

Episode 2.09

F9: Control Failure

Harry wandered out of the lift, bleary eyed and holding a mug, immediately turning left to go to his usual station. Instead he walked into the arm of a leather chair occupied by a man in a strange red and black environmental suit, typing on a keyboard looking console hovering over his lap.

It took an uncomfortable few seconds for him to put two and two together. "This isn't..."

"Voyager? No it isn't," Dave's amused voice said through the helmet speaker.

Harry swiftly turned around. The sight of the very different bridge slapped him awake long enough for him to find his actual station at the back. He sat down at his strange elongated desk with numerous different touch screen panels and old fashioned looking Delta Flyer like controls dotted all around. His attention was quickly drawn to their front window which had bathed the bridge in an eerie red light. The window itself created the illusion of them flying through red clouds. "So er, how long now?"

A second environmental suit user, who was sat in the dead centre and much fancier chair, tried to look over her shoulder, only to see more of the back of her helmet. After a little grunt she complained, "hold your porses there. You're not..."

"My what?" Harry tried not to laugh.

At the far front of the narrow bridge, James shook his head, silently judging someone.

Lilly meanwhile ground her teeth. "Verbal typo, let it go."

An obnoxious giggle from the back did nothing to help. "Oh, I thought it was the surname of your great granddad or something," Tani teased.

Dave sheepishly looked over at his sister, not that anyone could tell. "Actually..."

Lilly loudly shushed him, "let's not!" After an awkward wriggle in her seat she muttered, "get into that right now."

"Shame, I was dying to hear about good old cousin Larry Louse," Tani laughed to herself.

Dave groaned as he pushed his console to one side, out of the way. "I just remembered that it takes me twenty minutes to use the bathroom in this thing, so I'd better get going now." He tried to hurry to the lift, making a lot of noise along the way.

Lilly cringed to herself, until she spotted James looking back at her. "What? I was smart enough to go before we put these on. I'm not following him, not my problem."

"Yeah but someone should. If he spends too long in there..." James said.

"You drama mass-killing clown," Harry scoffed too loudly for his own good. He got a frown directed at him as expected, but fortunately an amused one. "It's not really going to take him that long. He'll only be going for a..." his eyes widened a lot. James nodded knowingly. Lilly though was too preoccupied with the horrible mental image of her brother parked on a toilet, still with his helmet on, reading a tablet.

"Okay, so you'll check on him if he doesn't come back, if it's not that big a deal," James said.

Harry had turned pale in the meantime. "No, no. He won't get radiation burns in one minute."

"If you say so," James chuckled and turned back.

Harry tugged on his recently cold sweat drenched collar. "Suddenly I don't feel so hot. Are you sure it's safe for us to be in here without one of those?" He pointed towards Lilly and her suit.

"Tch, you're fine as long as you're an ex Borg," Lilly replied with little care. "Stop being a big baby."

"Yeah but..." Harry pretty much squeaked in response, "barely."

Meanwhile on Voyager's bridge, their own viewscreen showed a similar red cloud a fair distance away from them. Kathryn drummed her fingers impatiently, while Chakotay watched her with a smirk.

"Well? How long are you going to sulk about it?" he asked.

Kathryn side eyed him dangerously. Chakotay laughed it off.

"I mean it's obvious," Danny was saying, "Harry's gonna crack first. One yawn and he'll think his lungs are melting."

Tom fake laughed in her direction, "oh yeah? Are you forgetting that this retrieval team has someone who thought losing her hair was the absolute worst part about being turned into a Borg drone."

"No," Danny replied smugly. "They'll be okay in there, so there's nothing to set her off. Harry on the other hand is a paranoid little mummy's boy."

The only warning the bridge got was a barely second long growl from the command chairs. "It's just our luck isn't it. Oh it's a big universe, isn't it? Is it?" Kathryn rambled, gesturing wildly. "One little ship, one giant never ending quadrant, and we happen to run into the second Borg-proof gigantic nebula within a few years. I swear, if we're going around in circles, I'm going to..."

"Captain," Chakotay tried to calm her down, "Kathryn. Think about it this way. At least we don't have to rely on only Annika to help crew the Liger's ship."

"You're right," Kathryn sighed and smiled. "Somebody tell her and record the results. There's sod all to do while we wait for the Umbrella Z5 to pick up its grandma."

Tom tried his best not to laugh, it was useless though. "I dunno, that's better than its real name."

Kathryn looked a little lost for a few seconds, she turned to Chakotay. "What is that blasted fleet called again? The last time I called the three ships that rendezvoused with us *Liger, Bion and Tear, oh my*, the stupid kids didn't get it."

"Dellia," Chakotay said, fully expecting what was coming next.

"Dell..." Kathryn said seriously. She rolled her eyes and stomped off to her Ready Room. "I hope whoever let their five year old niece name the military fleet after her cute doll got fired out of the torpedo tubes for that..." unfortunately she was cut off by the door closing behind her.

Tom snorted into the laughter he was holding back. "Okay Chakotay, good one. Now, what did they really call their ships?"

Chakotay kept a straight face, and he wasn't sure how he managed. "That is their real name. Dellia Fleet." Tom was stunned into silence. "Dave said that there was a petition to change the previous name because it was too cutesy."

"What?" Tom and Danny both laughed until they couldn't breathe. Chakotay smiled and shrugged it all off.

The Z5:

The Doctor clicked his tongue over and over, saying nothing. His patient lying before him inside a glass chamber was getting more anxious with every tut.

"I'm sorry," the Doctor finally said after ten minutes, "but there's nothing I can do."

"But..." Harry protested until the chamber opened, making him panic further. He tried to grab the parting glass and pull it back around him. "No, no. I'm not like Morgan or James or Jessie. I wasn't a Borg, just a few nanoprobes here and there."

"Lieutenant," the Doctor tried to intervene.

"If it's not radiation poisoning, then what is the spot on my face?" Harry stammered.

The Doctor chuckled, leaning forward to pick a red goey lump from his cheek with no effort at all. He showed him it afterwards, "its chilli, that's why it burns."

Harry furiously blushed. "Well, I... they said to report anything weird during this trip!" he snapped defensively before running out the door, barely brushing by Morgan on her way in.

"Ah Morgan. I trust the nebula isn't causing you any ill effects?" the Doctor said with a smile.

"No," Morgan replied slowly, raising an eyebrow. "I was looking for Tani, and these dumb Liger computers don't know who is who."

The Doctor chuckled. "What happened to your *cheat sheet*?" He got an eye roll as a response. "It's very much like our system, but their communications and identification devices are more primitive." He gestured to a small folded device on the nearby console.

"Yeah, yeah. Have you seen her? She's meant to be annoying Jessie and I in Engineering," Morgan said in a dreary tone.

"So you're looking for her, because?" the Doctor questioned.

Morgan's eyes drifted to one annoyed side. "It's my dinner time she's skiving through. We're not supposed to leave anyone non Liger alone in case they get stuck with their dumbed down keyboards and knobs." The Doctor's smirk rattled her even further. "Shut up, I know!"

"Might I suggest I find her and you return to Engineering," the Doctor said a little too eagerly.

"No," Morgan groaned, confused at his tone. "I have a feeling I know where she went."

Lilly wriggled in her seat, determined to fit comfortably into it. Everytime she tried to lean back she got stuck halfway. Instead she decided to get up and wander around the Z5 bridge. Her first destination was the helm.

"Getting the hang of it?" she asked while inspecting the console.

James glanced briefly over his shoulder toward her. "Kinda, it's a bit like the Flyer's controls." Typically as soon as she walked away, satisfied, he noticed a green light flickering on his right. Instead of calling her back right away, he checked what Harry nicknamed *the Dummy's Guide to Running Liger Ships* he had lying nearby. Nothing there mentioned a green light at all, he started worry.

Harry noticed during Lilly's approach and allowed a quiet snigger to himself, which she heard and stared in judgement at him for. "It's nothing, I lost a bet to Tom." Her brow furrowed further. "For the love of god, don't tell him. I don't want to be his next victim."

Lilly groaned, "so is this why Janeway told me to pretend you're the team leader? Gotcha. Turn it off." Harry looked on in quiet for the moment dismay. He did as he was told, mumbling incoherently.

Meanwhile Tani casually walked over to the helm. "Hey um," she said a little nervously. James visibly tensed, she figured it was due to the PADD he was studying. "Oh yeah, this Liger tech's pretty basic... for me cos of living on a Borg ship and all. Maybe I can help."

"I'm fine," James said in more ways than one, since the green light had gone off. He checked the course map underneath it, hoping they were even the slightest bit off course so he could do something. It wasn't so he looked back at the PADD to pretend to read it.

Tani tried to take it from him with no success, making her pout. "Honestly, it's easier to learn from doing or watching. I'll show you." She leaned over the console, intentionally getting into his personal space.

James shifted his chair to the right. He found out in that instant that it was bolted down to the floor before he did. The ripping metal noise caught Lilly and Harry's attention.

"No, it's fine. I got it," James said, annoyed and a little embarrassed.

Tani giggled, not getting the hint whatsoever. She moved in closer. "Yeah you do," she purred, grabbing his chin in a vice like grip. Before he could move again, she leaned in to press her lips against his.

Lilly and Harry froze, both unsure what to do. "Um, are they?" she asked. Harry laughed nervously and mouthed no.

That was the moment Morgan arrived on the bridge. Her fists clenched at the sight of her former best friend pushing her current one into his chair, she assumed to stop him from escaping, his eyes wide and clearly trying to pull back.

Morgan growled and stomped over. She grabbed her by the back of her collar. With little care as to how much power she put into it, she tossed Tani onto the floor. James meanwhile clambered out of his chair as if she were still there.

"Ow, Morgan!" Tani screeched up at her. Morgan stepped to her left to stand between the two. "What's the matter with you?"

"Me? I'm sticking up for a friend," Morgan spat back.

Tani pushed herself up back to her feet, furiously eyeing her. "You interrupted us." Morgan scoffed loudly in disgust. "Oh very mature Morgan. Attacking me cos you don't have the stones to make a move yourself."

