

## Episode 5.16

### Shadow

Everything was a blur. The slightest bit of movement seemed to stretch from where it started to where it ended up. There was a low hum emanating all around, which was only overlapped by a louder one for a moment at a time. The light was piercing, rough. Nothing about this place was gentle or inviting. It was dangerous.

Something soft and warm would occasionally touch and those feelings would fade into the background, if only for a moment.

The lights were so bright, painful.

One by one they all faded into oblivion. All that remained was blackness. Nothing was left.

Tom couldn't believe what he was seeing, neither did anyone else. Stars seemed to be moving back and forth, some even colliding with each other into a twisted streak. A distant nebula folded up over itself and back again. Where they were wasn't black either; a hazy dark blue coloured the entire screen. He swore he saw that move too, it reminded him of being under water.

"What is this place?" Harry asked for him.

"The real question is how come we didn't see it until we were in it?" Jessie said while pulling a sickly face. "Can we turn it off?"

Tom looked over his shoulder briefly, surprise on his face. "Remembered we get motion sick, Jess? There's another continuity point for us." Even though they didn't feel up to it, he and Harry raised their hands into the air for a high five. Harry didn't look so sure afterwards.

"I dunno, she is pregnant and I'm pretty sure that was just a transwarp or slipstream thing," he said.

Tom sighed in disappointment. "After the last few weeks you couldn't give us one thing to be happy about?"

Harry passed his friend a sympathetic smile. He raised his hand again, "remembered she's pregnant continuity five?" Tom smiled and fived him back.

"That would be like high fiving for remembering that Janeway drinks coffee," Damien muttered from opps. Jessie couldn't help but growl in his direction. "Don't blame me, I'm not the one who keeps knocking you up."

Jessie barely repressed a gag. "Oh god, that would never happen."

Tom figured he should change the subject back before things got a little messy, literally. He smiled at how proud he was for not being the stirrer. "So about this weird topsy turvy place..."

"You were the one who changed the subject," Harry smiled at him.

"I... that's just, how did you know what..." Tom stuttered. He sighed sadly. "You know me too well. Fine, I'm still curious though."

"I dunno, the computer says there's nothing out there," Damien shrugged, clearly not caring about anything that was happening.

Harry frowned in Tom's direction. "Surely we have many Starfleet officers who could take Opps. We don't want to be like original Voyager and just use anyone on the main cast list. I mean why was Neelix manning Opps during a cliffhanger?"

"I think you just answered your own question, Kim," Damien muttered. "If you really want a genius's opinion then it'll cost you."

"Again I ask, why is Damien here?" Harry asked.

Tom was too busy thinking to really answer him. "We've already done the Neelix was at opps in Unimatrix Zero joke. Repetitive joke shoulder slap." He patted Harry on the shoulder.

Jessie rolled her eyes. "God, am I the only one who's trying to stay on track? Since we're in a giant Game Sphere that copies parts of actual space, I'm going to say that this place isn't finished. Just my guess."

Damien stared at her like she had kidnapped his favourite rabbit. He shook it off but some of the anger was still there. "That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard. Leave the thinking to the people who know what birth control is."

Both Tom and Harry gulped the air, they quickly shuffled backwards to sit on their chairs, hoping they would hide them.

"Being stupid looking, not to mention so annoying that even Tom doesn't like you, and generally being so useless you can't even do villainy right does not count as birth control," Jessie hissed at him. She grumbled something with a few swear words under her breath, nobody really wanted to understand the rest.

Damien scowled in her direction. "Big talk for someone who can only attract the desperate blondes."

Jessie chose to smile at that comment. "So how is Mrs Damien of Nine doing?"

Damien's eyes narrowed, his face turned extremely pale. "Well played."

"Thank you," Jessie didn't mean it.

Tom leaned on the arm rest closest to Harry. "Any first officer-y advice?"

"We're doing it," Harry whispered.

Tom shook his head, "no not that..." He pointed at the viewscreen. "That."

"I should congratulate you. Not many girls make it to their hundredth accident. It's definitely an achievement," Damien sneered.

"It's not over," Harry winced. Tom did the same thing.

"For god's sake, has it ever occurred to you that this was on purpose?" Jessie grumbled.

Damien sniggered, "no. I am still waiting for a better story to top the love spell one though, humour me."

Harry decided to ignore them, well try to, he gave Tom a look to hint he should do the same. Tom smiled and winked. Harry grimaced in response. "Too much."

Tom looked a little ashamed of himself, "yeah. So, any ideas as to what this place is?"

Harry quickly peeped over the banister to check if Jessie's attention was still on Damien. He was shocked to see she wasn't at her station anymore. "Um, the Game we're in is corrupted?" Damien's laughter made him cringe. "I'm not taking her idea, no thanks."

"The blonde crybaby wasn't an accident? Classic! Next you'll be saying her idiot dad wasn't either," Damien continued laughing.

Tom dared to peep as well, he had a better view of Damien's side of the bridge anyway. He quickly ducked back down with his eyes wide. "Game Sphere corruption? I'll take it. I swore I wouldn't organise another meeting for at least another week."

Harry was curious, he turned his head back to have a look as well. Just in time Jessie turned her head his way, her fist only half way to its target. Damien was still laughing despite being held by the scruff of his shirt. Her eyes were a lot wider than Harry had seen on her before, he tried to turn back but his body had froze. "Can I help you?" she asked in a sweet voice. The smile on her face though didn't match at all.

"No," Harry squeaked. Suddenly he was pulled back down into his seat by two hands. He soon realised it was Tom that rescued him. "Thanks."

"No problem," Tom smiled. His body leaned further forward, the usual mischievous twinkle was in both of his eyes. "Who's she fooling? She and Jamesy don't try for kids, they just think about it and they appear. Right?" he whispered. Harry stared blankly at his friend, he backed away as far as he could so he wouldn't get caught up in the wrath of that comment. "Relax, she's too busy to hear me."

"Uh huh," Harry stuttered. He waited but nothing happened. He did hear the resulting face smack sound he knew all too well just behind him.

"I mean three kids is enough, but this is their sixth now isn't it? Though then again, they were secretive about the first one, and Duncan. Once Sasha made three it was time to stop. It wasn't time to say hey why don't we have another kid; bow chika wow..." Suddenly he was lifted off his seat by his hair. Harry nodded like that was completely normal.

"Eew," Jessie complained behind them both. Tom fell back into his seat, his hands quickly rushed up to tend to his sore scalp. "What the hell do you put in that stupid hair of yours? Snots?"

"No, apparently life saving hair mousse," Tom replied with a pained expression. He was about to make a run for it when a hand flew into his cheek. It was hard enough to make him stumble over the side of his chair. It also left him with some of his hair stuff on his cheek.

Harry slowly glanced up, daring to make eye contact with Jessie standing behind him. She was a little busy rubbing her hands clean on the banister. "You look pretty today," he said meekly.

Jessie didn't look as happy as he thought she would be, far from it. "Are you saying I'm not pretty usually?"

"I said prettier," Harry quickly lied.

For what seemed like an eternity Jessie narrowed her eyes at him, he didn't dare move in case that set her off. Luckily she smiled eventually. "Finally, someone other than the hubby noticed," she said as her hand went to her hair. With that all over she returned to her station.

"Phew, this is why I picked you to be my right hand man," Tom sighed in relief as he straightened back up. "Or in the literal sense, left hand."

Harry quickly leaned in close to him, "noticed what?"

Tom looked over to Tactical so quickly his neck twinged a little, the pain was excruciating. "Oh god. I don't know. The only difference I saw was she was a little bigger," he answered so quietly Harry barely heard him.

"Have you regressed a few years? With a pregnant Jessie, you'll get yourself killed," Harry whispered.

Tom shrugged and sighed sadly. "A Captain does what he or she has to for the greater good, no matter what the cost."

"Tom, you only distracted her from killing Damien. How is that good?" Harry muttered.

"Not that," Tom said. "Notice I waited a bit before I said anything. I just figured we could do with a distraction from everything that's going on."

Harry didn't believe him, one of his eyes squinted more than the other. "Uh huh."

The turbolift doors opened allowing Nathan to enter the bridge. He stopped nearby Jessie's station, he looked a little shocked. "Woah Jess, did you touch a sparking station or something?"

Jessie didn't get it at first, she stared at her brother with a bemused expression. "What? What do..." She then got it, her hands both flew to her wavy hair. "No," she growled.

Nathan laughed nervously, "oh okay, oops." He quickly escaped towards the helm. Before he sat down he got distracted by the viewscreen. "Woah again, what is that?"

"A dead brother," Harry commented.

"Mmm hmm," Jessie agreed. The look on her face was vicious.

Nathan continued his nervous laughter as he sat down. "Jessie knows I'm just teasing, we're cool. It's what siblings do. Right sis?" He didn't dare look, just in case.

### **Sickbay:**

The Doctor sat down in front of his desk, sighing heavily. Worry lines were all over his forehead. "I didn't know who else to call."

James looked across through the glass divider. Two of the biobeds were still occupied, but they weren't alone. Kiara was still standing next to one of them, watching the occupant intently. He saw her mouth open as if she was talking to someone.

"Is she awake?" he asked, turning his head back down towards the Doctor.

"Not right now. Ylara's been in and out of consciousness since her miraculous recovery," the Doctor looked a little concerned. "I still don't know how it happened. The damage just reversed itself like..."

"Magic," James finished for him.

The Doctor sighed and shook his head. "I wasn't going to say that in a literal sense, but that thought did occur to me."

"Jessie didn't do anything, Annika definitely didn't. Daniel's in a coma..." James said, ending on a brief smile.

The Doctor scowled in his direction, "yes, I noticed."

The smile had long gone, "and Craig well, all he did was read in unison. No one else could have done it."

"Kiara," the Doctor said like it was the most obvious answer.

James glanced back towards Kiara and the biobeds. "Has she said anything?"

"Who, Kiara or Ylara?" the Doctor questioned.

James sighed as he again turned his head back. "Either I guess."

"Kiara's talked, but only to her. I haven't intruded on her to listen in," the Doctor answered. "Ylara, no."

"No?" James said with a frown. "Not even a word, an attempt to ask what happened?" The Doctor shook his head. "You said the damage was reversed. She should be a little better."

"Yes," the Doctor's gaze went elsewhere. "Now that you mention it, she looked a little... distant. I doubt she even hears Kiara, and I find it a little odd that she of all people is here to help, or attempt anyway, to keep her grounded." His head shook, "that is mostly why I called you here. Kiara has been here since yesterday. Somebody needs to convince her to go home, even just for a few hours. I'd ask Chakotay but after what he did, I don't want him here."

"What, recently or the incident everyone knows about?" James said.

The Doctor sighed, "recently and I did report it to Security. You should know."

James shook his head. "I've been a little preoccupied lately, so I haven't been to the office or anything today... yet."

"It doesn't matter. Security was the reason Daniel was even here anyway," the Doctor scolded.

"I'm glad I could help," James smiled.

The Doctor groaned to show his frustration. "It would be nice if you grew up a little. Solving all your problems with violence..." He walked by James on his way to the main part of Sickbay. "... your non Slayer ones anyway, it's a little old."

"Hang on," James protested. He turned around on the spot as the Doctor walked towards the console in the centre of the room. "Daniel wanted Ylara to die painfully. He knew that the Leda was being sacrificed when he was doing the spell, but kept on doing it anyway, and *I'm* the bad guy?"

"You have no proof of that and no, that's not what I meant. Yes what he did was wrong but two wrong's don't make a right," the Doctor said.

"No, but in your perfect black and white world the bad guys don't get what's coming to them. They're forgiven and made to think they can do stuff like that again, cos no one will hold them accountable," James said. "People need to be punished and some people need to do it."

The Doctor glanced over his shoulder at him, a brief smile flashed on his face. "It wasn't something you needed to do, you did it to make you feel better. You're not the bad guy, but you're not the good guy either."

James shrugged, "and? I knew that already."

"Forget it." The Doctor sighed, he glanced towards Kiara. James saw that and did the same. "Kiara, I need to tend to my patient."

Kiara shook her head. "Plenty of room," she murmured.

The Doctor hinted at James before he looked back down at the console. James walked forward towards her. He was barely half way when he spoke up, "Kiara, can I talk to you?"

Kiara shook her head again. "She needs... I can't leave her alone."

"She needs rest and this is important too," James said, glancing briefly at the biobed she stood next to. He noticed the occupant's eyes were closed and her breathing was slow and steady. She was sleeping, he was sure. He lowered his voice, "please."

Kiara barely took her eyes off the biobed as she slowly walked towards him. "I'm coming back."

James nodded, "I know, but maybe some lunch first, okay?"

The Doctor sighed a little in relief as she did follow her uncle out of Sickbay, if not reluctantly. Her head was still turned towards the biobed and she wasn't in a hurry to go. James gave her a small nod just before the door closed behind them. He didn't have much time but he was going to use it wisely.

No sooner than he stepped forward, the door opened again. He faked a smile as he turned to his latest patient.

Voyager continued its journey through the haze, slowly and carefully. As a shooting star zigzagged across a moving nebula, something large flashed into existence and was gone within the same second. The starship slowed to a stop.

"What the hell was that?" Chakotay asked.

Tom stood up to join him, his eyes were wide. Everyone were now staring at the viewscreen and the blue they were seeing on it.

Nathan glanced down as his station began to beep at him. "This is even odder."

Tom sighed, "of course it is. What?"

"Just in case I did a full stop, but we're moving again," Nathan replied. His frown managed to get worse. "We're being pulled by some sort of gravity source. I can't explain it." Tom walked over to see what he was seeing.

