

STAR CROSSED, Part One:
"Exactly What You Would Do"

[Note: "Gliese" is pronounced /'gli:zə/]

Lights up on a love seat, where AMY sits in casual clothes, apparently talking to herself, flipping through a magazine.

AMY: We're trying on wedding dresses tonight... That's exactly what I told her. The world needs to see her in a dress more often, and apparently I need to marry her to make that happen... Oh, she's taking a sabbatical so that we can go on honeymoon. She goes into space all the time, but I've never been outside the atmosphere, so she booked us a month on an orbital leisure cruise... *A little shocked:* Mother, that's none of your business. *Smiles.* But they do have gravity on those ships, so I'm sure we'll figure it out.

GEMMA enters. She looks very sharp & stylish in a designer suit of some kind, hair & makeup exquisite.

GEMMA: Amy, I'm home!

AMY: Gotta go... Uh huh, love you. *Taps her ear to disconnect the call, jumps up.* Gemma!

Amy stops in her tracks as she sees Gemma hanging up her overcoat near the door. Amy is stunned – and Gemma stops as well, carefully taking in Gemma's reaction.

AMY: Wow.

GEMMA: Yeah?

AMY: You look amazing.

GEMMA: I do?

AMY: Uh, yeah.

GEMMA: Thanks.

AMY: I mean, you normally look good, but it seems like you're really... trying. Or something. *Pause.* How was work? Did they approve your sabbatical?

GEMMA: Sort of.

AMY: Sort of?

GEMMA: I've got some... news... about work.

AMY: Good news? *Pause.* Bad news.

GEMMA: Complicated news. *She crosses to Amy. Sit.*

Gemma takes Amy's hand, sits. Warily, Amy sits as well.

GEMMA: I'm not supposed to tell you this. If anyone finds out that I've told you, I'll be court-martialed.

AMY *alarmed:* Gemma, what are you-

GEMMA *putting her finger to Amy's lips*: Sshhhh, it's okay.

AMY: But you can't get court-martialed before we get married!

GEMMA: I can't marry you if I don't tell you this. *Amy falls silent*. They're sending a deep space cruiser to Gliese 581 c. It's one of the nearest Earth-like planets outside our solar system.

AMY: So?

GEMMA: They've assigned me to be Chief Medical Officer.

AMY *in shock*: Oh.

GEMMA: I didn't request this assignment.

AMY *starting to panic*: I thought the terms of your enlistment specified you'd never have to leave the solar system.

GEMMA: Amy-

AMY: Otherwise it'd never make sense to even start dating, let alone moving in together and building a life together-

GEMMA: I know.

AMY *exploding*: Deep space cruisers don't come back! *She jumps up, away from Gemma*. We're getting married, Gemma! Tell them no!

GEMMA: I was specifically ordered to join the fleet. I can't tell them no. I've never seen a deep space mission pulled together with such urgency, Amy. It means something.

AMY: It means what exactly? Tell me what's so important out there in deep space.

GEMMA: I can't. I have no idea. We don't get our mission briefing until we leave orbit.

AMY: So you don't even know your mission, but you're happy to just take off, just like that.

GEMMA: I'm not happy at all, can't you see that?

AMY: So you came here just to break my heart? You should've just left.

GEMMA: There's something else, Amy. This is the part I shouldn't tell you.

AMY: Oh, *this* is the part-

GEMMA: They can clone me, Amy. They can clone me, and transfer a complete copy of all of my memories and knowledge into the clone. They can set this clone up with a pension... and they can leave this clone to be with you.

AMY *stunned*: That sounds horrible.

GEMMA: I was supposed to come here, and tell you I'm on sabbatical, and marry you... and then just take a new position, something local. But... I love you too much to lie to you before we get married.

AMY: What...?

GEMMA: The cruiser left orbit early this morning, Amy.

AMY *slowly realizing*: And she was on it?

GEMMA *nodding*: And if you don't love me... the way you loved her... then I'm not sure how I'll be able to live.

They regard each other for a very long moment.

AMY: How long...

GEMMA: She started training for the mission two years ago.

AMY *almost whispering*: She's known *that* long that she was leaving?

GEMMA: It takes nearly that long to grow a clone to adulthood.

AMY: I see. And when was the last time I actually saw her?

GEMMA: Almost a month ago.

AMY: My god.

GEMMA: You have to realize, Amy... she's terrified to be leaving you. She's terrified that you're just going to hate her for the rest of your life...

AMY: She'll be in cryogenic sleep for the rest of my life.

GEMMA: No, that's not how it works. Cryo is just for civilian space travel. Military astronauts stay awake and on duty during their missions.

AMY: That doesn't make sense.

GEMMA: Amy, she's very, very different now. Military astronauts receive nanoswarm implants to help keep them alive and safe. The swarms convert radiant energy into sustenance, and they... they constantly repair cellular decay, and enhance the body's natural immune system, so... barring a catastrophe, she's effectively...

AMY: Immortal.

GEMMA: Barring a catastrophe. *Pause*. So... they can't put military astronauts into cryo because the swarms treat the freezing process as damage, and restore the astronauts' body temperature.

AMY: So she'll be awake for hundreds-

GEMMA: Thousands.