Morgan's eyes widened further, mimicking her mother's killer stare. "Don't think you're anything like me, I'm not a big creep like you. Get out of here before I smash your face inside out."

Tani for a moment looked on in dismay, a frog in her throat. She tried her best to look mad instead on her way out of the bridge.

"Thanks Morgan, I owe you one," James said.

"Yeah, you do, pay up," Morgan said and she held out her hand. The almost blank and yet still wiggled out expression she got in return wiped any humour from her face. "I'm joking. It's okay, you're my friend. You would've done the same thing."

James glanced to one side towards the helm and back again, then gingerly lowered himself back into the chair.

Lilly approached them but kept a good feet between her and him. "Is everything okay?"

"Yeah yeah, fine," James mumbled as he got back to focusing on the helm.

"Uh..." Lilly hesitated, sharing a glance with Morgan sighing guiltily. Before Lilly could say anything to her she walked off. "You can take five, or maybe ten. Okay?"

James frowned and looked up at her, "sorry?"

"I'll watch the controls. You get a drink, have a break. Anything," Lilly said, smiling weakly.

James quietly looked back down at helm, shaking his head. "That's okay. This is fine."

Lilly's face fell. "Okay but if you change your mind," she said, then walked back towards her seat. Harry's bemused expression behind it ruffled her feathers. "What?"

"Nothing, just thinking of requesting a transfer to this ship," Harry said. Lilly laughed as she sat back down in her narrow chair.

Tani swaggered into the Engine Room, almost giddy at the sight of an oblivious Jessie half monitoring a console and drinking a small carton through a straw.

"It's about time," Jessie muttered like she didn't mean it in between sips.

"I know," Tani said, almost smug. Jessie finished her drink and started ignoring the girl, hoping she'd go to the *oppositest* side of the room. It only spurred her on though. "Soo, your little game sorta backfired. Hmm. Too bad, too late, too old."

She knew it would, but it still tickled her to see Jessie look up at her with a steely expression. "Yes, this act is a little old. Bother off."

"Oh," Tani giggled. "You're not up for a little kiss and tell?"

"Thanks but desperate and annoying kids aren't my type," Jessie muttered.

Tani laughed as if she didn't get it. "I know what is, and aaw too bad, he's mine now."

Jessie rolled her eyes and turned her chair away from her.

"No argument? I guess it's for the best. Just don't say I didn't warn you," Tani teased as she leaned on the edge of her console.

"Warn me? You never talk about anything else," Jessie couldn't help but laugh. "That's pretty sad, but you'll grow up someday, don't worry."

The insult slapped Tani in the face. "You take him for granted. Not like me, I..." she stammered. Jessie had enough and decided to go to the furthest away station herself. Tani ground her teeth as she followed. "You know what, I was gonna be gracious about it but now..."

Jessie laughed in disbelief. "Good one."

Tani scowled and folded her arms. "James kissed me," she said smugly, but still with some anger.

Jessie's laughter didn't ease as if she didn't hear anything. Once she was done she sighed, "I have no stomach or time to hear about your gross visits to the Holodeck."

"Holodeck? I mean the real deal," Tani grunted. "Whatever helps you sleep at night Jesswessy. Didn't think he'd be so gentle and yet so rough at the same time. He looks so fresh faced, but there's like a fine stubble I kinda dug."

Jessie froze, except for her growing skunk eye. Tani smiled, satisfied she got what she wanted at last, and started to walk away.

"Wait a minute, what did you do?" Jessie coldly asked.

Tani stopped and giggled obnoxiously. "Oh, do we believe now?"

Jessie's eyes narrowed, she launched herself toward her. Tani smartly moved aside. "You didn't..."

Tani swirled around to face her again with flair. "Can you blame me? He's so fine, and strong, yet so innocent in a way."

"You better be just trying to piss me off, for your sake," Jessie snarled.

Tani laughed mockingly, "well yeah. Put you in your place, thinking you're so hot and..."

"Oh enough!" Jessie snapped. "Did you touch him or not?"

Tani smiled coyly, "he works out, doesn't he?"

"That doesn't..." Jessie said, shuddering in rage, "answer my question."

"True," Tani said nonchalantly, her cheeks blushing.

It was taking every inch of self control Jessie had to not act on her thoughts, that and tightening fists could only do so much. "Sick little brat. If you moved on him, I'll..."

"What?" Tani scolded with offense. "So it's okay when you do it, but me...?"

Jessie's furious eyes flickered briefly with confusion. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"You heard me," Tani smiled defiantly. "You kissed him, I kissed him. Other than meddling Morgan betraying me, what's the difference? Jealous cow, the both of you."

"Morgan?" Jessie said, her eyebrow twitching. "Morgan stopped you."

"Oh that's right," Tani snickered. "The only difference I see is that James didn't push me away like you imagined. So I guess mine was reciprocal and..."

Jessie slapped her hard in the face, so much so Tani lost her footing and stumbled back. The teen looked on in shock, cradling her sore cheek.

"If this is true, prey I never see you again." Jessie pointed at the door, "get out before I give you a preview."

"Wow, you're really territorial. And I'm the sad one," Tani muttered, then laughed awkwardly. Jessie's hardening stare pushed her back out the door.

Dave pulled a few anxious faces, the last couple clouded up his helmet. Lilly snorted and giggled. "You sent him off? What if we need to get away in a hurry?" he asked.

Harry glanced toward the occupied helm. "I don't think we need to worry about it," he said with a smile.

"Relax will you. We've found her. All we need to do is bring the coaxial drive on, and we're outta here," Lilly said, gesturing to the screen. Within the red clouds Dave could just make out a ship shaped speck,

its similar colour to the nebula made it hard to focus on. Lilly groaned at her brother's anxious grunts. "Our pilot will come back after the salvage mission."

Harry meekly raised his hand above his shoulder. "Question. This nebula is very dangerous to anyone without nanoprobes. You knew exactly where this F9 ship was." Lilly bit her lip and glanced off to one side. "How did it get in here in the first place?"

"The F9 was a prototype for a number of experimental tech," Dave replied. Lilly sighed and walked away for a moment. "One of them was a shield that we've theorised protected the crew from the radiation, for only a short time. It was the safest place to park her when she was damaged in the battle with your stupider selves."

"Oh," Harry said, a curious expression formed on his face. He eyed the helm. "So there's a good chance we'll have to cross some *old friends* of yours. Are you sure you want to go over?" he asked in Lilly's direction.

"We won't," Lilly answered. She turned around to walk back over to them. "The ship will be empty. The problem we have is that the F9 was meant to self repair and when done, automatically re-activate certain systems. Clearly it hasn't done any of these things."

Harry made a little squeaky hmph sound. "Another experimental technology?"

"Hardly. It's a flawed design that handed a few of the older Dellias to the Sixes," Dave said. Lilly cleared her throat, eyeing him dangerously. He only laughed it off. "Hey they wanted a new name, they got it."

Harry frowned while Lilly rolled her eyes. "We need to decide on a team. We're already short on people," she said.

"F9's been in this death trap for a while, the toxic fumes are going to be so much worse than our ship is," Dave said.

"What are you implying?" Harry said mid cringe.

Lilly shook her head. "We get it, you're a pansy so you'll stay here. I'll lead the team, I know that ship inside and out."

Dave's face softened, "Lill?"

"It's fine," Lilly countered determinedly. "I'll ask Emma, she might remember the way around. All I'm worried about is that the ship was severely damaged, we might need some muscle to get around." Harry was about to chime in. "But, to activate the core we need someone in the Engine Room and the Bridge. So that's two... muscle pairs."

"Bingo baby," Dave chuckled to his sister's embarrassment. "What's the problem? We have a couple of Slayers on our merry cruise."

Harry winced as well. "That only leaves me, Tani and you on the Z5."

"Ooph, point taken," Dave suddenly looked worried. "The helm controls do not go well with these cumbersome suits." He gestured his glove trying to grasp something.

"It's fine," Lilly said abruptly. "If anyone follows us in here, we'll have plenty of time to return and retreat. It's no biggie. I'll call them."

"You might..." Harry stuttered, pointing towards the helm, "want to start there."

Lilly and Dave frowned. They turned towards the helm. Their eyes bugged out at the sight of Emma in an environmental suit as well, moving around the joystick looking thing. That was also when they noticed via the viewscreen that they were spinning in random directions.

"Emma, old ship, may have creepy things there," Lilly quickly stuttered while running over to her.

Emma stopped and eyed her suspiciously. "I'm not falling for that one again." Both Dave and Harry mouthed *again* to their horror.

"Please, I'll let you into the armoury just this once if you come," Lilly pleaded.

Dave shook his head rapidly, "no no, oh god."

Emma's eyes and smile widened. "Okeydoke!" she laughed and got up, leaving the ship upside down and floating towards the other ship. Lilly panicked and tried to fix it, struggling with the lever due to the huge gloves. In the end she pressed the brakes, abruptly bringing their ship to a rough stop.

Jessie peered around an open door to find a long rectangular room lined from ground to ceiling with rifles and other strange looking weapons. There she spotted James barely looking over them, occasionally picking one up to not look at.

Emma behind him seemed to be stripping the walls and packing multiple bags.

"Hey," Jessie said, armed with a friendly smile. He looked at her in mild surprise. "Window shopping?"

"Huh?" He glanced at where he was earlier. "Oh well yeah, I guess."

Jessie's heart sank, the anger from earlier started to boil. She pretended to laugh to cover both. "Well you might want to pick a few to try on before the sale hoarders take everything."

James frowned, then looked behind him just in time to find Emma admiring what looked like a chainsaw. He quickly snatched it from her. She responded with a childlike aaw and pout.

"So er..." Jessie said, straining to think of what to say. "How about those erm, peanut butter... popcorn they have here."

Emma grimaced, "eeew!" She hurried off with some of her bags, leaving James looking very confused.

"Great, that's better," Jessie sighed in relief. "I just wanted to see if you were alright."

James' confusion turned into nervousness. "Yeah why?"

