

The Mystic Far

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The Mystic Far

by [SLWalker](#)

Summary

An HIV-positive English professor takes a hell of a leap of faith; it's a good thing he has Scotty and Springsteen ready to catch him on the other side.

Notes

Merry Christmas, Dara! Albeit a bit late. >> Still, I hope it was worth the wait. <3

The first thing Owen Hanson did, after his lover saved the whole of all universes, after Edith Kirk was on her feet and well, was drill Leonard McCoy in the face no less than six times.

Not that that was the number of punches he'd thrown, mind; those were just the ones that for sure *landed*. His middle and ring fingers broke somewhere in there. Later, much later, when Scotty would cradle his repaired hand and kiss those knuckles, Owen would grin fiercely, but before then, Leonard was bleeding all over the Sickbay floor, Edith -- fresh out of surgery yet perfectly okay -- was dragging Owen off and Owen's first real act in the 23rd Century (once he got done reeling) was to take back some of the blood his lover lost from one of the people responsible for him losing it.

And later, Scotty would reflect aloud that Leonard couldn't have seen it coming, and Owen would smirk. But a skinny, HIV-positive poet with the stereotypically soft hands and gentle, willfully effeminate body language he could put on or take off like a coat was not usually the type to go and start swinging like some wildcat.

Then again, Leonard never saw what kind of punishment Owen used to take back when he went clubbing. If Leonard had seen that, he might have known to turn around and hide in his office and lock the door; that Owen wasn't afraid of pain and sometimes even sought it out.

In all of the years that Owen and Scotty were together, Leonard was the one who'd only met Owen a few times, and all of those times were *before* Scotty bought a revolver to end his own life. And, in truth, Leonard did continue courting the beating he would eventually receive by the way he treated Owen every time, which was not really any better than he treated Scotty *about* Owen. Both of those were things the poet was happy to break stereotype for; he didn't share it readily with anyone, but he grew up going to school with bruises and black eyes and busted lips and nuns who looked the other way, and there were only so many times anyone could swallow their own blood before they learned how to swing back.

Leonard hadn't cost Owen any. But that didn't matter. He cost the man Owen *loved* and that was absolutely worse.

"Owen?" Edith Kirk had asked, shocked, after she rescued Leonard from any more of a beating.

"Sorry, Senator," Owen had answered, even though he wasn't really sorry at all. Or, maybe, that he was sorry that she saw it, but not that he had done it.

Had he known what all they had suffered and lived through and nearly died for (again), he might not have. But as his hand throbbled fiercely, as he was tackled to the floor by a bunch of men in black, he didn't regret it for a second.

A blonde nurse named C. Chapel came and fixed his hand, her mouth in a disapproving line. That in itself was-- completely baffling to the poet. She came in, asked for his broken hand, and waved something over it that felt warm and a little like static electricity except *inside* of his body, and just like that-- it was fixed.

Well. Mostly. She splinted his fingers, but said they'd be completely finished knitting the following day. The pain was almost non-existent, though. The swelling, too.

The last time Owen was sure of anything aside *Scotty* (and breaking Leonard's nose), it was that it was the year 2000. A fine October day. His lover had just gone for a pack of cigarettes. Owen was on the phone with his dealer for some weed, because they'd left behind the harder stuff a couple years ago, painstakingly, but even with the neuropathy meds that had come out recently and made life immeasurably better, Scotty still hurt often and the weed helped them both. Helped the pain. Helped the anxiety. Helped them sleep. He was just hanging up when his lover walked back in--

--wearing a black-- something. Uniform? But even more, he had a *hand*. Pink and human looking. His hair was shorter and sandier, less gray; he didn't look a ton younger, but by god, Owen knew every inch and line of him and could still see the difference in only a few heartbeats.

But even more than the physical, it was the *look* in Scotty's eyes. As if he hadn't seen Owen just fifteen minutes ago. As if Owen had sent him off to some war he had to fight and that he had never expected to come back home from.

Nyota had told Owen the truth back in '98 (and Spock's pointed ears and green blood were unmistakably alien once they were shown to him), but even though Owen believed it, it had always been-- an abstraction. *Oh, the love of your life was born in the year 2222*. He believed it, but it was impossible to wrap his mind around. After he'd been informed, of course Scotty had told him all about the time; that there was no homophobia. That none of the STDs of the late twentieth century had survived the medical innovations leading into the twenty-third. That gay men didn't die in terrifying numbers of HIV because there was no HIV. That the world was clean and capitalism was a miserable footnote in the Federation, not the wheel grinding people down to powder and despair. That cars ran on anti-gravs and people could move across a whole world in a heartbeat with something called a transporter and no one had to go hungry. Education was free to the highest levels. Exploration was more important than militarization.

