

The Future is Ours – Part 35

“Deposed”

By Dawn

Depose: *v* To remove from office; to testify or affirm under oath

Rated NC-17

A small, olive-skinned woman wearing a wrinkled pantsuit marched into Kathryn’s great room and extended her hand with enthusiasm. “Admiral Janeway, it’s good to finally meet you. I feel like I already know you, since I’ve been tracking your movements for the last year.”

Kathryn stood quickly to accept the woman’s vigorous handshake. “A pleasure to meet you as well, Detective Mouline.”

She waved her hand quickly between them. “Just call me Aicha.”

“Alicia?”

“No, no, no. A-sha. I’m Moroccan. Some say that our names are troublesome to pronounce. I don’t know why, seems perfectly clear to me.” She plopped down on the couch and dumped a satchel full of PADDs on the table in front of her.

“It’s a beautiful name.” Kathryn asked, “Can I get you anything?”

“No, no. I’d like to jump right into this. I’ve wanted to talk to you for months, but Khurma wouldn’t allow it. Don’t know why,” she shrugged.

Kathryn couldn’t tell if Aicha was kidding, or not. “For awhile, he was trying to protect my privacy.”

“Well, that’s all blown to bits now, isn’t it? What did he tell you about my work?”

Kathryn tried not to be amused by the diminutive woman’s mannerisms. “Just that he’s been in contact with you recently about some of the situations we’re dealing with.”

“Some?” she asked wide eyed. “Try all. And not just recently, either. I’ve been up to my earlobes in this muck and mire since the war ended. I hope you don’t mind me saying this, but Min Zife is a pain in the ass.”

Laughing out loud, Kathryn shook her head and said, “No, I... um... don’t mind you saying that in the least.”

Chakotay walked into the room with a curious look on his face.

Kathryn said, “Honey, let me introduce you to Detective Aicha Mouline of the Inter-Planetary Criminal Police Organization.”

Aicha stood quickly and shook his hand with even more fervor than she had with Kathryn. “The famous, or should I say infamous, Captain Chakotay. Wow, this truly is an honor. I’ve been a fan of yours since I was a greenfoot in the interplanetary relations department.”

Chakotay grinned broadly as he tried to withdraw his hand. “Infamous?”

“Oh, yeah,” she said in complete awe. “I was on the team assigned to cover the Maquis situation. You did some outstanding work out there. Really terrific stuff. My favorite was when you took down that frigate in the beta sector of the Badlands. I don’t think anyone could’ve pulled that off like you did.”

“Thank you, but,” he rubbed his jaw while he hesitated. “I didn’t realize specific details about the Maquis were available.”

“Well, not to just anyone. But it was our team’s job to collect evidence on the Maquis, and let me tell you, I had a terraquad of data on you! A huge fan, really.”

Chakotay pulled on his ear. “Evidence for whom?”

“The Federation, of course. But that’s neither here nor there, now. The Maquis are vindicated, so that data isn’t good for anything except taking up storage space. But you know...” She rubbed her hands together.

“What’s that?”

She blushed a unique shade of dark olive that brought out some feminine qualities in her otherwise tomboyish appearance. “I take out your files every now and again just to reminisce. Your tactics were definitely the best of any Maquis. I can see why Starfleet put you to work teaching their people.”

“Well, thank you, Detective,” he said, stealing a glance at his wife.

Kathryn cleared her throat. “It would seem that you have a little bit of hero worship towards my husband.”

Aicha guffawed. “More than that, Admiral. I’ve got a full-blown crush on him. All that intelligence plus he looks like this? Of course I don’t have to tell you.”

“No, you don’t,” she replied carefully.

Chakotay tugged on his ear again. “I’d offer to stay and talk with you two, but I fear I’d be a distraction.”

Aicha replied quickly, "You'd be a distraction all right. Besides, this is confidential, anyway."

"He's got clearance, Aicha."

"No, no, no. It's not possible." She sighed as she looked at him. "Oh, how I wish it were, though. I would truly enjoy getting inside your head."

Kathryn put her fist over her mouth to avoid making a very inappropriate sound.

"Perhaps another time, Detective."

"Aicha, please call me Aicha."

"Aicha, it is." He took her hand and kissed the back of it. "I'll be in the study if you need me."

Kathryn asked, "Don't I get a kiss, too?"

Chakotay looked back at her and winked. "Later, my love."

Once his door was closed, Aicha shook her head and blew out a puff of air. "I don't know how you can get any work done around him."

She clicked her tongue and said, "He's a great conversationalist. So, Admiral Khurma tells me that you've been to Betazed?"

"Oh, I've been all over, following both you and Zife's people around."

"Following me?"

"Well, sure," she said with surprise. "You didn't know that?"

Kathryn furrowed her forehead. "Perhaps you could describe the scope of your assignment?"

"Sure. Khurma contacted me two years ago in regards to Zife and his business dealings. A lot of what Zife is doing is outside of Starfleet's jurisdiction, but there's enough overlap that we could either choose to work together or we could step on each other's toes.

"It's the IPC's job to coordinate with the local police in criminal cases that cross jurisdictions. Zife has had dealings on so many planets that our agency has been turned on its ears trying to track it all. As a matter of fact, there are so many leads to follow, and so many parties involved, that we've got a team of five people working on it and we still can't piece everything together."

"So, why have you been following me, then?"

More serious now, Aicha said, “Because Khurma asked me, personally, to keep tabs on the investigations involving attacks against you.”

“Oh,” Kathryn said with surprise. “I didn’t realize that. Thank you.”

“Wow, he really was being discreet.”

“I didn’t even know your agency was involved in this until Tuesday.”

“Wonder why?”

“Don’t know. Perhaps Khurma was hoping that if we worked independently, we’d turn up different information.”

“Well, that’s why I’m here. You’re on leave, so I need to learn everything you know to keep this investigation going.”

“That’s... a lot.” Kathryn tapped her fingers on her arm as she thought. “Which planets, specifically, are part of the investigation?”

“Every planet that has gotten a special deal or a rotten one.”

“Including the ones he’s been getting raw materials from?”

“Yes, the ones he has forced illegal contracts with, and the ones he has... ah... bolstered the economies of.”

“I see. And you’re sure you’ve got all of them?”

“I’m quite thorough,” Aicha said without any hint of doubt. “And as I said earlier, I’ve also had input into the investigations involving attacks on you – Joria, Sirius IX, Ktaria, and Earth. That one on Monday... terrible.”

“To say the least.”

“And on your birthday.” She clicked her tongue and shook her head. “Rotten deal.”

“You knew it was my birthday?”

“It’s my job to know everything about you, Admiral.”

“That must be why you’re a good detective.”

Aicha pulled a computer out of her bag and set it on Kathryn’s coffee table. “I’m not just good, Admiral. I’m the best, and that’s why I’m on this case. It has taken me two years to gather all

the pieces, and my hope is that, together, we can bring this to closure within the month. How does that sound?”

“Wonderful. I’ve been researching impeachment to try to figure out who has to initiate the process.”

“It’s complicated. First, any council member or committee may accuse the president of a crime as long as there is evidence to support it. The full council must then vote on whether or not to take the case before the judicial committee.”

“Do you think they have the evidence needed?”

“No, but we’ll give it to them as soon as a trustworthy person steps forward. I suspect they’ll come to you, first.”

“They might.”

“Has anyone mentioned anything?”

“Not as of yet. When I left them on Thursday, there was talk about taking a stand, but it was just a beginning.”

“Well, that’s something.”

“Can your organization bring charges against the President?”

“Oh, yes, we can. But they have to be charges against him, personally. Not charges against decisions he has made while in office.”

“Do you have anything on him?”

“Not enough to warrant the upset it would cause. That’s why we’ve let this go on as long as it has. He protects himself to the extreme.”

“Or his people protect him.”

“That, too. We’ve also left them alone in the hopes that they would lead us to him. We have thirty-four individuals under surveillance – not all of them are guilty, but we’re in the process of weeding that out.”

“Why didn’t Khurma tell me that?”

“Same reason he didn’t tell you about me, I guess. Regardless, what I do have plenty of is criminal evidence against sixteen individuals connected to the president. I’m ready to start making arrests.”

Kathryn's mouth opened and quickly turned into a satisfied smile. "I like the sound of that."

Aicha grinned. "I thought you might. Personally, this has been such a huge part of my life for the better part of two years, that I think I'll feel lost when it's over. Now, what I need from you is all of your evidence and official statements regarding your experiences."

"Okay, which ones?"

"All of them. This might take us a couple of days, but we'll get through it all."

Kathryn blinked slowly. "A couple of days?"

"Yes. Now," she paused as she typed something into her computer. "For creating your affidavits, I want three detectives from my team present, including me. Admiral Khurma wants to be involved, as well. Do you have anyone else you'd like to attend?"

"I want Chakotay present, and..." Kathryn took a deep breath. "I've got a call to make this afternoon about putting a lawyer on retainer."

"Oh, no, no, no. We don't want any civilian lawyers getting involved in this. We must proceed with the utmost caution regarding the confidentiality of this information."

"I don't trust just anyone, Detective."

"A wise precaution, but why do you think you need a lawyer? You're the victim and a key witness."

