

## Episode 2.03

### Interactions

#### **Sickbay:**

The Doctor sighed as he walked into his office. He looked toward his desk to add yet another commbadge to the metre high pile. The impact knocked a few off balance, they slid down and clattered onto the floor.

"How strange. No one seems to be wearing a commbadge but Annika and Vorik," the Doctor mused aloud.

He sat down in his chair, then a thought occurred to him. "I know, I'll just wait until somebody comes in because they're ill. It is almost dinner time."

#### **The Bridge:**

Kathryn walked onto the Bridge through the turbolift. Besides from Tuvok, the place was empty.

"Commander, where is everybody?" Kathryn asked.

"According to the computer, the entire crew minus two are in Sickbay," Tuvok replied.

Kathryn smiled as she glanced down at her commbadge-less uniform. "Oh, so people are cottoning onto it now. Took them long enough."

Tuvok's eyebrow raised a smidgen, "if you are implying that they are avoiding the yearly physicals, it doesn't explain not coming to duty. Should I investigate?"

"Not everyone is as smart as you and I, I'm sure..." Kathryn said, trailing off when she noticed Tuvok's commbadge. She let out a little awkward cough as his eyebrow raised. The pair heard the sound of the turbolift doors opening. Kathryn smiled, "there, that'll be them escaping now."

Despite what she said, only Chakotay stepped out of the lift. Kathryn's face slightly stiffened at the sight of him. "You're late, Commander."

"Yes I know," Chakotay said impatiently as he took his seat.

Kathryn's shoulders tensed slightly. "I hope you told the Doctor not to drag people in at the start of their shifts."

Chakotay's face scrunched up as if she had told him to drink her coffee for her. "That defeats the object of attaching my commbadge to one of Kiara's old discarded teddies, doesn't it?"

#### **Meanwhile:**

The Doctor studied the latest object on his desk with a bemused look in his eye. With its mostly torn off floppy ear and missing eye, it looked very sorry for itself. Something about its furry face and golden fluffy head made him smile though. He picked it up to put it on his shelf.

"I'm going to name you Seven," he said with great affection.

#### **The Bridge:**

Kathryn's upper body trembled as she tried in vain to contain her temper. "So, if you weren't there, why are you late?"

Chakotay sighed impatiently, "missed a turbolift, brushed my teeth for a little longer than usual, longer shave, thought I had time to finish that last bite of breakfast, misplaced boot? I dunno, you'd be surprised how easy it is to lose a minute."

That did it, Kathryn's expression hardened into deathglare shaped stone. "My Ready Room, now." Chakotay didn't argue, he followed her into her office, leaving Tuvok once again all alone.

It didn't last, the turbolift arrived once more to drop two more people off and not who he expected.

"Woah, did Doc actually do it? Is it safe to enter?" Morgan asked warily, stepping back into the turbolift's door frame.

Tuvok frowned, "to what are you referring?"

Morgan forcibly laughed with her eyes widening. "Do you not remember last year? Doc said if we all dodged his physicals *next year* he'd flood the bridge with sedatives and get us that way."

Both of Tuvok's eyebrows were back in the Alpha Quadrant by the time she was finished. "I am positive he was joking. Now, why are you both here?"

It was Craig's turn to look confused, he wandered over to lean on the Commander's station. "You said you wanted to discuss my annual security review in your office." He instantly looked worried, "oh, I didn't make it did I? I'm fired, that's why you're not there."

"No, I checked your location earlier and surmised that you were either ill or being examined by the Doctor. I tried to contact you but I see there was a misunderstanding," Tuvok said, noting the no commbadge on the young man's chest.

Morgan snorted into giggles, then gave Craig a meek looking bump in the arm with her elbow. He yelped and cradled it protectively. "You idiot. Have you seen the morons you work with? Why would you go before them?"

Craig was too busy whimpering in pain to reply. Tuvok thought to chime in anyway, "it's nothing to be concerned about Lieutenant. I suggested to the Captain that you'd benefit from training in another field. It is ultimately up to you if you want to remain in Security or not."

"So..." Craig said, then breathed in to tame the throbbing pain, "I'm not fired but you'd prefer I was somewhere else? I dunno if that's better."

"It's nothing personal, Vulcans do not discriminate," Tuvok said. Morgan laughed and walked off to his confusion. "It's not only you. Ensign Taylor will be offered an alternative too, if he shows up anyway. The Captain was more than eager to shake up the Team One dynamic. Or as she liked to call it, the take the mick. Whatever that means."

Morgan brightened up as she hurried back over. "Oh that reminds me. James asked me to give you a message."

"Yes?" Tuvok said, but he knew what it would be.

"He said that he and Jess aren't coming in today. She's still sick," Morgan said.

Tuvok shook his head. "Perhaps it's time for an intervention. Crewman Rex hasn't been to duty all week. She should see the Doctor."

"Now that's just cruel, it's not her fault she's ill," Morgan grumbled.

"Morgan, the Doctor is just going to treat her. He's not a prison officer," Tuvok said.

*"Sickbay to Tuvok."*

Craig chuckled, "speak of the devil," he whispered as quietly as possible.

*"I've brought forward your appointment since an earlier slot is free."*

Tuvok tapped his commbadge with silent judgement from the two beside him. "What time, Doctor?"

*"Now. Or more accurately ten minutes ago. If there's anyone else there, the now slot is also free."*

Morgan and Craig fearfully shook their heads at the Commander. He almost sighed in frustration. "Very well, I'll get someone to cover for me."

Morgan waited for him to tap his commbadge to raise her hand eagerly, "I'll do it."

"No," Tuvok replied hurriedly. Morgan huffed at the offense. "Mr Anderson, take Tactical and inform the Captain or Commander when they return of my whereabouts. "Miss Morgan, please inform Taylor that his excuse will not *fly* this time and..."

"Oh?" Morgan said with growing interest, "you're accusing him of using Jessie as an excuse. This'll be fun."

"You misunderstand. Taylor does this every year to avoid his security review. Now I don't doubt Rex is ill, but if she is ill enough to require his care, she should be in Sickbay. Knowing Taylor, I doubt he'd encourage her to avoid going, so logically she has a minor ailment and they don't want the Doctor finding out and..." Tuvok said.

Morgan giggled, "so you're accusing James of using a sick Jessie as an excuse to skive his *am I fit for Security test* that I'm sure even Naomi would A+ judging by your teams. Even better. I'm on it." She hurried out before Tuvok could argue further, passing Tom and Harry on the way.

"Woah, ghost town," Tom commented as he made his way around the banister.

Tuvok gestured to his station, then wandered across the bridge to use the other lift. Craig took over from him with an uneasy expression.

"Yeah, not even Janeway or Chakotay are here," Harry said on taking his own station. "Did the Doc nab them?" he said toward Tactical expecting Tuvok still, but recoiled when he saw Craig.

"Not sure. They weren't around when I got here," Craig replied.

Tom winced through his gritted teeth, "uhoh. I hope the old arguments aren't brewing up again. I thought it was settled."

"Or, Janeway's getting her tenth morning coffee. As usual you're making stuff up," Harry muttered bitterly.

*"Oh, so you automatically assume that it was my fault based on what? You're so perfect!"* Chakotay's voice drifted through the walls. Everyone cringed, even Tom who was feeling a little smug but figured he'd save it for later.

*"Lets see. Based on, you and those stupid headboards. Oh lets give up hope and live on this godforsaken planet together forever, googley eyes. Massage, hand holding. Warrior speech..."*

*"Oh I'm sorry, I didn't realise you had no agency or free will. I'll stop my years ago interest in you that you had to reciprocate, your helplessness."*

Tom winced at the unintelligible noise that followed after that remark. "So, that locking them up intervention didn't last."

Harry stared at his best friend with a blank face and head tilted to one side. "No, who'd have thought?"

For once Tom noticed the sarcasm in his tone and only responded with a mimed mutter while pulling a face.

"Maybe if we leave them to it, they'll make up like they always do," Craig suggested.

Tom shook his head, "nah. This is more than just a little disagreement over command decisions. You don't fix a drunken life changing mistake after a cool down and chat. We're gonna need something bigger."

Morgan hurried out of a turbolift with a grimace, leaving behind two arguing crewmembers. She made her way to one of the doors further down the corridor and pressed the chime. Once she heard the *come in* she stepped inside.

"Let me guess," James sighed on seeing her.

"Yep," Morgan smirked in response, "she goes to Sickbay, and you go back to work, you skiver."

James rolled his eyes and turned away to grab a cup from a nearby table. "I think the next message I send might need to be censored."

"Please, I'm sixteen, I think I can say bloody without getting grounded," Morgan scoffed.

"That's not..." James started to laugh, then thought better of finishing that sentence. "No it's okay, I'll tell him myself."

"I hope you enjoy your time in the brig. Mum's chucking anyone for anything in there lately," Morgan said.

James shrugged and sipped on his drink. "It wasn't that bad the last time, I'll manage."

"You've been in the brig?" Morgan laughed. "What did you do?"

James looked up at the ceiling and paced, apparently deep in thought. "Lets see. First time I think was because of a *disagreement* with Tom. Then there was the impression of Janeway and Chakotay Jess and I did, which would've been fine if I hadn't said something like *sorry mum* to her."

"You called her mum? I'm not your bloody sister. And when did this happen?" Morgan asked.

"Oh, years ago," James said while shaking his head. "I think they gave up putting me in there, made no difference. Though it was a bit stricter back then."

Morgan walked over whilst folding her arms, eyes narrowing, "oh so is that why you pretty much do what you want. Untouchable huh? You didn't need to use Jessie to skive, did..."

James' face stiffened, "I'm not skiving. Jessie hasn't felt well for a few weeks now, mostly bed bound. I'm not going to leave her just to make Tuvok's version of happy."

"What about Sickbay, or call the Doc?" Morgan said, a small smile formed, "you know he'd be eager to see someone today."

"She doesn't want that, she thinks it's only a stomach thing from something she ate back on shoreleave," James sighed. "I want her to get better yeah, but it's not up to me."

The door chimed, making James' shoulders tense to Morgan's confusion. "What?" she whispered.

"Hellooo, *housecall*," the Doctor's voice called from the other side of the door.

Morgan shook her head. "I didn't call him," she whispered.

James' eyebrow raised, "uh, I wasn't thinking that. Now I am."

"Hmph," Morgan grunted. "Tuvok went to his physical. He probably told him then."

"I can hear people whispering," the Doctor's voice said.

"Er, the door's jammed. Everything's fine though," James said. Morgan looked at him in deadpan, he shrugged pathetically. "I panicked."

The door opened anyway, allowing the Doctor to stride in cheerfully with his medical gear. "It seems fine to me. Now, which room is the patient in?"

James cringed, "oh god, she's going to kill me."

"If she does that while bed bound, she's my new role model," Morgan snickered.

The Doctor though frowned, "oh, why? Because you weren't the one who called me about your sick friend and roommate?"

James wasn't impressed with that remark, Morgan noted his clenching fists going behind his back. "Jessie doesn't want any help, she said not to let you in if you came by. Apparently, it's not that bad," he said the last bit, not fully convinced.

The Doctor smiled, "well you didn't. I let myself in, emergency medical override. So which room is hers?"

James looked torn for a moment. He was about to gesture to one side of the room when one of the doors opened to a very pale looking Jessie with what looked like bed hair. She groaned at the sight of the Doctor. "Oh no, no, no. I'm fine, I just throw up sometimes. It'll go away." Her hand flew to her mouth and she doubled backed to where she came from.

The Doctor sighed sympathetically, "ohno, she wasn't fooled by Neelix's *perfectly edible* cookies, was she? I have one crewmember who I had to put on a hypo-drip two months ago, and they're still on it."

Morgan pulled a few choices faces, "they tasted like toothpaste." She got a few bemused glances so she quickly turned on her heel to leave.

"I'll be seeing you at 1100 hours for your physical, Morgan," the Doctor said.

"Crap," Morgan muttered and she ran out of the room.

"So, what's been the symptoms?" the Doctor asked as he picked up a tricorder.

James glanced toward the door Jessie had gone through. "Throwing up mainly. Only actually, she never told me anything else."

"I see, anything you've observed? Does her movement seem stiff from pain, low energy levels?" the Doctor asked.

"The last one I guess, after the sickness blows over. She spends the rest of the day in bed," James replied.

"Hmm," the Doctor looked concerned. "So this has been going on for a couple of weeks? Why would she refuse medical intervention? Seems like something I could fix in five minutes."

Jessie stepped back out, this time with a sweaty face. She groaned again, "ugh, I don't want to go anywhere. It's okay."

"I'll be the judge of that," the Doctor said while hurrying over to her, waving the tricorder in front of him. He noticed her mouth a *fine* so opened it up to begin his scan. He looked puzzled at the readings he was getting. "I'm afraid, you'll have to come to Sickbay for a more detailed scan."

"Is this just a way to get me to go through that stupid physical?" Jessie groaned.

"What a good idea," the Doctor cheerfully replied.

"*Janeway to Taylor. Get to your duty shift now!*" Kathryn's voice screamed over the entire ship.

The Doctor's jaw dropped, while Jessie cringed more at that than the Sickbay trip. James though found it hilarious, "yeah, maybe tossing my commbadge outside wasn't the best idea after all."

"Indeed," the Doctor grumbled bitterly.

With Tuvok back at Tactical and Craig *demoted* to Jessie's usual station, the day shift were able to get to work. Most of which were extremely eager to, the atmosphere around the command chairs was approaching Pluto's winter temperature, and so no one dared speak a word. Even Tom was keeping his thoughts to himself.

To Harry's horror his station picked up something he had to report. He swallowed the lump in his throat, "Captain, I'm sorry to disturb you but sensors are picking up a planet nearby with dilithium deposits."

Kathryn seemed to be disgusted when she looked across at him. "Sorry to disturb me? This is a bridge. What if we were about to blow up in a few seconds, we'd be dead before you finished." She noticed Chakotay rolling his eyes, souring her mood once more.

"I... I'm sorry," Harry whimpered.

Kathryn groaned and climbed to her feet to walk over. Poor Harry started to shake so badly it hurt his chest. "Never mind. What I want to know is why Seven of Notice Me never reported this earlier." The thought of chewing Annika out made her smile, the atmosphere immediately went up to almost livable levels. "No matter. Set a course Paris... oh wait, is this planet habited, in somebody's space, anyone or thing around?"

Harry sighed in relief, "no to all, Captain."

His relief was short lived when that didn't pacify the Captain one bit. "Hmm, that's suspicious. Still, get us there and keep the shields up."

"Yes ma... Captain. My Captain," Tom badly improvised, kicking himself internally. "Oh god, this can't get anymore tense."

### **Sickbay:**

Jessie sat on a bio bed waiting for the Doctor to come back out of his office. Finally after two minutes he did. He had a worried expression on his face as he approached.

"Can I go now?" Jessie asked.

"There are some things I need to discuss with you about your condition," the Doctor replied.

To his dismay Jessie stood up and walked towards the door. "That's nice, maybe later." He hurried to stand in front of her, blocking her from leaving with a panicked expression on his face. It worked but she wasn't happy. "I know already. Plenty of fluids, bed rest. If you must eat, dry foods only."

"No, that's not what I was going to say. You don't have a stomach bug or anything at all wrong with your digestive system," the Doctor said.

Jessie didn't look convinced, still she stayed to his relief. "I'm throwing up meals I don't even eat. How can my digestive system be okay? Am I dying?"

"No, there's nothing technically wrong with you at all," the Doctor replied hesitantly.

"So if I'm fine, can I go now?" Jessie said impatiently.

"Well, I suppose I can't stop you as it's not going to effect your..." the Doctor replied. As he expected she walked around him. He had to be quick to stop her, "you're pregnant."

It did that a little too well. She did stop, but ended up on the floor. The Doctor hurried over to gather up and gently place her back on the closest biobed. A quick scan showed she only fainted. He gave her a mild sedative for her sudden fall. It didn't take her too long to come back around.

"What a weird dream," Jessie mumbled groggily. Once her eyes were fully open she noticed she was in Sickbay and tensed. "It was, wasn't it? I fell asleep waiting for you to tell me I've got a stomach bug. Yeah?"

The Doctor smiled awkwardly, "I'm afraid not."

"But..." Jessie started to stammer very nervously. "That's not possible. How could this happen?"

"It's simple.." the Doctor eagerly replied.

Jessie's resulting face froze the hologram in a block of ice, "no! No!" She clambered off the bed and stomped randomly around the room while the Doctor thawed. "I'm not seeing anyone and so I haven't slept with anyone. I don't sleep with random people for fun, that's just not me..."

"Okay," the Doctor said as soothingly as he could to calm her down. "You don't have to explain anything to me, it's none of my busi..."

