

Thirty Hours

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Rating: PG-13

Summary: Snippets and moments, taken from the thoughts of Kathryn Janeway during the last 30 hours on New Earth. POV KJ

Disclaimer: Voyager doesn't belong to me. If it did, Resolutions would have looked a lot different.

A/N: I set my own timeframe and presume that it was midmorning when Tuvok called. So we start at 10am.

This story is a one-time-only thing. It is way out of my comfort zone because of the perspective I used, and I merely wrote it to prove something. Usually, I don't even read 1st person stories - much less do I write them.

1

Almost every emotion I have expected to feel. There are so many of them, and so many I *should feel* in that moment. But all that is inside me are the least logical, the least plausible, the least *possible* ones.

We are going to return to Voyager.

We are going to continue our journey home, to the Alpha Quadrant, to Earth.

We are going to have the chance to see the blue planet again, after all.

You manage a small, encouraging smile. You are strong for me, happy for me, even though it requires much effort from you. I know that I should be happy; happier than you are.

But all I feel is sadness and disappointment.

2

We don't start packing right away. We sit outside the cabin, our little house that has become the center of our life here in these past weeks; sit in silence, stare into the woods, up to the sky. I consider counting clouds or blades of grass to distract myself. I sense your hands twitching while you stare at a small pile of logs you had gotten ready for the boat you wanted to build.

By now you've understood that, just like you, I do my best to ignore the truth of what will happen tomorrow. That, after all my fierce hoping and frantic searching, I've made peace with spending the rest of my life on this planet, and that thus the prospect of leaving it again is nothing I'm looking forward to.

When a breeze rustles the leaves, lets the trees, lets nature around us whisper, you take my hand. And I let you. You hold my hand tightly enclosed in yours, and I wonder if you would let me go again if I tried to now.

How symbolic.

It will never be like this again.

3

Stowing away all the things we need to take with us seems impossible. The fond memories connected to them make them so much bigger than they are, and I fear that these memories are so fragile that putting them into boxes will destroy them.

Something that won't harm them is carelessness. Our packing is too slow for that. It is as if there is an invisible resistance, strings attached to our arms, something that wants us to keep from doing what has to be done.

When I glance over to you, I find you staring at objects before you put them away in one of the boxes. You look at them like you would look at something that is doomed to die. To be forgotten.

Or perhaps something that never had the chance to live.

There is this part of me that feels the same.

4

I find it strange to neatly fold my dresses and arrange them in one of the smaller containers like I'd just take out and wear them again as soon as we are on Voyager. I know though that I may never even touch them again. They are evidence of a life that was lived in another world, in every sense.

I like these dresses; I liked the freedom they provided. I was never a woman to wear dresses or skirts because I usually found trousers more practical. I still do. But I've come to appreciate the feeling of soft cloth playing around my legs; it gives this impression of lightness I can't explain.

Now I see the clothing I've learned to love vanish, one by one, in the semi-darkness of the simple repository unit and wonder, just for a second, if they felt like being put into their casket could they feel something.

I shake my head to banish the thoughts; I know I have to be reasonable.

I have to be grateful.

Right now, I am neither.

5

You ask me where I want you to put this and that, and I want nothing more than to say: Wherever. As long as you leave me alone with it and I don't have to think about it. Of course I don't do that; I'm the captain, I can't afford putting personal feelings first.

But no, I remember then; right now I am not the captain. I'm Kathryn. A woman who has found a new home on an unknown planet ten thousands of light years away from my *real* home. One that has never felt so foreign like it does now.

It costs me a lot of effort to make my tone sound light, but we both know that you've long since seen behind the mask. That I still have it in place is a mere habit.

All the same, you don't comment on it; you return to the task at hand, your duty, like any good 'Fleet officer would.

But you're Maquis, and I'm the respected Starfleet captain.

And I can't help but notice the irony.

6

There is a flower you appear with in front of me; the one you had found in the first days of our stay and put into a pot. I can't remember why you did it, but I think it had something to do with my studies then; something about using this planet's fauna as well to try and find a cure.

