

If Only In My Dreams

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If Only In My Dreams

by [daraoakwise](#)

Summary

Based on a December writing challenge, Montgomery Scott and Leonard McCoy through the years.

Baking

Day 1 - Baking || Vanilla, sprinkles, and chocolate flavored kisses.

“Here’s the thing that annoys me,” Nyota Uhura said without any preamble, sitting down abruptly across from Scotty.

The engineer startled violently and nearly spilled his tea on his padd. “Um. What’s that?” he said cautiously. Uhura was *not* a woman to be trifled with, and Scotty very much hoped that *he* wasn’t the thing annoying her this time. It had happened before; he wasn’t always the most observant when it came to such things. Especially when he was buried in plans for a radical recalibration of the dilithium chamber.

“There is nowhere on this ship to cook anything,” Uhura continued.

Ah. She was just here to talk shite at him. Scotty’s gaze and attention wandered to his padd, the complex equations flowing back into his mind. Exasperated, Uhura kicked him under the mess hall table. “Synthesizer will make whatever you’d like,” he muttered vaguely.

“So, I can just walk up to the synthesizer and ask it to make Maandazi, can I?” she asked him archly.

Chekov stepped over the back of a chair and settled next to the engineer, his face innocent and cherubic. He rested his elbows on the table. “Or Baklava?” he sighed.

“Purin?” Sulu asked hopefully, plopping down on Chekov’s other side.

McCoy slid in next to Scotty. “Sweet. Potato. Pie,” he whispered into Scott’s ear, popping the alliteration.

Scotty scowled down at his padd. “What the hell is this?” he asked crossly.

McCoy poked at Scotty’s half-eaten plate of dinner. The food jiggled unnaturally. “What is *this* Scotty?” McCoy asked, as though he was speaking to a child.

“Food,” Scott answered in exasperation.

“Is that so?” McCoy leaned back and crossed his arms. “What *kind* of food?”

Scott gestured helplessly; heaven alone knew. “Brown.”

“We’ve been out here almost three damn years,” McCoy sighed in long suffering. “Three years of jello with flavor bits, or whatever the hell Starfleet calls synthesized rations. In case you haven’t noticed, it is revolting. Every bite of it.” McCoy gave him a calculated smile. “Except for *chocolate ice cream*, which you wrote a new formula for last year. And chicken pot pie, which Jim blackmailed you into writing to stop him from telling me that you were the chocolate ice cream bandit. Which he immediately told me anyway, by the way.”

Scott closed his eyes and wearily rubbed the bridge of his nose. “And so the reason the lot of you are sitting here bothering me is ...?”

“I want vanilla!” McCoy exploded. “Sprinkles! Chocolate-covered kisses!”

“We would like an oven,” Chekov explained reasonably.

“Or, even better—the synthesizer to make baked desserts,” Uhura said. “Since we don’t actually have ingredients to cook anything in an oven.”

“And we are all terrible cooks,” Sulu interjected. “Except for you.”

The Chief Engineer of the Enterprise boggled at them, and lifted his padd in the air. “This is ... this is the recalibration of the dilithium chambers I’m workin’ on here. So we dinnae *explode and die*. And you’re talking tae me about pudding?!” His crewmates looked sheepishly down at the table.

“It’s the holidays. Back home,” Chekov sighed, tracing his thumbnail through a groove in the table before standing. “Third one we’ve missed.” Sulu followed the young navigator, and Uhura reached across the table to squeeze Scotty’s hand before heading out herself.

Scott watched her go, a puzzled look on his face. “Leonard ...” the Engineer started, but McCoy just shook his head. “This is the first time you’ve been in the mess hall all week,” McCoy said gently. “I’m pretty sure it’s the first time you’ve been out of Engineering in the last twelve shifts.” He leaned forward and ghosted his thumb across Scotty’s cheek. “We miss you when you get like this.” Scott smiled ruefully, but his eyes drifted to the padd, and the maths pulled him back in.

A week later, McCoy had to confess he wasn’t feeling the cheer of the season. There was a two-week subspace communications lag, so he’d already sent a Christmas message to his daughter and arranged for some gifts to be delivered. Here on the Enterprise, literally half a galaxy away from home, there wouldn’t be much in the way of holiday merrymaking. The human celebration days were spread all over the end-year calendar, much less any of the high days of any other species in the galaxy, and so each of the holidays would largely pass unmarked. Jim would probably be up for an evening of drinking one of these nights, which was at least something to look forward to.

The junior officers club had made their play on Scotty, hoping to draw him out of his head and maybe convince the man to come up with something that might make things special. In the right mood, Scotty could jumpstart a party, but as sometimes happened, he wasn’t reachable just now.

At this point, McCoy would just take Scotty walking into their quarters at the end of a shift and giving him a kiss, much less a part of a day for a quiet holiday celebration. But when Scotty went like this, trivial things like *his partner* slipped his mind. McCoy just had to ride it out; it was part of the price of loving Scotty. Somewhere on the other side the engineer would apologize and make it up to him, but that didn't stop it from hurting. McCoy shoved his hands into his pockets and headed to the mess. Dinner sounded terrible, and coffee was an awful idea this late—so coffee it was. But when McCoy arrived outside the mess hall ...

“Something smells good,” McCoy said out loud to himself in astonishment, and walked through the door. “ *Cookies* ...?!”

“Biscuits,” Scotty corrected jovially, catching his elbow. “There you are, Leonard. I thought I was going tae have tae fetch you.”

McCoy looked around the mess hall in wonder. The entire off-shift crew was positively *wallowing* in dessert. And it was *Christmas cookies* . Red frosting and green sprinkles, warm vanilla and rich chocolate, the spice of gingerbread and heady weight of fruit and brandy, music playing through the speakers that McCoy could barely hear over the laughter.

“Hey Bones!” the Captain called happily, munching his way through an enormous frosted sugar cookie. “Look at what Scotty made!”

“The raisin spice is fascinating,” Spock said, and Chekov and Sulu beamed at him on their way by, each carrying about two dozen cookies.

“How ..?!” McCoy boggled.

“I'm a miracle worker,” Scotty answered happily, just possibly slightly drunk, and wrapped an arm around McCoy's waist.

“Very much,” Nyota said, brushing by them for seconds, or thirds. She kissed Scotty's cheek on the way by, and then McCoy's. “I'll grab you a brandy, Leonard. Unless you'd rather milk?” she teased.

“Better make it brandy,” McCoy answered her, and then quietly breathed into Scotty's ear. “You are in the middle of a manic episode.”

“Evidently,” Scotty shrugged, glancing around at the piles of dessert.

“This isn't dilithium.”

“Isnae it?” Scott asked in mock surprise.

“You programmed these. All of these.”

Scott tilted his head in thought. “Sugar, C12H22O11,” he said. “Gluten, C29H41N7O9. Sodium hydrogen carbonate, NaHCO3. Sodium chloride, NaCl. Lactose, C12H22O11...”

“Alright, alright. Damn show off,” McCoy said with a laugh, and finally snagged a cookie for himself.

“Good choice, chocolate,” Scotty said approvingly. “Just right for ...”

“Chocolate covered kisses,” McCoy breathed, and let his lips prove it.

Frozen Lake

Day 2 - Frozen Lake || Cold hands, Scarves, and Snow.

McCoy looked out over the frozen ice, which was shockingly bright under the alien star. The planet was a waterworld frozen into a vast snowball; in some places the ice was hundreds of meters thick. In others, like here above a hotspot in the mantle, it was thinner, with a few pools just enough above freezing to be liquid water from time to time. Just now, even that pool was frozen over. The photosynthesizing extremophile green algae that had piled up around the pool looked almost like pine trees swaying in the breeze. All it needed to complete the look was a cabin on the shoreline.

The hardy indigenous species didn't build cabins, of course, but vast ice cities. And that was their trouble, just now. An ice-borne pathogen was creeping its way through their people. They didn't seem to care much for leaving the orbit of their planet, but were advanced enough to send and receive subspace signals, and had reached out to a passing starship for help. The Enterprise had stopped; how could they not?

But McCoy was freezing his ass off.

"Ah, Doctor McCoy," called the Chief Engineer, coming up beside him. "We've got the medical tent up for you. It's marginally warmer than standin' here in the freezing cold."

"I'm not sure I dare move on this ice," McCoy grumbled. "I'm going to fall on my ass."

The Engineer chuckled at him. "It is pretty here, though." And it actually was. It didn't snow here, not really. The ice had frozen the water cycle, quite literally. But it was cold enough that the little water there was in the air froze, twisting like shards of pure light as it fell to the ground. Their breaths puffed white in the frigid air, and they stood in companionable silence for a moment until McCoy shivered.

"Aren't you cold?" McCoy grumped.

"Who the hell taught you tae wear an encounter coat that way?" Scott lectured him, and bodily grabbed the Doctor. Scott pulled off his gloves and tucked the scarf around McCoy's face, his fingers cold against his neck, then tightened the fasteners at each gap. "Better?" Scott asked.

"Better," McCoy answered in surprised relief. "You're good at that."

Scott blew on his hands and grinned at him. "Two years stationed in exile in frozen hell. Yeh learn a few things."

"I suppose. You'd better get those gloves back on though, before your fingers fall off. I'd imagine you consider them important."

"Aye," Scotty said, and pulled them on and shook out his hands, trying to get circulation back. Then he gave McCoy a sly look. "Fingers are critical tae good work. Sometimes even in engineering."

Is he ... flirting? McCoy thought in astonishment. He didn't know the engineer very well, beyond his reputation as a madman and workaholic. Jim claimed he had a wicked teasing streak in him, but also a heart of gold somewhere beneath the mathematics and engine grease.

"It needs a cabin there on the shore," McCoy said, gesturing to the scenery. "Then it would look like Christmas."

"Oh, aye. And a nice fire. Single malt whiskey. And a pretty lass or lad tae share it with."

"Yeah," McCoy agreed wistfully, and Scott shot him a grin.

"I'm going back tae the nice warm ship," Scott said, and reached out to straighten McCoy's scarf again. He let his hands linger for just a moment longer than needful, and then slid them down the front of McCoy's parka. McCoy caught his breath at the feel of someone's hands on his chest, even through the thick layers, and Scott smiled slowly, not meeting his eyes. "Unless yeh need help with your coat again. Or your trousers. Just call up, and I'll be happy tae help."

"I'll keep that in mind, Mr. Scott," McCoy said, a little hoarsely, and Scott's warm gaze flashed up to his own. Then he looked down again and stepped back.

"Have fun, Doctor McCoy," Scott said, and reached for his communicator.

"It's Leonard," McCoy said abruptly, a little recklessly.

"I'm Scotty, tae everyone in the universe except my wee granny," Scott said with a wink, and dematerialized back up to the ship.

McCoy took a deep breath of the frozen air, but strangely he didn't feel cold anymore. He whistled a few bars of "Winter Wonderland," and then headed for the tent Scotty had built for him. Time to go work some miracles. He'd have to wait until later to see if the universe might just be working one of its own for him.

Hot Chocolate

Day 3 - Hot Chocolate || Marshmallows, warm hands, and soft smiles.

McCoy unobtrusively scanned the drinks that the king was pouring for them out of an ancient kettle. They hadn't been outright *poisoned* in a welcoming ceremony—not yet. But he did have a code with the landing party. One finger meant “*take tiny sips and pretend it doesn't taste like piss.*” Two meant “*should be okay.*” Three meant “*don't guzzle this delicious nectar in case it is impolite.*”

The drinks steamed in the ornate mugs, and it smelled delicious, but that didn't always mean it was. McCoy glanced down at the scanner and — *huh*. It was, for all intents and purposes, hot chocolate. McCoy checked the sucrose levels to make sure it wouldn't be bitter, and then flashed three fingers to Kirk and Uhura, who both reacted with very well-hidden relief.

“Your majesty, we thank you,” Kirk said, taking a steaming mug. “We hope this is the start of a warm friendship between the Federation and your beautiful world.” The Captain took a sip of the hot liquid, and his eyebrows rose in surprise. “We have a similar drink on my world,” Kirk said.

“Is it also used in ceremonies of friendship?” the king asked.

“Yes,” Kirk answered with a smile. “Yes it is.”

The king had insisted that they take a thermos of hot chocolate with them when they left, carefully packaged in some ancient and undoubtedly priceless container. Kirk had tried to demure, but Uhura had given him a tiny shake of her head; declining the sacred gift would be deeply offensive.

They materialized on the familiar transporter pad, and Scotty grinned a hello at them once he was sure they were all in one piece, his attention largely on powering down the complex machine. Kirk handed McCoy the thermos. “I put you in charge of the hot chocolate, Bones. Although when you're done we'd probably better put the container in the vault.”

“Hot chocolate?” Scotty asked, amused. “I think I got horse's piss in the tea ceremony on that planet a few weeks ago.”

“Definitely a nice change,” Uhura laughed, and headed up to the bridge with the Captain.

“When are you off duty today?” McCoy asked Scott, leaning on the transporter console.

“1600,” Scott said, punching the last buttons to secure the transporter. “But then I have the bridge for Gamma shift tonight at 0000; I was going to try and grab a few hours of sleep.”

“If I pop by at 1630 with hot chocolate and dinner ...?” McCoy offered, following Scott out the door.

“Aye. That would be nice,” Scotty said, and the two men parted ways to their duties.

McCoy let himself in at 1630; Scotty had recently keyed his cabin door to McCoy's biometrics, a surprisingly intimate gesture that McCoy wasn't *quite* ready to reciprocate. Scotty hadn't even asked, content to let McCoy move at whatever speed he was comfortable.

“Give me a sec!” Scotty shouted from the bedroom, and McCoy sat and put his feet up. Scotty came out half dressed in his trousers and black undershirt. Like the Captain and Spock, the ship's second officer was rarely out of uniform, even in his own quarters; an emergency call to stations was always a possibility. Tonight, though, he tossed his red duty tunic over the back of a chair and settled on the couch next to McCoy.

“How was the planet?” Scott asked with a yawn, and reached around to rest his arm on the couch behind McCoy, almost but *not quite* touching him.

“One of those rare, completely lovely encounters with a delightful people,” McCoy answered. “If their highest cultural expression is hot chocolate, you know they have to be a decent sort.”

“Aye,” Scotty laughed.

“I'm fairly certain,” McCoy said, holding up the container, “that this is 4000 years old.”

“We'll let the surgeon pour, then,” Scott said, lifting his hands as though he might break it, and McCoy stood to take two cups from Scotty's tea kit. A big gaudy Christmas mug would be more fitting, but Scotty didn't have anything like that, just an indestructible durac ceramic set of fussy floral-painted dishes that wouldn't have been out of place on his grandmother's sideboard.

“I'm not putting hot chocolate on saucers,” McCoy said, anticipating Scotty's half-formed objection; the man was a complete snob when it came to tea, but McCoy wasn't going to give in on hot chocolate protocols. “Also brought the synthesized version of sandwiches,” McCoy continued, gesturing to the table.

“I have got to find the time to work the synthesizer formulas,” Scotty sighed. “In theory, we should be able to perfectly replicate anything. It's just sheer laziness that Starfleet synthesizer tech turns everything into a weird aspic.”

“It doesn't make bad marshmallows, though,” McCoy said, and plopped a handful in Scotty's drink before handing it over and settling back down under Scotty's arm. “That was probably sacrilegious.”

“Hot chocolate in a teacup is sacrilegious,” Scott teased, but that didn’t stop him from taking a sip. “Although that is damn good hot chocolate,” he admitted.

McCoy smiled softly at his ... friend. Yes, *friend* would work, for now. Outside the small window that Scotty’s rank privileges afforded him, the stars of the universe streamed by, light and life in the cold black of space. And, held protected inside the miracle that was the Enterprise, they lapsed into a comfortable silence, warm and comfortable side-by-side.

Cozy Cabin

Day 4 - Cozy Cabin || Patterned rugs, soft blankets, and warm baths.

As happened *every damn time* Kirk and Spock beamed off the ship together, it had all gone to hell. McCoy had spent three full shifts with his arse parked in the center seat, scrambling to work it out. McCoy had paced and fretted and shouted at his elbow the entire day until Scotty had finally snapped at him to get back to sickbay. McCoy had retreated like a kicked puppy. They'd both been glad he was in medbay, though, when they finally beamed the injured command team home.

They hadn't meant to, but the exhausted men had finally arrived at their adjacent cabins at roughly the same time. McCoy gestured toward his door with his chin; a clear "*come if, if you'd like.*" Scotty shrugged, not opposed, and followed.

McCoy collapsed dramatically onto the stiff couch, an arm over his eyes while he toed his boots off. "When they're feeling better, remind me to *kill* the Captain and Spock," he groaned. "God almighty, I hate days like this. I didn't hear how it finally worked out; I take it you saved the day?"

Scotty perched on the arm of the couch and rubbed his eyes. "I think it was a team effort." McCoy lifted his legs, an invitation to sit, which Scotty did, and McCoy put his legs back down in Scott's lap.

"Sorry I was a pain in your ass," McCoy sighed.

"It wouldnae be the Bridge without Leonard McCoy grumbling at the guy in the center seat," Scott answered, and McCoy smiled ruefully, not disagreeing. Scotty pulled a thin Starfleet-issued medical blanket off the back of McCoy's couch and tucked it around them, and for a time they drowsed together.

McCoy finally stirred. "I was thinking the other day about this cottage I stayed at once. A weekend away in medical school. Oregon coast in December. The fog, and the surf. Blankets piled up on the chairs. Big damn soaker tub looking out across the Pacific. That cozy little cabin is literally *trillions* of miles away now."

"Mm. Sounds nice. Pretty blonde thing wrapped around you in the tub?" Scotty asked drowsily.

"Brunette. Gorgeous with muscles. Emptiest head, though. I'd trade that cabin for this one in a heartbeat. But not the company."

"I think you might be a bit daft, laddie." Scotty murmured, almost asleep.

"I would kill for a soaker tub, though," McCoy continued, voice dropping lower, softer. "Just sitting there naked in the moonlight, water almost too hot to stand, the jets beating your muscles. Someone's slick skin under your hands, sweat and steam, half-weightless sex in effervescent water...." He paused, and flipped his position on top of Scotty, and kissed him lazily. Scotty cracked an eye at him, and flowed with the kiss.

