

Disclaimer: Paramount is much bigger than me, and oh so awesome. They own everything.

*Special thanks to Elem for the mighty beta.* The woman is a marvel. Having said all that, I've made a few changes to this story since I got it back, so any mistakes are all mine.

Rating: R-ish (for some language and some unpleasantness)

Summary: Voyager returns from the Delta Quadrant, but things don't go as expected for the Captain.

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Thirty minutes after Voyager burst through the remains of the Borg hub, Starfleet had the ship in orbit in a holding pattern around Earth. Voyager's captain had been instantly suspicious but when she received assurances from various admirals that the authorities just wanted to give them a proper welcome, Janeway relaxed. Somewhat.

On receiving further advice that it would be at least another hour before anything was 'sorted out', the captain suggested that the bridge crew join Tom and B'Elanna in sickbay and visit the baby.

"I want to have a hold of the baby before her grandfather arrives. He'll pull rank on us all and we won't get an opportunity until she's three." She stood up and started for the door. "Who's with me? Harry? Chakotay? Seven?" she glanced at Tuvok.

"I will stay here and 'hold the fort', Captain. Please extend my congratulations to Lieutenants Paris and Torres."

"I will indeed, Tuvok." She ushered the others into the turbolift before her. "You have the bridge, Commander."

#

"I can't believe we made it. I can say that now that we're home." Janeway laughed at the expressions of the others with her.

"I never doubted that you'd do it, Captain."

"Thanks Chakotay, but we *all* did it."

As the group emerged on Deck Five, Janeway was warmly embraced by two crewmembers who had been waiting for the lift. One was even bold enough to kiss her on the cheek, before they disappeared behind the closing doors.

Janeway was stunned. Harry and Chakotay shared a warm smile and even Seven looked pleased at having witnessed the event.

"Come on, Kathryn, we don't want to let the Doctor monopolize Miral." Chakotay said as he took her arm. Janeway, all of a sudden, seemed to have something in her eye.

She didn't get the chance to 'remove' whatever it was, as just then Crewman Yosa suddenly came around the corner and took her hand and thanked her sincerely before continuing on his journey.

If Chakotay hadn't been guiding her by the arm, she wouldn't have moved from the entrance of the lift, she was so overcome. She'd regained some of her equilibrium by the time they'd reached sickbay and once inside she let herself relax and enjoy Tom and B'Elanna's happiness with the

others.

#

*"Bridge to Janeway."*

Janeway carefully adjusted hold of Miral and quietly responded.

"Auntie Kathryn here, Tuvok."

There was only a fraction of a pause before Tuvok responded. The laughter of the bridge crew could be heard in the background. *"Captain, Admiral Burke would like to speak to you."*

"Put him through to sick bay, please Tuvok." She turned to the Doctor "Doctor, could you bring a terminal over here. It'll take more than an Admiral to make me forfeit my Miral rights."

The Doctor positioned a terminal on a trolley and moved it to Janeway's side.

"Admiral Burke, a pleasure to see you again, sir." Janeway gave him a radiant smile. "May I present my youngest crewmember, Miral Torres-Paris?"

Burke blinked in surprise at being presented with a baby, and his stern look softened. "Captain, it's a pleasure to see you too. And it looks like Owen Paris is going to be even more insufferable now." He managed a smile at the baby before returning to business. "I'm sorry, Captain but I need to discuss some issues with you. May I beam aboard and talk to you privately? Perhaps your ready room?"

Janeway felt Chakotay tense beside her. "Admiral, I've been assured that the ex-Maquis..."

"I assure you, *and* all of your crew, that there is no cause for concern regarding the fate of any of Voyager's complement." He tried to look reassuring but didn't quite pull it off. "I need to discuss some things with you privately, Captain."

Now Chakotay was really tense. His protective instincts had just reached a critical level.

"Admiral," Chakotay's voice was soft but Janeway could hear the underlying concern. "Captain Janeway..."

"Is not in any trouble." Burke interrupted. "Please Commander, I give you my word." His expression remained stern. "Captain?"

"Aye, sir." She relinquished Miral into Harry's arms after gently kissing the baby's head "I'll have you beamed directly to the ready room, sir."

"Understood. Burke out."

Chakotay was right by her side and Janeway put a hand on his arm and stopped him following her.

"Stay here, Chakotay." He was going to argue. "Please. I'm sure it's just some petty issue that can be easily resolved. I promise to call you if I need rescuing."

#

Admiral Burke was already in the ready room when she entered. His very serious expression did

nothing to calm her. It was clear that she was about to hear something that she wasn't going to like.

"Sir." She stood at attention and braced herself for what was to come.

"At ease, Captain." He looked closely at her. "I'm afraid I have some rather bad news, Kathryn."

Due to her long Starfleet history, Janeway knew most of the senior admirals personally, some had known her father and were almost avuncular towards her. Burke wasn't one of them, and he *never* used her first name. Now she was truly worried.

At that moment, the computer indicated that someone was at the door and Janeway didn't move a muscle as Burke bid the visitor to enter. The Doctor entered, looking both wary and perplexed.

"Kathryn, I'm afraid I have some tragic news." Burke took her by the arm and sat her on the sofa by the window. "There's no easy way to say this, so I'll just come out with it. I'm afraid there's been a terrible accident."

"Mom? Phoebe?"

"Yes."

Yes? Yes? Both of them? Janeway's mind raced through a myriad of possibilities and then, as if it realized that this was going to be too awful to contemplate, it went blank. She wasn't aware of the Doctor sitting next to her on the sofa and taking her hand.

"Yes, I'm afraid so. A shuttle accident a short time ago." He looked at her closely. "I can't tell you how sorry I am."

Janeway sat in stunned horror, unable to comprehend how this could be happening.

"We're going to beam the crew down to Earth and from there they'll be meeting family and friends. They've been granted two days leave before debriefing. There will be an informal gathering at Head Quarters to get everyone together. It's all arranged." He looked at Janeway who was still sitting motionless and expressionless on the sofa with her hand in the Doctor's. "I can inform the crew for you."

"No." She shook her head, finally emerging from her mental haze. "No, please. Don't spoil this day for them. Let's just keep this quiet, if possible, for a while. Will the press know?"

"No. It wasn't a civilian shuttle, so there's no need to release a passenger list."

Janeway felt like she'd been struck. A Starfleet shuttle. Of *course*. As an Admiral's wife, Gretchen Janeway would be afforded every facility. Her mother and sister were on a Starfleet shuttle because they were coming here to welcome her home. Admiral Janeway hadn't mentioned anything to her because in her timeline, her mother was still alive. Janeway put her head in her hand as she was suddenly overcome with anger and grief at the unfairness of it all. Coming home seventeen years early had caused the deaths of her family. This was her fault.

Burke was talking again. Something about temporary quarters. Transporting them. Staying apart from the crew. She'd no idea what he was talking about.

It was a few minutes before Janeway was fully aware of her surroundings again. Admiral Burke had left, but the Doctor was still sitting by her side, still holding her hand.

"Captain, I'm so sorry. If there's anything I can do..."

"Thank you, Doctor." She placed her other hand on top of his. "You'd better get back to sick bay. They'll be worried and I want this day to be the best it can be for Tom and B'Elanna."

"They're with Miral, they won't miss me."

Janeway got to her feet, grasping his hand in between hers.

"I'll be all right. And of course they'll miss you. Go back, please Doctor. I'll join you on the ground."

#

Janeway managed to stay at the meeting point for a few hours. She successfully kept up a passably happy facade for the crew, many of whom introduced her to family and friends. Never far away, but always just out of reach, was Chakotay, still looking out for her even now that his job was finished. Admiral Burke was directly on hand for the entire time. When she expressed the desire to return to her quarters, Burke said he would accompany her.

