

Mission: Murder on the Exeter Express, Day 3

Stardate: 2445.12.03

(USS Exeter – Emergency Transporter Room 2 – 2O/CEO – Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek – 0057)

(USS Exeter - Holodeck 3 - Ensign Janice Hammerfield – 0058)
(Uss Exeter -Holodeck 3- Tac/Sec Ens.(Sg) Stan More 00:58)
(USS Exeter – Emergency Transporter Room 2 – FO Cmdr Ailynn Bracken – 0058)
(The Roadhouse - CSO Lt Jg Erin Cortez - 0059)
(USS Exeter -Holodeck 3- "Maxine" - 00:59)
(USS Exeter – Emergency Transporter Room 2 – CTO/30 Lieutenant Sg. Ravok – 0100)
(The Roadhouse - CSO Lt Jg Erin Cortez - 0103)
(USS Exeter – Holodeck 3 –CFO – Lieutenant – Ire Williams – 0107)
(USS Exeter – Holodeck 3 –Maxine– 0108)
(Uss Exeter -Holodeck 3- Tac/Sec Ens.(Sg) Stan More 01:09)
(USS Exeter – Holodeck 3 –CFO – Lieutenant – Ire Williams– 0110)
(Uss Exeter - holodeck 3 - COO Ensign Paul Sleeford 01:10)
(USS Exeter –Holodeck 3 –Security Officer - Ensign – Arbor – 0111)
(USS Exeter – Holodeck 3 - FO Cmdr Ailynn Bracken – 0112)
(USS Exeter – Holodeck 3 – Medical Officer, Ensign JG Heinrich Kruse, M.D. – 0112)
(USS Exeter – Holodeck 3 - MedIntern aEns Lana Wakeman – 0113)
(The Roadhouse - CSO Lt Jg Erin Cortez - 0114)
(USS Exeter – Holodeck 3 - CTO/30 Lieutenant Sg Ravok – 0114)
(Uss exeter - Cargobay 3 - COO Ensign Paul Sleeford 01:15)
(USS Exeter – Emergency Transporter Room 2 – 2O/CEO – Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek – 0115)
(USS Exeter –Sickbay– Nurse – CPO – Ewan McDonald– 0116)
(USS Exeter – Sickbay – Medical Officer, Ensign JG Heinrich Kruse, M.D. – 0116)

(USS Exeter – Outside Holodeck 3 – CO, Captain Trip Williams – 0116)

(USS Exeter – Emergency Transporter Room 2 – 2O/CEO – Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek – 0118)
(USS Exeter – Sickbay –Nurse – CPO – Ewan McDonald – 0118)
(USS Exeter – Holodeck 3 - FO Cmdr Ailynn Bracken – 0119)

(USS Exeter – Holodeck 3 – CTO/30 Lieutenant Sg Ravok – 0119)

(Uss Exeter -Holodeck 3- Tac/Sec Ens.(Sg) Stan More 01:21)
(USS Exeter –Outside Holodeck 2 – CFO – Lieutenant – Ire Williams – 0123)
(USS Exeter – Sickbay - FO Cmdr Ailynn Bracken – 0124)
(USS Exeter –Sickbay–CFO – Lieutenant – Ire Williams– 0126)
(Loch Lomond - Coma induced dream - Tac/Sec Ens.(Sg) Stan More - 01:26)
(USS Exeter – ACMO – Ensign Dural Methor DrPH - 0126)
(USS Exeter – Sickbay - Lt Jg Greta Smith & Lt Ire Williams – 0129)
(USS Exeter - Operations Office - COO Ensign Paul Sleeford 01:30)
(USS Exeter – Deck 7- Sickbay/ morgue examination section. – CTO/30 Lieutenant Sg Ravok – 0203)
(USS Exeter – Personal Quarters– CO, Captain Trip Williams and Dir. R&SE Ashlyn Williams – 0600)
(USS Exeter - Ops Office - COO Ensign (sg) Paul Sleeford 06:30)
(USS Exeter - Quarters - COO Ensign (sg) Paul Sleeford 06:40)

(USS Exeter – Corsica's Quarters – Conus Lt(jg) Victoria Corsica – 0018)

The day had been long, and the time had gotten away from Victoria. Yawning the door to her quarters opened as Corsica was about to step through the newly opened doorway when her combadge chipped.

=^= Bracken to Corsica. Report Immediately to the area outside Holodeck 3. Serious continuing situation may need your expertise. ^=^=

She pressed her badge, "Understood, en-route." She replied turning her back on the comforts of her quarters and made quick time to the nearest turbolift. It didn't take an empath to know something was dreadfully wrong.

(USS Exeter – outside holodeck 3 –Ensign - Arbor– 0023)

"Any idea what's going on here?"

He turned to look at Smith and stepped over to her away from the senior officers.

“Not a lot Lieutenant. All I know is that there are people trapped in Holodeck 3 and that we are having problems gaining access of the main doors.”

(Reply Smith)

“They are saying about 6 people that we know of.”

(Reply Smith)

“Lieutenant Ravok had indicated about assaulting the holodeck from above via the armoury.”

(Reply Smith)

(USS Exeter – Deck 9, Enroute to Holodeck 3– Conus Lt(jg) Victoria Corsica – 0025)

The door to the turbolift slid open with a slight hiss. The change was immediate, almost as if she stepped into a different ship. The sounds and noises of what should be one of the most active decks on the Exeter was irly quite. Things were starting to add up, something was horribly wrong, and she hoped against the tightening feeling in her chest that she was wrong.

She rounded the corner to the hall where the holosuites were located, and all at once it hit her. Sorrow, hate, anger, loss, sadness, desperation it drove her to her knees. As the dark emotions overwhelmed her mental barriers. Tears welled in her eyes as Corsica found her footing and sprinted the rest of the way to the door of holosuite 3, understanding that what her crewmates were suffering was a test of life and death.

"Seems our friend has thought of everything. Is Corsica here yet?"

"I'm here sir," she called answering the captain's question. "What do you need of me?"

(Reply Trip, any)

(USS Exeter – outside holodeck 3 – Lt JG Greta Smith – 0025)

“Not a lot Lieutenant. All I know is that there are people trapped in Holodeck 3 and that we are having problems gaining access of the main doors.”

Greta looked at him and tilted her head a little, “Trapped? How many?”

“They are saying about 6 people that we know of.”

Greta sighed heavily, “6... do we know if they're okay?” She glanced over at Ravok and turned back to Arbor, “What are we doing about getting our people out?”

“Lieutenant Ravok had indicated about assaulting the holodeck from above via the armoury.”

Greta nodded, “Wait... if they are trapped, does that mean that it’s a holodeck fault or is someone holding them there?”

(Reply Arbor)

Greta could feel that fire that she had inside her beginning to build. Gritting her teeth slightly, she nodded to Arbor, “Well, i can say one thing. What ever is going on, we will get them out.”

(Reply Arbor)

Smiling, she nodded, “We have some of the best crew in the fleet. Who ever is in there, we’ll get them out safely.”

(Reply Arbor)

(USS Exeter – Deck 9, Holodeck Maintenance – 2O/CEO – Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek – 0026)

Ravok turned to look at the screen while Keira yelled over her shoulder. Keira saw Trip enter the room, "You had a live feed," he informed her.

Which caused her to look back at the screen to see a characterized yellow smiling face waiving a finger back and forth, asking for a magic word.

" Damn it." Ravok exclaimed as he turned away from the monitor in a rage." Fvadt susse-thrai!" He further cursed in Romulan.

“You figure the sociopath would want to gloat, Slykhe dha'rudh! ” {Rom, N. Dialect: greedy jerk}

"Before the feed cut, did anyone get a count of how many are in there. Is it just Sleaford, Ire, and Cortez? Are there others? Does anybody have any idea?" Trip asked.

Ravok turned to him.

" Lieutenants Williams and Cortez. Ensigns Sleaford , Hammerfiled and More two medical/ science personnel that in unfamiliar with and My cousin Nesha ." He said looking over Trips shoulder at Greta.

"Keira, could it be possible for a security team to go in through the jeffires tube system into the Holodeck, and if so Ravok, could you get a team through?"

Ravok looked at Keira and nodded his head. " Yes it is..." he answered for her.

" And yes I can. I should be able to access holodeck 3 from an entry point on the ceiling. The armory is right above holodeck 3. We can drop down in overwhelming force, but it appears the occupants are restrained with force fields. We could the bioelectirc field modulators on the EV suits to momentarily disrupt the forcefields."

"It's a tight fit from the ground one by one, crawling. Nasty choke point. Or the one from the ceiling, fast rope in. Ground is quieter, but makes them more vulnerable. Small warning from the top when the friction descender sings against the cord. We could fix that with a short range sonic dampener." Keira was answering the Captain but also thinking out loud. "Once the threshold is crossed they'd beholden to what ever rules she has set up in there. If she for example put all the entry points behind rock, they'd have to drill through rock to get access."

She was babbling again. "Yes, it can be done," she answered simply.

She also offered, "We could also attempt a modified annular confinement beam to transport someone or something in." What she really wanted was to not send her boyfriend, the last time he went striding into danger, he lost an eye and almost his life. She of course said nothing, though the feeling was burning a hole in the pit of her stomach.

(reply Trip, Ravok, Bracken, Corsica, any assembled)

(USS Exeter – Outside Holodeck 3 – FO Cmdr Ailynn Bracken. – 0027)

Ailynn was half listening to Trip, and half wondering how they could proceed with the ever-changing situation in Holodeck 3. Suppressing another yawn, she began to pull her

attention back to her surroundings as she heard footsteps and voices grow nearer. She was only still half paying attention to her surroundings as a voice addressed her.

“Commander Bracken, did someone ask for a doctor?”

She turned, to see a male human, perhaps a couple of years older than her, though a couple of inches shorter. She smiled gently, and spoke pleasantly, hopefully putting him at ease.

“Good evening...morning...whatever time of the blasted day it is. Doctor....” She paused.

“Don’t tell me...I’ll have your name in a second....Doctor Kruze isn’t it? Mum spoke very highly of you, said you’d be an asset to the Exeter.”

(Reply Kruze)

“Anyway, listen to me babbling, been a long day. Ongoing hostage situation, at least six hostages, potential casualties. I can help you out if need be, but I don’t want to undermine you, you have the medical lead on this for the moment. Nurse Drake will be around to assist too.”

(Reply Kruze)

(USS Exeter – Deck 9 - Holodeck 3– Conus Lt(jg) Victoria Corsica – 0030)

She listened to the conversation going on around them. She knew action needed to be taken. She also knew who they were dealing with was a clear sociopath with a clear lacking of empathy. One that chose to have this showdown in this location. If that was the case She would know the weaknesses of her fortress.

"We can rule out that whoever is wholed up with in will be expecting a assault of some kind. It could very well be a trap with in a trap. Anyone who enters this room will be in the world of sociopath and subject to the rules that person dictates." Corsica spoke analyzing the mental profile of one beyond the one source of joy and amusement beyond the door before her.

Pain filled her mind as she lost contact with another mind beyond the door, as Clarke met his fate.

She shook her mind. "I've lost contact with another mind."

(reply any.)

"I don't know, the person could be dead or just unconscious, I can't tell with only being connected to surface emotions." She answered. Trying to make sense of the feeling that were bombarding her mind.

Corsica knew if she didn't do something more. Even greater harm would come to the crew. She focused she knew what risk she would be taking, she knew the risk that diving deeper would do. The deeper she dove the more connected the more she would feel the emotions as if they were her own. But in her mind she started to build that bridge.

Would the Captain allow her to take such a risk Corsica did not know. But she knew if she was gonna be of any assistance she needed to make this connection. She needed to be in place when the inevitable breach of the holodeck would occur.

Joy, Happiness, and a superior arrogance, the feeling of always being one step ahead. She reached for Maxine's mind. Corsica knew this person cared little for the pain she inflicted on others but if she could reach her own sorrow, her own sadness, maybe she could break down her hard exterior shell long enough to cause her to make a mistake in her own game.

(Reply Maxine, Trip, any)

(USS Exeter – Deck 9, In front of Holodeck 3– CO, Captain Trip Williams – 0031)

Trip listened intently to the options that were given by his advisors. However, much like his counselor, he could feel the emotions coming from within the holodeck and it was troubling.

"Look whatever we decide, we need to act fast. The sooner we act the sooner we can put this to bed." Trip rubbed his eyes. "We'll do the annular confinement beam, send in a team of three or four. "

Trip looked around to see who was assembled.

~Ailynn is running on fumes, Merek just had a close call, and with Ire in there, I can't risk sending in Greta. So Arbor, the new doctor over there, Ravok, and @#\$% it, I'll go myself. Whoever is behind this has been hurting my people, and it's time for her to pay.~

"Alright, here is what we're going to do. Merek, you get the beam ready. Ravok, Arbor, and the doctor, umm....New guy what's your name?"

(Reply Kruze)

"Ok so Arbor, Ravok and Dr. Kruze are going to go in, Commander Bracken, you and Lt. Smith Guard the door. Nurse Drake, will stay on standby just in case. That alright with you Commander?"

(reply Bracken)

"Lt, Corisca, you'll stay outside as well, keep Commander Bracken apprised of anything that may be going on in there. As long as video is out, you're the eyes and ears."

(Reply Corsica)

"And before you gear up Lt. Ravok, I'll be leading the rescue team, not you. My people are in danger, and dammit, I'm gonna get them out,"

(reply Ravok, Bracken, Merek)

(reply Ravok, Bracken, Merek, Kruze, Corsica. Arbor and GReta iyw)

(USS Exeter – Deck 9, In front of Holodeck 3– Medical Officer, Ensign JG Heinrich Kruse, M.D. – 0031)

Commander Bracken turned to Heinrich, and spoke far more pleasantly than he expected her to in such a time and situation. "Good evening...morning...whatever time of the blasted day it is. Doctor.... Don't tell me...I'll have your name in a second....Doctor Kruze isn't it? Mum spoke very highly of you, said you'd be an asset to the Exeter." Heinrich tried to hold back, but he couldn't help but smile. Perhaps, even blush a bit. It doesn't take a medical doctor to put two and two together, and he assumed the Commander must have meant the Fleet Surgeon General.

“Well thank you ma’am, that’s very kind.”

“Anyway, listen to me babbling, been a long day. Ongoing hostage situation, at least six hostages, potential casualties. I can help you out if need be, but I don’t want to undermine you, you have the medical lead on this for the moment. Nurse Drake will be around to assist too.” Hostage. Potential casualties. Medical lead. Heinrich had only been a Starfleet officer for three days and was already being thrown straight in the thick of it. He hated the graveyard shift. It was all too overwhelming. He had no idea what to say.

“Understood.” Was all that came out. He stood back, his mind racing. He pieced together the various simulations and role plays he had done while at the Academy. He tried to recall the different case studies they had gone over. There’s a lot that can be done in a Holodeck. While Heinrich wanted to walk into the situation knowing what to do, the fact was he could not know until he saw the patients, or bodies.

"Alright, here is what we're going to do. Merek, you get the beam ready. Ravok, Arbor, and the doctor, umm....New guy what's your name?" Heinrich snapped out of his trance.

“Dr. Heinrich Kruze, sir.”

"Ok so Arbor, Ravok and Dr. Kruze are going to go in, Commander Bracken, you and Lt. Smith Guard the door. Nurse Drake, will stay on standby just in case. That alright with you Commander?"

All Heinrich could do was nod. This was getting to be very real. And he felt wholly unprepared.

(Reply any)

(USS Exeter – Deck 9, In front of Holodeck 3– FO Cmdr Ailynn Bracken – 0032)

"Ok so Arbor, Ravok and Dr. Kruze are going to go in, Commander Bracken, you and Lt. Smith Guard the door. Nurse Drake, will stay on standby just in case. That alright with you Commander?"

Ailynn's full attention was immediately turned toward Trip, a thousand words immediately ran through her mind. She opened her mouth to object, but Trip was already speaking To Lieutenant Corsica. She let the conversation between the two of them run it's course. Trip then continued.

"And before you gear up Lt. Ravok, I'll be leading the rescue team, not you. My people are in danger, and dammit, I'm gonna get them out,"

"Captain, I must object." Ailynn looked toward her old friend, now superior. She remembered an old argument that she'd had at the Academy with some of her classmates. ~True loyalty,~ she had thought, ~was knowing when to object to a superior on an action that one felt was incorrect, not a blind following of their orders.~

(Reply Trip)

"Captain, I must object to your being a member of the away team, I appreciate its your prerogative, however standing regulation says that it be me. Your responsibility is to the 490-odd souls of the ship that remain out here, not the 7 in that room Sir." Her tone was gentle, but firm, she'd drawn herself to a stance that was less slouchy than she'd been.

(Reply Trip)

She smiled gently. "Besides, if you think I'm going to let you hightail it into there, get your arse killed, then leave me to explain to Ash what's happened, and moreover, look my as yet unborn cousin in the eye why they don't have a father, then, respectfully, you need to think again. Sir." She was all too aware of the other officers around them, some more junior, but hopefully they'd learn a lesson about the interplay between high ranking Command staff, especially the relationship between First Officer, and Commanding Officer.

(reply Trip)

(USS Exeter – Deck 9, In front of Holodeck 3 – 2O/CEO – Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek – 0033)

"Alright, here is what we're going to do. Merek, you get the beam ready. Ravok, Arbor, and the doctor, umm....New guy what's your name?"

