

Episode 5.12

Three's A Paradox

"This isn't about doing the right thing. You know that better than anyone."

As usual he didn't understand a word of what he was saying. His temper was still hard to control, but he was getting there. This fool was not helping at all. "So what are you saying? Am I supposed to help him? Him, of all people!"

"I cannot answer that."

"Why me? You must know what he did. I know it would be too hard to find somebody willing to help, but you didn't even try, did you?"

The annoying man smiled. "We didn't pick you out of a hat or something. I told you, it has to be you. Don't you see? You've already done it or we wouldn't be here. It really isn't that difficult to understand."

Not this rubbish again, he angrily kept to himself. This was an opportunity too hard to resist taking advantage of. He could undo his sins before he even thought of them. Chakotay knew he had to try, to hell with time.

PART ONE

Getting onboard was as easy as he planned. He wasn't surprised of course, but in a tiny way he felt sorry for the so called opponents he faced.

There was nothing stopping him from completing his task. At least that was what he thought. He had no idea that within the team he had infiltrated, he was not the only one who didn't belong there.

"This time, I'll finally get what I deserve," the man thought. A smile threatened his cover so he held it back for now. As the team split up at a corridor junction he let it loose. He only had to lose this one guy who was walking behind him and he was free to begin his plan.

That man would make sure he would fail again.

The USS Leda continued its slow orbit around the planet known as Shurouva. A few alien ships had joined them, but kept their distance behind them.

Lieutenant Kim's Log Stardate 58647.4: The Leda has returned from another evacuation mission, but for now we're postponing the next one for a more important assignment. I'll be more than happy when this one is complete, for numerous reasons.

"Hey Harry," Tom's loud but muffled voice cut in. Harry sighed in annoyance. "We're swapping Captain seats when this is done, see."

As if. End log.

Harry quickly leapt from his desk, dashed out of his Ready Room and entered the Bridge. He groaned when he found Tom reclining in his chair so far he was lying down.

"See, it's broken."

"Dream on, Tom," Harry muttered. "Shouldn't you be getting back to Voyager?"

"I would but the chair's knackered and I can't get up. You'll just have to beam me to my Bridge," Tom said with a cheeky smile.

Harry shook his head, "as you wish." He nodded in Opps direction, all he got was a roll of the eyes. "I'm starting to miss Faye. Where is she anyway?"

"Why? I'm much more interesting," Damien countered.

"She did her job, that's the difference," Harry sighed angrily. His attention went back to Tom who had decided to rest his head in his crossed arms. "Hint, hint."

Tom smiled, he was enjoying every minute of Harry's tantrums. "I don't know why you're hinting, Harry. I was doing my job as the fleet Captain."

"That doesn't mean you had to tag along. You have Voyager," Harry protested. His eyes lit up slightly, "it was also agreed that I'm the Captain when the Leda is on its own, ha!"

"Yes because I'm not there," Tom smugly retorted. Harry's throat growled, he kept his mouth shut. "I am now."

"So... so you're okay with James in command of Voyager?" Harry was running out of arguments.

Tom shrugged. "He's not going to piss anyone off or pick a fight with someone sitting in a dead farmers field, is he? It's a workless job right now, hence why I'm here, keeping busy."

Harry stared blankly at his so called friend as he continued to relax in his chair, now bed. "Are you serious? Look at you! Also you've been waiting for this day for weeks."

"You're damn right, this is a fine chair. I wonder if it's too late to tell repair teams to redesign the Bridge. I can't have a recliner chair with a barrier behind me," Tom said gleefully.

Harry sighed, that was not what he meant at all. He racked his brains to think of something, anything to get that man off his Bridge and onto his own. While he was doing that the viewscreen showed a small object approach from the planet.

"This is gonna end well. I'm video-ing this," Damien grinned. Everyone who was not Tom and Harry gave him a dirty look.

"Of course it's too late, that's what I'm trying to tell you," Harry groaned.

The object got a lot bigger, and much clearer as it approached. The people who were watching could make out the colour and shape of it.

"Nah, I'm sure a few certain people could rip that banister off in five minutes," Tom said.

"You're missing my point," Harry groaned.

The oval shaped front of the object glided towards them, banking slightly left to approach them nose to nose. Its speed slowed down much to Damien's disappointment.

"See!" Harry pointed at it.

The object was so close now everyone could see the individual lights coming from it, and even inside the tiny glass windows on the front of it. Tom finally chose the moment it stopped to look.

"Voyager? She... well sh..." he stammered. Harry face palmed as the man in his seat tried desperately to get the chair upright again. "Take her back down and we'll do it again."

"I volunteer for the first half of the mission," Damien sneered. Once again he got a few dirty looks. "I don't need permission." He scoffed at the console beeping at him. "They're hailing."

Harry shook his head, "on screen if you can manage that."

Damien was too disappointed that nothing had gone wrong, he couldn't be bothered to mess with him. He did as he was told for once.

The familiar sight of the Voyager Bridge appeared on the screen. Tom's reaction was to panic a little more.

"Who did that? I didn't..." he stuttered. He then caught sight of something else that annoyed him. "What is she doing in my seat?"

Jessie smiled as she relaxed in the Captain's seat. "Just trying it out." A foot rest appeared from the base, Tom's eyes widened. "Someone should."

"You... you bitch," he growled.

Jessie's smile just got bigger, her legs stretched on the new foot rest. She waved sweetly at him.

"How could you let her... We were getting along," Tom stuttered. "And how could you do this without me? You two are too cruel to me."

"This is shock to you? Did you bump your head?" James asked from the helm. The sight of him there made him tear up a little, but that was probably because his eyes were so wide.

Damien growled, "you could have bumped the ship a little. Just a little head on collision, is that too much to ask?"

"That didn't end too well for the Enterprise E and the ship it hit, did it?" Harry said.

"It ended well for me. While it was getting fixed I stole it," Damien smiled. "I remember trapping that bald Captain in his seat with that stupid seatbelt, which I designed myself for the occasion. He wouldn't give in until I threatened to let my brainwashed Deanna Troi take the helm. He surrendered very quickly."

Tom and Harry nodded at each other, finally it made sense. Tom shook his head very quickly, "wait, are we really remembering Season Two cliffhangers? Look at us and our continuity." He and Harry quickly high fived.

"Jesus Chr... if you think I'm letting one of you two reclaim that ship, you've got another thing coming. The Pegasus was a shuttle in comparison," Damien huffed.

"If the Enterprise is still in one piece, I think it would be better off towed back to Earth, honestly," James commented. Both Tom and Harry glared at him, Damien was too busy reliving his victory in his head.

"I was its First Officer for years," Tom protested.

"Yes and a fine job you did of it too. Speaking of which, where is it?" James asked with a smile on his face.

Tom looked around nervously. "You know what I've still got the Flyer to fix, so toodles." With that he ran off.

"Toodles?" Harry mumbled. "Never mind. Now that Voyager's back in space, we can get back to our evacuation mission. How long has B'Elanna quoted for the rest of the repairs?"

"Another few hours and she'll be ready to test the warp core," James replied.

Damien's attention came back, "oh, I have a perfect addition to the warp core to make it work better."

B'Elanna's head appeared from the side of the screen, scaring the crap out of everyone who didn't know she was there. "No warp core shield!"

Damien looked very disappointed, "how did you know?"

"Please. Only you would invent something that's supposed to be useful, but would fail at the slightest nudge," B'Elanna groaned. "Besides you've admitted to being responsible for certain *upgrades* to the Enterprise before you stole it."

Damien pouted angrily. Harry smiled like it was him that caused it. "You know what this means."

"That Damien was responsible for everything bad that happened in Nemesis. A little harsh, don't you think?" B'Elanna giggled.

"No, well yes. Admitting to being the one who stole a starship, as well as sabotaging her," Harry said with a sly smile. He tapped his commbadge. "Kim to Anderson. You're going to like this one."

Voyager:

The smell was enough to tell her not to drink it, but Yasmin was so desperate for a coffee she decided to take a chance. She dared to take one tiny sip, but that was harder than she figured. Instead of a soothing hot liquid in her mouth, the contents of the cup had left her top lip covered in a brown sludge. Her eyes studied the coffee, which did look like a normal black coffee to her while her tongue absent mindedly cleaned the sludge off of her lip. She immediately regretted doing that.

A few crewmembers walked passed her in the opposite direction just as she tried to spit what seemed like soil out of her mouth. Unfortunately for her it was already dissolving on her tongue. Desperate to get that disgusting taste from her mouth she stuck out her tongue, and then tried to wipe it with her fingers. Luckily by this point she didn't really have an audience.

"Ugh, this is why mum called Neelix the coffee devil. It's not a good thing," she grumbled. Now she wanted a coffee even more than she had ever done. Heck she'd settle for tea if it meant getting the taste out of her mouth.

Yasmin failed to realise that a door nearby was opening as she was walking by it. The noise of it made her leap backwards. Normally she'd spill the contents of her cup but it barely even budged, making her scowl at whatever this stuff was. All she knew is that it was definitely not a liquid.

"Yasmin?" a familiar voice said from the doorway.

Yasmin's eyes widened slightly as her pupils followed the voice. She blinked many times as she assumed the fake coffee had made her hallucinate. No matter how many times she did it, what she saw was still the same.

"Shouldn't you be on the Leda?" the voice continued.

Yasmin decided to rub her eyes slightly, all that did was blur her vision for a few seconds. What was standing in front of her was still a much healthier looking Chakotay, with far less technology on his face. All that remained was a sole implant attached to the side of his neck. "What did you do?"

He looked confused for a second or two. "Oh. I was getting a bit tired of the Borg and dead jokes. It's been a while."

"Yeah," Yasmin said uncomfortably. "You looked a lot cooler before."

Chakotay sighed, "only you would think that." Yasmin shrugged her shoulders with a smile on her face. "Don't tell anyone, okay?" He turned away to walk down the corridor.

"Hey, is what my brother says true?" she called after him.

"No," Chakotay bluntly replied.

"Oh," Yasmin seemed a little disappointed. Chakotay sensed that and stopped, a curious look on his face formed. "I miss mum, it's too bad it didn't work."

"You..." Chakotay mumbled. He looked over his shoulder. "You keep doing stuff that makes me re-think you being just a girl clone of James. He doesn't see it the same way as you do."

Yasmin shrugged again. "I keep telling people that there's more to me than that, why does nobody listen?" Chakotay turned around fully. "Damien made me to betray everyone, didn't he? Mum used to say that was probably why I had my creepy moments."

"Great," Chakotay groaned with disappointment.

"What?" Yasmin said curiously.

Chakotay shook his head, "forget it." He turned away again. "If only a James clone with even less morals is okay with what you've done, you know you've screwed up," he muttered to himself.

"Weird, what was his problem?" Yasmin said.

Sleep didn't come easy for him that night. He had hoped now that his body was recovering that he would feel an improvement. He did not. Strangely he was even more restless than usual. It didn't help

that the only quarters he could find were on the Leda, also he had to settle for a bunkbed. Fortunately though he didn't have to share it.

Normally the stars would soothe him but he had no window. All he could do was wait for the darkness and his exhaustion to knock him out.

It felt like hours before he finally drifted off.

When he awoke again he felt even worse than he did before. His eyelids were so heavy he could barely open them. It even felt like a struggle to move, never mind sit up. The first thing he decided to do was pull his sheet off him, in the vain hope that the cold would coax him out of bed. As he settled it down beside him he noticed a shadow at the end of the bed.

A hand flew out to touch the light panel beside him, it took him a few tries before the room lit up. His tiredness was a faint memory as he bolted upright.

His eyes weren't playing any tricks on him. Even when his eyes adjusted to the sudden bright light he still saw it. A man stood at the foot of his bed.

"What the hell do you..." Chakotay growled. Something else was wrong. The last time he had sat up quickly he had bumped his head on the top bunk, this time nothing happened. He shook that off, the man in his quarters was more important. "Get out!"

The man was not alarmed, he was even calm. "I apologise, I did not mean to startle you."

"What?" Chakotay snapped. He threw his legs over the side of the bed and climbed out. This guy was going to get thrown out if he didn't explain himself. That was too lenient, he thought, he would just get rid of him now. His hands were about to grab the intruder when he noticed something else that was odd. The entire room was different. He remembered the thought about his bed and turned back to look at it. It was no longer a bunk bed, it was now a regular double bed. "What the hell is going on?"

"I apologise. Normally I'd let the subject get a feel of things before I confront them," the man said. Chakotay's attention flew back to him. That was when he noticed the man was wearing a Starfleet type uniform, but it was still a style he had not seen before. That didn't matter though, he had just admitted that whatever was happening was his fault. He went to grab him again. "Please, do not be alarmed. I'm here to help."

"Help?" Chakotay scoffed. "So far you've kidnapped me, placed me in a different room and watched me sleep. You better have a damn good explanation."

The man gestured to the device in his hands. It looked like a tricorder at first glance, but the design of it and the readings on it looked completely different. "I wasn't. I was waiting for you to wake up."

"You've got to do better than that," Chakotay warned.

"Of course," the man managed a smile. "I am Maxwell Evans, Commander of the USS Sedna."

Chakotay's angry exterior weakened slightly; that name was familiar to him. "Sedna? I know that..."

"I imagine you do. Our ship was assigned to fix a paradox involving your ship before," Maxwell said. "That was before I joined the crew, I'm afraid."

"Paradox? Good lord, don't you think we have enough?" Chakotay groaned.

Maxwell smiled, he resisted the urge to laugh. This didn't amuse Chakotay at all. "I understand your frustration, but the paradox involving your daughter had nothing to do with us."

Chakotay's temper was starting to run out, he grabbed the man by the arm. "Don't ever mention her again."

Maxwell pulled his arm away without even blinking. "I have no intention of doing so, Commander. My visit is about something else."

"Oh? So..." Chakotay said.

"As you probably remember now, the Sedna is a Time Management vessel. We monitor the temporal continuum for paradoxes and in laments terms, fix them. Your Voyager keeps us in a job, let me tell you," Maxwell chuckled.

"Hilarious," Chakotay muttered.

"We detected three distinct paradoxes, that's why I'm here," Maxwell said.

"Three?" Chakotay was surprised. "Are you sure you're not detecting the current one."

Maxwell shook his head, "we know what we're doing, Commander. The point is we need your help with one of them."

"Can't you do it yourself? You're the expert," Chakotay said.

"I'm afraid not. Like many paradoxes, this can only be fixed by one particular person," Maxwell said. "We need you for one of them."

"Me? Right now I'm of no use to anyone," Chakotay muttered.

"It has to be you. I cannot explain why as you must figure that out for yourself," Maxwell said. Chakotay stared blankly at the man, he nodded. "I don't make the rules."

"Explain to me again what you people on the Sedna do," he said. "The last time you basically had us do all the dirty work for you, and here we are again. How the hell am I supposed to help fix a paradox when I know nothing about it."

"I didn't say that I won't tell you anything about it," Maxwell smiled. He looked around the room, "take a look around."

"What?" Chakotay was running out of patience again.

"Go ahead, take your time. I'll return when you figure it out," Maxwell said. He pressed something on his tricorder, he soon disappeared in a green transporter beam.

Chakotay shook his head angrily. He briefly had a look around as he was suggested to do, but it only frustrated him more. His attention soon went to the window he didn't have before. He approached slowly while he took in the sight. It didn't soothe him one bit, it just made him all the more uneasy. It didn't matter how beautiful it was, it was wrong.

"You son of a bitch. You didn't even ask, you've transported me back in time already. Haven't you?" he snapped. He looked behind him to see if that strange man had appeared again, but nothing happened. His head turned back to the window. All he could see was the glistening blue oceans of Earth. The man appeared then instead, this time beside him at the window.

"No," he answered.

Chakotay shook his head, "could have fooled me."

Maxwell smiled, "I have then. The date is still 2382." Chakotay swung his head in his direction. "I find it's a lot easier to show people than tell them."

"More cryptic rubbish," Chakotay muttered.

"This is the result of not helping me," Maxwell continued like he wasn't interrupted.

"What?" Chakotay snapped. "What's so bad about this?"

Maxwell looked down to the floor, his shoulders slumped. "The beauty of Earth often deceives, doesn't it?" He turned to face him. "As I said, I can't fully explain it. All I can tell you is what has happened." He waited to see if Chakotay had anything else to say, but he didn't. "The Federation is crippled. We only have a few ships left, and we've barely just saved Earth from a devastating Game Sphere. Sound familiar?"

"I doubt I'll ever forget," Chakotay replied. "That happened two years ago though."

"Yes, but the Federation is still reeling from it. Our sister ship, the Erona did not interfere this time around," Maxwell explained. Chakotay didn't have to ask, his face said it. "That would be too difficult to explain. Voyager is one of the few remaining defences we have, and it's not enough."

"So you're not going to explain how a paradox has caused this, even though you've admitted your own ship didn't do anything to help here," Chakotay said.

Maxwell sighed, "it's because they couldn't. They don't exist in this version of the timeline. If I go into this further it will interfere in your decisions while you fix this, I can't."

"Then what the hell do you expect me to do? This is very vague," Chakotay grumbled.

"I know, but believe me, that's for the best. If I gave you the information, you will handle it differently," Maxwell said. "You see in my perspective, and technically yours, what you do has already been done. It's only if you don't do it, a paradox forms." Chakotay mouthed *what* as his headache grew into a migraine. "I'll make this simple. I'll be sending you back to a certain point, what you do there will result in the timeline you're used to. I cannot influence you anymore than what I've already done."

"What I do there... you don't even know what I'll do. I may do something terrible," Chakotay said.

Maxwell shrugged, "I do already know, and that's beside the point. All I have to do to fix the paradox is send you back to an earlier date, with the clues I have given you already and the one I'll give you before you go."

"Jesus Christ, this is why Kathryn hated time travel," Chakotay muttered to himself.

"You hate it because you're thinking too much about it," Maxwell said.

Chakotay rolled his eyes, "yes that must be it. So what's the clue you haven't given me yet?"

"You're not going to like it," Maxwell answered. "In order to achieve your goal you'll need to help someone you're not going to want to."

"I have to help someone? One someone helps save Earth from a Game Sphere, and/or creates the Erona in the future. This is ridiculous," Chakotay grumbled.

Maxwell tried to hide his smile but Chakotay caught it, he scowled. "You know as well as I do that one tiny event can change the course of history."

"So who are we talking about?" Chakotay dared to ask.

"If I told you, it's likely you'd resist coming with me," Maxwell didn't answer.

Inside a darkened quarters a green transporter beam formed, materialising Chakotay just beside the window.

"Whatever gave him that idea?" he smiled, looking at the tricorder device in his hand. "Okay so this is the time he had in, I wonder..." He looked around to try and figure out where or when he was. His attention returned back to the tricorder as he shrugged his shoulders. The date, time and place were clearly shown but there were lots of other readings he didn't understand. A red line was crossing a tiny chart, gradually lowering as it did. He looked back to the part he did understand.

"December Twelfth, 2369, USS Endeavor. What does this time and place have to do with *him*?" He winced slightly, "I'd better get a disguise first."

Before Chakotay could even move the doors opened. Panicked he darted under the nearby table.

Whoever had come in stomped his or her feet and dropped a jacket on the floor. The lights activated. All Chakotay could hear now was the person huffing and grunting.

Chakotay glanced down at his tricorder, he hoped it would tell him a little bit more.

"I'll teach her," a man's voice muttered angrily.

Chakotay's head raised, his eyes widened. He'd recognise that voice anywhere. Just in case he tried to edge closer so he could see a bit better, all he could see were a pair of legs pacing nearby.

"Nobody makes a fool out of Damien. Who does she think I am?" the voice continued. The pacing stopped, Chakotay heard a devious laugh. "Oh I'll get you your coffee, Commander. Enjoy, it'll be your last." The legs went out of sight. All Chakotay could hear now was a chair being moved and a computer switched on.

"Kathryn?" Chakotay mouthed, his eyes narrowed.

He listened, expecting to hear more about what he was going to do or even just sounds giving him away. All he heard eventually was a lid being peeled off a plastic pot and the theme music for Watership Down. Chakotay tried not to groan audibly, but it was very difficult.

After a few hours Chakotay was trying not to doze off. He knew Damien was up to something but he wasn't entirely sure what. He knew it had something to do with coffee, and he had muttered something about a delivery.

"Excellent," Damien finally announced. He stood within inches of where Chakotay lay, it was very tempting to attack him but he didn't have a weapon he wanted to use on him. "I hope you enjoy your last drink, Janeway. It'll be black and hot, just like you asked. Mwahahahaha." A small thud just above him startled him slightly. Damien then seemed to walk away and go through some doors.

"Finally," Chakotay muttered. He peeped out from under the table, looking directly up to see what was on the table. All he could see was a small metal box. It had been closed up but it wasn't sealed so he decided to have a look inside. As he expected he saw a few jars of Nescafe coffee, but they were clearly covering a device sitting underneath them. "Hmm, I wonder how much time I have?"

Right on cue the shower in the bathroom started running, he could only just make it out. Luckily another sound confirmed it.

"Don't be so quick to, walk away, dance with me," Damien's voice sang. Chakotay quickly covered one of his ears to block out the noise. Fortunately for him he didn't sing anymore. "God! Why is that song in my head? It's bloody awful." Chakotay heard a few angry grunts. "Wish I could kill that squeaky, bald, over hyped, can't dance at all asshole."

"And so it begins," Chakotay groaned. As he had plenty of time he picked up all of the jars of coffee and rushed to the replicator. Once he had finished he returned the jars to the box and then rushed out of the room.

Later:

What Damien didn't realise was that he was being followed. Chakotay had tried to remove the gel he had in his hair, so it would droop over his tattoo. He didn't have time to disguise himself better.

With the turbolift dead ahead, Chakotay quickly racked his brain for a solution to this problem. He didn't follow the other man inside, he continued down the corridor, hoping there was another one nearby.

Chakotay eventually found what he was looking for and rushed inside. "Deck one. I hope." The turbolift ignored his second comment and sprung into action. Only a few seconds later it stopped, the doors opened. Carefully he stepped back out onto the Bridge.

Everyone there were in shock, well almost everyone.

"What? I'm not late," a very familiar voice said.

Chakotay felt his heart skip a beat, the blood in his face drain away. He didn't even see her, her voice alone gave him chills. "Kathryn," he whispered.

"Your office just blew up," another man said from the command chairs. That was when Chakotay spotted another familiar person walking up to them. He quickly turned to his side so the man wouldn't see his face.

"Oh... bummer," Kathryn casually said.

"Commander, I am pleased to see you are all right," the Vulcan calmly said. "Admiral Paris was wondering if you gave anymore thought about the promotion offer?"

"Why yes I have, a lot of thought," Kathryn said quickly. Chakotay smiled, she was never that good at lying after at least her fifth coffee.

"You don't know what Lieutenant Tuvok is talking about, do you?" the other man confirmed for him.

"Of course, does that get me out of this dump?"

Chakotay tried his best not to laugh so nobody would notice him. That was when he spotted Damien in the corner of his eye. He was surprised to see him in a Starfleet uniform, it looked very strange to him. The so called villain was facing away from everyone, towards a station.

"Um, why would they promote you and keep you here, when I'm still here?" the other man asked impatiently.

Kathryn's voice scoffed. "Why wouldn't they? At least if I was in command I wouldn't have offices blowing up, willy nilly. Tell Paris I'll take it."

"That can't be it," Chakotay muttered in disbelief. His eye went back to Damien who glanced behind him.

"God damnit! Plan B it is." Chakotay watched him dash back into a turbolift on the other side of the Bridge. He decided to turn directly around and re-enter his own. The tricorder beeped at him so he quickly glanced at it. The only difference was the line on the chart had stopped sloping down, it was going in a completely horizontal direction.

"What does that even mean?" he asked it.

The line spiked for a second, but that wasn't what startled Chakotay. "Temporal transport complete," it spoke to him.

"What?" Chakotay said, glancing around. Nothing was changing. He returned to the tricorder, the button he had pressed to transport himself was flashing. "Oh what the hell." His finger pushed it. The green light took him away again.

This time he appeared in a large corridor, luckily nobody was around to see him. He quickly inspected his surroundings. Directly beside him was a huge window, on the other side of it was the familiar sight of the USS Voyager. He then noticed the corridor lead to numerous junctions connecting to it. The tricorder was his next glance.

"August twenty ninth, 2370." A group of two men and a woman walked passed him, each carrying repair kits. They headed into the nearest junction. Chakotay was about to follow them when a third man ran up to catch up with them. He lingered at the back. Chakotay recognised him immediately, that was a lot more incentive to follow.

Chakotay carefully turned the corner to continue his stalking of Damien. After following him to the turbolift he overheard his destination and quickly called another turbolift of his own. He had caught a few people's attention on the way which worried him. He hadn't worn a Starfleet uniform in years, even if he did it would have been the wrong one for this time period anyway. Walking around an unlaunched starship in the casual clothes he slept in wasn't doing him any favours, but he had no time to stop and change.

Even though he was still thinking about his lack of disguise, he waltzed straight into Engineering like that. Luckily nobody noticed as he quickly dashed through the nearest door. He expected the navigational control room to be empty when the ship was standing still, but he was dead wrong.

Damien swung around to face him. "You!"

Chakotay tried not to give away how much he hated him or just knew him. He forced a confused look on his face. "Me what?"

Damien wasn't buying it. "Don't play dumb with me. I'm much, much smarter than you."

"Okay well, I'm just a little lost and..." Chakotay improvised.

