

Episode 5.23

Say It Again With Emotion

Security Office:

The text and images on the computer screen were like a blur to him. Other thoughts kept distracting him from his work. Everytime he tried to snap out of it he'd forget what he was doing, remember for a few seconds and start the cycle all over again. Only this time the cycle was broken by somebody approaching his desk.

"Did you find out anything?" he asked.

"James Taylor," Rachel's voice said, forcing him to look up at her with a frown.

"Actually, I lean more towards Stuart now," he said.

Rachel thought about what he said, then rolled her eyes in annoyance with herself. "Of course."

"Did you get anywhere with the warlocks?" James asked, ignoring that for now. He couldn't hide the confusion on his face though.

"No, they're not worth bothering with," Rachel replied with a scrunched up face. "It's you I want to talk about."

James laughed for a second, "that's okay, I already know all about that."

Rachel stared at him blankly, again she rolled her eyes and sat down in one of the chairs. "Those morons don't know why they were supposed to kill people, they're nothing more than sheep. All they've done is open my eyes to you."

"Um, right? Thanks for trying though," James said while raising his eyebrow. He tried to concentrate on the computer again, that was until a hand reached out to turn it around. "I'm really busy, don't..." he turned it back around despite her hold on it.

Rachel pulled her hand back so it was merely resting on the desk, her other arm joined it. "I now know where I've seen you. You're Susy's boy."

"What?" James said after a few seconds of staring blankly.

"Well, for the most part," Rachel said warily. Her eyes squinted towards him. "She looked after you anyway. Maybe I said too much."

"Um, I'm going back to *what?*" James said.

Rachel sighed while leaning forward on the desk. "You really don't remember me, do you? I bet you don't even remember my daughter, who's heart you broke either."

"I think you've gotten me mixed up with someone else. I've done nothing of the sort," James said, his eyebrow raising even higher.

"Does Dannielle ring a bell to you?" Rachel snapped. James' eyes widening answered her question. He was about to stammer out some words but she continued, "yes so you can imagine I have a bone to pick with you."

"Uh," James said awkwardly. "No, no I can't. That arranged marriage that didn't happen was a sham, you and Susy..."

"Yes I know, it was initially a little scare tactic to get you two to start dating others. However my girl was interested in you and you were nothing but cruel to her," Rachel grumbled.

James sighed, his shoulders slumped. "I don't remember doing anything cruel to her. I did overreact to the whole thing during the introduction, nothing was directed at her, it wasn't personal. I agreed to meet with her so we could figure out a way out of this, but she..." He hesitated, Rachel's eyes stared almost piercingly towards him. "I thought she would hate the idea as much as me, but she didn't. I was freaked out that she only came over to plan the wedding. I wasn't cruel about it, I just..."

"Rejected her, yes I know," Rachel said.

James frowned, "what was I supposed to do? Go along with it. That would be cruel."

"It wasn't what you did, it was how you did it," Rachel hissed.

"I... I didn't believe she actually liked me. I'm still in denial. We had met for five seconds before that. I actually thought at first she was playing around with me," James said nervously. Rachel's stare got even more intense, it was starting to remind him of someone. "I didn't want to hurt her. The worst I said was that the whole thing was weird and I refused to take part in it. I never thought for a minute that she wanted to go through with it. We had only known each other for ten minutes by this point."

"Well she did," Rachel said.

"I didn't. I'm sorry she was hurt by it, I really am, but I was a teenager dumped into a weird situation. I had no experience in anything like this. I handled it the best I could. I can't say anymore than sorry, can I?" James said.

"You said you didn't know her. It wouldn't have hurt to give her a chance. No, just outright rejection," Rachel muttered. "Dannielle was a wonderful girl who could have easily done better. I suppose I should be grateful you didn't give her a chance, she dodged a phaser beam I think."

"You're making it personal. If Susy had set me up with a different girl and she did the same thing, how I would have reacted would have been the same. The arranged marriage was weird, I wanted no part in that. It wasn't her that I was talking about," James said.

"Then why wouldn't you give her a chance?" Rachel asked.

James sighed impatiently, although it didn't show as he was still very worried about who he was talking to. "Because I wasn't looking for a girlfriend. That was why Susy tried to scare me in the first place. She thought I needed to get out more and socialise, she knew I'd resist everything she told me to do and go out of my way to get out of it. I still think she took it way too far."

"Yes you were a pain in the arse, I remember her telling me all the time. I was a little relieved that you didn't want my daughter," Rachel said. James groaned and covered his face, anything to cover the *this is awkward* look on his face. "She could do better than a loud mouthed fight starter." She noticed what he was doing and frowned. "Yes I know, teenaged boys will be teenaged boys..."

"Yeah sure, so when you say the warlocks are worthless," James said quickly.

Rachel narrowed her eyes. "I wasn't done."

James figured he looked a little nervous, so he cleared his throat and tried to at the very least keep his face blank. "I need to know what they said. People could still be at risk."

As Rachel scowled a small amount of hair fell in her face, she angrily tried to blow it to one side. Her eyes rolled impatiently. "If they had any kind of magical talent they'd be out of that brig by now, but they're not. *She's a big threat to us*, is the only meaningful thing I got out of them. I'm not surprised that little boys like them are so threatened by a strong woman like my Jessica."

The name made James lose any colour he had left in his face, and his chest felt like something was on fire in there. Rachel was too busy fixing her hair to notice this, so he quickly tried to compose himself. He waited for her to stop, hoping that he looked relatively the same as before when she did.

"Jessica?"

Rachel smiled at him a little maliciously, at least that's what it felt like to him. "Oh, I thought you wanted to move on to more important things."

"I'm... not sure what you mean by that," James said. Internally he cringed at the hesitation he displayed at the beginning.

"Yes you do. You weren't interested in having a girlfriend, but you were more than happy to play around with my other daughter behind Dannielle's back. Did you think I didn't know about that? It was the reason Susy called the whole thing off," Rachel muttered.

James closed his eyes and shook his head. "That's not what happened. I dunno why you're changing the subject back."

"We're still talking about Jessica, unless there was another girl," Rachel said coldly.

"I didn't play around with anyone. I fooled my mum... I mean Susy, into thinking that's what was happening. So she'd call off the wedding," James said.

Rachel obviously didn't believe him, her eyes were firing daggers. "So you're avoiding the subject of Jessica because?"

"Jessie. Her name is Jessie," James didn't answer, which annoyed Rachel further.

"What is it with that awful name? She's a lovely girl, that name is suited to men and tomboys," she snapped.

James pulled a half annoyed and half puzzled face. "Uh, that's what she prefers to be called so I wouldn't say that to her face. Show her some respect."

Rachel laughed mockingly, "oh now the claws come out. Why were you hiding her from me, hmm? You knew she was the victim those idiots went for, but you didn't think to tell me that."

"I didn't know who you were," James answered. "It doesn't matter, I still wouldn't cos she's had no desire to ever reunite with you. You abandoned her and she hates you for it. Why would I blab that she was on Voyager to you?"

Rachel's eyebrow twitched slightly like it did when someone called her ma'am. She shot to her feet, with her hands still pressed firmly on the table. "Don't you dare! You have no idea what you're talking about."

Her outburst unsettled the sleeping baby enough to wake her up, cries starting emanating from the baby seat. James stared at Rachel with an annoyed stare before he reached over to pick the baby up and give her a cuddle to calm her down. Not long after she was settled in his arms she went back to sleep.

Rachel sighed to compose herself. "I'm sorry, that was... I shouldn't have done that."

"No," James said. He thought about saying she shouldn't have done a lot of things, but thought it was best to keep that to himself for now.

"You're still friends with my daughter, that much is obvious. Maybe you can tell her that I didn't want to leave her, I..." Rachel said quietly.

"I'm not telling her anything like that. I'm on her side," James interrupted.

Rachel could feel the anger building up again. "Who are you to decide whether or not she makes up with her mother?"

"I won't guilt trip her or meddle with her relationship with you. I won't upset her by bringing you up either," James said.

"You think I'd come to you first and not her? She knows I'm here," Rachel muttered.

James winced internally, his shoulders fell a little. "Great," he sighed. "I'm guessing cos you asked me that, that she told you to leave her alone. I think if you cared about her you'd respect her wishes."

"She doesn't know the truth. I'm not as bad as she makes out," Rachel protested.

James shook his head. "Then maybe you should have left a note explaining this truth, then she wouldn't have to make something up. I am curious as to how you can explain putting one twin up for adoption that makes you look *not as bad*."

"That would defeat the point of what I wanted to do. It's only in recent years that I've wanted to break that and see her. I don't have to explain myself to you," Rachel said.

"I never asked you to," James groaned.

Rachel arched another scowl, this one reminded him too much of one of Jessie's. It was unnerving in more ways than one. "You're judging me though. You. The little brat who showed nothing but contempt for the woman who raised you, who wasn't even your real mother and she knew that. You..."

"Yeah, teenagers can be selfish sometimes. Some people though grow out of it and feel a little guilt, try to redeem themselves," James said.

Rachel bit her lip. "You're comparing mouthing off at your not mum, worrying her with suicide attempts, sneaking out of the house at night, and getting into fights to what I went through?"

"Yeah, what was I thinking? Abandoning your daughter while keeping the other is a whole different ball park," James said.

Rachel stared at the tiny baby sleeping snugly in James' right arm. Something inside her clicked, her features darkened. "You're not wrong. You got to be a teenager, I didn't. I won't be judged by someone who doesn't know what that's like. How terrifying it is. You're in your thirties, I was fourteen when I had mine. Think about that."

James stared at her blankly. "You make it sound like you were forced into having kids then. Were you?"

"That's not the point," Rachel snapped.

"Actually it is. You had plenty of opportunities to not have to be a teen mum. Chucking one of your kids away wasn't one of them," James said.

"Am I hitting a sour point here? Susy did say your real mother was a teenager," Rachel said to avoid snapping again.

Both of James' eyebrows raised, he felt his eyes widen and his jaw threatened to drop. "Wow. For all you knew I was a disrespectful asshole who calls my mum by her first name, you think that anyway. What if I didn't know about my real mother?"

Rachel casually shrugged, he assumed that meant she didn't care one way or the other. "I don't care." His assumption was right, it made him roll his eyes. "Don't take your mother issues out on me."

"I have no mother issues anymore. I forgave her a long time ago and unlike you she deserved to be forgiven," James said irritably. He felt some movement in his arms, he glanced down to still find his

daughter asleep but fidgeting. That was hint enough so he climbed out of his seat. "I don't want to help you and Jessie isn't interested..."

"Jessica," Rachel tried to correct him sternly.

"Jessie isn't interested in giving you the time of day. You're wasting your time, so just go," James said while walking around his desk.

Once he walked by Rachel, she gave his back a cold stare over her shoulder. He reached a different door to the one everyone used, then stopped and turned around. His eyes rolled as he realised Rachel had barely moved, the most she had done was turn her head.

"I don't get it, why are you waiting?" he asked.

"I'm not giving up that easily," Rachel replied bitterly.

James quietly groaned. The door nearby opened so he could step inside. Once he did he whispered to the bundle in his arms, "looks like we're going for a walk after this."

When he returned a few minutes later James found Rachel not only still in the office, but standing behind his desk with her back to him. He hurried over to her. When he was half way there he noticed she was holding something she couldn't stop staring at. It looked like a PADD.

First he had to worry about his daughter. Rachel seemed too engrossed in whatever she was looking at to notice or care about him seeing her. With the baby seat moved to the sofa he carefully placed the baby down into it before going back to his desk.

The first thing he noticed once he approached Rachel was the arrangement of photos he had on the shelf behind his desk had been changed. One of them was missing. He figured that was what she was looking at.

"What are you doing? You can't go through people's personal things," he snapped, hoping that would make her put it down and leave. He didn't want to have to pull her away.

Rachel barely reacted to it. "My little girl. She looks so happy here."

James sighed to try and calm himself, it worked only a little. His hand reached out to take the offending picture from her hands. Only then she turned her head to stare coldly at him. The picture she seemed so invested in was a recent family one taken before Sasha's third birthday party. Jessie was in the centre with Sasha sitting happily on her lap. Duncan and Amy sat on either side of her. He noted that it was one of the many he wasn't in as he was taking the picture.

"Didn't you hear me?" James said.

Rachel scoffed lightly. "First you hide my daughter, then you pretend you're just her friend. You're not getting any apologies from me."

James looked towards the other pictures, the ones drastically moved out of place were all ones with him in them. "Jessie wouldn't want you learning about her life. I know that. I was trying to look out for her."

"Hmph, I asked my partner to transfer to the Enterprise so I could do just that. Only I never found her. Then that battle happened," Rachel said bitterly. Her eyes shut tightly. "After all the horror and all that hardship, I think finding out if my daughter is married with children is a small reward at best."

"I'm sorry but you weren't looking hard enough. For a time we were posted to the Enterprise after its return to Earth, I was doing this job..." James said.

Rachel swung around, her eyes fiery. "I didn't know she had adopted this ridiculous nickname. I didn't know if her adoptive parents, if any, had changed her surname cos I couldn't find any Annet in the

crew manifest, let alone a Jessica Annet. I didn't know if she'd be married or not, and if so had she changed her name." James sighed uncomfortably, he turned his head away to hide the regret showing on it for saying that. "Also four months is how long the Enterprise was home. Was I supposed to keep checking every day?"

"You said to me that she was relatively famous. I assume that's when you figured out who I was talking about," James said.

"Relatively yes, by reputation only. I knew she was on Voyager and I had heard tales from it. They don't mention her by name," Rachel spat back at him.

James shook his head as he reached to put the picture into an empty spot on the shelf. Rachel side stepped slightly so she didn't have to be so close to him.

