

## Episode 5.14 Try Harder Next Time

Three tiny fighters emerged from the atmosphere, charging straight for the alien ship looming towards their world. They barely had a chance to charge their weapons when an orange beam slammed into them, one at a time. They were gone in seconds.

The alien ship drifted into orbit calmly as if nothing had happened. The planet didn't resist as the intruder aimed a barrage of torpedoes its way.

### **Voyager, Security Office:**

"What do you mean you travelled back in time?"

James' shoulders raised to shrug, but they didn't go back down. "I went back in time."

"Funnily enough I'm not in the mood for your sarcasm," Jessie almost growled. She dropped into the chair opposite his desk, her arm draped over the growing bump. "It's the paradox stuff you were spouting on about. I'm not daft but this, it's a bit confusing to say the least."

"I barely got it as well. I was shown the result of not doing anything, then I was sent back. Everything I did there happened in this..." James noticed his wife probably wishing he was dead, he shut himself up quickly.

She sighed, "fine whatever. You don't have to tell me absolutely everything, especially if it's headache inducing. From the way you were going on, I thought you were confessing some horrible secret."

"I haven't finished," James winced a little. "I haven't told you when and where I went to."

"It obviously wasn't to stop me doing this," Jessie muttered, pointing at her belly.

"No and it was supposed to hap..." James said.

Jessie interrupted with an annoyed groan. "I know, it's all my fault, it was my idea. I don't need you reminding me of that for the rest of my life, thanks."

"Do you want anything?" James asked quickly, pointing at the replicator.

Jessie's bad mood faded away instantly, she sighed in relief. "God yes. The usual." James did the same thing as he hurried over to the replicator.

The doors opened to let a couple of Security people in. One of them was about to speak when Jessie turned her chair around to face them. "Not now! He's busy!" The two scampered away, probably wetting themselves in the process.

James cringed quite a bit before turning back around with the food he'd ordered. Jessie seemed to be all smiles when he did so, especially when he handed the bowl to her. "Wow, you were fine only a few days ago," he dared to say.

Jessie looked at him with confusion on her face. "What do you mean? I am fine." She started to dig into her bowl of ice cream.

"Yeah, of course," James said. "I should know better than that by now," he muttered to himself. "So about this time travel thing."

"Uh huh the when and the why, I'm all ears," Jessie nodded.

"I er... think I should tell you another time," James said reluctantly.

Jessie shook her head, ice cream still in her mouth. She quickly swallowed it. "No, no. If it's making you grumpy enough to throw watchers around and make my brother have nightmares, then get it all out. Okay?"

"It's not, those two annoyed me all on their own," James said.

"Oh," Jessie's face fell for only a second. Another spoonful of ice cream fixed it. She sighed in disappointment as it was her last one. "Can you get me a bigger bowl next time, please?"

James couldn't help but smirk as the bowl she had was pretty large anyway, it was probably supposed to be a serving bowl. "Sure."

"Okay, so time travel and paradoxes. It must be something to do with us or you wouldn't be in confession mode right?" Jessie smiled.

"It is yeah," James said. He felt a little uncomfortable thinking about it, but her smile helped settle it a little. "It'll likely, definitely bring back some crappy memories. I'm hoping you don't remember at all."

"Ooph, that doesn't sound good," Jessie winced, though she still was in her good mood despite it. "Definitely about me then."

"Yeah, um... the time I had to go to was '51," James nervously said. He was right to be nervous, Jessie's good mood disappeared quickly, her face fell. "I think you'll know where."

Jessie sighed uncomfortably as she glanced down at her hands. "Unfortunately yeah."

"The time officer didn't tell me what to do, and I didn't want you to see me or anything," James quickly said. He sighed to slow himself down, "I really didn't want to intrude in your past, but..."

Jessie glanced up, her eyes widened a little. "Those men, they took me. I never wanted to think about it again, but now that I am... Demons right?" James nodded. "Right, that's why you were picked." She could feel her heart thumping, and it was only getting louder. "What did they want with me? I was a nobody then."

"Your power," James replied.

Jessie shook her head, "so that alternate present you saw, I wasn't around cos they succeeded?"

"From what I understand they weren't going to take it all, just enough so you'd..." James trailed off, he figured she got the point. "I know you were only little, but ever since it happened I've been paranoid that a part of you recognised me when we met. I tried my best to avoid it."

Jessie frowned as she thought about it. "No, I don't even remember how I got out of it. I ran, they got me..." She shuddered at that memory, "it was such a blur, I told myself it was a bad dream."

"Nothing about an annoying guy watching over your dorm?" James thought he'd ask.

"Oh god," Jessie groaned, her face started to turn an interesting shade of red. "No, I kept to myself, and I probably would have been too shy to even look at anyone. Besides I would have recognised you later on as you grew up, not when you were four. I think you're fine," she answered honestly. She sighed as she did remember something, "though my memory has definitely let me down lately."

"Why, what did you forget?" James asked, a little relieved to change the subject.

"Ugh, that stupid book Kiara gave me," Jessie grumbled. "I put it down and it wasn't where I thought I left it."

James looked a little concerned, "have you found it at all?"

"No," Jessie replied. She noticed the concern on his face. "Kiara's been talked out of it, I don't think it was her."

"Yeah but..." James said. "She's not the only one. If you had just put it somewhere else, you'd have found it by now. It was a big enough book."

"Did anyone else know about it?" Jessie asked. She shook her head, "don't worry about it, really. I checked, no one had been in our quarters but us. Besides only me and Annika could use it, and I really doubt Annika would do it. She still thinks Ylara is Lena."

James wasn't convinced, he just looked even more worried. "I'll go have a look for it, and double check if anyone was in our quarters." He quickly rushed for the exit.

"James wait!" Jessie quickly yelled, stopping him at the doorway. "Can you help me up?" she asked quietly and sweetly. James shook his head while he walked back over to her, he gently lifted her up to her feet. "No one's going to use that thing," she whispered.

"Why not, it's not like we don't have someone onboard who likes to do things like that," James questioned. Jessie raised her eyebrow, "I didn't mean me."

Jessie narrowed her eyes but mockingly, "ok you, fess up. You're just going to put that book back where it was."

James couldn't help but smile at the look she was giving him. "You caught me."

"Mmm hmm," Jessie's smile soon faded away, her face turned serious. "Kiara misunderstood. The sacrifice in that spell isn't what she thinks it is."

"Sacrifice?" James didn't like the sound of that.

"She probably thinks it's like the spell with me and Unu, it's really not," Jessie said, glancing down at the floor briefly. "Whoever performs it will lose something, something dear. I doubt Ylara would count somehow." Her head shook, "you won't see me doing it, cos so far this pregnancy is problem free. I'd like to keep it that way."

James nodded lightly. "I wouldn't ask you to. Don't worry, we'll find it. If someone has taken it, I'll get it, and they'll get it right back." Jessie looked a little confused, it made him a little embarrassed for once. "You know, back..." he said, gesturing throwing something. "At them."

"Oh," Jessie laughed. "You're losing it, Nathan's a bigger wuss than I thought." She walked out of the office, not without passing him a playful smile and wink before she left.

"I don't threaten you, that's why it wasn't..." James protested. He quickly followed her. "It wasn't that bad."

### **The Bridge:**

B'Elanna shook her head as she headed over to the Engineering station. "It really was."

Tom frowned, he leaned forward out of his chair. "I don't snore."

"Yes and Harry doesn't sleep walk either," B'Elanna laughed. She sat down at the station and got straight to work. "Good news is the warp core is ready to go."

Tom was still focusing on the snoring part of the conversation. "Miral and me get along now, she wouldn't do that just cos I snore a little."

"A little? The neighbours complain," B'Elanna giggled.

Nathan also laughed a little, he turned his head to look over his shoulder. "And their neighbours do as well?"

"Hey, private conversation, shhh," Tom tried to snap at him, it just made him laugh more.

"If you think Miral's never going to tease you again, you're in for a surprise," B'Elanna shook her head. "For weeks you've been pestering me about the warp core, now that it's finished all you care about is Miral waking you up at 0300."

"It is every morning!" Tom growled.

B'Elanna tried to contain her laughter by keeping her lips tightly shut. "We'll just have to gag you. Now warp?"

"Fine, I'll let Harry know that we're ready to go when the shoreleave people are back," Tom huffed. "I still need to hear his report from the recon mission."

"You mean hear about his holiday with the girlfriend," B'Elanna said.

Tom shrugged, "that too."

Nathan turned his attention back to the helm, not that he could do anything but make sure they were still in orbit. "Well only one went well, and it doesn't take a genius to figure out which."

"Last time I checked none of Harry's girlfriends tried to chop his feet off," Tom said. "Oh! Too soon?" he laughed smugly.

"Girlfriends? Is he even into plurals yet?" Nathan smirked.

"We'd be making the same joke about your legs if little sis didn't help you," Tom grinned.

Nathan turned his chair all the way around. "You can't use the same insult twice."

"Twice, oh I have a good one for that too," Tom said.

B'Elanna rolled her eyes. "By the time we go to chase after that ship, it'll have done two laps around this sphere thing."

Tom glanced her way, he couldn't resist it, "it's called a planet, dear." He quickly ducked out of his seat before B'Elanna could do anything to him. When nothing did he grew nervous, but still brave or stupid enough to look her in the face. She hadn't budged from the spot, but the look she gave him made his eyes melt. "I know, you meant Game Sphere. It was just a joke."

"Another winner," Nathan commented, smirking away.

"Hilarious, I hope it's still funny when you're sleeping on the sofa," B'Elanna muttered. Tom looked at his feet like a child who had been scolded. She meanwhile headed back for the turbolift. Tom felt the icy chill from her blow right passed him, he shivered.

"Wow, and I thought I was hormonal," Jodie commented from opps. "It's nice having an excuse."

"Really, I haven't noticed the..." Nathan started to joke when something smacked him in the face. He grimaced as whatever it was, was sloppy. It slid down his face, then onto the floor. "Difference."

"I don't like peppers," Jodie smiled like nothing happened.

Tom had already shook off his wife's killer stare and was grinning like an idiot again. "Speaking of two..."

"No more cutting feet off jokes. Jeez Tom, it was four months ago," Nathan groaned as he picked bits of egg, peppers and beans off his face. "If you want to make fun of something, make sure it's up to date."

"Nice face," Tom smiled smugly.

Nathan pretended to laugh as he turned his chair back around. He then noticed a pea stuck to his right nostril. "Peas and beans, in an omelette. It could be worse I guess."

"It was scrambled egg," Jodie pouted.

"God, and I thought the rice pudding pie Jessie had yesterday couldn't be beaten," Nathan shuddered.

Tom's eyes meanwhile widened, "Jessie's pregnant again!" He was back to being terrified again, "Jesus, someone needs the snip. Wow."

Everyone was staring at him blankly at this point, well except Nathan who still had to pick bits of egg from his hair.

"Has she got a goal to be knocked up in every season? It feels that way. Laziness I'll bet," Tom muttered to himself.

"Well... time to go for my break," Jodie yawned, she headed for the turbolift. Tom meanwhile looked at his watch. "I'll let Jessie know."

"Know, about your break? Why would I..." Tom finally realised what she meant, his eyes managed to enlarge even more than before. Quick as a flash he chased after her, or at least it felt fast to him. Jodie still beat him to the turbolift and she was long gone before he got there.

Nathan shook his head, "it's quite noticeable now, Tom. How blind are you?"

