Double Trouble

by felineranger

Summary

The posse find an alternate version of Rimmer floating through deep space in an escape pod. But where has this Rimmer come from, and is he everything he seems?

Notes

Set early Series 7, before Rimmer leaves to become Ace.
“Hey, buds! Something coming into range on the scanners!” It had been an uneventful few weeks on Starbug, so the escape pod drifting into view on the Cat’s screen caused more of a stir onboard than it might usually have done. Lister and Kryten, both eager for a diversion, joined him from the mid-section to take a look. They had come across abandoned pods before; usually empty apart from a few basic supplies that they could pilfer. Very occasionally they contained the remains of some poor unfortunate who had escaped whatever fate had befallen their craft only to float aimlessly in space until those basic supplies had run out before they could ever reach the safety of an inhabitable asteroid. There had been one memorable occasion when a pod they’d brought aboard had contained a mutated spider that had grown larger than anyone was comfortable with. Kryten had swatted it with the largest frying-pan they owned and - at Lister’s insistence - both the pan and the squished arachnid were flushed back out into the vacuum of space.

“Any life signs?” Lister asked cautiously, slipping into his seat.

“It doesn’t appear so, Sir,” Kryten replied, squinting at his own view screen; “I don’t think we’ll have a repeat of the spider incident,” he remarked with a slight tone to his voice. He had been fond of that frying pan but no amount of scrubbing had appeased his master. “I’ll bring her in,” Cat started to key in the relevant commands to the system, “I’m getting low on hair gel. Maybe there’ll be some in there.”

“I doubt it, Sir. Most species don’t consider hair-gel a basic necessity to survival.”

“Maybe this pod belonged to a species that was civilised,” Cat remarked tartly, unperturbed.

Rimmer joined them as they went to the airlock, “What’s going on here?”

“Pod,” Lister filled him in simply.

“Who’s got the frying pan?” Rimmer asked with a shudder.

“No life signs,” Lister reassured him, “We’re just gonna take a look to see if there’s anything useful.”

They stood round as Kryten examined the surface of the pod, “Curious,” he remarked, “The external controls have melted. It must have come through some very rough weather.”

“It won’t open?” Lister asked.

“Not without help.”

“No probs,” Lister helped himself to a bazookoid, “We’ll give it a hand. Stand back.” He aimed a shot at the hatchway and after a few moments, the smoking door dropped off. “Good shot, sir,” Kryten said approvingly. Lister stuck his head through into the dark interior and leapt back when he came face to face with someone inside, “Aghh!!”

The familiar man crouched inside stared up at him, white-faced and wide-eyed. “You!” he whispered hoarsely. “Rimmer?” Lister said, dumbfounded. The other crew-members standing behind him exchanged nervous baffled looks. “I suppose you’re going to kill me now,” the Rimmer in the pod croaked bitterly, his voice husky with disuse.

“What?” Lister looked down at the still smoking bazookoid in his hand, “Oh! No, no! You’ve got it
wrong, man! We were just trying to get you out. Er...” He quickly handed the gun to Kryten and held out a hand to the cowering man. “We didn’t realise there was anyone...No life signs on the scanner, see?” he gestured to the H decorating the man’s forehead, “Here let me help you.”

“I don’t need your help,” the Rimmer told him icily, brushing him aside and stumbling out.

The Cat made a disgusted sound, “How come we always end up with copies of Goalpost-Head? Why can’t we ever find another me?” The two holograms eyed each other with suspicion as Kryten bustled forward. “You must have come through a wormhole, Sir. That would explain the condition of the pod. How long have you been in there?”

“Too long,” he replied shortly.

“I’d better run your light-bee through a health check. Follow me and we’ll get you seen to!”

A little while later, once Kryten had given the newcomer’s bee a thorough look-over and pronounced it stable, Lister and Rimmer joined them in the medi-bay. Cat had gone back to the cockpit after complaining loudly that he wished he’d never seen the damn pod. Rimmer hovered a cautious distance away while Lister took a seat beside the bed. The new Rimmer stared at him with a slightly unnerving expression which he tried to ignore. “So...um...what’s the story, man? How did you end up on your own in the pod?”

“Something hit us,” he said simply, “Tore a smegging great hole in the side of the ship. The others died on impact. I managed to get to the escape pod.”

“What hit you? Didn’t the scanners alert you at all?”

“If I knew what it was I wouldn’t have said ‘something’, would I?” he replied sharply, “Our scanners were about as accurate as a plastic watch out of a cereal packet.” Lister gave an involuntary shiver. He knew all too well how unreliable Starbug’s equipment could be. It was something he tried not to dwell on but it was hard not to feel that this tale of woe could so easily have been their own.

“I’m really sorry,” he said gently, “Was it...Was it much like here?”

“Yes,” the new Rimmer said, giving him a strangely bitter look, “Yes, it was.” Lister let it go. He didn’t want to rub salt into the wound by reminding the hologram of all he’d lost. He stood up, “Well, listen, if you need to rest or whatever then Kryten can make you up a room. You don’t have to...y’know...until you’re ready.”

“Fine,” he said shortly. Lister exchanged a weary glance with Kryten – *I tried* - and made to leave. He was stopped by the sound of their own Rimmer’s voice. “Why didn’t the impact kill you too?” he asked accusingly. Lister hesitated, watching the two Rimmers glaring at each other like a pair of cobras and wondered if he should intervene; but the other Rimmer spoke before he could. “Because the others were all together in the mid-section when the accident happened; right in the impact zone. And I was in my sleeping quarters. Alone.” He broke off his mutual scowl with his doppelganger and shot a look of pure venom at Lister. The words had been pointed enough but the look said it all. Lister swallowed hard, “Come on, man,” he said quietly, tugging at Rimmer’s arm.

They were a little way down the corridor before they spoke again. “I don’t like him,” Rimmer said.

Lister gave a weak smile, “Why doesn’t that surprise me? Have we ever met a version of you that you did like?”

“There’s something weasely about him.”
“Yep, that sounds about right.”

“You know what I mean, Lister. There’s something odd about him. You felt it too, I can tell.”

Lister shrugged helplessly, “What do you expect? The guy watched everyone he cares about die in an instant then spent god-knows how long floating alone in space. You’d probably be odd too. So would anybody.”

“Why are you sticking up for him?”

“Look, what are you saying to me? You want us to stick him back in the pod and flush him back out into space? Is that what you’d want someone to do to you if you were in his place?”

“No, of course not.”

“I’m just trying to give the guy a break,” Lister said, wondering why he felt so defensive suddenly, “I think he needs one right now. So try and be nice, okay? I know it doesn’t come naturally but just make an effort, for smeg’s sake. Things are bad enough round here without another Rimmer vs Rimmer smackdown going on. None of us need it – understood?” Rimmer looked at him in surprise,

“What’s got into you?”

“Nothing,” Lister deflated a little, “Just...what he said about the scanners. It worries me, y’know?”

“Hmmm,” Rimmer looked like there was more he wanted to say on that subject but, for once, thought better of it. “Listen, I’m going to go take my shift.”

“Okay,” Lister said wearily, “I’ll come and relieve you at nineteen-hundred. I need a nap.”

He headed to his quarters and lay down on the bunk but he knew there was no chance of sleeping. Because Rimmer, much as he hated to say it, was right. There was something odd about their new crew-member and it was bothering him almost as much as the idea of them all being wiped out because of a scanner fault. Lister was good at reading people and what he’d got from this new version of Arnie J hadn’t been the self-pitying bitterness he was used to – although that had been there too – it was anger. And it seemed to be directed mainly at him. To the others he’d been rude, disdainful and mistrustful but the looks he’d thrown at Lister had burned.

He shifted uneasily on his bed as he remembered the parting shot their new arrival had fired at him. They were all together in the mid-section and I was in my sleeping quarters. Alone. It wasn’t just his imagination, he was sure; there had been a blatant accusation in those words. He’d wanted Lister to get the message loud and clear. You shut me out. You all shut me out.

Lister bit his lip thoughtfully. Did their Rimmer feel the same way? No. No, he certainly spent plenty of time alone in his room but Lister had always felt that it was at least fifty percent voluntary. He certainly got peevish enough if they had the temerity to disturb him. Despite the squabbles and insults, Lister was confident that Rimmer knew he was part of the posse, even if he wasn’t the most popular. Okay, so sometimes he and Rimmer bickered, argued and bitched. If things got really bad then they shouted, threw things at each other or spent days in a chilly accusing silence; but there was always a thaw. He didn’t hate Rimmer and he didn’t need the natural sense of intuition he’d been blessed with to know that Rimmer didn’t hate him either. What if things had been different where this Rimmer came from? What if this Rimmer did hate him? He didn’t like the idea of spending the rest of his life trapped on Starbug with someone who actually hated him.

He would have to do something; that much was obvious. His knowledge of Rimmer-
psychology meant he was well aware that any effort to improve the relationship was going to have to come from him. But where was he going to start?
Breakfast the next day was a fairly awkward affair. The new Rimmer had finally emerged from his quarters but he wasn’t in a talkative mood. He sat at the far end of the table in a gloomy silence, ignoring Kryten’s desperately cheerful attempts to draw him into conversation. Eventually the mechanoid cast a slightly pleading look at Lister, who sighed inwardly. He really wasn’t convinced that he was the best person to be trying to prise the traumatised hologram out of his shell, but what the smeg. It wasn’t like he could make things worse. “Listen,” he cleared his throat, “Maybe it would be nice if you er...came and sat with us in the cockpit today. What do you say?”

“What for?” he replied stoically.

Lister hesitated. This wasn’t actually a bad question. There wasn’t an awful lot their new arrival could do. They had all stations manned and he probably already knew the controls back to front as they all did.

“Well...you know...” he said weakly, “I thought maybe we could all hang out. Get to know each other?”

“I know you perfectly well enough,” Rimmer said icily. Well, that told me, Lister thought. “And anyway, there’s nowhere for him to sit,” the original Rimmer chimed in, “He can’t have my chair, I’ve only just got it adjusted properly to suit my back.” Lister threw him a ‘You are not helping’ glare and the hologram went back to eating his toast with a slightly miffed expression. “Okay, well, whatever,” Lister continued pleasantly, “Just so you know you’re welcome to join us if you want some company or anything.”

“I don’t think that’ll be necessary,” he said flatly, then brushed the crumbs off his uniform and disappeared back up the stairs to his quarters.


“Thanks a heap for the support, man. Really. I don’t think you could have been more welcoming if you’d tried.”

“I didn’t say he couldn’t join us,” Rimmer protested, “I just said he couldn’t use my particular chair. I think that’s reasonable enough.”

“Face it, bud,” the Cat patted Lister’s shoulder sympathetically as he reached for the last piece of toast, “Nice just doesn’t work with the Goalpost-Head mentality. You’re best off just ignoring them like I do.” He flashed a toothy smile at Rimmer, who bristled, “You weren’t ignoring me last week when you asked if you could use my light-bee for a game of squash, you overgrown moggy!”

“Stop it,” Lister drummed his fingers on the tabletop, “I’m thinking.”

“Don’t hurt yourself,” Rimmer remarked with false concern. Lister ignored the witticism, “I think you should go up there and talk to him, man.”

“Me? Why me?”

“Because he needs someone to talk to and he obviously doesn’t trust us. You two might have something in common. Maybe he’ll open up to you.”

“I’m not a smegging agony aunt! What do you expect me to say?”
“Just do it, will you?” Lister stood up and headed for the cockpit, “And be nice!”

“Who died and put you in charge?” Rimmer muttered.

“You did,” Lister retorted with a grin, “Remember what I said. Be nice!”

Rimmer knocked at the door of his double’s quarters feeling incredibly awkward. Nice, indeed. How was he supposed to be nice to a complete jerk who didn’t want people to be nice to him in the first place? The double opened the door and stared at him blankly, “Yes?”

“Can I come in?” The double shrugged and stepped aside to let him in.

The two of them stood restlessly, arms folded, avoiding eye contact. “So...” Rimmer looked around, feigning interest, “Settling in alright? Everything tickety-boo?”

“I suppose so,”

“Got everything you need?”

“Yes.”

“Good. Very good...” Rimmer trailed off. “Anything you want to talk about?”

“Like what?”

“Well, you’ve obviously been through some...difficult experiences. And you’ve been on your own in that pod for a while. I thought maybe you’d like to talk about it.”

“What do you want to know?” I don’t want to know, Rimmer thought bitterly, I don’t even know why I’m here.

“How long has it been since...it...happened?” Rimmer asked. His double shrugged, “I’m not sure anymore. Years maybe. I lost track of time after the first six months. When you’re alone for that long it stops mattering anyway.” Rimmer thought of a dark cell and lines upon lines of tiny marks scratched into a stone wall. “Yes,” he said rather more gently, “I can understand that.” At least he had known they were coming for him. And he had known. In six hundred years he’d never doubted it, although he knew he didn’t deserve it. He knew Lister would never let the others desert him. But to have sat in one of those pods for years knowing that no rescue was coming, that there was nobody left alive to care...He shivered and asked a question he’d never have thought of asking before. “Do you miss them?”

“Miss them?” his double asked as if confused.

“Your crew-mates,” Rimmer said surprised, “Who else?”

His double shrugged uncomfortably. “What’s to miss? The morons were never much company anyway.” The coolness of the reply shocked even Rimmer, who considered himself the master of contained emotion. “But still,” he pressed gingerly, “To lose them all so suddenly like that...It can’t have been easy.”

“We weren’t what you’d call close,” his double replied casually. Rimmer thought of the matter of fact way the man had relayed the tragic story to them when he’d first arrived. At the time he’d assumed the cool approach had been a defence mechanism, a way of distancing himself from what
had happened. Now he was less sure and that scared him a little. But a couple of things started clicking into place. “I’m guessing things were a little different where you came from,” he said cautiously.

“Why would you think that?”

“Because of Lister.”

His double looked up sharply, “What do you mean?”

“You tense up whenever he’s in the room. You follow him round with your eyes as if you’re expecting him to attack you or something. It’s like you’re afraid of him. Was the Lister in your universe a real psycho or something?” His double turned away, his mouth compressing to a thin, tight line. “Look, you don’t have to worry,” Rimmer told him as reassuringly as he could, “Maybe the Lister in your universe was nasty or violent or whatever, but he’s not like that here. He could do with showering more often and he can be irritating enough to wind up a whole convoy of clockwork cars, but he’s...” Rimmer had imagined he’d have to force his next words out but after the conversation he’d just had he found they came surprisingly easily, “He’s really pretty okay. You don’t have to be scared of him.”

“I’m not scared of him,” his double replied scathingly.

“So what is it then?”

“I’d have thought that you of all people would understand,” he said, as if Rimmer was being dumber than a Page Three girl with concussion.

“What do you mean?” Rimmer asked, affronted.

“The Lister in my universe...” the double said stiffly, “Was my universe. He was my everything. My whole world.”

Rimmer was dumbstruck. “But...you just said that you weren’t close,” he protested feebly. “No,” his alternate self laughed bitterly, “We weren’t. But I wanted to be,” he stared down at his clenched white fists, “God, how I wanted him. But I was always on the outside. Always the queen of Spain to their three musketeers. Just like you.” Rimmer said nothing. It hurt, but to an extent his double was right. Lister and Cat and Kryten had their little club and he was outside it. He knew that in many ways it was his own fault as much as theirs, but he’d never known what he could do to change things. He would rather stand outside with dignity than make a fool of himself trying to gain access to their tight circle. But either way, he wasn’t going to let this messed-up weasel make this about him.

“So let me get this straight,” he said, “If you were in love with the Lister in your universe then why do you hate mine so much?”

“You don’t always have to like somebody to love them. I hated my Lister in many ways...For how he made me feel, for toying with me the way he did...” Rimmer found himself shocked, horrified and yet horribly fascinated, “You mean he knew you were in love with him?”

