

## ***The Future is Ours – Part 5***

### **“Temporal and Temperamental”**

By Dawn

Rated PG-13

Summary: Kathryn Janeway’s life becomes infinitely more complicated.

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Kathryn was escorted by two security officers through the corridors of the Relativity to a briefing room where she was instructed to wait. She sat down in one of the chairs and tried to clear her mind of everything she had just come from so she could concentrate on where she was now.

Braxton had not been forthcoming about why she was there. She was worried that it had something to do with Admiral Janeway’s travel through time, but Kathryn thought they would’ve done something about that long before now. This might be about some other temporal incursion that she knew nothing about.

She waited ten minutes before the door opened again. Her jaw dropped when she saw her older self walk in.

Braxton said with a sneer, “I’ll let the two of you catch up while we make the final part of our journey.”

“Where are we going?” Admiral Janeway asked as she sat down.

“To stand trial for the largest temporal incursion ever recorded. Personally, I’m pleased to see that you’ll finally have to face the consequences of your blatant disregard of time travel ethics.” He stormed out of the room.

Admiral Janeway turned to Kathryn and said, “I’d venture to say that he’s a little irritated with us.”

“I’d say he’s irritated with you.” Kathryn rubbed the bridge of her nose as she looked at her older self. “Care to tell me when, exactly, you were pulled from?”

“I see by your uniform that you’re not part of my past, so that’s good news.”

Looking down at her gray shoulders, Kathryn said, “I like the old uniform better.”

The Admiral leaned back in her chair and explained, “I just left Voyager and was about to enter the nebula. We spoke only five minutes ago. I hope this doesn’t take long, or I’m going to need to figure out how to get another dose of that pathogen.”

Kathryn remembered injecting her with the pathogen and again felt the emotional burden of what the Admiral was about to do. “I am four months into that revised future.”

“You made it home.”

“Yes, thanks to you.”

“You’re welcome.” The Admiral pursed her lips. “Although it seems you were prophetic. The Relativity has intervened.”

“What I don’t understand,” Kathryn held a finger up as she thought, “Is why they brought me from four months into that future, instead of pulling us both from where you were just now.”

“That does seem odd. Did you do something recently to cause trouble?”

Kathryn grimaced. “Of course not.”

A flash of light startled them and now, standing before them, were Q and Q, Jr. “You’re absolutely right, Kathy. You haven’t done a thing, but I have.” Q waggled his eyebrows.

“What is this about, Q?” the two ladies asked in unison.

“Don’t I even get a hello, Aunt Kathy?”

Kathryn smiled almost-sincerely, “Hello, Q. It’s a pleasure to see you again. What have you and your father been up to?”

“You’ll find out!” Q, Jr.’s eyes widened in excitement and both Q suddenly disappeared in another flash of light.

Both Kathryn Janeways looked at each other and sighed in unison. Admiral Janeway said, “Well, this just got a lot more interesting.”

“I feel a headache coming on.”

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Six hours later, when she rematerialized in her own timeline, Kathryn knew at once that the Relativity hadn’t sent her back to the exact time she left. There were fewer people in the room, and those that were there looked frantic. She needed to buy some time until she figured out what to tell them.

Chakotay saw her first, and he exhaled slowly to release tension. “Kathryn,” he said thankfully as he crossed the room. “Are you okay?”

Patterson was not nearly as calm when he saw her. “What the hell happened? Who did this, Katie?”

“How long was I gone?” Feeling dizzy from her experience, she steadied herself by holding onto the back of a chair.

Johnson answered, “Ten minutes, exactly.”

Barely audible, she asked herself, “That’s all?”

Chakotay responded, “Ten very long minutes. Are you hurt?”

“I’m fine,” she assured him and took hold of his arm for balance. Addressing Patterson, she asked, “You recall Voyager’s encounters with the Timeship Relativity?”

“Yes.”

“I just had another one, and Q was involved.” She rubbed her neck and decided not to tell them how long she’d actually been gone. She was exhausted and needed time to think.

Chakotay asked, “How bad is your headache?”

“Pretty severe, actually.”

Admiral Thompson asked, “Is any action required?”

“No, there’s no threat. It’s over.” She sat down and took a long drink of water.

Patterson responded, “Very well. Jones, cancel the red alert and send the Sol Squadron back to their posts. Tell ‘fleet security to stand down. The crisis is over.” He touched his commbadge to contact Fleet Admiral Khurma to give him an update and to inform him that Kathryn was safe.

Kathryn took a moment during the flurry of activity to catch her breath and gather her thoughts. She looked at Chakotay to gauge his reaction to the situation.

He sat down next to her and asked, “You sure you’re okay? You don’t look well.”

“I’m a little disoriented, nothing to worry about.” She saw that he was handling everything as professionally as he usually did. It appeared that their relationship would not impact his ability to maintain his composure under duress.

After Admiral Khurma joined them, Patterson redirected their attention to the issue at hand. “Captain Janeway, could you give us a report?”

Kathryn looked around to see who was in the room. “Before I begin, I want to know how many of you are privy to the confidential circumstances behind Voyager’s return?”

Admiral Khurma asked, “Does this pertain to that?”

“Yes.”

Admiral Paris joined them as Khurma replied, “Command Authorization Clearance Level Twelve and above.”

The rear admirals, captains, and aides rose to leave the room. When Chakotay remained, Admiral Wilson asked, “Commander Chakotay? Do you have clearance that I am unaware of?”

“No, sir, but I am aware of what transpired to get Voyager back to the Alpha Quadrant.”

Fleet Admiral Khurma said, “The Commander may stay, but I must have your full agreement that anything said here will not go beyond this room.”

“Absolutely, sir.”

When the room was clear, Kathryn began her report with a slight delay tactic. “As you know from Voyager’s logs, we encountered time travel on two separate occasions. The first was when we were taken back to twentieth century Earth, and the second was to help the twenty-ninth century timeship Relativity apprehend Captain Braxton who was attempting to sabotage Voyager.”

“Yes, although you weren’t as forthcoming about your experiences as we would have liked,” Wilson said.

“I invoked the temporal prime directive. That applies today, as well, sir.”

Wilson was not pleased and demanded, “Captain, are you suggesting that you plan to purposely withhold information from us?”

“Yes, sir, I am,” she said calmly in the face of his rising anger.

“What do you hope to gain?” Hayes challenged.

“Only the safety of the timeline as it currently exists, Admiral. I do not wish to jeopardize our future.”

Paris jumped in before Wilson could respond and said, “She’s completely within her rights to make this judgment. Please continue, Captain.”

Kathryn nodded, trying to figure out how much to tell them of her experiences. “During our encounter with my future self, Admiral Janeway, I was curious about why the Relativity didn’t intervene. Today, I got my answer. The entity, Q, has been keeping them at bay for the last four months. Needless to say, nerves were frazzled on that ship when Q finally released them to do their jobs.”

“Is this the same Q that Picard encountered?” Admiral Johansen asked.

“Yes, sir, and the same one we encountered on three occasions. By delaying the Relativity from resetting the timeline, a second timeline was allowed to fully develop. I don’t grasp the temporal mechanics of it, but I was told that the events that have transpired over these four months have created a drastically different future than the one Admiral Janeway experienced.”

Patterson asked, “So you were pulled out today to correct that?”

