



When boundaries are crossed, the consequences for Voyager and her crew are unpredictable.

MaquisKat

Episode 9-05 - Crossing the Line

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The bridge had been quiet in the hours since the rescue of the survivor. Alpha shift was ending and the Captain had not returned from Sickbay. The fact that there had been no communication with the bridge as to the identity of the rescued individual didn't surprise Barton really. She didn't expect Janeway to share information with her willingly, however if it hadn't been someone of importance then she had a feeling that everyone would already know. This fact piqued Barton's curiosity and suspicions. Shifting slightly in the center seat, she decided to take action. She headed towards the turbolift as she called out, "Mr. Tuvok, you have the bridge until relief arrives."

"Indeed," Tuvok responded with a note of command in his voice, "Commander Barton, I need to speak to you in the Captain's ready room."

Barton turned slowly, fixing the Vulcan with a questioning glare at his tone. "Really, Commander." A silent battle of wills grew between them, the tension on the bridge becoming palpable. The Vulcan's unemotional visage presented no clues as to why he

needed to speak with her, however there was something in his stance that told her he would not back down. "Alright." She moved to the ready room door and keyed in her override, Tuvok stepping down from his tactical station behind her and following her in. Barton moved to Janeway's desk as though it were hers and settled into the seat, leaning back and relaxing arrogantly in the Captain's chair. While this may have evoked a reaction in a human officer, Tuvok only watched Barton implacably.

"Normally, matters of discipline fall into the purview of the First Officer or in extreme cases, the Captain. However in this instance, since the Captain is indisposed, it is necessary as I am still the second officer of Voyager for me to step in." Tuvok kept his gaze on Barton, his posture rigid and his eyes unreadable. Barton's eyes narrowed as she could guess where the Vulcan was going with this. "You exceeded your authority as Executive officer, today. You directly contradicted the Captain's order in front of the bridge crew. Such occurrences only serve to undermine the Captain's authority with the crew and their faith in the command team." There was an undercurrent to his words and that undercurrent communicated what he didn't vocalize. Barton cursed under her breath, the Vulcan was already suspicious of her motives and he was Security chief. Things seemed to be coming to a head far sooner than she had anticipated.

Thalia looked up at him keeping her expression as cool and collected as his. "The First Officer's duty is to counter the Captain..."

"The regulation you are about to quote is only to be applied when there is a question of the Captain's ability to command. If his or her orders directly contramand standing Starfleet Orders or if there is a question of the Captain's loyalty or mental state, then that general order would be

applied." Tuvok arches his brow and looks at the woman inquisitively, "However unless you are in possession of information that I am not, that regulation does not apply in this case."

Barton held her piece. The Vulcan was right, she had stepped outside the bounds of Starfleet regulations and there was no way to make him understand the bigger picture that she and Section 31 were aware of. They were all on the same side, but Tuvok would never understand that Janeway and Voyager were a threat to the Federation, whether they meant to be or not. The Vulcan must have taken her silence as acceptance of his words as he continued.

"If you felt the Captain was in error in ordering us back to the Alpha Quadrant you should have offered her another suggestion or an explanation of why that would be the case." Tuvok continued, carefully observing the human before him. She was almost Vulcan in her lack of emotional response. Most humans would have expected him to admire her control. However, in this case it added to his suspicions. When humans were confronted, normally even the most controlled of them would give off subtle signals that would communicate their emotional state. Thalia Barton was the epitome of Vulcan control. For a human to attain such control would take very specialized training. "Normally I would recommend that the Captain relieve you of duty for a certain duration of time in such an instance. However the Federation is at war, and we cannot afford to have able-bodied officers away from their posts. Instead I will recommend that she place a disciplinary note on your file."

Barton nodded, "Of course, I will be making a report to Starfleet Command that Captain Janeway wasn't available to conduct this disciplinary meeting herself. May I inquire to the status and identity of the survivor?"

"All information regarding the survivor has been deemed need to know by the Captain." Tuvok regarded Barton evenly. "If you need to know, the Captain will inform you."

"If we're through here then," Barton stood and moved out from behind the desk, and without waiting for any response from Tuvok left the ready room.

Standing silently he watched as the door closed behind Voyager's new First Officer. Though his expression didn't give any clues to his thoughts, Tuvok was busy cataloging and analyzing all the information he had available to him about Commander Barton. Though he as yet didn't have enough information to draw a conclusion from, there was a distinct possibility that the newest threat to Voyager was one from within.

Only the dim glow from the control panels of the bio-bed and the other medical equipment in Sickbay took away from the darkness of the room. The faint whisper of breath from the still figure on the bed did more to convince the Doctor that the general anti-toxin was still doing its job than the faint beeping of the monitors. Smiling to himself, he realized that there had been a time when he would have depended solely upon his instruments, rather than the physical evidence of his patient's breathing. To him that seemed progress indeed. Running several scans on Chakotay to further analyze the poison in his patient's bloodstream, it became evident that his analysis was correct. Tapping in a few more commands to the computer, he picked up a hypospray and pressed it against the Commander's neck releasing another dose of the general anti-toxin into his body.

Slowly he walked around to the other side of the bed, making as little noise as possible. As he did so the small, exhausted form of the Captain, hunched in a chair, her forehead against the edge of Chakotay's biobed, her hair messy and draped over her paler than normal complexion came into view. Shaking his head as he reached down and shook her shoulder gently. "Captain... Captain. Wake up."

Her head lifted and she regarded him with visibly reddened blue eyes. "Chakotay... Is he?" Janeway's voice was hoarse as she spoke.

"No, Captain... The Commander is fine at the moment, which will be more than can be said for you if I continue to allow you to sleep in that position. Do we really need to revisit those massage treatments?" The Doctor asked, hoping the subtle threat and her exhaustion would work in his favor.

As he watched her expression change, the Doctor was reminded of exactly how the Captain reacts to threats. Even subtle ones made by concerned friends. Visibly quailing under her intense glare, he was almost relieved when she barked, "Report."

