



## Episode 8-23 – Distant Elephants

By: LauraJo (laura@laurajo.net)

As the heat of the day slowly started to build, a tiny blemish appeared against the background of the perfect red sky. In this deserted area of land on the outskirts of a small town, no one was present to witness as the outline of a Starfleet shuttle gradually formed from the moving shadow and grew larger as it made its final descent. Eddies created by the shuttle's movement caused dust to swirl on the ground until slowly, gently, the small craft touched down.

The hatch opened with a hiss, and rose to reveal two people waiting to disembark. A vulcan male and female stood carrying a travel bag each and carefully scanning their surroundings. Once the hatch had fully risen, the male thanked the pilot with a nod of his head and walked out of the vessel, followed closely by the female. Once they were clear, the shuttle took off, leaving them alone and returning the peace and stillness to the area.

As they turned to face each other, the vulcan female spoke three simple words.

"Welcome home, Tuvok."

\*\*\*

There were more people present to witness as the dark profile of the starship Voyager came into view in the skies above San Francisco, but not as many as some had predicted. There was no cheering crowd, no banners were waved to welcome the ship to her final resting place; only scattered groups of those interested enough to watch what, when put simply, was just a starship landing like any other.

It was true that not many ships landed in this particular location, just as it was true that this wasn't and never would be 'just a starship', but it was also the case that most people had said their goodbyes and waved the vessel off when she had docked at Utopia Planetia. The area surrounding the landing site was populated with scattered islands of people, each one averaging only one or two individuals. Keeping to herself under the shade of a lone tree, Kathryn Janeway awaited her ship's final descent.

She hadn't spoken to any of the other onlookers, although she had recognised some faces as members of her old crew. She suspected that somewhere out there, B'Elanna was standing with Tom and Miral. In many ways, a ship belonged to its Chief Engineer every bit as much as it did to its captain, and though B'Elanna often tried not to show it, she had a sentimental streak in her. She would need to be here just as much as Kathryn herself did.

Janeway had begun to accept Voyager's fate. It had been a slow, hard process, one started after witnessing the docking at Utopia Planetia with Chakotay. At least Voyager wasn't being consigned to a life as scrap metal; not many ships had the honour of being preserved as museums, let alone with pride of place in San Francisco itself. Unlike many captains, she would have the privilege of being able to revisit her old vessel at virtually any time she pleased.

However, she still had to be present to see the ship that had been her home for close to eight years land safely. Starfleet could have asked her to land the ship she had captained for so long, the ship that had only known her as its captain, and Kathryn was annoyed that they were using a skeleton crew of engineers from Utopia Planetia to do the job. They could have made something of Voyager's landing, rather than trying to sneak her onto the Earth's surface with as little fuss as possible.

These were her views, the ones she had confided to very few people; but Janeway also recognised that many people had achieved a sense of closure after seeing the ship dock at Utopia Planetia - Chakotay amongst them. He would have been there to see Voyager land anyway, in support of his best friend, but he'd been called to his sister's. He had instead promised to accompany Kathryn as she toured the new museum later that day.

The time that transpired between Voyager coming into view and the ship touching down appeared to be inexplicably long. Kathryn decided that either her perception was suffering some unknown ailment, or the crew onboard the vessel were being especially careful to keep the exhibits intact. The museum's preparation before landing the ship appeared to be the one concession the powers that be had made to give the landing any significance. This way, the museum would be ready for viewings as soon as it was secured on the ground, rather than waiting the time it would take for exhibits to be set up, wall displays mounted and visitor guides produced. The doors would open after lunch this afternoon, mostly to members of Starfleet and those who had prearranged to be there on the first day. General tours started at the beginning of the following week.

When the time for the ship to land did finally arrive, it was without pomp or ceremony. There were no announcements, no flashing lights, and visitors were left to discern the appropriate moment to leave the area only from their own observation. Kathryn didn't stay as long as she thought she would have. Rather than watching everyone else leave around her, she turned and quietly left the area before the ship's systems had even begun to shut down. She had seen what she needed to: her ship's final flight. In less than three hours she was due back to tour the new museum, she would walk around the grounded vessel then.

For now, she had a day to get on with.

\*\*\*

Harry took one last look at the ship as her engines powered down, and then made his way over to where he had spotted Tom, B'Elanna and Miral earlier. As he got closer, it was Tom that spotted him first.

"Hey Harry! Did you see it?" Tom actually seemed excited by the whole thing, an attitude that as yet had not permeated through much of the crew. Harry's reply, though not quite so exuberant, was nonetheless cheerful.

"Yeah, I've been here for the whole thing. End of an era." The three were thoughtful for a few seconds before Harry continued. "B'Elanna, I was thinking. Quite a few of the crew are either working at Starfleet HQ, living in San Francisco or visiting due to Voyager's landing. Do you think this would be a good time to do a little digging? You know..."

"Find out what people know about Section 31?" B'Elanna interrupted. "Well it's an opportunity, I won't deny that. But who's here, is there anyone around that might actually know something?"

"We won't know unless we try." Harry quickly scanned the surrounding area in the hope of spotting someone quickly, but there was no one about. To his surprise, Tom saved him the bother of trying to convince B'Elanna any further.

"B'Elanna, I know you're as intrigued about this whole thing as Harry, you've talked about it often enough these past few days. Go with him, find out what you can. Harry's right, there are likely to be more people in the area today than on any other day, and I can take Miral."

One look at Tom's face showed B'Elanna that he really didn't mind her skipping off without him, so she quickly decided to go with Harry. Conducting her own visual scan of the area, she saw Ensign Vorik in the distance. As her gaze settled upon him, he turned quickly and started to head away from their position. B'Elanna couldn't be sure if his movements had been prompted by her scrutiny or were just pure coincidence, but either way she decided he was the perfect subject to start talking to. Before he could get too far, she turned back to Tom and Harry and said,

"Okay, Tom, you take Miral. I'll see you later. Harry, come on!" She then took hold of Harry by the arm and pulled him away from her husband and child, leaving Harry with time only to throw a quick goodbye over his shoulder. As they hurried along, it occurred to Harry that maybe Vorik was scurrying away in an attempt to prevent himself being seen to think it necessary to watch an old vessel landing for the last time. There was something very sentimental, and therefore very un-Vulcan, in the whole idea. If that were the case, it was too late - Vorik had been busted.

It didn't take long for the determined pair to catch up with their target. The vulcan ensign hadn't managed to leave their sights once, and when they called his name for a second time he thought it unwise to appear as though he hadn't heard them. It was obvious they had seen him, why make matters worse? So instead, he slowed to a halt and turned to greet them.

"Lieutenant Torres, Lieutenant Kim. Can I be of assistance?"

B'Elanna decided not to correct her rank, or lack thereof. She did not wish to get into a discussion on that topic right now, other matters were more pressing.

"Ensign, you've been in the 'fleet for some time now," she started.

"Longer than either of you," the vulcan stated, "can I ask where this is headed?"

Now they were faced with a direct question, neither Harry nor B'Elanna were quite sure what to say. The truth was, there was very little they knew about Section 31. They had very little basis on which to ask questions of others. B'Elanna decided to just jump straight in.

"Have you heard of an organisation known as Section 31?"

"Yes."

Typical vulcan, thought B'Elanna, short, to the point, and you have to bleed them for every tiny bit of information.

Slightly more suited to dealing with vulcans than B'Elanna, Harry decided to take over.

"Can you tell us anything about them?" he asked.

"I know little, but could I ask you why you are interested?"

Harry inwardly sighed, but he continued nonetheless.

"We've come across them in our dealings with the Sernaix, though as yet have managed to uncover very little information. It would help us a lot if we could find out more."

"I see," Vorik paused. "I know little more than of their existence, though that is of course more than many others are aware of." The last appeared to Harry and B'Elanna to be some sort of excuse, a defence against his ignorance in this matter. Frankly, they were surprised. They had

thought he would have known more. However, it was clear they were going to get nowhere further so B'Elanna decided it would be best to move on and try elsewhere.

"Okay, thank you Ensign. We appreciate your time."

Vorik nodded in acknowledgement, then turned and left them alone. When Harry was certain he was out of earshot, he let out a sigh.

"Well, that went well."

"I just hope that someone knows more than that," B'Elanna replied, "otherwise this is going to turn out to be one big waste of a day."

"Someone will know something, they have to. Maybe we'll come across the captain. Her father was an admiral, she has to know something."

"Don't count on it, Harry," B'Elanna already sounded dejected, "Tom didn't."

And with that pleasant thought, she strode back towards Voyager and left Harry trailing in her wake.