Chakotay kept his attention on the screen. As he did the screen started to lose its picture, like it was an old analogue TV losing reception. All he could see was the blue haze was subtly changing colour and getting brighter.

"What's wrong with the viewscreen?" Jessie questioned.

For now Harry was back manning Opps. He looked a little confused. "Oh it's not the viewscreen."

Outside the same exact thing was happening directly in front of Voyager. Whatever it was, it was sphere shaped. Voyager slowly was getting dragged towards to it.

Tom quickly leaned over to reach his old manual controls, he tried to turn one of the levers to the left. Nathan stared at him like he was mad, he had no clue why he was doing that. Everyone felt the ship lurch to the left, while the viewscreen started to clear up on its left side.

"Tom?" Chakotay voiced his concern.

"The gravity pull, it's just like a planet's," Tom stuttered.

Chakotay frowned at him but looked at the viewscreen anyway. The distorted part did look spherical to him, barely peeping out of the right corner of the screen. As sudden as it all started it faded away, back to normal.

"It's stopped," Nathan sighed in relief.

Tom backed away from the station while wiping his sweaty brow with his arm. "Keep us going in this direction."

"One of us is right about this place," Harry said, glancing briefly in Jessie's direction. "It's broken or the Softmicron haven't figured out where to put everything yet."

"Or what they want to put in," Tom said ominously.

Chakotay shook his head, he went to go sit in the First Officer's seat but Harry coughed from afar. His eyes rolled. "Sorry, habit." He cleared his own throat and turned back to face the front of the Bridge. "If this is really a part of the sphere that's under construction, then the Softmicron will definitely notice we're here. Since we're alone, I think it's the former."

Jessie grumbled under her breath. Chakotay glanced her way with a slightly bemused look. "If it was a corrupted part of the sphere, they'll want to fix it. They'll know then too," she said.

"So what *is* it?" Tom asked. He sighed in annoyance. "I was so determined not to call another meeting."

"We don't know nearly enough right now. The Enterprise came in here too, so we really should keep following their trail," Harry said.

Chakotay didn't want to know the answer to this question, "who's in Astrometrics right now?"

Harry pulled a disgusted and worried face, it looked ridiculous. "I'll send someone else down. I assume you want to map this place."

"I do, if we can," Chakotay nodded. "Annika, or Seven knew what she was doing there better than anyone. Whoever you send needs to be almost as good or helped build the place."

Harry groaned. "You were okay with giving up the First Officer role, why would you do this to me?"

Chakotay pretended to look surprised, "oh, you Harry? I never would have guessed."

Harry smiled sneakily, Chakotay was genuinely surprised by that. "Fine. Then I'll call the previous Opps manner up here, once he's out of Sickbay of course." Everyone looked at him, each one with their own distinctive and silent way of telling him *don't you dare*. Chakotay seemed fine with it though.

"Now that you mention it, Damien is a know it all with strange stuff. Maybe he should be on the Bridge while you babysit Annika," Chakotay said. "Good thinking Harry."

Tom shook his head as he made his way towards the turbolift. "God, when I'm embarrassed for you, it's time to grow up. I'll get Damien and send him to Astrometrics. I'm afraid Annika will be doing the babysitting though."

Chakotay's eyes rolled as his body turned around to follow Tom. "We don't trust him, or her for that matter. As a matter of fact, why is he not in the brig and why is she not slayed?" The last part his attention went to Jessie.

"Hey, I'm James' wife. I'm not his boss," Jessie protested.

Tom glanced at her, he was very confused. "What's the difference?"

"Exactly what I was thinking," Chakotay muttered.

"We've tried killing Annika before, she always comes back. What's different?" Jessie huffed.

Tom shrugged and stepped into the turbolift, leaving Chakotay to answer that question. He smirked in her direction. "She's a vampire." He didn't notice Nathan behind him waving his hand face down, and pulling a *kinda* face. "A sparkling one made out of porcelain with a taste for stalking. It's so ridiculous

I'm surprised Fifth Voyager didn't come up with the idea, though I'm not surprised we're making fun of it."

Jessie smirked, then tried not to burst out laughing. "That actually sounds too funny to slay, or take seriously. It also explains why she was licking Damien's plate after he left." Everyone did the same thing; grimaced and turned pale. "Also the picking up empty yoghurt pots and stuffing them in her bra, if she even wears one."

"Jessie, please stop," Chakotay muttered.

Harry felt a little sick to the stomach. "Suddenly I'm not wanting to be here or in Astrometrics. Where do I go?"

Jessie shrugged. "Hey, I'm the one who should be easily sick, not you softies. Man up." Harry and Chakotay took offense to this and turned their attention away from her. Nathan just laughed quietly to himself.

### **Sickbay:**

The Doctor sighed in frustration as his patient wouldn't keep still. He was laughing way too much. Everytime he went to treat a different wound, he'd do something like double over and laugh harder or swap his laughing into his hand.

Tom also sighed but for different reasons. He knew what to say to stop this, but it made him feel a little sick to do so.

"I don't know why I bother," the Doctor huffed as he gave up. He stomped off to check on his two more critical patients.

"This is why I stay here. This place is so damn funny. I needed a good laugh," Damien snickered.

"Yeah swell, we'll try to fix that," Tom muttered quietly. He cleared his throat. "We um... need your um, expertise."

Damien smiled smugly. "Of course you do. What does that have to do with working in your Astrometrics lab?"

"You'll see when you get there. We've never been in a place like this before," Tom replied.

"As much as I like having people appreciate my greatness, I will not..." Damien said.

Tom groaned loudly, "I know, Annika stalks you and you don't want to work with her."

Damien managed to look even more amused. "That's true, but no. I'm not a member of your crew, I don't slave for you. I only went to Opps to annoy people, I was bored."

"Well, be bored," Tom grumbled.

"Hmm, no," Damien sneered. "What would be in it for me?"

Tom smiled. "A lifetime supply, or should I say an unlimited use of the replicator. Think, you can have all the Mississippi Mud Pie Muller Corner yoghurts you want."

Damien almost drooled at the thought, but his sneer grew instead. "They're not as good as they used to be, it's no longer got the chocolate crumble bits. That doesn't matter though, I hacked into the ration system anyway."

"I knew you'd say that, the hack part anyway," Tom wasn't fazed. "How about this? You work for us as a member of the crew, or you'll be chained to where the portal opened on Deck Thirteen. We need somebody to guard it 24/7, and heck since she's an immortal sparklepire, Annika can join you too."

Damien's sneering and laughter were a distant memory. He glared at the ex helmsman. "You don't have the stones."

"I not only have the stones, I have the delete code for the Mud Pies," Tom smirked. "Not that you'd find a working replicator in the two metre vicinity you'll be in."

Damien's eyes narrowed. Tom felt like he was staring him down, but he wasn't going to budge. It felt like hours before Damien finally let up and smiled at him. Tom tried not to look as worried as he felt. "I underestimated you." Tom relaxed and smiled a little. "Don't be so proud, I had very, very low expectations of you anyway."

"So..." Tom's smile faded. "What's your answer?"

### **The Mess Hall:**

Kiara stared out the window, not that there was much to look at. Before Neelix could scamper over and try to do his Morale Officer routine with her, James sat down beside her and placed a plate and a glass in front of her. She decided to stare at them instead.

"I know it's been a while, but you usually eat," James said.

"What did you want to talk about?" Kiara asked quietly, barely breaking eye contact with her plate.

James folded his arms across the table. "I wanted to see how you were after what happened. The last time I saw you, you were off to the Continuum."

"They didn't care," Kiara grumbled. She reached for the fork sitting on the plate, but all she did with it was tap the food and plate with it. "*As long as the timeline has not been altered, we do not care for such trivial matters.*" Q tried too but they wouldn't listen."

"Trivial? Lena and Ylara's trivial?" James muttered.

Kiara nodded, "of course. If you're not Q, you're beneath them. Why bother? It doesn't matter anyway..."

"Maybe not. Something happened," James said.

Kiara's eyes lit up, "oh, you noticed?" James' resulting frown dimmed everything immediately. "Yeah, she's no longer dying. Of course you noticed."

"Someone or something stopped it. Ylara was dying and then suddenly she wasn't," James thought aloud. He noticed Kiara staring in his direction, her eyes gave away all the worry she was feeling. She meanwhile wasn't quite sure what to make of his, they seemed elsewhere.

"Yeah, weird," she barely mumbled.

James lightly nodded, "yeah."

Kiara's shoulders fell, her attention went down to her plate. Her eyes briefly flickered upwards, noticing then his attention seemed even further away. She felt a little relieved, the conversation felt like it had turned into a test, almost like he suspected she was behind the miraculous recovery. Her head tried to shake that thought away. The food he'd gotten her looked nice, her stomach growled, it was enough to get her mind off what happened to Ylara for a short time.

Neelix decided to wander over, his Morale Officer smile plastered over his face. "How is our favourite Q doing then, hmm?"

Kiara felt a little twinge at the Q part, she tried to hide it. "Fine."

"Perhaps my popular Cake ala Neelix will make you feel better," Neelix smiled.

"Um," Kiara stuttered. The thought of a cake made by him put her off her meal. "I'm not hung... I'm fine."

Neelix was oblivious to her nausea as usual, his smile grew. "Oh a young, growing girl like you can handle that and a slice of cake. It'll put a smile on your face."

Kiara worried he wouldn't give up until he was force-feeding her it, she shuddered at the thought. "No thank you!" she squeaked.

"Oh, no need to be modest," Neelix giggled.

"I'm not," Kiara stuttered. She looked to her uncle for help, but he didn't seem to be listening or even looking their way. His gaze was still very distant. She was on her own. "I don't like cake."

"Oh my, that's ridiculous. Everyone likes cake," Neelix's sides almost split. He started to wander over to the kitchen.

Kiara quickly glanced again at James, but he wasn't going to help her anytime soon. She had no choice but to run for it. Once she climbed out of her seat he jumped like he had just woken up. His eyes widened as they looked up at her.

"Um... Neelix was er..." Kiara tried to explain.

"That's different," James said as he quickly stood up too. Kiara was pretty sure Neelix would have tried baking a cake before, if he hadn't she was even more worried. James looked back at her, concern planted on his face. "Neelix what?"

Right on cue Neelix arrived carrying a sloppy, green looking thing on a large plate in one hand, and a knife in another. It looked sorry for itself and some of it was even bubbling. James took one look at it before smacking the plate from the Talaxian's hand. It landed on the floor, making the entire room erupt into cheers and applause. At least until it started to eat through the carpet.

"Let's go," James quickly said, his hand went protectively across her back. She didn't need to be told twice, she rushed for the nearest exit. In fact once anyone had spotted the carpet turning black and smoky, they were doing the same.

Neelix was soon the only one left, pouting angrily. "Aaw, can't let it go to waste." He knelt down to retrieve it, using the knife as a serving spoon. One taste of it made him smile, but then collapse seconds later.

One of the stations beeped continuously behind him. He turned his head to one side in the direction it was coming from.

"Dare I ask?"

Harry sighed as an unknown walked around him to take his place at Opps. He reluctantly moved a little to one side, but still stood by it. "The trail's going cold."

"What?" Chakotay said.

"Whatever this place is must get even denser or just blocks our sensors further in, it's not clear. Nevertheless in about ten or so minutes we'll run out of trail to follow," Harry responded. The new Opps officer glanced nervously at him and back at the station. She soon got to work.

"Or it has stopped," Jessie said.

Harry shook his head. He looked back at a particular panel to double check before he made a fool out of himself. "I doubt it. We'd have detected it by now."

Chakotay turned back towards the viewscreen, "or..." Harry sighed in frustration. "It's no longer here."

"We're very close, we would have detected debris at least," Harry said.

"We have no idea what this place even is so we can't rule anything out," Chakotay pointed out.

Harry made a few more sighs and mutterings as he headed for his new First Officer's seat. Chakotay only heard the word *rusty*.

"There's nothing there, not yet anyway," Harry said impatiently. "I do remember how to use Opps, I know what I'm doing. The trail just stops."

"Fine. Our opinions and ideas do not matter cos Harry's always right. Should we keep the Leda on course or... oh too soon?" Chakotay said.

Nathan meanwhile was squinting his eyes towards the viewscreen. "What's that?"

Harry's bottom lip trembled, he could feel one of his eyes starting to water. He tried to clench his jaw and blink any tears away, all in an effort to look tougher. "There's nothing there. No trail, no ship, no debris!"

Nathan's head tilted to the right, "it's getting bigger."

Jessie growled in Harry's direction. "Oh good god, we're in a place where a ship, a planet or a star could just appear at any moment. Our sensors think there's nothing anywhere, so they can't find a way out. We lose the Enterprise trail and suddenly it's..."

"Exactly, we can't. It's probably still on course, trying to find a way out," Harry interrupted her. He regretted that immediately when he saw her face. "You two are the ones panicking, thinking it's destroyed or stopped when there's nothing to back it up."

"It looks black, like a black blob," Nathan muttered. He tapped in the commands to slow them down.

The Opps officer looked a little nervous, but she didn't dare interrupt the argument.

"We're only telling you to cool your jets and keep an open mind. No, as soon as you hear a conflicting opinion, you start stamping your feet like a little brat," Jessie said. "Prick," she muttered under her breath.

Chakotay nodded. "Anything can happen in this place. We need to be alert as anything could fall into our path."

"Uh speaking of which..." Nathan tried to interrupt.

The Opps officer barely made a squeak, but as it was silent for a moment everyone heard it and turned her way. "Um... short range sensors are detecting a large mass... um, in front of us."

Chakotay raised an eyebrow as he watched Harry rush back to his old station. "Isn't that interesting. All stop." Harry cleared his throat again.

