

Episode 2.17

Why oh Why

The Readyroom:

Kathryn was sitting at her desk drinking her fifth cup. The entire room smelled of coffee. Kathryn breathed in the aroma and she smiled. She took another sip from her cup.

The door chimed. Kathryn put the cup down and she leaned back in her chair. "Come in," she said.

Neelix strode in through the main door, with his usual grin planted on his face.

"Captain, I have a wonderful idea," he said cheerfully.

"What is it?" she asked, already dreading the idea.

"Well you know that a lot of the crew are making more enemies than friends lately, so I thought up a perfect way to get people back together," Neelix said.

"What is it?" Kathryn repeated.

"A Christmas Party, Christmas is only eighteen days away," Neelix said.

"That is a wonderful idea, Neelix. But how will it get people back together?" Kathryn asked.

"Well it's the Christmas season, Captain. The spirit of Christmas may help," Neelix replied.

"Good, whatever. When are you planning it?" Kathryn asked.

"Tomorrow night, all non human crewmembers will also be encouraged to join the festivities," Neelix replied.

"Fine, notify the crew," Kathryn said.

The Mess Hall:

"I suppose music will be a good addition to the party," Neelix muttered.

"Of course, without music a party is boring," Lena said.

"Yes, but a band has to be performing all the time, you surely cannot stay on the stage for a couple of hours," Neelix said.

"Well it would work more if there were another band. I think we'll just have to perform for the usual hour and a half," Craig said.

Kiara, Naomi and Bryan walked over to the group.

"Hey Neelix, we couldn't help but eavesdrop on your conversation with PokéCrap, and I think we have come up with a plan," Kiara said.

"PokéCrap? You little piece of..." Lena grumbled.

James shushed her and shook his head. She grumbled a few swearwords to herself.

"Get with the Christmas spirit girls. What is your plan?" Neelix asked.

"Well Craig said that it'd work more if there were another band, so...." Naomi replied.

"So... what?" Neelix said questioningly.

"Pulse are at your service," Bryan, Kiara and Naomi said in unison.

"You guys, a band, that's a good one," Lena laughed.

"Pulse?" Jessie said.

"Yeah, that's the name. Oh come on, it's better than PokéBall," Kiara said.

"PokéBall happens to be just one of our band names, we have a stage only name," Lena said.

"Do we?" the rest of the band said questioningly

"Really, what's the stage only name then?" Naomi asked.

"Er... " Lena muttered. She looked around the room for inspiration. None came. She thought, "Virus, Cosmos, Black Hole, Cherry, Orphans, Hyper..."

"We're waiting," Kiara muttered.

"Our stage only name is Virus," Lena said.

Kiara groaned, and rolled her eyes. "Lovely name, Lena, it suits you perfectly," she said as she walked off.

"Hey, that's not bad. I wonder why Kiara's acting so bitter about all this," Bryan said.

"She's been like this ever since the YWF, she's in a huff with a few of us," Lena replied.

The next night:

The room was decorated with tons of tinsel and flashing Christmas lights. The lights had been switched off so the Christmas lights were leaving a beautiful colourful glow around the whole room. Neelix's kitchen was covered in lots of thankfully replicated party food. All of the large tables had been removed. The small tables were near the large sofa chairs in the corner of the room, and by the window. A stage had been set up at the left side of the room. Disco lights were illuminating the entire stage.

Pulse were performing for the first time, a melancholy ballad with a lot of pre-recorded guitars. Kiara was standing behind a microphone on a stand. She was gently swaying along. Bryan and Naomi were behind microphones on stands on either side of her. Unknown to most Kiara was only miming to the main vocal.

Kathryn, Chakotay and Lena were sitting on one of the sofa chairs. Kathryn and Chakotay were drinking whisky again. Lena was just drinking Cherry Coke since she was performing next.

"Doesn't she look so pretty up there?" Kathryn said as she beamed at Kiara.

"Yes she does, she looks just like her grandmother," Chakotay beamed, and he put his arm around Kathryn's shoulders.

"I don't know which one he's insulting, I really don't," Lena muttered to herself.

"Aren't you proud of your daughter, Lena?" Kathryn asked, as she continued to beam.

"Oh yes I am, I didn't think she'd be able to put me asleep before ten. She's really proving me wrong," Lena replied in distaste.

"Now don't start, you're just jealous," Chakotay said. Lena burst out laughing.

Lena rolled her eyes, "oh yeah, I get it. The song's about kidding around, you're kidding." She faked a laugh, then sulked.

"I think she looks beautiful and graceful," Kathryn beamed. Lena put her hand over her mouth, pretending to gag.

"I agree, she is just like her grandmother," Chakotay beamed.

Lena stood up. "I think you guys have been on the drink a little too much," she said as she kept her hand placed over her mouth.

Craig walked over to their table. "Which song next, Lena?" he asked.

Lena looked down at her parents, who were still beaming. She smiled. "The ultimate test to see if your parents are well and truly drunk."

Craig turned an interesting shade of red, "ohno, not the tutu one again. I keep telling you that it means something else."

"What?" Lena said with disgust in her voice. Her face softened in realisation, making her laugh. "James said it was meant to be *too soon*. Were you singing tutu the whole time?"

"I... er, no..." Craig turned even redder, "toot toot once or twice." Lena snorted a bit before giggling at him. "What song were you going to suggest anyway?"

"I dunno, I kinda want to do Something 'bout You now," Lena chuckled. Craig looked on confused for a second, then his blush managed to get even redder. "Do you ever read the lyrics we send you?"

Craig pretended to smile confidently, "of course!" He rushed off with a tail between his legs.

"That was a beautiful song, lovely. Well done. Next up is Virus," Neelix said as he clapped his hands.

Lena dragged Craig over to Neelix. Jessie and James followed them slowly.

"Which song are we doing?" Jessie asked.

"Definitely not the something about you, jumping on my too soon one, that's for sure," Craig said far too loudly and boastful than he meant to. Lena still couldn't stop laughing.

James leaned over to Jessie and whispered, "oh great, someone told him. There goes my fun." Jessie smirked.

Lena tried to calm down, she breathed in then out slowly. "I think it's time to unleash the *funky fever*."

James and Jessie both looked a little worried, Craig however was confused again.

"Isn't it a tad early for that one? Our son's still here," James said in a hushed voice.

Jessie meanwhile pulled an unsure, slightly disgusted face. "We haven't had time to change the lyrics, like at all."

"It's fine, most people here are already sloshed anyway," Lena said. She turned to Neelix to whisper the song title, then hurried off to the nearby computer to program the song's instrumental into the speaker system.

"Okay, here's Virus with their new song Watch Me Go!" Neelix yelled over the microphone. He quickly vacated the stage.

The band got into positions in front of the microphones. Craig brought out the fourth one and he put it up behind Lena. She and Jessie were at the front, and the guys were at the back. Despite that James started the song off, the first few lines instantly making Kathryn turn a little pale.

When it was Lena's turn she checked to see if her parents were still watching, smirking slightly as she insisted on singing Jessie's lines as well. Jessie was more than okay with that.

At that time Kiara had sat next to Chakotay. "She's a disgrace to the family, right?" Kiara giggled.

"This song is absolutely disgusting," Kathryn muttered.

"Actually it's quite catchy," Chakotay said, and he started swaying slightly to the music.

Kiara snatched the whisky off him with a judgmental look in her eye. "I think you've had too much," she said.

The song finished, and Neelix came up on the stage.

"That was er, nice song by Virus. Up next is Pulse," Neelix said.

Virus stepped off the stage. Lena went straight over to Kathryn & Chakotay. She passed Kiara on the way.

"Beautiful song, Lena," Kiara said sarcastically.

"Mind the windows, Kiara," Lena muttered and she sat down next to Chakotay. "So what did you think?" she asked.

"I thought it was quite catchy," Chakotay said.

Kathryn glared at him into silence. "It was absolute filth. You're far too young to be singing that!"

"It can't be that bad, geez, you need more alcohol," Lena said, and she filled Kathryn's glass with more whisky. In the corner of her eye she spotted Tani marching through the crowds. When she realised who she was aiming for she hurriedly got up to follow her.

The two men were too engrossed in their own conversation to notice until she growled, "what the hell are you doing here?"

They looked at her aghast, one averted his eye to avoid eye contact with her.

"I warned you," the avoider whispered.

"Yeah thanks bro," the other whispered back. "Look Tani, lets not make a scene of this, it was ages ago."

Tani huffed and folded her arms, "you have some nerve."

Lena got to her, gently clasping her arm. Tani pointed a glare back at her. "Yeah maybe I should've told you sooner. Lets go get a drink."