AMY: Thousands of years...

GEMMA: She's going to be wide awake for a very long time, and she's always going to hurt about you.

AMY: Uh huh. She gets to live forever, and you get stuck with me.

GEMMA: Are you kidding? I wouldn't trade places with her for anything in the world. She knew that I'd tell you, and she couldn't stop me. I know how she must feel, and it makes me sick to think about it. *Pause.* I know a secret way you could send an encrypted burst transmission to her... You could say goodbye. I'm sure she'd love to hear your voice one more time.

AMY: I don't think she would.

GEMMA: She would, really-

AMY: No, she would *not* want to hear what I have to say. *You* risked a court-martial to tell me everything, while she just took off into space...

GEMMA: Amy... I would've done the exact same thing in her position. You have to believe that.

AMY: Maybe. If I send her that transmission, will she be able to respond?

GEMMA: No.

AMY: So there's no sense asking her for an apology.

GEMMA: You may as well ask.

AMY: Maybe. *Pause.* So. You've got all her memories.

GEMMA: I do. Right up until the night she saw you for the last time.

AMY: I didn't understand why she was crying during dinner.

GEMMA: I kept saying it was hormones.

AMY: Which I did not believe, by the way. *Pause.* What was our first date?

GEMMA: Watching the Leonid meteor storm, from the roof of my building.

AMY: Where did we make love for the first time?

GEMMA *smiles*: In the physics lab at the base.

AMY *pause*: And how exactly did you propose to me?

GEMMA: You proposed to me, if I'm not mistaken. Surprised the hell out of me actually.

AMY: Really? Do you know how hard it is to outwit Gemma Carlisle the master scientist?

GEMMA: Did you know I would say yes?

AMY: Honestly... I had no idea. I've never been more afraid, actually.

GEMMA: Afraid of what?

AMY: Of being alone, if you said no.

Gemma crosses to Amy but doesn't quite work up the courage to try to touch her.

GEMMA: I want to try on wedding dresses with you.

Amy takes Gemma's hand.

AMY: You're going to look beautiful in a wedding dress.

GEMMA: They made me a little younger than she was when she left. I think you noticed that already.

AMY: That will certainly help.

Amy pulls Gemma toward her kisses her sweetly.

AMY: I'm really glad you told me the truth, Gemma.

GEMMA: Yeah?

AMY: Yeah. That's exactly what you would do.

Fade to black.

STAR CROSSED, Part Two:
"No Sense Of Direction"

Lights up on GEMMA sitting near a small steel table. She wears a lab coat over a flight suit. She is running through a series of instructions in her head: we see her concentrate for a moment, then glance up toward the ceiling; then concentrate again, glance toward the wall; etc. Whenever she indicates that she is operating lab equipment throughout the play, she signifies via facial expression that she is taking these actions.

KRIS enters carrying a steel case large enough to hold something the size of a baseball inside.

KRIS: Where do you want this?

GEMMA: Exam table.

She studies the case closely as he sets it down.

KRIS: This is my last special delivery before I go onto my recreational shift.

GEMMA: Congratulations on reaching your fifty years of medically mandated pleasure-making, Lieutenant. You've earned it. *Looks away from the case finally to acknowledge Kris.* Yeah, so it's my expert opinion as a medical officer that this thing you brought me isn't human. Why am I looking at it?

KRIS: The briefing you're about to receive is classified. Do you acknowledge, Doctor?

GEMMA *surprised*: I acknowledge, Lieutenant.

KRIS: Before this vessel could be mobilized for its current mission, the military launched a fleet of advance probes toward the Gliese system, to try to spot any unusual signs before the cruiser arrives. One of these probes recently claimed a major diagnostic malfunction and requested a pickup for repair.

GEMMA: You realize I don't repair probes.

KRIS: Yes, well it turns out there was nothing wrong with the probe.

GEMMA: I'm so relieved.

KRIS: But there was definitely something wrong with the specimen inside its collection tray.

GEMMA: Oooh, a "specimen." Is that your special delivery? You brought it in a shielded case - is it dangerous, or can I look at it?

KRIS: I think you should just run a preliminary scan and see for yourself.

GEMMA: You're so coy.

KRIS: I want you to experience the surprise, just like I did. I know you're "just" a medical officer, but you do know how to operate these instruments, correct?

GEMMA: Lieutenant, I could operate these instruments in my sleep, if the nanoswarms ever allowed me to sleep. Hang on, I'm just finishing warming them all up.

A beat or two while Gemma ignores Kris and concentrates.

KRIS: Hey, so... can I ask you a personal question?

GEMMA: Of course.

KRIS: When do you actually... take your recreational shift? I don't think I've ever seen you take it, actually. No one on the crew seems to know either. Not that I was surreptitiously asking your friends about your shift schedule.

GEMMA: Naturally. Is there a reason you're asking?

KRIS: Why yes, as a matter of fact. I was thinking at some point, I could... try to adjust my shift schedule to line up with... to line up with your recreational shift a little better, so that we could...

GEMMA: The aforementioned pleasure-making?

KRIS: Yes. Exactly.

GEMMA: Hold that thought - the scanners are all online and calibrated. Initiating basic scanning sequence.

We hear a nice low hum for a few moments, then silence.