His demeanour change made Jessie subconsciously fidget on the spot. "I had to endure some, bragging."

The colour left James' cheeks. "Oh, sorry about that."

"Wh..." Jessie stuttered, put off by how genuine he sounded. "No, no, it's you I'm worried about."

James shrugged and returned to gazing in the general direction of the weapons wall. "Nothing that a..." he took a one at random. One button press and a laser sword shot up from the handle. "A bit of Star Wars'ing won't cure."

Jessie quietly laughed when he switched it back off. "You don't have to do that. It's just us here. I understand."

"It's okay. Morgan helped," James said with disgust he couldn't hide. He shook his head, "wasn't for long."

"James," Jessie said softly, "you're allowed to be upset about it. Remember what you told me; it's not your fault."

"Yeah," James said unenthusiastically. Jessie frowned at his tone. "It keeps happening, different women, so maybe I'm doing something."

The anger bubbled, Jessie tensed to keep it contained. "That's not what you said when we were at school, and I kept getting pestered. How is it suddenly different when it's you?" While talking she remembered Tani's similar comment earlier, a lump formed in her throat, choking her into silence.

James seemed to sense it, he looked on in concern, "no I guess it's not. You're right. Sorry." He walked around her without choosing a weapon. Jessie was too busy fretting to notice.

An awayteam consisting of Morgan, James, Lilly and Emma materialised at the back of an overly large and mostly red bridge.

Lilly's face softened as she looked around, a couple of tears in her eyes threatened to fall. "Right where I left her," she murmured on her way to the biggest chair sitting at the dead centre of the back wall.

"What?" Morgan's voice startled her into sitting on the armrest instead. "Did you leave your drink there? Gross, it'll be all flat."

James walked over to what looked at first like a hole in the floor at the back right of the bridge. When he got there he noticed the stairs heading down to the next deck. "Right. Maybe half of us should get to engineering."

Lilly wobbled a bit on her chair, then looked around to see if anyone saw. No one did to her relief. "Emma?" Her friend glanced across at her, "do you remember the way?"

"Me?" Emma complained and grimaced, "with him?" After some rummaging through the bag she brought, she giggled maliciously, "fine. If he tries to kill me again, I got this."

"I wasn't trying..." James protested.

Emma pulled out the chainsaw she tried to take earlier, her eyes wide with glee. "Let's go, stabby."

Lilly laughed nervously, "um Emma. The weapons bribe wasn't so you'd bring some with you. There shouldn't be anything to kill here."

"But..." Emma squeaked innocently, shifting her eyes briefly in James' direction. "Self Defence?" He shook his head. "Oooh, mummies and nebula monsters." Emma ran after and passed him, giggling like Kathryn after a dozen coffees.

Morgan made a little worried groan. "Watch your... everything," she whispered.

"We both know that doesn't help," James tried to say with humour, but it fell flat. He followed Emma down the stairs.

"Maybe I should go instead of him," Morgan said on route towards Lilly.

She meanwhile hurriedly stood back up, looking very alarmed. "No, no. Emma doesn't do that anymore. He'll be fine. Besides if I'm wrong, he's tough so he can defend himself."

Morgan's widening eyes drifted off to one side. "Er, doesn't do what anymore?"

"And then there was that one creep who..." Emma giggled. "It was so funny."

James hung back trying not to listen. A door to his left distracted him, so he thankfully missed the gory details. The words *Stasis Area* stopped him cold. "Uh, hang on."

"Then it was pizza time..." Emma said over the top of him unintentionally. She grumbled impatiently. "Oh don't be a baby, it was just a little pinch."

"No," James said. "Stasis area?"

Emma flinched, stopping her as well. "Well yeah, the radiation nebula and all."

James frowned toward the door. "But you and Lilly." Emma left without him, making him sigh. He was about to do the same when he thought to scan the door first. The results he got kept him there, pressing his fingers at the cracks in the door, denting them slightly enough to get a grip on them. The groaning metal noise that made drew Emma back the way she came. By the time she returned the door was spread open, and she could see no one around. She shuddered before running inside.

"Hey, remember my tug and pull story!" she growled.

"No," James said, more interested in the seven foot tall booths dotted all around a massive cargo bay. "These still work, there's people alive in here."

Emma paled, her jaw dropped. "What? But..." she hurried over to peer inside the same one he was standing in front of. "They're still here. But how, why?"

James raised a curious eyebrow. "Still here?"

"But Damien said..." Emma stammered, ignoring him. "That little shit, he lied."

"Um question, many of them," James said.

Emma shook her head, then glared fiercely at him. "We can't. The radiation will kill them. We need to go to Engineering."

James slowly glanced between the booth and her, both brows narrowing. "That wasn't any of my questions."

Emma hurried off once more without him, leaving him baffled.

Z5:
Dave tapped on the little panel on his arm with a pained grimace, while Tani sat beside him completely oblivious and rambling.

The lift doors had barely finished opening when Jessie squeezed through them hurriedly, only to stop and look around. A little sigh of relief and she wandered over to Harry. "Second time's the charm. Hey, do you pick up that EM field too?"

Harry stared at her concerned. "You mean the echo we were getting from the shields, that was..." he glared in Dave's direction, "just a hum!"

"Oh my god!" Dave shouted as he jumped up to his feet, "this helmet isn't noise cancelling." He stomped off to the right, towards another door.

Jessie quickly ambushed him to knock loudly on the front of his helmet. "There's someone else here!"

"What?" Dave stuttered.

"Using your shield frequency, and the nebula's own background noise to hide in plain sight," Harry said.

Dave ran over to the nearest empty station. "Ohno. Let me see." A few taps activated the viewscreen, but nothing really changed. The only difference was the lack of red ship. Even so his face paled, he slammed his hand onto another button. "Lilly, he's here. Don't reactivate the ship, get the shield up."

"Um, what, who?" Tani squeaked.

Damien chuckled at the image of the F9 and Z5 straight ahead on his own screen. The rest of his bridge crew looked on impatiently, almost everyone furiously scratching some painful looking red blotches on their skin.

"Do hurry up, Silly Billy Lilly. I'm so hoping for a change of scenery," Damien sneered.

Tom grunted but not because his latest scratching had left his hand bleeding all over the helm. "What are we stalling for? I'm bored and my console's dirty."

Seventh Harry gasped, "they're scanning the area."

Damien scowled at no one in particular. "Why would they scan when..." a thought came to him, making him growl. "Who messed up this time?" Everyone pointed at Tom, even him. "Fine! Plan D, boarding party with me."

"Oh goodie!" Annika's evil self Six laughed like a child and ran off into the turbolift.

Damien shuddered in revulsion. He followed her, pointing at random people on the way. "I won't ask twice. Now." Everyone he pointed at fidgeted, terrified.

"But, that red junk heap has been in this burning nebula for ages. It'll probably be more exposed to it than we are," Chakotay said.

Phoebe shrugged indifferently, "so? We only have one suit left. It's first come, first serve."

The nameless crewmembers panicked and ran out, pushing and shoving into the same turbolift. Damien was not impressed that he had to wait for the next one.

Inside the F9's overly large engine room, Emma and James hovered around a strange circular machine at the far back. Emma rooted around a drawer nearby, mumbling incoherently. James paced nearby, eyeing other consoles.

"Johnstone to Stuart. Problem. We have company."

Emma turned away and looked up, wide eyed. "Oooh, is it vampires?" James looked at her curiously. "Oh, the Tolg? Nah, they're gross."

"Emma, don't start the core. You know what to do instead."

"Great," Emma sighed in relief, slamming the drawer shut. Seconds later her chainsaw was not only out of the bag again, but powered on. "I sure do."

They heard Lilly sigh, then a massive thud in the direction of the door they came through. Many more followed, denting the door so much there wasn't much left of it, only an unshapely hole at its centre.

Emma giddily ran over, brandishing the chainsaw in front of her, only to get immediately shot by a phaser. She made a little disappointed *aaaw* as she passed out.

"Oh look at that," Damien chuckled on his way inside, followed by burned unknowns armed with rifles. "Not one," he said eyeing Emma first, then James, "but two presents for old me." Satisfied James wasn't going to try attacking him as well, he turned to the left to one of his companions. "Good job, Ensign whatever." They didn't respond since they were too busy choking on their fresh throat burns and collapsing seconds later. Two more of his people went down. "Oh well. Six!"

Six galloped forward through the new opening. "Yessum!"

"Do what you must, but bring him to me alive," Damien ordered. He focused on the remaining unknowns, one of which was safely dressed in one of the protective environmental suits, just in time for all without one to collapse as well. He groaned loudly, "take her to the torture bay."

In the meantime Six approached James looking ready to fight, he on the other hand was trying not to gag at her undead stench. "Put em up pretty boy," she said, meekly raising her hands as if ready for a slap fight.

"Okay, hang on," James tried to sound put out. He rolled his sleeve down to cover his hand before delivering a gentle looking backhand, still she flew back a few feet on her way down.

Damien and the last nameless cocked their weapons as loudly as possible to get his attention. "Don't think that'll earn your freedom," Damien chuckled, his eyes couldn't help but be drawn to the twitching Six on the floor. "Come with us, or the girl dies." He pointed his phaser down towards Emma sleepwalking about pulling something off and laughing.

James sighed at the same time the ship rocked, the hull groaned in response. Damien slapped his commbadge, "you idiots, we want this ship in one piece."

"It's not us," Phoebe answered.

The Z5:

Dave watched the screen as a prolonged phaser strike revealed the belly of Voyager hiding within the clouds. "Jessie," Dave started to order.

"Yeah yeah," Jessie groaned, pressing the clearly labelled missile lock button.

"Lilly, how's it going?" Dave asked.

"Not good. Whatever you two are doing, it's destabilising the hull. I can't raise the shields like this, the hull can't take it."

"But," Dave stammered.

Damien returned to the Seventh Voyager bridge all smiles. Phoebe stared at him accusingly.

"Fools. Ripe for the picking," he boasted, before shoving Tuvok aside to take his station. "Turn off the cloak."

