



Episode 8-6 – Yesterday's Love Story

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The summer night air was hot and sticky, its weight bearing down upon her shoulders as if it were a burden of some kind. It was, in a way, the way it was hard to move through its dense content without a small bead of sweat forming at your brow. The several layers of dark, heavy fabric draped across the lines of her body did not help matters, either, simply adding to the dense air's burden upon her shoulders. At least, she noted with a twinge of satisfaction, she had chosen to wear a dress with far shorter sleeves than she had intended, as well as keeping her hair off her neck, or this journey from the huddled masses of people would never have been possible.

Her father's presence occupied the large space to her right. He was a large man, somewhat intimidating to those who had yet to experience his friendly demeanor. His face exuded confidence and finesse, but decked out in the gray uniform; he commanded a presence that you couldn't help but notice.

She was proud: proud of her father, proud of her state, proud of President Davis and the Army.

"It's dreadful out here," her father said. "Remind me again why we're here?"

She smiled. "Because, Daddy, you said the people were going to your head. Besides," she sighed, "I always enjoy a little peace and quiet with you."

Her father smiled. "This party is for you, honey, you and Thomas, and you're not even in there to enjoy it."

"I know," she said, her voice almost a whisper. She smiled again, this time with slightly less enthusiasm and slightly more of a sigh. Yes, she knew this party was for her, she had only been reminded about fifteen times today by her mother, her sister, Thomas' mother and sister, and now her father was jumping on the bandwagon. She knew there was no hope for her.

She returned her gaze to the darkened horizon line. The sun had set an hour ago, leaving small traces of light along the line where the sky and the land became one. On a not-too-distant patch of land, somewhere bordering the nearest edge of their property, she spotted the small lights, swaying back and forth.

"Daddy?" she asked, her eyes still fixed on the strange lights, "do you see those lights, along the West end?"

She glanced over to her father quick enough to see his eyes squint, his mind studying the strange illuminations. "Yes, they appear to be a line of men. I can't be quite sure at this distance."

"Perhaps your men are coming to offer their congratulations," she suggested with a smile. Her father led a regiment of 1000 men, and had wheedled his way out of duty for one night to attend his daughter's engagement party. He had joked earlier that some of the men would allow him to leave only if he allowed them to join him, a prospect she was not sure was entirely false.

"Perhaps," he replied.

Never one to pass up guests, she raised her arm, waving it back and forth. "Hello!" she called to the men walking along the property, "Boys! Care to join the party?"

The sound of eager footsteps could be heard approaching, and she turned to her father, a smile crossing her face at the contentment that was her father's face. But as the soldiers drew closer, she watched the contentment slip into surprise, and then horror.

"Sarah..." His tone was wispy, fluttered, a mannerism she would hardly expect from such a man as her father. She felt his hand grasp her bare, sticky arm, its grip urging her to move.

"Daddy?" she asked, confused at her father's sudden reaction.

"Those aren't my men," she heard him say as he attempted to pull her through the balcony doors. As she struggled to gain understanding of the situation, her eyes flicked towards the advancing men, and she, too, became a picture of horror, as the lights from the house fell upon the approaching men in blue coats.

Yankees.

Her back was turned when they started shooting; her first instinct was to duck, and she did. He was pulling her through the house, ahead of her, items falling off shelves as stray bullets hit them, shattering pieces of wood into splinters on the floor. His head turned to see the men, his whole body turned for just a split second, and he was in front of her, and then...he wasn't.

He was still holding her arm, and his fall dragged her down as well. Immediately she saw the red pooling under his clean gray uniform and near the hairline. Her reaction was to cry out, and she did.

"Daddy!" she cried, ducking her head as bullets continued to sail. She shook her father, but he remained limp on the floor. She gathered his head and upper body into her arms, herself now sitting, her beautiful dress spread across the floor and already stained with his blood. His head wound bled onto the bodice, but she didn't seem to notice. "Daddy?" She shook him again. "Daddy, wake up."

The finality of his response - or lack thereof - weighed upon her shoulders even as she felt the men entering the drawing room, their heavy footsteps vibrating as they walked along the wood floors. She felt them staring down at her. Her first thought was whether or not they were going to shoot her, too, her second being if the guests on the other side of the house were even aware of the gunfire.

"Is he..." she heard one of the men ask.

Her eyes never left the prone body. "Yes." Her voice was cold, harsh, qualities that surprised Sarah herself. She looked up at them, watched as they lowered their guns and bowed their heads, as if they were actually sorry for what they had done. Bastards.

She saw one of the soldiers in the back. "We're sorry," he said, and his innocence shattered the menace of the other soldiers. He looked as if he had just tagged along for the ride, which was a thought that made Sarah more disgusted. She felt no pity for the brown-haired Union soldier.

"Go back to hell," she barked.

The men, surprisingly, backed off, leaving all but the brown-haired one to stand, dumbstruck, at the site of all the blood and carnage he had inflicted. Sarah stared at him, her eyes narrowed as she studied him with anger. He seemed...familiar, in a way she couldn't place.

His eyes...

Kathryn Janeway awoke with a start.

Last night's rest had hardly been a restful one, and had claimed last night as yet another wasted night of sleep for Kathryn Janeway. The turbolift doors opened to reveal a bridge full of well-rested crew members, and she hated that she could not join them. Her dreams had been vivid in the past few weeks, and while vivid was sometimes nice, Janeway's definition of vivid did not include watching the same man die and the same woman cradle his corpse in her arms night after night.

As she did every morning after these peculiar dreams, she tried in vain to search her own memory banks, trying to place either of the hauntingly familiar faces to a person she had once met or known. The woman, whose delicate hands always held her father's dying body, held a level of familiarity Janeway associated with family members, though she couldn't place the woman as a cousin or nephew. The man, decked in a blue Union uniform, held familiarity as well, but for him, he seemed more a friend than a family member. Whatever he was, or had been, Janeway simply could not place the face.

Janeway was no expert on Earth history (although she wouldn't call herself ignorant either), but she had been able to pin down the time period of her peculiar dreams: the Civil War. Her past experience with Q had helped her assessment; she suspected her dreams were more likely the product of an overactive imagination working off weeks of sleep deprivation rather than Q's search for a good time.

The fact that she'd been called to the bridge a full hour before her duty shift began didn't seem to ease her fears of sleep deprivation. She had just sat down on her couch to enjoy a warm cup of coffee when Harry's hail came intruding into her quarters. It was just turning out to be one of those mornings, she thought.

"Harry," she said, having journeyed across the Bridge to the ensign's station.

She wasn't able to finish her sentence. She didn't need to. Harry could identify the look in Janeway's eye, the glimmer of annoyance at being dragged from her quarters early. But he couldn't help but smile.

"Sensors have picked up what appears to be an inhabited planetoid about two lightyears from here."

Janeway's face showed the awe and surprise she was feeling. "Two lightyears?" The ensign nodded. "Why didn't this show up on earlier scans?"

The ensign could only shrug. "It's as if it's just...there."

Janeway turned around. "Why does that not surprise me around here?" she commented quietly, hoping to keep the comment to herself, though she knew she hadn't succeeded, as the smiles of a few ensigns to her right caught her eye. Good, she thought, better to keep some humor around here.

