

AGENT

The Strange Case of Starship Iris. Report One: Violet Liu

Transmission one, begin.

FX

(A crackle of weird static transitions us into the strains of some very urgent-sounding warning sirens.)

VIOLET

(Talking to herself) Okay. It's okay. Deep breaths.

(She sounds shaken and terrified. It's not okay, and she knows it.)

Stay calm, Vi. Stay—oh Jesus, that's a lot of smoke.

FX

(Running footsteps in an echo-y room. The click and buzz of Violet activating a comm system on a computer terminal.)

VIOLET

Violet Liu to Scout-1, uh, guys, do you copy!

(silence)

Well, Violet, you just watched their shuttle explode, so. PROBABLY NOT. (Deep breaths.)

(The sirens continue)

Really, Vi? Panic? Floating alone in the void, and the thing you reach for is panic? (Breathes in, breathes out.) *Grow the hell up.* Okay, one step at a time. Uh. How hard can it really be to work this thing. Connors did it every day and he's objectively—Well. He's dead. So how smart can he be?

FX

(Sound of switches flicking)

VIOLET

Hello, hello? This is the Starship Iris, ID 45-Alpha-76-52-Tango, mission priority 7, under the command of Captain Tom Jasper, sector 284-325, requesting aid. We had—we had a catastrophic shuttle failure as the rest of the crew was returning from their final scouting trip on planet uh, 5925, cause unknown, and—um.

(A pause. It hasn't been real to her until now.) I'm the only survivor. Requesting aid. Nine of ten target samples were collected. If at all possible—

A GRATUITOUSLY PLEASANT FEMALE VOICE

Hello.

VIOLET

Oh thank god, this is the Ir—

VOICE

If you can hear this message, something has gone wrong—

VIOLET

No. Nononono.

VOICE

—with your network connectivity.

VIOLET

SERIOUSLY?

VOICE

Please reboot your system and try again.

FX

(The sound of more switches flicking.)

VIOLET

(To herself) The surge must've knocked out the—

VOICE

Hello. If you can hear—

VIOLET

How do I turn this off, for the love of—

VOICE

—this message, something has gone wrong—

VIOLET

Yeah, thanks, robot voice! Thanks for the UPDATE!

VOICE

with your network connectivity. Please reboot your system—

VIOLET

Come on, come on, shut up.

(A slight pause. Violet takes a deep breath)

VOICE (With precisely the same tone and inflection as before.)

Hola. Si puede escuchar este mensaje--

VIOLET

...better. (The next few lines are spoken over the recording)

VOICE

--*algo esta mal con su conexión a la red. Por favor reinicie el sistema y vuelva a intentarlo.* (The message continues to repeat)

VIOLET

...Marginally better. Okay, so all I need to do now...is reboot the system. Uh.

(Switches, keys clacking under the duration of this speech as Violet frantically tries to fix the computer.)

Shit.

(The voice ceases.)

Yes!

Did that—no. Of course not.

'Hey, young Violet, I see you're a freshman in college, have you considered maybe, I don't know, using your elective credits to spend thirty goddamn seconds studying anything about a ship's internal systems?'

'Oh hi, older Violet, you know I did think about it—'

FX

(sound of Violet very lightly electrocuting herself)

VIOLET

Shit!

'—I thought about it, but there's this really cute girl taking *Early Pre-Crisis Folklore*, so. You understand.'

'Yeah, great, young Violet. Now there is a choice that is *definitely* gonna serve you well, hovering in the middle of a vast black waste too empty to even howl. Great. Also, just so you know, turns out she's only into blonds, *and* she drops out second semester to join a *cult*, so just. A-plus choices, all around.'

Shit. What are the odds I wind up fixing this by accident. God, what is the fuel level even—

(A pause.)

"Three percent remaining."

(Grim) Three.

(A pause.)

This is it, Vi. This is how you die.

GRATUITOUSLY PLEASANT FEMALE VOICE

Hello. If you can hear this message—

VIOLET

COME ON.

VOICE

(The recording continues, the next few lines are spoken over it) something has gone wrong with your network connectivity. Please reboot your system and try again. Hello. If you can

KAY

Hello?

FX

(The sound of Violet hitting the console hard with her fist. The recording stops.)

VIOLET

OH MY GOD, ROBOT VOICE, NOW IS NOT THE—

KAY

Uh, living breathing human being here.