Kathryn rubbed her forearms. "While that may be, I've also been acting as a very public detective. Any chance that I'll be facing charges of slander?"

Aicha licked her lips. "Just answer the questions and don't elaborate. I have studied every public appearance you have given in great detail. Not once have you said anything incriminating about the Federation, the Council, or the President. You have given general threats against those who are against us, but unless one has a guilty conscience, your words can't be isolated to any specific individual."

"That has been my intent, but I still want to seek counsel." Kathryn scratched her eyebrow as she said, "I won't breach confidentiality, but my concern stems from a call I received yesterday. Zife wants to bring me up on charges."

"For what?"

"I don't know, yet."

Aicha shook her head in disgust. "Stall him, however you can. This is going to blow up in his face so fast, he won't know what hit him."

“While it would be nice to beat him to the punch, I’m not counting on it.”

“Then, if you’re feeling up to it, we should start today. We can put things in motion immediately.”

“Let’s do it.”

“Great. I need to make a few calls to get the ball rolling.” Aicha looked up and asked, “I assume we can do this here? I can’t think of a more secure location.”

Kathryn nodded. “That’s fine, but I’ll need to make other arrangements to keep my extended family out of our hair. They’re at work and school right now, but I’m expecting them back within the hour.”

“If you’ll take care of that, I’ll do the rest. Thirteen hundred?”

“Sure, and you’re welcome to continue working from here.”

Aicha glanced up from her computer. “I was planning on it.”

Kathryn shook her head in amusement as she got up and went into the study.

Chakotay asked, “How’s it going?”

“I have mixed feelings about her personality, but we’re getting somewhere.” Kathryn tugged on his hand until he was standing up and hugging her.

“She’s something else,” he said as he held her close.

“She was sexually harassing you.”

He chuckled. “Don’t worry about it, love. It’s not every day that one comes face to face with their hero. You’ve had people encounter you almost daily.”

“Yes, but it’s never been that overt.”

Shrugging, he said, “So, she lacks some social graces. I bet all of the men who idolize you also find you rather alluring.”

“An old broad like me?” she said with a laugh.

His hand dropped to slide over her rear as he dove in for a deep kiss.

Kathryn pulled back before he had a chance to really get something started. She admonished, “The detective is on the other side of the door, mister.”

“Want to ask if she’d like to join us?”

“Chakotay!” She swatted him playfully on the shoulder.

“Just kidding.” He grinned and placed a simple kiss on her lips. Suddenly all business, he pulled away and asked, “Can you tell me anything?”

“Yes. We’re gathering a group together here to create my affidavits at thirteen-hundred. I want you there. Is that okay?”

“Of course, it is. Assuming Aicha allows it, I guess.”

“I didn’t give her a choice. I just wanted to make sure you were okay with it.”

“Absolutely.” He rubbed her upper arms. “Who else will be involved?”

“Khurma, Aicha, two other detectives, and I assume a court reporter to record my statements. Whatever we come up with today will be submitted as testimony, whether or not this comes to trial. She has sixteen people she plans to arrest.”

“I’m glad to see that legal action has begun.” He turned and started shuffling through PADDs on his desk. “I’ll get our notes together, including the data that Matt and Owen sent yesterday.”

She watched him for just a second before she asked, “Chakotay?”

“Yes?” he said as he looked at her. “Something wrong?”

“I’m right in trusting her, aren’t I?”

“Do you trust Khurma?”

“Yes,” she said immediately.

“This had to be turned over to the legal authorities at some point. If he trusts her, and he’ll be here this afternoon, I believe you can trust her.”

Kathryn raised an eyebrow. “You’re not just saying that because she’s smitten with you, are you?”

He grinned and gave her a kiss on the cheek. “You’re funny.”

She tapped her commbadge. “Janeway to Jarvin.”

“Yes, Admiral?”

“Would you come into the study, please?”

“On my way.”

Once the channel closed, Kathryn nodded towards Chakotay’s shirt. “Honey, why don’t you change into your green pullover?”

“Why? You say that one looks bad on me.”

“I know.” She gave him a fake smile and then welcomed Justin into the room. “I need you to make arrangements for my family to be elsewhere this afternoon.”

As she was explaining, Chakotay answered an incoming transmission on their comm terminal. He put the caller on hold and waited until she was finished.

“Who is it?” Kathryn asked, noting his serious expression.

“Admiral Flynn.”

Her eyes bugged slightly. “The Judge Advocate General?”

Chakotay nodded. “Would you like me to leave the room?”

“Probably so. Would you be willing to make lunch for your two biggest fans?”

“I’ll fix lunch for my number one fan, and the other can have some, too.” He kissed her cheek. “Don’t forget, my love, you haven’t done anything wrong.”

“Thank you.” Once the door closed behind him, she squared her shoulders and sat down. With a tap of the key, Flynn’s image came up on the viewscreen. “Admiral Flynn, how are you today?”

“I’m curious.” His smile put her at ease immediately. “Call me James, would you?”

“Of course.”

“And may I address you by your given name as well?”

“Yes,” she said with her best diplomatic smile. “What is it that you’re curious about?”

“Over the last twenty-four hours, I’ve received six calls in regards to you.”

“Six?”

“Not that I’m surprised, mind you. I was sure that the efforts of your more,” he hesitated as he decided what word to use, “covert... activities would come to fruition soon, but it raised a few flags to get that many calls in such a short time span.”

“I’m sure it would. May I ask who the calls were from?”

“President Zife was one. You know that he has requested a hearing?”

“Yes,” she said with a sigh. “Do I need to start preparing for that?”

“Yes and no.” He folded his hands on the desk in front of him. “This is a secure line, Kathryn. First of all, you should know that I’m part of Matt and Owen’s group.”

Kathryn was taken aback. “You?”

“Yes, and I respect how much information you have and haven’t given to us. The data that has crossed my desk shows significant discernment on your part.”

“Thank you... I think.”

He gave her another disarming smile. “Relax, Kathryn. What I’m trying to tell you is that I’m on your side and I want to help you in every way I can.”

“I appreciate that, James. What I’d like to do is stall Zife as long as I can. Khurma suggested using my health as an excuse, but I’d really like to avoid that. We don’t want to set a precedent that the President can do this.”

“Unfortunately, the precedent is already set that he can subpoena a Starfleet officer. However, there are certain restrictions.”

“Such as?”

“The Starfleet court has absolute jurisdiction over active duty personnel, so you cannot be brought up on charges in any court that’s not mine.”

“Is a court martial what the President is asking for?”

“Not, exactly. He wants to confront you face-to-face, which I’m not going to let happen. You are protected by this court, Kathryn.”

“That’s good to know. I’m wary of discussing anything directly with him.”

“As you should be. The only legal recourse is to call you in for a preliminary hearing to gather evidence against a criminal complaint. However, he hasn’t made one. Until he does that, I’m not taking any action.”

Kathryn nodded slowly. “And are you going to tell him what he needs to do?”

“I know for a fact that the President has lawyers on his staff whom he can consult.”

“Did he indicate what complaint he might have?”

“Defamation of some sort, but I don’t want you to worry about it at this point.”

“That’s easier said than done, James.”

“Bear with me. I haven’t pulled all of the rabbits out of my hat.”

She sat back and narrowed her eyes. “Who were the other calls from?”

“Matt and Owen both called to ask about legal representation for you. Rest assured that if this gets that far, you will get the best in Starfleet.”

“Thank you.”

“The other calls were from Khurma, a detective from the IPC Police, and a Federation Council member.”

“Council member? Who?”

“One who was curious about the impeachment process and asked if you could initiate it. I told them it needed to come from within the council itself and how to go about it.”

“You’re not going to tell me who?”

“No, I’m not. But don’t worry, the individual is a friend. If he or she wants you to know, they’ll come to you. I just wanted to inform you that the council is looking into the possibility.”

Kathryn relaxed. “Feels like things are falling into place.”

He smiled in return. “Yes, it does. And I believe the IPC detective came to visit you this morning?”

“She’s still here, and we’re creating my affidavits in less than an hour. Do we need to do it under your supervision?”

“Affidavits?” He appeared irritated and started shuffling things on his desk. “She was merely to open a dialogue with you and compare notes. Yes, I need to be there. Where and when?”

“My home at thirteen hundred. Mouline is calling Admiral Khurma to be here – perhaps you could come with him?”

“All right, I’ll clear my calendar for the afternoon. Tell her I’m bringing a court reporter to transcribe it. She can have one, too, but I want an official documentation of this for our own records.”

She blew out a slow breath. "I hope I have enough to say to make it worth your while."

He stopped what he was doing and looked at her. "You're kidding, right?"

"Yes and no. I have a lot of information, but I don't know how much of it is new."

"Ah," he said with a caring tone. "I can understand why you're nervous, Kathryn, but our goal is to turn everything you know into evidence that we can use to press charges against the criminals that are undermining the very fabric of our Federation. Whether we already know what you're going to say or not is beside the point. We're going to document it, take it off your shoulders, and use it."

"Thank you, James. I feel significantly more at ease now that I've spoken with you."

"It is truly my pleasure, Kathryn. I'll see you in about thirty minutes."

After terminating the link, she sat at her desk for a moment and tried to order her thoughts. "All right, Katie... you can do this," she told herself.