She took her seat, nodding only briskly to Chakotay as she sat down, an acknowledgement of their recently strained relationship. She kept her eyes straight ahead, trained on the head of the lieutenant occupying the helm. It was an attempt to keep from locking eyes with the Commander, knowing full well such a brief confrontation could send her hint of a good mood back to where it came from.

"Ensign, can we hail them?"

There was a moment of pause before Harry answered. "There appears to be a small concentration of inhabitation on one of the western continents. I'm opening a channel."

Janeway took a breath, finally delivering her standard greeting.

The alien that appeared on the screen was, at first, somewhat menacing, and Janeway felt her throat constrict at the notation that they may have encountered yet another violent species. While only his upper body was visible (she wasn't sure which gender this alien represented, so she could only guess), Janeway could only assume this individual was very tall, and very slender. Sleek was a word she might have used.

The first thing she noticed were the dark eyes that somehow appeared to be glowing. In fact, she noticed, his entire green face seemed to give off a glow, much like an angel in Earth's ancient western religions. His mouth was small, and his nose was practically nonexistent, save for two small flaps between his eyes and mouth. Atop his long and narrow face was not hair, but rather a protruding ridge, which extended about two inches above his head, and, Janeway assumed, around the back. He wore what appeared to be a robe of some kind, which Janeway thought might bunch along the waist, though it was out of sight.

When he spoke, his voice was deep and yet soothing. "You are strangers, Captain Janeway of Voyager." The alien's calm and accurate comment soothed Janeway in a strange manner, and she could only nod a response. His mouth curled up in a gesture that Janeway thought resembled a smile. "You are not hostile toward us, so we welcome you. I am Supervisor Lokal, and we are the Inryeth."

Janeway sighed. It was always nice to see a friendly face. "Supervisor, we are curious why we didn't detect you earlier."

Lokal smiled again. "We are protective of our colony, Captain Janeway. We have many an enemy who would rather see us destroyed, and they have often employed the services of other vessels. Forgive us if we are too cautious, but Nareth is all my people have now."

Janeway nodded. "Of course."

Lokal's tone changed to one of concern. "Captain Janeway, your ship has seen much of this space in too little time. Perhaps a visit to our colony would provide a break from combat?"

Janeway sat, stunned. "How did you..."

Lokal once again smiled. "Forgive me, Captain Janeway, it appears I have acted rudely. My people have abilities...I believe you call them 'telepathic'? I am sorry if I have intruded."

Janeway sighed again, knowing somehow that Lokal meant no harm. Perhaps, she thought, I have 'abilities' of my own. "Supervisor, perhaps you could help us. We've been trying to identify this part of space using our available star charts, but we haven't had much luck. Since you are inhabitants of this space, would it be possible for you to provide us with more accurate star charts?"

Lokal contemplated the request for a moment, his face finally registering the faint beginnings of a smile. "In good time, Captain Janeway." He paused. "In the meantime, if you would assemble a group of your crew members, I would be happy to escort you on a tour of Nareth."

Janeway took the deflection of her question with a short sigh, then quickly smiled. "I'll send a team down to meet you, Supervisor. It's always nice to see a friendly face."

As the shimmer of the transporter faded, the first thing that hit Janeway was the humid air of the... her eyes surveyed the area, finally settling on "cave" as an appropriate title. Perhaps "underground tunnel system" was more accurate, seeing as the room they stood in branched off into five different portals, each one leading somewhere.

Janeway turned her head to survey the team that had beamed down with her. To her right, two ensigns from Engineering had removed their tricorders, and were scanning the cavern and surrounding tunnels, Janeway suspected. To her left stood Tuvok, his own tricorder out. Only Janeway remained a slave to her five senses.

The sound of footsteps crushing the small stones that covered the ground, and the shadow of a light from one of the adjoining tunnels, alerted Janeway to the approach of the colony's inhabitants. Leading the group from a tunnel directly in front of them were two tall aliens, both dressed in long brown robes, their heads bowed. In their hands they carried long rods, in which a light source of some kind was attached. It swung with each of their long footsteps.

Behind the light bearers, Supervisor Lokal walked, followed by three others Janeway could only assume were attendants. Janeway's earlier description of angelic qualities was only heightened as she saw these people in full regard. The group came to a stop in front of Janeway and her team, and she couldn't help but marvel at how they towered over the Voyager crew members, measuring something approaching seven feet, Janeway guessed. While the faces of the light bearers were hidden as they remained bowed, Lokal and the three others had glowing complexions.

All their robes were a dark brown, gathered at the waist by a belt of some kind. Janeway noticed Lokal's hands folded neatly across his torso, a sign of pleasure, she hoped.

"Captain Janeway," Lokal spoke, "I see you have brought friends."

Janeway smiled. "Yes, Supervisor. These are some of my crew members-"

She had meant to introduce the away team one by one to Lokal and his group, but the Supervisor's deep voice cut her off. "Ensign Molina and Ensign Ashmore," he said to the men on her left. His eyes fell upon Tuvok. "Lieutenant Commander Tuvok." Lokal smiled again, looking again at Janeway. "Welcome."

The away team stood stunned, and Lokal's smile soon faded. "I am so deeply sorry, Captain Janeway. We do not receive many visitors here."

Lokal then proceeded to introduce the group standing behind him, two of them, Janeway learned, were equitable to engineers. "With your permission, Captain Janeway, they may escort your two ensigns to a cavern rich in deuterium supplies." Janeway was stunned for a moment, and then realized Lokal must have sensed the ensigns' interest in the deuterium traces they picked up on Voyager.

Janeway nodded, and the two Inryeth engineers turned on their heels, gesturing for the ensigns to follow. She watched the four disappear into the tunnel from which the group had first emerged. Her gaze returned to Lokal, who was intently studying Tuvok.

"You have a very interesting crew, Captain Janeway," Lokal said, his gaze still upon Tuvok. Janeway quickly thanked him as his gaze shifted to her. Immediately, her defenses went up, and Lokal gasped slightly. "I am sorry, Captain Janeway." She assured Lokal that no harm was intended, and he suggested a tour through the underground colony. Janeway agreed with a nod to Tuvok.

The humid air quickly gave way to a cooler rush as they entered one of the tunnels. Looking up, Janeway judged the tunnel to be at least eight feet high, an accommodation to the Inryeths' unusual height. The floor soon changed from the natural stone and sand of the cavern to the cool, uniform tile of a manmade structure. Her boots, Tuvok's as well, thudded on the tile, but Lokal's made no noise, despite the similar appearance.

"Tell me, Supervisor, why keep this colony hidden?" Tuvok's voice seemed almost to echo on the natural walls of the tunnel.

"We are a gentle people," Lokal replied, "but we somehow managed to acquire some enemies along the way. It is one of the reasons we are alone in this colony, and why we choose to hide ourselves." Lokal's answer was cryptic to Janeway, but she suspected the tone had been an obvious gesture at giving and taking with the truth.

Lokal's attention, however, was directed at Tuvok, and the suspicion passed him by. "You and I are an alike pair, Commander."

"How so?"

