

When I Count, There are Only You and I Together

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When I Count, There are Only You and I Together

by [daraoakwise](#)

Summary

Set after Higher Power, the consequences of Scotty's encounter with other possible lives catches up to him. In ways that might change how this one goes, after all.

Who is the third who walks always beside you?

When I count, there are only you and I together

But when I look ahead up the white road

There is always another one walking beside you

Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded

I do not know whether a man or a woman

—But who is that on the other side of you?

—T.S. Elliot, The Wasteland

Lt. Commander Andrew Corrigan had never actually been aboard the *Enterprise*. He'd been on the team that had built the medbay in her predecessor before she left the Riverside Yard, but this one had been assembled at *Yorktown* shipyard. Still, he mused as he stepped off the shuttle, it didn't take any prior knowledge to see that the ship had been beat to hell.

Rumors of some kind of battle above Jupiter yesterday morning were looking disturbingly true. As was the one that whispered Earth had been destroyed. *Twice*.

He believed that rumor, though he couldn't say why. Early April was finally breaking winter's grip; the birds were lifting their voices in the pale yellow of sunrise. They woke him early, today, and so he stopped at a beach on the way into work to watch the Atlantic hurl itself against the shore. He'd given little thought to the churning rumors until, between one breaker and the next, the view abruptly seemed both eternal and also obliterated out of existence. He gasped at the unlive memory of his bones being atomized, and felt shakily at his own chest, surprised to find himself whole.

He was late to work, unable to turn away until the sun had lit enough of the sea and land to prove it was still there. By the time he arrived at his office in the biomechanical engineering department of Starfleet's Baltimore research and teaching hospital, there was a bizarre message waiting for him.

"Do you know Montgomery Scott?" his boggled tech asked. "He's asked you to come up to *Enterprise*."

And although Corry hesitated a moment, the answer there, of course, was *no*. Of course he didn't. Scott was Starfleet's most notorious and mercurial engineer. There were vast swaths of starship design under his patents, to say nothing of entire branches of physics that carried his name. He'd kept up with the man's papers, over the years, as best he could. (Informed less often by understanding than the grumbles of the

academics who couldn't poke holes in thoughts they didn't like, which delighted him for reasons he couldn't quite say.) Corry had no idea why *Enterprise's* Chief Engineer wanted him aboard.

But orders were orders, so he got in the queue to have his ass beamed to San Francisco, and then took a shuttle to the Starbase, and another over to the ship, which was visibly being held together in the repair berth by tractor beams and external shields.

He caught up to the ship between shifts, and because he was the only passenger, sat up front with the shuttle pilot. The pilot leaned forward to peer out the window. "*Holy shit*," the lieutenant whispered. "How is she even still together? My cousin's nephew said he had a telescope pointed at Jupiter yesterday. And every bit of his footage was confiscated, but there was a huge battle. And three starships. But only one came home."

Corry frowned. "I haven't heard about losing any."

"Neither have I," the lieutenant said. "But my cousin's nephew said he could make out the name *Enterprise* on all three ships." The lieutenant took a deep breath and dropped his voice to a conspiratorial whisper. "Another friend's wife is an *Enterprise* tech. The ship is a year early, did you know that? And a thousand light years from her reported position last week. And my friend says that her wife says it's all time travel and multiple universes."

"Was the Earth destroyed?" Corry asked, entirely recklessly.

The pilot nodded, looking gray. "I think it was. Everyone I've talked to today had that dream last night. The one where you're dead." He gestured at the broken ship. "They undid it."

Corry had no idea what to even say about that. And, he thought as he stepped off the shuttle, he still had no idea why he was here. He'd grabbed a case of his favorite tools before he left Baltimore, and held them to his chest now, not quite sure if he was using them as a shield or trying to protect them from the absolute frenzy of activity spilling out of the shuttlebay and onto the engineering decks.

A rocky little Roylan who was carrying a massive armload of equipment caught sight of him and paused, looking him over. Corry's blue science tunic was deeply out of place in the sea of red and—for some reason—black tunics.

"I. Uh," Corry stammered. "The Chief Engineer asked me to come aboard?"

Royslans had internal eyestalks, but he managed to give the impression of rolling them all the same. "Just follow the shouting," he murmured, annoyance clearly directed at the Chief and not Corry, and hustled off.

And—yes. There was definitely shouting.

Corry had actually met Commander Scott. Once. And although he was certain the man would have forgotten their encounter long ago, Corry never had. Corry paused when he caught sight of him. He wasn't particularly large or imposing, nor classically handsome, but mesmerizing all the same, because his entire *presence* filled the deck.

And he was having a shout at about thirty Starbase officers.

