

Junkyard Dogs

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Junkyard Dogs

by [SLWalker](#)

Summary

(2237 - 2238) - Between fifteen and sixteen, Montgomery lands a job, finds and tests Perera's Theory, gets the idea to go into Starfleet and somehow manages to do all of that without ever learning who exactly the man is that he works for, or how they're connected.

Notes

This story uses plot points from the novel Kobayashi Maru -- namely, Perera's Theory and the Aberdeen Solution -- though some of the incidentals don't quite match up. Even so, you can count this as a prequel to the story 'In Theory' in that novel. And thanks to DaraOakwise for fleshing out some more of the Scott family dynamics, too.

Chapter 1

The irony of it all didn't escape him.

It wasn't as though the basic necessities weren't provided for every single Earth resident already; food, clothing, shelter, healthcare, education, all of those were available to anyone who wanted 'em. It had been almost a century since scarcity was an issue on Earth. And sure, after all the basic necessities were given, things had to be earned, but everyone was afforded the opportunity to do so.

Therefore, the fact that Jay could hear a thief mucking around his junkyard struck him as somehow ironic. About the only reason to even thief anymore was to sell stolen goods on the black market for hard currency, the kinds of currency used outside of Federation oversight, and most of the people doing that were chasing designer drugs or worse.

It was the third time in as many weeks that someone had been prowling around, and it was a good reminder that there would always be useless people in society, no matter how much opportunity was given or how well people were cared for.

This time, though, Jay was ready. He didn't bother with a stun baton; instead, he took a cricket bat he kept for ne'er do wells and the occasional belligerent customer. It was amazing, the spiritualizing effect of him hefting it in front of someone; thus far, Jay hadn't actually had to use it.

Whether that would be the case this time was still in the air. It was late, close to midnight, and there was a fairly steady mist coming down. After the first two break-ins, he'd decided to stick around the yard for a few nights to see if he couldn't catch the culprit in the act, and then soundly make the culprit regret being there. He hadn't found what had been taken yet, but there were only so many reasons someone would be prowling around a junkyard in the middle of the night.

His business partner had suggested it might not be that good of an idea to go bashing in the skulls of any lurkers, maybe just call the authorities. But Jay was a scrapper, and while he didn't plan on killing anyone tonight, he did plan on causing trouble for whoever decided to make themselves a nuisance.

The thief in question wasn't trying too hard to be sneaky. Jay could see the weak light from under one of the wrecked skimmers, and a pair of beat up old leather boots sticking out from under it. Probably swiping converters. Whoever was under there didn't hear him approach; admittedly, though, he wasn't exactly broadcasting his presence. After a few moments of watching, Jay quietly leaned his cricket bat against the wrecked bumper of another skimmer. He figured that he could grab it fast, if his fists weren't enough to do the trick.

He wasted no time; grabbed the boots sticking out and dragged the body wearing the boots out from under the skimmer. Not too hard a task, considering that the ground was muddy.

What he wasn't prepared for was the full, feral fury that body was capable of. Jay barely got the thief out from under the vehicle before there were fists flying rather erratically, and none of them his own. He didn't even have a chance to go for his bat; something snarled at him and hit him upside the head, not quite hard enough to ring his bell, and then tried to get free.

He shook off the hit, then jumped just as the thief was scrambling up, slamming the body back down in the mud. And he was just about to start swinging himself when he caught a look at the thief's face; muddy, barely illuminated, but still entirely recognizable.

He dropped his fist.

"Fuck."

"Should I call ahead to the hospital?" Winslow asked, without looking up from where he was finishing the accounting. While he could have done it tomorrow, he had figured that it might not be a bad idea to stick around a couple nights and make sure Jay didn't end up incarcerated for homicide.

"No," Jay said, and Winslow glanced up to see that Jay had the thief in hand.

He looked back down at his books as he processed what he saw, and then looked right back up again, squinting. And then one of his eyebrows rose slowly. "Well."

"Aye." Jay let go of the thief's upper arm -- which his hand just about wrapped around entirely -- and shook his head.

The thief was actually not much of a thief, at least on looks. Covered in mud, soaked, dressed in some fairly ratty clothes, he was quite a sight. A wiry slip of a boy; he looked just a little too lean, a little too thin. If not for the fact that Winslow knew who he was, the suggestion might have been to call the authorities and send him to detention.

But Winslow did know who he was, and didn't want to contemplate the grief that might cause all parties.

"Cait Scott's boy," Winslow said, after a moment, keeping the complications of speaking *that* particular name out of his mouth. "Not exactly the thief we were expecting."

"I'm not a thief!" the boy snapped, defiant, looking ready to run. "I didna take a thing!"

"What the hell were ye doin' here, then?" Jay snapped right back, glaring at the kid.

The boy didn't try to hold the look, just turned his head away and stared fixedly at a spot on the floor to his side. Sullen, but obviously upset.

"Should I get him a towel, at least?" Winslow asked, as much to break the tense silence as anything else.

"I'll get it." Jay was still scowling when he stalked out of the office, shoulders hunched up.

"So, what *were* you doing?" Winslow asked, after Jay was gone.

"Just fixin' things," the boy replied, barely audible, not looking up. He continued to glare at the floorboards, but he was working his jaw in a way that had nothing to do with anger.

"Fixing things-- in a junk yard." Well, that was an interesting hobby. Especially for a fifteen year old, in the middle of the night, in the rain. "Why?" He didn't get an answer, and prompted again, "Montgomery. Why?"

Either shocked by the fact that Winslow knew his name, or just responding to the tone of the question, the boy froze for a moment and then his shoulders slumped and he sighed, a resigned sound. "I saw that skimmer a few weeks ago, an' I knew I could fix it. There isna much wrong with it, mechanically speakin'."

Winslow nodded; his next question would have been why at this hour, alone in the rain, but then Jay stalked back out again.

"Here. Clean yerself up," he said, brusquely, holding the towel out. "I'm gonna call yer mother, and have her come and get ye."

"She's nae home," the boy said, backing up a step, any defiance in his expression draining away to be replaced with something that looked worryingly like fear. "I can walk back, it's nae that far."

"If yer family's still livin' where they always have, it's all the way across the city and then some." Apparently, Jay didn't want to hold the towel out any longer, and laid it across the back of a chair. Then he headed towards the comm.

Winslow watched between them for a moment; it was pretty obvious to him that Montgomery was about to take off out the door, and he was certain that Jay wouldn't be able to catch up fast enough. And there was no way he was about to try to go running after someone decades younger than he was. "Why don't you just take him home yourself? A little out of the way, but that saves a good deal of trouble on all sides."