GEMMA: Uh... hmm. According to the scan, there's a perfectly empty shielded case sitting on that table.

KRIS: Surprise!

GEMMA: Is this a joke?

KRIS: The case is not empty. There's a small asteroid fragment inside, about the size of my fist.

GEMMA: You've seen it?

KRIS: I personally supervised its retrieval from the probe.

GEMMA: But it's invisible to scanners?

KRIS: It was invisible to the scanners on the probe. We're hoping you have better luck here in the lab.

GEMMA: How can you see it if it doesn't reflect light off its surfaces?

KRIS: It appears to the human eye as an *absence*. A hole where it ought to be.

GEMMA: It must have mass if you can cart it around in a suitcase. How did the probe find it?

KRIS: What we think must've happened... see, these probes have several styles of collection chutes, some of which stay deployed at all times. We think this specimen just happened to cross the probe's path and land in the chute. The probe's scanners didn't notice the object itself, but over time it noticed its velocity slowing unexpectedly. Then it test fired its thrusters a few times and couldn't understand why it was moving so sluggishly with a supposedly empty cargo hold. So it assumed a malfunction and called for help.

GEMMA: Okay, I think I've got an idea here. Give me a minute to recalibrate.

KRIS: Anything you need.

GEMMA: This'd probably be going a lot faster if you'd approached one of the approximately three hundred highly competent research officers on board.

KRIS: They don't have clearance to study this specimen.

GEMMA *puzzled*: Why do I have clearance?

KRIS: You don't have clearance to know the answer to that question. I don't know either, if that helps.

GEMMA: Not exactly. I have a deeper scan prepared, focused on pinning down the object's mass. We can worry about its other properties if we get that far.

A different hum fills the air, louder and longer; then stops.

GEMMA: The scan has correctly identified the mass of the table and the case.

KRIS: But not the specimen?

GEMMA: No. So can I look at it?

KRIS: Is it safe to be close to it?

GEMMA: Well, how did you get it off the probe?

KRIS: I was in a full contamination suit.

GEMMA: But it's not emitting any harmful radiation, or any harmful anything, so what's the problem?

KRIS: I just... trust that you know what you're talking about.

GEMMA: That's very sweet. Open the case.

Kris opens the case slowly and carefully, revealing a black rock inside.

GEMMA: It sure does look like a rock, doesn't it. Oh but I see what you're talking about – our brains fill in the image of a rock because that's all that could fit that hole in space. Hang on. *She leans down and stares intently at it.*

KRIS: What are you doing?

GEMMA: The probe didn't have the advantage of a nanoswarm hotwired to a human nervous system as one of its scanners. I'm currently feeding this image directly to each and every lab instrument that just claimed this object wasn't sitting here on this table, and eagerly awaiting their response. *Pause.* Nice. The finest military lab equipment in the galaxy has suggested that we try rebooting the entire lab and scanning again. You know, Kris, I don't know how long that's going to take since it's never actually been done before. You don't have to stay if you want to get on with your recreational shift.

KRIS: No, I can wait. I'm curious about all this.

Gemma begins to concentrate on the task at hand. Her focus is split between complicated mental tasks and the conversation below.

KRIS: So... you never actually answered my question, the one about *your* recreational shift.

GEMMA: Ah yes.

KRIS: You did tell me to hold that thought.

GEMMA: It's true. Good work.

KRIS: If you don't want to sync up shifts, that's fine, I can-

GEMMA: I don't take recreational shifts, Kris.

KRIS: What?

GEMMA: I was the first person in the history of the nanoswarm experiment to exhibit an allergic reaction to the recreational shift chemicals. I was just coming off my very first duty shift and was fully prepared to immerse myself in the debauch levels. But something about the recreational chems triggered an atypical response.

KRIS: Didn't they test you for allergies during training?

GEMMA: Of course. But by the time we left, I was different. Apparently I'd been suppressing a significant amount of guilt for leaving on this mission without saying goodbye to my fiancée first. I couldn't relax. Eventually I couldn't stop crying. My swarm didn't intervene, which I guess meant my nervous system thought I was having a perfectly healthy experience. I begged them to make it stop. It took a few years but they found an antidote. I wanted back on duty shift as fast as possible, but they confined me to quarters on medical rest. Just me and my lonely brain.

KRIS: My god, I can't imagine...

GEMMA: I didn't get better, though. I became suicidal. Which is a terrible feeling for anyone, but it's a lot worse when you have a nanoswarm inside you that'll heal your wrists the instant you slice them open. That became my sole focus in life. Find a way to kill myself and obliterate the mess I'd made of my life.

KRIS: Obviously you didn't succeed.

GEMMA: Yes, I'm sorry I spoiled the ending of this story by continuing to exist.

KRIS: How many times did you try?

GEMMA: I tried exactly once. My goal was to steal an emergency escape pod and fly it into the nearest star. That should've been catastrophic enough to kill me. The pods have a manual release mechanism in case the bridge is damaged.

KRIS: But the bridge would know the minute you launched.

GEMMA: I know, but do the math, Kris. We're on a top secret mission to an unexplored region of space – do you think they're going to alter the course of this cruiser to rescue one defective crewmate who wants to die?

