

Episode 2.11

Kiss of Death

"What do you mean you're quitting?" Morgan asked.

Lilly looked across at Craig with a raised eyebrow. He looked as bemused as she expected. "It means I'm quitting. The band," she answered intentionally slowly.

Morgan stared at her blankly, rapidly blinking. Her attention then drifted over towards Craig and back again. "Band of what? I have no idea what you're talking about."

"Yeah right," Lilly muttered, "no harm done then." She stormed out.

Morgan and Craig waited until she was absolutely, definitely gone before sighing in relief. "That was close," Craig said.

"Yeah, why would Lilly be in our band? I didn't think we were that drunk that day," Morgan laughed.

The Holodeck doors opened. The pair stared at them expectantly. When Kiara walked through them they were even more confused than when Neelix walked in wearing stereotypical fishing gear.

"Why didn't you tell me there was band practice?" she huffed while putting her hands on her hips as their mum would.

"Uh because you're not part of it," Craig replied, but quickly turned hesitant, "are you?"

Kiara pouted, "no, but why not? I'm grown up now and stuff. I can at least cover for Morgan when she's off."

Morgan snickered briefly, Kiara narrowed her eyes at her. "Sorry, I was just imagining you trying to piss off mum with some of the dance routines and lyrics."

"Yeah yeah," Kiara said blankly. "I didn't want to be in a two hit wonder anyway."

Morgan tried to look mad to cover her shiftiness. "Two? Cos there's two of us, well you see the thing is, Jess..."

"Oh dear," Kiara laughed, then walked back the way she came. "I send your videos to Annika on a daily basis, if you need a reminder."

"Uhoh," Craig said with some growing horror. Morgan though smirked instead. "You said you weren't recording it."

"I also said to put on the blonde wig I gave you, that should've been your first clue," Morgan teased.

Craig's eyes shifted side to side, "but James didn't have to do it, why did I?"

Morgan resisted the urge to rolled her eyes up. "He's already blon... oh you know what, never mind. It's not like we're going to perform Barbie Cow again."

"And why not?" Craig asked a little suspiciously.

Morgan stared back, narrowed eyes. "How many times did James smack you around last week? You know why."

"Too many times," Craig bitterly said. "Where is the psycho anyway? I assume he's the reason Jessie's not here either."

"What, why, what do you mean?" Morgan nervously stuttered.

Her response threw Craig right off he couldn't remember even feeling mad, let alone what they were talking about. "I... what were we called again?"

Morgan frowned, unable to answer him. She quickly tapped her commbadge. "Janeway to Rex and Stuart. Craig wants you to get your lazy butts down to the holodeck."

Craig's jaw dropped. "Wh... why? They're going to kill me for that."

Morgan looked nervous yet again, "why, you're making stuff up, dummy."

"Um, have you been on the coffee again, cos your dad did warn you. We all did," Craig said.

"What's the rush? It's my day off. I can slap all day if that's what he wants," Jessie's voice said.

"No, uh no," Craig laughed very nervously, "but thanks."

"Anytime. Bye."

"Wait," Morgan quickly said to stop her. She heard the telltale bleep that meant she was a tad too late, but still could hear the faint buzz. "Today's the day we were gonna try out the band, you know."

This time James spoke up, *"today's also the day that we were watching Duncan till 0200."*

Craig silently mumbled a *boohoo*. Even Morgan didn't hear and so she stared, puzzled at him. "It's like dinner time, nearly," he said as an improvisation.

"So, what song are we rewriting today? I hope there's some part of it that can be rhymed with Craig and punched," James' voice asked.

They heard the bleep again, this time for sure they knew they were cut off.

"Rhy...med?" Morgan said slowly with widening eyes.

Craig tried to avoid laughing at her, he was already two for three.

Sickbay:

"I should have known," the Doctor muttered as he worked at his console. He tapped his commbadge. "Sickbay to Morgan, report here immediately!"

"Sorry, I can't, I'm performing Chain Reaction in a minute."

"Well I'm sure you've got enough time to tell me why you deactivated my program Thursday night," the Doctor said.

"Er... I didn't."

"Yes you did. According to the computer only you, Jessie and James were here when it happened. I ran a scan on the console, your DNA was on it," the Doctor said.

"Stop looking at me like that...."

"Oh crap, when did you do that?"

"Er, after I left the Doc's office. I went through the other door."

"Morgan, you didn't. You must've left through the main door, since the console you used was in the main part of Sickbay," the Doctor said.

"Er..." The commlink was cut off.

Meanwhile in Holodeck 1:

Morgan felt rather uneasy as James and Jessie stared at her. Craig had no context whatsoever so looked around at them all, bemused and a little worried. He edged closer to her just in case.

"So er, I was thinking that instead of the pestering line, we change it to *got a pedestal to put yourself on*. It's closer to the original," Morgan said through her embarrassment. It didn't work, her cheeks flushed.

Craig nodded rapidly, "yes, I like it."

"Craig, go play in traffic," Jessie snapped. Craig got deer in headlight eyes as he focused on her. "It means get lost."

Morgan shook her head, "no wait a minute, there's nothing to talk about. I thought he wanted to be turned off, so I did on the way out. I dunno what your problem is, gosh," she feigned outrage and folded her arms.

Craig was agreeing until the word gosh, then his eyebrows narrowed and he turned his head quickly toward her so fast it made him dizzy. "Wait, what is going on?"

James groaned on the approach to him. Craig instinctively backed off a step, then he forced himself to stand his ground. It didn't matter, he was pulled off to one side out of earshot of Jessie and Morgan.

"You saw, didn't you?" Jessie asked with blushing cheeks.

Morgan made a little indecisive squeak, "well it wouldn't be the first time." Jessie's blush turned into a scowl, Morgan laughed it off though. "What? I left you alone. I didn't make a big thing of it, and I didn't say anything."

"And you deactivated the Doctor?" Jessie said plainly.

"Yeah, you're welcome. Next time, in private where I can't see it," Morgan said, sounding relieved. She noticed Jessie's eyes slid to one side, which she knew was the direction James and Craig had gone. "Oh you haven't," Morgan groaned in disgust, "but he's annoying and talks too much."

Thankfully Jessie took that well and so she smiled weakly. "Didn't let that put you off, did it?"

Morgan shuddered a lot. "Eew no, no. I dunno what that was about. The Doc said it was some weird mind connect with Emma, and she was like imagining..."

"Yeah I don't want to know," Jessie muttered. "So is that why you turned him off?"

"No," Morgan protested, "I was trying to be a good friend like you asked me to."

"Oh, well next time if you see Tom or someone like him coming up to us, even if we're not doing anything at all, not even in the same room, feel free to do your thing," Jessie said.

They both laughed. James took that as a cue to bring Craig back while he was rambling on. "Is it a secret lab that cures obnoxious Slayerness?" Craig guessed.

James was still pulling him when he let go, so Craig ended up on the floor. "Yes, that's it," James said deadpan. "So?"

"It's okay," Jessie said, glancing at him. He looked relieved and a little less tense.

Morgan turned up her nose, "hey, I'm not like that. No one knows." Jessie and James both cringed, Craig looked up at her curiously. She pulled a few choice faces herself. "That we hid mum's coffee stash... somewhere. The Doctor was onto us. Shhh."

"Oh," Craig sounded disappointed as he dragged himself back to his feet. "That explains..." he gestured to her. She scowled, so he knew instantly he was three for three with little effort.

The next day:

Captains Log Stardate... er... pass.

"Why don't you just go back to saying supplemental?" Chakotay asked.

"Shut up, you're ruining my log," Kathryn moaned. "If you're gonna linger, make yourself useful. The stardate spreadsheet won't find itself."

As far as we know there's no pervert pirates, time travelling ninnies, undead murderers, Damien lackeys... so we've got a day or so of peace, if we're lucky. If not, someone's getting demoted.

The Ready Room door chimed seemingly just in time for Kathryn to finish. "Yes?" She smiled at Tuvok as he entered with tense shoulders. "Ah Commander, what can I do for you?"

"May I speak to you in private, Captain?" Tuvok asked.

"Of course," Kathryn sweetly replied. Chakotay was already on his way out when she directed a throat clear in his direction.

Tuvok waited an extra few seconds after the door had closed before he approached the desk a step. "I request a leave of absence, Captain."

Kathryn's face fell. "Oh? That's not like you. I only remember you taking a few days off only one time, back on the Endeavour was it?"

"Indeed," Tuvok said while looking increasingly uncomfortable, "for deeply personal reasons, just like this..."

"How many years ago was it, six, eight?" Kathryn pondered aloud.

"Seven," Tuvok answered.

Kathryn's eyes shot wide open. Tuvok hoped then and there she got it, if it meant he could go back to his quarters quicker, but he knew better than that.

"What has that walking boob or two done now?" Kathryn hissed.

