

## ***The Future is Ours – part 31***

### **“These Are Not Simple Issues”**

By Dawn

Summary: Kathryn addresses the general session of the Federation Council

Rated PG

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Standing outside the council chamber door, Kathryn straightened her tunic and looked to Sue.  
“Are we ready for this?”

“You’ve faced the Borg Queen, Admiral. You can handle a bunch of politicians.”

She smirked. “Well, when you put it like that.” Holding out her hand, she said, “Shall we?”

“After you.”

When the two ladies and their security escorts walked into the noisy chamber, a silence spread instantly through the room. It lasted only a moment until Dooha’s aide walked up to Kathryn.

“This way, Admiral.” She led them to a table near the center podium.

Dooha approached her and said, “Admiral Janeway, welcome to General Session. Can I get you anything?”

“Sir,” she said as she stood up to shake his hand. “A glass of water would be nice.”

He nodded towards his aide to take care of it. “This morning, we’ll go through our usual opening fanfare, and then allow you a moment to make your comments. We need to vote on the procedure, and then I’ll open the floor for questions.”

“Thank you for allowing me this opportunity, sir.”

“We’re honored to have you here.” He smiled genuinely, and then looked around before adding, “Most of us, that is.”

“I didn’t expect this to be easy.”

“Just remember that approximately 95% of the individuals in here support you. They may not do it openly, but they do appreciate what you’re trying to accomplish.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” she said confidently. “Has Admiral Khurma arrived, yet?”

Dooha said discretely, “Don’t be obvious about it, but look at the mezzanine level in the center.”

Kathryn glanced up and she felt her heart thud heavily as a sickening chill spread through her body. She said to Dooha, "I didn't realize the President would be here."

"His prerogative. Unfortunately, he has invited Khurma to sit with him."

Swallowing past the lump in her throat, she said, "I would've expected Khurma to have given me some warning."

"He just found out when he arrived fifteen minutes ago, and he didn't have a chance to speak with me or anyone else because the President ushered him in here." Dooha gave Kathryn a meaningful look. "I suspect it was an attempt to unnerve you."

"Most likely." She gave him a confident smile. "But I won't be intimidated."

He chuckled quietly. "No doubt."

"Anything else I need to know?"

"Just that the President is here only as an observer. By law, he cannot comment or participate in the session in any way."

"I'm less worried about him than I am his supporters."

"I know," he said supportively. "But you know that Admiral Khurma is behind you one hundred percent, as am I."

"Thank you, sir."

He secretly gave her a wink before leaving to start the proceedings.

Kathryn retook her seat and filled Sue in on Zife's presence so that she wouldn't be surprised when she happened to notice. Then she tried to appear completely at ease, hoping that her behavior would influence her state-of-mind.

That practically the entire Federation was watching both unnerved her and filled her with a sense of power and purpose. It was a surreal experience after being isolated from the Federation during their seven years exile in the Delta Quadrant. She wondered what the older Admiral Janeway would think about this, and then her mind drifted to Q and how he was probably hovering nearby, just wishing he could burst forth, prance around in front of the council, and gloat about his involvement in her success.

Her attention was drawn to the opening of the session as the Anthem of the Federation began to play. Everyone stood as a procession of flags from all the worlds that were represented in the room were paraded in. She imagined how grand this procession probably was before the Dominion War took its toll on the politicians and the politics of this great organization.

As the opening activities continued, she thought about how much she believed in the Federation. She reminded herself that the Temporal Review Board had said she'd become a very influential human in this timeline, and that they'd charged her with the responsibility to take advantage of that to ensure a positive future. She supposed that this was the moment that could make all the difference.

Dooha stated, "We now proceed to the primary agenda item for this opening General Session of Governing Council for the United Federation of Planets. Vice-Admiral Kathryn Janeway of Starfleet is our special guest and brings us a report from conferences she has held throughout the Alpha and Beta Quadrants on our behalf.

"This morning, you each received the formal petitions that she and her staff have prepared. At this time, all of the media partners are receiving their copy, and I urge everyone to read the text carefully, keeping all matters within context and debating the issues with care. Now, I invite Admiral Janeway to give her opening comments before we open the floor to discussion." He turned to her and said, "Admiral?"

Kathryn nodded her thanks and stepped up to the podium. "Ladies, Gentlemen, and multi-gendered species, thank you for allowing me this opportunity. It is a true honor to speak before you, and one I do not take lightly.

"One year ago, President Zife," she paused to nod at him in a gesture of recognition, "appointed me as envoy to the Federation Security Council. During my tenure, I have had the privilege of visiting with twenty-six governmental bodies on a great number of issues – far too many to be addressed in this forum. However, the judicial council and I have narrowed the list down to three major concerns that impact almost every world we visited. I come to you today with these petitions so that you may work towards a better future for all involved. I am asking this council to deliberate over these concerns with open hearts and open minds so that the needs of these worlds may be addressed in a sincere and amicable forum.

"The Federation has a long tradition of strength, fairness, and equity for all species. The petitions in front of you mark the next step in rebuilding the faith and trust that have been lost due to the recent war and the troubled times that followed it.

"The first petition is a plea to pardon undeliverable war-time trade agreements combined with a request to form egalitarian policies towards future trade agreements; the second is a request to reinstate or develop new programs to assist Federation members with scientific and medical research; and the third is a request to establish policies that safeguard the independence of Federation planets.

"These are not simple issues, and they will take a considerable amount of time and effort to address. However, billions of individuals are counting on us to act with integrity, wisdom, and courage to do what is right in the face of adversity. Thank you."

Kathryn expected an enthusiastic round of applause when she finished, but tried not to show surprise as she walked gracefully back to her table amidst a polite murmur of appreciation for her words. She had an inkling that the boisterous response was prevalent in ninety-five percent of the venues across the Federation.

“Thank you, Admiral,” Dooha said as he stepped up to address the council again. “The judiciary sub-council has presented a motion that we appoint three task forces to address each of these petitions. Do I hear a second?”

Someone called out, “I second.”

“The floor is now open for discussion.”

Kathryn listened carefully as they debated the protocol for addressing the petitions. It seemed that, in recent history, no individual had brought forth a concern that didn’t fall neatly into an already-organized sub-council. She had expected certain council-members to start attacking the petitions immediately, but instead, Dooha was keeping the conversations focused on inane policies and procedures.

As she continued to listen, Kathryn was surprised that Dooha was letting the council go off on so many tangents. After thirty minutes of discussion on committee and task force structure, Kathryn realized that Dooha was purposely allowing the proceedings to focus on how to address the issues, rather than addressing them in general session where they all feared debate would get out of hand quickly.