Jessie swung around to glare at him once again. If he were human he figured he'd be a puddle of panicking goo on seeing it. "I can't be knocked up, a virgin can't get pregnant!"

"Ah, I see. This is a mystery," the Doctor stuttered.

"Your tricorders are broken. Find one that isn't and try again," Jessie snapped.

The Doctor tried his best to find a tone that wouldn't annoy her. His database said there was none, so he tried soft, "I used several, as well as the biobed scanner, remember? I wouldn't have told you if I wasn't 100% certain."

Jessie was shaking by that point, he wasn't sure if it was anger or fear. He assumed both. "But... I told you. I haven't done it with anyone. It's not possible."

"Well," the Doctor said warily as a thought occurred to him. Once again he was searching his database for a delicate way to voice it. "After the events of a month ago, it's possible you don't remember."

"Don't remember, what?" Jessie stammered with fire in her eyes.

"The pirates, they fired the love spell beam at the hotel as well as Voyager, but in a less concentrated setting. The effects would've been shorter, but stronger," the Doctor said. He trailed off when his words weren't relieving the confusion on her face, it was making it worse. "You don't know what I'm talking about, do you?"

"No," Jessie groaned slowly. "What kind of stupid weapon is called a love spell beam? I don't remember anything that..." She turned pale, "wait, don't remember. Love spell beam is a code name right. Not literal."

For a split second the Doctor considered deactivating himself to get out of the conversation. He soldiered on, cursing himself. "It's purpose was to distract us while they stole the ship. It made the infected fall for the nearest person so they'd be too, busy with marriage proposals, writing love poems, or worse..."

"No, no, no... not that," Jessie stuttered and once more started to pace erratically.

"No, not that," the Doctor repeated, puzzled. "The worst that was reported was a *couple* kissing too much. They passed out from not coming up for air." Jessie stopped to stare at him in disgust. He shrugged meekly. "Everyone forgot what happened during, but were disoriented since they lost many hours and sometimes were in a different place. You don't recall that? It would've been during your time in that resort before you reboarded the ship."

Jessie shook her head dismissively, "no. Normal. We were stuck in that hotel, we had a few drinks. I woke up with a hangover."

"So you remember the entire night?" the Doctor questioned.

Jessie thought about it, so sure she was right. Her face lost all colour again. The Doctor quickly grabbed a little container in case she threw up again. All she did was shake. "I... don't remember going to bed. Not that I woke up in one. Oh... oh god."

The Doctor gestured back to the bed, hoping she'd sit down again. She didn't, she stood and trembled. "Why don't we go sit down in my office. I'll get you a drink, we can talk about it or..."

"No," Jessie said weakly before turning to look at him. "You're sure?" He nodded gently. "Great, this... I didn't want it, not like this and it could be any one of those four."

"Four what?" the Doctor said at the same time he understood what she meant, "I see. Would it help if I did a paternity test? It's still early though so it might not be 100% accurate, it could definitely narrow one or two down depending on..."

"Okay... no, I dunno," Jessie mumbled. "I don't want it to be any of them. It doesn't matter."

The Doctor frowned, "why wouldn't it matter?"

Jessie burst into insincere laughter, "right, do you see me trying to raise Paris Junior? Or adding to Chakotay's growing list of not remembered making kids? Oh god, don't even get me started on Craig."

"Hmm," the Doctor only said to delay voicing his reply, "and James?"

He regretted that immediately. Jessie's face hardened enough it looked like stone. "Oh yeah sure, that won't ruin anything at all. Happy ever after, wedding bells and shit."

"How did that get by the so called censor system?" the Doctor muttered to himself.

Jessie ignored him and continued ranting, her cheeks turning bright red with anger. "You have no idea what you're talking about. Oh you're super close with a guy, make out already. You're just as bad as everyone else."

"I didn't mean it like that. I only meant that he would be a better result than the three you mentioned," the Doctor said without really thinking.

"Are you glitching or something? Even if I was hoping for that result, doesn't make it so, you utter prick!" Jessie snapped.

The Doctor laughed nervously and stepped back, "I'll go over the scans and see... check things. Other things." He hurried off.

Jessie followed him though, "oh fine, go ahead. Nose around in my personal affairs. Everyone else does."

The Doctor froze on the spot between his desk and the doorway. "I won't check without your permission. I promise."

"I'd believe it if you weren't hiding with your back to me," Jessie said. The Doctor turned to face her. He didn't say anything, then walked over to the chair on the opposite side of the desk, hinting she sit

in it. She reluctantly did so after a few minutes of silence, then she sighed shakily. "I don't want to know, but I don't want to not know either. It doesn't matter, but it kinda does. I'll know that I was with one of them, but not which. It creeps me out."

"Is that a request for the test?" the Doctor asked gently. He waited a few more minutes for her to nod lightly. He brought his computer to go through the test results he ran earlier. He opened crew files and began to program a new scan.

"It's not better you know," he heard Jessie very quietly mumble. He looked up at her to see her staring into her lap solemnly. "I mean yeah, Tom would be the worst thing to happen ever. Craig would squick me out, he's like a kid. And Chakotay, his family life is drama enough and he, no."

The Doctor sensed she wasn't done and waited patiently for her to continue while watching the computer screen.

Jessie sighed. "He would be the best result out of a bad situation, but it'd still be the worst."

One of the personnel files were denied from the test. The Doctor lightly smiled, "it's definitely not Chakotay, there's very little matchi..."

Jessie covered as much of her face as she could with her hand. The Doctor thought that it'd be best to watch over the scan in silence until he had the results. It didn't take very long for it to spit out the next two in rapid succession, leaving one. He stared at the screen, musing over how to tell her as the match percentage steadily continued to rise. When it stopped and beeped, he noticed her watching him tiredly.

"Well, um... there's a ninety nine percent chance, and like I said it's still early but..." the Doctor said awkwardly.

"Whoever it is, I've still got a kid via an alien drug rape beam, so just tell me," Jessie mumbled.

The Doctor sighed, "James."

Jessie stared at him blankly to his surprise, "run it again."

"It'll be the same result," the Doctor stammered. "The others were too low of a percentage to consider a re-scan. Ninety nine percent compared to something like..." He glanced briefly at the screen, "ten, there's little doubt."

"Oh," Jessie said plainly. The Doctor knew not to let his guard down. As he expected she slammed both hands on the desk and paced heavily side to side, mostly keeping her back to him. "That's just bloody great. Everything is ruined."

"Um, lets try and calm down and think for a moment. How is anything ruined?" the Doctor tried to say calmly. Jessie swung around and stared with wide eyes in his general direction. "Sure, you didn't plan for it but you two are friends. That'll make..."

"Were," Jessie snapped, throwing him completely off. "We won't be friends after this. No. I know."

Thoroughly confused, the Doctor stood up to approach her. "This is the twenty fourth century. You don't need to marry him to look after this baby."

Jessie scoffed and turned away. "That's not what I meant. I just know this'll drive us apart. I can't bear to go through it, not again," she ended up stuttering.

"Again?" the Doctor's voice and eyebrow raised quizzically.

Since she only had her back to him, he only noticed her shoulders tense up. He heard her sigh impatiently. "Walked into that one," she muttered. "We've fallen out before, years ago, and..." Another sigh, this one sadly, "it's taken us years to return to what we had before."

"Strange, I didn't know," the Doctor said.

Jessie turned to face him armed with a frown. "Why would you?"

"Well, I figured a fall out between you two would have been noticed, and gossiped about, by many," the Doctor said a tad nervously. He got an eye roll in response. "Why do you think this will happen again here? He's not going to blame for you for this. I know it'll be uncomfortable and difficult, but..."

"Uncomfortable? Best friends who live together knowing that they had a night together they don't remember, raising the kid from said night. Sure, uncomfortable's the perfect description for this mess," Jessie said mockingly.

The Doctor shook it off. "I know but it doesn't automatically mean you'll fall out. Even if you do, it's just something you work on and continue, like all friends do. I know you two are close and it'll seem like the end of the world, but it's not," he said, blind to the tensing cheeks and sharpening eyes pointed at him.

"I'm not bloody talking about some little argument about leaving socks on the floor, or a disagreement over meeting plans. You're a moron if you think what I was talking about was the only argument we had, and that it was some ickle thing," Jessie snarled at him. "I'm talking about stuff that threatened the entire nature of our friendship, an incident that left me re-evaluating everything we had, who he was, who I bloody was, until all that was left was anger. I hate everything I was then. And even more, I hate everyone who treats our relationship as some big joke. They don't know how much it hurts when they do."

Her voice had raised to a near shout and she was trembling with her chest heaving. She took in a deep breath in an attempt to calm herself. All it did was lower her voice to a whisper, "this'll bring it all back to the surface again. I don't want to lose him."

"Then you won't," the Doctor said with a weak smile.

Jessie rolled her eyes, "you're naive. You have no idea."

"Actually, I have a general idea what you're talking about," the Doctor said very carefully. To his relief she didn't react, she stared vacantly to the right. "Having a drunken one night stand baby with someone you have feelings for and or been involved with..." that got her attention, her head swung around fast to look at him with wide almost bulging eyes, "will make for a tense conversation, I get that. I still think..."

"Woah woah, you can't assume... I didn't say... I was involved with him. Why did you say that?" Jessie angrily stammered.

The Doctor nervously shook his head, his brow furrowed. "Did I misunderstand what you said? I'm sorry if I did."

Jessie blinked furiously, "well er, I..." She felt her cheeks burning and it angered her once again. "No you didn't, but it's not that. I'm not, I can't."

"It's okay. It's none of my business, I won't tell anyone. It's also nothing to be embarrassed about," the Doctor smiled warmly.

It did the opposite of what he intended, she started to shake again and look away again. "I'm not, I just... it's more complicated than that. There was this alien ceremony we volunteered for."

The Doctor frowned, confused once more. "I was following you until this point. I understand that you'd be worried about telling an ex who's still your close friend about an accidental pregnancy, anyone would. But what's a ceremony got to do with... anything?"

"The last rite," Jessie said as if it would answer his question. "Wasn't really a rite but... The alien told us we'd have to consummate the ceremony, otherwise everything we did was wasted. James wasn't

happy at all with this. He thought it was inappropriate, it was too soon for..." She cleared her throat and clenched her jaw as if angry with herself. "We argued, we made up and for some time I thought things were okay."

"I... I see," the Doctor said sympathetically.

Jessie looked over her shoulder back at him, "I was blind. I didn't see, or rather didn't want to see it coming. When it did, I was... I really hate myself for how I acted. Pathetic really."

"Sounds like you're being too hard on yourself," the Doctor said. Jessie shook her head timidly. "You're both stronger having gone through that, clearly, because you're still good friends. If you go in thinking it's going to go wrong, it will. Talk to him, explain it. If he cares, and we both know he does, he'll help you."

"No," Jessie said firmly, her eyes closed. "I'm not going through with it. I want an abortion."

The Doctor's eyes widened quickly, "what, but..."

Jessie turned to stare directly at him, "but what? Last time I checked I was the one who was pregnant. It's my choice."

"Well yes of course, I just don't think you've had time to really think this through. You're acting impulsively," the Doctor stuttered.

Jessie grimaced while her eyes darted to the right and back straight ahead, "so? That's my problem. When can you do it?"

"Well I..." the Doctor said while he tried to think of a way to stall her. "Come back in two days. I'll be finished with the crew physicals by then."

"Fine, I'll pop by after my shift," Jessie said, her shoulders once more visibly tense. "I don't have to tell you, no one hears of this."

"Of course," the Doctor nodded.

### **The Bridge:**

Harry desperately tried to dab the torrent on his forehead. It wasn't his day so far. He cleared his throat, hoping this time his voice wouldn't betray him. "Captain," he squeaked.

"Yes Mr Kim?" Kathryn asked in a neutral tone.

"Uh," Harry once more attempted to clear his throat, "internal sensors are picking up an energy fluctuation in the hull plating."

Chakotay glanced across looking concerned, "where?"

"Everywhere," Harry answered.

"Damage?" Kathryn said in Tuvok's direction.

Tuvok worked quickly, "negligible. I am detecting a minuscule distortion in our warp field, likely due to a dust cloud we flew through a few minutes ago."

Tom's ears perked up, "what dust cloud? That wasn't there before." He felt Kathryn's eyes bore into his back, causing him to shiver. "I swear, our course was clear."

"Energy levels have returned to normal," Harry said with relief, more due to Tom getting the blame than whatever was happening being over.

"Even though there was no damage to Voyager, permission to investigate?" Tuvok said.

Chakotay nodded while also staring into Tom's quaking back. "Granted."

"Oh, I forgot. I'm meant to be on paternity leave. Ciao," Tom stuttered, getting up. A hand grasped his shoulder midway, freezing him on the spot.

"Before you go, double check the course you set," Kathryn said far too sweetly to be genuine. The squeezing hand was also a tip off. Tom couldn't swallow the lump in his throat.

### **The Mess Hall:**

"Hey, that's actually quite cool," Danny said excitedly.

Jessie did a double, then triple take while her jaw dropped. "Cool? Why's it cool?"

"Well I was going to wait until I told Ian, but it seems right. I found out the other day that I'm two weeks pregnant. We can be pregnant together," Danny replied, almost giddy.

"Did you miss the abortion and love spell parts?" Jessie icily said.

Danny gasped as if she had, "no, ohno don't do that. It'll be fun. That kid would be so cute, and we can have play dates, our kids hanging out." She gasped again, this time more excitedly. Jessie continued to grind her teeth. "We could be sister in laws."

Jessie was speechless for a few minutes. Danny didn't notice, she continued to ramble. "Your kid isn't even born, and you're already marrying them off?" Jessie snapped, cutting her off.

"Well if yours is a boy or a gay girl, I don't want Kiara snatching them first. And then there's Tom's kid..." Danny tried to say seriously, but her lips were threatening to curl.

"Tom's kid?" Jessie managed to say through enraged twitching.

Danny burst into mischievous giggles, then she patted her friend's shoulder. "Oh, I can't keep this up. You're so easy to tease."

"I'm not in the bloody mood funnily enough," Jessie grumbled. "You haven't a clue how much I'm freaking out about this, do you? If you did, you wouldn't joke. Or if you do and still, then maybe you're not my friend at all."

Danny's face fell quickly, "ok ok, I'm sorry. I didn't start out teasing, I thought the idea of us having and raising our kids together would soften you to the idea. I liked the sound of it, I kinda lost it."

"Only kinda?" Jessie groaned.

"You've only just found out. Why don't you think it through? Talk to James," Danny suggested.

Jessie sighed impatiently. "Doc said that too. The answer's still gonna be the same. And James never finds out about this." Danny looked shocked at the last sentence. "What? Why tell him that he had his consent violated because some weirdo aliens wanted to nick the ship? I wasn't too keen on hearing it but I had to, he doesn't. Why put him through that?"

"Yeah but, remember when you almost stole a chip off his plate last month, but chickened out before you touched it. You told him as if you gobbled his whole meal and blamed it on Morgan," Danny snickered for a reason Jessie wasn't sure of. "And you expect to keep a massive secret such as having an awesome fun night with him and aborting his baby, for the rest of your lives?"

Jessie only frowned at her, Danny shrugged casually. "Good luck," she said flippantly, "he'll know by the end of the day."

"After I said that he laughed, as of course he would. Do you think he's going to find this funny?" Jessie said. Danny winced. "We'll argue, we'll fall out and I'll only see him during awkward meetings. If I'm

aborting, why bother telling him and risking that? If it helps avoid losing him, I'll have no trouble with never telling him."

"Why would you argue and fall out permanently?" Danny asked.

Jessie looked at her as if she was an idiot, "really? You were there when it nearly happened the last time."

"Yeah but..." Danny stammered. She shook her head stubbornly, "that was years ago, you both have changed a lot since. He doesn't seem as rash and easily pissed off ish, which was a big part of the problem."

"Don't, it wasn't just him," Jessie said as she looked down glumly at the table.

"Well fine, but I said you both," Danny shrugged. "I can't imagine why you'd have a spat over this big enough to worry you. Are you concerned he's gonna be happy when you're halfway telling him, before you drop the A bomb."

"Happy? No, not likely," Jessie cringed and raised her eyebrow.

"Then what?" Danny questioned.

A cup was placed on the other side of their table, they both looked up in that direction. Danny quietly winced while Jessie once again tensed her shoulders.

"Oh... sorry, should I...?" a very awkward James said while pointing his thumb to one side.

Jessie glanced at Danny who she thought looked like she was ready to say yes. Jessie shook her head before she could. "It's fine."

James still had the same unsure look on his face as he sat opposite them, especially when he spotted Danny point her grimace toward Jessie. "Okay... um, did the Doc help you out?" he asked.

Jessie lightly nodded. Danny turned her stare at the new arrival and gave him a smile. "Don't mind her. I think she's a little thrown that I beat her to the knocked up goalpost," Danny said.