Tom whimpered at the closed turbolift door. Luckily an idea popped into his head. His hand flew to his commbadge. "Paris to all Senior Staff, report to the Conference Room." Nathan stared at him with both eyebrows raised, Tom just smiled smugly once again on route to the Conference.

"Wow Jess, you look radiant and slim. I'd never have guessed," Tom said in a flustered voice. He managed to wink.

Harry and Craig walked into the Conference Room, just in time to be treated to a great view of Jessie's response. Naturally he was on the floor with a broken nose seconds later.

"Are you hitting on me or something, Paris? Are you!" she screamed at him.

"He's unconscious," Harry whispered.

Jessie threw her angry glare towards him, it froze him on the spot. "Of course he is, he's as frail as a twig."

"Then why?" Harry stupidly started to ask. He quickly dashed for the furthest away chair he could find.

Craig tried to smile at her, "that never gets old, thanks for that."

Jessie smiled as well, "meh, I'm a giver." She went to sit down.

"So erm, does anyone have any clue why he called the meeting?" Harry asked warily.

"It might have something to do with the Leda mission. Though knowing him, he probably wants to hear about how the girlfriend dumped you," Craig replied.

Harry narrowed his eyes, "she didn't dump me. I'm just leaving and probably never coming... back." His bottom lip stuck out, his eyes looked a lot paler. "Damn."

"I'm surprised she lasted longer than an episode. The alien girlfriend/boyfriends never do, which is why nobody likes those episodes. Harry ones, never last longer than that," Craig commented.

Jessie didn't look very well, "please Craig, I'd like to keep my ice cream down at least."

Harry quickly cleared his throat, "can we talk about something else? We don't all want to be as miserable and batty as Craig."

"Batty?" Craig muttered.

Harry shrugged, "say what you want about my love life, but at least I'm not hallucinating all the time." Craig glared in his direction. "Naomi told me."

The doors opened again, rescuing him, a few more of the Senior Staff walked through them.

James had to laugh as he spotted Tom on the floor. "Nice shot, Jess."

Jessie smiled sweetly at him, "what do you expect?"

Harry groaned, "speaking of keeping food down." His eyes widened, "oh god, saying things out loud. What's Tom done to me?"

The last few entered the room and took their seats, most of them just stepped over Tom to get to them. No seats were left when everyone was seated.

"Ookay, I may as well run the meeting," Harry sighed.

"Nobody cares about the girlfriend unless she dumped you," Chakotay butted in.

"Beaten," Craig commented.

Chakotay groaned, "damn."

Harry's face was beyond red at this point. "Guys please, this is urgent. That's if this was why Tom called the meeting. Even it isn't, you guys have to know." He was relieved when no one made another smart ass remark, he figured that would be a little later. "The Leda spent a day and a few hours following a warp trail from our mystery ship..."

"Mystery ship?" B'Elanna smiled. "Is that what we're calling it?"

"Well we're still not 100% sure if it is what we think it is," Harry said. "We believe we've figured out where they're heading. There is a system with two m-class planets on its path. If we hurry, we may catch them."

"Unless they have been going at warp nine the whole time," James said.

Harry sighed, "well then we'll find out if they've been by at those two planets, hopefully they'll give us an idea where they went after that."

"So we're closing the gap between them and us by sitting here, having a meeting. I love it," Damien said. Most of the room agreed by nodding, they then almost simultaneously noticed who said it and turned their heads towards him. "What? I'm in the market for a new ship. What is it, one of those Softmicron ships or those cloaky ships the resistance had?"

"Nobody tell him," Harry groaned into his hand. Everyone's attention were back at him, each one giving him their own *are you kidding* look. "He has a point, we should get going. I dunno what Tom was thinking, he must get lonely or bored."

Everyone took that as a dismissed and they started to get up. "Oh, one more thing while you're here," Harry remembered something. As expected the entire room groaned, though one of them was an

unconscious groan of pain. "I'm still in need of a first officer as Starfleet thought I was competent enough to not need one." He ignored the resulting sniggering. "However I can't be there all the time, so..."

Soon he was mostly alone as a lot of the staff had headed straight for the door anyway. Harry was more than surprised that Chakotay was one of them. He noticed he was looking at him and turned back by the door. "I'm not taking orders from you, so forget it." He left as well, leaving only two other people left.

"Damien, I'd rather have Naomi or Amy, or Jodie's newborn, when it comes, in charge," Harry muttered.

Damien seemed confused, he smiled as he understood. At least he thought he did. "Ah, you need somebody close to your intelligence level, say no more." He left as well, stepping on Tom as he did.

Harry quickly glanced around nervously, even though he knew Jessie and James had already left. "Thank god, I should have said Miral or Johnathan instead of Amy." He then realised what Damien said, his eyes narrowed. "Then why would I ever want you?"

He jumped a little as Tom's hand flew on to the table, his other soon followed. A loud groan escaped him as he pulled himself up. "Oh god, I can't even be nice to her. She's definitely up the duff." Harry frowned at him, he really doubted that Tom was as nice as he thought. Though Jessie's comments begged to differ. "Hey Harry man, how did it go?"

"Okay. The trail seemed to lead to another system, so..." Harry replied.

"No, Tira. Give me all the gossip," Tom tried to grin, but it hurt too much. He wobbled a little as well.

Harry's face lit up. "Well first, we both rented a place in the mountains. It was freezing and..."

His story went on for a while, he was so caught up in it he didn't realise that Tom was bleeding on the table. He also didn't notice that the poor ex-helmsman had fainted from it only five seconds later. "I figured that I had to see her in a bikini, so we went..."

### **The Leda:**

The viewscreen showed Voyager pulling out of orbit and shooting straight into warp, the Leda itself barely seemed to move. Nathan cringed a little as he looked backwards at the command centre. He was starting to regret swapping ships with Naomi to avoid his cranky and pregnant little sisters.

"Please, I've been a Captain many times," Damien said proudly.

Chakotay shook his head, "do you really think stealing three ships and calling shotgun counts?"

Damien stared at him like he was insane, his eyes were a lot wider than usual. "I'd never do something so ridiculous as calling shotgun, that would leave a chance of Riker or Justine getting command. Not that they'd know what it is. Oh and it's four!"

Nathan sighed, "guys, we should..."

"I really doubt the Enterprise counted," Chakotay groaned.

"I really think it does, and that makes five," Damien smiled. Chakotay stared blankly at him. "Seventh Voyager?" Chakotay's stare continued. "FVDA ship, I really neglected to name that thing." Chakotay's eyes rolled. "Pegasus B and C." Chakotay's face finally changed, he frowned.

"There were two of those?" he said.

Faye shrugged, "just go, they'll be at it for a while."

"Yeah," Nathan sighed. He turned his chair back around.

"That bloody stalker bimbo of yours destroyed one. I just nicked the new one they built to replace it, mwah..." Damien sniggered

Chakotay groaned again, "ha, ha, nobody laughs like that, ha. Nobody cares okay. I bet that the only reason any of your crew listened to you was they didn't have a brain cell between them." Damien smiled and was about to point something out, "or were brainwashed."

"Nobody here likes you anymore, so that gives you no edge dead boy," Damien said.

Chakotay's eyes drifted to one side, "you've definitely done that more times than me."

"Yeah you're right, I can do better," Damien seemed disappointed. "Barbie's kept me up all night, almost every night for the last week. Stupid cow thinks it's romantic to break in and watch me."

"More proof that the Doctor made her insane," Chakotay muttered.

Damien ignored him, he was getting frustrated with what he was saying. "When I did get to at least half sleep, she asked *don't you love me? My boobs are fantastic. They wobble,*" he whined in a bad woman's voice. "I didn't know you could throw up in your sleep without a few drinks."

Most of the bridge were in stitches, Damien was too busy feeling sorry for himself to notice.

"Right so I'm in command until Harry stops hanging out with his other girlfriend," Chakotay snickered. He sat down in the big chair. "Damien meanwhile should put his girlfriend out of her misery, one way or another."

"Why would I want to get her zombified by the Tolg? She's dead enough, thanks!" Damien huffed. His eyes narrowed, "she's not even close to being good enough for me."

"Wow, she's not loopy enough for you?" Nathan sniggered.

Chakotay looked back up at the so called villain, his eyes scrunched almost closed and worry lines took over his forehead. "What do you mean dead enough?"

"Duh, vampire!" Damien said like it was obvious. "That's if you can call it that. I'd call her an annoying undead pixie personally." He rolled his eyes as he collapsed into the other command chair, ignoring Chakotay's confused look.

"Is she the vampire that Ylara wanted to report?" he asked no one in particular.

Damien shrugged, he was past caring. "Probably, I did tell her."

"If she hasn't dealt with it, tell the other one. Not that she ever stays dead, dead anyway," Chakotay shook his head. "Ok, should we be going?"

Nathan's shoulders raised slightly, "Voyager left already, so I had to."

"Great, what does it matter anyway? It's not like we'll catch up," Chakotay sighed.

### **Voyager:**

"Uhoh," Jodie mumbled.

"What, you didn't drop your sandwich on the console again, did you?" James asked.

Jodie shook her head, "no, it's not that bad."

Jessie glanced across from her station, she could just make out a few brown crumbs around her sister's mouth. "Cake? And don't you ever stop pigging out?"

"No, no cake," Jodie lied, her eyes darted side to side. "I um, I'm getting a distress call."



James turned around and frowned at her. "That's not as bad as a few bits of cucumbers and salad cream falling out of a sandwich?"

Jodie's eyes rolled, "it was gherkins and cream actually, god!"

James' head slowly turned to Jessie instead, his eyes were quite wide. She just giggled in response. He mouthed the word wow before turning back to Jodie. "I'd say that was good news." The angry sister's eyes narrowed so much she may as well have closed them completely. "Distress call?"

"It's coming from that system we're heading for," Jodie said without a care.

"Can we hear it?" James questioned. He didn't get an answer, just an angry stare. "Please?"

Jodie faked a smile, "manners cost nothing. You can't get by on just your looks, mister."

"Have I ever," James commented. Jessie meanwhile nodded.

Jodie sighed as she pressed one button, it was almost like it was such a huge effort to do. The comm activated, but all they could really hear was static. Jodie growled at her station, she had already picked up a muffin so she was forced to use her left hand to tap her station.

The static cleared up a little, they could just hear a voice in between the noise. "... an alien ship... out of nowhere. They fired... our entire fleet... gone. We need assis... firing... the surface. Please help." The comm cut out.

"An alien ship," Jessie stated, dread was starting to sink in. Almost everyone else felt the same way.

"Uh huh," James nodded. "We're going as fast as we can, and we're going there anyway." He turned to the helm looking not so sure about that, "right Naomi?"

Naomi nodded, "sure thing boss." She quickly hid the foundation she was using under her console when he approached her.

"I hope we are cos the Leda's following us. Should I tell them?" Jessie wondered.

"No that's okay, I will," James replied, wandering straight over to the Conference Room. The door opened and he stuck his head through it. "Harry, Damien's nicked your ship." He quickly walked back to the centre of the bridge, smirking towards Jessie. She shook her head but did the same.

"What!" a scared yelp was heard from the Conference Room. Harry dashed out looking panic stricken. "How could you let this happen?"

"It's easy, I like torturing you," James replied. Harry was about to run for the turbolift, but James stopped him. "I lied okay."

"Oh, thank god," Harry sighed.

