

Blake Adams exited the holodeck. He had just finished testing himself with the *Kobayashi Maru* scenario. He had tried many times, but he still had not found a way to beat the test. He knew that Starfleet Academy had abandoned the use of that particular assessment decades ago, but he still liked to challenge himself with it. It was always said that the *Kobayashi Maru* was a no-win scenario, but then again, one person had beaten it—James Kirk. Blake had also heard that Kirk had cheated. Did Kirk cheat just because he had changed the conditions of the test? Blake Adams didn't think so, but he wanted to beat the test without altering the parameters. If he could do that, then he could say that he had done something that the famous James T. Kirk was unable to do.

Adams went to his quarters to change out of the old-style uniform of the late 23rd Century into his current uniform. As he was dressing, the intercom came to life.

“Bridge to Captain.”

Blake fastened his uniform jacket. “Adams here. Go ahead.”

“We have detected something on long-range sensors. It appears to be an energy reading, but the signal is weak.”

“Let's check it out. I'm on my way to the bridge.



Lieutenant Commander Jada Lightfoot sat in the center seat and leaned forward as if she could make the image on the screen seem closer. “Time to intercept?”

“Three hours, forty-two minutes at current speed, Sir,” Lieutenant J.G. Eric Kelly said.

Lieutenant Commander T'Les looked up from the science station. “We will be in visual range in two point seven minutes, Commander Lightfoot.”

Commander Blake Adams entered the bridge. “Report, Number One.”

“We've altered course and should intercept the object in approximately three hours forty minutes, Sir,” the XO said as she relinquished the command chair. “We are almost in visual range.”

“Any ideas what it might be,” Blake asked as he sat down. “T'Les?”

“I would prefer not to speculate, Captain, but the object is not a natural phenomenon.” The Vulcan science officer adjusted the controls on the scanner. “The energy reading has a specific pattern that indicates a sentient origin.”

“Have we tried communications yet, Number One?”

“No, Sir.” Lieutenant Commander Lightfoot nodded to Lieutenant Mary Goodman at the OPS/Engineering station. “Send universal greetings on all frequencies, Lieutenant.”



“Aye, Commander.” Mary Goodman keyed in the code to send the message, but she looked up at the main viewscreen before sending it. “Captain?”

Adams, Lightfoot, and the entire bridge crew looked up to see the image that appeared.

“Magnify the image, Mary,” Adams said. As soon as he saw what was displayed on the viewer, he immediately turned his head back toward Goodman. “Belay sending that message.”

Jada Lightfoot stared at the image. “Is that what I think it is?”

Adams turned back to look at the viewer. His next words were directed at the CONN officer. “Eric, take us out of warp.”

“Aye, Skipper.”

“T’Les, have they detected us?”

“I do not think so, Captain. According to scans, the vessel seems to be disabled and adrift.”

“Mary, send a coded message to Commodore Gardner,” Adams said as he focused his eyes on the viewscreen. “Tell him that we have encountered a Borg cube.”



To Boldly Go: The Sound of Silence

A U.S.S. *Providence* story

By Cleve Johnson

Captain’s Log: Stardate 56312.1

After informing Commodore Gardner of our discovery, we have resumed course to intercept the Borg cube. Due to the potential risk, I have decided to approach the other vessel using our holocloak. If the Borg cube is functioning and scanning us, they will detect one of their own ships. Commodore Gardner wants us to assess the situation and report back to him within 24 hours. He has informed Starfleet Command to be on alert in case the Borg have decided to invade...again.

1135 Hours

Blake Adams sat behind his desk in the ready room with his eyes fixed on the monitor. He was studying all the information that Starfleet had gathered about the Borg during previous encounters with the *Enterprise* and other ships. The most relevant information came from the logs of the U.S.S. *Voyager*, which had returned home from the Delta Quadrant just a few months earlier. Captain Janeway and her crew had more encounters with the Borg than anyone to date

The chime sounded to indicate that someone was outside his door.

“Enter.”



The door slid open revealing Lieutenant Commander Lightfoot. She stepped in and approached her CO. "Sir, we will arrive at the cube's coordinates in five minutes."

"Any change in the status of the Borg vessel, Jada?"