Tani tried to pull her arm away, "You knew!?"

"We found them on the YWF ship," Lena replied, looking guilty.

"But I thought because of all that Kiara crap and the paradoxy stuff, that they didn't exist," Tani said.

One of the men laughed a little too much. "Not how it works, I'm not afraid."

Tani scowled, "you should be. Now get off me!" Lena did just that, fortunately Tani stomped off.

"You two were friends, what happened?" the so far quieter man spoke up.

Lena stared at him blankly. "Same thing that happened to our Ash here."

The other man cleared his throat awkwardly. "Ashley. And I see. So who, what, when or which?"

"Doesn't matter," Lena grumbled. "Look, you know she holds grudges. Maybe avoid her if you can. That's what I do." She eyed the quieter man, "and Steve, stop doing that."

The quieter man eyed the floor, "doing what?"

Lena groaned and pointed at him, "that. I don't need your awkward sympathy. The girl you both knew didn't exist, I'm not Morgan, not anymore."

"So is that why Tani unfriended you? She took the not really growing up with her on the sphere news personally?" Ashley asked.

"No," Lena said at the same time James and Jessie approached her. She directed her eyes in his direction briefly. Ashley laughed as he understood, nodding slightly.

Steve focused on them with a slightly awed expression. "You're the guy who beat down Mick The Stone."

James laughed nervously, "I did? I still haven't a clue what happened there."

"Oh yeah," Steve chuckled as well. "He's got two sides of him, one is the gentle giant known as Mick and the other is the cyborg persona he got from those wannabe Borgs. It's sorta leftover after their mini collective went bust about a year ago."

Jessie winced, "wannabe... you don't mean the Valarians?" James tensed, while Steve shrugged as if he didn't know. "We've ran into them before. Their mechanical personas are pretty strong, right?" she said uncomfortably.

Steve nodded, "that's right. Human side isn't affected, but he's a big dude so..." He smirked in James' direction, "taking him down then's still pretty impressive."

"Okay," James said in a disinterested tone. Jessie looked down awkwardly as he walked off to get another drink from the designated booze table.

A few hours later a tiny hand reached up from the ground to try and take a bottle. Kathryn noticed and quickly reached down to stop him. "Oh no no, that's not for little boys."

Duncan looked up at her with a pouty expression on his face. It was so cute, she nearly melted on the spot. She shook her head to get her resolve back, "you don't want to end up like Tom, do you?" She pointed toward Tom dancing madly to one of Pulse's ballads.

He shook his head with a grimace. Kathryn smiled, "good boy." She directed him gently in another direction before she walked off.

The tiniest little noise slipped from the boy's lips, "wh...?" He wandered off.

Once their song was over, Naomi eyed him suspiciously as Kiara came over to her. "I'm sure Duncan's just spoke," she said.

"Nah, he can't talk," Kiara said.

Virus went onto the stage. "And finally Virus will perform two of their songs that have been mixed together as a remix. Remember it is available on their debut single," Neelix said into the microphone.

Craig meanwhile looked on worried at two of his bandmates. "Ohno, you guys aren't drunk are you?"

James and Jessie looked at each other, then back at Craig with forced straight faces.

"No," Jessie replied.

"Yes," James though replied at the same time. Jessie elbowed his arm. "Oh, no."

"Don't worry Craig, it's probably better off if they're drunk anyway," Lena said.

The four got into positions and started to sing. Everything seemed pretty normal until the end when Jessie decided to grab James to give him a long kiss.

"Oh my god, why," Kathryn complained.

Chakotay groaned, shaking his head. He thought about saying something but she kept rambling on like that, at least until Tom stumbled over to them and put his hands on his hips.

"Oh my god!" he screeched, "shut up you stupid Peter Pan bitch."

Kathryn's eyes froze over. Chakotay started to feel like his whole body did. "I beg your pardon!"

Tom laughed, "I beg your pardon, I..." he was cut off by a burp which made him turn pale. "Uhoh, rain check." He ran off with his hand over his mouth, unknowingly passing Duncan.

"Soopid peda pan bish," Duncan tried to say. He looked pleased with himself.

Tom staggered back in, eyeing the boy with a confused frown. Despite that he passed him again to walk over to Bryan helping himself to the pizza slice table.

"Do your dad a favour. Take Duncan back to our quarters and babysit him," he said. He took a swig of lager.

"Ok, I'll do the favour, what is it?" Bryan asked. Tom didn't swallow the lager at first. He just stared at Bryan. "What?" Bryan muttered questioningly. Tom swallowed the lager slowly. "Take Duncan back to our quarters and babysit him, that was the favour," Tom said slowly.

"But you asked me to do a favour and babysit Duncan," Bryan pointed out.

Tom nearly went cross eyed, it made him wobble. "Please Bry, do your daddy a solid."

Bryan backed away to avoid the alcohol fumes. "I'm one."

"One what?" Tom asked. His eyes lit up, "oh I love this song!" He ran off towards the dancefloor, leaving a very confused Bryan behind listening out for a song that wasn't playing.

Neelix approached the microphone, about to announce something when he spotted Tom climbing onto the one foot tall stage as if it were a mountain. Next thing he knew the microphone was pulled from his hands with a piercing screech.

"Yo, guess what time it is?" Tom shouted into it. He got nothing but silence and blank stares. "That's right, it's time for the Michael Sullivan Show. Lemme hear the chant." He waited and still got nothing but a random person coughing. Still he clapped. "Wonderful, wonderful. Let me introduce our host..."

Harry shook his head, embarrassed for him. "He does realise Sullivan's not real, right?"

Tom then brandished the mobile emitter to his left, winking mischievously. One little tap and Sullivan fizzled into existence wearing his fancy suit.

"Helloooo folks, Tommy and I have a fun show for you tonight," Sullivan crooned.

"Oh god, I'm not sober enough for this," Chakotay groaned, grabbing Kathryn's coffee while she wasn't there. His eyes bugged out at the mere stench of it.

Sullivan laughed and clapped as if he had an audience who cared. "We're mixing it up tonight with our theme. I'll let my good mate Tommy explain."

Tom burped through the microphone, luckily this time it didn't make him feel sick. "I think with a certain holiday coming up, we need to get everything out in the open air, tear each other new ones. Clean the laundry so to speak."

Sullivan looked confused, "what?" he whispered.

"Our Mikey, Mikey here will help ease all of your suffering," Tom continued as if hadn't said anything.

"If I have the power," Sullivan pretended to sound insecure.

Tom patted him on the shoulder, "he has the power."

Bryan looked around at all the people, obviously drunk, buying this. His face turning bright red as he gathered up Duncan just before he reached one of the buffet tables. He left before the shouting and pushing started.

As always one voice overpowered everyone. "Who drank my coffee!?" Kathryn screeched, freezing the whole room. She looked to Chakotay who already had the sense to make his escape minutes before.

Sullivan laughed through his nerves, "I'm sure no one would have the audacity to steal from you, Kathy."

Kathryn stared with steely eyes in his direction, "oh go and hump your own leg you insult to the Irish."

"Um, your magic box over there has coffee," Sullivan stuttered, pointing backwards. Kathryn was already at the replicator before he finished. "Next problem I can solve?"

Emma pointed her hand up, "Tom said you guys were showing The Mummy Returns with free beer and Cherry Coke. Can I have some free beer and Cherry Coke?"

"No, you can't," Sullivan replied.

"Can I have a chain-saw then?" Emma asked.

Tom looked on a little impatiently. "You can't have finished those free drinks already."

Emma shoved the bottles on her table with a single arm swipe. "What drinks?"

"Ahem!" Tani cleared her throat purposely loud while raising her hand. Tom and Sullivan looked very relieved. "I have a problem."

"We know," someone in the room sniggered.

Tani looked around angrily, then back at the stage. "How about we talk about everyone who keeps casting me aside for someone *better*."

Ashley and Steve glanced at one another awkwardly. "Oh boy, here we go," Ashley whispered.

Tom brightened up considerably. "Now that's what I call a show. Come on up, come on up." In his excitement and arm gesturing he stumbled off the stage and ended up face down on the floor.

Tani went up to the stage to join Sullivan anyway like nothing ever happened.

"Now then Miss..." Sullivan said in a friendly, customer service voice. Tani told him her name. "Tani. What happened to you sounds so awful. Mind telling us about it, then ole Uncle Sullivan can help you solve it."

"Ookay," Tani said with a judgmental look on her face. "I once had a best friend, but they decided to get a new one. It's like I didn't exist."

"Ooooh," Sullivan tried to sound outraged. A few drunks chimed in, including a muffled Tom.