Kris tries to respond, but fails.

GEMMA: Here's the hilarious part.

KRIS: Oh, this is a funny story?

GEMMA: I got inside the pod and triggered the manual release, and *boom* – I could feel the pod violently ejected from the hull of the cruiser. A few tiny rockets on the pod fired for about 10 seconds, and died. Then I realized I was in pitch darkness. The controls were dead. I was spiraling away from the cruiser, with no sense of direction. What I would learn much later... in a real emergency, the pod's actual engine would've been warmed

up, its nav system would've been powered up, the cruiser's current position would've immediately been downloaded into the nav system... If the bridge doesn't declare an emergency, none of those things happen automatically.

KRIS: Specifically to prevent that kind of misuse of military assets.

GEMMA: Correct. The only thing working was the transponder and minimal life support. I wasn't smart enough, or trained properly, I just... didn't know what I didn't know. *She is starting to finally, actually, seem emotional about recalling these events.*

KRIS: Gemma, we don't have to... I mean, you're here now, so...

GEMMA: Maybe, maybe not.

KRIS: What do you mean?

GEMMA: I was trapped in a tiny indestructible coffin with no external stimulation whatsoever – you can't even stand up. And that's when I became part of a very interesting science experiment. Turns out the nanoswarms can do more than just repair and maintain clusters of memory in the brain. Turns out if the brain is just spinning on idle looking for something to do, the swarms can actually manufacture new memories. If you give them enough time – and trust me, I had plenty of time – they can create full blown tactile hallucinations with an amazing fidelity. And I just gave in. Because... because I was finally home. Back on Earth. With Amy. And it was years ago, before any of this, and I could... I could go into private practice instead of enlisting in the military. And I could stay with Amy, and never break her heart. And never have to abandon her. I finally had my life with Amy back. *Long pause.* But then I'd see a mention of Gliese 581 c in the news, and I'd suddenly find myself screaming in terror and pounding at the insides of a military escape pod, and I'd scream and scream and bash myself against every surface until I could wake up, and find myself in bed, with Amy holding me tight, telling me it was all a nightmare, and I could finally relax again, and feel safe.

KRIS: How long...?

GEMMA: It took them 317 years to rescue me. That includes almost a hundred years of bickering between the military and the civilian central command about attempting a rescue mission. Apparently someone somewhere did the math, and this particular defective crewmate actually was worth altering the course of the cruiser for. *Pause.* That was a long time ago. I'm back on duty now, and I stay on duty. I mean, I'm only comfortable telling you all this because everything around me, including you, is obviously a hallucination, and I'm going to wake up in my bed with Amy any minute now.

KRIS: Funny.

GEMMA: I'm not joking.

Long pause.

GEMMA: The lab is back online. One more scan?

Kris nods, becomes fixated on the rock. We hear the loud hum again, then silence.

GEMMA: Nothing. I'm completely out of ideas. We should ask the Admiral about getting a proper research team involved.

KRIS: Did you hear that?

GEMMA: Hear what?

KRIS: It wants me to touch it.

Kris leans forward and puts his palm on the rock. A brief expression of surprise crosses his face, then he collapses, dead.

Gemma is dazed for a moment, then rushes to Kris' side, tries to wake him, checks his pulse. Then she stands, carefully closes the case on the rock.

GEMMA: I need a secure channel with the Admiral.

After a beat, the Admiral speaks over an intercom.

ADMIRAL: Go ahead.

GEMMA: Lieutenant Carson is down, sir. That specimen he brought in off the probe... he touched it, and it killed him. He said it wanted him to touch it.

ADMIRAL: Any other casualties?

GEMMA: No sir.

ADMIRAL: Is it talking to you?

Gemma stops, listens for its voice.

GEMMA: I believe it's trying to, sir. But I have considerable experience interacting with voices in my head. This one's not going to get to me.

ADMIRAL: What else do we know about the specimen besides that it can talk?

GEMMA: Nothing.

ADMIRAL: I'm issuing a quarantine.

GEMMA: Good idea, let me just grab a few things-

ADMIRAL: You are under quarantine, Doctor, along with Carson, and the specimen.

GEMMA: What?

ADMIRAL: I'm temporarily confining you to that lab until the rest of the deck is cleared. Then I'm sealing off the entire deck. You'll have all the provisions you need until we can figure this out.

GEMMA: Can't we just throw the rock back into space?

ADMIRAL: Doctor, it's not a "rock." You just admitted it's talking to you.

GEMMA *slowly dawning*: First contact.

ADMIRAL: Not quite. We were contacted once before, back on Earth. That's what triggered this mission.

GEMMA: What happened?

ADMIRAL: That's all I can tell you for now. Admiral out.

Gemma slumps against a wall, defeated. Amy enters.

AMY: Is it really talking to you?

GEMMA: Sure is. I can see why Kris responded. It's pretty seductive. *Pause.* I could be trapped here for the rest of the mission.

AMY: You have options.

GEMMA: I'd love to hear them.

AMY: Kris had the same nanoswarms implanted that you do, yeah?

GEMMA: Yes, everyone on board has them.

AMY: So... looks like you've got yourself a catastrophic event, right there on the table. Just like you've always wanted.

