

Episode 5.24

Dark Clouds

Up here she could see for miles. Here she could be alone, clear her head and forget all of her troubles. That's what she loved about this town, most of it was filled with lush green countryside and clean air. She was going to miss it.

Right now though it wasn't as soothing as it normally was. Something was missing, something important. Storm clouds lurked over the hills, they were approaching fast. The sky was already a dark grey as it was, rain spat across the fields before her. What she was looking for could be anywhere.

It was all her fault.

The constant stream of shrill beeps brought James out of his head. To one side of him there was movement, only slight. He turned his head to the opposite side across the room. For the third time since he went to bed he found himself walking over to the crib by the door.

That damn noise rang twice before he could look inside it. The volume seemed to be louder than the last time. He almost pushed his way through the doors, which opened just in time, to go towards the main door. It opened swiftly as soon as he arrived at it. "This better be..." he spat before spotting a sullen Craig on the other side. "What's the matter?"

"I'm sorry. I didn't think it could, no should wait," he stammered in response, his voice raw. "You need to see this."

Craig hadn't said another word since the pair had set off. James wondered silently what was so bad that he'd attempt to wake him in the dead of the night, but not tell him about it. He thought about asking again when they stopped outside of Sickbay. Craig inhaled sharply, yet sighed slowly. He looked nervous.

"Craig, you're starting to frea..." James said.

Craig nodded and stepped forward, opening Sickbay doors. James followed him with a worried frown on his face.

The first thing they both saw was the Doctor hovering over an occupied bed, although where he stood blocked most of their view of the patient. He heard them walk in and turned around to greet them somberly.

"Well?" Craig dared to ask.

The Doctor closed the tricorder in his left hand while glancing at his patient briefly. "I'm afraid it's not good. There's a lot of damage to her sku..."

"What's going on?" James demanded.

The two men grimaced slightly, Craig more so out of guilt. The Doctor walked over to one side so the patient could be seen. A young girl no older than fifteen, covered in bruises, her clothes torn. Medical devices sat across her forehead in a half circular pattern, the lower half of her face was covered by a mask that deflated everytime she took a breath. Before either of the new arrivals could say anything the Doctor gently covered her up to her shoulders with a grey sheet.

"Team Four were called to a guest quarters on Deck Eight. A member of the crew was already there, she could barely speak, she just pointed at the door," Craig tried to explain. "They went inside to find the whole place in a big mess, a girl lying next to a broken book case." He shook his head grimly. "They immediately called me and..."

James had been focusing on him while he had been talking, but when he hesitated he couldn't help but look back at the girl. Despite the bruises and technology across her face she seemed a little familiar to him. Then he noticed the alien features barely visible behind the wounds. "She's Eryan."

"Yeah, she'll be one of the refugees you and Lena saved," Craig said quietly.

The Doctor leaned over to hover a regenerator gently over her wounds. "You're just doing that now?" James wondered out loud.

"I wish this was the worst of her injuries," the Doctor sighed.

"You said there was damage to her skull," Craig said.

The Doctor nodded before straightening back up again. "Yes. It feels like it's becoming a regular thing but she's in an induced coma for the time being."

James noticed Craig's fists clench by his side. "What about the other... thing?" the younger man asked.

This vagueness and secrecy was starting to annoy James now, the sight of the young injured girl wasn't helping. "What thing? Why are you trying to hide stuff from me? You demanded I come with you."

"You're right," Craig's voice almost broke. He dared to make eye contact with him. "Because of the way she was found, the injuries, it was hard not to think of anything else."

"Allow me," the Doctor butted in to Craig's relief. James' attention went to him instead. "My initial scan confirms it. This is an attempted sexual assault."

Craig winced, his eyes shut tightly. James' face meanwhile turned dangerously pale and tightened. "You're wrong," he eventually said, throwing the Doctor off guard.

"I assure you, I'm not. The injuries make it very clear about the attacker's intent," he said.

James stared briefly at Craig, he was just as taken aback as the Doctor, then back at the patient. His head shook. "No. This kind of thing doesn't happen." He took a step back, Craig noticed he was starting to tremble. "Not here, not now." Craig and the Doctor stared after him with their jaws dropped as he backed out of Sickbay.

"I knew he'd be pissed but I didn't expect that," Craig said.

The Doctor nodded slowly. "If I hadn't seen it for myself, I'd agree with him. Humans have long since evolved past an assault as vile as this. It shouldn't happen."

"But it did, and we need to catch this guy before he tries again. I'll need James's help," Craig said. He hurried outside to run after him, he was surprised to see that James was only standing outside with his back against the wall. His gaze distant. "I... I wanted to make sure it was. We didn't know for certain, only the Doc would know. If I told you what everyone thought before we knew for certain..."

"We don't," James said plainly.

Craig's shoulders fell, he could understand his denial. "The Doc's never wrong. At least, and I can't believe I'm saying it, it's not as bad as we thought." James looked him straight in the eye in such a way that made him feel like he should get back to Sickbay. He soldiered on anyway, "an attempt, not an actual... Still bad, I know."

"She's just a kid, Craig. Worse yet a survivor of a race nearly wiped out. She escaped from the underground, where her life was constantly at risk by experimented on killing machines, only to come here and be beaten like that," James said, his voice raising every few words. He was practically shouting at the end. Craig winced as a result. "We promised her she'd be safe now," he said quietly.

"The Doctor won't give up on her. She'll be fine and we'll catch this guy, okay?" Craig tried to calm him.

James didn't look so sure, he scoffed to one side. "Sure we will. Cos guys like that are always brought to justice."

Craig wasn't quite sure where that came from, he tried to shake it off. "An attack like that will bound to have left clues. The Doctor will find blood, skin, finger prints... If he doesn't we've got a crime scene to work on. No use giving up before we begun, right?"

"Right," James muttered.

"What do you think? Do you think we should work on the crime scene together, or divide our efforts?" Craig questioned.

James didn't answer right away, his eyes drifted to one side. Craig assumed he was thinking about it. Finally he spoke, "is the Enterprise in transporter range?"

"Yeah but their shields are up, as ours are. Whoever did this should be on Voyager," Craig answered.

"Okay. I'll do the crime scene, you..." James trailed off as he walked away.

Craig knew better than to follow him this time.

The Mess Hall:

Like every day, Neelix strolled into his kitchen to prepare breakfast, without even asking for the lights. He had been on Voyager long enough to avoid walking into anything in the dark. He had a great idea in mind, basically inspired by the numerous alien guests the fleet had at the moment. Since the Enterprise was operating on a skeletal crew he had told them he was more than happy to hurry over there with some of his food, before the

Voyager crew started arriving in the Mess Hall. That's why he was here a little earlier. They seemed reluctant, obviously not wanting to put him out, but he wouldn't do anything less for them.

The idea he had for breakfast meant he had to stop by the recently moved Habitation Lab. He half expected to have to start from scratch as he imagined crops grown on Deck Thirteen would be talking sentient mutants, or at the very least poisonous. It didn't help that Tom had told him about a true story about an overgrown plant that liked to eat people. They had even made a holonovel about it, with singing and dancing. Neelix struggled to remember the name of it while he put the box down.

Since he hadn't memorised his ingredients he decided he had to switch on the lights now, so he did. When they activated he was shocked to see somebody standing, looking out the window. He was very glad he had not turned on the lights when he was handling a knife or hot food.

"Oh dear, I didn't expect anyone to be here so early," he whimpered.

The figure barely registered his presence. She kept on staring out the window.

"Kiara. It'll be a while before breakfast, I hope you can wait for..." Neelix said to her. Then the name of the program popped into his head, "Little Shop of Horrors."

The figure turned around, showing off her disturbed expression. "At least you're honest about it now."

Neelix was confused. "Honest about what?"

"That's what people call your kitchen, I'm sure," Kiara said.

That didn't ease him, he instead decided to shake it off. His morale officer mode was kicking in. "What's a young girl like you staying up so late? Shouldn't you be wrapped up nice and warm in bed?"

Kiara's eyes drifted to one side. "I wish I was."

"There's nothing stopping you," Neelix said warmly while he walked over to her. "Did you have a bad dream?"

Kiara's face scrunched up as she looked at him directly. "How old do you think I am?"

"Everyone has bad dreams," Neelix said defensively.

"Yeah but you said it in a tone you'd use on a baby," Kiara mumbled.

Neelix chuckled nervously, "I didn't mean it that way. Why can't you sleep?"

Kiara hesitated before turning her back on him, her gaze went back to the window. "I'd rather not. I don't want to talk about it."

Neelix was surprised to hear the Mess Hall doors opening again. People usually didn't arrive for another two hours. He had a peep over his shoulder to see who it was. "Craig, I haven't started breakfast yet..."

"Oh I'm not here for that. Ever," Craig commented.

Kiara tensed a little, Neelix noticed in the corner of his eye. "Is there a problem?" he asked as Craig approached them.

"With your breakfast? Where do I start?" Craig said in a blank tone.

Neelix huffed. Craig thought that finally he had said something that Neelix couldn't twist into a compliment about his cooking. Instead the Talaxian said, "you can't start yet. I haven't even prepared the ingredients yet." With that he scurried off, leaving Craig trying to figure out if anyone ever could insult him knowingly.

"I don't want to talk about it," Kiara said quietly.

Craig nodded lightly. "I know. Would it help if James talked to you instead?"

Kiara sighed and turned back around. "It doesn't matter. I don't want to talk about it."

"Please Kiara. We need to find out who did this and fast before..." Craig pleaded with her.

Kiara shook her head. "I don't know! If I did, I'd have told people by now."

From his kitchen Neelix looked over with concern on his face. Morale mode had turned back on. Any more outbursts from the girl and he told himself he'd go to her aid.

"I never said you did. It's just, we need to know everything, so we can catch him," Craig said as softly as he could. "Before he attacks again."

Kiara shook a little, her eyes shut briefly. "Does Lena know?"

Craig shook his head, "no, should she?"

"I don't want her to worry. She's been through enough," Kiara whispered.

Craig took a step closer, he lowered his voice. "Is she involved at all?" Kiara shook her head timidly. "Then she doesn't find out from me."

Kiara smiled weakly. Her legs felt a little weak from the trembling, so she walked over to sit down in the nearest seat. "We were... I was supposed to keep her company tonight while her dad was out. Sleep over."

"The girl's dad?" Craig mumbled to himself. He worried, he hadn't had time to check for any parents.

"On their planet he was some structural engineer. He volunteered to help, to repay us for rescuing them," Kiara said.

Craig sighed and nodded. "How did you two meet?"

"The Enterprise trip back through the anomaly," Kiara replied grimly while she stared at the table. "She's been through a lot. Her planet dying, her town being raided by monsters, hiding out in a horrible cave. I thought she could do with a friend. We are similar ages so..."

"She didn't look nine," Craig blurted out without thinking. Kiara gave him a very Janeway like stare. "Sorry. Has she met anyone else since arriving on Voyager?"

Kiara's next sigh was telling to him, her head bowed as she did it. He quickly sat down opposite her. "Pearl was very outgoing, friendly. She'd talk to anyone who'd listen."

"Why do I get the feeling there's more to what you're saying?" Craig said carefully.

"That isn't her full name. I couldn't even pronounce it. Pearl is just a shortened version of Perlash..." Kiara said meekly. She noticed Craig staring at her expectantly, it made her realise that wasn't what he meant. "You mean about the outgoing thing." Craig only nodded. "Her dad and her argued about it all the time. He told her to be careful, even on a ship like this."

"I guess some of the Erayans still don't trust us. That's understandable," Craig said.

Kiara shook her head. "No, her dad was very grateful. As I said, he volunteered to help out with his expertise. He just... I guess he wasn't sure how Humans would react to it."

"React to what?" Craig questioned.

"She had a rough time. Please don't judge her," Kiara said as she stared at him, pleading him with her eyes.

"Kiara, I wouldn't... what?" Craig stammered.

"She... she got along with other girls, no problem. With men though, she'd flirt badly with them until they responded, one way or another," Kiara said. Craig's face turned very pale, he could feel his skin prickling with the lack of blood flow. "Most of the time they'd reject her or walk away, and she'd yell at them. Sometimes though, they flirted back. Before anything happened, if it would at all, she'd scream at them for being perverts."

"Oh god," Craig could only say quietly.

Kiara stared at him, her eyes were intense. "She told me she saw people being ripped apart by those experiments, while she fled her town. Seeing something like that..."

"I wasn't judging her, I promise," Craig said quickly. "I'm just surprised no one reported it. And also surprised anyone would respond to a teenager's flirtation."

"I don't think they were taking her seriously anyway, at least from what I saw," Kiara said meekly. "Except that one guy."

"Which one guy?" Craig asked.

Guilt was all over Kiara's face in an instant, her shoulders slouched. "I don't know, I wasn't there. He was apparently mad when she did her pervert bit."

"If he didn't mean it, then I'm not surprised," Craig said.

"No, I think he did. He knocked on her door a few times when her dad was out. That's why I was staying over tonight. She was terrified of him," Kiara said, now trembling.

"Please, she's not a bad girl. She's just seen some awful things. Who would take the slow destruction of their home planet well?"

"I know, I get it. Pearl didn't deserve this, not ever," Craig said. Kiara was still shaking but his words re-assured her, he could tell by her eyes softening. "We'll catch him. You've given us a lead, thank you."

Kiara nodded meekly. "Maybe. Maybe not. She never said what species he was, what he looked like. She just called him an old creep. Pearl was fourteen going on ten, to her most of the crew were old."

"It's okay. If he knocked at her door as often as you say, there'll be evidence of it. The computer should tell us who was around at that time, and in the middle of the night I doubt there was many. This should be easy," Craig said in a gentle tone to re-assure her further. Kiara gave him another nod, this one looked far more confident. He rose from the chair to leave.

"Craig," Kiara said once he was half way out of the room.

He stopped to look back towards her. "Someone on this ship beat her so badly I barely recognised it was her. I don't believe... It won't be easy."

Craig didn't know what to say to that. He let his gaze linger for a while. "James is... working the case too. I could stay if..."

"No. I want you and him to capture this excuse of a person," Kiara said angrily. "I know it's wrong but poetic justice would be nice."

Craig turned away from her to head back out again. "Not entirely."

Deck Eight:

A team of three walked through the open doors guarded by two Security personnel, each of them carrying a tool kit of some kind. Once they were inside they could be heard whispering quietly in disgusted and worried voices. The two Security officers looked sullen. Each of them likely wished they were anywhere else on the ship.

James stood a few metres away, staring towards the open door, silently wondering if there was anything he could do outside to avoid going in. One of the people who went in walked back outside with a small piece of wood. They were about to walk away in the other direction. "Wait!" he called out, stopping them instantly. "What's that?"

The startled crewman quickly steeled himself before walking over. "The Doctor asked for any biological evidence." James looked down at the wood in his gloved hands, now he could see a little blood on its broken edge. "It could be the victim's, you never know though."

James noticed one of the Security officer's flinch. "Who could do this?" she asked quietly.

"A monster, obviously," her partner said.

"Probably," James said. The two glanced at him startled as if they didn't expect him to hear them. "We're assuming someone in the crew did this." The weight seemed to lift as he thought it over. "No one on this ship would beat a teenaged girl into a coma. No one. Has to be a demon."

"But the Doctor said..." the crewmember with the evidence stuttered.

"He's wrong," James butted in. He walked over to the open doorway, but stopped just before he reached the opening. Instead he focused on the door panel beside it. "It's not broken. Probably has transport capabilities, some do."

"Don't we have a demon shield?" the female Security officer asked.

"A portal has to be trying to open to even power it, or be tricked into it by some idiot warlock. It wouldn't stop a demon trespassing if it was already around, so to speak," James said. He was about to tap the panel, he stopped himself at the last second. "Gloves?" he asked one of the guards. The male officer handed him a pair of clean gloves which he quickly put on. Then he was able to tap at the panel. "Has anyone checked this yet?"

"Yes sir. The only finger prints belong to the occupants of the quarters and a Kiara Janeway," one answered.

James nodded, then he did a double take at the name. The two officers cringed as he stared at them. "Kiara?"

"She was the one that found the victim," the woman said.

Before James could say anything else or do anything else, the man quickly spoke up as well. "There's no sign of any forced entry, other than hers anyway. The door will have opened for anyone fleeing the scene so..."

"We need a list of anyone who was on the deck at the time of the attack. Do we know that yet?" James asked.

"Anderson said he'd leave that one to you, as the attacker could have easily left their commbadge at home and you'd be able to figure that out," the woman replied.

James sighed partially in relief, his head threatened to turn towards the open door. He forced it back. "Fine, so what is he doing?"

"I believe he said he'd be questioning the witness and people the girl knew, after checking in with Sickbay," the man said with hesitation. "She has a father. I wouldn't want to be the one who tells him about this."

James didn't even want to think about that, at least not yet. The anger he felt at the situation was brewing under the surface. The last thing he wanted was to trigger it. For now he had something to distract him. At the very least it would distract him alone in his office, no one would be around to witness or be affected if it didn't work. He noticed the Security team and the man still looking at him, in his point of view they looked a little afraid of what he may do.

"Time of the attack?" he asked any of them.

"She was found at approximately 0140 hours. The Doctor estimates that she had been there for an hour when she was found," the Security man answered.

He wished he hadn't asked. "An hour?" James said, his voice strained as he tried his best not to lose his temper. His earlier suspicions were confirmed, everyone took a step back and their bodies seemed to tense up. It was enough to get him to calm down a little.

"I'm sorry, it's no one's fault. I just... it's a long time for a little girl to be lying so badly injured on her own."

The first person to relax was the one who brought out the piece of wood. They gave him a sympathetic nod. "The attack will have rendered her unconscious. She wouldn't have been aware of the time she was alone."

"I've heard better silver linings," James mumbled to himself. He glanced at everyone one at a time, then he turned to go back the way he came. "Carry on."

The Ready Room:

Tom felt the strength in his legs give up along with his state of mind, he shakily sat down so he wouldn't collapse. Craig had finished talking five minutes ago, he decided to wait patiently as he understood how he was feeling.

"Suspects?" he finally said after a few more minutes silence.

"One so far. A guy was stalking her apparently," Craig replied.

Tom felt his eyes blink far more times than usual as his brain processed what he just said. "Stalking. A fourteen year old girl?" Craig nodded. "Who?"

"Dunno yet. I think James is looking up who was on that deck when the attack happened. I'll ask him to expand that once I'm done here," Craig replied.

Tom sighed as he leaned back in his chair. "I miss the good old days, you know? Evil clones of us who's most evil thing was a bit of kidnapping. Damien attacking us with rabbits. Holodecks gone wrong. Brainwashed celebrities."

"Demon portals that threaten to destroy the ship. Homicidal maniacs shooting random people. Everyone being brutally murdered by ghosts," Craig said. Tom frowned. "Those were the days."

"Okay maybe it wasn't all silly and mostly harmless, but now it feels like something awful happens all the time," Tom said. "What was the last thing that happened that we'd consider light?"

"Annika last week painting Damien murals in Astrometrics," Craig said.

Tom stared blankly at him. "You're defending this?"

"Well it was one of her less aggressive stalkings," Craig said. He said it so plainly Tom continued to think he was serious. At least until a small smirk threatened to appear. "I'm just trying to look on the bright side for once. It wasn't all nice and silly back in the old days, and it sure isn't just doom and gloom today."

"Are you sure about that?" Tom asked tiredly.

"Tom, not long ago you called me a self pitying idiot. What I got from that speech is moping around won't help solve anything. If we're going to figure this out, we're going to have to tackle it the way we normally do," Craig said.

"The last time we had to investigate an attack with an unknown assailant, you and James almost came to blows and it ended up being solved by Jessie," Tom said with a slight smirk on his face.

Craig sighed, "lucky for me it didn't. What's your point? I was a much bigger mess back then, I didn't want his help and I didn't care either. Now, I'm the one who asked for his help."

"I'm just saying that we shouldn't tackle it the way we normally do," Tom said. "Instead we should get master detective Jessie on the case."

"We would have solved it if we were working together. She only solved it cos she overheard us arguing," Craig said.

"Fine. You two have buried the hatchet, huh. Okay, who am I to doubt you?" Tom said in a teasing voice. "So he's looking at who was there at the time. The Doctor is running DNA tests on anything he can find. You're?"

Craig's shoulders slumped. Any good mood he had during this conversation was starting to slip away. He tried his best to keep it still. "I need to talk to her dad. He might know who the stalker was."

"No he won't," Tom said plainly, causing Craig to frown at him. "If he did, he'd do something about it. He's a father. At the very least he would have told Security. At the most, we'd be investigating a man being beaten instead."

"Someone still needs to tell him though," Craig said.

"Yeah," Tom sighed. "Maybe I should do it. Father to father, Captain to guest I've failed."

"Surely that's mine, no actually James' job," Craig said. He winced after saying that. "Yeah, you should do it."

Tom had to laugh despite the situation. "Why, it's not his daughter we're dealing with."

Craig's eyes had widened, "don't say that. Don't ever say that. His reaction to this girl was bad enough. He seemed to take it very personally, almost like she was his. I dread to know how he'd react if she was."

"I think we can imagine considering his past breakdowns," Tom said.

Craig shook his head. He remembered the time when he was forced to travel back in time to save Ylara and her brother. He had come face to face, or rather fist to face with a much darker Evil Slayer. His encounter with James' version a few years ago paled in comparison. He at least stopped to talk to him. The only reason he recovered was that what caused it was undone. What if this had happened to him and like Ylara's brother; couldn't be undone so it was left to fester? The thought of him turning into a similar case was terrifying.

"No, no you can't," Craig only ended up saying.

Tom had pulled himself to his feet and walked part way around the desk while he had been thinking. "We're all dragged into a case like this, I think. I'd be more worried if James didn't react at all to it. Just make sure he doesn't do anything stupid."

"Me, how?" Craig said bewilderedly.

Tom smirked and then laughed quietly. "Tell on him. Not even the mighty Slayer can go up against an angry wife."

"Are you speaking from experience? Sort of," Craig questioned lightly.

"Do you really have to ask that?" Tom said.

"Yeah, I'm already kicking myself," Craig said with a slight smile.

Tom patted him on the shoulder as he walked by him. "Just think, yours may be the mighty Slayer. Don't get married." He continued towards the exit, leaving Craig a stuttery and red faced mess.

"Wait, me and Lena? That's not happening," he eventually managed to get out.

Tom stopped at the door. "You're moving on? But James is already married."

"That's not funny," Craig said as sternly as he could manage.

"I think you're very wrong about that," Tom sniggered as he disappeared through the door.

Craig groaned. "At least I was right. Things haven't changed that much."

"Sickbay to Anderson."

Craig reluctantly tapped his commbadge, already dreading what he was going to be told. "Yeah?"

"Can you come back to Sickbay please, I've found something."

"Sure," Craig sighed. The dread was building up knowing that the Doctor only asked him to go to Sickbay. If he had wanted James to go, he would have contacted them both at the same time. It must be a bad something if only he was being summoned. He tried to tell his paranoia that he likely already called him or he was already there. It didn't work so well.

Despite his worry, he hurried out of the door towards the nearest turbolift.

The Security Office:

"You really said that?"

Lena dragged herself away from the streaming stars view through the window. Her shoulders casually raised up and then down. "I don't remember it word for word, but yeah."

James smiled as he tried to picture it. For some reason it just made his chest feel heavy. The smile disappeared with it. "It's not a good month for parents."

"Oh? Something you want to tell me?" Lena questioned him.

"Okay, older parents," James said.

Lena started smirking at him, he didn't know why. "I heard about Jess and her mother. Do you two have anymore long lost parents we should know about?"

James couldn't help but laugh. "I can't guarantee anything."

"My dad, your dad. Either mum had terrible taste or we're very unlucky," Lena said.

"Hmm, yours is either the best liar in the quadrant or he's making it up as he goes along," James said. Lena inhaled deeply and nodded a little. "What do you think happened?"

"You don't want to know what I think," Lena said in a grim tone.

The computer at James' new desk got his attention briefly with a couple of beeps, his head turned towards it and back again. "Now I really do," he said while side walking towards the desk.

Lena rolled her eyes with a slight smile on her face. "No you don't. It's stupid."

"I won't know that until you share it," James said once he reached the desk. The computer was dragged forward, then rotated around so he could see it. Lena was still in the corner of his eye, at least until she started to pace.

"I could believe dad not taking mum's death well. I could believe him being mad for a bit. I can't believe dad would go so far as to resurrect her though, let alone in the way he did it," Lena said. "I also find it hard to believe that he'd use Damien as well."

James had a quick look at the list of names that appeared on the screen. He then turned around on his heel so he could face Lena again. "I think we all can agree on that. Why is that stupid?"

Lena smiled bitterly while exhaling through her nose, it sounded like a huff to him. "He wouldn't do it. He'd mourn her and he'd continue on in her place. Dad's far better than this... this imposter."

James walked over to stand beside her as her head dipped towards the floor. "Imposter?"

Lena nodded lightly. "Earth was under constant attack then. You haven't considered it?"

James didn't answer right away, he wasn't sure what she meant exactly. He had a nagging feeling what it might be, but he brushed that aside thinking that it wasn't possible. It seemed safe to say, "no."

"Cubes were landing all over, you were punished with cleaning up that mess. Apparently more cubes attacked after I was gone, one just like Manchester," Lena said.

"Newcastle, yeah," James nodded. "What's that got to do with your dad though?"

"Nothing, probably," Lena said too nonchalantly for his liking.

"Lena," he said, vocalising his distaste.

Lena shook her head before turning around to face him directly. "Mum dies, Jessie nearly dies, dad goes insane, I die, the Softmicron attacks. I don't like it."

"I'm pretty sure you're not supposed to," James said.

Lena's eyebrow raised. "You of all people taking me literally. I meant..." A smirk appeared on his face, cutting her off. "It stinks okay. Don't tell me you didn't once think that."

"Not long after I left Earth to see mum, a cube landed near my home town," James said quietly while staring out the window.

Lena cast her mind back to that time, then she remembered something. Her skin paled slightly, butterflies in her stomach appeared to do back flips. "A lot of the cubes were around your home."

"It's nothing new. Not to me," James muttered. Lena's eyes turned sharp, and a little dangerous. "I always thought what happened to Manchester was meant for me. I lived there for years. They probably didn't know I was gone." He turned his head slightly to look her in the eye. "That was long before your dad's personality swap."

Lena sighed. "Fine. Fine, dad's behaviour just doesn't sit right with me. It goes against everything I know about him, from both timelines. What on earth was so much worse, that what he did to mum was a rosy alternative? Was that what changed him? Is it really that simple?"

"Perhaps," James replied.

Lena felt her gaze gravitate back to the streaming stars. "I still think it stinks. I'm not the only one right?"

James barely shook his head. "No."

Lena back stepped away from the window, her attention eventually fell on the computer. "You were working on something. I hope it wasn't too important."

"Yeah," James sighed. Lena looked down at the floor, as if her head suddenly became heavy. He felt that way himself when he saw that, he quickly reached out to take her hand. "It could wait a few minutes. You're my sister. You come first."

Lena smiled weakly, then she started to laugh a little. "You can be so corny sometimes."

James laughed with her. "Well, it runs in the family."

"Which side, cos that ain't me," Lena continued to laugh.

"Suddenly I'm regretting my decision," James said not seriously. He walked away with an amused glint in his eye.

Lena followed him curiously. "So what's going on? It must be something interesting at this time of night?"

James tapped at the computer to attempt to scroll down the list. It didn't move though. "That's it?" He briefly glanced behind him. "There was an attack a few hours ago. I'm just looking at who was around at the time."

"Oh? We haven't had a mystery like this in a while," Lena said. "Change of pace from... well, everything. I shouldn't like that, should I?"

"Unfortunately no. The girl, she's one of the Erayans. Just a kid," James said awkwardly.

"Who'd attack a little kid?" Lena asked in distaste.

James stared at the list again. "Maybe one of these people. Or someone who isn't stupid enough to wear their commbadge. Or a demon."

"If it was one, what stopped it?" Lena questioned.

"I don't kn..." James blurted out without thinking. He then thought about what she said.

"She's not dead right?" Lena asked carefully and with a little worry tainting her voice.

"No, coma," James replied quietly. The dread he felt when he was told about this fell over him once again. He started looking at the list more intently. "You're right. Nobody interrupted, nobody came for an hour. A demon would have killed her, not... this."

Lena walked over to join him in front of the desk. The first thing she did once she got there was stare at the list of names. "Why don't we cut this list in half. I'll take one, you take one." She noticed James was still staring at it. A few seconds of studying his face told her he was actually just staring in that general direction, not at anything in particular. "We'll catch him or her. Yeah?"

"Him," James said plainly without moving any other muscle.

Lena forced a smile on her face. "Oh, so you know that. You want to save us some time and name him?"

James snapped out of his daze. He looked at her in surprise. Lena then wondered how long he had been in it. "I'll do it. You should go to Kiara."

"Why?" Lena asked slowly, her eyes showed off her worry. "You think this is a serial kid beater?"

"In a way. The thing is, the girl who was attacked was a friend of hers, she found her," James said a little reluctantly. The look of horror on his sister's face made him regret not being more reluctant. He quickly attempted to back pedal a bit. "I'd feel better if no one was alone until this guy is caught."

"You mean Perla?" Lena stuttered before he could say anything else. "Who'd want to hurt her? She's a cheerful and optimistic girl, despite what happened to her."

"Random attack, maybe," James mumbled. He sighed while closing his eyes, his head lowered without him thinking about it, so when he opened them again he was staring at the floor. "I shouldn't have told you."

"No, no you should. You know I don't like being kept in the dark. I especially hate being molly coddled, or whatever," Lena said. She didn't have to say it, her face said thank you all on its own. "If you need help with the case, just call okay? I want to catch him."

James only nodded in response. It made Lena hesitate before she walked away for the door.

"If it wasn't my daughter, I'd have stayed and helped. You know that right?" she asked.

James frowned, "of course I do. You don't need to tell me that."

Lena studied him carefully, it just made him frown all the more. She let out a sigh when she didn't get the answer she wanted. "I'm only saying it cos..." she hesitated while she tried to figure out how to put what she was thinking into words. "This isn't the same thing. It's not gonna end the same way either."

That made James even more confused. His head shake proved that to her. "I have no idea what you're talking about."

"Hmm, I hope so cos that means I'm just imagining it," Lena said with a warm smile.

"Seems that way," James said.

Lena's smile grew, she turned to the right slightly to walk away. "Keep your cool okay, big bro?" she said while heading for the door.

James was left even more confused than he was before. He tried to shake it off and study the list on his screen. First he had to make a few changes to it. A few taps took away the two female crewmembers, leaving only four remaining. The list was swapped out for a schematic of Voyager which then zoomed in around the saucer side of Deck Eight. A few dots appeared within the deck, some moving and some still. Text that appeared with it said Lifesign Signature Scan.

"I thought so," he whispered. Another few taps took some of them away until he was left with five. The list of four names was immediately brought back. This would be easy, all he had to do was match the lifesign signatures with the names, based on their commbadge location and he'd have one left. He'd still have the challenge of identifying the fifth one.

He then thought that all he'd done was confirmed that somebody was wandering on Deck Eight commbadge-less at the time. To identify him he'd need to do a ship wide version of this. A commbadge signal had to have a lifesign in the same place. However he knew all too well that some people would take off their commbadge, as well as their uniform, once their shift was over. It may be possible that some people will have forgotten to put it back on when they go back out to the Mess Hall, Holodeck or even just for a walk.

It was okay, he told himself. It still will narrow things down greatly. It didn't take long to match the names on the list with the lifesigns on the scan. Their commbadge and lifesigns matched their location perfectly.

Before starting on the new ship wide scan, he studied that fifth dot again. It did tell him something he didn't want to believe. The person that was wandering around Deck Eight without a commbadge while a girl was being horribly attacked was Human.

James still wanted to believe that whoever did this wouldn't show up in any of his results. That the mystery fifth person was just somebody that couldn't sleep and had decided to walk or run around the ship to tire themselves out. That hope spurred him into continuing his work.

The Bridge:

The atmosphere on the Enterprise looked a lot lighter than Voyager's grim one, at least from what could be seen on the viewscreen. Harry even relaxed back into the chair.

"You did hear me right?" Tom questioned, just in case. "Until we find out who did it, only our Security chiefs are allowed to beam back and forth between the ships."

Harry nodded, "yeah Tom, it's hard to miss."

"Then, why aren't you more concerned?" Tom asked.

"Oh I am, but Security approved transports also means that Neelix can't bring his breakfast picnic over," Harry answered.

Despite everything, the bridge quietly chuckled to themselves. Tom couldn't resist a brief smile. "Lucky you. Has anyone been to the Enterprise in the last day?"

"I keep checking, and no. I asked Tira as well if she had any guests, she said her shields have been up the whole time," Harry answered.

Tom sighed in disappointment. "The Katane says the same thing. They're extra eager to solve this, I can't blame them."

"Can I add something?" Chakotay's voice said just off screen. He walked into it seconds later. Tom reluctantly nodded. "An attack of this nature should be quite simple. If you beat somebody half to death it's impossible to not leave behind any trace evidence; skin, hair, leather from your boot if you kicked them, finger prints. At the very least you can narrow down species."

Tom tensed up half way through his second sentence. Harry butted in before he could say anything, "I hope you're not pinning the blame on one of our allies."

"I'm not blaming anyone," Chakotay said defensively.

Tom climbed out his chair to at the very least loosen his stressed joints a bit. He ended up standing a little slouched with his arms folded. "What is your point? The Doc will know all this."

Chakotay stared at him quizzically. "Then it should be simple, but you're acting like it's complicated, and possibly abnormal. You described it as brutal, so I imagine your suspect list will be more supernatural than not."

"No, we already have a suspect," Tom said awkwardly. The two bridges noticed his discomfort. Chakotay eyed him suspiciously. "He just doesn't have a name or face yet."

Naomi shuddered, "ew, I wouldn't like to run into that guy."

Tom stared only at the back of her head as she was sat in front of him. "I don't mean literally."

"How can you have a nameless, faceless suspect?" Harry asked.

Tom's folded arms tightened, it looked like he was hugging himself instead. "I can't share the details of the case in such a public place. What if he knows we're on to him?"

"He?" Harry sniggered, his finger gestured casually around Voyager's bridge. Tom scrunched up his face and turned a bit to look around. He eyed one man at the back station suspiciously, not that he'd notice as his back was to him. So far he couldn't see any other man he could possibly be talking about. He ended up staring at the only one he'd seen, getting more suspicious by the minute.

Chakotay groaned. "I think Kim is suggesting that..."

Harry shushed him, "no, no, he'll get it."

Tom walked over to the back of the bridge. By the time the man noticed he was being stared at, Tom was already in his face giving him narrowed eyes.

"Uh, can I help you?" he said irritably as the Lieutenant was more than violating his personal space by this point.

"Don't get snippy with me, boy-o. I'm onto you," Tom snapped.

Most of the bridge, and the Enterprise's, snickered as quietly as they could. Chakotay looked to Harry expectantly. "Maybe not," Harry sighed. "Tom!"

Tom quickly waved him off, "I got it."

"You're worried about a male attacker finding out that we know what he's done, when only one guy is on your bridge," Chakotay said.

Tom didn't react at first. Everyone assumed he was thinking it over. Then he laughed nervously and patted the man on the shoulder. "Ha, got you. You can go for your break now. Kay? Thanks for being a good sport."

"Are you on something?" the man asked.

Tom continued to laugh, "oh you. Get outta here." He tried to shove him towards the turbolift. Once he was gone he forced a smile at all who was sniggering at him, which was everyone. "You guys are so easy. I'm not that daft. Sheesh."

"Okay Tom, you're not," Harry patronised him.

Chakotay sighed a little impatiently, "so your suspect is a man? Anything else we should know?"

"Nope, that's it," Tom lied.

"Wow, this case solves itself," Harry quipped.

Chakotay wasn't buying it though. "Why is your suspect a man?"

"Trust me, you don't want to know the details. Just, don't let anyone on or off your ship without Security permission," Tom said in his commanding tone.

