

The Future is Ours – part 30

“Hop Into My Pocket”

By Dawn

Summary: Kathryn goes to Paris to try to win over the Federation Council

Rated: PG

Kathryn and her entourage beamed directly into the transporter room of the Federation Council building in Paris. The last time she'd been there, she'd just returned to Earth at the end of the summer after the incident on Sirius IX. She hadn't been herself and had relied heavily on Harry and Khurma that week. But now, she was a stronger woman, and she was ready to get some work done.

Khurma stepped up to greet her. “Kathryn, how are you today?”

“I'm doing well, Admiral. How are you?”

“Oh, not too bad,” he said as they started walking. “Adjusting to the time zone change is as challenging, as always. I feel like I should still be asleep.”

“I know what you mean. This is about the time I usually go to bed.”

“Are you ready for our first meeting?”

“I have a breakfast on my schedule. Is that correct?” she asked.

“Yes. Much like the reception that you hosted, it's with the chairs of each sub-council and task force. Just a chance for us to get started on the right note.”

“Do you have a feel for how receptive they are to me being here?”

“I think feelings are mixed, but they did appoint you to do a job for them.”

“And now they're uncertain about following up.”

“Right.” He pressed the call button on the elevator and turned to face her. “You need to win them over with your charm.”

“I really hope the future of the Federation doesn't hinge on my charisma, Admiral.”

“You say that as if it's not a sure bet, Kathryn.” He winked at her.

Amused, she ducked into the elevator. “Let’s just take it one conversation at a time and see what happens.”

“A good idea, Kathryn. A very good idea.”

The morning breakfast segued into a breakout session with the judiciary council to go over the petitions that Kathryn was bringing to the full council the following day. She spent most of the time listening intently to the conversation to learn more about the ins and outs of the council, and specifically, what was important to the people at the table.

Since the general session would be broadcast to the entire Federation, the council reworded some of the language to make it more acceptable for public consumption and more palatable to some of the council members. They decided to combine the issues of pardoning expired war-time agreements with establishing egalitarian policies, since they both dealt with the same set of policies.

They surprised her when they threw out her petition for the formation of a council oversight committee, stating that it should come from within, not from a Starfleet Admiral. Kathryn knew it was a hot issue with many planetary governments, but it was clear that the council would not permit her to bring it up. She decided that it was an issue that would not be quieted, so she let it drop for the time being.

As Kathryn and her entourage entered the building’s cafe for lunch, Councilman M’niss came up to her.

“Admiral Janeway, won’t you join us?”

She quirked a smile at the feline-like Caitian and replied, “That would be nice, thank you.” Turning to Mark and Sue, she said, “I trust that you can manage by yourselves?”

Mark nodded. “We’ll stay close.”

“Just be sure to eat.”

As he led Kathryn to a table, M’niss said, “I’m sure that it’s difficult being among such a large group and unsure whom to call friend.”

She chuckled lightly. “True, but with my entourage, I carry some friends around with me, wherever I go.”

Once they were at the table, he said loud enough for the other two seated there to hear, “You are among friends today.”

“Thank you,” she said as she sat in the proffered chair. “Are you referring to the three of you or the judiciary council?”

Truov, a female Coridanite, said, “The members of the judiciary sub-council are appointed by a special committee outside the control of the executive branch. It took a great deal of planning over the last six months to put the right people in the room with you.”

“I’m glad to hear that, but I suppose that if there’d been any dissenters among us, the meeting would’ve gotten a little more lively.”

“That’s one way of describing it,” Truov replied before nodding at the menu in front of her. “I recommend the quiche or the cheese soufflé. Both are satisfactory entrees and native to this region of your planet.”

“Thank you for the suggestion. I’ll have to try the soufflé.”

Truov flagged down a waiter, placed their order, and then turned to Kathryn. “You were very quiet this morning.”

“Was I?”

“Yes, we expected substantially more debate from you as we were editing your proposals.”

Kathryn shrugged nonchalantly. “I’m here to bring the issues to your attention. What the council does with the petitions from here is entirely up to you.”

The third person at the table, a Grazerite named Sakish-Anar, said, “I find that surprising. You seem the type who would be exacting in your fight to get these pushed through in their original form.”

“The wording isn’t as important as the essence of the issues. After all, my staff compiled those proposals based on our conversations with dozens of planetary governments.”

“Your staff wrote them?” M’Niss asked.

“Yes, but I edited them, as did Admiral Khurma and Secretary General Dooha. They’ve been revised so many times that this morning’s changes didn’t faze me.”

Truov leaned forward and rested her arms on the table. “But you believe that the... essence?” She paused until Kathryn nodded. “Has remained the same?”

“Very much so. They are issues that we ran into time and time again throughout the Federation. In fact, the proposal that was dropped this morning is the most significant issue and will not go away quietly, but I suspect that if the other petitions go through, a council oversight committee would be the logical next step to ensure a better future for the Federation members.”

“You may have a point,” Sakish-Anar said quietly. “Some of the members are a little nervous to be seen even talking to you. That’s no way to conduct ourselves.”

“Agreed,” she said as she gratefully accepted the cup of coffee that Sue set down in front of her. “Thank you, Lieutenant.”