"I dunno why I'm arguing here," he said. "If you'd found her back then you would have gotten the same response. You can't put your kid up for adoption, ignore her when you accidentally see her as a teen, then decide to meet with her when she's in her thirties. What did you expect?"

"I'm not as naive as you think. I knew she'd be upset, but I hoped she would hear me out. It doesn't justify your rotten attitude or you hiding important details. I deserve to know if I have a son in law and grandchildren," Rachel said. Her head turned to look at the photos again.

"I actually could be worse, and secondly yes it does. For all I knew Jessie didn't know you were here. Even if she did, I know she'd rightly be pissed at me if I shared her life story or any other information. It's not my place to do it and I hope you know this," James said.

Rachel looked to the side without moving her head, barely making eye contact with him. "I know now, so tell me. Which of these are mine?"

James wasn't quite sure what she meant, the first thing that came to mind were the photos themselves. "Uh none. They're mine."

"Hardly," Rachel scoffed at him, while pointing her finger at one particular picture. James looked to see which one she was gesturing towards. He was a little annoyed as that one was one of his favourites; Sasha grinning with her strawberry birthday cake after the candles were blown out.

"I don't think so..." he muttered.

"She's the spitting image of my two girls. That's one at least," Rachel interrupted him. Then she pointed towards a picture of younger Duncan sitting with his unopened Christmas presents. "That one, he looks like you."

James was even more confused than before. She didn't want the photos themselves, but he still didn't know what she was getting at. He was frowning more than usual. "I wish people would stop saying that. He's..." he ended up saying, even if it was the last thing on his mind.

Rachel hadn't finished though. She picked up one of the pictures of Amy from her first Christmas, with a piece of tinsel displayed proudly on her head. "Cute, but..."

"But?" that alone offended James, he didn't really want to hear the rest. "I think you should go."

"Blonde, I don't see any of Jessica in there," Rachel continued anyway with an indifferent look on her face. She handed it over to James without looking, he caught it before it fell on the floor. "Newborn, so that makes two."

"Two what? No, I don't care. You don't..." James grumbled while carefully putting the picture of Amy back.

Looking at it reminded him of how adorable Amy was when she put the tinsel on her head, her first word that came right after it, and how it actually made him like Christmas for once. Then he thought

about the awful attitude Rachel had while looking at it and it made him furious. Rachel was still looking around the pictures, seemingly unaware of it. She was about to take the newest one Jessie had asked for after the new baby was born, when James had enough. He took a hold of her arm as gently as he could, despite how he felt. The look she gave him was very similar to the one Jessie would use before a groin kicking.

"Get out. I'm not asking anymore," he said, his voice colder than he intended.

Rachel tried to pull her arm away to no avail, it only made her eyes even deadlier. "Get your hand off me."

James was more than used to seeing that similar threatening stare, so it had less effect on him. He only pulled her away from his desk, making sure not to actually hurt her while doing it. He let her go as soon as he did.

"Look, you may not give a crap about your kids, but I do," James snapped.

Rachel butted in, "how dare you, you don't..."

James in turn cut her off, "how dare I? You're the one shrugging off your own grandkids cos you don't like how they look. Honestly, I'm starting to think Jessie was lucky not to be raised by you."

Rachel's eyes widened. Her face started to turn red. "I didn't do that, they're not my grandkids."

"Oh my god, yes they bloody well are!" James snapped. He regretted it immediately, only for the volume, he glanced at his daughter on the sofa. She luckily seemed fast asleep still.

Rachel was taken aback for a moment. She laughed bitterly. "You're trying to tell me I have four grandkids, four, from one daughter. You're ridiculous."

James had clenched his fists to try and calm down, it worked a little. "That's okay. Jessie's not going to like this anymore than me. If there was any chance of making up with her, this will ruin it. You won't need to worry about too many grandkids. Everyone wins."

"You're a piece of work," Rachel muttered.

James rolled his eyes, "yeah, so I'm told. But you're no better. You can't pick and choose your grandkids, just like you can't pick one of your twins to keep."

"I didn't think they were, I still don't," Rachel protested. "In this day and age, how on earth does one woman get pregnant four times?"

James thought that was a tad too hypocritical from the woman who was only a kid when she had Jessie. He then thought pointing that out was too rude even for him. "No, I'm not going to say that. Too easy."

Rachel glowered at him, "oh I suppose that was going to be a fourteen year old mum comeback. Be more original."

"Now we're understanding each other," James said.

"You're a pig, as evidenced by the four children," Rachel hissed. "Which by the way all look different."

James groaned, he was more tired mentally than annoyed. "And? They're not identical twins."

"Ah, now we're understanding each other," Rachel said mockingly.

"So?" James said, his eyebrow shooting up.

"So? I don't expect you to understand. I suppose you didn't notice that Dannielle and Jessica are identical twins," Rachel said.

"That doesn't mean Jessie is destined to have some of her own. I mean we thought it was something that could run in her family until we looked it up. It's not. Identical twins happen by random chance. If they were not identical twins then yeah, it's a possibility," James said.

Rachel casually shrugged before folding her arms. "Actually it does run in the family. I just got lucky with Jess and Danni." James stared at her blankly, his eyes drifted to one side. "I am a twin, my sister is a natural red head with similar eyes to me. Not identical. My mother and aunt look similar but not identical, born on the same day. My grandmother..."

"I get the picture. I don't understand why it's such a big deal though," James interrupted.

"Of course you wouldn't. You're a bastard one off child that broke up a marriage and killed their daughter," Rachel snapped. "What would you know about family tradition?"

James stared at her with his eyes wider than usual, they glistened with anger, his jaw clenched tightly. His clenched fists were starting to tremble a little. He had enough. "Get out or I'll throw you out."

Rachel cringed a little to his surprise but it did nothing to calm him down. "Okay, that was a little too harsh."

James' wide eyes looked to the left and back again. "You think?"

Rachel sighed, she headed for the exit. As the door opened she turned back around to look at him. "This never would have happened if I... it's my fault. It's not yours." James walked over to her to gently push her the rest of the way outside. She looked shocked as the doors shut in her face.

"Oh my god," he groaned. His head was buzzing, he had no idea what to make of any of that. His head turned slightly to look towards his daughter. He thought there was no way he should be anywhere near her until he calmed down. As if on cue she woke up whimpering.

The Enterprise:

Chakotay sat at the only standing command chair on the bridge, quietly tapping the panel on the arm rest. It had a large crack through the middle of it, it still worked despite that. Everyone else but Harry were keeping to themselves at their stations. He was busy bothering the two Engineering crewmembers attempting to fix the Captain's chair to the floor.

"Can you make it recline?" he asked.

He got another groan from the two Engineers. They shared a disgruntled look. "No," one answered.

"The Leda's did," Harry said. Chakotay shook his head.

"That was a newer ship," an Engineer pointed out.

"It wasn't the flagship," Harry said.

Chakotay rolled his eyes this time, he couldn't keep out of it this time. "Harry, you're not the Enterprise's Captain. You are its babysitter. So just pick up one of the chairs lying around and sit your bony ass down, or I'll make you."

Harry stared at him with his eyes wide. "The Enterprise is just another ship. What's the big deal?"

"It's not a replacement for the Leda. It's a descendant of the most influential ship in Starfleet. You really think you're worthy enough to fit in with greats like Kirk and Picard?" Chakotay sniggered. "No, we just don't have much choice out here. It's either you, Tom or me."

"For an influential ship its chair leaves a lot to be desired," Harry said lightly.

Most of the bridge were giggling quietly to themselves at this point. A lot of them figured or at least hoped Harry was just messing with him, but Chakotay reacted like he was serious enough.

"It has seatbelts," one of the Engineers laughed.

"Shuttles should have them too, they crash just as often," Faye sniggered.

"What, twice? We wish," Chakotay groaned.

"Three, maybe four actually," Triah pointed out.

"Hmm yeah. Two before we got it, once on a moon, the Equinox battle. Four, that we know of," Faye said.

"I'm surprised Jessie didn't crash it on that planet a few weeks back," Bryan laughed. "You know while hallucinating that it was a giant clothes shop. Oh my god, I must fly into that."

"Yes cos fly a shuttle through buildings Jessie needs an excuse to fly badly," Chakotay muttered.

Harry sighed loudly enough to interrupt them. "And I thought the new chair installation wouldn't distract me enough. Thanks guys," he smiled.

Chakotay stared at him blankly, then his eyes rolled. "Don't pretend you were being picky for laughs. You've always been obsessed with the big chair."

"Yes, at least this one is bigger than the first officer's chair," Harry teased him, which didn't go down well. He decided to push his luck, "which that isn't. That's the counsellor's."

"Good, cos then I don't have to hold back. You're the most inconsistent person I've ever met. One minute you're a grouchy teenager, the next a smug know it all, or like you are now, a spoilt brat who tries to hide that with his *charm*. I honestly think you suffer from multiple personalities and you should get it checked out. Right away," Chakotay said.

"Well, you're the expert so you'd know all about that," Harry said with a smirk directed at him.

The turbolift doors opened for another gold shirt crewmember. "Commander Chakotay?"

"What?" Chakotay tried hard not to snap at him.

"You have a visitor," the crewmember said.

Chakotay stared at the messenger with a bemused look. "I do, who?"

"She is waiting in Ten Forward. She didn't want to come up here for some reason," he said.

His curiosity was piqued and it was definitely better than putting up with Harry's chair comments. Chakotay got up to head for the same turbolift.

The Stuart's Quarters:

No more toys were hiding in the main living area, or in her and James' room. The bed's had been made, again. Toys were put away even though Jessie originally thought the kids who left them should have done it. She had even wiped the windows down despite them not being dirty. There wasn't anything left to do. All of her thoughts from her earlier visit came rushing back, with no distractions to stop it.

Luckily though all the chores she had made herself do, to do just that had wiped her out. Having a daytime nap was better than thinking about her mother, so she headed off for her room.

As soon as her head hit the pillow she already started to drift off.

The sound of the living room doors opening got her full attention. Her eyes were wide open, for some reason her heart was thumping fast. The door to her room opened, she gasped at who stood there, smiling at her. The warlock known only as Matteo stared directly at her as he approached, his face mostly red. She soon realised the top half of his clothes were slowly soaking in blood.

She tried to sit up but none of her limbs would move. Her yelling out was silent. He leaned forward to grab her.

Her eyes shot wide open once again. He was gone, the door was shut. Jessie's heart was still beating way too fast, her forehead was dripping with sweat it even infiltrated her hair, making it uncomfortably wet. She took in some deep breaths to calm herself down, then she realised she wasn't alone in her room. Somebody stood near the wardrobe, a hand hovering over the handle.

It took her a few more seconds to really react to it, and she sat up quickly. "Hey!"

The figure jumped and turned her way. Now she could see who it was. "Oh, sorry sweetheart. I was just..." Rachel's startled voice said.

"How did you get in here? Our door is far more secure than any others," Jessie stuttered angrily.

Rachel nodded timidly. "Yes I know. I used a teleportation spell. Took me a few tries."

"Why? Why are you here? You can't just burst in uninvited," Jessie snapped.

"You didn't respond, I thought you were in trouble again," Rachel stuttered. "Then I noticed you were only sleeping. I didn't want to wake you and I'm still a bit shaky on this spell. It's been a while since I've seen the book it was in."

"I told you to leave me alone," Jessie said quietly while climbing out of her bed.

"Yes I know but a cult of warlocks tried to kill you. I need to know why," Rachel said.

Jessie sighed impatiently, "it's not the first time someone's tried to kill me. I don't see you figuring those other times out too."

"This is different I presume. Witches are a threat to many, not their own though. I want to know what you've done to upset this particular cult," Rachel said.

"I'd hardly call them a cult. It was one guy blaming me for something I haven't done. Done, now go," Jessie said.

"A cult is generally one person tricking gullible people. They're generally betrayed or ripped off. That's what happened here," Rachel said.

Jessie rolled her eyes and walked out of her room, leaving Rachel behind. Her jaw dropped briefly. The older woman hurried after her.

"I understand that you hate me right now, however we need to find out why this happened. Warlocks and witches don't fight each other," Rachel said quickly.

"I'm quite tempted to break that rule now," Jessie muttered.

"I just want to know, if anything, what you did that could possibly anger them. I'll sort the rest out on my own," Rachel said stubbornly.

Jessie wandered over to the replicator to order something. She made sure to take her time too just to keep Rachel waiting. Once a bowl appeared she scooped it up to take a long first bite of it, in full view of her as well. Rachel sighed patiently.

"He said I was filth. Nothing more. That should keep you busy for a while, hmm?" Jessie said, taking another bite afterwards. "Look, the lead warlock is dead. His remaining minions are locked up and haven't figured out a spell to escape. There's nothing to do. You're just trying to stick around longer."

"Jessica," Rachel groaned. Jessie cleared her throat. "No. There must be something, even small."

"I was pregnant, and lord knows I can't have a normal pregnancy without violence and death," Jessie said.

Rachel nodded knowingly, though it made Jessie a little bit more wary of her. "That explains a lot," her voice filled with sadness.

Jessie flinched slightly. "What does?"

"Why none of your children are like you and I," Rachel said.

"I beg your pardon?" Jessie snarled, her eyes turned cold.

Rachel either hadn't noticed or was naive about how dangerous that was. "It has become a tradition. Every generation we are blessed with at least one pair of girls, each with the gift of magic. Your grandmother was a twin, as was I, and now you and Dannielle."

Jessie stared at her while blinking rapidly, her face was a little whiter than normal.

"I was raised to believe that each twin covers for the other's weaknesses. My sister for example was an excellent healer, she specialised in creating shields and other protective spells. I on the other hand was more likely to slap a bully around without even touching them. Hmm," Rachel said, ending with a wary smile. "Unfortunately without my sister I've had to learn her spells, it hasn't been easy."

"Your sister..." Jessie mumbled.

