

## ***The Future Is Ours – Part 27***

### **“We Can Do This”**

By Dawn

Summary: Honeymoon part 2

Rated: NC-17

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The next morning, Kathryn looked up from where she was lying on the couch as Joe materialized in their cabin’s living room. Not feeling well, she was relieved to see him. “Hi, Joe.”

He immediately pulled out his tri-corder and started scanning her. “Admiral, you’re extremely pale. Are you nauseous?”

“Yes, but nothing’s come of it, yet.”

Chakotay had come into the room from the kitchen. “She’s been experiencing increased upper abdominal pain over the last three days. At first, we attributed it to tired muscles, but you mentioned something about her liver the other day.”

“Yes, it was starting to swell,” Joe said as he studied both the tri-corder data and her physical appearance. “What other symptoms are you feeling right now?”

“Mostly headache and my fingers are a little numb. Maybe my neck is out of alignment.”

Joe scanned her neck and nodded. “Yes, it is, but there’s a lot more going on here than that. You’ve lost almost a kilogram since Saturday.” He gave her a quick neck adjustment and went back to scanning her.

“Lost a kilogram?” Kathryn frowned. “I thought I’d gained some.”

“It’s edema. You’re swelling.”

Chakotay squatted down near Kathryn’s head. “She felt completely wiped out last night, and was listless when she woke up this morning. That’s been the norm for the past week, but she has been bouncing back quicker than she did today.”

Frowning, Joe said, “You should have contacted me, especially after your experience yesterday. Mr. Paris gave me a report.”

“I haven’t been awake that long, and we knew you’d be here soon.”

He shook his head in dismay. “Your body’s metabolism is severely out of balance, causing your heart’s neural interface to receive mixed messages. In response, it has increased your blood pressure to make sure your body is getting enough oxygen.”

Feeling light headed, Kathryn forced a deep, shaky breath. “Should I expect this often?”

“Yes and no. I’ll be able to treat the symptoms, but while you’re pregnant, we can’t address the underlying cause.”

“Which is what?”

“Your body just isn’t ready to carry a child,” he said sadly. “We need to discuss your options and give you time to think about them before deciding what to do.”

“About the pregnancy?”

Joe took a deep breath and nodded. “Yes, I have concerns about your liver and pancreas because the pregnancy is exacerbating the residual problems in your body. I fault myself for not examining you over the last month.”

Kathryn rubbed her forehead in frustration. “Joe, there is no decision to make regarding the baby.”

“Admiral, if you would just listen to reason. I don’t think you understand how dangerous this is for you, and how unlikely it is that the embryo will survive.”

Chakotay started to say something, but then stopped.

“What?” she asked.

He shook his head, and with barely contained annoyance at Joe, said, “I’m trying to let you handle this conversation.”

Taking his hand, she said, “This is your child, too.”

“Fine then.” Chakotay’s chin rose defiantly as he spoke. “There are risks no matter what we do at this point, but the fact remains that a life was created naturally and we intend to let nature take its course.”

“Let nature take its course? That’s your plan?” Joe looked away in frustration. “I hope you realize that both of you would be dead right now if I’d let nature ‘take its course’ over the years that I’ve been treating you.”

“Doctor, you’re crossing the line,” Chakotay warned.

“I’m sorry that you don’t care for my bedside manner, but the decision to continue with this pregnancy is a mistake.”

Kathryn glared at him. “This pregnancy may not have been planned, but it is *not* a mistake. Have I made myself clear?”

“Yes, Admiral, but you’re wrong. Not only has your uterus suffered damage that we can’t repair now that there’s an embryo inside, but you’ll grow continually weaker and be unable to defend yourself should you be attacked again.”

“I’m wrong?” she asked, blinking slowly. “If you have any chance, whatsoever, of swaying my opinion, you’re going to have to give me another option besides terminating this pregnancy. I won’t do it.”

“I didn’t say terminate. I said delay or relocate. The options are to find a surrogate or put the embryo in stasis until your body is healthy enough to receive it.”

Chakotay asked, “In either scenario, what are the baby’s chances of survival at this stage if we moved it?”

“What?” Kathryn looked at him in shock. “Chakotay?”

He picked up her hand and held it between both of his. “It’s a question that I would like him to answer.”

Joe blew out a deep, photonic breath. “Slim. Implantation has already occurred.”

Chakotay rubbed his thumb across the back of Kathryn’s hand. “That’s what we assumed. It’s too dangerous.”

“The embryo’s chances are negligible either way, but brain development hasn’t begun, yet. You could try again in a matter of months.”

Chakotay shook his head, refusing to break eye contact with Joe. “No. I don’t care what the stages of development are. This child is real to us, and we will do whatever we can to give it a chance at life.”

Joe looked back and forth at both of them, and upon seeing their resolve, his shoulders dropped in defeat. “The only way this child is going to survive is with constant vigilance to protect your health.”

“Fine,” Kathryn said. “Give us something to work with and we’ll take steps to make it happen.”

As she attacked this problem like she did any other, scientifically, a glimmer of hope crept up on Chakotay. “What’s involved in treating her?”

Joe hesitated for only a second and then nodded in resigned acceptance. "I'll talk you through it as we do the exam, but I think we should move to your bedroom."

"Would you like me to carry you?" Chakotay asked Kathryn.

She shook her head. "No, but you can help me up."

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Once she got settled on the bed, Joe said, "If you'll excuse me for just a moment, I'm going to contact Starfleet Medical for some additional supplies."

Chakotay acknowledged him with an absent nod, but his thoughts were elsewhere.

Kathryn asked, "What are you thinking about?"

"Hmm?" His eyes focused on her, but it took a moment until her question sank in. "Oh, just that I'd like to consider having a larger team of doctors treating you if it's as dire as he's predicting."

In their unique gesture of unconditional support, she laced their fingers together and gave him a sympathetic smile. "It's too soon to lose hope, and we still have Beverly to rely on."

"You're right." He studied their hands for a moment, reminding himself that they'd overcome impossible obstacles before. "Besides, you excel when the deck is stacked against you."

Joe came back and sat down on the far side of the bed. "As I mentioned earlier, your metabolism is out of balance. I'm going to have to adjust that weekly, possibly more often because your liver, pancreas, and kidneys are still suffering from the affects of your low bodyweight. They'd be fine under normal circumstances, but the added stress of the pregnancy..."

Kathryn interrupted, "I understand. We'll do what we need to do."

He turned on a device and directed it at the bottom of her chest. "Your liver is the crux of the problem. It has increased in size significantly since I scanned you on Saturday, and is therefore causing the abdominal pain."

Chakotay asked, "Why is it enlarged?"

"Normally when there is a drop in blood sugar, the liver releases glucose into the blood stream. As your activity is increasing, I'm seeing a trend that the liver isn't functioning

as it should. Instead, it's holding onto all the sugar you've been consuming, growing larger and larger."

Chakotay rubbed her leg in long, soothing strokes. "So the hypoglycemia isn't completely related to her lack of food absorption?"

"Not completely, no." Joe opened his tri-corder again as he explained, "Your liver is partly responsible for releasing enzymes that absorb the essential minerals and vitamins from food."

"Is this a new development?"

"Yes, because of the added pregnancy hormones. They're doing exactly what they're supposed to be doing, encouraging your body to store energy."

Chakotay asked quizzically, "So the pregnancy is making the inflammation worse and the inflammation is jeopardizing the pregnancy?"

"That's exactly right," Joe said as he finished up with her liver and took out another device. "I'm going to check on you every few days until we get you stabilized again."

"Not a bad idea," Kathryn said as she stretched her neck and sighed. "I'm tired of feeling weak, and I'd like to do whatever it takes to nip any problems in the bud."

Joe's expression was more sympathetic than it had been all day. "What I think would cheer you up is to hear your baby's heartbeat. Would you like to?"

Chakotay looked up quickly, surprised at Joe's suggestion. "Is that possible at this stage?"

"Barely, the heart has formed in just the last couple of days."