M’Niss commented, “I fear that the media has generated tension where there should be none.”

“The way I see it,” Kathryn stated. “The best way to handle being around me is to be open and honest when asked about what we discussed. Nothing that I say to any councilmember should be considered secretive or privileged.”

“A good suggestion, Admiral.” M’Niss changed the topic by asking, “How is your health now, if I may be so personal?”

“I appreciate your concern.” She took a sip of her coffee before saying, “Although I haven’t regained my strength or stamina, I think I’m doing well overall.”

“I’d say you are. Honestly, I didn’t expect you to return to work at all.”

She winked at him. “I’m not easily deterred, Councilman M’Niss.”

“What could possibly deter you, if not what happened this winter?”

“Are you hoping to find out or was that a rhetorical question?”

He held up a hand in apology. “Merely rhetorical, Admiral. I, we, everyone admires your courage and bravery. It’s an honor to have you here.”

“Thank you,” she said graciously. “But I must say that I’m the one who feels honored to be invited to speak at the General Session. Not many Starfleet officers would get an audience like that.”

“You’re right. As a matter of fact, only a few in Starfleet have ever been allowed to address the Council. James T. Kirk was one of them.”

“Well,” she said with a laugh. “That man did everything, so it’s no surprise that he showed up here with some problem.”

M’Niss continued, “We were probably facing the end of civilization as we knew it. We often were with him around.”

Kathryn laughed. “Then what we’re facing now pales in comparison.”

“Doesn’t everything?”

Sakish-Anar said, “Oh, I don’t know, Admiral. I think you just might outshine the great James Kirk.”

She held up her hand in protest. “No, thank you. I don’t want that kind of legacy.”

“No? I assumed you had your sights set pretty high.”

Shaking her head, Kathryn said, “Not at all. Once all of this settles down, I’m looking forward to a nice, long break. I’ve had a lot on my plate for a long time, and I’ll gladly let others take the reins for a little while.”

“You surprise me, Admiral,” Truov said.

“Do I?”

“Well, yes. It is a common belief that you want to run for election or be promoted to Fleet Admiral.”

“That’s a common misconception or perhaps wishful thinking on the part of some of the people I’ve spoken to. I fear they’ve put me on a higher pedestal than I deserve.”

“I disagree, Admiral,” Sakish-Anar said. “It appears to us that your ethics are indisputable and that you’ve gained the trust of not only the planetary governments, but the public at large. That is nearly impossible to do.”

“I believe I’m in a unique position and that my role is what makes it possible to bridge the gap between the many, divergent constituents. They all want me on their side, and to be honest, I can empathize with just about every viewpoint because of my experiences in the Delta Quadrant and with the former Maquis on my crew.”

Truov pursed her lips. “Now you just need to gain the trust of the Council. Once you do that, I wouldn’t be at all surprised if they approve you to run for the presidential election. Finding a good candidate that is known quadrant-wide is extremely challenging.”

“While that would be an honor, I don’t believe the timing would be right for me. I’m hesitant to cause this much upset and then officially step into politics.”

“Oh, I don’t know about that,” commented Sakish-Anar. “To quote one of your human phrases, I say hit the iron while it is hot.”

Kathryn smiled at the goat-like humanoid who looked so serious, yet so friendly at the same time. “Regardless, I think we’re jumping the gun. My proposals may just as easily fall apart as succeed, and Dooha could run me out of town on a rail.”

M’Niss asked, “A rail? What does this mean?”

“Oh, it’s just an expression for sending someone away in unfavorable circumstances. One of my former crewmen, Commander Tom Paris, was very fond of old-fashioned sayings. After spending seven years on the same bridge, I picked up on a few.”

“Interesting,” M’Niss replied as their lunch was brought to them.

As they began to eat, Kathryn said, “If there’s one thing that I’ve learned as a result of the last eight and half years, it’s that you never know what will happen tomorrow, so live for today. Let’s enjoy this wonderful lunch and talk about something else.”

“What would you like to discuss?” Truov asked.

Kathryn thought for a moment and then said, “Your home-worlds. I haven’t had the honor of visiting them.”

“An oversight we must fix as soon as possible,” Sakish-Anar said. “The people of Grazer would be very excited if I brought you home for a visit.”

Smiling, she replied, “Someday, perhaps.”

After lunch, Kathryn, Admiral Khurma, and Secretary-General Dooha had a meeting with all of their aides to finalize the proposals changed during the morning’s meeting. Then she stepped out to the coffee bar to get some much-needed caffeine.

As she was putting the lid on her cup, she stopped short at the sight of her former protégé. “Annika! What brings you to Paris?”

“My friend, Dr. Holmes, is here speaking to the Council. We decided that I would attend with him.”

“Oh? What is he speaking on?”

“Warp drive mechanics.”

Kathryn frowned. “I didn’t realize that was on the agenda this week, although it sounds a lot more interesting than trade agreements.”

“He’s not speaking to the full council, just the sub-council on technological developments.”

“Ah,” she nodded with understanding. “That’s probably the only group I’m not meeting with.”

“I knew you’d be here, and wanted to speak with you when you have some free time.”

Kathryn scratched the bridge of her nose with her thumb. "I'd love to, but my schedule is jam-packed as it is. Could we talk via com-link next week?"