"We were estranged. I only heard from an announcement that she was gone," Rachel said, her head bowed briefly. "With Dannielle gone and now this. Our family will never recover."

Jessie looked away, her arms folded. "What is *this*?"

Rachel frowned in confusion. "I studied the pictures. Unless you went out of your way to keep your twins separated..." Jessie's head shot back, her eyes wide. "And your husband can't count, or he was lying about all of them being related to me then..."

"You brought James into this, *and* you snooped around our photos?" Jessie stammered, her anger building up again.

"He keeps them behind his desk, hardly snooping," Rachel protested.

Jessie scoffed, "you're unbelievable. You have no right to be butting into my life, and you certainly don't have a right to be judging it."

"I wasn't judging. If I was, I'd have brought up that dreadful man sooner," Rachel said.

"So you were judging, you just wanted to get onto my good side before saying it out loud," Jessie muttered. "Nice. Look, I don't give a crap that none of my girls are twins or witches. They're happy and healthy, that's all I care about."

Rachel stared at her sorrowfully. "Well you must have cared when one of them used to be a twin. It's no good trying to bury something like that. That daughter will need to be taught to endure without her sister, she's lost a valuable teammate."

Jessie felt both her throat and chest throb, luckily the anger was more than a distraction at this point. "You don't know anything about my girls, I bet James didn't say anything either. So stop assuming..."

"I'm not assuming. It's in our genes, Jessic... Jess. There's a high chance of non identical twins and they're always girls who use magic. The one who was a twin will still be a witch, and you need..." Rachel said.

Jessie stomped over to her, "I don't need to do anything. I don't care about your traditions based on a random chance, also I managed just fine without my so called partner. You know the one you separated me from."

"It wasn't Dannielle's fault that I left you. Calling her so called and crazy isn't fair when she isn't here to defend herself," Rachel said in a low voice.

Jessie smiled, finally there was some hope. It pained her to say it but it was the only way to end this conversation for good. "You know why that is, why she isn't here? I killed her." She expected Rachel to be shocked or disgusted, even angry but her face didn't change. "Didn't you know that? We had a fight and I got rid of her."

"It was an accident, I know," Rachel said softly and sadly.

"No it wasn't. We wanted to kill each other, I won," Jessie snapped.

Finally a reaction, Rachel's face twitched slightly. "I was told there was a fight, she fell during the scuffle. Accident. There would be no reason for you to want to kill her, I told you, it's not her fault."

Jessie groaned, "no, nothing is."

Rachel shook her head, Jessie saw some anger in her eyes and was hopeful she would leave now. "Of course, it makes sense. Her death was accidental and I can see why you blame yourself after everything you did." Her eyes tried to soften as they looked towards her. "It's okay, I forgave you long ago. If I were to blame anyone, it would be that Taylor kid."

"What?" Jessie's resulting snap sounded high pitched. Her throat cleared she tried again, "What? James tried to stop us. He did nothing wrong."

Rachel walked over to her, a frown formed on her face. "You knew that Dannielle loved him and you not only took him from her, you married him, had kids with him."

Jessie's jaw was hanging more than she would have liked. She shut it and tried to shake off her shock, it only made her mad. "Loved him? She saw him for a few minutes. How much Disney crap did she watch as a kid to think that was love, huh?"

"You can't..." Rachel butted in.

Jessie wasn't even close to being done, "I took him from her? James is a Human being for god's sake, he's not some toy I snatched from my poor iddle sister's hand. I also didn't decide to date him because I thought *that'll show that spoilt Dannielle*, cue evil laugh. Good god!"

"You didn't grow up with a sister so I'll let that one go. It's an unwritten rule that you don't date anyone your sister is interested in. She wouldn't have done that to you," Rachel snapped back.

Jessie stared at her blankly for a few seconds before bursting into hysterical laughter. Rachel watched her, growing angrier by the second. Jessie tried to calm down with some deep breaths. Once she was relatively calm she tried to keep a straight face, that only made her laugh again.

"What's so funny? Don't you have any morals?" Rachel asked.

That was enough to not only make Jessie stop laughing but make her use one of her deadly glares. "Do you know why she and I got into that fight? She kidnapped me the night before my wedding, put some binding spell on me, chucked me under her bed... Oh by the way that bed was in James' grandparents house, cos she tricked them. She also imprisoned them too. Then she tried to take my place. Once she

was caught out, my lovely innocent sister tried to get me back by kidnapping my kids and holding them to ransom."

"What?" Rachel could only mutter.

Jessie nodded, "uh huh. Once that didn't work she challenged me to a fight to the death. A fight James tried to stop and I told him to butt out of. As for that unwritten rule of yours. I have been in love with him since I was thirteen. So by your rule, she was in the wrong but I suppose you won't see it as that. No. I foresaw their meeting and schemed for years before and after to stop this match made in heaven. Dannielle was a perfect little angel after all."

"This wedding drama sounds a bit made up, and was obviously after the engagement between her and him. I'm not saying you deserved that or that it is even true..." Rachel said.

Jessie felt everything this woman said strike at her, it was starting to wear her down. Her shoulders had sunk, her head lowered so much she was looking at the floor. She even felt a few inches smaller.

"Fine. I don't know why I care about what you think," she said quietly. It took quite a bit of force to lift her head and look at the other woman directly in the eye. Once she did Rachel noticed they were beginning to tear up. "I don't know why you're even here if you think of me this way. No, I do... Dannielle is dead and I'm all that's left. I don't want to be your backup daughter," her voice rose, it trembled with anger.

"That's not true," Rachel tried to say reassuringly.

"Isn't it? Nothing's changed. She's all you give a damn about. What did I do that made you hate me so much, huh?" Jessie asked through a throbbing throat. "Did I cry once, did I need to be fed while you cooed over Dannielle? Did I bond with dad better? What?"

"I don't hate you," Rachel stuttered.

Jessie stared at her defiantly, any tears in her eyes froze in place. "Then why is it after all this time you seek me out? Why is it when you finally do find me all you can talk about is Dannielle and how much I screwed her over? That girl hated me so much and you wanna know why? She had everything. She was raised by a mother who loved her, dotted on her. She talked like she was used to getting anything she wanted."

"Then James came along, someone or in her view something she wanted that I had that she could not. I remember that meeting between her and him like it was yesterday. No interest whatsoever until she saw I was there. Suddenly she was in love and wanted to marry him. Why? In her eyes I had something she couldn't have and she couldn't stand it. She couldn't let me, the abandoned twin, be happy. I imagine if I grew up with her she'd have stolen my toys and you would have scolded me for having them first. That's exactly what happened there."

"That's..." Rachel argued.

"That's the truth. I grew up with the knowledge that both my parents didn't want me. Then I found out that not only did my mother not want me, but she wanted my sister. I met someone that actually cared about me and Dannielle went out of her way to steal that away. Didn't she have enough? If she was as sweet and perfect as you envision her, surely she would have just been happy for me and went to the wedding. Of course not. In the end she died because she either wanted me to die, or for me to live with the guilt of killing her," Jessie said. "I did nothing to her and that's what I got. All I did was exist."

Rachel swallowed a lump in her throat. "Jess. He wasn't worth either of you fighting over."

"Maybe you should have told her that. In the end I fought her not to kill her, but to give her a smack or ten for kidnapping me and my kids. Don't put me on her level. I only said all that before to get you to leave me alone. James is worth fighting for but if that was all that was, I wouldn't have. I didn't need to," Jessie said bitterly. "He chose me and that was a huge injustice for her."

"She thought they were engaged before you took him. Try to see it from her perspective," Rachel said.

"I can't, I'm not that nuts. Did you not tell her it was a sham to scare the two of them into the dating world?" Jessie groaned. "Don't pin this on me."

"I shouldn't have brought this up..." Rachel stammered. Jessie shook her head rapidly. "I just wish it ended up differently. You both should be here, and at least one of you should be a mother to twins. Something's gone wrong horribly, I... I take full responsibility for it. I failed both of you and our family."

The mention of twins again left a sharp twinge in Jessie's stomach, an old pain that haunted her long ago. Her hand went to cover it. "I am," she found herself saying. She didn't want to, but Rachel wasn't going to shut up about it anytime soon and she couldn't bare that pain everytime.

"What?" Rachel was just confused.

"I did have twins," Jessie said, the memories of that made her whole body tremble. "One, she died."

Rachel gasped, her face turned a ghostly white. "I..."

"Didn't know. You don't know anything, that's the problem. Maybe you should think before you judge anyone ever again," Jessie said in a harsh tone.

"How? Which one?" Rachel asked quietly.

Jessie rolled her eyes, hoping that it would mask the pain she was in. "I only told you that because I was tired of you saying my daughters aren't good enough for your precious family. A family I don't want to be a part of. Both questions are none of your business."

"But... it's not possible. She should have been protected. How could this happen?" Rachel stuttered.

"Oh right, ignore the part where you ranted about your grandkids not being suitable for your family tradition, bringing up some very painful memories for your long lost daughter who hates you. Is saying sorry really that hard for you?" Jessie said.

Rachel sighed, "no. I am very sorry. I wish I could take it back."

"Well it's a start," Jessie said.

"Does that mean...?" Rachel said hopefully.

Jessie scoffed, "not even close. I let dad into my life because he apologised, even if it wasn't his fault. You have done nothing but find fault in my life and make excuses. Why should I give you a chance? Admit it, you're only here cos the spoilt little angel Dannielle isn't around. Admit it or I'll never respect you."

"I didn't choose to keep Dannielle because I preferred her!" Rachel blurted out. As she expected she got a bemused look of disbelief from Jessie. "I was a fourteen year old girl with twin babies. My family had cast me aside because of it. I couldn't cope on my own. I decided to put you both up for adoption, but I was too weak to go through with it."

"Right, in that case you wouldn't have..." Jessie said.

"I couldn't part with either of you, but I couldn't take care of you both either. I was trying to do the right thing. You're right to think I was selfish, but not with you," Rachel said. "Dannielle was the one who suffered from my selfishness. I gave you a better start, or so I thought. I chose you, as you accused me before, because I had bonded with Dannielle more. I thought you would be happier without me." She gave her a weak smile, "I was right in the end, wasn't I?"

Jessie's arms folded firmly, her eyes seemed to glaze over as she thought about it. "How can I believe that? You being here goes against what you say."

"I suppose it's my selfish side striking twice," Rachel said honestly.

Jessie sighed as she looked down at the floor, her arms tightened their grip on each other. "See it from my side. You reappear after so many years, bring up some awful memories, slag me and my family off..."

"I do, I'm sorry," Rachel nodded quickly. "I knew something was wrong when I didn't see a twin, I was right but I handled it terribly out of fear. As for Dannielle, I guess I only heard her side of it and made the rest up. Something I did a lot. I was out of line."

"Nice recover, how do I know you mean it?" Jessie asked, bringing her head back up.

Rachel gave her a small strained smile. "I guess you don't. Maybe if you give me a chance I can prove it."

Jessie bit her bottom lip while laughing slightly, her head shook. "Why should I?"

"I was never expecting you to accept me as your mum, at least not right away. I could teach you about your roots and your power. Or I could just tell you stories of how awful of a mother I was, so you don't feel so bad about me not being there," Rachel said, ending with a little mirth in her voice.

"Sounds like fun," Jessie said in deadpan.

Rachel's smile grew, it was a lot warmer than her last few. "How much magic do you use?"

"I don't, not much," Jessie replied with little interest.

Rachel looked downcast. "That's not what I heard. You've unlocked your whole strength, you've had trouble in the past but you're still clear minded. That's nothing to be scoffed at."

"That's because I don't use it," Jessie said quickly. "The last time I tried, it didn't go entirely well. There's stuff I can't do in case it sets me off."

"You not using it all the time is a good thing. Power is always tempting, you must have resisted to have lasted so long," Rachel said.

Jessie felt a little uncomfortable, she fidgeted slightly so she allowed her arms to fall by her sides. "You misunderstand. I have turned a few times. I've killed people."

"I know," Rachel said softly. "That was in the early days, right? You've had years of this power easy to reach in you, yet you haven't. Give yourself better credit."

"But..." Jessie mumbled.

"You won't turn evil from doing harder spells. That's not how it works. It only gets the better of you if you keep abusing it," Rachel explained. "You're holding yourself back by not doing anything. Haven't you ever been in a situation where you know you can help, but the fear of turning has held you back?"

Jessie didn't answer her, not aloud. So many examples filled her head, some as simple as just not understanding the spell books in her possession. She saw Rachel nodding like she understood anyway.

"Don't think of me as your mother. Think of me as a teacher. I can help you and once I have, you can cast me aside and forget about me," Rachel said. Jessie frowned her way. "Use me. It's the least I can do."

The Security Office:

James stared at his latest guest with so little interest on his face, he thought that he had either misheard or wasn't even listening. The Doctor waited a few seconds before he decided to try again.

"I didn't lose you after Daniel has woken up, did I?"

After a few seconds James only blinked, he showed no sign that what he had said registered. When he finally said something his voice sounded tired. "Of course we are."

"That's, not what I was expecting," the Doctor said with hesitation.

Nathan, who sat on the opposite side of the desk, shifted around so he was sitting sideways. His head constantly kept looking between them. "Okay, I'll ask. How?"

"He's not sure," the Doctor answered, which made James scoff and roll his eyes. "None of the vision images are consistent, they never are."

"Yeah but the us dying must have been consistent enough," Nathan said.

The Doctor sighed, "Voyager is destroyed. There's no way to be vague about that."

"What about the Enterprise?" Nathan suggested hopefully. "Maybe we evacuate to it before that happens."

"It's not a lot to go on," James said.

"The man has just woken up from a coma, that you put him in," the Doctor snapped.

Nathan winced loud enough for them both to hear the air rushing through his teeth. He looked to James to see the response. His face was still the same as before.