Tuvok sighed, he wasn't surprised. He still tensed further than he already was. "Do you grant my request, Captain?" he said in a shaky, frustrated voice.

Kathryn looked oblivious to that detail, only confused. "But she wasn't around back then." She smiled contently, "good times."

"Captain," Tuvok unintentionally barked, finally getting her surprised attention. "I will not be on duty for a few days. I am not unwell, so there is no need to involve the Doctor. This has nothing to do with Seven of Nine."

"Strange. I thought the image of her would put anyone off," Kathryn said. Tuvok stared at her in quiet astonishment and a little offense while she smiled coyly for about a second. "Request granted, and happy birthday."

Tuvok's expression hadn't changed, he merely blinked for a short while. "Do you..." Kathryn eyed him playfully. "You only pretend to be easily flummoxed, to what end?"

Kathryn chuckled as she brought a cup to her lips for a sip. After she said with a smile, "I don't know what you're talking about, Commander. Dismissed."

"Yes. Thank you Captain," Tuvok said with much confusion. As soon as he was gone Kathryn shrugged casually and got back to recording her log.

The Mess Hall:

Tom came in carrying Duncan who was crying extremely loudly. He hurried over to Morgan, James and Jessie's table.

"Please babysit again, I'll pay you anything," Tom moaned.

Jessie and James glanced at each other, then they looked back at Tom.

"Yeah sure, on one condition," Jessie said.

"Name it," Tom said.

"See if you can last an entire day without taking the piss out of anyone," James said.

"What?" Tom laughed genuinely. Their straight faces and earlier smirks told him they were serious, and he laughed harder. "You people are sick."

"Take it or leave it," James said.

"Fine, you win, you're killing me, but ok," Tom said.

"By the way it, starts now," Jessie added.

"Damn, I had a really good insult in mind," Tom muttered as he looked at what Neelix was serving for breakfast. He then looked back at Jessie and made a little pained squeak. Jessie's eyes narrowed at him. "Okeydoke," Tom stuttered, dropping the little boy off with James, then quickly ran off.

"We should've said a week," Jessie said.

Morgan giggled as she sat down in a different seat. "Next you'll be trying to convince mum to go cold coffee."

"One impossibly funny thing at a time," James said.

"Oh, then what's..." Morgan said, gesturing her hand towards Jessie. They both stared blankly at her, Jessie's turned a shade darker after a moment. "Not that!" Morgan blurted out, "I mean the makeover, or lack thereof."

Jessie fidgeted in her seat and looked away a little. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Really? Cos in all the years I've known you, you've never once left your quarters without some of that paint on your face," Morgan said, unfazed. "Or leave your room for that matter."

"So?" Jessie defensively snapped, instantly regretting it. "I couldn't really be bothered one morning, and I realised I don't really need lipstick or eyeshadow, or anything." Her cheeks flushed as she dipped her head down, "I don't, do I?"

"Need?" Morgan sounded confused.

James cleared his throat as a hint, which she didn't get and so frowned at him. "You only noticed anyway because Tom drew attention to it, in his head and you heard him, right?"

"Well yeah, I guess so," Morgan mumbled, "it's no big deal."

"Uh huh, if it isn't noticeable, how did he notice?" Jessie asked uncomfortably.

Morgan thought about it, making her shudder for a second. "Do I have to?" she whined. "He was thinking something like, oh look James bringing a corpse to the Talent Show, laughing at his own joke."

Jessie looked further down, then got up to walk off. "Morgan," James warned the teen.

"I know, so gross. But it was him not me," Morgan complained.

James was about to get up when he noticed Jessie only left the table to go to the replicator. Still she ordered something rather sullenly, slowly and occasionally looking over her shoulder at passing people.

"Oh come on, you know I'm the last person to give a crap about silly things like make up and cute tops," Morgan said with growing defensiveness. "If she wants to go to work makeupless in a tank top and leggings, so what. I normally wouldn't have noticed. It was Tom being gross."

"I know, but you've got to be a bit less... Morgan-y," James said.

Morgan's eyes narrowed to near slits. "What's Morgan-y?"

Jessie wandered back over with a cup in hand. "Don't worry about it," she mumbled while sitting back down. "Nobody noticed yesterday, so... maybe it's not the makeup thing, it could be cause I am feeling a little sluggish today."

"Yesterday?" Morgan said, a little surprised and confused.

"See," Jessie tried to smile. "You and Craig rushed me out of bed for that band practise, I had no time to get all spruced up."

James noticed Morgan's baffled face and had to laugh. "And like you say, you don't need it."

"Nope," Jessie genuinely smiled back.

Morgan glanced between them, pulling a face. "Guys, what did I say?"

Jessie giggled and shook her head. "We're not doing anything." She gave James' arm a little playful nudge with her elbow, "are we?"

"Nope," James replied.

"Not yet, but you're doing that flirty compliment eye gazing crap. It's putting me off my breakfast," Morgan said.

James eyed the empty plate in front of her, "I can see that."

Morgan rolled her eyes, then focused them on little Duncan dozing off in James' arm. "I thought you were on duty today," she said.

"Yeah, so?" James said, looking like he was trying not to smirk.

"Oh for... don't even think of taking him to the bridge again. Mum would not shut up about the stain on her chair she apparently still can't get off," Morgan complained.

James did laugh but quietly as he stood up, "okay, so take Duncan to the bridge and let him use Janeway's chair. Got it."

Danny approached the table just as Morgan was about to tuck into her second plate. "Oh so the little birdy was right, Jessie does look different," she sang while inviting herself into the last remaining seat. Jessie groaned into her hands. "Almost glowing I see." Danny elbowed James a couple a times, "nice job."

"What are you going on about?" he asked.

"Oooph, a little touchy for a got lucky guy," Danny giggled and winked.

Morgan slid her plate to one side, turning very pale. "Never mind, I'll skip breakfast today." She got up and hurried away.

Duncan seemed to be on the same wavelength as her, he coughed and spit up on himself. He immediately started whimpering.

"Yeah me too kid, me too," James said. Jessie looked at him with pleading eyes. He hesitated for a moment, glancing down at the baby. Jessie eyed the same stain he did, then gently shook her head. "Really?" James only mouthed as he hurried off as well.

Danny didn't seem to notice any of that, or she wasn't fussed, she leaned toward her friend with a glint in her eye that could only mean one thing. "Soooooooo?"

Jessie rolled her eyes, "soo what?"

"Oh don't play that game with me Jessie-wessy," Danny pretended to sound offended, "again!"

"What?" Jessie frowned.

Danny waved a finger in front of her face, making her blush once more. "So it's convenient timing that make up obsessed and fashionista Jessie is wandering around the ship with nothing on her face, and wearing casual for her clothes, only a week after her little life altering trip to the desert?"

"I think you need to look up the word convenient," Jessie muttered.

"Oh so you and James weren't hooking up during your little vacation, and for a week afterwards?" Danny asked.

Jessie's eyes widened, cheeks managed to flush even redder. Danny of course smiled as if she'd won something.

"What, no, where did you get that from? Who said that?" Jessie stuttered. Danny only laughed quietly which touched a few nerves. "And what would that have to do with my not wearing makeup and stuff? Wouldn't some girls try to dress themselves up more to impress new boyfriends. Not that I have one."

Danny tried to repress another laugh but snorted instead. "I think you got that backwards, my dear terrible at lying friend."

"Ugh," Jessie grunted as she turned her head away. "I didn't do any of that to get the attention of one track minded boys. You're the one that's got it backwards."

Danny gasped, "that's not a very nice thing to say about our James. I know he can be a little weird, guy wise, but that's not on."

Jessie narrowed her eyes and looked back at her, "what are you..." then she thought she understood, so scoffed instead. "Will you stop it. There was no hook up, and I dunno where you got that from. And you lot are really making me think about going back home to re-replicate everything."

"Ohno, no. Don't do that. I wasn't making fun of you," Danny stammered. The icy stare she got back for that threw her off further, "for the make up, I mean."

"So you don't think I need it then?" Jessie asked in a low volumed voice.

Danny smiled, "no, I think he fancies the whole package."

"No," Jessie snapped while her cheeks flushed again, "it doesn't matter, that's not what I meant. Forget it."

"Hmm," Danny murmured while she gazed at her friend with scrutiny. "You'd react like this either way, so I'm not sure." She heard footsteps slowly approach, making her smile and look up. As she expected James had come back, her questioning gaze focused on him instead. "Sooo, drunk smooch under the stars, yay or nay?"

James avoided looking at her and focused straight on Jessie. "Apparently I can't take Duncan with me to duty. Do you want to walk part the way, and take him?"

"God yes," Jessie said, very relieved. She knew what smile Danny would have directed at either of them, so she averted her eyes from her too on her way passed the table.

Sickbay:

"And the point of that is?" the Doctor asked.

