

## ***The Future is Ours – Part 1***

### **“Are You With Me?”**

By Dawn

Rated PG

Summary: Missing scenes and additional thoughts from Endgame that include more conversations between Janeway and Chakotay, and between Captain Janeway and Admiral Janeway.

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As Chakotay entered her ready room, Kathryn asked, “Any false alarms with B’Elanna last night?”

“No, Tom told me at breakfast that they managed to sleep completely through the night. Well, at least he did.” He sat down in front of her desk.

Amused, she speculated, “I wonder if a Klingon’s redundant organs include two bladders.”

He laughed quietly and then became serious. “Kathryn, I have a confession.”

“Oh?”

“Well, not really a confession, per se. But I’d like your advice.”

She stopped shifting through the PADDs on her desk to give him her full attention. “Both a confession and advice? Is there a shady secret in your past that you haven’t told me about?”

He chuckled softly. “Many, but we’re not dredging those up today.”

Relaxing in her chair, she said, “Darn. And here I was, hoping to learn something dark and mysterious about you.” She’d missed their flirting over the last few weeks since he and Seven returned from being trapped under the Ledosian barrier. He had been brooding and even though she missed him, she was willing to give him the space. God knew she needed it sometimes too.

“Perhaps someday, but that’s not what I need your help with. Yesterday, when you asked me to join you for lunch, I should’ve been straightforward with you.”

She tried to remember what he’d said. “You had plans, didn’t you?”

“Yes.”

“There’s no harm in that.”

He pinched his thumb and forefinger together. “Maybe just a little.”

“What? Did you plan a mutiny during your lunch break? Reprogram some command codes or something?”

“No, of course not.” He smiled. “I had a lunch date... I think.”

“A date?” That was definitely not what she was expecting to hear.

“Well, I’m not entirely sure.” He laughed nervously. “It was a picnic, but I thought we were just going to talk over lunch in the mess hall.”

“A picnic?” Kathryn felt her stomach tense up. He’d never dated a member of the crew before, and while she wouldn’t say anything against it, she didn’t love the idea either.

“Complete with a blanket and basket. The setting made it a little more intimate than I expected it to be.”

She absently sorted through the PADDs on her desk. He certainly had every right to date someone. He deserved some personal happiness since she couldn’t show her love for him. “So, what is it that you want to confess? Were you making out in a Jeffries tube or something?” Heaven forbid.

“Of course not. I just think I should’ve told you that I was going on a date. I don’t like keeping anything from you.”

Her countenance softened, even though a knot in her belly remained firm. “Well, I appreciate that, but this sounds like a rather private matter.”

“Yes, but you’re my closest friend, and now I want to ask for your advice. It seemed uncouth to ask when I omitted that I was getting involved in the first place.”

“Involved?” She raised an eyebrow and shifted in her chair.

“Well, sort of involved.” He tugged at his ear. “It’s too soon to tell, and I haven’t decided yet if I should pursue it. She’s attractive, pleasant, and very intelligent, but I’m not entirely sure.”

“Who is she?”

He waved a finger. “I’m not ready to divulge that.”

“It’s a simple matter of me checking where you were at lunch yesterday and who was in the same room with you.”

“Yes, but I know you’re not going to do that because I’m going to ask you to respect my privacy. I’m not ready for you to know.”

His lack of candor was annoying. “All right, fine. What sort of advice can I give you?”

“Well, I’ve not dated anyone on Voyager before, and it feels a little... awkward. I’m afraid the scuttlebutt will run rampant as soon as we make it public.” He stood and took a couple of steps toward the stairs to look out the viewport. “I don’t want to sneak around, but I also don’t want anyone to know until I’m ready.”

“Why wouldn’t you want people to know? If you’re falling for this woman, why keep it a secret? Everyone on this ship cares about you and respects you.”

He nodded in appreciation. “The challenge is that I’m not exactly young, and she is.”

“Ah.” The knot in her stomach doubled. “You think we won’t accept the relationship because you’re ‘robbing the cradle,’ so to speak.”

He looked back at her, slightly annoyed. “It’s exactly that kind of disparaging remark that I’d like to avoid.”

She leaned forward, resting her elbows on her desk. “Chakotay, I’m sorry. Please accept my apology.”

“Of course, but that’s why I wanted to talk to you. Your opinion matters a lot to me and as the leader of this community, the crew will follow your lead.”

“So are you asking for my approval to date this young lady, or do you just want me to openly support you?” Either way, the thought of it made her nauseous.

“Both, actually.” He turned to her. “Kathryn, you are the closest friend that I’ve ever had. I hope you’ll be happy for me.”

She swallowed hard. “I’ll do what I can. However, as your friend, I would like to offer some of that advice you asked for... please be sure that you’ve fallen in love with her before you make it public. That way, when you do, I’ll know that I have reason to wish you happiness. I don’t want to openly accept you dating a young crewmember if it’s just a passing fancy.”

“Astrometrics to Captain Janeway.”

Without losing eye contact with him, Kathryn touched her commbadge. “Go ahead, Seven.” She watched Chakotay blush slightly and look away, which confused her. She wondered if he was embarrassed to be interrupted having this conversation.

“Long range sensors are detecting a nebula with extremely high neutrino emissions accompanied by intermittent graviton flux approximately three light-years away.”

Kathryn’s heart fluttered. “A wormhole?”

“Inconclusive. I’d suggest closer investigation.”

Kathryn stood. “Agreed. Send the coordinates to the helm.”

When the channel closed, Chakotay said, “And I thought today wasn’t going to be interesting.”

She smiled and nodded towards the door. “Ready for an adventure?”

“Always.” He put his hand on her lower back as they entered the bridge.

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Later in the briefing room, the senior staff gathered to discuss the nebula and the large number of Borg cubes that were hiding inside it. Voyager failed to detect one of the cubes until it was right on top of it, and only Tom’s intuitive piloting skills got them out of the encounter alive.

Kathryn studied the readings and listened to her staff debate, as she weighed the risks of the options. Everything was always a gamble. Take road A or road B, each having a different outcome. Where would they be safer? Continuing in the Delta Quadrant, or taking the risk to get home?

Tuvok said, “There’s no evidence that the cube detected us.”

Chakotay asked, “Where is it now?”

Checking her readings, Seven answered, “Approximately three light-years away.”