"What?" Phoebe roared. Harry still went to obey, she fired a deathglare at him, "no! They're mostly firing blind."

Damien rolled his eyes. "Do it, or I'll overload Opps and do it myself."

Harry squeaked. He pressed the panel, then hugged his dear station protectively. Phoebe's glare intensified.

"Shields up, frequency 4214," Damien thought aloud while tapping away gleefully.

The Z5 bridge watched Voyager decloak while coming to a stop directly in front of them, leaving the two ships nose to nose.

"What are they doing?" Jessie mumbled.

"Dunno, that can't be good," Dave said. "Lilly, it's now or never."

F9:
"Check," Lilly tried to say with confidence, but the computer she was using kept complaining at her.

A loud clatter from below them got Morgan and Lilly's attention.

"I thought you said the boarding party were in Engineering," Lilly said.

"They should be," Morgan mumbled. She ran over to the stairs leading down to deck 2. The door at the bottom looked almost folded over. She raised her fist as she made her way down, cautiously. The door tore further open. The person on the other side sent shivers down Morgan's spine and instantly made her feel sick. "Oh my god, it's hideous!"

"What?" Lilly stammered, eyes wide.

A phaser shot rang out, followed quickly by a thud tensed her further. She warily peered over the console she was at.

"Oooh red and... red? Ugh, what a clash," Six strolled up the stairs with her new black eye. "Don't you know, contrast is queen."

"Uh," Lilly stuttered as she hurriedly finished what she was doing.

Z5:
"F9's shields are active," Harry said.

"Good. Jessie, resume attacking," Dave ordered.

Jessie winced at the readouts before her, making an unsure moan. Ever since they decloaked, the other Voyager had done nothing but raise their shields. They were waiting for something, she figured. "Ok, sure," she said slowly, cautiously reaching for the weaker phaser like weapons.

"They're powering weapons," Seventh Harry said, dabbing his sweat drenched hair. Some of it fell off into his hands, bringing him to tears.

Oblivious, Damien smiled. "Show time."

The Z5 fired a short phaser burst towards Voyager. The blast struck the shields, which merely wobbled for a bit. Seconds later a similar blast emanated from that exact spot and flew into the Z5's face, its shields sprang up and to the laymen's eye caught fire for an instant.

Inside the bridge's computers were all overloading; sparking and starting fires.

"What the hell happened?" Dave shouted over the noise.

Harry pushed his chair to the side to get to a less scaldy side of his station. "They matched our weapon frequencies but..." He winced as one part of the panel started to sizzle. "That shouldn't have happened. What hit us didn't have the same power as what we threw at them." He had to give up, so ran over to a different console. "Power failures on decks 1 through 20."

Jessie cringed, her clenched fists slammed against her own knee. "Shields are fried." She had to move away as her station started to smoke, "so's Tactical."

Dave ran over to the helm to hurriedly tap something on the keyboard looking part. "Lilly, can you hear me?" All he got for a reply was static. "Hurry, while we still have power, beam our team back."

"The F9 has their shields up," Jessie reminded him.

"I know, but it's pre-transport proof. Should be okay, hurry," Dave said.

Harry worked fast, ignoring the beads of sweat raining down his chin. "I'm only picking up two lifestraps, both on the bridge."

Damien darkly laughed to himself watching the Z5 gradually lose all of its power and drifting to one side. The F9 lay for the taking in the background, looking a little listless as well. "Get a lock on it, get us out of here."

Tom scratched his already bleeding face. "Owwww," he cried. Still he listened, but it took him twice as long as the console was a bit sticky from his own drying up blood.

Dave could only watch helplessly out the window as Voyager tractorbeamed the red ship and flew out of his line of sight. The rest of the bridge's consoles and lights gave up, leaving only the flames as a source of light.

"Wow that was badass. How did we pull that off?" Seventh Harry giddily laughed. The Doctor injected him with a hypospray and moved onto the next person, an ensign passed out on the floor. He gave them a little finger poke, got no response so walked off instead.

"We?" Damien scoffed. "You imbeciles can barely work the replicators on this ship. Without me you're useless."

"Seems so," Chakotay sneered towards Phoebe sitting in her chair.

She glared back. "Fifth will detect us without our cloak. But with it they'll spot the F9 flying out on its own with no engines."

"I'm aware," Damien groaned. "We don't need much time. I'll strip what I want from its carcass, then we'll leave before they know what happened."

"Right," Phoebe didn't sound convinced.

Damien walked over to her, narrowing his suspicious eyes at her. "Is there a problem, Mother?"

"No," Phoebe lied. "I'm just surprised that your master *become a Borg* plan was solely for a simple ship snatch. What about all of our plans for the Ligers, their empire is for the taking. Without the two brats..."

Damien grunted in disgust. "A few stragglers and the idiot Sixes. Hardly worth the lack of effort. My plans are far more grand."

"I don't suppose you'd mind sharing," Phoebe muttered.

"In good time. I won't forget your sacrifice to the cause," Damien said, pressing a hand against his chest with a smug glint in his eye. He walked away, leaving Phoebe seething again. "If Voyager comes, give me a call. For now I've got some sweet revenge to take care of."

Once he was gone Phoebe stared darkly at where he once stood. Chakotay looked on concerned. "Even you?" he said.

Phoebe gave him a brief nod. "It's not too late. Our Alex will still be king with or without that walking ego's help."

Chakotay fidgeted on the spot, "but how? We don't know how Damien is controlling him."

"Maybe by remote control like in that documentary about the sun ship," Tom suggested.

Everyone ignored him, as per usual.

"It's okay. His revenge should keep him busy. We'll take what we want from our new ship, then set a course for Voyager," Phoebe said.

Chakotay smiled at her, "oh you are so evilly delicious."

"Keep dreaming Chumpatay," Phoebe scoffed, leaving him pouting like a child.

Fifth Voyager:

Craig shook his head despondently. "No response. They're dead in the water."

Kathryn paced the back of the bridge, drumming her fingers behind her back. "How the hell did we not see those idiots until now?" The whole bridge was silent, not that she was expecting anything other than a joke from Tom. "We can't concern ourselves with them just yet. We need to help our people first. Have we had any luck contacting the rest of the Z-Fleet?"

"Apparently they're still busy engaging the Sixes, Captain," Tuvok said.

"We can't go in there after them, not unless you want to jailbreak Annika," Chakotay said, knowing he'd be punished for it.

Kathryn merely growled in his general direction. "Then what? We can't leave them there."

"But we can't let Seventh get away with the effing nine," Tom said, resisting a smirk.

"Oh yes," Kathryn shuddered in revulsion, "those F jokes are not getting old yet."

"Seventh's parked on the other side of the nebula. They're not in a hurry," Craig offered.

Kathryn's eyes narrowed, "they're either using that ship as bait, or they're not expecting us to have noticed them yet. Keep a close eye on those wannabes. I want ideas people, one hour." She made her way to the Ready Room.

"Am I the only one wondering why everyone, including us, is so obsessed with this centuries old ship?" Tom said. "I hope it isn't so Neelix can raid its kitchen."

Chakotay groaned, "don't think too hard about it, you're smoking up the bridge."

On board the Z5 they had managed to get most of the emergency lighting on, and gathered around the bridge looking sullen. All except Jessie, who paced around at the back looking agitated.

"This is bad. If they get the core working, there's no telling what they'll do with it," Lilly said.

"Annoy other people for a change," Morgan suggested not seriously.

Harry sniggered quietly. "Well yeah, that too. But if they get the F9's coaxial core to work on their Voyager, our people won't know the difference until it's too late."

"Um, can I just remind everyone here that this is Seventh Voyager. They're all idiots," Tani said.

"They tricked us, kidnapped the F9 and two of our people, left us for dead in a toxic nebula. How dumb are we?" Dave pointed out.

Jessie rolled her eyes as she stopped nearby. "That'd explain the lack of action going on around here."

Lilly glanced up at her, "with only Dave and I left, there's not much we can do. Unless you learned our whole systems during our little day trip."

"No, but I know some who might," Jessie said. Everyone turned to her this time looking a slight impatient. "You guys aren't that observant, are you? You have tricorders, scan for life."

"Okay I'll bite," Harry said. A few seconds later he looked worried. "I'm picking up more lifesigns on this ship. They boarded us too, we'd better..."

"No," Jessie quickly snapped. She tapped on the little tricorder looking communications device in her palm. "Doc, how's it going?"

"One down, thirty to go."

Jessie's face fell, "oh, it's a start."

Lilly jumped to her feet to face her better. "The stasis units? They were still there? Why didn't you say anything until now?"

"James and I were sorting it out still when Seventh arrived. That was more urgent," Jessie snapped back. Lilly hesitated and backed off a step. "What are you so pissed for? This is your crew, right, or are you hiding things again? I hope James and your friend weren't kidnapped for nothing."

Tani widened her eyes to the maximum, "huh what?"

Harry groaned, "get a new tune Jessie." He was glared into a puddle of goop. "Tani."

"No, no I wasn't..." Lilly said, glancing at her similarly confused brother. "When we took the F9 into this nebula, we had to use stasis but..."

"That figures," Morgan commented.

"Yeah guess..." Lilly mumbled, a little annoyed. "But some stayed behind to make sure the F9 would be shut down until its auto repairs were done. It would then set autopilot so it'd leave and finally wake up the crew."

"Wait a minute," Jessie stammered.

Dave clicked his tongue a couple of times, "you want answers or not?"

"To be honest, unless it helps us get this ship up and running, no not really," Jessie grumbled.

"I want that too, but you gotta chill Jess. James will be fine. We both know he's not going down that easy," Morgan said. She tried to ignore Tani's dreamy giggle for her sanity and gag reflex's sake. "This might be important enough to help us out."

"It won't," Lilly shot out so fast it sounded like one word. "I don't know how it ends. Whoever betrayed us back then, they might still be there. That's all I'm worried about."

"What?" Dave sounded shocked, "you never mentioned a traitor."

