

I am the soft stars that shine at night

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I am the soft stars that shine at night

by [Pixie](#)

Summary

During its last battle with the Klingons, the *USS Buran* is sent 70,000 light years away, and over 100 years into the future, to meet up with the *USS Voyager*.

Notes

Takes place in *Voyager's* fourth season, before the episode "Message in a Bottle" and between the second and third episodes of *Discovery*, prior to the destruction of the *Buran*. To be clear, this is not Mirror Lorca.

The title and final stanza are from the poem "Do Not Stand At My Grave And Weep" by Mary Elizabeth Frye.

Temporal operatives must remain objective and impartial. Based on the expressions of the two before them, they were very good at their job.

"You picked up their distress signal." One did all the talking, the other silently recorded everything.

"That's right," Janeway confirmed. "My Operations officers have standing orders to scan for Federation frequencies."

The silent operative made a note.

"And you altered course to intercept."

"Yes."

"At warp nine?"

Janeway pursed her lips. "It was a distress call."

The operative's brow creased slightly. "That was not an accusation, Captain, we are merely trying to ascertain the sequence of events."

"I don't understand how you don't know all this already. If you're really from the future." Lorca glanced to the woman at his right. "The more future."

"As we have explained, we cannot—"

Both captains rolled their eyes, and raised their hands to wave the explanation away. The silent operative made a note, and nodded for the querying one to continue.

"What did you find when you arrived?"

Janeway straightened her shoulders. "The ship was adrift, life support failing, no response to hails. My security officer identified it as—"

"—the *USS Buran*," Tuvok named, with an eyebrow raised in curiosity, "thought to have been destroyed during the Klingon War in 2256."

Janeway frowned, but set aside the mystery in favor of the immediate problem. "Life signs?"

"Faint," Harry said. "But yes."

"Is it safe to beam over?" Chakotay asked B'Elanna.

She shook her head. "I'm reading heavy radiation."

Janeway stood. "All right. Harry, scan for distinct life signs, beam survivors directly to sickbay."

"Aye, Captain."

Janeway tapped her communicator. "Doctor, I'm sending you an unspecified number of injured refugees." She nodded to her helmsman. "Tom go help. B'Elanna," she turned to address the engineer, "see what you can do about the ship." B'Elanna headed to the turbolift with Tom as Janeway joined her security officer at his station. "Tuvok, report."

"So you knew about the temporal irregularities when you beamed the *Buran* crew on board *Voyager*."

"Yes," Janeway affirmed through her teeth. Lorca hid a smile.

"Captain Lorca." The operative turned to him. "You were unconscious during the evacuation."

"Yes. We all were."

He blinked at the bright lights. "Where?"

A voice responds, but not to him. "Bridge, Captain Lorca is awake."

"On my way." Another voice. A woman's.

"Where am I?" he demanded.

"Sickbay."

Gabriel frowned. "Not my sickbay."

"No," the man— a doctor he assumed— confirmed. "We discovered your ship adrift in space and evacuated all survivors to *Voyager*."

"*Voyager*?" He didn't recognize the name.

The doctor nodded. He appeared to be wearing a uniform, but not Starfleet. An ally, perhaps.

"How... how many survivors?"

"Nineteen."

Lorca closed his eyes, the glare of the overhead lights suddenly too much to bear.

"Doctor, how is he?" The woman's voice again. Closer this time.

"I've given him a compound for the radiation poisoning, and healed two broken ribs."

He opened his eyes, locked them on the woman who has appeared beside the doctor. "Are you in charge?"

She nodded. "Thank you, Doctor," she addressed her companion and he started to move away. Lorca reached a hand to his sleeve.

"Wait. My crew."

"They are all in recovery," the doctor explained. "Only one remains in critical condition and I believe she will pull through."

Gabriel nodded and let go. As the doctor walked away, the woman turned her full attention to his patient.

"Captain Lorca, I'm Captain Kathryn Janeway. My ship picked up your distress call."

