

B4FV Episode 1.01

Caretaker

Commander Kathryn Janeway stared solemnly into space, cradling an unusually large cup in her skinny hands. The disobedient door chime to her office decided to go off when she placed the cup by her lips. Raising just one finger, she slurped at her beverage, determined to make the selfish crewmember at her door wait as long as possible.

Two minutes later the cup was empty, her finger was drumming the desk, her left eye was on the nearby replicator. Finally she replied, "come in!"

The doors opened swiftly for a shy looking young ensign, who hid his face by glancing at the floor, a ridiculous amount of brown hair also helped with that. He dumped a package on her desk, "for you ma'am." He turned to leave.

Kathryn jumped to her feet, "wait!" The unfortunate ensign jumped out of his skin. "Is it coffee related?"

"I... er... dunno sir... er ma'am," the ensign stammered. "Excuse me." He managed to leave much quicker than he entered, leaving Kathryn to curiously stare at the package.

"Doesn't smell like coffee," she mumbled. It was obviously not worthy of her time, she was due back on the bridge anyway. Resisting the urge to get another coffee, Kathryn Janeway moved away from her desk and left her office.

Moments later the package beeped, then exploded leaving the entire office in flames.

Kathryn entered the bridge, she was greeted by a lot of shocked faces but these didn't faze her. Like nothing happened she took a seat next to her Captain. He was busy staring at her with an eyebrow raised.

"What? I'm not late," she said.

"Your office just blew up," the Captain said, without blinking.

"Oh... bummer," Kathryn casually replied. Her eyes drifted up to the Vulcan Security Chief who walked up to the commanding officers.

"Commander, I am pleased to see you are all right," he calmly said. "Admiral Paris was wondering if you gave anymore thought about the promotion offer?"

"Why yes I have, a lot of thought," Kathryn said, her eyes darting around randomly.

"You don't know what Lieutenant Tuvok is talking about, do you?" the Captain muttered, groaning into his hand.

"Of course, does that get me out of this dump?" Kathryn asked the Vulcan standing nearby.

His eyebrow raised very high, the Captain meanwhile looked up to glare at her. "Um, why would they promote you and keep you here, when I'm still here?"

She casually shrugged in response, "why wouldn't they? At least if I was in command I wouldn't have offices blowing up, willy nilly. Tell Paris I'll take it."

At the back of the bridge the ensign from before looked around at her briefly, then back to his station. "God damnit! Plan B it is."

Loud footsteps broke the eery silence that had taken over the dark streets of Manchester. This side of town was known to be dangerous, and strange to say the least. As usual it was deserted, except for one lone figure walking alongside the kerb.

He clearly didn't care about drawing any attention to himself. His loud steps could have been heard a few streets away, as they seem to purposively aim for any puddles on the road. His clothing however was as dark as night, the only contrast was his bright blonde messy hair.

Unknown to him a couple more figures had heard him, they emerged from the alley way and began to carefully follow him.

Little did they know the young man seemed to expect it. A small smile tugged at his lips as he stopped dead, his hand reaching for the long, thin bag on his back.

As per usual it was a beautiful sunny day in San Francisco. Unfortunately for the graduates at Starfleet Academy the temperatures were close to zero, there was still snow lying on the ground. Each graduate had made sure to wear at least two layers of clothes underneath their graduation cloak.

Two Admirals were handing out the certificates very slowly in the eyes of the freezing students. "Harry Kim," one called out.

One young man breathed a sigh of relief, making it appear like he had just breathed out some smoke. He walked up to the stage to accept his well earned certificate, the other Admiral held out his hand for him to shake. Harry tried not to blush as he forgot he still had his room-mates fluffy black gloves on.

Harry quickly left the stage, his face beet red, and joined his family at the side of the ceremony area. His proud parents didn't appear to be affected as much by the cold, they greeted him with big grins and a hug.

"Aaaw our little Harry's all grown up," his mother cooed over him like he was five, pinching at his red cheeks.

"Mom, no... not here!" Harry whined. The pinching did warm his cheeks up a little but he was very aware of his classmates nearby.

"So son, do you know where you've been assigned?" his father asked him.

"Dad no, I still have to go through extra experience training so they can pick my field," Harry replied as his mother settled for cleaning his cheek with a hanky.

"Honey, you've been here for years and they still don't know," she said. "Though my boy is probably too good at everything to pick just one field."

Harry smiled, half of it out of embarrassment. "Um, would you like a tour of the place?"

His mother replied by hooking up her arm with her son's, "happy to sweetie." She dragged him away like she was giving the tour, her husband followed them both, still smiling broadly.

He could barely see a metre ahead of him. The man's dark eyes had tried to adjust to the overlapping darkness, only managing to lighten the black into a dark hazy grey.

This is never a safe place to meet up, he thought to himself. My contact gets the job done, but if anyone saw him he'd most likely be arrested on the spot with that reward hanging over his head.

He was late. A sigh broke the silence, the man's large frame shifted impatiently. Getting new recruits was getting more and more difficult. The Marquis Captain had wasted his time with every visit for two months now. It looked to him like this would be another repeat performance.

Footsteps interrupted his thoughts, the Captain moved his hand down to his pocket that held both a weapon and a contacting device. He could never be too careful.

"Commander Chakotay?" a gruff voice said quietly.

He was almost relieved. He knew he could handle himself in a fight, no question but something about this town, this area that unnerved him. He had heard some strange things about it. An accidental chuckle brought him out of his worries, his eyes had finally adjusted to allow him to see the outline of his company's figure. "Well?"

"I have found two. You're not going to like it."

Chakotay sighed, now wasn't the time to be picky. The last battle with the Cardassians had seriously depleted his crew. "Take me to them."

His comrade chuckled to himself, this annoyed the Captain. "You don't get it, do you?"

"What is the problem exactly?" Chakotay grunted.

"I can't take you to them exactly, one of them still needs to be convinced," the recruiter smirked.

"That's not really your job, now is it," Chakotay stated, his calm voice didn't give away his annoyance with the other man. "Now why won't I like it?"

"The first is a Doctor, he has offered to smuggle in supplies," the recruiter replied. "However his step son is another matter."

Chakotay rolled his eyes, his hand once again was reaching to the weapon in his pocket. "Then we'll just recruit the Doctor, what's the problem?"

Despite the darkness Chakotay could tell his comrade was smiling in the most unnerving way he could. "Trust me, we want this young man on our side. He'll be most helpful."

"How so?" Chakotay sighed.

"Well if I said it all it would spoil the surprise now wouldn't it?" the recruiter laughed to himself. "All I can tell you right now is he's a first year Academy cadet, with quite the colourful record already."

"So are you suggesting we wait until he's expelled, is that the problem?" Chakotay angrily asked the difficult man in front of him.

"The problem is he'll be difficult to recruit and difficult to give orders to. The only reason he's still there is he's one of the brightest in his class, and um... how can I say it? Another special skill he possesses. We'd be fools to let Starfleet "control" it."

Chakotay had quite enough. He turned around to leave, "just send the Doctor to the usual place. I have plenty of bright recruits, if he'll be difficult I don't see..."

The man placed a hand on his arm. "When have I let you down before Commander?" he said roughly. "Trust me, you want this one on your side. Recruiting him will only be difficult because of his nature. However he hates Cardassians and his step father tells me we have something he'll not say no to."

"Fine, where are your recruiters?" Chakotay sighed.

"They had to wait for the boy to leave Starfleet grounds, by the time we get to San Francisco I'm sure they'll have confronted him."

"What is this thing he'll not say no to?" Chakotay asked.

"A girl apparently, a member of your crew."

Chakotay couldn't believe what he was hearing. "What? We don't run a dating agency, this is serious. I don't need another hormone driven spotty little Starfleet brat getting distracted."

"Mr Paris wasn't really that spotty, but I see your point," the man chuckled. "Rest assured that isn't the case, it's just something to get him on your ship. Come... we should make our way to my ship."

The two Marquis men made their way through the dark alleyways of San Francisco, each one less appealing than the last. In the distance they both could hear a struggle in the distance. Both men picked up their pace until they reached the next turn, what they saw in front of them stopped them dead in their tracks.

"So it's not just Manchester," Chakotay muttered as he eyed the two beaten people on the ground, in front of him.

The recruiter widened his own eyes, not believing what he was seeing. He rushed to their side to see if they were still alive. "Rushtan, Evans, what happened?"

One of the beaten men tried to open his bruised left eye, "he... didn't take kindly to being followed."

Chakotay shook his head, the recruiter helped the unfortunate man sit up. "But... how did he spot you?"

"I don't know sir, he just did," was his response.

"Which way did he go?" the recruiter asked carefully.

The man pointed his finger shakily straight ahead of them. "He just went that way sir. Be careful."

"We'd better hurry then," the recruiter said, turning to Chakotay. "You'd better stay with them."

"Hang on, we're after the one who did this to them?" he asked in disbelief.

"Exactly, but if he asks, we don't tell him this is why we want him," the recruiter replied. "Now I'll bring him back, this way..."

"Are you concussed Sampson, I know I said anyone really can join us, but I think this is the limit," Chakotay said. "What species are we dealing with exactly?" He marched forward to where the beaten man was pointing.

"Human, but I wouldn't..." the recruiter stood back up quickly.

Chakotay turned the corner, his fists clenched tightly. He half expected to see a man twice his build ready to punch him as soon as he did, what he saw instead shocked him. All he could really do was stare blankly as a young and thin blonde boy who didn't look much older than nineteen, leap over the wall nearby and disappear out of his sight.

"Unbelievable," was all he could say. He headed back the way he came.

Sampson stared up at him as he struggled to help the second injured man onto his feet. "Well?"

"He's gone," Chakotay muttered, staring blankly at the ground. "What the hell happened? He was just a kid."

"I told you, didn't I?" Sampson said in an ominous tone. "We may have to speak with his step father again."

"Oh do hurry," Chakotay sarcastically said as he finally made eye contact with the recruiter. "You two couldn't handle a kid? I should seriously think of rehiring."

Rushtan and Evans glanced at one another, both of them close to speechless. Sampson stepped forward to their defence. "Didn't you read up on that report I sent you?" Chakotay only stared impatiently at him. "A woman was murdered in a busy public place, strangely there were no witnesses. Her son showed up and attacked a group of Cardassians, accidentally killing two of them."

"That was him, I don't believe it," Chakotay shook his head in disbelief. "If the Cardassians killed his mother..."

"That wasn't proven," Sampson butted in.

"That doesn't matter, if he thinks it why did he start a fight with these two?" Chakotay questioned.

"We didn't get a chance to mention we were in the Marquis," Rushtan replied. "We were following him and he wasn't too pleased about it."

"We only were as we had reason to believe that Starfleet are keeping an eye on him," Evans added on.

Sampson shrugged his large shoulders, "well a chat with his step dad will clear this up. I'm sure once I mention that member of your crew Chakotay, recruiting him will be a breeze."

"Great," Chakotay's eyes rolled. "Who is the unfortunate lady?"

"I just don't think it's a good idea!" Kathryn snapped at the poor soul in front of her, death glare on full blare.

He in fact was Admiral Paris, even he managed to look a little nervous. "Well not everyone can handle caffeine."

"Then don't have coffee then, decaf is not coffee!" Kathryn screamed at him, knocking the full cup out of his hands.

Admiral Paris sighed, he was still not used to her strange obsession with coffee. "If you're going to react like that to my beverage choice, I shouldn't bother to tell you the news."

Kathryn's blue eyes narrowed, "don't tell me you're a tea lover."

"No, well yes but no," Paris responded. "We needed a Marquis operative, Lieutenant Tuvok volunteered."

"But I just saw him at Tactical," Kathryn frowned in confusion.

"He's been gone a week," Paris muttered, shaking his head in disbelief.

Kathryn stared at him suspiciously, "I don't think so." She marched onto the bridge, almost knocking her Captain right out as he was on his way to the Ready Room she just left. "See, he's right there!" Her finger pointed at a blonde crewwoman standing at tactical.

"Uh... this may be inappropriate to ask sir, but I have to," the Captain muttered as he got his bearings back. "Who's she been threatening to sleep with to get this high up the ranks?"

Admiral Paris stared blankly in his direction, he decided to ignore the question and deal with the crazy soon to be Captain. "That's not Tuvok, that's Ensign Hathaway."

The blonde girl looked up, smiled politely at everyone then returned to work. Kathryn gasped, "oh my god Tuvok, you're smiling! How precious!"

"Oh god, when is her ship ready sir?" the Captain asked the Admiral.

Paris had meanwhile just hid his face with his hand, "I need a distraction." Right on cue his commbadge chirped to get his attention.

In: "Stevens to Paris."

Paris tapped the commbadge, "yes son?"

In: "We have a problem, code 137 sir."

"Give me a few minutes, Stevens," Paris said, sighing in relief. "Kathryn, I have matters to tend to."

Kathryn saw him attempt to go into the turbolift, she rushed to stop him. "Hey hey, what is that about Tuvok leaving. He seems happy here."

"That is not Tuvok. He has been on a Marquis ship for a week now," Paris grumbled. "I didn't tell you earlier as you spent the entire time digging through Federation guidelines, to find a way to get your dog onto your new ship."

"I don't see what's the harm in bringing her aboard, I really doubt anyone will try to blow up my office with her around," Kathryn said. She passed an accusing glare toward her Captain, "a little afraid of the competition?"

"Ugh," he groaned. He then said the words his entire bridge crew dreaded every day, "I'll be in my Ready Room." He disappeared into his office. All everyone could hear was him yelling obscenities in between words, "what the (beep) hell is this (beep) on the floor, it (beep)ing stinks here! God I (beep)ing hate that Janeway!"

"Anyway!" Paris said loudly enough to get her attention back. "We have a few graduates here for you to look through." He groaned as Kathryn looked around. "Not literally!" He handed a padd to her. "Just have a look through, you'll have to put through a request like everyone else. Now, I have to leave."

"Sure sure, don't forget Tuvok on your way out," Kathryn cheerfully said as she looked at the padd.

"Oh... I give up," Paris grunted, he escaped into the turbolift.

As soon as he was alone he keyed in the commands to stop the turbolift, then tapped his commbadge again. "Go ahead Stevens."

In: "Sir, we believe there are Marquis recruiters near the Academy."

"You just believe, what happened?" Paris questioned.

In: "We've seen a couple of people following *him* sir, however when we got to the area they were gone."

"Great, has he said anything himself?" Paris grunted.

In: "Just the usual attitude sir. With all due respect sir, he may be intelligent but he's hardly Starfleet material. Why can't we expel him?"

"I think that's quite enough," Paris snapped into the commbadge itself. "The council have their reasons. The most important matter here is about the Marquis, patrol the area. If they're still there we

need to find them, stop them. They've tried this recruitment tactic last year with new, stressed students. We can't allow manipulation like this. Understood?"

In: "As you wish sir. But I do wish the council would reconsider, he's even worse than that half Klingon girl was a while ago."

"Yes but her tutors expected a lot out of her, it is a shame we lost her. If you lose him too, somebody will be demoted. Understood?" Paris harshly said.

In: "Yes sir. I'll go and have another talk with him, just in case. Stevens out."

Paris sighed as he returned his commbadge to his chest. "Computer, resume turbolift."

Sparks flew across the small Marquis bridge, the source was a measly little replicator sitting inside the wall nearby the door. Half Klingon B'Elanna Torres furiously marched over to it. Everyone nearby were smart enough to get out of her way, even if the sparks went in their direction.

"I just fixed this! What the hell happened!?" Her eyes darted to the nearest person to her. That was a man twice her height and weight, with scruffy brown hair and a goofy but nervous smile on his face. "Well!?"

His face, despite being already pale turned white. "Um... I er..." he quickly pointed a finger towards the floor.

B'Elanna turned on her heel to stare at where he was pointing. Lying on the ground was a guy covered in a lot of nasty burns, strangely enough he had a huge grin plastered over his face. "Ooooooh yeah, that's the stuff!"

"Oh for god's..." B'Elanna grumbled, the rest of her sentence was in Klingon. "Chakotay, you have got to stop recruiting from the loony bin. That Sid, he's causing more damage than the Cardassians."

"Well maybe it would be a good idea to use him as a stress ball," Chakotay suggested. "Ian, either give her a hand or go and greet our new recruit."

The guy who stood nearest to B'Elanna moved a step forward. "But Commander, I haven't done anything wrong." A growl from B'Elanna made him regret his words. "Ok um... " he stepped backwards slowly, "new recruit... you betcha."

"I thought we were getting two new recruits," a short blonde girl commented from the side consoles. Her chair spun around quickly, her eyes lit up. "Are there any cute boys?"

Chakotay slapped his forehead in disgust, "Danny! One track mind, look it up."

"Ohno, I was only asking cos we don't want the girlies to be distracted. B'Elanna I'm looking at you," the blonde girl said with a serious look on her face.

"Yes and Jessie hasn't took up most of the entire women's quarters with her bags," Chakotay mumbled, "and some of the men's too."

"Oooh taking a peek were you?" Danny giggled to herself as she turned her chair back.

Chakotay rolled his eyes as he began pacing up and down the bridge. "We only have one newbie, the other will just be smuggling medical supplies to our ships using the Bad Lands as a cover. The newbie is our new opps officer as the last one got blown up."

"But all he ever did was steal lines from the Tactical, and fail at hacking information from the Cardassians," B'Elanna muttered in a muffled voice, she was now buried inside the replicator.

The doors opened swiftly to allow two figures into the bridge. "That shouldn't be a problem anymore," Sampson said. He turned to introduce his new recruit. He however was just looking uninterested and staring out the port window. "Everyone this is James..."

Danny's eyes lit up even more than before, "Jamesie!"

This got the new recruit's attention, his bright blue eyes widened in horror as he took a step backward. "Ohno."

"Oh yes!" Danny screeched as she charged for him. He quickly took a side step to avoid a hug. "Ooh, playing hard to get as usual. I see you just couldn't bare the thought of life without me."

Funnily enough everyone else had developed a headache, Chakotay groaned into his hand.

"I didn't even know you were here," James muttered. Danny edged closer to him, he'd edge away twice as far each time she tried. "Why... how?"

"Oh funny story, maybe we could discuss it over dinner," she winked at him.

"This is the girl you bribed him with?" Chakotay asked Sampson quietly.

"No, if I knew I'd still would not have mentioned it," Sampson quietly replied.

"Hang on a minute, what happened to Ian?" Chakotay questioned.

Sampson chuckled to himself, "he's probably hiding in the weapons storage again. How is he fitting in anyway, Porter's recruiting skills are not exactly up to par with mine these days."

"Well he found Danny, so let's just say he's lucky to still be alive," B'Elanna grumbled as she climbed out of the replicator.

"Indeed," Tuvok added on.

"Oh I almost forgot," Sampson said. He gestured towards Chakotay, "this is Commander Chakotay, he's in command of this ship so it's in your best interests to listen to him."

James smirked slightly as he looked towards him, "sure... I don't want to get on tubs' bad side." Chakotay's eyes narrowed, he wasn't loving any of this.

Sampson turned towards B'Elanna, "this is B'Elanna Torres, she's our best Engineer. It's best to watch yourself around her, she is quite the erm... fire cracker."

"And Sampson's quite the dead man when he's alone," B'Elanna grumbled as she climbed back into the replicator to fix it.

"You've already met Danny," Sampson muttered, he gestured towards Tuvok at the Tactical station. "This is Tuvok, he's in charge of our weapons and shields." His eyes caught sight of Sid on the floor, he was busy rubbing his burned arms, giggling like a school girl. "Um... that's Sid, calling him strange is an understatement."

Danny giggled too, "ooh he's really loving touchi...."

"Oh god no, I haven't missed that," James butted in.

Danny pouted her lips, "you don't let me have any fun."

"Well, I'll leave you to it. Commander, he's all yours," Sampson said, quickly regretting it as Danny burst out laughing. He quickly rushed out.

"Hmph," Chakotay grunted, folding his arms. He walked towards his new recruit. "First things first, this isn't Starfleet..."

"And?" James interrupted him.

One of the fuse's in Chakotay's head went out, he tried to keep his cool. "However we are a team here, we don't function well without some kind of order. Our only rules are; always do your best, don't piss off B'Elanna, and respect the chain of command."

"So you then?" James questioned.

"Yes," Chakotay replied.

"I'll pass," James commented.

A second fuse went off, his eyebrow twitched. "What do you mean by that!?"

"You swapped that last rule with the do whatever you can to get things done," Danny said quickly to avoid a scene. "That's why Sid always messes up, and why almost everyone on this ship has bruises." B'Elanna casually shrugged. "Though come to think of it, that's probably not a good rule for you Jamesie."

James closed his eyes, cringing slightly, "stop calling me that."

"What do you mean by you'll pass?" Chakotay grumbled.

"Oh it's not over," Danny sighed, she jumped back into her seat.

James shrugged his shoulders, raising his arms up at the same time. "What else could it mean?"

"You don't have a choice in the matter. I'm your superior, you take orders from me. Can your minuscule brain handle that information?" Chakotay grumbled.

"You said I had to respect you, not take orders," James said.

"Ok glad we got that cleared up," Danny said sweetly, "now are we off to the Lands of the Bad?"

"Well you do both, clear enough?" Chakotay snapped.

"Clear," James replied much to his relief. "It means sod all to me anyway."

Chakotay's last fuse blew, he marched over to close the distance between them, pointing his finger at him. "Let me get one thing clear. You're not in Starfleet anymore where all they can do is make you run laps or yell at you. This is the Marquis, if you talk to me like this again I won't hesitate next time."

James smirked at him again, he nudged him out of his space. "Ok tubs, let me get one thing clear. Keep out of my face and I'll not harm yours. I'll follow some orders, but I'm not going to respect anyone who thinks they can push people who are smaller than him around."

He walked around him and headed for the only door, he went straight passed Ian as he left. James didn't notice, but Ian did. His eyes widened in shock.

"Was that James?" he asked.

Chakotay by this point was seething, "unfortunately."

B'Elanna walked up to stand by his side, "Sampson did warn you."

"Fine he did, but I don't get it," Chakotay grumbled, sighing a little. "Danny?"

"Well.. he did as he was told at school unless the other boys were peeing him off. He's not usually this irritable over nothing. He has a smart mouth though, but harmless enough," she replied with a puzzled tone.

"Hmph," Chakotay grunted.

Ian sighed, "I should have known he'd join us, what with what happened to his mother and all." Danny stared at him with wide eyes. "Murdered."

"Oh my god, that would explain it," Danny gasped.

Chakotay groaned, "I already knew this, it doesn't give him an excuse to behave that way. And yes Danny, set a course for the Bad Lands."

"Coolio," Danny said, clicking her fingers. Her chair swiveled back around to face the console.

As usual, all was chaotic inside the crew's quarters. Everyone was rushing around, collecting weapons, and in some people's cases, their lucky charms.

Chakotay marched into the room, and he watched as everyone scrambled around the quarters. They turned to face him as he began to speak.

"Listen up everyone. When we lower the ship's shields we board it and take whatever we can. We will be given a lot of resistance, only shoot to defend yourselves. Am I understood?" Chakotay said calmly.

Some people replied with a nod. A lot of people groaned, what was the point of being in the Marquis if they weren't allowed to go on a Cardassian killing spree?

Chakotay rolled his eyes as James took one step forward, with his hand slightly raised.

"What?" he said questioningly.

"Why can't we kill any Cardassians except in self defence? Some of us want a little revenge," he bluntly asked. A lot of the crew agreed, most of them quietly with a few nods.

"So do I, but this isn't the mission for it. I know a lot of you have had family members killed by Cardassians, but there is no need." Chakotay said.

The young raven black haired girl who stood beside James sighed a little in annoyance, "you wouldn't kill them anyway, hurt maybe."

"Same thing," James muttered.

"Would you please stop gassing, I wanna go and have some fun," Danny giggled. Everyone showed that they agreed with a few loud cheers. She took a side step to get closer to James, "so um... I'm with you baby." He shuddered pretty violently.

"Oh god..."

"Er, Chakotay. Can I leave my son here?" an older woman asked, clasping a hand on a fifteen year old boy standing beside her.

"Aw, but mum, I wanna go," he whined.

"Listen to your mother, Craig. It'll be dangerous," Chakotay said.

"Oh fine, she gets to have all the fun," Craig muttered.

The black haired girl pulled James aside from the others, "I know you're mad about what happened, but the ones we'll be fighting with won't be the same ones."

"Yeah but," he protested. She raised a finger to interrupt him, "Jessie, they mur...."

"Shush," she said, in a teasing voice. Her back arched forward slightly, she peered up into his eyes. "if you continue to interrupt me, I'll make you pay."

He tried to hold back a smile as he stared back at her. She knew full damn well that all she had to do was act cute to get her own way. "Don't do that with your back, it makes me look smaller than I am."

Jessie playfully punched him in the arm as she straightened up. "Surely I'm smaller when I do that." A little bit of her black curly hair went into her face, she blew at it and it fell back to the side of her face. "Now no killing, you're not a killer."

Despite the girl in front of him making cute gestures constantly, he grew uncomfortable and turned his head ajar. "Yeah you're right."

"Let's go!" Chakotay announced, interrupting the moment. Everyone in the room cheered loudly.

