

Star Trek: Renaissance

"The Burning Sky"

by
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For Cassie.

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TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE

Station Epsilon, and the space around it is positively crowded. What appears to be several hundred ships are nearby. They range from large frigates to small one-man scout ships, from well-armed to defenseless, and from being in top condition to being held together by a couple of self-sealing stembolts.

The docking ring is hardly visible with all the ships gathered around it and docked to it.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- DOCKING RING

The docking ring corridor is also crowded with people, coming and going, mostly wearing civilian clothing. Most of these people are obviously newcomers to Station Epsilon.

From out of the crowd we spot ERIK GREY, wincing in pain and clutching his right arm as he is escorted down the corridor by NEIL CROSS and JENNIFER QUINLAN, both of whom are smiling.

QUINLAN

Six hours we've been waiting just to board the station -- you'd think you'd be a little more organized by now!

CROSS

We're doing the best we can, Jen. We weren't expecting you. Not all at once, anyway.

GREY

Nobody expects a massive imposition.

Cross and Quinlan look at Grey, who is smiling a little.

QUINLAN

That was bad.

GREY

Sorry.

QUINLAN

I mean, that was really, really bad.

GREY
I couldn't resist.

Cross looks confused.

CROSS
Did I miss something?

QUINLAN
Old joke, Captain, don't worry
about it.

GREY
These last weeks, we've had
plenty of time to get to know
each others' jokes... good and
bad.

QUINLAN
Tell me about it. Anyway, we're
just glad to have gotten here in
one piece.

GREY
That's right. We almost bought it
on Drayon III. The colony shields
were about to collapse; Starfleet
hadn't bothered with the last two
power shipments because of
Bajor... anyway, space on a ship
going off-world was at a premium.

QUINLAN
It was sheer luck that the
Ryujin, Rocco's ship, picked us
up. A lot of people didn't get
out in time.

Cross grimaces.

CROSS
Damn. I hope it was quick.

QUINLAN
A level 6 plasma storm? Oh yeah,
it was quick.

GREY
It's one of many things that
Starfleet has to answer for,
Captain. It's why we're here.

QUINLAN
We got your message.

She smiles, and Cross returns the smile.

There is shouting from up the corridor, and the three of them move to one side to make way for a medical team rushing down the corridor.

GREY

So who else from the old lady is here?

CROSS

Talora, as you know. Ensigns Schindler and Mexes. Baxter and Wetterling arrived not long before you did. Plus whoever else was in your convoy, such as--

QUINLAN

Nat!

Down the corridor, a grinning NATHANIEL STOLT is jogging down the corridor to meet them. Quinlan hugs him and Cross shakes his hand.

CROSS

Welcome to Station Epsilon, Lieutenant.

Stolt makes a face.

STOLT

Ugh. Thanks for reminding me, sir. I almost had a whole week to enjoy that promotion.

CROSS

You earned it. And you'll keep it, albeit in a different chain of command.

QUINLAN

Where's Michelle, did she make it with you?

STOLT

Yeah, she's down in Cargo Bay 1. They've converted it into a hospital for all the wounded who are coming aboard.

(to Grey)

Sounds like you could use some medical treatment yourself, Commander -- that arm must be painful.

GREY

(grimacing)

It's broken. We had a run-in with a Starfleet patrol after Drayon.

GREY(CONT'D)

One of Rocco's friends tried to set it, but...

CROSS

Right. Stolt, why don't you take Grey down to Cargo Bay 1, while I look for some quarters for you guys? We only have a few of them, and they're going fast.

STOLT

Aye, sir.

Cross, his face serious, looks at the three of them for a long moment.

CROSS

I can't tell you how happy I am to see you people. For the first time in a long while, I feel...

(beat)

...I feel truly hopeful.

Quinlan smiles at him. Stolt nods.

GREY

We serve at your pleasure, Captain.

Cross smiles again, and nods, Then he becks for Quinlan to join him. Quinlan looks back at Grey as she walks away.

QUINLAN

Catch you later?

GREY

You bet.

Quinlan and Cross disappear in one direction, and Stolt leads Grey down another corridor.

STOLT

So it sounds like the two of you had some interesting times on your way here.

GREY

You could say that.

Meanwhile, the throng of people continue coming and going through the corridors.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE

Another shot of Epsilon -- ships can be seen coming and going from the docking ring.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- CORRIDOR

Things on the station seem to have calmed down somewhat; only a few people are moving about as Grey walks toward the camera, bending and flexing his arm and nodding with approval at the restoration of his full range of motion.

He stops at a door, checks the number on it, then enters a code into the side panel. The door opens for him and he steps into...

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- QUARTERS -- LIVING ROOM

The darkened room, which looks like it hasn't been used in quite a while, is small, containing only a couple pieces of furniture, an open doorway leading to a bedroom, and a couple of small windows looking out at the stars. The door closes behind Grey as he enters.

GREY

Lights.

Nothing happens. Grey looks around.

GREY (CONT'D)

Computer, lights.

The room remains dark. Grey sighs and mutters under his breath as he steps farther into the room and starts to unbutton his shirt.

He talks to himself, apparently mimicing a hopelessly optimistic Epsilon engineer.

GREY (CONT'D)

Of course the repairs are finished in this section, Lieutenant!

(Back to his normal self)

Idiot couldn't even get my rank right...

A hand falls on his shoulder.

Grey yelps in surprise and whirls around, hand automatically falling to the phaser on his waist.

Then he relaxes and takes a breath -- Quinlan is standing there, a slight smile on her face.

QUINLAN

Sorry. The door locks aren't working either, so I just came in.

GREY

It's all right.

They look at each other. Beat pause.

QUINLAN

How's the arm?

Grey looks at his arm, bends and flexes it again.

GREY

It's fine. Back to normal.

QUINLAN

Good.

Another pause.

Then, suddenly, as if guided by a single mind, Grey and Quinlan move into each others arms and kiss. Passionately.

We linger on the kiss for a moment, then...

FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE

Epsilon, and its environs. The new ships are still getting organized around the station.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- COMMAND CENTER

CARLA PETRUCCI is pacing around the upper platform reading a padd, as various crew members man their stations. Crew member FELIX looks up from his station.

FELIX

Commander? Incoming transmission from SMS-2, priority.

CARLA

SMS-2?

FELIX

Epsilon's solar monitoring stations. They keep a check on the solar radiation count in the system.

CARLA

I see. What are they telling you, Felix?

She walks over to his station and looks down at the console, clearly not understanding anything that she sees there.

FELIX

We're reading localized aspect changes in tachyon eddies. Looks like a possible polyneutrino flare.

CARLA

I don't like the sound of that.

FELIX

Indeed. It definitely looks like it could be systemwide. We may be in for quite a show in the next few minutes.

CARLA

Is there anything we need to do?

FELIX

Other than double check our
radiation shieling? Not a lot.
Just sit back and watch.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- REC LOUNGE

We come up on a close-up of Cross, holding a small wood-carved sign in his hands. TALORA, Quinlan, Grey, Stolt, MICHELLE KAPLAN, BASTIAN SCHINDLER, and several other half-familiar faces are standing nearby, holding champagne glasses and somberly watching as Cross approaches the wall. We slowly zoom in on what is hanging there: it is the dedication plaque from the Bridge of the Enterprise, scorched and scratched, but otherwise still in decent condition.

Cross looks at the plaque for a moment, sadly, then slowly walks over to the wall and affixes the sign to the bulkhead underneath the plaque. It reads:

IN MEMORIAM

U.S.S. ENTERPRISE

NCC-1701-G

"You treat her like a lady,
she'll always bring you home."

--Adm. L.H. McCoy

Cross backs away from the sign and the plaque, as the onlookers applaud mutely. He nods in satisfaction.

CROSS

I'm sorry that we couldn't have a
more fitting service to honor our
fallen ship -- and doubly sorry
that we knew her for such a short
time.

STOLT

Three years. We only had three
years with her.

GREY

I wouldn't trade a day of it.

There are nods all around. Quinlan looks around.

QUINLAN

This may sound awful, under the
circumstances, but... I'm glad
she went the way she did.

QUINLAN(CONT'D)

I remember when they nearly left her in a graveyard, abandoned, left for scavengers for the scrap metal market. I wouldn't have liked that.

Schindler opens his mouth to say something, hesitates, then plunges forward:

SCHINDLER

I think it's a fitting tribute, Captain. I just hope we can move it to Earth someday.

Cross looks at him, and half-smiles.

CROSS

Well-put, Ensign.

He takes his own glass from a table and raises it.

CROSS (CONT'D)

To the Enterprise. She served us well, and she will be missed.

ALL

The Enterprise.

As one, they raise their glasses and drink.

CROSS

Before this gathering concludes, I want to thank you all once again for coming to Epsilon. None of you had to -- and more than a few of you made sacrifices to be here, sacrifices which could not be asked of anyone. It is appreciated, to say the least, and while I cannot promise victory in this war, I can promise that your efforts will not be forgotten. At least, not while I draw breath.

He pauses, looks at his former crew who are looking at him intently, a few of them nodding.

CROSS (CONT'D)

In the last hours, days and weeks, I've heard each of you call me Captain at least once. Since I'm now officially a Captain in the Coalition Militia, you can continue to do so. But please remember that, for most of you, I am no longer your commanding officer.

CROSS(CONT'D)

We all serve the Coalition Council at this time. Many of you will be assigned to different crews; some of you will leave Epsilon entirely in the near future. This may be the last time that all of us are together. But never forget that we are...

He pauses again, considers, then smiles.

CROSS (CONT'D)

We are a family.

(beat)

I was reluctant to use that word -
- I'm not the sentimental type, far from it -- but that's how it is. This is the connection that comes after the experiences we have shared. So whatever happens, wherever the coming battles will take us, never forget who you are. Never forget this moment, here, now. And never forget that I will always be proud to call every one of you my comrade-in-arms... and my friend.

Still smiling, he raises his glass again.

CROSS (CONT'D)

To absent friends, and the ones that are here.