Lena marched her way through the crowd, "hey wait a minute, that's.."

"I wasn't talking about you Lena, not yet," Tani huffily said.

Lena stopped and stared blankly. "As I was saying, that's not what happened."

"Ah Morgan, looking good," Sullivan said. Lena narrowed her eyes so much they were barely slits. "Continue Tani."

"Well I..." Tani looked shaken, her voice stammered. "See, see what I mean. It's always about bloody Lena! First Ashley dumps me for her, after I defended her against him, then Lena casts me aside for even hotter eye candy."

Lena groaned in disgust. "Ashley wasn't one of the bullies on that sphere, and..."

"Yeah yeah, it never happened," Tani taunted her while shriveling up her nose. "He only said to me and everyone you weren't one of us."

"But Ashley has never been my friend, you idiot!" Lena snapped back. "And the thing with James, you're so insanely jealous of someone who can't stand the sight of you, that you hated me for being friends with him, you spread rumours. You cast aside your best friend, not me."

The crowd started murmuring. It stirred Tom back to his feet, then eventually the stage after a couple of tries. "Oh yes, this is good stuff. I'm loving it."

"Sounds like a real pickle, ey folks," Michael said with a flourished wink. The Mikey chants started playing, but not from the crowd, from the speakers.

"Why else would Ashley not want to be friends with me anymore!" Tani sobbed furiously. She noticed Ashley looking away, blushing and awkwardly, then Steve beside him looking at the floor. "I befriended the lonely kid and I'm the bad guy? Then you tell me to shove off..."

"For god's sake, I didn't, you did," Lena muttered impatiently. "And stop doing this here, Tom will probably be broadcasting this live on his stupid program."

Tani shrugged with indifference, "no he won't. I know something he doesn't."

Tom chuckled to himself so much he had a tear in his eye. "Classic..." he then seemed to realise what she said, "wait, what?"

"If it's about the Delta Flyer cuddly toy he sleeps with, that ship sailed last week," Kathryn said in between sips. Tom's eyes widened, he started making pathetic squeaking sounds, to which she smirked. "You mean you do? It was just a guess."

"Nuh uh," Tani grunted. "I'm tired of everyone picking on me, so you want an embarrassing show, you got it. Ashley writes Harry Potter fanfiction, the shippy kind."

There were a few sniggers amongst the crowd. A couple of people stared at the very embarrassed Ashley, while his brother bit his bottom lip to stop from laughing.

"One time I caught Janeway in the cargo bay replicating a coffee flavoured Christmas tree. It didn't last," Tani continued.

No one was surprised, still a lot looked. Kathryn seemed almost smug. "And? I'm not ashamed."

"Lena has a Holodeck program called Pocket..." Tani said with a darkening smile.

Lena hurriedly butt in, "that's just a fake name for my training program, so no one uses it. Stop it."

Nearby Faye gasped and turned to her, "you collect In My Pocket's too?" Lena had no idea what to say to that, she pretended not to hear her.

"Okay Tani, this is getting a little off topic," Sullivan said, trying to guide her from the stage. She gave him a rough shove, dislodging the emitter so he fizzled off-line. Tom missed where it dropped, and quickly tried to hunt for it on his hands and knees.

"My favourite one is about our favourite host," Tani said, looking down at him. He didn't really pick up on that and continued looking. "Did you ever wonder why your son never listens to you?"

Lena's face paled, her eyes widened. "No, no," she mumbled, she continued her pushing towards the stage.

Tom looked up all confused, "Bryan?"

"No," Tani said through a faked smile. "The other one. The one I saw punching you in the nose one time and laughing about it."

"Well uh..." Tom stammered while getting to his feet. "He's more Klingon than Bryan, so what?"

Tani smiled sweetly. "Is he, is he really? He doesn't look it. In fact..." Lena got to the stage, making her back off hurriedly. "Doesn't look like..." she said very quickly before Lena slapped a hand across her mouth.

Tom watched them suspiciously. "Lena? I'm touched that you care but..." Tani laughed behind the hand, failing to push it away. "He doesn't look Klingon, that's because of the disorder that can affect part Human Klingon hybrids, the spine curving. Doc had to alter the DNA before he was born to..."

"You don't owe her an explanation, you moron," Lena barked back at him. Tani ducked down to jump from the stage. "Hey!"

"You should get one though. And I know who you should ask first," Tani giggled. She escaped into the crowds as Lena jumped down to get to her. She followed quickly.

Tom stared after them, suddenly feeling sober with a lump in his throat. Amongst the crowd he looked for his wife. Instead he spotted Harry first. "Yeah um, that's it for tonight all."

The party soon got back to normal after all the awkwardness had faded away, apart from a few people asking Ashley if they could read his fanfiction and his denials about it.

Harry walked over to the table with just his friend sitting at with two cups in his hands. One he handed to Tom, the other was snatched by a Kathryn coloured blur. He groaned impatiently. "I never see her coming."

Tom sighed, "tell me the truth, am I being paranoid?"

"About what?" Harry carefully asked.

"Duncan," Tom answered. He didn't notice Harry's tiny flinch and brief glance away. "He hates me. Cries all the time when he's with me, looks at me funny, the occasional hit." He looked up at his friend, "he's not mine, is he?"

The blood drained from Harry's face, and it felt like all of his upper torso as well. Tom watched him with prying eyes. "Because of what Tani said?" he said in a higher pitch than usual.

Tom's face hardened, "you know something."

"No," Harry blurted out defensively, making him wince. "No. I just had a suspicion."

"And you're telling me now, because?" Tom's voice trembled.

Harry timidly shook his head. "I didn't know for sure. If it was my imagination then I'd be rocking the boat for nothing."

Tom breathed deeply through his nose and out. All it did was make him shake more. "Then, what do you think it is?"

"Well..." Harry said hesitantly, "Duncan spends a lot of time with him, mostly behaves around him, likes to hit you."

Tom shuddered as he closed his eyes and clenched his jaw, if only for a moment. "My thinking exactly."

Harry gazed down at his hands folded on the table. "I'm sorry."

Tom shook his head, "no, B'Elanna wouldn't cheat on me. There's more to it than that."

"I agree, but how?" Harry said.

"And why?" Tom murmured.

"Why?" a tiny voice said from beside him.

The two men looked around to the source, finding Bryan holding Duncan as if he were a crewmember on bring Janeway coffee duty. Duncan seemed to think it was funny.

"Did he..." Harry stuttered.

Tom smiled, "yes, yes he..." Then it hit him again when he noticed Duncan looking at him, Tom's entire demeanour soured fast. "Bryan what... no, give him here."

Bryan barely had time to argue, Tom snatched Duncan away which immediately set the boy off, he made a little whining sound and started to fidget. "Of course," Tom grumbled bitterly, "not for long."

"What's the matter dad? I thought you'd be happy," Bryan said.

Harry winced as he looked up at his friend.

"Oh I'm thrilled. Stay with Harry," Tom muttered, getting up from his seat.

"Ohno, what are you doing?" Harry asked grimly. "Maybe you shouldn't..." he gestured at the baby.

Tom stared at him briefly, then walked off silently.

James/Jessie's Quarters:

The pair were sleeping off their drink when they were woken up by banging on the main door.

"I know you're in there you wastes of oxygen! Get here and open the door!" Tom screamed from the other side.

"I wonder who that can be?" Jessie said. She slowly climbed up and headed towards the main door. The main door opened. Tom stormed in holding Duncan. "What do you want?"

Tom looked around the room. "Where's your boyfriend?" Tom asked.

"What? Boyfriend, how did you bloody find out?" Jessie stuttered.

Tom eyed her suspiciously. "You're still drunk," he said. He pulled out a hypospray, and he injected her with it. She collapsed. "Hmm, that made me feel a little better," Tom muttered to himself.

"Why?" Duncan said.

Tom groaned, and he put Duncan on the nearest chair.

James walked in, and he headed straight for the replicator. "Hi Tom. I need a vodka, do you want a drink?" he asked.

Tom eyed him suspiciously. "You're being too nice to me, you're still drunk," Tom said. He rushed over and hyposprayed James. He collapsed.

"Why?" Duncan said.

Ten minutes later:

Jessie and James had woken up, and luckily for everyone else in the room they had sobered up too. Tom had sat down on the sofa. James and Jessie were just standing around, getting rather annoyed with him.

"Are you just going to sit there all day?" Jessie asked angrily.

"Have you sobered up yet?" Tom asked. The pair shrugged their shoulders. Tom rolled his eyes. "Fine, I'll test you. James, can I have a drink?"

"Get stuffed," James replied.

"You're sober. Jessie, is it true that you and James are seeing each other?" Tom asked.

