

The Future is Ours – Part 34

“Trouble At Home”

By Dawn

Summary: Tensions run high

Rated PG-13

Kathryn closed the French doors behind her and joined Owen outside on the deck.

“Sorry for the delay.”

“Oh, please, don’t apologize, but I feel like we’re intruding on a family affair this evening.”

“No need to be concerned. I invited you before all this happened.” Kathryn waved towards the house. As she sat down at the patio table, she asked, “Are you aware of why they’re here?”

“You mentioned threats last week. What’s going on?”

“Just some pictures of me and the family with notes asking me to back off. I didn’t think they had any teeth until last night.”

“What, exactly, happened last night?”

“When Chakotay beamed down from the Excelsior, he was taken immediately by another beam. It’s being researched, but Chakotay identified his captors as Morropian.”

“They’re getting sloppy.”

“Yes, they are.”

Owen asked, “So you’re calling it quits? This isn’t like you.”

“I was worried that it might be perceived that way. Owen,” she said as she looked him in the eye, “there’s something else you should know. I’m pregnant.”

He did a double take. “Katie? Pregnant?”

“Yes, so I really need to tread carefully.”

“Are you and the baby okay?” He covered her hand. “I’m worried...”

“Don’t even start.” Kathryn squeezed his hand and then leaned back in her chair. “I’ve had enough of that from my sister today.”

“Ah, is that what the tension in there was about?” He nodded towards the house.

“You noticed?”

“Anyone would. You could cut the air in there with a knife.” He winced. “Sorry, bad metaphor considering last night.”

“Yes, well.” Kathryn waved it off. “Khurma knows about it, and is being a little over-protective.”

“For once, I completely agree with him.”

“I know you don’t see eye to eye with him, but he’s a good man.”

Owen dipped his chin. “A good man doesn’t make him a good fleet admiral. He’s letting Zife walk all over him.”

“No, he’s not. He’s gathering evidence, just like your group is trying to do.” Kathryn narrowed her eyes in thought. “You and I haven’t had a chance to talk freely since last summer. I’ve gotten to know Khurma a lot better in that time.”

“Last summer you said he was wasting your time.”

“Yes,” she agreed. “But I was wrong.”

“You? Wrong?” He winked. “I don’t believe it.”

“It happens. Just ask Chakotay, he’ll tell you.”

Owen laughed. “So, what was Khurma up to, if not kowtowing to the President?”

“Letting Zife think he had Starfleet under his thumb, and by doing so, letting him expose his special business partners in the process.”

“I don’t know, Katie. I think you trust him too much. What if he turns on you?”

Kathryn shook her head. “Zife is the one he’s going to turn on.”

“But if he can earn the trust of both you and Zife, how do you really know where his true allegiances lie?”

“Because our president is an idiot. Surely you’re not going to say the same thing about me?”

“Of course not, my dear. Just be careful what information you give him.”

“No, Owen. We have to start trusting each other, and my instincts tell me that he’s being straightforward with me.”

Owen rubbed his chin and sighed. “And now, Khurma believes that you’re stepping on toes because of these task forces you’ve stirred into action.”

“Right. Zife wants me out of the picture and his henchmen want the opposite so they can coerce me. Zife believes he can regain control over the council and over his supporters, but this is a can of worms that’s not going to be closed. There are council members who are ready to take control, and we’re going to stand back and let them. That’s the way it should be.”

“You don’t want the glory?” he joked.

“No, I want certain people taken to trial, and I want to walk safely down the street again. If the council can make decisions without any hint of coercion, I will have done what I set out to do.”

They continued to talk as the sun set, Kathryn bringing him up to speed, leaving out some details that he didn’t need to know.

Chakotay came outside and brought a tray of hot tea, cheese and crackers. “I thought you two might need a little something.”

“Thank you, this looks great,” Owen said.

“But we’ve just finished dinner,” Kathryn accepted a cup of tea.

“That was over two hours ago,” Chakotay pointed out. “Everyone’s gone up to bed now.”

Owen handed her a plate. “Eat up, Katie.”

She nodded towards Owen, telling Chakotay, “He knows now, too.”

“And don’t worry, the secret is safe with me,” Owen said.

Chakotay raised an eyebrow. “You’re really letting the cat out of the bag today.”

“She wouldn’t let me get in two words edgewise about it.” Owen looked sternly at Chakotay. “I trust that you’re coddling her as best you can?”

“Kathryn Janeway and ‘coddle’ don’t even belong in the same sentence.”

“Thank you,” she told Chakotay. “Is Marilyn getting bored in there?”

“No, we’re fine. We admiral spouses have to stick together.”

Kathryn said, “Well, you won’t need to continue suffering. We’re just hypothesizing now.”

With concern, Owen asked Chakotay, “How are you feeling?”

“I’m fine,” he said. “Not that it was pleasant, but I’ve been through worse. Honestly, of all the people they could’ve attacked, I’m glad it was me.”

Kathryn grimaced. “Why?”

“Because I’ll bounce back. If they had done that to a civilian, it could’ve caused life-long psychological trauma.”

Owen said, “Sounds like we’ve got them backed into a corner. I wasn’t happy about the leave announcement, but now that we’ve talked, I agree that it’s best thing to do right now.”

Chakotay nodded. “Yes, but I’m a little worried that with Kathryn out of the picture, publicly, the Council members are going to get skittish.”

Kathryn said, “That’s a good point. I’ll have to mention that to Khurma and see if we can let them know that I’m still at it.”

“Otherwise, we’ll get the same affect as if you’d met the terrorist demands.”

“Can’t have that,” she rubbed at the grit in her eyes.

Chakotay said, “Speaking of coddling. It’s almost ten.”

“That’s my cue.” Owen stood and picked up their snack tray to carry it back inside.

From the sofa, Marilyn said, “I’m watching the Fednews. You’re all over it.”

“I am?” Kathryn asked.

“There’s a lot of speculation as to why you’re backing off.”

“That’s to be expected,” Chakotay said.