Nathan glanced back over his shoulder. "Already done." His finger pointed at the viewscreen. Everyone else decided to look towards it, most of them had to squint to see anything. All there seemed to be was a darker and blurrier patch in the middle of the blue mist. Nobody could make out if the large whatever it was, was a small object almost in their faces or an extremely large object in the distance. The area they were in seemed so hollow it was hard to really tell.

"How did I miss that?" Harry said as quietly as he could.

"It barely registers. It's just a mass," the opps person almost whispered to him.

Chakotay briefly glanced back, "what? A mass still reads as something. Since it's this close, Harry the Wonder Kid should have saw that."

Jessie did the same thing as Nathan and tilted her head to the side. "Is it close? It looks like a huge... thing in our path, far away."

"No, it's definitely close," Harry said begrudgingly. "Kaitlin's right, there's very little to pick up. It's probably a rock or a..."

The object seemed to be moving, rolling to one side. Everyone who were watching caught a brief glimpse of red from it. It was very dim but in the dark it was blinding. It appeared to come from a thinner part of the object, which was quickly blocked by a larger piece of it as it rolled.

"Or a starship," Harry whimpered. As everyone tried to figure out the object's shape thanks to his remark, he quickly worked at his station again. "I'll see if I can extend our forward lights to get a better look at it."

The turbolift doors flew open. James rushed out of it, Kiara was behind him but a little slower. "We need to turn around, now!" he warned.

"Why?" Chakotay asked. Nathan was already keying in the commands, Chakotay rushed forward to stop him. "Wait a bloody second, he's not first officer anymore."

"Neither are you," Nathan scowled up at him.

"If we don't leave, we never will," James said. He rushed over to the nearby back station.

Harry didn't look so sure, his finger was hovering over the last command. "Maybe some context would be nice."

"I'll explain it later," James said as he worked as quickly as he could.

Harry sighed, he decided to press the command anyway. The black blur on the viewscreen was then attacked by two bright lights shining from below. Everyone looking could clearly see what the blur really was. Decked in a silver hull, the object drifted slowly onto its back. The belly of it was large and distinctive. They could make out the faint outline of a round deflector. The lights barely shone on the red they'd seen before, they cast an eerie eye shaped shadow into the void behind them. The lights moved to the right, briefly shining on text written on the object's saucer.

"It's her all right. USS Enterprise," Chakotay muttered. "What the hell happened?"

James tried not to roll his eyes, "we'll find out pretty soon." He was still firing commands on the back station. Only then people noticed that the lights themselves weren't moving, Voyager was.

Harry started to panic, he began to leave his station. "Wait, we've finally found what we came into the Sphere for and you want to leave?" Jessie started to look around for something, grumbling something under her breath. "They're in trouble, we've got to..." Something hard flew into his head, he had to stop to squeak, "ow!" Jessie sighed in relief and smiled.

Chakotay shook his head. "They're not going anywhere. We should leave until we can figure this place out."

"But..." Harry whimpered.

Jessie started looking around for something else to throw. Harry then realised what she was doing, he ducked way too early in advance. Then he noticed a shoe of all things lying there. "What the..." just then a second thing bopped him on the head.

"Shouldn't take too long to get out," James muttered to himself. He turned away from the controls. "Okay so..." he stopped when he noticed the pair of shoes lying next to Harry and the man himself

rubbing his head. His eyes widened in shock, "what the...?" He looked over to Jessie who just gave him a smile, he still couldn't believe it. "Wow, way to have my back Jess."

"Hmm why not, I love you more than shoes," she giggled, giving him a wink.

Chakotay felt a little sick, he looked around at everyone expecting the same. Harry just looked sorry for himself, Nathan was laughing, two ensigns seemed to be doing an *aaaw* routine, Kiara looked distracted, while the nervous opps girl was still being nervous. He ended up looking at James. At least he was how he expected; a little embarrassed.

"They must be a crappy pair of shoes," Chakotay said to himself. "How long till we're out?"

"An hour. We should erm... keep an eye on every little thing," James answered, getting a little distracted by Jessie's constant flirty glances. Chakotay cleared his throat loudly to help him out. "Yeah, I thought we'd skipped that phase in the pregnancy." He got another wink. "Obviously not."

"Eew," Nathan still laughed.

Chakotay sighed, "all right. Maybe when we're out of here we can analyse any data we got in Astrometrics. For now, we..."

"Panic?" Tom's voice said from behind everyone. He stepped off the turbolift, earning a groan from Jessie as he blocked her view. He didn't realise that yet.

"Damn it, I ran out of shoes," she grumbled.

Tom nodded, "that's a vote for panic, anyone else?" He frowned at everyone as he glanced around, "what did I miss?" He stopped looking around when he reached Jessie, he cowered at the glare she was giving him. "What?" was the resulting squeak.

"Budge over, you're not stare worthy," she snapped.

"Oookay," Tom stuttered. He did as he was told anyway, despite not understanding her. "I sent Damien down to Astrometrics and assigned Security outside. I tried to get Craig as we're running out of named people, but he wasn't answering. And you're here," he said in James' direction. "Never mind, I managed. He said something about it being useful, so I doubled Security."

Harry straightened back up using the station to steady himself. "We found what we came here for." Tom quickly stared in his direction. "Maybe that's what Damien found useful."

"Hardly. It's adrift," Chakotay said.

Tom shrugged, "I don't care. I told Annika that if Damien tries to leave, he's actually giving her a signal to kiss him. I don't even need Security." He smirked, a few others did too. "You never know though."

"That'll do it, but that's not it," Chakotay smirked.

James nodded. "I have a good idea what happened to the Enterprise." Tom turned his attention to him instead. He didn't think he wanted to know when he saw his face. "We'll have to come back for it."

"Come back," Tom looked confused. To him the viewscreen hadn't changed since he left. The black blur and the silver object was long gone. "Oh don't tell me, another vision? Maybe you can get these before we enter the strange blue-ey things next time, ey?"

"I'll try," James shrugged. Tom sighed in relief as he thought he'd get at least snapped at. "We've got an hour, so it could still happen."

"Check. What's the first thing we should look out for?" Tom asked.

James sighed as he tried to figure out the best way to tell everyone. "It wasn't in order, but I got the general idea. Lets just say when the unexpected starts happening."

Harry rubbed his head, his eyes widened soon after. "Like shoes and clothes addict Jessie throwing her shoes at people. Oh god, we're doomed!"

James looked worried for a second as well until he saw the looks Jessie was still giving him. "No, that's something else."

"Are we in the right range? Or should we only start worrying when Voyager stops to drink a cup of coffee or Neelix makes something edible?" Chakotay asked.

"Actually, yeah," James replied.

Most of the bridge crew looked a little relieved at that answer. Harry though got a little worried a few seconds later. "Wait, is that going to happen or is it possible for stuff as weird as that to happen? Can we go any faster?"

Nathan pressed a few commands and smiled. "Oh helm control's back." He glanced behind him, "we're already going at maximum impulse. I wouldn't recommend warp."

"No, you don't want two core breaches on your record," Tom commented, which he regretted immediately. His friend looked a little hurt and betrayed. "Sorry."

"No it's fine," Harry huffed. He made his way back over to his chair. "It's not like my core breach is the reason we're here in the first place. I wonder who's is."

This time Tom looked a little hurt, his bottom lip stuck out. "The Enterprise was *lost* in a blaze of glory. The Leda was lost to a stupid watcher playing Hocus Pocus," he blurted out defensively. Harry's eyes widened as his head swung in his direction.

Chakotay shook his head. "Oh dear, they haven't had a lovers spat in ages. It was long overdue," he smirked in James' direction.

"If anyone starts talking about something that sounds weird, and not usual Voyager weird, can you let me know?" he asked with a worried look on his face.

"Um, sure if we see something weird or if anyone reports seeing..." Chakotay's smirk disappeared.

"No," James interrupted. "If something weird happens to someone, they're not going to know it is and or care enough to report it. I can't explain it. Only witnesses or eavesdroppers will be able to make that distinction."

"I don't understand," Chakotay muttered.

James frowned as he turned towards the turbolift. "I don't either. It's just how I saw it."

"I thought you were going to explain it, is now not *later* enough for you?" Chakotay said. "I got that the last vision needed to be a secret, but it's a little too coincidental for the second one to be too. We need to be in on it."

Harry and Tom had stopped bickering and were staring at James, just like Chakotay was. The only one that wasn't was Nathan. He sighed and turned back around. "You're right, sorry. It's just a little difficult to explain it all. I'll try though."

Each step seemed to be lower than the last. The path ahead looked straight though, it didn't look like it was getting lower with each step either. Red lights flashed down the hall, each one looked darker than the last. The next step felt deeper than all the others, it made her lose her footing. Her hands reached

out to stop the ground from rushing at her. They slammed into cold, hard stone. The ground still looked like a grey carpet, she didn't understand.

She ignored it for now and pushed herself to her feet again. The corridor was not how it was when she fell. The corridors were no longer made of metal or flashing red. They were made of rock. The only light she could make out were from dimly lit torches that had been abandoned on the ground.

Something hit her from behind. She swung around to see a person overtaking her, talking to herself excitedly. The woman didn't seem to see her or care that she had bumped into her. The strange corridor didn't seem to bother her either.

Somebody else approached her, this time from in front of her. A child she hadn't seen before with red hair in pigtails. She was laughing and reaching out to nothing in front of her. This one seemed to spot her though, when she did she gave her such a scowl it was unnerving. Before she could ask or do anything the child swung her leg out at her own. The pain made her tumble to the floor again, the corridor seemed to spin around her.

The next thing she saw was a man kneeling on the floor, cradling his leg. He looked huge to her, she figured she was barely knee high to him. Behind him an animal ran around the normal metal corridors. She had a strange urge to run after it and give it a cuddle, so she ran. While she did so she heard a child's laughter ring out from her own body. A voice soon followed, "Baxxie, wait!"

Two more people walked by, each one giving her a strange look as they did. She had managed to tell the man to *shove it* without even thinking about it. She was no longer in control. Then it occurred to her that she wasn't before.

The corridor span again, it twisted and merged into another room. This one looked familiar. There were people, a large crowd in front of her clapping and smiling. She was sitting but she didn't remember doing so. Behind the people she could make out a large screen. On it was a dark blue which felt like it was moving. The chair and computer in front of it told her it was the Bridge, Voyager's Bridge.

The people in front started chanting one word. "Tom, Tom, Tom."

It looked ridiculous. Everyone were happy, some of the women were giggling or swooning in her direction. This time a man's voice emanated from her. "I know, I know," it was Tom's. "I've saved the day again, but there's no need. I'm just doing my job. I live for this."

The clapping and chanting got louder. She felt her cheeks get red, pride swelling in her chest. It wasn't hers, that was obvious. It was like she was trapped, forced to watch whatever this was.

One person appeared from the left and somehow walked straight through the crowd, like they didn't exist. "Tom," they said, but barely. It was almost like the voice was coming from far in the distance, but they were right in front of her. Her attention was focused more on the crowd, chanting and applauding her.

The person tried to shake her by the shoulders. She felt it, but at the same time she didn't. Tom's voice spoke from her again, "oh I couldn't. I'm married, but I'm flattered." The female members of the crowd looked disappointed.

In an instant it was dark again. Only this time she could still see this crowd in front of her, like they were still bathed in light. Something seemed to pull her backwards; she saw the Captain's chair, the tip of a blonde head, the banister behind it. They disappeared into the black as she stopped. All that she could see was the blue haze on the screen.

That disappeared as well, leaving her to stand in complete darkness. It was quiet for a moment. Something roared behind her, it started quiet but got louder in a matter of seconds. She turned around just in time to see a wave of flames flying towards her. It was too late but she flung her arms in front of her face anyway.

Suddenly there were bright lights shining directly in her eyes. They faded a little so she could see the ceiling. Her entire body ached, her head more so. Everything felt heavy. The lights were too strong and

she tried to look away from it. As she did she saw another body lying next to her, a familiar one, only a couple of metres away.

Even though she was looking away from it, the lights still pierced into her right eye. She had to leave. Unlike before, moving was painful and heavy. It took the very little strength she had to push forward slightly.

The Doctor was pleased with the results he had got. He had to try it out as soon as possible. He rushed out of the lab, through his office and into the main Sickbay. A look of horror appeared on his face. His hand flew to the commbadge on his chest.

"Sickbay to Bridge."

*"Paris here."*

Harry's voice chimed in afterwards in a childish manner, *"Paris here."*

*"Very mature Harry. I said I was sorry."*

Chakotay's sigh was loud enough to hear, *"what is it Doctor?"*

"Ylara, she's gone," the Doctor stuttered. He rushed over to the two biobeds. Daniel still lay comatose on one but the other was empty. "I didn't want to call Security as I didn't know what her state of mind was, I..."

James looked over to Kiara, both of them had the same look of concern on their faces. Kiara was the first to move, she rushed into the turbolift. He quickly followed her.

"I assume she doesn't have a commbadge on her. Is that too easy?" Nathan commented.

Chakotay nodded while rolling his eyes. "Don't worry Doctor, we'll find her. Is she in any danger, physically?"

*"No. I figured she was too weak to do anything though. I wonder what could have set her off. Sickbay out."*

Jessie's *hmm* got everyone's attention. She looked surprised as she didn't think it was loud enough. "The vision. James got one, usually Ylara gets a similar one hinting at the same thing. Perhaps..."

"Maybe," Chakotay almost agreed. "You think she'll come here though? She's not exactly clued in on space and ships."

"No, it's just I know what happens after them. He usually gets up and runs off, Ylara might do the same," Jessie said.

