

Name and Nature

Posted originally on the [Ad Astra :: Star Trek Fanfiction Archive](http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/306) at <http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/306>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Star Trek: The Original Series
Relationship:	Montgomery "Scotty" Scott/Spock
Character:	Montgomery "Scotty" Scott , Spock
Additional Tags:	Period-Typical Homophobia , AOS Fusion , Alternate Universe - Fusion , Established Relationship(s)
Language:	English
Series:	Part 3 of Seamark , Part 9 of Stations on the Dial
Stats:	Published: 2023-06-19 Words: 6,530 Chapters: 1/1

Name and Nature

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Summary

(1991) - It took until April until they were outed as partners and the inevitable bigots started acting up; needless to say, Scotty wasn't going to take *that* lying down.

Notes

The original tag on AO3 was: *Discussions of oral sex as related to truck accessories*. Or, in more straight-forward terms: The boast that someone makes when they say they can suck the chrome off of a ball hitch.

"If you persist in smirking, you will require stitches, and I am unqualified to suture."

Scotty tried to school his expression back to neutral, but Spock could already see that it would be a losing battle. His bondmate was insufferably pleased, and if Spock exaggerated the need for stitches to repair Scotty's busted lip, it was only in a futile attempt to discourage more fighting and manage his own worries.

This had been going on for three months now, after all. Both the fighting and the subsequent first aid. It was constant enough that Scotty usually hadn't finished healing from the last fight before picking another one.

(And that was not accounting for the five times Spock had to arrange bail.)

"Sorry," Scotty said, which was a lie that Spock didn't need to sense to call out.

"You're not, and I don't know why you would say you are." Spock started packing away the first aid kit, mouth pressed into a line.

"No, Spock," Scotty said, more seriously, catching him by the wrist lightly. "I can be sorry it's upsettin' ye without bein' sorry for the fact of it."

The firebrand of his hand was a poor distraction from the emotional sincerity lit across their bond, emphasized by the contact. A punctuation mark, boldface. A language Scotty had learned readily, despite being psi-null.

Despite all frustration, Spock *did* already know that. They had been bonded for almost a year; even though he was still learning things about this man, he knew that Scotty didn't like upsetting him.

And despite all concern (*fear*, he thought, because lying to himself in this case was unacceptable), the same thing that had Scotty fighting was part of the same thing Spock admired deeply about his mate.

He slipped his arm free and finished closing the first aid kit, breathing out in a manner that was certainly not a sigh. When he looked up, Scotty was watching him with a soft look of concern. Still fiercely pleased with himself, of course, and yet that was not at odds with his care and regret for Spock's fears.

Red in tooth and claw, Spock thought, with both resignation and undeniable affection. The words were penned by Tennyson, a reflection on Nature's inherent pitilessness and her claim on mankind as a part of her -- her final work, who seemed so fair -- and not as belonging to some

higher power, despite often appealing fruitlessly to one.

Applied to Montgomery Scott, they gained a depth Spock would never have been able to grasp before all of this.

"Allmhadadh," Spock said, an endearment and acceptance at once, and leaned in to kiss the man on the brow, making very sure his mate was aware of how he felt, in all of its complexity. The pride and the fear. All of the shades between those. "If you insist upon continuing this, then make sure they never catch you unaware."

Beyond the emotional equivalent of an acknowledgement, there was a little shot of confusion back over the address, but -- unsurprisingly -- Scotty didn't ask after it. "Been doin' pretty good at that so far," he said, with a shrug. When Spock raised an eyebrow, though, Scotty huffed and then failed to subdue a smile (with a wince) before saying, dutifully, "Aye, fine, I promise to take extra care to avoid bein' cornered by any intellectually-challenged bigots."

Then he hopped down from the table he had been sitting on, sliding an arm around Spock's waist in half an embrace, right back to smirking despite the pain of doing so. "Now, as to me baitin' 'em, on the other hand--"

This time there was no way for Spock to deny that sigh, so he didn't bother to stop himself from shaking his head, either.