"So why did you kick that cute ass guy out?" Danny whimpered from Tactical. "I liked him."

"You like every guy," Harry pointed out.

Danny laughed in his direction, "yeah you wish."

Sickbay:

Craig expected to find the Doctor still with his patient when he arrived. That wasn't what he found. Before he had even entered he noticed half of a Security team was guarding the door. Once he did he found the other half standing on opposite ends of Sickbay. Nikki stood near the victim, studying a tricorder.

"Doc?" Craig said while taking another step inside.

"In here," the Doctor's voice called from his office.

Craig turned his head to the left, and sure enough there he was. He hurried inside, silently hoping that the Doctor had solved the whole thing. The look on his face told him that it was likely he didn't, or he was about to put a spanner in the works.

"What is it?" he asked.

The Doctor sighed in frustration. That wasn't a good sign, Craig thought to himself. The source of the Doctor's frustration seemed to be the computer as he rotated it around so Craig could see it. Not understand it though. To him it looked like a garbled mess.

"I've never seen anything like this," he said.

"What?" Craig stuttered. He was leaning on the *put a spanner in the works* side, but he was still surprised by the Doctor admitting this. "Like what?"

"This is supposed to be DNA sequences," the Doctor explained, pointing at the screen.

Now that Craig knew what he was supposed to look at, he stared at it again, hoping it would look far less garbled. It didn't. All he could determine from it was that it was a very busy and chaotic set of DNA. Since the Doctor was baffled about it, he knew that wasn't normal. "So, it's an alien? Maybe?"

The Doctor forced a laugh, "if it is, it goes against everything I know about genetics. This, shouldn't be possible."

"Apart from it looking like its been put through a blender, what's the matter with it?" Craig asked.

"That's exactly what's the matter with it," the Doctor replied.

Craig felt oddly relieved, but only because he felt like such an idiot staring at it. The relief was overshadowed by the thoughts about what that may mean. "Maybe this is what demon DNA looks like." The Doctor stared at him as if it was something he had already considered, and was already disproving. A horrible thought came to Craig, which he blurted out right away. "Softmicron? They're shapeshifters. Maybe a shift gone wrong?"

"Interesting theory but I don't think that's the case," the Doctor said. He pointed at a few parts of the DNA sequence. "This, and this are fairly consistent with humanoid DNA. The rest... I have no idea."

Craig was even more confused than before, and that was saying something. "Um. So he could be Human. I thought..."

"If he was, he'd be dead by now. Some of the sequences that should be there, have strange ones that don't fit in their place. Some are empty. It's, as I said, shouldn't be possible," the Doctor said.

"So we're ruling out a half Human?" Craig said meekly. The Doctor nodded quickly. "Then what is he?"

"I wish I could tell you," the Doctor replied.

"What makes you so sure it isn't demon?" Craig asked.

The Doctor pulled the computer back over to him with a sigh. "It wouldn't explain the Human sequences. Only a vampire would explain that, however the samples couldn't have come from one." Craig scrunched his face in disgust. He didn't want to know. The Doctor made sure that he would anyway, "blood. Vampires are dead. They shouldn't bleed."

"They still have blood though," Craig pointed out. "Where did you find it?"

"Under her finger nails. She must have scratched him," the Doctor replied. "I'm still looking but the amount of it tells me the attacker bled from her attack. I'll keep an open mind."

"No, maybe not. A vampire wouldn't have left her unconscious," Craig said. He sighed deeply, they were back to square one. Or at the very least back to square stalker. "Maybe there's further DNA evidence that won't be all... dodgy. There could be something wrong with the scanner, the sample was compromised."

The Doctor stared at him, slightly bemused at his suggestion. "Dodgy?" Craig smiled awkwardly. "I have already considered that. Which is why I called you here."

"Oh?" Craig wasn't sure whether to be worried or not.

"While I was treating her wounds I had to scan for DNA evidence as well as scan in casts of them. You understand that?" the Doctor said, and not in an insulting manner.

Craig thought about it, then nodded. "Treating the wound will erase the evidence. Casts are a copy, right?"

"Yes," the Doctor said, sounding a little relieved. "I have the awful task of cataloging them, so I can determine when they happened and how. Also hopefully by who. The scan revealed that one of the wounds was inflicted on a previous one. The second one cracked her jaw..." Craig cringed at the thought of that. "And bruised the area around it, mostly obscuring the original one."

"Oh god," Craig verbalised his disgust. "I really hope there's a point to this."

The Doctor understood what he was feeling, he felt it too. "The second attack left skin traces behind. It's one of the many samples with the strange DNA. However, the first attack left us something far more useful." He walked over to the wall panel nearby. One button press brought up a hand print. Craig's eyes widened hopefully. "Finger prints."

"Doc, you just solved it," Craig said quickly.

The Doctor didn't look as convinced. "I checked the prints in our database, and once I did I compared their DNA with the garbled ones we found. There is a 0.12% match."

"Meaning?" Craig said, his hopes quickly fading.

"Normally I'd say it was a different attacker, a different species even," the Doctor replied. "With these strange DNA samples, I'd say all bets are off."

"It's a start. Thanks Doc," Craig said. "Who is it?"

Engineering:

Most of the Engineering team were huddled around B'Elanna, nearby the warp core. Every now and then she'd stop talking and some of the team would pipe up. The ones not apart of this were busy manning different stations.

Tom quickly looked at them first. He shook his head as none of them were who he was looking for. Reluctantly he walked over to the group. B'Elanna spotted him first in between the gaps in the crowd. The look on his face told her to wrap it up.

"Okay, split into teams. Report your results every half hour," she ordered. The crowd soon dispersed, leaving only her standing there.

Tom approached looking apologetic. "I hope I wasn't interrupting anything important."

"Well, just a few semi important things. Nothing they shouldn't be able to do without me. I hope," B'Elanna said. "What's the matter?"

"I'm looking for the Eryan specialist. His name is Yutan," Tom answered.

B'Elanna looked around at her team dispersing, she quickly pointed towards one of the side stations. Tom turned his head to look in that direction. A team of four had just reached it, they were talking quietly amongst themselves. One of them was a middle aged Eryan man with gentle features and a friendly smile.

"He's a structural engineer. He apparently was a part of the Tower project," B'Elanna said matter-of-factly.

Tom's head swung back around, making his neck click in protest. He ignored the brief pain for now. "I'm sorry, what?"

B'Elanna laughed, "relax. He's not one of *them*. The Eryan towers were built by normal people, tricked into thinking they were harmless power plants. He wasn't involved in the planet draining side of it. Just the design of the building. He'll know their weakness better than anyone."

"God. No wonder he offered to help," Tom said grimly. "Imagine being unwittingly involved in the destruction of your planet. That's a lot to live with." That thought alone made the reason he came here even more unsettling.

B'Elanna seemed to sense his discomfort, she stepped closer to her husband and put a hand across his arm. "You didn't know about this and you still want to talk with him? What's happened? Do you want me to..."

"No, Captain's prerogative. It's not something you can delegate," Tom said through a lump in his throat.

B'Elanna sighed. "If you need help. Give me a sign."

Tom nodded gratefully. "I will." With a heavy heart he started to make his way over to the team. They didn't notice until he joined them. They looked at him expectantly. "Yutan?"

"Yes?" the alien said politely with a smile. Then he noticed the uncomfortable look on the Lieutenant's face. "Is there a problem?"

"I'm afraid so," Tom answered carefully, just as the Engineering doors opened again. "Perhaps we should speak alone."

"All right," Yutan said warily.

His eyes moved to one side, just over Tom's shoulder. Tom assumed he was uncomfortably hinting where he would walk to. Tom turned around and found himself face to face with Craig. He wasn't alone either, four Security officers stood behind him. Each of them armed.

"Craig? I told you I'd handle it," Tom said.

Craig seemed pained but firm, he gestured for him to step aside. Tom shook his head, mouthing *no*. He didn't want to believe it. Finally he did step to one side, all the while staring at B'Elanna in dismay. She had no idea what was going on, but shared his expression anyway.

"What is happening?" Yutan asked in a stutter.

"I'm placing you under arrest," Craig answered him as firmly as he could.

Yutan's mouth dropped in shock, and he wasn't the only one. "For what? I didn't do anything."

Craig hesitated slightly. Then he looked behind him to gesture to his team. They walked forward to surround the scared alien. "Just come with us, we'll discuss it in the Brig," Craig said.

"Are you sure?" Tom eventually stammered. By the time he did, two of the Security officers had clutched each of the man's arms. The other two stood behind him. Craig just nodded his reply. "But..."

The Security team lead the alien man away, all the while he stuttered his innocence and struggled in their grips. The rest of Engineering looked on in shock.

The Enterprise:

Unlike Voyager's and more like the Leda's, the Enterprise's brig had more than one cell. Six in total, paired off into separated rooms, each cell opposite the other. One lone console sat in between the two cells, manned by two personnel.

The room Craig was in only had one prisoner inside. Despite his crime, he didn't want more people knowing about it, especially when he knew two more Erayans were being imprisoned on the ship too. Child kidnappers were the last kind of people he wanted knowing about this.

"I swear. I didn't know what the towers were really for. I wish I did," Yutan protested.

Craig approached the forcefield in between them. "That's not what you're here for."

"Drawing the plans for that monstrosity is my only crime," Yutan said firmly despite his worry.

"Where were you at 0040 hours this morning?" Craig asked.

Yutan stared at him blankly. "I... don't know what that means."

"It's a time. Forty minutes passed midnight, 12:40 am. Didn't anyone tell you about this when you started working with us?" Craig asked.

"Oh, zero hour. My terminal was set to remind me a short time before zero hour to report to Engineering. Your time system is confusing to say the least," Yutan said, still in a nervous tone. "I imagine by the forty that I was already there. It doesn't take long to get to your engine room. In fact today I left early."

Craig caught on to that right away, he didn't like it. "Why?"

Yutan was offended by the accusation lurking in his question. He responded in kind. "That's personal," he said firmly.

"I wouldn't talk like that, not when you're the top suspect in a crime like this," Craig said.

"I still don't know what you're accusing me of!" Yutan snapped.

"At approximately 0140 hours, a friend of your daughter's visited her. She instead found her beaten and unconscious," Craig answered him, the words made him feel sick. The look on the other man's face didn't help. The complexion in it whittled away, his eyes even paled as well. His jaw started to tremble. Craig wondered if he was just a good actor, it was certainly convincing.

"No... my little girl," Yutan stammered, his voice barely above a whisper. Anger soon took over, his eyes glazed over. "You're accusing me of this!?"

"Yes, your finger..." Craig started to explain.

Yutan's anger made him step too close to the forcefield. It didn't put him off either. "I wouldn't hurt her. It's the last thing I would do. Just because a few characters in my race staged a kidnapping, doesn't mean we all beat our children."

"I never said that," Craig said, slightly taken aback. He then noticed his own voice was shaking along with him. He breathed in to try and tame it.

"Then don't waste your time on me. Find the brute that did this to my sweet daughter!" Yutan snapped.

Craig took in another deep breath before continuing. "Your finger prints were on her face. It looked like she had been slapped there first before being punched."

"How dare you," Yutan growled. "I love my daughter. Why would I want to hurt her?"

"You tell me," Craig said without thinking.

The doors to the brig opened sharply. Craig briefly looked to see who it was. He wasn't expecting anyone, least of all James. He took one look at the prisoner before walking the rest of the way over to Craig.

"Tom told me what happened," he said.

Craig looked at him and got the feeling that he had messed up, or was getting in the way. He tried to brush it aside. "The Doctor found his finger prints on a wound."

"Absurd. I'd have no reason to hurt her," Yutan butted in.

"What about her flirting with the whole ship," Craig asked, immediately regretting it. Yutan's eyes flashed with horror. Craig averted his own, briefly noticing James staring at him. He still felt like he was being belittled. "Did *you* find anything?" he asked aggressively.

"Don't start with that again," James said coldly.

The tone of voice made him stand down, at least for now. Craig tried to calm himself. "There's evidence that he hit her. He admitted to changing his schedule. What happened to her was awful, I guess I... it makes me sick."

"I know, me too," James said in a more friendly tone. "Do you want me to handle this?"

"No, it's fine. I'm fine," Craig answered. Now he was calmer he turned his attention back on the prisoner. He had since turned away from them to pace, while stuttering words to himself. "Yutan."

"No!" Yutan belted out as he swung back around. "My daughter is my everything. What you are accusing me of is disgusting. I want to know who really did it."

"Then co-operate. Being evasive and lying is wasting our time too," Craig said.

Yutan stared at him harshly for a moment. He seemed to agree with him and his anger was redirected internally for now. "You want to know why I left early?"

"Yes," Craig nodded.

"We had an argument," Yutan answered reluctantly.

"About?" Craig asked.

Yutan shook his head in disgust, "she's a teenager, damaged by what happened. I thought it was best to not encourage it further, so I left her to calm down. Me as well."

"Do you know anyone that can back that up?" James asked. Craig glanced at him briefly, annoyed that he was likely trying to take over after all.

"I went for a walk. I didn't pay any attention to anyone else," Yutan said, his voice riddled with regret. "If it helps, I walked around my deck, joined someone in the lift and I entered the same deck they did. I didn't bother to ask their name. There was a window, I watched the stars go by. Then I thought I should go to Engineering as I'm not used to your time system. I didn't want to be late."

"The one in the lift. Can you describe them?" Craig asked.

"Um, he was in between your heights," Yutan answered, gesturing towards both Craig and James. "Dark hair, beard. Skinny. Um, he wasn't wearing a uniform. I do know it was late so he was probably off duty."

"Was he wearing a commbadge?" James asked. Craig was about to protest this time, but James looked at him to hint it was important.

"I think so. Most of you people do," Yutan replied. "Why?"

James shook his head, then gestured to Craig. He assumed he meant that he could continue with his questions. "How did you leave your daughter?" Craig then asked.

Yutan scoffed, "certainly not with a hand print on her face. She was angry, she went to her room."

"Was the argument about her interactions with men?" Craig asked.

James flinched at the question, it however was a trigger for Yutan to get angry again. "What are you implying?"

"Dad's are very protective of their daughters," Craig said as vaguely as he could.

"You're young, so you must remember being a teenager, right?" Yutan said plainly to hide his anger for now. "They rebel against everything. If you tell them to do something, they won't even if they agree with it. She's my little girl, but sometimes I forget she's growing up. Dad's baby their daughters too. That's all I did."

"So you argued with her, you left her to cool off before your alarm. Do you know how long before it?" Craig questioned. Yutan meekly shook his head. "Do you know of anyone who would want to hurt her?"

"No," Yutan answered quickly. A little too quickly for either of their liking. "I'm included. I'm the last person who would."

"Yes but the hand print..." Craig said.

"Do you have any children, Mr...?" Yutan asked.

"Anderson, no," Craig replied.

Yutan nodded, "I thought so."

"I don't need to, to know that child hitting is wrong, and sick," Craig said with a sigh at the end.

"That's true," Yutan said. "But you know nothing about raising children."

James' eyes narrowed slightly and suspiciously. "Considering we were talking about a girl being slapped, that point can't be used against him. Unless there's something else you want to tell us."

"Any moron knows you don't hurt children. However once a person has a child, the thought of it becomes far more repulsive. Your job is to protect them," Yutan said.

"Still. Craig doesn't need to have kids to get that," James said.

Craig glanced at him briefly, he quietly thanked him with a nod before looking back. "Explain to us how your finger prints got on her face. Then maybe we'll be able to stop wasting our time with you."

"I don't know. Before the argument we were getting along fine. She gave me a hug, we had a little cry about our planet. Perhaps I touched her cheek. Nothing malicious about it," Yutan replied.

Craig didn't look so sure, but he sensed James bought it from the corner of his eye. "They were directly above a wound. Somebody slapped her, hard enough to leave an imprint. That doesn't sound malicious?" Craig asked.

Yutan trembled in anger, his eyes were drowning in sadness though. "I don't beat my daughter. We're very close. She'd talk to me about everything, unlike most kids her age she didn't hate spending time with me. Her teenage tantrums are rare, once they're over she gives me a cuddle to apologise every time. Why would anyone want to hurt a girl like that?"

"That's not true," Kiara said.

James blinked a few times towards nothing in particular, then looked her in the eye. "Which part?"

Kiara shuffled in her seat, clearly uncomfortable. Lena looked on from the sofa with a worried look on her face. "They used to be like that, before they left Erayas. That's what she told me."

"What was her relationship really like with her dad then?" Lena asked.

"Best word is strained," Kiara replied.

James straightened up in his seat, his arms lightly folded. "Was it a teenager and parent kind of strained?"

"You mean like Lena and me back in the old days?" Kiara asked.

Lena cleared her throat, but decided against saying anything.

"You're still not a teenager, so no," James replied.

Kiara looked over at her mother with an apologetic look on her face, "I didn't mean anything by that."

"No, it's okay," Lena said quietly.

James glanced at her briefly, catching an expression of guilt as she turned towards the window. "I challenged everything my mum... sorry, Susy did. I just wanted to be difficult. I'm probably not a good example as I was an extreme example of pain in the ass teenager." He smirked a little, "not much has changed."

Kiara looked on thoughtfully. "I guess it's kinda like that. She had good reason though."

"What she went through," James nodded.

"No," Kiara said, surprising both of them. Lena turned back to join them. "It's what he went through. He drank, a lot. She thinks he blamed himself for what happened."

"Why would he?" Lena asked.

Kiara glanced down at her lap, her hands entwined together. "He helped build the towers. When he was told that they were what caused the problems on the planet, he apparently got hammered. Ever since then..." She trailed off with a throat clearing.

"He seemed perfectly sober when I talked to him," James said.

"Pearl suggested supplying Voyager with information, hoping that would help ease his guilt. I guess it did. He'd sober himself up before going to work, come home and wallow. Rinse and repeat," Kiara said. She briefly looked at Lena behind her. "She never told me, but I think the reason she acted out the way she did was to give him a wake up call."

"A cry for attention," James muttered. Kiara nodded and smiled weakly. "Sounds familiar."

"Acted out how?" Lena questioned.

Kiara bit her lip nervously. "Pearl was a daddy's girl. It should have got his attention more than anything else." She noticed James' eyes divert back to the desk, his posture slumped back into the chair. She started to tremble, "please don't tell me you think he's responsible for this. He was not that kind of drunk and he adored her."

"No, I don't," James answered.

Lena was surprised at this, "so why are we talking about him?"

"Unfortunately we need more than my gut feeling," James replied hesitantly.

"Did Craig tell you what I told him?" Kiara asked desperately. Both Lena and James easily noticed the fear in her voice. "About the stalker?" she tried again.

"He said something about her flirting with men, but that's it. I assumed that's what you meant before at the wake up call part," James said. He cringed quite a bit, "remind me to never drink too much and or ignore my girls when they're teenagers."

Lena couldn't help but smirk. "I don't see that happening, but will do."

"Great thanks, so stalker?" James said quickly.

"Lets just say he didn't take her flirting as a joke like everyone else did," Kiara answered.

"I assume you never met him or you'd have told us who by now," Lena said. Kiara nodded grimly. "Seems like prime suspect."

James looked a little annoyed to say the least. "Why didn't he tell me? The rejected idiot is a far better suspect than a traumatised dad."

"Did daddy know though?" Lena asked.

Kiara shook her head timidly. "I doubt it. That would have been more of a wake up call for him. From her stories about him before, he reminded me of both of you. Fiercely overprotective."

Lena laughed nervously while James didn't react at all. "When was I ever like that with you?" Lena asked.

"Even when you blamed me you always stuck up for me. Don't be like that," Kiara said with a little anger in her voice. It made Lena feel a little guilty for saying anything. "He knew she was flirting, he caught her once. Only he was still in his drunk hours."

"He wouldn't slap her for this, would he?" James felt awful but he had to ask.

"God no. Would you?" Kiara said, but not really asking, she knew the answer.

James actually shuddered in revulsion. "No. I'd probably slap the boys around though." Lena sniggered to herself. "Once they were adults, I mean," he said, quickly clearing his throat.

"We got it," Lena said, still amused.

"You said he caught her doing this once. Were you there?" James asked. Kiara shook her head. "We may get lucky and find that he caught her flirting with the stalker. I doubt it but it's worth a try. He was avoiding the subject though. I guess I don't blame him."

"Seriously, what are you going to do when Sasha, Amy and er... have you given her a name yet?" Lena questioned.

James responded just by narrowing his eyes in her direction.

"Never mind, there's my answer," Lena teased.

"Right, like you'll be nice and calm if Kiara decides to date," James said.

Kiara glanced up at her mum, just catching her scowl in response. "Yes," she eventually said unconvincingly.

"Good one," James said. He rose out of his chair. "I should go talk to him again. I may as well let him out. There's no way he did it."

"You arrested him, or did Craig?" Kiara stuttered. James' sigh told her the latter. "Why?"

"Yeah, you're right I can't let him out," James said quietly. The two girls looked confused. "There's still another question he's refusing to answer."

Deck Eight:

"Maybe he just couldn't handle it," Craig said.

James stopped walking alongside him, he stared after him with a disgruntled expression. Craig quickly turned and double backed a few steps.

"You said he was a drunk. Maybe he forgot he even did it. I don't know," he continued.

"If you don't know, why are you so certain it was him?" James asked.

Craig stared blankly at him. Then he shook his head. "His finger prints were in the slap wound."

James continued walking, his head shook as he did so. Craig stared after him, his eyes wide in disbelief. He hurried after him.

"I think you're forgetting that he went to his duty shift around midnight. She was attacked afterwards," James said.

"It was only an estimated time," Craig said.

James groaned as he turned the corner leading to the crime scene. Two new Security officers guarding the door stared at him bewilderedly until Craig arrived as well.

"I doubt the Doc would get it wrong, do you?" James said.

"I don't want it to be this guy anymore than you, but it doesn't explain the evidence the Doc also found," Craig argued.

James shrugged, "not yet. That's why we investigate things."

"This is starting to sound familiar," Craig groaned while rolling his eyes.

"Yeah, once again you're taking it personally whenever I disagree with you," James said. "I'm just suggesting we should investigate further. If we focus on only the dad we may miss something."

"Okay fine. I'm all for the dad not being an asshole," Craig said, his voice hinting that he'd let it go. "Did you find anyone suspicious on the deck at the time?"

James nodded. He walked over to investigate the door panel again. One officer knew he'd need it, and handed a pair of gloves to him. "One guy was wandering around without a commbadge on him. A Human guy."

"I take it you haven't figured out who?" Craig stated.

"He wasn't the only one. Eleven men were doing the same thing elsewhere. I'd have to dig deeper to figure out which one was where," James replied. Instead of pressing the controls on the panel, he tried to open it carefully. The gloves made it a bit difficult.

"Maybe we should listen to Lena. Divide them up, six each," Craig suggested.

"It's on my to do list, I just don't want to tip off the one who did it," James mumbled while he continued trying to open the panel.

Craig didn't seem bothered about it, "why not? Make him sweat and he won't do it again, in fear of being caught."

"Or he might attempt to cover his tracks," James said. He grunted as his finger slipped over the crack in the edge of the panel. He rolled his eyes, being careful wasn't working. This time he went to open it, he didn't even try. Everyone cringed when the panel didn't just open, it took some of the wall with it. James didn't seem to care at this point, he immediately started poking around the circuitry inside.

"We already know no one forced their way in. What are you looking for?" Craig asked.

"There's always a way around these things, some not easily detectable," James replied.

Craig folded his arms, a slightly bemused look on his face appeared, pushing both his eyebrows up and his lips to tightly push together. "I think we may have noticed a hole in the wall."

"I'm sure you could," James said in a patronising tone, normally a one used on a naughty kid. Craig didn't take offense at it, he saw it as him trying to lighten the mood. "You could short circuit the door, trick it into opening. Adjust your commbadge to make it think you're someone else."

"That sounds like stuff only people like you would know," Craig said in distaste. "Who else knows this stuff?"

James briefly glanced at him, his own eyebrow raised. "People like me? Anyone who knows anything about the ship's systems and wiring, which is most of the crew, will be able to come up with the first one." He shook his head. "There's always the simplest one, and it's normally that."

Craig scoffed, "what, ringing the door chime?"

James again looked at him, "exactly."

Craig blankly stared, his mouth slowly dropping open. He groaned into his hand before his jaw reached its limit, "of course. Kiara was going to stay with her. The victim answers the door, thinking it's her and it isn't. It's so simple an idiot should have thought of it. An idiot didn't."

"If it makes you feel any better, the dad wouldn't need to break in so this probably doesn't matter," James said, not seriously. He turned away from the panel, staring at the part that was pulled off in distaste. He tossed it to one side like it was garbage.

Craig mockingly scowled at him. "I didn't say it might be him cos I want him to be, or because I like to disagree with you. Or piss you off either. I just can't get my head around the slap evidence."

"I know," James said lightly.

Craig groaned at him. "Fine. Did you find anything?"

"No short circuit, there's been no tampering. There's nothing wrong with it," James replied.

"So the guy either rings the door and she can't stop him getting inside, or it was the dad," Craig said. "We're no further forward. At least we've narrowed down the how."

James nodded while he thought about it. "You said that you can't stop thinking about the slap."

"Yeah, but you said we shouldn't focus on one person," Craig said.

"We both shouldn't," James said. "He was going on and on about you not understanding cos you're not a dad. Let me talk to him."

"But you don't think it's him," Craig said.

"Any one of us can talk to the twelve men on my list. Lena offered to help. I can always join you after I talked to him," James suggested.

"So much for not tipping him off," Craig smirked.

James smiled back, "I liked your idea better. Make him sweat."

It was strangely quiet on board ship today, too quiet. It was creepy. The only conversation Jessie saw on route to the Mess Hall was whispered. Something must have been going on, but the hushed voices didn't give her a clue as to what.

When she finally reached her destination, she found it eerily similar. People were either keeping to themselves while they ate or drank, or they were whispering to the person next to them.

Before she could even think to find someone to ask, Neelix hurried over looking a little too keen. That was never a good sign.

"Ah Jessie, how's the little one doing today?" he said, just about to crouch down beside her.

Jessie instinctively pulled the little baby seat carrier up and then over to her other hand. "She's fine. What's with the creepiness? Has something happened?"

Neelix's good mood threatened to slip away, he tried his best to keep the happy morale officer mask on. "You haven't heard?"

"No, but I assume it's Security related as I found James had already gone when I woke up," Jessie said.

"Well you know this ship. News travels fast and it can be jumbled. All I know for certain is that a poor Eryan girl was attacked in her quarters," Neelix answered.

"I didn't think that was something people could jumble up," Jessie said.

Neelix stepped closer and lowered his voice to a whisper. "Her father was arrested in Engineering." Jessie's eyes widened. "I find it hard to believe as well, but their world did have Soft spies on it. Maybe it wasn't her father, if you get what I mean."

Jessie's eyebrow slowly raised, her wide eyes instead judged him. "So, the reason the bad news keeps becoming more rumour like is cos you're saying crap like that?"

"No," Neelix replied in an offended tone. "I just thought of it. It's better than the other theories being swapped around."

Jessie groaned and walked away. Neelix hurried after her. "Walking away means conversation's over, Neelix," Jessie called over her shoulder, on route to the replicator.

Neelix stopped part of the way there, looking a little insulted again. He then decided to go find someone else to talk to.

"I hate this ship sometimes," Jessie muttered. The person in front of her at the replicator looking behind him, he gave her a nervous look and hurried away without grabbing his food. "What?" At least she could use the replicator sooner, so she shrugged it off and ordered her drink.

Enterprise:

When he entered the first thing to get his attention was the dramatic difference between the man Craig arrested barely an hour ago, and the man now sitting, slumped over his own legs in the Brig. His hands were in his hair, fingers clutching it so tightly he could easily rip it out if he moved them. He barely looked up, almost as if his head was far too heavy now or he had lost the strength to do so.

Yutan definitely looked like a man who's world had come tumbling down. It wouldn't be easy to fake.

"Do you think..." he said in such a low voice it came out as a croak. He paused for a few seconds. "That I didn't see enough violence, depravity, fear while my planet was slowly crumbling away?" His hands did move from his head, a few stray hairs went with them. His arms fell onto his lap.

"No," James answered.

"Is it guilt? Am I just an angry regretful man in your eyes?" Yutan barely muttered.

"I don't know what happened yet. That's why I'm here," James said.

A bitter smile appeared on the alien's face. James could only just make it out as his head was still lowered towards his lap and the floor. "You have no idea... What it was like to witness what I did, knowing that if you had done nothing, it wouldn't be happening. That you survived it and others didn't."

"I do have an idea," James said, resulting in the other man to scoff in disbelief. "I was there, I saw the damage. I had that moment where a decision could mean the difference between life and death for others. Many times. I've lost count. I have no choice, I can't not make that decision and then I must live with it. That's my burden, my life, it's not yours."

The man lifted his head in attempt to look at him. He didn't say anything but his eyes certainly wanted to.

"Your decision didn't kill your planet. If you'd said no, they'd have just found someone else. It would have made no difference to what happened..." James said.

"Aren't you the one who helped us escape?" Yutan interrupted him.

"My sister is who you really want to thank for that," James answered.

Yutan lightly shook his head. "You're lecturing me on guilt and our impact on things, and then you say that to me. Interesting."

"What?" James asked while frowning.

"I think what you said, told me more about you than it did about me," Yutan said. "I understand your point even so. It's something I've been thinking about since I arrived on Voyager. Those towers were always going to be built. I didn't have to help them though. If I didn't, my conscience would be clear. Until today I suppose."

James briefly glanced behind him at the two guards to see if they were listening. They barely were paying attention at all. He stepped closer to the forcefield anyway, and lowered his voice. "Are you admitting to something?"

"Your sister's daughter has been a wonderful friend to my little girl. She needed somebody to be there for her, not her self pitying fool of a father," Yutan said. James didn't take that as an answer to his question, so he waited for him to finish. He assumed he was right as the man continued talking. "I only saw the real her from a distance. Smiling, laughing. The girl has no bad bone in her body; so sweet and gentle. I could never imagine anyone wanting to hurt her."

"What do you mean from a distance?" James asked.

Yutan thought about the question, then laughed. It wasn't a nice laugh, it was hateful and full of self resentment. "You're not a father either, I assume."

"Actually, I am," James said.

Yutan's expression didn't change. "Just boys?"

"No," James replied.

Yutan nodded and stood up. "Then she or they are still young clearly. I bet they're at that age where daddy is perfect, someone they always want to be around." He noticed the brief downward glance to the floor James did after he finished. He sighed knowingly. "How old?"

"My eldest daughter is three. Why?" James mumbled his answer.

Yutan smiled, it didn't seem genuine, it seemed almost jealous. "Do me a favour. No, do all of us fathers a favour." He got a frown as he expected. "Cherish this time. Your daughters will worship you, you'll be the first they come to. Unless you've somehow managed to skew their view of you already."

"I don't understand where you're going with this," James said.

"I think you do," Yutan said. "You and I it was different. We don't have a previous perspective. We were teenage boys, not girls. Girls they... slowly start to see their father for who they really are the older they get. The biased view they have fades away. You become a burden, an embarrassment. Sometimes a hindrance."

"I'm sorry but you're not exactly convincing me of your innocence here," James had to say before he continued.

"I know," Yutan said grimly. "It was just my daughter and I, her mother died when she was a baby. We were inseparable. I doted on her, she always looked up to me with such pride. I wasn't lying when I said what we were like. Emphasis on the word were. As soon as a cute boy comes along old dad is no longer the number one man in her life."

James didn't like where this was going, he didn't notice that his face reflected what he was thinking. It was scrunched in disgust. "Didn't you think it was the alcoholic who she didn't like to be around? Ever think of that?"

"Hmph," Yutan grunted. "Where did you get that from?"

"It's called doing my job," James answered bluntly. He ignored the annoyed look he was getting in return. "You think that you can sway me by claiming we're similar, that what happened to you will happen to me too. Convince me that you're the dotting father. You'll have to do better than that."

"Do you think it'll be all cuddles and *daddy's* in ten years time? Will they be still pleased to see you then, or will you get an eye roll?" Yutan said. His tone of voice didn't have any malice in it, only regret and sadness. "You won't be her hero anymore, just someone in her way."

"So? I'll just have to learn to deal, as that's the point, it's normal," James said irritably. "Yeah I'm not ready for that now, but I will be. This isn't about me anyway, so stop changing the subject."

Yutan laughed somberly, "I'm not though. That's the sad part."

"What?" James immediately said, confused at what he was trying to imply. "Are you suggesting I did it, or you?"

"No. The boy I caught her with. That fresh faced teen. I was that guy back then," Yutan rambled on with intent. "We all were though, weren't we? Any pretty girl walks over and we're instantly weak. If we couldn't get her we'd go crazy."

James' eyebrow raised higher than normal, he resisted a judgmental head shake. "Speak for yourself."

Yutan looked at him as if he felt sorry for him. "You think you can convince me that you're that highly evolved? Human, Slayer... whichever, I doubt it."

"I'm only suggesting that you don't speak for us all. Not all of us are mindless animals who think girls owe us attention," James said, his voice harsher than he intended. He figured that was just his natural tone everytime someone was whining about a girl not liking him.

"I'm sure someone like you wouldn't understand rejection. I do," Yutan said, ignoring that.

"Someone like me?" James said slowly.

Yutan felt he had to scoff, "most claim they're independent and whatever, but they still fawn over the strong types. The ones that'll look after them."

"Oh god, enough," James groaned, rolling his eyes in disgust. "If I wanted to listen to this crap, I'd have visited the *I hate women* warlock club in Voyager's brig."

"I never said I had any problem with women. That's not what I'm implying," Yutan said angrily. "I played the field when I was young, I was good at it. It didn't mean I never got rejected though. I just got used to it. In the early days I was like all those boys that you claim to think talks crap." He noticed the other man's eyes narrowing a little. "I'd get angry."

"You didn't?" James asked not so carefully.

"No, of course not," Yutan groaned. "The worst thing I did was make a rude comment. I just mean some guys can go further. They, as you say, think they're entitled to the girl they like. One of them probably was told no by my baby girl. He did this."

Despite the awkward conversation they were in, James thought that he was most likely right. He really didn't think it was him. Or he hoped at least. James wondered if it was such a good idea for Craig to tell him the full details of the attack. It was clear the man was a wreck from finding out. Some things he shouldn't know. Then he thought he'd want, no need to know if it had happened to one of his daughters. He visibly shuddered at that thought. It made him angry, he had to push it out of his head.

"It changes everything you are," Yutan was still talking, James realised a little too late. He had no idea what he had said before to set him off, there were tears in the man's eyes. "When you have a daughter. Suddenly you understand, you're on the other side of the fence. You remember all the other girls in your life before, you think of what their dad's went through. You think, I couldn't do that, I can't let them go. You hope your girl will be the exception... that she won't be interested."

James understood that fear a little too well. He didn't dare vocalise it though.

"I'll admit, I still treat her as my little princess. Babied her. She saw it as disrespect, no doubt. I know that," Yutan mumbled. His head lowered towards the floor. "You were right. My drinking was the trigger. She was trying to get my attention, my help. She was in trouble and I didn't see it, no, all I saw was my selfishness."

"So, she didn't tell you about the man following her?" James asked, hoping for not only a return to the case but a distraction from these new worries he had.

"No," Yutan said with self hatred. "I had caught her with that boy, Bryan or something."

James seemed a little surprised, "Bryan?"

Yutan nodded. "In hindsight it was nothing, innocent even. A little hair flip there, excessive blinking. He seemed more bemused than anything."

"Yeah, Bryan's five years old," James said to the prisoner's surprise. "He just looks older than he is, and he probably was... some sort of mused."

Yutan laughed bitterly and a little painfully. "When she got home we argued about it. Kiara had warned me, I didn't believe her, I saw it for myself. Only a few months ago this girl was playing with toys and playing chase with other kids down the street. I refused to believe she had changed that quickly. I was probably right. Kiara's really nine, Brayan five." James shook his head at the wrong name again. "My daughter was always younger than she was, probably because of my treatment of her."

