



## Episode 8-15 – Fall of Shadows Part 2

By Seema (seemag1@yahoo.com)

"You are Angelo Tessoni?" Hileya's voice was crisp, authoritative, and Marla could see that all present in the courtroom were focused on Hileya.

"Yes, sir," Angelo replied. Marla was proud of him; he sounded confident, a far cry from the apprehension Angelo had exhibited earlier.

"Are you currently assigned to the USS Voyager?"

"Yes, sir, I am."

"You also served on the Equinox under the command of Captain Rudolph Ransom?"

"That is correct, yes, sir."

"Was this your first posting?"

"No, sir," Angelo responded. "I served on the Goliad under Captain Price."

Hileya nodded. "And you were posted to the Goliad for how long?"

"Two years, sir."

"Did you request the transfer to the Equinox?"

"Yes, I did."

"Why is that?"

"Because I wanted to spend more time on science," Angelo said earnestly. He looked over at Marla and she tipped her head slightly in acknowledgement. "The Goliad was primarily a diplomatic ship. Scientific exploration was an afterthought."

"So you are a scientist?"

Angelo shifted in his chair. Marla wondered if Hileya intended to pursue the same line of questioning with Angelo as he had with her. She shook her head; their stories were not vastly different. She was just thankful that Pachano had decided to call Chakotay to testify as to their good behavior while aboard Voyager; they had wanted to Janeway to speak on their behalf, but given the circumstances, that was no longer possible. Instead, Janeway had signed an affidavit and the judge had allowed that in lieu of the captain's testimony.

"An engineer, sir, but I have an interest in xenobiology as well as xenocultures," Angelo said. "It was the opportunity to spend more time among other species which attracted me to the Equinox."

"Yet, you too participated in this barbaric experiment, despite your so-called 'respect' for other cultures," Hileya commented.

"Objection," Pachano said. "I ask that the counsel refrain from inserting his opinions regarding my clients' alleged activities into his statements."

The judge, Art Curie, nodded. "Sustained. Watch out, Commander Hileya."

"Let me rephrase." Hileya clasped his hands in front of him. "You participated in the experiments already vividly detailed by your colleague, Noah Lessing, and confirmed by Marla Gilmore."

Angelo visibly squirmed. "Yes, sir, I did."

"Doesn't committing murder such as you did violate-"

"Objection!" Pachano interjected forcefully. "Your honor, he's making a conjecture as to what my client may or may not have done."

"Your honor, it's simple a question of semantics," Hileya said. He gestured at the defense table, his wide sweeping movement indicating Noah, Marla, Brian and James. "I believe both Mr. Lessing and Miss Gilmore have already admitted what they have done was tantamount to murder. I don't believe Commander Pachano can object if her clients have already admitted to a crime."

Curie glanced down sternly at both lawyers, peering over his wire-rimmed glasses. "I'm going to agree with Commander Pachano, counselor. In sum, you are dictating an outcome and that is unacceptable. You will need to withdraw this line of questioning or find another way to get your information without bringing a question of semantics."

In Marla's opinion, Hileya looked frustrated as he paced in front of the judge's bench.

"So tell me," he said to the judge, "how do I refer to this particular incident by something other than what it truly is?"

"You're a clever man, Commander," Curie answered. "You will find a way, I'm sure. You may resume."

"Yes, your honor." Hileya looked back at Angelo. "My question, Mr. Tessoni, if you were a scientist, one who took an interest in other cultures, why did you feel the need to subjugate another species?"

"As I said before, sir, we had no choice. It was either them or us. We admit that what we did was selfish, but understand, the need for self-preservation is extremely strong." Again, Angelo spoke clearly and his voice did not tremble with the admission. Perhaps, Marla mused, we are coming a full circle. We're back at where we started, Starfleet officers with a conscience and a moral code.

"The need for self-preservation," Hileya repeated, a trace of scorn in his voice. He glanced up at the judge. "I have nothing further for this witness." With that, he turned on his heel and returned to his seat. Maria Pachano rose.

"Mr. Tessonni," Pachano said in her evenly articulated voice. "Do you feel any remorse for what you did?"

Angelo nodded. "Yes, ma'am, of course. We - all of us - we talk about it often. None of us feel right about what we did, but under the circumstances, we really felt as if we had no choice."

"So you felt your hand was truly forced by your circumstances?"

"I do, yes, ma'am."

"And if you were faced with this particular decision again in the future, how would you react?" Pachano asked as she approached Angelo, her hands clasped behind her back.

"Regardless of orders, I would not commit to an action that violates my own code of ethics," Angelo said. Marla nodded. Good answer, she thought, silently sending encouragement in the direction of her friend.

Pachano nodded. "Thank you, Angelo. I have nothing else for this witness."

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T'Sai's expression did not change as she approached Chakotay. Chakotay rubbed his hands together, reminding himself that T'Sai was on Janeway's side and that she would only ask him those questions that would help Kathryn.

"Commander," T'Sai said. Chakotay was grateful for the fact that she accorded him the field rank Janeway had granted him seven years ago. Since returning to the Alpha Quadrant, the field ranks - with the exception of Harry's recent promotion - had been inconsistently used, especially in the case of the former Maquis. Just another sign of things to come, Chakotay thought as he focused his attention back on T'Sai.

"As first officer, you often provided your opinion on a variety of subjects, did you not?" T'Sai asked.

"Yes, I did."

"Did you expect Captain Janeway to take your advice at all times?"

"As I said before, no, I did not. It was my job to offer up the alternatives. She was the one who had to make the ultimate decision. There were plenty of times when she did choose an option I proposed."

T'Sai nodded. "In the charges that Commander Shelrak brought up-" she turned to glance momentarily at the Axanar lawyer - "specifically, the aiding and abetting of the hostile alien as well as dereliction of duty, did you ever feel that Captain Janeway was acting in anything other than the best interests of her crew?"

"No," Chakotay said firmly. He looked at Kathryn and was pleased to see her lips turn up ever so slightly. "At all times, Captain Janeway was focused on her crew and her promise to her crew."

"You were, as some have said, in uncharted waters." T'Sai stumbled over the last colloquialism but recovered quickly. "You must have been faced with many situations which required quick thinking."

"Yes." Chakotay nodded. "We made enemies more often than we made friends. In some cases, such as the Sernaix, the species we encountered would shoot first and ask questions later. In many of these cases, including the alliance with the Borg, time was of the essence."

"In retrospect, do you view the decisions Captain Janeway made as detrimental to the well-being of her crew?" T'Sai asked.

"No, not at all." Chakotay quirked a thin-lipped smile. "She got us home, didn't she?"

"Now, regarding the Borg," T'Sai said. "As Commander Shelrak pointed out, you did not agree with the alliance. However, was this another example of 'quick thinking'?"

"Yes, ma'am. In this particular instance, we had very little information to go on. If we had paused to consider all of the possibilities, it's likely either Species 8472 or the Borg would have attacked us. The circumstances were such that Voyager would not have been able to survive an attack from either species. Yes, we disagreed on the course of action, but we were stuck between a rock and a hard place."

T'Sai nodded. "In reference to the dereliction of duty charge, please relate for the court please exactly what transpired during the three months in 'dead space.'"

Chakotay noted that Louvois seemed especially interested in this particular question; Shelrak merely looked bored.

"There's not much to tell." Chakotay shrugged, keeping his tone even and nonchalant. "We had been through some particularly tough times and we had ended up in a void of space where there was nothing to explore for light-years. The Captain chose to use this time constructively." He paused, noting that Janeway was shaking her head at him. He chose to ignore the signal and continued on. "If you review the complete Voyager logs, you'll find that most of the crewmembers took the opportunity to renew hobbies or spend time with their friends or learn new responsibilities."

"But in your logs, you wrote she did not emerge from her quarters for a stretch of nine days," T'Sai pointed out. "Did the crew not worry about the absence of their captain?"

"If there were concerns, they were unwarranted and I was unaware of any specific instance of anxiety," Chakotay said evenly, stunning himself with the untruth. His face felt warm, but he willed himself not to move or reveal any discomfiture. "I let the crew know that the Captain was available if they needed her."

T'Sai didn't look convinced but thankfully, her next question demonstrated that she would leave off this particular line of questioning.

"In terms of crew interaction, how would you characterize Kathryn Janeway?" T'Sai queried. Chakotay's face softened. How would he characterize her, indeed...

"The Captain, as I've said, was always available to her crew and she took an active interest in their lives and development. For instance, she, along with several others, organized a talent night. And she was not content to sit on the sidelines." Chakotay smiled at the memory of Kathryn

performing the ballet of a dying swan. The crew, he recalled, had loved every minute of it and little touches like this had made Kathryn seem much more accessible, despite her position of authority. "She took part in the show and continued to participate for every year after that. Kathryn - Janeway - also knew the names of every crewmember on board the ship and she made a point of knowing something about each one. Perhaps she did keep to herself on occasion, but the crew knew their captain cared about them and intended to get them home."

"So despite this occasional solitude you refer to," T'Sai said, "you would say that Kathryn Janeway was actively involved in the running of her ship and the welfare of her crew?"

"Yes, very much so."

T'Sai nodded. "Do you believe Kathryn Janeway ever willingly risked the lives of her crew?"

Chakotay considered. "Not willingly. She certainly considered every angle carefully."

"And would you say that Janeway followed Starfleet procedures in the majority of cases?" T'Sai asked.

"Always," Chakotay said. "From the beginning, despite the blended crews, Janeway was determined to run Voyager as a Starfleet ship."

"To the extent that when you proposed a Maquis solution to a problem, Janeway was unwilling to consider it?"

Chakotay nodded, recalling his proposal to share technology with the Kazon after several weeks of relentless attack, not to mention the death of his friend, Kurt Bendara.

"Yes," Chakotay said, clearing his throat. It surprised him how emotional he could still get over Bendara's death, even after all these years. So much for time healing all wounds, he thought dispassionately. Time only helps you live with the loss, nothing more, nothing less. "I proposed meeting with the Kazon and giving them what they wanted."

"Despite the General Orders to the contrary?"

"Yes."

"In the end, Janeway decided to form an temporary alliance with the Kazon?"

"Yes, that is correct."

"What made her change her mind?"

Chakotay didn't answer right away; this particular incident rankled at him, simply because Janeway had chosen to take Tuvok's advice over his. At the time, Chakotay had viewed it as yet another way Janeway hadn't quite trusted him enough to confide in him.

"I believe she re-evaluated the situation," Chakotay said evenly. "As it has been said, a captain's first duty is to her crew. Janeway chose the alliance as she believed it would get us through Kazon space in one piece."

"And for this same reason, she formed this alliance with the Borg?" T'Sai turned slightly to face Shelrak.

"Yes," Chakotay said. "Despite my reservations, she had given the matter a lot of thought and was convinced that an alliance with the Borg was the best possible solution. Unfortunately, as the saying goes, the best laid plans often go awry."

"Did it ever occur to either of you that settling in the Delta Quadrant might be the best possible solution to your quandary?" T'Sai asked.