"No, sir. Energy levels are low, and there has not been any indication that they are scanning us." Jada Lightfoot approached her CO's desk and sat down across from him. "I have to admit that I'm scared, sir. The idea of assimilation..."

Blake looked away from his computer monitor and focused on his first officer. "I'm not too excited about that prospect either." He smiled. "Whatever you do, don't let the crew know that you're frightened. You have to stay strong and show confidence."

"I know, Captain," the XO said. "That's why I told *you*."

"It will be our secret," Blake replied. "Now, I suppose that we better get out there."

Blake rose from his chair with Jada following his lead, and they both started for the exit that would lead them to the bridge. The doors parted, and they entered the bridge. Each went to his and her duty chairs and sat down.

"CONN, take us out of warp and approach the cube at full impulse," Blake said. "Pull right up alongside at one thousand kilometers."

"Aye, Skipper," Eric Kelly replied.

Blake turned his head toward the science station. "T'Les, full sensor sweep. Let's take a good look over."

"Scanning. Power levels are at five percent. Life support is functional." T'Les continued to check her readings. "Life signs are sporadic."

Blake stood and approached the front of the bridge to gaze at the image of the Borg cube on the main viewer. "Yoshi, what do you think?"

Lieutenant Yoshi Nakamara, the tactical and security officer, looked up from his console to look at his CO. "I would like to take a closer look, sir."

Blake turned to face his XO. "Jada?"

"I agree," the first officer said.

Blake turned back to face the image on the viewer as he considered the risk. "Make it so," he finally said. "And be careful."

"Always, Captain," Jada replied as she rose from her chair and started toward the turbolift. "Lieutenant Commander T'Les, Lieutenant Nakamara with me, please."

The three officers exited the bridge.



Chief Petty Officer John McKinney stood behind the transporter controls when the XO, science officer, and chief of security entered the room and took their places on the transporter pads.

The XO looked directly at the transporter chief. “Maintain transporter lock on each one of us, Chief.”

“Aye, Commander,” McKinney said as he started working the controls. “Energizing.”



1208 Hours

The particles of energy swirled as the atoms coalesced and reformed into the three Starfleet officers. Lieutenant Commander Lightfoot, Lieutenant Commander T’Les, and Lieutenant Nakamara found themselves in one of thousands of identical corridors. Lightfoot and Nakamara each held a phaser at the ready while T’Les opened her tricorder to start scanning their surroundings.

T’Les started walking toward a Borg drone that lay motionless on the deck a few feet in front of an empty alcove that it apparently had been connected to. The adjacent alcove still contained a drone in an upright position, still connected. Neither drone moved. “These drones appear to be dead, Commander.”

Jada Lightfoot turned one hundred eighty degrees to slowly observe all the alcoves in the area. Some were empty; others were still occupied. No signs of life were present. “What happened?”

“Unknown,” T’Les replied. “I suggest that we try to directly access the memory of one of these drones.”

“I thought you said they’re all dead,” the security chief said.

“Although their biological functions have ceased, the cybernetic implants may still be useful in determining the cause of their demise.”

The first officer nodded. “Let’s look for a memory junction that the tricorder can connect to.”

“According to sensors, there is a concentrated power emanation twenty-four point seven meters in that direction.” T’Les pointed down the corridor.

“Lead the way, Commander,” Lieutenant Commander Jada Lightfoot said as she holstered her phaser and pulled out a tricorder of her own.

Yoshi Nakamara kept his phaser in his hand just in case all the drones were not dead. He wanted to stay alert and ready for any possible threat to the away teams’ safety. As he followed his two superior officers, he felt the hairs on his arms stiffen. Something didn’t feel right. It may have just been his uneasiness at being on a Borg cube and thinking about the stories that he had



heard or read about. His thoughts were interrupted by a loud thud from behind. He quickly spun around and saw another drone on the deck. “Commander!”

The first officer turned and followed the chief of security back toward the disturbance. Lightfoot immediately started scanning the drone that was face down in front of its alcove. “I’m getting a faint life sign, Lieutenant.”

“It’s alive?” Yoshi gripped his phaser tighter and pointed it straight at the Borg drone. “Orders, sir?”

Jada thought about her options. She tapped her Starfleet insignia that doubled as her personal communicator. “Away team to *Providence*.”