VIOLET

What?

KAY

Hi. My crew detected an energy flare on the outer edge of our scanners. Thought I'd give back-up frequencies a shot, sweep the area. We've been trying to ping you on the network, but we haven't—

VIOLET

(ugly laugh)

KAY

(understanding, commiserating) Surge knocked you out?

VIOLET

That's my theory, yeah.

KAY

What was that thing?

VIOLET

That was our short range shuttle-slash escape pod. Exploding.

KAY

Shit. You guys okay out there?

VIOLET

...we lost everyone but me.

KAY

Oh my god, I'm so sorry. Oh my god, are you—

VIOLET

Ship name and ident number.

KAY

What?

VIOLET

Who are you?

KAY

Sorry, sorry, I just—wasn't expecting to find anything else out here. The Philadelphia, ID 37-Echo-81-32-Victor, priority 3, under the command of Captain K. Grisham. That's me.

VIOLET

Violet Liu. Of The Starship Iris. 45-Alpha-76-52-Tango, mission priority 7. I'm a biologist, I was only here to oversee the samples.

KAY

Okay, Science Officer Liu, I'm guessing you're very freaked out right now, but if you stay on the line, I can talk you through getting your system running again and—

VIOLET

(grimly) It's okay.

KAY

What?

VIOLET

(The earlier, panicky ranting has given way to something closer to numb resignation) There's no need. We were carrying our reserve fuel externally, and I think a piece of debris from the blast must've—cracked one of the tanks, I mean I guess I should be grateful the ship didn't explode, too. But we're down to three percent. And even I know. That's enough to get back to the station in—eight days, maybe, if we burn careful? Or it's enough to keep things in here livable for—god, six days, something like that. But not both.

KAY

Are you sure.

VIOLET

It's a big ship. Airy. Jasper hates it, calls it a waste of— (remembers Jasper is dead.) Um.

KAY

If you could just, if you still had that escape shuttle—

VIOLET

Yeah, believe me, the irony's not lost.

KAY

Well, listen, what are your coordinates? Maybe I could convince the crew to—

VIOLET

I was at the edge of your scanners, right? That's at least a ten-day round trip for you. Missions running as tight as they are since last outbreak, no way do you have the fuel or the time.

KAY

Yeah. But I can send a signal to the network—

VIOLET

Anybody close enough to help would've picked up on the surge already. They'd look into it like you did, they'd figure out somebody was out here.

(Pause. Kay says nothing.)

It's, we've reached the point, you know? All hope is false hope. If there's anything I'm owed now, it's the truth. Have you picked up on anyone coming to my rescue?

KAY

(heavily) No.

VIOLET

It's okay. It's not—there's nothing you can do.

KAY

Uh, are you comforting *me* right now?

VIOLET

(Flippant) Look, I'm gone in six, seven days, no matter what. (A little less flippant) You've got decades ahead of you, and this has gotta be pretty unnerving for your first mission.

KAY

How'd you know this was my first—uh, besides all the obvious—I'm pretty green, huh?

VIOLET

You are *very* green, Captain. Very, very, very—

KAY

Hey now—

VIOLET

No, it's—everyone has to begin somewhere. (Pause) Actually, if I could ask you for a favor. It's stupid, but. (She hesitates. Oh, how she doesn't want to ask for this.) Can you keep talking? Until the signal goes or—I mean, for as long as you can, I know you must have other duties, but—

KAY

Okay, Liu, how—wait, never mind, don't waste your last breath defending such an idiotic—uh, yes. I mean, yes, I'll talk for as long as I can, which—experience has proven, is quite a long time. ...What do you want me to talk about?

VIOLET

Anything. (Considers this.) Well, maybe not sports.

KAY

God, give me a tick to think, feels a little petty to—complain about the food in the mess hall, anything that trivial is—

VIOLET

Honestly, I. I would love trivial right now.

KAY

Okay, um. Huh. Okay, as long as we're getting trivial. What year did you graduate undergrad?

VIOLET

Um. '85?

KAY

Class of '85? (Pause) So this is a shot in the dark to end all shots in the dark but did you, in '81, attend Intro Bio at Harmony College with Professor Michaelis?

VIOLET

...what?

KAY

Liu, L-I-U. Violet Liu. Are you, like, five feet tall, septum piercing, this haircut where the top is all—

VIOLET

(reflexively embarrassed, without even thinking): Oh my god, that haircut, wow—

KAY

Well, I thought it was *very* cool. (Pause)

Uh, hi. Kay Grisham, I sat in your row. Hi.

