

Time

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Time

by [SLWalker](#)

Summary

(2244) - One year post court-martial finds Scotty and Corry still doing the best they can to keep their heads up while navigating the mess they got into.

Notes

I loved writing this one.

The Lunar Spaceport was just about the most dirty place in the solar system.

Unlike the beauty that was Spacedock, or the utterly organized chaos of the San Francisco Fleet Yards, the Lunar port was a rough, dark, somewhat grimy platform in space. Some of Earth's earliest extra-planetary construction, it was a mishmash of architectural styles that had been built on top of one another, until what was left looked more like a wee'un's assembly of what they thought a spaceport *might* look like, in theory.

The only area that boasted anything like clean living was in the tourist center and museum, and the rest of the damn place was just-- well, old. Ill-lit. Greasy, not a little bit. Working and living there was kind of like living in a really bad dive.

It was, sometimes, hard to remember that he was a Starfleet officer and not some sad, civilian grease monkey who lost a bet, but usually all it took to make him stop questioning his entirely debatable circumstances was to remind himself that he could be in prison instead.

It was far better to be a free grease monkey, Scotty figured, than be a prisoner. It was at least honest work and he'd never felt being a mechanic was somehow any lesser. And further reasoning always led him to the same old conclusion that he had gotten himself into it, and that eventually he'd be able to work himself back out of it; in the meantime, he'd behave himself, work hard and thoroughly appreciate that he at least was wearing a Starfleet uniform and not an orange prison one-piece.

Still, on days like this one -- start to finish frustration -- it was kind of hard not to bitch.

He dropped to sit on the floor of his barely-closet-sized quarters; covered with muck from badly maintained personal vessels, he knew better than to sit on his bunk. He'd made that mistake once and ended up having to buy all new bedding, since he didn't use the Starfleet issued bedding he'd been assigned. At least he had coveralls to wear over his uniform; he had a bad feeling that if he ruined the uniforms, he'd probably end up in really deep trouble.

His supervisor was always looking for a reason to punish him; Scotty had gotten decent at dodging it as much as possible, but the man still relentlessly hunted for new ones. Damaged uniforms, even those damaged in the line of duty, would be one such reason.

The monitor light was blinking, and once he managed to peel himself out of his coveralls, he got up, absently scratching at the back of one leg with a socked foot. Thumbing the switch, he waited forever for the outdated network to bring up his messages.

All right. Two new schematics, one tech journal, one letter from his aunt--

And one outbound assignment.

Scotty grinned a bit to himself, scrolling down to open that message. He was in the rotation pool for shipboard assignments, but it wasn't

nearly as often as he liked when he got one. And almost always, he ended up just staying within light of Sol on some freighter, then it was right back to Lunar and right back to crawling around the guts of these bloody pieces of junk.

"Cargo Transport, Vulcan, U.F.P. *C/V Nickelplate*: Sixteen days outbound, sixteen back." He grinned wider. "About bloody time." And then he saw the estimated time of departure and the grin vanished.

Eight hours.

"Oh, *sonuva*-- " That left about ten minutes to get properly cleaned up, just under an hour to join into the transporter queue to get to Earth, however much time to pick things up, then back to Lunar hopefully with enough time to pack for the month away--

He grabbed a clean uniform, dashed out, then skidded back in to grab his boots off of the floor.

It had been twice since Corry was 'exiled' to Vulcan that Scotty had been back to South Bristol, and both of those times were because his best friend practically begged him to go. Neither time had been very comfortable, but he went anyway to check on the family and report back. It wasn't in the least that Corry's parents didn't write to him, but Cor wanted an outside report on how they looked, and Scotty was willing to bite the bullet and go do as he was asked.

One thing he never failed to complain about in his head, though, was that South Bristol was about as secluded as a place could get. And cab fare was a small fortune from the transport station in Augusta, too. If not for the fact that the people were pretty friendly, Scotty would have thought the town was xenophobic, but they were nice people. They just liked peace.

Which was why he was in danger of missing this damn assignment.

He still took a few precious minutes to steel himself enough to walk up to the door. This was the first time he'd come here of his own volition, and he was half-expecting to get pitched into the street on his ear. But finally, realizing that standing there was going to cost him this run, he went up and knocked.

It was a moment before Corry's mother answered the door; he'd stepped as far back on the steps as he could, and when she opened it, she frowned in puzzlement. Before she had a chance to ask, though, Scotty leapt into it. "Ma'am. I, uh-- well, I got an assignment to Vulcan, and I wanted to know if ye had anything ye wanted me to take to Cor. Er, Andy. Yer son." And then he promptly mentally kicked himself. *Idiot*.

Melinda blinked in surprise. "I-- you're-- all right." She half-smiled. "You came all the way from where?"

