

DESTINY VOYAGE

Three yellow roses are arranged in a triangular pattern, with one rose at the top and two below it. The roses are in full bloom, showing the characteristic spiral pattern of the petals. The background is a light, textured white.

**To The Memory
Of My Mother
Maxie Rene Holmes
The Lady of the Yellow Rose
With Love, Respect
And Honor**

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When there is a meeting of two kindred souls

It's said their joining was preordained

Merging the past, present and future

Of yesterday, today and tomorrow

Seeking at the appointed time

To become a single spirit

One life into another

As their destiny

Forever on.

Alyce Holmes

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The San Francisco sky was just beginning to darken as a thin youth stepped forward and whistled above the sound of night traffic to hail a passing taxi. A checkered cab rolled to a stop in front of the boy. The operator leaned forward and eyed him skeptically.

Over sized garments emphasized his thin frame. He wore baggy pants, and a denim jacket rolled back several times over short arms. A blue flannel shirt hung well past his waist and the strap of a canvas bag tugged heavily at one shoulder. A dark cap pulled tightly over his head hid the color of his hair, leaving a small, oval face visible.

What he lacked in age had been transferred to fiery diligence. Narrowed blue eyes flashed at the man and a look of cold determination was clearly etched on the youth's brows. The boy ignored the man's stare and climbed into the passenger seat, directing the driver to the state docks.

"Yes sir," the man returned, sarcastically. The driver glanced in the rear view mirror at his latest charge, then eased the clutch and moved from the curb.

The boy smiled slyly to himself. He rolled down the window and welcomed the cool night breeze on his face. His head rested against the back of the seat to look at the darkening sky.

Forty minutes later, the car drew to the pier. "Stop here," he beckoned. He paid the fare and watched as the man counted each bill, reversed gear and headed back the way they had come.

The cry of sea gulls, dull shadows flying high over head with smooth, graceful movements, resounded through the night air. Docked boats in a neat line of slips swayed against the incoming tide. A swift breeze caused his pants and jacket to billow outward as he made his way along the narrow plank in search of *The McDermont*.

Clear blue eyes searched the pier finally coming to rest on the majestic craft, as it stood large and regal against dark seawaters. Lights glowed from upper decks and a few figures could be distinguished from where he stood on the platform below. He made his way to the vessel and scurried up the metal gangplank.

"You there," someone shouted above him.

A huge man moved forward and blocked his path. Large hands rested on the rails at both sides. The boy's eyes rolled slowly upward sliding over a broad, thick body and into the burly face of a man with sun wrinkled skin. A sailor's hat was pushed forward over thick brows and the bottom half of his face was covered with a dusty red beard.

An unreadable expression crossed his face just before the man's beard creased across the center, showing the signs of thin lips hidden beneath. His accent was throaty and Irish. "You must be the new mate. We weren't expecting you until tomorrow morning. What's your name?"

"Scottie," the boy answered back, quickly. "Scottie Davidson."

The man reached into his pocket and pulled out a folded slip of paper. "That's exactly who we were expecting. My name is Borge. I'll take you below to show you to your cabin."

A large hand came forward taking Scottie's into it. Borge's grip was firm and strong. The boy felt his fingers crush under the strain of it. He heaved his bag further onto his shoulder and followed the man across the deck to an open portal.

The lower portion of the vessel resembled a floating hotel more than anything Scottie had expected and his eyes anxiously drank every detail. The walls were painted white. Doors lined the passageway leading into the crew's private quarters.

Scottie took two steps to Borge's one, trying to keep pace with his long gait. He followed him to the end of a passageway where he stopped in front of a single door. He opened it and led Scottie through.

"You should find everything you need," Borge said. "The cabins are fully equipped, but you can add anything else you like. If there is something you need, let me know. The galley is one deck below. The team hits the exercise room before dinner. Come down once you get unpacked."

"Thanks," Scottie coughed. "It's been a while since I worked out."

"I believe you," the large man replied, before backing through the entrance and closing it behind him.

