

The Future is Ours – Part 2

“Defending Honor”

By Dawn

Rated PG-13

Summary: A continuation of Part 1 that includes crew debriefings and the creation and resolution of a personal conflict between Janeway and Chakotay.

The day that the Voyager crew disembarked was a whirlwind of activity. Kathryn was glad that Chakotay never left her side as they greeted the press and dignitaries who were given the opportunity to meet them. Despite all the cameras flashing and the dizzying noise, Kathryn couldn't have been happier, even though she had to count on Chakotay's reassuring arm to help her navigate through the throngs of people who wanted to see and talk to her. The press conference was a welcome relief to the crowds, but only because it meant that people weren't pushing against her.

That evening, the staff at Pathfinder hosted an informal reception for Voyager and the family members who were able to attend. That group would have been more than enough, but it seemed that all of the dignitaries within transporter range wanted a chance to meet the famous crew, too. Kathryn spent the entire evening being introduced to people that she'd never be able to remember and, even with Chakotay at her side, she was slightly disconcerted. It had been a long time since she had been in a crowd that large.

Her mom had decided not to attend. She didn't want to share her daughter and preferred to wait until they could be alone to be reunited, but as the party died down, Kathryn felt sad that her mom hadn't come. As she bid farewell to the last of the VIP's in attendance, Chakotay brought her a plate of food. “Thank you, I'm famished.”

“I thought you might be. Did you even eat lunch on the ship?”

“Was too nervous. Mmmmm... this cheese is so good. I forgot just how much I love real cheese.”

He chuckled. “You look like you've never tasted anything better.”

“I'm not sure I have.” She took another bite. “Mom's going to have a blast cooking for me this week if I think this dried-out cheese is a delicacy. Oh... do you think the crew is taken care of for their leave? With Christmas this week...”

“Taken care of, including the Doctor.”

“Oh, thank you. That’s a relief.” She hadn’t had a moment to think about it. “Where’s the Doctor going?”

“Jupiter Station to be with Dr. Zimmerman. Lieutenant Barclay is taking him.”

“Is Seven going to her aunt’s?”

“Yes,” he said curtly. “And before you ask, no, I’m not going with her.”

“I wasn’t going to. She just happens to be one crewmember that I tend to worry about.”

“She has already left.” He looked away for a moment and then changed the subject. “Tuvok has been given an extended leave to Vulcan and won’t be back in time for debriefings, but I don’t know why.”

“Medical reasons.”

“Is his family okay?” Chakotay looked concerned.

“Yes, as far as I know. He... I shouldn’t be telling you. I don’t want to betray his confidence.” At his questioning look, she said softly, “He needs help with something that only a Vulcan healer can help with.”

“And if we were still out there, how would he have gotten that help?”

“He wouldn’t have. One of the many reasons the Admiral returned.”

“I see.” Chakotay studied her. “Sometime, you’re going to have to tell me all that the Admiral told you.”

“Perhaps,” she said casually. “So, where are you going?”

“There are quite a few crewmembers that don’t have family nearby, so I’m going to stay here with them for most of the week.”

“Don’t you have a cousin in Ohio?”

“Yes, but I barely know him. I might call on him for one day, but I don’t want to impose. I’ll wait until I have a longer leave to go visit my sister.”

“All right, but don’t spend the whole week worrying about the crew. Be sure to get some quiet time to yourself.”

“I will,” he smiled gently until something caught his attention. He took her plate and drink as he said, “I think there’s someone here to see you. She looks almost exactly like you.”

She turned to see her Mom coming into the room. When they made eye contact, Kathryn couldn't stop the joyful tears from falling and ran into her Mother's arms. "Mom! I thought you weren't coming!"

"I couldn't stay away when I saw you on the news." Gretchen hugged her daughter tightly. "It's taken me hours because of all the security and traffic."

"Oh, Mom," Kathryn pulled away to look at her. "You should've called Owen. He would have gotten you here."

"Don't you think I tried?" Gretchen touched Kathryn's face. "You're such a sight for sore eyes."

Kathryn hugged her again, warmth and comfort filling her from head to toe. "I missed you so much."