"And on that note," McCoy said decisively, sitting up. "I'm going to go take a shower on the hottest setting the sonic will allow ... Care to join me?"

Scotty blinked fully awake at the invitation, eyes reflecting panic that he might have been dreaming in his half-doze. "I ... what?"

McCoy stood and extended his hand. "The crew has already been talking. We should give them something to talk about. If you want."

Scotty swallowed hard. "God, yes. I *want*, Leonard," he answered softly. "But I'm second officer; I'll have tae report it tae Mr. Spock, and he'll have tae do an investigation tae make sure there wasnae inappropriate coercion."

"Which is why I'm standing in *my* quarters asking *you*," McCoy said steadily, his hand still outstretched. Scotty looked him up and down, a slow smile spreading on his face.

"Aye," he breathed, and took his soon-lover's hand.

An officer's cabin wasn't cozy. There were no patterned rugs. No soft blankets. No distant surf, or warm baths or sunset views. Just gray carpets and chrome lines, the throb of the antimatter reactor and the endless dark of space. But ever after, when Leonard McCoy remembered his favorite places, in that cabin with Scotty in his arms was the most treasured of all.

Fire Places

Day 5 - Fire Places || Fuzzy socks, soft rugs, and hands intertwined.

“They are targeting Engineering, sir,” Spock said sharply, and the ship heaved as it took another hit. The power flickered before steadying.

“Mr. Sulu, get us out of here while we still can!” the Captain ordered.

“Yes sir!” Sulu said crisply, and pushed the ship to warp. The Enterprise protested loudly, but held. “I don’t think we have long at warp,” the helmsman said, knowing the feel of the ship beneath his hands as well as anyone.

“Drop us in behind that nebula from earlier today, it should shield us from scanners.”

Spock looked up. “Internal sensors are showing serious combustion occurring in Engineering,” he reported grimly. “The bulkheads have dropped around Section E1.”

Kirk hit a button in the arm of his chair. “Scotty, are you on fire down there?” he asked urgently.

“We are definitely on fire, sir,” Scott answered tensely. *“And suppressors dinnae seem tae be functional. I’m going tae vent the compartment. Vacuum protocols!”* Scott shouted, clearly screaming at his people. *Dinnae hold your breath! Breathe out!!!* he switched back to speaking to the bridge, voice calm even over the blaring alarms. “We are going tae need a medical team in E1. Burns and decompression sickness.”

Kirk gestured to Uhura, who was immediately on to sickbay.

“Do not take longer than fifteen seconds, Mr. Scott,” Spock warned.

“Aye, or we’ll lose consciousness and die,” Scott agreed. *“Venting now!”*

“Pressure and atmosphere dropping rapidly,” Spock reported. Thirteen psi. Eleven. Eight. Six, five, four ...”

“Below the pressure on Everest,” Kirk murmured.

“Two, zero ... combustion has ceased,” Spock continued.

“Come on, Scotty, reverse it ...” the Captain growled.

“And increasing,” Spock said, and the bridge crew breathed in relief. “Point six. Three psi. Climbing.”

“Bones!?” Kirk called into the comm.

“Medical team. And I. Are running,” McCoy puffed into a handheld communicator.

The ship’s surgeon skidded to a halt outside main engineering, but the bulkhead was still down. “Scotty!” McCoy shouted a bit desperately, pounding on it, aware that the Engineer probably couldn’t hear him through the thick door.

“Atmosphere has just about cycled, Doctor.” Chapel said. “There it goes.” To his relief, the fire-and-decompression door lifted. Engineering was a mess. The air was freezing, but the metal was hot, still holding heat from a serious fire that a moment’s exposure to space hadn’t dissipated.

The Chief was leaning on a wall, grimacing. “You’re fast, Leonard,” he said gratefully. “Ten of us. At least one lad who held his breath ... watch the temperature in the metal, I’m fairly certain I melted my boots tae my feet.

“I’ll be back, hang tight,” McCoy said with an unhappy frown, and Scotty nodded while McCoy dashed off to assess triage. Scotty was on the ground by the time the Doctor got back, sitting upright with his eyes closed. McCoy scanned him. “Nitrogen in your joints. The bends. And yeah, your boots are melted to your feet from the heat.”

“Everyone okay?” Scotty asked softly.

“They will be. Come on, love, let’s get you patched up.”

After 24 hours of decompression-sick engineers in his medbay, McCoy released them all to their quarters—except the Chief, who he released to *his* quarters.

“Ah, come on Leonard,” Scotty tried to negotiate. “I know we’ve been making you crazy.”

“No,” McCoy said flatly. “I release you to your quarters and you will be in Engineering three minutes later. Nope.” He helped his still-stiffly moving boyfriend down the hall, and knew he’d made the right call when Scotty only just made it. McCoy deposited him straight on the bed, then rummaged through a door.

“Fuzzy socks!” he said in triumph, holding up a pair with a scowling green face and ‘the Grinch’ written up the side.

Scott laughed in delight. “Joanna got those for you,” he said, completely certain. Scott and McCoy’s teenage daughter got along like the greatest of friends, and were constantly plotting together against McCoy.

“Absolutely,” McCoy enthused. “But you are wearing them on those still-healing feet.”

“Go on, then,” Scotty said, his lips twitching. McCoy grumbled about not being his mother, but carefully pulled off the medbay slippers, checked the shiny, healing new skin across the entire sole of both of Scotty’s feet, and gently tugged the socks on. Then he pulled his own shirt off and crawled in next to Scotty, calling for the lights off. Scotty pulled him close and intertwined their fingers.

“Thank you,” Scotty said softly, speaking of many things.

McCoy considered a number of acerbic responses, but finally settled in something authentic. “You’re welcome,” he said, and closed his eyes. He was just drifting off when Scotty poked him.

“Hey Leonard,” he asked wickedly. “Yeh know what we need tae make this cozy?”

“Oh, don’t you say it,” McCoy groaned.

“A fire!”

McCoy swore at his boyfriend and punched him in the dark, very very grateful to have him here and safe in his arms.

Blanket Fort

Day 6 - Blanket Fort || Fluffy pillows, movies, and snacks

Leonard McCoy usually would have spent shoreleave with Jim, but Jim was taking advantage of the planet's high-speed subspace relays for some meetings with Starfleet. Which meant Nyota and Spock were in those meetings too. Chapel didn't need her boss horning in on her leave. Sulu and Chekov were nice, but *so young*. He'd heard that a reluctant Scotty had been kicked down for leave, and so, with nothing better to do, went looking for the man.

Scotty had a ... particular reputation when it came to leave, and although it wasn't remotely where McCoy would have chosen, he'd followed Jim enough times to know what to look for. And sure enough, he found the Engineer in the first place he checked.

The pounding music was too loud, the lights too bright, the shadows too dark, the dancers undressed. The air was thick with mind-altering smoke—and alcohol was alcohol on every planet.

"Ah, McCoy," Scott said mellowly, more than a few drinks in, some kind of joint burning between his fingers. He waved at the table. "Have a seat, put whatever you'd like on the tab."

McCoy wasn't very interested in the dancers. Bodies were bodies, and he had a hard time not looking at them clinically. He watched Scotty's face instead. The man was impassive as he watched the show, almost non-reactive. Stoned, drunk. Maybe high. He'd probably already had sex somewhere. Aboard ship, McCoy knew what to expect—a terrifying genius, but largely kind. Off it? McCoy had heard of this reputation, but to *see* it ...?

They'd had—what? Dinner, once or twice. Some pleasant evenings over old liquor. Nothing that would give McCoy any right to think he had claim on Scotty's time, much less his affections, exclusive or otherwise. He was just gearing himself to stand and go when he realized that Scott was looking at him.

"You dinnae like this," Scott said.

McCoy shrugged uncomfortably. "Don't let me interfere with your plans. I think I'll just head back to the ship ..." he started.

Scotty raised a hand in protest, put out the joint and threw some money on the table. Then he stood and caught the eye of the club boss, who glanced at the money and then nodded; all square.

Scott rested a companionable arm over McCoy's shoulder and guided them out. The air outside was quiet, crisp, and cold, a shocking change from inside the club. "Better?" Scott asked.

"Honestly? Yes," McCoy admitted. "But look, don't bother on my account. You looked like you were having a good time..."

"Ah," Scotty sighed sadly. "I've fucked it up, disappointed you, and proved myself the right bastard for which I have a well-deserved reputation."

"I have no right to be disappointed or tell you what to do with your time," McCoy disagreed swiftly.

"Yeh dinnae, aye?" Scott said, almost sadly, and McCoy suddenly felt like *hewas* the disappointment. "I'm bad at shoreleave," Scotty continued. "I'd rather be on the ship takin' care of my bairnes. They toss me down here, and I just look for the quickest way tae shut off my brain. It doesnae mean I like it. But if you're fool enough tae be interested in keeping my company, I have another idea."

McCoy let Scott take his elbow, and followed him three streets away to a bright, almost tent-like building. "Scotty, if this is a brothel ..." McCoy started, an edge of warning to his voice, but Scotty just laughed at him.

"This planet is about pleasure. And sex, booze, and drugs are a quick shortcut, but certainly no' the only road. And this isnae for children, but it's also ... Nyota would have the word. Lighter? Kinder? I'll show yeh, if you'll trust me?"

McCoy nodded, and they ducked under a flap. This place was light and warm; it somehow smelled of nutmeg and popcorn. An attendant smiled at them. "A double, please," Scott said, and paid. Before McCoy could protest his shoes were gone and he'd been wrapped in a soft white shawl, and was following Scotty back, past billowing curtained walls to their own cozy cubby.

"Sit please," the attendant said pleasantly, and another attendant appeared as well. McCoy looked dubiously at the flat floor, but at Scott's amused look sat with the sigh—and the floor flowed up around him into the most perfectly ergonomic seat he'd ever been in. Scotty settled in beside him.

"Close your eyes," the attendant said, McCoy complied, a bit reluctantly, anticipating exactly what happened—hands on his head, tracing the joints of his skull, the coiled trigger points in his neck, the bones of his face.

He looked over at Scotty, who was looking back at him through cracked eyelids. "Very mildly telepathic," Scott soothed. "They're looking for what makes you happy. And me; they'll combine them ... Oh, lassie, we cannae be here any more than four hours," Scott said, directing the last to the attendant, who nodded beatifically.

"Nothing makes me happy," McCoy grumbled.

"Shush, Leonard," Scotty said. And it *did* feel nice, so McCoy let himself drift. And in his mind, he didn't *see* anything in particular, but he *felt*

it. Discovery and science. A hard job well done. A beloved person in your arms. Rain on a roof. Space. Earth. Good food, old spirits. Music. Starships. Home. Kisses in the dark. The smell of magnolias, of ozone. Tracing a well-loved body with your hands, the gasp of your name on their lips.

McCoy didn't know exactly when the attendants left, but he could feel that it had been three hours when he surfaced. "That was better than the nightclub," McCoy sighed contentedly.

"Mmhm," Scotty agreed lazily.

"I think they left us some food." And they had; meats and cheeses, fruits and bread, a very delicate dessert, some kind of bubbly wine. They munched happily for a half hour, talking more easily than they had started.

Scotty got up first. "We have tae go," he said. "Or the Enterprise will leave us."

"Wouldn't hurt my feelings," McCoy said, stretching lazily, and let Scotty help him up. "This was a nice blanket fort. Thanks for letting me crash your shore leave," he continued, a little shyly.

Scotty reached out and gently took his hand, and the feel of it was as nice as the hours they'd just spent together. "I wanted tae invite you tae do this, but I was too afraid. Thank you for coming tae look for me."

McCoy looked down at their hands, and knew he had a goofy smile on his face, but didn't care. "Any time, Scotty. Any time."

Catching a Cold

Day 7 - Catching a cold || Tissues, savory soup, and cuddles.

Quarantine. *Fantastic.* A member of the away team had come home with the sniffles, which had morphed into a raging respiratory infection. And they were all going to be fine, after some suffering, but everyone who had been exposed was locked down in sickbay behind a bioshield. It was just starting for McCoy—that catch in his throat, the start of a sniffle. He grabbed a tissue, blew his nose, and then tossed it in the biohazard bin.

“Doctor McCoy,” moaned a miserable Lieutenant the next bed over. “Can’t I just go to my quarters?”

“And shed viruses all down the hall? Not likely,” McCoy snapped.

Across the medbay, outside the shield in the section that had been disinfected in every corner, the door slid open. “Hey Chief,” an engineer said woozily.

“Well, you lads just look miserable,” Scotty commiserated, and leaned on the wall just outside the bioshield. “Everybody okay?” he asked softly, catching McCoy’s gaze.

“Just peachy,” McCoy grumbled. Then he glanced down at Scotty’s hand, wrapped in a towel. “If you need medical help you get to join us here in hell, because the entire medical staff is infected.”

“No thank you,” Scott said. “It will stop bleeding eventually.”

“Let me see,” McCoy sighed, and Scotty unwrapped his hand. “Yeah. No. That won’t stop bleeding any time soon. Get in here.”

“Not happening,” Scotty protested. He wrapped his hand back up and went searching for medical equipment.

“You’ll need the ...” McCoy started, standing on his toes to try to watch what Scotty was doing. “Okay, yes, the tissue knitter. And the ...”

“Dermal regenerator, aye,” Scotty said, and went to work on his hand. “If you think I’ve never done this before, remember that I spent two years on Delta Vega with no medical staff at all.” When he was done he held his palm up for McCoy to inspect, and opened and closed his fist.

“Not bad. I’ll take care of the scar tissue later.” Scotty went to wash the blood off, and McCoy flopped down in a biobed with an irritated sigh.

“You’re running a fever,” Scott said, standing by the shield again, looking at the readings on the bed.

“It’s just getting started. I’m not looking forward to the next 48 hours.”

“Eat some food and drink some electrolytes,” Scott warned.

McCoy rolled his eyes. “Yes, thank you *Doctor*. Give a guy a dermal regenerator and he’s an expert.” He sighed. “To tell you the truth I’d kill for some real chicken noodle soup, but the synthesizer is crap at it.”

Scotty shrugged. “Give it another try. You never know.” He put his hand on the shield. “Take care of yourself, Leonard. I’ve got tae relieve Mr. Spock on the Bridge, but I’ll be back tae check on you tonight.”

“Keep your hands out of meat grinders please!” McCoy shouted at him as he left, and Scotty gave him a rude gesture before the door slid shut behind him.

McCoy rubbed his hands up and down his face, then glanced at Jim Kirk, who had levered up onto an elbow on a nearby bed and was looking across at him, a smile tugging on his lips. “What?!” McCoy snapped.

“What was that?” Kirk asked.

“What was what?”

“Scotty checking on you.”

McCoy shook his head. “He wasn’t checking on me. He cut the hell out of his hand.”

“Sure,” Kirk said incredulously, and exchanged a glance with Nurse Chapel.

“Let me show you, Captain,” she said in mock long suffering, and stood and headed to the food synthesizer. She punched some buttons for chicken soup.

“It’s awful,” McCoy warned. “Watery chicken broth with tiny noodle bits.”

“Oh, god bless the man,” Chapel murmured, and took a steaming bowl off the dock. Even through stuffy noses, everyone in medbay could smell it. Thick, golden broth flavored with thyme and something just slightly spicy. Deep orange carrot medallions mixed with onions and celery, juicy bites of chicken, and best of all, enough thick homestyle noodles to fill the bowl. Chapel handed it to the Captain.

“It was not like this yesterday. I saw a crewman try to order chicken soup and he had to dump it down the recycler. Have a bite, Bones,” Kirk

cajoled, and held up a spoonful. McCoy batted away the attempted spoonfeeding, but took the bowl.

“It had to have been Scotty,” McCoy admitted. “But I don’t know why you’re grinning at me like the cat that ate the canary. A bunch of sick crewmen, and he just wanted to help.”

“If you say so,” Kirk laughed, then sneezed and headed to get some soup for himself.

McCoy settled back on the bed, hot soup warming his hands, and sighed in relief. Maybe the next few days wouldn’t be so bad after all.

Especially if Scotty stopped by a few more times.

Snowed In

Day 8 - Snowed In || Candles, snow drifts, and quiet.

“What do we do, Captain Scott?” asked young Ensign Franklin, clearly afraid.

And he had reason to be; their little ship had crashed and was dying, the rest of the crew dead. No way to punch a signal through to call for help. No chances left, no hope. Outside the cracked screen of the bridge, they were surrounded by what looked like snow, but wasn't; just thick, powdery space dust that had accumulated on the outside of the massive artificial sphere. The emergency chemical lights flickered, almost like candlelight on his young companion's face.

Scotty sat back in the center chair and tried to ignore the ache from his broken arm. “Well, laddie, this is a tremendous scientific find. A Dyson Sphere! It's just our bad luck tae have been caught in its gravitational field. And that we cannae tell anyone about it.”

“Sir ...” the Ensign trailed off in astonishment. They were going to die, and his legendary senior officer was rhapsodizing about *science*.

“I have one idea left, laddie,” Scott said after a moment. “It's dangerous and without guarantee, but it gives us a chance. The transporter.” At Franklin's confused look, he continued: “we disable the rematerialization subroutine, lock the pattern buffers into a diagnostic mode, reroute the matter array through the pattern buffer, and use the phase inducer to keep our patterns intact.”

“...hold our patterns in the transporter until we can be rescued?” the young officer slowly worked out.

“Aye.”

“The power might fail. It could be decades! We might *never* be rescued!” Franklin cried.

“I told you, it is a *chance*,” Scott said gently. “Maybe a one in a million chance, but the only one we've got.”

Franklin swallowed hard, then stood. “When do we get started?” he asked.

“Now,” Scotty answered, and gestured at the computer. “I've already got it programmed. We just have tae step ontae the pad, and surrender our fates to the universe.”

Franklin nodded, and helped Captain Scott up. The lifts were down, and so they had to climb through the damaged shafts. Which hurt Scott's broken arm terribly, but no use complaining about it.

“Do you have a family, Mr. Franklin?” Scott asked as they climbed.

“My mom and dad. Little sister. I promised them I'd be home for Christmas. I guess not now.”

“Aye, me too,” Scott answered sadly. “Were you home last Christmas?”

“I was,” Franklin said, and he smiled at the memory.

“A good one?”