A chorus of agreement as glasses are raised in another toast. Then, the meeting breaks up. People head toward the doors of the Rec Lounge, or break up into groups to head elsewhere in the lounge, or gather around for a better look at the Enterprise memorial.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. EPSILON -- REC LOUNGE

Later on. Most of the Rec Lounge tables are full, with both familiar and unfamiliar faces. Several people from the Enterprise are still here; we zoom in on Grey, Quinlan, Stolt and Kaplan seated around a table near the large picture windows. We see Cross and Talora talking in the background, as well as COUNCILLOR AIA and another Sejrekan, SUROS, signing to one another. At this table, Kaplan is resting comfortably in the crook of Stolt's arm.

KAPLAN

We didn't get out until two weeks after San Francisco.

KAPLAN(CONT'D)

The full travel restrictions were in place by then, so we didn't have an easy time of it.

STOLT

Fortunately, I got in touch with a hacker -- a friend of Cale, actually. She got us fresh identity documentation.

KAPLAN

That's right. Say hello to Mr. and Mrs. LaRochelle of Upper New York.

Grey and Quinlan -- sitting next to one another but maintaining a respectable personal distance -- chuckle.

QUINLAN

At least you didn't have to have your appearance altered. Erik had to pose as an Andorian at once point.

STOLT

I guess we're relatively low on the food chain.

KAPLAN

Nat...

STOLT

(quickly)
Sorry, I didn't mean to suggest--

GREY

It's all right. We were higher profile than you; it's just a fact of life. I guess we should be flattered, actually.

QUINLAN

There you go. It's an honor to have people want your head on a silver platter.

STOLT

I suppose so. Anyway, from Earth we took a passenger vessel to Risa, and disappeared into the crowd there.

KAPLAN

We finally had a proper honeymoon.

STOLT

Didn't really get much of one on the Enterprise, did we? After that the Captain sent his message, and we hooked up with the captain of the trader ship Alex Bowman. The rest you probably know.

KAPLAN

What about you guys? I heard you came in with Rocco.

QUINLAN

That's right.

STOLT

I've heard rumors about Rocco... What's his last name?

Grey and Quinlan look at each other.

GREY

I thought that was his last name.

QUINLAN

Who knows?

(to Kaplan)

Rocco's a private kind of guy. We came here with him, but we probably don't know more about him than you do. To us, he's just Rocco.

STOLT

So how did he pick you up? Was it on Earth?

GREY

No, we got out before you did. Booked passage to Alpha Centauri, and with the help of one of Jen's old friends, we got a mark 4 shuttle to get away from the Centre.

QUINLAN

(scoffing)

One of my old friends. He neglected to mention that that pile of crap didn't go past warp 5.

STOLT

Where did you go from there?

GREY

The Drayon system.

KAPLAN

Drayon? From Alpha Centauri at warp 5... That must have taken weeks!

STOLT

In a mark 4 shuttle, no less. Cramped, not very comfortable, minimal replicator systems -- you two must have been at each others' throats by the time you reached Drayon.

Pause. Grey and Quinlan look at each other again.

GREY

Well...

QUINLAN

There were moments.

GREY

Definitely moments there.

QUINLAN

Touch and go for a while.

GREY

Yeah.

Another, somewhat embarrassed pause. Stolt looks between the two of them, and is about to say something...

...when a light suddenly glows into the Rec Lounge from the windows. Grey and Quinlan turn to look. Their eyes widen, their jaws hang as they stand and look out the windows. The Rec Lounge is silent as everyone does the same.

Outside, the stars are on fire.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE

As we look at Epsilon and its surroundings, it seems that space itself is glowing with a fiery light, blue-green laced with gold. Dazzling white particles flicker here and there, dancing within the glow. Beyond Epsilon, the local sun is shining fiercely.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- REC LOUNGE

At their own table, Talora turns to Cross.

TALORA

What is this?

CROSS

I heard about this. It's a polyneutrino flare. It's a unique phenomenon; only a few stars in the galaxy, including this one, emit this level of polyneutrinos.

TALORA

Are we in danger?

CROSS

Only from radiation, and there's no danger there -- we have more than adequate shielding. The nearby ships should be alerted, though -- some of them might have to raise shields, or even leave the system temporarily. I'm going to the Command Center.

They leave the Rec Lounge together. At another table, Aia and Suros turn to each other and sign to one another frantically; their gloves are off, so we cannot hear their conversation.

Back at Quinlan's table, Quinlan smiles.

QUINLAN

It's beautiful, whatever it is.

Under the table, out of sight from the others, her hand reaches for Grey's and squeezes it.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE

Another view of Epsilon, some time later. The space in the system is still glowing, but not quite as intently as before. Many of the ships are gone, having taken refuge out of the system or in the umbra of gas giants. Most of the remaining ships are hiding behind larger asteroids or are sitting there with their shields raised; every so often a dancing white particle collides with a shield, creating a brief miniature light show.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- COMMAND CENTER

The glow from outside is shining through the command center windows as people work at their stations. Carla is moving from station to station, closely scrutinising what each crewman is doing; Cross stands at the planning table with ROCCO, who is looking down at a map of system S14-97.

ROCCO

My own ship, the Ryujin, and about twenty other ships have taken position behind the fifth planet, the largest gas giant in this system. Most of them can hold station there for months, if necessary; those that can't can leave if they have to.

CROSS

Well from what I understand, these flares only last a matter of hours. They tend to occur in multiples, however -- so we can expect at least two or three more in the days ahead.

ROCCO

I'll keep our formation in the loop.

CROSS

Very good. I appreciate your help with this. We're a bit undermanned up here, and manpower is a valuable commodity.

ROCCO

I'm happy to help.

A pause as Rocco looks at Cross, appraising him.

ROCCO (CONT'D)

I'm also happy to finally meet you, Captain. I've heard a lot about you.

Cross sizes the other man up.

CROSS

I wish I could say the same about you, Mr. Rocco.

ROCCO

(smiling)
Just Rocco is fine.

Beat.

CROSS

Okay. Rocco.

Rocco looks over his shoulder, where Carla is approaching.

ROCCO

I hope we can talk again
sometime.

He nods and walks toward the turbolift as Carla walks up to Cross. They watch him leave the Command Center.

CARLA

What do you think, Captain?

CROSS

Our new friend? He's competent,
and by all accounts a good ship
captain. But honestly, I'm not
sure what to make of him.

CARLA

I've asked around, and no one
seems to know anything about him.
Secretive type.

CROSS

Hmm. That doesn't exactly score
him in the plus column.

(beat)

But as I said, we can use all the
help we can get. How's the rest
of the fleet going?

CARLA

Everyone is safe now.

She looks down at a padd in her hand before handing it to Cross.

CARLA (CONT'D)

You can probably make more sense
of this than I can.

Cross takes it off her and studies it for a second.

CROSS

The good news is, we can expect
the polynutrino concentration to
diminish beneath the hazardous
range in about eight hours.

CARLA

The bad news?

CROSS

There will be another flare in less than twenty-four hours, and yet another one in about sixty. We're in for a long week.

He hands the padd back to Carla, who looks at it and grunts.

CROSS (CONT'D)

How severely were the communications disrupted the last time this happened?

CARLA

Long-range subspace transceivers are usually inoperable during the flares, but we shouldn't have a problem with short-range signals.

CROSS

Sensors?

CARLA

More severely affected. If Starfleet picks this moment to attack us, we won't know about it until they're at our back door. But since we have enough ships to do it now, I would suggest we post sentry ships around the Kupier Belt. We'd have a little more warning that way.

CROSS

Sure -- for all the good it does us. Sensors or not, we have no thrusters, no way to run or hide from Starfleet if they show up.

Carla sighs and rolls her eyes.

CARLA

I know, I know. I brought it up at the last Council meeting. We're looking into the problem.

CROSS

Well you'd better look faster, Carla, because right now, Epsilon is a sitting duck.

SUROS (O.S.)

(signing)

I think I can help you with that, Captain.

Cross and Carla look toward the turbolift, to where Aia and Suros are walking toward them. Aia nods a greeting.

AIA
 (signing)
 Commander Petrucci, Captain
 Cross, I would like you to meet
 Suros. A colleague, and an old
 friend from the western continent
 on Sejreko.

SUROS
 (aloud)
 Pleased to meet you.

His speech is slower and more clunky than Aia's, as though he has had less experience in spoken language. Carla and Cross nod to him.

CARLA
 How do you do.

CROSS
 You say you can help us? How?

SUROS
 (signing)
 You are correct that, if
 Starfleet shows up, we cannot
 run. Station Epsilon has no
 thrusters or engines, and it is
 massive enough that dozens of
 ships would be required to tow it
 even at a small fraction of
 impulse.
 (beat)
 However, they may be a way that
 we can hide from them.

CROSS
 How?

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- CONFERENCE ROOM

Cross, Carla, Suros, Aia, Talora, PETER HAMILTON and KIERAN MACGREGOR are gathered around the table, with Suros standing at the front near the viewscreen. They look at one another.

MACGREGOR
 A cloaking device?

SUROS
 (signing)
 No, not a cloaking device.

SUROS (CONT'D)

A masking device. As you know, a cloak is impractical with this station because of the polyneutrino field. However, we can take advantage of this very field, as a power source, to mask the station.

HAMILTON

How would this be different from a cloak?

SUROS

(signing)

The station would still be visible to the naked eye, and to the most powerful short-range sensors. In every other sense, however, it would be undetectable.

TALORA

I've seen studies on the practicality of such devices. They are less efficient than cloaking, and the power requirements would be prohibitive.

Suros smiles.

SUROS

(aloud)

It is possible, here.

MACGREGOR

How?

SUROS

(signing)

The same thing that makes a cloaking device impossible: the polyneutrino field. We use an inverse phase modulator, combined with a subspace coil--

CROSS

No need for the Technish, Mr. Suros, we believe you. Bottom line, please.

SUROS

(signing)

We polarize the station hull and use it to tap into the polynetrinos themselves, which both provides a power source and aids in the masking effect itself.

AIA

(signing)

The bottom line, Captain, is that what wouldn't be possible almost anywhere else in the galaxy would be possible here. We can hide from Starfleet.