Kathryn tuned out the men's conversation as she laid her hands on her belly, almost reverently, imagining the life inside her womb. She wanted to listen to the heartbeat, but was worried that it might make the baby all the more real to her. She felt a hand on her arm and gasped in surprise.

"Kathryn?" Chakotay looked at her with concern. "Are you okay?"

"Yes." The short answer was all she offered in response.

His eyebrows furrowed as he tried to interpret her body language. "Do you want to hear the heartbeat?"

"Yes?"

He gave her a warm, comforting, smile and lifted her hands away from her abdomen.  
“He needs direct access.”

Joe placed an ultrasound scanner against her lower abdomen. When he found the right setting, he looked up and asked, “Ready?”

The sound of a rapid pulse filled the room. Kathryn knew her lips were trembling as she felt the emotional weight of the moment surround and envelop her. Reaching for her husband’s hand, she squeezed it hard, determined to enjoy every aspect, to seize the moment, and to relish it for all it was worth.

Chakotay drew in a shaky breath. “It’s amazing.”

“Yes, it is.” She wiped away a tear as it tumbled down her cheek.

“That’s our baby,” he pointed out.

“It really is.”

He kissed the top of her head. “I love you, Kathryn.”

“I love you, too.” She looked up at him and said with her husky voice, “I think this has got to be the most captivating sound I’ve ever heard.”

“And it will be until we hear his first cry.”

She smiled. “‘He’ again?”

With a shrug, he winked at her.

Joe interrupted the moment by pressing a hypospray against Kathryn’s neck. “You should be feeling better now. After your honeymoon, I’d like you to spend an afternoon with me at Starfleet Medical to run a few tests.”

“All right,” Kathryn replied anxiously.

“I’d also like to get some biopsies of your liver and pancreas,” he said as he packed up his tools.

She flexed her fingers into fists and relaxed them again. “Anything else we should be aware of?”

“While you’re pregnant, my goal is to keep you comfortable by forcing these organs to do what they’re supposed to do. If that ceases to work, we will have to do a transplant or deliver the baby prematurely. Regardless, we need to plan for a premature birth due to the damaged tissues in your uterine wall. We’ll have to watch the placenta carefully.”

She closed her eyes. “Understood.”

While Joe put the last of his things away, he addressed Chakotay, “Captain, you’ll need to stay on top of her glucose levels. I’ll leave you with a scanner, and I’d like you to keep a log of her diet, daily activities, and I want a blood glucose reading at four hour intervals. If the level drops below seventy, she’s hypoglycemic and needs to eat.”

“Thank you, Doctor.” As Chakotay listened to Joe’s instructions, he glanced at his wife several times.

Joe said, “I’ll return on Thursday to check on you. Call me if there’s any problem.” When he didn’t receive any response from her, he said to Chakotay, “Would you walk me to the door? I need to contact Lieutenant Jarvin about transporting back to Starfleet Medical.”

Once alone, Kathryn stewed in frustration for a moment before she decided that she was tired of being in bed. She went into the bathroom, shut the door firmly behind her, and hoped that Chakotay would interpret that she wanted privacy.

After she’d done what she needed to do in the bathroom, she remained secluded, using the time to study her reflection in the mirror. She definitely looked healthier than she had that morning, but what she didn’t feel was sick enough to require something as drastic as another transplant.

She lifted up her shirt and lowered her waistband to look at her belly in the mirror. It was far too early for a bump, but she couldn’t help but wonder if there were any noticeable changes. Turning to the side, she examined her body’s profile, but gave up when she saw nothing except the distinct outline of her hip bones and ribs. It looked awful to her, but she was glad that Chakotay found her beautiful regardless. She smiled, remembering how after all that time she’d spent dieting last fall, he’d told her that he’d fatten her up.

Now that she was calmer, she made a mental checklist of calls she wanted to make and research she wanted to do before she saw Joe again. Deciding that Chakotay would be intruding upon her solace soon if she didn’t get a move on, she took one last good look at her reflection and then opened the door.

The state of the bedroom took her by surprise. The bed was made, their clothes put away, quilt folded, and all the dirty dishes from breakfast that morning had been removed. Although she would have been peeved to know that he’d been hovering a few minutes ago, it now made her smile that he’d stayed nearby, keeping busy while waiting for her to emerge.

She walked through the door to the living room and stopped short when she saw that he’d moved one of the recliners close to the bedroom door and was sitting in it, his back to

her. Walking around to the front of the chair, she caught his eyes and said, “Thanks for straightening up in there.”

“You’re welcome.” He closed his book and set it on the floor.

“You don’t have to stop reading.”

“I wasn’t absorbing much. My thoughts are elsewhere.”

She motioned towards his lap. “Is this seat taken?”

“Not, yet.” Holding open his arms, he asked, “Interested in testing out its comfort and compatibility?”

“Oh, no need for a test run,” she said as she slid into his arms. “I’m fully acquainted with its best features.”

“Do tell,” he encouraged as he reached up to turn off the floor lamp above their heads and tapped the chair’s controls to make it fully recline.

She snuggled against him as she described, “For starters, it’s warm, loving, and is definitely on the top of my list as one of the most comfortable laps in the entire galaxy.”

“Sounds like you’ve done a lot of comparisons.” He gathered her hair and laid it over her shoulder.

“No... no comparing. I’ve just dreamt about being held by you in many, many places throughout a couple quadrants.”

He wrapped his arms snugly around her and rested his cheek on the top of her head. They sat quietly for a long time until he asked, “Are you okay?”

Sighing quietly, she said, “Depends on who you ask.”

“I’m asking you.”

She took a long moment before answering. “I firmly believe that I’m not as sick as Joe thinks I am, and I’m really annoyed that I can’t convince him otherwise.”

“And what’s your plan for proving him wrong?”

“Haven’t quite figured that out, yet. However, I want to call Beverly this afternoon.”

“I was going to suggest that.”



Kathryn touched her stomach. “With all that has happened to me, I didn’t think we’d be able to have children.”

Chakotay rubbed her arm with a firm, comforting touch. “Yes, a lot has happened to you, but because of your strength and your will to survive, you’ve always pulled through – most of the time with flying colors. You’ve beaten death more times than I can count. You’ve made it home twice, three times, maybe four, when the odds were against you. Now, you have the beginnings of the family you’ve always dreamed of having. This is your time, and don’t let anyone take that away from you. We can do this, Kathryn.”

“It’s been said that you and I can do anything we set our minds to, hasn’t it?”

“So I’ve heard.” He gave her a firm squeeze. “We’ll get through this. The odds are against this little fella.” He paused, waiting for her reaction to calling the baby a boy again. “But we’re going to do everything we can to give him a fighting chance. No matter the outcome, we’ll still have each other, and we’ll need to remind ourselves that we gave the baby our best.”

“Even if our best isn’t enough?”

“Even then. We know that this is risky, but you and I... we’re risk-takers.”

“Yes, we are.” She nuzzled against his neck. “Would you hold me for a little while?”

“I’ll hold you forever.” He kissed the top of her head. “Or at least until we get hungry.”

“Just so long as you resume the holding at every possible opportunity.”

“My top priority.”

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“Kathryn!” Beverly’s image came up on the comm terminal, smiling brightly. “I didn’t expect to hear from you so soon.”

“You just left orbit this morning, right?”

“Yesterday, according to our ship’s clock, but yes, we’re almost out of the Sol system. How are you feeling?”

Kathryn tilted her head and grimaced. “Not well, actually. If you have time, I need to talk.”

“I have nothing pressing at the moment.” Beverly set down a PADD and leaned closer to the terminal. “What’s bothering you?”

“I convinced Dr. Zimmerman that we’re keeping this baby where it’s at, but he is still predicting a premature birth and a significant risk to my health. I think I want assurance and a second opinion.”

She smiled with understanding. “Well, from what I saw on Saturday, you aren’t as healthy as we’d like to see while pregnant, but as long as you stay on top of things and take it easy, I think you’ll be able to carry the child almost to term. I wouldn’t be surprised if you went on bed rest for the latter part of the pregnancy.”

Kathryn nodded. “That’s what he said, but he’s also concerned that at some point, we’ll need to do a liver transplant.”