Forty minutes into the discussion on policies, it appeared that the council had come to a decision. Kathryn thought that Dooha looked almost saddened by the general cooperation.

He said, “The motion stands as read. All in favor, say, ‘aye.’”

A display panel behind Dooha’s became lit with a large number of green lights.

“All opposed, say, ‘nay.’”

A handful of dissenters registered their votes which were indicated with red lights. Dooha said, “The motion carries. Take a moment to consider which of your fellow council members would be best suited to address each petition and then register your nominations. We will have a tally in ten minutes when we return. I call for a recess.”

Dooha came over to Kathryn’s table to shake her hand. “Very nice opening remarks, Admiral.”

She could see that some people were headed her way, so she quickly asked, “You were hoping that debate would take longer, weren’t you?”

His eyes widened with amusement as an Andorian representative walked up. Dooha said, “Admiral, I’d like to introduce Representative Lenos of the Andorian Empire.”

Kathryn spent the entire break shaking hands with council-members whom she hadn't yet met. Most told her that they appreciated her work, and the rest congratulated her on the speech and the petitions.

Towards the end of the break, an older man with Betazoid eyes came up to shake her hand. "Admiral, I am Reittan Grax of Betazed."

"A pleasure to meet you Mr. Grax."

He moved a little closer and spoke quietly as he said, "I'm a friend of the Troi family, whom I believe you've also had the pleasure of meeting?"

"Deanna Troi, yes."

"I would like you to know that there are rumors of an attempt to undermine your authority in the next portion of this session."

She gave him an understanding smile. "That doesn't surprise me, but thank you for the warning."

"If I see any opportunity to come to your aid, I will try to do so."

"Thank you, but don't worry if you can't. I can hold my own."

"I'm sure you can, Admiral. You should also know that most of the council supports your efforts, but there is a strong sense of fear and disquiet among those present this evening."

"Fear?"

"When some begin to speak, yes."

"Hopefully not when I speak?"

He paused before answering, "When you step up, I sense joy, anxiety, excitement, foreboding, hope, calm...just to name a few."

"There's more?"

Taking her hand, he kissed the back of it and said, "A pleasure to meet you Admiral. I hope to speak with you again."

"I'll look forward to it, Mr. Grax."

While his description of the council's mood was almost as amusing as it was ambiguous, Kathryn was glad for the warning that a personal attack was looming. It wouldn't be the first

time, nor the last. She took a deep breath, straightened her tunic, and asked for a cup of coffee. She knew she'd need it.

Once everyone was back from their break, Dooha called for a tally of the nominations. There would be seven members on each task force, so the top ten nominations selected for each were put forth for a vote. Each council member voted for seven, and the task forces were set.

Dooha spoke to the council. "Admiral Janeway will be available to each task force for the rest of the week to get further information and to clarify any concerns that the task force might have. We will now open the floor for any questions that are not specific to the proposals." He turned to her, "Admiral?"

She put on her best smile and confidently stepped to the podium. "Thank you, Mr. Secretary. First question?"

A man she didn't recognize stood and asked, "Admiral Janeway, as you talk with these task forces, how can we be sure that your judgment hasn't been compromised by the attack against you?"

"That's a valid question, councilman, because one can't help but be affected by torture. However, my suffering was at the hands of terrorists, not the people of the Federation. There have been innumerable terrorist attacks since the war, and I firmly believe that all of them are a symptom of the problems that we are facing. As a result, I feel stronger in my vow to help the Federation resolve some of the problems that are harboring an environment in which terrorists feel they have no other choice but to use violence and coercion as tools for communicating."

Another councilman asked, "Would you clarify, please? You are confident that you were attacked by terrorists, yet you want to help them?"

"Vastly different groups of terrorists, councilman. Those whom I want to help need a voice. Those whom attacked me want to quiet that voice."

There was a quiet in the room until the next person standing at the microphone remembered to speak. "Admiral, since this session is being watched by many throughout the Federation, what can those from worlds which are not in jeopardy expect from these petitions?"

"The Federation charter challenges us to promote social progress and better standards of living on all worlds. Do we forsake some worlds because of economic reasons? Does it mean something that the Federation charter asks us to uphold equal rights of members both large and small? The way I see it, these worlds are still part of our Federation, even though they have renounced their membership out of desperation. I consider their actions an avenue for lodging their protest."

Dooha stepped forward and asked, "Admiral, would you give an illustration of one of the many situations that relies on inter-planetary dependency? An illustration of how the current situation

has a negative affect not just on the estranged worlds, but also on the worlds that are represented here?”

She nodded and took a moment to remember an applicable situation. “An example comes to mind that is affected by all three petitions. The astrophysics department of the national science institute on Algolia was studying the collisions of matter and radiation in an electrically charged atmosphere. Funding for that research was suspended when that planet withdrew its membership from the Federation. They withdrew because this council mandated that in order to be good citizens, they had to provide a considerable amount of nillimite alloy at one fourth the market price for the rebuilding of San Francisco on Earth. That mandate, if they had fulfilled it, would have depleted that planet of the most marketable resource they have. Meanwhile, the Napean homeworld, still a member of the Federation, experienced a devastating radiation leak during the rebuilding that they were trying to do themselves because Federation resources for post-war rebuilding were being spent elsewhere. Without going into the scientific details, if the research had been completed on Algolia, the radiation poisoning on Napea might have been treatable. Thousands of lives could have been saved.”

Liyal stepped forward for the next question, making the hair on the back of Kathryn’s neck stand on end. She hadn’t seen him since the reception at her home where she got into an argument with him. Knowing that her voice likely sounded on edge, she asked, “Do you have a question about resource allocation, Councilman Liyal?”

“I will have many *facts* to share with you at the task-force meeting, Admiral, since I’m sure that I will be appointed to participate. My question for you now is in regards to your fascination with terrorists.”

“Fascination?” She forced herself to keep cool.

“A considerable portion of your staff are members of the Maquis, Admiral. That alone implies that you automatically have sympathy for rebels. But let us not forget that you are married to a known convict and terrorist.”

She decided to let her exasperation show. There was no harm in her showing annoyance with the question that likely, ninety-nine percent of the Federation would be just as annoyed with. Rather than trying to defend the Maquis, she chose to draw upon her words from the interview with Gayle Struthers a year before.

“My husband, Captain Chakotay, is professor of advanced tactics at Starfleet Academy. He is teaching the next generation of Starfleet officers new ways to defend our Federation from those who would attack it. One could name him a rebel, but he is not, nor was he ever, a terrorist. His rebellion was simply a choice to leave Starfleet when this Council allowed the Cardassians to murder over three thousand members of his tribe. I’m in love with a man who did what he could to get supplies to the surviving colonies after they were cut off by this Council. If that marks me as one who would show favoritism to those who would leave a corrupt Federation, then I will gladly own up to that description.”