Tom asked, “How can they not have seen us? We came within ten meters of their hull.”

“The Borg wouldn’t knowingly risk a collision. The radiation must have interfered with their sensors as well as ours,” Tuvok answered.

Harry said, “If they can’t detect us, we should go back.”

“I wouldn’t recommend it,” Seven replied. “My analysis of the tritanium signatures suggests there were at least forty-seven Borg vessels inside the nebula.”

“We can’t just give up on those wormholes!” Harry’s tension was tangible.

Kathryn hated saying it to him, but she had to. “Oh yes, we can.”

Harry suggested, “What if we tried to modify the…”

“Sorry, Mr. Kim. You may be the captain someday, but not today.” It was her choice. She had to make it. Forty-seven or more Borg ships that they couldn’t detect didn’t give them very good odds. She had been assimilated before, and she wasn’t inclined to experience it again.

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It had been a quiet day, and since she had nothing else to do, Kathryn decided to spend the evening on the bridge. It gave her time to compose a letter to her mother, although because of the nebula they had encountered, their long-range communications were blocked until they could clear the sector. It also gave her time with the beta shift officers, who never seemed at ease working with her.

“Captain, ma’am?” asked Ensign Jurot from ops.

“Just Captain is fine. Yes, Ensign?”

“Sensors are picking up tachyon emissions, about one light year off starboard.”

“Source?”

“Unknown, Captain. I’m sorry.”

“All stop.” Kathryn pulled up her screen and studied the readings. “No need to apologize, Ensign, the source is not always identifiable.”

“Yes, Captain. Thank you, Captain.”

She wished they would relax. They’d been serving together for over seven years and she’d never bit anyone’s head off. Well, not completely. “Helm, bring us about and take us within range of emissions.”

“Aye, Captain. Speed?”

“Full Impulse.” Tom wouldn’t have asked that question, she thought. Just for good measure, she added, “Bring us to a distance of approximately three thousand kilometers, and Ensign Jurot, please put it up on the viewscreen.”

“Aye, Captain.”

They studied the readings for awhile longer, but it became clear that she was doing all of the thinking. She needed her senior staff. “Senior officers, report to the Bridge.”

Tom, Harry, and Tuvok were the first to arrive and take their places. She filled them in quickly, and they all began working rapidly at their consoles. It was a welcome sound compared to the last twenty minutes of silence.

A few minutes later, Chakotay and Seven arrived on the bridge. As he walked down to the command level, he asked, “What is it?”

Kathryn answered, “Judging from the tachyon emissions, some sort of temporal rift.”

Seven took her place and asked, “How’s it being generated?”

“That’s what we’re trying to figure out.”

Although her senior staff hadn’t come to any conclusions, she at least felt that they were thinking with her. After several minutes, Tuvok reported, “I’m detecting nadiion discharges on the other side of the rift.”

“Weapons fire?” Chakotay asked.

Tuvok answered, “It’s possible. The signature appears to be Klingon.”

Kathryn stood up and concentrated on the viewscreen. “Red alert.” She didn’t know who the Klingons would be firing at, but she wasn’t interested in getting caught in the middle.

Tuvok said, “There’s a vessel coming through the rift.”

Chakotay asked, “Klingon?”

“No, Federation.”

Kathryn quickly looked at Tuvok in surprise, and then back at the viewscreen, trying to figure out what this could mean. Why would Klingons be firing at a Federation Ship and how did they get here?

Harry said, “We’re being hailed.”

Kathryn ordered, “On screen.” What she saw made her do a triple-take and she still felt shocked.

An image of a much older Kathryn Janeway appeared, wearing admiral's pips. She ordered, "Recalibrate your deflector to emit an anti-tachyon pulse. You have to seal that rift."

Tom turned around to look at Kathryn, obviously in as much disbelief as she.

Kathryn spoke to the older version of herself, "It's usually considered polite to introduce yourself before you start giving orders."

Tuvok said, "Captain, a Klingon vessel is coming through."

The Admiral said, "Close the rift. In case you didn't notice, I outrank you, Captain. Now do it!"

Kathryn nodded to Harry, giving him the unspoken order to proceed. Voyager fired the pulse as ordered and closed the rift. She turned her attention back to Admiral Janeway and said, "I did what you asked. Now tell me what the hell is going on."

"I've come to bring Voyager home."

It took Kathryn a moment to absorb what she was saying. "Forgive me for my hesitation, but... this is a little hard to believe."

"Beam me aboard and we'll talk. Transporter room one?"

"By all means." Kathryn held up a hand towards the turbolift. "We'll see you in a moment." When the communication link terminated, she turned to look at Chakotay, still a little stunned. "What do you make of this?"

He cocked his head to the side. "Well, she certainly looks and sounds like you."

"It's uncanny, Captain," Tom added.

Kathryn frowned slightly at Tom and then turned back again. "Chakotay and Tuvok, you're with me." As she walked up the stairs to the upper level, she said, "Harry, Seven, I want a full spectrum analysis of the rift, the weapons signatures, and that shuttle."

"Already on it, Captain," Harry answered.

She shook her head in amusement as she stepped into the turbolift. "Do you think she's for real?"

Tuvok said, "It appears that she does have similar reckless tendencies."

Chakotay stifled a laugh, earning a glare from her. She said, "I am not reckless. Well... there was that one time that I flew us through the binary stars."

“Of course, Captain,” Tuvok replied. “Only that one time.”

They stepped out of the lift and began walking down the corridor. Chakotay said, “Tuvok, your sense of humor is as enjoyable as always.”

“Thank you, Commander.”

“What do you think?” Kathryn asked. “Twenty years older?”

“It’s hard to say,” Chakotay answered. “But you do age beautifully.”

“I’m a little relieved to see that I’m still alive.”

Tuvok said, “Remember the temporal prime directive, Captain. The less you know, the better.”

Kathryn took a deep breath as they stepped into the transporter room. She felt a small degree of comfort as Chakotay squeezed her shoulder as he passed.

Crewman Jones at the transporter controls asked, “Ready, Captain?”

Kathryn glanced at Chakotay and then nodded. “As I’ll ever be.” When the blue shimmer of the transporter beam faded away to reveal Admiral Janeway, Kathryn said, “Welcome aboard.”