(Reply Kruze)

"Ok so Arbor, Ravok and Dr. Kruze are going to go in, Commander Bracken, you and Lt. Smith Guard the door. Nurse Drake, will stay on standby just in case. That alright with you Commander?"

(reply Bracken)

"Lt, Corisca, you'll stay outside as well, keep Commander Bracken apprised of anything that may be going on in there. As long as video is out, you're the eyes and ears."

(Reply Corsica)

"And before you gear up Lt. Ravok, I'll be leading the rescue team, not you. My people are in danger, and dammit, I'm gonna get them out,"

There was lots of chatter, vital communication to be sure but it was going at a fast enough pace that it seemed to blend together in an odd buzzing cacophony.

"Sir, I haven't told you the risks of my plan." Keira blurted out.

(Reply Trip or Bracken)

"Beaming in is high risk, high reward." She said evenly. "It eliminates the bottleneck, you have the advantage of a quick entrance and you can arrive in whatever formation you want to but, you might not beam in. There is a possibility she's thought of that, and given what I've encountered trying to shut down her little pocket domain, you may not come back at all once you energize. I also know for certain you won't be able to beam out until I've figured out what all she's done, but that takes time we don't have."

(Reply Trip or Bracken, Kruse, Corsica, any)

(USS Exeter – Deck 9, In front of Holodeck 3– CTO/3O Lieutenant Sg. Ravok – 0033)

Ravok paid full attention as Trip spoke.

"Ok so Arbor, Ravok and Dr. Kruze are going to go in, Commander Bracken, you and Lt. Smith Guard the door. Nurse Drake, will stay on standby just in case. That alright with you Commander?"

Ravok instantly glanced over at Commander Bracken who seemed to be in a state of shock, but not in a helpless way but in the way she often looks when she is about to bombard someone with common sense. Trip carried on conversation with Counselor Corsica then turned his attention to Ravok.

"And before you gear up Lieutenant Ravok, I'll be leading the rescue team, not you. My people are in danger, and dammit, I'm gonna get them out," Trip commanded.

Ravok was about to speak but was beaten to the opportunity by Ailynn.

"Captain, I must object."

Ravok stood there growing more and more impatient, his family was in there.

He took a deep breath as the captain and first officer talked. When they were finished Ravok looked at everyone.

" Let's end this and get our people back." He said with pure determination. The people on the other side of that door were family. To him Erin was still the girl that sat next to him in Xeno

linguistics during second year at the academy. She was the girl that didn't see him as a Romulan. She saw Ravok for who he was and in many ways made him see things about himself that he was blind to his entire life.

Ire. To Ravok he was still the most fortunate and simultaneously unfortunate pilot he had ever encountered. Ire was a brother in arms and a friend in heart. Ire had asked Ravok to be his best man. It was the highest honor of Ravok's life up to that point.

Nesha was older than him but had all the traits of an annoying kid sister. His daughter looked up to her in many ways.

He often wished he had more time with her. Besides his daughter she was the only link to his own Romulan heritage that he had left.

(reply any)

(USS Exeter – Deck 9, In front of Holodeck 3– CO, Captain Trip Williams – 0036)

“Captain, I must object.” Ailynn looked toward her old friend, now superior.

~I knew this was coming.~ Trip smiled. He knew the rules. He knew the booksmart Ailynn knew them too.

"Go Ahead."

“Captain, I must object to your being a member of the away team, I appreciate its your prerogative, however standing regulation says that it be me. Your responsibility is to the 490-odd souls of the ship that remain out here, not the 7 in that room Sir.” Her tone was gentle, but firm, she’d drawn herself to a stance that was less slouchy than she’d been.

"I understand." Trip replied Politely.

She smiled gently. "Besides, if you think I'm going to let you hightail it into there, get your arse killed, then leave me to explain to Ash what's happened, and moreover, look my as yet unborn cousin in the eye why they don't have a father, then, respectfully, you need to think again. Sir."

"Ailynn, I get that I do. But it has to be me." He paused. "Look, you are in no shape to lead a mission like this. You've had almost no sleep in the last 24 hours. You're tired and fatigued. I on the other hand had rest, and enough caffeine to get me through this. I'm more alert than you right now. Essentially I'm all jacked up on mountain dew. I can't send Merek, we need her on the outside. Ravok, he needs back up. I don't want to risk any more folks."

(reply Ailynn)

"Look Lynn, this isn't just me ordering my crew into a situation they may not come back from, this is me ordering them into a situation where they may cease to exist before even getting there. The odds.... the odds are not like they were at the asteroid. I can't, I can't ask anyone to do something I'm not willing to do. I know the risks, to my ship, my crew, my family. But I knew those risks every time we flew a mission...."

(reply Ailynn)

"Look I know what you're going to say, no this isn't me trying to make up for the fact that I left men behind, stranded, during the second battle of Wolf 359. If not for Frost and the Honey Badgers, we;d have lost the bulk of them. I know when to make the tough call, I know when to make that order. But I also know, I want to give folks a fighting chance. I wouldn't make this choice if I didn't think you were capable of taking my place....if the worst happened."

(reply Ailynn)

Trip grumbled and then nodded. "\$#%@! You're right. You're always right. My place will always be on the bridge, it's not just a pride thing, it's duty, its responsibility. @#\$&" Trip turned and punched the screen where the words you didn't say he magic words was scrolling, and absolutely destroyed it.

"Sorry about that. Look, get some caffeine stimulants. You're leading the team."

(reply Ailynn)

"Ravok, Arbor, get phaser rifles, one for the Commander too. Kruze, get your medkit and a phaser ready."

" Let's end this and get our people back."

"Commander Merek, get the beam ready. I want our team in that holodeck by 0100."

(reply Merek)

(reply Ailynn, Merek, Kruze, Smith, Ravok, Arbor iyw)

(USS Exeter – Deck 9, In front of Holodeck 3– FO Cmdr Ailynn Bracken – 0037)

"Ailynn, I get that I do. But it has to be me." He paused. "Look, you are in no shape to lead a mission like this. You've had almost no sleep in the last 24 hours. You're tired and fatigued. I on the other hand had rest, and enough caffeine to get me through this. I'm more alert than you right now. Essentially I'm all jacked up on mountain dew. I can't send Merek, we need her on the outside. Ravok, he needs back up. I don't want to risk any more folks."

“Dammit Trip I am more than capable of overcoming a small amount of tiredness, the adrenaline alone has shifted that. I can not let you do this.” She answered gently, but firmly.

"Look Lynn, this isn't just me ordering my crew into a situation they may not come back from, this is me ordering them into a situation where they may cease to exist before even getting there. The odds.... the odds are not like they were at the asteroid. I can't, I can't ask

anyone to do something I'm not willing to do. I know the risks, to my ship, my crew, my family. But I knew those risks every time we flew a mission...."

"This is not the same thing. I am not about to let you go pulling rank rolling against those odds just because you want to play hero and make up for..." Ailynn was getting annoyed. The longer that they spent discussing things...

"Look I know what you're going to say, no this isn't me trying to make up for the fact that I left men behind, stranded, during the second battle of Wolf 359. If not for Frost and the Honey Badgers, we;d have lost the bulk of them. I know when to make the tough call, I know when to make that order. But I also know, I want to give folks a fighting chance. I wouldn't make this choice if I didn't think you were capable of taking my place....if the worst happened."

"I understand that, I do, however, that is my job to get sent into these situations, it's my job to lead the team, it's my job to take them out, get things done and bring them back, and I will not sit idly by, wondering if today is the day that I become Captain because my oldest friend decided to use his prerogative, and be on an insanely dangerous beam in, instead of where he should be, i.e. on the Bridge." Ailynn's tone was crisp, not quite sharp, but far more forceful and carefully annunciated than normal, another sign that her patience was wearing thin.

Trip grumbled and then nodded. "\$#%@! You're right. You're always right. My place will always be on the bridge, it's not just a pride thing, it's duty, its responsibility. @#\$\$" Trip turned and punched the screen where the words you didn't say he magic words was scrolling, and absolutely destroyed it.

"Sorry about that. Look, get some caffeine stimulants. You're leading the team."

She nodded. "Captain."

She was all business now. If there was one thing, above all else that had always utterly unnerved her friends and colleagues at the Academy, it was how fast her manner changed. In between heartbeats she could turn from playful, to full on utter concentration, from appearing almost vapid, to having her entire intellect laser focussed on a problem.

She was aware of Trip giving out orders to the rest of the team. She turned as she moved to leave the room, her surgeon's fingers pulling her hair into a beautifully tight french braid as she spoke. "Suited and booted, wheels up in twenty minutes, Emergency Transporter 2."

She got to the door once more and stopped, looking at Trip, she didn't say anything, but held his gaze for a moment, then nodded, and left the room.

(Reply Trip only IYW)

(USS Exeter – Deck 9, In front of Holodeck 3 – CO, Lt. Commander Trip Williams – 0038)

After giving his orders, Trip took Keira aside.

"Commander, I know you have reservations about this plan. But honestly, I can feel the pain of the folks in there. They are hurting, they are grieving. Hell..." Trip began to whisper at this point. "Ire is feeling a rage, I have never felt him have before. I'm not just worried about their physical health, but their mental health. The long term effects. I know this is gonna be rough, but sometimes you have to hit on 17 in Black Jack if you want to win.:

(Reply Merek)

"I wouldn't be asking you to do this if I didn't think you were capable of doing this. I wouldn't ask ravok to do it if I didn't think you were capable of doing it. I don't care what anyone says, you are a generational engineering mind."

(Reply Merek)

"So, reservations or not, this is the game plan. I trust you to get them in there. If you object, I'll get Brightwood or Vosi to do it. But you are the one smart enough to get them in there. I've made my decision. But if you don't think you can do it then we will change direction. But I know you can. I believe you can."

(Reply Merek)

(USS Exeter – Deck 9, In front of Holodeck 3 – 2O/CEO – Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek – 0039)

"Commander Merek, get the beam ready. I want our team in that holodeck by 0100."

~ No acknowledgement, no thanks for the input, techie just do your job I guess.~

“Aye.” She said softly and began to turn around, but the Captain touched her shoulder. He motioned for her to come to one side.

"Commander, I know you have reservations about this plan. But honestly, I can feel the pain of the folks in there. They are hurting, they are grieving. Hell..." Trip began to whisper at this point. "Ire is feeling a rage, I have never felt him have before. I'm not just worried about their physical health, but their mental health. The long term effects. I know this is gonna be rough, but sometimes you have to hit on 17 in Black Jack if you want to win."

“Roulette?” She looked puzzled, “the Earth casino game?” Sometimes the Captain’s Earth colloquialisms went right over Keira’s head. Despite that, the gravitas of the Skipper’s words let her know that time was of the essence and he believed this was the best plan.

"I wouldn't be asking you to do this if I didn't think you were capable of doing this. I wouldn't ask ravok to do it if I didn't think you were capable of doing it. I don't care what anyone says, you are a generational engineering mind."

“I’m flattered you think so, but this person has been steps ahead of us from the beginning...” Keira started.

"So, reservations or not, this is the game plan. I trust you to get them in there. If you object, I'll get Brightwood or Vosi to do it. But you are the one smart enough to get them in there. I've made my decision. But if you don't think you can do it then we will change direction. But I know you can. I believe you can."

~Everyone’s life is in your hands, no big deal.~

“Aye.” She answered this time with more confidence. “I still don’t trust the site to site system, have them assemble in Emergency Transporter room two just down the hall, eighteen minutes?”

(Reply Trip, any)

Keira broke into a trot toward the transporter room.

(Reply any)

(USS Exeter –Deck 9, In front of Holodeck 3 – Medical Officer, Ensign JG Heinrich Kruse, M.D. – 0039)

Captain Trip and Commander Bracken were disputing among themselves, but Heinrich wasn't really paying attention. He had grown up being told stories about Starfleet heroes of old. He may now have to be one of them. When you listen to a story it's exciting, but one of the most trying things in life can be to find yourself within a story. Heinrich was in a story.

"Kruze, get your medkit and a phaser ready." Captain Trip knocked Heinrich out of his fugue. "Aye captain." He muttered. ~At least I have the bare minimum right, I brought my medkit~ he thought to himself. But when he checked his belt he realized he forgot his phaser. Stupid!

"Commander Merek, get the beam ready. I want our team in that holodeck by 0100."

"I still don't trust the site to site system, have them assemble in Emergency Transporter room two just down the hall, eighteen minutes?" Heinrich overheard. ~Good,~ he thought ~that gives me more than enough time to pick up my phaser.~ Heinrich promptly left the gathered officers and walked down the hall. He remembered he left his phaser in sickbay. But he needed to remember how to get back to sickbay. The hall no longer looked familiar. He was walking past living quarters when he should have been walking past the game room.

~I think I'm going the wrong way.~ He turned around. Passed by the officers still gathered and found the turbolift. "Deck 4... wait no deck 7... yeah deck 7" He told the computer. When the door opened he knew exactly where he was. He walked down the hall and entered sickbay. Found his little office nook and picked up the phaser he left. Now he just needed to find his way back.

He walked back to the Turbolift. ~Now what floor was I on...~ "Uh... deck 8." When the door opened he did not recognize anything. But he didn't think much of it because he didn't expect to. He saw a sign on the wall pointing left to the transporter rooms. He didn't see any of the officers in the hall, but again didn't expect to. But when he walked into the transporter room there was no one around. ~Drat, I must be on the wrong floor.~ He checked his watch. 0048. ~I still have some time.~ He walked briskly out of the transporter room and down the hall. He moved as fast as he could without breaking into a sprint. ~First mission and I can't even find the right room.~

He made his way back to the turbolift. Since no one was around he said, “Computer, take me to the deck with the holodecks.” The turbolift began to move, and when the door opened he recognized the floor. Greatly relieved he ran down the hall until he saw a sign “Transporter room 2.”

(USS Exeter – Emergency Transporter Room 2 – 2O/CEO – Medical Officer, Ensign JG Heinrich Kruse, M.D. – 0057)

He entered the transporter room just as Lt. Cmdr. Merek was making the final adjustments. “Positions please, transport in two minutes.” Keira announced.

“I made it! I made it!” Heinrich called out. “Sorry about that, got a little lost.” He hurried up to one of the pads and waited.

(Reply any)

“Energizing” Heinrich began to dematerialize.

(USS Exeter – outside holodeck 3 – Lt JG Greta Smith – 0041)

As the team that would be going in to rescue their crew began their preparations, something occurred to Greta.

~Arbor is a fine officer, capable and dependable.... But why not me. Why am I....?~

Then, as the sound of the Captain hitting one of the panels outside the holodeck hit her ears, she knew.

She realised why. Keeping herself calm, she took a deep breath, fixed a determined look on her face and took her phaser out of her belt.

Standing by the door of the holodeck, she closed her eyes for a moment. Knowing the last time something like this had happened, she had broke and, determined not to do it again, she opened her eyes, stood ready and waited. Hoping and praying that they were all okay on the other side of the door.

(Reply any outside holodeck)

(USS Exeter – Deck 9- Holodeck 3 - Tac/Sec Ens.(Sg) Stan More - 00:55)

Anger. Pure and true flowed through him.

"And Stan More. Oh Stan, what could I do to you that you haven't already done to yourself. Honestly, it might have been better to leave you on the outside. You;d have caused more chaos that way. But sometimes its better to keep you on a short leash."

~ That's correct ye shrill sounding frangot because once that leash is cut. I'll send yer carcass to hell ~ he thought but said.

"Aye..." He did not wish to vent out aloud. Who or whatever this Maxine was. It was clear she was looking for a reason to hurt. The less said the better.

The situation became more deadly. Stan had to watch as Maxine's insane and sick game continued. He almost rushed to his best friend Paul's aide. But he knew it would probably get Sleaford killed. So instead Stan held himself back. But it was a strain on the young Scot.

"Well while Sleaford is recovering his breath, Ire is seething in anger and Erin is wallowing in grief. Let's move on shall we. Janice, Lana, and Stand, truth or death? Oh just because I'm being merciful. First to speak, speaks for you all. If they say truth, it's truth, if they pick death. Death."

She could not even get his name correct. Stand indeed. But maybe it was a trap designed to lure him into speaking first? Well More was not going to oblige her. Maxine had zeroed in on Hammerfield and taunted Stan again.

"Oh well this will be fun. Truth it is. Sorry Stanley, we will have tussle later." Maxine said with a laugh. "Now then, you can answer in any order you want, I don't mind."

~ “ A tussle? I nay think so lassie I nay think so ~ Stan thought.

Maxines taunts continued.

Then last with a laugh, "And Stan, dear Stan, oh bringer of chaos and fun. What shall I ask you. I know, not counting me and this moment in time of course. Are you your own worst enemy?"

~ That's it is it yer wee frangot? Taunt us into nailing ourselves into our own coffins with our mouths.... ~ “ Stan thought.

Looking Maxine in the eyes. Stan sat down on the floor.

“ Not today Lassie” he said. With that he gave her a wink. Then he bent his head and began to idly play with his boots. Ignoring her completely.

(Reply , Maxine and the rest of Holodeck prisoners)

(USS Exeter – Deck 9- Holodeck 3 -Maxine - 00:56)

“ Not today Lassie” he said. With that he gave her a wink. Then he bent his head and began to idly play with his boots. Ignoring her completely.