“Very.”

“We dinnae know exactly what happens tae a mind in a transporter,” Scott said as they pushed through fallen conduits into the transporter room. “Longest anyone has ever been in one is 29 minutes. On the *Enterprise*, incidentally, and it was me and a couple of other lads. In theory, the thoughts in your mind are held in the same stasis as your body, the neurons frozen where they were. But there are reports of people dreaming in transport. Either way, Mr. Franklin, hold last Christmas in your mind. Tae give you something nice tae dream about.” *Or the very last thought of your life*, Scott didn't say.

“Yes, sir,” the Ensign said. He stood stiffly on the pad, and Scotty could see how afraid the boy was, his mind in turmoil and pain.

“Close your eyes, Mr. Franklin,” Scott soothed. “It's Christmas. The snow is falling. It's quiet, candles flickering. You're sitting between your mam and your da, your little sister on the floor leaning against your legs. And it's warm, and perfect, and you're loved ...” the ensign relaxed, so Scott pulled the dematerialization lever, and Franklin sparkled out of existence into the near-death of the transporter.

“Home for Christmas in your dreams, son.” Scotty blew out a breath, and set the transporter for a thirty second delay. But there was time yet; a few minutes still until the life support dropped below survivable levels. He looked up. It was cold and dark, and so very, very quiet.

“Forgive me, love,” Scotty said to the dark. “You asked me not tae go in this one. I'm sorry tae do this tae you. And *this* year, when Jim Kirk isnae going tae walk in your front door either ... I'm sorry. Do you remember that one Christmas after the five year mission? We rented that little place for two weeks. It snowed a meter and a half, but we didnae care. Firelight and food and old spirits. Making love when the mood struck. And it struck rather a lot, as I recall. I've never been good at sitting still, as you well know, but those weeks were precious.”

The computer chimed, giving the alarm even in its very low power state: *Warning. Internal atmosphere below life sustaining levels. All personnel evacuate.*

Scotty sighed. “I'm doing this now, Leonard. I love you.” He punched the delayed dematerialization sequence and then stood heavily and

walked to the pad. He blew a breath through his lips, and sternly told his heart to stop pounding so hard. Then he closed his eyes and imagined a thousand days and nights, drowsing in bed with Leonard McCoy's head on his shoulder.

And in the silence, the lights flickered around him, like candlelight on snow.

Sledding

Day 9 - Sledding || biting wind, cold noses, and laughter

McCoy walked into Main Engineering, which was a freezing wreck. “Hey,” he said, grabbing a cadet. “Is there a Chief Engineer?”

The cadet shrugged. “If it’s anybody, it’s that Lieutenant Commander who showed up. He ranks us all, and seems to know what the hell he’s doing.”

“Scott?” McCoy asked, searching his memory for the name.

“I think so. You can find him from the shouting.”

Sure enough, there was one voice carrying authoritatively across the chaos, just finishing up instructions to a group of wide-eyed engineers. “... okay, go, and please dinnae touch anything that will kill you. Which there is a hell of a lot of hanging about. If you dinnae know what you’re about tae touch *ask me first* ... who the hell are you?”

It took McCoy a minute to realize he was being addressed. The Chief looked at him expectantly, hands on his hips. “Doctor Leonard McCoy,” he said, a beat after it became awkward.

“Aye, well, I’m Doctor Montgomery Scott, but by ‘doctor’ and the blue shirt I assume yeh mean ...”

“The Chief Medical officer, yeah. Apparently. And we have actually met.”

Scott shrugged. “If you say so. Can you step away from that console that you’re about tae lean on, Doctor, if you touch it in its current state you’re going tae get electrocuted.”

McCoy froze. “Is there a *safe* spot?” he asked. Scott looked around, and then gestured at McCoy, tracing out a box with his hands. “Right there where you’re at. Is there something in particular I can do for you Doctor?”

He held up his medical tricorder. “We ejected the core two hours ago. I should have already done a radiation check on all engineering personnel. And before you protest, I know you’re all as busy as hell but I’ll be damned if I’m going to have some 19 year old kid fall down dead tomorrow afternoon from radiation poisoning.”

Scott smiled at him, almost proudly, and then whistled down loudly to the next level. “Division one! Line up outside the chief’s office, medical wants tae look at you!” A groan went up, and Scott scowled. “That means *now*, run lads!! Division two, you’re next!”

“Ship of children,” the Engineer grumbled. “You dinnae look like a kid, at least.”

“Uh, thanks. I think,” McCoy answered dryly, and scanned Scott. “You look clear.”

“That’s good news, I was as close as anybody. Brand new ship like this shouldnae be leaking radiation in a core ejection, but she took a pounding too. I’ll walk you down tae the office so you arenae killed by some arcing wire.”

McCoy rubbed his nose and hands, which were freezing. “Why is it so cold?” he complained. “And *windy*?”

Scott gestured vaguely. “No core. Engineering is usually heated by the heat radiating off the core itself. The auxiliary environmental systems keep us livable but not necessarily comfortable. And the deck is big enough that we are actually getting micro weather patterns in here—air getting heated by the enviro system, then rising and touching the hull, which without the core isnae getting warmed up much beyond the temperature of space, so the air falls. Wind. And there is actually,” he swiped a finger across a handhold, “the tiniest bit of snowfall.”

The engineer grinned suddenly, and it changed his look entirely. McCoy sternly beat back a sudden flicker of *completely inappropriate* attraction.

“The snow is about right, when you think about it,” Scott laughed. “I just took a Starship *sledding* down an antimatter shockwave at the edge of an event horizon.”

McCoy shuddered. “In the future please do *not* tell me about all the ways we almost died.”

Scott shot him a look. “Is there going tae be a ‘next time,’ Doctor?”

“If the universe was a rational place, which it isn’t, I’d say no,” McCoy said. And then he let himself laugh for the first time in days, because he could feel it, in his very bones: this wasn’t the end, not by a long shot. “I suspect that this might not be the last time you and I go sledding together, Mr. Scott.”

The engineer grinned, and *god*, that was attractive. “From your mouth to god’s ears, Doctor. I’ll leave you tae your scans ...” he raised his voice for the benefit of the mooney cadets “*of engineers who will cooperate or they’ll hear it from me!!!*”

Scott watched McCoy go, and whistled softly; the man cut a handsome figure. Then he shook himself because although this had been a day of miracles, *that* was wistful thinking. “Who the hell taught you to hold a molecular spanner that way!” he shouted at a cadet, who jumped in terror. “God almighty, I’ll make engineers of you lot yet!”

Winter Market

Day 10 - Winter Market || Murmuring crowds, rows of stalls, and the smell of food.

Nyota Uhura had been the one to institute “market day” on the Enterprise. They were over three years into the five year mission; most consumables had been consumed, but there were a few things still. Bottles of liquor picked up on planets, some real coffee beans, bricks of chocolate. But more common barter items were things like board games exchanged for a song, a massage for some new art to hang in your quarters, swapped shifts.

Market day always lifted everyone’s spirits; the more creative among them set up booths, and buffet tables of the delicious-smelling food that Scott had reprogrammed lined the mess hall. The crew had outdone itself for this one, though—following along with the Earth calendar it was a *winter* market, full of bright colors, warm spices, and facsimiles of snow. The hall was buzzing with warm laughter and conversation.

“Ah, Nyota,” McCoy said cheerfully, and slid into a seat next to her. “It looks like another triumph!”

“Everyone does seem to be in the spirit of things this year,” she said with a smile.

“I’m looking for a gift, what is the word on what’s available?”

“What are you trading?”

“Skipping the quarterly medical exam?” McCoy teased. That was, of course, not possible. “Kidding. I have a bottle of old Kentucky bourbon.”

“Wow,” Uhura said, shocked. “You’re actually willing to trade something that rare this far from home? You’ve probably got your pick of whatever you want then, and it wouldn’t surprise me if you start a bidding war for a barter like that! Seriously, Leonard, what are you looking for?”

McCoy shrugged a little bashfully. “Something for Scotty.”

Uhura smiled at him. “I gathered. You don’t just want to give him the bourbon?” Uhura asked, tapping her lips thoughtfully

“I thought about that. But I’d like something a little bit special. A little more permanent. Does anyone have a watch? Ring? Something along those lines.”

Across the room, Scotty walked in, and headed straight for the food. “Let me ask around,” Nyota said softly. “I’ll see what I can do.”

“Thanks, Nyota,” McCoy said gratefully, and went to intercept his boyfriend. He caught up with him filling a plate of food, and leaned in to kiss his neck.

“You give me the shivers, love, in the nicest way possible,” Scotty said, and wrapped a free arm around McCoy’s waist. “What’s everybody selling?”

“I haven’t had a chance to look around, but I’ve heard that the junior engineers are selling that horrible hooch that they’ve been distilling in hydroponics.”

“What hooch is that now?” Scotty asked, playing dumb. Kirk and Scotty both turned a blind eye to the well-worn starship tradition.

McCoy made a face. “Don’t be tempted, it’s really awful and probably dangerous. Spock told Jim a while back that he was going to stop busting them about it, but Jim told him to keep it up.”

“Half the fun is in getting away with it, and Mr. Spock is a worthy adversary,” Scotty said with a laugh. “Isnae that right, Nyota?” he asked as she came up beside them, and leaned in to kiss her cheek.

“Spock enjoys coming up with new ways to terrify the junior officers. Like you,” Nyota said, and kissed her friend back.

“I would never ...” Scott started in mock affront.

“So waking up unsuspecting ensigns in the middle of gamma shift on your assigned nights and giving them the bridge is ... what then?”

“Training,” Scott said simply.

“Sure,” she said, bumping his shoulder. “Nothing to do with wanting to crawl back into bed with someone?”

“You’re terrible,” McCoy laughed.

“I dinnae hear you complaining!”

McCoy offered Uhura his arm. “Eat your food,” he told Scotty. “I’m going to circulate for a minute. No peeking, I’m shopping for you!” Once they were out of earshot, he turned urgently to Uhura. “What do you have for me?”

“Chekov has a watch he’d trade, but he wants to see the bourbon first. He’ll meet you over by the dessert table.”

“Keep Scotty occupied, will you?” McCoy asked.

“Good luck,” she said, and headed back to her old friend.

“And what are you selling today, Nyota?” Scott asked.

“Songs,” she said simply.

“Ah, priceless. And what would information cost?” he asked.

She stole a bite of food from his plate. “Depends on what you’d like to know.”

“What’s he up tae?” Scott asked, eyeing McCoy and Chekov huddled in negotiations across the room.

“Sorry, that information isn’t for sale.”

“Mm. He has one bottle of bourbon left, you know. *One*. ” Scott shook his head. “Do you suppose Mr. Chekov might trade, say, a *new acquisition* for an authentic borscht programmed intae the synthesizer?”

She winked at him. “I’ll see what I can do, Scotty.”

Negotiations complete, McCoy grinned over at them, and Scotty smiled back. “Thanks lassie. He gives more than he should.”

“I think he’d say you’re worth it,” she said. “He really loves you.”

“Clearly daft in the head,” Scotty answered.

”I’m serious,” Nyota said, reaching out to touch his hand.

Scotty shook his head, but couldn’t stop his smile. “Aye. Well. He isnae alone in any of it.”

Snowball Fight

Day 11 - Snowball Fight || Heavy breathing, footprints in the snow, and warm hugs.

It didn't happen very often, but from time to time Leonard McCoy was *very* grateful for the close-combat tactical training Starfleet had forced him through first semester at the academy. Just now he was blessing the name of the hard-ass commander he had really hated at the time. He held his weapon tightly in his hand and moved as softly as he could through the snow of this freezing planet, trying to tread lightly and not leave footprints.

He caught the Captain's eye, and nodded curtly at his gestured motion. McCoy was being deployed against their enemy in a flanking move. It was a little exposed, a little dangerous, but McCoy was still on his feet and mobile, which was more than they could say for most of the team. They'd taken heavy casualties, picked off one at a time by a shadowy adversary. But McCoy had the enemy commander in his sights, and he knew what he had to do.

No time to think about the danger or trying to remain hidden; he ran forward with a whoop and absolutely *whitewashed* Scotty with a snowball. But Scotty got a handful of McCoy's coat, and the two of them went down into the powdery fluff together.

"You're dead," McCoy deadpanned, grinning down at the enemy commander, who was flat on his back.

"Aye, I do seem tae be," the man said, contemplating his mortality, "but you are too," he continued, and then started to stuff snow up McCoy's coat.

"Ah! Not fair!" McCoy cried, trying to wiggle away, "you're dead!"

"Kiss for a dying man?" Scott mock-begged, and then grabbed McCoy's scarf and dragged him down for an absolutely wicked kiss, all snow crystals and cold nose on the other side of absolutely *searing* lips, and hands that refused to let him go.

"I'm a little warmer now," McCoy panted when they came up for air. They were both breathing hard, their breaths puffing white in the frigid air. At some point Scotty had flipped their position, and McCoy was now flat on his back, looking up at his boyfriend. "And feeling like we might be wearing too many clothes."

Scotty leaned on an elbow in the snow beside McCoy and grinned across at him. "Go on then. You take yours off first, I'll watch."

"We win!" cried an exuberant Kirk, coming around the corner with the rest of the away team. He took in the sight of his two officers who had clearly been rolling around in the snow. "Aw, Bones. Fraternizing with the enemy again?"

"Absolutely," McCoy enthused with a happy grin, and both Scott and McCoy yelped and covered their heads when they were pummeled by good-natured snowballs from both teams from the snowball fight.

"All right!" Kirk said, waving off the junior officers, who were having a good time targeting their senior officers, and were now eyeing their Captain. Kirk helped McCoy to his feet, then Scotty, dusting the snow off of them both.

"That was fun," Kirk enthused. "You about had me, Scotty."

"I *would* have had you," Scott complained. "I just wasnae anticipating you sending one of your men in on a suicide mission." Scott shot him a look and dropped his voice. "Which, should it ever come up for real ... can yeh not do that with Leonard in the future, please?"

Kirk sombered instantly. "No promises, Scotty. And you know that."

"Right," McCoy interrupted; he wasn't going to let the good mood slide. "If you're going to hold a wake for me, I'm going to need a lot more alcohol."

Kirk flipped open his communicator, ready to call for beam-up, and then paused. "We're not going to tell Spock about the snowball fight. Are we?"

"Is that an order, sir?" Scotty asked, blowing on his fingers.

Kirk nodded firmly, looking into the middle distance. "Yes, Mr. Scott, I think it is. Kirk to Enterprise," he said into his comm.

"Enterprise, Spock here. Was your survey fruitful, sir?"

"Yes, Mr. Spock. If a bit chilly."

"Congratulations on your victory by the way, sir, although you may want to brush up on ground tactics. Mr. Scott nearly had you with a maneuver I believe I recognized from the Battle of Gettysburg," the Vulcan said dryly.

"How does he do that?" Kirk asked with a laugh. "We're freezing our asses off here, Spock. Start a fire and bring us home."

Lonely

Day 12 - Lonely || Gloomy skies, soft blankets, and a warm fire.

It's what they did every year, if there was any hope that Scotty would be on Earth for the holidays. And it wasn't as if McCoy had never spent the week alone—ships got delayed, plans changed—but Leonard McCoy was starting to wonder if coming here himself might have been a bad idea. It was objectively perfect—dark snow-threatening skies, a warm fire crackling at his toes, a soft blanket tucked over his lap.

But Lord, this beautiful cottage was *lonely*.

McCoy sternly fought back a prickle of tears. An unexpected soft knock on the door almost caused his heart to jump, but no. Scotty wouldn't have knocked. He would have blown in like a snowstorm of motion and cheer and sound. McCoy stood and answered the door, and was happy to see the lovely face of Nyota Uhura smiling back at him.

"I brought wine," she said, and invited herself in whether McCoy liked it or not. "Spock says ... if you need him here Leonard, he'll put on thermal underclothes and brave the cold."

"He hates winter in Vermont," McCoy said with a laugh, or as much of one he could muster. "Tell him I appreciate the offer."

The old friends sat down together beside the fire, and silently watched it crackle until it had nearly burned itself out. And that, somehow, was the metaphor that allowed them to speak. If the light was gone, maybe they could find a way to say their names at last.

Jim, and Scotty.

Somehow, unbelievably, nightmarishly, in one year, they both were just *gone*.

"I've been thinking," McCoy cleared his throat, his voice cracking from disuse. Or so he told himself. "Thinking about last year," he continued. "Just before they launched the Enterprise-B, and we were all together. All happy."

"It was lovely," Uhura agreed softly.

"Eating, drinking, and being merry. We had no idea," McCoy said bleakly. "A week later Jim died saving lives on a ship called Enterprise. Scotty never really got over it, you know—looking out of that gash in the ship into airless space where Captain James T. Kirk was supposed to be." McCoy didn't bother to wipe his eyes. He was going to weep, it was going to be terrible, and he had to let it come. "I think that's why Scotty doubled down on the Romulan supernova project. He was finally most of the way to retiring, but when they asked him, he couldn't say no."

"Spock asked him," Uhura said softly.

"I know," McCoy gasped. "I know, Nyota. I'm not angry. Tell him I'm not. It would be illogical to blame him. I don't. I don't blame Scotty either. I blame our collective need to save the world! We pulled it off so many times, I don't think it ever occurred to any of us that the reaper would come looking for repayment for all the lives we stole from Death's hands."

"Two of our best," Nyota said, her own voice raw. "I feel like Death got overpaid."

McCoy dropped his head and squeezed the bridge of his nose tight, trying to find control, shoulders shaking from the effort of it. "Because they didn't find Jim's body, I had to talk myself out of hope every day. And then when Scotty disappeared into thin air two months later, somehow I couldn't find hope anywhere. Or I didn't think so. But Starfleet issued his ... his death certificate last week. *And I feel like I can't say goodbye!*"

Nyota stood and sat down beside him on the couch. She pulled him to her breast, heart to heart, and wrapped her arms around him, and he finally let himself sob; to wail into her neck with the vast depth of his loss. And he couldn't say how much time passed, but unexpectedly, he found the end of his tears. He hadn't expected that an end of tears was possible, but when he lifted his head he felt cleanly hollowed out, and lighter for it.