"Oh, Katie, you have no idea..." They hugged for a long minute until Gretchen said, "I think we're being watched."

Kathryn pulled back and looked around. Everyone in the room was quietly and happily watching them. She wiped her eyes and smiled back. Loudly, she said, "I'd like to introduce Gretchen Janeway, my mother. Mom, I'd like you to meet some of my crew, and..." She looked around and laughed. "...and a lot of other people."

Everyone laughed with her and went back to their conversations. Chakotay came over to greet them and held out a hand. "Mrs. Janeway, it's an honor to meet you. My name is..."

"Chakotay," she finished for him and pulled him into a hug. "Welcome home."

When Gretchen finally released Chakotay, she held him at arm's length. "She has told me so much about you. Thank you so much for bringing my darling Katie home safe."

"I think you might have that backwards, Mrs. Janeway. It was she who brought us home safely." Chakotay glanced at Kathryn and winked.

"I know how this all works, and I know it was your job to keep her safe."

Chakotay laughed. "I did my best."

Gretchen took one of Kathryn's arms on one side of her, and Chakotay's arm on the other side, and said, "Come on, you two. Introduce me to people and get me some champagne. Now that I'm here, I'm ready to celebrate."

A week into debriefings, Kathryn was in her temporary quarters at Starfleet Headquarters, going over some notes, when she thought she heard a noise in the corridor. She patiently waited for the chime to ring, but after a minute, curiosity got the better of her and she decided to see if someone was there. She opened the door and was surprised by who she found lingering outside. "Seven?"

"Annika, actually. My aunt suggested that I try using my given name now that we're on Earth."

"I think it's a good idea." She stood back from the doorway. "Won't you come in?"

"Thank you, Captain." Annika came in far enough to let the doors close behind her.

"Would you care for something to drink?"

"No, thank you."

Kathryn nodded and sat down. Noticing Annika's discomfort, she tried to ease her into conversation. "How are the debriefings going?"

"I find them uncomfortable." Annika sat down on the edge of the chair across from her.

Smiling over her coffee mug, Kathryn agreed. "I do too, but they're a necessity, unfortunately."

"I suspect Starfleet is attempting to ascertain whether I can be trusted."

"Why would you think that?"

"Everything they want to know is in the daily reports. I felt I was thorough."

"Extremely thorough, but this is the nature of debriefings. They like to rehash everything to try to gain a broader understanding. I'll admit that more than once, I've felt like telling them to just go read the damn report."

"It seems like they're trying to catch me in falsehood."

"I doubt that, you're eidetic memory would make that impossible. Debriefings are just redundant. I think I've discussed the last two weeks of our journey at least ten times with almost as many different people."

"May I change the subject?"

"Of course." Kathryn stifled a chuckle at the abruptness. "What's on your mind?"

“Chakotay alluded that you are aware of our relationship.”

“Yes.” She instantly felt guarded, but was also very curious about Annika’s take on the situation. “I believe you had a picnic lunch?”

“That was date number three. Neelix told me it was an appropriate third date.”

“Neelix knows about you?” This was a surprise.

“Yes, well, he did know. Lieutenant Barclay said that he would assist me with setting up communications with the Talaxian colony.” Annika looked oddly uncertain. “But meanwhile, I’m pleased that Chakotay chose to confide in you. I was concerned about his wish to keep our relationship a secret.”

“He’s just trying to protect you from the publicity. The reporters would have a heyday if they caught wind of a relationship between you two.”

“Much like they’re having with the incorrect assumption that he’s in a relationship with you?”

“Yes, exactly.” Walking arm in arm down the gang plank had seemed platonic to her and Chakotay, but the press had eaten it up. Not that she minded it a bit.

“I have concerns, and I don’t know how to talk about them. I’ve thought about talking to the Doctor, but since he admitted having feelings for me, it doesn’t seem appropriate. I could ask B’Elanna, but Chakotay doesn’t want her to know about us. I don’t feel comfortable with the counselor they’ve assigned to me.”

“So you came to me. That’s fine. I want you to be able to talk to me about anything. I hope you know that.”