A Moroppian was at the microphone next, and by the sneer on his face, Kathryn knew that she might be in trouble. “Next question?”

“Janeway, you just told the entire Federation that it was this Council’s fault that the colonies were destroyed, yet you’re here asking for our help.”

Her voice tense, she asked, “Was there a question in that statement?”

He looked annoyed. “Yes, Janeway. Do you believe that by attacking the Federation Council’s past decisions, you’re going to help save these worlds who have turned their backs on the Federation?”

“It is no secret that poor decisions have been made in the past, councilman. The petitions before you focus on the future with the hope that good decisions will be made from this point forward. They do not cast blame, nor do they name anyone in this room a terrorist.”

The Moroppian stayed for another question, and the Kazerite behind him did not balk. “Would you name anyone in this room a terrorist, Janeway?”

“I’m not here to do that.”

“If you were?”

“But I’m not.”

Dooha stepped up beside her and said, “Let’s move on. Councilman Lal, I believe you have the next question?”

The Kazerite anxiously looked at the hovering Moroppian and Bolian, and then glanced down at a PADD that he hadn’t been holding just moments earlier. “Admiral, I’ve...” He glanced back again and saw Liyal take a step forward. “I have a question here.”

“Is it your question, Councilman Lal?” Kathryn asked.

“Umm... yes, I believe it has become so.”

“Go ahead,” she encouraged.

“I find this a senseless question, but I will ask it. Do you believe the Federation is corrupt?”

“I believe whole-heartedly in the Federation. Just about every person that I’ve met during the last year has expressed concern for the Federation, and that tells me that each one of those individuals wants it to succeed and prosper as much as I do. Now, since the last speaker got two questions, I’d like to answer two for you as well. Do you have another?”



“I’m, uh, not sure you answered the first, but I did appreciate your response. My question for you is, ‘What can the council members who are not on a task force do to assist in the successful outcome of your petitions?’”

She tried really hard not to smile as it become completely obvious who was behind the corruption. They had just ‘outed’ themselves. “Thank you for that question, Mr. Lal. I believe the best thing that any council member can do is to follow the oath you took when you were elected. Do you remember that oath?”

“Absolutely,” Lal said. “I do solemnly affirm that I will to the...”

One by one, most of the members of the council stood and joined him in doing so. “...best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Articles of the Federation; that I will impartially represent the needs of all Federation members; that I take this obligation freely, without any reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter.”

After a round of applause, Doooha asked, “Admiral, do you have any final comments before we close this session?”

Kathryn felt like she was about to burst with joy as she said, “Thank you. I know that what we are facing is not easy, but the Federation is worth fighting for. Our future requires stepping out of our comfort zone and taking risks to ensure that we uphold the Federation Charter to protect the fundamental rights of all sentient beings. There have been times in my career when it has been extremely painful to follow the prime directive, when the people serving under me have suffered because I chose to uphold the principles of the Federation, but I have stood my ground. In fact, I’m risking my life just to be here today because there are those who continually try to silence me. I ask you to find the courage to address the needs of the billions of individuals that you represent. Whatever the outcome of these petitions, my hope is that they are debated openly, honestly, and without anymore hints of coercion. You sent me to open a dialogue with those who are disgruntled. I went, and now I’m back. It’s your turn to take a stand and do what is right.”

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After a long period of hand-shaking following the general session, Justin escorted Kathryn into a private conference room so that she could eat and have a few minutes of rest to maintain her stamina. Mark joined them as she was finishing her meal and reported that a security team from the Pioneer would be arriving soon to give them a report on their investigation into the security breach in her hotel room.

Now finished with her meal, she looked at both of her security officers and a grin tugged at her lips.

“What is it, Admiral?” Justin asked.

“Do you two know that my former fiancés were named Justin and Mark?”

“Yes, we did, Admiral,” Justin said with a chuckle. “If it makes you feel better, you can call me something else. Jason is pretty close.”

“Nah. Justin saved my life. You have, too.”

Mark asked, “Did your Mark ever save your life?”

She shook her head. “No, but he kept me grounded. He’s a philosopher.”

“It’s too bad Chakotay’s name is so rare. We could’ve brought another onto the team,” Justin said with amusement.

“I think one of him is about all I can handle.” She fiddled with her wedding ring, her thoughts drifting to the moment he’d given it to her.

“May I ask about your Justin, Admiral? I saw that he was a ranger, but there was nothing about how he died.”

Instantly sober, she replied, “A shuttle crash. My father and I were also involved.”

“Ah. Did your father survive?”

Kathryn shook her head and very quietly said, “No.”

“My apologies, Admiral. I didn’t mean to upset you.”

She waved off his concern. “It was twenty years ago, but I don’t think one ever gets over the loss of a parent or a loved one.”

“No, you don’t. My parents’ deaths still get to me, too. I had thought about looking for a wife from our colony, but I guess it’s good that I didn’t because I would’ve lost her, too.”

“No survivors?” she asked.

“No,” he whispered, and then took a deep breath and smiled. “But I’ve got Sue now.”

“Yes, you do,” she said proudly.

The door opened to admit Commander Moore. He extended his hand towards Kathryn and said, “It’s good to see you again, Admiral. How are you?”

“Improving every day, thank you. I appreciate you taking the time to help us on this investigation.”

He sat down and said, "I understand that you were expecting several members of my team, but knowing that your time is limited and that you prefer succinct reports, I thought I'd come alone."

Nodding, she asked, "What have you got for us?"

"The breach was caused by a member of the cleaning staff who thought she was helping out a member of your security team."

"You're kidding."

"No," he said with a shake of his head. "She gave us a description of the man she let into your room, but its general enough that we can't pinpoint it to any one individual. The likelihood that the infiltrator is someone recognizable is slim to none. He was wearing a Starfleet uniform, but that doesn't mean he's a Starfleet officer."

"No, it doesn't. The man who abducted me in Greece was posing as a Starfleet officer, too."

"Right," Justin said. "That one was paid handsomely for the job, but he won't tell us who his benefactor was. Evidently, he's more afraid of that individual than he is of a Federation prison."

"And Pratin was a dead end, too," Mark mused, and then grimaced. "Pardon the pun."

Kathryn was uncomfortable with Mark's attempt at humor, but chose not to reprimand him because he was unaware that the virus that had killed Pratin had almost killed her, too.

Moore continued with his report. "The surveillance device was a second lens attached to the camera on the computer interface. It was virtually undetectable if not for the very low frequency comm signal that it was transmitting."