In retrospect, Spock *was* a little surprised that this had not become an issue earlier than it did. That it had taken until April before their status as partners was noted by anyone outside.

Some of that had to be that neither of them were given to public displays of affection, and yet more to Spock preferring greatly to stay indoors during the winter. But they shopped for groceries together. They rarely but occasionally went to restaurants together. They lived in the same house, and when the weather was nice and Scotty wasn't buried in work, they went on drives, mostly in the area, though sometimes out further.

(Autumn had been particularly beautiful; they had taken a long weekend and disappeared into Vermont purely for the pleasure of driving through the fall foliage and mountains ablaze with those colors. With a new bond still fresh and sensitive between them, and with them both still feeling their way through how to stay together, that trip had cemented something for Spock: a sudden sharp, exquisite clarity that he had made several right choices and also perhaps had found some luck on top of them, to have what he did. What they did.

That weekend also was the first time they'd had sex again since the *pon farr* ended, despite sleeping in the same bed in the interim.)

But despite their private natures, they had taken no great pains to hide anything. Spock was aware enough of the social atmosphere of this world -- one didn't work with Edith or live with Nyota without learning these things from two very personal viewpoints -- but it still didn't change how he conducted himself. And, he knew, Scotty had no desire at all to immerse himself in or subject himself to the social strata of 1990s North America; Scotty wouldn't even watch the evening news, and what little he heard was either via coworkers or snippets from the radio. Even though he blended in comfortably with the rough, blue-collar crowd he worked with, he never really belonged to them; despite being well-liked and respected on the docks of New Bedford, Scotty remained a kind of insular that Spock recognized as the same type he had maintained with their crewmates on the *Enterprise*, with very few exceptions.

And yet, regardless of neither of them trying to hide it, it still wasn't until April when they were "outed" -- to use a colloquialism -- and even then it was more poor fortune than carelessness or intention.

It had been the first truly warm and pleasant day of the year, a Sunday; the breeze off of the bay was still stiff, but the sun was shining between banks of high, fluffy clouds and the air smelled salty and clean at once. Spock had a fresh number of library books and needed no more incentive than the fine weather to go sit out on one of the reclining deck chairs to read, taking cushions and a blanket with him.

His mate, on the other hand, was in the unenviable state of being both restless and lacking energy, still recovering from pneumonia he had contracted in January, which had taken him off of his feet for most of three weeks and which still left him feeling ragged around the edges and aggravated by that fact. Spock had given up trying to soothe that away, not for any lack of desire to, but because all it served to do was frustrate both of them. He couldn't give Scotty the rest of his energy back and Scotty couldn't force himself to relax; any attempt to would have a paradoxical effect anyway.

That wasn't to say Spock was completely helpless in the face of it, though; when Scotty prowled out onto the deck for the third time in fifteen minutes to check *yet again* that Spock didn't need anything from the shops, Spock set aside his book and said, "That answer hasn't changed and won't change for you continuing to ask after it. But if you would like to know what I want--?"

He left the question open-ended; Scotty eyed him with something that didn't quite elevate to wariness. "If it's somethin' about how I should settle down and accept this-- this--" He gestured sharply, unable to word it.

"No. I don't need to tell you what you already know and wilfully ignore," Spock said, dryly, before shifting the blanket and beckoning. "But I do want to hold you."

It was not always a guarantee, that particular tack, but it was the truth. "How do I know that's not a ploy to get me settlin' down?" Scotty asked, archly. And when Spock just raised an eyebrow, he rolled his eyes in an unnecessarily theatrical manner, though he wasn't quite able to hide the little smile tugging on the corners of his mouth.

Melodrama, Spock thought, an echo of a fangless admonishment that Scotty and his brother would occasionally toss at one another because it was something both of them would play up for the benefit of the other. "More than one thing can be true at once," he pointed out, still holding

his hand out expectantly.