VIOLET

Oh my god. Kay... (Trying to place her. Can't.)

KAY

No, it's alright, you don't remember me. I wasn't very—memorable, back then. Anyway, I'm pretty sure we never spoke.

VIOLET

Then—how do you remember—

KAY

Well. (With an air of “I had such a crush on you”) It was a VERY cool haircut.

VIOLET

(laughing, a little loopy. She has been very far from home, for a very long time.) Oh god.

KAY

Yeah. *Yeahhh*.

VIOLET

I don't have that haircut anymore, just so you know—

KAY

Well, just so you know, Violet Liu, I am crying a little inside.

VIOLET

Professor Michaelis, god, that takes me back. D'you remember how he—

KAY

How could I forget?

VIOLET

That toupee!

KAY

Telling you, I still see it when I close my eyes sometimes.

VIOLET

Did you ever think maybe he did it on purpose? He knew his lecturing wasn't going to hold our attention on its own, so—

KAY

'Hey, my eyes are down here!'

VIOLET

Harmony College.

KAY

Good old Harmony College.

VIOLET

I was just thinking about HC, uh this Folklore class I took freshman year. God, what are the chances?

KAY

(Slowly) Maybe it's not chance.

VIOLET

Okay, the fate talk, I can't follow you there.

KAY

You don't believe in some higher order?

VIOLET

I believe in the human hunger for a comforting narrative. I believe that it's only natural people would invent fairy tales when life gets heavier than they can deal with—

KAY

...and you're seriously not there yet? (pause) Sorry, that was—that wasn't funny at all—

VIOLET

No, hey. And who knows, check back when the oxygen starvation's really kicking in, maybe I'll be singing the praises of the whole Greek pantheon, from Zeus to Hades. (Pause) Too dark?

KAY

I think maybe *you* get to say what 'too dark' is, right now.

VIOLET

Hey, Kay?

KAY

Yeah?

VIOLET

Um. Thank you. Really—thank you. I— (Breaks off, embarrassed at the emotion.)

KAY

No skin off my nose, Liu. I finally got the courage to talk to that cool-looking girl from Intro Bio. Just, you know, eleven years and ten days too late.

VIOLET

Yeah. (sober again) Listen. Can you pass on a message to my family?

KAY

Of course, what do you want me to—

VIOLET

God, just, all the standard things people say in these situations, I guess? That I love them, that it doesn't hurt, that I'm not afraid— (Her voice catches a little on 'afraid' because she's terrified.)

KAY

Yeah, I will. Of course.

VIOLET

(Resolute) And tell—pass on to command that we got nine of the ten samples. They're in cryo, deep storage, background battery should keep 'em going long enough that when—

KAY

Wait, how do you have the power to keep the samples frozen if you can't keep the ship liveable?

VIOLET

Cryo chamber's brand-new, super efficient. Also the ship's huge and the chamber's—not.

KAY

...how big is the cryo chamber?

VIOLET

Why are you—look, this isn't some martyr complex. The samples are higher priority than me now because *they* have a chance of making it—

KAY

How big is the cryo chamber?

VIOLET

What?

KAY

Could a person fit inside? Curled up in a ball? If that person was around, say, five feet?

VIOLET

Okay, let's be clear here, I am at least five one with good posture— (Kay's actual plan begins to sink in) Oh.

KAY

So I'm thinking. You need an escape pod, let's make an escape pod. Put the ship on autopilot to our coordinates, cut the atmo reg, you've got enough residual air and heat to get you into the cryo chamber, we pick you up, you turn in the samples to our station, and—

VIOLET

(Dejected) Wait. I'd have to reprogram the ship. A lot. I can't use the comm system without electrocuting myself. There's no way I can do it. And neither can you, unless in addition to captaining an entire ship, you're also a very talented hacker--

KAY

So listen. I maybe had a—somewhat troubled youth before college. I'm not proud of it. (She is, actually.) But—if you can get me in remotely, I can do the rest.

VIOLET

(Barely daring to hope.) What.

KAY

(Almost deliriously happy) You still feel like thumbing your nose at fate, Liu?

