

Episode 5.29

Back To Normal

PARIS

The computer screen continuously flashed at him, demanding his immediate attention.

Tom had been staring in its general vicinity for ten minutes so far. It could complain all it wanted, he thought to himself. He knew as soon as he looked at it, there would be only a short space of time to reply. Everytime he had to talk to him he no longer felt like the infamous Tom Paris who guided the Voyager crew back home despite impossible odds and brought back the long thought destroyed Enterprise from the *dead*. Instead he'd feel like he was fifteen years old again, hiding his maritime manuals and ship models from his father.

It was time to get it over with. His hand flew to the computer before he could change his mind. The screen instantly changed to show his father, Admiral Paris, sitting at his desk in the San Francisco offices. His stomach lurched at the sight of him.

"Afternoon son. I trust your mission to the Morikin system went well," Paris said with an awkward smile.

He was too casual, a little too friendly, Tom thought to himself. It always threw him off guard.

"We're all ready for your gathering tomorrow evening. I hope to join you this year, it seems only fitting," Paris said. Tom caught his last breath in his throat. "If I don't make it, I'll catch you up on the latest over the following breakfast. If you'll have me."

Tom winced through his teeth. "I think I may be out that morning."

Thankfully it was a recorded message. Tom studied for any reaction in his father's face, just in case. There was none so he tried to relax. "Regardless, I'll see you soon son. Admiral Paris out." Finally his image disappeared.

"Sure," Tom muttered distastefully. The Admiral would likely be notified of his message being received, and be waiting for a prompt reply. He always expected extreme punctuality from everyone. That at least hadn't changed. He had a few minutes to put on his game face and decide how to reply.

Cocky smile armed, a boring status report quickly tapped on a PADD by his hand, Tom was ready to face the beast.

B'Elanna cast a watchful eye on the warp core as it hummed gently. She still wasn't used to the new, flashy design they implemented. The simplistic and yet mesmerising look of Voyager's core couldn't be beaten, while the bulky old looking Enterprise one left a bitter taste in her mouth. Both of them had their coolant tanks exposed, so at least this new one had one good thing about it with the deadly material flowing beneath the core's outer layer. Inspired by the slipstream drive design, it had the same overall shape of

Voyager's, but armoured by a silly neon striped shell. She'd accept that if it weren't for the red glowing tubes gracing the four corners.

Somebody appeared in her peripheral, to her right. It took her a moment to bring her full attention back to reality. She turned to address the nervous and very young crewman standing beside her. Easily twice her height, average build, even so he was very much on edge around her. B'Elanna thought to herself that she had calmed down since the old days, still it made her smile.

"What is it Ensign?" she greeted him warmly.

"The hourly report, sir. The only problem appears to be two malfunctioning gel packs on Deck Five," he reported. B'Elanna was about to question him further, he had a feeling what she would say and responded before she could, "there's a team already on the case. They reported in two minutes ago, they said replacements were needed. It should be done in half an hour."

B'Elanna nodded appreciatively, still the Ensign didn't relax. "At ease before you sprain something."

"Sir?" the Ensign almost squeaked.

"Relax. We'll reach Earth within a few hours. After that anything that goes wrong is McKinley's problem," B'Elanna said, laughing lightly.

The Ensign laughed hesitantly with her, unsure if he was supposed to. "You um... looking forward to seeing your crew again?" he asked.

His question was a step in the right direction, she figured, even if it was an obvious one. B'Elanna hadn't thought about it recently until now. "Some, yes, if they make it this time."

The main entrance doors opened, getting her attention. "Keep up the good work," she said before walking away towards it and the new arrival. "How did it go?"

Tom still had his smile painted on as he glanced around at passing engineers. Once they left he tried to fade it out, it proved a little difficult. "Same as ever." B'Elanna sensed a missing *but* at the end of his sentence. She waited for it. Instead he lowered his chin. "Maybe we should think about leaving the kids at home this year."

"Tom," B'Elanna's voice lowered, disagreeing with him but softly. "We don't know for sure. Even if we did, it would only look off to everyone." Tom knew she was right, still he couldn't shake off his paranoia. "Miral's really looking forward to seeing Amy."

"Yeah," Tom answered meekly. His mask finally melting into a grimace.

A hand gently cupped his shoulder, supportive and warm. "Remember, everything's normal."

The word had very little meaning to him now. It had been so long since his life could be described as such.

"We did this last year, and the year before. We'll exchange stories, make fun of each other, eat and drink. Come two days our lives *will* be back to normal, for another year," B'Elanna said. "Same as every other year."

"He's going to be there, so he says," Tom said quietly.

She didn't have to ask or wonder anymore. The reason for Tom's greater anxiety was plain for her to see, not that anyone else would. All she could do was keep his mind off it until the time arrived.

"Daddy?"

He turned in time to see a little girl bounding for him. Her long hair tied into bunches streaming behind her. They weren't the only things trailing behind her. Both of her tiny red shoes were loose, laces flew around with her as she ran. He had to stop her before she stepped on them again. This girl spent more time lying on the floor than anything else.

Just in time he scooped her up, holding her with one arm while the spare hand reached for her laces. "No," the little girl snapped, tapping his knuckles to stop him.

"Why?" he asked, expecting the same style answer she always gave him.

"Don't like them," she said bluntly.

Well okay, he thought, the amount of time lying on the floor was second to his little girl's stubborn nature. They tended to go hand in hand. "Why not? They're pretty, they suit you," he tried to convince her.

"I don't care. I want white ones," the girl pouted, her arms folding together. He took the opportunity to try and tie the laces with one hand, which proved difficult. "No. Mummy won't change them," she whined.

Harry shook his head while smirking to himself. He and her mother had completely opposite parenting styles, and so they created this little terror which he still wouldn't trade for anything else in the universe. Her mummy was the firm one while he was raising her like his parents raised him. She would accuse him of spoiling her while worshiping the ground she fell on. The shoe laces incident would be a perfect example she'd use against him. Harry decided to keep this to himself, but in his mind the only solution would be to get her different shoes like she wanted. Tira wouldn't miss something like that.

"I'm more than just pretty," the girl said, her head dipped down, the pout growing.

"Oh I know that, munchkin," Harry smiled at her.

His little princess gazed up at him, her lavender eyes sparkling. *Uhoh*. She only ever used her innocent stare when she wanted something, and he already seemingly owed her new shoes. "Can I boss people around like you, daddy? I wanna sit in your chair."

Harry was suddenly struck with the memory of what happened the last time she was interested in something he did. He still didn't know how such a tiny thing could dent a clarinet so badly it sounded closer to a trombone. He should have learned his lesson after the kal-toh incident. How was he supposed to know that certain illegal moves caused a mini explosion? It took him weeks to recover all the pieces, which he was certain that his sweet daughter would keep hiding.

Tira had a point, he knew that. She was his only child, he was still learning the ropes, this little girl had a way of making him succumb to anything. His parents adored her, showering her with praise and presents. Tira was fighting a losing battle and the result was a girl who'd rather fall on her face than wear red shoes. There were days he'd try to find a middle ground, but the little girl was so stubborn to change, she never got any rewards for good behaviour and he'd fall for her doe eyed routine in no time.

Tom had warned him and it wasn't like he didn't see it for himself with Miral. Every parent he knew had similar issues. He remembered well how Duncan was when he was a baby and toddler. He only settled down slightly when his parents did too. Poor Triah was still trying to get her son to stop making a mess everywhere he went, thanks to his dad's completely absent style.

The little girl squirmed, hinting that she wanted to be down. He did so, hoping that he could finish with her laces while she waited for her answer. She shook her foot everytime he tried. It got him wondering why she cared what colour the shoes she wore were. She'd run around with a paper bag on if she was left alone. Given half the chance, she'd run around in only her underwear.

As if she sensed his thoughts, she began to pull her dress over her head. He tried to stop her, prompting whines. "No munchkin." She tried again while blowing a raspberry. "Mary, we're going out soon."

"Not in a dress I won't!" she huffed.

Harry stared at her blankly, bemused. "What?"

"Dresses are for show offs. I'm a smart girl," his daughter said, her head nodding.

Now he had an idea where this come from. "We're not going to the party until tomorrow."

"I'm not a doll. I want to wear trousers," Mary said.

Harry sighed then chuckled, "okay, okay. If you're so smart, why are you doing what the little girl last year said?"

It was rare for him to secure a victory, today was one of those days. Mary was speechless, her eyes darted around as she thought of an answer. Finally she shrugged meekly. "Can I have a cookie please?"

So predictable, change the subject, he kept to himself. At least she asked politely. It was progress.

NEELIX AND THE DOCTOR

Neelix hummed to himself while collecting a few pots and pans from the sink. One still stained with a stray purple pea. He brought it closer, tilting it slightly. A quick exhale sorted that problem out. His hums turned into tuneless warbles as he carried them to the workbench, with numerous food ingredients waiting for him. There wasn't much room to put all of them down, which made him groan humourously at his mistake. He had no idea that he was being watched.

Quickly determining that the grill pan would be useless, he tossed it over his shoulder. Only then noticing the audience. His smile spread to a grin, his eyes lit up. "Oh hello, didn't see you there." He puffed his chest, "welcome to A Briefing With Neelix. Today is an extra special episode." To prove his point he swung his arm out at the many food items in front of him. After doing so he began to pace, smiling fondly. The camera man followed him.

"If you follow my show loyally, you'll know what I'm talking about. It's the day we look back on old times, remember lost friends and family." He stopped, faking a gasp toward the camera. "Ohno, don't look like that. I'm not going to be spreading doom and gloom, no. That's not what this show is about. Happy memories, happier times is what it's all about on A Briefing With Neelix."

The camera man followed him to the far side of the set by a window. On the wall hung a photo of Voyager orbiting Earth. It brought a tear to the Talaxian's eye. "Good times, good memories," he said in a lower voice. He turned back to the camera, all smiles once more. "Yes, today's show is dedicated to the USS Voyager and her crew. She died so we may live in peace. Free from the uncertainty of the Games and their awful little creatures. We must not mourn sadly. Celebrate!" he shouted the last line, gesturing his finger upward. "Their existence and their sacrifice." He bowed his head briefly to let that sink in.

Once done, he made his way back to the bench to face the camera once more. "To kick things off, I'm going to share one of my most popular recipe's. Described as breathtaking, or simply *oh my god*, the Voyager crew could not get enough of it." He failed to notice his production crew biting their lips, one held their nose in anticipation.

Neelix meanwhile grabbed a pepper in one hand, and vinegar with the other. "First, we marinade the peppers in a thin layer." Despite his words, he drowned the pepper in the biggest pan with the whole bottle. He looked worried when it ran out, until he grabbed another to continue. The smell left tears in everyone's eyes. "Oh, getting emotional again. This takes me back!" he sniffled, wiping the tears away.

One of his audience watched on a small screen on his station. He shook his head, not out of disbelief when Neelix finished emptying a second bottle. "He's cut back over the years," the hologram commented.

His attention briefly returned to his work, which he was almost done and wasn't really top priority. He had days to finish filing the crew's yearly medicals. As always he wanted them to be done before the gathering tomorrow.

"Now, we shave some garlic. Just a little," Neelix's voice said over the screen.

The Doctor's eye drifted over in time to see him grate a large clove of garlic several times. He was surprised there was anything left of it when he was done.

"We leave that to simmer while we prepare the meat," Neelix said cheerfully while placing the huge pan onto a hob turned to its highest. It immediately started spitting viciously. He ignored it to go to the slab of raw meat sitting next to vegetables. "Oh, we'll move these along so..." He pushed the meat a little to the left, then the vegetables so they were sitting in that same spot.

"Ohno," the Doctor groaned into his hand. Nobody would be stupid enough to follow his recipes or his lack of hygiene, he hoped with his entire being.

Neelix ducked down out of camera sight for a few seconds, reappearing with the grill pan he had thrown. It was momentarily upside down, then flipped back upright. "Okay. Rabbit is a delicate meat, so we need to cook it slowly. First, preparation is the key."

"I hope Damien isn't watching," the Doctor said.

As Neelix picked up a butcher's knife, the previous pan spat so much it aggravated the flames, engulfing the whole thing. Neelix continued, somehow unaware even when the fire warnings went off and his production crew started shouting.

"Now my secret ingredient, other than love, is rather tricky so pay close attention. Close up please," Neelix said.

"Oh god, the smoke stinks of vinegar!" somebody off screen spluttered.

"And garlic!" someone else cried.

Neelix remained oblivious. His knife stabbed the meat in the centre, which he then roughly shimmied about until most of the meat had been crushed. There wasn't much left to eat thankfully once he was done. "I'm afraid that my usual secret ingredient can no longer be replicated for some reason. I assume high demand. We'll substitute it with something called turnip."

The Doctor was surprised that he was surprised when the oblivious man grabbed a whole turnip, merely cut it in half with the same knife he used to cut raw meat, then shove it into the hole. All of this while his kitchen turned black from all the smoke.

"What are you watching, an emergency broadcast?" a woman behind the hologram asked.

The Doctor bit his lip, shaking his head in disbelief. Her annoyed sigh told him he didn't need to answer her, she noticed it for herself. "He'll never know he's actually in the comedy slot. They really should give him stunt camera people though."

"Is that?" Nikki asked, squinting her eyes since the smoke was getting in the way. "Is that beetroot?"

Sure enough Neelix's next ingredient was a whole jar of the stuff. He used a hammer to smash it into a paste, which he slavered all over the meat.

"He threatens to do the banquet every year, one..." Nikki said, repressing a gag.

"No. Thanks to this he's famous. Security have his picture," the Doctor said. All they could see was smoke now, until Neelix waved his hand. "Assuming he survives."

"Phew, it's getting a bit steamy in here," Neelix laughed. There was a thud, the Doctor assumed it was him passing out.

The Doctor shook his head, briefly turning his attention to the woman by his desk. "Please tell me you passed this time."

"I passed the first question," Nikki said sheepishly.

The Doctor stared blankly, "your name?"

Nikki faked a laugh, "yeah good one, you know I can't spell that." After so many years of knowing this girl, the Doctor wasn't sure if she was serious.

LENA AND KIARA

The clouds parted a little, allowing the sun to shine. Some of the crowd had dressed for a cooler cloudy day and were already regretting their decision. Hundreds of people stood around, chatting with their group or absentmindedly sipping on drinks. Further back on the lightly sloped areas of grass, some sat on sheets with picnic boxes already broken into. Several people were still arriving through the gates as the spot lights brightened into a soft blue tint over the epicentre of the gathering. A small stage, with a high curved screen forming the back of it. A man walked out onto it, prompting most of the crowd to clap.

"Thank you, and to all who are arriving now, welcome to the Gamefree Festival. It's time now for our very special guest," the man said, pausing for further applause. "You may know her as the chosen one... out of two," he said with a flourished wink. A few people laughed, everyone else remained deathly silent but the man took it in his stride. "All painful jokes aside, we know her as the lovely Lena. Give her a hand folks!"

While he side stepped off the stage, the crowd erupted in claps and cheers. The spotlights on either side dropped down to nothing just in time for the sun to hide behind the clouds again. A figure slowly emerged up from the centre of the floor, with their back facing the audience. A tiny tinkling bell sound effect signalled the beginning of some gentle music playing through the speakers throughout the event.

The figure now completely on the stage raised a microphone.

Bittersweet, memories, that's all that's left of me. No matter what, I know that I can get by.

The music picked up in volume, an electric piano seemed to be the prominent instrument. The figure then turned around to face the audience.

I know what they want me to be. Using gentle lies to shape me.

Lena's voice began as a mere whisper, amplified by the microphone and speakers. She couldn't help it as the thought behind her next lines made her tremble.

My life was never mine.

Images falling through my mind.

Floating outside time.

The break in between the verse gave her a chance to recover, take a deep breathe. Fortunately the tremble gave her soft vocals an edge, it got the audience's attention.

We acted so crazy then.

I didn't say sorry before you left.

Lena's eyes drifted to the left side of the stage, no one but the front rows would have seen it. The announcer did as for a moment it felt like it was at him, but it wasn't. The young girl with long brown and wavy hair stood ahead of him, as close to the stage as she could without being seen by the crowd. A much younger sister, he thought, the two looked very much alike.

See, I was resisting.

I'd fight your battles for you.

No hesitating.

The brief pause felt awkward, Lena was used to singing more upbeat material and this was far from it. She didn't realise until then that she had been swaying gently all this time. Standing still on stage wasn't her thing. Pushing a strand of hair back behind her shoulder, she continued.

Don't worry, 'cause I'll come back.

I could hear you whisper as you vanished within the light.

But still I fight. To hide the pain, as I stare at empty pages.

The spot lights slowly started to brighten, illuminating her in a soft blue glow.

I've been waiting for the silver in the clouds.

Only it gets darker, it gets harder to see anything.

The piano slowed down, then began to build up to something bigger, all the while the other instruments in the background rose gradually.

It's only the two of us, so who cares if we fall down.

Behind Lena, the giant screen flickered to life with an image of stars gently moving, a nebula in the distance. The spotlights reflected the stars themselves on whatever it could reach, giving it a sparkly effect. The music swelled to its peak at the same time.

Because the five worlds, call out through the ages.

They'll live with you, even though you can't see.

The image spread over onto the stage's ceiling, even across the sky over the people's heads, immersing everyone in what it was showing.

Their distance holding you. Together within silver walls.

On the silver cue, a very familiar ship flew from the screen and flew in the sky above Lena. It looked like to everyone that it was really there, flying over them.

Only five worlds, one fifth of a lifetime.

Will stay with you. Making all of your forgotten days seem like yesterday.

They'll haunt you forever.

The final word she hung onto for as long as she could, before allowing herself to breathe in once more while the piano picked up. Behind her the peaceful image of space behind became far less quiet. A circular anomaly grew out of nowhere, a shadow emerged from it. The sight of it got everybody talking quietly amongst themselves. Lena was about to

continue when the shadow showed itself to be a Borg Sphere. It wasn't real, everyone knew, but it put most of the crowd on edge. It lingered in the background behind in the sky above her.

Now and then we all can lose our way.

Tomorrow's going to bring a better day.

People were starting to wonder what the point of the images were in relation to the song. They only got further questions as the Borg ship began to fire at the first ship, damaging it instantly.

And I can see that finally, I'm free.

The music built up to a climax, with the phaser barrage silently slamming into the back of the image of Voyager directly over Lena's head. From the right side of the stage another person stepped out into the far corner, hidden behind the lack of light.

Because the five worlds.

The new arrival adlibbed softly over her, "were for nothing." Lena wasn't sure if she heard it, the music overpowered the voice, so she continued while it was still singing *nothing*.

Have forever been broken.

Lena thought she heard a *oh* come from behind her, she didn't have time to look over her shoulder to check.

Will stay with you. They'll carry you home.

The audience were wondering who the other singer was. An unannounced guest, a lot guessed. Her next line, cut in while Lena still was singing her last word, "destroy our home," was raised a little so the people could hear it but Lena herself would still not over the music.

She sang her next one unknowingly over the top of the other singer.

We are only Human.

The holographic Voyager maneuvered a little to the right to dodge an attack. A second weapon, what looked like a prolonged phaser beam sliced into its hull. The audience's reaction to it confused Lena as she couldn't see it, barely just above her head. She had to be professional though, so she couldn't stop.

Protected by silver walls.

"By ruined walls," the mystery singer sang, taking one step further out of the shadows. People still struggled to see her, but the voice was all too familiar. She sang the line with such venom, at quite a volume Lena did hear it this time. Her body flinched at it.

The voice was hers.

And five past lives.

Lena tried not to visibly shudder when she heard her own voice vocalise behind her.

You don't see but feel them hurt.

Now the audience could see the other singer. Same face, same hair, even the same outfit. The girl was an exact copy of Lena. The only difference was a malicious glint in her eye everytime she sang. "We're nothing special."

They'll stay with you.

The other her countered with a mere, "oh no," as holo-Voyager maneuvered to finally fly over Lena's head, above the audience.

Making all of the pain... Voyager didn't look right, it was damaged. It wasn't supposed to be.

You feel so far away.

About to sing the final chorus line, Lena was left speechless when a few weapons flew into her line of sight. The other singer followed with, "end of days."

One hit tore her old home to bits in seconds. The audience were as shocked as her, their voices almost drowned out the music.

"They'll haunt you forever," the impostor stole her last line, and with a lot of power. The music swelled at the same time, before fading out to a gentle piano tap.

The Borg ship flew over Lena, only to fade out along with the stars. She only had a couple of seconds to see it.

"Oooh, the fifth world," the singer sang softly while stepping backwards into the shadows once more.

Lena's knee's buckled at the weight of the images. She dropped to them while the audience struggled to decide whether they should clap or jeer at what they saw.

The announcer glanced to the girl he thought was her sister, in case she wanted to go to her first. Only she was gone. He did hear footsteps fading away from him, so he looked over his shoulder in time to see her disappear around the back of the stage. He decided to put his game face on and walk back on the stage as if the performance went as planned.

The girl broke into a run behind the stage. Her target, the look-alike stage crasher heading for one of the tents. Before she had the chance to lose her within them, the girl picked up her speed. Only once she was close enough she shouted at her, "hey!"

To her surprise the woman stopped to face her, smiling broadly. "Kiara? What did you think, did mummy make you proud?"

The mocking tone in her voice enraged Kiara further. The imposter didn't expect anything, let alone a vicious back hand across the face. Unlike the real thing, the blow made her stumble backwards, almost to the floor. "What have you done? How...?"

The fake laughed through her stinging cheek. "I put on a good show. That's all."

Kiara's eyes narrowed even further. "Who put you up to this? Who programmed you?"

"My, I did ask for no paparazzi, so I'll tell you. No questions, no interview," the fake sniggered.

Kiara reached forward to grab her by the arm, pushing her to one side, closer to the tent. Doing so made her think, that was her original destination. She looked around, focusing on the edge of the stage, and up at the other spot lights towering over them a metre away. Her gaze fell back on the woman, her grossly smug expression and darker eyes didn't suit her, they weren't meant to be on Lena's face. "We're out of the holo emitter range. You're not a hologram." The fake Lena shook her head slowly, Kiara felt the blood rushing away from her cheeks. "Who are you?"

"It's difficult to say. Am I you, your sister, or the mother who didn't want you?" the fake said sweetly. "What are we going with these days?"

"Dead," the exact same voice said from the stage. Kiara knew to close her eyes, just in time for the microphone stand to be flung at the woman in front of her. Knocked out instantly, they dropped to the floor in a heap. The noise gave Kiara the cue to look again, she spotted the real Lena jump down the steps to join them. A stern look planted on her face, fire in her eyes, a hardened look ruined by the obvious tear trail under her eyes.

"Are you all right?" Kiara asked softly.

Lena gave her a nod, then looked down at the copycat by her feet. "All it did was make it easier."

Kiara noticed slight movement come from the body, it was still breathing. "How are they here, what was the point? It blew its cover."

"It didn't want to kill me. It wanted to hurt me," Lena answered with a disgruntled sigh. "Why else would it use Annika's methods?"

"Yeah," Kiara laughed nervously. "You don't look surprised."

That wasn't entirely true. Lena didn't expect a personal attack from a copy of herself. Normally they would remain in the shadows, preferring to be out of the spotlight. This creature was against the norm. It wanted to play with her and in Lena's opinion, that meant only one thing. They knew.

"I hope it was alone. I don't want to think about what comeback they've been planning for so many years," Kiara said.

Lena realised that it couldn't be just one thing, but two. Either way, they were beginning to get bold and that was never a good sign.

AN OLD FRIEND

Everything she had heard about this place was true. Earth was beautiful. Vast blue oceans, interesting mountains of various different sizes, shapes and colours. The many lights sparkling in the dark, some of which formed patterns in her mind's eye. It looked peaceful, she thought.

Oblivious to what danger it is in, another thought intruded on her own while her consciousness floated within the atmosphere.

He hadn't visited her in so long, there had to be a reason for this one. Her other incarnations had dealt with him far more, something she was always sorry for and didn't understand.

"I've been here for a good minute and I'm already bored. I don't see the big fuss, to be honest," she heard his voice float above her.

"Surely you still don't need to put on your act. We're alone," she told him.

A chuckle within the clouds ruffled them a little. "A confident little girl, aren't you Three? You think the Continuum can't see through your little bubble?"

If they could, they would have dealt with her a long time ago. Her soul grimaced. A few lifetimes ago in her perspective. He knew it, he was teasing. There was no reason to go along with it, it would only encourage further. She couldn't let his nickname for her go however.

"My name is not Three. I refuse to be simplified like your kind," she said.

Of course he laughed at her, as she expected. It was affectionate though, she recognised that even after so much time. "I'm not your enemy, you know."

She knew that. There was already some doubt to his motives before she had freed one of the Quinn's from his eternal prison. He had told her of Q's obsession with Humanity, his secret admiration for them. If he wasn't aware she had done this, he would be now.

"I hope it wasn't the one who tried to hide in the first season. I'm still trying to clean up that mess," he said with some amusement mixed in with a little exhaustion.

"Why are you here?" she asked quickly before her thoughts betrayed her.

"Five may have a *headache* for a while. Tell her not to worry, it'll fade in a year or so," he said sympathetically.

She knew that as well, and the nickname made her sigh, pushing parts of a cloud away from its parent. "You didn't answer me."

The lighthearted feeling she got from his presence faded, replaced with a serious aura. It worried her greatly. "Same reason you are I imagine."

"I don't know what you're talking about. We succeeded, there's little more we can do," she said.

"Oh?" his voice said humourlessly, which didn't suit him one bit. "You don't strike me as the self centered, narrow minded type. Your friends were saved, for the most part. The Continuum were momentarily appeased. However the cycle still continues, you sense it too."

There was no way for her to argue against him, he'd see right through her. Her whole being radiated the anxiety she was feeling over it. Her mind had been focusing on the issue for so long she had lost track. "Will the Continuum be supporting you this time?"

Before he answered, she felt a negative vibe float over to her in a wave. "They consider the matter settled. At least..." he hesitated as if he was paranoid someone was listening. Once he was convinced he continued, "at least where the Humans are concerned."

If she understood him correctly her opinion of the Continuum dropped a few thousand light years once more. They weren't like Q, they only cared about the grand scale. Needs of the many outweigh the few. Unfortunately in the Continuum's perspective, one species of billions would be considered few. They'd brush Humanity under the cosmos' carpet if it solved the problem. It looked like to her they were on their own again. The questions were would Q be helping her under their nose once more, and would he consider a different tactic?

"I hope you're not already there with a finger on the button," she said.

"I don't know about you," he said in a serious tone. She sensed his mischievous side bubbling underneath. "But I don't fancy doing this all over again. It's took us too long to get this far."

If she still had her physical form she would have smiled, instead her soul glowed a warm yellow. She felt a bit mischievous herself. "Since we're throwing caution to the wind, hopefully not too literally, you mind if...?"

Q already knew what she was going to ask, he laughed a little. "By all means. This is a team effort after all. It would be rude not to."

They all needed to be here, to find out what had caused the ripple she had been feeling the last few years. One of them may have an idea already. She had to call them back, time was a factor. Her voice reached out to as far as the Delta Quadrant where one of her incarnations had decided to return home and rest.

"Do you really think One would help? We don't want her flying off the handle again," Q teased.

She ignored the nickname jokes this one last time. The next time he called her other selves by a simple number she'd return the favour. No doubt Quinn would be interested in hearing a few tales from her successors dealings with him. Her thoughts returned to the matter at hand. There was no way they were going to fail this time. She was sure.

Kes had all the confidence in the universe that whatever plan Q and herself would come up with, it would not be necessary. Her friends had proven themselves time and time again. She hoped so, for their sake.

