Day Hike on the Forge
by starfleetdream

Summary

Just a Vulcan walk in the park. [Minor spoiler alert: This is an excerpt from "To Honor and Protect."]

Notes

A/N: Soran is the creation of Selek, and for his use in my stories I am quite grateful. This story fits into, and may become a part of, “To Honor and Protect,” but it contains no significant plot spoilers if you want to read it now. It takes place during Sarek and Amanda’s first year on Vulcan. Enjoy.

Soran was horrified. Not in any overtly emotional way, of course, but he made his disapproval of Sarek’s plan to take his Human bondmate on a trek into the untamed desert abundantly clear.

“Precisely where do you intend to take this… expedition, S’haile?” He asked, once he had regained control over his incredulous expression.

Sarek ignored his aide’s reaction. Soran could be somewhat excitable, at times. “I thought the Menallar d’T’Asal (Cliffs of the Lady of the Morning) would be suitable.”
Soran’s discomfiture only increased with this news. “Sarek, the three-day journey to reach the base of the cliffs would constitute excessive exposure for a Human. And while I do not doubt T’sai Amanda’s physical abilities, the 4,000-meter climb to the upper reaches is hazardous even for many Vulcans.”

Sarek turned to regard his friend with some amusement. “Soran, I am not unaware. I have no intention of subjecting Amanda to the hazards you mention. We will travel by aircar to the base of the cliffs, and traverse the lower tranche before returning to the vehicle. The journey will take less than one-half day, somewhat strenuous for my wife but by no means exhausting.”

Soran looked dubious. “Very well, S’haile. I will assemble the needed supplies.”

As it turned out, it was an opportune time for such a trek. The council would not resume for a few days, and there was a scheduled break in Amanda’s classes. Sarek took the opportunity to appropriately prepare his wife for the journey.

First was a thorough briefing on desert hazards. He sat Amanda down, PADD in hand, and proceeded to explain the habitats and habits of all of the Forge’s dangerous flora and fauna, of which there were many.

They had not gotten past le-matya and wild sehlats when Amanda complained, “I’ve had this briefing before, remember?”

Not about to be dissuaded from his task, Sarek replied, “Since your memory is not eidetic, this is a review.”

“Hmph,” she said, making her thoughts clear on the subject.

The next image to appear on the PADD screen was of a thick vine covered with large, vibrantly colored flowers.

“Oh, how beautiful!” Amanda exclaimed.

“D’mallu, you will recall, are omnivorous,” Sarek commented. “Larger specimens have consumed adult sehlats.”

Her eyes widened, and then she shook her head, conceding defeat. “All right, you win. I’ll study this list.”

“A most logical decision, my wife,” he told her, gracious and elegant as ever in victory. “Soran requests my presence. I shall return forthwith.”

Sarek discovered that Soran had his own PADD, on which he had compiled a lengthy list of gear for the trek.

“Four portable deflector units; eight dehydrated, prepared meals, Terran and Vulcan, with appropriate utensils; remote sensing device; twenty liters of purified water in high-impact travel containers; two fully redundant comm units; expandable wilderness sleeping platform with thermal coverings; four headlamps; two emergency medi-kits, one Human, one Vulcan; twenty rescue flares…” The aide paused a moment, re-checking his list.

Wilderness sojourns were not new to Sarek. In addition to the kahs’wan survival test experience of every Vulcan child, he had spent much of his free time as a youth exploring the remote reaches of his
family’s lands and beyond, such that the ancient survival disciplines were now second nature to him. He had no doubt of his abilities to make such an expedition and to keep Amanda safe while doing so.

He ignored for the moment what Soran’s extensive supply list implied for his friend’s corresponding judgment of his abilities. Sarek could not resist asking at least one question, however. “Four headlamps?”

“Two are for back-up,” Soran replied, as if the need were obvious.

