

A Great Perhaps

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by [LordMcCoveyCove](#)

Summary

Season One, Episode Six of Star Trek: Full Speed Ahead

Stardate 43243.1: (continued from the previous episode) The missing Ensign O'Day has *Farragut* along with two other Starfleet vessels conducting a wide search and rescue, with his best friend Lieutenant (jg) Greg Aspinall leading the charge. As time wears on and the chance of finding him alive dwindles due to the limits of the ensign's EVA capacity, Greg risks as much as he can to find his friend, even in the face of orders from Captain Leone.

Notes

This story was originally published on 02 February 2013, at the classic Ad Astra site, under a different name than my current nom-de-plume.

The character of Caryn Johnson first appeared in Peter David's novel, "Q-Squared." As her appearance was a result of an alternate timeline, in the prime timeline, she serves on *Farragut*.

Historian's Note: The events of this episode take place between the events of Star Trek: The Next Generation's third season episodes, "Booby Trap" and "The Enemy."

Teaser

Star Trek: Full Speed Ahead

by Lord McCovey Cove & A. J. Gertner

Episode Six: A Great Perhaps

Captain's Log

Stardate 43243.1

With the trilitium resin field left behind by the destruction of the freighter Shoeless Joe scattered in one of the major commercial spacelanes between Starbase 310 and Starbase Deep Space Four, a search and rescue operation for our missing ensign, Thomas O'Day, has become increasingly difficult. While we have no conclusive proof that Ensign O'Day survived the destruction of his shuttle, we are proceeding under the assumption that he made it to his EVA suit and is awaiting rescue. To that end, I've summoned my officers to the ready room to discuss our options.

The ship remains stationary amid the two remaining freighters within the convoy while the starships Sutherland and Excalibur have arrived to provide assistance. Captain Andrew Estrada of Excalibur is the senior captain on the scene, but he has deferred to me for the time being.

Senior Chief Petty Officer Tallan stared out of the ready room's floor-to-ceiling viewport with his arms folded across his chest. His blue antennae twitched slightly as he replied to the open question. "A standard EVA escape suit carries approximately twenty-four hours of life support, sir, but if I know the ensign as well as I think I do, he would have rigged his suit for low power usage."

Captain Krystine Leone shared a look with Lieutenant Petra Bartlet, *Farragut's* chief engineering officer. "How long would that extend his suit's power for?"

"Hard to say, because it's not an exact science," replied Petra. "Thirty-six to forty hours, on the outside depending on what exactly he modified the suit to do."

Tallan turned to look back at his commanding officer as she was seated behind the desk. "Captain, it depends entirely on the condition of the suit. If it's damaged, then he would have much less time. If he made it out in pristine condition, it could be as much as forty-eight hours."

Leone checked the chronometer on her desktop terminal. "By my guess, then, he either is beyond rescue, or he has roughly twenty-two hours left."

The ship's chief science officer, Lieutenant Abigail "Abbie" Atherton, chimed in, "There's also the added problem of scanning through the trilitium out there. If Ensign O'Day has drifted near enough to the field then his rescue beacon's signal could be obscured by the interference."

Commander Jesse Kincaid sat in the lone chair in front of the desk, but listened carefully before making a comment.. "I think that we should proceed with the assumption of the best possible outcome, Captain."

"I concur," Leone replied. She turned her chair back toward Petra and Kincaid, then crossed her legs and leaned forward with her fingers interlaced. "Let's get a plan together."

Abbie started with her idea. "We should get back out with a concentrated search in the last known position of *Komarov*. I'd like to lead the away mission, with Lieutenant Aspinall as my pilot."

Kincaid placed a flat hand atop the surface of the captain's desk. "I'd agree to that, but how would you cut through the interference of the field?"

Petra said, "We could outfit the shuttles with an augmented sensor package to help cut through the interference. I would say that it will also extend the range enough to help us locate the ensign."

Abbie nodded. "I think Lieutenant Bartlet's suggestion will work. If she can provide the hardware, I can handle the software en route."

"I can also lend a hand in configuring the sensors, if needed," offered Tallan.

"It seems we have a consensus, then," Leone rose from her seat, leading Kincaid to do the same. "The clock's ticking and the ensign is counting on us. Let's get to work."

The chorus of affirmatives preceded the exodus of officers back toward the bridge. Kincaid lingered after a quick, but pointed look from his captain. Once they were alone, he wondered, "Sir?"

Leone leaned forward in her seat and rested on her elbows. "What's the latest on the probable cause analysis on the explosion?" She added with an edge to her tone, "Since it may have cost me one of my crew?"

"The investigation is still ongoing, so I don't have any conclusions, yet." Off her displeased expression, he quickly continued, "However, there's a high probability that this was simply an accident. We're continuing to analyze the remains of the ship as we find them to determine if there's anything else that could be the culprit. I have, though, reassigned some key personnel to the search for Ensign O'Day. It's obviously the top priority, sir."

She nodded slowly. "Thank you. Contact *Sutherland* and *Excalibur*; see if they can provide assistance with the incident investigation, if you

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need it. Use my name, if you have to. If I have to write a letter of condolence to his parents, I damn well want to be able to tell them why their son is no longer with us."

"We still have time to find him, sir. I have every confidence that Lieutenants Barlet and Atherton will be able to cut through the interference."

"As do I." Leone turned her chair away from Kincaid to gaze out the port. "And if we don't find him alive, then the least we can do is return him to his family."

Act One

The interior of the shuttle *Garrovick* felt cramped as Greg stepped aboard. The access panels along the deck had been removed, exposing the vessel's critical circuitry beneath it. Abbie, Tallan, Petra, and two other engineering crew worked at each panel with tools in hand; the staccato sounds from each person played out a soft but rather discordant symphony to his ears.

Abbie brought her uniform sleeve up to wipe at her brow. She made brief eye contact with Greg before returning to her work. Without looking at him, she ordered, "Be ready to depart in five minutes."

"Two minutes," corrected Petra. "We're about done here. The rest you can do en route."

"Two minutes, Mister Aspinall," Abbie called out as he moved into the shuttle's cockpit.

Tallan replaced the panel and locked it into its former position. "The upgraded sensor palette package is in place, Lieutenant."

Greg settled into the pilot's chair and began the pre-flight as Petra replied to Tallan. The engineering team began to pack up their equipment to disembark, while Tallan took the station opposite Greg.

"Good luck," was all Petra said before tapping the control to close the hatch.

"Shuttle pre-flight completed, and we're cleared to depart," Greg announced. "Hold on to something." The nose of the shuttle lifted up off the deck suddenly and with little notice, the starfield to the rear of the saucer section filled the forward viewport. "We're free and clear to navigate."

