

Tiger of the Wind



by MultiMapper

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Chapter 1

Another away mission, another food gathering mission for Chakotay. The forest was lush and beautiful. This forest was more reminiscent of Dorvan V than the forests of Earth. While Chakotay was usually pleased to go to a well-forested world, this world delighted and saddened him at the same time.

Scans had shown no signs of sentient life and few animals of a predatory type. Therefore, it was reasonably safe to venture off alone for a bit. He desperately needed solitude on this replica of his home world. Chakotay had confided his feelings to his captain who was understanding and even encouraged him to take some time for his personal needs.

Chakotay found a tranquil glade and scanned the area with his tricorder and confirmed that no other members of his team were within 2 kilometers in any direction. Then he slowly, reverently began the litany of words to summon his entrance to the spiritual plane. As the spirit plane came into focus in his minds eye, he looked at the familiar landscape and noticed a difference. He looked to see his spirit animal, the wolf but the wolf was different. The wolf that he saw had ivory horns with metallic veins and blue/gray fur.

The wolf looked at Chakotay with an appraising eye. After a few moments the wolf seemed to make a decision and walk up to the spirit self of Chakotay. The wolf bumped Chakotay's leg and nuzzled for just a moment. The wolf backed up 1 step and looked into Chakotay's eyes with vibrant blue/silver eyes. The emotion conveyed in those eyes nearly took Chakotay's breath away. Chakotay could sense loneliness, loss, and great despair within the wolf. As if the wolf could tell that Chakotay had seen his pain, he slowly blinked his eyes and took the step forward to place his head against Chakotay's leg.

Chakotay crouched down and placed his hand on the wolf's back. He began slowly stroking the wolf's fur in a gentle and soothing manner. They stayed like that for a long while, just sharing comfort. Although Chakotay didn't recognize it, he was also receiving comfort from the wolf.

After a time, Chakotay let his hand fall from the wolf and slowly stood. The wolf took a step back and looked again into Chakotay's eyes. //Thank you//

Chakotay was startled for an instant at the masculine, resonating voice in his mind. His spirit animal sometimes chose to speak to him in this way, but her voice had always seemed like a whisper to his mind. This voice was strong and sure. //I am used to finding my spirit animal here, have you seen her?//

The wolf turned his head slightly, //She allowed me this time to visit with you, she felt it would be good for us both.//

Chakotay nodded in comprehension, //Yes, I must thank you too. I am not accustomed to sharing myself in this way anymore.//

The wolf tipped his head lower, //You must leave this plane soon, we will meet again.//

And with this declaration, the wolf walked up to Chakotay and nuzzled his leg one last time before walking away into the forest.

Chakotay stood for a moment and noticed the spirit landscape fading from view. A few minutes later he opened his eyes on the material plane and he saw himself looking into the blue/silver eyes of the wolf. "Hello again."

The wolf dipped his head as if to acknowledge the statement. "Do you understand me?", Chakotay asked with caution. The wolf dipped his head again with a little more enthusiasm.

The COM badge on Chakotay's uniform sounded and Chakotay reflexively answered it, "Chakotay here." "Commander, it is an hour before nightfall. Time to round up your teams. Did you enjoy your break?"

"Very much, Captain. Thank you." And he began to put his clothing back on. "I'll see you in a while then, Janeway out."

Chakotay finished dressing and looked back at the wolf. "I won't be back to this planet again, it was a pleasure meeting you." Chakotay said, with an obvious note of regret in his voice.

Chakotay began to walk away from the wolf, then stopped and looked back. The wolf was walking off in the opposite direction, slowly with his head down.

Then Chakotay went about the business of gathering away teams and returning to Voyager.

Aboard the ship, the mood was light. After months of being short of supplies, this planet had filled the cargo holds to overflowing with foods for the crew. Neelix, ever searching for a reason to celebrate, convinced the captain that a harvest festival was in order. The captain was only too happy to agree.

At the end of his duty shift, Chakotay went to his cabin. He felt a sense of loss, leaving the wolf back on the planet. He decided that he should go into meditation and speak with his guide about the loss. Her serenity had comforted him in the past, and he now sought that comfort.