“I do, but I’ve also been listening to the crew discuss you and Chakotay.”

“Oh?” How interesting. “What do they say?”

“They’re responding to the press’s assumptions regarding your unrequited love. If there’s an element of truth to that, then I shouldn’t discuss this with you either.”

“That wouldn’t leave you with anyone to talk to. Don’t worry about the scuttlebutt, and just tell me about your concerns.” Kathryn wondered if Annika would notice that she didn’t deny the rumors.

“It’s about Chakotay, but I find this topic uncomfortable.”

Based on her conversation with her older self, Kathryn could guess easily what the topic might be, but she decided to let Seven find the words herself. “Is this something you can discuss with him?”

“No, I don’t want to admit that I don’t know what I’m doing.”

Kathryn had to fight not to react. “With what?”

“Intimacy. The biology of it is clear, but the relationship aspect of it is... perplexing. The Doctor tried to explain it to me a couple years ago, but I haven’t had an opportunity to engage in it with a real person.”

“A real person? Were you intimate with the Doctor?”

“No.” Annika absently clenched her fists. “I created holographic simulations to practice relationships. I thought I was prepared for the real thing, but Chakotay is not responding as I expected him to.”

“Well, every man will be different, holographic or real.”

“I realize that, but I was careful to program the hologram with Chakotay’s personality.”

Kathryn closed her eyes as a feeling of dread washed over her. “Please tell me that you didn’t create a hologram of Chakotay.”

Annika was silent for a moment. “I used the simulations that the Doctor created for practicing interactions with the crew, and isolated Chakotay’s pattern. He is attractive, intelligent, and has a strong character. I decided that he would be an ideal boyfriend.”

“Oh, Seven... Annika. Does he know about this?”

“No, I didn’t feel comfortable divulging that.”

She took a deep breath. “Annika, even though we’re not on Voyager, I’m still your Captain. I know you’ve told me this in confidence, but he has to know. It’s a violation of ethics to create a hologram based on a real person without his or her explicit agreement.”

“I don’t believe that he would have agreed if he knew about it.”

“No, he wouldn’t have. He would have suggested getting involved with real people and real situations instead.” Kathryn scratched her head, trying to figure out what to say. “What you’ve done can develop so easily into holo-addiction, where you start cutting yourself off from interacting with real people and instead, become dependent on a fantasy where you can control the characters.”

“Yes, I know. That’s why I stopped.”

“You have to tell him.” Kathryn felt bad for both Annika and Chakotay, because she didn’t think this would turn out well. He was very sensitive about being used by others for their personal benefit.

“I’ve learned that in some relationships, it’s better to live with a small lie than to disclose entire truths.”

“Not really.” Kathryn tried to think of a way to explain. “You can tell someone that their hair looks nice, even if you don’t think so, because it’s polite. That’s a falsehood in a relationship that’s okay. But creating a hologram of someone is a much bigger issue, and once you lie about one thing, it’s so easy to lie about more. Then the relationship can catapult into disaster because of a lack of trust.”

“Whether I lie about his hair or about the hologram, both are to protect the relationship.”

“No, Annika.” Kathryn sighed. “I’ll give you a choice. Either you tell him, or I will.”

“Captain, please don’t say anything. I’ll take care of it.”

“Okay, I’ll give you one week. Please let me know when you tell him.” Kathryn wanted to groan, but refrained. They still hadn’t addressed her real concern. “I think he’ll understand your motivation if you explain what happened and that you’d now like to learn how he really responds in intimate situations.” She paused, hoping Annika would say something more, but when she didn’t, Kathryn asked, “What’s got you troubled enough to want to talk to me?”

“Kissing. We’ve engaged in the activity on four occasions. I initiated the first two and found them enjoyable and unpressured. On the third kiss, he used his tongue, and it was distasteful. I read about it afterwards and learned that it’s common to use the tongue as a lead in to foreplay.”

Kathryn didn’t know if she was amused or repulsed by this conversation, but her ‘daughter’ needed to discuss this with her ‘mother.’ All mothers probably felt something akin to this when their teenage daughters had this conversation. She forced a smile and urged Annika to continue. “Yes, using the tongue while kissing is a very intimate gesture.”