“What!?” Beverly’s mouth dropped open. “But I just scanned you four days ago.”

Kathryn nodded. “I know. At the time, did you detect any major problems?”

“A few, but nothing that would warrant a transplant. Although…” Beverly scratched her chin while she was thinking. “Your liver was enlarged because it wasn’t releasing glucose. That was why you passed out.”

“Dr. Zimmerman spent the morning here, balancing my metabolism. He said my pancreas wasn’t producing the insulin it was supposed to. There was something about digestive enzymes, too, but I don’t recall exactly what he said.”

“Hmmm.” Beverly typed something into another terminal. “Permission to access your medical file?”

“Yes, but will he know you accessed it?”

“He will, but there’s nothing wrong with your seeking a second opinion, especially in this case. I don’t suppose I have to tell you that doing any transplant during a pregnancy is dangerous.”

“That’s why I called. I need your advice, because I just don’t feel like I’m sick enough to warrant such drastic measures.”

“And you don’t want to do anything to put the baby in jeopardy.” She gave Kathryn a compassionate smile before turning her attention towards the medical record. “Dr. Zimmerman has already updated your file with results from today’s visit. I can tell you, without any doubt, that nothing on your scans warrants emergency surgery. He treated the symptoms, and that can continue for awhile if need be, especially if you plan to remain within transporter range of Starfleet Medical for the next nine months.” Beverly looked at her pointedly.

Kathryn held up her hands in surrender. “Absolutely. I have no plans to go off planet, and won’t make any until this medical issue is resolved.” She added, “Unless I’m with you on the Enterprise.”

Beverly smiled as she studied the medical file further. “I’d like that a lot, but I’d rather you stay out of harm’s way for the time being.”

“Wouldn’t everyone?” Kathryn rubbed her neck. “Don’t know how confidential this is, but there was an attempted abduction yesterday.”

“What!” Beverly’s mouth dropped open again. “Of who? Not you, I hope.”

She clicked her tongue. “Yes, of me. But you’ll be happy to know that when I walked away from him, he was bleeding heavily and all I had was a bruised cheekbone.”

“To have been a fly on the wall…” Beverly shook her head in astonishment. “I bet he had no clue you’d be so strong.”

“Strength had nothing to do with it. I seized an opportunity and I knew where to hit.”

“Amazing,” Beverly said, beaming with pride. “May I tell Deanna?”

“Yes, but so that she doesn’t worry, also tell her that I’m not having a setback because of it. If anything, it was liberating to go through it and be able to defend myself.”

“I’m glad to hear it, and she will be, too.” Beverly held up a finger. “And yes, I will maintain confidentiality.”

Kathryn groaned. “I appreciate that. If it gets out that someone was even partially successful in reaching me, I’d be more at risk.”

“That’s the last thing you need.” Beverly nodded in understanding. “Let’s get back to your medical situation. Do you have a medical tri-corder there?”

“There’s an emergency med-kit in the kitchen. Let me get it.”

“Sure.”

When Kathryn went into the kitchen, Chakotay was there getting a glass of tea. He offered it to her. “Care for one?”

“Thank you, but I’ll wait until I’m finished talking with Beverly.”

“Oh, she’s still on?” He frowned when he saw what she was getting. “Med-kit?”

“I think she wants me to scan myself. I feel one hundred percent more hopeful, and she hasn’t even told me that Joe is wrong.”

“Good,” he said with a big smile as she walked back out.

Kathryn sat down and flipped open the case. “You want a scan of something?”

“Yes. Program this code...” Beverly told her what settings to use and waited while Kathryn ran the scan.

“I have no idea how to read this.”

Beverly smiled as she said, “Luckily, one of us has a medical degree. Upload the results, if you would.”

As Kathryn was doing that, Chakotay came in and asked, “Anything I can do to help?”

“I read that Dr. Zimmerman gave you a glucose scanner?” Beverly asked as she studied the new data.

“It’s right here on the desk.”

“Take a reading, please. I’d like to know her current level.”

“Sure.” Chakotay frowned when he saw the results. “Seventy-eight. I’ll get her a snack.”

“Hold on just a minute.” Beverly sent them a code. “Enter this into your replicator.”

Chakotay left and Kathryn asked, “What do you see?”

“The scan you just took was of your pancreas. Dr. Zimmerman didn’t try giving you glucagon this morning. It’s a very simple test that he must have dismissed based on other data, but I want to rule it out, nonetheless.”

“All right.” She looked up when Chakotay returned.

“I assume you want this loaded into a hypo?” he asked.

“Yes, and give her the full dose. It’s not much.”

Kathryn extended her neck to accept it. “Joe said something about glucagon, but I don’t remember what.”

“Your liver isn’t completing the process that begins with glucagons and ends with glucose entering your blood stream. Your file says nothing about whether your pancreas is initiating the process.”

“Oh.” Kathryn glanced at Chakotay and then back at the screen. “So all of this could stem from just the pancreas?”

“My diplomatic answer is that some of your liver problems could be traced back to the pancreas, but without being there, I can’t know for sure.”

All of a sudden, Kathryn felt her body sway with vertigo and she heard Beverly call out, “Catch her!”

“What’s wrong?” he asked in alarm as he kept her from falling out of the chair.

“Kathryn? Are you with us?” Beverly asked with undisguised worry.

“Mmmhmm.” She pressed her hand against her cheek. “Dizzy.”

“Chakotay, take another glucose reading.”

He struggled to operate the scanner and hold Kathryn at the same time, but he managed. “162. Is that high?”

“Not too high, but it isn’t what she’s used to. The change was too sudden.” Beverly tucked her hair behind her ear and concentrated on the data she was looking at. “I need another scan with the tri-corder. It’s already programmed to the right setting.”

While waiting for the reading, Beverly said, “You’re doing fine, Kathryn. Give your body a few minutes to adjust.”

Chakotay uploaded the data. “Thanks for doing this, Beverly.”

“I’m glad I can help. I just wish I was still there.”

Kathryn mumbled, “Duty calls.”

“Yes, unfortunately, it does.” Beverly said distractedly as she studied the information. “Okay, this tells me what I wanted to know. I’m going to write up a report and recommendation for Dr. Zimmerman, and so that he doesn’t get irked that I did this test without his permission, I’ll phrase it in a way not to wound his ego.”

“I appreciate that,” Kathryn said, more alert now. “I take it the glucagon worked?”

“Extremely well. I’m not going to counter his diagnosis, but I think it’s safe to offer you some advice. Unless something changes, you don’t need a liver transplant. Your uterus

isn't in great condition, and there is definitely something going on with your pancreas. Whether it can be treated without replacing it is unknown at this point. You'll need to undergo further tests at Starfleet Medical."

Chakotay breathed a sigh of relief. "It's something, at least. Thank you."

"You're very welcome, but you will both need to be very pro-active about regulating her body's metabolism and watching her blood pressure throughout the entire pregnancy." She studied her patient intently. "Kathryn, how are you feeling now?"

"Better, but still shaky."

"Your blood sugar is normal right now, but it's high for you. Sit or lie down for a little while, maybe an hour, in a chair that will hold you up if you get dizzy again."

"I will. Thank you."

Beverly smiled at her. "I'm glad you called, Kathryn. I'll let you know if I learn anything else, either from research or from Dr. Zimmerman."

"I'll do the same. Talk to you soon."

"Take care of her, Chakotay."

"Absolutely." He turned off the comm terminal and helped Kathryn to the recliner. "You're steadier on your feet than I expected."

"I'll follow her suggestion, but I'm not sure I need to sit here for an entire hour." She sat down in the comfortable chair and sighed with contentment. "Although, now that I'm here, closing my eyes for a few minutes doesn't sound all bad."

He adjusted the controls so that she was lying back. "Okay if you sit in this all by yourself while I start making dinner?"

"It won't be as cozy."

Putting a blanket over her, he said, "This should help. Do you want that tea?"

"A small sip sounds good."

"Coming right up." He quickly fetched it from the kitchen.

"Thanks." She took it from him and drank greedily. "I'm thirstier than I thought."