VIOLET

Honestly, I feel like kissing you. (Pause.) That came out wrong, I meant—I meant, ‘Oh, I could kiss you,’ in that, you know, like-- (For a brief moment, an all-consuming flare of embarrassment eclipses even Violet’s urgency and terror. Then she remembers, and the urgency eclipses the embarrassment again.) Uh, which way should I go?

KAY

Engine room. Let’s save your life first.

FX

(Violet’s footsteps)

KAY

Uh, maybe talk over this kissing business later. Over a glass of the best wine hydroponics has to offer?

VIOLET

(Walking) Tell you what, Captain, you pull this off and drinks are on me.

KAY

Now there’s a wager I can get behind. (Pause) Except for the whole part where if I fail, you die in a grisly—

[FX: Four beeps, door opening sound]

VIOLET

(Wasn’t listening.) Made it in.

KAY

There’s supposed to be a keypad on the door, how’d you just—

VIOLET

Well, Connors set it up. I figured he was too lazy to change the code from the default.

KAY

Don’t tell me: ‘1234’

VIOLET

(almost a little confused) 2180. You know, the first year of the Republic?

KAY

Sorry—distracted. So I’ve pulled up schematics of a similar ship and judging from the wiring, my guess is you want the North wall.

VIOLET

(Sarcastically) Well, let me just. Get out my compass?

KAY

Opposite the engine. There should be a small box with five blinking lights on it—

VIOLET

There's blinking lights everywhere. It's like standing in a cloud of lightning bugs.

KAY

Look for a small screen, about the size of your palm. If your nav guy was lazy enough, there's a chance the screen's still covered in a layer of plastic—

VIOLET

Found it.

KAY

Okay, tear off the plastic.

VIOLET

Yep.

KAY

So it's connected to the wall by a bunch of colored wires.

VIOLET

This gonna be a cut-the-green-wire situation?

KAY

For the love of god, don't cut any of those wires. Okay, using two fingers, tap the screen and—

THE SAME GRATUITOUSLY PLEASANT VOICE FROM BEFORE

Hello.

VIOLET

(Murderous) You again.

GRATUITOUSLY PLEASANT VOICE

If you can hear this message, something has gone wrong with your network connectivity. Please reboot your system and try again. (Message begins to repeat)

KAY

(Talking over the recording) Change of plans, do you see a clear cord running from the box to the wall?

VIOLET

Yeah

KAY

Yank that sucker outta there.

(The voice immediately goes silent.)

VIOLET

(With feeling) Captain Grisham, you're my hero.

KAY

Any time.

VIOLET

What next?

KAY

What are the odds you know the system password?

VIOLET

What are the odds it's—okay, apparently it's not 2180.

KAY

The ship's internal computers? No, it's gonna be a long random string of letters and numbers, to protect it from, y'know, hackers and—scoundrels.

VIOLET

(Teasing) Like you?

KAY

Hey now, I am, *at worst*, a puckish rogue.

VIOLET

So what do I--

KAY

Any chance your nav man wrote the password on the bottom or back of the box?

VIOLET

Uh. No.

KAY

Okay, this is not ideal but. We're gonna do what they used to call a hard reset.

VIOLET

What does that mean.

KAY

Means you'll be able to make a new password.

VIOLET

Doesn't sound so bad

KAY

Well, first we've gotta shut everything down for a sec. Everything that can't run on reserve battery. Including your stabilizers. (Pause) It's gonna suck.

VIOLET

(The bravest little toaster) So let's get it over with.

KAY

Alright. Counting from the left, very carefully unplug the third and fifth cord—

VIOLET

Okay. (Pause) That's it?

KAY

It's an emergency protocol in case of outside attack. Not like they'd design it where you've gotta leap over a pit of spinning blades or something—

VIOLET

Uh.

KAY

You okay?

VIOLET

All the lights just went out.

KAY

They're supposed to. (With empathy) Pitch black in there?

VIOLET

Yeah. Engine's still humming, though.

KAY

Good. Now plug the wires back in, same order you pulled them out.

VIOLET

Yeah. (Pause) Nothing happened. Nothing—everything's still dark.

KAY

Calm down. It'll take a sec—

VIOLET

How long?

KAY

Well, if it's longer than five minutes, we've got a problem.

VIOLET

Then what?

KAY

For now, let's focus on what's in front of us.

VIOLET

(Audibly freaking out) What, sitting here in the dark, just—waiting?

KAY

You sounded a lot calmer when you thought you were definitely gonna die.

