

New Beginnings

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New Beginnings

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Summary

The first New Years Eve out of stasis was always going to be hard for Dave Lister. How was he to know Rimmer was only trying to be nice?

Arnold Rimmer was in a strangely good mood today, even bringing himself to smile at the Cat, Holly and half a dozen Skutters that morning as he'd headed down to Parrot's bar. A few hours later, he looked around and sighed contentedly: *yes, this was perfect.*

"This looks absolutely spiffing," he grinned at the Skutters. "You did very well following my instructions, lads. If this doesn't shake up that lazy slob, nothing will."

Holly appeared on the view screen on the wall next to the Hologram, smiling knowingly.

"Throwing Lister a party, Arnold?" he asked.

"Well ..." Rimmer trailed off coyly.

Holly grinned and winked at the blushing Hologram.

"Aw, I knew I was right. I see everything I do."

"Well, what else am I supposed to do?" Rimmer snapped, quickly going on the defensive to recover some dignity. "He just lays around all day. I've got to think up something."

The Cat looked up balefully from the last decoration he was pinning on the wall. "I sleep all day, why you never throw me anything, Alphabet-Head?"

"If I could, I'd throw you something alright..." Rimmer muttered irritably.

He was just doing his duty: keeping Lister sane, he didn't need anyone questioning his intentions.

The thing was; Lister was getting depressed and Rimmer knew it. The scouser wasn't speaking, not really leaving his bunk room anymore; even his curry intake was going down. It had started round Christmas: Lister loved Christmas and the first one without human company had hit him hard; Rimmer had found him unconscious in the canteen on Christmas eve, having downed half the bar, and had got several of the Skutters to help drag him to the medi-bay. He was now being grumpy and short with him and he needed his chirpy annoyingly positive bunkmate back.

As much as Lister thrived off annoying Rimmer, Rimmer thrived off antagonising Lister... and he was worried.

When the Hologram had first been booted up and had found out that he would be responsible for the sanity of David Lister he'd actually considered switching himself off again. How could he survive with no one but that lazy slob for company? A person who devoted any spare energy and time to making his life a living hell. However, over the last year or so since the accident, the Hologram had softened a bit towards him. The man could be a disgusting slob who wouldn't know respect if it bit him on the behind, but he had come to see how much the man had grown in maturity.

The Scouser had been an unexpected comfort after the miserable event with his double a few weeks ago. The fact that he had recognised how different he and Rimmer 2.0 were had touched him. Lister had even kept his word to never mention Gazpacho soup again and to be truthful that had been the most considerate thing anyone had ever done and Rimmer wanted to repay the favour and he felt an old fashioned New Years party would be the right way to cheer him up.

The party would remind Lister that he was still alive, that he was still young and had all his life and chances ahead of him. Despite everything they were on their way to Earth, his five-

year plan was still viable and nothing was lost yet. That thought cheered Rimmer up too. Suppressing a telling smile, the Hologram walked into the bunk room.

Lister was huddled underneath a stained blanket that was slowly turning yellow from slept on curry remains. Seeing the Scouser shaped mountain Rimmer sighed and made a mental note to make Lister take a shower before the party, and find a way to get the man some clean sheets. He shook his head; *don't get distracted!* He had to get the messy slob out of bed first.

“And a very happy new year to you too, Me'laddo.” Rimmer deadpanned.

“Smeg off Rimmer.” Lister grumbled from underneath the blanket.

“Oh come on, Listy,” Rimmer chided. “A new year, a new leaf, new chances! Who knows what could happen? Something good could be just around the-”

“Nothing good is gonna happen Rimmer,” Lister interrupted bitterly. “You know that as well as I do. I'm gonna be stuck in space for the rest of my life.”

“But ...”

“And you know the worst part?”

“Running out of poppadums?” Rimmer smirked.

“*No!*” Lister shouted, not emerging from the blanket. “*It's you!* Do you know what it's like, being stuck in space with the most irritating man in the entire smegging universe? To have nothing to look forward to but having to put up with you for the rest of my life, with no hope of ever seeing any other human beings for the rest of time? Because right now the best thing I could wish for, for the new year, is for you to not be here!”