"I'm anxious to see how Dr. Joe responds to Beverly's recommendations."

“I just hope his ego isn’t too damaged.”

Chakotay took the glass from her and set it on the side table. Leaning over to give her a soft kiss, he said, “I’ll wake you when dinner is ready.”

“Thanks.” Her lips felt warmed by his kiss, bringing a smile to her face as she happily drifted off to sleep.

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A couple of days later, Kathryn stepped out of the shower feeling relaxed, refreshed, and surprisingly sexy. She’d used a special epilator that her sister had given her at the bachelorette party and removed every follicle of hair below her neck. The result left her feeling very sensitive to every sensation, especially the towel as she dried herself off. She’d told Chakotay that she wanted to fix their lunch and had a plan to give him a meal he’d never forget.

She opened the bathroom door to let some of the steam out and heard him call her name.

“Kathryn?”

Not ready to spoil the surprise, she quickly put on her robe before replying, “Yes?”

He leaned against the bathroom door jamb and watched while she applied her moisturizer. “Khurma called while you were in the shower.”

“Oh? Do I need to call him back?”

“You can if you’d like, but he wanted us to know that the security breach has been closed.”

She met his eyes in the reflection of the mirror and then turned to look at him directly. “Where was the breach?”

“Your assailant doesn’t know who hired him, but the M.O. is identical to the way Pratin was hired.”

“Do they suspect the Bolians?”

Chakotay shook his head. “He didn’t specify, but said that the Federation Council Public Affairs office knew specific details about your conference on Joria and our trip to the market, but they haven’t been in the loop on anything else in between. He’s certain the leak is there.”

“But they don’t know who?”

“No.”

“Then how, exactly, is that sealing the breach?”

“Your schedule is no longer available to anyone outside of a very select group at Starfleet.”

She frowned. “Why did the public affairs office need to know about our shopping trip?”

“They didn’t, but last fall, they were included in all plans pertaining to you. The trip to the main island wasn’t handled with the same diligence as our wedding, for example, so they fell back to the previous method for arranging your security. Starfleet has launched an investigation.”

Kathryn yanked the towel off her head and grabbed a comb. “That is... that is... completely unacceptable!”

“You’re going to pull your hair out if you’re not careful.”

She gave him the evil eye as she roughly pulled the comb through her hair. “I want a full review of security protocols, and I want it done yesterday!”

Stepping up behind her, he patiently took the comb out of her hand and proceeded to do the job for her. “Already taken care of.”

“What is?”

Chakotay gently worked the tangles out of her hair as he spoke. “As soon as I got off the comm with your C.O., I called Justin in and demanded a full review of protocols. He has already started.”

“I see,” she said, her shoulders relaxing. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” He ran the comb through her hair from her forehead all the way through to the ends in the back. “Justin said that the director of Starfleet Security has just completed a review, but assured me that he’d double and triple check everything.”

She angled her neck to the side and closed her eyes, enjoying the feel of his touch on her hair. “That’s nice.”

“The review?”

“No, the comb. It feels good.”

He chuckled and moved the hair away from the back of her neck where he laid a kiss. “You feel good.”



Smiling, she pushed him away. “You keep doing that and lunch is going to be late.”

“I can live with that.”

“Maybe so, but I'm hungry.” She ushered him out of the bathroom. “Now, let me get ready so I can cook for you.”

“I don't mind doing all the cooking, you know.”

“Yes, but you've been taking care of me and I want to do this.”

He shook his head in amusement as he left the bedroom. “All right. I'll just catch up on some reading.”

Kathryn couldn't help but smile at her reflection as she dried her hair.

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About ten minutes later, Kathryn confidently walked to the kitchen wearing her new yellow apron. It was a full apron made of a sheer fabric and had a low neckline that showed off an ample amount of cleavage. As she pulled sandwich fixings out of the cooler, she counted to herself and had only made it to four when she heard Chakotay clear his throat.

“Need something?” she asked innocently.

He licked his lips as his eyes traveled down her body and back up again. “You, uh, got a new apron.”

“Like it?” she asked, twirling around to show it off. “It was a bachelorette party gift.”

“From who?”

“Lanna.”

“I see.” He tilted his head and asked, “Did, uh, she mention that it's supposed to be worn with clothes?”

“Nope.” Kathryn set out four slices of bread on two plates. “Want to help?”

“I'm quite happy to just watch.”

She shrugged as she spread mustard on two of the slices. “Suit yourself, but you may find that I don't make it to your liking.”

“I suspect that anything you make while wearing that will be to my liking.”

“An apron makes that much of a difference in my cooking abilities?” she asked as she placed a slice of cheese on each sandwich.

“Absolutely. I might just have to keep you in the kitchen.”

“Hmmm.” She gave him a wry look as she took out some turkey slices. “You think the infamous Admiral Janeway’s place is in the kitchen, cooking for you?”

“Infamous?” he said with a laugh. “I don’t know about that, but she’d definitely heat things up.”

“And burn them, most likely.”

Mischievously, he replied, “When you play with fire...”

Amused, she asked, “Do you want pickles? I didn’t see any in the cooler.”

He stared at her for just a moment and then asked, “Is that a serious question?”

Looking at him oddly, she replied, “Of course it is. Why wouldn’t it be?”

Moving from his spot by the door, he came up behind her and set his hands on the counter, one on each side of her. He placed a kiss behind her ear and whispered, “In all the years we’ve been eating together, have you ever seen me eat a pickle?”

A chill spread through her from his proximity and the delightful tickle of his breath on her neck. “You eat tuna salad and it has relish in it.”

“It’s disguised.” He looked over her shoulder at her front. “The only thing I want to relish is you.”

“Is that...” She was caught off-guard when she felt his erection pushing against her bottom.

“Is what?” he asked as he placed soft, wet kisses on her bare shoulder.

Her neck extended as he moved her hair to the side. “I forgot what I was going to say.”

Pressing her into the counter with his body, he said, “I’ve got a pickle you can eat.”

“I am getting a little hungry.”

He rolled up a slice of turkey and held it to her lips. “Or would you prefer some meat?”

Taking a bite, she moaned huskily, “I do enjoy good meat.”

“Any type of meat, in particular?” He asked as he continued to feed her while kissing the side of her neck.

“Mmmm,” she hummed as she chewed, fully enjoying the delicious sensations he was provoking in her body. “Sausage?”

He paused for only a second before smiling against her freshly washed skin. “Did you plan this when you woke up this morning?”

“Yesterday. I remembered this apron when I was fondling you while you were grilling.”

His hands went around her waist and then moved up, gently caressing the underside of her breasts. “And, why, exactly, did B’Elanna give you an apron?”

“We were, uhm...” She arched her chest into his hands as he cupped her breasts. “Mmm... reading an article back in the hospital about ways to make one’s love life more exciting.”

“Is our love life not exciting?” he asked as he gently pinched her nipples.

“It’s... quite nice, actually. And you’ve been getting more assertive lately. I really like that.”

“Assertive?”

“You know, aggressive. Insistent.”

“Yes,” he confirmed as he tweaked her nipples a little harder. “I’ve noticed how you respond favorably when I get demanding. Tell me something...”

She gasped as he teased her breasts, alternating between a firm pinch and a feathery touch. “What’s that?”

“If I’d been a little more authoritative with you on Voyager, sexually speaking of course...”

“Of course.”

“Would you have submitted to me?”

“Hmmm...” she said with a laugh. “One of the nice things about being Captain is that...”

“You can keep some things to yourself?”

“Something like that.” She turned her face to look at him. “I had fun imagining it, though.”

“And what did you imagine?”

“Specifically?”

He gathered up her hair and guided her head back to lay on his shoulder. Holding her jaw with one hand and securing her body against him with the other, he gave her a kiss that was anything but tentative. “Be explicit.”

“Well, I uh, imagined you making love to me in many ways.”

“I’m not talking about making love. I’m talking about me being sexually aggressive.”

She swallowed hard as he ran his hand down over her hip and grabbed firm handful of her ass. “I think my favorite one to imagine was you coming into my quarters before duty shift and ordering me to wear sexy underwear and some sort of device that would keep me humming all day, perhaps you would have let me come mid-afternoon in the ready room.”