Knowing how much you had already gotten used to life on what had been chosen by fate to become our new home, and that you'd rather seen me do the same - accept and move on - I had been surprised and touched by this gesture.

Now the beautiful plant with a reddish-blue delicate blossom is another painful reminder of what has ended a good six hours ago, and what will be forever done with in another day.

I can't help but lightly touch the petals; they are soft, like velvet. Then I tell you that we will take it with us; who knows what secrets it might still carry.

You nod; a faint smile I only notice because I know you well enough appears on your features; you are happy that we won't leave the flower behind.

It can be the symbol of a new beginning.

7

Disassembling the technical devices demands us to work together. Until now, since the moment Tuvok informed us about Voyager coming back, we haven't spoken much; only the few words that were necessary. One could claim we even avoided the other as much as possible. Is it because we ignore what we don't want to admit, or because we don't know what to say to each other, I have no idea.

Even working together now is done in almost-silence; a silence that is starting to get awkward. After you became my first officer on Voyager, we developed the ability to communicate without words, and it always was something I appreciated. It was almost like a symbiosis.

Now it seems to me that nothing is left of it. Not in these minutes, or hours. We've done nothing, nothing to be ashamed of or feel guilty for, and still it is as if Tuvok caught us right when we were...

I shake my head, for the second time in the past hours, and ban the thought from my mind; it's the last thing I want to think of right now.

You look at me in confusion when my headshake is a bit fiercer than I intend it to be; but when I tell you that it was just a reflex caused by an insect flying by, you accept it.

8

I have excused myself for a moment; I want to visit my bathtub, the one you built for me, one last time. So far, we haven't made a decision whether we take it with us; it means more ballast we can't afford, and since there are bathtubs on Voyager, we also wouldn't need it.

It hurts, though, to leave it behind; you put so much effort into it, and you did it just for me - never once have you used the tub yourself. I'm not even sure you were ever going to - it is too small for you.

The moment you showed it to me I was so delighted that I almost hugged you. It was the first in a series of strangely uncomfortable moments where a decision needed to be made about who we are on this planet - captain and commander or Kathryn and Chakotay. I know you sensed my movement that would have brought me into your arms hadn't I stopped myself in time. I also know that there was this glint of disappointment in your eyes.

The talk we had, the one I hoped to define parameters with - looking back, I'm not so sure anymore why I brought it up to start with. I knew, was expecting then, to spend the rest of my life with you on this planet. I'm not so presumptuous to assume we could have stayed *just friends* forever.

I didn't want that either.

I still don't.

9

I could spend hours here.

My hands stroke the surface of the tub, my fingers follow every line of the wood you've used to make it of. It's a calming feeling; one I never would have expected to find comfort in.

And deep down inside me, I admit to myself that it has nothing to do with the object itself. It could be anything. As much as I love the tub as such; in the end it is just about the fact that you've crafted it, with your own hands, and you did it to make me feel more at home on this planet.

I smile at the memory of how you came up with all those helpful items. The headboards. Some shelves. The tub. A sunroof. And this small table to attach to the tub after one end or the other of my towel always ended up in the water when I had it lying on the rim. Most things you created for me; the spoiled child of the 24th century. I felt ungrateful because I couldn't fully appreciate your work; work that spoke of giving up, at least to my mind.

Only when I began helping you after the storm, I understood why you worked so hard. It provided a feeling of doing something useful; of my existence still having a purpose. Repairing the shelter, starting my gardening... there was progress, there was something new every day. All of a sudden, there was a life again where I thought it had already come to an end.

I know that when I return to Voyager, I will have a life with a purpose as well.

It frightens me the I'm not all that sure if I still want it.

10

Dusk has arrived about half an hour ago, and by now, it has become dark beneath the trees where I'm standing. Roofed by branches and twigs hung with countless leaves, not a single beam of moonlight reaches the ground here.

A few steps away, on the clearing we're residing at, it looks different. There the light of two bright moons illuminates everything it meets, and is so bright that it can compete with the sun. In our first night, I looked up in awe at the two silver globes. They are slightly out of phase, never reflecting the same amount of light, which makes them even more fascinating.