Lokal smiled. "Your idea of a *katra* - it is very similar to our *nula*." Tuvok's interest was piqued; Janeway could tell as his eyebrows shot up. Obviously, Lokal, too, picked up on the interest. "We believe each person's experiences reside in their *nula*, which records the events of a person's many lives." Lokal's eyes shifted to Janeway. "Captain, I believe you call it a soul."

Janeway smiled as she processed the similarity. Lokal continued. "In order for one to live a productive life, one must embrace the full *nula* within them through a series of meditations, in which the experiences embody themselves in dreams that teach a lesson." Lokal's eyes seemed to glow as he spoke. "It truly is a wonderful experience. These dreams... they are windows to a past one must witness in order to move forward."

Janeway's mind suddenly conjured up the image of the young woman in her dreams. Was this dream more than the product of an overactive imagination? Was it part of her *nula*, as Lokal thought it to be? And then her mind shook the idea, dismissing it as simply a thought brought on by the suggestive nature of Lokal's words.

Lokal continued forward, his deep voice explaining the origin of the very caverns they walked in. And yet, what her mind couldn't shake was the eerie familiarity of the Union soldier's eyes.

The doors to her quarters closed with a singular swoosh, leaving Janeway to stand among the darkness and the silence of the room. It suited her, the day's activities and excitement still buzzing around her head in a frenzy she still had not recovered from. She made her way across the room, finally falling upon her couch.

Lokal was a very generous man, and he was eager to show off his colony to Janeway and Tuvok. The mining operations, the dining halls, the artisan wings, the housing wings, the power center, the temple. Her head spun as she tried to recount the day's footsteps, her mind boggled by the endless system of tunnels and caverns that Lokal seemed to know by heart.

She remembered the first place they had visited: the power center. Lokal had been so proud of their methods of power. He explained how the original inhabitants of the colony had dismantled the ion reactors in their fleet of ships and reconfigured them to use as a source of power for the colony without the previously detectable excess emissions. He seemed so proud of those reactors, despite the fact that it was probable he had never lived to see the process completed.

Janeway sighed, her head leaning back to rest on the top of the couch. What she needed was the caffeine a fresh cup of coffee would ensure; yet her legs seemed too tired to budge. Her eyes slipped shut as she yawned deeply, but she fought her brain to open her eyes once more. She knew what sleep would bring - more dreams of death and heartache. It was hardly a prospect she looked forward to.

Yet Janeway knew she'd have to sleep eventually. Of course, she could go to the Doctor and ask for a stimulant to keep her awake, but she knew his inquiries would force her to reveal those dreams, and the last thing she needed was another reason for the Doctor to be nagging her. She settled on coffee, resolving to get up.

She paused for a moment, enjoying the silence and the darkness. How comfortable it was...

Sarah didn't know what she was doing in the barn at such an early morning hour, and yet she found herself here, among the hay and the unbearable stench of the horses. The solitude of the wooden walls was, in some strange way, comforting to her.

Trying to find an escape from the influence her father had over the household was hard, and since reminders of his death were not something she wanted now, she retreated to the only place she knew his influence had not reached: the stables. He had always thought that the keeping of so many horses was unnecessary, despite the fact that his only daughter enjoyed the beauty of the black stallions. Her mother had indulged her pleasure, but her father rarely stepped foot inside the walls. This made it the perfect place to escape.

The fact that her appearance was far from ladylike pushed Sarah to retreat to a quiet place as well. She was dressed in simply her white shift, with the undergarments to riding britches underneath, an outfit that was hardly ladylike. Rested against her bare arms was one of her

father's rifles, which she carried for protection. Some of the slaves had reported Union soldier creeping around the premises, and Sarah wasn't willing to be ambushed.

The sound of metal tins slamming shut drew Sarah to attention, and the rifle was immediately cocked and pointed in front of her. Her eyes scanned the stables she stood in, finding nothing resembling life.

Another tin came crashing to ground behind her, and she spun around, not surprisingly finding a figure crouched behind her, near one of the shelves. He wore a dirty blue uniform, and the rifle was trained on the small of his back.

"One move and you die," she announced.

The soldier looked up, and Sarah gasped. The brown-haired soldier was the same that had remained in her drawing room four days earlier, the same soldier who had been present as his comrades shot her father for no apparent reason. She was disgusted yet again.

"Give me one good reason why I should spare your life, Yankee," she asked.

The soldier now stood to his full height, in which he nearly towered over her, and Sarah found herself staring into the deepest green eyes she had ever seen. It was strange, seeing such green eyes on a brown-haired fellow. And then she noticed her lapse in judgment, and straightened the rifle again.

His arms remained limp by his side, the evidence of his morning raid - a small tin full of grain - still hot in his hand. When he spoke, his voice was as innocent and cautious and four days earlier. "There ain't any," he said, his voice thick with a Northern accent.

Her own Southern drawl took moments to respond. "Takin' a bullet for the good of yer country. How patriotic," she commented, sarcastic and bitter.

She didn't quite know why she did what she did next. She felt herself lowering the rifle, pointing at the ground. She watched the soldier, but his expression remained unchanged.

"Finish before I change ma mind," she remarked, but the soldier remained still. She wasn't sure if he was scared or just being defiant. "You're just gonna stand there?"

The soldier smiled. "Do you actually know how to use that rifle, miss?"

Sarah stared at the soldier, her face turned in anger. "Yeah," she replied. "My father taught me how to shoot."

The memory was obviously lost on the soldier, despite the fact that he himself had witnessed the end of that man's life. Instead, he smiled. "Ain't exactly ladylike."

Sarah didn't know why, but she found herself laughing. She watched as the soldier extended his hand. "Levi Sullivan," he introduced.

She regarded the man for a moment before returning the gesture. "Sarah Biddle."

"Damn," he said, grabbing her hand, "that's quite a rock you got there." She tried to withdraw her hand in a fit of embarrassment, but Levi's hand had such a grasp that it only tightened with her movement. She had, of course, chosen to shake with the hand displaying Thomas' engagement ring. And while she had never before been ashamed to show off the gorgeous piece of jewelry, at this meeting, it hardly seemed appropriate. Her eyes immediately darted to the floor.

"I'm engaged myself," he continued, and Sarah suddenly became interested again, not feeling quite as alone. "Got a girl waitin' for me back in Philadelphia."

"Really?" Sarah added, at a loss for anything else to say. The moment was, by all accounts, extremely awkward. She caught a quick glance at Levi's face, and somehow felt a slight comfort to see he, too, was at a loss for things to say.

"Uh," she said, quietly, "you can let go of my hand."

Levi seemed to be startled out of some kind of trance. "What?" His eyes found his own hand in hers, and quickly released it. "Sorry," he added with embarrassment.

"Hey," Sarah finally said, "no harm intended, but you ain't exactly the soldier-type." It was true, the man's innocence and naivety betrayed even the air of a green soldier. He was in his mid-twenties, much like Sarah, but he still retained the innocence of a young boy.

"Yeah," Levi answered, studying the floor and kicking various stones around the floor, "I guess I'm not. I'm just along for the ride, you know?"

"Why enlist then? You feel you gotta prove yourself to someone?" She smiled. "Impress that girl of yours?"