GEMMA: Not always, Amy. Just since-

AMY: I've forgiven you a billion times already, but you won't forgive yourself. You might be back on duty but you're defective and your swarms aren't healing you. So just do it. I don't mind if I cease to exist after this conversation.

GEMMA: Don't say that.

AMY: Don't cling to a life you hate because of me. Take care of yourself first.

GEMMA: Amy, I wasn't trying to kill myself when I took off in that escape pod.

AMY: I don't understand.

GEMMA: I couldn't get anywhere near the equipment on the communication deck, to respond to your message... your encrypted burst transmission from Earth. Demanding an apology.

AMY: Oh. That does sound like me.

GEMMA: Yeah. And in my deluded and suicidal state... I thought I could make it home in that pod and apologize in person.

AMY: Oh. *Pause.* I was probably long dead by the time you ejected.

GEMMA: Probably. But normal human lifespans were already up to 200 years by the time the cruiser left Earth. Maybe life extension techniques kept getting better. Maybe they had a breakthrough and figured out how to prevent aging altogether. I had to try. I had no other reason to live, really.

AMY: What's your reason now?

GEMMA: The same reason.

AMY: I see. You're still defective, but you're fooling them. It may be a while before you get another chance.

GEMMA: I don't know. Something tells me the game might be about to change.

Gemma pulls herself up, back to the exam table, opens the case, pins the rock in her suddenly intense glare.

GEMMA: I see what you're doing here, Mr. Specimen. Just starting a friendly conversation, are we? Well, I'm glad we're already on good terms, because we may be spending tens of thousands of years together, just you and me, engaged in friendly conversation. Learning each other's languages. Getting inside each other's minds. Sharing all our little secrets. I just have one friendly piece of advice. Leave Amy alone, or I will spend as long as it takes to figure out how to properly hurl you straight into a star. Understand?

Pause.

AMY: Understand that you're a crazy person talking to a rock? Please. *She exits.*

GEMMA: Thank you. Now that we've got some privacy... what do you think we should do about this quarantine?

Fade to black.

**STAR CROSSED, Part Three:
"Sudden Inexpressible"**

Lights up on MICHAEL, wearing dirty work clothes as though he has been digging. Michael stands center stage, staring out, transfixed by something out of our sight – moving forward, we'll refer to this as It. We're with him for a few moments: now he smiles... now he seems surprised, but not unpleasantly... now he nods as though realizing a truth of great import... he moves a little closer, and that produces a big smile... he takes a slow step back, and laughs. Then, he is serious. He is interacting with It; It is mischievous in ways, immense in others.

MARIA enters, also in work clothes. At first, she doesn't see It.

MARIA: There you are! I thought we were going to take the same tram back up for dinner-

Then she notices It and stops in her tracks, momentarily stunned by It.

MARIA: Oh, my.

MICHAEL: We're skipping dinner. Linda's on her way down.

MARIA *slightly overwhelmed*: I can hardly stand it.

MICHAEL: It takes some getting used to. Squint a little. *She does*. No, I mean... squint with your brain.

Maria tries that advice, and seems to slowly grow more relaxed.

MARIA: Is it actually-

MICHAEL: Yeah, if you just sort of-

MARIA: Oh oh oh, I get it. *It's like they're playing a video game for a moment, navigating a tricky course, taking delight in overcoming obstacles. Yeah, we're skipping dinner. She sits down on the floor to get more comfortable looking at It. The two of them literally play with It for a while together, almost like children.*

MICHAEL: I just don't understand why it's buried so deep.

MARIA: How'd you find this chamber anyway? It's not connected to the main complex, there aren't any doors...

MICHAEL *trying to remember*: By accident. *Clearing his head as best as he can*. Someone pointed one of the big drills at a bad angle and we clipped that corner up there.

MARIA: Man, that was lucky. *She is slowly sinking into It, almost as though she's feeling an endorphin rush.*

MICHAEL *thoughtful*: I guess it was lucky, yeah.

LINDA enters – their supervisor, work clothes as well but they aren't as dirty or ragged.

LINDA: This better be good, Michael, a military shuttle just landed for some reason and everyone on the surface is getting questioned for- *And she stops in her tracks. What the hell is that?*

MARIA *giggling*: What does it look like?

MICHAEL: The R&D team hasn't seen it yet.

Linda approaches It carefully. She is very guarded as she experiences It for the first time, but It clearly has an effect – perturbing for her, perhaps, but at the same time, she sees Its potential.

LINDA: Who else knows about this?

MICHAEL: Just the rest of my drill crew.

LINDA: Keep it that way.

Linda smoothly inserts herself in front of Michael to look at It. A cascade of emotions plays across her face – she exults in It, feels empowered by It, flirts with a feeling of awe for It but shuts that down. Michael studies her reactions. Then, she recoils slightly, as though she has been lightly slapped.

MARIA *giggling louder*: I don't think it likes you very much.

LINDA *snapping at Michael*: Get your drunk apprentice out of here. And call the drill crew back. I want that passageway widened as much as possible.

MICHAEL: The R&D team is not going to like that.