Jessie rolled her eyes, "not that crap again. You need to get a hobby you weirdo."

Both of Tom's eyebrow twitched. "Good. Cos I want you to remember this, and I want answers."

"Why?" Duncan squeaked.

The pair looked at him in surprise, to which he smiled at them and waved. It only ruffled Tom's nerves further.

"Yeah, that. That..." Tom grumbled. He was met with blank stares. "Where the hell did he come from?"

"Er, you came here to ask us where kids come from?" James said over his nerves. Jessie winced discreetly.

"Just keep talking like that and I'll get even more angry so I can yell. I don't mind," Tom said.

"Why?" Duncan said.

"That helps too. Anyway, that's not what I meant," Tom growled.

"Then what more do you want to know? Do you have amnesia or something?" Jessie asked.

"Oh for god's sake!" Tom yelled.

"Why?" Duncan said.

Tom's fists clenched so hard they were white. "He's not mine. Don't deny it."

The resulting silence was deafening, even Duncan looked uncomfortable.

Tom laughed painfully and angrily. "That's it? You're not even going to say anything, after all you've done to me."

"Who told, or how did you..." Jessie asked quietly.

"Does it matter? You've basically admitted it anyway," Tom snapped.

James and Jessie glanced at one another, she gave him a nod. "Yes it's true," he replied.

"You... what... I don't..." Tom stammered, his rage steadily rising. He jumped out of his seat to march over to them. "What's wrong with you people? Don't you do anything normal?"

"It's complicated," Jessie said.

Tom scoffed, "oh is that why I'm only finding out about this now? Why am I only finding out about this now? Was anyone ever going to tell me at all?"

James cleared his throat and stared at him as if to silently tell him to calm down. "Of course we were, it's just the longer it went on, the harder you'd take it."

Tom pointed a finger at him. "Don't you dare put the blame on me!"

James lightly swatted it out of his face. "We're not, I'm just saying how it is."

"It was a difficult thing to bring up when it... when it first happened," Jessie said as carefully as possible. "We wanted to avoid exactly this and only made it worse by waiting."

"You mean my finding out, spare me," Tom grunted.

Jessie bit her lip firmly. "No, it was always going to upset you whenever we told you. The longer we put it off, the worse it would be."

"So, how did this happen, how did you convince my wife to take your kid?" Tom asked as calmly as he could manage.

"It wasn't like that," Jessie protested angrily, "she saved my life and Duncan's. I was stabbed and she..."

"Oh and then you told her to keep it quiet or else, how noble of you. Is this how you freaks say thank you?" Tom grumbled.

James took a step forward, Jessie quickly put an arm out to put him off, it did for the moment. Tom shook his head in disgust.

"I told you already. I'm not excusing why you weren't told, but it's what happened," Jessie said.

"Okay, then where did he come from then? I knew it was him, but only assumed Jessie was involved..." Tom said.

James' eyes narrowed, "*does it matter?*"

"Nice, throwing that back in my face," Tom faked a chuckle. "The kid was born and you two just forgot you had one, or was this an unofficial adoption?" He didn't pause long enough for an answer, "let me

guess, *we're just friends, we just had a few too many one night*. Spare me from all your childish denial. Not one bit of this makes sense, at all."

"Look, we're not proud of this. I know I'd do it over again if I could," Jessie said.

Tom laughed for real this time but with some bitterness. "I'd say *I'd bet you do*, but then I'd be complimenting that freak."

"What?" Jessie sounded confused.

James rolled his eyes, "you keep throwing that word around..."

"Oh cry me a river!" Tom shouted back at him. "You made me think I had a second son, when he was yours this whole time!"

"Oh," Jessie mumbled, a little embarrassed. "That's not fair, it wasn't malicious or anything. It happened."

"And you keep saying that," Tom said mockingly. "I wouldn't be surprised if you have been like bunnies this whole time." Jessie shuddered, Tom brushed that off. "You think, ohnoes this baby is so inconvenient. It'll be super easy to pretend to be hurt and trick some poor schmuck into taking it."

James stepped over so there was barely any gap between them. Tom was too angry to be worried, it only made him smirk. "You're making this worse than it is. We wouldn't do anything like that, do you hear how ridiculous that sounds?"

"Yeah," Tom agreed, smiling. "And you're ridiculous, it fits."

"No," Jessie firmly said. "We planned nothing. With the Love Spell and the stabbing, it was all over the place. We didn't know what to do."

"The Love Spell?" Tom laughed. "You're seriously expecting me to believe that the virus that made people at most make out, was the reason you were knocked up. There's we were drunk denial, and then there's this. This is so Jessie, not that I can blame you. Who's gonna believe this crap?"

"It's true," Jessie muttered. She looked on in disbelief, "you were at the hotel when the spell hit. You knew we were gone, cos you were lingering round outside my room."

"So let me get all this straight. Jessie got pregnant during the Love Spell by excessive making out, and gross don't tell me. A few weeks later B'Elanna offers to be a surrogate mother to save Jessie and Duncan's lives. B'Elanna carried on with the pregnancy, without telling me that Duncan wasn't ours.

She gave birth eight months ago, and the Doctor lied to me by saying that he had to take the Klingon genes out to save him. B'Elanna makes you two Duncan's god parents, now that I know I think that's rather funny. Anyway... a few months later, Duncan learns to talk and B'Elanna & I are STILL looking after him!" Tom's ranting turned into shouting.

Duncan had a pet lip on his face when he chimed in with a, "why?"

"Yeah why, so now's the question... are you going to *man up* and take him?" Tom snapped.

"There's no question," Jessie mumbled.

Tom looked on in disgust, "oh I see. Not finished having fun at Tom's expense, are we?"

Jessie glared back, "you're putting words in my mouth."

"Look, the whole story is a load of crap. I don't see why I have to listen to any of your excuses. Should I leave the product of your attempted revenge here?" Tom said.

"Now you see why we didn't tell you about this. You do this all the time, we're sick of it," Jessie said angrily.

"Oh don't worry about that anymore. I'll be back to drop off Duncan's things, and that's the last you'll put up with me," Tom said. He smiled then walked straight out the door.

Jessie collapsed onto the sofa with her head in her hands.

"Why?" Duncan said. He pointed at himself. "Cher' co," he said as he continued to point at himself.

The next morning:

Two crewmembers' discussion was interrupted when the lift stopped and Jessie walked inside.

"Deck Two," she said.

The two crewmembers avoid looking at her. The turbolift stopped and they walked out. As soon as the door closed, Jessie could hear them whispering. The turbolift continued moving.

The Mess Hall:

Lena stood up, and she walked away from her table. She headed over to Neelix's kitchen. She looked around, but she couldn't see Neelix anywhere, so she hurried inside to grab what looked like salt. On the way back to her table she heard the main door open, so she looked briefly to see who it was.

Jessie walked up to Lena, trying to ignore everyone who was looking her way.

"Don't tell me, Tom has told everyone his story," Jessie said.

"You guessed right," Lena muttered.

Jessie looked quickly over her shoulders. "It doesn't matter. They'll get tired of it eventually," Jessie said.

"That doesn't sound like you," Lena said. She heard the door opening again, and she looked toward it. "Ugh great."

Jessie looked towards the door. Tani had walked in. She came straight over to Jessie and Lena.

"You'll never guess what I heard," Tani said.

"In fact I can," Jessie said.

"I suppose Tom's theory makes more sense. Even drunk and under love spell, James would never go for you," Tani said.

Jessie laughed to herself. "Getting mixed up there?" She walked off towards the replicator.

"Why did you open your big mouth?" Lena hissed at Tani.

Tani shrugged as if it were nothing, "I didn't get the chance to tell him, you saw to that."

"Yeah but..." Lena protested. Jessie returned with a drink. "You started it."

"I suppose," Tani said wistfully. "So Jessie, was it..."

"No, bitch somewhere else," Jessie muttered.

Tani pretended to look offended, "he was gonna find out about your cruel idea, don't take it out on me."

"Look Tani. Don't believe what Tom told you. James and I are not like that. So shut up and forget about it," Jessie said.

"What do you mean you and James are not like that? I know he's not like that, but sluts like you are," Tani said.

Jessie stared at her with her jaw dropped, anger brewing in her eyes. Tani waited for her next outburst. Instead she closed her mouth and got up to leave without another word.

Lena wasn't expecting it either, she got up quickly to follow her. "Wait a sec..." A brief run and she caught up with her. "You didn't have to leave."

"I do. He'll be up soon, probably," Jessie mumbled.

"Duncan?" Lena said without thinking. Jessie only nodded. "How come you left at all just to get that?"