"Well, if he suddenly disappears for a few days, or a week, people will figure out the truth. Maybe we could just give him anything you have so far to keep him on duty," Kathryn replied.

"But Captain, this serum I conveniently finished just in time for this episode, and this episode only probably, is highly experimental. The last *test subject* who will remain nameless..." the Doctor said.

"Tom," Kathryn said.

"He or she complained they didn't like the taste, drank it all, then spent the weekend on Deck 15 writing a woe is me blog," The Doctor sighed.

Kathryn shrugged casually. "Okay, so I was wrong. So what, it happens. Point is, Tuvok's not a rejection short of a killing spree, so where's the harm?"

"We'd better prey to god this is enough to calm him down, or he's going to be clocked out by the end of the day," the Doctor muttered as he finished fiddling with a hypospray.

"Well, the crew will be entertained for a few days," Kathryn said as she shrugged her shoulders again.

Tuvok walked in looking a little twitchy. "You wanted to see me Doctor," he said calmly despite that.

The Doctor nodded, and he walked over to Tuvok with the hypospray. "I just want to give you an injection, since I discovered that you have a *mild fever*," the Doctor said.

Tuvok eyed Kathryn briefly, she averted her gaze to some beakers sitting on a cabinet nearby. "Oh that looks interesting, what does that do?" she asked.

The Doctor stared at her with a blank expression. "It's Neelix's last broth. It seems to be stronger laxative than anything I've brewed up."

Kathryn stepped to one side away with it, shrivelling her nose. Tuvok meanwhile raised an eyebrow.

"I told you that it was not necessary to involve the Doctor. There is no cure as it is not an illness," he said.

"Well," the Doctor sounded hesitant, the ell was dragged out, "I wouldn't know about that. Six years in the middle of nowhere on Voyager has given me some insight, it's not so different for Vulcans."

"What?" Kathryn said, sporting a hateful glare his way.

The Doctor tried to avoid any eye contact. Still he shuddered. "Six years, only four children, one of which was before the ship's launch. You do the maths."

"Very well, proceed," Tuvok said. The Doctor slowly put the hypospray to Tuvok's neck, and he pressed the button. He then stepped back.

"How do you feel, Commander?" Kathryn asked.

"Hmm, I do not feel any different," Tuvok said, his voice sounded calmer, more Vulcan like. He gave the Doctor a nod, "thank you."

The Doctor beamed proudly, "you're welc..." Tuvok tapped him on the butt, winked and strode off as if nothing ever happened. He and Kathryn stared with deer in headlights expressions for a few minutes, both unsure if that happened or not.

After a few awkward minutes the Doctor broke the silence, "did you know your daughter switched me off the other week?"

"Oh. Sorry, I'll tell her to pop by asap," Kathryn said, sounding thankful for the change of subject. She hurried out leaving the hologram very confused.

James and Jessie were heading down the corridor towards the turbolift.

"Can I ask you something?" Jessie asked.

"Yeah," James replied.

"Do you think I should wear makeup again?" Jessie asked.

James stopped in his tracks, and he laughed. "What kind of question is that?"

Jessie stopped, then she went over to face him. "Please? I want your opinion."

Meanwhile just around the corner, Tani was watching. She mumbled under her breath, "say yes, say she looks better as a clown than a scruffy tramp. Vain cow."

"Well, okay," James said uneasily while trying to find the right words. "I didn't really know why you felt you needed it, but it was something you liked to do. If you don't anymore then you shouldn't care what anyone thinks, and that definitely includes me as well."

"I feel so stupid though, slobby," Jessie mumbled, rolling one of her shoulders up. "I didn't this morning, and yesterday, the day before. But it was just us, so I figured you couldn't tell me."

James' face softened, "tell you what? I think you look gorgeous, I always have."

Tani gasped, "please tell me he didn't say that."

"And besides, it's who you are that matters the most. That's who I fell in love with, not some lipstick and stuff," James said.

"You know, you say the sweetest things," Jessie said while stepping up to give him a kiss.

In between them both, Duncan giggled and reached his hand upward.

Jessie smiled down at the boy awkwardly, a little embarrassed. "I really shouldn't do that again," she laughed at herself.

"Why?" James asked with a smile. Duncan also responded with a tiny squeak as he gazed up at him. "Don't forget..." he said, carefully handing him over to her.

"Take him to the bridge to annoy Janeway. How could I forget?" Jessie smirked back.

James nodded. "See you two later," he said as he turned to walk away.

Jessie waited and watched until he was out of her view before turning herself to go back the way she came. To her annoyance she almost walked into a seething Tani, glaring at her with her arms tightly crossed.

"Hi slut," she said.

Jessie groaned and rolled her eyes up to the ceiling. "Here we go again." She stepped to one side to walk around the girl.

"Nuh uh, we need to talk," Tani said, quickly stepping to get in her way.

Jessie was about to respond but Duncan beat her to it, he burst into loud sobs.

"That'd be my reaction as well," Tani said, pointing her eyes between the two.

"Grow up sometime, Tani," Jessie muttered. This time she turned around to walk away.

"Hey," Tani grumbled, rushing after her. "Don't think I don't know what your game is. How do you sleep at night?"

Jessie chuckled over her annoyance, "quite well actually." Duncan's sobs meanwhile softened into whimpers. She kept on walking.

"You're sick, you know that!" Tani shouted as her pace turned into a sprint. She cut in front of Jessie once more, making her stop abruptly. "How did you get him to sleep with you, and how..."

Jessie's eyes flared up, "excuse me!?"

"Does Tom know you made his wife your personal incubator, just so you can trap James in your vice?" Tani snarled.

"What? That's..." Jessie ended up laughing genuinely, though she still felt irritated, "that's the stupidest chunk of words you plastered together I've ever heard, and that's saying something."

"Oh, so this isn't yours?" Tani snapped, pointing at Duncan. He blew a raspberry at her and turned his head away.

Jessie briefly smirked. "You've got one hell of an imagination, kid. Piss off." Again she turned around to walk away.

"Ok then, maybe I'll have a chat with Tom and B'Elanna, see what they say," Tani said, her eyes glistening.

It got the desired effect, Jessie stopped cold in her tracks. "Let's get one thing straight," she muttered coldly before turning back to face the teen. "You stick your nose into my affairs any further, and I'll be using you as my own personal punch bag."

"Yeah right," Tani giggled. "Like I'm going to be afraid of Miss Oh Do I Look Stupid without flour and paint on my face? Please, I want you to compliment me, er I mean your opinion, honest!"

Jessie ground her teeth, eyes hardened. "You'd be..."

"You do by the way; look stupid and slobby, like the walking dead," Tani continued.

"Better than being a bitter, jealous little girl," Jessie snapped back.

Tani huffed loudly, "I'll prove it. You only manage to snag him by tricking him. I'll kiss him again and then you'll see what it's meant to look like."

"You'll be kissing my fist in a minute," Jessie's voice managed to get cooler than it already was.

"Oh, but if he's just your friend, why do you care?" Tani teased.

Jessie scoffed, "why does Tani not have any friends, the mystery continues."

"Just admit it, you don't want other women around him or he'll figure out that he has other options than you," Tani hissed.

"I'll admit that I don't want anyone to have to put up with abusive little snots like yourself," Jessie said. She noticed Duncan squirming in her arms, she eyed Tani distastefully. "One sec..." She gently sat the little boy on the floor beside her. He let out the cutest laugh as he started to flick the laces on her shoes.

"I'm sorry, but I'm not the one pulling the old deceptive face mask crap until I snare the guy," Tani said.

"For the last time, I never wore the stuff to attract people," Jessie groaned. Tani laughed in disbelief. "You wouldn't understand, so why bother? It's not your business anyway."

"Well, I think you need an opinion off somebody who doesn't suck up to you," Tani said.

"James doesn't suck up to me," Jessie growled.

"He does, cos you look terrible, and he doesn't want to admit it," Tani said.

Jessie couldn't help but laugh mockingly, "so that's it? That's all you've got? You think there's some giant conspiracy because a baby was born and I decided one day to not bother putting some foundation on. You can't seem to get your plot straight either. Maybe just maybe admit that you're overreacting over not getting your way."

"Orrrr," Tani said slowly, "you're a manipulative old hag, so insecure about her waning looks that she's got to lure in her old flame even though he's clearly tried to move on. It must've hurt when he showed interest in much younger women, huh? Sucks for you."

Jessie breathed in slowly as if to calm herself, she then covered her face. "For god's sake, I really can't be bothered with you. This is pointless."

"Then why don't you leave, and take that with you," Tani snapped while pointing at Duncan.

Something clicked in Jessie's psyche. If she didn't feel the young boy's eyes on her, her hands would be clenched and ready to swing. Instead her shoulders tensed, eyes were on fire. "Take what with me?" she asked dangerously.

"Ooph, why so offended? I thought he was Tom's brat," Tani teased.