Jay stared at him-- actually, both of them stared at him. Disbelief, wariness and anxiety. Winslow refused to allow himself to compare those expressions.

"It just saves some trouble," Winslow repeated. All the while thinking, *Likely, saving it for later.*

Jay worked his hands on the steering wheel of the skimmer, peering out into the mist and waiting for the traffic signal to change. The silence was suffocating; he reminded himself to have a word with Winslow when this was over. Actually, several words. Some of them very unsuitable for polite company.

Caitlyn Scott's son stared out the window, arms crossed tight, and Jay was half tempted just to let the kid out to walk the rest of the way, rain and cold or no. He wouldn't -- despite being a nuisance, the kid was still just a kid -- but this comparatively short ride was miserably uncomfortable. He was pretty sure the boy wouldn't mind being cut loose, either. It was obvious that the only reason he took the ride was to avoid having anyone called to come and pick him up, including maybe the authorities.

Jay tapped his fingers, then accelerated a little harder than he normally would have, only to be caught by the next signal. Middle of the bloody night, and it figured he had to hit every one. If he had a running sensor net in his skimmer, of course, the signals would scan his vehicle and change for him, but Jay didn't particularly like anyone being able to track his skimmer and record the movements. As such, he had to just wait for the damn timer.

"Fixin' a totaled skimmer," he said after a moment, more to break the silence than start a conversation. "In the middle o' the night."

"Aye, sir," the boy replied, and it didn't even qualify for a half-hearted tone. When it became perfectly apparent that he wasn't going to be allowed to get away, and that the least bad option out of several bad options was to be escorted home, any rebellion ended. He reminded Jay a little of one of those animals that just went lifeless when confronted with a threat, that kind of paralysis, but Jay didn't know why he thought of it.

Silence fell again. It was closer to one in the morning now; Jay had insisted the kid go back to the worker's area, get washed up, and put some non-muddy clothes on. No way he was going to let the seats of his vehicle get ruined, not now that his night already had been.

But cleaned up and wearing coveralls three sizes too big, any impressions of a thief had pretty much vanished. He favored his mother, the boy did, almost uncannily. Jay thought that was probably a good thing, but it didn't make this ride any less uncomfortable. At least the boy wasn't asking questions about how Jay and Winslow knew his mother. Jay didn't really want to contemplate how he'd answer those.

"When's the last time ye ate?" he asked, affecting nonchalance, but remembering how skinny the kid's arm was in his hand.

"School." There was a pause, then the boy added, "I'll make somethin' when I get home."

The rest of the drive went back to that suffocating silence. Jay didn't have anything else he wanted to ask, or to say, and was pretty sure the feeling was mutual. If not for vastly different reasons.

"This is fine," the boy said, a little rushed, just before Jay was ready to turn up the driveway, something of a plea in his voice. "I-- I mean--"

He didn't want anyone hearing a skimmer come up to the house. Jay stopped the vehicle; he didn't particularly care to see anyone up the drive anyway. "Ye can just send those coveralls back in the post."

"Aye, sir." And without wasting another moment, the kid all but jumped out of the skimmer and jogged up the drive.

Jay hesitated only a moment more, and then pulled away. It was a relief.

It had been a mutual decision. Maybe not an easy one, but when it was all weighed and measured out, it had seemed like the most sensible one at the time. Cait would stay with her often-absent husband, and Jay enlisted in the Merchant Marine, leaving the yard to Winslow to run for awhile, just so they couldn't go changing their minds about it.

Jay was in a foul mood when he came back to work the next morning. And the day after. Winslow wisely kept quiet; Jay thought about telling the old man exactly what he thought about the interference, but that would mean talking about the kid, and Jay just didn't want to. Best to forget the encounter. All choices had already been made, long ago; dwelling on those now would only make everyone miserable. Any contact with that family could only lead to bad things.

Sure, Jay coulda handled it better. No doubts about that. It wasn't really the boy's fault that Jay had some-- *past history* with his mother. In fact, Jay was pretty sure that kid was about the only innocent in the whole mess they got themselves into, long ago.

Cait had always been on the move; beautiful and effervescent, burning with a constant energy, chasing down the next achievement and the praise that went with it. She loved travel, loved cooking, loved being renowned for her talents; she'd been a wee bit quieter in secondary, when she and Jay had gotten together, more pensive and thoughtful and more in *need*, but it wasn't long after they graduated that she hit high gear and then just never came back down.

Jay supposed Robert, much as he didn't care for the man, was probably a better match for the restless-spirited Caitlyn. Robert wasn't home all that much either, and didn't try to keep her back to keep the home fires burning. Didn't ask her to take his name, didn't do anything except eventually ask her for children.

It was a pretty passionless marriage. Cait had told Jay that, honestly, laying in his arms one night while her husband was halfway across the quadrant doing his thing. Oh, she loved Robert, she had said. But, in the way a lot of spouses claimed throughout the centuries, wasn't all that much *in* love with him.

Jay, on the other hand, had grown up with Cait and Edward and Charlie. He had went to school with them, had even gotten into trouble with them, a younger sidekick to the older Scott boys. And he'd kindled a romance with Cait before she took off for better and brighter things. So, when she came back to prepare for starting a family -- getting the house in order, working out the finances, figuring out how she would be able to keep her career at the level it had been at -- she and Jay happened to go rekindling their old flame before Robert was due back from his travels for his-- contribution.

In the end, it had been a mutual decision to break it off. Jay told her flat out that he'd marry her, if she decided to divorce Robert, but he didn't want to spend the rest of his life only seeing his wife on occasion. Cait wasn't ready to give up her fast-paced lifestyle, even if she did want children. Jay didn't think children should be raised by caretakers, relatives and mostly absentee parents. And Robert allegedly had no problems with that.

The last time he'd seen her had been eight years ago now, and it had been nearly so uncomfortable for him as seeing her firstborn child. A brief, pitifully polite conversation, and then they split and didn't look back.

He could have handled it better. But when the boy came back three days after being caught, likely right after classes given how he was dressed, Jay was pretty damn sure Cait could have probably handled things better herself.

Who the hell irons coveralls?

"Ye coulda sent 'em in the post," Jay said, leaning on the desk, holding his coffee mug. Mostly so he wouldn't have to see Winslow, who was sitting at said desk.

