

---

Tom Wreke and Laurel Scoresby are lying in bed together, legs tangled up beneath the covers. Her shoulders are bared, and Tom runs his hand gently over the smooth skin there, pressing his thumb lightly against a birthmark in the shape of a heart.

**TOM WREKE**

I wish I could just fall in love with you.

**TOM WREKE**

It would be so much easier.

His eyes are dark, sorrowful- as he presses a kiss tenderly to the spot just beneath his touch. Laurel sighs, resting her head against his for a moment, fingers playing with the curls of brown hair at the nape of his neck.

**LAUREL SCORESBY**

Oh, Tom- don't say that.

Tom stays there for a moment, shifting so that his head is in the cradle of her neck and shoulder, breathing fanning out against Laurel's skin.

**TOM WREKE**

I know, I know.

**TOM WREKE**

But- if I could...

Tom trails off, wistful. Laurel continues to pet his hair, scratching her nails gently against his tender scalp.

**TOM WREKE**

You're the woman I would want to spend the rest of my life with.

**TOM WREKE**

It just seems plumb unfair that we're both wired the way we are.

He breathes out a sigh. Laurel moves- so that she's cradling Tom's head in her hands, palms pressed to his cheeks, as she strokes her thumbs gently against his jawline. He's looking up at her through the fan of his long lashes.

**LAUREL SCORESBY**

Tom- you know that I love you dearly.

**LAUREL SCORESBY**

But I'm not *in* love with you, dear.

**LAUREL SCORESBY**

I never could be, either.

She leans in to press a kiss to the center of his forehead, lingering for a moment. He smells of soap and cold water, and she feathers another kiss to each eyelid, before pulling away again. Her red hair is loose around her shoulders, a few errant locks framing her face.

**TOM WREKE**

I know that.

This is a conversation that they'd hashed over many times before- Tom's voice is tired, shoulders slumping, as he leans into the touch of her hands.

**TOM WREKE**

And it's much the same.

**TOM WREKE**

I've- tried, you know. I've tried to fancy women in that sort of way- but there's no spark. It's all dead wire.

He grimaces a little at the recollection.

**TOM WREKE**

But if things could be different...

**TOM WREKE**

There's no one I'd rather be beside.

Tom closes his eyes then- as if afraid to look at Laurel.

**LAUREL SCORESBY**

I understand.

The blankets rustle, as she repositions the both of them in bed- pressing Tom to lie down on his back with her hand splayed against his sternum, and lying down on top of him, ear pressed to his chest. She can hear his heartbeat, ticking steadily away. He raises one broad hand to stroke at her hair, cradling her close to him.

**LAUREL SCORESBY**

One day, you'll fall in love, Tom-

**LAUREL SCORESBY**

And it'll have been worth all of the heartbreak and grief alongside the way.

**LAUREL SCORESBY**

And I'll be there, as I am here-

**LAUREL SCORESBY**

And we will always be lifelong friends.

Laurel looks up for a moment, to press a kiss to the side of his jawline. She moves to pull the blankets up and over the two of them- Tom taking a moment to ensure that the two are wrapped up snugly, patting overtop of her back when she's swaddled up in the comforter.

**TOM WREKE**

We'll always have each other.

His voice is quieter, low- a little roughened around the edges. He doesn't sound sad, exactly- just nostalgic.

**LAUREL SCORESBY**

Of course we will.

Laurel nods a little, brushing some of her hair out of her face.

**LAUREL SCORESBY**

There's nothing that could make me give you up.

**LAUREL SCORESBY**

I'm a woman who knows what she wants, remember?

Laurel is smiling, then- bordering on cheeky, as she looks up at Tom. He's smiling down at her.

**TOM WREKE**

And there ain't nothing that could stand in your way of getting it.  
Always been a go-getter.

Laurel nods, before smothering a yawn. Her eyes skitter to the clock along the wall- glowing faintly, like the stars stuck to the ceiling of Theodore Sylvester's bedroom.

**LAUREL SCORESBY**

It's getting late, darling.

Tom takes a look at the clock, and groans.

**TOM WREKE**

Suppose we should try to get some rest. Early start, tomorrow.

Laurel pats him on the chest, once or twice- the way you would to settle a child. Her voice is tender on the last few words, as she closes her eyes for the night.

**LAUREL SCORESBY**

Yes- goodnight, Tom. I love you- I always have.

**TOM WREKE**

And I love you, Laurel. I always will.

He kisses the crown of her head, before tilting his head back to drowse off.

---