“That was Captain Braxton’s intention, but because this was such an enormous temporal incursion, an advisory panel comprised of individuals from the two twenty-ninth century timelines convened to determine the best course of action. Braxton merely brought me and Admiral Janeway in to meet with that panel.”

“Both of you were taken into custody?” Patterson asked with surprise.

She evaded the question by continuing with her story. “It was the panel’s decision to allow this timeline to continue, and that’s why I’ve been allowed to return.”

Admiral Khurma said, “That must have been a real struggle for them – how to decide the fate of the human race based on one incident.”

“Yes, I believe it was, and if Q’s exaggerations are to be believed, it was humanity’s fate that hung in the balance. I only heard the outcome, not the debate. I am happy to report, however, that the current timeline’s pros and cons will produce a far better outcome than those of the other.”

“Can you be more specific?” Khurma asked.

“Sorry, temporal prime directive.” She hoped she was being evasive enough not to arouse any suspicion.

“Do you know anything of your future, Captain?” Khurma asked.

She recognized the leading question and decided to not rise to the bait. “I know that I won’t be time-traveling anymore. The panel seemed to think that if I traveled back in time once, I could do it again. They’re going to keep watch on the Klingons that built the device that Admiral Janeway used twenty-six years from now, but I’ve been outfitted

with an implant that will prevent me from time travel in the future. If I come across anything resembling chronitons, I'll find myself transported to the Relativity."

Patterson asked, "They can do that? I wonder how that works."

She wished they could run with that tangent and explore the engineering behind it, but she knew this wasn't the time or place. "You're welcome to scan the implant, but I doubt there'll be any way I can get rid of it."

"I just might do that," he said and then asked, "Is there anything else to report?"

"No, you have the gist of it." She sat back in her chair and took a deep breath. Out of her peripheral vision, she saw Chakotay tapping his fingers on the table – a very clear sign that he wanted to say something but was holding back.

Patterson asked everyone, "Are there any other questions?" Seeing nothing but shaking heads, he concluded the briefing. "Very well then, I think with all the excitement of this situation, we should resume our Voyager crew discussions tomorrow. Captain, if you have a moment, I'd like to speak with you alone."

"Of course, Admiral," she remained seated as everyone else in the room rose.

Chakotay said, "I'll wait for you in the atrium." He gave her a look that made it clear he wanted to talk, too.

When everyone was out of the room, Patterson came around the table to sit with her. He had been a very good friend of her father's and Kathryn thought of him as family. He'd been her favorite professor at the academy, and had been instrumental in giving her command of Voyager. She thought him very likeable and affectionate.

He said, "Katie, I'm worried about you."

She turned her chair to face him and folded her hands in her lap. "Because of my excursion today?"

"A little, but mostly because of events over the last two weeks. I left you alone after you turned down the promotion because you needed some cooling-off time, and I know that Owen spoke to you."

"Do you agree with him?"

"Wholeheartedly. However, there's been a lot of talk about you 'round the tables upstairs and it's not all good."

"Because I don't want to be a commodore?"

“No, it’s more about your continued dealings with the press.”

“I’ve told the press nothing, Admiral.”

“I know, I know. I’ve been impressed with how you’ve handled them. The flip side is that you’re generating quite a positive following from the media. People adore you.”

“And that’s a bad thing?”

“It gives you a lot of power over the public, Katie. I’d venture to say that it’s more power than anyone else in Starfleet has at the moment, Admiral Khurma included.”

“Starfleet could take advantage of that. The Fleet Admiral doesn’t have to be afraid of my influence.”

“I agree, but I know you well. He doesn’t.”

“I’m not going to stop talking to the press, Admiral, but I will continue to be positive about Starfleet and the Federation.”

“Yes, I’m sure you will. You have a knack for making people think you’ve given them what they want without giving away a thing. It’s quite astonishing.”

She laughed gently to avoid aggravating her headache. “The Voyager senior staff all became good at that. You wouldn’t believe how often we managed to exchanged little things like maps, fiction, and music for food and mineral rights. It made for some interesting trade negotiations.”

“They learned from the best.” He looked at her pointedly. “Tell me something else, if I may ask a personal question?”

“You may ask.”

He looked amused at her response. “I’m only asking because of the current politics, and, well, because I’m curious and like to watch out for you in your father’s absence. What’s going on between you and Chakotay?”

Kathryn could see that question coming a light year away. “Will my answer affect my career?”

“It might, but only because we like to place couples in the same city, if possible.”

She frowned at him, not believing his excuse. She had sensed some disfavor towards Chakotay from a few of the brass, and knew that could affect both their careers. “I imagine that his Maquis background is looked upon critically by some.”

Patterson pursed his lips in thought for a moment before answering. “There’s a proposal coming your way, Katie, and the individual behind it likes that you root for the underdog, so to speak. I don’t believe there’s any harm in your friendship with Chakotay, and what others believe about the Maquis won’t matter a hill of beans in the long run.”

“My friendship? Are you telling me to keep it there?”

“Things will settle in the next two weeks. I trust that you can hold off on any unwanted publicity until then?”

“I don’t see a problem with that.” She added, “For two weeks.”

“Splendid.” He clapped his hands together. “Now, about your little adventure today – are you okay? Do you need any help?”

“I’m fine. A little shaken, but fine.” She rubbed her neck to try to ease the painful pressure that was steadily increasing where the implant had been placed.

“This implant – I take it that it’s some kind of restraining order?”

“Yes,” she sighed. “My punishment for abusing time travel twenty-six years from now.”

“Do you feel any pain from it? You don’t look well.”

“Only a little. I trust that Starfleet’s physicians continue to know what they’re doing in four hundred years.”

“Still, you might consult with your EMH. He’ll be able to evaluate it without needing an explanation.”

“I’ll do that.” She touched the tender spot on the base of her skull.

“And this Q, do you think we’ll be seeing more from him?”

“It’s possible, but we’ll have to wait and see. He’s fond of testing me.” She decided that this wasn’t the best time to discuss Q’s motives.

“As he has been with Jean-Luc.” He paused. “I was slipped a note during the meeting to find out what you’re not telling us.”

Kathryn rolled her eyes. “I’m not surprised.”

“The problem is that you’re not sitting at the table with the brass yet. It’s hard for some admirals to accept your lack of candor. I sense that you’re holding something back and I assume others sense it as well.”



“Tell me something. If Picard had the same experience, would they trust him?”

Patterson thought for a moment and nodded. “Probably so.”

“Then they’ve got to trust me.”

“Can you be cryptic with me? Make me feel like you’ve told me something without giving it away?” He winked.

She laughed outright. “There’s nothing more to tell.”

“I don’t believe you.” He looked at her pointedly.

As she gathered her thoughts, she asked, “Perhaps you can advise me?”

“Always a pleasure.”

“If you were faced with the choice between disobeying the temporal prime directive versus satisfying the curiosity of a handful of admirals, which would you choose? And what if you knew that any information shared could jeopardize the security of the Federation?”

“Hmmm. I see your dilemma.” He rubbed his chin. “Is there any chance that you’re putting anyone in danger by withholding information?”

She raised an eyebrow. “Surely you trust me enough to know the answer to that question.”

“Yes,” he sighed. “But I must ask it, regardless.”

“You’ll have to convince them to trust me.”

“I’ll do what I can.” He changed the subject. “Now, onto other business. We’ll start tomorrow with the five from the Equinox again, but I think we came to a reasonable conclusion today.”

“I think so, too. The Equinox is a difficult situation for me.”

