

The Future is Ours – Part 7

“Preparing for the Future”

By Dawn

Rated PG

Summary: Kathryn makes commitments regarding her future

Late Monday morning, Kathryn waited outside Fleet Admiral Khurma’s office. His receptionist was an officious woman who didn’t appear to have a high opinion of anyone, so Kathryn didn’t take the haughtiness personally.

She’d never been to this office before. It was significantly more elaborate than any other part of Headquarters. The elevator opened onto a corridor with plush red carpet, solid wood paneling, and chandeliers. Kathryn thought the extravagance was misplaced and it looked more like a grand hotel than a military building.

That morning, she and Chakotay had transported directly from Aspen. They’d spent a wonderful Sunday morning lying in the luxurious king-sized bed, an afternoon skiing in the beautiful Rocky Mountains, and an evening enjoying a nice dinner in front of the fireplace. She delighted in the memories of how much they’d also enjoyed each other.

Her first stop that day had been to Admiral Paris’s office to ask if she could set up residence in his conference room for the week. He was thrilled to have her there, and even more ecstatic about the response to her unplanned press statements on Saturday. Kathryn had put that out of her mind after leaving town, but Paris informed her that her comments had been re-broadcast all weekend and that journalists had picked apart and over-evaluated everything she said, all in a positive light.

Patterson joined their conversation a few minutes after she arrived, and the three of them discussed her trip to Paris. She informed them of her decision to accept the assignment, but added that she wasn’t accepting their espionage request until she had more information about the issues and the people involved. They weren’t thrilled, but they understood her concerns and told her that they respected her decision. All three came to the conclusion that the matter wouldn’t be addressed until she officially started her new assignment and after the Admirals had a chance to talk to the rest of their group.

Chakotay was spending the day greeting the Voyagers as they arrived for their conferences which would be taking place all day Monday and Tuesday, with follow-up meetings on Wednesday and Thursday. There were six detailers handling the thirty-minute conferences, and Kathryn was thankful that Chakotay was there to help the Voyagers feel more comfortable.

Kathryn's attention was brought back to the officious receptionist when the comm-terminal signaled a message had arrived from the inner-sanctum, as Kathryn had decided to call Khurma's private office.

The self-important receptionist raised her chin. "Captain Janeway, Admiral Khurma will see you now."

Kathryn stood and graciously said, "Thank you." As the doors opened automatically, she took a deep breath and put on her best 'captain's mask.'

"Captain Janeway, please come in," Khurma came around from behind the desk. He motioned to a sitting area near an inactive fireplace. "May I get you anything? Coffee, tea?"

"Coffee would be lovely, thank you." Kathryn took a good look around the sanctum while he ordered their coffees from the replicator. The décor matched the outer office in extravagance, but the colors were blue and gold.

Khurma said, "I see that you're taking stock of your surroundings, Captain."

"Yes, Admiral. I was noticing how the décor is so ornate on this floor."

He looked around and nodded. "If you ask me, I think it's a bit excessive. I try to spend as little time here as I can. My study at home and the office in Paris are both preferable."

Kathryn smiled. "Paris is a lovely city."

"And my overbearing receptionist, who came with the position, isn't there. She is at least quite good at managing my schedule."

"There's something to be said for that." Kathryn hadn't really engaged in small talk with him before. She found him different and much more personable than she had expected.

"Tell me what's on your mind, Kathryn."

"At the moment, I was thinking how much more relaxed you seem to be today than you were on Saturday."

"Yes, I'm afraid that one of my failings is that I let President Zife affect my disposition," he sighed. "My wife often points that out to me. After I meet with him, I'm a little on edge. He's putting a lot of pressure on Starfleet to fix the problems in the Federation."

"I noticed that. I worry that he believes sending me out there will be a quick fix. I don't think my presence will do anything but placate people until the real problems, whatever they might be, are addressed."

“I agree, and for now, that’s all I’m expecting you to do. If you’re successful and bring a few members back, we’ll all be thrilled. But the problems run deep, and at this point, I’ll be happy just to open a dialogue and diffuse some tense situations.”