She nodded. “He used his tongue again during our fourth kiss, yesterday evening. And in addition, he touched my breast. I didn’t find it acceptable.”

Trying not to show a reaction, Kathryn swallowed hard and asked, “How did it make you feel?”

“Uncomfortable. I do not like the tongue. It’s...” Annika wrinkled up her nose and shook her head. “And I feel that my breasts should not be touched so soon in the relationship. I’ve read that it’s proper etiquette to wait for marriage to initiate intercourse.”

“I don’t think etiquette is the right word, but it is suggested to young people to abstain from engaging in sexual activities until they’re more mature. One should definitely wait until in a committed relationship, and, even then, it needs to be something you want to do.”

“When the time comes, I realize that I will have to allow my body to be touched, but I don’t know how to tell him that it’s undesirable at this time. I’m not even sure if I want to continue this relationship that long.”

Kathryn was silently rejoicing at this revelation, but couldn’t show it. She took a sip of coffee to cover her smile.

“Have you ever engaged in intercourse, Captain?”

Trying not to spew coffee out her nose, Kathryn forced herself to swallow. Once she regained her composure, she answered, “Yes, Sev... Annika, I have. With both men that I’ve been engaged to.”

“Over time, did you find that you got used to being touched and eventually welcome it?”

Kathryn fought the urge to show a surprised reaction to that question. “Annika... when you’re more experienced with dating and with men, you might find that you’re more sexually attracted to some than others.” Remembering what the Admiral had told her about Seven’s aversions, she added, “It’s also possible that you just may not be inclined to experience intercourse. Every person is different.”

“Is it possible that I’m not as attracted to Chakotay as I think I am?”

“It’s possible. If I may ask, do you feel a tingle when he kisses you?”

“A tingle?” Annika looked uncertain. “Like an energy spark?”

“Yes, sort of, but it’s a pleasant feeling.”

“No, I don’t think so.” Annika furrowed her eyebrows, trying to recall. “Do you find Chakotay attractive, Captain?”

She could lie, but she wouldn’t. “Yes, I do.”

“Has he ever kissed you?”

“Once, five years ago.”

“And did you feel a... tingle?”

“Why do you ask?” Kathryn really did not want to answer that question.

“I’m curious to know if he is unable to illicit that response. Perhaps it’s his problem.”

“It’s chemistry, Annika. When two people are attracted to each other, there are physical and emotional responses to their presence and their touch.”

“Like when Tom and B’Elanna are near each other. Their eyes dilate, their body temperatures increase, and B’Elanna’s scent changes.”

“Exactly.” Kathryn blinked rapidly to cover her slight discomfort with this newfound knowledge.

“I’ve studied their interactions. I’ll have to take note of how Chakotay reacts in my presence.”

“A good place to start.”

“Thank you, Captain. This conversation helped me a great deal.” Seven rose from her chair and Kathryn followed suit.

“If I may make one more suggestion.”

“Of course, Captain.”

“I realize that the Doctor created your clothing to simulate the protective dermal covering you had to wear as a Borg, but I think the time has come for you to find something more conservative to wear.”

“I think it would be nice to wear a uniform.”

“Well, technically, you’re a civilian, but you can wear slacks and a tunic that are similar to the uniforms. This outfit...” she motioned to Annika, “reveals your figure in detail, and most men would assume that you are craving attention and sexual interaction.”

Annika looked down at what she was wearing. “Perhaps that’s why most male’s eyes dilate and their body temperatures increase in my presence.”

“Yes, Annika.” She couldn’t believe that she hadn’t had this conversation with Seven earlier. “It may still happen with conservative clothing, but at least then you’ll know they’re looking at your beautiful face, and not...” Kathryn gestured to Annika’s body, “the rest of you.”

That evening after a long bath, Kathryn let the sounds of Brahms soothe her as she quietly enjoyed a warm cup of coffee. She wasn't far into the second movement when she heard another movement outside her door. She didn't have to wait more than a nanosecond before her chime rang. Not caring if her visitor saw her in her robe, she said, "Come." Her eyes widened as Chakotay came storming into her quarters and stood towering over her.