With a deep rumble, he asked, “Device?”

“There are certain contraptions which can be replicated with enough credits.”

“What do these contraptions do?”

“Keep a woman on the edge. I imagined that under your control, you’d keep me on a precipice – kind of like what you did on our wedding night.”

“Did you ever wear sexy underwear while in uniform, my love?” he asked as his hand moved around to the front of her body.

“Yes.” When he cupped her pubis, her mouth dropped open and she gasped.

“What do we have here?” He turned her around and lifted up the apron to see her hairless body. “Someone’s been busy this morning.”

“Do you like it?”

“Yes, I believe I do. Not all the time, but this definitely has some advantages.”

Squirring under his touch, she said, “I feel very exposed.”

“And do you like feeling exposed?” He cleared away the countertop behind her.

“Only to you.”

Chakotay licked his lips and grinned. “Good answer.” He easily lifted her up and set her on the counter.

“We prepare food on this counter, you know.”

“Mmmhmmm, and you look good enough to eat.” Pulling up a chair, he sat down and folded her knees so that her feet were on the counter, too.

She felt incredibly exposed and deliciously uncomfortable. “This isn’t exactly what I had planned.”

“Good.” He spread her nether lips so that her hard little clitoris protruded between the folds, her juices glistening as they poured out of her. “One thing you need to learn is that you’re not in control here.”

“Is that so?” Taking a deep breath, she tried to relax in preparation for what he was about to do.

“Mmmhmm. I’m the captain now. What I say goes.”

“All right,” she said, playing along.

He looked up at her beautiful and very dilated eyes. “When speaking to your captain, it’s appropriate to say, ‘yes, sir.’”

Rolling her eyes, she replied, “Yes, sir.”

“Very good. I won’t have to punish you.”

She snorted. “Punish me?”

Shrugging, he replied, “Seemed like the right thing to say.”

“How would you punish me?”

He leaned forward and drew one long lick up her folds to her clitoris, eliciting a deep, throaty moan out of her. “By not letting you come.”

“I’ll...” Breathing very shallow, she huskily replied, “I’ll remember that... sir.”

“See that you do,” he said with a wink, clearly enjoying their little game. Diving back in, he gave her another long lick and then tormented her tight bud until she was strung up so tight he could tell that she was about to erupt. He suddenly pulled back and licked his lips.

“You stopped!” she exclaimed, panting so heavily that her chest was heaving.

“Lunch is far from over, my love.”

She started to put her legs down and he stopped her.

“I didn’t give you permission to do that.”

“Sorry... sir.” She fought a smile and put her feet back where they were.

He went to the cooler and pulled out a short cucumber.

As he washed it off with soap and water, she asked, “What are you doing?”

“I’m going to have to do some research on these devices you mentioned. Meanwhile, since we’ve got a food theme going here with this apron, I’m going to use a substitute.”

Her eyes widened as he sat down in front of her again with the cucumber. “You’re not...”

“Oh, but I am.” Winking at her, he said, “Try to relax.”

Kathryn just about jumped off the counter when the cold vegetable touched her clitoris. “Oh!”

“Hold still, my love.”

“That’s cold!” She spread her legs to give him access and then let out an uncontrollable moan as he rubbed the slightly rough end of the cucumber against her sensitive bud. “Oh my.”

“Don’t come, my love.”

“Then you’d better stop doing that!”

He grinned wickedly as he continued. “Didn’t I tell you that you don’t give the orders around here?”

Throwing her head back against the cupboard, she concentrated hard on not coming, but the torture was exquisitely pleasurable. She took deep breaths and thought of reading dull reports, cleaning out plasma manifolds, and a certain long, thick penis. “Damn!”

Chuckling, he took pity on her and stopped tormenting her clit. He scooted back and said, “On your feet, Kathryn.”

Carefully, she slid off the counter and stood in front of him.

“Spread your feet apart and bend your knees.”

She did as he ordered, curious if he was going to do what she suspected. When he pressed the cucumber into her opening, she gasped and said, “I don’t think that’s going to fit.”

“It may be bigger around than me, but I’m sure you can take it.” He pushed until it was all the way in.

Rotating her hips, she clenched and released her inner muscles until they grew accustomed to it. “I guess you’re right.”

“Now tell me, do any of these devices you mentioned have double penetration?”

Kathryn’s eyes bugged out. “You are NOT sticking a vegetable up my ass.”

He laughed loudly. “All right, I’ll concede on that one. Especially considering what I have planned for you.”

“Which is what?”

“Hold it in.” Taking her hand, he led her to the kitchen chair. “I want you to sit down and eat your lunch.”

“With this thing inside me?” Very carefully, she sat down and realized that she had to keep her posture nearly perfect for it to be comfortable.

“Yes, with that inside you.” He brought her plate over and put it in front of her. “Eat quickly.”

“Yes, sir,” she replied sarcastically. Kathryn ate as she watched him pour their drinks and sit down across from her.

“Comfortable?” he asked.

“No,” she stated very emphatically.

“What does it feel like?”

“Like I’m juicing all over this chair.”

“So erotic, then?”

She moved her hips a little and moaned. “God, yes. I feel very full.”

Licking his lips between bites, he grinned. "Is that the kind of device you would've worn? A pretend penis?"

Shaking her head, she said, "No, the ones I looked at stimulate several spots via remote."

"Did anyone at your bachelorette party give you one?"

"Nope."

"Do you own one?"

"I thought about it, but I was afraid Voyager would run into trouble and I'd end up in sickbay having to explain it to the Doctor."

He laughed and then watched her for while they ate, thoroughly enjoying her obvious discomfort. "Still aroused?"

"Not as much, but yes."

His eyes narrowed for a second and then went to retrieve something out of the cooler.

"What are you doing now?"

"Chocolate syrup." He came up behind her and untied the neck straps of her apron.

"Oh, my." She took a deep breath to prepare herself, but when the cold syrup hit her left nipple, she still yelped. "Damn! That's cold!"

"So it seems," he said with a chuckle as he dripped it on the right one, too. "How's that feel?"

"Like my entire focus is on my nipples." Looking down at her chocolaty chest, she said, "I'm going to need another shower."

"I'll clean it off in a little bit."

Furrowing her eyebrows she said, "I guess I should say, 'Thanks?'"

He sat down again and watched her eat, her attention continually drawn down to her sticky breasts. She also kept clenching her vaginal muscles and was squirming in her chair.

"How are you feeling?" he asked.

After taking her last bite, she said, "Wet and sticky."



“That’s all?”

She cleared her throat and added, “Continually wet.”

“Oh, good. I hope you’re enjoying this.”

“It’s... different.” Taking a drink, she added, “And very erotic.”

“All right, then.” He stood up and took their plates. “Wipe off the table, please.”

She did as he asked and then put her hands on her hips. “Now what, sir?”

“Your tone is getting a little saucy, my love,” he said as he came back over and pulled her against his body.

“And your shirt is getting a little sticky.”

“It’ll wash,” he said as he dove in for a punishing kiss.

At first, she braced her hands on his shoulders for balance, but then relaxed as his pressure softened into a forcefully erotic play of tongues; tangling, stroking, and thrusting in her mouth. He held her by the hair with one hand and with the other, squeezed her bottom, pressing her against his erection.

She squirmed under his hands, the stimulation of his hard member against her aching nub was nearly too much while she was full of the penetrating vegetable. It felt almost like two men were involved, but she was sure that unless one was holographic, this would be the only way she’d ever want to share her man.

He grabbed hold of her and lifted her up onto the table. Once she was in place, his kisses dropped from her mouth, nibbling down her neck until he encountered the chocolate. He spent a lot of time licking her nipple clean, driving her crazy with arousal.

His fingers found the cucumber and guided it out of her. “Very good, Kathryn.”

“Hmmm?” she asked as if in a trance as she watched him throw the vegetable in the trash.

“For keeping it inside you. I was attempting to patronize you.”

“Oh,” she replied absently as she reached for him and pulled his mouth down for another kiss.