As his spiritual landscape came into view, he saw his spirit animal standing beside the form of his wolf friend from the planet. Chakotay was surprised to see this. He walked to the animals and spoke reverently, //I didn't think I would see you again. I'm glad you are here.//

The blue/silver eyes of the wolf showed his joy, //I didn't realize that I was missing companionship until I met you in the forest.//

Chakotay responded, //I too was comforted by the companionship. Although I live on this ship with many people. In all the ways that count, I am alone.//

The wolf stood quiet for a moment then asked, //Would I be allowed to live on your ship? I am so alone.//

//I don't think the captain would allow it.// Chakotay answered with regret evident in his thoughts.

//Can you bring her here? I would like the chance to ask her myself.//

Chakotay looked into the wolf's pleading eyes and saw the need. It was the least he could do for this kindred spirit. //I will talk to her now. I'm sure that she will be willing to listen to you.//

The wolf nodded and began to walk away, //Thank you, I will wait for her to arrive. I hope to see you again soon.//

The wolf walked into the tree line. Chakotay noticed movement from the corner of his eye and saw the she wolf, his spirit animal, walking toward him.

//Trust your feelings in this matter, this path can help you both, and may lead you to other, less obvious paths of fulfillment.// With that statement, the she wolf walked into the tree line as well.

Chakotay returned to the material plane of existence and dressed in preparation to meet with the captain.

Chakotay met with the captain in her ready room. He looked a little apprehensive which sparked her curiosity. "Out with it Commander, what's on your mind?"

"I have an unusual request captain. Something of a personal nature." he stated plaintively. She looked into his eyes, willing him to continue.

"I met a creature on the planet, day before yesterday. He was able to speak to me while I was on my spirit journey."

Her eyes sparked with curiosity but she said nothing.

"He talked to me again a few minutes ago and asked if he could join us." and Chakotay looked for her reaction.

"This creature, why would you consider letting it join us?" she asked with concern.

"Because he's lonely Katherine, I know that doesn't sound like much of a reason, but when you talk to him, I think you'll agree that it would be cruel to leave him alone on that planet."

"When I talk to him?" she asked with surprise in her voice.

"He asked to meet you on a spirit journey, so that he could ask you for himself."

"I'm intrigued, I suppose there wouldn't be any harm in talking to him."

"When would you like to take the journey?"

"Let's meet in your cabin at 1800 hours. I'm not inclined to grant his request, but I will try to keep an open mind."

"That's all I ask, thank you Katherine."

1800 - Chakotay's Quarters

::Be-Op::

"Come in" Chakotay answered.

The captain walked into his quarters dressed in comfortable clothes.

"Some coffee captain?" Chakotay offered.

"Maybe later, I have to admit, I am curious to meet your friend." she responded with a small smile.

She sat on the floor in a relaxed position. Chakotay took her through the litany of familiar words to begin her journey while she touched the okouna. Since she had taken a spiritual journey before, she was able to reach the spiritual plane with little effort.

Her spirit self looked around the desert valley, admiring the beauty of the place. She turned and saw a blue/black wolf with small metal veined horns looking at her.

//Are you the one that I am here to meet?//

//Yes captain, it is a pleasure to meet you.//

//What is your name?//

The wolf seemed to ponder the question then said, //I've had no use for a name, I haven't spoken to another in such a time that I haven't needed one.//

//Fair enough, the commander says that you want to join us. I have to tell you that it isn't likely that I will grant your request.//

//Thank you for your honesty captain. May I ask why.//

//The regulations that we follow forbid us from interfering with the natural development of other species. I believe that taking you from your home world would be a violation of that prime directive.//

//I understand your concern, but this is not my home planet. I happened upon it some years ago and decided to stay for a while.//

//Then you are capable of space travel?// she asked with genuine curiosity.