Maxine began to laugh uncontrollably and then smiled. "Oh Stan, when will you ever learn to not be hasty with your decision making. I have told you repeatedly that I am willing to kill your crewmates to punish you for your insolence. I told Sleeford that the more he begged to be hurt to protect the others, I was going to hurt the others. When Erin was defiant I killed Nesha. Yet here you are, ignoring me. So either you didn't think this through, or you actually want your crewmates to die. So be it." Maxine then played a quick game of eeny meeny miney mo and then ointed at Erin.

"Erin, have you had a good life?"

(Reply Erin)

"Pity, well when you see Tyko Nix in the afterlife, tell him I said hello."

(reply Erin iyw)

"Toodeloo."

At that moment energy surged through Erin's stasis field and into her, and withn in second, the stasis field expanded, much as it had for Nesha and David Clarke, as Erin's body fell to the floor, joining her two fallen comrades.

"Well what a shame. I very much enjoyed Erin's company and I wanted to see her make it to the end. But alas, there it is."

Maxine smiled again, "Lana, I believe its your time to say truth. Hopefully you learned from Stan's lesson. The more you defy, the more of your crewmates die"

(reply Lana)

(Reply Erin, Lana, any of the captured)

(USS Exeter – Deck 9- Holodeck 3 -MedIntern Lana Wakeman - 00:57)

Maxine smiled again, as Lieutenant Cortez lay on the floor, from where she was Lana was unable to see the seriousness of her injuries, if at all she was still alive, she was held too firmly in place in her stasis bonds.

"Lana, I believe its your time to say truth. Hopefully you learned from Stan's lesson. The more you defy, the more of your crewmates die"

Lana sighed, her eyes tightening slightly in thought. She'd seen where defiance and refusal had got everyone. "What is it you want me to say? Talk to you about my tortured childhood, how dreadful my mother was?"

(reply Maxine)

"Well, Maxine. I'm sorry to disappoint you, my mother tried her best, she didn't always make the best decision, didn't always get it right; but she was there. At least she was until I got older, then...things went south a touch, didn't approve of the way I approached things that I'd worked on." A tear escaped the grip of her left eye. "We parted on bad terms. That's all you need to know."

(Reply Maxine)

"DAMMIT...I tried everything, I pushed myself and all I got was open criticism. Did she love me? As a small child yes, later, toward the end, no." Her voice fell to a whisper as more tears ran down her cheeks. "No she didn't. Quite the opposite."

(Reply Maxine, any captured)

(USS Exeter - Holodeck 3 - CSO Lt JG Erin Cortez - 0057)

The noise was still in Erin's ears. The whole noise that she knew was in her mind but all she could think about was the fact that Nesha was dead. The woman who had gone into bat for her against her own mother and had been a recent constant in her life was now dead because of her. The guilt she felt was all consuming. As she tried to steady her breathing, she became aware that the woman who was holding them in the holodeck was now pointing at her.

"Erin, have you had a good life?"

Looking at her, Erin knew what was about to happen on some level. She looked at her and said, "Yes and no."

"Pity, well when you see Tyko Nix in the afterlife, tell him I said hello."

Erin looked at the others briefly and then turned back to "Maxine" and closed her eyes.

"Toodeloo."

A strange feeling hit Erin at the same time as the electricity did. She didn't feel the pain, didn't feel anything other than an overwhelming sense of relief and something else. Sorrow. As the room faded and she felt herself fall to the floor, all she could think was one word.

~Sorry~

(Reply any)

(USS Exeter - Holodeck 3 - COO Ensign(sg) Paul Sleeford 00:57)

NRPG - Comments and thoughts are the characters and in no way express the thoughts of the author.. end NRPG

Sleeford looked across at Ire, seeing him suck in his grief and self loathing, from his limited view over his shoulder he could see Hammerhead standing quietly in thought, Stan whom

Sleeford thought would make a fight of it, sat on the floor playing with his boot laces, like a petulant child. The three dead bodies lay held it here stasis field.

That left Wakeman and himself, sighing Sleeford looked at 'Maxine' sitting gloating at the front of where ever this was, looking over the death and chaos she'd created.

"Okay Maxine, you win. Kill them all for all I care, I'm fed up playing your game, so fry them all and hang me out to be framed for their deaths and the murder of Tyko Nix, I'm too tried to fight you anymore, to be honest your going to kill us all anyway so just get it over with"

(Reply any in holodeck)

(USS Exeter – Emergency Transporter Room 2 – 2O/CEO – Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek – 0057)

A series of diagnostics, and an adjustment to the console to have it only take manual input, and she was ready. The team had already begun to assemble as she was making the final adjustments.

(Reply Bracken, Ravok, Kruse, Arbor, IYW)

"I've adjusted the console to only accept my manual input. This precludes any nasty viruses or booby traps in the software and I've done a full mechanical sweep of the transporter pads and found nothing that shouldn't be there." Keira reported. "This transport is completely manual, I won't beam you into anything, but to avoid anyone merging with the ground some of you might be one to five centimeters above the ground. Take that into consideration when you materialize."

(Reply Bracken, any)

"Positions please, transport in two minutes." Keira announced.

(Reply any)

As the team coordinated Keira performed her final calculations. She looked up one last time, her eyes locked with the man she loved, who she came to adore over the last year and a half.

(Reply Ravok)

"Arhem docgae, duhaen h'ta fvau i arhva," {ND Rom: I know, just hurry back to me.} she answered.

(Reply Bracken)

The Romulan woman steeled herself. “Energizing.” She announced as her left hand guided the slider controls up and the away team dematerialized off the transporter pad.

(Reply Bracken, Ravok, Kruse, Arbor, IYW)

(USS Exeter - Holodeck 3 - Ensign Janice Hammerfield – 0058)

“Okay Maxine, you win. Kill them all for all I care, I’m fed up playing your game, so fry them all and hang me out to be framed for their deaths and the murder of Tyko Nix, I’m too tired to fight you anymore, to be honest your going to kill us all anyway so just get it over with”

Janice looked over at him still pinned in place and shook her head. She then looked at the bodies on the floor. She thought it imperative to keep buying time for anyone on the ship to try and stop Maxine, if they even knew about it at all. She did agree with Paul that there was no way out for any of them but there was a lingering question that had troubled her since she was brought into the holodeck. Was it just their lives in immediate danger or that of the entire ship? There was plenty of time and opportunity for Maxine to do a lot of damage and she knew that there were still a set of chemicals missing.

“NO! Don’t listen to him,” she shouted, “Let them go. I’ll stay here. Ill play your games – let end this properly no more truth choices. You – Me – Death,” she tried playing into Maxine’s apparent sadism. Maybe it would be enough but Janice knew full well she wasn’t hold any other cards in her hand to play.

(Reply any in holodeck)

(Uss Exeter -Holodeck 3- Tac/Sec Ens.(Sg) Stan More 00:58)

Stan had messed up again. Instead of doing what was expected of him. He had played the sulking child and ignored Maxine. Now Erin had paid the price for his bad choice.

Tac/Security. Why had he chosen to wear yellow? When he first arrived on the Exeter. Stan had been destined to go to Science. But the Captain had convinced him to try Tac/Sec instead. Everything had gone wrong for him. If he had stayed in blue maybe none of this would have happened.

Anger flowed through him. Maxine sat there dishing out her insults and punishments. More was fed up with this. Time for a dish of home truths and he hoped her stomach was empty. He looked up at her and stood. More heard the others speak and started to laugh.

“Och she won’t do that will ya lassie? Nay and you know why. Because it’s more sport for her to see us suffer. True. We all have our faults including me. Oh yer if I had kept my mouth shut and acted better. I would of been a lieutenant by now and an Assistant head of department. But I screwed up big time. That I know. Oh I know what your say next. Another little speech Maxine mocking one of us. Then no doubt another punishment? Just to hide the true fact. Yer nothing but a bully and like most bullies you hide behind others. Sitting in the shadows while your little team does yer bidding. That’s why you sit up there hurting us remotely. Because facing us in hand to hand combat. It’s no fun for you.” Stan snarled.” Well. If yer gonna kill me anyway. I challenge you to hand to hand combat. What’s the matter? No sport for you?”

(Reply ,Maxine)

(USS Exeter – Emergency Transporter Room 2 – FO Cmdr Ailynn Bracken – 0058)

Merek was making the final adjustments. “Positions please, transport in two minutes.” Keira announced when Kruze entered the room.

“I made it! I made it!” Heinrich called out. “Sorry about that, got a little lost.” He hurried up to one of the pads and waited.

“No problem Doctor. Form up at the rear and make ready.”

She stepped toward Kiera, and spoke to her quietly, her voice dropping to a whisper that none other could hear. “If this goes wrong ace, it’s been an honour. Do not blame yourself, we’re doing what we have to do.”

(reply Kiera)

As she stepped away her mind was mostly on the job ahead, but a part of it was already inside the holodeck, her closest friend was in there, going through who knows what.

She stood on the pad and nodded to Kiera, and then spoke to the others. “Make ready,” Then to Merek. “Energise”

(Reply none)

(The Roadhouse - CSO Lt Jg Erin Cortez - 0059)

It was a sound. A sound she hadn't heard for a long, long time. Opening her eyes, two things became immediately apparent to Erin. The first was a smell. A smell that, again, she had not smelt in a while. Stale beer and peanuts. The second was the feeling she wasn't alone.

Lifting her head from where it had rested, she looked up and saw the blonde woman looking at her with a well worn bar towel over her arm. The woman smiled at her and said,

“Look who's awake.”

Lifting herself up, Erin blinked a few times and looked around. The room where she knew she had been, was no longer there. Looking at the woman again, a feeling of realisation hit her.

“Jo?”

The woman nodded and smiled, “In some form. But for all intents and purposes, yes. Nice to see you again, Erin.”

Blinking again, Erin took a breath, “Wait.... Is this....?”

Jo gestured around her and smiled widely, “Yep. This is the Roadhouse, or at least what your memory was able to recreate.” Looking at Erin, her face suddenly became more serious, “You know what happened don't you?”

A flash entered Erin's mind. A flash of white energy and a feeling. Pain and relief. As her eyes opened wide, Erin looked at Jo and said,

"Did.... Am i dead?"

Jo smiled softly and a soft chuckle escaped her lips as she replied, "Not quite. Not yet anyway."

"Wait... I don't understand. If i'm not dead, then where am i?"

"Well, that is something that most races have struggled with for time immortal." Jo replied as she put her bar towel down and poured Erin a drink. Handing it to her, she continued, "This, all of this is not real but to you it is.

You are here because you haven't made your choice yet."

"My choice?" Erin asked, taking a sip of the drink.

"Whether to go back or not." Jo pointed to the door at the front of the room. "That way leads back. To your life, your pain, your troubles, everything you know." Turning to her right, she pointed to the well worn wooden door at the back of the room.

"That way, well, that way leads you out."

"Out?" Erin asked as she rested her hands on the bar."

"Out. What you would call the afterlife. Whatever you think it is. Whoever you have lost, where you wish you could be and what you wish you had done. A chance to do it all again. Put simply, you choose that door and you don't go back. Choose the one at the front and you do. Little Erin has a choice to make."

Shaking her head, Erin stood up from the stool she had been sitting on and looked at the woman in front of her. "I... don't understand. This place, I know it. I used to go here when I joined Starfleet. Why this place? I don't..."

Jo sighed and looked at her, "Listen little chick. You seem to be at a crossroads. Out there, in your real life, something must have happened for you to almost welcome this. Then again, there are somethings and people there that are holding you to that life. So, as I said, you have a choice. Go back or move on."

(Reply any)

(USS Exeter -Holodeck 3- "Maxine" - 00:59)

Maxine listened intently to the offers of both Sleeford and Hammerfield and smiled. However, before she could respond, Stan spoke up.

"Och she won't do that will ya lassie? Nay and you know why. Because it's more sport for her to see us suffer. True. We all have our faults including me. Oh yer if I had kept my mouth shut and acted better. I would of been a lieutenant by now and an Assistant head of department. But I screwed up big time. That I know. Oh I know what you say next. Another little speech Maxine mocking one of us. Then no doubt another punishment? Just to hide the true fact. Yer nothing but a bully and like most bullies you hide behind others. Sitting in the shadows while your little team does yer bidding. That's why you sit up there hurting us remotely. Because facing us in hand to hand combat. It's no fun for you." Stan snarled." Well. If yer gonna kill me anyway. I challenge you to hand to hand combat. What's the matter? No sport for you?"

"I'm the bully Stan? You're the one who wants to fight hand to hand with someone smaller and weaker than you. Is that what you consider a fair fight. Knowing you have the physical advantage. If anything Stan, you're like a little chihuahua, all bark, but no bite. Your teeth so

small, they wouldn't make a dent. What did you think would happen when you decided to act all nonchalant? That I would ignore you? No, you acted like a petulant child and Erin paid the price. Big brave Stan, all he has is his words. Then again, you could have ended things before they began, had you followed through with your threats to kill Tyko Nix, back when he was masquerading as a refugee. Because he was rude to you? But you didn't follow through. No, because you hide behind big words and threaten those weaker than you. Big Scary Stan, threatening a refugee. Because he was rude. Did you think they would have given you a medal? You'd probably be in a brig somewhere. But hey, your friends would still be alive. Because I would never have been on the Exeter, never needed to kill him. So no Stan, I won't fight you hand to hand, because why would I give up the upper hand for you. You had your chance to play and you decided that you wanted to take your ball and go home. You think I am a bully, well the lowly always think that their betters, their rulers are bullies. As far as I am concerned. You're out of the game. You forfeited. I should just kill you, but I'm going to make you watch instead."

At that moment the stasis field around stan shimmered blue for a brief second. He was now effectively muted. No matter what he said, no one on the outside could hear him.

"Ire, sweet Ire. How bout you, you are the most gentle and kind person on the Exeter. You wouldn't hurt a fly. Well, you would a hologram of your fiance trying to kill you. Are you at your breaking point yet?"

(reply Ire)

"Tell you what, let's test that. You'd fight a hologram, because it was self defense and you know its not real. But would you kill someone unarmed? How broken are you?"

The stasis field around Ire dropped.

"Free shot Ire." Maxine said as she dropped to her knees. "I am unarmed and surrender to you. What will you do?"

(reply Ire)

(reply Ire, any captured iyw)

(USS Exeter – Emergency Transporter Room 2 – CTO/30 Lieutenant Sg. Ravok – 0100)

Ravok entered the transporters room with his phaser rifle armed and ready to go. He stood on the pad.

"I've adjusted the console to only accept my manual input. This precludes any nasty viruses or booby traps in the software and I've done a full mechanical sweep of the transporter pads and found nothing that shouldn't be there." Keira reported. "This transport is completely manual, I won't beam you into anything, but to avoid anyone merging with the ground some of you might be one to five centimeters above the ground. Take that into consideration when you materialize."

Ravok simply nodded his head and closed his eyes, calming himself and focusing on his breathing.

~ Pilot cool~

(Reply Bracken to Merek iyw)

"Positions please, transport in two minutes." Keira announced.

He heard the footsteps of the others walk onto the pad. He opened his eyes and looked past everyone. All he could see was Keira. Locking eyes with her he smiled.

"Kiu htaodt'ia'rhoinnie uaefvalhuneitrde'h'n

yuuhhai " {SD ROM: Everything will be fine.} He said to her.

"Arhem docgae, duhaen h'ta fvau i arhva," {ND Rom: I know, just hurry back to me.} she answered.

(Reply Bracken)

The Romulan woman steeled herself. "Energizing." She announced as her left hand guided the slider controls up and the away team dematerialized off the transporter pad.

As he felt the transport sequence start he gripped his rifle tight.

Emerging on the other side of the beam he looked and saw Ire standing over a body. His attention quickly diverted to Ensign More kneeling next to Erin. Ravok held his rifle ready to fire as he examined the scene around him. He quickly made his way to Ire as others rushed towards Erin.

" Ire ?" Ravok said to him his voice displaying his fear.

(reply Ire)

Ravok lowered his rifle and grabbed Ire by the arm. " Come on man. It's ok ,you're safe now"

(reply Ire)

" Arbor! " Ravok yelled out. " Check the others " He ordered.

(reply Arbor)

(The Roadhouse - CSO Lt Jg Erin Cortez - 0103)

Leaning on the bar, Jo looked at Erin in her eyes and said, "Something is happening you know. Back there."

“Back....” she tilted her head a touch, “You mean there is still a chance i could go back.”

Jo laughed heartily, “hunny that was always an option. The question is and, in a way it’s why you are here.... Do you want to go back?” Jo stood back and looked at her, “Look, best way i can explain it. It seems that you have a choice. Out there, you are running. I mean you welcomed this turn of events. You actively didn’t try to stop that mad bitch from killing you.

Rather than fight, you let it happen. Some part of you thinks that you deserve this.”

Erin closed her eyes, “I could have saved him, both of them....” her voice trailed off as she fought down the visions of Nix and Clarke lying dead.

“It was their time. Nothing you could have done to save them hunny and somewhere in that mess of a mind of yours, you know that. That’s not the real issue here is it?”