Definitely not the least bit nettled, Sarek rejoined, “Amanda is not making this trek alone, I must point out.” At his friend’s blank stare, he continued. “And let me reiterate that this ‘trek’ is for one half day only, and will occur outside of peak temperature hours. Much of this equipment can be supplanted with traditional techniques. I do possess the requisite skills,” he finally added, somewhat miffed.

Soran looked decidedly dubious. Then it was he who appeared miffed when Sarek innocently inquired, “Surely you are aware of such skills. You did pass your kahs’wan, did you not?”

In the end, Sarek carried only a small pack with a few conveniences, a Human medi-kit and water, all for Amanda. They arose after just a few hours of sleep in order to complete the trip before the heat of the day. Preparing to leave, they discovered I-Chaya waiting expectantly by Sarek’s flitter.

“Very well, old friend,” Sarek informed the sehlat before making room for the huge animal.

Amanda climbed into the aircar eagerly, if somewhat ungainly in the eshikh-saikhut (desert suit) she wore. Part hiking gear and part survival suit, the outfit she wore was intended to both facilitate travel in the shifting sands and rocky terrain they would traverse as well as to protect its wearer from the environmental extremes they could experience. Sarek wore a much lighter and simpler version than hers, but he had been insistent that she would need the extra protection against exposure. What a worrywart, she thought as she tried to get used to the heavy garment. She was well versed in all the outdoor environments Earth had to offer, and while she appreciated this would be different, she wasn’t worried.

Although Sarek had shown her on a map where they would be going, she hadn’t paid much attention to how they would be getting there. So when they headed off straight for the starlight-outlined L-langons, she didn’t think much of it until they passed over the foothills and flew directly in amongst the towering peaks.

“I thought you said we wouldn’t be hiking at high altitude,” she said, curious, when she noticed with surprise they had climbed to several thousand meters.

“You are correct,” Sarek replied, eyes ahead of him. “However, we must first reach the starting point of our journey.” He pointed the craft toward a narrow crack between two rock walls and accelerated. Amanda swallowed.

They shot through the slim canyon pass to emerge within a circle of still-taller peaks. Fierce gusts of wind buffeted them, but Sarek deftly maneuvered the aircar through the turbulent air toward another narrow pass ahead. More than once the vehicle dropped tens of meters into an air pocket, but he remained unperturbed.

Amanda was fine handling watercraft in all manner of weather conditions, but as a passenger in the
air it was another matter. She was amazed their flitter could even do this kind of flying – certainly none of the ones she had ever piloted on Earth were capable of this. *I guess Vulcan flitter technology is more advanced... to handle the weather patterns here.* She tried gripping her armrests as inconspicuously as possible – but then gave up when I-Chaya emitted a loud howl and hunkered down on the floor in the back after a particularly precipitous drop.

Sarek glanced over at her. “Do not be concerned, *Aduna.* I-Chaya simply does not favor flying in these environs.”

“I see,” Amanda murmured, silently approving of the sehlat’s judgment on the subject. She hoped that neither she nor I-Chaya would lose first meal high up in the L-langons.

They reached the second pass, another cliff-lined slot, and, still buffeted by the wind, Sarek aimed the craft only meters away from the unforgiving rock wall as they barreled through. Amanda held her breath.

Immediately upon reaching the other side, he turned the craft nose downward, plummeting toward the valley floor below. After a few agonizing seconds he leveled out, then banked hard around a looming rock formation before pulling up and somehow landing gently on a broad stone outcropping.

Amanda sat still for a moment, very thankful that her seat was not about to fall out from underneath her again. She slowly released her breath. “Will it be... like that when we return?” she asked, hoping her voice remained neutral.

Occupied with shutting down the aircar, Sarek at first did not notice the emotion she was trying to conceal. “Most likely not,” he replied, and Amanda relaxed. “There was less turbulence in the inter-mountain passes today than is typical.”

*Less?* She stiffened again, and this time her reaction did not escape Sarek.

“Were you... frightened, *Aduna*?” he asked, eyeing her closely.

“No!” She denied, then reversed herself. “Well, yes, a little. I’ve never flown in a flitter in conditions like that, that’s all.”