Nyota was as watery as he was, and she kissed his forehead. "I grieve with thee," she said softly, and moved aside a bit. She found a blanket and tucked it around him. Outside, it had finally started to snow.

McCoy spoke, a whisper, an admission: "I miss Jim, my best friend. I miss Spock, who misses *Jim* so much that he can't look me in the eye. I miss Hiraku and Pavel, who call to check on me and try to pretend they aren't checking on me. And I *miss* Scotty, Nyota. God, oh god, I miss him. And it's not like he was *here*, like he was *home* very often. But I miss his voice. His ridiculous stories, or when he would call on fire about an idea he'd had. I miss the hope that, on any given day, he might walk in my door. I miss looking up at the stars, and the possibility that somewhere in the universe, he was doing the same." He took a deep breath, and then another. And for the first time, he wondered if he might survive this. "You said you brought wine?" McCoy asked hopefully, and Uhura laughed a half-sob.

"I do have wine," she said tearily.

"And I have food. Some bread, some cheese. Let's eat, drink and be merry. For tomorrow, dear friend ... we find a way to live without them."

Warm Bath

Day 13 - Warm Bath || Bubble bath, soft music, and gentle hands.

Starships had a water problem. Engineering had 2.5 megaliters for cooling and power generation, but every molecule of it was carefully accounted for and very carefully contained. Water that touched a bulkhead adjacent to the exterior hull could freeze. Loose water in a gravity loss scenario could be catastrophic. To say nothing of the vast energy requirements of storing, cleaning, warming, and recycling water for consumptive use. Toilets and sinks were vacuum engineered, and the environmental system cycled the steam from the ten milliliters used in a sonic shower to maintain air humidity. The Captain and First Officer had low-pressure water showers, and there was one in the seldom-used VIP suite.

But there wasn't a bathtub on the whole ship, which meant that if you happened to stumble across an uninhabited, Class M, geothermically active planet with perfect hot tubs, there was an all-out *fight* for shoreleave passes.

"Thirty eight degrees in the water, with an air temperature of about negative two degrees," McCoy was enthusing to the Captain. "Just the right mix of minerals. Magnesium chloride, sodium chloride, potassium chloride. It is a literal spa planet, Jim. We've got to stay long enough to cycle the whole crew down!"

Captain Kirk lifted his hands in surrender. "Fine, Bones. You talked me into it. How many of the crew have requested leave, Spock?" Kirk asked, spinning his chair toward his first officer.

Spock flipped through the list on his pad. "All but twelve, most of whom are species that cannot submerge themselves in water or prefer not to. Two others who have diagnosed aquaphobia. And, as usual, the Chief Engineer has failed to request leave."

McCoy frowned at that. "He broke his ribs last month, he probably needs a soak more than anyone. Put him in the list anyway, I'll certify it as medically necessary."

"He's tough to dig off the ship," Uhura volunteered from her station.

"Then I'll personally throw him into a transporter beam," McCoy growled, and Chekov snickered.

In the end, that's exactly what it took, and McCoy frog-matched the complaining engineer to the transporter room and onto the pad. "Doctor McCoy," Scott sputtered, "this is really nae necessary. With the core powered down and half the crew gone, I could get a lot of work done."

"Not happening, Commander," McCoy said firmly, and nodded to the transporter officer, who just smirked and pulled the dematerialization lever.

The planet was gorgeous, with high, snow-capped mountain peaks giving way to this rocky outcropping. Heated waterfalls poured from a cliff into a series of broad, shallow pools of steaming, crystal-clear water. There wasn't a single whiff of sulfur, but instead a pleasant near-pine smell from nearby trees. There was snow up to the edge of the pools, and some of the younger members of the crew were giggling, braving the pleasant shock of rolling around in the snow and then jumping straight into a hot tub.

"There is a quieter pool around the corner, reserved for the senior officers," McCoy said. "Which in this rotation is just us."

And it wasn't like it hadn't *occurred* to McCoy. But everyone was skinnydipping. There wasn't usually anywhere to wear a swimming suit, so no one even owned one, and five hundred people jammed into a few hundred meters of livable space for a year had dissolved boundaries. But the Doctor and the Engineer had been flirting with an *almost-something* for months now. He tried not to look as Scotty peeled off his uniform, until he noticed that Scotty had no similar compunctions.

A little bashfully, aware that he didn't quite hold up to the physique of the twenty-somethings just around the corner, McCoy slipped into the hot water. Not that it hid much, but the bubbles and the steam partially preserved his dignity. Scotty slid in next to him, and blew out a breath. "Ohh, hot!"

"You'll get used to it in a minute. It's nice."

Scotty grabbed a handful of snow from near the edge of the pool and held it in his palm, dissolving it in the water. Then he tilted his head back, closed his eyes with a groan, and floated on the surface of the pool. McCoy tipped his own head back, anchoring himself on a rock, and felt his muscles uncoiling pleasantly in the heat. He could hear the crew, whooping and splashing around the corner, but nearer there was something nearly like birdsong, high and cheerful in the cold air.

"I'm willing to confess, this is nice," Scotty said. The wind had changed, and he was a shadow on the other side of the pool through a thicker bank of steam. "You were right."

"Please remember that in the future," McCoy answered.

"Leonard McCoy: always right. Got it," Scott teased.

"Damn straight."

Scott glided toward him in the water. "You're beautiful," Scott said. "Please remember *that* in the future."

"I'll check your eyesight when we get back to the ship," McCoy laughed, trying to brush off the compliment.

“You are,” Scott insisted, then scooped up a handful of sand from the bottom of the pool and smoothed it across McCoy’s back. The grit of the sand, the heat of the water, the weight of Scotty’s hands, and McCoy caught his breath. Scott traced the sand across the muscles of his shoulders, then rinsed it off with a handful of water. But he kept his hands on McCoy’s back, fingers on his neck, thumbs down his spine. Then Scotty was sitting behind him, and his lips replaced his hands.

It was *intensely* erotic, and McCoy didn’t bother to tell his body to cool it.

“Tell me tae stop,” Scott murmured, breath hot against his neck.

“That. Is not happening,” McCoy managed.

“How about now?” he asked, and his hands were *considerably* lower. And Scott had a reputation for having great hands, but ... *Jesus God*. “Changes everything, Leonard,” Scotty whispered in his ear, and ... *god almighty, how the hell did Scotty know to touch him like that??*

“It damn well better,” McCoy said, his brain already swirling on the edge of bliss, his body absolutely willing to follow wherever Scotty wanted to take him. Then his heart caught up with his sarcastic head, and he leaned back far enough for an intense, open-mouthed kiss. “For the better, Scotty. It changes everything, for the better.”

Homemade Meal

Day 14 - Homemade Meal/Cooking || Savory spices, hot meals, and family.

“Leonard!” Nyota Uhura cried in delight, swinging the door open. “And Scotty! I didn’t know you were on Earth!”

“I’m not,” he said with a wink, and leaned in to kiss her cheek.

McCoy handed Spock an armload of groceries. “We brought wine. And bourbon. And scotch. And apparently something to make food, I have no idea.”

“Veg curry,” Scotty said, rolling his eyes. “Because you heathens cannae just keep replicating food, not when you’re home.”

“It’s much better than that horrible synthesized garbage we used to get,” Uhura said with a shudder. “Thanks, I think, to an engineer who put the programmers to shame.”

“They’ve been programming *alcohol*,” Scott complained. “It’s a damned travesty.”

“Bones! Scotty!” Kirk called happily, coming around that corner. “That makes all of us.”

“Oh!” McCoy exclaimed in surprise. “Are Hikaru and Pavel here too?”

“*Reliant* and *Excelsior* are in orbit, and their captains are indeed here,” Kirk answered.

It had been quite some time since the whole Enterprise family had been together. But the imminent launch of the *Enterprise-B*, and Starfleet’s desire to send her out with pomp, was pulling the old crew home. They were heroes of the Federation, several times over. Legends, although that title embarrassed them all. But they were grayer, now, and the days of heady adventure were fading. The end of back-to-back-to-back missions had finally scattered them. But when circumstances allowed, they gathered here at Spock and Uhura’s gorgeous San Francisco home. As always, the smell of foods from many worlds and cultures filled the air, and the drinks and conversation flowed easily deep into the night.

The stars were out, and they drifted onto the patio, a fire chasing off the slight autumn chill. They all could look up at the sky, and find some of the places they’d been. There was the star of New Vulcan. There, a nebula where a ship and many of their crewmates had died. The Klingons, there. The Romulans, there. Shoreleave, and battles, and wonders. On and on, into the black—worlds they’d stood on, until they had to turn back. The next generation would have to push beyond. And it was.

“It’s a public relations stunt, and that’s all,” Kirk was saying, gesturing with his drink. “They plop Chekov, Scotty, and me awkwardly on the bridge. I say something ridiculous like ‘*take her out*,’ and we cruise around the moon at half impulse.”

“It’s an *Enterprise*,” Scotty sighed. “Even if she is *Excelsior* class,” he teased, poking Sulu good-naturedly in the ribs. “They’ve got -A fully decommissioned now and wrapped up in the reserve shipyard. The fleet needs an *Enterprise*, even if none of us are serving on her.”

“Demora is,” Sulu said with a smile. “Helmsman.”

“A Sulu at the helm,” McCoy said. “Sounds right.”

“We hand *Enterprise* to the next generation,” Uhura sighed nostalgically. “The end of an era. What’s next for you, Jim?”

Kirk rolled his bottle of beer between his hands, then glanced over at Spock. “Someone once told me that my best destiny was to be Captain of a Starship. And that’s what I’ve always been. I don’t know, Nyota. I guess I need to find what my second-best destiny is.”

“Take your time,” Uhura said gently, and took a sip of her wine. “What about you, Scotty. I heard a rumor that you just *might* be about to retire?”

“I’ll believe it when I see it,” McCoy muttered under his breath.

“I keep threatening Leonard that I’ll buy a boat.”

“Why the *hell* I had to fall in love with an idiot who can’t keep his damned feet on solid earth is beyond me,” McCoy sighed.

Scotty laughed. “I dinnae ken, Nyota. I’m not sure I know how tae sit still. There are some projects calling my name.”

“Starfleet Engineering would like their best design engineer to sit his ass in a chair, stay away from space, and think deep thoughts,” Chekov teased.

“I already did that, when I fixed the train wreck that was the *Excelsior* class!” Scotty complained. “They never quite forgave me for pulling down *Excelsior*’s pants and leaving her dead in space. No offense, Sulu.”

“None taken,” Sulu shrugged. “The ship I finally got is reliable to a fault, and has a good heart besides. So no complaints from me.”

The Earth turned beneath their feet, time moving forward to unexpected ends. But the end of this evening was upon them. “What lives we’ve lived, my friends,” Kirk said warmly. “And what an honor to live mine with you.” He lifted his drink, and no one could imagine then that it would be the last time. “To friends. To family. And ships called *Enterprise*.”

Sleigh Ride

Day 15 - Sleigh Ride || Sleigh bells, foggy breath, and the smell of cedar.

“Whoa there, girl,” McCoy murmured to the ... well, it wasn’t a horse. Six legs and four eyes, but otherwise horse-like enough. His grandpappy had had horses back on Earth when McCoy was a boy, and that admission had been enough for Scotty to turn over horse duty to him shortly after they arrived.

The horse-thing snorted, its breath puffing in the cold air, and the sleigh slid to a stop in the snow, its bells jingling. Scotty jumped out, patted the horse, and started unloading their load of supplies. McCoy jumped out behind him and handed the horse-thing a few cubes of sugar he’d been carrying around in his pocket to bribe the thing. It lifted the sugar with velvet lips, belying the fangs beneath.

“Morning,” McCoy called cheerfully to the shop owner waiting for their delivery of coal, and climbed back into the sleigh. They’d become friendly with everyone in town since moving in three weeks ago. They had no idea, of course, that Scott and McCoy were actually Starfleet officers, and aliens besides.

This was deep undercover work in a pre-industrial society, with the Prime Directive very much in force. The Captain hadn’t been thrilled with dropping his chief engineer and chief medical officer alone on an alien world and then warping away, but Starfleet had concerns about both technological and genetic interference from the Klingons on this agrarian world. One which had no idea that they were abutted by Federation space and Klingon space, that there was a Federation listening post at its North Pole, or that it was strategically important on an interstellar level.

They were posing as travelers from a distant town, come to seek adventure and fortune, but glad for now to make deliveries to scrape by. Fuel delivery for heating in mid-winter put them everywhere—in shops, homes, and buildings without drawing suspicion, where they could carefully scan for Klingon activity.

Delivery done, Scotty swung back into the sleigh beside McCoy. “Go, horse,” McCoy clicked at the thing, which honestly seemed to roll its eyes in long-suffering before heading off on the path that it knew well. “I’m not sure the horse likes me,” he grumbled.

“Probably because it doesnae like being called a horse,” Scott murmured vaguely, snuggling in closer beside McCoy. Out of range of watching eyes, he glanced down at his tricorder. “There’s energy readings that are wrong, but I still cannae pinpoint them.”

If the Klingons were near, it was actively dangerous here. But snuggled beside Scotty in the cold, with the horse clip-clopping and sleigh bells jingling, it was easy to pretend they were on earth. He leaned into Scotty and stole a kiss. The horse-thing was looking back at them with one of its four eyes, and seemed vaguely amused. McCoy closed his eyes to avoid its judgment.

“Are you going tae drive or just kiss me?” Scotty asked, and poked him in the ribs. They were passing through a thick stand of towering trees that smelled of deep, smoky cedar.

“The horse knows the way,” McCoy hummed, but opened his eyes. Scotty was grinning at him, and when he looked at his boyfriend, they definitely were *not* on Earth. Those were Scotty’s eyes, but not his face; both of them had had minor surgery before they arrived to give them decidedly non-human marks and ridges. McCoy reached out and touched him, letting his fingers glide over the human patches across his cheek and down his neck. “You’ve got coal on your face.”

“Burning fossil fuels,” Scotty grumbled. “I’m about ready tae set up a fusion reactor in the center of town tae keep these people warm.”

“I’m sure Starfleet would have no objections,” McCoy deadpanned, and took the reins again.

The horse snorted in alarm at the exact moment that McCoy’s medical tricorder pinged the one warning he’d hoped not to hear: *Klingon life signs*, and close. Scotty knocked McCoy to the side, hard, tumbling them both into the snow as disruptor fire passed overhead.

McCoy gasped, the air knocked straight out of him. The horse-thing whinnied in deep alarm, and then ran in terror; they had to roll to keep from being crushed by the sleigh. Scotty’s arm was around his waist, half carrying him behind one of the big trees. The Engineer’s other hand was wrapped around a phaser. “I think there might be Klingons,” Scott said dryly.

“No shit,” McCoy growled.

“You are surrounded, Starfleet,” a voice said through the trees, and four simultaneous bursts of weapons fire from every direction proved it. Then four Klingons stepped into the clearing, closing on them. “You have a choice. You can die honorably in battle, now. Or you can surrender and die sometime next week after we torture you for all the information you know.”

The men glanced at each other, their hearts sinking. This was very bad. Scotty tossed his phaser out into the snow, and stepped out. “Scotty!!!” McCoy hissed at him.

“He doesnae know anything,” Scott called fiercely, turning to focus on the one who appeared to be the commander. “He’s not Starfleet, just some kid who’s been helping me. You want me. My name is Scott. I’m the chief engineer of a Federation Starship. But you’ll get nothing from me.”

“A brave noise, Starfleet,” the Klingon laughed derisively. “You will die badly. Take them both,” he said, turning away.

But abruptly, suddenly, a half ton of snorting, foaming, *fanged*, six-legged horse—and one merrily jingling sleigh—stormed through the

clearing. The horse headed for the Klingons, bucking wildly, biting, kicking it's too-many hooves. Scott and McCoy froze while the horse spread bloody carnage around them. Then it stopped, eyes rolling, chest heaving, nose to nose with McCoy.

"Uh, good horse?" McCoy said, and slowly reached for his pocket. "Some sugar?" he offered. The horse puffed happily and munched it docilely out of his palm.

Scotty eased past the horse and patted it on the way by tie up the unconscious troop of a Klingons. "Yeh auld thing," he murmured fondly. "Not a fan of Klingons, aye?"

The horse-thing nudged McCoy again, snuffling at his pockets. "Talk about a one-horse open sleigh," he said in admiration, handing the horse the rest of the treats, then reached for his communicator. "McCoy to *Enterprise*. I think we've found our evidence of Klingon interference ..."

Mistletoe

Day 16 - Mistletoe || Warm lights, smoke, and friends.

Engineers visiting sickbay were common. They were constantly mashing their fingers or burning their hands or otherwise injuring themselves in their death-trap of a department. A doctor visiting Engineering was rather less common, but McCoy headed determinedly toward the Chief Engineer's office.

Outside of Engineering, Scotty was cheerful and bighearted, and someone whom McCoy was just beginning to admit he just might be falling for. Inside Engineering, the Chief was a somewhat different person. McCoy knew that the junior engineers lived in terror of the man. Not because of his anger—although this being the Engineering deck, the Chief was fully capable of an expletive-riddled shout, if there was cause. By all accounts, if a person had a question or was confused, Scotty was a patient teacher. The man was a genuine genius who lived and breathed engineering and the mathematics that powered it. But a massive matter-antimatter reactor pulsed at their feet, empty space never more than a few meters away, and so Scotty demanded nothing less than perfection from his people and himself. His junior officers feared failing him, and failing to live up to his impossible example.

Scott's office door was open, apparently as usual, and McCoy rapped on the threshold. "Do you have a moment, Mr. Scott?" he asked.

Scott held up a finger, eyes focused on whatever he was working on. Then glanced up and the professional set of his face softened when he saw who his visitor was. "Dr. McCoy, a rare pleasure tae see you down here. What can I do for you? It's a bit early for scotch but I could make some tea?"

McCoy shook his head regretfully. "Not a social call, I'm afraid. We may have a problem," McCoy said, and the friendly smile was replaced again by the steady gaze of an engineer.

"Tell me," he said, leaning forward.

McCoy tapped on his padd. "Did you know I get copied on the environmental reports? Temperature, humidity, pressure, the mix of gasses, airborne pathogen levels, things like that."

"Aye."

"We got a strange bump in the oxygen/carbon dioxide mix the other day. I'm seeing an unexpected biological load, including reproductive pollen. Like somehow we suddenly have a forest growing on the ship."