"What the hell did you say to her?"

Not moving an inch from her comfortable spot, she simply leaned her head back to look at him. She should have expected this. "Please have a seat, Chakotay."

He didn't. "This is my chance at happiness, Kathryn. I asked for your support and instead, you go behind my back and try to convince my girlfriend that she's not sexually attracted to me? After all we've been through? This is outrageous!"

Kathryn scratched her chin, trying to figure out what to say to him. "I know you're looking for a fight, but I'm not going to give you one."

"Dammit, Kathryn! I was just starting to get through to her and then..." He shook his head, fuming mad, and sat down hard on the chair across from her. "I can't believe you'd do this to me."

In her calmest voice, she said, "Chakotay, I think you're misinterpreting what Annika and I talked about."

"I sure as hell hope so, because if I'm not, then you and I have a serious problem."

The hairs on the back of her neck prickled under the intensity of his anger. Now would be a good time to use those diplomatic skills that everyone seemed to think she had in abundance. First rule of diplomacy – get the other party talking. "Tell me what she said."

"No, I want to know what you told her."

Damn, she thought. He was just as good a negotiator as she was. "All right, she was extremely nervous and didn't know who to talk to."

"So you used that to turn her against me?"

"Nooo," she said softly. "Will you allow me to relay at least a small part of the conversation before you throw accusations at me?"

He looked away in disgust. “You were saying?”

“Thank you.” She found his anger annoying. “There’s a large part of our conversation that I’m not going to tell you, because she asked me not to.”

“What about?”

“I’m just telling you that I’m omitting something so that when you do find out, you won’t be angry at me again because I didn’t mention it.”

He glared at her. “What game are you playing?”

“I’m not playing any games. Seven... Annika... whatever... came to ask me questions about intimacy because she was uncomfortable talking to anyone else about it.”

“Intimacy? We haven’t even been intimate yet.”

“I gathered.”

“This is none of your business.”

“I certainly don’t want it to be, but you two are making it my business and putting me in the middle of it. I told you two weeks ago that she was an adolescent when it comes to relationships, and this is exactly what I was afraid would happen. She doesn’t understand the physical reactions that couples feel when engaged in sexual activities. Chakotay, I don’t think she can feel it because of the Borg implants.”

“So because she can’t feel everything a normal person can, you told her that she wasn’t attracted to me?”

“She said that she didn’t feel any sort of physical response when kissing you. Do I tell her that some men will trigger a stronger sexual response than others, or do I tell her that it’s unlikely that she’ll ever feel the most intense emotional and physical response that a human can experience?”

“But how do you know what she can feel? How do you know that I’ll never be able to gradually work her into it?”

She couldn’t tell him about her conversation with the Admiral. “I don’t know what, exactly, her limitations are, but she sat right here this afternoon and asked me if in my experience, did it ever become tolerable to have a man touch me. She doesn’t like the feel of your tongue in her mouth and she found your fondling inappropriate. I think if she was sexually attracted to you, she’d crave those things.”

“Dammit, Kathryn.”

She felt drained. “Chakotay, I care deeply about both of you, and I want you both to be happy. I’m just not sure that you can be happy with each other.”

“How dare you make that decision for us!” He shook his head angrily. “You want to know what I think?”

As angry as he was, she wasn’t sure. “Please don’t say anything that you’ll regret.”

“I think you’ve said enough today that it won’t matter what I say. You have just destroyed this friendship.”

The knot in her stomach was back tenfold. “I hope when this settles out, that you can find some way to accept what I’ve told her in the spirit that it was intended.”

“I don’t see how that’s possible, Kathryn.”

She shook her head as he left, letting her tears fall once again. This was definitely not what she had promised Admiral Janeway. Time... it’s time that heals all wounds. She had to find some way to fix this before she ran out of time.

The next day, Annika stopped Kathryn in the corridor outside of the debriefing rooms. “Captain, I’ve made a mistake, and I want to apologize.”

“It’s not your fault, and by the way, you look very nice today.” Annika had replicated new clothing that was much more tasteful.

“Thank you, Captain.”