Back in familiar territory, the Doctor stood slightly straighter and moved to the other side of the biobed. "The Commander is stable and the general anti-toxin is still preventing further damage being done by the poison." He moves to a small view screen, set in beside one of the control panels and brings up a complex molecular display also bringing up the Sickbay lights at the same time. "This is the poison. A derivative of Litrevutaren-D. In this case, the poison would bond to his bloodstream and prevent the distribution of oxygen to other organs. Once the subject is dead it breaks down into components that would normally be present in the blood."

Kathryn took a deep breath and focused on the Doctor again. "That paints a grim picture of the Logan, Doctor. Someone on board that vessel, tried to kill Chakotay. Making it look like he abandoned them during the battle and lost his life from life support running out in the pod."

The Doctor nodded briefly, "Precisely Captain. It was only our unexpected arrival and luck in finding the Commander so quickly that prevented that scenario from being exactly what happened."

Janeway shut her eyes tightly, wanting to block any thought of Chakotay's possible death from her mind. Her hand moved up to rub the bridge of her nose then she opened her eyes and fixed her gaze on the Doctor once more. "Do you have an antidote yet, Doctor?"

The Doctor looked sympathetic. "No, but I have the computers working on it at this very minute and the anti-toxin is preventing the poison from bonding to any more of his blood cells."

"How long before the general anti-toxin loses its effectiveness?" Janeway asked fighting to keep her voice steady.

"No more than twenty four hours, Captain." The Doctor's watched as Janeway closed her eyes tightly, her expression becoming one of physical pain. At that he reached out once more, laying his hand on her shoulder. "I will have an antidote before then Captain..." He paused for a moment wondering if he should mention other possibilities. "I have another option as well Captain. I want to keep it as a back up plan, because in Chakotay's current state this option could very well kill him."

The Captain's eyes opened, her expression neutral once more. "Alright Doctor. What is this other option?"

"Because the poison bonds to his blood cells, we could extract contaminated blood from the Commander and transfuse him with uncontaminated blood. The problem with this process is that I would have to continue to do it until the levels of the poison were low enough in his system that the transfused blood wouldn't be compromised again. In his current weakened state, the shock of the transfusion could kill him outright or we could cause massive organ failure."

Janeway's eyes looked haunted though her expression did not reflect that as well. "For now that risk is too high. But keep it open Doctor, there may come a point where that is our only option."

The Doctor watched as the Captain's command façade lowered into place once more. "There is more at stake here than just the Commander's life, Doctor. We need to know who did this to him and why. The Federation and Starfleet can't afford an enemy from within at this point, but that seems to be exactly what we have here."

The Doctor nodded, turning to shut down the monitor. When he turned back towards Janeway, she had settled in her chair once more. Her small hands wrapped around Chakotay's so tightly that her knuckles were whitened. "Captain, I really do think you should return to your quarters and get some rest..." Shaking his head, the Doctor realized that Janeway wasn't listening. Probably wasn't even aware of the words that he had just spoken. He contemplated calling Tuvok to come and retrieve her from Sickbay for a short moment, then simply turned and dimmed the lights once more.

Gamma shift was the quietest shift in Engineering, even when the ship was on full alert making it easier for Barton to slip into an unoccupied workstation and begin to download and analyze the schematics for the Borg and Sernaix systems on board Voyager. After their first failed attempt at destroying the Sernaix shipmind, 'Oz', it had preyed on her that they had managed to outmaneuver her so cleanly. In her opinion, not just Janeway was dangerous, but her entire crew. Their loyalty wasn't to the Federation and Starfleet but to their Captain and in her opinion Janeway was a loose cannon waiting to go off. Their loyalty to Starfleet only lasted as long as hers did from what she could see. Combining the two missions of removing Janeway and Voyager from the war and destroying the shipmind would redeem herself in her own mind and would remove the threat of a Captain with too much power.

Concentrating her attention on the Borg systems, she paid close attention to all the control points where she could take control of the Borg slipstream and the other integrated systems. Making note of all possible weaknesses as column after column of data flowed across the screen. After a moment, she turned her attention on the Sernaix systems. As she attempted to start the download, relay after relay to the systems closed or timed out. Effectively shutting her out of the file. Each time this would happen the console would buzz loudly. Cursing the damned thing under her breath, she turned her attention to trying to disable the sound at this console, but after each attempt the sound would turn itself back on. She looked over her shoulder to check to see if the noise from the console had alerted anyone, but no one was visible only the flat blackness of the pieces of the Sernaix drive system. Barton turned back to her data pad, hitting a few more commands and trying to force the Sernaix system data to download.

The soft footfalls behind her didn't catch her attention until the shadow fell across her screen. Another annoying buzz filled the air as the Sernaix data once again failed to download. Barton spun around, to be faced with the blonde, cat suit clad, Borg girl. "You appear to be having some difficulty with this console, perhaps I may be of assistance to retrieve the data, Commander."

Barton kept her expression carefully neutral. "That won't be necessary." She turned back to the console and forcing herself to stay in control, shut down her link and closed the files she had been accessing. "Just have this console wiped and the default controls reloaded. I believe that will take care of the malfunction."

"I will see to it that the console is repaired." Seven responded, watching as Barton walked away with her PADD not even acknowledging her further. She turned back to the console, her fingers moving with Borg precision over the control padd. At first nothing appeared. The records of the files accessed having been wiped from the system. Again her fingers flew over the keypad, and moments later a list of files appeared on her screen. The schematics for the Borg systems. Seven felt the now familiar emotion of unease, remembering Barton's actions before Voyager's launch. Once again she activated another set of Borg algorithms, pulling up another list from the deleted

section of the memory core. This was a list of files that had been attempted to be opened from this station. The Sernaix schematics.

"Ok, Miral catch." Tom called as he rolled the brightly colored ball along the floor to his daughter who clapped and giggled as it rolled between her widely spread legs. Chubby little hands hit the ball where it lay and she looked up at her father with a huge smile and wide eyes.

"That's right Miral... Roll it back... Roll it here." Tom patted the carpet between his outstretched legs. A high pitch squeal sounded through the room as the ball was pushed back to Tom. Miral vocally approving of her own accomplishment. "That's perfect, sweetie." Tom caught the ball and pushed it back towards Miral, but mid-way along its path the ball lost the little girl's attention as her head snapped up to look at the cabin door.