Abbie shared a glance with Tallan at the suddenness of their departure, but chose to say nothing. "I'm almost finished with the programming. Take us to our last coordinates. By the time we're there, we should be ready to scan with the enhanced sensors."

Garrovick banked around *Farragut's* tactical pod strut under Greg's control. The shuttle straightened out its trajectory and the impulse engines glowed brightly. "En route. ETA is fifteen minutes, give or take," Greg reported.

Lieutenant Commander Tricia Hargreaves stepped off of the turbolift to the rear of the main bridge. She carried her PADD in her right hand while activating it with her left, opting to use a stylus rather than her fingertips. She drifted toward the tactical station behind Lieutenant Wilson Nieves and glanced at the console's display.

The display showed the tracking of a single shuttle moving at a high rate of speed toward the debris field. According to the identification number, the shuttle's name was *Garrovick*. Hargreaves tapped a few notes into her PADD, which made the customary noises as she did so. Unfortunately, the tones brought her presence to the attention of the ship's tactical officer.

Nieves asked, "Is there something I can do for you, Commander *Hargreaves*?" He stressed her name and raised his voice slightly when he did so.

Hargreaves felt the blood rush to her cheeks. "No, thank you, Lieutenant."

Commander Kincaid rose from the center seat and turned around to frown at her. "Commander, I need the bridge cleared of all non-essential personnel."

She stood her ground. "I'm not nearly finished with my investigation, sir. And if this incident has any bearing on Starfleet's question into Captain Leone's conduct, then I should be here to document it." Hargreaves' attention moved back to her PADD, as though the issue were resolved. "Now, may I ask why the captain isn't present on the bridge during this crisis?"

"No, you may not," Kincaid replied coldly. "Lieutenant Commander Hargreaves, you are in danger of being reported for insubordination. Your assignment has nothing to do with the current investigation; in fact, this is not yet a matter for the Inspector General's office. You have no jurisdiction here, but you are in getting in the way of *our* investigation and rescue efforts. Do I have to repeat myself?"

She quietly deactivated her PADD and shook her head. "No, sir."

"Dismissed." Kincaid did not wait for her to clear the bridge before continuing, "Lieutenant, make sure that we're forwarding the sensor readings from the search crews to Commander Elannis and her team. There may be data there that will help them determine if there was more than a simple accident."

As the turbolift doors closed, Nieves shot Kincaid a quick grin. "Thanks, sir."

"Don't mention it," Kincaid replied, already turning back to check on the status of one of the search teams.

Judging by the approving expressions on the faces of the bridge crew, Nieves knew that the exchange would be mentioned many times over by the end of the day.

Rear Admiral Joseph F. Aybar, the Inspector General of Starfleet, stared at Lieutenant Commander Hargreaves over the subspace communications link. His dark hair and eyes always seemed to look right through her whenever they spoke. In his baritone voice, he told her to "Report."

"Sir, I have found sufficient evidence to bring charges against Captain Leone and Commander Elannis," she told him without hesitation. "With

your permission, I would like to relieve them of duty and take them into custody for transfer back to Earth for court-martial."

"Permission denied."

She made no secret of her confusion and displeasure. "Excuse me, sir?"

Admiral Aybar leaned forward in his seat and raised his voice, as though she could not hear him. "I said, permission is denied. You will not take either officer into custody, nor will you attempt to relieve them of duty."

Trish sputtered, "B-But *why*, sir? The evidence points to gross violations of the Prime Directive, and furthermore, I think that Starfleet has a serious case to permanently transfer them both to a penal colony for the rest of their lives."

"The evidence also contains information that has been recently classified by Starfleet Command. In fact, all mission data collected by your investigation has been sealed at the request of the heads of Starfleet Intelligence and Starfleet Tactical," replied the admiral, in a resigned tone.

Although she smiled, her tone dripped with barely-concealed anger, "I must protest strongly, sir. This is a grave miscarriage of justice."

"Be that as it may," he said with a shrug, "I have been informed that the data contained within your report touches on too many sensitive topics and cannot be admitted in a court of law under present conditions. Perhaps, with time, those orders might change, but for now..." He allowed his voice to trail off, indicating the unsaid portion of his statement with a wave of his hand.

She could not believe how nonchalant he was acting about the case. Just a week ago, he told her not to leave any stone unturned. "Sir, you realize that this is simply Captain Leone's family manipulating the system on her behalf, don't you?"

Aybar frowned at her. "The decisions of the admiralty are not subject to your review. And I would caution you further about meddling in affairs far above your paygrade."

Her frustration threatened to boil over; it took all of her composure to keep herself from exploding before her commanding officer. She took in a deep breath to calm down and tried a different tack. "I understand, sir. Currently, *Farragut* is investigating the cause of a civilian freighter explosion. I think my skills would be helpful if I was assigned to assist and review, sir," she suggested carefully.

"That incident has not yet been referred to our offices, Commander. There's no indication that it will be, either, but that determination has yet to be made. Your orders are to return to Starbase 310 and undertake another investigation," Aybar said, happy to be returning the conversation to something less uncomfortable. "I will transmit the case to you as soon as you arrive."

Defeated, she stood before the admiral and nodded. "Aye, sir." Once the viewscreen powered off, Hargreaves reached for the nearest chair and threw it against the bulkhead with all her might. She watched as it bounced off and fell to the deck in one piece, though the back of it appeared to have been bent by the impact.

It wasn't enough to satisfy her rage. She decided to make use of the ship's holodecks for a while. On her way there, she wondered if it was against Starfleet protocol to create an image of the person you hated most, for the sole purpose of beating the shit out of it.

As far as she was concerned, Krystine Leone may have won this battle, but the war was far from over.

Act Two

Lieutenant Commander Ariel Elannis walked along the corridor shoulder-to-shoulder with Petra as they approached the primary engineering lab. The doors parted to reveal a quartet of enlisted members, all wearing the same mustard yellow colors as Ariel and Petra; three humans and a Tellarite.

"Hello, everyone," began Ariel. She waved off their sudden stance to attention. "I apologize for inviting you late to the party, but we're going to need your collective analysis on the current situation using the sensor data we've gathered so far with the shuttles out there. While the senior staff is tasked with the search and rescue of Ensign O'Day, the decision has been made to call in the A-Team on this one."

The oldest human wore the rank insignia of a chief petty officer on his collar as well as an amused smile. "It's about time, Commander," he chuckled. "Right, Lieutenant?"

Lieutenant (jg) Harold Vestry was at least fifteen years younger than Chief Wendell Brown. Though he obviously shared in his amusement, it was brief. "Anything we can do to help, sir," Vestry said plainly, "though, I must ask why Crewman McComas is here?"

The youngest human turned her head in askance toward Vestry before looking at Petra. "Lieutenant Bartlet ordered me to report here for duty."

Petra explained quickly, "The crewman is striking for our division, Lieutenant Vestry. Senior Chief Tallan has already vouched for her and this is part of her training, so you'll please indulge me."