“It’s good to be back.” The Admiral nodded at Kathryn, but her eyes quickly averted to Tuvok and Chakotay. She slowly stepped down and stretched out her hands to take one of each of theirs. “So good to be back.”

Kathryn watched Chakotay’s reaction. He seemed totally captivated by the Admiral. It had been a long time since she’d seen that look in his eyes, but then again, it had been a long time since she’d really looked him in the eye and showed him how she felt.

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Both Kathryn Janeways were accompanied to the bridge by Chakotay and Tuvok. On the way, the Admiral described how she had obtained the temporal device from the Klingons, and how they had changed the deal at the very end. She, of course, couldn’t abide by their new price, so she stole it. Kathryn observed how she was constantly touching one of the men throughout the conversation.

When they walked into the ready room alone, Admiral Janeway nodded to the thermos flask on the desk. “Fresh coffee.”

“Would you like a cup?”



“No, I gave it up years ago. I only drink tea.” The Admiral stepped up to the upper deck and looked out the viewport. “I told the curator at the museum that if he wanted to make the Ready Room more authentic, he should always keep a steaming pot of coffee on the desk.”

“Voyager’s in a museum?” Kathryn wondered about the size of the building that could have contained it.

“Voyager *is* a museum, on the grounds of the Presidio. On a clear morning, you can see Alcatraz from here.”

Her suspicions were confirmed. “You made it back to Earth.”

The Admiral nodded to Kathryn’s coffee. “Unfortunately, our favorite cup took a bit of a beating along the way. It was damaged during a battle with the Fen Domar.”

“Who?”

“You’ll run into them in a few years.”

“You know what? I shouldn’t be listening to details about the future.” Kathryn held up a hand to stop the topic.

“The almighty Temporal Prime Directive. Take my advice. It’s less of a headache if you just ignore it.”

“You’ve obviously decided to or you wouldn’t be here.” This bantering with herself was going to be harder on her than she suspected.

The Admiral dipped her chin. “A lot’s happened to me since I was you.”

“Well, I’m still me and this is still my ship. So no more talk about what’s going to happen until I decide otherwise. Understood?”

“All right. Let’s talk about the past. Three days ago you detected elevated neutrino emissions in a nebula in grid nine-eight-six. You thought it might be a way home. You were right. I’ve come to tell you to take Voyager back to that nebula.”

Kathryn exclaimed, “It was crawling with Borg!”

“I’ve brought technology that will get us past them. I don’t blame you for being skeptical. But if you can’t trust yourself who can you trust?”

Good point, Kathryn thought. “For the sake of argument, let’s say I believe everything you’re telling me. The future you come from sounds pretty good. Voyager’s home, I’m

an admiral, there are ways to defend against the Borg, my Ready Room even gets preserved for posterity.”

“So why would you want to tamper with such a rosy time line? To answer that, I’d have to tell you more than you want to know. But suffice it to say, if you don’t do what I’m suggesting, it’s going to take you another sixteen years to get this ship home and there are going to be casualties along the way. I know exactly what you’re thinking.”

“You’ve also become a telepath?”

“I used to be you, remember? You’re asking yourself, is she really who she says she is or is this some sort of deception? For all you know, I could be a member of Species 8472 in disguise. Have your people examine my shuttle. Tell them to take a close look at the weapons systems and the armor technology. In the meantime, the Doctor can confirm my identity.”

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Later in sickbay, Kathryn couldn’t help but notice how her older self responded to Seven when she delivered the report on the shuttle scans. The look on the Admiral’s face was almost identical to the way she looked when she saw Chakotay and Tuvok. Kathryn, of course, wasn’t familiar with her own expressions and body language, but it seemed to her that the Admiral was totally engrossed in their presence. Kathryn presumed that something had happened to all three, because it was clear that the Admiral hadn’t seen them for awhile. That thought made it a little difficult to hold a steady breath.

After learning that the Admiral was exactly who she said she was; Kathryn gave the order to have the stealth technology from the shuttle installed on Voyager. She hadn’t decided whether she was going to follow the Admiral into the nebula yet, but it would be nice, at least, to make enhancements to Voyager while she contemplated the options.

Two days later, Kathryn decided to go ahead with the Admiral’s plans. It had been a very busy two days, with every crew member available working on the modifications. The ship’s weapons systems needed to be completely overhauled, and the battle armor would require a considerable amount of work to be installed on the ship’s outer hull.

She made a note in her personal log that although she’d had some strange experiences in her career, nothing had quite compared to the sight of her future self briefing her officers on technology that hadn’t been invented yet.

What she didn’t say in her personal log was how uncomfortable the situation made her. She tried to keep her distance because it was just too odd. It reminded her of something Harry had said early on in their journey, about an experience being weird. She’d told him that weird was part of the job, and this certainly qualified.

One didn't often have a chance to watch themselves, their little gestures, expressions, and movements. Was she imagining it when she saw a little sway in the Admiral's hips? Surely she didn't do that. She also made a mental note to avoid that hairstyle. It made her look like a grandma. But what struck her most was the Admiral's outward affection towards Chakotay and Tuvok. She didn't think she had ever touched either of them that much in the last seven years total.

Her introspection was interrupted by a call from sickbay. Seven had been found unconscious in the cargo bay. By the time she and the Admiral arrived, the Doctor had already treated Seven and told them that her cortical node had been exposed to a low-energy EM surge.

Seven reported that she had received a warning from the Borg Queen that they'd be assimilated if they re-entered the nebula. Kathryn had been about to reply that the Queen must be nervous if she's giving out warnings, but the Admiral put her off by waving off any concern. The Admiral was confident that their superior technology would defeat them, as it had before in her experiences. Kathryn wasn't reassured, but decided to allow the mission to proceed as planned as long as they maintained a red alert. Her skin crawled with the realization that the Borg Queen was watching them.

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Kathryn felt a deep sense of anxiety about what they were preparing to do. She could be seeing Earth in a matter of minutes, depending on the location of the wormhole's exit.

Her older self stood near the engineering station on the bridge and observed quietly. Kathryn did her best to ignore her as they neared the nebula. "Bridge to Engineering."

B'Elanna answered, "Go ahead, Captain."

"Deploy armor."

"Yes, ma'am."

Voyager slowly entered the nebula, taking care to avoid collisions with anything Borg as they scanned for the worm holes. If sensor readings were correct, there were dozens of them in there. The ship shook under weapons fire.