Now and then, they are tinged with a greenish hue - something you once commented on by joking that someone had forgotten to clean the planet's silverware of its verdigris before our arrival. That was just before you promised me that one day, we'd take the shuttle and take a closer look at *New Earth's* companions.

11

Slowly I walk back to the cabin, and when I enter it, I find you sitting before your sand painting. Red-colored sand rests in the palm of your hand, and you slightly move your fingers, rolling the particles around, letting them fall to and fro while you watch them.

You have to be miles away with your thoughts - when you notice me standing in the room, you startle a bit. I smile at you, and after a short moment your expression softens where it was frozen in a frown when I came in.

After I decline your offer to make dinner - eating is not the last thing on my mind - you say that we should call it a night. I agree. I don't have high hopes to be able to catch sleep, but at least I will have tried to. I will have tried to pretend normality.

We look at each other before we both vanish behind our partitions, and your face will be forever burned into my memory. There is this look of profound sadness and loss; just for the fraction of a second it crosses your features, but I see it. How could it miss it?

There has to be the same expression on my face.

12

I can't sleep. It's no surprise, nor something that annoys me. It's a fact I accept as it is. I may have gone to bed, but I was wide awake since Tuvok called us, and I suspect my mind wants to make the most of these remaining hours on the planet. Sleep would be a waste of time.

I turn from one side to the other and back again, and wonder if lying down at all wasn't already the wrong decision. My mother always said that even if I wouldn't sleep, I should at least lie down, because it helped to relax. When I was young, I wanted to hear nothing of it; later I admitted that she was right. But this time, if anything, it only has made me more awake - and more restless.

Despite everything, I still want to sleep - and if only one hour. I can't, though.

Sighing, I sit up and turn on my bedside lamp, take my book, and lean back against the headboard; one of the first things you built for us here.

But all I can do is stare at the page without reading even one word.

13

It's been thirteen hours since Tuvok contacted us and told us that Voyager was coming to get us.

Thirteen hours.

Since I was a child, and over and over again throughout the years, I have wondered about this number, and people's superstitions. The thirteen as an unlucky number? I never believed it.

In school, I was number thirteen in the student's list of my class that was sorted by surnames. At the academy, my room number was 2-13. And mother's birthday is also on a thirteenth.

I never felt that the number was unlucky. Quite the contrary. When no one wanted it - wherever and in whatever way - I was too happy to claim it.

As I watch the chronometer in the faint light of the small lamp beside me, I catch myself wishing that, just this once, it would be an unlucky number.

14

I stand outside the cabin again. It is of no use to remain in bed when I won't sleep, so I have gotten up.

This night, it has gotten cooler than ever before. Or it is just me; I don't care. I wrap my arms around myself and take in what I will never see again.

The mountains we never got to explore; the path that leads to the river we saw not enough of; the plains stretching behind a thin line of trees we never got to wander upon. The animals we never got to see, or the flowers we will never discover.

I smell the sweet fragrances of another planet far away from Earth and yet so much like it we would never breath again.

Yes, I never loved nature much. Leading the rough life, not having all the comforts of the 24th century. Of a spaceship. After ten weeks on this planet, however, this has become what gives me inner peace. I've never felt at peace so much - with myself, my life, my fate, my past and present and future. With everything.

Out there, war is awaiting us. There are fights to fight. But there is also new space to explore. There's everything to do I always dreamt of, I worked so hard for.

And against what I trusted to be the unshakeable core of my being, I'm ready to abandon this dream.

15

I feel you step up behind me more than I hear you. There's an awareness of you and your presence I've never felt for anyone else in my life. I was always mindful and observing, and only few things got past me unnoticed.

But for them, I always had to rely on my physical senses - hearing, seeing, smelling even.

It's different with you and in the beginning, it confused me. Now I feel comfortable with it. Never before had I this awareness of someone, and by now, I like to believe that there's more to it, that there are things I maybe can't understand with my scientist's mind, but that are true nonetheless.

You don't stop the usual half a step behind me; you also don't come to stand beside me. You're close instead; I can feel your warmth, and I lean back, just a bit.

We speak no words, not even when you suddenly encircle me in your arms and take over the task to warm me.