“I know, but it’s for the best if we put it behind us and move on. Those five are going to be well cared for, I promise you, as will every other member of Voyager’s crew.”

“Thank you.”

“My aide is setting up interviews for your senior officers next week to discuss potential job offers. That also includes you.”

“All right. Is there anything I should know?” She felt her heart beat a little heavier in her chest.

“Yes, actually. Read up on President Zife and Admiral Khurma. I haven’t decided how I feel about it yet, but they’ve taken an interest in you.”

“They have?” Kathryn was genuinely surprised, even with the information she had about the future.

“Mmm hmmm,” he said as if trying to sound distracted. “And tell B’Elanna Torres to give some thought as to whether she’d like to stay with Voyager’s analysis, work with new ship design, or go out into space again. She’s so talented that everyone wants her, including me.”

“What about her husband?”

“We’ll get her situated first, and I’m sure we can find something exciting for him to do wherever she ends up.”

“I’ll do that. Thank you, Admiral.”

“You’re welcome.” He stood and extended a hand. “Soon, I think you’re going to have to start calling me Matt, though.” When she stood and accepted his handshake, he pulled her into a hug. “Katie, I couldn’t be prouder of you if you were my own daughter.”

Tears welled in her eyes as she felt enfolded in his fatherly affection. “That means a lot to me.”

“It does to me, too.” He pulled back and held her by her upper arms. “I hope that if anything develops between you and that maverick waiting for you out there, that you’ll let me walk you down the aisle?”

She was not expecting that and had to stifle her surprise. “I... don’t know what to say.”

He gathered up his padds and chuckled to himself. “I’d suggest that when he asks, you should say yes.” He widened his eyes suggestively and left the room, leaving her standing there shocked and amazed.

She gathered up her things and headed out to meet Chakotay. He stood up quickly when he saw her coming, and she could tell that he was worried. Smiling to reassure him, she said, “We need keep a low profile. Would you meet me at my mother’s house in an hour?”

“Of course. Is everything okay?”

“Yes,” she assured, unwilling to elaborate. “I have a few things that I need to do before I leave here and I want to avoid the press if at all possible today. I don’t think they’ll expect you to go through the Bloomington station mid-week. I’m going to transport directly into Mom’s front yard.”

“Are you sure you’re all right?”

“Yes. I’m not feeling my best, but I’m okay.” At his questioning look, she added, “Trust me.”

“Of course.”

She smiled gratefully and asked, “You know how to get there?”

“Yes, I’ll see you soon.” He reached out to touch her hand and then thought better of it, so he smiled apologetically and left the building.

Kathryn took a deep breath and went to Admiral Paris’s office where she knew there was a private meeting room she could use. When she was settled, she pulled up the comm unit and contacted her mother to let her know they would be at her house when she got home from work. Then she placed a call to the Doctor on Jupiter Station.

The Doctor beamed. “Captain! It’s good to hear from you!”

“How are you faring with Dr. Zimmerman?”

“He’s as pleasant as ever.”

“You sound upbeat.” Kathryn smiled.

“We’re bonding, much to his chagrin. He’s been doing some maintenance and making improvements to my program. I’ll be able to change my clothing myself! Next time you see me, I’ll be a new hologram.”

She was amused with the joy he found at being able to change his appearance. “Tell me, Doctor, will a name be part of the new program?”

“I hadn’t thought of that. I should ask him,” the Doctor agreed. “After all, it is up to the parent to name the child.”

“That’s true. But, remember, you’ll have to live with whatever name he gives you.”

“Hmmm... good point. I’ll have to think about it.” The Doctor thought for a moment and then realized that she might need something. “So, Captain? What can I do for you today?”

“Probably nothing today, but I wondered when will you be returning to Earth?”

“I haven’t decided. Am I needed?”

“I’d like to see you next time you’re here.”

The Doctor looked at her carefully and with sudden concern. “Are you ill? You don’t look well.”

“Not ill exactly, but I do need your expertise. You’re the only physician that I can talk to because the circumstances are confidential.”

“Captain? You’ve got me worried.”

“You don’t need to be concerned. Is there anyone within earshot who could hear me?”

The Doctor looked around and said, “Possibly. Let me transfer you to another terminal. One moment.”

Kathryn put her elbows on the table and rubbed her eyes while she waited. It had been a terribly long day and it was only two o’clock.

“Okay, Captain. We’re on a secure channel and this is a sealed room. What are your concerns?”

“Today, I was taken by the Timeship Relativity. Do you recall it?”

“Of course. They were involved when we couldn’t detect the cause of some damage to Annika’s ocular implant.”

“Right,” she sighed. “They pulled both Admiral Janeway and me out of our respective timelines to discuss her temporal incursion.”

“Are you suffering from some ill-effects?”

“They’ve implanted something in my brain to prevent me from doing any more time travel.”

He was aghast. “A brain implant? Where is it connected?”

“It’s at the base of my skull.”

“With your proclivity towards headaches, that’s not the location I would have chosen.”

“Yes, I know. My head is hurting quite a bit, but that could just be from the stress and tension.”



*The officer in the middle said, "Admiral Kathryn Janeway and Captain Kathryn Janeway, I am Admiral Jenkins. You have been summoned to hear the final decision of this Temporal Judiciary Board for the temporal incursion of Admiral Kathryn Janeway on Stardate 70649.4."*

*Admiral Janeway asked, "The final decision? Has Starfleet become such an autocracy that it doesn't allow defense representation at trials?"*

*"This is not a trial, Admiral. This is a panel that determines how best to proceed with severe temporal incursions."*

*"Still, I would like to give a defensive argument before you decide my, or rather, her, future." The Admiral pointed at Kathryn.*

*Jenkins said, "Trust me when I say that we have debated this at great length for weeks."*

*"Weeks?" Kathryn asked. "Couldn't you have summoned us sooner so that we could have participated in this debate?"*

*"Your input is irrelevant, because you don't know the outcome of your actions."*

*Admiral Janeway said, "I disagree. I know exactly what happens in the last twenty six years of my timeline."*

*Jenkins glared at her, "But you don't know what happens in the next twenty six years of the Captain's timeline."*

*Q and Q, Jr. appeared in the familiar flash of light. "Surely they should have some input in the matter, don't you think, Admiral Jenkins?"*

*"No, Q, I do not." Jenkins was obviously furious with Q.*

*Braxton turned red in the face. "You and your son are not welcome here, Q. You've caused enough trouble. Go back to the Continuum and harass somebody else."*

*Kathryn looked at her older self with a raised eyebrow and saw a mirror of her bemused expression.*

*Q strutted into the middle of the room and struck an ostentatious pose. "Tell the Kathryn Janeways what you have planned for them, why don't you? What retribution would you force upon one of the most brilliant officers in your limited Starfleet history?"*

*Kathryn said with a strong warning tone in her voice, "Q!"*

*"Aunt Kathy, you don't understand."*

*Kathryn held up a hand to silence her godson. "Don't make this worse."*

*Admiral Jenkins said, "Q, that's the best advice I've heard all week. Don't make this worse than it is. Your interference has created a temporal incursion that is off the charts."*

*Admiral Janeway asked, "Q's interference?"*

*Braxton explained with a scathing look, "Q has made my job impossible and prevented us from arresting you the minute you came through the temporal rift." He glared at Admiral Janeway.*