“I regret to have caused you discomfort, my wife,” he replied earnestly, now obviously concerned himself. “You must know that I would never endanger you.”

“Oh, of course you didn’t, Sarek!” Amanda hastened to reassure him. “I just wasn’t expecting a roller-coaster ride like that. I wasn’t worried about my safety.” *Not much, anyway.* She knew how seriously her husband took her safety and contentment.

“Very well, my wife,” Sarek replied, clearly doubtful. He resolved to find a smoother flight path back out of the mountains when they returned. He turned to gather his pack from the aircar.

Determined not to let the desert suit get in her way, Amanda looked for something she could carry. “What can I bring?”

“You need not burden yourself, *Aduna.* I have the supplies we need, and you are still acclimating to Vulcan.”

“But Sarek,” she protested, “that’s silly. I’m perfectly capable. Besides, according to you, I won’t be ‘fully acclimated’ for years.”
He raised a disapproving eyebrow at her, having none of her assertion. “Precisely my point and hardly ‘silly.’ I will accept no argument in this. Let us proceed.”

It was still night but the waning sliver of T’Kuht in the sky provided sufficient illumination for them to travel the well-worn trail. I-Chaya, moving more quickly than his deceptively lumbering gait suggested, loped along ahead of them as though he had made this trip many times himself.

Amanda realized he probably had. And as she hiked along the pathway, grateful for the cool nighttime air, she reflected how may others before her, almost certainly none of them Human, had left footsteps here from ancient times to modern. Sarek had told her this route was part of a pilgrimage journey that Vulcans in the surrounding provinces had been making for millennia. Once again, I am a newcomer, she thought, and I am still discovering ways in which my adopted world is unfamiliar.

Sarek observed his small Human wife as she hiked in the gradually growing light. Although he walked in front of her, his keen ears told him whenever she was more than a step behind, and he would turn and wait for her. Many times, she had stopped to look more closely at a plant, small animal or rock formation, a thing he had noticed but considered unremarkable, and he was struck with the wonder she felt, perceiving his world anew.

He quietly ordered I-Chaya to follow behind Amanda, on the slim but non-zero chance that a desert predator would discover and take an untoward interest in his curious bondmate. Having thus provided additional security for his wife, Sarek relaxed enough to indulge her curiosity, pointing out the pel-tar’uk shrub with its edible berries and the scurrying valit, a shy desert rodent. At one point, a brilliant flash of blue in the scrub brush caught their attention.

“It is a lara bird,” he informed her. “They are somewhat rare, and exceedingly difficult to maintain in captivity. In ancient times the sighting of one was believed to represent good fortune.”

Amanda’s bright blue eyes smiled up at him. “We’ll be lucky, then.”

His thought in response was illogical, so he did not voice it. I am indeed, for I see one every day.

For her part, it was obvious to Amanda how attached Sarek was to the desert, and how at home her urbane, cosmopolitan husband was in this arid wilderness. He was clearly enjoying himself. Being in the desert is to him the way being on the water is for me.

He, of course, insisted on frequent rest and rehydration breaks for her. At one such stop, she noted he hadn’t taken any water himself.

“I do not require it,” he answered her. “The water we have brought is for your consumption.”

“You’re not planning on drinking any?” she asked in disbelief. “How long can you go without water?”

“Approximately six Vulcan days; three without adverse effects.”

She was about to argue with him over his unnecessary sacrifice when an odd sight over his shoulder in the distance captured her attention instead. In the morning sky she saw… clouds, but they were quite different than the ones she typically observed, high and wispy overhead. These reminded her of Terran thunderclouds, tall and dark, although they appeared isolated on only a narrow slice of the horizon.

“Sarek, what kind of clouds are those? Will it rain?” She asked, excited at the idea of seeing actual precipitation for the first time on Vulcan.
Sarek turned, and paused a moment before responding. “Those are not clouds of water vapor. That is a sandstorm.”

Amanda’s eyes widened, and this time he could clearly sense a jolt of fear through their bond.

