

## **much less a mystery**

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## **much less a mystery**

by [violet\\_pencil](#)

### Summary

When you realize you want to spend the rest of your life with somebody, you want the rest of your life to start as soon as possible; or, a teacher and an ambassador meet on the beach, and the rest is history.

### Notes

Written as a treat for marquisguyun in the 2023 Every Woman exchange.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

It was a warm Saturday, and Amanda Grayson had been stacking rocks on the beach at Crissy Field for nearly two hours. She'd jammed her fingers a few times, her back was beginning to ache from stooping, and since she'd begun earlier that morning the fog had lifted and the sun was beginning to beat down, uncomfortably hot on her bare shoulders and legs. But she was in the zone; she'd even tied her old record. She stood back, hands on her hips, regarding the eleven large, lumpy rocks now standing stacked in a solid pillar, and her eyes narrowed in satisfaction.

"May I inquire as to the purpose of this activity?" someone asked, behind her, and Amanda jumped. Letting her mind drift, carried by the noise of the wind and waves, she hadn't heard anyone approach. What a voice, though! Even raised to reach her, it was deep and rich. Oddly formal, but warm too; radiating warmth, like a banked coal. She'd been struck before even looking over her shoulder.

A tall man with a long face stood about ten feet away, on the rocky slope slightly above her. He was dressed oddly, in long, heavy trousers and a thick jacket over a deep gray cowl-necked sweater. Amanda nearly broke a fresh sweat just looking at him. Then, as she raised her hand to block the sun from her eyes, his arched brows and the pointed tips of his ears came into focus.

She dropped her hand to her side again, considering the question he'd offered. "Primarily meditative," she finally answered, "in the sense that it's challenging enough to demand focus. It tests my patience." She paused, rolling her head to crack her neck. "And I suppose it helps build..." She held out her hands, fingers splayed, and rotated her wrists.

"Spatial apperception and reasoning."

"That, yeah," Amanda smiled, pointing. Was it rude to point at Vulcans? Or smile at them? She belatedly hoped not.

The Vulcan stepped closer, circling slowly around her stacked rocks, then raising his eyes. "Do you practice an avocation that requires proficiency in three-dimensional spatial apperception?"

"I teach history to ten-year-olds," Amanda said, planting her hands just above her waist and arching her back to stretch out some of the kinks. "I double majored, teaching and linguistics, but I don't get to use the linguistics all that much. And you're the Vulcan ambassador." She remembered seeing a news clip in the school's informational database: the Vulcan Ambassador, attending a World Series at Tucker Stadium. He'd actually been wearing a baseball cap.

He inclined his head, bowing slightly. "I am Sarek of Vulcan."

"It's a pleasure. Amanda Grayson." She raised her hand to shoulder height, wagging her fingers. She felt silly immediately, but presumably a wave was better than sticking her hand out for a handshake, or trying to do that Vulcan hand gesture and getting it wrong somehow. "I imagine some days it feels like we've got the same job."

He had been considering her rock stack, but raised his head sharply. He considered her for a long moment, and Amanda looked away after a few seconds, blushing. Maybe prolonged eye contact wasn't embarrassing for Vulcans? She looked back, holding his gaze, and this time *he* looked away.

"I could not confirm that statement."

*Which is not the same thing as actually disagreeing with it*, Amanda almost shot back, but decided to go easy. "People— humans— we don't make it easy for you, do we?" she offered instead. "Everybody always trying to knock you off your pedestal, putting the worst spin on everything you say."

He didn't smile, but: "I am compelled to admit that the difficulties of my avocation are not entirely caused by human foibles."

"Ha!" Amanda said. "I imagine that's true." Getting a Vulcan to say something arrogantly offensive was practically shooting fish in a barrel. Even Vulcan politicians regularly walked right into that trap, happily going on record to confirm Vulcan superiority over all other life forms. Well, not *happily*— eagerly? Often, anyway. More than Sarek probably liked. "Job security, I guess you'd call that?"

"Will you continue, or is your construction complete?" Sarek asked, glancing past her at the rock stack.

"Yeah," she said. "Somewhat tempted to just stick a pebble on top and break my current record, but that would be cheating."

"You feel that your accomplishment would be invalid if not sufficiently difficult?"

"I don't know about invalid. Not personally satisfying."

"Fun," Ambassador Sarek said abstractly. His eyes were blue-gray, Amanda noticed.

"What about you?" she said. "Are you having fun?"

He took a moment to parse her question. Amanda liked that. In her experience, a good listener was rare; someone who took the time to put together a truly responsive, thoughtful reply? Even rarer. "I have found that spontaneous casual conversation with Humans in an informal setting can be highly informative. This location facilitates many diverse modes of leisure activity and therefore attracts a wide demographic variety of Humans."

"I thought maybe this was your day off. You're working?"

"Upon first being questioned, you described your choice of leisure activity as, primarily, a skill-building exercise," Sarek said. "But would you continue in this activity if you did not also find it personally satisfying?"

Amanda tilted her head. "So it's fun. You come here and talk to people because you think it's fun."

He opened his mouth, then closed it. "I would not use such phrasing."

*Wouldn't say it; not the same as not thinking it*, Amanda thought, for the second time. She grinned at Sarek, and he blinked back, startled. He had such a dour face, but he wasn't a dour person. Seemed like he just didn't expect people to *get* him.

Amanda understood that. Boy, did she ever.

"Have you had lunch?" she asked, pointing over her shoulder with one thumb. "I know a great vegan place in Pacific Heights."

He looked at her for a long moment, and though her face started to burn hot, Amanda didn't look away.

"It would be... a pleasure," he said, and held out a hand to help her up from the rocky beach.

## End Notes

love is much less a mystery  
than who you give it to  
— father john misty, *kiss me (i loved you)*

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