The cheers were long forgotten a few months later. The Marquis crew were in another difficult battle with the Cardassians. Up against their tiny old ship was a huge battle class cruiser.

An explosion behind him made him duck, he still barked out his orders. "Damage report!"

"Shields are at 20%, we can't take anymore hits Commander," Tuvok calmly replied.

"B'Elanna we need warp power," the Marquis Captain threw at his Engineer.

She slammed her hand on the station, "damn it Chakotay, we're barely maintaining impulse. What do you want me to do with it, ask it nicely?"

"Well you could stop hitting it," James commented from afar.

B'Elanna growled, "this engine is 38 years old, about the same as his IQ points. I have no chance in hell in reasoning with it."

A Cardassian appeared on the small screen above Chakotay's head. "Marquis ship, this is Gul Evoc of the Cardassian Military. Cut your engines and prepare to be boarded..." He was cut off, Chakotay looked behind him.

"I'm in, I didn't want to tell him that," James muttered.

"Fire Tuvok," Chakotay ordered. Tuvok nodded, and fired the last remaining torpedoes. They went straight through the Cardassians shields, the last one hit them.

"They've increased security this time, that's all I can give you for now," James added on.

Chakotay sighed, "I'm taking us into the bad lands, that ship's too big to evade the storms."

The Marquis ship flew into the huge expanse known as the Bad Lands, plasma storms immediately greeted them with barely any breathing room in between. The Marquis ship easily danced its way around them, the Cardassian ship began to follow them. They dodged one storm, but was hit immediately by its neighbour, knocking it badly damaged out of the expanse.

"We need to hide out until they're gone," Chakotay muttered.

"There's a higher frequency plasma storm eight kilometres ahead, it should hide us from their sensors," Tuvok reported.

Chakotay nodded, "that's where I'm going."

Tuvok and James' stations began beeping madly, Chakotay looked back. "What?"

"There's some sort of coherent tetrayon beam scanning us, I can't locate the source," Tuvok replied.

"Now there's a massive displacement wave following us," James looked behind him as Chakotay stood in the centre of the bridge. The tiny screen showed a very pale yellow wave forcing its way through the Bad Lands, the plasma storms did nothing to put it off.

Chakotay rushed back to his seat. "I can't lose them, everyone hold on."

A bright light engulfed the entire ship, blinding everyone.

"She boasts a warp speed of 9.975, class nine warp core. Fifteen decks, each filled with bio-neural gel packs. She's the first of her kind; the first ship to use these as the primary..."

"Yes, yes. Where's the arm rest replicator?"

The Admiral's eyebrow twitched. "What?"

Kathryn Janeway used her best death glare on the unfortunate man. "I was promised a replicator on the arm rest of my command chair."

"Who told you that? Even the flagship doesn't have that," the Admiral replied, his headache growing.

"Paris obviously. I served under him for years, and this is what I get," Kathryn complained. She collapsed into her command chair anyway. The few people who shared the bridge with her, stared in bemusement.

"As I was saying..." the Admiral sighed. "You're getting a top class ship here Kathryn. You could always install an arm rest replicator."

Kathryn rested her arms on the armrests, then stroked them all the way along. "I dunno, I quite like the chair." She climbed to her feet with a pleasant smile on her face. The Admiral sighed in relief as he knew that look meant that her last coffee cup had finally kicked in. "When will she be ready?"

"Voyager is expected to leave Utopia Planetia in a week, Kathryn. You have plenty of time to review your crew personnel."

"Good. Now, maybe I should have a tour of my new Ready Room. Hopefully this one doesn't blow up," Kathryn said.

The Admiral followed her from the centre of the Bridge, to the doorway on the starboard side, directly in front of Tactical. The expression on his face was panicked.

"We have two crewmembers installing your replicator, maybe we should do that later."

The doors opened for them both. Kathryn didn't seem to have heard him, as she looked around her new office with an impressed look on her face. Her eyes lit up at the sight of her desk. She wasted no time to go over and test the chair out. The Admiral sighed yet again in relief. His gaze wavered across the glass divider next to her desk to the two unfortunate Ensigns at the nearby wall.

"Yes, she's a fine ship. I can see her going far."

Only the other Ensign noticed as his teammate laughed quietly to himself.

"What?"

"Oh, nothing. Pass me the last piece."

He nodded, then walked over to the centre of the room where pieces of equipment lay. The amused Ensign, who was in fact the same one Kathryn dealt with on her last ship, pulled something out of his pocket and used the device on the new replicator. His team mate returned to hand him a small glass panel, it only took a few seconds to attach it to the replicator.

"All done now, Sir."

"Oh dear," the Admiral groaned.

Kathryn stood up to look the Ensign's way, the familiar one turned towards the replicator so she wouldn't recognise him. "Captain."

"I'm sorry?" the poor flummoxed Ensign whimpered at her gaze.

"So you should be," Kathryn snapped. She shook her head at the Admiral. The poor Ensign rushed out looking a bit sorry for himself, the second one took the chance to escape with him.

"Maybe you'd like to test..." the Admiral quickly said.

Kathryn was too fast for him, she had already reached the new replicator. "Coffee, black." The Admiral sighed, he could never get used to that. He wandered over to join her as she went to take a sip. Her face shriveled up in disgust. The Admiral pulled a similar face as she spat the contents of her mouth back out. "What is this, this isn't coffee!"

"Well I..." the Admiral stammered. He then noticed a tea bag sitting at the bottom of the cup. "Oh, I know what that is, there's a few dud replicators that get orders wrong. That's an easy fix. Why don't we ask someone to take a look at it, then have a look around Engineering."

"Hmph, fine," Kathryn huffed. She marched out of her new office, with the unfortunate Admiral trailing behind.

Only a second later the replicator went up in flames. Not noticing this, the Admiral overtook Kathryn to get to one of the engineers on the bridge. While he quietly informed them about the replicator, Kathryn was stopped by the first Ensign.

"Captain?"

"Yes, Miss," she retorted.

The man looked confused, "excuse me?"

Kathryn shrugged, and stepped to the side, out of his way. She grew impatient when he remained where he was.

"I mean, why did you call me Miss?"

"Since you called me Sir, I thought it would be appropriate. Now I hope you fix that replicator before I go for my next cup of coffee, understood?"

The Ensign seemed confused. "Why, what's wrong with it?"

"It obviously is just as backwards as you are, now excuse me," Kathryn remarked as she went for the turbolift.

The Ensign rushed back into the Ready Room. The familiar Ensign noticed this, then looked to the turbolift. He groaned as he noticed the doors closing on Kathryn and the Admiral.

"For god's sake! Why me?" he complained just as a man's screams started coming from the Ready Room. Everyone but him ran into the Ready Room to help.

The Penal Settlement - New Zealand

A group of men quietly laughed amongst themselves as they made their way towards a hole in the ground. At the bottom of it a blond, tall man stood working on a large machine, oblivious to this.

One of the men was clutching his hands together. Once he reached the hole, he opened them up above it. The men rushed away snickering quietly.

Still oblivious to what happened, the young man pushed his stubborn hair back, wiping the sweat from his brow as well.

A shadow cast over him, thankfully blocking the sun for him.

"Tom Paris?"

He looked up, squinting his eyes a little. The first thing he saw was a huge bun of hair. As it was the first feature he noticed about this woman, it was all he could focus on.

"Captain Janeway. I served with your father on the Al'Batani."

"My condolences," the man cheekily said.

Kathryn smiled warmly, "thank you. I was wondering if we could go somewhere and talk."

This got his attention. However that was the worst thing he could do, as he failed to notice that something shared the hole with him and was getting closer.

"Oh really? Is it shaded?"

"I hope so. My hair feels like it is on fire."

Tom couldn't help but smirk to himself. Now all he could imagine was the huge bun of hair burning. As her hair was so huge, she still stood staring with her hands on her hips.

"The Federation needs your help," Kathryn continued, oblivious to his thoughts.

"I'm not exactly here for a vacation, you know," Tom pointed out.

The coffee she had just before she left was starting to wear off, her eyebrow twitched. "I can't imagine why the rehab commission was so eager to loan you off to me."

Tom smiled broadly, "oh really? I guess I'm all yours then."

Kathryn's nose shriveled up as she turned to walk away. Tom seemed to not notice this and continued smiling like an idiot. By this time though he noticed something black crawling up his arm.

The whole penal settlement probably heard his resulting screams, the men responsible laughed loudly at it. Kathryn continued walking like nothing happened.

Tom scrambled from the hole, desperately batting his arms. He ran to catch up to her while trying to look at his back. Once he caught up with her he pretended nothing was wrong, and walked casually.

"Your dad taught me quite a lot. I was a science officer during the Arias expedition."

"You must be good. My father only accepts the best and the brightest," Tom said.

"Flattery will get you nowhere," Kathryn smiled.

Tom shook his head as he passed the laughing men from before. "Neither does charm."

"If you want to know what will work, you'll have to figure it out yourself," Kathryn teased.

Tom didn't even give himself time to think, "impossible hairspray?"

The woman turned around, put her hands back on her hips, and glowered up at him with such intensity. He didn't see it coming as she was half his size, so it startled him more than the guest in the hole earlier.

"Do you want to leave this spider fested sun trap or not Mr Paris? I could very easily dump you back into that hole."

"Um... yes leave, you betcha. Did I mention how awesome your hair is?"

Her gaze didn't falter, her hand still went to her hair though. "Tell me something I don't know. Now, do you want to hear about the mission?"

"More than you'd believe," Tom replied.

"I'm leaving on a mission to find a Marquis ship that disappeared a week ago, in the Bad Lands."

"Definitely crazy," Tom commented under his breath.

"What?"

Tom's eyes widened, "definitely breezy, isn't it?" Kathryn frowned and looked around. "Must be just me."

"Starfleet picked Voyager as she's a lot more maneuverable than most starships."

Tom's interest was piqued. "Really? You'd like me to fly her?" His face fell quickly, "oh you want me there as a former Marquis. I can't. I was only there for a few weeks before I was caught. I don't know their hiding places too well."

"Well nobody expected you to be that useful, but you must have seen some of their terrain during your stint," Kathryn said with a sting in her voice. He felt it pierce his pride a little.

He decided it was best to brush it off, pretend it never happened. "What's so special about this Marquis ship?"

"My Chief of Security is apparently onboard, not that anybody thought to tell me before I assigned him to Voyager," Kathryn huffed. "He was undercover."

"I see, I'm an on the cover man myself," Tom laughed to himself. Kathryn stared at him harshly, she didn't get it. He kept laughing until he noticed that, it froze the blood in his cheeks. "Look er, as much as I'd like to escape from my worst nightmare, I don't think I'm the one to help you with this. None of the Marquis ever trusted me, there's no friends in that circle."

"I'm sure you're used to that, Mr Paris," she smiled. "Unfortunately you're the only one who can help us. Starfleet don't intend on making you do this for free. They guarantee a full pardon for your co-operation."

This brightened up Tom's afternoon, if only for a minute. He smiled straight ahead of him. "Do you have any idea which ship it is?"

"All I know is that a Commander Chakotay, a Starfleet deserter, leads it. I hear he does a lot of his recruiting on or around Earth," Kathryn replied.

Tom sighed heavily, his full pardon seemed a few lightyears away now. "Academy dropouts, that wouldn't surprise me. I doubt Starfleet would give me the pardon if I just point you in the general direction, you've already got that."

"No, you'd be an observer on this mission," Kathryn smiled.

"Observer?" the word felt like such a huge insult, his pride was dented. "Hell, I'm the best pilot you could have."

"Yes, if I wanted to almost fly into danger with a few other ships following behind me," Kathryn muttered to herself. The coffee withdrawals were getting painful by this point, she didn't care if that comment hurt his feelings or not.

"Ouch. Was that necessary?" Tom almost whimpered. "I'm still better than everyone else."

"That's not the point. You are coming with us to show us Chakotay's hideout. You were a member of his crew, weren't you?" Kathryn growled. Tom decided to just nod, everything he said was like throwing a boomerang at her. "After it's over, you'll be cut loose."

"Story of my life," Tom quietly said.

Kathryn rolled her eyes, "regretting this already." She turned on her heel to walk away.

Deep Space Nine:

"What do you mean? The work experience was approved by Starfleet Command themselves," a woman stammered to a Security Officer. A group of ten teenagers stood behind her, most of them talking amongst themselves. The Security Officer was busy reading the PADD she gave him.

Harry stood behind all of them, his face beaming with excitement. He was unfazed by the queue in front of him. He was early anyway.

"I'm afraid not Commander. Voyager's mission was changed a week ago," the Security Officer told her. "We're not accepting any children until it returns."

"Nobody informed me," the woman argued.

This was going to take a while. It didn't bother Harry one bit, nothing would. Since he was very early he slipped out of the queue to have a look around.

One of the boys in the group snuck over to snatch one of the girls' bags from the floor. She gasped as he held it in his arms, then shook it around lightly. "Did you bring your toys, Faye? Can't leave home without those."

The girl standing nearby rolled her eyes, she gave him a harsh elbow in the arm. It almost made him drop the bag. The girl he took the bag off stared at him wide eyes, her mouth opened to say something. No sound came out of it, her face went bright red.

"You couldn't last two minutes without acting like an asshole, could you?" the other girl hissed at him. She snatched the bag away from him to give it back to its owner. She smiled gratefully before looking down at the floor.

"Well I'm sorry, I get a little antsy when I'm hungry," the boy complained.

The other girl was still annoyed but wasn't surprised. "What, you didn't pack your pre-brunch foot long sandwich?"

Two adults waiting behind them walked around the kids while they argued or looked at the floor. The teacher chose that time to lead her group away, not that all of them noticed.

The boy laughed nervously. "Of course!" The girl stared at him impatiently, she rolled her eyes when she figured it out. "I knew I should have made two."

"Everything checks out," the Security officer said to the two adults. They knelt down to pick up their bags and move off. The trio of kids mistakenly thought he was talking to them, so they walked by him. He was too busy checking the next person's clearance to notice.

Harry found himself at a busy bar. As he had plenty of time he decided to nab a seat there and take in the atmosphere for half an hour.

He'd only been there a few seconds when a Ferengi behind the bar spotted him and approached. "If I may say so, it's been my special pleasure to see many young officers like yourself come through these portals," he said.

"I'm really not interested," Harry interrupted him, but with a polite smile on his face.

"Interested?" the Ferengi was confused.

"You were about to try and sell me something, right?" Harry said, keeping that smile plastered on.

The Ferengi looked a little offended. "I was merely going to suggest that your inferior vessel could benefit from a cameo from this station's most popular person."

"Worf is here?" Harry brightened up.

"You think the most popular guy was a one from a previous ship?" the Ferengi's offense metre was rising.

Harry's smile was starting to waver. "Uh no, I meant to say O'Brien. That one would be a nice cameo..." He laughed nervously, "oh right, he was too. Um..."

"Slurs about my station, from a Voyager person no less," the Ferengi complained.

"What I meant was," Harry stammered.

Almost everyone in the bar were watching now, Harry felt a few inches smaller with every pair of eyes he spotted looking at him. One pair of them belonged to Tom Paris.

"Here I am trying to be a cordial host, knowing how much a young officer's brand new vessel would appreciate a decent send off on the eve of a dangerous mission. What do I get, hmm? Fourth wall insults," the Ferengi growled. "Someone's going to hear about this. What's your name, son?"

"Um, my name?" Harry stuttered.

"You have one I assume, or are you another one of those unnamed yellow shirts," the Ferengi said.

"Kim, Harry Kim but..." Harry answered.

The Ferengi had a padd in his hands now, he tapped away on it. "So who was it that told you to diss Deep Space Nine?"

"You know, the idea about making your *captain* the grand messiah for the Bajorans was a great idea," Harry tried to butter him up.

"Oh no, no no no!" the Ferengi snarled.

"Really, people need to know he's the hero before he's done anything to earn it. The Bajorans are an interesting species, not boring at all," Harry continued.

The Ferengi looked at him suspiciously, "I suppose you like Cardassians as well."

"Cardassians, what a great idea. So original," Harry grinned.

"No it's not and you fell for it," the Ferengi snapped. "Now inform your superiors that I'll be making a complaint. Unlike yours, we never forget anything on this station."

Harry's smile was starting to slip, "I like long running story arcs."

The Ferengi seemed to calm down, he leaned on the bar and smiled deviously. "Let me tell you about the real original Enterprise."

Tom decided now was the time to rescue the poor Ensign. He casually walked over to the bar to join him. "That was fun, wasn't it? I tried that Holodeck program last week, shame about the dead Engineer."

"Yes it was," the Ferengi muttered. He kept his stare on Harry as if he was trying to block Tom out.

"Hard to believe that anyone could spend all those years playing it," Tom continued.

"That's an interpretation," the Ferengi said, still not looking at him.

Tom shrugged casually, "you know I heard that Deep Space Nine likes to snare people from other ships by pretending that it's the bees knees. That's just an interpretation too, right?"

"I was just giving the boy a send off," the Ferengi chuckled nervously.

Harry gave the barkeep a cold smirk as he vacated from his chair. Tom patted him on the shoulder, "let's go." The two men walked away.

"Damn, so close," the Ferengi sighed.

The bag on Harry's shoulder started to slip, he clutched onto it. Tom gave him a friendly smile. "Didn't they warn you about Deep Space Nine at the Academy?" he asked. Harry chuckled through his resulting grin.

Voyager:

Tom and Harry arrived in Sickbay, just in time for the resident Doctor to leave his office.

"Can I help you?" he said, barely giving them a passing glance. The surgery biobed was his destination, a nurse was busy treating a patient there.

"Tom Paris reporting on board," Tom said.

"Oh yes, thee observer," the doctor said with disinterest. Tom's irritation was clear on his face.

Harry glanced between them with a confused look forming on his face.

"That's me," Tom finally replied with. "As a matter of fact I seem to be observing some sort of problem right now. Doctor," the last word was dripping with sarcasm and contempt.

The doctor looked over, sensing it. "I was a surgeon at the hospital at Caldik Prime, the same time you were stationed there. We never actually met."

Harry was growing more and more uncomfortable. It wasn't the words that were being said, it was how they were being said. The doctor was doing a terrible job at hiding his lack of respect for Tom. He felt it was better to stay out of it.

The doctor walked over to finally make eye contact with him, Harry felt the icy aura from where he stood. "Your medical records from your last posting have come in. Everything seems to be in order. The Captain asked if you were on board, you should check in with her."

"Er, I haven't paid my respects to the Captain yet either," Harry said, anything to ease the tension. Both men hadn't broken eye contact and he was worried this would get physical.

The doctor finally broke it off and looked at the young Ensign. "Well Mr Kim, that would be a good idea. Perhaps think clearly what you want to say, that's my advice for you."

As the doctor walked away Harry turned to Tom, eager to know what on earth just happened. "What was that about?"

"It's a long story Harry and I'm tired of telling it," Tom didn't answer. "I'm sure somebody will tell you before long."

Once they were gone the doctor returned to his patient. "So... what did you say?"

"I asked the Captain if she would like a cup of tea," the patient said mid whimper.

"Ah, rookie mistake," the nurse commented.

"The Doctor called, and I was right," a man's voice said from the computer. It sat on the glass table in front of the sofa.

Kathryn walked over holding a cup of coffee. "The hair dye you use isn't fooling anyone?"

The silver haired man sighed, "no, what?"

Kathryn sat down, her interest had faded. "I wasn't listening."

"I gathered. Molly is pregnant," the man said.

Kathryn's eyes narrowed dangerously, "who's the father? It better not be you, you sick fu..."

The man quickly laughed to interrupt her, "the puppies are due in seven weeks."

"Oh I see, Mark. You don't want me to leave so you get the dog knocked up," Kathryn grumbled.

"Oh Kath, that's not true in the slightest," the man smirked at her.

"Yeah right, you're going to have to take her home with you," Kathryn said as she poured herself another cup of coffee from the pot.

Mark's face fell. "Me? I just got the house cleaned."

"Well the last time you left her outside, this happened. Grow some balls," Kathryn grumbled.

"Um, I suppose that's your way of saying *you love me so you love my dog too*, right?" Mark said.

Kathryn gasped, almost spilling her coffee in the process. "I was joking about you knocking up my dog, you didn't!?"

Mark covered his face with both of his hands. "No I mean, it's like your dog is your baby and as your fiance I should love and look after her too."

"Why am I marrying you again?" Kathryn asked bluntly.

"Because I'm the only one who loves you enough to take all this crap," Mark replied just as bluntly.

Instead of taking that badly, Kathryn just laughed and stared dreamily at him. "Aaw Marky Warky, I'll miss you."

"I'll miss you too," Mark said back with a smile. "I'll take Molly home. I could never refuse you."

"Thanks honeybuns," Kathryn cooed at him. She slurped at her coffee.

"So when are you leaving?" Mark asked.

Kathryn sighed, "soon, I just need to approve the system reports and all of the replicators."

"Then I won't bother you anymore," Mark said.

"Oh come on, you do nothing but bother me. That's our thing you sick son of a bitch," Kathryn teased him. Mark laughed nervously. "Oh there's a replicator I missed on Deck Two..."

"I'll remember that," Mark said.

Kathryn frowned at the computer, "why are you still here?"

"I collected the doggy bed, I thought Molly would... Kathryn?" Mark said, noticing midway that she had ran off. He sighed, "see you in a few weeks, you crazy cow."

As soon as she was outside, Kathryn ran into Tom and Harry, nearly knocking them both flying. "Oh god, make this quick, it's an emergency."

Harry straightened up, his whole body stiffened. "Um, I'm Ensign Harry Kim reporting in."

"That's a long name. I'll just call you Ensign In," Kathryn said, twitching slightly.

"Kim," Harry corrected her.

"That's a woman's name," Kathryn said. "Whatever I'm not here to judge. Welcome to Voyager."

"Thank you sir," Harry said.

Kathryn's eyebrow twitched a few times. "Why do people keep calling me that, I don't look like a dude."

"Um, I'm sorry... Ma'am," Harry stammered. Tom looked at the poor Ensign in trouble for the second time in an hour. He felt sorry for him.

Kathryn rolled her eyes, "ma'am is a suitable crunch, but I prefer Captain."

"You mean suitable in a crunch?" Tom dared to say.

Kathryn was fidgeting like she needed to pee really badly. "I don't care, I'm in a hurry. There's something I need to check before we depart, it's a matter of life and death."

"Captain, we're almost ready to depart," the first officer said from the centre of the Bridge.

"Crap, if that replicator is a dud I'm hanging you two up by your nose hairs," Kathryn groaned. Harry and Tom gave each other a quick worried stare. "Did you have any trouble getting here, Paris?"

"No, why?" Tom answered.

"Oh good, I'd hate to start the mission with a missing shuttle," Kathryn huffed as she walked in between the pair.

Harry looked to Tom for an explanation, Tom just mouthed *she's nuts*. The two men reluctantly followed her to the centre of the Bridge.

"This is my first officer, Lieutenant Commander Cabbage," Kathryn introduced the first officer.

"Um, Cavit," he tried to correct her.

"All right, calm down," Kathryn scolded him. She widened her eyes at Harry and Tom, "god what a drama queen. No wonder he's just a Lieutenant Commander."

Cavit shook his head, he extended his hand for Harry to shake. He reluctantly did the same to Tom while giving him an uncomfortable stare. Tom tried not to show his distaste for that.

Kathryn pointed at a station in the back right corner, then walked over to it. Harry followed her. "This is your station Ensign In. Would you like to take over?"

"Kim," Harry tried again. She glared at him, "um, yes ma'am."

"Jesus, does this look like crunch time Kimberly?" Kathryn snapped. Harry whimpered but fortunately she didn't linger long, she wandered over to the centre of the Bridge again. "Ok Carrot, let's get this over with."

Cavit sighed. "Lieutenant Stadi, set a course for the Bad Lands, half impulse."

The woman at the helm nodded, "aye sir."

The brand new USS Voyager departed one of the Deep Space Nine branches, it glided away into deep space.

"There are ten varieties of tomato soup," the computer said after a negative beep.

Tom groaned impatiently. It didn't help that he could see Cavit and the grumpy doctor talking to Harry at a nearby table. The Ensign seemed a little distraught.

"Plain, with pasta, with vegetables..." the computer continued.

"Plain!" Tom snapped.

"Please designate temperature," the computer said.

"Hot," Tom grunted at the replicator. It finally gave him his dinner after what felt like two hours. He carried it over to where Harry was sitting. The two officers hurried away like they were allergic to him.

The look Harry gave him as he sat down made him sigh. "Told you it wouldn't take long."

"Is it true?" Harry asked.

"Every word," Tom answered plainly. He tried the soup, he immediately regretted it. "Ugh, that wall of replicators needs tearing down and replacing with a kitchen."

"You lied about the accident," Harry said coldly. Tom just nodded. "Why?"

"What can I tell you that you don't already know? I was selfish," Tom said. "Then the ghosts of those cadets I got killed came to me in the middle of night, telling me the true story about Christmas."

"Is that supposed to be funny?" Harry asked.

Tom shrugged, "probably not, nothing's been funny so far."

"So..." Harry said.