"By gettin' killed?" he answered, looking up with a smile in his eyes and on his face. Sarah enjoyed the brief delight on the man's face. "No, it's not about that. Got to fight for what I believe in, you know?"

"Yeah," she replied quietly, "I guess."

Instead, Levi continued, unaware of Sarah's discomfort. "I mean, it's like where I'm from, everything ain't perfect but at least we treat everyone like they people. But here? Nah, no one's equal here." He paused. "What they do here is wrong, I tell ya. Workin' 'em and beatin' someone's back like that? That ain't moral. That's the work of immoral people. Savages."

Sarah suddenly felt familiar anger boiling in her veins yet again. "Savages, eh?" She glared into Levi's eyes. "You think I'm a savage?"

The realization of his error became apparent in Levi's eyes, and he tried to soothe her rising anger, but Sarah was in no mood for condescending remarks.

"Get out," she replied relatively calmly. Levi began to protest, but she raised her voice, and the rifle she still gripped in her hand. "Don't make me say it again."

Looking defeated and genuinely wounded, Levi turned and retreat out the barn, a small metal tin of grain still clutched in his hand. That, and an internal wound were all that he had to show for his excursion.

Savages, Sarah thought, why does that not surprise me...

Janeway awoke with a start, the haunting mirror of her own words still echoing in her brain. At first, her mind was relieved to have a different dream to ponder over, but the intrigue soon fell into the same dead-ends as before. But there was something else; someone else's words were collecting in her brain, asking her, urging her...

"Bridge to Janeway. Janeway, please respond."

Hurriedly, she sat up, realizing she had fallen asleep on her couch. Her hands slapped the combadge still on her uniform. "I'm here, Harry."

"Captain, one of the reactors on the surface of colony seems to be malfunctioning."

Janeway sighed, rubbing the bridge of her nose. "I'm on my way, Harry. Janeway out."

The doors to the bridge slid open, and Janeway had no more than a foot out of the turbolift when the ship shuddered. The sudden movement threw Janeway's balance, and she had only a matter of seconds to brace herself against the bulkhead next to Tuvok's station.

"Report," Janeway barked as she walked to her seat, trying with each step to compensate for the constant shudders that rippled the ship, the klaxons of a red alert casting the bridge into momentary shadows of red.

"It's one of the ion reactors inside the colony, Captain," Harry replied. "Sensors detected an overload two minutes ago."

Overload? Janeway was sure those reactors had been in fine condition when she had visited earlier. "What was that disruption that rocked the ship?"

"A wave of alpha particles, probably a result of the reactor overload," Harry replied again.

"Did you hail the colony?" Janeway asked.

"No response," Harry said gravely.

Janeway stared at the screen for a moment. What had once been a clear atmosphere was now a blanket of crackling radiation. What looked to be the heaviest concentration was centered over the continent where the colony was located. She thought back to what Lokai had told her and Tuvok earlier. She remembered he had mentioned protocols for such an occurrence as this; at the time, she hadn't paid as much attention as she might have hoped.

"Tuvok," she asked, "do you remember what the Supervisor told us about the overload protocols?"

Tuvok contemplated the question for a moment, his mind trying as well to recall Lokai's words. "The Supervisor mentioned that the power center and surrounding wings were protected by a layer of rock in which radiation was impenetrable."

"Harry," Janeway said, her body turned to face the ensign. "I want you to lock onto all life signs in the power center and in a fifty-meter radius, and transport them to sickbay."

Harry's fingers flew over the controls. "I've got fifteen, initializing transport." Janeway's eyes flitted back to the viewscreen for a moment before warning signals emanated from Harry's consol. "Something is wrong, Captain."

"It's the alpha particles," Chakotay said. "At this distance, the transporter beam only travels a few kilometers before it degrades."

"Tom," Janeway barked, and the helmsman turned in his chair, "can you move us closer?"

"That would not be wise," Tuvok replied from his station. "I am detecting high levels of gamma radiation closest to the planet's atmosphere. If we attempt to transport at a closer range, the structural integrity of the ship will be damaged."

Janeway paused for a moment, contemplating her options. She couldn't just turn around and let the radiation kill those fifteen people, but moving any closer would risk the lives of her own ship. The moment was tense, as she weighed the importance of both groups.

"Harry, even if we could get closer, would the beam still degrade?" Janeway asked.

"Theoretically," he replied, "no. The concentrations of alpha particles are lower, and gamma radiation doesn't degrade a transporter beam the way alpha particles do."

"How close would we have to get?"

Harry's eyes glanced quickly to Tuvok before he answered. "500 kilometers, 800 maybe." His voice was hesitant. "But with the shields down, the damage to the ship would be--"

Janeway's hand cut off the rest of Harry's words. "Tom, I want you to move us within 500 kilometers," she ordered.

"Captain!" Chakotay barked. "You're going to tear this ship apart!"

Her eyes turned to him, and she glared deeply into his, her stare angry and defiant. "I'm not going to stand by and watch these people die, Chakotay. If you're going to question my orders, then I suggest you get off my bridge." She turned back to Tom. "Do it, Lieutenant."

Silence reigned as Tom announced he was moving closer. Consoles behind her began to warn of the increased stress on structural integrity. The shudders of the ship soon became more and more violent rocks, and Janeway was forced to grip the edges of her seat to keep from falling out.

"500 kilometers," Tom announced.

"Now, Mr. Kim."

"Initializing transport," Harry said. No one spoke as they waited, and the ship tossed and turned as the radiation took aim at the structural integrity. "Got them! All fifteen are in sickbay!"

Janeway couldn't help the smile that formed over her face. Her eyes swept back from Harry to the viewscreen, momentarily falling on Chakotay's face, who only sat unemotional, staring back.

"Tom, get us out of here," she ordered.

"Aye aye, Captain."

The doors to sickbay slid open, revealing somewhat of a chaotic atmosphere. All the biobeds were filled with injured Inryeth; where beds were not available, the wounded simply stood. Most had only scarred hands and faces from what Janeway guessed were radiation burns, nothing that the Doctor couldn't treat with a dermal regenerator.

Her eyes fell upon one prone figure lying lifelessly on the main biobed, the Doctor hunched over him. His once glowing green skin was now burned and horribly blistered, and Janeway noticed with horror that it was almost the color of his dark brown robe. She could only guess that he was one of the engineers near the core when it overloaded.

"Captain!"

Janeway turned toward the familiar deep voice, finding Lokal among some of his injured colonists. She noticed with a twinge of humor that he appeared to be the only one without a burn to the face or hands. This was, of course, because Lokal had not been transported with the injured, but rather beamed aboard afterwards to meet with the survivors. While the Inryeth did not have it in their capacity to smile as a human did, Janeway swore that his face glowed more than it usually did, and that the corners of his mouth were upturned in a smiling fashion.

"Captain Janeway," he said again, his long and slender fingers curling around her own in a gesture of friendship, "I do not know if I can begin to convey my appreciation for what you did."

"Supervisor, I don't think that would be necessary-"

Lokal threw his hands up in mock annoyance. "You risked your ship and your crew to save the lives of total strangers." He sighed with content. "Thanks and appreciation are indeed necessary. I do not know how this tragedy would have played out, had you not been here to rescue us."

