

## Seamark

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## Seamark

by [SLWalker](#)

### Summary

(1990) - If Spock was one of the most critical reasons that Scotty kept choosing to live through one more day, then maybe Scotty could be the reason Spock would continue to see the next one himself.

### Notes

This story has one hell of a pedigree. So, let me say right off: If you just want to read it for the pairing, the relationship or the fuck-or-die scenario, you are absolutely welcome to, even if the context will seem way out there. But just for the sake of having context if you want it:

This AU is based off of Chapter 10 of DaraOakwise's [A Higher Power When You Look](#), which is the story of the AOS crew's many adventures. Chapter 10 there is her version of City on the Edge of Forever, except instead of taking place in the 30's, her heroes land in 1989 and run into a relatively contemporary Edith Keeler. Her Jim makes some decisions there that-- lead to some very interesting consequences. (And some heartbreaking ones.) So, this is an AU of an AU taking place in 1990, born of her query as to how I think TOS Scotty would have reacted to the same scenario, and also many late nights of us chatting.

While it's still the AOS versions of Kirk, McCoy and Uhura (Pine, Urban, Saldana) at the ages they would be in 2266, it's the *TOS* versions of Scotty and Spock (Doohan and Peck/Nimoy), circa Season 1 of the Original Series, and the universe is a speculative fusion between the two. The premise being, though, that as in the original canon, Scotty and Spock have been shipmates for a damn long time, starting under Pike's command, and that probably Nimoy's Spock and Pine's Kirk would not have bonded the same way that the original Kirk and Spock did. (And also, I don't see TOS!Kirk making the choices AOS!Kirk did in Dara's original.)

There are also mentions of things from Disco, SNW and my own AotW, too. And this is also for Gen Prompt Bingo, Round 24: Vulnerability.

So, you know, blame Dara again and enjoy the ride. XD

## Chapter 1

The sun baking New Bedford was invisible belowdecks, but its presence was inescapable.

There was a fan blowing, circulating air, but it still smelled like brine, marine life (and death), diesel fuel, oil, metal and work, and while Scotty wished he could cool off down there, and while he occasionally gave a passing thought to how many braincells he was killing by breathing in those fumes, he was getting paid a princely sum for the discomfort, on top of the already kingly sum he had hidden in a lockbox in his rented house.

Jumping off the pier into the oil-sheen rainbow on the polluted water around the fishing fleet to cool off would just be risking sickness anyway; the afternoon sun had no mercy, but if he really did want to swim, it wasn't terribly far to safe beaches.

It was still *definitely* better than New York had been, anyway, where he had spent a worrying amount of time feeling like someone had rubbed a cheese grater against the lining of his lungs, no thanks to the smog, and where crime and poverty and despair were only a little less endemic than the rats. And at least in New Bedford, choosing to continue existing for one more day was easier.

Not always *easy*. But-- easier.

There was a clang somewhere half above, half to the side of him and then a voice called out, "Hey, Scotty! Someone's on the phone for ya!"

He had a home phone, so very few people would have thought to call him at work. And only one person from his own time even knew *where* he worked, which narrowed down the list considerably.

That was ultimately enough for him to set his spanner down and climb back out of the guts of the trawler, wincing sharply as the sun hit him. "Did they say what they wanted, lad?" he asked, carefully pulling his sunglasses out of his hair to put them on, minding not to touch the lenses, and breathing a sigh of relief when the light went from searing to somewhat *less* of an assault.

Terry shrugged, offering over an old t-shirt that had been ripped into a rag. "They said that you won the Publisher's Clearing House sweepstakes and you should get on the phone right away."

Scotty took the rag even as he rolled his eyes heavenwards, and gave the kid's head a gentle push on the way past, making sure to transfer just a little of the grease in the process.

Turning a spanner in the twentieth century wasn't all that different from turning one in the twenty-third; everything had become more refined, more efficient, safer, cleaner, and more environmentally friendly in the future, but the principles were the same and so were the skills needed. He was every bit as much of a mechanic as he was an engineer, and even in the twenty-third century, he had worked on commercial boat engines, both as a lad of fifteen through eighteen, and then as a moonlighting job while out on disability. Or later, just as a *hobby* during the *Enterprise's* refits. He knew how to fabricate parts in a machine shop after backwards engineering them, or even redesigning them altogether; he could weld, too. And he could lead and teach, if it came to it.

Of the five of them, Scotty was -- by quite a number of kilometers -- the best suited to build a good, comfortable life very quickly in this era.

It was just a wee bit ironic that he was also the one least interested in continuing to live one, too.

But once he'd landed here, in the deeply competitive commercial fishing port of New Bedford, it had taken him no time to make a name for himself. He just followed the sound of cursing, clanging and desperation, freelanced for a week and a half -- earning enough to feed and lodge himself and a bit more besides -- and by then, everyone knew his name.

And *everyone* wanted to hire him.

There had been an out and out bidding war between vessel owners for his permanent employment -- not only for their sake, but to deny him to the competition -- and so Scotty had spent some time letting the offers come in, and all the while he pressed a smile for people that he didn't quite feel, shook a hell of a lot of hands, got mistaken for Canadian plenty of times, ached into his soul for the Massachusetts accents surrounding him -- not so far different from the Maine accent -- and eventually found himself sleeping in Dan Howland's guest room.

Howland had given him the best offer -- not the highest, but the most well-rounded, an hourly wage plus a percentage per catch for every vessel Howland owned -- and threw in the use of his pickup truck until Scotty could get his own car or truck. And even if his wasn't the highest offer, it was still a hell of a lot higher than Scotty had made working at the garage in New York.

More, for that matter, than all five of them had been able to bring in combined. Twice over.

He'd come here in January and by the end of the month, he had a job, a place to rest his head and a vehicle to use. By the time winter turned to spring, he had enough to rent a nice little place in Fairhaven, which was helped along by Howland's connections, deep and many.

By June, Scotty had a fine -- if maybe impractical -- car and had bought that old pickup off of Howland, too, for when he wanted something more utilitarian than a '72 Stingray. Then he put to sea for almost two months, while Howland's fleet tried to race the inevitability of a struggling fishery, transferring from vessel to vessel without even coming in to port, occasionally throwing his hand in on setting out and

hauling in, at least when he wasn't taking his turn at the helm or keeping the engines and ice makers running.

(It had been about the hardest physical labor he'd ever performed, and that was taking into account that Scotty already *worked*, even in his own time. He had all of a week to get past the seasickness, regain his sealegs and rest up, and then he barely had time to stop, sleep, eat or anything else, he was so busy. But he also made a very handsome five figures for it, and hadn't once thought of dying while out there.)

He was *still* a little unsteady on land as yet, used to the constant motion of the sea; even as he headed into the office, he was trying to compensate for a rolling deck he wasn't on and ignoring the way it made his bad hip twinge. But he made it, picked up the phone with the rag and asked, "Hello?"