She gathered up her things and confidently strode into the main room of her house to see Chakotay putting lunch on the table and Aicha still busily working on her computer.

Without looking up, Aicha said, "Everyone will be here in thirty-five minutes. You ready?"

"Ready as I'll ever be," she replied. "Admiral Flynn and a court reporter from his office will be joining us."

The detective paused to look at Kathryn. "Did you call him?"

"He called me, but I told him what we were doing and he wants to be involved. He said that you could bring a transcriber as well, but he wants to document it for Starfleet's purposes."

"Oh, okay." She scratched the top of her head, further mussing her already messy hair. "I, uh, didn't exactly clear this with him. S'pose I should've."

"Probably, but he didn't seem upset."

Aicha scrunched up her shoulders and looked apologetic. "His office is supposed to represent all Starfleet personnel in legal proceedings."

"You didn't think that any of this could incriminate me. That's his job to think about those things. We're fine, Aicha."

Chakotay interrupted. "Incriminate you?"

“My words, not his,” she assured. “I’m just anxious about Zife. Flynn told me that our president wants to call me in for a preliminary hearing to determine if there is probable cause for a criminal investigation.”

“He’s grasping at straws, Kathryn.”

Aicha shook her head. “He doesn’t have anything on you. He can’t because I don’t. Believe me, if there was something, I’d know about it.”

“While I appreciate your confidence, that doesn’t mean he hasn’t fabricated evidence. Regardless, Flynn is stalling the process with red tape. We’re fine, for now.”

Chakotay asked, “Did Flynn give you anything to worry about?”

“Quite the opposite, actually,” Kathryn said as she walked up to Chakotay and gave him a hug. “He’s got my back.”

Holding her close, he whispered, “So do I.”

“Me, too,” Aicha said as she walked into the dining area.

Chakotay and Kathryn shared a secret smile before acknowledging their new friend. He said, “Lunch is ready, ladies.”

During the quick meal, they talked more about what to expect that afternoon so that by the time her guests were due to arrive, Kathryn felt ready to go.

As she paced across the great room, a thought came to her. “I should be in uniform.”

Aicha said, “We’re recording visuals, but what you’re wearing doesn’t matter.”

“I’d feel more comfortable,” she said as she went upstairs. “Be back in a few.”

When she was gone, Aicha remarked, “Comfortable in a uniform?”

“It’s kind of like her battle armor. She feels more in control when she looks the part.”

The first guests to arrive were the two admirals and the Starfleet court reporter. Chakotay greeted them at the door. “Admiral Khurma, Admiral Flynn, welcome to our home.”

“Always a pleasure, Captain,” Khurma replied, shaking Chakotay’s hand.

Flynn took Chakotay’s hand next. “I’m honored to finally meet you in person, Captain. This is Lieutenant Crawford, my aide.”

“A pleasure, Lieutenant. I’ll show you where to get set up.”

As they left, Flynn addressed Aicha. “Detective Mouline, we need to have a chat about protocol.”

“You’re absolutely right. I got so excited about the prospect of getting into Janeway’s head that I didn’t consider there might be other parties who would use this information.”

He quietly said, “While I’m just as interested in what she has to say, this is not what we agreed on.”

“My apologies, sir. I’ll remember to follow procedure in the future.”

“Thank you.” He smiled politely and asked, “Where is she?”

“Changing into her uniform. She’ll be down in a minute.”

Khurma said, “Let’s follow the others. Do you know where we’re holding this?”

“Her living area is big enough. The captain and I moved their dining table for the reporters to use.”

As Flynn entered the main living room of the house and said, “Wow, this is impressive.”

Chakotay smiled. “Make yourself at home. Can I get you anything?”

“Oh, you don’t need to serve us, Captain. I’ll make some coffee if you have a pot. We might need it.”

He smirked as he went into the kitchen and poured Flynn a cup. “It’s decaffeinated, but I’m guessing that you haven’t spent much time with my wife, have you?”

“No, why?”

Khurma said, “She drinks coffee by the liter.”

“I do not,” Kathryn said as she walked into the room wearing her uniform jacket and a long, black skirt. “I drink it one cup at a time, just like anyone else.”

Chakotay said, “I’ll refrain from commenting.”

“Smart man,” she said with a barely concealed smile and then turned to the other admirals. “Thank you for coming on such short notice. I didn’t think this would turn into such an operation when I suggested we get started today.”

“No problem, Kathryn,” Khurma said as he took her hand and patted the back of it. “How are you feeling?”

“I feel ready to make some changes in our government.”

Aicha commented, “I didn’t realize that skirts were part of the Starfleet uniform.”

“No, but I’m hoping any video of me can be shot from the waist up. Can you believe that after only four days, I’ve gained enough that none of my slacks fit?”

“I was wondering,” Chakotay said as he set out a full coffee service on the counter.

“That’s good, isn’t it?” Khurma asked. “I don’t mean to be rude.”

Aicha asked, “You don’t think it’s rude to tell a woman that it’s good she’s gaining weight?”

“I’m surprised, Detective,” Kathryn mused. “I thought you knew everything about me.”

Flynn said, “It’s her health. You look great, Kathryn.”

“Thank you, but it’s more than that. I’m just over four months pregnant, and I think it’s about time that I start letting people know.”

“Pregnant?” Aicha asked, stunned. “Wow. This is a surprise.”

“Glad to hear that everyone has done a great job of keeping the secret.”

Flynn said, “Congratulations. I see why you’re eager to bring things to closure.”

“Yes, and as my legal advisor, you should know that in another two months, I may be on bed rest for the duration.”

Khurma gasped. “Kathryn? I wasn’t aware of that.”

“We won’t know until we see how my health holds out, but I believe all of you should know in case I’m needed for any official proceedings.”

“Not that I’d want to use this as a ploy against Zife,” Flynn started to say.

“But the timing is pretty good, isn’t it?” Khurma finished.

Chakotay said, “I was thinking the same thing.”

Kathryn nodded. “If Zife pursues this, I could gain a lot of public support by letting my condition be known before any negative press hits.”

“Oh, good idea!” Aicha said with excitement. “I can’t wait to see how all of this plays out, especially with you getting even more pity from the public, Admiral.”

Flynn admonished, “Detective...”

“Sorry, sorry.” Aicha busied herself with setting things up in the living area, just out of earshot from where the rest were standing in the kitchen.

Khurma said, “She’s damn good at what she does, but I tried to keep her away from you as long as I could, Kathryn.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Kathryn said with a wave of dismissal.

Chakotay asked, “Can I get anyone something besides coffee?”

“I’d love a glass of water if you’ll point me in the right direction,” Khurma said.

Kathryn looked on with quiet resolve as everyone scuttled around getting things set up. She wondered if maybe she should call Sue in, but to spring it on her assistant with such short notice wouldn’t be fair. Sue liked to be well prepared, and Kathryn figured that if they needed any follow-up information, they could always subpoena Sue and Harry for further testimony.

Chakotay came over and handed her a cup of coffee. “Doing okay, love?”

She nodded her thanks. “I’ll be fine. This isn’t a deposition, so it’s not like anyone will be cross examining me.”

“That comes later.”

“So this will be good practice.”

He nodded towards her skirt. “You want to replicate new slacks?”

“No, this will be fine. The replicator was down here and as Aicha said, what I’m wearing doesn’t matter.” Looking up at her husband, she said, “Thank you for being here.”

“I wouldn’t be anywhere else.” He rubbed her back and nodded towards the couch. “Looks like they’re ready to get started.”

Kathryn sat down and neatly crossed her legs, giant mug of coffee cradled between her hands. “Where would you like me to begin?”

Aicha said, “Let’s discuss one person and event at a time, starting with Liyal of Dolsia. Please tell us about your interactions with him, in addition to any data you’ve found implicating him in illegal activities.”

She took a long draw of coffee and glanced at Khurma before replying, "I hope you're all comfortable. This will be a long afternoon."

Kathryn spent most of Saturday glued to the Fednews, watching anxiously for something to happen. Gretchen tried to distract her with idle gossip, Phoebe tried to discuss nursery décor, but only Katie had a modicum of success with attracting Kathryn's attention by asking her aunt to help with a puzzle.

She found a news program in which a couple of correspondents were discussing what they called the 'Janeway Factor' in the current political climate. They pontificated that her arrival on the political scene had provided a significant catalyst for change.

Later on, when she grew tired of hearing them speculate on the cause of her leave of absence, she decided to cook dinner for everyone.

After she got out the ingredients, she chopped up the onions and started sautéing them in a skillet. While they were cooking, she chopped the peppers and opened the containers for the sauce. She went back to check on the onions and saw that they were scorched. "Damn it!"

"What's wrong?" Gretchen asked.

"I burned the onions," she shouted, extremely frustrated.

Her mom came into the kitchen and said, "It's all right, honey. I'm sure there's another onion in here. We'll just start over."

"I don't want to start over, mom. I wanted to do it right the first time."

"A bit late for that. However, all we need to do is dump those out and wash the skillet."

Kathryn ran her fingers through her long hair and said, "I need some fresh air." She saw that Chakotay was looking at her with concern, but pretended not to notice and went outside onto the deck.