Tom tried to resist saying the thoughts rushing through his head. It was tough and he was very close to blurting it out when Harry kicked him in the shin. "Ow, thanks."

"For what?" Harry shrugged. Tom scowled at him. "You're reaching Jess. Ylara almost died from something that destroyed her brain and then healed it again. She's not going to be thinking rationally. She saw she was in Sickbay, heard the Doc singing and bolted. Or she wasn't thinking at all and just mindlessly walked out. Or she's possessed or something, and whoever's in there will wreak havoc and..."

Chakotay rolled his eyes, "nope, you're wrong. Here's my theory, which is correct. You're a fool for even bothering trying to suggest something so, so wrong." Harry stared at him blankly. "That's what you sound like today. Shut it."

"Oh, so Jessie's automatically right cos she sleeps with one Slayer, she knows them all," Harry complained.

Tom paid him back with his own kick in the shin. "No, she just came up with a reasonable theory and you shot it down without giving a reason. People come up with ideas, we discuss, we do. That's how teams are supposed to work, remember? What's happened to you?" Harry sighed in frustration and in pain, he turned his head away.

"Harry gets a ship, Harry loses a ship, Harry has a tantrum, the end. That's what happened. Now, back to important things," Chakotay said. He turned towards Nathan. "We're still on course?"

"Yup, another fifty minutes and we should be out of here. Not that I can see normal space on the sensors," Nathan answered.

"If anything changes, let us know immediately," Chakotay ordered. He looked to Tom who he expected to make a fuss, he only nodded. "James and Kiara are obviously going to look for her. A team or two should do the same, but shouldn't engage, just report her location. We meanwhile should deal with this hallucinating, power sucking type place, agreed?" He looked at Harry, "I bet you don't and have a better idea, huh?"

Harry didn't look very happy, he kept his head turned away from everyone.

"Okay, agreed. Everyone should stick to pairs. If anyone sees their partner or anybody doing something nutty, its time to call for red alert," Tom said.

"Who's going to babysit Damien and Annika?" Jessie dared to ask.

Tom smiled in a sneaky way. "I had the perfect idea about that, but now I have a reason to." His hand reached for the side computer in between the chairs, he pressed one command in. The viewscreen immediately changed to show an overhead view of Astrometrics. Everything looked normal to Tom's disappointment.

*"Of course, I'm such a genius," Damien muttered. He laughed. "Naturally." He seemed to be oblivious to Annika standing behind him, watching his every move. "If they think they're getting this information for nothing then they're as mad as Barbie."*

Chakotay's eyes rolled for what felt like the hundredth time that day. "What about the part where we actually need to see where we're going, and the sensors don't work here?"

Tom's shoulders fell, "fine, I'll keep an eye on them." He was just about to turn the viewscreen off when Annika reached out to smack Damien on the butt. He jumped a mile and turned around. She blew him a kiss. "Man, look what you did. Almost missed it!" He turned the viewscreen back and transferred the video to his computer.

"One of us should find out what he's discovered," Chakotay pointed out.

Tom smiled up at him briefly. "Say no more."

The Bridge was silent for once, with the exception of Tom's computer playing Astrometrics footage. It went on for a couple of minutes. It was almost rude to keep it that way.

Harry's almost timid voice was the one to break it. "It's not a hallucination, it's real."

Tom was too absorbed in his video to pay any attention. Chakotay heard him though thanks to the silence. He slowly walked up to him. "What?"

Harry didn't look back, his head remained where it was. "The way James described the vision. It's not hallucinations."

"How do you figure, or are you just disagreeing for the hell of it again?" Chakotay muttered.

Harry's eyes squeezed shut as if that would contain his anger. "Forget it."

"No, I won't fall into the *character gets told off for insisting he's right, nobody listens to him when it counts, and ends up being right in the end* trope. Unlike you I want to hear other opinions," Chakotay said.

"Just because strange things happen in the vision, doesn't mean they're having hallucinations. It could be, but it isn't the only explanation. People wouldn't see or react to them if they were," Harry mumbled. "That's all."

Nathan frowned slightly. "That's a good point."

Chakotay wasn't that sure, "he said the person it happens to doesn't know or care that it's *weird*, so we have to rely on witnesses or people they talk to, to report it. That sounds like hallucinations to me. Though the witnesses part could go either way."

"Who has hallucinations and doesn't think *hey, a pink elephant roaming the halls. That's strange. I think he's right*," Jessie said.

"We'll probably find out soon enough anyway. Even if we escape unscathed this time, we still need to get the Enterprise out," Chakotay said.

Tom glanced up briefly. "I think I may have to rewind this slightly."

### **Astrometrics:**

Damien worked at a station with one hand, the other was cradling a yoghurt pot. "I've seen this before. That narrows it down." His working hand picked up the spoon so he could dig in. His eyes meanwhile scanned the readings he was getting.

"So this Ylara girl. Is she prettier than me?" Annika huffed.

"Yes," Damien replied without hesitation. Two spoonfuls later and he frowned. He turned around reluctantly to see Annika standing there with her arms folded. "Is what, whater than what? I really shouldn't say yes to anything you say."

"Ylara. Is she prett..." Annika then scoffed and smiled. "Of course she isn't, no one's sexier than me."

Damien looked at her in disgust, it almost put him off his yoghurt. "Neelix is sexier than you." He rolled his eyes and turned back to the station.

"How could you? I thought we had something special," Annika started to sob. "We... we've known each other for so long."

"Don't remind me," Damien groaned.

"We worked together, we're friends. Obviously that means we're meant to be," Annika cried.

Damien barely glanced over his shoulder. "Have we ran out of bad vampire book jokes? What's this one about?"

"That's the problem, you don't think I'm serious," Annika stuttered. "Don't you love me?"

"No," Damien laughed. He finished his yoghurt and for extra emphasis he threw the pot backwards into her face. Unknown to him she liked that and promptly starting licking the inside of it.

Once she was done she got back to being sad. "What did Ylara have that I don't? She's dead, that means your feelings for her instantly disappear and you get with the hot one with giant boobs. Especially the hot girl with the giant boobs who you've known longer and not for five minutes."

Damien grimaced slightly, but because he was more confused than disgusted. "What stalkerish rubbish are we skitting now?" He reached out to start a different scan. Luckily he had one last yoghurt left to eat, his hand grabbed that afterwards. "She's not dead anyway. Apparently she recovered."

"Oh," Annika sighed in disappointment. "That doesn't matter. She obviously just gravitated towards you cos you reminded her of someone she loved."

Damien laughed again, "hardly, no one's like me."

Annika wasn't listening. "I bet you only liked her cos of some memories of another guy, probably a Tolg one, that were merged with yours. It would explain your behaviour change."

"Hmm, this has similar energy readings to Death Corridor," Damien said as he read the readings. His eyebrow twitched. "What behaviour change?"

"You're so selfless and brave but you act like this. I know the real you. I've been inside your head," Annika purred.

Damien's whole body shuddered in revulsion. "Eegads, stop it! You're starting to really creep me the hell out."

"If you're a villain, why are you helping?" Annika asked.

"God," Damien grunted. "If you're a vampire, why aren't you Slayer bothering. Go away!"

Annika pouted angrily. "I'm a good vampire. I'm a humatarian."

Damien stared ahead of him blankly, it was hard for him to do. He eventually shook it off. "This place, it shares some traits of that Corridor but the sensors still say there's nothing here. Wait, where have I seen something like this before?" he asked himself as he spotted something new.

Annika sighed as loud as she could. "Dilly dally, shilly shally."

"Wha..." Damien just mouthed. "Are you narrating your boobs again? Thanks for the warning." Just in case he was right he kept his eye on the station in front of him.

"No, that's *my milkshake*..." Annika pouted.

Damien didn't hear her thankfully, he was too engrossed in what he was reading. "Of course, I'm such a genius." He chuckled to himself. "Naturally. If they think they're getting this information for nothing then they're as mad as Barbie."

"Ylara's just some dead chick. I don't get it," Annika whined to herself. She took a step closer to him and armed the only serious face she had. Unfortunately it was her old bug eyed look she used when she was Seven. "So which is it? A memory or us?"

The look on his face made her hopeful. He seemed to be thinking about something deeply. His gaze was distant. A smile was about to form on her face when he just burst out laughing instead. "Oh, that's what stalker crap you're parodying. Subtle, I get it," he laughed as he glanced behind him. He got a glimpse of her huge eyes, it scared him into shutting up and turning back around. "Eew old bug eyed Seven, I dunno which is worse."

Annika reached out to smack Damien on the butt. He jumped a mile and turned around. She blew him a kiss. He shuddered once again and made a mental note to shower her touch off him later. His hand reached out to grab another yoghurt pot. Once he had opened it he remembered something. He slowly looked down at the yoghurt with a confused frown. "I... finished this."

### **The Bridge:**

Tom also frowned, he leaned in closer to his computer to try to get a better look. "Computer rewind to time index four point seven." The screen showing Damien and Annika in Astrometrics slowly went backwards, but not for long. It stopped to go in the right direction just when Annika was about to swing. He watched carefully at the spot where the yoghurt pot was sitting. "Rewind to four point one." The computer went backwards for a few seconds again, during that brief rewind the pot vanished into thin air. When it replayed it appeared as if from nowhere.

Chakotay looked a little impatient as he stood nearby. "What? You get some sort of kick out of Annika's flirtations?"

"No, who would?" Tom muttered in disgust. He pointed a finger at the screen. "Watch there. Computer rewind that again."

Chakotay watched carefully at the same spot Tom was looking at. When the yoghurt appeared he only made a *hmm* sound. Tom glanced up at him angrily.

"That's it?"

"What do you want? Oh," Chakotay groaned. His mouth dropped open, his hands flew up to slap both of his cheeks. "Oh my gawd!" he did in the most over the top manner he could.

Tom couldn't help but snigger. "Actually yes, that's what I wanted." Chakotay quickly scowled down at him. "Is this what James was talking about?"

"Probably," Chakotay sighed. "The yoghurts will keep appearing, slowly drowning and crushing us inside our own ship." Tom rolled his eyes, he waited for him to finish anyway. "In an effort to slow their progress, Damien will *sacrifice* himself by eating them all and dying horribly from the inevitable heart attack." He shrugged, "it didn't sound like the vision James described but I say we make it happen."

"You know, I have to say I find you a lot more entertaining than the old Chakotay. That guy was just a berk," Tom smiled.

"Berk... do you even know what that means?" Chakotay asked, narrowing only one of his eyes.

Tom's eyes darted from side to side. "It's a tree. You know, you were wooden and did nothing."

Chakotay couldn't help but laugh. "Fine, call James that next time you see him. In fact, call any English person that and let me know what happens."

"No, I'm not that nuts," Tom laughed as he climbed out of his chair. "That yoghurt appeared out of thin air. The vision had people talking to themselves, running after pets, power draining... you understand what that means don't you?"

"Season Five is all out of original ideas so we're recycling old plots from the prequels," Chakotay replied not seriously.

"No," Tom groaned. He shrugged, "well yes, maybe. I don't know." His eyes widened slightly, "possibly."

Chakotay groaned into his right hand, he moved it away to find Tom looking a little worried. "Damien said that this place shares something with Death Corridor, that's a clue on its own."

"Oh god, we're not only recycling old episodes, we're recycling episodes that were recycled themselves?" Tom started to panic. "When will it end? It won't will it? What if..." Chakotay's hand reached out and gave him a slap across both of his cheeks. It stung but it calmed him down somewhat. "I'm back."

"Yey," Chakotay muttered.

"One of us should talk to Damien and get the whole scoop. Everyone else, keep an eye out for strange things appearing," Tom said.

Nathan looked a little confused, "weren't we anyway?"

Tom nodded and glanced towards his mopey first officer. He gave him a knowing glance for it. "Now we know the strange things aren't hallucinations."

"If you don't mind, I'll talk to Damien. Something tells me he won't respond to you," Chakotay said. He headed for the turbolift anyway.

Tom quickly sat back down in his chair. "Sure, go nuts." He missed the smirk Chakotay sent his way as he was too busy staring at the computer screen. He reached over to poke Harry and get his attention. He wasn't going to give him it. "You're missing gold, come on Harry."

### **Meanwhile:**

The turbolift doors had barely opened and Kiara was squeezing out of the turbolift. She hurried down the corridor, paying no notice to the people walking by or standing around. As she reached a junction her head quickly swung side to side. On both sides there was nothing, she kept looking anyway as she tried to decide which way to go. Her gaze lingered to the left as the sound of water trickling got her attention.

As she walked along the corridor the noise got louder.

"La, la, cook my pretties," Neelix *sang* to the pot he was stirring.

For once no one seemed to be complaining about the noise. Everyone in the Mess Hall were too engrossed in their meals. The room was buzzing with people talking excitedly at one another.

The doors on the left of the kitchen opened for James and a random unknown crewmember. The unknown seemed to be in a hurry, not caring who he was trying to push out of his path on the way in. James barely noticed the light to him shove, but it stopped him at the entrance anyway. When the unknown realised he couldn't budge him, he settled for squeezing past him. The man quickly rushed over to join a woman at the galley.

"I didn't believe it either," the woman giggled at him. She handed him a spoon, which he quickly shoved into his mouth. The man made such a loud *mmm* it quietened everyone down for a few seconds.

James shook his head, then turned his attention to the rest of the room. After a quick look around he turned to leave. Just then Neelix emerged from the kitchen carrying a large tray of bowls. "Anyone for seconds?" James expected the entire room to evacuate, so he got out of the way of the door just in case he got caught up in it. When it didn't happen he turned back around to see what happened instead. What he saw chilled him to the bone.