Tuvok reported, "Armor integrity at 97%."

When another volley hit them, Kathryn asked, "Tuvok?"

"Integrity holding at 90%."

"Maintain course."

The Admiral pointed out, "They're looking for ways to adapt."

Another stronger volley hit, and Tuvok reported, "Port armor integrity down to 50%."

Kathryn decided it was time to fight back. "Mr. Paris, attack pattern alpha-one. Target the lead cube and fire transphasic torpedoes." She wanted to shout, "Yes!" when the cube exploded after one shot, but she refrained and kept her eyes on the situation. She told Tuvok, "Target the second cube."

When the second cube exploded, the nebula became eerily void of any cubes. She hoped that meant a momentary retreat, and chanced a glance at the Admiral, only to see a smug smile on her face.

Chakotay asked, "Distance to the center?"

Seven answered, "Less than one hundred thousand kilometers."

As they approached, the image on the viewscreen cleared to reveal an enormous Borg structure, unlike anything she'd ever seen. Wide-eyed, Kathryn asked, "What the hell is it?"

The Admiral said, "Mr. Paris, alter course to enter the aperture at co-ordinates three-four-six by four-two."

"Belay that!" Kathryn jumped up. "Admiral? I asked you a question. What is it?"

"The road home!"

Seven said, "It's more than that. It's a transwarp hub."

Kathryn turned to the young woman and said, "You once told me that there were only six of them in the galaxy."

"That's correct," Seven replied.

Kathryn glared at the admiral. "You knew this was here but you didn't tell me about it. Why?"

"I'll answer all your questions once we're back in the Alpha Quadrant."

Furious, she ordered, "Tom, take us out of the nebula."

Tom asked, "Captain?"

"You heard me."

The Admiral tried to intervene. "I gave you an order, Lieutenant. Proceed to the aperture."

Kathryn was pissed. "This is my bridge, Admiral, and I'll have you removed if necessary. Tom, take us out!"

"Aye, Captain."

Kathryn concentrated on getting Voyager to a safe distance, and then was ready to pounce on the Admiral. "How could you even think..."

"Captain?" Chakotay interrupted.

She rounded back to him. "What is it?"

"May I speak with you in your ready room?"

Her anger was about to boil over, but she could see by the intensity on Chakotay's face that he was going to haul her in there whether she liked it or not. Damn, she loved that look. Without a word, she turned on her heel and glared at the Admiral as she passed. She assumed that he followed.

In her ready room, she paced back and forth in front of her desk, muttering to herself about the Admiral's deceit. Sarcastically, she said to herself, "By the way, there's a gigantic Borg hub in there that could mean the alpha quadrant's certain annihilation is only minutes away! Didn't think of that, did you? Damn, self-righteous, stubborn, pig-headed..."

"You do know that you're talking about yourself, don't you?" Chakotay was leaning against her desk with his arms folded across his chest, watching her walk around and grumble.

"That is not the point!" Kathryn glared at him for a moment and then threw her hands up in the air. "What gives her the right to make these decisions..." She stopped and glared at him again. "Don't answer that."

"Wouldn't think of it."

She tried to stay angry, but she couldn't help but fight a tug of a smile at his comment.

"Are you finished?" he asked.

She exhaled forcefully. "Fine, go ahead."

"I thought you needed a moment to cool down before you threw yourself out an airlock."

Kathryn gestured toward the bridge. “She could have said something... anything... about what we’d find. She obviously knew that was in there.”

“Yes, she should have. But, if I may speak candidly, Kathryn Janeway has a tendency to tell people only what they need to know in order to achieve a specific outcome.”

“I do not...,” she paused, “do that... all the time.”

He looked pointedly at her. “You do when you don’t think people will cooperate otherwise.”

“You know, this is worse than when the prime directive comes back to bite me. This time, it’s myself!”

“Kathryn, you know that this crew would do anything you ask, follow you anywhere. And I mean you, not the Admiral. What was clear on their faces just now is the question of why you wouldn’t go through with it. This has been your utmost priority.”

She stared at him as if he had two heads. “Don’t you understand what that hub indicates? The Borg queen has made it clear to us on more than one occasion that she’s planning a second invasion of Earth, and this is a door to the alpha quadrant.”

“I understand that. But it’s likely that this isn’t the only transwarp hub.”

“I believe Seven said there are six.”

“Exactly. There could be a ‘door to the alpha quadrant’ at all six of them.”

“But we’ve found this one. What if we could find a way to use this one to destroy all of them? They must be connected.”

“That’s true.” He looked out the view port and then back at her again. “But, surely we could mount a defense from the alpha quadrant. We’ll know the location of the exit aperture once we’ve gone through it.”

“Chakotay, we make it back eventually. If we have the ability to destroy this thing, we have to try. We might even be able to bring the Borg queen down with it.”

“We’re one ship against fifty cubes attempting to destroy a mammoth piece of technology that we know nothing about. I don’t know, Kathryn...”

“What? Am I being too reckless?”

“Always.” He looked intently at her as if he was trying to decide whether to ask her something.

“What is it?”

“Are you feeling okay?”

She shrugged. “Other than being really ticked off?”

“You’ve been avoiding the crew since she arrived. And you’ve been avoiding me.”

“It’s hard to explain.”

“Try, please.”

“Seeing myself interact with my crew... it’s like an out-of-body experience. And she obviously hasn’t seen some of them in a long time. I feel the need to distance myself from her.”

He stepped closer, a sympathetic smile making his eyes shine. “This must be overwhelming.”

“Yes and no. It’s a relief to know a little about the future, even though with that knowledge, I could make a different decision and change it all.”

He took her hands in his. “Like taking a risk with your life because you’re sure you’ll survive?”

“Exactly.” She studied their joined hands, wishing she could be brutally honest with him about everything she was feeling. “I’ve been uncomfortable watching her. It makes me see things about myself that I don’t like, and I even feel a degree of jealousy seeing her interact with the people that I care about.”

“Well, I do know this... We’ve got the upper hand just having one Kathryn Janeway on the Bridge. But with two, our odds are increased exponentially.”

“I wish I felt as confident.”

He drew her into a hug and said, “It’s not your confidence that makes you exceptional, it’s your intelligence, your intuition, and your bravery.”