Vestry snapped back to attention as though he were an Academy midshipman again. "Of course, sir."

The Tellarite, Operations Specialist Second Class Skav snorted. "Just what we need, another sniveling human mewling for attention around here."

Ariel did nothing to hide her smile when Skav spoke. Most everyone forgave Skav's employment of what Tellarites called "civil conversation." Though it was "civil" to them, it was nothing short of abrasive, rude, and condescending to most other species. Clearly, McComas had not had too much experience with Skav or any other members of his race, for she shot an angry glance toward him before returning her attention toward the two senior officers.

"Now that we're all friends, surely we can move forward with this pressing matter?" asked Petra. Her tone grew an edge as her frustration seeped through. "Mister Vestry, you're obviously point."

"Yes, sir," said the lieutenant. He turned his head, "Chief Brown, Skav, start compiling the data gathered and segment it for proper analysis in two hours." The chief moved off with Skav to the lab computer and got to work without saying anything in acknowledgement.

"I don't suppose I could seek Senior Chief Tallan's assistance, sirs?" asked Vestry. "His expertise would be missed."

Ariel responded, "I'm afraid the Senior Chief is presently assigned to the SAR mission underway."

"Utilize the crewman's expertise for now," ordered Petra as she made her way toward the exit. She paused and added, "I would prefer that you use the crewman to stand in for the Senior Chief until his return but let me know if you require any further resources."

Vestry shared a brief look with McComas, then nodded to Petra. "Aye, sir."

Greg entered in the new search pattern as they approached the coordinates specified by Abbie, who continued to work within the access panel but switched out her tools for a PADD. She set up a second display to directly access the control computer for the shuttle's new sensor configuration and monitored it closely.

Tallan watched as the lieutenant's fingers flew over the PADD's inputs. "Ever consider a career in engineering, Lieutenant Atherton?"

She did not respond right away, instead completing her task and then compiling the new interface with a decisive tap of her right index finger against the screen. "I always thought of engineering as a science, Senior. I just went macro rather than specialize." She gave him a quick grin when he snorted in reply.

"We're in position," Greg noted. "Ready whenever you are."

Abbie tapped the PADD once more and replied, "Scanning now."

Tallan immediately turned his attention to the output on the co-pilot's console. The sensor's proximity alarm began to sound not long after the first pass was completed. "Excellent job, Lieutenant. We've got much better resolution."

Abbie moved into the cockpit and asked, "What are we seeing?"

"I'm seeing some overlapping debris fields." He pointed out the new readings from the sensors on his console, while Abbie leaned in over his shoulder within the cockpit.

"Correct me if I'm wrong, but this field over here is showing non-Starfleet hull materials," Abbie pointed her finger as she spoke. "Which would mean that we need to move over to this side of the field."

Greg tapped in new commands into the shuttle's helm and displayed his new course on the console. The line traced around the edges of the

trilithium field to prevent the shuttle from coming into contact "Repositioning now. ETA: twelve minutes at full impulse power." Again, he did not wait for an order; *Garrovick* surged forward toward the indicated destination.

Less than two hours from Harold Vestry's order to Chief Brown and Petty Officer Skav, the data retrieved from *Farragut's* contingent of shuttles appeared in a highly organized format on the lab's master display.

"Problem number one," began Vestry, "is to determine the most probable cause of the explosion. We need to work the problem backward, so let's begin with the analysis of the debris field and the patterns we're seeing.

"Problem number two is whether this was sabotage or chance."

Brown, Skav, and McComas each regarded the display's information. Skav's skill at processing raw data seemed to be unmatched aboard the ship, so far. He devised a system to quickly review and determine the relevant information to pare down their workset to maximize their efficiency. But, McComas decided that the Tellarite would not likely accept a compliment from her.

"Some new information is being delivered," Skav said. "*Garrovick* is showing the debris fields with higher resolution than the other reports. I'm putting them up on the main display, now."

When the screen shifted, McComas left the trio to sit in at the nearest lab station. The raw information from *Garrovick* duplicated on the smaller screen in front of her, but she began to filter the data to look for specific markers.

Chief Brown commented, "Metallurgy suggests that the debris in the lower part of the scan field is our shuttle. Lieutenant Atherton has already marked off that section for their search, and she noted that the larger field is our civilian freighter."

McComas continued to work, using Abbie's notations on the uploaded data as a guide. "Computer," she began, "using the most recent information, extrapolate the debris marked off by Lieutenant Atherton against the rest of the datasets and cross-reference into a result list."

"Working," replied the computer. "Please stand by."

As she spoke, the other three moved their attention to her station. Vestry strode in behind McComas and peered down at the display. "You're narrowing it down further for us," he said.

"The search became more difficult when the shuttle broke up within the field, creating additional variables to contend with," replied McComas. "We have to make sure that we're not wasting time in analyzing the wrong field."

"Task completed," announced the computer. The new index of results appeared as the computer spoke.

McComas immediately siphoned the information into a new project, and ran through the list. "There's a lot of data here."

Vestry asked, "Can you split that up into four chunks?"

McComas nodded and did so in lieu of a verbal reply.

He addressed the other two. "Let's each of us take a data chunk and review it. Shout if you need anything."

The console on the shuttle began to blur before Greg's eyes. He closed them tightly, then opened them to try and assuage the fatigue he felt creeping over him in the most recent hours of fruitless searching. "Keep an eye on the helm for me, Senior," Greg said to Tallan.

"I have the helm, Lieutenant," the Andorian replied.

Greg cleared his throat and rose from the console to order a raktajino from the replicator and then took a long quaff from the mug in spite of the heat.

From her seat in the passenger compartment, Abbie looked up from the sensor readouts on her PADD to glare at Greg. "That's your sixth mug."

Greg took a labored breath and replied tersely, "I'm glad you're keeping count."

"There aren't many benefits after the third cup. And one huge disadvantage."

He ignored her at first, choosing to drink further. Greg sat down behind the helm once more and placed the mug on the small ledge on the starboard bulkhead next to his seat. He nodded toward her, "Anything on the sensors, yet?"

"I would have said so if there were," Abbie replied, glancing at the Senior Chief and then the chronometer. "Greg..." she began, only to be interrupted by the chime of an incoming transmission. She activated the viewscreen and gazed back at the image of Commander Kincaid.

"Report, Lieutenant?" he began without ceremony.

"Nothing new, sir. We're still going through the search grid."

"You've been out there for sixteen hours. I'm sending *Babbage* out to your current position to take over that search grid. Give them your findings up to now and come back to *Farragut*. *Garrovick* needs a change of crew."