“Understood,” she said, although she thought they could do a whole lot more if they put their minds to it.

“I’m perfectly aware of what the problems are, and I know there is no quick fix. Meanwhile, the President will want to ride on the coat-tails of your achievements and fame. How do you feel about that?”

Kathryn waved her hand and shrugged. “I think he can believe he’s taking advantage of my sudden popularity, but I suspect that the public is smart enough to figure it out. The questions that I’ve been receiving from reporters have recently addressed concerns about the safety of the Federation.”

“Yes, I’ve been following your statements to the press.”

“What’s your take on their questions?” She was hoping to lead the conversation toward the press’s interest instead of her responses.

“The statements you made on Saturday were a surprising change from your previous evasive maneuvers, but I thought you handled it well. It’s exactly the kind of press coverage that the President will like, as long as you can continue to steer interviews away from pointing fingers and towards your ideals about everyone thinking positively.”

“It felt like that’s what they wanted to hear.”

“The President loved it. He called me yesterday to congratulate me on coaching you to say the right things.” Khurma laughed. “I hope you don’t mind that I didn’t correct his assumption.”

“Of course not.” Kathryn smiled, and after a moment’s pause she informed him, “I’ve come to give you my answer about this assignment.”

“I was hoping that was the case. What did you decide?”

“I’d like to accept, but with a few stipulations.”

“Well, that depends on what they are.”

“President Zife implied that my office would be in Paris. I’d rather be here.”

Khurma nodded. “I’d rather you be here, too, although you will have to attend some Security Council meetings in Paris. My intention is to be a buffer between you and the President. I believe that he’d like to keep you under his thumb, but I think you’ll be more

successful if you have a certain amount of separation from him. You don't need him looking over your shoulder and meddling in your discussions. So yes, you can set up office here at Headquarters or at the San Francisco Federation Council building. What else?"

"What size staff would I have?"

"Typical staff of a vice admiral is one lieutenant and one ensign, but that can be easily amended. You've got a big job to do, and I'm sure having the right people, regardless of rank, would be beneficial. I'm happy to give you as many resources as you need."

"I'll start with two aides for now and see how that goes, but I'd like to choose them."

"Of course, all Admirals do."

"Also, I feel the need for two security officers on my staff. I'm concerned that with the amount of publicity I've been receiving, someone might try to take advantage of the public's perception that I'm valuable."

"You're quite valuable to us, Kathryn. I think that's a sensible precaution, although when you're traveling, you'll also have the security of whatever ship you're on."

"Thank you. My last request concerns my working style. I've become accustomed to working on my own. I'm happy to give daily reports, happy to attend briefings and committee meetings as needed, but I would like the autonomy to proceed with this assignment as I see fit."

Khurma thought about the request for a long moment before replying. "I can appreciate that you don't want to be micro-managed, but ultimately, you report to me, and I report to the Federation President. He has a specific agenda in mind, as do I, about where we'd like you to start."

"Do your agendas match?"

"No, unfortunately. I'm concerned that if you bring a third agenda to the table, we'll have trouble before we ever get out the door."

"I'll follow orders and would appreciate your guidance. I'm more concerned with President Zife's interference, than yours."

"I'm glad to hear it. Once you get a little deeper into the assignment, if you find that your ideas drastically differ from mine, we can discuss it. I try to keep an open door with my immediate staff, and your assignment is one of my top priorities at the moment."

"I appreciate that."

Zhurma finished his coffee and set the empty cup on the side table. “Anything else?”

“When would this assignment begin?”

“Immediately. There are a couple of situations that are rather heated.”

“I’m sure, but I’d really like to take leave next week for personal reasons.”

“Just one week?”

“Yes, to honor a promise to a friend.”

“May I assume that friend is Commander Chakotay?”

“Yes. We’ve made plans to leave for the Banora colony on Monday to visit his sister.”