Her smile turned into a mischievous grin as James' eyes shot wide open just as he placed the cup at his mouth, while Jessie turned her head to glare at her.

"What are you doing?" she quietly hissed.

Danny shrugged and winked, "now you have a general idea. You're welcome."

"You're gone," Jessie said, eyes narrowing.

"Gone," Danny snickered whilst standing up. She hurried over to the nearest replicator.

"Is she... was she joking?" James asked, still hovering his drink at chin level just in case.

Jessie groaned into her right hand, "I have no idea with her anymore."

James put down his cup and looked at her with a worried frown. "You still don't look well. I hope the Doc didn't just drag you to Sickbay for a medical and toss you out."

"What? No," Jessie stuttered, her eyes widening slightly. "He gave me something, but it's not instant. I didn't understand it all, it's something like a mix of a stomach bug and motion sickness."

"I see," James said, although he didn't sound convinced at all.

Jessie tried to smile as if nothing was wrong, "so, how was work?"

James looked more bemused than worried, an eyebrow slowly raised. "Uh, funny you ask that today. Tuvok's re-assigned me to work in Engineering."

"Oh, what's that like?" Jessie said a little too eagerly. If it were anyone else they would've fallen for it, but James was briefly taken aback.

"It's a bit like the Mess Hall was when Neelix locked himself in his bathroom for two days," James answered once he collected himself. "He wants me to shadow B'Elanna when she gets back. For now, I gotta try and uh, he said manage them but..." he laughed awkwardly, "no way."

Jessie nodded, "yeah," she stopped when she noticed he had no more to say about it. Her throat cleared, "so, what are you going to do tonight?"

James looked at her again with a bemused, then blank expression. "What's happening here?"

"Huh?" Jessie laughed nervously, "what do you mean, we're talking."

"Like crewmembers who feel like they *have to* make small talk in the turbolift," James said. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," Jessie blurted out and tried again to smile.

James' face was even more worried than before, making it so much harder to keep the smile up. It didn't help that she spotted Danny by the replicator with an armful of snacks in one arm giving her a wink. She had to really strain herself not to scowl, because of the forced smile earlier she looked to James like she was in agony. He looked over his shoulder in time to catch Danny walking out while stuffing her face with crisps.

"Is this because of what Danny said?" he asked in a hushed voice.

Jessie's attention snapped back to him so fast, it left her with a twinge in her neck. "What, no, don't be daft."

"Excuse me," B'Elanna's voice cut in from beside both of them. They both looked to find her standing next to the table holding her newborn son in her arm. Jessie immediately cringed and looked down at the table. "Sorry, but can I sit here? There's no spare tables."

James nodded, "yeah sure." This time he noticed Jessie's brief wince in the corner of his eye, he gave her a concerned frown she didn't see.

B'Elanna sat down in the chair Danny had previously used. "Thanks, I figured I'd ask you guys first since I hear Tuvok suckered you into replacing me."

"Suckered doesn't seem like a strong enough word," James commented.

"Oh so you know," B'Elanna sighed, she smiled in relief. "He whined to me that he couldn't find anyone who knew what they were doing and could keep those idiots in line. He suggested Seven and well, I'm still in too much after birth pain to put up with being insulted like that. I said you don't need somebody as smart as me in there to run the place, you just need someone who doesn't take any of their crap, so I suggested you."

James' eyebrow rose pretty high, "normally I'd say thanks, but after what I saw I'm not so sure."

"You're welcome," B'Elanna smiled sweetly as her baby stirred in her arms. She gave his nose a little tickle which made him gurgle happily.

Jessie meanwhile fidgeted uncomfortably in her seat and averted her gaze.

"How is he anyway?" James asked, unaware of it.

B'Elanna beamed proudly at the baby before looking back up, "he's amazing. I thought since he was Tom's son, I'd have a lot of crying over nothing, but he's usually good as gold."

James laughed, a little relieved, "are you sure he's the dad?"

Jessie inhaled sharply a little louder than she would've liked, but still kept her gaze elsewhere. James though heard her and eyed her curiously.

"I suppose we'll have to wait until he learns to talk to find that out," B'Elanna chuckled. She returned her attention to the baby and so changed her voice to a cutesy kind, "we don't want another meddling daddy, do we." The baby squeaked and smiled in response.

"Oh for god's... can you please talk about something other than babies for one sodding minute!" Jessie snapped, leaving her trembling fiercely. By the time James, B'Elanna and pretty much the entire room looked at her in shock, she had already buried her head into her folded across the table arms.

B'Elanna's eyebrow twitched, "what the hell's your problem?" she grumbled.

James then heard muffled sobbing and so he quickly switched to a closer chair. "Jess, what's the matter?" As soon as his hand barely brushed her shoulder, she rolled it back as if to push it away. He recoiled from it as if he were slapped in the face. Meanwhile the sounds of crying encouraged B'Elanna's baby to join in.

"Oh no no, don't do that," Jessie's muffled voice whimpered. She lifted her red face up so the table could only see her eyes and tip of her nose. "Please, shut the damn thing up, I can't..." With her head back down only James heard her stutter, "I can't do this."

"Damn thing?" B'Elanna hissed. "He's my son. How dare..."

"Hang on," James quickly said, prompting an eye roll from B'Elanna. He spotted her mumbling *of course* as he once more focused on Jessie. "Jess, what's the matter? What can't you do? Is there anything I can do to help; go somewhere and talk or..."

"No, no," Jessie groaned painfully. "You can't help me. It'll only make things worse."

B'Elanna shrugged and bitterly stared at James as they briefly made eye contact. He looked like he literally had been slapped this time, he tried to shake it off. "What do you mean, did I do something...?" he asked.

Jessie once again groaned, angry at herself. To her tablemates though, she seemed angry at them. She lifted her head up only to try and avoid both of their gazes, so ended up looking straight ahead. "No, I'll just... go. Get it over with," she muttered and pushed her chair back.

"Wait, no. If I've done something to upset you this badly, I don't want..." James stuttered.

B'Elanna exhaled loudly enough to interrupt him, "she yells at my baby and you're blaming yourself. Huh, I was wrong, maybe I'd be better off with Harry taking my place."

Jessie shook her head, "I'm sorry but I can't deal with... First Danny, then you. It's like someone's trying to torture me."

"That's the worst apology I've ever heard," B'Elanna muttered.

"Wait, what does Danny and B'Elanna have in common that'd get you so upset?" James asked, earning B'Elanna's wrath being pointed in his direction. He looked a little worried but not about that.

Jessie thought to say something before he figured it out, "look believe, trust me. *You* don't want to know."

"If it's making you this upset, I don't care what I want," James said, his voice cracking a little from the worry. "Do you want to go home and talk about it?"

"No," Jessie replied quickly while closing her eyes. "Danny was right, I can't do this. I'm already ruining everything. I wish I was dead," she whispered so quietly only he heard her.

Naturally he panicked and reached for her hand, she also flinched from that. "Jess, it's okay, it's gonna be okay." He was put off briefly by her scoffing sadly in response. "Don't do this, you know I'm always gonna be on your side, no matter what. Why don't you want any help?"

"Not after this you won't be," Jessie said, fighting back further tears. "If you forget it, nothing's wrong."

"What?" James said, more confused than anything.

B'Elanna looked between them both suspiciously, then settled on Jessie. "I saw Danny this morning pouring crisps into her bowl of milk. You were talking to her, and now you're flipping out because I brought a baby over and James asked me about him." She noticed James flinch from her remarks at the edge of her sight. Coupled with Jessie tensing she felt convinced of what she was thinking, so she lowered her voice and leaned toward Jessie. "Do you want me to go somewhere else, or him to sod off so you can tell someone who is not gonna flip the table?"

James frowned, "you know, I can still hear you. Why would I flip the table? You got it all wrong, you don't understand..."

B'Elanna blinked a few times toward him, then shook her head in disgust. "Oh, don't I? Please mansplain it to me."

"What? That's not... what?" James stuttered, more confused than ever.

Jessie grasped the table with both hands to stop from snapping.

"I wasn't patronising you. I was just saying that what's wrong isn't what you I think have assumed, because I know her better and it's something we only know, you don't," James said irritably.

B'Elanna sighed, "okay I don't need her answer to my question then. Go away before I break something, you possessive meathead." The look on her face rivalled a coffee-less Kathryn, her poor son seemed unnerved by it.

James though stared back with a similar one of his own. "You are not helping. Stop assuming that it has to be one thing only because you're too closed minded. Doing so is going to make her feel worse."

Jessie gave up and slammed one of her hands on the table. "Oh god enough! You're both right, so just stop it please."

James' eyes widened in shock, while B'Elanna didn't look surprised, she seemed somewhat smug. He ignored that and focused on Jessie, "what do you mean, you know what she was implying?"

B'Elanna angrily groaned again, "dear god, if I wasn't carrying a baby..."

"I know," Jessie nodded grimly. "Can't believe I'm doing this," she whispered. "During that love spell thing at the hotel, I... there was, something happened that I don't remember."

"What love spell thing?" James asked, he sounded unsure that he even heard her right.

"It was what we nicknamed the weapon those pirates shot at us," B'Elanna said. A realisation hit her and she was suddenly worried, "Tom was at the hotel too."

Jessie shuddered in disgust, "no, thank god." B'Elanna was offended but relieved. James was still utterly confused. "It apparently makes the infected fall in love with the nearest person. I was infected, drunk too, and now..." she trailed off very nervously.

"Now..." James said, glancing briefly at B'Elanna.

"Now," Jessie moaned, "I'm pregnant."

B'Elanna winced, not from the news, that didn't surprise her, but she expected fireworks from the other side of the table.

James looked shaken, he struggled to even just say, "what?"

"I tried to warn you to get out," B'Elanna sighed. She cringed slightly as she looked toward Jessie who preferred to stare at the table again, "apart from Tom, there were three men there. Are you..."

"Tom?" James stuttered, visibly twitching.

Jessie cringed, "it's not him."

B'Elanna narrowed her eyes briefly in his direction as a warning, then turned back to Jessie. "I can still get rid of him, one way or another."

"No," Jessie shook her head timidly.

James tried to stop himself from shaking, but it only left him with anger. "Who did this to you?"

Jessie cringed again, B'Elanna mumbled a *still could* before glaring at him. "Very sensitive of you," she said in a threatening manner.

"I know, I'm sorry but..." James said quickly, "a love spell, being drunk. It all sounds very... I don't want to say the word, so I'll just use creepy even if it's not strong enough."

"I agree but it's not like she was the only one infected and the guy took advantage of it," B'Elanna scolded him. "See, this is why you shouldn't be here. Any excuse to overprotect her, you're nothing but a sexist hothead looking for trouble."

Jessie shook her head, "he's not, I'd be mad too if it were..." She laughed insincerely at herself. "That's why I didn't want you to know."

"Because you figured I'd blame Craig or Chakotay and I'd..." James tried to say, but saying their names did nothing for his temper, anything he'd say after would be a lie. B'Elanna eyed him knowingly. "Make things worse, like you said. You're right, whoever it is, has nothing to do with me. And I'm sorry," he stuttered.

Jessie looked in his general direction but couldn't make eye contact, the guilt weighed her down. "It does have something to do with you. That's the problem."

B'Elanna even looked surprised at hearing that, no more so than James who looked like he was about to pass out. "It's... me?" he stuttered quietly.

Jessie regrettably nodded and looked away while whispering, "yes." It left James speechless for once for quite a few awkward minutes.

"I thought it'd be anyone but him cos of what you were saying," B'Elanna said quietly. "Should keep my mouth shut."

"It's okay," Jessie said, "you don't have to do anything. I'm not keeping it."

James' shock at the news turned back into his earlier confusion. "But I figured you'd..." he said while he tried to de-muddle his thoughts. He couldn't so it left him a little annoyed at himself. All he had left was, "why?"

"You know why," Jessie said quietly to sound neutral but it sounded bitter.

"No, no I don't. I thought the opposite, I don't get it," James nervously stuttered. A thought occurred to him that left a lump in his throat, "is this why you didn't want to tell me?"

Jessie sighed and closed her eyes, hoping that if she opened them she'd wake up. She avoided doing so and replied with, "I didn't want to risk, this," she said gesturing between the two of them. "I don't want us to fall out, and ruin what we've had over the years."

"So you thought keeping a massive secret was the way?" James sounded shocked, "and you'd abort just so we wouldn't argue? I get this even less."

"Please stop, don't you think this is hard enough already," Jessie snapped at him.

James felt his whole body tense as his throat throbbed, he shook his head. "I can't believe you'd do something like this, and for what, because you think I'm going to hurt you. Is that how little you think of me now?"

Jessie's jaw dropped in horror as he stood up, "no, that's not what I meant. I just..."

"If you didn't trust me anymore, why didn't you tell me that years ago?" James said with his voice cracking. He stormed off before his burning eyes betrayed him.

Jessie shook while suffering the same symptoms he was. Only now everyone were looking toward her, curious as to what was going on. She couldn't stand it and so escaped the Mess Hall via a different door, leaving B'Elanna behind to regret her part in it.

### **The Bridge:**

Harry ducked down knowing it was utterly pointless, but it was his natural instincts that were in full control, and so he stayed there hoping this would pass.

Kathryn though remained fixed in front of Opps, glaring straight through it and directly at him. "Remind me again Mr Kim, what I asked about our destination before we set a course."

Harry whimpered fearfully, "if it were in someone's territory."

"Mmmhmm, and?" Kathryn growled.

"Habited?" Harry squeaked.

"And what was your answer?" Kathryn asked with a dangerous smile on her face, which he didn't need to see, he could feel it. The only answer she got was further squeaking.

Tom chuckled to himself, "well you didn't believe him anyway. Good thing we came prepared."

Next thing Tom knew the Captain was standing behind him, glaring into his skull. He felt his temperature drop.

"Captain, there is something far more curious about this planet than what Mr Kim reported," Tuvok said.

Kathryn made her way toward him slower than she did to Tom, staring warily at him. "If you say anything with the words anomaly or temporal in them, I'm going to do an eyebrow-ectomy."

Tuvok forced his eyebrow to remain where it was while she was staring at him. "Negative Captain. Not only am I detecting lifesigns in what appears to be a metropolis, but I am also detecting several ships

in the system. All of them have Starfleet signatures." The whole bridge froze, except Harry who's ears perked up. "The majority of the populace are Human, Captain."

Kathryn had stopped when she was within a foot away from Tactical to Tuvok's relief, still with the same annoyed expression. "How the hell didn't we notice a Starfleet colony until we were almost on its doorstep? And how come they're so far out here?"

"Well, if you think about how many shortcuts we've taken, we must be in the Alpha Quadrant by now, just still far out in the borders. It's not too out there for a colonisation ship or two to have come here and settled in the few years we've been gone," Chakotay said.

Kathryn pointed her narrowing eyes towards her indifferent first officer. "You're suggesting that in five years Starfleet have travelled almost twenty thousand lightyears, built a city, dropped off civilians and brought a few regular starships to patrol it?"

"No," Chakotay sniggered, "I just wanted to see how you'd react."

Steam rapidly rose from Kathryn as she clenched her jaw. "I'd expect that sort of stupid optimism from Lieutenant Squeaky over there. I'll not even entertain the idea that those ships have transwarp or slipstream capabilities. Something is very wrong here."

"Actually, I do detect residual slipstream tunnels, although I cannot scan the ships themselves to see if they have the engines that can generate them," Tuvok said.

Kathryn shuddered, "and why not?" She didn't wait for an answer, "because there's something not right about any of this. Keep our distance, we don't want them spotting us until we're absolutely sure."

"So what do we do?" Tom dared to ask.

"Squeaky, see if you can find a blind spot in transporter range," Kathryn barked towards Opps which still looked empty. She saw a tuft of black hair peep over the controls. "If you can't, we'll have to sneak a shuttle down."

As she expected she heard a giddy laugh come from helm, "I know just the man for the job."

"Great," Kathryn smiled, "if we need him, you'll let him know, won't you?" Tom's shoulders and spirit fell.

Morgan strolled through yet another corridor, trying her best to restrain a massive yawn. It didn't work at all, it was so big she for a few seconds couldn't see where she was going once she hit a junction. When her eyes opened she noticed James detour around her from another corridor, then walk in front of her. The fact that he didn't stop or even look at her riled her up, so she picked up her own pace to follow.

"Hey, wait up. What's up your butt?" she complained.

She noticed him shake his head, but he didn't slow down until he got to the turbolift at the end. This allowed her to catch up to him. She was about to pretend to scold him when she noticed his tense expression.

"What's the matter with you?" Morgan asked as gently as she could.

James didn't answer, his hand reached out to press the turbolift panel. It wound Morgan up further.

"Look if someone's pissed you off, I'm free for an ass kicking. I got nothing better to do," she said with a smile.

