

Episode 5.22

Ruins

It was a habit now. Ever since he had graduated he would brew a warm cup of Coynek, sit himself down in his favourite chair, open up his journal and his mind would go blank. Then he would look outside into the garden through the large bay window, the sentences would flow out of him.

Today though it was his first day in a new job and office. The chair was still solid from never being used, he hadn't even found a perfect spot for it yet.

He had found himself staring at the only window, so close that his warm drink was leaving a cloud of steam on it. There he saw it. A lone tree standing in the grounds outside. It was close enough to see a bird attending its nest. Tall enough that he could not see the top of it. His office sat on the fourteenth floor so he knew it must have been around for a long time to have grown that tall.

He thought he had finally found his spot.

Once settled his pen touched the paper, his eyes focused on the tree, words began pouring out.

Sixteenth Day, Rotation 5090. I'm more than a little nervous, however my excitement dwarfs it. It is a great honour to be accepted into a wonderful project such as this one. No longer will we harm our beautiful world by squandering its resources. I've spent my entire career fighting bureaucrats to listen to my ideas for renewable energy sources. I feel like here I will finally be able to make a difference to the planet I love.

The bird in the nest started to sing. It brought a smile to his face. His writing quickly filled a page, then another.

Thirtieth Day, Rotation 5090. The sky is empty, the star shines brightly. A light breeze has pushed a lone blue leaf from its branch. It settles on the window pane beside me. They told us the summer would be short this year. As if we'd need reminding that the Axial Variant was coming. I don't mind, I'm an indoor's man anyway. Those years the summer ends by the twenty fifth day, yet the temperatures keep rising and sky water doesn't come. I told them we're killing our planet, there's the proof. At least here I can do something about it.

Forty Seventh Day, Rotation 5090. The last leaf from the tree has fallen, and yet the star still shines strongly. I can't even remember the last time water fell. The magnificent tree no longer houses any leaves or animal life, but it still stands strong and healthy. It has probably seen plenty of droughts in its long life. Winter approaches anyway. I'm sure that despite the odd temperatures that it instinctively knows.

We have finally gotten some positive results from our second generator test. We should be able to officially activate it in a few days. We did have some trouble with the influx capacitor, I'm working on a way to re-direct the energy so we can bypass it all together. I believe it will save a lot of time and energy. I have scheduled in further tests. Tomorrow I will suggest it if all goes well.

Forty Eighth Day, Rotation 5090.

Today the view outside wasn't calming him down. It didn't help that it looked the same as every other day. The tree stood baking under the star's light, it shone inside his office making it stuffy and

uncomfortably hot. He was angry but he had to write something. His pen hit the paper, almost scratching the table in the process.

I don't mind rejection, in fact as a scientist I've grown to expect it. Every good scientist knows that you lose more than you win, that's how you grow and learn. However I know I'm right. The influx capacitor is drawing in more energy than we can recycle back. I have a fix for it which I tested all night and got my team members to back me up on. Yet they're still going ahead with the second generator activation.

I joined this project to protect my world from greedy power factories, not to become a part of one. If this goes online the way it is, we'll be no better than them.

Sixtieth Day, Rotation 5090. I hate having to waste electricity by using the artificial lights during the day. It is wasteful. However the sky is tainted by dark grey clouds that haven't seemed to move for days. As always I've looked outside to the ancient tree as my muse, my distraction from everything else. It appears I'm not the only one. Many co-workers were more than happy to tell me of its history.

This station has been built on a controversial land. Hundreds of rotations ago the tree had been the lone survivor of a horrific mining accident. A one so destructive the land had collapsed into the pits. The tree clung to life with little effort. It became a symbol of our strength and endurance.

And yet the higher ups thought it was the best place to build this power station. Not only is it on a mass grave but a protected historical site.

I find myself staring at it again. When I first arrived it was thriving; covered from the top to its roots in brilliant leaves and flowers. Now it is but a shell. No longer did it stand tall and firmly, a testament to its history. Branches have broken from it, and not from strong winds or heavy water. The weather has been strangely calm for a while now. It feels to me like the tree has lost the will to live.

A scoff escaped from his lips. Before long there will be nothing left of it. It was an extremely mild winter, yet it looks frailer than a young tree in its first storm. Stop it. He said that out loud as well, his hand gripped the pen tightly.

Paranoia. I'm merely projecting my fears over the project onto this tree. Spring will come and it will thrive once more, bringing a new generation of creatures to it.

I have submitted my idea for a new generator design. This will be for the final phase of the power station, and hopefully will make up for that second generator's flawed design. I asked for the specifications for the first generator but I was turned down. I was hired for my expertise in power distribution in a clean, safe and manageable way. But it feels like every suggestion I make is laughable to them. My team feels it as well. Why are we here? I feel like I'm asking that every day.

Eighty Ninth Day, Rotation 5090. On the way into work today I stopped by the tree, I couldn't help but notice the thick roots protruding out of the ground. It gave me a sense of foreboding. Perhaps winter bothered me more than I cared to admit. Management have told us that they are pleased with the power plant and wish to build more like it on every continent. A few months ago I would have welcomed it, now... I'm not so sure.

116th Day, Rotation 5090. The tree that has stood for hundreds of years, that survived a land slide so many generations ago, now lies broken in the middle of the grounds. The symbol of strength has withered in a mild and dry winter. The shining example of our endurance broken in half from its own frail weight. It is fortunate that nobody was injured but a part of me died when I saw it. How could I not have seen this coming? I have started to notice other trees starting to wither and die as well, even ones that normally thrived in the winter months. What is happening?

He looked towards the window once more. The sight no longer inspired him to write, it darkened his soul. Whenever he went back to writing his journal he'd notice that hours had passed him by. He stared at the sky, where one cloud shaped like his childhood pet hovered. It made him smile the first time he saw it, but that was ten days ago. The entire sky looked the same.

I cannot remember the last time I felt the wind at my neck. In fact the last time I went for a walk I had to sit down to collect my breath. Now that the new station is under way I have time to research why. Nothing is right about this, nothing.

122nd Day, Rotation 5090. I don't know how this will come out as my hand is shaking, no my whole body trembles as I write this. My route to work was blocked off by safety inspectors. I decided to go down Fifth Street as it is mostly down hill, quicker than the country path I used to frequent as a boy. Only it seemed steeper than I remember it. The pathway was cracked, uneven. Dangerous even. I wasn't alone, others were turning around at the sight of it. In the end I chose the scenic route, even though I knew it would double my journey time. I wish I had took my chances with the hill. What lay ahead of me was a wasteland. Trees were broken and fallen, the grass had turned into an ash yellow as it lay defeated by whatever was causing this strange weather. The path littered by pot holes. Ones so big I had to jump over them.

Once I did manage to get here what I had seen had sullied my mind. I couldn't help notice that even the well maintained power station was showing the strain as well. I started to notice that every step I made sounded hollow as if nothing was under the path at my feet.

I look out the window now and all I see is nothing. I feel it too. Even the distant tower is shrouded in a thick, motionless cloud.

127th Day, Rotation... it doesn't matter. The news reports are in an uproar, every few minutes there's a new incident to report on. Paths, roads are collapsing. Buildings are beginning to crumble at their foundations. Nobody knows what's causing it. I believe I do. Our planet... she's giving up. We've violated her, taken her very soul. This is to blame. I am to blame. I fear

The ground beneath him trembled violently enough to throw him to the floor, and his desk on top of him. The journal he wrote in lay beside his head. The building's alarm system was blaring while a computer voice told everyone to evacuate. The desk was light enough to push from him but he didn't move, not right away. He wasn't hurt, only his guilt weighed him down.

His head once again turned to the window. What used to give him peace made his chest tighten. He could just make out the tips of the buildings in the distance. Seconds later the building rumbled again but not as viciously. One of the tips had vanished. A new thick cloud had taken its place, overwhelming the rest of the skyline. This one wasn't a natural cloud though. His eyes shut, he could hear the screams even from here.

He should be evacuating, but his hand reached over to grab his journal. The pen forced him to stretch a little. Once again the window had inspired his next passage.

I have to shut off the generators. I must. People are dying. I only write this so if anyone finds us they will know what happened here. I thought we were saving the planet, saving it from ourselves. Only we were deluded, tricked into destroying it. Our own greed drained the life from this world and I sat there and watched it happen. The planet I love so much... forgive me.

The journal was left open where he left it, on the cold metal floor. The ground continued to rumble mercilessly non stop for a long time. Finally it stopped. It no longer lay there. Instead it hovered, untouched, surrounded by a vast debris of rocks floating in the sea of space.

The USS Voyager brushed by, its shields carefully pushed smaller debris away from its path. It was soon followed by the Enterprise. A nearby star shined brightly on the two vessels.

"Another one," Tom said grimly.

For a few minutes the Bridge was quiet, with the exception of the computers normal noises. Danny interrupted it with a melancholy sigh, it was loud enough for everyone to stare towards the Science station where she sat. "Sensors are picking up a vast quantity of metal and plant life amongst the asteroids," she said afterwards. "Also picking up some biological matter."

"It is like the last one, eery," Jodie commented.

"I was hoping it wasn't. I don't like this at all," Tom said.

The viewscreen switched to show the Enterprise bridge, and the few people manning it. One of them was Harry, he was hovering over the old Opps station and tapping it every now and then. A few people sniggered quietly as the person actually manning it pulled a face and polished wherever he touched afterwards.

"If it's anything like the last one..." he said.

Tom nodded, "the Softmicron may not be too far away. We'll stay on our toes." He turned to look towards Tactical. He wasn't used to not seeing Jessie there, who was there now was also taking some getting used to. "Any ships in the area?"

Lena shook her head, her attention was fixed on the Tactical station. "No, just us."

"Am I missing something here?" Nathan asked warily.

Chakotay made his presence known by walking onto the screen. Harry quickly looked behind him to check if he was stealing his seat. Satisfied he wasn't he turned back to catch the Opps station being polished again.

"Not long after discovering an asteroid field just like this, filled with unnatural debris, the Softmicron decided to use us as target practice," Chakotay said.

Lena shuddered quite a lot, Chakotay noticed that and thought he should stay out of sight while she was there. He did so. Tom and Jodie both noticed it in the corner of their eyes. "What's the matter?" Tom asked.

"This place, it creeps me out," Lena answered quietly.

Harry sighed, "yeah. It definitely gives me that feeling of walking in a graveyard at night."

"That's exactly what it is," Danny mumbled.

"We don't know that for certain. Metal, plant life, heck any kind of life signatures are perfectly normal for asteroids," Tom said.

"Not to this scale, Tom. The last time we thought it was debris from a destroyed ship," Harry said after another tap. He groaned as that was polished too. "Triah, have you seen the state of the bloody ship? One finger print isn't going to make any difference."

