

## Set Me as a Seal

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# Set Me as a Seal

by [Spirallds](#)

## Summary

There are things that one who cannot forget should never be made to remember.

## Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

*Please view the prerecorded message. Please view the prerecorded message. Please view the prerecorded message.* The computerized voice looped incessantly. While they could have overridden the code, the easiest solution was to view the prerecorded message.

But instead of someone who might explain the current condition of this ship named Voyager, the image was nothing but a blank wall.

The man stuffed his hands into his pockets and began to stalk around the edges of the empty image.

"Think they waited too long to document what happened?" suggested his blonde companion.

The man ran a hand back and forth through his hair, considering. It was then that into the framed image a man stepped. The figure ran his hands over the tidy, short hair on his mostly bald head before turning toward the camera.

"Doesn't look like a man about to leave his last will and testament," she said.

"You are aboard the USS Voyager, Intrepid class, from what Starfleet calls the Alpha Quadrant, though if you are from here, you likely think of this as the Alpha, and not the Delta, quadrant."

"What's he talking about?" asked the woman.

The man pressed a finger to his lips, eyes focused on the image.

"When did you go all mums-the-word?" she muttered under her breath before settling cross-legged onto the floor.

"I am the Doctor. If you are viewing this, then the probability is high that you followed my directions. Thank you." The image paused and pursed his lips. "Particularly given that you are someone too curious to leave a beacons plague ship well enough alone. The following is a detailed record of all events that have led to this moment. In doing so, I hope to make it unnecessary for my program, the Emergency Medical Hologram, to be initiated. There are things that one who cannot forget should never be made to remember."

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"Are you sure about this, Kes?" asked Neelix, "We're beyond the star systems I know and I have a bad feeling about Chacachacare."

"Yes, I am. Their children are ill. Besides, I'm the Doctor's assistant; who else would go?"

Even I knew that Kes had moved into her own quarters, one nearer to Sick Bay. As I understood relationship protocol, it meant that Kes and Neelix were no longer a couple. Her body language seemed to match my assessment, though Neelix's actions suggested otherwise. Perhaps there would be an opportunity later to ask Kes. But then I recognized that might be

poor form, even if we were close friends. Lieutenant Paris was the better choice. He understood these things. Although that didn't help me - or Kes - in the moment.

"I can assure you, Mr. Neelix, every precaution has been taken with Kes' safety, including a wide-spectrum vaccine," I said, certain that would take care of the matter.

Leaning in closer, his eyebrows bunched in consternation, Neelix tried to whisper, which meant his voice carried all the more. "I'm sure the Doctor has been thorough, but the only thing we know for sure about this planet is that it's full of people who are *sick*. As a hologram, he's not at risk like you will be."

"What am I, reconstituted rations?" muttered Paris as he walked past them and began the final check of the shuttle.

"See? Tom's going. He can assist the Doctor. I'm sure you could be a greater help by staying aboard the ship," said Neelix. "Or if you insist on going, perhaps I should join you."

"Voyager will be at Tobago, trading for dilithium. You're needed there. I know a lot more about healing than mining, so I'm needed here. But I appreciate the concern." Her tone was firm, though when her hand that touched Neelix's cheek it somehow softened the rejection. It was a technique I have not yet been able to master.

Lieutenant Paris popped his head out the shuttle door opening. "All aboard!"

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We arrived in the twilight, with Lieutenant Paris easing our shuttle into the docking port of the colony's main building. As expected, the landing was impeccable. It had been an odd request by the Chacachacarians, but they had insisted a daylight arrival was unacceptable. Captain Janeway had been displeased, but given Lieutenant Paris' assurances he could manage it and the urgent necessity of dilithium, she'd acquiesced.

The Urich, whose title was akin to mayor, greeted us along with an entourage of what I presumed were officials. What communications had not made obvious was that they were all shorter than Kes, but with shoulders twice as wide. I found this curious, as it suggested they were from a planet with greater gravity than this one.