James sighed a little impatiently, "no."

Morgan continued to smile, "ah ha, gotcha. So are you mad at someone or something?" She stared at him, waiting for some sort of response. Just before the doors opened he rolled his eyes away from her and she thought she heard him mutter a few words. They shocked her, leaving her a little squeamish. "Eew, you did what?"

James' head darted in her direction, looking very confused again, "excuse me?"

"You and Jessie, oh my god," Morgan chuckled and yet still managed to look grossed out.

James stared at her blankly, blinking more than usual. He then noticed the turbolift had arrived and was thankfully empty, so he pointed to it and stepped inside. Morgan got the hint but didn't budge.

"I'm not going to be victim number two," she laughed.

The doors started to close between them, James put a hand out to grab one of them and stop it. "Yeah very funny," he said in deadpan, his head gesturing once more for her to follow him.

Morgan tried to get a straight face back as she stepped inside. As soon as the doors closed she said, "you forgot I was recently telepathic, didn't you?"

James rolled his eyes again, "you have no right to be using it anytime and on anyone you want though."

The comment slapped the girl in the face, so she pouted. "I can't control it. Why would I ever want to hear your thoughts, you talk far too much anyway and you annoy me."

"Hmm," was all James said in response, and quietly. Morgan glanced over to see him mulling something over, this time she didn't hear it. "Don't tell anyone."

"Who do you think I am? Of course I won't," Morgan said. She saw him nod, then look away tensing his jaw. "I didn't know you two had gotten together..."

"We didn't," James said abruptly, cutting her off. He looked down apologetically, "sorry, it's just... this is all sudden, I don't know what I'm doing."

Morgan frowned but nodded anyway, "okay. Sounded pretty bad in my head."

"Yeah," James barely said at the same time the intercom chirped.

*"All senior officers report to the bridge,"* Kathryn's voice rang around them.

Morgan smiled and shrugged, "okeydokey. Bridge," she ordered. The turbolift sprung to life. James tiredly stared at her with the smallest of frowns. "What, you're a senior officer aren't you?"

"And you are...?" James said.

"Bored, duh," Morgan replied with a smirk on her face.

When the turbolift arrived the smirk was ancient history as she was greeted to the sound of her parents exchanging insults.

While James stepped out, she hesitated. He turned towards Tuvok, "I thought it was no longer my job to break up catfights?"

"Indeed," Tuvok's eyebrow raised, almost sounding annoyed.

It also annoyed the command duo who turned their scorn towards James instead. He smiled politely at them before walking over to what he assumed was an empty Opps station. With the argument over, Morgan felt a bit better about stepping out onto the bridge.

"What's up then?" she asked carefully.

Kathryn then noticed she was there and tried to melt her icy demeanour. "We're in transporter range of a planet that went from baron to colonised by Starfleet in a space of an hour. I want to send an awayteam to investigate, however..."

Chakotay sighed, "I'll lead it if you want, but I think we should be far more cautious. If you're right, we're putting an awayteam into danger when we could just as easily continue on our way as if we haven't seen anything."

"And if I'm wrong, we could miss out on communicating with Starfleet and since they managed to get here, a hitchhike home," Kathryn said irritably.

"Come on, you don't believe that. It's the one thing I'm agreeing with you on, this whole thing stinks," Chakotay said.

Kathryn shrugged and walked off, "and if us agreeing on something isn't fishy, I don't know what is."

James bumped into something on getting to opps, so he peered down to find Harry sitting on the floor, hugging his legs. "Shh," he whispered fearfully.

Chakotay groaned and began to head for the turbolift, "I'll take two teams, just in case. Paris," he then pointed toward Opps, "Taylor, Kim. You're up."

Harry clambered to his feet so fast it surprised James enough to make him double check if he were still on the floor. "Hurry up," he said eagerly with his eyes wide. James shook his head and stepped away from the station, Harry scampered past him.

Chakotay reached the turbolift and almost got knocked off his feet by the rushing Lieutenant. He shook his head and tapped his commbadge. "Chakotay to Rex, transporter room two."

"Have you forgotten that she's ill?" James warned him on approach.

"That's not what the Doctor said," Chakotay sniped back. He stepped into the turbolift just in time to avoid a glare, at least until James joined him and the others in the turbolift.

"Uh Commander, if it's two teams, they're not exactly even," Tom reminded him.

Chakotay looked ready to throttle the helmsman, "Jessie just grab the first person you see on your way. Chakotay out."

"As long as it's a girl, this team is a real sausage fest," Tom commented, prompting blank stares from the entire turbolift. He laughed nervously, "god, nobody has a sense of humour anymore."

Harry laughed to his relief. "Oh, I'm so telling Jessie that." Tom immediately started to sweat nervously.

The awayteam dematerialised in a quiet back alley. They could hear the telltale sounds of a normal public street only a few metres away. Chakotay slipped a tricorder out of his pocket but kept it discreetly by his thigh as he glanced at it.

"Okay, according to sensors there were two areas of the city that didn't match typical Starfleet schematics; a large building to the west, and a tower at the northern edge of the city that was generating a signal we couldn't identify. My team will investigate the tower, see if it's harmless or something that might be casting an illusion, anything out of the ordinary. Harry, your team will scope out this building but do not enter it. We'll report back here in an hour. Understood?"

He got mostly nods. Only a confused looking Tom got his annoyed attention. "Yeah um, I'm not exactly sure what we're looking for. Aliens with bad human make up on, a sign saying *this is totally human stuff, honest?* And also why is Harry leading a team and I'm not?"

"I think the first question answers the second," James commented.

Tom looked even more confused, he scowled at him, "they have nothing to do with each other, you idiot."

Harry laughed quietly to himself, "okay, can I pick my team first? I pick anyone but Tom."

Chakotay groaned, "fine, but I'm only agreeing because I have a feeling this mission will need some fodder."

"Hey," Tom whined.

"On a totally unrelated note, I'll bring the girl who on her last *mission* stabbed somebody annoying in the back. Come on," Chakotay said, walking off.

Emma grinned and followed him, "wait, can we bring Harry too then the team's perfect."

"Hey again," Tom complained half-heartedly. He followed them muttering angrily.

Harry sighed in relief, "okay, so that's a lot less stressful. Let's go team." He then noticed his team members didn't look thrilled, and were clearly avoiding looking at each other. "I knew it was too good to be true," he sighed again.

Both teams soon found they had to get through an extremely busy market no matter which way they went. Harry was a little relieved that he didn't have to be discreet with his tricorder or else he'd get lost, since he passed a few uniformed humans wearing similarly shaped devices on their belts.

Chakotay was less than relieved when he overheard Emma asking one stall, "hey do you sell chainsaws?" He backtracked and grabbed her to pull her with him.

"I thought you'd know how to be discreet in a place you didn't belong," he scolded her.

"What? No harm in asking," Emma said innocently and with puppy dog eyes. Chakotay groaned.

Harry's team were still within the market when they could see the building Chakotay was talking about. At first glance nothing seemed out of the ordinary about it, it looked like a typical modern Starfleet building; tall and metallic with far too many windows. Harry tried to scan it, this time discreetly but strangely nothing showed up at all, raising suspicions.

"Maybe we should attack this on all sides," he said. "I'll have a walk around it, you two stick around here and eavesdrop a bit."

"Why don't I do the looking around," James suggested, making Jessie wince and look down, "I was in Security before."

Harry also flinched as he noticed Jessie's reaction. "Um, okay sure. You're right. Just be careful."

"Hmm," was James' only reply as he headed off towards the building.

"Okay, that was cold," Harry said apologetically toward Jessie. She looked at him blankly, "I wish I knew sooner, or I would've took Emma instead of one of you."

"Don't worry about it. I don't care," Jessie said, clearly lying. She began to wander around nearby stalls, pretending to be interested in them.

The further Chakotay's team walked, the crowds seemed to thin. Only a few odd people would pass by them when they could finally see where they were heading. A tinted light blue metallic skyscraper, barely a couple of metres squared in depth, standing amongst what appeared to be an industrial area. Completely vertical until the final few metres, where the walls closed in on each other to form a sharp tip which flickered a white light occasionally. Tom likened it to a massive needle and gave himself a cold shudder.

The team kept close to one side of the street, dividing their attention between that and the shop windows, hoping that'd be enough to fool the public. Just in case it didn't, Chakotay walked directly beside Tom to block anyone's view of the tricorder. Emma lingered in the back until she spotted something in a window and double backed.

"I dunno what to make of this. It looks like a transmitter, a real fancy one," Tom mumbled.

"Fancy? A transmitter sounds pretty clear about what it does, so what's so fancy?" Chakotay asked.

Emma glanced over her shoulder to look at them, then back again.

"It's not using any of our usual communications frequencies. Doesn't help that the tricorder can only detect that it's a structure and won't give me any details," Tom answered.

"Sounds a lot like the Shadow Tower," Emma muttered while eyeing up a few blunt objects in the window. Even still she noticed the two men looking at her gormlessly. "You know, like a cloak only for dumb people. You know?"

"No," Tom meekly replied. Chakotay tried not to laugh.

Emma sighed impatiently, "we didn't want our technology to be nicked by twenty first century humans, so the Shadow hid the entire island we lived on from old fogey scanners. You guys might have spotted it if you got close to it though since you have modern scanners. Plus like this one you can literally see it once you were within its range."

Chakotay nodded as if he understood, and yet he still ended up frowning as if he were confused. "So Starfleet must've invented the same thing but... why would they ever need to use it? There's no one else here."

Emma shrugged, "I dunno, maybe there were cave people on the planet first."

"Who we also didn't detect an hour ago, and for some reason I doubt had any kind of scanners besides tossing a rock or lighting a fire and watching the smoke," Chakotay said with a smile. Emma turned back to the shop window and smiled as well, he wasn't sure if it was his comment had anything to do with that. "Something is definitely strange about all of this."

Tom brightened up, "oh you mean the Ligers' tower on the AU Gravett Island?" Emma pointed a look straight ahead of her, not at Tom himself, as if to say *what else you idiot*. Tom of course took offense. "I saw it and worked around it, it's not the same. Your tower hid by jamming frequencies all around, we couldn't even see our own lifesigns when we were near it. Here I can scan everything but that, and it's right there, standing out a mile for all to see while yours was camouflaged in the grassy mountains. It's not trying to hide, the tricorder can't find anything about it in its database, as if it doesn't exist."

"Yeah, exactly," Emma said, sounding disinterested as she peered over at the neighbouring shop window.

Chakotay looked pained, "I hate to say it but he has a point. We haven't been separated from Starfleet that long. You said that the Shadow's point was to hide it from less advanced species. Starfleet couldn't have advanced so far that our tricorders can't figure them out."

Tom smiled mostly out of relief. "Yeah, and it isn't just this. We had the same trouble with the ships floating around the system. The type of signal, what the building's made of, which seems to block my scans so I can't see what's inside it."

"Is it one of yours Emma? This could be a Liger colony we've mistaken for Human," Chakotay asked, turning to where Emma was for confirmation. She was nowhere that he could see, making him groan.

Tom hadn't noticed yet, "but they were definitely Starfleet vessels, just different classes with fancier shields than ours. What are the odds that Emma's people from an alternate dimension to ours have the same basic ship design?" He turned around and also noticed their missing teammate. "Do you think that's a yes?"

Chakotay only hmm'd in response.

James meanwhile took his time to circle the building he had to scan, all while trying not to seem obvious. Occasionally he checked the tricorder in his pocket. Nothing looked out of the ordinary. That was until he was about to reach the front again, he noticed the air around the roof looked a little blurry as if it were surrounded by a forcefield. He waited for the people behind him to overtake before he could slow and stop, then got out the tricorder again. It once more said there was nothing there where the building should be, but once he pointed it quickly upwards and brought it back he noticed a spike in energy levels.

He returned to where he started, this time quicker after seeing that. He looked around for his team. Once he spotted Harry, somebody from a nearby stall pretty much shoved a strange device in his face.

"Hey there, good day sir. You look like someone who would benefit from my amazing, state of the art personal shield!" a man shouted so loudly it left his ear ringing.

James pushed the device and arm out of his face and continued walking.

That still didn't deter the salesman, he followed. "At only 33,000 you can protect yourself from phaser blasts, sharp accidents and even a fist to the face."

James firmly grit his teeth and rolled his eyes. "No *thanks*."

"But what'll protect you and family & friends from murderous people the next time you hit the town?" the man pretended to sound concerned. James intended to ignore him until the salesman made the mistake of grabbing his arm.

James swung around, sharply pulling his arm out of his grip. "I'll tell you what, put that on you and let's see if it works."

The salesman's eyes were wide, he started to shake. He ran off with his tail and device between his legs.

Unknown to James, Jessie was at a nearby stall and had seen everything. She decided to walk over before he threatened anyone else. "James..."

"The building's shielded. Pretty advanced wise too. Where's Harry?" James said flatly.

Jessie didn't look impressed with his tone, but she shrugged it off and turned towards a building on the opposite side of the street. With tables and chairs outside, most occupied by people slugging pint glasses, it seemed obvious to them both what kind of building. "I saw him go in there."

"Of course," James groaned. He focused on the tricorder once again and turned slightly as if to walk away.

Jessie briefly grasped his arm as a hint to stop. "We still have half an hour until we have to meet Chakotay's team. After we update Harry, can I have five minutes to explain?"

"Now, here?" James asked hesitantly, and to her relief without any of the previous attitude. He sounded more worried than she expected.

"We can't work together, or at all, like this," Jessie said, gesturing toward the earlier salesman returning to his stall.

James followed her glance, then shrugged. "He'd have pissed me off any day." When he looked back again, he noticed her look glumly down while biting her bottom lip. "Okay, sure."

Without anymore words, they made their way across the street to the bar. As soon as they stepped inside they bumped into the crowds already inside. James grumbled something Jessie didn't hear due to the noise, and without much hesitation he pushed his way through to a quieter part of the pub. Jessie followed in his wake, avoiding some of the people's annoyed glances in their direction.

Even in the quieter parts of the pub, neither of them could see Harry anywhere. Jessie felt her stomach turn so turned around to look for an unoccupied table. It took a few minutes before James noticed, as she had been behind him. He hurried over to join her at the table which had two long and soft benches on either side. "You alright?"

Jessie breathed in deeply and out. "Yeah, the Doc said the nausea drug might not work as well if I'm tired. I'll wait here if you want."

James sat opposite her. "I'll get you a drink first at least," he said while looking for the bar, which wasn't easy to do with all the people everywhere.

"Listen um. I'm sorry. I didn't mean what you thought, back in the Mess Hall. I just... this news, I wasn't expecting it either, it..." Jessie stuttered, but hesitated when James looked back at her. "It's scared the hell out of me, and I don't know what I'm doing."

"It's okay," James' gaze briefly met the table, "I overreacted."

"The last thing I wanted to do was hurt you, you know that right?" Jessie stammered.

James grimaced and looked down, nodding. Jessie recognised that as one of many of his feeling guilty expressions. "I know. I'm sorry too."

A woman approached the table holding a little padd like device. "Hi, welcome to the Ashfault. Can I get you some drinks?"

"Just some water for me please," Jessie replied as she absentmindedly placed a hand on her stomach. The woman nodded and tapped the padd.

"Do you do Long Islands...?" James started to ask but he noticed Jessie's eyebrow raising in judgement. "I'll have a white coffee please."

"Right away," the waitress said with a smirk. She walked away.

"We are on duty, remember?" Jessie couldn't help but laugh.

James cleared his throat, "yeah. So what are we..."

Shouting nearby overwhelmed his voice and cut him off, they both looked across to see Emma arguing with a couple of men who looked like bouncers.

"What do you mean, I'm old enough. I'm older than you pricks!" she shouted. One of the bouncers reached to grasp her arm, but that only gave her an opening to snatch a bottle from a nearby table and run off into the crowds. The two gave chase.

Their own table was quiet until their drinks were delivered. Jessie thought over what to say as her fingers tightly grasped the glass. The silence went on too long for her taste so she blurted out, "do you want it?"

"What?" James said.

Jessie cringed, "I mean; do you want this baby?"

James looked very nervous, "nuh uh, I don't want my answer to influence your decision or anything. Whatever you decide to do, I'll support you. The way I acted before, it's out of my system."

"I don't know though, not anymore," Jessie said to his surprise. "I didn't want to resort to something so drastic but there's so much that can go horribly wrong, and it will, I know it. It's a massive chance to take, and I can't decide it on my own."

"We have time. It's okay," James tried to say reassuringly.

Jessie's shoulders tensed, "until then, people may find out. If we decide to keep it, everyone will know. Pregnancy via a drunken one night stand is embarrassing enough. Then you add a love spell and everyone I told you so'ing, I dunno if I can stand it."