16

I don't know if it is this world's idea of humor, its way to say goodbye, or its way to express its grief over our nearing departure. But while I stand in the warmth of your embrace and we memorize this little spot of our *New Earth*, raindrops start to fall down on us.

We had a storm before; but never once in over two months rain.

I prefer to think that our planet is crying; it's better than to assume that it is as cruel as to find a way to force us inside our now almost-empty shelter. In this skeleton of a shelter; and empty hull devoid of familiarity. Everything personal is gone and it looks cold, like it did when we started to decorate and make a home of it.

You take my hand and pull me inside when the rain gets too heavy; at first, we opted to just stay out there, indulge in something we couldn't be sure we'd ever get again. But because all technology including the sonic shower has been disassembled, and our clothes are packed away, getting soaked to the bones is not the best idea. So I agree with your silent decision, your lead, as we quickly head inside.

Just like I don't disagree when you pull me close again once we're in our shelter, and kiss me.

17

Your kisses are as desperate as they are passionate; and I return them because all of a sudden, I can't think of a single reason why I shouldn't.

The beds have not yet been dismantled; they were going to be beamed aboard as they are and then have a team take care of them. When you lift me up and carry me to yours to lay me down on it I not only wish that we had more time, but also that we had a more beautiful environment.

It's not that it matters much. Or at all. Most important is that we have each other. For a few stolen moments; a few stolen hours. I cast a glance at this offending trinket that the chronometer is to me right now, and see that we have enough time left.

Enough time. As if there would ever be enough of that.

18

It is a haze, and I barely register what is happening. I decide to just feel.

Feel your skin on mine. Feel your hands caress me. Feel your lips kiss me. You worship me and for the fraction of a second, somewhere in the back of my mind, I wish you wouldn't be so perfect. What you do wouldn't be so perfect.

So giving it up as I know I'll have to again soon wouldn't be so hard.

I feel at peace. I feel at home. I feel safe.

And I allow myself to sink into this feeling, still hoping that I will never have to lose it again.

Dreams and wishes and memories will be everything I can take with me.

19

We lie in each other's arms, afterwards. You hold me close, and your warmth encloses me in a cocoon of something I can't remember to have ever felt before.

Your fingertips draw gentle circles on my skin, and your mouth seeks mine for tender kisses time and again. You press me to your body, have locked one leg around mine, and I doubt there is and space at all left between us. I can feel every muscle you move, every breath you take.

You don't get enough of me, and it's no different for me, even though I am desperate to hide it. Not from you, no.

From myself.

If I admit it, I won't be able to take it back. I won't be able to trick my mind into believing that I'm content with this being the one and only time we will be together like this.

20

I tell you that we should get up; my voice so soft and unsure of the words I'm speaking that I almost don't recognize it. You look at me with a pleading notion in these dark, soulful eyes of yours, and this ever-present voice of responsibility in my head exhorts me to withstand, to not get distracted by your obvious wishes...

... and mine. Despite my words of reason, I want nothing more than to stay in bed, in your arms, and sleep. Because now I feel this wonderful tiredness that comes with comfort, and because I should catch the sleep I won't be able to anymore once we're back on Voyager. And especially not while feeling as safe as I do now.

It doesn't matter what I want, though. It doesn't change anything either. I suppress the urge to groan when I detach myself from you, and try my best to avoid looking at your face that has protest written all over it. Yet you remain quiet.

For just a moment I want you to fight, to hold me back, to pull me down again and tell me that there is still time, that there is no need to get up... because there is none. With not much left to do, we can only sit around.

Or use whatever time we have.

21

Not even half an hour later, I find myself out of the bed and dressed. It may have taken me a bit longer than intended and you may have had almost succeeded in convincing me to stay, but it is my blessing just as it is my curse to be able to decide in favor of obligation. Every time.

You watched me while I clothed myself, choosing my uniform already, and our intimate encounter notwithstanding, I felt exposed - in more way than just the physical one. It was as if you tried to strip me of my layer of captaincy I pulled on with the uniform, just to preserve a part of the woman beneath you've gotten to know. Preserve her freedom.