As they reached her door, he asked for a private talk. Despite just wanting to go to sleep for as long as possible, Janeway agreed.

"I'm sorry Captain that I have to approach you like this, but these are desperate times." Janeway just wanted him to go away. She didn't care about whatever it was he obviously wanted to share with her and she opened her mouth to ask him to leave, only vaguely hoping she wasn't going to seem insubordinate. He forestalled her by raising his hand. "Captain, please. I need to ask you something extremely important, but first I need to give you some background. Please?" He indicated that she should sit on the sofa.

Frankly she didn't give a damn about whatever he felt compelled to tell her and made no effort to look interested. She was past caring, but he didn't seem to notice.

"I'll start from the beginning. About four months ago, the Federation received a communication from an unknown group. They said that within the next two weeks, they were going to 'gain our attention'. Twelve days later, an uninhabited moon around Qizos Four was destroyed by an explosion of unknown origin. The Romulans, Cardassians and even the Klingons have reported similar incidents. The analysis is still continuing, but at the moment it's looking like conventional Starfleet or Klingon standard type weaponry. They're not very advanced, perhaps even outdated, but nonetheless effective.

"Another message was received from the group a few days later, warning that this was just a demonstration and that next time it would be a *populated* planet. The really bad news is that, true to their word, they did target such a planet but luckily gave us the location of a significant sized warhead, located in the densest part of the biggest city. It wasn't detonated, but with it were a list of demands. Even if we considered giving into their demands, we couldn't. I can't go into details about those, I'm sorry."

Burke paused and eyed Janeway carefully, not able to judge anything from her outward appearance. She hadn't moved and sat very still on the sofa. He decided to press on with his story.

"Anyway, similar devices were found on planets belonging to the Cardassians and, we *think*, the Klingons. We're not sure about the Romulans, they're playing their cards very close to their chest, but we suspect that they were targeted too.

"We, as yet, have been unable to ascertain how or when the device was planted. To date I think we're up to around 135 to 240 planets that have been named as potential targets by the group. We might be able to protect a couple of these planets... maybe... but the task is just too onerous. The demonstrations of their power and methods have indicated that they're probably capable of destruction on a colossal scale.

"All this is now made worse by rumors circulating on these planets, and others, that haven't even been specifically named. There's been some panic on a few of the planets and even on some that haven't been named by the terrorists.

"The combined resources of the Romulans, Klingons and the rest of the Federation have only uncovered limited information. Quite frankly, we've run out of ideas."

He hesitated, as if expecting a comment. When none was forthcoming he continued his narrative.

"The terrorists have said that they'll destroy up to forty populated planets within the next six months, so you can see we don't have a lot of time.

"We've received intel that indicates that a semi legitimate freight and cargo outfit has some kind of ties to the terrorists. To be perfectly honest, we haven't been able to confirm this information, but at this stage it's about all we've got, however unlikely. We need someone to be within the organization and to maybe get a hold of some kind of information.

"Meanwhile, the only other things we can do are to continue analysis of the debris from the destruction of the moon."

Janeway still hadn't responded or shown any interest in what he was saying, but he carried on.

"This is what we have on the group." Admiral Burke handed her a manila folder of printed documents, rather than a padd. He was relieved that she took the offered documents as he was beginning to think she was catatonic. "Be sure to recycle them when you've read them. Basically they outline our attempts, so far, to infiltrate them. All have failed and a few have, I'm sorry to say, resulted in the presumed death of two operatives."

"Presumed?"

"Disappeared three months ago and haven't been heard from, or seen since."

Janeway now realized what it was he wanted her to do. He wanted her to infiltrate the group as well.

"And you think I'll be able to succeed where these experienced and trained operatives failed?" Janeway didn't try to hide her incredulity.

"Nothing about you has to be made up and therefore you're less likely to raise their suspicions. Your family really did die on the day you finally returned from seven years in the Delta Quadrant." Janeway winced. "Sorry to be so brutal, but to be honest, I don't have the time for niceties. I need someone. Desperately. And tragically, you fit the bill. Believe me, if I didn't think lives, and hypothetically *billions* of lives at that, depended on us finding out about this situation, there is no way in hell I would approach you." He tried to gauge her reaction. "Kathryn, you're a starship captain, I'm sure you don't need to be told about 'things that have to be done for the greater good'."

"No sir. I understand only too well. But what I don't understand exactly is what you need from me."

"We need you to get yourself in the employ of the Tingalh and the best way for this to occur is if you leave Starfleet. Or better still, if you're forced to leave Starfleet. We want you to get yourself cashiered or be asked to resign your commission." He stared intently at her, maintaining eye contact through the whole plan. "After you leave, you buy yourself a cargo type vessel and somehow you get a job with them. We need someone on the inside or, at least, closer than we are now."

Burke watched Janeway in silence.

Finally she spoke. "I don't know if I can do it, Admiral." She rubbed her forehead. "It's all too much to take in. Can I give you my answer in a day, or two?"

"Of course"

"And forgive me for saying so Admiral, but isn't this all a bit obvious?"

"Well, to be honest, yes. But we're desperate. We're not sure that we'll be able to keep a lid on the rumors and panic on several of the planets and, at this stage, the Federation is not sure what its next step should be. We don't actually know where or when this group will strike, or how many planets will be involved. Even if we could evacuate all the planets we may very well discover that the actual targets are somewhere else. The group has been cagey with details. Your part may be a small battle in a larger war. Obviously, we have other irons in the fire, but we need to cover every contingency that we possibly can." He took a step towards Janeway and held her gaze. "*'All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing'.*"

Janeway knew that quote only too well.

"Edmund Burke. Relative of yours?"

"No. Sadly."

"You play dirty, Admiral." This bastard knew all the buttons to push and the fact that she knew what he was doing, wasn't much help.

"It's my job." He scrubbed his face with his hands. "Look, Captain... *Kathryn*. I know this is the mission from hell, offered to you at a terrible time. This should've been a time of immense satisfaction and happiness for you. And to be blunt, was it not for the death of your family, I'm sure it would be, but, I wouldn't be doing my duty if I didn't at least ask you."

Janeway put her head in her hands. It was much too much to take in. The whole day was surreal. It was staggering to think that less than twenty four hours before she'd been in the Delta Quadrant preparing to engage the Borg. Now she had the prospect of another dreadful mission. She didn't notice Burke leaving her room.

#

Janeway spent the following two days, between getting home and the night of the gala, asleep. Or mostly asleep. She was completely exhausted and realized that, by the time of the welcome home party, she'd probably been awake for almost four days straight. After the arrival of Admiral Janeway she hadn't had a proper night's sleep and during the final few days, before their attack on the Borg hub, she'd had none.

Admiral Burke had suggested that she remain on board Voyager and she'd readily agreed. At first she'd considered going home to Indiana, but the Doctor advised that she get some rest before trying

to deal with family issues.

The Doctor had been permitted to stay on board with her and, although always close by, he tried not to be intrusive. On the afternoon of the second day the pair sat quietly together in her ready room and discussed the future of the crew and Voyager, in fact anything other than her own situation.

When he finally gathered the courage to challenge her about Burke's request, she clearly indicated that she didn't want to talk about it, but he also got the strong impression that she was seriously considering the Admiral's plan.

"Please, Captain, you can't honestly be thinking of accepting his *so called* offer?"

"Doctor, I don't want to talk about it."

"At least discuss it with Commanders Chakotay or Tuvok."