"Did it record audio as well as visual?" she asked.

"No, just the visual. Unless the recipient could read lips, they only got images. Unfortunately, they were very telling images." He shifted in his chair before he said, "On a side note. Congratulations, Admiral."

"Thank you, Commander."

Justin asked, "So the comm line was secure?"

"Yes. The computer interface was not. The standard operating procedure is to scan continuously for listening devices, so the infiltrator had to use something that would fall under our radar."

Kathryn nodded. "Well, that makes me feel a little better."

"It does?" Mark asked.

“That my comm terminal at home couldn’t have been tampered with in the same way.”

Justin said, “Not likely, but we can increase the range of transmission frequencies that we scan for in your vicinity.”

Mark offered, “I suggest that we run a test on any comm equipment that you use outside of your home, in case there’s a piece of technology that doesn’t operate until the unit is used.”

“Good suggestion,” Moore said. “Meanwhile, I have some information that Captain Young asked me to pass along to you. Do you want to discuss it alone?”

“No, these two can stay. They might be able to help.”

He handed a PADD to her. “That’s a list of all the major supporters of Zife’s first and second campaigns. Although this information is not easily accessible, it is publically available by law, so our inside source did not commit any illegalities. We filtered the list by those who are Bolian, Moroppian, or Dolsian; those who contributed to both campaigns; and those who have done well economically in the last three years.”

Kathryn read the result and pointed out, “This is only five individuals.”

“That’s right. All five are officers of the Bank of Bolias, as noted by their brown uniforms. They are responsible for turning the bank around in the last four years, making it highly profitable with an impenetrable security system.”

Justin asked, “Impenetrable? The Bolian bank? I don’t think so.”

Mark pointed out, “It used to be notorious for being broken into, but I don’t think that’s the case anymore, Justin.”

“That’s right,” Moore said. “I don’t know what you’re looking for, Admiral, but it might be worth taking a closer look at the bank.”

Kathryn asked, “You really don’t know?”

He smirked. “Not specifically, no. But I can guess.”

She made eye contact with each man in the room, saying, “What I’m about to tell you is to be kept quiet, understood?”

“Yes, ma’am,” they all replied.

“We have a report that a Bolian bank officer was aboard the ship I was held captive on. I want to know how dependent that bank is on the current government.”

Moore asked, "Would you like me to look into that?"

"Could you?" She leaned forward. "How would you go about it?"

"Who would you go to if you wanted to find out all you can about profit and loss in this quadrant?"

Justin asked, "The Ferengi?"

"Exactly," Moore said with assurance. "Admiral, do you think you can find an assignment for the Pioneer that will take us out towards Deep Space Nine?"

"I think that can be arranged." She looked at Justin and asked, "Would you work with Judy to make a list of planets in the former demilitarized zone that could use a little special attention?"

He sat up a little straighter. "Absolutely. I'd like to go."

Kathryn smiled with understanding. "I know, but I'd feel better if you were here."

"Then I'm here. However, I think it would be a good idea to send one or two former Maquis with the Pioneer."

"All right. I'll leave that to you to set up."

Moore offered, "There's a former crewman from DS9 teaching at the Academy, Miles O'Brien, and I hear he knows a little about the Bolian Bank. I suggest we contact him as well."

"Can't hurt. Let's make sure we can trust him before we talk to him."

Justin said, "O'Brien was aboard the Enterprise for a long time. You might ask Picard if he can be trusted."

Kathryn nodded. "Good idea, although if he was enlisted, Picard might not know him well."

"It's worth a call," Mark said.

"Yes it is." She turned back to Moore. "Good work, Commander. Would you keep me apprised?"

"Yes, Admiral."

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Kathryn was told by Dooha that the task-forces wanted to have one meeting without her, and suggested that she get some rest to prepare for the next day. Once home, she placed a call to

Picard from her house. He answered immediately. “Good afternoon, my dear Admiral. How are you?”

“I’m doing quite well, actually. Busy with the council this week.”

“So I hear. Remarkable job today – I allowed our entire ship to watch the proceedings. Having rescued you, they were all quite interested in your success.”

She rubbed her neck and smiled. “I’m not sure I want to know how many people were watching that.”

“Billions, no doubt. I was quite impressed with how you stood your ground.”

“Thank you.” She took a deep breath. “I was a little worried there for a few minutes.”

“I thought you might be, but you didn’t look it. I fully expect that you’ll have the council cleaned up and new representatives elected within the week, correct?”

She shook her head in amusement. “Not quite, but I’m winning over a handful of them.”

“I’m sure,” he said with a laugh. “So, what can I do for you today?”

“I’d like to talk to a former Enterprise enlisted crewman, and was wondering how well you know him.”

He rubbed his chin with slight embarrassment. “I’m afraid that I don’t get to know the enlisted ranks as well as I should, but I can ask my officers.”

“Please do. His name is Miles O’Brien.”

“Ah,” Picard said with a grin. “Well, O’Brien is a special case. What would you like to know?”

“Can I trust him with information?”

“Absolutely. I trust him just as much as I would any member of my senior staff. One would never know that he didn’t graduate from the Academy. He’s even teaching there now – quite the coup for an enlisted.”

“I’m glad to hear that.” She narrowed her eyes in thought. “Now I need to convince him to talk to me.”

“If he seems skeptical, just tell him that I requested he do so. I don’t think you’ll run into any trouble.”

“Would it be better for me to talk to him, or one of my officers?”

“Depends on the circumstances and how private you want the conversation. I take it this would be a meeting you wouldn’t want certain parties to know about.”

“I don’t want anyone to know about it, both for his safety and my own.”

“Perhaps you should send someone not directly connected to you.” He raised his eyebrows.  
“Just in case you’re being followed.”

“Just in case?” She took a deep breath. “That’s a given, but I’ll see what I can do. Thank you.”

“While I’ve got you, may I speak about Commander Kim?”

“Of course. I trust everything is all right?”

“Yes and no.”

Alarmed, Kathryn sat up straighter. “What’s wrong?”

Picard pointed his finger at her. “You let the cat out of the bag, Admiral.”

“Oh.” She tried to cover her smile. “He was feeling anxious about leaving my side.”

“I wanted to surprise him.”

“Please, accept my apology.”

“No, I won’t,” he joked. “Call me whatever you like, but I love seeing the expression on young officers’ faces when I offer them a posting on the Enterprise.”

She leaned forward and rested her chin in her palm. “Did he accept?”

“He still doesn’t want to leave your side. I need you to wean him, my dear Admiral.”

“I’m trying. Can I help it that I’m so likeable and fun to work with? Besides, he’s really great to have around.”