Annika hesitated before she said, "I should have contacted you in advance."

"I doubt that would've made a difference. How long will you be on Earth?"

"Just until tomorrow afternoon."

Kathryn sighed and looked at the clock. Taking Annika's arm, she said, "Come, sit with me for a few minutes. Tell me what's on your mind."

"I'm not sure this is the best location for our discussion." She looked around nervously, glancing repeatedly at the hovering security team.

"They aren't eavesdropping." Kathryn signaled Mark to come closer and asked, "Would you ask the team to stand back so that Annika and I may have a private conversation?"

"Of course, Admiral."

After they moved away, Annika said, "The subject I'd like to speak about is not appropriate in a public location."

"Is this about Dr. Holmes?"

"No, it's about one of my projects at the Institute."

"Oh?"

Annika did a visual scan of their immediate vicinity and then leaned in closer. "Prior to returning to the Alpha Quadrant, you, or rather your future self, said something that I think about often."

"What's that?"

"She suggested that I should help you deal a devastating blow to the Borg in order to atone for the atrocities I participated in while I was a drone."

Kathryn nodded slowly. "We've talked about that a few times."

"Four times, to be exact. So, I requested time to work on a project that could identify Borg activity over long distances."

"Have you detected any?"

“That’s what I wanted to discuss with you. My scans have shown zero activity, which cannot be accurate. I’d like to request permission to take Voyager closer to the Delta Quadrant, or to equip one of Starfleet’s other ships with the Borg sensor technology.”

Kathryn rubbed her hands together as she thought about the request. “Was this something you thought about doing while on Voyager?”

“Scanning for Borg activity was standard practice in the Delta Quadrant. The Daystrom Institute has superior technology than Voyager, but it is limited by its location. Taking a ship into deep space could provide more accurate results.”

“You’re doing nothing more than what would’ve been standard operating procedures on Voyager?”

“No, except that the scanner I’m working on would continually monitor and record the activity in an attempt to locate patterns.”

“Can this technology be used to track any other life form besides Borg?”

“Of course. Is there something you’d like to track?”

“Not at this time, but I think you should test it on another subject to see if they can detect the scans.”

“I’ve done that, and the scans have gone unnoticed. The device I’ve created has recorded all the movements in Cardassian space during the last month.”

Surprised, Kathryn asked, “Cardassian?”

“It’s the most unique species that I could isolate at a long distance, and I know them to be an enemy of the Federation. They seemed an appropriate test subject.”

“Does anyone at the Institute know you’re tracking that particular species?”

“Just Dr. Holmes. He argues with me about it, often.”

“Okay.” She paused as she rubbed her neck. “Two things... One, you need to stop scanning Cardassian space immediately. Choose an ally or a member of the Federation and, before you scan them, ask for their permission through appropriate channels.”

“But what purpose would it serve to scan an ally that is open with their information?”

“Your job, Annika, is to develop the technology, not provoke distrust or risk re-igniting a war by spying on former enemies of the Federation. Understood?”

“Yes, Admiral.”

Kathryn closed her eyes and shook her head. “I can’t even imagine what would happen if the Cardassians discovered that we have that kind of information. Heaven forbid if you’d turned that scanner in the direction of Romulus.”

“Would you like me to delete the data I collected, Admiral?”

“No, but cease your scans immediately. I’ll speak to Admiral Khurma about what to do with the information you do have. And tell no one that you have it. Have I made myself clear?”

“Yes, Admiral.”

Kathryn took a moment to let that conversation sit before she went on. “The second thing we should discuss is the Borg issue. Is it possible that Voyager’s actions eliminated all Borg activity within range?”

“I suppose it’s possible. If not, my scans should have picked up traces of transwarp signatures. The Borg won’t stay away forever.”

She studied her hands for just a moment while contemplating where to take this conversation. Coming to a conclusion, she asked, “Annika, you understand temporal mechanics better than anyone, correct?”

“That is correct.”

“A little over a year ago, I was involved in another time travel incident.”

“After Voyager returned to Earth?”

“Yes. I have knowledge of something that I shouldn’t know, but if I tell anyone, it will affect our actions.”

“You could endanger the timeline.”

“Precisely.” She leaned forward. “Listen to me carefully. I need you to continue developing the technology, but don’t be alarmed by not finding any transwarp signatures. Instead, I want you to find your atonement in the lack of Borg activity.”

“Are you saying...?”

Kathryn held up her hand. “I’m not saying anything except that the technology you’re developing is important. We can’t anticipate every species that we’ll come up against.”

Annika’s eyes were wide as she processed the information. “I understand, Admiral, and I have a lot to think about.”

“Good, but don’t discuss it with anyone. Not even your closest friend. Understood?”

“Understood,” she said nervously. “But I would like to know more about your experience.”

“I’m sure you would, but unfortunately, I can’t divulge any more than I already have.” Kathryn smiled at the young woman. “Now, I have just a couple more minutes. Tell me about your relationship with Dr. Holmes.”

Annika paused while she adjusted to the new direction of the conversation. “The relationship is progressing.”

“Are you enjoying yourself?”

She straightened her posture before she stated, “Yes. I find physical expressions of intimacy with him much more enjoyable than with Chakotay.”