Lilly looked very sorry for herself, almost guilty. "There's a good reason for that. You're better off not knowing." Dave stared at her, flummoxed. "Keep up with the stasis units, but check who is in each one first. The pods don't let anyone in without a scan of their ID, so."

"Very well. *Who am I trying to avoid?*" the Doctor's voice asked.

"It wasn't, you know who?" Dave asked while wiggling an eyebrow. Lilly glared at him. "No?"

"No," Lilly said, stoney faced. "Who did you wake up?"

"*Hmm, one moment.*" An uncomfortable silence filled the bridge. "*Oh, he's gone. Some chap called Shepard, Scot.*"

Lilly's face turned deathly white in just a couple of seconds. "Oh..." Dave looked on in sympathy.

"He's not the traitor, is he?" Harry questioned.

"No," Lilly tried to sigh to calm herself. "Just a bad memory. I'm..." She walked off towards the lift doors, which had been left open to allow access to the empty shaft. "Going to go fix things. That's more my thing."

Once she was safely out of earshot, Tani piped up far too eagerly, "who's Scot?"

"Second in command of the F9. A bit of a block head who will be no use," Dave answered. "Maybe we should move on."

"Oh, this sounds juicy," Tani laughed.

Jessie passed her a wicked side eye that even unnerved her. "That reminds me. I found this, but I didn't know where it was from," she said while bringing out a large, clunky piece of metal.

"Oh, that's the..." Dave sounded relieved.

"You don't have the stones, old hag!" Tani spat back. Dave cringed since he was more or less in between the two.

Jessie smiled sweetly, "this is better than any stone."

Harry coughed uncomfortably, "ladies. It can wait. Remember?" He frowned, disgusted, "the sooner we fix this ship, the sooner James is rescued."

Tani grinned broadly as if she'd won, then stuck her tongue out towards Jessie. She meanwhile lowered the block with a disappointed groan and narrowing eyes. "Do that again, and I'll make sure you never ever can use it again."

"I dunno why you're so pissy worried for. Unlike you I have faith in him to handle himself. You treat him like a little baby," Tani said.

Dave shuffled further towards Harry, he widened his eyes and hurried off to get out of firing range.

"Ookay!" Dave panicked. "Tani, you go with Lilly, give her a hand. Harry and I will continue restoring power. Morgan and Jessie..." Morgan narrowed her eyes, cutting him off, but it wasn't her she was doing that to, but a figure climbing out of the lift shaft. They all assumed it was Lilly returning, but when they turned around the face behind the helmet wasn't her. A lean faced young man with scruffy brown hair looking around cautiously. Once he spotted the people watching him, he seemed to relax a little. "Jimbo Dave," he laughed. Tani snickered quietly. "Mind sharing the news?"

Dave groaned as if he were really in pain. "It's just Dave. Everyone, this is Scot Shepard. Scot, for quickness sake, these are our allies."

Scot eyed the suspicious Morgan first, then Dave. "The bald guy too?" Dave nodded. "Right, a catch up would be swell."

"Relax," Dave said, gesturing towards Harry and Jessie, "they're the originals, they're on our side." Scot inched closer, still cautious. "Their other selves have the F9."

Scot almost got whiplash looking in Dave's direction. "What? How did they find us? Where's Lilly?"

Dave shuddered, "cut that out, she's fine, leave her be." Scot rolled his eyes before wandering off. "It's a long story. Right now we need this ship up and running so we can get it and our people back."

"Sheesh," Scot groaned, scanning the darkened bridge. "Is this a funeral ship?"

Jessie and Morgan shared similar annoyed looks. Dave meanwhile ground his teeth. "Ever since we lost the F9, the first time, we've built many more ships. Now..." he explained.

Scot laughed insincerely. "Yeah whatever. I assume baldly is reviving everyone else." He waited till he at least got a nod. "Might I suggest you avoid waking up a fella you call Uncle Ragma."

"Why? Our replicators are down, so it'd be a miracle if he found any booze," Dave said.

Scot stared as if judging him. "Yeah, you're right. Without booze and no enemy to sleep with, we should be safe."

"What the hell are you talking about?" Dave snapped.

"It's a long story," Scot said in a similar tone Dave did earlier. "We've got work to do. Who here is good with weapons?" No one answered him. "Well fine, I work better solo. I assume things haven't changed much..."

"Just leave the shields to us," Dave grumbled.

Scot winked and walked around the bridge, looking for tactical.

"He's a first officer?" Jessie groaned.

"Yep, like I said, block head. On the F9 it wasn't what you know but who," Dave replied. "Jessie can you work with him?"

"Why, what, hell no!" Jessie complained. "I have no patience for twats right now."

Dave sniggered, "oh I know."

Seventh Voyager:

A dozen guards walked alongside James toward what he thought would be Sickbay. Despite it being the same room, their version seemed to be coated in red lights and filled with strange, bizarre looking tools. There already, Damien watched the Doctor secure an unconscious Emma to the biobed with metal restraints over her limbs. Damien sneered in James' direction when he noticed his presence.

"Ah our next patient. Do come in," he snickered on approach, gradually getting more and more suspicious with every step. "Did you check?" he asked one of the guards.

"Uh, yes sir," the baffled guard lied.

Damien fortunately seemed to buy it. "Good. Quick question; what's two plus two?"

James stared back at him blankly. "I'm not helping you with your homework."

Damien chuckled darkly. "I'm convinced, that's him. Leave us be."

Each of the guards looked alarmed. "But sir?" one of them stuttered.

"I can handle him, besides..." Damien said, stepping backwards towards Emma's bed. "Can you demonstrate your new toy, EMH?"

"Finally," the Doctor groaned.

He tapped on the PADD in his hand, triggering a tiny jolt from Emma's restraints. It woke Emma up with a startled, "hey don't touch the gumballs. Huh?"

"Co-operate, or the volts rise," Damien sniggered. He gestured to the guards.

James didn't look impressed as they filed out one by one, leaving him alone with the mad doctor, the strange bald teenager and their patient. "Why don't we get ahead on the cliché back and forth banter. What do you want with us?" James asked.

Damien responded with an obnoxious squeaky laugh. "I don't know how that idiot clone of yours managed to fool me. There's such an annoying difference." He approached, eyeing him with cautious hatred. "It's very simple, so you shouldn't have any trouble. You two deserve what's coming to you. Lie on the other bed. Doc!"

The Doctor sniggered maliciously, "which one? The needle injector or the amputator?"

James glanced between him and Damien, raising an eyebrow. "Ok, I suppose it would be idiot-proof to brainwash the hologram."

"Yes, it was," Damien sneered, then his brow twitched in annoyance. "The injections table! This needs to be slow."

"Aaaw," the Doctor moaned, putting down the recently picked up saw. He begrudgingly pointed at the bed to Emma's right.

"Now," Damien ordered, pointing toward the padd the Doctor was still holding.

"Fine," James groaned. Once he lay down the Doctor pressed on the padd anyway, but instead of shocking Emma, they brought forth metal restraints like hers over James' bed.

Damien cackled in his usual villainous style, meanwhile pushing in front of the Doctor. "Push off."

"What?" he grunted.

"It's no fun if you help..." Damien said flatly, then he frowned, "no wait, why am I arguing with this thing? Computer, delete the EMH."

"You son of a..." the Doctor complained as he fizzled out of existence.

"Now," Damien chuckled, focusing on a tray nearby full of different equipment. "Who should be first?"

Emma turned only her head towards James, "who's the bald creep?"

He shrugged, "I dunno, but maybe we should humour him for a bit, he seems a bit sensitive."

Damien blinked furiously at them both, "very well, if you insist!" Huffily he grabbed what looked like a syringe from the tray and stomped closer to James' bed, aiming it in his direction. Emma's laughing and pretend huffing made him jab it into James' shoulder as if it were a knife. "That should dull your senses. Since you have nothing much to you, you'll probably not notice the difference. At least not yet."

"Speaking from experience, hmm?" Emma taunted him. Damien swung around, grabbing the first thing his hand brushed in the tray. "While we wait, for you I have some karma. A serum that mimics the pain a man feels when he's kicked in your favourite place to strike. Only it's all over the body, and lasts longer."

"No thanks. I'd rather do it for real, maybe inch a bit closer," Emma said, fidgeting in her cuffs. Damien leaned in with the hypospray, making her look bemused as well as disgusted. "I think you're getting your nappies crossed, he's over there." The spray was pushed into her arm. Moments later stabbing pains struck her stomach over and over again, triggering the need to double over but she was stuck where she was. All she could do was twitch and bite her lip.

Damien laughed at her pain while James shifted slightly, he seemed to be stuck as well. "Oh sorry, I got ahead of myself, that was the second injection," Damien pretended to sound concerned. Emma stared furiously at him. "Fun, fun. Now where's the one where the vic slowly suffocates?" He started rummaging through his tray.

"You've already used that one," James muttered.

Damien pretended to look confused. "What's that?" He turned to peer over him, "feeling a little groggy there, killer? Then it's your turn a lot sooner, good. I hope you know how to hold your breath, this'll last longer."

Z5:

"Ah ha, there it is," Scot said from under a console. Jessie stood nearby, absent mindedly drumming her fingers. "These new phasers. We're lucky you didn't blow us up with that stunt. They're packing way too much juice."

"Don't you listen?" Jessie said irritably, "they reflected our phasers."

Scot stuck his head out to peer up at her, "at double the power, I know. It wouldn't have done this much damage, unless your new better shields are like tin foil."

"Doesn't matter now. I want to know how they snuck up on us with their fancy cloak they did not have in our previous encounters," Jessie said.

"Yep, he wouldn't stop boasting about it but it was always a no show," Scot said, standing back up. "Look, I'm bummed they got the ship too..."

"Yeah right," Jessie scoffed.

"Oh," Scot sighed, "they took one of yours. Weird, wonder why. Was it someone his Voyager didn't have yet?"

"No... kinda," Jessie mumbled to his confusion, "forget it."

"Yes, we want to know why Lilly fled in horror the moment she knew you were awake," Harry said on approach.

Jessie rolled her eyes. "Learned from the best, huh Harry?"