Tom's brow furrowed as he lifted himself up off the floor, looking at the door, then back at Miral. "What's up sweetie pie?" He took the couple of steps that it took to reach his daughter and pulled her into his arms.

"Unca..." Miral squealed. "Vrrrrmm... Unca... rrryyy..."

Tom pulled back from the overly enthusiastic child's squeals, wincing. "Ok, bring the volume down a little, baby." Her babbling continued, just as loud but perhaps a little slower. Tom chuckled, about to settle Miral on the couch when the chime sounded in their quarters. "It seems we have a visitor, Miral." Tom looked towards the door as he called, "Come."

"How's my favorite niece?" Harry asked as he stepped into the room.

"Unca... Unca..." Miral squealed once more as she leaned in her father's arms reaching out for Harry. Tom felt a tremor run down his spine as he heard his daughter call out to Harry, leaving him wondering. Shaking his head, Tom forced those thoughts out of his mind.

"What, now that I have provided you with a surrogate niece, I'm no longer necessary, Harry my man?" Tom feigned a hurt expression.

Harry rolled his eyes as he moved closer pulling Miral from her father's arms. "If you think I am buying that Tom, you obviously are losing it. Isn't he Miral? Dad's losing his touch."

"No need to get mean," Tom snorted as he moved to put away some of the toys that were laying about, "So what's up Harry? Or did you just come to steal my daughter away from me."

"Actually I was wondering if you and Miral wanted to come and burn some energy off with me... I have holodeck time." Harry bounced Miral on his hip.

Tom eyed Harry, "Now the question is what holoprogram we could take Miral to without incurring B'Elanna's wrath."

"Resurrect Fair Haven and we die horrible deaths," Harry provided in a happy singsong voice while making faces at Miral.

"Like I needed to be told that," Tom threw some more of the Miral's toys into the storage compartment. "We could downscale Captain Proton..."

Harry shook his head, "You looking for your adrenaline rush by making B'Elanna want to kill us? No way, no how."

"You have no sense of adventure my friend," Tom shook his head, "Too bad we don't have any of Naomi's Flotter programs left in the database. Come on... We'll figure it out when we get there."

"Ozymandius," Seven spoke aloud as she moved closer to the main Sernaix drive control housed in Engineering.

"Yes, my dearest Annika," the Sernaix shipmind answered gleefully.

Seven arched her eyebrow, "I prefer to be called Seven."

"And I prefer to be called Oz," the disembodied voice echoed through engineering eerily, "Think we can cut a deal."

Seven's mouth quirked slightly in a small grin and she nodded her consent, "Very well, Oz. Commander Barton was accessing the schematics..."

"Ah yes, well you know what they say... When the cat's away the mice will play." Oz's voice rang out in a singsong manner. "And Janeway is definitely the chief huntress of this pride."

Seven's brow furrowed, "Why do you persist in speaking in riddles when the information you may hold could be vital to Voyager's and your own survival."

"I speak in riddles when the situation at hand is riddled with them." The shipmind stage whispered to the Borg. "I am the all knowing, all seeing Wizard of Oz... but look behind the curtain and you'll only find a man."

"Then you do not know why Commander Barton was accessing your files." Seven turned to leave engineering once more.

Oz's voice echoed behind Seven as she traversed the corridor leading away from the drive control. "I don't need to know everything not to trust. You and I both know what she's capable of, Seven. You were there. And I know her actions aren't ones a friend would take. Keep your friends close but your enemies closer... Now is that us doing that." The further away Seven got the quieter Oz's voice became, even though she knew he was fully capable of projecting his voice wherever he pleased. "Or her." His final words were quieter than most whispers, but Seven heard.

Kathryn found herself almost mesmerized by the steady beeping of the monitors as she kept her watch by Chakotay's bedside. So much so that she barely noticed when a quiet presence joined her in her silent vigil. Looking up slightly she was somewhat surprised to find Seven standing by her side; her arms behind her back in a classic 'Seven pose' but her face bore the general stress of concern. Kathryn sighed and smiled slightly, it seemed almost like an absurd scene from one of Tom's twentieth century movies. The ex-girlfriend and the current both waiting nervously by the handsome hero's bedside to see if he would survive the night.

"Has the Doctor found an antidote for the poison yet, Captain?" Seven's voice was not as assured as it normally was.

Kathryn shook her head slightly, "Not yet, but he will. Chakotay is holding his own on the anti-toxin for now and the Doctor has a backup plan if he doesn't find an antidote in time."

Seven nodded and shifted slightly. Her body language was so easy to read for Kathryn at times that she had to wonder how she missed the change in Chakotay and Seven's relationship just before their first return to the Alpha Quadrant. The statuesque blonde's body seemed to tilt towards Chakotay and the biobed, but there seemed an invisible wall that stopped her approach. A wall that seemed represented by the line of Janeway's back to the floor.

Shaking her head, Janeway reached back behind Seven's back, took one of her hands and pulled her closer to Chakotay's still form. "Knowing we're all with him, Seven. That's what gives him the strength to fight his way back to us." Janeway settled Seven's hand on Chakotay's chest. "We had settled this back on Earth. You're his friend and you're welcome here as well."

Seven looked back at her Captain and nodded, then turned back to Chakotay. "Commander, while the poison you were injected with is strong. You are stronger. Voyager, your friends," Seven looked at Janeway fondly then continued, "The Captain needs you. Recover. You will comply."

Kathryn felt a tear escape the corner of her eye, but couldn't keep the smile off of her face as well as Seven delivered her unique form of encouragement. "So Seven, did you just come to check up on the Commander or did you have something else on your mind?"

"You are correct in assuming I had something else to discuss with you. I would not have disturbed you otherwise." Seven looked towards Chakotay once more.

Janeway held up her hand and stood, straightening her uniform and letting her command façade slip over her features once more. "No, Seven. Above anything else I am the Captain of Voyager. I can not allow personal concerns to affect how people treat me or how I command this vessel."

Seven nodded in understanding. "Very well. Earlier today in Engineering, I encountered Commander Barton. She was accessing files and seemed to be having some difficulty. I offered my assistance. The Commander denied needing my assistance and requested that I re-initialize the workstation she had been using. At first I was going to simply comply with her request, but instead..." Seven stopped seemingly puzzled as to why she had stopped.