//In a sense. I exist on many dimensional planes simultaneously. It is a talent that you and the commander share with me, as you are here. Under the right circumstances, I am able to move my material form from one location to another.//

//We are two days travel from your planet, does this mean that you would be able to come to us?//

//Yes, if you invite me to join you, it is my intention to travel to your ship by my own means.//

//Can you give me one reason that I should grant your request to join us?//

//The only reason I have is that I would like to share your journey. In doing so, it is my hope that I could contribute something to the community of your crew.//

Janeway thought about his answer for a moment then spoke, //I will consider your request and give commander Chakotay my answer. It was a pleasure meeting you.//

//A pleasure to meet you as well. Regardless of your decision, thank you for considering my request.//

Janeway watched the wolf walk past a rock and over a dune into the desert.

The desert began to dim around her as she returned to her normal consciousness.

"Did the journey go well?" Chakotay asked hopefully.

"It did, I can understand why you want him to join us. I could feel his loneliness as if it were a tangible thing. I need to think about this commander. I'll take a rain check on that coffee and inform you of my decision soon."

With that declaration, Janeway gathered herself up and walked out of Chakotay's cabin.

The captain sat in her ready room and tried to consider the ramifications of this decision. This animal was obviously a sentient being and had a great need for companionship. She reflected on her decision to allow Neelix and Kes, and later Seven of Nine to join the crew and how fortunate that had worked out.

In the end, she could see no logical reason to deny the request. The Starfleet regulations didn't seem to apply in this circumstance since the animal was capable of interstellar travel. After an hour of considering the possibilities, she had made her decision.

The commander was anxiously waiting for the captain's call when the Com beep nearly made him jump out of his chair. "Chakotay, go ahead."

"Commander, I have decided to allow the creature to join us. It will be your responsibility to see to his well-being."

"Thank you captain, I will tell him right away. Should we turn the ship to go back for him now?"

"No Commander, he said that he was capable of coming to us. Let me know if you need anything when he arrives."

"Yes Captain, and thank you again."

"Janeway out"

The commander had a sense of joy. He prepared himself and promptly entered the spirit realm. As his vision came into focus, he saw an anxious wolf before him.

//She said yes, my friend.//

The wolf barked and turned in a tight circle, the joy obvious in his movements. When he settled, he said, //Thank you, when can I come to join you?//

//As soon as you are able, is there anything I can do to help you make the journey?//

//Yes, just stay here for a moment. You may feel a little strange, like you are being pulled away from this place. Try to hold onto this plane while I follow your bond back to the physical plane. When I'm done, I'll tell you, though I imagine that you'll be able to feel it.//

The wolf then laid down on the ground and closed his eyes. Chakotay knelt before the wolf, watching him but not touching him so as not to distract his efforts. Then Chakotay felt a tug from the area of his breastbone and the world seemed to turn sideways and darken just a little. He concentrated on his surroundings and felt the world slowly come back into focus but there was still the sensation of the tugging. A few moments later, the tugging stopped and his vision seemed to shimmer.

The wolf rose to his feet, visibly tired and walked to the commander. Chakotay ruffled the fur behind his ear. //My physical body is with yours now. When you return, do not be concerned. The travel is exhausting, my physical form will require rest but will recover in a short time.//

//Is there anything that I can do for you when I return?//

//No, I'll awake in my own time.//

//I've been thinking about the crew's reaction to a sentient wolf. Would you be offended if I didn't mention that we can communicate?//

The wolf looked a little stunned by this but then considered it. //No, I would not be offended, there is one other of your crew who could communicate with me but he needs guidance to reach this plane.//

//Do you know his name?//

//No, but if we encounter him, I'll let you know he's the one.//

//Okay, I suppose we should get back now, so you can get your rest. I'm glad to have you with us, I hope you'll be happy.//

//I already am.//

The wolf laid back on the ground and closed his eyes. Chakotay watched as the landscape faded to black as he came back to himself. A few moments later he opened his eyes to the sight of his cabin. Sitting on the floor, a meter before him was the wolf, fast asleep.

Chakotay quietly clothed himself and left the cabin to tell the captain that their newest crewmember had arrived.

"Captain, may I speak with you a moment?"

"Certainly, Tuvok you have the bridge."

The left the bridge and went to the ready room. Once they were both seated, Chakotay said, "He has arrived, he's in my cabin, sleeping."

