

Midwinter

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Midwinter

by [daraoakwise](#)

Summary

(2246) In one turn of the multiversal dial, Scotty and Corry spend a midwinter weekend together, knowing they won't get the spring

Notes

Merry Christmas/Yule/Solstice to Steff

*Midwinter spring is its own season
Sempiternal though sodden towards sundown,
Suspended in time, between pole and tropic.
When the short day is brightest, with frost and fire,
The brief sun flames the ice, on pond and ditches,
In windless cold that is the heart's heat,
Reflecting in a watery mirror
A glare that is blindness in the early afternoon.
And glow more intense than blaze of branch, or brazier,
Stirs the dumb spirit: no wind, but pentecostal fire
In the dark time of the year.*

T.S. Eliot, Little Gidding

2246

It wasn't winter in space, or summer, or anything else, Corry considered, looking out the small, triple-enforced porthole to the Earth below. Earth, spinning blue in the vast cold that made up most of all reality, protected by its delicate layer of air. That wispy atmosphere was nothing

less than an improbable alliance of the tectonics of the planet and the spinning magnetism of its molten core, the deadly but-life giving fire of the local star, and the chlorophyllic respirations of vast forests of trees and algae. It was entirely miraculous.

He watched the entirety of Terra turn under him, his eyes drawn to the North American coast, east and north, painted white in midwinter snow. Nearly everything he'd ever loved was there. *Nearly*.

"Cor," said a delighted voice behind him. "What the hell brings ye to the shipyards today?"

He turned away from the Earth toward his smiling ... the word had to be boyfriend, didn't it? It always seemed too much, and too little. 'Boyfriend' couldn't possibly encompass everything about the gravitational center of his heart.

Scotty would blush and demur, if Corry ever tried to describe that to him. *Had*, even when they were wrapped together, tracing each other's skin, and Corry tried to find all the words for the *beloved*, for *bespoke*, for *bound*. The stellar explanation was as good as any, and Corry was caught in his orbit as surely as Earth was around its sun. He'd never said so aloud, though. Scotty would try to apologize for it.

He watched admiringly as Scotty sat on his bunk and pulled off the EV suit, appreciating the strong lines of his body, the sweat at the nape of his neck, the easy way he moved in the slightly-off artificial gravity.

Corry smiled ruefully and straightened up the pile of gloves and equipment Scotty threw on the bedside table, an excuse to get close as much as to contend with the untidiness that would surely make his bunk mates crazy when they came in. (Corry would know.)

"Figured I'd keep you company on the way home," Corry said, and leaned in for a kiss.

"I'm soggy and I stink," Scotty warned.

"Literally do not care," he breathed, wondering if he would always have to parry Scotty's hesitation. He would do it, forever if need be, but lived in the hope that one day, Scotty would just accept the reality of being loved.

It rarely took him long to relax into the languid press of Corry's lips, and even still half-tangled in the life support equipment, he gave in immediately today. Pressed back, even, hot and urgent, pulling him in with a hand on the back of Corry's neck, his thumb sliding down the hollow of his throat. There was some unnamed desperation in him today, taking something for himself but giving back more.

Corry would take it, this week. This *month*. He finally broke off to breathe, forehead pressed to Scotty's and hands wrapped around the open collar of the EV suit. He considered peeling it back off his shoulders, hitting the privacy screen on the bunk, and drifting into whatever pleasure Scotty wanted.

But the planet was spinning under them, and even if it was winter in Maine, and even if things were still fraught, it was still *home*.

"How are things?" Scotty asked gently, because Corry had apparently drifted away for a moment there.

"Frigid," Corry sighed, letting go of the collar. "Rach is still pissed as hell at you and me for rescuing her from a drug den. And then daring to tell mom and dad. And they're ..." he shrugged. "Struggling to know how to help her. I think they preferred it when it was me facing the possibility of prison. Court martial for piracy is one thing. Drugs are ... I don't even *know*, Scotty. How the hell does that even happen? How does that even sound *good*?"

Scotty traced Corry's face, something flickering in his eyes Corry couldn't quite follow, then tapped Corry in the chest, above his heart, as though trying to say something he couldn't find the words for either.

"Lemme up, I need to shower," Scotty finally said. He shivered when he got the suit off, just down to the jumpsuit uniform, and stepped into the head.

"Mom went and got you a proper wardrobe," Corry called through the door. "She said that you're not allowed to wander around Maine anymore without being dressed for it."