She leaned her forearms on the railing and looked down at the ocean waves crashing on the rocky shore below, concentrating on the rhythm of the water. She tried to let the sound wash over and surround her, hoping to bring calm to her addled mind.

When she heard the back door slide open and closed, she didn't have to look to see who it was.

He put a shawl around her shoulders, wrapped his arms around her, and kissed the side of her head. "Your mom only wanted to help you, not take over."

"I'm a real bear today, aren't I?" She sighed and leaned against him.

“With good reason, but your family might like to know why.”

“It’s confidential. You know that.”

“I don’t think they’ll be running to the press, and it’s not too hard to figure out that you’re waiting for something major to happen.”

She nodded and closed her eyes, relishing the feel of his arms surrounding her. After a long moment, she shared, “I came out here to look for some peace, but didn’t find any until you showed up.”

Nuzzling her hair, he said, “In you, I found the true meaning of peace.”

“Your angry warrior legend. It’s been a long time.”

“Yes, it has. I should make up a new one.”

“Nah, that would dispel its magic.” She snuggled further into his arms. “I thought of something this week that I’ve been meaning to talk to you about.”

“What’s that?”

“I think we’re a better couple when we’re working together.”

“You do?” he asked, surprised.

“Mmmhmm. I feel energized when we’ve got a common goal. For example, when we used to put our heads together on Voyager to develop a game plan – those were my favorite times to be in command.”

“We make a good team.”

“It’s more than that. I believe that I’m a better commander, officer, or what have you, when I’ve got you as my wingman. You give me confidence, you spark my imagination, and you remind me that I’m never alone.”

“Thank you. That’s quite a compliment.”

She turned in his arms to look up at him. “Whatever we decide to do next in our careers, could we do it together? Even if it’s just writing that textbook we talked about.”

His eyes grew bright as he said, “I’d like that a lot.”

“I don’t know if it’ll work out, but whenever one of us travels, I think both of us should. I really miss you when we’re not together.”

“So do I.” He cradled her cheek in his hand and gave her a soft kiss. “Besides, we’ll have a child to take care of, soon. He might just be a little hellion that will take every last scrap of our combined patience.”

She laughed heartily. “True. The likelihood that you and I will have a perfectly balanced and well-mannered child is slim to none.”

“Why do you say that?” he asked with amusement. “Just because I’m a rebel and you’re a spitfire?”

“A spitfire who was ready to toss a frying pan out the window just because of a burned onion.”

He chuckled and then drew in a deep sigh as he looked out over the ocean.

A moment later, she asked, “What are you thinking about?”

“I’m not sure, really.”

“Tell me,” she urged.

Staring at the waves, he said, “It feels like everything’s about to change, but it also feels like we’re finally coming home. I don’t know how to describe it.”

“We came home to a pretty messed up Federation, and I was voted the one most likely to fix it.”

“And soon, your work will be done.”

Kathryn laid her head on his chest and snuggled into his warmth. “Can I admit that I’m a little scared?”

“Yes, you can. But what are you scared of?”

“Losing all of this.”

He looked down at her. “All of what?”

“Our home. Our life together. What if I took it one step too far with the President? They almost killed you this week.”

Caressing her hair, he said, “Don’t let them get to you, love. We won’t lose any of this – not now. You’re safe, I’m safe, and all the people who have threatened us are about to face the music.”

“And if I end up in prison, too?”

“You won’t. We have enough friends, enough connections in some terrifically high places, that whatever happens, we will be okay.”

Closing her eyes and concentrating on the warmth of him, she said, “Make me believe it.”

He rubbed her back with long, soothing strokes. “Kathryn, I’m not leaving your side, no matter what happens. You are not alone, and if the time comes when you’re hanging onto the last thread, I’ll be there to catch you, and I’ll bring every person I know with me. Want me to name all the people who would do anything for you?”

She finally looked up at him and couldn’t help but smile. “Think you could?”

“Honestly?” he asked. “Probably not. Maybe we should start a Janeway fan club so you could have a roster of all the people who think you’re the top banana.”

“You’re reminding me of something that Deanna told me on Wednesday.”

“Oh?”

“It’s human nature to remember every negative comment that anyone has ever said, but to easily brush off all the positive reinforcement that our friends and loved ones tell us every day.”

“That’s true.” He lightly gasped. “I have an idea!”

“What’s that?”

“Tonight, you should make a list of all the people you’ve met over the last two years who are honorary members of your fan club.”

She rolled her eyes.

“I’m serious. Think about all the world leaders, the council members, the press, the crews of both Voyager and Pioneer, your family, your peers amongst the admiralty... who could you call in a pinch?”

Shrugging, she offered, “All of them?”

“That’s right. And would any of those leaders allow you to go to prison because you had the guts to stand up for the Federation?”

She scratched her eyebrow. “I can think of about sixteen, but it’s my hope that they’ll go to prison before me.”

“There you go.” He gave her a tight hug and said, “Come on. Let’s go tell your family what’s going on.”

“I suppose.”

Arm in arm, they walked inside the house to find Phoebe, Mike, and Gretchen all busily making dinner. Katie was setting the table, deciding exactly who would be sitting where and what color napkin they'd get.

Gretchen said, “I didn't mean to upset you, Katie.”

“I know, mom. I'm just feeling a little out of sorts right now.”

“We can tell,” Phoebe said gently. “Anything we can do to help?”

Kathryn raised her chin and explained, “I'd like to tell you what's going on, and why I'm being difficult today.”

They all stopped moving, except for Katie who had started making place cards. Gretchen asked, “Can you? I don't want you to breach security.”

She shrugged and said, “I don't think any of you will run out and tell anyone.”

Mike said, “You have my word, Kathryn.”

Phoebe and Gretchen nodded, as well.

Kathryn pointed to the viewscreen in the great room. “The Inter-planetary police are about to arrest over a dozen people tied to illegal activities including my abduction, illegal government contracts, treason, and fraud.”

Phoebe ran over and hugged Kathryn. “Oh, wow, sis! This is fantastic news! Finally!”

Kathryn looked over Phoebe's shoulder at her mom and saw that she was dabbing at her eyes. Mike had made a fist and was practically dancing as he said, “Yes!” over and over again.

Chakotay laughed. “Kathryn, I think this is indicative of what type of reaction you can expect from the entire Federation.”

“I sure hope so,” she said as she gave her sister another squeeze and then stepped back. “Thank you.”

Mike asked, “What are you worried about? Isn't this what you've wanted?”

“Yes, but I'm concerned that they're going to point fingers back at me, accusing me of slander.”

Gretchen offered, “Cornered animals will always lash out, but it's a smart trainer who knows how to stay out of their reach.”

“That’s good advice, mom.” She started pacing. “And this leave of absence is one way I’m trying to do that. Also, we’re stalling the President in a mire of red tape because he’s ready to bring me up on charges. I just hope all of this hits the fan soon.”

“It will, my love.” Chakotay kissed the top of her head as he walked by her to go into the kitchen. “What can I do to help?”

“You can go sit with your wife,” Gretchen instructed.

“You sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure.” She waved him out of the kitchen. “I’ve never seen a world leader look so forlorn. I dare say she needs about all the tender loving care you can dish out.”

“Mom,” Kathryn chided. “For starters, I am not forlorn, I’m anxious. And second, I am not a world leader.”

“Could’ve fooled me.” Gretchen fought against smiling. “Just last week I saw someone who bears a striking resemblance to you addressing the Federation Council.”

She shook her head, slightly amused. “Fine. Call me whatever you like.”

Chakotay tugged on her arm until she was curled up next to him on the sofa.

Phoebe asked, “What is it about being around family that reduces the indomitable Admiral Janeway to a petulant brat?”

Kathryn replied, “The brattiness of her baby sister.”

“Take it as a compliment,” Chakotay said as he rubbed the tight muscles on his wife’s back. “She’s not wearing her command façade around us.”

“I do not have a special façade.”

“Of course not, dear.”

Mike laughed. “I’ve seen her fight, Chakotay. You might want to be careful.”

“Oh, I think I can risk it. She’d miss my backrubs if she knocked me out.”

“True,” Kathryn said with a sigh as she resituated her body to give him better access to her shoulders. “This feels really good.”

“I think what might help you relax is a long soak in the tub. You haven’t done that for a few days.”

“Mmmmm, yes. I might fall asleep though.”

“I’ll keep watch, and the sleep would do you good.”

“I’ll sleep after these arrests happen.”

Chakotay waited until the rest of her family had gone back into the kitchen before he leaned close and whispered into her ear, “I’ve got ways of making you relax, my love.”

With a deep hum, she replied, “That would certainly do the trick, even if for just a little while.”

He kissed the side of her neck, just behind her ear, drawing a tiny shiver out of her. “It’s a date.”

Kathryn looked up from her bath to see Chakotay walk into the bathroom. “Don’t worry, I haven’t fallen asleep yet.”

“Are you even trying to relax?”

She twisted the big sponge, nearly in danger of tearing it in half. “My mind won’t stop.”

“What are you thinking about?”

Tossing the sponge into the water, she leaned back and closed her eyes. “Patience, and how I have none.”

He leaned over and kissed the top of her head. “Stop worrying. It doesn’t do any good.”