Greg keyed in a break-in to the communication from his console and addressed Kincaid directly. "Sir, with all due respect, I think too much time is wasted in rotating out the crew. We should remain on station and continue the search until we find Tommy." Kincaid opened his

mouth to reply, but Greg continued before the executive officer could say a word. "None of us are tired and we're willing to continue."

The helmsman looked up at Tallan and then at Abbie. "Right?"

Abbie shook her head, returning the transmission to her own console. "Acknowledged, sir. I'll handle the lieutenant. *Garrovick* out." She gave the Senior Chief a meaningful look as she cut the transmission, as if daring him to disagree.

Tallan raised his hands in surrender, saying nothing to either officer before returning to tend to the co-pilot's console.

Greg, on the other hand, visibly fumed at Abbie. "He's still out there, damn it!"

Turning her seat to face the pilot, she began quickly, "Greg, we can barely see straight. We stopped doing any good about an hour ago. We need clear-headed people out here if we're going to find him. Plot a course for the ship, or I'll lock you out of the computer. Now."

Greg felt the sting of her words and the finality of the situation at once, causing his throat to constrict slightly. Not wanting to look at her any longer, he turned back around to touch his console and entered in the course back to *Farragut*. Through clenched teeth, he replied, "Aye, *sir*."

Act Three

Abbie sat the science station on the bridge, fingers rapidly flying over the interface as she tried to comb through the data of the various shuttles. Kincaid hovered over her shoulder while Greg paced behind her, unable to watch. Nothing could be heard except the soft response tones of the computer.

Leone watched the chronometer in her armrest with a sinking heart as forty-eight hours from the ensign's disappearance elapsed. She closed her eyes briefly, taking a breath and then announced, "That's time. Anything out there?"

Abbie shook her head, her shoulders slumping. "No, sir. Nothing to indicate where Ensign O'Day might be." Kincaid put a hand on her shoulder to comfort her.

The announcement of the deadline by the captain caused Greg to let out a held breath loudly. His eyes watered and he felt his legs weaken. He reached up to place his hand against the bulkhead, but missed its location by nearly a half-meter. As he threw his entire weight against his hand, his body fell to the deck with a loud thud. Before anyone could move to assist him, he informed them, "I'm all right. I'm fine."

Leone rose from her seat immediately at the sound of Greg's voice. Though he gave her a sheepish grin at the misstep, she was not buying his assurances. "How long have you been up?"

Greg shook his head in a denial but Abbie spoke before he could, "Closing in on forty hours, sir." She ignored Greg's glare in reply.

"Lieutenant Aspinall, you're relieved. Report to sickbay and check in with a doctor. Until they clear you for duty, you're not to set foot on my bridge," Leone said sharply.

In spite of his bloodshot eyes and his apparent inability to stay upright without leaning on the nearest bulkhead, Greg protested, "Sir, I'm fine. We should keep on this search for as long as we have to." Unfortunately for him, every third or fourth word was slurred.

"No one's calling off the search, Lieutenant," Kincaid answered, stepping forward to reach out and steady the younger man.

Greg slapped away the proffered support from the executive officer and lurched forward slightly toward Leone. His fatigued-laced anger caused a sudden redness to his expression. He opened his mouth to raise his voice, "Krys-

Once again, Abbie interrupted. "Captain, with your permission, I'd like to go to sickbay with the lieutenant. I only got a couple hours myself and I'm feeling somewhat lightheaded," she explained, moving quickly to Greg's side and taking one of his arms to pull him towards the turbolift.

Leone narrowed her eyes toward Greg briefly, then shared a look with Kincaid. "I think that's a very good idea. For the both of you. Commander Kincaid, will you call for replacements, please?"

Kincaid nodded. "Aye, Captain." He gave Abbie a thin smile as he tapped his commbadge to pass the word over the intercom.

Abbie had Greg practically in the turbolift before he could formulate a coherent reply, if one wanted to be generous. "I'm not...bla..tired," he insisted as the doors closed.

Leone looked at her XO and noted, "She's a good officer."

Kincaid nodded his agreement. "The best, sir. I'm going to have her replacement continue to go over the data but otherwise, start calling in the shuttles out there whose crews have been on for more than nine hours. We should try to avoid that hyper-fatigue situation in others."

"Very well," Leone replied with a succinct nod. "See to it, Jesse."

Sovera reviewed the findings on the medical tricorder as she angled the scanner over Greg. He had flat out refused to lie down and so was seated on the edge of a biobed. He would list to one side every so often, but Abbie stood nearby to help him steady himself.

"Your muscles are undergoing microspasms," began the doctor. "I also see that you are partially dehydrated. Combined with your vertigo and slurred speech, you are experiencing extreme fatigue, Lieutenant. You should eat food, drink some water and sleep for at least twelve hours." She set down the scanner and added, "I will prepare a sedative for you, to help you get to sleep faster once you are in your quarters."

"I... I'm not... We have to find him, I gotta find him. I'm not... sleep," Greg retorted firmly.

"Lieutenant, you may rest assured that there is nothing further that you can do for your friend. You should not push yourself into exhaustion in order to recover his remains."

"He's not dead!" he screamed at Sovera. His vocal tone dropped significantly due to the combination of fatigue and anxiety. Greg's arm pushed Abbie away as he got to his feet. He wagged his finger at the doctor, "You give me whatever you need to give me so I can go back out there and find him!"

Abbie rushed to put herself between the doctor and patient. "Greg, she's not going to do that, and you know it. You need to get some sleep because you couldn't find a battlecruiser if it was in front of a viewport right now." To focus his attention on her, she pushed his face with her hand to make sure he was looking at her and not the Vulcan. "You know we're still looking for him, no one's given up. But if you want to help him, you gotta get some sleep first."

He gave no signs of listening to anything Abbie told him. His tirade appeared to exhaust the last remaining bit of energy left within him, and

without warning leaned forward sharply toward her.

With a quick motion, Abbie caught him and kept him upright as he leaned against her. "I don't think that sedative's going to be necessary, Doctor," she mentioned. "Let me get him back to his quarters so he can get that sleep," she continued, already starting to lead him away. He offered no resistance.

"Do you require any assistance, Lieutenant?"

"I think I'll be okay. He's still mobile, more or less." Abbie paused before adding, "You know how exhaustion can play with the mind of any species, Doctor. I'm sure you'll be discrete about any side-effects of his condition."

"Indeed. If you do require anything further, please notify sickbay and we will assist you presently."

"Thanks, Doctor," Abbie acknowledged without bothering to smile as she guided Greg towards the doors.

"Chicken broth, lukewarm, in a mug, please," Abbie ordered from the replicator inside of Greg's quarters. They were the first words he understood as he roused himself somewhat. He found himself in a chair at the small table and he blinked blearily. "Where's the doctor?" he asked, somewhat clearly.

"In sickbay," Abbie replied as she set the cup in front of him and then took the other seat. "I want you to drink that and then you're going to bed, Greg."