\*\*\*

Tuvok spent the first part of the morning, accompanied by his wife, making his way back to the house he had not seen in over eight years. Like many of the Voyager crew, Tuvok had left his home expecting not to see it for some time. He was, after all, to spend some time undercover in the Maquis. The precise length of this mission had been unknown, though it was always expected to be of considerable duration. Depending on the success of his reconnaissance, the infiltration could have lasted for anything from weeks to months to over a year. As events had turned out, his period in the Maquis had been relatively brief. It had been time spent aboard a Starfleet vessel, serving in his usual capacity as Chief of Security, that had kept him away for so long. He was grateful that his unexpected removal to the other side of the galaxy had only delayed his return to his home world, and not prevented it entirely.

For the most part, T'Pel allowed her husband to walk in silence. Whilst it had been some time since she too had been on Vulcan, her last sight of the planet had been considerably more recent. She was grateful for her experiences in the Bubble. The mind meld she and her husband shared had allowed her to experience his sensations of being so far from home in the Delta Quadrant, not knowing if he would return. However, she considered that having lived a similar life on a day-to-day basis gave her a greater understanding of this time, and as such helped her bond with her husband continue to deepen.

The couple were taking a longer route to their property than was strictly necessary, and T'Pel chose not to voice how 'human' his sightseeing detour could appear. She had noticed a change in Tuvok in the past few months. Whereas in the past her husband had never wavered from vulcan customs or values, despite his frequent association with other races in his work, since spending so long aboard a ship with the same mix of mostly human crewmen he had picked up tendencies that were at the very least of questionable vulcan origin. However, while she knew this to be true, and she knew Tuvok to be aware of his actions, she knew he did not appreciate such things to be pointed out.

When to keep quiet was a lesson learnt early in vulcan childhood.

Eventually, the couple reached their front door. T'Pel stood aside and allowed Tuvok to enter first. As he did so, he surveyed the room in which he had spent both so much and, more recently, so little time. It was just as he remembered it. The same tasteful colours in the decor, the same logic puzzles displayed in the cabinet in the corner, the same artwork hanging on the wall. This was his

home, the residence he had shared with his family as he and T'Pol had raised their four children. If he had been human, he might have said that the familiarity was comforting.

But being Tuvok, the Vulcan returning home after so long, he merely turned to ensure his wife had now cleared the front door, and pulled it shut behind her.

\*\*\*

With the administrivia of her morning and lunch break over, Kathryn Janeway approached the gleaming Voyager and entered with some trepidation. Now that it came to seeing what they had done with the place, which elements of their journey were felt fit for portrayal, she was almost as nervous as a schoolchild waiting for their first report card. This place would represent the truth behind their journey to thousands of people. In the years to come, she would meet strangers who had formed an opinion of her based solely on the information they had gathered from this museum.

It was a hard feeling to shake off, and an odd one. She was about to walk around what could essentially be her own memorial, and she wasn't even dead yet. She hoped not to be for some time to come.

Chakotay had yet to join her. His transport back to San Francisco had been delayed slightly, so he had instructed Kathryn to begin her tour without him. She had told him she would start at the bottom and work upwards, hoping he could make it by the time they reached Engineering.

And so she made a beeline for Deck 15.

It didn't take long to get around; there really wasn't much of any consequence down there. In fact, Janeway mused, she would be willing to bet most visitors missed this deck out entirely. No wonder those who had worked down here had been so fed up at times, it was so far away from anything of any interest.

She wasted no time in moving up a deck, and was just starting to consider if this was any better when Chakotay came to a halt beside her, out of breath after running from his transport.

"Kathryn, sorry it took so long."

Kathryn smiled back at him reassuringly as she replied, "It's okay, you didn't miss much, not down here. It's just occurred to me how rarely we came down to these decks."

Chakotay chuckled. "No, there was always more going on elsewhere. Who would want to come down here when you can be facing down countless hostile races from the comfort of a chair on the bridge!"

Joining his laughter, Kathryn took another look around her while Chakotay gathered his thoughts. After a minute had passed, he spoke again.

"How was the landing?" he asked.

"It was okay, nothing special. Most people had said their goodbyes before, we knew that."

"I wish I could have been there with you."

"Maybe it was better that you weren't," Kathryn brushed off his concern. "I had time to make peace with my ship, to think about where I go from here."

"And?" Chakotay asked. But he got no reply. Kathryn moved off to the next section, pointing to a particularly impressive display as she went. Chakotay didn't know what to make of her ignoring his question, so he chose to change the subject.

"My sister and I enjoyed a nice morning, and by lunch she was expressing a wish to meet some of my friends from Voyager."

"That's nice," Kathryn replied noncommittally. Chakotay went on.

"Of course, some held more interest to her than others."

This time, Kathryn interrupted before he could say any more.

"Let me guess, she wanted to meet the reclaimed Borg drone, and the ex-Maquis who became one of the finest engineers the fleet has ever seen."

Chakotay had been about to say that his sister had been particularly keen on meeting Kathryn, but something told him not to say it. And he had no idea why. Instead, he followed Kathryn's lead with a forced laugh.

"Yes, something like that." As he paused, Kathryn stopped walking in front of him, and he realised they had made a full circle of the deck.

"Should we move on?" she asked. "I think we've seen everything down here."

With a nod of his head, Chakotay agreed, and followed her to the turbolift.

\*\*\*

Tuvok looked up as T'Pel re-entered the room. She had been in their study contacting Sek, their eldest son.

"I have set up a time, we are to arrive at their house in two hours. T'Meni will have finished her schooling for the day, so you will be able to meet your grandchild."

"Indeed."

"Though Sek's wife is off-planet at the moment, attending a conference," T'Pel continued.

"Then I shall reacquaint with her another time."

The room fell into silence once more, and T'Pel regarded her husband curiously. Presently, he began to talk.

"I have been thinking about distant elephants."

A puzzled expression on her face, T'Pel replied, "Distant elephants?"

"I did not realise how important it would be to me to return to Vulcan. It has been a distant goal for eight years now, but always something that would be addressed when the time came. Now the time has arrived, and I find myself unprepared. Returning home seemed a small consideration when it was not an immediate one, but now it is before me I have found it to be disturbing. More adjustment is necessary than I anticipated. The distant elephant appears larger when it is standing directly in front of you."

"I have not heard you use that expression before."

"Its origins are on Earth, it is unsurprising that I do not use it often."

"Then tell me, are any other elephants appearing to you?"

"The expression would also fit my thoughts concerning T'Meni."

"Our grandchild disturbs you?"

"That is not what I imply. I am preparing to meet the first in a new generation of our family line. The firstborn child of our own firstborn. At the time I was informed of her birth, it was impossible for me to return to Vulcan and welcome her to my family. Since that time, I have been aware of her existence, but thought little of the time I would meet her. Now her paternal grandfather will enter her life, an important figure in a young child's development. Yet I have not prepared for this role."

"Tuvok, you have prepared. We raised four children together."

Tuvok nodded, but there was little conviction in his action. He sat unmoving for several minutes, before finally speaking.

"If you will excuse me, I must meditate."

And with that, he left the room.

\*\*\*

Janeway and Chakotay exited the turbolift and stepped onto Deck 8 of Voyager. Their main stop on this deck was Astrometrics. The lab held mixed memories for the friends. It was a place from which contact with loved ones had been reinitiated, and news related - both good and bad. The demise of the Maquis and Mark's marriage to another woman were among the earliest news titbits to come their way.

Of course, the room also carried with it images of its constant occupant over the past five years: Seven of Nine.

For one, the relationship that turned out to be a mistake, on more than one level.

For the other, the friend, the surrogate daughter even, who not so long ago left her with a damaged relationship, and a feeling of betrayal. The feelings had lessened in recent months, but they were still there at times.

As the doors parted to allow them entrance, both found it strange but also a slight relief that the only occupant of the room was in fact Icheb, who immediately stood proudly to attention in his cadet's uniform.

"Captain, Commander."

"It's just Chakotay now," the ex-commander corrected.

"Yes, Sir." Icheb, like many others it seemed, was having trouble getting used to the lost ranks of the ex-Maquis crew. Chakotay was getting used to it, though he did notice Kathryn flinch a little as he amended Icheb's address. It was barely perceptible, but she flinched all the same.

As the group started to make small talk, Chakotay realised that with everything that had happened lately, Kathryn had had little time to catch up with Icheb. He knew how proud she was that Icheb had formally started his Starfleet training, and sensed that she might like some time alone with him to find out how he was going. Deciding that now might be the perfect opportunity, he took advantage of a lull in the conversation.

"Kathryn, I just realised I have a call I forgot to make this morning. If you'll excuse me, I'll go and take care of it now. Should I catch up with you again in Sickbay?"

Slightly surprised, but hiding it well, Kathryn replied,

"Of course. I'll see you there."