James shrugged, "probably, who knows what's happening over there." Harry's eyes widened in horror. "Seriously though, the planets we're heading for, one of them is under attack by an alien ship."

Harry waited for a moment. "Um, is that a lie?"

"No," James replied, raising an eyebrow.

"Well it's hard to know with you," Harry commented. He glanced around the bridge, then back at the Conference Room. "Where's Tom?"

James' eyebrow managed to get higher, "wasn't he with you?"

Harry turned back to return to the Conference Room. A quick peep inside and his eyes were wide again. "Oops."

"Still unconscious?" James tried not to laugh. Jessie smiled, maybe a little too proud of her handiwork.

"No, he is now," Harry meekly replied. His hand went up to his commbadge. "Sickbay?"

"I don't know. Are you sure you weren't just tired?"

Ylara stared at the man sitting in front of her, the cocky smile she couldn't stand was testing her patience. She bit her tongue for the moment. "He knew me." Her head shook, "well not me, but... you know."

"The vampire knew Lena," Daniel mumbled, a small sigh followed. "Why are you telling me now? The Voyager crash was a few weeks ago now."

"I told Wesley," Ylara responded. She got what she expected; a dry laugh from Daniel. "Since it was related to her, I thought it would be best not to bother you."

Daniel looked a little surprised, "you considered my feelings? You're still Ylara right?"

Ylara rolled her eyes, "yes."

"Hmm shame," Daniel teased, earning a glare. "Is that why you've avoided training with me?"

"I don't need it," Ylara muttered.

Daniel pulled himself off the comfy sofa, smiling that smile again. "Again I ask, why now?"

"Wesley didn't know what I was talking about," Ylara replied.

"Okay let me see if I got it all. During the demon invasion you were confronted by an abnormally strong vamp, which killed Kevin. You escaped from him. Almost two months later you tell a watcher about it?" Daniel tried to sum up.

"He was no longer on the ship. I tried, I looked," Ylara explained. "I assumed the shield destroyed him. It was only when somebody made me talk about it I remembered that he knew all about the shield. He wouldn't have just walked into it."

"Do you think he escaped instead?" Daniel questioned.

Ylara nodded, "yes. I just don't know how. Your transporters couldn't have been working." She closed her eyes and sighed angrily. "Perhaps he went through another portal."

"That's impossible too as we had them all covered," Daniel said. "Look there's only a few vampires that are strong enough to be recorded, and they're all dead. This guy must have been new."

"New but he knew who Lena was," Ylara stated. "Surely you would know about any she has encountered. That's why I'm here."

"Only one, the rest were dead before she left the Borg sphere," Daniel said. He grimaced a little, "then again, a lot of that time was a fake memory so there's no way to know for sure."

"Who is this one?" Ylara asked.

Daniel shook his head, "I told you, dead. She, James, Sandi, even Kevin confronted him. He managed to survive that somehow."

"That sounds like him. He knew who Kevin was too," Ylara nodded.

"Probably not, Chosens generally can be sensed by these things with ease," Daniel said. "And also he's dead."

"You just said..." Ylara muttered.

"There was a later encounter between him and James," Daniel groaned. "It doesn't matter. If it is him, which I doubt, you would have some memory of Lena's about him. Right?"

"Four couldn't take him, but James did solo?" Ylara said in disbelief.

Daniel shrugged, "evil."

That one word made all the pieces fall together. "Frenit."

"Ah you do have something. I was starting to worry that her memories were fading," Daniel said, his eyes casting downward.

"It was him. I remember now. Lena wanted to kill him. His face, his attitude, it was all the same," Ylara said.

Daniel didn't believe her, he shook his head. "James killed him for arranging the killing of his mother and wife, there were witnesses. Though one of them was killed, revived but kept in a coma for two months, so I doubt that one would be a reasonable witness."

Ylara stared at him like he had just stunk the room out. "So it makes sense that the witness was revived, but not Frenit?"

"It makes sense cos I asked, I looked into it. I'm a watcher, I have to cover for my Slayers," Daniel replied, sighing sadly.

"Yeah great, that didn't answer..." Ylara mumbled.

"That's not entirely true. It's my fault he turns so easily anyway, so... what the hell," Daniel shrugged. Ylara's eyes slowly rolled, she cleared her throat afterwards. "Frenit was dust, it was seen by the witnesses who didn't die as well. Vamps don't come back from that. Perhaps you're confusing the memory cos of what I said."

"Then how did he recognise me?" Ylara questioned.

Daniel groaned into his hand. "He sensed you, and made a guess. There were three Chosen's at the time, only one was a girl and not everyone will be up to date on the possession scenario. Look, if you're that worried that he escaped I'll ask someone to check the transporter logs. Apart from that there's nothing we can do until we're done playing hide and seek."

"Fine," Ylara said. The door behind her opened, whoever walked in stopped and stared at the occupants. They both slowly turned their heads to look at him back.

"I'm sure I locked that," Craig said, pointing back at the door.

Ylara turned completely and stepped a few times towards him. He didn't look particularly comfortable about it. "Look, I was told that you were the one who talked to Kiara, and..."

"Don't," Craig quickly interrupted. "I didn't do it for you."

Ylara nodded, "I know that. I don't want anything more to happen to her. The child's been through enough."

Craig couldn't look her in the eye, he just stared ahead of her. "Me too." He was relieved when the next thing she did was walk around him to leave. Once the doors shut he couldn't help but sigh in relief.

"She's certainly changed," Daniel commented. "Seems like getting the crap beaten out of her did her some good."

Craig stared blankly at the man, it was the best he could do. "Unless you've come here to die horribly in front of me, get out of my office."

Daniel smirked, quickly closing the gap between them. "Are you still whining that Lena picked me? Get over it sometime this decade, okay. It wouldn't have happened if you didn't dump her in the first place."

"Stop!" Craig snapped at him, he felt his fists clenching. Daniel continued smirking at him. "You're fourteen years older than her, she was twenty. That says more about you than my whining ever could say about me."

That comment seemed to wipe the smirk off Daniel's face. "She wasn't a kid, you know."

"Yeah that's what all perverts say," Craig muttered.

Daniel's smirk soon came back, Craig felt his fists tighten even more. "What was the age difference between you and her when she was in her home timeline? Better yet, when did you first get a crush on her? Was it while or after everyone thought she was the future version of the baby girl you babysat?"

Craig couldn't take it anymore, his right fist aimed for that annoying smirk. Daniel was expecting it though. He grabbed his wrist, maneuvered his way around behind him while quickly pulling it around his attacker's back. "Well?" he asked.

"She wasn't though!" Craig spat. His left elbow flew into Daniel's ribs, it was enough to make him let go of his arm.

"During I see. Who's the pervert here?" Daniel said.

"I was a stupid, desperate and lonely kid then. What's your excuse?" Craig countered. Daniel's head shook, that smirk seemed to be trying to sneak its way back. "I always knew she wasn't Kiara, they acted differently, they looked different. I..."

"Okay, okay. Calm down mate," Daniel said, this time only smiling.

Craig stared at him blankly, it took all the restraint he didn't have anymore not to try and hit him again.

"Look at us, fighting over a girl, a dead girl, like a couple of kids. It doesn't matter who she picked, either way we both let her down in the end," Daniel said. "I just needed to know if you still get worked up over her."

"What? You walked into my office, chatted with Ylara, just to get a reaction. Why?" Craig said in a slightly bemused tone.

Daniel shrugged as he sat back down on the sofa, right next to a jacket lying on it. "Cos I'm going to need some help, and everyone else seems to have accepted it. You saw to one of them." Craig stared at him like he was eating Neelix's food willingly. "From what you said before I wanted to know if it was acceptance or just you protecting little Kiara."

"What the hell are you blabbering on about?" Craig muttered.

Daniel's smile disappeared, his face looked deadly serious. His hand picked up the jacket and threw it to the other side. Underneath it was a large, dusty old book. The same hand slowly stroked the cover. "It isn't just witches that can cast spells, you know."

Craig's attention went to the book, it felt like to him like it was staring back at him. Judging him silently.

Opps beeped at her impatiently, at least it sounded that way to her. She groaned angrily before putting down her milkshake.

"Seriously, does she ever stop eating?" Tom whispered to Jessie. She shook her head without looking at him. "Have you warned her?" She nodded this time. "And?"

"It's been eleven years, surely you can figure that one out," Jessie looked up and smiled sweetly at him.

Tom's eyes widened a little, his hand went to his nose to check if it was still healed. "She's not as bad as you, is she?"

Jessie shrugged, "she accused me of calling her tubby and she tried, yes."

"But she's not as far long as you," Tom stupidly said. He realised right away and ducked quickly.

Jessie just rolled her eyes, "it's her first."

"Hmm," Tom said as he straightened back up. "Ah and you're used... to dealing with her."

"Nice save," Jessie narrowed her eyes. "It's okay, I said the first one's the toughest, she called me a pro and... well I didn't talk to her for a month."

"Yikes!" Tom couldn't believe what he was hearing, he turned to look towards Jodie. "You called your sister a prostitute?"

Both sisters stared at him with the same exact death glare on their faces. Tom shrunk about five inches. "Professional," Jessie said as slowly as she could.

"That's what I said," Tom squeaked. He was starting to wonder if he spoke another language to these two.

"You're right Jess, maybe you have hit him too many times," Jodie said.

Jessie nodded slowly, "yeah. It wasn't just me though, James can share the blame."

"Okay I hate to challenge you Tommy, but we're in hailing range of that planet," Jodie said.

Tom mockingly mimed what she said while his back was turned, he forgot Jessie could still see him. "Any sign of a ship in orbit."

"Nope," Jodie replied.

"Can we scan it to make sure we're allowed to hail it?" Tom questioned. He smiled when he didn't get an answer, he turned around and saw the blank face he expected. "Is it pre-warp or not?"

"It sent a sub-space distress call," Jodie said bluntly.

"You could probably do that without breaching the warp barrier," Tom said smugly.

Jessie rolled her eyes, "considering they said an alien ship is attacking them, not *oh my gawd, a UFO. Help us space men.* I think we're good."

Tom decided to go over to his chair, as if that would tune the pair out. Once he sat down the two sisters air fived and giggled to themselves.

"Okay drop us out of warp, hail them," he sighed as loud as he could.

"Aye aye, Cappie," Jodie laughed. Naomi just signalled that she heard with a shrug.

"Give me strength," Tom almost preyed.

"You're on," Jodie said.

Tom climbed back out of his chair, trying his best to get back into command mode, not punch bag mode. "This is Lieutenant Commander Tom Paris of the USS Voyager and Leda. Can we be of assistance?" He waited for a few minutes before glancing to Opps. "Lifesigns?"

"Can't tell from this far away," Jodie replied. Her station beeped as soon as she answered, "oh, they're answering." Tom nodded at her and turned to the viewscreen. "Audio only."

"Okay, fine," Tom said. "This is Voyager."

A terrified male voice responded to him, it unnerved him quite a bit. "*Please, leave us alone. We haven't done anything to you.*"

"Um, we're not here to hurt you. We're here to help," Tom stuttered.

*"That's what the last ship said. Your kind have done enough, please leave."*

"Our kind," Tom stammered. A lump had grown very quickly in his throat. "Are you saying another ship like ours attacked..."

"They've cut us off," Jodie butted in.

Tom's face was deathly white, he looked around the bridge at everyone. All but one had the same problem, well naturally anyway.