CHAKOTAY

It slipped by, right under the huge starship's nose within only a few metres of its shields. None of the wiser. It made little difference how close they were to it as they flew passed. As close as possible felt more insulting, which he couldn't resist. It was more than fair, it was ironic in a way. See how they like having something hidden right in front of them, even if it was for a few seconds.

The weapons officer sat beside him, he caught looking at him with a smirk on her face. It was blurry, just in the corner of his eye. He turned his head to stare at her back.

"What?" he asked.

"You enjoyed doing that," the woman said. He didn't answer vocally, his matching smirk did instead. The woman laughed, her eyebrow flickered upwards slightly, making her face long scar seem a bit zigzagged.

Chakotay entered the commands for a warp jump. He glanced once more at the image of the starship behind them, still maintaining their orbit, unaware he was even there.

"How did it go?" he asked.

The woman giggled in a malicious way, clashing with the childlike twinkle in her eye. "Oh, it went screamingly well."

"Emma," Chakotay warned her, already feeling sick and she hadn't even started on the details yet.

Nevertheless she continued, "there was one guy who actually cried *mummy* before I kicked him in. Do they have mummies?"

"Kicked him in where?" Chakotay found himself asking even though he didn't want to know.

Emma's eyes lit up. "It was so funny. His screams turned into gargles. Blood whooshing up like a fountain. His face..."

Chakotay raised his hands as a sign of surrender. "I get the picture. Unfortunately. Where would you even find something like a..."

"I called it the meat grinder," Emma smirked.

"Lovely," Chakotay groaned. "You know this is important right? You can't be so indiscreet."

"Oh I am," Emma said innocently. "I work better without witnesses. I buried what was left of them at the back, I think."

An image of the girl happily singing to herself while digging a hole in the ground popped into his head. It wouldn't have been so bad until she started kicking small objects into the hole, all while mocking the victim's death cries. Chakotay shook it off, knowing that his latest recruit wasn't as crazy as she tried to appear. The meat grinder incident could've been an over dramatisation, he hoped it wasn't wishful thinking on his part.

"Maybe next time a quick neck snap or choke. There's a reason why it's effective," Chakotay decided to suggest.

"Do they have necks? Gotta make sure," Emma said, slightly puzzled.

Another member of his team approached the pair from behind, stopping in between them. "Commander, the Dauntless has transmitted code 146."

"Location?" Chakotay questioned as his face fell.

"It would be an hour out of the way from our current course. Co-ordinate shift would be .075 by 131." She handed him a PADD. As the Commander studied it she turned to address Emma. "Did you find another turbine?"

"How did you know?" Emma asked sweetly, grinning widely.

Chakotay tried not to shudder as he typed in the new course at the helm.

"That's a fun kill smile. I know it well," the woman replied cheerfully despite the topic.

"Yeah well, he deserved it," Emma said, glancing back toward Chakotay with a quizzical look. "What's 146?"

"Infiltration," Chakotay answered. Emma waited for the full answer she knew he was holding back. "Command level."

Emma's good mood dropped away in an instant. "Oh. Then whoever sent it has probably been caught by now."

"That's not the biggest problem," Chakotay said unevenly. "Getting onto a planet, into a building is one thing. A starship is shielded, or at least it should be. It's not like we can decloak and ask to visit."

"No, not with both of us on board," Emma mumbled, disappointed. "What if someone else hailed them? Do they know the ship?"

Chakotay sighed deeply, he shook his head. "We stole it, so I imagine all of them know. I don't think I'm quite ready to out the Marquis II just yet, not for one ship in the outskirts. We're not ready."

"You stole another ship?" Emma sniggered, forcing Chakotay to stare at her blankly. "Maybe you wouldn't have such a high price on your head if you got help for that."

"Stealing a shuttle all those years ago is *not* why Starfleet want to get their hands on me," Chakotay said. Their conversation sparked an idea to grow in his mind. "There is a sure fire way of getting them to lower their shields without the two of us hiding under the tables."

"How?" Emma asked.

"You said it yourself. They want me, you're probably wanted for multiple counts of *hilarious* homicide..." Chakotay said with a light hearted smile. Emma returned it with pride. "If they found out we are nearby, they'll try to capture us."

"Nope. They just liked to send me to death traps and set demons onto me," Emma shook her head.

"Fine. Maybe you should hide under a table then. I think it's time to crash the party," Chakotay said.

Emma's eyes shot wide open, her bottom lip quivered. Chakotay recognised that look and immediately grew worried. He didn't have time to do anything about it. "Literally?" she said, her voice squeaking. "Can I fly?"

Chakotay worked on his station, pushing the ship into warp. One panel to his right brought up an image of a Federation starship with the usual oval saucer, almost straight star drive, and three nacelles with one placed in the middle of its back. "We should arrive in five hours. Plenty of time to devise a strategy."

"Sooo, can I?" Emma asked with a pout.

Chakotay stared thoughtfully ahead of him. "Perhaps a fake hostage situation will get their attention. I *steal* this ship and someone escapes from me to send a distress call."

Emma reached over to touch the helm anyway as he was clearly distracted. At the last second the particular set of commands faded to black, while the neighbouring one closest to Chakotay flashed the text *Auto Pilot Engaged* a couple of times. He looked at her with a faked sad face, "oh, this ship's getting on. It can get a bit crabby sometimes. Don't worry, auto pilot is usually reliable."

"Probably because you fly it like an old man," Emma argued.

"No, the ship's a she and please, she's sensitive about her age," Chakotay whispered.

Emma groaned and got up to walk out of the small bridge. The Commander smirked once she was gone, secretly relieved. "One disaster at a time."

CRAIG AND AN OLD ENEMY

The thirty odd years Craig knew her, he thought he'd seen everything. The moment he walked into his step sister's house he was instantly proved wrong.

Something had to be amiss if his nephew was allowed to answer the door with the mat on his head. He didn't expect though to walk into the living room and find his sister floating on her back from the ceiling in a makeshift hammock made out of old bed sheets, pushing a vacuum back and forth upside down.

She seemed happy enough. Strangely blissful despite how painful and awkward it looked. So Craig waited for her to finish, which would have to be soon. Even Triah wouldn't clean the same spot with one thing for more than ten minutes before she'd have to move to another. He wondered if she managed to put up that contraption, couldn't she have vacuumed using a similar method to get up there.

Once the machine was off and the house was mostly peaceful again, Craig spoke up, "you know, you could have asked."

Triah hadn't noticed him enter, she jumped slightly, rocking the hammock enough to make Craig worried she would fall out. Instead she rolled over in it to put the vacuum down onto the old chair she only used to step on and reach things. God forbid she used it as an actual chair. After every clean it would go back to the shed, which she always wore some rain coat that reminded him of a hazmat suit to go into.

"Please, you'd miss so many spots," Triah scoffed mockingly.

"Ever heard of a feather duster? How dirty can a ceiling get?" Craig asked, knowing he'd regret it.

Triah wasn't shocked that he asked, like she usually would and he expected. Her eyes merely rolled. "This is why I avoid your place. Dusting a high object without vacuum? You don't own that house, the dust does. I don't know how you can live with that."

"You'd Hoover the floor afterwards," Craig said.

Triah laughed as she dropped down onto the floor, thankfully feet first. "Oh Craig, sometimes I wonder how you dress in the morning."

Craig laughed with her, "like normal people do. You should try it."

"No thanks. I've seen you wear the same trousers two days in a row," Triah said with disgust in her voice. Her eyes widened as she looked around. "I thought it was too quiet, where's..."

On cue her son ran by Craig and into the living room, leaving green tracks behind him. The mat on his head had deposited brown needles onto his head, shoulders and then the carpet. Naturally some dropped into the green as well, which Craig noticed looked a little sticky and was already drying.

"Scott, stop. Still!" Triah shouted. To Craig's surprise, Scott did stop. "I... where, have you even been to look like that?"

The boy bit his lip as if he was trying not to laugh. "Nowhere."

"Nowhere is made of green tar, is it?" Triah said tiredly. She turned to Craig, her eyes flickered with despair. "I don't even have anything green."

"Yes you do, in the sink," Scott said, then he gasped as he realised he'd told her after all.

"Which sink?" both Craig and Triah wondered aloud. Triah's face suddenly was a picture of horror. "That, that's the stuff I use to make my toilet bleach with."

Scott shook his head, smiling sheepishly. "No it's not."

Craig involuntarily backed off a few steps, fearing for his life. Triah had smoke rising from her. "That's mummy's cleaning cupboard. How did you get through the padlocks!?" she shouted.

"Uhoh, released the Kraken," Scott said in his uncle's direction before he escaped in the same direction he was running to earlier. His target was the kitchen door. Craig knew the boy wouldn't survive the day if he went in there that like that. As expected, Triah bolted after him, grabbing him in time as his hand touched the handle of the door. Scott did as he normally did once he was caught, reach up to give her a peck on the cheek, all while smiling innocently. In a couple of years he wouldn't be able to pull that off anymore, Craig thought.

"Ohno, not this time," Triah growled. "You're going in the bath."

Since the mummy's boy routine clearly wasn't working, Scott's huffy nature took over and he tried to pull away. "Aaaw but mum, I had one two hours ago!" He was already up to her shoulders in height, so he managed to get out of her hold.

Triah's face turned red, "I told you not to play football in the garden, I just cut the grass." She had her arms back around his shoulders, guiding him back the way he came. Craig was a little impressed that she didn't force him to have a piggy back ride to the bathroom, like she used to.

"So, why bother if I can't go on it?" Scott whined further.

"It's raining, that's why!" Triah snarled at him.

Craig just managed to hear his commbadge chirping at him over the noise. He took it out of his pocket, tapping it before he brought it closer to his face.

"Don't have any kids," Triah hissed to him as she passed by.

Craig nodded, "no problem, already there." Once they were gone he felt his shoulders relax. He didn't even notice they were tense until he did. "Yeah?" he said into the commbadge.

"Craig, it's me." Usually hearing Lena's voice brightened his mood, regardless of what was happening. Her tone though instead left him worried. *"We have a crasher. We're going to need to tighten security. Understand?"*

He did. The word that stumped him though was crasher. He thought about it as he made his way over to the window, looking out of it gingerly before shutting the curtains. In that fraction of a second he noticed a human sized shape blur behind a tree. Once the

room fell dark he remembered, the realisation slapped him in the face. "The festival. Ohno, is it that time already?"

"No, there were a few cancellations before me," Lena's voice answered. She sounded annoyed, now he had a good idea of the reason.

"Gee, I wonder why," he heard Kiara mutter in the background.

"What happened?" Craig asked.

He got a sigh before an answer, *"we're fine. It felt more like a warning than an attack."*

Craig wasn't relieved to hear that, for multiple reasons. The one shouting in his head was the proximity of this incident to the yearly gathering. He hoped Lena was wrong.

"A one off revenge attack or a warning. Either way, it's worrying," Kiara's voice said.

Craig's eye fell to the blocked window. He hadn't forgotten what he saw outside, the conversation brought it back into focus. "I wonder if anyone knew about this," Craig mumbled.

"If anyone has, wouldn't we know about it by now?" Lena's voice asked.

"Mum!" Scott's voice shouted from the stairs, outside the living room. "There's a man here, he stinks, put him in the bath."

There was a feeling of panic for a couple of seconds. The response to Scott's shouting settled his worries down. "I'm not the one covered in snot, little brat," a man's voice muttered irritably. "Isn't it time for your sponge bath with mummy? Get your nappy changed and jump in."

Craig's panic was long forgotten, he groaned over the top of a heavy foot stamp. "I'm ten!" Scott snapped.

"Let me guess," Lena's voice sniggered.

"Yeah. I'll call you back," Craig smiled as if she were there. He tapped his commbadge.

More heavy steps followed, these ones sounded like they were on the stairs though. "Oh my god, is that the same robe you wore last time? I told you not to come in my house," Triah's voice broke the sound barrier.

Craig sighed and decided to go quell whatever was happening in the passage. There he found Triah standing on the fourth step, glaring at a robed figure in front of the open door. Scott had a scowl of his own, it would have been identical to his mother's if his bottom lip wasn't sticking out. The robed figure turned to Craig's direction.

"You're taking a huge chance meeting me today. This better be good," Craig told him.

The man grunted, he glanced over his shoulder to shut the door. "Everything I say is good. You're just not listening."

"So, you're good now?" Craig couldn't resist, a smirk formed on his face.

It had the desired effect. The robed figure twitched visibly and greatly, Scott heard him grumble a few swear words.

"Yes, let your guard down," the man said in an obviously put on boastful voice. He said it far too quickly for it to be legit. "I'll make it brief. It's quiet, uneventful."

"You broke out of prison for that?" Triah muttered.

Craig wasn't sure what to make of it. This news could have meant anything but after his earlier call he had a bad feeling. "You think they know?"

The man reached up to lower his hood, revealing his face. For once he didn't have a smug or mocking expression on his face. Damien seemed almost serious, which was never a good sign. "They were bound to find out sooner or later."

Triah tapped her son on his shoulder, once she got his attention she pointed upstairs. "You're right, we should leave them alone," he said. She expected it, but still he ran for the front door instead. She rushed straight after him.

"I know," Craig sighed. "I had hoped it would be later. We're not ready. Tomorrow's too tempting for them."

"About that, I do know one thing," Damien said. He smiled as he spotted Craig's interest growing. "They're putting on quite a party this year. I hear an old friend will be a special guest."

Craig's face turned a little white. "You don't mean... Are you sure?"

Damien nodded. "He told me himself."

"Why?" Craig asked, trying desperately to ignore the dread building in his chest.

Damien burst into close mouthed laughter, his shoulders shook. "I didn't break out of prison. He allowed it, just like he's done before."

"He thinks you'll betray us, at our own reunion party," Craig thought aloud. He was worried, but he couldn't let Damien know. The smile on his face showed that Craig had failed. "Will you?"

Disgust took over Damien's smug face, he grunted in anger. "You misunderstand. I'm clearly the distraction. I won't be insulted by these things any further. I'm better than that."

"Yeah sure," Craig said quickly. "You have considered that they may expect you to defy your instructions. Not doing it may be what they want."

Damien's eyes narrowed. "Maybe they want me to think that, so I'll do it and fall into their hands. I'm no fool."

Craig groaned and covered his face briefly, "we could do this all day. We need to find a safer place to talk."

"What are you doing with that? No, put it..." Triah's voice screamed. The sound of a machine blowing air interrupted her. "No, I don't want those leaves in my garden. They've been on the pavement!"

"Yes, we do," Damien smirked.

Craig laughed nervously, "in more ways than one."

STUART

The sun had finally come out, the path outside seemed to be already drying from its warmth. A couple of laughing children ran right by. It had to be ten minutes by now, so she looked to the clock sat on the book shelf she knew was mostly just for show. What was behind and hidden by a holographic wall was a mystery to her. Getting her attention back to the clock, her impatience grew.

"Oh come on. You've been up there for an hour!" Amy shouted towards the stairs. Whether or not she was heard, she didn't know. It wouldn't matter, it never did. They'd make her wait, as usual.

On the next floor, in the largest of the bedrooms a little girl hovered in front of the wardrobe, scanning half of it for something. A brush gently went through her chocolate brown hair, styling it into a neat ponytail.

"Your sister's waiting, you have plenty of things to choose from," Jessie told her once she was done.

A pout developed on the girl's lips. "But, I have nothing that goes with the new red top I want to wear. Unless I want to go looking like Supergirl," she said, her finger on a navy item.

Jessie's eyes drifted up to the ceiling, smiling slightly. "Is this what I sound like?"

Her daughter swiveled around to look up at her curiously. "What's that mummy?"

"You're only going to the park again. Whatever you pick's going to get dirty," Jessie said, avoiding the question.

"I didn't say you're only going out with daddy again when I helped you pick something yesterday," her daughter said in a sweet voice. Her face scrunched a little, confused for some reason. "What we picked ended up dirty too, such a waste."

Jessie's face flushed a little, she tried not to stutter her next words, "they weren't dirty. They were ruff..." She cleared her throat to shut herself up. "You have some black tracksuit bottoms, they'll go with red."

"Granddad was mad. I don't get why, he doesn't care about fashion. He's terrible," she said, shaking her head and tutting once. It wasn't malicious, the little girl said it with affection. Her brilliant blue eyes always sparkled when she did. Jessie smiled and reached into the wardrobe to retrieve the trousers she mentioned. Of course the girl turned her nose up at it. "But those are not for going out."

"Alisha sweetie, you're missing the point. Your sister invited you out to play. You're not there to impress anyone," Jessie gently scolded her.

The little girl broke out into her usual bright smile. "Silly mummy, thinking I give a crap about what the other kids think. Have you seen how they dress?" she said the last sentence in a hushed voice.

Jessie laughed with her, "mmm hmm, so why did you push that last boy off the swing?"

"You don't want to know, trust me," Alisha answered, blinking a little too much. Jessie sighed, everytime she did that it meant trouble. She needed convincing and Jessie knew

what buttons to press. Today the button was navy leggings. As expected the response wasn't in favour of them, she broke out into nervous stutters. "He started it. He pushed some younger boy to get on the swing. Eye for an eye, and daddy said not to take that literally. Also boy said I was the ugly sister cos *blondes* are cuter."

"I thought you didn't give a crap," Jessie teased, all the while putting the cuter and ugly words aside for now.

The pair heard a tap on the front door, Jessie briefly glanced towards the passage. Alisha shrugged casually, "he said it to Amy, creep. How much older does he have to be before daddy will slap him around?"

The question caught Jessie off guard, she burst into laughter. "Oh, so dad's gave you the talk already. You'll have to do your own slapping for a while yet, sweetie."

"Aaw, you won't tell me the age limit either? Mean," Alisha pretended to huff. "Is Sasha close?"

Hurried footsteps going up stairs caught Jessie's attention briefly. "No, and don't encourage him. You haven't seen how, erm, far your daddy used to go."

"Was it like what he did to the neighbour? I love daddy, he's so funny," Alisha asked, her smile came back brighter than ever.

Amy hurried into the bedroom while Jessie wondered silently how her youngest witnessed that incident. At least there was no way she saw the whole thing, which was a huge relief. "Mum, *he's* here," Amy stammered nervously.

Jessie tensed, she looked at her with a painted on smile. "It's okay, you stay up here. I'll deal with it."

Halfway down the stairs Jessie felt a rush of cold air strike her. For a moment she thought nerves had gotten the better of her. Then she noticed the blinds in the dining room fluttering everytime she felt it. Jessie glanced over her shoulder. It was coming through the downstairs passage, the front door. It wasn't like Amy to answer the front door, let alone leave it open. She knew she hadn't before she heard light footsteps in the living room.

Any anxiety she had been feeling was gone instantly. There was no need to be nice and polite, no fake smiles or anything. It was a relief, but the brazenness of the visitor was insulting. Fuming she grabbed the handle to the living room and pushed the door open. The figure standing on the other side, inspecting the photos standing on the window sill, turned towards her with a fake smile of his own.

"What the hell Paris... you can't just barge into somebody's home uninvited!" she snarled.

The man didn't even blink which was even more insulting. "Your lovely daughter let me in."

"Yeah right," Jessie said. Amy was still far too shy to do so. Unless it was a family member or a friend, she'd always tell her or James. There was no chance in hell she'd open the door to this man, let alone invite him in. "Leave, I won't have people barging into my house. I don't care who they are."

"That's interesting, because your husband isn't so like minded," Paris said, his eyebrows furrowed slightly, seemingly feigning confusion.

What did that mean, Jessie thought to herself. She hoped it had nothing to do with why he was here today. "The odds of James being okay with you walking into our house on your own, then making you a nice cup of something, is lower than your son keeping his mouth shut for ten minutes."

Paris' smile turned into a genuine smirk. "That's not what I mean. You're wondering why I'm here, I assume." The glare was more than enough of an answer. "Where is your husband, may I ask?"

"Out. If you have a message, I can relay it," Jessie said in distaste.

"For someone who no longer has a purpose in life, he's sure out a lot," Paris said.

A few years ago the Admiral would be nursing a black eye for a comment like that. Today Jessie had to hold it back. It was the response he wanted from her, she knew it. "I didn't realise he was under house arrest. Why is he being monitored?"

If he was disappointed at her reaction, he didn't show it. "I guess I beat him here. Very well." Jessie flinched, the comment made her think he already knew where James was. Luckily she had plenty of experience with hiding her concern. "You were correct, for the most part. He will be monitored very closely. The slightest miss step and he'll be in prison for a very long time."

There was no reason to keep any neutral or fake expression on now, the blood drained from Jessie's face anyway. "What? On what charge?"

"What else?" Paris said with a shrug. "Security breaches, trespassing and my personal favourite; murder."

"That's ridiculous. James and I have a normal life here now, for once. You said it yourself, there's no reason for him to do anything," Jessie snapped as she stepped forward.

Admiral Paris' face tensed, his eyes flickered in anger. "Animals don't change their nature. A Slayer as violent as Mr Stuart would never settle for a happy family life. It would be too boring for him."

Jessie involuntarily clenched her fists, it took all the strength she had not to do anything with them. "You've always had nothing but contempt for him. Why is that?"

Paris' eyebrow raised, while his pupils dilated. The question surprised the Admiral. "I beg your pardon?"

"You wouldn't believe him when he said a Game would destroy a city, you even accused him of doing it to get attention. I don't recall you ever recognising what he did to get Voyager's crew, including your son home. Who by the way insisted that him and Lena should be commended for their actions. Your attitude everytime you walk into this house," Jessie answered as calmly as possible. "It seems a bit strange to me. I'd like to hear your excuse... oh sorry, *reason*."

Paris took a step closer, leaning forward a little to look her in the eye. Jessie stood her ground, daring him to even think of trying something with her deadly gaze. Instead he

smiled. "You're right. A suitable reward for his actions in the Game Sphere is long overdue."

Jessie noticed movement behind the Admiral, the second door to the living room sliding open carefully. "Be careful. You don't want people to think you're..." Jessie said as somebody walked through the tiny gap in the door. "Giving him *preferential* treatment."

"Hmm, it would be expected," Paris said as the new arrival edged towards them.

"Would it? The public regard James and Lena as heroes. The fact that officials have never said one word about them has always been a question," Jessie said. "It'll look a bit odd now after so long."

Paris stared her down. She couldn't tell what he was feeling, whether or not she had made her point a little too well or at all. At the very least he wasn't aware of the third person almost right behind him.

"I know what your pet has been doing," Paris hissed. The figure behind him momentarily stopped to mouth the word pet with a narrowed eyed, raised eyebrow and near smirk expression. "I know about the callous murder of the Klingon chancellor last week. I know he infiltrated Starfleet Command and his cold blooded assassination of council member Barton. I know that your next door neighbour was buried in his own back garden." Jessie was worried, but mostly because a weapon was slowly being pointed at the Admiral's head. "And I know the rat's behind me."

"Then I can ask. Have you got anymore stupid names for me before I cut your head off?" James said in a light tone.

Paris smiled darkly, only Jessie could see it though as his back was still facing James and the weapon. "Was that a threat?"

"An inevitability," James answered.

"Hmm. I doubt it. Not your ability or attitude, that's never been doubted," Paris said. He turned slightly so the pair were on either side of him. "But of your family's survival instincts. My location, my lifesigns are being monitored. You can't get away with it."

Jessie clenched her jaw as she resisted the temptation to hurt him. "You son of a..."

"If you do anything, you won't be able to stop the news from spreading. Your secret would be out," James said, strangely calm despite what the Admiral said.

It surprised the Admiral slightly, his eyes wavered for a second or two. It helped calm Jessie's angered nerves. Still her fists remained clenched. "I'm not the one keeping secrets," Paris said, his voice had lowered to a near croak. "I'm not the one murdering innocents."

"You have no proof that I have, or you would've had a battalion of redshirts out there," James said. Before the Admiral could respond he grabbed his arm roughly, "now get out of my home." He didn't give him a choice, he dragged Paris to the front door. Jessie followed closely, secretly hoping he'd resist in some way so she would have a reason to smash his nose.

"You're making a big mistake here, Slayer. Don't think for one second that I can't touch you," Paris snarled as he was pushed out of the door, light enough to keep him on his feet. "You'll regret playing games with me."

Jessie scoffed, rolling her eyes. "Unlike you, we don't play around, tricking people for our amusement. The games are over, accept it and move on while you still have some dignity left."

"Or people left," James added on.

Paris broke out into quiet laughter. "It's only just beginning." He walked away with his head turned so he could maintain eye contact for a while.

James closed the door, rolling his eyes at the same time. "They all act like a poor man's Damien impressionist. It was hard to keep a straight face."

"Maybe you should have opened with that then," Jessie said with a half smile. She sighed in relief, "I don't need to ask if your trip went well, at least."

"It could've gone better," James said reluctantly.

A city filled with lights, spanning miles in all directions had a gap in it. One building within a mixture of old buildings centuries old, and modern ones built a few decades ago. It appeared to be abandoned, not a soul in sight. Entirely made of glass, it would've been lost in the night if it were not for the street lights reflecting off a few windows.

The grounds before it were eerily quiet, until footsteps crunched against gravel on the walkway. One step brushed against something that clinked across the concrete, their second step landed on top of it to stop it. The door behind them closed on its own when a figure hiding in the shadows let go of it. They walked the few steps toward a lump lying in their path.

They looked around discreetly, then crouched down to lift the object up from the ground. Further clinks and crunching until it was completely clear. With it they walked back into the building, leaving behind only the shattered glass.

Jessie shook her head. "A bricked building would've been far noisier, and longer to clean up."

James considered that for a second, then he scrunched up his face before smiling a little. "Yeah, but if I had been similarly careful in one, the odds of him *escaping* it would've been lower."

"Hmm yeah, you did clean up the glass, right?" Jessie asked, suddenly worried.

"You act like this was my first time," James said, laughing slightly.

Jessie didn't feel better though, "Paris knew. If you covered your tracks, how?"

"The net's closing in, it's a good sign. I guess him knowing so quickly is a bit odd," James answered.

"He's getting bolder. Desperation or confidence, I wonder which it is," Jessie said as her worry drew her gaze to the window.

"Knowing him, both. We're prepared for either. They know without their network they're weaker, they'll do anything to get that power back," James said.

"That's what I'm worried about," Jessie mumbled.

On his way back to his shuttle Paris caught sight of a pair of young children, one teenage boy and pre-teen girl. The girl with her long curly black hair, paler complexion and brown eyes. The boy with messy blond, slightly darker skin and blue eyes. At first glance they would look like polar opposites. A closer look a stranger would see their shared facial features and shape, making it obvious they were siblings.

Paris smiled at them as he walked by on the opposite side of the path. The boy noticed him and stared back, his eyes narrowed with every step.

"Good day, son," Paris said politely despite his sharpened eyes drilling into him. The boy rolled his eyes and kept going. His response amused the Admiral, encouraging him further. "Just in case I miss tomorrow, give your father my best wishes for his birthday."

The boy hesitated on his next step, stopping him momentarily. The girl kept going, his reaction made her frown over her shoulder. "Ignore him Duncan," she said.

"I'll see you tomorrow, all going well," Paris finished with, now behind them and a few feet from his shuttle.

"Are you still here?" the boy asked rudely, bringing the Admiral to a stop. The boy turned around so he could see his face, a twinkle in his icy eyes. "Haven't you got somewhere to go, home perhaps..." his mouth dropped open in mock concern. "Oh wait, you don't. My bad."

"What! How dare you be rude to me," Paris hissed.

The boy's lips curled into a smirk, exactly how his father's would, Paris felt like he was talking to a younger clone. "Careful, you don't want to throw your last toy too far out of the crib, you'll be left with nothing." He walked away, leaving the Admiral lost for a decent comeback. He seethed quietly to himself.

REUNION

It looked like everyone had made it this year. Tom was torn over whether it was a good thing or not. Hundreds of people in one place, all but a select few blissfully unaware of what worried him so much. He had to keep it that way, so with his smile prepared and painted on beforehand in his Ready Room, he greeted everyone who stopped to chat with him. A lot of the faces he recognised, none so far were ones he would feel better seeing. The gaps in between people he would walk and look around, hoping to spot them.