"So I was kicked out of the Academy only to join the Marquis. It was only a matter of time before I screwed up there too. The rest is history," Tom said.

"Sounds like to me you shouldn't take what those officers give you," Harry said. "Everyone makes mistakes."

Tom stared at the young Ensign in disbelief. "You listened to the story, right?"

"I did. That doesn't matter to me. It sounds like you could use a friend around here," Harry said.

Tom smiled warmly at him, "I'd like that, but I'm not the kind of guy people should befriend."

"I'll be the judge of that," Harry smiled back.

"Bridge to Paris and Kim. When you're quite finished flirting with each other, we've reached the Bad Lands."

Tom and Harry stared at each other with wide eyes.

The Bridge:

Despite the call Kathryn didn't look irritated at all when they returned. She seemed normal, they knew that wouldn't last long.

"The Cardassians gave us the last known heading of the Marquis ship. We've figured out a few possible courses they could have taken because of plasma storm activity," she said as Tom joined her at Tactical.

He looked down at the charts on the station. "They were probably trying to get to one of the m-class planetoids in the Terikof belt."

Cavit didn't even bother looking up, "that's beyond the Arias system."

"You have a what ass?" Kathryn snapped at him.

Cavit recoiled a little to avoid being spat at. "Um, Ah-ry-as Captain."

"The erm plasma storms would have forced the ship in this direction," the man at tactical quickly said, pointing at the chart.

"Send that to the helm," Kathryn ordered him. He nodded. "Helm follow the course being sent to you."

"Yes Captain," the helm girl responded.

Kathryn maneuvered around Tom to leave the Tactical area. He dared to follow her. "The Cardassians claim they chased the Marquis into a storm, destroying it. The idiots must think I was born yesterday."

"I doubt that," Tom couldn't help but snark.

Kathryn stopped suddenly and turned around to stare into his face. He almost squeaked at the intensity at the glare. "I beg your pardon!"

"I er... doubt their story," Tom said nervously.

Luckily Kathryn believed him. "Me too. There would be a trace of their warp core left behind if it was destroyed."

Harry glanced up from his station, "Captain there appears to be a coherent tetryon beam scanning us."

Kathryn turned her head his way, "origin Mr Reporting."

Harry couldn't be bothered to correct her again. "I'm not sure. There's now a displacement wave moving towards us."

"On screen," Kathryn ordered.

The viewscreen activated. The same pale yellow wave that the Marquis ship witnessed filled the screen. It looked a lot more menacing on the bigger screen.

"What the... get us away from it helm," Kathryn commanded.

"We may be able to disperse it with a graviton field," Cavit told her.

Kathryn glanced back over her shoulder, "do it. Red alert!"

Harry was a little surprised when the lights dimmed for the red alert signal and lights. That itself was a little less unnerving than the old one they used to put up with in simulations.

"New heading 41-180," the girl at the helm reported.

Cavit typed in a few commands at Tactical while that officer worked at the back of the station. He lifted his hands up when he was done like he finished a magic trick, "initiating graviton field."

A beam emerged from the centre of the viewscreen, striking at the wave. Nothing changed.

"The graviton field had no effect," Harry reported.

"The wave seems to be following us," the helm girl said, tension obvious in her voice.

"Full impulse!" Kathryn barked.

Harry shook his head, sweat was starting to drip from his forehead. "The wave will intercept us in ten seconds."

Kathryn was starting to feel the effects of not having a coffee in ten minutes, her whole body twitched. This wasn't helping. "Can we go to warp?"

"Not until we've cleared the plasma field, Captain," helm girl replied.

"Five seconds," Harry stammered.

Kathryn gripped the arm rests tightly. "All hands brace for impact!"

Everyone did as they were told, all except Cavit. He decided to make a run for the command centre. The ship trembled, a bright light pierced the bridge as he was halfway there.

The brand new starship was already a broken mess. Consoles exploded, some were on fire. Smoke filled the bridge. Bodies littered the ground, some of them moving, the rest not.

Tom stumbled over to the helm to check on the woman there. Kathryn weakly pulled herself halfway up just as a bulkhead exploded above her. She focused on her first officer lying there in front of her. A quick finger to his neck confirmed her fears, he was gone.

"Report!" she angrily screamed at anyone.

Harry clutched onto opps, he hoped it would stop his hands from shaking. "Hull breach, deck fourteen. Comm lines to Engineering are down."

Kathryn tapped her commbadge, "repair crews, seal off that hull breach on fourteen."

"Yes Captain."

"Casualty report coming in. Sickbay is not responding," the man at Tactical said.

"Is anybody?" Kathryn grumbled. "Paris how's Stadi?"

Tom slowly looked around at her, "she's dead."

"Captain, there's something out there," Harry quickly reported.

Something inside her just clicked, Kathryn swung herself around to face the Ensign. "Oh there's *something*, well that just solves all our problems you little..."

"He's new, take it easy," Tom tried to stick up for him.

Kathryn rolled her eyes. "I need a little more than something, I'm not in the mood."

"I don't know. I'm reading, I'm not sure what I'm reading," Harry stammered.

"Oh just put the bloody viewscreen on, or is that not responding too!?" Kathryn snapped.

"I'm trying," Harry said, turning his back on everyone to work. He glanced over his shoulder when he thought he got it.

The viewscreen at first showed a lot of static. When it cleared up it showed a huge space station with antennas sticking out from its base. It appeared to be firing something into empty space every few seconds.

"Um," Harry couldn't believe what he was seeing. He read his station again to make sure. "If these sensors are working, we're over seventy thousand light years from where we were."

Everyone stared ahead of them at the screen, what he said barely registered.

"We're on the other side of the galaxy," Harry said, his voice cracked.

None of them knew how they got there. The last thing any of them saw beforehand had been the strange space station. James made a comment about it looking like multiple spatulas jammed into some Playdoh. The name DohSpatula stuck a little too easily. For days nothing happened. The crew worked to get their ship back up and running. Out of nowhere they felt a transporter steal them away. Bringing them to this place. Whatever it was.

Surrounded by muddy grass, asphalt, and a multitude of people in old fashioned clothing dancing around. In the centre of the madness, a large white farmhouse with an old man sitting on the steps, playing a banjo merrily.

As much as it looked out of place, the Marquis crew felt like the outsiders. The confusion over the situation had morphed into general annoyance from the dreadful music playing.

One crewmember had enough. Jessie strode over to the old man on the steps. James followed her, curious as to what she was going to do. He didn't have to wait long. She snatched the banjo from its owners hands to smash it into the nearby tree. What remained was handed back to him.

"Stick to the tambourine next time, idiot," she hissed and then walked away.

James was already close to laughing when he saw the expression on the man's face. Wide eyed, jaw threatening to drop, unsure of why that happened or hadn't expected it. James shrugged before walking after her.

Unaware of this incident, a woman hurried out of the house with a tray of food to offer it to the still baffled crew.

"Corn on the cob?" she kept repeating.

Unfortunately she said it in earshot of Danny, then again directly to her face. She snorted into laughter. Everyone around her groaned in perfect unison. "Corn in the gob ey?" Danny was the first to take something from her. Thanks to the way she ate it, she was the last as the woman hurried away in disgust.

In the corner of Jessie's eye she saw the old man pull another banjo out from behind him. Her teeth ground together as he began to play that like nothing happened.

"I'll end him," Jessie said in a such a calm and gentle voice, it took the people nearby a while before her words clicked.

"Jess, he's not worth it," James said. That might have worked if the old man didn't force eye contact with his banjo breaker, as if to make a point. Jessie lunged forward, only to be stopped by James quickly throwing his arm out.

Ian approached the pair, staring at them bewilderedly. "He's taunting us. Or he's doing some swap bodies thing."

Jessie didn't get it at first. When she did, she scowled at him in disgust. "Oh so because I'm angry and lashed out, I must be James huh. Classy."

"Well, if someone told me that somebody smashed the banjo, I know who I'd blame," Ian said nervously.

Chakotay watched from afar, seconds away from face palming. What finally set him off had to be the sight of Sid finding a cattle prod. Somebody snatched it off him before he could find something to heat it up with.

"All right, that's it," Chakotay snapped. He stomped towards some of the dancers. "I have enough weird going on without you people adding to it. Now tell me..." The dancers kept on dancing, ignoring him. He tried to address the man with the banjo instead. "What is this place and why are we here?"

The woman with the corn returned with a much less friendly expression than earlier. "If you are not interested in any corn, we can always skip ahead to the main course."

"What? Hotdogs and a guy playing the recorder?" James said.

Chakotay finally allowed his hand to move up and cover his face. Both of them were itching to do it at this point.

"Why hotdogs?" Jessie asked innocently. Danny snorted into laughter again, answering her question. Sort of. She knew it was rude to her at least.

"I need to re-think my life," Chakotay said, muffled through his hands.

The farm faded away into nothing, replaced by a mechanical environment filled with uncomfortable looking beds hanging from the ceiling. Any sense of relief the crew had was wiped when they looked around.

There was little time to ponder what was going to happen next. They felt the transporters envelop them once more.

The beds, now occupied by the Marquis crew, revealed a terrifying feature. A sharp needle descended from the ceiling above each one. They'd keep going until the stomach was punctured. There were no screams or resistance, their eyes were closed tight.

Not all of them were so lucky. Perhaps it was payback for what she did to his banjo, or the insult in general, but Jessie was fully aware of what was going to happen to her. Her body stripped bare with only a sheet covering her. Something was holding her down, nothing she could see. Everything felt numb. That was until the needle pierced her skin. All she could do was scream.

If that wasn't bad enough, she could hear Sid's giggles and then slurred sleep mumbling's of, "again, again!"

Her vision began to blur while her stomach burned. The last sight she could make out was her best friend on a nearby bed suffering the same fate. With his head slumped the other way she could not see if he had to watch his torture too. Then the darkness came.

Voyager:

"I'm sorry, I didn't quite catch that. We're where?" Kathryn said dangerously.

Harry shivered. She was staring into his soul, he felt it slowly turn to stone.

"Captain, the Marquis ship is here too," Tom said from the helm. He hoped that it would redirect her for a moment. "Their shields are down and they're badly damaged."

Kathryn hurried to his side to see for herself. Instead she slapped the hand hovering over the panel. He stared at her with a wounded puppy expression.

"Think of the helm as all women. It doesn't want you touching her, keep your dirty mitts off," Kathryn hissed at him.

Even though his hand still stung Tom turned away and muttered under his breath, "please, if the helm was you I'd be on the other side of the ship."

He heard her growl, the right side of his face and neck burned from the intensity. He didn't dare move to avoid catching a glimpse of her staring at him.

"There are no life signs aboard," Harry stuttered.

"What about on the station?" Kathryn asked him.

"Array," Tom blurted out, instantly regretting it. The heat was beginning to make him sweat.

"Do you say anything but *look at me or punch me*, Paris?" Kathryn said dangerously.

Tom meekly shook his head, doing so he got a blurry preview of her face. It convinced him to try to keep quiet for now.

"Our sensors can't penetrate its hull," Harry answered her previous question.

Kathryn focused her attention on the viewscreen. Fortunately for it her face softened slightly. "What are those pulses coming from it, Mr In?"

Tom wondered what she meant, he looked up as well. The alien structure looked strange enough, but he could see it slowly turning on the spot, occasionally firing a white blast of energy into the distance.

Harry didn't dare correct her name for him again, he didn't want her wrath focused on him, ever. "Massive bursts of radiant energy. It seems to be directed toward a G-type star system."

"Hail it," Kathryn commanded.

The comm activated before Harry could do a thing. "*Carey to Bridge,*" a man's voice said over rough static.

"Carey, Carrie," Kathryn muttered to herself.

"Engineering has some severe damage. The Chief's dead. Possibility of a warp core breach."

"Oh, I thought Carey was that annoying pissant doctor," Kathryn said, more confused than she was before. Her eyes widened, the blue in them flickered. "What, a core breach? Why didn't you open with that?"

"Uh... can I answer that after the ship blows up?"

Kathryn swung around to stomp towards the turbolift. Nobody, not even people tending to the injured, got in her way. "Secure all systems, I'm on my way. Don't you dare leave."

"No response from the station," Harry quickly said and unintentionally quiet.

Before she stepped into the turbolift Kathryn sharply turned her head in his direction. He instantly thought he was next. "Get down to Sickbay, find out what's going on." Thankfully it was brief as she focused on a man at Tactical next. "Mister Dullins, the Bridge is yours."

The man she gestured to waited until she was gone to say, "Rollins."

Tom looked over his shoulder toward him, catching Harry rush for the turbolift closer to Tactical. It seemed to him a little pointless hanging around if he wasn't allowed to touch anything. He quickly made his decision to dash after him. "Harry, wait up."

Sickbay:

The pair rushed in through the main entrance. They were immediately greeted by raging fires in several parts of the room.

Harry helped the teenaged boy from the queue at Deep Space Nine off the ground. Then he and Tom immediately rushed over to the check on the medical officers. Tom scanned them, hoping they were merely unconscious. Harry picked up a fire extinguisher.

The results of the scan weren't good, his shoulders slumped. "They must have been right next to the console when it exploded," Tom said.

Harry used the fire extinguisher to try and put the fire out.

Kathryn power walked down the corridor. Everyone using the corridor did their best to keep out of her way, most with a fearful look in their eyes.

She was almost there when she caught sight of a woman with random strands of hair tumbling over her shoulders. A fuzzy bulb of it hung out, lopsided on one side. The top of her head looked like she had gotten a large static shock.

The Captain turned to confront the obviously frazzled woman. "God, go take the rest of the day off, you look like a drunk hedgehog." Then she realised she was only talking to the reflection on the computer panel next to her. "Oh the humanity."

"Computer, activate Emergency Medical Holographic Program," Harry commanded.

An older man with barely any hair appeared out of thin air. He looked around briefly.

"Please state the nature of the medical emergency," he said robotically.

"Dumb question," the teen boy muttered. He was standing by one of the bio beds where one of the patients was lying.

"Status of your doctor?" the EMH said questioningly.

"He's a bit dead," Tom answered.

"Point four cc's of Trianoline," the EMH ordered. The boy looked at him with a confused look on his face.

"Erm, can you repeat that?" he said meekly.

The EMH looked impatiently at Harry and then Tom. "Is he the only nurse?" he muttered.

"I doubt it," Tom said.

The hologram sighed and he walked over to a medical tray. He picked up a hypospray and he injected the patient with it.

Tom studied the hologram in distaste. "An artificial doctor?"

"Yeah, why not?" Harry said.

"Couldn't they have made him nicer?" Tom complained.

"It's for emergencies only. Bedside manner's not gonna matter," Harry pointed out.

"Uh no, I meant nicer on the eyes. Hot, blonde..." Tom gestured both his hands in front of him. Everyone conscious stared in disgust. "Very smart."

Harry rolled his eyes and walked away. The EMH's reply was to push Tom out of the way on route to another patient. "If you're going to overcompensate. Do it outside," he said.

Harry smirked. "You heard him."

"Tricorder," the EMH commanded, pursuing his right hand outward. Harry followed him and he handed him the tricorder he was carrying.

The EMH pushed it straight back with a disgruntled, almost patronising face. "Medical tricorder!" he barked.

Tom tried his best not to laugh at Harry's pouting face.

Engineering was in complete disarray. Injured and dead were being hurried out, consoles sparked uncontrollably or were already blanked out. The majority of staff had huddled around the core, the purple fluid inside it churned, a light haze stemmed from it across the room.

"Lock it down," Kathryn barked at the team.

"If we lock it down with this much pressure, we might never get it revitalised," one staff member told her.

Kathryn sighed downward at the computer panel she stood at. "We don't have a choice. We need to get it under control before we try to clip it down."

They were all on the same page. Everyone got to work. The man who had spoken to her opened a floor panel and stepped down into a deep hole, armed with a few tools. Kathryn watched him with one eye still on the panel.

"Warning: warp core micro fracture. Breach imminent," the computer warned them.

Kathryn tensed, "you don't have to tell me." She sped up her own work.

"That's it. Constrictors locked," the man said in relief. Kathryn nodded. "I just need a little while to straighten this out," he mumbled.

"Take your time Mr Harry, this is delicate work," Kathryn said.

The man nodded too, then frowned. "It's Carey, Captain."

"Then who the hell is Harry?" Kathryn wondered to herself but aloud. She still continued what she was doing while thinking about it.

The purple started to tame, the sounds coming from the core diminished.

"Unlock the constrictors," Kathryn ordered while her fingers worked.

"Constrictors online," Carey confirmed.

Kathryn double checked her console before asking, "pressure?"

Carey sighed in relief and smiled, "it's working. Twenty five hundred kilopascals and holding."

"Finally," Kathryn sighed in relief. Now that everything was calmer, the rest of the staff moved away to fix something else. Doing so they noticed the Captain's frazzled hairdo was back to its usual impossibly neat bun. They caught her tapping the knot holding the bun in and pocketing a small brush.

Once she noticed them looking at her, the anger was soon back to normal too. "What?" She turned away to return to the Bridge, she eyed the warp core in distaste for no reason they could see. "What, it's normally that colour? It would look much better in blue."

"Uh, you want us to change the plasma coolant colour?" Carey stuttered in disbelief, hoping she was joking.

"I bet it wouldn't break in five minutes if it were. Blue, strong and vital. Matches my eyes," she mumbled as she passed him. Her commbadge chirped.

"Bridge to Janeway. We're being scanned by the array, Captain. Its penetrated our shields."

"Station. Can't we have a minute's peace?" Kathryn muttered before tapping the commbadge. "So, what kind of scan?" She got no response. "Oh come on, I didn't snap at you, big pansies. Respond." A crewmember sneaking by behind her disappeared in an alien transporter beam, which she not only saw in the corner of her eye, she heard it too. "That's not a scan!"

She marched back towards Carey, "initiate emergency lock off. They're getting this ship over my..." The transporter took her away too mid sentence, her hands flew to her hips, "hey! Dead body!"

The EMH finished with another patient lying on a biobed. Before he could dismiss her she disappeared as well. "And they complained I was rude," he said. Then he looked around to find he was alone. It merely annoyed him. "Computer, deactivate the EMH. It's not hard!" He reached for his commbadge, "Sickbay to Bridge. I didn't say anyone could leave." No answer. "Hellloooo??" He sighed impatiently.

Now it was the Voyager crew's turn to visit the strange farmhouse. This time it seemed quieter and less crowded. The lady handing out corn brought a fresh tray of different food to offer them.

Whoever had one on their person at the time, brought out a tricorder in the hopes of curing their confusion.

"Uh, Captain?" Tom asked on approach to Kathryn.

Kathryn was one of the crew with a tricorder, she glared at it as if it were its fault. "What kind of stupid interior design is this for a station? Stupid pricks."

Tom looked to Harry instead. "I can't detect any stable matter. It's got to be some sort of holographic projection," Harry said.

The woman approached them with a bright, beaming smile. "Sugar cookies anyone?"

"Oh Jesus Christ," Kathryn groaned in response. The woman quickly changed her route to avoid her. "Oh no you don't," Kathryn growled as she gave chase. "Get back here you old bag and tell me what the hell is going on!"

The woman had to stop, what with Voyager crewmembers all over her escape routes. She turned around nervously chuckling. "You're guests here. The neighbours will be here any minute. Try to relax."

As if on cue the group of people from earlier arrived through the front gate.

"Oh yes. Suddenly on the other side of the quadrant, my crew's dead, Marquis idiots are missing. Relax." Everyone backed away at least one step. "I'll get right on it!" Kathryn roared.

"What's her problem anyway?" Harry whispered with a hand by his mouth.

Tom shrugged, "I don't think it's only one." He then spotted a woman in a flowery dress making eyes at him. He zoomed over to greet her so quickly Harry was left talking to himself.

"Tell me why you kidnapped us, or I'll start butting heads," Kathryn snarled.

The woman gasped but still kept a cheerful facade. "So violent. You remind me of a couple of our last guests."

"The Marquis?" Kathryn asked.

The woman hurried off through the gap Tom had left before she said anything more incriminating, leaving Kathryn to stew. She eventually looked around to inspect the place.

Harry meanwhile walked over, tricorder in hand, to Tom who was already getting a little friendly with the woman he met. "Uh Tom, we're the only people here. She's not real, a hologram."

"Never stopped me before," Tom smirked.

Harry blankly stared at the pair. "That doesn't surprise me whatsoever," he retorted before walking away from everyone.

Tom smiled, enjoying her company until he replayed what Harry said in his head. He ran after the Ensign, "hey, meaning what?"

"If you're mad, you already got it," Harry replied.

"What are you doing?" Tom asked as he caught up with him.

"There's got to be a control panel somewhere, a power conduit. Anything," Harry answered.

"Hmm, of course," Tom said.

Harry's tricorder beeped viciously. His eyes fluttered open wide at the readings he was getting. "Woah. Sporocystian lifesigns."

"Sporocysts, what?" Tom stammered.

The pair then noticed the woman following closely behind them. "Where are you going? There's nothing over there but a silly boring barn," she said in a badly faked Texan accent.

"Wow," Tom cringed at it.

Harry was more bemused by it though, "you haven't heard her talk yet... of course not." He glanced over his shoulder to address her, "what's in the barn?"

"Oh nothing but piles of hay. If you like spores, you'll love the duck pond," the woman replied.

Harry and Tom shared the same curious expression, and neither of them were thinking about ponds.

Kathryn passed the banjo man, apparently knowing better than to play with her around. She still turned on him though. "You people have got a dodgy idea of what would be homely to us, and I grew up on a bloody farm."

The old man pretended to be deaf and looked away. She grunted and walked off to pester a different hologram. Then she noticed something was off about what was left of her crew. "Wait, where's In and the pervert? I doubt they've split up already."

"Over there," Faye said timidly while pointing in the direction Harry and Tom went. "I think."

Kathryn acknowledged with a nod and hurried off. She backtracked after a few steps to look at her strangely. The young girl's face turned bright red. "They're looking younger every year. It better not be just me," she commented. She shook her head and smirked, "nah."

Tom and Harry tried to enter an old wooden barn. The woman rushed in front of the door and put on her best flirty look. "Hey, wouldn't you prefer to triple date. Huh?"

Tom of course smiled at it while Harry's eyes widened. He took one look at Tom's expression and mouthed no. Tom looked at him, only then realising what she may have meant. He groaned in

response. "How old are you Tom, sixteen?" Harry grunted as they walked around her and inside the building.

The tricorder in Harry's hands beeped harshly while he pointed it around the barn. "Lifesign is definitely coming from in here."

"Where?" Tom asked while looking around the whole building.

"I'm not sure. It's all around us. Oh..." Harry said over the top of his tricorder beeping once more. He made his way over to another door. "Oh over here. There's some sort of matrix processor. Humanoid lifesigns too. I'm reading Human, Klingon, Vulcan..."

The woman glared from afar, then ran forward to block their path once more. Her arms stretched outwards to stop them going through. "I'm not ready for you yet!"

Out of nowhere they heard a dog barking and snarling at them. They swung around to see a very large one baring its teeth.

"Nice puppy," Tom said, his hand edged up to tap his commbadge. The woman took the opportunity to slam her fist into his jaw, knocking him down onto his ass.

The dog's barks were silenced the second Kathryn burst in, parting the outside doors with both hands. They flew to her hips, a death glare on full blast as she marched inside. The woman almost melted at the sight of it, the dog whimpered and ran off outside. Tom and Harry tried to avert their eyes incase they were blinded.

A few members of the crew followed her inside, more tense because of her being in the proximity than the situation.

Multiple transports surrounded the Voyager crewmembers, blocking them from going any further. All of them armed with pitch forks.

Kathryn scoffed at the sight of them, "oh please. You act as if I've never been threatened by one of those overgrown forks before."

"That and torches," Tom whispered.

Kathryn side eyed him into a puddle of goo. "You tell us what..." she snapped.

"You're cutting the line, that's what," the corn woman sneered. The barn then faded away. In its place, the seemingly never ending stream of beds in a harsh lab environment. Some still occupied by the unconscious Marquis crew.

The holograms allowed them to walk towards the beds. Harry flinched at the sight of people younger than even him lying there helpless. Sympathy flooded through him.

Kathryn scanned their faces until she saw one she recognised. Seeing Tuvok at their mercy killed any restraint she had left. She swung around, ready to hurt the closest hologram when the Voyager crew were transported once again.

Harry found himself staring at the ceiling, unable to move anything but his head. Even then he could only lift it up and down. Down was when he saw the needle coming for him. He screamed as it pierced his chest.

When the crew awoke, they found themselves all back where they were on Voyager before they were taken. Kathryn had the misfortune of not only waking up on the debris covered Engineering floor, but also becoming a pillow for Carey.

He was still really groggy when she pushed him into a roll. He landed face down while she wiped off imagined drool from her stomach.

"Disgusting prick. Someone really ought to punch you in the nose," she growled.

Carey slowly rolled onto his back so he could sit up. "This is Starfleet, nobody can get away with that."

"Don't test me," Kathryn muttered as she stood up. She frantically wiped and pat down her trouser legs, before tapping her commbadge. "Janeway to Bridge. Is everyone accounted for?"

"Yes Captain, more or less," Rollins answered her.