"Me first!" one man screamed as he pushed one hapless guy down. The rest of the crowd turned on him, easily shoving him to the back. Neelix was nowhere to be seen, he seemed to be absorbed by the crowd. Several people squeezed out of the crowd carrying the bowls, each one almost drooling at the sight of it.

"What the... what the hell?" James could only muster.

"Sorry folks, need more bowls. Wait here now," Neelix's voice said from within the crowd. They soon dispersed to let him escape to the kitchen, though they followed him straight to the galley. One accidental shove was all it took to turn the crowd into a riot.

Neelix quickly escaped his kitchen holding a new tray of bowls with a terrified look on his face. Now the crowd were too busy beating each other up to notice he was there.

"Oh dear, you need to break this up," he said in James' direction.

James nodded but he was still a bit weirded out by what he just saw. "Usually I would just tell them dinner was ready, but that won't work this time." He glanced towards a confused Neelix, "did you figure out how to use the replicator or something?"

"No!" Neelix was offended. "This is home cooking at its finest."

"You mean like the dissolving floor pudding?" James said.

"You don't have a flair for names, do you? I do hope your wife picks your next kid's name," Neelix huffed.

James stared blankly at him. "Did you just compare my kids to the crap that you... oh never mind!"

He had to see what the fuss was about. He walked a tad closer so he could see inside the bowls. The idea of eating ever again vanished from his head, he'd never felt so sick in his life. The contents of the bowl appeared to be moving, luckily the movement only came from the large bubbles growing and popping. Most of what he could only describe as slop was a mushy pea green, the rest appeared to be white hairs sprinkled on the top. The best part was the mouldy looking slice of bread dipped into the side. "Did you get everyone drugged before serving dinner?"

"What kind of..." Neelix was getting a little angry.

"No, did *you* get drugged up to make this?" James asked him seriously.

A woman's angry scream interrupted them. They both looked over just in time to see a poor guy stuck in a woman's choke hold, he looked a little blue. Nobody helped him as they were too busy doing something similar.

"Make yourself useful instead of being mean to me," Neelix almost growled at James.

He groaned, "fine, I'll save the day." He snatched the tray off Neelix whilst holding his breath. He tried not to look at it as well as he tossed it over to the middle of the room. The entire rioting crowd stopped instantly, they watched the bowls clatter to the floor. An eerie silence followed.

"How could you?" Neelix stuttered, almost sobbed.

"Yeah, that won't work..." James said with a casual shrug. Just then the entire crowd, well with the exception of the guy who was almost choked to death, ran towards the bowls. They soon started fighting again. "... but I needed to do something fast." He rushed over to tend to the guy trying to catch his breath. No sooner than he did that he roughly tried to shove James aside and run for the crowd.

Neelix sighed sadly, "this is awful. It almost makes me want to give up cooking."

"We'd be so lucky," James muttered to himself. There was no easy way to stop them, besides maybe using a phaser on wide stun. He sighed as he seriously considered that instead of pulling them apart. They were obviously going to keep on fighting until they were knocked out. "Or..." he thought aloud as his head turned towards the pot in the kitchen.

Neelix followed his gaze and his eyes widened. "No!"

Chakotay arrived at the door to Astrometrics. He stopped outside to really think of a non violent way to approach Damien, but it just made him laugh. He stepped through the doors only to be greeted by a ghastly sight.

"Ehhhp eee!" Damien barely mumbled. Unfortunately for him most of that was muffled by Annika's lips being forcefully pressed against his. He was trying desperately to put her off by slapping and punching at her, even kicking, but she was having none of it. Her arms were encircled around him, one around his back, the other behind his head to stop his escape. She had even lowered him down so he was almost horizontal and she was leaning over him.

"Um, I can wait," Chakotay smirked. He grew a little disgusted the more he watched. He decided to step outside instead and wait for her to finish.

"Nooooo," Damien barely squealed.

Against his better judgement Chakotay decided to turn back inside and stop it. Once he had gotten the information she could always grab him again. He sighed and walked back in. "Annika I heard the replicator's giving away free catsuits."

Annika gasped, immediately dropping Damien to the floor. "Oooh, I'm getting a stripy pink one!" She ran for the door, but stopped once she reached it. She turned around to give Damien one last wink. "See you later lover."

Once she was gone Damien could no longer breathe well as he was too busy dry heaving. "Oh god... why?" he stammered eventually.

"She's crazy," Chakotay smirked. "I hate to interrupt you dying horribly but I need to know what you found out."

A very pale Damien pulled himself back onto his feet, he had to lean against the console to keep straight. "I tried to leave and she... she jumped me."

"That's nice," Chakotay said. "This place?"

Damien scoffed, he stared at him in anger. "I'm not doing anymore for you... freaks, until that bitch is slayed. Permanently!"

Chakotay rolled his eyes, "really? Annika dead, permanently. I thought you were supposed to be smart."

"That's too bad, cos you need to know what we're dealing with here," Damien muttered.

"Fine," Chakotay groaned. He tapped his commbadge, "Chakotay to Stuart." Just then he heard all the loud commotion from the Mess Hall.

*"I'm busy!"*

*"Oh my god, he's got the pot... get him!" one man screamed.*

*"No, you get him. I'm not that nuts," one man grumbled. The voices faded away into the background. Then there was a transporter beam. The voices started to get louder again.*

*"He's beamed it away, hurry!" one woman yelled.*

*"Great... now I've got to stop them from following it into space. Call me later, unless someone's dying." The room was silent once again.*

"That's okay, I'll just get one of his dumbass kids to do the slaying," Damien growled.

Chakotay had enough of him. He stepped forward to grab the ex villain by the hair around the back of his ear and yanked him forward. "I'll handle it, just tell me or I'll tell Annika you want to go catsuit shopping with her."

Damien squirmed in his grasp, he managed to smirk despite his situation. "Then I'll tell the freak what you really planned to do on that Tolg ship."

Chakotay's face turned a little pale, he let go of the other man roughly. "What are you talking about?"

Damien laughed deviously, "like you said, I am smart. I wasn't going to be a pawn in your little game. Nice try though, too bad about Janeway."

Chakotay resisted the urge to punch him in his smug face, he was almost proud of himself for it as the temptation was huge. "You're talking rubbish as usual. Now, tell me what this place is or its smooch time again."

"Hmph, I'll only tell when it suits me," Damien grumbled. Chakotay pushed him aside as he approached the stations. He had a good look at what Damien was looking at earlier. "You imbecile, you won't be able to understand it."

"I've seen this before," Chakotay said as he read it. Damien pretended to clear his throat. "Where?" He turned back around to look at the other man, "you mentioned Death Corridor. It's not even close."

Damien chuckled, "you lack any kind of imagination. Of course it's close."

"The only thing it has in common is the solid hallucinations we're supposed to get," Chakotay said as he pointed at an empty yoghurt pot.

Damien stared at him with amusement all over his face. "I thought the sleeping with Janeway only happened after you were promoted to first officer. It's obviously not your smarts, or looks for that matter."

Chakotay forced a smile on his face. "I'll get James to kill off Annika, smash her to tiny sparkly bits." Damien nodded and smiled in victory. "Then I'll tell him to smash your face in with whatever he used to smash her." Damien's smile soon vanished. "I might suggest something like a bulkhead or a shuttle, if he can pick one of those up for that matter. I could always replicate a sledge hammer for him to use."

"Stop," Damien grunted. One hand instinctively went to his face, "unlike you, I like my face."

"Well then you're in a pickle, aren't you? Sure James usually doesn't listen to me, but mention you or Annika and I'm sure he'll be happy to," Chakotay said.

Damien sighed, "very well, I'll keep it simple. This and Death Corridor aren't the same, but they're connected by the same thing."

"Connected. Do you mean it's a way out of the sphere?" Chakotay questioned.

"Hardly," Damien sniggered.

Chakotay resisted rolling his eyes for now, "then what is it?"

"It's... unstable," Damien smiled as his answer avoidance annoyed Chakotay further. "It's not supposed to be here, and since we have no company I don't think they know that yet."

Chakotay's hand reached for his commbadge again, "ten seconds."

"As I said, it's got something in common with Death Corridor," Damien said impatiently. "It's a gateway, and not a one we want to be sitting in."

The doors in front of Kiara opened swiftly. She was greeted by a cloud of steam thrown in her face. She attempted to wave it away so she could see ahead of her.

"Excuse me," a woman's voice huffed at her.

One final wave and she could see her. The woman was sitting on a bench encircling the room. Kiara's eyes widened as she realised the woman was sitting in just a towel.

"You're letting all the steam out!" the woman snapped at her.

"Sorry," Kiara stuttered as she stepped backwards. The door closed in front of her. "What the..." She was about to walk away when she noticed something else odd, this time with the door. The text on it read *Science Lab Two*. "Huh?" was her only response to that.

### **Engineering:**

Nobody had listened to him so far, so the young Lieutenant decided to brave telling the Chief Engineer. He meekly approached her, clutching the padd in his hand so tightly his thumb was starting to go white. She hadn't noticed him, but he did notice that she was smiling so he calmed down a little.

"Lieutenant. There's a slight problem with one of the bio neural gel packs."

She still ignored him.

"Lieutenant? One of the bio neural gel packs..." he tried again. Suddenly she turned to face him but she didn't seem to be looking at him. With a spring in her step she walked towards him. He quickly tried to get out of her way but there was no time. To his shock and horror she didn't crash into him, she walked straight through him like he wasn't there.

"I wish all days were like this," she sighed happily. The officers around her each nodded and smiled their agreement. "How often do we get a quiet, nothing breaks day like this. Keep it up everyone."

"Yes Lieutenant," was everyone's response.

The man stared bewilderedly at her and then everyone else nearby. Before he could do anything else somebody else walked straight through him. It gave him chills.

"Oh my god, what is happening?" he stuttered. "How am I going to..." The padd in his hands caught his eye, it soothed him somewhat. "I can't be dead or I couldn't be holding this. I have to find a way to tell someone." He hurried over to the nearest person to get their attention. They ignored him too. He kept on trying.

Kiara hurried down another corridor, her head darted around at every junction. She was starting to get a little desperate now that she had covered half of the ship so far. "I knew I shouldn't have left," she grumbled to herself.

She turned yet another corner which lead only to another turbolift. Around half way down the door opened. Who she saw step out of it made her gasp.

"There you are, I've been looking all over." She hurried down the corridor, but the closer she got the feeling of something not being quite right grew. Then something else happened that confirmed it. A smile spread across the face of the person, it was warm and friendly.

"That's what I was going to say," she said.

Kiara's eyes couldn't help but wide. Something was wrong here. "You're... but..."

"I'm better now, thanks to you," the woman in front of her said. "I woke up and you were gone. I went to look for you."

"I'm sorry," Kiara found herself saying. Her head shook, "no, you were not talking, you looked lost. Now suddenly you're okay?"

"I thought that was a good thing," the woman smirked. "Come on, we should catch up. I want to know everything." Her hand reached out for her. Kiara was tempted to take it but something felt very, very wrong about this. "I've missed you."

"Me too," Kiara almost whispered. "But this can't be real." The first time she blinked after saying that, the woman in front of her was gone.

Chakotay stepped off the turbolift and onto the Bridge. "We may have to take a chance at warp after all. If we don't get out of here..." He then noticed something very odd which stopped him in his tracks. "What the hell are you doing?"

Jessie groaned, "he doesn't care, he's been whining about not having one for ages."

Chakotay frowned at her briefly, then he turned back to look towards the command chairs. The barrier seemed to have disappeared. Not only that but Tom was sitting in a brand new chair, which he had reclined back so he was almost lying down. His eyes were closed.

"Tom!"

Startled, Tom sat up just to give him a glare. "Hey, Captain Paris to you."

"What the hell have you done to the Bridge?" Chakotay hissed. He marched over to where the barrier usually was.

Tom shrugged casually, "I didn't. I assume someone heard my suggestion."

Chakotay stared blankly at him before looking to everyone else for some help. Harry shook his head, he seemed in utter disbelief just like he was.

"I went to check on Opps and when I came back it was like this," he said.

Chakotay's next stop was Jessie. "Bathroom break," she answered with a nervous look on her face. "All right sandwich break," she said, showing him the empty plate.

"Helm boy?" Chakotay said.

Nathan laughed to himself. "Nice, really."

"Great," Chakotay groaned. He made his way around the chairs so he could stand in front of them. "So your chair and everything changes, not long after being warned that strange things will happen, and you don't question it?"

"What? It's only a chair. What's the big deal?" Tom said.

"I tried already," Harry groaned.

Chakotay's hands went to his hips, a glare was directed Tom's way. "I should have known Tom would be first."

"What did you beat out of Damien then?" Jessie asked.

"Mostly garbage but it does confirm that we're right to be leaving," Chakotay answered. His head turned to look towards the viewscreen. "He thinks it's a broken gateway, an accident, I think it's something else. We were warned to turn around but we kept going, following the Enterprise wherever

it went." Harry's face turned a little white as he absorbed what he was saying. "It tricked us, it lured us here. Once the hallucinations or whatever the hell they are get bigger, we won't be leaving. We'll be sucked dry and left for dead."

"Oh god," Harry stuttered.

Jessie didn't look impressed or even worried. She shook her head. "If the Enterprise was the lure, why is it powerless? Obviously whatever is at work here happened to it too."

"We're here, they don't need it anymore. That's why," Chakotay replied harshly.

"What did Damien say it was a gateway to?" Jessie asked.

Chakotay groaned in frustration. "He didn't. Does it matter? All he whittled on about was that it was similar to Death Corridor, but not in an obvious way. If you remember that thing's inhabitation didn't want us getting through alive. The Crazy Horse ended up, more or less, just like the Enterprise did after going through it."