"I'll say. How you got from the Endeavor to here, with the same Wesley Crusher outfit and greasy hair you had a year ago, only I could figure that out," Damien said.

"Don't let me stop you then, excuse me," Chakotay muttered. His eyebrow twitched when what he said registered with him. "Wesley Crusher outfit?"

"I know, it's bad enough that one twerp wears colours like that. Now do you mind, you're distracting me," Damien groaned.

Chakotay frowned at him, he did so back mockingly. "You remember me from the Endeavor?"

"You know I was told to be patient with very slow people, but I really don't have the give a craps to do so," Damien muttered.

"That's all?" Chakotay questioned. Damien rolled his eyes and started pointing at the door. "I'm just some bloke you saw on a Bridge, so what's the *you* stuff all about?" He then noticed a replicator sitting on a console behind Damien, it was in a couple of pieces. "Surely the replicators would be pre-setup, all you'd have to do is pop them into place and connect the power."

"The Captain wants hers to be..." Damien replied, deviousness appeared in his eyes. "Specially prepared."

"Do you mean sabotaged?" Chakotay asked plainly.

Damien's eyes narrowed. "What, why would somebody want their replicator sabotaged? You really are a big stupid ape, aren't you?"

Chakotay tried to contain his temper. "I know you planted the bomb in her office last year. I saw you leave before it went off."

"Hmph!" Damien grunted. "She didn't die in any explosion. If I had done it, she would have."

"Yeah sure, your plans always go well," Chakotay laughed. Damien looked at him suspiciously so he quickly tried to brush it off. "You know what you did wrong, didn't you, smart guy?"

"I don't know the meaning of the word wrong, but I think you're in its definition somewhere," Damien muttered.

"You filled the package with coffee. Don't you know anything?" Chakotay said.

Damien laughed, "I know everything... except what wrong means." He cleared his throat. "That bitch thought I was just some dumb kid that would serve her coffee. I'm much more than that. She got what she deserved."

"What? Splattered coffee all over her office," Chakotay tried not to laugh. "No, it's a test. She asks for coffee, you get her coffee and she'll treat you that way forever. Get her tea and she'll respect you. Everyone knows that."

Damien kept his eyes narrowed, he didn't look too sure. "Is that... that why she left her office early? She wasn't interested. Ah, it all makes sense now."

"Yes," Chakotay said, trying desperately not to laugh. "Serve her tea and she won't be able to resist."

"Hmm. Why would you want to help me?" Damien asked.

"Look me up, I'm a member of the Marquis," Chakotay said. This was almost too easy.

Damien smiled deviously, "ah, very good. I would have known that if you had bothered to disguise yourself. I know, I can't expect everyone to be smart like me." He turned back to his replicator to finish his work. Chakotay contemplated grabbing his neck from behind but he quickly shook it off. He soon turned around carrying the replicator, "before I go, do you want to replicate a less vomit coloured outfit?"

"No, no thank you," Chakotay said through almost gritted teeth.

The Bridge:

"For god's sake! Why me?" Damien complained. Once again Kathryn had escaped disaster and had stepped into a turbolift with a random Admiral. He ignored the sounds of a man screaming inside the Ready Room. Nobody else did, they all rushed inside to help him.

Hiding behind and partially underneath the Tactical station, Chakotay smiled smugly. He enjoyed that for a second, removed it and stood up into view. Damien scowled at him as he stomped over.

"Do you think I'm a fool?"

"Yes," Chakotay answered on instinct. He winced slightly, he should have kept that one in his head.

Damien smirked deviously, his annoyance seemed to have dissolved instantly. "I see, well thankfully everyone makes that mistake."

"Yeah yeah, that's why you're a measly Ensign serving coffee to superiors," Chakotay retorted.

Damien's smile didn't waver, only then did Chakotay take him a little seriously. Only a little. "Is that what you think? I should give myself better credit." He stepped backwards while fishing in his pocket. "Congratulations Commander Chuckles..."

"How do you..." Chakotay stuttered, then it hit him.

"Once again you've naively become the bad guy," Damien sneered. The tricorder Chakotay had earlier emerged from his pocket. Chakotay's eyes widened as the other man waved it in front of him, and quickly backed away. "You really are an excellent sidekick. I'll know who to turn to if I need help again." He laughed in his usual evil way as he pressed a button.

"You... you played me. You son of a..." Chakotay growled. Damien began to disappear in a green transporter beam, Chakotay quickly lunged forward to grab him. Both of them disappeared a second later.

Both men appeared in the centre of a strange Bridge, everyone manning it turned their heads to look at the newcomers.

"Hey, don't you realise what you've done?" Damien hissed.

"When did you steal the device?" Chakotay snapped.

Damien's smile returned, "does it matter?"

Chakotay frowned at the villain, "if you didn't have one of your own, how did you even get into the past?"

"Ho boy, why they picked you to fix a temporal paradox is a mystery. You have no real grasp of them, do you?" Damien sneered, waving the tricorder again.

Chakotay stared blankly at him for what felt like a few minutes. "That makes no bloody sense. You know what, I only didn't do this before because I thought you were from 2369 so..." He threw a punch towards Damien. He ducked just in time for some random bald guy to walk passed, he got it instead.

Two other men approached the pair as Damien straightened back up, he looked back to laugh at the guy who was punched. "Damien, what are you playing at? You were supposed to be infiltrating Voyager while the Kazon still have it."

Damien groaned, "Ricky, Ricky... I think we've played this game long enough. We both know that I'm the real brains of the FVDA."

"That's why it never did anything worthwhile," Chakotay commented.

The second man huffed and put his hands on his hips. "FDA, and just because you were the one who said we should kidnap annoying celebrities, doesn't make you the leader. Rick and I wrote Voyager. Who better to destroy this horrid fanfiction version."

Rick nodded in his direction, "yes Brannon. How dare they make Seven of Nine a butt of the joke character, and introduce nobodies to steal her spotlight."

"I know! So get to it Damien. We'll kill them before they even get the chance," Brannon snarled.

Chakotay rolled his eyes as Damien looked across at him, then back to the other two. "I'm sure you'll agree with my method of paradox fixing here." He pointed a phaser at them and fired it on widespread just in time for the bald guy to stand back up. He vaporised along with them. "Oops, got Justin Timberlake too," Damien sniggered.

"Great, enjoy," Chakotay groaned. Damien then realised the tricorder was gone from his other hand, he swung around just in time to see Chakotay transporting away. He grabbed him at the last second.

When they rematerialised Damien was lying on the ground, nursing a black eye. Chakotay smiled as he looked down at the tricorder. That strange line had plummeted its way down to near the bottom, and was now orange. "Huh, weird." He then realised that something large was in his pocket, his hand went into it to pull whatever it was out. His face turned blank as in both of his hands sat a futuristic tricorder; the only difference between the two was the line that kept bugging him. The one from his pocket was still red and high on the little screen.

"What the..."

The original one disappeared from his hand, then he caught a blur run away from him. Damien was no longer lying on the floor, so it was obvious to him what had just happened. He narrowed his eyes and gave chase.

It didn't take him long to catch up but it made no difference. He watched a waving Damien disappear yet again.

"Temporal transport complete," his tricorder spoke again.

"Hmm," Chakotay figured he understood what that meant now. Like before he pressed the flashing button.

Little did he know a small child had just walked into the room. He transported away without realising. The little girl blinked a few times. "I gotta lay off the tea," she said, turning on her heel. She ran out of the room. "Mommy, can I try your coffee?"

"No Kathryn, no... No don't touch that filter machine!" a woman's voice yelled from outside.

Chakotay appeared in a more familiar place, but he wasn't too pleased about it. It was Voyager again but the corridor he was in looked charred and there were no signs of power or life. A quick pace down the corridor and he caught Damien faffing about with a second tricorder.

"You better not be doing what I think you're doing."

"Relax," Damien rolled his eyes. "Can't you tell the portal rubbish has already happened..." He smiled, "more or less." He disappeared again leaving Chakotay clenching his fists.

Just around the corner another Damien sat down with a small device. He activated it. A few minutes later a very old man walked slowly over to him.

"Damien."

Damien shushed him, keeping his full attention on his device. With a spare hand he pulled out a yoghurt.

"In my day we used our hands to eat yogurt," was the old man's response to Damien pulling out a spoon.

"Uh huh. Any minute now," Damien mumbled.

The older figured looked confused. Suddenly a blue swirly portal appeared behind him, the gravity of it dragged him inside. Minutes later it closed.

"Mwahahahaha," Damien laughed. "I knew sitting on Deck Thirteen would get rid of that codger eventually. Now I'm free to get on with my dastardly plans in peace." A growl caught his attention, he looked down at his device with an evil smile on his face. "Oh you're picking a fight with me, how foolish."

Chakotay popped his head around the corner and back again. He shook his head and pressed the button to follow the other Damien.

"You killed off the old man, really?" Chakotay asked as soon as he materialised. His eyes widened. He wasn't talking to Damien.

"Commander. It is highly inappropriate to transport into somebody's quarters while they are dressing."

The resulting screams could be heard throughout the ship. Damien was just outside the Cargo Bay so it was deafening to him, he still smiled though.

"Maybe we should rescue him," a familiar Ocampan said to him with concern.

"Ohno, that's the threat I was talking about," Damien said. "Those two..." he pretended to shudder. "You have no idea what they get up to in the future. I'd get off this ship while you still can, there's nothing you can do here."

"But you're Damien, why do you care?" Kes asked suspiciously.

Meanwhile they could still hear voices in the Cargo Bay. "Well if you insist on watching, I shall continue," Annika's voice said. Once again all they could hear was screaming.

"Normally I wouldn't but he even tops what I do. I can't have him stealing the limelight you understand. People hate him more than me," Damien explained.

Kes gasped, "ohno. Perhaps I should warn the Captain, or..."

"You can't. That new drone will not hesitate to kill you, she's here to replace you, you know," Damien said, he started seriously but he was sniggering by the end of it.

"I don't trust you," Kes said.

"Fine don't, let Barbie Drone become a crazy homicidal maniac and Chuckles dig up dead bodies. I'll just have to step up my game to keep up," Damien said with a sneaky look in his eyes. "Just don't be surprised when Janeway, pre dig up obviously, starts complaining about those two hooking up in the series finale. She'll do worse time travel damage than I could ever do."

Kes shook her head, "you don't really expect me to believe this, do you? Chakotay would never date her, and he'd never do something so awful. The Captain would never alter the timeline in such a way. Also Seven turns into a lunatic, how stupid do you think I am?" She marched off, shaking her head. Damien smiled evilly.

Chakotay chose that moment to walk out of the Cargo Bay. His face was whiter than it was when he was a dead Tolg drone.

"Oh Chuckles, pop quiz for you. I hope it won't strain your tiny brain too much," Damien said in a sing song voice.

Chakotay answered with a gag, Damien pulled a face as he ended up with sick all over his shoes.

"Hmm, I know that feeling," he actually said with some sympathy. He shook it off immediately.

"She... she has nothing... nothing underneath that suit," Chakotay muttered.

"Fantastic," Damien shuddered. "Now what would happen to your little paradox daughter if I tricked Kes into thinking she should stay on Voyager."

"Nothing," Chakotay muttered. "Kes would leave anyway."

Damien stared blankly as he tried to figure it out, he was annoyed that he couldn't. "What?"

Chakotay rolled his eyes, grabbed him by the arm and pressed a few buttons on the tricorder. They disappeared, then reappeared in the exact same corridor. Damien looked at him like he had just tried to count to three by using a four, Chakotay then dragged him around the corner. Just then a nearby, already damaged wall seemed to mutate and then exploded.

Kathryn lead an exhausted Kes down the same corridor, Tuvok soon joined them. "I can't control it... I must leave," Kes stammered.

"She's not going to make it to the shuttle bay," Kathryn told Tuvok. He nodded, quickly mind melding with Kes.

"Well... I..." Damien stuttered. He pulled his arm from his grasp, "it's not my fault that I didn't know. This never happened in Season One."

"No, not much did," Chakotay muttered plainly.

Damien's eyes narrowed, "you're right." Chakotay groaned as he pressed his tricorder again. Chakotay easily followed him by taking his arm again.

"Who's threw up here, it bloody stinks," Kathryn muttered, staring at the mess on the floor in disgust.

They rematerialised in the Cargo Bay once again, Chakotay responded to this by throwing up one more time. Damien tried to get away while he was doing this but Chakotay kept a hold of him.

"She's not even here," Damien argued.

Chakotay begrudgingly wiped his face, directing a glare towards him. "The room triggers the memory, now... Stop and think about what you're doing here. None of us are getting anywhere with what we're trying to do."

"Then stop following me. It's not that hard," Damien grunted. "I'm doing you a favour. Imagine a Season One without Hunters, or more episodes with me in it."

"Swell," Chakotay said quietly.

"I can remove that claptrap excuse about Slayer boy being different because of a spell. I've already given Kes a leaving scene. I could make Season One make sense. Why fight me?"

"I can't believe that moron told me I'd have to help you," Chakotay grumbled. "You can't just go back to old episodes, change everything around, make characters do different things and expect it to still be the same in the future. You have to alter everything, and quite frankly I don't want to waste years rebooting the timeline when I could be wasting time in the present."

"It's better than having a sixth season instead," Damien commented.

"What?" Chakotay said.

Damien frowned, "what?"

Chakotay rolled his eyes, "don't be cute with me. Fourth wall jokes about the series were old before they were even done."

Damien smiled evilly, "that reminds me." He pressed a button on his tricorder.

"No!" Chakotay ended up yelling at an empty room. He groaned to himself, "if I only I knew when, how and where he was born. This would be such much easier then." He pressed the button that normally followed Damien.

"Yeah, you're dying at the end of Season One to make way for better female characters," Damien said when Chakotay reappeared. "I know what I'd do if somebody tried to replace me."

"That is not likely. I am clearly the most useful and interesting character in the series," Annika said. Chakotay tried to not to react the same way, his stomach and throat ached.

Damien scoffed, "no that's me, and they're even killing me off. Well trying to, I'll come back. That's a Season Two plot twist, keep it to yourself."

"I see, thank you for the advice Mr...?" Annika said.

"Um Smith," Damien improvised.

"Mr Smith," Annika nodded. She walked away.

Chakotay shook his head, "I thought you were changing things, not doing what I'm supposed to do."

"No. Telling her that her later delusions are true before she goes insane, it's obvious what will happen," Damien sneered.

"She'll go insane and try to kill the girls replacing her, get locked in a holodeck nut house, be not cured and end up being comic relief for three more seasons?" Chakotay said.

Damien stared at him, narrowing his eyes gradually. "What are you saying?"

"I'm saying that all you've done so far is keep the timeline exactly how it was," Chakotay laughed.

"Enough! My efforts have altered it," Damien snapped.

"Right. I've got no real reason to follow you around as you've done a great job so far. I meanwhile have been side tracked from what I planned to do. I'm sure it's of no interest to you, I really doubt re-doing the Tolg ship incursion will effect you in anyway," Chakotay smiled.

Damien smirked back, "even you are too goody two shoes to do that."

"To do what? Do the right thing?" Chakotay said. He closed his eyes, grimacing a little. "I won't let myself make that huge mistake again. My daughter and wife will live, you will still have to body swap with some schmuck, and I won't have to listen to everyone bitching at me for the rest of the trip. I imagine there will be other changes, but they'll likely be good ones."

"What? You can't save Janeway. That Frenit vampire killed her, you know, the strong one," Damien grumbled. "Don't waste your time. I know why it all went wrong on that Tolg ship. You can go back, fix it and she'll live again."

"Yes because you'll be more than happy to help me undo an event that benefits you," Chakotay said with a roll of his eyes.

"It wouldn't undo my return to my own body, will it?" Damien said.

Chakotay shook his head angrily, "I'm not really asking for your help. I just wanted you to know before I erase you from the timeline." Damien tried to stop him but Chakotay disappeared first.

"Damn it," he groaned.

He scanned the tricorder, unlike Chakotay he understood it enough to use it properly. A date and place appeared on the screen. "Co-ordinates set for temporal transport," it spoke. The date confused him, it wasn't what he expected.

"Oh Chuckie, if you think this will bring your daughter back and make you a good guy, you're stupider than I thought," Damien sighed. "Who cares though. Does this paradox affect me?" He quickly typed a few things in, his face went very pale. "I die? Haha no way that's happening." He pressed the button to time jump.

2372 New Earth

Chakotay found himself inside a dense forest. The only light was from the tricorder. In the distance he could hear a few men's voices, slowly approaching. His head turned to the source, then towards the nearest tree. He quickly hid behind it.

"I dunno Thompson, I'd much prefer to be in a group of three than be the guy picked off cos he's alone."

"I won't though, that will be Tom if you come back with me."

"Guys you can be gay for each other all you want when you get back. We need to help him."

Chakotay shook his head and sighed deeply. His thoughts were conflicted; he had gone back as far as possible to make sure he succeeded, but on the other hand it was so far back he had no way to really predict the consequences. The present he knew would be unrecognisable.

"This isn't about doing the right thing. You know that better than anyone," he remembered Maxwell saying.

Maxwell's explanations seemed to make sense, in a way, until this point. What did he mean by that, Chakotay thought. Is this what Maxwell wanted him to do in the first place? Is this the right thing to do? What would Kathryn think, how would she feel about this?

That final thought froze him on the spot. He remembered the time when he was at his worst and he thought, or imagined that he saw her. He wondered if that was really her or what was left of his conscience trying to stop him. He was too focused on these thoughts he missed Tom and the two Security officers Thompson and Foster walk passed him.

Kathryn would be devastated and this thought made him rethink his entire plan. Is there another way? Is there a way to do this without...

"I don't get it. Are you here to relive your glory days?" Damien's voice interrupted him.

Chakotay only moved his head to the right slightly. Damien stood behind him looking puzzled.

"How is coming back to your old love nest, before you even came here, going to bring your coffee missus back?" he asked.

"Frenit killed her to get revenge on James. I just thought..." Chakotay actually explained.

Damien looked a little shocked, it was out of character for him but nobody really saw it. "You've really gone to the dark side, Chuckie. Killing her brat to save her skin? I'm impressed."

"Don't... I wouldn't be the one to do it," Chakotay snapped.

"I never thought I'd ever say this but; I don't understand," Damien said with disgust in his voice. He shuddered violently. "I don't like it."

"I couldn't kill him even when he was normal," Chakotay quietly said. "Frenit would take care of that, I just..." He turned his head to the right. "If I stopped Tom from saving his life, then Frenit would win, he would have his revenge already."

Damien interrupted him again with a slow clap. "Nice job Chak. You almost singlehandedly did more damage than I could ever have imagined."

"What do you mean?" Chakotay muttered.

"You have no idea do you?" Damien shook his head. "You didn't just want to save Janeway, you wanted to make sure your daughter wouldn't give in when Ylara possesses her too. Congrats, that would have done it."

"It doesn't matter. I can't think of another way to stop Frenit without killing her annoying, self centered son. We should both return and see what Maxwell really wanted me to do," Chakotay said.

"Pot, kettle, black Chuckles," Damien sniggered. "Let me ask you one thing."

Chakotay rolled his eyes and finally turned around to face him. "You're not qualified to judge people on being self centered or annoying."

"That's basically what I said but..." Damien smirked, he shook his head. "What would really happen if James stayed dead? Hmm?"

"I'm not giving you tips," Chakotay muttered.

Damien scoffed, "good, because you obviously don't know but I do. Like I said, Janeway is saved but at what cost? How do you know something else doesn't kill her later? I imagine a ship's energy eating rift to a demon dimension would do the trick." Chakotay stared blankly at him. "That's just one thing, would you and your missus have survived on this planet to even get back to the doomed Voyager?"

"You're giving him way too much credit. I only decided not to do it so I wouldn't hurt Kathryn," Chakotay said.

Damien rolled his eyes, "it's not about credit. You kill him off and what happens to your daughter?"

"Nothing. Her body is not affected by changes in the timeline, Ylara would just cease to exist," Chakotay said, shaking his head.

"Wrong." Chakotay had enough of him at this point, his hand raised to strike him. He didn't even look concerned about it. "Lena's the one that ceases to exist." That stopped him in his tracks, forcing Damien to smile. "I thought you knew. She was only brought here to fix the Chosen line. Kill her brother and there's no reason for her to be here."

"You... you don't have a clue what you're talking about!" Chakotay snapped.

Damien put a finger by his own lips. "Shhh, keep that up and Frenit kills us instead, another big no."

"The temporal implant protects her. Even if it didn't, what you're saying is baloney. The Q have admitted to being responsible for this, along with Kes. That idiot blond has nothing to do with this," Chakotay ranted at him.

Damien waved his hand in his own face like he was waving away Chakotay's argument. "True the temporal implant protects her from time travel alterations, but it doesn't cement her here. I don't know why I'm explaining this to you, you should know this."

"No, I don't know why either. You don't care about anyone but yourself. This is just some scheme to get me to do something you want," Chakotay growled.

"Like bringing your dead wife to the Tolg?" Damien teased him. Chakotay finished what he started, but Damien quickly backed away from his reach. "Oh wait, that was your idea, wasn't it? You really do come up with some corkers."

"I'm taking this from the guy who was so sick of Annika stalking him that he went back in time to make her insane," Chakotay rolled his eyes. "While we're at it; celebrity crewmembers, a clone of Riker that could only eat and be deeply stupid, the rabbit army, killing off Jessie and when she was back, killing her daughter so she'd turn evil on you. You're right, I make stupid plans."

Damien bit his lip and trembled with fury. "I stopped you from making a terrible mistake, and this is how you treat me?"

"No, I decided against it before you had even shown up. I really doubt that saving us from some paradox you made up was really your reason for following me here," Chakotay said.

"It's not made up. I followed you here because your idea would reset the paradox back to the beginning. I'll tell you what that means," Damien angrily explained. "Goodbye Lena, adios Voyager, and good riddance to your precious Earth and Federation." Chakotay frowned and shook his head, he didn't believe him. "Fine, go back and knock Tom out, or whatever you were going to do. Heck just for laughs, go back to when Janeway did James's father and shoot the guy in the head before they even meet. You'll see how right I am. Oh wait, you won't, because you'll be a part of floating debris in the outer edges of Borg Space."

"Let's say that what you're telling me is true. How do you know this?" Chakotay asked.

"My god, I travelled through alternate dimensions to search for people to crew my own Voyager, or haven't you forgotten?" Damien groaned.

"Of course I have. A lot of the cast have tried to forget Season One, that's why nobody acts like that in the other seasons," Chakotay said. "Before you say it, Season Two; it's dependant on the episode."

Damien shook his head furiously. He was smirking again though. "More excuses disguised as jokes, fine. Let me explain as simpleton as I can."

"That should be easy for you," Chakotay commented.

"Hilarious and original," Damien pretended to laugh. "James doesn't die. You and Mrs Chuckie visit your little monkey and vampire haven for two months. Sappy crap happens. A few years later Lena is born." Chakotay opened his mouth to interrupt, Damien raised his hand. "Shush! More years later those idiot Q's impregnate her. They see a perfect opportunity to fix the Chosen line which croaked it earlier on. You can't have two Chosen's with a generational age gap between them, can you?"

"This is just a theory from what you've heard, it's rubbish!" Chakotay managed to interrupt

"I'm not done. Things go a bit hokey, the Borg get involved. They manage to send her back to that time when the Chosen's drop dead, but she still gets Borg-ified. It doesn't matter; she's in the right place and the right time for a memory wipe for everyone involved. A year later, Kiara appears. Some more later Lena arrives thinking she's her, all Chosen and other bull crap. Cycle is complete."

"So what's stopping Lena's birth if he did die?" Chakotay questioned smugly. "In fact no, I don't care cos..." He leaned forward to snatch Damien's tricorder. Before he had time to react, a fist flew into his face, knocking him back into a tree.

"This, is what I think of your ridiculous tale." The tricorder fell to the ground, his foot immediately stomped on it, smashing it to pieces. Damien's eyes widened in horror. "The only paradox here will be you showing up in the vampire's evening meal tonight, good riddance." Chakotay pressed a button on his own, transporting instantly.

Damien used the tree he fell against to climb back up, his hand rubbed his sore cheek. "It's true," he pouted.

Chakotay appeared in a ship's corridor, he frowned immediately. His attention went to the tricorder.

"February 2382, USS Leda."

"Okay," Chakotay said, glancing at the nearby door. "Well I was close."

Suddenly the tricorder was snatched out of his hands. "Yoink!" Damien's voice giggled.

Chakotay groaned as he disappeared in the same green transporter beam. "So that's how Damien got his own device."

"I knew you'd figure it out," Maxwell's voice said from behind him.

"God," Chakotay grumbled quietly before turning around. "Look, I'm sorry I stole it. As usual I thought I could do better and..."

"It's alright," Maxwell smiled.

"Is it? I've basically just sent Damien loose in the past. I also considered erasing the last ten years of Voyager's history," Chakotay said.

Maxwell stepped forward. "I know. Did you forget the advice I gave you?"

"Um yeah, I hope you have another one of those things. What was it you wanted me to do?" Chakotay questioned sincerely.

"You've done it, that's my point," Maxwell answered.

Chakotay looked very confused, "technically only Damien kept the timeline as it was, until I left him on New Earth. I don't..." Maxwell shook his head.

"I know, but believe me, that's for the best. If I gave you the information, you will handle it differently. You see in my perspective, and technically yours, what you do has already been done. I'll be sending you back to a certain point, what you do there will result in the timeline you're used to. I cannot influence you anymore than what I've already done."

"You knew I would steal the device and follow Damien's attempt to change the timeline, which only happened 'cos I changed my mind and returned here?" Chakotay said.