"Ylara died horribly because of him, three more on the Leda died when it imploded. He also killed my step mother in cold blood. I'm not losing sleep over it," he muttered. Nathan gave him a bemused look. "I just think we need more than Voyager's going to blow up someday. You said there were images, they may be more useful than you think."

"I worry sometimes that you really don't care about the people you've hurt or killed, especially when it's because the person's accused of the same thing. It makes it difficult to work with you," the Doctor said.

James' eyes shifted to one side, Nathan noticed the flinch he did when that happened. He turned the chair to one side so it was facing the wall. "You shouldn't have come to me then."

"Daniel believed you or Lena should know first," the Doctor said uncomfortably. James' head turned in his direction slightly. "You are second in command again as well."

"Crap," James groaned as he looked briefly at the back wall. Nathan sniggered in response. "Fine, let me put it this way. Voyager could randomly explode tomorrow, while retaking the Krralef world or in twenty years time in a battle. You or he haven't given us anything that can tell us which. What can I do with this?"

"He wasn't confident in the images he saw. He wanted to warn one of you and think them through," the Doctor answered.

"Did he tell you any of them?" Nathan questioned.

"A mixture of blue and red reflections on the hull as it buckled. A tower coming down. A black wave. Fire burning. That last one seemed to put him off," the Doctor replied.

Nathan pulled a face, "blue and red? Sounds clashy." James looked directly at him with an amused look in his eyes. Nathan chuckled at it. "I've spent way too much time with Jess lately."

"I was just going to say," the Doctor commented.

"I don't know about the colours, but the tower and black wave are definitely Game Sphere related. The Enterprise logs did mention something like the latter absorbing Erayas," James said.

"We never did find out what that black or rather blue on the inside anomaly was," the Doctor mused.

James nodded, "Damien said he did. I never did trust anything out of his mouth though."

"Maybe you could pump him for info," Nathan suggested.

The door opened, somebody was about to stick their head in. James groaned into his hand, "no!"

"Aaaw," Danny's voice whined as the tip of a blonde head disappeared back into the corridor.

Nathan's eyes were wider than normal. "Does she really just wait around for double entendre opportunities?"

"Sometimes I wonder," James mumbled. "It might be worth interrogating him. I just hope the Doc here doesn't object to the mistreatment of a mass murdering terrorist and slave driver."

"Would it matter if I did?" the Doctor sighed.

"Damien, really?" James pulled a face.

The Doctor reluctantly nodded. "It's in my programming."

"What about the fire? Does that ring any bell?" Nathan asked warily.

"It unnerved him just saying that. There's more to it, I'm sure of it," the Doctor said. "I should return before Neelix poisons him back into a coma."

"We'll arrange a meeting once he puts it all together. I doubt anyone will trust me alone with him, and I'd prefer he didn't bother Lena either," James said.

"I agree. Should I tell Mr Paris in the mean time?" the Doctor questioned.

"That's okay, I'll do it," James answered with a sigh.

The Doctor nodded before he walked outside. Nathan watched him until the door shut behind him. He then spun his chair around instead of readjusting his position to face James directly again.

"That's put a bit of a crimp on what we were talking about," he said.

James stared at him, his expression was confused. "What were we talking about?"

Nathan laughed nervously. "I don't know now. This has left you in a bad mood."

"No. It's been a weird day," James said with a shake of his head. "It can't be worse than everyone dying, right?"

"In yours and my opinion, it's sort of there," Nathan said, his hand gestured flatly by his nose. He rose out of his seat. "I'll come back another time."

"No," James said quickly to stop him. He forced a smile, "it's fine. I'm not mad, just a bit distracted."

"I dunno. I'm still not sure if you and I are okay. I also don't know if that time on Deck Thirteen was just a fluke. I don't want to overstep my boundaries," Nathan said.

James looked at the door again, Nathan wasn't sure why at first. When he looked back he noticed Nathan's confused face. "Danny."

"Oh," Nathan said, he checked as well. The door remained closed. "I didn't mean for it to sound like that. Oops."

"In Danny's head it would," James said quietly. "No, I'm glad you were there. I needed a distraction from it all."

The two men heard a little giggle from outside. James gestured his hand towards the door, "see." Nathan couldn't help but smirk. "Danny, go away!"

"Spoil sport," Danny's voice sounded disappointed.

"So, I have a good idea about what or who you want to talk about," James said uneasily.

Nathan felt a little guilty and he hadn't even said anything yet. His whole body tensed up. "Yeah. Um. I'm planning on doing something for the thirtieth anniversary of um... well, you know." The little colour in James' face drained away. "On the twentieth I placed some flowers on her grave, talked to her, you know updated her on a few things."

James' eyes looked a thousand lightyears away. He didn't say anything for a few minutes. Nathan felt the guilt not only wash over him like a tidal wave, it dragged him down like one too.

"Yeah, I shouldn't have said that. Forget it, okay?" he stuttered.

"I hope..." James said just as he had begun to stand up. Nathan hovered midway between sitting and standing. "I hope you're not inviting me to anything."

"I guess I was. Nothing huge. A family gathering at the most," he answered.

James shook his head meekly. "You don't want me to do that."

"Why not?" Nathan asked carefully.

"I didn't handle the twentieth anniversary as well as you did," James replied a lot quieter than usual.

"You don't know that. I cried like a baby, I drank myself into a coma once I got home," Nathan said with a sad smile forming.

James closed his eyes, he shuddered as certain memories flooded back into his head as if they had just happened. "You don't want to know."

Nathan looked on in concern as James turned his chair around so he could no longer see him. It made him very uncomfortable, it didn't help that he was still neither sitting or standing up. He thought he should leave but he didn't want to run away from the mess he caused. In the end he chose to sit back down.

"It'll be nice. You, Jess, the kids, Jodie and I. We don't have to talk about her or anything, just a family dinner. You can invite your sisters if you want, I'd encourage it." He stopped when he heard a deep and laboured inhale. He knew what that meant, now he definitely wasn't leaving. "I know it's rough. You shouldn't continue to struggle through it alone. I know you do cos even Jessie doesn't know much about what happened or her for that matter. I won't force you though." He forced a smirk on his face, "as if I could."

The chair moved slightly but he still couldn't see him. "I... did things I'm not proud of. I thought about avoiding people until it was over this time."

"James," Nathan said lightly. "On the tenth anniversary I went to a bar, drank too much and picked a fight with the biggest guy there. I woke up in hospital. Even though I told myself that I'd do something more suitable on the twentieth, I still ended up drinking far too much. You know that bridge that she always liked to stand on?" He waited to see if he answered. He didn't. "I nearly hurled myself off it. I'm not proud of it but I punched the guy who saved me. Not that the jump would have killed me, it wasn't high enough."

"I drank far too much and pinned Jessie to the wall, just so she wouldn't leave me," James said in a hoarse voice. It was enough to shock Nathan to his core, his mouth hung open and his eyes were wide. "I wish I had jumped off a bridge instead."

"When you say pinned?" Nathan stammered.

"I was making moves on her, being clingy and saying stupid things. She rightly wanted to go to another room, away from me. I blocked her from leaving, she tried to go around, I did it again," James's voice was getting quieter. "I still don't know how she forgave me for it."

"That's... not as bad as I thought," Nathan said.

James turned his chair back around quickly. Nathan quickly noticed the red around his eyes. If there were any tears on his face before they were long since wiped away. His face now only showed anger. "Are you serious? She was terrified of me, I look back on it and cringe. I wonder what would have happened if nobody came by to shoot me." Nathan only shook his head. "Assaulting the woman I loved because she wouldn't spend the night with me, that was how I marked the anniversary of the rape of my sister. Very fitting and it wasn't even on the anniversary, it was a few days before it."

"I'll admit it's not good," Nathan said. He made his shaky voice sound a lot more stable, confident. "But we all deal with grief differently. I actually do think punching the guy who pulled me off the bridge was worse than yours. You'll disagree, I know, I would too. Jessie probably forgave you cos you were obviously depressed from the anniversary, drunk and not your usual self. My foster brother urged me to face up to the man I hit and explain that to him, but I honestly thought I didn't deserve forgiveness."

"She didn't know," James said plainly. "She still doesn't."

"Um, yes she does," Nathan was very confused now.

James looked him in the eye, to Nathan his looked a little lost. "To this day she thought it was just the pregnancy news and the fear of being like my dad that set me off on a drinking binge. It's only partly true."

Nathan stared at him for a minute or so, James looked back towards the wall in the mean time. "Jessie knows now, she'll have figured it out."

"How? It's not like I told her the date," James said quietly. His eyes rolled, he seemed to sneer towards no one in particular. Nathan knew it was at himself. "I guess this year she'll find out."

"Yeah, would that be so terrible?" Nathan asked in a whisper.

James gave him a look that easily meant yes. Before he could enquire the door opened. Nathan groaned, he half expected it to be Danny again.

"Oh, sorry. I don't want to interrupt," Jessie's voice said. James and Nathan looked towards her. They both faked some sort of smile that made her more uncomfortable and now suspicious. "I can come back later if..."

"No, I think I depressed him enough," Nathan said while climbing to his feet. He hurried over to the door, briefly stopping beside Jessie. "I seem to be really good at that. Fix him little sis."

"Yeah thanks," Jessie muttered, a stink eye was directed at him. He laughed nervously before rushing outside. She sighed in James' direction, one hand flew to her hip. "Stop that, you couldn't even fool Naomi."

James forced away the fake smile, all that was left was a mostly blank face. As usual his eyes said something else. He got to his feet so he could walk partly towards her. "How are you doing?"

Jessie laughed bitterly. "Crap. You?"

"Do you want to talk about it?" James asked.

"No, not yet. I wandered around the ship, I even tried to sleep it off. All I want to do is scream, you know," Jessie replied with a meek smile. "You didn't answer me anyway. With my mum and now Nathan bugging you..."

"It doesn't matter, that's why," James said quickly. He got what he expected, a scowl from Jessie. "I'm fine, now."

Jessie giggled, she smirked afterwards. "I hope for your sake that wasn't a lie. I'm fine now that you're here, wink."

James resisted but not well enough, he laughed as well. "You're right, it did sound like that."

"You mean it wasn't? What's a girl have to do to be romanced these days?" Jessie said while trying not to laugh again.

"Sorry, will a hug make up for it?" James said.

Jessie smiled as she walked closer to him. "Depends on the hug." James closed the gap to wrap his arms around her. She quickly embraced him back tightly, her head rested against his chest.

Enterprise

Ten Forward:

The only tables still standing were bunched together to make one large table. Chakotay thought about the possible reasons for it. The only thing that popped into his head was its tiny crew for the last few months. Considering the size of the Enterprise it must have been eery and very lonely living on it like that. Meal times probably livened it up for an hour if they all arranged to sit together.

There in the centre of the table was a familiar face staring into space. He didn't want to disturb her or so he told himself. Truthfully he hadn't been so afraid since that day.

"Lena," he managed to say anyway.

Her head turned only slightly. "I want to hear it from you."

Chakotay's blood ran cold. It halted his brief approach for a moment. "Hear what exactly?"

"Everything."

"Lena. Don't you think we could start somewhere lighter, easier. Maybe with a hello or a how are you?" Chakotay said, not that he expected anything like that.

He noticed a brief smile on her face. It wasn't a nice one though. "The last time we talked you slapped me, at my mother's funeral. You're lucky I'm here at all."

"Yes," Chakotay said quietly, the memory of that made him feel sick.

"I deserve an explanation," Lena said.

"You do but..." Chakotay said quickly.

Lena climbed out of the chair she sat in so she could stare directly at him. "So it's true. My dad's a selfish coward."

That hurt more than he liked. "I... you could say that. I just can't because you don't want to know."

The smile on her face was bitter. It was directed at him this time which made it sting all the more. "I gave you a chance."

"I know," Chakotay sighed.

"Last one. Is it true about what you did to mum? Did you really leave her behind?" Lena interrogated him. "Did you try to murder my brother too?"

"James isn't exactly a saint," Chakotay blurted out. Again his old prejudice was corrupting his answers before he could think it through.

"No, but he didn't try to kill his son in law, which is what I asked," Lena muttered.

Chakotay didn't think again, "give him twenty years. You meant step son anyway."

Lena ignored that for now, "Damien?"

"I wish," Chakotay smirked.

"Not a time for jokes. I didn't mean did you try to kill him, I meant did you work with him?" Lena grumbled.

"Yes, all true," Chakotay replied.

Lena's bottom lip trembled a little. Whether it was anger or an attempt to fight off tears, he wasn't sure. "Why?" was all she said.

Chakotay had asked himself that a lot these days. "I tried. Everything I did made things worse. In the end I was no longer me..."

"When did that part happen?" Lena asked.

"The funeral," Chakotay replied without thinking.

Lena exhaled as her eyes burned. Now he knew.

"Turning Evil isn't exclusive to witches and Slayers. I..." he said.

"Excuses!" Lena hissed back. "I want reasons, intentions. I don't want to hear vague double talk or brush off's. I'm not like anyone else, I won't take that crap lying down. To the point." Chakotay felt his lips curl, he wouldn't expect anything less from her. She was still her mother's daughter. "Why did you take mum to the Tolg?"

"I was trying to save her. I lost sight of everything else. I'd dug myself in too deep of a hole," Chakotay answered.

Lena didn't look impressed with that answer. "What did I just say? Because of you my mother is a Tolg drone. I deserve a proper explanation, not excuses. If this was your mother would you settle for anything less?"

The answer was definitely a no. It was simple but he understood now how difficult he had been. He was blinded by his hatred of James to care about his feelings on the matter. Yasmin was little more than a blip on the radar, in fact in his poor state of mind he'd forgotten about her. Kiara was far too young and was already confused by her own mother's situation, he didn't want to add a grandmother

to it. But Lena was another story. She was his daughter and had done nothing to deserve his recent transformation. She did deserve an answer, no matter how hard it was.