"Thank you for this act of kindness," said the Urich, as she curtsied low, her multiverdant turban still upright. The men in the group removed their caps and dipped their heads, revealing that they all had but a thin ring of hair with very shiny bald pates. Another woman with a turban made of elaborate twists presented them with three espresso-sized cups of steaming liquid with small bits of green floating in it, likely leaves. We had not been told of any greeting ceremony.

"For us?" I asked, pulling out my tricorder. "As an Emergency Medical Hologram, I do not eat. May I ask what is in this... tea?"

"Whatever it is, I doubt it's alive," said Paris, tipping his head toward the tricorder.

The woman's tray tremored, but then she answered. "Maranta leaves. It is the first drink for new arrivals. Tomorrow your first meal will be a porridge of maranta roots."

Before I could object, Kes took a cup. "Thank you," she said, then sipped. She smiled. "It has such a light taste. I would love to learn more about maranta when we have time. Perhaps I can add it to my garden."

Something unwound in the woman and she began to chat happily with Kes as Paris joined her in drinking the tea. While they drank, Lieutenant Paris' eyes flicked from the Chacachacarians' heads to my own and then back. I couldn't help but notice the way the Lieutenant's pupil's dilated - a sure sign of mischief - before Paris dropped his gaze, trying to resemble something akin to a representative of Star Fleet officer.

"We've prepared a room for you here at the Center, if you'll follow my assistant, Gero," said the Urich.

The man led them to a room no bigger than a holding cell, but before I could fuss, Kes smiled at Gero, saying, "Thank you for making space for us. I hope we haven't inconvenienced you. Is it too late to examine the children tonight?"

"Yes, but I will take you to them first thing in the morning!"

I took note of the way the man beamed in response - not only to Kes' words, which were much more complimentary than my own would have been, but also in response to her overall demeanor. I made note that when we returned to Voyager, I would ask her to help me fine-tune my subroutines on bedside manner to include diplomatic missions, as my mobile emitter exponentially increased the chance of first contact. I never had the chance to ask her.



The next morning, when the exterior door opened, Kes and Paris each raised a hand to shade their eyes. While the sky was thickly clouded, the constant flashes of cloud to cloud lightning lit the sky.

"Holy Lava Lamp, Batman," said Paris.

To the humanoid eye, moving outside was similar to being under that strobe light at one of Paris' retro gatherings, as arms, legs, heads, and mouths looked as if they moved in a herky-jerky way. What that had to do with superheated viscous rock as a light source was unclear.

An occasional bolt of lightning came downward, but was drawn off to the rod on the communications building. It was the only structure that incorporated metal. The rest of the buildings in this loud, dusty outpost were an amalgamation of the area's stone and wood.

Our guide brought us to various dwellings where I examined the children, all who were so near to a state of coma they had to be aided to swallow the pale broth. Even though the children were my patients, I couldn't help but notice the adults. All had scars. Pock marks on their faces and necks, patches of angry-colored skin on their arms and legs from healed sores, and blackened nails. Signs that this was not the first illness to sweep the community.

As we walked to the next dwelling, Paris and Kes, who had been behind me, talking quietly, stepped up to each side. "Have you noticed their hair?" asked Paris in a whisper.

I hadn't, but with a quick scan, I responded, "Not particularly. The majority have some sort of head covering."

"We noticed that too," said Kes.

I shrugged. "Likely a cultural affectation."

"But the ones without hats have no more hair than you, Doc."

"Again, that may be within normal variation for these people."

"What about other hair?" whispered Kes. "They seem to lack the fine hairs most humanoids usually have on their arms and faces."

"Mmm. It is inconclusive but worth additional consideration, along with the other markers of illness." I knew their eyes were on me, the question unasked, but I did not elaborate.

"Later, then," said Paris.

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The initial illness for which our help had been requested was easily diagnosed. "Simply put," I told the Urich, "the children have consumed an excessive amount of maranta. Tell their parents not to feed them anything made with maranta, and their lethargy will lift. They might even regrow some of their hair."

The Urich furrowed her brow. "But we must all eat the maranta every day. It is what keeps death's hunters at bay."