VIOLET

(Intense) I'm a scientist. I don't like unknowns.

KAY

Well, if there's anything I can do to—help distract, or—

VIOLET

Are you really out here on a priority three?

KAY

That's what they tell me.

VIOLET

(Brave, weak joking) Is it an, if I told you I'd have to kill you--

KAY

More like, if I told you, you'd pass out from boredom. Diplomacy. Heavy on the talking, light on the--

VIOLET

Daring shoot-outs with criminals?

KAY

After four months of politicians, believe me I would love nothing more than to face down some good old fashioned space pirates.

VIOLET

How is this your first mission?

KAY

Well, shucks.

VIOLET

No, I mean. If you graduated officer school in '85, what've you been doing for six years?

KAY

(Doesn't want to talk about it.) Things came up.

VIOLET

You fought in the war, didn't you? (Pause) You're green on protocol but you know what you're doing and they don't just hand threes out to anyone. You volunteered. You could've gotten command on some supply ship but you chose—

KAY

Don't. I had all these tech skills, and you know, it was—fighting for the whole human race. Didn't really feel like a choice.

VIOLET

Well, on behalf of the human race—or at least, all of us that didn't wanna get murdered by space aliens—

KAY

Seriously, Violet.

VIOLET

(Quiet) I was listening to a thing the other day, they called it the most narrowly won war in recorded history.

KAY

I know.

VIOLET

That why you're so comfortable fighting losing battles?

KAY

What?

VIOLET

Be honest. What are the odds your plan works?

KAY

I don't know. It hangs on—so many variables that I don't have. The state of your ship, how much of the systems we can get back, the state of your cryo chamber—

VIOLET

Less than fifty percent?

KAY

Yeah. But more than— (Trying to be comforting, petering out) Six.

VIOLET

Where are we at, in the countdown?

KAY

We've got time still. Tell me a story.

VIOLET

A story?

KAY

Take your mind off all this. Or—sing me a song. I bet you've got a lovely voice.

VIOLET

Wow, you do like long odds. Um. There's actually—there's this song I've had stuck in my head today, ever since I started thinking about this Folklore class I took? It goes, uh—

FX

(Thump)

KAY

What was that?

VIOLET

Me. Hitting the floor. The ship's starting to—shake?

KAY

That'll be the stabilizers. Don't worry, it's the first thing I'll fix when we're back online.

VIOLET

If we—Jesus!

FX

(Thump)

KAY

You're fine. You're okay. It's a shit way to travel but—hold onto something sturdy and—stay calm.

FX

(Thump)

VIOLET

Um. Ah—! (Still being tossed around) I don't remember how all of it goes, but uh—

(In a lovely but very unsteady voice. Terrified and the tempo is lurching in all directions.)

*As I was goin' over the Cork and Kerry mountains.
I saw Captain Farrell and his money he was countin'.
I first produced my pistol and then produced my rapier.
I said stand o'er and deliver or the devil he may take ya.*

(It's Whiskey in the Jar, approximately the [Thin Lizzy version](#) although sweeter and more tentative at first. Kay begins to join in. Gradually they gain confidence until they are almost rocking out. Engine sounds in the background, distant sounds of stuff in the ship flying around as the ship jolts)

KAY AND VIOLET

*Musha ring dumb a do dumb a da.
Whack for my daddy-o,
Whack for my daddy-o.
There's whiskey in the jar-o.*

(Violet is so surprised at Kay joining in that she flubs the lyrics)

VIOLET
I—uh. Being—?

KAY
I took all of his money—

KAY and VIOLET
*and it was a pretty penny
I took all of his money and I brought it home to Molly.
She swore that she'd love me,*

(Violet drops off)

KAY
never would she leave me—

Violet?

VIOLET
The lights are back.

KAY
Good. Okay, so find that screen—

VIOLET
Hang on, it got all thrown around—

FX
(Rummaging)

VIOLET
Yeah. It—shit, okay the stabilizers are still—Uh, not back, but it says—“Set password”

KAY
Good. Pick something you'll remember.

VIOLET
Got it. (Getting thrown around) Ahh—(Keys clattering, getting thrown around.) Okay. Type
“W-H-I-K-S-E-Y”

KAY

...Whiksey?

VIOLET

Listen, this is not—ah—ideal typing circumstan—just type whiksey, alright?