"Everyone? Tom yeah, Danny maybe. Hopefully no one else cares that much," James said, wincing slightly. Jessie eyed him with an eyebrow raise. "I know, but if you decide to keep it, Tom making jokes occasionally is only going to be a little annoyance, right?"

Jessie's face softened a little and she nodded. "I guess. And Tom making jokes isn't exactly a new thing. Should be used to it by now."

Only a few tables away Harry squeezed around a group of women wearing hen night apparel, cheering on the bride chugging two bottles at the same time. Harry headed for where he remembered the exit being, only he spotted Emma at a table on the opposite side to where James and Jessie's table was, sipping a pint glass.

"Aren't you a little young to be..." he said, quickly snatching it away from her. Emma grabbed it back immediately. "Why are you here?"

"Why are you?" she asked while trying to look serious and firm. That made her burst into hyperactive giggles.

Harry glanced around for anyone who may be eavesdropping. "Saw someone with a strange device, looked dangerous. Followed her in. Thought she was going to shoot up the place."

Emma peered up curiously, "oh?"

Harry's face flushed a bright red, "it dyed her hair in an instant, she just fired it at her own head. I thought..." Emma snickered so much her chest hurt, Harry meanwhile tried not to look like it bothered him. "Good thing this is a bar. Easy to play being drunk."

"Well, as a Voyager you certainly would be able to pull that off with no effort," Emma teased.

"Yeah," Harry said slowly with his eyes narrowing in the direction of her collection of glasses. "Starfleet's science department have been extremely busy the last few years. So much here is so... out there."

Emma nodded, "I know. I thought for a minute that we found a Liger colony. We're not far from the dimensional portal thing so..." She grabbed another drink, this one tall and golden. "Thought I'd celebrate."

Harry seemed confused to her, he blinked and stared blankly. "You thought? You mean it isn't?" Emma scoffed and shook her head. "I never considered it but since you put the idea out there, it makes sense that it would be. But you're saying it isn't, why not? It'd explain why we didn't spot anything until we got close. And why they'd even be hiding at all."

Emma tried to scowl menacingly at him but she almost wobbled out of her chair. "We're not pansies like you. We only hid on Earth to stop you guys from stealing and invading us. Outside of Earth and the solar system, we do things normally. No reason to hide here. Plus!" she burped and laughed, "our ships are so much more less dreary than those hanging around up there." She pointed up just in case he didn't understand what she meant by *there*.

She figured she was right when Harry raised his eyebrow. "So much more less? Okay, you need to be cut off."

"Make me," Emma said while leaning forward on the table, smiling darkly at him with her eyes wide. Harry wasn't sure if she was threatening him or flirting, he nervously laughed it off either way.

"You're right," he said, his voice a pitch higher than usual. "What little we got of those ships were Starfleet in design. They were just out of our..." he slowed down as he came to a realisation, "league, oh god."

Emma perked up, Harry assumed she was on the same page. "Oh I like this song!" She ran off to an open area between the tables and the bar, where many other people were dancing.

Harry groaned. "I best find the rest of your team, okay? Good, glad you agree. And mine," he muttered to himself. He headed for the exit to meet up with his team, thinking they'd be waiting outside for him impatiently. Only he walked right by without seeing them.

Jessie glanced to her left a few seconds too late to see Harry pass. "This place is strange but it's still very human-like. If Chakotay thinks these are aliens pretending to be us, they're very good at it."

As soon as she finished her sentence loud jeering from the dancefloor got both of their attention. They noticed all but one of the patrons there were looking at the corner of the room where a tall computer stood with speakers on both sides. The music stopped abruptly and Emma was fiddling around with it, but with her back to the pair so they didn't realise it was her.

"Still, the shielded building is a little suspicious. It didn't look important enough for the special treatment," James said once it quietened down enough for him to be heard.

"It could be a government building," Jessie said. James thought about it and nodded slightly. "It's probably that tower thing that made this city so invisible at first."

"Yeah maybe," James agreed.

Two men approached their table, one of which looked a little too drunk and had to grasp his friend's shoulder for support. They sneered in the table's basic direction, while the drunk one slurred, "why hello gorgeous. Couldn't help but notice you shining like a star in this dump."

Jessie looked disgusted, "remind me why I suggested we go into a pub to talk."

James smiled briefly, "Harry has a drink problem."

"Ah yeah," Jessie smirked before looking up at the two men, "not interested. Bye."

The drunk laughed obnoxiously, then plonked himself down on James' side of the table. "Good thing I didn't mean you then, sweetie." Not satisfied with that he slid a little closer, smiling dreamily at his neighbour with his chin resting in his hand.

"Yeah sorry dude. Blond pretty boys are his type," the other man said while sitting down beside Jessie much to her disgust. He smiled smarmily at her, "me though. I like them hot, foxy, feminine."

"Ugh," Jessie groaned as she moved away from her admirer. "Try that somewhere else with an idiot with no gag reflex, or standards. On second thoughts, no one deserves that."

The drunk pretended his arm slipped, hurtling his body in James' direction, landing briefly on his shoulder. "Oh, what strong arms, do you work out?" he purred. James slid away until he was mostly hanging off the edge of the seat, which made the drunk tumble down. It only made him laugh, "oh you're so mean."

"That's it," James said as he stood. "We should go, Jess."

Meanwhile the other guy tried to discreetly move his hand to grope Jessie's leg. The look she gave him for it would've scared off anyone sane who wanted to live, instead he kept going. His hand barely brushed it when he found an elbow slammed into his ribs.

"Definitely," she hissed. As soon as she stood the two men also hurriedly got up and walked around the chairs to block their escape.

"Oh, but we were enjoying your company," the sober one said and he winked at Jessie.

The drunk faked a pathetic pout, "yeah, you're not going anywhere."

Many were watching this unfold, including the people blocking Harry's exit. He decided to see what was so interesting, immediately regretting it. "Ohno." He hurried back through the crowds.

"Just get out of the way, I'm not in the mood for you," James said.

"We only want to get to know you better," the drunk smiled coyly.

"Tough, we don't want to get to know you," Jessie said and she opted to walk around them. The other guy quickly took a hold of her arm and he pulled her back. The drunk thought this was hilarious.

Harry reached them from James and the drunk's side, just as James stepped forward. Harry inadvertently bumped into him, which stopped him for the moment. "Can't take you guys anywhere, can we? Trouble follows you, it seems," Harry tried to say pleasantly.

"We're not being any trouble, are we pet?" the guy who grasped Jessie's arm said.

She pulled her arm from him staring viciously at him, "don't call me that!"

Harry winced not once but twice as the man tried again to touch her arm. "Listen, let the lady go. You're only going to get into trouble."

Both men laughed at him like teenage boys would. "Really, what kind of trouble?" the arm grabber sneered.

"I'll show you if you want," James coldly said.

Harry quickly stepped in between them, then he turned his back on James to address the harasser. "Hey hey, there's no problem here. We've got to go back to work and so we're going to walk away." He eyed Jessie, "right now."

"Sure," she mouthed.

Then she turned to leave the same way she tried to earlier. The man took the chance to reach out and pinch her on the behind. James noticed it and grabbed his wrist before it reached his target. That got Jessie's attention, she whirled around to once more face them.

"You'd better show her some respect, or I'll force this down your throat," James snapped.

Harry cringed while the drunk laughed dirtily. "Oh he's saucy. Can I keep him?"

His friend wasn't amused, but neither was James. The former tried to pull his arm back unsuccessfully, angering him further. "It's only a bit of fun kid. Keep your school boy threats where they belong." He pulled again. This time James let him go and so he stumbled back from the recoil.

"Great, the end," Harry stuttered, hinting over his left shoulder at James to leave. "Please," he begged.

Jessie decided to back away this time. Her doing so, nor James and Harry being there didn't deter the man. He attempted to follow her, sneering. "Come on, just one snog. You'll enjoy it more from a real man."

James walked around Harry and to in front of the crude man. "Not you, boy," he laughed, "Artie though wouldn't mind." His drunk friend seductively waved.

"Look, the lady clearly isn't interested. Let it go, both of you," Harry stuttered. "James go, that's an order."

"Sure," James said and yet didn't budge.

"What's your problem mate? You claimed her already, how is she?" the man asked crudely. "It's my turn, don't you think?"

Jessie's jaw dropped. "What did you say? You piece of dog crap on my new shoes, I'll fu..."

"Oh god," Harry stammered at that. Then he noticed James' face had hardened. When Harry tried to pull him away with him he got nowhere. "Please, ignore him."

"Right," James grunted. He looked as if he were going to leave, stepping back a touch. But then the right arm swung, his fist slammed into the creep's face. He fell to the ground hard, blood pouring from his nose. "Now I'll go." This time he did turn to leave, only to bump into a grimacing Jessie.

"I wanted to do that," she said.

James briefly glanced back at the man nursing his face, while his friend knelt down beside him. "Still could."

Harry though groaned as if he only shoved him slightly. "Why must you... can't we go anywhere without you picking a fight?"

James looked at him suspiciously, "that was you last time."

"Uh right, let's go," Harry stuttered, pushing his hands in front of him as a hint. Only then he noticed the pub had frozen, all watching them. Worst still what looked like security officers were squeezing their way through the crowds to reach them.

Strange phasers that looked more like deadly blades attached to a trigger were brandished at them and the two men. "Hold it," one barked. They were soon surrounded. "You're not very good at being inconspicuous, are you?"

Harry tried to look calm. "I'm sorry. My friends can be a bit, rough when they've had a few." He turned to Jessie, "I thought you were supposed to stop him."

"It was self defence," Jessie argued, then pointed at the men on the ground. "He attacked me."

"Oh and why was that?" another security officer asked, narrowing their eyes suspiciously. "Did they figure you out, huh? You're under arrest."

"Wait, what for?" Harry asked. "Like she said it was self defence. Ask anyone."

"We're not interested in that," the first officer snapped. "Suspicious skulking around, spying and scanning buildings, carrying archaic technology. I suppose we could add the violence to the list."

"What? None of that is true," Jessie said.

"Take it up with the Judge. You know the penalty for espionage, Federation scum," the first officer snarled.

"Espionage?" Harry stuttered. "We're not... You've got the wrong idea."

The second security officer gestured to his people with a nod. They paired up all while keeping their guns trained on each of the team members and the two men. Tricorders and a phaser were snatched with no issue other than a scowl from James.

"Hmm, did you think this junk..." the first security officer sneered while retrieving a tricorder from one of his people, "would be too primitive to be noticed? Clever, but not enough. Where did you get them?"

Two more officers approached dragging Emma with them. "We found another one Captain. I caught her tampering with the jukebox."

"No I'm Liger, and I was trying to find a good song. Flush your ears asshole!" Emma spat at the one who spoke.

"Right? Another one from the stone age. At least you're consistent," the first officer chuckled. "Take them to the penitentiary. You can discuss this with the Judge."

### **Voyager:**

Kathryn stood near the window in the Conference Room, staring at the planet below as if it were a crewmember she was scolding. What was left of her senior staff waited and worried.

"Tell me something," she said after a long five minutes, "how is it that no matter what the mission, where it is, we still manage to balls it up? We've only been here an hour."

*"Some good luck, I suppose, well apart from Harry's case,"* Tom's voice said.

Kathryn's stare hardened despite him not being in the room, and it being directed at the planet. Everyone assumed he'd still be able to feel it.

"No smart alacky remarks, Mr Paris. I'm not in the mood for them," she growled. The planet finally got a breather as she turned around and leaned on the back of her chair. "Chakotay, there better be a damn good explanation as to how more than half of your team were arrested."

Outside the building James had scanned earlier, Tom shuddered and looked up at the sky. Chakotay only saw his reaction in the corner of his eye.

"Rumours circulating the market place was that they were all accused of being Federation spies," he replied while shaking his head.

*"Federation spies? I knew it, it's a trick,"* Kathryn's voice groaned.

Chakotay nodded knowingly, "the technology here is far more advanced than anything we have. My theory is that it isn't a Human planet, but with the arrests that theory's out the window."

Tom turned to him with a mixture of confusion and judgement on his face. "Hang on. That only proves we were right. The Ligers are very secretive with their tech when it comes to us. Of course they'd hide from us again."

Chakotay sighed impatiently, "Emma is a Liger, which I'm sure she can prove." He looked towards the building, currently guarded by two men with sophisticated looking phaser rifles. "They escorted our people into one of the shielded structures we came down to investigate. That can't be a coincidence."

"Maybe we should have done more research before sending an away team," Craig muttered. Kathryn leaned on the table in front of him and she fixed her most lethal death glare on him.

"If I want your input, I will ask you for it, understood!" Kathryn yelled.

"Yes... ma'am," Craig stuttered. Everyone cringed, except Kathryn who instead darkened her stare. "Captain."

"So the people down there are Human with similar Human structures, but they're neither Human nor Liger?" Tuvok questioned.

"I don't think we should rule out Liger. Emma could say she was one but so could we; we know enough about their technology to convince them, and they still are technically Human," Kathryn said.

"But what about their very Starfleet looking ships?" the Doctor questioned.

Kathryn scoffed, "it wouldn't be the first time someone was able to disguise one of their ships as one of ours. As Paris said, they tend to hide from us, what better way?"

"Oh I dunno, not luring us to their planet thinking we've found our people and a way home," B'Elanna said, risking the wrath of Kathryn.

Fortunately Kathryn wasn't mad, she looked thoughtful. "You're right. And why arrest our people and not confront us. Surely they must know we're here in that case."

The comm beeped. "*Janeway to the Bridge, please.*"

Kathryn wasn't surprised, "and there it is. Dismissed."

Everyone hurried out through the same door to get to the Bridge. Craig took over Opps, while B'Elanna manned Jessie's station. The senior staff let the unknown crewmember at the helm remain at her post for the time being.

"What is it?" Kathryn asked a Lieutenant returning to the back stations from Tactical. She froze, fearful for no reason Kathryn could understand.

The blonde female crewmember at the helm responded, "a couple ships are approaching, they're scanning us."

Kathryn stared into the back of her head, puzzled. "Hmm. Since they're closer, can we get a better look at them?"

Craig shook his head, "no, nothing's getting through their shields. I can put them on screen though."

Kathryn nodded, so he made the command to change the viewscreen. Flying directly toward the bow of Voyager; two massive silver vessels with the signature Starfleet saucer section design. Neither of them had the usual warp drives, instead the stern of each ship looked bare with only a strobing blue light on both sides, one of which looked like Voyager's stern if its warp nacelles had fallen off during a warp flight. As it approached it looked more like Voyager ten times the size with its nacelles replaced with phaser cannons pointed at them.

"They've erm, sent us a message, one way only," Craig stuttered.

"Fine, lets hear it."

*"Federation ship, leave orbit or we'll be forced to destroy you. Your spies have been captured so I'd suggest you'd better leave this system before we kill them."*

"Captain, I'd suggest against an armed confrontation," Tuvok warned. Kathryn walked over, eyeing him curiously. "I cannot predict what their weapon and shield capabilities are, but I surmise if they are able to deflect our sensors, it would be wise to err on the side of caution."

Kathryn sighed. She tapped her commbadge. "Janeway to Johnstone. Lilly, I need your input up here, now."

As soon as they were brought into the mystery building the team were separated, each into windowless rooms with the door locked. Harry was strong-armed out first. Then pulled into a dark room furnished with only a table and two chairs. The guards forced him to sit in front of an imposing security officer he'd been told was only known as the Judge, carrying what appeared to be a PADD in his hand.

"Look, you've got the wrong idea. This is a huge misunderstanding," Harry said.

The Judge turned the PADD around to show him it. Harry's face drained at the image of Voyager lurking behind the moon.

"I don't suppose you can explain what this is," the Judge said.

Harry struggled to answer. "I'm not sure I understand. What do you think it is?"

The Judge stared intensely at him. "Wise guy, huh. Fine, stop me if I get a detail wrong. This is another one of the Federation's foolish plans to get us off this planet. They bring out one of their ancient junk ships from the museum, dress it up, and put it into orbit around our planet. They want us to think it's harmless but it's really a ticking time bomb, which could go off with one torpedo fire."

"What?" Harry stuttered.

"Is that not true? Which part?" the Judge said.

Harry hesitantly shook his head, "all of it so far."

"Inside is an old warp core, very fragile. One strike from us would detonate it," the Judge said.

"No, no, we're not your enemy. We only came here to look for supplies, we didn't know you were here until we entered the system," Harry said.

Harry assumed from the Judge's expression that he wasn't convinced. "Where did you get that ship? What are you intending to do with it? Will it breach if we go near it, is it rigged to explode? Our scientists believe that a warp core detonation could destabilise the moon's orbit, that could cause flooding across each continent. Tell us, if that is your plan, the Federation sinks to a new low."

"Why would the Federation want you off this planet?" Harry asked.