"Wouldn't that just be more?" a young girl's voice whispered.

"Who's that?" Kathryn asked.

"I er... I dunno. Some kid woke up on the Bridge. What? Claire something."

"Why would one member of the crew be in another location?" Carey wondered, instantly suspicious. Kathryn was too.

"I sleep walk okay, if you must know."

Kathryn headed for the exit. "I don't remember hiring more than one fresh Starfleet brat. Oh whatever. How long were we over on that station?"

"Three days," Rollins answered in shock.

"Oh shoot," Kathryn grunted, now running out of Engineering and to the turbolift. "I left my replicator on," the engineering crew thought they heard her say.

The Bridge:

Rollins looked at Tactical with concern. "The Marquis ship is powering up its engines. Hello? Captain?"

The not shy teenaged girl from Deep Space Nine repeated what Kathryn had said silently. She shrugged and decided to take a peek at the Opps station.

"I'll put a tractor beam on them. That's the tamest thing she would do," Rollins said. The thought of him getting that wrong made him sweat buckets.

Sickbay:

Now that everyone was back, the EMH rushed around to every patient with his many questions. He thankfully spotted Tom wandering around in a daze before he bothered the poor woman with the facial burns.

"Excuse me. Can you tell me what has transpired?" he asked him.

Tom didn't know himself. He had a much more immediate problem on his hands. He span around on the spot to triple check the room, knowing he'd be disappointed anyway. "Computer, locate Ensign Kim."

"Ensign Kim is not on board the ship."

Tom tapped his commbadge in a panic, "Paris to Janeway."

The Bridge:

Kathryn hurried out of the turbolift to get straight to the Ready Room. All while saying, "no, I'm not going to kiss your broken nose better Paris."

"Uh, Captain," Rollins nervously said.

She was barely halfway to her destination when the Captain stopped and sighed overdramatically. "Fine, you're right. It's already ruined." She walked back the way she came. "What?"

"Harry didn't come back with us. He must still be over there," Tom's voice said, cutting off Rollins before he could open his mouth.

"Who?" Kathryn was puzzled.

"Captain. The Marquis ship has their crew back and they're powered up. We've tractored them," Rollins said.

"Which? Oh," Kathryn said as she got her bearings. "Hail them. There's probably been a tiny mix up. Check the ship for any Marquis peeps."

"Peeps?" Tom's voice sniggered.

Kathryn slapped her commbadge to cut him off. "So much for being polite. On screen."

The viewscreen changed from the exterior of the Marquis ship with a blue light shining on it, to the left side of the cockpit. Chakotay seemed taken by surprise at this as he turned his head towards them.

"Commander Chicksday. This is the starship Voyager, I'm Captain Kathryn Janeway," Kathryn said.

Chakotay frowned, "uh, Chakotay."

"Damn, so close," Kathryn whispered.

Everyone shook their heads, even Tuvok did so. "No, no it wasn't," Chakotay groaned.

"Well I'm sorry. There's been a lot of new names today," Kathryn snapped. "We were sent to find your ship after it vanished from the Bad Lands, so here we are. Thanks a lot by the way," she muttered the last sentence.

"Oh that wasn't on purpose, I assure you," Chakotay said through gritted teeth, while rolling his eyes.

Kathryn actually smiled in response to his and everyone's surprise. "Apology accepted. Now, one of our crewmembers is missing. I thought that maybe he was transported to your ship by accident, and one of yours to ours?"

Chakotay's interest was piqued, he sat forward in his chair. "Two of our people are missing. You have at least one of them?" He looked over his shoulder, nodding at Tuvok, then back again, "a female someone?"

Both of Tuvok's eyebrows raised, he looked away towards the window clearly resisting a comment.

Kathryn checked with Rollins, he shook his head. "Oh. Perhaps not. You?" she directed at Chakotay.

Chakotay sighed, "no, we have no extra people onboard."

Kathryn looked puzzled, she folded her arms behind her back. "Scan the station. They must be there."

"Inconclusive ma'am, I've already done so," Rollins said.

"If you do stumble across one of ours and he's a he, he's extra handy. Too handy. We don't need him anymore," Chakotay said.

Tuvok's eyebrow managed to raise even higher than normal. "Commander?"

"You and I have seem to have the same problem," Kathryn said thoughtfully.

"You have a smart ass missing too? If it weren't for the other missing person, we could celebrate," Chakotay commented.

Kathryn smirked at him. She knew that pain all too well. "If only Commander. He's still here. Maybe we should work on this shared problem together, hmm?"

"I suppose so. Four of us will transport over to your ship," Chakotay answered. As soon as he did the shot of the ship was back on the viewscreen.

The turbolift opened, Tom stepped out of it. Seconds later Chakotay, Tuvok, B'Elanna and Ian dematerialised a few feet from Kathryn. All of them were pointing phasers in different directions. Rollins responded with raising his own.

"Captain, they're armed," he warned.

"No shi..." Kathryn hissed. Despite a phaser being more or less pointed at her, she marched over to the man holding it. The same man she had just spoken to on the screen. "I'd put that down unless you want it up your hint end."

"My what?" Chakotay was very puzzled.

Kathryn hesitated, her eyes glazing up, "hind, hint. Oh who cares." She ignored the Commander and focused on Tuvok standing behind him. "Good job, Tuvok. Wink," she said, then winked for real.

The three Marquis crew all looked around to glare at the Vulcan, who actually managed to look awkward. "Perhaps it would've been more tactical to announce my allegiance after the weapons had been lowered," he said.

"Tuvok!" Kathryn's eyes shot very wide open as she scolded him. "Shhh, he's right there."

Chakotay rolled his eyes as he turned part way back to the Captain. "You know what, I give up. I'm the only sane one here."

"Since, as Humans would put it, the cat's out of the bag, we should explain Captain," Tuvok suggested.

"Where?" Kathryn's head darted around, her eyes wider than usual. "Oh," she laughed and turned back. "Truth is out there, I get it. Yes."

"I must inform you that I was ordered to infiltrate your crew, sir. I am in fact Captain Janeway's Chief of Security," Tuvok explained for her.

B'Elanna growled viciously, she lunged for him. "Son of a bi..."

Chakotay put his arm out to stop her, all while not breaking eye contact with his spy. "Were you tasked with delivering us into Captain Crazy's waiting hands, Vulcan?"

"That's racist," Ian commented.

Kathryn rolled her eyes, "no it's ableist. I'm not crazy."

"My orders were to gain information on your activities, and deliver you into their waiting hands yes," Tuvok replied.

"I knew we should've send Cabbage, the worst he'd do is run around during a battle," Kathryn said. "Seriously Tuvok, they're on our Bridge with phasers. Maybe be a little less honest."

Chakotay looked back at her, only then noticing Tom as he hung around near Tactical. His eyes turned cold. "I see you had help."

"Hello to you too, Chakotay," Tom said. Now that he was spotted, he walked over to the centre of the Bridge to stand behind Kathryn.

"At least he was doing his duties, but you! Let me guess, lost a bar fight and needed bail? Running from daddy? What are you getting out of this one, Paris?" Chakotay snarled, about to close the gap between them.

Kathryn got in his way before he could, they almost collided. Despite their proximity she stared up into his face with her usual cold, withering glance. Tom was a little surprised at this, he beamed at the thought of her sticking up for him.

"His quarters are on Deck Nine. You didn't hear it from me," she whispered.

Chakotay resisted a smile, instead his eyes sparkled with mirth.

The tension on the Bridge relaxed slightly after Kathryn turned away from the Marquis commander. Tom smirked in his direction, gloating silently that the Captain had took his side. Of course he was unaware that she had calmed the Commander down by doing the complete opposite.

"Now, maybe we should work on rescuing our missing people. Then it's a matter of hitching a ride back home," Kathryn addressed everyone.

Tuvok stepped forward and around the Commander. "Due to our original reconnaissance, I believe we are dealing with a single lifeform."

"Yeah. Harry picked up only one other lifesign during our stint," Tom said. "Sporo something or other."

"Indeed," Tuvok said. "I would suggest the lifeform scanned our computer database to establish the most comfortable environment. In effect, a waiting room to pacify us before biometric assessment."

Kathryn chuckled to herself, "did it only scan the Little House on the Prairie program? It clearly wasn't interested in pacifying us. Sugar cookies, I mean, really? As opposed to not."

"Better than corn on the cob," Ian commented.

"Wait, so this guy kidnapped us just to scan us?" B'Elanna asked angrily.

"It's possible as a Sporocystian lifeform he or she was curious about humanoids. Why else would it have released us unharmed?" Tuvok said.

"He didn't though," Tom reminded him.

Kathryn marched forward toward the turbolift, everyone watched her carefully. "Time to christen the phaser rifles. Meet us in transporter room two. We're going back." Once she reached the turbolift she span around to speak to them all. "We'll divide into teams."

"Uh, who is meeting who in transporter room?" Tom questioned.

"Nobody lets me finish around here," Kathryn growled. "Mr Chakotay and I will look around for um, Larry and... um, er pass."

"Harry," Tom groaned.

"I thought that was our crewmember's name," Kathryn said.

B'Elanna walked up to stand by Chakotay's side, her head leaned to her left to whisper, "how does a woman like this get command? Next time, I'll gladly be the kidnappee than board USS Circus."

"I'm sure," Chakotay muttered back. "Jessie, our missing crewmember is called Jessie." Ian cleared his throat. Chakotay did the same thing. "We should hurry."

"Fine while we look for him too, Mr Tuvok you find out as much about this hellhole as you can. It brought us here, it can send us back," Kathryn said. "All right, let's do this."

Tuvok and Chakotay headed for the same turbolift, each taking a different route to it. Tom quickly ran to catch up with them all before Kathryn followed them inside. "Captain, let me go with you."

"If this is about getting even with Chakotay, then..." Kathryn said.

"It doesn't," Tom cut in sharply.

"Oh, too bad," Kathryn said, about to go in again.

Tom stepped forward, hinting that she should stop, "I don't want to see anything happen to Harry..." He frowned when he realised what she said, "wait what?"

Kathryn smiled fondly, "aaaw, you two will make a cute, albeit annoying couple. Okay, come on lover boy." She gestured for him to follow her.

Tom stammered a bit, his face turning red. "No! No!" He followed anyway.

Kathryn stared at the man in front of her with narrowed eyes. "Did you really have to get changed before coming here?"

Tuvok glanced down at his normal Starfleet uniform. "Regulations Captain."

"Uh huh," Kathryn said, leaving one of her eyes still narrowed. "Big girl."

The other two members of the awayteam looked on, one slightly bemused while the other still looked a little bit mad.

"No," Tom grunted.

Chakotay laughed, "are you still being homophobic over there?"

Kathryn sighed impatiently, "guys enough with the chin wagging, we've got work to do. Tuvok?"

"You were the one who started it. And I'm not being homophobic. Janeway is the one treating the idea of Harry and I as a joke," Tom suddenly snapped.

Kathryn's eyes widened as she struggled not to laugh, she sucked in her bottom lip as she looked at the other two men. "Seems like I pressed the knickers in a twist button. I wasn't even joking either. That's what I get for being nice, huh?"

"Looked up the word lately?" Tom sniped back.

Kathryn's good mood was wiped away in an instant. Tuvok knew he should change the subject back, "there are no other humanoid lifesigns on this station. Kim, Rex and Taylor are not within tricorder range."

Tom still managed to snicker despite his bad mood. "Rex? Should I have brought a bone to lure him in?"

Chakotay smiled back, prompting Tom to laugh further. The Commander joined in with him, "oh please, please save those jokes for when we rescue her. I have to be there."

"That won't be happening soon. I do not believe they are on the array," Tuvok said. He noticed Kathryn mouth the word station.

"Where else..." Chakotay murmured as he scanned the area. Then he spotted the old man with the banjo sitting by the house. "Him, he can tell us." He walked over to him without the others.

Kathryn hurried to follow him. "You two keep looking, keep an open comm line."

The old man groaned when he spotted the two approach him. "Why have you come back? You don't have what I need."

"I don't know what you need and frankly I don't care," Kathryn snarled coldly. The old man looked up at her, surprised. "I just want our people back and all of us sent home."

"Oh, well now," the old man laughed dismissively. "Aren't you contentious for a minor bipedal species."

Kathryn glared in Chakotay's direction. "Five minutes alone. That's all I need."

He winced in response and decided to crouch down next to the old man, out of gaze range. "No species likes being abducted from their home and toyed with," he said calmly.

"Oh it was necessary," the old man groaned.

"Where are our people?" Chakotay asked softly.

"They're no longer here," the old man replied as if it were nothing.

Kathryn's hands were on her hips now. Neither man knew how dangerous this was. "What have you done to them?" she snapped.

"You don't have what I need," the old man said. He hesitated, his hand raised to his chin. "They might." His face scrunched, he waved his hand toward them. "No, you'll have to leave them."

Chakotay shook his head, "no, we don't do that."

"Okay, so we're supposed to let you steal our people because they have something you want. Whatever the hell that is. Then go happily on our way for seventy years?" Kathryn grumbled. "Not a chance. We're their leaders, it's our responsibility to get them back safely. We won't abandon them. Maybe a selfish old geezer wouldn't understand."

The old man stared up at her, his jaw dropping. "Ohno. I do understand that," he said with some sympathy. "I have no choice. There's just not enough time left," he cried.

"You're not wrong there," Kathryn said, half tempted to roll up her sleeves.

Chakotay laughed quietly and nervously. He found it a little ironic that out of the two of them, the Starfleet Captain was the grouchy violent one and the Marquis resistance fighter was the voice of reason. He wisely kept that to himself. "What do you mean?"

"I must honour the debt that can never be repaid," the old man said. "But my search, it's not going well."

"Maybe if you tell us what our crewmembers might have that you want, we can help you find it and you can give them back," Chakotay said.

"You?" the old man snorted into laughter. Kathryn quietly seethed. "I've searched the galaxy with methods beyond your understanding. No. All you can do is leave."

Kathryn firmly ground her teeth before she replied. "You've dragged us seventy thousand lightyears from our home. We have no way back in our lifetime unless you send us. You've kidnapped three of our people because they *might* help you. Might. You've really screwed us over and for what, nothing? And you've got the cheek to get mad at us and tell us to get lost?"

"Sending you back is terribly complicated. Don't you understand?" the old man wheezed.

"No. It wasn't complicated to bring us both here, separately," Kathryn said. "It was easy peasy when you wanted something. Now that you're done with us, *wah it's complicated.*"

"I don't have time!" the old man growled at her. Before she could say or do anything more, he waved his arm in their direction. Both of them disappeared in a transporter beam.

Kathryn and Chakotay found themselves back on the Bridge. Tom and Tuvok were right behind them looking a little startled.

Harry groggily opened his eyes. He squinted at the bright light that was shining in his eyes. When his eyes got used to the light he opened them up to see where he was. Two aliens with larger ears were watching down on him in a strange unfamiliar room.

"Where am I?" Harry asked as he tried to sit up.

"Don't try to move yet, you're very ill," the alien woman said.

Harry sat up. "Ill? This is a mistake, I'm not..." He felt something strange on his arm, so he moved his sleeve up to see why. Strange lumps had grown on his wrists, he gazed at them in horror and started to heave.

A loud bang started him. He wasn't the only one, the two aliens gasped in shock as well. They hurried towards a door that looked curved in a random place from what he could see. They were mostly blocking his view of it.

"No!" he heard a man shout on the other side. Grunts and lighter thuds against metal followed.

One of the aliens shakily produced what appeared to be a syringe, while the other's hand hovered over a door panel.

For a few seconds it was quiet. The alien with the syringe hesitated, unsure what to do next.

Harry glanced around the small room while he had the chance. That door was the only way out and he wasn't getting through that way anytime soon. His mind raced as he wondered where he was and how. The memory of the needle lingered in his thoughts, he subconsciously found himself staring at another growth peeking out of the exposed part of his chest.

Another loud bang made him jump. He glanced over as the two aliens stumbled backwards. The door seemed to have been parted slightly. It abruptly opened completely. The syringe was raised in anticipation. They lunged for a figure as he barged in. Before the alien could use the syringe, his wrist was grabbed. Harry saw the new arrival ball his spare hand into a fist and swing it towards the captor's face.

The second alien stumbled to the side in a panic. She seemingly didn't want to confront the intruder. Doing so allowed Harry to see him. He looked Human, so Harry immediately thought Voyager had already arrived to rescue him.

Instead he got little more than a blank look before going over to a second bed beside him. Harry looked around, only then noticing he wasn't alone. A Human woman lay on it with similar growths on her skin to Harry, still unconscious and unaware of what was happening.

The intruder was no more than halfway there when a garrison of aliens rushed in. He spun around to confront them. One was shoved harshly away, another elbowed into the wall before they managed to sedate him with another syringe.

Harry could only stare, gobsmacked as they dragged him back outside. He noticed a few growths on his arms and one on his neck. He was in a similar predicament to him and his roommate, who he assumed this other man knew.

Apparently they were sick. Harry felt fine and apparently the intruder did as well. He thought about how they got there and why. Was the whole crew and the Marquis subjected to this, and were they all imprisoned in this place? Harry had so many questions, but had no idea where to start.

Two months ago:

Jessie hurried into the corridor with a smile on her face, and eyes sparkling.

Ian stood there waiting for her. "Jess," he said as she passed.

"Hey," she greeted him warmly. "Have you heard?"

"Yeah, I was there. Listen..." Ian said with a growing frown.

Jessie didn't like the serious look on his face, it wasn't like him. "What's the matter?"

Ian hesitated. Jessie was rarely happy on this ship, which didn't surprise anyone who knew her. Shared living quarters, little room for belongings, crowded environment. For as long as he knew her and especially from what Danny and James had told him, she wasn't a freedom fighter. He often wondered why she had joined the Marquis.

Now he was worried that he had killed her good mood for something that could've waited. "Um, well," he stammered, while trying desperately to think of something else. Though he decided to talk to her not just for Jessie's sake. James was his friend and he couldn't deny the dread he felt when he saw him join the ranks.

It was a little late anyway. Jessie was already concerned. "Did James tell you why he joined?" Ian finally asked.

"He hasn't. But he's always gone out looking for fights with bullies, so it doesn't surprise me," Jessie replied.

"Perhaps you should ask him sometime. Some... *stuff* happened since you joined. He's different," Ian said.

Jessie's face fell further into full blown worry. "Oh, I know there's *stuff*. He's never been very good at hiding from me. When I get a chance..."

"You're not going to ask me what happened?" Ian said in surprise.

"As if you'd tell me," Jessie laughed.

"I was going to. Then I figured he's not going to be... *different* with you," Ian said.

Jessie stared at him curiously. "No," she shook her head. "James has barely been here five minutes. I'll give him a chance. He'll talk to me, I'm sure. He always does."

Ian nodded, "yeah, you don't have to worry though. It's everyone else that crosses him that has that luxury." He then worried he had said too much, so he hurried off towards the bridge. Jessie watched him with an intense frown, now more curious than ever.

Captain's Log Stardate 48315.6: Since the inhabitation of the station won't co-operate, we are left with only one lead; the energy pulses it keeps firing. We've traced their path to the fifth planet in a nearby system.

Kathryn stared out of the large window in her office, with a thoughtful and yet sad look on her face. The door chime barely distracted her from it. "Come in."

Tuvok carefully entered the Ready Room as he normally did; two steps in so he was barely in front of the door, keeping it open. He'd always check the air before fully walking inside. The strength of the coffee aroma was how he judged it, which he'd divided into four categories.

Low was an illogical risk, designated for emergencies only, but not for all. Sometimes an urgent situation would require someone with a cooler head, and that wasn't Captain Janeway on her bare minimum.

Medium used to be only one, but he had to divide them into two. Visual factors took place as well as her vocal tone. A medium aroma could be too soon, and an interruption would be dire. It was rare though, poor timing usually. The odds were great that he'd visit after she had consumed the agreeable amount.

Strong was avoid if possible, especially in emergencies. No questions asked.

With the smell and the visual cue of the empty cup on the desk, Tuvok assigned the situation as Safe Medium. So he allowed the doors to shut behind him.

"Captain. I've observed something peculiar about the Array's pulses. They're getting faster," he reported.

"Of course they are," Kathryn groaned.

"The interval between each pulse has decreased by point four seconds since we arrived," Tuvok continued anyway.

Kathryn exhaled huffily as she turned her back on the window. "What's the point? Look..." she crouched down briefly to swivel the computer on the coffee table over. Tuvok approached carefully so he could study the screen. "The planet they're firing them at is dead. No oceans, not even a puddle. It looks like it used to be a M-class but the nucleogenic particles are gone."

"Curious. The planet is incapable of producing rain," Tuvok said.

Kathryn gestured her arms widely while her eyes flashed. She once more faced the window. "I've never seen anything like it. I doubt anyone could survive there, but it's the only lead we have. Once we've finished repairs, we'll set a course for it. There must be a clue there that'll lead us to our missing people."

She sat down on her sofa, all while draping an arm across the back. "Did you know that Barry used to play the sax for some football team? Pretty odd I thought. Or maybe they were separate things," she murmured.

Tuvok had a feeling that she had misunderstood completely. He thought it was best to avoid getting into one of their correction matches for now. "I did not have the opportunity to meet Mr Kim."

"I hardly knew him," Kathryn sighed, her voice straining. "Or any of them. I like to, I need to take more time to do that. I still don't know that helm woman's name. That eulogy, I may have to wing it."

"Captain, you require sleep," Tuvok suggested.

"His mother called me before we departed from Creep Space Nine," Kathryn said, smiling slightly. "Funny woman. Said he left a clarinet behind. Then she asked if she had time to send it."

Tuvok's earlier suspicions were confirmed. Still he went along with it, "I thought you said he played the saxophone."

Kathryn stared at him in shock, "so did I. I laughed and she got all huffy. I cut her off before she'd ask about drums as well, or a football."

"Are you sure it was Kim's mother you were talking to?" Tuvok asked carefully.

Kathryn was silent, he assumed she was thinking about it. After a few seconds she smiled warmly at him. "No, it was. I was thinking of that daft Cabbage. I really couldn't picture that Barry boy in a football outfit, he'd disappear in all that padding. How embarrassing. At least with you back..."

"Indeed," Tuvok agreed. "Although you are probably exhausted. Your head will be clearer after some rest."

"You're right as usual. I've missed having you around," Kathryn said sincerely.

"And I am gratified that you came after me so I can counsel you once more. The crew will be as well," Tuvok said.

"I spoke to your family before we left too," Kathryn said.

Tuvok worried about that for a moment, "are you certain?"

"Cheeky," Kathryn scowled with humour. Though she didn't look sure. "Yes, it was them. They're worried about you."

"I hope you didn't contact the Jeffersons in London again. Vulcans do not worry, so," Tuvok said.

"Well at this point Jeffersons are like family. And shut up," Kathryn chuckled. "I hadn't met your wife and kids then. It was an easy mistake to make."

"They were Human, the children looked nothing like me. Their mother was a red headed woman who had never travelled outside of her home country," Tuvok said.

"What? You could have met your wife there, and it's rude to ask what species your wife is. I was lost and asking for directions," Kathryn said defensively.

"The Conference we were supposed to meet at was in Paris," Tuvok said.

Kathryn brushed him off with a half hearted hand wave. "Oh shush. I can never tell which side of the Channel I'm on. All the ports look alike."

Tuvok promised himself that he wouldn't get into these arguments only a few minutes ago, and still there they were. He shook his head, "perhaps I should navigate us from here. We are already lost."

Kathryn's eyes narrowed, "I thought Vulcans don't make jokes, or is this for my benefit?"

Tuvok thought carefully about how to answer that. The logical solution was to not.

Voyager and the Marquis ship carefully flew towards scattered metal drifting everywhere. A lone ship hovered directly ahead. It looked like it should've been a part of the field, but it was moving about on its own engines and had the lights on.

"Hail them," Kathryn ordered.

"Yes ma... my Captain," Rollins stumbled, fearing for his life for the slip up.

The viewscreen changed to show nothing but rubbish. Someone behind it hurriedly tried to clear it away. Then they could see him. Orange whiskers covered the outline of his jaw. Dark spots scattered across his forehead and scalp, as well as in a straight line from the ears down to his cheek. His temples a bright shade of yellow, highlighting the dark spots even further which surrounded it. The hair on his head reminded Tom of the Mohican haircut his prankster classmate received on April Fools Day. He ended up keeping it for months.

"Whoever you are, I found this waste zone first," the alien hissed at them.

Kathryn laughed at him, "you think I want this crap? You're funny. I like you. What do they call you?"

"Furball usually, or rat. But I prefer Neelix," the alien replied.

Kathryn looked on sadly, like she was ready to give everything up. "I'm never going to remember all that," she whispered. Tom smirked from afar, safely out of her range. "Um, I'm Captain Janeway of the Federation Starship Voyager."

Neelix looked very impressed. His amber eyes matched her despair ridden ones. "I'm never going to remember that. Can I call you something shorter, or is that offensive?"

Kathryn smiled, finally someone she could relate to. "Captain or Janeway is fine."

"All right Captain," Neelix beamed back. "Since you aren't interested in my *crap*, I'm delighted to know you. How can I help?"