Triah huffed, "don't remind me."

Harry leaned forward to press his hand on the station, then dragged it across. Triah gasped in horror. "Anyway, I think there's more to it than that. We didn't know then about the Game Sphere and its planet draining towers."

"He's right. I'm picking up smaller objects, stuff you wouldn't find naturally occurring in an asteroid field," Danny said.

Tom reluctantly walked over to see what she meant, even though he had a good idea.

"What happens to a planet once the towers have finished draining the life from them?" Nathan asked, hoping that he would get a different answer than what he was thinking.

"Well, no planet's the same but in theory that without the sufficient..." Harry began to answer.

Lena stared blankly at the sensors displayed on the station before her. "I know this. I did." The people who heard her mumble those words noticed a little anger in them. Tom looked at her with concern.

Harry was thrown off a little, but he continued. "Simply, some planets would be unable to support new life. No plant life, no water, no atmosphere; they'd become barren wastelands. Others could eventually lose core stability, and then..."

"Turn into asteroid fields?" Nathan finished for him.

Harry nodded, "that's one way to put it, yes."

"Or not. Until we find evidence to the contrary, these objects belonged to a ship that met its end here," Tom said quickly and command like. "Planets drained by Game Spheres wither and die, that's it. Right Lena?"

Lena's head jerked up, "uh..."

"That's it? We're talking about millions, perhaps billions of people dying a slow death by oxygen deprivation, dehydration and/or starvation. Though you're right, what happens to the planet after everything is dead is far more traumatising," Chakotay said off screen.

Tom faked a smile towards the viewscreen, "and this is why I will always play scissors in these important crew making decisions."

"The day I pick something other than paper, you'll change your hand," Harry muttered bitterly.

Chakotay groaned, "your other first officer choice is infamous for also debunking your stupidity with sarcasm. What's the difference?"

"One's hotter?" Danny butted in.

Tom pulled a disgusted face at her, "oh how well you know me." Danny gave him a wink. "The difference is my other choice doesn't hang out on the Bridge. I can breathe easy."

Lena glanced at everyone that had been talking with distaste. "We've gone from billions of people dying with their planet to rock, paper, scissors?"

Tom cringed slightly, and he wasn't the only one.

"Well we always were random. I guess we can't get away with that now with issues like this," Harry said.

"There's no planet. For all we know this stuff is from an accident with another starship," Tom protested.

Nathan wiped away nothing from his forehead, "phew, it could be only a few hundred people dead instead. Two out of three, winner takes all?"

"Or it could come from a ship throwing out its rubbish, we don't know so let's not jump to horrible conclusions," Tom grumbled while glaring into his back. "We have enough things going on without adding more things to worry about with no proof of it."

Deck Nine:

The atmosphere of the room was freezing as Craig entered it. It stopped him in his tracks. Nobody seemed to have noticed him arrive so he decided to stay in front of the door. It was strangely quiet, and it felt like it had been for a while.

One of the men standing behind the forcefield crossed his arms defiantly. His face tightened. It made James on the other side of the field roll his eyes impatiently.

The three men that Craig could make out all had similar expressions on their faces. There was a fourth man lurking behind two of them. He stepped forward much to the others' annoyance. Unlike them he looked a little nervous. Even with his back on him, Craig noticed James' shoulders tense once he did.

"You?" he said, breaking that cold silence.

The man laughed meekly. "Yeah."

"Yeah? That's all you've got to say?" James said as his temper built up further.

"Nope. Thanks for not beating me up for once. Makes a change," the man said, prompting further glares from the other men.

Craig was way too curious to remain on the side lines. He piped up, "you know him?"

James glanced back at him, for some reason his shoulders relaxed a little. "Unfortunately," he sighed.

"We're even now, right?" the man stuttered. The others turned on him differently. One shoved, another gave him a colder stare and the third muttered a few choice swearwords in his direction. "Come on guys. We're all that's left, what's the point in keeping up this silly act?"

"Even? Everything I did to you was in retaliation for you being a bullying cun..." James grumbled.

"I'm afraid you're getting a little mixed up there, freak," the arms folded man said.

James just rolled his eyes and turned his back on the quartet behind the forcefield. "The idiot used to go to my school. He spent most of his time being one of those slimy little boys who thought they were god's gift to women. What I don't get is..." He glanced over his shoulder, "why join a gang that wants to kill the girl he couldn't get." He grew annoyed with himself, "I just answered my own question."

"You have? When a girl turned me down, I'd just drown my sorrows in the first drink I could think of," Craig said meekly. His head dipped, "or drive her to suic..."

"Craig," James warned him but in a quiet voice. "No you didn't."

Craig's arms folded protectively. He noticed the vocal man was mouthing off behind James, but silently. He pointed at him briefly.

James turned back around to see it for himself. He quickly stopped. "Problem?"

"Well yeah. It isn't a gang, it's a..." the man protested. He got a slap across the back of his head for saying it. "I didn't know it was Jessie, okay."

"Oh, then it's okay. You're free to go," James said. Of course the man fell for it for five seconds, his face lit up. "Are you kidding me?"

The man huffed as loudly as he could. "Well you were obsessed with that woman. I wouldn't be surprised."

"If you didn't know the victim was Jessie, why did you join them?" Craig asked.

James shook his head. "He knew. Jessie wasn't their only target after all. It wouldn't be the first time you organised or joined a team to get at me, huh Ricky?"

"Ricky was the short one with the bad goatee," the man muttered. "I'm Charlie."

James shrugged casually, "sorry, all you assholes looked alike to me. You certainly did after I was done with you anyway."

Craig tried not to laugh, but the other men weren't impressed with that line at all. It annoyed another one to speak up, "that's just it. You think you're above us. We're all just common muck to you!"

"I wasn't talking about you. I was talking about Charles and the other twats who thought it was funny to pick on a girl just because she wouldn't date them," James said. "Unless, there's something about your motive you want to tell me."

"Charlie, not Charles. I knew you hadn't forgotten my name, you violent jackass," Charlie grumbled to himself.

The man who recently spoke up smirked towards James. "You know it already. You're a stain on Humanity. Hurry up and die already."

To his annoyance the comment didn't even faze James. "Did you come up with that on your own, or did Matty promise to let you play with his friends if you said it to me?"

"Ugh, he always said crap like this even as a kid. If he wasn't such a fre..." Charlie snapped. The one who spoke earlier pushed one his hands rudely into his face, pushing him backwards a bit.

"Show some respect. His name was Matteo. He believed in a better future and you likely killed him," he snarled. "That's why he isn't here, am I right?"

James looked at everyone in the brig, his eyebrow raised slightly, then back at him. "He's not the only one either. You remember, don't you? Your precious leader tore the room apart with all of you in it."

"What?" Charlie stuttered, his eyes widened. This didn't surprise the other three, they stared blankly.

"Not only that. He killed ten people whose only crime was that they were near him," James said. Two of the men flinched, their eyes glazed over. Only one, the one who last spoke up remained stoic. "It's a little rich that I'm being called a stain on humanity by people who joined a gang planning to kill a pregnant woman, fronted by a madman who kills for shits and giggles..."

"Enough!" one of them snapped at him, his eyes were a little wide. "you're lying. The spell was an accident, and he wouldn't kill those people. As for *her*, she's..."

"Do not listen to him. He is trying to cause disruption between us. It's working. We agreed not to talk to the filth, didn't we?" the calmer man hissed. "We are not saying another word."

Craig stepped forward to stand at James' side. "Your leader turned Evil, they don't do accidents, he attacked you. Surely that casts some doubt on your cause?"

The stoic man looked at Charles, daring him not to say anything. He shrunk slightly before turning his back on everyone.

James waited for a few minutes, but the glares from the three of them were back. He rolled his eyes. "Fine, enjoy your one bed brig."

Craig turned his head to watch him leave, then glanced back at the men in the brig. "I don't suppose you'll tell me."

He got a few sniggers from the men in the group. The one who had made himself the new leader stepped as close as he could to the forcefield. "You? There's only one thing worse than dirt, and that's fools who cover themselves in it."

"Twice," another man chuckled.

The tone of their voices and their laughter sent a shiver down his spine. He didn't want to show it though. He stared back as sternly as he could before leaving as well. He wasn't surprised to see James waiting for him.

"I don't get it," he said.

James shook his head, "no, me neither. If they hate me, blame me for something then that's fine. But why Jessie, why those people on Deck Eleven? Heck, why his own team?"

"He was out of control for the last two," Craig said in a low voice.

"True, still doesn't explain Jessie," James said with a sigh at the end. "He went to a lot of trouble to steal Voyager's power, but he still attacked us in our quarters with a sword, recruited people to help him. Makes no sense to me."

"Yeah, if he was gonna just take the power anyway, why bother with the warlock wannabe club?" Craig wondered aloud.

James stared towards the door, his expression slowly turned into a frown. "Maybe he needed help from them to do it. I'm not sure."

"I was just guessing, but they were all warlocks in training?" Craig said, a little surprised.

"One said that he promised to share it with them. Nathan also said that the Matteo guy was recruiting men only," James said.

"Sounds to me like a warlock cult, no girls allowed," Craig said, he sounded a little disappointed. James picked up on that and looked at him, eyebrow raised. "I just thought that maybe they'd talk to fellow spell casters. We don't have any male ones, unless you count Daniel."

"No, and they hate Jessie. Are you suggesting we torture them with Annika? I'm all for it," James said.

Craig's whole body shuddered at the thought. "No, not yet anyway. All they're guilty of is being sheep, right? Do they deserve it?"

"Charlie does," James said lightly.

"We have one more witch. Maybe they'll talk to her," Craig said.

James looked confused, he tried to figure out who he was talking about before asking and embarrassing himself. He couldn't. "We do?"

"Yeah. An Enterprise crewmember," Craig nodded.

Enterprise

The Ready Room:

Harry lifted the big chair from the ground, quickly realising that it wasn't going to stand without some help. For now he carefully nudged a piece of debris underneath one of the legs.

The comm beeped. "*Paris to Kim. Good news.*"

Chakotay meanwhile knelt down to brush down another chair, only to find his hands covered in black before he had even touched it. "Maybe we should have let Triah in here after all."

Harry let out a whiny sigh. "Yeah." He tapped his commbadge quickly, "Kim here, what is it?"

"There was a communication directed to the Leda, naturally it came to us instead."

"That's not good news, Tom. That's just cold," Chakotay had to laugh.

"I wasn't done. Whoever's calling is asking for you. I wouldn't keep her waiting."

Harry's face lit up, "oh? Patch it through."

"Where?" Chakotay asked as he looked around.

Harry did as well, his shoulders fell. "Damn." Quick as a flash he disappeared out of the Ready Room. Chakotay assumed he wasn't coming back and walked over to tend to the chair he left. He was wrong. His first clue was the sound of him grunting and something dragging along the floor.