Rimmer didn't reply for a good while, reeling from the outburst.

“Oh ...” he whispered softly, feeling a quite realistic sensation of simulated heartbreak.

He swallowed heavily, trying to gather the strength to continue his attempts at raising Lister, but, unfortunately, the Scouser hadn't finished yet.

“Got nothing to say, have ya?” Lister spat over his shoulder. “Because I'm stuck! Stuck forever with a man who gets upset about cold soup rather than feeling guilty about wiping out the whole crew! A man so petty about his own self-worth he hides the holo-disc of the girl I love! So please enlighten me about all the good things coming to me cause I can't think of any ...”

The silence after Lister finished stretched out for a long moment. Frowning at the lack of sour response from the Hologram, he peered back out from under the blanket. Rimmer had gone.

Relieved and feeling slightly better after venting, he returned to huddling under the covers.

Five minutes later, the Cat came waltzing in with his usual casual confidence. When he spotted the lump on the bed, he poked it and jumped back with a hiss as Lister gave a groan.

“Smeg off, cat...”

“Hey buddy, what're you still doing in bed?” The Cat asked, looking confused.

Lister lowered his blanket to look at the Feline quizzically.

“What?”

A surprised look from the Cat returned his followed by a long suffering sigh from the Feline.

“Well bud; What are you doing up here when there is a perfectly good party going on?”

“*Party?* What the smeg are you talking about?” With a weary sigh Lister appeared from under the duvet and sat up.

“He didn’t tell you?” Cat frowned. “He came to get you ages ago.”
Before Lister could ask a second time, Holly appeared on the screen.

“Why are you still here?”

This was getting seriously annoying, Lister felt.

“Look, just smeg off guys,” Lister said. “This is the calmest I’ve been in days, so just leave me alone will ya?”

He was met with two disapproving scowls.

“Tss, try to do something nice this is the thanks you get.” Holly shook his head, then disappeared.

“I hear ya head.” The Cat said, turning to stalk out the room. “He ruined our night. Thanks a lot, dog food breath.”

Lister watched them leave in utter amazement. *What where they up to? What party?* Despite himself he had now become curious ... It had been a long time since they’d last had a party. Should he at least take a peak? Well, there was nothing else to do, was there?

“Holly?”

The dismembered face returned, still in a huff.

“What, party-poop?”

“You win. Where’s that party?”

“Parrot’s ...”

Lister jumped from his bunk.

“Come on then, let’s go...”

Pumping music, disco lights, decorations and a banner stating: “*Cheer Up Dave, It’s New Year*” greeted him as he entered the room. The Cat was dancing on the bar and two Skutters were having a make out session in a corner.

“What the smeg?” Lister called to Holly, whose face was by now back on the bar’s screen.

“There really is a party?”

“Oh, couldn’t trust me on my word, could you?” Holly stuck out his tongue.

Brain-fog clearing by the sight of fun Lister grabbed a beer and jumped on the bar to join the Cat.

“Sorry I snapped mate. Let’s party!!”

The Cat stopped mid groove to narrow his eyes at the human in front of him.

“Get me a new shiny thing and it’s forgiven!”

That was easy, Lister smirked.

“Sure thing, man!”

A little while later the pair had moved to the bar. Lister was now on his third beer and explained to the Cat what New Year meant: *no, you didn’t have to pay to get it and no, it didn’t come in a box with a pink bow.*

Soon the pair were dancing again. Lister hadn’t felt this good in weeks!

Sometime around eleven o’clock, Cat looked up from his drink and cast an eye around the room.

“Hey you seen Goalpost Head around? I mean, this whole thing was his idea ...”

“Rimmer’s idea!?” Lister coughed on his lager.

“Yeah, he spent hours getting those metal guys to get all this stuff up. Thought it would help you, apparently.”

Lister bit his lip. Rimmer had thrown him this party? That must have been why he’d been at their bunk earlier. He really wished he hadn’t snapped at him now. He’d find him to thank him later, he pacified the oncoming feeling of guilt that started to bubble up in the pit of his stomach.