LINDA: The R&D team reports to me, and so do you. Which means – they're not going to hear about it. *And then, she is caught up in looking at It again – her impatience fades rapidly, replaced by a kind of greedy lust. Then, electricity seems to flow through her, and she enjoys it, although she struggles to control it.*

MARIA *getting to her feet, moving to Linda*: How are you getting it to do that? *She tries emulating the concentration she sees on Linda's face, and is almost overwhelmed.* Wow. I had no idea. Ohhhh and if we do it together-

And then the effect spirals for both of them; Michael takes a step away from them. Maria and Linda are finding themselves unexpectedly linked. They are astonished – and then Maria snaps out of it, and steps back away from Linda, who cannot tear her eyes off of It. She is reveling – her ambition is cycling through her in a feedback loop, but she's neither evil nor simple about it.

MARIA *appalled*: You're just going to... keep it?

LINDA: Our funders will not want it trapped in academic red tape. They'll want to study it themselves... figure out how to harness it... maybe even replicate it...

MICHAEL: You mean... mass produce it?

LINDA: Of course not – the masses couldn't handle this.

MARIA: I'm the masses, and I'm handling it-

MICHAEL: But... it's not something you can *own*.

LINDA: Oh, so now you're the R&D team?

MARIA: Why shouldn't everyone get a chance to... *Gets swept up in It.* ...to feel this? It's like medicine, it's-

LINDA *frustrated*: Stop talking, and get the drill crew.

In the silence, Linda grows slightly more anxious but stays with It. Maria winds up in a very blissful state. Michael seems troubled, can't get his groove with It. As he takes in the sight of Maria's delight, he turns to Linda.

MICHAEL: Even if you widen that passageway until there's no wall left, you won't be able to get it out. We don't have any lifters big enough.

LINDA *scoffs*: It's just a-

MICHAEL: Its surface area is shifting unpredictably. What if it expands in the main drill shaft and gets-

MARIA: It's really wedged deep back in there, too, if you dislodge it you might trigger-

LINDA: Do you people want to lose your jobs? Call the drill crew-

MICHAEL *patiently*: I'm just suggesting that we study it a little more before we try to move the entire thing. What would happen if there was an accident and we hadn't told the R&D team anything? That'd be on you, Linda, right?

Linda begrudgingly accepts that this is true. For a moment, she's disappointed – then, a very clever idea strikes her. She turns to Maria.

LINDA: It likes you. Get me a sample. *As Maria hesitates*: You have learned how to excavate by now, haven't you?

Their eyes meet – then Maria smiles. Michael starts to offer her a pair of work gloves, but she declines with a smile. Maria displaces Linda center stage, faces It and establishes a conduit to It. She seems to be asking It permission, and her beaming face indicates that she feels confident and welcome. She takes a step toward It and involuntarily lets out a moan – mostly pleasurable. She gains momentum in this fashion until she steps off the edge of the stage, disappearing into darkness in a series of moans that build toward a climax that never occurs – she cuts off unexpectedly, and we don't hear from her again.

Linda is horrified. Michael has a better feeling for what has happened, and tries to calm her.

MICHAEL: Here's what we need to do. We need to send the drill crew back up to the main dig. We need to dynamite the passageway here on our way out. We need to tell the R&D team there's nothing down here. And you'll need to come up with a story about Maria's sudden transfer, so that no one heads down here to investigate her disappearance.

LINDA: We're just supposed to... keep *that* a secret?

MICHAEL *gazing at It*: There must have been a reason they buried it this deep.

Gemma enters, in her flight suit but wearing a military overcoat instead of her lab coat, carrying the case with the specimen.

GEMMA: That is a very good observation.

LINDA *furious*: How did you get down here without telling me?

GEMMA: It started with me not telling you.

LINDA: But all the soldiers up top-

GEMMA: -were a diversion. And now you've learned a useful lesson about military tactics.

She moves to the center of the stage, studying It, studying everything about the chamber.

MICHAEL: Would you mind telling us who you are and what you're doing here?

GEMMA: I'm Admiral Gemma Carlisle of the First Fleet. Effective immediately, we're commandeering this

mining operation – and in fact, this entire asteroid - for military purposes. We're here because you've discovered an alien life form.

MICHAEL: How could you know that? We just discovered... whatever it is... fifteen minutes ago! We haven't even told corporate HQ yet!

GEMMA: We had advance warning. Your drilling operation managed to send debris hurtling through space. I happened to find some of it. I'll show you.

She opens her suitcase and shows them the specimen. They seem transfixed.

LINDA: It wants me to touch it.

She reaches for it but Gemma snaps the case shut.

GEMMA: It's just saying hello. Now if you'll both please round your crews up and assemble them all to the surface for a briefing. And let me be very clear – we will *not* be dynamiting any passageways to this chamber. Prepare instead to widen all the chambers as far as possible. We're excavating this life form. Understood?

They nod and exit. Gemma finally gets a chance to stop and stare uninterrupted at It. Amy enters, watches quietly for a beat.

AMY: This place is weird.

GEMMA: Oh. I'm surprised to see you.

AMY: I've been watching you. You and the specimen... you're best friends now, huh.

GEMMA: Jealous?

AMY: You spend more time talking to that rock than you spend with me.

GEMMA: Amy, I love you, but you have to understand, that rock is teaching me the secrets of the universe.