"On occasion, yes, but like I've said before, Janeway made a promise and she intended to carry it out."

"I believe Commander Shelrak has spent an illogical amount of time compiling a long list of command decisions he intends to call into question-" T'Sai began, but was interrupted by Shelrak, who had finally shown some evidence of alertness again.

"Objection. Commander T'Sai should refrain from insults," Shelrak said, his pride obviously wounded. Chakotay had to restrain a smile.

"My apologies." T'Sai bowed slightly in Shelrak's direction. "I withdraw my comment, your honor."

"Very good, counselor," Louvois said. "I suppose I don't have to remind you to refrain from making judgment statements about opposing counsel."

"No, your honor, you do not," T'Sai said.

"Very well. Resume." Louvois settled back in her chair, the leather creaking as she shifted her position.

"I believe it is possible that Commander Shelrak will continue to inquire about certain command decisions made by Captain Janeway," T'Sai said. "As her first officer, Commander Chakotay, did you ever feel there was a moment when Captain Janeway made a decision which was contrary to her primary responsibility as captain of Voyager?"

Chakotay didn't think at all, knew he couldn't think, otherwise he would be able to recall some instances when Janeway made decisions he knew he couldn't stomach. But, he thought wryly, I've already amended the truth at least once.

"No, ma'am," Chakotay said clearly, and he was pleased to see Louvois taking notes.

T'Sai appeared satisfied, well, as satisfied as a Vulcan could possibly appear. She glanced at Louvois.

"I'm concluded with this witness," T'Sai announced.

"Very well," Louvois said. "Mr. Chakotay, you are dismissed with the thanks of the court. Commander, Shelrak, you are welcome to call your next witness."

Shelrak rose, his chest puffing out with an inflated sense of self-importance. Chakotay could barely restrain himself from casting a glance at Kathryn as he passed by the defense table. However, she did not look back at him.

"I call Lieutenant Harry Kim as my next witness, your honor," Shelrak announced as Chakotay left the courtroom.

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B'Elanna turned her face towards the sun, the rays warming her face. A clear, beautiful day like this was rare; she remembered days of endless fog during her Academy days and the stubbornness of the city residents towards implementing any kind of weather control. It was a cruel irony to be blessed with a crisp day such as this, when for the most part, she was confined to quarters.

At any rate, she was glad of the distraction. The small room they had been assigned was growing rapidly claustrophobic, amplifying her fears and concerns. All of the worst-case scenarios came into play as she had sat in the room playing with Miral. What would happen to her? To Tom? To Miral? In frustration, B'Elanna had finally made a decision. Hell with Starfleet directives, she was going outside.

B'Elanna pushed the stroller down the paths, keenly aware of the security guard trailing just a few steps behind her. For a moment, B'Elanna contemplated aiming a well-placed kick at the guard, but thought better of it when she saw a familiar figure making his way to her.

"Chakotay!" she called out.

The former first officer of Voyager quickened his stride.

"I've been looking for you," Chakotay said as B'Elanna stopped. He bent over slightly to run his fingers over Miral's soft curls. Miral gurgled at him, her chubby fist reaching out to grab a handful of Chakotay's shirt.

"I've been paroled for an hour," B'Elanna said wryly. "Apparently, having a child allows you special privileges. How did you get loose?"

Chakotay glanced at the security guard who remained a respectful distance away. B'Elanna turned to follow Chakotay's gaze; the fact the guard kept his hand on his phaser did not escape B'Elanna.

"You know, as a former terrorist, I have my ways." Chakotay smiled. B'Elanna shook her head and bent down to check Miral's hat. The child had a habit of removing her hat, her shoes or socks when B'Elanna was not looking.

"You're good, Chakotay, but not that good," B'Elanna said flatly. "You've said it yourself. We've become so Starfleet, there's hardly any of that Maquis deviousness left in our blood."

"You know me too well." Chakotay crouched next to B'Elanna so he could continue to play with Miral, whose little sighs made it clear she was happy to see Chakotay. "Actually, I was called as a witness at the Captain's hearing."

B'Elanna straightened up, her expression not changing. "What?"

"You heard me," Chakotay said casually. "As you might imagine, they had a question or two for me."

"I'll bet," B'Elanna said. "How did it go?"

Chakotay shrugged. "Who knows? I suspect it's all a formality. Their minds are already made up and they are just going through the motions. The last conversation I had with Kathryn pretty much sealed it. I think she knows it too."

"Comforting." B'Elanna felt a slight chill go down her spine, despite the warmth of the sun. Without thinking, she reached down to adjust Miral's blanket. Miral squirmed in her stroller, reaching to grab B'Elanna's hair. Carefully, B'Elanna uncurled Miral's tight grip as she straightened up to face Chakotay.

"Indeed. I have to testify for the Equinox Five in an hour and then I have a meeting with my lawyer later on this afternoon."

"Sounds exhausting," B'Elanna said. As far as she knew, she was not scheduled to testify for either Janeway or the Equinox Five at the moment. For that, she was grateful; giving testimony against her friends and former commanding officer, in her eyes, constituted a betrayal of those relationships. However, she knew, if called, she would need to fulfill her obligation truthfully and then pray her words did not cause too much damage. "Especially if they all have their minds made up already."

"I'm not looking forward to it for that very reason," Chakotay continued. "Seems to me that the Starfleet legal division is earning its keep for the first time in years."

"Still, the process seems interminable. What's the reason for the delay?"

"Your guess is as good as mine."

"As beautiful as all this is -" B'Elanna took a long look around the park - "I'm really looking forward to getting on with my life. I hate to think we'll be stuck here much longer."

"Like I said, I'll look into it. Perhaps you'll be headed for your all expenses paid vacation to New Zealand sooner than you think."

B'Elanna didn't laugh. "Now you sound like Tom," she complained. Truth be told, she did not appreciate Tom's occasional flippant remarks concerning their situation. She understood that her husband was doing his best to put a positive spin on current events and that he used humor as a dense mechanism; still, the uncertainty was driving her to distraction and she felt more on edge than she had in years. "What do you think will happen?"

Miral squealed as her pacifier fell out of her mouth and thankfully, into the baby's blanketed lap. B'Elanna wiped it off quickly with a washcloth before handing it back to Miral.

"It's political. A lot of people don't consider our contributions to Voyager as 'time served.'"

"Define a lot of people," B'Elanna said sharply.

"The Cardassians, for one," Chakotay said uneasily.

"So the Federation is friends with the Cardassians now?"

"Apparently so, and even to the point of putting together an aid package to help Cardassia rebuild."



"Terrific. So the Cardassians help in the last hours of the Dominion War and they get an aid package, all those years of tyranny and subjugation forgotten."

"I'm going to do my best to negotiate a deal that is agreeable to both sides."

"I don't doubt that." B'Elanna resumed walking again as Miral was once again starting to fuss. "Chakotay, I'm not willing to go to prison for what we did."

"I don't think any of us are." Chakotay fell into step next to his friend. "But I don't necessarily know whether we have a choice in the matter."

"Are you giving up on us already?"

"No. I'm just evaluating the situation realistically. The Federation wants to keep Cardassia happy. Cardassia wants the Maquis brought to justice. It's that simple, B'Elanna. You can't ignore the politics of what is happening to us. This whole thing -" Chakotay gestured expansively - "is a political witch hunt designed to satisfy a cadre of admirals for reasons unknown to any logical person."

B'Elanna bit her lip. Chakotay sounded reasonable enough and he wasn't telling her anything she didn't already know. In the past, she had not particularly cared what happened to her; live, die, go to prison - it was all the same to her. However, now she had Miral to consider and the thought of separation from her child was more wrenching than B'Elanna could have ever anticipated.

"So we're going to take the fall because some stuffy admiral doesn't want to make the spoonhead mad," B'Elanna said sharply. The tone of her voice caused Miral to whimper and B'Elanna paused briefly to stroke her daughter's hair. "It's all right, Miral. I'm sorry. Chakotay, I refuse to be labeled as a terrorist for the rest of my life-" her voice trailed off.

"They won't forgive us for taking up arms against the Federation. You know that."

"Taking up arms?" B'Elanna whirled in surprise. "Chakotay, the Federation's treaty with Cardassia and the formation of the DMZ was directly responsible for the rise of the Maquis. If the Federation had done anything to protect its citizens at all, we wouldn't have needed to take up the cause. You know that as well as I do, so don't try to rationalize what's happening to us. The situation was of the Federation's own making and they're just afraid to face up to their own mistakes. If those stuffed shirts had an iota of sense, they would quit giving aid to the Cardassians and instead hold them responsible for what happened in the DMZ. In fact, I suggest we put the Cardassians on trial for the slaughter of the Maquis. After all, isn't it the responsibility of the Federation to bring the murderers of Federation citizens to justice?"

Chakotay glanced over his shoulder; the guard was still following them, his expression impassive.

"B'Elanna," he said in a low voice, "getting upset won't help."

"What do you want me to do? You just said we could possibly face prison sentences. That is completely unacceptable-" she stopped as a second security guard approached her.

"B'Elanna Torres?" he asked, a bit uneasily.

"Yes, that's me," B'Elanna answered. "Something I can do for you?"

"This is for you." The guard held out a PADD. "You are asked to return to your quarters until your hearing. Your outdoor privileges have been revoked."

"And here I was being so good," B'Elanna said with a scowl. She put the PADD in her diaper bag and turned the stroller around. "Chakotay-

"And you are to have no further communications with other Maquis," the guard interjected.

B'Elanna sighed.

"You really know how to take the fun out of everything, don't you?" she asked, trying desperately to keep her anger in check. Already, Miral was twisting around in her seat trying to see what was going on. "Fine, I'm going back."

As she made her way back to the barracks, flanked by the two security guards, B'Elanna resisted the urge to turn around to take one last look at Chakotay. By the time she reached the quarters assigned to her and Tom, B'Elanna's lower lip was trembling involuntarily. Damn, when had she become so emotional?

Stop it, B'Elanna scolded herself fiercely as she lifted Miral out of the stroller. Somehow, she could not push away the sense of foreboding that was slowly taking over every cell of her body. Miral squealed as B'Elanna put her down on the floor.

"Here," B'Elanna said absent-mindedly, handing Miral a brightly colored toy before turning her attention back to the PADDs the security guard had given her. Keeping one eye on her daughter who seemed completely engrossed in the toy, B'Elanna sat on the edge of the bed and scrolled through the material. As she continued to read, absorbing the material, the words blurred in and B'Elanna dropped the PADD, causing Miral to yelp in fear.

"It's all right, I'm sorry for scaring you," B'Elanna said softly, reaching down to scoop Miral up into her arms. B'Elanna pressed her lips against Miral's soft skin. "It's a mistake, a terrible mistake. When your father gets here, we'll fix it. Don't worry. Everything is going to be all right."

And so B'Elanna sat, her eyes trained on the door, waiting for Tom to come back.