Kathryn cleared her throat and blinked. “That’s good,” she said slowly.

“It is. We have progressed at a more satisfactory pace. As you suggested, we held hands. After two weeks, we proceeded to sitting close. Two weeks later, I allowed him to embrace me. We are now at the stage where he may put his arm around my shoulders. He calls it cuddling.”

“I see.” Kathryn rubbed her jaw. “Have you kissed?”

“No. I did not find that to be a favorable activity with Chakotay.”

“Dr. Holmes is a different man.”

“It is still an exchange of bodily fluids that I find repulsive. He has not pushed the issue.”

“What is his age, if I may ask?”

“Is that a factor in a successful relationship?”

“No, but I find it surprising that you’ve met a man with this much patience.”

“Dr. Holmes is fifty-seven in terran years.”

Sighing, Kathryn said, “I’d like to meet him.”

Annika tapped her commbadge before Kathryn could stop her. “Annika Hansen to Dr. Richard Holmes.”

“Hello, my dear. Did you find your friend?”

Annika shifted uncomfortably. “Yes, I am speaking with Admiral Janeway now. She would like to meet you. Is this a good time?”

Kathryn jumped in and said, “Actually, Dr. Holmes, I have a meeting starting in a little under ten minutes, but I would love to meet you later this evening.”

“I would enjoy that as well, Admiral. Annika has told me a great deal about you.”

“Not all bad, I hope,” Kathryn smiled.

“All good, actually. I will finish my conference at nineteen hundred. Is that a good time for you, Admiral?”

She checked her schedule on her PADD and said, “I’m finished thirty minutes later. Could we meet for a late meal at Fouquet’s on the corner of the Champs Elysees?”

“That would be delightful. I’ve wanted to try that restaurant.”

“Wonderful, I’ll have my security team arrange it for us. Unfortunately, we’ll have to eat inside, but I’m sure you can understand why.”

“Of course. The need for your security is of paramount importance. I wouldn’t want to do anything that might jeopardize it.”

“Thank you.”

“Annika,” he said. “I’ll speak to you soon. Holmes, out.”

Kathryn smiled. “He seems quite charming.”

“A true gentlemen according to my research.”

“Annika, I’m thrilled that you’ve found him, but may I make a suggestion?”

“Of course.”

“Relax.” She touched the younger woman’s hand. “He obviously cares a great deal for you, and if he’s waited this long, I’m sure he won’t push you into anything you’re not comfortable with.”

“I’m comfortable with our relationship as it is.”

“Yes, but it’s time to really embrace your humanity, Annika. Let him love you like you deserve to be loved. And if you’ll let down your guard, you just might be surprised with a relationship that is beyond anything you’ve imagined.”

“Admiral,” Mark interrupted. “It’s time to proceed to your next meeting.”

Kathryn nodded and then spoke to Annika again. "I'm looking forward to tonight."

"I find myself feeling anxious about you meeting him."

She shrugged. "I suppose it's like introducing your boyfriend to your mother for the first time."

"At least you have no designs on this boyfriend."

Mark's mouth dropped open, and Kathryn quickly admonished, "Annika."

"I apologize if that was inappropriate, Admiral."

Kathryn glanced up at Mark before she said, "Well, you have a point. I did marry your last boyfriend."

Mark looked away and bit his lips to keep from laughing.

With a deep sigh, she said, "Annika, I never meant to hurt you, and with your eidetic memory, you should recall that you're the one who broke up with Chakotay."

"Of course I remember, but I also think you would've helped me more if you hadn't wanted him for yourself."

"You put me in a very difficult position, and now you're harboring resentment towards me. We need to talk about this sometime."

"Resentment? No. I merely feel sorry for you because you married him. Chakotay lacks the charm and attractiveness that are desirable in a mate."

She glanced up at Mark again and wanted to smack the expression off of his face. He was pressing his fist against his mouth, clearly trying not to guffaw. Picking a piece of lint off of her pants, Kathryn said, "Well, it's good that my standards are what they are because I find his charm and magnetism quite engaging."

"I suppose you must."

Kathryn stood and straightened her tunic. "I am *really* looking forward to meeting the man who, in your book, outshines my husband. We'll see you tonight, Annika."

Before leaving the café, Kathryn pulled Mark aside. "Lieutenant, I would appreciate..."

"Your conversations are completely confidential, ma'am."

With a sigh, she said, "Thank you."

“But if I may ask?”

Lacking any humor, Kathryn replied, “What?”

“Did she and Chakotay really have a... physical relationship? I just can’t imagine.”

With a click of her tongue, she said, “Mark, I realize that I’ve relaxed my formality around you and the rest of my staff, but that kind of question about my husband is quite inappropriate.”

He sobered instantly. “My apologies, ma’am. I didn’t mean to... Admiral, please, I’m so sorry.”

Kathryn patted him on the back as she moved them out the door. “Apology accepted, but to answer your question, they realized they were incompatible before they got to that stage in their relationship. Something I am extremely grateful for.”

“Yes, ma’am. I’m sure you are.”

“Mark, I’ve never discussed this with a member of Voyager’s crew outside of my senior staff, but did you know they were dating?”

“No, ma’am. It didn’t reach the rumor mill until the time of our placement interviews. At the end of that week, you remember what happened, don’t you?”