There was an art to wooing -- and occasionally subduing -- this man; it required a self-awareness of Spock that he found suited and pleased him, and it required being frank and forward about his own desires, a style of communication it had taken him work to recreate once the feverish demand of *pon farr* left him. Whatever he asked for in concession would have to be balanced by effort, any show of trust he was granted was to be treasured, and for his part, he took to that willingly.

Another dimension of language exchange.

After a moment, and a resigned sigh that was only sincere insofar as humor dictated, Scotty stepped over and gave over his hand and before a minute was passed, he was leaned back against Spock, both of them tucked under the blanket, the proximity making the bond between them glow with warmth, a resonant, quiet pleasure for Spock both physically and mentally, and one he projected back so they could share it.

All restlessness aside, Scotty fell asleep within ten minutes there, acting admirably as a space heater and anchor, and Spock picked his book back up and spent a perfect afternoon reading, occasionally turning his head absently to nuzzle at his mate's hair, content as far as circumstances could ever allow either of them to be.

And it was sometime during that afternoon when someone or another out on the water spotted them; like a contagion, word spread quickly.

But even now, despite it all, Spock would not have traded that time together.

From the other side, Scotty really *didn't* like worrying Spock. He just also happened to believe that if he didn't assert their right to live whatever damned so-called *lifestyle* they wanted, it would only be a matter of time before the threat to their lives became more than habitual bigotry or vague fear.

Unlike the other three humans, Scotty had made no effort to fold himself into the social dynamics of the twentieth century. He had been laser focused on getting them home, and then when that had been shattered under his feet, he'd turned to survival. And even then, it wasn't for any great desire to stick around in the living world, but because the loyalty and affection he had for Spock was stronger than his desire to cease: He didn't want to leave his longtime shipmate and colleague alone.

So, determined to live a quiet life and support himself and Spock (and Nyota if she needed help), Scotty kept his head down and worked. He actively avoided any news and gossip, and when people tried to loop him in on it, he politely but firmly rebuffed them.

The only thing he did listen to was the music. Hearing songs he'd dredged out of old databases played fresh on a radio was a unique sensation. He'd found some new things to listen to, too, which was another mark in the column of Reasons Not to Die.

(Oddly, he had never discovered Pink Floyd in his own time; now that he had, their stuff was hit or miss for him, but what did hit tended to hit hard. It could get him singing, anyway, so he'd picked up some of their albums to add to his collection of thrift-store cassettes and vinyl records.

Spock had said they were -- in a word -- fascinating, which-- aye, fair enough.)

But anyway, so dedicated as he was to *not* being a part of this world in any measurable way, he just didn't hear it, the first time he was called a fag.

Or the second. Then, apparently realizing he wasn't listening, one of Dan Howland's fishermen got into his face and repeated it a third time, but then looked thoroughly nonplussed when Scotty just blinked back and asked, "What's that, then?"

Mind, Scotty knew what *ugly* looked like coming down the pipe at him even if he didn't recognize the term. He'd known from his single digits what it looked like when someone was about to try to hurt him. His ability to recognize danger was honed sharp under his father's fist and so he was perfectly aware that this young fool was spoiling for a fight.

He didn't let said fool know he was aware of that, of course.

The man had gaped and glanced at his buddies for some manner of courage; whatever he found there made him just bold enough to look back at Scotty (who wiped over his face with a clean rag with one hand, then flipped his spanner in the other idly) to ask, "They don't have cocksuckers in England?"

By then, Scotty had mostly worked out the scoreboard, so he had some idea this had something to do with him and Spock. Anyway, the term cocksucker was a pretty unambiguous hint.

Which was why he tilted his head and worked his jaw for a moment, looking at the young man thoughtfully before asking, "Lad, did ye just call me an Englishman? 'Cause I'll give ye one chance to recant that, else ye're in for an overdue geography lesson."