"What? What did I miss?" Naomi asked mid foundation applying. Everyone's stare went to her instead. "What?"

Tom shook his head, "just keep us on course."

"Great plan, they're already acting like you when you've said something stupid," Jessie muttered. "Imagine their reaction when they see not one but two ships enter orbit."

"We won't need to go into orbit, we just need to follow the warp trail. We can investigate the damage as we pass," Tom said. He turned to Opps, "can you update the Leda on what just happened? I'll be in my Ready Room."

He was at the door when Jessie spoke up, stopping him, "so it is her. But why attack a defenceless planet?"

Tom's shoulders sank, "let's find out."

### **The Leda:**

Harry had returned to the Bridge, much to the annoyance of both Chakotay and Damien. Harry wasn't too pleased either as the former still occupied his chair. The pair were also back to arguing.

"I'm just saying that you were her first choice, so why do I have to suffer her now," Damien complained.

Chakotay disagreed, immensely. "That was probably the most insane thing the original Voyager series did, barring warp ten jumps and lizards, so there's your clue right there."

"Yeah, she's a fruitloop. Where's your argument, Chuckles?" Damien countered.

"What's yours?" Chakotay snapped.

Damien thought about it for the moment, everyone stupidly assumed that was the end of the bickering. "You date her, it's not like there's any JC shippers left to piss off, what with the death and assimilating her thing."

Chakotay clenched the chair's arms so tightly Harry worried he'd break them. "That's it. I've had enough..." he growled, quickly standing up. Harry's eyes widened seconds before he dove for his chair. "I'm sick of being the bad guy in this, tell them what happened or I will!"

Damien snorted into laughter, of course that only made Chakotay even madder.

"Are you worried what will happen if they knew, cos I thought you loved being the bad guy," he snarled.

"Oh boy." Damien wiped a tear from his eye while getting his breath back. "News flash, everyone knows. You're on the dark side now Chuckie. Besides, I could easily tell the blond bimbo that you tried to erase him from history just the other week."

"He wouldn't believe you," Chakotay grumbled.

Damien tried not to laugh, at least not until he responded, "the beauty of that is, he would. You've tried to kill him before. Besides you still come across very badly in the story, so be my guest. I couldn't care less."

The argument was interrupted by the Red Alert siren. The unknown at Tactical quickly spoke up, "sir, there's a ship approaching us from ahead at high warp. They've armed weapons."

Harry remembered the last time they were attacked at warp, his face tightened as he debated with himself in his head. "Nathan, drop us out of warp. Faye inform Voyager of that."

The pair reluctantly nodded. "Voyager's already out of warp in that system we're talking about," Nathan reminded him. Harry only nodded.

Damien stared at him with a look of disappointment on his face, it was the look Chakotay gave him that made him question the decision he made. "You're leaving Voyager on her own?"

"We don't stand a chance in a fight, remember?" Harry said. "Especially in a high warp battle."

"We don't even know what it is," Chakotay pointed out.

Harry shook his head. "I have to put the safety of my crew first, decision is final."

### **Meanwhile:**

The siren was ringing around Voyager's bridge as well, everyone was on edge.

"The Leda's dropping back," Jodie reported.

Tom nodded, "good, how's our shields?"

"Normal 100%, demon one same," Jessie replied.

"Okay, ready weapons. Come about 180 just in case we need to aid the Leda," Tom ordered.

Naomi's eyes widened, she looked across her station for a come about button, then the 180 part stumped her. "Um, how do I do that?"

Tom groaned into his hand, "just go backwards to the Leda when I tell you. Not literally backwards! For now evasive maneuvers."

"Should be in visual range in a few seconds," Jessie said, cringing slightly. "Probably for like half a second."

Tom looked up at the viewscreen anyway, he could just make out the planet ahead. It seemed too quiet compared to the Red Alert blaring in his ears. A light then blurred over head, it was gone as quick as it appeared.

"They're firing," Jessie warned.

Naomi looked a little anxious, "which button's the evasive one?"

"Are you serious!" Tom yelled. He glanced back at Jodie and then Jessie. "Is she serious?" The bridge shook lightly before anyone could answer. Naomi still waited for an answer. "You used to know what it means. Forget it, you're fired."

"Why are you yelling at me, Jessie didn't even fire at them," Naomi asked.

"Fire at a ship going at warp? I didn't realise we had mini warp drives on our torpedoes," Tom groaned into his hand. "Status?" He asked as he climbed out of his seat. For everyone's safety he lightly nudged Naomi's chair away from the helm, she pouted angrily.

"Shields holding. The ship's still at warp," Jessie replied.

"Damn it, we'd better turn around and get to the Leda. Jodie can you..." Tom started to order.

"Yeah yeah, one thing at a time!" Jodie complained. To everyone's surprise the one thing she was busy with wasn't food. "The ship tried to send us a message as it passed, while I was trying to get a good look at it. Distracted me. Pricks."

Tom shook his head, he decided to get Voyager turned around first before dealing with that. "Can we hear it?"

"No, it's text," Jodie rolled her eyes. "And please isn't hard to say." Tom waited for her to tell him the message, he still had time to set Voyager away again in the opposite direction.

"That ship could easily ignore Voyager, stop by us and attack. Voyager would have to turn around, they're already way ahead," Chakotay argued.

"Yes, listen to the man who brought you Zombie Janeway," Damien sniggered.

Harry's face twisted, his eyes turned towards Chakotay. "He's right. We're better off at Voyager's side. Nath..."

"Got it," Nathan nodded. A brief flash of light enveloped the bridge, only for a second. "Um, it's just passed us."

"Oh, no harm done," Harry relaxed.

Chakotay shook his head. "I'm being judged by the *man* who came up with kidnap celebrities and rabbit armies. Really?"



"The ship didn't just fly by, it left us a message," Faye butted in. She shook as she read it, "turn around."

They had left an easily lockable office, wandered down corridors, climbed down cramped Jeffries Tubes, only to setup camp in one of the hatches in the bowels of the ship. Craig really didn't understand why, or why he followed Daniel without any more answers. One question troubled him more than that.

"So why do you need me again?"

Daniel sat down on the floor, cross legged, his attention fully on the book in his hands. Craig tapped his foot impatiently, "well?"

"The spell requires a sacrifice for it to work," Daniel answered without looking. Craig stared at him with disbelief obvious in his eyes. Daniel looked up and laughed at him, "I'm kidding, kinda. I don't need you for that."

"So if watchers can do magic..." Craig started to ask.

"We're not as powered up as witches are, but we do have to have something to get the visions. Old Wes taught me a few things," Daniel replied. He lay the book down on the floor in front of him. "Like how to read crap like this." He then fished a padd out of his pocket, keeping a close eye on the book and tapped on it.

"Again I ask..." Craig groaned.

Daniel stopped tapping on the padd, he immediately tossed it over to Craig. He stumbled to catch it, but it dropped on the floor anyway. Daniel smirked at him as he knelt down to pick it up. "Two people have to read the incantation."

"Oh," Craig sighed. "About the sacrifice part?"

"I figured it was obvious," Daniel shook his head. "It's a restoration spell, not a swap bodies spell. The sacrifice..."

"I doubt you can just pick what you want to sacrifice!" Craig snapped.

Daniel sighed in annoyance. "Leave it to the professionals kid. I just need you to chant."

"No," Craig sternly said. "I'm not doing anything until you explain everything."

"Fine," Daniel faked a smile. "It's not like we're in a hurry."

"Turn around," Tom mused as he stared at the Astrometrics screen. "Is it a warning or is someone helping us?"

"Hang on, I can't quite get the hang of this. It's all wrong," B'Elanna muttered while typing away at a station. The screen changed from a star chart to a shot of somebody's bathroom. "Uh..."

Harry tried not to laugh, so did Chakotay. "Annika's been here," Harry said.

"Maybe not, it could be someone else's bathroom," Chakotay sniggered. Just then he spotted the toothbrush with a rabbit shaped handle and the rabbit tiles.

B'Elanna tried not to smirk as well, "ookay, well then, now I know what's wrong with this." She keyed in a few things to fix it. The starchart immediately reappeared.

"The computer's been going through all the sensor data we've received and it should have come up with a corrected map of the area." The screen zoomed in to where Voyager and Leda's signatures were. Several sectors disappeared and were badly replaced by new ones, some parts overlapped each other. A few zones seemed to twist into some strange shapes. Planets even jumped around to different systems.

"Eew, what's she done?" Jessie complained.

B'Elanna winced as she looked at it. She dared to make the computer zoom out further, it only looked worse when she did. "Annika didn't do this. The first one you saw was the map we had of the Beta Quadrant. As Annika was too busy peeping on Damien or buying catsuits, she didn't notice or care that the areas of space we were mapping didn't match it." She sighed, "this is the real deal."

"So, the Game Sphere theory could be right. I kinda hope it is," Harry cringed a little. There was curiosity in his eyes though. "I wonder how much area of space this thing covers."

"Could be?" James said with a shake of his head. "The question is how many of them are there?"

Tom's eyes shifted to one side, "how many? Isn't one bad enough?"

B'Elanna nodded, "the aliens we met from the Delta Quadrant were here. I really doubt the entire span between the Beta Quadrant and there is covered by a giant sphere. It's likely multiple spots covered by a game type object, each one with an entry point like the Corridor."

"I doubt it. Why provide an escape?" Chakotay said.

"They're probably one way entrances, I did say entry after all," B'Elanna said impatiently. "The message could be someone warning us about it, not realising that we know. Or it could be just those aliens warning us off."

"No, their fleet was destroyed," Tom said. "If this were some nice guys flying around telling people, why did they fire on Voyager?"

"Maybe they don't like your jokes," Jessie commented.

Tom pretended to start a laugh, he rolled his eyes afterwards. "I'm right though."

"I'd definitely lean more towards the *turn around* as a warning, the shot fired was another one," Harry agreed.

"Was it our mystery ship?" Tom asked.

B'Elanna shook her head grimly, "no, but whoever they were they didn't intend to hurt us. It didn't match anything we'd seen before either."

Tom turned to look at the horrific star chart B'Elanna had made, "I say we keep going then."

"Really? Why the change of tune?" Chakotay questioned.

"If we change our course we'll be avoiding our mission. Besides if it's bad guys, why warn us away from a trap?" Tom explained. He smiled and nodded towards everyone. "We'll head out as soon as our Leda crew return." With that he headed for the exit.

"That's going to be the trap isn't it?" Chakotay muttered. He shrugged and followed him.

"Yeah," almost everyone agreed.

*Lieutenant Commander Paris' Log Supplemental: After a very brief encounter with an unknown ship, Voyager and Leda are continuing to follow the warp trail. To avoid spooking the aliens who've warned us away, we've only scanned the surface from a distance as we passed by. Hopefully we'll get some answers soon.*

"Taking us back to warp nine point seven five," Tom reported to himself at the helm. He glanced over his shoulder briefly, then again for a bit longer. "Naomi out of my chair!"

"What? I thought we were swapping jobs," Naomi whined. Tom shook his head at her before turning back to the helm. "Can I at least be a Captain's assistant?"

"Deja vu," Tom muttered. "Anyway, anything yet?"

B'Elanna sat at the Science station, her fingers danced across the panel as her eyes quickly took everything in. She sighed and her face fell. "Confirmed. Weapon signatures are Federation in origin."