"I was hoping one of you could tell me. We have been able to elude you for decades," the Judge said.

Harry started to stammer, "we're not who you think we are. We are from your past, probably hundreds of years ago. If you look up the USS Voyager you'll know at least that it went missing in the Bad..."

The Judge's face tensed. "I see you're going to keep up this charade. Very well, I'll just have to get my answers from your teammates, by any means necessary."

Harry's arms were grabbed by the guards. "Wait," he panicked, "don't waste your time. This is clearly a huge misunderstanding and I know why, they don't. You'll only get more of the same."

The Judge hinted to the guards to let him go, they did. "So you claim you're not Starfleet?"

"I am, but my team aren't. One is a passenger, she's a Liger refugee we picked up," Harry said, hoping he would bite. He didn't change his expression, nothing happened. "The others are ex Marquis..."

"I don't think so," the Judge grunted disapprovingly. Harry frowned, confused once more. "We have a record of all our operatives, current or deserters. If they betrayed us, we'd know who they are. They'd be high on our records."

"Wait, what?" Harry stammered, "you're Marquis?"

Judge smirked, gesturing the guards to take him. "I'm done humouring you. Take him into the detention centre, then bring me the next one."

"No, I'm their superior," Harry stuttered as he was dragged out.

Soon it was Jessie's turn to be hauled out of her cell and sat at the table. The rough push onto the chair made her stomach turn, she tried to will it still all while her face paled.

"So, are you supposed to be the Marquis or the Liger dinosaur?" the Judge asked.

Her nausea was briefly masked by anger, "what, are you calling me old?"

The Judge chuckled, "so Liger then."

"That's it," Jessie hissed, the guards kept a hold of her shoulders to keep her down. That motion unsettled her stomach again. "Ugh fine, I was a Marquis years ago. I dunno why or how you'd know that though."

"That's interesting, we have no record of you. How long ago did you betray us?" the Judge snarled.

Jessie stared at him blankly. "Eh, the Marquis are still around? I heard they were wiped out."

"I'm sure that's what you'd like to happen, but not even close," the Judge said to her confusion. "You know the real reason we arrested you right, what the penalty is?"

"No. Two perverts started a fight, we ended it," Jessie said.

"Picking a fight with two known troublemakers wasn't a good cover, I agree," the Judge said. He shook his head, disappointed. "I suppose you'll deny having any involvement with this trap sitting in orbit," he gestured to the PADD. "All of you were on it, our scans confirm that. What is it's purpose?"

"Purpose? Look, I have no idea what's going on here. We were only trying to find out how other Humans got here, but clearly that was a bad idea cos you're paranoid nutters," Jessie said.

"Paranoid? We're not dragging 400 year old rust buckets out of retirement and hiding them next to our enemies moons," the Judge snarled.

Jessie looked on in shock, "400 years? Oh... right, so the future. Marquis, what are we rebelling against now?"

Judge groaned very impatiently, "take her to the detention centre. Bring in the other girl first, she's drunk, she may be more forthcoming."

The Judge was soon regretting that choice. He stared straight ahead of him looking bored with his chin resting within his palm.

"Oh, Harry's cute isn't he? Got a cute little butt, pinchable," Emma slurred. She gasped as if she realised something, "oh, do you have one of those giant fan things. You can toss someone in there, turn it on and go vroom, all gone. It'd be so much fun."

While she daydreamed about that, the Judge tried to get a word in. "What does any of that have to do with all your secrecy in the pub?"

"Wasn't that secretly, I just told them I was 316 years old and they gave me the pint," Emma said, looking at him as if he were stupid. "Dunno if you're sitting on a stick stuck up your bum, but you really gotta stop being so suspicious."

"I don't believe you," the Judge tried to interrupt her.

"Do I look like I give a shi..." Emma laughed, then burped.

"Guard, make sure you sedate her before taking her to the detention centre," the Judge sighed.

Guard 1 looked worried, "er, we're all out."

"Out? We haven't used any today. How can we be out?" Judge snapped.

"We had to, the last prisoner. He broke out and..." guard 1 answered.

"What? You used the daily allotted sedative on one prisoner?" Judge said.

Emma giggled, eyes lighting up, "oh did it hurt?"

"Not exactly sir," guard 1 said, flinching.

The Judge followed the guard outside, while the other kept an eye on Emma. Not far down the corridor he noticed several other security officers lying or sitting, scattered all over with medical personnel tending to them. Further down James sat, slouched against the wall, drifting in and out of consciousness, with one of the future rifles still lying in his loose grip.

"They must've opened the door to bring him to you for interrogation," guard 1 said.

The Judge groaned impatiently. "You bunch of incompetents. Dump him straight into the detention centre while he's still out."

"But, there's no one left to interrogate," guard 1 reminded him.

"That's okay. Voyager will mount a rescue, if they don't we still have the two other spies in the city. Find them," the Judge smiled.

**Voyager:**

Lilly looked at the viewscreen in disbelief, then at the impatient waiting Captain. "I don't know what you want me to say."

"Are they your ships?" Kathryn growled.

"No," Lilly scoffed. "They're dull grey, none of my ships would go out like that."

"I didn't realise Jessie was in charge of ship design," Craig commented.

Kathryn narrowed her eyes, he was none of the wiser since her back was on him. Lilly though found it amusing, "why would you think they're Liger ships? They're clearly yours."

"Yes clearly. They've threatened us and arrested four of our people. Clearly they're ours," Kathryn snapped.

Lilly rolled her eyes, "well maybe you should have started with that." Kathryn ground her teeth, steam rose. "Wait, you thought they were Liger because of that? You do remember why we hid from you people right?" Lilly said with a lot of offense.

"Yes I realise that, but there's no explanation. They're far more advanced, human lifesigns and shield two buildings from scanners, one of which our people are in. Also we didn't even see them until we were on their doorstep. That's the Ligers MO isn't it?"

"Oh," Lilly said, concerned. "Well maybe..." She shook her head, "no. Our only remaining ship travelled to your dimension, to your time so our technology would be pretty much even now. There's no way they colonised a planet in a few months, and built new ships too."

"Then you know what that leaves us with Captain," Tuvok said.

Kathryn's eyes darted from side to side, "no."

Tuvok's brow raised, "yes you do, you just don't want to accept it."

"No," Kathryn said a little more forcefully. "I don't care if they're aliens posing as us, unless you're implying it's 8472. I'm not doing that one!"

B'Elanna smirked in her direction, "well Chakotay is on one of the teams." Kathryn stared at her with a twitching eyebrow. That only made her laugh. "It's pretty clear what happened. Voyager hit something on the way here, and then this planet's suddenly colonised by advanced humans. We've jumped into the future."

The time travel headache quickly throbbled into existence, making Kathryn wince and crave coffee. "No."

"You just like saying that," Craig commented.

Kathryn scowled at him, "no..." Everyone smirked. "Then why contact and threaten us, why arrest our people? If they're future humans, why aren't they following the temporal prime directive? If it's true, then they would have brought our people back to us and if they could, send us back. If not, then warn us away without the death threats."

"Hmm, you say that they shield some of their buildings. I assume you meant like we did with the tower?" Lilly mused aloud. Kathryn's staring at her she took as a yes. "Then I might be able to help with that."

"But you said it's not Liger, how do you know it'll work the same way?" Craig asked.

"That's why I said might. The principle should be the same," Lilly replied.

Craig's console beeped, he looked down at it, instantly panicking. "Captain. Someone's transporting to the surface near the building."

"Who?" Kathryn asked.

"Uh Seven, I mean Annika," Craig replied while frowning.

Kathryn groaned loudly and rolled her eyes halfway then back. "Of course. Hail her." Craig did as he was told and gave her a nod. "Janeway to Seven of Nine, what the hell are you up to?"

*"I have the perfect rescue plan. Leave it to me."*

"Mind sharing it with us?" Kathryn hissed.

*"Shhh, I'm approaching the side entrance. They mustn't see me."*

The turbolift doors opened, Morgan hurried out. "Mum, I used up all my rations and Kiara stole my last sandwich."

*"Hey, what are you doing?"*

*"That woman's trying to sneak inside. She must be a Marquis."*

*"Seize her."*

Kathryn struggled not to laugh, she did so by biting her bottom lip. Morgan wasn't sure what happened and was looking around all confused.

*"Oh you rotten girl..."* Annika's voice groaned. They heard hurried footsteps, then a scuffle. *"No, no. I took a wrong turn. Hey watch where you're putting that."*

*"Eew, its plastic."*

*"Stop resisting ma'am, you're... what's this?"* There was a little more scuffling, some grunts and Annika huffing. *"What's this?"*

*"Er..."* Annika said, then it went silent. *"My makeup? It's a, um new brand of lipstick."* More silence, until she started to whine. *"I'd show you but I'm already wearing it, see. Ohno I wouldn't..."* A man screamed, Annika giggled. *"Couldn't you buy me a nutritional supplement first...? Ohno, that's not good."* Another man screamed not as painfully as the last one.

*"She's a Borg. The Federation are using Borg viruses again. Get her."* Bangs mixed in with the scuffle sounds.

The comm cut off, disappointing everyone but a confused Lilly. "Maybe you should beam her back before they take her in," she suggested.

Kathryn's humour faded from her face leaving only an emotionless mask. Her eyes though drilled into the girl. Kathryn groaned and looked at Tuvok. "Temporal prime directive, it applies. Can't do anything."

"Not entirely. If we're correct, they're the ones responsible for maintaining their temporal timeline. They're interfering with their own past by arresting our people. Our rescue shouldn't interfere in our own," Tuvok said.

"Oh of course! Craig, can you?" Kathryn irritably asked.

Craig looked confused, "they're not taking her in. They're dragging her to the middle of the square in front of it. Oh... her commbadge signal's gone, I'm not sure which one's her."

"That's too bad," Kathryn said. Lilly stared at her strangely, Kathryn stared blankly back. "Is there anyway we can watch?"

"Why, so you can see which one is her and save her?" Lilly questioned suspiciously.

"Who do you think I am!" Kathryn roared in her face.

"Ookay, I'm sure there will be security cameras around an area like this. Try that..." Lilly said.

Kathryn was already in her seat tapping at the side computer. The viewscreen showed the town square. People were gathering around a raised platform with a metal beam at its centre. Security were dragging Annika to it, the crowd jeered at her. They began to tie her to the post.

The helmsgirl giggled, "oh after this, see if there are any CCTV cameras near a bedroom window or something."

"Oh, that's Danny. I thought I recognised that voice..." Kathryn said, shrugging that off so she could sit comfortably and watch.

"Captain we should be able to get a lock on her now," Tuvok said as the guards backed away from Annika.

"Hmm, I don't fancy beaming that thing into my ship. Could ruin it," Kathryn said.

"Are you talking about the pole?" Lilly asked.

Kathryn smiled, "sure."

"This woman has been found guilty of bio terrorism!" a guard announced to the crowd. Everyone boomed as other security people piled wood around Annika's feet. "For this she shall be sentenced to death. Doing this we send a message to the barbaric Federation; we will not be intimidated. The New Marquis have arisen and we will have our freedom!"

He was met with deafening cheers. Annika tried to say something, she repeated it until they settled down. "Don't you think burning me alive is barbaric? I'm not even Federation, I'm unique."

"Oh relax, it's just for show. Gotta keep up the morale," guard 1 whispered to her. He noticed a few guards rushing off, leaving one behind who walked up to him. They whispered as well into his ear. "Okay, maybe we should pretend to postpone it till evening until we replace the wood. Just be careful not to set it off."

The crowd and Voyager were murmuring curiously, not sure what was going on. The guard faced the audience to address them. The other guard hurriedly tried to leave but tripped over one of the bits of wood, sparking a small fire which rapidly spread around Annika. He ran off panicked.

"Oh for... Everyone leave quickly, somebody tossed this woman's "lipstick" into the kindling. We don't want people turning into Borgs," the guard groaned.

Everyone ran for cover. The guard did as well, leaving Annika trying to put out the fire by frantically blowing on it. Then she looked up as if she just heard him, "wait, my hypospray. Ohno. The nanoprobe serum will react violently to fla..."

Most of the Bridge cringed at a loud bang, flames took over the entire screen before it turned to static.

Morgan winced, "well, that was..."

"Disappointing. That... we er, couldn't save her in time," Kathryn said. Everyone looked at her. "Bring Chakotay and Tom back, it's too dangerous to be there. We need a way to beam through that shield. Lilly."

"Sure," Lilly said uneasily.

Two guards escorted Emma through corridors lined with mostly empty cells. The ones occupied weren't being restrained by anything, nor were they locked in by bars or a forcefield. They did though look nervously at the armed guards walking by.

They stepped into one of the occupied ones and pushed her inside. Annoyed she spun around to confront them only to get the sharp weapons pointed at her. It didn't have to touch her to give her an electric static shock that left her with a crippling headache. They walked off afterwards.

"Oh thank god, a sane roommate," Jessie sighed in relief.

Emma looked at her. Her headache was still there, but she still widened her eyes quite a bit and giggled. "Oh help me go after them and grab those weapons. I'm gonna stick it up their asshole and watch them explode."

Jessie stared blankly, then she looked at the other person in the cell. A human woman sitting on one of the beds, twirling her sloppy mashed potato into a rabbit with a grin on her face. "Never mind, it's just me," Jessie said.

"Huh? I'm sane," Emma said in an innocent voice. "How come we can leave whenever we want in this jail? There's no lock or anything."

Jessie scoffed, "I've been in a place like this before. It's free reign, so they hope they can cull the numbers if the prisoners kill each other." She winced as Emma widened her eyes further, "that's not a suggestion."

A group of five women walked by the cell. One looked inside, snickered and told the others to double back to the door.

"Oh look, it's the new ones," she sneered.

"What did you do then?" another, tall with long straggly red hair asked and not sympathetically.

"I was drunk, and they thought that she was a spy," Emma replied.

"Oh, thanks a lot," Jessie muttered.

"A spy, that is interesting," the red haired woman said. The others laughed.

"She isn't though. She's a marccy, aren't ya Jess?" Emma said.

"Marquis and yeah so what?" Jessie muttered.

Two of the girls who hadn't said anything yet approached Emma. "You could do us a big favour," the pretty brunette with an innocent face whispered.

"Why, I don't know you," Emma said as she walked over to Jessie's side.

"Oh, it's a favour for you as well. Your roommate, we all hate her. You could off her for us," the brunette sneered maliciously. It looked very strange coming from an angelic face.

Jessie looked a little worried as Emma smiled at that. "I'll be right back," she laughed and ran off. Despite that the women at the door let her go, all while smirking.

"So what about this one then? The spy," the first woman said.

"I doubt she'd be any use. She looks like a goody two shoes who's probably married with kids," the red head sneered.

Jessie rolled her eyes. "Ohno, I can't join the *too edgy* for girl scouts club? I guess I'll have to find someone else to paint my nails blood red and write blood thirsty vampire falls for an idiot fanfiction with."

The brunette looked a little shocked, but laughed it off mockingly. "Oh, this one think she's witty." The other women sniggered amongst themselves. The brunette approached looking Jessie straight in the eye to try and unnerve her. "What should we do with her?"

"Well mashed potatoes here thought she was clever too. What ain't broke," a short haired blonde said in a matter of fact tone. "Spy's friend can use her for initiation in a few weeks time."

Both the women's expressions faded away as Jessie didn't even react, she looked almost bored. She pretended to look shocked at that, "oh I'm sorry, were the threats over? I forgot to not worry."

All of the women gathered around her, boxing her into the cell. Still she didn't look too bothered about it. The brunette and blonde tried to lunge forward to grab her arms, Jessie pushed the brunette away but had no time to stop the blonde grasping her arm and pushing her into the wall.

Other prisoners began to gather around the doorway, eager to watch the fight.

Laughing, two other women closed in to deliver blows while the blonde attempted to hold her still. One was kicked in the knee and so backed off, but she was replaced by the final two, one of which punched her in the belly.

While the pain took her breath away, the hit itself flipped the temper switch. Jessie swung up the arm that was being held so her hand would smash into the woman's face, then she stamped on the woman who hit her last on the side of her leg so hard she screeched and fell to the floor.

Despite this the rest of the women continued attempting to deliver punches and kicks, Jessie more than repaid them and it didn't take more than a few minutes for her to be the only one left standing. Two of the women hurried out of the cell, one with a swollen eye and the other with a busted lip. Two others had similar injuries, but were determined to pay her back for them. The one with the leg stamped on was too busy crying on the ground.

Jessie wasn't that much better off. Her own lip was cut and bleeding, her face felt like it was on fire with how many times they struck her there. The knuckles on her right hand were sore and bleeding. What bothered her the most was the throbbing pain below her stomach, she feared the worst and instinctively clutched it with her left arm.