He chuckled against her lips and untied her apron, tossing it to the floor. Kissing down her body again, he went to the other breast and took his time licking the sweetness off of her.

Kathryn thrust her chest out, fully enjoying the pleasure of his warm, wet tongue licking the syrup off her breasts.

Once they were mostly clean, he helped her lie back and brought her bottom forward to the edge of the table. Guiding her hands to grip the edge, he instructed, "Don't let go."

"Why not?"

As he started undoing his pants, he paused to say, "Because I told you not to."

"Am I going to fall?"

"No," he replied with amusement.

"I just thought there might be a reason why I have to hold it."

"There is – to see if you'll continue to be submissive."

"Oh," she said as she grabbed the edge like she was instructed. "If you insist."

As he kicked off his pants, he said, "I think the dominance game might lose some of its power when you question me."

"Sorry... sir," she quickly added. "I'll try to be better at pretending in the future."

He spread her legs and blew air across her very wet labia, causing her to shudder. "See that you do."

"Mmmmm," she moaned as he rubbed the tip of his penis through her wet folds. "I was wondering if I needed to work on arousing you."

"You weren't the only one aroused while you ate, my love. I've been stiff since the moment you walked through the house wearing that damned apron."

Laughing, she replied, "It has served its purpose, then."

"Are you ready for this?"

"Do I get a choice?" she mused.

His eyes narrowed playfully as he thrust hard and fast into her. When she moaned in response, he asked, "Better than a cucumber?"

"Oh, yeah. For one, you're warm. And two, you move."

Lifting her legs, he maneuvered her until he had her at the exact angle that turned her body to gelatin. When she went nearly limp and curled into the sensation, he knew he had her just where he wanted her. Keeping her on the plateau of ecstasy was his only goal for the next fifteen minutes. He varied the speed of his thrusts, alternated the pressure, and toyed with the depth as he guided her arousal into a state of bliss.

He could tell that she was flying high when she stopped communicating and spoke to him only through the reactions of her body. It was when she was nearly shaking with arousal that he set one leg down so he could lightly stroke her clitoris. She responded immediately, her body becoming both stiff and totally pliable at the same time. Watching her writhe in ecstasy was an incredible sight to behold. He kept it going as long as he could until he couldn't take anymore and ejaculated in powerful, hot bursts. Seconds later, he lightly pinched her clitoris and sent her over the edge in a powerful and body-shaking orgasm.

Once her body stopped twitching, he whispered, "Kathryn?"

"Mmmmm."

She was limp as he set her legs down. "Are you okay?"

"Mmmmmmm...azing."

He grinned as he carefully picked her up, one arm under her legs and one around her back. "I've got you," he whispered as she curled up against him.

"Mmm... sleepy."

Kissing her head, he replied, "Let's get you to bed."

"Sticky."

He walked through the house and laid her on the bed, maneuvering her and the bed covers until she was lying on top of the fitted sheet. "Don't move. I'll be right back."

Kathryn wanted to turn and curl up into the pillow, but she was very aware of the stickiness on her body. She opened her eyes when she felt the bed dip with Chakotay's weight.

"May I?" he asked as he showed her the washcloth.

She reached up to touch it and when she felt that it was warm, nodded. "Mmmhmm."

Chuckling as he cleaned her chest, he asked, "Did you think it would be cold?"

"Wouldn't put it past you," she said with a smile. "You're mean when you're bossy."

“You seemed to enjoy it quite a bit,” he mused as he folded the washcloth and used it to wipe between her legs. Smiling as it made her twitch, he studied her hairless pubis. “Is this more stimulating bare?”

“Mmmhmmm. Very sensitive and every time our bodies came together, I felt more pleasure.”

“Then you’ll have to do this every now again.” He patted her right on the mons, making her twitch again.

Groaning, she said, “Stop that.”

He covered her up and placed a kiss on her lips. “I think you like it.”

“Incorrigible.”

Running his fingers through her hair, he whispered, “And you wouldn’t have me any other way.”

“Hmmm,” she hummed with a smile as she curled up under the covers. “Love you.”

Smiling at his beautiful wife, he softly said, “I love you, too, Kathryn.”

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A couple days later, Kathryn looked up from her book to see Chakotay come out onto the deck looking rushed. “You okay?” she asked.

“Bernie just called. The Broken Circle is on the Fed News. Want to watch?”

“You bet I do.” She snapped her book closed and let him help her stand. As soon as they got inside, Chakotay clicked on the vid screen.

They caught a reporter in mid-sentence. “...anniversary of Federation President Min Zife’s inauguration. The rally you see behind me is a call for President Zife to step down from office. This is the first such demonstration of its kind, and while we expect no response from the President’s office, it is clear that these protestors want to send him a message.”

Kathryn rubbed her mouth as she sat down to listen to the interviews.

The reporter held her microphone for two young men. One of them said, “It’s time to stop Zife, and get him out of office. He’s not a leader.”

A young woman said, “He’s dragging the Federation into a hole. His actions are inappropriate, and his inactions are appalling. People are suffering and he’s getting wealthier every day.”

The camera cut back to the reporter. “Hundreds of people are gathered here today to give voice to their concerns about the state of the United Federation of Planets.”

An older gentleman waved his arms vehemently as he said, “I am absolutely outraged that we have these criminals running this Federation. I deeply believe in what it stands for, and I am pained that it’s in shambles. Admiral Janeway is the best thing that’s happened in the last decade, and even she has suffered at the hands of Zife’s immoral conduct. If this moment, I learned that Zife and his cronies somehow disappeared, I would celebrate.”

Chakotay glanced at his wife and asked, “Have you heard any mention in the press that he was responsible for your abduction?”

“No,” she said as she shook her head. “And I’ve been watching a lot of it in the last two months.”

A middle-aged woman was speaking on the Fednews. “What people need to understand is that these people in this administration need to go, now. I hope to make a difference by coming here today and saying, ‘Don’t give up, have hope for our future.’”

Kathryn blew out a breath. “I don’t know if I want Zife to see this, or not. He’s going to be hot.”

As the reporter reminded the viewers what was going on, Chakotay commented, “It’s not possible to stir people up for change without shedding light on some issues. It might get uncomfortable for awhile, but this is what we need to have happen.”

“I wish they’d leave my name out of it, though.”

He shook his head. “That won’t happen, because you’re their hero.”

Sighing heavily, she merely nodded and continued to watch.

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Chakotay looked out the window of their cabin at the deep blue sea. They’d been in the idyllic paradise for well over a week, and he was starting to get cabin fever, not that he’d admit that to his new wife. They knew that fatigue was common during the first trimester, but nonetheless, he was itching to go outside and do something, maybe sailing within their protected zone, or further out if their naval security could move with them.

The last week had been quiet, much to his relief after the excitement of the first few days. Joe and Beverly were now working together on Kathryn's health issues, and had concluded that the pancreas was the crux of the problem. Whether she needed a pancreatic transplant was still up for debate, but at least now they knew what the problem was and how to address it with medication and diet.

He glanced up at the clock and saw that it was after nine, much later than Kathryn usually slept. Deciding to check on her, he picked up the blood glucose scanner and headed towards the bedroom. As he neared, he heard her retching and moved fast. Pushing the door open, he saw that she was sitting on the floor, throwing up into a trash can, barely able to keep her head up.

"Kathryn!" he gasped as he knelt down next to her, helping to support her head.

"Awful," she managed to say.

"It's okay. Let it out."

Her body heaved again and she gagged, bringing up a small amount of bile.

"You're okay, love." He pulled her hair back, tucking the damp strands behind her ear. Trying to reassure her, he said, "I'm so sorry, Kathryn. It'll be over soon."

After a couple more heaves, Chakotay touched his commbadge. "Security, we need Dr. Zimmerman."

Mark Yosa replied, "I'm on it. Is it an emergency?"

"No, she's just not feeling well."

Seconds later, Joe appeared in a transporter beam and walked quickly to the bed. "What's the problem?"

"Looks like morning sickness has hit. Can we do anything to help her?"