Picard laughed. “I know what you mean. For years, I’ve thought I should get Riker to move on, but he’s just so darned dependable. Now that he’s running off to get married and find a ship of his own, I’m feeling like a parent facing an empty nest.”

“We’re proud of them, but as you know, it takes years to develop these kinds of relationships with our officers.”

“Yes, it most definitely does. At least I still get to keep Data, LaForge, and Beverly.”

More serious now, she said, "I'll do what I can, but I do need Harry working on my behalf until we can bring most of this to closure."

"I understand, and I promise you that I will give him that freedom. I would like him in place by September, and if we're still doing errands for you, he can take point."

"Thank you, Jean Luc. I appreciate that."

"Now, I just need you to convince him to flee the nest."

"I'll work on it. He likes being needed."

"Good to know. I'll see if I can come up with a few needs of my own."

"Has he briefed you on Sirius IX?"

"Thoroughly. He's a little anxious about visiting that planet."

"That's to be expected, but he'll do fine. I doubt there's anything I can add to his report."

"No, but you can make headway with the council before we get there. That would certainly help us convince Sirius to rejoin the Federation."

She cocked her head in amusement. "I've only been here two days, Jean-Luc. Give me three, at least." Her comm badge chirped, so she said, "I should answer. Give Beverly my best, would you?"

"I'd be delighted. Good luck, my dear Admiral."

Once the signal was closed, she tapped her commbadge. "Janeway here."

Khurma asked, "Kathryn, how are you feeling?"

She sat back in her chair and had to smile. "A little wiped out, but holding up. How are you feeling, sir?"

"Fine, Kathryn, just fine. Ran into Dooha and he told me he sent you home to rest. I was worried."

"I might've appeared a bit lackluster." She picked up the PADD with their itinerary on it. "He said I wouldn't be needed until morning."

"It is his agenda, so I'm sure that's fine. I just wanted to check on you."

"And maybe rake me over the coals for almost losing it this morning?"



He exhaled shakily. “This will have some repercussions. I’m not sure what they’ll be, yet.”

“I would offer to apologize, but it would do no good and mean nothing.”

“Our fault for putting you in that situation. President Zife was not happy.”

“I’d be surprised if he was.” She ran her fingers through her hair, loosening her bun. “But I feel that I’ve said what needed to be said, so what happens now is out of my control.”

“It was my hope that you would stay in control, but what’s done is done. Kathryn...”

When he didn’t continue, she asked, “What is it, Admiral?”

“The outcome of this may not be good, but on a personal note, I want you to know that I’m proud of what you’ve managed to accomplish.”

“Thank you, but what kind of outcome are you implying?”

“I don’t know what’s coming. For now, get some rest. I’ll keep you apprised if I learn anything that I can share with you.”

Hesitantly, she said, “I’d appreciate that, sir.”

“Khurma out.”

She leaned forward and rested her face in her hands, her heart beating heavily as a result of the stress and blood-pressure spike that she was feeling.

Someone knocked on her door and she mumbled, “Come in.”

Sue peeked in to say, “Just checking on you.”

As a powerful dizziness washed over her, she said, “I don’t feel well.”

She came further into the room and asked, “Need Justin or should I call Zimmerman?”

“Joe.”

Sue tapped her commbadge. “Lieutenant Brooks to Dr. Zimmerman, Starfleet Medical.”

“Go ahead, Brooks. How is the Admiral?”

“She isn’t feeling well, but Justin hasn’t scanned her, yet. She wanted me to call you.”

“I’d be surprised if she weren’t feeling a little drained. I’ll be right there.”

Once the line was closed, Sue put her hand on Kathryn's back and said, "Let's get you out of your uniform."

She felt fuzzy, as if the air around her had grown heavy with cotton. It was a very strange sensation and she was at least thankful that she was at home, that Sue was with her, and that Joe was on his way.

Joe arrived and asked, "Admiral? Can you describe your symptoms for me?"

When she said nothing, Sue answered, "She's growing more lethargic with each second. I can't even get her coat off."

"Hold her up for me," Joe instructed as he scanned her.

Justin walked in. "Is she ill?"

"Seems like she's about to faint," Sue said.

"Ah," Joe said while looking at his data. He set his equipment down and carefully lifted Kathryn into his arms. "Lieutenant, would you turn down her bed?"

"Of course!" Sue and Justin worked together to peel back the covers and move the large pillows.

"Leave a few of those. I'd like her elevated slightly."

They got her settled, her boots and coat off, and drew the blankets up around her.

Joe requested some items from his nurse at Starfleet Medical and then sat on the side of Kathryn's bed to treat her. "She'll be fine. Just needs some electrolytes and balancing of her metabolism."

"Oh, good," Sue said with a relieved sigh.

"Did something happen to cause her stress?"

Justin answered, "Other than taking on the entire Federation Council?"

"Yes, because this would be a very delayed reaction if that was it."

"She had come in here to place a call."

"To whom?" Joe asked.

"I'm not at liberty to say. I'm sorry, Doctor."

“No matter, I’ll get her sorted out here in a moment.” He hummed as he worked. “She was quite something this morning.”

“That she was.” Sue shook her head. “I can’t believe the Secretary-General let it go on as long as it did.”

Kathryn murmured something unintelligible.

“Admiral?” Sue asked as she unzipped the back of the turtleneck Kathryn was wearing.

Several moments later, Kathryn mumbled, “Seepy.”

“That’s good,” Joe replied. “Because I want you to sleep for awhile.”

Kathryn opened her eyes to see the worried faces of Justin and Sue. “Did I faint?”

Joe answered on their behalf. “Not quite, but you were close. I don’t believe you ever completely lost consciousness.”

“The Doctor asked us if something stressful had just happened. We didn’t know.”

Frowning, Kathryn asked, “If I say yes do I have to tell you what it was?”

“Not if you don’t want to. I just need to know if this was a reaction to a specific stimulus.”

She hummed tiredly. “Yes, there was a stressful conversation, but I’ve handled far worse.”

“True, but not while this exhausted, pregnant, and low on blood-sugar.”

“Mmmm. Justin, call Chakotay for me, would you? I’ll call’m later.”

“Sure, Admiral. Do you want him to know about this?”

“S’okay. He knows the other stuff, too.”

“All right. Do you want me to arrange that meeting we talked about?”

Joe said, “I don’t want her doing anything else stressful today.”

“Not me,” Kathryn said with a tired sigh. “Want Tom. Ask him by later?”

“Good idea. I’ll give him a call.”

“All right, Admiral,” Joe said. “I want you to sleep now, and I’m leaving Justin with instructions to scan you every hour. I’ll be back to check on you this evening.”

