

Common Goals

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Summary: Written for Secret Drabble 2012 on VAMB. The first sentence was given by my recipient, Malezita.

Disclaimer: All Paramount. Just borrowing them.

Author's Note: When I look at what they are offering in ice cream parlors nowadays, I figure that the one B'Elanna is eating is also in the realm of possibilities.

Thanks to: Koneia - who saved me with three little words from losing hope completely and giving up (no, not *these*). And to Spooky for being, as always, my great encouragement :)

"A goal without a plan is just a wish."

"Huh?" B'Elanna Torres looked up from her banana pancake ice cream dessert - with maple syrup - she was engrossed in, only half listening to her husband rambling about the newest gossip. It was just one of Tom Paris' habits she had learned to skillfully ignore; there often simply were more important things. Like this fabulous taste on her tongue right now.

"Something my dad once said to me when I was still a boy. Just had to think of it. And *this*," he tipped his head to the right side where the bigger part of the room lay, "definitely was a piece of work."

"Hmm."

"I mean," he went on, his wife's monosyllabic answers not bothering him at all, "Of course there never really was a plan; actually, it was merely a common wish, but..."

"We all wished very hard to accomplish that goal?"

"You could say so," Tom chuckled and glanced over to the second next table where Kathryn Janeway and Chakotay were seated. They appeared totally oblivious to their surroundings, and the hustle and bustle of a reunion party neither of them would have expected to ever have only a good year ago.

B'Elanna, having finished her ice cream and just ordered another one, finally granted him some attention and followed his eyes.

Almost the complete former crew of Voyager had found the time to come to this party. The room was swarming with people, known and unknown faces, friends and their families. Even though - or maybe because - they had spent more than seven years together on one small ship, seen each other every day, the crew still was very close, and no-one of them missed a chance for a come-together whenever they managed to make it.

Throwing a quick glance to her husband who sensed the motion, the couple smiled at each other knowingly.

Voyager's former pilot still felt this indescribable happiness whenever he thought about it. Who would have thought it would ever come to this when they had started their involuntary journey - and even more involuntary cooperation with the Maquis crew?

Back then, Tom had quickly noticed this special bond their commanding duo was developing. Two years into their journey, after they had picked them up from their supposed-to-be exile planet, he would have bet every ration he would ever possess on their flight back home that Kathryn and Chakotay had finally admitted their feelings, this unmistakable attraction even a blind man was able to spot. And neither Tom nor several crewmembers who were with him on this 'task' to keep an close eye on the captain and the commander were blind. Quite the contrary, they were very perceptive.

But even though probably everyone had seen it, and most of the crew had hoped for their commanding duo to find their happiness, it nevertheless took them almost the entire seven years of their journey to take the next step in their relationship. And no one was happier than Tom that it had still happened on Voyager; something told him that outside the confines of the vessel that had become their home these two love-birds would have found just another reason to keep their distance, literally.

"What are you grinning at?" B'Elanna wanted to know, a smirk matching his adorning her features.

"Was just thinking of those early years, and how much work still lay ahead of us then. How often we thought something would change soon, and how frustrating it sometimes was when it didn't. In retrospective, it all seems so... so..."

"Simple?" She offered, and on Tom's forehead formed a frown as he considered the word.

"I don't know if I would say 'simple', even though it was. I mean, there really was only one outcome. Only one acceptable, after all."

He remembered it like yesterday.

Neelix' departure shortly before the end of their journey had left many crewmembers with a feeling of loss and sadness. Their captain had hidden her feelings well, unsurprisingly so, but Tom and some others had become too close to her to not recognize this melancholy that had been possessing even her then. With Chakotay's 'Janeway antennas' - quite famous among the crew - on high alert it had been easy to convince the commander to support their plan for a party. And function as a shield between Janeway and her crew's doing so that it would be a surprise.

Recruiting some helpers, the pilot had planned and organized the event to lighten up everyone's, but mostly their captain's mood, and even given it, thanks to subspace communications, this unique Neelix touch - including the man himself, who appeared on a big screen on the holodeck.

With the evening going on, not only Tom had noticed how Janeway had shifted closer and closer to their first officer on the couch the two of them had claimed. Even Seven, having just finished her newest lesson - *Suggestive talking: How you say things without saying them.* - with the Doctor, remarked that the captain seemed to hope for continuing the party with the commander in private, and earned herself silent nods.

Of course nothing happened then, and *of course* Janeway left long before her first officer, allowing not much room for speculations. Certain developments afterwards, however, did. It were the little things that almost went unnoticed - almost. Here a long look, there a lingering touch, and an increasing frequency with which either one of them was seen entering the other one's quarters, or both of them the holodeck.

But Tom knew exactly when, as he bluntly put it, two people were doing *it* - and those two weren't.

Except that they were.

What bringing them together had taken, neither had ever found out. But to bring 'them' out in the open a computer malfunction had been enough. Not a single person had been to blame - just a 'single thing' that nevertheless seemed to have skillfully plotted the union between the commanding duo. Voyager's computer core loved to occasionally play tag with engineers as well as the rest of the crew, and this had been no different.

One random little pebble in the engines, sucked in from an even more random nebula, and every possible and impossible computer function had gone wild, so to speak.

And where they had conspired and planned and concocted, the ship herself had suddenly outrun them, aiming to receive praise for something Tom and his brothers and sisters in arms had worked so hard on setting the ground

for. Not that they had ever really done anything, but, in their opinion, it was the thought that counted. And a gentle push, in whichever form, now and then, even though it lacked of system and consistency.

Till the day, Paris still couldn't believe how easily they had been fooled. Kathryn and Chakotay may have showed some unusual behavior and this tad more closeness, but other than that, they had done a pretty good job of hiding what was going on behind closed doors.

Until they were caught with their pants down - this, however, *not literally*, lucky for poor Harry who found and freed them. A nasty glitch in several systems at once had trapped the captain and the commander in a Jeffrey's tube junction for a few hours - with hatches locked, forcefields in place and the transporter unwilling to work.

Afterwards, no one had an idea how it had come to this, especially with their always-correct commanding duo. But, they all guessed that the inability to do anything to help their situation had made them help themselves. Or more precise, put their time to good use otherwise. Their choice had been some kissing-practice. The kind that included Kathryn's legs around Chakotay's waist and him pressing her against a wall.

Tom had never seen anyone as pale and red at the same time as Harry after that incident.

The moment the truth had been out, their relationship had started to blossom. Not having to hide anymore, but being warmly, *happily* accepted as a couple by their crew had them drop their façades and allow themselves to show their love.

This had started over a year ago - and when Tom now looked over to Kathryn and Chakotay, he saw two very happy newly-weds who were everything, but certainly not afraid to show the depth of their feelings for each other.

"We did a pretty good job, even without a plan, didn't we?" he said, almost reverently quiet, and the most sincerely happy smile stole itself onto his face as he watched the couple from his thoughts. B'Elanna, however, had only eyes for her second helping of ice cream in an enormous bowl that was placed in front of her in that moment. Before her spoon passed her lips, she granted her husband one last reply.

"That we did. Who would have thought we'd bring Voyager back after only seven years?"

END