"Tuvok is on his way to Vulcan, Doctor and I don't want to interfere with his recovery."

"And Chakotay?"

"He's got other...look, Doctor, *enough*." She got to her feet. "I've got to get ready for this damned gala tonight. I'll see you later." And she was gone.

#

Janeway arrived at the gala an hour late. Burke had arranged for her to be beamed directly to the event and, true to his word, kept her away from the crew. She could see them from her position on the main podium and scanning the smiling, happy faces, her eyes finally found the table containing her senior staff.

It was obvious that they had been told. Their sympathetic glances were almost physically painful to her. Owen Paris must have told them, she supposed.

Chakotay spotted her almost the second she'd been quietly ushered to the main table and he instantly started to make his way towards her. He must have known she didn't want any fuss because he moved without attracting any attention.

Janeway decided to meet him out of sight of the main crowd and communicated this with a small gesture towards an ante room to the side of the stage.

She was glad she was able to meet him in private because almost the instant they were in the room together, silent tears, her first since arriving home, began to fall.

Chakotay embraced her and held her tightly.

"Kathryn, I'm so terribly sorry. Is there..."

But he didn't get a chance to finish his question, as Admiral Burke appeared in the room with them.

"Captain, I'm sorry, but the President has just arrived."

She freed herself reluctantly from Chakotay's arms and wiped the tears from her face.

"Chakotay, please don't let the crew know tonight. This is their night. Let them enjoy it."

#

The news of the deaths of Janeway's mother and sister still wasn't common knowledge amongst the Voyager crew, it was, however, known to most of the dignitaries at the event. The one thing she was thankful for was that she hadn't been called upon to take part in any of the speeches and, as there were no presentations, she was allowed to keep to herself. Her only requirement had been to smile and nod at appropriate times during the speeches.

Later, she couldn't recall how she managed to endure all of the formal ceremony. She only knew that Admiral Burke was there the whole time.

Finally, the interminable event ended and she made her way back to her room. She managed to avoid all of the senior staff, and only had to contend with an extremely unhappy Doctor who perhaps sensed her intention of going through with Burke's insane scheme.

Her own immediate plan was to visit the bar downstairs and get absolutely falling down drunk. It was only a coincidence that her plans fitted in with Burke's request, but for a few hours, she just wanted to escape the pain. No one from the crew were big drinkers, so she was fairly certain that she wouldn't encounter anyone she knew in the hotel bar.

Janeway was on her third drink when a familiar voice sounded next to her.

"Captain, I am concerned..."

Seven! She was the last person Janeway felt like seeing.

Suddenly ashamed of being well on her way to being plastered, she didn't need to see anyone from the crew. She certainly didn't want to have to help Seven, yet *again*, with advice or support. Janeway tried to convince herself that it wasn't because Seven and Chakotay were together that she was so angry with the young woman, but she remained unconvinced, so she interrupted.

"Look, Seven. I really don't care if you're concerned, okay?" Janeway paused and tried to overcome the urge to hurt the young woman. However, judging by the look on Seven's face, she'd managed to do so anyway. "I think from now on, you should get your advice from Chakotay."

"But I..."

"Seven, please... just leave me alone." Janeway turned away from Seven so she didn't have to see the bewildered and hurt expression on her former protégé's face. "Another scotch." she said to the barman. "A double, straight up."

Janeway could feel Seven's presence just behind her, and when, after several moments, she finally gave in and left, Janeway was almost overcome with remorse for her treatment of the young woman. It wasn't Seven's fault. It wasn't anyone's fault really, besides her own. It wasn't even Admiral Burke's fault for asking her to undertake this mission.

She leant on the bar, holding her head in both hands. This was a total nightmare. Still, what choice did she really have?

Voyager had returned home and here she was, still trying to save strangers.

#



"Kathryn? Are you all right?"

Chakotay. Of course. He always knew, perhaps instinctively, when she was in trouble. It was comforting to be in his company.

He waited for her to acknowledge him but when she refused to turn around he moved to her side. "Seven told me she tried to speak to you." Damn. Reality crashed in on Janeway. He was here with her because of how she had treated his *girlfriend*. Great. Just great. This was the way it would be from now on, she supposed, all conversations between them would always have the specter of Seven of Nine hovering above them.

"Kathryn? *Kathryn*?" But, damn, she loved the way he said her name. It was like a caress. "Was it really necessary to treat her like that?" A caress followed by a bucket of ice water dumped over her head.

Christ, couldn't she even get quietly drunk without every damned member of the crew seeking her out. And, of course, it had to be Chakotay. Janeway threw back another drink and looked at him through bleary eyes, realizing that she was going to have to do considerably more drinking before she was immune to this particular hurt.

"Who?"

"Seven. She came back from seeing you in tears. Dammit, Kathryn, I know you're coping with the loss of your family, but Seven's your family too."

"Family? You're kidding, right?" Suddenly she wanted to hurt him and it felt good to lash out. "I haven't had a real family for seven years, and now that I'm home, I still don't."

"Do you always have to be such a heartless bitch?"

Janeway was so shocked at his words that she couldn't look at him. Instead she turned away and stared at her drink with such concentration that her eyes almost watered.

Chakotay was equally horrified by what he'd just blurted out and lapsed into silence.

He tried to apologize by putting his hand on her shoulder but she shrugged it away.

Finally admitting defeat, his anger returned and with a final, "Fine!" he stormed away.

Being with Chakotay, even if he was angry with her, was better than not being with him at all and deciding that she still had some way to go before the pain was completely numbed, she ordered another drink.

#

A short time later, comforted by the fact that she was finding it hard to concentrate on *anything*, let alone her awful homecoming, she threw a drink back in one mouthful before tapping the glass on the bar to get the waiter's attention for a refill.

"Captain, your conduct is unbecoming an officer."

It was Admiral, um, *whatshisname*. Janeway had been introduced to him earlier in the evening but she couldn't remember who the hell he was, and peering at him through half closed eyes, she didn't care. The man was a pompous ass. She'd known that ten seconds after they'd been introduced. He

was one of the *newer* admirals. Janeway decided that they must have been desperate to promote him.

She lifted her glass in a toast. "Can I buy you a drink, Admiral?"

The admiral's face took on an unattractive red hue and the veins on his neck began to protrude, but Janeway found baiting him strangely enjoyable. Here was someone she could hurt without any emotional fallout.

"You're walking a very fine line, Janeway. You could lose..."

"What?" she glared at him. "I have nothing left to *lose*, Admiral. My family is dead, my skills are outdated, the organization that I have faithfully served for over twenty years is now promoting idiots and the man I love is having a relationship with someone who I've come to consider as my daughter." Oops. She hadn't meant to say that. There was such a thing as getting *too* much into character. "I have nothing left to *lose*. So don't bother trying to threaten me, you pathetic martinet."

Janeway was particularly proud of that speech. This was fun. Hopefully, no one noticed the bit about Chakotay and Seven. If she could lift her head, she would have checked the bar area but her head refused to move.

In an effort to emphasize her 'drunkenness', she fell off her bar stool. She thought the fall went well, as she managed to spill her drink over Admiral Hester on the way down. Hester, yes, right. Now she remembered.

Lying sprawled on the ground, she laughed out loud but made no attempt to get up. Her good humor ended abruptly when she realized that Harry Kim had come to her 'rescue'. She was now disgusted with this charade and herself. The thought of possibly losing Harry's respect upset her greatly.

"I'm sorry, Harry." She said automatically.

"Let's get you back to your quarters, Captain."

He picked her up gently and checked to make sure she hadn't hurt herself.

"I'm really sorry, Harry."