“Oi, you two!” Holly’s large face filled the screen closest to them a minute or two later.

“What did you do?”

Lister looked up in stunned indignance.

“Nothing! Just been here all night!”

“Nothing? Well explain then why I just had Rimmer in the projection room demanding to be switched off. Yeah, you heard me; *Rimmer*.”

Lister closed his eyes and sighed. Damn it, he should have gone to check on the Hologram sooner.

“He was at our bunk earlier. He - smeg - The poor guy only wanted to wish me happy new year and I practically bit his head off.”

Saying this Lister recalled what it was he’d said to him and shuddered; talk about no good deed going unpunished.

“Well I think you really flamingo’d up there, mate.” Holly said gravely.

Lister looked down into his beer. “I know man ...”

“You really think he doesn’t feel ...?” Holly raised his eyebrows trying to look as kindly as he could.

“I didn’t - It’s just - smeg ... The guy is so hard to read.”

“Not that hard. In fact he is really running overtime on the emotion programmes right now. Shame really, he was rather happy before. He was beginning to trust you. All new for him, that.”

“He was?” Lister felt rather conflicting feelings of warmth, guilt and confusion hearing this.

“Yeah, and just so you know: huge file on his guilt about the accident too.”

“So he does feel guilty about the accident?” Lister frowned.

Holly looked surprised at this question. “Of course he does! Why did you think he didn’t?”

Lister shrugged. “He was so casual when he arrived that first day when I came from stasis. It just seemed...”

“What made you think it was his first day too?”

“It wasn’t?” That was news to Lister.

“Gordon Bennett, still regretting waking you up...” Holly muttered, then spoke up. “I had to reboot and counsel the guy hadn’t I? It’s Rimmer we’re talking about so it took me about a month to have him functional, get him through the grief and all that. I had to firewall the worst of it to keep him functioning.”

“Smeg.” Lister sighed. For a second he thought how hard it had to be for Rimmer to have caused that accident and be stuck on the ship forever as a ghost, surrounded by all those memories. Then he realised the Cat was talking.

“From the sounds of it he ain’t coping all that well right now, bud ...”

Lister knew he had to go find him and try to make it up, Rimmer deserved that much.

“Where is he Hol?”

“Observation dome ...”

Lister rushed to the lift and then rushed up the last flight of stairs, where he froze. He stumbled in on Rimmer kneeling on all fours in front of three disinterested Skutters.

“Oh for smeg sake, just press the button! No the other one!”

“I’d rather they didn’t, man,” Lister said softly. Rimmer flinched as he looked up. Lister noted that his eyes were red and puffy in the millisecond before the Hologram turned to hide his face.

“Smeg off, Lister.”

“Rimmer, what are you doing?”

“What you’ve always wanted me to do, apparently,” Rimmer said, bitterly.

With a weary sigh he stood up and walked to the balcony to stare at the starlight view with unseeing eyes. Lister joined him.

“Rimmer,” Lister sighed helplessly. “I’m so sorry. I shouldn’t have snapped at you like that. Wh ... what I said was unforgivable but ... I never meant it. Thank you so much for that party it’s looking great.”

Rimmer stared at him sceptically. He didn’t say anything, but his eyes were like coal.

“I know, I am a smeghead, a gimboi, a goit,” Lister listed off the names. “But I’m sorry I hurt you.”

Rimmer frowned. “You’re really sorry?” he asked suspiciously.

“Rimmer, we’re friends... in our own, weird way. Alright,, sometimes I smegging feel like strangling you, and I know you feel the same way about me a lot of the time, but no one goes through all we’ve been through without bonding somehow. And that’s what friends do, apologise.”

Holly appeared, breaking the following silence, projecting his head onto one of the glass panels.

“It’s eleven thirty PM, earth time - Well I say earth time, it’s the time we programmed when we left. Could be anything now, really...”

“What do you say, Rimmer?” Lister asked. “Wanna come ring in the New Year?”

“You mean, my whole plan in the first place?”

“Alright, alright! Well, what do you say? A new year, a new leaf, new chances. Who knows what could happen? Something good could be just around the corner ...”

Rimmer sniggered softly then shook his head.