Opening her eyes, Erin looked at the woman behind the bar and shook her head, “How can i go back there, knowing that because of a choice i made, a rash and foolish choice, she died. He is never going to be able to forgive me. I killed his cousin.”

“Honestly, what is it with you, chick?” Jo replied taking Erin’s hands in her own. “You feel guilt to easily. Sure, if you had not had shouted and done what you did there is a chance she may still be there. But, it’s like any choice you make in your life. You deal with the consequences. So tell me. Why are you here right now? What is it that is keeping you from making the choice you know you need to?”

“I.... “ Erin sighed heavily, “.... can’t face it. Not again. I’ve been down that road too many times...”

“And yet you are still here. Well, not there exactly but you know what i mean. You are stronger than you give yourself credit for. Listen to me. You don’t have a lot of time to make your choice. The doors will open soon, both of them. So, there’s someone that might be able to help you.”

Erin looked at her, eyebrows raised. “What...”

Then she heard the voice, the one that had saved her once.

“Yhhau, elhs'hswiehv daehlen.”

(Reply none)

(USS Exeter – Holodeck 3 –CFO – Lieutenant – Ire Williams – 0107)

"Ire, sweet Ire. How bout you, you are the most gentle and kind person on the Exeter. You wouldn't hurt a fly. Well, you would a hologram of your fiance trying to kill you. Are you at your breaking point yet?"

"You have killed these people for your own sick amusement"

"Tell you what, let's test that. You'd fight a hologram, because it was self defense and you know it's not real. But would you kill someone unarmed? How broken are you?"

"You will pay for this."

He felt the stasis field around him release him as he dropped to one knee. He in a glance he took in the room around him. At the bodies of Clarke, Nesha and Erin, at More, Iana, Sleaford and Hammerfield who were still breathing. He looked down at his feet to where the still form of Greta was lying near him. He rose back to his feet as he looked at "Maxine" and gripped the hilt of the dagger.

"Free shot Ire." Maxine said as she dropped to her knees. "I am unarmed and surrender to you. What will you do?"

"End you."

There was not anger, no screaming or shouting or bursting into tears. There was just a cold all-consuming nothingness. He sprung forward covering the distance between him and "Maxine" as fast as he could in case, she blocked him with another stasis field.

He looked into her eyes as he stepped in close. He grabbed her with one hand as he slid the dagger in between her fourth and fifth rib. It entered "Maxine" at an angle where it sliced to the heart and severed the aorta and as he pulled it back, he saw that there was bright blood on its blade.

He watched as the light in her eyes dimmed as he let go of her and the dagger. He stood there as "Maxine" crumpled to the floor in a bloody heap as he stared down unflinchingly.

"Not a hologram then."

(Reply any in Holodeck 3)

(USS Exeter – Holodeck 3 –Maxine– 0108)

As Ire closed the gap and stabbed the knife into Maxine's heart she smiled. A single tear, caused by pain or sadness, flowed down her cheek. "Well done Ire. Well...done..." At that moment she died. Yet as her heart stopped beating her body began to tingle with energy. A

device implanted around her heart began to beep as she was instantly vaporized from the inside out, leaving nothing but an outline of her remains.

At the moment she was vaporized, the rescue team appeared in the middle of the holodeck. Soon a voice was heard throughout the room.

"My time is at an end. I underestimated you Exeter, and I paid the price. All because I needed to make sure Tyko Nix died. And now here I am dead. I was to be an empress, in the end, I was just a footnote in history. Sad. End program."

The holodeck returned to normal, the stasis field dropped. The nightmare was over.

(reply any in holodeck, whether prisoner or rescue team)

(Uss Exeter -Holodeck 3- Tac/Sec Ens.(Sg) Stan More 01:09)

He shouted and shouted but he could not be heard. He banged his hand against the stasis field. But got a shock for his stupidity. Stan watched as the events around him played out. It all felt unreal as Ire managed to kill Maxine. If he was not feeling like the lowest of the low. Stan would have openly rejoiced. But Stan knew he would never laugh again.

The holodeck returned to normal as the program shut down. Suddenly familiar voices rang out. Shapes became to fill the grid covered room. Stan walked over to Erin's body. He slowly sank to his knees and sobbed.

"I'm so sorry lassie forgive me please....." He said. A hand touched his shoulder but More violently to shook it off.

(Reply , Any)

Stan did not see who had touched his shoulder. He stood and took off his uniform top. He placed it beside Erins fallen body. Then walked towards a corner. Were he slumped down to the ground and bowed his head. He heard voices but ignored them.

(Reply , Hostages & Rescuers)

(USS Exeter – Holodeck 3 –CFO – Lieutenant – Ire Williams– 0110)

"My time is at an end. I underestimated you Exeter, and I paid the price. All because I needed to make sure Tyko Nix died. And now here I am dead. I was to be an empress, in the end, I was just a footnote in history. Sad. End program."

Ire stood there watching the faded outline of Maxine's body.

" Ire ?"

He heard Ravok's voice coming from behind him.

"Yes Ravok."

"Come on man. It's ok ,you're safe now"

He turned from the Maxine and looked at Ravok.

“Yes, we are safe now.”

He saw Ravok yell at one of his security officers. He glanced over at this shoulder and seeing the blood still oozing from his arm.

“I better go to sickbay to get this taken care of.”

He turned and headed out of the holodeck.

(Reply Ravok IYW, any)

(Uss Exeter - holodeck 3 - COO Ensign Paul Sleeford 01:10)

Sleeford watched as Ire approached Maxine and plunged the blade in her chest, twisting the blade with an efficiency that would have made his old combat trainer smile.

As the body that had been Maxine began to vaporise Sleeford felt the field that had restrained him vanish as if it had never been. Turning at the sound of a beam in he saw the three bodies on the floor, watching with a dispassion as More slumped in the corner.

As he stood there the voice filled the holodeck,

"My time is at an end. I underestimated you Exeter, and I paid the price. All because I needed to make sure Tyko Nix died. And now here I am dead. I was to be an empress, in the end, I was just a footnote in history. Sad. End program."

Walking over to where the three bodies lay, Sleeford gently closed the eyes of each, pausing at Cortez, sighing he stood and walked past Ensign Arbor as he scanned the room for trouble, laughing to himself he shook his head, the guy was about five minutes too damn late. Approaching the arch and door Sleeford paused and looked back over the scene that had been hell for the past twenty minutes, it had seemed like he'd been in there for hours. Nodding to

the counsellor and the medical officer as they stood there, he walked past the captain with a nod, heading for the nearest turbolift.

As the door closed Sleaford closed his eyes and let out a large sigh, the stress of the day slowly leaving his body and mind.

(USS Exeter –Holodeck 3 –Security Officer - Ensign – Arbor – 0111)

Arbor scanned the holodeck with his phaser ready scanning for any obvious enemies since they had all materialised into the holodeck.

" Arbor! "

He swivelled to look at Ravok who was standing beside Williams.

" Check the others "

“Yes Sir.”

He looked over where Ensign More was kneeling beside Cortez. He saw that the others were up apart from Clarke and Kervik who were still on the ground. He stepped closer keeping phaser trained steadily on them. There was no knowing what happened to everyone in the holodeck or if there were boobytraps. So, he was not going to take any chances. He knelt beside Kervik and reached out to touch her cautiously. He could not feel the resonance that all living creatures had when he was close by.

“Lieutenant Ravok, Ensign Kurze, Nervik is down I can feel any life signs.”

(Reply Ravok, Nervik)

He quickly stepped over to Clarke and checked him.

“Same with Clarke.”

(Reply Ravok, Nervik)

(USS Exeter – Holodeck 3 - FO Cmdr Ailynn Bracken – 0112)

Ailynn felt the world change, and she wasn't ashamed of being butt-clenchingly terrified. All trace of tiredness had gone, the most ancient part of her brain, the bit that was labelled 'primal terror' was just for a second calling all the shots and had filled her body with all kinds of interesting hormones.

As she and her team materialised in the holodeck, she could see that the program was already ending, she saw what was once Maxine, suddenly turn to ash, and drift to the floor. Ire stood by, a bloodied knife in hand.

Taking in the rest of the room. She was gratified to see that the team was already moving, checking bodies on the floor. She looked around, seeing that the other hostages were safe, shaken, but otherwise physically uninjured, turning her attention to the fallen, she saw three bodies, one in yellow, and two in blue, Seeing the horror around them, she could see it immediately affect everyone. She moved quickly, checking each of the fallen for a pulse, her heart sank deeply into her chest when she found Nesha deceased, and further still with Ensign Clarke. She then moved to the body, then one that she had hoped beyond every hope that she'd been wrong about identifying. ~Erin?~ she felt sick to her very core.

“HEY! OVER HERE” She heard Lana call out, in a voice that at that moment grated on her.

“No, no, no.” She felt Erin’s neck, her highly practiced fingers directly on the carotid pulse.

~was that?~

It was there, tiny, and fluttering, but it was there. Ailynn didn’t dare look at Erin’s injuries, this wasn’t the time for that.

“MEDIC! I HAVE A PULSE!”

(Reply Kruze)

“NEVER MIND HER, WHAT ABOUT US?” Again, Ailynn ignored her, if she was well enough to shout, she could be left until last.

“Weak pulse, intubate and get her breathing. You know what to do. Trauma 101. Stabilise her. When we get site-to-site back you’re straight to sickbay. By the time that you get there the trauma team will be ready, you have the patient Doctor.”

(Reply Kruze)

=^=Merek to Bracken.^=

“Bracken!” she answered, somewhat curtly.

=^=Our transporters are now fully operational, and clean of any stowaway sub-routines. Site-to-site is now at your disposal. I have locks on everyone in the room.^= Keira reported.

“Thank you Kiera, does the Captain know?”

=\=Negative, but you are busy, I'll inform the Captain. I just thought you'd need the information first, if there are any casualties.=\=

“Give me medical transport, Kruze and Cortez, on my order.”

=\=I will, Merek out,=\= she said closing the channel.

Ailynn opened another channel immediately. “Sickbay this Bracken. Emergency incoming Scramble Trauma team. Bracken out”

(Reply Sickbay iyw)

She stepped back over to Kruze. “Doctor. Are you ready?”

(Reply Kruze)

She longed to go with them, but that wasn't her job, not anymore, besides, from what she had seen up until now, Kruze showed promise.

"Kiera, Transport now." She half snapped over the comm.

(Reply Kiera)

She could see that the scene was still in chaos. Drawing a breath, she opened a channel to Trip.

"Bracken to Captain Williams"

(Reply Trip)

“Holodeck secure, request security backup to secure entrance to the room. Get these fracking doors open.”

She was tired, and spent. The adrenaline that had been keeping her going had run out, and a wall of tiredness hit her like nothing else. She saw her team, all visually stricken by the few short minutes in here. She saw the remains of the hostages beaten, physically and emotionally, and she saw the two remaining bodies, that had a matter of a couple of hours ago, been happy, smiling and energetic members of her crew. Now though, they had breathed their last, the two deceased and her closest friend literally at death's door; Ailynn bowed her head, the emotion flooding her.

~I'm sorry...I failed you all.~

(Reply as above)

(USS Exeter – Holodeck 3 – Medical Officer, Ensign JG Heinrich Kruse, M.D. – 0112)

Heinrich materialized. The program began to fade. Maxine turned to ash. A different side of Heinrich kicked in, one that did not make any evaluative judgments. One that only saw the facts. He put his phaser away and took out his medical tricorder. As he was moving about checking various bodies he heard Lana cry out “HEY! OVER HERE!” As he went to approach her he heard Commander Bracken call to him, “MEDIC! I HAVE A PULSE!” He turned and made a beeline to Commander Bracken and Lieutenant Cortez. He didn't even hear Lana complain.

As he knelt down Commander Bracken gave him instructions. "Weak pulse, intubate and get her breathing. You know what to do. Trauma 101. Stabilise her. When we get site-to-site back you're straight to sickbay. By the time that you get there the trauma team will be ready, you have the patient Doctor."

"Understood." Heinrich said. He took out his medkit and placed it on the floor. He retrieved an emergency respirator and assembled the tube while Commander Bracken was talking to Merek. By the time he had applied the tube and got the ventilator running on the floor Commander Bracken asked, "Doctor. Are you ready?"

"Ready for sickbay, commander." He said.

"Kiera, Transport now."

(USS Exeter – Holodeck 3 - MedIntern aEns Lana Wakeman – 0113)

Lana had watched in trepidation as Ire stepped up to Maxine, eventually sliding the knife that would end her life between her ribs, she could tell that death was inevitable for Maxine, finding herself laughing nervously at the death in front of her. Her emotions were all over the place, the admission of her deepest truth, although nothing compared to the deaths in front of her, and the horrific injury, the trauma that poor Stan was now going through, had nonetheless made her think about something that she had long thought forgotten, and it had not sat well in her mind.

She saw what was obviously an away team beam in and then watched the team split and check the bodies and other survivors.

Bracken moved around quickly, it was interesting to watch her work the room. The layman might be forgiven to think that she was ‘just paying lip service’ to the checks that she was making, but Lana, having the training that she’d had back at the Academy, saw far more.

Her eyes never stopped moving, although Bracken’s fingers only checked the pulse for an extremely short time, Lana knew that with that briefest touch, she was carrying with her years of experience that belied her tender years. ~What a waste of talent~ Lana thought as Ailynn continued to check.

“HEY! OVER HERE” Lana called out, she felt her body begin to shake as the nerves took hold, the thought of what could have happened to her, to everyone filling her. The situation around her slowly began to return to some semblance of normal, not that that would be possible for a while.

“MEDIC! I HAVE A PULSE!”

Lana watched as the new Doctor who’s name she didn’t know moved toward Ailynn.

“NEVER MIND HER, WHAT ABOUT US?”

She saw the annoyance flash across Ailynn’s face, and Lana, remembering her training, remembered, that if she was well enough to shout then she would be fine. She began to feel a little guilty for calling out and mouthed an apology toward Bracken, who had already moved off to bring the scene back into everyone’s control.

Eventually, the doors opened, and after a while, Lana managed to stand properly, and left the room, she would, perhaps for the first time in her life, welcome the counselling that would surely come.

(Reply none)

(The Roadhouse - CSO Lt Jg Erin Cortez - 0114)

Turning on the stool, Erin’s eyes opened wide as she saw Nesha sitting in a booth behind her. Standing, she walked over to her and took a breath,

“How are you here? I....”

Nesha smiled, “Yes you did. Part of me did die. Well, i suppose all of me did but something in you needed to see me.”

Sitting opposite the woman, Erin rested her hands on the table between them. Looking down at her hands, Erin became aware that they were shaking. Closing her eyes for a moment, she looked at Nesha as a tear rolled down her cheek,

“I’m so sorry... if i hadn’t...”

“Erin, stop.” Nesha interrupted. “You always feel that you are to blame. That you have to carry the guilt with you. It’s almost as though you feel you deserve this.”

“Don’t I? If i hadn’t shouted at her...”

“Then i still would have died. Her actions were not yours. You did not cause what happened. She did.”

Wiping the tear off her cheek, Erin looked at her again, “He’s going to blame me for you. I... can’t deal with that. Not him.”

Nesha laughed a little, “He won’t. You need to place more faith in people. Let them help you. Erin, don’t hide. Don’t run away like you have done. You can’t this time.”

As she opened her mouth to respond, a sound entered her ears. A sound that she knew signalled something. It was then she felt something that almost felt like a wind blowing through the bar.

Looking around her, she noticed that the two doors, one at either end of the bar had swung open. Looking back to Nesha, her breathing quickened.

“What do i do?”

“Ieiugh miin, rinam.” {Your choice, sister}

Erin stood and looked from one door to the other. As she took a breath, she felt Nesha rest a hand on her shoulder,

“You know the choice you want to make. You know where your heart is telling you to go. Which door to choose. The only question now is are you brave enough to walk through it, knowing where it will lead and what you will have to deal with.”

Erin looked at and as she did, Nesha began to fade slowly. “Nesha.... I’m sorry...”

Her voice became soft, almost akin to a whisper as she slowly continued to fade, “It’s okay. Truly. Tell him hwiiy A mnek l'ta'fvull'aelmnaejaerhoaommuy. Don't couvæ a'e.”

As she faded away, Erin looked towards both the doors. The one at the back at the bar that lead onto the next life and the one at the front that lead back to her current life. Closing her eyes, she made her choice and walked through the door.

(Reply none)

(USS Exeter – Holodeck 3 - CTO/3O Lieutenant Sg Ravok – 0114)

As the medical officer ran to Erin's side, Ravok turned and saw Nesha on the floor. He walked over to her body and dropped his rifle and sank to his knees beside his cousin's body. He touched her cheek. She was still warm but her surface temperature was quickly becoming equal to that of the room around them. The romulan heartbeat was faster than that of humans. Which meant their bodies cooled even faster when they died.

The room seems to dissolve around him.

Looking at her he could only think about his father and how he never got the chance to say a proper romulan goodbye to him.

Ravok leaned his mouth down next to her ear and whispered

" Carry your secrets to Erebus. Keep them silent in the halls. This is done. Fire and old blood will find you again. Save a seat for me." Ravok tried to remember the words to the song of Erebus but he couldn't. His father had taught him long ago.

When he raised his head back up his eyes were met with a terrible sight. He scooted himself backwards across the floor in a panic. It was Baker laying there reaching his hand out to him. Ravok closed his eyes.