Scott frowned. "Did something blossom in hydroponics?"

"First place I checked. Nothing that would explain what I'm seeing. Spock and I have been chasing it down all afternoon, and we've narrowed it to engineering."

Scotty scratched his face, puzzled. "Leonard, if we're about to bust someone's, uh, 'smokable plant collection'..." he started.

"That and the still," McCoy teased.

Scott sighed. "There is not a still. At least not in engineering because there are enough ways tae die down here without putting tubing under pressure."

"It's not weed," McCoy said, going back to their problem. "Not in the levels I'm seeing."

Scotty shrugged. "I mean, we dinnae have a *farm* down here. But maybe some sort of mold or algae or something has taken up residence somewhere."

"That's what Spock and I are thinking. Somewhere probably warm, a bit damp, and off the beaten path if no one has noticed anything."

"Plenty of hidden places. And downright hot places. Damp, though?" He tapped his fingers on his desk. "One place I can think of. Just outside the plasma vents. The plasma really heats things up, and that high up we get condensation too. I'll have tae shut off both reactors, though, if we dinnae want tae cook ourselves. Want tae go for a climb, Doctor?"

"Not particularly," McCoy murmured, but Scott was already moving. He whistled over to a specialist and sent him to grab the antigrav protection, then called up to the Bridge to advise that he was about to shut down the reactors. The ship throttled down, dropping out of warp, and the systems board changed from green to amber as departments across the ship went to battery reserve mode.

"*Mr. Scott we are secured to power down both reactors,*" Uhura reported from the Bridge.

"Turn them off," Scott ordered to his people, and around them the usual throb of the antimatter reactor and hum of the fusion one went silent.

"That's creepy," McCoy said.

"Aye," Scott agreed with an unhappy frown. "Come here, let me get you geared up." Scotty helped McCoy into an antigrav harness, hands quick and gentle as he cinched the buckles. Then he plopped a helmet on both of their heads. "Let's go, lad, he said, and they started upward, both of them puffing with the exertion of stairs and ladders after a few minutes.. These were the hidden guts of the ship, and McCoy had never seen them. They were *damn high up*, though, and very exposed. "Dinnae look down if it bothers you," Scott said cheerfully, swinging up to the

next level.

They finally reached where Scott was headed. The Engineer popped off an access hatch and turned on the headlamps in both of their helmets. And then, instead of climbing the dizzying heights, they were pushing through a claustrophobic tube.

“Does nothing bother you?” McCoy groaned.

“I’m nae the biggest fan of spiders,” Scotty said easily, and they came out the other side in a larger room. It was warm, here—very warm, the superheated plasma usually passed through in massive conduits overhead. Scotty opened a panel and toggled a switch, flooding the room with warm light. “Huh,” he said. Above them, growing through the piping, were vines. “I’ll be damned. Here’s your forest, Doctor.”

McCoy pulled out a tricorder and scanned a clump. “Don’t be sex pollen,” he muttered.

“I’m sorry, but *what?*” Scotty asked.

“Weird growing plant. It’s always sex pollen, isn’t it?”

Scotty grinned and put an arm around McCoy’s shoulder. “What, yeh dinnae want tae have sex with me, Doctor?”

Not like this, McCoy managed *not* to say aloud.

“Well, it’s got tae come down,” Scotty sighed. “Mess of a job, but it cannae grow through the conduits like that. A rupture would kill us all. How did it get here, do you think?”

“Must have picked up a spore, or seeds, or something. It’s a bit of an extremophile, growing in this heat and without light. Let me take some samples before you send people in to tear it down, make sure there isn’t any danger.” He put on gloves and clipped a bit of it off, and put it into a sample container.

“It’s a bit too bad,” Scott said. “It is very pretty,” and it was, bright green with white flowers and small berries.

“If it’s safe maybe we’ll keep some of it. It looks like mistletoe,” McCoy said, and immediately regretted it. He’d shared some nice evenings with Scotty, and one sweet and almost-chaste kiss, but otherwise was trying to beat back what was almost certainly a ridiculous crush on a good friend.

Scotty tilted his head at him, studying his face, then looked up at the vines growing above their heads.

“Well then, Leonard McCoy,” Scotty said softly, and stepped into him. And the kiss started out like their first, but changed rapidly—hands and lips, hesitation sliding into heat. “I’d say it was the sex pollen, except I’ve been wanting tae do that for a bit,” Scott confessed when they came up for air, hands stroking tiny circles on the back of McCoy’s neck.

McCoy brushed Scotty’s lips with his thumb. “Yeah, me too,” he said, and kissed him again.

“Oh, god,” Scotty finally managed, breaking away reluctantly. “They’re going tae start sending search parties soon. Can you please hold that thought? I have some other places where I’d like tae kiss you,” he said, and the look in his eyes meant the double entendre was deliberate.

McCoy kissed him, hard, one more time. “As long as you don’t make we wait too long. And next time, no mistletoe needed.”

Gingerbread

Day 17 - Gingerbread || Icing on their cheek, smell of cinnamon, and playful kisses.

Scotty liked to watch the good Doctor work. The man claimed to be nothing more than a country surgeon, but Scotty knew better. There were a million things to know about the apparently infinite biology of the universe, and McCoy worked doggedly to understand it all. He could absolutely be a grump, whacking hypos into people's necks if he thought they were a careless idiot who deserved it, but moving with tender and almost painless precision with anyone who was suffering.

Scott took a sip of water, inside the medical tent for a few minutes to try to get his core temperature down from the dangerous heat outside, and watched McCoy. When needed, he checked the Enterprise engineers who were cycling inside for hyperthermia and small injuries, but he was spending the better portion of his time with the Vulcans.

This was the third time this year the Enterprise had rotated to New Vulcan to assist with the monumental task of building a new homeworld. The first two trips had been entirely about basic infrastructure—power, water, sanitation. This one, though, they were finally getting the Vulcans out of tent cities and building permanent structures. Most of the ship's engineers were planetside to get it done. It was good work, but dangerously hot under the blazing New Vulcan sun, which meant that the medical staff was here too.

McCoy was the very best of them. He was excellent with the equipment, of course, but relied on his hands almost as much. He had to be a high-level empath, for a human; he gained some sort of understanding from a hand on a brow or fingers on a pulse.

McCoy wandered by and put a cool hand on the back of Scotty's neck, which made the engineer shiver, then pointed a medical probe at him. "You're good to go for another hour, Scotty." Scott nodded, then stood and tossed his empty water bottle in the recycler. "Mind if I join you for a minute?" McCoy asked. "We're keeping it very cold in here, and I'm a bit chilled."

Scotty just took his hand, and they walked into the blazing heat.

"I can't get over that you're building the Vulcans gingerbread houses," McCoy said.

The comment caught Scotty off guard, and he snorted a laugh. "I'd call it 'adobe,' love."

"No, it's gingerbread. Down to the decorations," McCoy said in amused satisfaction. They stopped and looked up at one of the buildings, and Scott frowned, searching for words. High above them, Keenser and some of his more artistically inclined officers were carefully carving and painting symbols into the walls.

"It isnae gumdrops and candy canes," Scotty said at last. "Two weeks before we got here, every time I turned around Mr. Spock seemed tae be standing there, trying tae tell me about aesthetic concerns, and I kept telling him that was the most damn illogical thing I'd ever heard. The priority was getting the Vulcans out of tents and into homes, not puttin' ... well, gingerbread on things. And then we got here ... and their hearts are still so broken. And I changed my mind. Here," he said, and dipped his finger in some white paint, and drew a triangle intersecting a circle. "This one is '*Kol-Ut-Shan*.'"

"Infinite diversity in infinite combinations," McCoy quoted softly. "The defining principle of their entire philosophy."

"Aye," Scott said, absently rubbing the paint between his forefinger and thumb. Then he got a wicked look in his eyes and swiped a playful line of paint across McCoy's cheek.

"Oh, are we doing that?!" McCoy growled in mock anger, and grabbed Scotty for a playful kiss, making sure to get as much paint on Scott's face as possible. "Why the hell does the paint smell like cinnamon?" McCoy asked.

An ancient, *almost* familiar voice behind them answered the question: "A plant indigenous to this planet. It has qualities we are already appreciating, including a smell very much like cinnamon."

The two men scrambled to near-attention, and glanced at each other guiltily, both messy with paint. "Ambassador Spock," McCoy breathed. "Our apologies. We are being ridiculous and inappropriate."

The ancient, time-traveling version of Spock lifted an eyebrow, and then *smiled* at them. "This is, of course, why Vulcans are so pleased to keep humans near," he said. "Who else is so at ease with their own irrationality?"

The two humans gaped at the Vulcan. "My god," McCoy breathed after a moment. "He's *teasing* us."

"I am," Spock admitted. "Forgive me. I miss my friends, and for all your youth, you are very much like an engineer and a doctor I once knew. It is good to see anyone happy. And that the two of you are such pleases me."

"Were they happy?" McCoy asked boldly. "Your friends?"

"My Leonard McCoy and Montgomery Scott?" Spock mused. He looked up at the building under construction. "This building is nearly identical to one that stood on Vulcan that I remember well as a child. But it is not the same building. Its history is entirely different. Indeed, it would not be here at all, in a different universe." He studied their kiss-messy faces, then placed a hand on both of their shoulders, a gesture so human that it was startling, "Live long, old friends. And be happy." He bowed, and stepped away.

"I don't know what the hell that means," McCoy complained.

“I dinnae ken that I *want* tae know,” Scott said. He wiped the paint off McCoy’s face with his sleeve, and then gave him one more kiss. “Get on with yeh. We’ve work tae do.”

Sunsets

Day 18 - Sunsets || Golden hour, towering pine trees, and warm coats.

The fundamental tragedy of their decades together was that, when things got hard, Leonard McCoy needed solid Earth beneath his feet, and Montgomery Scott needed outer space under his.

And in all their years together, losing Jim Kirk was the hardest thing yet.

McCoy stuffed his hands into his coat pockets and let the golden light of sunset wash over him. He'd fled north from San Francisco after the memorial, alone up the old Highway 101, and stopped at last surrounded by the truly ancient Redwoods. They were a thousand years old, and seemed to know how to mourn with him. A footstep behind him told him he wasn't alone.

"How did you find me?" McCoy asked, not needing to turn and look to know who it was.

"Easily. I followed you," Scotty said wearily. "I was just going tae let you be, but I couldnae leave without saying goodbye."

"When are you going?" McCoy asked.

"Now," Scotty answered, and McCoy did turn around at that. "The *Jenolan* is leaving orbit within the hour."

McCoy reached out for him, then clenched his fist without touching him. "Would it make a difference if I asked you to stay?" he said.

"Would it make a difference if I asked you tae come with me?" Scotty whispered in return, and McCoy closed his eyes in pain. Scotty came to stand next to him, almost shoulder to shoulder, facing the setting sun as it filtered through the trees. Both of their hands were firmly in pockets, even if they would have been warmer hand-in-hand.

"I've stood on a hundred planets and watched the sun set. Stood *above* more. Earth is always special," McCoy said. Scott grunted noncommittally, and McCoy glanced at him. "You don't agree."

"A sunset standing beside you is all I ever wanted." Scott gestured with his chin. "The star in the sky never mattered that much tae me, because my orbit was around you."

"That's incredibly sappy, Scotty."

"Aye."

McCoy clenched his jaw, and couldn't look at the man standing beside him. "Don't leave me, Montgomery," he said.

Scott sighed. "Is that an ultimatum?" he asked.

"Yes," McCoy said simply, and Scotty closed his eyes.

"Goodbye, Leonard," Scott murmured with heavy finality, and stepped away.

"No!" McCoy cried, and grabbed Scotty's arm. He blinked back his tears, and rested his forehead against his partner's, and then pulled him desperately into his arms. "Don't leave me," he begged again. "I can't bear to lose you too."

"Forgive me," Scott whispered into his neck, clutching at the back of McCoy's coat. "Forgive me for being the man who cannae stay. But I'll be home for Christmas."

McCoy hummed the bars of the ancient song, and swayed with his lover, a dance together under the last moments of sunlight and the first of starlight. And Scotty was the better singer by a long way, but Leonard McCoy sang anyway, his voice cracking: "*Christmas eve will find me, where the love light gleams, I'll be home for Christmas ... if only in my dreams.*"

Movie Nights

Day 19 - Movie Nights || Laughter, snacks, and cuddles.

A desperate call for help on a Federation world suffering from a plague, which arrived at the same moment the *Enterprise* was warping to a critical diplomatic summit, had necessitated a divide-and-conquer strategy. The *Enterprise* had continued to the summit with the two dozen ambassadors who were aboard, but had sent McCoy to the plague planet in the shuttle *Galileo*. The Captain had assigned Scotty to be McCoy's pilot, protector, and all-around carer; the Doctor would sometimes push himself too far on these sorts of missions, and Kirk was confident that Scotty wouldn't let him.

Two weeks and two successful missions later, the *Galileo* and *Enterprise* were headed for a rendezvous 48 hours later. McCoy had spent the first twelve hours sleeping, and the next eight filing a report for Starfleet, but now was restless and bored, to Scotty's exasperation. Scott finally put the ship on autopilot, shoved McCoy into the small bed in the back of the shuttle, and flipped to the seldom-used entertainment section of his padd.

"I dinnae have any idea who any of these actors are. I havenae watched a vid in twenty years. Pick something," he said, and tossed it onto McCoy's chest.

"You haven't watched a vid in *twenty years*?" McCoy asked in disbelief, sitting up.

"Unless you count mathematics lectures from MIT, nae. Pick something. I'll make popcorn."

"The synthesizers can't make popcorn, they just make vaguely buttery foam bits ..." McCoy started, and on Scotty's look spread his hands in mock frustration. "You really need to start *telling* me when you reprogram food. Seriously, I need a list."

"Pick a movie!" Scotty called over his shoulder.

"Just for that it's going to be a romantic comedy," McCoy grumped, and sat back in the bed. It was a narrow, lumpy rack. On the trip out they'd rotated sleep time on it, and barely slept at all while dealing with the plague planet. And there wasn't really room for two, but Scotty handed him a bowl of popcorn, dimmed the lights, and scooted in beside him.

"Popcorn," McCoy said reverently, popping a perfect crunchy-buttery bite in his mouth.

"I lost a bet tae Chekov, and this was the payment," Scotty shrugged, and put his head on McCoy's chest. "Go on then, play your movie."

"You can't fall asleep," McCoy said, poking him.

"Wouldn't dream of it," Scotty yawned, and was snoring before the opening title.

McCoy finished his snacks, and the end credits of the vid woke him up two hours later. "Great," he grumbled, and Scotty shifted against him. "We are both the one who sleeps through the movie."

"Nae, I watched the whole thing," Scotty said lazily.

"Is that so? What was it about?"

"Big-time Starbase exec goes back tae Earth, meets an organic farmer, and learns the true meaning of Christmas," Scotty laughed, the rumble in his chest against McCoy's settling pleasantly.

McCoy paused. "Okay, that's the plot of *all* of them," he said, and tilted his head for a slow kiss, both of them stubble-rough. "I think I've got popcorn in my teeth," he apologized.

"Leave it, Leonard," Scotty said, then rolled on top of him with a determined breath. He skimmed the shirt up McCoy's body and pulled it mostly over his head, thumbs catching every sensitive spot, not bothering to untangle McCoy's hands from his sleeves before going to work on his belt. McCoy's heart pounded double-time in his ears when Scotty tugged his trousers just below his hips, and then followed from navel down with his lips. McCoy arched against the touch, and finally managed to untangle his hands from his shirt just in time to get a shakily grip on the headboard.

"God ... Scotty," he barely managed.

They had hours yet before rendezvous with the ship, and they'd unravel each other completely in this terrible bunk. And this, McCoy considered, rushing ecstatically toward where Scotty was taking him, this right here was his favorite romance.

Hiking

Day 20 - Hiking || Rough ground, crisp morning air, and sunrises.

Scotty was trying very hard not to think. Survival, first. One foot in front of another. Find the crew. He glanced up at the young and frankly terrifying woman who had saved him, the enigma Jaylah, and tried not to *think*.

He'd woken up with Leonard a day ago on *Yorktown*, expecting a day of lazy leave together before he needed to refocus on the supply transfer to *Enterprise*. Even when a call from the Captain had blasted those plans to hell, he had not expected that a day later, he'd be hiking over rough ground with an alien sun rising over his head. One foot in front of another. He *hurt*, his body bruised from the pummeling that came with crashing into the ground inside a torpedo, and his shoulder ached from catching himself on the edge of a deadly cliff. *Don't think*.

The *Enterprise* was dead. His fair, beautiful lady! The moment the beasts who had been attacking her tore off her nacelles, he knew her end, despite his desperate efforts to save her. When he had looked up into the sky of this world and had seen the ionized trail that was the mark of a Starship crashing through the atmosphere, when felt the distant impact through the ground of a million metric tons smashing itself bits, he knew. He knew she was dead. She was a love of his life, and he could feel it in his heart. And somewhere deep inside of himself, he wished he had gone down with her, a self-confession that he was going to have to face, assuming he survived this. He felt the agony of it stripping its way through his brain, never the most stable of places, even under Leonard's loving care. *Leonard*. God. *Don't think*.

There was every possibility that Leonard was dead. There had been no time, no time at all to think of the other love of his life. Not until now, breathing the crisp morning air, trudging behind Jaylah, did he allow himself to face the truth that Leonard was almost certainly dead. McCoy would have been moving through the crew, trying to help as the ship decompressed around him. If anyone had still been aboard the ship, Leonard wouldn't have climbed into an escape pod. The only hope would have been if Spock had shoved him into one, but that was assuming Spock had still been alive. Scotty's desperate heart was trying to tell him that there was hope, however faint, that Leonard was alive, but his heart had always been an idiot.

He slipped on the ground, going hard to both knees, and Jaylah glanced back at him sharply. He just wanted to stay there, but she grabbed him under the arm and pulled him to his feet. She looked into his face, and he tried to ignore the flicker of pity in her eyes. She turned away, walking swiftly again. He wearily rubbed his eyes and wished he'd gone down with his ship.

Don't think! "Are we there yet?" he called to Jaylah.