“Forget it, Lister. I didn’t mean a word of that. Just said it to raise you from that smelly mess you call a bed and get you to the party. I know you’ve been down since Christmas.”

Lister nodded. “It was a nice gesture, it really did cheer me up. If you’re feeling down, you know ... you can talk to me. I never really thought about how you felt Rimmer, I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay no-one ever does. I’m used to it.”

A long silence, Lister felt unsure of what to do: he really wanted to go back to the party but Rimmer clearly wasn’t ready yet. Maybe he should talk to him a little more?

“How does it feel ... being a hologram, I mean? I know you always wanted to tell me and I kind of brushed you off. I’ll listen now, promise.”

Caught of guard Rimmer looked up, an eager look in his eyes, as if Lister had asked something he'd been bursting to tell someone.

"It's as if ... as if I'm always locked in a glass bubble ... I can talk to people ... but I can't interact. I am always separated by an invisible force. I ... can't touch anything. I can't paint, I can't write ... I can't dress myself, take a real shower, eat real food ... It's as if I'm never really here." He froze, he'd clearly said too much. Before he could turn away and put his fist in his mouth Lister quickly tried to reassure him.

"Hey, don't be embarrassed it's okay. Must feel lonely in a way." Rimmer sort of nodded. "By the way, Rimmer, what do you do all day?"

Rimmer shrugged as he looked at him rather hopelessly.

"When you're not there there isn't much left beyond reading books ..."

A snort from Lister.

"You? Reading books?"

Rimmer shook his head. "Back to insulting me already, are we?"

A naughty but apologetic grin from Lister. "Hey, shove off. I've only seen you reading the same three books over and over."

The look Rimmer gave him back was rather heartbreaking.

"Well what do you expect? There's only three books available on the basic hologram factory setting."

"Basic settings?"

"Well, there's a basic setting all holograms are set with. You can... 'customise' it later on, like outfits, books and stuff." Rimmer said reluctantly. He hated the entire 'customise your hologram' marketing to the still living, like holograms were some kind of novelty game. But by the time he'd discovered how limited the clothing and entertainment choices were for him, he was too embarrassed to ask Lister to update it. And knowing the Scouser he was certain he'd have just ended up with a bunch of dresses and pirate outfits, with afros and mohawks. He'd tried to get the Skutters to type in some things, but they were useless and couldn't spell.

"And how do I do add books?" The smile Lister shot Rimmer made him feel that at that moment at least he could trust him.

"Well, you go to the hologram simulation suit and key in 'Add X book to Holo-library'.

"...that's it?" Lister asked incredulously.

"Pretty much yeah."

"And you never thought to ask me before?"

Rimmer didn't answer, looking at the ground.

"Too proud to ask, weren't ya? For smeg sake, Rimmer, pride'll be your downfall you know."

"I know."

Holly appeared again. "One minute to midnight, guys."

Lister shot Rimmer a quick smile.

"Got a New Years wish, Arn?"

Rimmer gave him a look.

"Yeah, right. What, like a hug from my bestest fwiend?" Rimmer asked condescendingly, but on the other hand looking as if a hug was something he desperately needed – which he did.

Lister raised an eyebrow then noticed Holly wink at him, behind Rimmer's back. Quickly but tentatively Lister reached out to Rimmer's projection. He felt an odd static prickle when he

touched him, the one he remembered from earth – when he took off his sweater during freezing winter weather. That was good, he could feel something.

“Lister what the-” Rimmer muttered, attempting to push away. Then he stopped in surprise and gasped. The static trembled in Lister’s arms.

“Lister? Listy you’re - you’re hugging me and ... and I can feel it!”

“Shush Arn.” Lister whispered hoarsely. “You better get used to it, because you’re gonna feel it a whole lot more!” At this he lifted up his face to reach the Hologram’s mouth and kissed him.

“DONG!!” Holly cried out. “DONG, DONG, DONG, DONG, DONG!!!”

“Happy New Year, Arnie.” Lister said as they released.

“Happy New Year, Listy.”

“DONG, DONG, DONG, DONG, DONG, DONG!!!!!!!!!!!!”

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