KAY

(Singing) *There's whiksey in the—* (pause) I'm in. Look, I don't know how much heat and atmo you've really got so—head to the lab, I've got this. And—stabilizers should be back—now.

FX

(Footsteps)

VIOLET

Thank god.

KAY

The god you don't believe in?

VIOLET

Shut your pie-hole. Captain.

KAY

(Laughs) Tell me when you're in the lab. Hey, just remember, with each new setback, you get an even wilder story to tell everyone back home.

VIOLET

Yeah, spoken like a woman who is definitely about to jinx us.

KAY

You can't buy into fate or God, but *jinxes*—?

VIOLET

I'd rather not take chances right now.

KAY

Too bad that life is nothing but, huh?

VIOLET

Yeah. (Resolute) Well, to quote our alma mater, 'Scandendum—'

KAY

'Scandendum Est Spiranti,' yeah. I, uh, (slightly embarrassed but a good sport) I *may* have those words permanently inked onto my body. Which, arguably kinda cheesy, but—

VIOLET

Arguably? (Laughing) Can't believe I'm gonna buy you a drink.

KAY

If it's any consolation, you'll only be seeing that tattoo if the drink goes *very* well.

VIOLET

So with that not-at-all distracting image, I—dammit.

KAY

What?

VIOLET

I'm looking through the door of the chamber. It's a little smaller than I—

KAY

Can you fit?

VIOLET

Not with the samples.

KAY

(Like it's very simple) Then take the samples out.

VIOLET

(Tense) You get why I can't do that, right? You get how that looks. The shuttle explodes, the systems fry, everyone dies but one person, and that one person leaves the mission to rot. The Intergalactic Republic doesn't—

KAY

You've got a witness. If you think I wouldn't testify to—

VIOLET

My crew *died* for—

KAY

Your crew died in a freak accident. They didn't die so you could throw away your life for a *priority seven*—

VIOLET

If we want to stay ahead of the Dwarnians, every bit of research—

KAY

Samples are replaceable. Something tells me there's only one Violet Liu. (Pause) Just—I know what I'm talking about, okay? They'd want you to make it.

VIOLET

There's not, actually.

KAY

Violet are you—take out the samples.

VIOLET

(Vague) Yeah. I've just got to—there's a process before you can access the—

FX

(Computer beeping)

VIOLET

(Typing, half-distracted) There's not only one Violet Liu. It's a common last name, common first name. There was another in my program, actually, a year ahead of me. I used to get her mail sometimes. One time I got her grades by mistake, that was—her grades were way better than mine. I know it's stupid, but that always felt like a referendum on me, somehow. I met her a few times. She was taller, too. Less neurotic.

I'm not the best scientist out there. I'm not even the best scientist out there named Violet Liu.

KAY

Well you're the Violet Liu I wanna meet. And not just because you're about to owe me a drink.

VIOLET

(Quietly) Okay, taking the samples out.

KAY

(Very relieved.) *Thank you.* (pause) Think I've got everything good to go, if you can just—

VIOLET

Kay?

KAY

Yeah?

VIOLET

I really, really wish I could remember you.

KAY

Well, now you'll get a chance to—

FX

(Footsteps)

KAY

(slightest bit of an edge) What are you doing?

VIOLET

(Already kind of knows what she is going to see.) Computer. Display autopilot route. (A beat.) That's the wrong coordinates.

KAY

Damn, are you sure? Thought you didn't know much about—

VIOLET

Unless your goal is to send the ship into the actual middle of nowhere.

KAY

...Wow, you're right, I am so sorry. Head for the chamber and I can fix it while you're—

VIOLET

It was a class of thirty.

KAY

What?

VIOLET

Intro Bio. It was a class of thirty. It was supposed to be a huge lecture but, you know, year after the coup, when the university heads, uh, resigned, people started pulling their kids out. By the end of the second week, we could fit in a classroom. Pushed our chairs in a circle.

KAY

I know, I remember. Violet, I don't know how long the air and the heat are gonna hold for. It's about to get very, very cold and hard to breathe. You don't have time to—

VIOLET

What are the odds, really? That out of the entire universe, I'd get picked up by one of thirty people who—

KAY

The air's getting thinner, right? It's cold. You can't concentrate. Think. You're a scientist, you know about Cabral-Crespo Syndrome. Paranoia sets in and people do things they'll regret later. You need to get into that chamber, Violet. After everything we've—*I am so goddamn tired of people dying.* Please.