—

McCoy was trying very hard not to think. He had his arm wrapped around the desperately-injured Spock, hauling him toward who-knew-where. This was a terrible place to be, high in the mountains. They'd left the cave at sunrise, and any other day he would be paused to appreciate its beauty. He usually preferred planets, but he would much rather have been waking up with Scotty on that stupid snow globe in space. His head ached, throbbing from the blow it had taken when they crash landed. He was doing a good job ignoring it, but couldn't fight back his fears.

In the moments before they'd been taken, he and Spock had gaped up at the decapitated and dismembered *Enterprise*. And in that instant, he had accepted the awful truth that if Scotty wasn't dead already, he would be soon. Scores of dead red-shirts had been sucked dry in the hallways, more shot through their hearts, and even more were drifting frozen in space, blown out by a hundred explosive decompressions. The last time McCoy had heard his lover's voice, a despairing Scotty had been trying desperately to hold the ship together, to pull off a miracle. But there would be none.

Spock stumbled against him on the uneven ground, grunting in pain, and McCoy sat him down to rest. "Do you think anyone else is alive?" McCoy asked softly. It was a stupid and self-destructive question, but he couldn't help himself.

"If we survived, logically others must have as well," Spock answered after a pause. It was a kind lie. Their survival had been entirely random and unique. There was no data at all to extrapolate anyone else's survival. But to admit that would be to admit that Jim and Nyota were likely dead as well.

"Yes," McCoy agreed. "They made it off. They must have." He climbed to his feet and pulled out his comm. "McCoy and Spock to *Enterprise* crew. Come in *Enterprise* crew. Anyone!" Nothing. Silence. Probably because there was no one alive to answer. McCoy beat back his despair and hauled Spock to his feet. They'd keep walking until they couldn't, McCoy knew, and for the first time in his life wished for the feel of the transporter grabbing him. But he longed even more for Scotty's grinning face on the other end.

Sweaters

Day 21 - Sweaters || Cozy feelings, goosebumps, and comforting hands

McCoy watched as Scotty peeled off his Starbase uniform for the last time, drab and red with *Yorktown's* patch on his arm, and reached for his heavy dress grays. Grays were always too hot, too heavy, but McCoy wasn't sure if it was the actual material, or the events that seemed to require the dress uniform. Its lines and creases were almost sharp enough to cut, and the epaulets on Scotty's shoulders and bands around his wrists still looked strange—full Commander, a promotion which had been necessary for the Chief Project Engineer at the *Yorktown* Shipyard.

McCoy helped Scott into his coat, then leaned into him and ran his hands down the front of his uniform, holding his gaze. Scott lifted his chin so McCoy could button the final fastener on the high collar. The Engineer's eyes didn't flicker, his jaw squared, but McCoy could see the goosebumps on his neck as McCoy's fingers brushed his throat. Scott scooped up his cap and settled it low across his brow.

"Damn," McCoy breathed, because dress grays and the kilt was a *very* good look. "I do like a man in uniform." Scotty gave him the barest smile at that, his eyes flicking appreciatively down McCoy's own dress uniform. "Commander," McCoy said formally, and dropped a step behind him as they headed down the corridor.

This was not the shakedown cruise. It wasn't the maiden voyage, or the christening. This was simply the transport of *Enterprise-A* from its construction berth at *Yorktown* Base to Earth orbit in preparation for all those things in the coming weeks. And yet. The ship had been born in the plain sight of two million people, gleaming majestically through the clear walls of the base since its first beams had been put into place. This ship was a gift for the Captain and crew that had saved the station from what had been certain destruction. A station that had then processed the bodies from another ship called *Enterprise* as they were painstakingly recovered from Altamid and its orbit. The citizens of this station had stepped aside in the corridors for the flag-covered coffins and their stone-faced escorts too many times over the last two years. To ask the people of *Yorktown* Station to let their beautiful ship go without saying goodbye was asking too much.

And they knew Scotty here, too—the only member of the *Enterprise* crew to stay aboard *Yorktown* in the aftermath. Everyone else had been scattered to the stars, on temporary assignments until the ship was done. McCoy and Scott had fought about it, bitterly, repeatedly, resignedly. McCoy *needed* to go home. After the suffering of Altamid, he *needed* Earth under his feet. And Scotty—Scotty couldn't stomach the thought of it. And so McCoy had kissed him, hard and desperate, and then walked away.

McCoy had found solace, if not peace, on Earth alongside Spock and Kirk, while Scott took command of the *Enterprise-A* construction crew, his blood and sweat mingling with theirs in her very bones. Concerned *Yorktown* eyes had watched the Engineer pace the corridors of the Station at night, seldom sleeping from the strain of breathing life into the ship—and from the death of another.

For two long years, McCoy knew better than to call, and Scotty never called him, until three weeks ago when he had asked McCoy to be a part of the tiny skeleton crew bringing *Enterprise* to Earth. They were done six weeks early, and—"Spock knows, but Jim doesnae yet. You have got tae keep it quiet!"

"You want me there?" McCoy had asked, hesitant and a little ashamed.

Scotty had sighed. "*Leonard just—come home tae me?*"

There was no announcement, but the Yorktownians saw Starfleet officers in full dress beginning to line the main transit corridor, and the word spread like fire—they *are* launching *Enterprise!! Now!!*—and the citizens came running.

Scott paced down the hall, and the *Enterprise* crew stepped off the wall, following from where they had been standing at attention intermixed with *Yorktown's* crew. Nyota Uhura. Pavel Chekov. Hiram Sulu. Christine Chapel and Keenser. Carol Marcus and Cadet Jaylah. Scotty's surviving engineers. A small handful to take the sleek new ship home and put her into James T. Kirk's hands.

A cheer started up behind them, echoing off of *Yorktown's* high walls, from the throats of Starfleet officers and Yorktown civilians: *Enterprise! Enterprise!* McCoy swallowed hard, and risked a glance at Scotty's face. The man was weeping but he didn't slow, headed for the main breezeway onto the ship.

Commodore Paris was waiting for them, and the crew came to attention behind Scott. "Ma'am," he said crisply.

"Commander Scott," she said. "Please note in the ship's log a change in designation from Yorktown Shipyard Project 0006 to Starship *Enterprise* 1701-A. Your orders are to transport her from *Yorktown* Station to Starbase One at best speed and then turn her over to her commanding officer, Captain James T. Kirk, for shakedown and deployment."

"Aye, Commodore," Scott said fiercely.

"Godspeed, *Enterprise*," she said, and stepped aside.

McCoy held his breath as they walked down the breezeway, toward a ship McCoy had yet to step foot on. He saw Scott glance at him out of the corner of his eye as they stepped through the airlock. Keenser and most of the engineers turned aft, toward main engineering. That's where Scotty wanted to be; McCoy could feel it in a brief pause in his step, but he headed to the Bridge.

There were exclamations of appreciation as everyone sat and took their stations, running their hands over panels and controls. McCoy didn't have a station on the bridge, but took his usual place to one side of the central chair.

"Aren't you going to sit down?" McCoy murmured to Scotty, who was standing behind the command chair, his hands resting on its back.

“No,” he said simply. “Ms. Uhura?”

Uhura pressed her earpiece to her face. “We have received clearance from *Yorktown* base to disembark, Commander. Priority one. They say ‘until we meet again, *Enterprise*.’”

“Give them our thanks and love. Mr. Sulu, thrusters please. Push her out slow.”

The pilot’s hands moved smoothly. “Docking moorings retracted, thrusters, aye.”

“Disengage the external inertial dampener?” Chekov reminded Sulu, and it was nothing but teasing—Sulu had forgotten to do that once the first time he’d ever touched a ship called *Enterprise*.

Sulu smirked at Chekov. “Clear of moorings, sir.”

“Thrusters forward, please.”

“Jim would order one-quarter impulse,” McCoy said.

Scotty smiled faintly. “He’d never forgive me if I was the first one tae break the rules in her. Thrusters only until we’re clear of the base, Mr. Sulu.” The massive ship moved majestically forward. From the bridge, they could see tiny figures in all of *Yorktown*’s windows, waving madly.

“They’re cheering,” McCoy said.

“I’m quite certain they are,” Scott answered.

“We’re clear of the base,” Sulu reported.

“One-quarter impulse out to 500,000 kilometers.” Scotty reached forward and toggled a button on the Command chair. “Engineering. Status?”

“*Warp at your order*,” Keenser said simply.

Scotty looked at McCoy, and then down at his hand, also resting on the back of the command chair. Scotty reached out and slowly closed his fingers over McCoy’s, and the tiny gesture was enough to make tears burn behind his eyes. Two years apart, but they both were forgiven.

McCoy allowed himself the luxury of putting his other hand on Scotty’s sleeve, the material thick under his palm.

Later today, in quarters that would soon become their home, McCoy would pull that coat off of Scotty, followed by his own. He’d toss them toward a chair, and wouldn’t care if they hit the floor. And then he would pause. Scotty would look back, standing bare-chested, a flicker of challenge in his gaze. Then McCoy would push him backward into a bunk that had never been slept in. Scotty would gape at him, and then give in, hands cool and comforting against the bare skin of his back, a counterpoint to the desperate heat of McCoy’s. “*Slow down, Leonard*,” Scotty would say. “*I’m nae going anywhere*,” but he’d let McCoy do whatever he needed.

But for now, here on the Bridge, Scotty squeezed his fingers, and didn’t let go, the command chair still empty in front of them. “They’re waiting for us,” McCoy said.

Scotty nodded, and then looked around at the crew, who were smiling back at him. “Warp four, tae Earth,” he ordered. “Let’s go bring everyone home.”

Unique Traditions

Day 22 - Unique Traditions || Smiles, acceptance, and making memories.

“Argggg,” McCoy sighed dramatically, collapsing into the chair beside Scotty’s desk. He tilted his head back and closed his eyes, scrubbing his hands down his face.

Scott looked up from the latest emissions and consumption report, trying very hard not to smile. “Tough mission, then?” Scotty commiserated.

“Pour me a scotch, will you?” McCoy asked plaintively.

“Oh, aye,” Scotty said, a twinkle in his eye, and reached for the bottle and tumblers he kept in his desk drawer. “Tae celebrate your happy nuptials. Congratulations, by the way. I’m a wee bit hurt I didnae get an invitation.”

McCoy lifted his head and glared at Scotty. “How the hell did you hear about that already? It was an *accident*,” he hissed, but took the drink that Scott passed to him.

“This is, what, accidental marriage number six?” Scotty chuckled, pouring one for himself.

“Why does this keep happening to me?” McCoy moaned. “Do you know how annoying it is to fill out the ‘annulment of accidental non-Federation marriage’ form? And then Spock needles me about it for *weeks*. He’ll say things like: ‘Doctor please be certain you do not...’ I don’t know... ‘do not wipe your ass incorrectly or you may find yourself inadvertently married.’”

Scotty just grinned at him. “Spock would say that, would he? Seriously, Leonard,” he said earnestly, leaning forward. “I understand how this could happen.”

“Thank you,” McCoy started, but then Scotty continued, lips twitching.

“Beautiful alien princess took one look at those pretty eyes of yours, those cheekbones, that smoldering gaze, and couldnae help herself.”

McCoy glowered at him. “I don’t have a smoldering gaze.”

“She has good taste, is all I’m saying,” Scotty said, lifting a placating hand, and backed down—it was hilarious, but McCoy was clearly irritated and embarrassed. “What happened this time?” he said, and he was serious and listening.

McCoy sighed and rolled his drink between his palms. “Jim was making me play diplomat. And the princess was interesting, and pretty,” McCoy admitted, and shot Scott an apologetic look. Scotty just shrugged, not concerned about it. “She took my hand, and led me into a private room. Poured two drinks.” McCoy gestured to the bottle, and Scotty handed it over. McCoy took their two tumblers and demonstrated, placing the drinks in the desk between them. “Took my hand.” McCoy gently picked up Scotty’s hands and pressed palm to palm for a moment before tracing across the crease in both of Scott’s hands and brushing his thumbs down to the inside of his wrists. Scotty blinked, the gentle touch running a shiver down his neck. McCoy dipped both thumbs into his own drink, then Scotty’s, before tracing a line of the liquor down both their lips. Then he put both hands on Scotty’s face and leaned forward for a tender kiss that lingered between their breaths.

“I hope you didnae kiss her that way,” Scott said with a thoughtful frown.

“She kissed *me* that way,” McCoy admitted, and rocked back in his chair. “That’s apparently all it took. Jim had to scramble like hell when he figured out what had happened, and why they were expecting me to stay and provide them an heir.”

Scotty chuckled, the absurdity of it striking him again. “So, you’re telling me we are now married according tae the laws of Ourdia?”

McCoy tossed up his hands in annoyance. “I’ll fill out the annulment paperwork!” he yelled crossly, and stood.

Scotty picked up his emission report, irritated now himself, but spoke softly just before McCoy stormed out the door: “I didnae say that, love.”

That stopped McCoy in his tracks, and he turned around and looked at Scott, who was pretending to be engrossed in his report. “Scotty ...” McCoy started, voice hesitant and afraid. *Marriage* wasn’t something he did. Not anymore. Not again.

Scott interrupted him with a shake of his head. The engineer wouldn’t look at him, but continued. “That wasnae a proposal. After all,” he gestured at the drinks still on his desk. “You’re already a married man. But six different princesses and princes have thought tae take your hand.” Scotty looked up, fierce and tender. “I’m just saying, I can understand the temptation.”

Proposal

Day 23 - Proposal || Nerves, candles, and a tasty meal.

Some days, when you were one of two surgeons on a Starship trillions of miles from home, were just exhausting. There were terrible days, of course, that ended with bodies in his morgue, but this wasn't one of those. Just too many hours catching up to him all at once.

McCoy headed to his quarters, peeled off half his clothes and shoes, and collapsed in his bed. He was just wondering, with some annoyance, when his absent boyfriend was going to show up, and then he remembered that they were supposed to be at Scotty's this evening. He sighed wearily, haphazardly pulled his shirt and shoes back on, staggered into the corridor, and let himself into the quarters next door. Scotty glanced up from where he was sitting at his small table, buried in pads and paperwork. "There you are. I was wondering if you were going to make it by tonight or if you were still on duty."

"Sorry," McCoy said apologetically. "I forgot we were in your quarters tonight and fell asleep in mine."

"Should have stayed asleep," Scotty chided gently. "You look half dead."

McCoy grunted and headed for Scotty's bed around the corner, shedding his shoes and shirt again. "If you're working I'm going to sleep for a while longer. Wake me up if you make dinner."

"Aye," Scotty replied distractedly.

McCoy woke to the feeling of the mattress dipping and hands stroking his back, not demanding anything, just easing and comforting, working out knots and tension he didn't know he'd been carrying. He sighed contentedly.

"Are you hungry?" Scott asked.

McCoy considered it. "Yes," he decided. He stole a sweater out of Scotty's closet, one of the very few non-Starfleet things the man owned, and padded out into the small living area.

"Candlelight supper?" he asked in surprise at the dim lighting.

"No' hardly," Scott laughed. "The fire suppressors would take care of that right quick. I just didnae want the lights to disturb you, in case you wanted to sleep."

"Leave them off, it's nice. Did you actually cook or ...?"

"Replicated, unfortunately," Scotty grumbled, passing him a dish of gorgeous food that smelled completely fantastic. "But some new recipes."

As expected, it tasted like heaven. Somehow food always tasted better at Scotty's. "I've been meaning to ask you. How do you know how to make food do this?" McCoy asked.

Scotty smiled. "My granny," he said simply.

"No offense, Scotty, but food like this isn't what I envision when I think of a Scottish granny."

Scott laughed. "She is a world-class mathematician, but also classically trained at Le Cordon Bleu during the 2190s when they were really studying Earth and non-Earth culinary fusion. You think I'm good, you should try her food."

"She raised you, didn't she?" McCoy asked.

"Aye. Not a sad story. Or ... aye, a sad story, for my granny and her only daughter. I should have come out of childhood bloody, or not at all. Instead it was maths, and food, and 'mind you wash your ears, Montgomery.'"

"Well, god bless your granny," McCoy breathed, gesturing at the table, and they enjoyed the meal together in what should have been comfortable silence. But Scotty wasn't relaxed; there was something twitchy and hesitant about him. And Scotty could get that way if his brain chemistry was sliding, but McCoy helped him monitor that, and he'd been solid and steady recently. This was something external.

McCoy chewed his bite of food, then gestured at Scotty with his fork. "What?" he asked.

"Hmm?" Scott said.

"You're acting like you've got ants in your pants. What's wrong?"

Scotty sighed and sat back, and picked aimlessly at his fingernails. "This is what I get, for loving a damned empath. I had a question. A suggestion. Maybe a proposal."

McCoy squinted at him suspiciously. "Well, you'd better spit it out then."

Scotty hesitated, then stood up. He reached out and tapped the bulkhead that stood between his quarters and McCoy's, which was immediately aft. "I pulled the schematics this evening. There's nothing important between your quarters and mine. Or, nothing that cannae be moved. I could punch a door. I did it between Spock and Uhura's at the start of the mission. It wouldnae be hard to do it to ours." He circled back and

looked seriously at McCoy. “But only if you want. You can say no, and I wouldnae be angry.”

McCoy blinked in surprise. “We move in together?” he asked slowly.

“Aye. Essentially.”

McCoy mulled it over. “Some definite advantages, including not having to walk through the hall to see each other,” he said. “I was half naked tonight.”

“Aye. And we could redo the space. Either yours or mine for a bedroom, and then a larger work and living space in the other. An apartment aboard ship. But there are disadvantages. We cannae get away from each other. Which, knowing us, is a real thing. We both have our moods, and I can be a right bastard.”

“You and me both,” McCoy said thoughtfully. “You wouldn’t have mentioned it, if you didn’t want it.”

Scott shrugged. “I do want it. But if you dinnae, I willnae take it as a personal affront. You dinnae have tae answer tonight, you can think—“

“—Yes.” McCoy interrupted. “My answer is yes.”

Scotty grinned, and as always, it was like sunrise, even if his surprise when good things happened always twisted in McCoy’s gut. “Really?”

“Yes, really. I think it’s a brilliant idea.”

“Well, I *am* a genius. I’m going tae go get my plasma torch...”