Jessie sighed, her shoulders slumped a bit. "We thought our replicator was broken. Obviously not."

Lena frowned. "What... what do you mean?" They reached the turbolift and went straight inside. "If it's a rations thing, I..."

"It's okay, no. There's enough in my account. Duncan's stuff didn't come cheap, obviously," Jessie muttered.

"I..." Lena looked even more confused, "I assumed Tom would drop off everything he owned in a rage."

"Sorta," Jessie winced. The lift reached its destination so they stepped out. Lena waited for Jessie to continue, but they reached her quarters first. "He put them back into the replicator so we'll have to pay to get them back. Fair I suppose."

Lena shook her head rapidly, "what no, no it's not."

Jessie laughed bitterly, "it's okay, he can sleep in my old bed until we can afford a crib."

"Jessie," Lena said through her gritted teeth. The door chimed before she could say anything. "I get he's mad at you, but what about Duncan?"

Jessie headed back towards the door to let it open. Since Tani was on the otherside she regretted that immediately.

"You know Lena, it's rather rude to shut the door on someone," Tani said.

"So?" Lena groaned.

"Ok, I'll just say what I have to say and leave, ok," Tani said.

Lena scoffed, "no, you've said more than enough."

Jessie glanced at her briefly, "it's okay, I'll handle it."

Lena reluctantly walked away to the other side of the room, tightly folding her arms.

"Look to be quick, I know that it was your idea to get revenge on Tom. And I know that you most probably forced James into it. So, to clear things up, I'll just say one more thing," Tani said.

"I didn't agree with anything you said there, but go on," Jessie said.

"I really hate you, and that's about it really," Tani said.

"That's nice, will you go now?" Jessie asked.

Tani nodded, and she turned towards the door. She quickly turned back around and she hit Jessie in the face. She then walked out. The door started to close, then it opened again as Lena hurried after her. Jessie barely had any time to do anything before she heard a thud outside. She shook her head, opting to wait instead.

Lena walked back in like nothing happened. "There's a nice dent in the wall opposite your door. That's ok right?"

"No, she isn't worth it," Jessie replied.

James stepped out from one of the bedrooms with a look of concern on his face. "What was that bang earlier?"

Lena giggled and looked away with an innocent expression. Jessie though looked down sheepishly. "Just Tani making an impression," she answered to Lena's amusement.

"Okay?" James said, still sounding worried.

The door chimed once again. This time Lena went to check the door. Her face hardened the person standing opposite her backed off a step. "No, bog off."

Jessie and James peered around her to see Harry standing at the door holding a padd. He seemed to be glaring at no one in particular as if he were afraid to direct it at any of them.

"I'm not here to defend Tom or argue. I'm only here to give you this," Harry said, gesturing the padd in Lena's direction.

"What, is it an overdue babysitting fee," Lena grumbled.

Harry groaned, "no, he's still working on that one."

Lena looked around to her friends in shock, they didn't react at all, she assumed it wasn't news to them. "I'm not playing the mail girl if it's threats or something."

Harry ground his teeth and rolled his eyes. "It's a peace offering, an optional summoning."

"Right," Lena laughed, walking off.

"Look, everyone knows now, they're making up their own story," Harry said as he took a step inside, pointing the padd toward Jessie instead.

"You mean they're believing what Tom told them," James said.

Harry's eyes narrowed, still they avoided pointing at anyone. "Tom only wants the truth. Give him that so everyone can hear, and he'll settle things as is. He said you'd know what that meant."

"He's threatening us," Jessie muttered.

"The opposite," Harry replied, "he'll leave you alone, not give you the bill you talked about. He doesn't want anything more to do with you, so it works for both sides."

"He already has the truth," James said.

Harry put down the padd on the nearest surface. "Then this won't be too much trouble for you. It starts at seven." He walked out quickly.

"What does?" Lena asked.

Jessie walked over to collect the padd, taking a quick peek. She couldn't help but laugh briefly. "What else?"

The Ready Room:

The door chimed and Lena walked straight in.

"Ok, mum, make it quick, I've got people to slap," she said.

Kathryn groaned, "that's exactly it. Somebody saw you push Tani into the wall near James and Jessie's Quarters. Explanation please?"

"Tani started it. She hit Jessie, so I pushed Tani into the wall as she made her way out of the room. I don't see why I have to be blamed for this," Lena answered.

Kathryn seemed almost sympathetic at first, at least until she got out of her chair while cradling her large mug, then her face was straight and unreadable. "If that's true I won't defend her, but this has gone on long enough. You and Tani used to be friends. She's been a teabag in my cup ever since."

Lena's jaw dropped. "That's not *my* fault!"

"That's not what I said," Kathryn said softly. She stood in front of her daughter to look her in the eye, kindly but with authority. "She put in a couple complaints. She wants to leave the ship."

"Mum, she has issues. She's fine when there's just two of us, but the second I meet new people she's branding me a traitor," Lena stuttered.

"Is that what happened with this Ashley character?" Kathryn asked carefully.

Lena rolled her eyes to the side, "no. We rescued them from a wreck site. Since they were new I showed them the ropes. I didn't really like them, so I never made friends with them. Tani did."

Kathryn nodded, "Ashley?"

"Yeah. Steve was a bit weird round her," Lena replied.

"So what happened?" Kathryn asked.

"I dunno," Lena answered honestly. Kathryn was taken aback by that. "She accused me of taking him away from her, and that she stuck up for me from him, I betrayed her. When they vanished she eventually calmed down. No apologies. I didn't want to have no friends so..."

Kathryn reached over to place a comforting hand on her shoulder. "I'm sorry."

"It's fine, it didn't happen," Lena said through a faked, weak smile. Kathryn didn't buy it. "It's not up to me to stop her from leaving, if that's what she wants."

"Of course not, that's my problem. I just have a lot of trouble understanding her, and I thought you..." Kathryn said.

"Welcome to the club," Lena mumbled.

Kathryn grimly nodded. "I can't and won't drop her off alone in the middle of the Delta Quadrant. I offered to assign her to the Ligers temporarily, see how she fares. The problem is with her behaviour lately, they're not too keen on the idea. Lilly said and I quote, I don't want perverts on my ship."

"So?" Lena said with a shrug.

"So..." Kathryn started to lose her patience, a quick sip helped a bit. "So she's stuck here and we need to work on this problem. I hoped you'd still want to help her despite, everything."

"How am I supposed to do that when I can't even help myself?" Lena asked with a growing lump in her throat.

Kathryn warmly smiled at her. "That's exactly why. Tani's also got to live with these fake memories, they're clearing bothering her, just like they are you. This could help the both of you."

Lena thought about it, she gave her mum a timid nod and walked out. She kept thinking.

Holodeck 1:

The Michael Sullivan show program was up and running, but the show itself wasn't on. Voyager crewmembers were going into the audience space.

Tom and Harry were backstage talking.

"Tom, this is stupid. Can't you lot work this out on your own?" Harry said questioningly.

"Harry, Harry, I and B'Elanna would be able to work this out with a pair of chimps easier than those two. I know that they don't want Duncan, they never did," Tom said.

"Correct me if I'm wrong but haven't you spent the last six years tormenting them because they were close best friends. If I were one of them, I would keep a secret like what they did too. Just because they didn't tell you straight away, doesn't mean that they are using Duncan as revenge material," Harry said.

Tom's whole demeanour crumbled into nothing, he turned quite pale. Harry couldn't help but feel very guilty about it, until Tom laughed quite obnoxiously as if it never happened. "I see they got to you too. It's okay, soon the whole crew will see what they're really like."

"Selected guests have arrived - security protocol engaged," the computer's voice said.

Harry wasn't surprised, "that again? It worked so well last time."

"The best way to catch people in a lie is to make sure they can't compare notes. It'll be fine," Tom said. He immediately looked worried when he spotted Kathryn and Chakotay arrive alongside some other audience members. They made a bee-line straight for him.

"Tom, mind telling me what this..." Kathryn said far too politely while brandishing a padd. Then she gestured to the studio, "and this is all about."

Harry side stepped away a few times until Tom noticed him, he grabbed his arm.

"Well it was either this or I call Security," Tom said with a straight face.

Chakotay's eyebrow flickered briefly. "Security? This hardly concerns them."

"Let me guess," Tom said with a disappointed tone, "Tuvok knew about this too."

Kathryn and Chakotay exchanged wary glances. "It still wouldn't concern him," Chakotay said.

Tom scoffed in disgust, then looked at his friend for backup. He was too busy sweating to do anything useful. "Last time I checked, which was twice last night, forcing a person to have a child against their will is a crime. A few actually. Plus, I'm sure there have been many more that James the murderer is guilty of."