Harry was holding her firmly around the waist and was trying to propel her towards the exit.

"Captain, you will report to my office at 0900 tomorrow." She'd almost forgotten about Admiral Hester.

"Whatever." Janeway answered, but she was really hating this situation now. Could she keep doing this? Could she continue to face Tom, B'Elanna or even Chakotay like this?

Harry was just about dragging her now. They were leaving by the back entrance, she realized when she finally managed to pay attention.

"I'm sorry, Harry."

"I know, Captain."

"Trust me, Harry, you don't have the slightest clue."

How much had she had to drink? They were just outside her quarters now. How the hell did they get here so fast?

"Captain, you need to enter your door code."

"Oh. Right." She leant her head against the door, trying to remember. "Oh yeah, it's 'home'." She snorted. "Irony, huh?"

Harry entered the code and the door silently slid open. Having relaxed his grip on her, Janeway pitched forward and landed face first on the floor.

"Shit." Mumbled Janeway into the carpet. "Sorry, Harry."

She felt his hands on her shoulders, rolling her over. When he had her in a sitting position, he just lifted her up, as one would a child, and moved her to the bedroom. He placed her gently on the bed. She mumbled but didn't move.

"Kim to Voyager EMH."

"Doctor, here."

"Doc, can you come to the Captain's quarters, please?"

"Of course, I'm on my way."

#

"Captain."

"I'm so sorry, Harry."

"Captain, it's me. Mr. Kim has left."

Janeway rubbed her forehead.

"Admiral Burke wanted you to be convincing. I'd have to say, he got his wish."

"Please, Doctor. I feel bad enough as it is."

"I know, and I'm sorry Captain. I'm afraid though, it will be worse if you continue."

"Hmm."

At that moment, Admiral Burke transported into the room.

"Doesn't anyone knock anymore?" Janeway was not impressed.

"Captain. Enough." He looked at her sternly. "Great performance this evening. Have you decided anything yet?"

"I was a disgusting 'performance' Admiral. I deserve to be up on charges."

"You were following orders, Captain." The Admiral's tone softened. "But I really am very sorry."

"I've spent the last seven years holding steadfastly to Starfleet ideals and principles, Admiral. I just

don't think my crew will buy it." She smiled sadly at him. "And to be frank, I'm not sure I want them to. They're the only family I have now."

"It's a huge sacrifice, I know. If there was any other way, believe me, we'd take it." He studied her face, as if trying to gauge her thoughts. "If it's too big a sacrifice, we will understand."

"Yes, sir. I know." She adjusted her uniform again. "If no one 'bites' within six months, I can return to 'Fleet?'"

"Full rank and privileges restored. Probably a promotion, if you want it."

"I'll do it."

"*Captain!*" the Doctor was aghast and then he turned to Burke. "No! Admiral, please, I must protest."

Admiral Burke looked pleased.

"Doctor, I know this is a dreadful thing to ask Captain Janeway to undertake, but you know my reasons." He turned to Janeway. "Captain, thank you."

Janeway said nothing.

#

So, less than three days after returning to the Alpha Quadrant after seven years of exile, Janeway agreed to another six months in the wilderness.

By now, all the crew knew of her mother and sister's deaths, and she had to admit to herself, there was a small part of herself that was looking forward to escaping them and their sad looks when they encountered her.

Janeway hadn't returned to Indiana, finding herself unable to face the empty house, and stayed in 'Fleet accommodation near Head Quarters. Burke assured her that he would get someone to take care of the house and all the necessary legal issues regarding her mother and sister's deaths.

She'd requested that her debriefing start as soon as possible and it had begun a day earlier than the rest of the senior staff. This helped in keeping her away from the others. She certainly didn't want them to see her at her 'worst'.

Her fall from grace had been well established by the time Admiral Hester, who she'd offended so successfully in the bar after the function, sought her out and ordered that she be sent to his office. After he'd abused her for a few minutes in the corridor outside the debriefing, she remembered that she never had reported to him as he'd ordered. Hester had even gone so far as to demand that a reprimand be put on her official record and Janeway had been impressed by the nose to nose argument he and Admiral Burke had had at that time. There was no better way to get the rumor circulating that Janeway was in trouble than the constant stream of inquisitive officers and staff passing by. They would see to that.

As a parting shot, Hester almost spat at Janeway "I'll have your pips, Janeway."

"Have you lost yours, sir?"

For this comment, Hester had Janeway escorted to the brig, despite the protestations of Admiral

Burke. Janeway had to admit, Burke was a great actor, as he tried to talk Hester out of the decision. The last thing she heard as she disappeared around the corner with her security escort was Burke saying to Hester "Please, Herb, cut her some slack..."

When Burke came and got her out of the brig about an hour later, he was beaming with delight. He explained that he'd talked Hester out of charging her with gross insubordination but that she was definitely on a strict warning. They could only use her tragic circumstances as an excuse up to a point, but as they entered his office, she could tell he was thrilled.

"Excellent work, Captain."

"I hate this, Admiral. I really do."

#

Although Janeway didn't see any of her crew's debriefings personally, she closely monitored their progress and made sure all her recommendations were followed, via Admiral Burke, who had vowed that they all would be taken care of and given every freedom. Janeway told him flat out, that if any of the crew faced charges, there was no way she would continue with the mission. So far, he'd kept his word.

The crew themselves were told that all Janeway's recommendations were contained in her logs and status reports created on Voyager, rather than obtained since arriving home, therefore her personal input would be limited. They figured out within days that this meant they would not see her in person.

Rumors started quickly within the official Starfleet crew that Janeway was having real issues at her sessions.

Ensign Hickman reported to a group at lunch on the third day that Janeway had been reported as drunk on duty and confined to quarters.

"You're kidding." Samantha Wildman was more than shocked. "I don't believe it."

"It's true." Asserted Lieutenant Jones. "I overheard the JAG Commander on her panel telling an MP about it in the corridor."

"An MP?" Jenny Delaney looked horrified.

"Yeah," confirmed Jones sadly. "It seems that the Captain said something to Admiral Hester and the admiral wanted her up on charges."

"But..." the protest died on Wildman's lips.

"She needs a counselor not a damned policeman." Jenny Delaney asserted and the others agreed.

Rumors continued to fly over the following days that Janeway had called her counselor a "simpering jerk with no idea what he was talking about". This piece of classic Janeway cheered the crew until they realized that Starfleet would not take kindly to this sort of comment.

#

"I think the Captain's in trouble." Harry sat at the table with his former crewmates, placing his lunch tray beside Seven's.

"Brilliant observation, Starfleet." B'Elanna reached across and took a handful of fries off his plate. "Of course she's in trouble. Since she heard about her family she's..."

"No, I mean with Starfleet."

Everyone at the table stopped what they were doing and looked at him.

"Explain." Seven looked even more unhappy than the others.

"Yeah, what do you mean?" B'Elanna snapped.

"I just saw her being 'escorted' down the corridor by security."

B'Elanna looked stunned and her hand with the fries stopped in mid air on its way to her mouth.

"We must immediately go to her assistance."

"Seven this isn't like on Voyager, we can't just organize a rescue." Tom said kindly.

"But it is clear that the Captain is in difficulty. It is our duty to help her." Seven eyed the group and played her trump card. "She would do the same thing for any of us."

"You're right, Seven." B'Elanna said absently and looked at the young woman as if for the first time. Dragging her eyes away from Seven, she turned to her husband. "My first thought is your Dad, Tom. What do you think?"

"Yep, Dad has known her since she was a cadet and he's got some connections in JAG as well." He looked at Seven. She looked as if her whole world was falling apart. "When's Chakotay likely to be finished?"