"She didn't have t' do that," Scotty called back over the hum of the sonic, sounding both exasperated and touched. Corry knew that Scotty still didn't know what to do with his parents' love. They'd loved him as Cor's best friend. They loved him the same as his partner. And, like Corry, they would keep it up until he accepted the truth that he was worthy and welcome around the warmth of their hearth.

Corry just about groaned when Scotty stepped out again, the Starfleet-issue threadbare towel barely around his hips. He took the dirty uniform from his arms and switched it out for the bundle of L.L. Bean winterwear. "Get dressed before I do something ungentlemanly," he said, tossing the uniform toward the laundry.

"I'm no' fussed," Scotty said with a teasing smile.

"I am!" Corry cried in mock exasperation, throwing up his hands. "I flail around like a drunk turkey in three-quarter weight."

"It's pretty funny," Scotty said with a smirk, fastening his trousers before he pulled on the sweater and coat, though he stuffed the hat and gloves in a pocket. "Oh, nice," he said admiringly, and took Corry's hand as they walked off the shipyard.

Corry supposed it was easier to get down from orbit and around the planet than it had once been. Still, it was a shuttle from the shipyard to the surface, a public transporter across the continent, and then a skimmer home. He appreciated that, even in a universe they could cross faster than light, Earth could still still feel vast and unknowable.

He didn't pick up Scotty for the commute every weekend. There were some weekends where he didn't come home at all. Most weekends, though, Scotty made the trip himself. But after the ache that these last weeks, full of Rach's poisonous glares and his parents' tremulous silences, he couldn't sit around and wait. Still, despite his worries, even after just a few hours away, crossing over to Rutherford Island was

like pulling a blanket over your shoulders. He knew Scotty usually had the cab drop him short and walked across the bridge, and Scotty had never quite been able to explain why. Corry knew, although struggled equally to explain that he was invoking the light of this place, like a fire in the night, casting its protection around him.

Scotty could feel it, even if he couldn't speak it. Somehow, that made Corry's grief for his sister worse. Why couldn't Rach feel it? Why *wouldn't* she?

Scotty had drifted off for a while on the drive. He was strong and a hell of a worker, but a week in the shipyards was no easy task. When he woke up, he munched on the high-calorie snacks Corry always made sure were stuffed into the center console and the glove box. He was partial to smoked salmon, black-pepper potato chips they could only find at one convenience store, and horrifyingly spicy pork rinds.

The drive today had been mostly quiet, both of them comfortable in the silence of one another and the music they shuffled through. Scotty's musical collection, mostly, and an impressively curated one. "It snowed this week," Scotty said at last, on the final turn for home.

"Ayuh. Couple inches, Tuesday night, Wednesday. Dad was out here shoveling the porch by hand, even though we have the snow clearing bot."

Scotty chuckled at that, his face lit by the warm glow of Corry's childhood home while Corry powered down the skimmer.

They sat together for a moment, frozen by something holding them still, the breath caught in both of them. Corry shook it off first, then walked around and opened Scotty's door. He scooped up their pile of coats with one arm—they could make a dash from the skimmer to the front door—then gallantly offered his elbow, which Scotty took with a twinkle in his eye. Cor could see he was considering taking the piss out of him for one thing or another, but Scotty finally just leaned into Corry's not-actually-needed but welcome support with a contented sigh.

Their boots crunched through the snow and then across the porch, and they were home. They closed the door, then kicked off their boots and hung their scarves and coats before mom could growl at them.

"Hello, Scotty dear," Melinda Corrigan called cheerfully when they stepped into her kitchen. "And Andy, I suppose."

"They like you better than me," Corry sighed dramatically, collapsing into a chair at the table. He gratefully took a mug of coffee offered by his mother.

"Aye, well," Scotty shrugged, taking another mug. Then he turned toward Melinda and continued, more seriously: "thank ye, by the way. For the warm clothing."

She smiled, a little tremulously. "If you don't like the size—or the color!—it's no problem to trade them in, I could go first thing tomorrow, I just thought the black with the red trim was a good color on you, and maybe a better fit, not down to your knees like when you swipe Andy's ..."

"It's perfect, mum," he soothed, interrupting her uncharacteristic rambling.

She blinked. "Did ... you just call me 'mom?'" she asked.

"I've never called anyone 'mom' in m'life," he said with gentle teasing, lifting the vowel nasally, and then dropping harder into his natural accent that sometimes got smoothed away. "But 'mum,' aye. Unless ye mind, and then it was 'ma'am.'"