Tom's shoulders fell, that was the news he was expecting but it still hit him as hard as Jessie did earlier. "What are they doing?" he asked no one in particular.

B'Elanna's head shook. "Obviously as I don't know what was there before, I have no idea what was hit. It'll take some time to put it all together. I'll keep on it."

"In the mean time we continue the hunt," Tom sighed. "Can we at least tell how much damage there is?"

"Well they weren't lying about their fleet, I didn't detect any ships in the area," B'Elanna replied as her eyes scanned the data. "The damage seems localised to one continent. This wasn't a merciless and random attack, they were after something."

"Let me know if you figure anymore out, anything will..." Tom said. Opps beeping loudly interrupted him. "What now?"

Jodie for once didn't have to put anything down, though there was a plate sitting on the top of opps waiting for her. "Another distress call."

"Okay let's hear this one too," Tom ordered, ignoring the dread building in his chest.

*"This is the planet Ruva. We're under attack by a hostile alien ship. They're aiming for..."* An explosion in the background overlapped the woman's next few words. *"Facilities. Please if you can hear this message, help us. We have done nothing to provoke this..."* This time rumbling drowned her out. *"Hurry."*

Tom looked back over his shoulder towards Opps. "Are we closer to this one than the last planet?" Jodie glanced down and nodded. "Tell them we're on our way."

"Uh Tom," B'Elanna butted in. "If it is the same ship, the aliens are just going to think..."

"I know. Tell them we're hunting a rogue ship of ours," Tom said.

"We go in with weapons charging and they'll not believe us," Jessie warned him.

Tom sighed loudly, "we'll have to take that chance. I'm going to assume I won't have to change course."

Jodie shook her head, "nope, we're still following the warp trail."

"Good, I guess. Update the Leda and Red Alert," Tom commanded.

Jessie glanced over towards Jodie with an uneasy look on her face, her finger had already been hovering over the Red Alert command. One touch and it was on. "Tom, even if that ship is another version, so to speak, it's still going to take out the Leda in a few shots," she warned.

"I doubt Tom's forgotten the him versus evil James odds," B'Elanna said.

Tom shook his head, he disagreed. "She'll last longer than that, the Leda's got two more years of shield and technology upgrades on her. Tell her to stay behind us anyway. Harry will know when he should retreat. Besides, we all know that ship's weak spot. Jess you'll go straight for that."

"We're relying on a joke weak spot? This'll end well," Jessie muttered.

### **The Leda:**

Doubts were running through Craig's mind as he watched Daniel prepare some strange ingredients in between them.

"So this location is to..." he mumbled to himself.

"To give the restoration a little power boost, yes," Daniel groaned impatiently.

Craig glanced around the Jeffries hatch they were in. He had lost track of how many decks they had climbed down and crawled across, but he knew they were low down enough to be near places like Engineering. He saw the red alert lights at the corner of his eye, flashing on the wall and door panels. The butterflies in his stomach started to bounce around at warp speed.

"Maybe we should wait. If we end up in a fight and what we're doing causes problems, we'll..." Craig stuttered.

Daniel groaned again, his frustration clearly growing. "Do you want Lena back or not!? Or do you like having Ylara fluttering about like she owns that body?"

Craig grit his teeth as his emotions went back and forth. "What's the hurry? She's not going to suddenly be immune or do something in the next ten minutes. Wait."

"The spell won't actually absorb that much power. They'll not notice a thing," Daniel countered. He waited to see if Craig had anymore excuses but he remained silent this time, his face however told him everything. "Should I find someone else?"

"No!" Craig quickly snapped. It took Daniel by surprise. "I just... I don't think this is a good idea." Daniel rolled his eyes. "I told Kiara that I thought she wouldn't want to come back. I didn't lie to her, it's what I really think. If I did this, then..."

"She just needed time, time to get over the depression. She didn't get the chance. Why deny her that?" Daniel argued. "You stopped Kiara from getting into trouble with the Q, that's great, but it wasn't cos the actual goal was wrong. The process was."

"That's true but..." Craig trailed off mid thought. He cast his mind back to the last time he saw, or rather talked to Lena. He remembered her smiling and joking, he remembered the kiss, but the part that stuck in his mind most of all was one little thing she said.

*"But he's what I need right now. Maybe someday..."*

Those two words told him she was looking into the future, she didn't want to die. Was it an act, or did she really see herself getting better and the possession provided a brief but tempting easy way out? He had no way of knowing.

"Ylara doesn't belong here. She died thousands of years ago," Daniel interrupted his thoughts.

"Some people would argue that Lena doesn't either," Craig managed to say, even though it hurt him to.

"Somebody or some people, whether they were Q's or Kes, Tolg, Borg whatever... went out of their way to bring Lena here. The Chosen line was a mess without her, and this was the solution. In my eyes she does belong here. Ylara doesn't," Daniel said.

"Who are we to decide that?" Craig demanded.

Daniel smiled bitterly. "I toyed with all this crap before I decided to do this too. Lena didn't die naturally. She's still technically alive. Her soul was forced out only for some dead girl to take her place. Does that seem right to you?"

"No," seemed like the simple answer to Craig. The hard answer was the one he was struggling with. "Watchers like you are the reason we're in this predicament." Daniel's smile fell off his face. "They exiled Ylara's soul to punish her for being a teenager who couldn't cope with her brother and mother's murder. Then they sit back and let some idiot priests use her soul and others to punish Slayers who only wanted to save their planet. Their only crime was not being told, by the same watchers, that the ritual destroys the planet in the process."

"I had nothing to do with that, I'm not like them," Daniel muttered.

"But you were. You pretended James didn't exist so his lack of training would turn him psycho, when that didn't work you murdered his step mother," Craig said. Daniel tried to interrupt but he didn't have a chance. "Your partner in crime kidnapped Zare and kept her locked up for years. Don't tell me you're not like those assholes from back when. You are, and memory loss or not you always will be."

"Don't you think I feel bad enough about that?" Daniel growled.

"No, cos all you've ever done since then is break a million rules by dating your Slayer, being bone idle, and worst of all not acting like any of this stuff bothers you," Craig argued.

"Two rules," Daniel corrected him, his eyes cast down. "It's always bothered me, I did everything I could to hide it. That's why I want to help her now, to make up for all the stuff *Ronnie* did to her and her family. This isn't about me, this isn't about the watchers of the past either. This is about a girl who had her life stolen away from her, twice. All I want to do is help her find her way home and rebuild that life."

Craig sighed, "and what about Ylara's life?"

"It's another price I'll have to live with," Daniel answered. "I've made my decision. The question is, can you live with it?"

He thought long and hard about the answer, or at least it felt like to him. He felt there was no good or bad option, each one was the same; One dies so the other can live. The who lives was the easy choice, it was the who dies that stabbed him in the gut.

In the end, there was one answer. Daniel would do this ritual with any old schmuck if he refused, he couldn't really stop him.

"No," Craig finally answered. Daniel nodded in acceptance. "I can't live with it, but I'll help anyway."

Daniel's eyes widened in surprise for a second, when they returned to normal he smiled warmly. "All right. It's very simple, all you do is read."

### **Voyager:**

"We're entering the system where the distress call came from," Jodie said. She quickly slurped at her drink and returned to work.

Tom moved his hand across his station, "dropping out of warp. Evasive maneuvers on standby." His other hand was hovering over the manual steering panel he installed. "Other ship status?"

"Scanning," B'Elanna responded. Her head shook as she read the data on her screen.

In the calm of space, a white flash pierced the black. Voyager shot out of it and slowed right down. Another flash appeared, this time it was the Leda. The smaller ship followed the larger one closely. Directly ahead of them was a beautiful green world surrounded by five moons, but they weren't the only things that were.

On Voyager's Bridge the crew had a first hand view of the same thing on the viewscreen.

"I hate to say I told you so," Jessie stuttered.

Tom swallowed the huge lump in his throat but it wouldn't budge. The sight of the armada of alien ships dead ahead, each one changing their course to greet them, seemed to make it bigger.

"No sign of it," B'Elanna answered.

Jodie sighed in relief, "we're being hailed."

Tom couldn't shake off the dread, he had a bad feeling about this. "On screen." Anything to get that view of the armada away. It changed to show two pale blue skinned aliens. "This is Tom Paris of the U... Voyager and..."

"USS Voyager you mean," the lead alien said harshly.

"I really should get the name part of the ship repainted," Tom commented very quietly. He glanced up at the aliens. "We're responding to your distress call."

"Your rogue ship was no match for us," alien two hissed. "You don't look much better."

The lump still managed to grow, it made speaking a little painful. "What happened to it?"

Alien one smugly laughed, "it fired a few shots and then left when we confronted it." Tom felt a little relief, not much though. "They won't get away with it."

"I apologise on the behalf of my people for whatever happened here, but please, let us recover our own ship. We have reason to believe that it was stolen and..." Tom tried to explain.

"Enough," alien two snarled. "You sent that ship to attack us, it failed so the two of you show up to *even the odds*."

"Scan us, you'll see that our other ship isn't a battle ship. It's armed with only a few weapons to defend itself. You said yourself that the first ship stood a better chance. Why would we send two weaker ships?" Tom said.

The two aliens glanced at each other, one of them turned to a computer behind them. "Your Voyager is infamous for causing trouble wherever it goes. It recently attacked another world, did it not?"

"What?" Tom frowned, he glanced at everyone briefly. They were just as confused. "No, the only one even close was the one we were attacked at. Towers from the surface..."

"Towers," the second alien spat as he turned back around. "That is what your rogue ship was aiming for, power distribution towers. Clearly a plan to cripple us first."

"They were trying to destroy Game Sphere towers?" Jessie asked quietly so the aliens couldn't hear.

Tom overheard but only just, his eyes widened slightly. "These towers, were they recently built?"

"What does it matter?" alien one replied. "You will not deceive us. Retreat or be destroyed."

"I told you. We're looking for our ship, so we'll be leaving anyway. There's no reason to threaten us," Tom said.

"But if it is that, we can't just..." Jessie tried to tell him quietly.

Tom glanced behind him, "not now Jess." He turned back, "we'll leave but I insist you look into those towers. You need to find out where the power is being drawn from."

"What is this? Who are you to tell us how to run our world?" alien one said angrily.

"Someone who's planet was almost destroyed by things like that," Tom replied.

The two aliens looked at each other again, their anger was only riled up further. The screen switched back to the armada.

"Maybe you should have said by towers like that, not things," Jodie commented. "Creates a mix up," she said, pointing at the screen. Tom dared to look, the ships were spreading out in front of them into groups, some flew around or overhead.

"But Earth's sphere didn't have a tower," Tom stuttered. He groaned into his hand, "minor detail, they wouldn't have known." His head shook, hands returned to the helm. "We're still leaving." Just as he said that a few more ships blocked his view briefly. "If we can. Hail the Leda."

"You're on," Jodie said.

"Harry, in case you haven't noticed we're not welcome here. If you see an opening, get out of here even if we can't. Okay," Tom ordered.

*"Way ahead of you Tom, but it's not going to be so easy, they..."* The ship trembled a few times. *"They keep moving around to block our path."*

"I don't think you can push your way through this time, Tom," B'Elanna teased just as the ship rocked again.

Jessie kept a tight hold of her station, "shields 90% and holding." Another rock made her tighten her grip. "Well they were, 88%."

Tom's hand reached for one of the levers, "no problem, none at all."