B'Elanna appeared by his side, caressing his back. He didn't see her coming, his nerves were frail so he couldn't help but jump a little in shock. "Relax, paranoia doesn't help anyone."

She was right of course, she always was Tom thought silently to himself. He couldn't help it though. His father never attended these parties, he was always far too busy. A few years he would record a video message to be played after everyone else's speeches. What was so special about this one that he'd try to show up? He'd understand the tenth year anniversary, that would be a special one. Today, not so much. He hadn't seen him yet, so Tom told himself that it was an empty threat.

A loud couple of taps echoed around the large hall, courtesy of the microphone standing on the stage. For the first time in a couple of days Tom felt a little better. Finally the face of an ally, a friend. Even if it was only his first officer he saw nearly everyday, it was a big comfort to see him.

"Hello everyone, welcome to another reunion," Harry spoke into the microphone. He paused as close to a dozen more people filed into the hall. "This year we're kicking things off on a not-quite sombre note, with a fitting tribute to a very special woman we all know and miss. Please welcome..." Harry turned with his arm outstretched to greet someone entering the stage, only for his eyes to pop out at the sight of his daughter clambering onto it instead holding something by her lips. Tom recognised his look as pure horror.

"Daddy, daddy, daddy, guess what, guess what!" his daughter said super fast, her own eyes inhumanely wide. She tossed the object over her shoulder, Harry's intended guest stumbled forward to catch it, just missing it. "I had the best drink. It was like brrr, bleurgh at first and then, and then it was like whooo! I wanna sing for the nice people. Oooh, can I have a shuttle for my birthday. Daddy, daddy!" she tugged at his trouser legs so hard she nearly pulled them down. "Why is your last name a girl's name? Why are you not Captain yet, is it cos of that? Oh daddy! You have funny hair, it's like wet all the time like you stick it in a sink."

Harry quickly bundled the little girl up in his arms and stood up. Tira soon joined him on the stage. "This isn't the tribute I had in mind," he groaned as he carried his rapidly nodding and grinning daughter away. Yasmin took his place after picking up a flask from the floor. All the while the audience laughed quietly.

"The kid came out of nowhere," Yasmin muttered while checking if anything was left. Seeing there wasn't made her pout. "Anyway. This year it's the tenth anniversary of a pretty crappy time in our journey. She had gotten us all home like she promised, only for her to be taken away from us a few months later. I don't want us to mope about it, but remember how great she was. Her actions and some of her words..."

"I want some more coffee, now!" Mary screeched off stage somewhere. People couldn't contain their laughter, luckily it overlapped some of the child's tantrum'y screams.

"So erm... my brother and sister agreed that we should instead think back on our favourite times with her. How people met her and some things she did that left a lasting impression," Yasmin said, gesturing to the large screen behind her. She stepped to one side out of the way. An image of Kathryn Janeway faded onto it, smiling into the camera with her arms folded.

The image faded into a black background with text reading, "what was your first impression of Captain Janeway?"

Tom appeared on the screen moments later, sitting behind his Ready Room desk, biting his lip, worried that his words would be his last. "Buns of steel," he said, quickly becoming flushed. The current Tom did the same as nearby people snickered in his direction. "But no seriously. The first time I met her, she was talking down at me, like she did until the very end. True I was in a hole at the time but sometimes it felt like I never left it."

Harry appeared next, his eyes aiming at the ceiling as he thought about it. "I still don't know what the criteria is for crunch time."

B'Elanna laughed on the screen, sighing afterwards. "Are we allowed to be honest in these things? My first impression was this woman wasn't content unless the solution was blowing something up. I still stand by that."

Tom looked towards the real B'Elanna, she smiled awkwardly.

The next clip showed the inside of the Stuart's home, with James and Jessie sitting on their sofa, him looking at her expectantly with a telltale sign of a smirk. "If anyone had told me back then that she'd be my mother-in-law, I'd have punched the nutcase in the face cos it would likely have been Tom," she said.

"That's not a first impression," James sniggered at her.

Jessie pulled a face, slightly exaggerated as she thought about it. "That hair is ridiculous." She turned to James expectantly, smiling curiously.

"I can't remember my first, but it was probably something like *can I get a redo?*" he said, not in a serious tone. He laughed a little awkwardly. "You stole my second one," he said to Jessie, prompting her to smile innocently.

Craig, reminiscent of a deer in headlights, was next, standing in a different living room. "Uh, I don't want to piss this woman off."

"So you date her daughter, great plan," Yasmin's voice said off screen. Craig laughed nervously.

Neelix appeared afterward with a tear in his eye. "She wasn't interested in my debris. I'll never forget that."

The shot returned to the Stuart's living room at the same sofa, only this time three of the children were sitting on it with Kiara in the middle.

"Coffee. Coffee everywhere," Duncan started with. Sasha pouted as if he stole her answer, and everyone thought that was likely. He wasn't done either, "when babysitting me once, she thought I was a coffee pixie."

"She always made me laugh," Sasha said, giving her brother a brief what the hell look in between. Amy nodded, it was the only time her face was in the camera's view as she kept her head down. "Grandma Janeway was strong and in your face. I always liked her 'cause daddy is too." She smiled, Amy dared to raise her head while turning it to look at her. Duncan thought about it, then nodded as well.

Kiara's smile spread, her eyes sparkled. "My first memory of her I was laughing. I don't remember what it was about, but yeah I gotta go with Sasha on this one. I wanted to be like her."

Duncan looked like he was trying to resist saying something when the clip ended. The black screen came back with new text. "Your favourite Janeway moment?"

Tom's face brightened on his second clip. "I'm pretty partial to her moments of badassery to be honest. There's a reason why her puns are the classics. Time to take out the garbage. Brr, chills. Personally, I think she was the only person to take on the Borg. On purpose. That's pretty cool."

"Call me dull but I'm a sucker for the times when she showed her caring side," Harry answered. "She wasn't just a Captain, she was a leader. Not just a mother to James, Lena or Yasmin, but us as well." His face turned a little pale, "I'm gonna get haunted aren't I?" The camera nodded.

B'Elanna didn't need to think about it, her answer was simple. "When she chased down the demons invading her ship and they ran away from her. No surprise where her kids get it."

Back in the Stuart's household James winced, inhaling through his gritted teeth. "Just one?"

"Threw a chair at Seska. Wish I was there to see it," Jessie smiled. James looked at her in bemusement.

"Though who didn't laugh when she mixed up Crewman Suder with Counsellor Troi? Only Janeway," Harry laughed quietly.

"There's coffee in that plasma storm," the Doctor said, smiling nostalgically. He sighed, his voice turned slightly sarcastic, "it was never dull."

"When she told the Hirogen to grow a pair and stick their hunt up their uptight asses. That kind of thing you never forget," Tom added on. He winked at the camera, "I bet you wish you'd seen that!"

Craig looked on a little nervously, even though his eyes gave away that his example was funny to him. "In one sector she was known as the Coffee Smuggler. Wanted: armed and slightly unhinged. Last seen holding up a Cheapa Coffee with a coat hanger. How do I know this? The bounty hunter hired to catch her followed us around, begging for a signed phaser."

Harry sighed in contentment. "Oh yeah, Mr Shooty. Good times!"

"Ohno," Harry groaned in real life. Tira laughed behind her hand as her partner's face flushed bright red. That stopped when the clip set their daughter off into another frenzy, jumping up and down shouting *shooty*.

"When she asked me to punch Seven of Nine whenever she said something *American*," James said with one finger protruded from a lightly clenched fist. Jessie smirked next to him.

Lena appeared on the screen, in the same living room Craig had been in. She looked disappointed. "What? I should've been first," she complained.

"I don't know anyone else who'd beat someone up for saying data or futile differently," B'Elanna admitted.

"James took the American versus British thing a little too far. Now I know why," Tom said, his eyes wide. "Like mummy like crazy son."

Lena returned, quietly thinking the question over. "Whenever mum didn't take any crap from anyone. It's cheating I know, but I don't care." The camera lingered on her stubbornly, shaking a few times. She frowned at it.

The next image was of Kathryn Janeway's grandchildren sitting on the sofa. Sasha spoke up first, "when she threw that cup of sludge in Neelix's face. She was like this isn't coffee, it's crap, why would you serve me your crap. Then she gasped and slapped him, calling him a dirty git before storming out."

Amy giggled, Duncan didn't until he remembered that as well, then he was in tears laughing from it. "Yeah, and Neelix was crying. He wiped the sludge off his face and licked it, gross," he said.

"Was that the same day she told him if he touched her cup again, she'd stick his head in his wok?" Kiara asked. The children laughed, Duncan shook his head while doing so. "Oh, yeah that was when he slipped her the decaf. You guys weren't around then."

James brought out a fourth finger, leaving only his thumb clenched. He hesitated on it, his good mood faded away slightly making Jessie a little worried for him. "Despite how badly I treated her, when I needed her, she was there. Yeah she was hotheaded and sometimes a *little* crazy, but..." He struggled to continue, his head lightly shook.

Lena came back with a smile on her face. "Mum would never give up. It was her way or no way. She did whatever she thought was necessary because she cared about this crew, us. I think that I wouldn't be who I am if it wasn't for her example." She grimaced, "except for the coffee thing. I dunno how she drank that stuff."

The screen faded into another still image of Kathryn sitting in the Captain's chair, smiling proudly with a cup waiting nearby on the armrest. The picture encouraged the entire room to break into applause. Harry and Tira's daughter kept going long after they were done, so Tira had to gently clasp her hands.

It was Tom's cue to go up to the stage, he quickly maneuvered around the crowds to reach it. Once he got there he smiled broadly, and this time it wasn't faked. "Captain Janeway is still greatly missed amongst us all. But she lives on in us, and no I'm not being cheesy." A few people coughed. "If it wasn't for her, I'd probably still be in that penal settlement in New Zealand."

"I thought this was a celebration of her," Jessie spoke up loud enough for most to hear.

Tom cleared his throat, putting on a smirk as he gestured to her. "If it wasn't for Captain Janeway, Jessie would be a very bitter spinster with an army of cats instead of kids." He

knew Jessie's expression meant that she was making a mental note to pummel him later when no one was around, so he laughed gently to show he didn't mean it. "I kid, I kid. But seriously..."

"There'll be a tribute to him in about ten minutes," Jessie whispered. Beside her James struggled to keep a straight face.

Tom continued undeterred, "her sacrifice not only gave us a fighting chance, it's the reason we're all here tonight. On this day eight years ago, we returned home, to a safer..." His voice threatened to shake, giving him away. "Galaxy. Where our lives could go back to what they once were, only bettered by our journey. Today we celebrate, reminisce, look back fondly on other lost souls."

"Snore, bring back coffee lady," Mary blurted out, pointing at Yasmin. Harry tried to shush her but it was too late.

Tom cleared his throat once more. "As with every year, we will have a special program to pay respects to them as well. If you'd like to contribute, talk to Commander Kim. For now, please enjoy the party and relax. You've all earned it."

Neelix made his way towards the buffet table, determined not to show any signs of bitterness for once again being denied the chance to help. Like every year he came to these gatherings, the food laid out looked boring, uninspired and utterly tasteless. Nevertheless he began to fill his plate. On the other side he spotted a familiar young face he couldn't quite name, building a sausage roll fortress on his plate, or so it looked. The last time he remembered seeing the boy, he was a foot shorter, the same height he had been for many years thanks to a botched magic spell. He still had the same baby face coupled with bright blue eyes, Neelix didn't know why he hadn't realised who he was at first.

Standing beside him in the queue was a blonde girl, a similar age. She was somewhat familiar as well, yet nothing about what she was doing clued him in to who she was. Not until she pulled a small wrapped present from her pocket, while her face turned red and mumbled something. He didn't hear, but the boy heard fine. "My mum wanted to give this to you."

Duncan took one look at it and threw it over his shoulder to the girl's relief. "No way."

"She said it was extra special because you were thirteen now, a..." the girl said, swallowing a disgusted lump in her throat. "A big boy now."

Duncan shuddered, almost dropping his plate in the process. "Is she still trying to convince you to ask me..."

On cue Danny appeared behind the two kids, wrapping both her arms around their shoulders. "Aaaw, how's my two lovebirds? I found a lovely place for some alone time..."

"Mum!" the blonde girl barked at her. "Stop trying to force Duncan and I together. It's not happening."

"Aaaw Kirsty sweetie. That's some denial right there," Danny cooed, pinching her cheek. The girl squirmed to try to escape it. "I couldn't get his dad, so you gotta do this for mummy. I want some hot grandkids."

Duncan and Kirsty scrunched their faces in such disgust, even Duncan put down his plate, his appetite completely gone.

"Eew mum, I'm still not thirteen yet," Kirsty complained.

Unknown to the trio, Jessie had arrived on the scene with a look that would always smack Tom around on her face.

"Not now, silly. Still gotta lay the foundations early," Danny giggled, then gave Duncan a wink. He groaned and walked away to escape from the crazy woman. "He's the only boy, so you gotta work with me Kirst. Unless you want to go the IVF route with one of his sisters."

"Oh god mum. This joke is no longer funny. It's also insulting to dad, like he was your second choice," Kirsty said.

Danny waved her off with her now spare hand. "Oh he knows that already." Kirsty's jaw dropped. "Sweetheart, you're not going to do much better. He's a spitting image of his dad, so he's gonna look good later." Jessie's face twitched, violence brewed in her eyes. "We already know he's inherited the badass Slayerness from daddy too. What's the problem?"

"He's my friend mum, and it's creepy that you're trying to set me up with anyone," Kirsty grumbled.

Danny shrugged, "his parents were friends, so? I'm only trying to help, I wouldn't pimp you out. We both know it's gonna happen sooner than later, don't deny it."

"Oh really?" Jessie said in a threatening tone.

Kirsty sighed in relief while her mother momentarily stood, stunned with her eyes widening. Her smile reappeared, brightening her face. She swung around with her arms outstretched. "Jessie, my best girl friend. Give me a hug."

Jessie rolled her eyes. "Really, best? I'm so sorry for getting in the way of your *hot kid or grandkid* dreams." She shuddered in disgust for saying it. Danny didn't notice. "Didn't you think you went far enough with my son's birthday present this year?"

"I know," Danny actually sounded apologetic. "It was thoughtless. A boy like Duncan's not gonna need a pickup line book in a million years. You must be busy being overprotective mum, batting the swarms of girls away, for my Kirsty as well."

"Oh mum, only you could ruin a buffet," Kirsty groaned. She began to walk away just in time to see Neelix trying to sneak something from his jacket onto a nearby platter of snacks. Luckily a Security team got to him first, grabbing his arms roughly. They dragged him away. "Only you and the mad Talaxian anyway."

"Oh batting people away, what a good idea," Jessie said, smiling sweetly. Danny briefly laughed before making her escape in between a nearby gathering, then away.

Not far away the Doctor spotted a straggler he didn't expect to see. He stood next to a tall and thin computer screen currently showing an image of a group senior staff photo, squinting for some reason, all while holding a wine glass in hand. Not only did he look like a party crasher standing alone, out of the way, he stood out with his dark robe, the hood lying on his shoulders.

"Should I call Security?" the hologram asked as soon as he was close.

The robed figure didn't break his gaze, or visibly react in anyway that he could see. "No thanks, today is funny enough," the cocky voice of Damien answered.

"Why on earth would you want to come to a reunion party celebrating Voyager's achievements?" the Doctor asked, making Damien break out into quiet sniggers. "For that matter, how did you even get into Starfleet HQ, let alone in here?"

Finally Damien slowly turned around, the same old smirk and contempt in his eyes greeted the Doctor as he did. Apart from aging the eight years, he hadn't changed a bit. The hologram wasn't surprised in the slightest.

"I was invited, and why not," Damien replied in a mocking tone of voice. All the Doctor had time to do was scoff. "For a year I was a member of the circus. I helped, didn't I?"

"You tried to lead a few crewmembers to their deaths in the final Game. You threatened to take the Enterprise," the Doctor said. "You were arrested for it."

Damien's eyes widened, both hands gestured outward casually. "And I served my time. Stop being all drama queeny. I'm here for the same reason everyone here is."

"Free food and drink," the Doctor said in monotone.

"To celebrate the slight setback of those little shapeshifting trolls," Damien sneered. He raised a glass and pretended to clink a glass the Doctor didn't have. "Cheers."

The Doctor rolled his eyes. "Slight setback?"

Damien looked at him in genuine pity, or at least it was convincing enough. "Aaw, someone wasn't invited into the inner circle. I was," he said smugly. "If only the destruction of the Games Matrix genocided the ridiculous fools. I'd be here every year."

"Silver linings," another man's voice said on approach.

The Doctor looked over his shoulder while Damien chuckled, his eyes gleaming. "Oh this party has everything. The super villain, the demon and the wannabe," the ex-villain sneered.

"Did I miss the super villain?" the new arrival asked.

"We both did," the Doctor smirked. He held out his hand toward him, "it's good to see you Nathan. It's been a while."

Nathan smiled, taking his hand to shake. "Surely you've got better things to do than keep the Sith wannabe here company."

"Hmph, still go around with your babysitters Natey?" Damien grunted.

"You mean friends and family? Yeah, don't you?" Nathan said, turning his attention back to the Doctor. He meanwhile had been glancing between them, feeling like a piggy in the middle. "One day I'll learn to tune him out, like everyone should."

The Doctor nodded, while laughing quietly. "It was much easier when he was in prison."

"You still have friends and family members? I figured you would have assaulted and murdered them by now," Damien sniped back bitterly. He ventured away, smiling far too smugly for his own good. The comment wiped the smirk from Nathan's face, the Doctor looked on worried.

"Remember, tune him out," the Doctor gave him a friendly smile.

Nathan shook his head, "you can talk Doc Jones. What was he blabbering about with you?"

"Paranoia over much better villains," the Doctor brushed him off. "How have you been? Any episodes lately?"

"Nope," Nathan couldn't help but grin. "Three years, six months today since I last heard my alter ego whine. Five years since its last escape attempt." He winced, teeth clenched. "Too bad for it, and me, that it did so during our yearly family gathering, in our home town. James' sister kicks hard. Though, that's not a shock."

The Doctor looked on, puzzled as he not only didn't mention it, the demon he was talking about chose the riskiest time to emerge from Nathan's subconscious. Something about it concerned him, "you don't think he was trying to, how do I put it delicately, make history repeat itself."

Nathan laughed nervously, "oh god no. It can't, thanks to you and that op. It's not going anywhere."

"Still," the Doctor mumbled.

"Doc, you saved my life, you killed its spirit. I'll never have any children, it'll never move on. All it did in its final days was pop up like a Damien and make stupid comments," Nathan's smile was genuine. "It just decided to vacate when Lena gave it a kick in between my legs. So yeah, that was nice."

"I don't suppose Lena was apologetic about it," the Doctor winced.

Nathan stuck out his bottom lip, right eyebrow raised. "No she was. She said she'd do it quicker and more discreet next time." He laughed into his trademark endearing grin. "Are they here?"

The Doctor nodded, "how kind. Yes, I've seen them all. You'll probably find most of them by the buffet table."

Nathan clasped his arm, a silent thank you. He headed away towards the mentioned table. On the way he passed Harry trying to settle his daughter down still, now she was pulling her tights off while sitting on the floor.

"No, you'll tear them, again," he protested.

"Good!" Mary laughed as she tossed them over her daddy's head.

Nathan resisted laughing too loudly, at least until he was out of earshot. He found Lena first talking very quietly with Craig. Both of them looked worried, not in the party spirit at all. He thought he would try to fix it. It was what he did best after all.

"Makes you want one of your own, huh?" he said, gesturing toward little Mary. The couple stared at him, Craig turning a strange red, while Lena looked ready to murder her brother-in-law on the spot. "Strike one. I'm on my way to the buffet, wanna help me empty it?"

"Lena already did that. Though to be fair, Duncan and Amy helped her," Craig said.

"I wasn't the one that took a whole cake," Lena protested. She shuffled a little on the spot, "I never got the chance."

Nathan was more than curious, "then who did?"

Lena pointed to the closest corner. There he saw two children sitting at a table with their backs to him. He could see the cake, or what was left of it sitting in between them. He wasn't sure which kids they were, all he knew was they were two girls. One blonde with her hair in bunches, and a red head with a side pony tail. They couldn't be older than nine years old, he thought. He had a good idea who one of them was when he spotted his sister run over to them to snatch away the cake. They looked up at her, confirming who the blonde was. The other girl he recognised as Tom and B'Elanna's mischievous only daughter.

"I had to tell her. That much cheesecake would make even Amy bounce off walls," Lena said.

"You just wanted it to yourself," Craig teased her, smirking a little.

As Lena faked a scowl in his direction, Nathan watched Jessie return the half a cake to the buffet table with Miral hot on her heels. He felt something brush up against his leg, he glanced down to just in time catch Harry's daughter run by him with her own shoes in her hands. Her feet bare. There was no chance to stop her, she was already running up to another trio of kids. One of which he knew.

"Lisha, Lisha!" she shouted to get her attention.

Alisha looked over at the younger girl bounding toward her, her eyebrow shot up. "Mary-Kate?"

The girl stopped in front of her, shoving the white shoes in her face. "I got these, pretty huh. Better than yours."

"Nope," Alisha said plainly, shaking her head. "Why do you care?"

"You didn't like my dress last year. Said I looked like a dolly," Mary pouted. She stared at the other girl's mostly ice blue outfit. "You're cold."

Alisha blinked rapidly, her eye briefly diverted to the two kids she was with. "I said I don't like dresses, but you looked like my favourite doll in it. I like my doll. *Compliment, silly.*"

"No you were mean," Mary said in a huffy manner.

"No, mummy and daddy taught me to only be mean to bullies. I thought you were funny," Alisha said. She tried to lower her eyebrow but the sight of the other girl still holding her own shoes made it a struggle. Then she spotted the girl's dad heading in their direction trying to pull a tiny pair of tights off his head, without success. It was

even funnier since they were pink and glittery. "Still do Mary-Kate. You shouldn't care what people think, okay?"

Mary nodded, "I know! My name's Mary Kathryn though." Alisha's face fell, disappointed she could tell. "Only you can call me that, if I can call you Lisha, okay?"

Alisha broke out into a grin, "okay, deal."

"You look so pretty, I wish I had your hair and eyes," Mary said.

"Don't be stupid," Alisha said abruptly, to the surprise of Mary. "Everyone should be proud of who they are, pretty not important, mummy told me that. You're still pretty though, just like your daddy."

Harry arrived just in time to hear that. Alisha flashed him a smile that proved to him that she did it on purpose. "Oh and here I was thinking you weren't a Stuart kid. You so are."

"Thank you," Alisha said very politely.

Mary giggled, "you do look super nice, daddy."

"Oh no thanks to you, munchkin," Harry said through gritted teeth. He was starting to think Tira had a point. The tights were not budging at all.

It didn't help as Damien walked by, then double backed to laugh at him. Once he was done, he walked past a few new arrivals. One of them caught his eye, and he caught his. The Admiral maintained eye contact as long as possible, nodding at him once. Damien returned the favour with a malicious smile. It faded as soon as the man could no longer see it. In its place was a cold stare and flickering eyes.

Tom looked on, worried as Admiral Paris took to the stage. He smiled at the crowds, his hand clutched the microphone. It didn't take long for the room to quieten down and stop what they were doing to stare at him.

"The crew of Voyager. Welcome to Starfleet Command," he began with warmth. "This is a day of celebration, as well as reflection. Eight years ago you survived despite incredible odds against you. Your efforts ensured a life of peace for the peoples of the Beta and Delta Quadrant. On this day eight years ago, you came home to a heroes welcome, and to a new world. A new home for us all. Today is an extra special occasion."

Tom realised he had forgotten to un-hold his breath. He slowly looked around toward James and Jessie, then at Lena, each of them with varying levels of scorn on their faces. His worry grew.

"Today we're brought together once more. Today we overcame superiority and tyrants. Our own power strengthened, brought back from the dead," Paris continued, his voice becoming far more passionate.

"Oh get to the point you overcompensating prick," Lena whispered.

Paris paused for effect. "On the eve of the twenty fifth century, the Federation shall grow beyond this simplicity."

The audience began whispering to each other, asking others what he was talking about. The ones they asked had no idea either.

He got the response he hoped for. Paris' lips curled while he continued his speech. "Starting today we will no longer seek out new life, new civilisations. We'll expand into a new realm, a new civilisation, a new existence. Today you witness history! Being reborn."

Voices around the hall raised, confused at his words. The lights then petered out of existence. There was a brief moment of silence, overtaken by a roar flying over them.

"What's...?" Tom said to B'Elanna. Low lights began to flicker back on. He then noticed two people within the crowd took advantage of the still darkness to wade through the confused crowds. Anyone who could still see him, even faintly, saw the Admiral outstretch his arms in a grand gesture.

"The voyage is over. Your plight is at an end. Embrace it or..." Paris said, his voice darkening as well.

Tom and B'Elanna both saw an audience member's silhouette raise something, pointed at the Admiral. Tom's first instinct was to panic at what could very easily be a weapon pointing at his father. In his mind though he knew the devastating truth. Still, he couldn't shake off the feeling, the instinct to stop this, to protect him. He knew he couldn't, even still he hurried towards the perpetrator.

He wasn't the only one who had noticed. The Admiral leered at them. "I warned you," he hissed. The light from the weapon lit up the room for a second. No one could miss it. People saw the Admiral's shadow flutter and change colour in that very brief moment. Then it was dark once more.

The lights flickered back on momentarily. Anyone who saw this expected a body slumped on the stage. Instead they saw nothing. He was gone completely.

"Is he...?" Tom began to ask, stuttering slightly as he finally got to the shooter.

"No," James answered him, he kept his weapon still trained on the previous spot. He looked around, "he changed shape."

"He could be anyone," Lena said beside him, her shoulders raised and tense. "We should stick together, just in case."

James nodded, showing his agreement. "I wonder what that noise was." Tom frowned at him, until he remembered what he was probably referring to. The Admiral's speech had overshadowed the loud roar that shook the building. He quickly figured that was the point. He slapped his commbadge.

The door swung open, lights activated on his command. Admiral Paris strode into his office, a confident smile on his face. The entire wall ahead of him, behind his desk, made entirely out of glass, changed to an orbital view of Earth. There a Sovereign class ship flew alone over Europe, shaded from the sun, only brightened by the buildings and street lights.

It wouldn't be alone for much longer, he thought. One small thumb press against his desk computer would see to that.

They began as dots in the distance. They quickly grew larger. Dozens of Starfleet ships swarmed around behind the lone starship in seconds. Paris smiled at them as his computer beeped in response.

"Standby," he ordered them, keeping his eye on the first ship closely. "Let's see if we can turn the tides a little."

Tom's face had turned a ghostly white. The crowds around him had dispersed, only his closest allies stood around him. "Can you... can you repeat that?" he said.

A woman's voice spoke up through his commbadge, "twenty four of them sir, and I'm detecting another approaching. Their shields are all up, no sign of weapon charging. Not yet."

"They wouldn't. Over the top speech aside, they wouldn't make the first shot. Not here," James said.

B'Elanna folded her arms, a thoughtful look on her face. "They wouldn't send two dozen starships to confront us, just to say hello. They're here to at least intimidate. But why now?"

Tom turned to Harry, he almost snorted into laughter at his new *hat*. Due to the situation he managed to hold it back. Harry noticed his face struggling though. "We should go back. We don't need to worry about discretion. This is an unusual situation regardless of what type of ships they are," Tom said.

His commbadge beeped. Another voice came over it, a one that chilled Tom to the core. "Tom, son," Paris said softly.

