

Summary: Interrupting their lunch, Janeway and Seven handle duty, and the worry that accompanies learning a loved one is in danger.

Content Disclaimers: Continued from my short story, "A Natural Course"

DUTY CALLS

by Lara Zielinsky

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Continued from "A Natural Course" On *Voyager's* bridge, moments later...

"Report." Captain Janeway's terse request hit Commander Chakotay's ears before her boots finished hitting the bridge deck. Exiting the turbolift, she braced herself on the railing overlooking the command well as *Voyager's* first officer twisted around to look up at her.

"The Hirogen are not responding to hails..." He trailed off as the ship rocked, causing everyone to grab for a handhold.

"They're firing on us," Harry Kim reported from Ops.

"Evasive maneuvers, Mr. Paris," Janeway locked down her emotions, determined to get the ship through the confrontation first before any other considerations. "Can we get any more speed?"

"We're already at Warp 8. Engineering reports 8.5 is our maximum at the moment."

"What is the condition of the Hirogen vessels?" she demanded, glancing toward Lt. Tuvok at Tactical.

Voyager's security chief reported quickly. "The ships are fully armed."

"Can we disable their engines?"

"I am attempting to calculate the impact points now."

"Whenever you're ready," she barked back. He looked up, his right eyebrow lifting sanguinely over his coal-black eyes.

"Yes, Captain."

Though it felt like an eternity as the two Hirogen vessels converged on their position, it was only another minute before the Vulcan's careful inflection reported back. "Targeting online. Firing."

"On screen." The view shifted to follow the sharp pinpoint from *Voyager's* phasers as they intersected one Hirogen hull.

"No effect."

"Evasive maneuvers, Tom!" Janeway ordered.

In reaction to their phaser fire, the Hirogens began a counterattack in earnest. *Voyager* was rocked stem to stern.

At Ops, the youngest bridge officer, Ensign Harry Kim, straight from the Academy when they left Deep Space 9 six years ago, kept her apprised of the damages.

"We've lost integrity in the starboard nacelle. Decks eight, nine and ten suffered seven points of explosive decompression. Repair teams have been dispatched."

"Tuvok?" Janeway shot a look over her shoulder as she braced herself over her readouts. "Our weapons are doing minimal damage to the vessels, Captain." He studied another reading. "Captain, they are preparing to detonate a subspace charge."

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"Shields to full!" She looked toward the viewscreen and the menacing hulk of the Hirogen vessel bearing down. "All hands! Brace for impact!"

When it came, the ship lost inertial control completely and temporarily lost its artificial gravity field, beginning to tumble and roll, which normally didn't matter. In space there was no up or down. But without it, *Voyager's* crew was tossed about the ship.

Paris at the helm, held on, finally steadying the ship's flight and nose-diving out of the way of the forward Hirogen ship.

The maneuver happened so quickly that even as Janeway rolled back to her feet from the floor, the two Hirogen vessels collided spectacularly exploding in a ball of gases.

"Any survivors?" she demanded.

From Ops, Harry reported. "No life signs in the debris field, Captain."

"Damage report." From the looks of the bridge, where a deck beam had fallen and a dozen panels had blown out from the energy exploding behind them, the ship had taken considerable damage from the last series.

"Decks eight, nine, ten, fourteen. The engines are offline. Thrusters are operational, life support has been lost to the cargo bays, power to the eight grids starboard of the shuttle bay has been cut off. Engineering and rescue crews have been dispatched."

While Harry reported the damage throughout the ship, Janeway leaned over and pushed a deck beam aside, finding Chakotay caught underneath it. He was conscious, and grasped her hand as she offered it to him.

He groaned as he stood. His uniform was torn, revealing several gashes.

"Get to sickbay, Commander."

Chakotay looked at her and blinked, trying to clear his vision. When he did, it was to see her dusting her hair from her face. No, it wasn't hair. "Looks like you need attention too." The captain had a dark streak of blood trailing down from her left temple across her cheek.

"Tuvok?" The Vulcan looked all right.

"I am fine, Commander."

"You have the bridge then."

Chakotay and Janeway, both privately considering seatbelts in the command chairs in the future, walked together to the turbolift. She called out "Sickbay" as the doors closed.