Kathryn's polite facade was starting to crack under the strain. "You're talking about the amendment of 2025 that protects women who wish to undergo abortions, from their abusive partners and or family members."

"That's one yes, and I think you'll agree these are rather unusual circumstances yes, but it applies," Tom said.

Harry winced, "does it?" Tom elbowed him.

"I was manipulated into fathering a child, who then turned into another man's child. That's another, completely different law or two," Tom confidently said. He smiled a little smugly, "or we can simply have it out on a harmless chat show to figure out what really happened, settle this in a day or two."

Kathryn frowned, her shoulders tensed. "Or is this merely a means of humiliating the people who have wronged you?"

"I'm so glad you admitted that at least," Tom said through a bitter smile. The smile faded, leaving only anger. "Oh and thanks for coming to the show. I am really interested to know why so many conspired not to tell me about this, so Mikey will call you up probably third or fourth." He walked off before either of them could argue or anything else.

"I'll be happy to," Kathryn said through a forced and very dangerous smile.

Chakotay side stepped a few times as well. Kathryn caught him a lot quicker than Tom caught Harry, and harder too.

The full audience had quickly caught the Michael Sullivan show spirit. All were chanting, "Mikey, Mikey, Mikey!"

Michael was on the stage with his microphone. "Hello and welcome to the Michael Sullivan Show. Today we only have one topic, but it's a good one. Everyone please welcome Tom Paris," he said.

Quite a lot of the audience cheered as Tom came onto the stage. He sat down on one of the available chairs.

"Now then Tommy lad, tell us what exactly is going on here," Michael asked as he walked over to Tom.

"Well it's really very simple. Two people that I know tried to get back at me in a really dirty scheme. And I mean dirty," Tom said.

"What was their scheme?" Michael asked.

"Well I just found out the other day that the child B'Elanna and I had, isn't ours at all, he belongs to those two," Tom replied.

Everyone did a fake gasp. "Mikey, Mikey, Mikey!" the audience chanted.

"What happened, Tommy lad," Michael asked.

"They told me this crap story. They said that they were drunk during the love spell that took place over a year ago. A few weeks later B'Elanna offered to be a surrogate mother to save Jessie and Duncan lives after an *accident* on a planet," Tom replied.

"Ooooh," everyone said.

"And B'Elanna didn't tell you?" Michael said.

"No, they told her not to because they thought I'd work out their scheme," Tom said.

"Lets bring them out, shall we?" Michael said. "Up first we have Jessie."

There was a mixture of cheers and mostly boos coming from the audience as Jessie appeared through the revolving stage door with a sour but worried look on her face. She quickly took a seat.

"Now then, we were going to bring James up first but apparently... no, it's probably better to see for yourselves what we're up against," Michael said, gesturing to the back wall.

It turned into a screen showing the inside of a waiting room, and a rather strange one at that. It had no doors or windows, only a mere chair. James was pacing back and forth, looking around for something.

"What?" Jessie hissed. She eyed Tom distastefully, "is this what you did to him last time we were here?"

"No," Tom replied without even looking at her, "I wouldn't do that to Craig."

"Do..." Jessie stammered, confused.

James stopped by one of the walls, staring intently at it. The crowd murmured curiously. When he started to punch through the wall, ripping wires away and whatnot, there was an uproar.

Michael gestured to turn it off. "Yes, we can't have someone like that in here, at least until he calms down."

"You locked him in a box, what did you expect?" Jessie snapped.

Tom rolled his eyes, "yes poor diddums, I can't think of anything worse. Lets change the subject shall we." Jessie stared icily in his direction.

Michael quickly came to his aid, "after our last show, we've had to take precautions to avoid any further violence. I'm sure you'll agree."

"Then why invite us at all, you've already made up your mind," Jessie asked.

The audience talked amongst themselves, to Jessie it didn't sound good. Tom winced in full agreement, "pretty telling, huh Jess, but I'll let that slide for now. Now your version of events, if you please, from the very beginning."

Jessie eyed the crowd uncomfortably, she shifted in the seat. "During our awaymission, our whole team were chucked into prison. In the.."

"No!" Tom cut in overdramatically.

Michael chuckled, "indeed. He said the beginning."

Jessie glared between the two. "It's irrelevant." Several members of the audience jeered at her, making her tense further. "It is," she protested, "I found out recently that I was pregnant, then I went on the mission."

"Hmm, and what's the story behind that then?" Michael asked.

"I'm not going to indulge you," Jessie said through gritted teeth.

Tom shook his head and clicked his tongue. "It's okay, Jessie. Who can blame you? I wouldn't want to admit to sleeping with that, brutish thug, either. It's okay, you're safe here."

Jessie's eyes were like daggers pointed at him, but her face drained. "That's not what I'm saying. It's not important here."

"Then allow me," Tom spat. "You two agree that smacking around the helmsman isn't fun anymore, so you try to think of something more cruel, more damaging, permanent to him..."

"Now wait a minute," Jessie said.

"Mikey, Mikey," the crowd chanted over the top of her repeatedly.

Tom nodded at the audience, allowing them to finish before he continued. "You are either already knocked up with the spawn of Satan's kid, or you decide to do so. Conjure up some little tale of woe, program the Doctor to go along with it, and trick a poor woman who recently gave birth into carrying it. It's despicable."

Jessie gripped each side of her chair tightly, her knuckles white. "That's got to be the stupidest thing I've ever heard."

"Well, correct me," Tom said.

"I told you," Jessie firmly said.

Michael shook his head, "but not the rest of us. You came here to convince Tommy and your peers, that you are innocent in all this."

Jessie flinched, "no. I came here to explain myself. There's a difference." People booed and jeered at her, she tried to ignore them. "Look, some gross aliens weaponised a make people fall in love beam to take over the ship. We were hit by a stronger jolt of it. There was no plotting, no nothing. We weren't in control. We don't even remember it."

Tom laughed, "nobody else in the stronger jolted area did any baby making. How come it was just you?"

"Well if my partner was Annika we would have nothing to discuss, would we," Jessie said, making a lot of people chuckle.

Tom fought off the blushing in his cheeks and sickness. "So you admit that who you were partnered up with was someone you'd sleep with anyway?"

The crowd loved that, there was laughter and cheering deafening the people on the stage.

"When did I say that?" Jessie snapped defensively, cueing further laughter. "Look, I hadn't known I was pregnant that long before that awaymission. I was stabbed by an inmate. It was no trick, your best friend Harry witnessed the attack. I had no choice in the matter."

"Oh!" Tom pretended to sound annoyed, "so you're blaming my wife for this, are you? Or James, too, as well?"

Jessie shook with anger, she tried to take in a couple deep breaths to stop it. "The only person I blame is the man who tried to kill me and Duncan. B'Elanna selflessly saved our lives. From what I was told, all James is guilty of is choosing a treatment that would save both of us, he didn't know..."

"And kill the man who stabbed you, but who's counting?" Tom chuckled.

Michael smirked at him when he saw the slapped face Jessie was sporting. "So if this is all above board, a horrible tragic accident with a happy ending, why the deceit? Why was Tommy here in the dark?"

Tom looked on approvingly, "excellent question, Michael." Another chorus of Mikey's started.

Jessie eyed the whole room, unable to say anything. Everything she thought of sounded stupid.

"Well?" Tom asked when the crowd settled down.

Jessie felt a few inches smaller. "I... don't know."

"I see," Tom said, a little disappointed. He turned to Michael, giving him a nod as a cue.

"Ok, we are now going to bring out friends and acquaintances to get their view of the situation. First lets welcome Captain Janeway!" Michael said.

Suddenly a lot of the audience decided it was the best time for an intermission. Tom was more than put out with the dozen of people who dared to stay behind. "It's okay," he said through forced smiles, "VTV is as always Live and recorded."

Kathryn joined Jessie on the stage, already armed to the teeth with her deathglare and a cup of coffee.

"Um, we don't have any refreshments in here," Michael stuttered.

"Yes this is a piece of crap so called program, isn't it?" Kathryn said before sipping her drink.

"No matter," Michael shook it off. "When did this tale of lies and child abuse start for you?" Both women glared him into a puddle.

Kathryn hmped as she looked away. "James told me when he confessed to the retaliation killing." Michael nodded as if she would continue. When she didn't there was a few awkward blank stares between them, she growled afterwards. "He was afraid he'd lose both of them. This was someone who thought he had nothing to live for."

"I see, so it was his idea to save them both the way we all know about," Michael said, glancing briefly at Jessie.

"No you moron," Jessie snapped. "The Doctor apparently suggested temporary stasis until a surrogate volunteered. It happened before either of us could have a say."