The kid didn't apparently have an answer for that. Just carefully set the cleaned, ironed coveralls over on a side table, then fidgeted. He looked like he wanted to do two or more things at the exact same time, at least one of which was to turn around and leave. After a moment, not looking at Jay or really anyone else, he took a breath and finally said, "I can fix it. The skimmer, I mean, an' ye can take it intae the body-shop, replace some panels, resell it on the used market."

"Make more on it partin' it out than tryin' to resell it," Jay replied, with a half-shrug that no doubt looked more casual than it felt.

It wasn't hard to see the disappointment; there was a moment of crestfallen quiet, then the kid just nodded, finally looking up, though still not all the directly. "Aye, sir. Then, uh..." He shook his head, turning around and heading for the door.

"How much more ye got on it?" Jay asked, on an impulse, just before the kid grabbed the handle.

The kid stood still, thinking, then said, "Three, four hours work on the drive components. Canna do much about the sensor systems, given the body damage, but I can get it runnin'."

Jay didn't need to turn around to know that Winslow was probably watching this exchange in rapt fascination. But it was a truth that he coulda handled things better before. It wasn't the boy's fault, that old history, and Jay didn't have to get to know him or anything, maybe just try to handle things a little better this time. "A'right. Ye can come back tomorrow, work on it. Business hours only, no more sneakin' in at night. And I dinna plan on payin' any."

"Not lookin' for pay," the kid said, but he drew himself up some and was a little more direct. "Just see no point in it nae bein' saved, if it can be."

"Fine. Bring yer own tools, and wear somethin' that ye can afford to ruin." Jay cut the conversation off with that, heading over to dump his now cool coffee out in the sink and pour himself a new cup.

"Aye, sir." There was a sort of relieved, almost happy note in the kid's voice, and then he headed out.

Jay still didn't look back at Winslow, but could feel his old friend eying him. After he couldn't stand it, he finally turned around and snapped, though without much bite, "Dinna say a damn thing. Keeps him from sneakin' in, and it's not like I'm plannin' on runnin' to Cait's doorstep, beggin' her to change things after this bloody long."

Winslow just returned the look, then shrugged and went back to the paperwork.

Jay had always been good with his hands. Both of his parents were mechanically inclined people; hell, they should have been. Both were mechanics. He grew up with his hands in the guts of anything that required a mechanical means of motion: large fishing boats, skimmers, right down to little remote controlled toys. He never really got into the idea of working in space, perfectly happy to stay grounded somewhere with real gravity pulling him, but he loved mechanics and spent his life working machines.

He didn't think the kid could do it. But two and a half hours after the boy showed up at the yard, he was asking for the skimmer's keys. And it started right up. Practically bloody purred, the formerly totaled piece of junk. The body was still ruined, but the engine (not in gear) revved into the red smoothly then idled back down just as smoothly, showing no signs it had been written off by insurance as unsalvageable.

Jay still didn't really care if it was repaired or not. But it was the first time he saw a smile out of the boy; when the skimmer started, the kid lit up with a bright and happy grin.

"Well, ye might as well drive it up to the body shop." Jay pointed the building out, once it was clear that the drivetrain was repaired. "Right up there, that set o' doors on the right side, back behind the office. Mind ye stay out o' the way of anyone workin'."

The reaction to that was the oddest mix between wariness and earnestness that Jay had ever seen; several long moments of silence, while the boy looked between the skimmer, the building up the hill, and Jay, obviously not sure what to do, and then he finally bobbed his head in a nod and got back in the driver's seat after gathering all of his tools up. He drove the whole way at an idle, too; the wrecked skimmer didn't handle particularly well, the antigravs misaligned no thanks to the body damage, but it made it there.

After that, the kid was around pretty much every day, from the end of his classes all the way until the yard closed for the night. And he was firmly affixed in Jay's mind as the 'kid' or the 'boy'; Jay didn't particularly want to call him by his given name, having known the man (another bitter reminder of things attached to an already bitter reminder) that name was inherited from. Most of the other workers just called him 'Scott', which was less of a mouthful than Montgomery. The boy cringed anytime anyone called him 'Monty' and Jay couldn't honestly blame him.

But Jay didn't really call him anything. It was a little easier just to think of him as some *other* kid that way, hanging around for lack of any better diversions. Not as much as Jay wanted, but enough to be bearable. Jay didn't spend much time around him; usually they only encountered one another twice in a day, rarely more, and it was brief. And Jay didn't plan on changing that any -- eventually, that kid would hopefully find better things to do with his time.

But it was still like that joke about the Tellarite in the room full of Vulcans. Anytime the kid was in the yard, Jay knew he was there, even when they didn't see each other; the sense that somewhere out there was a complication in small, teenaged form, the kind that might come through the office door at any given minute and start asking questions. And more than a couple times, Jay caught himself watching the kid work on something from the window, mentally picking out traits he could see and recognize. Some certainly were Cait's; the smile, for one, rare as it was. When the boy worked, he had the same unwavering focus she did when she was cooking, to go along with the obvious physical similarities.

Some traits weren't, though. And the part that really bothered Jay was that he recognized where those came from, too.

Jay yanked himself out of that contemplation whenever he caught himself in it. But regardless, and against his own will, he stopped really minding the kid being around. Weeks, then months, and Cait's son became a fairly familiar presence in the yard. Mostly the boy kept to himself; he'd finished the first skimmer, once he had discovered the machine shop and had gotten permission to use it (long as he wasn't in anyone's way), and when it was done, Jay could have sworn that it rolled off the factory line. Pristine from bumper to bumper, some truly beautiful work.

It didn't take long, despite the lack of interaction, for Jay to realize that the kid really was a *good* kid. Not very friendly, mind; he was a mess of fidgeting and nerves whenever he had to interact with people, unless he was explaining what he was doing -- then he got animated and happy until the conversation ranged to non-mechanics. And the boy was unnaturally independent; he didn't ask anyone for help, not even when he probably should have, nor did he seem to expect it from anyone. That didn't particularly surprise Jay, either; if Cait and Robert were still the career-driven people they had been before, then this kid probably had to learn pretty fast to fend for himself.

But even with the quirks, he was a good kid. Thoughtful and soft-spoken. He didn't ask for help, but he was quick to offer it; he was also eager to learn new things and lit up whenever someone offered to teach him something he didn't already know. No one disliked that boy; they couldn't socialize with him, he got so notably uncomfortable whenever anyone tried, but they liked him anyway. He had a kind of ceaseless, restless energy -- more of Cait -- but also a strange, almost driven optimism. Nothing could be declared beyond salvage without the boy going and trying, and sometimes failing, to save it.