"Couldn't you just go to your quarters?" Chakotay groaned into his hand.

The door opened, allowing those noises to be a lot louder. Chakotay could now see what he was doing too. With his back facing him he could just make out the edges of the Captain's chair being dragged along the floor. He could also hear Triah complaining about it.

"You're scratching the carpet!" she screeched.

"It's already scratched, and burned!" Harry shouted back. When he was half way through the door when he was stopped by something catching on it. He quickly realised the chair was too wide to get through. Chakotay could only shake his head as he started to try and rotate it around so it could.

"Seriously. Nobody cares Harry, just use the damn viewscreen," he said.

Harry pulled, then moved it again, he gave it one final tug. "You know." He tried to catch his breath. "I think I'll just take the call on the bridge." Chakotay rolled his eyes while Harry tried to push the chair back, only it was stuck. "Oh come on!" he cried.

"Yes, please use the viewscreen," Tom's voice sniggered.

Harry's face turned very red. "Oh he's still on?" Instead he decided to climb over the chair to get out, leaving Chakotay trapped unless he did the same. "Patch it through to the Bridge."

"I meant put your bridge on our viewscreen, but whatever."

Harry groaned, he gestured to Triah to go back to opps. She was too busy trying to scrub the carpet. "Fine, I'll do it." He hurried over instead.

The viewscreen flickered on to show nothing but a dark room. Triah gasped, everyone stupidly assumed it was an overreaction to nobody being on the screen.

"This is Harry. Is anyone there?" Harry stuttered.

"Harry?" a familiar voice whispered from the screen. There was some movement in the darkness. Whatever was being used to film it shook a few times, then was turned to one side. Just as it settled on a shadowed face Triah stood in the way, duster on hand.

"No, Triah... what are you doing?" Harry groaned as he moved side to side to see by her.

Triah ignored him and started to wipe the screen down. All anyone heard from her was random muttering, "smudge... missed it."

"You can clean it later. Move!" Harry snapped.

Triah swung around with a shocked look on her face. "Why?" She glanced briefly at the screen again, seemingly only just noticing there was a person on the screen. Thankfully she moved to one side and started polishing there instead.

"Finally," Harry grumbled. "Tira, what's going on?"

The figure moved closer to the screen, he could make out her familiar face a lot better. "Are you on your way back here?" she asked.

"We are yes, for the most part," Harry answered as he looked around the battered bridge he was in.

"Don't," Tira said bluntly.

Harry was confused and a little hurt by the sudden demand. "Why?"

He heard a sigh, then some shuffling around. Her voice became a lot more hushed. "I don't know how secure this channel is. I had to piggyback it through one of our transport ships. I've worked with the Captain before, I can trust him."

The few people on the bridge felt a little uneasy, even Triah had stopped her manic polishing to listen to this.

"Don't come back, Harry," Tira repeated.

Harry clambered out of the seat to get a bit closer to the viewscreen. "If you're in trouble..."

"Your bridge looks different, it looks like it went through a lot," Tira said.

"Uh, it did go through a lot yeah. This is not..." Harry said, but he didn't want to change the subject so he stopped. "We can't stand by and do nothing."

"You misunderstand. There's nothing wrong, I'm just off planet," Tira said.

Harry didn't believe her, her voice was telling him differently. "Okay but we can still..."

Her voice shook, "I'd love to see you again but I can't be selfish. On our last mission we witnessed a beautiful red sunset over the northern pole, just like we witnessed on our vacation. With the moon in the sky, the shooting asteroids, reflecting off the golden water, it made me think of you and that night we did some star gazing. You remember Harry?"

Harry looked confused, his head shook. "Um..."

"Sorry, you're with your crew. It's inappropriate to talk about this. As you can see we're in need of fuel so I'll have to keep this brief," Tira said in a melancholy voice. "Talk to you soon." The viewscreen switched back to normal.

"That was the worst you're dumped speech I've ever heard," Chakotay said from the Ready Room.

Harry glared in his direction, although the chair was still blocking most of the door. "She wasn't breaking up with me."

Triah shrugged and got back to polishing the screen. "Duh, unless she's super secretive about it and chickened out."

Harry stared back at the screen as if it were still showing Tira. "She was sending me or rather us a message."

There was a thud from the Ready Room, nobody looked to see why though. Chakotay then walked over to the centre of the bridge while hobbling a little. "Stupid thing bounced back," he muttered. Once he got to where he wanted to be he spoke a lot clearer, "apart from sod off, what else was there?"

"We never did any star gazing, it was cloudy every night," Harry answered. Chakotay frowned as he hurried back over to Opps, he quickly tapped in a few things. "Kim to Voyager."

"That was quick," Tom's voice sniggered.

Harry wasn't in the mood for that, "tell Astrometrics to look for a red giant system, preferably with a m-class planet in it."

"Why?"

"Hold on. If that was really a not so subtle message, and she has reason to think her line wasn't secure, we could end up walking into something," Chakotay pointed out.

"What do you suggest then? Fly aimlessly, continue to the Krralef home world?" Harry said.

"I haven't a clue what you're talking about, but will do," Tom's voice said.

Triah finally finished with the viewscreen and appeared to head back to her seat. "I think there was a one not far from here. It was a bit of an odd ball, but no towers so we left it alone. I think."

"Odd ball?" Harry questioned.

Triah bypassed opps to crouch down at the carpet. Everyone watching her rolled their eyes. "Don't quote me on it, I could be getting mixed up with another system."

"Triah," Chakotay warned her to stop wasting their time.

Triah laughed, "okay, sorry. It had a few strange orbits. Two planets were at risk of colliding with each other in maybe a year or two, we couldn't be sure. Also there seemed to be a moon orbiting pretty much nothing, was pretty strange."

"Nothing?" Harry said, his eyebrow raised.

"Yeah, Danny said something about its pull of gravity being way off or something. I dunno," Triah said meekly.

"Any m-class planets?" Chakotay dared to ask.

Triah thought about it while she scrubbed at the carpet. "Nope, don't think so. A few ringed gas giants, one of those eclair type planets..." Chakotay smirked at her while Harry stared with wide eyes. "Hard moon like surface, soft water underneath? Never had an eclair?"

"Not like that no," Harry muttered.

"Fine. An asteroid field, a really dangerous one closer to demon class with horrible green house gases, like Venus a bit and..." Triah continued.

Harry raised his hand, "wait. Asteroid field?"

"Yeah, also one of those boring just a rock planets. That and the Venus one smashing into each other would definitely make quite a mess," Triah said, shuddering a little.

Chakotay and Harry shared a knowing look. At the same time the crew could hear some quiet and nervous muttering on the comm line.

"If the Enterprise has come across it then it should be in its Stellar Cartography logs. We could save us some time and some Annika exposure by looking ourselves," Chakotay suggested.

"Sounds like the best plan ever. I'll take care of that," Harry said. He didn't waste any time, he hurried off into the only working turbolift.

Chakotay stared at Triah as she continued cleaning. "Maybe you should swap with Jodie or Faye on Voyager. You'd give yourself and us a break."

"And leave the Enterprise a mess? Hardly," Triah scoffed in between scrubs.

"Fine, you can be the designated cleaner. I'll just go pick a replacement," Chakotay muttered. Triah just grinned at him as he headed back to the Ready Room. Reminded that he would have to climb inside it he changed his mind and went for the Conference Room instead.

Triah's eyes widened, she ran after him. "No, no, no. All the ship models broke, glass is everywhere. The table's dirty and don't get me started on the chairs..." As soon as she disappeared into the room, she was pushed straight back out and the door shut behind her. "That was rude."

Security Office:

"So in the end it was a choice between white and pink, or bright pink," Jessie said as she sat down on the sofa. Beside her was a blinding white with pink tassels baby seat with a pink handle. She cringed as her hand gestured towards it. The bundle wrapped inside the thing didn't seem to mind as she dozed inside. "I figured it was the lesser of two evils. Now, not so sure."

James sat on the other side of it, he did little to hide his bemusement except peer inside it now and then.

"I knew I should have gotten the blue one," Jessie sighed.

"Why didn't you?" James asked without thinking. He instantly knew that was a mistake.

Jessie sniggered for a second, her eyebrow raised. "After the blue blanket incident, I thought you'd know better than that."

James cringed slightly at the memory of a Security officer who made the mistake of calling newborn Amy a *cute little man*. "She never wore her hair down again after that."

"If you don't know, don't go by the blue is for boys rubbish," Jessie said with a smile.

"You know, you can tell the computer to change the colour. It just needs a bit of tweaking," James said.

Jessie sighed, "I know, but I couldn't be bothered. Maybe when I'm a little bored I'll try again."

James gazed at her, his eyes pleaded with her, "I thought the whole point of our swap over was that you'd take it easy."

Jessie's eyes rolled over, an innocent look appeared on her face. "I will. There's just a few toys lying around the living room."

"Jess," James groaned into his hand.

"What? Are you implying that if I wasn't in need of a rest, you'd let me do all the baby stuff?" Jessie asked but in a mischievous tone that told him she didn't mean it.

James laughed, "no, but I am implying that you're incapable of doing nothing."

"Nothing is boring. You know I'm not a big fan of lying around in bed. I did enough of that last time," Jessie said. "You know, I'm not that tired. You didn't have to offer."

"Yes I did. Because of everything that's going on, I'm not getting any paternity leave. I never get to see her," James said.

Jessie smiled sneakily. "Oh? So this isn't about giving your poor wife a day off. I see."

James shuffled around on the spot, looking nervous. "It's that too."

"It's not about giving her more time to clean up your quarters, right?" Jessie teased.

"Yeah, you caught me. I used to store all my clothes in numerous big heaps so you'd get annoyed and clean it up for me," James laughed lightly. "I'm surprised it took you so long to figure it out."

Jessie narrowed her eyes mockingly. "Well, well. Four kids later and the truth finally comes out. Just so you know, I'll remember this when I'm feeling better."

James tried to resist smirking at her but it was no use. "I hope you do."

Jessie bit her lip yet she burst into laughter anyway. She walked over to sit down on his lap, her hand gave his face a very fake slap but it was more like a stroke instead. They started kissing when the doors opened.

"Jeez, you don't waste time do you?" Damien's voice mocked them. His eyes wider than normal.

The couple groaned as they pulled apart, Jessie shuffled onto the sofa with an annoyed look on her face. James then climbed up to his feet. "What are you doing here?" he asked.

"Stopping baby number five," Damien answered with disgust in his voice.

Jessie rolled her eyes, "hilarious."

"I thought so," Damien sniggered. "I just thought that as a Security Chief and a vampire slaying idiot, that you should know about a vampire related death."

James walked over to him, concern etched on his face. "What? Where, and since when would you care about that?"