“He and I kissed in front of all of you.”

Mark chuckled. “We were all so relieved. Most of us had thought you and he had been a couple all along and were devastated to learn that he’d dumped you.”

“We weren’t, and he didn’t.”

“We know that now, but at the time, there was talk of a lynch mob.”

Laughing out loud, Kathryn said, “Glad to hear it.”

Following her afternoon meeting to discuss the status of re-integrating Ktaria, Joria, and four other planets into the Federation, Kathryn made a beeline to her day-room to change clothes. The evening’s meeting didn’t require a uniform, and she wanted to blend with the crowd at dinner with Annika and her friend.

Once Mark had secured her inside her room, she checked her comm unit and saw that Chakotay had called just minutes earlier. She immediately placed the connection as she took off her tunic.

“Kathryn!” he said with delight. “I wasn’t expecting you.”

“How was your first day?”

“Just fine. There were fewer questions about you than with the last group, but out here, our celebrity status isn’t quite as profound as it is on Earth.” He tilted his head as he watched her hang up her coat. “Do I see a bump?”

“On my slacks?” Kathryn said as she looked down at her pants. “Where?”

He rolled his eyes. “Not *on* your slacks. *In* your slacks.”

“Oh,” she said as her hands rose to her belly. “But you just saw me three days ago. If memory serves, you inspected me rather carefully.”

“That I did,” he said with a wink. “Are you changing clothes?”

“Yes, why?”

“Show me.”

She raised an eyebrow. “You want me to strip?”

“Indulge me. I miss you and your bump.”

As she unzipped her slacks, she said, “There is no bump. Not yet.”

“But you had to replicate larger clothes, right?”

“Yes, but...” She paused to step out of her pants and then turned sideways so he could see. “I think I’m just getting my normal body back. It’s too soon to be showing.”

“Is your belly soft or hard?” Leaning, closer to his screen, he said, “Man, I really wish I were there.”

“Why, so you could see how ‘soft’ I am?”

“I know how soft you are, love,” he said with a laugh. “So?”

She pressed her fingers low into her belly and smiled. “It feels like the side of a ball.”

With a satisfied smile, he said, “I knew it. You’re pregnant, Admiral.”

“Yeah, and you’re the captain who knocked me up. What do you have to say for yourself?”

He made a show of polishing his fingernails against his lapel. “Not just any man could bed the most famous woman in the universe.”

After responding with an undignified snort, she sat down to talk to him seriously. “So, you’re doing okay?”

“Of course. How are you holding up?”

With a sigh, she said, “Pretty well, overall. The petitions got reworded again, and one was dropped.”

“Which?”

“Oversight.”

“Really? That one’s not going to go away quietly.”

“No, but they think it’d be better coming from an internal source than from me. There’s really nothing to report, yet.”

“Are you worried about this line not being secure?”

“Would I have stripped down to my panties if I thought that?”

“Good point.”

“I do have one thing to tell you. I ran into Annika today.”

“Annika?” he said with complete surprise. “In Paris?”

“Her gentlemen friend is here speaking about warp theory, and she came with him because she knew I’d be here.”

“I hate to be rude, but do you have the time and energy to talk to her?”

“We talked for about fifteen minutes, and later tonight, I’m meeting her and Dr. Holmes for dinner.”

“Are you sure that’s a good idea?” He instantly added, “I’m only asking because you don’t want to wear out.”

“She’s only here until tomorrow afternoon, and tonight is as good a time as any. I’m eager to meet this man of hers.”

“Why?”

“Because the way she describes their relationship, he almost sounds fictional. I want to see if he’s real.”

“Kathryn,” he admonished half-heartedly, and then with forced casualness, asked, “Did you see him?”

“Not yet, but I figure he must either have the patience of a saint, no experience with women, or he’s gay.”

He couldn’t hide his amusement. “Why do you say that?”

“They’ve been together for almost two months and she has allowed him to progress through each stage of physical intimacy in two week periods.”

“Sounds methodical.”

Kathryn frowned. “Yes, but after six or eight weeks, I lost track, they’ve progressed to cuddling. No kissing, mind you.”

With a loud snort, Chakotay tried desperately not to laugh outright. Wiping away a tear, he said, “I’ve ruined her for all men.”

Shaking her head with enjoyment over his reaction, she said, “Tonight should be interesting. Want me to call you when I get home?”

“I think I do. It’ll be the middle of the night, but I’ll go to bed early, so I won’t miss the sleep.” He looked down and then glanced back up. “I wonder what he looks like.”

“Don’t know, but I did learn that he’s fifty-seven.”

With disbelief, he asked, “Fifty-seven? Six years older than me?”

Kathryn reached out and touched the image of his cheek on the screen. “Do you trust me, Chakotay?”

“Of course I do,” he said, surprised at her question.

“Do you think I’m the smartest, cleverest and most intelligent woman you’ve ever met?”

“Why do I suspect that you’re leading the witness?”

“Answer the question.”

“Yes, Kathryn. Your intelligence is the stuff of legends.”

“Then you likely would take anything I say as fact, right?”

With a laugh, he said, “Right.”