Her ship. "*Voyager*."

"That's right."

He glanced around the room, overcrowded with the remains of his crew and a handful of others in the same strange uniform working to help them. He took a deep breath and looked back to Janeway.

"...Thank you for saving who you could, Captain."

She placed a comforting hand on his arm. "I'm sorry it wasn't more."

"Are you Federation?" The gold logo on her chest is not unlike the one on his, but also not the same.

"Yes." She answered without hesitation, but there was something beneath it, something in her eyes, and her hand on his sleeve.

"What aren't you telling me?"

She squared her shoulders. "There's no easy way to say this, Captain." He frowned. "You're in the Delta Quadrant, and according to our database, you've travelled approximately 120 years into the future."

Lorca felt his mouth drop open.

"What?"

"It's stardate 51383." The something was sympathy and it's all over her face. He didn't like it.

"I don't..."

"Captain!" A young woman approached— same uniform, but this one with yellow shoulders. "Excuse me," she told him, stopping at the side of his bed. She's speaking standard and clearly part of the crew but the facial ridges were unmistakably...Klingon?

"Captain Lorca, this is B'Elanna Torres, my chief engineer," Janeway introduced. "She's been working on your ship."

Lorca shook his head. The Klingon was on his ship.

"We got life support up and radiation shielding in place," B'Elanna reported. "It's a temporary fix but should hold long enough for us to salvage everything useful."

"Salvage?" Lorca repeated in a croak.

"Weapons, stores, medical supplies," B'Elanna listed, an obvious excitement in her tone. The ship was a hundred years old, but it was native to the Alpha Quadrant, and she felt like she'd found buried treasure. "Engineering's destroyed, and the bridge is mostly burnt out, but there are some consoles I'd like to cut out before—"

"You can't let this Klingon blow up my ship," Gabriel roared, the sound of blood rushing through his ears.

B'Elanna's eyes narrowed. "Excuse me?"

Kathryn raised a hand for the younger woman to stand down. "Captain," she started but he sat up, knocking her hand away.

"I understand this is a lot to take in but I assure you—"

Lorca dropped to the floor and stood to his full height, glaring down at the two women.

"Even if you're telling the truth—"

Janeway raised both hands, open, her eyes on his. Behind the captain, the doctor and a young blonde man in a uniform matching her's stepped in to close a circle around the time-displaced captain.

"How do I get back if you blow up my ship?" Lorca demanded, arms out defensively. He looked ready to jump all four. The doctor was holding a hypo spray, watching his captain for the order. Janeway shook her head for him to wait.

"Captain, please calm down."

Lorca lowered his arms, crossed them over his chest, still glaring, but waiting. Janeway nodded.

"B'Elanna, how long will your temporary fix hold?"

The Klingon pursed her lips. She's still glaring, too. "Three days. An estimate."

Janeway nodded, again, eyes remaining on Lorca. "I'd like you to run a full diagnostic on the *Buran*. Prepare a report, inventory everything." She glanced toward the engineer. "Take Harry and anyone else you need."

B'Elanna met her gaze. Imagined briefly what it might feel like to have a stranger gleefully discuss taking *Voyager* apart and lowered her eyes with chagrin. "Yes, Captain." Janeway touched a supportive hand to her arm and nodded a dismissal. As B'Elanna and Tom moved away, she turned her attention, and supportive hand, back to Gabriel.

"Meanwhile, let's see if we can figure out how you got here."

The temporal operative took a deep breath. The reveal of a Klingon-Human hybrid in a position of power within Starfleet to a man presently embroiled in a war with the Klingon Empire was a clear breach of temporal protocol and Captain Janeway freely admitted to it. *Voyager* gave him such a headache, why did he stuck with this assignment in the first place? And Lorca on top of it. He deserved a vacation after this.

"What's the last thing you remember?"