“*Go ahead, Jada. What’s going on?*” Commander Blake Adams’s voice came from the combadge and seemed to have a tone of concern.

“Sir, I have a Borg drone that is showing minimal life signs. I would like to beam it to sickbay.”

There was a short pause. “*For what purpose, Lieutenant Commander?*”

“It’s alive, sir. I think we can learn what happened if we can revive it.”

Another short pause. “*I’ll inform Doctor Hogan to expect a guest as soon as security gets to sickbay. Have you found any of the others alive?*”

“None so far, Commander.” Jada turned as she heard T’Les approach from behind her. “Just a minute, sir.” Jada focused her eyes on the science officer. “Report.”

T’Les stood with her hands behind her back. “I found a junction and accessed the cube’s memory files. Many of the files had been corrupted, but I was able to download enough information to determine what caused the cube to shut down. Of course, I will need to further analyze the data.”

Jada nodded to T’Les before turning her attention back to her conversation with Adams. “Commander, we are ready to beam back. The drone should be beamed directly to sickbay along with Mister Nakamara.”

“*Understood. Report to the bridge as soon as you return. Providence out.*”



1600 Hours

Commander Blake Adams, followed by Lieutenant Commander Jada Lightfoot, Lieutenant Commander T’Les, Lieutenant Yoshi Nakamara, and Lieutenant Commander James Goodman, entered the main conference room and took their usual seats around the table. Just as Blake noticed that Doctor Neil Hogan had not yet arrived, the door slid open to reveal the CMO, who made his way to the table.



“I apologize for my tardiness, Captain,” the doctor said as he sat down.

Blake nodded to Hogan. “You’re right on time, Doc. Let’s start with you. How’s your patient?”

Hogan leaned forward and shifted his weight in his chair. “Well, he’d be a lot better if he hadn’t been assimilated.”

Blake smiled. “I’m sure, but I was looking for more of a medical diagnosis.”

“Much of his body is riddled with cybernetic components, but his species is unknown. I don’t have a clue what his insides are supposed to look like to be able to treat him.”

“Brain functions?”

“He woke up once and started babbling nonsense.”

T’Les addressed the doctor. “May I inquire what the drone said?”

Doctor Hogan leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms. “I just said that it was nonsense.”

“Please, Doctor. His words may have seemed incoherent; however, there may be a hidden meaning.”

“Well, let me think.” The doctor scratched his chin and stared at the ceiling for a moment. “He said the words ‘destroyed, transwarp hub, queen, non-functional, no voices, silence, request instructions, silence.’ I think he also mentioned the word ‘freedom.’”

Blake turned to his first officer. “Jada, contact Starfleet Command at the end of the briefing and request details about *Voyager*’s return. I remember that there was a Federation News Service report that mentioned the destruction of a Borg sphere in the Sol system when *Voyager* came home.”

“Yes, sir.”

“T’Les, what do you think?”

“I would like to have more information before completing my analysis, but early indications suggest that the drone has been separated from the collective mind.”

“If that’s true,” Adams replied, “will it be possible to remove the implants, Doc?”

Hogan shook his head. “I wouldn’t attempt it by myself. I would want someone with experience removing Borg implants.”

“And do you know of anyone that has experience doing that?” Adams half-smirked.

“Years ago, Doctor Beverly Crusher was able to remove implants from Captain Picard after he was assimilated and later separated from Borg control.”



Adams gave Hogan a nod. "Please contact Dr. Crusher to see what information she can help with, Doc."

"Captain Janeway and her crew had more experience with the Borg than anyone, Skipper," Lieutenant Nakamara said. "The *Voyager*'s CMO could have information, too."

Doctor Neil Hogan let out a sarcastic sigh. "You do know that their doctor was just an EMH, right?"

"Actually, Doctor," Lieutenant Commander T'Les began, "That particular EMH became more than the sum of his initial programming. In fact, some consider him to have gained sentience during his time on *Voyager*."

"I'll send a message to Admiral Janeway at Starfleet Command to see if she can provide any information," Blake Adams stated. "For now, Doc, please do what you can for your patient."