"You'd think you would notice if one of your prisoners disappeared. I shouldn't expect much," Damien said.

"How is that a vampire related death, and which one?" Jessie asked in a slightly panicked tone.

Damien sniggered at her reaction. "She's dead duh, big bro gets to keep his feet."

James and Jessie looked at each other, she sighed in relief. James was still a little confused. "She? Feet... oh, that girl Nathan dated," he said once he got it.

"You know, I feel so safe knowing you're in charge of our safety," Damien said in an obvious sarcastic voice.

James only shrugged his response. Jessie shook her head at him. "How do you know it was a vampire death?" she asked.

"I figured it out somewhere between her standing there and her dropping dead with said vampire nearby," Damien grumbled. "I know something's are difficult for you people but..."

"So since you're still here, unfortunately, that means it was Annika. Knowing her reaction to Ylara once, the victim being a crazy woman and the fact that she's also wacko, jealousy kill? How am I doing so far?" James said as seriously as he could.

Damien's eyes narrowed. "Lucky guess."

"Or he and Craig already investigated that incident last week," Jessie giggled.

James turned to her, faking a pout. "Aaaw, way to ruin me looking smart in front of the *amazing* Damien."

"Hmm, I'd play along with this but even pretending to big up Damien makes me ill," Jessie said quietly.

Damien rolled his eyes in contempt. "Are you sure that wasn't the smoochathon, cos it made me ill."

"Oh don't worry, you'll find someone some day. I hear Annika fancies you," Jessie teased him with an evil glint in her eye. Damien gagged, he had to cover his mouth just in case.

The doors opened, Danny stuck her head through the door. "Or he could just make out with himself." James and Jessie stared at her in disgust, she winked at them.

"I'm above such things," Damien said with his nose shrivelled up.

James laughed quietly. "So does that mean no Damien Juniors? However will Humanity cope?"

"They won't, and I'm okay with it," Damien grunted. He smiled deviously, "though I could rebuild my cloning machine. Such a dilemma."

"Well, that settles it. I'm not going to spend my free time sleeping with that image in my head," Jessie said after a brief shudder. She walked over to the sofa to kneel down in front of the baby.

"Cloning machine? That's no fun," Danny said as she stepped inside.

Damien scowled back at her. "As if I'd waste my glorious genes with anybody else. You're all beneath me."

"Ohno," James groaned.

Danny giggled rudely. "Just in it for the fun, are you? I get it."

"I'm out of here," Jessie said quickly. She gave James a quick wave before running out of the office. He barely had time to wave back.

"You wonder why I hate all of you," Damien grumbled. He pointed accusingly towards James. "That catsuited bitch is a vampire, you kill vampires and other annoying people. Do I need to make this any clearer for your simple mind?"

James stared at him blankly. "If I killed *other annoying people* you wouldn't be here, also she wouldn't have had a chance to become your stalker."

Damien scoffed, "so what did you call the guy in two bits?" Danny giggled again, James just flinched. "How is that dirty?"

"Well..." Danny started to explain.

James quickly cut her off, "it's not. He was a threat to the ship, I..." Damien smirked at the hesitation in his voice. "I had no choice."

"Aaaw, growing a conscience are you? It doesn't suit you," Damien taunted him.

James groaned as he turned away from him. "You know why I haven't killed Annika yet?" He walked over to pick up the baby seat, and walk it over to the desk.

"You're a coward?" Damien guessed.

"No," James said with a frown. "Well, yeah Annika scares everyone." Damien stuck out his bottom lip and nodded. "No. Why would I kill her when she's doing a great job at tormenting you?"

Damien's face turned stone cold. His arms folded tightly. "Oh, so this is punishment? If I stopped complain..."

"No, it's just funny," James said while sitting down in his chair.

"What about Ruby? Was her death funny?" Damien snarled.

"Why don't you ask her yourself? We put her in the Enterprise brig so we could chuck those warlocks into ours," James said plainly.

Danny giggled behind her hand as Damien growled and stomped out of the office.

"He's so easy to rile up," James sighed. He did so again when Danny smirked at him for it. "What's the matter, Danny?"

"Oh nothing, I just wanted to catch up. I figured you'd be lonely in here," she answered.

"No, I'm fine. Amy usually spends the Friday afternoon with me so... no," James said. Danny pouted a little. "It's painting day, and she hasn't wanted to go ever since Scott threw pink paint over her head."

"Oh, is that why you knocked his dad into a coma?" Danny teased. Her face quickly softened when his showed the familiar signs of guilt. "I'm sure Jessie blew a few fuses. It'd be bad enough if someone did that to her, let alone one of her kids."

James tried to smile but he was still thinking about the first thing she said. "It didn't go down well, no."

"So... er, what you calling this one then?" Danny asked quickly to change the subject.

"I take it Jessie hasn't told you," James said.

Danny grit her teeth, her mouth opened and she made a brief hissing noise. Her eyes rolled to one side. "I think so. Is that the story about you time travelling to save her..." James shook his head. "Oh. Um, the girl from the future then?"

"That's the one," James said.

Danny smiled in relief. "I thought so the first time, cos you can't use her name, right?"

"No, she's not the girl I met from the future," James replied while looking towards the baby lying nearby. "Jessie still likes the name though."

"I'm just throwing a random name out there but what about Danny," Danny suggested.

James tried not to laugh to avoid insulting her, but it just came out like a smirk. "No, what with her sister Dannielle and the dirty jokes you come up with. That'll never work."

Danny shrugged casually, "oh well, can't blame a girl for trying." Her eyes lit up, "ooh, what about Dianna? With an I not an E."

"So, Danny and Ian combined?" James said warily.

"No, no. There's no Y in there, and you'd be crazy to have a triple N," Danny said innocently.

"Thanks, but I think it's something Jess and I have to work out ourselves," James said.

The doors opened at the same time Danny had folded her arms in a pretend huff. "I didn't make any rude names up, or make a joke with the Danny and Ian combined comment. I just can't win with you."

James laughed briefly, "no."

A woman walked into the office, her eyes a little wide as she looked around. She looked towards the baby on the desk a few times. "Um, is this the Security Office?"

"Yes it is," James replied.

The woman still didn't look so sure. "It feels more like a nursery, but ok."

Danny smirked at her, "one baby on top of a desk? What kind of nursery's were you brought up in, Rachel?"

The woman walked over to her, a smile warmed up her face. "Oh Danny, I didn't recognise you without the dirty jokes being thrown my way."

"Well, I do what I do," Danny said.

"The Enterprise is too quiet without you. I could get used to it," the woman said.

"Oh you don't mean that," Danny giggled. She turned to James again. "If it's important I can come back later. Toodles." She headed for the door, giggling at her own use of the word toodles.

The woman stared after her with her head shaking. "Strange girl."

"Yeah," James nodded. "So, what can I do for you?"

"A Mr Anderson said that you'd want to talk to me," she answered.

James sat up in his chair a bit, "oh, you must be..."

"Rachel, not Rachel," the woman butted in quickly.

"Right, you can sit down if you want," James said, gesturing his left hand at the seats opposite him.

Rachel nodded, she walked over to sit down on one of them. "He seems to be doing better." She got a puzzled look staring back at her. "Anderson, he was in quite a state when I first met him. I assume he knew the poor girl who died."

James' head dipped slightly, "Zare, yeah. It's been a tough few months for him."

"You a friend?" Rachel asked sympathetically.

James was about to answer, but he took a few seconds to think about it first. He decided to stick with his original answer, "yes."

Rachel smiled and nodded. "So, what did you want to talk about?"

"I was told that you're an experienced witch," James replied. Rachel's smile seemed to fade, making him a little nervous. "Sorry, I don't mean to label you like that, I just..."

"It's okay, that's not why I was worried," Rachel said, her voice friendly but her eyes showed caution. "Go on."

"I don't know if you heard about it but there was a black out on Voyager last week. We have a shield system meant to protect us from demonic threats, and somehow a warlock was able to tap into it," James said.

Rachel was a very worrying shade of white by now. James only had stopped talking because of it. She breathed in deeply before saying anything. "What do you mean by tap into it?"

"I'm still not sure on the how but he turned," James replied carefully.

"That's not how it works. How do I explain it?" Rachel said, with her head turning towards the wall. "When people are born with magic like me, we already have all the power we're ever gonna get. You

can't top yourself up. The turn you're likely talking about would have been triggered by him accessing it all. This blackout and power drain you mention, it doesn't make sense."

"But, I've seen power being drained before," James said, with a confused look on his face. He noticed Rachel staring at him warily. "Okay, so how would he have accessed it all?"

Rachel thought about it, her face frowned and then her head shook, "power can be drained, yes, but it doesn't really give the witch a power boost so to speak. It's just to weaken an enemy. In answer to your question, there are a few ways. One of them requires an enormous strength of will, and will not result in a loss of control. At least, not at first. I may need more information."

"He had recruited others to help him, taught them a few spells. One of them mentioned sharing it, but he told them they had no natural power," James said.

"That would explain something," Rachel mumbled to herself. She looked him in the eye, "I've heard about this demon shield. It is powered by attempts from the *other world* to break through to this one, and thus dispels it. I know of a spell that does the same thing, not many witches have been able to cast it as it requires a lot of power. Taking something like that down would need more than one person. He would have known that. Recruiting anybody and teaching them to do a few spells may have been enough."

James shook his head, "I wonder why."

Rachel pulled a face showing off her disbelief. "I find it a bit ludicrous that someone would turn themselves evil on purpose. Perhaps you misunderstood. Sounds like at the very least his friends did."

"Warlocks do not have to rely on pure anger or death to unlock their power," James mumbled as he remembered something. Rachel stared quizzically. "That's what he said."

Rachel sighed impatiently, her arms folded. "Idiot. It's just typical warlock talk. The only way to lose control of your powers is to unlock them all at once. It's impossible otherwise. The reason it happens is that you have access to everything, but you haven't learned how to use it yet. It's an overwhelming shock to the system."

James couldn't help but frown. "He did die. One of his team mates had struck him with a fire spell before this happened. Couldn't have been dead more than a few hours."

"I doubt a bunch of newbies would be able to handle a resurrection spell. They wouldn't have enough power," Rachel muttered in disbelief. Something then occurred to her. It did to James as well. "What a tool. What was so important that he'd turn evil over? This is so ridiculous."

"You're not wrong," James muttered. "They believed they were on the side of good, that they were saving the Federation. Yet they drain all of Voyager's power to channel it into some resurrection spell to do that, endangering it. Why did one of them assume it would be shared? Why would killing her save the Federation?"

Rachel's eyes glazed over for a while as she pondered those questions. James didn't notice as he was too busy thinking about that himself.

"Kill who?" she decided to ask eventually.