With a smile and a parting nod to Icheb, Chakotay was on his way.

Kathryn and Icheb's conversation continued on general matters to begin with, but Icheb knew she would eventually ask him how things were going at the Academy. He was torn about whether or not to admit to the problems he had had. What would his former captain think if she thought it had not all been plain sailing?

Icheb was aware that most of his problems had been due to his status as a former Borg, rather than anything personal, but even this was hard to admit to anyone. He didn't want people to think he was unable to handle the comments people made. If he received such insults at the Academy, the likelihood is he would receive them throughout Starfleet and even in elements of his private life, if and when he may eventually develop one. He had to show he could handle himself, his pride would let him do nothing else.

Kathryn had noticed Icheb's mind wandering as they spoke, and it was actually this very thing that led her to ask the question he had anticipated. It was something the two of them shared in common, training to be an officer in Starfleet, and as such seemed like obvious ground to cover in their conversation.

"So how are things at the Academy?" she asked.

His mind already made up as to what he would say, Icheb replied, "It's good. I feel I am getting settled now. Some of the early classes are on the easy side, but I anticipate more challenging topics as time progresses. I may even take a field assignment for a few months soon."

Icheb's face had lit up as he spoke the last sentence, and Kathryn was happy to see that he was progressing and enjoying the life he was leading. She was proud of him. She had no doubts that he would have had his share of problems, but he was obviously handling himself well.

After a few more shared experiences, such as Icheb's first meeting with Boothby, Icheb parted company with his former captain. Left alone in the Astrometrics lab, Kathryn glanced around some of the exhibits - including a large image of the Caretaker's array - before following Icheb out of the door.

\*\*\*

Harry and B'Elanna walked through the corridors of Voyager on the lookout for potential sources of information. Today, that's all people were; they didn't have the time or the inclination to stop and exchange catch-up stories with anyone.

As they rounded the corner into Engineering they spotted Seven on the other side of the room, and so joined her, hoping she might have noticed someone useful around.

"Seven," Harry greeted her, "I didn't realise you were going to be here."

"Neither did I," the former Borg replied, "but it appears that I am." She offered no further explanation than this. "I did not expect to see either of you here either, and you look as though you are looking for someone."

"We are," B'Elanna replied, "several someones. We decided to take this opportunity to do a little digging, find out what people know about Section 31."

Seven nodded. "A reasonable decision," as close to approval as they were going to get. "Whom have you talked to so far?"



Harry sighed. "Not many. We caught up with Ensign Vorik outside but he knew nothing, despite his family's long history with Starfleet. He knew of Section 31's existence, but nothing we could add to what we already had. In fact, I think we could have told him a thing or two. Since then, we've been walking around the ship, but either seen no one we could talk to, or big groups of people that we did not want to talk to all together."

"Discretion is the key here," Seven agreed. Then, as she spotted a new group entering Engineering, she continued. "There is a group that might be worth asking. If you will remember, I mentioned to you after conducting some of my research that Dr Bashir had some experience with Section 31."

Harry and B'Elanna looked around to see whom it was Seven was talking about.

"Who are those people with him?" B'Elanna asked.

"That's Miles O'Brien and Quark," Harry replied, "looks like a regular Deep Space 9 outing. I supposed they would have some interest in the ship, we did launch from there."

"Mr O'Brien also knows some things about the organisation," Seven added. "He too would be worth your while to talk to."

"Thanks, Seven, but there's one problem with this picture." Seven and B'Elanna looked at Harry quizzically. "Quark." Harry uttered that one name with more disdain than B'Elanna had believed possible from him.

"He could be a problem," B'Elanna agreed.

"I do not understand." Seven's statement was just that, a statement, but Harry and B'Elanna both knew that it was also her request for more information.

"Quark is a Ferengi," B'Elanna started, "a race not best known for their discretion. He is also not a member of Starfleet, and as such it may be best not to discuss sensitive matters in front of him."

"I am not a member of Starfleet, and neither are you," Seven pointed out.

"But that's different," Harry stepped in, "and I'm sure the Borg assimilated enough Ferengi for you to be aware of what we mean."

"I am uncertain that many were assimilated." Somehow, this didn't surprise B'Elanna.

"Either way," Harry continued, "we can't talk to the others with him there. In fact," Harry turned to face Seven straight on. "You could occupy him for us while we talk to Dr Bashir and Chief O'Brien."

"I could occupy him." Seven sounded less than convinced. "How would you have me do that?"

B'Elanna was intrigued, and decided to just step back and let Harry convince Seven to help them.

"Well, if Quark remembers me, he's going to be wary of my motives," Harry began his appeal. "When we last met, well, let me just say that he may have been left with a desire for revenge, against me and Tom." At this point Harry was struck with the perfect way to take B'Elanna out of the running too. "And seeing as it was me and Tom he had dealings with, well, it's been all over the news that Tom and B'Elanna are married. What better way to get back at him that through his wife?"

Seven was still unconvinced, "Those points aside, how am I supposed to occupy him?"

Harry was almost at a loss, he'd already used all his arguments, feeble though they were. Then, inspiration struck.

"Call it a challenge. Not many people survive their first lone encounter with a Ferengi without buying or almost buying something, this is the perfect opportunity to prove that you are better than all those people." Harry added a pleading smile to his statement, and hoped.

"Very well," Seven finally replied, "for the good of the Federation." Then she walked off in Quark's direction.

B'Elanna thought the 'good of the Federation' bit was a little over-the-top, but she let it slide. She was more interested in if there were any other reasons Harry had been able to convince Seven to help. She had noticed them getting closer over the past weeks, but had always been reluctant to ask either of them for any details.

Beyond even her own predictions, B'Elanna had come to gain a lot more respect for the ex-Borg in the recent past. She had seen Seven's self-doubt over personal relationships, and found herself unwilling to risk jeopardising what could be a valuable and healthy partnership for both of her friends. Yes, they were both her friends.

Of course, she could just ask Harry what was going on, but something told her that wouldn't be the right thing to do either. His experiences with Libby were still relatively recent. The last thing B'Elanna wanted was to see him retreat into himself, harming the relaxed interaction he now shared with Seven.

So instead, B'Elanna kept quiet, and just watched things develop.

On the subject of watching things, she was now also watching as Seven successfully manoeuvred Quark away from Dr Bashir and Chief O'Brien, leaving the way clear for Harry and herself to begin their questioning.

Was there nothing this woman couldn't do?

\*\*\*

Kathryn Janeway was surprised at how little time ten decks of her tour had taken her. Now on Deck 5, she entered Sickbay to find the Doctor standing in his office. She walked through to join him.

"Doctor."

"Captain! I didn't know you were here, it's good to see you."

"You too," Janeway smiled. "It seems to have turned into a day for bumping into people, since I've been walking around the ship anyway."

"Really? I've not seen anyone else as yet. Mind you, that's nothing new," the Doctor grumbled, "no one ever did make much of an effort to get to Sickbay."

"But you've been here the whole time?"

"Of course!" he replied. "I had to come and inspect the place, make sure they got it right."

Kathryn ignored the obvious remarks about getting out to see other people, and changed the subject. "Actually, Doctor, I was wondering. Have you been in much contact with Reg Barclay?"

"I speak to him regularly, saw him not long ago. What makes you ask?"

Kathryn sighed with relief. "I was hoping someone was speaking with him. I've not had a chance to keep in touch since we've been back, and well, he's done so much for us..."

"You felt guilty, but now you know someone else has been talking to the man your conscience can rest."

Kathryn wasn't quite sure how to reply to that. It sounded bad, but it was basically true. Best to say nothing. So, she changed the subject. Again.

"What do you think of the exhibit in here?"

"The exhibit? Well..." The Doctor strode out into the main part of Sickbay with such a sense of purpose that a feeling of utter dread seeped through the captain's entire being. Why did she suddenly have the feeling that that was entirely the wrong question to ask?

"This," continued the Doctor, indicating all around him, "is supposed to be a display of all the Delta Quadrant species we met during our journey. First of all, it's incomplete. Second of all, it's inaccurate. Thirdly..."

Kathryn held up one hand to stop him. "Slow down a bit, incomplete?"

"Yes, it's in the title, 'all the Delta Quadrant species'. Well, to begin with, the Numeri are missing, as are numerous others. So, either the title is inaccurate, or the display is incomplete."

"Well, that's not the end of the world. They can't include everyone we met, there are just too many!"

"That's not all that's wrong."

Kathryn had a feeling she was in for the long haul. "What else is wrong?"

"Some of the information they have managed to include is wrong. What kind of incompetent forgets to mention when a species has two separate and complete cardiovascular systems?"