Maxwell nodded. "Exactly."

"Time travel," Chakotay shook his head. "So I suppose saving Kathryn from Damien's assassination attempts, manipulating Kes and Annika... Forgive me if I say that this is a ridiculous thing to believe. Firstly Kathryn wouldn't have needed saving if I hadn't have let Damien steal the device."

"Oh she would have," Maxwell said.

Chakotay groaned loudly into his hand, he shook his head and looked back at him. "What?"

"Think about it. Deep down you have good instincts, Commander Chakotay. You just have to tame your warrior heart all over again, be patient," Maxwell smiled.

"Ugh god, and I thought the last episode was a sick fest," Damien groaned.

Chakotay closed his eyes and silently preyed to his animal spirit. "No, why?" He turned around briefly to see Damien standing behind him.

"Can't have him running around in 2372 with ten years of future memories, can we?" Maxwell answered cheekily. "He fulfilled his purpose too."

"Hey, I'm nobody's tool," Damien complained, glancing at Chakotay intently. He rolled his eyes.

"No of course not," Maxwell said. "I wish you both well."

"That's easy for you to say, you know how the rest of my life will be," Chakotay said.

"Maybe. Maybe not. Goodbye and thank you," Maxwell said before he disappeared.

Damien huffed loudly, "you really are a SOB, you know that."

Chakotay smirked at him, "oh?"

"You weren't going to alter 2372, you just wanted to leave me on that planet at that time," Damien muttered.

"If you want to believe that, be my guest," Chakotay said. "What happened anyway?"

"Oh I told Frenit that his so called nemesis wasn't dead and killing his mum would teach him," Damien said. Chakotay didn't react, he didn't believe him for a second. Damien sighed as he noticed that right away. "I mean, wouldn't you like to know?" He quickly dashed off.

"I really would," Chakotay said to himself. With a smile he re-entered his quarters.

PART TWO

She had never seen a man like this before. He was covered in a strange cloth, its colour was also odd. A tiny piece of gold seemed to be attached to the cloth around his chest. His skin was much lighter than what she was used to seeing, and she had seen lots of different people in these recent years. He stood right out.

He also had a strange way of speaking, she could only just make out his words.

"I am sorry. Who did you say you are again?"

"That doesn't matter. You're in danger."

She didn't think for a second that he was wrong, but she was starting to assume he was the real reason for it.

The man sighed as if he sensed her discomfort. "There are men who are after your daughter and son. I overheard them talking about it. They'll use you to get to them."

His words chilled her to the bone. He knows. Nobody but her knows. This didn't change her mind about him though. He could still be one of them.

"Would I be standing here in the sun... that sun if I was the real threat?" he said like he read her mind. His hand pointed to the blaring sun over their heads.

That was an excellent point. How did he know though? Will she have to find another village to live in again? She had to protect her children.

"Please, you must listen to me."

"Oh I am listening. You say they will use me to get to my children," she said. The strange man nodded. "They will fail. I would do nothing to hurt them. They would have to kill me."

"They know that, that's what I'm talking about. You don't know what they're capable of."

"I do." She heard all the stories. Not all of them could be true though. "Even if they destroy my soul, my body could never harm them."

He was annoyed now, his fists were clenched. His strange pale skin turned red around his cheeks. "You know nothing. Once your soul is gone they can do whatever they want with your remains. Your children will be none of the wiser and they will die."

"I do not believe you."

"Well that's too bad, because I'm not going anywhere. I'll die if it meant stopping this from happening."

What an odd thing to say, she thought. He didn't seem like a noble person to her, he only seemed odd.

"You are not a warrior?" He shook his head. "Why would you risk your life for people you do not know?"

"I'm not. I'm doing it for somebody else. Lucky for me it's the right thing to do."

"Oh come on!" Damien complained. "You already knew about this!"

On the other side of the forcefield Craig folded his arms and smiled.

"You know I'll only get out again," Damien muttered.

Craig shrugged, "I'll take what I can get." He walked out, leaving him alone with the other prisoners and the guard.

As he rejoined the corridor he spotted Ylara walking towards him in the direction he wanted to go. He decided that going in the opposite direction would shorten his time with her, so he did just that. It didn't work as he planned as she went out of her way to stop in front of him.

"I was trying to avoid you, not talk to you," he groaned.

"I know," Ylara said. "I was looking for James but you'll do."

Craig couldn't help but roll his eyes, "I'll do?"

Meanwhile the Brig doors opened again. Damien's head popped out to see if the coast was clear, he saw he was in Ylara's field of view and disappeared again.

"I need to talk to you about Kiara," she said.

Craig shook his head before continuing on his way. Ylara didn't stop him but she followed instead. He grew even more impatient with every step.

"Somebody needs to talk to her. I have no idea how to deal with this situation," Ylara explained. Craig knew exactly what to say but she quickly overtook him and stopped them both again. "You've known for a while that I didn't intentionally kill Lena or ever plan to. Don't say that I deserve it, it's getting old."

"What has she said exactly?" Craig asked.

"Many things, it seems like she worked it all out. Wouldn't it be better if somebody talked to her about it before she gets her powers back?" Ylara replied.

Craig nodded, he sighed deeply. "You're right. We wouldn't want her making you disappear or anything, now would we?" He rolled his eyes and walked away from her.

Ylara stayed where she was, clenching her jaw. She spotted Damien trying to sneak out of the Brig again, he spotted her and this time ran off in the opposite direction. Her head shook slowly.

He must have been staring at the ceiling for hours, it definitely felt that way. This happened every night now. Craig would rest his head on the pillow and the days events would make him question everything. Right now he was thinking that he should have listened to Ylara, not for her sake but for Kiara's sake. Then he questioned that exact thought. It was his fault that Ylara was even confronted in the first place, his fault that Kiara knew so much.

Craig knew he was wrong to ignore Ylara as soon as he did it. Being rude to her came naturally to him, he never hated anyone more and it ate him up inside. It was her evil side that destroyed his life, but it was her good one that brought her onto the fleet so he'd see her all the time. Seeing her wear Lena's face every day, and act the way she did made getting over her impossible. Craig hated the part of him that liked the idea of Kiara using her powers against her. Why shouldn't she attack the woman who took away her mother, she deserves it. He fought that side of himself everyday, and usually lost. The bitterness was stronger than him, and he resented himself for that.

Why am I so weak? Why, even now, am I not strong enough?

Once again he realised his thoughts were keeping him awake. His eyelids felt heavy, they were telling his brain to cut it out and let him sleep. As he rolled onto his side he caught a quick glimpse of the

time on the panel by his bed. 0324. His final thought was that he was right, he had been staring at the ceiling for hours.

A red light flashed in his eyes, the klaxon screeched into his ear drum. Putting these two things together brought him back into the waking world. As he sat up he caught a glimpse of the clock again, but he didn't really read it. There was obviously an emergency so he went to grab the clothes he left in a messy pile on the chair. In his rush he ran out of his quarters without his boots. It didn't take him long to realise, so he ran back to pick them up.

Only then he noticed something odd. 0324. The time was familiar, why? It wasn't important, he quickly hopped around on one leg to put his boot on and did the same with the other. He ran for the door. When he left, a group of three crewmembers ran passed his quarters, shoving him back a little as they did. One of them looked back, apologetic but in a hurry.

Craig thought he should contact the Bridge, find out what was going on. He realised right away that his commbadge was probably still in his quarters. *I'm not going back again.* He ran down the corridor to the turbolift. When it opened he saw a familiar face, but something was off about it.

"Ylara, what's going..." he thought he'd ask. Well try to at least. It happened so fast, he didn't see it. The pain in his face was excruciating, his vision was blurred. He could feel the blood pouring out of him. Once again he was staring at the ceiling.

Suddenly he saw a wavy, blurred hand open out in front of him. His own was weak as he tried to grab it. He felt a twinge in his arm as he was lifted up off the ground. He wasn't entirely sure if he had helped with that, everything still felt very fuzzy.

The face in front of him was not familiar. He seemed a lot friendlier than the last face he saw. His eyes weren't... Black. That's what was so off about it. Ylara with black eyes was definitely worth the Red Alert he was woken up by.

"I apologise," the face in front of him said. "I had to show you but I guess I had to cheat a little. Can't have you dying on us, can we?"

What? What was this man talking about? Craig wondered if he was dreaming all of this.

It was blurry but he could just make out a few flashing lights right next to his face. The pain in his face faded away into nothing, he felt a little more focused. The unfamiliar man smiled at him.

"What's going on?" Craig had many questions, but that one covered them all.

The man pointed to something behind him. Craig looked around. Ylara was still standing there, with her fist raised. He was about to duck when he realised that she seemed to be frozen in that position. The black eyes gave him chills even while she was like this.

"I thought... I thought she'd be immune to magic or something," he stuttered.

"It's not magic," the man said. Craig looked back to him, he noticed the man had a different uniform to any he had seen. "I'll explain. This isn't real, not in your perception anyway." That created more questions than answered them. "I had to show you this as it's simpler than telling you. I need your help."

"Me? What could you possibly need from me, and seriously, what?" Craig muttered.

"My name is Maxwell Evans, I'm the Commander of a Time Management vessel. We fix ruptures in time. I need you to help me with one," the man explained. "This is the result of you refusing to."

"Oh so no pressure then," Craig shook his head. "I didn't cure Ylara's evilness. In fact I don't know what did. Why me?"

Maxwell stayed silent for a few seconds, almost like he was trying to think of a way to answer him correctly. "In your present as you remember it, what you are going to do has already been done in the past. Nobody else can do it."

"Okay," Craig groaned as he rubbed his forehead. "What do I do then?"

"I can't tell you that," Maxwell replied.

"I have to do something, only I can but you won't tell me what it is. I'm sensing a flaw," Craig said.

Maxwell smiled in an almost smug manner. "Do not worry, I've had to explain this many times. It is hard to accept and understand in the beginning, but once you've done it..."

"I'm not going to do anything until you explain this to me," Craig butt in.

"I am allowed to give you some details, not all of it. We can't tell you everything as it'll effect whatever you do. I am confident though that when I tell you what I can, you will help me," Maxwell said.

"Oh, and why is that?" Craig wasn't convinced.

"Because, it concerns the woman you love," Maxwell said in a dubious voice.

Maxwell stared at him for a while, waiting for his answer. Ylara still stood there with her fist in the air, frozen in time. The red alert lights had frozen on the flash, nobody rushed passed them in a panic. Craig had his arms folded, deep in thought.

Eventually he looked back up towards Maxwell. "Do I really have to do this?"

"I'm afraid so. An Evil Slayer who has killed so many that their humanity has all but gone, is a dangerous thing, especially on a fleet of ships. No escape, no mercy," Maxwell replied.

"But maybe James, Zare, I assume Kevin's still alive since she was always like this, could..." Craig stuttered. Maxwell shook his head. "I may give James crap sometimes, but he has a habit of doing the impossible. He's not the only one I know but with an Evil Slayer..."

"Craig, this isn't the same. The *Evil* you have seen were still grieving, angry but sad. They were reachable. What the Leda and Voyager face now is a merciless killer. You would have better luck negotiating with a virus. There is no good in this present. Only death," Maxwell explained.

Craig looked down at the ground. "You're asking a lot of me, and I still don't know what exactly *it* is."

Maxwell nodded, "I know. Out of the three your task is lot less rewarding." Craig didn't care about a reward, he just didn't want this hanging over his head. He had enough of a burden on his shoulders. "That is why I showed you this. You're a good man, a one in pain but that doesn't change who you are. Sometimes doing the wrong thing can lead to a greater good, it's harsh but it is worth remembering."

Craig turned to look at the frozen Ylara. He had faced Evil Slayers in the past, James more so than others, but something about her eyes seemed different. He assumed the eyes turning black was a warning to people that the person had no soul, nothing was left behind after they've made the first kill. Ylara's seemed darker, a lot more hollow. Maybe he had the right idea, only the eyes turning black was just the start of what was to come. Luckily he had not seen any further than that until today. Maxwell's warnings felt right, she was dangerous and there was no talking to her. Even James in his worst of moods would talk to you and wouldn't attack random people, this kind of evil was the real deal.

"What are we waiting for?" he finally answered. Maxwell smiled and nodded.

The sun was blinding, he could feel his skin already burning. Craig was fair skinned, he was an English weather boy through and through. A lot of people complained about it, but he secretly loved the mild, not extreme weather. Not too hot, rarely too cold. Here he would turn red in ten minutes. Maxwell had been kind enough to allow him to dress down before he came, but he was still very aware of his clothes. They stuck to him, it wasn't pleasant. Considering where he took him, he thought that maybe Maxwell should have given him a different outfit completely.

The people he had seen had stared after him, mostly with wide, frightened eyes. They were barely dressed, darker skinned, black hair, and here he was with the Starfleet tank top and black pants walking in the desert environment.

Maxwell had told him that he'd given him a lot more information than the other two. Whoever they were. It was only because he was going to somewhere unfamiliar, he said. But he had been here before, and the memory of it ached more than he'd like. Two years ago he had arrived in this same country, hoping he would help in the rescue of the girl he loved. Instead his heart was ripped out as the evil inside Ylara beat her soul out of her own body.

Craig walked alongside the river, following Maxwell's instruction to do so until he saw a settlement. It didn't take him long to find it, but he didn't want to cross paths with the people here. He felt so alien compared to them, and they probably felt the same way. A little further down he started to walk towards the settlement.

Maxwell had also gave him some visual aids printed on pieces of paper. He was a little grateful for that as the sunlight was so harsh and he was alien enough to the people nearby. He checked one of them, then looked back up at the settlement. One of the tiny buildings matched the picture, that was his target.

As he made his way across the sand he tried to think of what to say. Maxwell had warned him that his new universal translator, hidden away in his pocket, may not be accurate. There was no way to really know how this ancient language was meant to be spoken. That was all he needed, it was bad enough looking out of place but sounding out of it too? He worried that people wouldn't even understand him at all.

Fighting the worry, but still distracted by his thoughts, he went to press a door chime. Obviously there was none, there was barely a door. He felt like such a fool standing there with his finger hovering next to a wall. He quickly tapped the door with it instead.

A woman answered, as he expected her eyes widened for a second. She composed herself quicker than he expected. It was time to try the translator, he hoped for a miracle. "Hello, I'm Craig." He waited for a response, she didn't look confused so it was a start. "I'm a..." he hesitated a moment. "Friend, of Ylara."

After a lengthily talk the woman had invited him inside. He was reluctant but he wasn't confident that he'd convinced her of the danger she was in.

"I am sorry but Ylara never mentioned you," she said as she sat down.

"She wouldn't. I doubt she'd remember me," it was the best lie he could come up with.

"We have only been here a week. Those things chased us from our last home," the woman said. Craig tried to remember her name, it was a bit of a mouthful. Yefetiri, something like that. "We are safe during the day, how did you hear this?"

"It wasn't during the day. You must understand, these... what did you call them?"

"Vampyres. They will not change me. I understand the mythos behind it. While dying I must consent. I will not," Yefetiri said.

Craig had to convince her that there was a serious danger here. Maxwell told him that in Ancient Egypt there was a serious threat from the vampires. Ylara had done quite a bit of damage to them, so naturally they didn't just want her dead, they wanted her to suffer. Her brother, the second Chosen, had only just turned ten. He remembered somebody telling him that his death turned Ylara to her black eye state in the first place. If that didn't happen that would mean in a nut shell that her soul wouldn't inhabit Lena in the future.

"Sometimes doing the wrong thing can lead to a greater good, it's harsh but it is worth remembering."

It made him feel sick to his stomach. Everything about this was wrong, he knew it, but it was what must be done. He wasn't like Chakotay, he hadn't fell off the sane ladder. He still believed in doing the right thing, he was just bitter about it. Right now his good side was winning over the bitter. It had been so long, the timing was terrible.

"I really doubt that anyone would consent to becoming a vampyre, but we still have so many of them running around. Consent, probably not a problem for these things," he told her.

Yefetiri stared down at her hands as they entwined nervously. "You really believe they will come for me?"

"These things are monsters. They don't like to lose. They'll want to make Ylara suffer," Craig explained through a lump in his throat. This is wrong, he thought again. Like a stubborn hair that was out of place, he flicked it aside knowing full damn well it would be back.

"My son Rashlal, he's ten years old. He's so eager to help his sister," Yefetiri said, fighting back the tears. "He is too young, she was too young. What kind of god would force such responsibility on children. What have we done that is so terrible?"

"It's too much for two people to bear, I know. Once the sun comes down..."

Yefetiri threw her head towards him, "are you saying I should let him fight?"

"No, I was just going to say that they know that, and they'll go out of their way to make sure she is alone," Craig answered reluctantly. Yefetiri stared at him through glistening eyes, she understood, a part of Craig hoped that she wouldn't. The weight on his shoulders was getting heavier. "Ylara needs you and her brother, don't let these monsters win by letting them take you away."

Yefetiri nodded, "of course, you are correct. I will prepare for our departure." She wiped away the tears with her hand. "My boy is helping with the harvest, you will have no trouble noticing him. He insists on carrying the heavier equipment. Because he can, you know. Ylara has explained to him many times that he has to be discreet about it, but he's a ten year old boy. You understand?" Craig wondered why she was telling him this, while he thought that he figured it out. "Can you collect him? Ylara will be home soon, she is bringing water." Yeah, that's what he feared.

"He wouldn't come with me, would he?" he tried to get out of it.

"No, just tell him the sires will run. He will know what that means and he should come home on his own," Yefetiri said. She got up to start picking up the few items in the shelter. There was no arguing with her, he figured. He walked out as quickly as he could, he didn't look back at the damage he caused. He hoped that Lena would forgive him for this, no... he hoped he would.

The weight was now crushing him.

The sun was starting to set, but Craig was too conflicted to really be thankful about it. He had watched boys and men harvesting the crops by the river, looking out for a boy with super powers showing them off. At least that was the picture his mother had given him. Nobody really stood out, he had no idea who to talk to. It was frustrating, he was in a hurry. That was when he finally realised how little time he had left, the sun wasn't burning him as much, the sky had become hazy.

Perhaps he was looking for too much, he wondered. The boy didn't have to be carrying huge equipment or anything, he just had to be eager enough. His eyes scanned the fields one more time. Finally a boy stood out. He didn't look ten to him; he was tiny but he fit the image he was looking for. The boy was energetic and was constantly bounding off to give somebody, anybody a hand. After he was done he'd help someone else.

A man ruffled his hair, smiling down at him. He said something that made the boy pout. The man said something else and the boy looked up at the setting sun. He spoke too before running off in Craig's general direction. *Maybe I don't have to interfere after all.*

Something told him to approach anyway. The boy seemed to spot him walking his way. He expected him to run another way or something, but the boy actually walked faster to meet him.

"Hi I'm..."

"You are from that other place, aren't you?" the boy said with no fear in his eyes.

"Other place?" Craig wondered what he meant.

The boy scowled at him, "I know, the See-er told me to be secretive. You do not have to watch me."

Craig had more questions, but the boy seemed more than happy with his own explanation, so why ruin it by acting confused. "Your mother has a message for you."

The boy crossed his arms. "You talk funny, just like your friend."

"Yeah so do you," Craig muttered. "The sires will run. That's the message."

"Oh," the boy's face whitened and his cheerful facade was gone. "My sister, does she know?"

"No but..." Craig replied honestly, though reluctantly.

"What kind of See-er are you? Ylara should know first," the boy hissed at him. He shook his head and ran around behind him. Craig didn't waste any time, he chased after him.

"Where are you going, it's not safe!" he yelled after him.

The boy had the cheek to turn his head back and shush him. He continued running. He wasn't running in the direction of his home, panic started to set in. The boy was a lot faster than he expected for a boy his age and size, and Craig didn't really enjoy running that much. He was never really any good at it, if it wasn't for his long legs he'd probably be amongst those poor kids at school who'd still be running ten minutes after the race. He used that advantage to catch up and grab the boy's arm, thinking that would be enough to stop him.

He forgot. How could he?

The boy's arm slid out of his grip with no effort, Craig felt himself fall forward for a second. He wasn't going to give up, he needed to catch him and bring him home. A lot was at stake here, not that he could tell him that, the boy would definitely run away from him if he knew the real reason.

"Wait, don't you think you should protect your mother," he called after him. *That should do it, surely.* Sure enough the boy stopped suddenly, Craig had to stop quickly to avoid crashing into him. He turned to stare up at the strange man. "I'll tell her."

"Hmph, you've got guts, Mister?" the boy grunted.

"Craig," Craig told him. "Why do you say that?"

The boy smiled, his eyes appeared mischievous. "My sister would be so mad if she knew you were sending me to fight."

"I'm not. Your mother is waiting for you, we're running out of time," Craig explained, pointing towards the sky. The boy looked, his smile disappeared. "Ylara is probably back anyway, you need to get home before they do."

The boy nodded, he understood, he even looked sorry. He didn't say anything else, Craig lead him home as quick as he could. Maybe there's still time, he hoped. His eyes looked up at the sky, that hope was fading.

The sun was barely creeping over the horizon when they reached the shelter. The village was still well lit so Craig had no idea what went wrong. He looked around for any signs of clues. The boy was starting to panic.

"She would not leave without me," he said.

Craig only nodded. Yefetiri was packing things away when he left her. She hadn't got very far, the shelter still looked the same. The only difference was that the young woman was not there.

"It is still light. I..." the boy stuttered. Craig placed a hand on the boy's shoulder. "Mother."

"The vampires couldn't have taken her or anything. The sun's not down yet," he tried to reassure him. "It's not your fault." The boy nodded but Craig could tell he wasn't believing it. "We should find your sister."

The boy looked at him with surprise. "We?"

"I can't leave you here alone," Craig said. He shrugged, "I can fight, so don't worry. Once we find her..."

"Rashla!" a girl's voice yelled from outside.

The boy's face lit up, "Ylara." He didn't wait, he ran straight out much to Craig's annoyance. He was about to rush after him when a thought occurred. *She'll recognise me.* Not right now obviously, but later. He couldn't leave the boy alone though, he carefully stepped outside.

"What are you doing?" the girl's voice said.

Craig looked to where the voice came from. The boy had ran into the arms of an older girl, not much older than sixteen. Long black hair tumbled over her shoulders, her eyes were a soft brown, they matched her soft features perfectly. *So this is the real Ylara, she's not what I expected.* She looked to him like she wouldn't harm a fly, or even say a bad word about anyone.

She hugged her brother tightly. "I came home and you were not there, mother too. I was worried."

"Sorry sister," the boy cried. "I wanted to help at the harvest and mother told me to come home and..."

The girl looked angry, she shook him but only lightly. "I told you to be back home before third quarter."

"I know, but..." the boy sniffed.

The girl stared at her brother, she wiped his tears away. "No, I am sorry. It is still light. Mother told you to come home?"

"Yes, she sent a man," the boy replied.

Craig felt like he was being watched. He slowly turned his head to the left. Sure enough he was right. A woman had quickly turned her back on him, and was walking alongside a wall. She looked over her shoulder, allowing him to see her face for a second. "Yefetiri." He quickly ran after her.

"Another See-er. We came home and mother was gone." The girl looked over to the shelter briefly, concern planted on her face.

"George said nothing about another See-er. Are you sure?" she said.

Craig followed Yefetiri's path alongside the wall, only then he realised something was horribly wrong. The wall was shading what light was left from the setting sun. *Idiot*. It should have occurred to him immediately. Her children are alone, scared that something has happened to her and she had just walked away from them. Craig's heart sank, he failed. He stopped following her and turned around immediately to go back where he came.

His heart was thumping so loud and fast, blood was draining from him as dread prickled at his skin. They were gone too.

I can't do anything right. Why did Maxwell choose him? He did everything wrong as usual. *What a pathetic mess I am.* He stamped his foot in anger.

"Mother?" the boy's voice called. Craig's head flew in the direction that came from. He still had a chance, he walked fast. *Wait, did he say Mother?* He didn't have to go far. Within the shade the boy ran towards his mother, her arms were outstretched to embrace him. His sister ran after him, grabbing his arm. She pulled him back with all her might.

"Don't!" she cried.

"Why?" The boy could only see his mother. Even at a distance Craig could see what Ylara was probably seeing. Yefetiri's eyes were hollow, there was no life in there. She had tried to hide it with her hair, but a brief movement revealed the scar on her neck.

"That isn't mother," Ylara stuttered.

Her brother pulled her forward. His strength was equal to hers but for now she had a size advantage. She picked him up and ran away as fast as she could. Yefetiri laughed coldly, she only followed by walking slowly.

Craig knew what he had to do. This was his mess, his fault, so he had to. She was new, she shouldn't be tough to beat. He stepped forward while his hand edged its way to his hip, what he didn't find there was a grim reminder. "No weapons."

A fiendish giggle emitted from right in front of him. He looked up, those hollow eyes were right in front of him, gazing into his own. Her smile was wide as she licked her top lip. Without a weapon he really didn't have a chance. He couldn't kill her. At the very least he could stall Ylara and her brother's escape. He stood his ground but the fear within him was desperately trying to win him over.

"Thanks for the warning, Mr Craig. You were just in time," she taunted him. Her eyes widened suddenly, she gasped. Craig frowned, what was that about? As if to answer his question her whole body faded into dust. Once it cleared he saw a man facing him, holding what he thought was a knife, but it was made of wood. Then he realised that this man looked like he didn't belong here either. "Wha... what?" he could only say out loud.

"Craig, huh? Interesting name," he said, suspicion in his voice. "I think you would be a lot better off if you forget this incident."