Marilyn said, "The commentators are discussing it as if it were a major political upheaval. The biggest concern seems to be that you didn't make a public statement like you usually do."

"That was for my safety."

"Exactly," Marilyn said. "That's where they're headed. Seems they're picking up on the fact that you might be in danger again or that your health is failing. The good news is that no one has mentioned anything about you abandoning your efforts. They're all worried."

Kathryn mulled that over for a moment. "You're right. That's not bad at all." She had an idea. "Marilyn, if I could impose upon you?"

"Anything, dear."

"Do you watch the news a lot?"

"Far too much," Owen said.

Kathryn smiled. "Would you let me know if the overall sentiment of the media changes? I think I'd go stir-crazy if we were to listen to it much, but I should keep tabs on it, just the same."

"I'd love to do that for you. I'll even type up a summary of the day and send it to you, if you'd like."

Waving that away, Kathryn said, "No, you don't need to go to that much trouble. I just want to know if they stop being supportive."

"All right." Marilyn turned off the viewing screen. "We should be getting home."

Kathryn and Chakotay walked their guests to the door and said goodnight. When they were gone, Chakotay ushered her up the stairs. "Time for bed."

She raised an eyebrow. "Taking charge?"

"You like it when I do," he smirked.

Her mouth dropped open and then she whispered, "Shhhh... My family could be listening."

Kathryn spent most of the next day in the study. Beverly and Deanna both contacted her separately to make sure she was okay, and after talking to her dear new friends, she felt confident that she was doing the right thing.

She read through the reports and intelligence files that Khurma had sent her, perused the news articles for follow-ups to her trip to Paris, and looked carefully at the data her staff had sent to her. There wasn't much that she didn't already know, but it helped her feel useful to make a list of things to follow up on. Chakotay was busy playing host to her family so she could keep reading. She supposed that she should feel guilty, but was so irritated with her sister that she relished giving her the silent treatment.

She took PADDs with her to both breakfast and lunch and didn't stop reading to take part in the conversation. Katie vied for her attention a few times, but Mike distracted the child so Kathryn could read. She was feeling guilty about that and made a mental note to put together a puzzle with Katie that evening.

Kathryn didn't bring work to dinner and sat next to Katie to make sure she felt welcome. The last thing Kathryn wanted was to be inhospitable. She was very glad that her family was there, she just wasn't happy with her sister's reaction to the pregnancy.

As they were clearing the table, Kathryn and Phoebe both made an effort not to run into each other and purposefully avoided speaking.

Gretchen stood in the center of the kitchen and threw a towel down forcefully on the counter. With steel in her voice, she put her hands on her hips and demanded, "I've had enough. Out with it, you two!"

Phoebe said, "Ask her. She's the one with the problem."

Kathryn's eyes narrowed. "Excuse me?"

"I have nothing more to say to her." Phoebe walked out of the room.

Gretchen yelled, "Get back here right now, Phoebe Marie!"

Both Chakotay and Mike acted like they wanted to blend into the woodwork, and Katie stood in the middle of the dining room wide-eyed and entranced.

Phoebe stopped at the doorway to the kitchen and stated, "This is between me and her."

"It may have been," Gretchen said, "But you two are making it miserable for the rest of us. I have no intention of being locked up in this house for God knows how long with the two of you fighting. This situation is bad enough without you two making it worse."

Kathryn crossed her arms and said, "I'll accept an apology."

Phoebe's mouth dropped open wide. "ACCEPT? How about OFFER?"

"You're the one who said I couldn't handle this. You're the one who called him a mistake!"

"I did not! I only said I was worried about you. That's no excuse for getting testy!"

Gretchen asked, "Who is a mistake?"

Kathryn said, "I wasn't looking for your approval, Phoebe. I was looking for a little joy. Is that so much to ask?"

"It's a lot to ask! In case you haven't noticed, I actually care about you!"

"Then you should understand why this is important to me! I can do this and it doesn't help to hear you say that I can't!"

"Do what?" Gretchen asked.

"What about me, Katie? Don't you think you could have offered me a little joy? You sure know how to throw a wrench in life!"

"You seem to be forgetting that I did tell you I was happy. I am happy, damn it!"

"STOP!" Gretchen yelled.

"WHAT?" Kathryn yelled back at her mom. "You wanted us to talk. We're talking!"

"No, you're not! You're fighting!" Gretchen put her hands on the side of her head. "This brings back memories of you two as teenagers."

Phoebe offered an olive branch. "Look, Katie, let's just agree to disagree."

"I don't want to disagree about this. I want you to be happy."

"You can't force someone to be happy!"

Kathryn's voice rose again. "I'm NOT trying to force you, Phoebe."

"That's a relief," Phoebe said with disdain. She walked across the room and picked up the coffee pot. "You're right, Mom. We need to find another alternative than to be locked up in here with her. Surely, Starfleet can put us somewhere else."

Mike spoke up. "Phoebes, don't."

“You could support me on this!” She yelled at her husband and slammed the pot back onto the counter without pouring any.

“Get between you and your sister? No thanks.”

Gretchen asked, “Mike? You know what they’re fighting about?”

“Yes, Ma’am.” He was wise enough to answer.

“Chakotay?” Gretchen asked.

“Yes, Ma’am. I do, too.”

Gretchen yelled, “Would SOMEONE please clue me in?”

Both men left it to their wives. Kathryn and Phoebe seethed at each other, angry that the other was forcing them to tell their mother.

Kathryn said, “Let’s just tell her at the same time. Together.”

“Fine,” Phoebe said dismissively. “On the count of three. One. Two. Three.”

“We’re pregnant,” they said simultaneously.

Gretchen braced her hands on the counter in front of her. “Both of you?”

In unison, they responded, “Yes.”

They were all quiet while Gretchen absorbed the information.

Katie broke the silence. “What is pregnant?”

Phoebe’s jaw was tense. “Oh great. Now look what you made me do.”

“You haven’t told your daughter?”

Mike said, “Katie, let’s go outside.”

“No!” Phoebe said. “I don’t want her finding out like this.”