She closed her eyes and enjoyed the feel of his solid, warm body for just a moment before forcing herself to let go. She looked up at him. “Thank you.”

“Come on, let’s study the readings and see what our options are. We’ll figure this out.”

Feeling bolstered by his faith and support, she let her Captain’s façade drop back in place as they walked back onto the bridge. She took a deep breath when she looked at the Admiral. Speaking to the entire bridge, she said, “All right, here’s the plan. Gather as

much information as you can about the nebula and that hub. I want a senior staff meeting in astrometrics in one hour. I'll be in engineering. Commander Chakotay, you have the bridge."

A chorus of "Aye, Captains" came in response.

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Seven described the hub as a connection point for thousands of transwarp conduits with apertures in all four quadrants that allowed the Collective to deploy vessels almost anywhere within minutes. They all agreed that it was a major tactical advantage for the Borg and understood why the Queen didn't want Voyager to see it.

The Admiral was frustrated with their desire to destroy the hub and thought they were wasting time, giving the Borg time to counter their advanced technology. She made it clear that she didn't think there was anything Voyager could do that would destroy it.

Kathryn told her senior staff to find a way to destroy it and asked the Admiral to take a walk with her. When they were by themselves in the corridor, she was ready to confront the issue. "I want to know why you didn't tell me about this."

"Because I remember how stubborn and self-righteous I used to be. I figured you might try to do something stupid."

Kathryn was incensed. "We have an opportunity to deal a crippling blow to the Borg. It could save millions of lives!"

The Admiral's intense glare bore down on Kathryn as she spoke. "I didn't spend the last ten years looking for a way to get this crew home earlier so you could throw it all away on some intergalactic goodwill mission."

"Maybe we should go back to Sickbay."

"Why, so you can have me sedated?" The Admiral threw a hand up.

"No, so I can have the Doctor reconfirm your identity. I refuse to believe I'll ever become as cynical as you."

The Admiral took a step away to gather her thoughts. "Am I the only one experiencing déjà vu here?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Seven years ago, you had the chance to use the Caretaker's Array to get Voyager home. Instead you destroyed it."



“I did what I knew was right, and you know it!”

“You chose to put the lives of strangers ahead of the lives of your crew. You can’t make the same mistake again.”

“That’s what being a Starfleet Captain entails! You got Voyager home, which means I will too. If it takes a few more years…”

“Seven of Nine is going to die,” the Admiral interrupted.

“What?”

“Three years from now. She’ll be injured on an away mission. She’ll make it back to Voyager, and die in the arms of her husband.”

“Husband?” This was too much.

“Chakotay. He’ll never be the same after Seven’s death. And neither will you.”

Her mind was reeling... how could she have lost Chakotay to Seven? Seven? She felt her stomach lurch at the realization that Chakotay was dating Seven. “If I know what’s going to happen, I can avoid it.”

“Seven isn’t the only one. Before I got Voyager home, I lost twenty-two more crewmembers. And then of course, there’s Tuvok.”

“What about him?” Surely not him too, she thought.

“You’re forgetting the Temporal Prime Directive, Captain.”

“The hell with it!” She had to know.

“Fine,” the Admiral shouted. “Tuvok has a degenerative neurological condition that he hasn’t told you about. There’s a cure in the Alpha Quadrant, but if he doesn’t get it in time...” She faltered before continuing. “Even if you alter Voyager’s route, limit your contact with alien species, you’re going to lose people. But I’m offering you a chance to get them all home safe and sound... Today! Are you really going to walk away from that?”

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The knot in Kathryn’s stomach was back. She’d been walking around the ship for two hours, trying to focus her thoughts and now she found herself standing outside Chakotay’s quarters. She’d checked the sensors and knew he was in there. While she was anxious about the opportunity to cripple the Borg and protect the Alpha Quadrant

from a possible invasion, she was overwhelmed by the personal losses that would come as a result.

The pressure she was feeling was borderline intolerable, and she needed to talk to Chakotay, now more than ever. Unfortunately, she was so furious with him that she couldn't see straight. Before she rang his chime, she knew she needed to calm down and focus her energy on the important matter at hand, the Borg hub. The door to his quarters opened suddenly, startling her.

"Good evening, Kathryn," Chakotay said. "What can I do for you?"

To hell with the hub. Fixing a glare on him, she yelled, "Seven?!?!?"

He pulled her inside. "Not in the corridor."

"You're dating Seven?!" She turned to him, her fists balled at her sides.

He took a deep breath. "She told you?"

"No." She stabbed the air in the direction of the corridor. "The Admiral just told me. What are you thinking?"

"Full support, Kathryn, remember? That's all I asked for."

"You say that like it's nothing! How the hell can I support you when you're dating someone I consider my daughter?"

"Your daughter?"

"As infuriating as she can be, yes, I do feel that way about her. Surely you realize that?"

"So why not let your best friend date her? You know me, trust me..."

"You're old enough to be her father!"

"I told you days ago that I was dating someone much younger and it didn't seem to bother you then. Now it does? Because it's Seven?"

"I was biting my tongue because I trusted you. I thought there might be some chance that you wouldn't see it through because your better judgment would surface. But Seven? Please tell me you haven't slept with her."

"That's none of your business."

"She's so young, Chakotay. So inexperienced. She's never been with a man before... Chakotay, you're her first crush."

“Second, actually. You’re forgetting Axum.” He turned away from her. “Kathryn, you have no clue what you’re talking about. You don’t know how she feels.”

“No, but I can guess. You’re a father-figure to her. It would be like a student dating her professor. She looks up to you because you’re in a position of power. You’re safe, you’re in control. She knows you won’t hurt her.”

“Of course I wouldn’t. Well not the woman she’s become. She did say that she’s forgiven me for trying to kill her when she was fully Borg.”

“How comforting.” Frustrated, she ran her fingers through her hair. “This couldn’t be happening at a worse time.” She felt so overwhelmed.

“Actually, I think it’s a great time. She’s really making progress with socializing.”

“I mean with the Borg and the Admiral here.” She rubbed her neck.

“I know you’re under a lot of strain, but this is not a problem that you have to solve.”