Kathryn continued, “Chakotay came to see me last night after talking with you.”

“I know. He was very angry when I suggested that we might not be compatible. I didn’t even consider your friendship with him when I told him that I got the idea from our conversation. I thought he respected your opinion so much that he would agree.”

Kathryn thought about Chakotay, and how much she should continue to say to Annika. It had been a taxing day sitting with him in debriefings, having to present a unified team with his anger simmering the entire time. She tried to deflect Annika. “Have you considered talking to the Doctor about this?”

“No, I don’t want to hurt him.” Annika paused, “Although it seems that I’ve hurt you.”

“Don’t worry about me. It’s not like it’s the first time I’ve had a fight with Chakotay.” She pulled Annika to a slightly more private room off the main corridor. “What I mean is

that I think you should talk to the Doctor about determining whether your lack of... physical response... is inhibited by..."

"By the Borg implants?"

"Yes." She didn't know why she suddenly felt so uncomfortable talking about this.

"He hasn't mentioned it before, but it's worth looking into. I knew that it affected emotions, but I'm not sure about physical response."

"There's a possibility that it's all tied together."

"I'll talk to him, and I'll talk to Chakotay, too, about the hologram. I think it'll make him angry with me, but he's so angry with you right now that I don't think it will matter."

"You might be right." Kathryn hugged her protégé and saw Chakotay look into the room from the main corridor. She released Annika saying, "He's waiting for you."

Kathryn heard Chakotay tell her that he'd be just a moment. She steeled herself as he came to speak to her.

"Kathryn."

"If you're going to curse at me again, I'd rather just skip it."

He looked away from her and then back again, obviously annoyed. "What did you tell her this time? To put me out of my misery and break up with me?"

"Chakotay, I don't appreciate your attitude, in the least. You are being inconsiderate and rude. I have neither done nor said anything with the intention of causing you pain. Whether or not you believe it, I do care about you and I thought you trusted me more than this."

"I don't know what to think."

She looked into his eyes for a long moment, hoping to see the smallest bit of compassion, but she only saw anger. "Chakotay... today, I only just suggested that she talk to the Doctor about her physical response issues. If there's a chance that implants could be the cause of her... problem, then she should find out."

"I'll take her right now."

"Let her do this on her own, when she's comfortable. This isn't a fight to protect your ego."

He glared at her and left the room.

The next two days of debriefings went by without any further conversations with either Chakotay or Annika, much to Kathryn's relief. She was finding it preferable to debate the first contact situation on whatever-the-hell-that planet was named to sorting out Chakotay's ego.

She spent some time doting on Miral, and talking with Naomi. Both girls soothed her nerves and made her feel like everything they'd been through had a purpose. While Kathryn was quietly rocking Miral, B'Elanna asked her, "Have you talked to Chakotay much this week?"

"A little."

"He's really been in a foul mood."

"Yes, he has."

"Do you know why?"

"Yes." Kathryn smiled at Miral's cute little rosebud mouth.

"Are you going to tell me?"

"Noooo." She didn't tear her eyes away from the adorable little forehead ridges. "He's just angry with me. Nothing to worry about."

"Is this about Seven?"

"She's trying to change her name to Annika." Kathryn looked up at B'Elanna. "What about her?"

"I think they're dating."

Kathryn forced her face not to respond and looked back at Miral. "Why do you say that?"

"They've been spending a lot of time together, and in the last few days, it seems to have gotten more intense. He seems very possessive of her. Maybe she's not putting out and that's why he's such a grump. He even told her to wear different clothes, and he's the reason why she's changing her name."

Kathryn leveled a glare at B'Elanna. "I don't think that kind of gossip is appropriate."

“Oh, sorry.” B’Elanna bit her lip and shrunk back into the sofa cushions slightly. “It’s just what’s going around.”

“Well, do your best to stop it, if you can.” Kathryn sighed. “First of all, I was the one who suggested that she dress more conservatively. And it was her aunt who suggested the name change. Both are an attempt to get her to blend into society better.”

If B’Elanna could have shrunk back anymore, she would have. “Oh.”