Winter had driven most of the work indoors; some of Jay's younger employees took the winter off to take classes at the local universities, and the ones that were left tended to be older and more relaxed. Except for the boy, who still found ways to keep busy from the time he showed up after school, to when he had no choice but to go home.

Currently, he was working on the hydrogen-based motor for a large commercial fishing boat. The engine itself was taller than he was, but Jay had to admit, the kid was smart. Scary smart. It took him no time to diagnose the problem and leap into fixing it. He seemed right at home in the middle of a giant machine. And he was careful, too; no jury rigging unless he had no choice, and once he was able to properly repair something, he did.

Jay had just sold the first repaired skimmer the day before; sold it at a fair profit, too. He thought about just putting all the credits back into the business. But-- he didn't.

He set the cooler down, and offered the padded envelope over. The second the kid had crawled out from under the giant engine, he had started getting twitchy, and now looked at the envelope cautiously.

"Well, take it," Jay said, holding it out further. "Couple hundred credits."

"I didn't ask for any pay," the boy replied, drawing himself up in what Jay thought was a little bit of misguided pride.

"Aye, and I'm not payin' ye. It's just a commission, for that skimmer ye fixed. Sold it yesterday."

It still didn't seem like the kid wanted to take it. But he didn't appear to have any reply to that, and just fell to absently turning his spanner over and over between his hands.

Jay fought down the urge to sigh. "Ye got a girlfriend?"

"A what?" The boy looked back up, eyebrows drawn, a little incredulously.

"A girl. Ye got one?"

The boy blinked, shaking his head, blushing. "I-- no. I mean-- well, no."

Jay raised an eyebrow, chewing down a smile. "Ye got one in mind?"

The kid shifted, left foot to right, then back and looked off to the side. Only after that almost painfully awkward silence, face flushed, he said, "There's-- there's a lass I go tae school with. I mean, I dinna ken if-- I havena--"

"If ye get up the nerve, ye'll need somethin' to take her out on, right?" Jay asked, then shook his head, shaking the envelope in illustration. "Take it. Sales commission. Ye can show her a nice time out."

Dealing with this boy was a test of patience. It was like he had to fight over everything internally if it didn't involve survival or pride. But after that typical period of obvious mental wrestling, the boy took the envelope, looking at the floor like he was taking blood money or something. Jay was pretty sure it was as much to end the conversation as it was for anything else. "Thanks," he said, quietly.

"Ye're welcome." Jay turned around, gesturing to the cooler as he did. "There's some dinner, by the by. There'll be no more o' this skippin' dinner and not eatin' till ye get home, not if ye wanna keep workin' here until close."

He didn't really need to turn back to feel the wary, probably affronted look he was sure to be getting. But the emptied cooler, with the dishes washed and everything neatly stowed away, was left on his desk at the end of the day. What would be the first of many times.

And despite every last attempt to shove it down, that made Jay smile.

The trick, Jay figured out after about three quarters of a year, was to basically ignore the boy. Not ignore him meanly, though. As long as you didn't direct all that much attention at him, he was fine; ask a question casually, like it was an afterthought, and you'd get a response that was more easily given and more direct. Try to actually focus on the kid, though, and he would get tense. He was like one of those puzzles that you couldn't look directly at, or you'd miss the overall picture.

Jay also figured out that it wasn't so much because the kid was truly anti-social, not like the usual little punks that were branded with the label,

but because he simply didn't have the first clue of how to really interact with people. He was constantly rechecking himself; trying to figure out what the right responses were to questions, trying to guard against giving up any answers that might make him vulnerable, trying to escape any conversation absent machines, all at the same time.

And the more time Jay spent keeping a somewhat distant eye on the boy, the more pissed off he got at Cait, the more he regretted things, and the more he wished everything had all played out differently. It really hit home when the kid came to work with new coveralls, and Jay realized he'd grown a bit, had put on a bit of weight and height. That he looked a little less like a skinny, harried boy, and a little bit more like a young man.

That was maybe the hardest part.

Jay didn't let his anger come out, except a few times when he and Winslow were talking after hours, and then he got so mad that he'd rage, pacing back and forth snarling.

"It's not like I can just walk up there an' say somethin'. What'll that do, but tear that family to pieces?" Jay had calmed down some after a long, angry litany, though he still paced. "It's too late for any o' that. We all made our choices, and it'll do no one any good now."

"They aren't exactly in one piece as it is," Winslow said, not looking up from the desk where he was going over some new inventory sheets and cross-referencing to customer requests and orders. "As for what good it would do--"

"No." Jay grabbed his coat, heading for the door before he even pulled it on, heart in his throat. "It stays buried."

It wasn't that Winslow was trying to be unkind, he knew. They'd been friends too long for that, and Winslow was a father and grandfather both. He'd been around back when Cait and Jay had their thing, that affair that nearly everyone knew about and no one ever talked about. He'd also been around when it was broke off, and when Jay decided that the best move he could make would be to head out into space for a few years so that the discord could fade.

The problem that had surfaced immediately was that Robert inevitably found out. Charlie and Edward, Cait's brothers, had known. Didn't approve, but they had known about it. Cait's father, her son's namesake, had perhaps had a clue, but had said nothing and continued to treat Jay kindly for what little they saw of each other. Something that Jay still felt guilty about.

He thought that the only people that may have been spared from the knowledge about the whole messy thing were the children of the family; not just Cait's, but everyone's.

Between the Scotts and the Stuarts, and all the branches tied to those old family names, it wasn't hard to find out how things had played out after he got back to Aberdeen. He didn't ask, but of course, the information was volunteered by enough people. Apparently, despite some initial rocky spots, Cait and Robert stayed together and managed to work it out somehow. According to most sources, it was surprisingly easy for them. No metaphorical blood-letting over it.

But the more that Jay spent time around the boy who'd been born right in the thick of that, the more he realized that the price hadn't really been paid by the adults. Both families had been social with each other before, and were less so after -- but even then, they tended to be outgoing people in general, especially the Scotts. By contrast, Montgomery was a black sheep. A shadow or a ghost.

The part that really burned Jay, though, was how comfortable that boy was in that spot. That he didn't expect anyone's attention, nor ask for it, simply did his own thing and was happier with his head buried in an engine than he was being an average, normal kid. When he started talking mechanics, he was all Scott; animated and fast-talking and a regular little chatterbox. Just like his mother, especially; that high intensity energy. But-- that was it. He didn't have friends he went out with after school, he didn't even really interact with the younger employees of the yard, some only a few years older than he was.