"You're, you're not from here," Craig said.

"Look who's talking," the man said with a smirk. "Excuse me, I have urgent matters to tend to. If I were you, I'd find a crowded place to stay for the night." With that, he ran off in the direction Ylara and her brother went.

Craig sighed as he sat down on the ground. His hands covered his face. "I knew I wasn't right for this. What have I done?"

"You haven't done anything," a familiar voice said.

Craig almost jumped out of his skin, his heart skipped a beat at least. He looked behind him and up to see Maxwell standing behind him. He sighed in half relief and annoyance before turning back the way he was facing before. "Let me guess. I have to start again."

"No," Maxwell replied. He brazenly sat beside him, Craig looked at him and then at his uniform with a raised eyebrow. "Oh don't worry, I pressed the pause button."

"You wouldn't be here, influencing me if I screwed up," Craig said.

Maxwell disagreed, he shook his head. "You're right in saying that I'm not supposed to influence your actions, that's not why I'm here."

"The mother's dead, please don't tell me that was what I was supposed to," Craig groaned. "Let me do it again or get someone else."

"You obviously still don't understand," Maxwell said in a soothing voice, he smiled warmly. "You will."

"Okay, so the mother being sired was supposed to happen?" Craig questioned. Maxwell made such a small nod he wondered if that was just an accident. "So I caused it." Maxwell did the same again, but this time his head went sideways. Craig climbed to his feet, groaning in anger. "This doesn't make any sense!"

"It shouldn't yet," Maxwell said.

"If I didn't screw up why are you here?" Craig snapped. "If my being here didn't change anything, why did you send me in the first place?"

Maxwell smiled. "It did something, that much I can say, but you didn't kill her. To answer your other question, I'm here to send you forward a bit."

Craig's eyes narrowed, he didn't understand. "Forward. Isn't that influencing?"

"You misunderstand. I'm not here to give you a reassuring push to keep going. I mean quite literally, forward." He showed him the tricorder he used to transport him here for emphasis.

"Oh," Craig muttered. He felt really stupid now. He was used to Maxwell being vague so maybe that was what threw him off. "So I did nothing, now I'm off to another point in the past to do more nothing?"

"Sometimes time travel doesn't require you to do something huge. Time travel is delicate, even a small thing can change things in more ways you can imagine," Maxwell said. He climbed to his feet. "I understand that you're conflicted, and this situation is overwhelming but you've got to stop doubting yourself. As I told the others everything you do here is what is supposed to happen. The pressure is only in your head. You know deep down what to do, follow your gut, it's right."

"Is it? It keeps telling me that what I'm doing is wrong," Craig said quietly.

"Hmm," was Maxwell's only response to that. "Do you remember what I told you before?"

"Vividly," Craig muttered.

"Keep it in mind for where, or rather when we are going," Maxwell said with a smile. Craig wished he would stop smiling at him like that. He may be used to this time travel rubbish but he wasn't. "Are you ready?"

"One question," Craig answered. Maxwell seemed to allow it as he didn't say anything. "Who was that man?"

Maxwell chuckled, "and here I was expecting a question I can't answer. I'm surprised."

"I'm getting used to the avoidy, time travel rules answers. I figured that this question wouldn't be such a headache," Craig said.

"In pre-warp civilisations a watcher is recruited from their own world, it's basically to ease the Slayers into the idea of other worlds and people. No use scaring them with an alien watcher. I'm hazy on the details of it but there's your answer anyway," Maxwell replied.

"The See-er," Craig mumbled. Maxwell nodded. "Wouldn't that watcher have to be recruited by a Human to ease them into the idea of other worlds and whatnot, and same to them?"

"Like I said, I'm hazy on that," Maxwell shrugged. "Now are you ready?"

Craig sighed, "he was English, I think. Wouldn't an Egyptian one be better?"

Maxwell smirked at him, shaking his head. "I'm a time traveller Craig, not a Game Cube/Slayer expert. It's back to being a secret or need to know basis in my time." Surely that was something he didn't need or should know. "Well?"

"Yeah, yeah, ready. When are we going?" Craig asked.

"Not far," Maxwell replied as he punched in the commands on the tricorder. The two disappeared in a green transporter beam.

They appeared in complete darkness. Neither of them could really see anything but the lights on the tricorder.

"Well somebody oughta have seen that," Craig commented.

He heard Maxwell laugh quietly, "nobody is here, I assure you."

"So what am I..." Craig began to ask.

Maxwell shushed him, he then spoke in a whisper. "Use what you know, what you feel. It'll come to you."

"Ohno, not more cryptic cra..." Craig grumbled. A green transporter beam interrupted him. "Crap," he sighed. He tried to look around but there was no light at all now. "Why did he tell me to hush?" he ended up whispering, just in case.

Right on cue a source of light appeared, faint enough to be in the distance. It appeared to be coming from a small ball of fire. It hovered along, got closer like it was walking. Craig got it, it was likely somebody carrying a torch. He didn't dare move, for all he knew he was hiding in between walls, and any false move would be painful. All he was certain of was directly ahead of him was safe, but that would mean getting closer to the owner of the flame.

The flame got closer until it was possible for Craig to see the definite proof that it was a torch. It swayed slightly, he could hear voices grunting. The flame fell to the ground. The voices got more and more violent. He carefully walked forward towards the fire. Black rolled in front of it, then back again. That stopped him for those few seconds. Quietly he continued.

A child's yelp got his attention, he stopped dead. The flame looked close enough to pick up now. His hand reached out around it, looking for the torch. Finally he found it, picked it up and hovered it around the direction he could hear the voices. All he could see was one large figure lying on the ground in front of him. The child's voice was grunting, while the other voice's laughter turned into a hiss.

Craig looked towards the fire in his hands, then back to the shadows. There was only one thing to do. Clutching the torch with both hands, he swung it flame first in the shadows direction. There was a scream, and Craig was thankful that it wasn't a child's. He recoiled the torch just in case that changed. The fire had spread, becoming a human shape. Whatever he got burned to ashes, the remaining flames fell to the floor.

"Hey!" the child's voice complained.

"What?" Craig muttered. He didn't expect that response.

"I got him, what did you do that for!" the child growled.

"I..." the torch was snatched out of Craig's hands, he wasn't strong enough to keep a hold of it. "I thought you were in trouble."

"I was not," the kid huffed. The torch was pushed close to his face he was worried he'd be next. "I know you. You were that man who warned me about mother."

Craig sighed as he backed away from the flame in his face, he was starting to sweat. "Yes, I'm sorry for what happened."

"Hmm. They were lucky that I was not home. They would not have touched her," the child's voice snarled. Craig felt a bit uneasy to say the least, the boy from before and the boy he was talking to now were different. They were obviously the same person but the difference was noticeable. He was angry, very angry.

"You can't blame yourself," he decided to say. The flame in his face, well almost, made him regret it.

"I do not. I blame you!" the kid snapped.

"Oh," Craig stuttered. *That makes two of us, kid.* "I just thought you would cos you didn't go home when you were supposed to. That's great that you don't, you're just a kid after all, you couldn't have stopped them."

"Were you not listening? I would have!" the boy shouted at him.

"Okay fine, so how is this my fault?" Craig dared to ask.

"I was going home, you stopped me," the boy answered with a growl. "You made me think my sister..."

Craig tried to wrap his head around what he was saying, and what Maxwell had told him earlier. If he was telling the truth, what would have happened if he had not given him his mother's message? He thought that he would have gone home, and most likely been caught up in the attack on his mother. He was only a kid, would he have stopped it? If so, why was Maxwell lying to him about causing her death? A horrible thought came to him. Was Ylara's brother meant to die with his mother, were they both sired to drive Ylara to the edge, turning her evil. No, that can't be it. Maxwell was all about preserving the timeline, if he had screwed it all up, he wouldn't have brought him here.

A rough shove brought him out of his head, it was a hard one at that. It almost winded him. "I bet you were behind it. You are on their side. You killed her, I should kill you."

Craig shook his head, "no, you don't understand. I was trying to help you. You have no idea what was at stake."

"You took my mother. I hate you!" the boy screamed at him.

Craig knew to back away a bit further, but he had no idea what his surroundings were. His gut was telling him that running would solve nothing anyway. He wasn't a coward, not anymore. This kid maybe an angry Slayer, but he was still just a sad kid who had lost his mum. "My god..." he stuttered.

"Craig, this isn't the same. The Evil you have seen were still grieving, angry but sad. They were reachable," he remembered Maxwell saying. Angry but sad.

Suddenly he was on the hard stone ground, his right knee was throbbing. He tried to get up but he felt a heavy foot press against his chest. The flame hovered over near his head. It drifted to the side, reflecting the light against the boy's familiar face. He stared at him with so much anger. The flames had given his face an eery orange, red glow.

"Sister will be so proud of me. She will see I am not weak. I will avenge mother," he said.

He should have saw this coming. The fact that he was a child shouldn't have made him forget, it should have made him realise it sooner. Evil Slayers are born from anger and blame, loss and grief. He tried to think that he was just jumping the gun, and the kid was only venting. The red glow across his face, lighting his eyes red made him re-think that idea. This boy was angry, he was blaming someone. His mother was taken, he didn't know how to grieve. A ten year old wasn't likely trained to deal with this. He knew what he was up against for sure.

Craig just didn't know what he had to do about it, other than survive at least.

The boy had knelt down, he assumed. His face was a lot closer. Now he could see for sure that the flame's light wasn't the cause of the red in the boy's eyes, it brightened them further so he could see it clearly.

"How would you like to die? Like the vampyre did, or slower?" he said in a creepy voice.

Craig closed his eyes tightly. There was one way out that he could see, but that would only save him. He didn't think it would help fix the timeline as he wouldn't have been here to be murdered by an Evil Slayer child in the first place. It was a start though.

"You're right. It was my fault."

The boy was taken aback for a second, he shook it off immediately. "I am hearing slower."

"I... wanted to get revenge on your sister. Ylara killed somebody I loved." The boy grabbed him by his hair, he inhaled through gritted teeth so he wouldn't give the evil the satisfaction of a complaint.

"So you killed somebody she loved, I see," the boy growled.

"I had the opportunity... I had the choice. Stop the woman who I hated, or help her to save other lives. I thought, I thought I could bring her back," Craig continued, his voice strained. He dared to look the boy in his red eyes. "It was only for a second. I can't bring her back. No matter what I do here, nothing will bring Lena back."

"Now you know how I feel," the boy growled. "And you did it to me."

Craig had to continue his story, despite what the boy was saying. He had to say it all outloud. "If it wasn't your sister, it would have been someone else." The boy frowned, he didn't understand but that didn't matter at this point. "I know that now, but I still can't fight the hate, the blame. How else will I get better? If I blamed myself, it would destroy me."

The boy looked at him, he backed away so he couldn't see what expression he had on his face. He seemed to have his attention at least. Whether that was a good thing or not, Craig didn't know yet.

"My mission was a mystery, I still don't know what it really is. All I do know is I felt I had a choice. Interfere in a stupid, pointless effort at..."

"Revenge," the boy cut in.

"Bringing the woman I love back by changing things. Or, I save the woman I hate, keeping everything as it was, saving lives," Craig continued. He waited for a response from the boy, he imagined he was confused. "It was only a moment. One tiny moment. Ridiculous. Lena would still die, just by someone else's hands," he repeated in a stutter. "Another Slayer. All I would do is set another bad Slayer loose in her body. Ylara, she..." He couldn't finish, it was too difficult.

"Ylara would not kill anyone. She is the nicest person there is," the boy almost growled. "You are making no sense."

"Would you?" Craig thought he'd ask.

The boy growled again, "only bad men who kill mothers."

"I didn't kill her," Craig said. "I thought I had to save her, I tried. I was wrong." He felt a fist hit his face, it made his head spin. He swore he heard his jaw crack. "I didn't cause her death. The vampires were always going to kill her. I don't know what I was supposed to do. All I did was slow you down." As he expected his face was hit again, he felt a small hand clutch his throat. "If you think that means I killed her then go ahead, kill me." The hand squeezed his throat. "You'll only kill yourself," he managed to croak out.

The hand moved away. "What do you mean?"

"Look at you. I'm not the vampire that killed your mother, you only think that I stopped you from saving her," Craig explained.

"I know that you did," the boy huffed.

"You don't. You're doing what I've been doing. Blaming someone else to hide from my own guilt," Craig said as he quickly sat back up. The boy let him, maybe he was getting somewhere.

"You think it was my fault?" the boy stuttered.

Craig reached up to check his sore throat, then his jaw. "No. I think you do. If I hadn't come along, would you have tried to kill every vampire you found?"

"Why not, it is my job," the boy spat.

"Not yet, you're just a kid," Craig said. The boy huffed, he must have kicked him lightly as he felt a sharp pain in his leg. "I blame your sister, give her a hard time because it's easier than blaming myself. I was a different man before that. I've mistaken it for being strong, but for a while I've been thinking that it's the opposite. Every night I think about it. It's not your sister's fault that Lena died, just as it isn't my fault that your mother died. We can't take it out on the real reason."

"Cos it's us?" the boy said, he sounded like he was about to burst into tears. He couldn't see it for himself though.

"No, it's not us. You'll probably never find the guy or girl who killed your mother, and I can't take it out on my reason because the reason went with her," Craig said, that lump in his throat was back. "Lena wasn't the only victim, but she was the only one who died. The reason is she wanted it. I can't ever blame her for that."

"Oh," the boy mumbled.

Craig noticed that during his sitting up he had rested against a wall. He didn't remember trying for it, the punches to his head must have did more damage than he thought. "You have to accept the truth, grieve. If you don't, you'll end up like the things you hate. What do you think your sister will think?"

"It's hard," the boy had definitely started to cry.

"I know. My mother died years ago, and I had no way of avenging her either. I realised that she'd want me to be happy," Craig said. "Your mother wouldn't be any different, would she?"

He could hear the boy crying, but he couldn't see him where he was. The torch burnt beside him, abandoned during the one sided fight. As if they were linked the flames flickered as the boy sobbed. Craig's shoulders fell, he felt awful for making the boy cry. He knew though that it was better than the alternative. Evil Slayers only stay evil if they let the anger completely consume them.

A familiar girl's voice echoed around them. "Rashlal!"

He didn't think the boy responded, he didn't call back to her at least. All he did was sob. Craig reached his hand out, hoping he would see it somehow. It felt like an eternity before a hand clutched his back, tightly. The girl's voice yelled for him again and the boy let go. Craig felt something heavy against his chest, he wasn't sure what it was until he felt some arms wrap around him, the boy's cries were muffled against him. This whole thing took him by surprise. The boy hated him before, he wanted him dead. Craig could only think that he was a much stronger person than he was.

"Answer me, please!" the girl's voice was desperate.

Craig looked towards the torch, it was probably the only way he could get her attention without yelling back. With one hand embracing the boy back, the other reached for the torch to raise it in the air. He wafted it side to side. The girl's voice called out the boy's name again, it was a lot louder this time. Footsteps followed.

For the first time Craig was thankful for the darkness they were in. He handed the still sobbing boy to his big sister, she never had to see his face or hear his voice.

"Thank you," she said. Her voice almost broke, she was really thankful that her brother was alright. Footsteps faded away, so did the cries. Craig was alone.

Craig sat down on the small hill of sand, watching the almost black view ahead of him. He wasn't alone now.

"I hope you're not going to send me forward again," he said.

Maxwell stepped forward to sit down besides him, he looked at him with a sympathetic expression. Craig slowly turned to see it. "I am, but it's home."

"Which one is that? Is it the one where I'm decked by a killer Slayer?" he asked.

Maxwell sighed deeply. "I do apologise. What I had to ask of you was, tasking to say the least."

Craig scoffed, but he accepted the apology anyway with just a nod. "Like you said, nobody else could have done it."

"So you're sure that you've done it then?" Maxwell smiled at him.

"No," Craig replied honestly. He shook his head while looking down at the sand. "I don't understand how this all fits together, all I have are theories."

"They fit together, it is simpler than you believe," Maxwell said. "Try me. One of the theories may be right."

There was one particular part of the whole experience that stuck in his head. "The Slayer that possessed Lena, it was the boy instead wasn't it? Not Ylara." He didn't get an answer, he turned his head to Maxwell. He nodded grimly. "In that reality, alternate time whatever, we invited him onboard when he was still evil? Surely we'd notice."

Maxwell smiled, a laugh caught in his chest. "No. I did say I cheated with that one. The *present* you saw was not long after your ships started their mission to Death Corridor. Rashlal got onboard on his own. He had a mission to accomplish."

"Kill people?" Craig said, but he didn't believe it. "A planet full of people and... No, how come nobody got rid of him. Three Chosens and a few Naturals."

"It's a difficult thing to ask of someone isn't it?" Maxwell said cryptically. "Kill your sister, the one who stood by you when you were *evil*."

Craig frowned, maybe he should have said two. He wouldn't expect James to do it. "Sandi, Kevin."

"You're thinking too much about it. It no longer applies," Maxwell tried to reassure him.

"He killed them didn't he?" Craig was getting used to the way he answered questions now. Maxwell nodded to confirm he was right. "All of them. I bet I was no help at all. Pathetic to the end."

"Do you always do this?" Maxwell asked him. "You talked a Slayer out of turning, saving many others in the future. That's including the one you care about." Craig's eyes widened, he wasn't sure what to say to the last part. "Nobody should blame you for hating the girl who inhabits her body now, you shouldn't. However I believe you knew that it could be worse even before this. Am I wrong?"

Craig shook his head lightly. "Her mother was sired, her brother died later on." He closed his eyes, he stupidly forgotten about that. "I stopped him from turning evil, but that means he'll die in front of her later." Maxwell didn't say anything, he didn't have to. "It was the way it had to be, she had to turn evil so Lena wouldn't be used to murder people. She, he would have to be stopped. She'd be gone forever."

Maxwell nodded, smiling a little in approval. "Yes. I can tell you now that this is over. Only one Slayer remained, Rashlal spared that one for a particular reason. It became his undoing. However the consequences of that difficult decision proved costly too."

"I think I know which one you mean," Craig muttered.

"I'm sure you do. If Rashlal was going to die, he was going to die by only one person's hands. He made sure he got what he wanted, he made sure that, that particular Slayer would have no choice," Maxwell said.

Craig cringed, he shook his head furiously. "I get it okay. Rashlal goes on a killing spree in Lena's body, probably tries to kill that Slayer's family. He then kills Rashlal and goes down the deep end too. The circle of evil, yeah. He seemed like such a nice kid too."

Maxwell looked impressed, "was I that obvious or did I give too much away?"

"Bit of both," Craig replied.

Maxwell chuckled, "now you know what a huge impact you've made. That *nothing* you did with delaying Rashlal from witnessing his mother's murder, and just by talking to him saved so many lives. You might want to cut out the pathetic comments, hmm?"

Craig looked straight ahead again. He wanted to think like Maxwell did, but he just couldn't get there yet. For the first time in two years he had hope.

PART THREE

Another tree branch sliced through his chest as he forced his way through. He couldn't let his speed drop even for a moment. The sun was beginning to set so he had no way to see them coming. An inconsiderate tree stump got in his way as well, but it would not break or swipe to one side for him like everything else. His footing was lost, it must have slowed him down only by a few seconds. That was too much, he thought.

He could finally see something directly ahead of him; light from what appeared to be small buildings. It got clearer and clearer. He was so close.

Freedom was within arms length when he was pulled harshly to his right. A hand tugged at his arm. He wasn't going to face death without a fight. All he could see was a faint glow of two eyes to his right, he instantly calmed down.

"What are you doing, you can't leave," a familiar voice hissed into his ear.

His relief soon faded, he had to explain himself or they would all be in trouble. "Sir, you don't understand. We were wrong."

"About what? We've waited so long for this opportunity."

"There is one here, and it knows we're here. It's protecting her."

Either his imagination was playing tricks on him or the pair of eyes brightened with fury. "Impossible! I know for a fact they're all dead. Even if that were not true, Human ones would be disposed of quickly."

"I swear to you sir. It was one, and it got in the way of our pursuit of the subject."

"Don't be ridiculous! Why would it want to get in the way?"

He didn't understand it either, but it was true. He saw it, no, felt it for himself. He was lucky to get away. "It's true. It killed Rifnon."

"I'll take care of this. Stay here."

His superior didn't have to go far. He watched as the larger man was tackled to the ground. Until then he could only make out vague shadows, but now he could see nothing, he could only hear.

A chilling crunch was the last thing he heard. As he could not see who or what did it, there was no way for him to know if he was still in danger. Staying on guard he slowly backed away. His foot landed on a twig, it snapped on impact.

The last thing he saw was a shadow appear in front of him. As his body fell to earth a child's scream blew through the wind. That scream ironically saved his life.

"Are you ready?" James asked.

Jessie smiled, her hand reached for something. "I'm always ready."

"All right, lets do it," James smirked.

Jessie pouted a little, "I dunno, maybe you could be a little more into this. It's like you're not even trying anymore."

That comment threw James off a little bit, "what do you mean? I thought you wanted to."

"*Lets do it.* Besides I'm the only one really doing something, you've already done your bit," Jessie answered. "Come on, where's that imagination I fell for?"

"I thought I'd make it up as I go along. You know I usually improvise," James said.

Jessie nodded and smiled again, "that's true. It's just not as fun if you're not enjoying it too."

"Guys stop it," Jodie giggled. The pair looked across at her. They both weren't sure what was so funny, her cheeks were bright red.

Jessie shifted in her chair, and looked over her shoulder. "What?" she asked her sister. James meanwhile turned his own seat all the way around.

"I feel like a fly on the wall, it's kinda hot," Jodie answered with a giggle.

James and Jessie looked back at each other, he was still none of the wiser but she just shook her head. James shrugged and turned his chair back around to the station he was at.

"How come you've got the crazy pregnancy hormones before me?" Jessie asked. She returned to a more comfortable position.

B'Elanna shook her head too, she decided to keep quiet for now and continue fixing the Tactical station.

"Never mind, hail them," James said.

Jodie shrugged and did what she was told. The big screen at the front of the Bridge activated to show the Leda's. Instead of Harry sitting in the big chair, Tom had stolen it. He panicked at the sight of them.

"Who did that?" His eyes narrowed. "What is she doing in my seat?"

Jessie smiled as she relaxed in the Captain's seat, her finger pressed one button on the armrest. "Just trying it out." A foot rest appeared from the base, Tom's eyes widened. "Someone should."

"You... you bitch," he growled.

Jessie's smile just got bigger, her legs stretched on the new foot rest. To annoy Tom even further she waved sweetly at him.

"How could you let her... We were getting along," Tom stuttered. "And how could you do this without me? You two are too cruel to me."

To make Tom sweat a little more James decided to lean back in his own seat. Tom's eyes started to bug out when he put his feet up on the helm. "This is shock to you? Did you bump your head?"

"Copy cat," Jessie teased from her spot.

James shrugged, "not my best, but it works."

The Leda Mess Hall:

Most of the habitants were holding their nose with one hand or just breathing in through their mouth. Unfortunately a lot of them were the children. Unknown to this Neelix was busy stirring something disgusting in a pot.

"How did he do that, isn't the oven turned off?" one of the teachers asked another.

She shrugged, "he even replicates bad."

Tom entered the room in a rush. He inhaled deeply to get his breath back, immediately regretting it. "Oh my god." He spotted Neelix cooking and even humming. His two youngest kids spotted their dad and ran over. "Is this the emergency you called me for?" They both nodded while pinching their noses. He quickly lead them out while holding his breath.

Sasha noticed this and pouted, "why didn't I think of that?"

She didn't know however that Duncan was desperately tapping his own commbadge only a few metres away. "Mum, Dad... help. Neelix is cooking crap. It bloody stinks in here."

"Damn it, I'll take care of it," James' voice groaned.

To Neelix's horror his pot disappeared in a transporter beam. The air immediately started to become breathable again. "Hey, that's just..." He then spotted the pot rematerialised directly outside the window. "Ohno, I better get that back." He ran out as fast as he could.

Soon things were back to normal, the kids were playing like nothing happened.

Carl walked over to where Amy was sitting. She was busy building something with large Lego bricks so she didn't notice him come over at all.

"Hmm," Carl mumbled. He reached over and pulled a piece away from what she was making. Her head darted up and her eyes widened. "I need that one."

"Hey!" she quietly squeaked. "That's mine."

"No it's not," Carl retorted, rolling his eyes. "We share."

Amy looked around, nobody really noticed what he did. "But, I already used it. Give it back."

"What?" Carl teased, he placed a hand by his ear. "Speak up or lose it."

"I... it's..." Amy stuttered. She looked at the ground around her where other blocks lay. She even saw ones exactly the same as the one Carl stole. While she did that he took more of her creation apart. He then tossed most of the bricks on the floor and only kept one.

"Need this one too, see ya squeaky," Carl laughed. He turned to walk away.

Amy quickly climbed to her feet and followed him. "You broke it. That's mean," she cried.

"You broke it, that's mean," Carl imitated her with a squeaky voice. "Wah." He turned back to face her, "stop being so whiny."

"But, you could have..." Amy stuttered, pointing at the other pieces she hadn't used. "Why?"

"We share. Stop being selfish," Carl groaned. "God, you're not like your family. Adopted are we?"

Amy's eyes began to fill up with tears, this made the older boy smirk. "Stop being mean," she whimpered. He shook his head before pushing her down to the floor. He walked away with his two pieces leaving the younger girl lying on the floor in floods of tears.

One of the teachers spotted her and quickly rushed to her side. Carl looked back briefly. He was more than surprised when he looked back.