McCoy caught him before he could get out the door. “Maybe not just now, Scotty. It’s the middle of gamma shift. And I think you may have other things to do tonight.”

“Oh?” asked the puzzled engineer. “Like what?”

And this was his life now, McCoy considered ruefully, and rolled his eyes. “Come to *bed*, Mr. Damned Genius.”

Holiday Traffic

Day 24 - Holiday Traffic || Car horns, comforting words, and snow.

"It's a *what*, Mr. Sulu?" Scott asked, pinching the bridge of his nose as he paced the bridge. He swore to himself, every time this happened, that he absolutely would never let the Captain and Mr. Spock off of the ship at the same time. No, never again, he would stand on the regulations and make them see reason. And yet, despite his lofty promises, he still somehow always ended up with his arse in the command chair while things went to hell.

"A traffic jam, Commander," Sulu repeated apologetically.

Scotty had *not* wanted to fly the *Enterprise* into this thing. They were way outside Federation space, well into first contact. They'd come across a vast station orbiting a planet, apparently a hub of trade for civilizations all through this section of the galaxy. The station had been delighted by the appearance of the *Enterprise*, and invited them to dock inside. Scotty had tried to talk the Captain out of it, to no avail, and then Kirk had frittered off with Mr. Spock to the surface of the planet to play diplomat. And now the Captain was in trouble, *and the Enterprise was stuck in traffic.*

"Station control apologizes, sir," Uhura said. "We are very big, and it is apparently some kind of holiday. They say they can give us clearance in an hour or two."

Scott squinted at the viewscreen, hands on his hips. "Just how urgent was the Captain's message? 'We accidentally got tossed in jail, please pick us up,' or more like 'they are executing us at dawn'?"

"The first kind," Uhura said, a ripple of amusement in her voice. "Maybe even an 'I accidentally married the princess, get me out of here.'"

McCoy, standing in his usual place just behind the command chair, snorted. "God, I hope it was Spock who married the princess. Maybe we could honk the horn?"

"Maybe I'll just fire phasers," Scotty grumbled. "That would clear a path." The bridge crew glanced at each other. It was occasionally hard to tell when Scotty was joking. The Captain's command style was to charm his way out of trouble, and Spock would logic his way out. Scotty, often caught in circumstances with crew in trouble and no information or options, tended to shoot his way out.

"Possibly not the best idea, Scotty," McCoy warned cautiously.

"I suppose not," he said, sitting with a sigh.

Uhura pressed her earpiece closer to her face. "I'm getting a general broadcast from the station. 'Festival of Lights begins,'" she reported, puzzled.

Abruptly, on the viewscreen, the lights of the station went dark.

"Did they just lose power?" Scott asked urgently, spinning toward Chekov in the science station.

"No, sir," Chekov reported. "Just turned the lights off."

"Festival of Lights," Uhura said in awe, on her feet looking at the viewscreen. There, in the airless space dock of the station, ships were parading on the perimeter near the windows of the inhabited section, lit in vibrant colors. Uhura cocked her head, getting a message. "Station asks if we have any colors other than our white running lights."

Scott blinked, and dragged his thoughts to schematics, but Chekov got there first, and snapped his fingers. "Starbase lighting, to help shuttles and tender ships maneuver in proximity to the starship. We can cycle them, red and gold."

"Do it," Scott ordered. "Oh, and vent some water vapor. It will make us sparkle like snow."

"Station thanks us," Uhura said a moment later. "We're apparently the biggest ship they've ever had in for the festival, and just won a big cheer from the crowd."

"I'll be damned," McCoy said happily, and put a hand on Scotty's arm. "We're in a holiday parade. I haven't been in one since I was a kid. Jim will be disappointed he missed this one."

Scotty sat back contentedly, and turned his hand to hold McCoy's. "Lieutenant Uhura, can you put the show on the screens for the crew to see?"

"Already done, Mr. Scott," she said warmly. "And the Station says 'Blessed Festival' to us."

"Sometimes," McCoy murmured. "Just sometimes, mind, the universe is amazing, and I'm grateful we get to see it."

Lazy Mornings

Chapter Notes

The Christmas chapter

Day 25 - Lazy Mornings || Soft blankets, familiar arms, and the morning light.

These kinds of days were vanishingly rare. The first morning light slanted through the window—light from *Earth's* rising sun, no less, glowing a faint pink and orange in the eastern sky. It should have been familiar—had been familiar for so many billions of humans—but not for them. They stirred awake under the unusual light, and then drifted back to sleep in each other's familiar arms. This day, there would be no alarms, no duty shifts, no throb of a reactor, no red alerts, no orders.

It was cold—that part was familiar—but it was the cold of the winter solstice, not the deathly absolute cold of space. The blankets tucked around them were soft and worn, heavy and warm. Sol wouldn't be in the sky for long today, and was approaching its zenith when they finally stirred, blinking lazily at one another.

“What were we supposed to do today?” Scott asked, his head on McCoy's shoulder, tracing lazy patterns in his bare chest.

“Nothing,” McCoy answered in complete contentment, and turned his head to kiss his love, heat rising in the kiss, in the slide of hands over skin, knowing they wouldn't leave this bed today.

In the coming days, there *were* expectations. Not harsh ones, but there were people who loved them who were desperate to see them. Joanna and Scotty had been co—conspirators against McCoy for years now, but had never met face to face. They had a day planned in Georgia with her. McCoy had actually met Scotty's people—his grandmother, his uncles, his sister, his nephew. Granny had shown up on McCoy's doorstep in San Francisco between the two *Enterprises*, and he had immediately fallen in love with the fierce woman. But none of Scott's family had seen him in a decade, and they were eager to have them both visit Scotland for a few days.

They were looking forward to those visits, and others with dear friends spread over the Earth—there would be plenty of laughter and food and drink and stories. But *today* was just them without plans or expectations beyond utter pleasure. A hot tub. A refrigerator full of food. This massive bed. And each other's bodies, as often as the mood struck. Today they would be thoroughly and indulgently human, here on this most human of worlds.

They'd saved this planet, once or twice. There would be no sunrises, no snow-capped mountains, no lovers gasping together on a winter's morning, if they hadn't stood in the sky with their crew, and *fought* for this place. For *home*, even if it was so seldom where they rested.

The world moved beneath them, and they moved against one another in ancient rhythms. *Unending*, a human might be tempted to say, but the universe knew better. They weren't eternal, not any more than this world or her star, than the galaxy or the universe itself. But here, now, in this moment and in this place, there was peace on Earth.

Furry Friends

Day 26 - Furry Friends || Shining eyes, the pitter - patter of paws, and that fuzzy feeling in your chest.

McCoy hadn't told Scotty that he'd killed his tribble, even if he had been able to resurrect the thing. It didn't seem to be any worse for the wear after a dose of Khan's blood. And he hadn't told him about the fact that it had been a part of Jim Kirk's resurrection too. In fact, the two hadn't spoken at all since they had stood together in sickbay and stared hopelessly at their captain's body. But Kirk was going to live, and McCoy finally went looking for Scotty. It was a sign of how badly the whole damn thing had gone that McCoy didn't actually know where the man was; it was Uhura who finally pointed him to the Riverside shipyard. Which made sense; of course Scotty was with the *Enterprise*.

Winter in Iowa. Great. Building starships in a cornfield seemed ridiculous, but what did he know? At least McCoy was able to talk the landlady into letting him into Scotty's temporary apartment so he wouldn't freeze his ass off waiting for his boyfriend. *Maybe* boyfriend, if walking off the ship without so much as a goodbye didn't also constitute breaking up. He turned up the heat and collected the tribble, who was happy to sit on his belly and coo contentedly. And McCoy, who had slept *maybe* two hours a day since Jim had died, fell asleep.

The tribble's little '*brrrip!*' of welcome, and the feel of fingers running through his hair, woke him hours later. "Leonard," Scotty said wearily. "What the hell are you doing here?"

McCoy opened his eyes, and allowed himself the very small weakness of reaching up to touch the side of Scotty's face. That Scotty closed his eyes for a moment and leaned into the touch was at least a slightly hopeful sign, as was the fact that Scotty sat next to him on the couch when he sat up. McCoy deposited the tribble into Scotty's lap before pressing his palms into his gritty eyes.

"What time is it?" McCoy groaned.

"0100," Scotty answered, and there was the slightest slur in his voice.

"You been drinking?"

"Drunk," Scotty admitted. "I was going tae finish off with another couple shots before bed so I could sleep."

McCoy sighed and looked over at him. "That's healthy."

Scotty shrugged miserably, aimlessly stroking the tribble. "When I close my eyes there's a dead security guard and a dead Jim Kirk waiting for me."

Starfleet had cleared Scott of the guard's death, although there absolutely had been an inquiry and very nearly a court martial. The admiralty had finally decided that stowing away, sabotage, and murder had been justified in order to save 500 lives aboard the *Enterprise*. McCoy hadn't been there for that, hadn't even known it was happening. Uhura had been the one to tell him after the fact.

"Jim is going to live," McCoy said, which, disturbingly, was the easier topic in the entire bag of snakes that made up the last month.

"I'd heard. Doesnae mean that I didnae pull his body out of my warp core. His eyes were open the entire time, y'know. Those blue eyes lookin' at nothin' at all until the radiation cycle ended and I could get my hands tae stop trembling enough tae close them. He was *heavy*. I knew it was dumb, picking him up in my arms with him still so irradiated, but I wasnae going tae let the bots be the first ones tae touch him."

McCoy swallowed hard. Maybe it wasn't the easier topic after all. They were doing this, apparently. "Why didn't you call me Scotty?" he asked softly, speaking just one corner of the pain that had kept them apart for weeks. "Why Spock, and not me?"

Scotty smiled bitterly, unshed tears shining in his eyes. "If you think I could bear tae stand there and watch you weep while he died, because I was too afraid tae do *my* damn job, you sorely overestimate my strength, Leonard."

It so nearly had been Scott on the wrong side of the radiation shielding. Scotty wasn't ready to hear it yet, and Jim needed to be the one to tell him, but the Captain had knocked the engineer out cold because Scotty was one breath away from going in. Jim had told McCoy that he'd watched Scotty reach the terrifying conclusion that someone had to go into the core, and the words "I'll go, sir," we're on his lips. The only way to stop him was to take that choice away. And McCoy didn't kid himself—Spock wouldn't have gone after Khan for Scotty's sake. If Scotty hadn't already been reeling from Khan knocking him out earlier in the day, if Kirk's punch hadn't been enough to put him on the ground, McCoy would have unzipped the body bag above his boyfriend's face.

It was agonizing to consider, and McCoy hadn't been able to leave it alone. Apparently Scotty hadn't been able to either, but from the end that thought it should have been him.

"I almost watched you die," Scotty continued, probably not aware he was picking up on McCoy's parallel thoughts. "Standing there on that warship, looking out a porthole, trying tae find a way tae save you. Five hundred lives, and I was only thinking about yours." He stood up and handed McCoy the tribble, and went looking for his alcohol.

The tribble made a sound of annoyance, not happy to be plopped on the couch when McCoy jumped up and grabbed the booze out of his hands. "Have you been taking your meds?" McCoy asked urgently. "Have you seen a therapist?"

Scott just gestured at the scotch. "What the hell do you care?" Scotty asked belligerently.

McCoy's weariness slid into fury at the question. "Why the hell *should* I care?" he snapped. "Did you know that I hadn't heard you'd resigned

until a nurse mentioned that Chekov was the acting chief? Not a message from you. Just off the ship and out of my life without a single word.”

Scotty looked at him square in the eyes for the first time all night. “It went so fast. I didnae imagine that Jim Kirk would accept my resignation,” he said softly. “And then he did. I should have told yeh. But I was standing in San Francisco before it was real.”

McCoy leaned forward, and pressed his forehead to Scotty’s, the muscles in his jaw jumping in tension. “It has occurred to me that in other universes, where any one of us made one single different choice, one or both or all of us would be dead. And so I can’t really be pissed about how things worked out.”

“You can be pissed about anything you’d like tae be, and with good reason ... if you’ll please, *please*, just come tae bed and let me put my arms around you?” Scotty begged.

McCoy breathed out in relief, toed off his boots and pulled off his shirt. Scotty hesitated when McCoy headed to the couch, but it was only to grab the tribble. The bed was one more in a series of too-hard, too-narrow bunks, but they held each other, desperate and grateful, until the purring tribble and their own beating hearts soothed them to sleep.

Roasting Marshmallows

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Day 27 - Roasting Marshmallows || Roaring bonfires, laughter of friends, and gooey marshmallows.

Jim had arranged it, and it certainly took some arranging. A summer reservation for a camping and climbing spot at Yosemite Planetary Park usually took years. But he'd managed it, somehow, probably with nothing more than his name. They were mere weeks from deploying again, a third five year mission, and probably shouldn't have been Earthside at all; there was far more to do than they had time for. But here they were, all together in one of the most extraordinary places on the planet.

"Here's your antigrav harness, Bones," Kirk said cheerfully. McCoy looked mournfully up at the vast wall of El Capitan, which the Captain apparently expected him to climb, at least for a while. Sulu and Chekov were already ready, and Spock had strapped into antigrav boots.

"How come Scotty and Nyota get to stay behind?" McCoy complained.

Jim shrugged. "Scotty threatened to resign, and he may have been bluffing, but I couldn't risk it since he is literally irreplaceable. And Nyota is ... not to be trifled with. Have you *met* her?"

Scotty patted him in the shoulder. "Dinnae worry, Leonard, we'll have dinner for you when you get back tae camp."

"Assuming I survive that long," McCoy grumbled, and followed Jim, always and as ever. And he'd never admit it, but the view, even from the relatively modest height he'd achieved, was breathtaking.

"That's something, isn't it Spock?" he murmured to the Vulcan, who was hovering sedately beside him with his hands behind his back.

"The aesthetics are impressive," Spock replied, and then glanced upwards. "But if you will excuse me, I believe the Captain is about to fall, and has turned off his antigravity protection."

McCoy kissed the ground gratefully when his feet were safely back in it, and pretended to complain all the way back to camp. Jim's indulgent smile said he wasn't buying any of it, but McCoy had a reputation to uphold.

As promised, dinner was bubbling deliciously over a fire when they arrived. And, not unexpectedly, Scotty was dozing with his head in Nyota's lap, the casual intimacy of a relationship that McCoy didn't quite have a part of, but which never gave him pause. It was the same one that McCoy had with Kirk and, *yes*, Spock. Something inexplicable, something wonderful. It was love, but—not soulmates; that was something else. Soultravelers.

Leonard threw himself down beside Scotty, and kissed him like a man who had escaped death. Scotty levered up on an elbow, first meeting Leonard's need, and then bringing him down gently.

"How was the view?" Scotty asked when Leonard came up for air.

"I have no idea," McCoy lied. "I was just hanging on for dear life by my fingertips." Scotty exchanged a glance with Uhura, neither of them believing a word of it either, then kissed Leonard again and climbed to his feet to finish the food.

Dinner was devoured and cleaned up before the sun set, and the stars of the Milky Way blazed across the sky in a way that they did in few other places. The dark skies here were carefully protected as a part of the exquisite value of this extraordinary place. The seven of them lounged around the fire, which had started as a roaring bonfire but had finally burned low enough for roasting marshmallows in the glowing coals.

McCoy had carefully propped a Graham cracker against a rock facing the flames, and was waiting for a slab of chocolate to melt across it. He'd steal a marshmallow from the row that Scotty was idly crisping to golden perfection.

"Jim, you can't just *burn* them," McCoy lectured from his place reclined against Scotty, who was idly tracing patterns against his hip with one hand, fingers dipping below the band of his trousers just often enough to be *wickedly* distracting.

"I like them that way!" Kirk argued, blowing out the flames on another one.

"We need a song," Pavel suggested, and before anyone else could chime in, Kirk and McCoy burst into a truly terrible round of "Row Row Row Your Boat," to much laughter, before Uhura took over. They had spent many evenings together in the rec room, a tiny bubble of home in the vastness of space, listening to her extraordinary voice. And although they were less trained, Spock's baritone and Scotty's tenor were true, and easily weaved the harmony in the song, as they had so many times.

The fire was nearly gone when their Captain spoke again, quoting into the quiet dark:

*The stars are with the voyager
Wherever he may sail;
The moon is constant to her time;
The sun will never fail;
But follow, follow round the world,*

*The green earth and the sea,
So love is with the lover's heart,
Wherever he may be.
Wherever he may be, the stars
Must daily lose their light;
The moon will veil her in the shade;
The sun will set at night.
The sun may set, but constant love
Will shine when he's away;
So that dull night is never night,
And day is brighter day.*

“There’s our signal, friends,” McCoy said, standing, and trailed his fingers up Scotty’s neck as he went. The group climbed to their feet, yawning, heading toward their tents. McCoy took Scotty’s arm, and tilted his head back as they walked. “I do like the stars from this angle,” he said fondly. “But I’ll walk in them, one more time, if it means being beside you.”

“Just once more?” Scotty asked wistfully, looking at Leonard, not the stars.

McCoy pulled him closer. “Once more above the stars for me. And then I’ll be content to stand below them, and look up and wait for you.”

Chapter End Notes

The poem is by Thomas Hood

Huddle for Warmth

Day 28 - Huddle for Warmth || Warm bodies, steady breaths, and comforting feelings.

“Hey,” Scotty said, stomping the snow off his feet at the threshold of the tent.

McCoy sat up stiffly. “Did you reach the ship?”

“Aye, finally. Uhura pulled it in through the storm when I got tae the top of those rocks. It’s still too dangerous tae send a shuttle, and transporters are hopeless. We have tae ride this out.”

McCoy nodded with a shiver. The tent was too cold, but they were lucky to have any environmental gear at all, pulled out of an old Federation drop kit from the first survey of this planet decades ago. The away mission had gone wrong, and Scott and McCoy were trapped here, focusing on staying warm in what was becoming a dangerous storm while relying on their crewmates in orbit above to figure out how to get to them.

“I brought us a rock,” Scotty said, rolling a smallish boulder in.

“Gee, thanks,” McCoy said sarcastically, eyeing the thing. Scotty just smirked at him, then aimed his phaser at it, heating it up. It actually made a significant difference in their little space. “Okay, fine, good idea,” McCoy admitted. “Now get those wet clothes off and get under the blankets with me.”