Khurma nodded. “Thank you for being up front with me about your plans. I think that would be fine, especially considering how busy you’ve been over the last month. A week away might even provide some rejuvenation. I’d like you to keep your travel plans private, however, or the media might think the Banora colony’s membership is up for debate.”

“Understood. I’d rather not have the media follow me there, either.”

“Also, to ensure your safety, I’d like to send a starship to that sector while you’re there. I’m sure we could find some nebula for it to study.”

“If you feel that’s necessary, that would be fine, although we’ve made arrangements to take a private transport.”

Khurma scratched his chin in thought for a moment. “Private transport. I’m not sure that’s a good idea. You are, of course, free to do that, but it might put you in a vulnerable position if someone unsavory learns of it. Would you be opposed to having a Starship take you, since we’ll have one going in that direction anyway? It’s perfectly acceptable to do that, and you’d get there faster.”

“I’ll consider it, but I’d like to discuss it with Chakotay.”

“Tell him that it’s for your safety and I think he’ll agree. Otherwise, you might have a Starship on your tail the entire time to keep a watch on you.”

“He does worry about my safety.” She nodded in agreement, “All right, we’ll travel on a starship.”

“Good, that’s settled.” Khurma stood and Kathryn followed suit. “If that’s all, Captain, I’d like to officially welcome you to this assignment.” He extended his hand for a handshake and she took it.

“Thank you, Admiral.”

“You’ll turn over command of Voyager on Saturday night and receive your promotion immediately following. That’s also when we’ll announce it to the press. Please try to have your staff in place before Saturday so we can announce that as well. You might appease a few interested parties if one or two of your staff were former Maquis.”

“I’ll consider that, but probably as security. They get a little heated when it comes to Federation politics.”

“Understandable. Perhaps your staff can begin working while you’re gone.” He walked her to the door. “Don’t hesitate to call me if you have any questions or concerns.” Extending his hand for another handshake, he said, “Welcome to the brass, Admiral Janeway.”

“Thank you, Sir.”

Kathryn felt a sense of wellbeing when she rounded the corner and saw Chakotay standing in the corridor talking to B’Elanna. She thought back to the first time she met them and found it incredible how close they had become. B’Elanna had gone from hating her to becoming a very good friend, but she was still the same brilliant, strong-willed woman that challenged Kathryn every chance she could. And Chakotay... Kathryn just smiled to herself thinking about their relationship.

He looked towards her, almost as if he sensed her coming before the sound of her footsteps could’ve reached him. At first, his expression was concerned, but then he saw something in her smile that reassured him, because his dimples quickly lit up the already bright corridor.

When she was close enough, Chakotay asked, “So, how did it go?”

Kathryn answered with relief, “It’s done.” She laid a hand on B’Elanna’s shoulder. “How are you, Lanna? Have you had your conference?”

“Just finished it.”

“I want to apologize for not helping you prepare for it.”

“Don’t worry about it, Captain. It was an easy choice for me, and it sounds like you’ve had more than enough on your plate.”

“It’s been a little full, yes.” Kathryn sighed. “So, what did you decide?”

“Starship design at Utopia Planetia. I’ll be leading a design team on a completely new concept that incorporates a lot of what we did to Voyager.”

“Oh, Lanna! That’s wonderful! I can’t imagine anything more perfect for you.”

“Thank you, Captain, for everything.” B’Elanna glanced at Chakotay and then back at Kathryn. “And that includes making this old man happier than I’ve ever seen him.”

“You’re welcome. He’s made me pretty happy too, you know.”

“I can tell,” B’Elanna laughed. “So, Captain, did you just come from deciding what you’re going to do?”

“I did,” Kathryn took a deep breath.

“And are you going to tell us?” B’Elanna probed.

“Yes, on Saturday night.”

“A hint?”

Chakotay answered, “She’s going to move mountains.”

“That’s a given,” B’Elanna laughed. “All right, I’ll be patient, but I’m not good at it.”

“Thank you for understanding,” Kathryn said.