"Scotty," was the slightly rushed, southern accented reply. "Thank heavens. Can you come down to the city?"

McCoy. One of Scotty's eyebrows climbed a fraction, but he didn't hang up. "Why would I do that? I've got work, McCoy, I've been breakin' my back from before sunup, so whatever it is had better be more important than that."

He didn't know what kind of reply he expected, but it wasn't the one he got. "It's Spock," McCoy said, seriously. "He's sick and gettin' sicker, and I figured you'd better know."

All right, that was definitely more important.

Scotty glanced out at the boat he'd been working on, did some calculations, made a plan or three and then answered, "I'll be down tonight."

Spock was, without any doubt, the only reason Scotty wasn't some well-picked skeleton dug into the seabed in the Gulf of Maine right now.

Dan hadn't been thrilled with Scotty telling him he was going before the end of the work day, but while the man was hard and not a little mercenary in business, he was also fair and honest. The fleet was in good shape, absent the usual overhaul of tired parts and routine maintenance, and Scotty figured that they'd manage without him for a couple of days.

He lit out of Fairhaven in the pickup -- hell if he was gonna take a Corvette into the city to land in a chop shop -- and with enough clothing and cash to see him through the next couple to few days (and more yet to give to Spock), getting on I-95 southbound, at first driving into the sun then finally putting it over his right shoulder. He liked his odds of missing even the tail-end of rush hour, but he still drove with worry gnawing in his gut.

Out of all of them, he had only known James Kirk and Nyota Uhura for two years, and Leonard McCoy for one. By comparison, he and Spock had met sixteen years before that and had spent almost all of that time as shipmates. The only times they weren't were during refits and when Spock was on special assignment elsewhere.

And while they were both deeply private individuals, and had never really chosen to share that private space before, that much time could not pass without parts of their lives being braided together regardless.

Spock was the only one left aboard the *Enterprise* who had met Scotty's adopted brother. Scotty was the only one left aboard the *Enterprise* who knew of Spock's adopted sister; who knew the name of Michael Burnham and who had seen the aftermath of what losing her had done to Spock. They both had been -- would always be -- fiercely loyal to Chris Pike, and Pike had asked both of them to stay on for Kirk when they had otherwise been considering other paths.

They shared music sometimes. Fought alongside one another. Bled together, for that matter. Tried to help Pike together. They never became friends, but they were something more than colleagues, too.

So, it was Spock who had followed Scotty out into the cruel December night some months back. And despite how painful the Vulcan had to find it, the below-freezing temperatures, he had merely fallen into step. He didn't try to convince Scotty to go back, just kept pace.

Then again, Spock had also been hard done by. The whole situation was ugly in so many ways that there could be no winners, aside maybe Jim Kirk and Edith Keeler. Even though McCoy and Uhura both had acquiesced to Kirk, Scotty couldn't imagine their lives here would be easy.

But it so turned out that neither he, nor Spock, could do the deed themselves despite discussing it. Edith Keeler needed to die, their entire future depended on it, but by the time they were able to recreate duotronics and access the tricorder, the time had passed when she was supposed to.

And then, in another historical record, she was supposed to die towards the end of December instead, burned straight through with what could only be a phaser. And Kirk had decided then and there that he couldn't let that happen or do it himself. And he declared that he would protect her life with his own and with lethal force. And he had put it to them to decide whether to stay or not, as if they had anything of a *choice* in the matter.

Spock and Scotty had both refused to give into that farce. And even though it got them suspicious looks from Kirk and McCoy -- Nyota was a class-act regardless, clearly empathizing even as she had her own choices to live with, given she had bonded with Edith herself -- the two of them had gone outside and tried to figure out what they could *do*.

No one wanted the woman dead. Edith was-- sweet. Generous and driven by compassion. A bit of a zealot, but her heart was good. Scotty

thought it was a damn bad idea for Kirk to get involved with her when they needed to be getting home, but he had no trouble seeing how the captain had done so. He'd not been much younger himself when he'd gotten involved with Fio Langley, despite regulations, so he knew that the heart didn't always pause for common sense.

Admittedly, it would have only been their careers if he and Fio had been caught. Not the *entire damned future*. But-- none of them had known that then. So, aside from wishing Kirk would focus more on getting them home and less on his lady love, Scotty didn't figure it would be *that* bad. Not unless Kirk got her pregnant, anyway.

And so, when it still looked like they would get to go home, Scotty had endured being stuck in far too small a space with far too many people, clinging with both hands to the idea that they were working towards that goal. But when the weather was even barely warm enough and he wasn't working or trying to reinvent technology with Spock, he spent a hell of a lot of time outside. He wouldn't have been able to stay sane in that pressure cooker if he hadn't had an escape option.

He might've picked up overtime, but working without papers meant that the garage he was working out of wouldn't have to pay it, so instead he spent that time walking or riding the bus (even he wasn't desperate enough to chance the subway), sometimes not bothering to come back for a night or two, relying mostly on his wits and prior experience to get him through it.

(Beyond his mechanical aptitude giving him an important advantage, he was reasonably sure he was the only one of them who'd ever dozed under a bridge or in a doorway. Or woven expertly through a commercial kitchen, with the easy grace of practice, to steal some dinner before anyone noticed he wasn't supposed to be there.)

Scotty had no qualms about exercising those very, very old skills, nor with playing the lost Scottish tourist in Manhattan long enough for someone in business clothes to pity him and pay his cab fare for somewhere else. He didn't thieve from individuals, he certainly didn't hurt anyone, but he was an old hand at surviving. This city was *mean* in many ways, far meaner than any in the future, and there were a few times he felt he was maybe taking too many risks with his own life, but given the choice between that and being crammed into that apartment, it was an easy choice to keep taking them.)

So, he'd endured and did his part to keep them sheltered, fed and clothed; he and Spock eventually managed to arrange identification for them all -- not strictly legally -- and then right after that they'd reinvented duotronics, and then--

Spock had walked with him to the garage he'd been working at on that Friday night in December; it was from there that Scotty intended to steal the yellow Mustang that his boss stored for the winter in one of the bays and leave the city.

Leave a few other things, too.

Scotty was angry and bitter and his hand was throbbing from where he'd punched Kirk twice in the mouth, breaking a finger but also claiming at least half a tooth and maybe more, and since he couldn't make himself kill a kind woman who had been condemned by history, not even to save his future, not even to save his *family*, he had no intentions of sticking around any longer.

The plan was simple: Take the Mustang. The garage was closed for the long weekend and through Christmas, too, so that car wasn't gonna be missed until Tuesday, and by then, it wasn't gonna matter.

Find a good station on the radio and crank it up. Put the pedal to the floor, head north.