She leaned in forward, trying to look as sultry as she could imagine being, and said, “Honey, you are an amazing man. You’re full of love, charm, wit, and have a generosity of spirit that is unparalleled. On top of all that, you’re damn sexy.”

Pink tinged his cheeks as he tugged on his ear. “Thank you.”

With a wink, she added, “The most famous woman in the universe wouldn’t allow just anyone to be her husband and the father of her children, now would she?”

“I suppose not.” His eyes were glowing with love as he said, “I want to kiss you so much right now.”

“I’ll be looking forward to it, one week from tonight. Although, I can’t decide if we should stay in or brave going out to dinner.”

“It’s your birthday. We should go out, especially since your lunch out on Friday went well.”

She nodded her approval. “I’ll set something up.”

“Let me take care of it.”

“Will you be giving me another scarf?”

“I thought that thing had a fancy name?”

“Pashmina.”

“Do you want another one?”

“Nooo,” she said very clearly. “I want something romantic and completely frivolous.”

He laughed. “I’ll see what I can do.”

“Speaking of romantic, I was thinking about wearing the wedding jewelry tonight. What do you think?”

“Out to dinner with Seven? Annika, I mean?”

“Before that. I’m going to a cocktail party with Dooha. There are some people he wants me to meet.”

“On one condition.”

“What’s that?”

“After you’re dressed, call me back. I want to see you.”

“It’s a deal. I’m going to lie down for a bit before I get dressed. Call you in a couple hours?”

“I’ll do the same. Got a pillow?”

“Yes, do you?”

He nodded, “Mhmm. Hold onto it tight. I miss you.”

“Miss you, too, honey.” She blew him a kiss before closing the signal, feeling warmed by his affection for her. “Computer,” she said as she got up. “Set an alarm for one hour.” A quiet beep was her only acknowledgement.

She took off her turtleneck and crawled into bed where she wrapped her arms around the spare pillow. Snuggling in, she imagined that she was cuddled up against her husband’s warm chest and that his arms were holding her tight. Her mind drifted back over their conversation and she couldn’t help herself as her hand drifted down to lightly massage the slight bump that was her baby. A warm, beautiful feeling flooded her senses as she imagined herself rocking the infant while looking out the French doors in their bedroom at the Pacific Ocean.

Kathryn was craving that moment in time. All the stress would be over and she could revel in being a mother and a wife with nothing more to do than care for her family. She couldn’t imagine a better way to spend a much needed leave of absence.

After another short conversation with Chakotay, Kathryn left her room to attend the cocktail party.

When Justin saw her, he whistled in appreciation. “I hope I’m not offending you, Admiral.”

She waved his concern away. “Not in current company, but I suggest restraining yourself when Sue joins us downstairs.”

“I have a feeling she’ll be just as riveted, ma’am.”

“What? In this old thing?” she joked as she looked down at her black dress. It had a very modest neckline and was rather conservative overall, but since Chakotay had nearly drooled upon seeing her in it, she knew it must accent her features nicely. She felt confident and beautiful.

It wasn’t until they had arrived and Kathryn had begun mingling that Sue was able to join them. She rushed up and said, “Admiral, my apologies.”

Kathryn held up her hand. “Relax, Lieutenant. Nothing of importance has been said, yet. All I need is for you to be a second set of eyes and ears for me.”

“I’ll try to be discreet about taking notes.”

“I appreciate that.” Kathryn looked carefully at her assistant and asked, “Are you feeling all right?”

“Yes... Oh, yes, I’m fine. It’s just that I felt like I was being followed, but Mark was with me and he said I was secure. We took an indirect path in an attempt to lose anyone who might’ve seen us.”

Kathryn fought against showing a reaction. “Did you notify Justin?”

“Yes, ma’am. He has doubled our security force tonight as a result.”

“Where were you coming from?”

“The Champs Elysses, where you’ll be dining later.”

Kathryn nodded towards Justin, signaling that he join them. When he arrived, she said, “I think a change in venue for dinner is in order. Do you agree?”

“Yes, ma’am. I’ll make arrangements and notify Annika and Dr. Holmes.”

“Thank you.” When he was gone, she told Sue, “I’ve learned that it’s best to let him worry about my security so I can do the job that I need to do. Can you help me do that?”

“Yes, Admiral.” She looked past Kathryn’s shoulder and said, “Admiral Khurma with Representative Gardi.”

Kathryn turned around and greeted them with her best diplomatic smile. “Admiral, Representative, it’s good to see you.”

“And you, too, Kathryn,” Khurma replied. “You remember meeting Representative Gardi?”

“Of course, it’s a pleasure to see you again, sir.” She accepted a warm handshake from the older man.

“The pleasure is all mine, Admiral. You look radiant tonight. I think the Paris lights serve you well.”

Khurma handed a PADD to Sue. “Lieutenant, would you take care of this for the Admiral? I’m sure it’s nothing of importance right now.”

“What is it?” Kathryn asked as she watched Sue flip it on.

“Oh, I don’t know,” Khurma said. “A courier handed it to me before you arrived. He said it was a memo of some kind.”

When Sue gasped, their attention was drawn to her. Kathryn asked, “Lieutenant?”

“I... uh... I... need...” Sue’s hand was shaking and she started looking for Justin.

Kathryn asked with concern, “Sue?”