"I'm sure the exhibit isn't as bad as it seems," Kathryn attempted to placate the irate Doctor, "but if you feel strongly about it why don't you contact those responsible for the exhibits and submit the changes you'd like to see being made?"

The Sickbay doors opened and Chakotay entered just in time to hear the EMH cry,

"I'm a doctor, not a museum curator!"

Sensing trouble, and correctly guessing the cause, Chakotay quickly strode to Kathryn's side and stepped into the fray.

"Doctor, with your experience on Voyager you are Starfleet's foremost expert on these species. Who could possibly be better than you to determine how to present them to the people of the Federation?"

There was a momentary pause as the Doctor contemplated what Chakotay had just said, but it appeared his ego had been sufficiently boosted when he replied,

"Perhaps you're right. Someone has to tell them where they went wrong, and there really isn't anyone else more suited to the job." He then left straight away, with the intention of contacting whoever would listen to him.

Turning to her new companion, Kathryn asked,

"How do you do that?"

Confused, Chakotay replied, "Do what?"

"Talk the Doctor down so easily. All I seemed to be able to do was get him more worked up, then you stroll in and talk him down so quickly I barely had a chance to take it all in! It's just not fair."

Chakotay just smiled, turned away, and started to walk out of Sickbay, muttering something unintelligible under his breath as he went.

"Chakotay?" Kathryn prodded as she followed him. "Chakotay, tell me what you just said."

Chakotay continued to walk, his grin spreading over his face.

"Chakotay! Speak to me! CHAKOTAY!!"

And he kept on walking.

\*\*\*

Tuvok and T'Pel arrived at the doorstep of a modest house, crafted from stone and situated on the outskirts of their hometown, on the opposite side to their own residence. Slowly, almost hesitantly, Tuvok raised his hand to press the button that would request their entry.

Barely seconds later, the door opened to reveal Sek standing before them. He wore robes of dark blue very similar to the ones his father was wearing, and was carrying a musical manuscript.

"Father, Mother, come in." He stood back to allow them entry into his home. "It is good to see you once more."

Slowly, father, mother and son made their way through to the main room of the house. There, sitting at a table, was T'Meni - Tuvok's first and so far only grandchild. She was attempting a logic puzzle, one intended for children of almost twice her own age. Tuvok noted that she was doing so with some success.

"I see she takes more than just her name from my mother," Tuvok stated. "Her logic appears to be well developed."

"She is consistently top of her class in her schooling," Sek replied, with what in humans would only be termed as pride in his voice. "I have great hopes for her."

"As do we all," T'Pel added. "It is gratifying to see her doing so well."

"I can only hope that Varith, Elieth and Asil are so fortunate."

"If they follow the example of their sibling, they can do no more." Tuvok's complement was not unrecognised by Sek, and he bowed his head to show this.

Only now, when the voices of the adults went quiet, did T'Meni turn to see those who had entered her home. She slowly rose from her chair and made her way to her father's side, leaving him the perfect opportunity to introduce his daughter to his father.

"T'Meni, I would like you to meet your grandfather, Tuvok. Tuvok, meet T'Meni."

Tuvok raised his hand in the traditional Vulcan greeting, and was pleased when T'Meni did the same.

"Greetings, T'Meni. It is my honour to finally meet you."

Looking a little shy, T'Meni moved slightly closer towards her father and made no reply. Sek moved them all further into the room, and everyone sat down while he went to get some tea. T'Meni had placed herself with T'Pel between herself and her grandfather, a gesture typical of children throughout the galaxy when meeting someone who is essentially a stranger to them. It had been some time since she had last seen T'Pel, but she did have some memory of who she was.

Once Sek returned, T'Meni was drawn out of her shell by questions about her school and her interests. Both T'Pel and her son were pleased to see the other two starting to act more familiarly with each other, and by the time T'Meni's meal time approached a satisfactory progress had been made.

As she left the room, the young girl turned to her grandfather and said,

"It has been interesting to meet you."

Then she walked away.

In Tuvok's mind, an elephant rode back into the distance, then disappeared.

\*\*\*

B'Elanna was getting fed up of the small talk. Harry had insisted that they couldn't just go in and ask two near-strangers what they knew about Section 31, so they had started off with the obvious questions - how did they like the ship, did they make the trip specially or were they on Earth for some other reason? She couldn't even remember their answers, her mind was so fixed on their purpose for talking to them in the first place.

Eventually, Harry slipped in a mention of Section 31 and their current interest in the organisation, and it appeared Dr Bashir was only too happy to tell them everything he knew. He launched straight into a tale of how he was abducted by Commander Sloan, a member of Section 31, and continued to talk about what had happened afterwards.

"Captain Sisko and I talked about what we should do, how we could go about what you're doing now and find out more," Julian was saying. "We talked about infiltrating Section 31, and as it happened I was later recruited by the very organisation I was so interested in. So, I pretended to join, and whilst I was with them travelled to Romulus and obtained information on the Romulan government; but all the time I was still secretly working for Captain Sisko."

B'Elanna had to admit, Dr Bashir could certainly spin a tale.

"I learnt that Sloan was in fact head of Section 31," he continued, "and that he had plans to assassinate the head of the Tal Shiar. When I attempted to get help and pass this information on to the correct authorities, my attempts were countered, and the council was informed that there was no Section 31. I didn't have enough evidence to contradict."

At this point, O'Brien decided to throw in his own involvement. Harry was pleased with how easily the information was being handed to them.

"It was later that same year that Julian and I found out Section 31 was responsible for the disease afflicting the Founders, including Odo. We conceived a plan to get the cure from them, which succeeded, and we found out a lot more about the organisation along the way. Unfortunately, it wasn't enough to destroy them."

B'Elanna and Harry couldn't have been happier. It appeared they had finally found a source of some useful information.

"Can you tell us more about what you found out?" B'Elanna asked. "Start from the very beginning, assume we know nothing."

"Well," O'Brien began, "they're an organisation a little like the Romulan Tal Shiar, or the former Cardassian Obsidian Order, only this lot started out as part of Starfleet..."

The information poured out of him. How they were now operating independently, but still in what they believed to be the Federation's best interests, and the depths to which some of the conspiracies ran, were amongst the gems to be told by both officers. None of the information was recent, so there was no mention of the Sernaix, but this didn't dampen Harry's enthusiasm by much. Between them, or even individually, Bashir and O'Brien were the most informative source they had questioned yet.

When they finally ran out of steam, Harry scanned Engineering to signal to Seven that she could return to them and rescue her from Quark's company. However, she was nowhere to be seen, and neither was the troublesome Ferengi. Sometime during their conversation they had both left the department, leaving Harry with the uneasy feeling that he owed Seven, and owed her big, for doing such a good job.

As he too left Engineering with B'Elanna, having thanked Bashir and O'Brien, he started to wonder what he could possibly do for someone as independent and needless as Seven to make it up to her.

\*\*\*

Janeway and Chakotay's tour of Voyager had reached Deck 3, which meant one thing - their own quarters. Kathryn was almost afraid to see what had been done. It was one thing trying to talk the Doctor down in Sickbay, but now she found herself with the possibility of a similar situation her sympathy for him increased. What would she do if she didn't like the portrayal of her own life onboard Voyager? With her position as it was at the moment, she wasn't too sure she would have the power to do anything at all.

They rounded the last corner only to almost walk straight into Tal Celes as she exited the captain's quarters. Celes stopped short, her face turning bright red at the embarrassment of being caught nosing through the quarters of her superior officer. She immediately began to apologise.

"Captain, I am so sorry. It's just, I never..."

"It's okay!" Kathryn cut the younger woman off mid-sentence. "There's no need to apologise for being in my old quarters, they're free for anyone to visit these days."

"I know, it's just, it feels like such an intrusion. It's one thing being in someone's quarters when invited, but walking through the home of someone you know, examining their belongings, whether replicas or not, it's just all so... so... but I never spent much time on the officers' deck, not on any ship, and I was curious to see what they were like. It seemed like such a good opportunity, but now you're here and I feel like... I don't know what I feel like..."

Celes' nervousness was coming out in her rapid, rambling speech, and Kathryn again felt the need to reassure her.

"Don't be silly," Kathryn started. "Over the coming years thousands of people are going to be walking through these rooms, examining every small detail in an attempt to learn more about our crew. You have as much right to be in those quarters as any of them. Even I have no more or less right to be in them now, don't trouble yourself about it."

"Thank you, Captain," Celes replied, though she still sounded unconvinced. "I'll be going now." With that, she walked swiftly away.

"You handled that well, Kathryn," Chakotay observed. "Don't try to tell me again you aren't good at talking people down."

"If you're referring to what I said earlier about the Doctor, this is different." Chakotay remained silent, thinking it best not to argue, and Kathryn continued. "Celes has shown a lot of promise over the past few years, I hope she can find some success now that we finally made it back home."