Janeway smiled. He was surely a friendly face. "Our doctor is treating the injured, and some of my crew have offered their help in containment and repairs."

Lokal nodded, his eyes glancing up at Janeway's face when she failed to say anything more. His dark eyes narrowed, and she suddenly realized he was... she couldn't think of a better word than "scanning" to describe his actions. "There is something else," he finally said. "Something about you, something you wish to speak with me about."

Janeway bowed her head in slight embarrassment. "Yes," she acknowledged. After another moment, her hand gestured to the sickbay doors, asking silently if Lokal wished to join her for a walk. He nodded his head in agreement.

They walked down a corridor for a while in silence before Janeway finally spoke. "Our conversation about a person's many lives, reincarnation... it's very similar to the beliefs held by religions on my own planet - Buddhism and Hinduism. That we as beings are born over and over again because we fail to see the error in our ways, and thus must relive each sequential life until we do."

Lokal glanced sideways towards Janeway. "I know comparisons of beliefs is not why you wished to speak with me."

The comment forced a small smile across Janeway's lips. "Actually, I keep remembering what you said, about how you have meditations that... manifest themselves as dreams." She paused, hoping Lokal's abilities would fill in the rest of her concerns. But he simply stared at her, eager for her next words. "I've been having dreams of my own, but they aren't ordinary dreams. I've been having the same one for days now, and only today has it been different. But the people are the same...it's almost like I'm watching a story unfold. They are that real." She noticed that Lokal was still intently studying her, and she continued. "These people...they feel so real I think I should know them, recognize them, and yet I don't. But I still get the feeling like I should."

There was silence between them as Lokal thought. "Do you honestly believe that these experiences are part of your *nula*?"

Janeway knew the question was not meant to ridicule her. Lokal simply wanted to gauge her honest belief in such a thing as a *nula*. "To be honest, Supervisor, I'm not sure what these dreams are. But my mind can't seem to shake the things you said, and..."

She needn't finish her thought, because she noticed Lokal to be smiling, or something resembling a smile. "You want someone to come up to you and tell you exactly what these experiences mean, don't you?" The man let out a sound Janeway could only describe as a chuckle. "You will get your answers, Captain, you will get your answers in an appropriate time."

Captain's Log: It has been one week since the reactor overload on the Inryeth colony, and the crew has been helpful in their assistance with repairs. The atmosphere is almost completely purged of radiation, and the power center and surrounding tunnels have been decontaminated. The repair team estimates that by tomorrow, the Inryeth should be able to return the center without the need for protective equipment. End log.

The senior staff had a visitor at their meeting: Supervisor Lokal. He had been staying aboard Voyager since the overload, and would stay until clean up and containment was complete. In a gesture of goodwill, Janeway had allowed him to sit in on the meeting with the promise of a substantial update on the progress of repairs.

For her part, Janeway remained in her chair while Chakotay took charge of a majority of the meetings, explaining as best as he could the many repairs that had been completed. She simply was background, providing comments here and there.

A diagram of the colony's tunnel and cavern system had been pulled up on the monitor. Lokal studied it intently. "This," Chakotay said, his finger pointing to the diagram, "is what Voyager's sensors recorded of radiation levels before the accident." He tapped a control, and the power center and surrounding tunnels were highlighted in red. "This is what sensors recorded after the accident."

"The radiation is red?" Lokal asked, and Chakotay nodded.

He tapped the monitor a second time, and the highlighted tunnels all but disappeared, leaving only small traces of red in the power center, around the overload reactor. "This is what sensors recorded an hour ago."

The glow from Lokal's face seemed to increase as his eyes studied the monitor. "Your crew has done this much in only one week?" he asked Chakotay, and the Commander nodded with a grin. Lokal shook his head. "I do not know what to say, Commander."

"Everything isn't perfect," Chakotay replied, "but it's manageable."

The wave of familiarity hit Janeway almost instantly, and she heard a small and practically inaudible gasp escape her lips. Up until now, while she had been able to recall the broadscaping events of her dreams, she was not able to distinctly recall actual dialogue between the young woman and the Union soldier. Yet, now, his voice resonated in her mind. *Everything ain't perfect but at least we treat people like they people.* Janeway didn't know what had brought on such an eerie feeling, save for Chakotay's choice of similar words.

"Captain?"

Janeway's eyes darted up to see the senior staff staring at her, their eyes filled with concerns. It had been Harry's voice that had pulled her from her reverie.

"I'm sorry," Janeway apologized. There was another pause, and the staff continued to stare. "What?"

Chakotay only shook his head, his eyes finding the ground, and Janeway knew he was muttering something inaudible under his breath. Harry regarded him for a moment before speaking. "I asked if there was anything you'd like to add."

Janeway didn't speak for a moment, her mind still contemplating the question. "No," she finally replied. "You're all dismissed."

The staff simply nodded, heading in their respective directions back to their postings. Only Lokai remained after everyone left, taking the time to study Janeway. But he said nothing, and he left the briefing room before Janeway had the opportunity.

Janeway had let the briefing's events stew in her mind for the remainder of the day, allowing her scientific nature to pick apart what and why she had felt the way she did. Her rational sense spit out a reason - of course the dreams were the connection, but not because of some past life, or a suggestion of reincarnation. Instead, her sleep deprivation (as a result of the unsettling emotions the dreams produced) had caused her mind to play tricks on her. It wasn't familiarity she felt, her scientific mind told her, it was exhaustion.

Yet, as before, her mind simply could not shake Supervisor Lokai's words, and the look he had given her before leaving the briefing room. It was as if he knew exactly what she was feeling. It nagged at her mind, which was why she found herself in front of his guest quarters aboard Voyager, ringing the chime.

There was a moment before the door slid open and the Supervisor stood towering over her. He regarded her for a second, then stepped from the doorway, gesturing for her to enter. She did so.

The air in the guest quarters was silent for a few moments; Lokai had taken a seat on the couch under the window, but Janeway chose to stand. He was studying her again, as he often did of those in his presence. Finally he spoke. "You wish to speak about earlier today, no?"

"Yes," she replied, only slightly stunned. Janeway knew that by now, she shouldn't be surprised at the Supervisor's ability to verbalize exactly what was going on in her mind, yet each time she was. At first, it had seemed like an egregious invasion of her privacy, the ability to keep her private thoughts at that diminishing in his presence. But she knew it was not meant as a rude gesture; it was his nature. And while she found it at times to be a disadvantage, in such instances as this, lifting the burden of explaining herself was always welcome. "In the briefing today, I had the feeling... I felt as if the words being spoken I had already heard. Everything felt-"

"Familiar?" Janeway was silent for a moment, her mind regaining its composure, and she quickly nodded in agreement. A faint smile crossed Lokai's lips. "Captain, I believe I may have a solution for you." She knew her eyebrows had shot up at the remark, her interest piqued. "I would like to guide you in a *dah-tel-nula*, one of the meditations I spoke of. It might help clear your doubts and concerns surrounding these dreams."