"I'm not..."

"Cut the crap. You're dead on your feet and you just blew up at the doctor, not that you probably remember, your brain is so fried."

Greg sat sullenly for a moment, then reached out to wrap his hand around the mug slowly. It felt like moving through water. "I'm a little tired," he finally acknowledged.

Abbie nodded shallowly and slumped back in the chair, her arms coming up to lay on the armrests. "You can't do that again, Greg. I know you're upset about Tommy, that you're beyond tired, but you can't blow up at people. Hell, you almost disobeyed a direct order from the captain."

"Used to babysit me," Greg defended himself in a mumble as he focused his attention on bringing the mug up to his mouth.

"I don't care if she wiped the poop from your ass once upon a time, you're a Starfleet officer now. We cannot allow our grief to take over that like that," she insisted.

"Tommy thinks you've got a nice ass," Greg added, seizing upon only a few words.

"Well, I'm glad he got a kick out of it, I guess," Abbie replied, expelling a breath afterwards. "Didn't they teach you at the Academy about dealing with loss in the line of the duty?" she tried a gentler tack. "They've got that *Kobayashi Maru* scenario everyone takes part in?"

Greg sighed heavily and took another sip from the mug. "That scenario is not the end-all be-all of loss. It's... more about how you deal with maintaining a balance between the loss of civilian life over the protection of governmental policy. Hardly a test of dealing with personal loss, I think." He took some more of the broth into his mouth and swallowed. "That's really good."

"And you've never lost someone before?" she asked tentatively.

"No. And I don't intend to, today or tomorrow."

Abbie looked at one of the windows, tracking the path of one of the incoming shuttlecraft with her gaze. "It's a part of life in general, and Starfleet in particular, you know. I was in my third month of service when I lost friends on a ship. We give up the ability to rage publicly at death when we sign on. And one day.." She turned to face him again. "You will too, no matter what you do. And you can't react the way you did today and expect to keep wearing that uniform."

Greg stopped drinking and put the nearly-empty mug down. "I'll make my apologies later," he promised, staring down at the remains of the broth rather than at her.

"It's not about apologies, Greg. It's about facing bad circumstances like an adult and an officer. And I'll admit, you don't know really know you can until you're facing it." She appeared to struggle with herself for a moment, then nodded as if deciding something.

"I'm not going to talk about this again, so hopefully you remember this. I had joined up during the Tzenkathi War. I'd been thinking about joining the reserves, to try to get into the exploratory service beforehand, but with the war, I thought it was the right time.

"I was an ensign, fresh out of OCS, when I was assigned to *Zhukov*, one of the Ambassador class vessels. We were on the front line and most of what I was doing was scanning, analyzing sensor data, things like that. Once in awhile, I got bridge duty and I got a kick out of it. Made friends with this guy in Ops, and this girl from New Athens who was in security, Nika Halkiopoulos. Nika was just coming onto the bridge this one day, and Mendel was at the Ops station when we were engaged by a Tzenkathi vessel.

"We had been in skirmishes before but I had never been in on the bridge when it happened. I was..scared out of my mind, honestly, but also...excited, really. And then we took a hit. A really bad one, practically straight at the bridge. One moment everyone's doing their job, calling out, and then there's this big flash and explosion and I'm pulling myself up from the deck. I'm looking through the haze and only one other person seems to be moving, and meanwhile the Tzenkathi cruiser is coming around for another pass and no one's at tactical and I just run over there while the other person runs to the helm.

"The body of the person at security was slumped over the console and I had to move it to get to the controls. And I just half pick it up and let it drop, I don't have time to be gentle or anything. And I see that it's Nika. She was a full lieutenant, you know. Her eyes are open, and she looks surprised. There's a piece of the bulkhead sticking in her chest. And I don't have time to close her eyes or anything, I'm just frantically trying to remember what they said in school about targeting, and meanwhile she's just staring up at me the whole time.

"Between the captain and me, we managed to return fire. We figured something out, and we took out the cruiser, avenged our dead, saved the ship and all that. But I only ever really remember Nika looking at me while I stood at her post. But if I had freaked out then like I freaked out later about that, how I still sometimes freak out about that, we wouldn't made it. So I get what you're feeling. And if you want to freak out about it, okay, but do it here, or do it in my quarters, or the holodeck. You can't do it on duty, you can't do it in public, all right, Greg?"

When Abbie looked back at Greg for his response, he had his eyes closed. His posture was hunched over his legs as sleep returned to claimed him. She watched him for a moment, her mouth pulled to one side in thought, then levered herself out of the chair. After some effort and minimal assistance from Greg, she got him onto the bed.

"Computer, dim the lights," she said right before she left his quarters to resume her shift.

Abbie stepped onto the bridge. When she caught the captain's eye, she reported, "He's asleep in his quarters, sir. The doctor thinks he'll be fine after some food and rest." At the captain's nod, she resumed her post, getting an update from the other officer there on the data review.

Chief Warrant Officer Andrew Reynolds spoke from the tactical station, "Captain, incoming transmission from Starbase 310. Admiral T'Ciryra is requesting to speak with you."

Leone got to her feet and walked toward her ready room. "I'll take it in here, thank you." Once inside, she activated the desktop terminal to see the insignia of Starfleet Command awaiting her.

The screen blinked and T'Ciryra greeted her with a nod. "Captain."

"Admiral," replied Leone. "How may I help you?"

"I require an update on the current situation."

She settled into the seat behind her desk and sighed. "I'm afraid that we've been unable to locate Ensign O'Day thus far, sir."

"And the deadline has already passed at this point, has it not?"

"Yes, sir, but that does not necessarily mean that all hope is lost. I'm confident that the ensign will be found," Leone replied in earnest. "I'm not willing to write him off, yet."

"Unfortunately, you will need to report back to port and hand off both the investigation and the search to Captains Estrada and Wilder. *Farragut* was originally expected to return from Deep Space Four in twelve hours from now."

Leone looked at the small chronometer at the bottom of the transmission screen. "I understand, however, I would like to request some latitude in handling this situation. We have an enormous amount of data to hand off, and a large number of shuttles currently on search duty. If I could possibly receive some more time to make sure all is well in hand before leaving...?"

T'Ciryra glanced off-screen briefly. "Captain, out of... *understanding*, I am willing to grant you no more than eight hours' reprieve before getting underway. I will advise Captain Maxwell. Will that suffice?"

"Could I ask for twelve?"

"You may ask, but I will not grant it."

Leone cleared her throat. "Eight hours it is, sir. Thank you."

"T'Ciryra, out." The screen blinked once more to show the logo before blanking entirely.

Act Four

Captain Andrew Estrada of the USS *Excalibur* patted Jesse Kincaid on the back. "Good to see you, again." They stood within the turbolift as it ascended toward deck one. "It's been what... four years since *Valdemar*?"