"You had a hunch, Seven... It's alright. Very human." Janeway's mouth quirked up in a characteristic half grin.

Seven's eyebrow arched in seeming surprise and then she continued, "I accessed the console's recently deleted records using a Borg algorithm it yielded a list of files all of which pertain to schematics of critical Borg and Sernaix systems aboard Voyager."

Though the general sense of unease that Seven seemed to be feeling carried to Janeway as well, she raised her hand. Despite the woman's earlier actions, and the somewhat suspicious nature of the actions Seven witnessed. It didn't make her a spy. "Seven, as my executive officer," Janeway found herself looking at Chakotay instinctively, "Commander Barton has legitimate reasons to be accessing those files. I'm afraid that doesn't convict her of anything in my book."

Seven's brow furrowed as it had earlier. "Captain her request for me to re-initialize that station would have wiped any and all record of her access from the system."

"Yes, Seven, but that access isn't restricted and you did say that the station was malfunctioning when you came." Janeway pinched her nose as she tried to get a clear picture of what was going on aboard her vessel.

"I do not believe it was malfunctioning. I believe Oz was restricting her access to those files." Seven stated flatly.

Janeway scowled slightly, she didn't like that the shipmind could restrict access to anything and she wasn't certain that she entirely trusted him either. "Did he tell you this Seven?"

Seven shook her head, "He did not. However he did tell me that he did not trust her and 'Keep your friends close and your enemies closer' then he asked if we were doing that or if she was."

"Cryptic as always, our friend the shipmind." Janeway shook her head slightly, "And this leads you to believe that he restricted her access to those files?"

"No, however the fact that the only files she did access were the files on the Borg systems and the files she could not access were the ones on the Sernaix systems..." Seven watched as Janeway began to nod.

"You're right. It was Oz." Janeway motioned for Seven to follow her. "Seven I want you to take this to Tuvok. I understand he has his doubts about our Commander Barton as well but I don't want you to broadcast this over the comm. system. Take it to him personally."

Seven fell into step beside Janeway and nodded slightly. "Very well and if we need to contact you?"

"I think it's about time that I had a little discussion with this First Officer of mine."

Leaning just inside the holodeck doors, B'Elanna couldn't help but smile at the scene in front of her. Sandrine's rendered child friendly by the extraction of all the characters, no hustlers, no gigolos, and no Sandrine. Harry with Miral perched on his shoulders, happily squealing each time her father sank another ball.

Smiling, the half-Klingon Engineer decided to rattle their cages some. She moved deeper into the holoprogram without drawing their attention then moved to the bar and took a swig from one of the mugs and she sputtered disgustedly as the foul tasting liquid oozed down her throat. "I should have known you'd try corrupting my daughter sooner or later, Paris. Teaching her to hustle pool..." B'Elanna's voice was harsh. Tom jerked at his wife's angry voice, his cue going awry. Only tapping the cue ball hard enough to roll gently into the ball he was shooting for and his cue tip tearing along the felt, destroying the pool table.

Both Harry and B'Elanna started laughing at Tom's startled and frightened expression. "And teaching her to drink this swill... Root beer. Really Tom." She shook her head and handed him the mug.

"Ha, ha... Very funny." Tom scowled at his wife and best friend. The adults being busy with their teasing each other, none of them noticed the very unhappy little girl atop Harry's shoulders.

She scowled at the ball that hadn't gone in as her father had obviously wanted. "IN," her little voice commanded. Drawing all three adult's attention to her. B'Elanna's eyes widened, both she and Tom's heads turned to see the solid red slide neatly into the corner pocket. Miral giggled and nodded her head affirmatively. "In."

Harry's eyes were like saucers as he took in what happened. "I believed you but..." The young Lieutenant shook his head slightly and looked back up at the baby on his shoulders.

"Tom..." B'Elanna looked at her husband and he nodded.

"Next stop, Sickbay. Hopefully Doc will have had a minute to go over those scans he took."

Barton looked towards the turbolift doors as the telltale sound of their opening echoed through the room. Much to her surprise Janeway stood there. From what she had gleaned despite their best efforts to keep it concealed, the survivor was in fact Commander Chakotay. A fact Barton planned to advise Admiral Warhol of at her earliest opportunity. "My ready room, Commander." Janeway's voice was all business.

The Commander rose from the center seat and moved towards the Ready Room doors, an almost surreal replay of the events with Commander Tuvok. "I assume you're here to ratify Commander Tuvok's disciplinary recommendation."

"Don't assume anything with me, Commander." Janeway settled in her desk, not willing to change her habits even if the woman's height and stature put her at a disadvantage even when standing. "If we weren't in the situation we're in now, I would relieve you of duty so quickly your head would spin and don't push me on it. I've relieved people I care about and respect more than you for a hell of a lot less than what you pulled today." Janeway steepled her fingers and looked at Barton closely. Tuvok was right. She was cool. Far too cool. "Somehow I don't think relieving you of duty would do either of us any good at the moment though, now would it Commander."

Thalia's expression didn't change, but Kathryn could have sworn she saw a gleam of satisfaction in her eyes as she said, "No sir."

"Seven told me you were having trouble accessing some files from one of the Engineering terminals." Kathryn leaned forward in her seat. "New ship, no shakedown cruise. Some things are just bound not to work quite the way they're supposed to. You should stick to familiar workstations."

Barton shrugged slightly, "I like to go directly to the source, Sir." She watched Janeway carefully. "Commander Tuvok advised me that all information on our survivor has been classified strictly need to know. You should know there are rumors going around the ship that our survivor is a former Voyager crewmember. Of course that would mean it could only be one person and we've received reports that the Logan survived the battle."

Kathryn's eyes darkened at the inference about Chakotay, "Well as Tuvok told you all information about our survivor is classified until I have had a chance to debrief him. I'm certain if he is a former crewmember from Voyager, he'll have plenty of interesting things to say about what went on during this battle. Both on the battlefield and on his ship."