"You know what..." Jessie snarled, her shoulders shook as she stepped a little closer, "count yourself lucky that I don't have the energy for you today, for you get to live one more day. Too bad for everyone else though."

"Aaw, I'm so scared, boo hoo," Tani started to fake crying. Jessie went to turn, leaving her to it. Instead she dropped like a stone to the ground, putting Tani right off. "Hey, that's a little extreme way of getting out of this."

Duncan burst out crying, so hysterically and loud that Tani tried to cover her ears to block him out. She used her elbow to bump into the wall computer, "transporter room? Helloo?"

A few attempts later a voice responded to her, "go ahead."

"Yeah, can you get a lock on Jessie and get her to Sickbay. And the kid as well," Tani said as if it was painful to.

"Sure. Jessie who?"

Tani groaned, "I dunno, Jessie Makeupface. Surely there's only one on this ship."

"Uh ok, stand by."

Harry tried to look elsewhere, but no matter what he could feel Tuvok's eyes on him. Just to be sure he snuck a glance, catching the Vulcan waving at him. Harry's eyes widened in horror, so he tried to ignore it.

"Captain, I don't feel very well, can I go to Sickbay?" he abruptly asked.

"Yes you can," Kathryn sighed.

Harry headed towards the turbolift. Tuvok smiled very discreetly as he went to follow him. Harry made a little squeak as the doors shut.

Tom started to shake, he grabbed his own wrist to try and stop it. "Captain?" he unintentionally squeaked. He barely got a grunt in response. "Did that just happen?"

"I think so, that can't be good," Kathryn replied sheepishly.

"Damn, it's not fair," Tom moaned.

Meanwhile in the turbolift, Harry felt like he'd been travelling the ship in circles, passing Deck Five multiple times. Tuvok stood opposite, enjoying the view and occasionally raising both eyebrows, sometimes winking.

Finally it stopped, but not on his deck. He whimpered as Naomi skipped in, fluttering her eyelashes at him.

There was someone else at the lift doors, but after seeing that and Tuvok pursuing his lips briefly, Faye decided to get the next one.

Sickbay:

The Doctor was scanning Jessie. Tani stood near the door. Duncan was still crying on one of the biobeds.

James walked in, he spotted Tani. He pushed her against the wall, she just grinned.

"Hey, if you wanted a kiss, you could've just asked," she purred

"I never want a bloody kiss from you. I want to know what you did to Jessie!" James yelled.

Tani giggled, a little high from the close proximity but at the same time a little worried. "I told her she looked a little sick, so here we are. So I take it you're free tonight."

"Ensign, not in my Sickbay," the Doctor moaned.

James sighed and he stepped away from Tani. He then headed over to the Doctor. "What's wrong with her?" he asked.

"I am not sure exactly. All I can detect so far is an alarming fever. Earlier she was 100 degrees and still climbing, now she's at room temperature," the Doctor answered.

Tani scoffed bitterly, "so either way, an improvement."

"Somebody throw her out before I do it literally," James muttered.

"Geez, you're so rude, you didn't used to be like that," Tani gasped in offense.

James briefly side eyed the Doctor, then her. "Oh, are we doing the amnesia bit again?"

Tani hmphed on her way out the door, to the relief of everyone conscious.

A smile slipped onto the Doctor's face. "Hmm, she does have a point." James looked at him as if he had recommended Neelix's cooking. "You have been on edge a lot lately. Shame, I thought you'd grown out of it."

"Wishful thinking," James murmured.

"Unrealistic, more like," the Doctor chuckled.

James rolled his eyes, "stop changing the subject. You have any theories as to why her temperature's so random?"

"Not yet. I will need to do a more thorough scan," the Doctor replied. He tapped his commbadge, "Sickbay to Paris. I'm going to need your help, can you stop by?"

"Sure thing Doc, absolutely. Right there."

The commline went dead while the Doctor was still reacting with plenty of bemusement. "Strange, he never likes coming here." He noticed James' eyes drift to the side, he assumed in annoyance.

Harry dashed inside, breathing heavily as if he ran a marathon. "Doc, Doc. There's something wrong with Tuvok."

"Oh?" the Doctor only sounded lightly curious.

"Uh yes. He's been giving me the eye, you know..." Harry stammered until he noticed James in the room as well. "The eyebrow, but that's not important right now. He's..."

"Oh that," the Doctor said nonchalantly, taking both James and Harry aback. "That side effect should wear off in a few hours or so. I hope. Maybe."

James started to raise his own eyebrow but then thought better of it when glancing briefly at Harry. He frowned back. "I really hope you're not going to be guessing with your other patient too."

Harry noticed then the occupied biobed, widened his eyes and stepped aside a couple of times away from him.

"Of course not. That one was Captain's Orders, this is much different," the Doctor grumbled in offense.

Harry made a little confused squeak. "If this is meant to be a joke, I'm not laughing."

The Doctor was about to start the over body scanner when the doors opened up again. He groaned irritably.

"Hey Doc," Tom over eagerly said on entry. "Please state the nature of the medical emergenceeeeeeee..." he panicked at the sight of Harry.

Harry rolled his eyes, "oh here he is, Mr funny man with his jokes. Go on, get it over with."

Tom whimpered pathetically like a sad dog. "I... why? I dunno what you're talking about bud." He ran over to join the Doctor, barely giving the patient a first glance. "You rang?"

"I need you to keep her temperature at a stable level while I run some scans," the Doctor answered.

Tom briefly glanced at Jessie on the bed, then winced. "Ohno, this is terrible." His attention darted around until he at first noticed James, then Duncan on another biobed preoccupied with spinning an empty hypospray around, at least until it went on the floor. "Oh. Harry?"

"No," James said harshly before Harry could react.

Tom pouted, "right, I'm working. No time to talk."

Harry laughed nervously, "that's my cue to go find a hole to hide in." He hurried out, passing yet another person on the way in.

"Doc..." they started to say.

The Doctor groaned, "what now?"

Chakotay didn't look impressed, he grit his teeth for the moment. "I realise you're busy, but we have a bizarre situation going on outside."

"And?" the Doctor said with indifference. He started the over body scanner. Tom meanwhile walked around the biobed to get out of the way. Doing so he noticed in the corner of his eye Chakotay sporting a fresh black eye. Instinctively he looked at James.

He in turn glanced briefly at Chakotay and back again, shrugging the whole thing off.

"Nice," Chakotay grunted apparently toward them both. "I was checking on the repairs to Deck Five, when I was accosted by a screaming Vulcan shouting at me for stealing his mate."

Tom made another sad dog squeak, but longer this time so everyone heard and took notice.

The Doctor meanwhile rolled his eyes up at the mere inconvenience. "I don't think Tuvok has priority in this case."

"I can see that," Chakotay said a little irritably, "but I'm sure you can spare Paris to take a look at him."

Tom's eyes nearly bugged out. "Me, no, I'm not really here."

"What?" Chakotay snapped.

James groaned. "You really have that little self control?"

"Duh, we have met before, you monster," Tom spat back at him. The Doctor nudged him, he assumed to get out of the way. Instead the hologram handed him a couple of hypos. Tom noticed his mood had gone from grumpy to forlorn. "You have the results?"

"Yes, they are not good," the Doctor said.

"What is it?" James asked.

The Doctor sighed. "It's her immune system, trying to battle a virus I cannot detect."

James looked confused and annoyed at once, he shook his head. "What?"

Tom peered over at the scanner with a similar expression. "I second that what."

"I'm honestly as baffled as you are," the Doctor begrudgingly admitted. "I can't find what is causing the symptoms, other than the occasional high fever. Anymore like that and it could prove problematic, but until now its been keeping whatever it is at bay. Now..."

"So what are you saying?" James asked.

The Doctor looked down sullenly. "Rapid dehydration, the temperature drops weakening the heart rate, blood cell count. I'd estimate she has no more than twenty four hours to live."

"That can't be possible, it doesn't make any sense," James stuttered.

Tom squinted at the scanner. "Good god, it's like she's already conked it. The rigidy in the limbs, cell degradation. Neural activity is pretty much nil, but what else is..." he started to laugh until he realised it, "happening? You know, to cause it. I..." James and the Doctor stared at him in contempt. "On another topic I'm gonna take my son for a walk, a long one."

"Mr Paris," the Doctor warned before he took a step. Tom sighed pathetically and remained where he was. "As eloquently as he described it, he's not wrong. This virus, pathogen, or whatever it is seems to be disrupting certain signals to and from the brain."

James frowned and looked away, head shaking. "Okay, so you do know why it's happening." His attention re-focused on the Doctor, "can't we put her into stasis, freeze it in its path."

"I wouldn't recommend it. It's likely it will only make things worse," the Doctor replied.

Tom sighed in relief, earning a couple of confused stares. "You said her immune system was giving her the high temps. I know it's risky, but it's better than the alternative, right?"

"I..." the Doctor sounded annoyed for a moment, then relented, "perhaps."