"Mum is fine," she said, and patted his hand a little tearily. "Of course it is fine."

Corry eyed the four bowls stacked on the counter, waiting to be set out. "Rach not joining us ...?" he started hesitantly.

His mother blinked rapidly, her shoulders tightening. "She's not here right now," she answered with forced nonchalance. Corry glanced at Scotty, who looked steadily back. "I was out most of today, but could unthaw some leftover chowder, if you boys are hungry?"

"That would be great, mom," Corry said gently. The front door swung open again, and Melinda turned toward it with enough anticipation that it just confirmed everything Corry was afraid of—Rach was *gone*. Again. His mother slumped, just a bit, to see that it was Corry's father, arriving very much *alone*.

Corry felt Scotty's hand on his knee, squeezing just a bit. He could read this situation as well as Corry could, and probably had the moment they walked into the door. Scotty always had a sense of who was in a building; a way of noting and noticing immediately where everyone was, or wasn't, and the sharp details of their moods. It was baffling, sometimes, in a man who couldn't seem to explain his own emotions beyond a terse 'fine.'

"Do we need to go look for her?" Corry asked heavily.

"We've been looking all day," Melinda admitted. "It's dark and cold, and she could be anywhere by now." Her voice caught on a sob, and she turned away swiftly. "Could you excuse me for just a moment...?"

"Fuck," Corry breathed fervently when she was out of earshot.

"Aye," Scotty agreed, and headed to the stasis cooler for the soup. "Go talk to 'em, love, see if there is anything we can do. I'll make some food, for anyone can stomach it tonight."

There wasn't anything they could do, and only Scotty and Corry could eat. Corry stomped around his bedroom—their bedroom—ranting to his boyfriend, both of them half-undressed.

This had been his childhood bedroom, updated somewhat for two men, although Scotty had absolutely insisted that the model Corry built when he was twelve of—who knew, exactly, it was some mess of about three starships—stay hanging in the corner. The bed where he'd lost his virginity sweetly one hot summer afternoon (and taken that of a lovely lass or lad or two or three, he was sure—including *maybe* Scotty's, of a certain kind), had given way to something larger and considerably more comfortable. But it meant there wasn't much room to pace.

(He had considered suggesting to Scotty the possibility of getting their own place, somewhere nearby, and had gone as far as looking to see what might be for rent before abruptly snapping off the screen. Because *that* was tempting fate in terrifying ways. If nothing changed then maybe *nothing would change*, he told himself with a kind of desperate delirium. Because there was a war on and they needed bodies in engine rooms ...)

"I don't understand," Corry said, tugging on his own hair while he nearly bounced off the walls. "She was drunk or high, or both. She *screamed* at them, Scotty. Our parents, who are nothing short of saints—she *screamed* at them and left. How? *Why*? I grew up in these walls too! How could she do that?"

"Bonnie lad, growin' up in th' same place doesna mean growin' up in th' same way," Scotty said, half chasing Corry around the room before he finally just *caught* him and put Corry on their bed. Scotty wasn't big, but he was solid and strong, and *god* could he just hold a person still when he got it in his mind to.

Corry considered fighting him for a wild moment; snapping at him, shoving him off, even though Corry knew perfectly well that he'd lose that tussle every single time, if Scotty decided to get serious about it. Scotty apparently saw that in his eyes and held him all the tighter until the fight went out of him. Corry went abruptly boneless.

"I don't understand?" he begged into Scotty's shoulder, and he knew he sounded bewildered and small.

Scotty let him go, just slightly, although Corry was still definitely pinned under him, and looked down at him. Hair that needed cutting was falling across his forehead into his dark eyes. Corry looked up at his lover, wondering again how on all of earth he'd managed to convince Scotty to stay, and brushed his fringe aside just as Scotty leaned down and kissed him.

"Ye're not meant to understand," Scotty said softly into his ear, lips on his throat, hands apparently everywhere, and Corry arched up into the hot weight of him. "What d'ye need?" Scotty breathed into his skin.

"I don't know," Corry groaned in frustration. Scotty pulled back a bit and tilted his head, looking down at him.

"Close your eyes and I'll make ye feel nice," he said, hands already tugging at what was left of Corry's clothing.

"What if I want to keep them open and make you feel nice?" he argued, just for the sake of arguing, though he body was absolutely going to follow anywhere Scotty wanted to take him tonight.

"Ye bastard," Scotty said fondly. "Ye can do that after the sun comes up in the morning."