Captain's Log: Stardate 56318.6

We have received information from both Doctor Crusher and Starfleet Command regarding our Borg guest, who is still under sedation. Doctor Hogan has tended to the Borg's wounds and biological functions as best as he can, but he is still reluctant to try to remove any cybernetic implants. Starfleet Command agrees with him. Admiral Janeway has ordered that the Borg drone be turned over to Starfleet Medical. The Providence is en route to rendezvous with the U.S.S. Pasteur, which will take it back to Earth. Meanwhile, the science vessel Eclipse has been detached from its relief efforts with the rest of the 5th Exploration Task Force at P'Khati and dispatched to study the derelict Borg cube.

Commander Blake Adams ended his log entry and left his quarters. He made his way to the ship's sickbay and entered. He saw Doctor Neil Hogan hovering over the drone that was on the biobed. "Anything new, Doctor?"

"Nothing new to report, Commander." Hogan was frustrated that he could not do anything to help the Borg drone. "I've done all I can with what I know. One of the problems is that I'm unfamiliar with this species. And I can't tell what he would have been like before his assimilation."

"Maybe Starfleet Medical can help him," Adams said. "Janeway's holographic doctor might have some ideas."

"Holographic doctor. What's the galaxy coming to when a hologram is allowed to think for itself?"

Adams held back what he thought about Hogan's reaction to sentient holograms, but, surprisingly, Adams found himself agreeing with his CMO. That was a rare occurrence since Adams and Hogan had not found common ground on anything. They usually avoided each other whenever they could. "I like my time on the holodeck, Doc, but I'm with you when it comes to



holograms who can think on their own. We'll be meeting up with the *Pasteur* in about twenty-six hours to transfer the drone to their care."

Hogan, uncharacteristically, shot a slight smile toward his CO. "I hope the hologram can do something for this poor creature."

"Silence."

Adams and Hogan turned toward the drone laying on the biobed.

"Chaos."

Hogan grabbed a hypospray and rushed to the Borg. "The sedation wore off."

"The voices are silent." The drone started to sit up, but Doctor Hogan placed his hand on its shoulder and gently pushed down, which the drone resisted.

"Careful, Doc," Adams said as he slowly approached.

Hogan ignored his CO but addressed the alien on the bed. "Be still. We won't harm you."

"Queen destroyed. All Borg disconnected from...the Collective is no more. Chaos. No more voices." The Borg drone continued to ramble. "Freedom."

"Yes," Hogan said. "You're free of the Borg collective."

"No more assimilation. No more voices."

"That's right. No more voices," Hogan repeated. "What is your name?"

"One of six."

"That sounds like a Borg designation," Hogan said. "I want to know your name."

"Accessing backup memory node."

"Doc?" Adams stepped closer. "What are you doing?"

"Trying to get some information about my patient." Neil Hogan's voice had a hint of irritation flowing out. "Maybe I can reach him."

The drone looked at the doctor. "We are...I am...accessing...I am Vesef Otan. Species two-four-seven...Kendrekan. Species Kendrekan," he repeated. "My world was assimilated."

Adams and Hogan stared at each other for a moment, and Adams turned his attention to Vesef Otan. "Your entire world was assimilated by the Borg?"

"An entire species eliminated," Hogan muttered. "You're among friends now, Vesef. We will take you to a place that has people qualified to help you."

"Freedom? From the Borg?"

"That's right, Vesef," Hogan said. "Freedom from the Borg."



Blake Adams smiled at the former drone, but he remained cautious. Blake turned to face the doctor. “Let me know if you have any problems. Someone from security will be outside sickbay at all times.”

“Understood, Commander.”

Blake Adams turned and exited sickbay. After the door slid shut behind him, he stopped and faced the security guard. “Stay alert. The doctor seems to have everything under control, but I don’t want to take chances in case the Borg Collective regains control.”

“Aye, sir.” The guard snapped to attention as Adams walked away.



Lieutenant Commander Jada Lightfoot, after hearing the turbolift doors open, turned the command chair to see who had entered the bridge. She immediately stood up. “Captain on the bridge,” she said.

Commander Blake Adams put up his hand. “As you were. Anything to report?”

“We are on schedule to meet the U.S.S. *Pasteur* at the designated coordinates. Nothing else to report.”

“Good.” Adams turned his attention to the tactical station. “Yoshi, keep an open commlink with the security crewman outside of sickbay. The drone is conscious, and I want to make sure that everyone is on top of things.”