"I wouldn't call morning sickness an emergency medical situation, but since I've probably got the two of you paranoid about her help, I understand why you called." Joe flipped open his tri-corder. "Has she eaten anything this morning?"

"No, I don't believe so."

Kathryn croaked, "Don't talk about food."

"Sorry," Joe said as he popped open his medkit and pulled out a hypo. "Admiral, I'm giving you an anti-nausea medication. It should help."

She sat back against the side of the bed and wiped her mouth with a tissue. “Ugh.”

Chakotay patted her arm and said, “Let me grab a washcloth,” as he went into the bathroom.

“Mhmm.” She said to Joe, “I fell out of bed. Did I hurt anything?”

“Are you in any pain?”

“No, just worried about baby.”

He scanned her with his tri-corder again and patiently said, “Everything looks fine. Your blood sugar is low, but I think you’re handling it well considering you haven’t eaten yet.”

Chakotay returned with a towel, a wet washcloth, and a glass of water. As he tried to lay the damp cloth on her forehead, she took it from him and wiped her mouth. “Water?”

“Right here,” he said as he handed the glass to her. While she drank, he moved the waste basket away and set the towel on her lap.

Joe said, “Once your stomach is calm, we should be able to get some food in you.”

“Thanks, Joe.” Chakotay relaxed some and took a deep breath. “I wasn’t sure what to do.”

“I’ll go prepare some food for her. Be right back.”

After he left the room, Kathryn handed him the water glass, her hand shaking. “Sorry.”

“Shhhhh...,” he said soothingly. “There’s nothing to be sorry for.” He took her washcloth and blotted her nightgown where it had gotten dirty. “We need some of that classic Janeway determination right now.”

“Misplaced it.”

Smiling, he replied, “Well, I’m sure it’s around here somewhere. Maybe we left it outside on the beach yesterday.”

“Mhmm,” she hummed.

Joe came back in with a plate. “Has your stomach settled, Admiral?”

“No,” she grimaced.

“You should try to eat. It’ll make you feel better.” Joe handed the plate to Chakotay.

He picked up a piece of bread and held it up. "It's peanut butter toast, Kathryn."

"With a little honey mixed in," Joe added.

Although she didn't want it, she took it and forced it down. "Dry."

Chakotay picked her water up again and helped her hold it since she was still shaky. "I promise that as soon as you feel up to it, you can stuff as much food in my mouth as you want."

She snorted. "Somehow, I doubt that."

Chakotay set the glass down and asked, "Ready for this gourmet breakfast?"

A smile crooked her lips. "Mmmhmm."

He handed her the toast. "It's not every day that you get this kind of breakfast service."

Joe did a full medical scan while she ate, humming as he used various medical devices on her.

By the time half the toast was gone, her heart rate had slowed and she was more herself. She glanced at the plate Chakotay was holding and asked, "Is that a banana?"

"Want it?" Chakotay held it up.

"Yes, please." When he had the peel back, she reached for it with a very shaky hand.

She took a bite and asked, "Remember last week when we were walking on the beach and I said I felt really, really good?"

"I do."

"Strike that."

"Your sense of humor proves otherwise."

She rolled her eyes. "Humor has nothing to do with feeling rotten."

After Kathryn got the rest of the banana eaten, Joe said, "All right, you're not in any danger, but we need to decide how best to keep you that way."

"Impeachment," she suggested.



“Not that kind of danger,” Joe said with an amused expression. “I suggest that if you wake in the middle of the night, you eat something high in protein. And, I want you to add an anti-nausea medication for the next month.”

Kathryn nodded. “All right.”

As he packed up his med-kit, he continued giving her instructions. “I want you to try eating continuously today to stay ahead of this morning sickness. Proteins and vegetables would be best. Try to avoid un-natural sugar and spread out your fruit intake.”

She was clearly glum, but nodded in agreement. “Thanks, Joe.”

“You’re welcome. Chakotay, later today, I’d like to give you a crash course in monitoring her vitals. I think it would be a good idea.”

“I’d like that.”

“Good, I’ll contact you in a few hours.” He tapped his commbadge and transported away.

Chakotay leaned towards her and kissed her temple. “I love you.”

“I do not like being sick.”

“Who does?”

“I know, but I feel bad that you have to take care of me like this. You didn’t sign up to be my nurse when you asked me to marry you.”

He took her free hand in his and threaded their fingers together. “I’m going to be completely honest with you, so you don’t have to worry about how I’m feeling.”

“Please do. I want to know.”

“Like you, I’m angry that you were hurt so severely, frustrated that a miracle cure isn’t available, and sad that you feel so rotten.” He let go of her hand to use his thumb to wipe a smudge of peanut butter off her cheek. “But I also know what kind of inner strength you have, and that you can handle just about anything that life dishes out. I promised you a long time ago that I’d do whatever was in my power to ease your burden. Taking care of you while you’re sick definitely qualifies.”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome, but I want to be clear. I don’t see this as a duty of marriage, nor is it the result of me keeping a promise. I *want* to be the one who helps you, as long as I’m able to do it competently.”

“I can’t imagine that you like holding my head while I vomit.”

He folded their fingers together again and shook his head. “No, but I want to be the one you reach for without any reservations or any feelings of embarrassment whatsoever.”

She cupped his cheek with the palm of her hand. “You are.”

“I’m glad,” he said with a smile, and then changed the subject. “And since we’re on the subject of total honesty, I have to tell you that I’m getting cabin fever. Can we sit outside on the deck while you pig out all day?”

Laughing, she nodded. “Absolutely, but first, I want a bath. I feel disgusting.”

He got to his feet and helped her stand up. “One bath, coming up. While you’re in there, I’ll change the bedding and start preparing your buffet. We’ll spend the day having a continuous party out on the deck. This will give me an excuse to experiment with marinades so we can take full advantage of that fantastic grill.”

“Sounds good. We should get you a grill when we get home, a fancy one with all the bells and whistles.”

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Later that afternoon, Kathryn went out to the deck with a fresh tray of hors d’oeuvres, smiling as she saw Chakotay fully stretched out in his chair with his eyes closed. After setting the tray down quietly on the table, she threaded her fingers through his dark hair.

“Mmmmm.” He sighed under her touch. “That feels good.”

“Then, I’ll just keep doing it.” She used her other hand to search for any knots in his neck. “Any tension?”

“No, my brain is just tired from thinking hard. Joe was thorough.”

Amused, she leaned down and kissed him. “Have a bite to eat and then you can tell me what you absorbed.”

He cracked an eye open. “A quiz already, professor? I just got the syllabus.”

“Befitting of the term ‘crash course.’” She scooted the tray closer to them and made herself comfortable on his lap. “Are you brave enough to try these stuffed mushrooms?”

“Depends. What ingredients did you use?” He smiled as he wrapped his arms around her.

“Mushrooms, for one.” She held one to his lips and said, “You did say I could stuff food in your mouth, did you not?”

“Good thing I’ve been decorated for bravery.” He opened his mouth and took a bite.

Watching him chew, she asked, “How is it?”

“Not bad. A little dry.”

She ate the other half and shrugged. “Too bad I can’t have wine to wash it down.”

“Milk?” he suggested.

“No thanks.” She made a sour face and picked up another to feed to him. “Tell me something.”

“Sure,” he said around a mouthful.

Examining another mushroom, she asked, “When I speak to a replicator and say, ‘Stuffed mushroom appetizer,’ why is the resulting creation significantly different than when you say the same thing?”

“Because I don’t say the same thing.” He bit back a smile before adding, “I say, ‘please.’”

She stuffed the entire piece in his mouth without giving him a chance to take just a bite. “Cheeky,” she said as she pinched his full cheek.

He winked at her, and when he swallowed, said, “It’s because I wouldn’t replicate stuffed mushrooms in their final form. I’d replicate the ingredients, or I’d find some appetizer that the replicator is less likely to mess up.”

“All right, since you’re so smart, tell me what you learned today.” She sipped at her iced tea while looking at him expectantly.

“You were sitting right here. Weren’t you listening?”

“Of course I was, but what I heard and what you heard were probably on two different planes of universal understanding.”

“Give me some credit, love.” He tickled her ribs.