I narrowed my eyes, trying to discern the reality behind the symptomology. "What do you mean?"

It was then that Lieutenant Paris rushed in, pulling Gero with him. "Where's Kes?" he demanded.

"I believe she's collecting maranta seedlings with Annona," answered the Urich.

I could see the muscle of Lieutenant Paris' jaw pulse as he clenched his teeth. "What's the matter, Lieutenant Paris?"

Paris turned to the Urich. "Tell him what this place is."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"You're not from here," he pressed.

"Nearly all the children are, but you're right, none of the adults were born on Chacachacare," she answered.

I measured her breathing, her pupils, and the quality of her voice. The Ulrich was not hiding anything, yet Lieutenant Paris's agitation was increasing.

"Why did the adults come here?" Paris asked. "Or perhaps I should say, why were you *sent* here?"

"To contain the outbreaks."

She said it simply, like the common knowledge it was among her people. Outbreaks. Multiple. It explained the pock marks, the scars, all of the signs of gravely ill people who had regained health. "They weren't just outbreaks," I said slowly. "They were epidemics."

Gero smiled, shaking his head. "No, no. no. That's why we came here. So it didn't become an epidemic. We came here to die so that our people might live."

"But you're not dead." I hated to point out the obvious, but there were things the Chacachacarians thought so obvious as to not be worth mentioning to me. How could I properly address their medical needs without all the information?

"At first, there were always a few who survived each illness. Eventually we discovered maranta. It changed everything. Everyone who eats of it, lives. That's why the children, why all of us must eat the maranta," said the Ulrich.

"Providence," said Gero. "And because my son is healthy, he has returned to our home world to petition for the reunification of families."

I frowned. "Gero, your son can be healthy while being a carrier. Those without the immunities he has built up may be incredibly vulnerable. In fact, it is quite likely he is bringing back a mutated version of the various contagions, something your home world has never seen."

Gero and the Ulrich paled, turning to each other and talking in low, worried voices.

"Doc," said Lieutenant Paris, his right eye twitching like it did when he had a pitiful poker hand, "their home world is Tobago."

"The crew." I closed my eyes, running scenarios. For how long had Tobago dealt with various health crises by removing its people than finding cures and building up a natural immunity? What did this bode for the state of their medical knowledge? How fast would a new strain move through the population? Certainly the odds were in such that Gero's son was nowhere near the crew. "Have you contacted--"

"I already tried to hail Voyager. There was no response," answered Paris.

"It could just be the ionic cloud layer," I offered.

"It could be."

"It is our lightning season," offered the Ulrich. "That is why we had you land at twilight."

Kes and Annona entered the room, chattering away and cradling armfuls of maranta root as if it were a bouquet of roses. "There you are! Annona's been sharing the stories of the miracle of the maranta. It has such interesting properties!"

"Indeed," I said drily, barely opening my eyes, more concerned in piecing things together than engaging in social niceties.

"Tom?" asked Kes, setting down her bundle.

He shook his head. "Long story. Not good. The Doc will fill you in. Sorry. I've got to get back to the shuttle and hail the Captain." I noted that he did have time to squeeze her hand on his way by.

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"I have heard humans speak of how, when they look back at a crisis, it is all a blur. That they run on a sort of autopilot, eventually coming out of the haze when equilibrium returns. I do not have such a luxury. I remember every moment. I can tell you the exact time Lieutenant Paris made contact with the Captain. I know that the length of my consultation with Diagnostic Program Alpha 11 was twelve minutes and nineteen seconds, cut short when Neelix's internal organs began to liquefy. He was pronounced dead four minutes later."

The man had since joined his companion, also sitting cross-legged on the ground. While his face was a stoic mask, he pulled from his pocket a white handkerchief and pressed it into her hand.

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"Neelix?" mewled Kes.

I had no idea that she had been standing there. I grabbed her by the shoulders and spun her around, pushing her toward the shuttle's door. "Lieutenant Paris!"

Paris popped his head inside, "Doc?"

By then, Kes was collapsed on the floor and I was crouched behind her, my arms wrapped around her.