“As for the rest, just because people are spending time together doesn’t mean they are dating. And I can assure you that his anger is entirely directed at me.”

B’Elanna was quiet for a minute before saying, “Hypothetically... if they *were* dating, what could you have done that would make Chakotay so angry?”

Kathryn didn’t respond with anything but another sigh.

“You told him that you love him!” B’Elanna sat up on the edge of her seat again. “That’s it!”

“No, I didn’t tell him anything of the sort.”

“But you do, don’t you? I mean, everybody knows you love him.”

“What makes you think that?”

“It’s obvious. What I don’t get is why he’s dating her if he knows. I mean, he’s been in love with you for years.”

Kathryn told sleeping Miral, “I think your Mommy’s romance novels are going to her head.”

“All right, I get it. You don’t want to talk about it.”

“B’Elanna,” Kathryn said softly. “It’s not that I don’t want to, but I can’t.”

“All right, but if you ever need to...”

“I know where to come.”

“Captain?” she asked tentatively.

“Yes?”

B’Elanna fidgeted a little with her hands. “Since we were sort of on the subject of name changes, would you call me Lanna?”

Kathryn was surprised. “Lanna?”

“It’s... Well... I had a dream once and you called me that... the time that I wanted to save my mother from Grethor. It’s what she called me, and since I had that dream, I’ve wanted to ask you.”

Kathryn was touched. “I’d be honored.”

B’Elanna said nervously, “After all, you’re Miral’s godmother now, and so a part of the family.”

“Thank you... Lanna.”

“We sure have come a long way since we met, haven’t we?”

Kathryn chuckled. “Yes, we certainly have.” She touched the baby’s cheek. “And this wonderful little miracle is the proof.”

“Who would’ve thought?” B’Elanna reached over and touched her daughter’s dark hair.

“Lanna...” Kathryn held B’Elanna’s hand. “Since we’re family now, as you say,” She smiled brightly. “Why don’t you call me Kathryn when we’re not around Starfleet.”

“That might take some getting used to.”

Kathryn laughed a little. “That’s exactly what Chakotay said when I asked him.”

“Are you really okay with him dating Seven?”

Kathryn shrugged. “I don’t really get a say in the matter.”

“I’ve been worried about you... with all this.”

She touched her chest and felt a surge of emotion. “Oh, I’m okay. I wish I could talk to you about it, but I can’t betray either confidence.”

“Well, he’s a p’tak if you ask me. I know a little about his feelings towards you, and I think he’s being an idiot.”

“It’s a complicated situation.” Kathryn focused her thoughts on Miral and tried not to think about it. She was on the verge of confiding in B’Elanna, but knew she couldn’t.

“If you want my opinion, I think the best medicine for you right now is to get away as soon as debriefings are over. Get away from all of us and be yourself. Find a gorgeous hunk or two and have some fun.”

Kathryn laughed. “Maybe so, although I'm not really interested in playing around.”

“No one says you have to sleep around, just go find someone to flirt with.”

“The press would love that, wouldn't they?” She laughed again.

“Okay, so go somewhere that the press can't find you.”

“We'll see, Lanna.” Laughing with a friend helped Kathryn feel much better, and a long break sounded wonderful.

Harry and Kathryn were finishing up their lunch when Harry said, “I've enjoyed having lunch with you today, Captain.”

“I have too, Harry.” She smiled brightly at him.

“It reminds me of something I never told you about.”

“Oh?”

“Back at the beginning, a couple of weeks after we left the array, you came up to the table where Tom and I were eating. I think you were trying to get to know us better, and after you left, I felt terrible for not inviting you to join us.”

She laughed. “Well, thank you for thinking of me.”

“You know something, Captain?”

“What's that?”

“Your laugh is wonderful. I don't think I've heard it enough.”

“Thank you, Harry.” She couldn't help but smile. “Maybe now that we're home, I can relax a little more.”

“I hope so.” He took the last sip of his coffee and returned to the conversation. “That day, Tom told me that ensigns don't invite captains to eat with them. I was more nervous about being proper around you from that point on.”

She smiled over her coffee. “Well, I'm glad that didn't last too long. It would've been a long seven years if everyone had been afraid to interact with me.”