Katie’s lip started trembling and water filled her eyes. “I’m sorry, Mommy. I’m sorry Aunt Katie. I didn’t mean to.”

Deflated, Kathryn asked, “Didn’t mean to what?”

“I don’t know,” she sobbed. “Please don’t yell anymore.”

Mike picked her up. “Shhh, sweetheart. They’re not angry with you.”

Phoebe pushed past Kathryn to go to her daughter. “I’m sorry, pumpkin.”

Kathryn picked up the two remaining dirty dishes and carried them over to the sink. She felt horrible, both for trapping her family in this situation and for being the cause of so much pain in their lives. She glanced over at Chakotay and saw that he was facing the window, but with eyes closed. His posture clearly showed that he was feeling bad, too.

Gretchen said quietly, “Girls, I can’t believe that you’ve turned what should be extremely happy news into such a huge fight.”

“Neither of us wanted you to find out this way, Mom.” Kathryn dried her hands off on a towel.

“I can’t believe you didn’t tell me. How far along are you?” Gretchen’s question was directly for Kathryn.

“Four months.”

Gretchen bit back whatever she was going to say. “And when did you find out?”

“March 30th.”

“Your wedding day.” Gretchen closed her eyes. “And you’ve kept it a secret because?”

“In case it didn’t survive the first trimester. We didn’t want the pain of having to tell everyone.”

“*You* didn’t want the pain. And you don’t think I’m hurt now because you’ve kept it a secret from me? Especially considering your health?”

“I’m sorry, Mom.”

Gretchen turned to Phoebe. “And you. How long have you known?”

“A week.”

“And with all that’s going on right now, you didn’t think it prudent to inform me?”

“I didn’t want to worry you,” Phoebe replied.

“Am I that delicate? You don’t think I can take it? After everything our family has been through, you think I’m so weak and fragile that I couldn’t know about one…” She turned

to Kathryn and continued, “Two precious, wonderful pieces of news? You don’t think it would have lifted my spirits?”

“The timing wasn’t right,” Kathryn said, feeling worse.

“Well, this fight of yours isn’t what I’d call great timing, either.”

“No, I don’t suppose it is.”

“How could you do this to yourself, Katie? Couldn’t you have waited just a few months?”

“We didn’t plan it.”

Gretchen blinked slowly. “What? As brilliant as you are, you don’t know how...” She stopped herself before saying babies to avoid announcing it to Katie.

Kathryn did not answer her mother’s question. Annoyed that her mother wasn’t joyful about the news either, she stated, “As I told Phoebe yesterday, this is not a mistake. It’s a gift.”

“Is it okay? Are there any concerns?”

“Look, I don’t need this...”

“Don’t say that to me. I’m your mother and I have a right to be concerned about your health.”

Kathryn looked out the window, unwilling to bear her mother’s piercing look. Solemnly, she explained, “He is fine, for now. I need to eat as much as possible and closely monitor my blood sugar and blood pressure. My pancreas needs to be transplanted, but it’s too dangerous to do while pregnant. Complications will arise because the placenta is abnormal, and it’s possible that I might not be able to carry it to term. We’re planning for a low birth weight, and as he grows, I will likely have to go on bed rest because there’s a significant chance of placental abruption due to un-repairable damage to my uterus.”

The room was extremely quiet except for Katie’s sniffles. Phoebe said, “You didn’t tell me all of that.”

“What would have been the point? Prove that you’re right and that I can’t do this?”

Chakotay said, “Kathryn, don’t.”

She looked at him and saw the warning in his eyes. They’d talked often that her willpower and perseverance were her greatest strengths, and because of that, he didn’t want her to consider defeat at any point. She nodded her acceptance and said no more.

“Katie...” Gretchen put her hand on her daughter’s shoulder.

Their conversation came to an abrupt halt when all the lights in the house went out and a red glow infused the room from the hidden emergency lighting.

Chakotay announced, “The proximity alarm.”

“What’s going on?” Phoebe asked.

“The security perimeter has been compromised.” Kathryn commanded, “Everyone, huddle on the floor, behind the couch.”

As they moved into the next room, Katie said, “I’m scared.”

Chakotay opened a drawer and pulled out two phasers. He tossed one across the room to Kathryn. She caught the weapon easily, having practiced the throw hundreds of times during Tuvok’s endless security drills.

Justin came inside and reported, “You’re on lockdown. Something has crossed the perimeter, but we can’t identify it.”

The three Starfleet officers took point around Kathryn’s family. Chakotay asked, “Could it be an animal?”

“Sensors aren’t picking up body heat. Remember not to fire your phasers unless someone is in the house. The windows are treated with a polaron energy barrier.”

“Right,” Chakotay said.

Kathryn felt the hairs on the back of her arms stand up. Intuition told her that there was definitely something or someone outside. From her vantage point, she could see around the side of the couch to the large windows overlooking the ocean. Even though it was pitch black outside, the red lighting allowed her to see the reflection of the entire room. She glanced at a mirror on the wall and realized she could also see into the study.

Phoebe whispered, “I’m sorry.”

“Not now,” Kathryn said, needing to focus. She refused to submit to fear, but if someone did come here, it was likely that their intention would be to force her into submission by torturing a member of her family. That was not an option.

They waited in the dark, Kathryn’s steady hand on the trigger. She could hear Katie whimpering, but she couldn’t afford to turn and offer comfort. Kathryn continually scanned the room, knowing that Chakotay and Justin were behind her doing the same.

The second she saw movement in the mirror, she aimed and fired. Her phaser beam bounced off the windows' reflective surfaces twice before stunning the intruder. Katie shrieked.

A voice commanded loudly, "Hold your fire! The assailant has been apprehended!"

Justin whispered, "Stay down. I'll confirm."

Chakotay shifted to cover Justin's point, since his was the most vulnerable of the three. "Nice shooting," he whispered.

Jaw clenched, she asked, "How did he get in the house?"

Justin returned, holstering his phaser. "Stand down red alert."

Larkin, the commander of the security force protecting them, came inside and said angrily, "Lieutenant, were you not instructed to hold your fire inside the house?"