Outside Emma hurried back. "This dumb place doesn't have a kitchen so..." then she spotted the crowds blocking her way, then some of the injured women trying to get through them. "What happened?"

"Your bitch of a friend, this isn't over," the brunette snarled.

"Who?" Emma laughed, "oh her, Jess something. I thought she was a kill joy softie. Way to go."

She was scowled at for that as they pushed by her. Emma shrugged it off and tried to get through the gaps they left, but they were quickly closed up seconds after they were through. "Aaaw."

Meanwhile only a few corridors down two male prisoners were standing over James, still unconscious from earlier on one of the cell beds. "Why would he have anything, he just got in?" one asked.

The other scoffed, "dude, the moron tried to shoot his way out, that's why he's like this."

Harry overheard as he passed by, he carefully hid around the wide door frame and peered in.

"So? They'd take the gun off him," the first man said.

"Your loss man," the second man sniggered. He walked forward and reached to check his jacket. Unfortunately for him that was when James woke up.

Harry widened his eyes and backed away in time for the same man to stumble backwards through the door and fall back first into the opposite cell. The other guy ran out in a hurry, purposefully shoving Harry out of his way as he did.

"What I wouldn't give for Shooty right now," Harry muttered. He was about to walk into the cell when James stepped out instead looking more than a little annoyed, if a bit groggy too.

"So is it just you?" he asked.

Harry scowled, "oh hi, you're okay, I'm fine too." James shook his head and walked off without him. Harry reluctantly followed. "Hey, this is a jail. We shouldn't split up."

The sound of jeering and other shouting ahead got both of their attention. Harry looked worried. "Do you hear that?" James asked.

"Yeah we should go the opposite..." Harry said. He growled as his teammate continued in the same direction anyway. He ran after him after some grumbling.

They didn't have to go far to see where the noise was coming from. The crowds outside Jessie and Emma's cell were getting rowdier; cheering and booing. One more of the women pushed her way out through the crowds to run off holding her bleeding nose.

"It's just a typical prison fight. Can we..." Harry called out from behind James.

James' face tensed at the sound of a familiar voice. He didn't stop and instead tried to get through them. Harry hesitated as the crowd began to disperse. He cautiously approached, while James pushed his way to the cell.

Jessie limped up to the door, grasping the wall with her left while her sore right clutched her stomach. "Jess, oh god..." James stammered as he offered an arm to give her some support. Her sore bleeding hand shakily took a hold of his arm.

"It's okay, I handled it," Jessie said, still with some anger in her voice.

They walked out slowly into the much quieter corridor. Jessie didn't feel up to going any further, and chose to lean her left side against one of the walls in between cells. James took the opportunity to look back over his shoulder into her cell, where the woman still sobbed over her leg.

"So I see," James couldn't help but smile proudly.

As he turned his head back he heard Jessie gasp. He only got a split second glimpse of her shocked and pained face before she tumbled forward towards the ground. James quickly caught her mid fall with both arms, one around her back. That hand he immediately noticed was hot and soaking wet.

Carefully he lowered her down to lie on the ground, with her head and shoulders propped up by the other arm, while the other shakily moved around to keep a still and firm press against her back.

Harry and Emma gathered around, as were a few other stragglers. Harry noticed Jessie's eyes were closed, her head limped to one side. "Ohno," he stuttered.

"No, no, no..." James started to panic, Harry assumed he noticed the same. "Somebody get some help, she...!" Cruel laughter from his left interrupted him.

James slowly looked around to see who was doing it. Only a few feet away stood the drunk from the bar, delivering a wink in his direction, holding a bloodied shiv the size of a phaser. He tossed it in front of him so it would land halfway between him and Jessie.

"Competition's out of the way. What do you say sweet cheeks?" he said cooly with a smile.

**Voyager:**

Lilly groaned so loud from frustration her fringe vibrated in the breeze. "No, it's not a cloak. It's a signal disrupter. It uses their shield against them and..."

Tom grinned and winked at her, "say no more. Let's rock 'n' roll." He dashed for the helm.

Kathryn stared daggers into his back. "Wait!" she barked while he was rubbing his back as if it were literal. "Will it work on their ships too? As soon as we head back into orbit they're going to confront us."

"No, it's a Tolg adapt to differing frequencies situation. It'll be a waste of time. Besides why would you fly back the same way you came? Space is huge, fly another way around," Lilly scoffed.

Tom sniggered obnoxiously. Kathryn frowned at him, "I dunno why you're laughing. You're the moron who thinks evasive maneuvers means fly in a straight line."

Chakotay cleared his throat. "Okay so to sum up; we sneak to the planet, raise our rotating shields, fly down into the city and..."

"Uh, I'm detecting that dust cloud that we passed on the way here. We're in the middle of it," Craig nervously said.

Tom sighed, disappointed. "I guess we'll never know."

"Again, what..." Kathryn stuttered.

Chakotay's eyes widened in shock, "look," he pointed at the viewscreen. The image of the planet and the two ships waiting for them in the distance blurred and twisted. When Kathryn turned to look the ships vanished leaving only the planet.

"What happened?" she asked.

"I... I'm not sure," Craig replied.

"Scan the planet," Chakotay ordered.

Craig shook his head, "nothing."

Kathryn blew a few fuses, "nothing, what do you mean there's nothing?"

"I mean, there are no lifesigns, no structures. Only plant life, it's like a jungle down there," Craig said.

"But what about our people?" Kathryn wondered.

Swear poured down poor Craig's face, he tried desperately to keep it out of his eyes. "I... I don't know. There's no one there."

Tuvok thought to rescue him before he was throttled. "Captain, five transporter signals were detected in Sickbay at the same time the anomaly occurred. We have three extra lifesigns."

"What?" Tom frowned, "five signals but only three people? What's going on down there?"

Kathryn turned to Chakotay, "get down there. I want some answers."

For once he didn't argue, he was in full agreement. "Yes Captain," he hurried for the turbolift.

**Sickbay:**

The Doctor pushed the tray with most of his tools over to the primary biobed, occasionally glancing over frantically to another occupied bed. "Mr Kim, can you see to my other patient, shouldn't be hard for you."

Harry looked around confused as he only saw B'Elanna standing around, while the Doctor tried to move James aside. He moved to the other side of the bed after his arm was touched. "Give me some space here," the Doctor barked anyway.

"What other patient?" Harry asked just as he clasped eyes on the biobed the Doctor was probably talking about. Emma was already there about to poke a stab wound. "Oh no, don't...!" he stuttered as he ran over.

The Doctor hurriedly began to scan his patient, worry lines took over his forehead. "Help me get her on her side, for god's sake keep her chin up so when I revive her she doesn't choke to death!" he ordered without looking at who it was directed at.

James instinctively reached to do what he was told but hesitated a second when he touched her. The Doctor looked up annoyed but noticed James' face turning pale and shaking, as well as blood on his hands and front. His own face softened, "it's okay, one thing at a time. Just turn her over and I'll treat this wound. Nice and gentle."

Harry glanced over nervously from the other biobed as James and the Doctor lifted Jessie's body up to place her on her side. The Doctor immediately grabbed a regenerator while James' shaking and bloodied hand went to his face.

In the corner of his eye he saw movement, his hand reached over to slap Emma's hand away from the body there. "Oh come on, he's already popped it," she complained.

Harry flinched as he laid eyes on the man's body in front of him. "I'm sorry Doc. He's dead too. What should I...?"

The Doctor's head darted up in shock, "he, who?" He was about to run over when James grabbed his arm to stop him.

"Wait you can't, Jessie needs you first," he stuttered.

"I can't prioritise one over the other," the Doctor said during an attempt to shake his hand off. He couldn't, "I have to see if I can save him too. If it were the other way around..."

James' entire frame tensed. The Doctor assumed he understood, but instead he only stared at him blankly. "Don't bother," he said coldly, "he's not worth it."

B'Elanna walked over to the other biobed, eyeing the body lying there. "Where did he even come from?" she asked, hoping Harry or Emma would answer. She noticed a couple of stab wounds and looked up at Emma. She looked offended at that. "What happened, who is he?"

"I didn't do anything, god!" Emma groaned and stomped off.

Harry laughed nervously, "yeah um, no, I was shocked too. He's from the prison, he..." He gestured his head to one side as if he were using it to point in Jessie's direction, "did that."

"Oh," B'Elanna's face fell and drained. "Maybe you guys should report to the Captain or something. I gotta finish up here." Harry looked puzzled. "I was here for a post pregnancy check up when all hell broke loose," she whispered.

Harry lightly nodded. He began to leave until he noticed Emma had gone into the Doctor's office to peer at Jessie's biobed through the glass. He sighed and went after her.

B'Elanna though found that funny, "it's never dull."

The Doctor meanwhile seemed to have finished his treatment and so lay Jessie on her back again. The over the bed scanner activated, he scanned with a regular tricorder while he was waiting. "This is troubling. Oh dear," he double checked the scanner, "we have a problem."

"What?" James asked.

"The weapon penetrated the womb, there's internal bleeding. If we revive her now before repairing the damage, the foetus will die. However I'm concerned that our chances of reviving her are slim if we put it off, every minute counts," the Doctor replied.

Any remaining colour in James' face was ancient history. He was once again shaking, "what, but... You can't..."

B'Elanna overheard the exchange and decided to walk over.

James shook his head in frustration at himself. "No, you can't decide this for her. She hasn't decided yet. She doesn't know," he stuttered, voice cracking.

"James," B'Elanna said with some sympathy, she stepped closer. "Look, that's not what he's saying. He's telling you that the baby might die if we save Jessie, but both probably will if we don't. He's not forcing any decision on you or her."

The Doctor looked across guiltily at the pair. "I'm afraid that's not correct, I am. There is another option."

James glanced at him with a tiny fleck of hope in his eyes. "What is it?"

"It's experimental, no guarantee," the Doctor warned. No one said or did anything as protest. "I prepare an artificial environment for the foetus, like a stasis unit, and transport the cells there. Then I should be able to revive Jessie. Afterwards it's a matter of finding a surrogate."

"Are you kidding?" B'Elanna scoffed, "that sounds like it would take a lot longer to do than treating her injury."

"That is a delicate operation, timely. This however was something I've been developing just in case once the crew started having children. A failsafe for something like this, but I didn't foresee a pregnancy this early, there's still a risk. It may not work but it gives the foetus an actual chance instead of nothing. Either way you choose, I need to start in five minutes," the Doctor said.

B'Elanna looked across at James staring down at the floor, his shaking fists clenched. The Doctor took the opportunity to sneak over to the other biobed to check on the other patient.

"I can't... Jessie should be the one to choose, it's her..." she heard James mumble.

"I know, but she can't. You know her well enough to decide, and you're the father aren't you?" B'Elanna whispered softly.

James shook his head, shakily sighing. "I don't... I don't know. If I choose to bring her back now, the baby dies and she decided she wanted to keep it, she'd never forgive me. I wouldn't." B'Elanna nodded, understanding. "But what if she still doesn't want it, and I choose this risky op to save them both, for nothing?"

"Not nothing," B'Elanna said with a warm smile. "It's like you say, the first treatment takes away her choice. The second one gives her the chance to make it later."

James' gaze drifted over to where Jessie lay still. His eyes glistened as he tried to hold back tears, the lump in his throat was threatening to choke him. "Yeah, you're right. Still, Doc mentioned a surrogate. If Jessie chose not to keep it, what then?"

"Worry about that later. One step at a time," B'Elanna said.

The Doctor walked back over looking glum. "The man was stabbed in the heart, it's destroyed. Horrific, who could do something like that?"

James cleared his throat but kept his gaze in the direction of the bed. "The second one," he said, getting the Doctor's attention. "We should do that one."

"Very well. I'll get to work immediately," the Doctor said.

The doors to Sickbay opened for Chakotay. He looked around as he walked in. He spotted James then Harry and Emma in the office. He walked over to them first. "Harry, I hope you have an explanation for what happened here. We have three lifesigns, five were transported aboard by persons unknown. I understand four but..."

Harry stared at him with wide, very nervous eyes, unnerving Chakotay a little. "It wasn't us. It was a Federation beam, I assumed it was you," he said.

Chakotay's brow lowered, "Harry, what's the matter with you?"

Harry shuffled over, his head darting frantically to the left to keep an eye on Sickbay itself. He lowered his voice, "we should call Security, very discreetly."

Emma pouted, "hey what? I didn't actually push that girl into a wood chipper. There wasn't any in the prison."

Chakotay and Harry slowly turned to stare at her in horror, she giggled cutely and wandered away towards the desk.

"Yeah um, do I get witness protection?" Harry said, then eyed Emma cautiously, "and Emma protection. From."

"Why?" Chakotay asked once he thought it was safe to.

Harry struggled to keep his eyes off the girl until Chakotay clicked his fingers in his face. "Oh, yeah. You want to know why we have two dead, right?"

"Yes, I see Jessie must've been one," Chakotay said carefully. "Are you worried about someone flipping out about it, or is it..." He gestured towards Emma with his chin.

"No, no. He stabbed her, in the back. This guy who was hassling them in the bar before we were arrested. So fast, I didn't have time to even warn her," Harry stuttered a lot.

"Yeah tell him it wasn't me," Emma called from the desk.

Chakotay sighed, "I never... Harry said he."

"Right. Tell that to B'Elanna," Emma said, shrugging casually as she sat down in the Doctor's seat.

"Okay so that explains Jessie. Which I already knew, kind of," Chakotay said. Harry glanced back to Sickbay. He saw that it was safe and so pointed at the other biobed. Chakotay followed his finger, it took him a second to understand. "So that's the killer. Whoever transported knew that one of our team was dead, but couldn't figure out which of the dead it was. I suppose that makes sense."

"Yeah but," Harry stammered.

"Just tell him," James said plainly from the door. Harry resulting gasp at his presence sounded more like a loud hiccup. Emma laughed at it. James shook his head, "I don't really care."

Chakotay's full attention was on him. He carefully took a step forward. "You?"

Emma's eyes lit up, she hurried forward to his side. "Oooh ooh, let me tell it."

*Only a few feet away stood the drunk from the bar, delivering a wink in his direction, holding a bloodied shiv the size of a phaser. He tossed it in front of him so it would land halfway between him and Jessie.*

*"Competition's out of the way. What do you say sweet cheeks?" he said coyly with a smile.*

*James' hand crept over to pick up the shiv as he stood. The laughter continued until his throat was grabbed, turning into a garbled mess. The shiv was then plunged over and over into his chest and...*

"Okay that's enough," Chakotay desperately interrupted.

Still Emma carried on, gesturing everything she was saying with her hands. "It was like woosh, blood everywhere. So funny and he was like aargh!"

Chakotay looked towards Harry who acted like he had seen a ghost. "What really happened, Harry?" he asked. Emma pouted again.

*James picked up the shiv, stood up and grabbed the guy by the throat. He stabbed him twice with the shiv.*

"That's... that's it?" Chakotay stuttered.

Emma blew a raspberry, "mine was so much better."

"I hate to agree. Don't give up your day job," Chakotay said.

"Yours was terrifying," Harry commented, still with his eyes wide.

Chakotay shook his head as he turned his attention back to James. "Are either of these stories true?" He only got a nod as his answer. "You know what this means, don't you?"

"I'll go to the brig myself once I know Jessie is okay," James answered.

"No, that's not how it works and you know it," Chakotay snapped. "Do you still have the weapon?"

James exhaled tiredly. He reached into the empty phaser holster on his waist to pull out the shiv. Harry and Chakotay tensed expectantly, only for him to put it on the closest surface to him and walk off.

"Wait," Chakotay blurted out. He dashed out after him, expecting him to have left. James only returned to hovering around Jessie's biobed, out of the Doctor's way. Chakotay sighed and tapped his commbadge, "Security. I need an armed team in Sickbay."

"That's not necessary," James said.

Chakotay awkwardly laughed, "you're joking? Of course it is. You don't call the shots here. You murdered a man."

The Doctor glanced over in shock. He tried to shake it off to get back on with his work.

"I just mean I won't resist. After I know, I'll go," James said.

On the closest biobed B'Elanna sat uneasily, she cleared her throat to make her presence known to the Commander. "I'll ask the Doctor to call the brig when it's over."

"B'Elanna," Chakotay warned her.

"Once he's there, what's the harm?" B'Elanna said, staring firmly at him.

"You're defending him?" Chakotay said, not really surprised but disappointed.

B'Elanna lightly shook her head, "I understand."

A Security team of four arrived and waited by the door for orders. Chakotay looked over his shoulder at them. "Please escort Mr Taylor to the brig."

"Aye sir," the team leader said, stepping forward.

The team followed him over to where James stood. He stared at them without budging, prompting them all to reach for their phasers. He let out a tired groan, "fine." He walked with them towards the door.

Once he was gone Chakotay let out a worried sigh, "The Captain's not going to be happy about this."