“I suppose you’re right.” Kathryn watched as he left the bathroom and then relaxed into the deep, warm water.

An idea about how to gain a little public support popped into her mind. “Honey?” she called out.

A moment later he stood in the doorway, wearing only his slacks and an undershirt. “Yes, my love?”

“I think I should go shopping for clothes tomorrow.”

“All right. What do we need to do?”

“I could just replicate what I need, but this is an opportunity to let my condition leak out.”

He nodded. “And just before all hell breaks loose in the media, too.”

“Also might be nice to have something to wear this week should I need it.”

With a wink, he replied, “No need to wear anything on my account.”

Kathryn rolled her eyes. “Good thing you’re out of my reach or you’d get splashed again. Would you do something for me?”

“Anything.”

Smiling, she asked, “Would you talk to Mark about arranging my little shopping excursion? I think he’s the one on duty right now.”

“Yes, he is. Where do you want to go?”

“I’m not sure. Maybe Phoebe has an idea. Think she’s still up?”

“I’ll check. Want to go after lunch?”

“Sure, and don’t let them make it so secure that I beam into a closed store. For this to work, I have to be seen.”

“All right.” Before he walked away, he added, “Now relax, would you?”

She called after him, “You’re gonna have to make me.”

“You can count on it,” he called back.

By the time Chakotay returned to the bedroom, Kathryn was completely naked, stretched out in the middle of the bed, propped up on her elbows, and bathed in moonlight.

He said, “My, my, my. What do we have here?”

“You said not to wear any clothes on your account, so here I am.”

“So I see,” he noted as he peeled off his undershirt. “Your baby bump is quite noticeable like that.”

Looking down at her belly, she said, “It has definitely grown a lot this week. I now look obviously pregnant.”

“Yes, you do, Mrs. Janeway.” As he dropped his pants and climbed onto the large, white bed to join her, he asked, “What do you have to say for yourself?”

“It seems that I was a little promiscuous, Mr. Chakotay.”

“Mmmhmmm,” he hummed as he caressed her rounded, swollen tummy. “This is amazing.”

“Think so?”

“Our baby is in here. We created a little human.”

“Yesterday, Joe said he’s about sixteen centimeters long.”

Chakotay looked up at her and smiled. “You’ve started referring to him as a male.”

“After my vision quest.” She crooked her finger and said, “Come here, honey.”

He scooted up higher on the bed and cradled her face in his palm. “Hi there.”

“Hi,” she said with a soft smile. “Come here often?”

“Every time I’m with you, babe.”

“Babe?” She laughed. “You’re calling Vice-Admiral Kathryn Janeway a babe?”

“A babe is a babe, regardless of rank, but I’ll bet that I’m not the only one who thinks so. I hear that she’s easy on the eyes.”

“Mmmhmm, and who do you hear that from?”

“A guy hears these things about promiscuous female celebrities.” He leaned in and planted a soft kiss on her lips.

She moaned at the intimate touch, letting him lower her to the bed. Her arms enfolded him, holding him close as the unhurried kiss grew deeper and more sensual.

Chakotay was stretched out along side her, cuddling close, but being careful not to lie on top of her. His lips wandered from her mouth down to her neck, eliciting a gasp as she gave him further access to her neck.

“You know right where to kiss me, don’t you?”

“Practice makes perfect.” He nibbled gently along her collar bone, taking her wrists and holding them lovingly down to the bed.

“Ooooh.” Kathryn arched her chest towards him as his mouth found her breast.

“Your nipples are growing darker, my love.”

“I noticed. Looks strange.” She watched as he suckled her, alternating between licking and taking her full aureole into his mouth.

“Looks incredibly sensual, Kathryn. You’re a woman heavy with child, a fertile body of sexuality. Nothing could be more erotic.”

“Sounds like something you’d say,” she said with a laugh.

He stopped suckling for a moment to look up at her. “You’re not into this, are you?”

“Quite the opposite, actually. Carry on.”

“You’re sure?”

“Do I need to ask my husband twice to make love to me?”

“No,” he admonished lightly. “Of course not. You just seem distracted.”

“I am, and that’s why we’re doing this. Remember?”

“Then I need to figure out what focuses your attention the most.”

“Penetration.”

He started to say something and then closed his mouth, smiling.

“What?”

“That’s not what I was thinking of, but I hate to disagree because that’s my favorite part, too.”

“Oh? What were you going to suggest?”

“Oral sex.”

“Mmmm, yes, that is nice. Were you thinking of me giving or receiving?”

“Receiving. I don’t think you get off on giving it.”

Her eyes widened suggestively. “Not always, but it definitely focuses my thoughts. We could try doing it at the same time, you know.”

He did a double take. “Kathryn?”

Laughing nervously, she replied, “It would definitely take concentration.”

“Um, yes, it would.” Chakotay blinked rapidly and took a deep breath. “Wow, that turns me on.”

“Then, let’s try it.”

“I’d love to, but not tonight. I’d want to shower first.”

“Oh, yeah,” she frowned. “You have a point.”

“You continually surprise me.”

She winked at him. “Good, because you’re stuck with me for the rest of your life.”

“Something I am truly thrilled about.” His mouth hovered over hers again. “If I keep kissing you, you won’t have any choice but to focus on that.”

“Then before you start, let me tell you that I don’t want you to be gentle.”

He pulled his head back a little. “You don’t? You’re four months pregnant.”

“I’m sturdy enough. Make me forget about everything else, command my attention.”

“I… think I can handle that.”

“You’re not sure?” She rubbed his muscular biceps. “You seem pretty tough. I hear you’re a capable soldier.”

“Oh? And who do you hear that from?”

She shrugged. “Women talk about these things, especially when they involve sexy male celebrities.”

“Would you believe me if I said it was all luck? Being in the right place at the right time, serving under the right captain?”

“Not a chance.” She tapped his chest. “I happen to know that captain and she thinks you’re the tops.”

“Only she would know,” he said as he nibbled along her lips. “I find myself wanting to treat you with loving reverence, not be rough with you.”

“All right,” she acquiesced gently. “Probably a better idea anyway.”

“I didn’t say that I would, though.” He grabbed hold of her wrists again and pinned them to the bed as he took her mouth firmly and forced his tongue between her lips.

She gasped under his assault, but quickly responded by kissing him as hard as he was kissing her.

Chakotay rose up and straddled her legs, positioning his body to give the baby some breathing room. Kathryn, however, didn't receive the same courtesy as he compressed his body tightly against her chest, effectually trapping her body under the power of his muscular frame.

Kathryn made a show of fighting against him, but he knew she wasn't being earnest about it. He closed his hands around her wrists and continued to ravage her mouth, insinuating one knee between her legs and then the other, forcing her legs to spread apart. She moaned loudly as his penis made contact with her mons.

Loudly, he whispered, "Quiet, Kathryn!"

"It's been over a week since we've done this!" she complained.

"We have guests," he said before he dove in and suckled her breast hard.

She felt a rush of wetness between her legs as his mouth tormented her breast. "Can't we erect a dampening field?"

"Oh, I'll give you an erection, Admiral," he said as he pressed his penis firmly against her. "But if you moan, I'll stop moving."

"You'd torment me like that?"

"You'd better believe it." He pushed her hands together above her head so he could hold them with only one of his, and then he used his free hand to grab hold of her breast. Sucking and licking, he stirred up an intense fire within her belly.

She opened her mouth wide as if to make sounds, but managed to keep quiet. Her pelvis thrust up, even as he pressed her legs open wider, opening her most intimate areas to him.

His mouth switched breasts and his free hand dropped to plunge his fingers into her dampness. Almost roughly, he thrust them in and out a few times and then began to spread her lubrication all over her vulva. "I hope you're ready, woman, because you're about to get stuffed full of my dick."

"Oh," she couldn't say anything more as he coated her clitoris with her own juices.

"Quiet!" he ordered.

She nodded earnestly, her eyes clamped shut as he positioned his penis at the opening of her vagina.

Barely penetrating, he held his position and asked, "You like that, Admiral?"

Nodding, she tried to lift her pelvis further to bring him deeper, but he had her spread so wide that she had no leverage to move. "Please," she begged.

He gave her a centimeter more and demanded, “Beg for it.”

“Please, Captain. I need you.”

“What you need is a good fuck, Admiral,” he said as he gave her a tiny bit more.

“Yessssss,” she practically hissed as she tried to draw him in further.

He withdrew and plunged hard, all the way inside her, causing her to moan uncontrollably. Once she did, he stopped all movement and said, “I can see we’re going to have a problem here.”

“Sorry, sir.” She squirmed on the impaled penis, trying to get what she needed.

Chakotay took both of her wrists again, this time bringing them to lie on each side of her head.

“Don’t move your hands.”

“But…”

“I need to hold up my own weight and I don’t want to hurt you, love. Just pretend I’m holding them down, all right?”

“All right,” she said as she made two fists and stuffed her hands under her pillow.

He braced his hands on either side of her and said, back in character, “I can see the only way I’m going to keep you quiet is to fill up your mouth, woman.”

“I’ll be quiet, captain. I promise.”

“Oh you will, will you?” He pulled out, inched in slightly, withdrew, inched in again, pulled out, and then plunged deep, causing her to moan in pleasure at the intense intrusion.