The whole group of four looked like *nothing* was going the way they expected it to; like maybe they had come over here thinking to kick a dog and found something altogether less domesticated waiting for them. The kid who had been hazing him watched him flip that spanner again and fell back a fraction. And probably, Scotty would think later, that could have been the end of it.

But then one of them said, "Leave him alone," trying to sound brave -- like they didn't start this! -- and made the critical error of pushing Scotty in the shoulder.

When it was over, Scotty crouched on the edge of the dock and looked down at the battered, bleeding faces of a few puppy fishermen as they peered back up at him from the water in stark fear -- the fourth had run away when the fists started flying -- and said, "Now, remember this, I'll only repeat it once: I'm Scottish, out o' Aberdeen, though ye'd do well to bear in mind I'm some part *Mainiac*, too. And as for anything else, that's my business alone. Now, I'm willin' to consider this put to bed; I'd recommend ye do the same."

He didn't make them agree or anything, in order to preserve their dignity, just stood up and went back to work, though he did pause in the office to get gauze to wrap up his bleeding knuckles.

When he got home, he had to explain to Spock, who in turn filled in the social context that had flown right over Scotty's head. Spock had explained about homophobia ("What the hell is that?") and about HIV (which he had heard of, but just didn't pay much attention to) and about how same-sex couples were viewed in this time. And after he was done explaining, Scotty thought about it for a moment before asking, softly, "Is that so?"

And thus began the War of New Bedford.

Dan Howland had come over that night and had found an unapologetic Scotsman with freshly bandaged hands. He left again, still employing the best engineer to grace New Bedford's docks, because Scotty made it clear he wasn't going to go back into the wardrobe -- ("Closet," Spock had corrected, from the side.) -- so if Howland had a problem, tough. Howland ultimately did not.

For that matter, those four fishermen never did give Scotty another issue, nor did any of Howland's people. He got some glares, he heard the occasional mutter, but no one in the company approached.

As to the rest of the lot--

Scotty might have called it *mutually assured destruction*, but that would have been giving the other side too much credit. Because every push they gave him, he doubled *down* on.

He began stopping in every local bar after work, rotating around to make sure to hit each one, nettling them intentionally. Before that, Scotty had not once gone into one of the locals despite invitations, but now he did. And when everyone would fall quiet as he stepped through the door, he'd flash them a grin and sidle up to the bar and order a cup of tea.

He had lived twenty years off and on in Maine; he could be as ruthlessly, dryly polite as any New Englander when he needed to be and deployed that without pity or mercy.

So, sometimes he got the tea, sometimes not, but that wasn't the point.

It wasn't everyone spoiling for a fight with him, and for every bigot who took a shot at him, there was someone else giving him a thumbs-up on the sly or a nod of respect. And, Scotty was sure, there were probably plenty of times he couldn't know about where people defended him behind closed doors.

But out in the open, he mostly had to deal with the bigots on his own.

So, he did.

They keyed his truck. He grabbed a black paint marker and wrote, on his driver's side door: **# OF ASSES I'VE KICKED**, and started adding tally marks under it for every ass he did indeed kick.

They shouted insults. He sourced a rainbow flag. They shouted threats. He held out his arms and said, "C'mon, then."

(They often stared early on, which was pretty pitiful as threat displays went. Scotty finally took off his shirt and used it as a towel, knowing full well that while he was a little middle-aged soft around his midsection -- though less than before all this -- and awfully pale otherwise, his shoulders and upper body told the story of hard work and a very good right hook.

It was amazing and not a little hilarious how fast that got them looking away. Even though working shirtless was a regular thing in the summer. Scotty was getting a hell of a lot of entertainment in finding the most effective ways to poke at them; he didn't usually care for sports, but this one kept him on his toes.

Admittedly, the sunburn he got was an excellent lesson on the need for sunscreen when one was being a right bastard.)