### **The Bridge:**

"Captain," Tuvok said. As he expected he was growled at. "A ship is approaching from our stern. They're hailing us."

"On screen," Kathryn ordered.

The changed view did nothing to help her mood, although it did ease her headache slightly. "Oh. Captain Sheepdog."

The woman on the screen twitched, her crew laughed quietly. "Shepard."

"Sure," Kathryn groaned. "Captain Jackie Shepard of the Aroma, I remember fine."

"Erona," the whole bridge corrected her.

Tom smiled, "I don't think I have to ask what brings our time traveling guardians here."

"You mean guardian angels," Will said smugly.

"No, I really don't," Tom said, "and I was being sarcastic too."

Jacqueline elbowed her annoying first officer off screen. "We detected a paradox within five seconds after we returned from our last visit..."

"Of course," Kathryn grunted.

"Yes," Jacqueline said with similar bitterness. "So we hopped back, only to find you weren't there. It took my crew of highly trained morons five hours to figure out that not only did we swap places with you, but that was what caused the paradox we detected."

Tom laughed, "why break a habit of a lifetime, or in your case career."

"Hey," an Erona crewmember objected. One peered into view, "that's not entirely true. It was meant to..." Jacqueline shushed him.

"So, since this is your error, I assume you're here to fix your mess. I have somebody on board who is very likely from your time, dead. And knowing us, probably shouldn't be because we weren't supposed to be there," Kathryn said.

Chakotay cleared his throat as he entered the Bridge. She glared, "I was getting to that, you prissy piece of sh...!"

"He attacked a member of our crew. Jessie, she's critical so..." Chakotay interrupted anyway.

Jacqueline looked more than a little shifty, she side stepped off screen. Will stumbled in her place, he was as shocked as everyone on Voyager. "I'm tired of being the face of these screw ups, you tell them!" they heard Jacqueline grumble, "I'm on break."

"Uh," Will stammered, melting under Kathryn's gaze. "John, what was it again?"

The man who spoke up earlier groaned, "as I was trying to explain before the Captain told me to be quiet. The paradox wasn't caused by us swapping times with you. It was caused by not doing it. Doing so fixed it."

Kathryn's head throbbed, "what does that even mean?"

"It was supposed to happen, duh," Will smirked. He saw her face and ran off screen again, leaving John on his own.

"It means that there's nothing to fix..." John answered carefully, "but er, how did you end up with one of our people? How did that happen?"

Vicky appeared on the bridge, grinning excitedly, "oh oh, is James there?"

John groaned, and he wasn't the only one. "We were only meant to transport four."

"Yeah well, Will said to aim for a corpse and I found two so..." Vicky said.

"Tell us where he is, and we'll beam him to our ship," John said, almost whimpering. Vicky looked hopeful. "No! The dead one. We'll return his body to his family."

"The morgue I assume," Kathryn said, twitching slightly. "So let me get this straight. We were supposed to provoke tensions between Starfleet and this New Marquis, kidnap one of your dead prisoners, and return home with a dying crewmember?"

"Well... sorta," John stuttered nervously.

"Sorta?" Kathryn hissed.

John glanced briefly to one side, "we got him, thanks Voyager. Gotta go." The viewscreen turned off in time to see the Erona turn around and head for a portal.

"That doesn't make any sense," Kathryn grumbled.

"Maybe they really don't like the dude who died," Tom said, carefully weighing his words for once. Kathryn glared at him anyway for it so he finished his thought, "or maybe Jessie was the future dictator of the galaxy and her dying will avoid that?"

"Really?" Kathryn snapped.

Tom winced, "no, I'm joking. If one of our own enslaved the universe, it'd be you."

"I wouldn't take their word for it. The Erona crew are pretty incompetent, you remember the last time it was our interference that resolved the paradox they caused. The only thing they said that was probably right was the mistake they made," Chakotay said.

"True, but that doesn't help us with Jessie does it?" Kathryn said.

"I'm sure the Doctor has a handle on it. In the meantime, can I talk to you and Tuvok, alone?" Chakotay questioned. Kathryn had a mix of curious and annoyed on her face, it made her look a little bewildered. Tuvok also looked across, eyebrow raising. "It's about the murdered con."

"Murdered?" Tuvok said, a touch alarmed.

Kathryn's eyes drifted over to him, also surprised. "Another prisoner, or are we just making sure our bases are covered?"

Chakotay hesitated to answer with everyone listening in. "Follow me," he repeated with no room to argue. He made his way to the turbolift. "I'll explain on the way."

"All right. Paris," Kathryn said then groaned. Tom was more than offended by that. "Craig, er... No. Fine, Tom you babysit the bridge. Try not to break it." She wandered after Chakotay, Tuvok followed her.

"No respect, I tell ya," Tom huffed.

### **The Brig:**

Kathryn marched inside, making the poor guards nearly wet themselves. She barely had to point, they were already running out of the door. Tuvok and Chakotay had to dodge them to get in.

James sat on the bed with his feet up on it, hands resting on his raised knees. He turned his head to look at his visitors.

Kathryn's face hardened at the sight. "On your feet, Ensign," she barked. Even Tuvok flinched.

To his and Chakotay's relief, James for once didn't argue. He put his feet down and stood up to face her.

"Do you have any idea what you've done, the mess you've made? And I don't want your sarcasm or attitude," Kathryn snapped.

"Yes. I don't deny it," James replied calmly, with a straight face.

Tuvok thought to chime in before the situation got any uglier. "Voyager slipped through a temporal anomaly. The planet we visited was only populated because we were 400 years into our future. The man you killed..."

James' blank demeanour twitched for a moment. Anger was in his eyes. "That *man* murdered an innocent woman from the past. In cold blood, for no reason."

Kathryn raised her voice to a sharp scolding, "but you had a reason. Is that your point, your only defence?"

"I wouldn't call it a defence," James answered. "It is my reason though, yes."

"You understand a crime this serious requires a serious punishment. You will need to be tried first, of course..." Tuvok said.

"No need, I did it," James interrupted him. "And I'd do it again."

Kathryn's anger nearly bubbled over the surface. She gestured to Tuvok and Chakotay to leave. Chakotay didn't look happy about it, "Captain?"

"I'll be fine," Kathryn quietly said. Chakotay and Tuvok exchanged similar worried glances before stepping back out, leaving Kathryn to study her prisoner in awkward silence.

After a few minutes of that she spoke in a softer tone, "I understand why you did it. But I can't go easy on you. You understand?"

"Of course," James said as if he agreed.

Kathryn's sigh sounded disappointed. "You really make this difficult. You want to be punished, don't you?"

"No," James answered to her surprise, "but I didn't want to keep this to myself."

"Is that because Harry and Emma saw you do it?" Kathryn asked.

"Not really. I would've still told someone," James said with no hesitation.

"Why? Normally killers deny, they hide it," Kathryn said, a little confused and starting to doubt what he was saying.

James' expression once again cracked, this time his features softened. "Because I don't regret it."

Kathryn's suspicions rose further. "That doesn't make sense. You can not regret it and still choose to lie about it to avoid punishment. You're not covering for anyone, are you?"

"You'd think I'd cover for Harry relapsing from his phaser bloodlust, or Emma? Or are you suggesting Jessie killed him when she was already dead?" James said with clear sarcasm, his face was back to blank though.

"That's it. You think Jessie won't make it, so it doesn't matter now," Kathryn said. James didn't answer vocally. Doing that though did give her, her answer. "It's not your fault."

"You weren't there," James blurted out angrily.

Kathryn nodded knowingly. "You're right, but I don't need to have been there to know it wasn't because of you. I know you, if you could've stopped her murder, you would."

"Clearly you don't know me," James muttered bitterly.

His remark took Kathryn aback for a second. She shook it off. "I do. I'm aware of how much you care about her. You put her life over your own, I've seen it many times. Still, it shouldn't mean you give up because she's gone."

"She was, is pregnant," James said with his voice cracking.

Kathryn recoiled a bit from the shock of it. She started to stammer, "I see. She is... Is it yours?"

James glanced to his right, avoiding eye contact. "We, she hadn't decided yet. I had to take her choice away. I could lose them both if I chose wrong."

Kathryn's shoulders slumped, her right eye burned and glistened. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be," James quietly said. He turned around to sit back down. "I mess everything up. Do what you got to."

### **The Ready Room:**

"We can't keep him in the brig until we get home, or worse, when he dies," Chakotay said, glancing up at Tuvok standing beside his chair.

"Nor can we house arrest him like Mr Suder. The situation is very different," he pointed out. "Taylor also has proved capable enough to escape such confines."

Chakotay sighed and sat back to de-tense his shoulders, it didn't work. "Well those are our only options, realistically anyway. We can't avoid punishing him." He looked across at Kathryn on the other side of the desk, looking lost in thought. "Captain?"

"There is the option of building a second brig for him. Then we'd have the primary one for emergencies," Tuvok suggested.

"Maybe but," Chakotay said, grimacing, "the thing we've got to consider too is if he's a threat to the crew." Both of Tuvok's eyes raised quizzically. "I'm not saying we should let him go with a *don't do it*

*again*, but like you said, he isn't Suder. He killed at random, for a mundane reason. James did it out of grief, and unless someone on this ship kills her again he won't re-offend.

"We talked about this last time regarding Suder too; we only have a few people on this ship, and we can't afford to lose anyone."

"How would you suggest we punish him then, Commander?" Tuvok questioned. "No matter the reason for it, he took a man's life and broke the temporal prime directive doing so."

"To be fair, he wasn't the only one. The prisoner murdered Jessie first, a woman from 400 years ago in his perspective. Even just one person could have a massive effect on that many years of history, who knows what damage he'd cause to his present if Jessie doesn't survive," Chakotay said.

Kathryn's eyes drifted in his direction and back again.

Tuvok nodded, "indeed. However the Erona stated that..."

Chakotay scoffed and struggled not to smirk. "I would take anything they said with a pinch of salt. If they say Jessie was supposed to go into the future, get stabbed and nearly or actually die, then I'm going to believe the opposite. They screwed up and don't want to admit it, or bother fixing it."

Kathryn sighed loudly, getting both Commanders' attention. "He wants us to lock him up for this, so he can't *mess up* again. That's why he admitted it," she said while still not looking directly at them. "He should be punished for this, and how we do he has to hate it. Otherwise we're locking him up for nothing."

Tuvok looked a little impressed. "Fascinating. Your logic is sound."

Chakotay smiled in her general direction, "so what do you suggest?"

Kathryn smiled back a little mischievously.

James stared in disbelief at the command trio standing in front of him as his forcefield was lowered. "Is this a joke?"

"No. Keeping you imprisoned here or in your quarters is not suitable punishment for you," Tuvok answered.

"I... then what?" James stuttered.

"You'll be put on a probation. A community service if you'd prefer, alongside your current job," Kathryn explained.

"By that she means your previous offer of babysitting the Engineering staff while B'Elanna's not able to keep tabs on them, has been rescinded," Chakotay added on.

"Oh," James sounded a little relieved at that part.

"Hold your horses. If you're going back to Security after a crime like this, you need to be evaluated. Which is perfect because from what I hear you missed your annual one this year," Chakotay said, resisting a smile. Any relief James felt had ran away by that point, he frowned instead. "With some modifications since you will be taking it alone this time."

Kathryn was less discreet, her smile turned into a smirk. "Six months you'll go to your normal shift and be paid for that, then spend the following shift on your probation, unpaid, in other departments. The first month; the Doctor needs help since Tom is only on paternity leave when his Sickbay shifts are due, or I'm about to slap him."

"Sickbay?" James laughed mostly out of disbelief but with some concern.

"Think of that as repaying a favour," Kathryn said, her smirk turning into a nicer smile.

James looked at her as relief threatened to overwhelm him, he tried to hold it back. "You mean?"

"Yes, she's fine. Everything went well," Kathryn replied. She waited for him to react; he smiled and sighed in relief, then covered his face with his hand. "So there's no point keeping you in here, is there?"

"That part doesn't make sense. He didn't kill Jessie," Chakotay said with a confused frown.

"Like I said, big time was what he wanted," Kathryn whispered to him.

"Indeed. So do you understand your punishment, Mr Taylor?" Tuvok questioned.

"Yeah," James replied reluctantly and nodded. The command trio turned to leave. "Actually," James said, making Kathryn stall first. The others did so at the door. "Stuart. I'd rather be called that."

Chakotay looked puzzled, "the other half of your surname that was your step dad's. Why now?"

"Janeway knows," James replied.

Kathryn widened her eyes and glanced around, "uh, I do?" James raised both eyebrows, hinting at something. She got it and nodded at the other two men to leave. They were more confused than before but did as they were told. Once gone she turned back towards James, "the baby. That's why?"

James nodded. "Yeah. I thought that if I ever had any kids, I wouldn't want them to have the Taylor name. The name, the family dies with me. It's less confusing if I don't use it either. If she decides not to keep it, at least it's done already. Of course that's if she even wants the kid to use my surname, that's a little..."

"Reasonable," Kathryn chuckled, "Jessie always complains when we call her Rex. So I can't see her saying no to that."

James smiled weakly, "yeah but still, I didn't want to assume."

"Consider it done. I still need to officially change Bimbo of Crazy's name for her death certificate," Kathryn said.

"Her death...?" James frowned, eyebrow raised. "But I just saw her twenty minutes ago. She came in to say *I told them so*, calling me a murdering monster and... some other stuff. I haven't a clue, I tuned out in the middle of the first sentence."

Kathryn's jaw dropped. She tried to compose herself to speak, "the explosion. She..." Her face hardened into stone, "excuse me." She stomped off to James' bemusement.

### **Sickbay:**

The Doctor beamed proudly towards two side by side biobeds. The occupants sitting on them noticed and looked a little creeped out. He shuffled away to do some *paper* work in his office when James walked in.

"Ah perfect timing. I need you to organise everything," the Doctor said, pointing at the desk full of PADDs.

James glanced briefly at them, winced and looked back. "In a minute Doc. I heard everything went okay."

"Of course it did with a brilliant physician like me performing the surgery," the Doctor said smugly.

"Thanks Doc, really," James said sincerely.

The Doctor beamed with pride again, "no need. It is my job. The PADDs go in date order, if they're the same date, then alphabetical or numerical." He walked off into the office and into the lab next to it.

James shook his head and continued to walk towards the two biobeds. Jessie spotted him and her face brightened up. She attempted to get off the biobed despite the nagging pain in her back trying to stop her.

"You're okay?" she said, relieved.

"That was what I was going to say," James sighed.

"I heard what happened after I... you know," Jessie said, trailing off into a mumble. B'Elanna looked on a little awkwardly. James meanwhile glanced down at his feet for a moment then up again. Jessie caught it and smiled, "I'm fine. We're fine."

"I'd better escape while I still can," B'Elanna said, getting up as well. She headed over to the door.

"Wait," Jessie called out to stop her. "What are you going to tell him?"

James frowned and looked over his shoulder towards B'Elanna, she glanced between them looking worried.

"Nothing. Not yet. Don't worry about it now," B'Elanna tried to smile reassuringly. She continued walking towards the door.

Jessie flinched before James turned his attention back toward her. He noticed her pressing her lips together tightly and tensing her shoulders. "What's that about?" he asked.

"B'Elanna she..." Jessie started to answer. "Um, the Doctor told you, he must have. Right?"

"Nothing involving B'Elanna, or another him no," James said warily.

Jessie groaned impatiently. "Of course not," she muttered. "B'Elanna offered to be the surrogate."

James blinked rapidly, "uh I'm sorry what?"

Jessie nodded, "yeah. Please tell me you at least knew about needing one?"

"Well yeah I knew that part but I didn't realise it would be done right away, otherwise that artificial environment thing the Doc was blabbing about would be..." James said quickly. He sighed, hoping that would slow him down or make him calm. It didn't. "B'Elanna? She's just had a baby, and then there's Tom..." His face drained as realisation hit him, "that's the him you asked about."

"Yup," Jessie meekly said with her eyes widening fearfully. "I can't ask her to... if I or rather we decide not to have the baby, I can't ask her to go through with that, you know?" James closed his eyes, sighed and looked back down towards the floor. "Yeah. And I can't ask her to carry it to term either. It feels almost like I'm using her. Both decisions, she has to be the one to endure it."

"Oh god," James muttered, looking back up at her, his eyes full of guilt.

"I can't say it's my body anymore. It's hers, and Tom's her husband, he can't not know," Jessie whispered. "What are we going to do?"

The two silently worried over that. Jessie stepped forward so she could hug him.

"I'm sorry, I..." James whispered. Jessie tried to shake her head against his shoulder. He got the message. Finally he held her back.

The Doctor stepped out of the office to complain about his paperwork still not being done. He noticed them, smiled sadly and turned back the way he came.

**THE END**