“Oh, he knew,” the double said bitterly, “He acted like he had no idea, because he knew I’d never be brave enough to confront him, but he knew and he got a kick out of tormenting me! It was like a game to him! A form of entertainment!”

“What did he do?”
“The same things he does to you.”

Rimmer physically staggered, “What?! What are you talking about?”

“You mean you really haven’t noticed?”

“You’re crazy!” Rimmer exclaimed.

“It’s just like it was in my universe,” the double insisted, “The way he teases you, and banter over every little thing. The way he’s kind to you one minute, then pushes you away the next. The way he always tries to make you jealous by buddying up with Cat and Kryten!”

“But...That’s just Lister! That’s just the way he is. It’s the way things are here.” The double shook his head pityingly, “You’re a fool if you think that. He knows what he’s doing. And he knows how you feel about him, no matter how hard you try to hide it.”

“Look,” Rimmer started to back away, “I think you’ve got the wrong end of the weevil here. I don’t love Lister. Smeg, I don’t even like the little goit most of the time!”

“You don’t have to pretend to me. I’m you! I understand!”

“You really, really, really smegging don’t!” Rimmer said emphatically, “I can assure you that our experiences are utterly dissimilar.”

His double stared at him hard, “Can you look me in the eyes and tell me honestly that you’ve never longed to be closer to him? That you’ve never opened up and told him things that you’ve never told anyone else hoping that he’d do the same; that it would bring the two of you together somehow?” Rimmer swallowed hard, thinking of those early, empty nights back on Red Dwarf. The two of them alone in that huge echoing space sharing stories of their childhoods, their relationships, their hopes, dreams and aspirations... “Back when we first lost the crew,” his double continued, “We would have these long conversations. We would talk about our lives before we met, about how we grew up. We would spend hours opening up to each other and I would start to believe that he did care about me, that there might be a chance. But as soon as there was anyone else around it was all different.”

Rimmer gulped. It did all sound so familiar and yet...he was sure he would know if he was in love with Lister. How could he have spent so many years of his life – or rather death – with somebody and not know how he felt about them? Yes, there had been moments between them of...intimacy? Tenderness? Having never really experienced those feelings with anyone else Rimmer was unsure how to class them. There had been Nirvanah, of course, but that whole experience had been so brief and intense and they’d hardly known one another. He knew Lister better than he’d ever known anyone else – and allowed Lister to know more about him than anyone else. Was that love? Did Lister...Oh God...Did Lister think Rimmer loved him? Had he known Rimmer was in love with him without Rimmer ever knowing it himself? He started to gnaw anxiously on his fingers.

“Now do you understand?” the other Rimmer was asking him, “That little bastard tortured me! For years he dangled the carrot of his affection in front of my face only to snatch it away again every time he risked losing face with those idiots he called friends,” the double said with venom. Another memory flickered into life in Rimmer’s head and drove a pang of hurt and self-doubt through his being - (I love you, man. I really, really love you) - “I thought it was all over with,” the double went on, “I thought maybe I could finally move on, find some sort of peace. But here he is again, haunting me. And this time I don’t just have to endure it, I have to watch it too. I...I almost wish you’d never found me!”
Rimmer lay rigid on his bunk, staring blankly ahead into the darkness. His double was clearly deranged; there could be no question about it. The man was in love with Lister for smeg’s sake and what further proof could you need? It was pure narcissism for him to project his twisted desires onto Rimmer. He’d spent too long in that escape pod probably. All the stuff he’d told Rimmer about that other universe was most likely one big delusion he’d convinced himself of while floating alone in space. Yes, that was probably it. Space crazy - that was his problem. Nothing at all to do with old Arnie J. Still...

Lister lay on his back, arms folded beneath his head, trying to unwind after his long shift in the cockpit. He had checked and re-checked the scanners obsessively all day, anxious to prevent any repeat of what had happened on the alternate Starbug, but the stress was starting to get to him. He needed to relax. He needed to think about something else. He wondered if Rimmer had enjoyed any luck in bonding with their new crew-member. Both Rimmers had lain very low today and he hadn’t seen either of them since breakfast. Experience told him that they’d probably traded a selection of increasingly petty put-downs before retreating to separate corners of the ship to sulk, but there was always hope. Maybe they’d spent the time poring over some telegraph poles or rhapsodising about Yvonne McGruder. Maybe by tomorrow the new Rimmer would have mellowed a bit and they could get on with their lives without this awful tension hanging around like a toothache. Maybe...

Rimmer entered the cockpit and was surprised to see Lister sitting alone at the controls. “I thought your shift ended hours ago,” he remarked.

“It did, but I came back and took over from Cat,” Lister traced a finger restlessly around the head of the joystick, “I can’t sleep,”

“Me either,” Rimmer dropped into his chair, “Mind if I join you?”

“Nah,” Lister smiled warmly, “I could use the company.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, why not?”

Rimmer cleared his throat, “I er...did what you asked.”

“And?”

“I’m not sure what to tell you,” Rimmer said honestly. Lister shrugged,

“That’s up to you, I suppose. Both of you.”

“I just...don’t know what to think about him yet.”

“Maybe I should talk to him,” Lister’s finger continued its slow path around the control lever as he thought. Rimmer swallowed hard, “No,” he said urgently, “No, I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

“Why?”
“I think you should stay away from him,” Rimmer said, uncertain of where the words were coming from. Lister smiled, “What’s this? Are you jealous at the thought of me spending time with another Rimmer?”

“I’m not jealous,” Rimmer snapped, “Don’t do that.”

“Do what?”

“Don’t try and make me feel...”

“Feel what?” Lister seemed amused.

“Like you’re mine! You’re not mine. You never have been!”

“Rimmer,” Lister got out of his chair and came to perch on Rimmer’s console, “You know that’s not true. I’ve always been yours,” he reached out to stroke his cheek and Rimmer closed his eyes. “You just never reached out to take me.”

“No,” Rimmer said, even as he clasped Lister’s hand to his face. “That’s not true. If I tell you how much I want you, you’ll laugh at me. You’ll tell the others and you’ll all laugh at me! You’ve lied to me before. You told me you loved me!”

“I wasn’t lying,” Lister whispered to him, “If you tell me how you feel I’ll show you I wasn’t lying...”

“No...” Rimmer murmured, turning his face and pressing his lips to the silken skin on the inside of Lister’s wrist, “It’s a trick. You’ll hurt me. You always hurt me.”

“If you tell me you want me, I’ll let you hurt me. I’ll let you do whatever you want.”

“Lies!” Rimmer gasped desperately. He jumped up and pulled Lister to him, crushing him to his chest and kissing him over and over again. “Why...do you...always...lie?”

“He knows I’m not lying,” Lister purred through the kisses, “He sees everything you miss. He understands what I mean when I smile at you. He understands everything.”

“Stay away from him,” Rimmer growled, starting to tear at Lister’s clothes, “Don’t go near him. He’s not like me. Do you understand? Lister? Lister! Lister....!!”

Rimmer jolted awake, sweating and painfully erect. The dream was slipping away fast but enough of it remained to make him groan to himself, “Oh smeg. It’s true...” He fell back against the pillows and reached for his cock, unsure why – lingering just below the desire – he felt an awful feeling of dread.

Lister was still sleeping. In his dream he was surrounded by Rimmers. Rimmers in blue uniforms, Rimmers in red, Rimmers in gold flight suits with long hair and confident smiles, Rimmers in suspenders carrying holo-whips in their hands. Enough Rimmers to fill a zero-gee stadium and more. Some of them were smiling, some of them were glaring, but they were all talking at once and they were all trying to tell him something...something important. “One at a time!” he was shouting, “I can only cope with one of you at a time!” He rolled over, half-waking and for a moment he was sure there was a Rimmer here with him in the darkness of his sleeping quarters, standing over his bed. But then he closed his eyes again, falling back into a fitful sleep and he knew it must be part of his dream. “Rimmer...” he murmured, but then tailed off into a snore and didn’t stir again. Even
when the door to his quarters hummed softly open and a shadowy figure slipped out of his room into the dark corridor.
Chapter 4

Rimmer was still in bed the next morning when Lister wandered into his sleeping quarters. He yanked the covers up to his chest indignantly, horribly aware of his naked lower half, “Don’t you ever knock, you disgusting inbred little maggot!?”

“Good morning, Rimmer,” Lister ignored the insult and sat down on the side of the bed. “It can’t be morning if you’re awake and dressed,” Rimmer sniped, wondering frantically if there was any possibility at all that Lister might secretly possess x-ray vision which would allow him to see through his blanket, “Early afternoon perhaps.”

“I wanted to talk to you before everyone else is around,” Lister said, “I wanted to ask what happened yesterday with you and...you. Him. Whatever.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, what did you talk about?”

“Nothing,” Rimmer said, feeling panic rising inside him, “Why does it matter?”

“I just want to know how things stand, that’s all. If you found out anything that might help with this situation.”

“Situation?” Rimmer asked, his heart pounding.

“Well, we can’t go on like this with him hiding in his room throwing poisonous looks at anyone who comes near.”

“Oh,” Rimmer relaxed, “I see what you mean.”

“So...?”

Rimmer fidgeted. How much could he tell Lister about what had been said between him and his double yesterday? How would he even begin explaining it? How did you tell someone that you – well, not you but another version of you – hated them with a burning passion because you were frighteningly head-over-heels in love with them? It made no sense. And if he told Lister about the double’s feelings for him would he then be exposing himself as well? Would he even be telling Lister anything that he didn’t already know?

“I think,” Rimmer said cautiously, “That the best thing you can do to help is to keep your distance.”

“Distance? On this ship?”

“Trust me on this one, Listy. This man doesn’t want to be your friend.” That at least was true. “Look, if you two spent all day yesterday holding a special meeting of the ‘We Hate Lister Club’ then fine. It doesn’t bother me one bit. I’m glad you have something in common,” Lister said tetchily, “But one way or another we all have to learn to live with each other. We can’t spend the next three million years ‘keeping our distance’. It just won’t work.”

“It’s always worked for us,” Rimmer said coldly. To his surprise – and satisfaction – he saw a look
of what seemed to be genuine hurt on Lister’s face. “Fine,” he said shortly, standing up, “I’ll go and keep my distance in the cockpit then and leave you alone.”

“Marvellous,” Rimmer replied, “And remember to knock next time!” Lister glared at him and rapped sharply on the door on his way out. “Goit,” Rimmer said out of habit, then lay back and stared at the ceiling.

It was hardly his problem if Lister didn’t want to take his advice, was it? Keeping away from the new Rimmer probably was the best thing he could do in the circumstances. Any attempt at kindness would only fuel the wretched man’s resentment. And why was Lister so keen to be best buddies with his double anyway? When had he ever shown this much interest in improving their relationship? His paranoia shifted up another gear. Maybe Lister did know how Rimmer felt about him. Maybe the knowledge that Rimmer had these...feelings...was the reason he’d never felt the need to put this kind of effort in. But now there was a new boy in town who apparently didn’t worship the ground he walked on, Lister didn’t like that. It wasn’t enough that he had one Rimmer who cared about him – oh no – David Lister had to have two, the self-centred little worm.

He banged on the door to his double’s room and pushed his way in when the man opened the hatchway. “You were right,” he said desperately, stumbling into the spartan quarters, “You were right about everything!”

“Of course,” the double retorted, “I don’t know why you ever bothered denying it.”

“I never realised how manipulative he was,” Rimmer paced the room, “There are so many things that make sense now. All these years he was exploiting these emotions that I didn’t even know I had! I’ve been such a fool.” His double smiled cynically, as if he’d seen this all before, “But I bet you still want him, don’t you?” Rimmer cradled his head in his hands. Lister. Wanting Lister. The very idea of it still seemed alien to him but then he thought of his dream. That warm body pressed against his. Those brown eyes looking at him – him – with desire. Yes, he wanted that and everything that came with it. “Yes,” he said weakly, “I do.”

“It’s okay,” his double walked over and put a hand on his shoulder, “Even after everything he’s done to me, so do I.”

“He came into my room this morning,” Rimmer said glumly, “He had the nerve to ask me how he could make you like him.” His double laughed and it wasn’t a pleasant sound, “Classic Lister, isn’t it? ‘I just want everyone to be happy and friends and for us all to dance round with cute little forest animals!’ What he really wants is attention and it’s never smegging enough, is it? He won’t be happy until we all fawn over him as sickeningly as that stupid mech-head.”

“You know I’ve always thought there was something odd about that robot’s fixation with Lister,” Rimmer said darkly.

“It’s not odd,” the double said matter-of-factly, “Who do you think programmed him to act that way?”

“What?” Rimmer’s initial reaction was disbelief but the more he thought about it, the more it made sense. After all, who was it who had insisted on rebuilding the blasted bog-bot in the first place? Who had put all the pieces together and tightened all the screws? Lister had. It wouldn’t have taken much to leave a few of the right screws loose, would it? Et Voila, one android with a Lister fetish. “That’s sick,” Rimmer exclaimed. “No,” his double shrugged, “That’s Lister.”
“Here’s your breakfast, Sir,” Kryten handed Lister the triple fried-egg, chilli, chutney sandwich with some caution. “Be careful not to get your sleeve in it again, I haven’t finished darning the burn-hole the last one left in your other shirt yet.”

“Cheers, Kryten,” Lister picked at the crust and tried not to think about his squabble with Rimmer. It was obvious what had happened. The two Rimmers had obviously had fun yesterday discussing all the finer points of exactly what was so awful and ghastly about Mr David Lister, Esq with the result that he now had two Rimmers ganging up on him rather than one Rimmer who might, every now and then, when left to his own devices, be willing to play nicely. What a great plan. He should never have encouraged the two of them to spend time together.

He heard the chime of boots coming down the metal staircase and looked up to see the Rimmers. It was odd, but even though they were utterly identical, even though they were effectively the same person, he could still tell at a glance which one was his. Something about the eyes...

“Lister,” they said together in a cold clipped tone, nodding to him.

“Smegheads,” he returned the greeting and went back to his sandwich. Rimmer narrowed his eyes. That was so like Lister. This morning with nobody else around he’d been so ready to play at being friends, but now that Captain Plunger was present it was a different story.

The Cat’s voice rang out from the cockpit. “I’m getting something! It’s not up on the screens yet but I can smell it!” Lister dropped his breakfast and ran to join him, “What are you getting, man?”

“Not sure yet,” Cat sniffed the air, “But it’s big.”

“A meteor?” Lister asked anxiously.

“Your backside?” Rimmer asked innocuously behind him. Lister spun round and was presented with two identical smirks. He realised with growing frustration that he didn’t know which of them had even made the remark. “Is that all you’re going to do? Stand there and make stupid little quips when we could all be in danger here?”

“Oh, please,” the new Rimmer rolled his eyes, “What’s the worst that could happen?”

“I’d have thought you of all people would know the answer to that,” Lister told him icily. The double met his glare head on, “Well, you and Mittens the Kitten seem to have everything under control. There’s nothing even showing on the scanners yet.”

“Doesn’t that sound familiar?” Lister retorted.

“What did he just call me?” Cat interjected, baring his teeth. Lister held up a hand to pacify Cat but to his surprise it was Rimmer who stepped in. “Come on, Duke. Let’s get something to eat and leave the Dynamic Duo to puzzle it out. Maybe with the help of Toilet-Bot they can actually solve this mystery on their own.” The two Rimmers retreated back to the mid-section.

Lister went to his seat and started to push some buttons with more force than was entirely necessary, “Just what we need,” he said through gritted teeth, “Git in Surround Sound,”

“Tell me about it,” Cat replied, “There’s something about the combination of those two that smells worse than three-day-dead dog,”
“What are we going to do, man? We can’t all go on like this.”