*What seas what shores what gray rocks and what islands--*

Go home in the only way that he had left.

"The traditional farewell of Vulcan wouldn't be appropriate here," Spock had said, quietly, speaking for the first time since they had left that miserable apartment. Bundled up in a heavy coat that Edith had gotten for him, he still looked threadbare in the artificial lights of the city. "To wish you peace and long life. But I regret I couldn't give that to you; either the farewell or the fact of it."

By now, the incandescent fury that had Scotty landing on Kirk and rearranging some teeth had burned down to a sorry flicker and a grief so deep that there was no fathoming the bottom of it. So long as he'd thought he'd be able to go home, he could have faced anything, he was sure; could have survived here or anywhere else while chasing that hope. And if not, if he would have died chasing it, then he would have at least had the belief that the people he loved would be able to continue without him.

Now, they were ghosts of some nonexistent future. And here he was, still alive.

He dragged a shuddering breath in through his teeth. For Spock's words; the kindness of them. And the sorrow in them.

They'd been living pressed back-to-back and shoulder to shoulder almost literally since landing here; had worked diligently, and desperately, trying to find their way back to where they were supposed to be. To find what needed repaired so that they might repair it; to write all they had lived and loved and fought for back into existence.

And they had failed. Because they couldn't make themselves into something they weren't, they had failed.

"I'm sorry that I couldn't return it to ye," Scotty said, once he was sure he could do so without his voice breaking on him.

Spock hummed quietly, then asked, "You have a taste for Eliot, correct?"

The sideways nature of the question had caught Scotty off guard -- and mercifully enough paused the ache in his throat and behind his eyes -- and he'd looked over, eyebrows furrowed. "Aye." Spock knew that; he'd admired the hand-bound book of T. S. Eliot's poetry that Scotty had been given for his fortieth birthday, having stopped by his office and having spotted it there.

But there must have been some further purpose to the question. With Spock, there always was.

"A gift from your brother," Spock agreed, clearly meaning the love of the poetry and not the physical book, though both were gifts from the same man; he didn't look over himself, but went on to quote:

*"Where is the end of them, the fishermen sailing  
Into the wind's tail, where the fog cowers?  
We cannot think of a time that is oceanless  
Or of an ocean not littered with wastage  
Or of a future that is not liable  
Like the past, to have no destination.*

*"We have to think of them as forever bailing,  
Setting and hauling, while the North East lowers  
Over shallow banks unchanging and erosionless  
Or drawing their money, drying sails at dockage;  
Not as making a trip that will be unpayable  
For a haul that will not bear examination.*

"I hope you'll forgive me if I choose to keep your memory in such a fashion," Spock added, then turned towards him and offered his hand. "Forever bailing, setting and hauling, while the North East lowers over shallow banks, unchanged."

It wasn't strictly happy -- the Four Quartets were, in general, deeply introspective stuff -- but the thought of at least one person picturing him as somewhere alive and as being unwilling to entertain the truth was more than Scotty would have ever asked for, and the words resonated even down into that bottomless well of grief.

He reached out and took Spock's hand; not quite a shake. The dry heat of Vulcan reflected between their hands, in the press of skin. "It was an honor, Mister Spock," Scotty said, lifting his chin a little.

Spock had held on briefly harder; barely, a subtle gesture, but clear as bell nonetheless. "Goodbye, Mister Scott."

He didn't look back as he walked away.

Scotty had stood there for-- he couldn't have guessed how long after. Still, but for the tears, and those only a bare fraction of the grief. But he didn't go into the garage to get that Mustang, as the night spun past; for whatever reason, he kept coming back to the realization that once he was gone, Spock would be alone. If not necessarily literally, then still in a real and profound way. And that Scotty had some small chance to do something about it.

Eventually, as the first gray light started to crack the darkness of night, he had mopped his face off on his cuff, made the first of many repeating choices to live through the day, and then turned and walked in the opposite direction than Spock had gone in.

He was on a Greyhound northbound by afternoon with nothing but two twenties and some change in his pocket, the clothes on his back and no great desire to be alive, but with a choice to remain so for now anyway. And he worked the first few weeks of a new year with a splinted finger.

Scotty hadn't gone back to the city since. But once he'd landed somewhere stable, he'd called the apartment and was incredibly grateful Nyota had answered the phone; he gave Spock the number to Howland's house and had found himself smiling, halfway, for how the Vulcan seemed absolutely unsurprised to hear he was alive.

It was the first smile Scotty had actually felt since-- probably sometime around October, maybe? And he didn't take that for granted.

"Anyway, go to the local Western Union office to ye, I've sent ye somethin' to get by on," Scotty had said, because he knew how hard Spock found even *eating* in this time to be, especially in the dead of winter, especially in a food desert like he'd been stuck in. "And I'll call again in a week, 'bout the same time, though ye can leave me a message here if ye need to get ahold o' me sooner."

And so, up until he put out to sea, that was how it had gone. He had made sure to send extra before he went out and had been planning on sending enough for Spock to get his own place within a few more days, but now instead would be bringing himself.

Whatever that would ultimately mean.

"You look good," McCoy said, after they stood on either side of the doorframe eying one another warily. He stepped aside and gestured Scotty in, then closed the door after he was.

"Aye, thanks," Scotty answered dismissively, looking around. Even without him there to take up space, even without his and Spock's work, the place felt cramped and lousy.

There was no evidence of Kirk, either. So, either he had moved out or he was wise enough to be elsewhere right now.

Scotty was just about to round on McCoy and ask where Spock was when Nyota came out of the bathroom; despite every complicated,

uncomfortable feeling being here brought him, the sound of joy she made on seeing him had him smiling.

They hadn't been close, but he'd done his best to watch out for her, and she had done the same; had been the one to send him out on errands more than a few times because she had noticed how oppressive being there was for him. They had spent part of the summer climbing out onto the roof at night, too, trying to shake off the awful heat of the day and maybe find space to breathe; he had listened to her stories about growing up, and to the tales of her lost family, and even occasionally shared one of his own, albeit only something from the *Enterprise*.

So it was an easy thing to hug her back when she wrapped her arms around him, and not-easy but welcomed when she reached up to touch his face, smiling brightly. "You look wonderful," she said, and then laughed when he took her hand and kissed the back of it gallantly.

"I tried to say somethin' like that and he blew me off like I was a cockroach sittin' on his shoulder," McCoy grumbled, though without any of the bite he was sometimes capable of.

"Simple answer, McCoy: She's a far sight prettier and I like her better," Scotty handed back, keeping the tone just light enough, though he did happen to mean it.

He didn't hate McCoy, but he didn't forgive the man suggesting that Christmas was a perfect time for Kirk to propose to Edith, while he and Spock tried to figure out how to save all their futures and had to come to the devastating conclusion that they didn't have it in them.