When he actually worked mechanics, though-- the focus on the job was Cait's, but the way he was able to translate the sharp intelligence and intuition of his mind almost directly to his hands, no fumbling or slipping, that wasn't Cait's. That wasn't a Scott trait.

Jay had realized, even at a distance, that the kid could be far more than a backyard mechanic, or even a top-rated one. Good as he was with the practical applications of mechanics, there was some combination of wiring that suggested that he'd be far better suited to engineering. The way he could diagnose a problem with an engine and come up with the solution, and often enough without any reference to the original manuals. Or the way he could improve the efficiency of whatever machine he was on, subtle little redesigns he made happen in their machine shop. He was wired for something more than just working with machines; for something more like creating new applications for them, inventing new technologies and otherwise going well above hanging around a junkyard.

It was a month before his sixteenth birthday when Jay saw that the casual suggestion that the boy take some courses at the University of Aberdeen's Engineering School had been heeded. Secondary wasn't much of a challenge to him; he'd elected to stay through Years 5 and 6, as college prep, but he was bored and unmotivated spending a whole day in secondary classes, and Jay had just noted one afternoon that he should look into applying for some higher level courses for half a day.

Now, sitting on the couch in the office, the boy was reading a new text of recently declassified Klingon technology, both what was established as fact and what was still theory about the Federation's usual enemies.

That crap was way above Jay's head and outside his interests, but as he was getting himself some coffee, he asked, "What's that?"

"Perera Field Theory," the kid answered, half-absently. "Just declassified by Starfleet... see, Klingon battle squadrons run in packs, an' they generate a linked shield system, aye? So, the theory goes that if ye go and beam a torpedo where those shields link up, ye could create this-- this feedback loop o' sorts, that'll destroy 'em. Dinna even need tae detonate the torpedo, given the complex energy dynamics at those linkage points; they'll do near all the work for ye."

"Aye, and?" Jay turned around, leaning on the counter. Watched the kid, who was so intently focused on the text that he didn't notice.

"Somethin' isna right about it. I've gone o'er the math, an' it's sound-- went o'er it a handful o' times, checkin' all the variables, but there's just-- there's somethin' that doesna fit. I dinna ken what, but if I could figure out a way o' testin' it, I might be able tae get tae the bottom o' what's off there." The boy gestured, randomly, then went back to marking his spot in the book with his fingertips. "Except, tech like that isna lyin' around."

Jay took a sip of his coffee, musing on it. "What would ye need?"

The boy glanced up briefly, thoughtfully, then peered back at the book. Or, more past the book, at something distant, going over it silently before replying, "I could probably modify some old nav shield generators tae match the Klingon design in here; be a cut-down, less powerful version, but scale the torpedoes an' math tae sync up, an' it'll prove or disprove the theory well enough, I think."

"Aye, ye think?"

"Aye."

Jay set his coffee cup down and went over to the comm. He didn't deal in space technology, but he knew plenty of people that did. While he knew that no one in the private sector could get their hands on the kind of technology that Starfleet or the Klingon Empire had, navigation shields were standard on all vessels that went into space, private or military. And if the kid thought he could prove or disprove an engineering theory through those-- well, Jay could at least give him a chance to.

"McKay an' Sons, Glasgow," the voice answered on the other end of the comm, gruffly.

Jay chewed down a grin when he saw the kid watching out of the corner of his eye. "Jay McMillan here. Put the elder McKay himself on, tell him who's callin'."

Chapter 2

Perera's Theory was far harder to understand when he actually tried to read up on it himself. The boy's explanation had been simple, direct and summed it up smoothly, but the actual math and technical information on it was a beast to slough through. More marks for how damn smart that lad was; every time Jay thought he'd figured that out, the boy would do something to show how sharp he really was.

Jay tried to get through the text anyway. He sat down in the evening, in his bungalow, put on his reading glasses and tried to pick his way through in order to be able to hold a conversation about it. It wasn't that he really cared about the information itself, or its applications. But thus far, having even a little bit of it absorbed into his mind was enough to be able to talk with the boy about it.

He never quite realized how fast children grew, until he was around one that he watched growing, unbidden and even unwillingly. And he never even contemplated how watching someone grow up could be both intensely painful and--

That was another hard part. Without ever meaning to, Jay found himself in those moments of pride that he felt he had no right to have. Watching this smart, motivated kid piece things together to test a theory put forth by someone far older and more schooled, it came as a shock to Jay to realize that he was grinning, and that it was a proud grin.

It gave rise to lots of moments of guilt and self-doubt, and moments where he even thought of kicking the kid out of the yard, just to spare himself those bad times when he questioned all of those things that couldn't be changed.

But he didn't. Didn't even want to, most of the time.

McKay had bargained out for seven of the navigation shield generators. Pricey business, too, but they had worked out a payment arrangement that could be spread out. Jay took the hit on the initial cost of transport, but had to make arrangements with the boy (whose pride was as touchy as his confidence was fragile) in order to pay off the debt. That was how Montgomery became an official employee of McMillan & Winslow Salvage, and the time he spent in the yard was split between modifying the generators and doing on-the-books yard work.

Jay knew that Cait probably had no idea what her son was doing for a job, and definitely not where, because she would have cut that off right quick. But Jay figured that if she did want to know that badly, she could bring it up with him. It kept Montgomery off of the streets, out of trouble and it gave him somewhere safe and monitored to work on his engineering goals.

It had been pricey, but it was worth the cost. Jay told himself that he got a good employee out of it, but the truth was, it made him feel both better and worse about things.

As the lad worked, he got more and more certain that there was something wrong with Perera's theory; got more and more confident in that assertion, too. When he talked about it, he lost his anxiety-stricken hesitations and could raise his voice to carry on a conversation directly, even with all eyes on him. He still talked fast and gestured everywhere, a bit more of that manic energy of Cait's showing through, but there was a certain level of calm even within it that was one more thing Jay felt that quiet, unwilling pride over.

It was really getting harder to just think of him as a boy, too. Even though he didn't look the part of an adult yet, he was growing into it fairly fast.

"He's gonna have some shoulders on him," Jay had commented, coming back in from where he'd been helping move some new parts over to the area of the yard where Montgomery had been working.

"Wonder who he got those off of," Winslow had replied, with a chuckle.