*Jenkins said, "You're out of line, Captain Braxton. Please refrain from future comments or I'll have you removed from the room."*

*"Great idea." Q, Jr. snapped his fingers and Braxton disappeared.*

*"Q!" Jenkins stood and yelled. "Bring him back!"*

*Q, Sr. said, "Absolutely not. My son is indisputably justified. Braxton is nothing but a hot-tempered nuisance."*

*Kathryn agreed, but decided not to give voice to her opinion.*

*Jenkins' temper seemed to be flaring too, but he was able to keep it in check. "If you'll keep quiet for just a few minutes, Q, we'll get this review underway."*

*"By all means. I'd love to know how you're going to proceed. How will humanity determine its own fate?"*

*Jenkins addressed the Janeways again. "Q has prevented us from fixing the temporal incursion made by Admiral Janeway until four months have elapsed for you, Captain Janeway, in 2378. The time that has gone unchecked by this board has allowed for a second time-line to be fully established."*

*Looking extremely proud of himself, Q said, "Do tell her, please, the outcome of this new timeline." Q was giddy with excitement.*

*Jenkins glared at Q and then continued, "The new timeline, we call it Timeline B, is significantly different than the original Timeline A."*

*Admiral Janeway asked, "In what way?"*

*"In Timeline A, the Borg eventually devastate both the Alpha and Delta Quadrants and cause profound loss of life across the galaxy. This has already happened in my history."*

*Kathryn asked Admiral Janeway, "Didn't you tell me that you defeated the Borg?"*

*Hesitantly, she said, "I defeated them in battle and developed the technology that you already know about. However, we never developed an offense to completely destroy them. Earth was attacked in 2386, but we were unable to help from our position in the Delta Quadrant."*

*Kathryn felt like a heavy weight had been dropped on her chest. To have had the technology to help Earth but not able to reach them would have been devastating.*

*Q, Jr. surprised Kathryn when he jumped in, practically singing, "But in Timeline B..."*

*He stopped when Jenkins glared at him. Kathryn was impressed with the power of that glare.*

*Jenkins finished, "But in Timeline B, your actions, Captain and Admiral, have resulted in the complete and total annihilation of the Borg."*

*Kathryn and the Admiral looked at each other in shock and then back at Jenkins. "Complete?" the Admiral asked. "How is that possible?"*

*Q proudly told the story, "You see, after what Admiral Kathy is about to do, every Borg in, around, and near any trans-warp hub and the uni-complex is going to be destroyed." Making a 'tally-ho' motion with his hand, Q continued, "It took almost fifty years, but eventually, every Borg ship is obliterated by one species or another."*

*Jenkins said, "By the year 2385, Timeline B shows zero Borg activity."*

*"That's phenomenal," Kathryn said in shock.*

*"Yes, it is," Jenkins said. "This panel, which includes representatives from both timelines, has been specifically created to address this incident. This is where our ethical problem has developed."*

*Q said, "What's there to discuss? In one future, you're close to losing everything, in the other, you've gained everything. Despite our testing of Jean-Luc Picard and William T. Riker, the Q happen to find humanity amusing. We don't wish to see it destroyed."*

*Jenkins continued, ignoring Q's interruption. "In addition to the Borg, having you, Captain Janeway, back in the Alpha Quadrant has made an enormous impact on the Federation. You and your descendants are vital to Timeline B's success."*

*Kathryn did a double take. "My descendants? Surely you mean my sister's descendents."*





“Are you feeling all right? You don’t look well.”

“It’s just a headache and I’m exhausted.” She smiled at him, grateful for his support.  
“Voyager’s EMH is en route and will take a look at this implant.”

“Good. I was worried about that. I don’t like the idea, not one bit.”

“I’m not thrilled with it, either, but I didn’t exactly get a choice in the matter.”

“Maybe we can figure out how to get it removed if it causes you trouble.”

“We’ll see,” Kathryn said. “There might not be any reason for concern.”

“Still, it gave Hayes some satisfaction that you won’t go change up the timeline again. He seems a bit over-concerned about it, if you ask me.”

“He wouldn’t even know it if it happened.”

“No, he wouldn’t. I’ll keep a watch for the Doctor’s shuttle and make sure he has access to whatever he needs.”

“Thank you.”

He paused to gather his thoughts before hesitantly asking, “When Patterson spoke to you after the briefing, did he mention what could be on the table for you?”

“Nothing specific, but he said that the President is interested. I don’t know why.”

Owen tapped his fingers on the table in thought before saying, “Zife is having some trouble now that the war is over. In my opinion, he was elected based on fear of what was coming, and now that it’s over, he needs help. He’s not a good diplomat.”

Kathryn tried to get her thoughts around the issue, but she was having trouble concentrating because of the building pain. “Let’s find some time to talk about this tomorrow, if we could.”

“Of course. I didn’t mean to add more to your day, but I’d like to talk to you privately about this.”

“I appreciate that. It sounds intriguing.”

“This could be a positive step for the Federation. I’ll have a slew of press releases sent to you so you can read all the official policies and communications before next week.” He patted her arm and said, “I’ll let you get back to your notes. Feel free to use the Admirals’ transporter so you can get home without fuss. Tell my aide whenever you’re ready.”

“Thank you, Owen.”

“Give your mother my best.” He ducked out of the room and closed the door.

Kathryn leaned back in the chair and closed her eyes. The pain in her head was escalating quickly, and she was beginning to have difficulty thinking. Before heading out, she scribbled down a few key words that would trigger her memory later.

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As she materialized on her mother’s lawn, the first thing she saw was Chakotay getting up off the front porch steps and coming towards her. It was the most comforting sight she could’ve possibly imagined at the end of a long, weary day. She soon found herself engulfed in his embrace and felt like doing nothing more than staying there.

“I’m worried about you,” he said quietly, running his fingers through her hair.

“It seems to be a common affliction.”

“It does?” He pulled back to look at her.

“You’re the fourth person in the last hour to say that to me,” she smiled sadly. “My head is killing me. The Doctor’s ETA from Jupiter Station is about ten o’clock here, and I really want to lie down.”

“Let’s get you inside, then.” He took her bag and put his arm around her back. “The Doctor is coming to treat you?”

“Mmm hmmm.” She keyed in the code to unlock the front door. “Since it’s confidential and he knows my headaches well.”

“The implant?”

“Right.” She sat down on the sofa and put her head in her hands. “This is almost as bad as when those damn aliens were sticking pins into my head.”

He kneeled in front of her and helped her get her boots off. “Can I get you anything?”

“I promised the Doctor I’d drink water. He doesn’t want me to take any medication until he gets here, though.” She unzipped her jacket and he helped her take it off.

“I’ll be right back.” While he was gone, she pulled off her turtleneck, leaving the gray tank. He returned with a tall glass of water and handed it to her. “Here you go.”

“Thank you.” She sipped it slowly. “I’d ask for some coffee, but I fear it would be a colossal mistake.”

“Probably.”

She set the water on the coffee table. “I have so much to tell you, but I’m so tired.”

“It’ll keep.” He arranged the throw pillows for her as she reclined. “I have a lot of questions, but as long as you’re safe, they can wait.”

She groaned in pain as her back relaxed into the sofa. “Safe, but a little overwhelmed by the magnitude of what happened today.”

Covering her with a blanket, he said, “We’ll figure it out together.”

“Mmm hmm...” Her head hurt too much to open her eyes. She reached out for his hand and felt comforted when he held it gently. “Thank you.”