Tom sat back in his chair to try and relax again. "This place must be the Death Corridor's nicer cousin then. There's no power drainage, what's the hurry?"

Chakotay pointed at him, "pretty much that."

"What? Damien got a new yoghurt, I get a new chair. I don't see what's so bad," Tom said.

Jessie glanced at the turbolift doors as they opened randomly. She shook her head and looked back towards the centre of the Bridge. "I'm not arguing against the danger here. I just don't think we were lured here by the Enterprise or anyone. It doesn't add up."

"I agree. The things happening aren't bad or particularly big, we're not far from the exit. If it was a trap, we'd be having a horrible time and unable to escape," Tom said. He felt his chair move slightly, he looked down towards the base of the chair quickly. There he found a familiar face not only looking up at him, but climbing onto the chair.

"Daddy!" Miral squeaked happily. With wide eyes he watched her climb closer and closer until she was head level with him. To his shock and everyone else's she gave him a cheek kiss, then cuddled into him. "I love you daddy."

"Oh god," Tom stuttered. He held onto her as he returned the seat to a sitting position. Carefully he placed her down onto the floor so he could stand up. "Let's get the hell out of here. Red alert."

Nathan's smirk was almost wider than his face. "So a brief warp jump then..."

"Brief? I want us at least ten lightyears from this spot," Tom stammered. He felt something grab ahold of his leg and cuddle into him. "Jesus Chr..."

"I thought he'd like that," Jessie giggled.

Harry smiled, "so did this place. Big mistake."

When the red lights started to flash panic started to rise in her. She quickened her pace down the corridor. Just one quick glance back made her miss somebody run out in front of her from around a corner. The person she crashed into didn't even notice her, they seemed transfixed by nothing in front of them. Her arms had widened as if she was expecting a hug. Stranger still the arms moved again to embrace nothing.

"Oh I've missed you so much, Jackson," the woman cried.

She backed away, but then turned to the left to go around the corner. There she saw a man lightly jogging around the corner, occasionally kicking the air. Another woman walked by him cooing at her own folded arms. That wasn't the strangest thing though. She tried to push her way past them, only to see a man confessing his love to an imaginary person, crouch on one knee and pretend to hold a ring.

Further down the corridor was a little quieter, so she slowed down. The entire length of the left of the corridor was a window showing the blue mist outside. Her eyes grew a little wider as she approached. Her hand pressed up against it. In the distant she could just make out a small ringed world, just faintly. It vanished suddenly.

She wasn't alone for long. A figure appeared from around the corner. Upon seeing her he stopped dead in his tracks, all of the colour in his face faded.

"My god. Ylara? You're okay," he sighed in relief.

Her head slightly turned to the left so she could see him in the corner of her eye. Her head turned back, then to the side again. After the second look she turned around fully.

"I... I'm sorry," Craig said towards the floor, guilt seemed to be weighing it down. He cursed himself inwardly. "Sorry. That doesn't make up for it. I was selfish and weak, I took it out on you. You shouldn't forgive me. I don't deserve it. I..."

"Craig, shut up," Kiara's voice grumbled. She appeared from the same corner, sending him a deadly glare as she walked. "She's not Ylara." Craig barely looked up and tilted his head towards her. "You should have known that, considering that you had a hand in it."

Craig used the remaining strength he had to raise his heavy head up so he could look at the other girl again. When he first saw her, her back was on him. Now she was looking towards them, her eyes were focused on their general direction but to him they seemed distant. Lost. They looked familiar.

"Lena," he whispered.

Kiara scoffed and shook her head. "Why are you so surprised? This is what you wanted wasn't it? To bring her back to what she would consider hell."

"No... I..." he stuttered.

Kiara's anger seemed to melt away quickly, it was replaced by a lump in her throat and a tear in her eye. "You wanted to be the hero. That's why you stopped me. I get it. I was wrong about you, you're not a good guy." She turned her attention back to the girl in front of her, she carefully walked towards her. "I'm sorry I left. James, he..." she shook her head. "It's not his fault, he was just worried. Like I am."

Craig meanwhile hung his head back down in shame.

"I realise things are a bit freaky right now, so why don't we go back? Back to Sickbay. Surely the Doc won't be affected," Kiara said softly.

### **Sickbay:**

"Of course he is," Kiara wasn't surprised.

The Doctor meanwhile was surrounded by a group of young women, each one of them laughing and giggling at everything he was saying.

"You flatter me. I'm only as good as my creator," he said with fake modesty.

"Oh please, sing to us again," one girl said.

Another girl nodded furiously, "yes please. Your voice is like velvet."

"Certainly," the Doctor chuckled.

"We'll find somewhere else," Kiara stuttered. She turned around to find that she was alone again. She groaned into her hand, "ugh, thanks Doc." As if on cue he started to sing in his opera voice. Kiara took a chance and ran to the right, hoping that it was the correct way.

Luckily she was, she managed to catch up right at the turbolift doors. "I'm sorry, I should have expected that. Eugh, those girls. Forget his singing, that's the creepy part."

"Girls?" a hoarse voice said to her.

Kiara's eyes couldn't help but widen. "You can talk? That's great." She sighed in relief, "that's more than great. Wait, why did you say that of all things?"

"I didn't..." Kiara frowned as it seemed like it was a struggle for her to speak. "See any."

"Any wha... girls?" Kiara said. She glanced back the way she came. "There were four of them, gushing over the Doc. You didn't see them?" She only got a head shake this time. "I did, that's strange."

### **The Bridge:**

"Are you crazy? You can't go to warp in here," James stuttered. Tom stared at him with very wide eyes. "Question answered."

Chakotay nodded. "He is, but why not?"

"I already told you," Nathan tried to interrupt. Chakotay angrily shushed him.

"That explosion at the end. That could be a why not," James said.

"Or it could be what happens at the literal end," Chakotay said.

James looked to Jessie then Nathan for some help, they both shrugged. "Exactly. We don't know, that's my point."

"If we stay here we'll find out," Chakotay said.

Nathan turned back to his station. "With planets popping up as a possibility, I really don't want to do that."

"It will only take a few seconds to warp the rest of the way. What are the odds?" Tom commented.

"Fine. We're twenty, fifteen minutes away. I don't want to be saying I told you so, so you better be right," Chakotay said.

Tom stared bewilderedly at him, then at James. "Hey, who's the guy in charge? Not you two. Nathan, warp one, five second burst."

"Don't," James warned.

Nathan winced slightly, then glanced behind him. Tom tried to glare at him but it only made him relax, not scare him. "Impulse it is," he said.

Tom groaned, "really? Who listens to their brother in laws. No one!"

"We're in a Game Sphere thingy, I listen to the specialist. Or whatever's close to one. Not the guy panicking cos his daughter gave him a cuddle," Nathan said.

James tried not to laugh but it was no use. "Oh, I'd call that one weird."

Tom pulled a face in his direction. "Oh yeah, I'd call the future Chosen being scared of her own shadow weird, but I don't make fun of you about it." His eyes widened when he realised what he had said. "Nathan, warp into the nearest planet. It would be quick," he squeaked.

Nathan sniggered, "no can do."

James and Jessie shared a look that Tom knew was trouble. He ran for the Conference Room, just in case.

"I should have worn my boots today. I would have thrown the hell out of them," Jessie whispered to James. He smirked at her.

"I assume you came here for some other reason besides being Gary Stu right or to flirt with the missus," Chakotay said.

James looked at him with a confused look on his face. "Gary who?"

Harry shook his head, "he implied that you're the perfect guy who never does anything wrong and everyone loves." He looked up at him with a confused look as well. "I don't get it either."

"I was implying the always save the day side of the Stu/Sue thing. I knew I should have called him Seven," Chakotay grumbled.

"Ookay. You're not wrong about the being here part," James said. He shrugged, "I just wanted to see how we were doing as I've seen some pretty weird stuff."

"You mean like the thing you beamed into space?" Chakotay questioned.

James remembered the horrible contents of the pot, he shuddered. "Yes, exactly." He wandered over to where the barrier usually was. The people who were watching him looked a little confused or worried when he leaned on it like it was still there. Those looks got even worse when he didn't notice the problem. He however noticed them looking at him like that. "What?"

"James, the barrier," Jessie stuttered.

James looked down at where his hands were, he frowned and looked back up. "Yeah?"

"Why are you leaning like it's still there?" Jessie asked.

Now James looked more confused than everyone else. He glanced down yet again. In his eyes the barrier was still there and the chairs in front were still the same. He noticed Harry's wide eyed stare in the corner of his eye. "It's not?"

"No, Tom got rid of it so he could recline the chair," Harry said.

James clenched his hands slightly to grip the railing. It seemed real enough to him. "No, no he didn't." He stared at Tom's chair next. "That thing doesn't recline."

"It's reclined right now," Chakotay said impatiently.

"I really doubt we're all hallucinating Tom's chair," Harry said. "Does anyone else see it?" The rest of the Bridge nodded or mumbled a yes.

Chakotay made his way over to the back of the bridge. His hands reached out to where he remembered the barrier being. James' eyes widened as to him his hands went right through it.

"So, you're immune. Why?" Chakotay said once he stopped.

The turbolift door opened. Damien stepped out, but he wasn't alone. Jessie took one look at him and screamed hysterically. She was gone in a flash. Damien laughed, "never gets old." He cooed at the

creature in his arms. Everyone looked his way to see the fluffy brown with white patches rabbit he had carried in. James however only saw him stroking air.

"Don't tell me," James muttered. He headed for the nearest exit, excluding the turbolift Damien had appeared from, which was the Ready Room.

Once he was gone Chakotay tried to snatch the rabbit from Damien's arms. He growled as he pulled back. "Don't touch my Patches."

"Fine, get attached. Once we've escaped it'll disappear," Harry said.

Chakotay glanced towards the Ready Room doors. "I wonder if James can't see that either."

Damien scoffed, "of course he can't. Isn't that the point?" He sniggered to himself, "as long as the witch can, it's all good."

"Jessie calm down, it's not real," James' voice emanated from the Ready Room.

"I don't care, just get rid of it," Jessie's voice stuttered.

Damien's eyes widened, his grip on the rabbit tightened. "It's ok, he can't touch you," he whispered into its fur.

Chakotay sighed. "All right, I'll bite. Why is James not seeing rabbits and new chairs *the point?*"

Harry climbed out of his chair with a thoughtful look on his face. "The only difference between him and us is that he's a Slayer."

"Bingo or should I say, duh," Damien sniggered.

"So? We've been in a Game Sphere for half a year and he didn't notice until recently," Chakotay said.

"True but everything we've mostly ran into was real; planets, ships, people. This isn't," Harry explained. "Chosens aren't supposed to be fooled by Spheres tricks. At least that's my interpretation of the lore."

Damien smirked in his direction. "It's nice when someone other than me is right."

"Fine, but Spheres don't give people what they want. They just trap them inside and try to fool them into thinking they're not," Chakotay said. "Which again, makes me wonder why James and Ylara were fooled by the Sphere." He directed the last part in Damien's direction. "So much for being right."

"I'm sorry, what?" Damien pretended that he wasn't listening. "All I heard is *I don't like those two, so I'll just be a cunt about them.*"

Harry tried not to laugh, Nathan didn't even bother. Chakotay groaned as he sat down on the edge of Tom's new chair.

"Spheres don't take over entire sectors of space randomly across the quadrant, then piece them together. They may have sensed something, but cos this is new..." Harry said. Chakotay directed a glare towards him. "Fine I'm just speculating. I don't hear you coming up with anything."

"It's simple. We stay on course and keep extra vigilant. In a place where anything can happen, anything will happen to try and stop us," Chakotay said.

Damien looked surprised, "wow Chuckie, I didn't know you were capable of figuring simple stuff out. Good for you."

Chakotay tapped his commbadge, "Annika, Damien's on the Bridge." Before he'd even finished Damien had already escaped back into the turbolift. "Never mind."

"Aaaw," Annika's voice moaned.

The Lieutenant from Engineering stepped out of the same turbolift. "Um, can you guys see me?"

"Of course we can," Harry replied.

The Lieutenant sighed in relief. "Good, cos no one in Engineering could. There's a problem with the bio neural gel packs."

"What kind of problem?" Chakotay asked.

"They're losing power. It started with one, since I *disappeared* more have been affected," the Lieutenant replied.

Chakotay and Harry glanced at one another with the same worried expression. "Source?" Chakotay said.

"None, the power just drains," the Lieutenant answered. "I tried to fix it but nothing works. The systems regulated by circuitry isn't affected, yet anyway. I tried to tell everyone but they can't see me. They all think everything's normal."

"How long until we're out?" Harry asked in Nathan's direction. He looked confused and looked again when he didn't get an answer. "Nathan?"

Chakotay turned as well, he and Harry noticed he was sitting deathly still with their backs on them. He seemed to be looking towards the right corner of the viewscreen.

"Uh, who's that?" the Opps officer stuttered, she pointed at that spot. Harry and Chakotay looked as well. Standing in the corner was a young teenaged girl, staring directly at Nathan. Her face was covered with bruises, her arms as well. Tears fell from her eyes.

"Nathan," Chakotay warned. "Turn to us, now."

The girl shook her head, she reached out her hand towards Nathan. "Nath, please. Help me. I'm trapped."

"But... you're..." Nathan quietly stuttered.

"Their spheres drain the life force out of the planet, when they trapped Earth my soul was taken," the girl said. "Please, I can't stay here. Help me."

Nathan's hand went to change course as he struggled to fight away the tears.