Justin joined them immediately. “Is everything all right?”

Sue handed him the PADD and asked, “Would you follow up on this?”

Kathryn immediately took it from him. “What’s it say?” Immediately, her eyes widened and then she quickly recovered. “Admiral, Representative Gardi, would you excuse us for just a moment? There’s a matter we need to attend to.”

Khurma held out his hand for the PADD. “What’s the problem, Kathryn?”

Gardi asked, “Is there anything we can do?”

“Oh, nothing too surprising, I suppose,” Kathryn turned off the PADD’s power and handed it to Justin. “It appears that my security has been compromised once again.”

“What’s on the PADD?” Khurma asked with insistence.

She glanced at Gardi, and seeing that he was genuinely concerned, decided to trust him. “A picture of me from two hours ago when I was speaking to my husband over the comm. I’d rather not show it to you, sir.”

“Why not?”

“It’s a private moment. The fewer people that see it, the better.” Kathryn turned to Justin. “Please have my things removed from the room at the hotel and let’s continue with our plans to return to my home tonight. We’ll deal with tomorrow after you’ve had a chance to look into this.”

“Aye, Admiral,” he said, very seriously. “Since Pioneer is still in orbit, I’ll ask for their assistance.”

Kathryn nodded thoughtfully. “Let’s keep this quiet. I don’t want a full scale security alert.”

“Why not?” Khurma asked. “Surely this is deserving of our full attention, Kathryn.”

“Because we don’t know who to trust.” She nodded at Justin to signal him to get started. “Meanwhile, let’s enjoy this party, shall we? I’m not about to let a bully stop me from doing what I came here to do.”

Khurma shook his head in dismay, but followed her lead.

Gardi said, “You have no fear, Admiral. I’m not sure if that’s good or bad.”

“I have many fears, sir. I just won’t let them stand in the way of conquering my biggest fear – that the Federation may one day cease to exist unless we address its problems,” she said with a pointed look. “Tell me, Representative, what did you think about today’s council meetings?”

Sharing a wary look with Khurma, Gardi said, “I think she might actually do it.”

“Do what?” he asked.

“Save the Federation on her lunch break and still have time for a peace agreement with Romulus.”

“She might, but she’s going to need our help. What was your take on Curd’s response to her proposal at the breakfast this morning?”

“Nullifying the mining contracts?” He shrugged. “Seems harmless to me, but Curd sure wasn’t happy.”

Kathryn asked, “Do you think it’s a matter of pride with him?”

“Oh, I don’t know if it’s pride, per se. He went through a hell of a lot to get them negotiated in the first place.”

“I can’t put my finger on it,” Kathryn said, trying to prompt Gardi to say more. “But my intuition tells me that Curd isn’t the one who was forcing the raw deal.”

“No,” Gardi said carefully. “But he was put between a rock and a hard place. He’s just one of the few left on the Council that was involved.”

“Any idea who provided the rock?”

With a sigh, he replied, “Well, that is the ultimate question, isn’t it?”

Kathryn nodded. “Yes, it is. Even if we suspect that we know the answer, how do we get proof, and how do we deal with it?”

Gardi said, “I realize that you want to get straight to the source of the problem, Admiral, but I’ve been giving your agenda some serious thought over the last two weeks.”

“Oh? You have an idea?”

“In general, Council-members don’t like to have their opinions questioned by anyone but their constituents. Even then, it’s something they handle carefully if they want to be re-elected or if they want to be respected on their home planet.”

“I can understand that.”

“Nor do they like their past dredged up in order to explain why certain decisions were made, especially if anything untoward was involved.”

“Because it might call their integrity into question?”

“And it might create a new wave of the illicit behavior you’re trying to uncover.”

Kathryn’s chin rose a notch. “Do you suspect that might be happening?”

“Not yet. If anything, I fear that any coercion will be directed towards you.”

On guard, she asked, “Why me in particular?”

“That PADD you just received. I got one myself a few years back that provided false proof that I was having an extra-marital affair. May I ask if that’s the reason you don’t want others to see it?”

“Absolutely not,” she snapped.

“Only when we hide the truth, can we be coerced, Admiral. My advice is to come clean with whatever they are trying to blackmail you with. Otherwise, the game is in their court.”

Khurma asked, “Kathryn? What was on that PADD?”

“Nothing you don’t already know about,” she said as she discreetly laid her hand upon her belly. “What alarmed me was that there are images from a supposedly secure connection.”

Glancing down at her mid-section, Khurma asked, “How could they get that from an image?”

“Get what?” Gardi asked.

She closed her eyes and sighed.

Sue said, “Admiral, it’s possible that whoever circulated that image couldn’t tell.”

Kathryn squared her shoulders and told her commanding officer, “Chakotay wanted to see if he could detect a bump, yet. I was only wearing my undergarments.”

“A bump?” Gardi asked, and then it dawned on him what she was saying. “You’re with…”

“Child, yes.”

Gardi smiled brightly. “Well, that’s certainly not anything to be afraid to share. The entire Federation would be overjoyed.”

“I have no doubts that they would, but I’d rather they focus on other issues right now.”

He waved away her concern. “If they find out, they find out. You’ll ask for their support, and you’ll get it.”

“I appreciate your confidence in me, sir.”