"Hell of a ride, Kathryn," he offered as they leaned against the wall of the lift, arms crossed over their chests.

"*Nothing* worked?"

He shook his head. "Guess they determined to make *Voyager* their latest trophy."

He looked at her solemnly for a long moment and then leaned forward, squinted and touched her head. When his hand came back both blinked at the short blades of grass that had been obviously tucked in her hair.

"Sorry we interrupted... lunch," he apologized.

Janeway promised herself she would not blush, but she could feel heat creeping up her throat. "Let's just get the ship back in order," she said.

He nodded and dropped the grass blades onto the deck.

They emerged just a hundred yards from Sickbay and walked amid the others streaming into the medical facility. Comrades were carrying a few friends or colleagues who had been injured too severely to walk on their own.

"Doctor?"

"Hello, Captain. Commander." *Voyager's* Chief Medical Officer, once a simple Emergency Medical Hologram but who functioned well beyond that original program now, strode between biobeds making assessments. "You're mobile," he said even as he scanned and repaired Lieutenant Ayala's broken fibula. "Grab a medikit from the third locker and start over there where I've assembled the cuts, bumps and bruises."

Janeway stifled her automatic nod at the autocratic tone. Chakotay spun, found the locker in question and withdrew the kit. After passing it over his face and torn shoulder, Janeway handed him the dermal regenerator and submitted as he passed it over her own cuts before they both moved to the biobed where a line had formed.

Their first patient was Ensign Beratt, with a muscle-deep laceration on his left forearm. "Captain?"

"Just helping out, Ensign," she explained with a smile as she held his arm for Chakotay.

He flexed the limb experimentally when she released it. "Good as new. Thank you." Beratt slid from the biobed and another slid into place.

"Crewman Killian," Chakotay greeted. With a motion he tilted Killian's head back, her tumble of jet-black curls falling across her shoulders. The hum of the dermal regenerator sealed up and then healed the laceration that split her left cheek very close to her brown eyes.

"Thank you, Commander. Captain," she said with a weary smile and Janeway grasped her under her arm and helped her off the biobed.

The doors to sickbay slid open and Janeway automatically looked up at the sound even as she was helping Crewman Lister onto the biobed, his leg wound making it difficult to maneuver. She froze in place.

Seven was hunched over and the arms wrapped around her waist were plainly evident as B'Elanna Torres, *Voyager's* Chief Engineer, stumbled in with her.

"Seven. B'Elanna." Janeway's call startled both women who looked up and changed direction toward her.

The captain left Chakotay treating patients, grabbed another medikit and gestured both women into the Doctor's office, the only unoccupied space remaining in the medical bay.

She started scanning and found B'Elanna had two fractured ribs, a separated shoulder, a dislocated knee and a broken foot. Seven wasn't in much better shape. Two of her implants had twisted through her left thigh, and her right arm was broken while her internal organs seem to have been tossed around and badly bruised. Janeway's heart clutched as she considered Seven was internally bleeding.

"What happened to you?"

"We were attempting to realign the shields on Deck ten when inertial dampers and gravity went offline," Seven replied concisely.

"Well, you slammed into *something* pretty hard," she countered.

"We were in very tight quarters," B'Elanna explained. The shield generator down there is tucked inside Jeffries tube 1-9-4." She rubbed her head. "I think my head hit her stomach."

Since B'Elanna's skull was in effect armor-plated... "That explains the internal bleeding." She pulled out the bone-knitter. "How'd you end up sporting a broken leg?"

Seven, Janeway saw, blushed. "I grabbed Lieutenant Torres... with my left hand."

Blue eyes lifted to blue eyes and Janeway found herself smothering a chuckle. "So is that how you got the black eye?"

"I slugged her in reflex, Captain."

"I don't doubt it, B'Elanna." She finished the bone-knitting, helped Torres off, and motioned Seven up onto the doctor's desk.

"I've got to get back to work," Torres tugged her dirty, torn uniform back into order.

Seven closed her hand over Janeway's then spoke to B'Elanna, "Thank you for coming to assist me."

"Next time, get yourself stuck in a little *larger* space, okay?"