Cross and Talora exchange glances.

TALORA

It would seem I owe Commander Petrucci an apology. This may be a good place for the Federalist headquarters after all.

CROSS

Looks that way. Suros, how soon can you have the masking device installed and ready to test?

SUROS

(signing)

A week.

CROSS

Assume that you had an exceptionally good engineering staff to work with, who are dedicated to doing whatever it takes to fight Starfleet -- and, incidentally, are extremely concerned with saving their own asses. How long?

Beat pause.

SUROS

(aloud)

Two or three days.

Cross stands; the others around the table stand with him.

CROSS

Take whatever manpower and resources you require.

Carla looks at him.

CARLA

Excuse me...!

CROSS

Yes, I almost forgot: Miss Petrucci, as station commander, will authorize the re-allocation. She knows how badly we need this device, and that she'd be a fool not to.

A long pause. Carla gives Cross a withering look, then nods at Suros.

CARLA

Whatever you need is yours.

SUROS

(signing)

Thank you both. I'll get started at once.

He turns to leave the room, Aia following. Carla glares at Cross once again before moving to catch up with them. The others at the table look at one another.

MACGREGOR

Think it'll work?

TALORA

It has to. Even with our expanded fleet, we're more vulnerable here than most of us realize.

HAMILTON

Well, take it from me -- if we have to pin all our hopes on something, there are worse things to choose than Sejrekan ingenuity. They know how to get things done.

Cross nods, and looks out the window, at the fiercely glowing starscape.

CROSS

Let's hope so.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- CORRIDOR

The corridors are now relatively empty and quiet; only a couple of people are seen coming and going as Grey and Quinlan round a bend and walk towards us, arms around each others' waists. Quinlan looks relieved.

QUINLAN

I thought they'd never leave.
It's almost like they wanted to
show each other off, you know
what I mean?

GREY

I guess that's what married life
does to you.

QUINLAN

I wouldn't know, thank God.

GREY

Me neither.

They look at each other, and laugh.

QUINLAN

So if that's a marriage, then
what is this?

Grey looks at her, querying.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

What we have. Is this a
relationship, an affair, what?

Grey considers for a moment, then shrugs.

GREY

In my mind, I just call it a
thing.

Quinlan drags him to a stop in the corridor.

QUINLAN

(wide-eyed)

A "thing?"

GREY

Yeah. I'm a male, so I'm
genetically predispositioned to
call it a thing. As in, Jen and I
have a thing going on. Or, we are
a thing. Whichever you prefer.

QUINLAN

Is that all I am to you? Not even
a thing, but half of a thing? Or
in a thing?

Grey looks at her, looks quickly up and down the corridor
to check that it's empty at the moment, then leans down and
kisses her, long and deeply. He pulls back and looks into
her eyes.

GREY

You're definitely something.

She looks at him a moment, then smiles. They continue down the corridor.

QUINLAN

By the way, Erik, is there any particular reason that we're keeping this a secret?

Grey furrows his eyebrows in thought.

GREY

Hmm. I guess it just never occurred to me not to keep it a secret. It's like the Watergate scandal: someone asked one of the conspirators who ordered the cover-up, and the conspirator said, "Actually, no one ever suggested that there not be a cover-up."

QUINLAN

Water-what?

GREY

Political history. Pre-space flight, I think. I'll tell you all about it later, if you're interested.

QUINLAN

I'm really not. But I also took it for granted that we wouldn't tell anyone. I don't know why.

Pause.

GREY

Maybe we should tell them.

QUINLAN

Yeah, we should.

Another pause.

GREY

But later.

QUINLAN

(quickly)

Yeah, later. People have enough on their minds right now.

GREY

Exactly. We don't want to add to their troubles.

QUINLAN

No we don't.

GREY

Fine, then.

QUINLAN

Yeah.

They arrive at the door to Grey's quarters. Grey enters his access code, and the door opens. The window on the opposite side of the room shows the fiercely glowing starscape; the light coming from it is bright enough to read by. Quinlan sighs in pleasure and steps into the room.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

Isn't that the most beautiful thing you've ever seen?

GREY

Almost.

Quinlan looks at him. Grey, still standing in the doorway, is gazing at her, a slight smile on his face. She runs a finger down his chest.

QUINLAN

Monkey-wrench boy.

(beat)

Have you ever made love beneath a burning sky?

Grey shakes his head.

GREY

First time for everything, I guess.

QUINLAN

You got it.

She grabs the front of his shirt and pulls him into the room. The doors close, cutting them off from our view, as we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- GREY'S QUARTERS

The burning sky from beyond the window is still bright, but softer now, more muted. It shines down upon clothing strewn on the floor and the furniture in the living room -- uniform pieces, belts, undergarments. Muffled voices can be heard from nearby.

Our POV moves past the half-wall partition that separates the living room from the bedroom, where we see Grey and Quinlan in bed, sheets pulled up to beneath their bare shoulders. They are grinning as they gaze at each other and hold up their hands, palms facing each other.

QUINLAN

See, told you yours were bigger.

GREY

I already knew that. But the really interesting thing is this...

He holds up his other hand, so that his two pinky fingers are touching. Quinlan looks for a moment.

QUINLAN

I don't see anythi--

(beat)

Oh! Your pinkies are different sizes!

GREY

Yep. My left is 2.7 millimeters longer than my right.

QUINLAN

I've never seen that before.

GREY

I forget the name for it, but it's a very rare genetic condition. One in several million. Nothing remarkable about it, really, other than that my fingers are different lengths.

(beat)

So, anything else you want to show me?

QUINLAN

No. That is, not unless you want to see my birthmark again.

She raises her eyebrows suggestively. Grey laughs and playfully elbows her. Quinlan grabs his elbow and digs her nails in.

GREY
Ow! Cut it out!

Quinlan lets go.

QUINLAN
(grinning)
Watch where you're sticking that elbow. Just because I'm in love with you doesn't mean I'll--

She breaks off, gazes at nothing for a moment, then sighs and flops down onto her pillow.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)
Damn. I didn't know I was going to say that.

Grey looks at her.

GREY
(quietly)
That you're in love with me?

QUINLAN
Yeah. I never said it before, not even to myself. I was like you, I guess -- I just treated this as a "thing." Take it seriously or not, whatever will happen will happen.

She pauses, then looks at him.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)
But it's true. I've fallen for you, Erik Grey. At some point in the last three years, I fell and didn't even realize it. I don't even know when.
(beat)
I've always liked you and respected you. I guess we got to be closer friends as time went on. But honestly, I didn't see this coming.

They are quiet for a moment. Grey takes her hand in both of his and kisses it.

GREY
Remember that first night in the shuttle from Centauri?

QUINLAN

(smiling)

You think it's even remotely possible that I would forget? No elbow room, minimal life support, and the fear of discovery constantly breathing down our necks. It was cold, too cold, no matter how much we fiddled with the environmental controls. And it stank.

GREY

To high heaven.

QUINLAN

Yeah.

GREY

But that night...

QUINLAN

Yeah.

(wistful sigh)

It was cold, and cramped, and there was only one sleeping mat, so I guess it was only natural--

GREY

You told me I could sleep on the bulkhead.

Quinlan laughs.

QUINLAN

I was joking, dummy.

GREY

You sure about that?

QUINLAN

Positive. I would have felt guilty about it all the way to Drayon. You were going to anyway, of course, until I told you that we could share the sleeping mat, that I didn't bite. But then, it turns out that you did.

Grey blinks.

GREY

What?

QUINLAN

I was falling asleep, and you made a move on me.

A pause, that stretches out as Grey looks at her in disbelief.

GREY

I made a move on you? You made a move on me!

QUINLAN

(frowning)

No, it was you. I rolled over, and you took me into your arms.

GREY

Bull. My arms happened to be there, and you rolled right into them.

QUINLAN

Okay. But then you kissed me.

GREY

You kissed me.

Quinlan looks at him, and props herself up on her elbows.

QUINLAN

Why are you trying to blame me for this?

GREY

I'm not assigning blame either way, Jen, I just think we ought to get our facts straight. You rolled into my arms and kissed me.

QUINLAN

You leaned toward me for a kiss.

GREY

So did you.

Quinlan opens her mouth to speak, pauses it, then laughs. Grey laughs with her.

QUINLAN

Okay, well, even if you had a passive role in the whole thing at that moment, you certainly took a more active role later on.

GREY

As did you. Okay, why don't we just say it was a mutual thing, and leave it at that?

QUINLAN
That sounds good.

A long, comfortable pause. She reaches over and takes his hand.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)
We didn't talk.
(beat)
That whole night, before, during
or after. We didn't say a word to
each other.

GREY
I guess I don't say that much
anyway.

QUINLAN
No, you don't, but when you have
something to say, you're usually
not shy about it.

Grey looks at her, then leans over and kisses her lips.

GREY
(quietly)
Sometimes we don't need words.
(beat)
I guess nothing needed to be said
that night. It was like... like
we knew it was going to happen.

QUINLAN
Like we were waiting for it to
happen.

GREY
Yeah.

They gaze at each other. Grey leans forward to kiss her again.

The doorbell chirps.

QUINLAN
Shit!

Quinlan leaps out of the bed, pulling the sheets with her to cover her naked form, and begins gathering clothing from the floor and putting it into the closet, stuffing it under furniture, generally getting it out of sight.

As she finishes, Grey joins her in the living room, wearing a conservative bathrobe. Quinlan looks around as the doorbell chirps again, looks down at herself, then looks at Grey desperately.

GREY
(whispering)
Closet.

He opens the closet door, half-guides and half-shoves Quinlan in there, and closes the door.

Then he composes himself, smooths out his hair, and takes a last, quick look around.

GREY (CONT'D)
Come in, please.

The door opens, and ENSIGN JAY BAXTER is standing there, a young man wearing his old Starfleet uniform. Grey's face lights up.

GREY (CONT'D)
Baxter! Great to see you!

Baxter steps into the room and shakes Grey's outstretched hand.