“Don’t let them rattle you, buddy. That’s what they want.”

“Yeah? Well, it’s working.”

“I know. I can smell it.”

Lister grinned despite himself; it was fun sometimes having a feline friend,

“What else can you smell?” Cat turned and looked at him and his expression took Lister by surprise with its seriousness. “I can smell that he’s lying about what happened on that ship he came from.” The smile disappeared abruptly from Lister’s face. “Are you sure?” he asked quietly.

“Buddy, you know I’m sure. Whatever hit that ship, I would have smelt it coming, man, you know that.”

Lister stared out of the view-screen at the stars and felt his heart sinking. He’d had doubts about their newcomer’s story but hadn’t wanted to consider the alternative if he was lying. “So what do we do?” he sighed, not really expecting any reply.

“I don’t know,” Cat said, “But I got a bad feeling about that guy. And I think you need to be careful.”

“Why me?”

“Because the way that Grease-Stain smells when he gets near you,” Cat pulled a face, “That’s not like anything else I’ve ever smelt before and believe me it is not good.”
Chapter 5

After his shift Lister went straight to Rimmer’s quarters hoping to find him on his own so he could share what Cat had told him and see if he might be able to provide any clues, but when he got there the two Rimmers – unsurprisingly – were sitting together at the table; and judging by the way they stopped talking as he entered he thought he could guess what, or rather who, they’d been talking about. “Didn’t I tell you this morning to knock before you come in here?” Rimmer snapped. Lister ignored him, “Look, I’m just here to let you know that we finally got a trace on that scent Cat picked up earlier. It’s a derelict, about two days away, and we’re going to head over and do some shopping; so start thinking if there’s anything particular you need, okay?”

“Amazing,” the double sneered, “The moggy was actually right for once.”

“When it comes to scent tracking, he usually is,” Lister replied coolly, “In fact it’s kind of strange that your Cat never picked up whatever it was that destroyed your ship. Wouldn’t you say?” he added innocently.

Rimmer’s double said nothing, but his eyes suddenly went black with menace. Lister held his gaze but wondered uneasily if he should have paid more attention to Cat’s warning that he be careful of this man. Maybe it hadn’t been such a good idea to voice his suspicions so openly just yet. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Rimmer throwing a doubtful glance at his new companion as the logic of what Lister had said sank in and he felt a flash of triumph. Obviously his friend hadn’t gone so completely over to the Dark Side that he would disregard what he was saying out of spite.

“I think,” the double seethed “That maybe you put a little too much faith in that Cat of yours, considering that his brain isn’t half as keen as his nose.” He turned to Rimmer, “Don’t you agree, Arn?” Lister flashed Rimmer a warning look – Don’t you dare agree with him. Rimmer squirmed uncomfortably, “You have to admit, Lister, Cat’s powers of deduction are just barely below what you’d expect from a hamster who’s had a double lobotomy.”

“I trust Cat’s instincts,” Lister replied hotly.

“More than you’d trust ours, I’m sure,” the double interjected sourly. Lister rounded on him, temper fraying. “What exactly is your problem, man? All we’ve tried to do is include you and make you feel welcome but all you can do is bitch! And you,” he spun angrily to face Rimmer, “For the last six years you’ve been part of this crew! Now I’ll be the first to admit that there’s been ups and there’s been downs but we’ve always come through them together! And now you’re turning your back on that to take sides with this guy just because he understands your hammond organ fixation?”

“He understands me, Lister, better than you ever have or have ever tried to,” Rimmer replied coldly.

Lister was genuinely wounded, “That’s not fair! Smeg, if I counted up all the hours I’ve spent over the years listening to you bleat about your crazy family and disastrous relationships and trying to counsel you through all the other things that have contributed to your deeply messed-up life then I’d have enough time on my hands to walk the equator of Jupiter! Don’t tell me I’ve never tried to understand you!”

“Well, I’m sure that in-between fantasising about Kristine Kochanski, playing durex volleyball with Cat, tinkering with Kryten’s programming, watching slushy drivel and eating your way through a
small lakes worth of curry you did nothing but think about me, Lister! Me, the person who came back from the dead to try and help take care of you and keep you sane! And believe me, for those two brief nano-seconds of your time I have never been anything but grateful!"

“Okay, that’s it!” Lister yelled, “You know what? Fine! I know all about how this works because, in case you’ve forgotten, I’ve seen this all before. You two enjoy your little club of two while it lasts because we all know that sooner or later you’re going to realise what a jerk you both are, have a row and come crying to me! Well, just don’t expect any sympathy this time! You’re on your own!”

“Haven’t we always been?” the double interjected sourly.

Lister took a deep breath to calm himself but it didn’t work. Normally he’d have stormed out at this point and taken out his anger on the panel behind his bunk but the Rimmers behaviour today – not least, though he’d hate to admit it, the remark about his ass earlier – had gone too far and he wanted to inflict at least one wound of his own before he left. For a moment the words ‘Gazpacho Soup’ hovered behind his lips but he bit them back. Angry as he was, he wasn’t that cruel. He adjusted his aim and went for a flesh wound rather than a headshot. “God,” he growled, “But I wish to smeg that Ace was here.” The two Rimmers drew in identical, outraged intakes of breath. Lister stayed long enough to drink in their displeasure and then stormed out.

“Did you hear that?” the double hissed.

“The nerve!” Rimmer bristled. He turned and saw his double was actually shaking head to toe with rage. “How dare he even say that man’s name to us after what he did?”

“Um,” Rimmer’s own umbrage faded a little, “What exactly did he do?”

“You don’t know?” The double stared at him, practically bug-eyed with fury.

“Tell me!” Rimmer pressed. The double started to pace, fists clenched at his sides.

“When that detestable, vile stain of vomit came to our rescue that day I saw right away that he wanted Lister the same as I did. You could see it as soon as they set eyes on each other. I’ll admit it, I was jealous. The sight of him...that long, silky hair glinting in the emergency lights as he threw his arm around Lister’s shoulders...and Lister letting him do it. It was too much. I...said something I came to regret.”

“What?” Rimmer asked fascinated.

“I told them...” the double cradled his head in his hands as if the pain of the memory was too much, “I told them to climb into a nice hot soapy bath together and play Spot the Submarine!” Rimmer relaxed slightly, “Oh. Yes, I said that too.” He remembered Ace lunging at him and Lister stepping in to hold him back. Perhaps the Lister in his universe hadn’t quite moved fast enough. “I’m guessing he didn’t take it too well.”

“Take it well?” the double howled, “Take it well! They smegging well followed my advice!”

Rimmer gasped, “Good god!” He raised his hands to his face in horror. “You mean...You saw them...You actually caught them...Ace...and Lister? Oh God!” It was just as he’d always feared...

“No,” the double slumped at the table, “No, I didn’t see them. But when I went into the bathroom...
after he’d finally gone...the suds were still there in the bath-tub...” The double finally broke down into sobs, “...And a little rubber duck!”

Rimmer sank down into the chair opposite, his legs shaking. “And...you don’t think maybe Ace just...decided to have a bath before he left?”

“Of course not!” the double pulled a tissue from his sleeve and noisily blew his nose. “Don’t you see? Lister left the suds there on purpose! He knew I’d find them! He wanted me to know what he’d done! That after all my years of wanting and longing he’d given himself to another version of me who was braver, more handsome,” the double dabbed at his eyes, “With better hair!”

Rimmer’s mind was whirring. He hadn’t been in the room after Ace had left, he’d been too busy sorting out his kipper trap. If he had ventured in, would he have found the tell-tale bubbles just as his double had done? He forced himself to think back. Had Lister smelt particularly clean that night? Had there been an extra sparkle in his eyes? Had he been disappointed that Rimmer hadn’t found his little message before Kryten came to rinse out the tub? “I always,” Rimmer found he had to swallow hard before continuing, “I always thought that there was something between those two. But until now I never had any proof.”

“Well, what more do you want? He just told you to your face that he’d do it again if Ace was here right now.”

Rimmer stood up, “I’m going for a walk,” he said weakly, “I think I need to clear my head.” His double stayed at the table, his red eyes staring fixedly ahead into nothingness, “I’ll make him pay,” he whispered hoarsely, “I swear one day I am going to make him pay.” Rimmer crept out silently.
Rimmer walked blindly, letting his feet do the thinking for him. In just twenty-four hours his world had changed so irrevocably. Suddenly he found himself living in what seemed to be this weird parallel universe where the only thing he really wanted was his bunk-mate, a world where said bunk-mate had turned out to be more malicious and cruel than he’d ever thought possible, a world where Commander Smug-Git, Stupid-Hair, Golden-Boots Ace Rimmer had wiped the slippery suds from Lister’s periscope and Rimmer had never even known. Rimmer felt lost.

He looked around himself. He was lost. He’d wandered into a supply room. He turned to leave and came face to face with the cause of his distress. Lister was just walking in. They glared at each other reproachfully. “Excuse me,” Lister brushed past him haughtily and started to take a stock check of the shelves, obviously preparing a shopping list for their raid on the derelict. Rimmer watched him silently. After a few long seconds Lister turned round and snapped, “If you’re waiting there for an apology, man, you’re not getting one.”

Rimmer looked at him hard. A terrible thought had started to form in his head. Everyone else is on the habitation decks, a nasty little voice in his mind whispered. They wouldn’t hear a thing if something were to...happen...in here right now. If you just shut the door and grab him, quickly so he doesn’t know what’s happening, you could have what Ace had so easily...

“Rimmer? Are you receiving me? Arnold Rimmer, come in, please!” Lister waved a hand in front of his face, “What’s the matter with you?”

“Nothing. Nothing’s the matter.”

“Then what’s this all about? Why are you down here anyway?” Rimmer’s eyes flicked nervously towards the door. He knew he could lock it with just one softly spoken word but his vocal cords just wouldn’t obey. “Are you really that smegged off because of what I said about Ace?” Lister asked, his voice softening somewhat, “Because the pair of you deserved it, you know. I only wanted...”

“Shut up,” Rimmer interrupted, “Don’t say that name to me ever again.” Lister’s jaw clenched. “Fine. If you really want to be that childish about it. Now smeg off, I’ve got things to do.” Rimmer didn’t move. Lister rolled his eyes, “Fine. Then I’ll go and work in another store room and come back here when you’ve finished sulking.”

He walked past Rimmer towards the door. And Rimmer suddenly found his voice.

“Lock,” he said quietly. Lister stopped short as the door whirred shut in his face. “Hey!” he wheeled round angrily, “What is the matter with you?” Rimmer took a step towards him and – to his mild gratification – he saw Lister starting to look genuinely uneasy.

Lister swallowed hard. He didn’t want another fight, he really didn’t. They’d already hurt each other enough for one day, surely? He looked pleadingly into Rimmer’s eyes and saw with a sinking heart that they were beginning to look more and more like his doubles. This wasn’t good. It wasn’t healthy. For any of them. “Rimmer,” he said placatingly, “I’m not going to do this with you. Okay? I’m out.” He turned and pressed his palm against the panel and Rimmer poised himself to spring, to grab...to have. “Open!” The door purred open smoothly and Rimmer, surprised, quickly stopped himself in pre-lunge and fell over. Lister turned to look round at him, perplexed, “What are you doing?”
“I locked it!” Rimmer replied from the floor, unable to keep a very slight whine of annoyance out of his voice.

“Yeah, I noticed, you moron! And I unlocked it. Kryten gave me clearance on all the doors onboard.”

“Why?”

“In case of emergencies, Sherlock! Why else?” He held out a hand to help Rimmer up but he knocked it away angrily, “Don’t try and be nice to me,” he snapped, “I don’t want your pity.” Lister stepped back, paused as if to say something, then thought better of it. He left, shaking his head.

Rimmer stood staring at the open door for a moment, then wheeled round and sat down on a crate of peanuts, trying to regain his composure. What had he been thinking? How could he have let such an insane idea even enter his head? It wasn’t just sick, it was stupid! Rimmer had never been in a serious fight in his life, how had he expected to overpower Lister – survivor of many a drunken bar brawl? At the first hint of danger, Lister would probably have floored him and then fetched the others. And he would have deserved it.

Rimmer knew he was a deeply-flawed man, in almost every sense of the word. But, he wasn’t a monster. Yes, he wanted Lister - maybe even...oh smeg it all, yes, alright, he loved the little bastard, hard as it was to swallow - but not like this. Even he was above that, coward and weasel though he was.

‘I’m not going to do this with you’ Lister had said, and what exactly had he meant by that? Had Lister, in that irritating way he had of getting under peoples skin, looked into Rimmer’s heart just now, seen what he wanted and told him quite flatly that it was never going to happen? I’m not going to do this with you. “You did it with Ace though, didn’t you; you cold-hearted little shit?” Rimmer said out loud, “I just wonder if you made even him beg for it first.” He gave the crate a miserable kick and buried his head in his hands.
“The scouter hasn’t returned any readings of life-signs, Sirs, and the ship’s infrastructure still seems very stable. I think we should be safe to go in and take a look around,” Kryten reported a couple of days later, as Starbug hovered above the remains of the large derelict. “Okay,” Lister nodded to Cat, “Let’s take her in nice and easy, man. We don’t want any nasty surprises.”

“Copy that, Bud,” Cat agreed, firing off a salute. Lister flicked him a sideways glance but said nothing. It hadn’t escaped his notice that Cat had been much warmer and more deferential to him these past couple of days than was usual, and he knew it was the feline’s way of sticking two paws up to the Rimmers. The tension onboard hadn’t gone unnoticed and although Kryten was still making an effort to keep himself uneasily neutral, Cat had taken great pains to ensure no-one was in any doubt as to who’s side he was on; and although Lister appreciated the show of support, it really wasn’t helping the situation.

As they drew alongside the ship, ready to dock, Lister squinted out at the writing painted large down the side. “The SS Richard Branson,” he read out, “I wonder who he was?”

“Don’t you know anything, Lister?” A snide voice behind him piped up. Lister didn’t bother turning to see which of the smegheads it belonged to. “Well, go on then,” he said wearily, “Who was he, seeing as you know so much?”

“Richard Branson was a very powerful and influential 21st century cult leader. He built up a huge following promoting celibacy. Or something like that.”

“Fascinating,” Lister replied shortly, “I’m sure the two of you would have had lots in common, what with your dedication to the Love Celibates and everything.” Cat sniggered derisively beside him.

“Sirs,” Kryten interrupted, clearly desperate to prevent yet another argument, “We should be approaching the docking bay now.”

As Starbug eased its way into the vast chamber and came to a rest, Lister let out a low whistle, “This place is massive. We’re going to need the scan to run off a floor by floor plan of the ship or we’re going to spend all week just trying to find each other.”

“I’m on it now, Sir,” Kryten started keying in the relevant commands.

“I don’t think it’s a good idea for us to be splitting up,” Rimmer Mark One complained, “Okay, so there’s no life signs but we don’t know how accurate that thing is. And what if some hideous new kind of non-detectable life-form has sprung up here in the thousands of years this things been rotting away?”

“I think that’s highly unlikely, Rimmer.”

“All I’m saying is that if there’s something here we’re unprepared for then I don’t want to be the one who has to take it on alone.”

“Really?” Cat interjected, “Because I think most of us would be quite happy to watch you take it on alone.”

“Whatever,” Lister snapped, “We’ll stay together until we’re sure it’s safe. Satisfied?”

There was no reply from Rimmer, which in the current circumstances was the next best thing to an
They gathered in the mid-section to look over the floor-plan Kryten had printed out. “According to the scans, I think these are the areas we should be targeting,” Kryten’s pink finger traced over the papers, “There are large store-rooms here and here where we can pick up food and fuel supplies. There’s another bay area on the opposite side of the ship where there appears to be transport-craft storage. If any of them are still operational, a small carrier might be a useful thing for us to have on standby. And on level fourteen there’s a science room which might have some bits and pieces worth salvaging. Apparently not all of the electrics are still fully functional onboard so we may have to do a bit of hiking from one end of the ship to another but even so I don’t believe that the whole expedition should take us more than two days.”