It was an ill-timed comment, meant lightly and taken hard. Jay had frozen, then had continued to the coffee pot, working his jaw. He stayed in the office the rest of the evening, and didn't leave until everyone else did, especially the kid. Winslow was apologetic about it, but the apology made it even worse, so finally it was just dropped and not brought up again. And the sting faded, though the nerve it hit was still active and open.

There was some mild relief after that; the lad got himself that girl he'd been pining over for some time, and then he spent a month and some being a perfectly average teenage boy who couldn't concentrate on anything but mooning over his fair lass. He still worked, but his focus was shot, and he actually took normal days off. He didn't have much spending money now that he was on the books properly and paying for the field generators, but Jay didn't mind him being less productive. It was kind of heartening to see him acting like a sixteen-year-old should act, right down to the hormonal obsessions of young love, and the lad being away more let Jay get himself better centered.

It only lasted that month and a bit, and in an equally normal manner, the kid moped considerably for awhile when it ended. But he eventually got over it, then went right back to the project he had let sit while he was trying his hand at romance, focused all over again.

"Any luck?" Jay asked, as he started cleaning up the office. It was raining hard outside, so the lad had come back in and was working the theory's math over for the umpteenth time, as though he didn't have it memorized from start to finish.

"No, sir. Whatever's not workin' in it for me, isna in the math. Too solid. But I suppose when I get tae test it, I'll learn for sure, one way or the other."

Jay nodded, chewing it over. They'd had a few talks about it now, and he found that when the lad explained things, it was far easier to grasp. Jay still picked at the texts, but he got over any pride when it came to asking about things that confused him, mostly because when the explanations did come, they were patient and held no condescension, and had a real, genuine passion to boot.

It fell quiet, but then the lad asked, "What was it like?"

Jay froze again, hoping to whatever might have passed for god that that wasn't a question he didn't want to answer, then tried for casual as he went back to cleaning, "What was what like?"

"The Merchant Marine." The kid gestured to the certificates on the wall, Jay's certificates.

It was hard not to sigh in relief, but he managed. Felt like he just faced a firing squad and all the weapons broke before they had a chance to take him out. "Not too bad. Hopped as a third-class tech onboard a cargo carrier to Deneva, worked my passage on the *Horizon Star*; then I got there and spent a few years workin' on the dyna-carriers. Managed to get up to engineer's mate before I came back to Earth."

"Ocean-goin'?"

"On Deneva, aye. Liked it, while I was doin' it."

The lad nodded, looking at the certificates. And after Jay finished his cleanup, and had a moment to think, he realized why.

"Dinna waste yerself on that," Jay said, shaking his head. At the confused, slightly uneasy look he got in reply, he elaborated, "I'm an old junkyard dog. It's no big thing for me to go crawlin' through the ranks, spendin' years doin' grunt work. But ye're too smart to go that route; ye'd just end up bein' wasted in some dead end job."

The kid frowned, looking unhappy and disheartened both, going back to gazing at the book he had on his knees.

Jay sighed, mostly to himself. He tried to think of how to word things, to get through what he was trying to say. "Perera's Theory," he finally said. "The Merchant Marine's good, honest work, ye'd find a spot there and they'd be glad to have you, but ye'd still end up workin' on old ships, on steady runs, where they dinna need people who see these theories and wanna test 'em out, aye? If ye're interested in goin' into space, then go into Starfleet. They have the newest tech, the best resources for research and development, and ye'd get to do this kind o' testin' for a livin'. And if ye want, ye can still be a mechanic there, too."

That seemed to do the trick a little better. The lad nodded after a moment, obviously working the notion over, testing it out. Then he said, almost suddenly, "Mum wants me to go to university. Business school, like my Nana did. She doesna mind me takin' engineering classes, but..."

The lad had cut himself off; whatever would have come after that didn't really need to be said, though. Fiona Scott had been a battleaxe of a woman who had tried very damned hard to marry Cait off to Jay as soon as they hit adulthood, but when that didn't work -- when Cait cast Jay aside for something more exciting -- and after the elder Montgomery died, she headed out to Risa to start a company selling localized weather-nets to resorts. She was fiercely smart and brilliant at numbers.

Her grandson didn't have the make to follow her path, though; Jay was certain he'd be miserable trying, too. And-- somehow it didn't surprise him that Cait either didn't realize that, or did and figured that Montgomery would have to learn to live with it anyway.

Jay started organizing his desk, just to have something to focus his hands and eyes on. He worked his jaw, trying not to let his shoulders get too tense. He wanted to say something, but what the hell could he possibly say to that? *Sorry, lad, yer mother's a steamroller and doesna much notice who she flattens if she's tryin' to get somewhere.* It would be pointlessly cruel to say that to her son, and probably not all that fair to her.

Still, though, he wanted better for the lad. So, he took a breath, let it out, then finally said, "Just think about it. Starfleet, Merchant Marine or university, let it work over in yer head for awhile, and dinna let *anyone else* tell ye which it should end up bein'."

It took until the late fall before everything was modified and finished. The field generators, all seven, were linked up to create a shielding system that was comparable to the Klingon design provided, right down to the resonant harmonics created by them. It required a lot of piecemeal work to get everything; the original navigation shield generators, then all of the parts needed to modify them, and some of them manufactured in the yard's machine shop.

Finally, the last part was the power source, and that was the hardest thing to obtain of all.

The University of Aberdeen's Engineering School had taken an interest in the project. Not enough to spend credits on it, but enough that they were willing to call in people who would be interested in the theory, including Starfleet engineers who were willing to provide the anti-gravity generator, the scaled explosive equivalent of a photon torpedo and a portable transporter platform, just so they could witness the test happen. That had left Jay and the lad scrambling to get ahold of the right type of power source, and finally they were able to locate an old engine from half a century before that had been loosely based off of a Klingon design. It could also be modified to handle a hydrogen-based fuel, making it safe to test the theory on the Earth's surface.

As much work as the mechanics took, though, every day was getting just a little bit harder to face for Jay.

He still didn't spend a whole lot of time with the lad, but he spent enough that it threw his life into a state of chaos. Jay wasn't used to that; he had lived with a pretty certain path in mind, and despite long years of the occasional regret, Cait and him had only derailed it for awhile. It had been a balm to realize that it had all been a mutual decision, and that he didn't have any obligations because everyone wanted it to be swept under the rug and forgotten.

He could just-- pretend that it didn't matter.