BAXTER
Good to see you, Chief. Sorry I wasn't at the dedication ceremony yesterday, I had to work a double shift in reactor control.

GREY
That's okay. I'm glad you made it.

BAXTER
You too. Um...

He looks down at Grey's bathrobe.

BAXTER (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, sir, did I come at a bad time?

GREY
(quickly)
No, not at all. I was just getting ready for the day.

BAXTER
Oh, okay... Anyway, they wanted me to find you and bring you down to reactor control. This Sejrekan guy, Suros, has us working around the clock on a project of his. I think it might actually work, too.

GREY

What is it?

BAXTER

A masking device. Suros thinks he can mask the station from Starfleet's sensors using the polyneutrino field in this system.

Grey considers for a moment. He nods.

GREY

Right. Use them as part of the masking effect and as a power source, by polarizing the hull using an inverse phase modulator and a subspace coil--

BAXTER

Yeah, he explained that to us earlier. My eyes glazed over a bit, but it sounds okay to me. Anyway, they want you down there to help in the installation and calibration as soon as possible.

GREY

I'll be there shortly.

BAXTER

Great, I'll tell them. Good to see you again, Chief.

GREY

You bet.

Baxter nods, and walks out of the quarters. Grey breathes a sigh of relief, and starts toward the closet door.

The doorbell chirps again.

Grey freezes, slowly turns toward it.

GREY (CONT'D)

...come in?

The door opens. An unfamiliar person is standing there, a big, burly man wearing a dark uniform covered in grease and soot. This is LYMAN. He nods politely and steps into the room.

GREY (CONT'D)

Can I help you, Mr...?

LYMAN

Lyman, sir, from maintenance.
Sorry to bother you this early in
the morning, sir.

Grey glances sideways at the closet door.

GREY

Not at all. How can I help you?

LYMAN

We got some reports of strange
noises from this habitat section,
early this morning. It sounded
like banging, or pounding of some
kind. Did you happen to hear
anything?

A long pause.

GREY

No. Not a thing.

LYMAN

Okay. I'm just going around to
all the quarters in this section,
trying to track it down. Could be
nothing. Voles in the pipework.

GREY

Or someone's party got out of
hand.

LYMAN

Yeah, maybe. Anyway, sorry to
bother you, sir.

GREY

No problem. Have a good day.

Lyman nods and lets himself out of the quarters. Grey
stands frozen for a minute, then shakes his head and turns
toward the closet.

The doorbell chirps again.

GREY (CONT'D)

Oh gods, what do you want...

The doors open.

GREY (CONT'D)

...Captain?

Cross is standing there in the doorway, staring at Grey. He
blinks.

CROSS

I'm sorry, Commander, have I come at a bad--

GREY

No, of course not, sir, please come in.

CROSS

Are you sure? I can come back.

GREY

No, that's fine -- I'm always happy to see you, of course.

Cross steps into the quarters, the doors closing behind him. The two men stand there for a moment in awkward silence.

CROSS

Are you settling in all right?

GREY

Yes sir. The quarters are fine.

CROSS

I know they're not what you're used to from the Enterprise, but...

GREY

I'll manage, sir. I always do.

CROSS

Good.

Another moment of awkward silence.

GREY

Is there something I can do for you, Captain?

CROSS

Yeah, actually, the reason I came... The engineering staff was trying to contact you last night and early this morning. I guess the comm lines are down in this area.

GREY

Yes, sir, about half the things are down here. I can tell that a lot of the repairs are patchwork.

CROSS

They don't have a lot of tools or material to work with. Anyway, they're working on installing a--

GREY

Masking device. Yes, sir, Baxter was just here. He told me all about it. I'm on my way to lend a hand shortly.

CROSS

Oh, good! They could certainly use you down there, Erik. They could use everyone right now. The sooner the masking device is up and tested, the sooner we can all breathe a sigh of relief.

GREY

Yes, sir.

Another awkward pause.

GREY (CONT'D)

Was there something else?

CROSS

No, not really.

(beat)

I was just looking for something to do, actually. The fleet is effectively shut down during the polynutrino storm, so I feel sort of like a fifth wheel around here.

(beat)

It's probably not dignified for a Captain to say that he's bored, but... I'm bored. That's it, really.

Grey nods in understanding.

GREY

Well, as long as you're here, sir, can I get you something to drink?

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- GREY'S QUARTERS -- CLOSET

Quinlan, standing in the dark with a sheet wrapped around her body, quietly groans and pounds her head against the wall.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- GREY'S QUARTERS

As before.

CROSS

Sure, that's fine. I guess your replicators are working, eh?

GREY

One blessed relief. Have a seat, sir, and what can I get you?

Cross sits down on the couch.

CROSS

Hot chocolate, touch of mint.

Grey nods, smiles, and walks to the replicator on the other side of the room. He tabs it on.

GREY

One raktajino, extra sweet, and one hot chocolate, touch of mint.

As he says this, Cross looks out the window at the glowing stars. He smiles, then looks around the room, his eyes randomly wandering. His eye falls upon something at his feet: a small piece of blue fabric, sticking out from under the couch.

He glances back at Grey, who is attentively waiting for the beverages to materialize in the replicator, then surreptitiously uses his foot to pull the piece of fabric out. His eyes widen as a blue brassiere comes out under his foot.

GREY (CONT'D)

Here we are.

Cross quickly shoves the bra back under the couch with his foot, and scrambles to his feet as Grey comes over with the drinks. He takes the cup of chocolate from Grey, and takes a single sip.

CROSS

(quickly)

Hmm, that's quite good. Well, thanks for the drink, Grey -- I really must be going now.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Be sure you come up to the
Command Centre when you have a
chance, so I can show you around
there.

He thrusts the cup of chocolate back into Grey's hands and
turns to leave.

GREY

But...

CROSS

Have a good day. Good luck with
the masking device.

He leaves the quarters. Grey stares at the closed doors for
a moment, dumbfounded. Then he shrugs, sets the drinks down
on the table, and walks to the closet door.

GREY

You can come out now.

The closet door opens, and Quinlan emerges, glaring at
Grey.

QUINLAN

You sure you don't want to make
him breakfast too?

GREY

(sighing)

He's the Captain, Jen. You can't
just toss him out of your
quarters.

QUINLAN

Maybe you can't.

A pause, then her face softens.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

It's okay, I understand -- like
you say, he's the Captain.
Anyway, you'd better go -- it
sounds like they need you down
there.

Grey raises an eyebrow, and pulls Quinlan into his arms.

GREY

I have a little time. Not much,
but a little.

Quinlan grins.

QUINLAN

Better make it fast, then.

GREY
That's not what you said last
night.

She laughs, and pulls him down for a kiss.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE

Outside station Epsilon. The glow from the sky is much softer now, about the same a decent Northern Lights display.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- COMMAND CENTER

A busy moment in the Command Center, as various crew members go about their business. Cross, Carla and Rocco are looking over Felix's shoulders at his display console.

FELIX
According to this, the second
flare will hit in about ninety
seconds.

CARLA
Have all ships reported in?

FELIX
Yes sir, all vessels have been
tucked away nicely.

CARLA
Very good.

Rocco turns to Cross.

ROCCO
So Captain, what's this I hear
about a masking device for the
station?

CROSS
Something a resident Sejrekan
scientist came up with. Assuming
it works according to the theory,
Starfleet will be unable to
detect us with sensors once it's
activated.

ROCCO
How does it work?

CROSS
We polarize the hull using an
inverse phase--

CARLA
We've got it covered, let's just
leave it at that.

ROCCO
(shrugging)
Fair enough.

A crewman from across the room looks up over his shoulder.

CREWMAN
Commander? Incoming long-range
transmission?

Carla frowns in surprise, and walks toward the crewman.

CARLA
This had better be good -- we're
going dark in less than a minute.

Cross and Rocco remain where they are. Cross turns back to
Rocco.

CROSS
Listen, the Karthos had a problem
with their ablative armor -- the
polyneutrinos have been gathering
in pockets there, and are
compromising the hull integrity.
Have any of your ships reported
similar problems?

ROCCO
Yeah, just one, the T'larmi.
She's a junker, scraped together
from various spare parts. I
believe that includes Romulan-
design ablative armoring.

CROSS
Great time for a design flaw to
pop up, eh? Anyway, Talora has
the Karthos keeping position
behind the fifth planet while
they replace the affected hull
sections.

ROCCO
They can't simply repair it?

CROSS
(shaking his head)
It's too far gone.

CROSS(CONT'D)

I suggest you have the T'larmi do the same thing.

CARLA

(shouting)

Captain Cross! Come quickly!

Cross looks at the wide-eyed Carla, across the room at a communications console. He runs over to join her, Rocco following. Carla points him at the screen. Cross looks.

He inhales, and bends down to the screen.

CROSS

Lea!

The face on the screen is static-distorted, but still recognizable as ELRIS LEA. When she speaks, her voice is similarly distorted, cutting in and out.

ELRIS

Neil... that you?

CROSS

It's me, Lea. Are you all right? Where are you now?

ELRIS

We're at... hours from Epsilon... losing life support, and our... longer we can hold out, and we can't... under our own power.

Cross looks at Carla.

CARLA

Something about a skirmish with a Starfleet patrol. They're losing life support, and can't make it to this system under their own power.

Cross nods, and turns back to the screen.

CROSS

Lea, if you can hear me, we're going to lose communications in a few seconds -- no time to explain why. You have to transmit your coordinates so that we can send someone out after you.

The image of Elris looks down at something, then looks back up.

ELRIS

...transmitting now. Neil, Starfleet... in this area. You--

There is a sharp POP sound, and Elris's image is replaced by static. Outside, the sky suddenly glows once again, more fiercely than before.

FELIX
Polyneutrino flare. Radiation
shields holding.

CROSS
Did we get those coordinates?

The crewman checks his readings, and shakes his head.

CREWMAN
Sorry, sir. The data was cut off
in mid-transmission.

Cross pounds the console with his fist in frustration. As he seethes, Rocco goes to an adjoining console and quietly speaks to the crewman there.

CARLA
I'm sorry, Captain.

Cross wheels on her.