“Okay,” Lister nodded and straightened up, “That sounds like a plan. Let’s put on our dancing shoes and get this party started.”

The Branson, as it turned out, had enough supplies aboard to completely re-stock Starbug’s own meagre storage space several times over. The ship was only a third of the size of Red Dwarf, but it was the biggest they’d come across since losing their mother-ship and after months trapped on Starbug every wide empty corridor seemed the size of a football pitch. Once they had teleported the first generous batch of food supplies back to Starbug they went in search of the science room. Despite the number of electrical faults plaguing the dead ship it was clear that in her heyday the Branson had been state-of-the-art. All around them were the remnants of various pieces of equipment that had obviously been part of everyday life on this ship but bore little or no resemblance to their counterparts on Red Dwarf. The science room itself was a colossal, three-storey construction in the shape of a beehive. A long spiral staircase ran directly up the central shaft of the room, walkways splintering off like spokes on each level. You could have easily fitted Starbug on end in this space. “Where do we even start?” Lister asked, awed.

“This is ridiculous,” Rimmer’s double snapped, “We could spend two whole days just searching through what’s left of this mess. I say we grab ourselves some fuel and get the smeg out of here.”

“Sir, there could still be workable technology salvageable here. Even a most fleeting search could prove to be valuable,” Kryten pleaded.

“He’s right, man. You saw some of the gizmos they had back there. It’s got to be worth a look.”

“In fact,” Kryten craned his neck upwards, “Unless my optical systems have crosswired again, I believe I can see what used to be the hologram projection suite up on the second level. Surely that’s worth investigating, Sir.” The Rimmers exchanged a look, “Well...I suppose there’s no harm in taking a little peekaroonie...”

Sure enough, the hologram suite proved to be a goldmine. There was a whole cabinet full of spare light-bees and Kryten insisted on collecting a dozen ‘Just in Case’. The Rimmers were browsing a rack of discs set into the wall, most of which were back-ups of the Branson’s old crew-members – however another shelf seemed laden with unfamiliar software. Rimmer pulled one disc out and blew dust off the cover. “New Light-Suite Portable,” he read out, “Now you can carry your simulation software with you wherever you go.”

“Extraordinary,” Kryten reached out and pulled another copy from the rack, scanning the blurb.

“What’s the big deal?” Cat yawned, “We already take the Smeg Set wherever we go.”
“You don’t understand, Sir. The software we use on Starbug to generate the Mister Rimmers is a very basic script-runner. It allows us to keep an image projected and run scans to detect any potential errors but that’s about it. Even on Red Dwarf, the combined hardware and software required to power and maintain a hologram took up an area twice this size. With this software we could not only generate their images using much less power but it would be like having access to a fully-equipped hologram suite on Starbug. We could run this from the main-frame, even from a laptop!”

“What does that mean for us?” Rimmer asked impatiently.

“It means, Sir, the two of you would have better error and virus protection, a greater range of preferences for how your projection operates, all kinds of things.”

“Examples, you overgrown steam-iron!” the double snarled.

“Well, I’m not familiar with the technology, Sirs, but at a guess I would imagine that the program offers a range of costume changes, hard-light sensation tuning, memory modification...”

“I don’t think we want anyone messing around with our memories, thank you,” the two Rimmers turned to glare warningly at Lister who held up his hands innocently. “The feature could come in useful, Sirs,” Kryten pointed out, “If the software is sufficiently sophisticated it would allow you to acquire great amounts of knowledge almost instantaneously. You could learn languages in seconds, master astro-navigation in moments! The applications are almost limitless!” The Rimmers shared another of their trademark looks, then turned back to Kryten. “We’d better take a few copies. Just in case.”

The days salvaging had been such a success that it was agreed that they would spend the night on the Branson and continue their foraging early the next day. After a more substantial supper than any of them had had for a long time they made up a small campsite in the empty refectory, near to the food and water supplies and settled down ready for another long day on the morrow.

Sometime in the night, Lister awoke from his slumber to realise that they had omitted to think about one important factor in choosing the strategic location for their sleepover. The toilets. He needed a whizz and he had absolutely no idea where to find a loo on this leviathan. Fumbling bleary-eyed with his torch, he padded out of the refectory and flashed the light up and down the corridor. There were no obvious signs posted ‘Gents this Way’. He shifted anxiously from one foot to another. The matter was getting urgent and he couldn’t decide which way to go. After a few moments of bladder-testing indecision, he decided that in the circumstances, any empty room was a good enough basis for a makeshift latrine and made for the first visible door to his left.

Once the crisis had been averted, he slipped as quietly as possible out of what he now thought of as his ‘saviour room’ – and walked straight into a Rimmer. The two of them both cried out in alarm as they collided in the darkness. “What are you doing?” a voice hissed poisonously. Lister’s frantically beating heart sank a little more. It was the double-Rimmer. “I was just looking for the little boys’ room!” he protested in a whisper. “Really? Well the sign on that door you’ve just crept out of says ‘Laundry Closet’,” the Rimmer whispered back sharply,

“I didn’t say I found it,” Lister replied defensively.

“Are you spying on me?”

“No! I just needed to take a leak!”
“In the laundry closet?”

“Look, why would I want to spy on you?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know why you do anything you do.”

This last was said so accusingly that Lister felt the need to retaliate, “Well, what were you doing? It’s not like you need to get up in the night to pee!”

“Oh, that’s nice. Rub the dead man’s face in it. If you must know, I couldn’t sleep so I was taking another look around. I went to investigate the transport vehicles.”

“Thinking of taking a little holiday?” Lister asked sarcastically.

“Maybe,” the double replied darkly, “What’s it to you? You don’t care if I stay or not.”

“Well, if you want to take off then be my guest,” Lister snapped, “You certainly don’t seem that attached to any of us.”

“Is that so?” the double said softly, menacingly.

“You don’t seem that attached to anybody,” Lister continued angrily. A small voice at the back of his brain that dealt with common sense tried to interrupt. Stop talking, Dave, it warned. Stop talking right now. Don’t go where I think you’re going with this. Not here. Not like this. Not without back-up. Lister, as he so frequently did in the heat of the moment, ignored it.

“Do you think I’m so dumb that I haven’t guessed yet what really happened on that ship you came from?” Lister challenged him. Even in the darkness, he saw the man’s eyes narrow. “Tell me, David,” he hissed, “What exactly do you think you know?”

“I know that this isn’t the first time I’ve seen a Rimmer floating all alone in space in an escape pod,” Lister retorted, “Your crew-mates didn’t die in some unstoppable accident at all, did they? You left them! Something went wrong, something went bad, and instead of staying and doing whatever you could - even if there was nothing you could do - you jumped ship and left them. You took the escape pod and left them to die while you saved your own despicable weasely skin! Just like he did!” Lister blurted out. “Only in your universe we couldn’t save ourselves. We all died because of you. That’s why you hate us and can’t stand to be around us, isn’t it! Because we remind you of what you did.”

To his surprise, the double started smiling, albeit unpleasantly. “Well, well. I am impressed. Sherlock Listy, you’ve got it all worked out haven’t you? Only with your usual brilliant flair, you’ve worked it all out wrong.”

“What did happen then?” Lister asked, “Because I know that the sob-story you gave us was utter bull. So what’s the beef? Why do you hate us so much if it’s not guilt?”

“Oh, Listy,” the double walked forward and backed Lister up slowly against the wall, “You’ll find out very soon, I promise. You’ll find out more than you ever wanted to know.” He leaned in close as if to kiss him, “And you’re going to find out,” he whispered, “That I’m not nearly as much like him as you seem to think.”

Lister held his gaze, refusing to be intimidated, then barged past, knocking hard into his shoulder as he went. He went back to the refectory and crawled into his sleeping bag, heart pounding. Tomorrow he was going to have a serious talk with his Rimmer and he was going to find out the truth about this asshole. This had gone far enough.
With the Rimmers finally convinced that the Branson wasn’t harbouring any multi-headed, sharply-toothed beasties, it was agreed the next day that they would all split up to look around the rest of the ship and meet back at the airlock to return to Starbug at eighteen-hundred hours ship time. They each took a radio and then splintered off to explore. Lister hadn’t found a chance to talk with Rimmer and he wasn’t surprised when he and his double went together on their expedition. He toyed with the idea of telling Cat and Kryten what had happened in the night but what good could it do? They didn’t know any more about the man than he did. He decided to keep quiet until he’d managed to speak to Rimmer alone.

“He did what?” Rimmer exclaimed.

“He followed me,” the double confirmed sourly, “Came tiptoeing after me in the dark like a schoolgirl with an adolescent crush. And when I confronted him he had the nerve to pretend he’d been looking for a toilet.” They tried the panel to another closed door but it remained dead and locked. They continued along the corridor. “What do you think he wanted?” Rimmer asked perplexed.

“Oh, the usual probably,” the double replied bitterly, “To suggest a little trip up to the observation dome for a private tête-à-tête while nobody else is around to see him fraternising with the enemy.” The double shook his head, disgusted and slapped at another lifeless panel.

“We used to go up there a lot too,” Rimmer said hesitantly, “You know, back when...”

“Back when he had nobody else,” the double filled in dryly, “And I bet it used to make you feel so special every time he’d follow you up there wanting to talk, wanting to get to know you better, always wanting to help. And then you realise that he never really cared. It was all just an interesting diversion, a way to pass the time. Another patented David Lister way of getting inside your head.”

“Yes,” Rimmer said quietly, “I suppose it was.” He tried not to let himself feel too saddened by the thought. In truth he’d always cherished those memories of looking out at the stars with Lister, with only the transparent glass of the dome between them and infinity. Somehow when you were up there it made all your problems seem small and insignificant in relation to the vast universe surrounding you. And it made the person standing next to you seem like the only other person in that wide, cold universe.

Rimmer remembered sitting up there one night, waiting for Lister to come up and ask him why he was there – because Lister always came eventually – except on this night he never did. When Rimmer had finally descended the spiral staircase and returned to their quarters he’d found Lister hunched over the table, surrounded by pieces of burnt-out mechanoid, sucking absent-mindedly on the end of a screwdriver as he tried to figure out how to get Kryten back up and running. Rimmer hadn’t gone up there again.

“I bet he’ll come to you next,” the double was saying. “He tried coming to me for attention and that didn’t work so he’ll be fawning around you. Just wait and see.”

“He can try,” Rimmer said, with false bravado, while a plaintive little voice inside of him cried out ‘Why didn’t he come to me first?’
“You know,” his double said quietly, “I think it’s about time that we put an end to all this, don’t you?”

“How do you mean?” Rimmer asked.

“I think maybe it’s time that we had it out with him. Once and for all.” Rimmer went cold. “You want to tell him how you feel?” he asked weakly.

“It’s not like he doesn’t already know,” the double said bitterly. “I just feel that this needs to end. It’s like being part of some god-awful vicious circle. I can’t do it anymore.”

“Well,” Rimmer blathered as panic started to well-up inside of him, “I can certainly respect that. And you can rest assured that you have my full support in this matter. But...I wonder if you might do me a little teensy favour and just...leave me out of it.” His double looked at him strangely, “Really?”

“Really,” Rimmer said emphatically.

“After all these years,” the double said to him, puzzled, “Don’t you want closure?”

“Closure? Absolutely,” Rimmer nodded; But not humiliation, he added to himself. “I’m just not certain that I’m quite ready to face Lister head-on with this. But by all means, you go ahead.” With any luck when his double finally confronted Lister and – inevitably – got shot down, it would mean an end to all this tension and aggravation. Yes, it would be awkward for a while but that wouldn’t be Rimmer’s problem to deal with. Let his double take the hit of the rejection and get over it and Rimmer could go back to idolising Lister in the same distant, silent way he had done for years.

“Would you rather that I waited so that we can do this together?” his double asked seriously. “No, no! You do whatever you need to, Duke,” Rimmer held his hands up graciously, “I’ll be with you in spirit, of course. He who dares, wins, after all.” Except in this case, sucker.

“And you’re absolutely sure you don’t want to be a part of this?” his double asked once more. “Absolutely posolutely,” Rimmer nodded, “There’s no need for you to bring me into this at all, I assure you.”

“Well, then,” his double shrugged, “I suppose in that case I’m doing this for the both of us.”

“You...er...You know how you’re going to go about this then?” Rimmer asked curiously.

“I’ve got a few ideas,” his double replied vaguely, bending the antenna of his radio back with one long finger then letting it boiiing back upright. “Good. That’s good,” Rimmer said, “I hope it all goes to plan.”

“When it does,” his double said compassionately, “I’ll be thinking of you.”

“Marvellous,” Rimmer said weakly.

“Listen,” his double checked his watch, “If I’m really going to do this then I need to prepare properly. Are you okay to carry on here on your own?”

“Yes, I’m fine,” Rimmer said, a little baffled as to just how one prepared for something like this. Maybe he was going to put together a presentation of some sort. That was what Rimmer would do. A detailed breakdown of all the different reasons why they should be together, with a chart to show how the relationship could be achieved within the limitations of shift-times, meal-times, maintenance and so forth. Sex-time would be red, obviously. Maybe a warm orangey-yellow for snuggling
time... “Do me a favour,” his double continued, “When he finally comes looking for you, cut short any games he tries playing and tell him I’m waiting down in the bay where the transporters are. And make sure nobody interrupts us, okay?”

“Okay,” Rimmer agreed blithely, “Good luck,”

Sure enough, just as his double had predicted, an hour or so later Lister stuck his head into the living quarters Rimmer was half-heartedly searching and said, “Can we talk?” Rimmer turned with a sigh, arms folded. It frustrated him that he’d never managed to get the same kind of handle on Lister that his double seemed to have. How had he known so certainly that Lister would come and seek him out this way? How did he decipher so easily all the subtle little games and hints that had evaded Rimmer’s detection for so many years?

“What do you want?” he asked sharply.

“I wanted to talk to you privately for a moment,” Lister came in and sat down at the dusty table. Rimmer stayed standing, “About?” he asked coldly.

“Him,” Lister said simply, “Rimmer, man, I’m really worried that there’s something not right.”

“Such as?”

“Well, where he came from, for starters. You were there the other day when I brought up how odd it was that Cat didn’t detect whatever destroyed their ship and you saw how he reacted.”

“Maybe it’s a sensitive subject,” Rimmer said defensively,

“Maybe he’s full of smeg,” Lister replied, “I saw how you reacted as well, remember, and I know it made you think for a moment. Did he ever tell you any details about what happened? Did he ever explain to you?”

“No...” Rimmer said hesitantly, “But that doesn’t mean...”

“He’s been lying to us, Rimmer. Cat can smell it, clear as day. That’s why I confronted him in the first place.”

Rimmer had been hoping to avoid this conversation. In truth, he had taken in Lister’s words that day and he had his own theory about why his double had lied to them, but it wasn’t a comfortable one. Rimmer was afraid that he – that is, his double – had done something wrong. Like Red Dwarf all over again, he’d botched some job that should have been simple and ended up wiping everyone out. No wonder the poor wretch had lied. Who would want to own up to something that atrocious twice in one lifetime? Rimmer hadn’t pursued it because he knew that the shame must be unbearable, and he knew that it could just as easily be his own. And there was no way in hell that he was going to share his theory with Lister.

“Does it really matter what happened?” Rimmer asked tetchily, “Can’t you just let it be?”

“Not if it means putting all of us in danger, I can’t,” Lister replied. “And after last night I’m starting to think that’s a possibility.”

“Why?”

“I caught him sneaking around last night...”
“From what I hear it was the other way around.”