Kathryn stood and turned to him. "Commander Larkin, direct your question to me. I fired the weapon, and I believe the instructions were to not fire a weapon unless someone was in the house."

Larkin looked at her oddly and then at the location of the fallen man who was being tended to. "From that position? That's not possible."

"It is," Chakotay said. "Using the barrier to reflect the beam twice." He turned to her and said, "What I don't understand is how you saw him."

Kathryn pointed to the mirror. "A simple matter of trajectories and physics, gentlemen." She then asked, "Who is he and how did he get in here?"

All the gathered security officers stared at her in awe. Larkin whistled. "Impressive. He's Ensign Corin, and he was securing the premises."

They looked to where the stunned man was being placed on a stretcher. Kathryn asked, "Is he okay?"

"He'll be fine. Sore, but fine," Larkin replied.

"You said the assailant was apprehended. Where?" Kathryn demanded.

"The north edge of the coastline, Admiral. He's a local and we're about to question him outside."

Disbelief struck her. "A local?" she asked, clearly demanding further explanation.

“A reporter, Admiral.” Larkin’s response lacked some of his earlier confidence.

“Bring him inside. Now.” She was ticked.

“That’s not a good idea, Admiral,” Justin said.

“That wasn’t a request, Lieutenant.”

Justin looked to Chakotay for help, but got none since his anger was bubbling just beneath the surface.

“The dining room will suffice for an interrogation,” Kathryn said. She turned to her family who was still huddled on the floor behind her. “I think it would be best for you to stay in here until I have a chance to question him.”

Gretchen stood up first. “Katie, shouldn’t you let the security officers handle this?”

Kathryn wasn’t used to people questioning her orders and had to remember that this was her mother attempting to coddle her. “No.” She glanced at Justin. “Well intentioned as they might be, this is a serious security breach and I intend to find out exactly how it happened.”

“Aunt Katie?”

She kneeled down, finally able to give comfort to the child. “I’m sorry that you were scared.”

“Is it safe, now?”

“I’m going to make sure it is.”

Her little jaw shook. “Don’t let the bad people take you away again.”

Kathryn’s heart melted. She stroked the little girl’s face. “I’m going to do everything in my power to make sure that no one ever hurts our family ever again.”

Katie threw herself into Kathryn’s arms, saying, “I love you, Aunt Katie. Please don’t be mad at us anymore.”

Chakotay took the phaser out of Kathryn’s hand so she could safely return the little girl’s hug. “I’m not mad at you, Katie, and I never have been. I’m just a little scared, too.”

Justin said, “He’s ready whenever you are, Admiral.”

Kathryn pulled back from Katie and held her face. “You’ll be okay?”

Katie nodded bravely. “Yes.”

She stood up and told her family, “This should only take a few minutes.” She ordered, “Ensign Williams, stay with them. Chakotay, Jarvin, you’re with me.”

Kathryn walked into the dining room and saw a young man sitting at the table, his eyes as wide as saucers. He instantly reminded her of Jared Norvellen in the way her presence seemed to strike fear in him.

He stood up quickly, “Admiral Janeway!”

Larkin put a hand on his shoulder to push him back down. “Remain seated, Mr. Reyes.”

Kathryn nodded towards the holo-imager. “This is what he was carrying?”

“Yes, Admiral. Only the camera and his identification.”

She glanced at Chakotay. “Check it, please.”

Kathryn sat across from the man and looked him in the eye. She wanted to see what kind of backbone he had. It only took two seconds before he got fidgety and nervous. That told her a lot.

Chakotay reported, “Nothing hidden, but it contains pictures of the outside of our house, from last night.”

Kathryn turned her glare towards Larkin who had the grace to bow his head slightly and look away.

Reyes said, “I mean no disrespect, Admiral Janeway. I’m a huge fan.”

She returned her glare to the assailant. “No disrespect? Yet you violate my privacy?”

“I don’t mean you any harm.”

Pointing at the camera, she said, “That tells me that you have absolutely no respect for me.”

“I was just taking pictures.” His wide-eyed expression returned.

Kathryn asked, “Who do you work for?”

“I’m a free-lance reporter for the Pacific Press Association.”

“Where do you live, Mr. Reyes?”

“In town.”

“Specifics, please,” she insisted.

“429 Summit Road, Apartment F, Gold Beach.”

Kathryn instructed Larkin, “Send Fitzgerald. No one is to enter the premises.”

“What’s that mean?” Reyes looked back and forth between them, nervously.

“How long have you been taking pictures of this property?”

“Just a few days.”

Chakotay leaned forward. “How many days, exactly?”

“This is my third night, Sir.”

“Have you shown these images to anyone?” he asked.

“No,” he shook his head adamantly. “Of course not.”

Kathryn’s eyes narrowed. “Who did you show them to?”

“I... uh...” His lip began to quiver.

“I need an answer,” she demanded.

“I told the editor that I had some pictures for him, but he didn’t believe me. He didn’t give me a chance to show him.”

“You told him they were pictures of me?” Kathryn asked.

“Yes. I’m sorry, Admiral.”

“I need his name.”

“Ralph Chang.”

“Did you send him any of the images?”

“No.”

“Did you show them to a friend?”

“No.”

“Did you gloat or brag to anyone that you’d been successful?”

“No.” He began to tremble again. “I know you don’t believe me, but I really didn’t. I’m kind of a loner – I’m not around people much.”

Chakotay asked, “How did you know to come out here looking for us?”

“I used to work for the man who lived here. I did errands and odd jobs and things.”

“Go on,” Kathryn said. Her anger towards her security team was growing by the minute, although she was feeling a certain amount of relief that this man seemed to be who he claimed.

“Well, I knew that this house got sold, but didn’t know who bought it. And I saw in the news that you were getting married at your new house. When I saw Starfleet people hanging around in town, I figured someone important must be here, and I hoped it would be you.”

Kathryn glared at Larkin and Jarvin and figured that if looks could kill, they would be on the floor convulsing about now. She returned her attention to Reyes. “How did you get to the house?”

“What do you mean?”