"You like picking on smaller people, huh?" Duncan grumbled, his eyes narrowed.

"Oh sh..." Carl quietly said. Duncan smiled and pushed him the same way he had pushed Amy, but not as hard. The boy still fell backwards onto the floor, landing on his bum. He cried louder than Amy did.

"Duncan!" the teacher Grace snapped. She rushed over to Carl's side. Jacqueline soon joined her, holding a crying Amy in her arms. "You don't do that!"

"But... he's a prick," Duncan protested. Grace and even Jacqueline scowled at him. "Oh so it's ok for him to do it?"

"Of course not," Jacqueline scolded. Her attention turned back to Amy to comfort her, nothing was helping.

Some of the other kids were treated to a view of a spacesuit crawl across the window. One of them could easily see Neelix's face through the helmet's glass.

Grace picked up Carl to comfort him, he stopped crying very quickly. "Now that wasn't very nice. You don't push people around."

"She was hogging all the bricks," Carl tried to explain, pointing a finger in the girl's direction.

"There were plenty of bricks for you as well. I saw you destroy what she made. You don't ever do that, and you don't ever push," Grace said.

Duncan rolled her eyes, "yeah that'll teach him." Both teachers told him off with just a look in their eyes. "He didn't even want the bricks. He just likes to take stuff and be an ass."

"Duncan, stop saying things like that," Jacqueline snapped.

"What, the truth?" Duncan was genuinely confused.

Neelix's grip seemed to slip and he then floated off the hull. He clearly mouthed *noooooo* as he did so. His hand still tried to reach the floating pot.

"No. You keep saying bad words, your sister will pick them up," Jacqueline said.

"Yeesh, priorities here. We got a future girl beater on our hands and all you care about is me saying ass?" Duncan said with a shake of his head.

Both teachers sighed as they looked at each other. "I'll be glad when he goes back to school," Grace commented. Jacqueline nodded.

"Not that I think girls can't handle it. I just think if you're going to hit anyone it should be assholes like Carl," Duncan continued like he hadn't been interrupted. Carl glared at him, he smiled back. "Yeah so start hitting yourself from now on, okay prick?"

"Screw you freak," Carl hissed.

"Both of you stop it!" Jacqueline snapped. "I think it's time we have a long chat with both of your parents."

Only ten minutes later the two teachers were regretting their idea.

"It's your fault you stupid bast..." Carl's mother hissed.

"Yeah yeah, everything's my fault. It's never your fault," Carl's father interrupted her. "No wonder he gets mad when broads nag at him, he gets it enough at home, you bitc..."

"Um," Jacqueline could only say while Grace's mouth was hanging open in shock.

"Oh so smacking some little girl around is totally okay with you, you son of a..." Carl's mother grumbled.

"He didn't smack her, he pushed her. You can't even get that right," Carl's father growled.

Jacqueline spotted Jessie arrive so she quickly got up and ran out. Grace was too shell shocked to really do anything about it.

Neelix was still outside the window trying desperately to get back to the Leda. He tried doing a front crawl but he wasn't going anywhere. The pot floated off into the distance.

Jessie watched as he burst into tears, unable to rescue his pot of horrible food.

"Mrs Stuart?" Jacqueline said.

"I'm not going to ask," Jessie said with her eyes still on Neelix. Jacqueline looked too and was surprised to see him. "So what's Duncan done now?"

"How did you know?" Jacqueline didn't ask seriously.

Jessie sighed, slowly shrugging her shoulders. "If it isn't Duncan being sarcastic or fighting with Carl, it's Amy escaping and..." She pointed in Amy's direction. Now she was sitting in the corner with Sasha while she played with dolls.

"Yes well, I'm afraid it was the second one," Jacqueline said. "Is your husband coming?"

"I doubt it. Tom's had to look after his kids cos of some emergency and..." Jessie said, trailing off. "Oh yeah, that'll be it," she said as her finger pointed to Neelix. "So somebody has to stay in charge of the Bridge."

"Ah well, I'm sorry to say this but one of the other children was picking on Amy," Jacqueline explained. "Long story short he pushed her, and Duncan decided to do the same back to him."

Jessie's eyes widened only briefly, she shook her head afterwards. "I'm not surprised, about Duncan anyway."

"Yes but it is getting to be a problem. He and Carl always clash, but Amy rarely interacts with the other children. She and Miral get along but that's it," Jacqueline said, turning her attention to Amy and Sasha. Jessie did the same. "I know once Duncan's back in school with the older children this shouldn't be a problem anymore, but I thought that if Carl's going to start on Amy I..."

Jessie nodded, she then noticed the two angry parents still arguing in front of Grace. "I'm glad you told me. I was worried about this."

"Well... since Voyager's back in action, the school should be running again soon. I know he's not going to be my problem then, but I think it's a shame that a clever boy like him keeps putting his foot in, so to speak," Jacqueline said.

Jessie nodded, "yeah I know. His father made me worry about him too for the exact same reason. We are trying. I mean he's not exactly like his dad was."

"Dare I ask?" Jacqueline smirked.

"Duncan only pushed Carl," Jessie said carefully. "Though in the early days that was all James would do. He only started hitting when he figured out how to not break things."

"Yikes," Jacqueline mouthed. "I assume he looked after you like Duncan does with his sisters." Jessie only nodded grimly. "Well then, once Duncan is out of the nursery group again, it's more up to us and Carl's parents to deal with the problem then." Both women looked back at the two warring parents and poor Grace watching it.

"Good luck. I remember those two going at it like that when she was having Carl," Jessie said. Jacqueline's eyes widened again. "No wonder the kid's like that."

Jacqueline only nodded in agreement.

There was a knock on the window. Neelix had managed to get back to the ship but was not close enough to really grab anything. He was already floating off again.

"You see the problem, don't you?"

James' eyes drifted to the left towards the helm, Tom was busy tip toeing across towards it. At the last minute he snapped, "no!" Tom jumped and scampered back to his usual seat. He turned back to look towards Jessie. "I see a problem, but that's not what you're on about."

"No," Jessie sighed. "History is repeating itself."

"You're not kidding," James muttered as he spotted Tom trying again. He noticed he was being watched still and dashed back. "I don't understand how Duncan defending his sister is..."

"He's you," Jessie quickly butted in. "And she's me."

James pulled a face before leaning in closer to her. "I'm sorry but that just sounds wrong," he whispered.

"I know," Jessie closed her eyes. "I don't mean *that*. Duncan's impulsive, protective and clearly has no fear about saying and doing what he wants. Then we have Amy who's shy, keeps to herself and worst of all, starting to get bullied for it."

James tried his best not to look mad at the thought of it, he chose to bite his lip. "Jess, Duncan's always been like this. I can't ever do it, so I'm kinda glad Duncan looks out for her this way. I don't want any of our kids to go through what you did."

"Well I don't want them to go through what you did either," Jessie said. "He's just going to get himself into trouble with teachers and groups of angry bullies. If he comes home one day in the state you were in, I..." She took in a deep breath as she was starting to stammer, her body trembled. James placed a comforting hand on her shoulder. "I can't go through what I did with you with my own son, I can't. It's too hard."

"I know, but I have a feeling this is more to do with Amy than Duncan," he said. He rolled his eyes, "Tom, you can pilot the ship the next time we crash land, okay!"

"I'm the bloody Captain, I shouldn't have to take this," Tom complained as he stormed off to his chair again.

"Yeah but it's my job to stop the Captain doing twatish things," James said with a smile.

"You're not even a pilot," Tom grumbled quietly.

Jessie sighed, "I think you're right."

"Of course you do, you're his wife. Though B'Elanna never agrees with me," Tom commented.

"Not that," Jessie groaned. "I always figured I was naturally like I am now, and was just shy because of my lack of upbringing. Amy is proof that I'm wrong. She's got that from me."

"I dunno. Mum used to say I was shy when I was little," James said.

Jessie shook her head, "we both know it was daddy dearest and other circumstances in your case, not genetics. It has to be me. I must be naturally shy, and what happened to me didn't help."

Tom's eyes lit up, "oh, what happened?" Both James and Jessie's glares shut him up, he went back to pouting.

"Jess, she's probably only shy because she's still not used to other children. Give her time," James said.

Jessie shook her head, "in the mean time Carl keeps pushing her around. You know that's how my bullying started."

"I wouldn't worry about that. Miral usually looks out for her," James said.

Tom groaned, "you're welcome! Maybe you can stop being mean to me now."

Both of them stared in his direction, James armed with his usual smirk and Jessie's face was blank.

"So she got the man hating, Klingon temper from you then?" Jessie eventually said.

Tom shifted in his seat uncomfortably, he tried to maintain a confident look on his face until they stopped staring at him. "Yes." They continued to stare with the same expression on their faces, so his facade started to fail. He turned his head away to avoid showing that. "Still wouldn't be here if it wasn't for me, so..."

"Yes, thank you for the difficult job of creating her. Those five seconds must have been such an awful experience for you. I'll tell you what, I'll be super nice to you from now on cos bless your heart, really. You must have been through hell and we owe you one for enduring that torture," Jessie said in a fake polite voice. She rolled her eyes and shook her head as she walked away. "Imbecile."

Both Tom and James watched her leave, while Jodie just snickered quietly to herself. Once she was gone the two men looked at each other; James couldn't help but laugh while Tom looked like he had been kicked in his favourite spot.

"What just happened?" he squeaked.

"Man hating, Jessie temper?" Jodie giggled her answer.

Tom exhaled through his nose while he rolled his eyes. "If she was shy, I repelled women."

"Yeah," James said through a smirk. Tom dared to narrow his eyes at him.

"I dunno what you're laughing at. She was making fun of you too," Tom grumbled.

"It's a shame that most insults go right over your head," James sighed.

"Torres to Bridge. I have some bad news."

"What, did Jessie decide to pick on you too?" Tom asked not seriously.

"I'm not going to touch that one. I'm afraid the warp core isn't responding yet. I think we've still got a lot of work to do."

"That's alright. The Leda will be off on another refugee mission, we may as well wait here for them anyway," Tom said, smiling slightly. "Isn't it time for your shift to end, Jamesy? You've got a cranky wife to calm down."

"You just want to land Voyager on the planet and bring her back into orbit cos you didn't get to do it," James said, narrowing his eyes at him in jest.

Tom shook his head a little too much, giving him away. "No way. Somebody needs to calm Jessie down before she breaks someone. Who was she fooling with the shy little thing lie?"

James shook his head. "Obviously you." He turned to leave the Bridge.

Tom waited until his back was on him before edging for the helm. He was about to sit down when he realised that he hadn't heard the turbolift doors close. His eyes slowly glided to his left as he looked over his shoulder. They met with James' just before he rolled them. With a shake of his head he went into the turbolift anyway. Once the doors closed Tom returned his attention to the helm, only then noticing that the power was off on it.

"Damn it James, you're no fun," he whined. The disappointment had dimmed the blue in his eyes.

His eyes flickered open. Only then he realised he must have been sleeping on his arm. He reluctantly decided to sit up, clutching his sleeping arm with his good one. A few stretches and bends would wake it up. He had only managed a couple when something strange caught the corner of his eye.

James slowly looked over his shoulder at the window behind him. What he saw confirmed that he wasn't imagining things.

When both he and Jessie had finally turned in for the night, the entire length of the window was filled with the planet they were now orbiting. All he could see now was black. Still feeling the effects of waking up he thought that the planet was just blocking the view of the star. That thought only lasted a second when he turned around as much as he could and noticed that he could see stars still, but they were streaming passed like the ship was at warp.

James knew that Voyager was not ready for warp travel yet. B'Elanna's earlier tests proved that. Something was wrong, and he felt it wasn't just what the ship was doing.

A muffled groan behind him snapped him out of that thought, if only for a second. If he didn't already, he wanted to figure whatever this problem was without waking up Jessie. Once he was alone in the living area he'd at least be able to ask the Bridge what was going on.

Quietly as possible, James climbed to his feet and made his way over to the door. It opened, displaying a much bigger mystery.

The whole room was completely different. Nothing was in the right place, the shape of the room was even wrong. It was almost like he had stepped into the past; his old quarters looked exactly like this. James thought that it would be best to check a few details before bothering the Bridge. Finding out why Voyager was flying at warp when it couldn't, wasn't going to explain why he had moved quarters.

A small computer sat on the sofa in front of the window. He approached it quickly, and then leaned over to touch it. One button press woke it up. The details already on the screen confirmed what he needed to know.

"It's definitely still 2382," he whispered. His eyes immediately looked over to the other side of the room. In his normal quarters there were two doors, one for each small bedroom there. There were still two doors there but that didn't relieve any anxiety he was starting to feel. One door was facing towards the window. This made him look behind him to the door he walked through. The bathroom was on the same side of the quarters, or at least that's where it should be. The bedroom he had exited was the only room on that side.

The anxiety was still growing. He dashed over to the other side of the quarters to check out the other two doors. The first one was the bathroom as he expected. The second door filled him with dread as soon as it opened. A double bed and two wardrobes side by side were the only objects in the room. It looked like nobody had used it in months.

James returned to the computer as a panic started to set in. He dropped onto the sofa, grabbing the computer as he did. He didn't notice he now had company.

"Trouble sleeping?" Jessie asked, stifling a yawn.

"Um yeah," James stuttered. He frowned as he looked across at her, she didn't seem fazed at all about their quarters drastic change. "You don't see it?"

"See what?" Jessie asked, quickly looking behind her just in case. "Another vision dream thingy?"

"No... at least I hope not," James replied with a wince. "If it isn't a dream though, what is it?" he said to himself.

Jessie sighed as she carefully approached. "What am I supposed to be seeing?"

"Everything's different," James answered. He glanced down at the computer then back up at Jessie. She had the biggest frown he had ever seen on her. "I know how that must sound but..."

"It's okay, I'll believe you. Probably," Jessie said with a shrug of her shoulders. "What's different?"

"First it was the ship. Where are we going, and how..." James said, trailing off.

"Where else would we be going?" Jessie asked him, her frown managing to grow. "We wouldn't be going backwards, though Janeway likes her coffee hunts I suppose."

Her sentence didn't quite register with him yet. "Then I came in here and noticed that the whole room was different..." His eyes widened finally, he looked back towards her. "Janeway?"

"Uh yeah," Jessie said carefully. She noticed his expression but wasn't sure what to make of it. "What's the big deal?"

"Backwards. We're still in the Delta Quadrant?" James questioned. Jessie only nodded, her face was filled with worry. He grew a little more concerned too when he noticed a little fear there too. "What year is it?"

Jessie turned slightly to walk away from him. "Okay, maybe saying I'd believe you was me being optimistic."

"Please Jess, what year is it?" James asked her. The computer on his lap obviously had the wrong answer on it.

"2382. FYI, time travel pranks aren't really funny," Jessie replied with distaste.

"I'm not joking, I wish I was," James stuttered as he quickly stood back up. He caught her looking a bit anxious. "Sorry, I know I wouldn't know what to think if this was the other way around but..." He shook his head. "Janeway, Delta Quadrant but it's the same time." His attention went back towards the doors on the other side of the room. Dread started sinking in deeply.

"Oh so not time travel prank, just losing your mind kind. Nice," Jessie commented. Her arms folded tightly like she was protecting herself.

James didn't respond right away, his attention was still towards the other rooms. Eventually his head hung down so he was staring at the floor. "Not time travel but... what is happening?" He slowly turned around to look at Jessie, she appeared very nervous to him. "Um, so... these quarters are normal to you?" He only got a nod again. "So the fact that we have an empty bedroom seems normal to you then?"

"This is a weird way of asking me to go back to my own room," Jessie muttered. She looked a little hurt at the thought.

Once again James had the *this is the past* feeling he had before, but he still remembered that Jessie had confirmed the right year earlier. "That's not what I meant. I just mean, no one else is living here right?"

"Uh, who would be living with us?" Jessie asked, her eyes were now wide. "Maybe you should go to Sickbay."

If this isn't time travel, what else could it be? Jessie wouldn't play a trick like this, and she didn't look sick. That was when he noticed another detail that was different. Without thinking he blurted it out, "you're not pregnant?"

Jessie's face flushed red, and her eyes widened a lot more. "What! Of course not, how could I be?" James instantly regretted saying what he thought. "We've only just got engaged, slow down okay."

"Engaged?" James was even more confused, another detail was wrong. "This is definitely 2382, I don't..."

Jessie shook her head. "Of course it is. I never thought you would be in a hurry. This is why I trusted you in the first place. I knew you'd be patient enough to wait for me," she rambled quietly he could only just hear her. He frowned not just at her words but at the familiar way she spoke. Once again he felt like he had gone back in time, only this time a lot further back.

"Wait? Wait for what?" James dared to ask.

"Well I'm not going to be pregnant before a wedding, am I? It's impossible without..." Jessie remarked quietly. She shook her head again and then marched over to a nearby table. Someone had left a commbadge sitting there. "I'm calling the Doc. I'm really worried that there's something wrong with you."

"No, no, I'm fine," James said to try and to stop her. It did work for the moment, but not in the way he liked. She looked at him, startled. She hung around the table just in case. The look on her face made him feel awful, guilt spread across his own. "It's not me, it's..."

"Me?" Jessie said with a raised eyebrow.

"No," James replied. "I realise how this must sound but please, I need you to trust me for the moment while I ask some probably weird questions."

"It's a bit late for that warning," Jessie commented.

James nodded slightly, he began to pace as his mind raced. "How long have we been engaged?"

"A while, about six months," Jessie replied quietly, her head turned towards the window.

"Together?" James asked.

Jessie quickly looked back at him, her eyes were back to being wide. "Okay, now I'm really worried." She sighed. "Just under two years."

"What?" James could only manage to say. He felt like he had been thrown through a couple of walls again. None of this made any sense at all. "No wonder we don't have any children. Even Amy wouldn't have had a chance." Saying her name made his blood run cold as well. Her, Sasha and Duncan weren't just gone, they didn't even exist. He started to feel sick.

"Children? First I'm pregnant, now we have children. I have to say, I'm a little freaked out," Jessie stuttered. She remained where she was, folding her arms again. "What's going on?"

"I... I wish I knew," James quietly stuttered. "I'm sorry, I'll do what you suggested."

"Sickbay," Jessie sighed.

James nodded as he turned to leave. He couldn't say anything else, there was a throbbing lump in his throat. He still had a vivid memory of tucking in all three of his kids last night. He especially remembered spending more time getting Amy to sleep as she was still upset about being bullied. Duncan fussed, but he always did. Sasha always drifted off easily, she was just hard to get up in the morning. They all were.

Now they were gone. He couldn't wrap his head around it, he didn't want to. Whatever was causing it though, had to be fixed. The only good thing about what was happening was that his mother seemed to still be alive, everything else was wrong.

Once he was alone in the corridor he fought back a few tears. They were distracting and he had to think, not mope around. That was when he noticed a strange man watching him from around a corner. Once the man had seen him look his way, he disappeared.

James gave chase. Once he had turned the corner himself he didn't have to do that long. The man wasn't in a hurry, he just walked like nothing had happened.

The man didn't seem surprised when he was grabbed, and roughly shoved back first into the wall. A hand squeezed his neck, but he still wasn't concerned.

"You're behind this, aren't you?"

The man even smiled. "Yes," he managed to croak.

"What did you do? No, I don't care..." James shook his head angrily. He also shook his hand as well, shaking the other man violently for a second. "Just bring my children back and maybe I'll think about not killing you."

"That is my intention," the man said.

James frowned, but he didn't budge. The man also kept a surprisingly calm expression on his face. "You just admitted to being behind this."

"I am. I have to show you somehow," the man said.

"What the hell does that mean?" James snapped.

"This isn't real. Not exactly," the man answered.

James reluctantly let go of the man, but kept close just in case. "A vision?"

The man reached up to caress his own neck. "No, not exactly. I'll keep it simple. This is an alternate present, you do not belong to it."

"That's you being simple?" James said, rolling his eyes.

"You understand. Your fate is revolved around alternate timeline's, which I'm sure you're aware of," the man said.

James slowly shook his head, his eyes were getting a lot more deadlier. "Keep to the point or I'll start breaking walls."

"Of course. I understand your frustration, but it was necessary to get the point across," the man said. "Basically this is what will happen to the present if you don't help me."

"Help you, with what?" James demanded.

The man smiled. "I'm sure you're aware of my ship, so I'll introduce myself first. I'm Commander Maxwell Evans of the USS Sedna."

"Sedna, it's familiar but I'm still thinking about the part where you admitted to doing this," James said.

"We're a Time Management vessel. We basically fix ruptures in time," Maxwell explained. He smiled, "well at least the ones that are particularly disruptive. Can't dissolve them all."

"Great, so you're saying that all of this is a time rupture, and you have to fix it," James said.

"Close, only you can fix this one," Maxwell smiled.

James groaned and rolled his eyes. "Me, why?"

"I really can't go into details. All I can tell you is that I have to send you back to an earlier time, doing so will restore the present you remember," Maxwell replied.

"So you need me to do something but you can't tell me what that is?" James questioned. He shook his head, "that's a good one. What if *this* is caused by you sending me back in time?"

"Ah, that's a good question," Maxwell smiled. "You have a benefit over the other two; you know I'm Human and not a demon. I have no reason to mess about with history. I suppose you do only have my word on that."

"Funnily enough, I'm going to need a lot more than that," James said.

Maxwell nodded, "I usually show people the consequences of the paradox not being resolved. It usually gives them an idea of what they need to do without telling them, and gives them a certain amount of proof that I'm not lying. Think about what you've seen and..."

"Yeah, you don't want me to think too hard about it. I may end up crushing something of yours," James muttered.

"Why would that happen? The events you've seen, not the crushing," Maxwell asked. "What would stop the birth of your children? Hmm. Think about it."

James sighed and looked back the way he came. He turned back. "Jessie... she was different. I couldn't put my finger on it."

Maxwell smiled and nodded. "Exactly. If I had sent you back in time without doing this, you'd have no idea what was at stake, would you?"

James shook his head, he wasn't convinced. He still couldn't understand what could have made Jessie so different that it would affect the timeline this badly. He wasn't even sure if what Maxwell was wanting from him was the right thing to do.

"I think you know deep down, that helping me fix the past will bring them back," Maxwell said, as if he had read his mind.

"No, I don't. Apart from the Erona, you time travel people tend to stop people from doing exactly that. No time travel and there's no problem," James said.

Maxwell sighed deeply, "it's not as black and white as that. Your sister for example wouldn't exist and you would be dead without it. You already know that. There are paradoxes that can only be resolved by going to the beginning. This is one of them."

Beginning. That word stuck out like a sore thumb, it worried him. "Beginning. How far back would you take me?"

"Well I imagine you're having trouble trying to determine what changed your Jessie so drastically. You really don't know," Maxwell stated.

"I don't like the sound of that," James shook his head.

Maxwell dared to chuckle at him, "it's not as bad as you think."

"I think it is," James said. "Jessie doesn't really ask what happened in my early childhood before I met her, and I return the favour. I know she had a rough time. If I go back then..."

"Then you'll save her," Maxwell said plainly.

James stared blankly at the other man. What did that mean? "Save her? She was alive."

"There are more ways to save someone," Maxwell stated. "You'll understand once we go. And I'm sure your wife will forgive your intrusion into her past, as you'll understand enough to explain it."

James shook his head many times. "No, I can't do this to her. She knows bits and pieces of what happened to me, but she's been very tight lipped about her own past. There's a good reason for that, and I don't want to betray her."

"You're concerned that she won't trust you after this. That's exactly what will happen if you don't," Maxwell said. He grimaced slightly, "that is all I can divulge I'm afraid."

"How on earth is interfering with something that happened to her before she met me, going to make her trust me? This makes no bloody sense," James' voice started to rise as his temper was failing.

"You'll see. Just remember, what you do in the past is already set. Your present is the result of what you're going to do, whatever it may be. I cannot influence you any further," Maxwell explained. He placed his hand into his pocket. A green transporter beam enveloped them both.

"What part of no, didn't you understand?" James snapped.

Maxwell sighed, "I knew you were going to refuse. I did what I had to."

"So much for not influencing me," James muttered.

Maxwell smiled and nodded. "You are supposed to be here, remember that." He looked around at their surroundings. "Do you know where you are?"

James thought about knocking him out and stealing whatever device he used to get here. That only lasted a second as the memory of his children from only the night before snuck into his head. He didn't want to know about Jessie's past if she didn't want him to, but he didn't want to fail his kids either. Jessie wouldn't forgive him either if he chose her feelings over their existence. He wouldn't. That settled any of the doubts he had left.

Maxwell was still watching him, patiently waiting for him to have a look around. Reluctantly he did so. They were surrounded by a dense forest. The light only just peeped its way through the cracks in between leaves and branches. What James could see of the sky was a beautiful hazy orange.

"Earth," he answered.

"Mmm hmm," Maxwell nodded. "We're in a place called Middleton, England. I've chosen a spot so we wouldn't be seen. I do still have some information for you, as well as items that will help you."

"You're really not going to tell me what to do here, are you?" James asked but he knew the answer.

"Telling you isn't a guarantee that you will do the same things exactly. You may think it's not good enough and try something else. Or you could try to match what I tell you, and fail in the process," Maxwell replied. "You need to experience it, follow your instincts and do what you think is right with the information you do have."

"So you're saying I can't actually mess this up. What I do is right, no matter what," James said as a headache started to form. He tried to shake it off. "What if I did nothing, or go to my old house and interfere in my own past. What if..."