“I got up because I had to pee!”

“That’s right, he told me. In the laundry closet.” Lister flushed, embarrassed. You took one leak on a pile of sheets and people held it against you forever. “Look, whatever. The fact is that last night he practically threatened me and I’m not talking about the usual ‘Put down that guitar, Listy, or I’ll knot those mismatched strings around your neck and hang you from the landing gantry’ kind of threats that I’m used to.”

“Well, what did he say?”

“It wasn’t what he said,” Lister complained, “It was how he said it.”

“Did he say ‘okay’ and add a lot of extra ‘a’s?’ Rimmer asked sarcastically.

“Why won’t you listen to me?” Lister demanded, “The day he arrived you said to me yourself that there was something odd about him. That you didn’t trust him. What’s changed to make you take his word over mine?”

“I just...understand him better now. That’s all.”

“Then help me understand. Because right now I feel like you’re the only person who can help.”

“And what if I don’t want to?” Rimmer asked desperately, his temper fraying, “Or what if I were to tell you, Lister, that actually the problem isn’t him at all? That the problem has been you!”

“Me?” Lister said indignantly, “What have I done?”

“Do you want me to start making a list?” Rimmer snapped, “You know, I don’t actually care if he threatened you last night because, quite frankly, I can sympathise! In fact, if he told me he’d threatened to choke you to death, there are days when I’d quite happily hand him the garrotte and wave him off to do the job for me!” Lister stared at him, shocked. He didn’t know what to say. “You just don’t understand, do you,” Rimmer continued, “The amount of effort it takes to get through one smegging day of your games and taunts. You think it’s all just a bit of fun, a way to stay sane, but it’s not, Lister. Do you understand me? It is not all about you! So maybe, instead of coming in here bleating because Big Bad Duke didn’t want to play your games last night you should shut the hell up and accept that for once you actually got what you deserved!”

“Oh, right. I get it,” Lister retaliated angrily, “It’s the same old smegging story that it’s always been. Nothing’s ever Rimmer’s fault. Well, you know what? Sometimes your problems are nothing at all to do with me and I’m getting really tired of always being the scapegoat for everything that’s wrong in your life! If you want to pinpoint what your major problem is then take a look in the mirror sometime or, better yet, take a good long look at that arsehole double of yours, because he is the epitome of everything that’s wrong with you. He’s an unpleasant, snidey, bitter little man who’s so wrapped up in his own self-made misery that he can’t see or understand kindness anymore – even when it’s being held right out to him.”

“Kindness?” Rimmer exploded, “Neither one of us ever wanted your damn kindness, Lister – now or ever!”

“Well, then what do you want?” Lister asked frustrated. Rimmer took a deep breath. He looked at the man in front of him; at the lips he knew he would never kiss, the body he knew he would never hold and in that moment he hated him with every fibre of his being. I see what this is, he thought
darkly. Well, damn you, Lister. You’re not going to make me say it. I won’t give you the satisfaction. You’ll get it soon enough from him anyway. “I want you,” he said very slowly and calmly, “To get the hell out of my life.”

Lister absorbed this silently, then pushed the chair back and stood up to leave, but as he reached the door he stopped and looked back. “You know,” he said, “The day he arrived, I found myself thinking about us two. About...how we are. I knew he hated me right from the start and I remember thinking...hoping...that it wasn’t that way with us. That it never would be. But I guess I was wrong.” Rimmer turned away and folded his arms, “Just go, will you? Go and sort out whatever foolish suspicions you have with him. He wanted to talk to you anyway. He’s down by the transporters.”

He stayed in that stance, staring at the wall, arms crossed tightly over his chest even after he’d heard the door close behind Lister. He knew it was all another game, another attempt at tugging his emotional strings from the person who’d been his puppet-master for so many years. But damn that little bastard was a good actor...

Lister wandered down the fifteen flights of the emergency stairwell, playing over the argument with Rimmer in his head. He knew he shouldn’t have lost his temper and let the row escalate the way it had done but in all truth he was hurt that Rimmer had taken sides so resolutely against him. After all the years they’d spent together he’d have thought that if nothing else he’d have gained enough of Rimmer’s respect for the hologram to at least listen to his concerns. Maybe he really was overreacting about this whole thing. Maybe his pride had been so wounded by the fact that somebody simply didn’t like him that he’d blown this whole thing out of proportion. What did that say about him as a person, that he was willing to label someone as dangerous and unstable just because they didn’t want to be his friend? Self-centred was what it said. He’d been sailing along for all these years, happy in the knowledge that Kryten and Cat always had his back and that Rimmer...well...that despite all the squabbles and insults there was a part of Rimmer that cared about him in an awkward and uncomfortable way, even if he’d never say it aloud. But had he been kidding himself all this time?

Maybe he’d been able to convince himself over the years that one Rimmer, despite appearances, didn’t despise him so much as he claimed. But now that there were two of them it was much harder to ignore the animosity and maybe he had to face the fact that he’d been viewing their relationship with rose-tinted glasses over the past few years. Maybe they’d never been as close as he thought.

He was going to have to do something to make all this right. He had to try and do better for the sake of the whole crew. And he could start by apologizing to Rimmer’s double about what had happened in the night.

When he entered the transport bay one of the little ships was humming cheerfully, its lights on and engine purring healthily. Rimmer’s double was in the cockpit, apparently running some checks, but he stopped what he was doing when he saw Lister enter and came down to meet him. “Hey,” Lister said warmly, “You got one of them working again! Nice one!”

“It should meet requirements,” the double replied coolly. Lister cleared his throat,

“Listen, man, I wanted to say sorry. About last night. You just made me jump, that’s all, and it was dark and it had been such a long day...I didn’t mean to be a jerk. So I’m sorry I turned it into a big
deal. And I’m sorry about what I said.”

“Whatever,” the double turned around and started riffling through a box sitting by the gangplank; a collection of useful items he’d found while searching the ship. Lister deflated a little. He hadn’t expected a mutual apology, this was Rimmer after all, but he’d expected something. This was obviously going to be harder than he’d thought. “So…er…Rimmer mentioned that you wanted to talk to me?” he ventured tentatively.

“I did,” the double agreed. He found what he’d been looking for in the box and straightened up, “But not here.”

He spun around and before Lister had time to react something hard connected with the side of his skull and black lights exploded in his head. He dropped to the ground, dazed. When he risked opening his eyes again, his vision swam sickeningly. He was holding something in his hand, small and dark, pointing it at Lister’s face. “Perhaps you’d be kind enough to join me on my ship,” he said charmingly. Through the ringing in Lister’s ears it sounded as though he’d shouted the words into a deep cave. “What?” he said weakly. Rimmer bent over him and now he could see what he was holding. It was a gun. Blood glistened on the end of the muzzle and he felt its wetness as Rimmer’s double pressed it to his forehead. “Let me put it to you another way,” he said, “You will come with me. You will do what I say. Or I will shoot you in the head. Now move.”
Rimmer’s double hauled Lister into the cramped midsection of the small red transport ship in the Branson’s docking bay; keeping the pistol pressed firmly to his head. Once the airlock had hissed shut behind them, he shoved him roughly forward and Lister staggered, grabbing the edge of the table for support. His head was still pounding from the blow he’d received and he felt nauseous and weak. He turned to face his captor but before he knew what was happening he was punched in the stomach with brutal force. He folded up, swooning.

The double returned to him with a length of rope and started to tie his wrists together behind his back. Still fighting for breath, Lister gathered his strength and kicked him as hard as he could with both feet. His boots connected with a wall of solid light. The double didn’t so much as flinch, but he did give Lister a sharp backhand across the face. The slap set off another blast of pain in his already singing head and he retched, closing his eyes as the world turned to wavering darkness for a few seconds. That was enough to convince Lister that gun or no gun, any further attempt to fight this man was going to end badly for him. He’d just seen him crush his radio into a mess of splintered plastic and wire with his bare hands, just as he’d once seen his Rimmer turn an enamel cup into fine sparkling powder with his fist on one particularly stressful day aboard Starbug; and clearly this guy had no qualms about using that strength to make Lister suffer if he pushed him too far.

Once his wrists and ankles were tightly bound, the double dragged him without ceremony into a corner of the room. There was a row of large metal hooks protruding from the girder above them, hung with mining tools. The double tossed the rusty equipment aside then looped more rope around the bonds on Lister’s wrists, threw the loose end over one of the hooks and pulled it taut, yanking Lister’s arms up painfully behind him and securing them there.

Lister was starting to get his breath back. He raised his head weakly, “Listen,” he said softly. It might be a little late for negotiation but smeg it all, it was worth a try. “I don’t know why you’re doing this. I don’t know if this is planned or spur-of-the-moment or what. But whatever it is you want, man; whatever you came here for, kidnapping me isn’t going to help.” The double ignored him, he was pawing through some more crates across the room. “Just tell me what’s going on and maybe we can work something out, yeah?” Lister suggested as sweetly as he could, “It doesn’t have to be like this…” The double pulled a dusty, oily rag out of the bottom of one of the crates and examined it critically for a moment, then tore a strip off. He walked back to Lister, shaking his head, “You really don’t get it, do you?” He forced the filthy scrap of cloth into Lister’s mouth and tied it tightly in place. Lister looked up at him helplessly, not understanding. The double squatted down before him and stared hard into his eyes. “I’ve got everything I came for,” he said simply.

He stood up straight. “Just so you don’t get any smart ideas about trying to wriggle free, I should warn you, if you put any weight on that rope you’re going to dislocate both shoulders. I’d just lie quiet if I were you.” He turned and went through to the cockpit, leaving Lister helpless on the floor.

“Sir,” Kryten said anxiously, “It’s been nearly an hour and I still can’t re-establish contact with Mister Lister or the other Mister Rimmer. Perhaps we should start looking.” Rimmer fidgeted nervously, “Give them time, Krytie,” he said, “I’m sure they’re not far away.”
“But they both knew what time we were supposed to meet back here, Sir.”

“Look, what can possibly have happened to them on an empty ship? I’m sure there’s nothing to worry about. They’ll come back when they’re ready.”

“I don’t like this, man,” Cat said restlessly, “I don’t trust that, dude, not one little bit. This situation smells all wrong.”

“For smeg’s sake!” Rimmer threw his hands in the air, “What are you both so worried about? Lister is more than capable of taking care of himself and as for my esteemed duplicate...Well, he’s me. Even if they have got into a scrap of some sort, I’m sure it’s nothing Lister can’t handle.”

“He’s not you,” Cat replied, with astuteness so unusual that both his companions looked at him with surprise. “I’m serious, Alphabet-Head. You’re no picnic – hell, you’re the human equivalent of a wart; unpleasant, unattractive and very hard to get rid of. But that guy is different.”

“What do you mean?” Rimmer asked, offended.

“If people were smells, you’d be an armpit,” Cat told him bluntly, “But him? He’s gangrene. He’s rotten. All wrong. How can you have spent so much time with him and not realise that?”

Rimmer looked at his worried companions and began to feel an edge of unease himself. No, he and his double weren’t exactly alike, he knew that. He had felt on more than one occasion a kind of dis-synchronisation between them, but it was minor – nothing to worry about, surely. He experienced a fleeting moment of deja-vu that he didn’t understand. His own voice shouting - Stay away from him! Don’t go near him! He’s not like me - and a deep unexplainable feeling of dread. He shook himself. “You’re wrong,” he said simply, “Maybe we aren’t exactly alike but I can tell you one thing with absolute confidence. My double would not hurt Lister any more than I would. Okay?” It didn’t help his mood when Cat and Kryten failed to look comforted by this.

Half an hour or so after the Branson had disappeared from view, Rimmer’s duplicate set the transporter controls to autopilot, sat back in his chair and sighed. A mixture of relief, satisfaction and...something else not quite so pleasant. He swivelled the chair round and looked back into the mid-section, where Lister lay bound and gagged on the floor. The first part of the plan seemed to have gone very well but this had all happened so fast. He’d only had a matter of hours to formulate this plot and put it into action and he’d assumed that he’d have his double here with him for support. He couldn’t understand why the man had backed out, when offered the opportunity to balance the scorecard with their tormenter once and for all. Well, no matter. It was down to him now. But he had to focus. He cradled his head in his hands and massaged his temples.

Just keep calm, he told himself; don’t get carried away and ruin things like you did before. Take your time, don’t rush. You’ve earned this Iron Balls. Make the most of it.

Lister lay as still as he possibly could on the hard metal floor. He had tried, surreptitiously, to work himself free of his bonds, but the double hadn’t been kidding. Any pressure on the rope pinioning his arms was incredibly painful and he’d decided not to test it any further. He was trying not to think about what lay in wait for him. He couldn’t understand what was going on here. Why did this guy hate him so much? And why would he go to all the trouble of kidnapping him when he could have easily killed him twenty times over by now if that was what he wanted? Obviously, he had something more planned for him, but what exactly? In the circumstances, Lister could only
surmise that whatever it was, it wasn’t good. Not good at all.
Lister heard the clang of footsteps approaching on the metal floor and looked up. Sure enough, Rimmer’s double had joined him from the cockpit. Lister tensed, expecting some kind of nasty quip, or maybe even a sharp kick in the ribs, but the man seemed edgy and preoccupied.

He knelt down beside him and reached into his pocket. Lister flinched back uncertainly but was surprised when the double produced a clean handkerchief from his pocket and started to gently wipe away the blood from his head-wound. “Nasty blow,” he said sympathetically, as if he hadn’t been the one to inflict it. “It must be painful. Don’t worry, it won’t hurt for long.” He continued to clean the blood from his face and neck with careful, tentative strokes. “The Branson disappeared from our long-range scanners about ten minutes ago,” he informed him quietly, “I wonder if they’ve realised yet that we’re gone. They don’t seem to be in pursuit just yet.”

Yeah, I get the message, Lister thought bitterly. The cavalry aren’t on their way. Fantastic. “My counterpart must have done a good job of keeping them off the scent,” the double added. Lister’s heart skipped a beat. Rimmer had known about this? He’d sent him off to meet his double, knowing what was going to happen? When he’d told Lister so coldly that he wanted him out of his life, had he really meant it this literally?

The double tossed aside the sodden, bloody handkerchief and then, to Lister’s surprise, started to lightly stroke the back of his neck. He froze. If this was meant to be reassuring, it wasn’t working. It just made his skin crawl. He felt hard-light fingertips move softly through his hair and regardless of the pain in his arms, he tried to squirm away. Rimmer narrowed his eyes, “You don’t like that? Well, how about this?” He suddenly gripped the soft skin at the back of Lister’s neck hard between two fingers and pinched. Lister yelped and flinched, sending another bolt of pain through his arms and shoulders. “And you’d better get used to it. You’re not running this show anymore, miladdo.”

He released him and Lister breathed deeply to try and calm himself. That had hurt. The double seemed to be trying to compose himself as well. “This is your own fault, you know,” he snapped, “I’m a reasonable man, for smeg’s sake, but you just always have to make things hard, don’t you?”

Lister twisted his head round to face him, asking the question with his eyes. Why are you doing this? Rimmer’s lip curled up angrily, “Don’t pretend you didn’t have this coming! Did you think you could have it your way forever?” Lister tentatively shook his head; I don’t understand.

“Don’t play the innocent with me!” the double shouted, furious suddenly, “You think you can squirm your way out of this by acting like you don’t know what’s going on here? It’s not going to work, Squire.” He moved his face closer to Lister’s. “It’s just you and me now, you see? So there’ll be no more games. No more playing with my emotions as it suits you, no more being kind to me when you want an ego boost and then humiliating me when your other friends are watching. You’re my plaything now, not the other way round. And I’m going to show you that my love is not a game.”
Rimmer headed down the stairs to the transport bay, after finally agreeing with the others that it was time to start looking for their absent companions. He hadn’t let on that he knew where they’d be; he wanted to be the first person who knew what was going on. His main worry was that his double might have let slip that he wasn’t the only person on Starbug who had feelings for Lister, and if that had happened then he definitely wanted to make sure that he found them before either Cat or Kryten did.