Kincaid smiled. "A little under four, yes, sir." The lift came to a halt and the doors parted to admit them entry to the main bridge. He led the captain to the other side of the bridge and into the corridor leading to the observation lounge.

The commanding officer of USS *Sutherland*, Captain Nathan Brotman, had already been seated to Leone's left and appeared to be mid-conversation when Kincaid and Estrada entered. Upon seeing Estrada, however, Leone excused herself to walk to Estrada and greet him.

Kincaid said nothing as his captain leaned in to give Estrada a peck on the cheek. In response, *Excalibur's* captain half-smiled.

"Andy, I'm glad you're one of the guys I'm handing over this mission to," Leone said warmly. She turned to Kincaid and explained, "We served together on *Hood* under Captain DeSoto for a couple of years before he won that XO spot on *Valdemar*."

"Small universe," said Andy with a grin. "Jess took over for me as exec on *Valdemar* when I earned my fourth pip."

Leone breathed, "No kidding." She gestured with an open hand to the seat that Kincaid normally occupied. "Andy, if you please. You've met Captain Brotman, I'm sure?"

"Not in person, but we've had a lot of calls," Andy replied. Before sitting down, he offered his hand to Brotman, who accepted it. "Captain, good to finally meet you."

Brotman flashed a smile toward Andy. "Likewise, sir."

"Jesse," Leone said, "why don't you call in Ariel, Abbie, Petra, and Isira?" As Kincaid turned to summon them, Leone turned her attention back to Andy. "So, I heard they've got you roaming the Black Cluster?"

"Yes, but not for much longer," Andy said. "I'm being told that we'll be shifted to the Romulan border in the next six months as the command cruiser out of Deep Space Four."

Abbie and Isira arrived together from the same door that Kincaid used, while Ariel and Petra used the opposite entrance near the turbolifts. Kincaid could not help but notice that both visiting captains immediately fixated on Ariel's presence.

Leone made the quick introductions and then turned over the briefing to Kincaid and Abbie.

"Sirs, as you know, we've collected quite a bit of data, all of which has been transmitted to your ships. We indicated where we left off in our analysis, as well as where our ships left off in the search grids of the debris field. So far, we still haven't found any evidence of anything other than an accident causing the initial explosion. Likewise, we have yet to find any evidence that Ensign Thomas O'Day managed to evacuate the shuttle prior to its destruction," Kincaid summed up succinctly before looking expectantly at Abbie.

"We also forwarded to your Chief Engineers the enhanced sensor package we were using to cut through the distortions left by the freighter's cargo explosion," the lieutenant explained. "Lieutenant Bartlet has outlined the hardware modifications necessary, while I included the program modifications which you would simply be able to upload into your computers. We estimate that you can make the modifications in no more than twenty minutes per shuttle."

Andy asked, "I presume that you were able to make these modifications to some or all of your shuttles?"

Petra replied, "More or less, Captain. To be honest, we did not have enough stores to utilize across all forty-seven- er, forty-six of our shuttles, pardon me. We were only able to modify eleven shuttles before we began our recall."

"And this was a project undertaken by your division, Mister Bartlet?"

"In conjunction with Lieutenant Atherton, yes, sir," Petra turned her head to acknowledge Abbie.

Andy grinned. "I had a sneaking suspicion."

Leone tilted her head slightly. "I don't understand."

"We served together on *Valdemar*, sir, for a little over a year," Abbie explained to Leone.

"Had I an open berth for a chief science officer, I think I might've fought you over her," Andy said with a smirk. "Please continue with the briefing, Commander."

Kincaid waited a beat, taking in Leone's slight nod of approval, before noting, "We also included two other search patterns for you to consider. These patterns were based on the analysis we completed and are designed to focus on areas we think are more likely to contain any trace of the ensign."

Brotman leaned forward. "But, this is for recovery, right? It's been well over forty-eight hours, and those suits aren't really given to extending their ranges no matter what you do to them. Surely, you're not holding on to some hope that he's still alive."

As Brotman was speaking to Kincaid, Leone bristled at the mention of the ensign's death. Isira noticeably picked up on that and cleared her throat to distract Leone before she could say anything.

Kincaid gave the captain a bland look, though there was nothing mild about his tone. "Regardless of his possible survival, sir, I believe it is our duty to try and recover what we can for his family to mourn properly."

Andy nodded. "I agree. Whether we rescue or recover the ensign, we should make every expedient effort to locate him." He set his eyes on Brotman as he spoke, "We do not leave our own behind." As he said it, he realized his mistake and added, "I meant no disrespect, Captain Leone. Your ship was ordered away."

Leone stared at the long table. "Of course not, Andy." Though she said the words, Isira knew there was very little truth behind them. "Besides, we're all one fleet."

Isira asked Leone and Kincaid to remain behind once the briefing concluded and the captains returned to their respective starships.

"What can we do for you, Counselor?" asked Leone.

"Sir, I'd like for you to strongly consider conducting a memorial service for Ensign O'Day." Off their uncomfortable expressions, Isira added, "Preferably while we're en route back to Starbase 310." She put up a hand to forestall any disagreement for the time being. "The crew is very upset. Very few people are ready to deal with this kind of loss when on this kind of mission. I think it is important to let people know that it is okay to begin to grieve even though we don't yet have his remains."

From Kincaid, Isira could sense his reluctant acceptance of her argument. "Captain, I have to agree with the Counselor. It would give the crew some closure after the frantic search we just went through."

Leone's uncertainty was replaced with discontent at their words. "A memorial service is also one way of saying to the crew that we've given up on the ensign. You don't think that would have an adverse impact on morale to know that their captain will throw in the towel if they were floating out there waiting for a rescue?" As she spoke, each word had more edge than the previous until its sharpness was unmistakable.

"No one thinks so, sir. I can assure you of that," Isira answered forcefully. "Moreover, the ceremony I had in mind was truly in keeping with the sentiments of a memorial. We will remember him, keep our thoughts with him though we cannot keep searching. We will give the crew a safe space to talk about Ensign O'Day without the conversation crashing to an uncomfortable halt."

The captain's jaw visibly flexed as she considered her response, though Isira could already tell that Leone's emotional state was in severe flux. Finally, after a few minutes of contemplation, she conceded. "Fine. Make the arrangements. Is there anything else?"

"Sir, would you like to speak with me privately?" Isira questioned. "If not now, then a bit later would be fine."

Before Leone could answer, Kincaid took that moment to lift himself from his seat. "By your leave, sir?"

Leone's gaze drifted from Kincaid to Isira. "That will be all, Jesse." Once they were left alone within the observation lounge, she continued to stare at the Counselor. "Something on your mind? Or perhaps mine?"