"What in the bloody hell ...!?" and somehow the man raised his voice further, gesturing to encompass everything. "This ship is currently jury-rigged straight tae hell and back. If yeh touch the wrong circuit it *will* melt yer brain!" He pointed starboard. "If you're wearing a red shirt I need yeh to stand on the wall and not touch anythin' unless yeh are accompanied by an *Enterprise* engineer! Who, today, are wearing *black* shirts!" he tugged at his own, which was distinctly sweat-and-soot stained. "This is nae difficult, people! And I am genuinely nae kidding; your brains *will* melt out your ears, and that's nae paperwork I want tae fill out today!"

There was a little tittering at that, but the Chief's glare was enough to get people lining up against the bulkhead.

"Who the hell is the guy in the blue shirt?" Scott snapped, hands on his hips, and it took Corry a moment to realize Scott was talking about him.

Corry held his case a little closer to his chest. "Corrigan, sir. I was asked to come aboard?"

Scott blinked at him, something unnameable spinning behind his eyes. "You're efficient," he said softly. "Just ... stand there a minute. And I'm deadly serious about nae touching anything."

"Aye, sir," he said, freezing in place, but the Chief had already turned slightly away from him toward the black-clad *Enterprise* Engineers. The bluster dropped off him, and his sudden stillness was so abrupt it was startling. Corry had to strain to hear what he was saying to them. For their parts, their gazes were locked onto his face.

"Lads," he said wearily; an apparently gender-neutral pronoun. "We've got tae get her settled; we've got tae make her safe for the people who are about tae tear her apart. Give me eight more hours, and I *swear* I will send yeh all home for three weeks."

Their assent was largely unspoken and apparently unanimous. The ship was falling apart, but her Engineering staff was working so smoothly that it almost looked like telepathy. Which—it had been a five year mission, but this was more than that. *Black tunics*, Corry's mind supplied, as if that was the answer. He didn't have time to turn it over in his mind, because the Chief turned back to him.

"Take a walk with me, Mr. Corrigan," he said, with a kind of deep fondness that made Corry wonder if he remembered after all. Corry followed Scott up the half-creaking ladder-stairs to the second level access to the warp core. The core was shielded, the faint blue ripple of a heavy radiation barrier surrounding it.

"Cracked the core," Scott explained wryly, as if that nearly-impossible bit of catastrophic damage was amusing. He tapped at the shield generators that were keeping the engineers from getting cooked where they stood, then leaned on the rail overlooking the activity below. He

abruptly whistled down. “Peters...!” he shouted, and a black-tuniced engineer below just raised a hand, and changed whatever he was doing slightly. It was enough to make the Chief’s shoulders relax, although his fists were still tight around the rail and his eyes locked on everything that was happening on the main deck.

Corry had never wanted to hug a stranger so badly in his life. “What can I do for you, sir?” he asked softly.

Scott glanced sideways at him. “I’m going tae confess that asking you up here was nothing more than rashness on my part, Mr. Corrigan,” Scott said. He took a large breath, and forced his hands off the rail, unpeeling his fingers one by one. “For a little while yet, here on the *Enterprise*, I’m still master of my fate. The moment I’m back on the planet it will be twelve days of hard debrief and six weeks of inquests. And by the time I come up tae breathe again, I’m afraid I might lose my nerve.”

Scott stopped talking, and Corry wasn’t sure what to say to that, or even if he was *supposed* to say something. But he wasn’t one for letting silence sit, so he went with: “I doubt you remember, but we’ve met before, Commander. And crossed paths another time since.”

Scott reached for the rail again, and you would have thought Corry had just punched him in the gut. “Have we?” he murmured faintly, his voice cracking. “When?”

The raw grief in the question made Corry hesitate. He could lie. ‘*Oh, you know what? I think I have you confused with ...*’ As though the man’s name hadn’t been seared into him for years. Corry summoned a smile, because it was a fond memory.

“An eighteen year old genius physics textbook author once took a trip to midcoast Maine. He happened to stop at a lobster shack, where I happened to be staring glumly at my warp physics textbook. He and I ate probably twelve lobster rolls between us. Somehow, he made me feel like I could actually pass warp physics. It was the best afternoon I’d had in ages, but I went to use the head, and by the time I came back, he was gone.”

Scott had closed his eyes, and shook his head. “Of *course* that was you,” he said hoarsely. “I’m sorry. That day went directions I hadnae dared hope for, but that lad was so afraid, all the time, most of all of himself ... And then I couldnae remember your name. When was the second time?”