" Its not him , it's not him" He said to himself. When he opened his eyes he looked down to his side to see the body of Clarke. He took a deep breath and asked back towards Nesha's body. Gone was the image of his former flight officer. A cold sweat streaked across his brow.

~ What the hell is wrong with me? Get it together ~ Ravok thought to himself as he moved back over to his cousin's body and picked her up off the floor.

" She didn't deserve this. He didn't deserve this." He said as he stood up with her body in his arms and walked towards the door.

(reply any)

(Uss exeter - Cargobay 3 - COO Ensign Paul Sleeford 01:15)

Entering the cargo bay Sleeford wandered the aisle until he found what he wanted, squatting down he pressed his thumb against the lock and lifted the lid, taking one of the bottles of twenty four year old malt whisky he'd been saving for his wedding and a glass. Closing the box he relocked it and left the cargo bay. Heading up to his office for some rest and peace.

(USS Exeter – Emergency Transporter Room 2 – 2O/CEO – Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek – 0115)

It had been a few minutes since she had transported the team to the holodeck, but it seemed like hours. Sensors had confirmed the transport inhibitor had been deactivated shortly after team had beamed in, but she kept the transporter lock on them, and the survivors, just in case. She used a side panel to check the operational status of the Holodeck and that too, had been deactivated. Perhaps some auto switch once she no longer had the upper hand? What a coward. Keira mused on whether she had some kind of kill switch to take herself out in that event as well. Some sort of poison tooth that she bit on to release a potent and very toxic quick acting poison, like in the spy novels that Mr. Jordan had lying around his house.

Her next task had been to ensure that site-to-site transport was back up and trap free. A level two diagnostic after the standard start up sequence had confirmed no additional programming was present in any transport subroutines. If that was because of her initial intrusion

countermeasures program, or the original author's self-righteous suicide, Keira didn't know. What she did know is that the systems were up and running again.

"Merek to Bracken." Keira opened a channel.

(Reply Bracken)

"Our transporters are now fully operational, and clean of any stowaway sub-routines. Site-to-site is now at your disposal. I have locks on everyone in the room." Keira reported.

(Reply Bracken)

"Negative, but you are busy, I'll inform the Captain. I just thought you'd need the information first, if there are any casualties."

(Reply Bracken)

"I will, Merek out," she said closing the channel only to open another. "Merek to Captain Williams."

(Reply Trip)

“Just calling to report we have full transporter capability. The XO is already aware of this fact. I have full transporter locks on everyone in the holodeck waiting for the Commander’s order.”

(Reply Trip)

“It will take some more digging to be sure exactly what happened. It could be my subroutine that burned them out, could be the kill switch she seemed to install once it all ended in there. That is a task for another time, however. I’m just glad that we have them back.”

(Reply Trip, any)

(USS Exeter –Sickbay– Nurse – CPO – Ewan McDonald– 0116)

=^=Sickbay this Bracken. Emergency incoming Scramble Trauma team. Bracken out=^=

Ewan looked over at the nurse who had paused in mid-sentence as Commander Bracken voice came over the comm system.

~Ow S&*T~

“This is sickbay. Understood and ready to receive patients.”

~Kruze and Wakeman are not here. Better get Methor~

“Okay we will keep bed one and two ready for the incoming. If there is more, we can spread out.”

~More information would be better. I wish the Commander had been more specific with the amount of patients and their conditions~

He ran across sickbay to where Methor was.

“Dr Methor. We have incoming wounded Commander Bracken has asked for the Trauma Team to be scrambled. We have no information about the number or conditions of the patients, and I have bed one and two ready for receiving the first two casualties. Dr Kurze and Intern Wakeman are not here so it is just us for the moment.”

(Reply Methor)

Ewan nodded as he heard the sound of a transport beam and saw Kurze materialise beside the bio-bed and Cortez on it.

~Ow hell~

He dashed back towards Kurze as the whine dissipated.

“Dr Kurze what do you need?”

(Reply Kurze)

(USS Exeter – Sickbay – Medical Officer, Ensign JG Heinrich Kruse, M.D. – 0116)

In a flash Heinrich and Erin were in sickbay, with Erin safely on the bed, the respirator gently placed on an end table. Before he could react Ewan McDonald dashed in. “Dr Kruze what do you need?”

~What do I need?~ Heinrich thought to himself ~I barely know what's going on.~ The important thing was getting the patient stable, but he still didn't know what had happened to Erin or what was wrong. He had Erin breathing, that bought him some time.

"Your patient, Doctor." Dr. Dural said. Heinrich nodded.

"Alright, we've got the patient stabilized, now we need to see what's going on. I'm not confident in the readings I'm getting from my tricorder. I want a Cardio scan and some coffee. It's going to be a long night." Heinrich took a deep breath. His adrenaline was still pumping, and the scene had not yet fully set in.

(Reply McDonald)

(USS Exeter – Outside Holodeck 3 – CO, Captain Trip Williams – 0116)

Trip stood outside the holodeck waiting anxiously for any sort of signal or sign that the away team was ok. =\=Merek to Captain Williams.=\=

"What do you got for me?" Trip

=\= Just calling to report we have full transporter capability. The XO is already aware of this fact. I have full transporter locks on everyone in the holodeck waiting for the Commander's order.=\=

"Perfect. Well done Keira." Trip's anxiety began to drop.

=\=It will take some more digging to be sure exactly what happened. It could be my subroutine that burned them out, could be the kill switch she seemed to install once it all ended in there. That is a task for another time, however. I'm just glad that we have them back.=\=

"Yes, get some rest, sleep. But in the morning take a team, comb through everything, make sure there aren't any party favors. Also see if you can't find any sort of recording of what happened in there. But that can wait until the morning. As soon as everyone is out, consider yourself off the clock. Captain Williams out."

(reply Merek iyw)

Trip took a sigh of relief as his commbadge went off again.

=^=Bracken to Captain Williams ^=

"Go ahead."

=^=Holodeck secure, request security backup to secure entrance to the room. Get these fracking doors open. ^=

"See you in a bit."

At that moment Trip nodded to the security team that had assembled while the rescue team had departed to the transporter room.

"Ready."

They nodded in return.

"Computer, open door." Trip said holding his breath, hoping it worked, otherwise they were going to have to use the sonic ram, which would have blown the doors.

A short pause and the door opened.

Trip entered with the security team and saw the carnage. Clarke, Erin, and Nesha on the ground. Stan in the corner. Everyone looked shaken up.

Trip walked up to Ailynn and put his hand on her shoulder. "You ok?"

(reply Ailynn)

"I'm gonna stay behind, make sure that things get wrapped up here. Check in sickbay if they need your help, but then after that go to bed. Is that alright?"

(reply Ailynn)

"Tomorrow, I'll have you and Ravok split up the folks who were in here, you take half, he'll take half. Just get a sense for what happened here."

(reply Ailynn)

"Lynn...." Trip paused. "It's gonna be ok." Trip wasn't sure if he was saying or asking. But he pulled her into a hug. Held her tight, then moved on to Ravok.

(Reply Ailynn iyw)

Trip approached Ravok and put his hand on the Romulan's shoulder in a firm assuring grip. "You're off the clock. Go home. Get rest. If you need tomorrow off, you have it. If you want to interview folks that's fine too. But at the very least, you have a half day tomorrow."

(Reply Ravok)

"Buddy, I'm here for you." Then Trip did something he had only done one other time with Ravok, when Baker died, and he pulled him into a fatherly hug,

(reply Ravok)

(USS Exeter – Emergency Transporter Room 2 – 2O/CEO – Lt. Cmdr. Keira Merek – 0118)

Kruse she was not familiar with but Cortez, she was. That maniac in there did something to Erin? They're lucky they weren't still alive, Keira would have pummeled her with in an centimeter of death for what she did.

=^= Kiera, Transport now. ^= Came the XO's voice over the comms, snapping her out of an irate tangent. Her duty centered her. Erin needed her.

With celerity and precision Keira selected the appropriate combadges and the wearers and activated the transport.

Keira worried about her friend and waited for the next call for transport.

(Reply any)

(USS Exeter – Sickbay –Nurse – CPO – Ewan McDonald – 0118)

“Your patient, Doctor.”

Ewan paused near by as the doctors chose who was working on who.

~I know is etiquette but come on let's go~

He looked over a Kruse who had taken control. As his eyes kept moving from the bio-bed monitors to Erin and back again.

~Okay~

“Alright, we’ve got the patient stabilized, now we need to see what’s going on. I’m not confident in the readings I’m getting from my tricorder. I want a Cardio scan and some coffee. It’s going to be a long night.”

“Of course, doctor.”

He moved over to the bio-bed controls and activated its cardio scan function.

~There we go~

“it should be done in a few minutes. How do you like your coffee?”

(Reply Kurse)

Ewan nodded and headed over to the replicator. He filed that tip bit of information away for the next time. It was always good to have a happy and caffeinated team and being tea lady once in a while was a sacrifice he could take. He returned with the coffee and gave it to Kurse.

“Here you go doctor.”

(Reply Kurse)

The bio-bed beeped and Ewan stepped over and brought the information up on the screen.

“Here is the cardio scan Doctor.”

(Reply Kurse)

(USS Exeter – Holodeck 3 - FO Cmdr Ailynn Bracken – 0119)

Trip walked up to her and put his hand on her shoulder. "You ok?"

Ailynn nodded, despite herself, knowing that in actuality she wasn't, but at the moment she didn't have time to not be better. These were the moments that she hated the most, where they were coming to the end of a heavy shift, a crisis or some such, and just when you thought all the panic had subsided, those ripples had settled back to a millpond, that you had to pick yourself back up, steel your nerves, draw on every atom of reserves you had to finish the game off, because there was always more to do, if nothing else, a report to write before you allowed yourself the luxury of sleep. "I'll be okay." she smiled half heartedly.

"I'm gonna stay behind, make sure that things get wrapped up here. Check in sickbay if they need your help, but then after that go to bed. Is that alright?"

"I will. Kruze looks like he's got Erin well in hand, Methor is up there too, so she's in good hands and I'll not insult them by storming in, as much as I want to." It was the truth, as much as she was longing to dash up and 'look after things', it wouldn't be fair on those currently attending Erin, not to mention the conflict of interest that she would face since Erin was such a close friend.

"Tomorrow, I'll have you and Ravok split up the folks who were in here, you take half, he'll take half. Just get a sense for what happened here."

She nodded. "Understood." She yawned and rubbed her eyes, and then massaged her temples. "I only saw things as they ended 'T', but this was a bad one." She sighed heavily.

"Lynn...." Trip paused. "It's gonna be ok." Trip wasn't sure if he was saying or asking. But he pulled her into a hug. Held her tight, then moved on to Ravok.

Ailynn nodded, and returned the hug, glad that Trip still felt he was able just to approach her as the friend that she had been, not just his ‘number one.’ She smiled gently as he turned away moving toward Ravok.

It was at that moment that she heard a thud, and turning, she saw that Ensign More had collapsed. ~Ah for...~ she stopped the thought as she dashed across the room, and once again, fell into her training, feeling the carotid pulse. Stan’s pulse was reasonably strong, but fluttering.

“Sickbay one more incoming, accompanied by myself. Ensign More has collapsed, I imagine that you’re pretty busy up there, so I’ll take this myself, but if there’s a floating pair of hands I’d be grateful” She spoke quickly, but clearly as she ripped off the tactical vest that she’d been wearing, she wished that she had the time to change into scrubs, but she was comfy enough in a uniform.

(Reply Sickbay)

“Understood. Bracken out”

“Computer. Emergency Medical Transport, Myself and Ensign More to sickbay, bay 2. ”

(USS Exeter – Holodeck 3 – CTO/3O Lieutenant Sg Ravok – 0119)

As Ravok was about to head out of the holodeck he felt a hand grab his shoulder, it was a firm grip

"You're off the clock. Go home. Get rest. If you need tomorrow off, you have it. If you want to interview folks that's fine too. But at the very least, you have a half day tomorrow."

Ravok looked Trip in the eyes.

"As always. I will perform my duties. I just need some time right now."

"Buddy, I'm here for you."

Ravok felt like collapsing as Trip hugged him. The last time this happened was after the battle of Wolf 359. A sudden rush of emotions surged through his mind.

Thoughts of Erin and Nesha filled him with both grief and anger.

"Thank you ... Trip." Ravok said, speaking to him as a friend in that moment.

(reply Trip iyw)

" I will report for duty tomorrow at the time you have permitted me too. " Ravok said and walked out of the holodeck.

(replies Trip if you want)

(USS Exeter –Sickbay – ACOMO – Ensign Dural Methor DrPH – 0120)

“Dr Methor. We have in coming wounded Commander Bracken has asked for the Trauma Team to be scrambled. We have not information about the number or conditions of the patients, and I have bed one and two ready for receiving the first two casualties. Dr Kurze and Intern Wakeman are not here so it is just us for the moment.” McDonald reported.

“Thank you Mr. McDonald,” Dural said standing. He made his way to the main room to find things already in motion. “Just so, excellent job on arranging sickbay.”

The shimmer of the transporter deposited the Chief of Sciences on the biobed and one Dr Kruze at bedside, who until this point had been away in the craziness that was the holodeck incident.

“Dr Kurze what do you need?” Ewan asked.

“Your patient, Doctor.” Dural stated moving to the side to take the next patient, but kept an eye on the proceedings, incase the young man needed a helping hand.

(Reply Kruze, McDonald, any from away team)

(Uss Exeter -Holodeck 3- Tac/Sec Ens.(Sg) Stan More 01:21)

How do you look someone in the eye, when you lived but their loved one did not?

How could he look Ravok in the eye after More failed to protect Nesha?

Stan should've found a way to save Erin and Clarke.

A voice rang out.

“MEDIC! I HAVE A PULSE!”

Stan could not clearly see who was at Erin's side. His eyes were too watery for him to focus. More shouts, more scurrying of feet. It was all a blur to him as he sat there on the floor.

Maybe it was his adrenaline dropping down now this horrific situation was over. Perhaps even grief and survivors guilt. But Stan realised that his hand hurt. In fact his whole right arm felt odd. The force field must have affected his cardiovascular system. When he punched it. Now the adrenaline that had been cushioning him was gone.

Good. He would face Clarke, Erin and Nesha in heaven. Then once he had told them how sorry he was. Stan could go to hell with Maxine. To burn forever in misery and woe.

Stan stood and began to walk towards the open holodeck door. A voice called out but he did not see who. More had just reached the doors when he slumped to the ground.

Perhaps never to walk or breathe again.

(USS Exeter –Outside Holodeck 2 – CFO – Lieutenant – Ire Williams – 0123)

Ire stepped through the doors of the Holodeck. He had followed behind Ravok who was carrying Nesha. There were people and noise around him as the Erin was being treated before being transported to sickbay and the others were being talk to by security. He had looked at his arm and realised that it was not going to stop bleeding if it was not treated. So, he had decided to head to sickbay for treatment.

He saw her in the corridor her brown hair and her hazel eyes looking at him. He paused for a moment as he saw alive Greta standing there, he saw the look on her face the worry the concern. He blinked and saw dead Greta superimposed in front of him. Blood covering her face and the gurgled sounds of her last breath. He blinked again as the fleeting hint of emotion dissolved into the blank nothingness to be pushed far deep down.

He turned away from Greta, away from the living and the dead as he walked away towards the nearest turbolift towards Sickbay.

(Reply any)

(USS Exeter – Sickbay - FO Cmdr Ailynn Bracken – 0124)

The scene changed to sickbay, and Ailynn hit the ground running, she was ashamed of her reaction, but she felt herself awaken once more as she drew strength from the bustle of the busy sickbay. Sounds and voices from bay 1 where she knew that Erin was being worked on by Kruze's evidently capable hands. There were others, just coming in for a routine medical, they suddenly felt themselves ushered to a waiting room, the priorities being the incoming trauma patients.

“Computer get me a scan.” She then turned toward the rest of the bay. “Any assistance please?”

(Reply any medic)

Ailynn straightened Stan on the bed, and turned his arm over in case she needed to put a cannula into him in a hurry, as she did, his trace appeared and looking at the EKG trace she saw immediately what the problem was. Ripping open his uniform, and cutting off his vest, she then grabbed a tricorder and made several measurements at very precise places in his

chest, all the while staring at the EKG trace and other information that the Tricorder was sending to the screen in front of her.

(Reply medic)

“Shock-induced Paroxysmal Atrial Flutter.” She replied. “Crash Trolley...NOW!” she snapped, her years of training coming back to her in an instant. “Paddles set to 250!”

(Reply medic)

(USS Exeter –Sickbay–CFO – Lieutenant – Ire Williams– 0126)

Ire walked into and paused out of the way near the door as he heard raised voices. He looked over and saw that Erin was on one bio-bed and More was on another.

There was a lot of activity around them and spotted Bracken, Kruze and Methor along with a group of nurses working feverishly around them. As he watched More spasmed as the high-pitched whine of the defibrillator before it discharged again.

He felt a wetness on his fingers and looked down. There was a slow drip of blood running off his fingers and dropping on to the floor. He looked back at the sickbay staff who were trying valiantly to save More and Erin.

~Looks like they are busy, and I am dripping blood onto the floor~

He headed across to a small trolley in the opposite side of sickbay He unpeeled his uniform careful to expose his shoulder and wound, picked up and flipped open a medical tricorder and began to scan his wound.