More gently, he asked, “Is there anything in your past that could be fodder for blackmail? Any skeletons in your closet?”

“I don’t think so, but I understand what you’re saying. If someone should try to blackmail me, I need to come out with whatever the issue is publically.”

“It’s all about integrity, so don’t do anything that would risk that, especially in your personal life.”

“That is not an issue.” She took a deep breath and refocused the conversation. “You were saying something about an idea you had.”

“Hmmm, yes,” Gardi took a drink before continuing. “What I’d like to suggest is that we focus on the future. It’s a catch-phrase that sounds similar to something you might’ve said in some speech or another. All of the council-members that I’ve spoken with over the last year want to get behind you all the way, but there is fear and illicit baggage keeping them from doing so.”

“How do we get around that?” Khurma asked.

“Make us believe that you’re not digging around for information on the past. Don’t even hint that you might be looking for the reasons behind any suspected criminal activity.”

“I see your point, but how do we flush out those who are using coercion tactics without doing that?”

“That’s secondary, Admiral. What you need is for the council-members to believe in you just as much as all these planetary leaders you’ve met with do. Get us in your side pocket, make us part of your team.”

Kathryn nodded thoughtfully. “Peaceful cooperation.”

“The ideals of the Federation.”

“So, are you suggesting that we drop the issue on the expired mining contracts?”

“Not at all, just give it a new twist. Focus your agenda on a better future for the people of the Federation, not what the council might have done wrong.”

“That was my intention.”

“Then emphasize it. The council members need votes to get re-elected, and if their constituents see that they’re working side by side with you, they’ll get their votes. If their constituents think you don’t trust them, the people won’t trust the representatives either.”

“You’re suggesting that I have the power to sway the votes of the entire Federation.”

He widened his eyes. “You do.”

Back at home later that night, Kathryn centered herself before she placed the comm call to Chakotay.

When he answered, his hair was in disarray and he wore a sleepy smile. “Hi, beautiful.”

“Hi. Are you sure you want to talk right now? You need your sleep.”

“For a minute. How was your dinner?”

“Interesting,” she said carefully. “Annika and Dr. Holmes seem well suited for each other.”

“How so?”

“He is definitely a father figure. I suspect she is more comfortable with older men.”

“Because of our age-old wisdom?”

“Something like that,” she said with a barely-contained yawn. “I’ll give you details later, but for now, I think we should sleep.”

“ ‘m kay. Your reception go okay?”

“It did,” she said with a slow nod. “I believe I made some headway on a plan to win over the majority of the council.”

“Good,” he said sleepily. “I had no doubts you’d soon have them eating out of your hand.”

“I had some misgivings, but I came to the realization tonight that on most issues, it doesn’t matter what the outcome is to my proposals, just that the council members vote without any hint of coercion.”

“Are you going to change your speech for tomorrow morning?”

“No, it’s been carefully written and approved already. However, my answers to their questions aren’t scripted, so I hope to put a positive spin on everything.”

“The entire campus here is taking a break to watch. The Fednews has really been publicizing the broadcast and there’s a lot of supposition about what you might say. I’ve been asked repeatedly.”

“Did you answer?”

“Noooo,” he said as if it were a silly question. “Only to say that I’m sure it will be brilliant.”

Her eyes widened. “No pressure.”

“Think of it as support from the masses.”

She wanted to say more, but her instincts told her to keep quiet for security reasons. Her tone more serious, she asked, “Chakotay?”

“Yes?” He was instantly more alert.

“I’ve... I’m not going to keep the dayroom in Paris. I feel more comfortable transporting back home during my breaks.”

“Something happen?”

She hesitated for only a moment. “There was a security breach with my comm terminal, but I’ll tell you about it when you’re back. For now, I want to be careful about what we discuss.”

“All right,” he said hesitantly. “Did you receive another... note?”

“Yes. I assumed that my hotel room was secure, and although I’m more certain that this channel is private, I can’t be certain about your terminal. I’d rather wait to tell you everything when we can speak face to face. Justin is redoubling security and I’m being as careful as I can.”

“Should I be worried?”

“Yes and no. This one had a little more teeth, but not enough of a bite to affect my plans. It’s not like we didn’t expect some negative reactions.”

“There’s a difference between negativity and... this.”

She leaned forward and smiled to try to reassure him. “I promised you that I’d keep myself safe, and that’s exactly what I intend to do.”

He nodded with understanding. “Remember last fall when you’d send me daily messages so I knew you were okay?”

“Yes.”

“I’d appreciate them hourly.”

Laughing quietly, she said, “How about every six hours?”

“Whatever you can manage.” He held both sets of fingers to his lips and blew her a kiss. “Anything else you need to tell me?”

“Just...” She suddenly felt overcome with emotion and looked away to compose herself.

“Kathryn?”

“One of the council members told me tonight that he was once coerced with false proof of an extra-marital affair. If you should receive anything that...”

“No, love. I won’t believe it.”

She implored, “Just keep trusting me, no matter what.”

“No one is going to undermine us, I promise.”

“Thank you,” she said through a watery smile.

“Go sleep, love, and call me if you need my voice. All right?”

“I will.” She touched the screen. “I love you, honey.”

“I love you, too.”