Scottie eased onto the edge of the bed. He hadn't expected things to go so smoothly. He pulled a pad and pencil from his canvas sack and pushed them into his jacket pocket. Taking one last look around the cabin, he slipped out

the door and retraced his steps to the stairs, descending one flight to the deck below. The sounds coming from the weight room echoed down the hall. Scottie pushed his slim hands into the pockets of his trousers as he stood just inside the open doorway.

Stacked blue pads were pushed into one corner. Large pieces of gleaming metal equipment occupied every available space. Heavy weights were in motion, being lifted by strong, bronzed muscles.

He watched one man lying on a padded bench perform several chest presses with a set of dumbbells. The sweaty muscles of his bare chest and arms were strained with his efforts.

Alert eyes scanned the area, eagerly searching for the one face he knew. He stayed in the doorway wondering whether or not to venture further when Borge spotted him.

"Hey Scottie. Don't just stand there. Come on over and meet the team." He walked over to Borge in long strides. "Boys, this is Scottie. He's our new mate. He's a small kid, but I think he can cut it." Borge slapped Scottie squarely on the shoulders. He lunged forward, the breath knocked from his body as a roar of laughter shot up around him.

"This kid doesn't look strong enough to do much of anything," replied one rough voice. "I'm Max." The man held out a calloused hand. "This is Big Charlie, Phil and Nigel." Max pointed to each man. "Are you a local kid?"

Scottie took an instant liking to this man. His sandy blond hair was fastened behind his head in a long ponytail. His eyes were warm and dark. A scar at the corner of his mouth deepened when he smiled.

"No sir. I moved here from Montana," Scottie confessed.

"Montana. That's where Percy is from. Hey Percy!" Max called to a man who had just executed the body slam of another. "This kid is from your neck of the woods."

Percy's clean-shaven head and face shined with beads of perspiration. Heavy black brows sat low over dark hooded eyes. He had wide muscular shoulders and thick, strong thighs. He stood six feet, four and towered like a giant over the boy.

"Never saw such a skinny kid come out of Montana." His voice was a low growl in his throat. Percy wiped a towel across his sweaty face and threw one end over his shoulder. "Sure you ain't a run away?"

"No sir," Scottie insisted. "I stay in touch with my folks. When I moved, I promised to write them and tell them everything." He pulled out his pad. "I don't know much about this trip. Where are we going? What are we looking for? They didn't tell me much when I hired on."

Borge cleared his throat. "Just follow orders and you will do fine."

Scottie wouldn't be swayed. "What do I tell my parents in case they get worried about me?"

"Just tell them you've gone to sea," Max grinned. "Do you have a little girlfriend you plan to write to?"

The question wasn't one he expected to hear. He swallowed a hard lump in his throat and was saved from having to answer by the sound of a gong announcing supper.

The galley was a huge, brightly lit area on the same level. A long serving table sat the length of one wall. Square tables with padded chairs filled the center floor.

The galley was another direct contrast to the upper levels. This was indeed a working crew, but they slept and ate in apparent comfort.

The smell of food wafted through the air and Scottie's stomach tightened as he remembered he hadn't eaten anything since earlier that morning.

Crewmen were gathered in small groups talking and drinking from mugs of brewed coffee.

An old man everyone affectionately called Pop set steaming pans of food on the serving table and shoveled out large portions of roast beef, mashed potatoes, green beans and bread.

Scottie was pushed into line by rough hands to get his tray then he took a seat at a table with the men he'd just met. He looked around the room at the others and fingered his still empty note pad, stuffing it deeper into his jacket pocket.

"Shouldn't the kid take a tray to the Captain?" Borge asked Pop.

"The Captain will be coming down," Pop returned, before biting off a corner of his bread.

Captain Ryan McDermont's face was etched in the boy's mind since seeing his photograph days before. He recalled the steel gray eyes, the strength and vitality that seemed to radiate from the man. Scottie jabbed at his vegetables with his fork, sending a bean shooting across the table.

"Evening Captain," he heard someone say. Scottie didn't turn around. He looked into his plate at the mound of potatoes staring back at him.