Emotionally, he was torn between desperately wanting to know how the confrontation had gone and mounting anxiety over whether or not his double had kept his word and left Rimmer’s involvement in this love triangle out of the mix. Either way he was going to be interrupting what was already, no doubt, an extremely awkward moment. But he’d given them long enough, surely? They must be over the worst of it by now. They’d obviously just lost track of time. Lister’s punctuality had always been poor and his double obviously had bigger concerns than getting back to Starbug in time for tea. And Rimmer was well aware that this wasn’t a situation that was going to be solved quickly over a friendly chat and a nice cup of Rosie Lee.

When he reached the airlock for the transport bay, he peered through the plexi-glass to try and gauge the situation before he went ploughing in. Frustratingly, he couldn’t see either Lister or his double. He was even more frustrated when he realised on entering the bay that they actually weren’t there anymore. They must have already started heading back to Starbug by another route and he’d missed them. Damn, damn and damn once more. That meant they were probably going to make it back before him and whatever had gone down here this afternoon he’d be the last smegging one to know!

He took a deep breath to calm himself. This wasn’t necessarily a big deal. It could well be that his double had kept his secret, that he and Lister had discussed the matter in a perfectly reasonable and civilised way and that nothing more now needed to be said about this by anyone, anywhere, ever. They’d think up a rational explanation for their lateness and nobody need ever know what had happened here. Or his double could have spilled the whole story, the pair of them could have had an almighty row and Lister could at this very moment be demanding that both those creepy dead perverts be switched off permanently. He took another deep breath and sniffed the air. It smelt like exhaust in here. That would have been understandable but this smelt fresh. Like burning fuel just after take-off.

Suddenly he realised there were only three little red transporters lined up against the wall. He was certain that his double had told him there were four of those craft down here, because he said he’d tried them all and only two of them were still working - and one of those only just. So where was Number Four, the working ship? A cold dread started to spread through Rimmer’s being. Oh God. It couldn’t be. It was just impossible. He bit down on his fist in anguished dismay.

The bastards had run away together! His smeggy double had actually managed to seduce Lister and talk him into flying off into the sunset leaving the rest of them behind! Rimmer ran over to the empty parking space and now he could even see the burn marks the jets had left on the ground when they took off. He looked around frantically as if the missing craft might be hiding somewhere but it was gone. Gone, gone, gone and Lister with it. Oh, why had he let his double come down here in the first place? Why had he encouraged this meeting? Why had he so naively played along, even playing matchmaker and sending Lister along to this little tryst? What had he done?

As he stood there, clutching frantically at his wiry curls and wondering what the smegging smeg he was supposed to do now – how was he supposed to explain this to Cat and Kryten? – he caught sight of something on the ground a few feet away. He walked over and scooped it up. It was a radio. Or at least, it had been. The thing had been destroyed beyond all repair. Rimmer stared at it, and suddenly all the panic and betrayal he’d been feeling just seconds ago started to disappear to
be replaced with something else. A dark, terrible sensation of dread.

...Last night he practically threatened me...The guy’s rotten. All wrong...I think it’s about
time that we put an end to all this, don’t you?...Don’t you want closure?...I’ll make him pay...I
swear one day I am going to make him pay...

He froze to the spot, breathing deeply. An alternative explanation was starting to take form
in his head but he didn’t want to acknowledge it. He found himself praying that it was just his
cursed stupidity; that he could rely on his never-ending talent of getting things wrong. For once in
his life, Rimmer did not want to be right. Not about this.

And then he saw the blood. There wasn’t much of it. Just a small crimson smudge on the
dusty floor. But it was enough to make Rimmer drop the radio and start running.

Kryten hovered impatiently by the airlock to Starbug, waiting for the others to rejoin him. A
screeched instruction from Rimmer across the radio had sent him hurrying back to the ship and now
his anxiety chip was thrumming like a Rampant Rabbit belonging to a nympho stranded on a desert
island. It didn’t take much to send Mister Rimmer into a flap, but on this occasion, Kryten was
worried that there might well be a valid reason.

Rimmer met Cat at the corridor junction, both of them panting and out of breath. “Come
on!” Rimmer grabbed his arm and dragged him along, “We have to get moving!”

“Get off my jacket, Grease-Stain! What the hell’s going on?”

“Move, damn you! Lister’s in trouble! Serious trouble! There’s no time to lose!”

“Is this because of your slimy sidekick?” Cat snarled, as he ran alongside him.

“Yes,” Rimmer admitted reluctantly, “I think so.”

“Goddammit, Goal-Post Head! You said he wasn’t going to hurt him!”

“I have a horrible feeling,” Rimmer panted, “That I may have been wrong.”
Chapter 11

Lister watched anxiously as Rimmer’s double carried a dusty laptop to the table and started it up. “You’re probably wondering where we’re going,” he said airily, glancing over at Lister, “To be honest I don’t really know yet. It doesn’t really matter so long as it’s somewhere...private. I’ve set the navi-comp to take us to the nearest deserted S3 planet with an appropriate atmosphere. Apparently there’s one that fits the bill nicely just a few hours flight away, so we’ll be starting our new life together very soon.” He left the computer to finish loading up and came back to Lister.

“We’re going to be very happy together, you and I,” he told him, “But there’s a few little details that we have to sort out first. To start with, you have to understand how much you’ve hurt me over the years. It’s time for you to admit that your behaviour has been cruel and selfish and for you to take responsibility for what you’ve done. It’s only fair.” He pulled the gag out of Lister’s mouth, “Now are you prepared to be grown-up about this?” he asked him, like a teacher talking to a naughty student. “I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Lister said hoarsely, “Listen, man, I don’t know what the situation was in your universe. Maybe you’re right and your Lister was a total bastard, but that’s nothing to do with me! I swear I’ve never deliberately done anything to hurt you! Until this moment I never knew you felt this way...”

The double grabbed his throat and squeezed hard. “Why is it,” he asked through gritted teeth, “That even now, with nobody to save face in front of, you still have to lie? Don’t you understand how pointless this all is? It’s too late to plead ignorance, it’s too late to take back everything you’ve done. All I’m asking for, Lister, is an apology. Now can you do that for me? Hmm?” Lister nodded as best he could with a hand locked around his throat. “Okay, then let’s hear it.”

“I’m sorry,” Lister whispered faintly through the pressure on his windpipe, “I’m really sorry...”

“Good,” Rimmer said smugly and released him. Lister gasped for air, trembling. “That’s a start at least. Now that you’ve admitted what you’ve done, it’s time to accept your punishment.” Lister looked up at him, eyes wide. “What?”

“If we’re going to move on and be happy together you have to understand the pain you’ve put me through. Once you’ve felt that pain and accepted that you’ve brought it on yourself, then I can forgive you and we can start afresh. It will be good for us. You’ll thank me in the end, you’ll see.” He gently patted the back of Lister’s neck then got up and went to one of the crates he’d been through earlier. He returned with a sharp pair of wire-cutters in one hand. Lister shrank back, his heart pounding with horror. “What are you doing?”

The double bent over him and used the wire-cutters to sever the ropes securing his wrists. The awful pain in his arm and shoulder muscles immediately eased, and he sighed in relief, holding his hands out in front of him, gingerly flexing his fingers. Already the cold, buzzing numbness of pins and needles was setting in but he didn’t have time to regain any sensation in his hands—the double was already tying them again in front of him. Taking a tight grip on Lister’s arm, he hauled him up to his feet and threw the long length of rope still hanging from his wrists over the hook above them and pulled tight, yanking his wrists high over his head. Lister yelped despite himself. If he stood on his toes this was just about bearable, but he wasn’t tall enough for this to be anywhere near comfortable; and with his ankles still tied together keeping his balance was almost impossible. “Don’t complain,” Rimmer said impatiently, “I could have tied that rope around your neck.” Lister quickly swallowed back another whimper.
Across the room, the laptop beeped a jolly little tune to indicate that the program had finished loading. The double went over to investigate. “Marvellous,” he beamed. “This all seems to be working perfectly. Everything should be ready in time for planet fall. And then you and me, Listy,” he wandered back and cupped Lister’s face in his hands, “Will be together forever.”

“You know,” Lister said tremulously, “Nothing lasts forever. One day I’m going to die and then you’ll be all alone. Surely you don’t want that.”

“You really do have the intelligence of road kill, don’t you?” Rimmer said disdainfully. “Never mind ‘one day’. You’re going to be dying very shortly indeed. What do you think all this stuff is for?” He gestured to the box of equipment he’d brought aboard from the Branson. “There’s a light-bee waiting for you in that box. I’ve taken a personality download facility and a copy of that lovely swish Light-Suite Software. It was all there for the taking. That’s when I came up with the plan. You see,” he possessively stroked Lister’s neck, “All I have to do is download your personality, then I can use the Light-Suite program to do a little memory modification. It’s very easy, you know.” He thought about this and laughed, “What am I saying? Of course you know. You’ve done it yourself, haven’t you?” Lister shifted uncomfortably. “Once I’ve got your mind how I want it, there’s really only one thing left to do.” He picked up the gun and pressed it gently to Lister’s head. Lister winced and closed his eyes.

“BANG!” Rimmer shouted gleefully, “One shot. Straight to the head. You’ll never feel a thing. And when you wake up there’ll be no memory of any unpleasant kidnapping, no memory of finding any escape pod. Just good old Arnie waiting to tell you all about how he managed to save your personality disk after the terrible accident the killed you and your crew-mates. And I’ll have you all to myself forever and ever. Now,” he picked up the wire-cutters again, “Where were we?”

“Any sign?” Rimmer asked desperately.

“Not yet, Sir.”

“Don’t worry, buddy,” Cat said grimly, “They can’t have got far.”

“Yes, they could,” Rimmer rubbed at his H, agitated. “They could have been gone for hours. Anything could have happened. God, why didn’t I see this coming? How can I have been so blind?”

“Because you’re a moron?” Cat retorted sourly.

“Don’t blame yourself, Sir,” Kryten told him soothingly, “You thought of your duplicate as being just like you and so naturally you didn’t want to admit to yourself that there might be something wrong with him. It’s a natural human reaction.”

“But if anything’s happened to Lister it’ll be all my fault,” Rimmer put his head in his hands. “Now, Mister Rimmer, you don’t know that anything has happened. Everything could be fine!” Kryten tried to reassure him but his voice sounded about as sincere as an estate-agent’s. “There was blood, you stupid walking vacuum-cleaner! There was blood on the floor! How can that be a good sign?”

“I agree, Sir, that blood is not a good sign, but it doesn’t mean we should panic. If there was a struggle, which there probably was, it could be from something as innocuous as a nose bleed. We cannot start thinking the worst.”
“I’ll tell you something,” Cat growled, “I don’t care if it was just a nose-bleed. Nobody messes with our home-boy and lives to tell the tale. Am I right?”

“Indeed, Sir.”

“Am I right?” Cat turned to Rimmer, who shook his head miserably.

“I don’t give a damn what we do about that traitorous bastard. I just want Lister back safe and sound.”

Lister winced as the icy metal of the wire-cutters slid up the back of his spine, slitting his shirt open. Rimmer’s double tore away the remnants and dropped them to the floor. He shivered, goosebumps rising as the cool air of the ship met his bare skin. “I don’t want you to get any filthy ideas that I’m doing this for my own titillation,” the double told him sternly, “It’s important that you should be naked for your punishment. Symbolically important. I’m not a pervert, you know.” Lister thought of fishnets and a holo-whip then decided that now was not the best time to voice his opinion on that matter. The wire-cutters started to slice through the back of his jeans and boxers and he began to feel really afraid as the situation he was in started to hit home. He was tied up, he was helpless and he couldn’t prevent anything that this man might decide to do to him. “Please don’t do this,” he whispered as the double ripped the torn fabric open. “Sorry, Listy,” he replied matter-of-factly, “But we both know this has to be done.” He cut the remains of the ruined garments off Lister’s body, leaving him in just his boots.

Lister suppressed a shudder as he felt the warm static of hologrammatic breath on the back of his neck. “Just remember,” the double whispered, “I’m only doing this because I love you. And once we’re all alone together in our new home you’ll learn to love me too, because you won’t have any other choice. There’ll be nobody else to come between us anymore. But like I said, first we have to work out our issues.” He carried Lister’s shredded clothes over to the table and shook them about a little until something fell with a clatter to the tabletop. “Ah, here we go. This is as good a way as any to start, I suppose.” He scooped up the lighter and gave it an experimental flick. Lister recoiled, “You can’t be serious!”

“Well,” Rimmer shrugged, “We’ll just see how it goes, shall we?” He walked back over. “No!” Lister started to struggle desperately, “You can’t!”

“Yes, I can,” he said calmly, “And, as you’ve already agreed, it’s really no more than you deserve.”

“Please! Please don’t do this!”

“It’s okay, Listy. This part will all be over very soon,” the double said soothingly, tightly re-tying his gag, stifling his protests, “And when it is, you won’t remember a thing.”

He flicked on the lighter and very soon the tiny room was filled with the sound of muffled screaming.
Chapter 12

“I think we’ve got them, Sirs!” Kryten called out triumphantly.

“Where?” Rimmer jumped up and peered over at the mech’s screen, the green glow illuminating his anxious expression. “There’s something moving on the mid-range radar. If we’ve followed the vapour trail correctly, I think we should have our man.”

“How far away are they?”

“Still some way, Sir, but we seem to be catching up with them fairly swiftly.”

“How long?”

“Just over an hour at current speed, I’d estimate,” Kryten said optimistically. Rimmer shook his head, “Not soon enough. We’ve been too long already.”

“Buddy, we’re already at full throttle. We can’t go any faster,” Cat called over his shoulder. Rimmer sank back into his chair, nerves jangling. Another hour. A lot could happen in that hour. He tried to calm himself. If nothing else, he was sure that Lister was still alive. If his double had simply had murder in mind, Rimmer was fairly certain he’d have found Lister’s body in the transport bay, not just traces of a struggle and an escape. Whatever his double had planned for Lister – and Rimmer thought he had a very good idea of what that might be – he obviously wanted him alive for it. But considering what it probably was, Rimmer very much doubted whether Lister was taking much comfort in that.

“Dammit!” Rimmer’s double slammed the laptop down violently on the table, “What the smeg is wrong with this stupid, wretched, clapped-out, piece of crap computer?!” The red error message reflected back in his eyes, turning them into two points of hellish fury. 

DOWNLOAD TERMINATED. SUBJECT UNSUITABLE. Having tried re-starting the process twice already, he finally took a stab at the ‘More Info’ tab and scanned through the report.

‘The subject you are trying to download is currently in an unsuitable condition. The most likely causes of this are:

1. Subject is inebriated – In this instance you should wait until effects have subsided and try again.

2. Subject is under the influence of a narcotic or hallucinogenic substance – See above.

3. Subject is suffering extreme physical or emotional distress – You should try to calm your subject and ensure they are as comfortable as possible before re-attempting download.

4. Subject’s brain functions have ceased to operate – Give up.’
The double flicked a sideways glance at Lister’s trembling, blood-and-tear-stained form. He thought he could guess where the problem lay. He knew that several years before he’d died new laws had been brought in regarding personality download. In the initial phases of experimentation into hologram technology, there had been cases of ‘panic downloads’. People who had never got around to creating themselves a back-up disk would have a heart attack, a stroke or sometimes a terrible accident and find themselves being downloaded by friends or family members even as they lay dying. The resulting holograms were nearly always insane and unsustainable – brought back to an existence where they were cursed to live in a mental state that was forever on the verge of death. The practice had eventually been outlawed; obviously the new wave of software had been coded to stop anyone who might be tempted, but for crying out loud. It wasn’t like Lister was dying; he was just a bit sore, that was all. It was nothing compared to the pain he’d put Rimmer through over the years.