“For what?” He gently brushed her hair back from her face.

“Loving me, believing in me. Everything.”

“Easy to do,” he whispered as he kissed her forehead. “Get some rest. I’ll be here when you wake up.”

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Kathryn opened her eyes and looked at the clock on the mantle to see that it was a little before seven o’clock. The curtains on the windows had been drawn shut, but there was a little sunlight peeking in. She stretched her neck, trying to relieve some of the pressure in her head, but it didn’t seem to help. She gingerly sat up and took a long drink of water. Voices were coming from the next room so she went to investigate.

“Hi there,” Chakotay smiled sweetly when she opened the door to the kitchen. “Any better?”

“Not really,” she squinted against the light even though it wasn’t very bright.

Gretchen asked, “Would you like some soup or a sandwich?”

Kathryn nodded carefully. “Sure.”

“Why don’t you have a seat,” Chakotay guided her to the table and pulled out her chair for her. “I’ll freshen up your water.”

She put her elbows on the table and rested her head in her hands.

Chakotay returned with her dinner and set it down in front of her. He laid a hand on her shoulder. "Would it help if I rubbed your neck?"

"I don't know, but I'm not sure I could tolerate a massage right now."

He squeezed her arm before sitting down across from her. "Try to eat a little."

Gretchen sat down too. "I hope you don't mind that we ate without you."

"Course not." She picked up a spoon and sipped the warm broth. "I didn't mean to sleep that long."

"You needed it," her mother said. "Chakotay was just telling me about your day. It sounds pretty tense."

Kathryn's spoon froze in midair as she raised her eyes to Chakotay. "You told her?"

"Only a little."

She gave him a look that indicated she was clearly not happy about him telling her mom anything.

"Katie, all he said was that there was some time travel involved in Voyager getting home, and today the time travel police took you to their ship to discuss it."

Kathryn swallowed another spoonful of soup and found it soothing. "The time travel element is extremely confidential."

"Why?" Gretchen asked. "It sounds fascinating."

Chakotay said, "I'm sure there are many who would find it a little too fascinating."

Hunkering down to conspire, Gretchen asked, "Are you from the future, Katie?"

"No, I just look old." She took a tiny bite of her sandwich and chewed it carefully.

Chakotay laughed quietly. "No you don't, Kathryn."

"What's the story, then?" Gretchen asked.

"Mom?"

"Yes?"

"You're wheedling."

Gretchen sat back in feigned annoyance. “Fine. Don’t tell me.”

Chakotay changed the subject. “Admiral Patterson called while you were asleep.”

“Oh?”

“He sent you a report that he wants to discuss over lunch tomorrow.”

“If this headache doesn’t get better soon, I might have to ask you to read it to me.”

“Sure. Do you know what it’s about?”

“Politics, I assume. Patterson said that President Zife and Admiral Khurma have taken an interest in me. Owen implied that they want to discuss a position that would assist Zife with diplomacy.”

“Really?” Gretchen was impressed. “The Federation President?”

Kathryn barely nodded and took another bite of sandwich.

Chakotay said, “I’m not sure if Zife is someone you’d want to get in bed with, Kathryn.”

Her spoon froze again and she slowly lifted her eyes to stare at Chakotay. Gretchen smothered a laugh.

“What?” Chakotay asked.

Kathryn said nothing, but Gretchen patted Chakotay’s shoulder and said, “I think Katie’s already got someone in mind for that job, son.”

Chakotay looked confused for a moment and then blushed a charming shade of pink. He smiled at Kathryn before correcting himself. “What I mean to say is that Zife’s popularity isn’t good and there are rumors that he might be involved in embezzlement. I think his days in office are numbered.”

“Must be why he wants help,” Kathryn said after eating another bite. “I’m not going to jump into anything without giving it a lot of thought, especially if those rumors are true.”

“A good plan,” Chakotay responded.

Gretchen asked, “Would you two excuse me for just a minute? I’ll be right back.”

Kathryn thought that now was probably a good time to tell him a bit more about her adventure into the future. “While I was gone today, I was given an assignment, more or less, that will have to take precedence over any position that I accept.”

“An assignment from the future? Won’t that affect temporal mechanics?”

She decided not to tell him everything. He didn’t need to know, but she had to tell him part of it so he’d understand what she had to do. “There’s a reason that Q held the Relativity off for four months. He wants me to do something for him.”

Chakotay’s eyes widened. “Is he blackmailing you?”

“Not exactly. I don’t believe he’ll take back what he’s done for us, and I can choose whether or not to follow through.”

Voice gravely serious, Chakotay responded, “Q can do whatever the hell he wants, and he usually does. Nothing could stop him from resetting all of this and starting over.”

Kathryn sighed. “I know you don’t trust him, and I didn’t for a long time, but my intuition tells me that he’s on my side.”

“What is it that he wants you to do for him?”

“Work towards a permanent alliance with Romulus.”

“You’ve got to be kidding,” Chakotay said.

“I’m not.”

“The Romulans?” Chakotay pointed out, “You failed to mention this during the debriefing.”

“How am I supposed to tell my superior officers that I have to accomplish what they failed to do following the brief Romulan alliance during the war?”

Chakotay shook his head in denial. “This is too much. He can’t ask you to do this.”

Kathryn sighed heavily and rubbed her neck. “Yes, he can, and he did. He believes I can do it.”

“You can’t back down from the challenge, can you?” Chakotay accused.

“I don’t know that I have a choice.”

“Of course you have a choice. Why does it have to be you?”

“The Q, Quinn specifically, were responsible for the hundred-year war between the Vulcans and the Romulans. Since Q has been preaching enlightenment and the virtues of

humanity to the continuum, they've charged him with the responsibility of fixing Quinn's mistakes. One major one being this chasm between the Vulcans and the Romulans."

"That doesn't answer my question. Why you? Why not ask a Vulcan do it? Or even Picard?"

"Because they'll need an intermediary that wasn't part of the politics with the war, and because Q thinks I'm in a unique situation to actually make this work."

"Do you have any idea how dangerous this is?"

She looked at him sympathetically, knowing this was hard for him. "I need you to have faith in me to find a way to work towards this without putting myself in danger."

He looked away and closed his eyes.

"Chakotay..." She held out her hand across the table for him to take. "Give me some time to figure this out."

Not meeting her eyes, he squeezed her hand before getting up and busying himself at the kitchen sink.

"I don't believe that Q would ask me to do this if I wasn't capable, and there may be unknown forces at work that will help me. If there's a chance that the Federation and the Romulan Empire could find a peaceful co-existence, the benefits would be astronomical. I just need to wait for an opportunity to present itself."

Gretchen came back into the room and looked back and forth between them. "What's wrong?"

Chakotay pushed away from the counter and said, "Excuse me, ladies, I need to take a walk. Clear my head a little."

After he walked out the door, Kathryn closed her eyes and let her head fall back until she realized how much pain that caused. She pushed her half-empty plate away and buried her face in her hands again.

Gretchen asked, "What happened?"

Rubbing her eyes, Kathryn said, "I was asked to do something today that Chakotay doesn't agree with, but it's vitally important to the Federation." She shrugged. "Don't worry. This isn't the first time we've been through this."

"What do you mean?"



She frowned as she answered, "I've taken chances on a number of occasions to fight for the greater good. He never approves. He always gets upset. But in the end, he always supports me."