CROSS
She's alive, she's out there, and
she needs our help. Don't tell me
we can't do anything about it,
because I'll be damned to just
sit here and do nothing!

CARLA
I share your feelings, but what
can we do? We can't just go out
there and fly around, hoping
we'll bump into her. We don't
have the time or resources for
that.

Rocco steps away from his own console and turns to them.

ROCCO
Okay, a couple of my ships were
able to catch the transmission,
and we're working on a rough
triangulation.

CROSS
Will it be good enough to find
her?

ROCCO

I think that, plus the partial set of coordinates we did receive, will be enough for a reasonable-sized search area. It looks like it's about a two-day round trip, maybe less for our fastest ships.

Cross and Carla exchange glances.

CARLA

The Karthos?

CROSS

Too dangerous for her to leave her position while she's undergoing repairs; the entire crew might receive a lethal radiation dose.

ROCCO

Sir, the Ryujin is almost as fast. I have her parked behind a nearby asteroid; we can leave at once with your permission.

CARLA

Granted.

CROSS

I'm coming with you.

Beat pause.

ROCCO

No, Captain.

Cross looks at him, his face turning red.

CROSS

(slowly)

I said I'm coming with you.

ROCCO

You're the acting fleet commander, sir; your place is here on Epsilon.

CROSS

There's nothing I can do here!

ROCCO

With respect, Captain, there's nothing you can do on the Ryujin either. You'd be dead weight. You'd get in the way, that's all.

ROCCO (CONT'D)

The fewer excess baggages we need to worry about, the faster we can get out there and start searching.

CARLA

He's right, Captain. You need to stay here.

Slowly, the anger on Cross's face turns to helplessness; he deflates as he realizes that they are right. Rocco hesitates, then puts a hand on Cross's shoulder.

ROCCO

I'll find her. I promise.

Cross looks up at him, a fierce intensity in his eyes.

CROSS

You'd better.

Rocco returns his look, then turns to jog out of the command center into a turbolift. The doors close behind him. Cross sighs and collapses into an empty seat. Carla looks at him sympathetically.

CROSS (CONT'D)

It's not right. I was there for her before; I should be now.

CARLA

Captain... Neil... The best way for you to be there for her now is to do what you can to save her, and let others do the same. You can't do everything yourself.

Cross nods at her words, but they obviously don't make him feel any better. On his worried face, we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

INT. EPSILON -- REACTOR CONTROL

A large, circular room deep within the depths of the station, filled with tools and computer consoles. Two doors lead out into corridors on one side, and there is a hatch on the other side; a sign above this hatch identifies it as REACTOR ACCESS.

The room is swarming with activity at the moment. Grey is on one side of the room, working with Baxter at a console.

GREY

Delta seven.

BAXTER

Check

GREY

Delta eight.

BAXTER

Check.

GREY

Delta nine.

Baxter frowns.

BAXTER

I'm reading a power fall-off in delta nine.

Grey looks over his console at the display screen.

GREY

Forty percent? That won't do at all... You sure the coupling has been visually inspected?

BAXTER

I inspected it myself.

GREY

Okay, try adjusting the feedback matrix. There may be a baryonic overload.

Baxter fiddles with the controls. Behind them, unnoticed by anyone, Quinlan enters the room and walks in their direction.

GREY (CONT'D)

A little more.

Baxter taps more keys.

GREY (CONT'D)

There we are. Power readings normal.

QUINLAN

The miracle worker himself, ladies and gentlemen.

They look back at Quinlan. Grey smiles.

GREY

Hey there.

QUINLAN

How're you boys doing?

BAXTER

Good, thanks, Lieutenant. I'll go check on the tertiary power couplings, Chief.

GREY

Right.

Baxter stands and moves to another console nearby. Grey turns to Quinlan.

GREY (CONT'D)

You here for a social visit?

QUINLAN

Don't I wish. They've got me working security detail, and I'm just doing a routine walk-through. Making sure nobody with a hidden transmitter is talking to Erika Joel.

Grey chuckles.

GREY

Well things are just fine here. I think we'll be finished in another twelve, sixteen hours.

QUINLAN

Good. So I'll find you later, then?

GREY

You got it.

They smile. A pause, then Quinlan moves toward him for a kiss.

GREY (CONT'D)
 (whispering)
 Not here.

Quinlan steps back as if slapped. Grey is still smiling, but shaking his head very slightly. She looks around -- the room is filled with people, but no one appears to be paying attention to them. She looks back at Grey, glares, and turns to leave the room.

Grey looks after her, a little embarrassed, then goes over to join Baxter.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- GREY'S QUARTERS

Quinlan is sitting on the edge of Grey's bed in a nightgown, staring out at the stars. The stars are again glowing mutely, not as fiercely, though they are still lovely to look at.

As she gazes out at them, we hear the doors open and close, and Grey appears at the partition, unbuttoning his uniform. He smiles down at her.

GREY
 Hey, stranger.

She doesn't respond. Grey sighs and sits on the bed next to her.

GREY (CONT'D)
 I'm sorry about before. I was...
 I guess I was a little
 embarrassed.

QUINLAN
 Embarrassed to be with me?

GREY
 No, damn it, you know what I
 mean.

QUINLAN
 No I don't. What do you mean?

She looks at him expectantly.

GREY
 Embarrassed... To be with anyone.
 (beat)
 Look, I'm used to things being a
 certain way. I'm used to work
 being work, and the rest of my
 life being what that is. And I
 have a thing about...

GREY (CONT'D)

fraternization in the workplace.
I tried that once, if you'll
remember.

QUINLAN

How could I forget? But Erik...

She looks into his eyes.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

I'm not Boyle. I'm not even
close.

Grey smiles a little

GREY

I noticed.
(beat)
Anyway, I didn't think it was
necessary. Jen, you already know
how I feel about you.

QUINLAN

No I don't.

GREY

Jen...

QUINLAN

Yesterday morning, when I told
you that I'm in love with you,
you didn't really answer me. You
started talking about something
else.

Grey looks at her, then stands up and starts changing out
of his uniform as he talks.

GREY

You have a freakishly good
memory, you know that?

QUINLAN

It's a gift.

GREY

Seriously. I wouldn't have
remembered that at all. I wonder
if that's a gender thing, or if
you and I are just--

QUINLAN

Erik, if you're not in love with
me, that's fine. I won't make you
say it. We can just keep doing
what we're doing and leave it at
that. Or we can stop, if you'd
prefer.

GREY
I most certainly would not
prefer.

Quinlan groans in exasperation.

QUINLAN
What is it, then?

Grey, stripped down to his undergarments, looks at her.

GREY
What is what?

QUINLAN
What are you getting out of this?
Is it all about the sex for you?

GREY
No.
(beat)
Although in our case, if it were
all about the sex, could you
blame me?

He grins a little. Quinlan opens his mouth to retort,
pauses, then laughs in spite of herself.

QUINLAN
(giggling)
I guess not.

Grey grabs a nearby shirt, puts it on, and sits down next
to her.

GREY
If you want to know the truth,
maybe I am -- was -- a little
afraid that you'd turn out to be
another Boyle. It's true, you're
almost nothing like her... But
how can I be sure my heart won't
be broken again?

Quinlan puts her hands on his shoulders.

QUINLAN
You can't. Not with me, not with
anyone. The only way to be sure
your heart will never be broken
is to never fall in love.

GREY
So why should I ever fall in
love?

Quinlan rolls her eyes.

QUINLAN

You idiot. It's not something you choose. Did you make a decision to fall in love with Boyle? Do you think I woke up one morning and said, "You know, I think I'll fall in love with Erik today?" Love has a mind of its own. It goes where it will. You can either follow it or not; either way, you risk a broken heart every time. That's the human condition, Erik. That's part of what it means to have one of these.

She puts her hand on his chest, over his heart. A long pause.

Grey takes her hand and holds it.

GREY

(slowly)

In that case, I might as well tell you--

A klaxon goes off, and a red light in the quarters starts to flash.

CROSS'S COMM VOICE

Red alert. All hands to action stations.

They both jump to their feet and quickly begin dressing.

QUINLAN

I'm in the Command Center.

GREY

Reactor control. We'll talk about this later.

QUINLAN

Erik, you don't have to--

GREY

No. We'll talk about this later.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- COMMAND CENTER

The klaxon has been silenced, but the red lights are still flashing as Quinlan enters the CC through the turbolift. Cross, Carla and the usual assortment of crewmen are present.

CARLA

Do we have an updated ETA?

FELIX

No, sir. Our ship has gone dark,
she's not reporting any longer.

CALRA

That's probably safest.

Carla looks over her shoulder and notices Quinlan.

CARLA

One of our out-system patrol
ships spotted a Starfleet vessel
heading for this system. It will
be in sensor range in 14 minutes.

QUINLAN

Could it be a science vessel,
coming to study the polynutrino
phenomenon?

CARLA

Our patrol didn't think so. It
looked like a battleship.

Cross looks up from his console.

CROSS

It's no good. Our ships can't
destroy or disable it before it
would have a chance to report in.
If the polynutrino count were a
little higher, maybe, but right
now...

CARLA

Understood.

(beat)

We can't destroy the patrol, and
we can't run from it -- all
that's left is to hide. We use
the masking device.

CROSS

That won't be ready for another
four hours.

CARLA

Call reactor control, tell them
they've got ten minutes.

Cross, looking uncertain, tabs his console.

CROSS
Cross to reactor control

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- REACTOR CONTROL

The room is buzzing with activity. Grey runs up to a communications panel and turns it on.

GREY
Grey here. We're already on it,
Captain. How long do we have?

CROSS'S COMM VOICE
Ten minutes, no more.

GREY
We'll get it done. Out.

He turns off the panel, and turns to see Baxter standing nearby.

BAXTER
Commander, we still have about a
dozen polarization couplings and
a couple hundred safety checks to
perform.

GREY
No safety checks. The masking
device goes on in ten minutes
whether it's safe or not.

He moves to another console to work on something.

BAXTER
Sir, we still have three guys at
the reactor core. If something
goes wrong, if the baryonic
matrix loses integrity, they
won't make it!