"What--"

"Neelix is dead."

The lieutenant mouthed one of his 20th century expletives then scooped Kes up and carried her from the shuttle. Her keening reverberated through the bay. As much as I wished to comfort her, Lieutenant Paris was with her. If I was brutally honest with myself, it was Tom Paris whose skills made him better able to provide the care Kes needed. My skills qualified me for finding a solution to this virus before it killed more of our crew.

I returned to the viewscreen. "Find out if there is anywhere on Tobago where maranta grows?"





"When will they arrive?" asked Paris.

I resisted the urge to say, *Forty-two minutes sooner from the last time you asked*, instead, without looking up from my tricorder, I answered, "In eleven point two-six hours."

The lieutenant groaned and slumped low in his chair, but otherwise kept quiet. Kes stood next to the room's one window, staring out, just as she had since we had first received word of Voyager's return.

As the test ran, I tried to use the time to consider variables, but my mind kept returning to the calculation of the timetable between the Away Team's first contact with the Tobagans, Neelix's first signs of illness, and then death. What troubled me was that even as short as the time span was between the first and the second events, the number of people with whom the away party would have had contact, and the number of people with whom those people would have had contact, and the number--

The tricorder beeped, pulling me from my dark thoughts. Both Kes and the lieutenant looked up at me expectantly. "You have been exposed to several contagions - though not as many as I thought were possible, which is good news."

"If contagion exposure is the good news, Doc, I'm not looking forward to the bad news."

"Well, then I shall have to title it as being the better news. You will not get ill. In ways I still do not comprehend, the maranta boosted your immune system and your bodies were able to create antibodies that conquered the contagions."

"That's good news for Voyager, isn't it?" asked Paris. "You can make an antidote, right?"

Kes bit her lower lip. She knew. I was sure of it.

"Well," I said, choosing my words carefully, "it's not bad news. And you are right, Lieutenant Paris, I will follow up these results with creating an antidote from your blood's antibodies."

Paris grinned and held out his arm. "Take as much as you need, Doc."

"The sample I took earlier is sufficient for the time being."

"Doctor," said Kes. "Which would be more helpful for your work? Blood samples from the children who have been raised here, or samples from adults who were sent here, yet survived?"

I wasn't convinced either was helpful. But Kes likely knew that. She also knew that she and the lieutenant would be underfoot if they stayed with me in the tiny lab. But it was more than that. They *needed* to have something to do.

"Yes, a multivariate analysis might yield additional information. Perhaps a cross sample of adults, based on illness and times of arrival," I suggested.

"Thank you, Doctor. Tom, will you conduct the interviews while I collect the samples?" asked Kes.

"Thank you." What I hadn't told them was that if I first could not generate a solution to their carrier status, they would not be able to return to Voyager, as they would infect the crew the way Gero's son, Rolden had.

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"I was able to create a vaccine specific to the passive viruses prior to Voyager's arrival, and once it was dispersed through the atmospheric system, Kes and the Lieutenant could rejoin the crew without needing an environment suits."

Within the image of the viewscreen, the Doctor smiled for the first time, and the pair of explorers exchanged looks. But the smile then slid away.

"I also anticipated the vaccine would be a base for creating an antidote, thus speeding the solution along. I was too optimistic.

"While my mobile emitter was beamed up during a lull in the weather, therefore allowing me to return immediately to Sick Bay immediately, Kes and Paris had to wait until evening to fly the shuttle back. For their sakes, I was glad for the delay in their rejoining the crew, allowing me to assess the scope of our situation. Another dozen crew were dead; both the autopsies and funeral rites were completed before the shuttle landed. It mattered little, as Sick Bay was already beyond its intended capacity."

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"Doctor," said Kes, her voice low, "Where is Tom?"

"At the jettison port." By the seventh day, there were so many dead, that we could not even send them forth with a proper casement, instead cold freezing each body before jettison. The force often shattering them into a thousand pieces. To provide some sense of ceremony, Lieutenant Commander Tuvok provided a paper crane for each. I posited that it was by sheer force of will that Tuvok kept himself functioning as long as he did.