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Tom knit his hands together and sat back in his chair, careful to maintain his posture. He understood that there was nothing informal about this meeting, the first face-to-face talk between father and son in years; the expression on his father's face dismayed him too. Not quite the "you're in trouble" look Tom was used to, but something else entirely.

"Well, here I am," Tom joked lamely. "And I guess I'm not going anywhere, so if you have something to say..."

Owen Paris sighed. "This is difficult for me, Tom, so I'm not going to beat around the bush. I plan to take custody of Miral tonight."

Tom's eyes widened. "What?"

"I think it's in everyone's best interests, including Miral's, if she comes to live with your mother and me until after the hearings are concluded."

"With all due respect, I don't think so," Tom said. He felt the heat rising in his cheeks. "I appreciate the offer, but B'Elanna and I can handle the situation. Don't worry about us."

Owen shifted uncomfortably in his chair. "It's not really an option, Tom."

Tom stared. "What?"

"Starfleet is ordering you to relinquish custody."

"This is ridiculous!" Tom could no longer sit still and he nearly launched himself out of his chair. "What right does Starfleet have to make a decision about my family?"

"Unlike the rest of you, Miral has not been charged with a crime-

"Charged with a crime?" Tom stared at his father incredulously. "Look, this is crazy. There has got to be a mistake."

"As there won't be a hearing, Miral cannot be held for any reason," Owen continued, as if his son had never spoken. "As in the case of Naomi Wildman, Starfleet has ordered that she be released to the custody of her nearest blood relative."

"I can't believe this. General order twenty-seven says specifically that Starfleet officers will not be separated from their families if family members can be reasonably accommodated," Tom pointed out. "That order certainly applies here. What? You're surprised I'd remember? I believe you drilled all of the general orders into my head years ago."

"That doesn't apply in this particular circumstance."

Tom scoffed. "So you're just rewriting the Starfleet codes? Why? Is this yet another way you want to undermine me?"

"It's not like that, Tom. The issue came up and it was decided that the best place for Miral was with your mother and me. It's simple. I assure you, it's not a permanent situation."

"Miral needs her mother and me." Tom spoke deliberately, carefully, hoping to make his father understand. "You can't separate a eight-month old from her parents. You've got to do something. Change their minds-

"I tried, Tom." Suddenly, Owen looked very tired. "You don't think I've been working non-stop on Voyager? As it is, I've only gained a few concessions. As I've said before, I've got to pick my battles."

"Well, then pick this one!" Tom shot back. "I'm not giving up my daughter."

"It'll only be for a few weeks."

"Doesn't matter," Tom said. "A few hours, a few weeks. I don't care. Miral isn't going anywhere without B'Elanna and me."

"The two of you can't possibly care for a child while both of you are under so much stress-

Tom leaned forward, resting his weight on the palms of his hands. "So that's what this about? You don't think B'Elanna and I can take care of Miral."

"I didn't say that-"

"You didn't have to. Your expression says everything." Tom laughed sardonically. "Once again, you don't trust me to do something right."

"That's not what this is about."

"Yes, it is," Tom said. He paced the length of the office, taking in the shelf full of the various awards Owen Paris had earned over the years. There were a few family photos scattered here and there, and it wasn't lost on Tom that his own picture was slightly tucked behind a trophy. At another time, Tom would have considered this an oversight on his father's part, perhaps a slight rearrangement that had gone unnoticed, but now right now, the picture represented the gulf between them. "You've never trusted me on anything, never believed I could ever amount to much."

"You're wrong, Tom."

"Am I?" Tom shook his head. "Tell me one time when I made you proud."

"This isn't the time."

"It isn't? Then tell me when is?" Tom crossed his arms against his chest. "When you came on board Voyager right after Miral's birth, I really thought things would be different between the two of us. You were so different from the father I remembered and I was actually looking forward to spending time with you. I see now that I was wrong. You're the same as you've always been."

"Look, I don't necessarily agree with what Starfleet has decided, but I only have so much pull, Tom, and it's more important for me to work on Janeway's case than to argue this to the powers that be."

"What about the Maquis?" Tom challenged. "Are you going to do anything about that?"

"I already told you. That situation is out of my hands."

"Great." Tom rolled his eyes. "I'm not asking for much. I don't want any medals, I don't want any honors and I certainly don't need Starfleet. I only want my family and it seems to me that you're doing your damndest to break us up."

"If anything happens to you or B'Elanna, then you can be assured that Miral has a good home-"

"Ha! I lived in that home and I know what's it like. I'll be damned if I let you raise my daughter."

Owen Paris stood up. "I believe this conversation is over, Tom. We can do this two ways. You can either surrender Miral or we'll take her from you with force. It's your choice."

Tom's face softened. "Please, Dad. Don't do this to us. I don't want to beg but I will. I'm asking, as your son, this one thing, this one favor. God, I hate that I'm begging, but I'll do whatever it takes. Just tell me you won't do this. Tell me you'll talk to someone and get this order changed. She's just a baby and she needs us." He bit his lip. "B'Elanna and I need her."

Owen remained impassive. "I'm sorry, Tom."

Tom swallowed hard, and glanced down at the carpeted floor. After a moment, he recovered his composure and looked steadily at his father.

"You've let me down in the past," Tom said quietly, "and I'd forgiven you for that, for the most part. I'll never forgive you for this."

With that, Tom turned to leave.

"I didn't dismiss you," Owen said sharply.

Tom glanced back. "Should have known. Even now, you're hung up on protocols. Just once, can't you be a father?"

Owen Paris squared his shoulders but maintained his position behind the massive wooden desk.

"Dismissed, Lieutenant," he said rather stiffly.

Tom didn't answer. He walked out into the corridor and found Amelie waiting for him.

"Let's go," he said abruptly as Amelie matched his quick, furious stride.

"Tom? Are you all right?"

He couldn't speak and it surprised him just how painful the lump in his throat felt. He blinked to refocus his vision, but it was no use. For the remainder of the walk to the barracks, he was quiet, knowing his voice would crack if he spoke.

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Janeway watched as Harry Kim took the stand. In seven years, he had come a long way. No longer the 'Ensign Eager' of the past, but rather, a capable and competent officer with just the right mixture of enthusiasm and restraint. Janeway could hardly restrain her pride at the man Harry Kim had become. Whatever else came of this hearing, Janeway only hoped that Kim's reputation would not be tarnished by these proceedings; he deserved a long career in Starfleet.

Janeway leaned forward, placing her hands on the table, as Harry swore his oath.

Truth be told, Janeway was still slightly perturbed over the lie Chakotay had told regarding her seclusion from the crew just over two years ago. She understood Chakotay was trying to protect her, but at the same time, fudging the truth, even a little, could land them all in more trouble than they already were in.

God only knew, the Maquis didn't need another point against them.

"You are Lieutenant Harry Kim?"

Janeway jerked back to attention as Shelrak resumed his questioning. Harry sat up straight, his demeanor calm and collected.

"Yes, sir," Harry responded in a clear voice.

"You are currently assigned to the USS Voyager?"

"That is correct."

"And for the past seven years, you served under the command of Captain Kathryn Janeway?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now," Shelrak began his habit of pacing, a habit Janeway found mildly irritating. "I'd like to direct your attention to the events of stardate 51715.2. Are you aware of the incident I'm referring to?"

"Yes, sir," Harry said. Janeway recognized the date as well; Shelrak had chosen to focus on the Hirogen takeover of Voyager.

"Now, in your own words, please recount what happened." Shelrak took the opportunity to pause and look back at Janeway. She met his gaze defiantly, refusing to be intimidated by him.

"Well, sir," Harry said, "the Hirogen, a species which hunts as a way of life, managed to commandeer Voyager after several days of relentless fighting. They used the holodecks to simulate famous battlegrounds or war scenarios and a little over half of the crew were implanted with neural devices, which caused them to completely absorb every detail of their new personalities and the scenario in which they were placed."

To Janeway's ear, Harry sounded a little too rehearsed, too stiff and too formal. She glanced over at T'Sai, wondering if the lawyer had spent too much time with Harry going over possible questions.

"Including the Captain?" Shelrak queried.

"Yes, including the Captain."

"Were you a participant in these 'war scenarios'?"

"Not to my knowledge, no, sir," Harry said. "The Hirogen needed someone who could keep the holodecks running. They chose me."

"Ah." Shelrak clasped his hands behind his back. "So you were in a unique position to observe everything that was happening on board Voyager during this time?"

"Yes, I was."

"Was there anyone else on the senior staff unaffected by the Hirogen?"

"The Doctor was left alone." Harry's lip curled up into the semblance of a sneer. "They needed him to patch up our people so they could be sent back to be shot or stabbed or whatever again."

"Did you attempt to communicate with the Captain?"

Harry looked at Janeway and she nodded slightly at him, hoping he would understand that she wanted him to be honest with the court.

"I tried, on several occasions, to reach the Captain and other members of the senior staff," Harry said finally. "It was only after Seven of Nine was brought to sickbay were we given the chance to break the hold the Hirogen had over the crew."

"You readjusted her neural transponder, is that correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"Objection," T'Sai said from her seat. "I fail to see the relevance of this line of questioning."

"Agreed," Louvois said. "Commander, please, move along. Or, if you have concluded, you may sit down."

"Your honor, I've hardly begun," Shelrak protested.

Louvois silenced the man with a piercing glance. "Do not waste our time, Commander. If you have ground to cover, please do so quickly."

"All right, Lieutenant. So together, with the assistance of the Doctor, you were able to formulate a plan to retake Voyager?"

"Yes, sir." Harry shifted in his seat, appearing distinctly uncomfortable.

"Now, was this the first time Voyager was in the hands of an alien species?"

"No," Harry said. He coughed slightly. "It was not."

"Isn't it true that the Kazon once had control of Voyager?"

"That is true," Harry admitted. "But we did get the ship back."

"Thanks to the efforts of Tom Paris, Lieutenant Suder and your EMH, isn't that true?"

"Yes," Harry said. Janeway closed her eyes for a second. The memory of surrendering ship to Seska and Cullah still rankled within her. She had never adequately put into words exactly how she felt about the loss, only knowing that a dull, hollow pain had manifested itself in her chest.

"And when the Kazon took over Voyager, what happened to the crew?"

"We were left on a planet," Harry said quietly.

"And you foraged for yourself?"

Harry nodded. "Yes. We had no other choice. We had no technology, so we made do with what he had."

"And on this planet, isn't it true that an Ensign Hogan lost his life?"

Janeway's head jerked back up as she stared at Shelrak. The condescension in his voice implied that she had been careless, that she had deliberately stranded them all on this planet. She remembered that planet in minute detail, from blazing sun to the kilometers of yellow-red barren

earth that had surrounded them. And yes, they might have been foraging for food, but every second of that time had been filled with schemes to get Voyager back.

And despite what Shelrak might think, yes, she did very much regret the death of 'an Ensign Hogan.' Even years later, the pain of loss - the memory of each dead crewmember - still remained strong. No, regret wasn't a strong enough word for what Janeway felt for those who had not returned home.