"What?" James cut in.

"Even the nanoprobes still in her system have been unable to deter whatever this is. Short of keeping her sedated, I'm running out of options," the Doctor said.

James glanced between him and Tom a few times, his face turning pale. "But, you can't let her die," he managed to say through a frog in his throat.

"I don't do that," the Doctor tried to say with optimism. It didn't do anything to the atmosphere in the room. He retreated back into the scanner results, tapping away occasionally.

Tom cleared his throat as he walked off to one side towards the medical tray. "Don't flip out just yet. The Doc's good but he might need some pestering."

"I'll leave that to you, I have someone to talk to," James said.

"But, what about?" Tom asked.

"I need someone to vent my anger on, unless you want to be that somebody," James replied.

"No, go ahead," Tom said quickly.

The Mess Hall:

Tani was sitting on her own at a table near one of the doors. James came in and he headed over to Tani's table. He sat down opposite her.

"So, how's the Mrs?" Tani asked in a huffy voice.

"Dying, no thanks to you," James replied.

Tani looked up in shock. "Me? I didn't do anything!" she grumbled.

"Yeah right," James mumbled.

"We were only arguing, then she collapsed. The Doc said that she just collapsed because of that temperature rise and lowing thing. I doubt that could kill her," Tani stammered.

"So how did she get infected with a virus?" James said.

Tani's eyebrow raised. "Virus? I didn't hear anything about a virus."

"Then how did she get it?" James asked.

"Look, I know I don't like her, but that doesn't mean I'd infect her with a killer virus. I'm not a murderer, unlike a certain somebody," Tani replied.

James bitterly chuckled, "so you think I did it because I've killed before?"

"No, I was just pointing out who's the murderer around here," Tani grumpily replied.

"Yeah, so why do you keep bothering me again?" James said with narrowing eyes.

Tani pretended to think about it, pouted and shrugged. "I'm 18, you're hot, I like bad guys, sue me."

James rolled his eyes to the left, "maybe I should." Tani made a little huff sound, her lip curled. He didn't notice while his mind wandered. "Tired, like death, can't detect it." Tani eyed him curiously at the same time he looked back in her general direction, "I wonder if she caught this virus while on the planet."

"Probably," Tani murmured. "Nothing to do with me. Where's my apology?"

"What were you even doing when this happened?" James asked, eyes narrowing slightly.

Tani didn't seem to notice, she gave him a smile. "Having a... friendly chat."

"Right," James pretended to laugh, "try again."

Tani groaned almost like she was disappointed, "really? I didn't do anything. She baits me that's all. She had her chance, ruined it and she gets another. Meanwhile little Tani here gets nothing but abuse."

James frowned at her while he clenched his left hand. "Abuse? You follow me around, spread untrue rumours, kissed me when I clearly didn't want it."

Tani gasped in offense, "you did, if you didn't you would have, could have stopped..."

"Stop," James tiredly groaned.

"No. I liked you, but you'd never give me the time of day. I tried and tried," Tani whined.

James sighed, "take the hint." Tani stared with a blank look on her face, it poked a few of his nerves. "I've never liked you. Accept it and move on, grow up."

Tani scowled, then leaned across the table. James internally flinched but sat his ground, staring firmly back. "What happened to you?" she hissed. "You used to be so nice and meek around women."

"Passive you mean? I suppose that'd make it easier for you. Too bad," James bitterly said back.

"So instead you decide to be hurtful, rude. To a teenaged girl. Wow, what a nice guy," Tani said with an uppity tone.

James laughed genuinely for a moment. "I never said I was. The sooner you learn that you can't say or do what you want without any consequences, the better so cut out the guilt trip."

Tani slammed both of her hands onto the table, getting the attention of anyone else in the room who weren't already eavesdropping. "I'm not some dumb little kid. That's the problem. You'd rather play it safe with *her*, than give me a chance so you spin this I'm too young for you. I'm not, I'm old enough. Please, give me a..."

"For god's sake," James muttered while starting to shake from building anger. He took a deep breath before speaking again, "no. It'll always be no."

"Why?" Tani huffed pathetically. "Because of her? She'll be dead soon anyway."

James shuddered while clenching his jaw. It did nothing for him. "Tell you what. I'll make this so much easier for you."

Tani was about to reply, beg again but James reached his left hand forward to give her a quick slap in the face. It looked like he made little effort, still she recoiled from it so much she nearly slid out of her chair.

Gasps echoed around the room as he walked away. The silence afterwards felt tense.

Neelix made the first move and hurried over to check on the girl clutching her sore cheek, a tear dribbling down from the eye above. "Are you..." she shook her head and whimpered. "Neelix to Sickbay."

"Unless this is urgent, I'm extremely busy. What is it?"

"It's awful," Neelix stuttered while patting Tani's shoulder awkwardly. "James, he slapped Tani, the poor thing."

He was surprised that the first response he got was what sounded like Tom sniggering quietly. The Doctor's voice groaned, *"I see. Bring her here and Mr Paris can see to her. Stop that."*

"What? It's about time," Tom's voice said.

Neelix looked dismayed, he glanced around at the audience. He noticed some avert their eyes as soon as he did. "She's a teenaged girl, he's..."

"Been molested by her a few times. I'm surprised he didn't do it sooner," Tom's voice said. Tani flinched and looked down at her lap.

"Mr Paris!" the Doctor's voice snapped. *"On second thoughts, he might come back here. Mr Paris will come to you."*

Tani shook her head, "no. Forget it. I'm fine." She brushed Neelix away and got up.

Neelix looked on helplessly as she walked away in a different direction mumbling to herself. It also didn't help when he turned around he saw another problem walking in, directly towards him.

"I'm flattered, but no thanks Mr Vulcan," he said.

Tuvok stared at him in disgust. "Please, I have standards. I just thought I should arrest you for food poisoning."

Neelix gasped, "Mr Vulcan! I would never..."

Tuvok's eyes drifted to one side, "then why is Stuart passed out just outside, looking like he's ate one of your broths?"

"What?" Neelix said, confused and a little conflicted. "He didn't eat anything, but that reminds me, I should report..."

"Uh huh," Tuvok said as his eyes wandered to a table in the corner. "I propped him up so he wouldn't gag on his own vomit. At least it's a suitable warning to anyone coming in as to what to expect here. Excuse me." He hurried off.

"Excuse me. What was that?" the Doctor's voice said.

Neelix glanced between Tuvok and the door he came through, frantic with worry. "Um, you deal with that, I gotta..." he followed in a hurry. By the time he got to the table, Tuvok was already sat down with some bemused women.

"I hear light colours are in. Logically if I am to attract a mate, I will need some advice on my appearance," Tuvok said. He handed a PADD to the group which made their eyes bug out, "I altered my file photo, which one do you think suits me best?"

Neelix turned on his heel and hurried back the way he came, then to the exit. "I'll beam him to Sickbay. Standby."

Sickbay:

Kathryn and Tuvok walked in. Everyone tried to ignore the fact that Tuvok was wearing a blonde toupee and very light foundation, which looked more like he threw talc powder in his face. Especially Tom, who had to squeeze his bottom lip between his teeth and clench his own forearms to stop himself from saying anything.

"Report Doctor, and quickly," Kathryn said barely through gritted teeth.

The Doctor stepped through a forcefield to approach them, carefully only making eye contact with Tuvok. He thankfully missed him pull out a mirror from his pocket to check himself out.

"I don't think it's compatible with Vulcans, or the sample was contaminated from the previous test. It at least warranted further testing before..." he said.

Kathryn growled loudly, "not that, you said they were dying."

"Right," the Doctor said in distaste. "First Rex was brought in, and now Stuart is showing similar symptoms. I've ran all the tests I have in my database, but I cannot find the cause of this disease."

Kathryn eyed over his shoulder briefly. "Is it contagious?"

The Doctor sighed. "It doesn't seem to be, not in a conventional sense. Airborne, we'd have more victims. Same with the kind spread by germs, poor hygiene. There were no injuries, bites that could've infected them. It doesn't help that I can't see it to know for sure."

"It got Jessie first, then..." Kathryn mused aloud, her eyes widening a little in worry. "Have you brought Morgan and Craig in for a scan?"

"That thought occurred to me as well. I asked Mr Williams to pay them a visit. So far he's sent Anderson's results, and I see nothing wrong with him," the Doctor answered. Tom hurried over with a PADD to give to him.

"But James was fine too until he wasn't," Kathryn said while the Doctor read the PADD.

"Not exactly. I observed their group's song and dance routine yesterday with much scrutiny," the Doctor said.

Kathryn's eyes narrowed, one eyebrow slid up. "Why?"

"I like music, and clearly they don't," the Doctor replied casually. Tom squeaked while pulling a pet lip, he shuffled away. "Rex and Stuart showed clear signs of fatigue, which at first I attributed to their experience during that awaymission, but now I see it as the red flag it was."