“Thanks, Joe.”

He straightened out her blanket and squeezed her shoulder. “You’re welcome. Good job today, Admiral. I was very proud to call you my friend.”

“Mmmm,” she hummed with a sleepy smile.

Sue whispered, “I’ll be nearby if you need me, Admiral.”

“Mmmhmm. Seep now.”

“Sleep well,” she said as she closed the window shades to darken the room. After the men left, Sue shut the door, slipped off her boots, and braved lying down on the bed next to Kathryn. She figured it was such a huge bed that Kathryn wouldn’t likely notice she was there, and she didn’t feel right leaving her alone after such an incredible day.

As Sue watched Kathryn sleep, she found herself surprised that she was continually amazed by this woman. She seemed so normal, yet so remarkable. So fragile, yet so strong. She was kind-hearted, but would stop at nothing to protect those who couldn’t protect themselves. It was an honor to get to work with her, and Sue knew she was only one of a select group of people that ever got to see the fragile side of Kathryn Janeway.

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Kathryn felt the pull of consciousness draw her from peaceful sleep. Without opening her eyes, she could tell that she was in her bed, but something wasn’t quite right. She popped open her eyes, and then a huge smile spread across her face as she saw Sue, sound asleep in Chakotay’s place on the bed.

The younger woman looked so relaxed and peaceful that Kathryn didn’t want to disturb her, so she moved as quietly as she could to sit up.

“Admiral!”

Kathryn cringed and turned back around to see Sue sitting up. “I didn’t want to wake you.”

“Are you feeling all right, now? I was worried.”

Softly, Kathryn asked, “Is that why you were sleeping in my bed?”

“Well,” Sue said with hesitation. “Technically, I wasn’t *in* your bed. I was *on* it.”

“Oh, I see,” she said with a laugh. “But to answer your question, yes, I think I feel all right. Do you know how long we’ve been asleep?”

Sue looked at the clock. “A little over four hours. It’s dinner-time in Europe, so mid-morning here. Eighteen hundred for our schedule.”

“Which makes it what for Chakotay?” Kathryn scratched her head. “About twenty-one hundred?”

“About that, yes. A little later.”

She stood up slowly and stretched. “I should call him.”

“All right, I’ll leave you alone so you can do that.”

“Thank you, Sue.” She caught the younger woman’s arm as she walked past on her way out. Kathryn glanced at the bed as she said, “And thank you for staying with me.”

“My pleasure, Admiral.”

Kathryn changed into more comfortable clothes before she sat down to initiate the comm-link.

Sue popped her head in and set down a plate with peanut butter toast on it. “Orders from the Doctor.”

“Thank you.” She waved as Sue closed the door to give her some privacy.

Chakotay answered almost immediately. “Hello love, are you feeling better?”

“A lot. Did Justin tell you that I fainted?”

“No,” he said with concern. “Just that you were exhausted. Are you okay?”

“Sue was holding onto me, I think. I didn’t fall.”

“Well, that’s good. Do you know why?”

“Spike in blood-pressure probably, but Joe fixed me up.”

“I can imagine that if anything was going to affect your blood pressure, it would’ve been that general session.”

“Oddly enough, I was fine until my C.O. contacted me.”

“Was he not happy?”

“Zife wasn’t happy, and my guess is that he let Khurma know it.”

“But we don’t want Zife happy.”

“Khurma wanted me to stay in control of the situation.” Kathryn took a drink of water.

“And he thinks you’ve lost that?”

“I did, a little. But he did apologize for putting me in the position of having to defend myself in front of such a large audience.”

Chakotay tugged on his ear. “I think you were defending me. Thank you for that, by the way. I was very moved by what you said.”

“I couldn’t let that go without a rebuttal.” She took a bite of the toast.

“I know, and I think you would’ve lost ground with the public if you’d taken it lying down.”

“So, in the bigger picture, I pissed off the President of the Federation, but fed the wave of animosity towards him for billions of people. I think that should count under ‘the needs of the many,’ don’t you?”

“It was more than that, and you know it,” he said as he tapped his finger on the desktop. “You exposed the corruption.”

“They did it themselves,” she said flatly as she stuffed the last bite in her mouth.

“They played right into your hand – it was incredible. I can’t wait to see the evening Fednews report.”

She sighed. “This could’ve cost me my job, you know.”

“If it does, then you are definitely going out with a bang.”

“My commanding officer doesn’t agree.”

“But Kathryn, if you were relieved of duty right now, it would be blatantly obvious that the President wanted you silenced because you said the council is corrupt.”

“It is corrupt.”

“I know. Trust me, what happened today was a great thing, no matter what the fallout is.”

“I don’t know, honey.” She ran her hands over her face. “Maybe I just can’t see the forest for the trees.”

“Maybe it’s the briar patches you can’t see. Let them throw you into one.”

“Really?” she asked honestly.

“Really. Kathryn, it will be okay. I promise.”

“Even if I get sacked?”

“Especially if you get sacked.”

A smile tugged at her mouth. “Thanks for cheering me up.”

“Any time.”

“Did Justin fill you in on the security report?”

“Images only?”

“Yeah.” She rubbed her eyes. “Very telling images.”

“The method of tampering is pretty tame, and Justin is sure they can detect it in the future. He told me about the plans for increasing security a notch.”

“I was actually surprised that no one mentioned the baby this morning.”

“That would’ve been enough proof to put them under arrest.” He leaned forward. “Kathryn, if our secret gets out, it’s okay. Three months have passed, your petitions are in place, and the media has something else to chew on.”

She smiled appreciatively. “Did Justin go over anything else?”

“The list of five?”

“That’s it.”

“Tom is coming over tonight?”

“If that’s what Justin said. I think Tom is great at getting people to talk.”

“I agree. Justin and I also talked about the barkeep on DS9, and I helped Justin make some plans for the Pioneer’s trip out there.”

“Thanks for that. I don’t have the energy to think about it.”

“You’re welcome. I’m glad to have helped.” He hesitated before saying, “I’d also like to call Bernie. It’s time for Broken Circle to make a move.”

“To do what? ”

“I think a citizen group should latch on to what you said today, taking into account who taunted you. They could do their own bit of research, and expose a good deal of the dirt.”

“Just so I’m not the one exposing any.”

“No, I think you’re done talking for now. Provide answers for the task-forces, but don’t try to affect their decisions. Also, I think you should avoid any private conversations with council members that aren’t on record.”

She nodded. “Good idea. I’m glad you’re thinking through this because I’m a little foggy.”

“Have you eaten anything since lunch besides that toast?”

“No.”