Harry was put off, offended for a moment. Scot as well until he realised something, then his whole frame fell. "Oh, she did. Course."

"Course?" Harry said in a hinting tone.

"I dunno," Scot hesitated. "If I don't tell the whole thing, I don't come off too well." At the opposite side of the bridge Dave laughed bitterly. "Fine, as well. It might explain other things too, so two birds, one shot. We had recently arrived back home, only to be immediately redrafted on another mission. For it we had some important company."

The red ship still in its prime entered orbit with a couple other ships around a golden planet, the blaring sun behind it cast a shadow over the ships.

Lilly stomped ahead up into the bridge, her face red, followed by a middle aged man sporting similar red hair and a lighter shaded goatee.

"No way, this is my ship. I'll call it what I bloody want," she whined.

"This is the flagship of the fleet, our first impression with other races. Be reasonable," the man argued.

"The only one embarrassed when we met the Vulcans was you, Uncle," Lilly hissed.

Scot dared to approach them both. "Lilly, what..." The man cleared his throat, expecting something from him. "Minister Ragma, welcome to the Lil..."

"No! We can't call it that anymore!" Lilly huffily said, eyeing the man. "It's too girly and kiddy, like me."

"That's not what I mean. You're putting words in my mouth," Ragma tried to say in a soothing voice.

Lilly scowled back at her uncle. "Oh go put a bottle in it instead, it's used to it."

Ragma laughed nervously, "you're really proving your own point." He handed her a little tablet, she turned her head away from him. "They claim to be from a mirror universe, unable to get back home. Since they're humans, we're meeting them on the down low," he whispered the last part.

Lilly peered at what he'd give her, she laughed bitterly at it. "Voyager? And you're worried that I name my ships after me." She walked off chuckling, "what's it doing here? Did it get turned around at Pluto and nobody bothered to ask for directions?"

"Buck up kiddo," Ragma deeply laughed as he followed her, only to try and ruffle her hair. She side stepped to avoid it. "I'll get out of your hair for now. Call me when we arrive. It's my job to make first contact with our hillbilly cousins."

Lilly waited for him to go back the way he came and for the door to shut so she could click her tongue. "You got all that?"

"Enough," Scot replied. "Maybe it's time for the G series after all."

"No," Lilly cringed. "I always said the F9 would be the last Lillyia, but not like this. I don't wanna change the name," Lilly complained.

Scot sighed, "yeah me neither, it's nice." Lilly eyed him suspiciously, and he wasn't the only one, some of the bridge crew stared as well. "You know, cos you like ship designing and stuff, so nice that you put yourself into every ship."

"Awkward," a crewmember whispered to their console partner.

Lilly tiptoed across to Scot and lowered her voice, "I told you. You've got to stop doing this. It's embarrassing."

"Sorry, I said," Scot said with a pout on his face.

"This is supposed to be the better, your version of this?" Harry said in a bored voice, his chin cupped in his hand. The rest of the bridge had similar expressions and positions.

Scot looked on awkwardly towards his listeners. "I haven't even gotten to that part yet. Anyway, we reached this mysterious Voyager. We were a little too shocked that Humans could build such a thing even in an AU, that we didn't realise something was off about them until we met Janeway in person."

"Hi, welcome to the..." Scot trailed off to a an embarrassed mutter, "F9."

"Oh," Janeway laughed, "I so hope that's the shortcut for the drinks machine. I'm dying."

Scot and the two security crewmembers he brought, stared at the woman with similar blank stares. Beside her Chakotay painted on a friendly smile. "You had a drink only two seconds ago. You were still drinking it when we were transporting."

Janeway looked down at the cup in her hands. "Oooh!" her eyes bugged out as she quickly chugged whatever was in it.

"I dunno, that seems pretty normal to us," Jessie said.

Scot thought she was joking, he snorted into sniggers until he noticed Dave's very forced straight face and eyes rolling to the side. "Oh."

"I'm Commander Chakotay, first officer of the USS Voyager," Chakotay said, trying desperately to avoid looking at his Captain with the remainder of her drink stuck to her cheek. "We're so happy to meet you."

"Yes, so happy we brought these," Janeway said, pointing to a chest by her feet. "Courtesy of our chef."

"Oh my god, they are evil," Harry stammered, his eyes bugging nearly out.

The chest had been opened to reveal delicious looking biscuits. Neither Scot nor his security people died from trying one.

"Thank you Captain," Scot said.

"Please," Janeway said with a cheeky wink, the tea bag still stuck to her face, "call me Kathryn."

"Wait a god damn minute!" Harry blurted out. Scot groaned at yet another interruption. "I thought Seventh Voyager was captained by her sister, Phoebe."

Jessie shrivelled her face up in disgust and confusion, "a tea bag?"

"Heh no, first name basis always gets me in trouble," Scot chuckled nervously.

Kathryn turned to gesture at the rest of her party. "I hope you don't mind, but I asked for my dimension travel experts to come as well. This is Six..." Six waved too much with a super cheerful grin on her face. "Don't worry, we rescued her from those gross zombie robots, she's one of us."

"Oh that's not what we're worried about," the female security officer said, faking a smile.

"Great," Kathryn broadly smiled as well. "And this is my dear sister Phoebe." The F9 crew got metaphorical whiplash looking at the woman staring daggers at the wall. She heard her name and forced a smile onto her face. "Long story short, her little oopsie is why we're here."

Phoebe's smile almost lost its structural integrity. "Yes well, you make one little typo and you never hear the annoying end of it."

"You can travel dimensions?" Scot questioned uneasily.

Phoebe rolled her eyes and looked away, mouthing duh. Only Scot noticed. Kathryn giggled innocently, "oh we get up to all sorts. Time travel, stuff, you name it."

Scot's blank face twitched, "um, then why do you need us?"

"It's a little embarrassing," Chakotay admitted. "We've been lost for a long time and wanted to go home. Only we can't find it. This is the closest reality to ours."

Scot tried to hide his discomfort, "er Kim, why don't you two take them to the boardroom. I'll join you after I..."

"Oh are you getting the refreshments? Tea and scones would be lovely," Kathryn said, sighing like she was relaxing on a beach.

"Oh god, stop. Mum and tea, we get it, she was evil," Morgan groaned.

Scot quietly laughed, "actually, she was pretty nice. Too nice in fact."

"You mean too nice as in suspicious?" Jessie said.

"No not at all," Scot answered meekly.

Scot entered the F9 bridge, the blue lights flashing instantly put him on edge. "What's happening?"

Lilly didn't look impressed sitting in the big chair, she pointed at the screen at the front of the bridge. Scot looked to see a furious Chakotay taking up most of it.

"About time. Perhaps you'd like to explain this," he growled.

"Er, explain..." Scot said as Chakotay moved aside to show he was in the Conference Room. Everyone saw Kathryn passed out over the large table, surrounded by cups. "Erm, forgive me but I don't see anything wrong."

"This is a mistake, surely..." Raha's voice said from off screen.

Lilly bolted upright, her eyes wide in horror. "Uncle?"

"Very funny Shepard," Chakotay grumbled. "I hope you realise this is a declaration of war, Ligers. And you had the cheek to call us the barbarians."

"I... don't understand, she..." Scot stuttered.

"What's to misunderstand? Kathryn is dead, our baby walked in on the so called negotiations," Chakotay snarled. "Instead she found her mummy like this, and your drunken minister standing over her."

Lilly hurried forward, passing Scot and standing behind the helmsman. "Wait, let me speak to the minister. We have no reason to attack your captain, we..."

Tuvok walked up beside Chakotay. "Logically there are a multitude of reasons. The obvious one is that you live in an utopia with your advanced technology, while the vast majority of your fellow humans live in the past, so to speak. They die of starvation, wars, prejudice and ignorance."

"But..." Lilly protested.

"Admit it, we are nothing but vermin to you. You were never going to welcome us here," Chakotay grumbled.

Raha briefly entered the screen, struggling with James. "Lilly, don't listen, they're..." he cried before he was dragged back out of sight.

"You will come to regret this. On the seventh hour, we strike," Chakotay said, then the screen changed to show Voyager facing them.

"This story contradicts Lilly's, quite a bit," Jessie said suspiciously.

Scot nodded, "I'm not surprised. She worshiped her uncle as a kid. What he did..."

"No. Jessie probably means that Lilly said nothing of the Ligers starting your little war," Harry said impatiently, staring accusing daggers at him.

Tani glanced between them both looking very bored. "When are you getting to the part with you pissing off Lilly?"

"I'd be finished if people stopped interrupting me," Scot snapped. The way Dave looked across, the others assumed it was out of character for him. Scot cleared his throat, "that wasn't the start of the war. Voyager was a lone ship with no backup. Humans in our reality and time were, primitive to say the least. We agreed to help them return home in exchange that they return Ragma, we'd trial him and punish if needs be. He wasn't. That... was our downfall. The public were divided on it, the ones who already opposed monarchy rule called it an abuse of power."

Tani groaned loudly, "oh, so all you did was try to lock up her Uncle. Boring."

"I wish," Scot said. Jessie and Morgan frowned at him, Harry tried not to laugh instead. "Lilly refused to believe he killed her. He insisted he was late to the conference because he was... with Janeway's sister."

Morgan cringed, "eeew, you mean...?" Scot nodded. Dave though shook his head and rolled his eyes.

"No he doesn't. He's stalling, talking rubbish," Dave groaned. "Everyone knows that Janeway was murdered by her own sister. Why do you think Phoebe took over the Voyager instead of Chakotay? He knew all along who did it, she had him and everyone else wrapped around her finger. A devious woman, cleverer than she makes out."

Scot stomped over to him, "you're in denial Jimbo."

"For the last time..." Dave snapped.

"Yeah yeah, you're Davey. You're trying to tell me you forgot Ragma campaigned for democracy rule, that royalty was an archaic *human* invention we had to abandon. And what do you know, he got what he wanted," Scot rambled. Dave scoffed and walked off to work on a broken station, attempting to ignore him. "You still defend him, when he couldn't care less about you or Lilly. You two were in his way and you know it."