Tom swallowed yet another lump to answer him as calmly as possible, "dad? What's going on. Are you okay?"

"Yes. I took precautions. Be careful, I've known for a few weeks that the Slayer has turned once more. He's killed many," Paris' voice said. Tom spotted James rolling his still blue eyes in the corner of his own, sowing the seeds of further doubt. *"I believe he's not the only one. You heard the sound before? That was a ship belonging to a group of rebels. They're paranoid and deeply dangerous. We were expecting them. You should lead the charge."*

Tom glanced at his allies, his old crew, standing around him. He noticed James fiddling with a modified tricorder, he had a good idea what he was doing. "We didn't detect any ship, just the fleet dad. Why me?" Tom asked.

"The rebels are lead by a man you used to know. I trust you and you alone to come to a more peaceful solution. I'm counting on you. I'll monitor your progress from here," Paris' voice said. The bleep signalled that he had cut himself off.

B'Elanna looked in James' direction expectantly. "Well?"

"He's in his office. That's way too obvious," he answered her.

Tom turned to Harry, they nodded at each other. Then Tom let himself laugh at his friend's plight. He of course scowled in return. "Now's not the time, Tom."

"Now's the perfect time," Tom smiled as confidentially as he could. "Battle stations everyone. We can do this." Some nodded, a few smiled. No matter what they did, he knew they were on his side and that reassured him. He could feel the confidence he used to feel growing back.

It took some of his hair with it, but Harry managed to get the tights from his head in time to enter the Bridge. He walked straight to the centre, keeping a close eye on the viewscreen. Instead of the fleet, which he expected, he saw empty space on it.

"The fleet are standing by for orders," the woman they spoke to earlier said from the command chairs.

Tom walked over to stand by his best friend's side. "The mystery ship?"

The man at opps shook his head, he looked over his shoulder to the command team. "They should be right in front of us, sir."

Right on cue a shape shimmered into existence in the centre of the screen. Tom frowned, the ship was definitely another Starfleet vessel. "What can you tell me?"

"It's registering as the USS Bozeman B. It's the ship that was reported missing two years ago," Opps answered him.

"Hail..." Harry began to order, but the beeps from Opps told him someone else had beaten him to the punch. Tom gave him a bemused look. "On screen."

The image of the starship faded out to a small Bridge. At its front two stations were two faces the ex-Voyager crew all recognised.

"So Tom, you haven't lost this one yet? I'm impressed," Chakotay said with a smirk.

Tom gave him a similar look back. "I'm surprised you haven't crashed yours yet. What brings you here?"

"We almost did," Chakotay said, briefly glancing at Emma on the parallel chair. She smiled sweetly in return. "I thought I'd finally come to one of these Voyager events. I didn't expect the warm welcome. Shame, I brought enough treats for everyone. I'll just have to arrange my own party." He casually shrugged, all while pressing a few commands into his station. The screen switched back to space view.

"What's he..." B'Elanna began to ask. She didn't have time to finish. Other objects surrounding the starship began to appear, quickly filling the screen.

Paris' brow furrowed, his eyes darkened as he saw the exact same thing they did. So many ships of different styles and colours de-cloaking around the stolen ship. Angered

by it, his fist slammed into the computer panel. "Starfleet Command to USS Voyager. This is an act of aggression, make the first move. Now!"

The voice once more gave Tom chills, he clenched his fists, determined not to let it break him. The order the man gave him, he'd regret it he thought to himself. It made him smile. He looked at Harry, "you heard him."

Harry nodded, the pair separated. "Voyager to Dauntless. Your squadron initiate Delta Four Seven," he ordered as he stood behind Opps.

Tom passed Tactical, "ready quantums, shields at full."

The Sovereign ship moved out of orbit first, leading the way. Two thirds of the starships followed it towards the renegade ship. At the last second, they branched off in completely different directions. The Sovereign lead four others, one of which was another Sovereign class to the right. They all maneuvered around to surround the rest of the fleet. All the while the renegade ship and its fleet approached, splitting up as well to block the remaining eight vessels from going anywhere.

"What... what is this?" Paris growled. His head snapped to the right at the sound of a commotion outside his office. Security officers shouting, phasers blasting, loud bangs as heavy objects hit walls and floors. Quickly he hit his computer again, "Paris to Voyager. Tom, what is the meaning of this!?" He waited but got no response.

His door swung open, ripping it off its hinges. Two figures walked in, armed to the teeth, a weapon in each hand pointed at him. The mere sight of them always filled him with quiet rage. Today after what he'd seen, he couldn't keep it quiet anymore. "You, you did this!" he spat. He looked behind him at the window quickly.

"If you want to fall ten stories, be our guest. It'll save time," Lena said with venom in her voice.

Paris clenched his jaw, determined to show some superiority over them. He settled for a smirk. "You've made a deadly mistake, freaks. You have no idea the enormity of my mission. This..." His arms outstretched, "is a mere nail in a huge structure."

James matched his expression, it wiped it from the Admiral's face. "You think we've lived the last eight years in ignorance? You underestimate us, again."

Paris' face turned white, the anger in his eyes hardened them. "Both of your callous murders of key figures in the Federation have not gone unnoticed. You will pay..."

"That's odd, because until a few weeks ago they had," Lena laughed sinisterly at him. "I'm guessing you don't check up on your outer spies as often."

"Yeah, how is your new *structure* anyway? Standing tall I assume, lots of support and connections," James questioned with a smile.

Paris chuckled darkly. "Your destruction of our network only helped us uncover its weaknesses. I have thanked you for that, haven't I?" He took a few steps out from behind his desk. "Though your new Voyager doesn't have the same specs as the old, so we needn't have bothered."

The eight starships opened fire on their captors, who quickly returned the favour. Grossly outnumbered, the eight began to lose their shields, one by one. Nevertheless they kept firing.

"Get a tractor beam on them," Harry ordered.

"The Katane already has," Tactical reported.

Harry smiled, shaking his head. "Naturally. Disable their weapons, don't do too much damage." Tactical nodded her head. He looked at the screen in time to see their older sister ship take a couple of hits like it was nothing from a much smaller vessel. One blue torpedo knocked out their shields. The tractor beam flew out next, trapping them further.

"Enterprise has got them, one more to go," Opps reported.

"You gotta hand it to the Softmicron. They sure do know how to give us a helping hand," Harry smiled smugly. "Once the last ship's disabled, prepare the shuttles for launch. We'll scan the crew one by one if we have to."

"Your friends from the Sphere have come a long way. Nothing better to do than meddle, I trust," Paris taunted his *guests*.

Lena noticed he was gesturing to the Katane holding one ship in a tractor beam. "Yes, we've got you to thank for that, haven't we?" she said, mocking his earlier tone.

"You're wasting your time. You think you've gotten the upper hand, that you've surprised and deceived *us* for once?" Paris said, breaking out into laughter. "Think again. Our connection to our reality is back online. There's nothing you can do but wait, wait for your inevitable deaths. Why wait..."

Lena and James shared an annoyed glance, she rolled her eyes, he only shrugged. They turned back to fire at the Admiral as he was still talking. This time it hit him, he dropped to the ground. His form reverted to his true Softmicron shaped self.

"We need to find this last network hub of his. Then it's finally over," Lena sighed, still frustrated despite their kill.

James made the first move towards the Admiral's desk. He quickly scanned the computer, while Lena took her time to walk over, watching the view outside carefully.

"The others hid theirs in plain sight, but not that plain," James said.

"I dunno, the Vulcan spy decided to build his pylon looking one in the mountains. Everyone could see that thing," Lena said.

James kept working on the computer, a frown on his face grew more intense the longer he did. Lena watched, getting more and more worried with every passing second. "What?" she asked.

"I don't see anything. No unusual power surges, no weird detours, no hidden rooms. Nothing," he replied.

Lena stared in disbelief, "but something did happen. The lights fluctuated. Something must be there."

James shook his head, "if it is, it's well hidden." The pair heard a man laughing from afar. Their first instinct was to look at the fallen Softmicron, but he remained deathly still on the ground. They immediately realised it was coming from outside, it was approaching and it was familiar.

"You've got to be kidding me!" Lena snapped.

A man they knew well and wish they didn't walked into the door frame, sneering at them both one at a time. "Can't say I didn't warn you."

Lena stomped forward, brandishing a sharper weapon in his face. "What exactly did you warn us about, Damien!" she shouted at him.

Damien tried to swipe the blade out of his face, Lena's grip on it was far too tight so it did nothing. He glared towards James, "I said you were making a mistake, that you weren't untouchable."

Lena scrunched her face, confused at his generic words. However James' eyes widened at them, they meant something to him.

"Now I have you, rats caught in my trap," Damien sneered.

"What the hell are you talking about you little rabbit obsessed shi..." Lena snarled.

"That's not Damien," James said firmly, shocking her.

Damien burst into hysterical laughter, only for a few seconds. "You're not leaving this room, not alive anyway." He cocked his head to the right, staring at Lena with wide eyes. "Did you really think I'd sit in my office after a near assassination? You don't remain under people's noses for twelve years by being stupid. Damien can be useful, when he does something right."

His arm reached out to something out of sight, he pulled it immediately back, bringing another Damien into view. This one at the very least unconscious. He tossed him harshly to the floor in front of him, forcing Lena to stumble backwards to avoid getting hit. His other hand drew a weapon of his own, an advanced looking phaser.

"Now I couldn't decide which one of you to kill first, I wanted you both to suffer and watch the other doing so. This should do the trick, widespread and slow burning," Damien said as his body shimmered as if it were made of water. It changed into Admiral Paris, smiling maliciously at them. "These are your Human weapons, you designed them."

You call us the monsters with your phasers and your so called ships of peace built like battleships. So called heroes with another name for killers. You make me sick."

"Where's the network HQ, *Paris*?" Lena asked, inspiring him to laugh at her. "You're going to kill us anyway."

"Did my decoy do the villains talk too much routine? That gave you the wrong idea," Paris said.

James couldn't help but laugh for a second, "really? I've counted three speeches so far."

"I could tell you, so you'd be tortured by being unable to stop it as you die. I think this will torture you enough," Paris said. "Though I will tell you this. It's something to think about while you're writhing in agony. Hundreds of your ex crewmates still wait in the hall, along with both of your children, loved ones." He sniggered, "yes. Once you're both nothing but ash, I'll chase them down, one by one. Starting with your deaths, I will begin... the hunt."

A phaser shot rang out through the office.

BACK TO NORMAL

No one noticed it at first. The sky seemed to be gradually getting lighter. Some glanced up, expecting to see the moon peeking out from the clouds or a low flying vessel. Others curiously checked the time on their nearest console or device, then they'd do the same.

Only they'd be forced to squint their eyes at an intense flash of light in the night sky. The new moon no longer invisible, hidden in the dark. Any stars that could be seen before were gone. Clouds illuminated in a light blue and pink haze.

It was eleven pm on a summer night, the sun had only recently gone down. Yet a white light shone in the sky, only the moon obscuring a small corner of it.

Everyone was looking up, a mixture of fear and curiosity flooded across the previously dark side of the Earth.

On the viewscreen everyone on the new USS Voyager's bridge could see the same thing, only instead of clouds in their view, a mix of Federation and alien ships were flying away from the phenomenon. If they hadn't seen it appear with their own eyes, the crew would be convinced they were only looking at their sun.

"What the hell is that?" Harry asked with dread trembling his voice.

Opps struggled to answer him, he rapidly shook his head as he inspected every part of his console. All eyes were on him and he could feel it in his back.

"I can hazard a guess," B'Elanna said plainly to mask her own worry.

"I'm detecting a massive amount of subspace energy, Commander. Other than that, the sensors have no idea," the Opps officer stammered.

Harry's chest sunk into a deep hole. He tried to recover it before he spoke again. He had to be strong for his crew. "Cross reference it with the final Astrometrics data from the previous Voyager."

The Opps officer glanced back over his shoulder. "Sir?"

"Hazarding a guess," Harry tried to smile, only his lip merely twitched.

"Aye sir," the Opps officer nodded.

While he paced the command centre of the Bridge, an officer with a golden collar to his uniform approached him. "Yes Lieutenant?" Harry said once he noticed him.

"The sweeps of the infiltrated ships are complete. We have nine detainees all together," the officer answered. He noticed the entirety of the Bridge looked worried. Judging by the non-senior staff members also confused faces, they were in the dark as much as he was. "All but one were in command level, the other was oddly enough in Sickbay working as a nurse."

"Transport all of them to our brig. Make sure at least two people have an eye on them at all times," Harry ordered. He turned his attention toward B'Elanna. "Looks like we'll need to have a chat with one or two of them."

B'Elanna didn't seem so sure. "The one with all of our answers is in Starfleet Command. That you can count on."

"I hope James and Lena remember that, or..." Harry said warily, following his words with a mild cringe.

The woman in the command chairs cleared her throat, getting Harry and B'Elanna's attention as she stood up to their level. "Is now the time to ask just what the hell is going on?"

B'Elanna and Harry exchanged awkward glances. B'Elanna lightly shook her head, while Harry felt a little conflicted on the matter.

"Now's the perfect time," a disembodied voice intruded. B'Elanna and Harry recognised it immediately, they groaned to themselves. Moments later a blinding flash took over the entire Bridge for a second. Once it was gone, a familiar face stood in its origin point, clicking his tongue. "Oh, what a mess you people are in. Again."

"Q. What mess are you whining about?" B'Elanna demanded.

Q's eyebrow flicked upwards. "You mean you don't know? You think you've won, don't you? It's only just begun."

"What?" Harry stuttered.

"You've angered the little blighters," Q chuckled in his direction. He then looked around at everyone, frowning more and more. "Seriously, this is the new ship? So much for originality."

B'Elanna clenched both her fists and her jaw. "Q, get to the point!" she growled.

Q wasn't all that bothered about her anger, he didn't flinch at all. "Do you have any idea what you did when you destroyed their network?" he asked casually.

"We stopped the games for good, and we made sure that they couldn't bring anymore demons into our universe. What's the bad here?" Harry said.

Q smiled at him, the usual glint in his eye that gave away his mischievous side was oddly missing. "Before you did so they were only settled on making a new factory, if you will, on your turf. To satisfy a very mortal and weak sense of vengeance. Now, they need a new tunnel and a new door."

B'Elanna stomped over to him and whispered, "we know this already. Captain Janeway died to bring us this information."

"Do you?" Q whispered back mockingly. "You understand the implications? What you're up against? Once more we're on the blink of oblivion. I can only offer you one more chance."

"What are you talking about?" Harry asked.

Q's smirk began to grow, "another roll of the dice. Land on anything but a six and you lose."

"A six?" Harry mumbled, his thoughts trailing off.

"We've cornered them. A majority of their spies have been captured or killed. That thing..." B'Elanna snarled, pointing at the viewscreen for emphasis. "Won't be at full strength or they'd have no need for the other *factories* on other Federation planets. You better not be saying that James, Lena and Chakotay's efforts over the last eight years were for nothing."

Q stared between them both, his face stiffening. B'Elanna thought she saw some sympathy in his eyes, she assumed she was imagining it. "You forgot the reason we're here at all. Why the other timelines failed." Harry looked up, awoken from his thoughts, while B'Elanna's anger faded into a realisation. "They all lost something. It seems we're fated to follow the same path after all."

A phaser shot rang out through the office, slicing through the silence like it was tissue paper. A body dropped to the floor, revealing somebody standing behind them. His face locked in a tight grimace, eyes simmering with hatred and sadness.

"That..." he said, his voice cold. It fell into a tremor while he lowered his arm, "was for my father."

The body before him shimmered, its shape twisting before his eyes until there was only a tiny, harmless looking creature no bigger than a small cat left. The phaser it held, half of its size, it would've struggled to hold it like this.

The rest of the room looked on, partly in shock at what they saw.

"And for trying to do a cliffhanger. Enough is enough. This is the end," he continued, rambling.

"Tom," Lena cut in, her eyebrow raising. The pair made brief eye contact. She noticed his eyes glistened in that moment right before he dropped to his knees. His body hunched over, head cradled in both of his hands.

She turned her attention back to James at her side, he had a firm yet sullen stare fixed on the new arrival. He walked over to him slowly, placing a hand on his shoulder when he did.

"I'm sorry," he told him at the same time.

Tom's head shook, and so did his hands along with it. "Don't. I'm fine."

Lena crouched down next to the fallen, tiny body of the Softmicron that once had Admiral Paris' form. A look of distaste on her face developed whilst staring at it.

"I shouldn't have told you," James said.

Tom raised his head out of his hands so he could look up at him. Tears rolled down his cheek, his face already white and clammy. Yet a small smile was there. "You think it's

better that I didn't know a member of my family wasn't really? Didn't you learn anything from the Duncan incident?"

Lena winced, while James' face was unchanged. A few seconds later he inwardly berated himself and laughed uncomfortably. "No. You're right. Eight years is a long time to know that some tyrant wannabe is pretending to be your dad. It's..."

"You think I should've been spared this?" Tom said while standing. He forced himself to look down at the body. "My only regret is that I don't know what did happen to my old man. Small fry compared to everything else he's done."

"Yeah, it would've been nice if we got the chance to ask him," Lena said bitterly.

James bit his bottom lip as he glanced down at her, her bitterness pretty clear to him, but he knew it wouldn't be to Tom. The former helmsman meanwhile looked on in dismay at her.

"This thing has ran Starfleet for god knows how long. Stole the Enterprise, sent it into the sphere to lure Voyager into it, while he invited his buddies over to help him out. Tried to build some kind of Games Matrix Version Two in our own backyard," Tom said bewilderedly. "Who cares but me what happened to my dad."

James shook his head as he moved his hand back by his own side. Tom noticed the look on his face was the one he was more used to; silently judging him, although he knew the silently part wouldn't be for long. "You still say some stupid things, you know that right?"

"Yeah, yeah. You're still really insensitive. I killed what looked like my dad. A little compassion," Tom said, not entirely seriously.

"Since he was the one ordering those things, finding out how he managed to take your dad's place isn't a teeny tiny thing," James said on route back to the desk.

Lena sighed and nodded slowly while clenching her jaw. Her hand rolled the body slightly. The two men watched her reach for the phaser it dropped. Tom's face drained as the realisation hit him, his head turned to the body on the floor. "Oh. Now he's dead. We'll never know."

"Right now though, we've still got the missing network hub to find," James said.

"Oh." Tom's head darted toward him with his eyes widening. "What do you mean? He activated something during his mad super villain speech."

Lena sighed as she inspected the phaser in her hand one more time. "His decoy did, anyway."

"Oh," Tom made a hopeful sound this time, earning a brief Janeway glare from Lena. "No?"

Both Lena and James pointed at the ground next to the desk, Tom noticed the other small body lying there. "Ohh.... right."

"That could've easily been him during the speech. All we do know is that after it, he changed into Damien and fled," James said. His attention turned to the computer panel spread across the majority of the desk.

"Damien?" Tom muttered, he looked a little worried as he glanced down at his victim once more. This time he noticed there was another more humanoid shape on the floor in front of it. "Wouldn't changing into one of us like you or Lena be a lot more effective?"

James stared ahead at the same thing. "No, I didn't get it either. It's not like he tried to be him."

"Does it matter who did the speech or what they looked like?" Lena asked with a roll of her eyes. "Somebody activated something that messed with the power here. We've shut down all the other connections in this new network, only one remains and it has to be here."

Tom folded his arms, his gaze a few miles away. "On Earth, not necessarily in San Francisco. That would be too obvious." The two siblings stared at him blankly, without moving, he thought he said something stupid again. "We weren't supposed to know about any imposters so that doesn't matter, I know. I say stupid things."

"You could be right," James said.

Tom nodded, sighing melancholy to himself. "No worries, I'll shut up while you figure it out."

Lena's face scrunched up as she looked back at her brother. He shrugged and briefly widened his eyes. "We were played. That speech was so obvious he may as well have said *hey, the secret base is here but it's not really, mwahahaha*," she said.

"A lot of the Soft we've met have been too smug and confident for their own good. It's too *bad* that them and Damien never really got along," James commented.

On cue there was a groan from the floor, coming from the larger body. Lena noticed movement in the corner of her eye, making her groan. "Ugh, where did I put my yoghurt?" Damien mumbled as he sat up. James and Tom briefly glanced at him while he held his heavy head.

"I guess, but it still isn't like them to have their secret network hub right at the heart of Starfleet Headquarters," Lena said.

Tom stared between them rapidly. "Wait, you guys think I'm right? That I wasn't expecting."

"We noticed. It only took you a minute or so to realise it," James commented.

"The damn thing tasted funny," Damien murmured, followed by a couple of lip smacks.

"He still triggered the activation from here. It must have been that loud noise we heard during his speech," Tom thought aloud.

James frowned, instantly making Tom wonder what he said wrong this time, but it was directed down at Damien. "What tasted funny?" he asked the villain.

Damien's head snapped up at James, the scowl appeared afterward. "Oh I see. Everytime you're stuck, call on Damien." He staggered to his feet.

"Why would that offend you? You are a genius, right?" Lena mocked him as she folded her arms.

Damien raised his hand up, keeping it flat, and pointed it towards Lena's face. Her eyes narrowed dangerously. "I've spent most of this decade living in that hole, passing you freaks intel. The least you can do is treat me with respect."

Tom's eyebrow shot up quickly it reminded the rest of the room of Tuvok's usual reaction to everything. "What are you talking about? You were arrested, you had no choice in the matter." He directed his confused stare to the others. "What intel?"

James ignored his question for the moment. "All I asked is what tasted funny. Pretty soon the answer's gonna be your own blood."

Damien chuckled darkly, "how's that *I'm not going to hurt anyone again*, pacifist redemption arc going? Oh sorry, I meant to use the past tense."

"Speak for yourself, I'm going with present," James smiled similarly back.

"Good, being a violent jackass is your only character trait. Without it and snoozeville," Damien commented. Just in case he stepped out of arm's way. Then he looked around quizzically. "Wait, someone tell me how I ended up here. The last thing I remember I was nodding off to the runt's obvious wannabe villain speech."

"Or hopefully a really bad yoghurt," Lena said in a lighter tone.

Tom shook his head and his arms folded. "Intel, from a guy no one likes stuck in a cell for eight years. Right."

Damien meanwhile clicked his tongue when it pressed against the roof of his mouth, his eyes narrowing. "It *was* a really bad yoghurt. They poisoned me."

"The fake Admiral broke Damien out of prison to do his dirty work for him before. That was why he ended up on Voyager, remember? It was no harm if he never did that again, but if he did we'd get an idea of what he was up to," James said toward Tom.

"I must have missed the memo saying that Damien was redeemed and we could trust our biggest secrets with him," Tom grumbled.

Damien burst into hysterical laughter, he clutched his sides for extra effect. "Oh Paris Junior." His laughter disappeared instantly, his face turned serious. "Nobody cares about your itty bitty secrets."

Tom rolled his eyes in disgust. "You know what I mean."

"Please," Damien grunted. "These things trampled all over my territory, stole my thunder. I was taking over the Federation before it was cool, with far less resources and more cunning. I'd like nothing more than to embarrass the little overgrown snots, show them how a real villain does it. Make them grovel..."

"Surely Paris would've noticed that the other hubs were destroyed when he activated this new network," Lena butted in to his annoyance. "Without them, all this last one will do is generate a measly signal to nowhere."

James shook his head stubbornly, "there's no connection to it here. He didn't notice because he couldn't. That noise we heard could've been anything from a low flying shuttle to a signal disguised as something else."

They realised something as soon as he finished talking. They glanced around at one another with worry. Damien sniggered quietly to himself for once.

"There's another Softmicron isn't there?" Tom voiced their worries aloud, confirming they were thinking the same thing.

James turned to look out of the window. "There's no one else that fit the profile. No one left that mum suspected. Whoever it is has been working in the background to avoid detection."

"So chances are their hub is too," Tom said in full agreement.

Lena found herself looking at the second Softmicron body once again. Something about it didn't quite feel right. A feeling she was missing something nagged at her over and over. She didn't think about it, her head fell to the alien by the desk. Her mind began to buzz as she wondered what exactly was his or her point, their role in this. The missing something then revealed itself. "He's the decoy," she said abruptly.

James and Tom looked across at her, Tom smiled in bemusement while James' face fell into a frown. "You mentioned that already," Tom gently reminded her, only to avoid any possible wrath.

Lena shook her head as she straightened back up to a standing position. "Not the one waiting in the office for us," she said in James' direction. Then she turned toward Tom instead, "the Admiral."

"What?" Tom stuttered.

"You're right. Their network project wouldn't be in an obvious place like this, just like their leader wouldn't be standing out in the open posing as an Admiral," Lena said.

Any expression the two men had on their faces fell away, leaving behind similar looks of horror. Tom's eyes widened at the same time.

"I did wonder why he'd go to the trouble of a decoy, only to blow his cover immediately," James said quietly.

Tom's eyes darted between the two. "Wait a minute. This thing murdered my father and took his place just so he could relay the big bad's orders, passing them off as his own?"

"I knew the guy was only a chump," Damien muttered.

Lena's own face fell, Tom's desperate tone of voice made her feel terrible for him. "And to distract us, make us think that we've defeated the leader while he or she hides. Take your pick."

"So what now? We interrogate the data entry clerks?" James sighed.

"I know you're joking, but not here we don't," Lena tried to smile but her face was frozen in a grimace.

Tom turned his back on them, his fists clenched as his arms folded. "My old man, nothing but the face of this invasion, not the one pulling the strings." He laughed to himself bitterly, "I don't know which he'd find more insulting."

Lena kept her eye on him while walking over to James' side. "If all of these network sites could be hidden in the least likeliest of places, we wouldn't have found them," she said in a hushed voice.

"That's true," James nodded, also lowering his voice. "They'll have tried to hide it, but their requirements for it would've narrowed their choices down."

"Still a big planet to search. If it's on Earth at all," Lena mumbled.

Slow claps echoed around the office. No one could see where they were coming from. A brief flash of white forced them to squint for a moment. They knew what that meant before they even saw the omnipotent being clapping sarcastically at them. "I couldn't agree more. Took you long enough."

Lena scowled as she lunged forward at him. The white light appeared again, taking him out of her line of sight. Only he wasn't the one who transported away. They were. Q remained behind, clicking his tongue as he looked around at the two bodies on the floor. "Such a mess." Only then he transported away as well.

Lena stumbled forward, nearly bumping into a large Conference table in front of her. She and the others looked around confused at their new surroundings. They weren't the only ones. B'Elanna and Harry appeared in a flash, already sitting in their usual seats.

"Well that's my theory gone," Harry commented.

B'Elanna rose from her new chair to go over to Tom, concern reaching across her face. He gave her a weak smile to cover his own worries.

More figures appeared, some sitting and the rest standing. The Conference Room was getting pretty crowded.

Tom waited for the flashes to stop before taking mental attendance of everyone there. His most trusted senior staff, past and present, as well as a few other familiar faces he normally wouldn't invite to a meeting. If he rarely did, he wondered why Q would. Once his eye fell on a couple of particular faces in the back, and then Damien, he assumed that the Q had lazily picked out people he was familiar with. Though he saw no sign of his children, or any others but Kiara for that matter.

"Um, why are we here?" Nathan asked, still with a small plate half full of party food in his hand. Neelix scowled intensely in his direction.

"Unscheduled conference with the Q continuum, I'd wager," Harry said.

"Q?" Jessie said with a groan.

Q reappeared at the head of the table, taking Harry's place to his annoyance. Lena glowered at him, "was that really necessary?"

"Who wants to live a life without whimsy?" Q sniggered as he kicked his feet up onto the desk.

"I think we all don't at this point," Harry muttered to himself. "What's with the dramatics, both Lena and James look fine."

The two mentioned looked equally confused. Q snickered at them for extra points. "I never said otherwise."