That all of those had once been true, but now were not, because the hand he gave up told them that their future was lost to them. Scotty's despair over that was well-hidden most of the time, but those times it wasn't were soul-crushing to witness. Owen couldn't presume to understand what it must be like to live it.

And Owen *did* believe all of it, because even the pieces of Scotty's old artificial hand were clearly beyond any medicine Earth had in the twentieth century, but believing something didn't necessarily make it understandable. Didn't make it even conceivable, not really.

But now, surrounded by a ship with gleaming interiors and a jail cell with a fucking *force-field*, having left behind everything because the man he loved asked him to, Owen had to wonder whether he had the courage to face what was coming ahead.

Initially, what Owen noticed was his lover's entire *presence*.

There was no real way to tell the time down in the futuristic jail cell they'd pitched him into; Owen had no idea how much time had passed, either, but it felt like plenty. There had been shaking and shuddering and flickering lights, the sounds of chaos, but no one explained what was going on. He had not yet really managed to grasp that he was on a ship in space and not something on Earth despite logic and what he'd been told; everything that he associated with travel (momentum, a window maybe) was nonexistent where he was.

Things had quieted down and he dozed in and out uneasily in his cell; between one long -- impossibly long -- blink and the next, his lover was standing there, taking him in with both a deep affection and a *quietness* that Owen had never seen from him before.

Not the quiet of depression; that wasn't so much quietness as it was desolation. This was something else.

Owen stood up even as Scotty did something on the other side of the force-field, which winked and disappeared.

"So," Owen said, voice cracking somewhere just above a whisper, suddenly unsure all over again about-- everything. Everything in the whole universe. "How long has it been?"

Scotty shook his head, gaze wandering all over Owen's face; a look of hope or grief or wonder or all of those. "Years. I cannae even tell yeh reliably how many."

Owen bobbed his head in a nod, throat thick. "You have a hand."

Scotty picked his left hand up and looked at it, flexing his fingers one at a time and then all at once before turning it back and forth. "The same one, too. I'm nae sure how, never quite been able tae figure that out. I dinnae think this body ever knew yeh. Though-- all the important parts of me do."

It was a strange, tremulous kind of hope or pain blooming in Owen's chest. He would be the first to extol the beauties of the written or spoken word; he also knew he was a cynic and had been since he realized just what the world thought of people like him. It was a dichotomy he'd learned how to be comfortable with; Doctor Hanson, imparting words of wisdom and love, and Owen who wanted people to hurt him. Even having learned how to be comfortable with it, he still wasn't always sure what of him was real and what of him wasn't.

It was one of the things he and Scotty had always sort of-- gotten about one another. Scotty doubted his actual reality, his bipolar whispering either grief or grandiosity; Owen doubted his own internal reality, what of him was the lie or the truth. Somewhere between the two of them, they had managed all right enough.

Now, though, there was a kind of-- sharpness in his lover's (former lover's?) eyes. Not the sharpness of something shattered and glinting pieces, but something *honed*. A clarity.

In all of their years together -- casually, then not-so-casually, then exclusively -- Owen had sort of fallen more into the role of caretaker. Not that Scotty didn't try to reciprocate it, he did, but he was often in such rough shape that Owen just happened to have more bandwidth. So, Owen was the one who paid the bills with their combined paychecks and handled the mundane stuff. He also did a lot of the emotional shoring up, because he *loved* Scotty and felt that someone oughta be willing to do so for that love, instead of out of nebulous shame or weird and ugly paternalism.

But the man standing in front of him, with a kind of strange and beautiful *stillness*, didn't look like he needed any of that.

"What happened? What changed?" Owen asked, feeling somehow more lost and small. But it wasn't a question of distress or disgust, just an attempt to find his feet.

Scotty took a deep breath and blew it out; his eyebrows quirked in an unfamiliar expression, something like a shrug, though less casual. "I'm still workin' that out," he said, frankly. "I-- havenae even begun tae really sort it. But I came tae get yeh out of here. Come with me again?" he asked, holding out that incredible left hand again.