"Damn it," Chakotay grunted, he rushed over to the helm. Nathan turned slightly in his chair to elbow him in the ribs. Before he could recover he flew out from his chair and kicked it into him. Chakotay fell backwards onto the floor, the chair fell on top of him.

Harry quickly looked around the bridge for some help, but nobody seemed to budge. He tried to stop him with the control panel in between the command chairs but it only beeped angrily at him. "Damn..." His eyes fell on the Ready Room doors.

"Don't worry. I won't fail you again," Nathan stuttered as he worked frantically.

Harry gently tapped his commbadge. "Kim to Stuart," he whispered. "Get in here, now."

Seconds later the Ready Room door opened. James rushed out, Jessie not so much behind him. Harry pointed at the helm, then at the corner. He then shrugged.

James didn't see anything in the corner, but he saw Nathan. He rushed over.

"No!" Nathan yelled at him. "I'll save her, I promise."

When James tried to grab him from behind, Nathan ducked down to dodge it. It was only a stall as his arms were grabbed anyway.

"No, why are you trying to stop me!" he stuttered. He tried to reach for the helm but he was pulled too far back. The girl was no longer at the corner at this point, she was standing directly in front of him, directing sad eyes at both of them. "If we leave, she'll be trapped here, stop!"

"Who?" James asked.

The girl's hand reached out to them both, "James. He's forgotten me, he cannot see me." Jessie meanwhile had come far enough out of the Ready Room to see her, her eyes widened at the sight. "You can't let him stop you, Nath."

"But... the promise," Nathan stuttered.

The girl's head shook. "You don't have to hurt him. Just get away. He'll thank you later, please."

Nathan tried to struggle against James' hold on him, but he couldn't move. He only had one way out, one that James had actually taught him. He hoped he wouldn't expect him to use it against him, thinking that made him feel terribly guilty. "But he's your... I can't. I'll convince him."

"Nathan stop, there's nothing there. You'll get us all killed," James said. Harry meanwhile was sneaking by to get to the helm. "Hurry," James mimed to him. He nodded.

"It's Debbie," Nathan blurted out, catching James a little off guard. "I'm sorry." He threw his head back into his, it dazed him enough to loosen his grip.

Jessie rushed forward as Nathan dashed back to the helm, he shoved Harry aside like he was nothing. "Nath, she's not real. She's a trick!" she yelled before his hands could touch the panel. He hesitated for a moment. "Think about it Nathan. You told me James was the only person Debbie felt she could count on, somebody she treasured. Would she really want you to hurt him?"

Nathan froze, only his head moved as he looked up at the girl. She was now standing behind the helm, staring at him desperately.

"I... he's strong. He'll be fine," Nathan stuttered. He reached for the controls again.

"You saw the Enterprise. We'll end up like that, we'll die here. That includes him, and me," Jessie said as she slowly approached him. She was almost by James' side as he started to as well.

"But her soul... I can't leave her," Nathan stuttered.

James looked up to where he was looking, he still couldn't see anything. The thought of what Nathan was seeing made him shiver. "She's not here," he said.

"No, she's right there!" Nathan cried. He threw himself around so he could face him. "How could you of all people not see her!?" He grew angry as a thought entered his head. "I understand. You deleted her from your life didn't you, to spare the pain. You never talk about her, you're hostile when people try to get you to."

"You understand nothing," James said quietly.

"I do. You'd forgotten about her until I mentioned her, and you hate me for it. Well I haven't!" Nathan snapped. "She may be nothing to you, but she was my best friend. I won't let her suffer any longer."

"And I won't let you kill everyone on this ship just cos you don't trust me," James said. "I don't want to hurt you to do it, but I will if you don't stand down."

Nathan scoffed, he shook his head. "That's rich. Just the other week you looked like you were five seconds away from offing me. I looked out for you, I tried to be your friend, a brother. Even when your sister was gone I still tried. This is what I get in return..."

"Nathan!" Jessie shouted at him. She was now standing by James' side, a mere metre in front of Nathan. "He could have knocked you out the moment this started. He didn't. Doesn't that count for something?"

Harry meanwhile stepped to one side away from the helm, gave James and Jessie a little nod and backed off slightly.

"I told you, I warned you about what would happen if you brought up his sister," Jessie said. "It's your own fault for expecting flowers and rainbows from him. You set yourself up." She sighed and looked down at the ground for a moment. "This isn't easy for either of you. Why can't both of you see that? That's the problem right there!"

Chakotay groaned from the floor. He had to push the chair away from him before he could even think about getting up.

"I... then why won't he help me, help her?" Nathan stammered.

"She's not real, she's a trick to get us to stay here," Chakotay grumbled as he climbed up.

"But..." Nathan stuttered. "You see her too, right?"

Harry nodded, "we do, but James can't. We don't even know her, so explain why we can and he can't."

Nathan cringed, his eyes closed tightly. "Oh god. Cos he's a..." He shook his head, "I'm such an idiot. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

Jessie reached out to place a hand on his shoulder. "It's okay, it looked pretty convincing."

Harry walked over to stand beside Chakotay. "I've put in a security code. Anyone who tries to change course will have to enter it."

"What about you?" Chakotay questioned. "What happens if you see your girlfriend or your mummy telling you to turn around?"

Harry's eyes narrowed as he turned his head to his side. "At least I did something. You're welcome."

James briefly glanced behind him at them. "I'll change it to something else." He sighed once he looked back. "Nathan."

Guilt was all over Nathan's face, he couldn't even look him in the eye. Jessie noticed and looked towards James with a worried look on her face.

"I'm sorry," James said. Nathan looked up in surprise. Before he could ask, James continued, "I haven't handled this well, it's not your fault." Jessie smiled warmly at him. "We'll talk, eventually. I'm just not ready yet," he finished quietly.

Nathan nodded, "I understand. I'm sorry too."

Jessie sighed in relief, "great. Why don't I get him out of here."

"Great plan," Chakotay agreed, he gave Nathan a scowl before going over to sit down in the Captain's chair.

"Yeah, sorry about that," Nathan said meekly. Chakotay shrugged in response. Jessie quickly lead him to the turbolift before either of them could say anything else.

Harry's shoulders relaxed once the pair were gone. "Am I the only one who's lost about what just happened?" Chakotay glanced his way, for once not with a patronising or angry look. "Good. I mean I get the lure bit, but everything else."

"You don't need to. It's over," James said as he walked across the Bridge. He stopped midway, "right?"

Harry looked around the bridge quickly to check. The girl was long gone. "Yep."

"Perhaps..." Chakotay started to say, but he thought better of it. He climbed back to his feet and turned towards James. "Nathan won't be the only one lured to the helm, or anywhere else. We need to be better prepared for it."

"Helm control was already locked to the helm, I just didn't think that would happen," James said. He shook his head, "I should have."

Harry smiled in understanding, "oh is that why I couldn't stop him." He looked a little annoyed with himself, "that was obvious."

Chakotay's eyebrow raised, "yeah. However we've got other places that could be at risk."

"Yeah, Engineering for one," James said. The Lieutenant from before nodded furiously. James noticed that in the corner of his eye and looked at him. "What, what happened?"

"Everyone's currently oblivious to any malfunction at the moment, everything's perfect. It's almost like they're stuck in Lieutenant Torres' dream day," the Lieutenant smirked.

"They probably are," Chakotay said. "They'll not notice anyone waltz in and try to break anything."

James agreed with a nod, "you're not wrong. I'll go right now." Harry cleared his throat. "After I change the code." He rushed to the nearest console which was the old Engineering station.

"Try not to have a domestic with the next saboteur, hmm. Others may decide to do it while you're *sorting* it out," Chakotay commented.

"Yes because you were very helpful distracting him with that chair," James said as he walked into the turbolift.

"I must have blinked and missed the part where he helped," Chakotay said in Harry's direction. He only rolled his eyes in response. "How long until we're out of this place?"

"Not long, just under ten minutes," Harry replied. "Nathan's brief detour delayed us a bit."

"Okay, if helm's locked and Engineering's under guard, we should be able to get out of here in one piece. We just have to hang in there until then," Chakotay said.

"That sounds too easy to me, where's the fun in that?" a familiar raspy voice said from behind them.

Both Chakotay and Harry's eyes went very wide. Chakotay's body trembled as well. He slowly turned around towards the turbolift doors. A very familiar and well missed smile greeted him. All of his cares melted away. "Kathryn?"

The Opps officer looked a little confused but not at that. "Um, Lieutenant. Anybody. I'm detecting another ship approaching."

Harry shook off the image of Kathryn Janeway standing in front of the turbolift, he knew it wasn't real. He turned towards Opps. "Softmicron?"

"No," the Opps officer answered. "It's got a Starfleet signature."

"The Enterprise must have got its power back," Harry stated.

Chakotay slowly approached Kathryn, his eyes glazing over. "How did you get here?"

"We haven't got much time. I managed to get control of one Tolg ship," Kathryn answered. "This place, the Softmicron will be guarding this now that we're here. They won't let us out. Unknown to them though, we can do a lot of damage in here."

Chakotay couldn't help but smile. "Only you could beat the odds. What's the plan?"

"No, I'll put it on screen," the Opps officer said. She pressed on one panel. The viewscreen changed to show another familiar starship flying towards them.

"My god. The Leda, she survived," Harry stuttered, his eyes even wider than before.

The Opps officer shook her head, "there are three lifesigns aboard. They've sent us a message, text only." She read from one of the screens. "The Softmicron have surrounded the anomaly. There's a way out of here but we have to turn around."

Chakotay managed to hear that, he briefly glanced their way with a frown. "It's true."

"Of course it's true," Kathryn smiled. "Don't you trust me?"

### **Meanwhile:**

Craig almost tripped over something he swore was moving on the ground. He quickly looked down to find a rabbit nibbling at his boot laces. "Um..."

"Patches, you don't know where that idiot's been," Damien scolded as he ran over. He quickly scooped the rabbit up and gave it a cuddle. "Probably in another dusty kill people book, I suppose."

Craig's eyes rolled, he walked away from. "Yeah I screwed up big time, but I won't have you take the piss out of me for it."

Damien couldn't resist the temptation. He hurried after him. "So have you seen Lena then?" Craig stopped, forcing Damien to stop and scooch around him. "I imagine her walking up to you, being all flirty or *my hero*, is all you really want."

The throbbing pain in his throat reappeared when he thought about it. Damien could tell he was hurting and was enjoying watching him.

"How, how do you know about that?" he asked.

Damien grinned, "please, I'm a genius. Whatever you want, it appears. Just like Patches. You know it's fake, but you don't care, sometimes you even forget." He actually looked a little sad when he looked at the rabbit. "He was my first one, weren't you?"

Craig slowly glanced in his direction, then down at the rabbit. "Whatever I want? Patches. I never understand you."

"Of course you don't, we have a hundred and probably two IQ points between us," Damien sniggered. "Don't tell me nothing you've wanted has appeared."

Craig again found himself thinking about the reunion with Lena, then he remembered the icy reception he got off Kiara. He felt disgusted with himself yet again. "One way or another, I killed Ylara and hurt Lena. Great job Craig."

Damien was a little confused. He smiled quickly afterwards, "oh it's not permanent, sadly. Normally I'd force Voyager to stay here so Patches can live again, but I love me far more." He laughed and walked away. "Come on Patches. Let's go find where Annika keeps her catsuits and you can poop all you want."

**Engineering:**

He was a little creeped out, but not as much as he was when he was in the Mess Hall. Everyone was happy, too happy. They'd run a diagnostic, press a few buttons and no matter how many warnings the computer gave them, they'd smile and leave it alone. B'Elanna even had a spring in her step.

"We can't get out of here fast enough," James said to himself.

A few computers nearby blackened out, the sound they usually made faded to nothing. He rushed over to look at it. One crewmember stood in front of it, still tapping away like it was on. She even patted it like a dog. "Good console, keep working. We don't want to jinx it."

James' eyes were a little wide at this point. One look at the computer and he knew there was nothing he could do with it. He kept walking and looking around.

"At least any saboteur would stand out in here," he thought.

Just then he heard a small clatter above him. A few of the happy go lucky Engineers were in his way, so he had to run around them on route to the ladder. Quickly he climbed up to the top.

What he saw he wasn't expecting, he wasn't sure whether to laugh or not just yet. A guy was lying on the computer opposite the warp core. His arms were caressing nothing above him, his lips were moving. He was also making a few suggestive noises. Lucky for now he still had his clothes on.

James walked slowly over to him but he didn't think the guy would notice him. Half way there he overheard the words he didn't want to hear, "really, right here? Oh baby."

"Oh crap," James whispered. He had to go faster. He then spotted the guy's hand moving, um somewhere. He definitely had to walk faster and not worry about being stealthy. He only had two metres to walk, but he ran it instead. His hand hesitated before moving forward to shove the guy in the arm. The man didn't seem to mind as he rolled off the console and landed in a heap on the floor. James shuddered as the man made a noise that sounded like he enjoyed it.

His hand reached over to one part of the console, mainly the bits where the man hadn't been lying. A little tweak there and transporter control came up. The man was thankfully gone before his pants were coming off.

"Whatever next?" James wondered outloud.

The doors behind him opening up answered his question.

**Meanwhile:**

Kiara paced her quarters, her head kept glancing towards the window as she did so.

"If people see stuff like what I did then we could be in big trouble," she said, glancing out the window one more time. "I can't tell if we're moving. This place is weird."

There wasn't any answer or comment, but she didn't expect it. Kiara sat down on the nearest empty chair. "I'm sorry. Things never change around here. One weird thing after another." More silence. "I managed to resist mine, hopefully others can resist seeing the stuff they want. I can't count on it though." She was relieved to get a light nod. "Will you be okay here, or do you want to come?"