“Aye, sir,” Lieutenant Yoshi Nakamara replied as he keyed in the private communications code to his security crewman.

“Jada, I’ll be with Counselor Goodman.” Adams turned and headed toward the turbolift before the first officer had a chance to reply.

“Yes, sir,” she said after the turbolift doors closed. She sat back down in the command chair and calmly said, “Steady as she goes, Mr. Kelly.”

Eric Kelly, the senior CONN officer tried not to smile. “Steady as she goes, Commander.”



In sickbay, Doctor Hogan sat in a chair that he had pulled close to the biobed where the former Borg drone lay on his back staring at the ceiling. Hogan glanced at the readings on the wall monitor behind the bed. “How long were you part of the Borg Collective?”

Vesef Otan slightly turned his head to see the doctor. “We were assimilated on the third day of the second month in the year of Oju.”

“I’m not sure when that was, Vesef.”

“What is your species?”



“Human.”

“Your home planet is Earth in Sector 001.”

“That’s right, Vesef.”

“By your time calculations, our assimilation took place eleven years, four months, and eight days ago.” The former drone, despite his injuries and lack of contact with the Collective, still was able to calculate information as precisely as he did when he was part of the hive mind.

Although Neil Hogan tended to be crotchety at times around his shipmates, he felt deeply about his patients. Even Vesef Otan, a Borg, caused the doctor to let his compassion show. “Now that you are free of the Borg, what do you want to do?”

Vesef did not know what a proper response would be to that question. He was part of the Borg for so long, that he had not fully regained his own identity yet. “We do not know what we want.”

“It takes time to figure out your own wants and desires,” Hogan said.

“Our wants and desires are irrelevant,” Vesef stated. “We are Borg. We serve the Collective.”

Hogan shook his head. “Not anymore, Vesef. You are free from the Borg and have your whole life ahead of you.”

“Yes, we are free now.”

Hogan let out a little laugh. “You should stop referring to yourself as ‘we’ since you’re an individual now. That will help you regain some of your identity.”

“We...I will comply.”



Counselor James Goodman came away from the replicator with two drinks. He handed one of the glasses to his CO, who was sitting on the sofa in the counselor’s office. “I think you’ve addicted me to this, Blake.”

Blake lifted his glass and lowered to his lips, sipping it as tiny bubbles fizzled in the glass. “Nothing better than Vanilla Coke,” he said.

James sat back and crossed one leg over his opposite knee. “So is this a social call or ship’s business?”

“A little of both,” Adams said. “I’m concerned about that drone being on my ship.”

James nodded his head. “That’s understandable. From all the stories we’ve heard and the reports that we’ve read from the *Voyager* logs, we have good reason to be cautious.”

“Do you think that the Borg threat is over, James?” Blake asked. “I mean, the reports make it seem like Janeway destroyed the Queen...and the entire Collective.” He turned his head



and looked at the stars streak by through the window. “The cube we came across must be proof that the Borg are gone.”

“Well, one inactive cube isn’t necessarily an indication that the entire Collective went offline,” James said. “Remember when Captain Picard’s reports on the second Borg invasion were declassified?”

“Yeah. Supposedly, he and Lieutenant Commander Data eliminated the Queen, but a few years later, Captain Janeway encountered her more than once.”

“Maybe there was more than one Queen,” James said.

“That doesn’t make me feel better, James.”

“You’re not the only one who’s uptight, Blake. I’ve noticed several people are concerned.”

“Your Betazoid senses getting a workout?”

“I’m only one-quarter Betazoid, but I can feel people’s emotional stress since we brought the Borg on the ship.” James closed his eyes and concentrated for a moment. “I can even feel the drone’s emotions coming to the surface. He’s confused and scared.”

“Is he angry about being severed from the Collective? Is he violent?”

“Not that I can sense,” James replied. “At times, it feels like...there’s a peacefulness among all the confusion.”

“Does that seem normal for a drone that has been suddenly cut off from constant communication with thousands of minds?”

“I have no experience with the Borg, Blake, so I don’t know what a normal response would be for someone like our guest.”

“Go to sickbay with me?” Blake asked. “Maybe you can sense what’s going on inside him if you’re in the same room.”