"A battle," Gabriel answered, succinctly. "We were losing." He lowered his eyes, remembering. "The warp drive went offline, we were leaking

plasma. Klingons were preparing to board. My XO and I intended to manually arm our remaining torpedoes— to keep my ship from enemy hands and hopefully take some of them with us."

The silent operative made a note.

"We were headed to a Jeffries tube when ...something happened."

"What?"

Lorca raised angry eyes to the operative. "I don't know what."

"Seven is working on it," Janeway offered.

"Your Borg."

Kathryn's eyes flashed. "My crewman."

The silent operative made another note. Janeway glared at both of them.

"She isolated the temporal variance between *Voyager* and the *Buran*. A sensor sweep of neighboring space determined the point of entry but we found nothing there."

"Nothing?" Janeway repeated, her disappointment palpable.

Seven input coordinates on her console and the viewscreen in Astrometrics sprang to life. "There are no space phenomenon in the vicinity. No artificial constructs." She pointed to a small cluster of dots. "The closest planetary system is unpopulated and the second closest," she pointed to another cluster, "has only a primitive population, pre-space flight.

Janeway leaned forward on the console. "Well, if it's a temporal anomaly maybe it comes and goes."

"A reasonable theory, Captain." Seven considered the map a moment. "Perhaps if I had access to the *Buran*'s sensor logs I could extrapolate a pattern."

Kathryn nodded and tapped her communicator. "Janeway to Torres."

"Torres here," B'Elanna answered from the bridge of the old ship.

"I need you to transfer the *Buran*'s sensor logs to Astrometrics."

The engineer frowned. "I'll send you what we have but the data is pretty corrupted."

"Understood."

Seven nodded that the transfer had begun. Janeway pursed her lips.

"How's the diagnostic?" They'd been working for over 36 hours. Time was short.

"Harry's still conducting the inventory and we've a couple non-vital systems to examine but my preliminary report is ready."

"Good, report to the briefing room. I'll collect Captain Lorca."

"Yes, Captain."

Janeway closed the line to Torres.

"Do what you can, Seven. Let me know immediately if you find anything."

"Yes, Captain."

Janeway exited Astrometrics and headed to guest quarters, calling the remaining bridge crew to the briefing room on the way. Lorca's response to her buzz was near instantaneous. Kathryn recognized the same nervous energy that plagued her when she was left waiting, and felt powerless.

"Captain," she greeted. "I've convened a staff meeting to discuss what we know so far."

His expression turned to an also familiar relief. Any news was better than no news. "Lead the way."

They started down the corridor toward the lift. "How are you acclimating yourself?" She noted he's replaced the burnt blue and gold he'd been rescued in with a black and red uniform like hers. Though the old badge remained.

"It's odd," he answered. "A lot of this is not that different." The corridors and turbolifts, even the quarters he'd been assigned, had a distinctively 'Starfleet' aesthetic. "I think it hasn't really sunk in."

Janeway nodded as they step into the lift. "Bridge." The lift started in response to her order. "Hopefully this will help."

She glanced his way. Her attempt at support does not seem to have had the desired effect, he was as tightly wound as ever. Perhaps another

tactic.

"It suits you," she murmured.

Lorca looked over, brow creased in confusion.

"Command red," Kathryn explained, eyes twinkling.

Gabriel flashed a genuine grin. She felt her stomach drop, and for a fleeting moment wished the lift would breakdown but the doors opened at their arrival on the bridge.

The silent operative observed Janeway's flushed cheeks as she described the seemingly uneventful ride on a turbolift but she decided not to make a note of it.

"Do you think it was the most prudent choice to include Captain Lorca in these discussions?"

"Prudent?" repeated Lorca in a tone that at least approached hostile.

Janeway look the operative dead in the eyes. "It was the *only* appropriate choice," she countered, "as we were discussing the status of his ship and crew."

The operatives shared a look. They definitely deserved a vacation. At least two weeks.

Harry and Seven were still working their assigned problems, but the rest of the senior staff, plus Captain Lorca, sat around the table. B'Elanna's report was what they expected, but that didn't make it any easier to hear.

