to himself. Honestly, who knew an oral contract would come with it?

"What was that?" Nyota asked. "Never mind. I don't want to know. However, this was not what aroused my suspicions. No, they were triggered by Chekov and his dream."

"His dream?" Leonard interrupted once again. "Why did that make you suspicious? I think my explanation worked quite well, thank you very much."

"It did make sense," Nyota said with a little nod, "except it didn't really explain why Spock had the same dream but from a different perspective."

"Spock had the dream?" Leonard's eyebrows shot up to his hairline in surprise. "I thought Vulcans didn't dream, or, at least, not in the sense that humans do."

"Wasn't really dreaming now, was he?" Nyota pointed out. "He was remembering events correctly, which brings us to the previously dead person I was speaking about. Spock's mother, Amanda. I had the confusing feeling I had never met her before when we received a comm from his parents not long after the Abrbonians had left. That didn't make much sense, given we would have met after she was recovered from Vulcan along with the others. I was certain I had met his father."

"I guess you wouldn't remember Spock's mother -- not if she was actually dead before the Abrbonians visited, which I assume you are claiming is the case," Leonard answered. He didn't want to discourage Nyota from her theory as she did appear to have the deal worked out correctly. At the same time, he had no idea what the Abrbonians would consider an acceptable definition of "worked out," so he was erring on the side of caution when responding.

"Yeah, that is exactly what I'm claiming," Nyota stated.

"Let's say you are correct," Leonard said, leaning forward, his arms resting on his legs, preparing to play devil's advocate. "That still doesn't explain how it's my doing. Maybe someone else thought it would be nice to have the Abrbonians give Spock his mother back."

"A good point," Nyota admitted, "or it would be if it weren't for a few interesting facts that I have yet to share since somebody keeps interrupting me. Someone I've told to just listen, I might add."

Leonard shot Nyota an apologetic smile as he sat back in his chair. With a little wave of his hand, Leonard suggested she continue.

"To understand how I know it was you, we have to return to Spock's recently developed tendency to dream," Nyota started, sending Leonard a suggestive look, giving him a good idea of the nature of those dreams.

At that, Leonard started to stand, something that wasn't quite as easy as it used to be for him. As he pushed himself up, he said, "On second thought, I don't think I need to know how you came to that conclusion."

"Sit down," Nyota stated in a very stern voice, and Leonard dropped right back into the chair, an automatic reaction to Nyota's tone. "You do realize that your reaction is very revealing in itself."

"That may be," Leonard retorted, a little embarrassed he had obeyed the woman so quickly. "I still don't want to hear about it. And I know you're supposed to be best friends now, but aren't there lines?"

"Maybe," Nyota replied. "But who else was he going to talk to about these things? The Captain? Not that he would break any confidence with Spock, but I can't imagine Jim being able to contain that 'I know something you don't know' look of his every time he was in a room with the both of you. And, let's face it, you guys spend a lot of time together, so you'd be seeing it quite frequently."

"I guess I should be grateful that it was you when you put it that way," Leonard admitted. "Still doesn't make me the guilty party."

"It does when you think of the dreams as suppressed or replaced memories, the way that his other dream turned out to be," Nyota argued.

"A coincidence," Leonard offered with a little shrug. "I'm sure stranger things have happened."

Ignoring him, as if he had posed a rhetorical question, Nyota continued. "The whole picture came together when we were on Mn'ha. The stories about the Abrbonians were very enlightening, to say the least. And you are doing a very good job at avoiding saying anything that screams I'm right. I can't blame you, given the horror stories they shared. But how else could two people have the same dream, unless those dreams represent suppressed memories? As for the dreams involving you, they make more sense if you consider that any agreement with the Abrbonians means that the person in question has to give up something. In this case, your relationship with Spock, though, if I am remembering correctly, and I believe we have covered the possibility that I might not be already, at least two of the Abrbonians were motivated by something other than benevolence."

"Please don't remind me of those two," said Leonard with a grimace. "They got me into this mess. Arrogant bastards."

"Yes, setting a pregnancy in motion was very autocratic of them," Nyota agreed. "I understand it was likely that they meant the child to be theirs, so I can't begin to describe how selfish that maneuver was."

"Yeah, it's not really something I want to get into, if you don't mind," Leonard admitted. "It's too much to consider, a violation but without a haunting traumatic memory to accompany it."

"I suppose it could have been worse," Nyota had to admit. "You could have suffered that traumatic moment."

Not that I would necessarily have a traumatic memory either way," Leonard pointed out. "The Abrbonians can, after all, alter memories according to your theory."