“That’s what I thought,” he said with a smirk.

“I didn’t make a sound!”

Getting up in her face, he said, “Don’t lie to your lover, Admiral.”

“Did I?” she asked earnestly.

He raised his eyebrows as he repeated his early movements, barely moving inside her and then giving her an all-out penetration.

She started to moan and then caught herself. “Damn!”

“I warned you.” He leaned forward, spreading her legs even wider. “Now I’m going to have to gag you.”

“With what?” she asked, pretending to be nervous.

“My tongue.”

“Oh!” she gasped and then realized too late her mistake as his lips clamped over hers and his tongue swept through her mouth.

As his penis began to move, his tongue did too, thrusting in and out of her in irregular and unexpected patterns. He varied the depth and angle of his penetration, stirring her higher and higher into what felt like another plane of existence.

Kathryn was out of her mind with uncontrollable arousal, exactly where she wanted and needed to be. Just when she was about to come, he’d change his motion and prolong the ecstasy, bringing her down before forcing her back up to another high. He repeated this several times until she was shaking and trembling with unrelenting need.

She couldn’t help but moan into his mouth and forget that her hands were to stay put. They tangled into his hair, rubbed over his back and arms, held his face, and then remembered where they were supposed to be.

The stimulation of his thrusts against the front wall of her vagina was her undoing. She tried to keep from coming, but nothing she could do would stop it. An orgasm the size of an earthquake flowed over her from deep within her center, rippled out to her fingers and toes, and then flowed back again, causing her body to spasm and shudder uncontrollably with pleasure, all of it focusing on her vagina, his penis, and an unusual hardness within her belly.

She felt him spurt within her just as he ceased kissing her. His face contorted in pleasure for his last few, unhurried thrusts. Finally, he exhaled in relief as he rested his forehead against hers and gave her cheek a soft kiss.

“Feel the baby, honey.”

“What?”

Her hands flew to her stomach. “Feel it. Wow, that’s... something.”

He withdrew and did as she asked, caressing her baby bump. “It’s so hard,” he said in wonder.

“The uterus has contracted.”

“Is that a bad thing?”

“God, no.” She closed her eyes, enjoying the pleasurable feeling. “It feels amazing.”

“I did that?”

“Mmmhmm. You definitely did that. My uterus always contracts from an orgasm, but because of its size right now, the sensation is really strong.”

He smiled and kissed her belly. “I love you.”

“Love you, too. And thank you for that.”

“You’re welcome. It was kind of fun to role-play.”

Nodding, she stretched and said, “Now, I’m sleepy.”

He pulled the covers up over her and said, “Then sleep.”

“Mmmhmm, but I’m sticky.”

Chuckling, he slid out of bed. “Be right back. Don’t move.”

“Don’t think I could if I tried.”

He wet a washcloth with warm water and returned to the bed where he peeled down the covers and used it to wipe their combined juices off her legs.

“Aww, you didn’t need to do that.”

“I like to clean up my messes,” he said as he covered her back up and tucked her in.

“Mmmhmm,” she hummed sleepily.

By the time he used the bathroom and crawled back into bed, she was sound asleep. He cuddled up close, kissed her temple, and whispered, “Sweet dreams, my love.”

Phoebe asked, “Are you sure that’s what you want to wear?”

Kathryn looked down at her knit dress. “What’s wrong with this?”

“It doesn’t like very admiral-like.”

“I only look admiral-like in my uniform, and the coat hides the baby bump too much for what we’re trying to accomplish today.”

Phoebe clicked her tongue. “Well, that dress makes it more than obvious, and not in a good way.”

Mark walked into the great room. “Are you ready to go shopping, ladies?”

Phoebe rubbed her hands together and blew out a deep breath. “This will be my first public outing with my venerated sister. Can anyone ever be ready for that?”

“Phoebes!” Kathryn rolled her eyes at her sister, and then turned to Chakotay. “Are you sure you don’t want to come?”

He made a face and asked, “Do you really need me to?”

“No, just thought you might have fun.”

“I’ll just watch you on the news,” he said as he pointed to the viewscreen. “Can’t wait to hear what you have to say.”

“I’m not entirely sure myself,” she mumbled. “All right, Mark. Let’s get this show on the road.”

Chakotay waved. “Have fun, ladies.”

Mark said, “Your estimation of a show is about right, Admiral. We have several uniformed security officers standing outside the shop attracting attention.”

“Let’s do it.”

He called for a beamout. They rematerialized on the sidewalk amidst stares and gasps from the nearby pedestrians.

Kathryn smiled and waved at the onlookers, trying to act as if it was a perfectly normal occurrence for her to beam onto a semi-crowded city sidewalk in the middle of a Sunday afternoon. She patted Phoebe’s back and asked, “Shall we?”

“Don’t we need to wait for the press or something?”

“They’ll be here when we leave. They always are.”

The two sisters walked inside the store and the five people inside were frozen in place as they gawked at the new arrivals.

Kathryn said with amusement, “Carry on, ladies. We’re just here to shop.”

The clerk at the counter stuttered, “Ad...Ad...Ad...miral!”

With her best smile, Kathryn walked up and touched the young lady's arm. "Would you be able to help me?"

"With what?" she asked in near shock.

"I need a new wardrobe," Kathryn said as she touched her baby bump. "My sister here tells me this is the best maternity shop on the west coast."

The young lady swallowed hard. "I... I should call the owner."

"What's your name, dear?"

"Rebecca, ma'am," she said as she touched her personal communicator. "She'll want to be here for this."

"I'm sure you'll do fine, Rebecca, but whatever makes you feel most comfortable. We'll just look around a bit, if that's okay?"

"Oh, yeah! Of course!"

Kathryn shared a smile with her sister as they started looking at the clothes while listening to the exchange the young lady had with the owner.

Rebecca whispered, "You should get down here, right now!"

"I'm sure you can handle it, whatever it is."

"Jodie! We have a celebrity in the store!"

"Who?"

Rebecca whispered, "Admiral Janeway."

"Who? I can't hear you."

"Admiral Janeway!" she whispered as loud as she could.

Kathryn tried not to laugh, and shared an amused look with another customer.

"In my store?" Jodie asked.

"Yes!" the young clerk replied with clenched teeth. "Now get down here!"

"That means she's...?"

Kathryn turned and, in her distinctively husky voice, said, "Yes, Jodie. I am."

“Admiral! I’ll be right there, ma’am.”

An hour later, they were finished and Kathryn was wearing a new outfit that accentuated her condition quite beautifully. They let Mark make arrangements to have their new clothes transported back to the house while she and Phoebe made plans to walk half a block to a pastry shop for dessert.

Kathryn shook hands with both Jodie and Rebecca, saying, “Thank you so much for your help today. It’ll be nice to have some clothes that fit me again.”

“And you’ll look beautiful in them, Admiral,” Jodie replied. “If you need anything else, an outfit for a special occasion or whatever, let us know and we’ll be happy to help.”

“I will definitely do that. Have a wonderful afternoon.”

“We already have!” Rebecca said with a grin.

Kathryn laughed and waved to the other ladies in the store. “Good luck with your shopping.”

Justin met her at the door. “Guess what?”

“Press?”

“Of course. We attracted quite the crowd. They’ve all been asking me for comments, but I haven’t given them anything.”

Kathryn licked her lips and said, “Let’s go.”

Phoebe said, “I’m kind of nervous.”

“Come on, it’s not that bad,” Kathryn said as she looped arms with her sister.

As soon as Justin opened the door, cameras started snapping holoimages. She waved at everyone and started walking down the sidewalk.

“Admiral! Admiral! A comment, please?! Is it true that you’ve taken a leave of absence? Are you on maternity leave? A moment of your time, Admiral! Are you carrying Captain Chakotay’s baby? Admiral, do you have a statement for us?”

She whispered to her sister. “Whose child do they think I’m carrying?”

Phoebe shrugged. “You’d better tell them or there will be rumors flying.”

Kathryn turned to the reporters and held up her hands for them to stop. They quieted immediately and waited for her to speak.

“To answer some of your questions... Yes, Captain Chakotay and I are expecting a child, and yes, I have taken a leave of absence from Starfleet.” She pointed to a reporter. “Your question?”

“Why did you take leave just as the Council was starting to address your concerns, Admiral?”

“As I’ve said before, my job was to take information back to the Council. What they do with it is up to them.” She pointed to another. “Your question?”

“Can you tell us what prompted your leave?”

“Concerns about my health and well-being, which I will not explain further. Next question?”

There was momentary silence until someone asked, “If your safety is at risk, why are you here today?”

“Because I needed new clothes and I’m not about to go into hiding. I did, however, enjoy my week of rest.”

“Does that mean you’re returning to work?” someone asked.

“No, I’m afraid not. The issues facing the Federation are entirely in the hands of the Council now. Fleet Admiral Khurma will let me know if they need me again.”

An older gentleman who was not a member of the press asked, “Admiral? Have you addressed the biggest issue facing our Federation yet?”

Gently, Kathryn asked, “What issue is that, sir?”

“Our President,” he said as if it was obvious.

“As a Starfleet officer, I’m sworn to uphold the Constitution of the Federation, the decisions of the Council, the orders of our commander-in-chief, and the rights of the citizens.”