"You promise?" Corry just managed.

"Aye. Hush," he said, and called for the lights off. And if Corry kept his eyes open, it was only because the moonlight reflecting off the snow on the other side of their window was still not so lovely as the love of his life.

The sun didn't begin to come up in midwinter Maine until around 0700, and didn't come through the windows until much later still. And if it was pushing noon by the time they got out of bed, it was because Scotty was quite as beautiful in the sunlight as the moonlight. Corry never knew how exactly they ended up so intertwined, much less how either of them managed to find it comfortable, but Corry had absolutely no plans to move at all until Scotty did.

"I'm not even getting breakfast for my troubles today," Scotty mock-grumbled into Corry's neck. "We're well into lunch."

"We should get up and take a shower," Corry said half-heartedly.

"I'm in favor," Scotty sassed, and Corry half-punched him.

"Don't get any ideas. I am fairly certain you've sucked my dick dry. Which is ... not how this morning was supposed to go, I was meant to make *you* feel good."

"Oh, ye did. As for dry, two fingers up your arse would definitely say otherwise."

"My father already banged on the wall once this morning," Corry begged.

"That's because the one of us, whose name rhymes with 'dandy,' was moaning like he was in a porn vid."

"I'm leaving," Corry said pointedly, sitting up. "To shower. *Alone*."

“Hey,” Scotty said seriously, his voice dropping off their lighthearted teasing, and he reached for Corry and pulled him back to his chest. “I’ve somethin’ I need to tell ye. And there’s no good time to say it. So I’d rather say it here, where I can hold ye, and not see yer face.”

The premonition of what was coming next hit Corry straight through the chest, and he *knew*. “Oh, god,” his whispered.

Scotty rubbed his cheek through Corry’s hair. “I got new orders this week,” he managed at last. “They took me off corrective action, and I’ll be Engineering advisor on a freighter, making the Denevan run.”

Corry reached up for the hands around his chest as his vision went gray in the edges, his clenching heart squeezing the air from his lungs. “That’s right across a war zone,” Corry managed, his fingers so tight against Scotty’s that his knuckles ached.

“No,” Scotty said, and Corry could feel him shaking his head. “Edge of one, that’s all. Crappy little freighter, won’t draw a lick o’ attention. Out and then back again.”

“When?” Corry asked, struggling to get the words out of his aching throat, glad Scotty couldn’t see his face.

“A bit of time yet,” Scotty said softly. “They’re slapping some additional shielding on the ship. Four weeks, maybe six.”

Scotty’s voice breaking was enough to get Corry to turn in his arms, and he didn’t bother to try to hide the tears on his face, even as he smiled wetly at Scotty. “I could. Um. Kidnap you. Steal a ship, sail to China.”

“I’m fairly certain they could find us in China,” Scotty said regretfully, and pressed their foreheads together. “It’s okay, Corry. It’s alright.”

Corry leaned in and kissed him, completely desperately. “It fucking is not, Montgomery.” He grimaced. “Ooh, nope, not calling you that again, ever.”

“I’d appreciate that. *Andrew*,” Scotty deadpanned, and a moment later they were giggling against each other, a little manically.

“Oh, god,” Corry finally managed, and wiped the tears from his eyes. He blew a breath out between his lips. “Okay. I want breakfast anyway. Shower. Clothing. Throw the sheets in the laundry because ... yeah. Then that diner in Damariscotta that serves breakfast all day.”

“That sounds good,” Scotty said, linking their fingers for a moment. “You okay, love?”

Corry kissed his knuckles. “No,” he said honestly, and headed to the shower.

The sunshine in the clear blue sky didn’t make anything warmer. The cold was enough to stick the inside of your nose to itself, and freeze the water in the air into twisting rainbow shards. All of which was perfectly fine when you were dressed for it, which they were. Corry took a moment to desperately hope that his sister was.

Walking hand in hand was awkward in gloves, which meant it was a perfect opportunity to link arms and lean into each other. There weren’t many people out, and it was their loss, as far as Corry was concerned.

The snow put him in mind of a poem, and he quoted: “*If you came this way, taking the route you would be likely to take from the place you would be likely to come from, If you came this way in may time, you would find the hedges white again, in May, with voluptuous sweetness.*”

“Eliot again?” Scotty asked wryly.

Corry nodded, in sudden tears. “You’re going to miss the peepers this spring,” he burst out in what must have seemed a massive non sequitur. Scotty just held him closer.