Maxwell raised his hand to try and interrupt him. "I can't answer that. Here." He dug into his other pocket to fish out a futuristic PADD, he handed it straight to James. "You will need this." He looked at it as Maxwell brought out another device from his pocket. It looked like a tricorder but it had different screens and controls on it.

"What, this is..."

"Your identification. Obviously we had to give you a fake name, and other details. I doubt an orphanage would hire someone with a date of birth of only two years ago," Maxwell smiled.

James looked up from the PADD. "It's 2351?" Maxwell nodded. "You weren't kidding about the beginning, were you?" He shook his head, "I still don't like any of this."

"I know, but your children's lives depend on it," Maxwell said in a sympathetic voice. He raised the tricorder up to his mouth. "Sedna, can you hear me?"

A woman's voice spoke from the tricorder but it sounded distorted. "*Donnings here, go ahead.*"

"Can you please transport the last item I need to give our friend here," Maxwell said.

"*Yes Sir. Sedna out.*"

As another green transporter beam appeared beside Maxwell, James remembered something else that Maxwell had said. "Orphanage?"

"Yes," Maxwell answered, he seemed confused. "I was under the impression you were aware of it."

James sighed, shaking his head once. "Jessie would refer to it as many things; orphanage, foster care, adoption centre. She's not an orphan so I assumed she just thought it was easier to refer to it as that sometimes."

"Hmm. I'm afraid orphanage is right," Maxwell said. He reached down to pick up a bag that was lying beside him. He struggled slightly with it as he handed it over. "You might need these too."

James took it and had a brief look inside. The first thing he saw was shiny, metal and very sharp. Without moving his head, he looked up only with his eyes at the other man. "At an orphanage? Really?"

Maxwell smirked slightly. "I'm afraid so. As I hinted at before, the orphanage is in need of another carer. Your identity was already hired so don't worry about the interview process. They won't check your bag unless you act like they should."

"Um, about this name?" James said, eyeing the PADD in his other hand.

"Don't concern yourself about it. As long as you get to the orphanage before the real owner of that name, there will be no problem," Maxwell said.

Another part of the file caught his attention. "You've hired me out as a carer?"

"How else would we get you inside?" Maxwell replied with a smirk. It was a big enough one to make James want to hit him again. He resisted for now.

Only a mile away was a large red-brick building, completely surrounded by a lush garden. The structure was at least three floors tall at the front of the building, while the back area was two floors

high. Each window were old fashioned and large, with what looked like wooden frames and crosses across the glass.

The sun was already beginning to set, the orange haze was getting darker across the horizon. Most of the windows were brightly lit up until curtains were drawn. Only a few lights remained in the building, mainly on the ground floor across the front.

The inside of the building was very plain. Every room that James had seen as he walked down the cream and baron corridors looked huge and cold. He still couldn't believe this was an orphanage. He was forced to wait in the only decorated room he had seen so far. Calling it decorated was a stretch, it had a little more colour thanks to the chairs dotted around the room, and the tall green plant in the corner. It looked like a hospital waiting room to him, but staff were dotted around with cups or plates, chatting amongst themselves.

A young woman approached from the nearest doorway. Her eyes and demeanor seemed friendly enough, her smile brightened up the dank room. The bags under her eyes and loose strands of hair from her ponytail showed the stress she was really under.

"Right this way, Mr Michaels," she said politely, her hand gestured to the door she walked through.

James climbed to his feet, but that was when he noticed something wrong about where she was leading him. "Uh, the sign says Girls Wing."

The young woman looked over her shoulder at the small sign on the wall beside the door. She turned back with a smile still on her face. "Nobody told you? At Middletons we assign at least one of the opposite sex for each dorm. It makes sense that we get the girls used to a male, father like figure and the opposite is true of the boys."

"Oh right," James didn't really feel too sure.

The woman seemed to sense it. "I figured they'd have told you during the interview. You are replacing the last guy after all. Did they even mention what age group you're assigned to?"

Obviously nobody had told him. Maxwell had transported away so he could no longer threaten him about this. He should have known anyway. This was 2351, he and Jessie in this timeframe would only be at least one year old. "Babies and or toddlers?"

The woman nodded, "yes one to two years. It's a tough job, but your file said you had two children yourself and worked in a nursery. Piece of cake, hmm? Now please, I'll show you around." As she turned to lead him through the doors, James took a quick look at the PADD Maxwell had given him for any information that would help him not look like an idiot.

As the pair made their way down another long, baron corridor James tried to figure out exactly what he was supposed to do here, in this time and place. He didn't have much time to as the woman stopped. She opened a door to the right which lead to another corridor. Luckily this one was a little less depressing with windows showing off the garden on the right wall.

"Down here is the rooms for our on site personnel. As you're one of them I'll show you to yours," she said.

James quickly looked at his PADD for a hint about the on site reference, but he had to follow her quickly.

"I'm surprised, not many guys like to apply for the on site position. Not many people do but it's usually women who want to spend all day with the children," she answered him anyway. He wish he hadn't have wondered, not that it would have made any difference. He could look after all three of his own kids at once, but other people's children were another matter. "They told you you're on the night shift today?"

"Yeah they did," James decided to lie.

The woman stopped at a door, then handed him another PADD. "Just in case any of the kids decide to have a run around, each room is passworded." He took it off her. "There's two things you should know before you start. First the lady you'll be meeting on your shift will be with you during the night too. Basically you take turns to rest while keeping an eye on the dorm. Anna's a lovely woman, she'll be more than happy to answer any questions you'll have. She's been doing nights ever since the last guy left."

"What happened to the last guy?" James asked.

The woman's smile vanished, she looked away and then back towards the door. "I'm not sure. He didn't come to work one day. He must have quit. It can be a stressful but rewarding job."

"I see." He didn't buy the answer, she obviously thought there was another reason but didn't want to spook the new guy.

"We'll have to introduce you to the girls before their bed time. Why don't you drop your bag off and we'll get going," the woman said. The smile was back on her face again. James followed her back down the corridor and into the drab one again.

It wasn't as bad as he thought. Sure the dormitory was as barren as the other rooms, but they had six feet tall windows giving them a view of the garden and the woods outside. The curtains were drawn now though. More importantly the young girls he was assigned to didn't seem too bad so far, most of them stared at him quizzically as he was introduced to them. The ones that could talk, politely greeted him afterwards.

He had tried not to, but he had noticed one of the girls was sitting on her bed already, absorbed with playing with her doll. Her back was towards him so he couldn't see her face. James knew he didn't have to though. He would have spotted Jessie out of the crowd, even at that age.

The women still on duty were now putting all the girls to bed. He had been told to wait until his shift officially started and oversee what the others were doing. He couldn't help but veer his attention to the lone girl from before. She had tucked herself in and he noticed none of the other carers had even looked at her, let alone gone over to check on her.

His attention was disrupted when another woman walked over to him. A chirpy smile was planted on her face. "You're the new guy, Mr Michaels right? I'm Anna Phillips."

"Nice to meet you," he smiled back at her. "So, do they usually break the newbies in with the night shift?"

The woman chuckled. "Not usually, they must have high hopes for you. Before it gets too late and we have to do the swap, I'll talk you through the ropes."

She lead him over to a table in the centre of the room. The other carers were making their way to one of the two exits. Anna quickly reached across to switch the lamp on the table on. Seconds later the other carers had turned off the main lights before leaving. The light on the table was dim, but enough for James and Anna to see. The rest of the room was clouded in darkness.

Anna hovered her hand over a tiny computer panel on the table, her finger rested on one of the buttons. Two cups shimmered into existence. "I hope you're a coffee person."

"Yeah, it's sort of a family tradition," James commented.

Anna smiled as she picked up one of the cups, he picked up the other. "There's not really much to tell you. You've done this sort of work before, I'm told."

Luckily it was so dark she couldn't see James' eyes shifting nervously to one side. "I guess."

"I imagine the other girls will fill you in on this too but there is one thing you need to know, especially as they've stuck you on nights for the first shift," Anna said.

"They've already told me about the rules for working with the girls," James said.

Anna shook her head, she hunched over the table and lowered her voice. "Not that. The girls have a habit of waking up in the middle of the night."

"They're babies, I'm not surprised," James remarked.

"It started with one of the girls crying about some bogey man, now all the girls do it," Anna continued. She noticed in the dim light James' face frowned. "I know that sounds normal, but they all describe it the same."

"*Bogey man under my bed?*" James guessed.

Anna smiled, "close. This Bogey man is in the same place, doing the same thing, every time." She turned her chair slightly, and then pointed her finger towards one of the beds. James looked over his shoulder to see which one she meant. It was too dark to really see who, but he did know it was the last bed on the row, in front of a window. "Standing at the foot of the bed, staring at her."

Cold shivers ran down his spine, he had just remembered that was the bed the ignored girl was using. "No, all it takes is one kid." He turned back to face Anna. "One kid to have that nightmare and tell one of their friends. Soon they all have it."

Anna lightly shrugged, "that would be true if they talked about it. They only tell one of us about it when they wake up. In the day, all that some will say is how creepy she is."

"She?" James frowned again, that part didn't sit well with him. "Bogey man would be a he, right?"

"I told you. He stands at the same bed and watches the same girl, every damn time," Anna whispered.

No, he didn't like this one bit. Now he was definitely sure the one girl who didn't join the group, the one who was ignored, was definitely one year old Jessie. She never said much about her life before she was adopted at three years old, but she did say that the other girls shunned her. It looked to him like it was a lot worse than that.

"That wouldn't make her creepy, that's stupid," he muttered quietly.

Anna looked confused as she noticed a little bit of anger in his voice. "Like you said, they're babies. They're afraid of this bogey man sure, but all they probably think about is why is he so focused on her."

"Shouldn't they be more scared for her, not of," James whispered, shaking his head.

"You're taking this personally, at least it sounds like it," Anna said with a wary voice. "It's not like she would notice any of this."

"A little girl wouldn't notice other girls avoiding her? You do know once kids get older they tend to attack the kids they're afraid of," James said. He looked down and muttered under his breath, "believe me I know."

Anna smiled sympathetically at him. "You're not the first one. A few days here and you'll see what I mean. It isn't just the bogey man. True, it's a big part of it. If it was just that we'd do something about it."

James rolled his eyes, "you should anyway."

Anna sighed. "She wouldn't notice. We talk to her, she doesn't even look at us, let alone talk back."

"Can she?" James asked.

"Yes, she can definitely talk," Anna shook her head. She was starting to get a little irritated, but it only showed in her eyes. "All Jessica does all day is talk to her doll. When she's hungry, she'll eat. She doesn't make eye contact either, she's just not interested. The only time we interact with her now is to bathe her once a week. That's it. The child looks after herself, at least as long as there's food put out on the table for her."

James shook his head while burying his mouth and chin in his hand. He didn't want her to see him biting his lip in frustration. He was struggling to believe all of this. Even though it was nearly thirty years ago, he remembered the day he met Jessie vividly. She was definitely shy, but not in the way Anna described. When he started up their first conversation she didn't ignore him, she talked to him back. If she had not said Jessie's real name, he would have thought she was talking about a different girl.

"We're not cruel, please don't judge as such. She's just a difficult child, nobody can reach her," Anna sighed. "It's very sad but..."

"You work in an orphanage," James muttered. Obviously biting his lip didn't help that much. "Jessica can't be the only child that you'd consider difficult."

Anna closed her eyes, quickly glancing down at the cup in her hands. She quickly stole a sip of it. "The irony of it is, she's the only one here who technically isn't an orphan. But you're right, we do have a few tough cases here. We're trained for it, just like you." Her eyes made contact with his angry ones. "You've obviously not encountered a one like this, that's why you're confused. Some children can't be fixed, and it doesn't help that everyone is afraid of her."

James shook his head in disbelief. "What did anyone do before these nightmares started? Has any of the kids even tried to talk to her, play with her? Surely the adults have nothing to lose by trying to talk to her. It's not like you're afraid as well."

"Some are," Anna frankly said. James' eyes widened, before turning his head to the side. "The first nightmare was on Jessica's first night. Why do you think they're scared of her? They think she's brought something with her."

"Not one person thought for a second that this whole situation has frightened Jessica too? Maybe the reason she won't respond to anyone is because she knows they're afraid. No one's on her side," James whispered angrily. Anna slipped a hand over his arm. "Someone should be."

"I thought the same as you when I first started. The other girls will tell you the same thing. It's best to just leave her alone, okay?" she said. "I know it may seem horrible, but we all think she's too far gone to help."

James shook his head again as Anna climbed to her feet. "I don't."

"Look, I like you. It sounds like you give a damn, which is a great thing here, so I'll give you some advice. I don't want another good carer to up and leave without notice," she said. He looked up at her with a frown. "Don't even try. As soon as you feel like you can't help someone, and she will do that to you, it will ruin you here. I promise you that." James didn't answer, he had no idea what to say to that. "Do you want to get some rest, or do you want to keep an eye first?"

"I'll stay here," he answered quietly.

Anna nodded. "There are twelve other girls in this group. They need your attention just as much, remember that." She walked away towards the nearest door.

It had been a couple of hours since Anna left James alone with the sleeping children. It had been uneventful, none of the girls had woken up from the nightmare he had been told about. They all seemed to be sleeping peacefully.

He ordered a second cup of coffee from the replicator on the table. His hand reached to grab the handle when he saw a shadow in the corner of his eye. He slowly turned his head a touch in that direction. He couldn't see anything more than a tiny patch, darker than the rest of the blackness. It felt like it was watching him, creeping closer to where he sat. Even though all his right eye could see was a black cloud, his mind could see eyes looking directly at him, watching his every move.

Enough of this, he thought. He swung his whole body around to face whatever it was. Nothing. Everything was normal.

The following morning, the sunlight rudely woke him up. The curtains in the room he was given were thin and white, like everything else.

Once he had reached the main corridor to the dormitory, he could hear one of the girls crying. He picked up the pace to get there, just in case. Anna stood at the door, mostly blocking his way in. Her face was pained with worry, her hand mostly covered it.

"What's wrong?" James asked her.

"Huh?" she was surprised, she hadn't seen him approach. "Oh, one of the girls woke up during my shift, about 5am. She was screaming, woke the entire dormitory up." Her fingers trembled as they approached her mouth, she was about to chew at her fingernails but she stopped. "The girls are wigged, to say the least. Little Suzy is still upset." Her eyes slowly lingered over in his direction. "Some guardian I am, I couldn't even get her to stop screaming."

"I'm sorry, I didn't even hear anything," James mumbled, looking down. He met her gaze again. "Has she said what was so terrifying?"

Anna shook her head. "Suzy can't talk. The most she can say is hello or please, and she says them *hella* and *plesh*. Don't worry about not hearing it, this is a huge place. Luckily nobody in the next room heard her, the walls are solid." Her whole body shuddered. "I'm hoping it's not the same nightmare as the others."

"Yeah," James said with a concerned frown on his face. "If she can't talk, she probably wouldn't understand the other girls talking about their shared nightmare."

"It's very unlikely, yes. That's why I'm hoping it's something else. If it's the same one, something weird is definitely going on here. We won't know unless she remembers later when she can talk," Anna sighed.

Another woman approached them at the doorway, she placed a comforting hand on Anna's shoulder. "Take a shift off, Ann. We'll handle it, try to relax for a few hours. Okay?" Anna only nodded as she walked away. The second woman turned to James. "You're the new guy, Michael right?"

"Michaels, second name," James quietly said. "Is Suzy okay?"

"Hmm, what a first day," the woman said with a slight smile. "She's better, yes. The poor thing was shaking for a while. I'll be frank, this stuff happens a lot here."

"So I've heard. Is there anything I can do?" James questioned.

"Your second shift wasn't until afternoon, but I won't stop you. The other girls may need an extra adult around. Try to keep them distracted, we can't let this situation get any worse."

"No problem," James said, but it felt like such a big lie.

Four tiny girls sat opposite him, each one staring directly at him like they were silently judging his every move. Luckily at least one of them wasn't really the silent type.

"Do you have kids of your own, Mister?" she asked.

"Uh yeah, th... two," James replied.

The girl squeezed her eyes part way closed. "Th... two?"

James smirked slightly, "yeah don't ask me to teach you how to count, I don't know how yet." Some of the girls laughed, but the others continued their stares of judgement.

"So why you look after other kids, and not yours?" the same girl asked.

James winced slightly, he had no idea what the person he was posing as's reason was. "That's a long boring story, and you've already had a nap."

"Why..." the usual suspect started.

Another girl cut in, "I don't wanna sleep. Bogeyman comes out then."

One of the other girls turned her head to her, shushing her. The very vocal girl huffed as she had been interrupted, her arms folded tightly.

"Have you all had the same dream?" James asked them all.

"He's real," the second girl squeaked.

"Why do adults never believe us? You're mean," the question girl huffed.

"I was only told by adults, so that's not really fair is it?" James said directly to her. "We shouldn't be talking about it anyway."

"No adults wanna talk about it," second girl moaned. "They ignore it."

"Well I kept an eye out last night, but I didn't see anybody," James said. All of the girls seemed to scowl at him, at least that's how he imagined it, they just stared. "Maybe he keeps visiting because you keep talking about him, so..."

"He visits cos of her," second girl butted in.

James sighed, he hid his frustration quite well besides that. "Who?"

"Creepy girl," another girl piped up. The others nodded. "He guards her."

"Suzy's bed is right next to hers," second girl said. "He probably saw her too and..." The silent girl began sniffing, she looked frightened at just the thought.

"Lisa don't, you..." James started to warn the second girl.

Question girl cut in, "are you going to run away like the last guy, Mister?"

"You don't know that he did," James answered.

"He did. He walked in when I saw the Bogeyman, he wasn't around anymore," Lisa said. The silent girl finally burst into tears. James shook his head, he reached over to pick the crying girl up and sit her on his knee. "Sorry."

"I think that's enough. We don't want to talk about scary things, do we?" he gently said. All of the girls shook their heads. "Okay so..." Another girl's cries interrupted him. The girls he was with didn't really react to it, they continued to stare at him. He looked around to see where that was coming from but he couldn't figure it out. Just then a fifth girl ran over to the group, clutching a raggedy old doll. She sat down with them, forcing the others to gasp.

"Ashley, you didn't?" Question girl stuttered.

The fifth girl pretended to look innocent. "Didn't what? We share toys."

James frowned as he looked around the group. "What, what's the problem?"

"We share toys here," Lisa explained.

"I got that but..." James said.

"You'll anger the Bogeyman!" the third girl snapped at the newcomer. "Give it back."

"No, we share, she doesn't," the fifth girl pouted.

Lisa sighed, "only creepy girl doesn't share. She has her own doll."

"I'm not scared of her. I waited until she left for the bathroom and..." fifth girl said. She noticed James looking towards her, she tried to hide her nervousness with smugness. "We share. She's greedy."

"She doesn't share, do you mean both ways?" James asked the others.

Lisa shrugged, "she only likes the doll. It's hers. Ashley's always liked it."

"It's not hers. I came here with a little pink pony, but I share it," Ashley protested.

"Creepy girl only plays with the doll though, you play with other stuff. Don't be stupid," Lisa snarled at her.

James raised his spare hand up, "stop it. Let see if I got this right. Even if they're your own toys, you have to share them?" Ashley nodded furiously. "But you took a toy another girl was playing with, and you think that's okay?"

"Told ya!" Lisa stuck her tongue out at Ashley.

"If it's the only toy she's playing with then..." James started to say.

"Creepy girl upset, Bogeyman angry," third girl squeaked, she looked worried.

James closed his eyes and took a deep breath. That was really starting to annoy him now. "Creepy girl stops here. She has a name, doesn't she?" All of the girls but the one on his lap pouted. "The doll was hers when she was brought here, right?"

Ashley nodded, "but I had to share."

"If it's the only thing she plays with, let her have it. Give it back," James told her. Ashley clutched the doll even tighter, stubbornly pouting her lips. "I'm not asking."

"Hmph, mean old man," Ashley huffed, she didn't budge.

James sighed again as another carer approached from behind. "I'm afraid it's the rules, Mr Michaels. Jessica left the doll behind, Ashley's allowed to play with it."

"To go to the bathroom, Ashley admitted that," James argued. "Come on, somebody have a heart. She doesn't play with anything else."

"Sorry, there's plenty of other things to play with. It's not like we're the ones keeping her from them," the carer said before walking away again.

The crying was still going on, it was really starting to get to James. He squeezed his eyes shut and again, tried to keep his temper. "Okay, I'll ask you." He opened his eyes again, looking straight at Ashley. "The only thing that you had was that pink pony. What if you were too shy or scared to choose anything else, and somebody took it from you. Would you like that?"

Ashley looked at the others, her pout was slipping. Her head turned back with some of that stubbornness back in her eyes. "She's not scared, she's the scary one."

"If you really believed that, why take the doll?" James asked.

Ashley sighed, the other girls looked expectantly at her. She sighed in a huff. "Fine." Harshly she tossed the doll at her feet, and stomped off. "Don't like him."

"I can live with that," James muttered as he leaned forward to pick it up. The girl on his knee reached out to play with it.

"She's got a mummy and daddy you know," Lisa said.

"Who, Ashley?" James frowned.

Lisa shook her head. "Jessca."

"She *did*," question girl stated.

James shook his head, "it's not nice to gossip."

"It's true," Lisa said. "They died."

James knew that wasn't true. Jessie's parents were definitely alive. He didn't think too much about it, all of these girls were here for the same reason. "This place... that's why she's here."

"Uh huh," Lisa nodded. "Not real ones. Real ones scared of her. Other ones, dead."

"Why you gossiping, he said not to," question one said to her.

Other ones? James' eyes tried to widen, but he didn't want to give anything away to the girls. "I don't understand."

"That's why she's here, and so's Bogeyman," Lisa said. James shook his head. "Other parents dead."

"He doesn't get why she had more, silly," question girl groaned. "She adop... adop, ed. You can shh now Lisa."

Lisa pouted, "they dead, now she brings bad man here. We're all scared. Ashley was stupid to do that."

James sighed as he returned the baby on his knee to the other girls. She squeaked as the doll was out of her reach again. He climbed to his feet afterwards. "I promise you. If there is a bad man here, I'll deal with it. But I really don't think you should be scaring yourself with tales like that."

"Oh it's no tale," Anna said.

"That's not helping," James muttered.

Anna looked at him with some sympathy. "I'm sorry. Your first day here and hell breaks loose." She noticed that he still had the doll in his arm. "If Miss Richard finds out you took that from Ashley, you'll have a stain on your record."

"What, for dealing with bullying?" James said. "Cos that's what this is." He sighed, letting his shoulders slump. "I'm trying to figure out how to give it to her without..."

"Jessica was adopted as a baby, something like a month old," Anna said.

James quickly shook his head, "please, I don't want to know."

Anna frowned, she continued anyway. "A family with two children already. Two months ago there was an accident. Jessica was the only survivor."

"I can't believe..." James muttered, his fists were both clenched. He didn't want to know any of this, Jessie obviously didn't want him to. Since it had already happened, he really doubted that he needed to know this to fix whatever he had to. "Why did you tell me that?"

"I figured you needed to know to understand," Anna answered, guilt starting to form on her face. "Like you said, we get cases like this all the time, usually Starfleet children. I've never seen a child so broken. It's likely because..."

"I'm sorry but this is none of my business," James cut in. His attention went down to the raggedy doll in his hands. "I don't want to be some stranger freaking her out but for now, this is all she has left, so..."

Anna watched him walk away, she sighed deeply. The crying had long since stopped, so all he could count on was the memory of it. He wasn't going to forget it very soon. The thought that no one had really dealt with it made him even more upset about it. Eventually he reached the bed she was using the previous night, it was then he spotted her. She had not noticed him as her back was to him and the bed, her stare was directed to the nearby wall.

Thoughts about how to deal with this flew through his head. He didn't want her to recognise him later on and he certainly didn't want to frighten her. He wasn't sure if her original fear of men happened before or after this, and knowing paradoxes he worried that confronting her now may actually cause it. He figured the best way to do this was to give her it without her seeing him, but how?

It came to him, but right at that moment he heard her quietly sniffle. He carefully stepped to the foot of the bed to see how she was. Her curly black hair had stuck to her face, both of which were wet with tears. Even though he was close she didn't seem to sense him. James threw away his original idea, she may not notice it. He instead knelt down and gently placed the doll beside her and quickly straightened back up.

By the time she noticed and looked at it, he had turned his back on her. He obviously didn't see it, but she turned her head slightly back to see who had placed it there. A bittersweet smile spread to her lips as she picked her doll up and gave it a cuddle. James had turned his head back in time to see it, then he continued walking away.

Lunch time and tea time had been and gone without incident. During these hours the young girls were brought into a large hall, also baron like everywhere else, to mingle with girls of other ages. All he had been told to do was keep watch on his group of six, whilst a second woman known to him only as Miss Richard watched the other six and possibly Jessie.

Every now and then prospective parents were escorted to the hall, and they'd be shown around a particular age group like they were objects in a show room. He already understood why Jessie hated

her time here, but seeing that was just another layer to the cake. Some of the girls he looked after seemed perfectly normal so he worried that being in this degrading place too long would change that.

The group he had to look after were spread out in the room, so it was a little simpler to glance over to Jessie to see how she was doing. She sat in the middle of the floor on her own, mostly whispering to her doll. Even the older children seemed to be giving her a wide berth, he noticed. There was a lot of floor space circled around her. No wonder she always hated to be alone, he thought. The room might as well have been empty.