“As grazhiv-sahrivlar go, it is a small one,” he said, intending to allay her concern. “They can arise at a moment’s notice.”

“That is ‘small’?” Amanda asked, obviously worried by the growing cloud mass.

“Yes. Nonetheless, it would be wise to seek shelter.”

“Where -- what shelter?” Amanda scanned the sheer-looking rock cliffs rising up on one side of them and the open, unprotected expanse of sand on the other. Even while they had spoken, the column of cloud and sand had grown significantly larger. She tried, unsuccessfully, to quell the unease that was growing as rapidly as the storm.

“Do not be concerned, Aduna,” Sarek said, not missing his wife’s increasing worry. “I will keep you safe.”

*How are you going to keep us safe from that?* Amanda wondered.

For his own part, Sarek was quite confident of his ability to avoid harm from the storm. Nonetheless, the need to protect his Human wife, untrained in such disciplines, demanded the utmost vigilance.

“There are caves. Come,” he beckoned, leading her expeditiously toward what appeared to be a crevice in a pile of boulders at the base of the cliff. The narrow crack did indeed widen into a passable opening, but a muffled growl from I-Chaya caused Sarek to cease his inspection.

“Not this one. It is occupied,” he explained.

Amanda closed her eyes at this news and tried to re-focus her mind away from her growing sense of alarm. Big, wind-driven storms had always made her uneasy. But how many expeditions of hers had Sarek endured into what must have seemed to be unfamiliar and potentially unsafe environments? He had trusted her, for the most part. Sure, he didn’t like to see her in ocean waves, but that was understandable. And there had been that time at the Tomatina festival in Spain when they had both ended up covered in tomato pulp before his security guards insisted upon removing them from the “dangerously violent” crowd of tomato-hurling celebrants. *But this…this seems like real peril.*

They could hear the storm now, a low, ominous roar rising in pitch as it approached. Lightening flashed within the clouds. “Sarek!” Amanda cried.

“Remain calm,” he said firmly, taking her hand. The trio hurried along the base of the cliffs. Finding another crevice, Vulcan and sehlat quickly assessed it.

“Amanda, attend,” he called to her after a moment, bidding her to follow him inside. “It is safe. This cavern appears geologically stable and I-Chaya declares it to be uninhabited.”

As she cautiously ventured in, he took her hand again, pulling her close so she could hear him over the rising wind. “Caves like this one have protected my people from wilderness hazards for millennia. We are taught how to search for them when we begin survival training in our youth, and to remember their locations.” The storm now almost upon them, dark, swirling clouds blocked the light of the morning sky, and thunder boomed. “If you will excuse me, my wife…”

To her horrified amazement, he stepped back outside into the wind.
“Sarek!” she cried again, really terrified now.

He reappeared, part of the stalk and roots of a large, tuberous plant in one hand. Amanda had barely noticed the flora along the cliffs. *What on Vulcan is he doing?*

“I am here, *Aduna*. Do not be concerned.”

Sarek now quickly piled the available loose rocks into the cave’s small entrance, and Amanda followed his lead, narrowing the opening somewhat. I-Chaya assisted with the larger boulders. Having secured shelter, he took a moment to alert Soran of their status by comm before returning his full attention to her.

“As you may have surmised, my wife, the duration of our trek will be lengthened. I calculate the storm’s duration will be approximately four point nine seven hours.”

“We’re going to be trapped in here for five hours?” she lamented, looking out at the storm in dismay.

“While we are not precisely trapped, as you say, we shall be delayed, yes.”

Another series of booms and shrieks came from outside as wind and sand whipped in at the cave’s entrance. Amanda jumped.

“Let us remain some distance from the entrance, my wife,” Sarek cautioned gently. “With that in mind, I assure you we are quite safe.”

At Sarek’s warning, I-Chaya dutifully shuffled forward and nudged Amanda further into the interior of the cavern.

“Hey!” She exclaimed, asking indignantly, “Did your sehlat just shove me?”