"We're following the energy pulses to the fifth planet nearby," Kathryn began to explain.

Neelix shuddered fearfully before she could finish. "Oh you don't want to go there."

"We might have to. The station doing this has kidnapped three of our people," Kathryn said.

"Let me guess," Neelix sighed tiredly. "He whisked you from far away against your will."

His comment got everyone's attention. Kathryn muttered to herself in anger. "So the old coot's done this before."

"Oh yes. Thousands, maybe fifty times," Neelix said. "But the Caretaker generally tends to abandon people on that planet of yours, never to return. He's been up to this for months."

"The Caretaker?" Kathryn said as she pulled a face.

"That's what the Ocampa call him. They live on the same world," Neelix replied.

Kathryn glanced over her shoulder towards Tuvok. He stared back quizzically. "How?" She shook her head. "Will they know anything about my people?"

"Oh very likely," Neelix nodded. "He sends them directly to them. Nobody knows more than that."

"But, from our scans the planet's uninhabitable," Tom chimed in.

"You don't know the half of it. I'd show you, but I've got so much to do today," Neelix said, gesturing to the junk around him.

Kathryn leaned forward against the railing, she smiled slyly. "Perhaps we can pay you for your..." she quickly cleared her throat to stop from laughing. "Valuable time. We need to find these Ocampo."

Neelix scoffed proudly for some reason, puffing his chest out. "Well, there's very little you could offer me." Kathryn resisted rolling her eyes or commenting on anything for now. Tom didn't grant him similar courtesy, he continued to smirk. "Unless."

"Yes?" Kathryn said slowly like it was painful.

"You have..." Neelix said, batting his eyes pathetically. His whole demeanour did a complete U-turn in a matter of seconds. "Water?"

"Water?" Kathryn said in surprise. "You're kidd..." Tuvok pretended to cough once. "Yeah sure, that's a fair trade. Sure."

"Are you an Ocampo?" Tom thought to ask, holding back his smile for now. Neelix laughed off the question. "Or does this whole area of space have a water shortage?"

Kathryn scowled back at him, forcing him to retreat backwards towards the command chairs. He didn't dare sit, he had a brief vision of the Captain neutering him for it.

"Sounds like we have a deal," Neelix said cheerfully.

"Good," Kathryn smiled. "We'll beam you over and tow your... ship into a shuttle bay."

Neelix's face shrivelled up, eyes began to squint. "Beam?"

"Oh good lord," Kathryn turned her head to groan and roll her eyes. Once she was facing the alien, her diplomacy face was back on. "Our technology lets us bring people onto our ship instantly. It's safe, don't worry."

"Then why do you even have that fancy ship? I can offer you quite a hefty amount of credit for it," Neelix said a little too nicely.

Kathryn tried her best, but the twitch in her eyebrow muscles ruined her smiley facade. "No, that's okay. Standby."

"Stand by what?" Neelix asked. He looked around for a different spot to where he was.

Kathryn sighed.

"That was incredible! It's so good to meet you," Neelix dashed off the pad excitedly. "This room, it's so pristine."

"Yes," Tuvok said, eager to keep the conversation to the point.

"You Federations sure do know how to make a nice ride, so much more advanced than anything I've seen," Neelix said. "Well except the Caretaker I suppose."

"The Federation is not the name of Voyager's race. It's an organisation of many races. I am Vulcan," Tuvok corrected him.

Neelix pressed his hands against his own chest, "Neelix." Then without much warning, he lunged for the poor Security Chief, trapping him in a firm bear hug.

Tuvok wondered what he had done to the Captain to deserve this. The only thing he could think of was his navigation remark yesterday. Though he doubted that she knew he'd do this, or smell so badly that he had to lower his nostrils to block it slightly.

Thankfully the hug didn't last long as the visitor began to stare in wonder at everything else around him. "What does all this do?"

"I assure you that everything here has a specific function. It is not necessary or vital to our mission. I suggest I show you to your quarters," Tuvok said.

Neelix nodded, if not a little disappointed. Tuvok gestured for him to go for the door. Even that opening amazed the alien. As he passed another fresh batch of the smell blew into poor Tuvok's face.

"Perhaps you'd care for a bath," he said on following him out.

He got the response he expected, "a what?"

Harry was sitting on the bed he woke up on. He looked around the room in time to see his roommate waking up. He stood up and went over to her. She quickly sat up and stared at him warily.

"It's ok, ok," Harry said in a reassuring voice.

It didn't seem to work, she looked even more unnerved. "Who are you?"

"Kim," Harry replied. "Harry Kim."

He wasn't sure why but she briefly laughed. "I don't see you as the 007 type."

"What?" Harry said with a blank face. He was embarrassed when he got it a second later. "If I were, we'd be free now. No, I'm an Ensign on the Starship Voyager. I was kidnapped from the station just like you were. I have no idea where we are."

He waited for a response, all she did was tense and glance around. Her inspection stopped at the door.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Jessie," she answered without breaking her gaze. "What happened?"

"I'm not sure. The last thing I remember was a needle," Harry winced. She looked back at him with wide eyes. "When I woke up I was here."

"The needle, it got everyone. Is everyone else here?" Jessie asked.

"That I don't know. We aren't alone though. There was another," Harry replied. He pointed to the door, "he tried to get in, I assume to rescue you."

Jessie rolled her eyes and groaned. Harry wasn't sure why. "Typical," she muttered. "Let me guess. He left those dents in the door?"

Harry glanced at them this time. The curve he saw before did look more like a dent now that there was no one in the way. There was a similar one further down.

"Human guy, blond, bit of a temper," Jessie continued.

"Bit is an exaggeration," Harry said. Jessie seemed annoyed, the groan was directed at the door as she shook her head. "What? He tried his best."

"That's not..." Jessie said quickly and defensively. "I'm not mad that he failed, I'm mad that he tried at all."

"Why?" Harry was more than confused.

"One day he'll pick a fight with the wrong person. Again," Jessie said as she stared at the floor. "James has always been overprotective, but these days he's taking it to extremes. I suppose it's to be expected."

"It is?" Harry said warily.

Jessie glanced back upward. In his perspective she was only looking in his general direction, avoiding eye contact. "You're a Starfleet officer? How come your ship's here too?"

Harry visibly cringed. He was wondering when she'd connect those dots. "We were under orders to find you when you disappeared. Apart from that, same story I guess."

He was expecting an angry response to that. Anything but a mild mannered hmm and an understanding nod. "I wonder how long we were unconscious. I woke up after you, so I've been under longer. That's... creepy."

"You've been missing a week. You weren't taken immediately right?" Harry asked.

"No. We tried hailing the thing, they ignored us. We couldn't go anywhere so..." Jessie replied as she absentmindedly reached to scratch her arm. Her fingertips grazed one of the growths, so she looked with a start. "What...?"

"Yeah," Harry said uncomfortably. "That's all our captors have said; we're ill."

"What, but..." Jessie started to panic. Harry understood completely, it took him a while to shake off the nausea on seeing them. "Who undressed me?" she was close to shouting.

Harry's eyes widened, "what?"

Jessie shuddered uncontrollably. "Oh god. That's really gross and violate-y. What was wrong with leaving me in my clothes?" Her panic grew, "ohno, where did they put them?"

"Um," was all Harry could say.

Luckily for him the door opened on its own. The male alien man walked through it, now sporting a bruised and swollen eye.

"I hope you're feeling better. I know how frightening this must be for the both of you," he said kindly. "I've brought some clothes if you'd care to change."

Harry cringed expectantly. Sure enough his roommate huffed in disgust, "I hope they're my clothes. I'm not going out in stupid white robes like yours."

"What is this place, and why have you kidnapped us?" Harry quickly asked.

"You are not prisoners. In fact we consider you honoured guests. The Caretaker has sent you to us," the man answered. "As long as you are not violent, you are free to leave your quarters."

Jessie sighed, "this is why you don't punch first, James."

Harry chuckled nervously. "Yeah um, so what's wrong with us? What are these things?" he asked, gesturing his swollen arm.

The man seemed troubled at the question. He looked sorry. "We really don't know."

"When you say not violent, you mean not anymore right?" Jessie questioned hopefully.

"You must be hungry. Would you care to join me on the courtyard for a meal?" the man ignored her completely.

The alien doctor escorted Jessie and Harry through a bright promenade which reminded her of a shopping centre. A mostly dead one with all the *good stuff* moved on to a better place. Everyone they spotted on their journey was all dressed similarly in robes, so Jessie wasn't at all surprised at the lack of clothes shops. Harry meanwhile was more unnerved by their stares and in some cases obvious stalking of them.

Every few seconds an echoed thump flew overhead. Once he heard a couple, Harry pictured the array and the pulses it was firing to some unknown place.

"Our food dispensers are right this way," the alien said, gesturing ahead with his arm. Their path led to a more open and brighter area. Harry's eye ventured upwards, fully expecting to see the sky and their planet's star, but instead saw a ceiling of rock formations and bright lights that mimicked star light perfectly.

Not far ahead they both could see a river flowing. Jessie kept staring at it as she walked until she reached the railing. Their food area seemed to be on a much higher level, overlooking the river and the rest of the colony.

"We're underground," Harry said in astonishment as he joined Jessie at the railing.

"Our society is subterranean. We've lived here for over five hundred generations," the alien explained.

"But why, did something... force you down here?" Jessie asked, a little meekly. Harry noticed her shoulders tense as she did so, and she didn't look the alien in the eye either. She didn't strike him as a shy person, so that wasn't the problem he thought to himself.

"Yes, the Warming," the alien answered.

Since they had all stopped walking, the amount of stalkers they had collected on route all gathered around them, gossiping quietly. Jessie looked across at them, tensing up even further with a scowl on her face.

"The Warming?" Harry said curiously.

The alien doctor led the pair towards what looked like replicators built into a wall nearby, with a queue of people waiting their turn.

"Long ago, our surface turned into a desert. The Caretaker arrived and opened a deep chasm in the ground. He led our ancestors to it. Since then he has provided for all of our needs," he said. The people in front of them didn't seem to mind when he jumped the queue entirely to replicate two bowls.

Jessie's appetite vanished the instant she looked at the grey slop in hers.

"Your Caretaker may be your saviour, but he isn't exactly a fun guy is he?" Jessie commented.

Harry's eyes shot wide open and his head snapped towards her so fast he felt it twinge. "Jessie," he whispered.

Jessie rolled her eyes and yet smiled at him. "What, I don't have or care to have any Starfleet tact. I'll leave that to you."

The alien wasn't offended though. "It's quite all right. We've lived this way all our lives, which we are grateful for. Our young people, such as yourselves, do crave more. It's only natural so I understand."

"Do you also understand why my friend assumed we were prisoners and acted as such?" Jessie said.

Harry sighed and decided to have a look around while eating the slop.

"I do. The situation has been explained to him. Once he recovers from the sedatives and isn't a threat to our people, then..." the alien replied.

Jessie shook her head as she turned it to one side, scoffing to herself. When she turned back she said, "I'll make sure he behaves himself. That I can guarantee."

The alien merely nodded. Harry took that as the matter resolved, so he could ask the questions that had been nagging at him. "So, do you have contact with the Caretaker?"

"Not directly. We try to interpret his wishes the best we can," the alien said.

"So how do you know why he sent us to you?" Harry asked another.

The Ocampa doctor lead them both to a close by table so they could sit down. "We believe he must have separated you from your people for their protection."

"A bit hasty, Jessie's friend probably doesn't beat people up for fun," Harry blurted out. Jessie glared at him with such ferocity, he thought he was back on Voyager with a much younger version of the Captain. "He doesn't, right?"

"No," Jessie sighed loudly and impatiently.

The doctor chuckled at his remark, "I meant from your illness. Perhaps the Caretaker was trying to prevent a plague."

"That's stupid. I was fine until he stuck that needle in my chest," Jessie muttered. Harry winced at the eerily similar memory. It couldn't have been though, from what he saw he wasn't the only one who was assaulted that way.

"All we know is that he sends people with this disease to us, and we've interpreted it as *please care for them*. It's all we can do," the Ocampa said.

"So we're not the first he's done this to?" Jessie asked.

He wasn't sure how to answer that at first. He lightly nodded, "you are not the first patients, no."

Harry's chest felt very heavy from the dread that was building up. His throat was hoarse when he spoke up, "can we talk to them, are they still here?"

The man in front of them looked uncomfortable and yet sympathetic. He sighed deeply. "Your condition is serious. We don't know how to treat it. I'm afraid, the others did not recover."

Harry knew it was coming, but it still didn't prepare him. He could only stare in shock directly ahead of him. He never imagined his first mission would be his last.

"Great," Jessie grunted. "I'm going to die in Greysville. It better be quick."

Harry's eyes widened once more, his stare directed towards her. He silently hoped this was just how she coped, and not how she really thought. Either way she was taking it better than him.

Tuvok walked down the corridor, then stopped at one of the doors. He pressed the door chime, but he got no reply. He walked straight in. He was greeted by a stuffy room, and lots of empty dishes on the table in front of him.

What was worse was this awful sound coming from the bathroom. It sounded like a cat getting strangled. Tuvok slowly headed into the bathroom, he felt all the steam as he stepped inside. He scanned the quarters, quickly regretting it when he briefly gazed into the bathroom.

Neelix was lying in a very bubbly bath, drinking a glass of water. The Lieutenant turned his back on him quickly for both of their benefits.

"Ah, Mr Vulcan. Come in, come in, please. I can't hardly see you. I tell you, where I come from nobody wastes water like this," he said cheerfully. Tuvok heard him scrubbing something. "A good sand scrub is the best we can hope for," a throaty chuckle was drowned out by a loud slurp of water. Tuvok couldn't help but wince when the next sounds he heard was a spit and water splashing.

"I am pleased you are enjoying yourself, but we are in orbit of the fifth planet. We are in need of your assistance," Tuvok said.

"Oh, can you pass me the towel," Neelix said, and he started to climb out of the bath.

Tuvok picked up a white towel, which he passed to Neelix while keeping his gaze fixed straight ahead of him. The luckily shorter than him Neelix wrapped it around himself.

"If you scan the large southern continent, there will be some extinct volcanoes. Follow the foothills north until you come across a dry riverbed," Neelix explained. "There's an encampment there."

"Do you think our missing crewmembers will be at this camp?" Tuvok asked.

"It's not impossible... maybe," Neelix answered hesitantly. "Maybe not. But we'll find them. We'll need to bring along a few canisters of water for barter. Do these replicators do clothing as well?"

"Yes," Tuvok answered. Even he was surprised at how relieved his voice sounded.

Neelix grinned up at him, "will it make me one of your snazzy uniforms?"

"No, absolutely not," Tuvok replied sternly. Neelix aaw'd like a child and wandered off to hopefully get dressed.

They had a little time to explore the underground colony before a couple of worried aliens reunited them with their fellow patient. Harry kept back by the river, he didn't want to do anything to get on his bad side after what he saw. The two aliens left them all to their own devices.

Since Harry was fully awake now and there was less violence going on, he could get a better look and impression of these two strangers he was stuck with. He needed to, there was no way he was going to die here. If he were to try and get out of this place, he'd need their help.

Jessie in his opinion was a little quirky and opinionated, but seemed nice enough to get along with. Her distaste for this place's *greyness* would make her more than happy to help. The other, whose name he had forgotten if she mentioned it at all, he couldn't put his finger on. As the two friends embraced and started chatting quietly, he looked entirely different to before. Brighter, almost harmless.

All he could figure out was he, or both of them for that matter, were his age and they were pretty close. He internally scoffed, one of them beat up half of the medical staff to get to her, that was obvious.

"Maybe next time James, think and breathe for five seconds before the breaking spree commences," Jessie said, still in a hushed voice.

She got a mild mannered laugh in response. "I was told to count to ten, I'm okay with halving it."

"Mmm hmm," Jessie said, clicking her tongue afterwards. She looked across at Harry nearby, "I think you guys met before, but er... this is Harry Kim. Harry, James Taylor-Stuart."

Harry braced himself as he moved forward to extend his hand. Luckily James didn't go for it at all, it was shaking so badly he had to bring it back to his side.

To his surprise James stepped back a little. "He's not going to piss his pants, is he?" he whispered to Jessie.

Jessie shook her head, giggling a little. "Can you blame him? Be nice."

Harry cleared his throat as his face turned a little red. "It's cold in here. Um, yeah it's lovely to meet you... in a better mood."

"Yeah well, sorry about that," James said, sounding surprisingly genuine about it. "I don't react well to waking up in a cell with people staring at me."

"Who doesn't?" Harry chuckled nervously. "So, do you remember anything from before this?"

James didn't look too pleased with the question. "I remember needles."

"Needles, plural?" Harry said with dismay directed in Jessie's direction. She reacted similarly. "Was one in the chest, like us?"

"Yeah," James answered lightly, his attention seemed to drift for a moment.

Jessie stared at him intently. "You always have to beat everyone's stories, don't you?"

James glanced back at her, smirking and sniggering at her. "I might have been dreaming it after seeing that one. It's a bit fuzzy. I was just trying to remember if it was before or after."

Harry felt tense all of a sudden after his mind gave him the image of multiple needles like the one he endured. "Um yeah, something at that point happened to us that was different to the others. An experiment gone wrong, probably."

"Or worst case scenario, we're all that's left," James suggested.

Harry stared at him fearfully for different reasons than earlier. "That's... looking on the bright side?"

"Well, no one's found us yet. It's one possibility," James said towards him. For some reason he pointed up at the rock formations, "there's one way to find out."

"Uh, we and especially you don't want to do that," Jessie said, briefly glancing at Harry. She hesitated and looked at him twice. "You two won't fare well up there."

"Wait, I hope you weren't suggesting digging our way up. And what do you mean by I won't fare well?" Harry stuttered. "I'm trained, I probably would know more than you do."

"The Warming, turned to desert. You two would look like lobsters after a few minutes. Also, no water which is not my idea of a sandy beach holiday," Jessie said.

James stared at her curiously, which she countered with a slighty smirk. "You don't even swim," he said.

"If it's hot, I can dangle my legs or walk in," Jessie said innocently.

Harry shook his head. "Making fun of my complexion, that's not... rude at all. But yeah, if it's true about no water, none of us will survive long up there. We need to find something that can shelter us once we find an escape route. That's the hard part."

"She made fun of mine too, she doesn't mean anything by it," James said with a little bite in his voice. Harry winced instinctively. "But you're right. We'll be deep down, I don't fancy digging until this illness finally kills me off."

"I wonder how the Caretaker brought the Ocampo here," Harry said thoughtfully.

"He probably transported them, like he did with us. That transporter, the coherent thing or those pulses. He has plenty of options to pick from," Jessie rebutted.

James looked around until he caught sight of the floating screens above them in the canteen area. He lingered for a bit before looking around again. "Maybe if we can find a terminal..."

Jessie smiled, her eyes partly rolled. "This isn't the personnel database, in English and binary, with Starfleet LCARs. You'll need more than five minutes."

James' attention returned to them. He caught a glimpse of Harry's bemused stare first before settling on Jessie. "All computers are the same. Every single one should have a virus defence setup. That should distract it for a bit."

"Ohno," Jessie groaned knowingly.

Harry meanwhile looked on a little shocked. "Wait, where are you going to get a virus from?"

"It doesn't have to be a real one. It just has to think so," James replied with a slight frown.

Harry felt like he was patronising him with it, judging him like he was an idiot. He took great offense at that. "Look, Jessie's right. This is an alien system we know nothing about. These people have allowed us to roam free here. I don't want you doing anything that'll get us locked up again." James laughed at him and walked off, Jessie meanwhile looked very awkward. "Wait. I'm the only Starfleet officer here, you're a civilian. You won't do anything, that's an order," Harry tried to bark.

"Oh god," Jessie groaned once more.

James stopped. For a long few seconds all the pair saw was his back. Then he turned around. Harry expected the James he first met in the hospital, thankfully instead he got the smirky patronising version. "If you want to sit here and rot, be my guest. I'm not going to take orders from a snout nosed Starfleet brat so I can do the same thing. Besides, this'll only take a few minutes. It'll tell us of a way out, then we'll take it. If it doesn't, well, I find violence quite handy sometimes."

"James," Jessie said in a warning tone, her eyes sharpened. Harry felt a little cooler seeing it.

"Wait," Harry said, something familiar popped into his head. "You've done this before, haven't you?" James mouthed a duh and rolled his eyes. "I knew it, you're that guy who broke into the Academy servers the morning of my final exam." Jessie frowned in confusion. "Last year, somebody called Taylor brought the whole thing down with a virus. No one could trace it. They had to restore the backups from two months prior."

"I don't know what you're prattling on about," James said, shaking his head.

Jessie glanced between them. "Why would you even be at the Academy?"

"I wasn't," James said.

"He was a first year. I remember that," Harry protested.

James sniggered toward him. Once again, Harry felt very insulted by his attitude. "Do I look like Academy material to you? Look, I'll be doing this anyway. Come or don't, I couldn't give a crap." He walked off without them.

Harry glanced toward Jessie, hoping for some sort of explanation or anything. She sighed with an apologetic look in her eyes. "I'm sorry, he's not usually this ru... well no, that's not true. He thrives on being rude, but it's usually in retaliation."

"He's going to get himself locked up in his room again," Harry said. "And I'm telling you, that's him. It wasn't just the hacking, everyone always said Taylor was an antisocial piece of work."

"Please, if James went to the Academy, he would've told me," Jessie scoffed. "I'll keep an eye on him. Maybe you can do your own thing and we meet back at Slops Diner later."

Harry chuckled, "no, we should stick together. You'll just have to work your *charms* if he uses the violence he likes so much."

Jessie narrowed her eyes suspiciously, "what do you mean by that?" Suddenly James wasn't who Harry was worried about anymore. He laughed nervously.

The awayteam of Kathryn, Tom, Chakotay, Tuvok and Neelix dematerialised in a scorching desert. The land beneath their feet a dreary, parched red. The sky above them they could barely see with the star bearing down on them with such intensity they were all already starting to sweat beneath their clothes. The Humans were expecting it, but it still shocked them how unbearable it was.

They all looked around for signs of life. Kathryn spotted a settlement of a few huts nearby. Neelix hurried forward to lead the group towards it.

Tom meanwhile tugged on his collar in a vain attempt to get some air to his neck. All it did was heat it up even more. "Ugh, this brings back New Zealand memories." He remembered the big black friend he met in the hole when he also met Kathryn, it made him super aware of his surroundings. "Who'd live in a desert?"

"The rich cormaline deposits are the big trading commodity around here," Neelix explained.

"So is that how the Ocampa can survive on this planet?" Chakotay asked.

Neelix winced, "not the Ocampa, the Kazon Ogla."

Kathryn looked disgusted for some reason, "the Kazon ogle who? That's disgusting, the pricks. They can ogle my fist."

"Uh," Neelix said uncomfortably. The rest of the team were mostly used to her comments by now. Tom was starting to look forward to them, especially now as it was a nice distraction from the heat.

Tuvok quickly came to the rescue before Neelix thought twice about the arrangement. "Who are the Kazon Ogla?"

Neelix pointed ahead at the people dotted around the settlement. All of them seemed to be gathering around to watch them. The aliens all had very bumpy foreheads and sunburnt red skin. Their most striking feature was the huge hair, which made them look like they tried to tame it after an electrocution by tying a gigantic dead pitcher plant on top of it. All of them looked like men, not a woman to be seen amongst them.

"They are. The Kazon sects control this part of space. Some have food, some have ore, water. They usually end up killing each other for it."

"Well good. I hate creepy perverts," Kathryn muttered. She directed a sudden glare towards Neelix which almost scared the whiskers off him. "I thought you said the Ocampo had our people. I should rip those..."

"My friends it's good to see you again!" Neelix greeted the aliens cheerfully and frantically at the same time, to get away from her.

He was the first to be roughly grabbed by the arms. The rest of the team were quickly disarmed and dragged into the settlement too. Neelix ended up being carried there roughly. Still he tried to talk to them as if they were being friendly, "I must speak with your Maj, the ever wise Jabin. Oh that tickles." That was when he was thrown towards the wall, luckily feet first.

The rest of the team were forced to sit down on the very hot ground, which Tom wasn't best pleased about. Weapons were pointed at Neelix to keep him by the wall.

"Very amusing. I love a good practical joke as much as the next fellow," he chuckled.

Kathryn death glared as many of the Kazon as she could, accidentally getting Chakotay in the process. He wasn't used to it, he thought he'd burst into flames at any moment. Tom quickly looked away in time.

Another alien emerged from one of the huts, which Neelix instantly recognised. "Jabin, my old friend!" That only antagonised the weapon pointers further, they lunged forward with them. It didn't put him off. "Water, I have water Jabin to replace all that I *borrowed*. Show them Mr Paris."

The leader, Jabin approached the team, seemingly ignoring Neelix.

"Their ship has technology that can make water out of thin air," Neelix proudly said.

"Oh," Tom said, realising what was going on. He wasn't sure whether or not to be angry at their new so called ally or to praise him for his sneakiness. For now his hand hovered to the canister in his belt. Kathryn's hand reached over to grab his, stopping him. Chakotay and Tuvok glanced at her with concern

"Wait, I'm not feeling widely generous right now," she hissed.