A growl escaped from B'Elanna's throat. "You meant Voyager, didn't you? It's a little late to be resetting the clock."

One long drawn out *huh* escaped from Tom's mouth. Everyone else who missed the conversation on the Bridge glanced at their neighbours to see if they knew, only to be met with similar expressions.

Q's eyes danced, lips curled. "Did I now? Since your quaint vessel kicked it in all five timelines, taking you with it in the last four, that could mean the ship itself. Or it could mean that Ensign Courage here is the key to saving the universe," he said in Harry's direction.

He quietly seethed for now, then the words flew out of him in an angry stutter, "I'm a Commander now!"

"Resetting the clock?" the Doctor questioned on behalf of the majority of the room.

"He's suggesting that we're in such an unwinnable situation that we need to change the timeline once again," B'Elanna answered.

Lena exhaled as loudly as she could, her eyes rolled aggressively. "It's one building, one stupid factory trying to recreate the Games Matrix. We'll find it, then it's history. Unless you know where it is, we have no need for any of your *help*."

Q turned his attention toward her, he appeared insulted at her words. He gestured to the white taking up most of the window. "It's not quite that simple."

"It never is," James commented.

"There's no such thing as changing the timeline. You only create a new one, in your flawed perspective of course," Q said. "Using your link to the *other side* to destroy theirs was a clever trick, albeit premature. All you did was keep the door locked for a few years, until they find the spare key. Once they open it again you won't have any means to stop them."

"So, the lynch pin is, or was Voyager itself. Why didn't you say so earlier?" Harry said irritably.

Q swung his legs back down to the floor so he could lean onto the table with his hands crossed together. "If I gave you all the answers, it would be a bit dull, wouldn't it? I can't tell you what you should or should have done. We can still fix this."

Jessie looked on with a mix of frustration and confusion. "But in our *flawed* perspective we're still in this unwinnable situation. Only this sixth timeline really benefits."

Q chuckled in her direction. "Your first incarnation manipulated their linear path to create a shortcut, disrupting an already volatile space time continuum. Species saved or even damaged by Voyager's intervention or their mere presence were erased. People who were lost would survive and continue to affect everyone around them. Relationships would change. Children born would not be, while the originally deceased would have ones that never existed before. Advances that did not belong in that time, did and so they were not invented. They were not needed. More importantly, the decision to change their linear path in the first place no longer existed. It was already fixed.

"Those links they missed, the broken loops caused paradoxes. The paradoxes weakened the, how should I put it so you'll understand?" He stalled for the moment to think about it. "The structure of their existence. The foundations crumbled, unable to take anymore. Don't misunderstand. First Voyager wasn't the only cause of the collapse. So many grossly underestimate time travel and the intricacies of infinite dimensions."

"You didn't bring your medkit with you, Doc? Migraine incoming," Tom whispered. The Doctor shook his head to his disappointment.

"They returned home, only to see the fabric of space tear apart their precious world, before it consumed them," Q said with a slight touch of sympathy. He shook his head once. "I was tasked with replacing those missing links, to strengthen the foundation. Which brings us to your second incarnation."

Harry quickly tried to cut in before he could, "stop. You keep going on about this being the fifth, fourth before us, the next one's the sixth. Dimensions don't work like that. How many times did we time travel? Run into time loops, alter the future. How many decisions have we made in our eleven year journey? Forget being the fifth incarnation. We must be Fifth Millionth Voyager at best."

"It doesn't have the same ring to it, that's for sure," Kiara remarked from the back of the room.

"You're trying too hard," Q said in a patronising tone.

Harry didn't take kindly to it. His cheeks burned and his eyes flared. "No, you're oversimplifying it as you think we're beneath you. You don't have to dummy it down for us."

"He kinda does," Tom said while dabbing his throbbing forehead.

"No," Q said plainly. "To put it in words you understand. You're the fourth direct descendent of the first crew I told you about. Four separate events brought you here today. It's true there are millions, perhaps billions more of you. What little cousins branched off from your decision regarding what underwear you wore that Monday morning is of no concern to me, or you."

Lena tried her best not to laugh as she was still angry with Q, and didn't want to show him otherwise. Her bottom lip and jaw quivered slightly, so for anyone watching her before she spoke it didn't work that well. "But it should to you, right? Not the underwear part, obviously, cos eew."

"I was talking about bigger events than..." Harry meanwhile muttered under his breath.

"You're the same Q in that first timeline. The same one I met in Four," Lena said over the top of him. "You exist in all possible time frames. So why concentrate on this branch only?"

"It's too difficult for mortal minds to comprehend. You've just proved that. It's not an insult, it's fact," Q said.

"So we should take your word for it and start anew in this sixth timeline? A sixth Voyager with no memories of what we did wrong and hope for the best," James snapped.

"As long as we don't end up as Seventh Voyager, I suppose," Tom tried to joke to lighten the mood and ease his head.

Lena cringed and then shuddered, "oh god, Seven. She better not be what we need to save, or I'm staying behind and dying with timeline five."

Q snickered at her, "funny you should say that. She was one of the catalysts for the path change in timeline one."

"You've got to be joking. Please tell me you're joking," Jessie said in disgust.

"No. Avoiding her death was a primary concern for the time traveller. Their opinion of the drone lowered in every incarnation, which was amusing considering I did not foresee it or even attempt it. Happy accident," Q said as he looked around at everyone. For some reason that no one knew he lingered in James' direction. "Which once more brings me back to the second."

"Really?" B'Elanna groaned.

"Actually, it's the one we know the least about. I'm a little curious actually," Jessie said.

Q turned to her with a knowing smirk. "I'll bet you are."

Jessie's eyebrow raised while her face twisted slightly. "What? What does that mean?"

"I had a lot of missing, broken pieces to re-fill, and yet it's a common Q rule to limit interference. The point is to guide the mortals, not do the work for them. All it takes is one event to change everything, however small. I determined that small wasn't enough. The problem was bigger than Voyager, bigger than Humanity. What if I could not only avoid the events that lead to the endgame I saw in timeline one, pun intended, but use the replaced link to tackle the wider problem," Q said.

"Which is?" Lena asked.

"I'm gonna assume the Softmicron and the Games Matrix," Harry said quietly.

Neelix cleared his throat, "yes, about that, I thought we defeated both of them. Why is no one surprised that they're still around?"

Tom and Harry both shuffled around nervously. "Well, that's er... the less who were in the know, the safer it was for everyone," Tom stuttered.

Q ignored them, he climbed to his feet to slowly walk ahead without breaking his previous gaze. "The Continuum begged me to reconsider. The Humans were a part of the problem, they'll only make it worse. Humans are too volatile for such power, they can't be trusted. Blah, blah," he grumbled on route. "I knew though if anyone could make this possible," he said, stopping in front of James who was frowning at him. Q gave him a smile chocked full of meaning, "Kathy can."

Lena stared at them both, her eyes much wider than usual. Chakotay quietly seethed to himself. The majority of the room mumbled quietly, confused at the Q's words. James' face meanwhile lost all colour in it, his eyes darted side to side. "Wha... what? What did you do to her?"

"Oh god," Jessie stuttered.

"Nothing," Q replied honestly. "I told you, I don't interfere, I guide."

James stared at him blankly, only blinking twice in rapid succession before he spoke. "You couldn't have guided her to a less homicidal father?"

"In hindsight I should've, yes," Q smirked at him.

Tom nodded, then his eyes bugged out. "Holy crap I just got it!" His sudden raised voice made Harry jump out of his skin. "You're telling us that James has only existed since timeline two, and he can thank Q for his existence. What a twist."

"No, no it's not," B'Elanna said.

"You'll have to start calling him dad," Tom sniggered, earning a classic glare from James that made him wilt and shuffle into an empty seat.

Lena shook her head, "hindsight? Your biggest knickers in a twist complaint was that the nature of his birth meant it'd be difficult for him to be Chosen. If you'd *guided* her to someone she'd have a relationship with then, there wouldn't be any need for timelines three, four, five, six etc..."

"Blondy wouldn't be Blondy, now would he?" Q sniggered. "You'd get someone else entirely, can't argue with genetics. Since he'd be different, when his partner was born would be different so there'd be no you either."

"So, any child Janeway had was a shoe in for the Chosen title? The father didn't matter," Neelix questioned.

"No. There's far more factors that go into picking one. Personality, location, physical prowess, I don't want to bore you," Q replied.

"Too late," Damien grunted.

The Doctor looked on with interest, "despite your comment earlier, you did pick his father so he'd get these *factors*."

"So possible dads of Slayers have to be sociopathic, narcissistic and sexist. I hope Damien doesn't breed, but I was already hoping that anyway," B'Elanna said.

"How dare you, I'm not prejudice to women. I hate everybody equally," Damien hissed.

The Doctor hand waved off both of their comments, "I imagine Q means he picked her a mate who was more likely to pass on genes that would benefit a Slayer. They're already born with strength and agility yes, but the child would be helped by having a natural ability already. The father should be fit and healthy, with traits such as confidence and bravery, something that he could teach the child. In foresight, Peter Taylor may have been an ideal choice to be the father of not only the Chosen but the one of two Q needed to deal with the Softmicron. It's fascinating, and proof that Q's aren't as omnipotent as they claim."

"I'm wondering how he did this guiding. Did he whisper in her ear, *hey this guy is hot. Have hot babies with him,*" Danny cut in a little too eagerly.

Jessie scowled in her direction, making a mental note to give her another hard slap in the face later. Chakotay was having similar trouble with the Doctor, he mumbled a few insults under his breath.

"Maybe Q said that his dad owned a coffee bean plantation. That'd do it," Tom sniggered.

"Will everyone please stop talking about how and why I was conceived. Please, it's creepy as hell," James cut in desperately.

"Yes please," Lena stuttered quickly. Jessie only nodded.

Harry nodded, "I agree. It's disrespectful to Captain Janeway."

"That is what's so funny about it," Damien said, smiling maliciously.

"It's really not," James said with a glare in his direction. "Can we move on?"

Q walked away, back towards the window with his hands crossed behind his back. "The second timeline didn't fix everything. To cut a long story short, the creation of a Human Slayer in this time period, as well as other factors unknown to you, the Softmicron threat was redirected."

"To Humans and Earth you mean," B'Elanna said, nodding in understanding.

James eyes rolled up, everyone turning their attention back in his direction annoyed him further. "Oh yeah, I remember now. I flipped my middle finger at them one *timeline* two day and they got a bit grouchy. Sorry about that."

Jessie smirked slightly. "Good going, you doomed us all," she teased. James smiled back at her.

"Third did nothing impactful, they died quickly. Fourth..." Q continued to explain. He hesitated as Lena's face turned a ghostly white, her shoulders tensed. "I'm sure you know how that ended."

"So?" Tom grunted.

"So, unlike them you're still here. Something can be arranged so you can knowingly impact the sixth timeline," Q said.

"Wait. We know about timeline four, a bit about three..." Chakotay said.

"We do?" Neelix cut in.

Harry briefly glanced his way. "Three was the one that was reset because James' death eventually lead to Voyager's destruction early. Right?"

"Correct," Q nodded.

"Okay, so what was so wrong with timeline two? Did he die there as well?" Chakotay asked.

Q seemed a little amused by the question, no one understood why. "No, he was actually the only one of you who survived that timeline."

Damien coughed intentionally, "Janeway's fault," getting a few members of the room's attention. He smiled in a fake way.

"Yet Damien remembers that dimension and James doesn't. Did you do to James what you did to me?" Lena asked bitterly.

"Why would I? What happened in two wasn't like what happened to you in four, Lena. Creating timeline three wouldn't erase him from history. It would and did redirect his life though. As with you, well..." again Q hesitated. Lena stared intensely at him. "Blondy's place in the timeline was fixed. Yours however needed to be changed. Your starting position budged back to an earlier date so he'd get the upgrade, allowing him to survive. And to also get us to this point."

"Oh I need to sit down," Tom stuttered.

A few people looked at him, all thinking the same thing. "You're already sitting down," both Harry and the Doctor told him.

"I need to sit down more," Tom said.

Q seemed to think it was a good idea as he sat down comfortably in his original chair, his arms outstretched, "think of this as one last favour from me to you."

"Favour?" Lena grumbled. "I don't remember you asking us back in Four. The favour ended up being a Borg ship that destroyed Voyager, then tossing me back in time to my starting position."

"That wasn't the intention, I assure you," Q quickly countered.

Lena marched forward toward him, "you intentionally set that Borg ship after me in 2372, and erased everyone's memories of it. You kidnapped my daughter and forced my mother, who didn't know me yet, to give birth to her. That was intentional as the point was to erase my original position from the timeline, was it not?"

Q shifted in his chair uncomfortably, his hands raised as if they were surrendering. "Okay, that last part is true. You weren't supposed to remember that, in my defence."

"No, I was supposed to think I was Kiara," Lena grumbled.

"Yeah, what was the point of that?" Harry asked.

Q looked at him in quiet defeat, eyebrow raised, "do you really want to get into that now?" He turned his attention back to Lena. "I wasn't the only one trying to fix things. Timeline four's creation, I had no part in. New players arrived and made a huge mess of it. If you want to blame someone, blame them."

"Yeah 'cause you were doing a fabulous job up until then," B'Elanna commented. She glanced briefly at James, "no offense."

"Taken," James said.

Lena rolled her eyes, "oh, so now you're blaming Kes. Very classy. If it wasn't for her I wouldn't exist at all, and everyone here would be dead. You may have had a hand in creating James, but you didn't save him, she did."

"I wasn't talking about her," Q said with a smile.

"Even if you weren't, you've admitted that all of your actions have been about using Humanity for your own ends. You weren't and still aren't doing us any favours. Stop trying to make us think you're doing this for our benefit," Chakotay snapped.

"He kinda is," a soft voice giggled. Everyone looked around to see where it came from. Most of them recognised it. The voice came from all around them, from the air itself. Beside Q it distorted, blurred. A human shaped shadow formed in its wake. Q mumbled something under his breath, his cheeks turned a light pink. "He won't admit it, just like he still won't admit that he was involved in the creation of timeline four," the voice continued from the warm smiling face of someone the majority of the room knew.

"Kes?" Neelix stammered, he broke out into a huge grin. He hurried over to greet her, only stopped by Damien putting his arm out in front of him.

"No, I'm still gagging from that poison yoghurt," he muttered.

The new arrival laughed quietly as the Q looked up at her. "I fell for his prankster routine as well, but he genuinely does care about what happens to us," she said.

"Must you keep making me ill with that nonsense?" Q asked in such an overdramatic painful way, everyone assumed he was putting it on.

"Don't be silly Q, you don't get ill," Kes said with a smile still on her face.

Tom caressed his aching forehead, even though it was doing nothing for him. "Okay, enough's enough. There's at least one Soft still out there, laughing smugly to itself in some unknown location with a lone network generator, hub, opener, whatever! What does the old Voyager and what we did with it have to do with what's happening, and how would it help now? And don't give me another confusing time travel, dimension exposition dump, my head can't take anymore. Since when have Q and Kes been best friends? If you're on our side, what's with the coy vague crap? Just come out and say it." He allowed himself time to breathe in deeply for the last one, thankfully so did everyone else. "And furthermore, why the hell is there two suns out there?" he shouted as he pointed to the window.

Nobody had given the view outside a second glance. It had looked normal. Blue oceans, a mixture of greens, browns and gold. Clouds of varying shades of grey drifting over the horizon. The imposing black above it all, the star in the distance shining ahead. Their forced second glance painted an odd sight. Another light was beginning to peek its way

out from behind the planet. The original one they saw, lying above, shining brightly over the continent of Europe. It was obvious now which light didn't belong there now that they could see both.

"What is that?" Kiara asked fearfully.

Harry's head bowed as the view silenced the room, leaving behind an ominous atmosphere. "I asked my Opps officer to compare any data from that thing to the Astrometrics data we got from the Sphere." His shoulders tensed. "The closest match was the portals that initially formed on Deck Thirteen."

The news didn't help with the tension in the room. The only thing that could break it was the inappropriate laughter from the usual suspect, it forced a few people to roll their eyes almost in unison.

"Then the answer is simple," Damien sniggered. His gaze hovered elsewhere. "Send blondy and his little sister into it. Prophecy fulfilled. Game Over... again."

"Send who and what now?" Lena asked him dangerously, her eyes flashing.

Damien looked at her with fake innocence. "What? Q admitted that they needed a Slayer to deal with the problem still ongoing. That looks ongoing to me. You two either didn't exist, were too dead at the time, or solo in the past four dimensions. That thing's a lot bigger than the portal on Thirteen, so tada, you need two. Have at it."

Jessie's eyes narrowed, not out of anger but confusion, while she turned up her nose in disgust. "Did the *genius* really forget why we even had the dimension discussion?"

"What you see is on a grander scale than the portals," Kes said, eyeing the man with a patronising expression as if he were a child.

Damien's eyes seemed fidgety, nervous. "No, I'm aware. I assumed we needed more Chosens to toss in there to make up for it."

Kes sighed, and she wasn't the only one. Apart from her, only Q was aware of the other presences floating around them. All of them a different incarnation of herself. All of them were a little sick of him, even the two that had never met him before today.

"What Q neglected to mention..." Kes said, after a spiritual reminder from one of her predecessors. Q scowled briefly at them both. "Was that there is another option. It'll be dangerous, and it will not be easy. Ultimately, a slight change in the past would fix it instantly, as well as other incidents I'm sure you'd be eager to."

Lena felt her heart skip a beat, her skin prickled at the loss of heat. Her mind had immediately thought of her mother. The warm and yet sad expression on Kes' face as it focused on her confirmed to her that was one of the incidents she had meant.

"Mmm hmm," Q nodded knowingly, his fingertips pressed against each other. "You think it'll be a simple walk in and blow the building sky high, like the others? No. The place you're looking for has been built with your knowledge of them in mind. To destroy it, innocents will have to perish as well."

Silence took over the Conference Room. Even Damien was being unusually quiet, his bottom lip bitten tightly as he struggled not to laugh.

"If you go back, you can stop them before they can even build it," Q continued. "Furthermore, those tragedies Five here hinted at, will be undone."

"Stop nicknaming us after the timelines we come from," Kes said irritably. Q pressed his lips together into a forced frown, both eyebrows briefly raised. Her past selves may tolerate it, but she wasn't going to. She scowled at him until he returned to a more neutral expression. Her focus returned to her old friends, who she expected were more than confused by the name banter. "You won't have to go back far. Like Q did with the Captain when they created Two, you will retain your memories until the change has been implemented. After that..."

"No," Lena cut in harshly. People around her, and Kes noticed her fists were not only clenched, they were trembling. She was also very surprised the girl was the first to object. "I don't care if it's only five minutes ago. I won't go through this crap again. Enough is enough."

James pulled a puzzled face, his eyes seemed wider as well. "Wait, mum knew that she had to have me to change the timeline? That's really fuc..."

"No, she didn't," Q said quickly. "All she knew is that something had to be changed, and soon."

"Still," James said in disgust. Jessie gently stroked his closest arm to help him feel better, it only worked for a few seconds. "I'm okay with going back only five minutes, if it means I don't hear about this."

Lena turned her head in his direction, only making her angrier. It wasn't toward him, she directed it at the culprit immediately afterward. "See, this is what I'm talking about. You claim that you want to help us, but you meanwhile use us as if we're your lab rats. James and I are nothing but experimental test tube babies to you!"

Q was taken aback by her outburst, he smiled to cover it up. "You misunderstand..."

Lena's face was bright red by this point, she marched right up to glower down at him as close as possible. "No, quite the opposite. We finally understand. We're your little pets, your personal project. I bet you were pleased with yourself when you co-erced our mother to spend the night with that monster he calls a dad. *Yes, he's a fine specimen for my cause.* Gross."

"You're angry with me because you and your brother exist? I do apologise for the injustice," Q said sarcastically, fueling the raging inferno.

Fortunately for him, the usual fire fighter stepped up. "It's not what you did," Craig said. "I for one am not upset that Lena exists, I'm grateful for it. How you went about it is the problem, it's beyond cruel. You showed up one day to bluntly say that her life was a lie, that her younger self was really her daughter, then left her to deal with it. You never gave back her real memories. She had to die to get them."

Kes nodded grimly, "yes, my regret is I didn't do more to help her. I believe I made it worse."

Q grunted, "if you call unlocking her telepathy early helping, then you're not wrong." It wasn't only the physical manifestation of Kes that glared at him, they all did. He laughed it off, "come on. You wanted people to notice that Kiara and Lena were different girls. I had to break the news then, I had no choice."

"You told us it was because of Kiara's rapid aging," Chakotay grumbled.

"Yes, and who was responsible for that little temporal anomaly?" Q said in a higher tone of voice, his eyes gesturing toward Kes.

The headache Tom had was weighing him down, he gave up finally and rested his head against the table.

"There was little point in the charade. Better for Lena to know the truth," Kes said. She noticed Lena's fiery stare was aimed at her now, she softened her own. "I am deeply sorry for my part in this. I want to help, to end this for good. When it is, you can live your life in freedom. Undisturbed. You'll never hear from us again."

"You're giving us the choice our past lives didn't get, as an apology?" Harry said.

"Call it what you will," Q smirked at him. "I for one want to move onto something else, something far less time consuming."

"You haven't even told us any details. How are we supposed to make any kind of decision?" Chakotay said.

Lena stubbornly shook her head as she walked over to him, "we're not going back, it doesn't matter."

Tom lifted his sore head from the table, "hang on. You're not the Captain, I am."

"Really, you want to go back to whatever time it was that Q thinks will fix this?" James questioned with his eyebrow raised. "Think about it, he mentioned the old Voyager. That's at least eight years of our lives, gone, just like that."

"It also isn't a decision that's Captain's only. It's on all of us," Harry said.

Tom felt like the eight years James mentioned hadn't happened. It was like the old days where everyone disagreed with him just because they didn't respect him. He wondered if his previous incarnations had the same trouble. He grit his teeth for a few seconds. "I realise that. All I meant was that Lena doesn't decide for us all."

"Sure you did, Tommy boy," Q chuckled.

"We don't have all the facts. Losing eight years would be a huge cost, I know. However if it means saving lives and ending the Softmicron's tyranny once and for all, wouldn't that be a cost we could all afford?" Tom argued. "It's something we should all discuss before making the decision."

Most of the room glanced around at each other, quietly mumbling to themselves. Tom and then Lena turned their heads to watch, and wait for them.

"You're not going to tell us, are you?" James quietly asked the Q.

He smiled in response, "I didn't tell your mother. If I did, what do you think would've happened to you? Would she have given birth to you if she knew what your fate was?" His words felt rude to him, but he said it in a kind tone. James didn't like the answer one bit, he merely shook his head to share it with him. "Sometimes the best action we can take can be a one done in ignorance."

"How convenient for you," Chakotay remarked. "If you won't volunteer anymore information, then we have no choice but to keep going in this timeline as if you never showed up."

Tom noted a few uneasy glances from the quieter members of the room, before turning to face the more vocal ones. "Normally I'd agree, as you say ignorance can be *bliss*. Now we know our actions could endanger others, I don't feel comfortable going in blind," he said.

"People could die if we do something, but more could if we do nothing," B'Elanna argued with some reluctance.

"I think we should figure out where this place is before making any rash decisions," Harry suggested.

James and Lena briefly shared a glance. "We were talking about that earlier. All of the network stations we disabled or destroyed weren't hard to find," James said. He then turned to the others. "Surely if you wanted to remain inconspicuous in case your secret is out, you'd hide these in the middle of nowhere, underground, up in the mountains."

Lena nodded, "one was." She huffed, "I'd forgotten what tired was after climbing into orbit. All that was left was pure unfiltered anger."

Craig had to laugh briefly at her face lightening up at the memory. "You did say that was your favourite infiltration."

"Duh," she smirked back. "If I knew, I'd have taken it out with my shuttle. Wouldn't have been half as fun though."

Tom shuddered at the terrifying image entered his head; Lena with her mother's coffee withdrawal anger, while she was pregnant. He hoped he'd never see her unfiltered anger, it was making him sweat buckets. "Anyway, you were saying James?"

"Um, there's a reason for their placements. All we have to do is figure that out," James answered.

"They're inconsistent from what you told us. A lot like the Sphere towers were," Jessie said.

B'Elanna stared thoughtfully ahead of her, "which backs up your theory. They'd hide them if it didn't matter. If you're gonna place them randomly to throw off invaders, don't pick a giant skyscraper in a small town. It stands out."

"Also we know this last building is meant to take innocents with it. I can't see why we can't disable it. Is it too late?" Neelix questioned as he pointed to the window. A subtle nod from Q answered his question. "If there's no other way, maybe we have to."

"There's always another way. Once we find this place, we can devise a strategy," Chakotay said.

"And if we can't, the option to go back is still there," the Doctor said.

Q leaned back in the chair once more, his hand hovered in the air to do a little shimmy, "myeh," his voice squeaked with little care. "Assuming you don't die in the meantime."

"I'd prefer we didn't. Who knows what this little change is, when his last two were forcing people to have kids," Tom said.

"You make it sound like Kathryn and the child abuser were my Barbie and Ken dolls," Q laughed humourlessly. "And I had nothing to do with the Q obsessed with having a half Human progeny. Until he did so the Continuum were content in finding somebody else to deal with this problem, and leave Voyager lost in its self created paradox. I merely moved the players around to give you another chance to fix it."

Kiara pulled a face while Lena's blank but deadly eyed stare was directed toward him. James meanwhile had tuned out after the doll comment, his face a very pale shade of white.

"Thank you?" Lena muttered dangerously.

B'Elanna folded her arms tightly, "I'm sorry, but in our own self created paradox?"

"He's talking about Endgame again. But you're right, the one the Q were threatening to abandon was the no Chosens and no contact with the Soft on your end problem," Kes said.

"Still proving my point here," Tom quickly said to cut the change in conversation short. "This change could be anything from flying slightly further to the left in the Games Matrix, to defeating the Game Sphere by forcing the anomaly to take over it, ie destroying all the towers. Since he isn't happy about his changes, he may want to go all the way back and undo the damage he's done, erasing not only James, Lena and their kids, but the last forty odd years of history."

Q straightened up with a stern face, he seemed almost offended. "I could be intending to go back and make sure someone more suitable would take over from Kathy. Perhaps fuzzball here, or the very amusing fellow with the rabbit fetish who thinks he's a galactic warlord."

"Hey," Neelix whined, assuming he was referring to him.

Damien sniggered quietly to himself, until he realised one part of his sentence he didn't like. "Thinks? Please, if it were not for some zombie Borg drones having a hissy fit, I'd be the threat you were thinking about going back in time to thwart."

Q and Kes both laughed at the same time, unknown to everyone else the other Kes' were as well. "Okay, yeah, sure," the Kes everyone could see giggled.

"Hmph, you imbeciles have no idea," Damien muttered. "Those shapeshifting poached eggs forget that they'd be nothing without me. If I hadn't have taken over Starfleet first, they'd still be playing in their little games, trashing cities. All they are, are a bunch of users. Not a brain cell between them."

"Oh don't worry Damien, we know you weren't the reason Starfleet were taken over in the first place," Lena said.

James nodded, "yeah, nobody thought someone who's greatest accomplishment was making stupid clones of people, would be able to infiltrate many ships and take them over. I mean, you confessed that the only reason you got the Enterprise was because it was parked in space dock awaiting repairs after somebody crashed it. The clues were all there."

Harry briefly laughed before adding on, "oh, I thought I was the only one playing along."

"No, I was beginning to feel sorry for the idiot. He needed a win," Jessie said.

"And he's still gloating about it. So funny," Lena cracked a smile.

Damien's cheeks burned bright red, about to burst in anger at any moment. "I rallied my own army against your stupid half lion, half tiger wannabe cousins." He pointed at Jessie, "I organised your death! I was the ruler of the Seventh Order, feared amongst my disciples. I cheated death to bring you further despair. The Soft waited for me to do all the dirty work, then swooped in to do what I already did. You're too stupid to realise it."