Chakotay stepped up to the table and asked, "Harry, could I speak to the Captain alone for a moment, please?"

"Of course, Commander." Harry picked up their empty food trays and said, "Thank you for lunch, Captain."

"Any time." She watched Chakotay as he sat down without making eye contact with her. They hadn't spoken privately in over four days and she was wondering whether Annika had been straightforward with him.

"Did I interrupt your lunch?" he asked gruffly.

"We were finished."

He glanced at her and accused, "Was the hologram the part of your conversation that you wouldn't tell me about?"

"Yes."

"You should have told me," he said quietly, but there was anger boiling under the surface.

"I gave her the opportunity to be honest with you, first. I believed if I made her tell you, she might learn more about why it's inappropriate. But if she hadn't told you about it within a week, I intended to."

"A week? You haven't known about this for months?"

"No, she just told me about it the other night in an attempt to explain her frustration."

His shoulders relaxed slightly and he looked down at his hands. "Well, that makes me feel a little better at least."

"You thought I would've let it go all this time if I knew?"

"It didn't seem likely, but..."

"But you were so angry with me that you'd believe just about anything? Never mind how well I know you and know how much this would bother you?"

"Something like that."

Kathryn took a drink of coffee and let that thought sink in a little. "Did she speak with the Doctor?"

"Yes, and then promptly broke up with me."

“I’m sorry.”

“You are?” Chakotay put his elbows on the table. “That’s surprising.”

“I’m sorry for your loss. What did the Doctor say?”

“She wouldn’t tell me. I take it she hasn’t spoken with you either?”

Kathryn shook her head. “She has a right to her privacy.”

“Privacy... I guess. If that means anything.” He stared at the table for a moment. “Well, I came to tell you, in no uncertain terms, how manipulative and unprofessional I thought you were to keep that secret from me, but um... I... ah... don’t need to say that after all.”

She crossed her arms across her chest. “I can put her on report if it makes you feel better.”

“That’s not necessary.” He studied her face. “You’re not going to make this easy on me, are you?”

“No, I don’t believe I am.” She was more than put out by his behavior. “I’ve got a tough skin, Chakotay, but the things you said... well, they dented it a little.”

He smothered his grin. “Dented it?”

“Yeah.” She pointed to her shoulder. “Right there. You might not have noticed the little indentation because these shoulders have been carrying a big load for a long time. I think they’re slightly bowed in.”

“I’m sorry, Kathryn.”

“Apology accepted.” She stood and said, “It’s time for our last debrief for the week. Do you think we can manage it?”

“I think that together, you and I can do just about anything.”

“Agreed. So what are we rehashing today?”

Chakotay looked at his PADD. “Oh great... Riley Frazier and the Ex-Borg Colony.”

“Nice cheery topic for a Friday afternoon, don’t you think?”

“Well, since we seem to be on the topic of women manipulating me, why not?”

“Don’t worry. I’ll defend your honor.” She touched his back as they walked out of the dining room. Kathryn passed B’Elanna in the corridor and winked at her. She hoped that her message conveyed that things were okay again.

Debriefings continued for another three weeks, and other than the crew getting antsy, nothing much happened. It was clear to Kathryn that Chakotay was uncomfortable spending time with her alone, but his support as her first officer never wavered.

Little by little, the crew left for a three-month leave, and eventually only the senior staff remained. Starfleet wouldn’t be handing out promotions or reassigning anyone until they’d had a chance to fully review each person’s file and had decided how best to re-integrate the crew into Starfleet. As for the Maquis, it was decided that they would handle each person’s future on a case-by-case basis to determine the best fit. Kathryn and Chakotay were both relieved that no charges would be pressed against anyone, including the Equinox crew, although their past decisions would be reflected in promotions and new assignments.

Tuvok hadn’t returned from Vulcan yet, but since she didn’t know how long the treatment would take, Kathryn wasn’t worried about it. She sent him a message to tell him that she was thinking about him, and he had responded that treatment was going well and wished her well also. The reply, although evasive, was welcome and she felt assured that he was going to be fine.