They talked quietly over breakfast about some details Corry would rather not have considered, but were genuinely important. And there was something centering in making plans. Next week they’d make a visit to an attorney for a power of attorney, advanced directive, and a will, because if something happened the default to Scotty’s biological family was unacceptable to them both.

Corry pushed his eggs around his plate. “You going to tell your parents you’re leaving the planet?” he asked hesitantly, because all of that was fraught for reasons Corry didn’t quite know.

“Aye, but not until the day or two before.”

“What about mine?”

Scotty shrugged, a little sadly. “Whenever you’d like. Today, if ye want, although they’re already pretty burdened.”

“Next week?” Corry suggested, and Scotty agreed.

Scotty didn’t have many earthly possessions, but was planning to get a storage locker in San Francisco, until Corry insisted that there was plenty of room in their closet. “Where, exactly?” Scotty asked fondly.

“There *will* be, as soon as I have a chance to drop some things at a secondhand recycler,” Corry insisted.

“Mmm,” Scotty said around a bite of sausage, clearly skeptical.

“You’ll come home every weekend until you leave?” Corry asked, suddenly terrified of the small handful of days they had left.

“Of course,” Scotty soothed. “And take every bit of leave they’ll let me have.”

They’d been apart before, of course. For that troublesome period in Engineering school. Years, while Corry was serving out his rehabilitation studying on Vulcan. (Where Corry had tackle-kissed his briefly-visiting best friend for the first time, and changed everything. That *Vulcan* would always be part of their romance was an amusing detail.) But they hadn’t been apart, not significantly, since they’d become a couple, a fact that was weighing on them both.

“Look,” Scotty said over the last of breakfast while they lingered over coffee. “If ye dinna want to wait around for me, I won’t ask ye to. I won’t tie ye to a long-distance relationship if ye dinna want it.”

“Are you breaking up with me?” Corry asked in shock, and he wasn’t sure his heart was still beating.

“No!” Scotty hastened, and he looked a little small. “Just. Letting ye tell me the shape of what you need. And if that’s goin’ back to just being my best friend, or opening things up or ... Whatever you need, I’ll always tell ye aye.”

Corry put down his coffee, not able to drink it around the lump in his throat, and reached for Scotty’s hand. He turned it upright and traced the calluses on his palm, which made his lover shiver and then close his eyes like a cat.

“I think,” Corry said slowly. “If we just keep talking, if we’re honest with each other, whatever both of us need will make itself apparent to us.”

“I can try that,” Scotty answered softly.

“That’s all I ask,” Corry said.

The day shouldn’t have been gentle. Not with a sharp cold, intensifying with the fringes of the next storm building on the horizon. Not with the ghost of Corry’s sister standing just around every street corner. Not with a wartime deployment stubbornly blocking every future. And yet, the day *was* gentle. They walked aimlessly, popping into shops when they got cold. Browsing (and mocking) antiques they had no intention of buying, drinking coffee and then tea and then finally mulled ale. Just talking, or not; basking in the tremulous joy of breathing the same air. They were some weeks past the solstice, but the sun’s passing was still low and swift. They went for dinner and a beer when it went down, and then home.

It was quiet when they arrived, and Corry’s parents had left a note: they had decided to leave for the rest of the weekend, they’d be back Monday, they had gone south, a bit, to find somewhere a little warmer. There was plenty of food, and if it snowed, could they please remember to clear the walk? (And if Rachael came home ... if Rachael came home ...)

“We’ll tie her to something until they get back,” Scotty shrugged, and then settled into the recliner that he frequently claimed as his own. Keeping Scotty a full night in bed, especially after the first night home, was sometimes tricky. He didn’t always sleep well, although there was some kind of magic in Aaron Corrigan’s beat-up recliner. Corry turned on a vid—Vulcan Zombies, or something—and fell asleep on the couch to the sound of Scotty snoring.

He woke on Sunday morning to a quilt over him he hadn’t remembered tucking around himself, snow falling in the morning light, and the smell of French toast cooking. Scotty was singing to himself in the kitchen in a language that Corry couldn’t place at all, which probably meant it was Welsh. Corry wrapped himself in the blanket and leaned on the doorframe, entirely delighted by the domestic scene. Scotty noticed him watching, and punched it up with a playful swagger.

“It’s snowed ten, twelve centimeters,” Scotty told him at the end of his song. “I already shoveled once, but if it keeps up, we’ll have to do it again.”

“We have a ‘bot,” Corry said, folding his arms in amusement.