Grey looks at him.

GREY
Can you handle those polarization
couplings?

BAXTER
Yes, sir.

GREY
Fine. You go down and help them.
You have seven minutes, then drop
everything and clear the reactor
core. Understood?

BAXTER

Yes, sir!

Without hesitation, Baxter runs toward the reactor access hatch and opens it. It leads to a narrow jeffries tube with a ladder going downward. Baxter mounts the ladder and disappears.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- COMMAND CENTER

Cross is pacing back and forth as Carla looks over Felix's shoulder.

CARLA

Any sightings from our Kupier patrols?

FELIX

No, Sir.

The turbolift doors open and Suros runs into the command center, signing frantically as he does so.

SUROS

(signing)

Captain, Commander, I need to speak with you!

CARLA

Not now, Suros.

SUROS

(aloud)

It's important!

Carla looks over his shoulder, then nods at Cross. Cross walks over to Suros, who shows him a padd. Cross looks at the padd, and frowns.

CROSS

You didn't see this before?

SUROS

(aloud)

No. Just now.

CROSS

You have absolutely no sense of time. Well... According to this, it's not very likely, is it?

SUROS

(signing)

No. But it's possible.

CROSS

We'll have to worry about it if and when it happens. Meanwhile, find a seat and stay out of the way.

He walks away from a nervous-looking Suros. Quinlan approaches him.

QUINLAN

Captain, is there anything I can do? I feel... Well, I kinda know what you mean by being a fifth wheel. Can I help?

Cross gives her a long, thoughtful look.

CROSS

Not here. Go down to reactor control, see if they need help.

QUINLAN

Yes, sir.

She turns to leave.

CROSS

Oh, and Jen...

She looks back.

CROSS (CONT'D)

It's about time.

QUINLAN

Sir?

CROSS

You and Grey. It's about time the two of you got together.

A long pause. Quinlan's jaw drops to the bulkhead.

QUINLAN

How did you...?

CROSS

Tell you later. Go, help them.

He gives her a dismissive wave.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- REACTOR CONTROL

Grey taps on the communications panel again.

GREY

Grey to Baxter. That's seven minutes, Jay -- clear the reactor core now.

BAXTER'S COMM VOICE

We still have three polarization couplings to install.

GREY

We'll have to go without. You and the others clear the reactor core now. That's an order, Mister.

BAXTER'S COMM VOICE

Sir, with respect, you know that incomplete masking might be just as bad as no masking at all. We can finish these connections, but only if we stay.

GREY

Baxter, you listen--

BAXTER'S COMM VOICE

Excuse me, sir, we're on a tight schedule, and I need to work rather than talk. Baxter out.

The line goes dead. Grey grimaces.

GREY

(muttering)

Damn stubborn...

He turns to crewmen standing nearby.

GREY (CONT'D)

Alright, keep an eye on those polarization readings, and let me know the instant they're all green. Meanwhile, run whatever safety checks you can.

CREWMAN

In two minutes, sir?

GREY

(with a shrug)

Best we can do.

Quinlan enters the reactor control room as the others go about their tasks. She walks up to Grey.

QUINLAN

Can I help? I'm useless in Command.

Grey looks up at her, hesitates, then nods.

GREY
 Sit down and run safety checks.
 The more we can get through the
 better.

Quinlan sits at the terminal next to Grey's and starts tapping away. They work in silence for a moment.

QUINLAN
 (quietly)
 Did you tell the Captain about
 us?

GREY
 Jen, honestly, this isn't the
 time--

QUINLAN
 Just answer me! Did you tell
 Cross about us?

GREY
 No, I didn't.

QUINLAN
 Neither did I. But he knows.

Grey looks at Quinlan in surprise.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)
 Don't ask me how, but he knows
 about us.

Grey stares at her for a brief moment, then turns back to his console and continues running checks.

GREY
 What did he say about it?

QUINLAN
 He just said it's about time.

A pause. Then Grey chuckles softly.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- COMMAND CENTER

As before.

CARLA
 ETA?

FELIX
 Three minutes, thirty seconds.

Carla turns to Cross.

CARLA

That could be off. We need that masking device now.

Cross nods and tabs a panel.

CROSS

Cross to reactor control. You know why I'm calling...

GREY'S COMM VOICE

Yes, sir. A few more seconds for the last polarization coupling. But sir, Baxter and three others are still in the reactor core.

Cross grimaces.

CROSS

Understood. Activate masking device the instant the last coupling is in place.

GREY'S COMM VOICE

Yes, sir.

Cross clicks off. Carla looks at him.

CARLA

You should have made that an order.

Cross sighs and shakes his head.

CROSS

I didn't need to.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- REACTOR CONTROL

Grey and Quinlan are still running checks. Nearby, a crewman is keeping an eye on his status screen. A red icon turns green.

CREWMAN

Sir, last coupling is in place.

GREY

That's it, everyone, stop all checks and hold on to something nailed down. Activating masking device... Now!

He taps a button.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE

The hull of Station Epsilon crackles with tiny bolts of electricity. Then there is a flash from the reactor core, and the hull begins to glow -- a faint, uniform glow across the hull of the entire station, as though Epsilon were trying to join the aural symphony of the sky around it.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- REACTOR CONTROL

Grey, Quinlan, and the other crew members look around as a sharp CRACK sound is heard, and the lights dim for a moment, then return to full intensity.

Silence for a moment.

QUINLAN

Did it work? Are we masked?

GREY

I'm afraid we're going to find
out the hard way.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- COMMAND CENTER

A similar scene here, as everyone is quietly looking around them. Felix looks up from his panel.

FELIX

Captain? Several of our ships are
reporting that Epsilon has
dropped off their sensor screens.

Cross looks over his shoulder.

CROSS

Tell all ships that they should
be dark right now. Those that
aren't over a gas giant's
magnetic pole should be in the
asteroid caves, or running
completely silent.

FELIX

Yes, Sir.

CARLA

It's good news, though. The device is working, at least for those ships.

CROSS

Yeah. Now we just need to hope it works where it needs to work.

CREWMAN

Commander! Starfleet vessel entering sensor range.

CARLA

This is it. Give me a sensory overview, main screen.

A map of the system appears on the main screen. As they watch, a blip appears at one edge of the screen and slowly travels toward the center. The CC is silent as they watch, and we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

INT. EPSILON -- COMMAND CENTER

As before. The blip on the screen continues moving toward the center of the system.

CROSS

They're not heading for us.

CARLA

They're not exactly heading away from us either.

She turns to address the crowd in the CC.

CARLA (CONT'D)

Folks, that Starfleet vessel could be here for hours, and this will either work or it won't. We should all return to our tasks. Nothing now but to hope for the best.

As she says this, Cross looks worried. He glances back at Suros, then turns to Felix.

CROSS

Give me a radiation reading.

FELIX

(tapping buttons)

Well as you might imagine with the polynutrino storm out there, it's--

CROSS

No, an internal reading.

FELIX

Inside the station? Let's see... Radiation inside the station is slightly above normal, but well within safety parameters.

CROSS

Stable?

Felix taps more buttons, and freezes. He looks up at Cross.

FELIX

No, sir. They're rising.

Carla, overhearing this, comes over to Felix's station.

CARLA
What's happening?

CROSS
(grimacing)
Radiation levels inside the
station are rising. Suros was
right.

CARLA
Right? About what?

CROSS
He realized that this might be a
problem just now: the masking
effect has nullified our
radiation shielding. The hull
polarization combined with the
passive energy barrier has set up
some sort of standing wave
pattern.

CARLA
Making both of them useless?

CROSS
No, the masking should be
unaffected, but the radiation
shielding will allow anything to
pass through. It's like we don't
have any.

FELIX
That would mean all that's
protecting us from the radiation
out there is the physical station
hull -- and that's not a lot of
protection, especially during a
polyneutrino storm.

Grey's voice comes onto the intercom.

GREY'S COMM VOICE
Grey to Command. Are you guys
watching the internal radiation
readings up there?

CROSS
We see it too, Commander. Stand
by.

GREY'S COMM VOICE
Captain, they're only getting
higher. Something must have
happened to the passive energy
shielding when we turned on the
masking device.

CROSS
We've already covered that up
here.

CREWMAN
Commander, the Starfleet vessel
is coming about.

Cross and Carla look at the main screen. The blip has
turned, and is going back the way it came.

CARLA
Any indication that it saw us?

CREWMAN
No, Sir.

CARLA
(dryly)
For what it's worth, the masking
device works.

CROSS
Too well. Cross to Grey. Prepare
to deactivate the masking device.

CARLA
Are you crazy!? Starfleet is
still out there!

CROSS
The standing wave effect is
caused by two forces interacting
with one another. We turn off one
of those forces, and that should
get rid of it.

FELIX
Radiation levels are now rising
past safety parameters.

CROSS
Felix, how long until lethal
exposure?

FELIX
Assuming they don't rise any
faster, we have a good couple of
hours. But that won't make much
of a difference.

CROSS
Why?

FELIX

Polyneutrino radiation has a particularly deleterious effect on certain neurological activity. It will knock us all out well before lethal exposure.

CROSS

How long?

Felix considers.

FELIX

I'd say fifteen or twenty minutes for us to start losing cognitive functioning, and another ten after that to lose consciousness.

CARLA

We still have to wait until that ship leaves sensor range.

Cross looks at her, and nods grimly.

CROSS

Cross to Grey. On my next signal deactivate the masking device. Not before. Understood?

GREY'S COMM VOICE

Understood, Captain.

COMPUTER'S VOICE

Warning. Radiation levels are exceeding safety parameters. Emergency bulkheads will now be closed.

As the computer speaks, heavy doors slam shut over the turbolifts.

CARLA

A precaution the original miners built into the station -- they didn't have very good radiation shielding.

Cross nods.

CROSS

Right now, I guess we do as they did.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- REACTOR CONTROL

Grey, Quinlan and the others in reactor control are still at their stations. Grey turns in his chair and speaks to one of the crewmen.

GREY
Kelly, break out the radiation suits. We might need them in a few minutes.