"We don't really have a choice," Tom whispered to her.

"Oh fine, fine, just a sip," Kathryn snapped.

Once her hand was gone from his wrist, he handed the canister up to the leader. Jabin took a swig from it, his eyes almost popped out as he looked down at the awayteam. "Do you have more?"

"I assume please isn't in your language," Kathryn muttered. The Kazon glared at her. "What, you stole our phasers and manhandled us. I don't like being held hostage for sodding water. Especially when *someone*," she said at Neelix, "mislead us into coming."

"Captain, they may have taken our intentions here as hostile. We did approach them armed," Tuvok advised. "Perhaps..."

Kathryn sighed, "oh for fu... why do I get the feeling this is going to bite me in the ass later?" She tapped her commbadge harshly to make a point, "Janeway to Voyager. Energise."

Behind the group a huge container dematerialised, prompting gasps and shouts from the aliens.

"You might get a smidgen more if you help us out," Kathryn said.

Jabin couldn't take his eyes off the container, he was too shocked. "Help? You people are magicians. What can we do that you can't?"

"Our people were brought here to the Ocampa by the Caretaker. Do you know where they are?" Chakotay questioned.

Jabin stared down at him with fire in his eyes now. "Ocampa." He snarled and pointed at the hut he walked out of. Everyone glanced over. A petite blonde girl hovered at the doorway, her face bruised and her lip cut. "She is Ocampa."

Neelix looked over as well, his face scrunched in fury at her condition. He tried to hide it behind his friendlier facade from earlier.

"Such worthless creatures. They live only nine of these planet's years. They make poor servants," Jabin ranted as he paced. "We caught..."

Kathryn took a quick peek around before interrupting. "Yes yes, boohoo. The boys club needed a little girl to help do the dishes cos it's soooo hard, but she won't. Wah my manhood is poked, hear me roar."

Chakotay and Tom both facepalmed, while Tuvok quietly wondered why he accepted the posting to be on Voyager.

Jabin snarled at her, "what language are you speaking?"

"Oh sorry, I'll dumb it down for you," Kathryn faked some sympathy.

Tuvok quickly spoke up to interrupt, "we need to speak to these Ocampa, to negotiate the release of our people. If you can guide us to their location, we would reward you with more water."

"Ah," Jabin seemed pleased with that explanation. Kathryn mouthed *what* at the Vulcan. "You're in for disappointment. They all live underground, two miles under to be precise. That's the only source of water, which that thing gave them access to."

"Wow, the fiend. Giving them water on their own planet. Disgusting, I'm outraged," Kathryn muttered.

"I hope they don't know sarcasm," Tom said.

"Yes it is," Jabin growled "There's no way to get down there. We tried. The entity has some kind of barrier we cannot penetrate."

Chakotay's eye fell to the girl inching further forward from the door. "She got out. There must be a way."

"Several manage, but they seal the way back up afterwards," Jabin said.

Neelix edged forward, "maybe she will help them find a way down."

Jabin laughed deeply. Kathryn resisted making fun of it for now. "You'd be wasting your time. I've used every method of persuasion I know to get her to help *us*. She won't!" Jabin shouted accusingly at the injured girl.

"Then she's worthless to you," Neelix said with some contempt in his voice. "Let us trade you water for this..." His skin crawled to the say the next part, it gave his voice the disgusting edge he needed, "scrawny little thing."

Jabin pointed at the container, "I'd prefer to acquire this technology that creates water whenever I want."

Kathryn laughed genuinely, all of the Kazon and her team slowly looked at her, making her trail off uncomfortably. Neelix took the opportunity to edge closer to Jabin.

"You're serious? Oh no, that's still funny," Kathryn chuckled.

Neelix reached out to grab Jabin and point what looked like a phaser at his throat. His men reacted immediately. "Tell them to drop their weapons. Drop them! Or you die in an instant."

"Do it, do it!" Jabin shouted at them.

They did as they were told. The awayteam quickly stood back up to reclaim their weapons from them. Tuvok and Chakotay moved towards Jabin as well to disarm him.

Neelix re-aimed his own weapon to the large container, snarling, "step aside!" He didn't give the aliens there much time to do so, he fired at it and they leapt out of its way. Water started to pour out of several holes, prompting the Kazon to hurriedly grab buckets and cups to get as much of it as they could. Neelix gestured to the young girl still at the hut. "Come on."

She ran towards him, straight into his free arm. "I strongly suggest you peam us out of here," he said.

Kathryn looked on in disgust for more than one reason. She tapped her commbadge anyway, "Voyager, six to *beam* up."

They thankfully didn't have to wait long. All six of them were taken away while the Kazon still filled every possible crevice they could find with water.

Kathryn growled as she stepped off the transporter pad. Her team followed her, while putting their phasers back into their belts. Kathryn kept hers out, contemplating using it on a certain member.

"Oh my dearest," Neelix purred, which didn't help. "Didn't I promise I'd save you?"

Everyone turned to look at the two alien guests on the transporter pad. They still stood closely, holding hands, Neelix stared lovingly into the girl's eyes.

Nobody could quite believe it. No more so than Tom, who looked also very disappointed. "I gotta grow a beard," he muttered.

Kathryn snorted into laughter and walked out. He heard her even when she was in the turbolift.

Harry, Jessie and James were in a dark, and empty passageway. Harry paced backwards and forwards as he was thinking. Jessie sat on the ground, leaning her back against the wall. James was standing next to her with his arms folded.

"I'm not surprised. The computer probably is the Caretaker," Harry said mid pace.

James sighed tiredly, "so I should expect a thunder strike any minute?"

Harry laughed, "he's not actually a god. But yeah, I'm staying over here." He changed direction to keep away.

"Well, all that's left is wait or dig up," James said.

"Look I'm sure Captain Janeway is doing everything she can to get us back," Harry said.

"Who, Captain Gainweight?" Jessie sniggered despite how tired she felt.

Harry stopped pacing, he glanced at her strangely. "Janeway," he said slowly.

"I knew that," Jessie said, her face turning red.

James shook his head. "Of course you did."

Jessie winced and she brought her hand up to her neck. James quickly put his arm around her shoulders.

"Should I get some help?" Harry asked with concern in his voice.

"No, I think it's going away now," Jessie replied with a faked smile.

One of the nurses that tended to Harry hurried over to the group, which took them by surprise.

"Are you in pain?" she asked.

Jessie groaned as she shook her head. "No, I'm fine."

The nurse took something out of her pocket discreetly. "I don't know if this will help but it's a medicine. I'm sorry about what's happened to you."

Harry took the medicine from her hand carefully. "We appreciate this, but we need to get to the surface to find our own people."

"The Elders would say that'd be against the Caretaker's wishes," the nurse said.

James rolled his eyes, "old, close minded and religious running the place. Picture me surprised."

Harry wanted to shush him, but he wasn't brave enough. "What do you think?" he asked the nurse.

"The Caretaker's been acting strangely the past few months. Abducting people, increasing the power supply," she replied anxiously.

"Is that the *oomph* we keep hearing?" Jessie asked.

The nurse nodded. "It's been tripled. There's enough power to run the city for five years."

"Nobody knows why?" Harry asked.

"When we ask, we're told to trust the Caretaker," the nurse said.

"The word *baah* comes to mind," James muttered to himself. Jessie smirked up at him. Harry was just thankful that the girl wouldn't have a clue about Earth sheep to get it.

As they expected she looked puzzled. "Someone I knew managed to get to the surface. I haven't seen her since."

Harry's attention was further piqued. "How?"

"The ancient tunnels that brought us here still exist, sometimes small breaches appear in the Security Barriers, they allow somebody to get through," the nurse replied.

James smiled, partly in relief, the rest of it looked strangely amused. "Sounds like fun."

"I think that's his way of saying; where's the shovel?" Jessie smiled awkwardly.

"It would take days, or even weeks to dig a way out," the nurse stammered.

James glanced between Jessie and the girl with confusion. "Okay, if there are already tunnels, why do we need to dig?"

"She did say ancient. Maybe they've caved in, in places," Harry said, this time he was the one giving him the *are you stupid* stare. James didn't appreciate it, his eyes narrowed. Harry shuffled away.

"No, stay. You have to rest, preserve your strength," the nurse pleaded.

"Please, it's our only chance," Harry begged back.

The EMH made quick work of the young woman's bruised eye. All the while an argument was brewing a few feet away.

"If you had told us what you had planned, we might have anticipated your irrational behaviour," Tuvok said in Neelix's direction.

He didn't take that well, he scoffed at him. "Irrational. We got out of there, didn't we?"

"Oh yes, you're right. I'll send you a huge tub of water for your efforts. I'll just need to tie a bloody rock to your ankle and you're good to go," Kathryn snarled.

"Excuse me," the girl said as she sat up from the biobed. "Don't blame Neelix."

The EMH had enough, he swirled around to confront them all. "That's enough. This is a Sickbay, not a politicians debate. Visiting hours are over. Everyone except my patient is to leave immediately."

Kathryn narrowed her eyes at him, "computer, dele..." Tuvok cleared his throat, making her sigh. "deactivate the EMH." She probably didn't need to say anything at all, her expression was enough to shut the poor hologram down.

The girl looked on in surprise at the man disappearing into thin air. She recovered quickly to address everyone else. "I never should have gone to the surface. I'm too curious. I'm told it's my worst fault."

Neelix dotted on her, "no no. It's a wonderful quality, your most endearing."

"So er... are you her foster dad, uncle or something?" Tom asked from the back. Kathryn gave him a slow motion version of an over shoulder skunk eye. His legs got all wobbly and he was forced to sit down in a hurry.

"Do you think you'll be able to show us the way down to your people?" Kathryn asked once she had turned back and softened her face.

The girl shook her head with an apologetic tint in her eyes. "I'm afraid Jabin is right. The tunnel sealed after I got through it."

"That's okay. We just need a general idea where your colony is. We can get there the same way we escaped from the Kazon," Kathryn said.

Tuvok approached her cautiously, "Captain, our sensors did not pick up any indication of an underground civilisation. The barriers Jabin described could be the reason why. It may also stop us from using the transporters."

"The tunnels are weakening, leaving small gaps between the walls and the barrier in some places. Could you get through them?" the girl suggested

Kathryn smiled at her, then looked up at Tuvok. "Tell the transporter room to look for one of these, it might just work." Tuvok nodded and turned to leave.

"Kes can tell you where to go, but now that we're free, we're leaving this system for good," Neelix said.

The girl seemed surprised at his plan, she gave him a disapproving but gentle stare down. "Neelix, these people rescued me."

Neelix's eyes flashed, "I rescued you."

"With their help," Kes said firmly. "It would be wrong not to help them now."

Neelix knew there was no arguing with her. He gave her the usual *you win* smile and sigh.

Many different types of flowers and plants lined both sides of the awayteam's path. Lots of different colours and smells radiated from them.

Ocampa working on the gardens stopped whatever they were doing to stare at these strangers in fear and wonder. The thump of the pulses being fired at them echoed around, and again much quicker than only hours before.

"Captain, the pulses are continuing to accelerate," Tuvok reported.

"Look, there's flowers here," Kathryn said in a disgruntled tone.

Tuvok raised his eyebrow quizzically. "By zero point eight seconds. I'm surprised you could tell."

Kathryn growled impatiently but ignored him. The team reached the end of the garden, where a larger concentration of Ocampa watched them without moving a muscle. All except one, who hurried forward when Kes did.

"Kes," he said in relief.

"Hello Daggin," Kes said with a friendly smile.

"We thought we'd never seen you again. How did you get back?" Daggin asked.

Kes glanced over her shoulder towards the awayteam. "These people rescued me from the Kazon."

Neelix puffed his chest proudly, "yes I did."

He got a disgusted scoff in response first. As he expected, it came from Kathryn. "Oh keep it in your pants you disgusting little hedgehog!"

"What?" Neelix stammered.

The Ocampa continued their conversation as if the pair had not spoken at all. "I'm trying to help them find three of their crew," Kes said.

"Oooh look at me, aren't I butch and manly?" Kathryn snarled humourlessly. "I'll help you out, no. I've seen well read Mr Men books with more spine than you." Neelix was now speechless, but it amused Tom to no end.

Kes' struggled to keep her voice from wavering, "does anyone know where the aliens are kept?"

"Oh don't even tempt me Bum Hair Paris," Kathryn muttered.

Kes coughed, "the ones the Caretaker sends here?"

"I think they're at the central clinic," Daggin quickly said before anyone else spoke.

"You're one to talk," Tom mumbled under his breath at the same time, hoping it would mean Kathryn would miss it.

It seemed to work as Kathryn glanced toward with Kes, interest piqued. "Can you take us there?" she asked her.

A male voice intruded in all of the awayteam's minds, forceful and commanding, "no she cannot."

Kathryn twitched in quiet fury and swung around behind her. She wasn't the only one. Kes' face tightened, her eyes shone defiantly in the same direction. "They can't talk telepathically Toscat, please talk aloud."

A tall man approached from the same direction the team had entered. His demeanour didn't match his commanding tone earlier. He looked almost sorry for himself. Chakotay thought to himself that Kathryn's earlier stare may have had something to do with it.

"I apologise, I didn't mean to be rude. But you should not be here," he told the team.

Tom rolled his eyes, "my hair's fab anyway."

Kathryn snorted into quiet laughter. "Already going bald, combover Paris." Tom gasped.

Chakotay sighed from the secondhand embarrassment blowing across from them. "You have our people here. That's all we're here for."

"At least I don't change my flat hair style every five minutes," Tom grumbled.

Kes shook her head while thinking, "ignore them, we have been." Toscat nodded.

"That won't be possible. We cannot interfere with the Caretaker's wishes," he said.

"Maybe you can't, but we can," Chakotay countered.

Toscat sighed, pained at the thought. "You don't understand."

Kathryn gingerly checked her hair, now loose over her shoulders. Her face turned bright red, "my hair's not fla... I had a headache." Tom smirked, sending her into yet another rage. "Oh fine, I'll beam back to the ship and start again shall I!" She even tapped her commbadge.

Tuvok sighed, "Captain, this isn't a scene."

"It is now," Chakotay muttered.

"You're right. They don't understand," Kes soldiered on without them. "They can't imagine being dependent on a higher being for so long. That we don't think for ourselves anymore, we merely follow the same routine every day until the day we die. They don't know what we once were before him; a people who had full command of our mind's abilities."

Toscat laughed, his tone turned patronising, "the stories of our ancestors' cognitive abilities are apocryphal. At the very least exaggerated."

"Someone take this guy's thesaurus off him before I beat him with it," Kathryn snarled.

Kes seemed to be on the same page. Her eyes were fired up, jaw clenched. It was clear to the rest of the team that she had this argument many times, with many similarly minded people. "We lost those abilities because we stopped using them," she bit back.

"We should not dwell on what's been lost but on what's been gained," Toscat said.

"What, the talent for dependency, laziness?" Kes said harshly.

Kathryn smiled before leaning in towards Tuvok, "I like her." Tuvok wasn't surprised in the slightest. Chakotay was though, he didn't think she was capable of liking anyone.

"I'm going to help them Toscat, whether you like it or not. I think my friends will join me," Kes continued, briefly glancing over to Daggin and the others. Many gave her a firm nod.

Toscat approached her, gently taking her arm to bring her to one side. "You defied the Caretaker by going to the surface, Kes. Learn from the experience. Follow the path he has set for us."

"A path you've interpreted like everything else," Kes said, shaking her head. "I've learned more out there than I ever could here. I saw the sunlight. I can't believe our Caretaker would want us to live our whole lives with our eyes closed." She defiantly turned away from the man to address the awayteam, "come with me. We'll find your people."

She lead the way out of the garden. The team, her friends followed. Only Kathryn remained behind briefly to make sure the helpless Toscat saw her smirk.

The path ahead of them looked to be neverending. Nothing but miles of winding metal stairs going up. Going up several flights of them was exhausting enough, without dragging the heavy shovels as well.

Jessie was the first to show it. Her steps had slowed. Most of them she hunched over slightly so she could use her left hand to help push her up them, making her constantly drop the flashlight. The shovel dragged across the floor the whole time.

Harry trailed behind her sideways, his back leaning against the rail for support as he climbed. Even that wasn't enough after a forgotten amount of flights. He began to slide further down until he was almost sitting on the steps he was climbing.

James had been only a few steps above Jessie a short time ago, but even though he had slowed as well, he found after hearing the sixth flashlight clatter that he was a flight ahead of both of them. He staggered back down from the midsection and offered to take the heavy shovel from her. The stubborn groan he expected, still he crouched down to get it. Her only resistance was incoherent mumbles and half a step.

"We should take a break," he said.

"I'm sorry," Harry gasped for breath.

James shook his head, "no, I am." As he tried to straighten up, the swollen patches stung as if they were on fire. It seemed to eat whatever was left of his energy, his limbs felt so heavy. Still, he forced himself to climb back to where he had been and dump the two shovels on the midsection behind him. "We should've stopped sooner."

Jessie settled on the step she had tried to lift up to before. It didn't take long for her to drift off into halfway sleep, still conscious but resting. Both of her teammates looked concerned. James thought about climbing back down again, but Harry was closer and he dragged himself up a couple more.

"I'm fine," she mumbled still with her eyes closed.

A few minutes passed silently, with only the thump of the pulses occasionally flying over. Harry broke the silence as well by going up a step. He didn't notice James frowning at him as he squeezed by Jessie, who had sensed it in her daze and flinched at his proximity, her legs bunched up and pressed against the railing. Harry made sure the gaps in between those steps were shorter.

Eventually he settled three quarters the way up and once more rested his back against the railings.

"This isn't a race," James said once he did.

It took some effort for Harry to even glance up at him on the top step. "You're not kidding," he tried to quip, it took his breath away. He wondered if James had similar difficulty when all he did was stare back. "Got a second wind, at least I thought I did. Wasn't a good idea," he weakly laughed at himself.

James nodded in understanding. "Yeah, a woman was beating you." Harry frowned. He saw a glint in James' eye as he turned his head back to stare ahead. "Inspiring," he then mumbled, at least that's what Harry thought he said.

He was exhausted, but Harry wasn't going to take that lightly. "I didn't want her to worry, think that she was holding me up." To his further annoyance James chuckled and shook his head. "She wasn't, but if it got too much, it's further effort to slow down." Laughter continued. "Why are you like this? What about you and the shovel, shooting off ahead of us?" he ended up snapping.

That shut him up. Harry wasn't sure if it was a good thing or not yet. After a few seconds of awkward silence, James looked back down at him. His face was blank, he couldn't read it. "I don't care," he said simply.

"Don't care? About what?" Harry asked, still out of anger.

James slowly glanced up, his fingers began to drum against the metal floor. "Been through worse." The sores punished him for even that. He sighed impatiently and grit his teeth till it faded away. "That wasn't a hint."

Harry smiled. This was the first real sign that he was as affected as they were, until now he seemed almost inhuman with their first meeting and the flying up the steps. It wasn't a smug *finally* smile, but a one of sympathy. Still, he had a score to settle so it didn't last. "And I'm the macho showoff. Interesting."

He got a bemused stare directed at him. Harry sighed, at least he wasn't mad. Yet. "Careful, that spine's stiff from lack of use."

"Oh don't you worry about me," Harry laughed quietly.

"Already there," James said with a half smile, then he looked away again.

Harry shook his head once more. "It can't be a coincidence that there's another Taylor whose good at hacking, has a temper, and is the second rudest person I've ever met."

James continued to drum his fingers on the ground, more rapidly than before. "I hope not," he muttered. He glanced back down looking offended, "only second?"

Harry smirked down at his crossed hands, and feet. "Why don't you want your friend to know you were at the Academy?" James slowly looked over his shoulder, down at him. "Were you kicked out, and that's why you...?"

"Joined the Marquis," James finished his sentence for him. "No. I joined because I'm racist enough to think all Cardassians are murdering bullies." He smiled a little unnerving, "or I was bored. Take your pick."

Harry studied his expression carefully, it didn't scare him this time. "You're my age, twenty, twenty one?"

"Random, aren't we? Yeah I'm twenty one, so what?" James said with a raised eyebrow.

"The entry exams are very tough, selective. If you fail you've gotta wait till the next year. I got lucky, in first time," Harry said, raising the other man's eyebrow even further. "I was graduating the same time you... sorry *Taylor* had started. That's..." he sighed sadly at the ground, "that's a good few wasted years of trying to get in, only to throw it away immediately because you don't think you fit in."

James quietly laughed down at him, then toward the rocks straight ahead of him. Harry watched him with a frown. He noticed James' check on Jessie before saying anything, "joining Starfleet isn't everyone's dream job. Not everyone sees themselves eventually commanding an Enterprise, or aging behind a desk dreaming of their wonder years."

Harry shifted uncomfortably. He knew that but he found it hard to imagine wanting to be anyone else. "Then why did you even join? Were you bored when filling out your application?"

"Maybe," James smirked. Harry almost took that as a confirmation that he was right, but he continued. "Or maybe I had enough of Starfleet's boring and very militarised way of life at the prep school, and decided to give it a miss altogether. I didn't think anyone would hear of my *reputation* over the pond and get the wrong idea."

"Pond?" Harry frowned. A realisation hit him. "Oh, Atlantic. You're English." James looked down at him again with a raised eyebrow. "Is the prep school those special high schools that help kids study for the entry exams? So you must have had some interest."

James sighed impatiently, hinting he should let it go. "If you must know, my step father worked there. He and my mum thought I was wasting my *intelligence* doing nothing. Stupid," he shook his head. "They just wanted Starfleet to tame me. I can't blame them."

"Why not both?" Harry said. James gave him another bemused look. "You have to have some smarts to take down a server at Starfleet command. Even if it was only two minutes."

"I'm not really looking for someone to kiss my ass, Harry," James sniggered.

Harry smirked back at him, "ah ha, you admit that was you?" James' eyes briefly sliding to one side answered that for him. "So why hide it? You're ashamed you left or that you were there at all?"

The thumps above them increased in frequency, with very little pause in between.

"They're still getting faster," James said. Harry nodded, mouthing a worried *yeah*. The suddenness of the speed increase startled Jessie out of her doze, she immediately looked up.

They weren't the only ones who noticed. Most of the natives the awayteam spotted were fearfully glancing upward at the screens. Instead of it increasing every now and then, each thud arrived quicker like a heart monitor attached to a dying patient.

The team hopped onto the escalators. Halfway up Kathryn quickly did up her hair into a makeshift bun, clipping it into place with a single file. "There, are you happy now?" she snarled back and down at Tom.

He rolled his eyes. "You missed a hair." The next thing he knew there was a palm in his face, the recoil from it made him stumble back a few steps. Since the escalator was going up he was stuck in the same spot, dizzy from the blow and that this kept happening.

The thumps then stopped for good. The entire habitat was left in an eery silence.

"They've stopped," Chakotay said.

Kathryn chuckled, "he won't, not for a while." She tapped her commbadge, "Janeway to Voyager, what's happened to the station?"

"It's no longer sending out pulses, Captain. It's changing its position."

"Keep me informed of any changes. Can you handle that Crewman?" Kathryn asked dangerously.

Voyager:

"But I'm an Ensign," Rollins whimpered.

B'Elanna rolled her eyes in disgust. "No wonder, you're spineless."

"Excuse me. You have no idea how cruel Janeway can be," Rollins said huffily.

"Please. She's all bluster. I don't know how any of you can take orders from and respect that witch," B'Elanna said.

A lot of the Bridge were frozen solid, paranoid that the comm was still active and Kathryn had heard everything.

Rollins chuckled nervously, "respect? Most here will take orders from people they fear, as for me..." B'Elanna narrowed her eyes toward him, melting what was left of his stubbornness. "I'm willing to take suggestions."

"Mmmhmm," B'Elanna smiled. "We should monitor the Array's power levels. We might be able to figure out what he's doing before he does it. Danny?"

"Yep," Danny said eagerly, that was until she tried to figure out what station to use. She span on the spot whilst pointing her finger. B'Elanna groaned and pointed towards Opps. "Oh obviously," Danny laughed as she wandered to the Science station.

Kes and her friends approached the awayteam in a hurry. "They haven't been at the clinic for hours."

"We can search the city. Ask if anyone's seen them," Daggin said.

Kathryn waved him off, "no need. If I were them, I'd be looking for the nearest exit. How would they do it?"

"There's only one way out. Up one of the ancient tunnels," Kes replied.

"What, there's more than one? We'd better split up," Kathryn said, casually shoving Tom towards Neelix. They both looked at her with dismay and judgement. "There, my headache's already fading."

"Captain, if I may? I suggest one team should speak with the staff at the clinic. We know nothing of their condition and how to treat it. We should gather all the information we can," Tuvok said.

Kathryn smiled toward him, "thatta boy, I can always count on you to keep me right." The rest of her team rolled their eyes. "I saw that!"

"We'll check the tunnels, get out of Queen Janeway's wig," Tom said toward Neelix, and then Kes. They both nodded, Kes lead them away.

"Maybe we should acquire a sample of this deadly illness and leave him here," Kathryn said.

Chakotay sniggered, "I'm all for it."

