

Station to Station Episode 4, “ATTENTION METRICS”

Episode written by Andrea Klassen

Station to Station created by Alex Yun

0. DECK OF THE ASTRID.

MIRANDA

I thought you were a lab tech.

NELLY

("TECH-NICALLY" GEDDIT?)

Well, technically I — sorry. That was bad. Adrenaline.

(SHE LOWERS HER VOICE)

I'm a journalist. I'm here undercover. And I think you might be able to help me.

1. DECK OF THE ASTRID. CALM SEAS

(JANELLE "NELLY" COCHRANE IS BRIGHT AND UPBEAT WITH A CONFIDENT DELIVERY. THIS ISN'T THE FIRST TIME SHE'S MADE ONE OF THESE RECORDINGS.)

NELLY

Hey, sis. It's Nelly, coming to you live from the deck of the research vessel Astrid, somewhere off the coast of... Alaska? It might be Canada by now, actually. The ship's following the coastline for the first few days of the cruise, but there's not a lot of difference between mountain ranges when you're miles out at sea, you know? Down here it's all just rocks and green stuff and freezing winds every time I get sweaty enough to want to unzip my coat. Remind me when you hear this I owe mum an apology — turns out I might need all four of the hats she knitted.

NELLY (cont.)

So, since you at least pretended to listen to the last diary I made you on one of these trips, here's round two. Follow along for breaking news updates on whether I've lost any fingers or tits or toes to the cold.

We left port early this morning. I think all the researchers are still on a high from that. Seems like nearly everyone out here knows each other already — there's some in-joke going round about... squid, I think? And maybe tequila?

I picked up a load of American sweets in Anchorage, so I guess I'll have to bribe someone with a Snickers if I want an explanation... Chocolate's a good way to start friendships, right? If not, you're going to have a lot of tape on your hands, Aya. Just hours and hours of reports on clouds and seagulls... the light of the moon on the wave, and — ooh, I know how much you *love* it when people post about what they had for lunch — I bet I can get at least an hour of material out of the soup of the day— Yeah, yeah. That's it. Today there was this roasted tomato number, with little croutons, and this pretty decent salad with a vinaigrette—

(SHE BREAKS OFF LAUGHING)

And you've turned me off already, haven't you? You're done — out. Files deleted. I'm going to ask you about this months from now and you'll just shout at me about soup until I hang up the phone.

(SHE PULLS HERSELF TOGETHER, KIND OF)

Alright, alright. Nicer big sister now, promise.

What else can I tell you about... Do you want to hear about proper disposal of lab waste at sea? Because have I got you *covered* there. Better make yourself some popcorn. This is going to be a thriller.

2. NELLY'S CABIN

(NELLY IS DRYER HERE, MORE MATTER OF FACT. STILL CONFIDENT, BUT NOT PERFORMING.)

NELLY

Audio log of journalist Janelle Cochran, aboard the Research Vessel Astrid, April 10.

Looks like the gamble paid off. I've been interacting with the researchers two full days now, and no one's clocked me yet. I guess scientists don't pay any more attention to who's writing the news than anyone else. And if anyone was going to match the face of their new laboratory technician to my Twitter pic, they had their last good chance a couple hours ago. From the sounds of it, the onboard file-sharing system is as good as it gets for network connectivity from here out.

Now I've just got to hope that anyone checking on my data uploads would take Aya's side in the great 'posting updates about your lunch online' debate. Enough noise to signal, and you can hide anything in plain sight, right? At least, that's the hope.

If I were our sponsors, that's what I'd be doing too. Priority one's going to be sorting out who's here on legitimate research and who's doing... whatever it is none of my contacts on shore wanted to tell me about in too much detail. All I've got for now is a name: Project Lazarus. Guess we'll find out how far chocolate bars can get me on *that*.

3. DECK OF THE ASTRID, CHOPPY SEAS

NELLY

Well Aya, I promised you some moon on the water content and I hope you didn't think I'd forget to deliver. The moon's only half full and it's cloudy, so we're a little so-so on that front. The waves, on the other hand, are going full out. About half the researchers I'm assigned to are taking turns throwing up in the toilet. It's cold — freezing, honestly, I am going to need at least two more jumpers next time I come out here — but the air smells a lot better than it does in the labs tonight, believe me....