Tuvok also raised an eyebrow, for a moment he looked like himself, except for the white powder. "Also Jessie has been unusually unfashionable lately."

Kathryn pointed a wide eyed frown at him sharply. When she returned to looking toward the Doctor her eyes were partly rolled. "Anyway!"

Tom inadvertently came to the rescue, "yeah um, Morgan's fine too." The Doctor glared, annoyed he didn't get to share the news.

"So," Kathryn exhaled impatiently, "the whole awayteam isn't infected, but it doesn't mean the trip isn't the cause."

"Indeed," the Doctor said with a nod. "The only kind of infection I haven't ruled out, since that requires talking to them, and without Paris around..."

Tom's jaw dropped, "hey, what do you mean..." His shock quickly evaporated into immature sniggers. "Oh. Nice."

Kathryn's face hardened while pointing in his direction, "what does that mean? Really?"

"I have a theory. Morgan told me on their return that Rex had been subjected to, how can I put it, unwanted advances by the fella who captured her," the Doctor said.

Kathryn blinked furiously. "Wait a minute," she spat, taking advantage of the brief pause.

"Oh, I was close," Tom moaned.

The Doctor rolled his eyes, opting to ignore him. "I've tried to keep an open mind about this, but the story doesn't make it easy. If I take it as fact, the assaulter was a 3000 year old reanimated corpse, who was already rapidly decomposing again during said act."

"Yikes," Tom stuttered before walking off, shuddering in revulsion.

Tuvok shook his head, "I agree with that sentiment."

Kathryn shuddered briefly herself. "Yes, okay. So you think he spread some old illness to her, and or a new one caused by his reanimation? And how does that explain James?" Tom snorted to himself, noticed he was heard and scurried off to the nearest biobed.

"The Maji man, Arden, called it the Kiss of Death. I didn't ask for details since it seemed frivolous to me, it sounds self-explanatory from the name," the Doctor said. Kathryn tapped her foot impatiently. "Stuart was to be next for this, via the other ex-corpse. However he fought back before she could."

"Again, how did James get infected too?" Kathryn asked. Tom couldn't help but laugh obnoxiously. Kathryn made a mental note to gag him later. "It's also possible that mere exposure to these two, or any kind of contact, infected them. Are you sure about Morgan?"

Tuvok made a little hmm sound, "there is one way to know for sure. It'd take a few hours to return to the planet Thairo at maximum warp. Perhaps this Arden might be able to help, or at least give some insight."

Kathryn glared at Tom for some unknown reason. He tried to avert his eyes, even thought he could still feel it. "Who the hell was driving this bucket over the last week, a slug?"

"You're welcome," Tom said very high pitched.

"Apparently so," Kathryn muttered. "Very well. I'll tell the bridge to change our course. In the meantime double no, triple check my daughter. I don't buy this kiss theory you have."

The Doctor frowned. "Why not? Do you have any idea how unhygienic mouths can be?" Tom opened his mouth to speak but thought better of it. Only Tuvok noticed, he shook his head like a disapproving teacher.

"Oh yes, because that was the most out there part of your zombies force themselves on people ritual theory," Kathryn hissed. She stomped out, shaking her head in disbelief.

Tuvok shrugged before following her, then started scratching at his bad toupee.

The Bridge:

"And then I said *you hitting on the wrong woman*," Craig said right behind Tom, leaning on his chair. He started thrusting his fist near his face, "so then I gave him a bit of this, and he was like *no, have mercy.*"

Tom had gritted his teeth so much everyone on the bridge could hear it. "Please... stop..."

Craig laughed as he patted him on the shoulder. "Sure. Did I tell you about the song I was gonna pitch for our band? You're gonna love it."

Chakotay meanwhile leaned across to address Kathryn, who he thought at first was sneaking a quick nap in between coffee sips. "Are you going to stop this?"

"Why, it's not my turn yet," Kathryn replied as her hand pat a little bag of coffee on her lap he somehow didn't see till then. Chakotay frowned until he read the label, then he smiled mischievously. She joined him.

Tom hit a part of his console, grinning in glee, "we're here. Maji space. Thairo just ahead."

"Captain, two Maji ships are heading towards us," Harry reported while repressing a smirk. "They're hailing."

"Put them on screen," Kathryn ordered. The viewscreen changed to show the interior of the lead Maji ship.

"Captain, we weren't expecting you back," Arden said.

"Two members of our crew are infected with a virus we believe they picked up at Thairo, we hoped that you may know something about it," Kathryn said.

"Are they the two who were Unu and Iinan's reincarnations?" Arden asked.

"Yes," Kathryn replied.

"Can I come aboard to examine them for myself?" Arden asked.

"Yes, I'll meet you in our transporter room," Kathryn replied. Arden nodded, the viewscreen changed back to view the ships. Kathryn headed towards the turbolift and she stepped inside.

"I still don't see why we don't just beam him directly to Sickbay, it would save time," Craig said.

Tom muttered something under his breath. Harry noticed and a glint appeared in his eye, "why stop there? Next time we beam the Flyer everywhere. It'd save time and fuel." Tom's face turned into an angry, grumbling picture. Neither Harry or Craig had to see it to know he was doing it.

Kathryn hurried back onto the bridge, back to her chair, snatched the bag she left and ran back the way she came. Chakotay sighed, not because of that, she'd left the mug on the armrest.

Sickbay:

Arden finished scanning Jessie and he walked back over to the Doctor, Kathryn and Lee.

"Just as I suspected. They're both showing signs of the Kiss of Death," Arden said.

Everyone heard a loud rustling. The Doctor instinctively blamed it on Lee but for once he was not eating. Then he heard a crunch coming from Kathryn's direction. Despite her standing there with brown coffee crumbs all over her mouth, holding the open bag of coffee, she gave him a dirty accusing look.

"Um right," the Doctor shook it off, and turned to a similarly confused Arden. "We were told that only Jessie had this performed on her. How did James get it too?"

"That is curious," Arden said. "Iinan and Unu would have to pass this onto each other's reincarnations, to create a similar link between them. It's said that should one fail, the other's hold on them would deteriorate. Neither should have it. The only way I can determine, is that it lay dormant instead and was passed on through Jessie to James."

Tom chose that moment to walk into Sickbay. "Did I miss anything juicy?"

"No," everyone replied at once.

Kathryn glared at him, encouraging him to leave them be again and check on the patients. The stain around her mouth only made it even more painful for him.

"I take it a kiss is the only means of transferring this virus?" the Doctor asked in a hushed tone. Tom's ear twitched. "Then I was correct, in a way."

"In a way?" Kathryn said with her mouthful. A few more crunches later she swallowed. "You never said anything close to that."

The Doctor resisted a groan for now, to everyone it looked he took a deep breath.

"So says the myth," Arden replied.

"Is there a cure for this illness?" Kathryn asked.

Arden thought about it, straining slightly before answering, "I wouldn't recommend it. We will need to retrieve what remains of Iinan and Unu and perform another ritual. If we fuse their souls back together, it should repair all of the damage done."

Tom stepped forward in a hurry, "what do you mean by their souls back together? You mean Eenie and Uno, or James and Jessie cos that's really twisted..."

Kathryn eyed him coldly, not that he noticed yet. She pretended to scoop some of the bags contents into her mouth and chew with it open. "Mmm, chewy." Tom whimpered and returned to where he was.

"Not exactly. Iinan and Unu's souls were fragmented during their death, parts left behind. What didn't reincarnate into your people. The ritual works like the Kiss of Death, it merges the broken souls back to one," Arden replied.

"Wait, what does that mean for James and Jessie? Will they inherit certain traits from..." Kathryn said, she cringed and stalled, "the two dead guys."

Arden seemed shocked at the thought, he shook his head fast. "Ohno, it doesn't work that way. Once Iinan and Unu are merged with them, their essence will be wiped clean, erased. For your crew, it'll repair the damage and that is all."

The Doctor started to laugh bitterly. "I naively thought it couldn't get any worse after serial killer ghosts. Perhaps we should consider replacing the shields with garlic or holy water."

"You were the one who suggested it would be this kiss ritual," Kathryn said, once more giving him a dirty glance.

The Doctor shook his head over and over, waving his hands in front of his waist, "no, not like this. I believe someone tried to do a ritual on them, and that ritual caused the illness, like passing on a cold. After that..."

"I understand your skepticism. If it helps, we can use your analogy from now on," Arden said politely. "To cure them we will need the instructions that'll be in the book they used, and the suggested ingredients for the *medicine*."

"You mean those books my team found and returned to you?" Kathryn asked in between quick coffee shovelling. Arden winced when he saw what looked like peanuts mixed in with the coffee.

"Yes," he answered once she stopped crunching. "My entourage brought both at my request. The problem is the language used in the books is ancient, undecipherable even to my people. It'll be difficult to find the right passage."