"Why don't you take a seat. We've got a lot to talk about," he said.

Lena stared at him for what felt like a while. She eventually nodded and sat back down.

Meanwhile:

There was a somber silence as the few members of Senior Staff stared at the Astrometrics screen. Tira stood behind them, averting her eyes.

"Am I seeing what I think I'm seeing?" Tom dared to ask.

Harry felt a little sick, "that's the most brutal thing I've ever seen."

"Tell me about it. Yet I can't tear my eyes away from it," B'Elanna said. She rubbed one of them, "maybe if I did, I'd literally tear them out and I'll never have to see things like that again."

"Maybe we should look at the sensor scans Tira sent us," Tom suggested.

Tira turned her head towards them looking gobsmacked. Then she saw what they were looking at and it definitely was not what she thought it was. The first part of the image that struck her first unfortunately was the squeezed together cleavage, barely contained in a red velvet type material. It was skin tight whatever it was.

"I would but this is set to screensaver, there's a password," Harry panicked while he typed. He glared at his friend, "did you think I wanted to look at this?"

"Why not, Annika or rather Seven was one of your billion ill advised crushes," Tom blurted out. He winced and looked at Tira, "sorry."

B'Elanna rolled her eyes, she gave Harry a light shove that made him stumble to one side.

"Screensaver with a password, that's probably something easy like Damien. We haven't done this storyline before!"

Harry and Tom looked at each other, both just as confused as the other. They shrugged.

B'Elanna grunted in frustration as the awful picture of Annika posing for the camera in a red cat suit was swapped for an even *better* one. "It's not Damien." Tom briefly looked up and screamed at the new image. Harry thought after hearing that he was not brave enough to look.

Tira squinted her eyes at the screen. "What is that she's sitting in?"

"The optimist in me says an acid bath she was slowly and painfully dying in. The idiot that's been on Voyager for nearly twelve years says bubble bath," Tom answered, almost gagging.

"Try Snuggiebumps," Harry continued to panic, and he wasn't even looking at the picture.

B'Elanna cringed as she typed in that word. The picture finally disappeared. "God. What was the point?"

"You weren't kidding," Tira commented to Harry. He nodded.

Tom was curious, but still a little scarred for life so his voice trembled. "About what?"

"If there's a tense, horrible and or sad situation going on, something stupid happens," Tira replied.

B'Elanna mouthed *yeah*, then shook her head. "No episode must go without at least one bad joke in it. It's the unwritten rule."

"Yes we like our useless fodder and Annika brain bleach, now sensor scans," Tom stuttered.

"I thought Annika was our useless fodder," Harry said.

B'Elanna tapped at the station. The large screen in front of them displayed various smaller ones, each one tainted by a yellow haze. The boys winced at some of them, B'Elanna just shook her head with a grim face. Tira had already averted her eyes again.

"Is this the first planet?" Harry asked in dismay. He heard Tira mumble a yes. He turned to look at her. "What made you even send a probe down there?"

"The distress call," she said.

"There's no chance that anything could survive down there," B'Elanna noted while she read the text at her fingertips. "Surface temperature two hundred degrees Celsius." Harry and Tom both cringed. "The atmosphere is choked with a high concentration of nitrogen and sulfur, there's no way that any heat from that star would make it back out into space."

"My god. How is there anything left?" Harry stuttered as he glanced away.

Tom was starting to miss the Annika pictures, he shook his head stubbornly. "No, your scans must have been wrong. I'm sorry Tira."

"I'm not. I sent four probes, which is why I have so many images and information. Each probe only lasted a minute after they entered the atmosphere, I lost two," Tira said. "There's definitely remnants of a civilisation down there." She pointed at one of the images which showed a blurry grey blob amongst the yellow. "That has gone on my later scans, the first two showed it eroding away so quickly you could see it in the blurred video."

"There's a video feed?" B'Elanna questioned.

Tom shuddered violently. "No thanks."

"I didn't expect you'd want to see it," Tira said.

Harry dared to look up at the screen once again. One particular picture got his attention, it was mostly brown and a little grey, the yellow appeared to be moving. He swore he saw a flicker of red, he blamed that on his imagination. "The theory holds up then. At least one planet was absorbed by the Game Sphere from a different system and chucked into this one, on a collision course with a native one."

"Now we know which one," Tom said.

B'Elanna's hands clenched against the computer. "The Softmicron did this on purpose. They didn't even bother with towers did they? Just chucked them into a close orbit with a red giant, sat back and laughed."

Tira felt a lump form in her throat, a big one. She wasn't the only one. "It's senseless. The only consolation would be that it would have been quick."

Harry frowned, "it is senseless. Cruel as they are the Soft have a motive for the towers. They're drawing power for something, they're creating an army. What's the point of this?"

"It doesn't matter. I'm feeling oddly motivated to smash some Soft's faces," B'Elanna grumbled.

Tom gave her a sideways glance. "Maybe that's the point. They sent Tira here knowing full well that she knows us. It's provocation." He inhaled deeply, the images made him hold it for longer than normal. "This stays between us. This is the kinda thing that will inspire the natives and if that's what the Soft are after, they're not going to get it."

B'Elanna gave him a weak but proud smile. "Now you're sounding like a Captain."

"Gee thanks," Tom had to smirk.

Jessie paced almost the entire length of the Security Office, while James and even the new baby seemed to look on.

"Just when I thought everything was fine, she appears in my life. Why?" she said during one pace. Like clockwork she turned on her heel to go the other way. "As soon as the mention of Dannielle comes along, she's like a whole different person. The claws come out. Why does she do it?"

"Jess, calm down," James said, noting her pacing was getting faster.

"She thinks that Dannielle meeting you once or twice means she owns you and I stole you from her, even though the whole fake engagement thing was her idea," Jessie continued anyway. She turned to do another lap. "Don't get me started on the whole twin thing. I mean, this woman needs professional help."

James pulled himself out of his seat to walk over. He tried to clutch her hand or at least slow her down, but she escaped from him anyway.

"If this goes on I will need it, again," Jessie grumbled. Finally she stopped for a moment while on the opposite side of the office to him. "Why does she hate me so much?"

James pulled a confused face, "that's creepy, déjà vu."

Jessie sighed impatiently, which made him quickly look back at her. He wasn't surprised to see her pacing towards him again. "Naturally, we've done this before. Your dad, your mum, my dad... it was obviously my turn."

"Then maybe that's it, we won't get anymore," James said with a hopeful smile.

Jessie stopped and chuckled quietly. "Yeah, unless one of our parents isn't our real one." She pulled a face, "no we've done that too."

James nodded, "it did sound familiar."

"She claims she left for my own good. That the only reason she decided to intrude was so she could have a daughter at her wedding," Jessie said. Before James could comment on that she continued, "and the stupid witch stuff. To make sure I would pass it on I suppose."

James glanced back at the photo arrangement behind him briefly. Something was off about it so he walked over to it. "It sounds like you don't believe her either," he said.

Jessie shrugged, then folded her arms.

"I dunno. She knew who I was, had already found you. Yet she charged back here just to yell at me for the whole fake arranged marriage thing, that was her and Susy's idea in the first place. You were... I hate to say it, not her priority."

"Same as always. She's probably been practicing both versions of the poor Dannielle speeches for years," Jessie said with a bitter laugh.

James turned around after moving one more picture, he looked relieved. "I'm glad it's not just me. I didn't want to make this whole thing worse."

"I never wanted to give her a chance. I always said I'd tell her where to go," Jessie said, her smirk fading away. "I mean why should I? She abandoned me as a baby. You know better than anyone what I went through thanks to that. She comes back and she's all over the place. Please forgive me, how

dare you steal things from your sister, no twins you heathen, forgive me, your sister is awesome, oh magic is fun."

Even though she was clearly annoyed, her ranting was making James smile a little, he couldn't help it. He tried to hide it.

"I honestly thought the twin sister she was talking about was the voice in her head," Jessie finished ranting. She noticed him smiling, her arms folded and she scowled. "I'm so glad that you find this funny."

"Sorry, it's you I find funny not that," James said, again trying to fight his smile.

Jessie laughed and smirked back, so he decided to stop trying. "I thought the quirky stuff was on my dad's side, cos of Jodie and Nathan. No, I probably got a double dose."

"I wouldn't call her quirky. Mad maybe," James said.

Jessie nodded, "yup. I can't figure her out. It's like two different people. One wants my forgiveness and or to catch up with me. The other is picking out which grandkids to have and blaming me for Dannielle losing her mind."

"That's funny, cos I met up with Dannielle a second time to try and think of a way out of the fake wedding. That was long before your fight with her," James said, cringing slightly.

Jessie had to laugh. "Oh really? How did that go?"

"Not well," James ended up smirking. "I asked her what we were going to do about it, and she said she'd look for a pink dress with... I wanna say a trail on the back?"

Jessie pulled a disgusted face, she couldn't help but shudder. "You're right, she was definitely a lunatic from the start."

"Pink and dress?" James laughed as he walked over to her.

"Eew stop," Jessie groaned.

James continued to laugh as he leaned in to give her a hug. She didn't know why he did but she wasn't going to argue against it, so she hugged him back.

"I imagine if it was the other way around, I doubt I would have asked you to leave and never come back. That's for sure," he said.

"I often wonder about that," Jessie murmured into his shoulder. All she got was a questioned *hmm* in response. "Would I be the mad twin if I was raised by my mum, would Dannielle be your best friend? Would I be looking in the Dresses for Barbies catalogue, planning our fake wedding? You meanwhile wondering what that crazy Jessica's problem was."

"No, not a chance," James replied.

Jessie pulled away a little so she could look up at his face. "We're identical twins. The only differences were because we were raised differently."

"Well, it's true that would have created some differences," James said. "But you two were always different people. If it were the other way around you two would have lived completely differently to the other. Dannielle probably would have been clingy... er with your upbringing, five year old me would have ran a mile to be honest. You probably would have had more confidence to be who you are now a lot sooner. I dunno if your mum would have still wanted to scare you into dating by faking an arranged marriage, but we would have been living in the same city anyway. We'd have met then and become great friends still."

Jessie smiled and shook her head, once she stopped she rested it back on his shoulder. "It'd be nice if that was true."

"I don't see why it wouldn't be true. Twins raised together can be completely different people," James said.

"I guess, I'm just thankful it is this way round," Jessie sighed.

"Even after everything you've been through?" James asked.

Jessie pulled back again, this time further so they could no longer hold each other. "Yes, no... maybe," she stammered. "It worked out. We met and we've had a great life together. But I can't forgive her for what happened before that. I don't think I ever will, regardless of her reasons. It doesn't mean I wish it was the other way around. It makes no sense."

"I know exactly what you mean," James said with a warm smile.

Jessie laughed a little bitterly. "Yeah, you're probably the only one. Your mum, my mum. Yours was different though. She found you and didn't try to run away. She left you to give you a better chance, not knowing what would happen."

"Isn't that what you said yours did?" James asked carefully.

"Yeah, I'm not sure I believe her though. If she had really tried to hand over the two of us for adoption, then changed her mind, surely they would have made a bigger fuss. They wouldn't let her do that surely," Jessie replied.

"Yeah, that does sound a bit unrealistic," James mumbled.

"What do I do? I want nothing to do with her but with the towers, Game Spheres and super human experiments going on, it'd be selfish of me to not take her up on her offer," Jessie said.

James disagreed, he shook his head first to show it. "It's not selfish, at all. You don't know if anything she says is true. There's nothing wrong with being wary."

Jessie's shoulders slouched a bit. A groan escaped her, a lot louder than she intended. "I know it's not the same, but what would you do?"

"Me? You're asking the idiot who tried to kill his mum and then gave her the cold shoulder for what, two years?" James said, disbelief tainting his voice.

Jessie stared at him determinedly. "Yes. With what you know now and if the situation was reversed. What would you do? Would you give her a chance, let her teach you how to use your power and ditch her, or ignore her completely?"

"I don't know either. I lost my mum before I got the chance to tell her that I forgave her, I wasted so much time being mad on principle. At least it felt that way looking back on it," James said. "However she wasn't coldly looking at pictures of her grandkids, complaining that they look like you and not me. Or..."

"She thinks because of this whole I must have twins thing, that I should have had more twins after what happened with Amy. Only she thinks Sasha was the twin as she apparently looks like me, while Amy and Duncan don't. They're just yours," Jessie muttered. "She only accepts Roxanne as mine because I still have baby weight."

James winced, "Roxanne?"

"Think of it as a temporary Baby Girl type name. It sounds more personal than our baby," Jessie said.

"So, is Sasha even mine in this scenario?" James dared to ask.

Jessie sighed, her head tilted to the right while her hand covered her face. "I don't know. Probably not. If dark haired girls can't have blonde kids, then blonde guys can't have dark haired daughters."

"We could always replicate a tiny red wig," James suggested not seriously.

"Don't joke, I may do it," Jessie smiled. It didn't last long. "Surely this whole twin fuss alone is enough reason to ignore her forever. How can anyone make having twins a family tradition? Nobody decides it."

"She thought something awful had happened, and she wasn't wrong," James sighed.

Jessie nodded grimly, "yeah, it still doesn't excuse her behaviour. It also is very off putting that she accused me of stealing you from my sister. That only happened cos I thought she'd leave me alone if I told her what happened. You know with that last fight."

"It was an accident, unless you twisted some of the details," James said mid cringe.

"Well it's not like I didn't do anything, we were fighting, and she wanted it to the death..." Jessie protested.

James shook his head, "I'm sure you didn't. It only happened because she stumbled over and hit something on the way down. Did you tell her you did it on purpose?"

"Maybe," Jessie said. "It didn't matter, she already knew everything. It just gave her an excuse to say that I'm only at fault cos I stole you. Dannielle being completely innocent, blameless, bugs the hell out of me."