"Without access to a Federation starbase, the *Buran* can't be fixed easily. Most systems are offline, and we'll need to scrub the entire ship of radiation." The Doctor was already at her about her own exposure, and Harry's. "With some work I can get impulse engines going but the warp core is dead." Without warp the ship couldn't keep up with *Voyager*, and limping its way home alone would take ten times as long, and that's if she somehow got the rest of the ship functioning at peak capacity. "The best option is my original plan to take parts for *Voyager* and destroy the remains." She turned sympathetic eyes to Lorca. "I'm sorry, Captain."

He nodded, hiding his feelings in a passably neutral expression.

"Thank you, B'Elanna." Janeway turned to her CMO. "Doctor."

"The crew all suffered radiation poisoning, minor lacerations, and broken bones. There were a handful of concussions, one amputation. But they are all recovering. Five remain in sickbay, the other thirteen have been moved to quarters and are under Mr. Neelix's supervision." The Talaxian had been giving them all a crash course in the community that had been built up on *Voyager* over the last five years.

"Good. Tuvok."

"According to Starfleet records the *Buran* was destroyed in battle with Klingons one hundred nineteen years ago," the Vulcan explained. "All hands were lost. As you requested, I have prepared dossiers for each of the survivors detailing their family records."

Gabriel lowered his eyes. His ship destroyed, his crew dead, and for what? A war none of these people even remember.

"Captain Lorca?"

"Hm?" He glanced back up to meet Janeway's worried eyes.

"Do I have your permission to proceed?"

"I'm sorry, I..." His attention had drifted. He still heard the sounds of that last battle, saw the explosions on the back of his eyelids no matter how tightly he closed his eyes. "You want to dismantle my ship and give my crew information about their funerals."

Her concern deepened. "Captain..."

He sat up straighter. "Yes, of course," he told her, then turned to include them all. "Please do whatever you can to help my crew. And..." He took a breath. "We had come to the same decision as Lieutenant Torres. I'd begun to give the order to..." He pressed his lips. To self-destruct. And he'd do it again. "If there's no way back, do what you need to move forward."

Janeway nodded. It was decided then. "Thank you all. Dismissed."

The crew stood and started to leave.

"Captain." Janeway gestured for Lorca to join her and her first officer. "I've asked Commander Chakotay to meet with each of your crew individually. I hope that in addition to dealing with their past, he will be able to help them find an appropriate position here on *Voyager*, for the future."

Lorca looked between the two, offered a small smile. "Thank you, Captain. Commander."

Chakotay nodded and moved to exit. Tuvok handed Janeway a PADD, she nodded thanks and turned her attention back to Lorca.

"I need a coffee. Join me in my ready room?"

"Please."

The silent temporal operative swallowed. She would love a coffee right now. Her companion was focused on more relevant details.

"Again, why did you feel it necessary to reveal the truth to Captain Lorca?"

Gabriel glanced toward Janeway. He was curious himself. She raised her chin in defiance.

"If our positions were reversed, I would want him to tell me."

She handed him a coffee and sat beside him on the couch.

"I'm sure that was hard," she murmured, lifting the mug to her lips.

Gabriel shook his head and sipped. It was not remarkably more difficult than anything else he'd lived through in the last few weeks. War is hard.

"You're holding something back again," he accused, though not with hostility. Janeway nodded with sad eyes.

"Tuvok found one anomaly in his review of your crew. The other eighteen survivors are recorded among those killed in action during the *Buran's* last battle." She holds the PADD out toward him. "But Captain Gabriel Lorca is listed as missing in action. All further information is redacted."

Gabriel took the PADD with a frown. Read the confirmation of her words; his record was sealed by the order of Admiral K. Cornwell. His frown deepening, he touched a finger to her name, and felt his chest tighten. He raised his eyes to meet Janeway's gaze.