Nyota knew it, too; her face softened and she gave his hand a squeeze before letting go, stepping in artfully and steering the line of conversation to something less like a minefield. "Some of your 'r's' have gone missing since the last time we talked, Mister."

"Ayuh, hazards o' bein' surrounded by Massholes." Scotty had not actually been aware of it, but he wasn't too surprised. He'd spent almost twenty years with his shore address in Maine, and inevitably sounded like it whenever he'd been ashore there long enough; he was never able to entirely shake off Aberdeen and defaulted back towards it when he was deployed, but he'd been in New England long enough this time that *hazards* had come out as *hazahds* just now.

All linguistics aside, though, he hadn't come down for a casual get together. "How's Spock?" he asked, addressing them both.

McCoy nodded towards the bedroom he used to timeshare with Nyota. "In there. He hasn't eaten in three days, and the last time I tried to ask if he wanted help, he threw the bedside lamp at me."

Scotty's eyebrows made for skyward at that; he looked back at Nyota for clarification, and she nodded. Then she took his hand again and gave him a tug towards the other side of the living room, lowering her voice to keep it between them. "Given my studies of the Vulcan language, I-- think I might know what's happening to him. I can't confirm that, Vulcans are very private about it, but-- I'm afraid for his life right now, Scotty."

Scotty had bent his head to listen, but that had him looking towards that door for a long moment, more unprepared than he might have expected for the jolt of *fear* he felt on Spock's behalf at that. Then he looked back at Nyota, keeping his own voice similarly low. "Can ye tell me anything else, lass? Can we help him?"

"I-- shouldn't. That should be his to tell," she said, gently. "And I did offer to help, but he refused. Strained, but kindly. I don't know if you'll have more luck talking with him, but I hope so."

"Aye. I can try, anyway." He offered her the best reassuring look he could drum up, then went over there and gave a light knock on the door. "Mister Spock?"

The answer wasn't immediate, but it came anyway, though it was hoarse-sounding when it did. "Come in."

That bedroom had the misfortune of catching the afternoon and evening sun. A kind thing in winter, but less so in summer. But even now, after dark, the heat and humidity still lingered and the single open window gave little relief, especially with the door closed, allowing no real airflow.

Scotty had persisted in finding a rental with central air, despite the moderating sea breeze in Fairhaven, because the last summer in this apartment had about killed him. At least after he was done baking all day, he could sleep cool at night.

He didn't comment on it, though, or the darkness. There was an overhead light, but he made no move to turn it on, just put half his ass on the window sill. "McCoy called me, told me ye were sick."

"In a manner of speaking," Spock answered. Sitting on the bed, he was little more than a shadow; one rough around the edges. His silhouette put Scotty in mind of the construction paper creations that Dan Howland's grandbabies decorated his refrigerator with. "I would not have called you. Did you miss work?"

"Only half an afternoon," Scotty said, resting his shoulder to the window frame. "Nothin' I'm worried for. And Miss Uhura seems to think yer life might be in danger, which is plenty enough reason for me to drive down. Is it?"

They had gotten very good, over the years, at being frank with one another. Even though Spock sometimes grew frustrated with Scotty's more metaphorical language use, and even though Scotty sometimes had to remind himself that Spock's nitpicking wasn't intended to cause hurt feelings, they were plenty capable of cutting through any bullshit.

If still both rather guarded by nature, even then.

"As things stand, yes," Spock answered, a more notable irritation coloring his voice. "It's not a sickness; not one as McCoy would understand it, despite its potential to be fatal. But I am a kind of-- *unwell*."

"Is it the kind of *unwell* that somethin' can be done about?" Scotty asked back, trying to grasp the problem enough to offer a solution.

"Nothing I'm willing to ask of anyone." Spock made a short motion in the dark; not an attack, maybe a gesture. His voice was sharp, though, as he said, "This is Vulcan business, engineer. Not yours."

The words were snappish enough to get Scotty to cross his arms, but even then, he knew better than to take it personally.

Spock must have realized how that had come across, though, and added, "Your help these past months has made my life considerably more bearable, Mister Scott. However, this is not something a more suitable diet and better clothing can fix."

"We reinvented duotronics with bloody-mindedness and parts out of a Tandy 3000, Mister Spock," Scotty pointed out, dryly. "I can't believe we'd fail to solve this, too."

There was a long stretch of quiet that fell there, though Scotty could all but sense the Vulcan chewing up real estate in his own mind, even half across the room. So, he just let it be quiet and rested his head against the heat cracked paint of the windowpane, closing his eyes, giving Spock the space to make some decisions.

It might have been twenty minutes before Spock spoke again, long enough that Scotty had half-dozed there, the heat making him feel lethargic now that he was sitting still long enough for it to work on him.

"I am-- betrothed," Spock said, pulling Scotty back to the room from whatever sweltering half-dream. "That's the closest human term for it; a marriage contract and a limited bond was formed between myself and my intended when we were children, so that when we reached the appropriate age and sexual maturity, we would be drawn together."

His voice was still rough, but where before it sounded lined with irritation, now it turned to something more like his familiar tones.

"Being only half-Vulcan, it was a possibility that I would never experience this-- mating drive," Spock said, tone shading into some manner of vague disgust briefly. "However-- now I have, and obviously I am unable to return to Vulcan to consummate the marriage bond."

Scotty didn't know all that much about Vulcan, though his brother did, having spent two years studying there and still having at least one friend kept from that time. But he could guess pretty quickly why Spock sounded so-- unhappy about it. If it was a strong enough surge of feeling that it had him chucking lamps at McCoy, it would have to be distressing for a being whose self-control was central to his existence to lose it in that fashion.

"And-- ye'll get sicker because o' that?"

"Yes."

"And it has to be with yer betrothed."

"No."

Scotty's eyebrow went up there, as he tried to sort all of the puzzle pieces out and form them into a picture he could understand. "Help me grasp this: ye need to consummate a bond, but the person ye're supposed to consummate it with won't be born for a couple centuries--"

"--the bond is only a direction for the drive to mate to point in," Spock said, snappish again, though not terribly much. "The drive would exist independent of the bond. But as my intended is not here, nor indeed any Vulcan, and I refuse to ask such a thing from anyone else, I am at the mercy of it."

That did a bit more to explain it. Scotty nodded along, letting the irritable tone roll off his back. "Aye, I'm gettin' it. But Nyota said that she offered to help ye. Is that-- not somethin' ye're willin' to do? Or would it not work with a human?"

"Her offer was kind, but not one I'm willing to take." Spock sounded a little like he was having to dumb things down, which Scotty figured-- fair enough, he was an engineer, not an expert on cultures. "It's possible with a human," Spock continued. "My mother is with my father when he is subsumed by the drive. But it will never leave either side *unchanged*. That's why Vulcans put those bonds into place, to hopefully direct us to a future spouse. There is nothing *casual* about *pon farr*. It often leads to a permanent, heightened awareness of another living person and a tendency towards a permanent relationship. The intimacy of it leaves no room for privacy. And beyond that, it's physically, mentally and emotionally taxing even for Vulcans, let alone what it would be for a human."