"I'm sorry, but is this the argument that you had last night?" James reluctantly asked him.

"Yes. I told her that she had plenty of time for boys later, that she should have more respect for herself," Yutan said, grimacing at the last part. He started to stutter. "She said I never listened to her, that I was just a drunken fool. I..." He had turned pale. James picked up on it, he was about to pursue it but Yutan wasn't done. "I usually sober up before going to Engineering, but after seeing her flirting the first thing I did was have a few drinks. I shouldn't have. Oh I shouldn't have. I lead him right to her, didn't I?"

"What..." James also stuttered while the alien's face was now whiter than the walls. "... Do you mean?"

"We'd been on tenterhooks ever since our rescue. None of it was her fault, she tried to help me," Yutan stammered. James heard disgust in his voice. He had a feeling where this was going, he didn't like it. "I'll never drink again. I destroyed everything in that... that one thing."

"What thing?" James said.

Yutan looked away, he turned his body away too. "It was over in a second. She looked at me like I was one of those experiments. Before I could apologise she ran to her room crying. I... I should be locked up in here. I left her alone like that, I ran away like a coward. He got to her after that. I deserve what's coming to me."

James closed his eyes tightly while he cringed. He shook his head to get rid of it. "So you did slap her?" He noticed a slight nod. "Why?"

"If you get an answer through anything I said, you'll tell me, won't you?" Yutan didn't answer. The guilt in his voice was obvious. "Don't repeat my mistake either. Learn from it."

"You're... you can't be serious?" James snapped. "Your daughter flipped her hair in front of a boy and you slapped her. How can I make the same mistake as you if I don't understand it?"

"I hope you never do," Yutan said sincerely. He dared to glance back at him, "I apologise. I assumed we were alike in some ways, you seemed to understand. I must have been wrong."

James stared at him blankly, his eyes were cold. "Yes, you were." He turned his back on him to leave. While he walked away he couldn't shake the thoughts in the back of his mind, the ones telling him that could be him someday. It made him sick to the stomach.

Voyager's Sickbay:

Craig blinked a few times, his face filled with disbelief. "You're kidding aren't you? Even after all of that, you still think..."

"I'm not defending the guy. Never," James muttered. The Doctor glanced at him after staring towards Craig before while he talked. He sat at his desk while the other two stood in front of it. "But everything after the slap wasn't him, I know it."

"You didn't think he even slapped her. You may be wrong again," Craig said. The Doctor looked to him again, he immediately turned his head back to James. To his annoyance Craig continued as James was rendered speechless for now, he turned his head back. "Look, you said he was talking about being annoyed his daughter didn't put him first anymore. You were creeped out, you said. I wasn't quite sure it was him until you said that."

James shook his head. "No, he's just an idiot dad who doesn't want his daughter to grow up. The thought of her dating and more was terrifying and I..."

Craig sighed, "oh no, don't do that."

It was James' turn to stare blankly and blink more frequently. "Do what? Talk?"

"You're not him. I mean yeah you're overprotective, and I think everyone on the ship that knows you has imagined you smacking potential boyfriends at least once," Craig said quickly. The Doctor sighed and nodded. "That doesn't mean you'll take it out on your girls. I think in the end you'll come through for them, cos unlike that moron, everything you do is for them and Duncan. Right?"

James didn't know what to say again. The Doctor looked impressed at this, he gave the younger man a nod of approval. Craig didn't take it though, he just winced a little. He noticed James' head shake a little.

"Ok, not everything. If that were true you wouldn't be so impulsive and Slayer-y, right?" Craig said nervously. "But you know what I mean. I know you're better than that drunken twat."

"Right. My daughters will probably never dare to bring a boy home. I'll probably not be invited to the wedding in case I go on a killing spree," James muttered, his eyebrow raised. Craig sensed even the tiniest bit of humour in his voice. He looked to the Doctor to see if he saw that. He had the same look on his face so he still wasn't sure.

"Perhaps at the very least they could remove the giving away of the bride part, just to be safe," the Doctor ended up saying to lighten the mood.

Craig couldn't help but laugh briefly and he felt awful for it. He looked to James to say sorry but he seemed to have a small curl in the right of his lips.

"I don't want to be that dad. I naively did when I was new at it, when we had Sasha. I didn't want them to resent me, like I did with both of my mums when they gave Jess a hard time," he said eventually.

"See," Craig said.

James sighed as if he said something stupid. "It doesn't mean I will be able to do it though. I still don't think anybody would be good enough for them."

"That's normal," the Doctor commented.

"Look, worst comes to the worst and you do end up being that dad. You won't handle it by slapping your kid," Craig said.

"So you do think that's all he did?" James said.

Craig and the Doctor shared a disgruntled look. Craig got rid of it before he turned back to James. "The problem is you think he didn't. We don't know enough, we should keep an open mind," the Doctor said.

"No. Sometimes people do snap and in that split second they slap someone. Before their hand even goes back by their side they're regretting it," James stuttered.

"Sounds like you speak from experience," the Doctor said grimly.

James briefly glanced at him before continuing, "but they don't beat up their own daughter so badly that no one recognises her. They certainly don't try to..." He couldn't finish, it made him feel sick again.

Craig didn't understand, he had thought that multiple times and enough was enough. "Correct me if I'm wrong but weren't you a punching bag for your own father?"

James' eyes widened as they focused on him. His whole body had tensed, his fists slowly clenched. "What?"

The Doctor meanwhile cringed, "I think this is going off topic."

"I'm sorry but you're the last guy I expected to naively say *oh dad's don't hit their kids*," Craig said regrettably. "Cos you're living proof that they do."

His fists had fully clenched, they were tight enough for them to whiten. His jaw had clenched too. "Don't..." James warned.

"I'm saying this for your own good. Maybe you think what happened to you was a one off, or you hope. The Doc's right, we need to keep an open mind. You said that we can't focus on one person, but I say excluding one person on a gut feeling is just as dangerous," Craig said.

The Doctor thought he had to step in before he had another patient. He quickly climbed to his feet. "Or maybe your suggestion that a father committed this crime brought up awful memories. It's normal for James to dismiss the accusation, it keeps his mind from it."

Craig turned to him, his eyes a little wider than normal. James was still staring at him, he was suddenly nervous now after what the Doctor had said.

"Perhaps one of you should continue to investigate the stalker angle," the Doctor suggested.

Craig seemed relieved at the suggestion, his whole demeanour perked up. "Oh, your missing commbadge list. While I was talking to some of them I thought there's a quicker way to narrow it down further."

"Really?" James was also a little relieved, and now a little curious.

"Well I say quicker, but it's probably six and two three's," Craig admitted begrudgingly.

James shook his head, "that's okay, if you have a better idea then let's hear it."

Craig inhaled through his gritted teeth before he responded. "It does mean adding more to it first."

"Someone should tell you the meaning of the word narrow," the Doctor remarked with a smile.

Craig timidly laughed, "it will eventually. Okay, we know the time frame it happened, we also know the attacker has to share some of that DNA sequences the Doctor found..."

"Um, that is easier said than done. Further samples have different sequences. It's almost like it changes every time I look at it," the Doctor butted in.

It didn't deter Craig though. James meanwhile seemed a little confused at what they were talking about. "You said there was Humanoid ones in there, even tiny ones. Were they also different in every sample?"

"Not always, but yes," the Doctor answered. His eyes lit up, "you're suggesting that we look for any of the sequences in the suspect list's genes."

"Yes. But that's not all," Craig said quickly as his excitement built up. The thought they were likely going down the right path with his help, it made him a little giddy too. "It may not narrow the list down at all, so I thought of something else. Someone who snaps and attacks a girl who's rejected them will have a record. Something even minute like a nasty argument, family issues, in their file that a suspect of a crime like this would have."

James gave him a look that said he was on board and he agreed with him, but unknown to Craig deep down he was still thinking about his outburst earlier. He tried to push it back for the moment. It wasn't relevant. "You mean like abandonment, mother issues... that sort of thing." Craig nodded towards him. "If only I knew when this original meeting with the stalker took place and where. We could compare the commbadge list with that."

Craig shrugged, he didn't let that put him off. "Only Perlash'na knows that. This is all we have and it's not bad." He looked a little guilty after that, "I hope I pronounced her name right."

"I don't think we'll be hearing from her anytime soon," the Doctor said grimly, instantly killing the mood. "I know very little about Eryan physiology, and unfortunately none of the refugees have medical training that can help me. If she were Human I'd know how to treat her brain injuries, but I don't want to risk it."

"I'll get started on the list then," Craig said. He was about to walk away when James held out an arm to stop him. "What?"

"Who did you question?" James asked.

"I mostly started at the beginning. Brown, Jenkins, I stopped at Grahams," Craig said. James pulled a puzzled face. "Jenkins was closer than Grahams. If you're wondering they all seemed mortified about what happened. Brown was in his quarters, the other two were playing hoverball in the Holodeck to work off their evening shift. Despite having to wake them both up they were more than happy to talk, you know."

"No, that's not what I was confused about," James said. "You went alphabetically, but there was an A on that list."

"Oh, well..." Craig said awkwardly. "We both know him, he wouldn't do this." The Doctor looked at them both with interest. "I was leaving him until last anyway, I can't give him anymore special treatment than that."

James nodded in agreement. "Good, I was going to take him off the list anyway."

Craig was more than surprised, his jaw dropped a little. He shook his head to force it closed. "You can't do that."

"I can. You're going to exclude him anyway when you go through their personnel files. I'm just saving you some time," James said.

The Doctor was back to turning his head towards the speaker, with a helpless look on his face. He had to sigh at the situation.

"Why, what's in his file?" Craig asked.

James hid his clenching hands behind his back while his eyes shut tightly. "You know already. He's told you on multiple occasions."

Craig wasn't sure at first, then it occurred to him. "You mean his girlfriend dying when he was a kid?" The sigh he got from James made him think he was wrong, but dangerously wrong. "That's all he's ever told me."

"She wasn't his girlfriend," James snapped. The Doctor and Craig were both taken aback by his outburst, they didn't dare provoke him any further. James tried to calm himself down with a few deep breaths. "She was my sister, and his best friend."

"Oh," Craig said while the colour drained from his face. He started to stutter, "yes... I remember now, I'm sorry."

The Doctor was still confused and a little worried though. "Still in the dark here. I don't even know who you're talking about."

"Nathan," Craig said quietly.

James' shoulders fell, his eyes focused on the floor. "He's not a suspect anymore than I am. Take him off the list." He walked out without looking back up.

Craig and the Doctor shared a look of worry. "Are you going to listen to him?" the Doctor asked.

Craig felt guilty and he hadn't even done anything yet. "No."

"Why not?" the Doctor questioned.

"You think I should?" Craig was surprised. He tried to appear more confident after everything that had been said, his sullen posture let him down. "I like Nathan and all, his past and that shouldn't mean we should exclude him. He was still walking around without a commbadge."

"Or he could have been in his quarters like Brown," the Doctor said. "As James said, you're going to exclude him anyway when you look at their files."

Craig winced, "that's just it. Something like that would mean I'd actually keep him on the list."

The Doctor was dismayed at the suggestion. He turned to his computer and started tapping at it, making Craig frown at him. "I'm assuming that this is why the girl's attack is a more personal case for James, and I think we should try to avoid anymore shouting matches. Don't you?"

"What are you doing?" Craig asked.

"None of the DNA sequences matches Mr Andrews," the Doctor said, sounding a little relieved. Craig just frowned at him. "That's one less thing for the two of you to argue about."

Craig sighed in response. "Oh there's plenty more where that came from, I assure you."

Outside people would walk by with their heads down, or together in silence. The atmosphere through the door was far different. A couple of children ran right by him, the one at the back was trying to reach for the other. Both of them were laughing and carefree. The rest of the children were happily absorbed with their toys or their drawings.

The other adults in the room didn't know what was happening everywhere else on Voyager, or they weren't showing their thoughts about it like everyone else. The teacher Jacqueline spotted James standing at the door, she hurried over to join him.

"Here again?" she greeted him in a friendly manner.

James' head moved down a little, the woman took it as a nod. The worried look in her eyes proved she did know about what was happening, but was keeping it from affecting her work.

"You don't think there's a danger?" Jacqueline asked.

"No, the Security outside is just because of the... previous incident," James answered quietly.

"Daddy?" Sasha's voice called for him. In a matter of seconds she was standing in front of him, staring up with a sweet smile on her face. Normally that was enough to make him smile back, however the conversation with Yutan was still playing in his mind. He felt oddly guilty for being in the same room as her. "We're making play doh cookies, do you want to help?"

Jacqueline smiled down at her. "I thought your group already learned that it's not a good idea to make them look like food." She briefly glanced toward James, "Scott thought the purple muffin would be a lovely present for Holly. It didn't go down well."

"Mmm hmm," Sasha squeaked with a nod. "He tried to give me it but I ran."

James focused on the last word more than the others, it made his heart skip a beat for a reason he didn't know or remember. "You what?"

Jacqueline noticed the two kids running around, one was Scott and his face was covered with a sticky blue and green substance. "Oh he's doing it again. Excuse me." She hurried off towards them.

"Amy's sad, her and Miral aren't friends anymore," Sasha said sadly. She showed her dad something in her hand. The first detail he noticed was that it was a bright red. It just fit into the palm of her hand, round with a large hole in the centre of it. Sasha pushed her other hand through the hole to let it hang on her wrist. "Thought would cheer her up."

James was finally able to smile. He crouched down in front of her to gently push some of the hair dangling by her cheek to behind her ear. "Amy will love it. That's very sweet."

"It's red, she likes red," Sasha said, her voice hinted to him she wasn't pleased with it yet. "I wanted to make it less boring, put something on it. Whatever I make looks bad."

"I doubt that," James tried to reassure her. Sasha just let out a little sigh in response. "What about something you like, to show its from her big sister."

Sasha stared at him curiously, then her eyes sparkled. "Strawberries. They're red too."

"Good idea," James said. The little girl looked happy, a little excited to have a plan in her head. He expected her to run off to do it. Instead she ran forward to give him a hug. As he hugged her back the words Yutan spoke popped into his head.

"Do you think it'll be all cuddles and daddy's in ten years time? Will they be still pleased to see you then, or will you get an eye roll."

James tried to ignore it, but it must have distracted him for a moment anyway, as the next thing he knew his daughter was staring at him. Her eyes showed she was worried about him. He tried to smile again to stop that, he meanwhile wondered when his previous one faded away.

"Let me know what she thinks of it, okay?" he said.

Sasha nodded. "Okay. But what's wrong, daddy?"

"It's okay," James shook his head while keeping the smile on his face. "It's just a bad day at work."

"That why you weren't at breakfast?" Sasha asked. James gave her a brief nod. "I'm sure you'll figure it out or fix it, daddy." Before she hurried away she stepped forward to give him a peck on the cheek.

"I hope you're not blaming yourself again," he heard when he walked back outside.

James stared ahead blankly, "Jessie?"

He got a conflicted smile directed towards him; warm but concerned. He glanced to his right and then left, quickly realising that the guards had left them alone.

"It's all around the ship now. The teenaged girl beaten almost to death, the suspects being her own father and a love sick stalker," Jessie said sadly. She looked into his eyes to see if anything she said triggered anything. Unfortunately she was right, his eyes would shift around to avoid hers. The pain in them was obvious, to her at least. Her hand reached forward to hint for one of his. "Lets take a break."

"I can't," James said, shaking his head. "Whoever did this is out there, he could do it again."

"I know you. I was afraid that you'd take this personally, and I see you already are," Jessie said. He wasn't budging, so she clasped his hand. "I know this case looks similar, but it isn't. I understand why you'd want to solve it so badly. You need to take a step back, maybe let Craig take over from here."

"Similar? I don't know what you mean," James said as plainly as he could. He knew it was a lie, he knew Jessie would see right through him too. As he expected she just shook her head. To her credit she didn't get mad at him for the lie. "I'm fine. I just wanted to check on our kids, I do that every day."

"Oh believe me, I know that. The teachers tell me," Jessie said with a sigh. "I talked to Lena, Craig I bumped into when I left. They're worried too. Craig told me he made a mistake bringing you in..."

James flinched at the last sentence. "He did? We always argue, what's the big deal?"

"He didn't know, or he didn't remember," Jessie answered softly and carefully. "James, he said if he remembered he wouldn't have told you at all. He's sorry."

"He doesn't have to be. A girl was beaten, almost raped. Of course I'm going to be mad. Who wouldn't? This has got nothing to do with me," James said quickly.

Jessie looked a little pale, she took in a deep breath. "Raped? Nobody told me that part."

James groaned while he covered his face with his free hand. "I shouldn't have said that. We were keeping that quiet."

Jessie reached for that hand too, bringing it down so both hands were side by side. She kept a firm grip on both while her eyes appeared to be pleading with him. "James please, leave it to Craig, come home, take a day or two off. You shouldn't be investigating this."

"I have to," James said.

"I understand, but obviously I'm not the only one seeing the parallels here," Jessie said, her voice a little strained now. "She's not Debbie." James finally stared at her directly, the pain in his eyes was unmistakable now. "She's not. You don't have anything to prove, and you certainly won't get your answers by solving this case."

"Jess," James barely whispered.

Jessie shook her head stubbornly, "I was scared before I knew the full details of this attack. Now that I do, I have this awful feeling that something..." She had to breathe deeply to calm herself, her body had started to tremble. "I don't want to lose you," she whispered.

"How... you won't," James stuttered.

"I'm not talking literally here. You kept her very existence from me for most of our lives. You never talk about her," Jessie said quickly, and almost rambling. Her body still shook so that didn't help. "I know for so many years you blamed yourself. The fact that you'll never know what happened makes it worse. It's only natural to get a case like this that mirrors what happened to her, and think that figuring it out will make you feel better."

"I just want to catch the guy who could do things like this. This doesn't have anything to do with my sister, please believe me," James tried to convince her.

Jessie briefly glanced down at their hands and the floor. "I want to." Her eyes then stared directly into his. "But I know you too well. Maybe you've convinced yourself that you're only doing this to solve a horrible incident. Which is okay, it's normal. Deep down I think you know the real reason, and you'll destroy yourself before you'd admit to it. That's what I'm afraid of."

"Jess, I'm not that guy anymore. You know that. I've been working hard, getting better. I don't hide things anymore, I don't charge in to every bit of danger without thinking," James was also trembling. Unlike Jessie he didn't know why.

Jessie bit her lip briefly, her eyes studied him carefully. She took a step closer so there was barely any space in between them. "I know, I'm the one that's been telling everyone. I'm very proud of you."

"There's a but, isn't there?" James mumbled.

Jessie meekly nodded. "But that's not what this is about. Maybe Nathan was right, maybe it's time we talk about her. You can't spend another thirty years not mourning her, not accepting it. I've made it worse by protecting you from it. You can't solve this case while comparing it with Debbie's murder."

"I'm not though, and we will... I just, not yet," James stuttered.

Jessie's shoulders slumped as guilt started pushing down on them. "This is the problem, I didn't want to push or nag you. I wanted you to talk to me on your own time." She sighed loud enough for the nursery occupants to hear her. "And you are comparing it. Craig tells me you refuse to believe the father could be a suspect."

Any fear and sadness he was feeling was washed away when he heard that. He was angry again. "What's that got to do with my sister? My father liked to hit kids, didn't he? If I was comparing, I'd..."

"Unless there's something else I don't know, you're excluding the dad because your dad didn't kill your sister," Jessie said.

James groaned, he resisted the urge to roll his eyes. "No, it's not that. I just don't see him doing something like that. The evidence so far backs me up."

"Or maybe you want to believe that nobody else could do what he did," Jessie said quietly and a little meekly.

James shook his head, "no, no. My father hated me, blamed me for everything. Her father loves her. I mean he's an asshole for slapping her, but that's the real one off here."

Jessie reacted as if he told her he was dying; her body slumped, eyes shut tightly. James had no idea why, it worried him. "It's bad enough that this case is just like your sister's. Now you're identifying with one of the suspects. You're coming home with me, now."

"What?" James said, his eyes widened a little. "Where did that come from? I never said anything."

"Lena told me. Yutan is overprotective, he has or had a close relationship with his daughter. He feels guilt for a tragedy that he couldn't avoid. You won't admit the possibility that he could have beaten his own daughter in a drunken rage," Jessie explained in a shakily angry voice.

"Jessie, that's not what is happening here. I think he's disgusting for the slap, I think he's weak for feeling sorry for himself while his daughter lies in Sickbay. I'm not him, I never thought that," James argued.

Jessie smiled sympathetically. "Are you forgetting who you're talking to? He's what you're afraid of becoming. That hasn't changed the entire time we've known each other." The grip on both of his hands tightened, she pulled them closer to her. "Craig has almost got the case solved. Leave it with him. You come home with me and spend time with our new daughter. Put all of this horror in the back of your head for a moment. It won't kill you."

"Where is she anyway?" James asked.

Jessie's smile grew, "yeah, change the subject." Her head shook as his expression didn't change. "I left her with Lena. After I saw you I was going to go back. We both will."

"I can't. I can't relax knowing that a fourteen year old girl is lying in a coma, with her attacker roaming free," James said to Jessie's disappointment. She expected it though. "I know this has nothing to do with my sister. I just want to catch a monster. It's what I do, right?"

"Literally a monster?" Jessie sighed. "So if we can't compare it to Debbie, we can pretend it's Slayer related."

"No, not literally. Are you really suggesting I'm making excuses?" James said, a little offended by her remark.

"What about a compromise?" Jessie questioned. "If you must be involved in this, let me help."

James couldn't help but smile weakly. "You want to keep an eye on me, you mean?"

"Yep," Jessie replied in an innocent tone, her eyes sparkled a little.

"Do I have a choice?" James asked.

"Nope," Jessie said with the same voice and look in her eye. She narrowed her eyes and pretended to scowl, "you mean you don't want to spend time with your wife? You'd much rather hang out with Craig?"

Finally he laughed, even if it was briefly. "Oh you know me so well."

The Security Office:

All four occupants had managed to fit on the small sofa, only just. Jessie was trying her best not to laugh at the one sitting on the other side of the baby seat, it was distracting her from the PADD in her hands. It seemed like the baby girl inside it was having the same trouble, her bright eyes watched the person as if they were nuts. James meanwhile looked to be tuning it all out by staring at the computer on his lap.

"Um, goochy goo," Lena said as if she was reading from a script, while shaking a little toy in the baby's face. She gave a smirking Jessie a confused look, "what does that even mean anyway?" Jessie was too busy trying not to laugh out loud at her, she squeezed her lips so they wouldn't, all the while shaking her head. "Look, it's alive, aaah," she said in the same tone.

The baby squeaked. Jessie assumed she was trying to say something like *what the hell?* It just made her snigger some more.

"Tough room," Lena muttered before returning to sitting back in her seat.

"What were you trying to do?" Jessie giggled.

Lena stared at her blankly, she looked a little mad in her eyes. "That's what people do around babies, right?"

"Sure, okay," Jessie said before biting her lip again.

"What's so funny?" Lena asked.

Jessie shook her head in an effort to calm herself down. "If you're trying to bond with her, just be yourself. That's why Duncan and Sasha were so fond of you. Okay?"

"Really?" Lena said, her eyebrow raised. "I thought Duncan just liked me cos I hit people."

"Meh, that too," Jessie said with a shrug.

"So, Amy. Should I hit people in front of her?" Lena asked seriously.

Jessie couldn't do it anymore, she laughed and immediately tried to hide it behind her hand. "I think you're taking the cool Aunt role a little too seriously."

Lena leaned forward so she could look over at James on the other side of the sofa. He looked a few thousand light years away with the computer. She and Jessie could have been fighting like the old days and he wouldn't notice. She noticed Jessie check on him too, they both glanced at one another afterwards.

Jessie gave his leg a tap to get his attention. It took a few seconds for it to register, and even then he only briefly looked at her. "I'm getting nowhere with these crew files. None of them scream *I'm a sexist asshole*. How are you doing?"

"I thought I'd look at the injuries," James replied. Both Jessie and Lena stared in shock at him, he seemed to sense it and looked over at them. "I don't mean I'm looking at pictures or anything, just the casts the Doc made."

"How... why? Isn't that the Doctor's job?" Lena asked.

"Craig's talking to the people left on the list, you're reading their files. What else is there to do?" James said defensively.

Lena shrugged, "what about the crime scene?"

"I already have. There's nothing there. He was accidentally invited in, he attacked her and walked out," James said. He briefly glanced between them and the computer again. "I've been in many fights in my time, I just thought I could figure out what happened from them. Find out who or what we're up against."

"Okay, maybe someone else should do that though," Jessie said uncomfortably. She reached over to take a hold of the computer, James kept a firm grip on it though, making her sigh. "James, please."

"I'm fine. Look," he stuttered while pointing at the screen. Jessie reluctantly followed his finger. Lena tried but she was too far away, instead she got up to walk over to his other side. The two of them watched as his finger kept pointing at different points on a body map, which luckily didn't have a face or anything recognisable on it. It was just quite literally a shadow of a person with coloured marks on various parts. "The face, the back, here on the arms, the middle of the stomach..."

"Yeah?" Lena said warily.

"Excluding the skull injury, all of them are not in vital areas. They're scattered," James said plainly. Jessie briefly eyed him with worry, then looked back at the screen. "I think she struggled, he was trying to subdue her."

"Well, considering the attack that's obvious," Lena said.

James shook his head, "no, I think it started as the creep holding her still. She struggled, making him more enraged. Even still, he avoided life threatening injuries."

"If he was trying to er... force himself on her, that makes sense," Jessie said.

"If he was angry he wouldn't care, he wouldn't be thinking. I don't think this is just a coincidence," James said.

Lena pulled a face as she focused on the red mark on the shadow's head. "He still knocked her into the coma, threw her into a book case. Maybe he didn't start out angry but he ended up that way."

James' eyes shifted to one side for a second. Jessie noticed him fidget at the same time. "He probably expected her to give in. She fought back," he said.

"Didn't you say she inflicted some damage on him? The Doc wouldn't have treated him or he would have said something. Someone must have seen him hurrying around with scratches on his face," Lena pointed out.

Jessie nodded, her face lit up for a moment. It faded immediately, "it was late. Not as many people around. He probably treated himself at home."

James stared at the same place Lena focused on before, he did it so intensely it started to blur. It wasn't only his eyes, his mind then drifted elsewhere as the thought of the young girl getting said injury flashed through it. What brought him out of it was the sound of his baby daughter crying nearby.

"Oh, maybe that's why she was pulling that face," Lena commented while she pinched her nose.

Jessie smirked at her briefly before scooping up the baby. Her head gestured to a bag lying nearby. "Can you pass me that?" Lena walked over to pick it up, then hand it over still with her nose pinched. "Be right back."

As Jessie hurried off into the nearby door Lena sat down in her seat, while keeping a close eye on her brother. Eventually he noticed it and gave her a stare back. "Okay, this is what I don't get. The theory is the guy was mad he was flirted with and yet didn't get the girl. The underage girl..." she said.

"Yeah, lets not go there," James muttered.

Lena shrugged, "he went over there to chat her up, maybe. She answers the door thinking its Kiara, he forces his way inside. If he was just mad at the rejection, it would be only violence but it isn't. He went there to sleep with her, whether she wanted to or not."

James groaned, "you went there." Lena kept staring at him, which made his eyes roll. "This matters because? The guy was a sick, perverted excuse of a Human. Why waste time thinking about his motives?"

Lena was more than confused. "You were doing the same thing with these injuries. I was just filling in the gaps."

"No, I wanted to know what kind of guy he was, physically. Was he strong, tall, skinny? Does he know how to fight? Was he really trying to do what the Doctor said?" James said.

Lena smiled, "ah ha!" James gave her a bemused stare. "So figuring out his motives helps. You don't want to believe this was that type of attack."

"Don't you?" he muttered.

"No, I don't want to either. I think it's sick. I also think you're not really helping her by ignoring it though," Lena said honestly.

James' shoulders fell, his whole body seemed to sink along with his mood. He climbed up, all the while dumping the computer in his old spot. "I only want to know who he is. I don't care about what he wanted to do. He deserves nothing."

"Oh, I think he deserves something and you know it," Lena said with a weak smile.

"I don't get it. Every guy this kid, repeat kid, flirted with didn't take her seriously. This guy though followed her around as if she owed him something. Why didn't he let it go?"

James said while he began to pace. "How come nobody saw him following her, or even the first incident itself?"

"You know what I don't get the most," Lena said. "Why when he knocked her out, leaving her half dead, did he just leave her?" James' head swung around to stare at her, his eyes wide. "Wasn't the point to get what he wants? She wasn't fighting back anymore. Why choose then to run?"

James nodded, his stare was again distant. "You're right."

"I am?" Lena said quizzically

"This isn't the same thing. It's different," James said quickly.

Before Lena could respond he hurried out without another word. She quickly leapt to her feet to follow him, then stopped to look at the door Jessie went through. "Crap. Should I follow?" she sighed.

Sickbay:

The Doctor was engrossed in the console in the centre of the room when James burst in, horribly startling him. He was thankful he was a hologram at that moment.

"Doc..." he started to say.

"I really ought to put a lock and chime on that door," the Doctor breathed. James stared at him with his brow furrowed. "Yes?"

"Your patient, she's still in a coma?" James asked.

The Doctor resisted scoffing and making a sarcastic comment. "Yes, why?"

"Are you doing anything right now?" James asked.

"No, what's this about?" the Doctor replied impatiently.

James walked around him to head for the occupied biobed. The sight of the girl brought all of the anger and upset back. He tried to avert his eyes. "Only she and the attacker knows what happened. The attacker still eludes us."

"Yes, Craig did say he wasn't having much luck matching the odd DNA sequences with the list of suspects," the Doctor said with a nod.

"If we can't find him, we can ask her," James muttered.

The Doctor frowned intensely. He grabbed a nearby tricorder and slowly made his way over to him. "Perhaps you should take a break." He raised the tricorder to scan him, at the last second it was swiped away to the floor.

"Don't do that, I'm fine," James groaned.

The Doctor sighed and walked away to retrieve his tricorder. "We can't talk to her, you know what being in a coma means."

"I might be able to though," James said.

"How?" the Doctor asked.

James forced himself to look at the patient, his eyes glazed over as they focused on the innocent face. "Her memories will still be in there. The coma should make it easier to see them."

The Doctor's jaw dropped, he stomped over to intervene and or protest. James didn't look at him, he just gestured his arm back to hint he should stop. "You can't. Her brain is damaged, that's why she's in the coma. You..." During his protests he failed to notice James tapping a few commands into the panel by the bed.

"Shh!" James hissed at him. "It won't take long."

"No. It's not just the patient I'm worried about. You have limited experience with telepathy. If you initiate a telepathic link with a coma patient, you could damage your own mind," the Doctor protested. He went forward anyway, immediately running into a forcefield. He looked on in shock. "Don't do this. There's got to be another way."

James continued staring at the girl despite how difficult it was. He tried to blur out her face to make it easier, instead another one took its place. He had to shake his head to return to normal.

"James!" the Doctor shouted at him. He rushed over to the main console to try to lower the forcefield. A thought occurred. He instead went to his own program. He was dismayed to find access to his own system was denied. All he could do now was tap his commbadge and call for help.

Her eyes appeared to be staring directly at him. The face frozen in a traumatised gaze. A sickening bruise covered her from cheek to her eye, the area around the eye bruised and swollen. A few strands of blonde hair had fallen in front of her, the rest dishevelled on the bed.

This time he couldn't shake the image away. No matter how much he squeezed his eyes shut or told his head to move, the image remained as if it was ingrained into it.

"James!" a voice just managed to penetrate. It was all it took to crack the aura of horror he was trapped in. One blink ended it. The face he had been seeing was gone, another took its place. At least this one wasn't looking at him. Her eyes were shut, the head facing towards the ceiling. Any injuries she may have had weren't visible.

It took him a few minutes to realise he was shaking horribly, and he couldn't tame it no matter how hard he tried.

"He locked me out of my own program. I can't get through the force field," he heard the Doctor say.

Then he heard footsteps approach behind him. "You don't want to do this. If it works you'll forever have the memories of what happened to the girl. If it doesn't, you could lose your mind. It's not worth it."

James took a step backwards. For the first time since he started he was able to turn his head away. As soon as he did everything clouding his thoughts started to clear up, as if

a fog was lifting or being burned through by the warm sun. He barely remembered walking there, what he was thinking, what he was feeling. Now that it was clear he realised how ridiculous his plan will have appeared to everyone, and how much he would have worried them.

One moment of weakness was all it took to make him do something stupid. He was mad at himself, he thought he knew better now. "I'm sorry," was all James could manage to say as he turned around. The first thing he saw was his younger sister staring at him, concerned for what he may do.

The Doctor let out a relieved sigh as a single tap from him lowered the forcefield.

"It's okay, everyone understands," Lena said. "You didn't...?"

The Doctor hurried over to his patient, still holding his tricorder. "No, I was monitoring both of them the whole time. No sign of telepathy."

Lena approached as well, only she stopped in front of James and put a hand on his arm. "I told Jessie some rubbish about you going for some food. I forgot there's a replicator in your office. It's up to you what you tell her, I just thought you should know though."

James nodded gratefully, "thanks anyway."

"Maybe it's a good idea after all. A break I mean," Lena said.

"That's..." James stalled for a second. Lena looked worried he was about to argue with her. "A good idea."

Lena smiled out of relief. "We'll figure this out together. Me, you, Craig, Jess. Don't have a breakdown on us, okay?"

Ten minutes ago James would have brushed that off, like with everything else. Now though he understood why she, Jessie and even Craig were worried. It was obvious, how could he dismiss it so easily? He felt like he had a lot of grovelling to do.

"What are you having?" he asked.

"You're going to need more than two hands, I'll come with you," Lena smiled.

A short while later Craig had joined the three of them in the Security Office, looking dazed and exhausted. The sight of the food spread out on the small coffee table perked him up temporarily. "I'll come back later," he said.

"No," James said to stop him. "There's plenty."

Craig smiled, but not out of relief, he was happy to be included and grateful for a break. He crouched down next to the table to sit on the floor. While reaching for a half of a sandwich he said, "I couldn't narrow down the suspect list."

"It's okay. We haven't gotten anywhere either," Jessie said.

"I was thinking though that you may be right," Craig said directly towards James. He looked on in surprise. "The father didn't do it. It doesn't fit with what we know, doesn't explain the weird DNA since we already found his. He admitted the slap..."

Lena nodded. "Also, he was in Engineering at the time, wasn't he?"

Craig clicked his left fingers while his mouth was full. He quickly swallowed. "The big one I ignored. I just wanted the case wrapped up, the bad guy caught, so I could stop worrying about it."

"I get that," James said.

"The so called man thought a hair flick from a teenager was a cue to follow her around. We're looking for a spoilt brat, not a depressed dad," Jessie muttered just as she picked up a scotch egg.

Lena scoffed while she finished off a sausage roll. Craig smirked at her as a few crumbs escaped as a result. "Remind me to put me and Kiara up for a hair cut."

"How is she?" Craig asked.

"Shaken. I thought it would be better if she was away from it all, so I got Naomi and Bryan to invite her to the Holodeck. I want to help and she doesn't need to be here," Lena replied.

Jessie smiled, "they haven't hung out together since she left, right? Good idea."

"Really? Her and Naomi were close. I guess a lot's been going on," Lena mumbled. "Did I do the right thing? I don't want her to think I'm getting rid of her."

"Yeah you did. You're helping her friend out too. She'll appreciate that," Craig said.

Jessie reached over to take the PADD Craig had brought in with him. "I wonder why the DNA would get like that. Maybe we should focus on it."

Craig glanced at her thoughtfully. "Yeah, it's weird, not something we've seen before."

Lena turned her head towards James as the other two continued talking. "Why is it not the same?" she asked him. She got a half hearted *hmm* from him. "You said that before you ran off to Sickbay."

"Oh," James said, suddenly uncomfortable. "Just that Perla survived and we could ask her. That's all." The stare he received told him she didn't believe any of that. He let out a tired sigh. "Debbie... she, they said it was... The struggle killed her. But here, the struggle saved her from something worse."