He still had no idea what Maxwell had wanted him to do. This nightmare the girls were having about her and the feeling that he was being watched last night came to mind. It seemed the most obvious answer, especially as he was given a bag with weapons, but something Maxwell had said gave him doubts about that.

"There are more ways to save someone."

When it came to time travel even just saying hello to one of the little girls may alter things hugely. Maxwell told him everything he did had already happened, it was pre-destined. Jessie was how he remembered her because of something he hasn't done yet. He shook his head gently. It still made him wary about what he said and did. For all he knew he wasn't here to deal with whatever was causing the nightmares. It was probably little things like giving her the doll back.

The big doors to the room burst open, interrupting his thoughts. Once again the two people in charge were showing parent wannabe's around. They walked across the room, heading somewhere for the back. They had the cheek to get so close to Jessie and do a detoured half circle around her like she was in a forcefield. Luckily Jessie had her back to this and didn't see it. It still made him mad though. He could forgive babies, toddlers doing something like this. They didn't know better and they were frightened. These were fully grown adults in charge of an orphanage. Avoiding a tiny child like she was infected with the Phage in plain sight of her, he felt that was worse than anything his father did to him. Normally he would have stepped in, said something, but if he was fired he wouldn't be much help to her.

"Mister?" a familiar voice behind him got his attention. He turned around to see the girl with the many questions behind him, looking up at him with her curious hazel eyes.

James knelt down so he was a bit closer to eye level with the tiny girl, she was still only half his height though. "Yes?"

"Bathroom," she said. It was an order not a question. He straightened back up, but crouched a little so he could hold her hand. It wasn't far, so he wasn't worried about being away too long. Once he reached the appropriate door, he overheard another group enter the large hall. Something about the air seemed to change. His head tilted slightly to one side so he could at least see through the corner of his eye.

He could never describe the feeling, but he felt it so many times in his life he could recognise it immediately. Whoever had just walked in to be shown around the child showroom was dangerous.

The little girl was tugging on his arm at this point. Her nickname for him got his attention. "Oh sorry," he said down to her. His hand reached out to open the door, his head turned in another direction. Another carer had seen him and was already on her way.

"Don't worry, I'll take care of her," she said politely. "Watch my group, please." He nodded. The rules about male carers handling delicate situations such as bathroom visits for the girls saved him. He didn't want to leave for a second. Whatever he was here to do, it had something to do with the new arrivals.

The group of older children he was supposed to watch temporarily was nearby, and his weren't far off so he didn't have to go far. James was free to turn around a little to get a better look at whoever came in.

There must have been only two people who usually show parents around, as this time Anna was brought away from her time off to do it. She had stopped not far from the doors to talk to the two men she was with. He couldn't get a good view of them as their backs were mostly turned on him.

His attention went to Jessie, but he was dismayed that he couldn't see her anymore. The previous group had walked another circle, no doubt, partially around her to advertise the children nearby. They were completely blocking any view he had of her.

He turned his head back to Anna and the strange men he had sensed. One of them was looking over his shoulder, directly in his direction. His eyes widened a little before turning back to Anna. James didn't like the look he gave him, maybe he could feel the same thing about him that he did. It's not like he'd recognise him.

For some reason Anna had decided to lead the two men over directly towards him. By this time the carer and the girl had stepped out of the bathroom. He gave her a nod as thanks.

"Anna, I thought you were off duty," James said, avoiding looking at the two men she was with. If he didn't he would have noticed both of them studying him carefully.

"I was but it's busy today. If we can find new homes for our girls, then it's a win," Anna smiled that chirpy smile.

Her intentions were pure, but she obviously didn't see anything wrong with them. "I see. They want a one or two year old, huh?"

"Yes. We're representing a family from another colony. It's not what you think," one of the men said.

James frowned. Anna hadn't noticed it, but he noticed the accusing tone he used. He reluctantly looked towards him. "Excuse me?"

"I apologise," the man said in an unconvincing manner. He didn't mean it. "I assumed you were homophobic and thought we both wanted a child."

"No, I didn't say anything," James said. The fact that they both looked like men never crossed his mind.

"Your tone said otherwise," the first man said coldly.

Anna finally sensed the tension and quickly came to the rescue, "Mr Michaels is new here, it's his first day. As an ex-nursery teacher he isn't used to the adoption procedure."

"Hmm, I'm sure he isn't," the second man smiled.

James' attention went for him this time. He figured he was probably right, they likely knew who he was. Or what he was at least.

"I was thinking little Lisa for this family. She fits the profile these gentlemen gave me," Anna said in another attempt to diffuse the tension. "What do you think?"

"I'm thinking it's a bit weird to have specifications on a child," James answered honestly.

Anna glanced at the two men then back at James, an uneasy expression was now on her face. She leaned in a little close to whisper to him, "I think it's cold too but what can we do?"

"Which one is Lisa?" man two asked her. His face seemed to hint that he already knew the answer. Anna didn't notice though. She smiled and lead the two men over to the group that Miss Richard was watching. Both men simultaneously looked over their shoulders to stare at James as they followed her.

He sighed a little before looking across to see if he could see Jessie now. The group had moved on thankfully, but that didn't make him feel any better. Where Jessie sat before was now just a huge

empty circle. He walked quickly forward to the spot, darting his head side to side to catch any glimpse of her. There was nothing. Panic started to set in. Had he made a huge mistake in talking to those men?

"No, don't wanna go with him!" he heard one of the girls cry. He swung his head over to the source. The two men and Anna had reached the second group. He noticed Lisa was trembling behind Miss Richard. The other girls had backed away too.

"That's all right, I don't think that's what the Johnsons had in mind," the man coldly said towards Anna. She sensed the tone and did nothing to hide her distaste in her features. The other man seemed to be looking towards the same empty spot Jessie was in earlier, he quickly whispered to his friend.

"Um, we don't tolerate this kind of behaviour around the children, Mr?" Miss Richard said to them both.

"Harley and I apologise. I think we'll have to come back another time," the first man said.

Anna's mouth dropped open in shock. She was about to say something when Miss Richard hinted she shouldn't with a hand on a shoulder. "This isn't a shop. We don't get new stock in every week. Please tell your Johnson family that we will deal with them instead or nothing," she said.

The two men just nodded. Anna had the unfortunate honour of showing them to the door. James slowly followed them, glancing side to side every now and then just in case Jessie had just moved elsewhere.

"She's not here," one man whispered to the other.

"She was. Maybe he..." man two whispered back.

"It's possible, but why?" man one whispered. Man two slowly looked behind him, spotting James. He was forced to stop as a result, the man gave him a warning with narrowed eyes before looking back. "We'll find her." All three of them disappeared through the door.

Jessie was gone but not because of them. Where could she be? He had no idea where to start. He thought there was only one way out, excluding the bathroom, and he was covering both of them the whole time she had been in sight. He scanned the room once again, not noticing that another one of his girls had approached him.

"Mr Cranky," she said.

James pulled a face before looking down at her. He realised why she said that immediately.

"What you doing?" Ashley asked, giving him the evil eye.

"Don't call me that," James said, shaking his head. "I'm just keeping an eye, that's all."

"Hmm. Creepy men came in," Ashley said. "Creepy girl ran."

James couldn't help but widen his eyes, "what?"

Ashley nodded. "Saw her. Ran that way." She pointed to the opposite side of the room to the main doors. He looked over but he couldn't see any door there, just tall windows. He was about to turn back to Ashley when he realised one of the windows was open, and they were low enough for a toddler to climb onto the ledge. He started to wonder if an idiot picked this place to be an orphanage.

James knelt down next to the girl. "Thank you for telling me." She smiled and nodded. He quickly walked over to the window, it lead straight to the garden. He knew that it was possible for nobody to notice a girl everyone ignored to slip out, but they'd notice somebody fully grown do it. He remembered that Maxwell had given him weapons and they were barely a detour on the way out.

Somebody would try to stop him, but that didn't matter anymore now. He quickly headed for the doors, ignoring the looks a lot of people were giving him.

Once James was outside he was surprised to see how much darker it was. The chill in the air reminded him that it was probably still around 5pm, and in the middle of winter. This wasn't going to help in finding Jessie, especially when there was a forest mostly surrounding the building. Why they would hide away a place like this?

He shook his head and continued his search. Movement at the far right side of the garden caught his eye and his head quickly moved to accommodate. He just caught sight of a little black haired girl squeeze through the fence and disappear into the wood. "No," he muttered to himself before making the first step forward.

Unfortunately he wasn't the only one who saw this happen. The two men stood by the gate to the orphanage, gave each other a knowing nod and exited that way in a hurry. James gave chase.

"You! I knew it. How..."

He didn't get the answer he expected or wanted. The only warning he really got was the sound of metal piercing the air. It was the last thing he heard.

The second man was only metres away, his eyes widened at the sight of his partner now impaled to the tree. The sword sticking through his chest slid out of him like he was made of paper, the body slumped to the ground.

The man knew he had to run.

The forest was so dense and it had gotten pitch black so quickly. James could only make out the silhouettes of the trees, but that wasn't what he was hunting for. The second man had ran this way.

Jessie was in here somewhere too but he was more worried that he'd not find either of them, and he'd go after her. He had to make sure he wasn't a threat before looking for her.

Voices in the distance got his full attention. Dead ahead, two of them at least. He recognised one. As he approached the silhouettes seemed to move. He maneuvered himself behind a tree as one looked like it was approaching.

Confident it was one of them, and was very close he threw himself at the shadow. They both tumbled to the ground. Only then he could see the man's face. It was not the same one that ran, but he got the same feeling from him as the other two. The colour of his eyes pierced the darkness, that was definitely not a Human trait. The man struggled to throw his attacker off. James' hand flew to his throat, he made it quick. He had to.

Demon or not, the sound of neck cracking under the strain of his hand always unnerved him. He shook it off and stood up, hoping to get a glimpse or any hint of where the last guy had gone. The sound of a twig snapping gave him a location, he didn't waste any time.

An ear piercing scream fluttered through the woods. It was a young girl's so James' thoughts immediately leapt to Jessie. He turned to run in that direction instead.

It felt like he had been running for hours. His head was racing. He couldn't imagine what would happen if he had failed. If she was in danger, mortal danger then he was responsible for this.

Finally he reached the clearing. He could thankfully see Jessie but she was not alone. She cowered behind a park bench as a man with unusual ridges across his face slowly approached her. As if it sensed him his head swung in James' direction.

This one was definitely demonic. Its eyes were a blood red except for the iris, they seemed to glow in the dark. It looked back towards Jessie, cackling viciously. The bench was taller than her so it obscured her view of this thing, at least now anyway. The demon kept its eye on her, seemingly not caring that James was there. It was odd but he saw it as an advantage to be taken.

James moved forward, grabbing the monster around the neck with his arm. He pulled it backwards back into the abyss of the woods.

"Slayer? Impossible," it complained before it was tossed to the ground.

"No, you're just weak," James said. He covered the demon's throat with his foot instead. It didn't really resist.

"There are none of your kind on this planet. How?"

That wasn't a surprise. James wasn't pursued by things like that until he was a lot older. What he was surprised about was the fact they were here and were after somebody else. It didn't know about him before, so it wasn't here from the future. That was one theory gone.

"You mean Humans? This is Earth you berk," he said.

The demon chuckled until the foot holding him down pushed further. "Do you really want to protect her? Your kind are bigger fools than I thought."

"I'm not the one about to die," James said.

The demon smiled, "you will be." James rolled his eyes. The sword in his hand impaled another one of these things. James pulled it back out when he was sure it was dead. It was quickly placed back into the bag on his shoulder before he headed back into the clearing.

He expected it but it still worried him, Jessie was gone again.

The clearing had lead into a small park on the edge of the town. He only just noticed then that it must have snowed a little while he was in the orphanage. The ground was still slushy and he could feel the salt grinding underneath his feet. The sun was gone, the air was feeling a lot crisper than before. He had to find Jessie soon.

There were people still walking around the town, surely somebody would have seen a tiny child running around with no coat on. He had asked everyone he passed by, but it seemed he was wrong.

An elderly couple approached him and were about to pass by him. "Excuse me." They both stopped in front of him. "Have you seen a small girl, about one, with black hair..."

"Yes," the woman answered. She pointed to a large building which looked like a small hotel. "We saw her slip in the snow. A woman picked her up."

James sighed in relief. "Thank you." The couple smiled and carried on walking.

"Are you her father? Cos she was in a state when Alisha found her. She hasn't said anything."

James could feel the judgement in her eyes drilling into him. "No, I work at the orphanage." The woman's deadly stare didn't let up. He quickly checked his pockets, and almost the bag to prove what

he was saying. "I had proof, I'm sure..." The woman who he assumed was the receptionist continued her stare, the other woman behind her must have been Alisha. As if one wasn't bad enough, she was staring at him as well.

"Her name's Jessica Annet, and I'm..." At that moment he found the PADD he was given at the orphanage, so he handed it to them.

"I see. She's had quite a fright," the receptionist said once she looked at it.

"Yeah er..." James mumbled. How was he going to explain this without looking bad? "Some of the kids didn't like the look of the visitors, I think she must have ran while some of them were... wiggling out. If you call the orphanage, they'll probably tell you the same. I'm sorry for the trouble."

The two women looked at each other with a knowing look. "Harley and Shanton," they both said.

James was surprised that they believed him and even knew what he was talking about. "They both stopped by here yesterday looking for the orphanage," Alisha answered his surprised expression.

"Yes, and not just us. They've spooked everyone they've talked to," the receptionist said. She gave her workmate a nod.

"I'll go check on her," Alisha nodded back. She turned around to step into the back room.

James sighed a little in relief. He really thought there would be a problem here. "Was she hurt? I was told she fell over."

The receptionist lightly shrugged, "well..." She and James both were startled at the sound of glass shattering in the next room. Screams soon followed with the sound of something crackling. They both were about to move when they noticed smoke drifting through the door.

Orange in the corner of his eye made his head swing to that side. His eyes widened. "Get down!" He didn't wait for her to listen, he dragged the woman down to the floor as a fireball shot through the nearby window. It smashed into the desk she was at before. Flames spread across the desk pieces, quickly spreading to the carpet.

"What's... why is this happening?" the receptionist stammered.

"I don't know, you should..." James said just as the front doors blew apart. More flames spread across the floor, blocking them inside. He looked towards the back room where it all started. The child's screams from there were hysterical, he jumped back to his feet to follow them through the thick smoke. In his rush his left leg grazed through the fire, but he wasn't going to let that slow him down.

The fire was scattered around the small room, black smoke choked the air. The only other movement he could see was Alisha's body struggling to stand up, then approach him.

"She's..." was all she could say before she needed to cough the smoke from her lungs. One arm went around her mouth to block the fumes while the other gestured to the back. He could tell without that. The screams were ear piercing and desperate. He didn't hold back.

The smoke was filling his lungs quickly as he reached the back of the room. James finally found the little girl trembling behind a chair. Her screams sounded painful, she would cough horribly, then go back to screaming as soon as she was done. Tears streamed down her black face. He quickly picked her up which made her struggle. He tried to ignore that and he made his way back the way he came, dodging the spreading fire. He felt her tiny hands squeeze his shoulder as her head buried into it. Her choked screams and coughs vibrated through his chest. He figured her screams must have been making her breathing worse, so he tried to comfort her by stroking her back gently. It didn't seem to change anything, but at least he tried.

Back in the reception, the two women had unlocked another door leading to a few steps, and a long corridor. "Back here!" Alisha yelled towards them. They entered the corridor as quickly as possible.

James then felt the same thing he did at the orphanage when the two men arrived, so he glanced back. Figures brazenly strolled through the fires at the front door like it was nothing to them. He quickly shut the door before they spotted them, and hurried after the two women.

At the end of the corridor was another door. They quickly entered it into another room. The chilling sound of the previous door opening got all of their attention. James quickly closed the door he was next to, span around and pushed his back against it. Voices echoed outside, they got louder and louder.

Alisha meanwhile opened the only window in the room as far as she could. Jessie screamed into James' ear as his body was jolted forward for a second. He felt the full weight of bodies throwing themselves at the other side of the door.

Nobody realised the ceiling was glowing orange, at least not until smoke billowed out from it. The two women looked desperately towards James.

"You need to get out of here," he told them. He looked down at the tiny girl in his arms while he carefully tried to pry her hands off him, which she resisted. Her screams grew more desperate as he lifted her forwards towards the two women. "Please, take her with you."

"But, what about..." Alisha stuttered.

This time it felt like two of them slammed into the door at once. "They'll get in any second. She can't stay here. Please, keep her safe."

Alisha nodded and then took a hold of her. James could only watch as the pair climbed out of the window with Jessie. Her screams still haunted him as they faded with distance. He waited to give the girls time to get away, while he removed a weapon from his bag.

When he felt like it had been enough time he swung it back through the door. He knew he got something with it, the sickening crunch he heard was obvious. He pulled it back out to his side, then swung around to open the door to deal with the ones he hadn't hit.

James could barely make them out, the smoke was getting thicker and thicker. There were so many of them there was no room to really move in the corridor. Their eyes each glowed maliciously through the smoke. If there was none he'd notice the two lying on the floor with bleeding holes through where their ribs would be, his sword stab would have sliced through in between them with no mercy.

The figure at the front scowled at him. "Where is she?"

James pretended to be confused, "who?"

The leader scoffed, then smirked at his friends as the smoke forced James into a coughing fit, he tried to control it but it was overwhelming. The group didn't seem to be affected by it.

"Having trouble breathing Slayer? It's probably something you can do without."

James was able to compose himself for the moment, but his throat was throbbing and his chest ached with every breath. "What kind of insult is Slayer?" he spat out.

The leader laughed viciously. "We could feel you outside, you can't fool us." His eyes danced as the smoke choked him again. "It's how you're here we don't get. Why don't you tell us."

James knew he wouldn't last much longer in this smoke. He was starting to feel drained as his lungs inhaled more of this poison. There was only way out without giving away where Jessie had escaped. He had to take out as many of these things as he could, but he feared he didn't have it in him to get them all. Nevertheless he decided to fight.

His left arm swung out to strike the leader, but he grabbed it right away. Good, they always fall for that. His right immediately attacked with the sword while he was distracted, but it was grabbed right

away. That never happened before, usually it happens so fast and they don't expect it. His whole body felt weakened, maybe he wasn't going as fast as he thought.

Both blockers laughed fiendishly as they pulled him forward into their group, each delivering their own blows as he fell through them. He tried to fend them all but there wasn't enough strength left in him to block once. Soon even the blows felt numb. He could feel himself falling. His ears rung to the jeers of the group. His throat felt like it had been ripped to pieces, the smoke tore down it like sandpaper scraping a jagged surface.

He blinked and found his sight was sideways, all he could see were clouded feet. His whole body shook as more blows were delivered. It got darker and darker until he couldn't see anymore.

A child's cries echoed over the darkness. A light smoke drifted everywhere like a morning fog. One man's voice screamed over the abyss but was soon overwhelmed by many other voices overlapping each other.

One voice became crystal clear; a young woman's, desperate and lonely. "I don't know Zack, I can't do this..."

The man's voice overlapped hers, "you can't take her. She's my..." The baby's cries and screams drowned his voice out.

A house began to fade in amongst the shadows, hazy and distorted. White, surrounded by green. Windows would flash a deadly orange and return to normal in a second. A shaded figure would fade in and out of existence at the front door. More of them appeared, and the windows would turn orange for much longer than a second. They appeared broken, black only for a split second.

Numerous screams howled from the house, disappearing into the nothing that surrounded it. Unheard and helpless.

The front door creaked open. Then the house charred from an invisible fire, the windows flashed to its broken state. Only the baby's screams remained behind.

A white flash pierced the area, blinding and unforgiving. On its wave images flooded his mind all at once. No, this was too much. *If you want me to understand this, you need to slow down.* As if the images listened to him they started to split apart, coming at him one at a time.

The man knelt on a carpet, his arms outstretched. His voice filled with pride and encouragement. A tiny baby crawled towards him, the green in her eyes sparkled. The image faded but the baby's laughter remained on the wind.

The man held a smaller baby, his smile was bittersweet.

She vanished, the man's expression was pained and his eyes screamed in torment. A shadowed figure stood in front of him, leering at the crib behind the man.

As sudden as they appeared they were gone, in their place a hole in the ground appeared. Fire was overwhelming the darkness, making its way towards the crib. The baby's cries were deafening. He wanted to stop it, this thought seemed to make the image fade away as if it were just a cloud of steam.

It was black again.

A woman's voice pierced the darkness, "we can't replace her with another child, it's not right."

"The children were expecting a little sister. We can't break their hearts like ours have been," the same man from before spoke.

The woman's voice suddenly sounded desperate, "I can't. We have to take her back. We both know... As long as she's in our family we will be reminded of what we lost." Her voice faded to a whisper, "I'm sorry."

Another man's voice cut in, it sounded very familiar to him. "She's not yours. Would you really trade your real family's life for her?"

"She's as real to me as my son and daughter are!" the first man's voice seemed to shout over something.

"They live, we take her," the second man's voice taunted him dangerously. The two men faded back into view along with the crib, the second one still hid in the shadows. The black nothing burned around them. "Or we kill them, we take her. It's really an easy decision." They started flickering into nothing while the hole replaced them again.

The man's voice turned into a gentle whisper, it didn't match his lips. "I know how hard it is, I feel it too. But our Jessica. Our Jess, she's been abandoned once already. I can't do that to her. We both chose to...." The menacing figure vanished, the other man distorted into a different position. A young woman faded in beside him. The tiny baby was back in his arms, wrapped in a pink blanket. They were both smiling, but their eyes were conflicted.

The dark figure walked straight through them, brushing their image aside into nothing. Fire burned around him, then his face was seen. The leader who wanted to take Jessie, he leered at him. The man stubbornly appeared again in front of the monster, and tackled him to the floor. It creaked and quickly collapsed under the strain, taking them with it.

The fire spread to the crib. The girl inside cowered in the corner, squeezing her doll to her chest, screaming for help. It appeared to surround the crib. A sparkling blue light seemed to block its path, protecting it.

The fire faded away in the breeze. Only then a bedroom seemed to fade in around the crib, but it was black, all the furniture was destroyed. All that could be heard was a soft, timid cry come from inside the crib. Untouched by the fire, it was all that could be seen easily in the black abyss. The girl shivered as she looked around at the hell she was in. Her head buried into her knees as she cuddled her own legs.

Everything faded away before a bright light washed over once again. It was a lot more focused on one spot, it was coming from somewhere for the first time. James felt he could control something, even if it was just his eyes shutting slightly to block it out. He could feel a presence, a real one. Now he could feel a lot more, he could move. He was very aware that he was lying down on something soft. The light started to dim, he turned his head away from it. A blur soon cleared itself it up into a woman's smiling face. The familiar sound of a tricorder accompanied her.

"It's all right, try not to move," she said.

He tried to speak to her but his throat felt clogged up, it only made him cough.

"You were lucky. Any longer and I wouldn't have been able to help you." She hovered a device over his throat, soothing it.

"Did everyone get out okay?" his voice still sounded a bit raspy.

"You already know the answer," a harsh man's voice spoke from out of his sight.

The woman looked away, "Lieutenant Roves, you said you'd wait until I finished my treatment."

"He can speak can't he? Don't coddle the suspect," the man's voice grunted.

"Suspect?" James said as he sat up. The woman was about to stop him but he had beaten her to it. Now he could see where the voice was coming from. A man close to his age with dark hair and a stubble, it was the gold and black uniform that caught his eye. He walked over to the bed.

"All were accounted for, except one. A little girl," he said. All the grogginess was gone, he had James' full attention. "The two women who rescued her were found outside, beaten."

"Well clearly it wasn't this man. He was found in the building unconscious and also beaten," the woman tried to defend him.

"Why are you wasting your time on me? Those men who started the fire..." James said.

"You fled the orphanage you worked at, a girl goes missing from it. Your friends show up to retrieve her and leave you beaten, clearly to deceive me into thinking you're innocent," Roves told him.

James shook his head, "the Lieutenant rank's only a formality right? Maybe a cracker prize."

Roves threw him a dirty look, grunting in anger. "You took her and lead her straight to them. At the very least you gave them a chance to take her, did you not?" He slammed his hands on the bed and leaned in to give him an intimidating stare down. Being a descendent of the owner of the deadly Death Glare, James was more than immune to it. He smirked at his measly attempts. "Don't give me the *I'm just somebody who works there, looking for a run away* excuse. You knew these men."

"Perhaps you should try a simpler job such as Security fodder or a PADD delivery man," James didn't even bother answering.

All he got in return was a growl. "Greg," the woman tried to calm him down.

"What would an ex nursery teacher know about Security *fodder*? Enough of this," Roves stepped back. "Will he stay alive during an interrogation?"

"Yes," they both answered. The woman smiled briefly in Greg's direction, he wasn't very amused. "I still need to do further treatments though," she said.

"Time's a factor." Roves gestured to the weapon on his belt, "come with me. Don't even think of trying anything, I'm not alone."

James decided to comply and follow him for now. He'd at the very least look out for an opening to escape, he had no time to waste with this man. Once they got outside he found out that Roves wasn't lying. A dozen guards, all with phasers, lined the corridor. "Is that really necessary?"

Roves gave him a little smirk, "just in case your friends come back for you."

"You really like to be insulted, don't you. It kinda beats the fun out of it," James commented.

Roves' smirk changed to a glare, he turned his back on him to lead him down the corridor.

"I don't know them. All you're doing is wasting both of our time while a frightened little girl is alone with these guys."

"We have people looking for her. Don't believe we're incompetent," Roves huffed back.

"You have no proof that I'm involved other than trying to get her back to the orphanage. How could I not?"

