

Torn

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Torn

by [SLWalker](#)

Summary

(2240) - Trapped between going and staying; how can life be one long sprint just to survive it?

Cochrane's Theories were interesting reading. While several had been proven and a few disproven, reading through them and the steps taken while Cochrane was thinking of them was full of fascinating insights. It was almost possible, even in the seemingly dry texts, to put together the profile of what the man had been made of, simply by how he used his knowledge and intelligence to think of something new.

So why was it impossible to do anything but watch the sleet hitting the window?

Scott rubbed at his eyes, trying yet again to drag himself away from staring as the bits of ice hit, then melted into the streams of water, gathering at the bottom of the window and then running off the ledge. Under the glow of the sign outside, they followed colorful patterns; drops of water making tiny, infinite little mirrors off of one another. Too many for the mind to contemplate, but beautiful in the possibilities.

The café was quiet. Just up the road from the spaceport, it was one of the few places where one could go get something to eat or drink in the middle of the night in Aberdeen, and one of the few places bus service ran that late. And given that it was open all night and he was pretty much the only one there right now, no one really put on any pressure for him to leave; the server, a kind of pretty lass a handful of years older than him, only stopped back intermittently to see if he wanted anything.

Other than that, he was left alone.

Going home had to be what walking into an ill-shielded antimatter reactor chamber would feel like. That feeling of disaster a moment away, and the crawling of restless energy all over your skin, making movement more a requirement than an option. He hated that; he usually had to be moving, and that made it worse-- then he felt like he had to just run, and keep running until he dropped. It was an old sensation he thought he'd gotten mostly under control; having to live with it so-- so present, so *immediate* again felt like a particularly cruel irony, given the *why*.

Adding in the nightmares, he had gotten exceptionally good at staying away from that house. He wished that Scotland hadn't finally bowed under pressure to raise the age of majority fifty years ago; now seventeen, he'd be a legal adult and could get his own flat or something. It probably wouldn't be much of a flat, given that he was attending classes, working part-time and preparing for Starfleet, but it would at least provide some secure and semi-quiet place, some place where he didn't feel like he was about to be eaten alive or worse, where he could rest his head.

But he had to wait. He kept telling himself that he just had to make it a few more months; he'd wrap up his classes in secondary and at the University of Aberdeen's Engineering School, and he'd head off to Basic Training.

For now, he had taken up residence in class, at the yard, in the café, or sometimes on the streets when none of the others were available, only going back home long enough to sometimes eat, sleep for a few hours and then get cleaned up and go back to class again. He didn't even do his laundry at home anymore; took it with him and used the facilities at the dorms on campus that he didn't have enough credit hours to quite qualify to live in instead.

The ice started hitting the window harder, and he kept staring at it, sometimes falling to rubbing his eyes and sometimes even feeling them slide closed without his permission. The sign outside of the café was a kind of garish, brightly colored thing, burning through the night in teal and red and orange. The streets of the Granite City were quiet tonight; sometimes a skimmer would go by, but nothing else. The sign reflected off of the road, too; it was all more dark, except those highlights created by water.

Cochrane's Theories were interesting. Warp drive as a concept, as a theory, was far older but Cochrane had been the one to do it. He thought it was incredible, but he still wasn't reading.

Scott tried to drag his attention back to the book on the table, but he couldn't seem to force his head to turn. As though he would miss something perfect, if he looked away from the patterns of light and water.

He'd wait a few more hours and go home. He'd gotten away with sleeping in the yard a few times, but Winslow had chased him off when he'd been caught enough. The old man was-- was kind, but still chased him off to go home to bed, back to his family's house.

He loved them. Loved his family. It was never that he didn't, not then nor now; he *wanted* to make them proud. He wanted them to see how hard he tried, and see that he really was doing good, that he wasn't being a disgrace; for that matter, he'd gotten himself to school when he was still in primary, after getting himself up and dressed, and in secondary he still did all of that. Aside that business with fighting, he'd done his best to not be a burden to anyone or anything. He pretty much made his own breakfast in the morning, did his own laundry, ironed his own shirts and even mended them when they'd gotten too ragged to be presentable, at least until he had a job and could afford to replace them himself.

He was 'hired' at the yard by Mister McMillan, before McMillan had gone off; that had been a sad day, but-- well, people left. He knew that. It was how it was. Missing people did no good, let alone missing your former boss, who you met with fists flying.