"Harry is asking for him. It will be soon."

"Stay with Ensign Kim. Given when he left, the Lieutenant should be back in less than six minutes. I will send him to the ensign immediately."

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"As was to be expected, it was hardest when it was a friend. The adventures Tom Paris and Harry Kim had shared together..."

The explorers twined their fingers together.

"It was after the Ensign's death, after both Kes and Paris refused to stop their frenetic pace of caring for the dying, that I took extreme action.



"But shouldn't I stay here?" Paris asked. "You can't work on a cure if you need to handle triage."

"I can manage for the limited time you will be assisting Kes in the hydroponics bay. It is important you gather the samples." It wasn't a lie. It just wasn't the truth he thought it was.

When I had confirmation that both were inside the garden, I gave the command. "Computer, please lock down the hydroponics bay for 24 hours. That's doctor's orders."

Paris hailed me, as I expected, he beet red in frustration. "If you think your lock down will work, you underestimate my ingenuity!"

"No, Lieutenant, I don't. However, it is my hope that you will consider following my recommendations instead of pouring your finite energy reserves into an elaborate breakout scheme. You and Kes are exhausted. You are beyond exhausted. Whether you wish to admit it or not, you are of no use to the crew of this ship in such a state. There is both food and sleeping pads in there. Avail yourselves of both."

"There isn't time for this!" he growled.

My shoulders slumped for reasons that went beyond my programming. "Please."

Paris stood there, his mouth moving, but there were no words, until finally, "Okay, Doc. Signing off."



"By the time I left the hydroponics bay, over half the crew was dead. Both were better about catching snatches of sleep, albeit barely so. More than once I found them asleep at a table, forks in their hands as if they had been mid-bite. However, they were also too wily to allow themselves to be alone together in any room outside of sick bay, fearing a repeat action on my part.

"They also refused to believe it was hopeless, so for their sake, I continued to work on a solution. Multiple times I was able to slow the progression, but inevitably, it mutated.

"Once I had calculated that the remaining crew would all be dead within 24 hours, I used a hypospray to render each of them unconscious. First Kes, as her quarters were closest and I was able to be there right as she was about to exit her quarters. Then Tom, though I used only enough to make him more pliant."

"Doc," he slurred as I half carried him as we walked down the hall, "don't do this. Kes and I... You don't need to do this alone."

"The sentiment is appreciated," I said as I lowered him into the chair within Kes' quarters. Then I held the hypospray to his neck. "Sleep well."

The lieutenant's fingers curled tight to my uniform and he gritted out the words even as the drug took effect. "We. Won't. Leave..."

"They were both furious with me. But as we three were the only ones left aboard Voyager, their fury drained away as the now unavoidable grief overflowed. They became more like specters than myself. I knew no way to ease their sorrow or my own.

"As for Chacachacare and Tobago, I do not know their fate. If I were a better man, a truer physician, I would have turned my attention to them. Though Kes reminded me that I didn't need to be flesh and bone for my heart to break." The recorded image of the Doctor stared off into the middle space, unmoving, and then the screen faded black.

The young woman sniffled, still on the floor, her legs now akimbo. Then she blew her nose in the handkerchief, the sound obscenely loud in the silence.

"But what," she hiccuped, "what about Kes and Tom?"

"They're here," said the man, now up and inspecting a work station.

"How'd you know?"

"They said they'd never leave him." The man was leaning over a work station, his fingers skimming lightly over the buttons, lights, and screens.

"But that was ages ago, wasn't it?" she asked, coming to her feet.

"They don't sound like the type to make that promise lightly," he said.

"I know I didn't."

"Yes!" He exclaimed, jabbing a finger onto the schematic. "Stasis chambers." He reached out his hand to hers. "Shall we?"

## End Notes

Thank you to Soundingsea and Sunnyd\_lite for their beta work. all errors are my own.

The wikipedia page on *Chacachacare* and its leper colony was a source for several names in this fic.

And yes, there is an implied crossover going on.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!