"Ensign Hogan's death was an accident," Harry said defensively. "The circumstances were beyond our control."

"Indeed," Shelrak said with that self-satisfied grin that Janeway was rapidly growing to hate. "Let's move on, shall we?"

Janeway felt increasingly weary as she watched Harry continue to testify about the events surrounding the Kazon's commandeering of Voyager; there were also questions regarding Seska, someone else who had continued to be a thorn in Janeway's side long after she had left Voyager.

A dull pulse formed just above Kathryn's right eye, claiming her attention; she could hardly remember the last time she had had a headache of any consequence. She was barely aware of T'Sai making another objection as the table in front of her blurred. Janeway gripped the edge of the table tightly.

"Captain?" Dave Evans leaned over to whisper in her ear. "Are you all right?"

Janeway blinked and quickly recovered her composure. "Yes, I'm sorry."

She was suddenly aware of the entire courtroom staring at her and she wondered if her temporary lapse was really so noticeable. Fury bubbled up within her. How dare they all judge her? They weren't the ones stuck seventy thousand light years away, they weren't the ones who had to make those command decisions. Damn, Janeway thought angrily, we should have stayed lost.

"Back to the Hirogen." Shelrak's loud voice jolted Janeway out of her thoughts; dimly, she wondered exactly how much time had passed. "Records show that Voyager was badly damaged."

"Yes. It took us months to repair all of the damage," Harry said. He shook his head. "Working double-shifts, that is."

Shelrak smiled patiently, his thin lips puffing out around the edges of his ventilator. "I'm surprised that the Hirogen left Voyager," he said. "After all, as you've said, the crew of Voyager provided them ample technology to continue this hunting lifestyle. Can you attribute their departure to anything in specific?"

"I'm not sure I know what you mean," Harry said clearly.

"For instance, do you know of any agreements Captain Janeway might have formed with the Hirogen in order to ensure their cooperation?"

"Yes, sir."



"Please, explain this agreement for the court." Shelrak took a long sweeping gaze around the room, before settling his piercing gaze on Janeway. His ventilator hissed as he inhaled deeply.

"I wasn't there when the agreement was made," Harry said flatly.

"But you know what it constituted, don't you?"

"Yes," Harry said reluctantly. "I do."

Don't try to protect me, Harry, Janeway thought as she gazed at the young man. You've got a career in front of you, and even slightly altering the truth now will destroy everything you've worked so hard for. I can take care of myself.

"Well, then," a note of impatience slipped into Shelrak's voice. "Please, tell the court then, what that agreement constituted."

"The Hirogen left Voyager. In return, Janeway gave them the holodeck technology."

"Which violates the General Orders, does it not?"

"Yes, sir, it does. But, you-"

"That's all, Lieutenant." Shelrak held up a hand. "You've answered my question. Thank you. Now, let's talk about the consequences of that decision. Now, several years after Captain Janeway traded the holographic technology with the Hirogen, what happened?"

"I'm not sure I understand what you mean," Harry said pleasantly enough.

"Is it not true that Voyager that Voyager received a distress call from the Hirogen?" Shelrak queried.

"Yes," Harry said.

"Please describe what happened when Voyager answered the call."

"We found a Hirogen ship."

"Is that it? A Hirogen ship? Was there anything particularly interesting about this ship? For instance, share with the court the reason for the distress call."

Harry shifted in his chair. "The away team discovered that the Hirogen on board were either dead or badly wounded."

"And what do you think happened?"

Harry looked at Janeway and then back at Shelrak. The young man took a deep breath before proceeding.

"According to a Hirogen we rescued from the ship, the holograms had malfunctioned and were fighting back."

"And was this indeed true?"

"In a way, yes, but we didn't know the whole story, not then."

"So, Lieutenant Kim, what is 'the whole story'?"

Harry took another deep breath. When he spoke again, his voice was strong and clear, carrying well across the courtroom.

"It turned out that what started with the best of intentions ended up to be a serious case of megalomania," Harry said. "The lead hologram, he intended to start his own religion on a Y-class planet he called Ha'Dara."

"Which is Bajoran for 'home of light', correct?" Shelrak queried.

"I'm not fluent in Bajoran, but I believe that's an approximate translation," Harry answered cautiously. He clasped his hands in his lap as he waited for Shelrak's next question.

"Now let me understand this properly." Shelrak began to pace in front of the witness stand, his boots scuffing against the floor. His constant movement began to grate on Janeway's nerves and not for the first time, she longed to get up out of her chair and shake the man. "These holograms were sentient enough to create their own religion?"

"Yes."

"How did this happen?" Shelrak spread his arms in a questioning gesture. "It seems ridiculous to me that a mass of photons and energy could create their own society like this. Surely there's more to the story. Perhaps the answers lie in the technology Voyager provided?"

Harry shifted in his seat. "Well, not really. The Hirogen were the ones who modified these holograms. We only provided the basics."

"But these weren't just any holograms. You agree with me on that point, don't you, Lieutenant Kim?"

"Yes."

"For example, did they not formulate an act of war against Voyager?"

"Well, I wouldn't call it an 'act of war'," Harry objected. He looked at Louvois. "That's not what happened. Not at first anyway."

"Would you care to enlighten the court in that case?" Shelrak asked. "Begin with the kidnapping of the Doctor."

To Janeway's surprise, T'Sai did not object to the obviously leading question. But then, Janeway figured, the question itself was fairly innocent. For now, that was.

"Yes, the holograms did kidnap that Doctor, but I believe they thought they were liberating him from the control of 'organics' at some point. At least, that's what I think they thought, I don't know," Harry said. "Then-"

"They also kidnapped Miss Torres, isn't that correct?" Shelrak cut Harry off sharply.

"Yes," Harry said. He looked distinctly uncomfortable.

"And to once again make it clear to the court, these were the same holograms borne out of the technology that Captain Janeway shared with the Hirogen?"

"Yes."

"So, what you're telling us, Lieutenant Kim, is that by exchanging technology with an alien species, Captain Janeway deliberately put her crew in danger."

"I did not say that," Harry said. "Exchanging the technology saved our lives in the first place."

"Wouldn't you agree that it's every captain's responsibility to consider the consequences of her actions prior to taking those actions? Especially if those actions end up harming her crew members?"

"Captain Janeway considered the consequences of everything she did," Harry said sharply. His clear voice carried well through the courtroom, leaving absolutely no doubt as to the strength of his conviction.

"Including the fact that these holograms would become powerful enough to resist their creators?" Shelrak's voice was sharp, almost condescending. He inhaled deeply from his pump and then nodded in Janeway's direction. "Isn't it true, Lieutenant Kim, that these holograms killed two innocent people?"

Harry nodded.

Louvois leaned over. "Lieutenant, you'll have to speak out loud for the record."

Harry cleared his throat. "Yes, that is true."

Shelrak nodded in satisfaction. "That's all I have for Lieutenant Kim. Commander T'Sai, your witness."

T'Sai didn't move and for a moment, Janeway wondered if the Vulcan had any intention of questioning Harry at all. Soon, Janeway realized that T'Sai was merely gathering her thoughts and formulating a line of questioning.

"Lieutenant Kim," T'Sai said as she rose from her seat. "You said that the Hirogen required an engineer while they had possession of Voyager. Were you ill-treated?"

"They didn't hesitate to use force if they felt they needed to," Harry said. "Unfortunately, they felt they needed to a lot."

Janeway recalled the bruises and scratches she had seen on Harry's face shortly after she had regained control of Voyager. Badges of honor, she had thought at the time, for Harry's bravery in the face of danger.

"So you had no doubt that the Hirogen would hurt you?" T'Sai asked.

"No doubt at all."

"Do you believe they would have killed you?"

"Yes." Harry nodded. "Hirogen, at heart, are fighters. They hunt because that's what they do. Eventually, they would have grown tired of us and killed everyone off in the end. As it was, they had turned off the holodeck safeties."

"So your fellow colleagues sustained injuries?"

"Yes." Harry bit his lip. "Most were life-threatening."

"How long did this go on?"

"Weeks," Harry said. "Felt like forever, honestly."

"Do you think they would have left of their own accord?"

"Not without incentive. With Voyager's crew and holodeck technology, they had everything they could possibly want in terms of hunting. No, they would have stayed until they either killed us all or Voyager had been rendered completely useless."

"So when you heard about the agreement Captain Janeway had made with the Hirogen, what did you think?"

"I was relieved," Harry said. "Frankly, if they had the holodeck technology, I thought they would leave us alone. I didn't care if it violated any rules, only that we were alive and hopefully, would never have to see the Hirogen again. At least, not in a similar situation where we were being hunted."

"Is it a fair statement that this exchange of technology saved the lives of the Voyager crew?"

"Yes, it is. And an accurate statement too," Harry said. He glanced at Louvois. "The Captain made a good decision even-"

"Objection." Shelrak was on his feet and in front of the bench in a matter of seconds. "The witness should not address the judge directly."

"Sustained. The witness' remarks will be stricken from the record," Louvois ordered. "Continue, Commander."

"Even though you are a Starfleet officer and follow its regulations, do you believe this agreement was a necessary one?" T'Sai said. Janeway immediately understood what her lawyer was trying to do: get Harry to persuade the jury that in this particular instance, violating a Starfleet General Order was a necessary evil. Whether the tactic would work on it was another story entirely.

"I do," Harry said sincerely. "We would have all been dead otherwise."

"I have no other questions for this witness."

"You may step down. The court thanks you for your time, Lieutenant Kim," Louvois said. "We will recess for fifteen minutes and return for the last witness of the day."

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Tom nearly tripped over the small bag when he entered the quarters. As he straightened, he saw B'Elanna, standing by the window, her hands on her hips. She turned to face him and damn, he knew that look. She \*knew\* and dear God, he hadn't been the one to tell her.

"I've already packed," she said without preamble. "Let's get out of here."

Tom glanced over at the bed, where Miral lay sleeping, a little pink blanket thrown across her rotund body.

"And go where?" Tom asked softly. He carefully closed the door behind him and approached B'Elanna slowly. "B'Elanna, there is security everywhere."

"I don't care," B'Elanna said. She kept her voice low and even; Tom marveled at her self-control. He had fully expected her to start throwing things once he told her the news about Miral, but he hadn't anticipated this controlled fury. At any other time, he would have marked it as another way B'Elanna continued to surprise him. "I'm not doing this, Tom. They can take everything else away from me, but they can't have my baby."

"So what do you want to do?" Tom grabbed at B'Elanna's hands, the way he did when he was afraid she would pummel him. She shook her head, biting her lips. It was only then he noticed that her eyes were watery.

"I was a Maquis. That should mean something," B'Elanna said haltingly. "We could sneak out, get past the guards-"

"They would catch up to us eventually and it would be even worse, don't you think?"

"You're agreeing with them?" B'Elanna stared at him incredulously. She pulled away. "I can't believe you'd actually allow them to do this to us."