"I'm sorry, without access to Starfleet, I can't find out anything more. You're a ghost."

"You don't know anything about that, do you," Gabriel suggested to the temporal operatives.

Neither answered, nor moved.

Gabriel set the PADD aside. "If Kat did this, she had a good reason."

Kathryn cocked her head. "Admiral Cornwell?" she posited.

He nodded. "The last time I saw her... was at a memorial service for a friend." The war had just begun, Philippa one of the first casualties. They'd clung to each other all night. He'd promised to come back to her. To win the war and come back. "You think you have all the time in the world."

Kathryn placed a comforting hand on his arm.

Her communicator beeped. "Captain."

"Go ahead, Chakotay."

"A temporal rift is forming to *Voyager's* port." Lorca looked up sharply. "Readings indicate it is similar to the one generated by Captain Braxton."

Janeway stood, a frown darkening her face. "On my way." She walked out to bridge, Lorca in tow.

"We are being hailed," Tuvok droned.

"On screen."

The viewscreen flickered, stars replaced with the image of two humans in colorful uniforms she doesn't recognize. One man, one woman. One dark, one light. The woman's eyes travelled over the bridge crew, making a silent record, as the man addressed the room.

"Captain Janeway. Captain Lorca. You are in violation of Temporal Directives 3, 12, and 79-B. We require an audience to discuss the options."

"So." Janeway cocked her head at the temporal operatives, their story caught up to the present. "What are the options?"

The silent operative made a note. Her partner clasped his hands on the table.

"Reset the timeline by sending the *Buran* back to the exact moment of exit."

Janeway crossed her arms, her expression clearly unimpressed. Lorca leaned forward. "We were preparing to die."

The operative nodded. "The timeline indicates you were successful."

Lorca shook his head. "None of you can explain how the *Buran* got here in the first place— how do you know what's happening now is the wrong timeline?" His voice shook with pent up anger.

The operative stood, shoulders squared with quiet dignity. He was good at his job. "It's not an exact science, we have to do what's best for history. Please stay here while we deliberate."

The two operatives exited the room, leaving Janeway and Lorca alone. Gabriel rose and started to pace, though the space was too small to go more than four or five steps.

"Typical bureaucrats," he complained. "If they have access to time travel why can't they just skip the part where we are left to wait?"

Janeway watched with worried eyes. He hadn't had any time to process after the staff meeting or their interrupted conversation about his record.

"How are you doing?" she asked in a quiet, comforting voice.

He glared at the walls. "Everyone I know is dead and my legacy is a question mark." He stopped pacing, shook his head, weary. "Maybe I should embrace being sent back to die a war hero." But what about the eighteen people who weren't dead.

"That's my biggest fear," Kathryn admitted, in a voice barely above a whisper.

Gabriel glanced her way. "Hm?"

"I've been meticulous with my logs," she explained. "But sometimes it feels like I'm shouting into the void. They're not uploaded, not forwarded anywhere. If something happens, if *Voyager* never gets home..." She raised her eyes to find him watching her. "No one will know what happened here. We'll just disappear. My legacy will be a blank."

Gabriel stepped back toward her, touched a gentle hand to her shoulder. "What do you want your legacy to be?"

The doors swished open before she could respond, readmitting the temporal operatives. "We've decided," the man advised.

"The *Buran* needs to go back," Lorca guessed.

"Yes."

He straightened. "I understand. I'll go. Let my crew stay with *Voyager*."

Janeway stood. "Captain—" she started to argue, but he raised a hand to quiet her.

"According to Starfleet records, my fate is different from theirs." His eyes flickered between the two operatives. "This is why. Isn't it."

The operative pressed his lips into a line. "I can't answer that."

Gabriel's eyes lit up, he took it as confirmation. "Let me do this. They deserve this chance."

The operative lowered his eyes. His companion made a note, and nodded. "It's an acceptable arrangement," she agreed. Gabriel and Kathryn blinked at the sound of her voice. "Tomorrow morning."