"Me too," agreed Chakotay, "she deserves it. They all do. Now, how about we take a look at what they did here then?"

Chakotay offered Kathryn his arm, and she linked her own through it, as they walked into her old quarters.

As they walked into the unknown...

\*\*\*

Sek and Tuvok sat alone in the younger man's study. T'Meni had finished her meal, and T'Pel had taken her out into the gardens for a walk with the intention of giving her husband some time with his son.

"I just remembered," started Sek, "I intended to show you one of my manuscripts."

He rose from his chair and crossed to a cabinet under the window, which once opened revealed a neat row of musical scores printed on real paper. In the corner of his eye, Sek noticed his father's raised eyebrow. It was an old-fashioned, illogical way to store the transcripts. To his credit, Sek wasn't phased by his father's scrutiny. He paid the unspoken question no heed at all, and continued his search for the piece he was looking for.

After a few minutes more, he pulled out a particularly well-worn bundle and handed it to his father.

"This is my best received construct to date."

Tuvok opened the pages, and after a few minutes' perusal commented, "Impressive."

Sek touched a screen to activate his computer, and then requested,

"Play music file 'Sek omega 4'."

A haunting melody filled the room, played on a combination of pipes and vulcan drums. Both father and son were silent as the music continued, each lost in their own thoughts as the tune swelled around them. Eventually, it was Tuvok that broke the silence.

"Where did you take your inspiration from?"

"I composed this piece after a day spent in isolation, meditating on the plains about five kilometres from our town. The melody grew from my thoughts on that day, and I spent the next six days committing it to record in this room. It was a further four months until I was happy that it was as it should be."

"And you say it was well received."

"Yes, a group of touring musicians requested permission to add this piece to their repertoire. I agreed, and since that time it has been performed across our planet and beyond. The recording you are listening to was taken from a performance in the Highlands of Scotland."

As the piece came to its conclusion, Tuvok commented,

"You have made a wise decision. You are obviously skilled at your chosen craft."

Sek nodded in acknowledgement and appreciation at his father's approval.

"May I hear it again?" Tuvok requested.

Sek instructed the computer to repeat the playback, and once again the only sound to be heard in the room was the music. As it drew to its end for a second time T'Pel quietly entered the room, having returned from the garden with T'Meni.

"Tuvok," she began, "it is time for us to be leaving."

Tuvok glanced at the chronometer on Sek's desk and rose from his chair, agreeing that it was time for them to be moving on. Sek, Tuvok and T'Pel moved out into the main room of the house again, where T'Meni was waiting to say her goodbyes.

"I will see you again soon," Tuvok addressed his granddaughter. T'Meni merely nodded, and walked with her father and grandparents to the door.

"We will visit you at your house soon," spoke Sek, "so that you may tell us of your journey. My wife will accompany us then."

"You are always welcome," replied T'Pel, as she and her husband turned to walk home.

\*\*\*

In contrast to the rest of the ship, the Mess Hall was brimming with life and energy. In keeping with its appearance in their days in the Delta Quadrant and the Bubble, it seemed that the room couldn't help but be the centre of Voyager's social universe. There were maybe ten or fifteen people present, most of them former members of Voyager's crew. The numbers were smaller than they often had been in its heyday, but bearing in mind the actual numbers of people present on the ship in total it was a definite majority. It was certainly more people than Kathryn and Chakotay had seen in one place all day.

As they scanned the room upon entry, Chakotay saw one of his former colleagues from his Academy days and went over to speak with him, leaving Kathryn standing just inside the door. She wasn't standing there long before a small bundle of energy came rushing up to her shouting,

"Captain!"

From across the room, Naomi Wildman had seen her former captain come into the room and was now dragging a Ktarian male over to meet her. Kathryn assumed this was Naomi's father, though somehow they had not yet been properly introduced. As Naomi screeched to a halt in front of her, Kathryn smiled down and said hello.

"Naomi, how are you?"

"Good, thank you Captain. I'm showing my dad around the ship, we just went to the bridge and after this we're going to my quarters." Looking up at her father, she continued, "This is Captain Janeway. Captain, this is Greskrendtregk." Naomi stumbled slightly over the name which was still quite foreign to her, and entirely foreign to Kathryn who didn't even attempt to repeat it.

"Nice to meet you," was what she settled for in the end.

"You too," Greskrendtregk replied, "I have heard a lot about you from Naomi." This was an understatement. Since Naomi had been living with him, Greskrendtregk had heard nothing but



tales about Voyager and her heroic captain. The hero worship had been obvious, but the genuine affection between the captain and his daughter had not been apparent to him until this moment, finally seeing them together.

"Naomi," Kathryn addressed the young girl, "what have you been telling him about me?"

"Nothing bad, I promise!" Naomi looked so sincere Kathryn found it a struggle not to laugh. "I was just telling him how good a captain you were, and how I was your assistant, probably the youngest Captain's Assistant in Starfleet!"

"Don't forget the best," Kathryn smiled at Naomi and then altered her gaze to address the girl's father. "Naomi was very good at her job, I was lucky to have her. You have every reason to be proud of her."

"I am," Greskrendtregk replied. He looked down at his daughter, who was now staring at the floor, her cheeks bright pink as a blush crept up her face.

Just then the doors to Kathryn's left opened again, and B'Elanna and Harry rushed in. They had just spoken to someone who had seen the captain enter with Chakotay, and having been hoping to catch up with her all day they had decided they couldn't let this opportunity pass them by.

"Captain," B'Elanna started, "I'm sorry to interrupt, but there's something Harry and I wanted to discuss with you."

Kathryn turned to apologise to Naomi and Greskrendtregk, but they had already turned to leave, assuming from her dramatic that entrance B'Elanna had some important business to discuss. As her she was looking on, Naomi glanced back and gave her captain a smile and a wave. Kathryn then turned back to her former Chief Engineer.

"It seems you have my full attention, so what is it?"

"Not here, outside." Harry and B'Elanna turned and walked back into the corridor, leaving Kathryn with no choice but to follow. By the time the doors had closed behind them and the three had slipped into a small alcove around the corner, Kathryn's suspicions were running high.

"We wanted to ask what you knew about something, Captain." Harry still lacked the directness that B'Elanna had displayed earlier.

"It's about an organisation that until recently, we never even knew existed." B'Elanna was also beating her way carefully around the subject, now that she was faced with her former captain. Kathryn recognised this, and decided to push on.

"Spit it out, B'Elanna. What organisation?"

"Section 31."

It took Kathryn a moment to recover.

"Section 31? What are you doing digging for information about them?"

"So you know something?"

"Answer my question first."

"There's a link between Section 31 and the Sernaix. Our involvement started after Seven's mind was occupied by a Sernaix ship-mind, and during that time..."

B'Elanna went on to explain to Captain Janeway everything that had happened to them regarding the Sernaix and the hints of involvement with Section 31, in as brief a summary as possible. She added what Dr Bashir and Chief O'Brien had told them earlier that day, and by the time she had finished Kathryn Janeway was, for once in her life, utterly speechless. After some pause, Harry Kim spoke up for the first time since B'Elanna had started explaining.

"So I guess you don't know any more than we do."

"No," Kathryn replied, "I did know of Section 31's existence, and some of what you've related to me just now, but nowhere near as much as you've managed to uncover. I'm afraid I can't help you."

"That's okay, Captain, we struck a lucky break with the doctor and the chief being here today."

"You certainly did. Can I ask you both something?"

"Sure."

"Of course."

B'Elanna and Harry replied simultaneously.

"Could you keep me informed of anything else you find out?" Janeway requested.

"You'll be the first to know," assured Harry.

"Well, as near the first as possible," amended B'Elanna, and the three friends shared a smile.

"Well, if you'll excuse me, Chakotay and I have a tour to finish." Kathryn excused herself, and then walked away down the corridor to re-enter the Mess Hall.

Behind her, Harry and B'Elanna headed off in the opposite direction.

"I guess we're unlikely to find out any more today," Harry commented.

"You're probably right. Care to take a look around the captain's quarters while we're onboard?" B'Elanna's smile was mischievous, as though she was going to uncover her captain's deepest darkest secrets.

"Sure," Harry grinned. "After all, not many officers get to nose around their captain's quarters with no chance of being reprimanded as a result."

Laughing, they headed off to the turbolift.

\*\*\*

In Cargo Bay Two, a lone figure walked amongst the exhibits.

Appropriately, the bay had been transformed into a display detailing all of Voyager's dealings with the Borg. From the first detection of Borg vessels on their sensors, to an account of all the publicly available knowledge about their return to the Alpha Quadrant, every encounter was mentioned.