Roves stopped to open a door, he gestured for James to go inside first. He did so reluctantly. Inside was another man his age, he looked very angry when he saw him.

"Is this him?" he hissed.

Roves smiled at this, he closed the door behind him. "Mr Michaels meet Mr Michaels. Is that proof enough for you?"

James tried to hide the worry he was feeling by rolling his eyes and arming himself with sarcasm. "Congrats, you found another guy with the same surname."

Roves started to circle around him, keeping eye contact. "Same forename, date of birth, place of birth, job offer, resume, parents names. Shall I go on?"

The other man charged forward, "you stole my identity to get into an orphanage, kidnap a girl and god knows what. There's a name for people like you."

"Falsely accused," James said, glancing away from him. "How do you know he's..."

"DNA never lies," Roves smiled.

DNA? This wasn't good. James tried to tell his anxiety that he just checked the other man's to compare the files. Roves meanwhile approached the real Michaels. "You can go, sir. I've informed the orphanage of this incident. They will gladly let you in."

"Thank you Mr Roves for clearing this up," the man said gratefully. He walked out, not without passing a dirty glare at James as he did.

"You knew it would come out, so you covered your tracks. You're a clever kidnapper, but you're not clever enough," Roves said, turning his head back to him.

"I'm telling you; files, even DNA information can be tampered with. I'm the real Michaels." He knew he wasn't going to believe it, but he still had to try.

"The file did show signs of tampering, very sophisticated. Once it was undone the truth came out. The question is, who you are."

"I told you."

Roves walked over to the only furniture in the dark, windowless room; a table. A laptop sat on it. He turned it around so James could see the screen. "While you were out we took the liberty of sampling your DNA, see if you match anything."

James was very white at that moment, he knew what was coming and he couldn't think of a way out of it. Anything he'd say would implicate him further.

Roves pressed a button to bring a personnel file up. "Tell me how you've tampered with this one too, *Mr Taylor*." He smiled, he knew he had James worried. "You look a little big for a one year old, don't you?"

"This is ridiculous. You honestly think I'm some kid?" James quickly said, feigning disbelief. "This is a stupid mistake, you're just wasting time." The man's smile was becoming a little smug. "Come on, that's not me. Don't you see how stupid this sounds?"

"You're right, it is. That's why you chose this file. Another ruse to keep us from your real identity. You will not waste our time further."

James shook his head, "clearly the men who took Jessica are doing exactly that. They've planted this here to keep you distracted."

"Oh, so this is their doing?" Roves pretended to look surprised. "You're a cruel man, whoever you are. I'll have to contact this boy's family so they can arrange a DNA test for him, his file is permanently damaged until we do."

"That's not necessary," James blurted out, regretting it immediately. Roves knew he was onto something. "You could probably fix it if you found someone who knew what they were doing."

"Like you, you mean?" Roves smirked. James shook his head and didn't respond to that further. "If I ask the family about you, do you think they'll know something or did you just pick the boy's file at random?"

"Enough," James groaned. "There is a little girl somewhere who needs help and you're wasting your time on some hacking. I know what I'd pick."

There was a knock at the door, Roves threw his head back. "I'm busy!" They knocked again. "Ugh." He reluctantly answered it. "What is it!" he yelled without even checking who it was first. He regretted that, "oh sir, I apologise."

"You're dismissed Mr Roves," another man's voice commanded.

"But, this man is..." Roves stuttered.

"Are you questioning my judgement, Lieutenant?"

"No sir, I'm relieved sir," Roves stuttered. He quickly dismissed himself.

James turned away, keeping his eye on the file. It was definitely his. The date of birth was right, name, his parents names. No picture yet as he would only be one year old in this time. Everything about this was awful. Demons had possibly kidnapped Jessie, and now his identity was almost out. If this Greg Roves contacted his father or worse, his mother, the timeline...

"I'm afraid we have a problem," the new man interrupted his train of thought. He entered the room. James got a vague glimpse of him through the corner of his eye. He was middle aged, white hair, almost his height, a stern face. This officer was wearing a command red uniform.

"We will if you don't let me go," he told him. It wasn't a lie.

"I can't do that," the man bluntly said.

James sighed in annoyance, "that girl needs my help. I failed her once, I can't..."

"Accessing that file alerts Starfleet Command, specifically me and a select few. I'm afraid Roves will not be able to issue the threats he gave you about contacting the family. Now I wonder, do you know why I'm telling you this?" the man said.

"What? No," James replied. He did have an idea what he was talking about. He had no idea though why his file was monitored this early, nobody knew about him yet. It did narrow down who, or rather what rank this man was. Only Admirals in this time would know to monitor a Slayer's file.

"The file is monitored for, how can I put this, strange events linking to it. I was alerted and here I am," the man explained.

"There's nothing strange about my involvement in this," James said.

The man approached by a few steps. "Where's my manners, I haven't introduced myself. I am Admiral Edward Janeway."

That name. James' eyes widened, the blood drained from his face. His mother had told him all about Admiral Janeway, her father, in one of the few times they got along. Things were getting messier, he had to get out of here. He definitely couldn't let him confirm his identity.

"I was the one who chose that file to be monitored. It couldn't be tampered with without my or other select Admirals knowing. We didn't get notified until Greg Roves did his DNA comparison."

"Not you too. That file has nothing to do with me," James tried to convince him.

Admiral Janeway wasn't taking his word for it. "James Taylor is one year old. I saw that for myself only last week. Your DNA matched his perfectly, care to explain."

James sighed, "it's a mistake."

"Impossible," Janeway said. He walked closer to get a better look at him, James turned a little to the side to stop him doing so. "Miss Annet was kidnapped. There were reports of unscrupulous characters who threw fire into the hotel she fled to or was chased in. The orphanage reported strange activities before this occurred."

"She could die if you don't let me go look for her!" James interrupted him, he had to convince him of that at least.

Admiral Janeway stood beside him, carefully studying him. "And then your... I'm sorry, James' file is accessed. It's not a coincidence."

"You're right, cos there's no relevance," James said.

Janeway surprised him by clasping a hand on his shoulder. Instinctively James pulled his shoulder back, but that made him face Janeway in those few seconds. "I'd recognise those eyes anywhere. I don't know how you've done it James, but you should know that time travel has consequences." James shook his head. "The longer you resist the truth the longer you'll stay here, and the girl doesn't get your help."

"If you really believed that this is a time travel thing, you wouldn't let me go anyway." Janeway smiled like he was confirming what he said. "You can't keep me here. My name is Michaels and I only want to return a scared girl back to her home. You and Roves are complicating things, and I really have no idea why."

"Just like your mother," Janeway said plainly.

James turned his head towards him without thinking, "what?"

"Once Kathy sets her mind to something it happens. Everyone else has to accept it, you can't fight her. You've got her stubbornness to a tee," Janeway replied.

"I don't know any Kathy, stop this," James said, turning his head back away.

Admiral Janeway shook his head in disagreement. "Your shoulders froze when I introduced myself. I wasn't sure if you'd know me or not until then. Kathryn told me she was leaving you in your father's care, perhaps she can be 'suaded after all."

"I don't know..." James muttered. He badly needed to get out of this situation, but nothing he said was helping at all. "You're mistaken. I'm not James, I'm not a time traveller and I'm not a kidnapper."

"Who is Jessica Annet?" Janeway asked instead.

James squeezed his eyes shut, grimacing slightly. If this was somebody else he probably would have knocked him out by now. He was running out of time. "The girl who we'll never get back if you keep asking me stupid questions."

"We have people searching. I mean, who is she to you?"

James couldn't convince him he was somebody else, his lies were getting him nowhere. Perhaps it was time for some truth. "I know where she could be, so can we just stop playing around and get her back?"

"Oh? In that case you'll tell me and I'll get the teams there," Admiral Janeway said.

Damn, that didn't work at all, he had just dug himself into a bigger hole. He remembered the sight of the men walking through the fire, how easily they overpowered him as a group. "You'll only send men and women to their deaths."

"So you're the only one who won't die? Why's that?" Janeway asked.

He knew the Admiral would pick up on that. James also knew he had started digging that hole he was in when he was knocked unconscious. After his DNA was taken there was no talking anyone around. He was a Security officer like Roves, and in his place he wouldn't believe him either. "You know for a Starfleet Admiral you seem to be really adamant about breaking your own directives."

Admiral Janeway chuckled, then smiled at him. "I understand your frustration, I'm not making it easy for you, am I? I'm afraid the cat was out of the bag long ago, it was just a question of when you'd admit it."

"Hmm," James sighed, allowing himself to relax a tad. "How would you ever know to monitor the file?"

"Maybe we can answer mine, it's a little more important right now as you keep saying," Admiral Janeway said. "Who is Jessica?"

"It doesn't matter."

"She's worth you travelling through time to save. If these things are from your time then we need to know before..." Admiral Janeway said.

"They go after me. They won't," James said.

Janeway did look concerned but he agreed. "I have a few teams monitoring where your younger self is living. Nothing has happened." He sighed deeply, "is she another... is Jessica like you? That's why I need to know."

"No," James replied.

"Then why would these creatures take her? If she's not like you then it must be to do with you."

"Thanks, you don't think I feel guilty enough?" James groaned.

Admiral Janeway looked like he sympathised. "I didn't mean it like that. Understand I have the Temporal Prime Directive to follow, as well as a secretive Slayer directive. They clash at the moment. I need this contained but I can't allow you to contaminate the timeline further."

"If I don't rescue Jessie... Jessica that's exactly what will happen," James explained. "I was shown what would happen if I didn't come here. What I do here is apparently supposed to."

"Including meeting your grandfather?" Janeway said in a bemused tone. "You called her Jessie. You do know her."

"Slip of the tongue," James muttered. What was with him today, he couldn't come up with a good argument if it hit him in the face. He shook his head in anger.

"She's either special like you or she's got something to do with you. I'm thinking the latter, she's your age and..."

James thought it was time to bite the bullet, he had already contaminated the timeline enough. "She's my wife. At least she was, if I do nothing she won't..."

Admiral Janeway wasn't shocked at all, he understood perfectly. "They'll kill her."

James didn't want to answer that. Jessie survives if he doesn't do anything either. "You were wrong. This can't have anything to do with me. They were surprised that Slayers were here at all, and it's not

like I have met her yet. She isn't like me but she is special." That was it. It finally came to him. That something that was missing from the Jessie he met in the alternate present. Her spark, the confidence she claims she doesn't have. The demons would have no way of knowing that she would be friends with him later. That left only one reason for the demons to take her. "She's special in a different way. They're not going to kill her, they want to take something from her."

"Take what?" Janeway looked worried.

"If I don't stop them the timeline will change to what I saw. I'm the only one that can," James once again didn't answer. "Please, just let me do this. I don't want to have to break out of here, but I will if needs be. Imagine the headache of *containing* that."

Janeway smiled. James thought he saw a little pride in his eyes, he swore he also saw a little of his mother in that look too. "You're Kathy's son alright."

"Does that mean?" he wondered.

"I only have your word. I can't make exceptions even for my grandson. Although I don't want to have to think of a reason how you escaped, but..." Admiral Janeway mused. "I will discuss it with the council first. Promise me you'll wait until then."

"I can't do that. This isn't just about Jessie and her future, this is about..." James said, trailing off. He had second thoughts about it, but if he was going to convince him he had to bring out the big guns. "The Jessie I know is miles away from Jessica. She's had an awful start to her life, I've seen it for myself. People call her broken, they're afraid of her, they believe there's no hope in there. I know better. I've seen what she'll become. These *men*, they'll take any of the hope she has left, destroying her. She became the woman I know all on her own, but I know it's us that need to give her the chance to before it's too late."

Janeway remained silent, listening intently. "She probably didn't even look at me, let alone trust me to be her friend. It's possible it took years before she ever said hello to me. I will never know for certain. But what I do know is the Jessie in that present was afraid of me. She looked uncomfortable around me at least, like I'd hurt her or leave. I can't explain it. My wife and best friend wasn't just gone, but our children too." Janeway's face turned a little pale at that part, he looked down to the floor. "That Jessie is what my Jessie always feared she'd be, I can't stand by and let that happen."

"You shouldn't have told me that," Janeway said finally. "Two weeks ago I didn't even have a grandson, now..." He shook his head, smiling slightly.

"You needed to know what was at stake," James said, mirroring what Maxwell said to him. "Just don't tell Mum, she'll freak."

Janeway laughed at him, "with good reason. It'll be between you and me."

"So, will you let me go?" James asked.

Janeway thankfully nodded, "I will, on one condition."

It looked like any other English housing estate, nothing really made it stand out from any other. It was only when James reached the end where the wide path turned around and changed into a narrow one leading to the woods, that the street took a dark, abnormal turn. Unlike all the others which were surrounded by wooden fences, this one house was cut off from the others with a tall imposing metal fence. The message *Warning: Dangerous, do not enter* was sign posted on many spots on the fence.

The house seemed to blend into the dark forest behind it. Its walls were charred black, the gaps where the windows probably were so ripped apart, it was hard to establish where the glass used to be. The front door had been left ajar, so the part hanging inside had rotted away to mostly nothing. The roof had collapsed in on itself, bringing some of the first floor down with it. All that was left of the first floor

was a lone window surrounded by barely a metre of bricks. Whatever room was there before would be exposed to the elements.

It was a grim sight. What made it stand out even further, in a dark morbid sense, was its neighbouring house. It stood proud with bright white, pebble dashed walls, a green garden filled with winter flowers, toys and a child's swingset. It just served as a tragic image of what the house used to look like before it was destroyed.

James looked at it for what felt like ten minutes. It was definitely the house he saw while he was unconscious, only now it looked a lot more sorry for itself than it did there. Only two months ago this was Jessie's home, now it was just an eyesore reminding everyone living in the street of the horror that took place here. It was also James' only lead to where she was now. It wasn't a big place, not anymore, so he was starting to get worried that he was wrong. Why else would he have *dreamt* about this house. At that moment he noticed something on the ground that looked familiar. He knelt down to pick it up, it was covered in soot but it was definitely the doll that Jessie carried around. He knew now he was in the right place, so he walked towards it.

The fence hadn't been touched at the front of the house. He followed it around to the side of the house where there were no windows, and then climbed over to the other side. As he approached the building he could just make out voices coming from inside it. He kept his back against the wall, edging closer to the front of the house, while trying his best to listen in.

"... heard something. Go check."

"It's probably the wind again. You're paranoid."

"We didn't expect one of those things here, we can't be surprised again."

James heard a loud sigh, then heavy footsteps. He kept hidden at the side of the house. The broken front door squealed as it was pushed aside. It took only a few seconds for James to see a figure walk out into the garden. He quickly turned his head back so he wouldn't be seen too. Even though he couldn't see him, he knew the figure was walking his way. The garden was littered with debris from the house, and his feet would crunch against some of it.

The figure was within inches of his hiding spot when he stopped. He hovered around for a bit, but as he couldn't see him, James wondered why. Was he being thorough or was he just planning the best way to grab him. The man's heel ground against a piece of glass, like he was turning around to walk back. This was his chance.

When James stepped out the demon had his back to him, his hand flew to cover his mouth while his other arm wrapped around his neck, and pulled him backwards.

"Listen carefully and I'll not kill you as slowly as I usually do," he threatened quietly. The demon could do nothing but listen.

The least damaged room in the house sat at the back of it. The fire appeared to have spread to the door to it and charred one side of it, but was put out before it got any further. The ceiling had a huge hole through it, the rest of it was intact, if not for some fire damage. The only sign that it used to be a dining room was the crushed table in the centre of the room, some of the smashed pieces of it pointed up to the ceiling and were stained with blood.

Five men had gathered in the room, all of them looked the same as the one earlier with the glowing eyes. Sitting nearby tied up and with tape on her mouth was Jessie. Her face was black from the fire before, the tears streaming down her face made it worse. With the tape all she could do was whimper.

"Are you sure it will be enough?" the leader asked his teammates.

"Of course. If we take anymore it'll kill her," demon two answered.

The leader scoffed, "I fail to see the problem."

"If she dies the power we will get from her will fade over time. Keep her alive and we stay powerful until she expires naturally," demon two said.

Demon three laughed, "or when she kills herself." The other two laughed with him.

"Aaw that's a problem, isn't it?" the leader taunted in Jessie's direction. She closed her eyes as more tears flowed. "Poor thing, all alone and so pathetic. Nobody loves you, how does that sting?" The others but two laughed coldly with him.

Demon two cleared his throat, "how fortunate for us, this way no one will know what we did. No angry witch mum and aunt will hunt us down to make us return it."

"Yes, thank *god* for bad parents, hmm?" demon four laughed.

The demon from outside made his way inside, straight for the leader. "Sir, the Slayer is here." The leader's face turned very sour, the others looked towards him. "He tried to get me to lure everyone one by one to where he is, the fool obviously didn't think that once I was free of him his threats were futile."

The leader's grimace turned into laughter. "Ah the classic. Very well, we'll go to him as he wished." He nodded to three of the demons in his group, then at the messenger. "Get Horax too. Make our guest feel welcome." He turned to demon two. "Tu, prepare the spell."

Demons three to five followed the messenger out of the door, leaving the leader and demon two, or Tu alone with Jessie. Tu turned to a spell book on what was left of the table to study it further. There were some strange bottles sitting next to it as well.

The leader knelt down in front of Jessie, she tried to shuffle away from him but it was difficult. His hand roughly caressed the top of her head, her eyes squeezed shut. "Okay my dear, this will hurt a bit." He gasped as a piercing pain filled his throat. He slowly turned to look behind him, just making out a small thin object sticking out of him. His own blood was choking him as it bubbled up into his mouth.

Demon two heard his distress, then looked up at the hole in the ceiling. He just had time to see a face smile at him before the same pain pierced his chest. Both of them collapsed to the floor. Fortunate for her, Jessie still had her eyes shut and her head turned away so she didn't see any of it.

James carefully jumped down, but no matter how careful he was pieces of the upper floor followed him down.

Meanwhile the other members of the demon group had reached the spot where he was hiding before. All of them glared at the messenger with contempt. "You fool, what have you done?" the one known as Horax snarled.

"I... it's a well known trick. How was I supposed to know that he knew that I knew," the messenger complained. The group stared blankly for a moment and shook their heads. They rushed back into the house, leaving him behind to sulk. He followed slowly.

Jessie cried and struggled as she was picked up, she didn't dare open her eyes. James tried to reassure her by gently stroking her back while he headed for the hole that used to be the back door to the house. She settled down but he could still feel how frightened she was. As soon as he stepped outside figures emerged from the woods, James didn't seem surprised or worried though. As they approached the fence it was clear they were Human and all but one were Security personnel.

"Take care of her," James said as he handed Jessie over to the Admiral. She cried out again during the exchange, only whimpering slightly as Janeway held her.

"Of course. Be careful," he nodded. He gave a hand signal to the team. They seemed a little confused but they and the Admiral returned to the dark woods to remain out of sight.

The group of demons charged out of the back door frame. James smiled, "what took you so long?" He turned around to face them.

"That was a dirty trick!" Horax growled.

"Where's the witch?" demon three said at the same time.

"I think you've got more things to worry about than that," James answered with a shrug.

"Don't get cocky freak. We beat you easily before and we will again," the messenger snapped as he caught up. The others glared back at him.

"That's funny cos I don't see any fire and smoke here, do you?" James said.

The demons didn't seem fazed at all, they charged for him. "Don't get it? Fine, I'll show you." Before they reached him he raised his right arm, revealing a crossbow sitting in his hand. His left hand reached around his back to pull a sword out of the bag he was carrying too. Horax collapsed half way with an arrow sticking out his chest. The first one to reach James was impaled briefly for his trouble. He abandoned the crossbow, grabbed him with that hand, pulled the sword out and swung him into demon four.

Demon three took a swing at him, he quickly ducked. The messenger demon took the opportunity to try and kick him in the head. Demon three was about to strike again when James grabbed messenger's foot at the last second and swung the whole demon like a bat at him. They both fell flying backwards into a heap, with messenger pinning demon three to the ground.

"Damn it Yufo, what are you good for!" demon three growled. He shoved the poor hapless messenger off of him so he could get back up. Demon four got back onto his feet as well.

James had pulled another weapon from his bag when the two on their feet charged for him, on both sides. He always liked to troll people or things that did this to him by stepping backwards at the last second, but this wasn't the time for messing around. Instead at the last second he pointed both swords in their direction. They both gasped as they impaled themselves.

By this time only the messenger Yufo was still hole-less, he struggled to get up. He tried to ignore the birds flying around his head as he did so. His vision seemed to be dancing around, but he could vaguely see what happened. The pair fell from the swords and onto the ground, James turned around to face him. Now he was alone he was reminded of the whole threat he'd received before all of this happened.

"Huhm er... I did what you asked, hmm? No hard feelings," he stammered, backing away slowly. Of course he was only going slowly as he feared that he'd fall back down from the dizziness.

James smiled as he quickly closed the gap between them. "No, no hard feelings. I keep my promises." Yufo didn't believe him, but it wouldn't help him one bit. He was right. His throat was grabbed and squeezed. "I'm curious, what would demons want with a witch's power anyway?"

"Uh we... er, against... um well..." Yufo stuttered furiously. He didn't really need to breathe so the throat squeezing didn't effect his voice too much. "You. Not you specifically. You know, ones like you. You know?"

James nodded, "I see." His grip on Yufo's throat eased off, and Yufo relaxed a little. Maybe he was going to go easy and/or quick on him, maybe he could get away, he thought. Suddenly he was lifted off his feet into the air, and then slammed into what was left of the wooden fence. James let go of the demon's throat, scrunching up his nose slightly. He walked away, leaving the still alive demon impaled in various places on the fence.

"Did that last one do something to upset you or say anything?" Admiral Janeway asked.

He sat down on the nearest seat, James stayed standing in front of him. *The last one was what?* "The fence one?" he remembered. "Honestly, I thought it would be quicker than leaving him to bleed to death." He was surprised when Janeway chuckled at that remark. "He did help, not on purpose, so yeah I..." He frowned as his grandfather was still laughing. "What?"

"You were very wrong," Janeway answered. "No matter, you took care of them all."

James shook his head, then looked around the familiar reception he was in. He didn't intend to return to the orphanage but he had a nagging feeling of unfinished business. Maxwell not returning for him helped with that feeling. "Did the rest of your team see all of this? I thought the whole point was..."

"No. They were returning little Jessica back here, I just wanted to make sure you were okay," Janeway replied.

"You never answered my question before," James blurted out without thinking. As he expected Janeway looked confused. "How did you even know to put my file on the watch list?"

Admiral Janeway's face fell, his laughter was long gone. "You grabbed my finger."

"What?" James muttered.

"When I first met you. You didn't mean to, and I tried to hide it from your mother," Janeway replied. "I knew what it meant. Only a select few Admirals are chosen to maintain the secret. Fortunately I am one of them."

"From a finger grab? What did I do, break it or something? If so..." James said.

Janeway shook his head, "don't apologise. You were innocent. No babies know their own strength, why should you be any different?"

James looked towards the door as Anna entered the room. She walked over to them slowly. He looked down at the Admiral as he thought about Jessie and the demon's explanation for kidnapping her. He wasn't wrong. Jessie wouldn't find hers for a very long time.

"Jessica's fine, well as fine as she can get," Anna assured them, but could only look towards the Admiral. "I still..." she reluctantly looked over to James for a second. "... Don't understand what happened, but..."

"We had to place an undercover operative here to flush out the kidnappers," Admiral Janeway lied to her. "I'm sorry we had to deceive you."

"I see, well the real Mr Michaels is looking after the girls for the moment. It's almost their bed time so whatever it is you want, can you please make it quick," Anna said.

"I... I just didn't want to leave without making sure she was all right," James replied. Admiral Janeway stood up to stand beside him. "Besides I have something of hers." He showed her to prove it.

Anna smiled warmly, she nodded. "Okay. Five minutes."

Most of the girls were staring at him quizzically. It was exactly like it was when he first arrived here. Anna smiled at them before turning to him. "The Security team told me that this Bogeyman the girls were seeing was one of the kidnappers, so we told them that he was caught. Ashley saw you rush out after those two that scared the girls, so..."

"Thanks Bogeymen slayer!" question girl giggled, she ran forward to hug his leg. Admiral Janeway couldn't help but laugh, especially when he saw the dismayed look on his grandson's face. The other girls did the same thing, apparently only needing one of them to work up the courage to do it.

"Um..." James could only say as they swarmed around him. He glanced helplessly at Janeway.

"Now, now girls. That's enough," Anna giggled as well. "I never said that he did anything." She tried to gently drag the girls away from him. "Jessica's by her bed."

"Thanks," James meant that in more ways than one. Anna understood, she smirked at him. As he made his way over to the last few beds by the wall, he could see Jessie sitting on hers, staring towards the window. When he reached her he stood for a minute, wondering if he'd done all he could or should have done. All that was left was this, he figured.

Slowly so he wouldn't startle her, he placed her doll on the bed beside her. Her head turned slightly as she must have seen it in the corner of her eye. The smile that formed on her face was more than enough for him, so he turned to walk away again.

Tears formed in her eyes as she picked up her doll, her smile grew wider. She looked up to see the man who helped her, only catching his back as he slowly walked away. She summoned the courage. "Thank you," she said so quietly it was barely louder than a whisper.

It was loud enough though for James to hear. He stopped for a moment to briefly turn his head, and smile for her. He could just see her looking at him through the corner of his eye. It was definitely a new start for her, he knew now that his mission was complete.

THE END