“On foot? Transport in? What path did you take?”

“Oh,” he said sheepishly. “I guessed that I’d have to sneak in, so I came up the coastline and climbed up.”

“Climbed up?” Chakotay asked. “Did you have rappelling equipment?”

“Yeah. It’s a hobby.”

Kathryn was beyond annoyed with her security team. “I’ve heard enough.” She stood up and ordered, “Commander, either take this man into protective custody or enlist him to be on your team. He’s a security risk.”

“Custody?” Reyes asked. “Am I being charged with a crime?”

“Overnight custody, Mr. Reyes. We’re going to leave any charges up to the Judge Advocate General tomorrow, but I can’t let you go home tonight.”

“Why not? If I haven’t committed a crime, you can’t hold me.”

Chakotay asked, “You’re citing Habeus Corpus?”

“Haby what?”

Kathryn was glad she had turned away because she wouldn't have wanted him to see her roll her eyes.

“Habeus Corpus, Mr. Reyes. You can be held for twenty-four hours for your protection and ours.”

Kathryn ordered, “Get him out of here. Commander Larkin, Lieutenant Jarvin, may I speak to you in the next room?”

The two officers followed her into the kitchen. Chakotay wasn't far behind. Kathryn paced across the kitchen twice before turning to them, hands on hips, steel in her spine. “Gentlemen, I want you to thank Mr. Reyes next chance you get.”

“Ma'am?” Justin asked.

“That was rhetorical, Lieutenant.”

“Yes, Ma'am,” he said, snapping his mouth shut.

“A civilian cut through your security grid. A civilian has shown you an enormous weak spot.” She pointed out the window and raised her voice. “Did you not think to secure the coastline?”

Larkin said, “Admiral, the likelihood...”

“I don't want your excuses, Commander. I want this fixed tonight. Have I made myself clear?”

“Yes, ma'am,” he replied immediately.

Chakotay's voice was low and intense as he said, “Do we need to discuss the ramifications of this kind of security breach?”

“No, sir,” they both replied.

“I sure as hell hope not.”

Kathryn instructed, “I don't care what it takes, but Mr. Reyes is not to return to his civilian life until this threat is over. I'll be contacting Admiral Khurma in the morning so be prepared for his call. You need a search warrant and then I want every trace of evidence in his house seized and destroyed. Is that clear?”

“Crystal clear, Ma'am,” Justin said.

“Make sure you find a way to keep the editor he talked to quiet, and whatever it takes, do not let Mr. Reyes out of your site. Make him your best friend if you have to, I don’t give a damn. He will not be reporting this incident. Is that clear?”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Larkin nodded succinctly.

“If Reyes had been a moderately competent reporter or a military operative, it is extremely likely that I, or a member of my family, would be dead right now. I want you both to take tonight, as you stand guard over us while we sleep, and think about whether you want to continue this job in the morning. Dismissed.”

After they left, Kathryn braced herself against the kitchen counter. She was feeling extremely light headed. Chakotay pulled out the medical tri-corder and took a reading of her blood pressure. He reported, “It’s within the limit.”

“Good. Now get me some peanut butter before I faint.” She knew she had to control her temper, but she was ready to hit something.

He opened the jar, stuck a spoon in it, and handed it to her.

Kathryn looked up and saw her family still sitting by the couch, staring at her wide-eyed and completely silent. Her adrenaline was still running on high as she said, “Now, if anyone has any qualms about me carrying this child, speak up now, because this marks the end of our previous discussion.”

She waited for anyone to give voice to their concerns and when they did not, she said, “I apologize for my lack of forthrightness and for not accepting your concerns in the spirit they were intended. As my family, I hope you’ll forgive my shortcomings and support me in this effort. This won’t be easy and I’ll need your help. But for now, I’m exhausted and I’m going to bed.” Not waiting for a response, she escaped up the stairs.

Kathryn was lying in bed, under the covers, licking peanut butter off her spoon when Chakotay came into the bedroom. She looked at him with a slight amount of guilt. “Have I completely traumatized them?”

He chuckled as he sat on the bed at her feet. Stretching his neck, he said, “Oh, I wouldn’t worry about it. I’d say that just about everyone you came in contact with tonight needed a good butt-kicking, your family included.”

“Poor Justin. Did you see the look on his face?”

“Oh yes, but he’s your chief of security. You had every right to pulverize him, and he’ll appreciate it once he’s recovered.”

“Pulverize?” Kathryn cringed.

“And Larkin is the one who designed the system here. I'm kicking myself that I didn't inspect it more carefully.”

She shrugged. “We expected them to do their jobs.”

“In his defense, the perimeter of the deck is protected by a forcefield, and it is highly unlikely that someone would try to rappel up that cliff.” Chakotay pointed out the window.

“Agreed, but they're supposed to be expecting the unexpected. There needs to be something in place down there at the shoreline.”

“I'll follow up on it,” Chakotay said. “It'll make me feel better. Reyes really did us a favor.”

“Yes, he did. Gave us a good drill, too.”

Chakotay caressed her leg. “If it makes you feel any better, your family is in awe of what you did tonight.”

“Dress down some officers?”

He nodded, “That and everything else. I suspect they haven't seen you in command-mode.”

“No, they haven't.” She dipped her spoon into the jar again.

“Mike can't get over that shot you made, and Phoebe was repeating the word damn over and over again, clearly astonished with the way you handled everything.”

Kathryn laughed. “Guess I'm not as helpless as they think.”

“They've only seen their Katie without a clear concept of the Captain Janeway who trekked across the Delta Quadrant. Not one member of your former crew would question your ability to do anything you set your mind to.”

She sighed. “I really feel awful for not telling Mom.”

“Yes, perhaps that wasn't the best decision we've ever made. And I do mean ‘we.’”

“I'll talk to her more tomorrow. I've put her through hell and back and I should have known better.”

He picked at a fuzz ball on the blanket.

“What is it?”

Shrugging, he said, “I feel like I should apologize to all of them for my part in this.”

“For knocking me up, you mean?” She crooked a smile.