"He is hoping to be finished with the sequestered sessions today. Perhaps then, he will be able to assist the Captain." Seven was suffering greatly. Her three mentors, Janeway, Chakotay and the Doctor, were all unavailable to her. Nobody had seen or heard from the Doctor since the first day. It was like suddenly he and his emitter were top secret.

#

Admiral Burke explained to Janeway why the Doctor hadn't been given access to his emitter or allowed to leave head quarters.

"We're not sending you alone on this mission. Your EMH will be going with you."

"Sir, with respect, no one is going to believe that Starfleet let me souvenir the Doctor or his mobile emitter."

"Of course not. You're going to 'steal' a 'copy' of his program."

He then outlined the whole plan. She would be asked to resign and Starfleet would attempt, of course, to hush it all up. They wouldn't want their golden girl to get any bad publicity for them.

"Of course, trying to cover up any scandal almost guarantees that it will be common knowledge, around head quarters, within days."

#

Janeway was glad when Burke decided the plan was to be changed to allow her to use Doctor's program. The thought of being entirely on her own for up to six months filled her with dread and her thoughts kept returning to her state of mind during the Void, not to mention her disgraceful conduct at that time. She smiled to herself that just lately her yardstick for proper behavior had changed somewhat.

The debriefing had been running for nearly two weeks now and she was heartily sick of forcing herself to be late, rude and insolent. Today, she was getting herself well and truly drunk before reporting late to her final session before the weekend. If she didn't end up in the brig today, she planned to spend the weekend looking at shuttles to 'buy' for her mission. The ship that she was to use had been picked out, but she had to go through the motions of finding and haggling for it.

Consuming a third of a bottle of scotch before 0900 was harder than she thought and she'd thrown down the final drink as she closed the door to her quarters, and she was even later to her meeting than she'd anticipated. The liquor was starting to hit her now and she kept on the path to the administration building as best she could.

"Kathryn?"

She stopped and nearly toppled over. Janeway blearily turned to where the voice had come from. Her heart sank when she saw it was Chakotay.

"Kathryn, are you *drunk*?"

She figured she must've overdone it if he'd so easily spotted it without her even speaking.

"Of course not." Janeway lied easily.

"You *are*." He took her arm as she swayed and tried to focus on his face. "God, Kathryn, I can't believe you've fallen apart like this. Let me..." but she didn't let him finish.

"Oh well, I'm really sorry I've disappointed you." she angrily shrugged her arm out of his grasp and nearly fell over again. "Why don't you just fuck off and leave me the hell alone. Just get on with your damn life Chakotay and let me get on with mine!"

Chakotay was oblivious to the stares of the passers by, but he couldn't have looked more shocked by her outburst. He didn't know what to say.

"So, if you'll excuse me..."

He winced at the venom she imparted in her voice.

Janeway took a staggering step away from him. "...if you'll, oh, *whatever*, I'm late for something." She lurched away from him and knew, without looking back, that he was still standing where she'd left him.

A couple of hours later her session with the psychologist was over, and she received a communication from Burke. He was again pleased with her progress and congratulated her on sobbing uncontrollably through the whole two hour appointment.

"It's perfect, Captain. They think you're a basket case. Well done."

Janeway wasn't the slightest bit happy with Burke's 'congratulations'. It had been yet another new

counselor that had met her and Janeway had actually liked this one. Already upset after the unexpected and distressing meeting with Chakotay, she was totally unprepared for the woman's opening remark of "Things couldn't have been more difficult for you, could they Captain?" and had promptly dissolved into tears. All the grief she's experienced over losing her family, and now her Voyager family, poured out of her in a torrent. Janeway hadn't actually spoken during the session, but the counselor had quietly talked to her for the hour. She had been so impressed with the work of Deanna Troi, that she suggested to Burke that he find another replacement somehow. Troi was just too sharp for Janeway's comfort.

#

Chakotay fidgeted in his seat. The chairman of the committee had assured him that there would be only one, maybe two days more of his debrief. He was certainly keen to see it end. Not through any worry of some adverse findings. No. His concern was mostly about Seven and Janeway.

Although he was somewhat comforted to know that Tom & B'Elanna had taken Seven under their wings, the irony of the thought of them both now being responsible made him smile, but he was sick with worry about Janeway, especially after bumping into her a few days ago. He knew that something was very wrong, perhaps a nervous breakdown, which would hardly be surprising under the circumstances.

Seven had been distraught when he'd spoken to her the previous night. Keeping himself and Janeway separated from the crew was bad enough for him, but it was apparent that it was quite distressing for other members of the crew as well.

Snatches of overheard conversations in the briefing area had only added to his worry. He'd detected initial sympathy towards Janeway from the officials he dealt with, but over the last day or two that sympathy had turned into something less than tolerance, and in some cases, into an almost hostile animosity that was ill-disguised by a few of the officers on his committee.

He'd requested several times to meet with her, but each request had been denied. One Captain had felt the need to tell him that he didn't have to cover up for her anymore now that they were home.

"Commander Chakotay?"

His attention had wandered and he was brought back to the business at hand.

"Yes, sir. I'm sorry."

"I was just saying that we have to extend your sessions. There are some important issues regarding the Maquis and their interactions with the Cardassians at the time you were thrown into the Delta Quadrant that Tactical and Intelligence have asked to be addressed." The captain running the session shuffled some papers around the table.

"You've got to be kidding, that was seven years ago. What on earth could they want to know that would be relevant?"

"Commander, watch your tone." The Captain was irritated and it showed. "We already have to deal with one member of Voyager's senior staff behaving in an unprofessional and unbecoming manner. We don't need two."

Chakotay acknowledged the captain's request but didn't apologize. He was too busy worrying about Janeway. She must've been in a bad way for it to be mentioned to him so openly. He just hoped she



could hang on long enough for him to finish and be permitted to get to her.

#

"Yes, I suppose it looks all right."

"Oh come on, lady, it's more than all right. This craft has been working the Benori Sector for over ten years. All the log files and service history are there. It's a bargain."

"I want extra dilithium storage installed." said Janeway, peering into the engine room.

"That'll cost." The salesman was getting increasingly annoyed by Janeway. He really hated dealing with people that knew what they were doing.

"And," continued Janeway, ignoring his last comment, "I want a replicator that *wasn't* on Archer's Enterprise to be installed."

"Now wait just a minute..." the salesman's boss had told him that this would be a straightforward sale. They'd had this clunker for too long and he wanted it gone. But Janeway had so far spotted almost every defect of the ship and worse still, she was demanding repair. "Look..."

"No, *you* look. Either you make the repairs and install a decent replicator, which I'll be checking by the way, or the deal's off."

"Now see here..." Holy crap. He'd never been so scared of anyone so *small* in his life. This broad was a firecracker and she looked a bit familiar. He tried to remember where he'd seen her, but she interrupted his musings.

"The other dealer has a Condor class utility at a good price. If you don't give me what I want, I *walk*. And that includes the dilithium, the replicator, oh and the hull plating near the forward hatch."

He agreed. Just to get rid of her.

Burke had been particularly unimpressed after her re-negotiating the price and repairs but Janeway had insisted that he was the one who wanted credibility and besides *she* was the one who had to spend six months living in the damned thing.

#

She took ownership of the ship, which she named *Bramble*, and arranged for it to be put on a temporary civilian mooring. It was fairly beat up and barely capable of warp three, but it had carried freight previously and had the added advantage that it looked anything but like a spy ship. In fact, Janeway had spent all of her 'stress leave' so far making repairs and enhancements, including putting holoemitters in the small living and dining areas. Actually, the work had proved to be almost therapeutic, taking her mind off her mother and sister, if only for a short time.