James snapped out of his thoughts and looked at her. "That's er... what's the most odd about this whole thing. Their original target was a witch." Rachel responded the way he expected, her eyes widened and she tensed up. "There are only a few of them left and they're in the brig."

"I doubt the evil one would have allowed himself to be locked up. What happened to him?" Rachel asked nervously.

"I can't say," James replied.

Rachel relaxed her arms down by her side. "Hmm, there is no cure. I think I have an idea." She nodded, "I have never heard of anything such as this. I'm afraid I'm not much help here."

"You might be able to. They refuse to talk to us. They may talk to you," James said. Rachel seemed a little alarmed at the thought. "Unless there's some kind of warlock versus witch rivalry that you haven't mentioned."

"No," she answered that.

"They won't talk to me or Craig, but we can send others into the room with you so you're not alone with them," James said to assure her.

Rachel shook her head defiantly, then gave him a smile. "A bunch of rookies aren't a threat to me. They're more likely to talk to me if I went in alone. It's not that."

"Then, what?" James questioned.

Rachel's eyes narrowed a little and briefly, then she climbed to her feet. "This witch they targeted. I don't suppose she's a natural witch, around thirty years old, and relatively well known."

James leaned back in his chair as he tried not to show any reaction in his face. "If you can find out anything, it would be a huge help. I can get Craig to pick you up and take you there when you're ready." Rachel looked a little confused. James gestured to the baby sleeping nearby.

"Oh. That's all right. I'm way too curious now. It shouldn't be hard to find," Rachel said.

"There should be two people outside guarding and two inside. I'll tell them to expect you. If anything happens they..." James said.

Rachel waved the concern away, "please. I can handle it. I've been practicing magic since I was a teenager."

"All right. Um, if you find something..." James said warily.

"I'll come straight here," Rachel butted in. She made her way towards the door. As it opened she turned a little to look back at him. "I have to ask, it's bugging me."

"What?" James said.

Rachel sighed, her eyes squinted a little, she seemed to be studying him carefully. "No, it's nothing. I just thought I'd seen you somewhere before. Never mind."

"That's..." James said while she hurried out the door. "Never good."

Voyager and the Enterprise dropped out of warp within seconds of each other. They flew towards another asteroid field, with the looming red giant star directly ahead of them.

"Well?" Tom questioned towards Opps.

"Triah was right, this is the system we observed a few months back," Danny said. "I don't see anything different, yet."

"Scanning for any nearby ships, lifesigns, anything really," Harry's voice said.

Nathan briefly glanced up from the helm to look at the viewscreen. He cringed at the sight they all had. "There's no sign of any planets with golden oceans, is there?"

"No, the system was pretty much lifeless. That's why we left it alone," Danny answered.

"Probably because of that," Lena said as she pointed at the viewscreen.

Tom nodded, "yeah, when a star becomes a red giant it pretty much crushes anything in its path. Maybe there was an m-class planet a long time ago."

"Can't be that long," Nathan said, pulling a face. "Otherwise how would Harry's girlfriend know what its oceans were like?"

Lena looked very uncomfortable, her head shook. "No, that's not what I was pointing at. I meant the asteroids."

Tom wandered over to the Science station. "What about those two colliding planets?"

"Uh, we just figured they were both from different systems and the Soft put them together for a laugh," Danny replied, shrugging slightly.

"Why? There's nothing on them," Nathan questioned.

Tom glanced between the two thoughtfully. "It does seem likely. Where are they?"

Both Danny and Jodie tapped on their stations to answer him. The viewscreen then changed to show mostly empty space, with a small dot in the distance.

"Magnify," Tom ordered.

The viewscreen zoomed in on a small and grey planetoid. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary about it.

"It's got an extremely elliptical orbit. It's nowhere near the one it's meant to collide with right now," Danny said. "We estimated it would collide with the other one on the shorter half of its orbit, in about ten of our months."

"I love how technical you can get," Tom commented sarcastically. Danny smiled and gave him a wink anyway. He shook his head. "If the two planets belonged in the same system originally there'd be some resonance between the two, right? Also four dimensions, what's stopping one planet flying under the other? What are the odds of two planets colliding? Literally astronomical."

"Like I said, it's gotta be on purpose," Danny commented.

Nathan groaned, "the Soft have got a twisted sense of humour. You'd think the people who like draining planets to oblivion wouldn't be above making people watch a planet loom slowly towards them."

"Yeah, I'm not complaining. At least it's not happening anytime soon, so it's not something we should be worrying about while we're here," Tom said.

Lena stared at the screen for a while, even squinting slightly. She looked down at Tactical.

"No sign of any ships in the area. No lifesigns on any of the worlds. Nothing. Why?" Harry's voice said.

"Not nothing. Scan the asteroid field," Chakotay's voice said.

"There's something," Lena said.

Jodie spoke at the same time, "nope, nothing."

The rest of the bridge glanced behind them, giving each girl a bemused look. "Which?" Tom questioned.

Jodie looked at Lena, "unlike that last asteroid field there's no debris. It's just a bunch of rocks. What are you looking at?"

"That's a relief," Nathan sighed.

"Not the asteroid field, one of the planets," Lena answered Jodie.

Everyone almost in sync looked at the viewscreen, Tom decided to squint. "I feel like I shouldn't look directly at it," he said in reference to the star.

The Enterprise Bridge:

Harry was back hovering over Opps, this time Faye was manning the controls. Like with Triah he kept leaning over to take over now and then.

"I see it too," Harry was mumbling while he tapped. The viewscreen zoomed in on the red star, it meant they could only see the edge of the asteroid field. Now though there was a round yellow object in plain sight. His eyes glazed over as he watched it. "Helm, get us closer."

Bryan stared at him like he was crazy, "we can't go near that star."

"I know that, just get us as close as we can," Harry ordered.

Voyager:

Tom hurried over to stand behind Nathan at Opps. "Wait a minute Harry, I'm the one in charge remember. That just looks like the Venus type world that Triah told us about. What's the big hurry?"

Nathan's shoulders raised, he pulled a nonchalant face. "It certainly looks gold enough."

Tom looked down at him. "You serious? The only golden oceans on that planet will be lava."

"Her clue didn't necessarily mean we had to go there to watch a damn sunset," Nathan snipped back at him.

"Red sunset, red star. Shooting asteroids, asteroid field. Golden water, golden planet," Harry's voice mumbled.

"What else?" Chakotay's asked.

"We may not even be in the right system. It's a bit of a stretch. I'm all for..." Tom stuttered.

"Didn't she mention a moon?" Lena questioned.

Danny's eyes lit up, she moved her chair side to side, "oh oh." She decided on facing her console so her fingers could type something in. "Yes, the moon with the decayed orbit of nothing."

Tom was a little relieved when the red star image was taken from the viewscreen, then replaced by a moving diagram of the system they were in. At the centre sat the huge star. Two mostly circular lines surrounded it, each one with a small round object moving along it. The first was yellow, while another was a hazy purple.

It would have looked normal if it weren't for the oval orbit that stuck out like a sore thumb away from the planet on one side, but on the other clashed with the first two. A small grey circle was slowly moving along the quieter side of the shape, out of harm's way for now.

Two more rings surrounded the star, each one had a ringed planet following their lines. In between the first two planets was a dense asteroid field spanning half of the yellow world's orbit, but yet completely dwarfed by the size of the star.

"It was here last time," Danny said as she worked.

A light grey, almost white round object appeared between the orbits of the purple world and the asteroid field. The elliptical orbit ventured close by, at that point it had even crossed the purple planet's orbit.

"Now," she continued, looking worried as she did.

The white object disappeared and reappeared right next to the yellow world, almost as if it was orbiting it.

"It's... that's weird. It looks like it could have been the second planet's or apart of the field, and now..." Tom said. "Can we get a better look without getting dangerously close?"

"Metaphasic shields should keep us safe from the radiation for a few hours," Lena answered.

Tom looked around at everyone on the Bridge with a thoughtful look on his face. "If it is a trap or someone's been listening in, we'll be handing over both ships. If we send one and they're out numbered..."

"I'll go," Harry's voice butted in.

Tom sighed impatiently. "The other is only a few minutes away. We're a team, opinions?"

"I'd say that it would be too dangerous to hide an ambush near the star. If it were a trap, they'd come from outside the system and attack the first ship they see," Chakotay's voice replied.

Tom nodded, he focused on Lena at Tactical. Her eyes widened a little, her head shook. It unnerved him more than he liked. "What's the matter?"

"I'm not... a good judge right now," she reluctantly said quietly.

"Chakotay's right. I'll take the Enterprise in. Voyager's in better shape to fend off an ambush if there is one," Harry said.

"She's also in better shape to survive getting close to a star," Nathan pointed out.

"I'm not hearing anyone for sending both ships," Tom said.

Nathan shrugged, "I kinda did, but you interrupted. Keep us together. We can't afford to lose another ship, or Enterprise twice."

Tom noticed Faye and Danny both nodding, he looked to a still hesitant Lena. "Okay. Bryan, Nathan set a course for the first planet, full impulse. Lena, yellow alert, just in case."

He heard a mixed chorus of aye's and okay's, then it fell quiet for a while. Everyone kept one eye on their stations and another on the viewscreen as the view of the golden planet grew. Lena's station bleeping broke the unusual silence. Tom quickly swung around to look at her again.

"Something's approaching from the planet. A ship," Lena reported while her head shook. "I didn't see it..."

"Don't beat yourself up, none of us did," Jodie said. "Radiation from the red giant probably masked it."

Tom sighed, he stared at the viewscreen once again. At first he didn't see anything but the planet and star getting bigger. As he watched a sliver of grey rose from the top, Tom frowned, it looked nothing like a ship. "That's..."

"The moon, coming up over the planet's pole," Harry's trembling voice said.

Tom was too distracted by that view he didn't see the much smaller object break off from it. It flew directly towards the viewscreen, getting bigger fast, yet it still was dwarfed by the scenery behind it. Few lights blinked from its mostly white hull weakly. That got Tom's attention.

"All stop, let them come to us," he ordered. Nathan only nodded.

The detail of the ship could be seen now. Tom and Nathan were a little relieved at that, everyone else were feeling the opposite of that. Tom's didn't last long as he noticed patches of the vessel's white hull were charred black.

"They're damaged. Can we hail them?" he asked.

"They're hailing us directly, before you ask I can't redirect it to the Enterprise this time. Secure channel only," Jodie replied.

"Don't you dare cut me off or anything," Harry's voice said.

Tom sighed, "that's not a secure line Harry, sorry. On screen."

"Da..." Harry's voice stuttered as he was cut off.

The viewscreen quickly changed to show the interior of an alien ship, and the familiar face of Tira looking very anxious as well as sweaty. "Tom? What happened to the Leda, is Harry..."

