

## Better Luck Next Time

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## Better Luck Next Time

by [kes7](#)

### Summary

Eighteen-year-old John Quigley has waited a lifetime for an opportunity to get away from his self-destructive mother's cycle of abuse. Starfleet Academy is his dream escape, but when he fails to make the cut, he must decide whether to endure another year of hell in exchange for one more chance.

The dismal rain the weather modification network had decided to let fall on San Francisco today was a perfect match to John Quigley's mood. The lanky eighteen-year-old walked down a nearly empty street in the downpour, chilled to the bone, yet thankful for the dreary weather that allowed him to pretend that there were no tears sliding down his cheeks. *It's only rain*, he tried to convince himself, as he wandered slowly around the unfamiliar city.

He hadn't cried since he was ten, the day his stepfather had finally left his mother. While she drowned her feelings in most of a bottle of gin, he had sat upstairs crying and staring out the window for what seemed like hours, mourning the loss of the only father he had ever known. By the time he finished crying, he was pretty sure he had no tears left to cry, ever. For the last eight years, it had seemed he was right.

Now here he was, nine days into legal adulthood, and the tears were back.

*"Unfortunately, we can only select one of you from this testing group. All four of you performed admirably, but one of you stood head and shoulders above the rest. Congratulations, Indara Otali, on your acceptance to Starfleet Academy. You should be proud of your achievement ..."*

For years, John had hated both his father, who walked out when he was only two, and his stepfather for leaving him. *Why didn't you take me with you?* he wondered. His mother was a difficult woman, manic one day and unable to drag herself out of bed the next, and she drank far too much. John knew there were treatments out there for people like his mother, but it wasn't as if they could force it on her without her consent. Since she refused to let them help, someone had to take care of her, and that someone had been John, ever since the day his stepdad left. The way she thanked him was with plenty of anger and criticism over nearly everything he did, along with alternating displays of guilt and false martyrdom.

He couldn't recall the exact moment he had decided he wasn't going to put up with it forever. It was just a conviction that had slowly built up inside him over time, and it began to influence everything he did. He was a smart kid, if a little distracted by his home life, and he found that when he applied himself, he actually did extremely well in his classes. He was a natural athlete, gifted with remarkable height, strength, and agility. And as he grew into a teenager, the reaction he got from the girls at school helped him realize he was also blessed with good looks and an appealing personality. His mother may not have loved him much, but everyone else did -- at least the parts of him he allowed them to get to know. Much of John stayed hidden underneath the surface, just like he hid the truth about his home life.

Somewhere along the way, he had stopped being angry at the men who had left his mother, and started to understand them. Only he didn't just want to leave his mother's house and Edmonton. He wanted to leave Earth. It was the best way he could think of to break free of the hell his childhood had become as his mother fought a war against herself that she could never win. He refused to become collateral damage.

So he had applied to Starfleet Academy. The day the data transmission arrived notifying him that his application had been accepted for consideration had been the happiest day of his life. He had waited until the last possible minute to inform his mother he was traveling to San Francisco for the entrance exams. She was predictably furious, and he was grateful he had turned eighteen a few days before -- there was absolutely nothing she could do but yell and threaten, finally opening a bottle of wine and storming off to her room to sulk and cry.

*"As for the rest of you, I hope to see you again next year. All three of your scores were high enough to maintain eligibility, so congratulations to you, as well, and be sure to study hard this year...."*

The exams had been eye-opening. He had never seen such a group of driven, talented, intelligent people in his life. Sentients of every shape and hue were there, presumably the best and the brightest of their homeworlds, and all competing for such a small number of slots ... the odds had not been in his favor.

Back home, he had been popular and high-achieving, a big fish in a small pond. Almost everyone at school was human, and almost no one had aspirations of joining Starfleet at all, let alone as an officer. John himself thought he might be reaching too far in applying to the Academy, and maybe he was right. If it hadn't been for the fact that he was still eligible to try again, he might have just enlisted instead, and attended the technical services school on Mars. But his scores had been good enough to keep him in the running. The possibility still dangled before him enticingly. Could he settle for second best? If there was even a remote chance he could one day serve as an officer on the bridge of a Federation starship, could he choose a life of maintenance work or cargo management instead, just to avoid another year with his mother?

Then again, could he really take another year at home? As he considered his options, he turned back to look in the direction he had come from. Below him, he could see the Academy in all its sleek, glass-walled, impressively landscaped glory. Even the dreariness of the day couldn't take away from its beauty. As he turned to head toward the transportation hub, he promised himself, *One more year. Just one more year.*

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