“I do. Well, I’m sure Miral’s getting hungry, so I’ll catch up with you later.”

“Have a good day, B’Elanna,” Chakotay said as the young woman left. He turned to Kathryn and asked, “So it went well?”

“Very well, actually. I had nothing to be nervous about.”

He glanced at the clock and said, “We have about ten minutes before the next round comes through. Do you have time to sit with me?”

“Sure.” She followed him to the row of chairs against the wall and sat down. “Admiral Khurma’s demeanor was remarkably different today, and I believe that I’m going to like working for him, after all.”

“Really? That’s quite a change from what you said yesterday when you thought he’d just get in your way.”

“I know.” She shrugged. “He admitted to being irritable after talking with the President, and other than Saturday, I’ve never spoken with him alone. He’s surprisingly easy to talk to and seems like he’ll be as open as he can to my suggestions.”

“I’m relieved to hear it. That will make your job a lot less stressful.”

Kathryn nodded. “We agreed on my office being here, and he wants to act as a buffer between me and the President. I’m not sure how the President will take it, but I’m pleased with it. Oh, he also agreed with putting two security officers on my staff. I didn’t tell him that was your suggestion, however.”

He chuckled. “That’s quite all right.”

“I also spoke with my two favorite admirals.”

“And?”

“They respect my decision not to cooperate until I feel safe doing so.”

Chakotay frowned. “That doesn’t sound very positive.”

“It was fine,” she said as she looked up and down the nearly-empty corridor. “This isn’t the best place to talk about it.”

“You can tell me later.”

“I will,” she smiled and took his hand. “Khurma is giving me a week to go to Banora, but he’s insisting that a starship take us.”

Chakotay frowned. “An entire starship? To take us on vacation?”

“When I told him where we’re going, he said he wanted a starship in that sector for my safety and protection.”

“Okay, I can see that.”

“And then he said if we were to take a private transport, he’d assign that same starship to protect us.”

“So it’s going our way whether we want it to or not?”

“Exactly.”

“All right. It seems unnecessary, but I’m all for keeping you safe.”

“Khurma thought you might agree.” Kathryn squeezed his hand. “Well, I’ve got a lot to do, so I’d better hop to it.”

“What’s on your docket?”

“Public affairs wants to meet with me about Saturday night. I need to get with facilities to look at available offices and decide where I’m going to set up shop. I have a staff of four to recruit, and Tuvok will be here this afternoon and wants to talk.”

“That reminds me. Annika was here and she’d like to see you sometime this week, too.”

“You spoke to her?”

“Mmm hmm.” He looked away.

“How did that go?”

“The conversation was a bit stilted, but it was fine,” he answered guardedly.

She took note of his sudden tension as she asked, “When Tuvok is finished here, would you direct him to Paris’ conference room? I suspect that’ll be around 2:30.”

“I will,” he said quietly. “Enjoy your day.”

“Chakotay?” She looked at him carefully. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” he assured with a smile that didn’t reach his eyes.

She stared at him for a long moment and could tell that he wasn’t. “Did I say something wrong?”

“No, love.” He squeezed her hand. “I’m fine. Really.”

“I’m not convinced.” She narrowed her eyes. “Just tell me if it’s me, my job, Annika, or Tuvok.”

He waved it away. “It’s just Annika. I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Okay, but, I’m sure I can help you with that.”

“How so?” He picked at a piece of lint on his trousers.

Kathryn leaned into him and grazed her lips along his jaw. She whispered, “I feel confident that my feminine wiles can make you forget all about any other woman. You’re just going to have to wait about six hours until we’re alone so I can show you exactly what you do to me.”

He laughed out loud. “Thank you.” His eyes were full of emotion as he looked at her. “I love you, Kathryn.”

Her eyes widened suggestively. “Yes, you most certainly do... and you do it quite well.”

He began to blush and pointed in the direction she had arrived from. “Go before you cause a problem, you lecherous woman.”

As she walked away with a little more swing in her hips than usual, she turned and asked, “How many was it? Four? Five times? I lost count.”