"Hmm. He saw that he had gone too far then, you think?" Lena said. "Should've known that before he even knocked on the door, I say."

"Maybe. Or maybe he didn't want to be caught," James said quietly.

Lena lowered her head so all she could see was her lap and the sofa. "You and Craig have been up for twelve hours, working on this non stop." She looked up to catch his eye. "Maybe come back to it tomorrow."

James felt a little worried about doing that. He shook his head. "What if he tries again in that time?"

"You mean a new victim? No, doesn't fit with what we know. The word's out, everyone knows it could be dangerous right now. He won't," Lena said.

"She's right," Craig interrupted. "My brain's fried. Tomorrow morning after some sleep we'll have clearer heads. As long as our teams on duty are vigilant and everyone sticks together..."

"All right, you win," James said quickly, his hands raising up as if he was surrendering too.

Jessie smiled towards him, "history in the making everyone. James backs down. Somebody take a picture."

"Nah. First he needs to look like it. Pouting and arms folded in a huff," Lena giggled.

"So, I do an impression of you?" James teased her back.

Craig was taking a drink at the time, he nearly spat it out. Jessie was free to just laugh. Lena meanwhile looked a little too shocked to actually be.

"Me? You're the biggest sulker. All moan and no play makes James a very dull boy," she said.

James pointed at her face, "there, there's the lip."

Lena gave him a warning glare, all the while keeping her lips firmly shut. The other two giggled quietly to themselves. James gestured to her arm which was gradually moving up to rest against her stomach. She didn't notice until her other arm was moving over to cross it. Instead it swung forward to snatch the uneaten sandwich James was holding.

"You two are as bad as each other," Craig dared to say in between laughs.

Before James and Lena could possibly turn on him, Jessie came to his rescue. "Yes, that's why they have us to keep them sane, and sometimes bump their heads together to get them to pack it in."

"No, we're just playing around," Lena said with a light smirk. She briefly passed a narrowed eye look at her brother, which he mirrored back. "He's the one that can't take a joke sometimes."

"No, you just make it far too easy for me to rile you up," James sniggered.

"I'm not riled. What does that even mean?" Lena pretended to protest. "Jerk." The sandwich she stole went to her mouth, but it disappeared at the last second. She looked over just in time to see it eaten. With a gasp she reached over to give him a playful shove. Since it was her, it almost pushed him off the sofa.

Craig glanced towards Jessie who was still smirking, all the while still munching on a few crisps. "What you described was more parenty than er... wife and or friendly."

Jessie nodded, her smirk faded away, "you're not wrong. Don't chew with your mouth full." Craig laughed at the serious face she put on when she said that. It didn't last, a smirk escaped from it which turned into laughter.

The Ready Room:

Tom paced in front of his desk while Harry on the computer screen watched. The Lieutenant was deep in thought, his clenched fist rested under his chin. Harry waited patiently for him to stop.

"Is it..." Tom mused aloud. He stopped to point at the computer, "a spade."

Harry smirked. "Not even close."

"Then its got to be the heart, ten," Tom sighed sadly. He didn't dare look to check while Harry brought something from out of sight. Tom squinted a peek as a card appeared, covering up most of the screen. He groaned in disgust afterwards. "Oh man. I forgot about those damn Jokers."

"That's twenty for me, and..." Harry said, dragging out the *and* longer than normal while the Joker was put aside. Another card took the previous one's place. Tom snapped his fingers, a gloating look was already on his face. Then he had another look, he realised quickly that he misread it. Before it moved away he quickly tried to put on a neutral face. "Well?" Harry said.

"Hmm. Hit me," Tom said as plainly as he could.

Harry's eyes sparkled mischievously. "Sure." Another card took over. Tom tried not to groan as his gamble didn't pay off, he didn't want Harry to hear that either. "Ok fine. Call it, if you dare."

Harry chuckled. "If you insist." Tom waited anxiously, all he could hope for was that Harry was bluffing as well and they were both bust. Harry showed him the Joker from before, a nine and to his horror that elusive Ace he wanted. "Twenty one," was the sing song response he was expecting. Harry then looked at the four cards that were his, he couldn't help but laugh. "A Queen, a three, seven and a two. Congrats."

"Oh shut up, that Ace was mine," Tom grunted.

"Aren't you glad we introduced the suit rule?" Harry gloated. "Though I doubt I'd be daft enough to ask for another card after getting a double ten."

"No, hearts are half value," Tom argued.

"Oh is that why you bet after the seven of hearts?" Harry laughed. Tom was about to object but he then remembered he was right after all. He had to laugh at himself. "Diamonds are half."

"Wrong again. They're neutral. Don't worry, I'll write down *your* new rules next time," Harry teased.

Chakotay walked into the background, immediately getting a good laugh out of what he was seeing. "Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't realise that you were spending time with your girlfriend. I'll see myself out."

Harry's face turned bright red. He quickly disappeared from the screen for a moment. Tom then saw him running into the background.

"Tira can't visit because of the lock down," he heard Harry protest, which was followed by Chakotay laughing some more. "She doesn't like cards. I mean, you didn't knock."

"Oh Harry. I thought I was the one being dumb," Tom groaned into his hand.

Chakotay appeared back on the screen but closer this time. "I hate to interrupt your strip poker... no actually I don't." Tom rolled his eyes. "But I thought you'd want to know that someone tried to beam through the Enterprise shields an hour ago."

That got Tom's attention. "Oh? Who?"

"Don't get too excited. I think he'd be the one beaten into a coma if he was the culprit," Chakotay replied.

"Witty. I assume that took you a good fifty nine minutes to come up with that gem," another familiar voice groaned.

Tom's good mood melted away. "Damien. Leave him to me." He then looked confused while Chakotay stared at him blankly. "Wait, he succeeded?"

"No. I just do a damn fine impression," Chakotay muttered as he disappeared off screen again.

Damien's voice snorted in disgust. "As if anyone could copy my greatness."

Harry walked back into Tom's sight while looking backwards. "I'm a genius. Everyone sucks but me. Oooh rabbits are cute. Mwahahaha. Drown me in yoghurts. How's that?"

Tom snorted but managed to stop himself from laughing right away. Harry smirked back at him.

"Oh Captain Mum... Janeway, I've finished cleaning your toilet for you. Want me to work it over with my own toothbrush? Wait, not now, I'm pretending to be Ensign Badass today, I'll screw things up my way. Oh Tom, you're so hot, lets make out," Damien said. Every sentence made Harry's blush get even redder. "Oooh cleaning the floors is so fun, can I get a promotion now? Holy crap a phaser, now I'm in Badass mode again. Eew a woman, get it away! No Chakotay, stop spanking me, I'm saving myself for Tom..."

"Ookay!" Tom quickly interrupted. He could only hear Chakotay laughing in the background. "Harry wins."

"Oh I don't know. Damien should at least get points for commitment," Chakotay's voice said.

Damien scoffed, "of course!"

Tom sighed, he could feel his own cheeks burning like Harry's. "Long winded points maybe. Leave him with me."

"But it's my office, we can't leave him here, he may do something," Harry protested. Chakotay's arm appeared on the screen to drag him away.

Damien walked onto the screen moments later. He looked deep in thought. "Now it feels like I should. It's only polite," he muttered.

"I'm just gonna get straight to the point," Tom said. "Did you attack a young girl last night?"

"Oh please. Like I'd do anything so... so boring," Damien grunted.

Tom's eyebrow twitched a little, "boring?"

"Girl gets bonked on the head? Please." Damien actually yawned to emphasise his point. "I'm much better than that."

"So why are you sneaking onto the Enterprise?" Tom questioned.

Damien chuckled deviously in his direction. "You couldn't begin to understand my subtle nuances that go into cooking up such schemes. If you did you'd quiver at my unadulterated horror."

"What?" Tom said.

"See," Damien sneered.

Tom shook his head, "no, I'm saying *what* cos that was a load of garbage with a few adjectives chucked in to look clever."

"Oh I suppose clever words would throw you off. You've been in Fifth Voyager for nearly fifteen years," Damien sniggered.

Tom's eyes shifted to one side then to the other. "So have you. Which explains the awful English."

"Yes, it does," Damien nodded.

"Oh never mind. You're just wasting time," Tom groaned.

"Seriously. You should be used to it by now," Damien said with a smirk.

Tom sighed into both of his hands. When he moved them he noticed Damien eyeing up the office like he was planning on decorating it. "I know you meant that as a fourth wall joke, but that made more sense when it was about you. Which is saying something."

"My rabbit statue would look great there with my poster," Damien muttered while staring at the back wall. He turned his head to scowl at him. "You're still here?"

"How come no one has put you in a coma?" Tom asked seriously.

Damien smiled, "perhaps because I'm the only smart one on this ship. Anyone dumb enough to attack someone like that isn't going to be as gifted as me."

Tom scoffed and was about to roll his eyes when a thought popped into his head. "Wait. They've eluded us so far, so where did you get dumb from? And don't say cos we're stupid too."

"I wasn't going to," Damien said, of course Tom didn't believe him. "I was going to say that I don't give a crap and I hope that whoever it is keeps up the good work." He turned his back on the Lieutenant, leaving him to silently berate himself for even bothering. "I suppose that's where the old fish tank was. I could put a rabbit hutch there instead."

Tom's hand slammed down on the computer to switch him off. He wasn't mad, the villain had given him an idea anyway. He hurried straight out the door.

Within the darkness all that could be seen were subtle shadows dancing from the left to the right, then they would appear on the left to do it again. All that they could hear was the sound of their own haggard breathing and the gentle humming of the electricity running under the floor.

A bright light flashed around the edges. It dimmed, the remaining light shone just in front of them. Shadows intruded what little light there was. Feet shaped. They stopped directly ahead.

"Where are you this time?" a man's voice groaned, frustrated.

Everything blurred, the light and the dark no longer were separate. The light was blinding, but it was the spinning ceiling that disoriented them.

Something struck their face. Not once, not twice, but so many times that they lost count. Each blow numbed the pain of the last, the new one more excruciating than before.

"Daddy?" a girl's voice trembled.

A shadow approached amongst the blur. It seemed to get darker as it did, until it was all they could see. It had a face.

It was Yutan's face. The view shook. He was shouting but no sound was coming from him. His eyes were wide and desperate.

One more shake and the face faded away, only to be replaced by a different one. This face appeared dark and unforgiving. Eyes filled with so much anger, cheeks were a brilliant red. His hair almost as dark as his eyes. Unlike the last face, he appeared to be crouching down instead of standing on even ground.

"It's your fault!" a different voice screamed. The lips didn't move to match it, and yet it came from the figure in front. "You've done nothing but bring us pain," the voice spoke as the face moved away like it was standing up. The shadow had a different form. It towered over them. Its leg raised and swung towards them.

"Dad, please. Please don't be mad," two voices spoke at once. One was the girl. The other belonged to a much younger child.

"You did this," the second man's voice said coldly.

They turned to run, the scenery ahead a deep imposing black. They were being chased.

"What are you doing?" the girl's voice stuttered out of nowhere.

Hands grabbed them by the waist. They fell.

"I just wanted," Yutan's voice stuttered.

Pain coursed through every part of their body. Through the darkness, they could make out something moving, closer and closer. Arms flew up to shield themselves.

"A son," the other man's voice snarled.

In unison Yutan's voice whispered, "my daughter."

The shadow leaned over, the face hidden within the darkness pushed up against theirs.

Flashes of images; a fist flying towards them, a foot hovering over the chest, a shadowed face obscured further by vicious tremors. Yutan's face emerged from the dark, his face shrouded by guilt.

As suddenly as he appeared, he was gone. A familiar room surrounded them. Their arms still shielded themselves. They could only just make out a figure in the corner. Something large flew towards them, rectangular, huge. The room got darker as it approached. They cringed and waited for it to land.

Before it could, a different room span around them. The last thing before the dark came again was rows of books. More flashes of images flooded their mind. Trees, a dark path drenched by rain, a metal bridge. It was dark once again.

The young girl's voice screamed in terror. A figure was approaching.

The other man's face appeared briefly in a flash, and then it became obscured by the darkness. Only it was still there, with only the outline visible.

"I didn't want to have to do this," a distorted voice said as the second man approached from nowhere.

Another image appeared. Trees swayed in the wind and rain, through a trembling gaze. The rain poured. In between brief gusts of wind, the only sounds were frightened sobs. The scenery disappeared in a thick fog, which immediately dissipated to show a destroyed quarters with books lying everywhere. A shadowed figure ran for the door.

"You made me."

The trees were back. Still shaking, the view moved to the right, showing a concrete path. The same shadowed figure ran down, away from them.

"Dad," the small child's voice cried in fear.

A small trickle of blood reached a book lying nearby.

"Help me," the girl's voice whispered.

Another face took over their view. Their familiar dark brown eyes stared deep into their soul, judging every part of them.

There was nothing but black. There was no movement to be seen, no sound to be heard.

"See this son, you did this," the second man's voice said. "I hope you live with this for a long time."

He forced his eyes open as far as they could only to be assaulted by further darkness, just not as crippling. He soon found himself trembling severely, his heart thumping so hard and fast he thought it would burst out of his chest. He was already sitting, bolt upright. His forehead drenched in sweat. Not just his forehead; his face, neck and even his hair as well.

His hands shakily lifted up in front of him. For a second he swore he saw something on them, dark and wet. The images he saw were still stuck in his head. He couldn't get rid of them.

Then he realised something else. His head thumped almost as hard as his heart. It felt like somebody had pushed a large knife through his temple, so large that it went straight through. His eyes even hurt as well. They were watering.

In the corner of his eye, he saw movement. He knew what it was but he still jumped as if he was in danger. He looked anyway. The person next to him was just rolling over in her sleep. He wondered how he managed not to disturb her so far.

James shook his head, instantly regretting it. Every bit of movement seemed to push at the pain in his head, as if his brain was wounded and moving with him, smacking into his skull.

He couldn't stay there any longer. He ran straight for the exit, barefoot and still in the clothes he slept in.

Sickbay:

The Doctor was so deeply engrossed in his work at his desk, he missed the figure walk quickly by his office, only stopping for the console in the way. It was only the sound of it beeping on contact that got his attention. Fearing the worst he leapt out of his chair to confront whoever was doing it.

He wasn't sure whether to be relieved or not when he discovered who it was.

"What are you doing now? You really should be getting some rest," he scolded.

The figure's head turned towards him. He wasn't expecting the wide eyed look of terror planted on his face, it startled him. He immediately noticed the subject was struggling to keep to normal breaths, he had also been sweating erratically. Whatever happened to him, it was obvious he needed his help first.

"You said there was no link," he heard while he picked up a nearby tricorder.

"What? You mean...? No there wasn't," the Doctor said, momentarily confused. He carefully approached the intruder, all the while opening the tricorder and raising the scanning device.

James stared at the only occupied biobed. He was shaking now. "Then what did I see?"

The Doctor was close enough to scan him. He thought it was best to start from the top, so he did. Seemingly he did not care about it, he let him. At this point the Doctor assumed that was why he was really here.

"Start from the beginning. What happened?" he asked.

Strangely that question appeared to calm him down. At the very least he stopped trembling. He shook his head slowly. "I went to bed. Everything was normal. I was fine."

Before he could explain any further the tricorder beeped at the Doctor furiously, he stared intensely at it. Worry soon grew. "Go on."

"It made no sense. I saw things, it was like a vision but..." James answered, but doing so was making him anxious again. "It was jumbled."

"From what you told me quite recently, that is common," the Doctor said calmly despite the readings he was getting. He didn't want to vocalise them just yet.

James appeared to be annoyed with himself, his fingers clenched against the console. "The images usually are but they have things in common, they're about the same thing. This was..." he stared ahead at nothing that the Doctor could see. "Multiple things, going on at once," he mumbled.

"Like what?" the Doctor asked.

James looked to him. At least his eyes were a little more normal than before. They were still wide and from what the Doctor could see, pained. "Like... I think the best way to describe it is a vision getting distracted by... er..." he groaned in frustration, a hand flew to his temple. "A memory."

"I see. So do they share a commonality at all?" the Doctor questioned.

James reflected some of the anger he was feeling towards him, his eyes focused on the tricorder. "You found something. Tell me. Please."

The Doctor sighed as he briefly looked down at the results. "How do I explain this?"

"Simply I guess," James sighed while cringing into his hand. "My head feels like someone's grabbing at it."

"Whatever part of the brain that allows you to use telepathy, it's... spiked," the Doctor said.

"Spiked?" James interrupted.

"You wanted simple. Not only that but it looks like its sending pulses to another part of your brain. I... it's..." the Doctor answered. James stared at him with a mixture of confusion and he assumed was agony. "I need to run some tests. Even I'm stumped as to how and why. Perhaps I somehow missed something that triggered it when you attempted to form a link with..."

James shook his head lightly to avoid further pain. "No, I didn't even start it. I wanted to but I couldn't focus. I still don't understand the problem."

"Neither do I to an extent. It's clear that whatever's done this has given you a massive dose of adrenaline. I can give you something to help you calm down, that should alleviate the other symptoms," the Doctor said.

James gave him a very brief nod. The Doctor walked over to the medicine tray to pick up a hypospray. Once he walked back over to him he noticed him staring at the other patient again. Even though he had permission he used that opportunity to inject the contents of the hypospray into his neck.

"They weren't even mine," James mumbled.

The Doctor frowned, "what wasn't?"

"At least, I don't remember them," James continued like he didn't ask anything. Then he noticed the Doctor staring quizzically at him. "The memories. Until now I didn't even remember them. Some could be, but the rest... I don't know."

"Once your body no longer feels like it's under attack, your mind should become clearer," the Doctor said.

"Except for the spike pulsing part," James said in the lightest tone he could.

The Doctor recognised he was trying to make himself feel better, he gave him an assuring nod. "Lie down. I'll run some tests," he said.

Astrometrics:

With the lights off, as well as most of the computers anybody walking into the lab would think no one was there. B'Elanna knew better. She walked further in while looking to her right, then to her left. That was where she spotted her husband, leaning on the lone computer station that was on. It barely generated any light so if she hadn't seen him she likely wouldn't have noticed immediately.

"Tom. You've been here for hours."

Tom smiled, usually it was him saying that to her. "I thought I had a lead."

"I know you care, but it's not your job. Why didn't you give your idea to Craig or James?" B'Elanna questioned.

"I was gonna if I got a head start on it," Tom said with a sigh at the end.

B'Elanna moved over to join him, all the while glancing at whatever he was doing. At first it just looked like a list of names. "I take it, it didn't work," she said as she watched him instead. He tapped two panels and something changed in the corner of her eye. Once she looked back one of the names was highlighted, information appeared underneath. She was still none of the wiser. "Weren't they doing something like this already?"

"Not exactly," Tom sighed again. With that out he straightened himself up to give his slightly aching back a rest. "Damien made me think that there are two types of criminals. The ones that brag and the ones that hide. Obviously this guy is a hider."

B'Elanna thought she understood so she looked at the list again. The crewmember he highlighted didn't seem to stand out in anyway. "You think that if a member of the crew did this, he'd cover his tracks."

"Generally on this ship if you try to keep a low profile, it does the opposite," Tom said mid yawn. "Draws attention. Oh, such and such didn't come to work today. Why? Lets find out. Such and such has been very quiet today. Or maybe the opposite, such and such offered to do extra hours. He doesn't usually, that's weird."

B'Elanna gave him a warm smile, then a nod. "I see. You're looking for anybody who's changed their routine."

Tom smirked at her despite his tired eyes. "Know anyone?"

B'Elanna laughed quietly, "perhaps." He mouthed a *yeah* to himself as he turned back to the computer. "I'm going to assume you haven't found anyone yet."

"So far everyone who was due a shift showed up, no one but our Security chiefs have volunteered extra hours. No reports of strange behaviour," Tom replied. "Well unless you count everyone's reaction to the crime. If I did everyone's a suspect, except Damien."

"So far?" B'Elanna said in an encouraging voice. Tom looked over to catch a smile. "Let me help you."

"One of us should be home to look after the kids," he said.

"If that's a hint then it's not necessary. I didn't just leave them on their own," B'Elanna said. Tom appeared very curious. "For one a Security pair were nearby, I asked them to keep an eye on our quarters for five minutes. I'm sure they won't mind another few hours." Tom blinked a few times, staring blankly. She ended up laughing at his face. "We can work on this at home. There's no need for you to do this here either."

"I know," Tom shrugged. The thought of home made him yawn again. "I didn't want to disturb anyone and I don't know what else to look for after I'm done. It's not worth wasting two people's time."

B'Elanna turned to the computer screen, she studied it for a few seconds. "Anybody off yesterday?"

"You mean supposed to be off?" Tom asked. "I guess so. I wouldn't know what to do with that though."

"Not yet no, but you might have new data to compare with in a couple of hours," B'Elanna answered.

Tom felt his eyes widen as much as they possibly could, which wasn't that much different to before. "Couple of... Is it really that time?" B'Elanna nodded. "Wow. Okay. I guess it can't hurt to take a few hour break."

"We're all going to need to have clear heads for this one. It's really easy to get too involved in cases like this," B'Elanna said warmly.

Sickbay:

"What?" James blurted out.

The Doctor tried to ease his nerves by resting back in his chair, but he ended up leaning forward to crouch over the desk instead. He pointed at the information on the computer. To James it looked even more confusing than the DNA sequences Craig had to look at earlier.

"See here, this is a regular Human brain." He pointed at a different one. "This is yours. I've studied both you and Lena when your telepathic abilities surfaced, and I discovered that this..." Another point but to James he may as well have pointed at the ceiling for all that it mattered. "Is likely where they come from, so to speak."

"Come from?" James questioned blankly.

The Doctor shrugged casually, "you asked for simple."

James was in too much pain so he bit his tongue for the moment. "How does that explain, anything?"

"Ah. Here," the Doctor again pointed. He noticed James' frustration at that. "Would a diagram be more helpful?"

"No, I believe you. Just explain," James replied impatiently.

The Doctor was a little disappointed for some reason, he let out a sigh. "Okay. Your original task was to connect to the victim to uncover her memories. It seems that's what you did..." James was about to interrupt, the Doctor was determined not to let him. "But as I tried to warn you the patient is in a coma for a reason, her brain is damaged. Also as she's a different species to you there was always the risk of incompatibility too."

James managed to interrupt this time, "I didn't make the link. You backed me up there."

"Yes, but as I said before, Human telepathy is unheard of and as such, I'm still studying it. Perhaps I missed it," the Doctor said. Again he was about to interrupt "You reached in for her memories but as her brain was quite literally alien and damaged, it seems that yours may have overcompensated or maybe it related to her..."

"Wait," James said, overlapping him at the last few words. The Doctor stopped. "Are you saying I made things up to fill in gaps?"

"No. I'm saying that in trying to bring out a coma patient's memories, you inadvertently awoken your own. That's why the images were so jumbled," the Doctor said. He noticed James' eyebrow raise as if he was hinting at something. "They may have filled in the gaps, yes. There's no way to know."

"You said related," James said.

The Doctor nodded, "yes." He noticed the colour was draining from his cheeks, his eyes were also becoming distant. "What?"

"Does that mean that the father..." James stuttered quietly. He looked at him directly in a way that made the hologram a little nervous.

"You still haven't shared what happened," the Doctor pointed out.

James' head turned to the left, though his attention looked like it was miles away. "It's as you'd expect. She was beaten, she tried to hide, defend herself. I saw her father a lot."

"I see," the Doctor said. It didn't tell him anything new though. "What about you?"

James shook his head, the rest of his body seemed to do the same but lightly. He appeared to try to settle it before trying to answer. "I don't know. It was jumbled, remember?"

"Not so jumbled that you didn't recognise memories that weren't hers," the Doctor reminded him as gently as he could.

Despite that James was a little annoyed, "I also said I didn't remember having them myself."

The Doctor pressed on regardless, "but you knew they were likely yours. Why?"

James sighed to calm down, all it did was get rid of the shakes for the time being. "The last time I checked there were no trees on Voyager."

"No trees," the Doctor said while deep in thought.

"My father," James said reluctantly and very quietly. The Doctor quickly turned his attention back on him. He noticed James fidget quite a bit before he spoke. "I heard him, saw his face a few times."

"But those moments weren't familiar?" the Doctor said.

"No. As I said, a jumbled mess. I'd hear a girl's voice beg but see my dad at the same time," James answered almost in a whisper.

The Doctor was more than a bit curious, he turned his attention to the computer. It was quiet for a while as he worked on something James didn't understand. He took the time to think about the images some more. Now he was a tiny bit calmer he had the feeling something was missing, something important. That was pushed back in his head when one particular image came rushing back.

One more shake and the face faded away, only to be replaced by a different one. This face appeared dark and unforgiving. Eyes filled with so much anger, cheeks were a brilliant red. His hair almost as dark as his eyes.

His hands. They lunged forward not towards his face, but his throat. The hatred on the man's face bore into him as something tightened around his neck. He had to get away. His first instinct was to pull backwards.

The Doctor heard a loud clatter to the side of him, like something hard hit the wall. His head darted up to check what happened. He saw that James was on his feet now, the chair he had been using was now deeply imbedded in the wall. He was about to ask what happened when he saw James trembling severely, with his hands covering his throat, his eyes extremely wide with fear.

"What happened?" the Doctor asked while he hurried over to his side. He didn't get an answer, nothing changed. One hand carefully touched his arm while the other opened a tricorder. James' body jerked violently away from him when he did. The Doctor was unnerved by the look of fear that was directed at him. "James? It's okay."

"Doc..." he mumbled, he looked down at the hands at his now aching neck. He brought them away to stare at them. All the while the Doctor scanned him again.

"What did you see?" the Doctor asked.

James shook his head, "it felt real. What's happening to me?"

The Doctor sighed as he closed the tricorder. "The telepathic activity in your brain has spiked again. That's all that's changed."

"No. Telepathy doesn't do this. I was there, my dad was..." James stammered. He backed away slightly. "He was here, he tried to..." His right hand was at his throat again, which still ached. The Doctor finally noticed that and decided to scan it. "Did anything happen?"

"Apart from attacking my chair, no," the Doctor answered, gesturing his head towards the discarded seat. He hoped he'd see the funny side of his remark, distract him for a few seconds. He knew it was a long shot though. "There's nothing wrong with your throat. Is there any particular reason..."

James lowered his hand, "no, forget it." He folded his arms tightly, hoping that would stop some of his body from shaking anymore. It didn't help that his heart was thumping furiously again, he thought that the Doctor would probably hear it. "You said that the memories I've unlocked could be related to the victim's. Right?"

"Yes but now's not the time to be worrying about that. I think you should go home and get some rest," the Doctor said as he walked towards the main part of Sickbay. "I've got something that may help calm you further."

James' head shook, "no, no. It means something. I'll be right back." Before the Doctor could argue he ran out of the office and straight out of Sickbay. The Doctor was just left, half way towards the medicine tray, with an open jawed shocked expression on his face.

Enterprise:

Two guards sat in front of the console, each of them slouched back in their chairs looking a little too comfortable. On the nearby screen was a picture of a Scrabble board, already with a lot of words planted on it. One of the guards tapped in something casually, which generated a new word onto the board. The other guard darted forward, instantly annoyed with it.

"No, no. That's not a word," he argued.

The other guard laughed towards him. "Yes it is, and you lose. I used your word, Z usage, slap bang on a red block. I'm already fifty points ahead. Tough luck."

"There's no Z in realise," the first guard groaned.

The second guard continued to laugh. "You really need to learn English, dude."

"You complained when I used a U on colour, we dipped on it, I won. You can't just go to American when you feel like it," the first guard said irritably.

"Real-eye-zzz, god," the second guard complained. He rolled his eyes, "you take the fun out of everything."

"I'm surprised you didn't leave out the last E," the first guard retorted with a smirk.

"Why would I, it was on the red block," the second guard snickered, wiping the smirk off the first guard's face. "Just admit it. You only wanted your way cos your words have more letters in it. We use Z, deal with it."

"I dealt with it when you forgot the U and E at the end of dialogue. It was you who complained about my spelling in the first place. Here," the first guard snapped. He reached forward to tap the screen. The other guard's word disappeared. The words English UK flashed on the screen. The second guard reached forward to undo it, not before the computer spat out an error for Player 2. "Oh look at that, you cheated."

"Nuh uh, you're gonna pay for that!" the second guard snapped. The two's hands clashed as they both attempted to fix the game to their liking.

"Try it and you're a dead man, Carlson," the first guard growled back.

They both missed the doors opening behind them. The figure who opened them walked in and stood staring at them. After a few seconds of pathetic hand slapping he uttered the words, "get out."

"Okay, okay, you can have it in English English," the second guard panicked before running for the door. Of course he had to run around the figure, and he made sure to give him an extremely wide berth.

The first guard's eyes were wide, his head shook erratically. He caught sight of the new arrival's angry eyes that were luckily not directed at him, but their only prisoner. It still freaked him out enough to run as well.

Once they were both gone the prisoner looked up to see what the bigger fuss was all about. He was surprised to find James staring at him from just behind the forcefield. Yutan felt a cold shudder travel through his body. It felt like he was staring straight through him, not at him. He didn't seem to blink either. His expression was stiff, almost frozen on the spot. He thought he was for a moment, until his hand moved to tap the panel next to the forcefield.

"What are you doing?" Yutan stuttered.

He didn't get an answer, at least not a vocal one anymore. James didn't break his stare towards him while his hand moved. Yutan was more than a little worried by now. He attempted to step back but there was nowhere for him to go. It wouldn't even give him a second breathing time.

The forcefield was down. Yutan had only two choices and neither of them were good. He could try to reason with him and hope for the best. Or make a break for it, which wouldn't be easy with the very little room he had. Luckily James wasn't in a hurry to do whatever he was going to do. He hadn't moved yet. Yutan thought he must be waiting for him to do something, likely his second choice. That decided it for him, he remained where he was.

"Whatever you've found now. It's wrong," Yutan said, immediately realising that wouldn't pacify him at all. The opposite in fact. "Please, you're a good person right? You risked your life for our people and you didn't have to. Rescuing refugees isn't in the Slayer job description."

Nothing changed, and right now Yutan wished that anything would happen at this point. The uncertainty was nerve wracking. He had no idea what he was dealing with, he only knew of his kind through legends he didn't even believe in before.

Yutan was just thinking of something new to say when James finally lunged for him. It happened so quickly, he barely had time to yelp. He hit the wall so hard it made the

entire room spin. All of the air was slammed out of his lungs. It was painful to try to breathe it back in. The whole of his back ached, the pain spread to one of his legs. Any movement made it all the more worse.

Not that he could go very far. One of his attacker's hands had grabbed the front of his shirt so roughly it had scratched the skin as well. The other hand slammed into the wall right next to his head. He felt the wall tremble, he heard it vibrate through his entire body. His eyes dared to glide over to look, to his dismay the hand could no longer be seen. All he could see was the arm surrounded by torn metal. Yutan knew he definitely had to be more careful now that he knew.

"Please, I..." he found himself begging without even thinking it.

"You. You did it. She trusted you, you betrayed her," James said in a cold whisper. Yutan was wishing he was being silent again, it was far less creepy. Then the words hit him. His head shook.

"No. I mean I made a mistake yes, but not that. I'd never..." Yutan stuttered.

He saw it coming, not that it helped. The hand holding him straightened out and swung towards his face. His neck clicked and it stung horribly as his head was jerked violently to one side from the blow. His cheek and eye burned so much he couldn't open the eye again, tears managed to squeeze their way out of it.

"Was that your mistake?" James snapped, his voice was shaking. His hand swung at him again, this time it was clenched as it swiped across Yutan's face. He heard his jaw crack on impact, this hit made him lose his balance. "Or was it that?" He couldn't stop it, he stumbled sideways to the floor. His hand flew up to check where he was struck, but before he could that same arm was grabbed, and he was pulled up into a painful sitting position still with his arm stretched. From the strength of it he was surprised that it was still attached.

His attacker crouched down which gave his arm the tiniest bit of relief. The relief didn't last. He was forcibly turned and slammed sideways back into the wall. That was nothing compared to the screaming pain his arm was in as it twisted during this. He didn't have time to worry about it, there was a face within centimetres of his own, staring at him with such fury.

"What else did you do to her? What did she do that made you hate her so?" the whisper was back, only now that they were so close it may as well have been shouted. "You liked to mess around, did her existing get in the way? Was she not what you had in mind? Well?" his voice was raising, it made Yutan cringe. "Answer me!" that one was a shout, it rang in his ears.

"No," Yutan cried out. "I loved my daughter."

"Loved her?" that was said with a bitter laugh mixed in. "She ruined your life, didn't she?"

If that was said to him in any other circumstances he would show how much he was offended, but not this time. Doing so would get him killed. "Quite the opposite. She saved me." There was no reaction, something he was grateful for now. "I hate myself too. That slap... I'd help the Softmicron over and over again if it meant I could undo it." He noticed a flicker in the other man's posture, as he was holding him against the wall he felt it too. "I was scared of losing her, she's all I have. I didn't see what she was

doing as a cry for attention, I saw it as her disappearing from my life. I reacted, I didn't think."

"You beat her over and over again," James said angrily.

"No!" Yutan tried to stop him. He was pulled forward and then slammed back into the wall for it. Everything span around him, his head felt suddenly heavier.

"She couldn't fight back, she trusted you. She was helpless!" James shouted at him. Yutan tried to shake his head, it just made him physically sick. He held still, hoping it would pass. He wanted to say something, but everytime he tried he felt his throat close up.

"All she wanted from you was it to stop," James stuttered. He shook his head and thankfully climbed up to his feet. The room was still spinning to Yutan, so he wasn't completely sure of that. "You didn't have to respect or love her. You don't even have to like me."

Yutan was thinking about how to respond in between painful breaths. Then he realised something odd about what he said. "Me?" was all he could say.

"You just had to stop," he heard James' voice crack.

His arm wouldn't move, all he could feel from it was pain. He told himself that it meant it was still attached at least. His other arm reached around to get a hold of it, then gently rest it across his lap. In the edge of his eye sight he noticed James just standing there, doing nothing. It hurt to do it but Yutan lifted his head. He felt a sudden rush of nausea, his throat tightened. He didn't dare move his head again.

"Why? I didn't do anything wrong," he heard James say so quietly he assumed he was thinking it, and his mouth mimed it.

Yutan could only watch and endure the pain that had been inflicted on him. The sense of dread and panic had long since faded, and so had the angry Slayer that had attacked him. If he didn't know any better, he would have thought that he had left and was replaced by a frightened child. As if on cue he heard the telltale signs of tears which were quickly pushed aside with a throat clear. Yutan attempted to bring his head up a little slower than last time. Now that he could see him better, he felt that his earlier impression was dead on.

The man before him now was completely different. His wide eyed look was no longer creepy and dangerous, they showed fear and vulnerability. Instead of that unnatural stillness he displayed earlier, he was shaking erratically. Yutan could see him mouthing words to himself which he couldn't make out.

Yutan was overwhelmed with sympathy which he didn't understand at all. Only a few minutes ago he had been beating him, Yutan feared for his life. He was clearly unhinged and could snap again like that at any time. What he had been saying though was nagging at him. He couldn't just leave it.

"You, weren't talking about my daughter were you?" he said slowly. As he expected he didn't get an answer, nothing changed. "You thought I abused my little girl. That I beat her and left. That her own father could hate her. Did that..." another wave of nausea put him off, this one made him a little dizzy. He took in a deep breath and out again. It kept that at bay for the time being. "Is that what happened to you?"

He didn't answer that either. However the muttering stopped. Yutan took that as an answer anyway. The sympathy for his attacker was rushing back, this time he couldn't stop it.

"I'm not your father, she's not you," he said firmly. "This isn't the same thing, at all."

"Isn't the same thing," he heard James whisper. His eyes had glazed over. He had heard that before. His eyes gravitated towards Yutan sitting on the floor, with the cracked wall supporting his back. Seeing his face brought it all back, the images he had seen, his face and voice. The anger was slowly building up again. "You hit her, she was crying, you ran."