McCoy would probably have sniped at Spock about him having no emotions; Scotty wouldn't cheapen either of them by doing the same. Instead, he ticked over the dilemma at hand, pausing in his thoughts only to ask, plainly but gently, "Do ye want to continue living, Mister Spock? Ye'll get no judgment for me, mind, whatever yer answer."

Spock, of course, gave the question all of the time it probably needed, then said, "Sometimes, I don't believe that I do. But on the greater part-- yes. I have been seeking a way to find and contact the Vulcan observers I know are stationed here on Earth at this time. They may even have answers for our future that we don't. They may have a way to *save* our future. I can't do that if I'm dead."

Scotty knew better than to give into any glimmers of hope there himself. For him, every single day had to start with a question about whether he intended to see the end of it, and what it would take to accomplish that. But it touched him that Spock could still reach for that; this world wasn't an easy one to live in for any of them, but least of all for Spock.

So, Scotty let it tick over for awhile; when he spoke again, it was considered:

"I've thought often about those stanzas ye quoted me, last December. They might well have saved my life, too." He chewed on it for another moment, then went on, "There's another part that follows onto that, too, I've had to remind myself of since:

"Fare forward.  
"O voyagers, O seamen,  
"You who came to port, and you whose bodies  
"Will suffer the trial and judgment of the sea,  
"Or whatever event, this is your real destination.'  
"So Krishna, as when he admonished Arjuna  
"On the field of battle.  
"Not fare well,  
"But fare forward, voyagers."

It was the continuing dialogue of an internal debate about the nature of change; of forward momentum. Scotty didn't know that he understood it even now, but he thought he could grasp enough of it to appreciate the sentiment conveyed in 'not fare well, but fare forward.' There was more than one way to take 'fare well', there, too -- both in the terms of *goodbye* and literal *wellness*, and that ambiguity also appealed to him.

Both resonated with him, then and now: Spock's desire to remember him unchanged, and his own willingness to acknowledge, for Spock, that life could not remain such, for as long as it lasted.

"Anyway-- you want to live. And ye need someone to go through this with ye." Scotty nodded, half to himself, half to Spock. "So," he asked, "how 'bout I do?"



## Chapter 2

Spock felt no sorrow, leaving that apartment in New York.

By the time they drove away, it was deep into the night, but the heat radiated off of the hard urban landscape, left over from the stark glare of the late summer sun. Still, despite the occasional siren, the streets were quieter and easier to navigate; it was as close to peaceful as it could ever be, and eventually they had managed to work their way out of the city and out of the suburbs, the night air cooling notably as they crossed into Connecticut and drove further north.

It was the first time Spock had been out of the boroughs of New York since arriving in this time; with all of his emotions floating on the surface of his consciousness like a mat of seaweed, he couldn't stifle the sigh of relief when they finally reached a stretch of interstate hemmed in by trees instead of concrete.

The sound was taken away by the open driver's side window; thankfully, he didn't have to explain it. Though, in truth, he likely would not have had to anyway.

New York had been his home -- in a loose and poor sense of the word -- for well over a year, but only for an immediate lack of better options. He had been able to bundle up in winter and spend time outside, unpleasant as the temperatures were for him, but it took fairly time-consuming measures to cover the green cast of his skin and the tips of his ears, so trips out during warmer weather were often short and rarely during the day. Beyond that, despite his faked identification and credentials, his only contribution to their shared dependency was to draw a limited wage from Edith's nonprofit by helping her write grant proposals.

Queens was not really a place for a Vulcan scientist, though he tried to help where he could.

The decision to go north with Scott was not difficult to make. Spock had not yet committed to anything more than a chance to get out of the city and the offering of a private space to make some choices -- "I'm usually out for work before it's even mornin' twilight, so sleepin' on the couch won't bother me." -- but even in the turbulent discomfort of hair-trigger emotions, he was grateful for it.

He would not have called Scott, no, but there was relief to be found in the knowledge that whatever he ultimately chose, he would not have to live with it, or die with it, in that apartment.

The man in question -- and at the heart of several questions -- was mostly focused on the road, left arm resting on the open window frame, steering with the other, thumb tapping the wheel with the rhythm of the song playing on the radio. His sunglasses were in a soft case on the dash; without them on the top of his head, the wind from the window buffeted his hair freely.

He had helped Spock carry everything downstairs and had secured it in the bed of the rusty, blue-over-silver pickup, taking advantage of the rope and tarp he had in the scarred up bedbox; unsurprisingly, he had been quick and efficient about it.

Spock had said his own goodbyes then, and had listened as Scott did the same right after, struggling with the surge of emotion that accompanied both of those things. It would be the last time Spock would ever see that side-street in Queens, though he didn't know that then.

"Take care of him," Nyota had said, softly, both arms wrapped tight around the engineer, her tears in her voice.

"I'll try, lass," Scott had answered, with his characteristic honesty.

"And let him take care of you, too," she had added, and to that, there had been no reply.

Before they parted, Scott reiterated an invitation for her to call him, should she ever want out of the city; notably, he did not extend the same to McCoy. And while McCoy had reeled himself back in and had been considerably more kind since that night in December when Scott left, Spock didn't feel he would miss the doctor. Certainly not the way he would miss Nyota, who spoke with him in his own language often and who had maintained a determined optimism even in the face of a daunting existence where her very skin still marked her as a target for discrimination and potential violence.

As Spock contemplated all of that -- Nyota, McCoy, Scott's lack of a response to the suggestion he allow Spock to reciprocate care -- Scott glanced over and caught him watching. "I don't honestly have much in," he said, apologetically. "I mean, I've got some tinned veg and some vegetable soup, but I'm usually only home to shower and sleep, so if ye have any requests--?"

Right now, Spock had no desire to eat; he wouldn't until the blood fever was past, if he survived that long. But for the sake of a response, he roused himself out of his inward facing thoughts. "I may," he said, frustrated deeply with the struggle of speech.

"There's a pen in the glove box." Scott gestured over to it. "Should also be an old phone bill or two, too, ye can just write whatever ye need on the back and I'll run out, get it for ye when the shops open." Then he hesitated for a moment, before asking, "If that works, Mister Spock? I mean--"

There had not been much discussion beyond Scott's offer, back in the apartment. Spock's first, kneejerk instinct was to reject it, feeling that there was no way that Scott could realize what he was volunteering for, but even with the heat singing in his nerves and licking like flames at the corners of his mind, some other and not insignificant part of himself urged *agreement*, which-- was unexpected.