"Lunar Spaceport, ma'am." At least that was easily answered. "I don't have much time, though."

"You'd better come in, then." She stepped aside and gestured through the door, and then frowned again when he shook his head. "We still don't bite."

"Aye, I know, but--" Realizing that he had no genuinely good excuse to turn down the offer, though, he winced and stepped through the door. "Sorry, ma'am."

She eyed him a moment; ever since the court martial, she had been measuring him every single time she laid eyes on him, and Scotty sometimes had to wonder what it was that she was looking for. Though, really, he couldn't blame her -- he didn't think that the fact that he and her son had become two out of four of the first cadets ever court-martialed in Starfleet history was all that endearing. She was never stand-offish, or impolite, but the scrutiny was more than enough to make him study the floor.

"I'll just be a few minutes; I was going to send his birthday presents via the post, but since you're going that way..." And with that, she headed up the steps.

Once she was out of eye-shot, he relaxed a little bit. His own parents had gotten to the point where they didn't even care enough to be disappointed about his career or his choices anymore, and while that wasn't necessarily a bad thing, it was still a pretty sharp contrast to how Cor's family looked from the outside.

They still cared a great deal about what happened to their son. And Scotty cared enough to try to be worthy of being even peripherally involved with this family.

Melinda came back down the steps with her arms full of packages. "Are you going to be able to carry these, or should I get a bag?"

"I can manage, I think," Scotty replied, eying the pile dubiously.

She shook her head and then went to get an old duffle bag out of the hall closet, which she immediately packed the presents into. "How have you been?"

"Workin'," Scotty said, automatically, leaning around the doorway to the kitchen to check the clock on the wall. He winced again when he saw the time. This was going to be razor close.

"No, how have *you* been?" Melinda asked, zipping the bag and standing, then holding it out.

Scotty squinted a little there, trying to grasp why that even mattered, even as he took the bag from her. "All right, I suppose."

She nodded and gave him that look again, that measuring look, that 'mother probably trying to figure out if her son's best friend was a rotten apple' look, and it was hard not to go back to studying the rug underfoot.

And then she did something that froze him in mid-thought and damn near made him drop the duffle bag in hand.

She hugged him. Wrapped both arms around him, gave him a kiss on the cheek, then stepped back, and this time it wasn't such a measuring look she gave, but a sort of warm one. "Be careful out there, okay?"

Scotty nodded, still shocked, and gestured in an incoherent little flurry with his free hand. "I-- uhm-- I've gotta go." And with that utterly useless reply, he was back out the door, still boggling over it.

It really did take most of the ride back to Augusta to get over that.

The *Nickelplate* was forty years old and it was still in better shape than most of the vessels Scotty had been working on of late. It was, at least, manned by a steady crew and the only reason he'd gotten a temporary place onboard was because one of the regular engineers had fallen sick. She sure wasn't the *Constitution*, but compared to doing courtesy service maintenance on a slew of private vessels at Lunar, she was a notable step up.

At least he didn't spend pretty much every hour covered in crud; he was able to work in his normal uniform, sans coveralls, and do a bit of what he had been born to do.

The sixteen day trip outbound was the most relaxing time he'd had-- in over a year and a half, frankly; he had cringed when he saw that they'd only be in orbit around Vulcan for an hour and a half, but still, at least Cor would have a familiar face to talk to for that long. Corry's letters were downright sparse, leaving Scotty to be the one doing all the talking, which he only did because he knew perfectly well that Corry's schedule for the Vulcan Science Academy was so marathon that Cor was lucky to have time to breathe, let alone hold any long conversations.

So somehow, against his usual nature, Scotty found something to talk about. His favorite topic was cargo-carrying to the Fleet Yards, where he got to admire the four new *Constitution*-class ships being built or finished out, but there were some occasions he managed some non-engineering talk, and even the odd occasion where he ended up rambling about things that occurred to him about life itself.

It served as something like meditation at the end of the day; at least, once he got done rambling nonsense, he did feel some lighter for it. Maybe more relaxed.

Vulcan, on the other hand, was emphatically *not* relaxing. Just walking from the port to the Academy was enough to make Scotty wish that he could drop on one of the obsessively manicured stretches of natural scrub-grass and gasp for air for a few minutes. It was incredibly hot, the gravity was a little higher than he was used to, and the air was thinner; he couldn't even fathom living in this kind of environment, where the air was so dry that it felt like he was being desiccated in a truly *gruesome* timeframe.

The planet and architecture were pretty in their own ways, aye, but the sensation of moisture being wicked out of one's body at a punishing speed made it feel more'n a wee bit inhospitable. And it also felt strange being *eyed* like he was; the Vulcans walking outside were completely unencumbered by the weather, and apparently found a panting, sweating Starfleet ensign worthy of being stared at impassively.