"Yes, you're a big bad villain," Jessie said in a cutesy patronising voice.

"Oh, you know what, you can go to hell. Again," Damien growled at her, before stomping off towards the nearest door. He had to push through a few sniggering people to do it.

"Okay, that was fun. Now back to Tom," Harry said with a smirk.

Tom scowled at him, "way to have my back, bud."

Q sighed despondently. "I'm afraid the little dummy spitter was partially correct regarding your enemy. They are users, and they did use his idea to their own ends."

"Oh we know that, I just don't think he knows how little was his own doing. I never bought it," James said.

"Yes, clearly Captain material," Tom muttered bitterly, inspiring Q to smile in his direction. "I may not be the best leader in the universe, but I know I wouldn't be the only one concerned that an omnipotent being's version of a minor change, may be a lot bigger in a mortal perspective. Especially considering that his previous choices were make a Slayer, something we still don't know, revive said Slayer so Voyager doesn't blow up, and give a baby to her grandmother to birth her, so their mother is temporarily erased from the timeline."

"Considering the Slayer's reaction to his conception wasn't favourable, I'll leave what change created timeline Three to your interpretation," Q said.

Kes groaned and did a little face palm, "really?"

Q chose to ignore her reaction for now, all the while keeping a close eye on James to see if he reacted in anyway amusing to him again. To his disappointment he only shook his head, biting his tongue for the moment. "I understand your reluctance, but I can assure you, this change is but a slight tweak. A minor course change with the same destination to avoid a storm, so to speak. All I can say is doing so will level the playing field, it shouldn't change your current lives all too much."

"No," Lena said. "This all started, the reason we were brought into this mess anyway, was because someone thought changing the past would solve their problems. I don't want to do that again. We need to go forward not backwards, or we'll never escape. It'll never end."

"I thought that the morale of that story was to not change the timeline to save Seven from dying. A lesson we all didn't need to learn, but a one everyone should live by," Jessie added.

Nobody disagreed with her there, except maybe the Doctor who kept a blank expression. One crewmember standing amongst the crowd nodded far more than everyone else. "Normally I would agree, but it lead to five Kes', so it all worked out in the end," he said.

Everyone turned to look at him. Tom stifled a gasp for all of five seconds, "oh my god, Evil C's still alive?"

"How did you know there were five of us?" Kes asked, a little shocked that someone noticed her non corporeal alter ego's.

Tom glanced around at everyone, "did anyone know this? I haven't seen him since the dry spell of 2007."

"Q called you Five, you mentioned other versions of yourself," the man answered. He turned to Tom, "if you want a canon explanation, a lot of us went into hiding when Seven turned into a so called vampire. Fourth wall, you know the answer to that one."

"Ah, to avoid the minor character quell. Clever," Tom sighed happily now that he understood.

It took all the strength he could muster to stop both of his eyebrows from flicking up. Chakotay could only shake his head, "I'm not going to miss the terrible habit of conversations going off topic. I'm sure as hell not going to go backwards to go through more of them. I'm with Lena."

"Me too, even if that one was partially my fault," Jessie said sheepishly.

James nodded, "as if I'd choose to go through all of the Game Sphere events again. Count me out of a reset."

Tom looked around at everyone, catching a lot of them nodding in approval. "Yes, I don't think I could go through watching my beloved kitchen blow up again," Neelix said sadly.

"I imagine Janeway would be pretty pissed if we undid her work. I don't want to be the guy who's responsible for that," Harry agreed.

"We did some good in destroying the Games Matrix, ending the Sphere. I don't regret it and I certainly am not interested in changing it," the Doctor said.

Kiara walked over to stand at Lena's side. "I don't like how it was done, but this dimension is our home now. We've worked hard to get here. I don't want to abandon it when the going gets tough." She smiled at her mother, she did the same back. "Besides, I think we've suffered enough."

"Exactly. Cheating gets us nowhere. We'll keep making the same mistakes if you keep bailing us out," Craig said.

Tom smiled broadly. Satisfied he turned to face Q, watching them all carefully with an expression on his face he couldn't figure out. "There's your answer Q. We're grateful, but no thanks. No Sixth Voyager, no sixth season. We're done."

Q was all too quiet far too long for his liking. His face still locked in the same blank state. He finally stood after a minute. "Well, that's a relief. I was worried you'd say yes."

"What?" Lena muttered, her eyebrow jumped up.

A cocky smile spread across the Q's face. "I wasn't going to do it anyway."

James stared at him with his jaw threatening to drop. The moment he closed it he felt the anger beginning to slip from him. "Then what the hell did we waste all this time for?"

"I only wanted to test your commitment. To see if you were truly ready," Q answered. Seeing everyone staring at him in silent anger made him all the more amused. "If you'd prefer, I did it for fun. Your lives won't be the only ones that will be event-less from this point onward."

"So, wait... what?" Tom almost shrieked.

Kes struggled to keep a straight face. "Don't joke about it Q."

Q glanced at her with a twinkle in his eye. Neelix saw it fit to seethe with jealousy. "Well it was fun, can't deny that," Q said. He returned his attention to the baffled mortals ahead of him. "If you still wanted to take the easy way out, cheat like Kathy One did, then I'd know you weren't ready. I had faith that Humanity would be the species which would solve this crisis. I didn't really fancy listening to *I told you so* for a few thousand millennia by all the Q who thought I was wrong."

"Hang on, wouldn't that Seven dead timeline be One? The result of Janeway's alterations being Two. Three; James' birth, etc. Making us sixth, not fifth," Harry questioned.

"Now that's a twist," B'Elanna commented.

Q looked at Kes once more while shaking his head, he clicked his tongue a couple of times. "Maybe the Continuum has a point."

Kes smiled sweetly, fueling Neelix's paranoia further. "One is where the fabric of space finally gave in and crumbled. The numbers mean very little, they're a simplification for our benefit, or an insult to our intelligence. Which is why I object to being named after them," she said, pointing a brief glare at the Q. "If it helps, the Captain Janeway, or rather Admiral Janeway that wanted to get Voyager home earlier was from timeline zero."

"Does it matter? As long as we're not *really* Seventh Voyager, it makes no difference," Lena said. She pulled a disgusted face, "no wonder Damien picked seven for his stupid evil mirror universe name. That number is the epitome of evil."

"I'll say," Craig sniggered.

"So okay, we passed the test and wasted far too much time yapping about it. We need to find this network station," James said.

Q nodded, "you're closer than you think. I'll give you a little tip before I go. Without a solid foundation, anything built upon it will weaken and fall. I suppose that is what you call a reason for their odd placements." The white light enveloped him, taking him away. Still they could hear his voice, "good luck."

Kes glanced at everyone sheepishly. "He wouldn't tell me either. He's still guiding I suppose."

"A foundation. Does that mean..." Harry said eagerly. As quick as his voice picked up, it lowered, "I dunno what it means."

"They're opening a door to their universe. Previously they used the Games Matrix, a subspace corridor, right? There was also an instability on the previous Voyager which they could open," Tom mused aloud.

B'Elanna tried to follow his train of thought, "the former they generated from a control tower. Which is what we'll be looking for. We know that."

"I'm thinking out loud," Tom defended himself. "The foundation is something they need so they can make the connection."

"A Game Cube site," Lena suggested. "A lost one would leave behind a lot of subspace energy so it can destroy everything."

"And a giant hole in the ground," the Doctor added.

James' face fell a little, "most, probably all Game Cube sites are in England."

"Which would explain why our *second star* opened over Europe, directly in its line of sight," Tom said, cringing slightly. "I hope it doesn't follow it."

"Okay. A lost Game site, with innocents in the way," Harry said.

Jessie felt a lump growing in her throat, she tried to swallow it away before saying anything. "Duncan said that the fake Paris told him to wish you a happy birthday for him," she said toward James.

He wasn't surprised in the slightest, it only irritated him briefly. "They kept sending cubes to places I lived or visited, that doesn't surprise me."

"It doesn't narrow it down by much either," Lena said.

Nathan cleared his throat to get their attention. "Oh, I don't know about that."

The sun peeked over the already sky blue horizon. The few clouds in the sky were already dissolving into nothing from the heat. The strange phenomenon had left the wildlife confused. Large flocks of birds fluttered overhead, away from it. Any still remaining were eerily silent. Insects kept to the shade if there were any out at all. The humanoids were beginning to follow suit. The temperatures already unusually high, and now with the sun rising to add to it, they feared what would happen if they walked into the rays.

People could barely inch their heads up slightly, the light from both were too blinding. Their eyes already burning from looking straight ahead.

"Seven years ago, Starfleet Command offered asylum to an ally. A species drifting, searching for a new home after losing two already. It was the least they could do to thank them for what they did."

Before the sun had begun to rise, some people dared to look through shaded glass, all trying to figure out what it was. All they knew was that from the moment it started it was directly over them. Whether it was following them or worse, growing, they couldn't tell.

"With the Games over, several damaged sites were safe to be rebuilt. The refugees were allowed to choose from one of them to settle in, so they could rebuild it for themselves."

Starfleet personnel scattered all over the town, trying in vain to keep the population calm. None of them had any answers. All they could tell the people were that the majority of the fleet were in orbit, investigating the problem.

"They chose a location that reminded them of their previous lives, in their first home. Quiet, out of the way. Unlike the other locations, they wouldn't be replacing a portion of or a complete city. They'd be living as neighbours to a small town with little consequence."

As more and more people shut themselves into their homes, cafe's, markets, the town grew all the more quiet. It was nothing more than a ghost town by the time a large group dematerialised in its centre.

"I guess telling them that the town was the birth place of the Chosen Slayer would put them off a little," Nathan said in a sullen voice. He turned his head toward James as he looked around. "Though even then, they didn't know the people who were thanking them, weren't doing it sincerely."

Tom squinted his eyes, even with sunglasses it was too bright. "God, and I thought England was all cloud and rain," he said to lighten the mood. He didn't expect it to work, but was a little disappointed that it didn't.

James walked forward as he gazed at his surroundings. It had been so long since he had been in the area, let alone the town centre itself. It hadn't changed at all. He wasn't sure if that made it easier or not.

The town had never been so empty before. A few Security personnel kept close to the buildings, some approached the few stragglers left. A lot of them were hurrying through the closest gaps in between buildings, likely to get to the transport centre and away from the unnatural light.

Jessie approached James to place a gentle hand on his shoulder. She was feeling as unnerved as he was, still she knew he'd blame himself if anything happened to their old home. "We can do this, it's nothing to worry about." He gave her a light nod.

Harry tugged on his collar, the heat was making him sweat through his clothes. He noticed a few of the awayteam were already removing their jackets. "God, couldn't they have done this in the winter? We need to find shelter that's big enough for us all."

"Any suggestions?" B'Elanna questioned.

Jessie glanced toward the same gaps in between the buildings. "The transport centre is closer, but I imagine there's quite the queue to leave at the moment."

"Anywhere that's sheltered will likely be crowded," Nathan said.

"The shopping centre or the school would be less likely," James thought about it out loud.

"It's Monday, the last thing we should do is disturb already frightened kids," Tom said. "Though this light, I'm already thrown off. What time is it?"

Jessie shook her head, she pointed behind her and up the street. "There's two places we can try just a few minutes away. If one's full, we try the other."

The awayteam turned around to follow her suggestion. First they veered to the edge of the wide open street, alongside a long modern complex filled with cafe's and bars. The bars with tables outside still had drinks on them, abandoned in the panic. The heat made it very tempting for some members of the team to quickly snatch a glass and finish them.

"That's probably not a good..." B'Elanna warned the people she saw doing so.

Neelix cringed at his, "ugh, this is revolting, what is it?"

Kiara snatched it out of his hands as quickly as possible, "we've got enough problems." Then she gave it a sniff that made her whole face twist and her eyes water. Lena took it off her just in case. "Oh god, with the heat and this, we're doomed."

"Why?" Nathan asked curiously.

B'Elanna let out a small groan, "this happened in the evening. I doubt you're going to get coffee's and soft drinks."

Still with a twisted face, Neelix wriggled out of his jacket and abandoned it on the floor. "Phew it's hot," he said, breaking into a smile. "My friends, I've missed hanging out with you." His voice began to slur. The rest of the team who hadn't yet put two and two together were beginning to feel the dread sink in. The ones who did were already walking a lot faster than them.

Tom carefully put his glass down on one of the last tables they were passing by. "See, thrown off. So, about this alien extension," he said while wiping the sweat from his forehead.

"I've been watching them build it from the ground up, from where I live. Up until recently, the people have been living in and around this town. Now that theirs is mostly finished, they've been settling into their new home, some have stayed here. Human residents have even moved in," Nathan explained, his voice getting lower with everything he said. He was downbeat by the time he came to say his final line, "I really hope I'm wrong."

"I doubt it. This is exactly the kind of thing the Soft love to do," Harry said abruptly, with a little anger. "Sorry."

A few metres from the top of the street, Neelix dashed forward while throwing something back in the air. "Race to the top?" He didn't wait for an answer, he took off on a sprint, despite clearly being at the top of the street by the time he started it. The poor soul in the way of the item he threw pulled it off their head in a blind panic. Seeing what it was as well left them gagging over and over.

Kes pat them on the back with a conflicted expression. She was disgusted like everyone else, but at the same time feeling a little nostalgic about the old days on Voyager. "Shouldn't someone stop him?" she said.

A few dared to look ahead, flinching at the sight of a bare bum running into the distance.

"No, but we should warn the original neighbouring town he's coming," Jessie shuddered.

Harry squinted through his sunglasses, thankfully not ahead but toward a large building on their right. "It's okay, they'll already be blind."

"Oh god," Tom shook, his hands flew up to tend to his now messy hair but thought better of it. "You guys go on ahead, I need to find somewhere to wash the Neelix pants smell off me. Then burn my own clothes." James and Jessie pointed at the same building Harry was looking at. Tom didn't ask, he ran in that direction.

"With this town's history, we should discourage him from setting fires, especially now," Nathan reminded them, his tone light.

Jessie raised an eyebrow in his direction, while James stared on blankly. "We should try the Centre first anyway, feel free to stop him," she said.

"What history?" James mumbled. He shook his head while he pushed that train of thought away for now. "It should be quieter, and we will be able to see what we're up against."

The trio lead the others down the path and through the glass entrance almost as tall as the building itself. They weren't surprised to see a lot of people already there, talking anxiously amongst themselves. Several quietened down when they spotted the awayteam. They slowly made their way around them, triggering further glances. Most got back to what they were talking about, but a few stares followed the team's every step, even moving so they could keep doing so when they were out of their range.

Looking around, the group quickly determined they were inside a leisure centre. They passed the corridor apparently leading to a gym and various courts. The full café sitting in the centre of the building, with replicators lining the white walls. The interior wall ahead of them made of glass. Whatever was on the other side looked like it was surrounded by similar walls, shaded on one side since the light levels were normal. The two lifts on their left with a sitemap for the higher floors in between them.

They reached the only door leading through it when someone from the crowd spoke up, "James Stuart?"

The entire group stopped, while James looked back over his shoulder. The voice came from a group of people following them. James nodded toward the team to go on without him. They did so, leaving him behind with the locals. Jessie though hesitated, something about it didn't sit right with her. She was by his side as he turned around to walk up to them.

"You're him, aren't you?" another person, a young woman, asked.

"Yeah," James replied reluctantly, unsure of their intentions or feelings toward him.

The man leading the group spoke, the pair recognised his voice as the one who got their attention. "You came from this town, didn't you? Have you any idea what's happening."

Jessie was momentarily glad she stayed behind, but angered by the strangers words. She stepped forward, "now, wait a minute..."

"It's okay," James said quickly.

Another man chimed in from the back, "they've destroyed our homes. They dropped monsters into our streets. All to get at you."

"That's not his fault, is it?" Jessie snapped. "He wasn't even here, we were in the Delta Quadrant for years. One of the cubes they waited until he was gone for a day."

"Jess," James said mid wince.

Jessie's angry stare was directed at him for a second, "no, enough's enough! Nobody bothers to understand. Someone should correct them."

The group looked on with a mixture of shock and a little worry. The first man shook his head timidly, "you're the one who doesn't understand. We support you."

James did a double take, "I'm sorry, what?"

The first woman smiled, "that's what you're here for, right? We've been silenced on that place long enough."

Others nodded in agreement. "Make them pay. We'll be right behind you," one said.

A smile spread across Jessie's face, she looked to James to see he was frozen in his shocked face.

"We stick together around here," another piped up.

"They don't invite innocent people into our home and use them this way," the first man said. "We won't stand for it. They're one of us, just like you are."

"So, you know the S word people are here. That's the first *they* you're referring to?" Jessie questioned.

"How?" James asked.

"Look outside, you'll see it," a woman spoke up while pointing at the door they were heading for. "It's only because we're an unknown town, in a small region, in not America, that they think they can get away with it in plain sight."

One young teen grunted, "come on, it's personal. We're the home town of thee badass Slayer, they're doing it to get his attention."

James looked at him with a raised eyebrow, Jessie meanwhile giggled quietly at his reaction. "Okay, I can live with bad. Ass yeah. Not together," he muttered.

"I dunno about it being revenge only. Maybe it started that way, but anyone more vocal about this tend to disappear," another local said warily.

"So much for a low profile," Jessie said.

James shook off what was left of his earlier surprise, he had no time for it. "It's true then. They've built the new network in the refugee settlement."

"Not in," the kid said, leaving them both frowning.

"The Game Cube was huge. It flattened the two villages, including the hill..." a woman explained.

"I remember," James' face fell. "It ripped even that away, leaving a massive cube shaped crater."

The initial man scoffed in disgust, "the perfect place to hide a base. All they needed was something to cover it."

Meanwhile the rest of the awayteam had been lead through an empty changing room, and then into a bright swimming pool area. It didn't take long for the team to figure out why Nathan had brought them there. Constructed on the top of a steep tall hill, the view from this centre's glass structure allowed them to see for miles around the surrounding countryside and nearby villages.

What got everyone's attention was the modern buildings laid across the hill in the distance. With its almost vertical incline and the huge drop, it looked unnatural. The people who knew about this area were well aware that was the case. To the left a couple of ships sat on a large tarmac field. Chakotay squinted his eyes at one, it looked familiar to him.

"I don't see..." Harry said as he scanned the newer village once more. He shook his head, "anything that could be described as a tower. Not even a big building." He then buried his head in the tricorder he had brought.

"The biggest is their communion hall, used for official town business and events," Nathan told him. "Far too public to be what we're looking for."

Chakotay split from the group, his eyes still trained on the ship, which looked tiny from where they were. Still he couldn't shake off the familiarity that got his attention.

"Are you sure this is it? The Softmicron could have easily built on the original Manchester site for a similar *get back at James* effect," Lena said.

"No, he hated that city," Craig reminded her.

"I know," Lena said defensively. "But its destruction still bothered him. He blamed himself for not stopping it. Heck even Newcastle would work. Didn't he foresee its Game and it still lost?"

B'Elanna studied the scenery while she thought over the possibility. "He did say that the Admiral imposter refused to listen to him. Even when it was happening we had so much opposition. It's also the odd duck out of all the sites. The only location he didn't have any attachment to."

"They picked it because it's the closest city to where he was born. They wanted to cause as much damage as possible, and they already attacked Durham," Craig pointed out.

Lena groaned, "if it's the next door neighbour's house I'm gonna kill somebody."

Nathan smirked at her, "no, he took care of that. It was only some spy, spreading fake dirt."

"Oh. Damn, that creep I wanted to take out myself," Lena sighed in disappointment.

"My god," Chakotay stuttered.

"It's not a big deal. I'm more surprised Jessie didn't beat him to death for the garden camera incident," Lena said to him with a frown. It faded away just as quickly when she noticed he was staring in shock at something outside. "What?"

"That's..." Chakotay said, briefly glancing at her and the others around her. His finger pointed toward the ship. "That's the Lillyia."

He was more than a little rattled when his comment got almost everyone crowding around him for a better look. Now that he had pointed it out, everyone also recognised the vessel sitting in the distance.

Nathan stood on his own with a confused look on his face. "What kind of name is that for a ship?" he muttered.

Harry backed away, slowly turning toward him. "The alien refugees granted a place to live on Earth were the Ligers? Why didn't you mention that?"

"Um, you've surely met a lot of people. I didn't think it was a big deal to," Nathan answered carefully. "Why?"

"For starters, it's a stretch to call people who evolved on an AU Earth; aliens," Harry said bluntly.

"I didn't," Nathan said just as much. "Seriously, apart from them being a Starfleet ally, what's the big deal?"

Chakotay's head dipped with his mood. "This is the place. Say what you will about the Soft, but at least they have efficiency that would make the Borg proud."

Lena nodded, "yeah." She pulled a face at her dad which he failed to notice, "how's that?"

"They did help us fend off the Soft/8472 alliance ten years ago," Harry answered.

Chakotay sighed, "you forget that they were a big part in repelling the original Starfleet takeover, courtesy of Damien. Their involvement probably held them back a few years. Also as Harry mentioned, they're a close cousin of ours. Humans if you want to be technical."

"In that case. We're definitely in the right place," Lena said.

The team stared toward the settlement, searching for something that looked out of the ordinary.

The silence was broken by a loud splash of water behind them. Everyone turned around or looked over their shoulder to see small ripples on the surface of the pool. A blurred shadow underneath it.

Craig groaned into his hand, "he didn't."

"He did," B'Elanna said.

"Did what?" Tom asked. It took a few moments for the awayteam to realise who said it. They looked over to see him standing in a tracksuit, and a towel in his hand caressing his hair. He was just as confused as they were. "What?" Kiara slowly pointed at the pool. "Why would I? The showers were on the way here," he said, insulted.

Craig nervously hand waved it off. "It's probably a local wanting to cool off, no worr..." Another splash of water interrupted him.

This time everyone were in full view of it. A head and torso popped out from under the water with a big grin on his face. "You guys are super slow. I won twice already. Who wants a dive race?"

Everyone quickly averted their gaze as soon as he pushed his hands against the ground. Lena decided as well to push her hand back. There was a yelp and another loud splash. She shuddered afterwards while wiping the same hand on her trouser leg. "It'll sober him up," she said defensively.

"We should get going," Harry suggested while folding his tricorder back up. "Maybe we'll get a clue where to go when we're closer."

"We think we have a good idea," Jessie said upon entering the area. James followed until he noticed what the room was, he pulled a face at the pool before continuing on. They were half way around when the majority of the team turned to face them.

"The locals give you a lead?" Tom questioned.

James nodded, "remember what Q said. There'd be innocents in the way. A strong foundation to support the building."

"Wasn't that a clue about it being in a shared building and Game Cube links?" Kiara asked.

Jessie reached the glass wall, she peered through it into the countryside mostly below them. James hung back, averting his eyes awkwardly. Nathan spotted him doing it, his own eyes dropped to the floor sadly. Jessie didn't notice as her own eyes were on the bottom of the hill. "Yep, the valley used to be a lot deeper."

"What?" Chakotay blurted out.

"Let's just say, if the hill was this short back when I was a kid, I probably wouldn't have had to have so many piggybacks up it from school," Jessie said lightly.

A few bemused stares were directed toward James, he didn't notice it at first. He rolled his eyes when he realised it and why, "it was steep, she was tired. Grow up."

Nathan turned his head away to smile. Unfortunately for him it was the wrong way, toward the grassy walkway not far outside. The painful memories of what happened on that path killed his newly found good mood in an instant, leaving a dark haze over his head. He had to get rid of it, the last thing he needed now was to wake up the monster inside him.

"So, it's been filled in. Is that what you're saying?" Lena asked.

Harry quickly reopened his tricorder for another scan, his face scrunched up as he tapped on it.

Tom's commbadge buzzed before a voice came from it. *"Voyager to Paris. As you requested, all of the reunion guests have arrived on the ship. Everyone's accounted for."*

"Good, thanks," Tom said. His second in command usually would've hung up by now. She was known for her bluntness. It was why he asked for her, it wouldn't be a Voyager without a quirky crewmember. He worried why she was still communicating. "Is there a problem?"

"Admiral Picard is asking for an update. The Enterprise and some of our fellow Game Sphere roommates are itching to investigate this anomaly."

Kes' eyes flew wide open, "no! They can't."

"Kes?" Tom stuttered. "You heard her, tell them to standby. We're working on it."

"I did tell him to cool his jets, but sure. Third of all, we're down a man. Someone beamed off the ship."

Tom groaned into his hand. "Why does that surprise me? Okay, thanks. Keep us..." He noticed she had gone a few seconds after her report. "Yep, typical."

Harry shook his head and glanced back up. "All I'm detecting beneath the settlement is regular soil. I am detecting residual Game Cube radiation, but that's expected."

"Expected? That sounds like a super safe place to build on," Lena said sarcastically. She turned toward Nathan, he forced a smile on his face once he noticed her. "Did the Ligers know what they were moving into?"

Before Nathan could answer Harry did instead, "it's pretty deep, and faint. There'd normally be no risk to them. It does prove what James and Jess found out though. The stuff should be on the surface left behind by the Game, but instead it's buried thirty feet beneath it. Unless there was a massive landslide, which I see no sign of, then something must be there."

Tom smiled around at everyone with some confidence, fake or otherwise. "That settles it. Get ready, we're going down there in half an hour."

The awayteam spread out around the building, most opting to remain in the quiet pool area despite the brightness of it. While some of them worked on their equipment and weapons, others sat or stood around trying to figure out a plan for what was ahead.

Further inside the building, Craig sat on a bench holding a PADD, pouring over what looked like floor plans to the person looking over his shoulder.

"What's that?" he had to ask.

Craig had a feeling someone was there, so he wasn't surprised at the sudden voice. He was only surprised that his new companion was someone he only ever saw once a year, usually on this date, and barely talked to. "Every network hub Lena and James went into, they got a scan of it. I'm hoping that there's some commonality that'll help us."

"Good idea," Nathan said with a nod.

"You live near here," Craig said with a mild frown forming on his face. Then he looked up at the curious man behind him. "Even after what happened here. I dunno if I could."

Nathan's good natured expression remained fix, though his eyes told a completely different story. "Not far from here, yeah. I didn't want to run away and hide. I owe it to Debs to keep living and atone."

Craig didn't know what to say in response. He brought his head and attention back down to his work. Nathan maneuvered around to in front of him. Craig noticed on the edge of his sight that he was smiling for some reason he didn't know.

"Are you and Lena ever going to tie the knot?" Nathan asked.

Craig's face immediately flushed a bright red. His voice raised a few notes higher than normal, "what? Why would you ask that?"

"You're afraid of asking her again, huh," Nathan said sympathetically.

"No," Craig answered quickly. "We already live together, her family's accepted me as one of their own, what's a wedding going to change?"

Nathan laughed, "ok ok. I touched a nerve, I'm sorry."

"No you didn't. It might work for others, but we're more than fine as we are," Craig said as calmly as he could. His red face continued to betray him. "She's never been a husband and kids sort of girl anyway, and that's one of the things I love about her."

"Yeah, she's one a kind," Nathan said.

"So no more quips about having our own kid. We don't need that," Craig muttered, lowering his gaze back to the PADD.

Nathan nodded, seemingly understanding. "Kiara's enough?"

Craig glanced up once more, staring blankly at him. "Don't say it like that. Kiara's more of a little sister than a step daughter. Just stop."

"Scott put you off?" Nathan questioned with a cheeky glint in his eye.

"I... no," Craig blurted out. "Little bit," he relented, then shook his head. "Lena and Kiara act and prefer to be sisters than mother and daughter. Lena's never been that interested in kids. People keep asking us when we'll have any, and it annoys her so much. You know, 'cause girls all want to be mummies, they just need to find the *right guy*."