VIOLET

(Sounding increasingly sluggish and out of it) You're right. It is cold.

KAY

Violet.

VIOLET

And hard to think.

KAY

Please.

VIOLET

I keep thinking about Harmony. How hot it got in the summer.

KAY

Violet, walk to the cryo chamber.

VIOLET

Remember? How hot it used to get?

KAY

Sweltering, yeah. And we can reminisce as much as you want, but first, you need to walk—

FX

(Footsteps. Dragging.)

VIOLET

I hated it. Sweating. The humidity. To be honest, I can't say I liked Harmony, while I was there. And now, today, I can't stop thinking about it. That ugly 2050's architecture. The pond drunk kids were always falling into.

KAY

(Wry) You're making me nostalgic.

VIOLET

But that heat, more than anything. The way it would—settle around your body, like a fog or a blanket. And the smell out there, that late-summer smell outside. Maybe even more than the heat. Running across the quad, late for class, and that smell would hit you in waves. Remember?

KAY

Of course.

VIOLET

Yeah. (Pause. The jig is up. In a much more collected voice) What did it smell like, Kay?

KAY

Well, you know— (Pause)

VIOLET

Harmony campus, late summer. (Pause.) It's a pretty simple piece of information. Of course, not the kind of thing that makes it into someone's transcripts. Or their ship personnel files. Or their freshman ID photo. Got any last guesses?

KAY

Violet, I—

VIOLET

No. You've got nothing. Because you didn't go to Harmony. Because you're lying to me, and you've been lying to me since we met. You're not the captain of the Philadelphia. Your name isn't Kay. You didn't fight in the war—

KAY

(Completely abandoning her persona) Wow, you're pretty sharp. I know you think the other Violet Liu is smarter than you, but don't sell yourself short, kid.

VIOLET

Who are you.

KAY

Same as anyone, a bundle of contradictions and regrets. Violet, I can tell you were faking it earlier, but the cold really is about to be a problem for you. You need to get into the cryo chamber—

VIOLET

Why, lady? Where are we going?

KAY

You know what we have in common right now?

VIOLET

Well for one thing, we both know you're a liar.

KAY

We both want you to survive.

VIOLET

I can't know that.

KAY

Every aspect of the ship right now is under my control. If I wanted you dead, you would be.

VIOLET

And instead, what, I'll be tortured for information so you can—

KAY

We don't torture. Hurting people doesn't yield reliable intel. It just makes them say whatever they think they need to say to make it stop. (A beat.) Also, it's wrong.

VIOLET

Why did you—

KAY

Nothing personal, okay? I'd never heard of you before this morning.

VIOLET

Did you kill those people on the shuttle?

KAY

No. Did you?

VIOLET

Are you a Dwarnian?

KAY

No. Are you? (Pause) We don't have time for this.

I'm not asking you to trust me. I won't insult your intelligence like that. I am asking you to act in your own self-interest. Whatever happened to your crew, we had nothing to do with that. You would've died very slowly in six or seven days anyway. Right now, we are giving you the option of getting out of here.

VIOLET

And going where.

KAY

You have to know I'm not gonna tell you that. (Pause.) We won't hurt you. This isn't Plan A for us, either.

VIOLET

And I'm supposed to take it on faith that—

KAY

No. Don't take it on faith. Take it on curiosity.

VIOLET

You honestly think, after everything, that I'd follow you out of *curiosity*?

KAY

I do. Maybe a rational person wouldn't take this risk. Maybe a rational person would opt for a quick death over whatever's waiting for you at the end of this flightpath.

You want to think you are a rational person, but you're not. You're a scientist. And there is no greater expression of sheer stupid human hope than the study of science. We're born groping around in the dark but science says, "We can understand this." It says, "There's something here to understand and this act of blindly reaching forward is worth it." It says, "You could be devoting your entire career to what's really a dead end and it's still worth it. You could be dismissed in your own lifetime, you could poison yourself with radiation, you could be executed. And it's still worth it. More than your safety, more than your life, that divine earthly act of trying to understand."

Personally, I find that brand of optimism exhausting but if it wasn't for science, we wouldn't have deodorant or instant coffee, so.

Look, you have a lot of questions right now. You can die with answers to none of them, or you can—

VIOLET

(Gritting her teeth) Step into the goddamn unknown?