“Isn’t it?” She desperately wanted to tell him how she felt, but wouldn’t. It never seemed to be the right time for them, and now the fact that he was looking elsewhere for a relationship meant that he obviously had gotten over her, regardless of how he seemed to be doting on the Admiral. She sighed. “Look, Chakotay, just be damn sure about this before anyone else finds out. And please, tread carefully with her.” She turned to go, a sadness enveloping her heart. There was so much she needed to talk to him about, but couldn’t. Not now.

“Kathryn…”

Without turning to look back, she stopped. “Yes?”

“I don’t want to lose your friendship over this.”

She swallowed hard and closed her eyes, thinking if he only knew how she felt. How difficult a position he was putting her in. “You mean a lot to me, Chakotay, and I don’t say that lightly. If you’re in love with her, you will have my support.”

“Thank you.”

She left before he could see the tear that escaped.

Kathryn’s heart ached over what she had learned, and then it worsened after she talked to Tuvok about his disease. The decision about what to do with the hub became ten times more difficult because now it was personal. If she kept Voyager in the Delta Quadrant, she risked losing her two closest friends and confidants.

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Later in the briefing room, the senior staff gathered to decide, as a group, how they would go forward. She felt this decision was one they should all make together because it tore at her heart and she didn't think she could make it on her own.

While everyone was in discussion, she kept one eye on the Admiral and the other eye on Chakotay and Seven. The Admiral was looking particularly exasperated at their conversation, while the other two weren't showing any outward emotions whatsoever toward each other. Kathryn couldn't help but wonder about how much chemistry could exist between them.

The final decision to destroy the hub and continue their journey felt like both a relief and a burden, although she supposed that either choice would have felt that way. Kathryn was worried that she had influenced their decision because she knew they'd follow her to hell and back if she asked them to.

If only there was a way to achieve both outcomes. After shift change, Kathryn retired to her quarters to give it more thought. Hours later, she still hadn't come up with anything and couldn't sleep, so she took her thoughts to the messhall. She sat quietly in the dark, wondering if she could still change their future.

The Admiral came in and ordered, "Coffee, black."

Kathryn turned at the sound of her own voice. "I thought you gave it up."

Admiral Janeway sipped at the coffee with pure joy on her face. "I've decided to revive a few of my old habits."

"Oh? What else, besides the coffee?"

She looked out at the stars. "Oh well, I used to be much more idealistic. I took a lot of risks. I've been so determined to get this crew home for so many years, I forgot how much they loved being together, and how loyal they were to you. It's taken me a few days to realize it, but this is your ship, your crew. Not mine. I was wrong to lie to you, to think I could talk you out of something you'd set your mind to."

"You were only doing what you thought was right for all of us."

Admiral Janeway said, "Well, you've changed my mind about that. And I'd like to help you carry out your mission. Maybe together we can increase our odds."

Excited now, Kathryn said, "Maybe we can do more than that. There's got to be a way to have our cake and eat it too."

“We can’t destroy the hub and get Voyager home.”

“Are you absolutely sure about that?”

The Admiral lingered a moment, obviously enjoying the scent of the coffee. “There might be a way. I considered it once, but it seemed too risky.”

“That was before you decided to revive your old habits.” Charged excitement bubbled up inside her again.

She hummed in pleasure after taking a drink. “I don’t know why I ever gave this up.”

“What will it take?”

“Well, as I see it, there’s really not enough room in this galaxy for two of us.”

Kathryn couldn’t respond to that, but waited and listened while the Admiral looked out on the stars.

“When I decided to come back here to bring you home, I knew that if the Starship Relatively didn’t intervene, we might very well end up with two of us. I figured I’d go off somewhere and be a hermit. Let you live your life without me overshadowing it.”

“I’d be okay with having two mothers.”

Admiral Janeway turned back to her and smiled. “But I doubt you’d be okay with a mother who had all the same friends, loved all the same people. And my heart might break seeing you get to enjoy a life that I never had the opportunity to live.”

Kathryn fidgeted for just a moment, trying to decide whether to broach another topic.

“What do you want to ask me?”

Kathryn smiled. “You know me so well.”

“Well...” Admiral Janeway motioned between them.

“It’s Chakotay...”

“And Seven.”

“Yes.” Kathryn sighed. “I suppose you told him, too, that you’d support him.”

“And be happy for him, yes. Biggest mistake I ever made.”

“Biggest?” She found that hard to believe.

“Okay, second biggest. The first was keeping him at arm’s length all those years.”

“Is that how you remember it?”

“Well, I wish after that one kiss on New Earth, that I’d never let us take a step backwards.”

“I’m with you there. Especially in light of this thing with Seven.”

The Admiral looked at her coffee. “Old habits are hard to let go. It became too comfortable for us to not cross that line.”

“Amazing how reckless we are, yet we won’t risk our heart, isn’t it?”

The Admiral was silent for a moment. “I’ve spent a lot of time with counselors over the last ten years.”

“And I assume that you talked about Justin?” Kathryn knew the root of her inability to risk her heart was because she lost her first fiancée.

“Some.” She looked down at her younger self. “It seems that the counselors believe that most of my pain is derived from the fact that I’ve lost just about everyone that I’ve ever loved.”

Kathryn took a steadying breath. “Everyone?”

“Well, not Harry, Tom, B’Elanna, and their children. The Doctor is still with us, as is Naomi.”

“But Justin, Daddy, Mark, Kes, Chakotay, Seven, Tuvok…”

“And Mom…” She smiled kindly. “Will you do us a favor? Make sure she sees a Doctor when her legs start bothering her. You know how she waves off aches and pains.”

“Okay.” Kathryn felt like the air had become stifling.

The Admiral nodded gently. “So, it’s really difficult for us to open our heart up to that kind of vulnerability, and I think that’s the root cause of our failure to take him by the collar and kiss the living daylights out of him.”

Kathryn laughed quietly. “We have dreamt of that often, haven’t we?”

“Yes, we do.” The Admiral paused before saying. “Not many people, perhaps any, have had the opportunity to go back in time and try to fix their mistakes. You might wonder why I’ve chosen to return to this point, and not a month ago to save Mr. Carey.”

“I was wondering about that, yes.”

“I couldn’t go back and fix every death. It’s just not possible. But, in addition to your arrival at the hub, I also chose this time because of the status of Chakotay’s budding relationship. It’s not too late.” The Admiral took a sip of coffee. “I’m going to sacrifice my life.”

She gasped, but said nothing as the Admiral held up a hand.

