

STAR TREK: RENAISSANCE

"Aftermath"

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STAR TREK: RENAISSANCE

"Aftermath"

TEASER

BLACKNESS

A scrolling text appears:

On Stardate 50975, a ruthless galactic power  
Known as the Dominion declared war to the United  
Federation of Planets. The resulting conflict  
Cost the lives of billions, and engulfed the entire  
Alpha Quadrant in flames...

SOUNDS of distant EXPLOSIONS, growing stronger...

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE

A Federation ship EXPLODES into our view, cut to pieces by  
a squadron of DOMINION WARSHIPS. Energy beams sear through  
the darkness as the two forces clash together violently.  
No mercy is asked or given.

At the center of the storm is a beaten up SPACE STATION,  
Starfleet in design...

INT. CORRIDOR

Fire, smoke and phaser fire. Total pandemonium. A MOTHER  
in a ragged uniform ushers her TEN-YEAR-OLD SON through  
the flaming corridors. Several officers try to hold the  
passageway against an unseen assailant. We can tell they  
are losing, badly.

INT. COMMAND CENTER -- CONTINUOUS

The last stronghold. Rifles turn immediately towards the  
woman and the boy, but don't fire. There is definite  
desperation in her voice:

MOTHER

They broke through our second  
defense line. I don't think we can  
hold on much longer. Get the Nimshi  
on-line and tell them we need an  
immediate beam out!

A young ENSIGN, worn and frightened, is at the  
communications panel.

ENSIGN

I can't, sir. The Jem'Hadar are  
jamming all our communications.

MOTHER

Switch to upper EM band. We need  
to get a signal through!

YOUNG NEIL

Mom?

The woman turns to her son. Obviously, the boy is scared, unable to comprehend the situation around him.

MOTHER

Neil, go sit behind the bulkhead.  
It'll be safer there.

YOUNG NEIL

Mom...

MOTHER

Don't argue!

There's urgency in her eyes. He won't contest that and goes. Her mother turns back to the comm officer.

ENSIGN

Sir, I think I got it!

A highly distorted voice breaks the nerving silence:

CAPTAIN DALE'S COM VOICE

This is Captain Dale of the USS  
Nimshi... is... this?

MOTHER

This is Lieutenant Alice Cross.  
Sir, we need an immediate  
evacuation. The Jem'Hadar are--

CAPTAIN DALE'S COM VOICE

... is a negative... taking heavy  
damage. You have to--

Suddenly, the line goes dead.

MOTHER

Nimshi? Captain Dale?

The Ensign shakes his head, disappointed.

ENSIGN

We lost contact, sir.

Lieutenant Cross turns pale. The Ensign gives her a pleading look.

ENSIGN (CONT'D)

What are we going to do?

Her mind races furiously. Young Neil looks at his mother, fear creeping slowly into him and curls tighter into the dark corner.

Lieutenant Cross turns to the Ensign, letting out a resolved breath.

MOTHER

Pass the phase flux inhibitor.

He looks puzzled. She pops a panel OPEN.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

If the Nimshi can't get to us, we can still try to get out of here. I'll try to rig the station's transporter array to beam us down to the surface. Help me out with this.

The boy finally gets up and goes to his mother.

YOUNG NEIL

Mom...

She ignores him, busy rewiring the circuitry. And keep her hands from trembling.

MOTHER

Patch in the power through the secondary EPS conduit. I think we can get enough juice out of the auxiliary life support for a five second energy burst.

ENSIGN

Will it be enough?

MOTHER

It has to be. Remember to remodulate the annular confinement beam to a wide spectrum output. That five second jolt won't do us any good unless we can get through the Dominion interference.

The boy is at her. The sound of distant gunfire grows stronger by the beat.

YOUNG NEIL

Mom...

Still, no response to him.

ENSIGN

It's no good, sir. The main emitter is fried.

MOTHER

Damn! All right, prepare to feed the matter stream directly through the comm array. I think the subspace relay antenna can handle the extra load. Use the secondary--

Young Neil nudges her hand, finally getting her mother's attention:

YOUNG NEIL

Mom. Where's dad? And Julie?

She looks at him, eye level. There is no easy way for her to convey the news.

MOTHER

They... they're not coming, Neil.

The ugly truth slowly dawns to him. As he starts to break into tears, her mother takes him into her loving embrace, feeling the loss as well.

Suddenly, the door EXPLODES into million pieces of SHRAPNEL. An energy bolt THUNDERS through the smoke, striking one of the officers squarely into the chest, taking him down.

The Ensign goes for his rifle, only to be CUT DOWN by another SCORCHING BEAM from the weapons of invading JEM'HADAR SOLDIERS bursting into the room.

Lieutenant Cross grips her son tightly, trying to protect him from the harm heading their way. Young Neil turns to look at the menacing soldier - proportions distorted, a mythic creature from deepest nightmares as seen through the eyes of a frightened child.

The weapon rises. His eyes widen --

INT. QUARTERS - BATHROOM

Same eyes, same face. A quarter of a century older. CAPTAIN NEIL CROSS looks at the mirror, studying every line and every scar in that seasoned visage, letting out a deep breath. A man with trouble etched on his brow.

A title appears:

STARDATE 78012, TWENTY-SEVEN YEARS LATER

He turns away into

INT. QUARTERS

Very Spartan accommodations for temporary use, no decorations or excess furniture. Standard issue Starfleet bags tossed casually on the floor.

Slumbering to the bed, Cross sits down. He stares the uniform that has been carelessly tossed on the chair, takes look at the collar pips. All four of them.

He buries his face in his hands, a man strung to the limit. Unable to stay in the agonizing position he's in, and unwilling to leave. A man caught in the limbo of the life he doesn't want.

The doorbell CHIMES.

Cross lets it chirp once more before answering:

CROSS

Come in.

ADMIRAL HENRY PORTMAN walks in. A "man of the sea" who has aged with dignity. Wearing proudly the uniform, he stands as tough but gentle, as stern but relaxed.

PORTMAN

You turned off your commbadge,  
Captain.

CROSS

Sorry. I just wanted to be alone  
for a while, that's all.

PORTMAN

Well, I can understand that. It is  
a big day for you.

CROSS

(detached)

I wouldn't be so sure about that.

PORTMAN

If I were you, I'd ecstatic on the  
chance of a first command. I  
remember my first assignment as a  
acting commanding officer of the  
USS--

Cross forces up a smile.

CROSS

(with a mock  
imitation)

"The USS Wellington. One of those  
older Akira-class ships. A fine  
built lady with a distinguished  
track record. A piece of art with  
heart roaring like a pack of wild  
beasts and grace to make a choir  
of angels weep. Ahh... they don't  
build ships like that anymore."

Portman returns the expression.

PORTMAN

I've told that one before?

CROSS

Once or twice.

PORTMAN

Stories like that can never be  
told too many times. Come on, get  
dressed. Your dame won't wait  
forever.

After a brief moment of hesitation, Cross takes the uniform.

INT. CORRIDOR

Portman and Cross stroll the corridor with a majestic view.

PORTMAN

We worked on the design for five years. I can personally assure you, the Phoenix-class is state of the art. Packed with everything Starfleet has to offer. You'll be in good hands.

CROSS

I'm sure it's fine.

Portman can sense Cross' apparent lack of interest.

PORTMAN

But it's not the ship you're worried about, is it?

CROSS

No... yes, partially. I've been began questioning whether or not this is what I want from my life. Being responsible for hundreds of lives on a daily-basis, making split-second decisions that might affect the well-being of the entire Federation. I don't think I can do this anymore.

(sighing)

I just don't know...

PORTMAN

You still have the dreams?

CROSS

Every night.

PORTMAN

You've talked to a counselor about it?

CROSS

Countless times. All they can do is to prescribe medication and pillow talk. What I went through, no drug or psychobabble can cure, Henry.

PORTMAN

Neil, you're drowning yourself in self-misery. I personally put a good word out for you, Neil. With all the reports we've been receiving from Betazed, the Trill Sector, the Klingons, we really need an officer like you.

Half joking:

CROSS  
Things are that bad?

Portman pulls him aside and leans closer to keeps his voice no louder than a whisper.

PORTMAN  
(dead serious)  
Worse.

Cross looks at him questioning.

PORTMAN (CONT'D)  
To tell you the truth, the Klingon Empire is in a deteriorating state, and the treaties we signed a couple years back are seriously dragging us down with them. Plus, with all the relief aid we promised into the former Cardassian Union, our resources are scattered thin, cutting down our ship production... And the raiders and pirate groups have noticed that too. The list goes on.  
(beat)  
All these boiling problems were one of the primary reasons the ship was commissioned by Starfleet in the first place.

CROSS  
You're really not kidding?

PORTMAN  
We have known each other for six years and I have watched you rise up through the ranks. Though you might not be aware of the fact yourself, I know what you are capable of. Take this one for your own sake, Neil.

Latched into the giant spacedock orbiting Earth is the HIGH-TECH FEDERATION STARSHIP. A sleek and slender specimen of Starfleet design, combining teeth as well as elegance.

Cross reads the markings on the hull...

CROSS  
The USS Enterprise, huh?

On the flattering shot of the ship, we...

FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE

Clamped on the spacedock, the USS Enterprise. Numerous shuttlepods and cargo drones buzz around the vessel. We circle slowly around it as the Captain starts his log:

CROSS (V.O.)

Begin Captain's log, USS Enterprise, NCC-1701-G. Stardate 78014.1. I accept this command with mixed emotions. Measuring up to the achievements of past Enterprise captains is a challenge indeed. Kirk, Garret, Picard, Winter. All of their names have been permanently etched into the history. Their deeds and achievements and journeys unforgettable. Even Captain Harriman eventually proved himself...

INT. MAIN ENGINEERING

A scene of utter chaos. Wiring and cables lie on the floor, wall panels hang gutted open, revealing a tritanium skeleton with several mismatched tools stabbed into it.

CAPTAIN CROSS walks over the coil of wire and looks around.

CROSS (V.O.)

I'm not so sure about myself. For the record, I asked for a desk job.

Busy working with one of the torn-apart racks is LIEUTENANT ERIK GREY, the ship's Chief Engineer. A model of Starfleet regulations with crew cut hair and polished shoes. You could swear you've seen him in some recruitment poster.

Being completely absorbed by the task at hand, he doesn't notice the Captain.

GREY

(frustrated)

Ensign Boyle, I thought I told you to recalibrate the secondary matter stream regulator five minutes ago. This ship doesn't run on her own, you know.

The dazed woman, ENSIGN BOYLE just stares at the Captain in terror. Hopelessly lost trying to make a good first impression.

GREY (CONT'D)

Boyle?

Cross nods to the Ensign who hurries to her duties.

ENSIGN BOYLE

Y-Yes, sir.

CROSS

(to Grey)

You must be Erik Grey.

Grey continues the work, ignoring.

GREY

Lieutenant Erik Grey.

CROSS

Right. Lieutenant. So, how is she?

GREY

A mess. Nothing works as they should. Faulty equipment, incompetent crew, half of this stuff can't measure up with Starfleet regulations. It's a total nightmare.

CROSS

Really? I've been told the crew should be one of the very best and the ship being the finest the fleet has the offer. How do you--

Grey cuts him off sharply.

GREY

Yeah, yeah. I'm sure it looks great on paper. Look, I don't have time for this idle chit-chat, so buzz off to bother someone else. Right now, you're in my, and my team's way, and we got our hands full even without someone coming here to stick his fingers in our work. As you can see the engineering is a total mess and we're expecting the Captain to come to make a personal inspection any minute now.

CROSS

I know. I am the Captain.

Grey freezes. His expression living horror, he finally turns around. Looking awed at the Captain, he tries to stand up straight, failing miserably.

Cross enjoys the grinding silence for a moment before extending his hand.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Captain Neil Cross.

Grey finally regains himself and stands in full attention.

GREY

I- I'm sorry, sir. I didn't mean any disrespect. It's just that, I mean...

Cross waves him to be quiet.

CROSS

It's all right, Lieutenant. I just hope that's not the way you always greet your superior officer.

GREY

Yes, sir. I mean, it's not, sir.

CROSS

Now, how's the ship? Could you elaborate on the "it's a mess"?

GREY

To tell you the truth, sir, this ship isn't finished at all. A lot of experimental technology and manufacturing methods were used when they put this thing together, most of them not even properly tested. Romulan, Klingon and even salvaged Dominion tech was used without much of a thought put into the question whether or not they can work properly together. The Quantum Slipstream Drive, the experimental hull plating, the new reactor, all of them sound great in theory, but practical use is another thing entirely.

CROSS

How long till we can get underway?

GREY

Five, six hours at least.

CROSS

I'm sure you can do it in two, Lieutenant.

GREY

No, sir, I can't. I don't exaggerate my estimates. Five hours is the best I can do at these circumstances.

CROSS

How come? I thought it's sort of a tradition among Starfleet engineers.

GREY

It's not in the book, sir.

Cross makes an intrigued mental note about that and decides not to push it.

CROSS  
Very well. Five hours it is,  
Lieutenant.

GREY  
Yes, sir.

INT. BRIDGE

The cutting edge in design, the nerve center of the new Enterprise. Gleaming 25th Century decor, curving surfaces and high-tech control panels. Cross looks around, inhales the peculiar atmosphere of a brand new ship.

Over the tactical console is LIEUTENANT J.G. GRIL DOJAR, a Cardassian in Starfleet uniform. A somewhat disparate match. He looks like a young and able officer with everything to prove.

He immediately notes the Captain and stands in rigid attention.

DOJAR  
(formally)  
Captain on the bridge!

All the officers and crewmembers stand up and face Cross, with a posture of formal respect for their Captain and for the memorable event taking place. Cross enjoys the moment for a while, then:

CROSS  
Man your stations, people.

Everyone resume their duties except Dojar. Cross eyes him with certain reservation. Dojar notices.

CROSS (CONT'D)  
You're...

DOJAR  
A Cardassian, sir? Yes, I am.

CROSS  
I was going to say 'my tactical officer', but yes, you are a Cardassian. I was expecting a Bolian.

DOJAR  
They accepted my transfer at the last minute, sir. Lieutenant Junior Grade Gril Dojar, reporting for duty, sir.

CROSS  
Why you insisted on transferring to this particular ship?

DOJAR

It's the Enterprise, sir. Finest  
in the fleet.

CROSS

We'll see about that. Take your  
station, Lieutenant.

DOJAR

Yes, sir. Oh... Commander Talora  
is waiting for you in the ready  
room.

Cross only nods and proceeds towards the ready room.

DOJAR (CONT'D)

(adding hastily)

I won't let you down, sir.

CROSS

(reserved)

We'll see about that too,  
Lieutenant.

INT. READY ROOM

Waiting patiently is COMMANDER TALORA, a full-blooded  
Romulan. A calm center of a storm with keen eyes and sharp  
mind.

She is standing in stern attention, not saying a word.  
Cross walks in and nods her to sit down. He takes a PADD  
and reads aloud with a very official tone of voice:

CROSS

Subcommander Talora of the Romulan  
Star Empire. Graduated third in  
her class from the Military Academy.  
Served in the Romulan Navy with  
exemplary record during numerous  
frontline assignments. Multiple  
commendations during the Dominion  
War, even received a medal from  
the Proconsul himself. Impressive.

(pause)

And now, you're here. Among the  
Federation.

She looks at the Captain, eye-to-eye.

TALORA

You have doubts whether or not I  
can perform my duties?

CROSS

No, they say you are up to the job  
and I believe it. It was more of  
an observation really.

(MORE)

CROSS (CONT'D)

I'm sure you are aware of the fact that twenty years ago, they wouldn't have allowed a Romulan to stroll freely aboard one of our ships. Much less to serve as a first officer.

TALORA

I am the first such case.

CROSS

Still, things change.

TALORA

Not as much as you might think. This is practically a warship.

CROSS

Need I remind you that our mission is peacekeeping, not waging war?

TALORA

Semantics, Captain. Twenty years ago, a member of the Romulan Navy would have felt out of place aboard one your vessels. Not anymore.

CROSS

You are rather straightforward, Subcommander.

TALORA

I've found that humans prefer to be less... tactful when working among themselves. You want me to act out of place... sir?

CROSS

No, being less tactful is part of your job as my second-in-command, to bring out options I might have missed. But that doesn't mean you should ignore the chain of command.

She nods.

TALORA

Yes, sir. I will remember that.

Cross stands up and they exchange a firm handshake.

CROSS

Well, consider yourself officially part of the crew, Commander Talora.

TALORA

That I wanted to ask you about, sir. About my rank.