They both remained silent a moment longer, observing the other with veiled eyes. Finally Janeway stood, leaning forward on her desk. "I'm not certain why you're here Barton. I'm not certain who assigned you or why." Kathryn straightened and moved around the desk coming up behind Barton. "I do know this. You aren't here to help this crew. You aren't here as part of our team. I can't prove it ... yet." Kathryn purposefully left a pregnant pause and circled around in front to look her opponent in the eye. "But when I do, you can be certain there will be hell to pay."

Barton arched her eyebrow. She knew she'd held out as long as she could. Now was the end of this particular scenario and any way she drew it out, it didn't look good for her. However she'd do her duty. "Captain, I have no idea what you could suspect. I was assigned to Voyager as your first officer. I am fully qualified for that position."

Janeway's nostrils flared and her lips thinned as she took in the 'innocent' pose of her first officer. "I suppose you are." Kathryn circled once more behind her desk, sitting down in her chair. "You know, Oz said something very interesting today. He told Seven to keep her friends close but her enemies closer. It's good advice don't you think, Commander Barton?"

"Yes, Sir." Barton barked out, keeping her expression neutral. This game had gotten that much more serious in a very short period of time.

"Dismissed."

Seven walked along side Tuvok as they made their way to Commander Barton's quarters, "The information you obtained is valid, Seven, however as of yet we do not have enough proof to do any more than continue our investigation."

Seven nodded, however she could feel the twisting in her stomach that seemed to tell her when something was wrong. "I do not think we should wait to act."

Tuvok observed the expression on Seven's face. "A hunch." His eyebrow arched. "I find it surprising that you are acting on a hunch. They are for the most part illogical, emotional responses." Seven nodded and drew herself straighter. "However, I have noted that often times a human's hunch is actually caused by their awareness of details that they do not have access to in their conscious mind." This time it was Seven's turn to look at Tuvok in surprise. He merely glanced at her and continued with what he was doing. "Unfortunately, as of yet we can not act on the information we have. If we were to do so, and were unable to prove Commander Barton's intentions, the Captain and crew of Voyager would come under intense scrutiny from Starfleet Command."

Arriving outside Barton's quarters, Seven and Tuvok stopped and opened one of the access panels for the internal security sensors. "Implementing modification Delta-32-8-B from the original Voyager will allow you to recover more detailed security scans of her quarters." Seven stated trying to guess Tuvok's motivation for bringing her here while the Captain was ensconced in the Ready Room with Barton.

"Indeed," Tuvok agreed, "Though I could make the modifications myself, as our time is limited, in this case two people are more desirable than one. It is my assumption that any equipment she is using has been adapted to be undetectable by standard Starfleet security scans. However they would not have had enough time to adapt their equipment to the scans we developed in the Delta Quadrant." Both Seven and Tuvok's fingers flew over the console, the sensors slowly recalibrating to their new settings. Moments later the modifications were complete and they lifted the panel back in place and moved down the hall, only moments ahead of Barton who arrived back at her quarters after her meeting with the Captain.

Janeway settled back down beside Chakotay putting one hand on his chest in need of the physical re-assurance that he was still alive. The slow but steady rise and fall of his chest beneath her fingers gave her the assurance that he was indeed still with her. "Chakotay, I need your counsel more than ever." She shook her head sadly. "I think someone in Starfleet is working against the Federation winning. Against us anyway. Commander Barton is a part of it, I'm certain of that."

She looked into the handsome face. Was there a little more color there than Before? Her hand traced his jaw line. "I keep doubting myself though. I keep thinking that I only think they're against me, because they took you away from me. That maybe Starfleet was right to separate us." Janeway looked down at her feet for a moment, wishing she could look into his eyes. "That's what they want, isn't it Chakotay. Put a new first officer with me. One that's argumentative, one who questions every decision I make. Take away the person that my own logs admitted kept me on an even keel for the last seven years. Use my own doubts about my reaction to them taking you

away to make me uncertain about Barton's actions. All of this would cripple my effectiveness as a Captain and would effectively cripple Voyager."

Kathryn pulled away from Chakotay, pacing the length of the isolation unit his biobed was in. Her mind was re-analyzing everything that had happened with this assumption in mind. Like dominos, everything started to fall into place. Janeway turned and tapped her comm. badge decisively. "Janeway to Lt. Cormac."

"Cormac here, Captain."

"Set a course for the Miratos sector." Janeway didn't have to be on the bridge to see the confusion on the face of the young helm officer. The Miratos sector was an empty area of space towards the Delta Quadrant, but still technically inside of the Alpha Quadrant. "Take us there at transwarp, when we arrive go immediately to cloak."

"Aye, Captain."

Kathryn moved back to Chakotay's side. If Barton was what she, Tuvok and Seven thought she was, then this should feed her enough misinformation to keep her guessing. Did they know something that Barton didn't. Janeway grinned. Abruptly changing course, going there at top speed and going immediately to cloak, left a pretty definite conclusion for her arrogant first officer to come to and if Barton wasn't what they thought she was then there was no harm done.

Sitting back down, Kathryn couldn't keep the smile off her face as she watched Chakotay's silent form. Whether he was awake or not, he always helped her to know exactly what to do. Only when Kathryn ignored his counsel did she find that she'd taken the wrong path.

"Who told you," The Doctor's voice echoed through the bay.

Kathryn's head came up abruptly. "Told me what?"

The Doctor smiled slightly, "I'm sorry Captain. From the expression on your face, I thought perhaps one of my assistants had let you know that I synthesized an antidote for the poison." Kathryn's eyes widened and her smile grew brighter. "I administered it to him while you were away on the bridge. He's responding very well."

"Then the color I thought I saw in his face," Kathryn ran her hand against his face again.

"Is actually there. The Commander will make a full recovery. I will have to treat some of his organs for damage caused by the oxygen deprivation, but that can wait until he regains consciousness." The Doctor was surprised when the Captain moved around the biobed and kissed him gently on the cheek.

"That was from Kathryn, not the Captain." Janeway straightened slightly and nodded at him, clapping one hand on his shoulder. "Good work, Doctor."

Janeway moved back to watch Chakotay, her back to the Doctor for the moment. The Doctor's hand went to his cheek. "And that was from the Captain." He shook his head and headed back for his office, "I think I preferred the response that Kathryn gave me."