“I will! Stop!” She was struggling not to spill her tea. “This is going to be awfully cold going down your shirt if you don’t stop.”

“All right, shhhh.” Taking her drink, he set it down on the table and picked up the PADD that Joe had left. He flipped it on and looked at it with her. “My list. The first thing I'm to do in the morning, whether or not you're awake, is to take readings of your glucose level, pulse rate, blood gas, blood pressure, respiratory rate, hydration, and weight. Then I take junior's vitals as well.”

“Junior?”

“Shall we stop my exam and decide on a name?”

“Junior it is.” She rolled her eyes.

“The tri-corder is set to notify me if any of the readings are out of range. If they are, I have another set of instructions for what actions to take. I upload all of the data and send it to Joe so he can analyze it to his photonic heart's content.”

In jest, she scowled. “Hey there, watch it with those comments about unnatural hearts.”

He patted her hip. “The organ may be unnatural, but the heart of your soul is anything but.”

“If you keep saying things that sickly sweet, I won't have a problem with an errant pancreas.”

Tapping the PADD against his cheek, he nodded. “Now there's a thought.”

She thwacked him gently with the back of her hand. “Continue, please.”

Winking, he said, “Then I take the same readings every two hours until I get the hang of it. After that, I take the readings every four hours unless there's a problem or after you exert yourself.”

“I have no doubt that you can follow a schedule, my dear former XO, but tell me what blood gas is.”

“Arterial blood gas level tells me the levels of oxygen, carbon dioxide, hemoglobins, electrolytes, and a bunch of other stuff that is probably important to someone, miss smarty pants.”

“That's ‘Mrs.’ Smarty Pants to you.” She raised her nose in the air as she reached for a piece of cheese to snack on.

Grabbing her around the waist, he adjusted her position on his lap so that her back was to him. He picked up the tri-corder and said, “Now, relax against me so I can practice.”

She did as he asked, but said, "I'm not sure you'll get an accurate reading with me so close to you."

"Well, I do have to learn how to differentiate between your levels and junior's."

"So, why not add a third to the mix?" She shrugged and nibbled on her cheese. "See what happens."

"Your confidence in me is profound, my dear wife."

"You, yes. Your skills with a medical tri-corder, not so much." She watched the read-out with him as he scanned her.

"Hmmm." Something caught his eye, so he keyed in a setting change and took another scan.

"What do you see?"

"Your pulse is elevated."

"Sure you're not looking at the baby's? The heart rate is a lot faster."

He pointed to the display. "Yes, almost twice as fast, but I'm not looking at that one, I'm looking at the one on the bottom. That's you."

"Well, look at where I'm sitting. Your proximity leaves me breathless, dear husband."

"Only when you're aroused, love, and you aren't at the moment."

She did a double take. "You can measure arousal with that?"

"I have ways of measuring that without any need for technology."

She squirmed against his lap, and said, "You're right. Your measuring 'stick' doesn't seem to be detecting anything."

He laughed. "I didn't say anything about my arousal. I was talking about yours."

"Then what are your so-called methods of measurement?"

"That's easy. When you're aroused, your face gets pinker, your lips part, your breathing slows and gets shallower, you smell different, and your body softens."

She turned her head to look at him questioningly. "I smell different?"

“Yes, you do, and not just down there.” He pointed between her legs. “Your whole body has a spicier scent, a little like maple syrup.”

Trying not to laugh out right, she snorted. “Then how come you don’t crave pancakes?”

“Who says I don’t?” He winked at her and then nodded to the tri-corder. “Humor me and try to slow down your heart rate. See if it changes.”

“Just slow it down?” She raised an eyebrow. “It might be artificial, but it doesn’t have a dial.”

He set the tri-corder down and took her napkin and cheese away from her.

“You’re not supposed to be taking away my food.”

“Shhhhh.” Putting his hands on her waist, he adjusted her body a little. “Let your head rest on my shoulder and relax against me.”

“If I do that, I am going to get aroused, you know.”

“Fine with me as long as you relax.” He gathered her hair at the base of her neck and said, “Lay back, love.”

She did as he asked and he let her hair drop over the front of her shoulder. “I don’t know if I can relax in this position.”

“Do you need my legs higher or lower?”

“Higher, so I don’t have to brace my feet to keep from sliding off.”

He adjusted his position by squaring off his knees and sinking down into the chair. “How’s that?”

“Better.” She situated her feet so they were flat on the deck and folded her hands to rest on her middle.

“Now breathe slowly in and out. Count to four with each inhalation.”

Bad memories assaulted her and she cringed. “Last time I tried that technique to slow my heart, I ended up with a new one.”

“Last time you tried to relax?”

“Just before it failed the first time in Mom’s sunroom, I was trying to slow it down by breathing like this.”

“Oh.” He laid his hands over her arms and kissed her temple. “I’m sorry, love.”

“ ‘s all right. If you’ll breathe slowly, I’ll try to match you without counting.”

“I wish we had some music.”

“Who needs music when we have the waves lapping at the shore?” She turned her face towards him so that her forehead was tucked against his neck. “Let’s stop talking if we’re going to do this.”

He held her hands, whispering, “I love you.”

The ardor behind his declaration made her feel warm all over. It wasn’t sexual arousal, but a stirring from deep within that made her flush with the intensity of his love. Fully aware of his body’s rhythms, she imagined herself connected to him, his heart beating for both of them, his lungs directing the tempo for hers, and the protection of his embrace enough to keep her safe for as long as she stayed there.

After several minutes, he picked up the tri-corder and scanned her again.

“Any better?” she asked.

“A little,” he whispered.

“Enough?”

He kissed her temple. “Your blood pressure, oxygen level, and glucose are fine, so I don’t think the problem is medical. Are you stressed?”

“Now, what could I possibly have to be stressed about?”

“I’m not about to create a list. I don’t think that would be very calming.”

She remained quiet for a long moment until she found something to say. “I’m just a little anxious about everything.”

Setting the tri-corder down, he enveloped her in his arms, his lips lingering on her cheek. “Everything?”

“Seems like an apt term.”

“Okay then, are you worried about the weather?”

She chuckled. “No.”

“Worried about having enough to eat today?”

“Hardly.”

“Hmmm...” With humor in his voice, he said, “Then you must be worried about whether or not you married the right guy.”

“Not a chance,” she said with a smile.

“I’m going out on a limb here, so correct me if I’m wrong, but are you perhaps worried about the future of the federation and staying safe while trying to manage a high-risk pregnancy that may incapacitate you and cause our child to be born prematurely?”

Her tone remained light, but she felt her stomach muscles clench with anxiety. “You say that like you’re reading off nothing more than a grocery list.”

Kissing her cheek softly, he whispered, “I understand why you’re anxious, but you have set enough in motion that the Federation will be fine. You’re safe, and you told me yourself that we have two starships and a whole boatload of people who are ready to do your bidding just as soon as you say the word go.”

“I know,” she said quietly.

“And how can you be worried about your health when you’ve got my expert medical care?” He rubbed his lips lightly against her hair, just above her ear. “Hmmm?”

Leaning into his kiss, she said, “Just promise me that if it gets too overwhelming, ask for help. I love having you take care of me, but I’d be fine with Patty around, too.”

“I promise.” He squeezed her tightly. “However, as we’ve proven just now, some of these health issues are aggravated by stress, and I believe that having this time alone to come to terms with everything that’s happened is one of the healthiest things we can do for you.”

Her voice was a hoarse whisper, “It’s as if you know me or something.”

Lifting his hand, he cupped her cheek and tenderly held her face close to his. “Deep breaths, love. There’s nothing to be done today except to enjoy each other, so clear your mind and concentrate on feeling content and at peace.”

She breathed slowly with him, focusing on the feel of his body and relaxing her tense muscles. This quiet moment was one to be treasured, and she tried to memorize everything about it – the sounds of the sea, the birds, the breeze rustling in the trees; the feel of his hands, his warm breath on her forehead, his solid strength beneath her; the salty smell of the sea, the earthy scent of the foliage around them, the spicy scent of her husband. It was perfect.



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