CROSS

Starfleet Command prefers you to be part of the formal chain of command to better fit with the rest of us, so it's not an actual promotion. It should be equivalent of your Subcommander.

She once again only nods.

TALORA

Anything else?

Cross pauses for a while, then:

CROSS

There is one other thing I wanted to ask you. Don't take it personally, it's just something that I'm curious about.

(beat)

If I was about to jump off a cliff and ordered my crew to jump with me, would you follow?

If she was taken back by the unorthodox question, she doesn't let it show on the surface. Talora considers it for a beat, then:

TALORA

Captain... If you ever order such a thing, I will push you over myself.

Cross is clearly intrigued by the answer. Talora shows a passing sign of self-contentment.

TALORA (CONT'D)

What are your orders, Captain?

CROSS

Prep the ship and the crew for departure. We'll leave at eighteen-hundred hours.

TALORA

Understood.

CROSS

(somewhat reluctantly)

Oh... and I'd like you to be the one formally receiving our Chief Medical Officer.

TALORA

Any particular reason?

CROSS

No, it's just that I'd prefer to talk to her later when all the

(MORE)

CROSS (CONT'D)  
commotion with all these launch  
preparations has quieted down.

Talora nods and LEAVES.

INT. MAIN ENGINEERING

Grey and Dojar, working on the finishing touches on the  
new warp core.

DOJAR  
So, Lieutenant Grey was it?

GREY  
Grey, yes. And I'd prefer if you  
would call me as "sir", or  
"Lieutenant" while we are on duty.  
Protocol.

Dojar is first a bit surprised by the by-the-book formality  
Grey requests, but then nods dutifully. He has gone through  
this treatment before.

DOJAR  
Lieutenant Grey it is. What do you  
think of the new Captain... sir?

GREY  
I have no opinion on him, but I'm  
sure he's got one on me. I made a  
complete ass of myself earlier. It  
wouldn't be a big surprise if he  
puts that on my record.

DOJAR  
Now you're being paranoid.

Grey glares at him.

DOJAR (CONT'D)  
(adding quickly)  
Sir.

GREY  
Come on, you of all people should  
understand. Haven't you had enough  
people giving you a sour look  
because of who you are? You're a  
Cardassian.

DOJAR  
Thank you for reminding me, sir.  
But you are right, the Captain has  
something against me, I can feel  
it.

GREY  
You haven't heard the rumors?

DOJAR

No.

GREY

Well, supposedly the Captain went through a lot when he was younger. I was told he got captured by the Dominion and dragged into the concentration camp. Guess he never fully recovered from that.

DOJAR

And now, he's my superior officer.

GREY

Well, I myself have nothing against your people, but I can't blame him either. The Cardassians did some pretty horrible things during the war.

DOJAR

That was over two decades ago. My people are a third-world power now. We don't have enough resources to feed our children anymore and our military is nothing more than a disorganized border patrol. One might think we've suffered enough for what we did. Won't they ever forget?

GREY

No. And I doubt they'll forgive either.

INT. TRANSPORTER ROOM

Talora walks in. A TRANSPORTER CHIEF is at the operator's console.

TRANSPORTER CHIEF

Lieutenant Commander Elris is ready to come aboard, ma'am.

TALORA

Energize.

With a SHIMMERING LIGHT, a figure emerges on the transporter pad. A Bajoran female, LT. COMMANDER ELRIS LEA, the ship's doctor. A character with inner fire but without clear direction. Born from a religious culture, yet she is a woman low on faith. The traditional Bajoran earring is missing.

And she looks more than dismayed.

TALORA (CONT'D)

Welcome aboard the Enterprise, Commander.

ELRIS

You're Talora, right? Where's the Captain? I thought he at least had the dignity to come welcome me on board personally.

TALORA

He is busy right now, but sends his greetings.

ELRIS

I'm sure. Can you believe that arrogance. He sends for me across half the quadrant and doesn't even bother to come and say "hello". That insolent bastard. This isn't a very good start, you know.

TALORA

Judging by your rather "affectionate" way of speech, I take that you already know the Captain.

ELRIS

You could say that. I'm his wife.

On Talora's intrigued expression, we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise in deep space, moving forward without any particular hurry.

CROSS (V.O.)

Captain's log, supplemental. We are finally underway. Though Mr. Grey can't give assurance that all the ship's functions will work at optimum capacity, he is confident that we can start testing several more experimental implementations...

(beat)

If we don't push our luck.

INT. BRIDGE

Cross at the Captain's chair, others at their respectful posts.

CROSS

Engineering, what's our status?

INT. MAIN ENGINEERING

Grey at the engineering panel.

GREY

All readings are nominal. I ran a level three diagnostic on all the propulsion systems, twice. We should be fine, sir.

INT. BRIDGE

Cross adjusts his position.

CROSS

Good. Keep your fingers crossed down there. It's time to see if she can dance the tune.

(to Conn)

Conn, set course one-one-three mark fourteen.

CONN OFFICER

Course laid in.

CROSS

Bring the Quantum Slipstream Drive on-line.

CONN OFFICER

Standing by.

Cross turns to Talora.

CROSS  
If you would do the honors,  
Commander.

Talora looks at the viewscreen, intently.

TALORA  
(matter-of-factly)  
Initiate.

EXT. SPACE

Enterprise swoops around and with a CRACKLING FORCE, the space around her bends and eventually is torn open. The ship disappears into the fissure.

INT. BRIDGE

The bridge trembles gently as the Enterprise smoothly rides the celestial creek.

Talora checks her panel.

TALORA  
All sections report nominal.

CROSS  
So far so good. Engineering?

INT. MAIN ENGINEERING

Grey allows himself a confident smile.

GREY  
All the readings are in the green, sir. I'm detecting a moderate hull ionization, but nothing unexpected. Although I don't think we should stress the engines.

CROSS' COM VOICE  
How so?

GREY  
Well, the prototype suffered a cascade reaction in the Quantum Slipstream matrix after pressing the engines over the twelve hour limit.

INT. BRIDGE

Cross shows a tint of worry.

CROSS  
What happened to it?

GREY'S COM VOICE  
Like the bird she received her name from, sir. Went up in flames.

Cross and Talora exchange looks.

CROSS

Affirmative. Conn, bring her to full stop. I think we've proven our point.

CONN OFFICER

Aye, sir. Full stop.

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise bolts from the quantum fissure back into normal space.

INT. BRIDGE

CROSS

Given our odds, I say that went well. What's our current position?

TALORA

At the edge of the Klingon border.

CROSS

Right where we should be. Conn, prepare to--

A BEEPING from Dojar's console interrupts.

DOJAR

Sir, we're receiving a distress signal.

CROSS

Coming from where?

DOJAR

Inside Klingon space. Audio only.

Garbled and barely audible, a panicking KLINGON VOICE shouts through the airways:

KLINGON VOICE

This is freighter J'Troq, to any vessel that can hear this! Please help! We are unarmed and cannot--

The message is cut off.

TALORA

Klingons pleading for help. There's a first time for everything.

Cross glances at her but doesn't say anything.

DOJAR

I now have the vessel within visual range.

CROSS

On screen.

A badly damaged KLINGON FREIGHTER appears on the viewscreen. Relentlessly pounded by a small one-man ATTACK SHIP.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Hail the attacking vessel.

A self-centered face of JENNIFER QUINLAN comes into the view. A woman in her mid-thirties, her attire rugged and practical. She gives the impression of a person who's seen a lot during her life, but still retained the healthy dose of arrogance and dry sense of humor. And now she looks like she knows more than she's sharing.

CROSS (CONT'D)

This is Captain Cross of the Federation starship Enterprise. Break off your attack.

QUINLAN

Don't give me any lectures, Captain, and stay away. This isn't your fight.

CROSS

You are making it mine if you continue... Captain.

QUINLAN

Wrong. Check your sensor readings. The ship I'm "salvaging" belongs to a Klingon faction currently in hostile terms with the High Council, and therefore also non-friendly to the Federation. You have no business here.

Talora checks the readout and leans closer to Cross.

TALORA

She's right. The J'Troq is one of the ships declared as renegades by Chancellor Martok. The Federation has signed a treaty, Captain. We're forbidden to render any assistance, especially when they're inside Klingon territory.

Cross bites lip, Quinlan notices.

QUINLAN

You can't do anything about this. You know it and I know it. So there's no point having this conversation. Good day and goodbye.

The image is sharply cut off. Cross almost rips the armrests from his chair. Then calms down and comes to a decision:

CROSS

Conn, set an intercept course.

TALORA

Captain?

CROSS

I'm not going to let those Klingons get killed or left stranded out here just because we signed a piece of paper years ago. You want to object, that's fine, but wait until we've saved that freighter. With, or without your approval, we're going in. You have a problem with that, Commander?

Talora takes a BEAT, then:

TALORA

Red alert! All hands to battle stations!

(leaning closer to  
Cross)

Let us just hope we're not walking too close to that edge now.

Cross smiles to the reference.

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise soars towards the transport in distress. Immediately, the small attack ship breaks off, not wanting to test the odds.

By employing a TRACTOR BEAM, the Enterprise is trying to catch the elusive vessel. The beam only dissipates harmlessly into the shields.

INT. BRIDGE

Dojar looks puzzled:

DOJAR

The enemy vessel is remodulating its shield frequencies on random intervals. I can't get a lock.

The bridge rocks slightly.

TALORA

She's bombarding us with inverse tachyon bursts. Trying to blind our sensors.

CROSS

She's good, I give her that. But enough is enough. Fire phasers!

EXT. SPACE

As the Enterprise chases the tiny vessel - firing phasers as she goes, the pursuit leads inside a NEBULA.

INT. BRIDGE

Talora follows the movement of the ship through her panel.

TALORA  
(contemplative)  
She's in a whole lot of hurry.

CROSS  
But to where?

TALORA  
Long range sensors are almost  
useless in here, so I can't tell.  
But she seems to know where she's  
going.

CROSS  
I don't like this. I don't like  
this at all. Tactical, any  
particular reason why we haven't  
punched through the shields of  
that ship yet?

DOJAR  
The vessel is employing some kind  
of regenerative shielding  
technology.

CROSS  
"Some kind"? We are in a critical  
situation and you are telling me,  
Lieutenant, that you are not fully  
aware of all the tactical facts?

Dojar takes a breath, tries to keep his hands trembling as Cross is clearly on his case.

DOJAR  
No, sir. I am trying to tell that  
the ship is projecting a--

Quinlan's ship unexpectedly TURNS AROUND and begin pouring phaser fire at the Enterprise. The bridge TREMBLES violently, shaking people almost off their chairs.

DOJAR (CONT'D)  
Shields at seventy percent!

CROSS  
What the hell was that? Ship that  
small can't possibly have firepower  
of that magnitude.

DOJAR  
She's firing again!

EXT. SPACE

Another lash of energy, but it doesn't hit the Enterprise, but close aside it - IGNITING a pack of volatile gas, shoving the big vessel like a toy boat.

INT. BRIDGE

The crew holds on as the ship shakes.

DOJAR

Shields at fifty percent.

TALORA

Metreon gas. She's using the pockets as makeshift bombs.

CROSS

Right into her trap...

(beat)

All right. All right! She wants to play soft, we'll play soft. She wants to play hard... we'll play hard.

(beat)

Quantum torpedoes!

DOJAR

Ready, sir.

CROSS

Fire!

EXT. SPACE

A volley of QUANTUM TORPEDOES collide squarely into Quinlan's ship, TEARING it apart in a furious EXPLOSION.

INT. BRIDGE

As the screen shows the ship turning into an expanding cloud of vapor:

DOJAR

I'm picking up an escape pod. One lifesign.

CROSS

As much as I'd like to leave her drifting in here and leave a note for the Klingons, I guess we can't do that.

DOJAR

Sir, I'm picking up a large object, just within sensor range. The escape pod is heading towards it.

TALORA

A ship?

DOJAR

A station. Looks like Klingon in design.

CROSS

Right next to the Federation border.  
(surly)

Bridge to transporter room one, beam the survivor from the escape pod directly into the brig before it can reach the station.

(to Talora)

I think it's time to have a little chat with our troublemaker. Commander, you have the bridge.

TALORA

Yes, sir.

Cross walks into the turbolift. Before the doors close:

CROSS

Oh, and maintain minimum power consumption to avoid detection. I doubt the Klingons will be very happy if they find us roaming around in their backyard.

INT. CORRIDOR

Cross steps out of the turbolift and almost bumps into DOCTOR ELRIS.

ELRIS

(coldly)  
Captain.

He looks at her, searching for the right words.

CROSS

Lea...

ELRIS

That's Doctor Elris or Lieutenant Commander Elris to you, Cross. You lost the privilege to call me Lea a long time ago.

She is making somewhat of a scene. Passing by officers and crewmen can't help but a stare as they go. Cross pulls her aside.

CROSS

Do we have to go over this in front of everybody?

ELRIS

How dare you!? I had a career on Bajor, a research, a future!

(MORE)

ELRIS (CONT'D)

Starfleet Medical was even interested publishing some of my work. I had a real life! Now, you just waltz in and request me to be transferred here. You, who I haven't even seen for the past four years.

CROSS

Me? You're the one who just decided to walk out of my life one morning. No letters, no messages, no nothing!

ELRIS

I couldn't continue to live the life we had then, Neil, and I can't continue to do that now.

She holds up a PADD and shoves it to Cross.

ELRIS (CONT'D)

Here's my official request to be transferred off this ship.

CROSS

I can't accept this.

ELRIS

Either that or my resignation, Captain. One way or another, I'm out!

(sharply)

Sir.

Elris marches off, leaving Cross behind. One of the younger ENSIGNS has watched the drama played out. Cross lashes out a vicious glance at her:

CROSS

Any particular reason for you to be standing there, Ensign?

ENSIGN

N-No, sir.

The Ensign is scared off and Cross sighs deeply.

INT. BRIG

Imprisoned behind a force field, Quinlan is sitting in her small prison cell. She glances up to see Cross walking in. Not a bit happy about it.

QUINLAN

(dripping with sarcasm)

Well, isn't it my dashing adversary. For all the stuck up Starfleet Captains I've encountered, I had to run into the one whose diplomatic

(MORE)

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

doctrine includes phasers and photon torpedoes. Didn't you read the Third Khitomer Charter or did you just misunderstand it?

CROSS

I plead to ignorance. Care to tell me your name?

QUINLAN

No harm in that I guess. I assume you're already frantically going through your well catalogued databases.

She touches the force field which lets out a sizzling FLICKER.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

Jennifer Quinlan. I'd shake your hand, but...

CROSS

Pretty interesting maneuvers you pulled off back there, Miss Quinlan. Regenerative force fields, inverse tachyon bursts, metreon explosives...

QUINLAN

...Phaser beams, sensor inhibitors, boxes of chocolate and bad attitude. You didn't come here to praise my achievements, did you?

CROSS

I think you know why I'm here.

QUINLAN

If you're trying to rough up a confession out of me, you're not doing a very good job. I've been in this situation before.

CROSS

That's what we can both agree on. I believe you have your hands into the whole mess right up to your elbows.

QUINLAN

Come on, Captain. I'm just a lone entrepreneur who smelled an opportunity.

CROSS

An entrepreneur who is also looking a lifetime in prison.

(MORE)

CROSS (CONT'D)

(a poignant pause)

But... we could come to an agreement that would get you a shortened sentence. Say, only a few years.

She laughs.

QUINLAN

Give me a break. You want information about the movements of different Klingon factions, go talk to Starfleet Intelligence or Chancellor Martok. Anyone else but me.

CROSS

Now you're being funny.

QUINLAN

The arrest wasn't even legit. You broke the Third Khitomer Treaty. You've got absolutely nothing on me.

CROSS

Tell that to the Klingons. I'm sure they'll be most interested in hearing about politics and border violations when they find out about your honorable deeds.

For a passing moment, they just look at each other, studying each other. But Cross is putting up a perfect game face.

She folds.

QUINLAN

All right, all right. But I want your word - if you even hold such a thing in value - that you'll get me off the hook, if I tell you what you want.

CROSS

Depends on the information.

Quinlan doesn't like the situation at all, but starts talking nevertheless.

QUINLAN

I've been monitoring this sector for a quite some time. It's a pretty isolated area of space, filled with lucrative "salvage" material, you know. Tracking ship movements, monitoring transmissions. For months, no solid opportunity. Absolutely nothing... until yesterday.

CROSS

The outpost?

QUINLAN

The outpost. A surveillance station buried deep into the confines of the nebula. Not all the Klingons play fair and honorably, you know.