Janeway looked from her Chief Engineer to her Astrometrics officer.

B'Elanna forestalled the question. "Seven had gone into the Jeffries tube to effect repairs herself. She *was* the only person in the immediate area. If she hadn't we might have lost integrity on deck ten completely. But she didn't count on getting caught in a collapsed conduit."

Janeway's eyes shifted to Seven who remained stoic and silent. "So you beamed in to pull her out?" She thought about that. "Seven, you could have been stuck in there for hours."

"I was not. I contacted Lieutenant Torres immediately. The only way in was to beam in, so that is what she did."

"Glad I brought a cutting torch," Torres murmured. "We had twenty meters of collapsed conduit to get through."

Janeway took a deep breath; there wasn't time to indulge her upset now, though she could feel it pulling at her stomach. Putting enough steel into her voice to cover up any quaver, she changed the subject. "I'll expect a full report tomorrow. For now, get *Voyager* back in shape."

"Yes, Captain." Torres patted Seven on her uninjured knee, a gesture that wasn't lost on *Voyager's* commanding officer, spun on her heel and exited sickbay promptly.

Alone now, Seven and Janeway studied one another before the captain returned to quietly knitting up the cuts and scrapes. "The Doctor will have to work on your implants there," Janeway indicated Seven's torn knee with a business-like tone. Then she fell silent. Her voice was soft and concerned when she resumed, "Does it hurt much?"

"I cannot feel my leg at all," Seven reported. The dry tone did nothing to stop Janeway's alarmed expression. "The nanoprobes have isolated the area while they effect repairs."

"Is that normal?" Janeway's hand settled on Seven's thigh.

"It would be considerably more painful if they did not block the nerve impulses, Captain."

"That's why you couldn't get yourself out of the Jeffries tube, isn't it? You couldn't move your legs."

Seven nodded.

Janeway again had a vision of Seven remaining stuck in that tube. She seldom worked with a partner and often was the only person around for several grids because she liked working in the isolation of the lab. If communications had been cut off, Seven would not have been able to reach B'Elanna. She would have remained undiscovered until a head count revealed her absence.

Dear God, Janeway thought, her face going ashen. *She could have been blown out during explosive decompression and no one would have known for hours.*

"I am fine... Kathryn." Seven's grip settled on the captain's, bringing the gray-blue eyes to hers. The former Borg lifted her right hand to the captain's upper arm and squeezed lightly. "You also sustained injuries," she noted with precision.

"How can you tell that? I've already been treated."

"You would not be here had you not. And..." Seven paused and offered a faint smile. "I can see that the Commander does not wield a dermal regenerator with nearly as much skill as you do."

She brushed her fingertips over the place where Janeway had suffered her cut to the temple. "May I continue repairs?"

Moved by the tender touch against her skin, Janeway could only nodded mutely.

Seven's fingers pulled the dermal regenerator from her own hands and she watched ice-blue eyes focus on the task, aware of the tingling as the skin was repaired more completely.

Seven finished and set aside the regenerator. When her arms settled around the captain's waist, Janeway enjoyed the fact that she found herself surrounded by quiet warmth and strength.

"Captain. Seven." The Doctor's voice interrupted the moment.

They separated and Janeway reflexively grabbed the dermal regenerator. "Just finishing up, Doctor."

He stepped inside his office and studied both faces. Janeway's was a little reddened, but the gash she had come in with was expertly repaired. Then he noticed Seven's left hand on the desk surface. The Borg components both there and on her thigh were compromised. "If you're all right, Captain. I'll see to Seven here."

"My nanoprobes have already begun repairs," the blonde replied coolly.

"No doubt. I'll just give them some help," he answered just as dryly.

"Seven, do as the Doctor says," Janeway interjected as she saw the Borg open her mouth to protest again.

"Thank you for your assistance earlier, Captain. Also thank the Commander," the Doctor said.

"I'll do that." Janeway moved away from Seven. The Doctor supported the young Borg to a biobed, assisting her in lifting her leg onto the scanner surface so he could effectively treat the complex biotechnology.

Seven's stifled wince was the last thing Janeway saw as she exited Sickbay, knowing, despite how she felt, she had to get back to the Bridge.

Duty called.

THE END