Tuvok's eyebrow managed to reach the surface. "We must hurry, then join the search."

"Yes yes, you're always ri..." Kathryn said, interrupted by the ground shaking violently. "Bawlings, I told you to keep me in the loop! What the fu..."

"Yes you're very scary but we're very busy here, I'll wet myself later okay," B'Elanna's voice said flatly. Before Kathryn could say anything back she continued, "the Array is firing a high yield energy weapon at the surface. It looks to be sealing the energy conduits on the planet."

"If I meet one more sarcastic ass pain, I'm going to butt some heads," Kathryn said through gritted teeth. She marched off without them.

"Understood Miss Torres. Keep the channel open," Tuvok said. He and Chakotay hurried to catch up to her.

B'Elanna squinted her eyes at the viewscreen. She was the only one, everyone else were averting theirs and grimacing. On it sat a odd scrawny looking alien, his or her's ears pointed to the ceiling and a bulging green right eye apparently staring at everyone it freaked out.

"Okay one weirdo sorted, so what were you saying?" B'Elanna asked.

"My name is Hohehoheho, from the Shriyanan Collective..." the alien answered slowly, trailing off into a low hmm. "I think."

B'Elanna checked around behind her, then to both sides. "You think what?"

"Uhhh you, er take care," Hohehoheho probably replied, no one was sure.

"Um thanks, we will?" B'Elanna said awkwardly. "It would help if idiots didn't fire on us."

Hohehoheho stared at her for a very long time, only blinking with its less engorged eye once. "Did we?"

Too many people were sniggering quietly by now. B'Elanna meanwhile seethed.

"Yes, our little neighbour doesn't usually spin around on the spot, even with Chakotay at the helm," Danny said.

"I don't feel so good. Somebody put a tractor on, anything!" Ian's voice groaned over the comm.

"Friends take care," Hohehoheho said a tad faster, he or she looked mad. "Home is far."

Voyager shook only a little. It was still enough to set B'Elanna off. "Why are you telling us to be careful while firing on us!? I'm really starting to lose my patience with this thing."

Hohehoheho's eyes glazed over, well one did. It nodded. "You are not take care. Work on anger." The viewscreen switched over to show the Marquis ship doing somersaults.

"I'm gonna hurl," Ian's voice gurgled.

B'Elanna cringed and gestured Danny to cut him off.

"They're setting a course for the Array. OH!" Danny said abruptly, startling nearby crewmembers. "Take care, care taker."

"Yes I got that," B'Elanna sighed.

Rollins and Danny both reacted at the same time but differently, Danny with a bit lip and Rollins with a cringe. "Oh boy," she said first.

"What?" B'Elanna asked.

"They flew straight into the Caretaker's firing range," Rollins replied.

B'Elanna shook her head, "of course they did."

Meanwhile the command trio of Kathryn, Tuvok and Chakotay hurriedly walked from the clinic.

"I don't understand it. If the Array is the Ocampa's sole source of energy, why would the Caretaker seal the conduits?" Chakotay asked.

"What kind of name is Howhehidiu? I swear some people are taking the piss," Kathryn asked.

Tuvok chose to answer only one question. "He would seal them if he no longer intended to use them. To protect the Ocampa from their enemies. Captain..."

"I'm glad I wasn't there, so embarrassing," Kathryn mumbled.

"I believe the Caretaker is dying," Tuvok tried to get her attention.

Kathryn waved him off flippantly, "I heard you and of course the old codger's on death door. Any moron could see that."

"It wasn't that obvious, he may be leaving," Chakotay said.

"Yes I'm sure," Kathryn laughed. "I'm sure it's some extremely late life crisis. He'll trade in that Array for a red hot rod and chase women and or men young enough to be his great grand kids." She grimaced. "Eugh, is that why he kidnapped us?"

Chakotay shook his head in much disbelief. "How did she make Ensign, let alone Captain?"

"People tend to find her... endearing," Tuvok answered with a slight waver in his voice.

"Aaaw Tuvie, I love you to..." Kathryn smiled at him. It didn't last, she slapped both of their arms. "...Stop talking about me like I'm not here, patronising pillock. First things first, we rescue our people. Theorise later, get the lead out and lighten up."

Her pace accelerated, she left them in her dust.

Chakotay looked on in bemusement, Tuvok's eyebrows looked like they wiggled as the raise swapped to his left. "To quote her last Captain's promotion recommendation; she's unorthodox but gets *fecal matter* done."

"I see," Chakotay sniggered.

"PS, please transfer her anyway, or I'll smother myself in those coffee hankies she leaves everywhere," Tuvok continued. "Captain Kris was an odd fellow."

"Yeah I bet he wasn't always," Chakotay said. "So you're convinced the Caretaker's getting ready to die?"

"He spoke about a debt that could never be repaid. I believe that debt is toward the Ocampa. He also frequently complained about running out of time," Tuvok replied.

Chakotay nodded uneasily, "I hope you're wrong. If you're not we're stranded here."

Tom lead the way into a darkened shaft. Metal winding stairs lay ahead. He pointed his tricorder upwards, the torch tied to his wrist shone but could barely pierce a few floors up.

"They are in this one, I can't see..." Tom stammered. He raised his voice into a shout, "Harry!"

He didn't get an answer. Nevertheless the tricorder said there were three lifesigns. He hurried to climb the stairs, Kes and Neelix were right behind him. "Paris to Janeway."

"Yes?"

"They're definitely in one of the tunnels. They must be pretty high up, can't see them. We're going up," Tom reported.

"Good. When you catch up, Voyager should be able to do a wide field transport. We'll head back up," Kathryn said. "Janeway to Voyager. Three to transport."

"No can do. Those discharges are causing interference, we can no longer find any of the holes in the barrier," B'Elanna's voice said.

Kathryn sighed as if defeated, "oh of course not. That'd be too easy."

"B'Elanna will figure something out, I'm sure," Chakotay said.

"We need a contingency plan if she does not," Tuvok pointed out.

Kathryn rolled her eyes, "or we can climb up the same tunnels Paris is." She ran off without them, "come on you pansies!"

Tuvok and Chakotay glanced briefly in surprise at each other before following her.

Tom, Kes and Neelix hurried up yet another flight, Tom had already lost count. Their speed had slowed at least a couple ago. The constant shuddering from the weapon wasn't helping matters.

He saw a few figures sitting on the next flight, he felt relieved they wouldn't have to climb any further.

"Janeway to Paris. You're gonna have to keep climbing once you find them. The transporters aren't working."

Tom's shoulders fell, he quickly looked further up, then down from where they had started. At least they were more than half way, he tried to tell himself.

"Yeah, no problem," he lied.

"We'll catch up in a few minutes, I'm sure. Janeway out."

The trio wordlessly carried on until they circled up to the next level. They reached Jessie first, seemingly passed out where she sat to rest. Tom thought to get her first, but his friend a few steps up groggily groaned on noticing him. He hurried past her to get to him.

"Took you long enough," Harry murmured.

"How could I let down the only friend I've got," Tom said as he struggled to lift him to his feet.

"Friend? What makes you think I'm your friend," Harry said.

Kes and Neelix stopped to check on Jessie. They shared a worried glance. "We may have to wake her," he said.

Kes wasn't a fan of that idea, "no, we should carry her." She then looked up towards Tom and Harry. They hadn't gotten far, Harry tried to mumble at him to stop, but Tom didn't hear him over the sound

of the weapon fire. What did stop him was James slumped over the top of the stairs, blocking their way.

"Neelix!" Tom shouted down.

Neelix stalled while he was beginning to lift the unconscious Jessie from her resting place. Kes smiled and shook her head at him. Then she hurried up.

"It's okay he's still conscious, or he was," Harry muttered.

Tom gently side stepped them both so Kes could get by. She immediately crouched down to tend to James. She noticed his eyes trying to open as if they were heavy, she placed one hand on his arm, the other around his back.

"It's okay, don't worry. We'll get through the barrier," she said softly.

"Why don't I..." Tom said, about to step forward to help. Kes though succeeded in rousing him, and James started to slowly get back up. Kes helped keep him steady as he did.

"Sweeting, perhaps we should swap," Neelix said even though the latest discharge had him and Jessie wobbling.

Kes held onto James until they were both on their feet, he gave her a nod and a silent thanks. He seemed to be ok to walk, still she kept a hold.

"We should hurry," she said.

"Not gonna disagree with you there," Tom smiled.

They all headed up the rest of the stairs with Kes leading the way. Little did they know Kathryn, Chakotay and Tuvok had just then entered the tunnel to follow them up.

It felt like it took hours to reach what looked like the top. The metal stairway had ended, a horizontal rocky tunnel lay ahead of them. A purple forcefield flickered relentlessly, blocking their path. Not completely though, Kes noticed. She checked James first, he nodded, then let go of him to approach it for a better look.

At the right side a few rocks had broken from the wall, leaving a slight gap at the edge of the forcefield. It looked big enough for her to squeeze through. She turned to the others.

"We should be able to get through. Be careful though, if you touch it, it apparently can burn your skin off," she said. Despite what she said, Kes edged closer to it sideways and slid her way through the gap.

The rest approached. Tom glanced warily at the unconscious girl Neelix was carrying. "We're gonna have to wake her after all."

"Maybe," James said groggily but with a determined glint in his eye. Harry worried what he was gonna do, especially when he approached the forcefield. He didn't expect it, he genuinely thought he'd help his friend, not leave her in the lurch. He was still thinking it as James scanned every edge of the field.

"Okay, I'll put her down first, don't wanna..." Neelix said as he crouched down gently. A bang, immediately followed by a slight rumble ahead startled him. It also startled Jessie awake, though she was too tired to do little more than open her eyes.

Tom swirled around to see what it was. All he saw was James nudging a few rocks he swore weren't there before to one side with his foot, the gap in the field looked somehow bigger. He blinked a couple of times to make sure as he didn't notice immediately; James was doing this on the other side of the field. Kes watched on with a sort of bemusement. It seemed to wipe him out as he stumbled into a kneel on the ground.

"How, what..." Tom stuttered.

Harry tried to smirk but even that was difficult, he wasn't surprised in the slightest. "Let's go."

"Right," Neelix said cheerfully, standing back up. Apart from him they all headed through one at a time while Kes once more crouched down to tend to James.

Once Neelix squeezed through with Jessie in one piece, Tom lead the way further down the tunnel. It didn't take long to reach a dead end. He waited for the others to catch up.

"This looks like the top. Neelix, phaser," Tom said.

Neelix carefully crouched to put Jessie down. Bringing out his phaser as he walked up to join Tom. The pair aimed at the roof of the tunnel and fired at the same time. Rocks and dust tumbled down ahead of them, the harsh sunlight tried to slip in through the haze which gave their eyes a little more time to adjust to it.

Tom didn't wait for the dust to settle, he turned to the others. "I'll go first, and pull you all up. Someone..." Neelix volunteered by rushing onto the fallen rocks, then gesturing his arms out in front of him. "Thanks." It was a struggle, some wobbling as he tried to climb up using them as leverage. If the situation wasn't quite dire, the others would laugh at the pair.

"Almost," Tom groaned as he stretched for the hole. His fingers grazed the edge. It wasn't enough. He almost slipped when he felt a bit more stable and a few more hands on him. He pushed up further and was able to rest his arms against the surface. With that he could drag his whole body to the ground.

He quickly turned around on his hands and knees to reach into the hole. First to grab his hand was Kes being lifted by Neelix. Next up was Harry, he needed both Tom and Kes to pull him up since he had little strength left. For some unknown reason Neelix was next, he didn't look at all happy about it. Tom helped drag him the rest of the way up.

As he and Neelix collected themselves, not only Jessie's hand shakily grab the edge, one of James' did as well. She did have her other arm tightly around his shoulder until then, it seemed to pain her a lot to reach around him to grab the edge. Kes and Neelix both quickly grabbed her arms and pulled her out. Tom meanwhile went to reach for him.

James tried to bring his other arm up to help push himself up, but instead it missed by a smidgen, weakened by the growing sores on his shoulder, and slid back. It was grabbed at the very last second, still Tom felt gravity try to pull him back down into the tunnel.

It all felt quite a bit lighter, he noticed another pair of hands grab onto the arm. Tom briefly looked beside him thinking it was Neelix again or Kes. Instead he saw the previously unconscious one grumbling something while straining. "You always do this. Idiot."

Ignoring that for now, Tom pulled with all of his might. All three tumbled onto the surface finally.

"Do what?" James coughed out, apparently wiped out by the whole thing.

Jessie looked far better than him, her anger seemed to give her life, at least that's what Tom thought. "Help everyone else, but who cares about you, right?" she snapped in between heavy breaths.

"Guys, bicker later," Tom said. He decided to help his friend up first, mainly to avoid them. Quickly with a spare finger he tapped his commbadge. "Voyager, can you get a lock on us now?"

"I can only detect six signals, shouldn't there be nine?"

Tom glanced around to make sure the others were following him. They were. "The others are..." another light, moving caught his eye. It was getting closer to them. "Get down!" he shouted as he threw him and Harry to the ground. Everyone did the same as an energy blast thundered down, crashing close to them.

Once it was over Tom shakily looked across at the hole they escaped from. Dust blew out of it, looking at it gave him a sinking feeling. "Paris to Janeway. Chakotay, Tuvok? Damn."

"You don't think...?" Kes stuttered in concern.

Tom didn't break his gaze. "Voyager, prepare to transport everyone in this group except me."

"Right."

Neelix jumped to his feet in outrage, "you're not thinking of going back there?" Tom turned to him, unwavering. It brought a smile to his face, "well if a fool needs company." He directed his attention down to Kes and the others, "take care of them dearest, I'll see you later."

"Voyager, make that four to beam up," Tom said, reaching over to claim Neelix's commbadge. He handed it down to Kes. "Lock onto Neelix's signal and energise." The pair headed back for the hole.

"Beat you to it for once huh," Jessie smiled weakly at James, who followed his glance after the two with a frown. They as well as Harry and Kes dematerialised.

"Are you sure you're ok, you look a little green," Kathryn asked.

Tuvok tried to raise his eyebrows but she had a firm grasp of his face, almost like she was framing it with her hands. "Of course I do, my blood is green."

"Oh," Kathryn blushed, "my bad!"

Chakotay tried to get up but pain ripped through his leg, bringing a scream out of him.

Kathryn swung around in surprise. "What is it?" she asked frantically. "Oh god, it's my hair isn't it? I knew I should have used the Coffee Nut method."

"My leg is broken," Chakotay muttered between gritted teeth. "And when don't you?"

Kathryn hurried down to the middle section to reach him, the stairwell groaned at the sudden movement so she had to remain on the steps. "Hang on," she told him.

"There they are!" Neelix shouted up to Tom. They quickly climbed down the steps, which he was sure was swaying the breeze.

"Oh Peekix, help me with Tuvok," Kathryn said in relief, quickly returning to Tuvok's side.

Neelix was momentarily put off, "Neelix."

"Who cares?" Kathryn waved him off.

"So rude," Neelix grumbled, but still he leaned over to help her bring Tuvok to his feet.

Tom squeezed by them all, "I'll get Chakotay."

Neelix and Kathryn guided Tuvok up the last of the steps and into the tunnel, right in time as another weapon's discharge shook the entire shaft. Rocks supporting it began to crumble away, the joints connecting the stairs to the shaft walls snapped from the strain. With it the middle section dropped like a trap door, leaving Chakotay clinging to life with only his fingers.

"Get out of here Paris before the whole thing comes down!" he shouted up at his wannabe rescuer.

Tom shook his head stubbornly. "I intend to, after I get you out of there." He edged closer to the edge carefully.

"You get on those stairs they'll collapse. We'll both die," Chakotay stammered.

"Yeah? But on the other hand, if I save your butt, your life belongs to me," Tom smirked. "Isn't that some kind of Indian custom?"

Chakotay shook his head, "there's more than one tribe."

"Is that a yes?" Tom said once he was finally in arms reach of him. He reached out his arm to clasp onto him, all while clinging to the shaky rail with his other. "You'd rather die than let me be the one to rescue you?"

"Fine, be a fool," Chakotay grunted. He dared to let his right arm go to grab his shoulder. "At least I'll take you with me."

With some shaky maneuvering, Tom managed to pull him up from the section, all while Chakotay hobbled on one arm, his arms wrapped around his shoulders and neck.

"Isn't there some Indian trick where you can turn yourself into a bird and..." Tom asked.

"Save your ignorant crap for when I'm not in choking position," Chakotay muttered.

Tom took it in good stride, he chuckled to himself.

They cleared the stairs, reaching the tunnel. It seemed to be the final straw for that flight of stairs, it snapped immediately and tumbled down the deep shaft.

Voyager:

The EMH stood over Chakotay, hovering a regenerator over his leg while he sat slouched on the biobed. His other patients still looked a bit groggy, but were sore free.

Kathryn stood around with a cup in hand, trying desperately in vain to catch up on the coffee she missed.

"Bridge to Janeway," Rollins said.

Kathryn was in the middle of a long sip, she quickly swallowed it. Unfortunately it went down the wrong way, making her splutter. "Damn it, I'll kill him," she managed to grumble in between coughs. "What?"

"Sorry Captain, two alien ships are approaching the Array."

"I really hope it's not the Hockeehehe alien, I'm still two cups behind," Kathryn said before hurrying out. "Set a course for the station then, I'll be right there."

Chakotay took that as a cue as well, he slid off the bed. "We should get back to our ship."

"But..." the Doctor protested.

Jessie wasn't too keen on that idea either, "wait, I'm not going out there looking like this." She gestured at the pale blue pyjama looking thing the Ocampans had given her, which she had insisted on tearing sleeves off and other places to look less *scruffy*.

"I'm sure there's a clothes shop somewhere on route to the transporter room," Harry sniggered, also getting up. In fact everyone was.

"Can we be vain later? Marquis ships don't have a dress code," Chakotay said.

"Yeah that's why she probably won't want to go back," James said.

"Wait, I strongly advice you to rest. I will not be held responsible for any consequences," the Doctor complained as they all filed to the door.

Jessie looked at the Ensign strangely, "when the hell did you get changed into a uniform?"

"Gotta go!" Harry scampered out. She chased after him.

The Doctor reached the door to hopefully stop them from escaping, only James was left though and he was already passing. "Hey, is the crew always this difficult?"

"You tell me Doc, I've only been here ten minutes," James answered as he left too.

"But... someone needs to turn me off," the Doctor complained to an empty room. "I really got to say that first before anything else," he sighed.

The Bridge:

Kathryn, Harry, Tuvok and Tom rushed out of the turbolift. Harry and Tuvok took their stations.

"Both vessels have armed their phaser banks, shields are up," Tuvok reported.

"What kind of ships do we have then?" Kathryn asked whilst making her way to the centre of the Bridge. Tom followed to stand nearby.

"Not sure Captain, they look like giant wasps flying backwards," Rollins replied.

Kathryn stared at him blankly until he slid away out of her sight, only she followed him. His only escape was the turbolift. "I swear I authorised everyone, why did I get all the fruit loops?"

Tom bit his lip to avoid laughing, "gee, I dunno."

"Put the wasps on screen," Kathryn rolled her eyes. Harry complied. She grimaced at the sight of the two ships which were an ugly yellow colour, with a vertical nose marking the front of the ship. "They look more like iddy fruit flies. Just in case, get the shields up and weapons ready Tuvok. Red Alert."

"The lead ship is hailing us, Captain," Tuvok said.

"On screen," Kathryn ordered. The ugly ship was instantly replaced by a close up of Jabin scowling at them. "Oh, not much better," she commented.

"Have you come to investigate the entity's strange behaviour too, Captain?" he asked.

Kathryn sneered at his gruff tone. "What's wrong? Did the Caretaker shoot some sand into your hovel and none of your *manly* men have any idea what a brush is?" She looked on in disgust, "though with your hair that's very likely."

"Stop trying to sound clever you old hag," Jabin growled.

Everyone froze, the consoles were even cold to the touch. The only sound was Kathryn's grinding teeth. "I'm sorry that wasn't clear. Did you say *please shoot me, Voyager*. I'm not one to ignore a request like that. Tuvok."

"Captain," Tuvok dared to protest. "We only came here to talk to the Caretaker."

"I'm sure there's time for both," Kathryn said.

Jabin cut in as menacingly as he could manage despite icicles forming on his own ship. "I won't allow you to board the Array. If it's a fight you want..."

"I'd hardly call it a fight," Kathryn scoffed. "Look, we don't care about you and your stupid wigs and fake orange tan. We only want to get home. Once we convince the Caretaker I won't have to see your ugly sexist mug again, and you get to live. Everyone wins."

"No, you dare challenge us!" Jabin snarled.

Kathryn sighed impatiently. "The only one doing that is your imagined masculinity, now shoo."

Tuvok meanwhile gave up and facepalmed.

"The only thing that is imagined is your ships ever returning home," Jabin snapped back. "I won't let a woman with your technology anywhere near the Array."

"Have you ever wondered why women scare you so much? Did mummy not give you enough hugs?" Kathryn said with fake sympathy. Jabin slammed his hand on his station to cut her off. Kathryn thought it was amusing, "nailed it."

"Captain, they are powering weapons and you started that one," Tuvok said.

Kathryn shrugged, "he came here to start a fight, they always do." The bridge lightly shook. "Fire phasers, evasive pattern delta four."

Voyager veered off to avoid a couple of strikes, then returned the favour as it swept past. The Federation starship dwarfed the attacking ships a few times over, its shields shrugged off the hits it did get.

The equally tiny Marquis ship danced around most of shots thrown their way.

"Shields holding at 90%," Jessie reported.

Chakotay glanced over his shoulder at her, "concentrate fire on the closest ship's shield array." She nodded.

"Janeway to Chakotay. Tuvok and I are going to visit the old man. Can you hold off these overcompensating ninnies?"

Chakotay smiled, just barely warding off a snigger. He wasn't the only one, the entire population of the Marquis cockpit were trying not to laugh. "Sure, no problem Captain."

"Good."

"Wait, does that entire ship stop entirely while she is gone?" James asked.

Jessie shrugged, "I'm more confused about Tuvok going with her."

"Maybe we should've updated them," Chakotay muttered.

"I'm surprised you even allowed James to come back," B'Elanna teased him.

"Meh, after Janeway I can handle anyone," Chakotay said quietly.

Kathryn reluctantly turned to Tom. "Mr Calais, take the helm."

Tom stared at her blankly, "you're doing this on purpose, aren't you?"

"Don't make me change my mind," Kathryn smirked at him.

"Yes ma'am," Tom smiled as he hurried forward. Before he could take the helm he was lightly slapped. "This isn't crunch time?" he whimpered.

"Barely," Kathryn muttered. She fast walked to the turbolift. Once she reached it Tuvok left his station to join her. "Maintain transporter lock on us, Tim. If things get dicey emergency beam out."

"Aye Captain," Harry responded, pointing a smug look in Tom's direction.

"Kiss ass," Tom chuckled.

The strange farm simulation was still running, only night had fallen. It seemed so much quieter than their last visits. An occasional dog would bark in the distance.

Tuvok and Kathryn followed his scans until he stopped beside the house. "The data processing system is behind this wall, Captain," he reported.

The silence broke with the sound of the banjo's wires being occasionally plucked.

"You take care of that," Kathryn said.

Tuvok nodded and he walked away, leaving her alone. She kept going in the same direction to the front of the house. On the front porch the old man sat, staring into space, his fingers hovering over the instrument. It didn't take long for him to stop her. He weakly laughed.

"Well, you're nothing if not persistent."

Kathryn bit her tongue, she had a job to do. Her voice softened as she crouched down beside him, "we need you to send us back home."

"That isn't possible. I've barely got enough strength to complete my own tasks," the Caretaker said.

"You have to seal the conduits before you die," Kathryn said.

"If I don't, the Kazon will steal their water," the Caretaker said desperately, his voice sounded defeated. "But in a few years when the Ocampas' energy runs out, it won't matter. They'll have to come to the surface and they won't be able to survive."

Kathryn ran through everything she knew in her head, she could only come up with one theory. "You're the reason why their planet cannot produce rain, aren't you? That's your debt to them?"

His tired sigh was her answer. "We're explorers from another galaxy. We had no idea that our technology would be so destructive to their atmosphere." His voice filled with guilt, "two of us were chosen to stay behind and care for them."

Kathryn's face lit up a touch, "there's another one like you around?"

"No, not anymore," the Caretaker groaned. "No, she went off to look for more interesting places."

"This still isn't adding up for me. Why do you keep bringing ships here, stab them with needles and then leave the ones who are infected by it to die on Ocampas?" Kathryn demanded. "If you ask me that's far worse than some accident."

"Oh, they didn't die of an illness," the Caretaker waved off any concerns like they were nothing. "They died because they were incompatible."

Kathryn frowned, disgusted by his attitude. "What?"

"I've been searching the galaxy for a compatible bio molecular pattern. Now, in some individuals I have found cellular structures that were similar but..." the Caretaker explained.

Kathryn jumped to her feet, her eyes flared. "You were trying to breed with us? Against our will. What the hell is wrong with you, you dirty old git?"

Despite his power the Caretaker still cowered under her fury. "I needed someone to replace me."