"Not as well as they think," Nyota reminded him. "Spock and Pavel had memories resurface, as I'm sure a few other people did."

"Did you?" Leonard asked, curious as to those items she had sought clarification on from others.

"Nothing that is truly relevant in making you understand my conclusions," Nyota stated, basically telling Leonard to mind his own business. "I do, however, have some questions for you. I'm not sure whether you would be able to answer them or not."

"Why don't you summarize your theory for me," Leonard Said. "A short concise one leaving out the supporting evidence."

Nyota gave Leonard an odd look, but did as he asked. "You entered an agreement with the Abrbonians where, in exchange for them returning Spock's mom to the land of the living, you gave up your relationship with him, having past events removed from the collective consciousness, while remembering them yourself."

"Yes," Leonard answered with a nod. He didn't bother letting Nyota know that memory changes did not include the relationship between him and Spock; no one had known about them. "Yes, what?" Nyota replied, unsure what he was getting at.

"I can confirm that what you said is true," Leonard explained. "I can't elaborate or clarify, but I can confirm."

"Is this some slack they decided to cut you as result of the pregnancy screw up?" Nyota queried, tilting her head to the side as she took in Leonard's body language, noting the stiffness that set in with her question. "If that was the best they could offer, it's a truly bad consolation for the stupidity of their actions."

Leonard simply kept staring at Nyota, but made no further comment. It was okay to confirm the deal he had made with the Abrbonians, but that didn't cover revealing why he could, and Leonard was not taking any chances.

"I didn't think you would answer that question," Nyota admitted. "And don't feel as though you need to answer any others if they are covered by your original agreement with the Abrbonians, but I do have a few, if you don't mind."

"You can ask, but I make no guarantees," Leonard replied.

"The first is why exactly Spock and I were put back together as a couple?" Nyota wondered. "I can't see that being something you requested."

"You are correct about that," Leonard said with a little shrug. "Small print. Make of that what you will as I can't really explain beyond that."

"An oral contract shouldn't have small print," Nyota retorted.

"True," Leonard agreed. "Doesn't change my answer, though, unless you want to refer to it as a whispered addendum."

Nyota gave a little a giggle at that. "Fair enough. The second question you should be able to answer as it doesn't come under that pact at all from what you've said so far."

Leonard arched an eyebrow at her and said, "That would be?"

"Who is the other parent of the child you are carrying?" Nyota asked. "Or, more specifically, is Spock the other parent of that child?"

"That's a very personal question, don't you think?" Leonard replied. "And one I'm not very comfortable answering, to be honest."

"I realize it is very personal," Nyota responded, "but if it is Spock I really think you need to tell him. And given that the two of you were in a relationship before the Abrbonians altered the memories of everyone on the ship-

"Everyone but me," Leonard said. "After all, it is not a sacrifice if no one remembers the truth."

"I'm guessing you are quoting the Abrbonians there," Nyota stated.

Leonard gave a little nod. "Verbatim."

Nyota shook her head in disbelief. "Honestly, they are quite an amazing group of individuals. Very arrogant. But to get back on topic-

"Quoting the Abrbonians isn't exactly off topic, now, is it?" Leonard smirked.

"Leonard," Nyota warned and the man gave her a sheepish grin as way of apology. "As I was saying, you should really tell him. He does deserve to know. Plus, I am guessing she has at least a feature or two from her other dad that will make it apparent."

"Okay." Leonard stopped her, this time for more legitimate reasons. "How the hell do you know I'm having a girl?"

"Oh, that." Nyota felt bad enough about knowing to look a little guilty. "Um, someone was pestering Christine about the sex of the child. She wasn't going to tell, of course, patient confidentiality, but there may have been some discussion of hacking into records to find out. She decided it was safer to answer than to have that happen. I wouldn't be needing to ask then."

Leonard rolled his eyes. It didn't come as a shock that there were crew members who would stoop to such an underhanded level to get the information. "I'll let it slide, then, because God knows the parentage would have spread like wildfire."

"And that is in part because it's Spock's, correct?" Nyota prodded.

Leonard was torn about answering the question. Nyota had released a bit of the burden by figuring out what was going on. He knew she'd at least be telling Jim and Spock about the pact. He didn't need to ask her if she would. On the other hand, it wouldn't be fair for her to know, and that's what he ended up telling her. "You realize I could not, in good conscience, tell you as I haven't told him."

Nyota smiled. "I can ask you again once you've had your little chat with Spock."