Once underway she would further enhance some of the systems so that the Doctor would have access to scanners and transporters. The trick would be hiding such modifications. The obvious emitters had to be put in her bedroom, making it appear that the Doctor was on board for a *very* specific purpose.

The ship would be reasonably comfortable for her to live in for the next six months or so. Six months. She shook her head. It seemed like a lifetime.

Janeway pulled herself out from under a console and looked at the clock. Almost 1500, which meant that the latest hapless counselor would be coming to 're-assess' her in twenty minutes. This also meant she had to break out the liquor and have a few shots in preparation. She needed to be just belligerent enough to piss off a trained psychologist but not so far over the top to get herself put in a psych ward. It was a fine line and she'd be glad when this part of the charade was over. Lying so much and disappointing her crew, even for a job as important as this, was killing her. The quicker she could get away from the crew's confused and bewildered looks, the better.

#

"She's bought a *what*?"

"A small cargo ship. The rumor is that she's sold her family's property in Indiana as well." B'Elanna bounced Miral on her knee absently. "Tom, what are we going to do?"

Tom ran his hand through his hair. "I don't know. Dad says he tried again to talk to her but she blew him off. He even tried to pull rank on her but she practically laughed in his face. I haven't seen him this upset since I got sent to New Zealand."

"I feel like we're letting her down, Tom. She needs help."

"It gets worse. Apparently she also walked out on another psychologist."

"You know, if this wasn't so damned serious, it'd be funny. She's leaving a trail of shrinks behind her who'll need counseling themselves after she's finished with them."

#

"Captain Janeway?" the officer at the desk showed his complete surprise at the appearance of the famous or rather, from what he'd heard, *infamous*, star ship captain. "Can I help you?"

"I hope so, Ensign..." she gave him her friendliest smile. She was also sober, for the first time, it seemed, in months. She wanted to make a good impression.

"Foo, ma'am. Ensign Douglas Foo."

"Well, Ensign Foo, I need a favor from you." She gave him the look that always seemed to work on Harry. The intrusive sudden thoughts of Harry and the others threatened to rise up and upset her and she ruthlessly suppressed them. "I want to talk to Voyager's Doctor." At his uneasy look, she added, "it's a *personal* matter."

Ensign Foo still looked uncertain.

"Douglas, I had seven years to do whatever I pleased to him. I give you my word, I won't harm him or his mobile emitter."

"Yes, ma'am. I mean no, ma'am." It was fairly clear that Ensign Foo had no idea what she meant, however, he was weakening.

"Just a few minutes." Janeway wheedled.

"Well, I guess..."

"Thank you, Ensign. I appreciate your cooperation."

She waited for the young man to leave her before activating the Doctor's program.

"Good morning, Captain."

The Doctor looked less than happy to see her. He was still unsure about her undertaking this mission.

"Good morning, Doctor. All packed?"

"There's a smallish data file with some music and books, but basically, I travel light."

She gave him a weak smile at his little joke. "Doctor, you really don't have to do this."

"Captain, we've been over this. I don't think it's fair on you to do this but I won't abandon you."

She squeezed his arm.

"Okay, standby. Here we go."

#

She had to be strong. It was her weakness that had caused the deaths of her mother and Phoebe. She'd been too weak to resist Admiral Janeway, and in turn the Admiral had been weak with her damned plan to bring Voyager home early. When she let her father and Justin die, she'd been weak because she couldn't decide.

Maybe, for once in her life, she could be strong.

At 0900, four weeks to the day after bringing Voyager home, Janeway walked into the administration building at Starfleet headquarters and 'officially' resigned her commission.

After slapping the padd on Admiral Ilargia's desk, Janeway turned and walked straight out of the Admiral's office as fast as she could. Even though she knew that this action was part of the mission, and an elaborate ruse, she didn't feel any better. Admiral Ilargia managed to make a snide comment about wishing her father could see what a fine officer she'd turned out to be, before she got outside his door, and it was all she could do not to call the whole thing off right there and then.

She made her way directly to the transport station, fervently praying that she wouldn't meet any of her crew before she got to the Bramble and departed Earth.

#

"Well, here we go." Janeway smiled weakly at the Doctor. "The adventure begins, Doctor."

"It does indeed, Captain." The Doctor tried to cheer her up. "We've been so starved of adventure in our lives."

"You know, Doctor, seeing as it's just us, and technically I'm not in Starfleet anymore, I think you'd better start calling me Kathryn."

"Thank you, Kathryn. I'd like that very much." He looked chagrined. "You'd think after over seven years that I'd have managed to get myself a name, wouldn't you?"

"Are there any names you like?"

"There are many. Too many." He pondered. "Mister Paris once suggested Philip."

"Philip's a good strong name."

"Yes, he said there was a famous 'Doctor Phil' in 21st Century Earth."

"Of course he would know something like that."

"Well, what do you think? Phil?"

"I think you're more of a 'Philip' than a 'Phil'."

"Philip it is then."

Janeway extended her hand. "How do you do Philip, my name is Kathryn."

"It's lovely to meet you, Kathryn."

#

When B'Elanna called him at 0530 and shouted "She's gone!" down the line, Chakotay's first thought was that Janeway was dead. Until B'Elanna took an audible breath and continued, he was sure that his heart had stopped beating. "She's taken that damned ship she bought and has just taken off. Left!" Later, he realized that the strange noise at the other end of the line was a sob. "Not even Tom's dad knows where she's gone."

Although all the crew were either on leave or had left Starfleet, the news of Janeway's departure spread amongst them just as quickly as gossip did on Voyager. Whereas on Voyager, a nice juicy rumor was enjoyed and even savored, this news was not welcomed and for the majority, it was too upsetting to be even speculated about.

The positive spin that Starfleet tried to put on Janeway's 'well earned retirement' was met with disbelief from the crew. Most seemed to think that Starfleet had somehow let their captain down, especially the Maquis, and a considerable number of the crew thought that they should've done more to help her in her time of need.

The remaining members of Voyager's senior staff sat around the kitchen table in the Paris family home. They had tried to contact Tuvok on Vulcan to see if Janeway had contacted him before her departure, but his wife had said that he was in a deep meditative state as part of his recuperation and she preferred not to disturb him. T'Pol did however confirm that Janeway has not contacted him either.

"I just can't believe it." Tom's words summed up the feelings of the whole group.

"It's wrong. I just...I...we should do something." B'Elanna added, rather helplessly.

"Except we don't know where she's gone." said Chakotay.

"Or why." added Tom.

"I believe it must be my fault." Seven's voice was flat.

"Seven, it's no one's fault. Sometimes people just..." Tom shrugged, he couldn't find an appropriate word to describe Janeway's actions. He looked to Chakotay, who shook his head in shared disbelief.

He too was unable to fathom Janeway's behavior since they'd returned to Earth.

"We'll just have to stick together until she comes home." offered B'Elanna. "I'm sure she'll come home, Seven. And it is not your fault."

The others nodded and all tried to convince themselves that she would return to them eventually.

#

"Did you hear the latest?"

Even though Janeway had been gone for nearly a month, everyone at table in the San Francisco restaurant knew who Torres was talking about. They seemed to talk of nothing else. All except Harry Kim, who didn't take part in the arguments or discussions. He usually just listened wearing a look of concern mingled with confusion.

"Some news regarding the Captain?" asked Seven.

"Yes, but nothing positive, I'm afraid." B'Elanna patted Seven's hand. "I heard from someone in security that Janeway stole a copy of the EMH's program just before she left."