The situation was a little bit more hectic on the Leda's bridge. The unknown tactical officer was sweating buckets, Faye wasn't doing much better either. Harry kept a close eye on the panel on his chair, which showed the sensor readings for the Leda, Voyager and the aliens, hoping for an opening. He tried not to cringe everytime his ship trembled. Obviously Damien was the only one enjoying himself, in fact he had pulled some popcorn out of nowhere.

"You'll die too, you know," Chakotay muttered. "There's a bright side to everything."

"Please, that's what transporters are for," Damien grinned.

"Shields 48%!" the Tactical officer stammered.

Nathan's face lit up, "there you are, you beauty." His hand flew across the controls.

Harry meanwhile spotted an opening, "got it. Nath, head for 147..."

"Way ahead of ya," Nathan smiled. Sure enough the ship was already moving forward, and a little to the right.

Harry's eyes widened, they quickly looked at the panel. The Leda's dot was not going where he thought. The ship lurched even more to the right. "Uh that's not where I meant." He only got a shrug from his temporary helmsman. "Oh god."

Jodie turned her head far to the right as she watched the viewscreen. Jessie spotted her do it and looked to see what she was staring at. The Leda had already slipped in front of them, it drifted onto its side to squeeze passed two of the ships currently firing at Voyager.

"Nice one Nath," Jessie couldn't help but smirk.

Tom looked up too, just catching the other ship straightening up. "I would have done that too," he muttered.

One of the alien ships attacking Voyager reacted badly to it, it turned around and chased after it. A couple more ships flew passed Voyager and did the same.

"There!" Tom saw his chance and he took it. His hand pulled the lever right down.

While one ship moved out of formation to chase after the Leda, another ship flew across to take its place. Voyager didn't waste any time, the impulse engines pushed the ship through the temporary gap, breaking them free from the armada.

The three alien ships chasing the Leda fired multiple shots towards them, the tiny ship swerved side to side to dodge them. A few slammed into its shields, but the rest flew off into empty space. The warp drives lit up, there was a flash and they were gone.

Voyager wasn't far behind, with half of the armada turning around to chase them and the three ahead of them turning around. Shots were firing continuously, the few that did hit barely fazed the shields if they hit at all. Voyager swerved upwards to avoid the oncoming ships, one of them seemed to see it coming and followed its path like a mirror image.

While Voyager fought to get away, the Leda flew straight ahead, the stars streaming passed them.

Harry had relaxed into his chair a little too much. "Next time, tell me."

"No time," Nathan shrugged.

Harry shook his head, "damage report." A half empty bag of popcorn bounced off his head, he slowly turned it around to look at the obvious culprit. Damien sat in the chair next to him, his arms folded in a huff.

"Shields took a beating, but overall we're fine," Faye answered. She wasn't so sure about that when she saw a few lights blinking in the corner of her eye. She turned to another part of opps. "Cancel that. There's a minor power overload in Engineering."

Harry almost leapt out of his seat in a panic, he rushed to her side. "How minor?"

"Minor. The core's running 1% higher than it usually does," Faye replied.

"Keep an eye on it," Harry said. He tapped his commbadge, "Bridge to Engineering. Is everything all right down there?"



Damien cringed as Annika's voice rang over the comm, *"everything's fine now, Kimmy wimmy. We just had some power drainage, I fixed it."*

"Annika, what are you doing in Engineering?" Harry had to ask.

*"That's a funny story actually. I came in to look for something..."* Damien rolled his eyes. *"And everyone just dropped to the floor."*

"Shocking," Chakotay obviously didn't mean it.

*"I know! I beamed the darlings to Sickbay, they looked so poorly. You've been working them hard, you bad boy."*

There was a collective gag. Harry tried to recover quickly so he could reply, "they've just had a holiday. So power drainage?"

*"Yup, almost like another system is taking it. I can't find where the power's going, I just figured if we're flying around I should move some power to warp. No need to thank me."*

"It's 103%," Faye warned. Harry's head quickly turned in her direction. "That's a 4% increase from before."

*"I don't think so! Let me check," Annika giggled.*

Craig's part was done, all he could do was watch as a green mist surrounded Daniel. His eyes were closed, two small clay pots sat in the palms of each of his hands. His right closed in on one of them to grip it, he then poured the contents of it into the other one. As soon as he did that a red powder erupted from it, creating a cloud in front of him. The green mist tried to penetrate it, but it appeared to be reflected back.

"Oh god, what have I done?" Craig stuttered, he looked down and noticed his hands were shaking.

While he was doing so the red cloud grew, the green surrounding it faded.

Daniel carefully placed the pot on the floor in front of him, the cloud seemed to follow its movements exactly. He opened his eyes and couldn't help but gasp at his creation. "It's working, I just have to tell it where to go," he smiled. He didn't notice Craig's reaction to all this, he just buried his head back in the book.

The cloud was now overwhelming the hatch, there was no room for it to grow any further. Craig finally looked again, his head shook in despair. The ship shaking didn't make him feel any better, it did it again and a lot more violently. He noticed then that the ship seemed to be humming a lot louder than it usually did. Something else was going on than just a ship battle, his fear told him.

"Damn, I just need a clear path," Tom groaned. He seemed angry to everyone else, but this was kind of flying Tom always loved to do. The control stick turned to the right and the ship did the same.

"Shields are at 60," Jessie reported. The ship trembled a few more times. "55."

Tom tried to hold back a sigh. "Damn. I could dance with these guys all day. Fine." The lever was pushed down again, everyone could feel the ship jump to warp.

"120!" Faye yelled as a computer station exploded nearby.

Harry paced backwards and forwards, trying desperately to think of something. He rushed to Opps in the end and shared the station with her. "Annika whatever you're doing, you're making it worse!"

Chakotay shook his head, "helm, slow us down. Now!"

Nathan nodded, "already on it."

*"I'm not doing anything sweetie. The power I mentioned has come back and it's being rerouted to the core. I can't stop it. Like I said I don't know the source."*

"I'm going down there. Chakotay you..." Harry stuttered as he headed for the turbolift.

*"Oooh, it's getting a bit cloudy in here."*

Harry stopped in his tracks, the horror drained away the colour in his face. Faye confirmed his fears, "warp core breach in progress."

"Voyager?" Chakotay questioned her.

"About eight to ten minutes behind now," Faye reported shakily. "We don't have time to wait."

Chakotay shook his head, "if we use the escape pods, we'll be wiped out when the core breaches."

"Ejection?" Harry asked anyone.

*"Nope, it's not budging. Ow it's hot!"*

Harry tried his best not to laugh, now wasn't the time for that. He settled for a face palm instead. "The computer can do that!"

*"Oh. Hehe, hang on."* Everyone heard her tap away at a station, the whirring noise in the background was getting loud. *"Nope."*

"God," Harry couldn't believe this was happening. "Kim to all hands, abandon ship. Make your way to the shuttle bay..."

Meanwhile in the Jeffries hatch Craig heard his voice over the comm. *"Repeat, abandon ship. Make your way to the shuttle bay and get as far away from the ship as you can."*

Craig bit his lip, he could feel the anger build up inside him. The red was everywhere he looked now, the only thing he could see clearly was the pot it seemed to be coming from. His hand edged towards it. As if he sensed him Daniel's hand reached out as well, slapping his hand away.

"Don't! It's nearly done."

"Don't you see what's happening?" Craig shouted at him. "We have to leave!"

"Fine leave, I need another minute," Daniel grumbled.

Craig couldn't wait, the noise from the engines was unbearable, the red clogged every sense he had. He had to try one more time, maybe he could stop it. His hand reached out, just touching the pot. The red cloud suddenly imploded in on itself, all that was left was a tiny red orb. That shot into the ceiling, disappearing from his sight.

"Okay, now we can..." Daniel smiled, oblivious to the chaos around him. He took his time standing up like nothing was even happening. Craig shook his head, he stood up while grabbing the other man's

arm, and dragged him towards the only door. "Wait, what if it didn't work..." Daniel pointed back at the book and ingredients he left.

"We'll be dead if we don't leave now," Craig snarled. "I won't let you do it again. Let's go!" It took all the strength he had, but he pulled Daniel out of the hatch.

The tiny shuttle bay was in chaos as almost the entire crew were filling into the few shuttles. Each one was packed already and there still were a lot of people left behind.

Harry stood behind at the doors, desperately trying to direct everyone. Chakotay stood behind him, shaking his head. "We don't have enough shuttles."

"Unless you have a suggestion to fix that, keep it to yourself!" Harry snapped.

Chakotay turned to him with a bemused look. "I do. Escape pods."

"You were right before, the pods won't get away fast enough," Harry said.

Chakotay shrugged, "they will if the shuttles give them a push."

Harry stared at him with his eyes wide, he thought he was mad. Or at least madder than he has been of late. "A wide tractor beam? Three shuttles couldn't catch all of them."

"It's either that or die here, what difference does it make?" Chakotay said with a hint of worry in his voice.

Harry figured he was right, there was no other choice. Steeling his nerves he raised his voice and prepared to give the order. "Everyone still behind listen up! The only choice now is the escape pods, go to the nearest one."

Everyone in the bay looked at him like he had given them the death sentence, a lot of them did as they were told anyway. Harry quickly pushed through to reach the nearest shuttle. "Can someone tell the people at the controls to set a wide tractor beam on the escape pods, catch as many as you can." He swallowed the lump in his throat, only just, "but only if you have time to. Don't put yourselves at risk." He patted the shuttle hull, "go." He turned back to give the same order to the other shuttles, he was relieved to see Chakotay had already started that.

"Permission to tell somebody to shoot Damien's escape pod," he smiled as they both reached the third shuttle.

Harry smiled back, "if you don't, I will." He gave the orders to the shuttle, he and Chakotay then rushed for the shuttle bay exit. Nobody was left at this time. However as they ran through the doors they ran into Craig and Daniel going the opposite way.

"Change of plans, escape pods," Harry told them, gently pushing them back. Craig passed Daniel a glare before turning around to join the other two. Daniel had to be coaxed backwards by Chakotay as they all rushed to the nearest pod.

### **Voyager:**

"That's weird," Jodie commented. Tom glanced backwards at her. "The Leda's stopped and they've sent out shuttles."

Tom turned back to see for himself, his face paled. "And escape pods, Jodie?"

Jodie was still looking at her readouts, she didn't know what to make of them. "There's a power build up, I don't know..."

Jessie was looking at a similar display on her console, she quickly looked up with wide eyes. "Tom, either stop or move to the side. The Leda's breaching."

"When?" Tom stuttered.

"Now!" Jessie snapped.

Tom quickly grabbed the lever he used to control the warp speed. "Hold on." His other hand grabbed the little control stick as the lever was pulled back. Unlike a normal drop out of warp, everyone felt this one pull them backwards.

The viewscreen showed the Leda as a tiny dot directly ahead, three shuttles were barely visible as well, each one with a tractor beam trailing behind them.

"Get a lock on as many of the un-tractored pods as you can, quick," Tom stuttered.

Jessie was the first to notice a white light pierce through the Leda's dot, obscuring the view of it. She looked over to a panicking Jodie, and thought she'd quickly try to help her out. Both of them hammered their controls as Tom moved the control stick to the right sharply. Voyager pulled to the right just as sharply. Everyone who weren't holding on fell to the right.

Tom's hand grabbed the warp lever once again, he didn't wait for a confirmation of the transporters, he pushed it forward as quickly as he could.