“Something like that.”

She sat up straighter and put her finger under his chin. “If I recall correctly, it takes two to tango.”

“Yeah, but if I’d remembered my reproductive biology, I would have seen the warning signs that you were very fertile that afternoon.”

“You knew?”

“Not at the time, but I’ve done some reading. If I’d known what to look for, it would’ve been as clear as day.”

“You’re making me warm, you know.”

“I am?”

“All this talk about reproduction and all this unused adrenaline running around inside me. I’m not the least bit sleepy.”

“You’re not?” he asked as he licked his lips.

“Nope. Any ideas on what could help me get to sleep?”

“I’ve got several.” He grinned wickedly.

The next day, Kathryn came out of her study and announced to everyone who was in the great room, “We need to watch the Fednews.”

“What’s going on?” Chakotay asked.

“A protest in Paris.” She turned the viewscreen on and stood back, watching intently with her arms folded across her chest.

“Today?”

Kathryn said, “Bernie just called to let me know. They moved it up in light of my leave.”

“You know these people?” Gretchen asked.

“Not directly, Mom.”

The viewscreen showed a mob of hundreds who were holding up signs and chanting the word, “Impeach,” over and over again. They were standing outside the gates of the presidential palace near Paris.

“Wow,” said Phoebe.

A reporter came onscreen. “Today, at the home of the Federation President Min Zife, protestors have gathered to express their opinions about what the next step should be in turning around the Federation government.” She pulled one man aside and asked, “Tell me about this protest. How was it organized?”

“My name is Gara, and I’m one of the founders of this group we call ‘Broken Circle.’”

“What does the name mean?”

“We believe that the Federation was once like a circle, everyone supporting and depending on each other. That circle was utterly destroyed by the current administration and it’s time for a new leader to emerge and take over.”

“You believe that a new leader could fix all the problems?”

“We’ve had two bad presidents in a row – one who let the Cardassians walk all over us and then took us into a war. The other has undermined our democracy with lies, thievery, and deception. It’s time for a new approach to government, a new leader who can protect our borders, champion the underdog, protect the rights of the individual, and see the value of every world whether or not it’s a member of the Federation.”

Kathryn made a fist and whispered, “Yes!”

The reporter turned to another, “And you, young man, what do you hope to achieve with this protest today?”

“We want the Federation Council to get off their asses and impeach the President! He’s an idiot and he’s ruining us!”

Trying not to smile, the reporter walked away from him, speaking directly into the camera. “Exactly one week ago, Starfleet’s Vice Admiral Kathryn Janeway addressed the Council, asking them to take a stand and fight for the Federation. Today, these young people, seemingly from across the alpha quadrant, are doing just that.”

She turned to a woman and asked, “The sign you carry says its time to put the criminals behind bars. Who do you feel the criminals are?”

“They’re the ones who are getting rich off of the Federation’s resources.” She made a chopping motion with her hand. “Don’t you see that the funds that are needed for our security and medical research are being used to deepen the pockets of investors in the Bolius and Dolsian systems? The President made Janeway go to those planets last year to show them off. How much more obvious could it be?”

Another young man cut in. “Yeah, that’s right. They’re getting rich while they impose embargos on planets they don’t like. Is that the Federation they want? One where you have to fatten the pockets of the leaders to be a member?”

The reporter started speaking to the camera again. “Today’s protest is calling for an impeachment of the President of the Federation. The question remains whether or not there is evidence of criminal activity that can be tied directly to his office.”

Phoebe said, “He...llo!” to the reporter. “Wake up, lady!”

Kathryn smiled at her sister, shared a knowing look with Chakotay, and looked back at the viewscreen.

The reporter asked, “You, sir. Are you a member of the Broken Circle group?”

“Never heard of them,” the older man said. “But when I heard this protest was going on, I gathered up everyone I knew and transported right over. Are you with the Fednews?”

“Yes, sir, and we’re broadcasting live across the Federation.”

“Good, then I have something to say.”

“What would you like the Federation to hear?”

“President Zife and his cronies have been in power long enough. They have deceived us, made a mockery of our government, forced members out of our Federation, and to top it all off, they’ve chased away Admiral Janeway.”

“Chased her away?”

“What other explanation is there for her sudden leave after a triumphal week with the Council? She was our only hope, but I don’t blame her one bit for protecting herself and her family. It’s appalling that a hero as great as Janeway has to hide from the leader of the Federation just because she has the guts to stand up to him.”

Kathryn’s mouth dropped open, aghast. “I don’t hide.”

Chakotay put his arm around her shoulders and squeezed. “No, you secure yourself.”

The reporter said, “There are many strong emotions running through this crowd today. If you’ve just joined us, we’re live at the presidential palace outside Paris. The protest is a call for the Federation Council to impeach President Zife who just yesterday made a speech as if nothing were amiss in...”

Chakotay’s commbadge chirped and he slapped it. “Chakotay here.”

“It’s B’Elanna. You guys watching the fednews?”

“You bet we are.”

“Tell your wife that she’s awesome.”

Kathryn said, “Thank you, Lanna. We’ll call you later.”

“You bet.” The commline closed as the reporter started to interview the next person.

“Miss, I see that you’ve brought your children with you today. What do you want them to learn from this experience?”

“This is history being made. As far as I’m concerned, today is the end of Zife’s control over the people of the Federation.” The woman raised her voice as she said, “Zife, if you can hear this... resign and go home. We don’t want you hear anymore.”

Kathryn winced. “That’s not quite the lesson I’d want my children to learn.”

The crowd’s chanting had grown louder and had a different tone to it. Chakotay asked, “What are they chanting now?”

Gretchen replied, “Impeach Zife. Has a nice ring to it, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, it does,” Kathryn replied with relish.

The reporter continued, “Evening has arrived here on May 23rd at the capitol of the Federation and home of its president. A crowd that started with just a couple hundred has grown into thousands of individuals who are all asking for the same thing – a new leader.”

A young man jumped up behind the reporter and shouted, “He’s goin’ down! Yeaah!”