The captain nodded her acknowledgement.

"I think it would be best if we keep his sentient nature quiet for a while. Since he won't be able to communicate with anyone but us anyway."

"I hadn't thought of that..." she said while considering it for a moment. "...I suppose it would be for the best, as long as he doesn't mind."

"He doesn't, I already asked. As far as the crew will know, he will be my pet. If it turns out to be a problem, we can tell them later."

"Very good Commander, we'll just keep this between us. Anything else?"

"Yes, he said that there is someone else who will be able to communicate with him. He doesn't know the name, but wants to be able to talk with him when we find out who it is."

"Keep me posted, Commander"

"Aye, Captain"

Chakotay returned his quarters to find the sleeping form of the wolf. As he walked in, the blue/silver eyes opened and a distinct look of joy was in those eyes. Chakotay walked over to his couch and sat down, patting the seat next to him to indicate for the wolf to sit down.

The wolf walked slowly to the couch and hopped up to sit beside him. Chakotay began to stroke the wolf's fur, stopping occasionally to scratch the spot behind his ear. After a few moments the wolf laid down and placed his head on Chakotay's thigh. They sat like that, in silence for an hour. The wolf drifting in and out of sleep. Finally the wolf woke up and

got off the couch. Chakotay watched as the wolf seemed to inspect the cabin, then the wolf made a little whine.

Chakotay was concerned. He decided that he would quickly go to the spiritual plane to find out what he could do. Since he had been so relaxed for the past hour, it only took a few minutes to reach the spiritual plane. The wolf was there and seemed to be moving with a sense of nervousness.

//What can I do for you my friend?//

//We are not in the forest, I do not want to soil the floor of your dwelling.//

//I'm sorry, that didn't occur to me. I'll take care of it when I get back, as well as some food and water for you.//

//Yes, that would be good. Then could we go out and walk around the ship. I am anxious to meet some of your people.//

//Of course, I think a walk would be good for me as well. I'll go back now and tend to your immediate need.//

The wolf nodded and then the spiritual plane faded.

Chakotay went to the replicator and, after a little searching through the database, replicated a litter pad. He laid that in the bathroom, then replicated some food and water.

After the physiological needs were taken care of, they left the cabin to walk around the ship.

They walked along, meeting surprisingly few crewmen and ended up at the holodeck. Chakotay explained the holodeck to the wolf then opened the door.

They walked into Sandrine's, which was unusually busy. Conversations stopped as the Commander and the wolf walked into the room.

The first to speak was Tom Paris. (imagine that)

Tom put down his pool cue and knelt beside the wolf. "Who's your new friend, Commander?"

Chakotay realized that his new companion didn't have a name. So he responded, "I haven't named him yet."

Tom looked up with mild surprise, then started to scratch the wolf behind the ear. "How you doing Tiger?"

The wolf snuffled against Tom, then gave him an appreciative lick on the neck.

"Wow, he really is friendly." He looked up at the commander and said, "Where'd you find him?"

"We met while we were gathering supplies and became fast friends."

Paris looked startled, "I can't believe the captain would allow you to take him from the planet."

Chakotay smiled and said honestly, "It took a lot of convincing..." then slyly added, "I must have caught her on a good day."

"I guess so." Then Tom returned this attention to the wolf, "Welcome aboard Tiger."

The wolf looked up at Chakotay, once he firmly caught Chakotay's eye, the wolf twisted his head to indicate Tom.

Chakotay didn't understand for a moment then it came to him. "Him?" He asked the wolf and the wolf nodded in acknowledgement.

Chakotay thought about this, then decided that, if Tom were the third person to be able to talk to the wolf, that he should be brought into it from the beginning. "Tom, would you have a few minutes later to discuss something with me?"

"Wha... What did I do now?" Tom asked with a genuine look of surprise on his face.

Chakotay had to laugh, "Nothing bad, I promise. Can you come to my quarters at 2100 hours?"

"Sure, I'll be there." Tom said, with a hint of worry on his face.

"Come on boy." Chakotay said to the wolf, and the wolf promptly looked up and walked to his side.