His favorite so far was the last time someone called him a cocksucker; he grinned ferally in answer and said, "I can take the chrome off a ball hitch. Jealous?"

They stopped calling him that then.

It wasn't that he liked fighting. Scotty really could have done without it. Nor had he ever intended to make any social stands or become something of an activist. But, he reasoned, if he had to fight, then he'd fight to win; no one was ever going to stand over him with a fist again.

And almost all of the physical fights he picked over this were very deliberate and calculated. The tally marks on his truck's door grew in number steadily, and if he had to walk around in some state of constantly healing, hands perpetually bandaged, that was a relatively small price to pay for the respect he was demanding he and Spock be given.

At least if he was the one doing the fight picking, then he was the one controlling the circumstances, and that gave him far better odds at coming out of it in one piece.

But now, three months in-- he had a feeling things were going to break soon, one way or another.

The first indicator was when a few of the mechanics for a rival company had started in on him when he was sitting having his lunch a couple weeks ago -- packed, because he wasn't stupid -- and some of Scotty's coworkers showed up, including that first lad who'd gotten a tune-up, scattering themselves around him close, eying the others.

They didn't say anything, but the message was clear, and once the rival company mechanics left, they moved off again. He gave 'em a nod, got nods back, and went back to his own lunch thinking, *Huh*.

The second was right before he had left on Friday last. That fourth kid, the one who had run back at the beginning, had caught him wanting to talk. And the conversation started with the kid stammering about that fight, all blustery and ashamed at once, but it got more and more wrenching as it went on, and by the time the sun started setting hours later, Scotty felt like he'd gotten the lad's whole sad, lonely tale.

Complete with a drunken father and so-called wicked feelings towards other men.

"Ye're from where again?" he asked the boy, as they sat on the edge of one of the Howland docks, long since alone after the work day had ended.

"Savannah, sir," the lad said back; his accent was heavier than McCoy's, even though his tone was softer. *Suh*. Handsome kid, objectively; he had such electric blue eyes that even Scotty had noticed.

"Well, some advice then. First: Dinna go back until yer old man's six feet down," Scotty said, shaking his head. "That'll feel pretty strange and ye'll not know whether to mourn the father ye coulda had or celebrate the one ye did kickin' it, but either way, he's not worth any more o' yer heartbreak. Ye've got work here, so keep survivin'. And as to the rest--"

Scotty paused there and mused on it quietly, looking off into the silhouettes of masts and outriggers, then said, "It's not always gonna be this way. Someday, no one's gonna give a single damn who loves who. But the same advice still applies until this changes: keep survivin' so ye can be there to see things get better."

The kid had heaved out a shuddering breath -- a hell of a lot of pent up stress, and no real easy end of that in sight -- but he leaned into Scotty for the arm around his shoulders and seemed to take something from a moment's kindness offered without condition.

*What seas what shores what gray rocks and what islands
What water lapping the bow*

As ever, Scotty's heart pulled northeast.

Anyway, it had been most of a week since Spock had patched him up (again), and his lip was basically back to normal (again); no one had taken his bait since then, though not for anything less than a stellar effort on his part.

(He was especially proud of the slow wink he gave some glowering, hulking bear of a dock worker on Wednesday. Scotty didn't think he'd ever seen that shade of red on a human face before.)

But now it was a blazing hot Sunday and since Scotty was feeling suitably apologetic for having caused his lover so much worry, he had decided to take an extra turn on cooking -- no hardship, really -- and was putting together the ingredients for vegetable skewers with a marinade he happened to know for a fact that Spock loved, which he could grill out on the deck later on.

The radio was on and playing Genesis -- still more *easy listenin'* than his usual tastes, but irritatingly fun to move around a kitchen to -- when Spock came in to go and get another glass of lemonade out of the fridge. Scotty didn't think anything of it as he did an almost competent sideways slide across the floor down the counter on his socks while Phil Collins sang about her invisible touch, going to grab the sirloin he had marinating for his own dinner, and almost ran into a shaggy, lanky Vulcan.