"I don't know, last time that happened I ended up a couple hundred years displaced," Owen said, voice wobbling despite his really shitty attempt at humor, even as he reached out and grasped that hand -- warm and soft and *alive* -- and even as his eyes were stinging. His heart beat like a panicked sparrow on his ribcage.

"We'll be at Earth soon." Scotty pulled on his hand, drawing him out of the cell slowly. "I want yeh tae see it from above. Lemme take care of yeh this time, for a bit, aye?"

Owen had lost all grasp of his composure, poor as it had been, and started crying hard enough that he had to struggle to say, "I'm not sure how."

As if it broke a dam (or renewed a bridge), Scotty pulled him in close and held him tight, one hand finding the back of his head as he murmured, teary himself, "Bonnie poet. We'll learn that together."

The Earth from space was beyond all beauty.

They were in some kind of lounge, disheveled for whatever had happened while Owen had been locked away, but the massive windows created a vista so incredible that he was knocked breathless anyway, the clutter quickly forgotten.

Scotty had grabbed an overturned lounge couch, righting it and dragging it close to the array of transparency so they could sit, and so they were wrapped up in each other when the view shifted as the ship went into orbit. The blue glow that Owen couldn't see the source of became the planet he was born on, vast and swirling in blue and white and green and brown, *sparkling* in a way not-quite-literal but nonetheless perfect.

He must have gasped. Scotty's arm tightened around him some.

"Yeh'll get tae see us approach Spacedock," he said, voice pitched soft. "Soon as we get back, they'll be able tae cure yeh, too."

Owen wondered there what it would take to explain to people from the future what it *felt* like to have HIV. To take a cocktail of drugs on the hopes that it would buy him more time, and that what time he did have left would be spent somewhere other than a hospital bed. To walk them through how devastating it was getting that diagnosis, regardless or whether it was expected or not.

He'd sat beside a number of hospital beds himself. Had held a lot of hands. Had watched lovers and friends and barely-acquaintances as they wasted away, as the sores broke out, as their lungs quit, as they died. The *concept* of there somehow being no more -- drugs, stigma, *certain death* -- was incredibly hard to grasp, it turned out. Owen had spent the bulk of the last two decades stewing in a mix of terror and nihilism; unlike Scotty, mania hadn't driven the decidedly unsafe sex he'd had in the past. But somehow, he had always managed to talk himself into going out to the clubs again, knowing he was courting a death wish and still unable to stop.

Maybe it was anger. Maybe defiance. Maybe it was that same gnawing loneliness as always. Whatever it was that drove him, eventually the reaper managed to tag him.

And now his lover was telling him that they could cure that. Beat the reaper, at least for a hell of a lot longer than he could have ever expected to.

Owen felt all those fragments of thought and hope and disbelief as they swirled around in his head and chest, watching as the mind-blowingly huge space station grew steadily as the ship approached.

“Do you think Leonard will press charges?” he asked, giving a quick shiver as the massive doors on the top section of the station started opening, asking less because he cared and more just to break the silence.

Scotty snorted, then *laughed* at that; the first was the cynical little sound that Owen was well-familiar with, but the second was one he'd only heard rarely, so rarely that it took him a moment to place it.

Joy.

“I dinnae think he will, but if he does, then I've got more than enough information I can feed tae headquarters tae bury him in inquiries and paperwork for the next several decades.” The words were frank even as the tone was oddly fond. *Years*, Scotty had said; whatever grudges Owen had for Leonard -- or any of them -- there was every chance Scotty had already buried those hatchets.

Maybe even in some forearms, Owen hoped, and if that was petty and mean-- well, he was also pretty sure that he'd held the man through a hell of a lot more pain than they had. Scotty could forgive them, but that didn't mean Owen had to.

“Good,” he said, voice a little hoarse, pressing himself more into both the couch and Scotty.

There was a long moment of quiet, then Scotty said, “Thank you, though. I mean-- it's been years since yeh last saw him for him, and a lot's happened, but I ken why yeh hit him and-- just-- thank you.”

In a different, more perfect world, such acts of violent revenge would be frowned-upon, and maybe even in this world they would be, but it was a relief that the reason Owen had acted wasn't lining him up for a firing squad or treating him as some monster for taking that route. Honestly-- a *huge* relief. Scotty was forgiving past when any man should be, but--

Owen tried to respond and his throat wouldn't work, absent the painful bobbing of his adam's apple, so all he did was nod and lean his head against his lover's as the giant space station swallowed them whole.