“*Aduna*, I-Chaya’s role in my household is to keep its members safe. This includes you,” Sarek informed her. “I am certain he intended no offense,” he added more lightly.

“Oh, Sarek,” she sighed unhappily. “I think you’re teasing me but I can’t even see us in this hole we’re stuck in, and that storm outside is awful --”

With his superior low-light vision, Sarek could see her in what little light there was. It was also quite obvious through their bond that she remained quite distressed. He reached for her, offering her the oz’hesta and guiding her to sit.

“*Aduna*, you should rest and rehydrate. Allow me to see to your needs.”

Instantly a tiny but bright lantern appeared from his pack, along with a water bottle and what appeared to be a miniature cooking unit. After seeing to his satisfaction that she drank the water, he began stripping the tuber into pieces for cooking.

“You’re hungry at a time like this?” Amanda asked.

“It is a logical opportunity for nourishment,” he responded. “The tubers of the *tal’oth-sakal* (*survival orchid*) can be consumed raw, although I believe you will find them more palatable cooked.”

Amanda simply stared at him for a moment as she digested the fact that he considered all of this routine, and had, in fact, prepared for it.

“You must find my behavior very illogical,” she sighed.
Sarek looked up from his task. “In what way?” He asked neutrally. Indeed, he did not fully understand her emotions at present, but he also sensed that declaring this fact would not improve her mood.

“I don’t know why, really,” she admitted, “but windstorms, tornadoes, like this especially frighten me. I guess you could say it’s an irrational fear of mine.” As if to prove her point, an especially violent blast of wind injected a spray of sand into their shelter. She slid closer to him.

“Is there anything that especially... bothers you, Sarek? Anything you have an instinctive uneasiness about? Or is this just another Human failing?” Amanda smiled sheepishly.

Sarek considered. “Irrational” fears were by definition illogical; therefore, he had none. He did not consider the fear of harm befalling his bondmate irrational. That concern was quite logical and demanded his frequent attention. Rational fear, of course, simply required control and the appropriate action to mitigate it.

Gazing down at her affectionately, he brushed her hair back from her cheek. “I see no failing here.”

The feel of her soft skin sparked the desire to touch her further, but he remembered his duty. “Mid-meal is prepared, my wife. Would you like to eat?”

A good idea, she thought. It wasn’t until he was handing her a neatly wrapped, purple tal’oth-sakal leaf containing a serving of cooked root and pel-tar’uk berries that she realized.

“I thought you didn’t cook?” She asked.

“I am well-versed in wilderness food preparation techniques.” At her continued, curious look, he explained further. “However, I have only infrequently prepared meals under more conventional circumstances. It has never been required of me,” he told her honestly.

She shook her head at him, unable to resist teasing him. “So you can survive on the Forge but not in your own aftum (kitchen)?”

“Were there no appropriate kitchen staff available, I would simply prepare wilderness fare as I have here, on the aftum floor if necessary. We would survive quite adequately,” he informed her confidently. “And while we are on the subject, you should eat, my wife.”

Perhaps it was the after-effect of their tumultuous flight, or her nerves from the storm, but Amanda suddenly felt queasy. “We’re not eating insects or anything, are we?” she asked, warily glancing at the unfamiliar food.

Sarek almost looked offended. “Of course not. We are vegetarian.”

They had barely finished their meal when the wind accelerated yet again, sending sand screaming through the cave’s narrow entrance. Thunder and lightening crashed right outside, the storm apparently at its peak.

“Oh! Are you sure we’re safe, Sarek?” Amanda implored him, her fear returning in a rush.

He took her hands to reinforce his words. “I am quite sure. Our shelter in this cliff is secure from damage by the wind. This area has been seismically stable for centuries. Hostile wildlife will not be hunting during the storm. Indeed, there is very little danger that could befall us here.” Then he added quietly, “Nonetheless, I regret that our outing has caused you such distress.”