It's really something, you know? I'm at the very back of the ship right now, where they shove the sub off, not even any railing between me and the deep. There's lights on the boat, but if you turn your head just right, just enough to block everything else, there's nothing but black. Even squinting, it's hard to tell what's sky and what's sea. It feels like standing on the edge of some giant hole in the world. Like I could be the only person left anywhere.

SOUND: A BEEP TO STOP THE RECORDING, ANOTHER FOR A NEW FILE

NELLY

(QUIETER)

That's two times now I've seen it out the corner of my eye. There's a shadow, over by lifeboats. Person-sized, I think, if it weren't crouched over. They could be taking seawater samples — but I could've sworn they dropped the containers off the starboard side, and no one's supposed to be out here at night without a reflector vest. And you don't move like that, all hunched down and creeping sideways unless — oh!

(BACK TO PERFORMING)

—Anyway, sis I bet you're having a nice time back home on dry land, where there's radiators and probably no one vomiting. I'll record more soon. Night!

SOUND: SOME SHUFFLING ON THE MIC, NELLY'S VOICE RECEDES

Sorry, I didn't see you there...

4. NELLY'S CABIN

NELLY

Audio log of Janelle Cochrane, research ship Astrid, April 11.

That was close. I don't know how he snuck up on me, but I don't think he heard anything — or if he did, he wanted to chat about the weather more. All rave reviews. I guess someone has to enjoy below zero temperatures and wind chill.

(SIGHS)

I swear when we headed inside I saw that same shape ducking behind one of the winches. Close enough to where I'd been standing I might have touched them, if I'd reached out a little. It could have been a deckhand, right? Guess we'll see if I'm that lucky.

5. NELLY'S CABIN

NELLY

Audio log, April 12

I, um, this one's going to sound strange, but... Note to self: there are 14 chocolate bars left in your storage drawer in the lab. Consider this a reminder to check that number tomorrow.

6. NELLY'S CABIN

NELLY

Audio log of — damn it—

NELLY

Damn it! Audio log, April 13. That stupid notebook. I knew it was a bad idea when I started it, and now — *stupid, stupid* — if I'd kept it all to audio like I planned —

They could have come in any time, couldn't they? The ship's at its first stationary collection point, so it's been five hours of collecting plankton samples followed by five more hours of labelling plankton samples and — God, they could have been in here all day without me noticing.

(SHE LAUGHS, KIND OF)

It would've been the perfect crime, if they hadn't left their jacket. Let's get a look at you... it's one of those goose down parkas. Expensive looking. I'd guess it fits an average-sized man or a bigger women. Something in the pocket...

SOUND: HEAVY FABRIC RUSTLING, CRINKLING

NELLY

It's one of my chocolate wrappers. Hold on, be right back.

7. NELLY'S CABIN

NELLY

Back. So... half my equipment inventories are out of order and there are only ten chocolate bars left in the box in the lab.

(SOFTLY)

Damn it.

8. THE NEXT DAY

NELLY

Audio log of... you know. April 14. I'm eating lunch in my cabin today. One of the scientists gave me a funny look while we were grabbing food in the mess. I don't know if he was angry I'd taken the last whole wheat roll, or if he was trying to sort out whether to blow my cover then and there. He was a bit heavy for a men's large, but some people like a snug fit. I can't even narrow down the suspect list to people with master keys. Not when I watched one of the lead scientists literally break into a locked supply closet with a bobby pin two days back.

It all comes back to who's who. I've got to start rooting the Mallux people out, but the researchers I'm working with have been running me so hard I haven't got much more than names for—

(SLOWING - SHE'S HEARD SOMETHING)

Must be a list of all of us onboard somewhere... If I could... maybe I'd...

(A PAUSE, THEN WE HEAR NELLY DRAW IN A BREATH, RESOLVING SOMETHING)

SOUND: A DOOR SLAMS OPEN

NELLY

(NOW FROM SEVERAL FEET AWAY, AGGRESSIVE)

Hey! Hey, come back here.

