

## Only Human

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## Only Human

by [nostalgia](#)

### Summary

She leans back, crosses her legs. Her hands sit still on the armrests. She feels the sudden jump to warp speed and listens to the omnipresent humming of the engines. Voyager is powerful and beautiful and most importantly it's hers. She settles back into her natural habitat.

And she doesn't look at Chakotay.

### Notes

I believe it is a legal requirement to eventually write something set after That Episode With The Monkey if you're going to do Voyager fic. This, then, is my attempt.

The Captain is a monolith, unyielding. Water flows around her and light illuminates her presence. She is infinite and perfect.

"Captain on the Bridge."

They all turn to look at her, enraptured. They want to see someone more than human and she makes sure that they do. She nods from one crewmember to another in turn, glancing away at the last moment to avoid making eye contact with Chakotay. She walks to the captain's chair, takes her seat with a holy dignity.

She speaks: "Tom, resume course for the Alpha Quadrant."

"Yes, ma'am." It sounds like 'Amen.'

She leans back, crosses her legs. Her hands sit still on the armrests. She feels the sudden jump to warp speed and listens to the omnipresent humming of the engines. Voyager is powerful and beautiful and most importantly it's hers. She settles back into her natural habitat.

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Kathryn has always been tactile with her crew. It comforts them, makes them feel protected. She bestows touches like favours, a reward for a job well done. She squeezes Harry's shoulder and he lights up, dazzling and dazzled all at once. "Good job," she says, because the words mean so much to them.

It never felt inappropriate before, because she never *wanted* to touch them. She never felt like she was transgressing a boundary, like she was reaching for something forbidden. It was always innocent, before.

She doesn't touch Chakotay. Not any more.

--

Once upon a time, a week ago, things were different. She gave up hope of getting back to her ship and became briefly, fleetingly, human.

Separated from the rest of her crew she had allowed herself to think like a civilian, to stop being the captain of a starship.

But last week might as well be an eternity ago, and will never come round again.

--

She summons him to her sanctum, stands on the upper level to gain the advantage of height. He should have to look up to face her.

"Kathryn," he says, and her instinct is to flee. She holds herself steady and stares him down. He tries again: "Captain," and this time she nods.

"We should talk about it," he says. He doesn't need to clarify what 'it' means, there is only one possible 'it' in this room.

She spreads her hands, palms upwards. Almost a shrug. "Why? What would be the point?"

"It might help us process things." 'Things,' like 'it,' need no further explanation.

"There's nothing to process," she tells him. "Nothing happened. Nothing did happen, nothing will happen, nothing *is happening*. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

She nods. "Good."

"Is there anything else you'd like me to forget about?" He's far too calm about all this. She almost hates him for it, but of course she doesn't. He speaks again, "Sometimes I wish we had a ship's counsellor on board."

She tilts her head. "What makes you think I could ever tell anyone what I did?"

"It wasn't just you." Sharing the blame is probably his way of trying to help. But it doesn't, in fact, help at all.

"I can't afford to be fallible. I can't allow myself to have feelings."

"You're not a Vulcan," he protests.

Oh, but wouldn't that be so much easier? That easy serenity, the dedication to logical behaviour. She steps down, moves past him to her desk. "I have paperwork to catch up on," she says, and he takes the hint.

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It's over the moment they hear from Voyager. Kathryn piles her hair back into its regulation bun, re-armours herself with her uniform. She packs away the remaining supplies and anything she might have felt for the man who is once again her First Officer.

She makes it look effortless, because she has to.

--

She finds herself in Tuvok's quarters at two in the morning. He watches silently as she paces the room, doesn't prompt her to speak until she finds the words herself.

"I have to talk to someone," she says, finally. "But I can't. It's a delicate matter, it's not something I want other people to hear about."

"Kathryn," he says, and the name shocks her a little, "I would never betray a confidence. Anything you tell me would remain between us. I would tell no other."

"Even T'Pel?"

"Even T'Pel."

So she tells Tuvok about New Earth. Everything about New Earth, even and especially the parts that she needs to forget. He sits impassive, occasionally asking for clarification but never saying anything that judges her for her failings.

Finally she says, "I have to be strong, Tuvok."

"You are."

She shakes her head. "Not strong enough. I'm too emotional, I can't repress everything."

"You are not a Vulcan."

"That's what Chakotay said."

"Then perhaps I have been wrong to doubt his wisdom," quips Tuvok, and Kathryn laughs.

"You've never liked him."

"But it is obvious that you consider him a close friend. I have learned to tolerate him for your sake."

"I'm sure he'd be glad to hear that."

"I too would prefer that my thoughts on Commander Chakotay do not leave this room."

“Your secret is safe with me,” she says. “So what do I do?”

Tuvok raises an eyebrow. “Nothing.”

“Nothing?” she repeats, surprised.

“Further intimacy is obviously unwise, however, you cannot eliminate your emotions. Therefore there is nothing you can do.”

She rubs her eyes. “I’ll be honest, I was hoping you’d be able to tell me how to fix this.”

He tilts his head to the side. “Alas, Captain, some things cannot be fixed.”

She hopes he’s wrong, but he’s usually right.

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She can’t avoid Chakotay – their duties intertwine too much. She sits beside him on the bridge staring resolutely ahead and speaking to him only when she has to. The crew probably thinks they’ve had a fight. There are almost certainly rumours. She hopes that none of them come anywhere close to the truth.

She hates wanting things that she can’t have, it frustrates her. It makes her irritable.

Somehow it helps that Tuvok knows, if only because she can tell herself that he’ll stop her doing anything foolish. He watches over her from his post, and it reminds her not to touch Chakotay.

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“I hate this,” says Chakotay, unprompted. They’re in her ready-room going over the morning reports, alone because she can’t think of an excuse to bring a chaperone to these meetings. “You can’t even bring yourself to look at me.”

She lifts her gaze to meet his. “There,” she says, “are you happy now?”

“I’d be a lot happier if you didn’t look so damned miserable all the time.”

“I didn’t realise my moods were so offensive,” she says, lightly. “Why do you let it bother you?”

“Because I care about you,” he says. “At the very least you’re my friend.”

“I’m your captain,” she corrects.

“The two aren’t mutually exclusive. Captains can have friends.”

“But they can’t have lovers.”

“No,” he agrees, quietly, “they can’t.” They stare at each other in silence, and then eventually he speaks again: “If things were different -”

“They’re not.”

He tries again. “If we got home by next year -”

“Then I’d be with Mark.”

“But if -”

She cuts in to silence him. “I’m not going to torture myself, Chakotay. I certainly won’t torture you.”

“Hope isn’t torture.”

“Are you sure about that?” She herself is quite certain that it is. When he doesn’t answer, she says, “Move on.”

“Is that an order?”

“If it needs to be, then yes.”

He considers. “Only if we can be friends again. I miss you.”

“How can you miss me? We sit next to each other all day every day. We practically live together.”

“And yet.”

She relents. “What are you doing for lunch?” she asks.

“Whatever you’re doing.”

She manages a smile. “It’s a date.”

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The Captain is an oak tree, moving with the wind. She towers over everything and draws her strength from her surroundings. She might not be human but she is very much alive.

She sits in her chair, ruling over her bridge like a benevolent monarch. This is her ship, these are her people. She's going to get them home safely even if it kills her. She hopes it won't.

She turns to her left and looks at Chakotay.

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