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 17 by ids

Leonard was lounging on his bed, staring at the wall, when the door chimed. He looked at the display that Spock had Scotty set up to see who was standing outside the door. It was a

compromise that had been reached in regards to the security guard argument. He could see Jim standing outside. His movements appeared to be impatient. Leonard guessed that Nyota had been talking to him. She had appeared to be in a rush to share after their discussion, and Leonard had assumed that it wouldn't be long after she spoke to Jim before he showed up. He expected Spock to be even quicker, just less sure of how the Vulcan would react.

"Come on in, Jim," Leonard said to the door, which slid open before he had finished talking.

Jim strolled over and sat on the edge of the bed, close to Leonard, and just took in his presence for a while before speaking. If Leonard had to guess, he figured that Jim wasn't sure where to start or what he could ask. Nyota did say she would emphasize the limitations that a bargain with the Ahrbonians could bring. Plus, Jim had read the reports from Mn'ha.

"I just had the most interesting conversation with our Communications Officer," Jim informed Leonard once he finally decided to talk. "I'm guessing you know what that conversation was all about."

"I could hazard a guess," Leonard drawled, trying to decide whether or not his friend appeared angry. He had, after all, entered into an unsanctioned agreement with an alien race. The face Jim was showing at the moment was very neutral.

"Got to say, I was very surprised by what she was telling me," Jim continued, as though Leonard hadn't spoken. "People who are dead not being dead any longer, memories being altered and other fun stuff. The kind of thing a Captain doesn't really want to hear."

"I can imagine it's scary to find out you aren't remembering history correctly. Probably not something you were actually expecting to have to deal with," Leonard admitted.

"Can't say I blame you, though, for taking the offer," Jim said. "It's hard to resist giving someone another chance with someone they cared about. The loss of a parent before her time is a difficult one."

"So, not overly angry at me, then?" Leonard asked.

"No," Jim said with a smile. "I mean, that is a serious gesture you made there, even if he doesn't actually remember it. Have to be someone important to you just to put up with the craziness of being out of sync with everyone else, not to mention having that special someone just out of your reach."

"You have no idea," Leonard admitted.

"I guess you can't tell us about real events that happened, can you?" Jim asked. "I wouldn't mind having a few confusing things straightened out, but Nyota said you were only allowed to confirm what the agreement was and not really able to discuss details."

"As far as I know," Leonard confessed. "I don't think I'll risk finding out."

"Yeah, please don't," Jim said. "I still haven't quite recovered from you just dropping in front of us after you received that threat on your personal comm."

"Hey, I was the one with the concussion," Leonard reminded him. "And the one who was threatened."

Jim nodded and swiftly returned to the original subject of their conversation. "Not that it took a lot to work it out once Nyota told her tale," Jim said quietly, studying his hands as he spoke. "But I can hazard a guess as to who the other parent is now."

"And I'll tell you what I told Nyota," Leonard replied before Jim had a chance to vocalize his guess. "I cannot, in good conscience, tell you as I haven't told him."

"Understandable," Jim said with a bob of his head.

Before he could comment further, the door chimed once again. Standing, Jim glanced at the screen to see who was dropping by. Smirking, he said, "Well, speak of the devil."

"I'm telling Spock you called him the devil," Leonard threatened as he opened the door for the Vulcan. "He will not be amused."

"He never is," Jim sighed as he walked towards the door. He stopped and gave Spock a slap on the shoulder as he was leaving. "I'm sure you two have a lot to talk about and don't need a third party hanging around, getting in the way."

Spock turned and watched the Captain leave before settling down in a chair near Leonard's bed. He sat there for several moments, his fingers steepled in front of him as he stared intently at the doctor lying on his bed. The intensity of the stare focused on him had Leonard fidgeting. He finally broke down and said, "Yes?"

"I have not asked you a question," Spock replied.

"I know you haven't actually asked," Leonard snapped, "but we both know what question is likely on your mind."

"I have many questions on my mind," Spock stated. "Most, I believe, cannot be asked as you will not be able to answer them. However, you are correct in thinking that there is a question that is dominating my thoughts. I do not believe it is the one you are answering. The one you are answering is one I do not need to ask, as it is the logical conclusion based on what Nyota has shared."

"Fine, then," Leonard said. Clearly, Spock had no doubts that he was the father of the child. "What is the question that is dominating your thoughts?"

Spock prefaced his question with a summary of his interpretation of events. "It is the same question that I have asked before, and, at the time, you refused to answer. However, based on new information, I believe that refusal was a result of needing to conceal information regarding the Abrbonians and the awkwardness of the revelations that would occur at the birth of the child."