"It's only for a few days, B'Elanna, not more than that," Tom said softly, deliberately forgetting about the 'weeks' his father had mentioned. He glanced at Miral and hoped he was right about the time length. At the rate Starfleet was moving, Miral would have time to graduate from the Academy before all of their hearings were through.

"This is barbaric!" B'Elanna fumed. "She's only eight months old. And they didn't think of asking us first?"

"She'll be going with my parents. They will take care of her."

"And that is supposed to make me feel better?" B'Elanna pulled open a drawer and grabbed a tiny pink sweater. "Tom, I'm not going to stand here and wait for them, all right? You can come with me-"

"B'Elanna!" Tom grabbed her arm roughly. "Think about this, okay? The three of us, we're not going to blend into the crowd so easily. You know that. Please, let's be rational."

"You're asking me to be rational?" B'Elanna sputtered. She crumpled the sweater in her hand. "I don't think this is the time to be rational. I'm surprised you can be so calm about this. Unless you don't care."

Tom sighed. He had thought about his conversation with his father all the way back and had even considered ways of telling B'Elanna; he simply hadn't anticipated that someone else would beat

him to the punch. And he should have known that B'Elanna would want to act, that every muscle in her body would be tensed to move.

"Don't say that," he pleaded. "You- I don't know that I can do this either, B'Elanna, but we have to. My father-"

"Your father." B'Elanna pounced on the word. "He can help."

"Don't bother," Tom said, bitterness seeping into his voice. "He refuses to help us here. He even threatened to use force if we don't cooperate."

B'Elanna stared. "What?"

Tom sighed and sat on the edge of the bed, cradling his head in his hands. After a moment, B'Elanna joined him, her hand stroking his back lightly.

"I thought I was getting somewhere with him," Tom said softly. "For the first time in my life, I really believed we could have had a relationship. I was even looking forward to it."

B'Elanna gently massaged the back of Tom's neck and he was grateful for the softness of her touch.

"I asked him for one thing, B'Elanna, just one thing." Tom shook his head. "I asked him not to take Miral. He refused. Emphatically. He was more interested in saving Janeway."

"What are we going to do?" B'Elanna whispered. She intertwined her fingers with Tom's. He clutched at her hand tightly and then leaned over to kiss her lightly on the cheek. "I don't think I can do this, Tom. I really don't. Even if it's only for a few days, as you say."

"You don't have to. I will." Tom tried to sound strong; he knew how difficult this was for B'Elanna. She had told him many times how she felt everyone she was close to eventually left her and since the beginning of their relationship, he had been determined to show her differently. Of course, he never anticipated that circumstances - no, Starfleet - would interfere. "I can be strong for both of us."

B'Elanna closed her eyes, as if she was already visualizing the parting scene. "It's still not too late to leave."

"Running away won't work. When we're caught, it'll be worse. You know that as well as I do. And what kind of life would that be for Miral? Constantly on the run?"

"Doesn't leave us with many options, does it?" B'Elanna's voice cracked slightly.

"No, it doesn't." Tom covered his face with his hands, hunching inward. B'Elanna draped her arm across Tom's shoulders, drawing her husband closer to her as his body shuddered. After a few minutes, Tom inhaled deeply and stood up.

"Okay," he said, "I'm fine, really, I'm fine. I can do this."

B'Elanna remained seated though, unable to look up. After a moment, she said, "Her, um, things, I've already packed them."

"Yeah," Tom said, but he didn't move. Instead, he looked down at Miral, her eyes slightly open as she continued to sleep. He reached down and touched her forehead ridges lightly; they were starting to harden into shape now and as a result, she resembled B'Elanna more than ever. As always, as he stared down at that little face, Tom was amazed by the rush of love he felt for his daughter. No matter what happens now, Tom thought, at least I know I've done one thing I can be completely proud of.

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The waiting was interminable. Marla Gilmore's hands were shaking. Thank goodness, she thought, the others looked equally uneasy. They had been cooped up in this little room again while the jury had withdrawn to make their decision. Their lawyer, Maria Pachano, was out in the hall, talking to that pompous jerk, Commander Hileya.

"How long has it been?" Marla asked finally.

Angelo looked at her, glassy eyed. "Too long."

"No, I mean really."

"An hour," Brian answered finally. "I think it's been that long."

"Damn, how hard can it be?" Noah asked. He pushed back in his chair, the legs squeaking against the tile floor in protest. "Either we're guilty or we're not."

The impatience in his voice belied Noah's anxiety, Marla knew. She knew that whatever happened in that courtroom, nothing would ever be the same again. Her career in Starfleet was virtually over; maybe they would give her a desk job on some far-flung outpost, but never would she be assigned to a starship again. So much for my dreams, she thought.

She had never quite contemplated a life without Starfleet and now the possibilities extended in front of her. She could spend time renewing her ties with her family - if they would speak with her. On Voyager, she had discovered she had a talent for writing, thanks to Neelix giving her the opportunity to occasionally write segments for his "Breakfast with Neelix" program. Perhaps she could write a book about what happened aboard the Equinox. The idea heartened her; she desperately wanted everyone - the entire Federation - to understand what they had been up against. Wanted them to read for themselves the circumstances surrounding the decision to exterminate members of an alien species in order to survive. Marla choked as the familiar question echoed in her mind: would you have done the same, if our positions were reversed?

"I hate sitting still," Noah complained, his voice jolting Marla out of her reverie. He started to pace the length of the room, his nervous energy evident in every muscle of his body.

"Sit down. You're making me crazy," James said sharply.

"This place is enough to make anyone crazy," Noah answered. He leaned towards James, placing his palms on the table. "Look, when they're through with us, we're going to think this room here is the Ritz. We'll be lucky if they keep us on Earth. I've heard there are penal colonies in places a lot less hospitable than here."

Marla shuddered at the thought. Perhaps they shouldn't have tried so hard to survive out there. Maybe it would have been better to be blown into a million little pieces than have to endure this other kind of mental hell.

"We did good out there," Angelo said, injecting a bit of humor into his tone. "Everyone, especially you, Marla, everyone did real good. I thought that Commander Hileya, he looked a little off, didn't he? And Commander Pachano, she really brought our stories to life, didn't she? I think she did better than that Commander Hileya."

Marla nodded. "Thanks, Angelo." Basically, they had all told the same version of events, with minor differences according to their positions onboard Equinox. However, towards the end, as Ransom had dissolved the hierarchy for the most part, the lines had blurred and the Equinox Five knew they would all share equally in their downfall.

"They may not do anything to us," Marla voiced her opinion cautiously. The others nodded, perhaps they were too tired to truly argue with her and for that, Marla was grateful. She stood up and stretched, feeling much better and more awake as the blood rushed through her muscles.

In that moment, she felt more optimistic than she had the entire day.

"Doesn't matter what happens," she said. "We'll face it together, right?"

Noah nodded. "You're right, Marla. We're stronger than them. Hate to use the cliché, but we've been to hell and back. If they had been in our positions, I don't know how they wouldn't have done it."

At that moment, the doors slid open and Pachano entered, her lips pressed into a straight line.

"The verdict has come," Pachano announced. "We must go in now."

The Equinox Five slowly rose. Marla felt her heart was pounding so loudly, so quickly, that it would jump into her throat. She rubbed her clammy palms together and after inhaling deeply, found herself completely at peace.

"All right," she said in a strong voice, "I'm ready."

The others nodded and one by one, they filed out after Pachano.

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Tuvok did not betray any outward nervousness as he approached the stand, but Janeway knew that her old friend did not want to be here. She had told everyone her crew - especially Tuvok - that they needed to be honest in their briefings, but this - she glanced about the courtroom - was more than they had expected. No doubt, Tuvok's loyalty to her would come into play and after seeing Chakotay's reaction to some of the questions he had been asked, Janeway was nervous about Tuvok's reaction. She could only hope that his sense of logic would prevail on him to answer truthfully to all of Shelrak's questions.

"Commander Tuvok," Shelrak said. "I'd like to direct your attention to the events surrounding Voyager's discovery of another Federation vessel. I assume you understand I am referring to the Equinox."

"Yes, sir," Tuvok answered.

"Now." Shelrak glanced down at his PADD. "Let me read some of the charges leveled against Kathryn Janeway in this particular instance. Conduct unbecoming a commanding officer, cruel



and unusual treatment of prisoners, violations of Starfleet protocol, destruction of UFP property and attempted murder."

"I am aware of the charges," Tuvok said evenly.

"Let's start with the first one," Shelrak said. "Conduct unbecoming a commanding officer."

"Objection," T'Sai said. "Your honor, can he really mean to go through the list of charges like this? This entire line of questioning is uncalled for."

"Unless you're willing to stipulate to these charges, I don't believe this is an irrelevant line of questioning," Shelrak answered.

T'Sai shook her head. "I will not stipulate to these charges as they are without foundations. The entire line of questioning should be dismissed."

"I'm building my case," Shelrak argued. "The circumstances surrounding the Equinox are very controversial and needed to be examined in great deal. I'm only proposing to go through it in a logical format, which I'm sure Commander Tuvok would appreciate very much."

Tuvok didn't flinch at the comment, much to Janeway's relief. Of course, she chided himself. When it comes to stoic in its purest form, no one did it better than Tuvok.

"I'll allow it," Louvois said finally. "But be careful, Commander."

"Thank you." Shelrak resumed his position in front of Tuvok. "If you could, please outline how it was you came across the Equinox."

"Captain Janeway and Commander Chakotay received a distress call from Captain Ransom," Tuvok said. "Given the nature of the distress call and the fact that another Federation ship might be close by, Captain Janeway made the decision to answer the call."

"And at this time the ship was only 3.2 light-years away, is that correct?"

"Yes."

Shelrak nodded. "So it was not out of the way for Voyager to provide assistance to the Equinox?"

"Regardless of distance, I believe we would have extended aid to anyone who needed it," Tuvok said.

"Despite the fact these so-called aid missions might interfere with your voyage home?"

"We may have had a singular focus to our journey," Tuvok answered. "However, I do not believe we would have turned our backs on anyone who needed our help."

"Even an alien species?" Shelrak persisted.

T'Sai stood up, this time exhibiting much more energy in her fluid movements. "Objection. What, may I inquire, is the focus of this line of questioning?"

"I agree." Louvois nodded. "Objection sustained. I do not believe that Voyager's tendency to give humanitarian aid or otherwise is relevant to this particular incident. Please continue, Commander, and try not to digress again."

"What was the condition of the Equinox when you found it?" Shelrak queried.

"The ship had multiple damages, including hull breaches and the warp drive was offline. In addition, there were interspatial fissures opening on three of the decks. I believe the Equinox was under attack."

"How did Voyager react?"

"We extended our shields around the vessel."

"Did you know who was attacking the Equinox at this time?"

"No, we did not."

"What happened next?"

"We hailed the Equinox but received no response. Captain Janeway assembled an away team and we beamed to the ship."