Kelly looks embarrassed.

KELLY
Sir... There are no radiation suits here.

Grey gives him a look.

GREY
(slowly)
No radiation suits in the reactor control room?

KELLY
We moved them out yesterday to make room for the extra equipment, sir. They should be in cargo bay 2.

Grey shakes his head, a sour look on his face. He thumbs the comm panel.

GREY
This is Commander Grey calling anyone in or near cargo bay 2. We need radiation suits delivered to the reactor control room, as many as you can carry. Does anyone read me?

The comm panel is silent.

QUINLAN
Well, let's just hope we don't need them.

She looks around her, worried. Grey glances at her.

GREY
Don't be scared, Jen.

Quinlan looks at him sharply.

QUINLAN
Don't you be scared either, you misogynistic pig!

GREY
(startled)
Whoa. I just thought--

QUINLAN
You thought right. I'm scared.
But if you say you aren't, then
you're lying. Don't patronize me,
that's all.

Grey looks at her for a long moment, then takes her hand.

GREY
Yeah, I'm scared. Even knocked
out, radiation poisoning is a bad
way to go.

QUINLAN
Then let's just make sure it
doesn't get that far.

They lock eyes.

GREY
I'm glad you're here, Jen.

QUINLAN
Yeah? I'm not.

They both chuckle a little.

CREWMAN
Commander? Still no word from
Baxter or the others.

Grey leans back in his chair and swears under his breath.

QUINLAN
I'm sure they're fine, Erik. The
comm lines between here and there
are probably knocked out, that's
all.

GREY
(shaking his head)
The comm lines are fine, we
checked. But the reactor core is
the least shielded area on the
station. They were probably
knocked out in the first few
seconds, and a couple minutes
later...

He shakes his head and pounds his fist on the bulkhead.

GREY (CONT'D)

I sent Baxter to his death. I just wanted an extra pair of hands down there, so I ordered Baxter, and now...

QUINLAN

You didn't order him to do anything he wouldn't have done on his own.

GREY

Maybe not. Still...

CROSS'S COMM VOICE

Cross to Grey. Starfleet vessel now out of sensor range. Deactivate masking device.

GREY

Acknowledged.

He taps buttons on his console. Nothing happens.

GREY (CONT'D)

(quietly)

Oh no...

He taps buttons again. Still no effect.

GREY (CONT'D)

The command relays must be shot.

KELLY

We'll have to go down there and deactivate it manually.

GREY

Yeah. And for that... We'll need those radiation suits after all.

He jumps out of his chair and runs toward the reactor control room door, now covered by an emergency bulkhead.

GREY (CONT'D)

Can we open this?

KELLY

We'll have to do it manually. I'll need to disable the locking mechanism, then you just force it open.

GREY

Do it.

Quinlan and several others walk to the bulkhead as Kelly opens a panel in the wall. He works for a moment, tapping buttons and pulling wires. Then he turns and nods to the others.

GREY (CONT'D)

On three. One... Two... THREE!

As one, the crew members pull at the bulkhead. Slowly, grudgingly, it opens, revealing the door itself.

KELLY

I'll have to override the door mechanism as well... There you go.

The door opens, and Grey jumps back, startled. Lt. Stolt is standing there, arms filled with sky-blue radiation suits, one fist raised to pound on the door. He blinks, then grins.

STOLT

You called for these?

Returning the grin, Grey pulls Stolt into the room and takes a radiation suit out of the pile in his arms.

GREY

Put one on yourself. Everyone, put on a radiation suit -- the radiation will start to affect us in a few moments.

Stolt drops the pile onto the floor, and everyone in the room grabs one and starts to don it -- there are just enough suits to go around. Grey looks at Stolt as he was dressing.

GREY (CONT'D)

You were in Cargo Bay 2?

STOLT

I was running some checks in there when the emergency bulkheads slammed shut. Sorry I didn't answer your message, but I figured time was of the essence.

GREY

Right. Thanks.

Now fully suited but for his helmet, Grey turns to the others.

GREY (CONT'D)

I need one person to go with me to the reactor core.

GREY(CONT'D)

I don't know if these suits will do much good down there, so I'll ask for volunteers.

Everyone raises their hand.

GREY (CONT'D)

Thank you. Nat, you're with me.

Stolt nods and follows Grey to the reactor access hatch as he dons his helmet. Quinlan, looking incredulous, follows them.

QUINLAN

I should be going. Sorry, Nat, but I know just as much about the command protocols, and I--

GREY

You're staying here.

QUINLAN

Erik, it makes sense for me to go!

GREY

I said you're staying here.

A pause.

GREY (CONT'D)

(quietly)

I'm not losing you. Not now, not after everything we went through to get here. If that makes me irrational, or a bad officer, then so be it. But I won't risk losing you.

He looks at her a moment longer, then looks at Stolt.

GREY (CONT'D)

Let's go.

QUINLAN

Wait!

She grabs Grey and, in full sight of all present, kisses him long and hard. Nobody moves or makes a sound. Quinlan then presses her forehead to his.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

I'm not losing you either.

GREY

You won't. I'll be back.

He kisses her again, then puts on his helmet and opens the reactor access hatch. He climbs through into the vertical corridor, mounts the ladder and begins to descend. Stolt follows him. At the hatch he stops, looks back at Quinlan, and grins again.

STOLT

It's about time, isn't it?

Then he climbs through, and closes the hatch behind him.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- COMMAND CENTER

Command is in a state of disarray. Some people are clutching their heads in pain, others are wandering around aimlessly. Carla looks around her, helpless confusion on her face.

QUINLAN'S COMM VOICE

Quinlan to Command Center. Grey and Stolt have gone down into the reactor core, to attempt to deactivate the masking device manually.

Cross, who has been watching everyone impassively, taps the comm panel.

CROSS

We don't have any radiation suits, Lieutenant, so we may be out of touch here in a little bit. Are Grey and Stolt protected?

QUINLAN'S COMM VOICE

Yes, sir, they have suits.

CROSS

Understood. Tell them to make it fah.

QUINLAN'S COMM VOICE

Sir?

CROSS

I zed, make it fah.

He looks up, blinking in surprise.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Fah? Mage it fah? Wha?

QUINLAN'S COMM VOICE

Captain, are you all right?

CROSS

I dink deh radition is tarring du
affegt me. When will deh...
massing... dat ting be durned
off? When, Jen?

He looks up again.

CROSS (CONT'D)

When, Jen? When, Jen! When-jen!
When-jen!

He lapses into a fit of giggling.

QUINLAN'S COMM VOICE

Don't worry about a thing, sir.
We'll handle everything from down
here. Quinlan out.

CROSS

Otay.

Carla walks up to him. She looks scared, and her left
shoulder is twitching.

CARLA

Satesu areleno tavi le datode!
Edezilip use po sel kiyineg he
ged, liyos amarie hecusa pemot!

CROSS

(philosophically)
My thoughts exacty.

He giggles again, and hugs a bewildered Carla.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- REACTOR ACCESS CORRIDOR

Grey and Stolt are descending the ladder in a long vertical
corridor. Grey reaches the bottom, where a small, sealed
hatch is in front of him. He opens it, and steps into...

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- REACTOR CORE

A small utility area facing the main reactor of Station
Epsilon. The bodies of Baxter and three others are sprawled
on the floor. Grey walks up to Baxter's body and turns it
over. Baxter's sightless eyes stare up at the ceiling. Grey
sighs.

GREY

Damn it, Jay, I'm so sorry.

He reaches down and closes the eyes. Then he turns to the consoles and makeshift equipment as Stolt enters the room behind him.

STOLT

Do we have to deactivate all the individual hull polarizers?

GREY

It shouldn't be necessary. They're all getting power from the reactor through a single node. We just have to shut down that node. But first we need to put all of the polarizers into safety mode; otherwise we risk a cascade power feedback loop that could take out a big chunk of the hull.

STOLT

(whistling)

That might take a while.

GREY

You can do it in batches. Get started while I find the central node.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE

The sun of Epsilon's system suddenly BURSTS with light. A shockwave explodes outward, leaving an intensely bright glowing space behind it.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- COMMAND CENTER

On the screen, the flare shows up on Felix's monitors. Felix bursts out laughing.

FELIX

It's early! The flare is early!
We're all gonna die!

He is laughing so hard he cries. Cross looks at him strangely.

CROSS

Ton sekut sam yeter ehaci?

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- REACTOR CONTROL

The flare also shows up on Quinlan's monitors. Kelly is looking over her shoulder.

KELLY

Uh oh.

QUINLAN

Uh oh is right.

She tabs the comm panel.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

Quinlan to Grey and Stolt. We have less than a minute, guys. How is it coming?

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- REACTOR CORE

Stolt, sweat on his face showing through the helmet, doesn't look up from his work.

STOLT

Almost there, Lieutenant. Just one more batch of polarizers to safety, then we'll shut down the node. Right, Commander?

GREY

Nec sal ulicet dap.

Stolt looks up, startled. Grey, looking weak and confused, is sitting cross-legged next to the node, shaking his head. He mumbles something else, then falls over, limp.

STOLT

Commander!

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- REACTOR CONTROL

Quinlan and Kelly, hearing the thump of Grey's body falling, look at each other, worried.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- REACTOR CORE

Stolt forces himself to look away from Grey and finish working on his polarizers.

A moment later he leaves the equipment and runs over to Grey. He examines him -- he is still breathing, but falling unconscious. Stolt shakes himself out of it -- no time.

STOLT

Commander, can you hear me? I need to know which node it is. Which is the central power node for the masking device?

Grey groans.

STOLT (CONT'D)

Commander! Which one!?

Grey shakes his head.

GREY

...bru...

STOLT

What?

Grey opens his eyes slightly and gives Stolt a tired, annoyed look.

GREY

...bruno...

STOLT

Bruno? Sir, it's me, Stolt -- there's no Bruno here. I need to know which node--

He stops, looks up at the node panel. The nodes are different colors, and in the center...

STOLT (CONT'D)

Blue node. Is that it, sir? It's the blue node?

Grey grunts.

