

## Beyond the Consideration of Whales

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## Beyond the Consideration of Whales

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### Summary

After the *Enterprise* is lost above the planet Altamid, there are memorials to attend back on Earth for her lost crew. Not many bodies to bury. For sailors, there rarely are.

Scotty wondered what sailors of Earth's seas would have thought of him. They may have recognized the wanderer. The engineer, pacing in the watches of the night. The prayers, murmured to the ship, '*hold together, my love, take us home.*' The wreck and death when she was dashed apart all the same.

All sailors loved the stars, but he knew little of the sea. Which didn't stop him from standing in its fury today, watching the waves pound the Moray Coast. One of his deputy chiefs had been born in Inverness. And there was no body to lay to rest—Rory Fraser was lost, somewhere, frozen in the orbit of Altamid. But Scotty came for his memorial, like all the others, and the Frasers had reached for him, like all the others, needing comfort he couldn't give. No one could.

The sailors of old would have been familiar with that too.

Still in dress grays, he fled up the coast to stand in the storm. And if the collar of his uniform was soaked through, it was wind and rain needling through the margins of his coat, not tears dripping off his face.

The sea smelled of itself. On lifeless worlds, you could stand on a coast and smell nothing in particular. On Earth, the smell of the sea was the smell of the living consuming the dead. The scent of it made his head spin nauseatingly.

Or perhaps it was the drink. The half-bottle left of the whiskey in his hand suggested that he'd had more than was wise—another thing he had in common with ancient seamen. There were bodies in the sea, or in orbit around a planet, and he took another drink because they couldn't.

He shouldn't have survived the death of his ship. He couldn't decide if he was grateful or resentful, and watched the churning sea.

Humans knew less of the depths of Earth's oceans than they did of the distant stars. It was safer to stand on the surface of Mars than to visit the Mariana Trench. Nyota said it was easier to speak with aliens than whales. They were Terrans too. But most of Sol III was theirs, and mankind was largely beyond the considerations of whales, though they still looked amiss at ships—the cultural memory of near-extinction in their oldest songs.

(He wondered whether, in some version of Earth across the multiverse, the whales were all dead, the last of their cetacean bones disintegrating at the bottom of the sea.)

Rory Fraser and all the rest of Scott's lost engineers wouldn't decay. They were tiny, dark satellites, now, orbiting an alien world. He wondered if Altamid had anything like whales. Not that it was a comfort one way or another to Altamid's dead moons.

"Montgomery," someone called behind him, and if the sound of his own name was unfamiliar, the voice saying it was not.

"Granny," he murmured without turning. "You're a bit far from Glasgow."

"Your uncle Charlie said you were in Scotland," she said, and he breathed sharply when she put her hand on his back, her fingers trembling, like her voice. "And I was afraid you'd leave it again without showin' your face."

He rubbed his eyes. Wet. With *rain*, not *tears*. "Yeh arenae wrong," he admitted, and wondered distantly how she'd found him.

He knew how much she loved him. But Scotty had her dead husband's name, and her dead daughter's face. And he had nearly been her dead grandson many times over. There was only so much of that a person could bear, he knew.

She took his hand in her own, and then pressed it to her cheek. *Rain*, on her face, because he couldn't bear her tears. "Ah, laddie," she whispered. "You're so cold."

*Not so cold as bodies in space, or in the sea*, he considered, *but ...*

"...There's a pub down the road," she continued, squeezing his hand. "Let's find some hot food tae go with that drink, aye?"

He turned to look at her, for the first time in years, and gasped a breath like hitting the surface of the water. "Aye," he agreed shakily, and turned away from the storm.

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