"Harry's fine. He's on our other ship," Tom quickly said to reassure her.

The news didn't relax her fully, though it did help a little. "We can't stick around here too long. It's far too dangerous and they'll likely notice all of this."

"I'm gonna risk sounding stupid but I gotta ask. Who will?" Tom questioned.

Tira stared at no one in particular with a lost and terrified look on her face. "The Softmicron. It looks like it is our planet's turn."

The two Security officers keeping watch inside the brig shared a worried look. The woman in front was tiny in comparison, but her stern stare directed up at them was unnerving them a little.

"These men are dangerous, ma'am," one of them managed to spit out.

The woman's eyebrow twitched. "They won't harm me, they can't. Your boss told me to come, so why don't you take it up with him."

She only expected the threat to concern them a little. One of them turned sickly pale while the man who spoke started to sputter nonsense. Their boss didn't seem so threatening to her, so their reaction surprised her. She tried to put it at the back of her mind with her other thoughts.

"Five minutes, please," Rachel said the last word begrudgingly.

"Sure," the quiet one mumbled. The two men quickly left much to her relief.

Rachel turned full circle so she could approach the forcefield. One of the men there watched her suspiciously. The other three men showed little interest.

"So, which one of you pathetic man-children has picked himself as leader?" she asked.

The man watching her briefly was taken aback, he smirked after composing himself. "Who's asking?"

"Somebody with more power in her little finger than your entire play group," Rachel answered harshly.

"A witch. What's with the pissy attitude?" the man asked.

Rachel's eyes narrowed. "What's with the trying to kill people, including one of your own? I think that's a better question."

"We didn't try to kill one of our own," the man answered.

"I noticed we brushed right over the kill people part," Rachel said, her voice running cold.

"That wasn't us," Charlie protested. The leader shushed him away.

A smile appeared on her face as Charlie turned his back on his brig-mates. Rachel gave the leader a hard stare. "Breaking apart at the seams?"

"You didn't come here to mock us. What do you want?" the man asked sternly.

"You know already. Your dead leader turned evil somehow, likely using you schmucks, tried to kill a witch, killed others and croaked. I want to know what the hell you're playing at," Rachel said.

"You clearly are too ignorant to know. I'd tell you but..." the man said smugly.

Rachel rolled her eyes, "no girls allowed? So this was an attack on women. You're not worth my time."

She began to turn her back on him. "No," he said, stopping her. "I'm just surprised you don't know."

"Know what?" Rachel demanded.

"That witch you speak of, is a threat to people like us," the man replied. As he expected he got an amused scoff from Rachel. "See, ignorant. You couldn't possibly understand."

Rachel's face stiffened, her jaw clenched. Her body turned to face him once again. "You used the forbidden Dujin texts to resurrect your dead leader. He told you to do it if he fell. Why do I get the feeling that wasn't what he said would happen?"

The man stared at her with his eyes wide. "You know of the Dujin?"

"Of course, I'm not five," Rachel groaned. "It wiped Voyager's very little power reserves, which I'm also guessing you didn't expect. Voyager's numerous power transfers to the Enterprise will have contributed to that."

"It was for a greater purpose," the man argued.

Rachel laughed in his face, "oh? From what I heard you expected to get a share of that power you stole. Only that's not what happened."

"I knew it. That so called Security chief sent you," the man grumbled.

"Instead the power and the spell were really to resurrect him, unlocking his full potential. Which one of you were tasked with killing him in the first place?" Rachel asked while dipping her head to the right to peer into the brig.

"How... you answer me first. How do you know this?" the man asked.

"I pieced it together from what I was told. Also unlike you I know what the Dujin text is really for," Rachel replied.

The man seemed to be very worried at this point. "Did you tell *him* that?"

"No, that is against tradition. What always is against tradition is using demonic spells for your own end," Rachel hissed.

"What are you talking about?" one of the other men piped up.

Rachel shook her head with contempt. "Didn't your leader teach you the rules? Without rules we are as bad as they are." She was more annoyed at herself than them after saying that out loud. "Of course he didn't. He intended to use you. Telling you the truth would get him nowhere."

"Matteo wouldn't stoop so low. He was a good man, he believed in justice and peace. He'd never use demonic spells," the lead man said.

"Putting your obvious love for him aside, he obviously wasn't a good man. Only a power hungry idiot would turn evil on purpose," Rachel said.

Charlie sniggered to himself. "I knew it." The lead man glared back at him. He ignored it and stepped back forward. "Matteo told us we all had a job to do, so we'd need more magic. We couldn't do it..."

"No, you couldn't. Every experienced witch knows a resurrection spell is useless without any power behind it. Without a resurrection he'd have to learn how to use his magic like every other warlock or witch," Rachel said. "He was a narcissist who thought he was too good to do it the hard way."

"We would have helped him. We all followed the text correctly, all of us held the pots. Instead it ignored us and all went to his corpse," the fourth man mumbled. "We thought we failed. We weren't stronger and it's not like he was revived right away. We decided to continue his work anyway."

Charlie huffed. "Yeah, about that. Thanks for waiting for me."

"You killed him and ran off," the lead man said.

"Accidentally, I wanted to get back at Taylor once and for all," Charlie snapped.

Rachel's head turned towards him quickly she almost got whiplash. "Taylor?"

The three men groaned as loudly as they could, it still didn't deter Charlie. "Ugh, always throwing his weight around like he was the big cheese, thinking he was better than us. The girls loved him for it, made me sick. So many times I wanted to kick the sh..."

"Wait," Rachel butted in to the other three's relief. "James Taylor?"

Charlie shuddered, "yeah. I always hated that gay little ponce."

"Yeah, the *married to a woman with kids that always made you his bitch* gay ponce," one of the guys teased him.

"He hung around girls all the time. Who does that?" Charlie muttered.

Rachel rolled her eyes in disgust. She headed for the exit shaking her head and muttering, "nope, right the first time. No girls allowed little boys club."

The Conference Room:

The atmosphere around the table was grim. Everyone there already kept to themselves, stuck in their own thoughts. A lot of them stared glumly out of the window, which showed the saucer of the Enterprise by Voyager's side.

When the door opened most of the room bolted up right as their thoughts were disturbed.

"She's cute. At last some good news," Tira's voice said softly, and despite her situation was genuine.

A few members of the table looked over to catch her and James, carrying his daughter in the white baby seat, walk up to a few empty chairs.

"No one's told me the bad news yet. I..." James said with a little guilt in his voice.

Tom lifted himself up from his seat slightly, his hand gestured to one of the empty seats. "Tira, welcome back to Voyager. I wish it was better circumstances."

Tira nodded grimly as she took a seat. Tom sat back in his own. James waited nearby, briefly glancing at the door.

"We're still waiting on our Enterprise staff," Tom said. He briefly looked to James, then at the rest of his table. "Maybe we should start anyway."

"It's good that you found it," Tira said politely.

"Thanks to you, yes," Tom smiled at her. "You don't have to worry, no one can hear into this room."

"I know, I just don't know where to start," Tira said. The doors opened again, which made her quickly look behind her. Her whole body relaxed as Harry and Chakotay walked through them. The former hurried over to her and sat down in the neighbouring seat. "Harry, it's good to see you. I wasn't sure if you'd understand my message."

Harry nodded, "I did, it was convincing everyone else."

Chakotay rolled his eyes as he sat down in the last remaining empty seat. "In our defence Harry's usually been dumped by four more girls in this amount of time."

A few members of the table tried to resist a smirk. It was painfully obvious though. One of them was Tom, he tried desperately to put a serious face on. Harry scowled at him in return. "Now we can start. Maybe with what, um tipped you off."

Tira glanced around the entire table, then behind her at the only one standing. "I believe it started when we discovered your Enterprise in orbit." She looked back at the table's occupants. "I told you that when it arrived we tried to communicate with it, then it left. My superiors passed it onto me so I could tell you."

"Maybe we should have invited an actual Enterprise crewmember to this meeting," Tom whispered. Chakotay nodded, he climbed out of his seat to step outside.

"Something about it didn't seem right to me. As the Leda was investigating I made a few enquiries about it. It wasn't until we returned home that I noticed something was definitely wrong," Tira explained. "A Commander I know very well told me that they had been in talks with the Enterprise after all. He..." She hesitated slightly, Harry looked on in concern.

Mostly everyone else looked a little shocked. Tom was busy fidgeting in his seat. "What? Why lie about something like that?"

Tira's eyes shut tightly. "I wanted to know what was said, but he... never got back to me. I, never saw him again."

"Someone didn't want us to know who had the Enterprise," B'Elanna stated.

"Or what it was doing," James added on. His face had turned a ghostly white. "Does this mean...?"

"Not long after Voyager and Leda left orbit rumours started to fly around about a new project," Tira interrupted. "Most people were excited but I recognised bits and pieces. Power conservation, new ministers with new bold ideas, controversial planning permissions."

"A tower network," James said.

Tira looked back at him and nodded, tears were in her eyes. "Members of my crew were apart of the protests. We were weeks away from another mission. That day came and some of them never returned to duty. We informed the people but nothing could stop it."

Lena stared at her with a similar expression, she had to look down at the table to avoid people seeing it. Craig spotted it from the other side of the table.

"There's an island not far from the capital. It's rich, unspoilt. The reason why is no one is allowed to build on it, civilian or government, it's off limits. People go there to get away from it all," Tira said. Harry knew what she was talking about, he softly put a hand on top of hers. She glanced at him with a look that told him she appreciated that. "It's beautiful, I go there a lot. Now... it's a construction site."

The entire room fell silent. Nobody knew what to say to it all. Tira just covered her eyes with her spare hand, trying desperately not to show any further distress about the situation. Harry responded by clutching her hand tighter.

"You can see it from the capital. This ugly tower with construction equipment, already as high as our tallest building," Tira continued. "It's not finished yet and they're already looking for another place."

James shook his head, the shock was gone and in its place was just anger. "They waited for us to leave. They probably lied to the Enterprise too."

"Now you understand why I had to be secretive," Tira stuttered. "It was never my strong suit. The tower is not even finished and people are already dying. They'll do anything to silence us."

"Why here? I gotta ask," Craig questioned.

"That mission I mentioned, it was a distress call which brought us here. It came from that planet," Tira answered bitterly. "No doubt the Soft's way of getting rid of us, a sick joke."

"Sick?" the Doctor vocalised the word that stuck out to him.

Tira's head shook. "It's better if you didn't know. The proximity to the planet and the star shielded us from the nearby transport ship's sensors, they rushed to our aid. That's how we found out it did so. I thought it was a perfect opportunity to call for help."

James walked over to stand beside Tira, on the opposite side to Harry. "How long ago was your last trip home?"

"Three weeks," Tira answered. "It took no more than two months to build that wretched thing. I imagine it's finished now."