"Hmm, I get that," Nathan mumbled.

Still Craig wasn't done, "it's not because of me being the childless one either. It's her they pester for being a woman. She's not *normal* in their eyes, because she doesn't want to follow the routine."

"Normal's overrated and a little dull, from what I remember," Nathan smirked and chuckled.

Craig laughed with him, as well as at, "you were never normal. I always thought you were too quirky even for Jessie's family."

"That's a compliment if I've ever heard one," Nathan said.

"Do you ever wish things were different? Would you be *normal* if you had the choice?" Craig questioned carefully.

Nathan's smile turned bittersweet, "nah. Do I wish the demon was gone forever, of course. But in these circumstances, no. It's not worth the risk. I'm happy enough with the family I have."

"Hmm, if it hasn't emerged in years, maybe it is gone," Craig said.

"Nah. I wouldn't inflict the demon on my worst enemy, forget risking infecting my own kid with it," Nathan said whilst sitting down on the floor ahead of him. "Besides, the operation is irreversible."

Craig's eyes widened a little. He absentmindedly moved his legs closer together. He didn't notice, Nathan did though and it made him snigger quietly. "It's not that bad Craigy, don't panic," he said. "I'd recommend it for someone in your position."

"Oh god. No, no," Craig stammered anyway.

Nathan shrugged casually, "suit yourself. Good thing Lena's not gonna change her mind, huh."

"No, no she won't," Craig muttered. "You're still an ass, aren't you. So much for character development."

"Craigy boy, I'm in my fifties. Why would I bother changing who I am now?" Nathan said, slipping into yet another smirk.

"You are?" Craig said in surprise. "I thought I was feeling a little old when we celebrated Kiara's sixteenth last year. I used to not change her nappies for god's sake."

"Not?" Nathan laughed. "She's been a teenager for a good while now, though. Let me know how you feel when Duncan has his."

"Duncan was temporarily frozen in time as well, so no. I'm not old until Amy or Alisha turn sixteen," Craig said.

Nathan sniggered at him, "oh yeah, keep moving the bar. What you gonna move it to in those six to eight years?"

It hadn't been that long since Craig had recovered from his blushing cheeks, now they were draining to a cool white. "God, where's the time gone?"

"It's been fighting a bunch of cowards hiding in the shadows. After today you're free to do whatever you want. It's not the time to mope, you should be looking forward," Nathan replied with a warm smile. He climbed to his feet, "something to think about."

Craig found himself nodding while he was gradually being left alone. He heard Nathan's voice as he walked through a open door, "today should be celebrated, not dreaded after all."

Jessie found him sitting on the floor, around the corner, with weapons at his side. He held one in his hand, while the other sharpened the blade. With his head down, she wondered if he was even paying attention to what he was doing. She crouched down beside him, a subtle head movement from him assured her that he noticed her presence.

"Hey... happy birthday," she said softly, before leaning in to give him a kiss.

"Happy altered timeline day to you too," James mumbled.

Jessie's face fell, "James."

He cringed and groaned at himself. His head shook before turning it toward her, "I'm sorry. Falling into old habits."

"I see that," Jessie said, her hand reached out to grab one of his, stopping it from its task. "If you keep that up it'll be nothing more than an oversized toothpick."

James looked down at the blade in that hand, he moved it to one side, adding it to the pile. "I didn't have time to really think about it 'till now. Mum mentioned something like this in that file she left us. I didn't fully understand it. Now I do."

"I'm sure she wouldn't change a thing," Jessie said. James turned his head to look at her curiously. She gave him the sweet smile that she knew was one of his weaknesses, her eyes sparkling as they made contact with his. "Neither would I."

The smile was working, but he was fighting against it. It was obvious to her with his flexing jaw and hesitant eyes. Her hand tightened to squeeze his, his gaze fell to them, that broke his resolve but not in the way she wanted. She saw a tear roll down his cheek, which her spare hand reached to brush away with her thumb.

"It's not right. Q can't use people like a means to an end. She couldn't have known or she would've refused," he said. She sensed a little disgust growing in his voice. "Forcing someone to have a child, even if it is to *save the universe*, it's sick. I hate that I'm a part of it. It was better that I was only the bastard child of a cheating psychopath."

"You were always more than that," Jessie said quickly.

James smiled but it was bitter. "That's the problem isn't it."

"How we're here doesn't make us who we are. You know that better than anyone," Jessie said in a light whisper. "Your path wasn't destined, all laid out for you to walk on. Everything you've done, good or bad, was through your own free will. You weren't forced into this fight, you chose to be a part of it. That's who you are. Q can't take credit for it. Just as you can't take the blame for how you were born."

"I know. I don't..." James sighed, hesitating slightly. "I don't regret being here. I'm glad I got a chance to live."

Jessie shuffled as close as possible to him, her head pressed against his shoulder. "So am I. I can't imagine how dull my life was in this infamous timeline One without you."

"Dull is probably right," James said, his smile finally turning genuine. Jessie pretended to scowl, she gave him a playful slap across the arm she was leaning against. "I think the odds of you running into someone far more dangerous than me is pretty low. So definitely dull."

Jessie quietly laughed, he only noticed it as he felt the brief vibration in his shoulder. "Not dangerous, I prefer exciting."

"After today it probably won't be anymore," James said as he looked down at her. "Can you handle it?"

"Pfft, thirty six years and you're still saying silly things to me," Jessie said, faking offense. "It's you I find exciting, not your night job."

"Oh," was all James could say for the moment.

"Nine years in the Delta Quadrant, one year in the Sphere. It's tiny compared to how long we've been together, and what's ahead. You're silly if you think I'm suddenly going to get bored as soon as one stupid little Softmicron is dead or arrested," Jessie said.

James nodded, then a thought came to him that made him frown. "How do you do that?"

"What?" Jessie asked.

"Gradually change the subject without me noticing," James questioned.

Jessie's smile grew while she pulled her head away to look him in the eye. "It's not me, that's the Fifth Dimension way, baby."

James started to cringe but instead he started laughing, "oh god, promise you never call me that again."

"Aaaw," Jessie faked a huff. "You didn't like honey or sweetie. Nobody sane likes darling. What can I call you? All that's left that I can think of is sugar or babes, and eeew. Not in this dimension or any."

"And I was supposed to be the not-dull one, yeah right," James sniggered.

"Please, we both fit the description. That's why we're a good fit. Further proof that you were supposed to be here, and that first timeline was broken from the start," Jessie said.

She regretted bringing that back up when his smile faded away. "You know, Q only guided her to my father. He didn't choose for her. She could have aborted at any time. She stuck around and raised me for as long as she could. She didn't avoid me when I joined Voyager." Jessie smiled before he could finish, there was a warm glow in his eye as he spoke and she knew where he was going with this. "She... could have easily chose to be only my Captain, but she was my mother when I didn't know and she didn't have to. She still cared even after all I said and done to her. She risked everything to help

Lena and I. She died for us, so we could live normally and in peace." His voice caught in his throat, "mum loved and wanted me. As long as I fought, Q had no part or care in anything else."

Jessie nodded. There was nothing more she could say on the matter, she felt.

"It's still sick though," James said, but not in the manner he used at the beginning of their conversation. It threw her off guard and made her laugh.

"Oh so sick," she giggled. Her agreement didn't put him off, he laughed with her.

"What?" Harry stuttered. "No."

Emma watched him with an innocently bemused stare. "No? I thought it was funny." Harry squeaked as she flung a knife into the air, only to catch it at the last second. "I think he landed on his thingy, that must've been..."

"Stop!" Harry and Chakotay both yelled at the same time.

Emma's eyes sparkled. "It was his own fault. If he didn't want to fall face first into a compressor, he shouldn't have pretended to be that prick from school. His face was making me ill."

"I think that's the point," Chakotay said on route to the large window.

"Like I said, his fault," Emma smiled.

"You couldn't stab or choke them like James does?" Harry asked. He scowled more at himself than anything else, "what am I saying?"

Chakotay shrugged, "beats me."

"Nah. That's boring and samey," Emma said. "What does Lena do?"

"I found a batleth in her living room. It's best not to ask these things," Chakotay answered.

"Oooh, I used to have one too but I got it stuck in someone's gut. It stunk so much after that, I could never get rid of it," Emma said.

"Um," Chakotay mumbled.

Harry ended up smiling through his horror at the image. "So you enjoyed being the only Slayer to stay behind. It suits you."

"A little too well," Chakotay whispered to himself.

"At first. They'd send me to some remote planet, and there'd be nothing to do. Then I'd try to leave and get ambushed. Should've known they were trying to get rid of me on day one," Emma nodded.

Harry grew a curious glint in his eye, "it's odd. You never did anything to them, at least until the grinder and compressor incidents." Emma grinned at the reminder. "Getting James away from Earth and into the Sphere I get. Even Kevin as he spent a lot of time hopping between the Games Matrix and the Games. But Zare, Ylara and you weren't that big a threat to them."

Emma narrowed her eyes at him, "are you being sexist?"

Harry's flew wide open in a blind panic, fearing for his life. "What? No!"

"Oh, lets get the threatening men out of the way. The girls are harmless so why bother?" Emma muttered.

Chakotay smirked while his back was safely turned, while Harry twitched in fear on the floor where he sat. "No, I see it more as the men Slayers were meddling and annoying." He quickly checked to see if James was in earshot. Since he wasn't he continued, "and they wanted the women out of the way as they were afraid of them. I mean you're violent and unpredictable, big no. Zare was a pro. Ylara was an ex Evil Slayer, no no, you don't want that around."

"James is technically a mix of all three," Chakotay sniggered.

Harry shushed him, "you're not helping."

"I know," Chakotay smiled.

Harry passed him a glare. "My comments weren't a gender thing. Kevin and James were the Chosens, both with Games Matrix experience. Ylara was a Chosen but she didn't know anything about the Games. Zare wasn't Human, so they wouldn't care about getting rid of her. And you..."

Emma narrowed her eyes until Harry curled into a near ball and stared at the floor. Then she giggled in Chakotay's direction, "that was fun."

"Definitely," Chakotay laughed.

Harry's head flew back up, "that's not cool. I have a daughter, I could never be sexist."

"So did Peter Taylor," Chakotay said.

"Oh that's nice, so low," Harry commented.

Chakotay sighed, "yeah maybe."

Emma's jaw meanwhile dropped, "you have a daughter? Are you married too?" Harry looked at her and nodded. "Shame. I'm going to miss those near kisses then." Harry sighed while Chakotay laughed once more. Emma turned her attention to him, instantly putting a stop to that.

Lena clicked the final piece into the weapon in her hands. With a heavy sigh she handed it to Kiara sitting next to her, already with a multitude of weapons by her side.

"You've known about the Softmicron being in the Federation all this time?" Kiara mumbled.

"Mum," Lena said as she picked up a bow. "She suspected it, investigated, went to the Tolg. You know the rest."

"Was that in the note she gave you and James?" Kiara said. She waited, but got no response. That was answer enough for her. "God, that's a long time to live with a secret like that."

Lena paused in the middle of picking up a bunch of arrows. She looked her daughter in the eye, "I'm sorry," she said sincerely.

Kiara shook her head and smiled back, it wasn't what Lena was expecting. "I doubt James told his kids. Knowing something like that is a big risk. I'd be more of a hindrance than help. I'm not talking about this 'cause I'm mad, I'm not. Just worried about you."

"I didn't tell you because it was nothing. They're overcompensating little freaks with a screw loose. They'd die from a finger flick," Lena grumbled as she passed her the bow, then the bag of arrows to go with it.

Kiara took it, then placed it onto the growing pile. After her comment she felt a pang of irony slap her in the face. "Really? Someone's overcompensating right now."

Lena stopped with her hand on a sword handle, her head turned to her young daughter. Her narrowed eyes tickled her into laughter. "You know," Lena said with a dangerous tint to her voice. "It's not too late to start slapping butts."

"Come on," Kiara continued to giggle. "You gotta admit, this is a bit much for one ickle guy or girl. It's even too much for one demon."

"I like having a choice," Lena said, bringing the sword in front of her. She pointed it toward the ceiling, eyes scanning it for any imperfections. "I may use them all on the little runt. It needs to suffer for all its done," her voice strained from anger.

Kiara knew by now her teasing method for calming her wouldn't work anymore. Her head hung for the moment. "Are you going to try again after?" she asked as soon as the sword hit the pile with a loud clang. Lena frowned as she reached back for it. Kiara quickly moved her hand in the way to stop her. "Not the sword, I mean in Starfleet."

Lena stared at her blankly while pulling back once more.

"They can't get in your way anymore. You'll have a choice. You can continue to be a singer, or you could go back to the Academy, pass and in ten years or so have your own ship," Kiara said.

"I never thought about it," Lena said, her face tightening slightly.

"There's no hurry. You'll have your whole life to decide. You'll finally be free," Kiara said. "You deserve it."

Lena smiled but it didn't look sincere at all to her. "There'll still be demons left to kill. The Soft are still out there."

"Sure, but compared to the last decade, it'll be less urgent, quiet," Kiara pointed out.

"I only wanted my own ship so I could fight the Games," Lena mumbled. She looked ahead, her eyes glazing over. "Singing was something to do in between Softmicron hunts, I couldn't do it all the time. Now that I say it out loud, I sound a little one track minded. I'm sure I'm more than a damn Slayer, right?" She rolled her eyes in disgust at herself.

"Yep, you are. You wanted to be a Captain 'cause you liked the sound of it. I remember you forming a band for a laugh, yeah, but you were so passionate about it. It was only recentish that you paired both of them with fighting, silly," Kiara said.

Lena laughed, her face turning red. "Oh god, the band."

"Don't tell me you're embarrassed by it," Kiara said warily.

"No, I just remember taunting mum by doing what I thought was seductive dance moves, and pretend flirting with my own brother," Lena cringed, then shuddered. "I can't use *I didn't know* as an excuse, I did it after I knew too. Then there's the song choices. You're nuts if you think I never paired singing with violence back then."

Kiara laughed nervously, "oh yeah, the I hate Seven songs. Good times."

Lena remembered a particular lyric and she burst into laughter once more. "Yeah it was. To hell with maturity. I should write another for my next set."

"Inspired by your last fight with her, I hope," Kiara said, grinning afterward.

"Of course," Lena said with her eyebrows wiggling mischievously. "What rhymes with sparkly bitch?"

Kes smiled at them from afar, despite the distance she could hear them clearly. She sensed someone approach her. She expected him, and yet she had no idea what to say to him.

"It's been a long time Sweeting," Neelix said.

Kes turned to face him with a small smile. "Sobered up, I see."

"For the most part," Neelix answered, his hand moved up to caress his forehead. "How is the other plain of existence?"

"It's wonderful, but it is so nice to be here with everyone again. I've missed it," Kes replied.

Neelix smiled eagerly toward her, she knew what was coming. "Then stay. You have four alter ego's up there, doing whatever you do. It wouldn't hurt."

Kes sighed as she shook her head. "I still have much to learn on my own, as well as from them."

Neelix's face fell, "you only left because you feared you couldn't control your new powers, that you'd endanger us. You clearly do not have that problem anymore."

"Neelix," Kes said with a heavy heart.

"Yes, I know why you really can't stay. You always hated my cooking," Neelix said sadly.

"Neelix, everyone hates your cooking," Kes laughed.

Neelix gasped at this apparently new information. "No?"

Kes nodded, "yes. People didn't use the replicators so your food could shame it. Why did you think people used to flee whenever you announced the Leola Flan was ready?"

"To tell everyone that?" Neelix said hopefully.

"Did more people come?" Kes asked.

Neelix gasped once more in horror, "oh my god. No, no one ever came back."

"When did people actually bother to eat your dishes?" Kes asked.

Neelix thought about it, all the while shaking at the huge revelations. "I don't know. I know sometimes they'd come to me instead of the replicator, so it couldn't have been that bad."

"That's because they couldn't," Kes said. Neelix's eyes widened. "Didn't you wonder why people used to mutter *oh god*, or *god help me*, everytime they picked up a bowl?"

"Aren't Humans a deeply religious race where some countries prey before a meal?" Neelix said in a near squeak.

"No, but whenever the replicators were broken we all were," Lena chimed in from afar.

Kes bit her lip tightly to avoid laughing, Neelix's jaw dropped even further. "Then why did they hire me for the cooking channel?"

"Neelix, that's not the cooking channel. It's the Laugh Out Loud slot on Channel Too Stupid. You air after Fox News, whose biggest story was *Aliens walk amongst us, oh god panic*," Lena butted in again.

Neelix gasped yet again, it hurt his only remaining lung with the overuse. Kes couldn't stop giggling now, she tried to shush the girl quiet, hoping that it would stop that too.

"No, why did you tell him? We don't have to eat it, and it's fricking funny when no one's at risk of dying," Kiara pleaded.

Lena stared at her, bemused, "you're kidding? The crew have been telling him for nearly twenty years. I imagine if everyone knew that all it took was Kes saying the exact same thing, we'd have been spared."

"But I'm a wonderful chef. What am I doing wrong?" Neelix asked, his eyes brimming with tears.

"Everything," all three women answered in unison.

Neelix's bottom lip trembled, "but but, Annika loved my food. Damien said so."

"Think about that again," Kiara said.

"Oh," Neelix responded. "How cruel, I wish I knew sooner." He walked away, crying now that they couldn't see his face.

Kes watched after him, she felt terrible but it needed to be done. Lena walked over to stand next to her, folding her arms with an indifferent look on her face. "Now I'm gonna have to find something else to watch on a Saturday morning."

The door behind them opened, Tom stepped forward to stand in between it. "It's time. Are you ready?"

"Always," Lena smiled confidently back at him. She glanced at Kiara, she nodded with her own smile. The pair knelt down to recover the weapons, which wasn't as easy as they thought. Kes had to quickly recover a few dropped ones before she could follow. "You're right, this is too much," Lena remarked.

"I told you," Kiara giggled.

Like the town they had come from, the brand new settlement the awayteam walked through was eerily empty. Not a soul in sight. Lena lead the way armed with the bow and a sword on her back, Harry and B'Elanna were right behind her holding tricorders. James kept to the back, facing away from everyone, a rifle in one arm and a sword in the other. Everyone else had at least a phaser in hand.

"Wait," B'Elanna said. The team all stopped on command, almost everyone focused on her. The exceptions; James and Lena kept a watchful eye on their surroundings, Neelix on his previously shuffling feet looking sorry for himself, and Harry checking his own tricorder. "I'm picking up something. Energy signatures directly below us. If I can find a way through it... Harry?"

Harry shook his head, "I see it too. I found it a couple of buildings ago, it's getting stronger since. If we can find a weaker spot."

Tom frowned between them both, he glanced back at Emma and then James. "Either B'Elanna or Harry should go to the other side of the town, one of our bodyguards go with them."

"If I go, I'll take James," Harry blurted out without thinking in a panic. He felt Emma staring at him even from behind. "On second thoughts, staying here within a huge group sounds good."

B'Elanna smirked, "I'll go, I've got a good idea where. James, you're closest." She moved through the team to get to him, she pointed toward an open tarmac area. The pair walked off in that direction. Tom only had to look at Emma to tell her to take James' place.

Harry spun slowly around, still scanning for a weaker point. He gestured to follow him as he moved slightly to the right. They soon realised they were walking in the opposite direction to B'Elanna and James. "We shouldn't spread out too far. Let's see what B'Elanna finds," Tom suggested.

Harry agreed before he had even said anything. "If she's thinking the same as me, she's heading for the other side of this underground building. I doubt it matters which side, as they'll likely not have an entrance."

"We'll probably have to transport inside it," Jessie said.

Tom worried that was the case as well. The last thing they needed was to gather attention before they had done anything. "How many feet underground was it again?"

Chakotay gave him a blank stare, "if you want to dig, be my guest."

B'Elanna meanwhile reached the open area. She intentionally kept to the wall of the building, even though her attention was completely on the tricorder. James had been behind her until then. He moved to beside her as something ahead of her caught his eye. A large ship lying half hazardly on the ground, landed in a hurry without a care.

"That's it, an opening. There's definitely a structure under our feet," B'Elanna said.

"Right next to the Lillyia," James added, getting her attention. She looked up at the same thing he was. "It's been used recently."

B'Elanna moved her tricorder to point toward the vessel, her brow furrowed. "There's hull damage on the bottom, whoever did so didn't land it with any care."

"Do you think...?" James began to ask.

"That it's our enemy's transport now. Yes," B'Elanna said uneasily.

"Is there anyway in, underground I mean," James asked.

"He got into it, we will. Let's tell the others," B'Elanna said, she turned to go back the way they came. James followed closely.

The rest of the team met them halfway. Tom didn't have to ask, B'Elanna nodded before he could. He smiled broadly, "let's do this."

Multiple transporter beams lit up the dark corridor. It fell back into darkness as soon as the transport was over, only the lights from their phasers and tricorders

"No lifesigns yet, but there's a large room up ahead. Plenty of corridors and rooms to choose from," Harry reported.

"We're all clear on what we have to do?" Tom questioned. He got many affirmative comments. "Okay, stay sharp."

They began their walk down the corridor. The destination no one could see yet. It was only when they were right in front of it, they could see the double doors, which opened slowly. The light from the other side dazed them briefly, the room ahead seemed like nothing but white.

Lena and James lead the way, raising their long range weapon while doing so. When their eyes finally adjusted to the sudden light, the room ahead still looked a stale white.

Doors lined every inch of the walls. Part of the floor ahead of them raised slightly, like a tiny stage. The pair looked around for anything, or anyone. Nothing.

"Okay," Lena whispered to the team behind them.

Everyone carefully followed the pair inside. The doors closed behind them.

A shadow emerged from the back wall, human shaped. Lena and James instinctively raised their weapons first towards it, a few others followed suit seconds later.

A sinister chuckle echoed from it. Female, and familiar. It put everyone on edge. The shadow grew more and more detailed, giving the new arrival a familiar face as well. "Well, it's about time you came to visit," she cackled.

"What the hell is this?" Emma grunted at it, she pushed forward with her own weapon raised.

The woman stepped down from the raised floor, a smile plastered all over her face. "Our new home. I thought you'd notice that by now."

"Wait, hold your fire," Tom ordered. "She's not real. Just a hologram."

"Naturally, Tom Paris spots the hologram first," the woman said with a friendly smile. "You do realise that this action you've made is a declaration of war. Typical Humans, nothing's changed in three hundred years. Still as barbaric as ever. I suppose you fit in with them, Emma."

Emma shook her head, gritting her teeth firmly. "Shut it, you're not her. You're not Lilly."

She got a laugh from the shadow. Her fingers brushed her red hair back, the smile on her face slouched for the moment. "Oh I see," she said after hesitating. "You think I'm one of them? Why wouldn't it be me? I'm the princess of the Ligers, you're proving right now that I needed protecting."

"Lilly wouldn't be so careless with her self titled ship," B'Elanna said.

"Really? Z4. Before you even get to the number, that's twenty five ships already biting the dust," 'Lilly' laughed. "I'm going to give you a chance, why are you here armed to the teeth? You must know your enemy isn't here."

"Oh right, lets leave then," Tom muttered sarcastically. He shook his head while stepping forward in between James and Lena, still pointing their weapons at her. "You think we're fools? An enemy that can be anyone they want. An old friend appears telling us to go look in another castle."

'Lilly' raised her eyebrow, a small frown on her face. "Everyone thinks you're a fool Tom," she said bitterly. "This is our territory, our town. Leave."

"No," James said sternly. "This is my town." Any doubts the awayteam had faded away at 'Lilly's' face twitching as she looked at him. "You're not her, you're not the big bad. You're nothing but a rat cowering in the corner."

"I would've settled for nothing," Lena muttered.

"And once the threat is gone, that's exactly what you and your pathetic brother will be," 'Lilly' snapped. "If you want to play so badly. I suppose we can have one last game. To the death." Her form faded away.

"We'll be there," Chakotay said with venom in his voice.

Tom breathed a sigh of relief. He stepped further ahead so he could turn around and face everyone. "As discussed, pair up, spread out. Don't let this thing distract you. We take this place out. All right? Move out."

As he said, the team began to split up into pairs to head for the doors. "I know that wasn't her, but..." Harry said. The few left gathered around him. "Lilly wouldn't let her ship be taken from her without a fight. So where is she?"

Emma flinched at the thought that entered her head. She tried to shake it away, "it wouldn't be the first time she had more than one Lillyia in commission. She could be anywhere."

"That's true. We can't worry about that now," Chakotay said gently. He gestured to his teammate toward a door no one had gone through yet. He followed, leaving the final pair behind. They were soon on their way as well.

Tom kept his nerves at bay with the thought that the Softmicron were very unoriginal in their designs. The corridors were bland, the shape of their Games, and now the simplistic he assumed office with only a console built into the wall. He was about to share that with his teammate guarding the door, but thought that she wouldn't appreciate it right now. Instead he concentrated on the task at hand.

A small device with a tiny touch pad in his hand flashed multiple colours while making a light buzzing sound. Two of the lights turned green, telling him to key in any password he felt like. Then he had to wait once more for the lights to change.

In between the pair another shadow emerged from the ceiling. With his position, Tom saw it clearly in his left eye. B'Elanna didn't spot it immediately, only noticing it from the corner of her eye. She swung around. Both of their eyes flashed as the details filled in.

"Son," his father's voice whispered shakily. Tom shook his head and turned his body away to keep an eye on the panel. "I know you'd find this place. Please listen closely. This isn't the main base. If you destroy it, you'll never find out what it's connected to."

B'Elanna exhaled through her open mouthed gritted teeth. She walked over to it. He looked at her briefly before turning his attention back to Tom.

"I'm so glad I got a chance to see you again, son. I never thought I would," he continued.

Tom's whole body was shaking. The lights still blinked in his hand, reminding him to concentrate on it only.

"Go to the ship. It has the co-ordinates for the network stations. You can shut them all down in one fell swoop," his father said, his voice cutting straight through Tom's concentration. His resolve weakened slightly, he hesitated.

B'Elanna walked around the hologram, all the while keeping a deadly glare fixed on him. "You're despicable. You murdered his father and then you have the audacity to steal his image, twice. Go to hell," she spat at him.

The hologram didn't falter, he looked on sadly. "I understand why you think that, but I'm the real Admiral Paris. They've held me captive for far too long. If you don't believe me, one of you stay behind. Call the others to check out my claim. Don't do anything rash."

Tom slowly looked over his shoulder to look at his father, or at least the image of him, right in the eye. "If you are him, you'll be able to tell me what my favourite toy was when I was a boy. Remember, you hated it. You tried to hide it from me, but I'd always find it."

"Tom," B'Elanna warned him.

"Of course I do," the hologram said, his lips curled slightly. Tom waited, the device in his hand clear in his line of sight just in case. "The model of a navel ship. You never put it down."

Tom squeezed his eyes shut for a second, a tear managed to escape. He shook his head, "goodbye dad." He turned his back on the hologram to focus on the device.

B'Elanna trained a weapon on the hologram, narrowing her eyes. It did the same back at her. "Nice try."

"Hmmpf," the hologram grunted. "Your people are weak. All it takes is one and your plan fails." He chuckled as his image faded away.

B'Elanna lowered her weapon and hurried over to Tom's side. She threw an arm around his shoulders, holding him closer. "Tom," she whispered.

"I'm fine," Tom smiled through his pain. The three lights on the device all turned red. His thumb moved up to press the touch panel. With that done he placed it onto the console, fixing it firmly in place. "I.. I liked to play with everything. Girl toys included."

"I know," B'Elanna smiled at him. "You don't have to explain anything to me."

Tom looked her in the eye, his filling up with tears. "It didn't matter. He didn't want me playing with toys at all. Dad wouldn't know what my favourite one was. He wouldn't care to guess. All he wanted me to do was study to be an officer. I hated him so much." B'Elanna knew whatever she said wouldn't help him, not now, she instead embraced him tightly. He held her back. "We never really patched things up, did we? I don't think I ever saw him again, it was always that damn Softmicron wasn't it?"