"Maybe that's your answer," James said quietly. Jessie nodded grimly, which made him close his eyes tightly for a few seconds. "I shouldn't have said that. I don't want to be the one that gets in the way between a mother and daughter. I really don't want to be the one who makes you regret not giving her a chance, if or when something happens to her."

Jessie weakly smiled at him. "You're not. If she had just come to me and told me why she left, toning down the dramatics and victim blaming, I might have given her a chance. Just one mind you. All she did instead was prove that Dannielle was far more important to her. If it wasn't over you, it would have been something else."

"You did say she apologised for all of that," James said meekly.

"Hmm," Jessie murmured while directing a raised eyebrow his way. "Am I getting the faintest hint of an opinion?"

James laughed nervously, "no, no." Jessie's eyes narrowed slightly, he wasn't sure if it was mockingly or not. "Maybe, subconsciously." He assumed they were jokingly as she smiled afterwards.

"What happened with you and Janeway was too cruel," Jessie said sympathetically. "You missed out on so much. I remember when you came home from that original make up visit. You were so happy, and that was just you two chatting, catching up, learning things about each other."

"Yeah," James lowered his head slightly. "Like you said, it wasn't the same..."

"Subconscious changed its mind? I know it's not entirely the same, but there is a lot that is," Jessie said.

"I just mean she was around for years and she didn't say anything. My response to finding out was an attempted murder. There was a friend who became a sister cos of it," James said.

Jessie smiled and nodded. "Oh, you meant the not the same as a *good* thing. You're forgetting that meeting when I was a teenager. Nothing for years. I may still try to kill her, she's really annoying and

I won't have evil as a reason because she wants to train me. I doubt there's another sister or this whole invited me to the wedding thing is one big fib."

"Brother?" James joked.

Jessie scowled, "great stuff."

James couldn't help but laugh at her expression, she relaxed it and laughed as well. "Forget me and Janeway, okay. You used to say you'd never give her the time of day but here you are thinking about it. What do you want to do? Do you want her in your life at all?"

The only answer he got was a long drawn out sigh.

Ten Forward:

"I didn't set out to hurt you, I didn't set out to hurt anybody," Chakotay said softly. He found himself chewing at his fingernails without even realising, at least not right away. "Kathryn knew it would happen someday, that they'd come for her. She didn't mind though, she had accepted it, almost as if it was a requirement of being who she was."

Lena looked down at her entwined hands as they tightened. "Who she was? You mean, James and I..."

Chakotay nodded. "The Chosens' mother, yeah I thought that was what she meant too."

"You say that like it wasn't. That was why though. Frenit wanted to hurt us, or just James anyway," Lena said.

Chakotay sighed as his attention went towards the golden planet outside. "Don't you find it strange that he sent lackeys to do it, or that he died and came back later?"

"What are you saying?" Lena asked.

The Mess Hall:

Rachel stared up at the two people standing at her table with a look of shock on her face. Her partner, Antony, looked between them curiously.

"I'm saying I'm willing to give you a chance, get to know you... and stuff," Jessie answered awkwardly.

The smile that developed on Rachel's face appeared quickly it brought a tear to her eye. "Oh, I'd love that. Please." Her hand gestured for her to sit down.

Antony looked towards the second person, "we should leave them be." He started to pull himself up.

"No," Jessie said quickly to stop him. "I'd feel better if James was here too."

Rachel glanced briefly at James, the distaste in her eyes was obvious and she knew it. She quickly tried to blink it away. Antony meanwhile smiled, "why not, we're all one family. Almost."

Jessie sat down at the table first, James did the same once she was down. "You must be the fiancee, Anthony?"

"Close, Antony. It's nice to meet you finally, Jessie," Antony said warmly.

Rachel smiled awkwardly, "I still can't get used to that."

Ten Forward:

"Why not?" Chakotay asked.

Lena was up on her feet, pacing rapidly, her voice was flustered. "Cos it makes no sense, dad."

"That's what I thought too," Chakotay said sadly.

Her body swung around to stare down at him, he was staring at the table. "Vampires killed her. End of story. That's all she meant. Jessie's the mother of possible Chosens too, you've seen how often she was in trouble. Mum was in the same kind of danger and she knew it."

"It doesn't matter who, what matters is she had accepted it was coming. I hadn't though," Chakotay said, his voice trembling. "I didn't believe her. When it happened and James was there, I thought..."

"I know what you thought," Lena muttered.

"Yes," Chakotay said with guilt tainting his voice. "Everything she told me, I merely humoured her. When she died it all became real. I wasn't going to let it beat us. I felt like I had a duty to fight back."

"To bring her back," Lena said.

Chakotay nodded, "I grew obsessed and you saw what that did to me. I forgot, no didn't care that it wasn't what she wanted."

"Mum's not the type to accept death without a fight," Lena said.

Chakotay's face tightened, his eyes became a little hollow. Lena frowned at it. "No, no she wasn't."

The Mess Hall:

"Oh I can believe that," Antony laughed. Rachel scowled at him for that. "Your hair falls out of place and it's not only a tragedy, it's the mirror's fault. I wouldn't change that about you for the world."

"I'm not that sensitive," Rachel said.

James and Jessie shared a similar amused look.

"She's your daughter and you're happy to see her again. Maybe it's time to let go of her sibling rivalry, not yours," Antony said.

Rachel rolled her eyes before looking back at the pair opposite her. "I'm not..." She cleared her throat as they were still facing each other, laughing quietly. "I'm passionate, that's completely different to sensitive."

Jessie returned to looking ahead of her, "yes, that would be nice. So apart from hair drama, what else can you tell me about you?"

"No, no it's your turn," Rachel said. "Um, any hobbies?"

"Hmm, you mean except boyfriend stealing and having babies?" Jessie tried to keep a straight face but she couldn't.

Rachel forcibly smiled, "those... those are lousy hobbies."

"Oh come on, it was a joke," James said, smirking briefly at a smiling Jessie.

"I know," Rachel said defensively, her eyes flashed anger in his direction. "I'm not an idiot, don't treat me as such."

"Rach," Antony whispered to her.

Jessie looked a little uncomfortable, she glanced briefly at James. "Maybe this wasn't such a good idea after all," she said. "Can't take a bloody joke."

"No, I did. I just didn't appreciate being told off for not laughing," Rachel said in James' direction.

"Sorry, I'll just..." James said sincerely, he pretended to zip up his mouth.

Jessie watched him with an angry concerned look on her face. "No, you shouldn't have to." She faced Rachel. "You obviously didn't like me making fun of you, but you took it out on him cos he stuck up for me. Don't do that or we're done."

"Do what, not like your jokes?" Rachel asked.

"No, be rude to my best friend and husband just cos you don't approve of him," Jessie snapped.

James reached out to touch one of her hands under the table. "Jess, it's fine. She's my mother in law, it's normal."

Ten Forward:

"There's nothing normal about this, dad," Lena said, rolling her eyes.

Chakotay leaned back in his chair, "okay not normal, natural. Your mum made me a better man. When she was gone that guiding compass faded away. I was so obsessed with getting her back."

"You already said that. You missed her funeral..." Lena snapped.

"In my head she was coming back so there was no point," Chakotay said quickly.

Lena didn't let that stop her, "you hit me. I won't ask why cos I know now. It's why you tried to murder James. Mum died cos she was the mother of Slayers. You blamed me."

Chakotay's eyes flew wide open, his face was riddled with disgust. "Of course not! I'd never blame you."

"Fine, then why?" Lena said as her body shook.

"Because I had turned into an evil, shell of a man during my quest," Chakotay answered through a lump in his throat. "I never blamed you, I didn't even blame James. Not really. It was me I hated, cos I didn't believe her when she was still around. I could have stopped it."

"You tried to get Jessie to turn evil so you could use her. You took mum to a Tolg ship, bartered with her life," Lena said on the cusp of tears.

Chakotay nearly blurted out what he was thinking, but he stopped himself. He thought it through, all the while biting his bottom lip. "I bartered with Damien's life. It was him I used, he just didn't know it."

Lena's frowned intensely. "You mean when he asked for his body back. How did you even know they had him?"

"He told me," Chakotay replied.

Lena scoffed, her head swung to one side, her eye caught the strange sight of the yellow planet and red sun through the glass. "Are you sure it wasn't you who was played?"

"Hmm, we both had our agendas," Chakotay smiled bitterly. "My plan counted on him having one."

"Dad," Lena said determinedly. "You still put mum at risk. Damien's as trustworthy as Neelix is with food supplies."

"He wanted his body back. I knew he'd try to double cross me during the exchange," Chakotay argued.

"That doesn't matter. This is Kathryn Janeway we're talking about! My mother, the so called love of your life!" Lena shouted at him.

Chakotay winced, but not at her yelling. "Only it wasn't." Lena stared at him blankly, although her eyes were on fire. "Damien needed the Tolg to re-animate his corpse, his current host would be exchanged

as well as... *Kathryn*. Two for the price of one. You think I did it so she'd be assimilated by them, revived, and I'd steal her away?"

"That's what everyone said. That's what you said!" Lena stuttered.

"Yes, and as far as everyone's concerned that's what happened," Chakotay said, he stared at her with an intense gaze. Lena wasn't sure what to make of it, she waited. "I made a huge mistake, several in fact. I have lived with that for so long I've even convinced myself."

"What did happen?" Lena asked shakily.

Chakotay couldn't look her in the eye anymore. "It doesn't matter. It all ended up the same way, I may as well have done it how everyone thinks."

The Mess Hall:

"What doesn't matter?" Jessie said in disbelief.

Rachel groaned, her patience seemingly waning thin. She sat back in her seat and folded her arms. "What? Sometimes certain things run in the family. It's no use arguing with genetics or psychology. I mean he's violent, so was his dad..." The last part was said with a brief finger pointed at James.

He was determined to keep his mouth shut, he turned his head away.

Jessie however wasn't, her hand slammed on the table, making the glasses on it rattle. "You're doing it again!" Rachel seemed to look confused. "I'm really, really trying to talk to you, get to know you, but somehow you manage to turn it around and throw a few snarky remarks his way. How on Earth did we go from clothes shopping to violence?"

"You haven't seen your mother on shore leave," Antony said to calm things down. Rachel threw him a glare that hinted he crossed the line, he still smirked though.

"I was just pointing out that you and Dannielle both share a love of clothes, which you got from me. She and I would always turn heads in some of the dresses we picked out and maybe you should try it," Rachel said in a snooty tone.

"She's married, she doesn't want to turn heads," Antony pointed out.

"I never did," Jessie muttered.

Rachel shrugged, "Susy said she wasn't allowed certain things and I thought the same... Wanting heads to turn doesn't mean we wanted the men, it's a self esteem boost. Some men just can't handle something like that and need to grow up."

James' face was a mix of confusion and what looked like disgust, he again looked away to avoid anymore trouble. Jessie's was very similar but there was no denying the disgust on her face though. It didn't last long, it turned into full anger. "Are you suggesting that James is controlling and that's why I wouldn't be seen dead in a dress again? That's it." Both her hands slammed on the table as she stood up.

"Jess," James said softly to calm her down.

She was having none of that. "That's the sixth time you've done this. Remember I'm the one who was abandoned here, and I'm the one making the effort. This is insulting, to both of us and we've done nothing to deserve it."

"She's right, that was out of line," Antony whispered to Rachel.

Rachel sighed to calm herself. "Okay, okay. You're right, I don't like him. He's rude and I can't shake off the hurting Dannielle incident."

"I already explained..." James said.

"See, rude," Rachel butted in with another finger point. The look on Jessie's face could have melted Neelix's teeth resistant Leola crumble, it actually made Rachel waver a little. "I'll get over it. This is about you and me, Jessica. My dislike of him shouldn't get in the way."

"Well maybe try cutting out the unwarranted insults. James is a huge part of my life, you have to accept that," Jessie hissed back.

Antony hovered up out of his seat. "I have an idea. Why don't he and I leave you two alone. I've got to return to the Enterprise anyway."

"I don't know, this seems like more trouble than it's worth," Jessie said.

The sentence stung her a little, Rachel shook her head. "No, no I'm not. I'll try to cut down the mad mother in law thing, okay. One more chance? We were having a good time before I ruined it. We have a lot in common, more than I had with Danni which surprised me. I... I don't want to lose you."

Jessie sighed and glanced briefly at James, he gave her a smile and nod. "You remember how my mum used to talk to you?" he said.

Jessie laughed briefly as she remembered. "Oh god yeah. She really didn't like me."

"She did eventually," James said.

Jessie's shoulders slouched, "fine, one more chance. You don't have to go though..."

James shook his head, "it's nearly time to pick up Amy anyway. I don't want to keep her waiting."

Ten Forward:

Lena's arms folded tightly. Her pacing took her to the other side of the room, then only halfway back. Chakotay watched her carefully, silently. His thoughts were crowded, so many of them risked leaking to the surface and the last thing he wanted was to hurt her any further. As if on cue he noticed her staring at him in a way only Kathryn did when he disagreed with her. Everytime that happened he argued back, he had to tell himself not to do that.

"So, that's it?" she asked him. They'd been in silence for so long it was a shock to hear her voice. "Oh it didn't go down that way, but oh I can't tell you. So you keep it to yourself."

"I told you more than enough. The fine details don't change what happened, it doesn't matter," Chakotay said.

Lena's eyebrow twitched up a little, "it does matter! My mum is dead, she's walking around somewhere as a zombie drone. Undead things freak me out, remember? That's just one ickle bitty thing wrong with this whole thing."

"Lena," Chakotay tried to interrupt.

"I wanted the truth, you said you'd give me that," Lena stuttered.

