

*Except from "Alternate Ending" - Troy's story*

"Sir? What are you doing here? Oh, God, you're not here to give me last rites, are you?"

Troy had the sense Seaman Andrew Bonneville was only half joking. "Not that I know of – I didn't even know you were here. Do you think you need last rites?"

Bonneville pulled himself taller on his mattress. "No, sir. Nope, not at all. I'm only here for observation. I swear, I'm really not worth anyone's time. Maybe you could convince D to let me go early? Sir?" He radiated hopeful optimism.

"Son, I'm afraid even my word wouldn't be good enough for our med tech. I'm not the one to get you out of here any faster."

"He's right," called Darijo's voice from the tiny office walled off in the corner. "So stop complaining, Bonny."

Troy smiled sympathetically. "What happened?"

"Nothing, sir." The kid fiddled with his bedsheet. "Stupid accident, that's all."

"Possible concussion, is all," Darijo corrected him, appearing at Troy's side. "Knocked himself senseless during an emergency drill yesterday, then heaved up his lunch all over my nice clean infirmary. So you, Seaman Bonneville, will be here under observation until I say otherwise."

Darijo turned to Troy and looked at the bagel in his hand. "We do feed our patients, you know."

"I know."

Darijo's knowing gaze travelled from the bagel to Troy's face, probably assessing heart rate, blood pressure, distraction and God knew what else besides. "All right, then." He nodded toward the far corner of the room. "Not sure how he'll be for you. He wasn't very responsive when I arrived, and Dr. Monro told me he didn't have a very good night."

Troy maintained his chaplain face while his insides shrank around his breakfast.

“Thanks.”

Darijo nodded and moved away.

“You’re here to see the lieutenant-commander, sir?” Bonneville’s voice was a whisper, though Lightner probably couldn’t hear from this distance. Sometimes he didn’t even hear you when you were next to him, Troy reflected, but maybe Bonneville didn’t know that.

“That’s the plan.”

Bonneville glanced toward the other end of the room with a frown that didn’t sit well on his amiable face. “Hopefully he’s better than last night. I mean, my bunkmate snores like a sawmill – I figure if I can sleep through that, I can sleep through anything. But...” Bonneville trailed off. He looked up, a worried crease between his eyebrows. “Do you think you can help him, sir?”

“I hope so,” Troy said. “Do you have everything you need? I would’ve brought you a bagel, too, if I’d known you’d be here.”

Bonneville’s smile was a shadow of its usual self. “Thanks, sir, but I’m all right. You get that to Lieutenant-Commander Lightner, see if he’ll eat it. Maybe it’ll do him some good.”

Troy headed toward the far corner and let his own smile fade. *I could use some help here*, he thought, touching the cross on his collar tab. *I know it’s not a fiery furnace or a lion’s den, but I’m running out of time and I don’t seem to be accomplishing much alone...*