Even as close as Scotty played his cards, the idea of living so-- so *blankly* was just beyond his comprehension. Not a single smiling face -- even the two or three humans he saw along the way (when he wasn't trying to stay conscious) looked like they'd jettisoned their personalities somewhere back at the port.

That made him worry a bit, though. He'd known when Corry had shipped off that it would be hard for someone that outgoing and social to survive in a place that frowned on excessive anything, but the idea of his best friend somehow becoming a robot was enough to really bother him.

Well, he'd find out soon enough. He took enough time before approaching the desk at the main entrance of the Academy to catch his breath (didn't work well enough), then asked where Cor was. After a few moments of checking the computer, the secretary replied, "Ensign Corrigan is currently in class and will not be released for two hours, thirteen minutes and six seconds."

Why the six seconds? Scotty wondered, incredulously. But-- hell if he was going to come all the way to Vulcan just to hear that, so he put on his best poker face. "I'm afraid ye'll have to call him out o' class. I've got a serious, time-sensitive experiment for him and it can't wait that long."

It was the truth, in a way. The experiment being whether or not Scotty could make passable New England Clam Chowder on a jury-rigged stove in an engine room while attending to his duties, and the time-sensitivity being whether or not the sealed container keeping it fresh would continue to do so in the brutal Vulcan heat.

The secretary raised one of her gracefully upswept eyebrows, and then stood and disappeared into one of the other rooms.

Scotty smirked to himself after making sure that no one was looking.

So far, so good.

His first real look at Corry in a year was a blur of blond, blue and black, but he didn't quite have time to process it before his entire attention was on *not* ending up on the ground.

Really, Cor must have checked himself before running full-out into his former roommate, but it still took the screeching of service boots and some flailing not to hit the floor. By that point, two things occurred to Scotty: The first being that Corry must be pretty acclimated to this climate to be able to move that fast, and the second was that he certainly hadn't become a robot.

"What are you doing here?! I can't believe it, I thought that something was really weird about them pulling me out of class, and I had no idea what to expect, but--" Corry cut himself off about a millisecond before Scotty was about to tell him to slow down, then grinned and pulled the nearly off-his-feet engineer back upright, though he still didn't let Scotty go for another several seconds. "Man, is it good to see you."

Despite nearly taking a header into a polished stone floor, Scotty couldn't help but laugh at that one. "I'd never've guessed." He waited until Cor let him go, then gestured to the bag and crate that he'd luckily set aside before he got bowled into. "I'm playin' delivery boy." And then he noticed the three or four Vulcan students who had stopped and were watching them. "And apparently, freakin' the natives out."

Corry was beaming, obviously not caring what the natives thought. "Delivery boy? Don't tell me you really have a time-sensitive experiment of the utmost importance."

"Sort of. But yer mother asked if I'd bring yer birthday presents," Scotty replied, then raised an eyebrow at the Vulcan audience, demanding, "What?!"

Looking almost offended, the students headed away in a most logical manner. Cor laughed, shaking his head, "They're actually pretty awesome people, but cripes, do you have any idea how hard it is to get through a day without so much as a laugh?" His expression fell a little. "My brain's on fire, I swear. I mean, they give logically portioned rest periods, and they've given me a little extra time because I'm only human, but--" He took a breath, then shook his head again. "I didn't even remember my birthday was coming up. I mean-- I check the date every day because deadlines and class schedules, but--"

Scotty frowned. Cor did look beat, despite his exuberance. Thinner than he had been on Earth, and with his eyes more shadowed. "Good thing I reminded ye, then, isn't it?"

"Yeah, yeah it is." The moment passed and Cor grinned again, shifting right back into high gear. "So, how long're you here for? I can probably get away with spending a few hours doing something other than studying. And oh my god, if you're here for a day, I swear I'll take a day of personal leave and catch up later, I could show you some things--"

Sometimes, he really hated being the bearer of bad news. Scotty shook his head, unwittingly cutting his best friend off. "Bout a half-hour, forty minutes. Between the walk here, and waitin' while they called ye out, and then takin' into account walkin' back."

Corry clearly tried pretty hard not to look crestfallen, but it wasn't a perfect try. "Ah well. Wanna go sit down for a few minutes? You look like you need to."

"That'd be nice, aye," Scotty admitted.

It was a good bit cooler in the shadows of the garden, and that said something, because it was still pretty oppressive. Plus, everything was very neat. Very organized.

"I'm sorry that I haven't written much," Corry said, between bites of the soup that he'd near gone orbital over getting. "By the time I get done answering Mom and Dad's questions, and making sure Rachel knows she'll be okay when she goes to college, I'm usually so tired I can't see straight."

"I don't really expect much," Scotty replied, all but clinging to the bottle of water one of the Vulcan garden-keepers had handed him. That had improved his opinion of this planet immeasurably, and maybe he could replace some of the fluid he was losing to this moisture vampire of an atmosphere.