Seven of Nine, however, was not interested in these subjects. Her only interest was in the wall dedicated to herself and each of the other former Borg that Voyager and her captain had taken under their wings. Stretched across the wall, much as they had been when they had been operational, was a line of regeneration alcoves. Of course, for the purposes of this display all pertinent operational components had been removed, but the appearance was still authentic.

It surprised Seven how sentimental she could be when presented with such a sight. This room held many memories for her, some of them the earliest she possessed as a human individual. Her memories before assimilation were still relatively few, and it was sometimes odd to think that her life as a human really did begin in early adulthood. People often assumed, due to her vast technical knowledge, that she was older, wiser, than she really was; but when she was alone, she could admit to herself that really, particularly emotionally, she still had a lot to learn.

Unexpectedly, a lump formed in her throat when she came to the display about the Borg children that they had left behind. It made her wonder whether Icheb had seen what had been written about his former companions. Next time she saw him, she would ask him. She knew he would want to come and read what had been said.

Lost in her thoughts and memories, Seven was unaware of the length of time she spent wandering about the exhibits. Such reminiscence was a new experience for her, an experience that she was coming to feel a need to share. She found herself surprised at the depth of feeling that could be evoked by what was essentially, just a big room.

She was startled out of her thoughts by a group of young crewmen piling noisily through the doors, seemingly oblivious to her presence. With one last look around her, and a tentative hand laid on a picture of herself with Icheb and Naomi, she turned around and left.

One day, she would bring her aunt back to see this room. She hoped it would help to explain to her what her life had been like, and what she hoped to achieve in the future.

\*\*\*

Kathryn and Chakotay moved from the bridge into her Ready Room, the final point of their tour. The Ready Room was empty, affording them the first privacy they had had since the lowest decks of the ship.

"It's been quite a day," commented Kathryn.

"It has." Chakotay looked down at his boots as he continued. "To be honest, I was a little worried about how you would handle today."

"So was I," Kathryn admitted. "It never seemed like such a big thing before, but this morning, and I don't know, with lots of things recently, it's like... distant elephants."

"Elephants, Kathryn?"

"You've not heard that expression? I just assumed... well, Tuvok explained it to me, and I thought that if a vulcan knew it, well..."

"It looks like you're going to have to elaborate."

"The way I remember it, it's about things appearing small when they're not immediate, you don't have to think about them too much so they seem like they're somehow not important. Yet when these same things become your present and are right in front of you, they're a much bigger deal, in the same way that an elephant appears to be much bigger when it's standing right in front of you."

"Yet the elephant is small when he's just coming over the horizon. That makes a lot more sense than I thought it was going to."

Kathryn let out a laugh. "I felt the same way when Tuvok first explained it to me."

"So which are the elephants this time?"

"Oh, I don't know." Kathryn walked up to the windows of her old sanctuary, and looked out over the surrounding grounds. "A lot of things. What would happen to Voyager once we were all back. I considered it, but I never gave the matter too much of my time. Somehow, I always assumed she would continue to fly. This idea, the museum, never crossed my mind; and its meaning for the ship, for all of us, didn't strike me until today.

"This museum is going to be here long after we're all gone. It's going to tell everyone all about our journey; who we were, what we fought for, after none of us are around to tell the stories ourselves."

"What's brought this on?" Chakotay asked. "I'm still hoping that's a long way into the future!"

"I'm not sure," Kathryn replied, "maybe it has something to do with Molly."

"What about Molly?"

Kathryn turned back to face her friend. "My mother had to have her put down. I didn't get to see her before she was gone."

"Kathryn, I'm so sorry." Chakotay walked over to Kathryn, intending to offer her comfort; but when he got there, he found himself uncertain as to how to act. Kathryn was no longer his commanding officer. There was no good reason, no protocol stopping him from just taking her into his arms, but it didn't feel right. Maybe it was the setting, maybe something else, but he wasn't comfortable.

Maybe it was Kathryn herself. She had been evasive when he mentioned the future earlier that morning. But then maybe that had had something to do with their being onboard Voyager too. She had been comfortable enough to seek comfort with him as they watched the ship dock at Utopia Planetia, it had seemed as though things may finally have been starting to change. But now, today, she had pulled back again.

"Listen to me," Kathryn's self-deprecating voice interrupted his thoughts, "getting all emotional. It's been a good day. I want to thank you for sharing it with me."

Kathryn held out her hand and attempted to lace her fingers through Chakotay's, but to his surprise he now found himself pulling back. The possibility that it was their location, the implications of this room, came rushing back to him, but he just couldn't get past it. A look of hurt briefly crossed Kathryn's features, before she schooled them back into a close approximation of her captain's mask.

"Anyway, I have to be going." She recovered her composure well. "I'm supposed to be at my mother's for dinner."

"Pass on my regards," Chakotay requested, and she brushed past him on her brisk walk to the door. Before he was able to properly take in what had just happened, Chakotay found himself alone in the Ready Room. He glanced around, taking what would now be a rare opportunity to remember the times he and Kathryn had shared in this room. He remembered early arguments about the post of Chief Engineer, the first of many, but always resolved. He remembered one of their first moments of friendship, as they considered the possibility of crewmen remaining with the 37's and what it would mean for their journey.

As the years went by, countless hours, countless decisions argued and agreed on and finalised, and lives changed for better, and for worse.

To many they had talked to, the thought of being stranded for eight years was unthinkable, the greatest tragedy to have befallen anyone they knew. But it hadn't all been bad. They had lived through experiences that no other could imagine, and had forged close friendships, relationships

that had survived one challenge after another. He couldn't help but feel that this was something that no one but the crew of Voyager would ever be able to fully understand.

\*\*\*

"Naomi, NO!"

Icheb entered the Wildmans' old quarters to find Naomi about to remove the Flotter doll from the exhibit in her room. Startled, Naomi turned around far too quickly and as a consequence the whole exhibit went tumbling to the floor. Almost before she'd fully turned to face Icheb she then swung back around to survey the damage, and a startled gasp escaped her lips as she realised what had just happened.

"Icheb, look what you made me do!" Naomi was obviously annoyed with him, and pointedly didn't look at him as she started to pick up the components of the display. Icheb instead came over to her, and started to help her tidy up the mess.

"I'm sorry Naomi, I did not intend to startle you. However, you should not be playing with the exhibit."

"I wasn't going to play with it," the small girl replied as indignantly as was possible, "I was going to take it to the museum's owners and tell them that this doll isn't accurate."

"In what way? It looks like an adequate representation for the purposes of this exhibit."

"It's supposed to look like my Flotter, but this one is brand new. Mine is more floppy than this one, and there's a rip in the fabric of his foot where I caught it on the buckle of my shoe once. If this ship is supposed to show people what it was like for us, the Flotter should look like mine, not any old doll you can replicate from the database."

Icheb was actually impressed with Naomi's argument, but all the same she shouldn't have touched the exhibit and he proceeded to tell her so.

"That's not important Naomi, you still shouldn't remove items from the display."

"It is important!" Naomi cried.

Icheb was obviously going to have to try a different tack.

"I think you should let someone know about the mistake," he continued, "but you don't need to take Flotter with you to do so. If you did, those people who came to see your quarters in the meantime would miss out on seeing him completely."

This time it was Naomi's turn to be impressed, and she told him so.

"You're right," she said, "I'll leave him here then. But that's not all they got wrong."

Curious as to what else was inaccurate - Icheb himself had not yet had a chance to survey his surroundings - he waited for her to continue.

"Ratty didn't get a mention anywhere. Not here, or on the whole ship. I checked. When I couldn't find anything in here, I looked in the cargo bay, and then I checked with the museum computer. Ratty isn't there at all."

Icheb had spent enough time with Naomi to know that Ratty was very important to her. Luckily, he had also spent enough time around her to have some idea how to diffuse this situation, as it was very unlikely that anything would be added to the museum about the small creature who should never have been on a starship in the first place. Children on generational ships throughout the

fleet could start to pick up stray creatures if they found out about Ratty, and he knew their respective captains would not be thankful for it.

"Maybe it's because he was only here a short time," Icheb began, "and there are so many things to show everyone that there wasn't space for him. Besides," and here came his trump card, "does it not make Ratty more special to you if not many people know about him? Other children may all want to call their pets Ratty, then yours would no longer be the only one."

Naomi was quiet for a minute as she thought about this. Maybe he was right; Ratty was special, and he was hers. Well, hers and Mommy's. But hers mostly. She didn't want other Ratty's, she only wanted the one she had. So maybe it was better that he wasn't in the museum.

Whilst Naomi was quiet, it occurred to Icheb that there was no sign of her father, and they had long since put the exhibit back together so she should probably be going to find him.