He did want to live, but that could not account for all of it.

"I am not in immediate danger," he said; indeed, if he *did* take Scott up on that offer, he would instead become the immediate danger, after a fashion. "I suggest you take us to your house; while you're sleeping, I will make a list."

He half expected an argument, but after a long moment, Scott answered, "All right. But if ye need me to run and get ye somethin' and I'm not up, will ye get me up?"

"If I require something more important than your resting, I shall." Spock tucked his arms tighter around himself, against the heat stoked inside of his skin, intent on resisting it as long as possible. "However, now might be an appropriate time to discard the honorifics."

That got a little huff of a laugh; Spock didn't examine his own tickle of pleasure at provoking it. "Just Spock, then?" Scott asked. "Ye might have to put up with my forgettin' a few times, but I can try."

*You won't forget*, Spock thought, though immediately chastised himself internally for it. He had not agreed to anything yet. "Your preferred address?"

"Scott, Scotty," Scott answered, with a shrug, quirking his eyebrows. "Same as it's been since I was a teenager."

"Not Montgomery?" Spock asked, the curiosity a welcome reprieve from what was going on inside of him. Outside, there was no moon and only the occasional artificial light when they passed some manner of populated area; in the truck, only the dash lights offered a scant illumination. At least the conversation was something *other*.

"No. Well, to my uncles, aye, to my sister, to my niece and maybe someday to my nephew on that side o' the world, but not really to anyone else. And I dinna prefer it, anyway. I've gone by Scott since I was sixteen; my squadmates in Basic tagged me with Scotty when I was eighteen, and I haven't really looked back since."

Then something clearly occurred to him, because Scott shook his head and heaved out a tired-sounding sigh. "But-- I'm not Montgomery even to them, now, either. Nor anyone."

A reminder of their losses. Spock hummed back a rough note of acknowledgment and commiseration; rare was the day he didn't think of his mother and father. Even for as long as it had been since he had spoken with his father, the realization that he now never would -- never *could* -- caught against ill-healed wounds left over from his too-short goodbye with Michael. And even though he had never stopped communicating with his mother, the knowledge that he never would again was-- difficult to live with.

Not because she had aged to a gentle death, the kindest possible end for a remarkable woman. But because a man here, their captain, fell in love with another remarkable woman and could not make himself let history play out as it must, and so sacrificed the future.

Sometimes it occurred to Spock that he and Scott were just as culpable, being unable to pull the trigger themselves, but perhaps if he was able to contact the Vulcans he knew to be on Earth in this time--

He discarded that thought before he could go any further into it. He had been constructing a subspace communicator from their tricorder, taking care not to render the tricorder unsalvageable, but many of the components needed to be manufactured by hand from difficult to obtain materials. And while Spock was more than equal to the task, the expense proved to be a hurdle. At least part of the money Scott sent him had been dedicated to that project, but even that could only stretch so far.

And all of that would be a moot point if he was consumed by the chemical imbalance making his existence especially unpleasant right now.

It was difficult trying to look at Scott as a potential mate; still, it was not as difficult as it would have been had Spock not already wondered in the past if there was something to be gained by seducing the engineer, back when they were both over a decade younger. And he would not have wondered that if he hadn't already found the man aesthetically pleasing and intellectually stimulating even before that; he remembered with the clarity of a Vulcan their first brush past one another, though he doubted Scott did.

But it was on the shuttle to board the *Enterprise* for their first assignment with her; Spock had kept mostly to himself, as was his tendency, and had watched Scott flitting around between the viewports, wide-eyed, gazing at the ship they were both assigned to in-- perhaps awe, perhaps wonder. Perhaps something deeper.

There were a number of future crewmates on that shuttle; only one had stood out to Spock.

Scott had weathered notably well since that first encounter, almost two decades back, but the stress of the summer and fall of the prior year had whittled him down sharp and withdrawn -- "Like a coyote," McCoy had said once, "'bout as friendly, too." -- and getting out from under it had apparently allowed him to bounce back since the last time Spock had seen him in December. His efforts in New Bedford had left him sun-touched and toned across the shoulders; even if Spock had not been contemplating him as a potential mate, he would have noted the improvement.

It was difficult, but no, not anywhere as difficult as it could -- perhaps *should* -- have been.

"I have been attempting to build a subspace communicator using components of the tricorder," he finally said, as something of a distraction for them both to latch onto; him from the coursing heat in his blood and the potential of the man driving to alleviate it, Scott from thoughts of his lost kin. "I believe, should I do that, I will be able to signal the observers stationed here."

The words served exactly the purpose he intended them to; Scott shot an intrigued look over at him, eyebrows up. "Aye? Thinkin' o' usin' the data storage crystal as a subspace resonance tuner, o' sorts?"

Spock hummed an affirmative, then said, "The tricorder's instrumentation and controls are sufficient to find the low-band subspace frequency the Vulcans would be using, but its power source is insufficient and my ability to regulate something stronger in a compatible manner requires rare earth minerals and delicate equipment that is-- difficult to acquire in this time."

"Difficult, maybe, but not impossible," Scott said, then grinned a little. "I was wonderin' what was in that box. It had the weight o' potential."

Spock raised his eyebrow, pouncing on the opening, and asked loftily, "And what, exactly, is the measured weight of potential? Is it quantifiable? I insist upon numbers, engineer, if you insist upon using such figurative language."

He ignored his own increase in pleasure at the laugh he earned for that.

*Barely.*

The rest of the ride back to Fairhaven was-- kind. In a word.

Not easy, but kind.

They batted ideas back and forth across the cab of the pickup, in terms of the subspace communications project, but the conversation ranged beyond that, too; once they had gotten started, they fell into a rhythm that they had refined over the past seventeen years of working together. Be it on recreating music from hand-written notes or studying potentially ground-breaking manipulations of the warp field.

It was a language that was both direct and sideways, including a gentle deference to one another's inherently private natures, and a more straight-forward challenge to each other's professional blind spots. And if the underlying circumstances had changed, the work they had done to build the language they relied upon now was intact even then.

But oddly, it was not the discussion on subspace communications which turned into the most enjoyable part of the drive for Spock.

It was during a relatively comfortable lull in the conversation, the gray light of dawn rising as they got closer to their destination -- having had to pause for fuel, though only once, thanks to the pickup's dual fuel tanks -- that Scott had absently sang along with the radio to one of the songs even Spock had heard played recently.

It had been music which had originally tipped Spock from aesthetic appreciation of the man to an attraction notable enough to contemplate acting on it; the first instance was when he was delivering the composition he himself had put together from sheet music Scott had sourced from a writer's museum and Scott answered the door in his shorts and socks and a t-shirt.

His aesthetic appeal was not harmed in the least by him wearing fewer clothes.