“Go!” He glared at her with amusement sparkling in his eyes.

Next day...

“Captain Janeway?”

Kathryn sighed as she heard her name being called from behind her. So many people were pulling at her and all she wanted to do was get a cup of coffee and a bagel. She schooled her features and turned around.

“Captain!” Harry Kim smiled brightly. “I was hoping to see you today. Do you have a few minutes?”

“Harry,” she said with relief, having no qualms whatsoever about talking with him. “Walk with me, would you?”

“Of course, Captain.”

“I’m headed to the commissary for a much needed cup of coffee. Are you hungry?”

“A little.”

“Good, I’d love some company.” A few minutes of quiet would be better, but since that wasn’t likely to happen, his company would be preferable to most. “Have you had a conference with your detailer, yet?” Kathryn asked.

“Yes, Captain, first thing this morning.”

“How did it go?”

Harry scratched his cheek before he said, “It was fine, overall, but I’m unsure about what to do.”

“Oh? Anything I can help with?” she asked as they walked through the doors into the seating area.

“I hope so.” He paused before asking, “Could we sit for a minute, Captain? Do you have time?”

“I’ll make time.”

“I know you’re busy.”

She squeezed his arm in reassurance. “Not too busy for you, Harry. Let’s get a bite to eat first. I skipped breakfast this morning and am regretting it.”

Once they got their coffee and snack, they took a seat at a table in the far corner of the dining area. Kathryn wasn’t sure why Harry led her so far away, but she assumed he wanted privacy. She asked, “So, are you not sure about your choice of assignments?”

“I don’t know what I expected, but the three options aren’t it. I have until Thursday to decide, but...”

“Do you want more time? We don’t need to announce your posting Saturday night.”

“I’m not sure that more time is going to help. Captain Blair of the Phoenix has invited me to be his second officer.”

“Oh, really? That’s wonderful! I knew that operations officer on a ship would be an option, but I hadn’t heard which one.”

“It’s a galaxy-class ship, and I think I’d enjoy it, but I’m not sure I’d be happy on any ship that’s not Voyager.”

She smiled sympathetically. “I know exactly how you feel, but we all have to move on.”

“I know, but the Voyager family has become so important to me that I don’t want to be away from everyone. It feels like I’d be losing part of me.”

“It’s a great opportunity, though. Second officer on a galaxy-class is a really great post, and you’re perfect for it. Even with only seven years under your belt, you’re a fine officer, quick thinker, and very adept at encouraging and developing the skills of those under your command.”

Harry blushed slightly, “Thank you, Captain. It means a lot to hear you say that.”

“I mean every word. Would you like examples?”

“No,” he chuckled as he stopped her. “But thank you, Captain. The other two posts are both in ship design – one overseeing a new project that will study how to use the Borg technology to enhance sensors, and the other is to join the shuttle design team. They want both Tom and me because of our work on the Delta Flyer.”

“Those are incredible opportunities, too. You certainly excel in both.”

“Thank you, but I’ve already accomplished those. It would be teaching the rest of the designers to incorporate what we’ve already done.”

“True,” Kathryn nodded. “I see your dilemma. You want something new, but you’re not sure if you want to be on another ship.”

“My real dilemma is that I know what I want, and it’s not one of these three.”

“Ah,” Kathryn perked up. “Maybe I can help. What is it that you want?”

“I want to work for you, Captain,” Harry said quietly.

She was touched, but knew that he didn’t know what he was asking. “Harry…”

“Before you say no, hear me out.”

“You don’t even know what I’m going to be doing.”

“I can guess, and I think that I’ve gotten to know you well enough that I bet it’s not far from the truth. The Voyagers have been discussing it for the last couple of weeks, and we believe that we’ve figured it out.”

“Have you?” she asked, a little amused that they’d been speculating so much.

“I’m sorry if that bothers you, Captain.”

“Of course not, and it doesn’t surprise me, either. I’m quite used to being the focus of gossip and speculation. What have you come up with?”