"Yeah, but I feel bad." Cor smiled, shaking his head. "'Cause you go to all this trouble to send me these long messages, and then I turn 'em on, promptly tune you out and go to sleep."

Scotty ended up laughing so hard that he made himself dizzy all over again. Once he got half-a-breath back, he said, "Good god, man, I'd be disappointed if ye did anything else!"

By then, Corry was laughing too.

"That's fine, there's nothin' that interesting in 'em to begin with."

"Sometimes you get interesting," Cor said, after he'd stopped chuckling. "Your rants about how people should take better care of their ships are downright colorful."

"I've got probably about thirty hours of those stored in my head, be thankful I've spared ye." Scotty took a long drink of his water, then checked the time and winced. "And-- I have about ten minutes before I have to drag myself back to the *Nickelplate*."

Cor nodded, wincing himself, looking so disappointed that Scotty tried to think of some way to delay the *Nickelplate*, though to no avail. But then Cor said, "Hang here a minute, I've got some stuff to send home to Mom," and darted out before Scotty could protest.

Fortunately, there was less to carry back to Earth than there had been to carry to Vulcan; two light packages, and Corry kept the duffle bag all of his birthday presents had been in. That would, hopefully, make the walk back to the port a little easier.

Even after a whole quart of water and sitting in the shade, Scotty wasn't looking forward to it, but he didn't have much of a choice. Plus, it was hard to want to leave Corry here -- he doubted that Cor got to be himself all that often on this planet.

Cor must've been thinking along the same tracks. Looking out into the dry, red heat, he said, "There's never enough time, Wolf, is there?"

The nickname made Scotty smile; Corry was the only one around who still called him that, and every time he heard it, he felt a little like he had only just stepped onto the decks of the *Lady Grey*, with everything in the universe still well within his reach. It was really hard to believe that had only been just over a year ago. "There is. Just-- not right now, ye know?"

"Yeah."

"One year, Cor. One year, and ye can transfer back to Earth. Go sailin', have normal classes, and *winter*," he made a joking face at that, "with yer knee-deep, man-eatin' blanket o' snow--"

Corry nodded, his expression fading from a sort of tired look to a more easy one, a little smile crossing his mouth. "And standing on the swing bridge after the lobster fleet goes out, or getting coffee at the diner."

"Aye, just like that."

Cor nodded again, then asked, "Hey, Scotty, do me a favor, okay?"

"Name it," Scotty answered, though he half-wondered what he was getting himself into.

Corry looked back at him then. "Go back and see my parents when you can?"

"I'm hardly a substitute," Scotty said, grinning wryly.

"No. No, you're not," Cor said, and for a moment it sounded like teasing, until he finished, "You're you, and that's why."

Scotty didn't have time to ponder on that, or even really ask about it. It was still hard to leave, though; whatever the planet, there wasn't a single fiber of him that wanted to leave his best friend here for another year. But he still made himself say, "Time I go, Cor."

"I know." Corry gave him a half-smile and a hug, holding on tight enough to make up for letting go. "Take care, Wolf."

The metal railing of the swing bridge was very cool in the pre-dawn, early September air, and the sunrise was about a half-hour away, give or take. Though, the fishing fleet was on the move; across the bay, he could hear the shouts of people preparing their gear, getting ready to head on out.

Scotty didn't get to linger long on the bridge; boats always had right of way through the Gut, and a horn blast made him retreat to the other side. But for the moments he had stood there, he could see why Corry liked it. Sure, the place was isolated and kind of old-fashioned, but there was something--

Something kind of optimistic about looking across a working harbor and seeing the glowing running lights of boats, and the slow rise of dawn, and the timeless routine of generations. It was the first real look he'd ever had of this town, not from the perspective of someone who was only there because he had to be, or because he'd been asked to be, but because he actually *wanted* to be. If only because Cor couldn't be himself, right now.

It was a bit of a hike to the Corrigan household, but the lights were already on in the kitchen. Scotty still didn't really like the idea of walking up and knocking, and he still hadn't quite puzzled out everything about this family of-- of entirely incomprehensible New Englanders, but he'd told Corry that he would and so he did.

Cor's mother looked less surprised this time, despite the early hour. "Good morning."

"Ma'am," Scotty replied, holding out the packages Corry had sent back with him. "Yer son asked me to bring these."

"I know, he wrote and told me he'd be sending them," she said, with a chuckle. She took those in one arm, then got the other around his

shoulders and didn't give him much of a chance to slip away. "C'mon, we're just about to have breakfast."

There was a split second where Scotty thought about planting his feet and then getting out of there. He would never figure out exactly why he didn't do that.

And eventually, he would even stop asking himself.

He nodded once, and went inside.

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