CROSS

They were spying on the Federation.

QUINLAN

Who cares who they were spying on? Raiders like me, other Klingons... you. The point is, all the lights were out. No power, no defense systems. No nothing.

(grins)

A ripe apple for me to pick.

CROSS

Your would-be private little hideout...

QUINLAN

I figured I could get away with a few days of downtime before someone came looking for answers.

CROSS

I was wrong, the Klingons won't put you in jail. They'll rip your heart out.

QUINLAN

Hey! You want the good stuff or not?

CROSS

Keep going.

QUINLAN

I only made a casual check on the place. The station was in a quite bad shape. I had to get some supplies before being able to turn it into a base for my purposes. I was about to get what I needed when you barged in.

CROSS

You are not impressing me, Quinlan.

QUINLAN

Wait just a damn minute! I'm telling this for your benefit, so pay attention. The station wasn't struck by a plasma storm or some weird subspace distortion, it was attacked.

CROSS

By whom?

QUINLAN

I don't know, but whoever it was, had firepower to knock out a fortified Klingon installation in a matter of seconds without them even having a chance to call for help. And I'm certain that it won't be far off. It's still out there... and you're next.

On Cross' troubled expression, we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE

Enterprise approaches and orbits the darkened SPACE STATION.

INT. STATION COMMAND CENTER

Three SHIMMERING FIGURES materialize in the center of the command area, at the heart of the Klingon installation. TALORA, GREY and DOJAR - geared up in Starfleet space suits.

They look around to see a view of death. Blown up panels and scorched monitors. DEAD KLINGONS who have taken their last breaths at their stations.

TALORA

Spread out and be careful. Whoever did this might be still around.

DOJAR

The electromagnetic interference is disrupting our sensors. I don't think we'll be able to get accurate readings over ten meters.

TALORA

More the reason to remain cautious.

Grey scans the room with his TRICORDER.

GREY

I'm not picking any signs of a fight, sir. This damage seems to be caused by some kind of excessive power surge. All the EPS conduits are burnt out. Probably the same thing that's playing tricks with our tricorders.

Dojar sweeps around with a PHASER RIFLE, covering the exits and checking the corpses for signs of life. Finding none.

DOJAR

(re: Klingons)

What happened to them?

GREY

I'm no doctor, but since there isn't any visible injury or trauma, I'd say they died of oxygen deprivation or hypothermia.

TALORA

In other words, the life support failed and they... just died?

GREY

Yes, ma'am.

TALORA

Get into engineering and try to establish power, Lieutenant. Dojar, accompany him. I will try to access the main database and Commander's log from up here. Report immediately if anything out of the ordinary happens. Understood?

DOJAR / GREY

(in unison)

Yes, ma'am.

TALORA

And stop calling me "ma'am".  
"Commander" is more than sufficient.

Dojar and Grey exchange looks and HEAD OUT.

INT. CORRIDOR

Cross and Quinlan stroll the corridor.

QUINLAN

I guess I should be grateful for you letting me out.

CROSS

You're not out because of my compassion but because we can use your expertise.

QUINLAN

And what makes you think I'm willing to help you at all?

CROSS

I'm giving you an opportunity here. If the force that struck them is still out there and hostile, we might be facing an imminent death. The Klingons, the Federation, all of us. And right now, we're the only ones who can do anything about it.

They step into

INT. TURBOLIFT

With Cross and Quinlan.

CROSS

Bridge.

She looks at him, jaundiced.

QUINLAN

You're making dangerous assumptions, Captain.

(MORE)

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

There was a time when the first thing to come in mind in situations like these wasn't to sound the call to arms.

CROSS

Times change. The following hours can mean the survival, or the destruction of this ship. And you along with it.

(beat)

Now, you can sit in your cell grudging, as we - like it or not - are going to get to the bottom of this. Or you can affect the outcome with your input. It's your choice. What do you say?

QUINLAN

I really, really hate you.

INT. BRIDGE

From the turbolift, Cross and Quinlan emerge.

CROSS

Take the tactical.

As Quinlan walks over at the tactical console as if it were her every day routine, other bridge officers seem a little puzzled, disconcerted.

Quinlan punches in a few commands, Cross immediately reacts:

CROSS (CONT'D)

But... I wouldn't do that if I were you.

QUINLAN

(sheepishly)

Do what?

CROSS

Access our command subroutines and try to reroute all the ship controls. I am watching.

QUINLAN

If you're so vigilant of what I'm doing, why don't you do this yourself?

CROSS

As tempting the proposition is, I need to coordinate the overall situation from here. Besides, you strike me as a person who frowns upon conventional thinking. You might pick up something rest of us miss completely.

QUINLAN

I'm ecstatic by the confidence you bestow on me.

Cross breaks out a smile.

TALORA'S COM VOICE

Talora to Enterprise, come in.

CROSS

Go ahead, Commander.

INT. STATION COMMAND CENTER

Talora has rigged her tricorder into the station's data network and has indeed succeeded on getting some systems back in working order.

TALORA

I've managed to access the station's main computer. Lieutenants Grey and Dojar are still sweeping the lower levels for survivors and working on getting the station back in operational status.

CROSS' COM VOICE

What have you got?

TALORA

Most of the data is heavily fragmented, but I was able to retrieve a large portion of their external sensor recordings before the power failure. Uploading now.

INT. BRIDGE

Cross and Quinlan at the science station, intrigued by the fuzzy sensor image shown on the screen. A sight of an alien STARSHIP, a big one.

CROSS

Now, this is interesting.

TALORA'S COM VOICE

Captain?

QUINLAN

Yeah, definitely a positive sighting of the Bucket.

TALORA'S COM VOICE

Who is this? Identify yourself.

QUINLAN

Your unwilling accomplice, Captain Jennifer Quinlan.

INT. STATION COMMAND CENTER

Talora is rather puzzled, to say at least.

TALORA

Captain Quinlan? Sir, you don't mean she--

CROSS' COM VOICE

It's all right, Commander. Miss Quinlan is our... temporary consultant on the current situation. Heed her words but swallow them with a grain of salt.

Talora isn't any less confused.

TALORA

Salt?

INT. BRIDGE

Cross shakes his head, somewhat amused.

CROSS

I'll explain later.

(beat)

'The Bucket' is the affectionate name for a starship belonging to an unknown faction. The same ship, or at least one identical to it has been spotted for the past two decades near Federation's key installations. Utopia Planitia, Deep Space Nine, you name it.

(beat)

No definite sensor data has been acquired and the ship always escaped before any communications could be established.

(beat)

Think of it as Federation's own Flying Dutchman.

QUINLAN

Only thing that's certain is that the ship is very powerful and is part of some highly secretive force. Starfleet Intelligence was spooked, of course.

CROSS

They're worried that all this cloak and dagger is just the tip of a bigger iceberg.

TALORA'S COM VOICE

An invasion?

CROSS

The aliens have resorted only to information gathering, without taking any hostile actions against ours or anyone else's property.

(beat)

Until now.

INT. STATION COMMAND CENTER

Talora unplugs the tricorder from the mainframe.

TALORA

Well, whoever is behind the destruction here, is long gone. I doubt we'll get any more information out of this place.

(taps her commbadge)

Lieutenant Grey, come in.

INT. STATION ENGINEERING

Part of the whole engineering section has been blown off leaving a scarred hole into space. Grey and Dojar move the pieces of scrap metal, trying to find something, anything worth investigating.

GREY

Grey here.

TALORA'S COM VOICE

Status report, Lieutenant.

GREY

The power core is beyond repair. Half of the engineering section is practically obliterated. There's nothing I can do about it.

TALORA'S COM VOICE

Affirmative. Prepare to beam back aboard the ship. We're leaving.

GREY

Aye, Commander.

Dojar's tricorder BEEPS wildly.

DOJAR

Wait. I think I've found something.

GREY

Where?

He points, under a pile of disjointed fragments of the bulkhead. They start to pull out the pieces of metal and discover--

A KLINGON, in a torn armor, clutching a low-humming DISRUPTOR, jacked into a cannibalized wall panel. He is encased in a faintly glittering FORCE FIELD.

Grey and Dojar come together to the only conclusion. They've found a survivor. Hold on him for a BEAT, then --

INT. SICKBAY

ELRIS and several NURSES are fighting to keep the severely injured Klingon alive. He is going flatline.

ELRIS  
Give me thirty milliliters of  
tricordazine!

One of the aides hands her the hypospray and with a distinct HISS, the drug is injected. Elris carefully studies the patient readout, worried.

ELRIS (CONT'D)  
Damn, it's no good. Give me another  
ten.

NURSE  
Doctor, we've given already five  
past safe dose. Another shot and--

ELRIS  
And his brains might pop, I know!  
But unless we get his neural  
functions up and running, he'll  
turn into a vegetable, permanently.  
Now, I've seen enough people die  
in front of me. I refuse to lose  
this one!  
(beat, then sternly)  
My call. Ten milliliters.

The nurse hands her the hypospray. Elris injects and agonizing moments pass...

ELRIS (CONT'D)  
Come on... come on...

Then a BLIP in the monitor, and eventually a steady pattern.

NURSE  
We've got a signal!

Elris sighs relieved.

ELRIS  
Give him fourteen milliliters of  
tri-ox to keep the blood oxygenation  
levels in the green.  
(beat)  
Great work, people.

Cross walks in with Talora. Elris' good mood immediately turns sour. It shows for a moment, but then she quickly regains her rigid composure.

CROSS  
Doctor.

ELRIS

Captain.

TALORA

What's the patient's status?

ELRIS

Well, he was apparently exposed to a vacuum and suffered a severe case of asphyxiation, but fortunately his emergency force field was enough to keep him alive. We've managed to stabilize his condition. He should be all right.

CROSS

Wake him.

ELRIS

Neil, he just barely survived from a severe neurological shock. If we stress him, who knows what might happen. This man needs rest.

CROSS

I don't have time to argue. He's in possession of vital information regarding the security of the Federation. We need him.

ELRIS

Needs of the many, huh?

Their eyes lock. A contest of wills.

CROSS

This isn't about him, is it? It's about me. And you.

ELRIS

That's ridiculous. This has nothing to do with us. My only concern is the patient, who you are currently completely disregarding. Like all the people that step into your life.

CROSS

Oh, come on! That was cheap. You--

Talora steps in between:

TALORA

Hold on just a moment. Both of you!

(to Cross)

Sir, with all due respect. We don't have time for this.

Cross calms down, sighing out the bad air.

CROSS

Of course. You're right, Commander.

TALORA

(to Elris)

And you, Doctor. I believe your superior officer gave you a direct order. Am I correct?

Elris is full of disdain.

ELRIS

I can see where this is going.

(to Talora)

And which side you are on.

She takes the hypospray and INJECTS the unconscious man.

ELRIS (CONT'D)

Your responsibility.

The Klingon's eyes flutter and slowly open. He looks around, disoriented.

KLINGON

Am I in Sto Vo Kor?

CROSS

Not yet, I'm afraid. Can you tell us your name and posting?

KLINGON (KALEG)

Kaleg, Son of Tru'ag... Coular Station... engineering department. Where am I?

CROSS

You're aboard the starship Enterprise. We need to ask you a few questions. Think you are able to answer?

Kaleg nods.

TALORA

Who attacked you?

KALEG

I don't know... It was an unknown ship. A big one. The Commander wanted us to reroute all auxiliary power to the defensive systems. I don't know what happened... A strange flash of light... We started losing power on all decks. It was... it was...

He groans, fatigued. Elris is about to intervene but Cross sternly motions her to stay back.

CROSS

Most of your sensor records were destroyed. Can you remember anything else? Where the ship was heading?

KALEG

The fourth planet. It had something to do with the fourth planet of the system.

ELRIS

I think that's enough.

Cross agrees and nods to Talora. They both head out, into

INT. BRIDGE

Cross and Talora take their stations.

CROSS

Yellow alert.

The YELLOW LIGHTS begin to blink as the ship's status rises to elevated readiness.

TALORA

Lieutenant, are there any star systems nearby?

DOJAR

Yes, sir. One with type-G star, approximately half a light year from here.

CROSS

Inside the nebula?

DOJAR

Yes, sir.

TALORA

Anything unusual?

Dojar goes through the sensors, but eventually shakes his head.

DOJAR

I'm sorry, Commander. The sensors don't pick up anything.

CROSS

Nothing? Concentrate your sweeps on the fourth planet.

Dojar does, but...

DOJAR

Still nothing, sir.

Quinlan is between choices, itching to say something but forces herself to remain quiet.

CROSS

That's odd. Think they've left already?

TALORA

Could be. On the other hand, they might be employing some kind of cloaking mechanism.

CROSS

We'll proceed with caution. Helm, take us closer.

CONN OFFICER

Aye, sir.

Everyone on the bridge seem to be oblivious to something Quinlan has picked up. She finally nudges at Dojar and pulls him aside, keeping her voice down.

QUINLAN

Hey, Lieutenant Dojar wasn't it?

DOJAR

Yes.

QUINLAN

You might want to scan the planet's polar region with a high frequency anti-proton pulse.

Dojar looks a bit puzzled... and reserved. Quinlan sees it best to explain:

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

The magnetic emissions there gather highly polarized particles from nebula gasses, causing interference powerful enough to hide a whole fleet of ships from casual scans. Advanced species or not, it's a trick most convenient for this environment. I've pulled it off numerous times myself.

DOJAR

Why are you telling me this?

QUINLAN

Well, I could bring this up straight to the Captain, but I doubt it would look good on your record.

Dojar has to admit she is right. He nods at her discretion, appreciating the gesture and returns to the tactical console.

DOJAR

Captain, I think there's a possibility that the ship may be

(MORE)

DOJAR (CONT'D)  
using the planet's polar region as  
a camouflage to shield its presence  
from our sensors.

CROSS  
Recommendations.

DOJAR  
We can probably use a high-frequency  
anti-proton pulse to enhance  
scanning resolution to punch through  
the interference.

Cross contemplates on the option, and then:

CROSS  
Do it.

Quinlan shows Dojar the thumbs up. He initiates the pulse.

DOJAR  
Her... my hypothesis was correct,  
sir. I'm receiving information.  
(upbeat)  
It's a ship! Unknown configuration.

CROSS  
On screen.

A GREEN PLANET comes into view. Something can be seen in the  
polar area.

CROSS (CONT'D)  
Magnify.

The menacing posture of the GIGANTIC ALIEN SHIP fills the  
entire screen. It calmly hovers at the planetary orbit.  
Its mere presence makes everyone on the bridge a bit  
worried.

TALORA  
Tactical report.

DOJAR  
Immense power output. Multiple  
weapon systems comparable to or  
exceeding our own. Length  
approximately... thirty kilometers.

A piece of information that brings things on a whole new  
perspective. On the crew's troubled faces, we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise, from an ANGLE that gives her a slightly more cautious, prepared and even dangerous look.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM

Sitting around the table are CROSS, TALORA, GREY, DOJAR and even QUINLAN. But no Elris.

CROSS

I just spoke with Admiral Portman. Starfleet's mobilizing a task force to intercept the vessel. But... it won't be here for another twenty-four hours, minimum. Plus, with all the red tape from the Klingon High Council, Starfleet probably can't get ships in here for another two days.

TALORA

Two days. By that time, the enemy might have fortified its position and caused irrevocable damage. Not to mention gained a serious strategic advantage considering the prospect of longer term warfare.

CROSS

My thoughts exactly. So, we need to find a way to stop, or at least stall the enemy until the help arrives.

Quinlan has hard time believing what she is hearing:

QUINLAN

Enemy? You know practically nothing about this ship! Nothing, and you've already catalogued it as an enemy?

TALORA

This nebula is strategically beneficial position to stage an invasion.

CROSS

And their behavior hasn't been exactly friendly. The fact that they knocked out a Klingon surveillance post doesn't really talk for their willingness for a peaceful dialogue.

(MORE)

CROSS (CONT'D)

Starfleet believes this alien faction could prove to be a serious threat to the Federation security. Especially now when we're still shaky on resources. And I happen to agree completely.

QUINLAN

What happened to the time when physical force was considered only as the last resort?

TALORA

Need I remind you that such... "pacifistic" approach led into a costly war with the Dominion twenty-eight years ago?

QUINLAN

I can't believe this.

CROSS

This isn't a debate, Quinlan. Starfleet's stand on this matter is clear. Now, we have to show unshakable resolve, that we can defuse this inflammable situation with a precise preemptive action.  
(beat)

Now, what's our status?