"Well we understand why you couldn't," Tom said with a glint in his eye they knew was trouble. "But why couldn't he? Are you once again blaming my wife for this mess?"

"Oh for god's sake Paris, put a muzzle on it for twenty four hours. My ears are buzzing," Kathryn said. The audience were mixed, some laughed while some booed. Kathryn glared around to catch the boos but she didn't.

Tom looked a little shaken, he bit his lip and retreated back to let Michael take back over.

"Why did you not share this rather disturbing secret with Mr Paris?" he asked.

Kathryn looked at him as if he spat in her drink. "It was none of my business."

"But you went along with it," Michael continued.

Kathryn inhaled sharply, it sounded like a growl. "Did I bloody stutter?"

Tom at first flinched from her tone and stare, but anger soon took care of that. Re-energised he dove right back in. "As the Captain of the ship, isn't it your duty, your business to mediate matters like these?" Kathryn stared at him sharply, not realising he was temporarily immune. "Instead you and the entire command team chose to keep this from me, and I assume laughed behind my back. I can't see any other reason to."

"You're imagining things as per usual," Kathryn hissed back.

"So why else would you pander to the lie? What would you have to gain from it?" Tom asked.

He only got a stare back from her in return.

Jessie sighed a touch impatiently, "nobody was laughing at you, who would? If James, B'Elanna or I told you the first second we could, would you have believed it? If you did or not, how would you react?"

Michael cleared his throat, "excuse me, we ask the questions."

"Listen to this folks, they're blaming me and my wife again," Tom directed to the audience. They seemed to mostly agree with him. "What did you say earlier?" he asked Jessie, "that I'd have to find out eventually, the later the worse."

"Exactly," Jessie muttered, sensing a catch was coming.

"Then ask the same questions one month, two month, a year later," Tom said. "Would I believe it, how would I react. Might as well never tell me. Wasn't that the point in the end?"

Jessie got out of her seat, eyes burning in rage, "no!"

"Then why didn't this get sorted at the best possible time, when Duncan was born and should've been with his parents," Tom asked.

"Because..." Jessie blurted out, then winced inwardly, "because I am a coward. I knew Duncan deserved better than me. I thought he'd be better off without me." The audience talked amongst themselves in shock. Jessie hurried off stage, out of sight.

Kathryn meanwhile gazed down at her lap solemnly. She shook her head.

"Perhaps we should take a break," Michael whispered to Tom. He raised his voice to direct it to the audience, "we'll be right back, in the meantime the polls are open to every crewmember. Who do you think is telling the truth, who are the biggest arseholes here. Have fun and take care of each other." He waved until the camera turned off.

Kathryn got up to go over to Tom. He still seemed too annoyed to be afraid of her. "Polls?"

He shrugged. "It's all above board, you get one too, even them."

"This isn't a game, Tom," Kathryn said surprisingly kindly.

Tom didn't take it as such, he turned away and stormed off.

Jessie joined James in a proper waiting room this time while the Doctor tried to fuss over his bloodied hand. He grumbled and sighed everytime he moved even a millimetre.

"What do you think we should do?" Jessie asked suddenly.

"I doubt there's anyway to prove that we're telling the truth, but at least Tom can't prove his theory either," James replied.

"Doesn't matter. Everyone else believes him, that's all I care about. I hate it when people are always staring at me," Jessie said.

James sighed, making the Doctor do the same and once again try to grab his wrist. "They'd rather believe that we'd weaponise our own son against somebody who is mean to us sometimes, than what really happened. I don't think we're going to change their minds."

Jessie slouched back, staring at the ceiling. "So what then?"

"I dunno," James sighed in response.

Jessie's tired groan turned into an annoyed shout as she sat back up. "He doesn't believe his own story, does he? It's so out there, it makes us look like evil personified and we're..." She noticed James meekly nodding, her shoulders sank, "we're not. Are we?"

"You're not. You were dying, unaware of this mess the whole time," James mumbled.

Jessie stared with a raised eyebrow, "for the whole entire time? Up until now, am I still dying?"

James couldn't help but laugh briefly, "no, you know what I mean."

"No," Jessie said, rolling her eyes, "I don't. I mean sure I didn't decide for B'Elanna and neither did you, but we both clearly decided not to tell him because we didn't."

The Doctor briefly glanced up at them, "and why is that?" He sat back, satisfied he'd finished his treatment.

James and Jessie looked at one another, both with uncertainty on their faces.

"We knew how he was going to react," Jessie said finally. "Ugh he's hated us for all this time! Why, that's what I want to know. If he had left us alone at the beginning, we would've told him about Duncan the moment B'Elanna came out of that operation."

James' brow tightened, "do we?" Jessie eyed him again curiously. "Know how he'd react. He wouldn't believe it, he would make fun of us, he'd tell the whole galaxy. Is it really that simple?"

"When you put it like that, we sound way immature," Jessie said with a half smile.

James shook his head, "Tom insists that we'd do something so evil to get him back, then there must be a reason why or they wouldn't buy it. They know, we just need to tell them. Everyone may understand then, and that's all we need."

The Doctor smiled and nodded. "As long as it doesn't involve punching through regenerating holographic walls with the safeties off."

Jessie narrowed her eyes at James. He laughed meekly, "to be fair, I didn't know it was regenerating until after the first nail came off."

Jessie shuddered violently, "oh god..." she gave his arm a gentle slap, "how can someone who is actually quite smart be so impulsively dumb?"

James chuckled, "who said I was smart?"

The Conference Room:

Kathryn stood up from her chair, and she looked around the table. She sighed in frustration.

She growled to herself, "what the hell has happened to this crew, there is too much hate now." Most of the table looked at her almost gormlessly. "Where is our crap stirrer anyway?"

Some people looked at James and Jessie, neither looked impressed by it.

Chakotay cleared his throat, "I think she means Paris."

Harry huffed in offense, "he's preparing for the second lot of interviews. And he's the victim here."

Kathryn slammed her hands on the table. "Maybe he was, but this has gotten out of hand, hasn't it?"

"Am I the only one that thinks tricking him into raising someone else's kid is cruel. All Tom's doing is asking questions he has every right to," Harry said.

"You're right," everyone was surprised to hear Jessie say. "But we answered him last night. He just doesn't want to believe it."

The screen on the wall activated on its own to show Tom and Michael at the stage, each holding microphones.

"And the results for our quarter time show are in," Tom announced. They both scooched aside to allow a little window to appear beside them showing a bar chart. The No column was massively higher than the Yes, the former could barely be seen. "Oh what a surprise, no one believes the murderer and his fangirl."

Michael chuckled, "indeed, no surprises there. The biggest asshole we're saving until one of them is chill enough to talk to us, right?" Tom nodded. "So join us in part two when we grill the psycho on these disgusting events."

They had no idea James had walked over to the screen and tapped it, not until he spoke up anyway, "grill who?" The two looked startled, Michael's face paled.

"Okay that's cheating," Tom protested.

James pretended to look confused, "why?"

"Why?" Duncan said.

Everyone looked towards Jessie with Duncan sitting on her knee.

"Why is he here?" Kathryn asked.

Jessie groaned, "because you asked all of us, including our babysitter to come here."

Lena waved at her mother half heartedly. "Very well then," Kathryn groaned.

"B**ch," Jessie muttered under her breath.

Duncan started clapping his hands. "Bish, bish, bish, b**ch, b**ch," he chanted. Everyone looked his way again.

"And he's already learning swear words," Kathryn groaned.

Tom rolled his eyes. "And we're surprised by this? I'm surprised they haven't taught him to kill yet."

"TOM! You're not helping! If you carry on like that you'll be thrown into the brig for ten years!" Kathryn screamed at the top of her voice.

"Yes ma'am," Tom squeaked. The screen turned off.

"Dismissed," Chakotay said quickly. Almost everybody cleared out the room.

Lena saw Tani sitting on her chair still. Lena walked over to her.

"Hey, sorry about yesterday," she said.

"Whatever, why are you trying to be nice?" Tani mumbled.

Lena bit her tongue for the time being. "I've been thinking about it, and mum's right. It wasn't just me that was affected by that Q revelation. I mean sure, I was more but... you know."

Tani peered at her curiously. "I've assumed my memories are similar, just on my own most of the time. But er, I didn't want to think too hard about it."

"Me neither. But without me the Ashley thing wouldn't have happened, so one way to look at it," Lena said. Tani laughed genuinely, then shook her head, forcing a frown on her face. "It's true isn't it? You'd still be friends. Q made it all up to fit me in."

"Even Ashley's smutty fanfiction?" Tani asked with a cheeky glint in her eye.