The cementing of it, though, was getting the finished song back a couple of weeks later: In addition to being pleasing to the eye, Scott could *sing*. Hearing his singing voice added to the music Spock had painstakingly put together had been a genuine enough pleasure that Spock had spent some time after wondering if seducing the engineer would be feasible.

His ultimate conclusion was a reluctant acknowledgment that it would be a worthy effort -- a lover who was an intellectual partner, enjoyable to look at, possessed of a few unexpected talents, present to share a life with -- but that the potential complications were too high to pursue it anyway.

So, Spock had set aside the thought and from there on out kept Scott in mind as a colleague only, though he *did* manage to find and gift Scott the majority of a discography from a Scottish band that had been saved in the Observation Archives from Earth -- saved because it was sociologically relevant in the leadup to World War III, the lyricist and lead singer having committed suicide in 2018, and now given to another Scot two-hundred and forty years later -- and in turn eventually did get that duet he had been chasing, him playing his lute and Scott playing the bagpipes he had taught himself to play specifically because Spock had suggested it.

Now -- in 1990, many years before that relatively young singer would lose a battle with depression, but eight years after his music was given to his countryman -- Spock waited until the song on the radio ended before commenting, "Not your usual fare, but sang with your usual artistry."

Scott had started, apparently either having not realized he was being listened to, or perhaps even that he'd been singing, then flushed. "In my defense, Phil Collins gets surprisingly deep sometimes. But-- no, he's usually a wee bit too *easy listenin'* for my tastes."

Spock raised his eyebrow, unable and ultimately unwilling to stop the very corners of his mouth from tipping upwards in a smirk. "And that song?"

"Not very deep," Scott said, half-reluctantly; he was still red, but then he chuckled, "But ye have to admit, pretty catchy."

Spock did not *have* to admit any such thing.

(But he privately agreed.)

The delicate pinks and violets of dawn reminded Spock of ShiKahr in such an instantly visceral way that it took him several moments to identify the feeling as *longing*.

They arrived in Fairhaven, down adjacent to the Fort Phoenix State Reservation, just before sunrise. Spock had intended to help unload the pickup, but had instead been caught by the colors painting the sky, standing there longing for a city sixteen and a half lightyears away.

He had left there so long ago, and so thoroughly, that it came as a surprise that he was capable of feeling that way, now as removed as he was. But as the fresh salt breeze ruffled his hair and circulated deep into his lungs, it was a considerably more arid landscape that he found himself missing. His memory allowed him to recreate the city, a thin layer of the mind's eye over the current patchy grass and sandy ground and low trees.

He stayed long enough for the color to climb in intensity; from pink to scarlet, shades of orange, more akin to fire. Down the narrow, cracked, one-lane road that dead-ended on Buzzards Bay, the sounds of movement from other dwellings roused him from his homesickness and back into the present, here on Earth.

This world was also beautiful. Spock had found it so many times; his mother's childhood region in Washington State, Seattle and beyond. The beaches of Hawai'i. The shores of Aotearoa. The mountains and plateaus of Sichuan. Despite his choice to follow the Vulcan path in life, half of him had come from Earth; despite his green blood, the iron core of this world pulled him with the same gravity as it had all of his ancestors on his mother's side of the family.

"Feels almost indecent, payin' rent on bayfront property when I'm not really in much to appreciate it," Scott said, looking across the water with an expression Spock couldn't quite read. "There are cheaper places over in New Bedford, but..."

He trailed off there, then shook his head.

A glance to the bed of the pickup revealed that Scott had already unloaded it while Spock was lost in thought and the brightening day. A further look around revealed the two-seated car the pickup was parked next to; its body was in very debatable shape, but Spock would assume its mechanicals were sound, given the owner.

The Massachusetts license plate on the back read: SEA WLF

"Sea wolf? A reference to the novel?" Spock asked, cocking his head at it.

Scott huffed, though it didn't quite sound like humor. "Sort of. If not the most direct one." He glanced over at Spock; in the natural morning light, his tiredness was apparent. "Ye're welcome to stay out here, there's a deck out the other side where people'd only be able to really spy on ye from the water. Will ye wake me if ye need me?"

"I will. Rest well, in the meantime," Spock said, before turning back to the pickup truck, getting into the glove box so he might write that list as he had said he would.

It didn't fail to occur to Spock that, even with the evermore insistent tug of *pon farr*, he was better able to control himself here than he had been in New York. As if a certain type of pressure had been lifted, making it easier for him to focus his energy on maintaining something akin to internal discipline. It didn't last indefinitely, it couldn't, but it gave him a number of hours of calm.

Some of it was doubtless being away from that apartment, shifting venues to a place where the air smelled of brine and seaweed and not smog; where the cries of gulls and the water lapping at the shore was the ambient background noise, rather than sirens and traffic.

Where he could be outside, unfettered. He did indeed take the recommendation of the deck; it was as good a place as any to contemplate the list he was making.

The *implications* of the list.

It was a problem better suited for Schrödinger: Spock currently occupied something of a quantum superposition, if not literally (impossible given variables), then metaphorically. Psychologically. He didn't know if he would be alive to require some of the objects on the list. It also supposed that he would take Scott up on the offer, and he had not yet committed to that.

Therefore, as he wrote it, he was both alive and dead. Which might have been why it took hours to complete.

When he did finally go into the house, it was with the flames again singing against the insides of every blood vessel, a tingling heat and need that T'Pring, in their own time, would have sated. Would have been *obligated* to sate, unless she challenged him.

By then, the sun was overhead; the inside of the house, though, was cool enough that it felt like it *should* have offered him relief and yet did not.

Spock had no real opinions on the nature of the house or the décor aside an appreciation for its location; inside, there was a wood stove, a television. The couch, which Scott was occupying. There was no major delineation beyond a counter between the kitchen and living room. It was larger than the apartment in actual size, though it only had one bedroom, and that was upstairs.

He didn't know how long he stood there, just inside the door out to the deck, but it was long enough to catch himself tracing the line of Scott's back with his gaze, from wind-blown black hair down, and long enough to become aware of the shift in his own body and mind from a more generalized need to something that was starting to whisper, insistently, *mine*.

The possessiveness was unnerving. Even in its initial phases, it was so much more *present* than the required biology lessons and the study of

Vulcan physiology could convey. But despite his efforts to shove it back out of his mind, to silence it, to remind himself that nothing was guaranteed, it remained at the edges of his thoughts, curling them black.

Consuming.

*Mine.*

He was only slowing it down. And then only barely.

He looked down and forced his fist to unclench; the envelope the list was written on was still readable, thankfully. Then he pushed himself forward, giving Scott a light jostle from the ankle, where blue jeans kept their skin from touching. "It has been approximately six hours," he said, aware of the imprecision of the words, aware of the rough edge his voice had taken on again.