“I think you’ll be promoted to Admiral and that you’re going to work in Paris for Admiral Khurma to act as a deputy security advisor to coordinate the diplomatic and tactical movements of the entire fleet.”

She bit back a smile. “You think they’d let me direct the assignments of the entire fleet? That’s what the Fleet Admiral does.”

“I know, but I think he wants you to advise him.”

Kathryn tried to contain her mirth. "I'm honored that you think so highly of me, but no, that's not what I'll be doing. I can see why you'd want to work for me if it was, though."

"But it's got to have something to do with diplomacy, doesn't it?"

She took a sip of coffee and tried to decide how much to tell him. "I trust that you'll keep what I'm about to say in the strictest confidence."

"Absolutely, Captain," he said eagerly.

"It cannot enter into the speculative arguments of the Voyagers, in any way. Don't even hint that you know anything, and after Saturday night, don't suggest that you had any prior knowledge."

"Okay," he said confidently. "You can trust me, Captain."

"I trust you completely. I just want to be clear that I'm not telling you this lightly."

He nodded. "I understand, Captain."

"You've just about got it, but not quite. The title's not right, and I won't be coordinating the fleet."

He looked confused. "I've got it right, except for the title and the assignment? What part of that is correct, then?"

"The diplomatic part. There's been no mention of a large scale effort, just me."

"You're going to be a solitary diplomat to fix all the problems of the entire Federation?" he asked disbelieving.

"You're making assumptions." She sipped her coffee before saying, "I can't explain it in detail right now, but I don't think that working for me is the right thing for you."

Harry looked down, "I understand. After seven years with the same people, I'm sure you need a break."

"No," she said quickly. "That's not it at all. Like many others, I'm actually finding it difficult to socialize with anyone except the Voyagers because no one knows what we've been through."

"I've found that to be true for me, too. My old friends just aren't the same, and I even found it difficult to relate to the woman you saw me with last week."

She felt a lot of empathy for him. "What I meant to convey is that you need a change. I'm the only commanding officer you've ever served under. You should get some new

experiences. Go out there and show Starfleet how talented you are. If you don't break from me at this point, you'll be limiting your career."

"May I speak freely?"

"Of course."

Harry said, "I don't care about my career right now. What I care about is that the home that I thought I'd never see again has changed, and I don't like what it has become."

"Your family?" she asked with concern.

"Not that home. They're exactly the same as they've always been, and they don't understand that I'm a changed man."

She was afraid that might happen. "That's not unexpected."

"What I mean by home is Earth and the Federation. There doesn't seem to be any pride left. There's no excitement about exploring or that unquenchable urge for scientific discovery. It seems that all anyone cares about is pointing fingers at whomever they think is to blame for the problems."

Kathryn replied, "Earth was attacked while we were gone. It's normal to feel threatened, and people have to move beyond that basic need before they can start thinking in terms of self-actualization."

"I agree, and I've heard what you've said in every interview and press statement. But I've also looked around me at the people listening to you, and that's the only time that I see a spark of energy and hope. I want to help you restore that, and I can't imagine that anything else would be fulfilling. No matter what job I'd have, my foremost concern wouldn't be sensors or encouraging junior crewman to succeed. It would be how I could restore that essence of whatever it was that made me want to go into Starfleet."

"You sound like me."

"I'm glad you think so, because I want to help you. If I may be a little presumptuous, I think we made a good team when I assisted you in first contacts and negotiations."

"We made a great team and you are almost as intuitive to my needs as Chakotay is. I really missed not having you at my side last weekend in Paris." She took a deep breath, giving herself a moment to mull it over.

"Will you consider it?"

"In your conference, did you talk about a promotion or are they saving it to be a surprise on Saturday?"

Harry said, "I was told that I'd receive one."

She didn't want to spoil the surprise for him, so she spoke generally. "I can have two aides, and both would be beneath what your rank will be."

"I don't need a promotion."

She laughed. "Yes, you do. It's just that the skill level required is lower than what you're capable of."