"Oh boy," Lee decided to pipe up.

Arden looked apologetic. "Exactly. Somehow your daughter was able to decipher the right passage before. We should consult her."

Kathryn's forehead started to throb. She pressed two fingers against the source of it, and with her other hand dug into a probably second one. "Morgan didn't say anything about understanding some alien language."

"She knew which passage to read to destroy them," Arden sounded confused. Kathryn's cold stare froze his insides. "She's not Borg? Did I misunderstand?"

"Just a tad. Why would the Borg know or care about your ancient language?" Kathryn snapped.

Arden thought it over, then nodded. "It was merely a theory. I have others. It can't hurt to ask her, right?"

"Ok fine, say she can. We grave rob, then what?" Kathryn muttered.

"That's the thing, from what I saw the two were vaporised into dust. It won't be an easy task to find them. The tunnels are a maze, only partially mapped by one of your team members," Arden answered, gesturing his head towards the patients. "If we can accomplish all that, the rest should be relatively simple."

"In comparison, quantum physics is simple," Tom mumbled to himself.

Kathryn overheard. "Tom?" He jumped out of his skin, then looked at her expecting a glare. Instead he got a smile. "You will lead one of the teams to the surface. Hop to it."

Tom turned very, very pale. The Doctor was worried he'd been infected too. "I will? Yes of course I will."

"Good. Lets get to work," Kathryn said.

A team of four materialised inside the ancient stone city. Morgan peered around while Arden lead the way towards one of the larger structures.

Morgan was the first to notice the entrance had caved in, she ran over stammering, "crap."

"What is it?" the Doctor asked on approach.

"We didn't map from any other entrance. If we can't get through here, we'll get lost," Morgan answered.

"Maybe our phasers can help," Chakotay suggested.

"No, if you do that the rocks may collapse on us," Arden said.

"Do you mean we have to move them by hand?" Morgan groaned.

"That seems to be our only option," Arden replied.

Morgan walked closer to the stone and she started picking up some of the stone. Chakotay and Arden tried to help speed things up by grabbing the lighter rocks.

The Doctor hung back, double checking the gear in the bag he brought. Something blue on the ground caught his eye. "Curious." He swung the bag further across his back and knelt down to take a closer look. When it shook ever so slightly he got out a tricorder.

A few miles away inside the other abandoned city's church, Tom was starting to wish Kathryn had gagged him.

Tuvok made a little childish whine, "no I don't think so, it'll scuff my clothes."

"All right Jess," Craig thankfully said before Tom could crack. He gestured towards the back area where he had first encountered Unu, "take Tom with you, use him as a human dust shield." Tom pointed a glare at him, "I'm not going back there."

"Both of us, on a feeling you have?" Tom tried to say calmly.

Craig smiled a little too smugly for his liking, "you're right. We'll stay here and loot the shelves." Before Tom could argue, he hurried over to the left side of the alter to rummage through wall high shelves of mostly broken and dusty trinkets.

Tuvok seemed a little disappointed. "It's a shame. I was hoping one of them could be my replacement. I fancy a change of scenery, easier and cleaner." He wiped his shoulder to prove a point. "I am excellent at making coffee."

Tom frowned at him, "you mean like a Captain's assistant?"

"What a fascinating idea. Once I've mated, I will consider applying," Tuvok said casually, walking off to join Craig.

"Um, creepier than this old church. Of course," Tom mumbled. He suddenly had no concern about leaving both of them to investigate what Craig called the wiggy back rooms on his own. Off he ran to investigate.

No sooner than he left there was an ear piercing scream. Tom assumed it was Tuvok being inappropriate with Craig and so kept going.

"Oh my god, what are you doing!" Morgan screeched.

The Doctor only saw her boot looking like it was about to stamp on his head. He covered the blue gem with a couple legs wiggling out of new cracks with his hands protectively, "no you can't kill it."

"I beg to differ, shift it!" Morgan shouted at him, still hovering on one leg.

"Why? We might need it," the Doctor said.

Arden had arrived to the side of him, his eyes wide with worry. "Is that?" Morgan mumbled an angry yup. "Doctor, it is a flesh eater."

"Nonsense, its physiology shows it doesn't have the capability to do anything but pinch," the Doctor said. As if on cue he felt a pinch on his hand. Even though he couldn't feel pain his eyes fluttered wide anyway. "Huh?"

Arden grabbed him and pulled him back to his feet. Morgan quickly squished the fully hatched bug while it was turning from its back to its feet.

"On its own it can burrow deep into the skin," Arden sighed in relief once he let go of the hologram. "They can summon others using supersonic waves. As a group they are lethal."

Chakotay looked back after moving another rock out the way. "Then we must work quickly," he said, gesturing his hand towards himself. Morgan and Arden rushed over to continue, but Chakotay kept his eye behind him. "Doctor."

"Right, in a moment," the Doctor said. Once Chakotay's attention was back on the entrance, the Doctor crouched down to take a sample of what remained of the bug.

Craig stared blank faced, wondering if he was really just dreaming all of this. Either way, he was not going to interfere with the crazed Vulcan running around in circles in a blind panic.

"They're in my hair, they're in my hair," he cried over and over.

Craig eyed the blonde toupee on the floor, currently a new home for an alien red spider, then up at him again. "I think its..." Tuvok ran off in the direction Tom went before he could finish.

Unaware of this, Tom had reached some dark dingy stairs leading down. He wasn't too sure about going any further since he couldn't see the bottom, so he raised his tricorder for a better look.

The lack of light was making him feel a little dizzy, so he decided to lean against the wall while the scans were running. Then he noticed the wall was uneven, a square the size of a small tile stuck out so neatly it looked to him like a button. He shrugged it off thinking it was dumb, but touched it anyway.

Tuvok ran onto the scene whimpering about legs, when the steps inverted into the ground, turning the staircase into a slide. The pair fell for quite sometime until they were deposited at the bottom with a thud, with of course Tuvok landing directly on top of Tom.

"That was fun," Tuvok giggled as he got up. His good mood didn't last when he noticed his whole uniform covered in sand.

He was still trying to bat it off when Tom staggered to his own feet and restarted his scan. "Ooops." He reached around his belt to retrieve a flashlight, Tuvok snatched it from him to his annoyance.

"Thanks," he said politely as he used it to see the state of his uniform better.

"Tom!" Craig's voice echoed from very far above. Tom peered up, knowing he wouldn't be able to see him. "What happened?"

Tom grunted a little, glancing toward Tuvok picking at his hair. "Oh nothing, just another Tuvok is stoned gaff."

"Nice try. I saw you press that button," Tuvok sniped back.

"Button?" Tom pretended to laugh, "this is an ancient city made of rocks."

In the little light they had he still managed to see Tuvok raising an eyebrow. He naively thought that he was back to normal. "Perhaps we should search for ingredients down here. We may find something that'll help us get back up, like a boomstick."

Tom did a double take in his direction, squeaking as he had been doing all day. "You mean a broomstick?" He saw the slightest hint of a nod. He pressed his lips tightly together to avoid saying what was in his head.

Meanwhile the other team were making their way through a narrow damp corridor. Morgan lead the way with her eye half on the map on her tricorder. "Shoot," she mumbled, slowing down.

"What is it now?" the Doctor asked right after bumping his head.

"I just remembered, the only way forward is through a hidden door. I can only vaguely remember where the button was," Morgan replied.

Chakotay gave her a reassuring smile, "it's all right. We have time to figure it out." He peered over at the Doctor, "right?"

"Right," the Doctor said cheerfully. No one knew it was fake until the facade fell to a grumpy sneer, "it's okay, they're only decomposing alive. No hurry."

Chakotay glared at him for it. Morgan though winced and picked up her pace, entering the nearest room. She waited for the others to join her inside before running across to the other side of the chamber.

It started as a discreet vibration only the Doctor noticed. Within seconds the whole team could hear the rumble of what Chakotay thought was a cave in coming from the corridor they came through. Morgan and Arden tensed, the former quickly hovered her hand over the wall, looking for something.

The noise only got louder, Chakotay and the Doctor expected the ceiling to show the same strain and cave in like outside. Instead a swarm of black insects poured out of the narrow doorway, gunning for them.

"Morgan?" Chakotay stammered, as he and the other men ran toward her, away from the swarm.

Morgan tapped on various parts of the wall, sweat starting to bead on her forehead. "Come on, open, open." Nothing happened until the bugs were within a few metres of the team, when her hand pushed in one part of the wall. Her relief was short lived when it only made a groaning sound beneath her. "Oh

come on, that's..." The ground underneath the team crumbled into sand, throwing them a few feet down into a building pile of sand.

While the team tried to recover, the Doctor's eyes were on the hole above them. The swarm had stopped on the cusp of it. As he watched they retreated out of view. "Interesting. They're sentient."