"He had to. You were his captain."

"Yes, but it was more than that."

"Why? Because he's in love with you?"

"He supports me because I've asked him to."

Gretchen folded her hands on the table. "Katie, a good marriage requires give and take from both of you. He needs you to cherish his goals and dreams just as much as you need him to support yours, and I imagine that his dreams probably revolve around having a quiet life with you."

Kathryn pursed her lips and frowned. "If that's really what he wants, then a marriage between us wouldn't work. As long as I have responsibilities, I'll never have a quiet, risk-free life. I would be profoundly surprised if he wanted me to sit around and keep house."

"You can't just push him away. You're in love with him, and you've already suffered too long from not acting on your feelings. This affects both of you and you're going to have to decide together, with Chakotay, whether or not you're going to pursue whatever it is that Starfleet has asked of you. Don't cut him out."

"If that was my intention, I wouldn't have told him about it. Whether he and I are to maintain the same friendship we've had for years or manage a marriage, I'm well aware that our relationship requires compromise and mutual support. We're adept at balancing each other."

"Yes, but he can't always be on the lower side of the scale. It's not healthy."

Kathryn studied her hands for a minute before looking back up at her mom. "What do you want me to do, Mom?"

"Oh, Katie," Gretchen reached for her daughter's hands. "If I could, I'd do anything to keep you safe. You're my baby girl, and you've been through too much already. I thought I'd lost you, and I can't bear the thought of going through it again."

"Mom..." Kathryn felt her eyes grow hot with threatening tears.

"But I can't clip your wings. I love you too much."

Kathryn got up and came around the table. Gretchen stood and they hugged each other tightly. Kathryn said, “I’m so sorry.”

“No, honey, it’s not your fault. You have so many God-given talents. I just wish your job wasn’t so dangerous.”

Kathryn pulled back and looked into her mother’s eyes. “I love you, Mom.”

“I love you, too.” Gretchen laid a hand on Kathryn’s cheek. “And just so you know, I’m falling in love with your Chakotay, too.”

She said quietly, “That’s easy to do.”

“Go…” Gretchen urged her into the sun room. “Lie down for a bit. When he comes back, I’ll tell him you’re in there. You’ll talk, and he’ll be okay.”

“Thanks.” Kathryn followed her Mother’s instructions, but she couldn’t fall asleep with so much on her mind. She thought about Q and the way he’d re-appeared to her after Admiral Janeway had been returned to her shuttle. He’d been adamant that she would be the one and only human capable of making the Romulans believe they could trust the Federation. She wasn’t sure how she could do that when she didn’t trust the Federation herself.

She wondered about the role that Romulus would be playing in the eventual destabilization of the Federation. Was Q giving her a hint? Was it a complete coincidence that the possibility of working for the President was dropped in her lap the same day that she was directed to seek a high-profile position? Could she, one short, middle-aged, human woman really accomplish what the temporal review board had asked of her?

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<I> *“Admiral and Captain Janeway,” Jenkins said. “Now that Q is gone, we need to address the stipulations for allowing the temporal incursion to continue. I think it’s important that you, Captain, understand that we are not disregarding the temporal prime directive, but instead, salvaging what we can of Timeline A.”*

*“Understood,” Kathryn replied. “It seems to me that the only difference, beyond the Borg situation, is the location of Voyager during the next twenty-six years. If circumstances in the Alpha Quadrant are better with us there, what are the repercussions in the Delta Quadrant?”*

*Admiral Janeway asked, “May I?”*

*Jenkins nodded his approval, “Be prudent.”*

*“Captain,” Janeway said. “Because of Tuvok’s illness and other matters that affected our senior staff, I did my best to eliminate contact with alien species. To most, we were nothing more than a passing nuisance or an opportunity for exploitation. I’d venture to say that everything we accomplished for the good was internal to Voyager only.”*

*“That’s a correct assessment, Admiral,” Jenkins said.*

*Kathryn squeezed the Admiral’s arm in sympathy, unable to imagine such a lonely existence. It would have been extremely difficult, especially without Chakotay’s friendship and support.*

*One of the others on the board said, “I’m Admiral Richardson of Timeline A. Could you also explain, Admiral Janeway, the state of the Federation when you returned home?”*

*“We’re just full of cheery topics, aren’t we?” Janeway sighed. “After the war, the public attitude towards the Federation and Starfleet became cynical, as you have no doubt already observed.” Kathryn nodded as the Admiral continued. “Confidence in the ability of the government and military to protect the citizens was low, and this ate away at public morale.”*

*Kathryn nodded in agreement. “This is happening now, but I have confidence that we’ll pull out of it.”*

*Janeway said, “By the time my Voyager made it home, Starfleet’s ability to police the Alpha Quadrant was severely limited by a lack of qualified personnel and a general distrust of the Federation by its citizens.”*

*Richardson said, “In the case of Timeline A, this problem snowballed and made the Federation weak. We were not able to adequately defend ourselves.”*

*“Just because of low public morale?” Kathryn asked.*

*“Yes, because competent individuals stopped seeking careers in public office and Starfleet,” Janeway said. “When we returned, there was an entire generation of Starfleet officers who couldn’t hold a candle to the competence level of what our peers could do, even fresh out of the Academy.”*

*Kathryn had a knot in her gut. “And you want me to fix this?”*

*Jenkins said, “We want you to seek a high-profile position within Starfleet and do what you can to affect positive change. We can’t tell you any more than that.”*

*“I’m only one person.”*

*As half of the panel chuckled, Admiral Murphy, Kathryn’s descendant, said, “A very inspiring person.”*

*Kathryn looked at the members who were smiling and noticed they were all from Timeline B. "Out with it. I know you want to tell me something."*

*Murphy asked, "You recently gave a highly publicized interview, correct?"*

*"Yes, last week. The press has been hounding me ever since."*

*"Interview?" Admiral Janeway asked.*

*Kathryn shrugged. "Evidently, the people wanted to meet the woman behind the uniform."*

*"Did you show them?"*

*"Not entirely," Kathryn answered, knowing how the experience made her feel exposed.*

*Murphy said, "That interview put you in the public spotlight."*

*"I've noticed," she said with unease.*

*Murphy struggled to not smile. "Timeline B experienced a similar loss of confidence in the Federation, but Voyager's return was a sign of hope that Starfleet could beat the odds. The result is not as severe, but the political decisions of your century have lasting repercussions on the health of the Federation."*

*"You wouldn't be telling me this unless you need me to do something more than just offer hope. How does this play into protecting one of the timelines?"*

*Jenkins said, "It doesn't. We are not merely interested in protecting the timeline. We are also interested in preserving the Federation."*

*"But you're creating a temporal incursion by telling me about the future."*

*"Only because we have an opportunity caused by a temporal incursion. The impacts of Admiral Janeway's actions are too significant to ignore, and because we've brought you here, we want you to help protect the future of the Federation. If the Federation disbands, Starfleet disbands, and this review board disbands. In turn, temporal incursions would go unmonitored."*

*Kathryn groaned while Admiral Janeway patted her back in sympathy. Kathryn asked, "So you want me to prevent future temporal incursions by causing one?"*

*"Captain," Jenkins added, "All you need to do is make sure you stay in the public spotlight, look for opportunities to sway public opinion towards the positive, and initiate change for the better."*

*Kathryn looked at Admiral Janeway. "What do you think?"*

*Janeway pursed her lips in thought, preparing her words carefully. "I think if you're as inspiring as they say you are, then you could work the system to affect change. You know who you can trust and you've got a lot of friends."*

*She pinched the bridge of her nose. Her headache was growing. "It's daunting."*

*"It's exciting," Janeway said. "I wish I were in your shoes."*

*Kathryn looked down at the Admiral's boots and said, "You are."*

*Janeway rolled her eyes with amusement and then said seriously, "You have no idea how justified I feel regarding my actions."*

*"No, but I'm getting there."*

*Jenkins asked, "Can you do it, Captain?"*

*"I can give it my best shot."*

*"That's all we can ask," Murphy said.*

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Her thoughts returned to the present, not wanting to think about all of the other things they'd asked her to do regarding the preservation of advances from Timeline A. She needed to start shutting down her over-active brain if she was going to get any sleep, so she decided to sit up and watch the nightfall.