"And I did," Chakotay said harshly but not on purpose. "Your mother told me she'd be targeted, she was. I defied everything to bring her back, I hurt you and others along the way. My last ditch attempt to do the right thing backfired and I can't even blame Damien for it. The sad thing is he fulfilled his side of the bargain. The only thing that little toad did was run off when it turned sour."

"Mum still ended up in the Tolg. You weren't going to trade her so how did that happen?" Lena questioned. "I watched her coffin lower into the ground, the dirt covered it. Your right thing must have included getting her out of there." Chakotay could only sigh as the whole conversation was making him feel sick from the guilt. "It says a lot that Damien didn't screw you over. He must have been quite pleased with your behaviour to do that."

"No," Chakotay muttered. "He got what he wanted. He didn't care how."

"So your mistake was not betraying him? Interesting," Lena said with disinterest.

Chakotay had to laugh but not because he was amused, "ironic isn't it? I was counting on him to do something Damien like. The only time he didn't was when I hoped he would. He got what he wanted and left, left me and Kathryn to the wolves. Maybe he did betray me after all."

"No dad. The only traitor in this story is you," Lena said with a deadly look in her eyes. It made Chakotay look away. "I did want things simple, didn't I? Having no dad certainly helps. Thanks a lot." She turned around and stomped through the nearest door.

Chakotay could only stare out the window, it was all he could do to avoid breaking down completely.

The Security Office:

"Can I have a picture of Voyager, daddy?" Amy asked with a cute smile.

James approached her with a small drink in his hand. He knelt down in front of her to give her it. All the while dodging the lego bricks she had scattered all over his office.

"A picture, why?" he asked.

Amy stared at the little wall she had been building distastefully. "Wanna make something new."

James smiled at her. "That sounds like fun actually. Can I help?" Amy nodded eagerly, her eyes lit up. "Okay, I'll go find one."

The doors opened as he stood back up. In the corner of his eye he recognised who had come in. He took a step to the left to block their view of Amy, fortunately the little girl was distracted by her juice when he did that.

"Relax, I'm not here to fight," Rachel said. She then noticed all of the large lego bricks on the floor, she couldn't help but smile. "Oh, I used to love these as a kid. Dannielle preferred to play with dolls though."

"Hmm. What's the matter?" James asked.

"Nothing, we're fine. I just..." Rachel's head leaned to one side, James assumed she was doing it to peek behind him so he mirrored her. It made her sigh. "I don't remember Jess telling me I couldn't see her children."

"No, but what if you two fall out again? I don't want to introduce a family member to my kids that may disappear," James said.

"Fair enough," Rachel let out another sigh.

Amy pouted and tugged on James' leg. "Daddy?"

James looked down at her with an apologetic face. "Sorry sweetheart, I'll go look for it now."

"Toilet?" Amy said while pointing behind her at another door.

"Oh, it's okay you don't have to ask," James said.

Amy gave his leg a quick hug before she hurried off towards the door. Rachel waited for her to go before she laughed. "Cute little thing."

"Yeah, takes after her mother," James said with a smile. He turned back towards her. "So what brings you here?"

"Jessica hinted that we may have gotten off on the wrong foot and that I should get to know you," Rachel answered reluctantly.

James' smile turned a little awkward, he cringed a little. "That's er... you don't have to do that."

"Why not?" Rachel asked in a friendly enough way, which caught him off guard even more.

"I don't exactly leave a good first impression, or tenth for that matter," James replied.

"Oh I noticed that first hand," Rachel laughed. "You managed to make a good one on my daughters though. That Danny speaks highly of you as well, which makes a change from her usual dirty jokes."

"Danny? You talked to Danny?" James said awkwardly.

"I doubt it's the pretty boy looks as Ian seemed to be a friend of yours too," Rachel chuckled.

James pulled a disgusted face as he always did when those two words popped up. "I doubt it too."

"And that Anderson boy," Rachel continued.

"Craig?" James said nervously.

Rachel seemed a little confused, at least at first. Her eyes looked more focused. "Yes, you said he was a friend."

"Emphasis on was. We've had too many fights I've lost count," James said awkwardly. He shook his head. "He's... it's complicated which is why I said yes to that."

"That's interesting cos I asked him the same question," Rachel said with a sly smile.

James approached her with a frown growing on his face. "I really don't think this is what Jessie had in mind. I'm not the one you should be talking to our friends about."

"No, but I was curious I suppose," Rachel said. "Aren't you interested in what Craig told me?"

James sighed, "no. I think I know anyway. We used to be friends, I gave him a hard time over my sister, etcetera."

"The poor thing said the hard time was deserved. He regrets it, which is odd as he seemed a little afraid when the subject of you came up," Rachel said.

"He's been blaming himself for everything lately. I'd say I started more of the fights than he did," James admitted.

Rachel nodded, "I'd believe that."

"Yeah," James said before clearing his throat. He eyed her suspiciously. "Why are we talking about this?"

Rachel acted a little shocked, her hands rose up in a defensive pose. "What's the problem? I'm trying here."

"I'm not the one you should be researching, I said that already. Also Craig and I's relationship isn't relevant here," James said.

"Jessica said that I have to accept you at least. Since we didn't get along I thought it would be best if I asked your other friends what you were like. I thought it would help," Rachel protested a little too much. Her arms folded behind her back as she smiled. "Bad tempered yet sensitive. Rude on purpose. Impulsive but thoughtful, well intentioned. Really sarcastic, but that would go with the rude part. Overprotective hothead."

James groaned, "let me guess, the last one was Craig."

"Good guess," Rachel smirked. "Any of it wrong? I've seen a few of them myself."

"Probably thoughtful. Who on earth would say that?" James answered. His head shook quickly. He spoke again before she could answer, "sounds like you mostly got everything. So why..."

"So, no good qualities then?" Rachel questioned.

James closed his eyes and sighed. "Most of those are my good qualities." They opened just as Amy ran back into the room and sat with her bricks. She glanced briefly at Rachel, who gave her a smile, then looked over to James. "I haven't got it yet, I've been..."

"Ok," Amy said, she smiled but she sounded disappointed. The lego wall she had abandoned got her attention.

"Do you like sports or anything?" Rachel asked politely.

"No, not really," James said awkwardly, his eyes were focused on Amy as she played. "I can't help but feel a bit..."

"So, what do you do for fun around here?" Rachel questioned.

"Interrogated here," James finished his earlier sentence.

Rachel laughed at him, "yeah right. You'd know if I was interrogating you." There was a deadly sparkle in her eye that was very familiar. He was starting to see where Jessie got her no-nonsense attitude from. He believed her.

"I just mean it's a little forced," James said.

Rachel shrugged. The doors behind her opened. Two Security officers ran in, each with a panicked look on their faces.

"Code Black," one of them reported.

James walked over to them, "where?"

One of them pointed outside, "not far. We were on our way here and it chased us. We tried to elude it but it still was behind us."

James glanced at Amy with a nervous look on his face. "Great." He looked toward a confused Rachel. "What spells do you know?"

"Um... mainly offensive, why?" she asked, now also nervous.

"Can you watch her?" James asked her as he hurried over to his desk. Amy noticed the commotion, she got up and followed him part the way over. She watched curiously as he pulled out a bag from under the desk.

"Sure, but what's going on?" Rachel stuttered.

James didn't answer, he rushed over to the door. "Which way?" he asked when it opened. The Security officers pointed to the right. With that he was gone.

"What's code black?" Rachel asked them. Then she noticed Amy running up to the door. She went to grab her but the little girl was blocked by the two Security officers quickly standing in front of the door. Rachel noticed they seemed more nervous about that than they were before. "Well?"

"Demon attack," one of the officers whispered.

Rachel's eyes widened, her mouth began to open in shock. "And you're just gonna stand there. He went alone."

The two officers shared a confused look, then gave her a slightly bemused one back. She gave them a scowl in return.

"No, we're going to guard outside," one said.

The other nodded, then frowned at him with his eyes wide. "We are? The phaser shots did nothing. We'd be sitting ducks."

"Yeah, but you know what happens when you stand on the side of the door where you can't see it coming," the first one said.

"Oooh, good point," the second one stuttered. The pair hurried back outside.

Amy was about to follow them but Rachel was thankful that she stopped again. The little girl turned around with a thoughtful look on her face, "black means hide. I *rememba*." Rachel watched with quiet dismay, but at the same time a little pride, as Amy ran over to hide under the desk.

"She's smarter than the Security staff," Rachel commented.

She thought she spoke too soon when Amy's head reappeared from behind the desk, a little higher than normal. Then she realised the toddler had climbed onto the chair to get on top of the desk, instead of under it.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

Amy nervously stared at her. "Foss shield," she answered shyly.

Rachel frowned, "I guess I could try a shield, but you should still hide like you said."

Amy looked puzzled for a moment. By this point she was on the desk itself, crawling over to the computer. Yelling and a couple of loud clatters outside made her squeak and retreat backwards into the seat. At least Rachel hoped that's what happened as she could no longer see her and had heard a small thud from that direction.

"Okay. The demonic cloak should work, I hope," Rachel stuttered.

She just began to close her eyes and chant when there was a deafening bang against the door. It startled her eyes open. The door was no longer there, it was only a hole. Standing in its place; a thin but ferocious looking figure, snarling at her. Its lime green eyes scanned the room as it entered.

"A Pilaren," Rachel whispered fearfully. "Why is it here?"

The new arrival's head snapped to its right with a hiss. Rachel looked as well, its eyes were on the desk. Panicked Rachel swung her arm out towards it while chanting a few words. It leapt forward, just missing a few sparks of energy fly from her hand. It didn't even give her a glance, all it cared about was getting to the desk.

It grabbed a hold of it. With barely a wrist flick the desk was hurtled into the air, towards the window. Parts of it broke apart from the strain.

Amy whimpered as she was left with nothing to hide behind. She scrambled backwards towards the chair and the bookshelf behind her. The figure snarled and hissed at her.

"Damn it," Rachel grumbled. Once again she tried to hit it with a spell. This time as it was standing mostly still it hit it. Its head turned almost 180 degrees to look back at her. Rachel did a different chant, this time her hand was drawn closer to her body while clenching. It was about to focus again on

Amy when it noticed her hand glowing a golden colour. Its body turned quickly and lunged for her instead.

She began to push her hand back outward but it pounced on her before she could finish. Despite its small and scrawny look it pushed her clean to the ground with so much force it winded her, she could no longer move.

There was only one spell she could think of to get out of this, but it was too close for comfort. Also a little scarring for a young child to see. She didn't have time to really think about it more than that. Its arm raised so it could slash her with its claws. She quickly began to chant it anyway, knowing that she probably didn't have time to finish it.

For some reason it stopped. Its head shot around to something behind it. Rachel worried that it was going back for Amy, she continued the spell. The demon moved away but not on its own. Something pulled it away from her and up into the air. She quickly realised what that something was.

"Get Amy and go," James said just as the demon squirming in his grip slashed at him. James responded by tossing it to the opposite side of the room. It easily recovered by rolling onto its feet. James rushed over to confront it.

Rachel stared at the two in shock. She tried to shake it off, the thought of Amy helped with that. She ran over to the trembling girl to pick her up off the floor.

"Daddy," Amy whimpered as Rachel straightened up with her in her arms.

"It's okay... I can try something else," she said to soothe her. Several different spells flew through her head, all of them were hard to do with someone else nearby. Rachel grimaced, there was one but it was riskier than the last one. It had to do, it was the only one that would work. Quickly she began to recite the spell.

The demon tried to jump on James like it did with Rachel, he responded by tossing the bag he carried out into its face. It sent it flying backwards to the ground. Once it was down he fished a sword out of it, then dropped it to the floor with a loud thud.

Not deterred the demon rolled away before it could be stabbed and jumped onto its feet. James followed it, ducking just in time as it swiped at him. Still crouched down he pushed it into the nearby wall. Not hard enough to go through it, but enough to cause some damage. Before he could straighten back up the demon swung its knee up to knock the sword from his hand.

James didn't seem bothered by that, his other hand lunged forward to grab it by the throat. "Cover!" he snapped.

Neither the demon nor Rachel knew why he yelled that. Amy did though. She squeezed her eyes shut and covered them with both of her hands.

Rachel watched in horror, her jaw dropped as the grip he had on the demon tightened, then twisted to the right. There was a horrible crack. The demon's body immediately went limp. James let go of it and it fell into a heap on the ground.

"My god," Rachel stammered, and yet her mouth remained open afterwards.

James sighed in relief. He turned around to walk over to them. "Thank you," he said as he recovered Amy from her arms. "It's okay now, are you all right?" Amy nodded. She figured it was time to open her eyes, but since she was still in direct sight of the dead demon, James quickly walked forward and turned around. "Are you hurt?" he asked in Rachel's direction. He grew concerned when she didn't respond, her expression hadn't changed.

"I'd better get those two guys to Sickbay," James said quietly. He tapped his commadge. "Sickbay. There's two injured outside of the Security Office."

"I'm on my way," the Doctor's voice responded.

Amy pouted, "I hid but he still found me."

"It's okay. You did the right thing," James said with a smile.

"He went straight for her," Rachel stammered, although her expression was still the same and her gaze was fixed on the demon.

James briefly glanced at her as he instinctively held Amy closer to his chest. "It did?"

"Didn't have time for shield," Amy said quietly.

"You did that too?" James said. He walked over to the sofa, quickly noticing it was covered in debris. Instead he walked over to his desk chair. "Remember, hide first. If you can't, then it's run or shield. Okay?"

"Sorry," Amy pouted.

James carefully put her down on the chair, he gave her a reassuring smile. "I'm not telling you off. I know it's always hard to know what to do for the best. You remembered what mum and I told you though and you tried, and for that I'm proud of you."

"He found me," Amy said.

"I have a feeling he would have anyway. It's not your fault," James said. "I think I've seen these things before."

"Pilarens," Rachel mumbled.