Spock looked down at him with one eyebrow slowly climbing; looked down and then really *looked down*, and if someone would have told Scotty a year ago that his long-time colleague would be eying him like that, he would have wondered what hallucinogen had gotten into the water supply.

Rather than say anything, though, Spock just pressed two fingers to Scotty's temple and *showed him* what he was thinking.

He then had the nerve -- the unmitigated *gall* -- to steal Scotty's sunglasses and walk out while Scotty stood there, gaping like a fish out of water and probably almost as red as that dock worker had been.

It took him maybe two minutes to even *process* what had to be the most filthy thing he'd ever in his life been the imaginary star of -- at least that he had been made aware of! -- and his face was still on fire when he marched out onto the deck, gesturing helplessly for a moment before finally saying, "My old knees couldna possibly manage that."

"There are cushions," Spock answered, mildly, without looking up from his latest issue of Scientific American, those stolen Ray-Bans perched on his nose.

Completely unable to summon a reply to that, Scotty just stood there pole-axed for a minute more before wandering back into the house, impressed with the level of detail Spock had given his imaginary vision there and shocked that the Vulcan was even capable of that. The last person who'd been that kind of-- *adventurous* had pretty regularly left him draped deadweight on the bed unable to form coherent thoughts.

--which was probably where Spock got that particular idea, come to think of it. Hazards of having bonded during *pon farr*; sex was very much a centerpiece at the time and that included recall of past experiences.

Scotty still had not shaken that off -- or stopped blushing -- when the phone rang and he sock-slid on the floor again to answer it.

Luckily enough, it was the only other person in this time that he was fine with getting a phone call from, and Scotty managed to shove Spock's-- extremely *clear* mental pornography out of his mind enough to conduct a conversation, leaning against the fridge as he and Nyota caught up.

She had gotten a job doing contracted literary translations -- not only for her knowledge of languages, but her ability to hear the art of those languages and bridge them together -- and therefore was easily able to drive up when Spock had called her back in January, after Scotty had his feet taken out from under him. And while Scotty hadn't liked that at the time (being that kind of vulnerable around almost anyone was frankly more distressing for him than having pneumonia in the first place), it had made sense; beyond being able to drive, she could take her work with her. And it seemed to help Spock to have someone around who could help him, or at least distract him from his worry.

(There were a few times in there where Scotty was drifting in half-dreams, listening to the cadences of whichever Vulcan dialect they spoke to one another.)

The upshot of all that being that she now called weekly to make sure that they were all right and to fill them in on what she was up to. She wisely avoided talking about Kirk, though sometimes she mentioned Edith or McCoy. And she also started cheerleading Scotty's one-man war on New Bedford's bigots the moment she learned about it, even though when she talked to Spock, she was able to be sympathetic to his concerns.

It was on the tail of that thought -- and gratitude -- that Scotty remembered something and said, "Oh! I've got a word I need translated."

She snorted at him, making him grin. "*I guess you came to the right place, then. I won't even charge you. What's the word?*"

"Somethin' Spock called me last week. Allmhadadh? Definitely not Vulcan. Sounds Gaelic to me, but I couldn't tell ye for sure."

"*Mm. Scottish Gaelic, actually,*" Nyota said, sounding thoroughly amused. She'd already teased him long-since about his lack of knowledge or interest in the language -- in his defense, he could probably still speak Doric-Scots fluently, which was considerably more relevant given where he was originally from -- and so this was probably handing her some form of ammunition. "*Now you want to know about it?*"

He rolled his eyes, even if she couldn't see it. "I do know some. I know some right excellent curses, lass."

"*Including the ones you invented?*"

"Hey, now, I was *six* when I came up with that one. And *only* that one."