"I don't know, Tom. But I do know he'd be proud of you now," she said softly. "Just like I am."

Tom pulled back, a smile planted on his face. "We've got another one of these things to plant. Together, we can do this. Easy peasy."

B'Elanna smiled back and nodded.

In a similar room with a second wall console, Harry worked on the exact same device while Chakotay hovered by the door.

"This console will do the trick better I think," Harry said, directing his gaze to the console furthest from the exit. He glanced down to check the device still flashing multiple colours. "Shouldn't take long."

Chakotay didn't answer, he kept a stern watch outside. Harry didn't think anything of it, he was only doing what he promised to do.

Two lights turned green, so Harry typed in his password.

"It's not going to work," Chakotay mumbled.

"What?" Harry said, his head darting to one side toward the Commander. "Of course it will."

"You can't do anything," Chakotay said bitterly.

Harry frowned at him. His attention wasn't anywhere close to him. Then he realised, he could hear footsteps approaching. His blood ran cold. "Oh." Quickly he returned to look at the device in his palm.

"Accept it, you've lost," Chakotay said.

"Why do you think that is? Who's fault is that?" a woman's voice asked harshly. Harry winced, he'd recognised that voice anywhere. Who else would the Softmicron taunt the Commander with?

Chakotay didn't flinch, "yours. You underestimated us. You tried to silence her, you failed."

"What are you whining about now? You ran away, you failed to get your so called revenge," the voice said. Harry's attempt to ignore it became so much harder as a figure shimmered through the wall, staring back at his guard. He hurriedly stepped backwards, aiming a phaser at her face. The hologram with Kathryn Janeway's face smiled smugly as her hand reached up as if to push it back down. "You always wanted to kill him. Do it. With him gone, you will avenge me."

"Oh god," Harry stammered.

Chakotay quietly laughed at her, she took it as him mocking her. "Your information's out of date. I know who the real enemy is and if I were you, I wouldn't be encouraging me to kill them."

The hologram side stepped, staring intensely at him. Harry turned away, determined to ignore it and concentrate on the task. "The Slayer brat was a mistake, and apparently so were you. Maybe I should find someone who will help me."

"Really? I thought you idiots were the master of decep..." Chakotay grunted as the hologram reached out for Harry. He quickly pointed his phaser at her arm, ready to fire. He remembered her walk through the wall and hesitated on the fire button. She lingered, waiting for him to do something. "What's wrong, you don't have an image of Harry's mummy to trick him?" he taunted her.

"Hey," Harry stuttered as he looked over his shoulder, only to come face to face with Kathryn's face. He yelped and stumbled back a few steps.

The hologram sighed, her eyes drifted back to the Commander. "Still a coward, I see. All bark and no bite. Without me you have no one to tug your leash. Spineless oaf."

"I thought we were talking about me," Chakotay said.

The hologram sneered at him as it faded away.

"What, why did it... what?" Harry stammered nervously.

Chakotay turned to him, Harry could see the older man holding back with one hand clenched. "It's okay, the hologram is non corporeal. All it can do is talk."

"Until the Soft gives up and comes for us itself," Harry said.

"I hope you're right. I owe it a little chat," Chakotay said, his jaw clenching as well.

"I'm starting to think it was a mistake joining this team," the Doctor worried.

Nathan looked back at him, "um, why? You're not a woman nor a biological being."

"I didn't mean..." the Doctor said exasperated. He groaned before explaining himself, "I meant this mission as a whole. If the Softmicron fancies using holograms, I may give it an advantage." He gestured at his mobile emitter.

"It's already got emitters Doc, what's the big deal?" Nathan asked.

"This is far more advanced than anything the Softmicron have," the Doctor replied as if it were obvious. "It will at the very least grant it a second body outside of this place. Furthermore..." The lights on the device flashed green, so he did what the others did.

Nathan shook his head as he turned back toward the door. "Sure Doc. The guys who can make flying holodecks that can go anywhere will be clambering over your emitter."

"I just think it warrants some caution," the Doctor said as he typed the long digit password.

Footsteps rapidly approached from down the corridor. Instantly on guard Nathan raised his phaser in that direction. He hesitated when he recognised the person that appeared around the corner. "James?"

"Where's the Doctor?" he asked in a panicked voice.

Nathan's eyes drifted into the room, "why, what's the matter?"

"The console Craig picked overloaded," James replied. His expression turned into glare as Nathan hesitated. "Hurry, he'll die!"

"Uh..." was all he could say.

The Doctor overheard this, he hurried over. Nathan noticed, so he pushed his hand out to keep him back.

"No," Nathan finally said.

James stepped closer, narrowing his eyes further. "What? Get out of my way."

"How do I know you're really James?" Nathan asked. "Prove it."

"There's no time," James grumbled, he looked toward the Doctor. "He's been electrocuted, I can't go near him. It isn't far."

The Doctor's programming screamed at him to do something, but there was doubt clouding his own judgement. It left him frozen on the spot.

"If it's that dire, get me out of the way yourself," Nathan said.

"Are you not satisfied with murdering my sister, that you'd kill Craig as well," James snapped at him.

His anger grew as Nathan smiled confidently. "You're not James. Doc, stay away, do your job."

"Are you sure?" the Doctor worried, he backed off anyway.

Nathan nodded. "Oh I'm sure," he said to him. "Taking his form must be killing you. Does it make you itchy all over?" he said ahead of him.

"You're right. I could do better," James said with a smile. He faded away, only to be instantly replaced by a young blonde girl. Nathan regretted taunting the monster. It took every bit of strength he had not to crumble into pieces. "How's that?" she asked.

"You're wasting your time," Nathan stammered.

"I know, but what's life without fun," the girl giggled, her bright blue eyes sparkling. Another punch to the gut. "Oh, I wouldn't know," she said in a fake sad voice.

Nathan stared at her firmly. "You're not Debbie. I saw you change, this is ridiculous."

"It hurts, and that's the least you deserve," she said, looking toward the wall and back again. "We'll play later. Busy." He expected her to disappear or walk away, instead she glided through the wall and into the room. Nathan panicked and rushed inside.

The Doctor side stepped away, doing his best to keep his emitter on the wrong side to her, device in hand. "It's too late." The hologram shook her head as she approached. He couldn't move any further away, the console got in his way. She reached out to grab his emitter-less arm. The Doctor moved it toward his emitter, she barely had time to brush his uniform when he tapped in a command and disappeared. The emitter and device clattered to the floor, enraging the hologram.

Nathan's eyes widened, he didn't know what had happened or why, but he had to act fast. He dove down to the floor to grab them. The hologram glared at him. She intentionally moved her right leg straight through his body, all so she could stand

directly over him. She crouched down, instinctively he pulled himself back to avoid her. A smile he never saw on the real thing appeared on her face, creeping him out further.

"If you won't play, maybe James or little sis will," thankfully she straightened back up afterward. "Oh, and thanks for the early and demeaning death. That was swell. Enjoy the rest of your miserable life, demon."

Finally she vanished, though the effects of her lingered behind. Nathan tried to swallow the large lump in his throat, his mouth was far too dry to even budge it. He didn't notice until then that he was trembling.

The device in his hand begun to flash red, waking him up out of his self pity. His enemy wanted him to mope around, miss this and fail the mission. It taunted him because he was a threat to it. He was only the easiest to manipulate in his team because he made it easy for it. A mistake he would never make again.

With the Doctor offline it was up to him to finish his part of the job. He pressed the final command and got to his feet.

Kiara pressed the device into the computer, it took a couple of tries to get it to click into place. "That's it, one more to go."

"Good, I want to get it over with. I'm more interested in finding that Soft," Lena said. She waited for Kiara to get to her before walking out of the room, only to nearly walk into another body.

"Why wait?" her own face sneered at her.

Lena stared at it blankly, her mind also went blank for a few seconds. She rolled her eyes, "really? This is a pretty lame trick. Aren't you supposed to pretend to be someone else, to distract me or something. Not me."

"But I'm not you," herself said. "I'm the girl who's place you took."

"Wow," Lena stuttered, making the other her smile. That didn't last long as Lena burst into laughter, "I get that far too much, it loses its effect."

"What?" the other her snarled.

"A couple of tips," Lena said, stepping closer to peer into her own eyes. "If you want to do the unnerve me by claiming I don't belong here, the stealing someone's place angle, use Seven. If you want to do the Ylara bit, maybe act like her, pretend to be a ghost." The stare she received would have melted the wall had Lena not been in its way. "Excuse me. Actually, no, don't bother." To add further insult Lena walked straight through the hologram.

Kiara walked around it with a smirk on her face. "Yeah, that was terrible. Sorry." She hurried after her.

Jessie drummed her fingers against the wall, all sorts of violent images flew through her head as she did. Her teammate meanwhile stood in the door, unsure where she should look.

"But by all means, keep shaming your family with the mutt. I'm sure you'll look back when you're ninety and be so proud of the devil sleeping with you did. Your proudest moment, I know," Rachel complained at Jessie's side. "I hope the five minutes of torture was worth it."

Her words flicked a switch, and it wasn't a good one. It had been many years and Kes still recognised Jessie's burning face as a bad omen. She once again looked away.

"That's it," Jessie snarled. She swung around to face the all too realistic imitator of her mother, taking a deep breath so she could give her the full show. "Firstly, good job getting my annoying, narcissistic mother spot on. That must've been so damn hard. Secondly, I won't need to look back and be proud of my *sleeping with* when I'm ninety, I imagine I'll still be doing it. Have fun with that image *mum*." As expected and hoped the woman grimaced. "Thirdly, five minutes, you're having a laugh right? Hours is closer."

"Stop," the woman grunted. Kes meanwhile struggled not to laugh.

"Fourthly. You're only doing this because you're not my mum, you're a future scrambled egg waiting for the Slayers to cook you. I hope James gets there first as he's a terrible cook. We're talking about egg shells everywhere. Oh, my metaphor ended somewhere, you figure it out. Fifthly, is that right, oh who cares, five is appropriate. If you actually thought that your little tirade here was going to convince me to drop everything and go to murder my best friend, then I've wasted my breath on you. What's next, going to James and tell him to turn evil, with a *pwetty please* on the end. Then stomp off shouting *you're mean* when he laughs at you?"

"You'll regret this," Rachel hissed.

Jessie laughed in her face, "right, okay Damien. Don't steal my idea, okay."

Rachel's face turned red with rage as she disappeared from sight. When she did Jessie heard Kes' quiet laughter.

"What?" she asked.

Kes breathed in to try to tame her giggles. "You haven't changed, that was amazing."

"Oh? I'd like to think I wouldn't have said the second and third one back in the day," Jessie said with a shrug. The device in her palm turned all red, so she quickly placed it. "At least not without getting embarrassed."

"True," Kes said. "You're not worried that it'll do something to get back at you?"

"Please, it's got nothing or it would've done it by now. Shall we go?" Jessie said. Kes nodded.

The door lay straight ahead of them, the last destination they had to tackle. Unlike the others it didn't open automatically, it had an old design with a handle and lock. James

stopped in front of it, glancing back at Craig. He knew what that meant, so he took a step backward and waited.

James took a hold of the handle, ready to push it down. Craig cleared his throat, getting his attention. "Shouldn't we wait?" he asked.

"I'll save some for Lena, don't worry," James replied. He pulled a slightly hesitant face, then smirked at him, "maybe."

"Your funeral," Craig tutted.

"Not my problem, I don't live with her," James said.

Craig laughed nervously at him, "and why would she blame me? I can't stop you."

"Good point," James said, only then pushing down on the handle until the pair heard a crack. The door crept open, his hand moved to push it the rest of the way. He then walked through with his rifle raised.

Craig waited for a few seconds. He sighed, "nah," before following him inside.

Unlike all the other rooms they had been in, this larger room seemed brighter with furniture and walls lined with blinking computers. Directly ahead of them stood a desk with a large leather chair with its back to them. Craig hung back by the door, his weapon pointed at it. James though kept walking slowly toward it. Craig worried about how close he was getting. He got his wish, the chair span around to face them, stopping James dead in his tracks.

"I hoped it would be you," the occupant sneered at him.

James sighed a little, shoulders slumping, "I wish I could say the same."

"Charming. Is that how you greet an old enemy," the chair occupant sniggered.

"Haven't you gotten anything better than a vampire I killed eight years ago? There's more to me than just Frenit," James said.

Craig's eyes shifted nervously, "uh, why are you tempting him?"

The man rose from his chair licking his lips, his gaze hovered back and forth between them. "Yes, why? If you want to have more fun, I'm more than happy to oblige." He walked around the desk, settling for staring at James only. Craig took the opportunity to sneak the tricorder out from his pocket. "I could order a few more clones of him. I know you enjoyed the one I sent after your mother. We all did."

James lowered his rifle, opting instead for raising the sword to point it in his face. "I think I'll enjoy this more."

"Hmm, I doubt it. A fight with me rarely ends well," 'Frenit' taunted him.

"I don't, I imagine you only got his talking too much right," James said. 'Frenit' opened his mouth to reply, but James pushed the sword forward before he could. It flew straight through him like he wasn't there. The fake vampire laughed at him. "Thought so. You're completely harmless."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that. Know you'll never catch me, you're wasting your time," 'Frenit' smirked.

Craig pointed his phaser toward the desk. 'Frenit' whirled around to glare at him as he fired it. Sparks flew from it on impact, the hologram grumbled a few obscenities while it flickered off-line. "He wasn't wrong on the last part," Craig said.

Many footsteps approached, the pair glanced toward the door in time to catch some of their team hurry through it. One looked around eagerly only to be disappointed. "This is the last room. Where the hell is this guy?" Lena grumbled.

"It's here. I'm picking up a lifesign, close by," Craig replied.

"Spread out, look for it. It's not getting away," Chakotay ordered.

Familiar laughter echoed around the large office, the team directed their attention to the desk. A figure they all recognised raised up from behind the leather chair, he casually rested his arms on the top of it.

"Oh I'm getting sick of this," Lena groaned.

"Then let me put you out of your misery," Damien sniggered. "At long last," he walked around to slouch in the chair, "I'll get my revenge on you do-gooders. No longer will I be one of you, the insult."

"He is the lifesign, should we shoot him?" Craig whispered.

Damien sneered at him, "I must thank you for arresting and handing me over to my minions. It saved a lot of time sneaking around behind your stupid backs. I couldn't have done this without you."

"Enough. Reveal your true form. Some of us have lives," Chakotay snapped.

"Chuckles, I'm insulted," Damien pouted. He swung his feet up onto the desk. "Did you really think that the big bad of the piece was some faceless person you never met? That it wouldn't be thee original thorn in your side? It began with me and it'll end with me."

"This guy does a good Damien impression," Lena said.

Damien scowled at her, immediately throwing his feet back down to the floor. "I am Damien! Ruler of the Seventh Dimension, future leader of the cosmos. The Softmicron bowed to my greatness long ago. They do my bidding. Now, despite the little setback with the Tolg and those stupid Human castaways with their ships named after a dainty flower, I have full control over the Federation and with it, the demonic realm. You will cower before me and..." He stopped, noticing the rest of the room rolling their eyes and in some cases pretending to drift off. "Oh very nice. This is a twist you didn't see coming, don't patronise me."

"Oh I'm sorry. Gasp, Damien's secretly been a blabbermouth talking out of his own ass all this time!" Jessie stammered in an over the top voice. "Janeway reaching for the coffee pot first thing in the morning is a more shocking plot twist than this crap."

"Wait, are we going for the Damien being the villain thing? I thought we were still thinking it was a Softmicron," James said.

"I honestly don't care, who gets first dibs?" Lena said, immediately raising her hand. "Oh me, thanks guys."

"Shot gun," Damien said, but anyone watching him didn't see his mouth move. Even he looked confused. His cheek contorted, head rocked to one side, then his body slumped onto the desk. Everyone stared with blank looks on their faces, all except Lena who was more annoyed than anything else. A faint outline of a person wobbled into view behind the desk, another Damien shimmered in its place with one hand touching a gadget on his wrist. "Enough's enough, I sound much cooler than that." He rubbed his right hand afterward, "I have a hard head. No surprise."

The rest of the awayteam arrived on the scene, the two Damiens being the first thing any of them saw. Chakotay looked at them in deadpan, "don't ask."

"Okay, I only scanned one lifesign earlier. He's a hologram," Craig said.

Damien burst into his usual laughter, "hardly. I've made some obviously brilliant upgrades to my cloaking device. Now invisible truly means invisible. Scan away." Just in case Craig did so.

"Um, so which one's which?" Tom asked. "Who should we shoot?"

"Both," Chakotay said as he approached the desk. Damien's smirk faded away, he backed away slightly with his hand back on his wrist. Chakotay ignored him completely, the one on the desk had his full attention. He had already begun to recover and was starting to straighten back up. "Although, I have a feeling you are really the one we're after. You've admitted as much."

The Damien behind the desk pushed his chair backward, then to his right, his eyes wide in panic. He didn't expect to hit something so soon. His head twisted around to see not a wall, but James staring down at him. The sight of him left him trembling as well.

"He," he pointed toward the standing Damien. "He made me pretend to be him. He's trying to trick you again. Damien's the real villain."

Damien actually blushed, "aaw, stop. You're too kind."

James pulled a disgusted face at him, "it's okay, we'll just kill him next."

Chakotay stared at the one in the chair intensely. "You murdered my wife..." he began slowly.

"No I didn't," the other Damien stammered.

"Funny, you were gloating about it before," James said.

Chakotay walked up to the chair, he leaned in with his hands on the armrests. The occupant cowered into it. "You sent us into that death trap you call a Game Sphere. Killed billions of people, enslaved so many others. Violate our home and turn our lives upside down. The least you can do is tell me, why?"

The man tried to cover his nervousness with laughter. It helped a little, allowing him to answer, "this universe, it's a haven. Peaceful, safe. You filthy bugs are not deserving of it. Suffer as we have and you will understand."

Chakotay kept the same cold stare on him for as long as he could without snapping. He pulled back when that time came. The fake Damien assumed he was leaving him alone. He was wrong, the former Commander threw his fist into his face so hard it knocked him partly out of his chair. Satisfied for now, Chakotay walked away, passing his daughter waiting for her turn. "Make me proud," he said to her.

Lena smiled as she took his place. James noticed their future victim's shape changing, shrinking in size. In its original form, it tried to slip through the cracks in the armrest. James put his hand out to stop it, pulling it back. A little, almost innocent squeal came out of it. Knowing what it done, what it was capable of, made it hard for anyone to feel sorry for it. Tom thought to himself that this cute persona was how they got away with so much for so long. He kept it to himself.

The dagger from her pocket was out, hovering in front of the trembling creature. Her eyes glanced up at her brother, confused as to why he wasn't doing anything else. "James?" His eyes glanced up as well, meeting hers. "You don't want to kill him?"

"Yeah I do, but this is your kill. It always was," James replied with a smile.

"No," Lena protested, her head shaking. "The timeline is the way it is because of the both of us. We should do it at the same time, for what he did to mum at least."

James hesitated, he gave her a smile as he reached out to hold the hand with the knife. The creature tried to wiggle free, screeching all the while. The knife silenced him for good.

"It's over," Kiara sighed in relief.

Tom bit his lip nervously, "not yet it isn't." He tapped his commbadge, "Paris to Voyager. All of the panels are in place. Activate the portal draining shield."

"Aye sir."

The awayteam stood outside in the centre of the new town, watching the sky. The blinding white rapidly faded, bringing the blue they were so used to back. It brought with it a light breeze, cooling the humid air left behind.

People began to emerge from their homes, also with their eye on the sky. In a few seconds the town was bustling with joy and relief.

"Eew," Damien killed the mood. Jessie shook the arm she was holding roughly. "Oh come on, can we go? This is making me sick."

"Remind me again why we're not killing him too?" B'Elanna asked Tom playfully.

Tom stared toward Damien with his eyebrow raised, "because, we're the good guys."

"Ugh!" Damien almost gagged. "I picked the wrong side. I need to find someone less revolting to overthrow."

"Finally, the exit's that way," Lena said, pointing at the sky.

As if on cue a tiny flash appeared in the sky. "What now?" Tom said warily.

Harry hurried off the turbolift to get to the centre of the Bridge, "well?"

"The database confirms it as a Liger vessel, similar design to the one on the surface, registry ending with a Z9," Opps replied.

"Hail them," Harry ordered.

The viewscreen changed from a space view filled with a few ships, and one approaching them, to a bridge. The person sitting at the centre of it brought him even more relief. "Lilly."

Her eyes slid from one side to another, her brow furrowed. "Harry? What's with the welcome home party?"

"Huh?" Harry was confused, then he remembered the fleet still in orbit. "Oh, that's a long story we need to go over. Where have you been?"

"We've been relocating my people from my dimension to Earth. Why?" Lilly questioned.

"Well..." Harry hesitated.

Lilly winced, "let me guess, long story?"

"Yes, but it's the same one," Harry replied.

"Oh good. No one has time for anymore than one long story," Lilly smiled.

Harry nodded in agreement, "yeah, if only we were given that same courtesy." Lilly's eyebrow raised pretty high. "Never mind. I'll catch you up later, just..." he hesitated for a second, "don't check on the ship you left."

"Ohno what happened to the Z4?" Lilly groaned. "I can't do this again, there are no more letters and I refuse to use the 10's in the registry again."

"You could use another name. What about, Dellia," Harry suggested.

Lilly stared at him in disgust and a little contempt. "What kind of name is that for a ship?"

Harry thought better than to argue with her. He smiled awkwardly instead.

Tom paced the transporter room, his hands crossed behind his back. He had no idea why he was feeling so anxious. Still he couldn't shake it off. His mind raced at the possibilities that lay ahead of him now that the Softmicron threat was gone. Now he knew why, he wasn't nervous, he was excited at the idea of doing something different. He imagined he wasn't the only one feeling like that.

The doors opened behind him, distracting him from that thought for the moment. He turned around to greet whoever came in. He was a little disappointed that his first transportees were the ones he knew the longest. He secretly hoped he could begin with someone a lot easier.

"Hey, just thought I'd..." Tom fell into a stutter. He cleared his throat, "I wanted to say, er, not goodbye, but see you next time."

Jessie smiled at him, he swore he saw a little smirk in there. "Until the next catastrophe you mean."

"Nope, I've had my fill," Tom admitted. "You'll be at next year's reunion right?"

"We haven't missed one yet," James said.

"Good, don't start now," Tom said. He looked down at Duncan first, giving him a friendly smile.

"Bye Tom," he responded in a similar manner, to his relief. "Don't miss us too much, okay."

Tom laughed as he dared to pat the young man on the shoulder, "oh I'll try." He then moved on to Sasha, who he hadn't really managed to see in a few years. A spitting image of her mother, only a lot nicer he thought to himself. "Keep your brother out of trouble, okay Sash."

"Too much effort," she commented, shaking her head.

"Yeah, you're probably right. Take care, kid," Tom said. She gave him a little wave as her goodbye, it was enough for him. Alisha was next in his line of sight, with Amy by her side. He struggled to find the words to say to them. After Duncan and Sasha, a simple bye wasn't enough. Then he realised his throat was feeling a little sore.

"Don't be a stranger okay," Jessie said, rescuing him. He wasn't sure if that was her intention, but he was thankful anyway.

"Thanks, that means a lot," Tom croaked, barely finding his voice. He turned to James last, once again he didn't know what to say or do. He decided to hold his hand out and hope for the best. "To another ten years of no punch ups," he found himself joking without thinking.

"I never agreed to that," James said with a straight face.

Tom withdrew his hand slightly with a wince, "oh, well..."

James couldn't keep his straight face up for long, he sniggered immediately at Tom's disappointed one. "Relax, I'm kidding." He surprised him by taking his hand to shake it once. "Maybe."

"Oh boy, I'm not going to miss that," Tom chuckled nervously.

"Glad I could help," James smiled.

Jessie looked at him, shaking her head. "I managed a nice goodbye, is it so hard?"

"Yes," James and Duncan said at the same time. Tom wasn't sure if they planned that all along or if they were joking.

"Yes," Alisha added on a few seconds too late.

Tom couldn't help but laugh. Whether they tolerated him, liked him or none of the above, he was going to miss having them around. The new Voyager never felt as homely as the previous one without everybody, even if he was familiar with the class. It was no use dwelling on it. Things change, that was the point. Life without it would be pretty dull.

"Oh Tom, do you always narrate like that in your head?" James cringed.

Tom's face flushed bright red, "what, you can't read my mind when you feel like it. That's rude."

James laughed at him again, making Tom rethink his missing him feeling. "I didn't, but that was fun."

"Oh, get off my ship will you," Tom said only half seriously.

"Oooh huffy," Duncan sniggered.

Tom looked down at the boy, then at James and Jessie. He ended up laughing with them, if only for a moment. "See you, don't let the hypothetical door hit you on the way out."

"Doors don't hit daddy, daddy hits doors," Alisha said cutely.

"I know," Tom said. He watched the family get onto the transporter pad. Once they were on it he glanced behind him at the smirking transporter chief. He made a mental note to scold them for that later. "Energise." One word and they were gone, back to living their normal life on Earth. After a few more goodbyes he'd have to return to his on the Bridge of the new Voyager.

Harry watched him as he took his seat beside him. "How did it go?" he asked.

"Some people never change," Tom answered in jest.

"Yeah, I'm okay with it," Harry said. "So where to next Captain?"

"Set a course; for normal," Tom ordered with a smile.

"What do you think's going to happen now?"

It was a question Lena hadn't really given much thought. First with Kiara asking her, now Craig, Lena wondered why it hadn't really come to mind before. There was always something to do. A suspicious building had to be picked out from the thousands on a planet, then it would need to be infiltrated. Her spare time lately was either spent hanging out with her family, or on the stage, and even though she had too many lyrics

to get right, her head would space out during every performance. It was relaxing in a way.

Now there was nothing she had to do. Her so called purpose was fulfilled, and yet she was still here. Now she had a chance to live her life how she wanted, without worrying that some shapeshifter or Q would decide for her. Sure, she'd have to fight a monster occasionally, but that she could easily live with.

Her whole life lay ahead of her, and for the first time it was all up to her. For now though, she didn't want to do anything. The thought of living aimlessly for a while sounded just what she needed. There was plenty of time.

She felt Craig watching her, waiting for an answer, probably. She turned her head, giving him a smile he always thought meant trouble for both of them. Or only him. Before she answered she looked ahead once more. "Well, now that we're free, we should think about kids. Marriage, a bigger house. I've always envied James. He's never bored with four kids running around. I want in on that fun."

Lena didn't have to look back to know Craig's face would be ghostly white, with his eyes almost bugging out in pure fear. She looked anyway to get the full experience, it still made her laugh despite expecting it. "What, erm... if that's what you want, no..." he stuttered. "Maybe we can negotiate the number at leas..."

"Relax, I'm messing with you," Lena burst into laughter. "It's not my kind of fun."

"Oh... thank god," Craig sighed in relief. He should've known better than that. Lena may have always wanted normality in her life, but like him, she knew that it came in all forms. After all she'd been through, she deserved anything she ever wanted, he thought.

In the night sky a bright sparkling light travelled along the horizon. It disappeared in a flash, leaving the view still once more. Lena watched it all with a smile, a huge weight had lifted from her shoulders, this time she knew for good.

Kiara walked up to stand on the other side of her, her eyes scanning for something. "Did I miss them leave?"

"Yeah," Lena answered. She reached for her hand, giving her a little wink. "They'll be back, no worries."

"I'm not worried," Kiara smiled too. "Today's a fresh start. I'm looking forward to it."

Lena nodded, casting her eye back up into the night sky. "Yeah. Fifth time's the charm."

THE END