“It’s the only way this can work. As you suspect, the Borg Queen is planning an invasion of Earth, and although she won’t be successful, it will cause a substantial loss of life. So... let me go to the uni-complex in Borg space. I’ve got a neurolytic pathogen that has been proven extremely effective in bringing chaos to order. If the Queen assimilates me directly, this pathogen should bring down the entire complex and all transwarp hubs connected to it. If you send a couple of torpedoes behind you, this hub should be decimated.”

“Let you be assimilated? How can you ask me to do that?”

“Who’s to say that once we do change the future, I won’t cease to exist anyway? Besides, you’re going to promise me that you won’t be afraid to live your life as fully as possible. Take a chance on love. In the end, we will lose everyone that we out-live, but they tell me that love makes life worth living. Chakotay hasn’t yet committed to Seven. Take this opportunity to rekindle the spark between you and don’t let him go.”

“Did he love her?”

“No, I don’t think he did, but he never admitted it.” The Admiral looked away. “As you suspect, it was more the love of a parent, and that really confused matters when they tried to consummate the marriage.”

“I don’t want to hear this.”

The Admiral continued despite her protest. “It never worked. They’d only been married a few months when she died. She wasn’t able to feel those emotions and didn’t have the physical desire to have sex. Chakotay wouldn’t make her.”

Kathryn let that knowledge sit quietly in the air between them. “Did you ever tell him how you felt?”

“Yes. A few years after she died, but because of circumstances and my inability to risk my heart, we never saw that love fulfilled. He was the last of the twenty-two. Sacrificed his life to save mine as we arrived in the alpha quadrant.”

Kathryn’s voice shook as she stated, “Exactly what I’d... what we’d always feared.”

“I held him in my arms as he died. We were both...” Admiral Janeway rubbed her fingers across her palms. “I’ve never been able to shake the image of his blood on my hands.”

Kathryn wanted to turn away, but couldn’t. She whispered, “Did he ever admit to loving you?”

Admiral Janeway nodded. “With his last breath.”

“Oh, God.” Kathryn’s eyes filled with tears and vowed. “I’ll do what I can.”

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Kathryn told the senior staff about the revised plan, and they weren’t at all happy with the idea of sacrificing the Admiral. Especially Chakotay... he had been seething that she would allow the Admiral to face assimilation. Kathryn took comfort that he was so worried because he had helped her through the difficult time after she’d been assimilated the first time. He knew that if Kathryn was terrified of it, the Admiral likely was too.

She reassured him that the neurolytic pathogen would work quickly and she wouldn’t suffer long. He wasn’t happy, but he understood why they were doing this. Well, he understood part of the reasons, at least.

Kathryn took a moment to compose herself before entering the Admiral’s shuttle. She found her sitting in the pilot’s seat.

“It’s about time. I’m not getting any younger, you know.”

Kathryn readied the hypospray. “You’re sure you want to do this?”

“Nooo, but Voyager isn’t big enough for both of us.”

She emptied the pathogen into the Admiral’s neck. “You know, I’m surprised that the Timeship Relativity hasn’t intervened yet. This seems like it would be a huge disruption to the space/time continuum.”

“Oh, I’m sure they have a reason. Maybe this will all make the galaxy a better place.”

“The whole galaxy?” She winked. “Just by changing the fates of a half billion Borg and a few humanoids?”



“You never know.”

Kathryn put her hand on a very familiar shoulder. “Well, good luck, Admiral.”

“You too.” As Kathryn started to leave, the Admiral added, “Captain, I’m glad I got to know you again.”

Kathryn smiled brightly and headed back to the bridge.

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When she arrived on deck one, the entire senior staff was in place except for Tom and B’Elanna. Chakotay said, “B’Elanna’s just gone into labor.”

Kathryn raised an eyebrow. “Is it another false alarm?”

“I’m afraid not,” Chakotay replied.

“That baby has got some kind of timing.” She stepped up to the helm and put her hand on the young woman’s shoulder. “Are you up to this, Ensign Jenkins?”

“Ma’am, I’m not sure.” Jenkins looked up at her Captain. “Do you think I am?”

Kathryn wanted to tell her yes. “In the past when Lieutenant Paris has been unavailable, you’ve done very well.”

Ensign Jenkins nodded and said, “Thank you, Captain, but I’m not sure that I’ll be able to hold her while riding the shockwave of the torpedoes, if it comes to that. We need our best pilot, and Lieutenant Paris even has experience piloting her through a transwarp corridor. I’m not sure that I even understand the physics behind it.”

“This could be your chance to shine, Ensign.”

“Thank you, Captain, but I think we’d all feel better if Lieutenant Paris could take the helm. I know it’s his baby, but I think B’Elanna would understand.”

“I think she would too.” Kathryn squeezed the young woman’s shoulder and tapped her commbadge. “Bridge to Lieutenant Paris. We’re about to get under way.”

“Captain,” Tom responded. “I’m afraid we’re…”

They heard B’Elanna’s voice say, “Go,” before the communication terminated.

Kathryn turned to Chakotay. She felt bad calling him away from his daughter's birth. Chakotay nodded, giving her the reassurance that she had to do what was necessary. She tapped her commbadge again and asked, "Is there a problem, Mr. Paris?"

"On my way, Captain."

When he arrived, Kathryn could see Ensign Jenkins' shoulders relax. As Tom crossed the bridge, Kathryn said, "I'm sorry to pull you away, Mr. Paris."

"We understand, Captain. She's in good hands."

Tuvok reported, "The Admiral's shuttle has entered a transwarp conduit, Captain."

Kathryn gripped her armrests, feeling anxious about what her counterpart was about to endure. Chakotay squeezed her arm in reassurance. She ordered, "All right, Tom, let's get this show on the road. Warp two until we reach the nebula."

"Aye, Captain."

She felt the hum of the warp engines come online. "When we're in range, Mr. Kim, put the nebula on screen."

"Aye, Captain."

She didn't have to wait long. "Slow to full impulse. Adjust speed as necessary." She tapped her commbadge. "Bridge to Engineering, deploy the armor."

"Armor deployed, Captain," Ensign Vorik responded.

They entered the nebula and Kathryn was surprised to find the path to the hub clear. Not one cube attacked them. When they were in range of the conduit, Kathryn said, "Take us in."

Tom responded, "Aye, Captain."