Their time in the lounge was the only rest they got; even as the station swallowed the wounded ship, even as the workbees and personnel swarmed her, Scotty had to go back to his station and Owen--

He had no place in this time yet; no purpose.

He had never been a sci-fi sort; every dream Owen had ever had of a future was grounded in the simple things: The right to love whomever; to walk anywhere with his lover hand-in-hand and not chance broken bones or death. The right to marry. A world where it was fine for men to cry, where women were treated as true equals, where skin color could only be a positive celebration of differences and not a whole series of unspoken (and often unwanted) rules and privileges. Even Owen's more fanciful daydreams were of roaming around Europe and the nations of northern Africa as he'd done when he was in his early twenties -- a much easier thing to do in the seventies than it would be later -- and maybe teaching classes over there. A year in London, living in a flat; a year in Stockholm, a year in Amsterdam, a year in Egypt--

It had never been about starships or starship engineers; had never been about visiting other *worlds*.

Scotty had offered to take him back to his quarters, had explained probably that they were all going to have to answer a hell of a lot of questions to a hell of a lot of people, but Owen had asked to just stay there in the lounge. And even though Scotty was clearly worried about him doing that, he hugged Owen and kissed his cheek and jaw and temple, one-two-three, and then said he'd be back just the minute he could be.

That left Owen looking out into the mind-boggling view of the interior of a space station so huge that he had no real grasp of its scale. His mind had shut down, but for fragments of thought or poetry. A defense mechanism, he knew, a way to hide from all of the questions he suddenly had no answers for.

He was grateful he and Scotty had never gotten any pets. Both of them enjoyed animals, but neither of them had the wherewithal to care for one. The idea of a kitty starving because they left--

He wondered if their apartment was gone. It almost had to be. And he wondered where they could go; where *did* homeless people turn to, in this time? Were there restaurants? How did one acquire food? Owen hated capitalism, but it was all he really knew and understood; the native tongue of consumerism, championed by that absolute slimeball Reagan -- may he rot in hell forever and ever amen, now that he was for certain dead--

Then Owen realized that Springsteen was also for certain dead and started sobbing, an out-of-control reaction of-- what? Being overwhelmed. Being lost. Losing every single touchstone of his existence but the one, and even that one he wasn't sure he knew anymore, though he knew he loved the man.

He was still crying helplessly when a well-made hand slid up his arm and he found himself looking through tear-blurred eyes at Nyota Uhura.

“Oh Owen,” she said, her own eyes glistening. “I'm so glad to see you again.”

They had a cordial relationship, though not always an easy one; her and Spock had acted weird and paternalistic towards Scotty early on,

though in the last couple years, the dynamic evened out considerably and in no small part because Owen just wouldn't *tolerate* otherwise. There were a few times he pissed Scotty off by hauling them up verbally when they crossed boundaries they shouldn't, and times when he knew he'd hurt Nyota by doing so, but--

But every single time, even when Spock remained stubbornly silent, Nyota fell quiet and clearly thought through things, then apologized openly and sincerely. Of all of Scotty's friends that he knew from the future -- though Owen hesitated to call them *friends*, or most of them -- Nyota was the one who consistently and *obviously* was operating from a place of wanting what was best for him.

Even if she had failed him bitterly before Owen even knew him, she was also the one who most clearly regretted it to the bottom of her soul.

Whatever their relationship was on Earth, though, seeing her now -- exhausted, but alive and genuinely glad to see him -- was the oddest kind of relief.

"Hi, yeah, sorry," he managed to choke out, trying to get it under control and wipe his eyes, hands shaking.

"I cried so many times after I was dropped in your time," she said, rubbing up and down his arm. "For-- everything. Everything I'd lost. Everything *we'd* lost. And then I came back here and I was so *angry*--" Tears slid down her face, but she made no effort to wipe them away and instead held out her arms. And when Owen wrapped around her -- the first time he ever had hugged her -- she held on tight, the book she had in hand pressed against his spine. "It's hard," she whispered, sniffing against his shirt. "But I'm still so grateful you're here. And if I can help, please let me."