SOUND: THE DOOR SHUTS, BURYING MOST OF THAT QUESTION

9. A FEW MINUTES LATER

NELLY

You can sneak into my room when I'm not here, but footsteps in this big metal echo chamber? Not silent. Walk back and forth in front of my door like that and I'm going to notice.

It was that woman from the submersible crew, Reva Santiago. We haven't spoken before but, um. I've seen her around — it's not hard to miss the only woman, and most of the non-scientists did our safety orientation together.

She'd just turned to come back down the hallway again when I got out there — not suspicious *at all*, that — said she was looking for one of the other ROV guys, that he was running late for some team meeting.

If she was lying, she's good at it. She kept eye contact the whole time. People don't do that, mostly, when they're feeding you a line.

Still. Keeping an eye on her.

10. April 17

NELLY

(WORN DOWN, BUT TRYING TO KEEP UP APPEARANCES)

Hey sis. Big news update here today. Apparently winter storm season's not quite as over as everyone thought. Word from on high is we're due for some pretty nasty weather in a couple days. Captain says we're best off riding through it, but we'll lose at least a day of research time when it hits. Of course now everyone's in a frenzy for every second of lab time they can get... I swear if I never see another coral sample — Let's just say it's been a long couple of days.

Hey, um, I know I'll be back on land by the time you listen to this but, remember — don't tell mum and dad your big sister spent part of her trip re-enacting *Perfect Storm*. I know you've got my back.

SOUND: RECORDER SHUTS OFF, AND IMMEDIATELY BEEPS AGAIN TO START ANOTHER FILE

NELLY

At least that's one person who does.

(SIGH)

Audio log, April 17. I heard footsteps in the hallway again last night. Late, too, nearly 3 a.m. Whoever it was, they were gone by the time I got up to check. Serves me right for going to bed. I talked to the other night shift ROV operator at breakfast and he said Santiago was with him the whole time, not counting trips to the toilet or for coffee — so, who even knows. I'm going to have to find another way to keep tabs on her soon. I think one of the day crew tried to give me her room number yesterday... and there was definitely a wink.

(AWKWARD LAUGH)

That could've been a good cover story, if I hadn't yelled at her in the hallway first. It's not like she's — I mean — her whole team's got good arms, you know? I could have been convincing.

11. April 18

SOUND: HANDLING NOISES AS THE RECORDER TURNS OUT. THE WHOLE SOUND PROFILE HERE SHOULD BE MUFFLED, WITH NELLY COMING IN CLEARER THAN REVA... AS IF THE RECORDER IS IN HER POCKET, PERHAPS

REVA

(DRY)

We have to stop meeting like this.

NELLY

What are you doing down here Santiago?

REVA

Me? I'm just stretching my legs. Shouldn't you be on shift right now, Cochrane?

NELLY

(A LITTLE FLUSTERED)

I needed something in my room — and I — aren't *you* usually on shift by now?

REVA
I'm on break.

NELLY
It's a strange place for a walk.

REVA
You looked at the sky lately? Less chance of rain down here.

NELLY
Right. I bet that's the only reason— [you're snooping around.]

REVA
It's warmer down here too. Did you say you were looking for something?

NELLY
What?

REVA
You said you left something in your cabin.

NELLY
Oh, I, ah—

REVA
Careful, if you're down here too long, someone might notice you sneaking off in the middle of a shift. You wouldn't want to look suspicious, right?

NELLY
I'm not —
Yeah, well, maybe you should take your own advice.

SOUND: A DOOR OPENS AND SHUTS, A BIT TOO HARD. MORE HANDLING NOISES AND THE RECORDER BEEPS OFF.

12. NELLY'S CABIN. SOON AFTER

NELLY
Audio log, April 18.

So, that happened. I waited until she'd gone, then tried a few of the doors around mine, just in case — I don't know. If she'd been sneaking into anyone else's rooms, she locked up afterwards. If she's trying to get into mine I don't understand it — if it's her coat in my wardrobe, she's already got enough on me to go to whoever's in charge — Unless... if there's someone else sneaking around...