~Deep but not too much damage~

He would need blood clotting medication, some pain killers, along with a dermal regenerator for the skin and muscles and began pulling open draws to find the instruments that he would need. He placed them all on top of the on top of the trolley so that he could get them easily with his good hand.

~Analgesia~

He injected himself with the pain killers.

~Give that a few moments before I start~

(Reply any in sickbay)

(Loch Lomond - Coma induced dream - Tac/Sec Ens.(Sg) Stan More - 01:26)

Stan looked around he was standing on the Loch bank. The sky was a deep blue More had never seen before. But the water in Loch Lomond was dark and forbidding. A man sat in a small boat on the shore line. He gave Stan a wave.

As More approached he saw that the man was dressed. In one of those old style Starfleet uniforms. The type worn during the dominion war. Stan recognised him at once. It was his late grandfather. Another fugue seemed to hover on the opposite side of the shore line. Strange music seemed to be coming from him.

“ Ya nay want that yin boy. Unless yer want.” He said to Stan.” He be the phantom piper. Come to escort to fallen warriors to the afterlife.”

“ I am nay warrior. People died because of me.” Stan said.

“ Did they? Maxine would of killed them nay matter what yer did or said. You were blocked off you could nay reach them. The moment that insane harpie took yer all prisoner thy were doomed.” His Grandfather said

“ But I wear the yellow...” Stan began

“ Yellow Red. It’s not the colour ye wear. It’s what beats beneath the cloth. Ye have a good heart Stan. To protect the innocent that’s what they tell yer. But what the dinna teach is when

things go against you. Your friends know you would of died for them a million times. But fate prevented you.” Butch McTaggard said

“ What do I do?” How do I face my friends?” Stan asked

“ A complete change. A new start. Ditch the yellow for blue. Go to the department you wanted to go to in the first place. “ Butch said

“ What if I can’t?” He said

“Shock-induced Paroxysmal Atrial Flutter.” She replied. “Crash Trolley...NOW!” she snapped, her years of training coming back to her in an instant. “Paddles set to 250!”

He looked around trying to see the source of the strange voice.Bright light began to envelop him.

“ Grandfather.....” Stan said

(Reply , None)

(USS Exeter – ACOMO – Ensign Dural Methor DrPH - 0126)

“If you’re walking you aren’t critical enough to be admitted yet,” Dural bellowed over the people coming into sickbay. “We’ll come get you when we have an opening. Yell if one of your fellow crew collapses.”

The Cardassian Doctor could hear the shimmering whine of the transporter, and turned around to see the XO and a new patient who he immediately recognized as Mr. More.

~He found his way back this time as a patient.~

“Computer get me a scan.” She then turned toward the rest of the bay. “Any assistance please?”

“You’ve got help.” Dural said with a couple short steps he was already on the trauma bed. He helped her straighten the flaccid mass that was More’s unconscious form. He saw the oscilloscope waveform write itself on the biobed monitor. “Oh, that’s not good.” Slipped from his mouth. He reached for the emergency supply cart just as the XO asked for it.

“Shock-induced Paroxysmal Atrial Flutter.” She replied. “Crash Trolley...NOW!” she snapped, as time went on her orders came quicker and more precise and . “Paddles set to 250!”

At times like this Dural's eidetic memory came in very handy. He remembered the exact placement of the electrodes for humans, one at the sternum and one at the apex of the heart. He grabbed the ordered devices and set them for the requested 250 joules and for verbal override if the XO wanted to change them she needed to only state it. Dural could have started vascular access, but didn't because he knew what was coming next.

~By the book.~

"Set for two hundred fifty joules, clear." Dural said calmly and clearly somehow making it over the noises of sickbay.

(Reply Bracken)

Stan's body flopped slightly as the current went through his body.

(Reply Bracken)

(USS Exeter – Sickbay - Lt Jg Greta Smith & Lt Ire Williams – 0129)

Walking into sickbay, Greta took a moment and looked around. The aftermath of something terrible was evident. Medical personnel working to save one of their own whilst the others dealt with the various injuries and other problems that had come from the terrible events.

Then, she saw him. Ire. By himself with what appeared to be a weight on his shoulders. Her heart ached for him. Walking slowly towards him, not wanting to surprise him, she stood a little way from him and said, soft, "Hey."

"Hay."

"Ire... "

"Yes."

Taking a step closer, she knew that her nerves were showing, "Ire... I.... Don't know what to do."

He paused as he looked up at her.

"About what Greta?"

"How to.. help you. Ire..." she took another step towards him.

“I will be okay.”

She bit her lip, a trait she had always had when she was nervous. "Ire... what can I do? Tell me what you need from me and I'll do it. You know that."

He saw the flash of murdered Greta superimposed onto real Greta.

“You can’t do anything for me Greta.”

Taking a shaky breath, "I can be there for you..."

“I need to be on my own.”

Closing her eyes, she nodded and looked down, "Come home... please."

He saw “Greta’s” smirk appear on Greta’s face.

“I cannot. I need to be on my own.”

She looked at him, tears in her eyes and nodded. Speaking softly, she said, "I'll be there. You know that. " Pausing for a moment, she looked at him and raised a hand towards him as if to touch his shoulder and stopped. Her hand dropped to her side as she nodded, "I should go..."

He saw the blood on Greta's chest where the dagger was and the trickle of blood on her face as she spoke to him.

"Okay."

She turned away from him, wiping her eyes a little. After a second, she turned back, looked at him and said, "whatever it is, whatever happened, I will be here. I... love you."

"Okay."

Taking a breath, Greta walked away. Away from the man she loved deeply because she didn't know what else to do. Walking around a corner in sickbay, she stopped, calmed her breathing and fixed a determined look on her face and headed towards where she knew Ravok would be.

(Reply none)

(USS Exeter - Operations Office - COO Ensign Paul Sleaford 01:30)

Entering the ops office Sleeford was met with a scene of devastation, it looked like someone had thrown a plasma grenade in and shut the door, righting a chair with his left hand, placing it in front of the remains of his desk. Sitting the bottle on the desk he sat and looked round.

~ Can today get any worse, accused of murder, kidnapped and tortured, yell at for trying to help, should have stayed on the farm Paulie, only trouble there was the pigs standing on your feet ~

Opening the bottle Sleeford poured a large drink, placing his feet on the table he took a sip and closed his eyes.

(Replies none)

(USS Exeter – Deck 7- Sickbay/ morgue examination section. – CTO/3O Lieutenant Sg Ravok – 0203)

Ravok stood there looking through the glass window at his cousin's body as she laid on the table. They had covered her up to her neck with a sheet.

" You didn't do this when I died. Of course there wasn't much of a body left. " A voice said to him from the darkened part of the room.

Ravok knew the voice all too well. He turned to his left and saw Baker walking towards him. Exactly the way he looked before they launched into battle.

" I mourned for you and I still mourn. Andrew "

" What did I tell you about calling me that? It makes me blush. " Baker responded with a laugh.

Ravok smiled and turned his eyes back towards Nesha on the table.

" She was beautiful wasn't she?" Baker asked.

" She was"

" Looking at her now, are you mourning for her? Or for me?" Baker questioned

Ravok turned and looked at him.

" I mourn for all those that we lost. "

Baker looked around " Then why am I here? Where's Andols? Trevi? Skyburn ? Dash? Why aren't they here?" Baker asked in a cocky tone.

Ravok turned quickly and grabbed Baker violently and slammed him against the wall.

" THEY DIDN'T KILL THEMSELVES TO SAVE ME!!!" He yelled in a fury

Baker laughed.

" You think I wanted to die? I had a son , a wife. It should have been you."

Ravok let out a loud yell as he threw his fist at Baker's face , but instead hit the wall, causing the metal plating to dent. Ravok looked around in a panic to notice Baker was gone. He looked into the room where Nesha was beside her he saw them standing above her and looking down upon her it was Baker, Trevi, Skyburn and Dash . The four of them looked up at Ravok in unison.

" Sir, we need you to leave now " a female voice said. He turned and saw a young medical officer carrying supplies in her hands. Her eyes fixated on the dented wall behind him. Ravok looked over his shoulder and back at her.

" I'm sorry about your wall. "

" Is it a Romulan thing to punch walls and scream at their imaginary friends as well?" She asked.

Ravok shook his head. " It's called grief. Maybe if you had people you loved die unexpectedly you'd behave the same way. Good night Ensign. " He said as he scooted by her.

" I'm going to have to report this." She warned.

He stopped and looked at her and laughed.

" Yes. Do that. Report it to security, I'll make sure to have a full investigation launched into why I punched the wall. " He stopped himself and took a deep breath.

" Im sorry it's been a long day. I'm off duty and I'm going to speak with a counselor tomorrow. "

She looked at him and gave him a look that gave the impression that he had extended his welcome.

Ravok turned and walked out.

(replies none needed)

(USS Exeter – Personal Quarters– CO, Captain Trip Williams and Dir. R&SE Ashlyn Williams – 0600)

After a short night sleep, Trip woke up on the couch. He did not want to wake up Ash when he got home, so he just grabbed some blankets from the replicator and slept on the couch. At least one of the two of them would get a good nights sleep, he wanted it to be her.

He looked around and sat up, sighing.

~What the %\$#@ happened yesterday? I mean #\$\$%, I'm glad we stopped the visitor, but...I guess I need to plan the funerals. #\$\$%~

Ash had woken a short while earlier, to an empty bed. She'd sighed sadly at the vacant pillow next to her, and once the morning confusion dissipated she pulled herself out of bed and stepped quietly to the bathroom, where after her morning ablutions and a shower, she pulled on her underwear and a clean uniform. ~getting a bit tight again.~ Ashlyn thought to herself, ~must remember to get the computer to rescan.~

It was then that she heard Trip moving about in the lounge, and she peeped her head round the door and saw him just sitting up, dropping the spare blankets as he did.

"Morning sweetie." She said as she entered the room. "You didn't need to sleep here, I was up and down a lot of the night anyway." She reached him and kissed him warmly. "Your son keeps punching me in the bladder." She laughed gently. She regarded her husband. She'd known Trip for such a long time, but it was only since they'd started dating that she felt she'd really got to know the real him, the one that not many saw. She could tell by a single glance sometimes how he was feeling, and he likewise knew her at the deepest level, what to say, and when not to.

"Honestly, just needed the couch. Had I crawled into bed, well you and I would be staying in it all day today." Trip got up and stretched.

“Go and wash.” She said hugging him, resting her head on his shoulder, “I’ll put the machine on and make some coffee. Then you can offload if you need to?”

"No coffee for me please. Coffee gives me the jitters. I need the adrenaline to go down."

Ash nodded, “Okay. Bad night? You never sleep on the couch unless there’s been trouble.”

"Five deaths last night. Some answers. But Bult and Thorn and..." Trip paused, "and Green. We don’t know why they went rogue."

Trip knew the real Maxine was dead. Whoever the visitor was, they saw to that before putting their plan in motion. But why Bult and Thorn went rogue Trip couldn't say. What he did know was the knowledge of the visitor was classified. Only he, Bracken, Merek, Ravok, and Corsica knew the truth. Which meant Maxine, the real Maxine would be vilified for things she didn't actually do.

“You’re kidding me...Oh Trip...How?” She shook her head irritably. “You can’t answer that, I know. Five deaths though?” She was truly horrified.

"I think Im going to petition Starfleet for the Exeter to have a week ported somewhere for R&R." Tril said as he began walking towards the bathroom. "We need it. I need it."

"I think that we all do. "Who were the other two? You named three." She replicated herself an orange juice and a bowl of granola clusters that she picked up one by one and ate dry with her fingers.

"Clarke in science and Ravok's cousin Nesha."

"Oh Trip that's awful, poor Ravok. Clarke I don't know, but Nesha...Oh the poor dear." She was genuinely upset. "How is he?"

"He...." Trip paused. "He'll never admit it, but I could feel his intense grief. And Ire...intense apathy. I think the vi...Maxine broke his psyche."

Ashlyn's eyes flicked up toward Trip, "the vi...Maxine?" She drew breath, She understood the need for operational secrecy. "It isn't simple, is it." Ash knew that she wasn't as highly qualified as her husband, her mum, sister, or niece, but she wasn't daft.

"There was such cruelty. The whole room reeked of it. Not actual smell. But the psychic residue. The lingering emotions. The stench of cruelty of pain."

“Have you felt it’s like before? Is it in anyway familiar?” She sipped at her juice, her heart going out to all the pain that Trip must have felt.

"Yes. As A kid at the playground. A bully was burning squirrels because he could. It was like that but worse."

“I can’t imagine that kind of sociopathy, especially here. Just how? I can’t begin to comprehend this. How is everyone?”

"Broken. Which is why I need to be unbroken for all of them. Im the ships dad. I need to be Broken beyond belief in here. So I can be strong out there"

She nodded, and put her breakfast down. “You can be as broken as you need to be in here honey, you know that.” She sighed, hugging him again.

"Thankfully babe, you make me whole. "

Ashlyn found herself glowing. “Flatterer.” she winked, “Counselling team is going to be busy in the days ahead then.” Ash said gently. She drew breath gently, her mind deep in thought.

“I knew that it’d be like this, and I accept the danger, but is there a point where there’s too much trauma, too much death and we just...settle down somewhere?”

“Just say the word my love. And I will leave tomorrow.”

“I wasn’t suggesting it, this is your career, what you’ve dreamt of and worked for.”

“My career is my job, it gives me joy. But you, our family.” Trip placed his hand on her belly, “Is my *raison d’être*, my calling. I’d give this up, for you.”

She rested her hand on his, and moved it to where their son was gently kicking. “I know, I’m happy here, I love the adventure, and I’ll always support you, be here for you to lean on. We can’t quit that easy.”

“I mean, I wouldn’t be quitting. I’d just be shifting priorities.” Trip said with a smile.

“Besides, If you quit, then Ailynn would probably become Captain, and she’d hate you forever for that at the moment.” She winked at him, and giggled.

“She’d forgive me in time. I mean she forgave me for all the times 13 year old Trip got....handsy. She’d forgive me for making her Captain.”

“I supposed she would at that.” Ash answered.

“But your sister would flip.” Trip paused and then began initiating Aimee. “Trip, I swear, if my daughter dies because you made her captain, well, I know 1001 ways to castrate you, and I will do it.”

Laughing openly, She looked at him. “You’ve been practising that. That was totally Aimee.” She laughed again. “Seems like so long ago that we saw everyone, I know that it isn’t, but it feels like every step we take is away from what was comfortable. You remember the chinese place we used to go to before we realised that we were dating? And the little community hall where I did the children's reading club?”

“Yes.” Trip said. He missed those places. He thought he would be in charge of the Flight Wing for years. He had made roots in the New Ares community. He missed it. Mars was home.

“One day...We’ll go back there, but for the moment, it’s you, me and bump.” she smiled happily. “However wherever the Fleet sends us next, can it be a bit less kidnappy please?”

“I’ll do my best dear.”

“Hmmp.” she sulked. “We’re related to half the Admiralty and we don’t get pick and choose of the cushy jobs.” She stuck her tongue out at him playfully.

Trip took his shirt off and sat on the bed, remembering he still needed a shower. “Did I make a mistake?”

“With?”

“Coming here, instead of staying on Mars, staying with the fighter wing.”

Ash shook her head. “You know you didn’t. You’re feeling reflective because of loss, grief, and the same emotions that you are feeling second hand from others. You know that you did the right thing, and if you think about it, you’d understand how bitter you’d be if you’d have stayed on Mars and watched this ship go off with someone else.”

“Yeah, you’re right.”

“And it’s okay to think about things like that, but don’t dwell on it. Therein lies the path to madness.” she smiled, kneeling behind him and massaging his shoulders.

“Your sister would have been happy though. If I stay on Mars, so does Ailynn. I think. Maybe she would have been on the Illuminar. But she’d still be in medical. So at least one person would be happy.”

“I’m not sure, perhaps she’d have stayed on Mars and finished off building her hospital there, who could tell.”

“No one, that’s why its speculative.” Trip said with a laugh.

“So despite the grief, the sadness and loss that surrounds us now, and possibly always will, I genuinely feel happy here, and I think that you do too. Sure, we’ll go back to our house on Mars one day, but for now...” She leant forward and kissed his back, dropping her hands from his shoulders. “Feeling a bit better?”

“Yeah.” He said softly. “We should invite Ronnie for dinner soon.”

Ash nodded. “I haven’t seen her for a couple of days. Does she...” She paused.

“Does she what dear?”

“You know I adore her, and I can’t imagine what she went through, but do you feel that she’d told us, you, everything that she could have?” Her tone was gentle, but puzzled, almost wary.

“Well I mean she never mentioned anything about someone hopping universes. But I guess that intel is classified so its not like she would know.” Trip paused. “#@!\$% I wasn’t supposed to tell you that part.”

Ashlyn sighed. "Trip honey, you didn't need to tell me that, I'd sort of wondered that anyway. Only logical way that she could be here yeah?"

"It slipped. I didn't mean to tell you. But I guess I can't keep secrets from you."

She smiled, "Don't worry, I know how to keep my mouth closed." She leant her head on his back. She opened her mouth to ask about her mum, but then closed it again, the question unanswered in her mind. "Love you you know." she said gently. "Give it a couple of days for things to settle a little, we'll then have Ronnie over for dinner. It'll be nice."