"Oh enough!" Harry yelled in his direction. "I don't know, or care about this minister uncle guy, nor what he may or may not have done to Seventh Janeway." Morgan pulled another face. "Either of them. Dave's right, you're stalling. You don't want to tell us what happened with you and Lilly."

Morgan sighed very impatiently, "wait, is that how this started? I thought Craig was the wannabe novelist around here."

Scot laughed a little nervously. "I told you. If I got straight to the point, you wouldn't get it. Especially if Dave here has been telling his version of the story."

"You mean the truth?" Dave muttered.

"Sure, in an avoidy sorta way," Scot smirked in his direction. "Maybe you guys can tell me what you know, and I'll go from there."

Jessie got back on with her work, while Morgan looked around for her own. Tani merely shrugged and avoided looking in his direction. All that was left appeared to be Harry. With a heavy groan first, he quickly whispered a few sentences near his ear. Afterwards Scot waited as if there was more, but there wasn't.

"Okay then," he said eventually after some silence. "We followed Voyager into whatever dimension they fled to. Lilly thought they'd manipulate other realities of us, and wanted to stop them by any means necessary. That's when we met... him."

Tani perked up, "oh the evil James, is he hotter or not?"

A bemused Scot looked around the bridge for help, in the end he settled on Dave facepalming into a console. He thought it was best to ignore her again and continue. "The Boss, he's brilliant. A genius..." Jessie snorted into laughter, Harry struggled as well. "We fought against Voyager for hours until we were forced to retreat. Unable to return home, we set a course for this nebula. At the time we didn't know its effects, so we were worried Voyager would follow. Lilly knew they would come for her anyway." Dave glanced across, frowning. Scot didn't notice, he was too busy staring down at the floor. "I tried to stop her, but she had Emma with her." Harry nodded knowingly. "And the rest you know."

"I think you're missing one tiny, not important bit," Dave said firmly.

Scot flinched. "Yeah I was getting to that. I'm just..."

"You couldn't think of a way to make you seem less douche and stalkery?" Dave said.

Jessie glanced back up and narrowed her eyes, more curious than anything else, glancing between the two.

Scot sighed. "Fine, fine!" he complained. "I kissed her. She got mad and left. I never saw her again."

Jessie and Tani side eyed each other, Tani accusingly so, Jessie with a straight face. Dave shook his head. "Was that before or after the civil war?" Tani asked. Jessie pointed another stare at her, this one was of disgust.

"After. Lilly insisted it was her responsibility to distract them while we escaped, claiming this Boss would need her for his plan," Scot said frantically. He noticed the many looks of disapproval pointed at him. It riled him up a tad. "Look, I know it was bad timing now, but then it seemed right."

Tani rolled her eyes. "Let me guess, since she was your best friend forever, she had to fancy you," she said. Jessie fumed in her direction. Tani smiled, catching that in the corner of her eye. "Tut, such ego and entitlement."

"Look, no..." Scot protested.

Jessie's scoff interrupted him, "no, I'm sure he did the much better jumping on her when she's rejected him multiple times, and forcing a tongue down her throat. So romantic."

Tani chewed the inside of her mouth to hold her back. Scot glanced between the two, then walked over to Harry. He shook his head frantically.

"You know, that's how it's done. Otherwise nobody would get together. Everyone would be politely asking may I have a smooch, it'd be boring," Tani said.

Jessie deeply sighed. "Of course, you're right. How awful would that be," she said, clearly sarcastic. "At least James would get through the day without being molested. Me too. The horror."

Tani laughed obnoxiously, "yeah, you wish."

Jessie scrunched up her face, shaking her head, "what?"

"Tani," Harry whined, "we're gonna need transporters if we're gonna rescue people."

Tani brightened up, "oh absolutely, boss." She hurried out, smiling in victory.

Scot looked relieved, probably because that was over and so was his flashbacks. "So yup, I'll get back to those weapons and..." He walked back over to Tactical, he was a little put off by the red faced, frowning Jessie still there. "Um, I can finish this solo, if you..."

"Did you tell her anything, she have any clue what you were going to do?" Jessie quietly asked.

"Well," Scot hesitated, unsure how to answer. "I didn't jump on her, if that's what you're thinking." Jessie glanced away, briefly grinding her teeth. "We've been friends a very long time. I've always liked her and wanted more, but..." he trailed off, thinking he wasn't doing himself any favours with that train. "I misread her, and when she said no, I backed off."

"Sure, you say that now," Jessie sniped as she walked around him and away.

"Hey," Scot was offended, he swirled around to follow a little ways behind her, "you don't know, you weren't there. I'm not the creep Dave's painting me as, but I admit I made a mistake which has probably ruined my friendship with her." Jessie stopped, wincing with her back still to him. "A mistake, putting it mildly," he muttered, "the biggest one I ever made. I never got to apologise. Don't judge me when you don't know."

Jessie sighed despondently, "maybe I do," she whispered to herself. She moved across to Harry, he was meanwhile wondering what she said. "I think I'll help Lilly in Engineering."

"Yeah sure, wherever," Harry stuttered, watching her walk away.

Seventh Voyager:

Phoebe sat in the Ready Room, back facing the main door, glaring at a PADD in her hands.

"I feel it again. The pull to my real self, it's the cost of my free will," she grumbled. "It sickens me. Show me again the true spirit of the Janeways, so I don't end up like you..." she clawed at the picture of Kathryn smiling straight ahead, "big sister. You mock me?"

Chakotay walked straight in, startling her into throwing it over her shoulder into the desk, smashing all of the tea cups she had there. He laughed at the resulting mess. "Oh that wasn't cups of tea by any chance was it?"

Phoebe span her chair around, already armed with the Death Glare. "What do you want?" she spat.

Chakotay reached for the PADD to have a peek. The picture softened his features for a moment. "Oh what a loaded question."

"Pathetic," Phoebe hissed, getting up. She snatched the picture from him. "What did you and her create, nothing useful, a weaking. What did we create..."

"Nothing," Chakotay replied with some offense. Phoebe growled before walking off to the sofa. "Alex, Damien, he's your mess to clean up. Don't think I'll fall for it again."

Phoebe laughed bitterly. "Why break the habit..." she narrowed her eyes and span around. "Don't tell me he's finished down there already."

"No," Chakotay sniggered, "last I heard he'd ordered the cloning machine to be dug out of the closet."

"Ohno, not again. Neelix is still serving the leftovers from the last time," Phoebe shuddered. "Do we have any left anyway?"

Chakotay made a little affirmative hmmm sound. "One."

Sickbay:

Damien waited impatiently in the lab, waiting for the replicator looking machine to make a beeping sound. Instead of it being permanently open, it had a microwave like door he had to open. The contents inside made him giggle like a child.

Ready Room:

"Well it'll keep him busy," Phoebe said.

Chakotay shook his head, "no need. We've got it." Phoebe didn't look impressed, he wrongly assumed she didn't understand. "You know, the drive."

"Are you sure? One hour ago somebody brought me what looked like a joystick," Phoebe said.

"Somebody's already glued it to his station," Chakotay said. "Yes we're sure. It's what Taylor and that Liger girl were working on. It also matched the description of twinkly lights and if kicked could radiate you."

Phoebe sniggered, "excellent. B'Elanna better be already installing it."

"As we speak," Chakotay smirked.

"Then we better be making tracks," Phoebe said, wiping the smirk off his face. She passed by him to go to the bridge.

"Now? I'd feel better with coaxial insurance," Chakotay stuttered, rushing after him.

"I'm not going anywhere without giving my sister a proper goodbye," Phoebe snickered. She was put off by Tom making engine sounds while roughly pushing a gearbox in circles. "And maybe a backup helmsman."

Chakotay shrugged and went to take his so called station; his seat.

"Tom, overcompensate later. Set a course for Voyager," Phoebe ordered. Tom was about to do so, he'd barely turned his chair around when she barked, "not through the nebula this time. Around!" To make things worse she snatched his new toy away.

"Spoil sport," he pouted.

Fifth Voyager:

"Here they come," Craig said from opps.

Kathryn was still in the middle of a sip of coffee, so Chakotay thoughtfully covered for her. "It's time to break a mirror. Red Alert, battle stations."

Kathryn glared at him but it only made him laugh. "You call that a pun or a witty line? You embarrass us all!"

"Setting a rendezvous course," Tom said while the two bickered.

Seventh Voyager:

Damien cackled with evil glee on his way back through the office. His prisoners were unaware he was no longer alone since his followers were much shorter than the biobeds.

"Ah, welcome back to part two of the Torture Files. Our still the same guests; the devilly angelic ball breaker, and the psychotic stabber of many," Damien sneered.

"Hey, there was no proof, it's not true!" Emma stuttered.

Her outburst put Damien off for a few seconds. "I was referring to both of you."

Emma glared in James' direction. "Are you stealing my stuff? Get your own fun!"

"You're the ball breaker," James said matter of factly, "I should know."

"Oh," Emma laughed, a little relieved. It didn't last, "I need to get myself a knife."

James rolled his eyes, "get your own fun."

"Ahem!" Damien angrily barked at them. "The pain I've put you through is but mere tickles compared to what I have in store for you next." Emma giggled, once again putting him off briefly. "You will be slowly devoured, just like I was by creatures so terrifying you'll wish for the sweet relief of death. Only I won't give it to you. Not yet."

He turned and looked down to address what had followed him in. To Emma and James it looked like he was talking to himself.

"Okay, split up and go get them. Just leave them alive," he cackled. Nothing happened. He looked around nervously and gritted his teeth. "Don't you start with that now. We'll talk about it later."

James managed to sit up only slightly to see what he was talking to. He groaned and dropped back down to Emma's confusion. "Suddenly it all makes sense," he said.

"Yes, go get them!" Damien shouted gleefully. Still nothing happened, at least not immediately. Emma was joined on the biobed by a little fluffy creature with big ears. "Yes, yes, don't go for the throat just yet. Maybe start somewhere small and..." The creature started to lick her hand. "No, no!"