"*Uh huh. So the others are just butchery of what's already there, then?*"

"Ye sure ye're not makin' me pay for this translation?" he asked, probably failing to keep his smile out of his voice.

Nyota laughed there, then answered, "*It's a variant of madadh-allaidh.*"

"Well, that's not tellin' me much. What does it mean?"

"*Wolf,*" she said, clearly smiling. "*It means wolf.*"

The prior week had been mercifully quiet once Monday was over, and the beginning of the coming one was off to what seemed to be a fair start.

Namely, Spock had not had to crowd his mate up onto a kitchen table to administer any first aid (again), nor arrange bail (again), he was having vegetable skewers made for him with a type of sweet and spicy marinade he found very agreeable, the weather was excellent, and he was contemplating the pros and cons of certain types of oral sex.

Spock figured that if Scotty was going to boast about what he could do to a ball hitch, he should be willing to show that said boast wasn't *idle*. Ever since Scotty had come home and informed him of that particular volley in the ongoing war, Spock had found thoughts of it to be-- exceedingly persistent in returning to mind at unexpected moments. While he could have perhaps banished them via meditation, satisfying them was also a valid solution.

(Truthfully, though, Spock *was* fascinated with how Scotty could decide to leverage and weaponize sexuality while being only conditionally interested in sex, and while remaining oblivious to the fact that he was attractive. Rather than approaching it with foreknowledge -- his level of sexual experience wasn't much higher than Spock's -- he instead observed what made the bigots of New Bedford most uncomfortable and then exploited it with merciless precision.

He also happened to use a much more benevolent and pleasurable form of that process on Spock when the mood suited him, noting and playing to what Spock found arousing, even if his deployment remained every bit as ruthless.

It was imminently logical. It also set Spock's blood on fire even outside of *pon farr*. It was little wonder he was contemplating oral sex with

distressing regularity.)

Still, he was patient; he thought that now that the seeds had been planted in his mate's head, there was every chance he would eventually get to find out how much truth was behind that boast.

Given certain memories he possessed, though, he figured that while it was an exaggeration -- chromed ball hitches being what they were -- it was not likely a lie.

He was just returning to his reading when a jolt traveled across their bond like a zap of electricity, some manner of strong and mixed emotion; it was heavy enough to catch his breath short and enough for him to set his magazine aside, though he knew to wait beyond that.

After *pon farr*, that bond had slowly settled to what Spock thought it was supposed to: mostly just a gentle weight in the back of his mind, an increased awareness of his mate's presence and emotional state, something that was stronger the closer they were together. An ease to sharing thoughts, too, something not unlike a limited, permanent mind-meld. It was mostly one-way -- Scotty having no telepathic abilities nor the brain structure to allow it to be a back-and-forth transfer, at least without a full meld -- though not entirely; while he wasn't able to read Spock's thoughts without them being projected right to him, Scotty was fairly tuned to Spock's internal state.

The more intriguing thing was that the bond only enhanced something that was already there, a kind of awareness and natural sensitivity that existed in some quiet space behind the masks Scotty wore; mostly he was on alert for danger -- the reasons for which still distressed Spock deeply -- but he was equally capable of picking up on joy or sorrow or frustration or anything else once he was familiar with someone, and that included Spock long before Spock was even aware of it.

(That knowledge did change how Spock saw some of their past interactions; moments when the engineer would say something ridiculous and Spock would admonish or correct him. Only since arriving here did Spock realize he was being *teased*, often when he was at his most stressed and in need of a distraction, because Scotty would still do that now, even after the game was up. Though now Spock could feel his humor and affection to go with it.)

Whatever Scotty was feeling now was so tangled even Spock couldn't discern all of the threads of it; still, there was an ache that accompanied it that Spock could feel in his center, a deep ache that he recognized as a kind of grieving homesickness, one he shared himself in some ways and one he knew, even wishing otherwise, he would never be able to heal.