AMY: Pretty impressive mutiny you pulled off.

GEMMA: Yes, the specimen didn't like the idea of wasting time under quarantine. It's very convincing, and when it realized I was immune, it offered me a way out... as long as I cooperated.

AMY: Which you did.

GEMMA: Of course. The specimen began whispering to the people on the deck above... "Come let us out. Come listen to Gemma tell you about a brand new mission." Even the Admiral was happy to oblige, eventually. Now he's the one locked alone on the medical deck and I'm running the ship.

AMY: You took a pretty big detour. There's nothing at Gliese 581 c, is there?

GEMMA: I have no idea.

AMY: How did you know to come here?

GEMMA: When the drill broke into the chamber here, my specimen knew. To us, it appears as though they can send messages backwards and forwards in time, but in fact it's a distributed consciousness puncturing our

reality from outside of it, from outside of time and space. Always trying to break through and consume our reality. It's been trying for a very long time. This chamber is millions of years old.

AMY: What happened here?

GEMMA: As far as I can tell... this consciousness burst into our reality, millions of years ago, and after a great conflict, a powerful ancient race managed to defeat it and bury its physical form here. The runes on the walls feel like they have some kind of charge to them, like an electric fence, caging the consciousness here.

AMY: And what happened to that powerful ancient race?

GEMMA: I don't know. They're not important.

AMY: They thought this thing was dangerous enough to bury on an asteroid, and you're just going to casually release it?

GEMMA: It's hardly casual.

AMY: You just said it's trying to consume all reality, and you're still going to let it out?

GEMMA: If I don't release it, it'll just find someone else to do it. *Pause.* All you do is ask me questions.

AMY: You're getting the secrets of the universe. I'm just getting left behind.

GEMMA: No, Amy, no. You're a part of me. You're coming with me.

AMY: Why did you even need to come here? It could have brainwashed the entire drilling operation into letting it out.

GEMMA: It made me a job offer. And I needed to accept it here, in person, because the specimen alone isn't sufficient for what needs to happen to me.

Gemma puts down the suitcase, and stands to face It.

GEMMA: I agree to be your Herald, and carry your message to humanity. When the message is delivered, a preordained chain of events will be set in motion that will release you from this prison. All I ask in return... is that you allow me to send a message of my own. *We hear a long, tortured rumbling. Gemma smiles.* Excellent. Amy... follow me.

And Gemma steps off the stage just like Maria did, and starts walking toward It. Amy follows reluctantly.

Fade to black.

STAR CROSSED, Part Four:
"Satori Kiss"

Lights up on Amy, sitting alone in what seems like an interrogation chamber; she is not happy. Dr. Nicholas Solitude enters with a briefcase, and sits opposite her.

DR. SOLITUDE: Thank you for coming. I'm Dr. Nicholas Solitude. It's a pleasure to meet you.

He offers to shake her hand; she refuses.

AMY: I should be planning the funeral.

DR. SOLITUDE: Yes, I understand this is a difficult time.

AMY: She died *yesterday*.

DR. SOLITUDE: My deepest sympathies-

AMY: Of a fucking *cold virus*. It's almost as though no one wanted that clone to live too long.

DR. SOLITUDE: Oh, now that would be terribly rote, wouldn't it.

AMY: Gemma left on her mission three years ago. Her clone died yesterday. In other words, her clone had a five year life span, if you include the two years she spent in incubation. So I got three years with her, total. Three years is no substitute for the life I would've had with Gemma if she hadn't been kidnapped by the military. In fact, now I've lost Gemma twice, thanks to the military. So I do hope you understand why I'm not inclined toward a friendly chat with any of you military fucks.

DR. SOLITUDE: Thank you for clarifying that for me.

AMY: What am I doing here?

DR. SOLITUDE: How much do you know about the mission that took your fiancée away from you?

AMY: I don't know anything, because I'm nobody to her.

DR. SOLITUDE: That's not true.

AMY: Oh, are you the sole guardian of truth in the universe and that's how you know what Gemma feels?

DR. SOLITUDE: Amy, I was Gemma's favorite instructor at the military academy. We were very close friends. I'm not your enemy. I miss Gemma dearly.

AMY: What am I doing here?

DR. SOLITUDE: Five years ago, we received an unexpected transmission via military relay satellites.

AMY: So?

DR. SOLITUDE: The message had no origin. It simply emerged into the system and routed itself to civilian central command. I'm going to play this message for you now.

He motions with his hand and we hear a burst of static, followed by a distorted voice that we might barely recognize as Gemma. She speaks in an overly horrible manner, straining to scare whoever receives this message.

GEMMA: I am the Herald. I come from your future. If you wish to survive to see your future as a species, you will send a deep space mission to Gliese 581 c. You will send Gemma Carlisle aboard this mission as Chief Medical Officer. If you do not send this mission, or if Gemma Carlisle is not aboard, we will consume you with no mercy. We have already consumed your species dozens of times before, and we will do so again if you do not follow these instructions. Soon you will worship us. End of transmission.

AMY: I'm sorry – was I supposed to understand that?

DR. SOLITUDE: Yes, she does need to enunciate, doesn't she.

AMY: “She”?

DR. SOLITUDE: We received another message just this morning.