She said, “It’s an enthusiastic crowd full of young people from all over the quadrant. Here with me is a group that traveled from Sirius IX for today’s rally. What message do you have for the people of the Federation?”

A woman replied, “We’re doing this for Admiral Janeway.” Looking into the camera, she continued, “Admiral, we know you’re watching this, and the people of Sirius IX want to thank you for all that you’ve done for us and apologize for what happened during your visit to our planet. Your bravery that day made an impact on us – one that we will never forget. To echo something you said in an interview over a year ago, if the time has come that you can no longer carry your load, we will step up in your place. The people of the Federation will NOT let him torment you any longer, and we will NOT sit by and let Zife destroy what has taken hundreds of years to build. You are loved by many, Admiral.”

“Oh, wow,” Kathryn said as she touched her own chest.

Chakotay held her close and whispered into her hair. “You were right, my love. They did need you that day – more than I could ever have understood.”

Kathryn shook her head and turned so she could hold her husband. “I’m so sorry.”

“Shhhh shhhhhh,” he whispered. “It’s okay. We’re okay now.”

Gretchen asked, “What’s wrong, Katie? That sounded wonderful to me.”

Kathryn replied, “It’s a long story, but Chakotay and I got into a pretty big fight after the explosion on Sirius. What that young woman just said brought it all back to us.”

On the viewscreen, another young woman had already started speaking. “So here we are, standing united. He can bully the Council, he can bully Starfleet, but he can’t bully the thousands of us here and the billions of people watching from home. It’s time for peace to prevail and we’re here to make sure it does.”

The reporter asked a young Ktarian, “Do you believe all the blame lies on the President?”

“Absolutely not. There’s a slew of people working for him and getting just as rich. Just last week at the General session, councilmembers Jorl and Liyal all but attacked Janeway. Their actions and statements were proof enough that their loyalties are with the President and his corrupt politics. I think it’s high time that we examined the voting records of the Council, the sudden success of the Bolian bank, and the reasons behind the good fortune of the planets that Zife is so damned proud of. There’s something fishy going on and it’s time the Federation did something about it.”

“Thank you, sir.” The reporter nodded to him and then faced the camera. “A profound statement to close this report. I’m Thaurise B’Nor, reporting for the Fednews.”

The image on the viewscreen switched back to the newsdesk in San Francisco where two reporters began remarking on the comments they’d heard.

Kathryn shook her head in awe as Chakotay turned off the screen. Beaming with joy, she said, “This calls for a celebration, don’t you think? What do you say we stop work for

the afternoon, trust our new and improved security system, and have a picnic out on the patio?”

Gretchen hugged her daughter. “A wonderful idea, Katie. I am so proud of you.”

“That wasn’t me, Mom. That was the people finally speaking up.”

“Because you inspired them.” She shook her head in amazement. “I knew you were destined for great things, but this is far beyond anything I could’ve imagined.”

Phoebe said, “She’s not done, yet. I still think she’s going to be living in that presidential palace someday.”

Kathryn opened her arms wide. “And leave all this? Are you kidding?”

“What? This old place?” Phoebe joked.

Gretchen said, “Come on, Phoebe. Let’s see what we can throw together. Give these two a moment to talk.”

After her mom and sister walked into the kitchen, Kathryn turned to Chakotay and asked, “How much of that did you choreograph?”

“The protest?”

Kathryn rolled her eyes.

He shrugged. “I made a few suggestions.”

“Such as,” she goaded.

Putting his arm around her to walk her outside, he said, “I suggested they keep it peaceful, but energized. Let everyone participating know in advance what kinds of things to say to reporters and then find a way for the best people to get to the cameras. I believe they understood that publicity and numbers were their main goals, not results.”

“And?”

“And what?”

She put her hands on her hips. “What kinds of things did you suggest they say to the reporters?”

“I didn’t get that specific.” He tilted his head at her. “You think I planted for them to sing your praises like that?”

“Didn’t you?”

“No. They knew what message they needed to get across. And remember, I sent word days before I knew that you were going on leave or what the response from the Council would be. They came up with the content on their own, and I bet at least half of what we heard wasn’t planned at all.”

Kathryn stood up on her toes and put her arms around his neck. Stretching tall, she whispered against his lips, “I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

Chakotay came into the dining room. “Kathryn, Admiral Khurma is on the comm for you.”

“This early?” she asked as she got up from the breakfast table, fastening her robe tighter.

“He looks concerned.”

Kathryn frowned as she walked into the study and activated the screen. “Morning, Admiral.”

“Kathryn,” he said carefully. “How are you feeling?”

“Fine, why?”

“I have some... news. Can’t say for sure whether it’s good or bad, but it’s likely to be stressful.”

“Has there been an attack?”

“An attack?” He blinked and then shook his head. “Oh, no. Sorry to alarm you. It’s nothing like that.”

Kathryn took a deep breath and blew it out. “All right. What seems to be the problem?”

“Before I tell you, I want you to know that I have no intentions of allowing this to happen.”

“That sounds ominous.”

“President Zife has scheduled a mandatory hearing, but...”

“Hearing?”

“For you. It’s not officially a court martial, and I’ve no…”

“What?!?!?” Kathryn stood up quickly and as a rush of vertigo came over her, she quickly sat back down.

Chakotay ran in and asked, “Everything okay?”

She held her hands against her face. “Give me a moment.”

Khurma said, “I’ve just given her a bit of a shock, Captain. Is she all right?”

“I’m fine.” She placed her hand on her chest and willed herself to regain control. “Just don’t throw things like that at me from out of nowhere. My brain and heart aren’t communicating well.”

“If a doctor could testify to your medical incapacity, it could make what I need to do a lot easier.”

Chakotay asked, “Testify?”

Kathryn held up her hand. “Don’t over-react as much as I just did.”

Khurma said carefully, “I’m not allowing this to occur, but President Zife has scheduled a mandatory hearing to confront Kathryn about the rumors he believes she has started.”

“What the hell?” Chakotay asked. “Can he do that?”

“He is the President of the Federation, Captain. He thinks he can do just about anything he wants, but I will not allow this to take place.”