James looked over his shoulder at her. He then straightened up and turned around. "You know them as well?"

Rachel lightly nodded. Her eyes squeezed shut. James walked over to make sure she was all right. "They come into this dimension to hunt for power to sustain them. As far as I know their only prey are Slayers."

"I thought so. A bunch of them appeared two years ago and..." James said.

Rachel swung around, her eyes were still wide. The sudden turn startled James for a moment. "You're one of them?"

"Uh..." James wasn't sure what to make of that. "What, a demon? No."

"No, a Slayer," Rachel snapped.

James couldn't help but groan. "Oh god, first Nathan, now you."

"What?" Rachel hissed.

James shook his head, "I'm not used to people not knowing who, or rather what I am. I figured cos you were a member of the Enterprise that you knew."

Rachel moved a little to the left so she could look towards Amy on the chair. She had managed to get it to spin a little, it was distracting her for the moment. Anger suddenly washed over her. "My granddaughter, my grandson? Them too?"

James didn't have to say anything to answer her. His head bowed slightly, his shoulders fell. He couldn't even look her in the eye anymore.

"You... you've..." Rachel stuttered in anger. "There was a Chosen who had children. He was arrested and stood trial for murder. It's you isn't it?"

James briefly looked behind him to see if Amy was listening. It didn't seem like she was. "Please," he said as he turned his head back. "I don't want my children to hear things like that."

Rachel scoffed, her eyes seemed to get even wider. "They're gonna find out eventually, aren't they? You're infamous for a reason."

"I know. For now though..." James said quietly.

"You're a monster. I know everything there is to know about you. Yet somehow you managed to sneak in and not only seduce one of my daughters, but both of them," Rachel stammered angrily.

"No, stop it. I'm not... I wouldn't hurt Jessie. There's nothing to worry about," James tried to protest.

Rachel faked a laugh. "Are you bloody serious? Nothing to worry about? Is two children being like you nothing to worry about? A murderous and manipulative freak, the father of my grandchildren. I suppose all of that means nothing to you but in my world, the normal world, it's the worst news you can get."

James felt his own eyes widen a little. He didn't know what to say to any of that. "It's not... try to calm down."

Rachel backed off, her hand flew up with her palm directed at his face. "Calm down? You are telling me to calm down. That's rich. I knew it. I knew there was something off about you, I could feel it. I thought it was just what you did to my Dannielle, that's all. It's so much worse."

"I understand, really. I didn't like the idea of bringing kids into my dangerous life either but..." James protested.

That was the wrong thing to say, Rachel was more than furious. "But you did it anyway! How very noble of you. You're disgusting."

"I... it's not like that, that's not what I was going to say," James said.

"That's what you did, so why not? Misery loves company after all," Rachel snapped.

"It's more complicated than that. By the time Duncan was born, Voyager was demon free. Even if it wasn't, demons don't just come for me. They go for anyone. Everyone took a similar risk, because it was worth it," James said. "Besides, I can protect them. Isn't..."

"Like you did just now?" Rachel grumbled.

James sighed deeply. "Yeah exactly," he said like he didn't mean it.

Rachel's face was bright red, it looked like she would hit him at any second. "How can you say it was worth it? I imagine little Sasha hiding in the corner, trembling in fear as a monster that isn't you comes for her, just to get back at you."

"The alternative is they don't exist at all. Is that what you prefer?" James answered bitterly.

"Don't you dare judge me. I'm not the one bringing innocent children into this freak show, cursing two of them, infecting them!" Rachel yelled at him.

By this time Amy had heard the raised voices and was looking right at them, with her bottom lip trembling.

"They're not cursed or infected," James muttered back at her.

"Oh of course not! I'm sure you find this Slayer thing an absolute blast. Doing anything you want with no repercussions, treating people however you like as they can't do a thing. It must be quite hard to see it from a normal perspective," Rachel snarled.

James shook his head, "hardly. If I could be normal without having to worry about demons again, I'd do it in a heartbeat. Since I can't, I'll do everything I can to make sure Duncan and Amy have a choice, that they can live a normal life. Cos at least unlike other Slayers, they have me to keep them safe."

"Until you croak, when is that happening?" Rachel asked coldly.

James stared at her with his jaw threatening to drop. "There's no need for this. Yes I've killed people," he said in a hushed voice. "But it was because of a similar condition that fully unlocked witches get. I had little control over it." He didn't believe a word of what he was saying but he hoped Rachel would. Her head shook, telling him otherwise. "As I said, when Jess and I had Duncan there was no demonic activity anymore."

"You're making excuses. You're nothing but filth," Rachel spat.

There was that word again, he thought. James felt it was a much harsher word than ones like freak or monster. He didn't understand why. "You're starting to sound like the warlocks," was all he could say out loud.

"Oh, very mature. I insult you, you insult me back. They tried to kill my daughter," Rachel said.

"Yes but why? It was me they hated. They thought of me like you do," James said.

Rachel stepped a little closer so her new glare had greater effect. Coupled with the words exchanged and that very Jessie like glare, it worked well. It made him very uneasy.

"What are you insinuating?" she asked dangerously.

"I'm not. I only wanted to reassure you, understand why. I don't know what else I can do," James replied honestly.

"Hmm, that's an easy one," Rachel laughed. The glare was soon back again. "Other Slayers are perfectly content with fighting and even more fighting, finalised in a glorified and young death. But you, hmm. No. You want to be a real boy, or so you say. You want it all. The fighting, the wife, your own way, the kids, the house with a garden, the nice little office, the glory of being the *hero*. You have no idea or care about the damage you do to the people around you just by doing that."

"That's not..." James tried to interrupt.

Rachel started pacing while she spoke, cutting him off. "The only reason Slayers like you turn is because of all that. They want to be something they're not, as well as the big hero. Well there's a word for people like that and it's not heroic. Selfish, brattish, spoilt, self centered. There's a few but we don't have all day do we?"

"You're wrong, you have no idea..." James again tried to butt in.

Rachel stopped pacing and stared at him intently. "So what do you call yourself then? Come on, I'm curious."

James stared back, his eyes screaming defiance. "Human."

Rachel laughed in response, she had to wipe tears from her eyes. "You're really that deluded, aren't you? I hope you don't infect your sister with this kind of garbage too."

"Garbage? We're still alive cos of these *self centered* things you were rambling about. I fully intend to teach Duncan and Amy the same damn thing. Unless you, their grandmother, think they should be just a weapon and die young like past Slayers," James said.

"What about Sandi, the Zare girl? I hear the other male Chosen died not long ago. Sandi died defending our crew from the Softmicron. Zare protected us from the experiments. How did that other one go?" Rachel demanded.

"All three that you mentioned were more than just weapons. Sandi was a selfless girl who survived the Games, twice, in order to protect people. If she was just a tool, she wouldn't have had any incentive to do so. She died so you could slag people like her off..." James argued angrily.

Rachel scoffed, "yeah right."

"Zare was a passionate and intelligent girl who suffered more than enough, but did she give up? No, because she was dedicated to making a difference. Kevin, you couldn't get less Slayer like there if you tried. He was *just* a guy who liked to hang around the Holodeck or hang out with women. He died saving my sister's life. I won't have you belittle any of them!" James snapped.

"It puts a damper on your still being alive because you're Human argument," Rachel said.

James groaned and rolled his eyes. "My point is each one died because they were a person first. A Slayer who isn't just wouldn't care. I don't get why you're so against this. You're welcome to not like me, but this is ridiculous."

"See, there's the hero dribble. Proves my point. *Oh I'm so selfless, noble. I make great sacrifices for you, I'm so tortured.* Give me a break," Rachel ranted. "You're just making excuses for your behaviour. You knowingly infected my family line with this disease, and..." Her face turned very pale as a thought came to her. "Oh."

"Okay look. You can say anything you want about me. Insult me, hit me, or even curse me. That's fine. But I won't stand here and listen to you talk about my kids that way. They're innocent children, how dare you..." James grumbled.

"Sasha wasn't the twin. The blonde one was," Rachel stuttered.

James could feel the anger he had about to erupt, holding it back made him tremble. "The blonde one?" he said dangerously. "She has a god damn name!"

Rachel didn't seem to care, her face was getting paler. "That's why. That's why there are no twins. She's not a witch, she's one of you. Her twin died cos of... This is your fault!"

James shook his head slowly, he couldn't believe any of this. During that he made brief eye contact with his daughter who was no longer on the seat. She was standing not far behind her grandmother with tears in her eyes. James attempted to walk around Rachel to get to her, but she intentionally got in his way each time.

"Oh what? Don't act like things like you have feelings that I can hurt," Rachel spat at him. "If anyone's at fault for this whole thing it's..."

"Oh do shut up!" James shouted back at her. It threw her off, even startled her a little. It gave him the chance to walk around her to pick up his daughter. Only by then Amy was heading for the door, tears streaming down her face.

Rachel swung around to see what was going on. Her own anger was gone, there was a twinge of regret as Amy's sobs were a lot more vocal now.

"It's okay, it's okay," James tried to comfort her, while gently rocking her. It didn't seem to help. He gave the tiny girl a kiss on the top of her head, his spare hand stroked her hair. "Don't listen to the horrible lady. She doesn't know what she's talking about." Her sobs started to break apart, but only cos they were getting in the way of her breathing. He closed his eyes and held her closer.

"I... I shouldn't have..." Rachel stammered. "That was out of line."

"You do that a lot," James said coldly to her.

"I didn't know she was listening. I wasn't trying to blame her or upset her. It's you I have a problem with," Rachel tried to explain. Her hand covered her face, "I need to take a break, calm down. I fly off the handle. That's always been my problem."

"What do you think Jessie will think? You're going to get more than a break," James said. He looked down at Amy, her sobs were quiet but tears still streamed down her face. "Mean woman is crazy, all right sweetheart." He got a squeak from her. "Mummy and I love you, that's what matters. Not what this horrible woman thinks, yeah?" He got a light *mmm hmm*, although she was still crying a little.

"I'm her mother, I'm concerned. She'll..." Rachel stuttered.

"Tell you to get lost again, yeah," James said as his head turned back to face her. Rachel's mouth dropped, she didn't believe him. Her head shook. "Give her a choice between the mother who abandoned her and did this to her daughter, and us, her real family. She'll pick us with no hesitation."

"You mean she'll pick you," Rachel muttered. "No, I'm her damn mother."

"Jessie's suffered more than enough. She, we don't need any of this," James said sternly, but quietly enough not to upset Amy again. "If she finds out about this, it'll..." His heart sank at the thought of it, "she deserves a lot better. For once it would be nice if there was no drama. If you love her..."

"Of course I do," Rachel butted in.

James sighed, briefly glancing at Amy who had buried her face into his shoulder. "I'd do anything for my kids. I know someday I'll have to hold my tongue, or fist, when or if any partners are introduced. I'll still try though, as the last thing I want to do is to upset them. I should be supportive, not..."

"What are you suggesting?" Rachel asked, with suspicion in her voice.

"Oh god, what happened?" Jessie's voice asked. The pair looked towards the hole in the door just as Jessie carefully stepped through it, carrying the latest member of the family with her.

James looked around briefly, wincing a little. "You know, the usual."

Jessie hurried over to tend to Amy, her spare hand reached over to clutch one of hers. "Don't worry. We're both here. Everything's fine now." Amy glanced briefly at her, her other hand wiped a few tears. "There's my brave girl," Jessie smiled at her.

"Yes she was very brave," James said, forcing a smile of his own. "She listened to what we taught her as well."

"Well you were always good at hide and seek, hmm cutie?" Jessie giggled, her hand moved to give Amy's chin a little tickle. It made her giggle. "I never get tired of that," she said to James with a smirk.

"Was the rest of your day okay?" James asked her.

Jessie shrugged, "not bad. Danny and I caught up. She hasn't changed." Her face grimaced during the last sentence. She turned her attention to Rachel who still looked sorry for herself. "Are you two getting along, or do I need to play referee?"

"We were doing fine until this..." James answered, all the while pointing towards the desk debris. Amy cuddled into him tightly, one of his hands moved up to stroke her hair again, softening her grip a little.

Jessie walked over to what was left of the sofa, all the while pulling a face at it. Her arm brushed aside the least covered part so she could place the baby seat down.

"What are you playing at?" Rachel whispered.

"You want to lose her so badly, go ahead say something," James whispered back. Rachel's eyes narrowed, they seemed to study him carefully.

Jessie wandered over, James looked a lot more relaxed when she did but Rachel remained the same. Jessie eyed her mother warily, then she looked at James. "Really?"

Rachel struggled to say the next words, they seemed to hang in her throat. "Yes. We've sorted it out, we're fine."

Jessie didn't look so sure, she glanced back at James again. He gave her a warm reassuring smile which helped her feel more at ease. Rachel responded with a brief flash of rage in her eyes. Once Jessie glanced at her again it was gone, she tried to smile back.

"Okay. Good. This family's had more than enough drama, I don't want anymore," she said. Her arm wrapped around the nearest of James'. "Right?" she said, looking up at him. Rachel seethed at them while she could.

James nodded, he laughed briefly. "That's the biggest understatement ever."

"So... we've got to pick up Duncan and Sasha, then it's tea time. Maybe we could leave another chat until tomorrow," Jessie said.

"Oh it's okay. I think we've all had an eventful enough day," Rachel said.

Jessie frowned at her, briefly glanced at James and back. "Am I missing something here?"

While she wasn't looking James glanced at Rachel with his eyes wide, hinting that she play along. Rachel looked at her daughter, she smiled warmly. "No, everything's fine."

"Okay," Jessie said but her face didn't look as convinced. The baby started to cry, so she turned back to tend to her.

James cringed slightly. He stepped a little closer to Rachel. "Maybe you could put a little more feeling into it next time."

Rachel gave him a cold hard stare. "I'll think about it."

THE END