They weren't inside the corridor for more than thirty seconds when Seven reported, "The Admiral's succeeded, Captain. Conduit shielding is destabilizing."

"Now, Mr. Tuvok!" Voyager fired a spread of three transphasic torpedoes behind them.

Kathryn watched over the readings intently; making sure that they managed to stay completely ahead of the shockwave.

Tuvok said, "Captain, a Borg sphere is approaching from behind. They're charging weapons."

Without hesitation, Kathryn ordered, "Fire!"

"Firing phasers." Voyager rocked under weapons fire. Kathryn nodded at Chakotay and he jumped up to help Tuvok.

"Aft armor is down to 6%."

Seven reported, "An aperture is opening in the Borg sphere. They're planning to assimilate us."

"Not today," Kathryn stated. There was no way in hell that she was letting them get their hands on this technology.

"Hull breaches on decks six through twelve!" Harry announced.

Tom said, "I can't stay ahead of them, Captain!"

"The armor is failing," Tuvok warned.

"Where's the nearest aperture?" Chakotay asked.

Seven responded, "Approximately thirty seconds ahead, but it leads back to the Delta Quadrant."

Kathryn decided on a course of action. "Mr. Paris, prepare to adjust your heading."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Captain?" Chakotay asked. "You're not thinking..."

She cut him off with a wave of her hand. She didn't have time to explain. "Bring us into alignment with the aperture of that sphere. Allow it to take us inside."

"Aye, Captain," Paris said with uncertainty.

"Seven, when the Borg assimilate a ship from inside a sphere, how do they do it?"

"They use large tubules to tap into the computer core first, and then transport drones onboard."

Kathryn scratched her chin. "I'm banking on them not being able to get through the armor in time."

"Agreed, Captain," Seven replied.

As the ship was swallowed by the sphere, she commanded, "Mr. Paris, ease off our speed as we enter the sphere's gravity."

"Aye, Captain. We're just about there."

A moment later, Harry announced, "The aperture is closing."

"Tuvok, ready the remaining transphasic torpedoes. One should do it."

They all waited in silence until the sensors indicated that they were no longer moving. They could hear clanking on the hull, but couldn't be sure what it was. Kathryn asked, "Mr. Paris, what's our position?"

"Right where we expected to be."

Seven said, "The transwarp network has been obliterated."

"We'll celebrate later." Kathryn gripped her armrests. "Paris, as soon as you're able, get us out of here. All hands, brace for impact. Tuvok, target the central plexus and fire." The ship rocked under the explosions. She held her breath as the ship's impulse engines surged them forward at full speed.

"We're clear!" shouted Harry as the image on the viewscreen changed from a ball of fire to show that they were surrounded by more Starfleet ships than they could count.

"We made it." She stood up suddenly, unable to believe it.

Harry announced, "We're being hailed."

"On screen," she said, almost breathless. Her eyes filled with moisture as she saw Admiral Paris, Lieutenant Barclay, and Admiral Sylvanus appear on the viewscreen. Her voice choked with emotion, she said, "Sorry to surprise you. Next time we'll call ahead."

Admiral Paris glanced at his son in wonder and then back at Kathryn. "Welcome back."

"It's good to be here."

The Admiral asked, "How did you...?"

She interrupted, too overwhelmed to explain at the moment. "It'll all be in my report, sir."

"I look forward to it. Is there anything you need?"

"I don't know yet, sir. I think we're still in shock."

“As are we. Very well, I’ll let you attend to your crew and meanwhile, I’ll work on what to do with you. When you’re ready, proceed to Earth’s orbit. Paris out.”

Kathryn smiled and said quietly, “Thanks for your help, Admiral Janeway.”

The Doctor’s voice called over the comm system. “Sickbay to Lieutenant Paris.” A baby’s cry was heard as he added, “There’s someone here who’d like to say hello.”

Thrilled with that wonderful sound, Kathryn said, “You’d better get down there, Tom.” After he left, she turned back to see Chakotay standing on the upper deck with Seven, and she felt the impulse to separate them. Since Jenkins had left the bridge, she ordered, “Mr. Chakotay, the helm.”

She retook her seat and said, “Set a course, for home.” Taking a calm, steadying breath, she marveled at what they’d accomplished. Pride filled her heart as she saw all the ships that had been waiting escort them home.

As the ship moved forward again, Kathryn wondered if the Admiral had felt this emotional when she saw Earth again. Then she remembered what the Admiral had said about Chakotay dying in her arms as they arrived in this quadrant, and Kathryn’s heart went out to her. This would have felt like such a hollow victory with so many losses.

She looked at Chakotay and wondered about what he must be feeling as he watched Earth grow larger on the viewscreen. She had some work to do to make good on her promise to the Admiral to rekindle the spark. She would give it her best shot, though. The Admiral had sacrificed so much to give Kathryn a second chance at love, and to give everyone on her crew a second chance at life. Kathryn would do everything in her power to make sure that sacrifice wasn’t in vain.

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The senior staff members were the last to disembark from Voyager. The entire crew had walked down the gang plank, and they were waiting for the roar of the crowd to die down slightly before going themselves. Kathryn stood with Tuvok and watched with quiet interest as Chakotay spoke to Seven. She couldn’t hear what they were saying, but was surprised when Chakotay waved the Doctor over and encouraged Seven and the Doctor to be the next two to leave. Tom, B’Elanna, and Miral were next, and then Harry and Tuvok.

When it was just the two of them, Kathryn said quietly, “I’m surprised you didn’t walk down with her.”

He took her hand and placed it in the crook of his arm. “We’re not ready for this kind of publicity.”

She remembered her vow to the Admiral and decided not to say anything disparaging that could drive a wedge between them. "I'm glad you're with me."

"Always." He leaned over placed a soft kiss on her temple. "How are you feeling?"

She blew out a breath. "Excited, nervous... I'm not sure I can adequately describe it."

"I suspect we're going to be asked that question a lot in the coming weeks."

Smiling brightly, she said, "I suppose so. Overjoyed to finally be home would be a good stock answer."

"Are you?"

She felt warmed by the kindness in his eyes as he looked at her. "Yes, I am... and the future is ours to be whatever we make of it."

"That's right." His smile lit up his face. "Are you ready?"

"Absolutely." They headed down the plank, arm in arm, into thunderous applause.

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End of Part 1

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