DOJAR

We have a full complement of quantum torpedoes, minus of course the spread we fired at Captain Quinlan's ship. All phaser banks and shield generators are working at optimum capacity. We are at full tactical readiness, Captain, if and when the need arises.

GREY

I'll run a level three diagnostics on all critical systems as soon as possible to ensure that they remain that way.

CROSS

Good. What about the threat vessel itself? Anything we can use to our advantage?

DOJAR

All our scans proved to be inconclusive. A full spectrum active scan might prove more information, though.

CROSS

No, the magnetic interference works both ways. I'd rather keep our presence hidden as long as possible, both from the ship and the Klingons. Anything else?

DOJAR

Not really, sir. The ship is just sitting there, conducting surface scans at random intervals. Methodical ones.

CROSS

What's so interesting down there the alien ship is willing to risk a war to get it?

Talora takes a PADD and reads:

TALORA

From the Klingon data archives. Coular Four. M-class. Population approximately ninety million, preindustrial society.

(beat)

Falls under the Prime Directive.

QUINLAN

(sotto)

Unless you're willing to run over that principle as well...

Cross throws her a dismayed glance.

CROSS

Even while Coular is within Klingon territory, we will adhere to the Prime Directive when dealing with a primitive species. We will take these people in account accordingly, Quinlan.

(pause)

If that's all, dismissed.

Everyone start to get up and leave, except Talora who approaches Cross.

TALORA

Captain, a word with you? In private.

He nods and they wait till the others have left the room.

TALORA (CONT'D)

I know it takes time for me to adjust into how things are run aboard a Federation starship, but I feel that it's my duty to inform my commanding officer if things don't work as they should.

CROSS

Like what?

TALORA

I couldn't help but to notice that Lieutenant Commander Elris was absent from the meeting.

CROSS

We have a bit of falling out going on. She didn't want to attend and I didn't push the issue. No big deal.

TALORA

She is part of the senior staff and should attend when important decisions regarding the ship's mission are made.

CROSS

Look, it's a personal matter. I'll deal with it on my own time. End of discussion.

TALORA

And that's not all, sir.

CROSS

(sighs)

Let me guess. Quinlan?

TALORA

Yes. Quinlan.

Cross saw it coming.

TALORA (CONT'D)

She has a disrupting effect on the chain of command, Captain. At one moment she is attacking us, committing criminal acts against the Federation and next thing we know she sits with us at the staff meetings. She, who isn't a Starfleet officer, or even a member of the crew, and yet is allowed to participate in the decision making.

CROSS

She has the experience and the skill I know we need in the present situation. Call it intuition.

TALORA

That's no excuse, sir. The Enterprise is a very prestigious ship. It takes a lot of effort and hard work to be get a position in here.

(MORE)

TALORA (CONT'D)

I myself went through extensive testing and months of training before Starfleet approved my request to be posted aboard this particular starship. Same goes with all the junior officers trying to struggle their way up through the ranks.

(beat)

But now, a social reject like Quinlan steps in and is immediately promoted over the others. What do you think that'll do to the crew morale?

CROSS

She wasn't promoted.

TALORA

Makes no difference.

CROSS

You feel your position being threatened?

TALORA

Quite frankly, yes.

CROSS

And you want to take this up to Starfleet Command?

TALORA

Do I need to?

He thinks it over.

CROSS

My decision stands, Commander.

She snaps into attention and with a bit overtly by-the-protocol tone of voice, more like a grinding metal:

TALORA

Yes, sir.

Talora is about to storm out when Cross adds:

CROSS

But only for now.

INT. SICKBAY

Elris has trouble concentrating over the frustration she is going through. We can pretty much guess what's the source of her resentment.

Talora walks in.

TALORA

Doctor Elris.

ELRIS

Commander. What brings you here?

TALORA

I thought I'd stop by for my required medical check-up.

ELRIS

You don't need one. The one you went through at Starbase 375 is still recent enough.

TALORA

Never hurts to be too cautious, right?

Elris gives her a suspicious look.

ELRIS

Have a seat.

Talora sits on the medical bed and Elris picks up a scanner and runs it over her head. Talora hesitates for a moment before cutting straight to the business:

TALORA

So, what do you think about the Captain?

ELRIS

I try not to.

TALORA

I personally don't know how to handle him. He has a very... peculiar way of commanding the ship and the crew. It is quite frustrating.

ELRIS

Believe me, he has that effect on people.

TALORA

His decisions seem irrational.

ELRIS

He is irrational. I don't know how I managed to live with him...

(with a small dose  
of melancholy)

To love him for all those years.

TALORA

It takes time to adjust to the life on this ship.

ELRIS

I don't want to adjust. I just want to be left alone.

TALORA

You know, on Romulus, the sign of leaving a consort and denouncing one's faith is a sign of extreme weakness.

Elris reacts, surprised.

ELRIS

How did you...?

TALORA

I read your and the Captain's personnel files and all the related reports.

ELRIS

They don't say anything about our personal life.

TALORA

I read between the lines, Doctor. And I also noticed you are missing the traditional Bajoran earring. Care to tell more?

Elris staggers on words.

ELRIS

I'd rather not. It's... rather personal. If you don't mind.

TALORA

(compassionately)

I understand. There are things in each of us we want to keep for ourselves.

(beat)

I just want to try to understand this crew better, to be able to function as part of it more efficiently.

ELRIS

You'll manage. If there's someone who can keep Neil in check, I'd presume it will be someone like you.

(beat)

Well, we're done here. You're in peak condition, Commander. As expected.

TALORA

Thank you, doctor. This conversation has been extremely illuminating.

ELRIS

Anytime. If you--

A violent RUMBLE and the lights FLICKER for a moment. Then, a CRIMSON ENERGY BURST shoots through the door and embraces the wall panels, shutting them off one by one. It quickly leaps from panel to panel and then, as unexpectedly as it came, the phenomenon bolts off.

Talora and Elris immediately follow.

INT. CORRIDOR

The energy manifestation races through the corridor. Quinlan almost bumps into the two.

QUINLAN

What the hell was that?

TALORA

You tell me.

QUINLAN

Me? I didn't have anything to do with that! I just got out from the turbolift as that thing jumped right out from the bulkhead.

ELRIS

It's wreaking havoc all over the ship. Where is it heading?

TALORA

To engineering.

QUINLAN

Can't we stop it?

Talora taps the commbadge.

TALORA

Commander Talora to the bridge.

Only ear-piercing SHRIEK. Talora quickly taps her communicator off.

QUINLAN

So much for that idea.

TALORA

Engineering can deal with the situation themselves. I'm heading to the bridge to help coordinate defensive operations.

ELRIS

What about us?

TALORA

Return to sickbay. If this phenomenon goes unrestrained we will have a lot of casualties coming in.

ELRIS

Right.

QUINLAN

I'm coming with you to the bridge.

TALORA

No, you are still considered a potential threat. You'll be confined to the surveillance of Doctor Elris for the time being.

QUINLAN

You're kidding.

Talora glares at her.

ELRIS

She's not. Come on, I'm currently short on medical staff due to shift rotation and I could probably use some help if we're having wounded.

Quinlan accedes and follows Elris. As soon as they're through the doorway, the nearby wall panel EXPLODES in a thundering ROAR, sending fragments of metal all over the corridor.

Talora recovers from the floor and wipes the blood off her forehead. She assesses the situation, then starts running to the opposite direction.

INT. BRIDGE

Pulsating lights and SPARKING panels. The entire bridge strains under the pressure it's put into.

DOJAR

Reports of power fluctuation, all over the ship!

CROSS

I need to find out what's causing it, now!

The turbolift door OPENS and Talora stumbles in.

DOJAR

I don't know sir. Our energy reserves are simply being drained.

CROSS

A weapon? A natural phenomena? What? These things don't just suddenly happen!

TALORA

It wasn't sudden, Captain. Same thing happened before, at the outpost. We're going down.

As the panels on the bridge start to go dark, one by one,  
we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE

The USS ENTERPRISE - which is just floating dead in space with all the lights out in the midst of crimson haze - is gradually shadowed by the MASSIVE ALIEN VESSEL.

INT. BRIDGE

Completely dark except for the beams projected from hand-held FLASHLIGHTS distributed for the crew.

CROSS taps the commbadge, but nothing happens.

CROSS

Comms are out. The main computer must be down.

TALORA tries the nearest control panel. No luck there either.

DOJAR punches in a few commands to the turbolift door panel. Same thing.

DOJAR

Looks like everything is affected.

CROSS

How long until life support fails?

TALORA

At Coular, it happened in minutes. The Enterprise was designed with more sophisticated redundancy in mind, so I'd say we have about an hour. Maximum.

CROSS

Then we'll have to put that hour into good use. Lieutenant?

DOJAR

Yes, sir.

CROSS

You're with me. We'll get to the Jeffries Tubes and try to reach engineering, weapons storage and any other parts of the ship which might provide us means to get us out of the harm's way.

Cross pulls the wall panel open revealing a tunnel that disappears into the darkness.

CROSS (CONT'D)

In the meantime, Commander, you'll have the bridge.

He sweeps the light through the passageway and starts crawling.

INT. SICKBAY

Same as on the bridge, pitch black with no working electronics. ELRIS flips on a flashlight, sweeps the room. We hear a MUFFLED GASP. She turns to see--

QUINLAN, lying on the floor. She looks like a mess.

ELRIS

You all right?

Quinlan coughs, wincing in pain. Her shirt is soaked in blood.

QUINLAN

Is that a trick question or a multiple choice?

Elris takes a tricorder and passes it over her.

ELRIS

At least your sense of humor is intact. Looks like a metal fragment has punctured your abdominal cavity. Some lacerations, deep bruises and heavy bleeding. One of smaller arteries might have been severed.

With an effort, Quinlan forces a smile on her face.

QUINLAN

Guess I need to call a doctor. Know anyone competent?

ELRIS

Not at the moment, no. Fortunately you don't have any internal bleeding nor were any of the vital organs damaged.

QUINLAN

Not if you don't count a bruised ego as one.

She GROANS. Elris presses the bleeding wound and reaches for the nearby EMERGENCY MEDICAL KIT. She takes a few instruments and starts to perform a crude surgical operation.

ELRIS

Hold still. Squirming around won't help.

Quinlan's breathing has turned more labored, with a sudden sense of helplessness creeping into her.

QUINLAN

This hasn't happened to me before,  
you know.

ELRIS

Well, there's first time for  
everything. Must be frightening  
for you to leave your life to  
someone else's hands.

Elris removes a small, bloody PIECE OF METAL from the wound  
at Quinlan's side.

QUINLAN

I've never thought about that from  
this perspective.

Finally, Elris closes the wound and injects her with a  
hypospray.

ELRIS

How do you feel?

QUINLAN

(sincerely)  
Vulnerable.

Elris smiles, compassionately.

ELRIS

We'll keep that as our little  
secret.

QUINLAN

(gasping)  
I appreciate it, thank you.  
(pause)  
How's the wound?

ELRIS

I think you'll live.

As Quinlan tries her stomach, we can see the wound is  
perfectly closed, a faint scar remains. Quinlan is  
impressed.

ELRIS (CONT'D)

Just don't go running and hopping  
around for a few days.

QUINLAN

You know, there's a lot of market  
for an able doctor in the frontier.  
I could use someone like you.

ELRIS

Good thing I have a lot to look  
forward to when I leave my  
resignation. Come on, let's see if  
your feet hold up.

INT. CORRIDOR

Quinlan and Elris step out from the confines of the sickbay.

QUINLAN

You're actually thinking about leaving Starfleet?

ELRIS

(nods)

After this mission. You weren't serious about that proposal?

QUINLAN

To tell you the truth, you'd be excess baggage. Long time ago I made a promise to myself that I'd always work alone.

(beat)

But I'll tell you one thing. Leaving Starfleet might be one of the best things that happen in your life. If you just look at the way things are now. What a jaded colossus the Federation has become. The bureaucracy, the loss of ideals, everything.

ELRIS

Yeah, I guess...

QUINLAN

But you're not really thinking about getting out because of Starfleet in itself, right?

ELRIS

It shows, huh?

Quinlan has to admit.

QUINLAN

So why then?

Cross and Dojar walk to them. Elris throws a glance at the Captain and then turns to Quinlan.

ELRIS

(under her breath)

Take a guess.

CROSS

Every system on the bridge is dead. Total power failure.

QUINLAN

Whatever happened, it seems to have taken the entire ship.

Quinlan bites lip. Cross notices the patch of blood on her shirt around the burnt tear.

CROSS

You all right?

She throws a glance at Elris.

QUINLAN

I'll live. Let's just focus at the task at hand.

CROSS

None of the components separate from the main EPS grid seem to be affected. Tricorders, flashlights, hand phasers, they're all still operating.

QUINLAN

Some kind of energy dampening weapon?

CROSS

Seems like it, but the configuration is nothing we've seen before. And we need to locate the source if we intend to punch through it. Think you'd be able to detect it?

QUINLAN

If I had the equipment, probably.

CROSS

The shuttlecraft have an independent power grid, so they still should be up and running. Try one of them.

Quinlan nods.

DOJAR

I can do it, sir.

Cross looks at him. Dojar is uncertain whether the Captain is only being professional or just simply a bigot.

CROSS

No.

DOJAR

No?

CROSS

No. I need you to get to the weapons bay and reset the warhead targeting circuits.

DOJAR

(little disappointed)

That is a routine procedure, sir.

CROSS

Then you'll know how to do it,  
right? I'll try to reach engineering  
and see if we can activate the  
fusion reactors.

(beat)

Once Quinlan has narrowed down the  
source, we'll disrupt it with a  
well-placed spread of torpedos.  
And in the same instant, kick in  
everything we can from the engines,  
and hopefully manage to get out of  
its reach in time. Questions?

Nobody says anything. Especially Elris who seems to have  
been left out of the entire conversation.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Good. Time is short so let's get  
moving; you have your orders.  
Regroup here in half an hour.  
Dismissed.

They disperse to fulfill their tasks, leaving Elris standing  
alone in the dark corridor. She lets out a discouraged  
sigh.

ELRIS

Fine. I'll just sit here then and  
do nothing.

INT. SHUTTLEBAY - SHUTTLECRAFT

Quinlan sits in the cockpit of one of the shuttles sitting  
around in the hangar. She begins punching in commands and  
immediately the screens flare to life.

QUINLAN

Right. Let's get down to business...

INT. WEAPONS CONTROL

A cramped maintenance area with TORPEDO CASINGS racked up  
on the wall. Frustrated, Dojar opens the nearest one and  
starts rewiring the cables inside.

DOJAR

He hates me. I know it.

INT. MAIN ENGINEERING

As Cross walks in, the ENGINEERING CREW jumps to attention.  
Grey foremost.

GREY

Captain!

CROSS

At ease, Lieutenant.

He relaxes, but only a bit.

CROSS (CONT'D)

What's the latest?

GREY

Same thing hit us that disabled the outpost, that's for sure.

CROSS

Any good news?

GREY

It didn't burn out our entire power grid.

CROSS

So we should be in clear waters when we get rid of whatever is causing this, right?

GREY

Yes, sir. That would be my assessment.

CROSS

Excellent. Guess that leaves only one question.

GREY

What's that, sir?

CROSS

You know how to jumpstart a starship?

Grey's lost expression is priceless.

INT. SHUTTLEBAY - SHUTTLECRAFT

Where Quinlan waits, bored. A display of background radiation. She switches through several frequencies, tries numerous filtering methods. And basically looks a needle from a cosmic haystack. Her initial enthusiasm long gone. She rubs her aching side.

QUINLAN

Why did I ever get out of the bed this morning? He hates me...

INT. WEAPONS CONTROL

As Dojar rigs the quantum torpedo, and curses to himself:

DOJAR

...I know it. If I were a human, or a Vulcan. He would treat me equally.

(beat)

Everyone would.

INT. MAIN ENGINEERING

Cross has made a long, wispy connections with cable and numerous tricorders, and phaser power cells. Like a twisted version of 25th century Christmas lights.

GREY

(full of disbelief)

Captain, are you really intending to connect that into the main impulse drive?

CROSS

My grandfather used to love old 20th century automobiles. You know, the ones with an internal combustion engine, wheels and everything?

GREY

Yes.

CROSS

Well, one day, after hours of begging and begging, he agreed to take me out for a little drive in the courtyard. While otherwise very well-kept and maintained, the car's centuries-old power cell had corroded to the point of uselessness and had lost its juice a long time ago.

(beat)

So, we wired a power cell from a hand phaser into the circuitry, to give the car the proper ignition to get the motor up and running.

GREY

Did it work?

Cross chuckles.