Lovingly, he suggested, “Go eat. I’ll write up some notes and send them to you.”

“Encoded?”

“Of course. I love you.”

“Love you, too, honey.” She blew him a kiss and signed off.

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As Kathryn was eating her dessert, the doorbell rang. She took the bowl to the sink and was just about to go into the great room when Tom and B’Elanna burst into the kitchen.

“You are so awesome!” Tom shouted as he pulled Kathryn into a bear hug.

B’Elanna looked ready to attack as she said, “You have no idea how much I wanted to go to Paris and knock some heads together.”

Kathryn held Tom almost as tightly as he was holding her, taking solace in the physical contact of a friend. “I can always count on you two to tell me how great I am.”

“Always?” B’Elanna laughed. “I can clearly remember...”

“Well, except for that one time,” Kathryn replied quickly as she pulled out of one hug and went into another with B’Elanna. “This feels good.”

“Who knew the great Admiral Janeway needs hugs?” Tom asked.

“You do,” she said as she bent down to open her arms to Miral who was toddling into the kitchen. “Hi there, sweetheart.”



“Up!” the little girl demanded as she held her arms out towards Kathryn.

Happily obliging, she picked up the little girl and rubbed foreheads with her. “I think you’ve grown in the last three days.”

“Probably,” B’Elanna said. “She’s eaten enough.”

“Let’s go sit down,” Tom said as he ushered the ladies into the great room. “You’ve had a stressful day, Kathryn.”

“You could say that again.”

Once they were seated and Kathryn was happily holding Miral on her lap, Tom said, “Not that we don’t love seeing you, but we were surprised when Justin asked us to come over tonight. Did you just miss us or do you need something?”

“Both, actually.” She looked directly at Tom. “I need your help.”

“Absolutely,” he said immediately, leaning forward with eagerness. “What would you like me to do?”

“I need you to go see someone at the academy. Get him talking over drinks.”

“A student?”

“Faculty. Miles O’Brien.”

“Never heard of him.”

“Hopefully, he’ll have heard of you.”

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Kathryn spent the better part of Wednesday in meetings about minor issues that were specific to just one or two worlds, as opposed to all twenty-six that she’d visited. The task forces were not meeting in order to give the individual council members time to read the proposals and do some of their own research.

As she walked out of her afternoon meeting with Sue and Justin by her side, Mark came up to them. “Admiral, I need to speak to you.”

“About?” She raised her chin and focused on him.

“We received another PADD with disturbing contents.”

Kathryn pursed her lips and motioned for them to go into a private room. They waited while Justin set up a dampening field so their conversation wouldn't be overheard. "What does it say?" she asked as she held out her hand for it.

"It's just pictures."

"Of me? How?"

He shook his head. "Not of you... of your niece."

Kathryn's mouth dropped open in shock. "Katie?"

Mark handed her the PADD. "It's images of her at school. We've already notified the headmaster, and the building is on lockdown."

She saw that there were a few images of Katie playing on the playground, and one of Phoebe dropping her off. "Does my sister know?"

"I thought you might like to be the one to tell her."

Kathryn blinked slowly and nodded her agreement. "Sue, what's next on my schedule?"

"In thirty minutes, you have a private meeting with Dooha."

"Can I fit him in tomorrow?"

"He wants to speak with you before the evening session that begins at nineteen-hundred."

"All right." Kathryn instructed, "Contact Dooha and ask if he'd reschedule for eighteen hundred with the understanding that I may be delayed. Mark, take the team to Phoebe's home and secure it for my arrival. Justin, after I've transported there, take this PADD to Moore and see what his team can come up with. I know they leave tomorrow, but any help he could give us would be appreciated."

As Mark and Sue left, Justin said, "Ma'am, it would be safer to have Mrs. Richards meet you at your home."

"For this, I need to go to her."

"Understood, Admiral."

"Drop the dampening field, please." Once the device was deactivated, Kathryn tapped her commbadge. "Janeway to Phoebe Richards, Indiana 647."

Phoebe answered, "Katie? Aren't you in Paris?"

“Yes, but I need to speak with you about a matter of some urgency. Are you at your home?”

“I’m headed to the market, but I can go back. What’s going on?”

“I’ll explain at your house. Be prepared to see Starfleet security there.”

“I’m always prepared to see them when you’re around, Katie.”

“Such is my life. How long will it take you to get home?”

“Just a couple minutes. Go ahead and transport there if you’d like.”

“I will as soon as my security team gives me the all clear.”

“All right, I’ll hurry back. I know your time is important.”

“Not more important than you. See you soon. Janeway out.”

Once the channel was closed, Justin said, “It’ll be a few minutes. How are you feeling?”

Kathryn rubbed her neck and sighed. “A little weak, but I’m not sure it has anything to do with my health.”

He pulled out the tri-corder and scanned her. “You’re doing a lot better overall than you were last week.”

Distractedly, she replied, “The Doctor’s visits have helped.”

“Here, eat this while we wait,” he said as he offered her a granola bar. “I’ll contact the Pioneer to let them know I’ll be transporting up.”

Kathryn took the snack and went over to the window to look down at the people passing by on the sidewalks. A sense of melancholy washed over her as she yearned for the freedom to walk down an open street again, and the despondence was only amplified by the knowledge that her actions had jeopardized her family’s freedom as well. She found it difficult to swallow the granola past the lump in her throat, but she forced it down knowing that she needed it to keep her strength up for the upcoming conversation.

Quietly, Justin said, “Admiral?”

Kathryn took a deep breath and straightened her back before turning to him. “Ready?”

“Yes, but…” He hesitated, and then seemed to change his mind about speaking.

“What is it, Justin?”

“I wanted to say something to reassure you, but I can’t think of what would help.”

Kathryn forced a smile. “We’ll get through this, and I appreciate everything you’re doing. You have the hardest job, looking after me.”

“No, ma’am. I’m quite sure that you have the hardest job, and it was my hope that I could take your mind off of your personal safety concerns.”

“You do, but the point of these threats is to undermine your efforts. We’ll do our best to make sure these people aren’t successful.”

He gave a reassuring nod. “After this trip to your sister’s home, it would help if you gave me more advance notice of your movements.”

Kathryn patted his shoulder as she stepped past him. “Of course, Lieutenant.”

They walked to the secure transporter room in the Federation Council building and beamed directly to Phoebe’s house. As soon as she arrived, Kathryn found herself in her sister’s arms.

“Katie, are you okay?”

Kathryn savored the hug for a moment before replying, “Yes and no.”

Pulling back so she could look at her sister, Phoebe said, “Talk to me. Is something wrong between you and Chakotay?”