Janeway contemplated Lokai's suggestion. Her mind had always been open to the possibility of a spiritual solution, however she had tried to lean more toward a hypospray or something more scientific. While she respected and abided by the religious customs of other cultures, she had never been one to put much merit into them. Yet here she was, discussing them as a solution as if they were viable antibiotics. She wasn't sure if she truly believed that a *nula* resided within in her, collecting her life experiences of this and past lives. Nevertheless, she couldn't pass up the opportunity to get a good night's rest.

Finally, she nodded with a smile toward Lokai. She had agreed.

According to Lokal, in order for the meditation to produce a positive effect on Janeway, she must first prepare herself. That entailed studying the Inryeths' religious beliefs, in an attempt to understand what she was about to experience. For this, Lokal had been able to locate for her a copy of the *ku-vah-nula*, the spiritual texts that detailed the origins of the *nula* and the meditations associated.

Janeway merely skimmed the *ku-vah-nula* that was given to her; even in the reduced version Lokal had produced it was a book worthy of a stack of four or five PADDs. The main idea that this text stressed was the value of understanding one's *nula*. Any attempt by a person to use his experiences for personal gain other than furtherance of knowledge was irresponsible, and against the guiding principles of the Inryeths' beliefs. The process was not a fool-safe one, and positive results were almost never guaranteed. However, good-natured intentions were almost always honored.

The meditation Lokal had the intention of performing - a *dah-tel-nula* - was one in which a person, as guided by a Master, was united with an errant memory or experience in the form of a vision or a dream. This meditation was used strictly as an introduction; no higher level of knowledge other than the satisfaction warranted by the meditation could be achieved strictly from this meditation. That was what she wanted, Janeway thought. She had no intention of transcending any energy or knowledge level. She simply wanted to understand the driving feeling that often resonated after having these vivid dreams.

Lokal had set a small cloth in the center of his guest quarters. He instructed Janeway to sit on one side of the cloth, with him sitting directly opposite her. The two empty sides were occupied by Tuvok and T'Pol - Lokal had specifically requested they be present, as he identified with their telepathic powers. He believed they could aid in the creation of ideal meditation condition.

In the center of the cloth, Lokal placed...to be truthful, Janeway wasn't sure what the object was. It was an almost perfect rounded oval, appearing to be a finely polished stone of some sort. It was painted green, a color that almost exactly matched that of the Inryeths' skin, with small brown stripes running in one direction, appearing as if they might travel the entire circumference of the object. Incidentally, the stripes were running in a vertical direction so that they pointed at both Janeway and Lokal.

At first, she had thought it to be simply an inanimate symbol in which Lokal chanted over. However, a simple touch of Lokal's fingers to the object, and the brown stripes began to glow. Janeway's opinion of the object changed, judging it to be similar to Chakotay's akoonah in its use in the meditation.

Lokal placed the palm of his right hand directly on top of the object, the round shape fitting perfectly the shape of his palm, and his long fingers extending far over. Janeway wondered if the object had been made specifically for his use. He then instructed her to place her own right hand over his own - which she did - in an attempt to direct the proper energy to her. As if it were an involuntary reflex, her eyes slipped shut and she felt her mind slowly beginning to clear.

Through the lull in her thoughts, she heard Lokal's deep voice chanting what she had read in the *ku-vah-nula*, his words summoning the dreamy haze she suddenly felt washing over her body...

There was a war raging in front of her home, on the edge of her property. Sarah would pick her head up from behind the winged armchair, and was able to see the flashes of discharging rifles. The air held the searing aroma of battle, a mixture of death and gunpowder. It burned her nostrils.

Her eyes drifted from the scene of battle to the rifle cradled in her arms, to the wooden floors around her, finding immediately a stained portion of the wood. Linny had tried her damndest, but the blood had pooled long enough to soak into the oak floors. Now it stood silently, a reminder of this battle's first bloodshed seven days tomorrow.

The fighting had begun just over three hours ago; Sarah knew because Linny and her sister had just started the cooking, and the sun hadn't even begun to disappear over the horizon. But now it was a mere trace along the horizon line of trees, its final rays mingling with the clouds of gunpowder floating. Linny's family had retreated to the wine cellar, keeping a watchful eye on Sarah's own family - her older sister Laura and her young daughter, her mother Grace, and her brother Adam, who had not even reached the age of eight. Now, only Sarah remained in the house, her sense of loyalty to her father charging her to guard the drawing room with her life. As she sat there, her thoughts couldn't help but drift back to Levi Sullivan. She wondered if he was in the battle that raged before her, and she wondered if he was all right. And then her mind reset itself, reminding her how he'd helped kill her father, and how much she was supposed to hate him.

Thomas and his family had left for Richmond yesterday, after the funeral services for her father had ended. They had left their sincere apologies, and Sarah had heard Thomas muttering vows of revenge against the Union army, something she thought had sounded like enlistment. Even now, as death loomed in the distance, Sarah smiled at the idea of a spoiled rich debutante like Thomas in battle, a rifle on his arm. It was an absurd idea.

A faint moaning coming from the hallway suddenly interrupted Sarah's dwellings. Weapon in hand, she eased around from her position behind the wing chair to the doorway. Taking a breath, she listened to the moan again. It was a moan of pain, or at least she thought it was. If a Yankee had crawled into her house, there was no doubt she would finish him off, and she cocked the barrel of the rifle with the intention of doing just that. She hesitated. What if it was a Confederate soldier, and she fired? She would kill the poor man without giving him the help she assumed he thought she could provide. In the end, she concluded that she would turn with weapon drawn, but not to shoot immediately.

She pointed the weapon at the figure sprawled across her hallway, the blue coloring of his uniform having already caught the corner of her eye. She reached her finger to the trigger when he suddenly looked up. She froze, the familiar eyes of the Union soldier willing her entire body to cease movement.

"Levi," she sighed, her mind, for a moment, forgetting the things he had said days earlier. He had managed to pull himself up slightly, and she noticed the wound to his upper leg, his blood staining his uniform and the wood floors of her hallway. She slid over to him, her hand pressing against the wound. "You're hurt pretty bad."

He looked up at her, his eyes trying to find where her compassion was emanating from, and how not to spoil it once again. "Yeah," he replied. "I think it went in and out."

Sarah's fingers pulled back the fabric of his uniform already torn by the bullet. Her hands were already covered in his blood, and it was smearing on the white shift she wore. "You need to get this bandaged up quickly," she said, using the edge of her skirt to suck up some of the still-wet blood. "If you don't, you're going to lose too much blood or the wound'll get infected."

She then proceeded to tear the pant leg further, her bloody hands reaching behind his leg. She felt more warm blood on her fingertips, and she felt Levi wince and tighten his muscles as her fingers grazed the exit wound. Pulling her hands back, she took the hem of her dress and began to tear it as well. She tore a large enough strip to wrap around his leg.

"You know how to dress wounds, too?" He asked lightheartedly. "I should have guessed you weren't an average girl." He winced again as she began to wrap the strip around his legs.

"Why didn't you go to the medic tent? You'd get this dressed up by a professional," she asked as she dressed his wound, but she was a fool if she didn't already know the answer. Her father often spoke of the tent, how the smell of death exceeded even that on the battlefield. A wound such as Levi's probably would have resulted in an amputation.