A white flash lit up the area, then as quick as it appeared collapsed in on itself. The Leda buckled under the pressure, tearing itself apart. Space around it seemed to ripple, creating a distorted wave going in all directions.

Every shuttle jumped into warp more or less in sync with each other, each one tractoring a group of escape pods. The left behind escape pods disappeared in a shimmer. Voyager's warp drives raised and shot into its own white flash. The wave flew through the space they were just in a second later.

Tom fell back into his chair, sighing louder than he ever had before. "How many did we have to leave behind?"

"Just three. If we had just a few more seconds," Jessie said sadly. Jodie confirmed it by hitting her console.

B'Elanna glanced between the two, "don't beat yourselves up. I tried to get some of them out too, we just didn't have enough time."

Tom's head shook, "what the hell happened? They got away first, none of the shots went through the shields." He reluctantly turned to Naomi sitting in the first officer's seat, "Naomi take the helm for now. If Nathan's still around, he can take over." He climbed out of his seat and tapped his commbadge, slowly he made his way for the turbolift. "Stuart to the Bridge."

Naomi quickly rushed to reclaim her seat, she stared at the manual part for a second and returned her attention to the console part instead.

Tom stopped next to Tactical and the turbolift. "Jess, did Harry make it?"

Jessie glanced down at her station, she nodded. "He's in one of the pods we beamed up. Cargo Bay Two."

"Right. You take command until James gets here," Tom mumbled, his head drooped down. "I gotta know what happened," he said as he entered the turbolift.

### **Conference Room:**

Harry's head buried into his arms as they folded on the back of a chair. "It shouldn't have." His head raised slightly, "it was one of the Leda's easiest battles."

"You're forgetting the power overload," Chakotay said. Harry shook his head. Tom only frowned, glancing between them. "I don't think it was the battle. Annika reported that the power was being drained from an unknown source." Tom's face drained even more than before. "When she tried to compensate, it started to feed back but straight into the system she was trying to save."

"An unknown source?" Tom couldn't help but shiver.

Harry straightened back up, "no. The Leda wouldn't have problems like that. Only Voyager has the Deck Thirteen instability, rifts that drain or chuck out power. We didn't detect anything like that anyway."

"We did detect a power build up when we approached, though that could have been the breach itself," Tom commented.

"She was fine, nothing was wrong," Harry complained. The other two men looked at him, clearly seeing the guilt on his face. "It doesn't make any sense. It doesn't help that every sensor data we got off it went with her."

The nearest door opened, B'Elanna and Annika walked in. B'Elanna did so quickly to avoid being too close to her, but she followed her like a puppy chasing a stick.

"The Engineering crew are fine, they tell an interesting story," B'Elanna said.

Annika nodded, "it's a good thing I beamed them to Sickbay, or they would have been left behind."

Chakotay narrowed his eyes in her direction, "for all we know you're responsible for the breach. You were the only one conscious in there, and it's not like you haven't tried to kill us before."

"She's not," B'Elanna said. "Everyone in Engineering say the same thing. Their stations were blacking out, communications were cut off and their own energy started to drain. Annika walking in just as they collapsed was a not funny coincidence."

Annika frowned, "I don't get it." She glanced down, noticing her visible cleavage wasn't quite right. She adjusted her top, down.

"Though she probably didn't help," B'Elanna shuddered.

"But the power returned, what happened there?" Harry questioned.

"As only Annika was there, we can only guess at the moment. Whatever was draining the power must have stopped," B'Elanna replied.

"See, her fault," Chakotay pointed his finger at Annika.

Annika pouted angrily, she swung her hands on her hips. As she did something wobbled, it wasn't a pretty sight. "When I got there, there was only a drop of about 1%, I chucked that into the core. I didn't do anymore than that. The spike afterwards was something else, you meanie."

"A drop of 1%," Harry thought aloud. "If that was all it was, why did stations go off-line, what happened to the staff there?"

"It was probably recovering when she got there," Chakotay said.

"So whatever fed from Engineering, slowly chucked it back, but to the wrong place and boom," Annika said.

B'Elanna sighed, "that's pretty much the gist of it."

Harry shook his head. "Three of my people are dead thanks to whatever did this. We need to find out what it was."

"Agreed, it could easily happen here," Tom nodded. He cringed slightly, "again!"

"Really? How many times can we suffer that plot?" Chakotay groaned.

"I'll get to work on it right away, not that we've got much to go on. There's the brief scans of the Leda before the explosion, and before it escaped the armada," B'Elanna said as she turned to leave. She groaned when Annika followed her. "No, no, god no." Annika kept following her anyway.

"Is it possible that the Leda fell through a spatial anomaly during its escape, like Voyager did when we got the haunted Deck Thirteen?" Tom questioned.

Harry shook his head, "definitely not. The space we were flying through was clear. I don't remember anything of the sort over the last few months."

"We didn't detect any portals anyway," Chakotay added on.

Tom wasn't buying it, "then where was the power going?"

#### **Deck Four:**

Daniel was barely listening as Craig followed him down the corridor, talking angrily at him. He had one thing to do and he didn't want to be slowed down.

"Are you listening to me?" Craig demanded. "You said the spell drained power, the Leda's power drain destroyed it. How are you not getting this?"

Daniel stopped dead in his tracks, Craig darted around him to avoid a collision. Daniel turned to face where he was before, but had to change direction as he had overtook him. "The power drain was minimal and it definitely wouldn't have gone back, unless it didn't work. It should have went to the target."

"So you're saying it failed, and three people are dead cos of us?" Craig muttered.

Daniel shook his head, "you're the one not listening. We saw the spell leave, after the warp core breach started. It wasn't us!"

"You don't know that for certain. You didn't know about the spell a few days ago," Craig snapped.

Daniel smiled, "then let's find out. She's in here." He pointed at a door just a tiny bit ahead of him. He didn't waste anymore time, his fist knocked at the door rapidly. Craig stood well back, his chest heaved and his heart thumped louder than Daniel's fist.

"There's a door chime," he mumbled.

Daniel waved off his comment just as the doors opened. Ylara appeared at the door, her face full of confusion. Daniel inhaled sharply as he thought about how he should speak to her without being too direct. Craig still hung back, barely looking in her direction.

"What?" she asked.

"Um, are you okay?" was all Daniel could think of.

"I was," Ylara muttered, her eyebrow raised pretty high. Her attention went to Craig then back again.

"Was?" Daniel's attention was piqued. "You mean something just happened?"

Ylara only managed to blink a few times, her stare was blank. Eventually she answered, "yeah, you showed up and started talking like this." Craig shook his head in the background, rolling his eyes as well. "What's going on?"

Daniel looked confused as well now. "Didn't anything happen during the battle and escape, to you I mean?"

"No," Ylara scoffed. "Answer mine."

Daniel didn't, he just turned around and stomped off, muttering under his breath. Ylara looked at Craig for one instead, he stepped a bit closer with a guilty look on his face.

"I'm sorry," he said quietly.

Ylara was even more confused than before. "For what?"

Craig once again found that he couldn't look her in the eye. He felt that he should give her an answer at least, considering his failed attempt on her life. All he could say was, "everything."

Ylara didn't know what to say to that, it didn't matter though. Craig walked away, the weight on his shoulders started to crush him again.

Harry stared at the stars for what felt like hours. Only they weren't real, they were apart of the twisted map B'Elanna had created in Astrometrics. Real or not, they couldn't make him feel better.

"Chasing ghosts?" a voice behind him startled him.

Harry glanced back to see the culprit, "in a manner of speaking."

"Sorry, I'll be quick," James said as he approached the consoles. Harry side stepped once to let him through. "B'Elanna asked me to have a look at the damage on the planets."

"Why you?" Harry questioned.

"It's just a theory everyone has," James responded. His finger pointed towards the star chart, "can I?" Harry nodded grimly. James pressed a few commands in and the chart disappeared. It was soon replaced by an aerial view of a planet. Harry slowly turned back to look as well. "Computer highlight the damage." The screen zoomed into some countryside, then highlighted some small buildings dotted around.

"That doesn't look like a normal target an attacking ship would go for," Harry said.

"No," James agreed. He pressed one more command, making the screen zoom in even closer. The buildings they could see looked like rural cottages, the highlighted ones were covered, some partially crushed by metal debris. Both men looked for the same thing, anything in the area that looked like it was made from the same material. "Well whatever was destroyed in the attack is long gone."

"Even so there should be more debris than this, scorch marks, the building's foundations, a crater in its place," Harry muttered.

"We've seen this before," James said.

Harry felt like kicking himself, he thought he should have gotten it before James did. "Game Sphere tower. It's destroyed and it disappears like it was never there. Only why is the debris still there?"

"There was some left over from the Shurouva towers as well. Maybe during the opening attacks, they broke apart. When the towers went, they were no longer apart of it to disappear," James said. He wasn't really convinced of what he was saying.

"There would be a lot more than this," Harry also wasn't convinced.

James frowned as a thought occurred to him. "This is the first attack, they were the ones that said their fleet was destroyed. This could be what's left."

"Okay if the Enterprise really is on a Sphere Tower destroying mission, why attack innocent ships? They didn't fire on the second guys," Harry questioned.

"I don't know. The natives shouldn't have been so eager to defend these things anyway," James said.

"Maybe they didn't," Harry said thoughtfully. A small smile began to form on his face. "These towers are built by Soft's posing as aliens, maybe..."

James nodded, "the Soft were manning the fleet."

Harry didn't mind that he finished his sentence, helping to solve a mystery made him forget the loss of his ship for a few seconds. "Right and the poor aliens just think they were attacked by the big bad Humans."

"No doubt the Softmicron will build another few towers," James said grimly. "I doubt they sent their entire invasion force onto the defending ships."

Harry stared at the screen, feeling oddly determined. "We have to stop the Enterprise." James turned his head towards him. "If we don't, nobody will want our help and the Softmicron wins."

"I don't know," James sighed. "We still don't know how it survived its own core breach. Or where its been between then and it going into Death Corridor. Who's running it and how did they figure the sphere thing out?"

Harry's face and his determination fell, he wasn't sure how to answer any of those questions.

"It was probably you panicking and grabbing the cauldron before it finished," Daniel ranted as he stomped into his quarters.

Craig quickly followed him in before the door shut him out. "You call that little thing a cauldron. I've seen egg cups bigger than that."

Daniel swung around, his anger had made his face extremely red. "That's the part you focus on!"

"Fine, let's focus on the red cloud of warp core breach," Craig said. "The spell failed and almost killed us, and you're angry at me?"

"It didn't try to kill us, god! The battle did that," Daniel snarled.

Craig's head shook, "you're wrong. As soon as that cloud appeared, I knew something would go horribly wrong. What we were doing was wrong, and that was the message."

"You're a coward," Daniel spat. "Always have been, always will be." Craig kept his tongue for the moment, he turned to pace back and forth. "Face it, if the warp core breach was caused by the spell it's on your head, not mine."

Craig swung around to face him once again, his eyes wide with fury. "Me? It was your spell. You felt the damage that was being done to the ship and you didn't stop..."

"You tried to stop it," Daniel butted in.



"You said it yourself, the spell left the ship after the damage was done. My interference, which was only a try, did nothing," Craig said, his voice trembling with anger. "You killed those three people, and you could have killed everyone on the Leda. Lena would never forgive you for that, and you know it."