"Help me," the girl's voice whispered.

"Yes, that is true," Yutan said shakily and full of regret.

James looked him in the eyes. They each noticed tears in the other's. "She begged for you to help her."

The sentence hit Yutan harder than James had so far, it made him gasp and his tears broke free. "I can just picture her. That brute hurting her while she cries for me. If I had not run away, maybe I could have stopped it. Maybe I would have left just before as normal, but heard her and helped. I failed her."

He cried into his good hand, the thought of what he had said weighed heavily on his shoulders. James stared at him with a similar feeling building in his chest, he walked forward to kneel down in front of him. He expected him to flinch at least, maybe try to get away. James doubted he noticed he was there.

"I'm sorry," he said quietly. "I know, that doesn't make up for it but..."

Yutan looked at him again. He gave him a slight nod. "I deserved it. It's fine."

"No," James disagreed, although some unknown part of him didn't. He tried his best to push that aside. "We... you couldn't have stopped it. You couldn't have known. I saw your face, my dad's face and I thought the worst. But I forgot there was another..."

Yutan wasn't sure what to make of that. He thought he understood what his problem was but everytime he said something, his current theory would go out the window. "What are you talking about?"

"One of... a Slayer's abilities is telepathy. I..." James said slowly. "I don't know how. I just did."

"What?" Yutan whispered.

"I just assumed that because my dad did that, you did," James continued, his attention seemed to drift away. "Someone else there. There was someone else there."

Yutan didn't even think about it, his good arm reached forward to grab his arm. "Who!?" he snapped.

The brief anger didn't last any longer than that. As soon as he grabbed his arm, James' eyes widened in a panic. He clambered backwards until the wall got in the way. He took

in many sharp breaths, he was even trembling. Yutan stared after him, his own eyes wide in shock at his response.

"What's wrong with you?" he had to ask.

James looked at him. The panic he felt whittled away, he couldn't even tell himself why he did. He just shook his head. "I... don't know. Ever since the vision, I... I don't know."

"What do you mean *you don't know!*?" a voice he didn't expect shouted at him.

James' head darted up at the source. Now standing in front, and towering over him, was a face he never thought he'd see again. That same dark face that haunted his dreams earlier. The same one that lunged for his throat.

"Dad?" he stuttered.

All he could focus on was the man's penetrating stare of anger and resentment. He didn't notice that the background had changed as well. They were no longer in the brig, but in a darkened bedroom. A window was behind him with the curtains hastily shut, allowing light from outside to narrowly squeeze through the crack in the middle.

The man snorted in disgust. He crouched down. James tried to get further back, but the wall continued to try and stop him.

"You trying to run away again?" the man said. His intense eyes drilled into his own. "Is that the kind of man you are? A coward. I didn't ruin my life to put up with a snivelling little waste of skin like you."

"No, I... I didn't mean to..." James heard himself say. He wasn't thinking it. The comment angered the man further.

"You..." he growled. His hand swung towards him so fast he didn't have time to avoid it. His cheek stung, he felt his eyes welling up and the fear in his chest about to burst. The view in front of him trembled violently. The slap didn't calm the other man down in the slightest, he seemed madder. "Little..." he swung again.

James heard himself scream and whimper as the hits kept coming. His arms flew up to cover his face but that didn't deter him. They only flew elsewhere. They got harder, the hand or hands were now clenched into fists. He felt them land all over his body. He heard the man shout at him through it all. Only one sentence was heard through all the pain and fear.

"It's your fault!"

He felt his arms shake, the hits had stopped too. James opened his eyes. He didn't even remember closing them. His arms were still in the way. He shakily moved one of them so he could see why. The man he feared so much was no longer there. Instead Yutan was sitting right in front of him with his hand on his other arm.

"Does this happen everytime you have a vision?" he asked in dismay.

James answered by timidly shaking his head. No, this was not normal, it wasn't like any of the ones he had before. He knew that from the moment he awoke from it.

Sickbay:

The Doctor was once again locked in an intense gaze with his computer, he didn't notice his latest guest rush in and over to his desk. She stared at him expectantly for almost a minute, he still didn't notice her.

"Doc!" Jessie shouted at him, startling him once again.

"Oh Jessie. There's no need for that. You could give someone a heart attack doing things like that," he said.

Jessie stared at him blankly, then she shook her head. "I could program a heart for you and walk back in again."

The Doctor frowned at her so hard his forehead was covered in creases. "There's no need for that."

Jessie folded her arms, she focused one of her more deadly glares towards the hologram. "You woke me up, telling me about some emergency. I noticed James wasn't with me so..." Her hands gestured forward and both of her eyebrows shot up. "He's not here so I'm either wrong or he's escaped from you again."

The Doctor sighed, "the latter. It's still no reason to be so irritable with me."

"When you sit there ignoring me after scaring me like that, yes there is," Jessie grumbled.

"Oh," the Doctor said, finally understanding. "Maybe you should sit down."

"Just tell me what's going on," Jessie said irritably.

The Doctor leaned back in his chair while pulling a worried face. "How long have you got?"

Jessie groaned, she eventually sat down in the opposite seat. "I've got until breakfast. Three curious kids and a second morning in a row with a missing father. Also my babysitter probably wants to know as well, and if we take too long... You do the maths."

"Okay, okay," the Doctor mumbled. "Did he tell you about his attempt to retrieve memories from the victim?" Jessie's whiter face gave him his answer. Before another shouting match could begin he thought he should continue quickly. "Lena and I talked him out of it before he could begin, but it seems that it worked anyway. I'm still working on the how's."

"He's... he's seen the memories of a girl being beaten?" Jessie stammered.

The Doctor thought about dodging the question or lying but that wasn't the worst of it, and he didn't want to keep digging himself into a deeper hole. "Yes. However that's not all. He explained that the vision they showed themselves in, was mixed in with other images. Other memories."

"Like what?" Jessie asked, her voice low and dangerous.

"His own. Repressed memories I suspect as he claims they were new to him at the time," the Doctor answered. He noticed Jessie's eyes become a little shifty, her mouth

moved as if she was mumbling. "The scan I did is very interesting. Whatever allows his brain to use telepathy seems to be connected closely to the pathways linked to memory. When he received the girl's, it appears the pathway was fired up and similar images from his own memory became intermixed with hers. It's fascinating."

"Fascinating?" Jessie said through near gritted teeth. The Doctor didn't notice the danger signs right away. "Interesting? Is that all you have to say about this whole thing?" The now raised voice gave him a clue he should be careful. "This kid was beaten almost to death. James not only saw the memories of that but he got repressed ones of his own, likely related to what happened to her? Fascinating is all you can spit out!?"

The Doctor began to stutter, fearing for his matrix, "yes, er no. I understand the implications of what I'm explaining to you. I just..."

"I'm sure you don't," Jessie muttered.

"Actually I do. I do have access to the crew's medical history after all," the Doctor said.

Jessie's eyes flashed with rage towards him. "What?" she whispered with menace.

"Uh... why is that such a surprise, or an outrage for that matter?" the Doctor asked. "I've always been well aware of the abuse he endured as a child, and I was certain you knew I did."

Jessie's resulting sigh sounded like a growl as she briefly looked over her shoulder. "If you know what James likely saw in his vision, then what's with the attitude?"

"I think it's important to remain calm. Someone should at least," the Doctor answered.

"Okay fine. Why did he run away? Why did you call me saying it was an emergency? Those things generally lead to not staying calm," Jessie questioned.

"I said it was urgent," the Doctor blurted out, and as he expected he got a glare for it. "I haven't figured out how to stabilise the neural pathways. He's still getting a misfire of memories. Or at least he did once while he was here."

Jessie leapt to her feet, her eyes widened. "What? And you let him run off!"

"You know as well as I do there's no such thing as letting James do anything. It's inevitable, like a sun rise," the Doctor muttered.

"Hilarious," Jessie growled. "I'll go find him." She turned to leave.

"Wait," the Doctor quickly said, stopping her. "I didn't call you here to do that. You need to know something before you confront him."

"There's more?" Jessie snapped.

The Doctor allowed himself a quick sigh. It didn't help at all. "Well two things yes. Firstly, when he experienced that memory he reacted as if it was happening."

Jessie walked over slowly to sit back down, her gaze seemed elsewhere. Finally her hand covered her face, he heard her groan into it. "God. That second thing better be the cure."

"No," the Doctor said, fearing the worst.

He expected Jessie to glare at him, but she just looked confused. "How can you not have a cure? It's obvious to me what the problem is and I'm not a walking computer."

He needed a better word than offended for what he was feeling after that. The Doctor tried to hide it. "Please, if it's obvious. Tell me," he obviously couldn't hide it.

"Duh, the chip Seska forced on him," Jessie groaned, rolling her eyes.

The earlier offense rolled off him, he ended up chuckling. He ignored Jessie's glare for the time being. "No, you misunderstand. This is completely different."

"No. Apart from how it happened, it's exactly the same," Jessie said.

"Should I explain it again?" the Doctor asked sincerely, but to Jessie he sounded patronising.

Jessie's eyes narrowed, "no, let me. Repressed memories resurfacing. Those memories happen while he's awake. They seem real to him and he reacts in kind. Hmm, I think we've done this before." The Doctor shook his head to her annoyance. "I can't believe you missed it. It does explain your attitude though."

"Secondly; I suggested that the memories he saw were related to the victim's. I assume from his reaction and the running off that he thinks the father was responsible. That got me thinking..." the Doctor explained.

"Oh, cos you haven't thought of it you gloss right over my idea. Fine," Jessie grumbled.

The Doctor decided to pretend he didn't hear her. "... That perhaps there was a deeper meaning to the vision."

"Like James did?" Jessie said, again rolling her eyes. "Do you have an original thought in your matrix?"

"No, I said deeper meaning. If the point was to just say *your dad is like my dad*, then there wouldn't be anything else. It also wouldn't be presented in such a jumbled fashion, disorienting him. I mean why didn't he see what happened directly; in the right order, the correct people and actions. Why the games?"

Jessie's anger fizzled away while she thought about it. Her head shook a little. "I guess, but she is a coma patient. Maybe she couldn't."

"Perhaps, but it still doesn't explain the tree imagery he described. Or the shadowed figure he kept seeing," the Doctor said. Jessie looked at him intently, he figured he finally had her on his side. "Since he saw his father in the vision, I thought I'd start with the files related to him."

"The shadowed guy was probably the attacker. She probably didn't know him, or see him," Jessie said. The Doctor shook his head. "How on earth are you going to find the answer in medical files from nearly thirty years ago?"

"It's a long shot I know, but... this is why I called you," the Doctor mumbled. He turned the computer around to show Jessie a screen full of text. "The only data I could find

during the whole abuse was a collection of highly secured personal logs and one incident report from the school. That's it." Jessie's uncomfortable downward glance told him she expected that. It was the cue to continue. "The logs were written by a Doctor John Stuart, a psychiatrist of all things. I found from his file that he later married James' stepmother."

"Yes, it was one big mess. It doesn't help James or Perla," Jessie mumbled uncomfortably. The Doctor sensed her bad mood was coming back too.

"Through some digging I discovered Stuart lost his licence and as such was fired for this incident. He was tried as an accessory," the Doctor said in dismay. "He intentionally wiped the abuse under a rug, and worse still he pushed himself into the family. That's more than a mess."

"Doc, don't you think this is going too far? This has nothing to do with... anything!" Jessie snapped.

"Yes, I just have a low opinion of doctors who not only ignore the oath but abuse it for their own end," the Doctor muttered. He tried to shake his own anger off. "I only discovered that as I needed to read the logs he wrote to do the investigation. I think you need to read the first one."

Jessie stared at him with her mouth hanging open, her eyes silently judging him. She didn't stay silent for long. "No, I really don't. What the hell will that do!?"

"If I were you, I'd want to know this too," the Doctor said ominously. Jessie's stare didn't change. "If James is re-living some of this then it's important to know, so you can deal with him."

"No," Jessie said sternly as she rose to her feet again. "Months ago James had to go back into my past, before meeting him, and was witness to some traumatising stuff I wanted to forget. Even still he went out of his way to avoid learning things about me, stuff I never could tell even him. He respected that my past was too painful to share, and I'll do the same for him."

The Doctor dragged the computer over to face him again. "Stuart was to visit the Taylor house after a neighbour sent in a tip."

"No, shut up," Jessie growled. She reached over to shove the computer off the desk. The Doctor winced as he heard the screen crack when it hit the floor.

"The family had recently lost their daughter, two months earlier. The neighbour hadn't seen the mother, Susy, since then. Stuart thought he was to give some grief counselling, nothing more."

"Why are you doing this? I'm leaving!" Jessie shouted at him. She started to walk away.

The Doctor continued anyway, just in case. "Inside he found Susy Taylor sitting catatonic in her living room. No sign of the husband or the son." He noticed Jessie flinch and stop for a second. She was about to walk away again. "Not long after he tried to counsel her out of her state, he heard something from another room. He thought it would be either of the two. He went to investigate."

"You're sick, keep it to yourself," Jessie grumbled just as she reached the main door.

The Doctor had to be quick. He launched himself out of his chair to follow her. "The sound came from a kitchen cupboard, one of many left open. This one had been broken." Jessie was in the corridor by the time he got to that part, he stood near the doorway, unable to move further. "Inside he found a child." Jessie was about to touch the panel for the turbolift. "Covered in bruises, blood. Malnourished."

Jessie froze on the spot, her body started to shake. What he was saying had given her a picture of it in her mind. It made her sick.

"Stuart noticed he was holding something, food more than likely. He tried his best to coax the child out, but he was terrified of him. He eventually tried to pull him out, gently," the Doctor continued.

Jessie swung around to face him. The Doctor noticed tears were rolling down her cheeks. "Stop it. Just stop!"

"The child ran from him. When he went after him he heard him calling for his mother," the Doctor said. Jessie approached with what he assumed was vengeance on her mind. "Stuart found him trying to rouse his mother, only she didn't change. Stuart regrets that the sight made him so angry he forgot everything; his training, his oath. He told this poor woman while gesturing to the child, that he'd be taken away now if she didn't respond. To his surprise it did work."

"How does this help anyone? Doc, just..." Jessie stuttered.

"The mother begged him not to take the child away, despite his need for treatment. Stuart knew what was happening and yet he still agreed to treat him at the house," the Doctor said, disgust was in his voice. "The father returned. He warned them that if Stuart reported him that he'd make sure he'd lose his job. His job. That was Stuart's only motivation."

Jessie shook her head, her hand rushed up to wipe a few of the tears away. More kept coming though. "No. He'd have to leave to report it. Peter would have done something to him while he was gone. He probably didn't want to chance it."

"From his scans James suffered punches, maybe objects thrown at him, kicks..." the Doctor said. Jessie cringed, her eyes squeezed shut. "Every day for those two months. What Stuart did or didn't do would make no difference. He would have been attacked anyway. At least if he had reported it then that would have been only one more time. No, it took him starting school, over a year and a half later, for a proper report and medical to be added to his file. The man who ended up being his step father just stopped by every few days to treat his injuries, then went back to his day job afterwards."

"John was a good man. I think you're misreading it," Jessie said, closer to a whisper.

"His log said and I quote, *if I do this, I could lose everything. Nothing will change. I have no choice,*" the Doctor said. "You can see it for yourself."

"No," Jessie cried, her hand covered her mouth. "James said he was like a father to him. It killed him when he turned on him a few years ago. How on earth will he take this?" Her head flew up to stare angrily at the hologram. "I can't keep this from him but I certainly can't tell him. Why, why did you tell me!?"

The Doctor looked on in sympathy, he didn't want to tell her but he had to. "I don't know how to treat him. It's likely he will go through this again. He needs you."

"Oh for god's sake!" Jessie growled. "Check the damn chip next time he's in Sickbay. I'll go tell him myself."

"It's not the chip," the Doctor said as calmly as he could. "The victim saw something in James that she could relate to. Her father didn't beat her, so it wasn't that. The logs could give me a clue as to what she found familiar." He ignored the scoff he got from Jessie, she was still crying as well. "That will lead us to her attacker."

"So after all that, the log you read has nothing to do with anything?" Jessie said.

"There was a detail in it that you must have missed. Though I suppose you may not know how it relates to the victim, so that makes sense. James or Craig may not have shared it with you," the Doctor said reluctantly.

The tears had stopped, but she was still shaking. Jessie stared at the Doctor intensely. "And what is that?"

"The Brig to er... Sickbay is it?" Yutan's voice rang over the comm.

The Doctor and Jessie both looked confused. The Doctor tapped his commbadge. "Yutan. How did you get a hold of a commbadge?"

"I'm with the Security Chief. Um... the Slayer one," Yutan's voice said.

Jessie gasped, "what, is he okay?"

"I don't think so," Yutan's voice said quietly. Jessie and the Doctor heard a quiet mumbling going on in the background. Jessie tensed up at the sound of it, the voice was familiar. *"He keeps hallucinating. I think he needs help, quickly."*

The Doctor was about to step through the Sickbay door when he remembered he couldn't. He hurried over to collect his emitter. Once he returned he noticed Jessie was way ahead of him, already at the turbolift.

"Wait for me!"

Fortunately she listened to him, but he doubted it had anything to do with him.

Astrometrics:

The smell wafting up from the cup in his hands was so strong, Craig thought that he wouldn't even need to drink it to stay awake. As soon as he reached the console he made an attempt anyway. The bitter taste hit him hard, it made him shudder.

"Ugh, how did Janeway drink this?" he said while putting it down.

The big screen was soon activated, the consoles in front of it woke up as well.

"Okay, lets..." he stalled for a long yawn. Once it was over he was mad at himself. "Really?" The cup was raised again. A few shudders later he attempted to start his work again. "Okay computer. Download the DNA scans from the Doctor's terminal."

The computer beeped in recognition. Seconds later the strange scan the Doctor showed him earlier appeared on the big screen. Craig thought it looked even worse than he

remembered. Many more like it appeared in different windows, most of which overlapped the older ones.

"Okay. Nice and simple. Computer, search the database for anything that matches these scans," Craig said. "Logs, medical files, incident reports. Anything." The amount of noise the computer made afterwards made him doubt it worked and that he'd get an error message. Since he didn't get one he assumed it was searching after all.

"No problem," he said with a smile. Another yawn was coming, so he went to grab his coffee again. The computer beeping stopped him before he could sip it.

"No results found," the computer reported.

Craig cringed slightly, his shoulders slumped in disappointment. "I thought that'd be too easy. All right." With his spare hand he tapped on the console, bringing up a small touch screen keyboard. Quickly he typed in some words, which appeared in a list above the letters.

Assault. Teenager. Strange DNA. His head shook at that one. *Inconclusive DNA test.* "Not enough," he muttered. *Garbled. Mismatched. Not possible. Broken. Glitched. Warped.*

He ran out of ideas. It was a long enough list he thought. For now. "Computer, search for..." Another word popped into his head. He didn't want to even type it, but he had to. It took him twice as long to write out the four letter word than it did to do the whole list. "Computer search the database for any Security cases that contain any of these words."

The computer made the affirmative beeps again. Craig sipped on his bitter drink while he waited. The big screen had opened up a new window, a list was slowly growing on it.

The doors opened behind him, he briefly looked behind him to see who it was. All he got was a brief blurry figure. Whoever it was appeared to be walking toward him already.

"You have a nice swanky office on the Enterprise to take advantage of, you know," Tom's voice said.

Craig didn't let that stop him from sipping on his drink. Now that it wasn't as hot it seemed to be even more bitter somehow. "Astrometrics has a nicer screen."

Tom laughed as he stood by his side. "Yeah, bigger you mean. I get square eyes looking at the little computers for too long."

"Is this the excuse we're going with?" Craig asked him in a bemused tone. "I thought it would be more fourth wall-y somehow."

Tom smirked, his attention went to the list the computer was building. "It's certainly good for exposition. What is this?"

"A last resort I guess," Craig replied honestly. "That weird DNA the Doc found. I thought it may have happened before. If it did, they may know why."

"Oh good idea," Tom said. "My own search has come up with nothing. Whoever did this is either not a crewmember or they're a sociopath going about their lives as if nothing happened."

Craig pulled a face at him, but that was mostly because of the coffee in his mouth. Once it was gone it did fade a little. "Or they're lying somewhere with their leg on the neck, has three noses, and purple sparkly skin... cos that's what I imagine when I see these DNA results."

"Really? I thought just a blob of goo," Tom smirked.

"Search completed," the computer interrupted.

Craig and Tom glanced back at the screen, Craig's disappointment from before was back. That slow building list now had two hundred and three entries in it. "Looks like I'm gonna have to narrow it down a bit."

Tom leaned over to peek at the words he had entered into the search. He briefly looked up at the screen. "Lets open one and see why it came up."

Craig nodded. The list was also on the screen by his fingers, so he tapped on one randomly. "Assault, check. Broken... leg. Yep," Craig muttered.

"Oops. Maybe we can alter the search to exclude certain words," Tom suggested.

"Or it has to have any of the DNA entries, get rid of *broken*," Craig added on. "How do I..."

Tom reached over to do that for him. The list disappeared and then started to load again. While they waited Tom sneakily took Craig's drink to take a sip. Craig noticed by the time he was drinking it. "Oh, did you get that from Janeway's database or something?"

"No," Craig answered but he didn't sound sure.

"Search completed," the computer said.

This time the list they ended up with only had two entries. The two men looked relieved. Tom smiled at him, "shall we start from the top?"

"Why not?" Craig smiled back. He tapped the first one on the list and then looked up, expecting it to appear on the big screen. All they both got was an Access Denied message. Both smiles were wiped from their faces. "What the hell?"

"Lets try the other one," Tom tried to sound optimistic. He reached over to the second one. They got the same message for that one too. "Well, who saw that one coming?"

Sickbay:

Two Security officers stood by the door, each keeping a close eye on the original patient's biobed. Yutan stood next to it, holding his daughter's hand tightly to his chest. The Doctor gave him a nod before walking away for him. His next destination was the only other occupied biobed, who's patient was merely sitting on it.

"Is that really necessary?" Jessie asked, gesturing to the guards.

"He still admitted to attacking her before that happened," the Doctor said.

Jessie passed him a cold stare briefly. She got rid of it before looking to James, who she noticed was staring towards the ground. "James?" she said softly.

"Is he okay?" he asked in a mumble.

The Doctor sighed and nodded. "Yes. He did have a concussion, which is child's play for me at this point."

"Even though he's an Erayan," Jessie said plainly.

"The symptoms and treatment are the same," the Doctor said just as plainly.

James slowly looked up to glance between them. "What's going on?"

"Oh, I was just surprised that the Doc still knows how to do his job. There must be room for the nosey wannabe detective subroutine, in between the singing like a prat and being rude ones, huh?" Jessie replied in a harsh tone.

"Yes, I had lots of room after I deleted the put up with Jessie complaining one," the Doctor said with a patronising smile on his face.

Jessie glared at him, he just continued to smile back. James looked between them a few times before giving up and looking back at the floor.

"I'm sorry," Jessie said, directed towards James. "The Doctor pissing me off shouldn't be getting in the way. How are you feeling now?"

"Headache's gone, I feel a bit calmer," James replied.

The Doctor's smile became a little nicer than the one he had before. "Yes, as usual I have to give you a stronger dose than anyone else."

"I'm sorry?" James said, his eyebrow raised. Jessie just shook her head.

"If you want to apologise for something, apologise for running out of here before I could do it," the Doctor said.

"No, I'm just sorry for what I did to Yutan. I dunno what came over me," James said.

Jessie smiled sympathetically. "It's okay, I think he understood you weren't well. It's obviously one of the symptoms of what's going on," she said, directing a *told you so* look at the Doctor.

"It's not the chip," he grunted.

James frowned at the Doctor. "The chip? Now that you mention it, it sure sounds it."

"It's not," the Doctor groaned. "Now, I recommend you remain in Sickbay until I can cure you permanently. I'll need to administer further doses to keep you like this." He walked away before anyone could argue.

Jessie scoffed and turned to James again. "He said it was activated the last time because he treated a head injury, not noticing it was there. I think he just forgot about it, accidentally activated it and he doesn't wanna admit it."

James smiled weakly, "yeah, maybe after the fight with the warlock."

Jessie reached forward to grab one of his hands. "I'll have to relieve the babysitter, but I'll come back once the kids are at nursery. Half an hour at most."

"Don't worry Jess, the kids are more important than me. Take your time," James said.

"I won't be that long," Jessie said.

James shook his head, "it's okay, I'm fine. As long as I don't think about it and the Doc remembers the drugs, I'm fine."

The doors opened. Craig hurried through them. The Doctor was the first to spot him, he walked quickly over to stand in front of him.

"Oh hey Doc, I'm just here to ask James something. Found anything?" Craig said.

The Doctor shook his head, "I'm afraid he's not well. You'll have to continue the case on your own."

"Oh," Craig looked worried. "Ok, er... tell him if he's up to it I may need his experti..."

"No, no. He's definitely not up to killing anything. What about Lena?" the Doctor said quickly.

Craig blinked a few times. "I said expertise. You know, hacking."

By this time James and Jessie had noticed him and were looking over.

"I'll tell him, but he's not allowed out until I say so," the Doctor said.

Jessie walked over with a curious look on her face. "Why do you need him so badly?"

"Sorry Jess, I just need some possibly related files unclassified, you know," Craig said, feeling a little guilty. "It's fine. Maybe Chakotay still has clearance. Tom's still trying, you never know. Excuse me." He rushed out faster than he came in.

"Classified files?" James said. The Doctor and Jessie glanced in his direction, the Doctor had a stern look on his face while doing so. "Maybe I could use your computer Doc..."

Jessie's eyebrow flickered up as the Doctor stuttered nervously, "ohno, I'm running a few things of my own on it. I'll need it... once it's fixed." Jessie looked a little nervous after he said that.

"Er, okay?" James said, his own eyebrow raised. "I could use the console I suppose, I just assumed that was the one that was being used."

"It is. It's running various DNA tests," the Doctor sighed.

Jessie rolled her eyes, then she turned back to James. "The reason the Doc's being evasive and weird is because he's been snooping on your personnel file."

"Really?" the Doctor groaned.

"Why?" James asked. Jessie was surprised he wasn't mad, at all. She tried to ignore it for now.

"It's hardly snooping when I have a patient having *flashbacks* and reacting to them. I need to know what to expect," the Doctor said.

Jessie stared at him with a disgusted expression that was only ever used when Annika was around. She glanced briefly at James to see if he was reacting the same. Her jaw dropped when she noticed he was just nodding like he agreed.

"Classified files don't just need a password, they need visual and audio proof from the person who owns the password," he said. "It was much easier to mess around with the system itself than try to trick it."

"Great, but you're still not leaving," the Doctor said.

Jessie rolled her eyes in his direction, then looked back at James. "I assume you have a point that shouldn't be rudely interrupted?"

"Um, yeah. I have a little program I made for things like this. It was definitely handy when mum put a Captain's only password on the replicator database," James said, smirking a little. "Took only a few seconds to delete the coffee."

Jessie smiled, then laughed at the memory. "Oh yeah. Those two days were funny."

James cleared his throat nervously, "yeah, I only did that once."

Jessie looked at him suspiciously, but she was still smiling while doing so. The Doctor meanwhile sighed, "that's nice but there's no way you can do that here."

"I know. I can tell Jessie where it is though," James said. He gestured his hand for her to get closer. He noticed the Doctor's eyebrow raise. "I don't want anyone else using it."

Jessie leaned in close so he could whisper a few words into her ear. She nodded. "Okay. It's easy for me to use, right?"

"Oh yeah, you just tell it to link to whatever you're trying to get into. Once it does that, you should be able to type in any old password," James answered.

"Okay, once I've done that I'll come right back here," Jessie said while nodding. She gave his cheek a kiss before she pulled away. "Take it easy. Okay?" He gave her an assuring nod and smile. It helped give her the push she needed to leave him alone with the Doctor.

Both of them watched her hurry out the door. The Doctor immediately gestured for him to lie down, which was met with a blank stare. "Fine," he groaned. James stared after him as he walked away, his eyes only narrowing when his back was on him.

Astrometrics:

Tom groaned in frustration as his latest password threw out another denied error. Not only that but it once again told him he had to wait five minutes before trying again.

"We're so close," Craig sighed.

"I know. I'm only the Commander of this ship, I don't have the clearance real Captains do," Tom groaned. He rubbed his hands across his face, hoping that would wake him up or calm him down. "I have one left. It's the one I was given to bypass the Security system we used at the beginning of the mission. I doubt it'll help us unlock highly classified victim reports."

Craig slowly looked back at the list they couldn't get access to. "I wonder why." Tom only grunted in response. "Why would any files detailing an attack or murder be classified to even Security officers?"

"I dunno. Usually it's high profile cases, or something that presents a larger risk to Starfleet," Tom groaned. "I'd usually be able to see those though. I have a feeling this is for Admiral eyes only."

"Right," Craig nodded, then he frowned. "Wait, what? We're talking about two assault cases. Unless there's an awful cover up involving a psychotic Admiral, or alien diplomat I guess, then we know the real reason this is classified."

Tom and him shared a knowing look. Tom weakly smiled. "Sounds like we're on the same page here." The computer beeped at him. "Oh, last chance time." He leaned over the console to try to press on one of the files. Once again it asked for clearance. He typed an overly long password into it.

"Specify name, rank and authorisation code," the computer responded.

Tom looked hopeful, Craig however was just confused. "You already put in a code," he whispered.

"Tom Paris, Lieutenant Commander. Gamma 742," Tom said.

They waited with their breaths held. Finally the computer responded positively. The two men sighed in relief. "Limited access authorised," it said, killing their relief almost instantly.

"Better than nothing I guess," Tom smiled at Craig. "That one was just for the anti-demonic boarding procedure. I wasn't to use it for anything else. Interesting how it has more jurisdiction than my own command codes."

"Hmm yeah," Craig said with suspicion tainting his voice.

The pair looked towards the big screen as one of the files they had tried to access was opening. They were a little disappointed at how little information there was. It took them just under a minute to read it all.

"Gee, look at that. It was a while ago," Tom said.

"2338, over forty years," Craig sighed. "None of this information tells us why it came up on our search."

Tom decided to read it all again to make sure. "It says the DNA tests on the victim were inconclusive." Craig looked a little embarrassed, he reached for his now cold coffee to finish it off. "It took them another nine months to get a lead. It would be nice if they told us how, we can't afford to wait that long."

Craig spotted something under the part that Tom would have just read. He tapped on the same part displayed on the station. Tom was about to object when a new window opened with the header *Arrest Conditions*. Most of the text appeared to be missing, as if it was deleted purposely to hide certain points. The two quickly scanned through it.

Tom started to read it aloud as he neared the end, he didn't even know he was doing it. *"It has been decided that the prisoner should be allocated immediately from the high security cells to the psyche ward, as soon as she is able. Further analysis to be completed on a tri-monthly basis. Oh god."*

Craig felt disgusted after reading all of that. "What about the last part?"

The doors opened. Jessie walked through them, immediately noticing the data on the screen.

Tom nodded. "Yeah, all of it is messed up. And that's the stuff that isn't classified. It's certainly not what I expected. It doesn't sound demony or Game Cube-y at all."

"So you got it open?" Jessie questioned as she approached, startling the two men.

"We did, kind of," Craig replied. Jessie stood beside him, staring quizzically in his direction. "It's limited. A lot of it is hidden."

Jessie looked up to read what they had just read, her face got more and more disgusted the further she went. "Hang on. The attacker here was an eighteen year old pregnant girl?"

Tom cringed, "um, that's not the worst part."

"Uh huh. Claims memory loss during the incident, examiners thinks she's nuts," Jessie mumbled as she read. "She gave birth in the prison's medical bay?"

Craig pressed one panel to turn that window off. The earlier one was brought back into focus. "The kid was put up for adoption while mummy was sent to a loony bin. Nobody won in this case."

Jessie briefly glanced at him, then Tom. The latter noticed the colour in her cheeks started to fade, her eyes glazed over. "Jess?" he said in concern.

She shook her head, "I'm fine. I'll just set up the hack James gave me. That should let us get everything." Tom watched her walk over to the far side of the station they stood at.

"Okay, I've been creeped out enough with this one. Lets have a quick look at the other," Craig said.

"No kidding. What possesses a teenaged girl to attack a twelve year old boy, like that? It's... eugh, forget it," Tom muttered. He gestured for Craig to hurry it up.

Craig quickly got rid of the file completely to bring up the list. He and Tom missed Jessie look back over her shoulder, her eyes widened. Craig tapped the second file and waited for it to open. When it did he and Tom were disappointed to find this one had even less information than the previous one.

"Is that it?" Tom groaned. "Fourteen year old girl attacked..." he winced, regretting his complaint. "And murdered. Suspects; none. A date. That's it?"

"This one won't be as much help to us," Craig said.

"Maybe it will if Jess can get in," Tom sighed. He read it again, "if they didn't catch him or her, I suppose it doesn't help. Maybe we should concentrate on the one that was solved." One detail got his attention. "Wait. The dates. They're not even close."

Craig looked as well. "2352, July 2nd. No kidding."

Jessie swung around in a blind panic, her face was a deadly shade of white now. "What did you say?"

Craig and Tom both jumped at her outburst and turned to her. Craig stammered a little, "uh, the date of the murder."

"No, what date...?" Jessie stuttered but she didn't wait for the answer. She looked up at the big screen to see for herself.

"Jessie?" Tom said carefully, then he noticed her shaking. "What's the matter?"

"The... the program just needs to be told where to... um, go, work rather..." Jessie stuttered, her hand meekly pointed at where she worked. "I gotta go." Before the two could argue, Jessie ran for the door.

Tom and Craig stared at each other. "What was that about?" Tom asked.

The door chime rang over and over, sometimes mercilessly and without pause. The occupant of the room continued to ignore it, or treat it as mere background noise. It didn't work so well, whoever was ringing wasn't giving up anytime soon. One command turned the music he was listening to up a few levels, and again until it was drowned out completely. He closed his eyes and hoped they'd get the hint.

Darkness had taken over the room. He had even managed to get the dim lights on the windows off. Once again his eyelids vibrated as they tried to close, which he didn't want. They tried again. He climbed up onto his feet to throw some more cold water in his face.

No sleep. Not now, not ever.

Before he could reach the bathroom door, the one leading to the corridor burst open. The light from the corridor burned his eyes, his first instinct was to squint. Thankfully the light didn't stay there for long. The door shut after somebody waltzed through them. Whoever it was, was just a blur to him what with the sudden light and the darkness cloaking them.

"What is this?" a familiar voice said shakily. It filled him with dread. She was the last person he wanted to talk to. "Why are you moping around in the dark?"

"Please Jessie. Not now," he said as forcibly as he could, but it just sounded self pitying.

He heard a brief sigh, her shadow moved forward. "You didn't report to duty today."

"It's my day off," he muttered while continuing for the bathroom. He braced himself for the small light he left on in there. It still stung his vision.

"That was yesterday," Jessie said.

Once his hands were full he brought them forward towards his face. The icy cool water splashed his face, aching it for a short moment. It did the trick for the time being, his eyes were far more alert. He noticed the music volume had been lowered, so he heard footsteps approach.

"This isn't like you," Jessie quietly said.

He wanted her gone. He wanted to be alone. Knowing Jessie, he knew it wouldn't be easy to do. "What, not being well? I should be alone."

"The Doctor's a bit grumpier lately but he'll still treat you," Jessie said.

The faint light was starting to make his eyes heavy again. He turned around to go back into the dark living room. However Jessie was standing in the door frame. She seemed a little shocked once they were facing each other.

"Jess, don't you have better things to do? I just need some rest. That's all I need," he said.

Jessie had trouble shaking off the image of him. He had no idea what he looked like himself, he didn't dare look into the mirror. Since he hadn't slept he assumed he looked how he felt. All the more reason to get the both of them back into the dark room. He tried to push his way through, half expecting her to stand her ground as she normally would. Instead she did move at the last second.

"Your face," she said once he was back into his hiding place.