Instead, Levi's hand fell on hers, clasping her fingers, smearing the blood onto his own fingers. "I needed to see you. Make sure you were all right."

Sarah froze, her eyes darting from the leg wound to Levi's eyes. He was staring at her, the emotion behind his eyes so intense she had to look away. The familiar feeling of awkwardness crept back between them, and Sarah stumbled for words.

"Levi, I'm fine-"

"I know now," he replied back, forcefully. Again, his voice dropped to a dull whisper. Had she not been so close, the sound of the guns would have drowned him out. "The thought that you were hurt... I wouldn't be able to live with myself."

The silence between them returned. She watched as he leaned in, standing still as he leaned in closer. When his rough, chapped lips brushed against her soft ones, she could only sit there. The kiss was brief and brisk.

"I'm sorry," he said immediately, his eyes studying his wound as his face flushed with embarrassment. "It's just... I don't think I've ever felt this way about someone before."

Sarah snorted quietly. "But you don't know me!" she replied. "And what about that girl you told me about, the one in Philadelphia, the one you're engaged to? Don't you love her?"

"Of course I do," he said, shaking his head, "but not like I love you." His fingers grabbed her hands, clasping them hard. She was unable to resist, her body frozen from the surprise of his words. "Can you sit there and tell me you don't feel the same way?"

Sarah could only bow her head and look away. She feared her words, feared the truth they held in them. She wanted to spit a response back to him, scream at him for jumping to such conclusions, hate him, and yet, she couldn't bring herself to do it. She was scared, more scared than of any battle that waged outside. Inside, she was scared of her emotions and feelings.

"Tell me."

She wasn't sure if she was supposed to agree with him or not. Instead, her heart answered. She leaned forward again, pressing her lips against his, and kissed him. To her surprise, and yet not, he kissed her back, deepening it with each movement, trying desperately to inch closer to her. She knew every movement of his leg sent waves of pain through him, but he seemed immune.

Her fingers went to his face, cradling it in her palms and smearing the blood on her fingers along his cheekbone and line of his jaw. His own fingers did the same, his too covered in blood. In that movement they branded each other with the bloodshed of the day.

He broke away, his fingers soon grabbing hers, his mouth managing to find an unbloodied portion of her hand and kissing it. "Run away with me."

She was shocked again. "What?"

"Run away with me," he repeated. "I'll change my name and we'll...we'll go North - New York - and get married and live forever."

Sarah shook her head. "I can't," she said, trying to think straight, "I have a fiancé, Thomas York. And so do you. I can't just abandon him."

Levi, instead, shook his head and smile slightly. "It doesn't matter. She'll just think I got killed or something."

"No," she said, trying to withdraw her hands, "I can't."

"Why not? Don't you love me?"

She bowed her head. "Yes," she said, finally admitting it to both herself and him. "I do. But I can't just abandon my life like that. I have responsibilities, to myself and to other people, and so do you."

Levi let her hands go as she finished, the finality of her remarks setting in. His fingers reached the bandage around his leg wound, and he quickly tied up the ends of the white strip, which was now

more stained with blood than it was white. Slowly, he stood, carefully, making sure as to not put much weight on the wounded leg.

Turning his eyes once more to Sarah, he said, "I should go." And then he slowly limped down the hallway, following the path of his own blood that he had laid, his footsteps smearing the stains as he walked.

Sarah made no attempt to follow him, muttering only "goodbye."

Janeway had offered lunch in Voyager's mess hall to Lokal, and the Supervisor had accepted with a nod and a smile. However, it did not take even his telepathic powers to know that she was not purely interested in small talk about repairs and such.

She chose a table near the corner of the room, secluded from the prying eyes and ears of the rest of the crew assembled there. She had only sat for a moment when, already, Lokal began to speak.

"It is obvious these dreams are trying to tell you something," he commented. "I felt the need to teach."

Janeway contemplated the Supervisor. "But what good is a lesson if the pupil doesn't understand?"

Lokal smiled. "True." He paused. "I get the sense the man and the woman are opposites, no? Yet sometimes, they share traits of one another."

Janeway nodded her head rather vigorously. "Yes, but I still don't understand what it has to do with me."

Lokal sighed, as one would with a small child. She ruffed at the condescending gesture. "By understanding the dream, we are then able to apply it to one's life. Draw parallels between the tales. Often times such a sequence of dreams is but a parable to one's life."

Fate, she concluded.

"Now," he said, directing the conversation's topic back to his analysis, "you may have to assist me, Captain, because I am unfamiliar with the time of this dream." Janeway nodded her participation. "Not only are they opposites in personality, they are opposites in battle, correct?" She nodded. "Yet, when he is wounded, instead of killing him as she should, she assists him. It would seem she betrayed her loyalties. I get the sense she is a very loyal person, yet she appears unable to hurt a soul, despite their side in battle." He paused. "And he, he wishes not to hurt a soul, but does so in the support of his cause, which is something she doesn't support, correct?" Janeway nodded again. "Then it would seem they both share a common dislike of war.

"He strikes me as being impulsive, as illustrated by his sudden declaration of love and proposal to run away." He paused again, the faint beginnings of a smile emerging on his lips. "She seems fascinated by this impulsiveness, yet she feels her own responsibilities to her family outweigh whatever interest in him she has. She hurt him when she pushed him away. He felt ridiculed by her, despite the fact that how she justified herself was, ultimately, correct." Lokal's eyes found Janeway's, and he smiled. "Well, Captain, I ask you now: can you find parallels in this story?"

Janeway felt exposed, horribly so, as if Lokal had just read her mind and declared her inner thoughts to the ship's crew. Yet she knew he hadn't, that what he said he had interpreted only from the dream they had experienced. Or perhaps he had found those thoughts, and had surreptitiously wound them into his interpretation. Janeway chided herself, seeing the ridiculous nature of that accusation.

Of course she could draw parallels. How much more exact to the situation with her Maquis be to that of her dream? And then the thought crept back to her mind, thoughts she had struggled for years to kill because of their inappropriate nature to her current situation. Could the Maquis not be the parable, but this?

Janeway suddenly felt extremely uncomfortable to be near Lokal. How he had read her... "No," she heard herself say, almost too quickly for anyone to believe her. She stole a glance at Lokal's face, a look of disbelief painted plainly across his face, yet he said nothing. He simply smiled.

"Bridge to Captain Janeway." Harry. Janeway reminded herself to commend the ensign on his brilliant timing.

She tapped her combadge. "Janeway here," she responded.

She could almost hear the smile in the ensign's voice. "Captain, I just received word from the away team that repairs and containment on the colony are complete."

Janeway smiled, watching as Lokal seemed... relieved. "Have Tuvok meet myself and Supervisor Lokal in Transporter Room One."

Harry acknowledged the order and closed the comm channel. The two stood from their table, making their way to the doors of the mess hall. I guess we'll finish this later, Janeway thought as the doors slid shut behind them.

The three figures materialized directly inside the colony's power center, and Janeway could hardly believe the change she saw. A quick glance at Lokal, and she saw that he, too, could not believe his eyes. What had once been a room charred black from the explosion was as immaculate as possible.