Scott jumped a little, turning away from the back of the couch to look at him drowsily. But whatever he must have seen on Spock's face caused his gaze to sharpen quickly, as he stilled there.

Alert. Watchful. Not afraid, though.

The well of affection Spock felt for him there did nothing to dissipate the heat, but it was wholly genuine; it was something that belonged to him, not to the *pon farr*. "I have your list," Spock said, offering the crumpled envelope over.

After another moment of that stillness, Scott pushed himself up and took the list, rubbing at his eyes for a moment before reading it over.

If he had any opinions about what was on it, he didn't reveal them; after reading over it once, then twice, he nodded and set the list aside to pull his boots back on. "All right. Shouldna take me more'n a couple hours." He looked up there, then, raising his eyebrows. "Will ye be all right until then?"

"I will." Spock kept reminding himself that he had not yet committed.

That he had not yet agreed. That the list was merely a possibility, not a certainty.

That he had no claim yet on Scott, and therefore he could not and *would* not reach out and physically keep the man there. That Spock would not give into the rapid drumbeat of *mine* against the insides of his ribs; that their long association -- whatever one might call it -- before this deserved a certain amount of consideration even in this.

Still, his fingers ached. His nerves burned.

And once the man was out the door and the sound of the pickup had gone, Spock dropped to a meditation pose and fought for every centimeter of his ability to reason against the rising inferno.

Later, with his control restored, mind cooled and body sated, he would be able to look back and realize that every step had been a choice, not just the final one. From telling Scott to come into the bedroom, to leaving New York, to the list, to standing in the kitchen as the thunder rumbled quietly outside on the horizon.

That he had been giving himself permission.

Clouds had rolled in; had darkened the sky and turned the bay outside from blue to slate-gray and green. The sea grasses past the yard bent, flashing pale gold; the air hummed, charged, both inside and out.

"Have ye decided, then?" Scott asked, standing with that same watchful stillness in the dim kitchen; Spock could recall many times when he had adopted the same stance. *Sharpness*; a state of being, perhaps, rather than a feeling. Or perhaps it was both.

Spock would find out from the inside out. If they were in accord.

"You will need to call off from work," he said, voice rough enough now that it felt like every word was scraping his throat on the way out.

"For how long?" Scott asked back.

"It varies, but I would not recommend less than six days."

Scott's eyebrows jumped briefly in surprise, one a fraction higher than the other, then a little hint of a dry grin crossed his mouth, though his gaze remained as alert as ever. "That in business days, Spock, or--?"

"Seven days, then," Spock said, stepping closer, the fire in his blood surging at that brief slide into humor. *Pleasure. Mine.* "An even week."

The phone call was brief; Scott claimed a family emergency that required a flight to Scotland. His boss clearly was not happy, given the tinny sound of grumbling, but agreed readily enough.

By the time he hung up, Spock had narrowed the distance between them to negligible; he knew, even as he did, that Scott was wholly aware of their relative positions, because his spine had straightened, stretched, and he drew himself up like potential energy a moment from becoming kinetic. When he hung the phone up, his hand lingered on it for a moment; by then, Spock was nearly close enough that even breathing more

deeply could bring them into contact.

Spock put his hand to the wall; hemmed Scott in between that and the end of the kitchen counter and his own body, able to clearly feel the human heat of the man radiating, reflecting.

And close enough to feel his own burn hotter in response.

A tableau, as thunder rolled across the sky.

“I will not have you as a war,” Spock murmured, bending his head, nearly speaking in Scott's ear; despite how close they were, he didn't completely block an escape, even if every last cell of him demanded he do. To close the gap. To take. “As ground to be conquered.”

Scott managed to turn and put his back to the wall, chin up, though it didn't buy him much room. “I wouldn't have volunteered if I thought that was how it was gonna go,” he said back; even without being inside of his mind, Spock knew that defiance was not intended to be contradictory to the statement, but a complement of it.

Spock hummed back an acknowledgment, low; he took his hand off the wall and skimmed the backs of his knuckles up the side of the Scott's neck, barely making contact. Skin against heated skin. Even just that sent a shiver up his own spine, the graze of mind to mind. Feeling, transmitted; thought, if still indistinct.

*Sharpness.* Both, then. A feeling, and a state of being. There was no other word for it.

His own *need* and *want* were transmitted back, only a fraction of those; enough to back away from, if needed. Even just as a fraction, though, Scott pulled in a quick, stuttered breath from it; getting to *feel* as well as *see* the shift in his expression was intoxicating.

Surprise. Still sharpness. Nervousness, too, now. Heat.

But still no fear.

“There will be no secret you would be able to keep from me. All of these masks you've so carefully woven; you will never again be able to face me with one successfully,” Spock said, quietly, hand drifting up until his thumb was pressed lightly to the dip under Scott's bottom lip, fingers framing his rough, unshaved jaw, barely there.

As hard as it was holding onto his own self-control, especially now in *contact*, he did for both their sakes. “I will be as gentle as I can be for as long as I can be, but the *plak tow* will set in. Withdrawing your consent will become difficult, if not impossible, when that happens.”

“I'm not fragile,” Scott said, certainly; some of Spock's words had his jaw knotting, his heart beating faster still, a frisson of *fight or flight*, but there was no hint of denial there, either.

Spock did not agree nor disagree; everyone was, or could be, where their pressure points rested, where the vulnerability of the heart met the reality of endurance. Human. Vulcan. In that, they were not so different. “I don't want to hurt you; any suffering I cause you will come back to me, but the blood fever is all-consuming and I have never experienced it before.”

Mental contact of this kind forced honesty to both sides; Spock's sincerity, even amidst the blaze growing by the minute, must have been clear enough. The sharpness faded, a heavy contemplation setting in for a long moment while they breathed in unison, despite the offset beats of their hearts.

“I saw a few whales, while I was out at sea,” Scott said at length, voice soft, eyes sliding closed; the depth of both his joy and grief at the memory echoed to the bottom of Spock's heart for a moment before he gently pushed Spock's hand away, perhaps the last request he would make for the privacy of his own thoughts. “They're all gone in our time, from the climate changin' or the wars or our short-sighted carelessness. I've never had a shore address more'n a few kilometers from salt water, but I never even thought o' the *lack*. And-- my brother, who loves the sea, who's talked about them, has never gotten to see a whale.”

There was a beat, and then he said, “Loved. Had never. And now would never.” Scott opened his eyes again, resting his head back against the wall; he bared his throat and looked at Spock steadily and finished, “I know what I'm offerin' and why. I hope that's answer enough.”

If what Spock felt there wasn't love, then it could not have been more than a single step from it.

He drew back only a little bit and offered his forefingers; offered to allow Scott to touch that feeling, at least for now on his terms.

And when Scott matched the gesture, and Spock let instinct start directing the weaving of the bond between them, it was with no less being offered back to him.

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