“And go against yer da’s very specific instructions t’ shovel the walk? Not on your life.”

Corry yawned, and sat down at the table to the excellent breakfast, dumping an obscene amount of real Vermont maple syrup on his French toast. Scotty, with considerably less sweet tooth, settled for some strawberries and clotted cream he’d steamed sometime that morning.

“Snowing like this, we’d probably better stay in,” Corry said. “We can turn the heat on and putter in the garage. The skimmer could use a tune-up.”

Scotty grinned at him. “I’ll tune up whatever ye’d like, but I was considering starting out with you, on several surfaces of this big, empty house.”

Corry chewed his breakfast sedately, pretending to consider it, and dabbed at his lips with a napkin “I’d be amenable to that,” he said at last.

“Would ye?”

“Oh, aye,” Corry said, and then stood and pulled Scotty’s chair out from the table just enough to straddle his lap, which made his boyfriend gasp a quick, punched out breath, which Corry caught with his lips and followed with a very deliberate tilt of his hips.

"I have not actually had sex in this kitchen," Corry revealed, in a little wonder.

"I think ye're about to remedy that," Scotty said hoarsely, and reached between them to undo the fastening on Corry's trousers.

"I think I am," he barely managed, because Scotty had a hold of him, and it was all he could do to stay still. "Although I'll never be able to look at this table quite the same way ever again."

"A table's for gettin' yer fill, so ..."

"Stop," Corry laughed, a little scandalized, but considerably more turned on, and then couldn't help himself. "I'm never going to be able to keep a straight face, whenever my mother tells me to 'eat up' from here on out."

"Oh, fuck me," Scotty groaned.

"If you insist," Corry whispered in his ear, and then glanced around. "There are some interesting things in a kitchen aren't there?"

"Corry ..." Scotty said, with a warning note.

"You started it," he said cheekily, and then more softly. "I'll be sure you finish it too."

(And they really did have a hard time keeping a straight face, after that, in the kitchen. And the laundry. And the living room. And if Corry's skimmer remained untuned, he felt well-oiled enough to make up for it.)

An alarm that Scotty had set at some point beeped cruelly at 0400, because they both had to be in duty by 0800—Corry in Baltimore, and Scotty in orbit. Outside in the dark was a blizzard in earnest, snow and wind biting deeply in every gap. Protected by the best winterwear Corry's mother could buy (which still wasn't enough, not on an aching morning), they spent a wordless 20 minutes digging out the driveway, with the help of the bot, so they could get the skimmer out. Then it was a quick and clinical shower, Starfleet uniforms, and coffee, because neither of them could eat this early. Corry would have held Scotty's hand all the way to the Augusta transport terminal, but the storm was bad enough that, even with the stabilizers, he needed both hands.

Time was acting strangely, the minutes ticking by far, far too quickly. He knew they would slow to a crawl the moment Scotty beamed away from him. This was his life, he knew. For the next year, or two, or six. (Or until his life stopped, because Scotty was dead ... he shoved the thought away before Scotty could see it on his face.)

"At least it isn't winter in space," Corry blurted out, not wanting to let him go at the terminal.

"No," Scott said absently. "It's colder."

Oh, god. Corry thought. *Oh, god.* Eliot's poem rolled through his head again, unbidden and unwelcome: *There are other places which also are the world's end, some at the sea jaws, Or over a dark lake, in a desert or a city--But this is the nearest, in place and time.*

Scotty kissed him, and studied his face, a little puzzled and concerned by everything Corry wasn't saying. "I'll see you on Friday," he soothed before he stepped away, as if that wasn't the better part of 7000 endless minutes away. Another week closer toward a spring Scotty wouldn't see.

"Scotty!" he called, and then didn't have words when his dearest love turned toward him, just before he disappeared. "Keep warm," he managed. Scotty smiled at him, and was gone.

Corry wrapped his arms around his chest, feeling cold to his core. Then he sighed and looked around the terminal, checking for his sister, knowing she wasn't there. With nothing else to do, he stepped onto the same pad that had taken Scotty, but would take him in an entirely different direction.

The poet whispered in his ear, one more time, and he didn't know why, but held onto it all the same, because his heart told him he would need it, before the end: *And what you thought you came for is only a shell, a husk of meaning from which the purpose breaks only when it is fulfilled if at all. Either you had no purpose Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured and is altered in fulfillment.*

Then the transporter took him, and despite the cold, he wished this midwinter would never end.

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