"Naomi, aren't you supposed to be showing your father around the ship?"

"I was, and I will be again in a minute," she replied. "I just wanted to look around here on my own. Especially once I noticed there were things wrong. So I sent him on to engineering, we haven't been there yet and there's lots there for him to see while I'm gone."

"How long have you been here alone?"

"I'm not sure now, I sat beside my bed for a while thinking. It's probably time for me to go after him now."

"Yes," Icheb agreed, "I think that would be a good idea."

"I am going to speak to someone about Flotter though." Naomi started to walk towards the door as she spoke. "Maybe if I take an adult with me they'll take more notice anyway."

"It is possible," Icheb replied.

Naomi turned around and said goodbye before she half ran, half walked out of the door, leaving Icheb behind her.

"Goodbye, Naomi," he replied, as the doors closed behind her, leaving him alone to continue his tour.

\*\*\*

It had been one hell of a day. Kathryn Janeway had been back in her apartment for over an hour, yet still she couldn't make herself sit still and relax for more than five minutes at a time. She wasn't even clear what had her so agitated, she just knew that everything was not right in her world, leading to her current restlessness and the resultant pacing around her quarters.

Her tour around Voyager had left her with mixed feelings. Seeing everyone's quarters had reminded her about the friends she was missing now they had all gone their separate ways. She may have tried to keep herself apart from the others, tried to remain the captain, but the camaraderie between herself and her crew had still kept her going over the years. Now it was gone, her crew were moving on with their lives. Somehow, they seemed to be leaving her behind.

At the same time, the tour had reminded her of all they had achieved on their journey, and just how hard her crew had worked to get them home safely. It had also reinforced her desire to get back to what she herself did best - captaining a starship. She had heard what she'd been told, she knew that the chances were slim-to-none that it would ever happen again, but that just served to make her more determined to do something about it.

Subconsciously, her pacing found her in front of her communications unit, and before she thought too hard about it she plugged in the code for Admiral Paris's home terminal. It was after-hours, but he was one admiral she could always get hold of, day or night - it helped to be in with the family.

His face popped on the screen less than thirty seconds later, and Kathryn found herself facing her friend and superior officer with no argument lined up. However, this wasn't the first time she had had to construct an argument on the spot, and she hoped it wouldn't be the last. She waited while Owen greeted her and commented on the late hour, then launched straight in.

"Owen, Admiral, I had to contact you again about my next posting..."

"Kathryn," he interrupted, "we've spoken about this before..."

"I know," Kathryn interjected, "but nothing seems to be happening, and I have no idea what I can do to improve my prospects. My career is important to me, right now it's not far from being everything I have, yet I can't even be sure if I do have it. You know me, Owen, you know what I do best. You know I can't spend my life working on small projects from Headquarters, not thrown out of the 'fleet but not really serving anymore, either. It's convenient for them, that's all, to have me out of the way. No public uproar from the heroic captain being thrown out of service, but they don't have to deal with me in charge of a vessel. What is it, are they too afraid I'll run shotgun after so long answering to no one but myself? I served for years before we were thrown into the Delta Quadrant, does my past record count for nothing?"

Kathryn stopped to catch her breath, not sure where that entire speech had come from. She knew better than some of the things she had said, and started to wonder if maybe she should have thought a little more before contacting Admiral Paris. It was too late now though, time to just deal with it.

"Are you finished, Captain?"

Owen's calling her by her rank got her attention, and she reflexively came to attention before replying,

"Yes, Sir."

"Then let me speak. I can't say any more to you than I have already, and for that matter than any other of your superiors has already. Frankly, I'm glad you let your little tirade out at me, because that kind of insubordination could get you in more trouble than you've been in already."

"I'm sorry, Owen," Kathryn's shoulders sagged a little as she continued, "I'm just frustrated. I can do so much more than they're letting me. Can't you tell me anything?"

"I know how you're feeling, but I'm afraid what you know stands. I can tell you nothing that you haven't already been told, or worked out for yourself."

"But..."

"That's it, Kathryn. Nothing else. Is that clear?"

"Yes." The tone of Kathryn's voice reflected her dejection. It was becoming clear that Owen either could not, or would not give her any more information. "I'm sorry to have bothered you so late."

"That's okay, I can understand your feelings on this, though it may not seem like I do. Goodnight, Kathryn."

Owen Paris terminated the connection before Kathryn had a chance to reply, leaving her staring at a blank screen. Collecting her thoughts, she moved through to her bedroom. She was feeling a

growing urge to get away for a day or two; take some time to think about her career, and her personal life as well. Those members of her crew she had spoken to today were at least moving forward with that part of their lives, almost without exception.

She would go out to her family's cabin near Lake George, maybe take a walk along the waterfront tomorrow - it would be too late to do so by the time she made it there this evening. Kathryn hadn't been anywhere near Lake George since returning to Earth, though it had always been one of her favourite spots. The holodeck recreation was fun, but never lived up to the real thing. Holoimages rarely did.

It didn't take Kathryn long to pack what she needed into a duffle bag, and she was just heading out of her apartment when she remembered she was supposed to have been at her mother's for dinner... two hours ago. The plans had always been tentative, Kathryn never being sure if something was going to come up at work to prevent her attending, so she could only assume that her mother had presumed this to be the case and not bothered attempting to contact her.

Not wishing to get into a long conversation, Kathryn rattled off a short text-only message and sent it to her mother's terminal, explaining where she was going and apologising for her absence at dinner. Gretchen probably wouldn't get it until the morning, but it made Kathryn feel better all the same. Taking a final look around at her apartment, she stepped out into the night, and locked the door behind her.

\*\*\*

Dusk was starting to fall on Vulcan, and the winds were picking up once more. Out on the desert plains the dust began its nightly dance, and Tuvok was struck by the familiarity of it all. Strange, considering how long it had been since he had last walked alone, taken a night to meditate out here.

He was having a hard time deciding whether today had been easier or harder than he had expected. His first meeting with his granddaughter had not been as open and welcoming as it might have been, but then he hadn't expected it to be that way. At the same time, it had not left him with the sense of enormity that he had anticipated.

It had left him with a renewed will to reacquaint with the remainder of his family. So much time had passed since he had seen his other sons, Varith and Elieth, or his daughter Asil. He had been in contact with them during those last years in the Delta Quadrant, when some communication was possible, but their time in the Bubble had again been devoid of any contact with the people back home. He had missed much in his children's lives, a fact he had not fully appreciated until this day and his meeting with T'Meni.

It occurred to him that now he was back on Vulcan it would be far too easy to lose touch with the events concerning his Voyager crewmates. There were few he could call friend, rather, his heritage dictated that there really was only one onboard that ship whom he could truly consider in that light.

Kathryn Janeway.

He had known her for a number of years, had seen her mature as both a captain and a person. And between this woman and himself there had developed something rare between their two races - a close and enduring friendship.

There had been many periods over the previous eight years when she had caused him concern. Her capacity to care for her crew was one of her strongest assets, yet it had also had occasion to be one of her failings. Her emotional decisions had at many times defied all logic, but he had to concede, she had gotten them out of every situation they had found themselves in. She had



almost combined the roles of captain and surrogate mother to many, and this he found to be an admirable quality.

As Tuvok approached the location at which he planned to spend the night, he stopped to look up to the skies. His thoughts widened to the other crewmen he had served with over the years, and he began to consider all that he had learnt on Voyager and all that he still had to learn. As the sun set over the horizon, his last thought of the day was that he had travelled perhaps the greatest journey of his life, but that now he was home, he had a new journey to begin.

\*\*\*

Harry trudged along beside B'Elanna, having been invited back to her apartment for dinner. She had an amazing tendency to set a pace much faster than was comfortable for him, even at the end of a long day spent walking every inch of their old ship and further. Frankly, he was exhausted, and was trying to come up with the best way to tell her so.

Completely oblivious to his discomfort, B'Elanna babbled on about their day.

"We may not have got useful information out of many people, but I think what Dr Bashir told us was worth the effort alone."

"B'Elanna, we mustn't forget that what he knew is now years old. Things change, it may be that nothing he told us is worth a damn." Harry's exhaustion was playing on his spirits.

"I can't believe what he and Chief O'Brien told us will get us nowhere. Things may have changed, but we have a place to start, somewhere from which to follow a trail. We didn't even know any definite names before, they gave us Sloan's name on a plate."

Arguing wasn't getting him anywhere, so Harry stayed quiet.

"We have to keep looking though," B'Elanna continued, "we don't have nearly enough information yet. I won't stop until we know exactly what is going on with the Sernaix, and if there's something we should be doing to... well, I'm not precisely sure what we should be doing, I just have an unbelievable feeling that following through on this is the right place to start."