Daniel chuckled, but it wasn't because he was amused. "What does it matter anymore? She's dead. The spell failed, the book's gone, you've talked a Q out of it. What now, huh? Ylara lives to be an old woman while Lena's soul rots? How is that fair?"

"It's not fair," Craig agreed with only that part. "Both Ylara and Lena deserve the chance to live, but only one can. It's not up to us to choose that. I tried to tell you that. But you, you'd rather play god."

"You know, I think fate's paying a cruel trick on us. That vampire she told me about was so close to killing her, and he didn't. Somebody should. Would have saved us all this grief," Daniel muttered. He didn't see it coming this time so he couldn't stop it, Craig's fist flew into his face. It was hard enough to knock him back a little, he felt a little blood dribble from his nose.

"You're supposed to be a watcher, guardian and or teacher of the Slayer. All you've ever done is kill people and ruin the Slayers lives. Who are you to talk about grief!" Craig screamed at him.

Daniel wiped the blood from his nose, smiling slightly. "Are we back on this? I told you, I'm not him."

"You only lost your memory. You're the same guy, only cos you've forgotten you're repeating the same crimes," Craig said.

"Oh I see what this is," Daniel groaned and rolled his eyes. "You don't care who's inhabiting Lena, not really. As long as her body's around." He raised his hand just in case, to block another hit. "You never loved Lena, you lusted for her. What's wrong, are you liking the idea of the *bad girl* more?"

"No," Craig said with certainty. "I'm just a Human being, I have a soul, a conscience. Something you'll never have. What we did today, I'll have to live with it every day. But you, you'll have forgotten it by tomorrow. I won't be judged by a heartless bastard like you." He turned to leave but stopped at the door, "you try anything else, I'll kill you myself."

He heard Daniel laugh behind him, but he couldn't tell if he was faking it or not. "You mean you'll get your ex best friend slash Slayer to do it. You'll tell on me and he'll come for me. Put the big boy boots back, kid, they don't fit you."

"Your material's getting old Dan, just like you. I'd watch your back if I were you," Craig said as he walked through the doors. They shut behind him.

The door chimed. Ylara stared at the door for a minute or two, in the meantime the door chimed a few more times.

"Go away Damien!" she decided to yell at it.

For a few seconds it was quiet, she figured he got sick and left. The doors opened, killing that thought. Damien waltzed in like he owned the place, a smug smile spread across his face.

"I've figured it out," he said.

Ylara rolled her eyes, "yes I have too. It's called a door."

"Hardly," Damien scoffed.

"Yes it is," Ylara muttered.

Damien laughed but he was faking it. "I'm sure it stumped you, old lady. No, I mean I get why you won't kill that Barbie for me. You're scared that you can't."

Ylara stared in his direction, but not directly at him. She felt he wasn't worth getting annoyed with. "You still haven't cleaned my bathroom, you know."

Damien walked towards her with folded arms, he was getting annoyed instead of her. "Oh come on! Ever since that Mess Hall incident our spats are lifeless and boring. Where's the hate? Where's the violence?"

"Why would I be scared of a sparkling vampire that's biggest weapon is how annoying she is?" Ylara asked.

Damien's smile soon came back, "oh you did hear that, did you?" Ylara's eyebrow raised, he sensed a tiny bit of frustration in it. "Well Kevin's assassin didn't have to be a big bad, did he? I'm guessing you slipped up or ran like you said, but he wasn't really all that. It doesn't make you look bad to say he was a big badass vamp, huh?"

"I see, so cos I couldn't handle that I can't handle the giant chest?" Ylara muttered.

"Naturally. I figured I'd tell you not to worry Lena's little head over it, I'll ask big bro to take care of it," Damien said. He bent over to give her a close up wink, "I won't tell him I came to you at all."

A small smile appeared on Ylara's face, her hand lunged for his very close throat. He seemed to know she'd do that so he jumped back.

"There's my girl," he cackled. "I thought you had gone all pathetic and girly."

"Your girl? I thought that was Annika," Ylara said. Damien shuddered briefly. "If you want me to kill her, you're going have to at least remember you still owe me chores."

"Chores, what chores?" Damien laughed.

"Okay, enjoy having her forcing you into kisses, smelling your underwear and maybe drugging you," Ylara smiled.

Damien's face turned extremely pale, but with a hint of green as well. "Smelling is next?" he squeaked. Ylara couldn't help but giggle at that. "Bathroom huh?"

"Please," Ylara smiled nicely.

Damien pulled numerous faces as he headed for the bathroom, he stopped just as the doors opened. "Wait, how do I know that you still won't kill her after I've done this?"

"Yeah," Ylara sighed. "That was my evil plan all along, a clean bathtub." The door chimed again. This time Ylara answered immediately, "come in." The doors opened and James stepped through them.

"Sure, answer to him," Damien groaned.

Ylara's rolled her eyes, "jealousy's an ugly thing."

James passed Damien a bemused stare as the ex villain turned back to face the bathroom. "You two friends again?" he smirked.

Damien scoffed, forcing Ylara's head to turn back his way. "Not that I care, but I think cleaning with just your hands will take a lot longer."

"How would you know, your only cleaning utensil was a rock," Damien argued back as he stomped over to a replicator.

"That's a yes," James said.

Ylara smiled between the two as she climbed to her feet, "he likes the abuse. It's a bit creepy."

James pulled a disgusted face, "likes it how?"

Damien scoffed even louder than before, "ha! You wish Slayer boy." A few cleaning materials appeared in the replicator.

"Creepy or not, he's good entertainment," Ylara said.

"Yeah," James agreed as Damien passed by him, carrying the supplies. He only had to slap his arm to make him drop them. He naturally got a few swear words and other muttering as he knelt down to pick them up. "There was something you wanted to talk about?"

Ylara nodded, "yes, it's something I should have told you before. My pride got in the way and..."

"Eew," Damien groaned, quickly standing up. "Anyone but him, gross." James grabbed his arm this time. "All right, the dad would be creepier. Anyone but them two."

Ylara stared at the man blankly, "I'm not confessing love for him, you idiot."

"Ah, good!" Damien laughed, glancing between the two. He noticed James smirking at him. "Yeah congrats, you were born with strength. What do you want, a medal? I don't sign autographs anymore."

James glanced briefly at Ylara who was giggling to herself, then back at him. He leaned in a bit closer. "You like her?" he whispered.

Damien laughed in his face but in a nervous way. "Please! The bitch has me cleaning her bathroom. Now will you back off, I already have one freak trying to kiss me."

James shoved him away, once again making him drop the supplies. "So, what is it you wanted to tell me?"

"Wait till I get some rabbits, and a ship. I'll sort him," Damien grumbled as he collected the supplies.

That didn't help Ylara's giggles, she tried to calm them down. "It's about the invasion on Voyager." She cleared her throat, that seemed to help for now. "You probably won't believe me but I ran into a strong vampire. Kevin died trying to protect me from him."

"Ran from," Damien muttered.

Ylara rolled her eyes, "yeah."

"This was what you wanted to talk to Wesley about," James nodded.

"Yes," Ylara nodded. "I believe it was Frenit." She was surprised when he wasn't, she frowned in confusion. "Um, I know you don't believe me but..."

"I believe you," James mumbled. "I ran into him too."

Damien looked up hopefully, "ran from? Wow and I thought you were a pro for dying."

"But you killed him, how is it possible?" Ylara asked.

James shook his head, "I didn't. Apparently I killed some shapeshifter instead, a lookalike." Damien stared at him and then Ylara, he seemed to be annoyed with what he said.

"Oh," Ylara sighed. "What happened with you?"

"It was in the tower. I just got away..." James said, glancing briefly at Damien. "Ran from him. I did some damage to him first, so it's a start."

"So he was in the tower when it exploded? Can a vampire survive that?" Ylara asked.

James shrugged his shoulders, "I don't know, normally I'd say no but this is no ordinary vampire. He hinted at why he was stronger than normal, but I don't know whether to believe him or..."

"Hold on!" Damien snapped as he climbed to his feet. The pair glanced at him. "A Softie changes into said vamp, he got into a fight with you, which probably wouldn't be too hard as he isn't the real deal. You killed him and didn't think, huh, when he didn't turn to dust and instead reverted back to his original form."

Ylara shook her head, she didn't understand what he was saying. James did though. "I don't think it was a normal run of a mill Softmicron shapeshifter."

"Classic idiot syndrome," Damien scoffed. "I shouldn't expect everybody to be a genius, but some common sense would be nice."

"The Soft's appeared to be creating super strong people, in the process their sense of self or souls are taken. It's not a long shot to say that they can make copies of people a lot more accurately and beef them up instead," James said.

Ylara nodded lightly, "and make their own vampires. Didn't you or another Slayer tell me that Masters were created from a Game Cube long ago? Something about memory loss."

"Yeah I never got that story. Three Soft's pose as vampires in a game, the game corrupts, and when they return to the real world they think they are vamps," James said. He smiled at her, "I never thought of that before, nice one."

Damien glanced between them again, they looked at him in return. "Was that common sense enough for you?" she asked.

"Please, that was a load of gibberish," Damien groaned. He headed for the bathroom with what supplies he had.

"Vampires were around in my time so I wonder why they bothered?" Ylara questioned.

"They never seemed to have an agenda, they just like to kill people," James replied. "Though the Equinox gave them one against us."

"Yes cos they had no reason to attack Humans before that. You idiots have no idea what you're talking about," Damien grumbled from the bathroom door.

James smiled apologetically in his direction, though it was obviously fake. "I suppose full credit goes to the lunatic who tried to enslave some first." Damien didn't notice and he smiled proudly. "Tell me what did you learn, since you're so all knowing about the Softmicron?"

Damien's smile fell off, "why should I tell you? You're the enemy."

"Nothing, thought so," James smiled.

"Oh please. You don't know anything either. All of this is guess work with no real proof," Damien said. "Typical blond."

"So you admit you don't know anything about them?" James said.

Damien shook his head rapidly. "When I said either, I meant her. Obviously."

James' eyes widened briefly to mock him, "obviously!"

"So, while I get busy on this stupid bathroom, you'll kill the other annoying blond bimbo, right?" Damien grumbled, turning his head back to Ylara. He frowned as she wasn't paying attention to him, her attention seemed to be distant. "Right?"

"You need help to kill Annika? That girl can kill herself surely, not that it'll be permanent," James scoffed. He noticed Damien's expression just as he walked away from the bathroom to stand almost side by side with him. "What?" James turned his head back to Ylara.

Ylara's hand was on her chest now, she breathed in deeply. She managed to make eye contact with them briefly. "I don't feel very well," she shook her head. Her legs suddenly buckled, both men rushed forward but James got there first to catch her as she fell. Her whole body started to jerk violently. He tried to hold her still as he knelt down, but it was too much even for him.

Damien was by her side now, he even looked worried. His hand went for a commbadge, "Damien to Transporter Room, you'd better beam Ylara to Sickbay. Now."

"Really?" a surprised voice said.

"Really!" James snapped at them.

"Er, yes sir!"

Damien leaned forward to try to help her as well, but it was no use. He looked up at James, he didn't even bother trying to hide his concern to do so. "What the hell's wrong with her, she was fine."

James shook his head. "I don't know," he stuttered. His eyes went down to meet hers, he was shocked to see that she was still awake during this ordeal. A lone tear escaped her left eye, her face frozen in shock.

All she could see were the blurry outlines of the two. Even that started to fade until everything was black.

"Ylara!" a voice pierced the darkness.

**THE END**