Missing people did no good, but he still did, and that had been unnerving and just added to the troubles that were really building at home. The moment he'd declared his intention to apply for Starfleet, his mother had protested with a vehemence and-- and *meanness* that had honestly left him jaw-dropped in shock. He'd never seen her angry like that before, and that anger felt like scalding water. That exact kind of shock. After that, he did whatever he could to not be at home. He had already been pretty good at not being there, and got better at it yet.

That was a year ago, and he was still ready to jerk away from the burn, like some-- some pathetic kid who got himself into a mess he didn't know how to get out of and couldn't live with.

He didn't like to fight, not like that. Not verbally, not physically. If confrontation could be avoided, Scott avoided it -- he didn't like the sick feeling that came with that kind of anger, the kind that boiled. He hated that feeling, he knew too well what it could lead to if you got to like it too much. If you're too good at something and you like it too much, you'll do it. He didn't like fighting, but it seemed like he was always doing it anyway.

If not verbally when he couldn't avoid it, then certainly in some silent internal way there was no definition for. He couldn't really remember a time in his life that he hadn't been. If there ever even was a time like that.

He wondered if it looked like the red-edged trails of ice bits and water on the window. And then he realized that he wasn't seeing those, but dreaming them.

He jerked his head up from where his chin had been resting on his chest, his fingertips still on the book; blinked hard and took a few deep, instinctive breaths in a hopeless attempt to clear his head, wake back up, be alert.

Just a few more hours. A few more months. There'd be no time to *think* in Starfleet, especially in Basic Training.

He would miss them. He didn't even know why, because it did no good; he didn't even know why, because he couldn't really remember the last time he felt like any part of his family. But he loved them anyway, and he would miss them, and he was scared. Scared of going. Scared of staying.

He held on, tooth and nail, to leaving for Basic. He hated fighting, and that decision to join Starfleet led to fighting, or frustrated silence, or guilt-driven pressure from his mother, and outright hostility from his sister, but--

He ultimately caved over going into Command School, if they'd accept him, just to ease some of the tension. And it did; his mother was more tolerant of that idea, of him being a captain someday, than of him being an engineer. As though being a captain would somehow be a far better use for his intelligence. But even then, she still tried to get him to stay at home like a proper son, and go to business school and use those brains he was given for something that she was adamant would be a better life for him.

He caved on Command School, but held onto leaving. Kept fighting, not just with everyone else, but inside of himself, not to fold on this one because eventually his spirit would die inside of him if he did.

He watched the ice hit the window, felt his eyes slide closed again, growled at himself to stay awake.

He hated fighting. But he knew on some primal level that he wasn't fighting for career or pride, but for his very survival.

Someone touched him on the shoulder and he slammed back into the corner, startled but not really awake, staring wide-eyed for a few moments until his brain caught up and it was just the server, who was now startled herself and had backed up considerably.

They stared at one another for a moment; her in something-- something like--

Sympathy.

"I'm fine," he rushed out on a breath, automatically, heart hammering.

"You look like you should be home in bed," she said, having far better luck at regaining her composure and throwing off the surprise. He couldn't place her accent, but it was pretty and gentle.

She set a cup of tea on the edge of the table, and he looked at it, uncomprehending, then looked back up at her. "I didna order anything...?"

The server shrugged, with a small smile. "I was a student once, I know how it goes. But you should probably skip the tea and head home."

Scott nodded, not looking at her anymore. Torn briefly between trying to stick it out a little longer, and leaving; he could feel her watching him

with some worry and that-- that-- he wanted to tell her not to worry about anything, he was *fine*, he was perfectly well capable of taking care of himself, he'd been pretty much doing it his whole life, but that look still hurt and he had no idea *why* it hurt, except that-- it just did.

He was so tired. And for a moment he thought about how badly he just wanted to rest his head in some quiet place, and how badly he wanted to be anywhere else, and how badly he wanted to sit with the tea the pretty waitress with the pretty accent had brought for him, and--

He got a knee under himself on the booth's seat, quickly gathering up his books, a rushed and jerky set of motions; even his hands weren't working like they should, even though he needed them to right now.

"Want me to call you a ride?" she asked, and she still sounded worried, and why would she worry about him? He didn't *need* worried about, he--

"No, I'm fine," he said again, a tight edge in his voice that he couldn't understand; he got his books into the waterproof pack he carried them in, then got that over his left shoulder. The right twinged, a deep little ache, reminding him of fatigue and the cold outside and yet again the *why*, and he recoiled away from that reminder internally.

She went to say something else, then just nodded, and he couldn't really make himself look her in the eyes.

He just slipped past her, then headed out the door, away from the patterns and infinite tiny mirrors, into the cold and darkness.

He couldn't fathom the tears that burned hot on his face next to the cold trails of sleet.

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