The door to the Paris' apartment couldn't have been a more welcome sight to the young lieutenant. B'Elanna let them both in, and called out to Tom as they deposited their jackets on a convenient chair. Entering the living room, Harry saw Miral playing with a replica of a Romulan Warbird, and sat himself down to join her.

Tom emerged from the kitchen with a smile on his face, and walked over to kiss his wife hello.

"One extra for dinner then?" he asked.

"I hope that's not a problem," Harry spoke from his position on the floor.

"Not at all," Tom replied, "I was replicating it anyway. Just going through my files to decide what to make."

Harry stifled a laugh, Tom never changed. He wasn't sure he'd ever seen him actually cook. A cry from Miral brought his attention back to the young girl, and he started to fly the warbird over and around her head, her small hands reaching out for it every time it came close enough. Little giggles escaped her lips, and made her small frame shake. Neither Miral nor Harry noticed Tom and B'Elanna leave them.

\*\*\*

The sky was overcast, and the incessant drizzle just added to the grey atmosphere as Kathryn approached the shores of Lake George. The atmosphere suited her mood well. Sleep had not been easy to reach last night, and she wasn't altogether sure the sleep she had managed to get had been worth the effort to get there. It was true that she rarely awoke feeling completely rested, but this morning was worse than most. She hoped that the fresh air - no matter how cold it was - would help to revive her, maybe get her thoughts running clearly again.

Touring Voyager yesterday had brought back many memories. Good times, bad times, but all of them in the past. Now, standing and staring out over the choppy waters of Lake George, it was really coming home to her that that part of her life was over, and it was time to move onto the next challenge. If only she knew what that was. Starfleet, as had been evidenced last night, were being less than forthcoming about her next assignment. She hoped this was because they had something exciting planned, something that they couldn't announce too early in case it all fell through and there was nothing left to tell people about. This was what she hoped. What she more suspected to be the case was that Starfleet just didn't have a clue yet quite what they were going to do with her. They had made it as obvious as they could that she would never captain a starship again. Just what else could they do with someone with her experience? Yes, she knew her science; enough to get her through life onboard a vessel anyway. But she hadn't had the opportunity, thanks to both the demands of command and a sheer lack of actual data due to their geographical position, to keep up with the latest research and achievements. To go back into the scientific world that command had plucked her from would take more work than many people assumed. She just did a good job with the appearance of knowledge, that was all.

Command was the obvious place for her.

A ship was the obvious place for her.

It was where she wanted to be.

Kathryn's thoughts were interrupted when she thought she heard the bark of a dog. As far as she had seen on her walk to the edge of the lake there had been no one else about, so she was curious to see if she was still alone. Scanning in every direction, she couldn't see anything but open spaces and the shadows of buildings, the area deserted by people in preference to the warmth and comfort of an indoor space. The man tying a small dog to a tree was hidden from her view by a large bush and the extra cover of the drizzle. She decided she must have imagined the bark, as from her point of view there was no sign of any animal that could have produced the sound. Molly had been on Kathryn's mind a lot recently, maybe it was just her imagination playing tricks on her.

Molly; now there was a sore subject. Kathryn had half expected her long-time companion to pass away before she ever made it back to Earth and Indiana, but to her surprise and delight, the old dog had hung on until she had been reunited with her owner. Then a cruel twist of fate stole her away before they really got to spend any time together. Molly may have been alive to see her owner's return, but she never lived long enough for Kathryn to have the opportunity to really enjoy spending time with her again.

A branch broke behind her, and this time Kathryn was sure the sound had been real and not her imagination. Turning quickly, almost too quickly to retain her balance, she couldn't hide her surprise at seeing Chakotay standing there.

"Wha..."

"Kathryn." Chakotay extended his hand to her, in which there was a single peach-coloured rose.

"What's this for? You're a few days off my birthday." Kathryn took the rose from Chakotay and inhaled its scent.

"It's not for your birthday, Kathryn, and I'm well aware of when your birthday is."

Kathryn glanced down at the flower in her hands again, before looking back up at Chakotay.

"So what are you doing out here?"

"I came looking for you. After yesterday, I couldn't leave things like they were. I tried to find you at your apartment, and then at your mother's because I remembered you mentioned your dinner there, but I got no answer at either place."

"How did you find me here?" Kathryn asked.

"I tried your office, and when you weren't there this was the only place I could think of that you might have gone to. If you hadn't been here, I wouldn't have known where to try next."

Kathryn let out a gentle laugh. "If you ever have to go looking for me again, the next place to try would be my sister's house in Ireland."

"I'll try to remember that."

There was a silent pause now, as neither one of them knew how to bring up what they both wanted to discuss. Kathryn continued to fiddle with the rose in her hands, until Chakotay finally spoke.

"Are you still afraid to be alone with me?"

"No!" Kathryn replied quickly, eager to reassure him. "What makes you think that?"

"You were at one time, I know that. I heard your thoughts, remember?"

"Yes, but things are different now. I don't have the same reasons to be afraid. There's no command structure to follow, no reason to stop myself from acting or feeling how I please. But, yesterday, I got the feeling that maybe you weren't feeling that way. You pulled away."

"In the Ready Room? Honestly, I'm not sure what happened there. I didn't mean for that to happen, I had just been thinking about how you had seemed distant to me earlier that day. And then, when you reached out to me..."

"Distant elephants?"

"The elephants look pretty big right now."

Kathryn bowed her head, unable to continue to look into his face, his eyes. Somehow, she knew that something was just about to change. Yet at the same time, she was unable to be the one to change it, unable to look at Chakotay and face what she hoped was about to happen.

She continued to stare down at the ground until she felt Chakotay's fingers gently lifting her head upwards, raising her line of sight so that she was looking at him once more. Brushing a stray lock of hair behind her ear, he slowly brought his lips to hers and kissed her. The kiss was gentle, loving, tender. Their arms found their way around each other, and closed any remaining distance between them. It was both everything and nothing that either of them had ever imagined. And it was over far too quickly.

As the kiss broke, they stood with their arms still wrapped around each other, their foreheads resting together. The first words to be spoken came from Kathryn, as she whispered "I love you," just loud enough to be heard above the wind.

Chakotay didn't reply; he couldn't. The emotions swirling inside him forbade him from saying anything, so he just kept holding Kathryn as a single tear escaped from his eye.

Then as suddenly as he had earlier appeared behind her, Chakotay pulled away, grabbing Kathryn by the hand and saying to her,

"I just remembered something!"

Intrigued, and with no real choice in the matter, Kathryn followed. They appeared to her to be heading towards a large bush. In fact, she could see nothing else in the area. However, as they got closer, Kathryn began to hear the yapping of a small dog, and she began to wonder if she really had heard a dog earlier when she had thought she was alone.

As they rounded the bush, she saw a Jack Russell Terrier tied to the tree behind it. As she crouched down in front of it, Chakotay moved to untie it. Holding the small dog's lead and coming back around to join Kathryn, he handed the lead to her.

"This is for you."

Kathryn was overwhelmed, and for the second time in two days found herself speechless.

"I... I don't... for me?" The grin she flashed at Chakotay reached her eyes.

Pleased with her reaction, Chakotay too smiled a full smile, the dimples on his cheeks emphasising his pleasure at seeing her so happy.

"She's for you. I was originally going to save her for a few days, but I couldn't wait."

Kathryn knelt down in front of her new pet, and let the dog familiarise herself with her. Looking back up to Chakotay, she asked,

"Does she have a name?"

"No, not yet," he replied. "That's up to you."

"Well," Kathryn was now talking to the terrier, "what are we going to call you, eh? What do you want to be called?"

Kathryn continued to play with the dog, laughing freely for the first time in weeks, or maybe months. Not caring about the drizzle and the mud, she rolled around on the ground, gathering as much dirt on herself as she was on the dog. Chakotay took up a position leaning against the tree, and just enjoyed watching.

\*\*\*

Morning broke on Vulcan, and upon hearing the front door click shut T'Pel looked up from her book, and rose to meet her husband. She needed no words to discern the exhaustion in his features, so she led him into the kitchen and prepared one of his preferred blends of tea. It took a moment to brew, and whilst it did so she took in the peaceful demeanour behind the exhaustion. It appeared that, beyond the tired eyes, the day's events and the night's thoughts had done her husband some good. She knew that his reintroduction to their normal life was going to take time, but she also knew that the challenge would widen his experiences. She too would learn from joining him on his journey.

She poured their drinks and carried them, leading Tuvok towards their sofa. Here, they sat, and talked, as the first signs of morning appeared on the horizon, and a new day began.

Welcome home, Tuvok.

-----

Written by: LauraJo

Beta: Lin

Producers: Thinkey, Anne Rose and Coral