KAY

And reach for a little understanding.

VIOLET

...You're manipulating me right now.

KAY

Yes. I have an agenda. At present, that agenda is to keep you from dying.

VIOLET
And then?

KAY
Get in the chamber. Find out.

VIOLET
(The horrible thing is, she knows Kay is right)...Goddammit.

FX
(Violet's footsteps, beeping of programming the cryogenic chamber)

GRATUITOUSLY PLEASANT WOMAN'S VOICE
New sequence begun. Specimen one. One—hundred and—forty—pounds. Cryogenic process begins in—thirty seconds. (Countdown from thirty continues in the background)

VIOLET
I can't believe I thought you went to Harmony.

KAY
Yeah, well. Who doesn't love a good fairy tale?

FX
(Door shuts)

VIOLET
(quietly, to herself) Can't believe I liked you.

KAY
If it's any comfort, sweetheart, I'm very good at what I do.

VIOLET
How can I hear you, from inside the—

KAY
Why would they bother to soundproof it?

GRATUITOUSLY PLEASANT WOMAN'S VOICE
(continuing the countdown)

FX
(A hiss of air)

VIOLET
(quietly) God...

KAY

It's alright. Probably not a picnic being wedged in there like a ham in a can but when you wake up, you won't even have memories of this part. Last thing you'll know is crawling inside.

VIOLET

If that's the case, can't you give me one piece of information that's actually true? Just for a few seconds. Call it a loan.

KAY

Tell you this much. I really was watching the network. When that surge happened, a couple ships did detect you, figured out you needed help. But you were right: none of them came. Your government really did leave you to die.

VIOLET

Yeah, I know. I knew you were lying once you said my life was worth more than the samples. That's—not how the IGR thinks.

GRATUITOUSLY PLEASANT WOMAN'S VOICE

Stage one beginning

KAY

I really did fight in the war.

VIOLET

(Bitter) Which side?

KAY

The human side. Don't be an ass. (Pause) Look, I get it, you don't wanna show weakness in front of me right now, but no way is it a fun time, being conscious in there. Stage two can't start until you're asleep, so don't fight it. (Pause) Deep breaths. (Pause) Hey, what did it smell like? Harmony in the summer.

VIOLET

Nothing.

KAY

Nothing at all?

VIOLET

(weary) It didn't have a smell. I was bluffing.

KAY

Clever.

VIOLET

(starting to fall asleep) ...why are you...still here?

KAY

I don't know. Completionist streak, let's say. Unless you mean existentially, in which case your guess is good as mine. I don't believe in fate, either.

VIOLET

(Definitely falling asleep)...honestly it's...kind of a comfort not to believe...right now

KAY

Yeah. Hey, as long as I'm saying stuff you won't remember...sorry about how this all shook out. It wasn't my idea.

VIOLET

...whose...?

KAY

Tell you later. Go to sleep.

(KAY begins to hum 'Whiskey in the Jar')

GRATUITOUSLY PLEASANT VOICE

Stage one complete

KAY

(continues humming)

Violet?

GRATUITOUSLY PLEASANT VOICE

Stage two beginning

KAY

You really do have a lovely voice.

GRATUITOUSLY PLEASANT VOICE

Stage two complete. Stasis achieved.

KAY

(Continues humming to herself until the last line, sings) *There's whiskey in the jar—*

AGENT

End of Transmission One.

Note: we strongly believe the first voice belongs to Violet Liu, Harmony College alumna '85. Currently a research assistant employed by Strauss and Marquez. For security purposes, in this report she will sometimes be referred to as Cindy Chu.

We have not yet identified the second voice. It may go without saying that no student named Kay Grisham attended Harmony in the years specified. We have, however, been able to link this name to another possible alias: Ishani Kanetkar.

No anomalies detected in the ship's automation. The Iris appears to have used the standard free program E.L.L.A., or Ella.

This report has been transcribed by Ensign Jessica Best. If you need to review a written version, please access procyonpodcasts.com. That's p-r-o-c-y-o-n podcasts dot com.

This is Agent Park, codename Apollo, thanking you for reviewing this report. Additional thanks to the specialists at Procyon for their assistance.

My second report is currently underway. For now, the Starship Iris Case is awaiting classification. However, for reasons that will soon become clear, it is crucial we continue to monitor and analyze these transmissions. Recommended status: priority five.

Long live the Republic.

[Report Two](#)