“Are you trying to raise *my* anxiety level?” James asked as he uncrossed his legs and stood. He took one more sip of the addictive Vanilla Coke, set the glass on the nearest table and started for the door. “I hope I don’t regret this.”

Blake laughed as he followed James through the open door.



Blake and James entered sickbay and cautiously walked toward the drone laying in biobed. They stopped when Vesef Otan slowly came to a sitting position. Neil Hogan remained sitting in the chair next to his patient. “How’s your patient, Doc?” Blake asked.

“From a medical perspective, he’s stable,” Hogan stated. “Emotionally? That would be a question for the counselor.”



James took a step toward the bed. "I'm Counselor Goodman. What is your name?"

"My designation... my name is Vesef Otan."

"It's nice to meet you, Vesef." James opened himself up and could feel a distinct emotional presence. "You seem to be calmer than I expected."

"Explain."

"Well, I would have thought that the trauma of suddenly being severed from the Collective would be very disconcerting. You seem to be dealing with your fear and confusion."

"I am adapting to my...situation."

"We are taking you to another starship to be transported back to Earth where you will be treated."

"I understand."

"Do you have any feelings about going to Earth or having your Borg components removed?"

"I feel...at peace."

"Are you frightened about undergoing a surgical procedure?"

"No. I have no fear about the removal of my implants. I look forward to restoring my original appearance."

"That's good, Vesef." It was the first time that Blake Adams referred to the alien by name instead of referring to him as a drone. "I hope that you can find a new life for yourself."

James felt the confusion and anxiety melt away from Vesef. "You are among friends, Vesef. I'm sure that you will be able to adapt and find your place in the universe."

"I wish to contribute to the betterment of society," Vesef stated. "That was the purpose of my people." He turned his head toward the doctor. "You are a healer. My father was also a healer. At the time of my assimilation, I was studying to be a healer."

Hogan smiled at Vesef. "I'm sure that you can continue studies and become one if that is what you still want."

"Yes, that is what we...what *I* want."



Captain's Log: Supplemental

We have arrived at our meeting with the U.S.S. Pasteur. My concerns about our Borg guest, fortunately, were unmerited, and there were no incidents. It appears that Vesef Otan will be able to adapt to life outside of the Borg Collective and make a way to regain at least some of the life that he once had before assimilation and eventually become a productive member of society on



Earth or wherever he decides to go once Starfleet Medical and Voyager's holographic doctor help him transition to his normal appearance.

As Commander Adams finished his log recording, he rose from the chair behind his desk and started toward the door that separated his ready room from the bridge. The door slid open and Adams found himself facing Doctor Neil Hogan. "Doc? Is there something I can help you with?"

Hogan wore his typical sarcastic smirk, but his facial muscles relaxed to allow a different mood to appear. "I wanted to come by and let you know that Mister Otan has been transferred to the *Pasteur*. I briefed the doctor in charge on how Vesef has responded so far to being an individual."

To Adams, it seemed that his CMO appeared to be more mellow than usual. "Are you okay, Doctor Hogan?"

"Of course, I'm okay," Hogan replied in his usual gruffness. "Why wouldn't I be okay?"

Blake, reluctantly, slowly placed his hand on the doctor's shoulder. "Vesef made a big impact on you, didn't he?"

Hogan thought about pulling away but decided against it. He felt vulnerable, and he knew that his CO was right. "Yeah, he got to me. But keep that to yourself."

Blake nodded. "I will."

The doctor started to turn away, but he stopped and turned back to face Adams. "I told him that I was grateful to have met him."

"What was his response?"

"He said that he was grateful to have met me, too, but he said that he was most grateful for the sound of silence," Hogan said as he pointed to his head. "In here." The doctor turned and walked toward the turbolift.

Blake smiled as the doctor exited the bridge, and he walked toward the center seat, which Lieutenant Commander Lightfoot quickly vacated. "Status?"

"The transfer is complete, and the captain of the *Pasteur* sends his greetings."

"Did you reply?"

"Yes, Captain."

"Very good, Jada." Blake turned his attention to the CONN. "Mr. Kelly, turn us around and take us back to our designated patrol area."

"Aye, skipper."

The small starship made a tight turn in the opposite direction and leaped into warped space.