He saw an opportunity to reassure her and to get her to leave. He tried his best to use his normal carefree voice to speak, "yes, it's still ruggedly handsome. A bit weird that you'd comment on it though."

Jessie remained at the door so he could still see her well enough. She didn't look fooled, she looked annoyed. "Did somebody attack you?"

The ache in his face shot back suddenly, his hand slowly reached up to touch it. His fingers brushed the broken line of skin, it stung at him to stop. His hand started to shake. "Leave. Please."

He saw her bite her bottom lip as she stepped forward. The door behind her closed, making the room completely dark again. It was only for a moment. It opened again. He assumed she didn't mean to let it do that and had moved back to her previous spot. "No. Before I... make up my own mind, or hear it from somewhere else..." her voice trembled viciously. "I want to hear it from you."

"I don't know what you mean," was his only reply.

"I only had a horrible feeling before. Circumstantial evidence that made me think of you," Jessie said sharply. Once those two sentences were out her composure seemed to fail her again, she trembled. "Then I saw your face. What happened?"

The silence was painful for the two of them. Jessie felt anger brewing at the surface, the only thing stopping it was that feeling of dread she felt in Astrometrics. The darkness and not being able to see who she was talking to wasn't helping.

"I don't know," he mumbled.

Jessie frowned, her eyebrow raised. "What do you mean you don't know?"

Tears threatened to fall. He instinctively blinked to stop them. All it did though was make his eyelids heavier. "I don't remember," his voice broke. It was little more than a whisper when he spoke again, "I went to bed some night, and when I awoke..." A gasp escaped him as his whole body threatened to break down. "I awoke in a nightmare."

Jessie stepped forward, cloaking them in the darkness once again. He could just make out her outline walk a little closer. "Tell me."

He looked at her with fear in his eyes, not that she could see it. "I can't," he managed to say in the middle of a sorrowful cry. "I don't remember. Why can't I remember?"

Jessie could just make out his figure in the dark as well, she could see him standing there grasping at his head. She heard him trying desperately not to cry. "We'll figure this out. Okay? You shouldn't be here on your own."

"You don't get it. What I've done. You wouldn't want to be around me," she heard him say in a calmer tone.

"I won't know until you explain it," Jessie said. She noticed his shadow move a little to the side. A sigh and snuffle told her he was still struggling. "I want to understand."

"Right. So you can help me?" he stuttered. Jessie sensed a little hesitation in his tone. "You can't help me."

"Maybe I can. I know what it's like, to..." she said.

To her surprise he laughed briefly, it wasn't nicely either. "Of course you do."

She flinched at the rude tone of voice he used. "What does that mean?"

"You know what everything's like. I'm starting to think you like being a busy body," he said, his voice strangely neutral despite what he said.

Jessie looked backward towards the main door, then back to the shadow ahead of her. "You just want me to leave. I'm not going to. What happened when you woke up?"

This time the silence was more unnerving than painful. She could see his form move around in the dark. She briefly looked at the door again, this time though she took a step towards it discreetly.

"The girl, Perla. What happened?" she asked.

She heard a sharpened inhale, he stopped pacing then. "Perla?" She saw him move on the spot, in the dark she had no idea what he was doing. "Oh god," he groaned, his voice overwhelmed by tears she thought. "She was hurt. Lying there. Not moving," his voice stuttering. "I ran away. I'm a coward."

The dread Jessie was feeling earlier took over completely, she subconsciously side stepped towards the door again. After a few of those she noticed it and forced herself to stop. "It's all right. I want to help. Just let me, please."

"You can't," his voice muttered. She thought it was her imagination. His words were definitely tainted by grief, and yet there was a subtle sound of anger within it.

"Why not?" Jessie asked.

As soon as she said that something pushed her backwards into the wall. She heard the impact before she felt it; a thud loud enough to make nearby objects vibrate. The pain followed, spreading from the middle of her back to her front. She involuntarily gasped at it, the pain of doing that on its own took her breath away. A heavy weight pressed against her chest and then her right arm. Laboured breath directly in front of her told her exactly what happened. It left her frozen, unsure of why and what to do.

"You're my sister," he snarled at her. Even in the dark she swore she saw a sneer on his face. It hurt her more than anything he had done before. "It's really too bad."

Before Jessie could respond she was pulled roughly forward, then she was falling. She hit the ground hard on her side. This time though she didn't feel any pain from it. Everything was a blur. All she could think about were the last few words he spoke to her, repeating over and over again. She imagined his face as he said it. It made her shudder with revulsion. Doing so brought a little of the pain back to her. Not only that but the sound of footsteps casually approaching her.

"You'd be perfect otherwise. You have stones, I like that," his voice said. It was close, too close. Jessie tried to drag herself away from it but she felt hands grab a hold of one of her arms and the small of her back. She kicked backwards, hoping to hit his leg. Eventually she did, it made him lose his grip for a moment. It gave her time to scramble onto her hands and knees.

It wasn't enough time to stand up again though. An arm flew in front of her neck, he pulled it and her closer to him. Another hand immediately clasped over her mouth. She struggled in the grip, her voice muffled through the hand.

"Shh, shh, shh!" he whispered mockingly. "If you hadn't come here to try to rescue me again..." Before he could finish she nipped one of his fingers with her teeth. The hand instinctively moved away. The arm didn't, she still attempted to pull away though. He responded by angrily throwing her to the floor again. "You see, right there. That's your problem! That's why we're doing this."

Jessie pulled herself into a sitting position before attempting to get up. It didn't matter though. He was already crouching in front of her, blocking her escape.

"Since you were here first, you once again solved it before the others," he said in a patronising voice. "Typical Jessie. Sticking her nose in, playing at the hero. What's wrong, a little bored at home?"

"Stop it," Jessie growled at him. She could see the smirk he did afterwards. "You're not him. So don't pretend you know me."

He laughed in her face, then had the cheek to lean in even closer so they were nose to nose. She recoiled in disgust. "How wrong you are. This *is* me."

"But why? You care about everybody. You're so lighthearted, carefree. This isn't in your nature," Jessie stuttered.

The laugh she got made her cringe. "Isn't that a little suspicious? Considering all the family you've ever known had a secret agenda, a little drama to add to your life. Weren't you a little wary of the oh so charming big bro that wouldn't hurt a fly?"

Keep talking, she thought. You're only making it easier.

"You know, I'm a little mad that you're making me do this," he said. By his tone Jessie sensed he really believed he was being forced. "Everything was nice and neat. You're the reason for it too. It's a shame, but..." He was interrupted by a nasty back hand. It knocked him off his balance, one of his hands had to press against the floor to get it back. She wasn't done though, her knee flung up to strike at his ribs. It pushed him all the way to the floor.

Now was the time to get away from him. She scrambled to her feet while ignoring all of the pain she was in. She was right at the door when a hand slammed on the door panel beside it, locking her in. As she had been about to break into a run, she almost slammed into the metal doors. She was once again grabbed, this time by both arms and flung onto the ground face first.

His body leaned in close, too close. She could feel his breath at the back of her neck. He still had a hold of her arms, one seemed to loosen while the other yanked her upwards. That hand roughly rolled her over to face him.

"I... I can't let this come out. You understand," he said coldly.

She had the perfect comeback in mind, he was in a good position for another kick. Only before she could do any of these things he grabbed at her throat with both hands. It took her by surprise, by the time she thought to fight back her body was too weak to respond.

He was close enough for her to just make out a smile on his face. Everything else around him started to blur, it was even managing to get darker somehow. "I can't wait to see how the Slayer reacts to this. Should be good for a laugh." Even his voice blurred, it echoed over the top of the music he had left playing.

"Why wait?" another voice said faintly amongst the noise.

The tight sensation around her neck loosened, she was able to breath again. She could still feel hands on her throat. Her vision was slowly clearing up. That was when she noticed the room was no longer dark, light was coming from somewhere. There was a dark chuckle from in front of her.

"Do you really want to do that? Can't risk having another sob-athon in front of the missus, right?"

There was something next to his head. Jessie could see it clearly now. It had a sharp edge and was made of metal. The point was poking into the side of his forehead, one tiny nudge and it'd penetrate the skin. The new light made it difficult, but still she forced her eyes to follow the blade to the handle. She had no idea why, she knew who was holding it.

"Come on James," he said, as if on cue. "You owe me, remember? I saved your life."

"Yeah," the other voice said. The blade moved away slightly, rotating as it did, showing off its width. It swung back the way it came twice as fast. Jessie quickly closed her eyes and tried to yell at him to stop, but nothing came out of her mouth. There was a loud bang, it sounded like a body hitting the floor.

Jessie opened her eyes reluctantly, fearing the worst. By the time she did somebody new was kneeling beside her, an arm gently moved over her shoulders. A body lay on his side in front of her. She quickly looked him over. Apart from a slight scratch on his temple, there didn't seem to be anything wrong with him. The area around it looked a little red, that was it. Her head turned to her right to look at her rescuer.

"It's okay. I barely bumped him with the blunt part," James said quietly.

"How... how did you know?" she could only stutter.

He briefly bowed his head, "Tom called me. Are you okay?"

That was a good question and a bad one at the same time. She had no answer for him.

Sickbay:

The whole room stood or sat around quietly, each silently wondering what to say. Tom wasn't one to keep the silence but the best he could do was blab out a few um's and well's. He was thankful for the door opening after a few minutes of that. Craig entered through them.

"I've moved our warlock wannabes into the Enterprise brig. He's in ours," he said. "Any reason why?"

Tom shook his head, "quicker access to treatment with... whatever the hell he has. I mean, what is going on?" He looked around at everyone curiously. All but the Doctor returned his stares with blank ones. He focused on Jessie as she was still being fussed over by the tutting hologram. "You figured it out. I was joking about the master detective thing."

"What?" she could only say.

Craig cleared his throat nervously. "The files we were looking at tipped her off. I looked at them again and I have no idea why."

James had been focusing on Jessie when he said that, he then looked towards him instead. "Did the program work?"

"Er I dunno yet. It's still running," Craig replied nervously. "We managed to get some limited access, that's what she saw or heard."

Tom was more than curious. "None of it screamed Nathan. What made..."

Jessie shuddered, her eyes shut. "No, no. Stop. It's not him."

Craig and Tom looked at each other, confused. "But he attacked you, James knocked him out," Tom stammered.

Jessie sighed impatiently. The Doctor did as well for different reasons. "He may look like him but that is not Nathan. Something else is going on."

"Yeah but something tipped you off, what..." Tom said. James directed a glare towards him, shutting him up immediately. "Okay, we'll be over here," he said, gesturing to the office. He shuffled away. Craig assumed he meant him, so he followed.

"Ah good. I was one minute away from throwing them out myself," the Doctor remarked irritably.

James stared at him briefly. The EMH only noticed it when James' attention returned to Jessie. The hologram reacted to this stare as if he had said something rude.

"You saw him... that was not him," Jessie said directly to James, in a hushed voice. He only nodded. It was an agreement but it still sparked outrage from her as if he didn't. "He... he was upset, moping around in his quarters. He said things. Then he changed. It wasn't instant, he'd go back and forth. It wasn't until he attacked me that..."

"What you're suggesting isn't possible. Apart from a head wound and a few slight bumps, he was normal. Just a bit fatigued," the Doctor said.

James again looked at him. This time though the Doctor noticed it sooner, and was able to see the wariness in his eyes. "How did you have time to find that out?"

The Doctor scoffed to show his offense. "It's standard procedure to tend to any prisoners you deal with."

"Surely Jessie needed your attention first. He was unconscious, he wasn't going anywhere," James said.

"Yes but I had no way of knowing if your means of making a man unconscious had done any lasting damage," the Doctor said irritably.

It was Jessie's turn to stare at him, she gave him a frown. "It was a reasonable question. We came straight here. What's your problem?"

The Doctor sighed while he finished off treating her arm. "Perhaps I am tired of all the violence. It never ends on this ship." He walked away, shaking his head.

Jessie slowly turned her head towards James. She tried to look him in the eye but she couldn't, she felt like she didn't deserve to. "I'm sorry."

He was more than surprised at that, he shook his head, bemused at it. "What on earth for?"

"It just keeps coming. One thing after another," Jessie mumbled her answer. Before she knew it she was staring down at her lap, the head on her shoulders felt much heavier now.

James reached for one of her hands. "How is that your fault?"

Jessie shook her head timidly, the smirk forming on her face was directed inwardly. "My depression, the pregnancy. Time travel, paradoxes. Warlocks trying to kill us. My mother's reaction to you. Now my brother." The last sentence made her voice crack. "My brother," she said through tears.

James' other arm wrapped around her shoulders, he stepped forward as far as he could. She didn't feel like she deserved it but he held her close anyway, her head nestled into his chest while she cried. One of his hands reached up to stroke her hair.

"What kind of moronic, self absorbed idiot would blame you for any of those things?" he asked softly. "You'd scold me if I had said that, why should you get away with it?" She laughed briefly through a gap in the tears, but they still kept coming. "You were the victim in all of those, so... I don't get it. So why are you saying sorry?"

Jessie thought of many ways to answer that, each one sounded more stupid than the last. There was only one way to do it, and she couldn't, not yet. She still had to do it, somehow, no one else could. That particular thought made her panic, she pulled away to look into his face. "You're not going to be the one to talk to Nathan, are you?"

He flinched at the question, his eyes darted elsewhere. That told her the answer before he even said it. "He attacked you. I want to know why."

I know why, she thought to herself. She squeezed the hand still holding one of hers with her other one, her eyes pleaded with his. "James, you can't. You're not well, you felt awful for what you did to Yutan cos of it. This will be worse."

"Yeah but we know him, he's family. I can't ask Craig to do it," James said.

"That's exactly why you should ask him. You're too close to this. Please," Jessie begged him. James looked at her with great concern, she rarely spoke to him like this. The times she did were a matter of life and death, usually death. This felt worse though, far worse. There was a nagging feeling in her gut that if she let go of him, something horrible would happen.

James slowly looked over to the office where Tom and Craig stood. They appeared to be talking quickly at each other, Craig had a panicked look on his face while he did it. "I'll talk to him," he said, before turning his head back towards Jessie. "It's okay, we'll get through this." She nodded but the feeling she had didn't fade, it grew bigger.

Meanwhile Tom had gestured his hands in front of him to hint that Craig should stop talking. They looked to Craig like a surrender pose more than anything else, so he didn't. "Hold on," Tom said it more vocally this time.

"Tom, this is serious," Craig stuttered.

Tom sighed irritably, "you're talking way too fast. Slow down, start again."

Craig's eyes looked over to James and Jessie in the main part of Sickbay, then returned back to Tom. "You just don't want to believe it." Tom shook his head irritably. "Those files do have a commonality, don't you see it?"

"No, no I don't," Tom groaned. "You've just dropped not one but multiple tonnes of bricks on me. I don't even know where to start."

"The first attack was forty four years ago. Nine months later the culprit is caught checking into a hospital. She gave birth to a boy in the prison's medical facility," Craig said, his voice turned into a whisper near the end. "The kid is not sent to the father, and instead is immediately adopted. I thought that was weird so I checked. Guess who the father was?"

Tom pulled a face that was both disgusted and very worried. "The kid she attacked?" Craig's widened eyes and furious nod answered him. "Okay, I still don't see how this relates to Nathan, and since you and Jessie got there long before me, I'm a little worried."

"He's the baby, Tom," Craig hissed while checking on the pair in Sickbay. Tom's jaw dropped, he feared it would fall out completely. "That will be why Jessie thought of him."

"Yeah but..." Tom protested once he could close his mouth again.

"So now you see what the two files have in common? This is huge," Craig stuttered.

Tom felt the blood drain from his cheeks, making his whole face tingle with dread. His chest thumped furiously. For once there was nothing he could say.

"Must you talk about this in my office? It has nothing to do with any of my patients," the Doctor complained. His voice made the pair jump out of their skin. He looked at them impatiently, like they were sitting in his chair or getting in the way of a treatment. They hadn't yet recovered so they didn't register it. He huffed and walked around his desk to sit in the chair.

Tom was the first to recover. He eyed the hologram with an annoyed look of his own. "Why don't we compare any DNA samples you may have gotten from Jessie, see if they match our first victim."

The Doctor chuckled at him as if he was a random crewmember telling him how to use a hypospray. Tom looked offended and a little suspicious. "You don't think I thought of that already? No, of course they're not a match."

"Of course, not?" Craig said with an identical expression to Tom's. Before the Doctor could respond to that a thought popped into Craig's head. "It was your idea to take him off the suspects list. Is there something you want to tell us?"

Tom looked on with interest, while the Doctor glanced between the two calmly. "I didn't want to bring it up yet as I wasn't fully sure, but yes there is," he answered.

"Well?" Tom said with more impatience than he intended.

The Doctor sighed, his eyes glided over towards the main part of Sickbay where James and Jessie were. When they returned he noticed only Tom had followed his gaze, Craig's gaze remained fixed on him. "You have your suspect, I have mine. On one side we have somebody who was born from a horrific assault on a twelve year old, lost his best friend in similar circumstances, who's gentle and optimistic. On the other you have a child abuse victim with severe anger issues, repeated violent offenses including murder and..."

Craig briefly laughed, cutting him off. Both Tom and the Doctor focused their attention on him while he tried to maintain his composure. Seeing their worried and worst of all, serious faces helped him out. The look of dismay replaced his previous one. "Wait, you're serious? Are you freaking kidding me!"

"Deadly serious it seems," Tom stuttered. "Why did Nathan attack Jessie then?"

"That's the only problem with this scenario?" Craig said, his voice showed his mortification. "It makes no sense. I can't even believe you're entertaining this idea."

"The attacker got in undetected, the evidence was destroyed just in case. Whoever did the attack threw the girl around like she was nothing. The telepathy incident; there was no link, yet he had a reaction anyway. It wouldn't be the first time he faked a telepathy incident to hide his crimes," the Doctor said. Craig shook his head and started pacing backwards and forward. "The reaction to the crime; disgust at it, or a guilty conscience? As for Jessie... well, the room was in darkness. Who can say who really attacked her? Only two men were in the room with her and one is unconscious."

"This is crazy," Craig spat at him. He looked at Tom and was shocked to see him acting as if he believed him. The look of horror on Tom's face was obvious to him. "No, really? You've known James for eleven years, me personally for nine. He's been my friend for most of those years. Yeah he is violent sometimes, but 99% of the time it's to protect people he cares about. He's the last guy who would violently beat a teenaged girl half to death, let alone try to... god. What's the matter with everyone?"

"What?" Jessie stuttered from the doorway.

Everyone cringed at her voice. Not one of them dared to even look at her. Even though he was doing the defending, Craig felt the worst about it.

"I wondered what all the yelling was about, and it's this?" Jessie said in disgust. "After all these years... this is what you think of us. Him a ruthless murderer and attempted rapist, and me the lying scumbag who protects him... or maybe a battered wife too afraid to speak out?"

"No. We don't think that," Tom said nervously.

"Your reaction says otherwise," Jessie said to him, with a little fire in her eyes. It grew as she focused on the Doctor. "This explains your attitude towards him, and even me lately I suppose. Maybe have the stones to say it to our faces next time."

"Jessie..." Craig tried to calm her down.

"It's okay Craig. I heard," Jessie said in his direction, the anger dissipated as she did. It came back full force once she looked away from him and eyed the Doctor and Tom. "If either of you really knew what James has been through, you wouldn't accuse him of this. You should be ashamed of yourselves. You know what... go to hell." She didn't wait for a response, she stormed out of the office.

"Excuse me. I don't think I can listen to more of this either," Craig said. He walked out as well. He was surprised to find Jessie not far in front of him, he nearly walked into her. She was staring towards the biobed she sat on earlier with a look of horror on her face. "What's the matter?"

"James. He was here," Jessie stuttered.

Craig walked over towards the biobed slowly. He didn't have to reach it to see a discarded commbadge lying on it. "Nathan?"

"No. He trusted you with it," Jessie shook her head, her head gestured towards the Ready Room. "I heard, he must have too. He's ill, this is the last thing he needed to hear."

"You weren't with us for long, he couldn't have gotten far," Craig said in a hopeful voice.

The pair headed for the door, just passing Tom as he stood at the office doorway. He gave the Doctor a nod before hurrying out after them. "Wait!"

"Yeah right," Jessie grumbled. She continued running down the corridor, but Craig stopped to partly turn towards him.

"If he knew, if he thought we were onto him, he'd make it hard for us," Tom whispered.

"What the hell are you talking about?" Craig snapped.

Tom glanced at the Sickbay doors and back again. "Someone had to believe him. It's much more believable if one of us didn't."

Craig's anger faded, "you mean...?"

Tom nodded and smiled. "I'll deal with the Doc. We have our suspect locked up. It's only damage control that's left now."

"Right," Craig said with a little relief in his voice. He hurried after Jessie, who was long gone into a turbolift by now.

He never imagined that he'd be in this situation. He didn't see it coming. There were so many questions swimming in his head, they overlapped the anger he was feeling at that very moment. It didn't even feel real. There was no way that he would be standing on this side of the forcefield, staring at this particular person on the wrong side. Not for anything, definitely not something like this.

Only he was. Before he could ask anything he had to get his head around it. If someone had told him that these two would be standing here for this, he would have laughed in their faces.

James did not expect any of this.

When he arrived he had new expectations, similar to what he saw earlier. Those were dashed once again. Instead of aggressive taunts and vicious out of character insults, he got what he would have expected if he hadn't walked in on him trying to choke the life out of his own sister. A confused and very nervous man, looking bewildered at being locked up. James understood that feeling all too well. He still couldn't understand how they had gotten to this point.

"James, good. Maybe you can tell me why I've woken up in here," he said.

There was a similar look of derision from the two guards at the computer. One glance from James told them to leave them alone. They were eager to follow this order. It took him a while though to think of what to say to him.

"Please tell me it's a mistake."

He wished it was. It felt like the only explanation right now. James walked closer to the forcefield in between them. The other man's face trembled, his wide eyes appeared to be racked with guilt. It made this all the more worse.

"Oh god, say something. Anything."

"I think you know already, Nathan," James said finally. It hurt to say it, physically and mentally.

His head shook defiantly, his expression still betrayed him. "No. No I don't."

"Then maybe you can tell me what happened," James said as patiently as he could. Inside the anger was bubbling beneath the confused surface. Maybe if he got some answers, it could tame it. "What were you doing before waking up here?"

"I... Jessie came to see me," Nathan answered as if he was unsure. "We were talking."

"Why, what about?" James reluctantly asked.

He knew that question would trigger something in Nathan. His whole body tensed. "I've been having some rough days. She was worried I guess."

"Then what happened?" James asked.

"Nothing. I woke up here," Nathan answered as his voice began to shake. "I, what did I do this time?" James heard him whisper as if to himself.

"What do you mean by that?"

Nathan seemed surprised he was heard, it made him even more tense and nervous. "No, nothing."

His response angered James more than he liked, he closed his eyes and clenched his jaw briefly to let it run its course. His body trembled as it usually would when he did. Once it was over, the nervous look on Nathan's face triggered it again. "Nathan. Understand that I'm giving you the chance here, the chance to tell me everything you know before I..." He sighed as he noticed his voice was raising. "Before I treat you like anyone else accused of this."

"I do understand that," Nathan said with shame. "What is it that I'm accused of?"

He had been avoiding it, but Nathan seemed to be as well. James had a feeling it would have to be him that would bring it up. "I walked in on you trying to strangle your sister." The horrified gasp he got for that made him regret that immediately. He had to soldier on though. "What were you really talking about Nathan?"

"No, oh god no," Nathan's voice cracked, his head shook over and over. He looked very pale, his hand had instinctively covered his mouth. "I... why?" He attempted to look James in the eye, they were filled with pain and strangely enough confusion as well. "How the hell are you keeping this together? Why aren't you in here, interrogating me old school? You're giving me a chance instead, why?"

James didn't want to run through all the reasons again, especially not out loud. The only one that came to mind immediately was the disbelief over the situation. Nathan's reaction to what he told him strengthened that feeling. "What happened Nathan?" was all he could say, as sternly as he could.

"I can't. I was telling her, I was going to tell her," Nathan stammered. He recoiled as if he had to stop himself from being sick. "Then it happened again. It may do it again if I..."

"What happened again?" James asked, his voice raised in anger.

Nathan made eye contact with him again while his bottom lip trembled, his fists clenched. He forced a laugh before speaking, "you don't want to know. I... I don't even..." His eyes glazed over for a while. "I didn't want to know either."

"What does that mean?" James asked.

The forced laughter continued. It got a little bit irritating, James noticed he had subconsciously closed his hands and tightly too. "Why does it matter? You saw me do it. Why bother?"

"Why?" James said mostly out of bemusement, it came out louder than he thought. "Because it makes no sense Nath. Surely you'd want to know what made you do this? Especially now that your sister is involved. Work with me here. All you're doing now is fighting against me."

"Nobody wants to do anything like that," Nathan said, strangely in a lighter tone than before. It threw James off a little, as before when he entered the room. "Why do *you* think this happened, huh? Come on, I'm curious."

James shook his head irritably. "Fine. From what Jessie told me and your *I woke up here* comments, I thought outside manipulation, possession. The usual."

"So it didn't occur to you that maybe the guy with the past, the one who joined Slayer training for fun, would just lose his temper?" Nathan asked like he was annoyed. His eyebrows both raised, "well?" He stepped as close to the forcefield as he could. "Come on, as a fellow kid with a tortured past, surely it occurred to you?" he said a little too irritably to be real. James felt like it was being faked.

"If you want or need to be mad at yourself, do it in your own time. I just want to know how long these memory lapses have been happening," he said.

"Wow, you fell for that old trick?" Nathan groaned and rolled his eyes. He strolled to the back of the cell. "I actually thought you were better than that."

James was expecting, or hoping the conversation would go this way. He could deal with this. "Oh, so we're done pretending now? Why don't we save each other some aggro, and cut to the part where you tell me who the hell you are."

All he got was laughter, and a lot of it. When Nathan swung around to face him his demeanour had changed completely. The tears were long gone, his skin had its colour back. The smile he had on his face was a one he hadn't seen before. It couldn't have been more obnoxious if he tried. "Who the hell am I? I'm Nathan Andrews, remember?"

"Like hell you are," James said bitterly.

The smile lingered, his eyes made it more like a smirk. "Poor Jessie fell for it too. Look where it got her." He knew what he was doing, he was obviously trying to anger him further. James was determined not to be played like that, like he always was. "Took you a while to get to her, didn't it? Though you're always a little too late."

He didn't want him to see the effect that had on him. James tried to look and sound bored when he spoke next, "enough of this, it's not working." The brief eyebrow raise told him that the fake Nathan wasn't buying it. "Just tell me cos I'm not falling for it. Who are you? What do you want?"

"What you probably want but won't admit to," he answered plainly. "Since we're so close I can go finish the job I started. Maybe smack her around some more, as we both know if you did it, there wouldn't be much left of her pretty face. Would there?"

"You're... you're just trying to get me mad, but what I don't get is why," James said as he tried to hold everything back. He kept trying to tell himself that this wasn't the same guy talking to him. Nathan was here moments ago, he couldn't risk doing anything that would hurt him. "It won't work."

The man in front of him scoffed, he followed that up with a condescending smile in his direction. "Oh, you've changed? How could I forget," he said mockingly. His eyes lit up as if he figured something out, but that was also faked. "Oh, probably because I blinked and missed the proof of this. I mean you're still killing people and beating them into a pulp. Unless! Don't tell me you were worse before?"

"Here we go," James just groaned like he was bored. Internally he was screaming for him to stop.

"Or maybe you're worse now," Nathan said and then nodded. "Yes. Before you'd turn evil and kill the ones that wronged you. Now you just cut out the middle man and do it all, and more, yourself. Yeah, that is better." He laughed as James tried not to flinch at his words, but failed. "I bet daddy is very proud of his biggest accident, hmm?"

"Stop it. You're changing the subject, you're..." James snapped.

"I wonder what Debbie thinks of you now," Nathan said with a put on sad sigh.

His hand touched the panel beside the forcefield, the fingers tapped at it. James didn't realise he did it, he didn't even think about doing it. The forcefield was down before he had even noticed. This brought smug satisfaction to the other man's face. He didn't move to take advantage of it. He just continued to stare him down while he walked through where the field was.

"Don't you dare. Don't you dare mention her," James said, almost growling by the end.

Nathan just laughed at him. "No, you never want to talk about her, do you? Is that because you have nothing to say?"

"What?" James muttered.

"Come on!" Nathan laughed brazenly. "You didn't even know her. What is there to talk about, other than your involvement in her death?"

That hurt more than James would ever like to admit. He tensed up, hoping that it wouldn't show. "None of that is true. I'm not here to talk about my sister, or me. You attacked Jessie, your sister. All of this is just wasting my time."

"You're wrong. It's always been about you. You have no idea the effect you have on everyone around you," Nathan said, his tone had darkened. The subject had angered

him. "If I'm wrong, tell me, what do you remember about Debbie? Huh? No chickening out, no moping... cos like you said, it's not about you, is it?"

"Then why are you so desperate for my point of view?" James asked, prompting Nathan to grunt angrily. "I want to know what's going on, not be messed around cos you fancy a laugh."

"I knew it. You've got nothing," Nathan sniggered but he was still annoyed with him.

"Three years and you couldn't be bothered to learn one thing about her. In a few months I learned about my sister's past, her hobbies, her quirks and I..."

"Beat her up and tried to kill her. Yeah, you win," James said while rolling his eyes.

Nathan chuckled darkly. "Well I also learned she can be a nosey pain in the ass, a meddler. I already warned her about coming to my *rescue*. She acts like she has so much to prove, but little to show for it. Surely even your self absorbed self has noticed that particular trait."

"Oh, I'm the one that doesn't know my sister. Right. Next you'll be telling me your sister loves dresses and running through a field of flowers," James muttered.

"I'm sure your sister would love that, if you hadn't made her a cold corpse in the ground," Nathan said as bluntly as possible. He smirked at James as he tried to stop trembling in anger, his fists were clenching so tightly his nails had pierced the skin. "All you have to do is respect her for once in your life and say one thing. You can't even do that. What is that, guilt or are you really that *me, me, me*?"

"I was just a kid," James said through gritted teeth. Nathan nodded as if he got his answer, and it was what he thought. "But I still remember her like I saw her yesterday. She always had a smile on her face, nothing seemed to bother her. Is that..."

Nathan snorted into laughter, cutting him off. James was more annoyed at himself for jumping through his hoops than that. He should have known better. "Is that what helps you sleep at night? Sure, keep thinking that."

Now he was annoyed at him instead. He directed a glare towards him, its usual effect was lost on Nathan though. He was too busy sniggering. "Maybe you'd like to share what's so bloody funny, huh?"

"Oh, I really would," Nathan sighed to stop himself from laughing. He smiled at him with some menace in his eyes. "I really could."

"You know what, I don't care. I don't know who or what you are, but you're certainly not Nathan. He's the only one I'd want to hear about my sister from. You're just wasting my time, I'm going," James said.

He turned to walk out of the cell. He had barely took a step when he saw movement in the corner of his eye. James swung back around, only to be pushed back first into the nearby wall. An arm was thrust into his throat. It all happened so quickly, without a pause, he was stunned for a moment. The face staring at him while this was happening didn't help matters.

That moment was only a couple of seconds, to James it may as well have been minutes. He grabbed his arm, while the other flew up to push him away. What he didn't see until it was flying up by his face, was an object in Nathan's other hand. He only noticed it was

silver before it was impaled into the side of his forehead. He felt every bit of it crawl deeper into his brain, sending painful shocks all through his head. He even felt it in his eyes. They had to close, and yet he could still see everything.

As the room span around him, and at times straight through him, the weight holding him pulled away. The wall no longer supported him. He felt weightless for a moment. He only heard it, his body slamming to the ground. He heard laughter echoing all around him as his sight blurred so much, he could make nothing out.

That was until that face hovered in front of him, smirking maliciously. It was the last thing he saw before everything faded into a piercing white.

Even though he couldn't see it, he still felt like something was spinning. Only it was him, his body involuntarily slouched from one direction to another.

The bright light had forced his eyelids to scrunch even closer together. It seemed to work, the light was easing. The dizziness was fading as well, he could feel the ground beneath his feet despite the odd sensation of falling before. His body still swayed as he tried to focus on the ground. The pain coursing through his head was still there, his eyes stung a lot more now they were tightly closed. He forced them open with a little resistance. He expected to still see Nathan, or the person badly pretending to be him, laughing at him. That wasn't even close to what he saw.

It took everything he had not to let his knees buckle and drag him to the floor. The longer he looked around the harder it got. The light golden walls, that old red sofa that used to swallow anyone who sat in it, the lined up antique wooden furniture that created a passage in between this room and the bedrooms. He found himself looking down at the floor at the soft carpet, the one he used to imagine the shapes were animals at the zoo or ships flying to planets and other things, anything to distract him from where he really was.

Everywhere he looked, he was hit by painful memories. He had only spent a tiny portion of his life there, and yet he remembered every little detail of it.

Why, what's happening?

A little girl laughed from the direction of the sofa. James was so sure his heart had not only stopped, but had leapt up into his throat. He couldn't breathe for a moment. He didn't want to but he found he was looking over anyway. There was movement coming from the seated side. He stared from the other side, just making out the top of a head. Brown scruffy hair.

Maybe I imagined that laugh.

Then he heard it again, as well as a boy's. He carefully walked a little closer, slowly. Then somebody rose from the sofa, the sunlight shining through the window caught on her long blonde hair. That smile on her face, the sparkling blue eyes. It felt as if somebody just as strong as him was punching him over and over. The lump in his throat throbbed.

"Debbie," he whispered.

The young girl no older than ten years old giggled towards the sofa, her arms folded as she put on a fake scowl. There was further laughter from the boy.

"Ha, that's just like him all right," he said in between them.

"Yup. I told him to remove the stick from his bum, and he was all *grr, me man, you woman, do the dishes,*" Debbie continued to laugh until her face was red. She stopped for a while, her eyes still showed she was amused though. "Did daddy give you the speech before he let you in again?"

James turned his back on all of this, he had to focus on something else until it went away. Maybe if he closed his eyes and tuned it out, this bad dream would end sooner.

"No, he must be in a good mood cos he just glared at me today," the boy answered with a laugh.

"That just means he likes you," Debbie said in a serious tone. "Daddy may be a grumpy sod lately, but he's harmless."

"Yeah right," the boy said, echoing what James was thinking to himself.

The pair continued talking and laughing while James stood there, trying not to fall apart at any second. Tuning them out wasn't working. It wasn't going away either, it even felt like it was real. If it were a dream or a vision, something would have happened as it normally would have. They all ended the same way; death and pain. This was too happy to be a nightmare. It couldn't be real though. As if on cue Debbie laughed so carefree.

He tried to figure it out. Maybe it was a nightmare, it just hadn't gotten to the point yet. Perhaps the vision was giving him a hint about something else, and again was about to turn sour at any second. It couldn't be anything else. He was attacked, something hit his head...

"No, Nathan!" Debbie screeched. James turned around quickly towards the source. By the time he did he heard laughter coming from both of them. The boy had ran off to the window, holding a model starship. She followed him until he opened the window and gestured the model outside.

"Don't be silly Debs. This is a boy's toy, you can't have it," the boy said while glancing briefly at her. In that moment James saw his face. He was thirty years younger, but it was definitely Nathan's. He had that same playful grin and scruffy hair, it was unmistakably him. "Only dollies and cooking stuff for you," he teased while the model hovered in the gap of the window.

"I'll cook you if you throw that, try me," Debbie said just as playfully.

There was a light tapping behind James, it came from the next room. The two children just continued to laugh and throw playful insults at each other. One of the doors lay parallel to the antique furniture creaked open. James mentally kicked himself for turning his head to look. A woman entered through the door and immediately scowled at the kids at the window.

"You two... come on. If you're going to let the cold in, at least play outside," she scolded them, though it was obviously said without anger. "Close that, I'll replicate some of my chocolate chip cookies."

The boy excitedly slammed the window shut, the woman flinched a little but kept her smile. "Well someone's lost first dibs privileges," she teased.