"Evening Captain," Borge supplied. Following Ryan's gaze, he added. "This is the new mate. He came a bit earlier than expected."

Looking out the corner of his eye, Scottie saw Ryan's dark brows draw together. A muscle jerked at the corner of his mouth. His hair was thick and dark, curling slightly at the neck and framing a strong, tanned face. The chin was square

with a well-chiseled jaw line. His nose was tapered and thin. Below that was a well formed, but unsmiling mouth.

His eyes could cut a man to size without their owner needing to say a single word. He possessed the look of a man in total control, a man who clipped out orders and expected them to be followed without question.

"What's your name?" he asked, addressing the boy in cool, crisp tones.

His pulses quickened at the sound of the deep voice and the man sitting so near. "Scottie Davidson," he mumbled.

Pop sat a tray in front of Ryan and he picked up his fork. Ryan's eyes stayed on the boy a while longer before he turned to his first mate. "Since the kid is here early, we might as well set sail tonight," he ordered. "We are two days behind schedule as it is. We won't delay cast off until morning."

No, Scottie thought. He wouldn't have time to get what he needed. The ship couldn't set sail with him on board. He took the chance to steal a look at the man sitting across from him. Their eyes met and locked. Cool blue met hard gray.

"Borge, I want to see you in my cabin before we sail," Ryan said, before he unfolded his long frame, leaving his food untouched. He turned back. "Scottie, you can go up and help with whatever has to be done."

"Yes, sir," he replied.

The men had their orders. They finished their meal and began to get the ship ready for sail. Scottie watched their movements before he realized that his carefully planned scheme was no longer possible. He took a few steps backwards before turning to collide into a broad chest.

He stumbled, gasping a few mumbled words of apology. The Captain's hand shot out catching the youth's upper arm firmly in his grasp, keeping the boy from tumbling to the

floor. The very touch from the man was like an electric shock and Scottie fought the urge to snatch his arm away before Ryan let him go and he scrambled past busy crewmen.

Just before reaching his cabin, he heard someone calling his name. "Hey kid, over here," Phil shouted. "Check the hatches on this deck. Sometimes the boys leave them open. We wouldn't want any ocean spray coming through."

Scottie opened his mouth to protest, thought better and clamped tightly down on it, pressing his lips into a straight line. When he turned to go, Phil slapped him on the buttocks. He spun around, angry eyes flaring hotly.

Phil grinned pettishly at the boy. "You need a good rough trip kid. You're kind of soft."

Scottie glared. He pulled the woolen cap further down over his ears and ran through the door of the closest cabin. He found each man's room was masculine and tidy. Some personal items showed a long-term association with *The McDermont* and a shared love for the sea.

The last cabin on the passageway was different. Scottie hurried in expecting to see virtually the same items, but stopped short when he entered.

This cabin was much larger than the others and contained more furnishings. Models of sea going crafts were displayed on a low table. Each one was carefully mounted to the tops to prevent damage during rough seas. A large king sized bed occupied the center of the room. A dressing table contained shaving creams, a razor, brush and other toilet articles. The desk was covered with papers.

"Do you plan on standing there all night, or perhaps you don't think water can enter my porthole?"

Scottie pivoted around. "No-no I don't. I mean yes," he mumbled.

Ryan walked to the desk, folded the papers and placed them neatly into the top drawer.

With the hatch secure, Scottie asked. "Will there be anything else?"

Ryan glanced around the cabin with keen eyes then they came to rest on the youth. He wondered how they could hire such a pitiful excuse for a deck hand. "There is one other thing," he began. "It has been brought to my attention that you're asking questions. You have been on board less than an hour. If you wish to remain here, do something to curb your curiosity. Is that understood?"

"Yes, I understand," Scottie whispered.

"You will address me as Captain." He waited for the boy to make the correct response.

"Yes, Captain."

Ryan held back a heated retort. "You're dismissed," he growled.