Janeway still recalled the smell of burned flesh and plastic as they had picked their way through the wreckage of what had once been a state-of-the-art scientific exploration vessel. At the time, she had been horrified by the extent of the damage, wondering how the hardy crew of the Equinox could have survived under such circumstances. And she also remembered wanting to find Ransom, to assure herself that he was still alive; she had wanted to talk to another Starfleet captain, especially one like Rudy Ransom whom she had admired for years for his scientific contributions and discoveries.

"And you found survivors?"

"Yes."

"And their condition?"

"Some were suffering from psychological distress and some were wounded. In general, they were anxious. All were beamed to our sickbay for prompt medical care."

"Now, you did discover Captain Ransom alive?"

"Yes. I believe Captain Janeway discovered him. He was concerned about his crew."

"Did he offer up any hints as to who was responsible for the attacks on the ship?"

"No. He only mentioned that the aliens had been attacking for weeks and communications had failed. He provided no other information."

"And yet, Captain Janeway accepted his story?" a note of scorn slipped into Shelrak's voice.

"He is a Starfleet officer. She had no reason to disbelieve him," Tuvok answered stiffly.

"Moving on. Did you learn more about these aliens at another time? Such as their state of existence?"

"Objection, leading question. More to the point, irrelevant," T'Sai said. Shelrak glanced at the judge, his arms outstretched in a placating gesture.

"I'm just trying to assess what Janeway knew or did not know prior to the actions we're taking into question," Shelrak said. "You must agree with me, Judge, that it seems rather careless of Kathryn Janeway not to investigate the situation carefully."

"I do not need to agree with anyone, Commander, least of all you," Louvois said flatly. The expression on her face clearly indicated her frustration with Shelrak. "I'm running out of patience. Get to the point. Do not continue to waste time. Commander T'Sai, I'm sustaining your objection."

Janeway was pleased to see that for the first time during this trial that Shelrak appeared unnerved. It took the lawyer a few seconds to recover his composure before he continued.

"Let's talk about when Captain Janeway took command of the overall mission," Shelrak said. "How did that happen?"

"The Equinox was in no condition to retaliate against the aliens," Tuvok said. "It was only logical that Captain Janeway take formal command over the situation."

"And what was Captain Ransom's response?"

"He did not care for the idea but accepted the logic behind it."

"Now, to draw your attention to the lab aboard the Equinox," Shelrak said, "you and Seven of Nine discovered unusual readings. Please describe to the court what you found."

"We determined that the EPS conduits had been deliberately rerouted to emit radiation."

"And what did you do with this information?"

"We took it to Captain Janeway. She needed to know about this particular occurrence."

"And this is when you drew the conclusion that Captain Ransom did not want you to enter the lab?"

"That is correct." Tuvok nodded in additional confirmation.

"And what was the Captain's reaction?"

"She wanted to vent the excess radiation."

"Did she inform Captain Ransom?"

Tuvok paused, his eyes meeting Janeway's. "No."

"So you're telling me that Captain Janeway deliberately interfered with the workings of another captain's vessel? Is that what I understand here?"

"That is one interpretation."

"And with the amount of radiation that was emitted, how did you accomplish this 'venting of radiation'?"

Tuvok shifted in his chair, the first sign of discomfort Janeway had noticed in her friend. You're doing fine, Tuvok, she thought.

"She ordered the Doctor to accomplish the task. Unlike the rest of the crew, he would be immune from the radiation."

"And the Doctor boarded this vessel without Captain Ransom's permission?"

"Under the circumstances, I do not believe Captain Ransom's permission was necessary."

Shelrak arched an eyebrow. "You do not believe permission was necessary? Are you qualified to make that analysis?"

"Objection!" T'Sai stood up. "Attacks on witnesses are unwarranted."

"He made a statement regarding protocol and I only wish to learn of Commander Tuvok's expertise in this particular area. I believe the question was fair, your honor."

"Agreed." Louvois nodded. "Go ahead."

T'Sai sat down and Janeway could see the tension in the woman's jaw. It was, Janeway noted, the first sign of emotion, however subtle, she had seen from her lawyer.

"I served as Voyager's security officer. I believed the circumstances warranted discretion and further investigation. Given Captain Ransom's efforts to distract us from the research lab, we felt we could only discover the truth if we kept our movements secret."

"Ah," Shelrak said. "So you were practicing a deception?"

"No. General Order Five specifically grants the right of Federation special representatives to assume command of a vessel in an emergency situation. Captain Janeway was simply following her duty."

"I see." Shelrak cleared his throat, but the tone of his voice made it clear that he did not agree with Tuvok's assessment. "When the Doctor went aboard Equinox, what did he discover?"

Tuvok's lip curled with faint distaste. "He discovered that several of the aliens who had been attacking the Equinox were in the research lab. Dead."

"And it was your conjecture that the crew of the Equinox were performing experiments on these aliens?"

"The Doctor made that assessment."

"Ah. Tell me, what was the Captain's reaction to this discovery?"

Tuvok glanced at Janeway before speaking. "She ordered me to apprehend Captain Ransom and bring him to her ready room."

"What occurred in her ready room?"

"It was a private conversation."

"She did not share the details with you?"

"No."

"And as chief of security, you did not ask?" A note of disbelief crept into Shelrak's voice.

"Objection. He is badgering the witness and I respectfully request that such hostility against Commander Tuvok cease," T'Sai said.

"Agreed. Watch yourself, Commander Shelrak," Louvois said. "Remember who is on trial here."

As if on cue, all eyes turned to focus on Kathryn Janeway. She did not blink and instead, squared her shoulders. Let them stare, she thought, and let them judge.

"Did Janeway say anything all?"

"She did tell Commander Chakotay and myself that she had relieved Captain Ransom of duty and confined him and his crew to their quarters for the time being. I believe such a decision would fall under the guidelines of General Order 23."

"How long did this confinement last?"

"Not long," Tuvok said. "There was a... break-out." Janeway nearly smiled at Tuvok's use of the word. Occasionally, Tuvok managed to borrow vocabulary from Tom Paris, a habit also shared by that other Vulcan onboard Voyager, Ensign Vorik.

"And what happened next?"

"I opened a channel to Equinox."

"And you were privy to this conversation, I assume?"

"Yes."

"Did Captain Janeway threaten Captain Ransom at all?"

"I believe she asked him to reconsider his actions."

"Did she threaten Captain Ransom?" Shelrak's voice was tight and edgy.

"She may have said she would open fire if he did not cooperate."

Janeway didn't flinch. When she had said those words, she had not wanted to do it, had not really expected that Ransom would push her to that point. For God's sake, firing upon another

Federation vessel? She knew, no matter how she could justify the threats to Voyager, she would never be able to justify her actions to herself.

"And what happened next? Did they cooperate?" Shelrak asked.

Tuvok once again shifted in his chair. "No."

"And so Voyager opened fired." It was a statement, one that Shelrak seemed to direct at Janeway. There was a measure of judgment in his voice, and Janeway was somewhat disgruntled that T'Sai had not risen to her defense.

"Yes."

"Did you mean to destroy them?"

"No, we only sought to disrupt their power systems."

"What happened next?"

"We were attacked by the aliens. They boarded our vessels and attacked both Captain Janeway and Commander Chakotay." Tuvok looked at Janeway. "Casualty reports told us that 13 of our crew were injured and two were dead. Lieutenant Anderson and Ensign Scandia."

"Given the attacks on Voyager, I assume that you pursued the aliens?"

"No," Tuvok said quietly. "It was determined that our enemies were the humans aboard the Equinox."

"Who made this determination?"

"Captain Janeway."

The flatness of Tuvok's tone belied the intensity of the actual situation. Janeway could recall every heart-pounding, pulse-racing second, and her own fury, just barely restrained. In retrospect, she had not liked herself very much during this particular time.

"Yet, the ship's logs show that an attempt was made to communicate with the aliens."

"Yes."

"What was the outcome of that communication?"

"We were once again attacked."

"Did you try again?"

"Captain Janeway was intent on finding the Equinox."

"Her first priority was Ransom. Is that what you're saying?"

"Yes."

Indeed, it had been. Janeway tried not to show any outward emotion, but she remembered clearly how over the edge she had been, how determined she had been. After all, she had upheld Starfleet principles and as a result, it was her duty to bring Ransom to duty. But now, with a more clear vision, Janeway knew Chakotay had been correct; she had crossed the line. No wonder Starfleet was charging her with 'conduct unbecoming to an officer.' She shook her head. If only they had been there, if only they had seen what she had seen...

"Is it because he was human?"

"Captain Ransom committed murder. It was only logical we bring him to justice."

"Even if it meant risking the lives of the crew? You just said you lost two crewmembers in an alien attack. So instead of trying to make peace with these aliens, your captain insisted on pursuing a crippled Federation vessel that could do her no good?"

"By commandeering the Equinox and ceasing their activities, we believed we could begin a good faith negotiation with the aliens. With Captain Ransom still at large, his activities could continue, furthering inciting the wrath of the aliens."

"And you did eventually find the Equinox."

"Yes, we did."

"Tell me about the ambush on the Equinox," Shelrak requested.

"Commander Chakotay and Lieutenant Paris beamed to the Equinox and incapacitated two of its crewmembers. They all returned to Voyager with no injuries."

"Again this was under Captain Janeway's orders?"

"Yes."

"What happened next?"

"We fired upon the vessel," Tuvok said. "To be precise, we targeted the weapons array and the power core."

"Did you agree with these actions?"

"I followed my orders."

"As the tactical officer on board, did you agree?" Shelrak neared the witness stand. Tuvok glanced at Janeway.

"No, I did not. I did not want to destroy the Equinox."

"Do you believe Janeway would have destroyed that ship?"

Tuvok pressed his lips together. Janeway knew the answer to this question, at least in her own mind, she did. Given the circumstances, given her rage, she knew she would have. Despite everything she held dear, those principles, the sanctity of life, she would have destroyed the Equinox.

"I cannot extrapolate on a situation which did not occur," Tuvok said finally. "I do not know what Captain Janeway's intentions were."

"Oh come on," Shelrak said. "You've been friends for years. You're telling me you didn't know what Janeway had in mind?"

"I believe her decisions were based with the crew's best interests in mind. We eventually broke of pursuit."

"Is this before or after the decision was made to pursue the Equinox into the thermosphere of an M-class planet?"

"After," Tuvok admitted.

"Despite the fact that entering a thermosphere could cause severe damage to Voyager, not to mention injuries to the crew, she was intent on pursuing the Equinox? Do you not find this to be an undue use of force, Commander?"

"Circumstances demanded diligent use of Voyager's resources to bring Ransom to justice."

"And do these same circumstances warrant Janeway's behavior towards Noah Lessing? I believe you know what I'm talking about Commander."

Janeway nearly shuddered at the shameful memory. How she had verbally lambasted Lessing, how she had threatened to vent him... Even now, she could not quite explain her behavior. She only had a recollection of a powerful rage, of focusing all of her dismay and anger on Noah Lessing; she had felt strong in that moment as adrenaline had rushed through every cell of her body.