There was a frown, then her eyes looked even more distant than usual. Kiara quickly moved her chair closer so she could grab her hand. "Lena? What's wrong?" Something about the distant look she had was familiar, she'd seen somebody like this recently and it wasn't her. Suddenly she jumped and gasped, it made her do the same. "What was it, a vision? What did you see?"

Her eyes were wide now, they made contact with hers. She stood up and quickly lead her to the door. Kiara did her best to keep up.

## **Engineering:**

James tried to avert his eyes. He still couldn't get used to seeing the bizarre catsuits she came up with.

"I don't want to have to hurt you," she said.

"Ookay," James tried not to laugh. "Um, what did you say you were here for again?"

"My smoochieookums," Annika said like it was so obvious.

James accidentally looked at her again, almost blinding himself from the bright colours of her catsuit. This one was worse as it had two bright colours, stripped horizontally. He swore the one under her chest was wider, and he hated it for drawing attention to that area.

"I got that. Why?" James said.

Annika smiled in a really bad villainous way, it just made her look cross eyed. She paced back and forth in front of the door. "Isn't it obvious? What was Damien's primary mission?"

"To annoy everyone? You two are perfect for each other," James answered.

Annika giggled like a schoolgirl with a crush, it quickly went so she could go back to looking like a bad villain again. "Flattery will get you nowhere."

"Neither does insults," James muttered under his breath.

"Destroy Voyager or take her for himself," Annika answered her own question. "When everyone is completely distracted by their own dreams, I will take control of the ship. The crew will die and Damien will finally have what he deserves."

"A dead Damien does sound good, if it works," James said. Annika pouted at him. "I could just stab him or break his neck. It's easier and doesn't risk everyone else."

Annika stamped her heel, it left a crack in the floor. "No! What are you talking about? What Damien deserves is Voyager and victory!"

"Oh," James pretended to understand. He understood before but he couldn't resist. "How do you know it would work? Think about it. Everything goes right. You take the ship, kill the crew, Damien takes over." Annika smiled at the thought. "That would be something you'd want. How would you ever know it was real?" Her face fell. "You wouldn't, would you?"

"I am immune to it, like you. You and your sister are the only obstacles," Annika hissed. "Fortunately killing Slayers is what I'm supposed to do."

"Again I'm confused, I thought your job around here was to annoy people," James said.

Annika tried to laugh maliciously, it sounded creepy but not in the way she wanted it to. "Good. You shouldn't know until it's too late." Suddenly she was right in front of him, he pulled a disgusted face as he backed into the station. "You and me, we're natural enemies."

"I wouldn't call you natural," James said as he pushed her back. She got annoyed that she stumbled back slightly from it. "I'll make this easy for you. Nobody's changing our course, nobody's ejecting or destroying any engines. Anyone who tries to stop us leaving goes through me."

"That suits me fine," Annika almost purred. She quite literally pounced on him, forcing them both into the station. She went straight for the kill; her lack of vampire teeth bared as she went for his neck. He was already disgusted before this so he not only pushed her off him, he kicked her first. Annika squeaked a *hey* as she went flying over the glass barrier surrounding the core, and fell to the bottom.

"Gross, I'll need more than one shower later," James grumbled to himself as he tried to wipe off the Annika germs. He quickly pulled himself out of the console, he didn't realise he had broken it until he

did. He was about to rush down after Annika when she jumped all the way back up and landed on the banister. His eyes were wide again. "What the fu..."

"I'm full of surprises," she giggled. He ducked as she pounced for him again. He straightened up to kick her away before she could recover, she rolled right through the door. "My catsuit!" he heard her shriek.

James slowly walked towards the hole in the door, he didn't go close enough to open it. He couldn't see her through the hole either. The door trembled, then a fist shaped dent appeared in it. He dodged to one side just in time for the whole thing to be ripped apart. On the other side was a very angry Annika pointing at a rip in her cat suit.

"I... just bought... this," she snarled.

James couldn't help but smile, "good." He then noticed a small gash where the rip was. It wasn't bleeding though, it looked like somebody had chipped a piece off of glittering rock. "You're... you're..."

"Say it," Annika hissed.

"Hilarious," James laughed. Annika growled in response. "Is this what you meant by natural enemies? Oh my god, that's really..." his laughter overtook, he couldn't talk anymore.

Quick as a flash she backhanded him, to his surprise it hurt quite a bit. It stopped him laughing at least. She smirked as it left a cut in his cheek.

"I will rip you apart. That will make my schmoochy happy," Annika snarled.

James still felt laughter brewing in him, he tried to stop it for now. "Fine. Try. I'll stop messing around if you will."

Annika frowned, "messaging, I wasn't..."

"Oh," James was a little surprised, he didn't know why. "This'll be fun." She was pouting when he threw a punch in her face. The ex-drone flew into the parallel wall, pulling it down in the process. He sighed as he turned his head back towards Engineering, "we'll play later, okay. I'm rather busy." He backed into Engineering again, keeping a close eye on the wall.

"Hey!" she squealed. "I'm a threat..."

"Yes I'm sure you are," James smirked as he reached the broken console again. A quick maneuver around it and he reached the glass barrier. He quickly peeped over the edge to see if everything was okay. The constant smiles creeped him out again. When he turned back he saw Annika right in his face. The next thing he knew the room was spinning.

They both landed on the next level with a sickening thud. James was unfortunate enough to land on the metal barrier around the core, breaking it into two on the way down. The floor strained from his then Annika's landing. Broken glass shattered around them, covering them with it. None of the Engineering staff reacted of course.

"I should have done this before," Annika giggled. She was already up. Her fist raised up, aiming it towards the core.

"No!" James yelled out through the pain in his ribs. Annika did stop much to his surprise. "You'll kill Damien. Are you that stupid?"

"Oh," Annika looked embarrassed. She giggled nervously. "I was just testing you."

James tried to get up but his ribs protested a little too much. He tried to ignore it anyway. Annika reached over to grab at his throat, she helped him the rest of the way up.

"That's what I don't get about vampires versus Slayer. Slayers get hurt, vampires don't. It makes it too easy," she teased him as her grip tightened.

She didn't notice the doors opening and the two new arrivals. Both of them ran over.

"Stop!" Kiara screamed at her.

Annika swung her head in their direction, her eyes widened. "Poopy, the other one." She glanced back at James and back again. She grew a little nervous as her new opponent walked closer with a vacant look in her eyes. She laughed nervously, "um er... back off, or I'll take his head off." She wasn't backing down and it only made her even more nervous. Her head darted back to the one she was holding, just in time to see his fist flying at her own head. Her grip soon loosened as she stumbled sideways onto the floor.

"What did you say about taking heads off?" James said. Annika panicked a little as the two Slayers towered over her.

"Um, you er... both have nice heads. Let's leave them there, huh," she stuttered. In a non literal flash she was gone.

Kiara breathed a huge sigh of relief. "That was close. Are you okay?" James didn't answer, he just stared elsewhere. "You James, are you okay?"

"Oh," James quickly said. "Yeah, I'll live." His eyes went back. He found her looking right back at him this time. He took one step forward closer to her. "Lena?" Her brief and hesitant eye movement confirmed it for him. "It was just a feeling before, but it's true."

Kiara nodded, "yeah. She's obviously still a little freaked out by it all."

"No surprise," James said. He looked a little confused. "How did you know to come here?"

"She looked like you did when you had that vision in the Mess. I followed her," Kiara replied.

"Right. Thanks," James said to both of them. He realised the three weren't alone anymore, he and Kiara both looked to find B'Elanna looking very angry at them. "Uh..."

"Do you mind telling me what the hell you've done to my Engineering!" she snapped.

"Looks like we're out," James said. Kiara nodded. It didn't help B'Elanna's mood much though. "Annika uh, she er... it's a long story." All he got was a growl from her before she stomped off muttering some Klingon swear words.

### **The Bridge:**

Both Chakotay and Harry looked a little heartbroken as they stared at the turbolift and viewscreen. No one stood there and the viewscreen showed stars and black again.

"I can't believe I fell for it," Harry stammered. His face turned a little red. "It was so obvious it wasn't real."

Chakotay glanced down at the floor to hide the lone tear that escaped. "Yes, obvious."

Harry cleared his throat. "Well now that we're out, we need to figure out how we're going to get the Enterprise out too. That's if it was real anyway."

"That's a good point," Tom said from the Conference Room door. Harry looked at him with surprise. "Sorry, I thought we were having a surprise party for me in there. I'm a little sad that it's over."

"Ah," Harry said.

Chakotay slowly looked up. "The Enterprise could have been a ruse to keep us there. I never thought of that."

"Don't sweat it. We all fell for the tricks," Tom smiled.

Harry rushed back over to Opps while Tom returned to the command centre. He looked a little disappointed at his old chair, only for a second. He grinned while he sat down in it. "Still the best seat in the house."

"Mmm hmm," Chakotay mumbled. The image of Kathryn alive and well was still stuck in his head.

Tom stared up at him, oddly sympathetically even though he missed that. "I think I can guess. You okay?"

Chakotay looked surprised. "What? Why would you..."

"I'm the *Captain*, it's my job to care," Tom smirked at him. Chakotay only sighed in response. "I wish people would stop thinking I'm self centered. We're all friends, family here right?"

Chakotay smiled half heartedly. "This has got to be the worst family unit ever in the history of everything then."

Tom's nose raised and he grinned awkwardly, inhaling air through his teeth. "I don't know, the Stuart/Janeway clan, present company included, is pretty weird."

"I said worst," Chakotay muttered.

"Nah!" Tom grinned normally. "We just get rid of Damien, Annika... we're cool."

#### **Meanwhile:**

Annika tip toed into the dark room, which you'd think would be easier in heels as you'd be used to walking on your toes, but she seemed to be wobbling a bit. It didn't help that she was giggling quietly to herself.

It wasn't the only noise in the room. Somebody was sobbing the name *Patches* over and over again. She was only a few steps away when the one crying stopped suddenly, turned his head and grunted, "get out!" Then he got back to sobbing like it never happened.

Annika pouted as she actually listened to him.

#### **Meanwhile again:**

The Doctor was a little confused as he treated his latest patient, he couldn't stop glancing at one of the girls with him.

Kiara sighed impatiently. "Stop that."

The Doctor didn't respond right away as he was worried Lena would pick up one of the items from the medical tray. He turned to Kiara eventually when her attention wavered. "What? I just..."

"You can stop just," Kiara muttered.

James gave the Doctor a raised eyebrow look and turned his head back to Kiara. "How long?"

"Have I known?" Kiara said. "Um, since she recovered. I... she grabbed my arm and I knew. Also I heard Ylara's voice."

The Doctor frowned so much the lines on his forehead barely had any gaps between them. "How could you tell, and how?"

"It wasn't Lena's," Kiara answered quietly.

"That doesn't make any sense. You're not telepathic, if you were wouldn't it be Lena's voice and wouldn't..." the Doctor said.

James glanced again at him with a *shut up* face. The Doctor looked a little offended at it, but it wasn't going to stop him doing his job. "What did she say?" he asked Kiara.

She looked around to check on Lena, who's main focus now was the carpet. "She said everything was fine now. In a nut shell."

James looked across at her as well with a worried look on his face. "She's going to need a lot of help getting through this." Kiara nodded. "You shouldn't have tried to do this alone, you know."

"Sorry," Kiara mumbled.

"Don't be. We'll figure something out together, okay?" James smiled.

"Yeah," Kiara nodded and smiled weakly back at him.

The Doctor pulled a face as he noticed something sparkling in James' hair. He pointed at it, James picked it off and groaned when he saw it. "Dare I ask?" the Doctor said.

James let it crumble in his hand. "No, you really don't want to know."

"Ah ha!" Harry startled everybody on the Bridge. They all looked at him impatiently. "It's still there."

"What is?" Tom said. "The Enterprise?"

"I think so. Now that the sensors know the mass is there, it still reads it from here. Barely," Harry replied.

Chakotay sighed, "that's actually more annoying than good news. How the hell do we get it out of there?"

"James plus shuttle equals profit," Tom suggested. Everyone looked at him in the way he expected, he laughed it off. "I wasn't serious, not entirely."

"Not entirely?" Harry groaned.

Tom shrugged. "Sure a shuttle wouldn't have enough power to survive in there, let alone transfer some to the Enterprise so it can fly out. Shuttles can't tractor it either. However we know he's the only one immune, except Ylara if she's better I guess."

Harry covered his face with both hands. "Crap. I knew it, I just knew it." Chakotay and Tom frowned at him. "We really would have benefited from having the Leda with us. This is a bigger tragedy than I thought."

"And the Ylara thing was sad too," Tom said in Chakotay's direction.

He thankfully took that comment as he was meant to, he smirked at him. "She's fine now, I'll let you live."

"Yay," Tom pretended to cheer.

"So basically we need another ship," Chakotay said towards Harry.

Harry smiled, "we do, and luckily we've made a few friends since we got here." Tom winked at him, only this time Harry smiled at it. "Yes Tom, I meant Tira."

"Oh yeah," he said approvingly.

"Well it's not like we need to keep going in the same direction. Why not?" Chakotay said. He looked towards the empty helm. "That doesn't help. Tom?"

"Yay," Tom said less enthusiastically. He reluctantly gave up his command chair to go back to the helm. "Just until Nathan's back."

Chakotay looked at Harry at Opps, then at the helm. "This is much better." The two men glared at him as he sat down in his old seat with a smile on his face. They got back to work. When they did Chakotay looked over at the empty Captain's seat and the smile was wiped clean away.

**THE END**