"Who cares," Morgan groaned. She looked over at Arden. He had landed against the wall, so his legs were sticking up in the air, and his weight was resting on his head and shoulders. Morgan got up to give him a hand.

"Where are we?" Chakotay asked as he looked around.

Morgan looked around for her tricorder. Chakotay spotted it half buried in the sand, he reached out to grab it while she walked over. They both peered at the map, Morgan double checked it and an open doorway ahead of her. "No way."

"What?" the Doctor wondered.

"Can I?" Morgan said while at the same time taking the tricorder from her dad. He looked on, bemused as she hurried ahead.

The others followed her into a massive chamber that looked very familiar to her and Arden. She shook her head in disbelief. "This is it, the ceremonial chamber. I must've triggered the long cut the first time down here." The tricorder bleeped, "someone else is here."

Every member of the team quickly armed themselves, but in the Doctor's case the closest thing he had to a weapon was a hypospray. They cautiously walked through the chamber looking for signs of life.

For a while there was nothing. Then the silence was broken by a ghostly voice singing being carried across the stale air. *"I never ever ask where do you go. I never ever ask what do you do."* The voice sounded familiar to them. *"I never ever ask if you'll be mine."*

Another voice groaned in the distance, *"please, stop."*

This one they not only recognised but also could identify. "Tom?" Chakotay said.

"Don't be shy," the other voice continued.

"And?" Morgan said but she didn't really want to know, the cringe on her face was starting to ache.

"Touch my bum, this is life, oooh!" the voice sang and giggled.

"Please kill me," Tom's voice begged. That was the moment they saw him in the distance. At least they assumed it was him, since the figure behind him seemed to be twirling around.

Chakotay groaned, "why did Janeway say we should bring him again..."

"Ooh cheeky cheeky," Tuvok laughed as he grasped Tom around the shoulders. He shuddered violently.

"Never mind," Chakotay mumbled. "Ignore them for now. Where were those two when they died?"

Morgan made a painful whine sound as she looked around. He assumed it was because Tuvok was almost caught up to them. "Unu..." she pointed upwards at the dozens of balconies across the inner wall, "was in one of those."

Arden tried to sound optimistic, "I saw where Iinan fell. We'll start there." He lead the way, deeper into the chamber. The Doctor followed with his own tricorder, his other hand digging into the bag to retrieve a jar.

"Voyager to Away Team One. Chakotay?" Kathryn's voice emanated weakly.

Chakotay tapped his commbadge, "we've found it, standby."

"You'll have to make it quick. A sand storm is brewing over the city, it came out of nowhere. If it gets any worse, we won't be able to get a stable lock on you."

Arden stopped, searching the ground for anything distinctive. The Doctor scanned around. His tricorder flared up over a patch of darker sand. "Found it, biological matter."

Chakotay hurried over to him, hinting for the tricorder. "Can we widen the scanning range to find Unu?"

"Wind strength is increasing. 110 kph and increasing," Harry's voice said over static.

The Doctor tensed his jaw while he tapped away on the tricorder settings. "I don't see how." He handed it to Chakotay, "here, I'll collect the remains."

As Chakotay and Morgan rushed off to check the closest corridor leading to a balcony, the ground trembled. The jolt coated the entire air with sand from above, making it more difficult to see and breathe.

"We're deep underground, how bad can it be?" Tom said.

Arden confronted him urgently, "did you find the ingredients for the elixir?"

Tom winced, "we kinda hit a snag."

"He hit a button," Tuvok chimed in.

Tom grumbled incoherently. "It's okay, Craig will still be hunting and he's..."

The Doctor stood, staring at the helmsman in contempt, "on the surface, in an ancient building, in the middle of a storm."

A deafening crunch echoed above them. Only Arden dared to look and see cracks growing across the ceiling. "We must leave."

"No shi..." Tom started to splutter, then he looked extra nervous, "shame in running."

"Morgan!" Chakotay's shouting got their brief attention. The cracks above started to give, the shattering noise overwhelmed what anyone said next.

Tom looked over again, then he saw Morgan climbing over a higher balcony than the one Chakotay was in. He had climbed onto the edge as if to climb up and follow her. Another tremor forced him back down.

Rocks started to tumble, smashing into the floor all around the team. Arden pulled Tom with him towards a different corridor to the one they came in, Tuvok and the Doctor ran after them. The former though stopped by the balcony Chakotay was at, about to climb. He grabbed his arm to stop him, if only for a moment as Chakotay snatched it free straight away. They noticed the balcony Morgan was in begin to crack.

"Eew," they managed to heard Morgan complain in between rumbles, "that's gotta be her."

"Morgan, down now!" Chakotay shouted as loud as he could.

Morgan briefly peered over the side, "what, I can't. Doc, the beaker..." She reached out, hinting. The Doctor quickly rummaged through the bag to get another jar. During a tremor it slipped from his grasp, smashing at his feet. "Doc!" Morgan shouted as the balcony started to slouch.

The Doctor regretfully took out the jar already three quarters full. He threw that up to her, wincing, expecting the worst. She caught it by the lid, then disappeared back out of view.

"*Chakotay if you don't get our daughter out of there, right now...*" Kathryn's voice snarled until she was cut off.

Morgan climbed over the edge of the balcony as it juddered, about to break clean away from the wall. She let herself drop down from there to the ground. While she landed on her feet, the shaking threw off her balance.

Chakotay and the Doctor hurried down to join her, and help, but she was mostly back on her feet by the time they got there. The three ran as fast as they could, away from the collapsing ceiling.

At the first crossroads they came to, they caught up to the rest of their team waiting for them. They ran for what felt like hours, dodging rocks and sand, until finally the transporters were able to beam them up.

Sickbay:

When they returned, they were immediately confronted by a very wind swept and sandy looking Craig with a grumpy look on his face. "Did you guys forget me? I thought you were all dead," he stammered, primarily focused on Morgan.

She shook her head and walked around him, carrying the jar over to the console in the middle of the room. Two of Arden's officers stood nearby, looking a bit apprehensively at the two huge, metal books on top of a spare biobed. Morgan didn't notice their expressions and hinted for them. They both groaned and went to pick them up one at time, together.

"Forget it," Morgan said. She walked over to snatch the top one.

Arden approached while she was flicking through the pages, grimacing at every one. "It was this book, correct?"

"Hmm yeah," she mumbled. Arden's face filled with concern, especially when he noticed her glancing between two pages. "That sounds right," she said, settling on one.

"Can you actually read these books?" Arden asked her.

"Sure," Morgan replied before starting to read aloud. Arden placed his hand in her way, making her scowl. "What?"

"Aren't you forgetting something?" he said, gesturing to the jar, and toward a vial Craig had in his hands.

Morgan stared at him accusingly, "do I have to do everything around here?"

Craig panicked for an unknown reason, and hurried forward brandishing the vial. Arden took it wordlessly, as well as the jar. The two mixed together in the jar, he gave a nod to Morgan so she could start reading.

The Doctor meanwhile moved across to the used biobeds, checking on each of their vital signs. He wasn't at all surprised when she was finished nothing seemed to change. He resisted saying anything for at least a minute. It was almost up when the readings he was getting started to rise. He hurried across to scan them with a normal tricorder, one at a time. "How..."

"Is it working?" Arden dared to ask.

"I..." the Doctor was momentarily speechless. "Neural pathways, heart rate, all returning to normal."

Morgan closed the book, sighing in relief. "Phew, got it right again."

Chakotay stared at her in growing horror, "wait, you weren't even sure it was the right one?"

"Of course I did. I just dunno how to pronounce some of these dumb words, that's all," Morgan said, laughing all the while. She walked out with a grimace nobody saw.

Chakotay eyed Arden, hoping for some reassurance. He didn't look so sure himself.

Captains Log Sup... August 15th: Ensign Stuart and Crewman Rex have been cured for their disease. We're continuing our course for home.

The Mess Hall:

Tom rushed in with a big grin on his face.

"Ok, my 24 hours are up. Tuvok, I think you're a few months too early for Halloween, maybe tone down the crack okay. Jessie, your face, I've seen healthier corpses and I could barely tell the difference when you nearly were one. Neelix, I've got a suggestion for your next recipe, it'll be in my toilet in five minutes," he rambled on, unaware or uncaring about the lack of reaction he was getting, not yet.

"Tani, did that little slap knock some sense into your brain, oh of course not, you haven't got a brain. James, you're the only guy on this ship where everyone can be so confused at how you got a kissing disease. When even Jessie's the donor, time to hand in your man card. Janeway, we all know how unhygienic your mouth is after 100 coffees, yikes. And finally my man Harry, it's okay, everyone's attracted a dumb blonde in their life, just don't make it a habit." He laughed for a couple of awkward minutes.

Everyone stared at him oddly. Nearly everybody burst out laughing.

"Tom, do you know that your fly is open?" Triah asked.

Tom turned bright red, and he ran out.

THE END