There are so many questions that have arisen in the past hours, if not days or weeks - questions regarding me, and how much of an influence you could be; now more than ever as you've broken through this wall of professionalism that once guarded me.

I always believed myself to be strong and confident, but your calm and subtle determination makes my own resolve waver - and it is, at the same time, a frightening, surprising and intriguing development.

One I am not afraid of anymore, but desperate to hold on to.

23

After we've eaten a quick breakfast, I don't feel like staying in the house. The packing is almost done. Nothing that is now still waiting to be done can't be finished in half an hour.

All you do is nod when I tell you that I will take a walk. You understand my need; you understand it as a ritual to say goodbye, because you follow that ritual yourself. You will, later.

I breathe in deeply when I stroll through the forest separating our clearing from the river. The air is so fresh, so... revitalizing. Years and years of breathing filtered air on spaceships kept one from becoming too demanding when it came to one's environment; but I had forgotten how wonderful it is when a soft breeze carries the aroma of nature, of grass and earth and flowers, past one's senses.

Within minutes, minutes that fly by as I fall for nature's distraction, I reach the water flowing by with rhythmic splashing and gurgling sounds. I sit down on the riverbank, take my shoes off and dip my feet into the cold water. The stream caresses the skin on them, and dances around my calves when I glide a bit deeper.

I smile. Had we built that boat, I indeed wouldn't have needed the tub. I would have had a gigantic whirlpool right beneath the keel.

24

I regret that my bathing suit is already packed away. And in the cabin of course. I never tried swimming in that river; even though the current is rather strong, I'm skillful enough a swimmer to have managed it.

Somewhere up that river is a waterfall; I can see the glitter of flying drops from one of the higher mountains in the distance. Waterfalls offer a fascination to me I can't explain. In fantastic stories they always are associated with something mysterious and beautiful at the same time. For me, the invisible one behind the trees is just another element that makes this planet so special.

What I see around me looks like it has been taken from a painting; a perfect picture of blue sky, snow-capped mountains, trees in all hues of green, crystal clear water leisurely flowing on its way through a riverbed, dotted with rocks, amidst the valley.

Walking a bit along the waterside won't hurt, I decide. Taking as many impressions with me as I can. It's funny how one waits until it is too late to explore and discover, to look at and try what one thought before would be around a whole lifetime.

In the first weeks after our arrival we didn't do much, except for you improving our living arrangements and me working on finding a cure for the disease that has befallen us. We didn't wander far, but always stayed close to our clearing and the cabin.

Now I can't help but think that this isn't the only missed chance we'll mourn.

25

I return to the cabin, but you are nowhere to be seen. Maybe you've also taken a walk? When we still thought we would be alone here for the rest of our lives we agreed to inform the other of where we are going. Now we don't have to care too much about that anymore.

Still, I feel worried, just for a moment, just out of habit. You're much better with wildlife; and if anything, *New Earth* has proven to be as peaceful as our first impression told us.

I never share these thoughts with anyone, but more than once - and maybe more often than I should - I have contemplated the possibility of one day having to settle down on a planet here in the Delta Quadrant. If I knew I'd be forced to make that decision, for whatever reason, if I knew it would be the only way to keep my crew safe and alive, because the price for a passage through the space of just another hostile alien race was a too high one to pay... could I see into the future...

New Earth is maybe the most perfect place to start a new civilization.

But no. We have a home. We have a destination.

My eyes water, and I blame the cold wind.

If only I could see at least one leaf move.

26

You return from your walk that obviously led you deeper into the woods and in the direction of the mountains - away from the river. Some days ago, you discovered caves, and we were planning to explore them before you came up with the idea for a boat.

When you showed me the plans for the boat yesterday, I was already planning the upcoming weeks. Building the boat, making a trip down the river; maybe even up, if possible, to the waterfall. And since this planet's version of fall seems to be approaching, it would soon have been too cold to be on the water - and perfect for a hike to the mountains and their caves.

I was looking forward to exploring them. Our tricorders as well as Voyager's data of thorough scans of the planet they had made before they had sent us here showed elements unknown to us.

There is so much on this planet; so many secrets we'll never know.