CROSS

Hell no. The power cell melted half of the engine straight through to the pavement.

Grey gives the Captain a highly disbelieving look.

CROSS (CONT'D)

But the principle remains valid. Once the source of the interference has been nullified, we use all these power cells to give the laser fusion initiators a jolt. And hopefully get a quick burst out of the impulse drive, just enough to get us out from the harm's way.

GREY

This is highly unorthodox, sir.

CROSS

It's not "in the book" if that's what you mean, Grey. None of the best tricks are. My grandfather taught me them all...

(getting a bit sappy)

That was before the war. Before everything...

Cross finishes the last connection, gathers himself up.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Now stand back, this may produce some unwanted side effects.

INT. SHUTTLEBAY - SHUTTLECRAFT

Quinlan taps the console in a tedious rhythm, switching wavelengths of the incoming radiation and humming at the same time:

QUINLAN

This little neutrino went to the market... And this little neutrino went home. And this little neutrino...

Abruptly the console BLEEPs, Quinlan wakes up from her slumber, immediately interested.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

Now this little neutrino was messing with the little ship. Hello there little one.

Her fingers dance on the console as she narrows the search down, definitely on to something. Finally, a clear image of an ENERGY BEAM projected from the alien ship to the Enterprise surfaces.

Finding what she was looking for, Quinlan gets up and HURRIES OUT.

INT. CORRIDOR

Quinlan returns to the corridor where Cross is already waiting.

QUINLAN

Got it. At three point fifty-five gigahertz on the upper EM band.

CROSS

And coordinates?

QUINLAN

I can give you the target area within fifteen square millimeters.

Dojar hurries to them.

DOJAR

All set. I rigged the launch circuitry of the warheads into the ship's plasma injection control. Once the impulse drive is activated, a volley of quantum torpedos should launch automatically.

CROSS

(nods)

Lieutenant Grey should be punching in the fusion reactors within five minutes. Head to the bridge and handle rest of the situation from there.

QUINLAN

And where are you going?

CROSS

Down to the surface.

Dojar jumps the gun.

DOJAR

Captain?!

CROSS

Stand fast, Lieutenant. Whatever the aliens want is down on the planet. With a ship of that magnitude, the best thing the Enterprise can do is to wait for reinforcements. But until then, someone has to go down there and find out what the aliens are up to. And considering my experience and the constrained time limit, the only viable candidate is me.

QUINLAN

I could go.

CROSS

To be blunt, Quinlan: I don't trust you that much yet. Besides, you'll be needed on the bridge.

DOJAR

I have to voice my objections, sir.

CROSS

I'll note that into my log. When I get back.

DOJAR

Captain, under Starfleet General Order Fifteen, no commanding officer shall beam into a hazardous area without an armed escort. Sir.

Cross groans, looks at Dojar, then to Quinlan.

CROSS

You want to be equally inventive?

She grins broadly.

QUINLAN

Don't look at me. I'm the renegade outlaw, remember? You're the Captain, you should know these little things.

Cross shakes his head, then concedes to Dojar's point:

CROSS

All right, Lieutenant, if you insist. Gear up and meet me at Deck Thirteen escape pods in three minutes.

QUINLAN

Escape pods?

CROSS

We don't have the power to use transporters and that ship will disable a shuttlecraft like a breeze snuffs a candle. Besides, escape pods are designed for rough landings.

QUINLAN

It'll be a one way trip.

CROSS

Don't get your hopes up. Just get to the bridge and tell them to get the hell out of here and wait for the cavalry.

Quinlan nods, now with a new kind of respect for him.

QUINLAN

Good luck.

He nods back, acknowledging her support.

CROSS

(to Dojar)

Let's move it, Lieutenant!

Dojar snaps into attention:

DOJAR

Yes, sir!

INT. BRIDGE

Quinlan crawls out of the Jeffries Tube and catches her breath.

She nurses her throbbing side and clutches the nearby control panel. Talora gives a questioning glance.

QUINLAN

We've got two minutes.

TALORA

Where's Captain Cross?

QUINLAN

Down on the planet's surface in a few moments.

TALORA

What? Why didn't you try to stop him?

QUINLAN

It's not my ship, and therefore not my problem. I don't have time to go to details right now!

Quinlan goes to the tactical console and with very little courtesy, pushes the manning officer aside and begins to attach her tricorder into the panel.

TALORA

Explain your actions.

She draws a phaser.

TALORA (CONT'D)

Now!

QUINLAN

Look, lady! Within a few moments a volley of torpedoes will be launched towards the alien ship with the intent to disrupt the dampening beam, and if I don't enter the proper coordinates our attempt to escape will end in pretty fireworks. Now, I suggest you give an order to, and I quote: "get us the hell out of here", when the time comes.

Talora swallows her dismay.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

(adding sharply)

Commander.

The conn officer awaits an order. Talora nods.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

All right. Here we go.

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise's impulse drive FLARES, and at the same instant the ship spews out a salvo of QUANTUM TORPEDOES

which EXPLODE harmlessly into the flickering deflector shield encasing the gigantic vessel.

But section by section, the power is restored on the Enterprise, and seizing the moment the ship SPEEDS AWAY like a small fly escaping from an invisible web spun by a gigantic spider. Hiding safely behind the shadow of the planet.

INT. BRIDGE

With a distinct HUMMING, the energy pours back into the ship's power grid and the lights turn back on.

GREY'S COM VOICE  
Engineering to bridge.

TALORA  
Go ahead, Lieutenant.

GREY'S COM VOICE  
(with an upbeat  
tone)  
All systems are operating. Power  
levels are returning to nominal.

TALORA  
Acknowledged, Lieutenant. Talora  
out.

She looks at Quinlan.

TALORA (CONT'D)  
Now, Quinlan, can you modify our  
shields to nullify the effects of  
the dampening field?

QUINLAN  
Yeah, but...

TALORA  
Do it.

QUINLAN  
Why would...

TALORA  
Just do it, or I will have someone  
to remove you from the bridge and  
do it for you!

Quinlan rolls her eyes and punches in a few commands.

QUINLAN  
Shield harmonics calibrated. And  
if I may ask, what are you exactly  
are planning to do?

She gives no answer, only takes the command chair. Gives resolved look at the alien ship on the main screen.

TALORA

Red alert. All hands to battle  
stations.

Quinlan looks horrified.

QUINLAN

You're not serious.

TALORA

I am. Full impulse!

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise turns to face the threatening starship.  
Standing small but defiant in front of the frightening  
behemoth.

From the side of the hull, an ESCAPE POD bolts off and  
SOARS towards the planet. As the gigantic lush green sphere  
grows larger compared to the tiny pod, we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FIVE

ACT SIX

FADE IN:

INT. CABIN -- NIGHT

Lit only by flickering CANDLES. Primitive by 25th Century standards but glowing with warmth and simple aesthetics. No humming power conduits or bright electronic lights, the ambiance is peaceful and serene.

CROSS is lying on the mattress, slowly opens his eyes. Feels his head which has grown a vicious BRUISE, though carefully bandaged now. The touch alone forces him to let out an involuntary GROAN. He slowly sits up, gathering his surroundings.

He notices his COMMBADGE, carefully laid on to the nearby table, among several candles and carefully textured stones. Cross picks it up, tries it -- But nothing.

CROSS  
Should have guessed.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)  
Ruura mieth?

Reacting to the sudden noise, Cross looks up and sees an ALIEN WOMAN. Young, probably in her early twenties by human standards. Tattooed face and piercing blue eyes. She looks at him, intrigued, but keeps her distance.

CROSS  
You're the one who helped me?

The woman just stares at him, puzzled.

CROSS (CONT'D)  
Where am I? How did I got here?

Again, only a quizzical stare. He's not getting anywhere with the line of questioning.

CROSS (CONT'D)  
You don't understand a word I'm saying, do you?  
(again feeling his head, to himself)  
The crash must have knocked out my Universal Translator.  
(beat)  
All right, let's just stick to the basics.

Courteously, Cross extends his hand. The woman draws away.

CROSS (CONT'D)  
It's all right, I'm not going to hurt you.

But she stays away, instead doing a quick move with her hands, running them across her face in a fluid motion. Cross thinks for a moment for the possible meanings, then crudely mimics the move.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Well... hello to you too.

The woman's eyes lighten up. But more like in awe than in joy. Cross isn't sure how to interpret that.

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise strafes over the ship's surface, FIRING phasers and torpedoes, full load, pulling no punches. The alien vessel strikes back and PUNCHES THROUGH Enterprise's shields and SHREDS AWAY a big chunk from the outer hull.

INT. BRIDGE

Smoke and fire, the ship is buckling.

QUINLAN

There went the shields!

TALORA

Weapon status?

QUINLAN

Three phaser banks still operational, two torpedo launchers. Less than half on the torpedo reserves.

TALORA

Keep firing. Helm, calculate a return trajectory. Come around for another pass.

QUINLAN

You're playing chicken with a brick wall, Commander!

TALORA

Excuse me?

QUINLAN

We've wasted most of our weapons on that ship and yet we haven't even dented the outer hull!

ELRIS' COM VOICE

Doctor Elris to the bridge. How long do you anticipate this will continue? We're receiving wounded from all decks and with the recent power shortage, we're not in the best of situations to cope with this right now.

TALORA  
 Acknowledged, Doctor.

QUINLAN  
 Face the facts. We are outgunned.

TALORA  
 Our orders were to halt the enemy's advance and that's what we're going to do.

QUINLAN  
 No! Our orders were to get out of here and wait for the fleet!

TALORA  
 I cannot confirm those orders.

QUINLAN  
 Neither can I, but that's the truth. What good we can do here anyway? We'll only get our noses bloody. It's over!

TALORA  
 And we just leave the Captain down on the surface?

A silence, then with a more subdued voice:

QUINLAN  
 If that's what it takes to save everyone else, then yes.

Another EXPLOSION, more violent this time. Quinlan locks eyes with her, dead serious.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)  
 Time to decide, Commander.

A moment between choices, then, gritting her teeth:

TALORA  
 Helm, set an escape course.

Quinlan sighs, relieved.

QUINLAN  
 Thank you. You just saved all our lives.

TALORA  
 Yes, and sacrificed the Captain's.

EXT. CABIN -- DAWN

Enthusiastic, the alien woman escorts Cross out of the cabin. We see the scope of the landscape for the first time. The cottage is at the base of an impressive range of mountains that reach high into the clouds sparkled in crimson.

She takes him through a narrow path to a valley. Cross stops on his tracks as he sees where it leads. A VILLAGE in the horizon. The woman is puzzled.

ALIEN WOMAN  
(motioning)  
Kona nieth! Kona nieth!

CROSS  
No. No "kona nieth".

But she insists, taking his arm. Cross breaks free, rather violently.

CROSS (CONT'D)  
I said no!

The woman recoils, cowering back. Cross reaches for her, gentler. She again takes a few steps away from him.

ALIEN WOMAN  
Keea iga nieth. Levey.  
(beat, weaker)  
Levey...

CROSS  
I'm sorry, I didn't mean to...

ALIEN WOMAN  
Innurega mieth rea nurega nieth.  
Levey, boketh iga nieth. Keea...

CROSS  
Please, I don't understand a word  
you're saying.  
(pause)  
Come on, we can't go to the village.  
Please, try to understand. We can't.

She doesn't understand what he's saying but understands the motions.

INT. MAIN ENGINEERING

The ground zero of total disaster. GREY paces over the wrecked bulkheads and torn-off power cables. Takes an ISOLINEAR CHIP from the floor, only thing intact in the room. As he inspects it closer, it cracks in two. Grey sighs and tosses the broken item among the rest.

The door OPENS - only halfway. Elris creeps through the cramped opening.

ELRIS  
Looks about the same down here.

GREY  
(downbeat)  
And I just got the everything  
working, ma'am.

ELRIS

Please, I'm not comfortable with ranks and salutes.

GREY

You are Starfleet, ma'am. I have certain obligations to uphold protocol.

ELRIS

Well, we all have our flaws. Internal comms are down again. The Commander wants to know when we're back up and running.

GREY

Look around. We're in the deep end of the pool now, Doctor. The ship needs extensive dock time before we can get anywhere.

ELRIS

I don't think we're going to have that luxury anytime soon.

GREY

Makes you wonder, doesn't it? Starfleet sends out its best and all we could do was get us almost killed.

ELRIS

You always carry that attitude?

GREY

Call me a realist, but Starfleet may have taken more it can handle. For all we know, the Captain might already be dead.

ELRIS

One thing I know about Neil, is that he's good when it comes to taking care of himself.

INT. CABIN -- DAY

Cross sits on the bed, tweaking his communicator. All he has is a splinter of wood that he uses to rewire the delicate circuitry. From the look of his face we can say it's not going very well.

CROSS

Come on, come on...

The splinter SNAPS.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Damn!

The alien woman walks to him. Sits besides him, looking intently at the strange object in Cross' hand.

CROSS (CONT'D)

This? I'm just trying to get some extra boost from this thing and maybe get in touch with some people I work with. If I can remove the flow regulator from the...

(beat)

What's the use? I might be talking to a wall and get equal response.

She takes the commbadge, puts it aside on the table and stares him. And then points him.

ALIEN WOMAN

Mieth.

Then points herself.

ALIEN WOMAN (CONT'D)

Nieth.

CROSS

What? What are you trying to say?

She repeats, first pointing him and then herself. More strongly this time.

ALIEN WOMAN

Mieth... nieth.

Cross imitates, rather clumsily.

CROSS

Mieth... nieth. Man and woman?

He draws a crude picture of man and woman into the ground and points them.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Mieth and nieth?

She shakes her head, sweeps the picture away and again points him.

ALIEN WOMAN

Mieth.

(taps him)

Mieth!

Cross thinks. Then realizes.

CROSS

(points himself)

Mieth... nieth? Me?

Again a frustrated shake of head.

ALIEN WOMAN  
(points herself)  
Nieth.

He's getting the hang of it.

CROSS  
(pointing her)  
Mieth... you?  
(and again himself)  
Nieth... me?

She smiles. Cross decides to take it a step further and motions himself.

CROSS (CONT'D)  
Cross nieth.

Then motions her, expecting. Finally she understands.

ALIEN WOMAN  
Neika nieth.

It is his turn to smile.

CROSS  
Well, what do you know. Nice to meet you Neika.

INT. READY ROOM

Talora is sitting behind the desk. Quinlan steps in, notices.

QUINLAN  
I see you've already made yourself comfortable.

TALORA  
Sit down, Quinlan.

She does, but eyes her warily. For a moment, there is only silence.

QUINLAN  
(sheepishly)  
Am I in trouble?

TALORA  
I've had just about enough of your attitude, Quinlan. Your necessity aboard this ship is very much in question. Whether or not you spend the rest of this mission in the brig, is decided in the next few moments. I suggest you take this seriously.

QUINLAN  
Cross wanted me up here and in the middle of things.

TALORA

Captain Cross is not in command now. I am.

QUINLAN

He wanted me to give outside opinion so that's what I'm going to do. You don't like it, fine. I don't care.

TALORA

Watch your words!

QUINLAN

Or you do what? Throw me in the brig? Throw away the key? Shut me up? Well you do that! I'm sure Crewman Vanek and Ensign Reed can really appreciate that.

She gets up.

TALORA

What are you talking about?

QUINLAN

I'm talking about the two members of the crew who got killed in your hotheaded endeavor, just to name a few. Cortez, DeVries, Goldwyn, the list goes on. Of course, you'd already know these names if you'd give a damn.

Quinlan bolts off. Talora jumps up.

TALORA

I didn't give you a permission to be dismissed.

QUINLAN

I don't follow orders. I'm not part of this crew.

(beat)

And I hope I'll never be.

She HEADS OUT. Talora slumps back on the chair, sighing deeply.

INT. CABIN

With Cross and Neika. Still doing the language lessons. Cross is holding a wooden cup in his hands.

CROSS

This cup... this "galim" is full. Full. How do you say full?

Cross points out what he means. She is getting the hang of it.

NEIKA

Aja.

Cross tries to imitate, but fails. Neika shakes her head.

NEIKA (CONT'D)

Iga. A-ja.

CROSS

Aja. I think I got it. So, if "iga" means no, then how do you say yes?

NEIKA

Yes?

CROSS

Yes. The opposite of "iga".

She doesn't get it. He points his thumb down.

CROSS (CONT'D)

All right. This is "iga."

Then shows thumbs up. She gets the hang of it.

NEIKA

Iniga!

CROSS

Iga and iniga. That's good.

NEIKA

Good. We talk.