Debbie snatched the toy back from him, sticking her tongue out. He ran over to the woman anyway. As he did there was another tap behind James, this one seemed louder and it lasted longer.

Debbie looked almost in James' direction, he caught his breath for a second, he felt a panic surge through him. He feared he could be seen. However she ran for the door just next to him. Once she had gone through it he was able to breathe back out.

The sound of a door opening, then muffled voices followed as if they were a few rooms away. He knew there was only a passage through that door, that wasn't possible. He didn't understand a word of it, but he felt like the new voice was familiar even if he could barely separate the two.

"Daddy!" he heard Debbie yell, startling him once again. His hand reached for the door handle, he just brushed the surface of it when he stopped himself. "Someone's at the door!"

James took a few steps away from the door, all the while staring at his hand. The handle was tangible, it felt real. *That still doesn't mean this isn't a dream. Come on, what else would it be?*

The woman moved out of the way of the door, gently guiding young Nathan away from it by touching his shoulder. Somebody new entered the room through it, this time a man.

His confusion over the situation, the anxiety he felt from seeing his big sister again, the thoughts rushing through his head trying to figure things out, all melted away in an instant. A wave of fear hit him full on as the man walked in his direction. The dark eyes, hair, the tightened scowl on his face. Even the way he walked. Seeing all of that made James' chest tighten so horribly, it took all the strength he had not to curl up in a ball in the corner and wish for it to be over.

Thankfully the man walked by him as if he wasn't there. And he wasn't, he told himself. Not long after he disappeared through the door James could still feel his startled heart thumping through his chest. He was annoyed with himself. How after all these years and with the knowledge that he was stronger than him, did his twice dead, once by his own hand, father still frighten him so much?

The raised voices coming from the passage brought him out of his shell, and back into this not reality. The woman was no longer in the room as well by the time he did. Debbie had returned though, which brought back the other feelings of anxiety he had been suffering.

Then he noticed her face, it was as if she was looking right at him. Her eyes were wide and in pain, she was very worried, likely about the raised voices from the other room. The younger Nathan walked over to give her a smile, which she returned weakly. He held her hand so he could lure her over to the sofa, which now James could see was covered in toy models and drawings on paper.

James was so freaked out by the stare he thought he got, he missed the passage door opening, as well as the people walking through it. They passed by him on route to where the children were.

"Debra darling, come over here," the woman said through tears.

"Uhoh, Debra is only when you're bad," Nathan whispered to Debbie, and yet James heard it clearly. She gave him an elbow nudge before getting up.

James watched her hurry over, just stopping a mere foot in front and to the right of him. She looked to his right, where he knew his father stood. He didn't want to look, he never wanted to look.

"What's wrong mum?" Debbie asked.

"Your father, he has something to tell you. Don't you Peter?" the woman said, snarling the name.

Debbie was frighteningly worried. His father, Peter, approached to crouch in front of her. James turned his head a little to the side so he was out of his eye line.

"In a few months you're going to be a big sister, Debra," he said.

What? The words echoed in his head, each time another voice that was floating in the background got louder. Eventually it pushed its way into the foreground. That voice was a one he missed more than anything. His head turned to the right, as if pulled magnetically towards it.

There she was standing with long auburn hair tied into a ponytail, her striking blue eyes and strong and determined face. Only she was younger, much younger. It took him by surprise. Whatever she had said had angered both his father and the woman, they were directing their bile towards her. As he expected from her, she didn't show that it was getting to her if it was at all.

"She's a little girl, some compassion shouldn't be too much to ask," she said, making them madder.

"Who are you to tell us how to raise our daughter? You're nothing but a whore. His whore," the woman hissed.

There were tears, no sobs were coming from the little girl now. James couldn't bare to look. "Stop it!" she screamed at them all. "I don't want it. Tell her to go away!"

"Sweetheart, I can't, I told you. That could be your brother she's carrying," the man said, if anything but gently.

"No, I hate him!" Debbie shouted through her sobs. Her words were stabbing him repeatedly in the chest, directly into his heart. James had to take in a deeper breath as it felt empty, hollow. He understood why she'd react like this, but it still hurt to hear it.

Young Nathan was back by her side, trying desperately to calm her down with a gentle back pat. "Debs, it's gonna be okay."

"No, I don't want a brother. He'll end up just like him," Debbie cried while pointing at Peter. His hand gently grabbed the hand doing it.

"Don't you talk to me like that. I'm your father," he said firmly.

"No you're not, not anymore. My daddy wouldn't cheat on mum, he wouldn't be so cruel. I hate you, and I hate you!" she screamed at him, and then towards one of the two

women. He tried to grab a hold of her, but gently which wasn't what James was used to seeing. She ran away from him before he could lay another finger on her.

A door slammed seconds later. Nathan cringed as it did.

James found himself looking discreetly at the auburn haired woman. Her eyes closed, her face locked in a tight grimace. There was an overwhelming urge to go over there and apologise, tell her he forgave her, everything he wanted to do before she died. He thought it was stupid. This wasn't real, that wasn't his mother standing there, not really. Even if it were, it was clear, he hadn't even been born yet. In their view he didn't exist yet.

She moved away while these thoughts ran through his head. He stifled a gasp, his mouth still dropped open though. Where she originally stood was Nathan. Not the child version, but the one he had confronted in the Brig, smirking towards him. *Was he there all along?*

"You, what the hell is this?" he found himself snapping at him.

Everyone else in the room acted like the pair were not there. His father even walked through Nathan like he was a ghost. Something he found even more amusing.

"Isn't it obvious?" he teased.

"No. You attacked me, I thought it was... it's all in my head," James stuttered.

Nathan casually shrugged as he looked over at his younger self. "Nope." James glared at him, even if he knew that he was probably only glaring at a figment of his imagination. "You wanted me to share."

James didn't even think it through, he blurted it straight out, "what the hell are you talking about?"

"Think about it," Nathan chuckled. "You're there," he said, pointing at the auburn women's abdomen. "How on earth would you know what was happening then?"

James looked at where he was pointing instinctively, he turned his head away instantly. "I don't. Maybe this is how I pictured it."

"Have you ever thought about it?" Nathan asked him. "Did you ever think about how your existence depended on the misery of everyone else?"

"That's not..." James shook his head, his eyes tightly shut. "That's not my fault."

Nathan walked over to the woman, he peered into her face but she didn't register his presence. "Hear that? He's blaming you, again."

"No!" James didn't mean to but he shouted.

Nathan rolled his eyes, he tiredly sighed. "Chill out. I'm just having a bit of fun."

"Chill... out?" James said slowly and angrily, his fists clenched. "You think that showing me this would be fun? That's if I believe you anyway."

"Oh believe it. It's your own fault for sticking your nose in, memories should be private," Nathan said. *What exactly does that mean? What's happening?* Nathan laughed while he thought that. He looked to his younger self as he walked towards a door, he sighed in disappointment. "Uhoh, time's up. What should we do next?" he teased.

"Make this stop. That's what you should do next," James muttered.

Nathan smiled just as the boy disappeared out of the room. The room they were in faded away, leaving only the piercing white again. "Oh. I'm just getting started."

"It's a he. He died..." Debbie's voice rang around him. "I hope, I hope it stays that way."

"What? You can't possibly mean that," Nathan's younger self's voice said in dismay.

There was a light sniffing, it was muffled and distorted like it was heard over a bad signal. *"I do. It's better for everyone. Mum won't be stuck with him. Dad won't have his own stupid clone. I won't have to listen to them always arguing. He won't have to live with everyone hating him," Debbie's voice cried.*

"Come on Debs. You don't hate him. He's just a baby. He didn't ask to be born."

James noticed Nathan rolling his eyes at the last part. He was still reeling from what his sister said about him. He refused to believe she thought about this, let alone said it out loud. Though knowing the circumstances now, he couldn't blame her.

"Yeah well, neither did I!" her voice echoed around him, so he didn't hear it only once.

"Stop this. Debbie wouldn't think like this. You think this bothers me?" James said defensively.

Nathan nodded, "yeah pretty much. You have this warped vision of her as the doting big sister. Couldn't be further from the truth."

"How many kids yell stuff like this when they get a new sibling? It's normal even when they have the same parents," James said. At this point he was trying to convince himself more than Nathan, and he could tell he knew it. The smirk on his face said it all. "I remember Duncan asking if we had a receipt when Sasha was born. It's just sibling rivalry. With the situation, of course she would say worse things than that. Of course she hated me at the beginning. You're not going to get me with this."

"Hmm, really?" Nathan said the last word in a higher pitch than normal, almost mockingly.

The white light began to fade, objects were being brought into focus as it did. James looked around while this happened. Walls surrounded him closely on parallel sides, some with glass panels in them. Human shaped figures dotted all over, some moving, some were clearly standing and the smaller ones he figured were sitting. A lot of them were gravitating around a large rectangular object, which as the light faded away completely revealed itself as a desk. The figures standing by it wore old and blue Starfleet uniforms, their faces were oddly obscured by a blur though.

They weren't the only ones. Not far in front of this desk were many different types of seats, a lot of them were taken up by a variety of people with the same blurred faces. The only ones that were clear were the younger version of Nathan, and heart wrenching

Debbie's in the middle of sobbing. He had an arm over her shoulder, she was muttering something in between her tears.

"How could she, Nate?" was all James understood. Most of her words were drowned out by the cries she made.

"I dunno," young Nathan regretfully admitted.

Debbie stopped to laugh, even it did look like a painful one. "So glad you came."

Young Nathan rubbed the back of his head nervously. "Sorry, this is just weird. Your mum told your dad that if he takes the baby, she'll leave him. Instead she runs off with the kid. I don't get it."

James pulled a face, he didn't get it either. He heard the adult Nathan laugh but it was muffled. He glanced over to see him trying to stifle it behind his hand. "Oh I'm so annoyed I missed that, it'd been good."

"What, I don't... what did Susy do?" James questioned reluctantly.

Nathan faked a gasp his way, "I thought this was just your imagination. All in your head, right?"

James' jaw clenched, his teeth ground a little. "What did he mean by running off with the kid?"

"He?" Nathan was confused, or he just pretended to be. He looked at his younger self, immediately he acted offended. "You mean, what did I mean?" *No I really don't.* "Well picture it. Her husband's slapper goes to the hospital to have his kid, she's stuck there with him..."

"Don't call her that!" James butted in angrily.

Nathan snorted into laughter, "oh please, like you never did. The kid's lying there while, you know, *family drama* happens." He said family drama as if it was the name of a silly comedy programme being advertised. "It's the source of all that's wrong in your family. It's so tiny and helpless. No one will notice, too busy squabbling. Well the rest is up for interpretation."

"I get it," James said, while trying to hide his rising temper with a fake laugh. "You did something, that thing in my head. You show me all this to mess with me. It's not real."

"I had my money on her trying to drop you into the nearby river," Nathan laughed as if he didn't say anything. "Wah, head first," he squealed the first word, then sniggered the rest.

If he didn't have Nathan's face, he'd be lying unconscious in his own nose blood by now. The anger he was feeling at that moment was overwhelming, holding it back was painful. He was starting to consider hitting him anyway, maybe all of this would end, one way or another.

"Oh I would it end all right," Nathan said. James flinched, it was if he could hear what he was thinking. It wasn't possible. "You hit me and you hit yourself too."

He smiled at the two kids sitting nearby, Debbie had rose to her feet and was walking towards one of the doors. Peter stood there, waiting for her. She stopped in front of him, folding her arms in a defiant pose.

"This is... these are his memories," James stuttered. Nathan shushed him, all it did was push further buttons.

"Come on. He wants to meet his big sister," Peter said.

Debbie rolled her eyes. "No. Kathy should just take him home to her ship or whatever. I don't care."

"Don't be silly sweetheart. He's a Taylor," Peter gently scolded, which was a bit weird for James to see and hear.

"If he was a girl you wouldn't care, just like you don't care about me," Debbie huffed.

There was a brief flash in Peter's eyes that James recognised, he looked on worried. They softened afterwards. "I told you. I needed a son to carry on my family name and traditions." Debbie looked hurt at that remark, she tried to walk away but he put a hand gently on her shoulder. "That's all. But I wanted you, my beautiful princess. There's a big difference."

Nathan sniggered, "ooh, ouch." He directed his smirk at James once again. He didn't notice though. Peter's words were a further punch to the chest. At this point James would have preferred the literal version.

"But..." Debbie protested, though by her eyes she seemed convinced.

"Come on. He won't even know you're there, little sod's still asleep," Peter said jokingly. Debbie nodded.

"Boring," Nathan muttered. He blinked and not just intentionally, it looked like he did it with a purpose too. James knew he was right when the scenery around them vanished, only to be immediately replaced by a row of bungalows, surrounded by trees and grass. The wide path following alongside it had been taken over by kids running around, playing games or riding bikes. The sky above them was grey and still, not that any of the kids seemed to care.

The child version of Nathan walked along it until he reached one particular house. James had been staring at the familiar building before he had even reached it. The young boy knocked at the front door and waited. It opened, he was relieved to see Debbie's mother on the other side. Her stare seemed miles away, large bags were under her eyes. On seeing Nathan she forced a smile to greet him.

"Hi Mrs Taylor. Are you feeling better?" he asked politely.

"Yes, I'm managing. Come in," she answered. As he stepped into the house, the street appeared to be fading away gradually into nothing. James noticed and was a little relieved that the adult Nathan had disappeared as well. By that time all that was left was just the front garden of the house, and the building itself. The door had long since shut. James didn't want to go inside anyway, he thought.

I'm not playing along with this, whoever you are.

Something pushed at him, his head turned quickly around to see what. Only there was nothing there. He quickly realised that the dream wouldn't let him wait outside. He was trapped wherever young Nathan went. His point of view was the thing pushing him forward. Reluctantly he had to go for the house anyway. He didn't even have to open the door. The lack of anything behind him nudged him straight through it, making him feel like a ghost again.

As he carefully walked further into the house, all the while trying to shake off his own memories of the place, he heard voices come from the living room. Nothing out of the ordinary. He was about to open the living room door, when he heard a baby gurgling as well. A girl's voice laughed, his sister's voice. He had frozen on the spot when he heard it, his hand hovering a mere inch from the handle.

For a reason he hadn't worked out the dream, or whatever this was, let him stay there for the moment. He could hear through the crack in the door, if he wanted to it was big enough to see through. *That's why*, he figured.

"Who are you?" young Nathan's voice said. "And what have you done with my friend?"

Debbie laughed again, and she wasn't the only one. A baby seemed to make a sound similar to a laugh. The young Nathan joined in. "Stop it Nate," she said, not seriously. "He did nothing but be cute. He is, isn't he?"

"That sounds diabolc... er diabolical to me," Nathan managed to mutter. He laughed, seemingly at himself. "You were so different last week. I'm not complaining."

"I know," Debbie sighed sadly with regret. "Kathy let me hold him. He was too weak, too premature you know. We weren't expecting him to last the week. And then..." She laughed, "then he opened his eyes as if to say *screw you* to the docs. The first person he saw was me. I'm sure he smiled."

So far this vision or dream had been one horrible punch to the gut or painful reminder after another. Ever since this part started he felt a bit more at ease. This was the sister he remembered. That made him think that maybe this was why the other Nathan vanished. He tried to put that out of his head for now. This could still just be some strange, lucid dream. Yet he still found himself slowly approaching the crack in the door.

"He's got that screw you attitude from you, for sure," the young Nathan said.

"Well duh," Debbie giggled. There was silence for a while. Finally she spoke again, "I realised something when I held him and he looked at me. He's just as much of a victim as me in this whole thing. My parents are at war, but he's only ever going to have one of his. He's innocent. I wish mum saw it that way."

Something odd happened when Nathan spoke again with the words, "she will." So did somebody else at the same time. James lightly pushed the door open to see why. He expected a third person to be there, but instead he saw the figures of his sister and Nathan blurring into the background. Two shadows walked around the sofa where they sat, slowly coming into focus. To make it even stranger, one of them was Debbie as well. The other appeared to be her mother.

Once they were clear, the blurry images were gone.

"But, daddy won't ever allow it," Debbie said in an argumentative tone.

Her mother looked at her sadly, she sighed. "He's daddy again, is he?" She bit her bottom lip as that comment obviously upset her daughter. "I'm not saying it because I want it to be so. I'm saying it because we both know it's right. That baby is nothing more than a means to an end to your father. You've seen them together. He doesn't even try, he just wants to standby and let the women do all the work until it's old enough to learn how to be a *man*." The mother muttered under her breath, "whatever the hell that means. It sure isn't about being faithful."

"Mum, he has a name. It's not his fault," Debbie grumbled.

Her mother smiled at her, although her eyes were weary. "If he went with Kathy, he'd at least be with someone who loves him. That's better isn't it?"

James paced with uncertainty, mainly about what was happening. His theory that he only could see things that Nathan was witness to clearly wasn't right. Nor was his own memories an influence either. He tried to think it through, at the very least it would distract him from what was happening.

"But... what about me?" Debbie stuttered.

"I'm sure she'll let you stay in touch," her mother said softly. It wasn't enough, her daughter looked to the floor to hide her tears. "Don't cry darling. It's only a feeling I have. It's just, we have to be ready to back her up if it does go that way. Your dad won't want to let his little protégé go without a fight."

Debbie huffed, her eyes rolled. "How can daddy be so cold with him? He was always giving me cuddles, playing with me and stuff. I've never seen him do anything but scowl at James. The only difference is he's a boy and I'm not. I don't get it. He should treat him the exact same way."

Her mother knelt down so they were face to face. James meanwhile turned away from them with a heavy heart, his throat throbbing with anxiety. He remembered wondering about that exact thing all the time. He had seen his father dote on his big sister, encourage her, give her hugs. He always had a warm smile for her. He was like a different man all together. However the closest thing he got to any of that was sneers and a rough pick up from the ground when he tried to run away once.

Those thoughts that used to haunt him all the time flooded back. *What did I do wrong? Why did he hate me so much? Maybe I deserved it.* His forehead suddenly throbbed, it felt like something was drilling into his temple. His eyesight disappeared for a few milliseconds, like a flash of darkness. While he grimaced into his hands Debbie ran towards him. He only saw her for a split second, just before she would have ran into him. Then she was gone.

His eyes felt like they were on fire, but he had to know, he turned around to follow. He was shocked to see her run to an uncomfortable Nathan lurking in the passageway. He didn't have time to ponder his old theory or anything, the pain in his head brought him to his knees.

The floor before him started to blur and change colour to a dim grey, which he figured were a symptom of his painful eyes. His hands fell to the ground, bringing the rest of his body down as well. The texture was hard and cold as well as rough. He tried to lift his head, the pain overwhelming his forehead felt like it was weighing it down, it was a struggle to do it. From what he could see he was surrounded by people walking by in

multiple directions. The ground he felt at his fingers had to be outside, concrete. He recoiled as he saw a foot almost land right on it.

"Debs no, you can't bring him in," young Nathan's voice said nervously, not far away from him.

Feet crunched against some gravel on the concrete. "I couldn't just leave him there."

Nathan's voice laughed. James tried again to look up, at least this time he managed to return to his knees. He soon noticed the people walking around him were primarily teenagers, passing the time outside an ancient brown and cream school building, about three stories high at least. He had seen the place before, but couldn't focus on when or where. He realised they were on the main path leading up to it, not far away from the freshly cut grass on the left. To the right a couple of shuttles stood side by side, two adults stood talking next to it.

"What's so bad about the nursery Debs? I went there when I was little," Nathan's voice asked.

James looked toward where he thought he was. When he found him, he noticed the boy had aged a couple of years. The blonde girl standing before him, with her back to James, was the same height. She hadn't come alone. Holding her hand was a toddler, also blonde, looking around at the older kids nervously.

"Yeah well, there's nothing but brats there now. Bullies," she said angrily. She glanced down at the small boy to give him a sweet smile. It made him feel a lot better, he smiled back up at her. "We're not staying are we?" she said in a cute voice.

"What?" Nathan stuttered, he looked behind him to check on something. "You're not, then why?"

"It's a nice day. I thought we could go for a walk along the line," Debbie said to him. She sighed as he pulled a face. "You can come if you want, that's why we stopped by here first."

"The teachers will catch you," Nathan whispered to her. "You can't keep pulling him out of nursery either. If kids don't want to play with him it doesn't mean they're bullies."

Debbie looked very offended. "They don't just not play with him. They make a point of it. One kid waited for him to sit down and ask if he could play, before running off to the woman in charge." She looked down to check on the toddler who's mood had gone down since they started talking about this. She leaned over to whisper to Nathan, "I heard one of the damn parents saying to her friend that he was a piece of work, that he's the bully. He heard her, he was crying."

"Really?" Nathan said just as quietly, his mood took a turn for the worst as well. "That sucks. He's just a shy little thing, where did they get that from?"

Debbie shook her head. She put a lovely smile on her face immediately before looking down at the toddler. "It's their loss," she cooed at him. Her hand reached out to ruffle his hair, the act made the kid giggle.

James managed to straighten back up onto his feet, at the same time a group of teenagers the same age approached them. They appeared to be lead by a tall black

haired boy. With the rude smirk seemingly permanent on his face James instantly didn't like him, an opinion the toddler shared as he began to fidget and hide behind his sister.

"Oh Debbie. Taking the dog for a walk again?" the boy asked, prompting laughter from the others.

"Hey, shut your mouth," Nathan spat at him.

The boy was just amused though. He walked over to stand right in front of him, highlighting the huge size difference between them. He made a point of leaning down into his face. The others had a good laugh at it. "Or what?"

Debbie stepped forward to drag the taller boy away from her friend. He smirked at her as she moved to stand in between them. "Get back to your cave, David," she said.

"Only if you come with me," he teased back, while giving her a wink. She looked at him in disgust. "What, I like a good challenge."

"So, all girls then?" the toddler spoke up, surprising them all. Debbie had a mix of horror and pride on her face, while Nathan sniggered behind her. The tall boy however didn't see the funny side, especially when the girls in his group started laughing at him as well. His face turned very red.

"You little piece of sh..." he grunted while lunging for the kid. Nathan was the first to react, just as the boy was about to grab the toddler he pushed him away as hard as he could. The boy's face managed to get even redder, the fury in his eyes was directed towards Debbie. He pointed at her, "you and your brat, you'll regret this."

"Piss off," the toddler groaned and rolled his eyes. Debbie quickly dashed forward to pick him up before anything else happened. Luckily the boy wasn't ready to pick another fight, he hurried away towards the school with his friends right behind him.

Nathan sighed, he seemed to notice he was trembling. "God, that wasn't a good idea." He looked mortified as Debbie was whispering to the toddler in her arms, with a proud smile on her face. "Maybe that's why he's having trouble in nursery. Wow."

Debbie just giggled. "Nope. That was new. So proud of you," she said the last part to her brother. She gave him a cheek kiss.

Just as James was wondering what the point of all of this was, everyone that he could see flashed out of existence, leaving the school yard empty. It was only for a moment. They reappeared, all in different locations to before. The only one he could recognise was Nathan sitting on the grass near the school gates. He was fidgeting nervously while his arms wrapped around his knees.

His attention was on the school gates when his eyes lit up. James looked over his shoulder to see why, although he already knew. Sure enough, Debbie hurried through the gates wearing the same uniform as everyone else, with a bag loosely hanging over her shoulder.

"Sorry, I had to drop James off again," she said in between tired breaths.

"It's okay, you're not late," Nathan said reassuringly, he still looked worried though. Debbie was about to say something when a group of girls pushed by her roughly, almost knocking her to the floor in the process. "You all right?" he asked.

"Yeah, sure," Debbie mumbled irritably.

The girls glanced back at her while sniggering. James was sure he heard them call her a few rude names, one of them being *slut*.

"I only asked you to come earlier cos there's something you should know," Nathan said.

"Oh, what?" Debbie asked just as a different group walked by her. These ones stopped beside her.

"So who's the father Debra, huh?" one of the boys laughed.

The others laughed too while Debbie stared at them in disgust, Nathan looked very uncomfortable. "What?"

"Probably a teacher, she always was a suck up," a girl giggled.

"Yeah, here let me grade your paper. Oh a B!" one boy laughed.

Nathan climbed to his feet, he looked mad. "Oh sod off, it's not true. He's her brother."

"No need to get jealous Nathan. She'll get to you eventually," the first boy said. They all walked away laughing between themselves.

Debbie stared after them with tears forming in her eyes, she even started to shake. "David," she could only say.

Nathan nodded, "yeah. He was telling all the boys in PE yesterday that James was your son. I got detention for yelling at him."

"But that's ridiculous, I was eleven when..." Debbie stuttered.

Another group of girls pushed by her on purpose. One of them threw what looked like a baby doll onto the ground when she did. One of them made a fake baby cry as well. Debbie struggled to keep her composure as they walked away, laughing.

A flash of white assaulted James' eyes for a second, the pain that came with it felt like someone squeezing his brain while digging their nails in. It was far worse than the earlier one, his hands instinctively flew up to his head as if that would help. Obviously it wouldn't. Through the small cracks in between his fingers the amount of light dimmed instantly, almost as if somebody turned off a light. Different colours darted around while multiple voices collided together, creating an audio blur.

The hand that mostly covered his eyes shakily lowered. Then he realised that the location must have changed in that moment. Now he stood in a bustling classroom. The only door to it was next to him, and when it opened he recoiled to avoid it hitting him. Not that it mattered, not here, it was just his normal reaction.

What wasn't normal was the classroom's sudden silence once the door opened. Thanks to his proximity to it, he got the *best* view of the person who walked in's reaction to the rest of the class. As they began to laugh, some yelling hurtful things, her eyes tried to blink away the tears while her face lost all of its colour. There were dark rings under her eyes, her normally shiny blonde hair lay flatly on her shoulders. The most striking part of her, those bright blue eyes had dimmed to nearly grey.

It was hard enough seeing Debbie again after all this time, and after everything... but seeing her like this stung him even more. The sound and images of the laughing kids misdirected the anger he had at *Nathan*. He wanted badly to stop this, even though he knew it was impossible. More than that, he wanted to reach out to his distressed sister to help her. Then he realised something.

This is because of me. As soon as he thought that he heard adult Nathan's voice snigger maliciously all around him. Despite it being so quiet, it still managed to stick out over the top of the other noise.

The image of Debbie turning on her heel and running back out the door clashed with another, this one of her hiding in a bathroom stall crying. Before James could really react to seeing it, the image overlapped yet another. The images of distress only lasted a few seconds at a time, there was so many of them. Watching them made him forget the pain in his head, he was now feeling something much worse. That feeling he knew very well.

"Stop. Please stop," he found himself begging quietly and he didn't only do it once. He repeated it over and over again.

The next image that was thrown in his face lasted a little longer than the others. Nothing seemed as traumatic about it, so he hoped that worked. He knew better though. All of them contained a kick to the gut somewhere. All it seemed to be for now was a regular assembly of students in a large hall. A teacher stood on the stage with a PADD in hand, every now and then gesturing it towards a big screen behind her.

James turned his back on it, even though he knew that didn't work when this all started. Why would it now? He could hear the teacher talking, some whispering amongst the students. Nothing awful, not yet. His whole body tensed as that turned into hysterical laughter from so many people. That wasn't all, soon some people were chanting the same exact word at different times. They managed to sync themselves up pretty quickly while the teacher tried to calm them all.

"Slapper," was the word. It was only a few kids out of the hundreds he saw before. Maybe only a few dozen were laughing. It was still excruciating to hear though. He told himself he wasn't going to look to see what triggered this. He didn't want to know.

As he thought that something blurred straight through him. They ran for the nearby double doors, pushing them both open as she flew through them. It was obvious who that was. As if he had no control over himself his body turned back around to the way it was before. It took him a few seconds to find what set the awful kids off. The big screen, a picture was on it that took all the willpower he had not to cry out in anguish, as well as hatred for whoever did this.

He didn't realise that while he stared at it, it shrunk down into a framed photo on top of a dresser. The area around it had changed as well, the laughter and chanting were gone. Still his hand shakily reached forward to grab it. At the last moment his hand retreated back. There was a figure standing directly beside him, his arm and her shoulder little more than a centimetre apart from each other. His head turned, she looked like she was engrossed in the picture as well.

Looking back at it, he remembered the day the picture was taken so clearly. Now he did anyway. Debbie had taken him from nursery so they could spend a rare warm day in March together. Nathan had also sneaked out of school to join them later, but the parts with only the two of them were what he remembered more vividly. Then another important detail came to him. Her favourite place, she took him there. It was a simple

country path going through their town, unspoiled by modern life. It was peaceful and green, very green. The feature she loved the most was the views.

He remembered one view in particular, a one that could be seen from one of the bridges, not far from where they lived. James remembered why he could never go there again when he was older. It always bothered him. Everytime he walked by it on route to school he'd stop and hurry down a side path to avoid it, almost instinctively.

There they could see for miles. Debbie would point out distant houses, all the while asking him what kind of families lived in them. He'd see a couple of horses in a far out field, she'd laugh and tell him about a one that chased her once just because she held an icecream. The hill so far away, she used to say there was probably another little boy looking right at them too and tell him to wave.

It all came back so quickly, it hit him so hard there were tears in his eyes. The picture was taken right there as Debbie sat in between the bars of the bridge. Her eyes were as he always remembered them; sparkling and bright. A wide toothy grin was on her face, making her face brighten up even more than usual. Her blonde hair, platted into a pony tail caught in a breeze, the picture capturing the moment it flew off to the right.

Nathan had caught up with them when they were here. He had nagged James to sit on his big sister's lap so he was apart of the picture. He never liked taking them at that age so it took some doing. He had managed though. She had lifted him up to give him a cuddle, all the while pressing her cheek into his. He had a similar smile on his face. For a moment James finally saw what a lot of people used to comment on. No wonder nobody really suspected them of being merely half siblings, in this one picture they did look far too similar for that.

It felt like a big insult thinking that, he hated himself for it. Debbie was a beautiful girl both inside and out. She lit up every room she was in. He was nothing like that. They only shared blonde hair and blue eyes, that's all. The picture itself felt like it agreed with him, their eyes stared directly at him. His younger self he imagined was angry at what he would become, while Debbie's was one of shame.

Voices were whispering behind him. He meekly looked back over his shoulder, only then realising he was back in the house at the beginning. Tops of two heads could just be seen over the back of the sofa.

"He... breaks things, they're afraid of him," Debbie's voice was the one he heard first.

"Debs, kids are clumsy, they don't know their own strength," Nathan's was next.

She disappeared, Nathan's position changed as well. Now voices were shouting in the room next to James. One of them always made him cower everytime it was raised, and even now it still did.

"Daddy, that's stupid. He's a normal boy. He likes running around, drawing, playing. He makes jokes. Even though he's afraid to when it's about him, he still sticks up for others," Debbie's sounded like it was in tears.

"Well that stops today. It's his fate," Peter's voice was loud and harsh.

"But..." Debbie's hesitated just as she reappeared on the sofa. What she said next came from there instead, "while all the other kids his age run around a playground, learn their

times tables, making friends, he'll be home being trained how to fight. Human stuff is just going to distract him, make him dangerous."

Nathan's voice breathed in deeply. "It'll also make him not care."

"Yeah. He'll die before he has a chance to live, probably won't even see his twenties," Debbie stuttered.

Peter's voice suddenly shouted, which startled James enough to make him stumble backwards a few steps. "So what!? We had to make sacrifices to bring him here, didn't we? It's his turn."

"I won't let him," Debbie whispered. "I'm not going to give up on him. I'm not going to let dad take away his humanity. We have to protect him. He must live."

A deathly silence followed, James stared back at the picture during it. His father's words repeated in his head. Eventually only one of them lingered. Sacrifices. Then Debbie's mother's earlier remark flowed after it. *"That baby is nothing more than a means to an end to your father. If he went with Kathy, he'd at least be with someone who loves him."*

"I promise," Nathan's voice intruded. James looked over to the sofa in time for him to say, "on my life."

Bright sun light shone through the nearby window, James had to squint for a few seconds. His father's voice was shouting again, this time from another room. That wasn't what made him shiver though. It was the sound of his own voice, his younger self was wailing as loud as he could. Of course it only made his father's louder and madder.

To his far right side Debbie stood staring at the floor, her shoulders slouched. The teen version of Nathan stood with her, his jaw quivering. Something hit something else hard in the same place the voices came from, creating a loud bang. Nathan froze when he heard the frightened cries saying sorry over and over.

"This stops," Debbie whispered.

Nathan was still frozen in shock and or horror, it was hard for James to tell. He was feeling both himself. He winced everytime he heard his father shout something.

Debbie looked to Nathan, then she walked around to stand closely in front of him. "Nate, listen. We're leaving. It's the only way."

"What?" James said out loud, he frowned in her direction.

Nathan was confused as well, he stared her in the eye. "What do you mean you're leaving?"

Debbie looked ready to burst into tears again as another bang echoed out of the other room. "I can't protect him here. The first shuttle I see, we're sneaking on."

"You're... you're joking right?" Nathan stuttered with fear in his eyes.

"No. You know that..." Debbie said, gesturing behind her towards the noise. "Is just because he had one of my starship models. All I could do was stall dad until he could hide. As usual," she said that bitterly.

"Ohno, I gave him that," Nathan panicked, guilt looked like it haunted his face. "You said your dad threw out all of his toys, I just wanted..."

Debbie smiled weakly at him, "he smiled and said thank you. I saw it. It's not your fault. It's dad, he's... he's so different."

"That doesn't mean you and him should run away. Can't we tell someone?" Nathan stuttered.

"Dad hasn't done anything, that I know of. Not yet," Debbie mumbled uncomfortably. "No, he won't. After his birthday party I'll take him for one of our walks. That's what I'll tell mum and dad anyway."

Dread washed over James like a freezing cold wave, he started to tremble as if it really was. He looked around desperately. There had to be a way to stop all of this. He couldn't watch anymore, he feared for what he may see next.

"No toys, no friends, but he still gets a party?" Nathan said with a conflicted expression.

Debbie gave him a sour one back. "Mum and I ganged up on him. He can't say no to me. Unless I'm asking him to stop screaming at a two year old. Dad says it's his last one."

Something seemed to click within Nathan, he reached forward to gently hold both of her arms. It took her by surprise. "You can't leave. There's got to be another way."

"I was expelled," Debbie said. "Not going to school for six months will do that. My father's turned into a monster. Mum seems to be taking the ignore it until it goes away method of dealing. So why not?" Nathan looked really hurt at that response. She sensed it, her face strained to smile. "Come with us."

"I can't. This isn't a good idea. My family, yours too, will look for us. They'll find us. Imagine what your dad will do if that happens," Nathan stuttered.

Debbie's weak smile disappeared, all that was left was just weariness. "I... I must protect my baby brother. He doesn't deserve this. This is all I can do to save him. I can't think of anything else." Nathan was about to interrupt with a but. "You know me. I won't change my mind. I'll leave with or without you, you know that. I've got nothing more to lose."

"Yes. Yes you do," Nathan whispered.

"Don't do that. You can still come," Debbie whispered back, her voice showing the hurt.

"If I do, they'll find us. My parents have connections in Starfleet. We wouldn't last two days..." Nathan said, his face flinched. He stared at her with an intense look in his eyes. It seemed to make her feel even worse, she shook her head. "I'd only take that risk if... if I was sure."

"Sure, of what?" Debbie asked.

He merely answered her by quickly leaning forward to kiss her. James rushed forward to stop him without thinking, he just stumbled straight through them. His eyes widened as he almost walked into another Nathan standing behind the other one. It was the adult one that taunted him before, only something was off about him. There was a look of horror and disbelief that unnerved James when he noticed it.

"Nathan?" he blurted out.

Nathan's eyes met his, as they did he trembled. "James? You... what's happening?"

Debbie meanwhile pushed the younger Nathan away with a furious look in her eyes. "What the hell are you doing?"

She got a similar look back, "you invited me to run away with you. I wanted to be sure."

"Oh my god. You're my best friend. We made a promise to protect James, remember?" Debbie stuttered, she stepped backwards. What seemed to surprise her far more than the attempted kiss was his callous roll of the eyes.