"We can send a hologram," Janeway suggested. Returned to her ready room, now she was pacing. "Preset the ship to self-destruct."

B'Elanna bit her lip. "I might be able to construct something but I can't guarantee it will survive the journey." There were too many unknown variables.

"The time cops won't accept that," Lorca argued from the sofa.

"If I had more than twelve hours..." The Klingon engineer glanced between the two captains. She didn't want to disappoint either.

Kathryn squeezed her arm, to encourage. "See what you can do with what you have." B'Elanna nodded and left to work the problem. Janeway crossed to Lorca and sat beside him on the couch.

"You said you were going manually set the torpedos."

"We don't know how the time vortex would affect it."

Kathryn shrugged. "Worst case scenario the ship doesn't explode."

He shook his head. "We don't know what that will do to the timeline."

"I'm willing to take that risk," she answered with conviction.

He leaned closer, placed his hands over hers, folded on her lap.

"It's not your risk to take."

"Captain... Gabriel..." She raised her eyes to meet his, their faces barely inches apart. "You deserve a chance, too."

His lips curled into a sad smile.

"The captain goes down with his ship."

He was awake when the door chimed. It seemed a waste to spend his last night sleeping.

"Captain?"

She was more disheveled than he'd yet seen her, but it was oddly attractive. Or given it was her, maybe not so odd.

"Seven of Nine's discovered a second variance in the space around the *Buran's* entry point. At first we thought it was related to the arrival of the time ship, but that's been ruled out and the quantum variance is still there."

Lorca frowned. "I only understood about a third of the words in that sentence."

Janeway grinned. "There is evidence of more than one alternate timeline in the wreckage of your ship."

He shook his head, still unclear on what any of that meant. She grabbed his hands, pushed him back into the room and followed, so the doors closed behind her.

"You don't have to do this," she said, expression wild, vaguely dangerous, and still oddly-not-so-oddly attractive. More so. "There's more to the story and together we can figure it out."

"Kathryn..."

"Please," she entreated. "I know we can solve this."

Gabriel sighed, and pulled her over to the sofa to sit.

"I believe you," he answered, softly. "I believe *in* you."

Kathryn relaxed visibly, and her hands tightened over his.

"That's why I can't risk it."

She blinked. Tried to pull back, away, but he won't let go. She shook her head. "I don't understand."

Gabriel glanced away, and back. His eyes were clear and calm.

"You," he told her in a voice full of all the emotion he'd been holding back, "and your Klingon," his enemy, "and your Borg" her enemy, "worked all day and night to try and save my life." In the long, angry, lonely weeks of war and loss he'd almost forgotten what Starfleet should be. "I want this future to survive."

Kathryn's chin trembled, his loss reflected in her eyes. "But..."

He pressed his lips to hers, gathered her up into his arms, emotions spilled every which way as their bodies proved to be far ahead of their conscious selves.

"I'm going to die tomorrow," he whispered, biting her ear, "help me spend tonight forgetting."

The burnt and barely functional bridge of the *Buran* was crowded with the ship's remaining crew, and *Voyager's* senior staff. All of them spent time arguing against this course of action, but gathered now to say goodbye. Gabriel spent a moment with each. Told his crew not to mourn, they made him proud every day. Thanked the *Voyagers* for protecting his people, they made his sacrifice worthwhile. Finally they all beamed away to safety. All but one.

"Godspeed, Captain."

He cupped her chin. "Get them home, Kathryn."

She nodded, and stepped back. The light of the transporter filled the air and he was alone.

Gabriel took his seat in the captain's chair. The torpedoes were set, he could activate them with the press of a button as soon as he returned to home space. On the viewscreen he watched *Voyager* move to a safe distance as the time vortex opened and expanded to engulf his ship. An overly bright light filled the screen, the bridge, and for a brief moment between time it was as if he existed within a star.

*Do not stand at my grave and cry;
I am not there. I did not die.*

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