The lieutenant in charge of the away team stepped forward, her face shining with a smile. "Supervisor," she said, and Lokal's eyes snapped from his survey of the room to the young women, "we've stabilized the structural integrity of this cavern and the surrounding tunnels. Very little traces of radiation are left, and that which remains are hardly harmful to your people. Your engineers assured me that they would be able to fix the damaged reactor."

Lokal was shaking his head out of disbelief. "Thank you," he said, though his voice wavered and Janeway was sure he was at a loss for words. "Thank you, Captain," he said again, turning to face her, "I don't know if we can properly repay you for the kindness you have bestowed upon us."

Janeway shook her head and smiled. "No payment is required, Supervisor."

He sighed. "Then I shall offer our thanks and our friendship." He extended his hand, and Janeway quickly followed, and they clasped their hands together and both smiled.

Conversation soon sprang up between the away team and the Inryeth present. The Supervisor took the time to shake each hand of the away team as Janeway watched. As he finished with the final person - the lieutenant in charge - he turned to Janeway and gestured for them to step into a corner, in order to speak privately.

"Captain," he said, his voice hushed so as not to draw attention to them, "I hope I have helped you in a way that even measures half to what you have done for us."

She chuckled slightly. "You never did give us those star charts you promised."

Lokal simply stared at her, his eyes filled with a grin his face did not otherwise show. "I never promised anything, Captain."

Janeway smiled warmly, though ducking her head. She contemplated the ground for a moment, and then brought her eyes up again. "I do have one final question," she said.

"What's that?"

She hesitated for a moment. "The woman... it seems she needs resolution." She paused. "Does she?"

Lokal studied her for a moment, and she knew precisely what he was doing. However, this time, she did not resist what she had previously thought to be intruding eyes. This time, she wanted an honest answer.

He smiled. "That all depends on you, Captain."

She stood once again in a room packed with darkness and silence, and once again the company did not bother her. Instead, she found the couch under the stars and slumped on it, her body sore with exhaustion.

That all depends on you. The answer had been cryptic at first, but soon Lokal's words grew on her, and she came to realize their meaning. Only she could embrace what she had learned, that these dreams were more than her overactive imagination. Only she could accept that, in some strange cosmic sense, it was her own life unfolding as she slept. To get answers in this time was to accept the nature of her dreams.

For years now, the situation had remained unresolved, despite what she may have told herself. Nothing was ever said about anything, things were simply assumed and silently dropped. She yearned for as much resolution unto herself as she did for the woman in her dreams.

Janeway's mouth yawned, and she knew that now was the time. This was the opportunity to resign to things out of her control, to let the hand of time steer her course.

Her eyes began to slide shut, and she accepted...

Staring out at the horizon, Sarah was sure she could make out the ghosts of the battle she had witnessed, watching through clouds of smoke as they fought and fell and fought and fell. This land, she knew, would never be the same, and neither would she. Just the thought of land brought back the memory of a year-old battle.

General Lee had surrendered to General Grant two weeks ago. The war was, by all means, officially over. It had taken its toll on the South, on the people and the land, on the spirits of those who fought here, for those who had lost a family member or a friend. It had taken its toll on Sarah, too.

The plantation had, for the most part, survived the war. President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation had bid goodbye to Linny and her family, and Sarah was sad to see them go, watching as they boarded the coach to their new home in New York City. They had been more than what some had called them, they weren't just "slaves" to Sarah. They had been family.

Thomas was gone. His own misguided revenge had backfired; the boy was not cut out for war, and hadn't lasted more than two months before he had been killed in battle. Of course, Sarah grieved, but a part of her couldn't care less. He had been cocky, arrogant, and had, in some twisted form of justice, gotten what he deserved.

There was a figure on the horizon; his tall and lanky form set darkly against the backdrop of the afternoon sun. Sarah, sitting lazily on a bench on the very back edge of her property, straightened as the yet-unknown figure moved towards her. And then he was closer, the chocolate color of his hair reflecting vagrant rays of sunlight in various directions, and his eyes...those eyes she could recognize without a face...

"Levi Sullivan," she pronounced, standing.

He stopped in front of her; his eyes now squinted at the sun positioned behind her. "Sarah Biddle," he replied. "Or is it Sarah York now?"

Her head bowed. "No, no." She knew he sensed her hesitation, and she lifted her head to him, staring intently into his eyes, her fingers winding and catching her knuckles as she fidgeted out of anxiety. "Thomas got himself killed."

Levi suddenly trapped her hands in his, her fingers ceasing their movement. He brought them to his lips, kissing the fingertips with care, making sure not to mention the diamond ring she still wore on her finger.

"You're alone, then so am I." His remark granted him a quizzical look from her face, and he continued. "Member that girl I told you about, the one up in Philadelphia?" She nodded. "Well, it seems that when the war got too heavy and letter-writin' wasn't exactly a priority, she took it as a sign of my death and married Benjamin Hanover from down the street."

"I'm sorry," Sarah offered. "I guess you're right about us."

"Yeah," Levi said, but what he didn't say said more to her than his words could ever do. She knew exactly why he was here, and yet, she didn't. He had never struck her as being the predictable type, but neither was she, for that matter.

She tugged at his grasp, guiding him to the bench she had occupied. As they sat, the words tumbled out her mouth before she had the chance to put up the usual defense. "I've been thinkin', about what you said." The words, she saw, meant little to him. "The part about New York."

She watched two things become of Levi's face. First, recognition skirted across his eyes, his mind flashing back to the reckless moment when he'd let his heart do the talking. But quickly following the recognition, Sarah watched hope dance into his eyes, and she couldn't hide the smile forming on her lips.

It was hope she had been nursing inside of her since he had limped quietly out her door that dismal day at dusk. Regret had always clouded her, from the moment the battle ceased and the armies limped in their respective directions. Then, she had felt lucky for what she had - Thomas. And then he was gone, and she had nothing but her memories and her self-pity.

And then here he was, standing in front of her, the root of all those emotions. God had taken pity on her and her foolish decision, and given her a second chance, marching him straight to her. How could she waste the chance, knowing the future she would likely live if she did?

"If it's all right with you," she began, hesitating slightly, "I was wondering if it wasn't too late to consider the option."

Levi's mouth became a huge smile, stretching almost up to his beautiful green eyes, a relieved sigh escaping his lips. In an instant, she was gathered in his embrace, his lips on the soft skin right below her ear, pressing breathless kisses all the way down her jaw, finally resting on her lips.

He pulled away; his hands cupping her face like it was made of porcelain. "There's only one condition." Her eyes became dark with concern, but he simply smiled. "Promise me your first responsibility will be me."

Her concern melted into relief, her eyes tearing up and her mouth smiling. "I promise," she whispered, and he laughed, embracing her again.

Together, they settled into each other, hands intertwined, on the bench overlooking the afternoon sun's slow descent into night. Together, they looked ahead to a future, their future...

The finality of the dream did not send Janeway waking in a start; her brain frenzied as it processed the information. Instead, she felt calm, resolved, not helping the small smile forming on her own lips.

Perhaps, she thought, it was a sign, a sign of her own impending resolution.

"Bridge to Janeway."

The voice, it echoed in the quiet room, its inflections unaware of the irony its timing held.

Perhaps.

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