"We were heading there anyway," James said, briefly glancing at Tom. He looked on nervously.

"We're gonna need a better plan than the last time, like an actual plan," he said in an attempt to lighten the mood. "If there's one tower it shouldn't be as hard, right?"

"It's getting close enough. The Soft will recognise us sure, but the Kralf's know us too," B'Elanna said. "They also sent Tira's ship away so I imagine they'll keep an eye on that too."

Tom smiled, "the Softmicron don't know that we've made friends since then."

"Yes they do, Voyager used the Katane when we were trapped on that planet," B'Elanna reminded him.

"It's also not here, it's searching for a planet to settle its evacuees on," the Doctor piped in.

Tom scowled at them both, one at a time. Both of them gave him a smirk back. "I wasn't even on the ship, cut me some slack. Besides we don't know if they can chat with their undercover tower builders without blowing their cover."

"Why would they care? It sounds like they just kill or kidnap anyone who knows the truth," Harry said bitterly.

"All we need is that cloak Damien was working on, put it on a shuttle. I can take a team or go alone," James said.

Lena looked his way, her eyes narrowing. "You mean we."

"I just didn't want to volunteer you," James said with a brief smile.

"Yeah right," Lena scoffed back. "I'll not make a mess or cause trouble like I did the last time. I promise. After what I saw on the Eryan planet, I really don't want to let these prats continue what they're doing."

"Count me in there," Craig said, surprising Lena enough to look at him. "James and I have already talked about this. We only liberated Shurouva because we all worked together. I imagine the whole crew would want to help if they could. The more the better."

Tira smiled gratefully. "Then contacting you was worth the risk. Thank you."

"Don't thank us just yet. We need a plan and it has to be a good one," Tom said. "We also all have to be onboard with it. No use in us fighting over it, that never helps."

With an armful of toys Jessie hurried over to one of the bedrooms to put them back down elsewhere. She'd worry about sorting them out once the living room was clear. On the way she spotted a few lego bricks dotted under the coffee table and a doll hiding under a cushion. Once she had dumped the armful onto one of the beds in that room, Jessie made her way back out into the living room, immediately spotting Duncan's Voyager model toy stuffed into the bookcase. It sat wedged between a book and the portable game machine. It took Jessie the few seconds it took to get across the living room to realise that was another thing that didn't belong there.

Of course on route she managed to step onto a lego piece or two. Fortunately for her and nearby furniture they were the larger ones for toddlers, so the pain wasn't as bad.

Before she knew it she had another armful of toys to get rid of. The nearby bathroom door swished open when she collected the last one. In the corner of her eye she saw something in there too, she had to look twice. A doll's head was barely peeping above the sink, if it had been a centimetre shorter she wouldn't have saw it at all. On a third look she assumed, no she knew that Sasha had thought to give her favourite doll a bath while she washed up that morning, again.

The door chimed. Since it was so quiet it sounded louder than normal. It startled her enough to make her drop a few things. With a groan she crouched down carefully to pick them back up. "Yeah?"

The familiar sound of the doors opening followed immediately. Jessie was about to pick up the doll that wasn't taking a bath when she heard something that was also familiar.

"Jessica?"

Jessie froze all over, except her eyes which widened enough to make them water.

The doors shut and she heard footsteps approach. "It really is you. I thought this would be a long shot."

A few more toys fell from her arms. In the end she left them all there in a big pile so she could stand up as quickly as possible.

"It's wonderful to..."

Jessie swung around, her face like thunder. "What are *you* doing here?"

The look on her face took Rachel by surprise. She tried to smile it away. "Well it was harder than I thought. There were no Jessica's, I asked around. Somebody mentioned a Jessie. I thought, why not? I assumed they misunderstood me to be honest."

Jessie's eyes were still wide, they drifted to the right. "No. What are you doing here?"

"I don't understand. To see my daughter of course," Rachel replied.

"No," Jessie sighed tiredly. Her hand caressed her forehead, blocking her just as tired eyes. "Maybe I should rephrase. Why the hell are you here?"

Rachel's smile faded, she seemed disappointed. "I was afraid of this."

Jessie felt herself laughing but she was getting angrier by the second. "Wow, are you that deluded? Did you think that all you'd have to do is pop into my life after thirty years, not say anything remotely like *I'm sorry*, and I'll run up to hug you with a *mummy* in tow?"

"No of course not," Rachel sighed.

"Yeah right. I think you must be getting mixed up with your crazy daughter. I'm the sane one that was lucky enough to be dumped," Jessie grumbled. A finger pointed at the door, "get out."

"Danni wasn't crazy. There's no reason to be rude, Jessica," Rachel said bluntly.

Jessie shuddered in revulsion. "Jessie. My name is Jessie."

Rachel didn't look so sure about that, she pulled a face in disgust. "That's very masculine. I'd rather not."

"No, it can be used for both," Jessie said. A blank face appeared on her face, "wait, can't you say the same about Danni?"

"It was my name for her, she didn't want anybody else using it," Rachel said with a smile.

Jessie couldn't believe what she was hearing and it showed. Her face scrunched up, eyebrow shot up, the eyes themselves were wide. "I don't care. I was just pointing out that... oh who cares. I'm Jessie and you are leaving."

Rachel's smile was soon gone. She took one step forward, forcing two steps backwards from Jessie. "Okay, maybe we can compromise. Jess is a cute name."

"No compromises. I want you gone!" Jessie snapped, again pointing at the door.

"But... I wanted to see you for so long. Please give me a chance," Rachel stammered.

Jessie was laughing again. "Next you'll be telling me you didn't mean to abandon me as a baby, and that the only reason it happened was cos you tripped over and I fell into a fast flowing river. You ran after me but you couldn't keep up. Then when I finally came to a stop the people there adopted me and called me Jessie cos they thought I was a boy."

Rachel bit her lip firmly, her eyes darkened. "There's no need for that."

"I think there is because you don't get how stupid you sound to me," Jessie muttered harshly.

Rachel sighed to try and calm herself. "Look, I can explain. I have been trying to get in touch with you for years. Do you think it's easy to find someone lost in the Delta Quadrant?"

"Oh this gets better," Jessie said sarcastically.

Rachel ignored her for the moment. "Once Voyager returned I sought you out but I couldn't find you. I assumed you were on the Enterprise. The rest is a long boring story, which some of it you may know. I know it's hard to believe Jessica but..."

"Jessie," Jessie snarled just barely through her clenched jaw.

"No, I named you Jessica," Rachel said stubbornly.

Jessie raised her shoulders as if she was going to shrug, only she kept them there with a bemused look on her face. "Which gives me further reasons not to use it."

"Fine, I'll use Jess," Rachel said, smiling nervously. She got a stoney glare back. "I see you've got at least one child."

The toys at her feet made Jessie very uncomfortable and a little annoyed with them. She turned a little to hopefully hide them with her legs, even if it was too late.

"You've had a baby lately?" Rachel questioned as soon as she did.

Something inside Jessie snapped. She stomped over to her intruder, her eyes brimming with anger. "I'm going to make this easy for you. Get out or I'll bloody make you!"

"No please. There's no reason to act like this, I can..." Rachel stammered.

"You want a reason? I've got hundreds," Jessie said in a bitter tone. "You were a thirteen year old kid knocked up with twins. As soon as the dad supposedly bolted, you decided to dump the one that wasn't your favourite in an adoption centre. I imagine you lied to get the one twin in there without the other, just as you lied to them about the dad running out on you before the twins were born."

"Jess..." Rachel tried to interrupt.

"Not long after the not as good twin was adopted by human beings with souls, demons wanting witch powers attacked, killed them all and burned the house down. The twin survived by a shield of some kind, left to think she was abandoned in the middle of a fire until it burned itself out." Rachel's face had turned ghostly white, she didn't dare interrupt now. "The still only a one year old was then dumped in an orphanage where everyone thought she probably killed her family and brought a monster with her, cos the demons weren't done were they?"

Jessie tried to take a deep breath quickly as she felt the tears starting to build up, but she didn't want Rachel butting in again. "So the girl was ignored and feared. She started to believe that maybe there was something wrong with her. Her parents didn't want her, the orphanage didn't want her. Who would? She never thought that anyone would be able to like her let alone love her. The girl spent her whole life believing she was the hideous monster that they accused her of. She was withdrawn and hid her true self from others." Her efforts were useless, tears fell to her cheeks. "If it wasn't for another isolated and bullied kid reaching out to her, befriending her, she'd still be like that; lonely and afraid of her own shadow, a monster that everyone should avoid."

"I didn't..." Rachel said quietly to herself.

"Are any of those reasons good enough for you, or should I dig a little deeper?" Jessie grumbled.

"I didn't know," Rachel said sadly.

"And if you did, you'd have spared me all of that. Give me a break," Jessie said. She stepped forward with her arms forward, ready to push her. Rachel backed off a few steps. "I don't need you. I have a family now, no thanks to you."

"I... I'll go. Maybe if you have time to think about it..." Rachel said.

Jessie waited for her to leave for a few seconds, she just stood there. "I've had decades to think about it. You had your chance to patch things up when I was a teenager, but no, all you cared about was precious Dannielle and her fake fiancée."

Rachel let out a sigh, then nodded. "I'll..." her finger pointed at the door.

"Go, yeah that'd be great," Jessie said angrily.

Rachel's shoulders slumped. Two steps and she was outside, with the doors shutting behind her.

"Craig, wait!"

Her voice froze him in his place. The poor woman behind him almost walked right into him because of it. He mumbled a sorry as she walked around him. The girl who called him ran up to stand by his side.

"Do you have a minute?" she asked.

"I have several. Are you sure I'm who you want to be talking to?" Craig answered meekly.

Lena responded with a little laugh, afterwards her lips remained in a smile and her eyebrow raised. "That woman didn't look like a Craig to me. You are still Craig right?"

"That's still under debate," Craig said.

That wiped the smile from her face. He felt bad for saying anything. "That's, that's too bad. I've had a rough time since, well you know, and I had hoped to spend some time with my best friend."

"He was the one that made you go through that rough time, you should know that," Craig said. His eyes lit up briefly, the next time he blinked it was gone. "Best friend?"

Lena was laughing at him again. "You're not the one with the memory problems. Keep up."

Craig could feel his cheeks turning red. She always had this effect on him, he thought. "I just thought with what I did, the proposal, the pressuring I was doing, that..."

"I much prefer to focus on things like you comforting me when mum died and Jessie had that near death, or the thoughtful good luck present you gave me before that last trip," Lena said.

"Some good luck charm that was," Craig muttered to himself.

Lena's smile was genuine but the pain in her eyes was still there. "When I felt like there wasn't much to fight for, I thought of the fun times we had together, how nice you were to me, how you usually kept me grounded. The despair though was more powerful and for that I should be the one feeling guilty."