"Yeah. Do I have to go to work today?"

"I could write you a note to hand in to teacher?" she chuckled. "Sorry babe. You're the big cheese, you've got to go to the office. Now...go wash." she kissed him again, then sighed slightly.

"Yeah, you're right." Trip smiled and stood up and headed to the bathroom. He was going to shower, get ready, and start the day. He felt better, at least on the surface, and he needed to be. Ash was his rock, and she steadied him. Now he needed to go and be the rock for the rest of the ship.

Ash stayed sat on the bed for a moment, a bunch of things still on her mind. She watched Trip go into their bathroom to prepare for his day, she herself had life a whole lot easier than he did, and she loved being able to shoulder his burden, at least in part. With a slightly heavy

heart, she stood up, wishing that they could just spend the day relaxing, and helping Trip unburden. Peeping round the door, she bade her husband a good day, and went on her way, her burdens considerably lighter than his.

(Reply none)

(USS Exeter - Ops Office - COO Ensign (sg) Paul Sleeford 06:30)

Sleeford woke with a stiff neck and a back that felt like a battalion of heavy infantry had held a parade on it, slipping his feet off of his ruined desk he stood and stretched, seeing the still full glass of malt on the desk he shook his head as he placed it on the replicator pad and watched it vanish, taking the bottle he walked to the wall, opening the small arms safe he placed the bottle in and closed the door. Walking out he headed home to shower.

(USS Exeter - Quarters - COO Ensign (sg) Paul Sleeford 06:40)

Walking into his quarters he stripped off the uniform he'd had on for the past twenty four hours, throwing it into the corner he walked naked to the shower, as the water cascaded over his body the stress and the strain began to leave, the memories would stay forever, he'd seen people die, during marine training they'd lost half a dozen recruits when the small craft they'd been training in crashed into a mountain, the following investigation stated pilot error, the remaining recruits knew different, they'd been complaining for months about shoddy maintenance.

Grabbing a towel, he wrapped it around his waist and padded back to the lounge area, grabbing a simple breakfast he sat on the sofa and ate, the sound of an incoming message on the PADD, broke his thoughts, reading the message he nodded, the summons to the captain's ready room was expected after the ordeal he's been through. Closing his eyes he took a deep breath,

=^= Bridge to Ensign Sleeford ^=^=

"Sleeford, whats up?"

=^= We have an incoming private communication from New Caledonia ^=^=

Having accepted the call he was surprised to see the face of his sister appear on the small screen. Seeing the tear stained eyes Sleeford stood and approached the screen

"Jean? Whats up?"

"It's dad, he passed away after a heart attack three days ago, we know you cant get home in time, so I said I'd tell you, we buried him this morning on the back field, over looking the valley.

Jake and I are moving into the farm to help out mother"

Lowering his head for a few seconds Sleeford felt a tear roll down his cheek, looking up he smiled, "At least she'll see more of the kids," , Laughing he looked up, "That will keep her busy, chasing those two around the farm, thank you for letting me know, give my love to everyone."

Closing the connection, Sleeford sat and stared into space for several seconds.

(Replies none)

(USS Exeter – Ready Room– CO, Captain Trip Williams and Civilian Addison Queen – 0730)

As Trip walked into the ready room he realized that someone else was in his ready room. “Ms. Queen?” He asked as he saw that Addison Queen from the Starlight Lounge was placing a tray of tea, milk, honey, sugar, and some waffles on his desk. “Who was it that ordered my breakfast, was it my wife or was it my yeoman?”

Addison looked up as the doors opened, temporarily distracting her from her task. “Good Morning Captain” she said with a quiet, demure smile on her face. “A combination of both actually. Ensign Helms asked Mrs Williams for a tray to be brought up.”

“Well, shows how much they care and how much I prefer real milk to the replicated stuff.”

“Isn’t it more or less the same stuff?” Addison asked, a look of confusion on her face.

“Its shit you know, not that it tastes like shit, the replicated stuff is quite good, its just that it is shit. They take our waste, recycle it, break it down, reform the atoms, and tada. Replicated matter.”

She opened and closed her mouth a couple of times, “I...kind of wish you hadn’t told me that, but now you mention it it makes an odd kind of sense.” She was genuinely fond of the Captain, and his wife in particular.

“Sorry that was a bit inappropriate it.”

She laughed warmly. “It’s okay. Growing up I was exposed to all kinds of things. I had meant to be out of your way when you arrived, so my apologies, I’ll pass on your thanks to Mrs Williams though.”

"I'll thank her more appropriately later." He said with a wink.

She blushed, “She’s...” Addison looked puzzled for a moment. “Can I ask...is she like that all the time? What I mean is...she took me under her wing, always makes sure that I and all her staff are okay and happy.” Ashlyn had indeed taken Addison under her wing when she’d come aboard, little to no training or formal qualifications, Addison was terrified of working in the starlight lounge, but Ash had proved to be a gentle, warm hearted mentor.

"She's a wonder woman thats for sure." Trip said with a laugh.

Addison smiled, aand laughed gently, put at ease by the Captains easy nature, which given what had happened according to ships gossip, he’d be forgiven for being a lot more grumpy this morning.

"Ms. Queen, may I call you Addison?"

Addison nodded. “Of course Captain.”

"Addison, why don't you pour two cups of tea and join me. I've got time to chat for a bit and you're pleasant enough company."

“If you’re sure Captain, that would be nice.” She picked up the milk, and poured a small amount in each cup, then picking up the teapot, poured them a cup of tea each, the steam from the aromatic liquid teasing her nostrils. She then picked up one of the cups and passed it over to the Captain, and then sat down herself at a chair opposite, her tea in hand. Sipping the hot drink, she sighed gently, not remembering a time where she was treated as such an equal.

"Addison, tell me about yourself. You're what 18, 19, 20? You can't be much older than 21."

She smiled, “Just turned 21, not long before I came on board.”

"Family, boyfriend, girlfriend, hopes, dreams?"

Sipping at her tea, she drew a breath thoughtfully as she answered. “No partners, maybe one day, but I want to settle into learning how to improve me first you know? I had a bit of college behind me, but I dropped out, I couldn’t settle into what I’d chosen to do, so just wandered, and travelled some. Then I realised that I was three years down the line and I have nothing, no job, no real experience in anything; so I put in for civilian service in the Fleet, Ash interviewed me day before the Exeter shipped out of DS9.”

"Has it been worth it?"

“I don’t know honestly, I like it here, but...can I ask? Is it normal to just feel itchy? That you need to see new things, experience new things?”

"I wouldn't know. Ive wanted this since I was 7. I'm 23, am a Captain, I've got a wife with a kid on the way. I wish I felt that way. But I've never felt that itch."

“You seem very grounded for such a high flier, no pun intended exactly.” Addison smiled.

“I’ve known people with half the success that you have turn out to be complete monsters.”

She sipped at her tea again, it was weaker than she preferred it, but it was nice to just sit and chat with someone completely different than she normally did. She blushed as she complimented him.

"Can I ask an awkward question?"

Addison nodded. “Of course,” she said, “ask away.”

"Am I hot?"

Addison wasn't precisely ready for the question being quite so searching into such a personal issue, "Wow...Erm...I mean yeah, I think that you're dead cute, what's the old word? Buff I believe?" she blushed embarrassed at the admission. "Why do you ask?"

"On mars, I was nicknamed by some of the bar staff at the fighter wings favorite pub as admiral what a waste. That I was too pretty to be in Starfleet. Sometimes I wonder...sorry this is silly."

"Wonder what? That you could be a total player? That'd be a real shame." She smiled playfully. "It's not silly at all."

"But I wonder am I weird for wanting this stability and domestic felicity at 23 when many of my peers want to explore...ummm...park their...dock their Starships in strange ports if you catch my meaning."

"Oh, I understand, I met a few of those back on DS9. One thing on their minds." She visibly shuddered, "all too well."

"My guess is you're the normal one. You have that itch, I don't. I should be sleeping with alien super models. But instead I am married to a wonderful woman. And i love that. I have no itch. But you're having the itch is more the norm."

"Do you ever regret it?" She shook her head, "regret isn't the word...wonder what might have been had you and Ashlyn not settled down?" She winked, "I dunno, play that field...sow those Texan wild oats?"

"Not really. When you know, you know. I mean sure, sometimes when my mind wanders. But she's my rock. Honestly Id be lost without her. I mean honestly, without her, i don't know. I'd be happy, but I think I'd be less grounded."

She shrugged, and sighed to herself internally. Trip was something else, she hadn't been exaggerating about the officers on DS9, hovering around like flies on muck, but they all paled into insignificance as she shared tea with the man in front of her. "More like the rest of the Flyboys? I doubt that, I think that you'd still do you pretty well. It's nice to see you and Ash together though, you always look so...well...together you know?"

"She brings the best out of me."

"Can I ask something? You, Ashlyn and Ailynn were at school together yeah?"

"Once upon a time."

"Was the Commander always that intense?" she paused for thought. "She's kind of scary, weirds me out a bit."

Trip began laughing. "Ailynn is special. She's smart as hell but sometimes her people skills are...well all Brackens are intense like that. But she's a sweetheart. I think she just had a hard time connecting you know. We're not always made to adapt to every phase. She'll be an admiral before I am, that's for sure. She's made for this work. But in high school she was the library queen. I made it 4 years of high school without entering the library."

Addison laughed. "I totally see that, no offence." she finished her tea, and placed the cup back on the tray, laughing gently. "So Brackens are intense and highly strung, but you married one anyway?" she teased him playfully.

"Ash is different. She didn't know she was one until..." Trip paused. "Well its not my story to tell really. But all Brackens have a sweet side to them, but and are intelligence, but Ash, her intelligence is more, in social intelligence. Honestly if she wanted to, she could go to school for counseling and be one of the best counselors in the fleet."

Addison raised an eyebrow gently, curious. “Could she do that? And stay on board I mean?”

“Probably. My uncle Will got his law degree that way, and now he’s the Judge Advocate General of starfleet.”

“I never realised that such a thing was possible,” Addison admitted. “Figured that it’d be monitored and you’d be split up or some such. With that said though, Fleet’s a lot smaller now than when those rules were written I suppose.”

“How’s the tea?”

“It was lovely thank you.” She sighed. “I should get on before Mrs Williams thinks I’m hiding somewhere with her husband drinking tea.” she giggled gently. I’ll leave the honey and waffles. You’re supposed to eat well to keep your strength up or something.” she said playfully.

“I was wondering why the tea wasn’t as sweet.”

Addison looked puzzled, “I’m not with you.”

“I put honey in my tea. I’m weird like that. The waffles don’t need them, because if they are the Trip Special, they’re filled with chocolate.” Trip paused. “Have I mentioned I might have a chocolate addiction. Part of the reason I work out so damn much.”

“Well, you look good on it, you’re clearly doing something right.” Addison tidied the empty cups back onto the tray. “I don’t tend to go for many sweet things.”

“You’re a charming person Addy. Mrs. and I should have you over for dinner. Also if you find anyone you think is cute, let me know, I’ll order them to date you.” Trip said with a

laugh joking, “And if they have significant other, I’ll order them to split,” Trip slapped his knee. He found himself hilarious.

Addison laughed. “Be careful of making those kind of promises.” she said smiling gently. “I might just take you up on it one day.”

“Then we’ll really see how effective my orders are.” Trip said with a laugh.

“Captain.” She said, standing up, a demure, cheeky smile on her face, “Thank you for the company, and for allowing me to join you. It was a lovely, warm gesture from you.” She picked up the tray. “Have a good morning Captain.” She then stepped carefully around the chair, and slowly left the room, the tray balanced on one arm.

Trip smiled. ~Good kid. What am I talking about, kid. She’s practically my age. Have a I really become such an old man, that I’m calling people in my peer group, kid.~

As Trip sat down at his desk waiting for his first appointment, he felt something he had never felt before. A question, a wonder. What else is out there? Could there be more? Is this all there is? In that moment, for the first time in his life, Trip began feeling a bit of wanderlust. He began feeling the way many his age did. He began feeling the itch.

(Reply none)

(USS Exeter – Ready Room– CO, Captain Trip Williams – 0800)

"Lana sorry for making you get up early, I know you had a traumatic evening. glad to see you up and about." Trip said as he motioned for the intern to sit down.

(Reply Lana)

"You've endured something no cadet should have to go through, but I hope, trust, and know, you'll be stronger for it." Trip smiled.

(Reply Lana)

"I have set an appointment with you to meet with Counselor Victoria Corsica at 1100 hours. Just to get a sense for how you are doing and your mental state. As I'm the one requesting it, I will have access to his evaluation, but other than myself and the counselor, it will be private and privileged. I also want you to set an appointment with Lieutenant Ravok to give a statement."

(reply Lana)

"Lana, tell me, are you ok?"

(Reply Lana

(USS Exeter – Ready Room– CO, Captain Trip Williams – 0900)

"Thanks for meeting with me Janice." Trip said as he motioned for Hammerfield to sit down.

(Reply Hammerfield)

"Listen, before I get any further, I have set an appointment with you to meet with Counselor Jack Roberts at 1100 hours. Just to get a sense for how you are doing and your mental state. As I'm the one requesting it, I will have access to his evaluation, but other than myself and the counselor, it will be private and privileged. I also want you to set an appointment with Commander Bracken to give a statement. Is that alright?"

(reply Hammerfield)

"Anyways, with the business out of the way, let me get to the point of this meeting. Simply put Janice, I just want to know how you're doing, how you're feeling, and how you're holding up."

(reply Hammerfield)

(USS Exeter – Ready Room– CO, Captain Trip Williams – 1000)

"Ire, glad to see you up and about." Trip said as he motioned for Ire to sit down.

(Reply Ire)

"Listen, I know you have dealt with this kind of trauma before," Trip said, referencing their time together in the fighter wing, "I have set an appointment with you to meet with Counselor Sigmund Rogers at 1100 hours. Just to get a sense for how you are doing and your mental state. As I'm the one requesting it, I will have access to his evaluation, but other than myself and the counselor, it will be private and privileged. I also want you to set an appointment with Commander Bracken to give a statement. Then once its over, we'll get with Ravok and the three of us should get a drink tonight."

(reply Ire)

"So Ire, buddy, talk to me, how're you doing?"

(Reply Ire)

(USS Exeter – Ready Room– CFO – Lieutenant – Ire Williams – 1002)

"Ire, glad to see you up and about."

"Yes Captain."

Ire took the seat he was offered.

"Listen, I know you have dealt with this kind of trauma before," Trip said, referencing their time together in the fighter wing, "I have set an appointment with you to meet with Counselor Sigmund Rogers at 1100 hours. Just to get a sense for how you are doing and your mental state. As I'm the one requesting it, I will have access to his evaluation, but other than myself and the counselor, it will be private and privileged. I also want you to set an appointment with Commander Bracken to give a statement. Then once it's over, we'll get with Ravok and the three of us should get a drink tonight."

He paused.

"Yes, Captain Counsellor Rogers at 1100."

"So Ire, buddy, talk to me, how're you doing?"

“I will be fine.”

(Reply Trip)

“I will be fine.”

(Reply Trip)

“If you don’t mind, I will go and see Commander Bracken.”

(Reply Trip)

(USS Exeter – Ready Room– CO, Captain, Trip Williams – 1005)

"So Ire, buddy, talk to me, how're you doing?"

“I will be fine.”

"I know you will be fine, but that's not my question."

"I will be fine."

"Ok. You will be fine."

"If you don't mind, I will go and see Commander Bracken."

Trip looked at Ire, something was off, he could feel it. But then again, from some of the things he heard, he had killed a holo version of Greta. Trip couldn't even begin to imagine what he would be like if he had killed a holo Ash.

"Alright buddy. But seriously. It will be ok."

(reply Ire)

"Anyways, I'm placing you off duty for the next two days. Just rest, take it easy."

(Reply Ire)

"Dismissed"

(reply Ire iyw)

Trip then tapped his commbadge, "Captain Williams to Lieutenant Greta Smith."

(reply Greta)

"Please meet me in my ready room, asap."

(reply Greta)

"Trip out."

Trip then stood up and stared out the window. ~Ire, you've almost died more times than I can count. Pull through this buddy.~

(reply Greta)

(USS Exeter – Ready Room– CFO – Lieutenant - Ire Williams – 1008)

"Alright buddy. But seriously. It will be ok."

“I will be fine.”

"Anyways, I'm placing you off duty for the next two days. Just rest, take it easy."

“Understood.”

"Dismissed"

“Yes sir.”

Ire stood and walked out of the ready room. He really did not want to see Rogers or speak to Bracken but Trip has ordered it so he had no choice. All he wanted was to be alone. He had less than an hour before seeing Rogers. He headed towards the turbolift and stay away from Greta from other people. What he really wanted was to get some sleep it. He had been up for almost 24 hours and knew that if he did not get some rest soon, he would not be able to function. He could not go back to their quarters not at the moment so he would find some where else. As the turbolift doors closed around him he knew just the place.

(Reply any)

(USS Exeter - Security Office - Lt Jg Greta Smith – 1008)

"Captain Williams to Lieutenant Greta Smith."

Rubbing her eyes, tired and emotionally strained, Greta tapped her combadge, "Smith here."