CROSS

Yes, we talk. But this conversation isn't getting us anywhere. I need information.

NEIKA

In... for... mation?

CROSS

Yes, information. Best if I'd just show you.

Into the ground, Cross draws a crude outline of the alien ship. Soon as it is finished, Neika's eyes flare up. Again with pure joy.

NEIKA

Innurega mieth!

CROSS

I am what?

She waves her hands widely.

NEIKA

Innurega.

CROSS

I don't understand. What are trying  
to say?

Neika hurries to the center of the room and removes the carpet, revealing a TRAP DOOR. Hastily she opens it and taking a lantern, climbs in. Cross follows.

INT. SHRINE -- DAY

A carved cavern underneath the cabin. From the decorations placed carefully and paintings on the walls we can tell this place has a very special meaning for Neika and his people. A holy place. Neika removes the canvas from the centerpiece of the room. It is a --

STONE SLAB. Exquisitely carved, depicting a pivotal moment in the history of her people. A contact between two cultures, gods and mortals. And on the center is the chariots the gods ride, a ship - identical to the ALIEN SHIP in orbit.

NEIKA

(points the "gods")  
Innurega.  
(then to Cross)  
Innurega Cross.

Off Cross' rather surprised expression, we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT SIX

ACT SEVEN

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise, still in a very bad shape.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM

Present the usual staff: TALORA, GREY, ELRIS and even QUINLAN. Talora at the head of the table.

TALORA

So, where do we stand?

GREY

Warp drive is off-line, same thing with Quantum Slipstream. Our offensive capability is less than fifty percent. Most of our shield generators have burned useless as well. I doubt we'll be able to generate a grid big enough to protect the entire ship. And the ablative armor matrix is literally falling apart.

ELRIS

The final casualty report came in. Twenty-five injured which three of them critical.

(beat)

Nine dead. Taken our current condition, I say we got off lucky.

QUINLAN

We should fall back behind the planet's moon to monitor the alien activity and wait for reinforcements. This isn't our fight anymore.

ELRIS

As we saw, our weapons proved to be virtually useless against the enemy. Unless we think of something clever, we'll have no other choice.

TALORA

Lieutenant Grey. Do we have any heavier weaponry in our ship's inventory? Transphasic torpedoes? Tri-cobalt warheads?

GREY

No. This ship was equipped for a maiden voyage, not for a full-scale war.

QUINLAN

So that's it then.

GREY

There is something that may work. Being very unconventional, I'm not sure how it may turn out.

TALORA

Explain.

GREY

Well, since our warp coils are pretty much useless, we have no need for all the fuel we have onboard, right?

TALORA

What are you suggesting?

GREY

That we inject all the fuel we can into the warp core and eject it at close proximity of the enemy ship. The new quantum induction core has a tremendous power output, it will produce a massive blast, but...

ELRIS

But what?

GREY

But... one stray energy discharge and we go with them. Warp cores are not exactly designed to be used as weapons.

QUINLAN

That's insane. Commander...

TALORA

You were allowed into this meeting with certain reservations, Quinlan. One of such reservations is how you represent yourself.

QUINLAN

I--

She motions her to quiet.

TALORA

Nevertheless I will not disregard your suggestions completely and will consider all the options.

Quinlan doesn't believe a word but Talora simply ignores her apparent dismay.

TALORA (CONT'D)

Dismissed.

## INT. QUINLAN'S QUARTERS

Small room with no interior decorations. No furniture except for a bunk and a replicator on the wall. But its occupant wouldn't want it any other way.

As she is leaving. Stuffing a Starfleet duffel bag full of clothes, Quinlan is frustrated. The distinct door CHIRP is heard.

QUINLAN

What?!

The swooshes OPEN and Elris steps in.

ELRIS

Am I interrupting anything?

QUINLAN

No. I was just about to leave. For good.

Elris smiles, sits on the bed.

ELRIS

Funny, I thought I was going to say that.

QUINLAN

I'm not staying to this nuthouse for any second necessary. I'll steal a shuttle if I have to.

Elris nods at the bag.

ELRIS

I see that's not the only thing you're planning to take.

Quinlan stops for a moment, smirks, then continues.

QUINLAN

Well, you did blow up my ship, so I figured I could take some compensation. Don't expect me to pay back.

Elris' face turns serious.

ELRIS

Why are you going?

QUINLAN

Why am I going? Hah! Why aren't you? I'm not staying with Commander Ahab for any second longer than I have to. Klingons or no Klingons, I'm better off myself. She's going to get you all killed.

ELRIS

She's just inexperienced. Romulan Navy is vastly different from Starfleet. But she came highly recommended. The Romulans really wanted to her push forward, to bring our two cultures together.

QUINLAN

Well, they should have put her a few times more on the holodeck before letting her to toy with real people.

ELRIS

She'll adjust to the crew, eventually. And the crew will adjust to her.

QUINLAN

If there's any crew left.

ELRIS

Then why don't you tell her that?

QUINLAN

Like I haven't tried.

ELRIS

Yes, Quinlan the rogue has tried. But not Quinlan the Starfleet officer.

That stops Quinlan on her tracks. She finally matches eyes with Elris.

QUINLAN

You read about that?

ELRIS

Only partially. I know you were an officer aboard the Nightingale. What were you? A Commander? A Captain?

QUINLAN

Lieutenant Commander. But I don't want to talk about that. What is past is past.

ELRIS

Then let's talk about the present. While the Captain is out of the ship, you're the most experienced officer on this ship right now when it comes to Starfleet matters.

QUINLAN

Right. What about you? Those are the insignias of a Lieutenant Commander you're wearing as well.

Elris runs her hands over the rank pips, sighing.

ELRIS

These? These are just for the show.  
I'm a researcher, a bookworm. I  
haven't been on the field for years.  
It's not my thing.

QUINLAN

Why is that?

She puts up a compassionate, but a slightly cryptic smile on her face:

ELRIS

What is past, is past, officer  
Quinlan.

Elris gets up and goes to leave. Then at the door, turns around:

ELRIS (CONT'D)

But we must look into our future  
now. You want to get something  
done? Talk to the Commander, talk  
to someone. Anyone. Just don't  
turn your back and walk away.

The door opens. Quinlan stops her:

QUINLAN

You are wrong, Doctor.

ELRIS

How so?

QUINLAN

That field work isn't your thing.  
You did all right today. Kaleg,  
the son of Tru'ag will thank you  
for that.

Elris smiles, then LEAVES. Quinlan is left alone to ponder her situation.

EXT. FOREST -- DAY

Cross and Neika walk a small forest path. Neil inhales the rich air.

CROSS

It sure is beautiful out here. So  
vastly different from stale starship  
air, and dull grey corridors.

NEIKA

Beau... ti.. ful?

CROSS

Yes. Precious. Valuable.

(MORE)

CROSS (CONT'D)

Things which are important, that  
add to our lives.

(pause)

Things we love.

NEIKA

Cross kono iga "beauty"?

Cross' mood is turning somber.

CROSS

Yes. I had a beauty once. A long  
time ago. But I lost her...

NEIKA

Iyene?

CROSS

No. Not dead, but gone. Close, but  
still distant.

NEIKA

Nieth iga understand.

CROSS

Neither do I. But somehow, over  
the years, it just happened.

(pause)

I let it happen.

Cross stops to think it over, his spirit now drowned into melancholy. Caused by things he hasn't thought about for a long time. Neika walks to him, touches him compassionately.

NEIKA

Cross inaja.

CROSS

Yeah... Cross inaja.

Then, after the moment of quietness, a sudden ELECTRIC FLICKER breaks the silence. From the depths of the forest, a FIGURE APPEARS! Camouflaged in Starfleet stealth gear, pointing a PHASER RIFLE at the two, mostly at her. It's DOJAR. Neika immediately backs away. Cross recognizes him.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Whoa! Back off, Lieutenant. She's  
a friend!

Dojar takes a moment before lowering the rifle. Then turns to the Captain.

DOJAR

I tried to contact you, sir, but  
your communicator is off-line.

CROSS

I shut it off for a while so I could make some modifications. I haven't had much luck with it so far. How did you find me?

Dojar holds up a TRICORDER.

DOJAR

You're the only human on the planet, sir. It wasn't very difficult to pinpoint your lifesigns. What about her?

CROSS

She's a local. I've had limited success communicating with her, she means no harm. My Universal Translator is down but getting it back on now shouldn't prove to be a problem. What about you? What happened after we crashed?

DOJAR

Luckily, the pod came down to a lake, so it softened the landing and camouflaged it for outside viewers. You weren't seriously injured but unconscious. I managed to retrieve you and most of the equipment before the pod sank. Unfortunately, the crash was sure to attract attention, so I had to leave you behind or both of us would have got caught. I'm sorry, sir.

CROSS

Don't apologize, Lieutenant. I probably would have done the same thing. Any luck contacting the Enterprise.

DOJAR

No, sir. Either she is out of range or... something has happened.

CROSS

Pessimism gets people killed, Lieutenant. Have some confidence on the ship and her crew. Come on, let's get back to the cabin.

Dojar nods. Cross looks at the very frightened Nieka.

CROSS (CONT'D)

It's all right. He is a friend. A friend.

She finally succumbs to trust him.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Come on. Let's get go.

And they start walking.

INT. BRIDGE

Everyone at their posts.

TALORA

Report.

QUINLAN

All decks report standing by.

Everyone ready.

(under the breath)

Except me.

TALORA

Divert all power to the shields.

QUINLAN

Done.

TALORA

Bridge to engineering.

GREY (V.O.)

Grey here.

TALORA

Final check on the release interlocks.

INT. MAIN ENGINEERING

Grey at the engineering console.

GREY

All systems are go. I ran the diagnostics on failsafes twice. If this plan is going to work, it's in higher hands now.

TALORA'S COM VOICE

I am surprised to hear that from you, Lieutenant.

GREY

Well, this is proving to be quite a learning experience for me, Commander.

INT. BRIDGE

Talora adjusts her seating.

TALORA

Affirmative. Then we're clear to proceed. On my mark. 5... 4... 3... 2... 1... Initiate!

EXT. SPACE

Taking heavy fire, the Enterprise swoops over the alien ship. From the bottom of the ship, a HATCH OPENS and the damaged vessel launches its WARP CORE.

Hurrying away from the ground zero, the Enterprise fires at it goes. The warp core plummets straight into the monstrous alien vessel and EXPLODES, producing a MASSIVE SHOCKWAVE that engulfs the Federation ship.

EXT. CABIN -- EVENING

Cross, Neika and Dojar look up into the dusk sky, seeing the bright flash.

DOJAR

Sir, do you think...?

CROSS

Hope not. I really hope that wasn't my ship.

EXT. SPACE

Enterprise drifts like a piece of wood on a wave. Singed and ravaged, the ship looks only a few notches above being beyond repair.

But the alien ship isn't in much better condition. A whole third of the mighty vessel has been shredded away with internal sections grotesquely torn into open. Scars from the explosion slowly cooling down from the glowing red hot.

INT. BRIDGE

Slowly people regain their positions.

TALORA

(coughing)

Report.

QUINLAN

No ship is designed for this kind of abuse. Twenty-one decks of state of the art science facilities, cultural databases and logs about years of peaceful exploration. And what do we do? We resort on catapulting the warp core at first contact.

TALORA

Any casualties?

Quinlan looks around and sees the CONN OFFICER lying on the floor, not moving. She checks his lifesigns. The man gasps for air.

QUINLAN

(to Talora)

Looks bad. Multiple cuts and lacerations, breathing erratic.

(to the Conn Officer)

What's your name?

CONN OFFICER

Guer...

QUINLAN

You're going to be all right, Guer.

Talora taps her commbadge.

TALORA

Bridge to Doctor Elris.

ELRIS' COM VOICE

Elris here.

QUINLAN

Well, at least the comm system is working.

TALORA

Medical emergency on the bridge, Doctor.

ELRIS' COM VOICE

I'm on my way.

QUINLAN

How are things down there?

ELRIS' COM VOICE

(somberly)

Could be better. Much better. Elris out.

Quinlan throws a resentful glance at Talora who is keeping her calm through this dire situation. Quinlan shakes her head and turns back nurturing the unconscious officer.

GREY'S COM VOICE

Bridge, come in.

TALORA

Lieutenant Grey?

INT. MAIN ENGINEERING

Grey is practically in the dark with only a flashlight lighting the room. No more sounds of a humming warp core.

GREY

We're dead in the water, Commander. The last of the armor matrix absorbed most of the shock, and that's what probably saved us, but  
(MORE)

GREY (CONT'D)

otherwise nothing works. Propulsion, weapons, external comms, primary life support and most of our sensors, all down. We're looking at three weeks at spacedock, minimum.

TALORA'S COM VOICE

(downbeat)

Affirmative.

INT. BRIDGE

Elris administers help on the wounded officer.

ELRIS

I think he's going to make it.

QUINLAN

Glad to hear that.

TALORA

What about the enemy vessel?

Quinlan goes to the tactical console, taps a few commands.

QUINLAN

Heavy damage to the hull. Looks like we blew a big chunk out of it. Irregular power readings.

TALORA

Lifesigns?

QUINLAN

Can't tell. They still seem to--

The whole bridge RUMBLES violently, yanking everyone around.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

A tractor beam!

TALORA

Impossible. After the damage we inflicted?

QUINLAN

They're pulling us in.

As the emergency of the situation begins to draw to its height, Elris looks at the woman in charge.

ELRIS

Your orders, Commander?

Talora thinks it for a BEAT, then, with calm and composed voice:

TALORA

Lieutenant Grey, report to the bridge.

GREY'S COM VOICE

Sir, I think I'd be able to coordinate the repair efforts from here. We--

TALORA

No need, Lieutenant. Being currently third in the chain of command, your presence is required here.

QUINLAN

You're not seriously thinking what I'm thinking?

She apparently is:

TALORA

Computer, initiate auto-destruct sequence.

Quinlan looks at her in shock and we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT SEVEN

ACT EIGHT

FADE IN:

INT. CABIN -- EVENING

DOJAR runs a tricorder over the Captain's head. The machine emits a glittering beam to his frontal lobe. CROSS twitches in discomfort.

CROSS

I can feel my brains turning into plomek soup.

DOJAR

This amount of theta radiation should be harmless, sir.

CROSS

And what do you know? My wife's a doctor. I know these things.

DOJAR

I didn't mean any disrespect, Captain.

Cross puts up a broad smile.

CROSS

I know, I'm just kidding. You did good back there, Lieutenant. Saved your commanding officer from drowning and preserved the Prime Directive. That's something we Captains of the Enterprise seem to have trouble achieving.

DOJAR

Thank you, sir.

CROSS

I might have been a bit harsh on you at the beginning but I think you'll make a hell of a tactical officer, Dojar.

DOJAR

Don't worry about that, Captain. We all have our past to bear.

(beat)

There, that should do it.

Dojar snaps the tricorder close. Cross turns to NEIKA who has been quiet through this entire conversation.

CROSS

Can you understand what I'm saying?

She gazes Cross, rapt. Impressed by his fluency in the alien language.

NEIKA

How did you learn our language  
that fast? Unless...

(smiling)

It's another miracle... That must  
mean you--

CROSS

It's a long story, Neika. Right  
now, we have more pressing matters  
to attend to. And we need your  
help.

NEIKA

Anything for you Cross. After all,  
you are a god.

Dojar is a bit surprised. He throws a look at Cross who  
starts to feel a bit uncomfortable.

CROSS

Yeah, well that's what we need to  
talk about as well.

Neika just stares at him, uncertain how to react to that.

INT. BRIDGE

TALORA is at one of the consoles in the back. She puts her  
hand on the panel and a light SWEEPS over it, scanning.

TALORA

Authorization Talora Zero-Six-Delta-  
Alpha.

COMPUTER VOICE

Identity confirmed.

ELRIS and GREY look a bit hesitant, unwilling and uncertain  
to contest the Commander. QUINLAN finally decides to take  
charge.

QUINLAN

All right, all right. I didn't  
want to have any part of this, but  
this whole mess has just gone too  
far!

(to Talora)

You. Ready Room.

(to others)

You... You just hold still. Don't  
do anything.

INT. READY ROOM

Quinlan practically drags Talora into the ready room, both  
bristling with anger.

TALORA

You are really driving my patience  
to the limits, Quinlan.

QUINLAN

What the hell are you doing?

TALORA

I am following orders.

QUINLAN

That's a load of crap! Why don't you take a look around? You've known these people - this crew - for only a day, yet you ask them to throw their lives away for you!

TALORA

They are a trained Starfleet crew. They know what is expected from them. They will follow my orders.