"Of course, cos everything's about him now isn't it? How could I forget?"

Debbie's arm flew forward to point at the door to the passage. "Get out!"

James slowly looked over his shoulder to watch what was going on now. Adult Nathan hovered nearby, muttering to himself while shaking his head. He could make him out in the edge of his sight.

"No, what can I do to change your mind?" young Nathan asked sharply.

Debbie scowled toward him, "you've just convinced me otherwise. You were all I would regret leaving behind."

"This didn't happen," Adult Nathan muttered quietly, sounding more puzzled than upset. "I'd never do something like this." The look of disgust on his face couldn't have been easy to fake. James wanted to believe that this wasn't his doing. It couldn't be. This was thirty years ago and there the young Nathan was, acting like the imposter. *At least make it convincing.*

"What's going on?" Peter's voice demanded seemingly out of nowhere. It made his blood freeze on the spot. Then he saw him charge over with that all too familiar angry and violent expression on his face. He made a stand between his daughter and the young version of Nathan. He appeared to be just as scared of him as James was, startled by his quick appearance. "The lady asked you to leave. Out or I'll throw you out."

Young Nathan started to tremble, his eyes were widening in fear and confusion. "What, but why?" His frightened eyes tried to look at Debbie standing behind her dad. She abruptly turned her head away and grimaced tightly, one small tear squeezed through anyway. James wasn't sure if either Nathan saw it, but he did. "Debs?"

Adult Nathan wandered clearly into James' point of view, slightly to his right. He directed an angry face and gesture to his younger self. "This part I remember. I didn't know what I said to upset her. How, how are we watching this? Is it a Holodeck?"

"You tried to kiss her," James said plainly.

Nathan scoffed, more bemused than upset at that moment. "No. I'd remember something like that. I wouldn't have. Someone is trying to frame me, trying to trick you, or both." His face turned a little too white very quickly. "Although, how would anyone know what *did* happen to do this?"

To make things an even bigger headache than it already was, Nathan's voice laughed from neither of the two already there. "Yes, how exactly?" It came from directly behind them.

James couldn't help but groan at the now third Nathan to join the scene. He turned around to see him, while the youngest one was being strong armed into leaving the building. The new arrival appeared to be identical to the Adult version, physically anyway. His demeanour and attitude gave him a smug aura, it helped him keep the two separate.

Adult Nathan kept his eye on his younger self, as he cried out for forgiveness from his friend. Shoulders slumped, his eyes filled with tears. Unlike the new Nathan, his aura looked pitiful. James turned his head away to get that image out of his head, leaving only the third one in his sight.

"Fine, you got me with all of these *flashbacks* so far. It's over now, there's nothing more to see," he said irritably. "Now it's time to explain what you've done, and who you are. You can't mess with us any further."

The smug Nathan faked a look of surprise, making him seem offended. "That's what I'm doing. I'm all about the truth here."

"No way," the upset one said, now by James' side. "I don't know how you're doing this, or why. At least get it right. I wouldn't..."

The possible fake laughed in his direction, then turned his attention to James. "Believe this guy?" He turned back again. "These are your memories, made flesh. You can thank Jay here for that."

The name made James flinch, but it made Nathan angrier. "That's impossible!"

"We never lose our memories. They're all still in there," fake Nathan said, gesturing to his head. "Sometimes you just need to clear the paths to them. Meditate, hypnosis or like we have, cheat a bit."

"Cheat? What did you stab me with before this all started?" James asked him.

Again he was offended on purpose. "You have only yourself to blame there, Jay. You're the one who woke it up with your intrusion."

"Stop calling me that," James blurted out angrily. His head shook, it did nothing to calm him down. "Are you talking about the chip? No, if that were the case it would be my memories we'd be seeing. Not his, or your made up ones."

Fake Nathan casually shrugged. "Oh, yours are mixing in there a bit. That much is true."

Nathan glanced between them frantically. "What the hell are you two talking about?" He stomped over to look his imposter right in the eye. "Forget it. I want to know why you look like me first. Stop doing this, show who you really are, you coward!"

He laughed again, "I am." The smugness was replaced by fake sympathy. "I think you know this, deep down. You always have."

"No I don't. You're talking rubbish," Nathan said.

"Oh? My best friend threw me out for no reason. I slept walked into a fourteen year old's room and..." fake Nathan giggled maliciously. "Oops."

James slowly looked directly at Nathan, unsure of what to think. Nathan noticed him do it and turned his own head away. "No. You're just..."

"Ignore him. If these are your memories then there's nothing more he can show us," James said. "That's why he's..."

The fake Nathan's smile grew inhumanely large, it crept them both out, while the scenery behind and around him blurred, distorted until the room was gone. His figure merged into it, finally vanishing from both of their sight. The colours around them started to change. A mix of greens, grey and browns. A light breeze blew by them while they sharpened gradually into shapes.

It took everything James had and probably more to not only fall to his knees, but scream out loud as well. Instead he remained frozen on the spot, his face locked in despair and pain.

He could only watch as Debbie lead the wary toddler by the hand along a wide up hill path, with her parents following closely behind. The child would turn his head back at their father with a fearful glance, which earned him a fiery eyed stare back.

Susy carried two bags; one on her shoulder, the other loosely by her side. For the first time during this whole thing she looked content. However she was the only one.

To their left stood an old church surrounded by large blossoming trees. It must have been at least half a millennium old. A mix of modern and slightly aged houses of varying styles lined parallel to it. Straight ahead of them appeared to be the town. The path they walked on would eventually branch off when the ground levelled. One would lead to the town centre, while the other would take them to the park.

The park itself was apparently built over an old circular road when it was no longer needed. The parts of the road that lead away from it were kept as walkways, as one lead to the other side of town. The side of town where the school was that James recognised. Seeing this reminded him. It sat in the quieter side, where all the cultural things were; the library, a miner's monument, a car museum of all things. No wonder it was quieter.

The other branching path from the park lead to the south side of it, which was identical in style. Both parks would be seen on either side of the town centre; which was simply one T shaped street. James remembered Debbie remarking that the design of this park sitting in the middle of the town probably looked like a smile and blushing green cheeks from space. The main town being the eyes and nose. He had asked what the other side of town was, and she had said it was a ponytail like hers blowing away and had laughed sweetly at his probably amused face.

That first park was as far as they were going. At least that was the plan. James was tempted to step in and do something, anything to keep them there. Although he knew he couldn't, he hadn't been able to do anything so far.

The family finally settled at the edge of the park, just under some trees. It was a good spot to look over both sides of the town; one side with the slightly new two storey library, and the other with its bars and cafes welcoming people to the *fun* side of the place.

The summer sun managed to get through the clouds, triggering a light breeze to try to ruin it. A day like this, it didn't matter to anyone. Everyone who lived there were used to worse anyway. The town's nickname of Wind Tunnel was well earned. It was also better than rain or snow.

Susy and Debbie lay down a table cloth onto the grass, the latter scowled at her father while she did it. He looked in distaste back at her, as if what they were doing was beneath him. That's a woman's job, he would usually say. The toddler meanwhile was eyeing the nearest tree, which had a couple of tiny apple's still growing in its higher branches. He still tried to reach for them, despite the closest one being two foot higher than him.

Debbie saw him, it lightened her bad mood a little. A big smile appeared on her face as she reached to cuddle him, then put him on her lap. The gesture cheered him up momentarily until Peter said something harsh.

Their voices were a little hard to make out. Likely because James' memory of this wasn't exact until later, this part was always a little hazy.

As if on cue he heard Debbie scold her dad, "oh dad. Don't be mean. I think he's adorable."

"Then you can keep him," their father said, clear as day.

James was about to turn away so he couldn't watch anymore, dread coursing through him. Only before he did it something caught his eye and stopped him. Susy smiled as she brought out a cake from her larger bag, it had three candles sitting in it.

This part he had forgotten. Maybe he wanted to. Despite that he watched her light the candles.

That was enough, he thought. If he watched anymore then whatever was taking Nathan's form couldn't torture him any further with these memories. Instead he was forced to watch the real deal breaking down into a gibbering mess. That made sense.

Only it didn't, James realised. He wondered how, no why Nathan was reacting to this. It was just a family gathering, a one he wasn't witness to. He didn't know what would follow this. Everyone else involved in this particular memory weren't around anymore. Sure James knew what was coming, but Nathan shouldn't.

Then he spotted him. The teenaged version of him observing the family from the swings, barely drifting backward and forwards.

"What?" was all James could respond with.

"Oh god. I tried to forget. I had."

"You were there?"

"I... wanted to talk to her before she left. Stop her from leaving, say sorry. Though I didn't know why she was so angry with me."

James couldn't watch him either. What was happening behind him was just far too painful to think about. What was left? Instead he focused on the part of town with the bars and cafes. Since it was a nice day all of the ones he could see had the tables and

chairs outside, all of which were full. All the people were laughing and chatting, soaking in the rare sun.

They would be fine. Their day would go by normally, some pleasantly. Some would have things on their mind, or would have some bad luck, but not like the Taylors would. It was just another summer's day for them.

James would never forget this day, no matter what date it happened on. The date just made it that much harder.

"Go on. Blow out the candles," he heard Susy say.

He remembered this now. He had tried to do that, but only got two of them. Dad would remark that he was in the terrible two's forever, and sure enough that's what he said seconds later. He remembered Debbie's laugh, but he didn't realise until now how forced and painful it was.

Now that he knew and he had seen everything building up to this. Or it was only because he was older, and not an innocent and naive three year old. Who knows? She wasn't laughing out of humour, she was trying to put up a facade for him.

"Just ignore the old misery, sweetheart," Susy said. That line was ingrained in James' memory, he winced, it wasn't long now. He kept watching the people enjoying themselves in the town. He tried to tune her out and listen to them, it was never going to work. "I'll tell you what. Why don't I get you and James an ice cream too."

No. Don't.

He may as well have been telling the sun not to go down. "I'm sure you can handle him for five minutes."

"That's a great idea, mum," Debbie said. The tone of voice, James had missed it when he was young. It was probably the only thing she said that sounded hopeful and happy, not faked. *Why?*

Then there was something else he didn't remember. "It's here somewhere," she said quietly. James turned around without even thinking, just catching her bring out a bottle from Susy's bag. Alcohol. It all came flooding back to him now.

Nathan stammered what he was thinking. "Bullied out of school. Parents were fighting constantly. A half brother suffering from abuse. She did whatever she could to dull the pain."

And mine too. It never fit with his image of Debbie, so James thought that it was just his imagination, a child's version of events that were never true. Only it was. Near the end she would sneak a drink or two, then let him have one as well.

"I wanted her to stop," Nathan interrupted his thoughts. "It didn't work, it only made her sadder." His voice suddenly became more desperate. "No, no!"

James knew he couldn't stop it, but he ran towards the scene anyway. While Debbie hunted through her own bag, his younger self looked at his dad who was now standing far away admiring the view. He ran off in the opposite direction. It took a few seconds for Debbie to pull out a PADD, then turn to find her brother gone.

There wasn't anything he could do. He could yell or point in the direction he went all he liked, she wouldn't hear him. Debbie desperately looked around as she scrambled to her feet. She focused on two directions. The way they came or the busy part of town. She chose the first option, all the while yelling his name.

James didn't see him until he ran straight through him; young Nathan ran after her, screaming for her to go another way.

"No, no. Keep going," the adult Nathan said as his alter ego stopped at the branching path. He wailed in despair as he headed into town instead, straight after the young James.

"I remember now," James mumbled, then turned his attention to the adult Nathan. It was torture to see the guilt forming on his face. "You..."

It got darker all of a sudden, forcing him to look up. The breeze had pulled in some thicker clouds, not many but enough to block the sun for a time. It was still quite warm. When James looked back down he was no longer in that park. Yet he was still surrounded by green. Trees were now on both sides of him, he stood on a concreted path. It was deathly quiet, no one was around. He could just make out the edge of town, only visible as it stood on the cusp of the hill next to him and he was a few metres below it. The medical centre, the roofs of the market stalls next to it. He could make out the low buzz of voices from the people there.

His younger self ran by him, mostly pulled by the steep hill they were on. Once he reached the bottom he slowed down greatly. James chose to follow him, drag him back to his sister. Maybe he'd stop it. He knew where Debbie went after all. He shook those thoughts away, they were ridiculous. He couldn't stop this, it was set in stone, this was just an hallucination or a vision. The only way to deal with it was to close his eyes until it was over. It wouldn't be long now.

He couldn't even do that though. He felt his eyes were definitely shut, and yet he could still see everything as if they weren't. The younger Nathan blurred by him as well. The adult one was right behind him, but moving slowly, his face still showing great pain.

The ground levelled instantly, disorienting them for a moment. The trees around them changed. The light above their heads had faded even further. James looked up, the clouds overhead were closer together. Each of them a miserable grey.

"Come on James, it's okay," they each heard young Nathan cry out. "Big sis is going to protect you. You don't have to run away again." A small squeak followed, as well as a rustle in the bushes. Young Nathan walked over to the side of the straight path, towards the trees and undergrowth. They all saw a small figure hiding behind a prickly bush.

Nathan's face tightened when his younger self carefully approached it.

"You were the one who found me," James said quietly.

Adult Nathan tried to swallow a lump in his throat. "I'm sorry."

"Why?"

"I should have followed her. I saw which way you went, she didn't."

"You didn't know what would happen," James tried to convince him. He heard a sinister chuckle being carried by the breeze. It was so quiet, he thought he imagined it.

"No... if I'd been more supportive, maybe you two wouldn't be separated at all."

"You tried. That's enough..." He heard it again, this time it was loud and so he was definitely sure it was real. Nathan reacted as if he heard it as well.

Young Nathan crouched down in front of the bush. "What are you doing giving us a scare like that?" The kid flinched as he gestured for him to hold his hand. "I'll go get her. You wait here."

Nathan stepped forward, his face blustered. "What? Another change. No, that..."

James gave him a confused glance, "you forgot this part too?"

"No, this wasn't how it happened," Nathan stuttered.

His younger self didn't let him off the hook, "I'll bring her here. Then she'll take you away from here. Promise kid." He got no response again, making him sigh. He climbed to his feet.

"No, this is wrong. Why is it being changed?" Nathan said in a blind panic.

"It's not. I remember this," James said. The look of horror he got from Nathan unnerved him further.

Tiny drops of water fell from the sky, one landed in his eye which he tried to blink away. He looked back up and saw the grey clouds were mixing with black ones. The wind picked up, blowing the drops of rain almost sideways. As before when James looked back down the area around them had changed again. It was the same path, just further down, right before a bridge.

That bridge. Metal, painted green like all the others. It would only take a few steps to walk across it, and yet it had built in benches on one side so people could take in the views. He and Debbie had sat there in order to take that picture, but she wanted to sit on the bridge itself so the hills and fields were in the shot too. They spent so much of their time there.

A figure was standing on it, gazing at that same view, details obscured by distance. Somebody walked by James but by the time he noticed him, he was already ahead of him, with only his back being visible.

"What's this?" Nathan asked.

The figure on the bridge got clearer the closer the other figure got to them. James and Nathan both knew who it was before then. It was her spot, her favourite place. Where they last saw her, she would have merely stepped into the back streets as soon as she walked into the town, and walked downhill. Or she could have gone from the back streets to that market and managed to follow young James after all, without even knowing. Either way she was there, but how they were able to see that, James didn't know.

Debbie's face was clear now. She'd been crying, as well as running for so long she was out of breath. Then she noticed the figure approaching, they just made her groan irritably. "Now's not the time."

"Oh? I thought you were looking for James," Nathan's voice said.

The real Nathan widened his eyes in shock and anger. "What? I never saw her again. This is rubbish!"

The figure moved to the side slightly as his hand went to his hip, then James saw his face. Sure enough young Nathan was the figure, now standing on the bridge with Debbie. He turned his head away as a rush of emotions attacked him. So many of them he couldn't differentiate between them. It made him feel sick, dizzy. That thumping headache came back, making him want to scream as well. Instead he just stood still with his eyes glazing over, thankfully obscuring any view he had left until he was forced to see something.

"How... have you seen him?" Debbie asked frantically.

"Yeah. Further back on the line."

"Why didn't you bring him with you?"

"Dunno. The squirt's afraid of me. What have you been telling him?"

"Nothing. He's almost always afraid. Dad giving him a birthday *present* helped with that," Debbie's voice was angry, pained. "Mine will be me taking him onto a shuttle when I find him. I haven't told him yet. I should have, he wouldn't have run away again."

Young Nathan smirked a little, "wouldn't it be better to let him run this time? He'd be free from the abuse, you could have your life back."

"How dare you!" Debbie shouted at him. "Jay is the only thing in my life left that's good. The only one who hasn't betrayed me."

She got a scoff, "ironic. He's the one that caused all of this in the first place."

"No he didn't," Debbie argued.

"Mum and dad arguing," Nathan said while counting one with his finger. A second one popped up, "dad turning psycho." Debbie trembled for numerous reasons as a third flew up. "Little Jay pissing off the bullies so you have to skip school all the time." The fourth finger made Debbie's blue eyes flash with rage. "He takes you away, causing a rift between us."

"Right! Cos he was the one who not only forced a kiss, but got mad about it," she snarled. "Jay hasn't done anything to me."

"Except getting you bullied and expelled," young Nathan said nonchalantly.

Debbie didn't let that get to her, or so it looked. "Shut up. He tried to protect me. David was already bullying us anyway." She was annoyed when he rolled his eyes. "If the old Nate was real and not you faking; the sweet, funny and selfless guy that's my best friend. You'll tell me where James is and then go away."

"Hmm, not far from those alien looking dudes," young Nathan answered. Her eyes widened slightly. "They'll find him, don't worry."

She was shaking a lot more violently now. "What did they look like?"

A flash penetrated the air in between the two on the bridge and the pair nearby. James hoped that meant that this was over, there was nothing else to see. Instead a large bubble had formed beside him, showing another part of the path yet again, only the bridge could still be seen behind it all. He was shocked to see a pair of vampires standing under some trees, only moving out when the black clouds flourished. They didn't see the young Nathan stumble across them and quickly disappear into the tall weeds nearby.

"Supposedly it's Human this time. We should kill it while it's young, no need to wait for the mind reading guys to steal the show," one said.

"Really? Good, this town's not as dead as I was told. Nowhere discreet to eat," the other said.

"You're relying on old information again you fool. The shopping mall is the perfect place on a day like this. I'll get first taste for that idiocy," the first one said.

They walked down the path. If James was right, in the direction away from the town towards the villages at the bottom of the hill. Near that bridge. Another flash took away the odd bubble to bring the focus back on the pair standing on it.

"Ohno. That's the creatures dad warned me about. Lets go get him before they find him," Debbie continued to panic. She attempted to go back in the direction of the town, but Nathan blocked her way.

"Oh relax, I already told them," he said.

"What?" she stuttered.

"I threw them off the trail," young Nathan casually said.

Debbie relaxed a tiny bit, "thank you, now can we..."

Young Nathan was the opposite, he studied her carefully. "What happens when you do? You're really taking off as soon as you get him? No goodbye's, nothing."

"Nathan not now. My baby brother's in danger," Debbie said.

"No he's not. When I tell them where he is, then maybe," Nathan said.

She looked like she was about to be sick. Only her voice gave her anger away. "What?"

He fished a PADD from his pocket, one tap on it and she could hear the vampires voices talking. Debbie tried to grab it from him, but he held it high out of reach. "They can't hear us yet. I can tell them where he is or I can direct them to the Dump." His other hand gestured west, behind him.

James didn't see him do it, he kept his back on them. Even still he had an idea where he meant.

"It depends on you. All I want is some closure," young Nathan continued.

"Closure? Vampires want to eat my little brother!" Debbie yelled.

"They won't. I just want a goodbye. That's all, not hard," young Nathan said.

"Fine. Bye."

"No, no, too literal. I need a one that means something, something I've wanted for a while."

Adult Nathan shouted suddenly, "this didn't happen! This isn't me!" His voice was shaking, desperate. "Whoever, whatever, stop this now!"

Nobody listened. Nathan realised that even James appeared to be somewhere else, staring in the opposite direction at nothing. Standing still, almost frozen. Nathan felt himself crumbling away, he supposed James was doing the same.

"You're sick, Nate. The only meaningful thing you'll get from me is my fist in your jaw," Debbie said.

"Do that and Jay dies." Debbie flinched in horror, all of her anger bubbling at the surface seemed to dissolve in an instant. "Think, freedom. No whiny brat crying all the time. Dad may lighten up. Maybe him and mum could make up. We could go back..."

"Never," Debbie hissed at him. "Those things you said, are the faults of the same people. Dad lost mum cos he cheated on her. He blames James cos if he didn't exist he wouldn't have been caught. Even though it's the 24th century, and accidents like that don't happen that easily. He wanted a son, he always did. Mum wouldn't give him one, so he went elsewhere. Dad's just a fool. And us... you thought that cos I'm a girl that I owed you a relationship. I wish I hadn't have wasted my time with you."

Nathan turned away from all of this too, he couldn't take it anymore. It seemed to be the right thing to do at the right time, the sound of arms being grabbed and Debbie's angry groan chilled him to the bone.

"No, I'll find him myself. Go to hell," she snapped.

"I'll tell them. Don't think I won't."

"How could you?"

"I'm not asking for much, Debs. I don't need that much time. Surely the way you go on, he's worth ten minutes."

She must have spat at him, the sound of it unmistakable. Nathan briefly turned his head to look over his shoulder, just catching his younger self, no his imposter wiping something from his cheek. He quickly turned back to avoid seeing more.

"You're the one who's not worth it," she said.

"Just think. Your suffering is for a reason. Your life needed to be ruined to bring in the little future hero, right? How many people's lives are you damning by letting him die? What's a nice time between two good friends compare with all that?"

"I don't care about any of that! He's my brother. I love him, no, love's not a strong enough word. He's precious to me. He's not the cause of my suffering, the people who see him as such are." The sound of her voice gradually breaking into tears, it made James' throat swell and throb, his eyes squeezed shut.

"Then save him. Like you made me promise."

"This isn't what I meant."

Young Nathan laughed darkly, "no. If I gotta protect the little freak then I need compensation." A grunt followed. A few footsteps scraped against the metal of the bridge. "Fine. You love him but not enough to save him at your *expense*. There's your answer."

"No!" she exclaimed. There was an awkward silence for almost a minute. "I... I'd do anything for him," she said through tears, or so it sounded.

Adult Nathan trembled horribly. The hatred for himself was coursing through him. All he wanted to do was to try to hurl himself off that bridge again. It would mean having to get close to what was happening behind him, he didn't have the strength. It wasn't real, what was the point?

They both heard a loud bang behind them. Nathan turned his head to see James' body and or his will had given up all together; he was on his knees, head in his hands. He could only stare at him helplessly. Shouts turned into screams behind him, the sound of a massive struggle haunted him further. His next thought made him hate himself even more. *Why do I hear struggling, didn't she agree.* It nearly made him sick. Maybe she tried to retrieve the PADD, perhaps she tried to fool him. Why couldn't he remember? Maybe he didn't want to. Is this even real? The people he loved the most, why? Who could be so cruel?

A chilling crunch stopped his thoughts. Then there was a deathly silence.

"Debbie," he whispered. "I'm... so sorry."

His voice sounded so pitiful compared to his younger self's one that immediately followed, it sounded nothing like him. "Hey! I don't believe this!" he shouted loud enough for his voice to echo down into the valley. Nathan saw himself in the corner of his eye kicking or punching at things; trees, even the metal of the bridge. "Stupid bitch. I'll just do this myself." He was charging towards him. Nathan wanted to hurt him but he just froze when he walked straight by him, the anger on his face, he didn't even recognise himself.

Only then he felt the rain pouring, soaking right through his clothes and to his skin. He looked up. It may as well have been evening. The dark clouds were completely black.

He realised James had finally moved from that spot, making his head turn to look for him. There he was, slowly walking towards the overgrowth just by the pillar of the bridge. A figure lay in it. Her blonde hair drowned by red. He had to look away before the bridge became all too tempting again.

It was worse than he ever imagined. James always thought that his wonderful sister was knocked out from the attack first, so she never suffered from the rest of it. Instead her eyes were left wide open in terror. The blood from her head injury pooled beneath her. James crouched down. With his trembling hand he reached over to gently stroke her

cheek. A part of him hoped that like before he wouldn't be able to touch anyone, but this time she was tangible, real. The lump in his throat tightened, his eyes burned from the tears.

Before she disappeared from his life once again, he leaned over to give her a tender kiss on the forehead. A goodbye, an apology. He pushed the pointlessness of doing that to an hallucination, something in his head, to the back of his mind.

Then she was gone. In her place just an empty path. He could hear footsteps and the sound of one of the vampire's talking. "About our deal."

"It's off. I'm going to rip the little brat's head off, not you," young Nathan growled.

The vampires both laughed. "A parasite like you? A three year old Slayer would win by coughing."

They clearly misjudged him. He tore off a nearby tree branch and swung it forward. One disintegrated instantly, its head turned to dust as it hit the ground. The other had dodged out of the way in time, he lunged forward to attack. They struggled for a short while before Nathan plunged the weapon into its heart with such a force, it stumbled backwards and fell down the steep ravine. He didn't land, he was dust long before he got there.

He continued walking, the path disoriented around them so it looked like he was walking on the spot. Finally he reached the bush, where the tiny figure still hid. The anger distorted and then vanished from his face in an instant as he walked forward.

"There you are," he said, relieved. He ran the rest of the way. As he did the toddler climbed out quickly, despite the many thorns that pricked him on the way. Young Nathan seemed even more worried as he noticed the little boy shivering in his soaking clothes. He lifted him up to his chest, clutching him as tightly as he could. He ran off, leaving the adult versions of both behind.

"All of that... happened in between," Nathan stammered. James looked at him without turning his head. "I found you. I ran back to town. Security found us. None of that happened."

"You haven't figured it out yet?" his own voice cackled out of nowhere. "The memory lapses, the sleep walking, this? It's clear and then it's pouring, surely you noticed that. Did you think you spaced out for half an hour?"

"Quiet. It's just a trick," Nathan snapped.

"Jay remembers."

Nathan looked around desperately, the voice still didn't seem to come from anywhere. It surrounded them. "You're a monster."

"We're one in the same. You know that. Why do you think the brat never liked you."

Nathan looked towards James again. He was still in the same spot as before, unable to look at him. He didn't blame him.

"You have no one to blame but yourself. So focused on a Slayer's sister, with her gone, who could compare? You made me resort to this."

Nathan shook his head, "no, I don't understand. You're not me. You must be an alien, or a demon trying to hurt me. I don't believe this."

"If you had just played along there'd be no reason to do this. We'd both be free. Accept it."

Lights attacked their eyes for a moment. The scenery distorted, melted away until the image of the Brig sharpened around them. Nathan noticed first that he stood closely to James, who was slouched against the wall with a nasty red puncture in the side of his forehead. His eyes were closed, clearly unconscious.

Nathan clambered backwards until another wall stopped him. When he hit it, James appeared to come around groggily. Nathan noticed the needle like device in his own hand, it had blood all over it. In his shock it rolled off his palm and onto the floor.

"I... it wanted me to... help it move on. When I didn't. Oh god. Debbie, that girl. No," Nathan stuttered.

James struggled to get up. While he did so his hand touched the wound, which made him focus on Nathan instead. To him, his eyes looked dead. Flat and lifeless. After what he had seen he hoped they would turn red or black soon. A cold shudder went through him. Her screams were gone but he could still hear them. Debbie's smiling face flashed in his mind. Then all he could see was the frightened toddler he let down. Without realising it at first he was staring at the grown up version now standing, gazing towards nothing, frozen.

"She had lost everything but you. She thought she'd lose you as well. I thought she'd do anything to prevent that," Nathan said.

Nothing.

"Even still, she fought back. Give her two options, she'll find a third."

Still, he got no response. This wasn't the way to get his attention.

"She died for you."

That did it, James' eyes drifted towards him.

"See this son, you did this," Peter's voice hissed in his head.

"You wonder if it was worth it. All you've done..." Nathan continued.

"I hope you live with this for a long time."

"Good or bad," Nathan said as if nothing happened. "Would she be proud or full of regret?"

All the faces of the people he had hurt or killed briefly flickered into James' thoughts, blurred into each other. Their voices all shouted at him. Nathan's words inevitably came to the surface clearly. "She didn't die so you could hit people that wronged you. Kill people. Act superior to everyone. She did it as she thought your life was worth more than hers. The people you have saved, have they tipped the scales yet?"

No. One death weighed a hundred times more than any he may have helped, if any. He told himself that when Lena was possessed by Ylara that he did the right thing, putting Earth first. Lena would have wanted him to do that. Only he knew he could have taken care of both. He could have talked to her, convinced her to stay. Then she'd undo what Ylara had done.

"Didn't think so," Nathan's voice intruded.

When Voyager was about to be torn to bits by an anomaly only he could close, he didn't even count that either. That probably only happened, Deck Thirteen as well, because he was there. Why bother if he wasn't? If he wasn't on board Voyager, it wouldn't have been at risk.

The planet he nearly destroyed by his beaming down, playing the big hero out of ignorance, but instead triggered what he tried to prevent. If it wasn't for Jessie, billions would have died, because of him.

Frenit on New Earth was only a threat as James had killed his daughter in self defence. That one was obvious.

The people in the Mess Hall he thought he was saving by choosing to get a rigged to explode Jessie away, that only happened because of her relationship with him. He probably only convinced himself he was saving them, but he was just being selfish as always.

Jessie. Apart from helping her avoid losing her witch powers, what good did he ever do for her? Her dying, getting injured, all the grief. She'd tell him it was worth it, but he didn't think so.

"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's voice yelled at him again.

I am a monster. She was right. A selfish idiot at least, making excuses for everything. Dad was right about me. I'm nothing more than a pathetic coward, running away from what I'm supposed to do. His heart sank as that realisation hit him hard. What could he do about it now? The damage was done.

"Maybe it was for the best that she didn't see you as you are now," Nathan said coldly. "I did her a favour."

Anger started to rise to the surface, but he wasn't sure who it was for; himself or whatever was controlling Nathan.

"You're Human first, Lena. Please don't forget that," he remembered saying not long ago.

Internally he scoffed. That was true for Lena, as well as Sandi and Kevin. Zare. He however, the signs were there all along. He had told himself so many times, which he ignored ignorantly. He wasn't Human. Humans don't put themselves first, cause so much suffering while doing so. He wasn't any better than any monster he had killed. No better than the Softmicron and their mission to suck dry habited worlds and create super soldiers. No, he was worse.

"We were best friends but slowly and surely you took over her life, her affections," Nathan said. James then realised he had been talking all this time, further proof he

thought. "She was going to abandon me for you. What choice did I have?" The tone tapped a switch in James' head. All he could see was red. He didn't even think it, he threw himself at the face gloating towards him. His hand went for his throat as the body slammed back into the wall.

Nathan's sneering face was now locked in a grimace, it slowly turned blue. Then James saw it. Relief in his eyes, the pain. His hand loosened its grip. The panic in Nathan's eyes afterwards confirmed his fears.

"You wanted me to kill you," he whispered.

Nathan made a sound barely through his bruised throat. Blood shot eyes widened in fear. His face scrunched as if he was trying to appear menacing, or evil. It just looked wrong. His eyes continued to give him away. James let go completely. He must have been holding him up, as he almost stumbled to the floor.

"I can't," James said.

"Please," Nathan begged through a croak. "For Debbie."

"That's why I won't," James said quietly. He turned to leave the cell, but Nathan grabbed his arm which he pulled back immediately. "Live with it. I have." He stepped out of the cell.

"No! I'm dangerous, sick. Kill me!" Nathan pleaded.

James looked away as he turned the forcefield back on. "No more. Never again." He left Nathan alone to sob into his hands.

The Conference Room:

"It's a parasite."

Tom squinted at the strange DNA sequences on the wall computer. Then he focused on the two watchers standing on either side, one of which looked a little too excited despite the situation.

"Fascinating," he continued. "I have never seen proof of it until now."

"How do we treat it?" Harry asked impatiently.

"You don't," Wesley answered. "Not without rewiring the host's DNA structure. It would kill him."

Chakotay folded his arms across the table, with a puzzled look on his face. "Hang on. A parasite in his DNA? How?"

"Yes. It's told that it lays dormant in the subject from birth until it moves on," Wesley said.

"Birth? Oh god," Craig stuttered.

"When the host reproduces, its own DNA structure is passed down into the child. It can remain in a family for generations, I suppose indefinitely," Wesley said.

Daniel pulled a face before looking at the screen again. "Wait, I've heard of this. These parasites never manifest. Their sole purpose is to exist. They're benign at best."

Harry stared at everyone with his jaw threatening to drop. "Benign. This isn't our guy then."

Tom would have sided with him normally, but something nagged at him. "What happens when the host has multiple kids?"

"Difficult to say as there's been no concrete evidence of it existing," Wesley replied. "The myth claims that once it has successfully been reproduced its consciousness moves on to the new host."

"Okay then so what happens when a host doesn't have any kids?" Tom asked.

Daniel inhaled sharply, it suddenly made sense to him. He smirked when he spotted Wesley looking a little bewildered at the question. Harry meanwhile looked embarrassed and covered his face with his hand to hide it. Chakotay rolled his eyes as if he got it hours ago and didn't want to say anything.

"Its sole function would be compromised. It needs a new host, so it would take over to make sure it gets one," Daniel said. Wesley gasped, most likely because he hadn't thought of it.

"But the way this one went about it. He or it sure drew attention to itself," Harry said.

"Did it? Until this week we had no idea," Tom said. "It took over Nathan's mother, got pregnant with Nathan, then moved into him. He in turn used Nathan to attack James' sister, but failed."

Craig cringed, "nice word for killing her."

"We didn't know until it tried again with Perla," Tom said.

Chakotay sighed, "I get why with her. Nathan's in his forties, still single, that would make it desperate."

"Yeah?" Tom said warily.

"But Nathan's mother was eighteen. Nathan and James' sister were thirteen, fourteen right? Teenagers. Why did it force its hand both of those times?" Chakotay questioned. "Nathan's mother wasn't dying or sick, was she?"

Craig looked down at the table, "she checked herself into a hospital whilst heavily pregnant, screaming to *get rid of it*. She claimed to have tried a few times but would suffer memory lapses, end up back home. They thought she was insane. Only during her evaluations she said she didn't want any kids, ever. She went for help to get him taken from her."

"It must have took over everytime she tried to abort," Tom said sadly.

Harry shook his head stubbornly, "an eighteen year old has plenty of time to change their mind later. It was a risky move."

"Plausible though," Tom said. "If its dormant it likely has plenty of time to study its host. It probably knew her state of mind on the matter, and it acted."

"Ok, what about Debra Taylor then?" Chakotay asked. "They were best friends. There was no hurry. They may have gotten together like her brother did with his friend, or he may have met someone else later. It makes no sense."

"Yeah," Harry said, full of thought. "If it gets a female host it has full control of the pregnancy. Nathan's mother makes sense. She carries out the attack and keeps the kid. Nathan though, carries out the attack and the girl he picked hurries to the hospital for an abortion, he gets locked up. Pretty big risk."

"That's probably why she's dead," Craig said grimly.

"But still doesn't explain why it picked her then and there," Chakotay said.

Wesley stepped forward to take a seat next to Harry. He and Tom looked over at him briefly, catching him sighing. "Yes but this choice had a Slayer brother. If it worked, it would have had him as an uncle. James with a demonic family member, that must have been very tempting for it."

The whole room fell silent for a while as they all thought about that.

Craig decided to break it, but still only in a quiet mutter, "what better way for a bored so called benign demon to do some damage for once."

Chakotay nodded, "seems like he succeeded anyway."

Jessie hurried down the corridor, struggling to keep her breath. She finally entered her quarters. As she did her eyes widened so quickly they stung a little. Something caught her eye, and it hit her hard in the chest. So hard it almost choked the life out of her.

The dark clouds still lingered.

TO BE CONTINUED