“So, you’re giving up?”

Clicking her tongue, she shook her head. “As I said before, the issues facing the Federation are entirely in the hands of the Council. I have provided them and my commanding officer all of the information that I have gathered from the planets that I visited. I am only one human voice, albeit a very loud one,” she said with a wink. “I believe that we should just let the system work.”

A reporter asked, “What are you going to do now, Admiral?”

Kathryn pointed down the sidewalk and said, "I'm going to have a pastry. I hear that they are wonderful."

It wasn't until late Tuesday afternoon that she got a call from Admiral Flynn. She was tense as she sat down in front of her comm terminal.

"Kathryn," he said with delight. "It's happening right now."

"What, exactly?"

"The IPC is making arrests."

"Zife?"

"Not yet. That's in Dooha's hands, but we definitely expect a strong reaction."

"Have you notified Starfleet Command?"

"Well, no. Why?"

She took a shaky breath. "I have a gut feeling that reaction might be a violent one."

"Whose reaction?"

"The President's of course." She scratched an imaginary itch on her arm and then tapped the desktop repeatedly with her fingertips. "Although, I guess that he's not prone to violence himself. That's why these sixteen arrests are taking place, because they're the ones who've done his dirty work."

"Kathryn," he said patiently.

"What?"

"Are you usually this nervous before a mission?"

"No, but the people who have made my life a living hell are about to be exposed. I don't know what to expect."

"They'll probably not say anything except, 'no comment.' At least, that's what I'd advise them if I were their lawyer."

She took a deep breath. "Put me on the bridge of a starship during a battle and I know exactly what to do. This is an entirely different animal."

“Is your husband with you?”

“Yes, why?”

“I just want to make sure you’re not alone.”

“I’m never alone, James, because of the people about to be arrested.”

“Then this should put you at ease. The Federation has designated D’Al Sagra as the Attorney General for these proceedings, and he’ll be giving a press conference in thirty minutes. Following that, I’ll be answering any questions in regards to your involvement.”

“Good, I don’t want to speak. It would look like I planned this.”

“Right. Now go sit in that beautiful living room of yours and put your feet up. I’d suggest a bottle of champagne or carafe of coffee, but I don’t think either would be a good idea.”

“No, not exactly what the doctor would prescribe.”

He smiled with understanding. “Listen, call me if you get nervous about anything you see or hear on the news. I’m going to be putting out public relations fires, but you’re my top priority.”

“I appreciate that, James.”

“You’re welcome. Now relax.”

She harrumphed and closed the connection. Walking into the great room, she activated the viewscreen and announced, “I’m turning on the Fednews. All hell is about to break loose, probably is already.”

Gretchen looked up from her book, Phoebe and Katie stopped coloring, and Chakotay came out of the kitchen, asking, “Will the arrests be caught on camera?”

“Not sure, but there’s a press conference in thirty minutes.” She blew out a frustrated breath when she couldn’t find any broadcasts that were related.

“It’ll probably take a few minutes for the press to catch up,” Gretchen noted.

Kathryn rubbed her arms as she paced back and forth in front of the windows. “We should call Tom and Lanna – they’ll want to watch, too.”

Gently, Chakotay said, “Kathryn.”

“Maybe Owen and Matt? Who else needs to know? The news will probably replay it incessantly so it probably doesn’t matter who sees it live. After the press conference will be questions. I’ll assume the commentary will go on for hours...”

“Kathryn, I’ll call them, but you need to sit down before your blood pressure spikes.” He gave her a stern look before heading to the study to use the comm.

Phoebe asked, “It’s really happening?”

“Yes, it is.” She kept glancing at the viewscreen where a program on the terraforming activities in the beta quadrant was being played. “Damn, I wish I knew what was going on.”

Gretchen stood up and walked over to her older daughter. Taking her arm, she said, “Katie, sit with me.”

“I’m worried, Mom.”

“I know,” she said as they sat down together, their arms linked. “But worrying doesn’t solve anything. Tell me a story about the Delta Quadrant – a time when someone accused you of a falsehood.”

“That happened more often than I care to remember.”

Chakotay came back in and asked, “What did?”

Gretchen said, “I’ve asked her to tell me a story from Voyager when she was falsely accused.”

Kathryn explained, “It was different out there, mom. What alien races thought of us didn’t matter because we could just move on. I can’t do that here.”

Phoebe asked, “Does it really matter what people think of you?”

“No, of course not.” Kathryn frowned. “Unless I decide go into politics, but that’s going to depend a lot on how this turns out.”

Chakotay offered, “There was the time when the three aliens were impersonating us. You cared what people thought of us, then.”

“Impersonating you?” Phoebe asked with a laugh. “That sounds like a good story.”

“It is,” Chakotay replied with a smirk. “I’ll tell you sometime. But an even better example of false accusation was when Annika overdosed herself on data and had Kathryn and me convinced that we were conspiring against each other.”

Kathryn said, “I was much more concerned about how you’d lied to me than I was about what you thought of me.”

“You lied to her?” Gretchen asked.

“No,” Chakotay replied, giving his wife a disparaging look. “Annika convinced each of us that the other had some sort of crazy master plan of deception regarding Voyager’s presence in the Delta Quadrant.”

“Don’t forget, honey.” Kathryn held up her thumb and forefinger. “I was this close to throwing you in the brig.”

“For bringing the Maquis rebellion into the farthest reaches of the galaxy?”

“No, because my best friend had made a fool out of me. That kind of thing doesn’t sit well with this woman.”

He held up his hands in mock surrender. “Truce.”

Kathryn winked at him and said, “The one accusation that affected me the most had some truth to it. It was Joe’s accusation of conspiracy when I erased a portion of his memory.”

“Ah.” Chakotay nodded with understanding and sat down near little Katie. “That was a difficult situation.”

“Your doctor, Joe?” Gretchen asked.

Kathryn nodded. “His program went into a causality loop because he had to choose between saving the lives of two people with the exact same injury, the exact same chance of survival. When his subroutines couldn’t handle the fact that he’d allowed one patient to die in order to save another, I made the decision to erase his memory of the incident.”

Patting her daughter’s knee, Gretchen said, “Sounds reasonable.”

Phoebe said, “Choosing one life over another... that’s a little too close to home, isn’t it?”

Kathryn rubbed her mouth and nodded. “A choice I couldn’t make with Dad and Justin, letting them both die.”

Chakotay inhaled quickly and then, with sudden realization, said, “Oh, wow. That makes a lot more sense now.”

She nodded. “I couldn’t take listening to the Doctor’s tirade when I’d had the same argument with myself for years.”

“Oh, Katie,” Gretchen said to her daughter. “The situation with your father was out of your control.”

Kathryn ran her fingers through her hair. “In the case with Joe, there were too many clues that we couldn’t erase, and he kept rediscovering what I’d done. He made some pretty strong accusations.”

“What did you do?” Phoebe asked.

“Eventually, I decided to let nature take its course... as much as you can call a hologram’s internal diatribe part of nature.”

Chakotay said, “It was remarkable how much he advanced in what could be considered sentience during that situation. He had to cope with the fact that, sometimes, there are no-win situations that result in death.”

“Wouldn’t that be something that all Starfleet officers would have to understand?”

“All commanders, yes,” Kathryn replied. “But he wasn’t programmed with that ability. He developed it through experience, and that’s why he is so rare and so much more than just a computer program.”

Gretchen tucked Kathryn’s hair behind her ear. “Good things can come out of bad situations, sweetheart, and I believe that’s going to happen today, too.”

“Mom, your faith in the good of all people amazes me.”

“You’ve got the same faith, Katie. I see it in you.”

“Thank you, but like you said yesterday, a cornered animal will attack.”

Chakotay announced, “Here it is,” and they all focused on the viewscreen.

A reporter said, “We’re broadcasting live from Earth at the Federation Headquarters building in San Francisco. Taking the podium now is UFP Attorney Sagra.”

An Efrosian male set a PADD down on the podium and looked intently at the gathered members of the press. “Ladies and gentlemen, my name is D’Al Sagra, and I am the UFP Attorney presiding over Sector 001 through Sector 020. I have been appointed as interim Attorney General in order to prosecute sixteen individuals who have been accused of crimes against the Federation.

“The infractions have taken place in multiple jurisdictions with the majority occurring here on Earth or against Earth citizens. Because of the extensive scope of the situation, the Inter-Planetary Criminal Police Organization has been involved and they have just completed a two-year investigation that has uncovered a substantial amount of evidence.

“Over the last three hours, sixteen individuals have been taken into custody and are being held at various locations throughout the Alpha Quadrant. The names of the individuals are as follows: from Bolarus IX, Zim Haro, Lin Walgot, Unter Dryx, Lysia Harth, Gan Wreth, Arlin Gerni, Dirx Lelec, and Representative Chal Sympor; from Dolsia, Povlin, Letro, and Representative Liyal; from Moropa, Yinnee, Kreshil, Taric, Erdo, and Representative Jorl.”

The press began shouting questions until Sagra gave them a look that clearly showed impatience before he continued with his prepared statement. “The charges against these individuals include Fraud, Embezzlement, Treason, Malfeasance, Murder, Kidnapping, Aggravated Assault and Battery, Torture, Extortion, Blackmail, Harassment, Conspiracy, and Obstruction of Justice.”