Able to hear his comments even as he moved away, Janeway allowed her head to drop slightly and a throaty chuckle filled the medical bay.

Barton slipped into her quarters. It was time to step up her operation on Voyager. As she moved to set up her special communications equipment, she felt the ship move to transwarp. She pursed her lips and tapped her communicator. "Barton to the Bridge."

"Lt. Cormac here, Commander."

"We just moved to transwarp. Why?" Barton tersely asked.

"The Captain ordered us to the Miratos sector, best speed. We're to go to cloak when we arrive."

"Thank you, Lieutenant. Barton out."

Thalia settled on her couch continuing the set up of her equipment, then she opened a channel back to Starfleet. "Barton to Admiral Warhol."

"Warhol here. Good to hear from you, Barton. How is your operation on Voyager proceeding?"

Barton shook her head, "I'm afraid I don't have good news to report in that area, Admiral. They aren't responding as expected to my insubordination. Janeway is far too certain that her solution is always right in any given situation and the original Voyager crew stands behind her one hundred percent. She currently is in the process of moving Voyager out to the Miratos Sector, at transwarp with orders to go to cloak once we arrive."

"The Miratos sector. I haven't received any intelligence on that sector. As far as we know its just empty space. I will pass the information on. As far as Janeway and her crew's reaction, we should have expected that, Barton. Just because her psych profile says she's given to periods of self doubt, doesn't mean they necessarily happen on the bridge." Warhol paused for a moment seeming to think, "We have to keep them out of the war, Commander."

Barton nodded. Understanding the unspoken missive. "As well, Admiral you should be aware that they rescued someone from an escape pod. They've kept him under tight security, but through monitoring the activity in Sickbay I can state with certainty that it is Commander Chakotay."

"That only makes it more imperative that you take Janeway, Voyager and the shipmind out of the war entirely. Section 31 can not be exposed through Grant's carelessness."

"Yes, sir." Barton responded. "It's been an honor serving with you, Sir."

"We heard you might have time now, Doc." Tom said as he and B'Elanna entered Sickbay carrying Miral.

"Indeed, I am happy to report that the other critical case that kept me from seeing my god daughter earlier is well on the way to recovery." The Doctor stood and moved to Tom who handed him Miral who was clutching her favorite teddy bear. "And how is my favorite god daughter today?"

Miral giggled wildly as the Doctor laid her on the biobed and tickled her mercilessly. Tom and B'Elanna both smiled at the scene in front of them. This was the stiff hologram they had started out with over seven years ago. It just didn't seem possible. Then he cleared his throat and brought their attention back on him. "You know it's very difficult to make a proper analysis of the situation when I don't have all the information." When they looked back at the Doctor his annoyance was clear.

Tom shook his head. Some things never changed. "We were in the holodeck and Miral made a pool ball I missed roll into the corner pocket."

"You missed, Tom." The Captain's gravelly voice echoed through Sickbay proper. "Are you and I going to have to have some matches to bring your skill back up to snuff?" She teased gently.

They all turned to see Kathryn, leaning in the doorway of the iso-lab. "How is he doing, Captain?" B'Elanna asked as she moved to Kathryn's side.

Kathryn held up both hands and grinned, "Thanks to the skill of our esteemed, Doctor he's going to be fine. Now what is the problem with my god daughter?"

"Our god daughter, Captain," The Doctor corrected her, "Has had another incident of the same type as I reported to you earlier."

Kathryn's brow furrowed. "Have you made any progress with the scans you took earlier?"

The Doctor's eyebrow quirked. "I haven't had a chance to go over them thoroughly yet Captain." His head moved in the direction of the iso-lab and she nodded understandingly.

Miral, who was becoming increasingly agitated with the lack of attention being paid to her and who wanted her most favorite Aunt to come and play with her, made the snap decision to attract the person of her desire's attention. She threw the teddy bear at Janeway with a growled, "Go," issuing from her throat. Where the teddy bear would have dropped to the floor, it suddenly lifted up from its rapid descent downward and floated to a stunned Janeway while the Doctor scanned the occurrence, his fingers moving rapidly over the key pad of his tricorder.

Kathryn caught the teddy bear reflexively, and the Doctor snatched it out of her hands scanning it as well. "I'm not reading any residual power signatures on the bear."

Tom moved to Kathryn's side as well. "I know it's always a shock the first time you see it."

"That's an understatement, Tom." Kathryn looked at him wondering how on Earth he could be so blasé about the entire thing.

The Doctor cleared his throat once more. "If you would all mind, you are distracting my subject. You and B'Elanna can come back in about an hour to pick Miral up." He turned his attention back on the Captain. "And you should go get some sleep."

Kathryn waved him off and put her hands on Tom and B'Elanna's shoulders. "Come on people, you can come visit our patient."

Tuvok sat scanning Barton's quarters from his office. The modifications that he and Seven had made to the configuration of the sensors had indeed worked. He was picking up some sort of transmission from within the First Officer's quarters. Narrowing the resolution of the scan slowly, he increased the quality of the data he was retrieving.

Slowly he began the process of filtering, then enhancing, then filtering the data. Time and again. Tuvok's eyebrow quirked. An outgoing communication on a channel not normally used, scanned or accessed by any Starfleet agencies he was aware of. "Computer begin playback of file."

"...have good news to report in that area, Admiral. They aren't responding as expected to my insubordination. Janeway is far too ..." Static crackled between the retrieved sections of the

communication. "...you should be aware that they rescued someone from an escape pod. They've kept him under tight security, but through monitoring the activity in Sickbay..."

There was no evidence to whom Barton was reporting to, other than it was an Admiral presumably at Starfleet. The incoming transmission was not retrievable. However, now they had the evidence they needed to act.

Bright light permeated his eyelids as consciousness returned to him. His mouth was dry and felt as though a pack of wild dogs had taken up residence there. Slowly he opened his eyes, this couldn't be the afterlife, he wouldn't feel so bad if it was.