Isira let the joke pass with only a small smile. "I wanted to give you a chance to express what you're going through, sir, before you have to speak about Ensign O'Day publicly. I know this is a new situation for you."

"I've lost subordinates on missions, before."

"Not when you've been the captain of the ship."

Leone sighed. "I've only been captain for all of fifteen minutes, Counselor."

Isira said nothing, trying to prompt the captain to fill the silence herself.

The captain took a deep breath and laid her right palm against the surface of the table to turn away from Isira and look out of the large viewports. "In those fifteen minutes, I've managed to lose one of my crew. You don't think that's a little strange for a new captain?"

"There have been many captains who lose crewmembers the day they gain command, and not just in a time of war. Starfleet is hazardous duty; even routine missions contain dangers. That's why Starfleet is so careful in selecting its captains."

"Yeah, well... I'm not the other captains, Counselor."

"No, you are not. Why don't you tell me what you're thinking, sir?" Isira coaxed.

Leone's flat palm curled up into a clenched fist. "That this wasn't supposed to happen, and certainly not to a kid like Tommy O'Day. He deserved better than this, and he deserves us going to every extent of making sure that he's back on board this ship with the crew where he belongs. And I think that a memorial service is a clear sign that we'd abandoned him, as though leaving him behind literally doesn't already do that!"

"But for the Admiral's orders, we would still be a part of that search effort. Everyone is aware of that. And everyone is always aware of the near impossibility of the ensign's ability to survive in a suit for this length of time. Even though most of your crew won't say it, almost all of them believe he is gone. There are Vulcans, Tellarites and other members of your crew who are less hesitant who voice this sentiment right now. Everyone's just waiting for your permission to mourn."

She drew in a deep breath through her nose and exhaled through her lips. "And I thought I said that was fine. It doesn't mean I have to like it, but I'll handle it like I do everything else."

"If you don't speak honestly about that, sir, they won't see the memorial as anything but a formality."

Leone rose from her seat, clearly finished with the conversation. "Then so be it, Counselor. I need to return to my ready room so I can stop talking to you. You understand, I'm sure." She did not wait for a response, instead leaving Isira alone within the lounge.

Abbie walked down the corridor with Captain Estrada, his informal escort to the transporter room.

"I meant what I said back there, Abbie. If I had the position open, you would have been my first choice," he said with a wide grin. As he did so, the laugh lines around his dark brown eyes formed.

"All from the year I was the most junior lieutenant on the ship, sir?" Abbie questions dryly. "I suppose I should thank you."

"As if I didn't keep tabs on my old ship. And as if Gleason wasn't campaigning on your behalf. I don't think you know half of what the Old Man does for you. If I didn't know better, I'd think you were related," he teased.

"I always thanked him for his recommendations, but really, we didn't serve together for that long. I tell him he doesn't need to chat me up so much."

"Jesus, I've never seen anyone so reluctant to acknowledge that they earned a Silver Star. At twenty, no less, and from someone who didn't go to the Academy. Listen, Abbie, in all seriousness, no one impresses the Old Man. I mean, no one. If he likes you, he calls you competent. The words he uses for you are, and I quote, 'knowledgeable, proactive, and excellent in all categories.' The *Old Man*. The Admiralty probably choked when they read that."

"I just don't like to be known for being lucky enough to survive and quick enough to save my own behind as if that was something anyone else wouldn't do, sir. I want to stand on my own, be known for what I do in my own department," Abbie explained, visibly growing uncomfortable as she guessed at the turn of the conversation.

"And about that. Abbie, you *have* to consider making a change to Ops down the line. If not Command directly. You have leadership potential all over you and I know that in time, you would make an excellent Captain. But you have to be in the right department for that." Andy grinned. "I see I'm not the first to make that suggestion. Gleason, huh?"

"Yes, sir. And I will tell you what I told him. I am a scientist and I intend to remain one. Respectfully," Abbie added with a smile of her own. "Are you trying to replace my rabbi, sir?" she added, raising a brow.

"I'm not senior enough to shove Gleason aside, but maybe I'm a bit more politic. Either way, we're both doing what we can for you."

"Andy," she replied in exasperation. "Please, don't. It's just so..."

"You don't want acknowledge it, but Starfleet is very political. You don't have the usual network that Academy graduates have, but what you do have is the ability to gain the respect of your commanding officers. Even if we're just helping you to better science positions, let us help you do that. You deserve it and you don't want to be edged out by someone with more strings to pull than you."

"I get it," Abbie accepted resignedly.

"Good," Andy responded triumphantly as they turned to walk through the open door of the transporter room. "So, are you seeing anyone?"

Abbie ignored the sudden smirk of the transporter chief at overhearing the question. "No, sir."

"Because my little brother is still available. I know he didn't graduate from the Vulcan Science Academy but MIT isn't a bad little institution. He'd be a great match for you."

"Thank you, sir, but like I told you before, I'm partial to men in uniform," Abbie answered easily.

Andy laughed as he shook her hand in farewell. "Good answer, Lieutenant. I'm sure you'll speak with Captain Gleason before I do, so please give him my regards. And forward my goodbye to Commander Kincaid as well."

"I will, sir. Good luck on your mission," Abbie replied as he stepped onto the transporter pad.

"Thank you, Lieutenant. See you around," Andy answered before giving the signal to the transporter chief to energize.

Act Five

Caryn Johnson ran a quick hand through her blonde hair as she pondered her reflection in the mirror within the small office adjacent to Ten-Forward. She kept her medium-length hair in a tight bun, and her makeup light and natural-looking for the occasion. She opted for a white dress made of a threadbare cloth that wrapped around her body with a flare at the bottom. Her bare arms had a single white band on both sides, and she wore the necklace she put on for special events such as this.

She moved out of the office and into the lounge area where many of the ship's crew were beginning to gather for the memorial service.

Outside the large viewports displaying the space outside the bow of the ship were the warp-stretched stars as *Farragut* traveled beyond the speed of light for Starbase 310. Gone were the tables and chairs; in their place were rows of seats made of thinner material for temporary use. Some of those chairs were already occupied as her staff circulated within the crowds of people to offer drinks and snacks as the captain ordered earlier in the day.

The double doors leading to port opened and admitted the ship's counselor, Isira Otex. She arrived with the ship's chief science officer, Abbie Atherton. Caryn had met them when she arrived on the ship not more than three days prior. They were together then, and it looked as though they had formed a fast friendship since. Both officers wore their dress uniforms, with the dual gold pips on the edge of the far right collar, just above the peacock blue color they wore on the body of the uniform.

"Lieutenants, welcome to Ten-Forward," Caryn said, wearing her customary warm smile. "May I offer you something to drink before seating yourselves?"

Isira smiled in response. "Thank you, Caryn. I'm fine, nothing for me." Abbie said nothing, but simply shook her head to the offer.