Chakotay returned just a few minutes later, shutting the door quietly behind him. She extended her hand to him, and he wrapped it in his own, sinking down on the settee next to her. He didn't look at her and his smile didn't reach his eyes.

He caressed her hand for a minute before whispering, "Seventeen times."

"Seventeen?"

"That's how many times that I almost lost you or that you asked for my support when it could've been fatal for you."

"That many?" She glanced at him and he nodded solemnly, not making eye contact. "I thought for sure you out-numbered me on that."

"How so?" He finally looked at her.

“I kept track, too. You almost died eleven times.”

“Ah.”

She added with a crooked smile, “But only two of them were your fault.”

“My fault?”

“Running off to get back the transporter that Seska stole and staying in that damned graviton ellipse to get the Ares IV module.”

“Ah, yes. Not two of my finer moments.”

Kathryn picked up his hand and absently studied the back of it. She saw a dark birthmark near his wrist that she’d never noticed before.

Chakotay said, “I’ve always supported you in the past because I had no choice.”

“Because I ordered you to?”

“No,” he shook his head. “Because I’ve been falling in love with you since the day I met you.”

“Chakotay...”

“Please, hear me out.” He paused to gather his thoughts. “I can’t imagine not supporting your decisions, because your seemingly insatiable longing to help the greater good is the very essence of who you are, and I love that part of you just as much as I love the way your eyes touch the deepest part of my heart. I’ve never been comfortable with you putting your life on the line to save others, and I can’t give you my blessing any more today than I could four years ago when you formed the alliance with the Borg. However, I will remain by your side, no matter what, because I love you.”

She closed her eyes, unable to bear the intensity of the devotion behind his words. Her heart felt unbearably heavy because of what she’d put him through, knowing she’d have to put him through it again.

“Kathryn?” he whispered.

Still unable to face him, she merely shook her head, but he seemed to know instinctively what she needed. He pulled her into his arms and held her close. She didn’t deserve his love, but she was so very grateful that she had it.

They held each other for a long time before her emotions finally calmed down enough for her to speak. Her voice was hoarse as she said, "My very wise mother had some advice for me."

"Oh? What's that?"

"She seems to think this should be a mutual decision for us." When he didn't answer, she lifted her head to look at him. "You don't agree?"

"I already told you that I support you."

"Yes, thank you. But that doesn't mean you agree with me."

"I don't."

She nodded and sat up all the way.

"Kathryn, I don't have to agree with you to support you."

"I know, but I want you to. I'd like you to help me figure out how to do this."

"It's not up to me."

"Chakotay, I'm offering you the right to help me choose the direction our lives will take. Please accept it."

He studied her carefully before responding. "This is unlike you."

"I'm taking my mother's advice. It's not easy."

Frowning slightly, he said, "I think we should sleep on it."

She raised an eyebrow. "You don't think I can do it, do you? Relinquish a little control?"

Smirking, he asked, "What if I challenge you to it?"

She couldn't help but laugh, and then regretted it because of the pain it caused. "Oh..."

"You're still in a lot of pain." He put a comforting hand on her back.

Rubbing her forehead, she said, "I've been so caught up in thinking about temporal incursions that I forgot about it."

"It's after nine. The Doctor should be here soon."

“It seems silly to pull a doctor from across the solar system just to treat a headache.”

Chakotay situated himself sideways on the sofa and motioned for her to lie against him. She nestled in comfortably and he wrapped his arms lovingly around her. He said, “But this isn’t just any headache, on just any head.”

“No?”

“This head belongs to my Kathryn.” He nuzzled her hair. “She’s something special.”

She closed her eyes and snuggled against him, feeling loved and treasured. After a few minutes of silence, she offered, “I think I know how we can do this.”

“Do what?”

“Figure this out together.”

“Okay, how?”

“You can help me decide what job to take, and what my conditions of employment are.”

He caressed her arm. “I can offer advice, but the decision is ultimately yours.”

“And I can make a decision based on your advice, and do what’s best for us.” She looked up at him and added, “For both of us.”

“Thank you for that, but I won’t hold you to it.”

She crumpled her forehead and frowned. “I’m just going to have to prove it to you, then.” There would be more than one high-profile job that could affect change, and she’d wait for the right one.

He squeezed her gently. “I love you.”

“I love you, too.” She laid her head back down on his chest, and lightly ran her fingers across his shoulder and bicep until she fell asleep.

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Later, she heard movement in the room, but didn’t feel like lifting her head from its very comfortable spot until she heard Chakotay whisper, “She’s asleep.”

Opening her eyes, she saw the Doctor standing over her with a tricorder. “Not anymore.”

“Hello, Captain. I would have called ahead, but Admiral Paris seemed to think I should come see you tonight, regardless.”



Kathryn slowly sat up and noticed her mom had arrived, too. “Owen tends to worry about me, but I would’ve asked you to come.” She touched her forehead. “This headache is pretty bad.”

He studied the readings. “I can see why, but I don’t see any kind of implant.”

“Implant?” Gretchen asked.

Kathryn chose not to answer her mom, but addressed the Doctor instead. “That’s good. I’d rather that standard medical scans didn’t detect it.”

The Doctor entered something into the tricorder, kneeled in front of her, and scanned her head again. “Not showing up now, either.”

Chakotay asked, “Do you see any signs of neurological strain? She was dizzy when she first returned.”

“None,” the Doctor said. “But before I dig any deeper, let’s make you more comfortable, Captain. I need you to lie on a bed or a table.”

Gretchen said, “I’ll show you to her bedroom, Doctor.”

Kathryn let Chakotay help her to her feet, and they followed them back into the house.

The Doctor said, “Captain, Commander, there’s a Starfleet Ensign out here.”

“Why?” Chakotay asked.

“In case I need anything and to take me back to San Francisco.”

When Kathryn saw the young man, she had to bite back a smile because he stood at full attention as soon as they entered the room. “Ensign, thank you for helping the Doctor this evening.”

“It was an absolute honor to be able to help you, Captain. Meeting you means so much to me. I hope that you’ll be feeling better soon.”

“Thank you,” she smiled as kindly as she could manage with the throbbing in her head. “Please make yourself at home.”

The Doctor had Kathryn lie on her back, sideways across the bed. He said, “Try to relax, Captain,” as he picked up her head and gave her neck an adjustment with two resounding pops.

“Ahh…” She could feel the tension leaving as soon as he was done.

“Wow,” Chakotay, who had taken a chair by the door, said. “I could hear that from all the way over here.”