GREY

...bruno...go'way...

He closes his eyes, and his head goes limp. Stolt looks from him to the panel, looks over it quickly, then shrugs.

STOLT

What the hell.

He reaches over and deactivates the blue node.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE

There is another FLASH, and the hull of Station Epsilon stops glowing. Seconds later, the shock front hits the station, and the sky begins to burn once more.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- COMMAND CENTER

Almost everyone in the command center has passed out. Cross, sitting in Felix's chair looking woozy and half-asleep, watches uninterested as the flare reaches the station.

QUINLAN'S COMM VOICE

They did it! Quinlan to Cross,
the masking device has been
deactivated!

CROSS

Feh.

He looks around, casting a disinterested stare around everything in the control room. He chuckles to himself, as though remembering a private joke we would never understand. Then his eyes roll back into his head, and he falls out of the chair.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- REACTOR CONTROL

Quinlan leans back in her chair, relieved.

KELLY

All right. It should be safe to
take off the suits now.

QUINLAN

Good -- I'm starting to itch.

She takes off her helmet and scratches at her hair as she reaches for the comm panel again.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

Erik, you and Nat okay down
there?

The comm panel is silent.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

Erik!?

No response. A second later, there is a pounding at the reactor access hatch.

A nearby crewman opens the hatch, reach in and pull Grey's body through. Stolt follows. Quinlan jumps out of her chair and runs to them.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

Erik! Help me get this thing off!

STOLT

Guess these suits weren't that great down there -- I was starting to feel woozy myself. But we did it. He did it.

Quinlan is pulling Grey's suit off of him as Kelly runs over to join them with a medical tricorder. He quickly scans Grey.

QUINLAN

Is he okay?

KELLY

He didn't take a lethal dose. He's just out of it right now.

Grey stirs. His eyes open to narrow slits, and he looks up at Quinlan. He tries to lift his head.

QUINLAN

Don't try to move.

He relaxes, grunts and sighs.

GREY

I won't... too much work...

QUINLAN

I know. Just rest now.

GREY

Felt like... my mind was being... turned inside-out...

QUINLAN

I know. It's over now.

Grey is still for a moment, then looks up at Quinlan again.

GREY

You're... still here.

Quinlan smiles.

QUINLAN

Where else would I be?

Grey tries to return the smile, weakly; then his head rolls to the side and he falls asleep. Quinlan shakes her head.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

I should have been with him.

STOLT

Jen... There wasn't anything you could have done. We might have lost you too.

QUINLAN

I suppose.

Still shaking her head, she pulls Grey's body into her arms and begins to cry softly.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- COMMAND CENTER

We see a close up of Cross's face. He is sleeping peacefully on the floor of the command center. We watch him for a few moments.

Then, a hand appears from nowhere and injects a hypospray into his neck. Cross sirs, then opens his eyes a little, looking up weakly.

Cross's POV: we see an angelic figure kneeling down next to him, surrounded by an aura, faintly transparent. The aura dissipates, revealing the face of Elris Lea. She smiles and shakes her head.

ELRIS

Honestly, Neil, how do you stay on your own two feet if I'm not here?

Pause.

CROSS

(muttering)

If you're not here, why should I?

ELRIS

What?

Cross blinks. His eyes snap open. From Cross's POV, we now see Elris normally, in the flesh, kneeling down next to Cross and running a tricorder scan on him. She looks at the readings, and smiles.

ELRIS (CONT'D)

No permanent damage. You're going to be just fine.

Cross bolts up into a sitting position, looks around and tries to stand. Elris helps him up.

ELRIS (CONT'D)

Don't move too fast, Neil --
you're still coming out of it.

He looks at her. His face is still woozy, but clearing fast.

CROSS

Lea?

ELRIS

Yeah. I'm here now.

A pause, then she reaches up and pulls him into a hug. Cross's confusion turns to relief, then joy as he wraps his arms around her.

CROSS

Lea, I was so scared for you.

ELRIS

I know. I was scared for me too.

He pulls away, and looks around the room. Nearby, TORAN NOA is bending over people, bringing them awake. Rocco assists him. Cross looks back at Elris.

CROSS

How did you...?

ELRIS

Long story. But your friend there found us and brought us here.

CROSS

Rocco? He's not--

He breaks off. He looks at Rocco, still helping to bring people around. He smiles.

CROSS (CONT'D)

Well. I'm glad. And I'm glad you got my message.

ELRIS

The glass slipper? Oh yeah.

Toran approaches them.

TORAN

Captain! Boy are we glad to see you.

Cross shakes his hand.

CROSS

Likewise, Doctor. We should have teams going through the station, waking up everyone else, and seeing if anyone needs radiation treatments.

TORAN

Already taken care of, sir.

ELRIS

So... What'd we miss?

Cross sighs, and frowns, as though wondering where to start.

CROSS

Well... Quinlan and Grey are together now.

ELRIS AND TORAN

It's about time.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE

The sky around Epsilon is still glowing as several ships start to return to the space around it. We watch as a couple of them dock, including the Romulan warbird Karthos.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- CONFERENCE ROOM

Cross, Talora, Elris, Toran, Rocco, Carla, Aia and Suros are gathered around the conference table.

SUROS

(signing)

It was my fault. I should have seen the standing wave effect to begin with.

TALORA

You didn't know that Epsilon uses that particular kind of passive radiation shielding.

SUROS

(signing)

I should have checked on it.

(MORE)
TALORA

We're just glad to have your masking device at all.

TALORA (CONT'D)

Without your help, we might all be dead or in a Federation brig right now.

Suros nods, but still looks unhappy with himself.

CROSS

Well, the good news is that the masking device works, and we'll be able to use it in the future now that we know what to expect. The bad news, however, is that we can't do anything about the standing wave effect.

CARLA

So we can only use the masking device for short periods at a time?

CROSS

It's a lot better than nothing. Anyone have anything else to discuss?

Nobody does.

CROSS (CONT'D)

All right, see you at the next Council meeting.

The meeting breaks as everyone stands.

TORAN

(whispering to Elris)
I'll catch up with you.

Elris nods. She heads toward the door, then stops, looks at Cross. Their eyes lock, and they smile at each other. Elris then turns and follows Suros and Aia out the door. Toran lingers at the foot of the table.

Cross turns to Rocco and offers his hand.

CROSS

I owe you a whole lot of gratitude, and an apology. My behavior earlier was inexcusable.

ROCCO

You wanted your friends back, and you didn't entirely trust me. That's a good enough excuse for me.

CROSS
 (laughing)
 Well, to say that you've earned
 my trust is an understatement.
 Thank you.

ROCCO
 My pleasure.

He nods and heads for the door.

TALORA
 I'll coordinate our fleet's
 return to Epsilon. Once this last
 flare has dissipated, we'll have
 seen the last of the polyneutrino
 fields for a while.

CROSS
 Very well. Welcome back, by the
 way.

Talora nods, and follows Rocco out the door. Only Cross and
 Toran are still in the room. Cross looks up and sees Toran
 lingering there.

CROSS (CONT'D)
 I'm sorry, Doctor, I forgot to
 tell you -- we've arranged for
 you and Dr. Elris to assume
 medical posts here on Epsilon.
 The infirmary is a bit crowded,
 and not as well-equipped as the
 Enterprise's was, but I'm sure
 you'll make do.

TORAN
 Thank you, Sir, but that's not
 why I'm still here.

CROSS
 Oh?

Toran slowly walks around the table toward Cross. His face
 is worried.

TORAN
 I need to tell you something,
 Captain. It's very important.

Cross sees the dead seriousness in his eyes.

CROSS
 Okay. Tell me.

CUT TO:

INT. EPSILON -- CORRIDOR

Quinlan is standing by herself at a picture window in the corridor. She is watching the stars, still glowing. Behind her, Grey comes from around a corridor and walks up to her.

GREY

The "fifth wheel" comment.

Quinlan looks around, startled.

QUINLAN

Hey you. What was that?

GREY

That's how Cross knew. He made the comment about feeling like a fifth wheel in my quarters, and he thought we were alone. You were hiding in my closet.

QUINLAN

Right. Okay.

GREY

In case you were wondering.

QUINLAN

Yeah.

He stands next to her at the window. There is a moment of shared silence.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

So I guess everyone knows now.

GREY

Pretty much, yeah.

Pause.

GREY (CONT'D)

Listen, Jen... I'm sorry that I left you behind in the reactor control room. It's not because I didn't think you'd be able to help me -- I know you would. It's just that I didn't want anything to happen to you.

Quinlan looks at him.

QUINLAN

A good officer, Starfleet or
Federalist fleet, wouldn't take
their personal feelings into
consideration when making command
decisions.

GREY

Then I'm a lousy officer.

Pause.

QUINLAN

Me too. Because I would have done
the same thing.

She reaches down and takes his hands.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

I would have left you behind too.
I don't know what this is that we
have, and maybe it won't last,
who knows? But I know I would
never be the same if I let
something happen to you. And even
if you don't feel the same--

GREY

I love you.

She looks at him. He is smiling slightly.

GREY (CONT'D)

You think I would have done what
I did if you were just a pal? No
way. I love you, Jennifer
Quinlan.

(beat)

That's what I was going to say
the other day. That's what I
should have said a long time ago.
And because of this war, I don't
know if I'll be able to have you
near me or not... But I know that
I always want you with me.

Quinlan looks into his face, the earnest look in his eyes.
Unable to control herself, she throws her arms around him
and kisses him. Several people walk by in the corridor as
they kiss, and look at them. Grey and Quinlan ignore them.

Then Grey pulls back, smiles at Quinlan and wipes a single
tear off her face. Quinlan laughs.

QUINLAN

Big baby.

GREY

It happens.

She turns and looks out the window.

QUINLAN

What is going to happen, do you think?

Grey sighs and wraps his arms around her waist.

GREY

I don't know. I really don't.

(beat)

But we'll face it together.

Quinlan nods.

QUINLAN

Together.

Grey tightens his arms around her, and we pull away from them as they gaze out at the stars, at the ships coming home to Epsilon, at the burning sky.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR

THE END