Movement to the right of James caught his eye. He looked over to see two rabbits wander next to him, only to curl up and go to sleep in the bed's shade.

"That's it. Family meeting," Damien snapped, stomping off into the office. Despite his lack of success, a lot of the rabbits did follow him.

Emma batted the rabbit with her away, it merely hopped off onto the tray. "What's the matter with that guy?"

James was about to answer when Damien started shouting again, "I don't care, you've embarrassed me in front of my mortal enemies! You don't take that tone with me... No, Fuffle get off, Cuddles can do so much better than you."

Emma and James couldn't help but laugh, and it was nowhere near over. "Who pooped in my corn flakes?" Damien cried.

"I was trying to think of a plan to get outta here, but this is fun," Emma sniggered.

The ship trembled a couple of times, prompting the red alert. "That'll do," James said as he lifted his arms out of the restraints as if they weren't there.

"Hey, why didn't you do that before?" Emma asked.

James got up to pry the restraints of her next. "I did," he said.

"Yeah right," Emma smirked. Her first thing to do when she was free was raid the equipment tray. "Hehe, this'll be good payback."

"You mean for Damien Junior there, don't you?" James said uneasily.

Emma smiled innocently. "Sure," she sweetly replied.

"Ah ha!" Damien laughed on entry, pointing a phaser toward them. "You think you can escape from me?"

"No, this show desperately needs a piss break or two," Emma said.

Damien pretended to laugh. "Learning from the best I see." Emma pulled a disgusted face. James only frowned. "One anything and you're both dead. I've had my fun."

Another hit to the ship shook him and them off balance. Damien hit the ground, losing the phaser from his grasp. Emma also lost a few of her tools and hypos.

"Aaaw," she moaned, hurrying to grab the ones in arms reach.

James rushed over as Damien scrambled on his hands and knees to get his phaser back. James stamped on the arm reaching for it. "Don't try it."

"You..." Damien spat through the pain, "I'll get you yet."

Emma ran over with what looked a deadlier pizza cutter and a hypo. She was a little too late, James punched Damien to the ground and unconscious as soon as she got there.

"Aaaw, you don't let me have any fun," Emma whined.

"Sure I do," James said in protest. Emma glared anyway. "I've got a shuttle to steal, you make sure he doesn't alert anyone. Okay?"

Emma giggled, "now you're talking."

Meanwhile on the bridge, the Seventh crew were having difficulty clinging onto their stations. Phoebe kept a keen angry eye on the other Voyager on the screen, her fingers clawing into the armrests.

"What are you waiting for? Where are those reflecting shields, the cloak?" she spat.

Harry sobbed over his newly on fire station. Anyone nearby quickly moved away.

"You lot, useless to the end," Phoebe snarled as she launched out of the captain's chair, straight for the helm. Tom braced himself for a beating, only to be shoved out of his chair and replaced by her. "That coaxial drive better not be in backwards like that new torpedo launcher."

Chakotay and Tuvok exchanged nervous glances.

"Captain," the regular Tom said nervously, "their engines are powering up, and I don't mean the warp drive."

Kathryn swung around towards Tuvok. "Shields status?"

"Ten percent, Captain," he replied.

"Ugh," Kathryn groaned impatiently. "Keep firing. Follow them."

Tom laughed but instantly regretted it, "I'm not that good."

"Nobody said anything of the sort," Chakotay muttered.

Kathryn smirked, "Tuvok, aim a torpedo in front of their port bow, detonate it when in range."

"Yes Captain," Tuvok said.

Seventh Voyager:

Phoebe saw something fly by her nose, she quickly swerved the ship to one side to avoid it, taking them back towards the nebula.

"Women drivers," Tom smugly said to Chakotay. He was too distracted by the fluctuating nebula ahead of them to care. He also didn't notice when a tricorder flew into Tom's face, knocking him out.

"Uh, what's that?" he asked, pointing at the darkening shade of red.

Phoebe looked up, just in time for the bow of the Z5 to emerge from the clouds. "Oh for..." she quickly changed course again, the ship shook multiple times, setting a few stations on fire.

"Shields are down," Tuvok reported.

Fifth Voyager:

Craig sighed in relief, "transporter room's got them."

Kathryn smiled. "Curiosity killed the copycat."

"What?" everyone said in unison.

Kathryn's anger threatened to boil off. "Destroy it, sheesh!"

Seventh Voyager dodged another torpedo hit, only just. Their new extra warp drives slapped on half hazardedly to the top of the ship powered red. They were about to move away when a phaser blast flicked one of them straight off the hull, knocking the ship into a frenzied spin.

Another torpedo hit this time, right into the belly of the ship. Its hull started to buckle.

"Set a course out of here," Kathryn ordered.

Tom hurriedly tapped away at the helm, "you don't have to tell me once."

"Craig, tractor beam on the Delilicious Z5," Kathryn said on route to her chair.

"Yup," was all Craig could say as he tried not to laugh.

Voyager swerved to the right, taking the limping Z5 with them. Seventh Voyager broke in on itself, creating a massive shockwave that could even be seen spreading out on the other side of the nebula where the F9 was left abandoned and adrift.

It was soon joined by Voyager and the Z5, they all got barely rocked by what was left of Seventh's wake.

Captain's Log... 54 er, line?

"54252.7," Chakotay's voice said.

Right, what he said. Seventh Voyager has finally been dealt with. Unfortunately they took the coaxial drive and yet another chance of getting home with it. At the very least we have retrieved the Ligers' prototype ship, so they're happy for now. The Doctor and some volunteers are working on reviving its crew. The member they've labelled as a traitor's pod is empty, so we've assumed the best, or is it worst?

In other news, the Deliquescent fleet have reported they won't be joining us for some time. Even with the death of their so called leader, the Sixes remain an active thorn in the Ligers' side. Despite that, Lilly insists that the Z5 and the F9, which is actually red and blue, can you believe it? I would insist it was just red as well, uck! Ahem, that they stay with us, probably until they're both repaired. Ungrateful snot.

Jessie entered the Mess Hall to head straight for the replicator and out again. Only she was stopped halfway when she spotted Scot and Lilly arguing at a nearby table next to the window. A couple more tables away sat James on his own, barely touching his food. She could hear what they were saying, so she assumed he could as well.

"Scot, I said you can go," Lilly snapped.

"No, I think we should work this out," Scot pleaded.

"There's nothing to work out, this isn't the time," Lilly said.

"Look, I don't know how many times I have to apologise to you. What do I have to do to get my best friend back?" Scot asked.

"Nothing, you embarrassed me in front of everyone. I can't accept any apologies," Lilly replied. "We are no longer friends. I know what you want now, you creep."

Scot's voice broke, "but... that's not true. I don't care how, I just want you in my life."

Lilly scoffed, "oh, so being my friend is enough for you now? Lucky me. Get lost," she spat. She stomped off, leaving him looking like Neelix reading a recipe book.

Jessie carried her tray over towards James' looking reluctant. Since she was taking her sweet time about it, Scot noticed her and approached.

"Why, she won't listen to me. You're a girl, what would you want me to do?" Scot said.

Jessie repressed a slap or two, only by thinking she wasn't any better. "Look, she doesn't owe you a sodding thing," she tried to say gently but it came out as a snap. "She was your friend, she trusted you. You're making it worse, reminding her of it everytime you pester her."

"But," Scot protested.

Jessie wasn't finished, he could tell by her narrowing eyes. "Leave her alone. It's up to her whether or not you can be friends again. Grow a pair and cry in the bed you made."

"Wow," Scot tried to say cheekily, but it came out flat. "Okay, thanks." He wandered off while he was still in one piece.

"Yeah," Jessie sighed, opting to sit at a different table on her own.

James noticed her in the corner of his eye. He picked up his nearly full plate to go over to her. "Sorry, can I join you?"

"Sorry? Yeah, sure, if you want," Jessie stuttered, looking a little flummoxed.

James sat down with a relieved smile. "I've been thinking about what you said. About Tani, I mean."

"Oh?" Jessie said with a cringe.

"It didn't feel right comparing, in anyway. What Tani did, what Simon did. I didn't want to think it was the same or I'm playing down what you went through. It couldn't be worse, that's insulting and then I

feel like an asshole for thinking that. And it if were *not as bad*, I feel guilty for making a fuss over it," James tried to explain. He pulled a few unsure faces once he was done, "I dunno if that makes sense."

Jessie weakly smiled and nodded, "a bit. It's easier to deflect, huh?" James nodded as well, still looking worried. "It's also typical of you. You didn't have to worry about me at all. You shouldn't."

"You're probably right," James mumbled while his shoulders tensed. "That's patronising too. I can't win," he laughed in spite of himself.

"Only in your head, you're too hard on yourself," Jessie said. Looking down at the table, she firmly bit her lip. "Is that why you keep taking the blame after what I did?"

James instantly looked uncomfortable. "What you did?"

Jessie raised an eyebrow and stared at him firmly. "I can say all I want about Tani but I'd be a hypocrite. You know, I know I forced you into that kiss. It wasn't right, and it wasn't what friends do, especially after you helped me from *him*."

"Jess," James struggled to think of a response. He reached out to place a gentle hand on hers. "I don't see that as the same thing, at all."

Jessie laughed bitterly, "no, of course you don't. It is though."

"How?" James said, eyeing the table, "I'm sure I was about to do the same thing."

"What?" Jessie stuttered, eyes widening.

James shook his head. "Yeah, that's how I remember it. I'm no better than *him* or Tani either. I'm weak, and I don't deserve anything from you. At least anything but a punch or two anyway."

Jessie genuinely laughed, then shook her head. "What a pair," she muttered. "Call it even?" she joked, holding out a different hand to shake.

"I thought we already had," James pretended to sound confused.

"Oh I don't know, I've got some near death experiences to have before we're even," Jessie sniggered. James didn't take it too seriously and laughed with her.

Unknown to either of them Andrew had walked into the Mess Hall looking for her. When he clasped eyes on the two friends laughing and joking, his eyes hardened.

THE END