Now that balm was gone. There was no way to watch this boy, and see him growing into a young man, and see yet more traits that didn't belong to Cait but to the other side of the equation that led to his existence, without it becoming a nearly constant source of mental turmoil.

Jay didn't let it really affect his interactions with the kid; he didn't want Montgomery thinking he'd done something wrong. And it wasn't so constant, that turmoil, that Jay didn't get to enjoy some days, especially days where all the pieces fell into place and the kid was excited and borderline friendly, and rambling a mile a second about it all. They still didn't talk much about anything but machines and theories, partly because the lad still avoided those kinds of topics, and partly because Jay just really couldn't bear them.

But every day that passed, it just got harder. The regret got deeper. The guilt did, too. Winslow didn't fail to notice it; Jay knew perfectly well that the old man would encourage Jay to speak up, to change everything, maybe even destroy everything for the sake of the truth coming to light after being buried. Mercifully, though, Winslow kept quiet. And Jay kept struggling.

And there were so many moments those days when Jay wanted to do exactly that: speak up. Where he wanted to go to Cait and demand that it all be said out loud. Where he wanted to look that kid in the eyes and tell him exactly where he came from; tell him where he got the sure, easy use of his hands, and where he was likely going to get a solid, strong build from.

He wished, despite his own thoughts, that he had that driven optimism that the lad did, that nothing could be pronounced unsalvageable until you tried to save it. That wasn't Cait's. And he didn't have it himself. It was something that belonged purely to Montgomery Scott.

Jay knew that there was no way to change things; no way to go back in time and redo it all, and no way to unravel it all now, not without destroying a family. It might not be a perfect family, but he knew he didn't have the right to go and drop a bomb on it. Never mind what it would do to the very kid that was the cause of all of this soul-searching; how could he possibly handle it, when he was only just getting comfortable in his own skin?

It was tearing Jay up inside, and more every day.

Even then, though, the moment where he knew he had to change something, to do something to end this all, came out of nowhere. He'd been thinking about it more and more, but there came a moment where he knew beyond any doubts.

It was only a few days before the test was scheduled to take place; the past several weeks had been spent transporting massive equipment (most often the old-fashioned way, via vehicle) to the University's grounds, and reassembling it. Jay and the rest of the yard's employees, all of them pitched in on it. Junkyard dogs, the lot of 'em, working so this kid could test a theory and maybe answer some question about himself that he didn't even know he was asking.

Late at night, the ignition power cells were rigged into the machine shop's chargers. The lad was half-asleep on the couch, notebooks still in hand, rubbing his eyes every so often even as he was going over things for what had to be a millionth time; the original math and his own plans and theories behind it. Winslow was hanging around, keeping up on the seemingly ever-present pile of forms, inventory sheets, invoicing and everything else that kept the yard running smoothly and profitably.

Jay was hanging around too, staring off into the November rain, mostly just following the dark trails on the dark window, and the sorrowful thoughts that went with 'em.

"Ye might as well go home," he said, after a few moments. "We'll know if those power cells took the charge tomorrow mornin'."

"I'll wait," the lad replied, despite a yawn. "If they dinna take it, I can maybe try somethin' else, aye?"

Jay half-smiled, though he didn't really feel it. "Aye, I suppose."

Silence fell again, but it was a strangely comfortable silence. Despite Jay's internal chaos, there was no anxiety-driven fidgeting from the lad, and no hard questions from Winslow. It was easy to imagine that they could be here, comfortable in each others' presence, five years down the road. Jay held onto that feeling for awhile with both hands and his whole heart, not wanting to let it go.

Finally, though, Jay looked over, regarding the now sleeping kid on the couch. Just over halfway through his sixteenth year, and Jay could see both something of the child he'd been, and the man that he was destined to be. Smart, good with his hands, mechanically inclined, focused; all the things that would make for a damn good engineer not too far down the road.

And yet still the innocent who got half lost in a mess he didn't create, who still believed that anything could be saved, who learned hard lessons early but kept fighting on despite them.

Jay carefully gathered the books and notebooks and set them on Winslow's desk, then he got his coat off the peg and rolled it up, put it at the end of the couch, and prodded the kid lightly in the shoulder. "Wake up, lad. Least long enough to stretch out."

The kid startled a little when he was woken up, but it was obvious that even his seemingly ceaseless energy had hit a limit and abandoned him. He just stared sleepily at Jay for a moment, then did as he was told without any protests, or wariness, or uneasiness.

It was a heart shattering thought that crossed Jay's mind, as he got an old blanket out of the closet -- clean, though stained from using it to crawl under skimmers -- and covered the kid over: Those eyes could have looked up at him from a cradle. Or the crook of his arm. Or from a wee bed, after a bath and storytime, tucked in. Those same eyes could have looked to him for comfort or advice or safety or shelter for sixteen and a half years.

But because of the choices that Jay and Cait had made, Jay had given that right up without ever realizing that someday, that same child was going to come into his life and show him how much he had lost.

He crouched there for long moments, jaw knotted; when he could finally make himself stand up, he looked back at Winslow and said, soft and ragged, "I need ye to buy me out."

Winslow was looking back at him, a certain misery in his eyes. "That won't change the fact that he's your son. Nothing will, and never did, no matter what agreements you and Cait made."

"No." Jay looked out the window for a moment, wanting to snarl back at the tight grief in his chest. Wanting to shout. Wanting to sob. "But this is killin' me, and we made our choices too long ago to change 'em. Bad choices. And we've gotta live with 'em; I dinna think I can, if I stay."

It had been a hard conversation, most of it conducted back in the machine shop so as not to wake the boy at the heart of it, and in the end Winslow had realized that there was no way Jay would -- *could* -- bend on this. He was going to get out; if he couldn't change the equation, and couldn't live with it, then he had no choice but to remove as much of himself as he could from it.

"You'll at least go and watch him test out this theory," Winslow had finally said, in resignation.

Jay had nodded, willing to hang on and dig his fingernails into the cliff edge he felt like he was slipping off of, at least long enough to make sure that the lad got to show off all those smarts and all that talent, maybe even to people who could give him a real chance to use it all. Despite the bad choices that could have destroyed it.

It was chilly out the day of the test, a good wind blowing, but the sun was shining and there was no rain in the forecast. Jay didn't get in the thick of it; Cait was down there, looking oddly awkward and uncomfortable sidelined the way she was, and he spent a few moments looking at her from a distance, comparing, contrasting. There were more than a few people around, too; Starfleet engineers, who were awed about the modified field generators, University officials who were doubtless claiming the kid as their student, some journalists who probably wrote for the technical journals. A good sized gathering.