“She has a knack for getting her neck out of alignment,” the Doctor commented as he continued to make adjustments.

Kathryn sighed gratefully as the Doctor worked.

He ran an instrument over her head and injected a hypospray into her neck. “That will help the inflammation and alleviate the pain.”

“Thank you, Doctor.”

“You’re welcome. Now, if you’ll turn on your side, I’d like you to continue to relax while I take a look at this implant with some non-standard scanning devices.”

She did as instructed and was happy to see that she was now facing Chakotay. She smiled at him and felt like a love-sick teenager when he smiled in return, showing his adorable dimples.

The Doctor said, “Tell me something, Captain, Commander.”

“What’s that?” Chakotay responded.

“Is this relationship between the two of you public knowledge? Besides the rumors the media is generating, that is.”

Kathryn said, “It’s no secret that we’re good friends.”

The Doctor hummed a little and then said, “I think I’ve become a keen observer of human behaviors, especially the behaviors of the Voyager crew members, but even without knowing the two of you as well as I do, your feelings toward each other are blatantly obvious.”

“And he did catch you sleeping on me, Kathryn.”

She answered the Doctor’s original question. “As far as the media knows, there are only invalidated rumors, and it needs to stay that way for just a little longer.”

“Why’s that?” The Doctor asked as he picked up another scanner.

Chakotay responded, “Her future isn’t settled yet, and we’d like the media to focus on that rather than on more personal issues.”

The Doctor said, “Mums the word then, but if you two spend any time around the Voyager crew, it won’t be a secret for long.”

Smiling at Chakotay, Kathryn said, “I trust that the Voyagers, as we’ve started calling them, will keep things in the family.”

“Aha!” The Doctor said to Kathryn’s head. “There you are.”

Her eyes glanced towards the Doctor and then back at Chakotay. “What scanner did you use?”

“One I developed for detecting objects that are slightly out of phase, and that’s what we’ve got here. This won’t be detectable unless someone is specifically looking for it.”

“That’s good,” Kathryn said.

Chakotay listened with interest as the Doctor continued, “It is placed on the surface of your skull, not connected to any nerves. I suspect the dizziness you felt was the phase variance, but it appears to be stable now.”

“So nothing to worry about?” she asked.

“Not that I can see. It’s made of the same poly-deutonic alloy that my emitter’s made of, and it bears a striking resemblance to the neural interface I found in Admiral Janeway’s brain. I wonder if I invented this, too.”

Kathryn said, “It’s possible. Have you thought about developing that interface?”

“I’ve put it on a list of things I’d like to research, but I haven’t done anything with it yet.”

“I think you should definitely pursue it. A great deal could be developed from that technology.” Kathryn glanced at Chakotay, who was giving her a very odd look. She figured she should stop talking about the future to avoid arousing suspicion.

“All finished, Captain. I don’t believe that the implant is going to cause you any problems.” The Doctor started putting his tools in his bag. “I think the best thing you can do now is to get a good night’s rest. I’ll leave another dose of strong analgesic for in the morning.”

She slowly sat up, “Thank you, Doctor. I feel much better.”

Chakotay saw the Doctor and Ensign out while Kathryn got ready for bed. She had washed up and was in her nightgown when she heard a knock on the bedroom door. He looked surprised when he saw her. “Hi, I brought you a fresh glass of ice water.”

“Thank you,” she smiled as she took a sip. Leaving the door open, she set the glass on the nightstand and turned down the bed. “Mom said she’s got you situated?”

“Yes. She replicated some clothes for me to sleep in and showed me where the refresher is for my uniform.” He picked her discarded uniform up off the bed, not quite able to take his eyes off her. “I’ll do yours, too.”

“Thank you.” Kathryn could see that her nightgown was attracting Chakotay’s attention and that made her feel pleasantly alluring. She figured if they were destined to procreate, there wasn’t much harm in enticing him. She took her uniform out of his hands and set it on the chair by the door. Her mouth crooked in a mischievous grin as she pulled him further into the room and shut the door behind him.

“Kathryn?” he questioned when her arms wrapped around his neck.

She raised an eyebrow. “I’m going to kiss you, if that’s okay?”

He smiled nervously. “Of course. I’m just a little taken with what you’re wearing, or rather, what you’re not wearing.”

“What? This old thing?” she asked playfully as she glanced down at the low-cut gown.

He groaned as she pressed her body against him. “You’re trouble. You know that, don’t you?”

She stood on her tip-toes and kissed him softly. “Yes, but I’m your trouble.”

He smiled devilishly as he took her mouth into a deeply passionate kiss while his hands explored the satiny fabric. As always, when the heat of his lips and hands touched her, her body spiraled into a state of arousal that left her breathless.

When the kiss ended, they continued to hold each other, cherishing the intimate contact. Kathryn laid her head on his chest and mused, “If you continue to kiss me like that for the rest of our lives, I don’t think you’ll have any problem convincing me to do whatever you want.”

His laugh was low in his chest. “I wish.” He continued to caress her back, dipping his hand low to cup her satin-covered bottom. “Kathryn, as much as I’d love to continue this, I don’t think it would be entirely appropriate considering we’re in your mother’s house.”

“I don’t think she’d mind. In fact, she’d probably say it was about time.” Kathryn lifted her head to focus on his beautiful brown eyes. “But you’re right, we’d probably be distracted, and I want to be completely focused on you when the time comes.”

He cleared his throat before taking a step back. "I uh... yeah. I'm going to call it a night. Sleep well." He quickly closed the door behind him.

Kathryn had to laugh when he opened the door a crack and his hand reached in to retrieve her uniform before closing it again. She turned out the lights and crawled into bed, feeling deliciously sexy – a nice change from her mood earlier that evening. Her thoughts turned back to her private conversation with Admiral Janeway about Chakotay. The Admiral would be tickled pink at Chakotay's reaction just now.

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<I>*Admiral Janeway said, "While we have a few minutes alone, tell me what you've been up to. Tell me about Chakotay."*

*"You want to see if I've lived up to my promises?"*

*"Of course, grant a dying woman her last request."*

*"Don't be so dramatic." Kathryn didn't want to think about it. "Very well. We made it home..."*

*"Tell me the good stuff. Have you kissed him?"*

*"Yes, quite a few times."*

*"Was it as good as I remember?"*

*"Even better."*

*"And the sex. How is that?" Admiral Janeway looked like she was about to drool.*

*"We haven't had sex yet."*

*"What?!? Why the hell not?"*

*Kathryn shook her head in dismay. "These things can't be rushed."*

*"See, that's where you're wrong. You're too cautious. Just rip his shirt off, for crying out loud, and get down to it."*

*"The romance between us is wonderful – only a couple weeks old."*

*Admiral Janeway rolled her eyes. "And here I was hoping you'd tell me how good it was. I've often wondered how intense he'd be. If you've kissed him, you must have some idea."*

*“It is intense, yes. He’s very attentive.”*

*“Do you suspect that you’ll writhe and moan under his touch? I often thought I might.”*

*“You have a dirty mind, you know, and you sound like Phoebe.”*

*“My mind is no dirtier than yours.” Admiral Janeway added, “I’ll bet he’s a lot more skilled than Mark. Won’t fumble around so much. And willing to spend a lot more time on the buildup than Justin ever was. I bet Chakotay’s adventurous, too – maybe even a ‘take charge’ kind of man.”*

*Kathryn laughed. “I bet you’re right.”*

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