“No... heavens no.” Kathryn took a deep breath and forged ahead. “Over the past few days, I’ve received three threats, more or less.”

“Threats?” Phoebe motioned to her couch and the two sat down. “To do what?”

“To stop what I’m doing or my family will suffer the consequences.”

Phoebe’s mouth dropped open for only a moment before her eyes flashed with anger. “How dare they threaten you!”

“That doesn’t bother me because I know whoever is behind these threats just wants to distract me. However, the PADD I received twenty minutes ago indicates that your family is at risk.”

“You’re my family.”

“The PADD has pictures of Katie at school, and of you dropping her off.”

“Katie!” Phoebe suddenly stood up and then couldn’t figure out what to do. “I need to get to her! I need to call Mike!”

Kathryn jumped up with her, and put her hands on her sister's arms. Speaking with command authority, Kathryn said, "Phoebe, listen to me."

"But..."

"Phoebe!" She waited until Phoebe made eye contact again. "We've already got a team at the school, and it's on lockdown. No one is getting in or out."

"But my daughter!"

"I know." Kathryn squeezed Phoebe's arms gently until she had her attention again. "The best thing is for us to remain calm. All right?"

"Oh, Katie," Phoebe hugged her sister again. "I don't know what to do."

"Lieutenant Yosa has a plan in place." She turned to Mark and invited him to speak.

"Yes, ma'am. Mrs. Richards, we have an officer waiting in the lobby of your husband's office and a team of four with your daughter. We'll set up a security perimeter here just as we have at the Admiral's home. We'll transport your family directly wherever you need to go, and have a security detail with you, your daughter, and your husband at all times."

"For how long?"

Kathryn said, "I don't know, but I can't let these people bully me into backing off."

"No, you can't! No one intimidates my sister!"

"We'll work through a plan and see what we can do to give you as much freedom as possible."

"I don't care about my freedom, but you listen to me, Katie."

"Go on," Kathryn said gently.

"You bring them down. You hear me? No one threatens my family."

A smile tugged at Kathryn's lips and she hugged her sister again. "Thank you, Phoebe."

After a long hug, Phoebe asked, "What other threats have you received? Are you okay?"

"I'm safe. So safe that I think the assailants are trying to get to me through you."

"Just... whatever you do, be careful."

"I certainly am trying to be." Kathryn rubbed her sister's arms. "Now, would you like security to bring Katie home or do you want to leave her at school until eleven thirty?"

“You’re sure she’s okay?”

Kathryn turned to Mark, and Mark pressed his commbadge. “Yosa to Larkin.”

“Larkin here.”

“Mrs. Richards would like confirmation of her daughter’s safety. She is listening to this conversation.”

Larkin said, “Mrs. Richards, your daughter is not aware of any danger. Currently, the class is seated in a circle and the teacher is reading a book.”

Phoebe breathed a sigh of relief. “Thank you. If it’s okay, I’d still like to be the one to pick her up, and at the regular time.”

Larkin replied, “I’ll see about arranging that, but we might need to transport you directly inside the building.”

“Whatever it takes.”

“I’ll be in touch, Mrs. Richards. Larkin out.”

Kathryn said, “I need to get back to Paris, but only if you’re sure that you’re okay.”

“Go on,” Phoebe encouraged. “I trust that your security will take care of us, and I want you to go see what you can do about getting that asshole out of office.”

“I doubt that’ll happen tonight, but I’ll see if I can make some headway.” Kathryn gave her sister one last hug. “I’ll contact you tonight after my council session is over. Okay?”

“We’ll be fine. I’m going to go call Mike and let him know what’s going on.”

“All right, but let Lieutenant Yosa secure it first. He’s going to stay here with you. Mark is my personal body guard so I know he’ll take good care of you.”

“Won’t that leave you unprotected?”

Kathryn smiled with assurance. “I’ll be fine in the council building, and then I’m going straight home.”

“I love you, Katie.”

“I love you, too.” Kathryn blew her a kiss before calling for a beam out.

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She went back to her house for a quick dinner and then transported to Paris for her meeting with Dooha. With Justin on the Pioneer, and Mark with Phoebe, she only had Sue by her side. However, she always had about three more security personnel that she tried not to notice.

After she walked into the private conference room, Dooha looked past her and asked, "Where is your security, Admiral?"

"There are a few outside the room. Why? Is your building not secure?" Khurma walked in at that point and Kathryn smiled at him in welcome.

Dooha continued, "I think there might be more of a threat to you within these walls than out there on the street."

"But the terrorists in here don't do the dirty work themselves. I bet I could drop any one of them on their rear ends, even in my weakened condition."

"Kathryn," Khurma admonished.

"Oh, don't worry so much Kamir. We're among friends here." He handed each of them a glass of white wine. "A toast is in order."

"Is it?" Kathryn asked.

"It is. We've had these task forces in place for two entire working days, and everyone is still talking to each other. I think that's worth celebrating. Kamir, would you do the honors?"

Khurma glanced at Kathryn before saying, "A toast then, to the charisma of Kathryn Janeway. May the council never know what hit them."

"Here, here!" Dooha said.

Kathryn took only a sip even though it tasted wonderful. "Now that we've celebrated, what would you like to talk about?"

"Our agenda." He gestured for everyone to take a seat around the table. "For the reception tonight, we've opened it up to the press."

"The press?" Kathryn asked anxiously.

Khurma asked, "Is there a problem?"

"I suppose not," she said tiredly. "I'm just not sure I have the energy to deal with both the council and a bunch of reporters."

“Not to worry,” Dooha said. “The news team assigned to the Council has very specific guidelines to follow for formal events. They will take pictures and report on who is seen with whom. It’ll be more of a social report than anything.”

“Should I be in a gown?”

“No, no, your uniform is fine. It makes you more recognizable.” Dooha looked at her carefully. “Although, you might want to freshen up. You look tired.”

“I am tired.”

Khurma asked with sincerity, “Kathryn, are you feeling up to this?”

“For a little while.”

Dooha said, “You’re still not quite recovered, are you?”

“Not entirely, but I can hold it together.”

Khurma put his hand on her back. “If, at any time, you need to step out, just go. We’ll make your excuses.”

“Good advice,” Dooha said. “The main point of the evening is to provide some of the council members a chance to be seen talking to you. It’s good for their publicity.”

“Sounds like something Gardi said to me Monday.”

“Gardi?” Dooha asked.

“He suggested that a little rubbing elbows with me might endear some of the council members to the public.”

“Quite true.” He nodded. “Just don’t overdo it. Tomorrow, you meet with all three task forces. Want to go over the agendas now?”

“Might as well,” she said tiredly. “But I’ll need coffee, and lots of it.”

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