"Chakotay... Chakotay..." The voice was familiar and very welcome. Maybe returning to Earth, the Sernaix and everything else had just been a dream. Maybe they were still in the Delta Quadrant. How else would he have come to be aboard Voyager once again. However the thought that that would mean everything that happened between he and Kathryn would have been a dream as well made his heart clench in pain. If that was the case, he'd rather be in the afterlife now. He opened his eyes slowly and Kathryn's concerned but smiling face came into focus. "Shh... Just take a small sip." He felt something cool at his lips and obeyed her directions as he felt water lap at them.

"Kathryn..." Chakotay questioned. He couldn't believe his luck. Of all ships to be rescued by, perhaps the spirits were with him after all.

"Yes, it's me." Kathryn stroked his face. She hadn't been able to stop smiling since he had begun to show signs of regaining consciousness. "How do you feel, Chakotay?"

"I feel like hell..." His voice was hoarse. "But I'll get better." He smiled up at her, his dimples showing.

The dam broke for Kathryn. A trickle of tears slid down her face and she laid her head against his chest. "I never thought I was going to see that smile again in my lifetime."

"It's alright, Kathryn. I'm here and you rescued me." His hand stroked her hair, "That's what we do. I rescue you, you rescue me."

"I love you, Chakotay." The words were barely a whisper, but he could feel them deep inside of himself.

"I love you too, Kathryn." His eyes met hers as Chakotay spoke. She leaned up to him. Brushing a feather light kiss over his lips. Kathryn pulled back and cupped Chakotay's cheek. Chakotay's face sobered as he remembered the incidents on the Logan. Suddenly his demeanor became business like, "Captain there are things you need to know about the events that led me to be in that escape pod."

"Indeed," Tuvok's voice echoed from the door of the iso-lab. "Your information could have an impact on the results of my investigation as well."

Janeway held up her hand. "Not here gentlemen. We need someplace secure."

"Captain, it is impossible for us to say whether a room is secure or not. With as much information as we have, the entire ship could be under surveillance." Tuvok added grimly.

"Point taken, Tuvok. However, let's reconvene this in my quarters with the rest of the senior staff minus the subject of our investigation." She looked at Chakotay, a twinkle in her eye though her expression was pure Captain, "I'll arrange a site to site transport for you, Commander."

The senior staff sat in stunned silence as Chakotay related the events on the Logan. Kathryn sat rigid in her seat, desperately trying to maintain her control and stop herself from wrapping his arms around him and never letting go. Instead she allowed herself to put a comforting hand on Chakotay's shoulder, though she thought it was probably more for her benefit, to assure herself that he had really survived than to reassure him.

Tuvok's report is less of a shock than Chakotay's. The entire senior staff having felt something 'wrong' about Barton from the time she took Chakotay's place. B'Elanna slammed her hand down into the couch. "I can't believe we didn't see through her to begin with."

"In fact, you did." Tuvok supplied. "However they counted on the fact that you would account your reactions to Commander Barton to a sense of disappointment that Chakotay would not be joining us on this mission."

Tom nodded, "Of course. So we're all giving her second, third and fourth chances because we think its us over reacting instead of her."

"Indeed." Tuvok agreed. "It seems clear that there is an agency within Starfleet that does not wish the Federation to win this war. Or at the very least, they have their own agenda."

As one Harry, B'Elanna and Seven all spoke, "Section 31."

Janeway held up her hand, "Section 31, if you believe it exists, is supposed to stand for the preservation of the Federation... Not its downfall."

"Its like the 'Men-In-Black' urban legend from the twentieth century, Captain." Tom began. "Just because they stand for protecting something, doesn't mean their methods always leave what it is they're protecting whole. There was a saying during that time. 'We had to nuke the planet from orbit to save it.'"

Janeway scowled. "So in order to preserve the Federation..."

"They're willing to sacrifice some parts of it." The Doctor piped up. "Much like a surgeon, making decisions about cutting away certain infected parts of an organ."

"I think that means in their eyes, we're part of the problem, Captain." Chakotay spoke quietly.

"Tuvok get a security team together. Computer, locate Commander Barton. Not by communicator, but by bio-readings." Janeway stood, her voice decisive as she spoke.

There was a moment's pause then the computer answered. "Commander Barton is approaching Engineering."

Tuvok tapped his communicator to dispatch the team he had already assembled earlier.

Barton had been monitoring Janeway's cabin throughout their conversation, wanting to know exactly how much they knew about Section 31 and their activities. She had left her cabin just as

their discussions had turned specifically to Section 31. This crew was more of a threat than Admiral Warhol had ever suspected.

She cursed that she couldn't move towards Engineering faster, but Barton couldn't afford to draw attention to herself. The Sernaix control system came into view just as she heard the tell tale sound of Starfleet issue boots pelting down the hard corridors of Engineering. Barton smiled as she moved into a dead run towards the nearest access panel. Quickly rerouting certain controls to the panel, she began to systematically force failures on all the control circuits to the Borg transwarp. She could feel the ship begin to shake violently, as the security team rounded the corner training phasers on her. Then the dilated warp effect rippled through the ship. Everyone seemed to move in slow motion, as it hit them. Security unable to even get their first shot off.

If her calculations were correct, Voyager had another thirty seconds before it blew up. Confident that she had completed both her missions, she bit down hard twice on one of her molars. There was a flash of brightness in her eyes, and her body slumped to the floor. The neural charge had taken her life.

Despite the dilated warp effect, B'Elanna and the rest of the senior staff moved to exit Janeway's cabin. Kathryn looked back momentarily at Chakotay who nodded for her to go as well. Then as quickly as it started, it stopped.

"Janeway to the bridge," she barked. "What just happened."

"The Borg transwarp, Captain. It went into an imbalance when we lost all control circuits to it." Cormac answered.

Kathryn winced, and looked at her staff. "Our status, Lieutenant."

"Checking that Captain... We're in the Delta Quadrant. Approximately seventy five thousand light years from home."

There seemed to be a collective sigh from her senior staff. They were back at the beginning or at least some semblance of it. She held up her hand, "At least this time we have a way to get home people."

"No casualties reported Captain, but both the Sernaix and the Borg drives are offline. We have standard warp engines. The Sernaix drive system seems to have somehow taken control of the Borg transwarp and brought us out of the dilation effect before Voyager came apart. I have no idea how it did it, but now the Sernaix drive isn't responding either."