The incident had played itself over and over in Janeway's mind. Not once had she been able to speak of her actions to Chakotay and Tuvok, the two people to whom she was closest to on Voyager. Nor had she ever apologized to Noah Lessing for what she had done; apologizing would have meant acknowledgement of something she herself could not rationalize.

"I do," Tuvok said softly. To Janeway's ear, his inflection did not sound flat or monotone, but almost sad. Yes, she thought, I shocked both Tuvok and Chakotay.

"What did Captain Janeway want from Lessing when she was questioning him?"

"The tactical status of the Equinox."

"Did he give it?"

"No, he was loyal to his captain."

"Did Kathryn Janeway threaten extreme measures?"

Janeway forced herself to keep her gaze on Tuvok. Don't let them see how much this bothers you, she lectured herself sternly.

"Her only intention was to frighten the crewman."



"Did she or did she not threaten him?"

"Yes."

Shelrak appeared satisfied as he stroked his chin.

"Did or did not Captain Kathryn Janeway attempt to murder another Federation citizen and Starfleet officer?" Shelrak asked, speaking very clearly and loudly.

"Yes." The simple, terse response captured the attention of the entire courtroom and a palpable silence fell. This time, no one looked at Janeway. Shelrak stopped pacing and for a moment, the rasp of his ventilator echoed through the courtroom.

"And when Commander Chakotay objected to her actions, what was the Captain's response?" Shelrak asked finally.

"She relieved him of duty."

"What happened next?"

"We made contact with the Ankari and asked them to help us reach an agreement with the other aliens."

"Were you successful in this attempt?"

Tuvok considered before answering. "The Captain and I attempted to negotiate, however, the Ankari were unwilling to help until we agreed to surrender Equinox to them. I assured the Ankari that the Equinox would be properly punished in accordance to our laws."

"And?"

"Janeway agreed," Tuvok said. He cleared his throat and his gaze met Janeway's steadily. "We needed to make this agreement in order to survive."

"Did you agree?"

Tuvok once again looked uncomfortable. "No. I disagreed with my commanding officer. Her behavior indicated extreme irrationality, a possible circumstance of the extreme stress she was under."

"And when you disagreed, what was the result?"

"She threatened to confine me to my quarters as well."

Janeway close her eyes, only for a second. On one hand, she was grateful that Tuvok was telling the truth, but it also bothered her exactly how brutal this particular truth was. How would T'Sai ever redeem her from this particular incident? Noting that T'Sai had remained relatively quiet for most of this question, aside from the objections, Janeway wondered if the Vulcan lawyer would even attempt to defend her actions.

"And?"

"I did not continue to disagree," Tuvok said.

"As a result, did the Ankari communicate with the aliens to call off their attacks?"

"Yes."

Janeway tuned out as Shelrak continued to question Tuvok about ensuing events. For the first time, she actually considered what might happen to her. It was now plainly obvious that this trial was no formality; there would be a verdict and she would have to abide by it. And given the length of time Shelrak was spending on the Equinox, she suspected that the consequences would not be good.

She looked up just to hear Shelrak ask, "The survivors of the Equinox remained on board Voyager?"

"Yes," Tuvok said. "However, they were stripped of rank and were under close supervision."

"Thank you. That is all." Shelrak nodded in T'Sai's direction, and to Janeway's surprise, T'Sai did rise and approach Tuvok. Janeway's mood immediately brightened.

"In regards to the aftermath of this particular incident," T'Sai said quietly, "do you believe Captain Janeway expressed any regret about her actions?"

"She did," Tuvok said. "She understood the enormity of what she had done and was truly dismayed in retrospect."

"And in your opinion, were Captain Ransom's actions a direct violation of the General Orders, as set out by Starfleet?"

"Yes, I do. Captain Ransom's actions were in complete disregard of the tenets we are obliged to obey."

"In that context-" T'Sai glanced back at Janeway and then returned her attention to Tuvok- "do you believe Captain Janeway needed to take forceful action?"

Tuvok tilted his head slightly before responding. "I do," he believed.

"And what were Captain Janeway's actions towards the crew of the Equinox in the aftermath of this particular incident?"

"The five surviving members of the Equinox crew were integrated into Voyager's crew and were given some responsibilities," Tuvok said.

"Were they treated with respect?"

Tuvok considered. Janeway knew what he was debating. She had turned over the welfare of the Equinox Five to Chakotay and while she had been kept apprised of their performance on Voyager, she had not taken the time to form relationships with any of them. In fact, she could barely recall speaking to them more than a cordial greeting at ship-wide gatherings.

"Captain Janeway made it a practice to treat all of her crewmembers with respect," Tuvok said finally.

"Even crewmembers that may have committed murder?"

"Even so," Tuvok said. "She made no distinction."

"Thank you. That is all."

Janeway stared. That was it? She felt trepidation in every cell of her body.

"Thank you, Commander Tuvok," Louvois said. "You are dismissed, with the thanks of the court."

Body completely stiff and head held high, Tuvok exited the courtroom. He did not look at Kathryn Janeway as he passed her.

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The chime at the door startled both of them. B'Elanna glanced, almost fearfully, at Tom, and without a word, he stood and answered it.

"Amelie," Tom said almost in relief. "Come in."

"Thank you." Amelie Despere stepped into the room. B'Elanna got to her feet, holding Miral in her arms.

"I don't think you got the chance to meet my wife when you were here earlier," Tom said. "B'Elanna Torres, this is Amelie Despere."

"Nice to meet you," B'Elanna said.

"And of course, you remember Miral from earlier," Tom said. He ran his hands gently over Miral's head, smoothing back her unruly curls. "She's being uncharacteristically well-behaved today."

"Bah!" Miral said agreeably. Amelie smiled.

"She's beautiful," Amelie said to B'Elanna.

"Thank you."

"So what do we owe the pleasure of this visit to?" Tom asked.

"I thought you would want to know that the Equinox crew trial has concluded," Amelie said. She stood rather stiffly and Tom indicated the only chair in the room. She shook her head and the formality of her posture caused B'Elanna to tighten her grip on Miral.

"What happened?" Tom asked as B'Elanna put Miral down on the blanket on the floor.

"They have been dishonorably discharged and ordered to one year in New Zealand. I thought you would want to know."

Tom swallowed hard and looked at B'Elanna.

"How- how did they take it?"

"I was not in the courtroom, but I believed they remained quiet and composed. They were given the opportunity to make a statement, but they declined, saying they had said everything they needed to on the witness stand," Amelie said. "They will be leaving for New Zealand shortly."

The look that passed between Tom and B'Elanna said everything: was this a portent of things to come?

"All right," Tom said finally. "Thanks for letting us know."

"If there's anything I can do..." Amelie's voice drifted off.

"Just let them all know, if you can manage to see them, that we're thinking of them," Tom said softly. B'Elanna nodded.

"Yes, please do," B'Elanna said. She glanced down at Miral, who was gurgling. In an almost automatic gesture, B'Elanna reached down to wipe Miral's face with a washcloth.

"Any word on the Captain?" Tom asked softly.

"The trial has recessed for the day," Amelie said. "I believe they will continue in the morning."

"Did it go well?"

"I do not know," Amelie admitted. She looked at Tom. "I should go as my husband is waiting for me outside, but I wanted you to know what was happening."

"We appreciate it. Both of us do. Thanks."

Amelie nodded in B'Elanna's direction. "It was nice meeting you. Tom, I will see you later."

After Amelie was gone, B'Elanna handed Miral to Tom.

"I've got to get her bottle," B'Elanna said distractedly. She walked to the replicator and Tom noted that his wife's hands were trembling. "That was nice of your friend to come by."

"Yes, it was," Tom said, his lips brushing against the top of Miral's head. "B'Elanna-"

"One minute."

He watched as B'Elanna tapped the appropriate codes into the replicator and a second later, a bottle materialized. B'Elanna quickly squeezed a drop of milk onto her forearm before settling herself down in the only chair in the room.

"I miss the rocking chair," B'Elanna said as Tom handed Miral to her. Miral sucked greedily at the bottle. "This chair is so uncomfortable. The springs are right in my back."

"I suppose we could ask for another one."

"What's the point?" B'Elanna asked. "Are you going to sit in it? You spend most of your time on the bed anyway."

"I just said, if you were uncomfortable, we could get another one. I'm sure it's not a problem."

"I don't want another chair, Tom."

Tom placed his hand gently on B'Elanna's shoulder. "I know," he said softly. "B'Elanna, it's almost time."

"She's not finished eating yet," B'Elanna said, a note of panic slipping into her voice. "Damn you, Tom, let her finish. You know how she gets when she's hungry."

"I know."

They both watched as Miral's little fist curled up against the bottle, her eyes half-closed in sleepy reverie. Truly, one of the only times Miral Paris was ever quiet was when she was eating or sleeping.

"I wrote out the feeding and bedtime instructions on that PADD," B'Elanna said. "I've also included the precise baby formula that they need to replicate. If they can get the real thing, that's better, but if they need to replicate, I've included the recipe. I don't like to use the replicator more than necessary. You never know. The recipe could be off, the necessary--"

"B'Elanna." Tom leaned in, his fingers gently running the line of her jaw. "You could come with me. You could tell them yourself."

"Tell them what?" her voice was unusually shrill. "If they had a half a heart--"

"B'Elanna!" Tom grabbed B'Elanna's shoulder. "Please. Don't- don't make this harder for us, for Miral."

"How can you be so calm?" B'Elanna asked, her voice shaking from a mixture of grief and anger.

Tom had been asking himself the same question. The initial fury over his father's order had turned into a slow burning rage. Yet, somehow he had managed to hold himself together. Maybe it was because he knew B'Elanna needed his strength right now. He squeezed his wife's shoulder.

"It's not too late to change your mind," he told her. "Don't make me do this alone, B'Elanna. Come with me."

"I am not giving my baby to anyone."

"Are you sure?" Tom looked at her carefully. He didn't want B'Elanna to regret this decision ever.

"I'm sure."

Tom could tell by the tightness of her jaw that B'Elanna had made up her mind for sure; she would not be accompanying him when he turned Miral over to his father. Tom straightened up and went to check on Miral's bags. B'Elanna, true to her word, had packed everything the baby could possibly need and then some. The same fastidiousness and attention to detail with which she had run Engineering, was evident in the careful and thoughtful packing. Tom touched Miral's stuffed targ.

He would have to remember to tell his father that Miral could not sleep without the toy.

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Naomi sat at her desk, contemplating her day before recording her thoughts into her journal. Neelix had suggested keeping a journal a couple years ago and her faithfulness in writing depended on her various moods. Sometimes, she wrote in spurts, creating lengthy logs filled with intricate details; other times, she abandoned her journal for long periods of time for lack of inspiration.

It had been several weeks since Naomi Wildman had written anything at all. In fact, as she scrolled past the last few entries, she noticed that they were unusually terse, mostly descriptions of what she ate and some of the lessons she had absorbed from Seven of Nine. As she glanced through, she picked up one entry: "Mom has been talking about my father a lot lately. Today, she was looking at his picture for a long time. I wonder what it will be like to meet him."