He motions again with his hand and we hear Gemma's voice more clearly now. Gemma appears in a strange holographic light isolated on stage, and interacts directly with both Amy and Nicholas.

GEMMA: This message is for Amy White.

AMY *dumbfounded*: Gemma?

GEMMA: Hi, Amy. Yeah, it's me.

DR. SOLITUDE: Well, that's new.

AMY: What's new?

DR. SOLITUDE: Until now, the message just kept repeating, asking for you over and over.

GEMMA: Sorry for the hassle, Nick.

DR. SOLITUDE: No hassle at all – wait, is this actually -

GEMMA: It's going to feel like a real time transmission to you.

AMY: Gemma, is that really you?

GEMMA: It is, but I'm different now.

AMY: Different?

GEMMA: My consciousness has been subsumed by an extra-dimensional alien entity.

DR. SOLITUDE: Oh, here we go.

GEMMA: That entity has been trying to pry open our reality like a, like a squirrel wants to crack open a nut. It's been making progress actually... puncturing the membrane of our reality in various places. It's going to succeed eventually. And I, I sort of stumbled across it, and decided, what the hell, maybe we can, you know, work together, join forces, you scratch my back, I scratch your... I scratch your admittedly extra-dimensional back.

AMY: You're not making any sense. Why are you here? You left. Why didn't you just stay gone?

GEMMA: Well, I just... it wants a Herald, to play out a script it uses. And I get a small reward for agreeing to be the Herald. See, it's done this about thirty times before – it wipes existence clean of all life and then, for no good reason, spawns life again in a primitive form to see how long it takes before it needs to wipe reality clean again. *Pause.* I was offered a chance to merge my consciousness with this alien entity, to play Herald because, well, it likes instilling a little fear in the mortals, and... what do you know, my entire identity is now smeared across the entirety of existence. From your perspective, I kind of exist at every point along the timeline. But I, uh... yeah, my physical body is long dead, so.

AMY *softly*: Why, Gemma?

GEMMA: I just... *Long pause.* Look, I, uh... I needed to apologize to you, Amy. And the only way to really do that properly was to transcend space and time.

AMY: Oh. *Pause.* Your clone died yesterday.

GEMMA: I know.

AMY: Oh. Right, you know everything, because of the whole-

GEMMA: -transcending-

AMY: -yeah, space and time, I get it.

Long pause.

GEMMA: Say something.

AMY: You already know what I'm going to say.

GEMMA: I know, but...

Long pause.

AMY *to Nicholas*: Can you make another clone of Gemma?

DR. SOLITUDE: We can. But this clone will start fresh, with the same baseline memories that the last clone had. The last three years... you'll have to start over.

AMY: Can we... can we download the real Gemma's mind from this... extra-dimensional alien, and stick it into a clone's body?

DR. SOLITUDE *a little condescending*: Amy, now you're just talking science fiction.

GEMMA: No, actually, we can make that work.

DR. SOLITUDE: Gemma, don't encourage her.

GEMMA: Seriously-

DR. SOLITUDE: You'd generate paradox! You'd be living here inside a clone knowing full well that you yourself are also simultaneously rocketing across the galaxy!

GEMMA: As long as I never communicate with myself, there's no paradox!

DR. SOLITUDE: And how does your extra-dimensional alien entity feel about this?

GEMMA: Well... let's be clear. This entity is going to consume our entire reality eventually.

AMY: What?

GEMMA: I mean, that's a given. It does this repeatedly. The Herald is just the beginning. It'll taunt you for a long while to come. And then it'll break through and consume all living beings. It'll actually wait until you've hit true diaspora across the universe so that it can consume as much of your life force as possible. There's like this giant horrible ripping of the very fabric-

DR. SOLITUDE: Okay, spoilers.

GEMMA: Sorry. But that doesn't happen for another 200,000 years or so.

AMY: Meaning?

GEMMA: Meaning who cares? We'll all be dead by then.

AMY: You mean transcending space and time is temporary?

GEMMA: Ironic, I know.

DR. SOLITUDE: So you were willing to assist the alien in the complete and utter destruction of all life in the universe... for this?

GEMMA: It always finds a Herald. It's preordained. Could've been anybody. Might as well be me. At least this way... I get a small reward for agreeing to be the Herald.

DR. SOLITUDE: The entire clone program is riddled with unsolved defects. We may never solve them all.

GEMMA: I know. If I imprint myself into a clone's body... I'm signing up for a very brief and very bright flash, and then I'm gone. *Pause.* I am so sorry I left you, Amy. I thought I was doing the right thing. I didn't know.

Long pause.

AMY: You already know how this turns out, don't you.

GEMMA: I'm waiting for you already, two years from now, when the clone emerges from the artificial womb.

AMY: I just need to... wait two years.

GEMMA: And then we get three magical years together.

AMY: Just three?

GEMMA: Just three.

AMY: And then you die?

GEMMA: And then I die. Finally. Thankfully. *Pause.* Amy, I love you. Would you let me come back to you, even if it's just for a very short while? Would you forgive me? Would you please accept my apology?

AMY: I would.

GEMMA: Yeah?

AMY: Yeah, Gemma. That's exactly what I would do.

Blackout.