Craig's eyes were wide, his face was still stuck on that bright red he wanted rid of. "No, no you shouldn't. You need more than a rubbish friend like me to convince you to keep living."

"I thought it was Daniel that brought me back," Lena said.

Craig was confused at the change of subject. He didn't know which one he preferred. "I helped him."

"Hmm," Lena nodded, her eyes seemed miles away for a moment. "What was Ylara like?"

"Lena," Craig said with a hoarse voice.

"She was so mad about being forced into the Slayer thing. That's the most I got out of her when..." Lena said, her eyes looked further away. "I get that."

"She was a good person. I just didn't give her a chance to show that," Craig replied honestly.

Lena returned to the corridor, her resulting smile was warm. "That's the Craig I know."

"But..." Craig stammered.

"Not the giving her a chance part, I mean the other part," Lena said awkwardly, her head shaking. "I hope you know I'm going to need Craig, my friend, until this whole Game Sphere thing is over. I... I'm really not sure what I can do. It's overwhelming. If he's too busy feeling sorry for himself then that's gonna be a problem."

"I'm working on it, I promise, but what could I possibly do?" Craig said quickly.

Lena sighed, her expression was nothing but pity for him. "Ever since I've come back it's been power draining anomalies, science experiments, towers and horror. People have changed, everyone's mostly miserable. It would just be nice to sit down and talk about any old rubbish, like we used to. Sometimes it would be nice to hear your advice and opinion on things, anything. Like you said in that meeting, we're in this together. Or was that all an act?"

"No, I meant it, at the time," Craig replied. "You have to understand that Slayers have been dying, and I had brought you back into this mess. I don't want that to happen to you too."

"Please, have some faith in me," Lena scoffed. The confident smile he remembered and loved so much was back on her face. It made him smile too. "Better. Things are confusing enough with two different timeline's clashing in my head, without all of the different things here too."

"I'm still not sure how that works," Craig mumbled.

Lena seemed to mull it over in her head before she said anything. "It doesn't. Before I died I had the fake Kiara persona life, followed by the brief assimilation, the life on the Borg Sphere and finally Voyager. Now... I remember growing up on Voyager as myself, the mess with the Q who created Kiara, and Voyager's destruction. Then the time jump. The assimilation seemed to make me forget all that, as I soon join Voyager again and the people I knew are not only younger than before, but different too."

"Time jump?" Craig blurted out as it was the part that stuck out the most to him.

"I was fifteen, Voyager was being attacked by the Borg sphere. I tried to evacuate with everyone else but... I was alone," Lena said, her voice got lower as she did so. "Then for some reason I was in the past. I met mum, dad, James. It was before I was born, that's all I remember about what time it was. The Borg followed me and the rest is history I guess."

Craig looked so confused his face was scrunched up enough to make Lena laugh.

"Like I said, it doesn't work," she said.

"I guess it does, if you forget the Borg and time jump business. Your first fifteen years were in the other timeline, while the rest is this one," Craig said.

Lena's face fell slightly. "Only at the time I didn't remember those fifteen years, so what I'm like now is built up from experiences that weren't real. It's difficult to figure out who I am."

"I doubt the Q would have strayed too far from your original life when building the fake memories," Craig said. "I know they had to convince everyone you were Kiara, but at the time she was only a baby. You and Kiara were different even in the beginning, which backs me up. It's weird that nobody really noticed that."

"Except you it seems," Lena said with a half smile. Her eyes narrowed, "I hope."

Craig hoped she was teasing him, he laughed a little assuming she was. It didn't last very long. "I think everyone thought I was a big creep for having a crush on you then. I even did too, you were just some older version of a kid I babysat. I thought I was just telling myself you two were different, so I would stop thinking that. I still thought that even when the truth was out."

Lena looked away towards the wall, her eyes were distant again. This time it made him worry. "Maybe we shouldn't talk about it. With my memories of my previous life back, it's only going to get more awkward."

Craig's shoulders fell. "Yeah. I must have been an adult when you were born. I'm a pervert no matter what, Daniel was right."

Lena glanced back at him, her brow was furrowed and her eyes sharp. She took a step closer. "That's not how I see it. I was fifteen, you were nineteen. We became friends, that's all. I don't remember anything inappropriate from you..."

"You kidding? I hit on everyone," Craig interrupted with a cringe.

Lena's stare managed to get even more intense, it worried him a lot. "We're making it more complicated than it is. You're only a few years older than me now. We're friends, ex's, whatever. I wasn't an older version of a baby you looked after, and you weren't my adult babysitter from when I was a kid."

"Oh god, I wasn't," Craig groaned at the last part.

"Maybe I shouldn't have said that," Lena muttered to herself. She shook her head before continuing, "the memories I shared with Kiara as a baby were extremely vague, I didn't recognise you with them. So without my real memories we met for the first time when I was a teenager, as were you. We were friends for years before anything happened."

"That is oversimplifying it," Craig mumbled.

Lena gave him a reassuring smile. "My life badly needs something simple about it. I'm the Chosen, I was never born in this timeline, I'm a walking paradox with two different lives in my head, my daughter looks like a teenager. A giant Game Sphere has trapped multiple planets and built towers on them. Can't you just give me one?"

Craig nodded, he smiled back. "I can do that. It's just if you remember me looking after you before I even met you, then..."

"Ah!" Lena raised her hand into the air as a stop sign. "You said you could do that. Liar."

"I can, I was more worried that you couldn't," Craig protested.

"I'll be fine. My current timeline memories are far more vivid as they're more recent, if you know what I mean. I guess what happened to me was like being reminded of a hazy childhood incident," Lena said.

Craig couldn't help but laugh, "why was I worried? You seem to have this simplify things down."

"I told you to have some faith in me," Lena laughed, her eyes sparkled. "Hmm, what should I simplify next? Paradoxes and Game Spheres are a big no."

"I don't know. Maybe you'd be able to concentrate on them better if other things weren't on your mind," Craig said.

Lena glanced down at the floor, deep in thought. "Dad." Craig felt his entire body flinch at the thought, luckily before she looked back up at him. "I mean there is more bothering me but I keep hearing

things about him, and I remember his behaviour before I died. He seems to be giving me space or he's avoiding me."

"I thought you were the one doing that," Craig said meekly.

Lena nodded, "yeah. From what I heard about him, I dunno if I want to hear his side of it. What if they're true, how can I forgive him?"

Craig didn't want to make things worse by telling her anything. He doubted that it would make her feel better either. Then he figured that saying nothing would confirm what she had heard already. "You want things simple. Just ask him."

"You know..." Lena said, sounding a little startled at first. She relaxed into another smile. "It really is that simple. Thanks."

"I hope so," Craig sighed.

Sickbay:

"This is the third time in an hour," the Doctor said impatiently.

Neelix looked on with worry all over his face. He seemed to ignore or completely miss the accusing tone in the Doctor's voice.

"Dare I ask what are you serving today?" he asked.

Neelix smiled. "I thought I'd try my hand at making pizza's like Mr Paris suggested."

The Doctor frowned, "I recall him suggesting that and you listening to him years ago. He was here for a solid week with stomach lesions."

The woman lying on the biobed in between the two groaned in pain.

"The cheese must have irritated it," Neelix sighed sadly.

"Oh so you do remember?" the Doctor snapped.

"I do now. Pizza's are very simple. Craig said something like if I can manage this, I couldn't possibly ruin a jacket potato. I tried that the next day," Neelix said.

The patient tried to sit up but the pain not only forced her back down, it made her pass out in a sweaty clump. Meanwhile a man on the neighbouring bed rolled onto his side with a heavy groan.

"Ah yes, you proved that not everything goes with a baked potato," the Doctor said.

"I remember that went well," Neelix beamed.

The poor man behind him threw up on the floor. Neelix seemed to miss it, the Doctor grimaced slightly. "I remember it going like that."

Neelix was confused at that remark as he still hadn't noticed the poor man still losing his lunch behind him. Something the man would probably be grateful for afterwards.

"What did you put on the pizza this time so I can find an antidote?" the Doctor muttered.

Neelix laughed, "you're funny, Doctor."

"What the hell is that smell?" another man's voice asked in a disgruntled manner.

The Doctor swung around to the source of the voice, which came from the primary biobed. The figure there was already trying to get up and failing.

"Smells like rotten eggs and fish," he continued to mumble.

The Doctor hurried over to try to stop him getting up, though something was already doing that for him. "Take it easy Mr Lavine, your body's not used to any kind of movement, it'll take some time to adjust."

His patient stared at him with a wide eyed look of horror. "What does that mean? How long was I out?"

"Two months Daniel," the Doctor answered gently, yet it still shocked him. "I don't know if you recall but you were attacked. Your injuries were extensive."

"Still haven't worked on your bedside manner, Doc?" his patient muttered.

The Doctor chose to ignore that. "Your whole body went into shock, you've been in a coma for most of that time. You can't just get up as if nothing happened. I'm not that good."

"Oh I know, I have some leftover pizza. That'll give him some energy," Neelix said. The Doctor was about to protest, but Neelix was already through the door.

"I'll take my chances," Daniel grunted. He tried again to get up.

"You can't, Doctor's orders. I won't let Mr Neelix feed you, do not worry," the Doctor said as he tried to stop him.

Daniel shook his head. The thought of Neelix's pizza was terrifying. "I'd rather take my chances with the angry Slayer that put me in that coma than whatever pizza Furball comes up with."

"I'd prefer if you did neither," the Doctor said, gesturing his head back to the occupied beds behind him. "I'll keep Neelix away, you just rest. Once you're free to go I'd avoid your attacker, even if..."

"Even if what?" Daniel asked with a curious look on his face.

The Doctor sighed, "just avoid him."

"Unfortunately I can't. He's the only Chosen left, I haven't got a choice," Daniel said.

"Yes you do," the Doctor quickly said.

Daniel again tried to sit up, the Doctor pushed him back down. "Doc, this is bigger than just me. Maybe if I get a chance he'll see that too, and I won't end up back here."

"Or, I could just tell them," the Doctor said.

"Them?" Daniel frowned. "Ylara didn't die?"

The Doctor pulled an awkward face as he straightened up. Luckily Daniel didn't take that chance to try and sit up again. "She did."

"Then what's with the..." Daniel stuttered. His face paled as something clicked in his mind. He was overwhelmed with the mixed feelings of joy and dread at the same time. "Lena? It worked."

"I assume from what you were saying that you had a vision while you were out," the Doctor said as neutral as he could. "What happened?"

The dread took over, guilt started to creep its way into his thoughts. "I brought her back just to die."

"I'm confused. You didn't expect Ylara or Lena to be around, so if you saw something like that..." the Doctor said.

"We all are," Daniel answered quietly.

TO BE CONTINUED