"The three you dumped on Ocampo were barely adults, two of them were male," Kathryn continued to angrily rant. "You mentioned the other you was a female so I'm not being prejudice or anything." She frowned, "why do I care what a perverted rapist thinks?"

"You're judging me based on your species' moral code, please listen, I'll explain," the Caretaker stuttered.

"Yes because ours is better, sheesh," Kathryn grunted. "What kind of civilised species thinks that this is ok? How the hell does Kim and the others have different cellular structures? We're the same damn species, what the fu..."

"*Voyager to Janeway,*" Harry's voice intruded.

The Caretaker retreated back to his banjo and looked away from her. It angered her more. "Oh sure, one of your victims right there, shame spiral." She tapped her commbadge. "Go ahead."

"*We've got problems here.*"

Voyager shot at the tiny ship chasing closely behind them, passing a gigantic ship ten times the size of them and heavily built. The shots it fired at them looked far more damaging than the smaller ships'.

"*The Kazon got some big backup,*" Harry reported.

Kathryn grumbled a bit, "of course they did. I need more time, can you hold them off a little longer."

"*Uh, we'll try.*"

Chakotay watched as the massive ship pounded Voyager relentlessly. Their own ship shook from the smaller ships' weapons fire.

"They've targeted Voyager's weapons," Jessie said.

"Neither us have enough fire power to stop that ship," B'Elanna added on with frustration.

Chakotay quickly made up his mind. "I'll set a collision course." B'Elanna looked at him in surprise. "The guidance system is disabled so I'll have to pilot the ship manually." He turned his chair slightly to address her. "Get the crew ready to beam to Voyager. Taylor, drop shields for transport."

B'Elanna wordlessly obeyed and exited her seat. Jessie did as well in a hurry, only hesitating slightly at the doorway to wait for James. He pressed a few things on his panel before he was able to follow them.

"Paris, my crew's coming over. Tell one of your crackerjack Starfleet transporter chiefs to keep a lock on me," Chakotay said as he worked quickly. "I'm going to try and take some heat off your tail."

Tom smiled, "no problem. But don't think for one second this makes us even. Your ass is still mine." He flinched as soon as he said it. "Life, your life is mine."

"Nobody else but you cares, Tom."

Harry laughed quietly. "We'll have to beam them in between shots, lower the shields for brief bursts, we'll need an ace pilot to avoid getting hit. It's gonna get rough. Think you can handle it?"

"I like a challenge," Tom grinned.

Kathryn groaned into her hand tiredly, her wits had long since reached the end and fallen off. "Let me get this straight. The Ocampa are gonna have to leave their city anyway, regardless of what you do here. So you can't spare five minutes to send our two ships back because?"

"It's complicated," the Caretaker said, drumming the banjo again.

"If you say that again I'm gonna smash that thing over your head. Assuming you have one," Kathryn muttered.

The Caretaker stared at her blankly, "you are a very difficult creature."

"Oh I'm sorry," Kathryn huffed sarcastically. "I guess I'm still stuck on that violating three of my people, then leaving them to die when it doesn't go your way thing. I'm easy to please like that."

The Caretaker did look a little guilty at her remark. "I needed someone who'd understand the enormous responsibility of caring for the Ocampa. Only my offspring could do that, and if your three crewmembers were truly compatible they would not have suffered, or known at all. I didn't mean any harm, I'm sorry."

"I'm still amazed that was your first idea, and it didn't occur to you to let the Ocampa take care of themselves," Kathryn said.

"They're children," the Caretaker brushed it off with a weak chuckle.

"What the hell does that mean?" Kathryn snapped. "Is that all we mere humanoids are to you? That makes your breeding plan so much more creepy."

"No, no," the Caretaker grunted. "They're childlike, dependant and weak willed..."

Kathryn shook her head, "probably because you spoiled them, catered to their every need. This is like a parent complaining about a kid having a tantrum because you missed out one thing from their Christmas list, despite the hundreds of presents they got already. You brought this on yourself."

"If your plan is to convince me to send you home, you really should send someone else," the Caretaker said.

"What, clearly you need some harsh truths here. The Ocampa will never evolve into so called grown ups until they face some challenges. Their strength will come from how they deal with it. Don't get me

wrong, it was noble to come to their aid after your mistake. But really, until you stop holding their hand they'll never be able to walk on their own," Kathryn said.

The Caretaker's face turned sullen, the realisation finally sunk in.

B'Elanna hurried out of the turbolift, frantic with worry. The rest of her Marquis comrades followed her a little less so.

"He's getting too close," Harry warned everyone.

Tom glanced up at the viewscreen, the Marquis ship was little more than a dot compared to the Kazon ship it was gunning for. "We should get him out of there."

"Not yet!" Chakotay's voice shouted.

Another hit engulfed the rear of the ship in flames.

Inside Chakotay watched the giant ship looming in closer, all while his bridge filled with smoke.

"You're breaking up. We're beaming you up," Harry's voice said.

"No wait," Chakotay snapped.

He waited a bit longer. Once he was close enough to see blurred figures running by the windows of the ship he shouted, "now!"

His form dematerialised barely a second before it slammed into the enemy.

Everyone on the bridge had stopped what they were doing to watch. A large portion of the Kazon ship erupted into a massive ball of flames. The strain of the collision knocked it off its course, making it lurch to one side.

"Transporter Room Two, do you have him?" Tom asked.

"They've got me," Chakotay's relieved voice answered.

Tuvok carefully approached the tense encounter between Kathryn and the Caretaker. Neither of them were speaking, and from the look on the latter's face, Tuvok figured he was mulling things over.

"Captain. I can access the system to send us back to Federation space. It will though take several hours to activate," Tuvok said.

Kathryn seemed more somber than usual, he wasn't expecting it. "Unless you help us."

"I wish I could but I have very little time left," the Caretaker said, genuinely sympathetic. "I have initiated a self destruct program."

Kathryn's eyes sprung wide, "if you destroy this station, we'll have no way to get home."

"You were right about me coddling the Ocampa, but I cannot leave them at the mercy of the Kazon. If they gained control of this installation they will kill them all," the Caretaker explained. He looked at them frantically, "in minutes this will all be destroyed. You have to go, go now!"

The huge Kazon ship lurched further to one side, the fires raging inside spread further. Its engines on one side pushed it directly toward the Array. It smashed into one of the branches, destroying it completely and engulfing the rest of the ship in a blaze.

Inside the Array the farmhouse simulation flickered and faded away, replaced by a sparkling bright and futuristic looking Holodeck.

Kathryn and Tuvok looked around to where the Caretaker had been sitting. In the old man's place; a large shapeless creature pulsating purple.

"The Caretaker?" Tuvok questioned.

"I'm kinda worried about the three crewmembers he wrongly saw compatibility with, wow," Kathryn muttered. Tuvok's eyebrow shot up. She missed it and tapped her commbadge. "Voyager, what's going on out there?"

"The larger Kazon ship collided with the Array, Captain," Harry's voice replied.

"Are you all right?" Tom's thought to ask.

"Yes we are, stand by," Kathryn said.

"The self destruct program has been damaged," the blob said, his deep voice sounded muffled, echoed around the empty room. "This place must be destroyed. The Kazon will destroy them." As he spoke his form shrunk rapidly until he was the size of a small sponge. His body hardened into stone.

Kathryn approached cautiously and knelt down to pick him up. Tuvok crouched down beside her. "Shall I activate the programme to get us back?"

"And leave the Ocampa to fend themselves against those sexist, grubby in dire need of a bath hotheads? I don't think so," Kathryn replied.

"Captain, any action we take to protect them would affect the balance of power in this system," Tuvok explained. "The Prime Directive applies here."

"Does it? We've been involved the moment the Caretaker brought us here, whether we like it or not. Our presence here likely was the reason for the Kazon ship to crash and destroy the self destruct. Or without us the Kazon may have boarded the Array before he could use it," Kathryn said. She smiled warmly at her friend, "we can't run away now, we've got to fix this."

Tuvok recognised the stubborn look in her eye, there was no convincing her. All he could do was support her decision. He gave her an affirming nod.

Back on Voyager, Kathryn and Tuvok stepped out of the turbolift as the ship shook from a couple of tremors.

"Lieutenant Tuvok, ready the tricobalt devices," she ordered, taking her place at the centre of the Bridge.

"Aye Captain," Tuvok said.

Almost everyone looked around in confusion, not only unsure what was happening, but didn't have a clue what devices they were talking about.

"Open a channel to the big babies," Kathryn said.

"Channel open," Harry responded.

The viewscreen changed from one of the little ships flying toward them to Jabin clenching his jaw and fists, his face redder than usual. "Be warned Janeway, I have called for additional ships."

"Yes you big tough men always have to call in your mates to help beat up one person, it's very convincing," Kathryn mocked him, making him growl again.

James struggled not to laugh, "I definitely like her better than Chakotay."

"Watch it," Chakotay grumbled.

Kathryn continued before either of them could say anymore. "I thought I'd warn you to get outta here. I intend to destroy the station."

"What, you can't do that!" Jabin hissed.

"Oh Blabbin, dumbass," Kathryn said sweetly. "You're welcome to stick around and see for yourself, but I doubt you'll have time to do more than gawk." She gestured to cut him off. He was left to stew once the viewscreen went off.

The tremors continued. "They're increasing fire, shields are holding," Tuvok said.

"Move us to within four hundred kilometres of the station, Paris," Kathryn commanded.

B'Elanna looked around with her eyes wide in disbelief. "You're serious?"

"Yes ma'Captain," Tom stuttered.

"Wait, what do you think you're doing?" B'Elanna shouted as she charged towards the Captain until they were nose to nose. Kathryn didn't even flinch, but Chakotay did as he stood nearby at the helm, almost within punch range. "That thing is the only way we can get home. Maybe we can have somebody who isn't a wacked out overgrown kid decide our fates, that'd be nice."

Kathryn tried her best not to lash right back at her. "Fine, if you want to sacrifice the Ocampo so you can go right back to thug life, or more realistically jail, go right ahead."

"We can deal with the Kazon, we can secure the Array. There is though no other way home," B'Elanna ranted.

Kathryn rolled her eyes and walked off, angering her further.

"Their reinforcements are probably more of those big ships. We don't have anymore of our own to ram it with," James said.

"What kind of clown car ship is this? I'm not the only one here with a problem with her plan, am I?" B'Elanna grumbled, she lurched forward only to be stopped by Chakotay gently clasping her shoulder.

"It's the right thing to do," he said. She looked around, a few people looked hesitant, some agreed. Defeat took over her, she held her tongue.

"The tricobalt devices are ready," Tuvok said.

"We're in position," Tom said, swallowing the nervous lump in his throat.

Harry looked on helplessly with his eyes wide, hoping for a miracle that would stop this.

Kathryn stared ahead with a fiery gaze. "Fire!"

They all watched in stunned and awkward silence as two blue torpedoes shot forward toward the Array. Where one torpedo struck a brief blue light shone and vanished, the space around it contorted. Explosions rang out, its hull buckled and broke apart. Seconds later only tiny pieces remained.

The silence continued, only now what they had done truly hit them.

"The lead Kazon ship is hailing us," Harry said in a hoarse voice.

Kathryn's defiant and cocky demeanour had melted away, leaving only grief behind. She tried to hold it together. "On screen," her voice still cracked.

Once more Jabin appeared on the viewscreen, staring her down angrily. "You have made an enemy today." He got the last word as he cut them off immediately.

Kathryn didn't really feel up to responding anyway. At least this way he didn't know that.

"They are withdrawing Captain," Tuvok reported.

Smoke billowed out of every orifice around the room. The man lying on the ground had to crawl on his belly across the carpet to reach the closest door, with his t-shirt over his face. The door opened and he quickly scrambled inside. The door shut, sealing most of the smoke outside.

"Phew," the man groaned, muffled under his clothes. He first pulled down his jacket hood to his shoulders before moving the t-shirt back. All while grumbling swear words.

The scruffy haired ensign from Kathryn's previous ship strolled to the window, expecting to still see the giant Array and the ships battling it out. His eyes bugged out when the view wasn't even close to what he expected. Instead what greeted him was a purple cloud, with deep darkened patches that looked like a tunnel.

"Computer, what happened to the Array, and..." the man grunted.

A computer monitor fixed to the upper corner flickered on to show a replay of the Array's destruction, mostly zoomed into the point of impact. It slowed down so he could see it better. Anger filled every inch of him.

"Again Janeway? How are you doing this?" the man cried. "I'll get my revenge, and you won't see it coming, mark my wo..." The monitor decided it had enough and broke free from its restraints, conking him straight on the head.

Kathryn was standing in front of the window, staring into space. The door chimed loud enough to break her out of her thoughts.

"Yes?"

The door opened for Chakotay, he wasn't alone though. Behind him were James, Jessie and two young teens. Kathryn barely noticed as she made her way over to her desk. The first thing she did was grab her mug and sip at it.

"Apparently you and I have the same problem. I get why we have a bunch of kids on our ship; Marquis attracts angry, vengeful and even bored people of all ages, but Starfleet..." Chakotay said.

Kathryn rolled her eyes as she sat down in her seat. "A bit of a mix up. Before we were sent to look for you, they were supposed to get a bit of experience. That class should have been told it had been cancelled."

"Hmm, and here I thought it was just a bad fanfiction trying to bring in characters that were too young," Chakotay chuckled.

"Duh," Kathryn shrugged. "Any of yours can join our pre-cadets in the schools I told Tuvok to setup. What else have you got?"

Chakotay frowned as she downed the whole extremely large cup, with steam still rising from it. "Wow, um..." he tried to compose himself. "These are the last lot, they were the two who were kidnapped by the Caretaker."

"Mmm hmm," Kathryn said as her head turned to the replicator.

Chakotay turned to the group behind him. "Kids, you can go." The kids left quickly, the coffee smell was overpowering. Jessie started to leave as well. "Not you."

"Oh so I'm old, am I?" she huffed quietly.

"I never said that," Chakotay rolled his eyes. "The last two are a problem. One worked in Engineering and that's full already. The other, well I don't think you have any need for a hacker."

"The day shift is missing someone to man the Engineering station, he/she could take that," Kathryn said from the replicator. Chakotay was a little shocked, he hadn't seen her walk there. The pair behind him were just as surprised, James tilted his head to one side and squinted his eyes.

"Okay, so that's Jessie sorted. I don't recommend him for the Bridge though," Chakotay said, gesturing behind him.

This time he caught Kathryn going back to the desk, she held another cup of coffee. "There's only really Sickbay left," she said.

Chakotay tried not to laugh, he felt one glare behind him. He didn't know it was Jessie that was doing it though. "Thanks for that image."

Kathryn stared at her new first officer like he had walked in wearing a dress. To him she looked just as ridiculous with the giant mug in her hands and a straw sticking out of it. "Put him on the Bridge, I'm sure there's something else he can do if he's that clever. What's the fuss?"

Chakotay was torn between laughing again and frowning. "I wouldn't say clev... um, just he's got an attitude problem and..."

"It's rude to talk about people like they're not there," Jessie found herself grumbling.

"Indeed, you're one to talk about an attitude problem," Kathryn muttered between straw slurps.

"Really? Hypocrisy all around," Chakotay said before clearing his throat. "Ok you two, bridge day shifts. You can go."

Jessie rolled her eyes as she turned to leave, she stopped when she realised she was the only one doing that. "What? James, what's wrong?"

James finally stopped tilting his head and staring, then turned to her. "Is it just me, or is there something really odd looking on her head?" His finger pointed at Kathryn. Jessie turned her own head to look.

Kathryn's eyes widened, and she started feeling her hair.

James' did as well, he shook his pointed finger. "There, you got it."

Kathryn glared at him. "That is my hair." Chakotay meanwhile slapped his forehead with his right hand.

"Well it sure is odd, bye," James said. Jessie giggled as they both walked out.

"Chakotay," Kathryn muttered.

Chakotay sighed, "that's what I was talking about. He's rude, bad tempered and doesn't shut up. He'll fit right in around here."

"What are their names? I'll need to know when I start yelling at them," Kathryn asked. Her eyes then narrowed, "what do you mean by that?"

"The girl's okay, well she was until he joined the crew. Jessie... erm, Jessie Rex something. He's James Taylor," Chakotay answered with a frown. He missed Kathryn's eyes almost falling out of the socket as they widened so much, he was too busy frowning. "Think Stuart is on the end, the step dad that joined was called that. Doesn't matter."

"Did you say Taylor?" Kathryn stuttered.

Chakotay looked puzzled. "Yes, is there a problem?"

"I think I might have erm, met his father," Kathryn replied. The urge to get a much bigger mug was strong, especially now that her current one was empty. "What are the odds?"

"Um tiny. Though to be fair his name is really common. He may not be related to the same Taylor you know," Chakotay said. He almost jumped out of his skin as Kathryn had gone again, she was back at the replicator getting the new mug. "How do you do that?"

She casually walked by him, staring at him with the judgmental eyes she gave him before. "Do what?"

"Uh the replicator thing," Chakotay stuttered. Kathryn's stare got even worse. He was starting to feel like he really was wearing a silly dress with the way she was looking at him. "That was fast, um. Forget it. Have you talked to Paris yet?"

"No, but I do have to address the crew. We've got a long journey ahead," Kathryn answered. A loud slurp echoed around the room. "I'm trying to think of what to say to them."

"I'm sure you'll think of something. Excuse me," Chakotay said over the slurps. He quickly left.

Kathryn spent the next few minutes lost in her thoughts. At least until her eyes fell onto the photo displayed on her computer. Her sitting with her precious dog Molly, her arms wrapped around her with a big grin on her face. The fiance Mark sitting on the far edge of the shot, staring at her with a frown with his arms folded. She remembered him complaining when she made it the screensaver all over her house.

"Learn to smile then you muppet, and shave your face, you're not a hobo," she had told him.

He said something about intruding on her family reunion, which she didn't get, then he didn't come over for two days. Kathryn smiled wistfully, "I miss you, you big drama queen." Her door chimed, interrupting her bittersweet moment. "Yes?"

Tom stepped inside, "you asked to see me Captain?"

Kathryn smiled as she took a seat, "I'm afraid you're in an ickle bit of trouble."

Tom immediately started to splutter nervously, "whatever she says, I was only talking."

"What are you dribbling on about?" Kathryn frowned.

"Oh. It's a joke, still working on it," Tom quickly covered.

"Yeah right," Kathryn rolled her eyes. "We don't have many pilots onboard, the only two I know like to crash into things, and we can't afford to be picky."

"Technically they crashed into me," Tom said.

Kathryn shook her head, silently judging him for now. "I'm making you a legit Lieutenant, assigned to the conn. Don't make me regret it."

Tom broke out into a huge grin, "what, really? I'm speechless."

"If only," Kathryn said exasperatedly. "I hope you realise that since the Marquis will be a part of this crew, you'll already have to watch your back. I wouldn't increase your odds."

"Ah, will I be needing a bodyguard?" Tom asked.

"Apparently Chakotay owes you his life. Better him than me," Kathryn answered.

Tom's smile was back, "oh this is going to be fun."

"Not for you. He'll be my first officer, so you'll still need to answer to him," Kathryn said.

"It could be a lot worse," Tom grinned. He stepped back to leave, opening the door. Before he could Kes and Neelix hurried inside.

"Ah Captain, we were just coming to see you," Neelix said excitedly.

Tom nodded, mouthing yep as he left. Kathryn didn't get it, she mouthed yep a couple of times. Then she remembered she had further guests. "Oh right. We've stocked up your ship with plenty of water, it's ready to go. I'm sure it'll last you a while with how often you must bathe."

"Well you see, that's what we wanted to discuss," Neelix said.

Kathryn looked disgusted, "I don't want to know. I don't care how much fur is in the plughole when you're done, as long as you get rid of it."

"No," Neelix's cheeks flushed.

Kes laughed behind her hand, "what he means is we want to come with you."

Kathryn blinked, her face locked in half a grimace and half shock. A thought occurred to her which she had to voice, "this isn't a cruise liner. We don't take passengers."

"Oh we won't be passengers," Kes said.

Neelix shook off his earlier embarrassment, "we'd be valuable colleagues."

"I could put another tank of water in," Kathryn said meekly. "It'd take only a hour."

Neelix wasn't put off, "whatever you need, is what I have to offer. You need a guide, I can guide. You need supplies, a tool..."

"You're a tool? Yes I get it," Kathryn muttered.

"You'll need a cook. Oooh, you haven't lived until you've tasted my angla'bosque," Neelix continued. Kes quickly shook her head and widened her eyes whilst he was focused on Kathryn. When he looked to her to back him up she could only shrug an apology.

"It will be my job to anticipate your needs before you know you have them. And I anticipate your first need will be me," he said with a flourish. Once he finished he and Kes both noticed Kathryn wasn't in front of them anymore, they looked around and spotted her by the replicator.

"Wrong," she said in between coffee sips.

Kes smiled warmly, "Captain, we'd very much like to be a part of your journey." Neelix put his arm around her lovingly.

Kathryn groaned as she wandered back, firmly grasping her hot cup. "So, what will you do?"

"I really love to..." Kes began to say.

"Welcome aboard," Kathryn said with a beaming smile. She held out her hand to shake while the other raised the cup to her lips.

Neelix glanced between them, confused once more. "So, are you interested in me?"

Kathryn almost spat out her drink and laughed. "Oh god, you really are a hoot. You're welcome aboard too you lovable goof." She slapped him hard across the shoulder and strolled out, still laughing.

"Why does she keep thinking I'm making jokes when I'm serious?" Neelix asked.

Kes shrugged and smiled back, "she didn't laugh at the cook part yet, so not always."

Neelix nodded while she left without him. He stopped and scowled, "what?"

The Bridge:

Everyone stood mostly to attention, staring towards the pacing Captain. A few worried that her speech would last a while so they brought a PADD to read, or were standing next to something to lean or sit on. The Marquis crew were already suited up in Starfleet attire, which one of them found rather uncomfortable.

"This thing is hideous," Jessie whispered to James standing beside her. "Yellow and black, ugh." He tried not to smirk.

"We're alone, in an unfamiliar and hostile area of space," Kathryn started her speech. "We've already made some friends here," she said towards Neelix and Kes. "And some enemies." Her face crumpled as she tried to remember the middle of her speech, but it was gone. "Crap," she whispered. As everyone were still staring at her she quickly tried to cover that up and continue on somehow.

"Who would have thought that this eclectic group of voyagers..." Kathryn paused to let the pun sink in. Most of the Bridge rolled their eyes. "Could actually become one crew. Starfleet, Marquis. Klingon, Ocampan... um," Kathryn stared at Neelix. "What were you again?"

"Talaxian," Neelix was offended.

"I thought it was Neelix, Mr Talaxian," Tuvok actually sounded annoyed for once.

"That's stupid. How could any moron get that mixed up, Mr Vulcan?" Neelix huffed.

Kathryn ignored them both, "Ocampan, Talaxian, that whiny hologram, Borg..." She frowned, "wait, that's not right."

"You think?" James commented.

Tom pouted, "I was going to say that."

Kathryn stared at him like he did say that, "even Mr Paris. Granted, we'll have our share of difficulties. Hopefully coffee shortages and office explosions won't be amongst them."

"Captain," Chakotay interrupted. Kathryn growled at him. "You do realise that's the Doctor's speech from Year of Hell, right?"

"No, yes," Kathryn badly improvised. "What's that?" Chakotay shrugged, he couldn't remember. "Ok fine, what was it?" Her face lit up. "There was this parable I heard as a child, and I never forgot it. A scorpion was walking along the bank of a river..."

"Really?" Chakotay groaned into his hand.

Kathryn started to pout as her mug or bucket of coffee had worn off. "We'll be looking for one person, amongst thousands..."

Everyone shook their heads.

"Here's the sequence of events, we will drop our shie..." Kathryn said.

"No!" everyone shouted.

"Oh fine, I'll improvise," Kathryn grumbled. "Yes our journey looks long and bleak, but it doesn't have to be. We're explorers, this is an opportunity to explore this unknown area of space. In the meantime we'll be looking for wormholes, advanced technologies, coffee brewers, spatial anomalies. Somehow, someday, we'll find our way back." She smiled broadly, "I knew I'd remember the end part. Nailed it."

Chakotay tried not to smirk, "uh huh, fifth time's the charm."

"And I'm sure we'll all get on much better without all the snark you people think I don't hear," Kathryn said dangerously.

"Well it's official, I'm not getting along with anyone," James said.

Two Days Later:

B'Elanna and the Engineering Lieutenant Carey were arguing at a station, while everyone else was crowding around to watch.

"This is my gig, I'll take care of it!" Carey yelled.

"Move it or lose it, and I mean all of that literally," B'Elanna grumbled. She pushed him away from the console.

Carey though pushed back. Everyone saw smoke coming out of B'Elanna's ears. She pushed him away once more to deliver a massive punch to the face. He went flying to the ground. Blood started pouring down his face.

B'Elanna walked up to him, and she knelt down beside him. "Sorry, maybe you should go to Sickbay," she said in a very unsympathetic voice.

To everyone's surprise she went to carry on the repair as if nothing happened.

"One thing's for sure, this trip sure isn't gonna be dull," Ian snickered.

******THE END******