"Please meet me in my ready room, asap."

"On my way." Greta replied

Standing, she looked at the Ensign outside the office, "Be back as soon as I can."

(USS Exeter – Ready Room– CO, Captain, Trip Williams & Lt jg Greta Smith – 1014)

Standing outside the door, Greta took a second. Taking a breath, she pressed the panel outside to announce her presence and waited.

“Enter.” Trip said as Greta came in. “Please have a seat.”

Greta nodded and sat, her hands wringing together.

“Look, G, we’ve known each other a long time, so I’m not gonna beat around the bush. I don’t like getting into my officer’s personal lives. But I’m worried about Ire. I get what happened was traumatic. But this is a guy who has walked away from more crashes than I can count with a shit eating grin on his face. He’s mister happy go lucky. But he’s not smiling.”

She nodded, not knowing how to answer. A reluctance to betray the man she loved.

“I’m asking you as his friend. He and I, man we were the first two. Remae tasked the two of us to rebuild the fighter wing before you, Ravok, or Petrova even got there. He was the first friend I made on Mars that I didn’t already know. Do you have anything for me, anything at all.”

"Sir, I can only answer what I know. He... whatever happened to him has affected him. He... won't talk to me. Doesn't want me near him. He... won't even come home. I can't...." She paused, took a breath. "I don't know what to do."

"So then you haven't heard?"

She shook her head, "I know that it must have been something bad for him to not even talk to me."

"Look scuttlebut is that he had to confront a hologram of an evil version of you and killed her. I haven't gotten confirmation on it, but its the rumor circling around."

Looking up at him, Greta tried to find the words but her mind was blank. The thought that Ire has been forced to do that. She opened her mouth to speak and couldn't.

"Look, I'm worried about him. Maybe, maybe he needs some space. We can't get him or you some temporary quarters. Until he works it out."

"He... said he didn't want to come home. I want to stay there. I want to be ready for when he does come home."

"And well, our conversation, confirmed my gut feeling. We might need to send him to Earth for evaluation, meaning he'll be gone for awhile."

She nodded, knowing it could happen. "I understand. " she replied softly.

"If that happens, because you are not his spouse, only his fiancée, you are not entitled to go with him. And depending on if Ravok asks for leave or not, I might not be able to grant a request for leave if you decide to go with him."

"Yes sir."

"This is all speculative. I'm only telling you because we go way back."

Nodding, Greta bit her lip again. "Sir... I want to do what's best for him but... how do I help him? He won't come near me."

"Give him space. That's the best I can come up with."

She nodded. Her mind was full of images and understanding of why he had reacted the way he did.

"You know what he told me today, when I asked him how he was. He said he was fine, but he was so...lifeless. I think, space is what he needs. Which sucks, I know. But it's your call. We can accommodate as needed. But, my gut feeling is to send him to Starfleet Medical for evaluation."

"I can understand that, Sir. But, my feeling is sending him away may only compound the problem. He... needs people around him that he knows and trusts. If that's not me, then I will deal with that."

"I don;'t think thats the case. He trusts and love you. But how would you feel if you had been forced to kill him."

"I don't know. Truly, I can't imagine what he is dealing with."

"Look, sending him away will give him the specialists he needs. We have good counselors, but the best are at Starfleet Medical. And its just an evaluation, to see what care he might need. But this all depends on the report from the counselor here."

She nodded. "I know you're right. I know. I just wish I could help him. If time by himself is what he needs, I'll wait."

"That's a healthy attitude."

"Sir, I know I have no right to ask this but... if he is going to be referred to Starfleet medical.... Would you tell me?"

“Yes, but don’t let him know you know, until he tells you. If he doesn’t then well...that’s between you and him.”

"Understood."

“Look, why don’t you try and find him, let him know he can one of the guest quarters on deck 3. 310 is open. Offer it to him, or say you’ll take it. Dude looks like hell.”

"I'm sure I'm no picture right now. I must have... " she stopped, realised that this was not a conversation for now. Taking a second, she looked at her friend and continued, "I'll make sure he knows. Whether he will speak to me or not, I will make sure he knows."

“Sounds good.” Trip paused. “Lieutenant. When was your last day off?”

"What's one of those? A day off..." she replied with a slight smile.

“End your shift early. And rest. See a counselor if you need it. Dismissed.”

Knowing better than to argue with I'm, Greta stood and nodded. As she walked to the door, she paused, looked back and said, "Thankyou. " and left.

(Reply none)

(USS Exeter – Personal Quarters - Tac/Sec Ens.(Sg) Stan More - 10:55)

Stan was not sure he should wear his Yellow top tunic. It had brought him nothing but bad luck since he had put it on. But he was going to see the Captain. Turning up in casuals would not be protocol. But if Tripp did not agree to what Stan wanted. He would have no other choice. But to leave the Exeter.

Stan took a few deep breaths then he put the top on. Giving Lillian his dog a gentle stroke behind her ear. He left to see the Captain.

(USS Exeter – Ready Room– CO, Captain Trip Williams – 1100)

"Stan, welcome, can I get you something to drink?"

(Reply Stan)

"Listen, I have set an appointment with you to meet with Counselor Victoria Corsica at 1400 hours. Just to get a sense for how you are doing and your mental state. As I'm the one requesting it, I will have access to his evaluation, but other than myself and the counselor, it will be private and privileged. I also want you to set an appointment with Commander Bracken to give a statement."

(reply Stan)

"So, I heard you had a bit of a health episode last night. How are you doing buddy?"

(Reply Stan)

(USS Exeter - Ready Room - Tac/Sec Ens.(Sg) Stan More - 11:01)

After he pressed the door chime. Stan was aloud in.

"Stan, welcome, can I get you something to drink?"

“ May I have a ice cold mineral water please.” Stan said.

"Listen, I have set an appointment with you to meet with Counselor Victoria Corsica at 1400 hours. Just to get a sense for how you are doing and your mental state. As I'm the one requesting it, I will have access to his evaluation, but other than myself and the counselor, it will be private and privileged. I also want you to set an appointment with Commander Bracken to give a statement."

“ I fully understand sir.” Stan said

"So, I heard you had a bit of a health episode last night. How are you doing buddy?"

“ Well. They fixed me up. But to tell yer the truth sir. I canna wear these colours anymore.” Stan took a sip before continuing.” Yer see ever since I put this wee yellow top shirt on. Things have not gone as planned. I know most of it was my own making. But our recent run in with Maxine was the last straw. Now please believe me sir. I love it here on the Exeter. But if ye remember I was supposed to go into Science. But due to over staffing you convinced me to go to Tac/Sec. Well sir with your permission I would like to return to science please.”

Stan felt the silence close in around him. As he looked up at the Captain.

(Reply , Tripp)

(USS Exeter - Ready Room - CO, Captain Trip Williams - 11:03)

“ Well. They fixed me up. But to tell yer the truth sir. I canna wear these colours anymore.”

Stan took a sip before continuing.” Yer see ever since I put this wee yellow top shirt on.

Things have not gone as planned. I know most of it was my own making. But our recent run in with Maxine was the last straw. Now please believe me sir. I love it here on the Exeter. But if ye remember I was supposed to go into Science. But due to over staffing you convinced me to go to Tac/Sec. Well sir with your permission I would like to return to science please.”

"Ensign, that is a conversation for another day."

(Reply Stan)

"I will take it under consideration, especially after reading the report from Sickbay last night, from before you were kidnapped and what transpired there. But now is not the time. You went through a considerable amount of stress. After you have met with the counselor, after I read their report, and things have cooled down a bit. I will let you know."

(Reply Stan)

"I also need to take into account your conduct in sickbay, and the fact that your actions resulted in three enlisted personnel and one intern in receiving a formal reprimand in their personnel files. So there is a lot to digest. Which is why I was hoping to have this conversation later, after you've had time to unwind and rest a bit. You've been put through a hellish ordeal. Let's tackle that moment. But in the meantime, since you did request a change and have gone through hell and back, here is what I can do, and what I must do. Publicly, you're suspended from duty for 3 days as a result of the sickbay incident. The only restriction is that you use that time as a minivacation and get rest and relaxation. So consider it, one part suspension, one part 3 day weekend. Rest, read a book. Whatever. During that time, I will go over your request, look at staffing needs...." Trip paused. Science did need an officer with the passing of Ensign Clarke, but he didn't want to think about that right now, "Go over your

personnel file, and read the counselors report. When that is done, I'll let you know my decision. How does that sound?"

(Reply Stan)

(USS Exeter – Ready Room– CO, Captain Trip Williams – 1200)

"Paul, take a seat, can I get you a drink, or snack?"

(Reply Sleeford)

"Listen, I have set an appointment with you to meet with Counselor Jack Roberts at 1400 hours. Just to get a sense for how you are doing and your mental state. As I'm the one requesting it, I will have access to his evaluation, but other than myself and the counselor, it will be private and privileged. I also want you to set an appointment with Commander Ravok to give a statement."

(reply Sleeford)

"How are you holding up?"

(Reply Sleeford)

(USS Exeter - Ready room - COO Ensign (sg) Paul Sleeford 1201)

Standing for the ops station, Sleeford nodded to his replacement and crossed the bridge, entering the ready room he approached the desk behind which sat the captain.

"Paul, take a seat, can I get you a drink, or snack?"

Sitting Sleeford crossed his legs, "Thank you sir, but no. "

"Listen, I have set an appointment with you to meet with Counselor Jack Roberts at 1400 hours. Just to get a sense for how you are doing and your mental state. As I'm the one requesting it, I will have access to his evaluation, but other than myself and the counselor, it will be private and privileged. I also want you to set an appointment with Commander Ravok to give a statement."

"Understood sir"

"How are you holding up?"

Sleeford sat for a second, "Well having some maniac try to kill you, kinda makes you evaluate your life, I saw things that to be honest I never thought I'd see, she she played us like a cheap fiddle. ", Sighing he shook his head, "We let her play us like a cheap fiddle, Oh give me a few days I'll be fine. The others,, well I'm not to sure, they where forced to do things that.. that...."

Sleeford sat in silence for several seconds, taking a deep breath he nodded, "Sorry sir."

(Reply Trip)

(USS Exeter - Ready room - CO, Captain Trip Williams - 1203)

Sleeford sat for a second, "Well having some maniac try to kill you, kinda makes you evaluate your life, I saw things that to be honest I never thought I'd see, she she played us like a cheap fiddle. ", Sighing he shook his head, "We let her play us like a cheap fiddle, Oh give me a few days I'll be fine. The others,, well I'm not to sure, they where forced to do things that.. that...."

Sleeford sat in silence for several seconds, taking a deep breath he nodded, "Sorry sir."

"It's fine. You guys went through hell."

(Reply Sleeford)

"Anyways this meeting is twofold, I wanted to check in and see how you were holding up. That was the first goal. The second one was to talk about your career."

(Reply Sleeford)

"I was going to give this to you yesterday, that was the plan anyways. I had filed the paperwork when we left Starbase Freedom, and was gonna hold a ceremony with your staff, but then well, a murder happened. But now that things have died down. Well here it is, lieutenant."

Trip then passed Paul a small box containing a black pip.

(reply Sleeford)

"From this moment forward, you are now Lieutenant Junior Grade Paul Sleeford. Congratulations."

(reply Sleeford)

(USS Exeter - Ready room -COO Ensign (sg) Paul Sleeford 12:04)

Sleeford sat in silence for several seconds, taking a deep breath he nodded, "Sorry sir."

"It's fine. You guys went through hell."

"hell is one way to describe it, watching people die, know that nothing you do can change it, makes you feel.... ", Sleeford laughed slightly, "Like you I suppose. I now understand how any commanding officer must feel sending people on missions"

"Anyways this meeting is twofold, I wanted to check in and see how you were holding up. That was the first goal. The second one was to talk about your career."

Tensing Sleeford waited, he'd only recently changed from Security to Ops, was he being changed again."

"Sir?"

"I was going to give this to you yesterday, that was the plan anyways. I had filed the paperwork when we left Starbase Freedom, and was gonna hold a ceremony with your staff, but then well, a murder happened. But now that things have died down. Well here it is, lieutenant."

Trip then passed Paul a small box containing a black pip.

Sleeford sat there, had he misheard the captain, he was sure he'd just called him Lieutenant, seeing the box, he slowly reached forward and gently took it.

"From this moment forward, you are now Lieutenant Junior Grade Paul Sleeford. Congratulations."

Taking the small pip, Sleeford placed it on his collar, "Thank you sir. "

(reply Trip IYW)

(USS Exeter - Ready room -CO, Captain Trip Williams 12:06)

Taking the small pip, Sleeford placed it on his collar, "Thank you sir. "

"You've earned it Paul."

(Reply Sleeford)

"I know this career change isn't what you wanted or expected, but you've adapted to it swimmingly. You've been an exemplary officer. I hope you know that."

(Reply Sleeford)

"Now then, before I send you on your way, is there anything else you'd like to discuss. If not you're free to go."

(reply Sleeford)

(USS Exeter – Sickbay– CO, Captain Trip Williams – 1300)

"Erin, how we feeling?"

Trip said as he walked over to the bio bed that Erin Cortez was laying at.

(reply Erin)

"You gave us quite a scare last night."

(reply Erin)

"Listen, I have set an appointment with you to meet with Counselor Sigmund Rogers at 1400 hours. If you're up to it. It's Just to get a sense for how you are doing and your mental state. As I'm the one requesting it, I will have access to his evaluation, but other than myself and the counselor, it will be private and privileged. I also want you to set an appointment with Ravok to give a statement. But you can do that whenever you feel up to it."

(reply Erin)

"I'm glad that you're in better spirits."

(Reply Erin)

(USS Exeter – Sickbay– CO, Captain Trip Williams and CSO Lt Jg Erin Cortez – 1303)

“Sir, permission to speak freely?”

“Go ahead.”

“I’ll talk to the counsellor. I’ll give my report to anyone. I Just not Ravok. Not yet.”

“Lieutenant, I know he’s hurting, but he’s a professional and he needs that info for his report.”

Taking a breath, Erin closed her eyes. "It's my fault, Sir."

"What's your fault?"

"It's my fault that Nesha is dead and i just can't ... What i need to say to him, i need to do that in private. I can't do it yet..."

"Cortez, you're both professionals. Request denied. The longer you wait, the harder it will be. You don't have to say you're sorry, but you will give Ravok your statement."

"Professionals, yes. I know that Sir." Erin coughed gently and then looked at Trip, "I'm just... I don't know how to say it to him."

"Start with an I'm sorry and tell him the truth."

She nodded, knowing that he was right. She also knew that avoidance something she had always done and needed to force herself not to go down that road again.

"The hardest tasks often have the simplest solutions."

"Telling someone that your choice lead to the death of someone they cared about... not exactly a simple thing is it?"

"Cortez, I've led hundreds of people into battle. I've than written to more next of kin then I'd like. In a crisis our actions orders sadly will get people killed. Did you pull the trigger? Were you negligent? Did you think you were doing the right thing?"

"I think so. No matter what we did, she would have done it anyway."

"Ravok and I are... we didn't have the comfort of a lab or office. We cut our teeth as pilots, as soldiers. He understands."

She nodded. "It's just, Nesha was like a sister to me. Ravok, he's my brother. I should really stop blaming myself for things I have no control over." Adjusting her position slightly in the bed, she sighed, "I'm not the best department head am I?"

"Cortez, you'll grow into it in time. But you're a sensitive soul. Bring it up in counseling. But maybe, given the emotions I'm reading from you, but maybe a gig on Mars might be more your scene."

"Mars... what makes you... You know don't you?"

"If you're referring to my cousin yes. But that's not what I meant."

"What did you mean?"

"Being a member of a Starships senior staff has a certain level of responsibility and need to face ramifications of our choice. If you can't face that, with a man you know will forgive you implicitly, then perhaps a posting with less danger is more appropriate. Mars is on the upswing. You may get lost in the shuffle there, but might be better for your mental health."

Erin closed her eyes for a moment and then opened them, looking directly at Trip,

"Sir, I know what I did. I know what my actions cost. Facing the ramifications of what I did is not the issue. I suppose I've always run from the hard times. Tried to find a way to hide rather than face them. This... this whole situation has shown me that." Pausing for a second, she continued, " Jimmy called me out on that fact. I know what he would say if he were here right now and he's right. I can't hide from this. It wouldn't do me any good and it isn't fair to Ravok either. My mental health aside, I took this role because I need to prove to myself that I am not the woman in my past. I am stronger than that."

"Look, I'm no counselor, but its ok if you're not. Everyone is trained to believe they need to be super strong. But we're not all that super. It's ok if this is as strong as you are. Own it. Own your weakness. Its better to know your limit and own it admit you can't Always handle it than to say you're stronger and always fall short."

"I can't run from this. You were right when you said that if I can't face this with Ravok, a man who to all intents and purposes my brother then I don't deserve the rank and position you gave me. I know this isn't going to be easy. Not at all. I run before. I ran to earth after dulon. I won't run again."

"Go see the counsellor. Talk to them about this. Then go see Ravok. The longer you wait, the harder it will be."

"Thankyou. And I know."

Trip nodded and then left sickbay.

Watching him leave, Erin took a deep breath. She knew he was right and she knew that she couldn't run. This was something that she needed to face.

(Reply none)

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