"Seriously?" Leonard asked, having no problem predicting where those thoughts were going. "Your question is about us getting together?"

"I wished to pursue a romantic relationship with you when I believed you were carrying the child of another," Spock said. "Why would learning the child is mine and that we were, in fact, involved before, negatively impact my pursuit, particularly as the reason I have no recollection of these events is solely due to your entering an agreement that saved my mother? This fact is not likely to make me think less of you."

"Still, I'd think you'd want to know why," Leonard sputtered.

"If your motive was to be rid of me then you would not have allowed a friendship to develop," Spock stated matter-of-factly. "The most logical conclusion is that the Abrbonian twins approached you, their proposal appealed to your emotions and gave you a chance to do what you thought would make me happiest. Your motive is more likely that you, in fact, care a great deal for me and a resumption of our romantic relationship is the next logical step."

"Hm... Sounds logical, I guess," Leonard agreed as he leaned forward, "but your reasoning might work a little better if you were here sitting on the bed with me instead of in that chair."

Spock quirked an eyebrow. "You haven't answered my question."

Leonard leaned back against the headboard. "Dammit, Spock, get the hell over here."

Looking a little put upon, Spock stood up and moved over to the edge of the bed. Leonard patted the mattress next to his hip, indicating where he wanted the Vulcan to sit, and grabbed his wrist the moment Spock sat down. Taking Spock's hand, Leonard placed it on his stomach and took a deep breath.

"This is your daughter," he stated. "I know you know that logically, but I don't think the reality of the situation has sunk through your thick skull yet."

Spock flashed the other man a look of disapproval regarding that comment, but did not retaliate. Instead, he spread his fingers across Leonard's abdomen with a thoughtful look on his face. Leonard took that as a sign that he was right. The two sat quietly for a while before Spock broke the silence. "I did not approach you regarding a relationship because the child is mine," he clarified. Spock did not look up at Leonard as he spoke.

"Given that this is the second time you've asked," Leonard murmured as he absently rubbed his fingers along Spock's wrist, "I kind of got that that is not the case. You had no idea the first time, now, did you?"

Spock dragged his eyes up to take in the man in front of him. "You intend to answer in the affirmative, correct?"

Leonard gave a chuckle. "Yes, I am answering in the affirmative."

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 18 by ids

The change in his relationship with Spock had taken Leonard's mind off of other things in his life, such as the threats against his child's life and that fact that he now waddled more than walked. The threats might be a more serious issue, but the waddling was more immediate as he was reminded of it every time he went anywhere. It had been a while since the second threat, so he was caught off guard when the latest threat became a reality. He heard a shout of warning and, on turning, felt the slight sensation of something slicing into him, while a weight pushed him sideways into the wall. The last thing he felt was his head crashing against the wall, as he slid down towards the floor, before everything faded away.

Leonard struggled to open his eyes. They felt like they were glued shut. His head ached and his back and side felt like they were on fire. Something else felt off as well. Lifting his hands to his stomach, he registered that it was no longer extended as it should be at this point in the pregnancy. Suddenly, his eyes flew open and he tried to call out, but all he heard was an odd croaking sound. It was enough to alert someone close by, as a shadow loomed over him and one of his flailing arms was grabbed to hold it still.

"Please keep calm, Leonard," he heard Spock say. "Our daughter is well. Doctor M'Benga had to perform a Caesarean section. It was imperative if you were to survive. You had carried her to a viable stage. It was a safe procedure."

Leonard could see Spock beckoning to someone as he was speaking, so he wasn't surprised to hear Geoff's soft tones as soon as Spock finished. "You had us all worried there, Leonard, deciding to take a very long nap."

"Baby?" he managed to gasp out.

Geoff gave a little nod to Spock and said, "Spock will go and get her now, so you can meet your little girl. While he's doing that, Christine and I will check you over and make sure you're doing okay."

Leonard lifted his head slightly to take in Christine standing at the end of the biobed. She gave him a small smile before reading off the results from the display to Geoff. It only took them a few moments to assess Leonard's condition, which was fortunate as Spock returned quickly to the biobed with their little girl. The Vulcan carefully laid the child on Leonard's chest, and the doctor's hands moved instinctively to hold her. He was concerned. Spock could not have left sickbay to have fetched her so quickly. Why would she still be in the sickbay? Leonard's mind was racing with the worst scenarios.

As though reading his mind, and, considering it was Spock, he may have done just that, the Vulcan said, "She is staying in sickbay only because you are here. According to the Abrbonians, there is a residual connection, as she was born ahead of schedule, and it is best to keep her close to you."