Still, this wouldn’t do. He needed this personality download and that meant he had to find a way to calm Lister down. But how was he supposed to do that? Rimmer was not an expert on these matters at the best of times, how the hell was he going to cheer Lister up after he’d just tortured him for an hour?

He edged over to him cautiously and started to wipe the tears off his face. “There, there,” he said awkwardly. That didn’t seem to help much. He watched a small bead of crimson blood trickle down Lister’s arm. He’d struggled so hard that the ropes had started to cut into his wrists. Rimmer frowned; that wasn’t the worst of the injuries Lister was sporting and he hadn’t thought to bring anything in the way of pain medication. That hadn’t been the point of this exercise. Why did nothing ever go right? Why couldn’t something go to plan for him, just once? Why had Lister put him in this ridiculous situation in the first place?

He took a few deep breaths to calm himself. Maybe he should just talk to Lister; try and make him see the silver lining in this big dark cloud he seemed to be sitting in. “You know,” he said sweetly, “I’m feeling so much better about our relationship already. And I’m sure you feel better in yourself now that you’ve finally told me the truth about a few things...” He tried to discreetly kick away a blood-stained chisel, “...Even if it took a little persuasion. Right?” No response. “You know what? Let’s just forget about the whole download thing for a little while. Here,” He unstrapped the harness from Lister’s head and put it down carefully on the table, “That’s more comfortable now, isn’t it? So why don’t you just calm down and relax a bit? Hmm?”

From inside the cockpit there was a loud chime from the autopilot. Rimmer frowned and went to investigate. There was an alert flashing on the radar screen – another craft had come into range and he had no doubts about who it was. They were still some way off but now that they’d found him it was going to be very difficult to shake them off. He started to massage his temples, trying to keep at bay the stress that was rapidly creeping up through his veins. Obviously his pathetic counterpart had done a lousy job of concealing his escape – or more likely he’d changed his mind about letting him take Lister as his own and had betrayed him, the back-stabbing weasel.

He gritted his teeth. Lister belonged to him now. He’d earned this ten times over and more, and no-one was going to take his prize from him. Not this time. He had to get that download completed. Quickly.

He darted back into the mid-section and saw Lister flinch as he approached. “It’s okay,” he said impatiently, “I’m not going to hurt you anymore, there’s no time. Your faithful bloodhounds seem to have sniffed you out. I should have known better than to trust that despicable, two-faced wart of a man!”
Lister’s heart leapt. The guys were on their way. Thank god, thank god. This nightmare was nearly over. “I don’t know if they’ve got enough power to catch up with us,” the double continued, “But now they’ve found us they could follow us to our new home. I was going to leave the...messy part...of our plan until we got there, but it seems now that might be leaving things a little late. So I’m going to need you to co-operate.” He picked up the headset off the table, “I need you to take a few deep breaths, clear your mind, ignore the pain and let me get your personality downloaded before they try and take you away. Understand? Once you’re dead there’s nothing they can do; I can alter your memories so you won’t want to go with them, so you won’t remember who they are, but first I need you stored safe and sound on this laptop, see?”

Lister panicked. Once that download was complete he was as good as dead. He started to struggle desperately. “Look, we’ve been through this!” the double shouted, “You can’t stop this! You’re mine now and nothing can change that! Just accept it!” But Lister wasn’t going to accept it. Right now panic, resistance and pain were the best and only weapons he had. He started to scream, over and over, he pulled on the ropes – tearing at his already bloody wrists, straining his aching muscles, twisting his bruised and abused body. “Stop it!” Rimmer shouted. Lister ignored him. “I said STOP!” The double swung his arm and slapped him with numbing force.

The world went grey. It was as though someone had suddenly turned down the lights and the sound in Lister’s head. He swayed, only the rope around his wrists holding him up as his knees buckled. His head was pounding. “Lister?” There were arms around him, supporting him. He rested his forehead on a soft, quilted jacket that smelt of nothingness but also, in some indefinable way, smelt so familiar. “Lister!” The gag was pulled roughly out of his mouth, “Lister, speak to me! Say something!” And the only thing Lister could think of was a ridiculous cliché he’d heard a hundred times before in a hundred different bad movies.

“Why are you doing this to me...?”
“They’re speeding up, Sirs. I think they’re heading for that planetoid,” Kryten announced anxiously back on Starbug. “Is there any way we can catch-up with them before they land?” Rimmer asked.

“They’re too small and too fast,” Kryten shook his head, “And they had too much of a headstart.” Rimmer put his head in his hands. All his instincts told him that if his double got Lister onto that planetoid, they’d never see him again. “There’s got to be another way,” he moaned.

“I told you, buddy, we can’t go any faster. We’ll just have to catch up with them when they make planet-fall.”

“No,” Rimmer shook his head, “It will be too late. I know it.” They sank into a depressed silence.

Kryten drummed his fingers on his screen. Rimmer threw him a look. He knew that mannerism. It meant the mech was thinking something that he was reluctant to share. “Spit it out, Kryten.”

“Sir?”

“You’ve got an idea, haven’t you?”

“I wouldn’t call it an idea, Sir. Just a fleeting thought, nothing worth mentioning.”

“Kryten...”

“Believe me, Mister Rimmer, you wouldn’t care for the idea.”

“Kryten, if you don’t tell me this instant whatever hare-brained scheme you’ve concocted, I will scoop that mess of short-circuits and burnt-out chips that passes for your brain out of your skull and use your head as a fruit-bowl. Say it.”

“Well...We do have the garbage cannon, Sir.”

“What? Forget it, Kryten. We’re not going to shoot that thing down while he’s got Lister onboard!”

“That wasn’t what I was thinking, Sir. The thing is...anything that we shot out of the waste disposal would catch up with the transporter very quickly indeed. Within seconds. So, if somebody – theoretically – were to...”

“That’s ridiculous. The chute is only a foot square. And even if you could fire someone out of it, Cat would die instantly and you’d be blasted into fragments. I can see the benefits of either option, don’t get me wrong, but it wouldn’t help Lister.”

“Your light bee would fit, Sir. And I’m fairly sure that with sufficient...padding, it would sustain little or no damage.”

Rimmer stared at him, “You want to fire me out of the waste disposal.”

“Seems like a win-win situation to me,” Cat grinned.
“Listen, furball...”

“Forget it, Sir. I knew you wouldn’t agree. We’ll think of something else.” They fell back into silence. Kryten whistled faintly. Cat tapped a few buttons. “Transporter to make planet fall in approximately twenty-six minutes,” he said innocuously. “And counting,” he added unnecessarily.

“Are either of you two even trying to think of another plan?” Rimmer demanded.

“Of course, Sir. I’ve devoted seventy per cent of my run-time to finding a solution that doesn’t involve firing you out of anything.”

“And?”

“Nothing yet, Sir.”

“And I suppose there’s no point asking you,” he addressed Cat.

“Buddy, I’ve have fired you out of that chute years ago if it was down to me. As far as I’m concerned, if you can save Dormouse Cheeks at the same time, that’s just a bonus.”

“Damn you both,” Rimmer snapped, “I’m not doing it.” There was more silence. Cat tapped a few more buttons. “Transporter to make planet fall in twenty-three minutes and counting,” he said, and this time his voice was all accusation. “You know I’m really going to miss the monkey...”

“Shut up,” Rimmer said, “I’m going.”

Lister breathed deeply. His body hurt inside and out and he felt sick. The hell with this. The hell with all of it. If he was going to die then fine, but damned if he was going to spend eternity as this maniac’s hologramatic pet. He’d rather die here and now. He raised his head weakly, “It won’t work, you know,” he said, “You can download me and play with my memories and mess with my mind to your heart’s content, but you won’t get what you want.”

“What do you mean?” the double asked.

“I’ll never love you,” Lister said, “And you know what? I don’t think you really love me. I don’t think you even understand what love is. You wouldn’t know what to do with it if you had it.”

“I understand that in less than an hour from now you’re going to wake up and find that I’m all you have left,” the double told him coldly, “And we’ll see how choosy you are then, shall we?”

“We will. Because I can tell you right now, that even if you were the only person left in the universe, I still wouldn’t want you.”

“I’ll make you want me,” the double snarled, “I’ll make you get down on your knees and beg for me, even if it takes the rest of eternity!”

“It’s never going to happen, man. You’ve got this big plan worked out, how you’re going to make yourself out as the hero who’s saved me against all the odds? Do you honestly think I’m going to fall for that? I know you, Rimmer, and face facts, you’re a loser. Always have been and always will be. And even if by some miracle you manage to convince me with your bullshit story, it won’t make any difference. Because I’d still be thinking that you’d have done it better if you were Ace.”

The double went pale. Lister braced himself - Come on then, asshole. Kill me if you’re
going to do it. “Oh, yes, I forgot,” the double said icily, “Nobody does it as well as Commander Rimmer, do they?” Lister hesitated, unsure where this was going. “I’m sure good old Ace Rimmer would have made a better job of kidnapping you as well,” the double snarled.

“You’ve got that right,” Lister retorted, “He wouldn’t have wasted time torturing me, that’s for smegging sure. He would have cut all of that crap and got straight down to what he really wanted. But you’re too messed up even for that, aren’t you?”

The double clenched his fists tightly, nails digging into his palms, “And you’d have let him do it too, wouldn’t you?” he said softly.

“Let him?” Lister forced a laugh, “Hell, Rimsy, for Ace I would have got down on my knees and begged.” The double’s hands were locked around his throat so fast that Lister never even saw him move. Go ahead, he thought in bitter triumph, Choke me. Get it over with.

“You know what?” the double hissed in his face, “Maybe you’re right. Maybe I’ll never be Ace. But I can still have what he had. And guess what, Listy? When I’m done with your memories, you will be down on your knees...because you’ll be begging me to do it again.”

He snatched up the wire-cutters and cut Lister’s bonds. Lister crumpled to the ground. He tried to get up but his limbs were dead and useless from being tied up so long. The double dropped on top of him, grabbing his wrists and pinning him to the floor. “No!” Lister writhed beneath him, trying to force some strength back into his numb extremities. This had not gone according to plan. If the guy had been busy strangling him right now, he could have coped with that. At least he would have known that in some small way he’d chosen his own fate. If he’d gone back to torturing him, he could have coped with that as well. He could live with the pain. But he couldn’t cope with this and he didn’t think he could live with the kind of scars this would leave.

“Please,” he begged desperately, “Rimmer, please, don’t do this. I’ll come with you, I’ll do whatever you want, I’ll love you forever and ever, just please stop!”

“Sorry, Listy,” the double panted, unzipping his trousers, “But you asked for this. And now...you’re going to get it.”

“No, you’re going to get it, Squire!”

They both looked up in shock just as Rimmer brought the laptop crashing down on his double’s head.
Chapter 14

The double staggered, but the blow wasn’t enough to knock him out; hard-light was tough. He scrambled to his feet and faced his counterpart, “Back off, you treacherous judas! I gave you the chance to be a part of this! You made your decision, you can’t go back on it now!”

“This was not what I expected when you told me that you were going to put an end to this situation!” Rimmer shouted, “I thought you were going to talk things through, set a few things straight, not...” he gestured incoherently at Lister, still sprawled naked and bleeding on the floor “...This! What the hell is wrong with you?!”

“Talk things through?” the double squawked incredulously, “You think talking things through is going to solve anything after the years of torment he’s inflicted on me?”

“So what’s your solution, Einstein?” Rimmer retorted, “You think this is going to make things better? You think you can just extract your nasty revenge and all those feelings and memories will just float away?”

“He doesn’t want revenge,” Lister said weakly, propping himself up on trembling arms, “He wants my hologram.”

“What?” Rimmer asked, aghast.

“Shut up, Lister! I’m warning you!” the double snarled, but Lister ignored him.

“He thinks he can brainwash me into loving him with that software we found on the Branson!” He looked up at Rimmer, “He was going to make me think he was you.”

“You unscrupulous dung-beetle!” Rimmer exploded, “That is the most unpleasant, twisted, devious thing I’ve ever heard!”

“Don’t try and pull the moral high ground with me!” his double replied, “I’m you. You would have done exactly the same in my place!”

“I would have done no such thing!”

But inside, Rimmer hesitated. He thought of that moment in the storeroom, when he had come so close to doing to Lister what his double had been about to do when he’d smashed the computer over his head. Was he really any better than this man? The double saw his uncertainty.

“Listen,” he said ingratiatingly, “Maybe it’s not too late for the two of us. In fact maybe it’s better this way. We can get rid of Cat and Kryten. If we work together there’ll be nothing they can do to stop us this time. And then Listy can belong to us both. We can share him. And we won’t need to bother with any of that memory-altering business because between us we can make him do whatever we want. Doesn’t that sound good?”

Rimmer narrowed his eyes, “What do you mean ‘this time’?”

“Pardon?” his double blinked innocently.

“You said there’s nothing they can do to stop us this time. What did you mean by that?”
“Look, it’s nothing. They’re going to be here soon, are you in or out?”

“I’m not making any decisions until you give me some answers,” Rimmer advanced on him. “Tell me, Arnold, what exactly did happen on your Starbug? Because I don’t think we’ve heard the full story.”

“There’s no time for that now...”

“There was no accident, was there?” Rimmer interrupted bluntly. His double glared at him. “Tell me the truth,” Rimmer demanded, “Right now.” The double huffed angrily and folded his arms. “I left,” he said simply.

“Why?”

“There was some...unpleasantness.”

“Details!” Rimmer snapped.

“It was his own fault,” the double snapped back, meeting Rimmer’s stare, “He’d been asking for it for years!” His eyes darted across to Lister, blazing with a fierce hatred...and something else; “He got what he deserved.”

Oh God, Rimmer thought, his insides starting to squirm with dread. He had a feeling he knew what was coming. “What did you do to him?” Rimmer asked, his voice soft with dread.

“What do you think I did?” the other Rimmer snarled, “I’m only human. There’s only so much one man can take! He pushed too far and I snapped!”

“What happened?” Rimmer insisted, getting angry. The double fidgeted uncomfortably; “We’d been celebrating a rediscovery of Red Dwarf’s vapour trail,” he said. “We’d been drinking all night. When I finally went back to my quarters, Lister followed me. He went off on one of his little drunken speeches; telling me I shouldn’t be so angry all the time, that I should open up and let people care about me; that if I let my guard down and trusted people I’d be much happier. All the usual rubbish you’d expect from him. I told him to leave.” The double breathed deeply before continuing.

“He...he put his arms around me and held me. He told me that after all we’d been through together we ought to try and have a proper friendship.” He began to tremble at the memory, his features contorting with rage, “Friendship! He had the nerve to use the word friendship to me even as he tried to seduce me! He knew exactly what he was doing; cuddling up against me, whispering in my ear, and no doubt the manipulative bastard would have woken up the next morning and blamed it all on the drink, and gone back to insulting me. It was too much. I couldn’t take it anymore. I...I kissed him.”

“What did he do?” Rimmer asked softly. The double shook his head and turned away.

“He laughed. He started giggling. When I told him to stop he said he didn’t know what else to do. Well, I knew what I wanted to do. And believe me, once I’d made it clear, he stopped laughing pretty quickly. He tried to hold me off, told me he hadn’t been prepared for this, that he needed time to think, that he’d never known, he’d never realised, that he’d misunderstood. All the lies I’d expected. Well, I wasn’t interested in any of it anymore. After all those years I’d finally made the leap and I wasn’t going to let him pull the net out from under me. It was all or nothing.”