Sagra set the PADD down and said, “Trial dates for the detainees will be set at individual hearings to take place over the next ten days. Further details on these charges will be made available to the press following this conference. I am not at liberty to make any further comments at this time; however, I will turn this podium over to Secretary General Dooha of the Federation Council who has another announcement.”

While they were waiting for Dooha, Kathryn looked at Chakotay and exhaled an unsteady breath. “I’d like a copy of those details.”

“I’m sure it’ll be in the evening news report.”

“I should ask James for the unabridged version.”

Dooha took his place and said, “Thank you, Mr. Sagra.” He raised his chin as he began to speak. “Today at fourteen hundred, Federation Standard Time, a closed general session of the Federation Council passed an order to initiate impeachment proceedings against President Min Zife.”

The press gasped and started shouting questions. While Dooha waited for them to quiet down, Kathryn pressed her fist against her mouth, suddenly feeling nauseous.

Chakotay asked, “Kathryn? Are you all right?”

“I’m okay.”

“You’re pale.”

“Mmhmm,” she replied and pointed to the viewscreen. “Let’s listen.”

Dooha continued, “A legislative hearing will convene starting next week to hear the evidence and deliberate on the charges against President Zife. Until a final decision is reached, the President has been placed on suspension.

“Because of the number of individuals involved in today’s arrests and the positions they hold within the Federation government, it is the Council’s decision to appoint an Interim President to assume all responsibilities therein. Madame Truov of Coridan will take office at an official ceremony in just under one hour.

“I am unable to make further comments until after the Council has reached a verdict. Until that time, I have asked Starfleet’s Judge Advocate General, Admiral James Flynn, to answer questions and guide the Federation citizens through the process.”

Kathryn took a shaky breath as James took center stage. “You could’ve warned me,” she muttered to the viewscreen.

James said, “Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I will answer your questions to the best of my ability, but know that I cannot divulge confidential information. First question?”

A reporter asked, “What can you tell us about the impeachment process, Admiral? Has Zife been arrested?”

“President Zife has not been arrested, but he has been notified of the potential charges he faces. At this point, I suspect that he is meeting with his lawyers to prepare a defense.”

Another member of the press asked, “Do we know how long Truov will be in office?”

“I would say that depends on a number of factors. However, if the Federation needs a new president, an election will take place.”

“Are there any rumors about who might run for office?”

“None that I’ve heard. Next question?”

“Have the council members who’ve been arrested been removed from office?”

James turned to Dooha. “Can you answer that?”

“I can,” the older man said as he stepped up. “Representatives Liyal, Jorl, and Sympor have not officially been removed from office, but in order to vote, they have to be present.”

“What is the process for removing them?”

Dooha replied, “That is up to the worlds they represent, as each has their own method for appointing or electing their representatives.”

A reporter asked, “Have either of you spoken to Admiral Janeway, and if so, what is her response?”

Kathryn crossed her arms and dipped her chin.

James answered, “Admiral Janeway is watching us from her home. I spoke to her earlier today and her response was that of quiet anticipation. As I’m sure you realize, some of the charges are for crimes committed against her and her family. She does not take any of this lightly and has some very specific concerns about the outcomes of the upcoming hearings.”

“Admiral, can you elaborate on the crimes committed against Janeway’s family?”

He picked up the PADD, skimmed it and nodded. “The information you will be receiving details that the charges of kidnapping and assault include both Admiral Janeway and her husband, Captain Chakotay.”

One young reporter butted in with, “Captain Chakotay was kidnapped?”

James replied carefully, “Yes, and the only details that he has given us permission to share are that the incident happened on May 20th and that he was returned within five minutes.”

“They day before the Admiral took her leave of absence?”

“That’s correct,” James replied. “It was Starfleet’s decision that she and her family be secured for their protection.”

Casually, a reporter asked, “Then why was she out shopping over the weekend?”

James chuckled. “Because she is Kathryn Janeway, and to paraphrase her, she’s not about to be locked up indefinitely.”

They all joined him in quiet laughter until another question was asked. “What has her involvement been in these arrests and the impeachment process?”

“Admiral Janeway has done her job.”

“Does that mean she provided evidence?”

James elaborated, “She wrote reports based on her conversations with planetary leaders and she gave statements about her interactions with some of the individuals.”

“Is she relieved that these arrests have been made?”

“I certainly hope so.” James looked at the camera as if he was looking directly at Kathryn, and then told the press, “Thank you all for your time. The information packets you receive will have instructions for how to reach me for further inquiries. Good day.”

The Federation logo came up on the view screen for only a moment before two commentators started dissecting all that had just been said. Chakotay immediately turned it off and everyone in the room focused on Kathryn.

She rubbed her eyes and pinched the bridge of her nose, staring blankly out the window.

Phoebe broke the silence. “Well?”

“Well what?” Kathryn replied, her eyes shifting to look at her sister.

“Why aren’t you dancing around the room with joy?”

“I’m waiting.”

“For what?”

She glanced at Chakotay to see him watching her with quiet understanding. “The other shoe to drop.”

“Why?” Phoebe asked. “This is what you’ve been working towards, isn’t it?”

“Yes.” She looked around at everyone before explaining, “It’s just that I expected it to end more dramatically. There should’ve been a showdown or an explosion, maybe a battle of some kind. I was a starship captain for so long that I’m used to resolving major conflicts with a fight.”

Chakotay asked, “This is too anti-climactic for you?”

“Not in my condition, but it doesn’t feel resolved.”

Gretchen said, “We could turn the Fednews back on. I’m sure someone is fighting about all of this.”

“Most likely,” Kathryn said with a sigh. “I feel the need to ‘do’ something.”

Chakotay asked, “What have you wanted to do since last summer that you haven’t been able to?”

“Walk down the street.”

He nodded. “So maybe we should go do that.”

Shaking her head, Kathryn replied, “I wouldn’t make it ten meters before someone told a reporter.”

Phoebe offered, “We could throw a party.”

Kathryn raised her eyebrows and then nodded. “A small one.”

Katie asked, “A party?”

Gretchen jumped up with excitement. “I’d better get cooking! How many people do you think?”

“Not many,” Kathryn reiterated.

Ignoring her, Phoebe and Katie followed Gretchen into the kitchen, leaving Kathryn and Chakotay staring at each other.

It wasn't more than a moment before Kathryn quirked a smile and stood up. She sauntered over to her husband, sat down astride his lap, and gave him a soft kiss. With her eyes still closed, she rested her forehead against his.

"That was nice," he said as he caressed her legs.

"Mmmhmmmm." She basked in their closeness, inhaling the intoxicating scent of him. "Have I ever told you how good you smell?"

He chuckled. "A few times. The first time was when we went sailing on the holographic Lake George. Since then, I've never changed my cologne."

"I'm glad. The scent tickles my nose and makes me feel at peace."

"A smell makes you feel at peace?"

"Only because that smell is you." She nestled closer to him so they could hug each other tightly. After a long moment, she asked, "Is it really over?"

"Not completely, but it is definitely the beginning of the end."

"I really like the sound of that."

"Me, too," he whispered. "Me, too."

Two days later, Kathryn was stretched out on a lounge chair on her deck, reading a book when Chakotay came outside.

She asked, "Did my mother call again?"

"No," he replied with a slight chuckle. "Not since first thing this morning. I think she's finally settled back in to her house."

"She only lived here for a week. I don't see how she could have become so accustomed to sharing every moment of her day with us."

He shrugged as he leaned against the railing. "You're easy to get attached to."

Kathryn closed her book and set it in her lap. "What's up?"

"Owen just called. The other shoe has dropped."

Sitting up, she asked, “What’s happened?”

“Zife is dead.”

“What? When? How?”

He took a deep breath and replied, “Looks like assassination or suicide, they’re not sure. He went to Bolarus to prepare for the trial next week and was found dead in his house last night.”

“Cause of death?”

“Poison, they believe.” He tilted his head and looked carefully at her. “You okay?”

“Me?” she asked, taken aback. “Why wouldn’t I be?”

“I don’t want you to think that you’re the cause of his untimely death.”

She rolled her eyes. “Only thing untimely about it is that it’s about eight months too late.”

“Kathryn!” he admonished and then tried not to smile. “Although you make a good point.”

“Honestly, I expected something like this to happen. It seemed too neat and tidy the way it was going.”

“Don’t say that to anyone else.”

“I won’t.” She patted the seat. “Come here.”

He nodded, talking as he sat down by her legs. “Owen expects a public announcement this afternoon, but he wanted you to know in advance.”

“I’ll have to thank him, but I’m not sure I want to watch.”

“Why not?”

She sighed and looked out over the ocean. “I feel like hibernating for a little while, starting now.”

“Hibernating?”

“I’m tired. I will testify if needed, but other than that, I’m ready to take this leave of absence to focus on our baby.”

Chakotay leaned forward, took her face in his hands, and placed a gentle kiss on her lips. “Let’s make that happen, then.”

“Think we’ll get bored?”

“Maybe, but I’m sure we can find something to do. Write a book, perhaps.”

“Let’s do it.”