Moving towards the door, Scottie passed Borge. A swift look up the passage revealed no one in sight. Most of the crew was busy on the upper deck. Scottie eased back towards Ryan's cabin and pressed himself firmly against the wall. This was dangerous, but he felt he couldn't leave the ship without some information. He leaned forward and placed his ear against the wooden panel.

"Did you manage to take care of everything?" he heard Ryan ask.

"It's done," Borge returned. "There shouldn't be any more problems."

"Thank you. I'm glad to hear that." The tension in his voice ebbed.

"We're ready to sail whenever you give the orders."

"Let's get started then. I'll be on the bridge shortly. I want to be in deep water as soon as possible."

"I'll see to it," Borge confirmed.

Scottie didn't have a moment to lose. He ducked into his cabin in time to hear heavy footsteps along the corridor. The ship would be leaving at any moment. After that escape would be impossible. Snatching his bag from the bed, he spilled the contents including a pocket camera that crashed to the floor.

"Damn," he breathed. "I have to get out of here." He got down on his hands and knees, pushing the broken bits into the sack.

Peeking through the portal, Scottie ran out and headed for the upper deck, but stopped short wondering if Ryan was still in his cabin. He wanted to get a closer look at the papers he'd seen.

When he tapped lightly at the door, there was no reply. Pushing it open, he went in and extracted the sheets. The papers contained equations, course outlines, nautical terms and navigational readings. He pushed them aside impatiently and pulled out the maps.

Red circles were drawn around small islands off the southwestern coast. They included Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, Santa Catalina and San Clemente. Another map was hand drawn, but even to his untrained eyes, it was very old.

"What the hell are you doing here?" Ryan snarled behind him.

Paralyzed, Scottie froze. The color drained from his face and the map dropped from shaking hands. He looked up as angry eyes drilled into his.

It was several minutes before he could force words from a mouth suddenly gone dry. "I-I didn't hear you," he stammered. He unconsciously took a few steps backward.

"I'm sure my being here wasn't part of the plan," Ryan snipped, coming forward in lithe, tiger like strides. Strong

hands shot out grasping Scottie's arms in a vice-like grip, bruising tender flesh beneath the material of his shirt.

For the briefest space in time, they stared at each other. Ryan's eyes darkened to black pits. The horror of this dilemma drained Scottie's rapidly dwindling strength.

"What are you doing in my cabin? Who sent you here?" The voice of Ryan McDermont cracked like a whip in the enclosed room.

Weak knees turned to jelly and a ball gathered in Scottie's throat. He tried desperately to wiggle free. The grip on his arms only tightened in his struggles leaving him totally helpless. He quaked at Ryan's expression of pure rage. Scottie's eyes searched the room looking in vain for a means to escape.

Ryan began to shake the thin body he held firmly within his grasp. Like a cornered animal, the boy fought back, doing anything to break loose. "Let me go," he screamed.

He kicked out with one foot striking Ryan on the leg. He ground his teeth together and they fell back onto the bed. Ryan landed heavily on top.

Scottie continued to fight, but not before Ryan let out a strained exclamation as he felt firm breasts heave against his chest in her struggles. He looked into Scottie's flushed face. One hand held both hers pinned against the mattress.

For the first time, he noticed the long, thick lashes and smooth creamy skin. His eyes traveled to her heaving breasts. He lifted his free hand to unfasten the top two buttons of her shirt and slid one rough finger down the cleavage between her peaked breasts.

She felt vulnerable to the heat emanating from his body, burning its male imprint on hers and igniting the basic instincts.

"Stop it," she cried. "Let me go."

His eyes narrowed to slits and his face became a hardened mask of stone. He raised his hand and snatched the cap from her head, allowing glistening blond hair to cascade over the spread.

"Good Lord," he growled, through clenched jaws. "The last thing I want or need on my ship is a damn stow-away, especially a woman."

You've just finished reading the first chapter of Alyce Holmes' Destiny Voyage. If you want to know more about Ryan and Danielle, please purchase your choice of a Paperback or CD on our website. Thanks for becoming an Alyce Holmes fan.