"You're kidding?"

B'Elanna shook her head and Tom answered with a whistle.

Harry's head snapped up. His look one of enlightenment. The others ignored him.

"Maybe that's why the Doctor hasn't been released yet? Could Janeway making a copy have had some negative effect on his program?"

"Well, ordinarily, if we were on Voyager, I'd say no, Tom." Her brow furrowed in concentration. "But, well, maybe. There's no telling what those idiots have been screwing around with, but maybe..."

"It is possible that the researchers have inadvertently damaged his program and are blaming the Captain." Seven was always unwilling to see her former mentor in anything other than a positive light.

"They must be mightily pissed with her, if she *did* steal a copy."

"I'll say, but the guy said that Starfleet was keeping it hushed up because they didn't want to have to admit that their golden girl had gone completely off the rails," at Seven's pained expression, B'Elanna added hastily. "Er, his words, not mine."

#

"I got a job"

The Doctor was impressed. They'd been on Laxos for less than a day.

"Really? That was fast."

"We'll be taking some cargo to one of their sister planets in this system."

"And so it begins." The Doctor pressed a hypospray to Janeway's neck. The medication was to counteract the effect of the alcohol she'd consumed while on the planet as part of her cover.

"Yes, and if I don't get my job back with Starfleet, at least we won't starve."

She was only half joking.

#

"But I really suck at espionage so far, Philip."

Janeway had, according to her cover, got falling down drunk at a bar in the less salubrious section of Lleuad. Unfortunately, she realized that it was difficult to remember who she'd even talked to or what she'd talked to them about, let alone their names.

"Yes, the dilemma of being genuinely drunk yet still hopefully obtaining useful intel is problematic." The Doctor considered for a few seconds. "What about a sub-dermal implant."

"I thought of that, but if our targets are serious, they'll be scanning for transmissions and signals."

"But not perhaps simple recording devices..." he could tell she agreed. "You could activate it before you leave the ship and it will just record everything. We can sort through the data when you're back on board."

"Good thinking. Let's do it."

#

Three weeks into her career as a hauling contractor and things were going very well, from a business point of view, at least. Work was reasonable plentiful and not that difficult to get. After making some deliveries and getting instructions for her latest pickups, it was time to do the hard part of her new job. Being a drunk.

The bar was, for some reason not immediately apparent, brightly lit to the point of garishness. Most of the patrons were dressed in blindingly fluorescent colors.

She felt that she stood out like a Klingon at sewing circle. Apparently, the barman agreed, and eyed her with suspicion and something akin to distaste.

Her career as a would-be spy was certainly getting off to a less than auspicious start. She hadn't even managed to sit on what passed for a bar stool before the barman addressed her with a snarl.

"We don't serve your kind here."

The obvious retort was unfortunately out of Janeway's mouth before she even thought about it being a bad idea.

"Just what kind *do you* serve?"

The look on his face confirmed that it had indeed been ill considered.

So she wasn't all that surprised a few seconds later when two sets of brightly colored arms picked her up from either side and started to march her towards a side door. For a very short moment, she considered resisting but she realized that, although they may have been brightly colored, they were

not smiling and they were very large. Not even Tom Paris had been thrown out of a bar this quickly, she was willing to bet. It wasn't a comforting thought.

In retrospect, "Thanks for the trip" was probably not the right thing to say as they reached the door.

The force that they threw her into the trash in the alley was a bit more than she'd anticipated or hoped, and she hit her head on the wall and was momentarily stunned.

After her head cleared, she gingerly checked that she hadn't been thrown into anything too toxic or disgusting. When a small box near her left leg moved, she nearly jumped out of her skin. She extricated herself from the debris on the ground and then carefully opened the top of the box to reveal an extremely small and bedraggled ginger kitten.

"Don't they serve your type either, little one?"

The kitten apparently tried to answer but the meowing sound it made was faint and weak. Picking the little animal up, Janeway looked around the alley but there was nowhere that would even be remotely likely to be its home. It seemed that it had been dumped or abandoned.

Janeway considered the now sleeping cat in her hands. She wasn't a cat person herself, but she couldn't in all conscience leave it here to fend for itself. The next drunk to get tossed out of the bar might crush it. No, she would take it back to the ship. Philip might like a pet.

#

The Doctor was bemused by his 'gift'. Especially because from the first day, it was clear who the animal preferred.

"How come Indiana is *my* cat but she sleeps on your bed, you named her and she follows you everywhere on the ship."

Janeway looked at him blankly.

"Philip, you know I'm not a cat person and the ship's not that big. I bought her home for you."

"Hmm, right. Well, I don't think Indie has quite grasped that detail."

Although she made out that she didn't want any attachments, the Doctor thought that Janeway was fooling herself. She made out that she wasn't interested in getting news about any of her former crew, but the Doctor didn't think it a coincidence that the day she got into her biggest drunken bar room brawl so far on this trip, was on Chakotay's birthday. She'd been in a foul mood all that day and she returned from her 'recon' with a broken nose, wrist and several fingers and quite a few deep bruises on her body. He thought he'd heard her crying that night but he hadn't been completely sure and the noise, whatever it had been, stopped when he'd checked to see if she was all right.

#

Janeway sat on a stool, trying to remember how many planets, and therefore how many bars she and the Doctor had visited.

"Captain Janeway."

"Not a captain anymore. Call me Kathryn." Janeway observed her new 'friend' casually, while leaning on the bar.

"Of course." The Bolian examined her closely. "I am honored to meet you."

"Really?"

"Oh yes. I was looking for someone with just your skills."

"Oh." She now appeared hostile and wary. "I'm not interested. Please leave me alone."

"Hear me out. You *might* be interested."

"I doubt it." She sighed as if exasperated. "Look, I don't want what you're offering, okay?"

"You don't know what I'm offering."

"Sure I do. You want me to be some kind of PR person for you. Meet and greet. Someone famous to introduce to your clients." She took a long pull on her drink and finished it. "I'm not available or probably even suitable. I haul cargo, that's all. I just want to be left alone. Excuse me, I have to get back to my ship."

"Captain..."

But she turned on her heels and left the bar, returning to the Bramble.

"I think I got a bite."

The Doctor administered her dose of detox.

"Lucky you."

"Philip, where did I go wrong with you." Janeway smiled at him while she rubbed her neck. "No, I think I was just sounded out by someone from the Tingalh."

"Really?"

"I guess we'll know if he makes contact again. He kept calling me 'captain' as if he was trying to trick me or something. Anyway, we'll see."

#

Two weeks after meeting the Bolian, Janeway still hadn't made contact with anyone else from the Tingalh. She continued to get plenty of work hauling goods and had just dropped off the latest cargo.

"How did it go?"

"Nothing." Janeway sighed. "I delivered the stuff and then *nothing*." She reached into her pocket. "However, it wasn't a total waste of time." She allowed the Doctor to press the usual hypospray to her neck. "That's better, thank you. Anyway, I was going past one of the bazaars and heard the most wonderful music." She handed the Doctor a chip. "My universal translator was on the fritz again, but it *sounded* beautiful. Sort of like Terran opera crossed with Bajoran jazz." Janeway picked up the kitten and began to pet it absently.

The Doctor prepared the chip for downloading. "We should try and get a decent personal universal translator for you. The last thing we need is for you to be seriously hurt in a bar room brawl caused by a linguistic misunder....oh my."



Out of the speakers came rather pleasing music and the universal translators on the shuttle had no trouble with the words of the song. However, the lyrics, which were carefully enunciated, were of the most pornographic and lurid descriptions imaginable.