Naomi sighed and pressed a button to bring up a blank page. Carefully, she began to write. She knew she could dictate, but she really didn't want her father to know she was still awake; she was supposed to have been asleep an hour ago.

"Today was my first day at the new school. Everyone was very friendly and nice to me. They wanted to know about Voyager and so I told them about Seven and Neelix. Some of the kids were scared about the Borg, but I told them that Seven was different. One girl, Lili, wants to meet Seven and then when I said I didn't know where Seven was, she accused me of lying. The teacher came out then because we were arguing pretty loudly. Father picked me up after school and he already knew about the argument. He told me I shouldn't make trouble and that it was important to be respectful to all the students and teachers. I don't like being called a liar though. I don't think Father understood that. He made dinner for us tonight. It was green and purple and I think it was alive. I couldn't eat very much. I really miss Neelix's cooking-"

"Naomi?" Her father's voice floated up the stairs. Naomi jumped and quickly saved her journal entry and hopped into bed. She had barely pulled up the covers when her father appeared in the doorway. "I thought I told you to go to bed an hour ago."

"Yes," Naomi said meekly. In the doorway, her father seemed unusually large. "Sorry. I just had to finish something."

Her father sat down on the edge of the bed. "You have school tomorrow. You need your rest. You should go to bed when I tell you to."

"I'm sorry," Naomi said. "I just wanted to do something before I forgot."

Carefully, her father ran his large hand over the covers, smoothing them gently. For a moment, Naomi forgot that the man in her room was her father and not Neelix.

"Neelix used to do that," Naomi said, "when he came to tuck me in at night."

"Well." Her father stood up awkwardly. "Good night."

Naomi was confused. Her father had actually been soft, even gentle a second ago - she actually thought she might like living here. Then a thought occurred to her. Maybe she could keep her father in her room for just a minute longer. "Do you know 'Flotter'?"

Her father looked confused. "'Flotter'?"

"It's a story and there are games based on it. I used to play it on the holodeck."

"On Voyager?"

"Yes. It was fun. Neelix used to read me 'Flotter' stories before bed." Naomi turned on her side, clutching at the edge of her pillow. "It used to help me sleep when I had problems."

"I see." Her father stood in the doorway again. "Well, good night, Naomi. I will see you in the morning."

Naomi didn't answer. She pressed her face against the pillow, suddenly feeling weariness overtaking every muscle in her body. She sniffled slightly. She heard footsteps approaching and stirred beneath the covers.

"Naomi?" it was her father.

"Yes?" her throat felt dry and scratchy.

"About this 'Flotter.'" Her father sounded uncertain. "You said it was a holodeck program?"

"Yes," Naomi said. She sniffled again, this time more loudly. "Sorry, I think I have a cold."

"Computer, dim lights," her father requested. He stood at the edge of Naomi's bed. "Would you like some tea?"

Naomi nodded. Neelix always made her tea whenever she wasn't feeling well.

"Very well. I will bring it to you." Her father turned to leave, but stopped for a moment as he approached the doorway. "I will make a reservation for the public holodecks this weekend, Naomi. Perhaps you can show me this 'Flotter' program of yours."

"I'd like that," Naomi said softly. Her father nodded and disappeared into the hallway. Naomi snuggled beneath the blankets, realizing that her father was as uncertain of her as she was of him.

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B'Elanna sat on the bed, watching the door. How long had it been since Tom left with Miral? She couldn't even think as a dull pounding asserted itself behind her right eye. Warily, she reached up to rub her temples.

Only a few days, she told herself. That's all. You can do this.

After a moment, B'Elanna got up. Her muscles felt stiff and she felt unnaturally cool. She moved almost mechanically towards the dresser and grabbed the first clothing item her hand landed on - Tom's red jacket. She shook it out, noting that it needed to be pressed in order to conform to regulations, but instead of recycling it, she put it on over her jumpsuit. The jacket hung loosely on her figure, ending just past her hips.

B'Elanna started to pace the length of the room. Tom had asked her again before he had left if she wanted to come with him when he went to meet his father, but B'Elanna had emphatically refused. She had been afraid of what she would do once it came to actually turn Miral over to

Admiral Paris and the last thing B'Elanna wanted was to let Starfleet know that they had gotten to her.

She wondered what Tom was doing now. Was he talking to Admiral Paris now? Had he handed Miral over? Was he showing his father all of Miral's things? Who else was down there? What were they like? How was Miral doing? Was she laughing? Crying?

B'Elanna shivered. Would Admiral Paris follow the feeding instructions exactly the way she had written them? Would he remember that Miral was particularly fond of her ragged stuffed targ and needed it in the crib before she went to sleep each night?

B'Elanna rubbed her hands together, trying to warm them. She wondered if she should have gone with Tom, whether she was being foolish for staying behind because she had been so afraid of her own emotions.

It's only for a few days, she told herself again.

Darkness had started to set in outside; through the window, B'Elanna could see the tiny pinpricks of light across the Bay in Marin County. In the distance, the sun had set into a bright red sliver and B'Elanna knew that it would never grow completely pitch black; San Francisco was known for its pink-tinged night sky.

The door slid open and B'Elanna turned as Tom entered. She nearly gasped as she realized he was empty-handed and then it truly struck her: he had done it and Miral was gone. She choked, wanting to scream, needing to release the intensity of the emotion inside of her. Until this moment, she had been unable to even think this could really happen, that Tom could actually do it. B'Elanna swallowed hard, putting her hand to her mouth.

It's like leaving your child alone in the woods, B'Elanna thought. She looked at her husband, noting how much older and tired he looked.

"Well?" she tried to keep her voice even. "How did it go?" It surprised her how nonchalant she could be at a time like this; in fact, it sounded like she was asking about a test flight or a new holodeck program. "Tom?" Her voice rose in pitch as her anxiety grew. Kahless, what had happened down there? "Tom, please."

Tom shook his head and without speaking, crossed the distance to the bed. He sat down on the bed heavily, his shoulders bowing in. B'Elanna, still enveloped in his jacket, sat down next to him, wrapping her arm around his shoulders and pressing her lips against his cheek.

"Tom," she whispered. His arm snaked around her waist drawing her closer. For a moment, they sat in unwelcome silence and B'Elanna started to feel cold again.

"She didn't cry," Tom said finally. B'Elanna blinked.

"What?" she asked softly.

"Miral didn't cry, not at all."

B'Elanna's eyes watered. Miral, in general, was a friendly, outgoing baby, thanks to the various people who had taken care of her on Voyager. As a result, strangers didn't bother Miral at all. But what would happen when morning came and Tom and B'Elanna were not there when she woke up? B'Elanna bit her lip. Kahless, what kind of mother was she, letting her baby go like that?



"I'm shaking," she whispered, almost in amazement. She held out her hands.

Tom pulled B'Elanna to him, drawing her down on the bed. They clung to each other long after the lights across the Bay had dimmed.

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Kathryn Janeway could feel the ache in every muscle of her body. She was surprised by how incredibly tired she felt after a day of sitting still. Thank goodness I'm away from that place, she thought as she walked into her quarters. More importantly, she was profoundly grateful that her shadow, Dave Evans, had disappeared for the night. According to the chronometer, she would have a good ten hours to herself before having to face both Evans and Louvois again.

Wearily, she stripped off her jacket, tossing it carelessly across the back of the chair. Then, she sat down, removing her boots. Sighing, she settled back into the chair, taking in the room. She knew she had nicer quarters than most of her Voyager crew; her suite was comprised of three rooms, including a study off the main living room. Starfleet had been kind enough to provide her with a working terminal, though, given her situation, Janeway wasn't quite sure what she would use the terminal for.

Janeway got up and continued to undress, leaving clothes in a trail as she headed into the shower. As a rule, she wasn't a messy person and had always taken care to make sure her uniform was treated as per regulations; tonight, she simply didn't care.

Janeway turned on the shower, feeling the warm pulse of water beat against her skin, soothing away the tensions of the last nine hours. After fifteen minutes, she got out, wrapping herself in the fluffy cotton robe that had been provided for her. As she padded out into the bedroom, she paused briefly in front of the mirror. As far as she could tell, she looked exactly the same as she had in the morning. She reached out for her reflection gingerly, her fingers lightly brushing against the glass.

For a moment, Janeway contemplated turning on the news feed, so that the incessant chatter of the reporters would drive away the silence. But then, she knew exactly what the top story of the day was and she really had no desire to relive the minutia of the hearings; after all, she thought with a ironic grin, I was there. So the verdict was easy enough: no news cast tonight. As Janeway stood in front of the mirror, the silence grew gradually more unbearable; for the first time in years, Janeway did not want to be alone with her thoughts.

"Computer, play-" she paused for a moment. "Play 'Someone to Watch Over Me.'"

The soft strains filled the room and Janeway's mood improved slightly. She was aware now, as she never had been before, how truly alone she was.

She finished getting ready for bed to the music of Gershwin.

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Across San Francisco, many tuned into the local newscast. Most evenings, viewers tuned in to watch the popular anchorwoman, Suellen Bartlett, who had garnered quite a following after her incredibly detailed and focused coverage during the Dominion War; her calm demeanor had inspired confidence in a turbulent time. Tonight, however, the draw was the trial of Captain Kathryn Janeway and little else was talked about throughout the city.

As a result, the newscast was played across the city in various locations, including coffee shops, bars, and pool halls, and speculation ran rampant regarding the fate of Kathryn Janeway and the various members of her crew.

"To recap the day's events, the five members of the Equinox crew were dishonorably discharged from Starfleet," Suellen Bartlett reported in her usual clipped tone. "Noah Lessing, James Morrow, Marla Gilmore, Angelo Tessonni and Brian Sorfin served on the Equinox under the command of Captain Rudolph Ransom. While in the Delta Quadrant, the crew of the Equinox violated several Starfleet protocols, including the murder of a sentient species in order to enhance their warp engines. The five crewmembers will serve one year in New Zealand for their part in these crimes."

Suellen Barlett paused before continuing on. "In other news, the trial of Kathryn Janeway, captain of the starship Voyager, will continue in the morning. What went on in today's closed hearing is still unknown, but insiders speaking on the condition of anonymity said that they predict nothing less than a guilty verdict for Janeway. Janeway and her crew were stranded in the Delta Quadrant for seven years and were in an area they refer to as 'bubble space' for seven months after a brief return from the Delta Quadrant."

The camera angle changed and Suellen Barlett shifted her position before resuming the newscast.

"Finally, the question of the Maquis has yet to be resolved. The Cardassians are pushing for imprisonment for crimes committed against Cardassians prior to the Dominion War. Many of the Maquis were killed in a rout in 2373 by a force of Jem'Hadar. The Maquis survivors who include Voyager's first officer, Chakotay, and its chief engineer, B'Elanna Torres, are currently being held in Federation prisons. The politics of the situation are, by necessity, slowing the decision of what to do with Voyager's Maquis but insiders predict..."

To be continued...

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