“Hmm?” Corry asked, struggling to shake off the waves of *anguish* coming off the man. “Oh, the second time we crossed paths? You wouldn’t know about that one, because I was dealing with McCoy. I’m a biomechanical engineer. Among other things, I design prosthetics, including specializing the base structure to the precise anatomy of an individual who has lost a limb.” He tapped Scott gently on the left shoulder. “I know your vasculature and nerves very well, from about here down.”

Scott released the rail, and turned his left hand upward to look down into his palm. Corry was proud to see how natural it looked and how easily he moved. “This is a *beautiful* piece of engineering,” Scott said reverently, and closed his artificial hand into fist.

Corry smiled. “I’m glad you think so.”

They stood shoulder to shoulder for a minute, watching the crew starting to strip the faintly-moaning ship down to her bones. “Black tunics?” Corry asked at last.

“Mourning clothing,” Scott answered simply.

“We were dead,” Corry said, entirely sure.

“Two years, the first time. And then again, for all of yesterday. Scott pinched at his sleeve, which came away a little dirty, and rubbed his fingers together.

“Hull breaches have put a wee bit of what was on the outside of the ship *inside* the ship,” he said conversationally. “This is Earthdust. The cremated remains of fourteen billion people. The entire sea and everythin’ in it. The pyramids. Cave art. The Mona Lisa. Dinosaur bones. You. All of it, reduced tae this.”

“You ... fixed it,” Corry said, and *oh*, this was a strange conversation, and he still didn’t know why he was having it.

Scott brushed his sleeve; more dust. “Doesnae mean it didnae happen. Everything happens, somewhere.” He rubbed his eyes. “A few hours ago, I was standin’ next to a stronger version of myself in an event horizon that...” he reached out in front of himself and grabbed a handful of air. “Crushed what I’m afraid might have been an infinite number of realities intae our minds. And in a plurality of them, Andrew Corrigan, including the life of the man standin’ next tae me ... there arenae words tae say what yeh mean tae me.”

Corry caught his breath, but couldn’t find his voice.

Scott tapped his head and twisted his neck, his eyes still closed. “He calls yeh his brother, but only because it’s a word that means ‘*bound*’ and ‘*twined*,’ and ‘*beloved*.’ It gets maybe halfway tae what he feels. And saying that aloud, I sound mad as all hell.” Scott huffed out a small breath of laughter. “Nae unusual, for me.”

“What are you asking of me?” Corry asked shakily, his head spinning.

“Nothing,” Scott said, rubbing the dust between his fingers again. “Maybe it’s jus’ the fragments of possibility clinging. Maybe it’s the cells of *his* hands he left behind when he touched my shoulder, longing tae go back home tae Maine and be held in your arms.” Scott looked up at him. “Everything was dead, Corry, and then it wasn’t... and I needed tae see yeh.”

Corry swallowed, because he *hadn’t told Scott his name*. To anyone in the entire universe who cared at all, he was just ‘Andrew’ or ‘Andy,’ or sometimes ‘Corrigan.’ Never Corry. *Corry* had been a silly nickname from the academy, and no one had spoken it in years—save the narrator in his own mind, who couldn’t seem to call him anything else. He hadn’t realized, until this very moment, that that voice sounded like Scott’s.

Scotty, it supplied.

“That may be the most intense thing anyone has said to me in my life,” Corry managed.

“Aye,” Scotty said, pushing back from the rail and straightening his shoulders, taking back something that he’d laid down for a moment.

“Thank yeh for indulging me, Commander. My transporters still have power; I’ll abuse protocol and beam yeh back tae wherever yeh need tae be.”

Corry’s heart knew exactly what to do with that, and he was talking before his mind caught up. “Tell me,” Corry asked, grabbing Scotty urgently by the arm. “In all those universes you saw, were we ever enemies?”

Scott frowned, then shrugged, although not hard enough to shake off Corry’s hand. “It’s the multiverse. Everything that can be will be. But in everything I saw? Nae. Never enemies.”

Corry pursed his lips. “‘*Everything that can be will be*,’ you just said. And never enemies. Strangers, at our worst.” He was trembling, and couldn’t begin to say why. “Tell me, Scotty,” he asked sadly. “Did you ever go back to that lobster shack?”

“Aye,” Scott said softly. “But you were never there.”

Corry swallowed, then lifted his hand off Scotty’s arm and looked at the Earthdust now on his fingers. “It still there,” he said fiercely.

Scotty studied him for a moment, his expression flickering through what may have been a hundred lives, or a million. Corry held his breath, because he only had the one, and it was hanging in the balance.

“Most of the time, yeh live on Rutherford Island,” Scotty said slowly. “There’s a swinging bridge, and th’ West Side Road ...?”

“That’s the place,” Corry whispered, and grabbed his hand. “When the admirals are done with you, you come *home*, Scotty. I’ll be waiting.”

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