The double scratched anxiously at his wrist. “I don’t remember exactly what happened next. We were on the bed. He was struggling, trying to get away, but I got hold of him somehow and...”
pinned him, held him down, made him do what I wanted,” his voice went dreamy. “...Next thing I remember I was on the floor. Cat was there, bending over Lister, shouting for Kryten. He looked at me and said, ‘What the hell have you done?’ I told him it was nothing. I told him Lister had started it. Then Kryten pushed past me and he said...he said Lister wasn’t breathing. At first I thought it was a joke. I thought they’d set me up, that they’d planned this all somehow, that they were all in on it. I started shouting at Lister to get up, told him I wasn’t fooled. But then I saw his face and I knew it wasn’t a joke. Cat and Kryten shoved me aside and rushed him down to the medi-bay. For a few moments I just stood there trying to work out what had happened, what to do next. And then I ran. I ran to the escape pod and left.”

“You didn’t even stay to find out if he was still alive?” Rimmer asked, disgusted. The double shrugged, “What difference did it make? He was lost to me forever either way. Whether he survived or not, there was only going to be one outcome for me. Switch-off.”

“So you ran for it, like the cowardly, custard-bellied creep that you are,” Rimmer sneered. “That we are,” the double reminded him snidely, “Unless Listy here has been telling me fibaroonies, it wasn’t so long ago that you jumped into your own little escape pod and made a break for it without much thought as to whether he lived or died.”

Rimmer opened his mouth to protest, but what could he say? He squeezed his eyes shut and massaged his H uncomfortably. “Maybe you’re right,” he said weakly, “Maybe we’re not all that different.”

“Quite. And at the end of the day, Rimsy, we both want the same thing.” The double suddenly reached over and grabbed Lister by the dreadlocks, dragging him over. Lister yelled in pain and slapped at him and was rewarded with a heavy boot in his back. “So what do you say?” the double asked.

“Rimmer,” Lister said faintly, “If you’re going to rescue me then now would be a really good time.”

Rimmer stared at them both, hesitating. “I don’t want to kill him,” he finally said anxiously. Lister stared at him.

“We’ll have to do it sooner or later,” the double said reasonably, “If this is going to be a permanent relationship. Might as well get it over with now.”

“I’m not good with blood,” Rimmer said awkwardly.

“What?!” Lister yelped, “Rimmer, man, tell me you are not seriously thinking about this!” The double gave him an impatient shake.

“Who says we have to worry about blood? All we need to do is dig a hole, get Listy here to stand on the edge, and once that trigger is pulled he’ll tumble in neatly. All we have to do is shovel over the dirt. ‘Keep It Tidy’ – as we say.” Rimmer shuddered, “I’m not so sure. Let’s face it, nothing about Lister has ever been tidy, and I can’t see that changing even in death.”

“I’ll tell you what I told him. It’ll all be over very quickly and when it is we can start our new life together. Surely if I can cope with it, so can you. Right?”

Rimmer took a deep breath and walked over to his double. He sighed heavily, then reached up and clasped his shoulder. The double grinned triumphantly. “See? I knew you’d come round to my way of thinking.”

“Rimsy,” Rimmer said affectionately, looking up into the mirror of his own face, “I’m not like you.”
He gripped the double’s shoulder and punched through his chest with all his might, penetrating his hard-light field and grasping his light-bee. The double gasped, his eyes dilating with shock. He dropped Lister and grasped at Rimmer’s arm, but it was too late. His image flickered and died and Rimmer was left holding the small, inactivated bee in his hand. He stared at it for a moment, then tucked it into his pocket and knelt down beside Lister.

“Are you okay?” he asked in a tiny voice, “You’re bleeding all over...”

“I’ve been better,” Lister replied shakily, leaning against Rimmer’s shoulder. Rimmer laughed nervously, “Bet you never thought you’d hear me spearheading an argument for the ‘Let’s Not Kill Lister Campaign’, eh?”

“I’m sure in different circumstances I’d have appreciated it more,” Lister said dryly.

“Where are your clothes?”

“Everywhere. Ripped up. Gone.”

“You probably couldn’t put them back on anyway; you’d be too sore,” Rimmer looked at the cuts and burns scattered across Lister’s back and frowned, “What the hell is all this?”

“Couples therapy,” Lister said weakly, “Apparently.”

Rimmer cast his eyes about desperately and spotted a grimy dustsheet over some tools in the corner. He picked it up and shook it out to get the worst of the dust off, then wrapped it carefully around Lister’s shoulders. “Here. You must be freezing.” Lister winced as the material touched his tender skin, but accepted it appreciatively nonetheless, “Thanks, man.” He looked at Rimmer slightly askance, “I don’t mean to sound ungrateful but you smell absolutely rank.”

“We can try sticking you in the garbage chute and see how rosy you smell afterwards if you like,” Rimmer replied tetchily.

“The garbage chute?”

“How else do you think I got here so fast?”

“You fired yourself out of the garbage cannon?!”

“I did. And I never want to speak of it again. Now come on,” Rimmer put an arm around him, “Let’s turn this crate round and get home.” He helped Lister wobble to his feet. He swayed and went very pale, “I don’t feel great,” he said and closed his eyes, “I think I’m going to be sick.”

“Look at me,” Rimmer gently tilted Lister’s face up towards him and stared into his eyes, “You’ve got a concussion,” he said quietly.

“You’re telling me?”

“Just try and sit quietly until we get back and Kryten can look at you. Alright?” He helped Lister into the tiny cockpit and settled him into a chair, then started to re-program the auto-pilot to take them back to Starbug. He opened the communication channel, “This is Alpha-Rimmer calling Starbug. Come in please!”

“Sir!” Kryten’s voice crackled through the speaker, “What’s happening? Is Mister Lister alright?”

“He’s going to need some attention when we get back, but nothing too serious. And I’m fine as
well, thank you for asking,” he added bitterly.

“What about your double, Sir?”

“He’s been neutralised, don’t worry about that,” Rimmer patted his pocket.

“Very well, Sir. We’ll be seeing you shortly. I’ll prep the medi-bay and...er... run a bath.”

“See that you do,” Rimmer replied darkly, “Over and out.” He flicked the comm-station off and turned to Lister.

He’d slipped down a little in his seat, head drooping, eyes closed. “Lister!” Rimmer jumped up and went to him, “Lister, look at me!” Lister opened his eyes wearily but they were bleary and unfocused, “My head hurts,” he said weakly. Rimmer gently examined the bump on his head. It was very swollen and an almighty bruise was starting to blossom there, but it was no longer bleeding. Rimmer prayed silently that his skull wasn’t fractured, he had no idea how they’d cope with such an injury given Starbug’s limited facilities, and the concussion was obviously more severe than he’d first thought. “I need to sleep for a while,” Lister yawned, his eyelids sinking again. “Not a good idea,” Rimmer said quickly, “I’m going to need you to stay awake until we get back.”

“Can’t...” Lister murmured. Rimmer shook him as hard as he dared,

“Come on, snap out of it, Lister! Talk to me! We’ll play a game. I’ll ask you questions and you have to answer them, okay? What’s the furthest planet from the sun?”

“Pluto...”

“Very good. One point to Listy. What’s the oxygen/methane ratio on Calisto?”

“I dunno...Seven to four?”

“Right again,” Rimmer said desperately, although he himself hadn’t a clue. All he knew was that he had to keep Lister going until they got back to Starbug. He just hoped all those hours of useless revision he’d done over the years would ensure he wouldn’t run out of questions, even if he still couldn’t remember the answers...
A few hours later, once he had showered several times and thoroughly cleaned out his light-bee, Rimmer wandered down to the medi-bay to check on how Lister was doing. He was sitting up in bed reading a comic book, but he looked tired and there were dark circles under his eyes, however the smile he greeted Rimmer with seemed genuine. “Hey! My hero!” he said cheerfully. Rimmer blushed awkwardly but he was also relieved. He’d been a little worried about how Lister would react to his presence. He’d surmised that when you’ve been kidnapped and tortured by someone it might be a little distressing to have their exact double hovering over you; however Lister seemed unfazed.

“I just thought I’d drop in and see how you were doing. How’s your head?”

“Bump’s still sore,” Lister gingerly touched the bandage on his head, “But Kryten’s satisfied it’s nothing major. Although he’s still been waking me up every hour, which I could have done without.”

“You took a hell of a whack,” Rimmer reminded him gravely.

“I’m a Scouser,” Lister grinned, “I can take it,”

“And the rest?” Lister’s smile faltered a little,

“It hurts like smeg,” he admitted, “But I’ve taken painkillers and Kryten’s put some special cream on the burns. I’ll be okay.”

“Listen,” Rimmer traced a pattern on the floor with his foot, “I just wanted you to know that I had no idea what he was planning. If I’d known what he was going to do, I would have never...”

“I know that, man,” Lister interrupted gently.

“I just felt that after we had that argument...and what I said...”

“Rimmer, we had a row. It’s what we do,” Lister said patiently, “I know you had no part in what he did to me. Trust me. We’re okay.” Rimmer fidgeted anxiously,

“And you know...what he said...about us both wanting the same thing...” Lister shook his head, smiling slightly; “You don’t even have to say it, guy.”

Rimmer sighed with relief. “I hope you won’t mind,” he said, “But I went over the black box footage from the transporter. I felt like I needed to know everything that happened.”

“Why?” Lister asked puzzled.

“Because it’s partly my fault. Because if I’d realised sooner what was going on, we might have been able to get to you before things turned as nasty as they did.” This was only partly true. Rimmer had wanted to know just how much his double had said to Lister about him. To his relief, aside from those last desperate moments before Rimmer had shut him down, the double appeared to have said nothing which would incriminate him. “Oh, come on,” Lister said, “There’s no way you could have predicted this. Even if you’d betrayed him and told me how he felt days ago, what would have been different? I still would have gone down there to talk to him and I still would have gone alone. It
wouldn’t have changed anything.”

“Perhaps not.”

Rimmer fished in his pocket and held out the inactive light-bee. “I thought maybe you should decide what we’re going to do with him,” he said, “After all, he’s had a good try at killing you in at least two dimensions; and for all we know he might have succeeded in one. It seems fair.” Lister didn’t take it from him. “What about you?” he asked.

“What about me?”

“You’re the person who probably understands him the best. If you’d been in his place do you think you would have been the same? Do you sympathise?”

“No,” Rimmer said, a little too abruptly, “And I don’t think there was a big difference in circumstances. I think it was all in his head.”

“We don’t know what happened in his dimension,” Lister picked at a loose thread on the blanket, seeming uneasy, “Maybe his Lister was playing with him. Maybe that’s how he kept himself sane. I entertain myself by winding you up after all; perhaps he’d just discovered a different way of doing it. A nasty way, maybe, but the principle’s the same.”

Rimmer shook his head, “He told me a lot about his Lister and what went on between them and it really didn’t sound any different to the way we interact with each other. I don’t think the Lister in his dimension had any idea what was going on under the surface of the relationship – any more than you did.”

 “Maybe he should have looked more closely,” Lister said glumly, “And maybe I should have too. I mean, how can you live with somebody for that long and just not notice that they have those kind of feelings? How self-absorbed would you have to be?”

Rimmer looked at him carefully. Twenty-four hours ago he’d been convinced that the man sitting next to him was a cruel, self-centred manipulator. He’d wanted to believe that Lister knew how he felt, because that would mean that Rimmer would never have to tell him. He’d wanted to believe Lister was playing with him because it would mean that there was a part of Lister that wanted Rimmer’s attention just as badly as he wanted his. But when his double had explained what had happened in that other dimension it had all become ridiculously clear to him how things really were.

Lister had never been trying to play with his feelings. Lister had truly had no idea how he felt; just like the other Lister had been oblivious to his double’s obsession. He wasn’t manipulative and he wasn’t self-absorbed either. He’d never realised because Rimmer had never made the effort to reach out and let him know he cared. And when that other Lister had made the effort, had tried to reach out to his double in a drunken moment of tenderness, the gesture had backfired more devastatingly than he ever could have imagined. All because Rimmer couldn’t deal with his haywire emotions. All because Rimmer needed to think the worst of others so he wouldn’t see the worst in himself.

“You can’t blame yourself, Lister,” he said firmly, “He,” (We), his mind added treacherously, “Never gave you any reason to think that his feelings for you were anything other than negative. You were right in what you said to him. He didn’t understand how to love somebody.”

“I didn’t mean that,” Lister said sadly, “I only said it to be cruel. I thought if I hurt him enough he might just kill me and get it all over with.” He smiled wryly, “Maybe it would have worked if I hadn’t said the ‘A-word’.”
“Oh, yes,” Rimmer tried to force some humour into his voice, “He’d managed to convince himself you’d had some kind of sordid one-night-stand with Ace!” He managed to convince me too, smeghead that I am.

“Mmmm, I gathered,” Lister flicked a distracted glance at the ceiling, “I’ll never look at my rubber ducky the same way again, that’s for sure.”

“Stupid really,” Rimmer said, “I mean...you and Ace. As if.”

Lister took the light-bee from him and looked at it carefully, “You know,” he said gently, “I know I should be angry. I know I should want to crush this thing into a million tiny pieces and jump on them. But somehow...it just makes me sad. I wish there was a way I could have explained to him, made him see sense.”

“Are you serious?” Rimmer asked. Lister shrugged sadly,

“He just wanted to be loved,” he said simply.

“Oh, for smeg’s sake,” Rimmer said uncomfortably, “Even you’re not that sentimental, surely?” Lister sighed and handed it back to him,

“I’m just saying it’s sad, that’s all. Do whatever you think is right.”

“Me? How do I know?” Rimmer asked, “Doing the right thing is your forte, not mine.”

“Not this time, I think,” Lister said, “It’s down to you, Big Man. Don’t tell me what you decided until it’s done.”

“Thanks a lot,” Rimmer said sarcastically.

“Any time. Listen, I’m tired. Let me get some shut eye before Kryten comes back, would you?”

“Niet problemski,” Rimmer stood and went to leave but Lister’s voice made him turn back,

“Yes?”

“Thanks for the rescue, man. I don’t think I said that before. What you did...with the garbage cannon and everything...that was really brave of you.”

“You’re welcome,” Rimmer said blankly. He didn’t often have to field compliments and wasn’t quite sure what else to say. He scurried out before he said something wrong, turning his double’s light-bee anxiously over and over in his hands.

Lister watched him go then lay down, settled his sore head gingerly on the hard pillow and closed his eyes. He just wanted to be loved. Maybe he really was being overly sentimental but he couldn’t shake the sadness he felt. Because even if it was wrong, even if it was frightening, even if someone was doing unspeakable things to you with a chisel while they said it, it was still nice to hear somebody say ‘I love you’. How sad was that?

He drifted away and, just before he fell into a deep sleep, he had a thought that he wouldn’t remember when he awoke. Which was that perhaps, for some certain people, being cruel to you was the only outlet they could find for their feelings....
Rimmer put the light-bee in a shoebox at the back of his wardrobe, safe but hidden. Just like all the other parts of himself he was too afraid or ashamed to reveal. He would keep it, if only to remind himself of what he might have – and what he had so nearly - become. He would tell Lister he’d flushed it into space. Maybe then at least Lister could feel convinced that Rimmer felt no kinship with the twisted fool, even if Rimmer himself knew different. He couldn’t bear for Lister to think, even for a second, that he might empathise or even understand what had driven his double to such insane lengths. He knew he could never admit his feelings to Lister now, even if he’d been able to sum up the courage. After what had happened he’d probably have nightmares if Rimmer so much as smiled at him, and who could blame him? Who was he kidding? It probably would have given him nightmares even before all this mess if he knew the truth.

It was only later that night, when he lay down to sleep and thought again about his talk with Lister, that it occurred to him that at no point on that black box recording had his double ever said anything to Lister about the bathtub...or the rubber duck.

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