Amanda took a calming breath, reassured by his solid presence. “I’m sorry to be so emotional, Adun.”
But I’ll get over it. Just hold me, and I’ll be fine.” She looked up at him in entreaty and he pulled her close.

“You should rest, my wife,” he murmured soothingly, gently pulling her down with him to sit on the sand floor. Pulling a small sleeping roll out of his pack, he unfurled it.

“It is logical to rest when we cannot travel,” he said in response to her skeptical look. “And you will rest more adequately if you remove your desert suit.”

His not-so-veiled invitation was enough to distract her from the fearsome weather once again. “You just want to see me naked,” she accused.

Drawing himself up with affronted dignity, Sarek replied, “I trust I do not need to resort to artifice for that.” He gestured to the sleeping roll while undoing the fastenings on his own suit. “I do mean rest. Come here, my wife.”

Amanda shook her head at him again, but acquiesced. While I-Chaya happily consumed the remainder of their meal, they bedded down in the rear of the cave and waited for the storm to run its course. Determined to remain calm, she burrowed in next to the reassuring warmth of her husband.

Sarek allowed himself to relax slightly. She would be safe next to him. In truth, he wished to do other than rest while they waited out the storm. But, sensing her resolve to prevail over her stubborn fear, he put his desires aside, and held her close instead. She is mine.

ooo

When Amanda awoke the air was much cooler in the cave, the wind outside finally calm. She herself was quite warm, however, with Sarek’s body spooned protectively around her. The storm has passed. He did keep us safe.

She smiled and relaxed against his firm musculature. A moment later she became aware of a different firmness -- as his _lok_ brushed against the backs of her thighs. Uttering a tiny sigh she arched her back, pushing her rear end against him, and his arms tightened, sensitive hands caressing her torso before roving further. He was definitely awake.

Amanda let her head fall back and her eyes close, her mind filled with vivid images of what she wanted to happen next. _Oh, yes_…

She was not disappointed.

“_K’diwa,_” he murmured, his voice throaty and low.

His body tantalized by the feel of hers and fully aware of his mate’s readiness, Sarek rolled himself over her with swift, cat-like grace. Settling between her thighs, one hand caressed her face while the other cupped a smooth, soft breast. She moaned and brought her arms and legs up around him. His _lok_ quickly positioned itself, and with a quick, firm thrust, he made them one. Amanda gasped, then moaned again.

Their bodies and minds came together and he thrust against her inner walls at a steady, insistent pace, working to draw out the length of time he possessed her body. //Slowly, Aduna, yes… You are mine and we are one… I will bring you to such… satisfaction…// his mind voice crooned to her. Her response was incredibly stimulating. Such intense sensation was difficult to contain, however.

He found it harder and harder to maintain his rhythm as her soft cries of pleasure rose in pitch and volume, echoing off the close walls of their shelter, and her body wound more and more tightly
against him. He sucked in a ragged breath, increasing his tempo. He felt her nails dig into his back, and he could not contain a hushed hiss. In a rush, he bent his head to her neck and shoulder and marked her, scraping her skin with his teeth.

“Adun!” She cried out helplessly as she gripped him in a frenzy, losing all control. Amanda gave herself up completely to him, lost in the feel of their bodies, their minds, moving as one. Her body sang.

//I love you so much --!///

Sarek shuddered, moving within her urgently now, driving them both swiftly to completion. He found it utterly irresistible when his wife surrendered to him so, to his male need. The only way he could respond was to demonstrate his satisfaction and pleasure in no uncertain terms.

The conclusion to their dance was hot, hard and decisive. His whole body tensed against hers, pinning her to the cave floor as he pulsed within her. She cried out, and he held her captive there for several long moments while she writhed and moaned beneath him.

//Aduna,// his mind voice breathed, thick with meaning that he could not express any further. He was complete when they were like this, their bodies tangled together and their minds intertwined.

//I love you,// she replied, exhausted, before they curled together again for a further, unscheduled rest.

I-Chaya, who had discretely removed himself from the cave a little while earlier, simply basked in the sun while he waited.

END (for now)

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