“Can you imagine how all hell would break loose if Kathryn and Zife were in the same room, hurtling accusations at each other?”

Kathryn frowned at her husband. “Hey!”

He softened his approach. “You know what I mean. If any kind of hearing is going to take place for either of you, it needs to be done with plenty of advance warning, lawyers, and a judge. This is huge.”

Khurma said, “Which is why I have no intentions of letting this happen. He believes that he is within his rights to demand that a Starfleet officer answer to him.”

“I’ll answer to my actions, but it will be to a Starfleet court, not a private meeting with the President.”

Chakotay said, "He's trying to cast blame wherever he can. I bet his supporters are coming down on him, hard."

Khurma asked, "Tell me more about this medical condition. Has it happened before with a doctor's immediate response?"

"Yes, but I don't want it in my official records that I am incapacitated in stressful situations."

"Is it a temporary malady caused by your pregnancy?"

"You're not using her health as an excuse," Chakotay snapped. "This hearing is illegal on its own merits without trying to find a scapegoat."

Kathryn laid her hand on Chakotay's arm as she told Khurma. "I'm not participating in any inquiry, hearing, or deposition regarding charges against me without a defense attorney present."

Khurma nodded. "All right. I'm in conversation with Starfleet's JAG officer to see how we should proceed, but it's my hope that we can prevent this from going to trial."

"If it does, it does, but I do not permit you to use my health as a reason to avoid it. That gives the impression that you agree that this action can take place."

"Of course not, Kathryn."

She leaned forward. "What we need is get moving with some legal action against the President. When is this detective you told me about supposed to see me?"

"Tomorrow. Has she not made contact yet?"

"Not that I'm aware of."

"Hopefully, she hasn't run into any trouble. I'll touch base with her, but I believe she's on her way to Earth from Betazed."

"Is she a betazoid?"

"No, she's human. She's not what you'd expect, but she's damn good at what she does. I'll let her fill you in on as much as she wants you to know."

"All right. Please, keep me informed."

"I will, Kathryn. And again, sorry to bother you this early in the morning. Khurma out."

She turned to Chakotay and stated, "This so-called 'leave of absence' isn't turning out to be very relaxing."

Cupping her cheek, he asked, "You okay?"

"Honestly? I have no idea."

"What would you like to do about this?"

"I want to call Owen and Matt and ask for their help finding a lawyer, but I don't want them to over-react."

"Which one is more even-keeled?"

"Matt." Kathryn sighed heavily. "I'll give him a call."

"Want me to stay?"

She shook her head. "I can handle it."

Leaning down, he gave her a kiss. "Don't worry, my love. You haven't done anything wrong."

"Hmph. Then I know nothing about how yesterday's protest came about, do I?"

"No, you don't." He winked at her as he left the study.

Kathryn looked down at her robe and thought about changing clothes, but decided it didn't matter for this one call. She keyed in Matt's home code and waited until someone picked up.

"Katie?" he asked as he sat down at his terminal. "Is everything all right?"

"That's a loaded question."

"What can I do for you?"

"Is this line secure?" she asked.

"It is from my end. Are you in danger?"

"Always. Khurma just called, and before you get up in arms, hear me out."

"All right," he said, hesitantly.

“Zife appears to be grasping at straws and wants to start casting blame. His first victim appears to be me.”

“What’s he done?”

“Nothing, yet, but he’s pushing for a hearing of some kind. Khurma is fighting against it, but I feel the need to find a damn good trial lawyer and put him or her on retainer. Know one?”

Matt’s chin bobbed and it was clear that he was angry. “This has gone too far.”

“It hasn’t, yet. We wanted to put pressure on Zife, and now that we have, he’s fighting back. We should’ve anticipated this.”

“Have you called Owen?”

“No. I figure it’s easier for you two to keep each other apprised than for me to call both of you each time something comes up.”

“Mmmhmm, yes.” He blew out a puff of air. “Two names come to mind. Let me do some research and get back with you.”

Kathryn said, “There is one good thing that can come out of this little move.”

“What’s that?”

“If the best lawyer in the Federation is working for me, he or she can’t be working for anyone associated with the President.”

“Good point.” Matt rubbed his chin hard. “How are you handling this?”

“I’m not sure, yet. But if I can at least get legal representation, I know I won’t have to handle it alone.”

“Not a chance of that happening, Katie. You recall our little fireside chat last Thursday at your home?”

“Of course.”

“You’ve got that many people, and more on your side.” He nodded in determination. “Let me get to work on this and I’ll call you later this morning.”

“Thank you.”

“My pleasure, Katie. Now, go get dressed. You can’t be seen lounging about all day.”

“Oh... wait.”

“Yes?”

“Owen was here on Tuesday night. Did he tell you?”

“Yes, tried to convince me that you taking a leave of absence is a good thing, but all he could give me was that I should trust him.”

“So he didn’t tell you my news, then?”

“Other than the leave?”

“My personal news.”

Matt cocked his head. “Evidently not.”

“I’m pregnant.”

He did a double take. “You’re what?”

“With child. Four months along. That’s why the leave of absence is a good thing. I need to be out of the line of fire.”

“Katie...” he whispered. “That’s wonderful!”

Smiling brightly, she replied, “Thank you, Matt. You’re the first person who hasn’t asked me if this was a bad idea.”

“How can a baby be a bad idea? Ever?”

“I’m glad we agree.” She laid her hand on her belly. “But just so you don’t have to ask, the baby is healthy, and I’m under constant monitoring to make sure I stay healthy, too.”

“How many people know?”

“My staff, family, Khurma, and everyone that was here Thursday night.”

“Oh, good. I can talk to Tom and B’Elanna about it. Always great to share good news.”

“Thank you, again.”

“You’re welcome. I’m overjoyed. Talk to you later.”

Kathryn took a deep breath and sat back in her chair, feeling much better for having reached out to her godfather. He was right in that she wasn’t alone. Truthfully, she had

billions of people on her side, and hundreds who would do anything for her. With those odds, she could face anything.