Leonard grimaced at the mention of the aliens. He had hoped to never see them again, but had the sinking feeling that they were onboard. This suspicion was confirmed when Geoff spoke.

"You were taking your sweet time waking up, and we wanted to be certain it was somehow connected to the threats they had made about the pregnancy needing to go to full term," Geoff explained. "We had to operate and it was too risky to allow the pregnancy to continue. The Abrbonians checked you over and assured us that your condition was not connected to the various protections put in place as part of their process."

Leonard gave a little nod and turned his attention back to his little girl. Pulling up the edges of the cap she was wearing, he traced her ear with his finger. Smiling, he turned to Spock and rasped, "Yours."

"Indeed," Spock agreed. He scooped out a few ice shavings from the small cup Christine gave him. "Take this. It will help your throat."

Geoff looked over at Christine. "He's doing fine. Let's leave them to do a little family bonding. Call us if there is anything you need."

Once the two had left, Leonard looked up at Spock and tried to utter words he felt were imperative, especially after everything that had happened. His voice was not strong after being unconscious for so long, but he managed to murmur, "Love you."

Extending two fingers, Spock brushed them along Leonard's upraised fingers. "And I you."

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 19 by ids

Leonard shifted his position on the couch. His back was still bothering him, but he refused to take any more pills for the pain now that it was down to a dull throb. This way, he could sit back and enjoy the little party in honour of baby Emily with a glass of bourbon, his first since all of this had started. He was ignoring Spock's disapproving looks as it wasn't as if he had to breast-feed. It was a minor miracle that the Abrbonians had forgotten to include that in the package, or maybe it wasn't something they did. Either way, Leonard was very grateful. He would be more grateful if he could enjoy his first taste of bourbon in months back in his own quarters, but that wasn't meant to be. Jim had decided that because Leonard had missed out on the baby shower, he'd switch plans to what he called a "Welcome the Newest McCoy" party. And it wasn't as if Leonard was averse to showing off his newest daughter any more than his older one. Speaking of which...

"Where the hell is Joanna?" Leonard asked as he scanned the room for his visiting daughter.

"Don't worry, Bones. She's in the other room with Christine and Chekov playing some games. I'm sure that head nurse of yours would take on anyone who might try something," Jim answered, sounding distracted. "Not that she's going to leave a permanent dent in wall like a certain someone did with your attacker."

Leonard felt a warm breath on his neck as Spock gave an inaudible sigh. "The damage could be repaired, Captain, if you would approve the work order. There is no need for everyone to be reminded of what happened to Ensign Smith."

"John Smith!" Leonard rolled his eyes at the name of his assailant. "He couldve signed the note and wed probably have assumed it was fake."

"Actually," Scotty said, weighing in on the discussion a little slowly. He, like the Captain, was only partially following the conversation. "It serves as a great warning. In case there are others crazy enough to follow suit."

"At least we don't have to worry about you setting someone else off by you getting pregnant again. I still can't believe the Abrbonians blackmailed you into listening to the most insincere apology I ever witnessed by claiming that they needed remove whatever it was they did to get you pregnant in the first place," Nyota added. Her contribution was impressive given she too was mesmerized by the sight of Spock's parents, more specifically Spock's father, as they bonded with their grandchild. It wasn't every day you got to see a grown Vulcan making faces and speaking baby talk. It was a rather disturbing thing to see, actually.

Leonard gave a little snort. "Insincere doesn't seem to cover it. The only thing they appeared to be genuinely sorry about was the one thing I was relieved to see happen."

Giving Spock a little poke in the ribs to distract the Vulcan from staring at his parents, Leonard said, "They really didn't like you, Spock. Wonder what you did to piss them off?"

"I assume that question is meant to be rhetorical as I am highly unlikely to be able to provide any true facts about the Abrbonian visit," Spock replied, turning away from the unsettling spectacle of his parents doting on Emily. "You are the only one who has an accurate memory of that time."

Leonard gave a little shrug. "Strikes me as something they'd incorporate into your new memories, that they'd want you to know why."

"They did not," Spock reassured him. "The feelings; however, are mutual. For a race that claims to be advanced, they are extraordinarily immature in their conduct. Blackmailing you into hearing and accepting their apology by refusing to ensure that you could not be impregnated again shows very little virtue on their part."

Leonard gave a little laugh as he leaned into Spock's shoulder. "Maybe we should have showed them the wall."

[Back to index](#)

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