(SHE GROANS)

Oh God, I don't know.

13. Later that night

NELLY

April 18, audio log continues.

I took a walk around the ship after tea tonight. Santiago's right, it turns out. The storm hasn't reached us yet, but the clouds aren't looking friendly. Lots of big, dark and grey out there. It really is a better day to get some exercise below decks.

It's... interesting, the things you don't notice. There are whole corridors on this ship I've never been down. Like, there's this turnoff just past my cabin I've passed a hundred times, but until I went looking I couldn't have told anyone it was there. I didn't go very far, but it seemed like it was headed downwards — where the engines must be. I — you know, I keep forgetting this ship has this whole other level. Maps everywhere, and — again. Couldn't have remembered it to save my life. They didn't even take us down there during orientation, and they showed us everything — even the septic system... There's something there, I think, but that's not the only thing I turned up tonight. I think I might have an idea how I can start narrowing down these researchers. More to come.

14. The Storm

NELLY

Audio log, April 19th.

The storm hit us a couple hours ago. The Astrid's been rocking hard, you can hear the waves slapping the hull every couple minutes now, and every so often the floor just drops out from under you if you're not holding on to something.

They had us strapping down machinery all day today. Deck crew sent everyone to their rooms as soon as they could after that. Not an official lockdown, but no one who doesn't have to is coming out until breakfast.

I gave it until midnight before I snuck out. Turns out whoever broke in here did me a favour. With that big coat on and the hood turned up you can't tell who's inside. It's warm too. Not bad in a disguise.

It took about 30 minutes of ducking and weaving to get where I was headed. I should have got there faster but there was another wave. It felt like being thrown. I tripped going down the corridor, bounced off a metal door. My shoulder went numb, but the noise was worse.

I spent 10 minutes hiding in a supply closet two turns back, waiting for someone to come looking.

(SHE LAUGHS)

I guess Santiago Watch helped. If I hadn't been trying half the doors in this place because of her, I wouldn't even have know it was there.

It was stupid to worry, really. There couldn't have been anyone else around to hear me. The captain's rooms are flanked by the chief engineer's and the first mate's. It's not likely they're coming back until this blows over.

So, yeah, turns out the locks around here aren't any better if you're in charge. A little jiggling with my crew ID card was all it took to get the door open. Finding the documents took longer. My hands were shaking. I must have jammed the desk drawer three times trying to get it open and closed. I don't know what I would have done if there hadn't been a hard copy...

The passenger manifest was in the bottom drawer, along with the cargo list. I haven't gone through the whole thing yet — got a lot of pictures on my phone to squint at now. But it didn't take long to find one thing that was missing. I went over everything, twice, and I'm sure of it.

Reva Santiago doesn't exist.

15. A few minutes later

NELLY

I mean, obviously she exists. I watched her kicking scientists out of the lab five hours ago. But I can't find her name, not anywhere.

I did find another name, though: Sabine Durand. According to the manifest, she's studying plankton populations with the team out of Paris, but I've been rostered with them most of the trip. The number of days we've spent hauling samples out of the water, I'm sure I'd remember—

(MORE CERTAINTY)

I know I'd remember her.

16. The next day

NELLY

April 21. We're clear to go back on deck today. It's — I'm going to be late for my shift if I don't hurry — but I was looking over the manifest again at breakfast. There's three more names I don't recognize. David Won, Jonathan Costello and Riley Arber. Two scientists... and an ROV technician.

17. The Storm is Over

NELLY

Audio log of Janelle Cochran, April 22. I'm going down to the lower decks. Tonight. I wanted more time — I don't even know what's down there — but if Santiago finds out what I'm onto... I think I can use the ship's intranet to stream all of this to my computer while I'm down below. If anything goes wrong, maybe someone can make some use of it.

18. Below Decks

NELLY

Still here. It's been pretty quiet so far, but I found a hallway off the engine room a few minutes ago that looked promising, so I'm trying that.

There aren't as many doors as I was expecting. The corridor branches every so often, but no more doors. What else — the paint. It's a different colour. Greyer? Flatter.

19. Below Decks

NELLY

Been walking about 10 minutes now. It's... here, listen.