QUINLAN

Yes, they will, but they're not just a crew. They're individuals!

TALORA

Needs of the state must go beyond the needs of its individuals!

Then it's suddenly dead silent.

QUINLAN

I was wrong about you. You're not a Romulan. You're a Vulcan.

Talora is total ice and fire at the same time. The insult struck a nerve.

TALORA

That's enough.

QUINLAN

Cold logic, nothing more. Brutal calculations. Guess four hundred crewmen is a pretty good trade for the billions at stake.

TALORA

And what do you know about sacrifices?

QUINLAN

I know enough.

TALORA

Yes, I'm sure you do.

Talora takes a PADD, reads from it:

TALORA (CONT'D)

Lieutenant Commander Jennifer Elise Quinlan. First officer, USS Nightingale.

(MORE)

TALORA (CONT'D)

Stardate 71399.2, a normal survey mission to the Argolis cluster.

Quinlan turns pale. Talora lifts her eyes, looks at her. She has her baited.

TALORA (CONT'D)

Yes, "Commander", we looked through your file. Care to tell what happened there?

QUINLAN

It seems you already know.

TALORA

Yes, and from what I read, I also know you have no right to judge my command decisions.

Quinlan's defiance has been stripped away by a swift blow straight to the gut.

QUINLAN

That was different.

TALORA

I see no difference. Lives were lost for the greater good then and will be lost now, for the same reason. Unfortunate, but acceptable losses. Starfleet Command may condemn my decision later but at least I'm guaranteeing there will be a Starfleet Command left.

(beat)

My order stands. We scuttle the Enterprise.

Quinlan is at an impasse. She sees there is no changing her mind. She turns to go.

QUINLAN

Fine. You sacrifice yourself, this ship, and the crew. But I will not go down with you. Not without a fight.

And she LEAVES.

EXT. FOREST -- NIGHT

Cross and Dojar follow Neika as she leads them through a narrow but heavily used forest passage. The rhythmic beat of FALLING RAIN echoes through the foliage.

NEIKA

The shrine isn't far away.

DOJAR

Could that be what the aliens are  
looking for?

Cross glances at his tricorder.

CROSS

Well, it is in the right direction.  
I'm also detecting rich kelbonite  
deposits in the mountains.  
Whatever's in there is pretty  
heavily shielded against sensors.

Dojar adjusts the phaser rifle in his hands. Tightens the grip.

DOJAR

We better keep our eyes open. If  
there's any unexpected trouble or  
an ambush, it's hard to detect in  
this weather.

Cross nods. Neika slows down, walks at Neil's side.

NEIKA

I'm glad you've come to us Cross.  
There are many sick in our village.  
Many of them won't live through  
the winter season. People you can  
help.

He feared it would come to this. Cross decides to take the straightest route, and let the truth out.

CROSS

No, Neika. I can't.

NEIKA

But you're a god.

CROSS

We may wield the powers of gods,  
but that doesn't make us gods. I'm  
a mortal, a "nurega", just like  
you. I often wonder if I can help  
even my own people.

Neika stares him, disbelieved.

NEIKA

That can't be true.

CROSS

Gods aren't allowed to make  
mistakes, Neika. Neither are people  
in my position, but I still make  
them. I've done them before -  
countless times - and I will most  
likely do them again. The great  
god you're looking is just a mere  
mortal.

She gasps.

CROSS (CONT'D)

I'm sorry if you're disappointed,  
Neika. We shouldn't even be here.

She looks at Cross, reading him. Then, on the contrary of his expectations, Neika's world stays in balance. There is certain comfort in her compassionate eyes. She takes his hand.

NEIKA

No... I'm not disappointed, Cross.  
You may be a mortal man, but I can  
see from your eyes you bear a burden  
of a god on your shoulders.

Neika looks up, letting the rain wash over her face.

NEIKA (CONT'D)

You know, there's a story among  
our people. You know why the gods  
created the rain?

CROSS

No, I don't.

NEIKA

So they could hide their tears  
when they saw the fallibility of  
their creations.

CROSS

I have no more tears left for my  
handiwork.

NEIKA

It's natural to fail, Cross. We  
get hurt throughout our life, but  
we learn. Without pain, we couldn't  
appreciate the moments of joy.

CROSS

I think I've caused enough pain  
during my life.

NEIKA

You think of her?

CROSS

(nods)  
And all the other wrong turns I've  
taken. Lea, my mother, my career,  
my choices.

NEIKA

Do you know what's the most simple  
equation in life?

He doesn't, obviously.

NEIKA (CONT'D)

Many wrongs don't equal one right.

CROSS

If that's the case, then what good is one right after so many wrongs?

NEIKA

(with a smile)

A start.

INT. TRANSPORTER ROOM

No crew around. The warning lights on the wall pulsate dimly red, throwing almost diabolic shadows on the walls.

Quinlan is moving with a purpose. She hurries to the equipment locker and grabs a PHASER RIFLE, slings it. Takes another and goes for the control panel. Opens it up and starts wiring the weapon into the hardware.

Behind her, the door OPENS.

ELRIS

Thought I could find you here.

Quinlan evaluates her, between reactions. Trust or not trust. She plays safe, puts her hand on the rifle.

QUINLAN

Don't try to stop me, Doctor.

ELRIS

You remind me of Neil, Quinlan. Both of you are stubborn, and never around when things to turn bad.

QUINLAN

I'm touched by the parallel but I won't be staying around for this suicide.

COMPUTER VOICE

Self-destruct in T-minus thirty minutes.

QUINLAN

Thirty minutes? That's plenty. Did the ice queen melt a bit and allow some time for the crew to say their prayers?

ELRIS

That too. It's also about the time it takes for the aliens to reel us in and get through our hull. "Total annihilation" were her exact words. But the clock is ticking, you'd better hurry.

Quinlan's eyes narrow. She has a hard time interpreting the Doctor.

QUINLAN

If you're trying to pull off some kind of bluff, you've lost me.

ELRIS

In thirty minutes four hundred people will die. Before I know who I'll allow to break the orders - an act which might very well lead to a survival of a serious threat - I have to know the person in question.

QUINLAN

I have no time for this.

She adjusts the final wire. Nothing happens. She curses. Elris takes a step forward, her posture determined, demanding.

ELRIS

What happened on the Nightingale?!

Their eyes meet. Elris' stare urges for an answer. Quinlan exhales deeply.

ELRIS (CONT'D)

Tell me.

She keeps trying the wires but allows her to hear her story.

QUINLAN

We were studying a black hole in the Argolis cluster. There was a navigational glitch and we strayed too close. Our warp drive was inoperable and the gravitational pull was too great to escape at impulse speed. We had a few moments to figure out what to do before it was too late. I knew the Captain wouldn't condone the course of action I was about to take... so I didn't tell him.

ELRIS

What did you do?

QUINLAN

I ordered everyone to evacuate to the saucer section and left only a skeleton crew to the stardrive, the bare minimum to pull the gamble off. The ship was separated and the stardrive section maneuvered into the position, and then I gave them the order. To...

A lump has been gathered in her throat as she speaks. Her voice staggering, full of emotion.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

To detonate the antimatter storage pods.

Elris gasps.

ELRIS

By the Prophets...

QUINLAN

The force of the explosion was enough to weaken the gravity field and allowed us to break free.

(beat)

Two hundred and fifty two people lived to tell the tale, their lives paid in blood by the people left behind. The people I sent into their deaths.

(pause)

I got court-martialed when we got back with the charges to breaking the chain of command, conduct unbecoming of a Starfleet officer and the loss of life I had caused. I couldn't handle the pressure that was about to follow and therefore resigned willingly.

(beat)

Now do you understand? I've learned to live with my decision but I don't want to be responsible for the lives or deaths of anyone except my own ever again.

Still she fails to get the transporter working. Elris moves to her.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

You want to stun me, kill me or drag me into the brig, fine. Do what you have to do. I'll do the same.

But Elris takes the wire from her hand and connects it. With a sparkling HUM, the transporter system sizzles to life.

ELRIS

Living with Neil has taught me a thing or two.

Quinlan stares at Elris, quizzed by her help.

QUINLAN

Why?

ELRIS

Whether or not you find some miracle  
that saves this ship, you don't  
need the guilt of not trying.

Quinlan gives her an appreciating nod. She hurries to the pad.

ELRIS (CONT'D)

You have less than twenty-five  
minutes to do the impossible,  
Jennifer Quinlan. Good luck to  
you.

Quinlan takes a deep breath, readies her phaser. And with the blue shimmer, DEMATERIALIZES.

EXT. CAVERN -- NIGHT

The steep wall at the base of the mountain. Carved into the rock are intricate RUNES AND SYMBOLS.

CROSS

Same kind of writing I saw in the  
stone tablet.

DOJAR

What does it say?

NEIKA

"To honor the gods that descended  
from the heavens to be among us.  
In their fiery chariots they  
arrived, to protect us, to preserve  
us, to lead us. Waiting to rise at  
the day of illumination."

CROSS

Sounds about right. Let's go.

INT. CAVERN -- NIGHT

Cross and Dojar sweep the thick darkness with flashlights. Neika hurries at point, knowing the way by heart.

NEIKA

It's just around the corner.

As they turn the corner, they come to a--

CLIFFSIDE. With a spiral descend into an abyss, as wide as it is deep.

DOJAR

I guess we found it, Captain.

Dojar shines the light down. In the bottom lies - almost as if sleeping - a dark outline of a cocoon-like figure.

Another ALIEN STARSHIP. As the pieces in the puzzle start to click into place for Cross and Dojar, we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT EIGHT

ACT NINE

FADE IN:

INT. ALIEN SHIP

QUINLAN makes good time, runs through the corridors. Checks the tricorder. Jazzes herself up:

QUINLAN  
Dampening field still up and  
running. Twenty minutes to go.  
Stay sharp, Quinlan.

Movement. Not wasting time, Quinlan heads around the corner away from the view. A group of STRANGE ALIEN BEINGS, completely non-humanoid, moving gracefully like fish in a sea through the corridor with the help of their numerous appendages. They stroll past her, talking in language the Universal Translator doesn't understand. She waits for them to go.

Then tackles with the nearby wall panel. Taps a few controls. Only gets a disgruntled BEEP.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)  
Come on, work with me...

INT. CAVERN -- NIGHT

CROSS and DOJAR walk the spiraling stairwell down to the starship. NEIKA reluctantly follows, preferring to stay behind for obvious reasons. Dojar flips the tricorder on.

DOJAR  
Hull configuration and materials  
match with the ship we encountered.  
Judging by the condition, I'd say  
it came down fast and hard.

CROSS  
A crash land?

DOJAR  
(nods)  
It's been here a while. At least a  
hundred years, probably more.

CROSS  
Guess they don't leave their own  
behind easily. Try to find an  
opening.

DOJAR  
After what the big one did to the  
outpost and to our ship, wouldn't  
it be better to just leave it alone,  
sir?

CROSS

We still can't reach the Enterprise which means they're probably already with the Starfleet task force, heading here to clash with the alien ship in orbit. Federation thinks this is an act of war while they're only wanting their ship back.

DOJAR

They could have just asked.

CROSS

That is a very narrow perspective, Lieutenant. Who says they have the ability to talk to us, or that they can even understand what we're trying to do and say? Which our actions seem hostile and which friendly?

DOJAR

You don't say...?

CROSS

The outpost sensor readings kept bothering me. I couldn't figure out what it was... until now.

(pause)

I think we struck first, Lieutenant.

Dojar is taken back by the Cross' revelation. But takes it in calmly.

DOJAR

It is a possibility.

CROSS

It's a very probable possibility. The outpost Commander makes one wrong move at first contact, we add needless paranoia with our fear stricken speculation and next thing we know we're all sitting on a powder keg, itching to start a war.

(pause)

We've got to find a way to get in touch with Starfleet or the aliens, and end this before all hell breaks loose.

Dojar nods, agreeing. They search for a door, an opening, a way to get in. Cross flashes light to a half-buried entrance. A closed door crushed beneath the ship. Dojar looks for the controls, finds them, tries them. Nothing.

DOJAR

The controls are dead and I doubt the door would move anyway. Should we try the phasers?

CROSS

It's made of some kind of hyperdense alloy. I don't think our phasers would do much good.

DOJAR

So, how do we get it open?

Cross thinks it through, Neika steps forward.

NEIKA

There's an opening at the back of the sanctuary, but if you enter, you'll disturb the Q'tami.

DOJAR

Who are the Q'tami? The aliens?

NEIKA

The Sleeping Ones. The gods who will wake at the day of illumination.

EXT. SPACE

Shadowing the near-wrecked Enterprise is the alien ship, holding the Starfleet ship in a short energy leash.

INT. READY ROOM

Sitting behind the desk is TALORA looking deadpan.

TALORA

Am I facing a mutiny?

Across the room stands ELRIS, with an equally serious face.

ELRIS

Does it matter anymore? In less than fifteen minutes we're nothing more than names in a Starfleet casualty list. There will be four hundred families that are going to get news most of them will never recover from. Yes, the crew is afraid, if that's what you're asking.

TALORA

That's not what I asked.

ELRIS

We should at least evacuate.

TALORA

That's a risk neither we, or Starfleet can afford. This ship and this crew possesses vital tactical and strategic information about the Federation. Our ship's integrity has not yet been breached and the security teams are on full alert. We can maintain information control until point zero if we stay in one place. If we use the escape pods, we're open targets for the enemy to capture.

ELRIS

That's a rather cold point of view.

Her words hit some marks, echoing Quinlan's earlier statements.

TALORA

You and I both know what happened when the Borg captured one vital Starfleet officer prior to the Wolf 359. Eleven thousand lives were lost that day because of a single person. If four hundred lives can save billions, it is an acceptable loss. Total curfew is the only way to maintain security...

(beat)

Which brings us to the reason you're here.

ELRIS

Quinlan.

TALORA

You aided in her escape.

ELRIS

She knows nothing of our security codes or current military secrets. If she can bring end to this madness, so be it. If she's right...

TALORA

If she's right? The Federation still has the Dominion War fresh in the memory. With the economical and political instability the Starfleet still is after the war, we can not afford to be wrong.

INT. ALIEN SHIP

Quinlan still at the control panel. Her tricorder working at overdrive. Torturous seconds pass, until finally the small machine gives an upbeat CHIRP.

QUINLAN

Finally. Now, where's the power distribution...

Her tricorder produces a rough schematic of the ship's power grid, sketchy at best but enough for her purposes. Getting the information she needs, she heads off. Now with a clear destination.

INT. ALIEN WRECKAGE

Cross and Dojar explore the wreckage. Its interior decor is identical with the ship above. Everything is tilted and dusty, strained and damaged.

DOJAR

Whoever built this didn't consider people with two hands and ten fingers in mind.

CROSS

There's still minimum power. Look for the EPS grid or something equivalent of it. If the power source is still undamaged, we can probably get it on-line.

DOJAR

If we can figure how to even begin to decipher this language and these controls. This is the most bizarre ship I've ever seen. My tricorder is still trying to get the power flow chart out of the system. This could take minutes, or even hours.

CROSS

Keep trying. I'll look around in the meantime.

With an effort, Cross finds the controls for one of the inner doors. With a push of a button...

INT. ALIEN SHIP - REACTOR CHAMBER

The door SWOOSHES open. Quinlan cautiously steps in. The POWER CORE, emanating a rhythmic thumping, is nothing seen aboard a Starfleet ship. It's a strange hybrid of both organic and metallic, raising high above the floor and descending far below the catwalks, into a myriad abyss. A truly alien contraption.

She quietly counts her blessings as there isn't anyone around. Though there doesn't seem to be any controls to use in the chamber either. Quinlan moves closer, looks around and takes her phaser rifle. Points it at the power core.

QUINLAN

Right. Time to get this show on the road.

She taps a button in the tricorder and we see a brief FRECKLE of energy around her that quickly disappears. Inhaling her lungs full of air, she yells:

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

HELLO!?

Few moments pass before an ALIEN BEING enters. Armed with a STRANGE DEVICE which can only be interpreted as a weapon, his lengthy appendages circling over her, moving closer.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

One wrong move and I'll blow this power node to the kingdom come!

The alien doesn't back off, but stops.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

Now, I don't know if you understand me, but you better understand this. This phaser is at maximum setting, and I'm prepared to use it if you don't back the hell off!

ALIEN BEING

No need to be vulgar, human. We didn't want things to come to this.

QUINLAN

So you do understand what I'm saying.

ALIEN BEING

Your method of communication is primitive, simplistic. And easily decoded.