Lena laughed as well, "he probably wrote every word, weirdo."

The two laughed together for a little while. Tani's face fell after a while. "I wish it were that easy. It seems so real."

"What did, you never told me," Lena said.

Tani looked disappointed. "You'd never understand. You're the Captain's daughter of a famous ship, a proper real deal Slayer and, well look at you. I'm just me." Lena was even more confused with that answer. Tani laughed it off as she stood. "Ashley wanted to be friends with the cool girl who could pick him up or something..."

"Um that was just cos he was annoying me, I wasn't really gonna drop him," Lena stammered, blushing a bit.

"Uh huh. Fact is I was just a stepping stone," Tani said sadly. She started to leave, leaving Lena to ponder what she said.

Before the doors closed behind her, Lena spoke up anyway, "did he say that?"

Tani frowned and turned around. "What, no, he didn't have to."

"Then how do you know for sure?" Lena asked.

Tani didn't answer, she kept going out the door.

The Holodeck:

"Mikey, Mikey, Mikey!"

Michael did a little curtsey, "thank you, welcome back to the Sullivan Show. During the break one of our villains has agreed to chat it out with us. Lets bring him on, shall we?"

The entire audience were silent when James came out from the revolving door. The only person who made a noise was someone trying to repress a sneeze, which only came out louder in the attempt.

"Right um," Michael said awkwardly as James took his seat. "We've gotten your not lass's side of the story..."

"My what?" James said, raising an eyebrow.

"She's not your lass, not lass," Michael said as if it were obvious.

James eyed the other side of the stage for a second. "Riight? You couldn't just say Jessie's side?"

"Fine, what's your side of it, from the beginning," Michael asked.

James deliberately sighed loudly. "The beginning?" He nodded while getting up. Tom tensed, Michael frowned, the audience only thought about booing him. He didn't go anywhere though. "Okay. One of the first times I met him, Tom insinuated that I was gay because I was friends with a woman, because men and women can't be friends."

"Hey, hey! Not that beginning, he means..." Tom protested. Michael had to put an arm out to stop him charging too close.

"Oh, you want me to skip ahead?" James pretended that he was put off, "okay, I get it, sure. The first time we were *invited here*, we were tricked inside and locked in, forced to talk about our so called friendzone. I'm sure Craig and Lena remember that too." He pointed to the audience. Lena did another wave, this one a little dangerously.

Tom pushed through Michael's hold on him, "you're stalling, stop it."

"I'm really not," James said, walking over slowly to continue closing the gap Tom already started to. "You said I was like a robot, an unfeeling monster with no humanity because... I dunno, I didn't want to jump any girl I saw, I instead preferred being friends with them as if they were people."

"Tommy is right, you're not on topic," Michael said.

"I don't suppose anyone here remembers the Upendi program?" James said in the audience's direction. They talked amongst themselves. "Did any of you know about the video cameras he put in there?"

"Because you kept hacking them!" Tom shouted at him.

"Oh," James pretended to sound shocked as he turned to re-face him, "is that why you brought that video of Jessie and I drunk to your first Sullivan show, to prove I was hacking your stupid Disney song program no one liked."

"You're going to regret this, shut up," Tom muttered furiously.

James smirked briefly, "okay." He turned back to the audience. "The following us around, making jokes, bets and my favourite, spiking our drinks so we'd kiss in front of your camera."

"Well you..." Tom started to defend himself, the audience started talking over him. He looked around desperately, then at Michael.

"Then how can anyone forget the second episode of VTV Live, the infamous tea total drinking game," James said.

Tom winced as the crowd got louder, he shook his head excessively. "No, no, no! He's avoiding the questions, drawing attention away from the sick thing *he* did..."

"You wanted my side of the story, from the beginning. You can't have it both ways," James said. "It's not just Jessie and I. The original Mutineers, the drinking game, your little Blind Date contest, the Q that wanted to destroy us with holograms from your games. You might think it's all a bit of fun, but there's real people using these programs and you conveniently forget."

"Yeah yeah, so you got your revenge on me, that's your take on this," Tom grumbled.

James glared back at him, then looked aside. "Remember when Q Junior made you a fake son, and what you said to Jessie, that her having a child would be a disaster."

Tom laughed mockingly, "oh come on, that was just teasing."

"And she laughed right, cos it was so funny?" James pretended to ask, staring daggers at the helmsman.

"Of course not, she took me seriously. And so are you thinking this justifies..." Tom ranted.

"When Janeway and Chakotay were fighting over the drunken wedding, that you orchestrated for your TV show might I add, what was your solution again? Remind us," James said with the slyest of smiles.

Tom stared coldly at him. "You're a real piece of work, you know that?"

"Very much so, yeah. But I'm not the one who constantly gets off on poking and prodding everyone's relationships, trying to be the puppetmaster for the entire crew for my amusement," James said, eyeing him right back. "You always thought the idea of us together was so hilarious, and yet you sadly made it something you had to make happen. We're not your dolls or your holograms, Tommy."

Tom clenched his jaw while he tried to think of a response.

"What, no snappy comeback?" James asked. He even waited for a bit. "No? Let me tell you, when this first happened I went over in my head so many times, how to tell you and how you'd react to it. I'll

admit, I imagined the laughter, the telling everyone and the made up stories, like *James threatened my wife at knife point to have my kid haha*, and you know what...?"

"You thought lets lie to Tom forever," Tom said through gritted teeth.

"No, I told myself Tom wouldn't stoop that low," James replied. "Not when there's an innocent kid involved, he'd do the right thing."

"Yeah right," Tom scoffed, "you admitted you still thought I'd laugh and tell stories."

James shrugged, "showed me how wrong I was, huh?" Tom's face paled again as the audience stirred once more. "I'll admit, I panicked at first. After everything that happened in the space of a day or two, I thought a few days, a week won't hurt, then we will. Then a week came and it was *too late*. Weeks turned into months. It's not nice but it's how it is."

"Then why tell the entire crew how horrible I am?" Tom snapped.

"Oh they know, they just needed a reminder," James replied. "It doesn't change the fact that these were the first things I thought about. I had to convince myself otherwise, and still they told me to wait a bit. My initial fears were right. I'm sorry I did this to you, I really am, but you wanted an explanation that you and everyone will believe. This is it."

Michael glanced between them, unsure what to do next. Tom struggled to form full words, so he turned his back on the audience for a moment.

"This should've been just between us. You've done as you've always do, turned a situation into a farce and hid in your holodeck programs. It's all you can control, sometimes," James said.

"That's it," Tom mumbled to Michael. He frowned back at him, "end it, run the polls. I'm out." He walked off the stage with his head down.

The Bridge:

Kathryn had sat, staring straight ahead with a steely gaze, unmoving with a cooling cup of coffee in her hands for ten minutes. Everyone there were getting a little worried.

Chakotay approached cautiously carrying a padd. He hovered it in front of her and still she barely even blinked.

"Sixty three to thirty seven," he said. He barely got a grunt in response. "It's not in Tom's favour."

Kathryn huffed through her nose, cooling her coffee down even more. "Enough. Who cares," she muttered.

Chakotay sat down in his chair, but only on the edge of it. "I know, we have a problem. I have an idea."

"If it has the words shore in it, you're sadly mistaken," Kathryn sighed.

"It didn't, but you're close," Chakotay tried to say lightly with a smile. He got a side eye in return. "It might be worth taking a break at the next habited planet that welcomes us, so the crew can celebrate the coming holidays. Might soothe a little of the nerves."

The Mess Hall:

Jessie, James and Duncan were sitting at one of the tables. Tom walked over.

"Well, the show did work after all," he said.

"Is that what you think?" Jessie asked.

"Well, it helped me. The Doctor was far more convincing than you loons," Tom replied.

"Why are you happy about that? I thought you loved telling people that theory of yours," James asked.

"I had to get back at you, I was angry. I did spend seven months looking after a kid that wasn't even mine," Tom replied.

"From now on, don't spread rumours about us. They're never true," Jessie said.

"Not even the Lena one?" Tom asked.

"No, and you didn't even make that one up," James replied.

"I know but, I did tell Harry," Tom said.

"Why doesn't that surprise me," Jessie muttered.

"Look, I came here to apologise for the rumour I started. But keep one thing in mind. Just because you're story was true, doesn't mean that I like you. I hate you for what you put me through," Tom said.

The pair nodded. "Fair enough," James said as well.

"I'll not speak of this anymore, if you don't," Tom said. He headed towards Harry and B'Elanna's table.

"I wish he acted like that all the time," Jessie said.

"Me too," James said.

"Why?" Duncan said.

THE END