"I'm pretty bad at that," Owen admitted, resting his cheek against her head, voice ragged. "But the offer means a lot."

She nodded against his shoulder, then drew back, looking up at him with her lip quivering briefly before firming again, as she held the book out. "I have to go, they're already starting debriefing, but I wanted to bring you this."

Owen took it; it was pretty old, a regular looking hardback, nothing special on the outside. He opened it to stanzas, to the art of words, and he huffed quietly. "Poetry?"

"Post-war. The third world war," she said, reaching out and flipping back to the cover pages, showing him the date. "The anthology was collected over the decade after First Contact. It's-- got something of everything in there. Hope. Grief. Rage. And a lot of people trying to figure out how to live in the world again, instead of just surviving it."

"Yours?" Owen asked, trailing his fingers over the black letters.

Nyota nodded. "I traded for it after getting back here. And it helped me feel less-- less alone."

Owen bobbed his head and blew out a breath, closing the hardback and squeezing the cover. "I'll take care of it and make sure it gets back to you."

"No," Nyota said, gently pressing the book back towards his chest. "It's yours now. It gave me what I needed when I needed it, and nothing would make me happier than giving it to you."

It would be the first thing that was *his* in this time period, absent one genius Scotsman, and Owen supposed he could be forgiven for hugging her again in light of it.

A couple hours later, when two red-shirted young men came to collect him, they found him sitting and reading, an out-of-time poet with tear-stains on his face and shirt, trying to find footing one stanza at a time.

Two years later...

Yesterday had been the third time that Professor Van Camp had complained about the noise this week, but Owen firmly believed that good music should *always* be loud. And after the initial adjustment, his students seemed to agree.

The ends of Owen's lectures were dedicated to two things that he felt the future needed more of: Rock and dancing. There was an absolutely delightful dichotomy between dissecting and analyzing pre-Surak Vulcan poetry and then throwing some Mellencamp or Pat Benatar on and encouraging his students to *dance*. In joy. In abandon.

In *defiance*.

This semester, he was teaching at the University of Maine, Brunswick campus; over the summer, he'd been teaching in Shi'kahr, on *Vulcan*, and the one before that, he'd been at his own alma mater: Harvard. In each, the intense fascination of both faculty and students about his perspectives and story was initially unsettling, but Owen eventually started finding it to be-- something else. He started structuring his lectures around it, too.

(The Vulcans did know how to dance, it turned out. And their poetry was *stunning*. Owen was in classes himself, learning how to read their language so he could read their works in their original tongue.)

But-- teaching what it was like to live in the era of homophobia and HIV. What it really *felt* like. He taught them poetry from that era, showing them a whole world of words that never would have been remembered if he wasn't there as a living reminder.

Often he left them in tears. Sometimes they cheered. And after some initial awkwardness, the majority of them took the chance to dance, too.

Now, though, Springsteen was singing and Van Camp was probably gnashing his teeth somewhere. And some of Owen's students were singing along with the lyrics being holoprojected, and some were dancing, and some were trying to work on an assignment. But all of them were smiling right now.

Scotty wasn't his student, but like they had back at NYU in the last decade of the twentieth century, they still often crashed each other's lectures. And now, Scotty was singing along with the song Owen had picked for today, the song that his lover had given to him.

("It came out in 2020," he explained, fingers tracing over Owen's face, chasing the tears after the song ended. "I had hoped so hard that yeh'd get tae go see him sing it live. Just-- the thought of yeh in the crowd as he sang this--" Scotty had swallowed there, eyelashes wet as he closed his eyes. "--so many times, I came back tae that, when things were bad. You, a bonnie old man, watchin' him sing this song.")

Owen didn't get to see Bruce sing it. But he wouldn't have traded listening to it with Scotty for a chance to go back and see it live in concert, either.

Now, Scotty was looking right at him, beaming as he sang, "Your old Fender Twin from Johnny's Music downtown, still set on ten to burn this house down! Count the band in then kick into overdrive, by the end of the set we leave no one alive!"

The joy of the song. The celebration of a life loved and lost; the celebration of a life continuing; the promise of a meeting again, out in the mystic far.

Scotty had told Owen he was sure Owen would love this song, and Owen most certainly did. Every single word.

"Ghosts, runnin' through the night

"Our spirits filled with light!

"I need,

"Need you by my side,

Your love and I'm alive...!"

And they were.

And they lived happily ever after, too.

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