Scotty was half-soaked, and shivered as he peeled out of his uniform. He draped it over the hot rock to dry, and then grabbed McCoy’s to do the same. Job done, he shimmied under the blankets, which were also decades old and smelled funny, but were literal lifesavers just now. McCoy grunted and pressed himself closer to Scotty, who was definitely shaking uncontrollably after ten minutes in the wind and snow. “Thanks,” he chattered, and was better a few minutes later, his breathing evening out as he warmed up against McCoy’s skin. “I wish we had a big thermos of tea.”

“I was thinking of warm things while you were gone,” McCoy said wistfully. “Hot chocolate. Under the plasma vents in engineering. Big geothermal hot tub. Construction site on New Vulcan.”

“Our quarters, heating things up,” Scotty volunteered with a grin, but then his expression sobered. “Let me look at you,” he said, and pulled the blanket back far enough to examine the injuries running down McCoy’s side, deep bruising and definite broken ribs. “You’re a damn self-sacrificing idiot,” Scotty sighed.

McCoy snorted at the hypocrisy in the statement.

They were here on this planet to assist with a Federation colony in trouble, hit by something wrong enough with the magnetic field to kick off these storms. Transporters had gone down, but McCoy had headed off alone on foot when they got word of some kids trapped a few kilometers away. He’d been avalanched an hour later, tossed by boulders and trees and snow, and had been damn lucky not to be completely buried. He’d managed to pull out his communicator and get an SOS out.

Scotty wasn’t supposed to be down here. Transporters couldn’t lock onto anything on the surface, not through the interference, but he’d managed to focus a single pattern—his own—down to the surface. Or, rather, within a few meters of it; McCoy had watched him materialize in the air and then fall into the snow with a yelp.

“*Better a few meters above the surface than below it,*” Scotty had explained, rather horrifyingly, and then went to work digging McCoy out. He’d propped him against a rock outside the avalanche zone and gone for the drop kit which, by an incredible stroke of luck, had only been a few hundred meters away. Now they were huddled for warmth, without much more than one another to ride this out.

“I’m still worried about those kids,” McCoy admitted.

Scotty patted him on the face, aggrieved and rueful. “They were up in a fishing cabin. With a fire, and food. I’m sure they’re better off than us.”

“I hope you’re right,” McCoy sighed, and eased himself down by Scotty again. Scotty pulled the blankets up over their heads, trapping the meager heat with them, and carefully wrapped his arms around him.

“Leonard, I’m nae kidding,” Scotty said against his skin, the half-light shadowing his face and giving him leave to speak. “Please be more careful.”

“I save people, Scotty. You live for engineering. This is what I live for. I can’t turn it off any more than you can turn off the mathematics.”

“I live for you too,” Scotty said quietly. “If I’ve never said that, if you’ve never thought that was true, I’m sorry.”

McCoy swallowed, hard. In fact, he *hadn’t* known that. The idea that he might be truly important to anyone, even to Scotty had, frankly, never occurred to him. He looked across at Scotty, who was looking back at him.

“God,” Scotty said, and pressed himself closer. “It has seriously never crossed your mind how precious you are, has it? Tae me. Tae Jim Kirk. Tae Spock. Joanna, and my Gran. Chapel and Uhura and the rest of them.”

“I supposed not,” McCoy said thickly, the heat of the words tingling up his spine.

“You,” Scotty said fiercely, almost angry, but kissed him gently. “You are *beloved*. Dinnae ever forget that.”

McCoy couldn’t speak, but just nodded, and they breathed together, warm enough wrapped in each other until the transporter took them home.

Holiday Lights

Day 29 - Holiday Lights || Holiday music, bright colors, and joy.

“Dad!” Joanna McCoy called out, rushing across the last meters between the family waiting area and the shuttle gangway. She wasn’t a little girl any more, and hadn’t been in some time, but still jumped into his arms.

“My baby,” McCoy whispered into her hair while they clung to one another. “My baby.”

Scotty stood behind them, grinning at them both until Joanna extracted herself and wrapped her arms around him as well. “Hello lassie,” he said easily, and kissed her cheek.

“Why,” she complained light-heartedly, “*why* are the two of you always on the last shuttle off?”

“Scotty was already starting to tear down the warp core,” McCoy sighed. “I had to drag him off.”

“He didnae,” Scotty said earnestly, collecting their duffles from the shuttle and looping both bags over one of his shoulders. “We wouldnae have left you standing here alone.”

“You’ll start tearing it down tomorrow,” Joanna guessed, linking arms with them both.

“Aye,” Scotty admitted with a shrug, as if they ship hadn’t just been pounded within an inch of its life.

The fact that the *Enterprise* had just prevented the destruction of the Earth by a murderous probe—again—wasn’t exactly being advertised, but it wasn’t exactly a secret either. Still, it was easier for everyone to pretend this return was just the end of another mission instead of another miracle. They’d talk about it later but—not today. Today was in that giddy gap between the holidays and the New Year, the days far too silly for the words they’d need to say later.

“Well, we have plans tonight,” she told them as they walked. “First you check into the beautiful B&B I got for you and change out of those Starfleet uniforms. Then we have dinner reservations at a real steakhouse and are hitting the holiday markets.”

The first days and hours back on Earth after a long deployment were always strange. It was hard to shake off the ringing silence that was the absence of a warp core. Real gravity felt heavier and smoother, the outside air sweeter. They moved like people who had worn the same uniform for five years, and their civilian clothing hung oddly. When they stood, it was at Starfleet parade rest, hands behind their backs.

The people of San Francisco knew Starfleet officers well enough that they recognized the signs, but with *Enterprise* unexpectedly in orbit, the citizens knew exactly who they were. Scott and McCoy weren’t as instantly recognizable as Kirk or Spock, but everyone from the B&B host to the waiter to the shop owners seemed to know they were senior *Enterprise* officers. They were getting wide-eyes looks from people who immediately tried to pretend that they didn’t know these men had saved them all yesterday.

Despite a gigantic and completely decadent dinner, they picked up donuts and cider as they walked through the cool air of the market. It was twinkling with a dazzling display of holiday lights. Music drifted in from everywhere, different genres competing from different tents, and Scotty was in full swing of a story. “... so they are running like hell. Getting chased by these massive dinosaurs.”

“Always getting chased by dinosaurs,” McCoy interjected with a sigh.

“And Jim Kirk has his communicator out, yelling at me ‘Scotty, get us out outta here!’” Scotty mimed shouting into his donut, then finished it and continued. “But I cannae get a lock because, y’know, they are running like hell. Suddenly they drop a meter and a half straight down, but they arenae moving for a second. So I grab them. But the biofilter is *screaming* at me. Fine, whatever, I toss up the quarantine shield and materialize them on the pad. And they are *dripping* with goo ...”

“It was reproductive ejaculate,” McCoy said dryly, stepping on the punchline. “It was spawning season, and we fell in a pool of semen. And it isn’t funny, we could have drowned.”

“It’s a little funny,” Joanna managed, giggling madly with Scotty over the look on McCoy’s face as much as anything. Some other nearby shoppers and shop owners had been eavesdropping, and were smirking in amusement. McCoy waved at them all in mock-indignation and walked to the edge of the boardwalk to take in the view of the Golden Gate Bridge at night. It was here, whole and beautiful. Like the Earth. Like his *daughter*.

His family got their laughter under control and joined him. He took Scotty’s hand, and his beautiful daughter leaned her head on his shoulder. It was nearly enough to make his heart burst.

“Welcome back to Earth,” Joanna said quietly. “Welcome home.”

Fireworks

Day 30 - Fireworks || Loud booms, sparkling light, and a breathtaking kiss.

Ohhh, they were so drunk. It was heady, champagne drunk; euphoric drunk; giddy drunk. It wasn't midnight, not quite yet, but the fireworks were already starting around them. A massive one went off in the sky above them, the boom thudding deliciously through their bodies.

"That one was impressive," Scotty half-slurred, leaning into McCoy. They were more-or-less holding one another up, and weren't walking much of a straight line, but no one seemed to mind.

"What are the words? To the song?!" McCoy half-shouted into his lover's ear, and then drifted into a badly-tuned melody. "...should auld acquaintance be forgot ... and something something lang synnnne."

"Oh, please, dinnae do a Scottish accent," Scotty begged him. "Not when you're so drunk that you've already got Georgia comin' through."

"This next firework is going to be a big one. And red," McCoy said sagely, and it was.

"Oh, good guess!" Scotty laughed, spinning them around in the sparkling light.

"I don't have to guess. It's my party," McCoy answered with a firm nod. "All these fireworks are here because they are my favorite."

"Is that so?" Scotty teased, and then grabbed his hand. "Ah, it's the countdown! Where are they? Six? Nae, seven! Six!" they counted together.

"Five, four, three, two!" Before they could say the final number, Scotty was kissing him—a deep, breathless kiss that never seemed to end, all hope and time and starlight and promise. Around them, the cheers and sound seemed to fade until it was just them. McCoy pulled away and looked into his eyes, trying to find the words, but Scotty just held him closer.

Scotty hummed a seldom-sung verse of the ancient song into his ear, dancing with him under the fireworks like there was no one else in the universe, his beloved voice beautiful and clear: "And we twa hae paidl'd I' the burn, frae morning sun 'til dine! But seas between us braid hae roar'd, sin days of auld lang syne."

"But seas between us broad have roared," McCoy translated heavily, swaying with him, clinging to Scotty, his eyes closed. "Since days long past."

"Well, yeh know what they say," Scotty said, and kissed him again, the tender brush of his lips enough to make McCoy ache. "At the stroke of midnight, you kiss the one you'll spend the year with."

McCoy gasped in pain. He still loved the man as desperately as he ever had, but he couldn't do this anymore. He had indulged this bittersweet dream long enough. It was a lucid one, and he'd known he was dreaming from the start. Outside himself, in the lonely waking world, he could hear the midnight chime of his antique grandfather clock back home in Georgia, and he could feel the chair he'd dozed off in, holding his old bones together.

"Scotty, you're dead," he told the dream figment sadly, and traced his face with fingers that had never forgotten its dips and angles, even after so many years. "You've been gone so long. I'd give the last seven decades without you for one more year with you. For one more *day*. I love you, and I miss you. I still miss you, even after all this time."

Scotty just smiled at him, and then stepped away, holding the tips of his fingers as long as he could, fading as real revelries outside filled the midnight air. "Happy new year, Leonard," Scotty's voice whispered. "And dinnae forget the promise of that New Year's kiss."

Wild Card

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Day 31 - Wild Card

The door opened, and Leonard McCoy didn't have to turn around to see who it was. He *knew*. After all this time, he still knew. "Well," he drawled. "If it isn't the ghost of Christmas past."

The half-choked laugh behind him *did* turn McCoy around. And there he was. Spock had called McCoy, just barely before the media got wind of it. And it was a great story—Picard's *Enterprise* had rescued a mythical hero from the glory days of the Federation. And not just any hero, but the beating heart of the most famous *Enterprises* there had ever been—Montgomery Scott. He'd stepped out of a transporter seventy-five years after he'd stepped into it, and now was hovering hesitantly in the doorway of McCoy's sitting room.

"Hello Leonard," he said gently.

"I've dreamed of this moment, so many times," McCoy sighed. "Although I wasn't standing in a 142 year old body in my dreams. Will you please come in and sit the hell down, so I can sit down too?"

There was room beside him on the couch, but Scotty sat in a chair across from him, fidgeting awkwardly. "I see the posthumous promotion caught up with you," McCoy small-talked at him, gesturing at the jacket.

"I'm a goddamned Admiral," Scotty complained. He wasn't in the wrong-colored pajamas that passed for Starfleet uniforms these days, but the dark jacket he was wearing clacked softly from the Starfleet arrow on his chest and rank insignia on his shoulders and collar. "And apparently still on active duty. I have meetings. At Starfleet headquarters. *Tomorrow*. It's an *order*," he snorted.

McCoy sat back, and wondered how to tell the man how badly Starfleet needed exactly his kind of blunt wisdom. How the Federation wasn't what it had been. How heady explorers had somehow become butt-covering bureaucrats. There were secrets, again, petty fiefdoms as bad or worse than the days of Khan and the *Vengeance*. A prime-of-his life, genuine ass-kicking legend might just be what Starfleet needed. Maybe Spock had already told him all that. Maybe Spock had already begged him to come back to New Vulcan and jumpstart the completely disastrous Romulan supernova project that had been mired for *decades* now, and was running out of time. The universe still *needed* Scotty, even if Scotty didn't know that yet.

It occurred to McCoy, on Scotty's concerned look, that he'd just drifted off for a moment in thought, like some kind of doddering senior citizen.

Well. To hell with that.

McCoy jumped spryly to his feet and advanced on the engineer, who watched him with widening eyes as he pressed back into his chair. McCoy thumped a finger straight into his chest. "*I told you so*," he hissed.

Scotty grinned at him, and *good god*, that was still beautiful. "Feel better then, love?"

"Much," McCoy said. "I've been waiting 75 years to say that."

That wiped the smile straight off his face, and Scotty leaned forward, his face in his hands. "I didnae expect it tae work. The transporter was supposed tae buy us a few weeks. *Seventy five years*. I still cannae fathom it. I dinnae know who I am here, tae myself or ... anyone."

"You've been gone half my lifetime, Scotty ..." McCoy started gently.

"Forgive me," Scott interrupted, dropping his gaze again. "For going away. And coming back. I'm not here with expectations; I'm not making any demands. I just wanted tae see you. I didnae expect you tae be *alive*, Leonard. It took me two weeks tae get up the courage tae ask the computer what had happened tae you."

McCoy smiled faintly at him. "You've been gone half my lifetime," McCoy repeated, and then continued what he meant to say. "And I still love you. But I'm not making any demands on *you*. I'm an old man, now. Twice your age. It's going to take you about four months to catch up on the minor engineering advancements of the last seven decades, and then you are going to be so *angry* at them, Scotty. The theory hasn't advanced at all. The supernova project is a 'fucking disaster,' and that's an almost-direct quote from Spock. You don't need an old man hanging on your arm while you go fix it all."

Scott looked fiercely up at him. "I called Spock first, when I found out you were alive. And *Nyota* too, as it happens; I hadnae imagined that she was alive either. I didnae know what tae do; whether tae show up on your doorstep, or whether it would just hurt us both. And they told me that the long-mission Starfleet officers of our generation were living longer. Something about the transporter repeatedly scrubbing our DNA clean; traveling at faster than light for years at a time doing something tae the way time touches us. You're nae an old man, Leonard McCoy, even with the white hair. And if you'll have me, I'll never leave your side again. Because I love you like a man who kissed you goodbye four months ago."

McCoy reached for his hands. "Then sit with me, for god's sake," he begged.

Scotty got to his feet, and they both more-or-less collapsed together on the couch. And then Scotty was weeping in his lap, and the raw grief of it was surprising. But then, McCoy had grown through the grief. It had twined and changed and softened, in its way, as it had become a part of him. But here was a man whose entire universe had left him behind between one breath and the next. And McCoy didn't kid himself. It was true, he was in magnificent shape for a 142 year old man. Hell, he was in great shape for a 90 year old man. But he was still in his fifteenth decade, and Scotty was in his eighth. His head whispered that this might be insurmountable. He was nearly surprised to feel tears running down his face as we wept with and for the love of his life.

The old grandfather clock ticked and chimed from the other room, and the shadows were lengthening when Scotty finally spoke again: "Tell me about your life, Leonard."

"I will," he said, stroking Scotty's hair absently. "I'll tell you all the stories. But right now, I'll just tell you one. After you died I spent about two years pottering around. Gardening. Playing card games. And then one morning I woke up, and I couldn't stomach the thought of spending one more day that way. So I marched down to Starfleet headquarters, reactivated my commission, and demanded that they put me on a ship. Do you know which one was just about to deploy? The *Enterprise*."

Scotty chuckled in surprise.

"First time I showed up on the bridge, just to give the Captain hell, I think I scared Harriman to death. Technically I ranked them all, and so they tolerated me. One afternoon I dropped by to share some bourbon with the Captain, and he asked me why I was really there. And I told him I was searching for you and for Jim. It wasn't until much later that I finally admitted the real truth to myself." McCoy petered off thoughtfully.

Scotty sat up. "What truth?" he prompted.

McCoy seemed to change tracks. "I always felt like part of Earth, you know. Like it was in my very bones, and it called to me when I was away. I tried to explain that once to Jim, and he had no idea what I was talking about. I never bothered trying to explain it to you. But on that last mission on the *Enterprise*, it didn't feel like that. Not anymore. All those years in the black, and I had become part of the *stars*. I wondered if that wasn't because my true home—you, by the way—was still somewhere among them."

Scotty smiled sadly, but didn't speak. McCoy tapped him on the back. "Come on, let me replicate you some dinner. Before you moan about it, *no*, I don't have ingredients for real food. I also don't own any pots or pans. You can buy some tomorrow, if you insist."

"I swear, Leonard, if you have synthehol ... " Scott started.

"I'm not a *complete* heathen," McCoy answered, rolling his eyes, and let Scotty wrap an arm around him as they walked to the kitchen. He went for the alcohol cabinet when they arrived, and poured them both a healthy double. They toasted each other, a little shyly, separated by the counter.

"The point of my story," McCoy continued after a long pull, "is that I don't *want* you glued to my side here on this planet," he said, and then raised his hand when Scotty flinched. "Shut up and listen to me, young man. The point is—I'll go with you. I'll live until I'm 200 years old pretty easily, and god alone knows what 75 years in a transporter has done to you. Everything is *wrong*, Scotty. Ten billion Romulans are going to die if we don't save them. Starfleet is rotten. But I'm still here. Spock, and Nyota. Pavel and Hikaru. You, my love, *you* are still here. Let's get back out there and save the universe once or twice more. You never know, maybe we'll find Jim Kirk out there too."

"Well, we'll certainly keep our eyes open for him," Scotty said, laughing in joy, and then leaned across the counter and *kissed* him. Seven decades of loss and sorrow melted away, and McCoy's heart soared. Scotty hadn't made it home for Christmas, but this was a new year. Against all the odds, time had turned again and a bright new beginning stretched out in front of them—and for this year and all the rest, they would walk side by side, where they belonged.

Chapter End Notes

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