Caryn placed her hands atop the bar. "If you should change your minds, please don't hesitate to see me or one of my people back here."

"Thank you, again, Caryn," Isira said, as Abbie moved off to scan the room. "You look very nice, by the way."

"Nice of you to notice, Lieutenant." The hostess gave Isira a quick once-over. "That dress uniform does wonders for your legs," she said, indicating the tights over the counselor's calves.

Isira shook her head and chuckled silently before moving off to join Abbie who staring out one of the viewports. After a moment, she noted quietly, "If you ever want to talk about it, to someone as a friend and not a counselor, you can always come to me."

Abbie gave her a half-smile and a nod, but Isira knew that the lieutenant had no intention of taking her up on the offer.

"How's Greg doing?" Isira next questioned, after gazing about the room's occupants and noticing that the helmsman was not among them. "I'm surprised he is not already here."

Abbie let out a breath. "He was pretty groggy when he woke up, I'm told. He wasn't cleared for duty by sickbay but he should be here."

Commander Kincaid entered the lounge from the starboard side, along with the captain. Both officers were greeted as they moved along to the small platform with the clear podium. The ship's seal laid upon a small navy blue pennant that draped down from the edge.

The ship's bell was near the podium, and Kincaid walked toward it to ring it six times, in pairs. "Attention to orders," he called out. Once the crew all turned toward him and stood at the prescribed parade stance, the exec continued, "At ease. Please take your seats."

Captain Leone then took the podium, accompanied by a PADD. She set the device down to keep it within sight, and then began to speak to the crew, "Thank you all for coming..."

As the captain spoke, Abbie reached for the back of a chair she intended to use. She paused to look about the lounge. She frowned when she realized that Greg was still absent, then looked meaningfully at Isira. With a start of surprise, the Betazed turned towards her and confirmed Greg's absence on her own before slowly nodding back. As people continued to move toward their seats, Abbie slipped out of the lounge.

By the time Abbie reached Greg's quarters, he already had emptied half a bottle of Aldebaran whiskey. The clear glass used in this endeavor remained atop his dining table, tinged with green, and the smell of it permeated the small compartment. To his credit, however, Greg appeared only tipsy rather than fall down drunk.

"What can I do for you?" he asked with a wide smile on his face when he answered the chime at the door. Greg looked at her from head to foot and noted, "You look good in that."

"There's a memorial for your friend going on right now in Ten Forward and you should be there," Abbie answered, wrinkling her nose at the smell. "Or should have been. You.." She shook her head, her anger plain. "You'd dishonor him if you went like that."

Greg stepped aside. "If we're going to have a discussion of this nature, maybe you should come in." He added, "Because I'm not leaving here to go anywhere unless it's back on duty."

"Right," Abbie replied derisively as she strode into the room. "You were still dehydrated when you woke up and I'm sure your beverage of choice isn't helping matters. Even if you would be permitted to be on duty while drunk." She gazed over the dishevelment of his quarters and frowned. "What have you been doing?" she all but demanded.

He walked toward the table and poured himself another glass of the green beverage as a demonstration, then took a long quaff to drain it half-way before returning it to the tabletop. "I'm just exercising my liver."

"What you should be doing is honoring your friend. You're the one who was closest to him. You should be at the memorial service right now. I know you don't really care about your reputation but this out of character, even for you."

Greg remained silent briefly. He placed his hands on his hips, then let out a belch. He muttered an apology, though it was unclear for what he was apologizing. "I don't want to go to any memorial service, thank you." He pointed at her dress uniform and said, "You look like you're ready to go, so why don't you head down there and give up on him like everyone else has on this ship?" The amiability of his tone disappeared on the last sentence he spoke, and his eyes glared at her.

"Memorials aren't for the dead, they're for the living. If anyone on this ship needs a way to begin to get over Tommy's loss, it's you," Abbie retorted. "People are there now, remembering the man and you're losing yourself in a bottle of booze."

"He's not dead!" Greg raised his voice as he spoke. His right hand lifted to point out of the viewport. "He's out there, somewhere. *Waiting* for us to find him!" In exasperation, he dropped his hands to his sides fast enough to cause them to slap against him. "I don't understand why we're not doing whatever we can to do that, but I'm not the one in charge, so it's not up to me."

"If the captain and everyone else on board want to write him off so they can get on with their lives and turn Tommy into a sob story they can remember later, then let them." Greg pointed to the bottle, "That's Tommy's favorite drink." He pointed to the display, which held a frozen image upon it, "That's Tommy's favorite movie. And on a night like tonight, he liked nothing more than to come to my quarters, have a few drinks, watch a good movie and laugh his ass off, shoot the shit, and then go home. So, you, the captain, and all the crew down there in Ten-Forward can go through all the formalities you like in trying to remember him... with your bells, and your false words of whatever..." Greg stopped as his voice broke and his hand moved up to hide his face from her. His cheeks glowed red, whether from embarrassment, emotion, or drink.

Abbie looked at him impassively. "You really think he's still alive out there." It was not a question.

He could only nod at first. Greg sniffed loudly and grabbed a hand towel from the table to wipe at his face. "Yeah," he said hoarsely. "I do."

"You can't go down to the memorial like that," Abbie acknowledged, shaking her head in defeat. "I once read a quotation about how death was really just a 'great perhaps', or something like that. I guess, you know, right now, that's all we really have, objectively speaking."

Greg peered at her for just a moment. He then reached for a third glass and poured a finger of the whiskey within to pass it to Abbie. "You're doing it wrong. You're supposed to drink first and then get philosophical."

"Well, I don't drink much," Abbie responded, eyeing the contents of the glass he handed her doubtfully.

"If you don't want it, then hold on to it and be social." As he said it, Greg smiled to himself. "I never thought I would say that to anyone. Something my uncle told me when I told him I didn't drink."

"I've heard that before," Abbie muttered. She motioned to the image frozen on the screen and asked, "What was his favorite movie?"

Greg looked up and then back at Abbie. "It's called *Caddyshack*. It's almost four hundred years old, but it holds up." He ran a finger along the rim of his glass and hesitantly asked, "Would you like to stay... maybe watch it with me?"

She shrugged a shoulder in acquiescence. "If only to make sure you don't pass out in your chair," she added, the worry in her tone clear.

He cleared his throat and approached his replicator. "One glass of ice water," Greg ordered. When the glass materialized, he brought it to his lips and took a quick sip. "I'll take it easy on the booze," he promised.

Abbie nodded her approval as she settled into a seat, the glass of whiskey still in her hand. "All right, let's watch this thing."

Greg took the seat next to her. He placed his water glass and took up the whiskey once more. "To the 'great perhaps?'" he offered as a toast.

Abbie inclined her head in response, lifting up her own glass. "To the great perhaps," she intoned, clinking her glass with his.

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