QUINLAN

Why did you attack?

ALIEN BEING

We didn't attack you. You attacked us. We defended.

QUINLAN

You attacked the outpost and the Enterprise.

ALIEN BEING

The power dissipater weapon only disabled your vessel temporarily. Your struggle only made things worse, we did not want to establish contact. You are primitive. Hostile. We have a law of non-interference, similar to your Prime Directive. It wasn't the time yet.

(beat)

Unfortunately, we didn't anticipate your relentlessness.

QUINLAN

That relentlessness may prove to be more costly than you anticipated as well.

Quinlan shoves the tricorder to the alien, a DIGITAL COUNTER slowly ticks the seconds down. Five minutes left.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

In five minutes, both ships will be destroyed. Yours, and ours.

The alien's "eyes" narrow.

ALIEN BEING

That must not happen. You destroy our ship and the Hegemony will retaliate without mercy. Total extermination.

QUINLAN

You invaded Federation space.

ALIEN BEING

Borders are of no consequence. We only wanted our ship back. That is our mission. Abort your plan of destruction.

QUINLAN

I cannot convince our people to do that unless you back off and leave first!

ALIEN BEING

Not without our ship. It contains things you're not allowed to have.

QUINLAN

We can't help you find your damn ship. Can't you see? Stubbornness kills us both!

ALIEN BEING

If we die, your species will die. We want the ship.

QUINLAN

I can't give you the ship! It's not in my power!

INT. ALIEN WRECKAGE - STASIS ROOM

Cross is at a large hall resembling a cargo bay. Filled with rows of CONTAINERS, large enough to fit a human. Or an alien.

CROSS

Lieutenant, you'd better come over here.

Dojar arrives. Looks around the room, enthralled.

DOJAR

This is amazing. The ship had live cargo?

Cross sweeps the dust from one of the containers. He notes the still humming tank, containing one of the aliens. Alive and well, albeit in some kind of hibernation.

CROSS

Apparently it still has. The Sleeping Ones. The Q'tami.

Dojar walks closer. He studies the container, looking for controls.

CROSS (CONT'D)

You know what you're doing, Lieutenant?

DOJAR

These look a lot like the Vorta cloning tanks I saw during the war.

CROSS

During the war? I was ten during the war. You couldn't have seen...

DOJAR

My father was a Gul in the Cardassian military. He used to take me around the base, to be among the Vorta and the Jem'Hadar, to show me that there was nothing to be feared of our allies.

(beat)

He honestly believed the Dominion would lead the Cardassia to a new glory.

CROSS

What happened to him?

DOJAR

He was executed by the Jem'Hadar.

CROSS

Things often don't go as we'd like them to go, do they? Bad guys don't wear black hats and heroes don't always ride into the sunset with the girl in real life.

(beat)

Come on, let's see if we can open one of these.

INT. ALIEN SHIP - REACTOR CHAMBER

Quinlan with the alien, neither side willing to back off. She stares at the tricorder. Under a minute left. She bows her head, preparing to accept what's coming.

QUINLAN

Listen to me, if we don't break away from this mortal coil, in less than a minute, things go from bad to apocalyptic. A war benefits neither of us.

ALIEN BEING

We will not abide to the rules of the inferior.

INT. READY ROOM

Talora, at the desktop panel. She stares at the screen. It is her final report for Starfleet Command.

INT. ALIEN WRECKAGE - STASIS ROOM

Dojar finds what he's looking for.

DOJAR

I think I got it. You want me to wake him up?

CROSS

Yes. Maybe we can finally get some answers.

Dojar complies and the container lets out a FAINT HISSING SOUND as some pressurized gas is released. With a mechanized pop, the lid OPENS and whizzes aside. The ALIEN inside slowly opens his eyes. Resembling the ones on the ship in orbit.

And gets up. Dojar backs off, reaches for his phaser, but avoids doing any rash moves.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Can you understand me?

ALIEN BEING

You are a human?

Cross raises an eyebrow. The alien turns to Dojar.

ALIEN BEING (CONT'D)

And you are a Cardassian.

CROSS

Correct on both counts. I'm Captain Neil Cross of the Federation starship Enterprise.

ALIEN BEING

I am not allowed to talk to you.

CROSS

You'll have to. There might be a war soon between your and my people. We need your help to avoid it.

The being hesitates. Seconds tick away.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Please.

ALIEN BEING

You will return me to my people?

CROSS

You have my word on that.

Cross looks him sincerely. Cautiously, the alien takes the offer.

ALIEN BEING

I will help.

DOJAR

First we need to get the communications system working. Can you show us where it is and how to operate it?

ALIEN BEING

There is no communications system.

CROSS

Then how can we contact our people. Or your people?

He doesn't answer, only closes his eyes. And concentrates.

INT. ALIEN SHIP - REACTOR CHAMBER

The last seconds slip away, one by one. The end seems inevitable, when suddenly:

ALIEN BEING

We have our ship. We will depart.

Quinlan's eyes FLASH OPEN.

QUINLAN

What did you say?

ALIEN BEING

The ship has called us. We retrieve it and leave.

Her heart racing, Quinlan looks at the tricorder. Ten seconds left and counting.

INT. READY ROOM

Talora rubs her temples, failure and self-disappointment blooming from her face.

Looks at the closing lines in her report. A downbeat account of events that occurred. She tries to believe she is doing the right thing, but the result tastes of ashes.

As she is about to send it, Quinlan's urgent voice comes up:

QUINLAN

They'll give up, Commander! Abort the destruct sequence! The aliens will leave! Abort, abort, abort!

As Talora rushes out...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise in orbit, damaged but intact. The Q'tami ship further away, but no longer threatening the Federation ship.

EXT. FOREST -- NIGHT

Cross, Dojar and Neika emerge from the shrine cavern. Cross takes in the night breeze. His commbadge CHIRPS.

TALORA'S COM VOICE

Enterprise to Captain Cross, come in.

CROSS

Cross here.

TALORA'S COM VOICE

It's good to hear your voice, Captain.

CROSS

(jokingly)

I take that you've been gentle on my ship, Commander

TALORA'S COM VOICE

We... we'll discuss that once you arrive, sir. Stand by for transport.

Neika steps forward.

NEIKA

So this is the time when the gods return to the heavens?

CROSS

(nods)

There's a need for me, for us, more than I realized. I have to go. I hope you realize that...

Neika gently presses her finger on his lips.

NEIKA

I understand. I will take the knowledge of your visit to my grave and will explain things to my people with prophecies and good omens.

CROSS

You are an extraordinary woman, Neika. Your people are fortunate to have you guiding their spiritual life.

NEIKA

I didn't meet the gods, but I met a man destined to do miracles. Your people are fortunate to have you as well. This is indeed has been the day of illumination.

CROSS

(nods)

For both of us.

NEIKA

(smiles)

Go get your world and life straight, Neil Cross. And may the gods light your way.

Cross smiles to the complete.

CROSS

Thank you, Neika. For everything.

(taps commbadge)

Cross to Enterprise. Two to beam up.

As Cross and Dojar dematerialize, Neika raises her hand, to bid a farewell. She brings up a smile. Hold on that moment for a while, and then...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT NINE

ACT TEN

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE

The Enterprise being towed to a SPACEDOCK by a pair of cargo haulers.

INT. CORRIDOR

CROSS strolls the corridor with QUINLAN and GREY, inspecting the damage.

QUINLAN

You loan the keys for a day and we already wreck the car.

GREY

I'm sure everything is in the report, sir.

CROSS

(deadpan)

Yes, I did read the report, Lieutenant. Thank you.

GREY

Where did we go wrong, sir?

CROSS

Well, out here, it's not playing by the book that's difficult, Lieutenant. Trying to find out by whose book we're playing by, that's tough. Guess we picked the wrong one today.

(hands Grey a PADD)

Here's the work schedule.

Grey glances at it, then looks at Cross.

GREY

It's rather... constricting, sir.

CROSS

Then guess it's time for you start working on those miracles you engineers always talk about. And I mean right away. Dismissed, Lieutenant.

Grey is left behind to digest that. Quinlan grins.

QUINLAN

I'm betting that poor thing will be spending all night up, getting the job done.

CROSS

We're not in any particular hurry but I'm sure you agree we'll need to accept a certain pace of work here. It's a rough galaxy out there.

QUINLAN

"We?"

CROSS

I want you be part of the team. What do you say?

She stops.

QUINLAN

Rejoin Starfleet? No, no, no. Not by a long shot.

CROSS

I'm not talking about rejoining Starfleet. I want you aboard as sort of permanent, ancillary tactical advisor on interplanetary issues.

QUINLAN

That's got to be the most useless post on this ship next to the counselor.

CROSS

(smirking)

We don't have a counselor on this ship either. Would you prefer that?

QUINLAN

Why? Why me?

CROSS

Beats going to the prison. Right?

QUINLAN

That's your sales pitch?

CROSS

You saved the ship. Brought common sense to everyone when things were about to get out of hand. And common sense seems to be a commodity we keep running out of here. I need you to keep everyone of us on the ground. Plus, your knowledge on more... eccentric side of galactic affairs would be important for us.

QUINLAN

By that you mean I know every bottom of a rock in the Quadrant and like to slum around with scoundrels?

CROSS

Basically.

Cross steps into the turbolift.

QUINLAN

What makes you think I'll accept the job? I don't want it.

CROSS

Neither did I.

The doors SWOOSH close in front of her. Quinlan can't help but to smile.

INT. READY ROOM

Cross behind the desk, talking to PORTMAN who stands across the room.

PORTMAN

It was an unfortunate chain of events you went through, Neil. Starfleet Command puts it down to the records as a tragic, mutual misunderstanding.

CROSS

A mutual misunderstanding?  
(scornful)  
Of course.

PORTMAN

However, I have authorized - by a special request of this so-called Q'tami Hegemony - an assignment of a special scientific and cultural envoy to the Enterprise, to prevent us from repeating the history.

CROSS

A Q'tami ambassador?

PORTMAN

Yes. I think a cross-cultural contact would only do good, for both of our species.

(beat)

Taken that you agree.

CROSS

(nods)

I'll arrange the details as soon as possible, but I thought the Q'tami were rather reluctant to open a dialogue with us.

PORTMAN

That seemed to change after the initial contact.

(MORE)

PORTMAN (CONT'D)

I believe their exact words were:  
"the tragedy has already happened,  
we might as well take most of it."  
(beat)  
He is scheduled to arrive shortly.

CROSS

Thank you, Henry.

PORTMAN

Is there anything else you might  
need, Neil?

Cross notices Portman's budding reluctance.

CROSS

(with a smile)  
Hard to give up on this, isn't it?

PORTMAN

(nods)  
I have two children, Neil and along  
them it's safe to say that this  
project is one of my favorites.

CROSS

Don't worry. I have a feeling we'll  
be fine. We'll take care good care  
of her.

A confident nod from him. The doorbell CHIMES.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Enter.

Talora walks in.

TALORA

Captain.  
(nods to Portman)  
Admiral.

PORTMAN

I will find my way out. And...  
good luck, Captain.

Portman walks out, leaving Cross and Talora talking  
privately.

CROSS

Talora, excellent, I wanted to  
talk to you. I was about to...

TALORA

Yes, sir. About the events on the  
last mission.

CROSS

Yes, I was going to--

TALORA

I accept full responsibility and therefore have come to leave my resignation.

Cross just looks at her for a few beats and then exhales deeply, rubbing his throbbing temples.

CROSS

Is this ship sinking, Commander?

TALORA

Sir? I'm not sure what...

CROSS

I asked you a question, Commander. Is this ship sinking?

Talora is lost for a moment. But returns with a quickly regained composure:

TALORA

No, sir.

CROSS

Then why the hell everyone is bailing out? First Doctor Elris, then Quinlan and now you. Is it this ship or just me? This is unacceptable, Commander. I won't approve this.

TALORA

Captain, my disregard for Starfleet protocol nearly cost the lives of everyone on board this ship and almost started an interstellar war!

CROSS

We all made that mistake. Were blinded of the peaceful option in the midst of a paranoid fear of an invasion. But hopefully, we know better now. I don't care if you'll make mistakes, it comes with the package, but I also don't want a first officer who refuses to learn from them - like you think you're doing right now. I don't buy that, Talora. You're an intelligent officer, you shouldn't jump to conclusions.

TALORA

But Romulan code of conduct dictates me to...

CROSS

To cop out, so to speak?

(MORE)

CROSS (CONT'D)

You're no longer in the Romulan Navy, you're a Starfleet officer now. Start acting like one.

TALORA

What about the crew?

CROSS

They'll understand, eventually. But you have a job to do. I won't lie to you and say it will be easy, but for what we went through and what we just avoided, I think we're needed now more than ever. And that includes you as well. This is a time I cannot afford to lose any good officers. You do understand that, don't you?

Talora takes in his words, considers them for a moment, and then:

TALORA

Yes, sir. And thank you, sir.

CROSS

For what? All I gave you was a good kick in the rear, Commander. Gratitude deserves something better. Now get out.

TALORA

Yes, sir.

She leaves. Cross shakes his head in frustration. What a job. He taps the desk for a while, and gets up. With a purpose.

INT. SICKBAY

Elris patches up the final patient of the day, gives an approving nod to the nurses. Another job well done, another life saved. She sits down in her SMALL OFFICE, exhausted from the day's work. Notes a FLOWER on the table, with a FOLDED NOTE and a PADD attached to it.

CROSS (V.O.)

Captain's log, Stardate 78020.5. We survived our trial by fire. A tragedy that almost engulfed us all. But in the end, reason prevailed, and now we can begin again and learn from the past. To reach for knowledge, to understand... and to heal...

Elris unfolds the note and something SLIPS OUT. She reads the text:

We may not be able to forget, but maybe  
we can forgive? I am sorry. For everything.

-- Neil

She looks at the PADD, her resignation she shoved to Cross earlier. Then she takes the small item that slipped out.

It's a traditional BAJORAN EARRING.

Without her noticing, from further away at the doorway, Cross looks at her, looking confident. Happy that maybe finally he is starting to get his world straight. And just maybe things start to get better from now on end.

INT. QUINLAN'S QUARTERS

Where Quinlan unpacks her clothes into the drawers.

CROSS (V.O.)

We hopefully give purpose to those  
feel lost and hope for those who  
have misplaced it... And a home  
for those who have none...

INT. TRANSPORTER ROOM

Cross nods at the transporter chief. The ALIEN FIGURE APPEARS with the shimmering effect. He is the same one that helped Cross and others on the surface.

Y'LAN, as we will come to call him, nods politely. Well-crafted words of courtesy and greetings of diplomacy are exchanged, words we cannot hear.

CROSS (V.O.)

And we have welcomed strangers to  
our midst with open arms. Hoping  
that we will not bear any ill-will  
among our two cultures, so vastly  
different we may be. It is a long  
road, for both sides, but it is a  
beginning, and beginning is  
everything.

INT. SHRINE -- DAY

Neika chisels the stone tablet, engraving something.

CROSS (V.O.)

There is a verse in the Bible  
saying: "Behold, the people is  
one, and they have all one language;  
and this they begin to do: and now  
nothing will be restrained from  
them, which they have imagined to  
do."

(beat)

We once praised that language of  
idealism, that language of

(MORE)

CROSS (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
understanding. Now, we speak, but  
do not talk. We hear, but do not  
listen. Perhaps we lost it during  
the times of uncertainty or the  
brutal years of warfare against  
the Dominion...

It is a caricature of Cross, shining a divine light - placed  
among the other gods in the sky.

INT. CROSS' QUARTERS

Cross casually casts the uniform down on the chair like he  
has done so many times before. But when he is about to  
turn to bed, he turns and again takes the uniform - and  
this time...

Folds it carefully.

CROSS (V.O.)  
The war that came and went but  
left us carrying our individual  
and collective burdens for quarter  
of a century, and we may continue  
play the aftermath for years to  
come. But for the better or worse,  
I am confident we are a crew, a  
people, that can withstand the  
hardships the new century casts on  
us, for we are, above all,  
mortals...

Cross lies down and closes his eyes with a look in his  
face he thought of having lost a long time ago. The smile  
of simple contentment...

EXT. SPACE

The same spacedock, as before.

CROSS (V.O.)  
...And as such, our time is too  
short to waste on bickering and  
grieving over a time gone by. We  
will carry on, and continue to  
look forward. As tomorrow... well,  
tomorrow is another day.

The Enterprise remains docked, waiting to get into new,  
uncharted territories, to new adventures and to the  
uncertain tomorrow. We, after a longing BEAT...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TEN

THE END