Both Janeway and the Doctor stood listening, stunned. Until Janeway caught the Doctor's eye and started to giggle with embarrassment. Suddenly the music swelled and the rather emphatic and probably physically impossible suggestion in the chorus caused them both to dissolve into hysterical laughter. Janeway was leaning on the console with tears running down her face. "No wonder the guy looked so shocked when I asked for the whole play list."

The pair leant on each other for support, both almost helpless with laughter.

"I can imagine Mr. Paris coming home from a shore leave with this as a gift for Harry."

"I'll make my log entry now." And she put the cat down on the counter and turned to the bridge area.

It was like a switch had been flipped. Janeway was instantly serious again, and the Doctor inwardly kicked himself, not for the first time, for mentioning Voyager's former crew. The slightest mention of any of the senior staff was guaranteed to create a melancholy in Janeway that even large amounts of alcohol failed to achieve.

Her good humor returned a day or two later and she got into a drinking competition with a Denobulan trader, going drink for drink with the alien for about ninety minutes. The barman mentioned it to other patrons and she and the trader had ended up being the floor show. At each completed shot, a good natured cheer would go up from the 'audience' and then there would be silence as the opponent attempted their matching drink.

As near as Janeway could tell, the event had ended in an honorable draw when both competitors passed out at the same drink count. At least that was what the barman told her when she woke up, hours later, with the other drinker slumped back in his chair, still out to it.

On another foray, a lusty attempt by Janeway to sing Klingon opera had resulted in her being ejected from the establishment for 'putting the other patrons off their drinks'.

She was making quite a reputation for herself, but apart from the Bolian, there had been not the slightest suggestion of an approach by the Tinalh.

#

Chakotay was supposed to meet Seven for lunch.

As his payment from Starfleet had been substantial and his needs few, he wasn't as yet too concerned about finding a job. He was helping Starfleet on a casual basis with questions arising from Voyager's discoveries, especially since the sudden and unexpected resignation of Kathryn Janeway.

The affect of Janeway's disappearance from not only from their daily lives but from the planet, had been quite shocking. There had been an extraordinary amount of distress caused by her leaving. Chakotay reflected that it was almost as though she'd died.

Many of the crew had taken her 'loss' very hard, especially after news of the deaths of her family was widely known. Chakotay had done quite a bit of talking to various people who were bewildered

by both Janeway's disappearance and her circumstances.

Seven had been particularly upset over the last few months. The lack of Kathryn Janeway in her daily life had been keenly felt by the young Borg woman in wholly unexpected ways. Chakotay had been unprepared for her emotional fallout but even more so for his own.

They had both been devastated by Janeway's absence.

In the end, Chakotay and Seven stayed together but only as friends. Neither felt, under the circumstances, that they could commit to a relationship and Chakotay came to realize that though Seven was outwardly a mature and intelligent woman, emotionally she was almost like an adolescent who had lost a parent. He wasn't sure what he would've done without the continued help from Tom and B'Elanna, as well as Harry.

As usual, Seven's conversation was all Kathryn Janeway and he realized that, like Seven, he missed her dreadfully as well. At first, he was surprised by just how much he missed her, but the realization slowly revealed that, contrary to what he'd convinced himself of over the last couple of years, he was still very much in love with his former captain.

While Seven detailed her latest job offers and problems that she was having with getting used to her new non-Voyager environment, Chakotay wondered to himself why he shouldn't try and find Janeway and see how she was. Perhaps he could talk her into returning. For Seven and the others, of course.

#

"Anything interesting, Philip?" Janeway had woken late. She'd been drunker than usual the previous evening and even after the Doctor's treatment, she'd gone straight to bed, feeling less than well.

"You mean apart from your impressive, if disturbing, repertoire of jokes about daschunds?" The Doctor sometimes found listening for hours and hours of Janeway's 'mission logs' a little tedious.

"You're just jealous of my quirky sense of humor."

"Quirky. Now, there's a description I hadn't considered." He handed her the logs. "Sorry, nothing remotely interesting."

#

Janeway took a seat and gratefully accepted the large glass of water the Doctor handed her.

"Philip, I think I've had enough. It's been nearly twelve weeks. If they were going to recruit me, surely they'd have done so by now." Janeway leant back in the chair while she absently played with the cat. "I want to go home. I want to relax with my friends - if I still have any after this debacle. Chakotay and Seven are probably married by now, maybe even expecting a child. I need to know if they'll forgive me. I miss everyone terribly."

"Me too."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. This has to be so hard for you too. On top of everything, and after all these years, you've lost your autonomy."

"Kathryn, please. I'm fine. And there was no way in hell I would allow you to endure this alone."

"Doctor," Janeway slipped up on his 'name' but she didn't care. "I wouldn't have made it at all, let

alone on this dreadful mission, without you. Thank you. But I think it's time we went home."

"You're the boss."

"No, I'm not. We're a team. A family of two." She gave him an earnest look. "When we get home, we'll storm Headquarters and demand your emitter back. Then, we'll go home to Indiana."

"I can't wait."

"Me too."

#

A few hours later, the Doctor was surprised to see her preparing to visit the planet they were orbiting.

"You're going to the station?"

"One more time. We're here, I might as well."

"Try not to get beat up on your final night, Kathryn."

"What can I tell you Philip? It must be my sunny disposition."

#

She'd been sitting at the bar for a while and was wondering to herself why, if she had decided to end the mission, was she continuing to drink and on the way to being drunk.

"It's good to meet you again, Kathryn."

It was the Bolian that had 'sounded her out' a month or so ago. Janeway gave him an uncertain stare as if she wasn't sure if she recognized him or not. This time he wasn't calling her 'captain', so Janeway was less hostile. The Bolian ordered the drinks, he was having water, and turned in his chair to look directly at her.

"You run cargo you said?"

"Some. What do you need transported and where to?"

"Supplies. Stablo III. And other places."

"What sort of supplies?" Janeway eyed the Bolian warily. There was something deeply suspicious about a Bolian who didn't smile.

"You don't need to know. 600 kilos. How much?"

"If I'm carrying it, I need to know what it is." Janeway took a slug of her scotch. "Sixty credits a kilo."

"Too much. Forty." said the Bolian.

"Fifty. But you tell me what I'm lugging." She drank the last mouthful of her drink and, not for the first time since this nightmare had started, vowed that she would never touch another drop of spirits

when this was over.

"Forty five. Medical supplies."

If there was anything more unlikely than a Bolian who didn't smile, it was one who didn't babble. There was definitely something going on here.

"Deal. But if I discover they're something illegal, I'll blow the lot out the airlock. Agreed?"

"The name's Berjis." He shook her hand. "Come with me now for an inspection."

"Tomorrow." She stood up. "Call me tomorrow. After ten though. I sleep late."

On unsteady legs, Janeway staggered out of the bar, anxious to share the news with the Doctor.

#

"You're not going to believe this." Janeway staggered into the ship and the Doctor prepared the usual hypospray.

"You won Arkus V's Miss Congeniality contest?"

"Funny man." She rubbed her neck, "I was approached."

"Don't tell me. You know how insanely jealous I get."

"Bite me." She poked her tongue out at him. "No, I got approached by someone from the Tingalh, I think."

"You're kidding?"

"Nope. We're picking up our instructions for cargo for the Territories tomorrow morning."

"I don't believe it. After all these weeks. And just when we'd given up."

"Yeah, I know. I suspect they've been watching us for a while. I'm pretty sure it's the same Bolian that sounded me out on Eretz." She became serious. "This may be our chance."

At last, something was going right.

**[Onto part two...](#)**