When you give me a little stone you have found close to an entrance to a cave and I scan it on your request - a request you make with a gleam in your eyes I have been missing in the past hours - it proves my own musings.

In my hand I hold an unpolished diamond.

27

The end is near.

I curse this silly voice in my head that confronts me with something I know I will have to face sooner or later anyways - announced or not.

There is nothing left to do, and it makes our situation even worse. We stand in the room, motionless, after we've checked the boxes for what must have been the hundredth time now, and stare ahead, around, upwards and downwards; everywhere except for the spot the other is standing on.

Two more minutes - and I burst out that this is ridiculous. Your reply is as calm and controlled as I'm used to, and it somewhat soothes my temper as well. Yes, it is, is all you say - then you take my hand and cradle my head with your other.

I fall willingly into your arms when you kiss me again; and when you pick me up and bring me to the bed, I know that it is just what I need. Feel you once more. Touch you once more. Love you once more.

We surrender to our hearts' desire again, because it will be the last time, because we've taken a taste of something too sweet, too forbidden, but also too addictive to forego in this last fragment of time we have left.

Alone and yet together.

While we are someone else.

While we are still *we*.

28

You hold me and kiss my neck gently - the gesture loving, not teasing - when Tuvok contacts us again to inform us that they'll arrive in two and a half hours. I can't help but heave a deep sigh, and I'm unable to figure out if it is because of Voyager's imminent return or your sweet caress.

Right now, I can very well claim that the last hours have turned my world upside down; much more than our forced stay here did to begin with. And that I'm not even sure that I want to turn it back.

I need to, though. There's not a shadow of a doubt in me that as soon as we are back aboard, I'll manage just that - be my captain's self, like I am expected to. Like I tell myself I am expected to.

And when that happens, I will push you away. I have to. We both knew beforehand that we could never continue what we've so incautiously started.

Didn't we?

29

The last boxes still stacked inside the cabin have to be carried outside. Most of them we have to bring out together since they are too heavy, but we work in silence nevertheless; no talking, no looking at each other, and, if possible, no touching.

How can we go from being so close to being so far?

I stop mid-motion and look at you, and you return my look with a questioning one of yours. I shake my head, and you after a moment, you lower your head; then you nod. Silent understanding. When I reach for the next box, you interrupt me by saying my name. Then you step forwards and close the distance between us.

I promise myself that it is be the last touch I will allow you when you take my hand and kiss it.

But if I'm honest to myself, I have no idea how I am supposed to say no should you ever touch me again.

30

Everything's ready. Except for us.

As we stand outside our house, surrounded by boxes and containers that hold the lifeless reminders of the time we had here, my little ape friend visits us one last time. I may not understand him, but I'm sure he's saying goodbye. Maybe he's saying, *Don't go*.

Oh but we have no choice, little friend. Even though we wish we had.

You look at me, again with this reassuring expression shining in your eyes, this tiny smile playing on your lips. And I feel reminded of something I don't want to be reminded of. The moment they hailed us.

Things will never be the same.

And yet they have to.

~*~

31

Business as usual. I didn't expect anything less. We had agreed to it down there, on this planet that could have been our paradise; I had willingly accepted the decision I knew was most reasonable.

You are my captain, Kathryn Janeway. You are my commanding officer, and I will follow you, no matter what. I will stand by your side, as your colleague and friend, and if it is your wish and request to keep our relationship on a professional, or friendly at most, level, I will not question you.

I hear your orders and I answer accordingly, as I am expected to, as it is right. I will check systems and reports, I will talk to the crew and listen to their updates, and I will inform you about everything, like any good first officer would do.

Life has to go on; we have to function as a perfect team, because our mission is everything but an easy one.

But that doesn't mean that I can't hurt. It doesn't mean that I can't feel sorrow and pain over what I, what *we* have lost. What we left on *New Earth*.

When I look at you, how you stare ahead and let your captain's mask slip into place, I know that you feel just the same. That you avoid my eyes because you fear I can see the same pain that is inside me as well. But it is too late. You'll never be able to hide anything from me. Not anymore.

We are who we are.

No one ever promised it to be easy.

END