Quiet down here, isn't it? I'd almost forgotten how noisy the Astrid is — engines humming, machines running, ventilation systems. Even the sound of the waves, sometimes, when the ocean gets rough. But not here. It's just... quiet.

20. Below Decks

NELLY

I touched a wall, just now. It's warmer than I remember things being up top. Could be heat from engines. You could make that call. Something about the paint feels funny too. It's slick, somehow. Plastic-y? I took some photos, but I don't know if it'll show. Still no doors.

21. Below Decks

NELLY

(HER DELIVERY IS STRANGE HERE — A LITTLE DISSOCIATED, ABSENT)

God, it keeps getting hotter and hotter. I guess I know why David was so willing to lend me his coat that first night. Not a lot of call for a parka with a lab down here, is there? ...maybe I'll ask him if I can keep it, if we run into each other.

22. Below Deck

NELLY

(BACK TO NORMAL, FRUSTRATED)

This is ridiculous.

I've been walking in a straight line nearly the whole time I've been down here. I should have walked clear out the side of the ship. I should be in the waves — the waves I haven't been able to feel for more than half an hour. I didn't even realize how used to that I was until it went away. Reverse-sea legs are a thing, right? Anyway, my stomach's been doing flips — I had to lean on the wall for a while to get my balance back.

23. Below decks

NELLY

God, where am I?

24. Below decks

NELLY

So. There it is. Forty minutes of walking and I finally found a door. I think I would have missed it if there were literally anything else to look at — it's the same colour as everything else down here. I was going to back just now, you know. I was thinking, 'Nelly, give up, go take a seasick pill and a nap.' I was thinking 'come back later.'

(beat)

So that's how we're playing this, huh? Fine. One look inside, and then I'm—

SOUND: FROM A DISTANCE. THERE'S A METALLIC. MUFFLED BANG

What the—

SOUND: TWO MORE BANGS. AND SOME MUFFLED VOCAL NOISE

Hello?

SOUND: THE BANGING CONTINUES. AND THE DIALOGUE SLOWLY FADES UP.

Hello?

MIRANDA

For the love of — Hey! Hey! Down here!

NELLY

Who's in there? Are you alright?

MIRANDA

The door's stuck. Let me out!

NELLY

Dr. Quan? Is — is that you?

MIRANDA

Get me out of here!

SOUND: THE DOOR OPENS. SMOOTHLY.

NELLY

What are you doing-- (down here)?

24.5

NELLY

I'm a journalist, and I'm here under cover. And I think that you might be able to help me.

25. LATER, MIRANDA'S CABIN

NELLY

(WEARILY)

Interview with Dr. Miranda Quan, April 22, concerning... Project Lazarus, I guess... or whatever the hell that was just now.

MIRANDA

Do you really have to record this? How do I know I can trust you? Just because you said you're a journalist, doesn't mean—

NELLY

And just because you say you got trapped down there doesn't mean you're not secretly a Mallux spy trying to get me to let my guard down, right? Which, I guess I already have, so I guess I'm screwed. Hell, even if you're not a spy, I'm starting to get the feeling this whole place is one big screw job.

MIRANDA

Yeah. That... seems like an accurate assessment of the situation.

NELLY

So, if we're screwed anyway, let's be screwed together. Agreed?

MIRANDA

Together... That — yeah. Together sounds good.

NELLY

Great.

MIRANDA

So... what now?

26. A Quiet Room

REVA

(FADE UP ON)

You couldn't get one of your techs to help you carry this stuff? I've got a shift in 15.

MIRANDA
(NERVOUS)

We — I couldn't find anyone. I think they're on break. I'll be quick, I promise. I just — I don't want to get in trouble for taking samples back to my room again.

SOUND: A door opens

REVA
I don't know how you keep mistaking dead fish for interior decor, doc.

NELLY
Oh, I think you know a lot of things, Santiago.

REVA
(THE WEARIEST OF SIGHS)
You again.

NELLY
(ALL THE COOL OF THAT PREVIOUS LINE? JUST GONE)
Yeah, it's me. Hey.
I, um , I think you should take a seat.