Together, they walked from the holodeck back to his cabin.

Upon arriving, Chakotay decided to go back to the spiritual plane to communicate one more time before Tom's arrival.

//I just wanted to be sure that he is the one.// Chakotay said promptly when the spiritual landscape came into view.

//He's the one. Tom... the concept of names is still strange to me, but I'm beginning to see the use of it.//

//Speaking of names, what name would you like for yourself?//

//Actually, I really liked it when Tom called me Tiger, would that be an appropriate name?//

//Honestly, I wouldn't have thought of naming you that but, yes, it is appropriate. Your name is Tiger.//

//I have a name! Please thank Tom when he gets here.//

//I will, I don't know what it will take to convince him. I doubt that I will be able to take him on a spiritual journey without teaching him some relaxation exercises and meditation first.//

//Just be honest with him, and I'll do my best to help.//

//Okay, I'd better go now, he'll be here soon.//

A few moments later Chakotay came back to himself, and Tiger jumped up onto the couch. Chakotay looked at the chronometer and realized he only had a moment before Tom would be there.

::Be-Op::

"Come in."

Tom walked into the commander's quarters a bit apprehensively. Chakotay gestured for him to have a seat on the couch next to Tiger. Tom did so and immediately began to pet Tiger and scratch his neck.

"So what's up Commander?" Tom asked, trying to sound casual.

"We're off duty Tom, you can call me Chakotay, and what's up may take a few minutes to explain. Can I get you anything to drink?" and Chakotay walked to the replicator.

"Whatever you're having will be fine." Tom responded absently, still trying to figure out what was going on.

Chakotay handed a cup of tea to Tom then took a seat on a nearby chair.

"First of all, Tiger asked me to thank you for his name. He really likes it."

"Uh, sure." Tom said with the worried look still in his eye.

"Okay Tom, I'm just going to say this straight out. Tiger is a sentient being, the captain and I can communicate with him, and he asked me to tell you about him because he thinks that you will be able to communicate with him too."

Tom sat quietly for a second then said, "Okay, I can handle that. What do I have to do?"

Chakotay was startled by Tom's easy acceptance of this and had to ask, "You're willing to accept it just like that?"

"Sure, Chakotay... we're in the Delta Quadrant, we've seen a few hundred things that were beyond imagining. A sentient wolf doesn't even trip my weird-o-meter. So what do I have to do to communicate with him?"

"The way the captain and I have talked to him was on a spiritual journey. I will need to teach you some relaxation exercises or meditation before you can make the journey, but Tiger believes that you will be able to do it." Then Chakotay took a sip of tea.

"Chakotay, you may find this difficult to believe, but I know how to meditate. I picked up a few skills during my stay in Auckland." And from the tone of his voice, Chakotay could tell that he had offended Tom.

"I'm sorry Tom. I just assumed that since you're so..." and Chakotay couldn't explain why he came to his conclusion.

"Directionless? Defensive? At war with myself?" Tom said with his most defensive smirk.

"Yeah." Chakotay acknowledged feeling that he had deeply hurt the man before him.

Tom sensed that Chakotay really was sorry and decided to let him off the hook. "You saw what I wanted you to see. Not too many people have gone to the trouble of digging to see if there is anything else."

Chakotay promised himself that it was time to change that. "Tom, whenever you're ready to try and take the journey, I'll be here to help you and I know that Tiger would enjoy talking to you."

Tiger raised his head and nodded at Tom. A large genuine smile crossed Tom's face.

Tom finally said, "I'd like that too. I think it's too late to do this tonight, but I'm free tomorrow night."

Chakotay smiled and said, "Good, that will give me time to gather a few things for your medicine bundle. Is 1800 late enough?"

Tom got up to leave then turned and said, "Yeah, that's fine. Sorry I got a little pissy, I guess I'm just a little sensitive about that stuff."

Chakotay stood and nodded, "You were right, I made assumptions about you based on next to nothing. I'll see you tomorrow."

And with that Tom left Chakotay's cabin. Chakotay sat for a while, absently stroking Tiger's fur, considering the source of his own preconceived notions regarding Tom.

[To Be Continued]