"Thank you, Lieutenant. I'll be on the bridge shortly." Janeway looked at her staff. "It seems we owe Oz a debt of gratitude. B'Elanna, Harry, Seven... See to him. Make certain that he's alright then get those drives back online. I'm not making this trip the hard way again." Janeway watched as those three headed out towards Engineering.

Tuvok's communicator chirped. "Ayala to Tuvok."

"Tuvok here, Mr. Ayala. Did you apprehend Commander Barton?"

"No sir. We caught up with her in Engineering. She was doing something at one of the panels. Then the transwarp became unstable. When the transwarp stabilized once more, she was dead."

"Have her transported to Sickbay for an autopsy." Tuvok replied. "Tuvok out."

"I believe that's my cue." The Doctor said and exited the cabin without waiting to be dismissed.

"Tuvok. Paris. You're with me." Janeway turned towards Chakotay, "Your orders are to stay here and recuperate. I'll be back as soon as I can." She smiled at Chakotay once more then led the other two men out of her quarters.

Chakotay shook his head. "The more things change..."

As the trio arrive on the bridge and take their positions. "Captain just as we left the Alpha quadrant our communications system picked up a transmission." Lt. Cormac who moved to another station reported.

"Do we still have it?" Janeway turned to look at Cormac who nodded, "Alright put it on screen."

"This is Commander John Sinclair of the Ekota. The Sernaix have staged another offensive." The screen shows pictures of another scene of huge devastation. "This time they are not retreating. They have set a perimeter. An enemy line of sorts..." The transmission suddenly becomes static.

"Tuvok, do you have the co-ordinates that transmission was sent from?" Janeway turned to look at her old friend.

"Indeed." Tuvok sends the co-ordinates to Janeway's terminal. A slight gasp is heard from her lips. "As you have surmised, Captain. The problems with our transwarp drive have caused us to cross that line."

Janeway looked up, her expression slightly bleaker. "So now we're in the Delta Quadrant, with two out of three faster than light drives off line, and we're behind enemy lines."

"That is essentially correct." Tuvok arched his brow as Janeway leaned back in her command seat and once again pinched the bridge of her nose.

Chakotay looked up from replacing the last of his replicated belongings in their places in his new cabin as his doors hissed open to admit Kathryn. "Not a bad place. Did they leave you with the unpleasant duty of collecting her belongings?"

"No, Tuvok and his security team did that for me. Though I am beginning to think I should just forget about replicating this stuff." He held up a small figurine. "It seems like every time I get comfortable with my possessions, I end up losing them aboard some ship."

Kathryn's face took on an expression of sympathy as she moved towards him. "We all seem to keep ending up in the same place. What I wouldn't give to just retire to some nice M-class planet out here and forget all about Starfleet, Section 31 and the Sernaix."

Chakotay smiled slightly. "But you can't."

Smiling wryly, Janeway watched him closely. "No I can't." How was she going to do this. She needed him, but could she force them to step back again in their relationship after they had moved forward so far and if she couldn't do that how could she ask him to be her first officer once again. How could she force herself to send him out on missions possibly to never return. Could she deal with going through what she had just done, time and again? This time with the guilt that she had been the one that sent him out to die.

Chakotay watched the emotions flickering across her face. He knew what was coming. She needed the Commander again. Her first officer. He felt his heart constrict. He knew what would come next. Could he consign himself to being by her side once again. Her angry warrior, but nothing more. He smiled slightly. At least it would give them both good motivation to end this as quickly as possible.

"I can't do this with out you, Chakotay." Janeway began to speak, her mind still sorting through scenario after scenario. Then it struck her. Whether they were together on Voyager or not, the dynamic between them had already changed. She could no more change it back than she could hold back the tide. Those barriers were gone and she couldn't fathom how to replace them. If he were to die in the line of duty now, she would feel the same guilt whether they were together on Voyager or not.

So caught in her own thoughts, she barely heard Chakotay as he responded to her. "You don't have to Kathryn. You seem to be short a first officer. I'd be honored if you would consider me for the position."

Kathryn's head came up and she smiled broadly. "Thank you, Commander." Then slowly she leaned in, capturing his lips with her own. This kiss slowly became more passionate. Communicating promises of love and understanding. Communicating that no matter what Kathryn and Chakotay would be together. Protocol would no longer stand between them.

Janeway looked around her bridge. Tuvok was at tactical. Tom and Harry at helm and ops. B'Elanna stood at the Engineering terminal, along with Seven. It almost seemed like she'd been caught in a time warp. Almost. There was only one person missing.

"Harry, have you completed the scans of the Sernaix line?" Janeway looked towards the Ops station.

"Yes, Captain. They have the Alpha Quadrant well and truly fenced off. And we are behind that fence." Harry transferred the results of the scans to Janeway's terminal.

Suddenly everyone's attention was drawn to the turbolift doors opening and Chakotay stepping out. Slowly smiles flickered across the face of each person on the bridge as he walked down the ramp towards Janeway who stood, barely keeping her face schooled behind her command mask.

"Commander Chakotay reporting for duty, Captain." Chakotay smiled broadly.

"Welcome back Commander." She motioned to the seat beside her, as her eyes twinkled with barely concealed mischief. "Next time, be on time for you shift."

Chakotay shook his head, "Aye, Captain."

"Computer log as of this Stardate, the Executive officer of the USS Voyager is Commander Chakotay and transfer all command appropriate command codes to him." As she spoke the entire atmosphere of the bridge seemed to lighten as if everything was now back where it was supposed to be. The universe was right with itself once more.

"Logged and transferred." The computer's voice acknowledged the Captain. She nodded to Chakotay and they both took their seats.

Tom grinned. "I almost feel sorry for the Sernaix." Harry turned and looked at Tom strangely. Tom just nodded back at the Command team who were sharing a knowing look. "The Sernaix don't have a hope in hell now."

Kathryn turned a low level glare on Tom Paris. "My sentiments exactly, Mr. Paris." She looked over at Chakotay, their fingers knitting together over the console. "Let's do it."

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