Montgomery looked nervous, but not in quite the same way as he once was. Jay had taken the chance to talk to him early in the morning, when it was still quiet -- had given him the tip of holding his hands behind his back to keep from fidgeting. The lad was doing that now, except when he got on a roll, then he started gesturing like usual.

"Quite a lot of work, for a boy that age," a man said, and Jay glanced over to see the small, gray-haired fellow standing next to him.

"Aye. It took him most o' the year, and a lot o' puttin' his nose to the grindstone, but he did it." Jay looked back down at the field, where things were starting to get organized for the presentation.

"It should be interesting to see what happens." A pause. "Your son, I assume?"

Jay hesitated for only a moment with a side-long glance, then nodded, squinting into the sunlight with a half-smile. "Aye, he's my son. Didna get to raise him, but... half o' me, down there."

It felt strangely good to say that.

"Hm." The man nodded himself. "I imagine you're proud."

"Very."

That made the man chuckle, then he patted Jay on the back and started down the hill. "As you should be. And now, I am going to go see if your son either makes my theory, or breaks it."

Jay laughed, albeit quietly, staying back while Alejandro Perera went to go see his theory in practice.

When it was all said and done, Perera's theory was disproven. The next several hours, of course, were spent while the scientist picked the brain of the young engineer, and several Starfleet recruiters tried to get a word in edgewise.

Jay didn't get involved with any of it, just stayed back at a distance. But despite the fact that he kept mostly inconspicuous, he knew that Montgomery knew he was there. And, though he didn't really look forward to what would come next, he knew that Cait had spotted him too.

And while her son -- *their* son -- was busy telling everyone how he had done it, how he had disproven the Perera Field Theory, she broke off and came up. One part looking reproachful, a kind of petulance, one part looking guilty. All Cait. He didn't feel any old fires burning for her, more just a sort of pity that she hadn't really had it in her to get to know the child she was half responsible for either.

"I dinna expect..." she started, then trailed off, looking anywhere but at him.

"He doesna know," Jay replied, without bothering with any preambles, crossing his arms. "I dinna plan on tellin' him, either."

She looked relieved, and he felt a spike of bitterness at that expression. "It's for the best, aye," she said, more briskly.

"No," Jay said, cutting her off before she could say anything too close to a lie, tipping his head up a little. "It never was. But lemme tell ye somethin', Caitlyn: he's a good lad. And I'm hopin' those Starfleet recruiters take that idea I put in his head, and talk him into it." She gave him an angry, hurt look, but Jay couldn't really find it in himself to forgive her, anymore than he could forgive himself.

"Jay--" she started, rubbing her forehead.

"No, Cait. Eventually, he's gonna find he's got a bit o' junkyard dog in him, even if he doesna know from where, and he's gonna decide on makin' his own path." Jay nodded, tossing one last glance down at the field, at the kid down there looking bright and happy as he chatterboxed at an old scientist, one who looked entirely pleased to have had his theory disproven by a sixteen-year-old. Then Jay turned around, walking away as he finished, "That's when he'll stop payin' for our bad decisions."

She didn't try to follow. And he didn't look back.

"Figured I'd pick up my engineer's mate certificate again," Jay explained, three weeks later. Cold and raining, as usual. And he was just boxing up the last of his things; the sign outside already had been changed. No McMillan, now it was just Winslow Salvage. "Head back to Deneva, see maybe if I can make it up to chief on a dyna-carrier. It's good, honest work, and I liked it."

Montgomery nodded, hands behind his back as he watched. Jay thought maybe that would become his new favorite pose. "I put in my paperwork for Starfleet's pre-enlistment program. Been hearin' about it from Mum ever since, and the rest of 'em along with her."

"Aye, well, just remember what I told ye, a'right? Dinna let 'em tell ye what to do with yer life."

The lad nodded again, studying the desk-top thoughtfully.

Jay set the box on it, after a good look around to make sure he wasn't missing anything. "Winslow's got ye scheduled around yer classes. If ye need more time for coursework, dinna forget to tell him."

"Aye, sir."

Hard as saying goodbye was, Jay was fairly sure that the hardest part was over now. He didn't know why, so much; why there was some sad, but honest peace now that he was on his way back out of the kid's life. Not because he was leaving it, but maybe just because he was leaving it just a little better, having been even briefly a father, even if that was knowledge the lad didn't have and probably never would.

Jay smiled to himself and pulled the penlight he'd gotten out of his pocket, offering it over. "Here, ye'll likely need this at some point."

The lad took it, frowning a bit in surprise. Then he turned it on, testing it out and both of his eyebrows went up in appreciation -- it was a high end little light, strong enough to do most work, in the cramped or sometimes dark places engineers had to go. "I, uh..."

"Dinna quibble."

The kid didn't, despite looking like he wanted to, turning it back off and reading the text etched on the side. He raised an eyebrow, looking back up at Jay with a half-smile. "Junkyard Dog?" he asked, amused.

"A reminder. Ye know, in case ye make it to bein' a famous engineer, ye'll remember yer humble beginnings."

At the 'famous' part, the lad made a face. But he held onto the penlight regardless.

"All right, I have to go. Agent's comin' to pick up my bungalow keys, and I have to drop this box off on the *Horizon Star*," Jay said, pulling his coat on, and taking one more moment to regard his son.

It was a painful thing, the lad looking sorry that Jay was going. Not like he would if he knew the truth, of course, if Jay had spent the past sixteen and a half years raising him. But a sort of heartfelt sorrow regardless. It was a fairly grown-up look, stoic and well-controlled, more of a look at the man he would be in a short while, that Jay would likely never get to know.

But if there was a moment that made Jay feel grateful for even this time, it was when the kid gave him an awkward hug, impulsive and uncertain, one more look at the child he'd been before.

Jay held on back tight, as if he could memorize that moment. "Keep yer head up, son," he said, voice rough, past the emotion that made his throat hurt. And then he let go, heading out the door.

Montgomery Scott never knew just how much Jay McMillan had said, when he had said that.

But a couple of years later, Jay was hanging a picture sent by Winslow of a snappy looking Starfleet cadet, in black dress uniform just after Basic Training graduation, over his bunk on the dyna-carrier he was the Assistant Chief Engineer on, cruising the Denevan oceans.

And he never failed to smile, even if it was sometimes sadly, that the young man looking back had his chin tipped up in pride.