Despite them being bondmates, Spock was no replacement for Scotty's lost family, nor vice versa; the tie to one another made this life worth continuing, it even gave them a space to genuinely enjoy it, but both of them were ultimately deeply loyal in nature and if Spock adjusted better, it was only because his strongest anchors -- his mother, his father, Michael, Pike -- had already been distant or lost to him.

But for Scotty -- who had left behind a brand new nephew, who had managed to rebuild something of a relationship to his blood sister and aging uncles, who had considered his adopted family to be a fundamental part of his life even while he was deployed on deep space missions, and who had shared a soul deep and definition-defying bond with his brother -- the wounds of losing them were carved to his core and had never entirely stopped bleeding.

He could never go home again because home wasn't a place, though the place he called that pulled on him enough to drag his gaze northeast in painful yearning often enough.

The wolf without his pack, whose life's purposes had been wrenched away from him; his devotion to duty and family in conflict with the inherent decency that wouldn't allow him to end Edith's life, not even if it cost him his own.

Spock could not be a replacement, nor did he want to be, but he could be something good for his mate; he was ever aware that Scotty had stayed for him. That loyal heart, even hurting, and the part of it Scotty gave willingly to Spock was no small gift; beyond saving Spock's life, it was enough to keep Scotty breathing even through those times when he wanted to stop.

In turn, Spock gave him a purpose; someone to provide for and care for, someone to cook for and drive for. Someone to patch him up as he threw himself headfirst into the cause of acceptance and respect for them both. Someone to hold him or chase him or just live alongside him. It was not the same as a family structure or even a shipboard one, all of which he had fit comfortably in and fulfilled his part of faithfully, but something sincere and honest and kind nonetheless.

And if it had been a challenge for Spock to learn how to return that care in a way Scotty would allow, it was one he took on willingly and whole-heartedly.

So, when he ended up with his bondmate straddling his lap, he was not very surprised, but he *was* glad of it. Spock just took off the sunglasses and shifted enough to make it more comfortable for them both, then held Scotty close, letting the man hide his face against Spock's neck, blanketing the bond between them with affection and soothing and gratitude, and providing a safe spot for a level of vulnerability that was rarely granted, sometimes pushed for, occasionally demanded and always treasured.

Spock knew the moment they were in contact what had caused that sharp tangle of emotion, but he didn't say anything; if Scotty preferred some other term of endearment, he would certainly let Spock know.

Still, in all of the Vulcan dialects and all of the human languages, Spock could think of no better one; an acknowledgment of both name and nature, adding to the history of both without encroaching upon them.

It was not quite ten minutes before Scotty sat up again, having gone through a whole spectrum of emotion before settling on a kind of touched acceptance and gratitude. He didn't say anything right away, just framed Spock's face in both hands and kissed him soundly, then rested their brows together; between them, that bond hummed with something that could only be called love, however strangely evolved and however battered the hearts that shared it.

Then -- true to form -- Scotty drew back just enough to give him a grin, albeit a little rough around the edges. "Cushions, huh?"

Spock kept his face in firm neutral, despite the fact that he couldn't help projecting back his amusement. Or from sliding his thumbs up under the hem of Scotty's t-shirt to find skin. "We have a number of them in varying levels of softness," he said, raising an eyebrow. "Doubtless one or another would be suitable as protection for your knees."

It got the reaction he was expecting, that frank (and intentionally brazen) statement; a quick, bright bark of a laugh. Then Scotty shook his head, still grinning. "I suppose we can test that theory after dinner, then."

Spock did a quick calculation on how long the vegetables and sirloin would be marinating. "Until then, we have time for warm-up exercises," he said, deeply grave purely for the additional laugh that earned him.

And then he took full advantage of the fact that he had his bondmate straddling his lap; he slid one hand up to get the back of Scotty's neck and the other down to pull them flush, and drew the man back in for a deep kiss, letting that carry on the conversation where the words no longer could.

(It was definitely not an idle boast.)

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