"That doesn't matter to me, because it would be something new and would be for a cause I really believe in."

"I won't be in Paris much, I hope. Was that where you were hoping to live?"

"Where I live isn't important as long as I'm making a difference."

She smiled at hearing her own words come back at her. "I'll likely be going into space frequently."

"I expected that you might."

She grinned, "Have you had enough of your mom's apple pie?"

He patted his belly, "More than enough. Truth be told, it's not as good as I remembered."

Laughing, she said, "Not many things are. Distance makes the heart grow fonder." She looked at her coffee cup, "Although nothing is quite like the taste of fresh brewed coffee."

"We'll have to take some coffee beans with us this time." Harry said, "Replicators don't do the real thing justice."

"No, they don't. But they're nice to have."

"Do you have time for a quick story?"

"Sure." She loved talking to him.

"The replicated apple pie never tasted like home because it wasn't mom's apple pie, but it was more than the fact that it wasn't made by her. I never told anyone because I was often given a piece of apple pie to cheer me up. My mom, although Chinese, is very dedicated to cooking Korean cuisine because she thinks it makes my Dad happy, and he goes along with it because he thinks it makes her happy. He once told her that she should

try her hand at apple pie because he liked a piece he had somewhere. So, she decided that she could make the Korean version of an apple pie.”

“Oh?”

“There aren’t many who can tolerate her pie. Most think it’s just awful, but would never tell it to her face. She combines three or four Korean dessert recipes to create this weird concoction of boiled apples, peppercorns, not quite enough sugar, and pine nuts in a rice flour crust, topped with toasted bean powder and edible flowers.”

Kathryn couldn’t help but make a face. “That sounds terrible.”

“It is, when you compare it to real apple pie. But it’s Mom, and it’s home. I just wish it was as good as I remembered. It’s hard to believe, but I got used to Neelix’s blend of herbs and they were nothing like Korean flavors. I wrote to her in one letter that I really missed her pie, and she’s inundated me with those pies since the day we got home.”

Kathryn laughed. “So you want to leave just to get away from those pies? I don’t think I’ll mention that when I talk to Admiral Patterson about you.”

“So you’ll consider it?” he asked hopefully.

“I’ll do more than that,” she smiled affectionately. “You’ve convinced me, but I need to run it by Patterson because he’s overseeing all the Voyager reassignments. I’d love to have you with me, just so long as you understand that it will be a lot of politics, and it isn’t the best career move. The job has absolutely nothing to do with operations, sensors, ship design, or engineering.”

“I understand completely, Captain.”

“Good. Now I need to find an ensign who knows a lot more about recent history than you and I do, and I’d like to find two security officers that I trust who are willing to take this on, preferably former Maquis. I’m afraid that if I don’t act quickly, the choice will be made for me.” She stood up to go.

“Can I help you with that?” He took her dirty dishes for her. “Finding security staff, I mean.”

“You have some ideas?”

“I do. Justin Jarvin and Mark Yosa, assuming all the Maquis will keep their commissions.”

“They will if they want them. You’re sure of their interest?”

“Yes, if you have time, I can explain.”

“Not now.” She gave it only a moment’s thought because she’d trust any of Voyager’s security officers with her life and much more. “Would you do something for me today if you have time?”

“Absolutely, Captain. I have nothing else on my schedule.”

“Please find Chakotay and fill him in on this conversation. I’m sure he’ll be surprised that I’ve told you as much as I have. Tell him your thoughts and ask for his assessment. I’ll be happy with any two Voyager security officers that you and Chakotay agree on. Then ask the officers to find me before the end of the day. Could you do that?”

“Yes, Captain. Thank you for giving me this opportunity.”

She patted his back. “Thank you, Harry, for wanting to do this. I feel like you’ve lifted a weight off my shoulders.”

He was beaming as they left the commissary.

Chakotay was only half listening to Harry as they walked down the hall until Harry asked, “So, what do you think?”

He stopped and turned to the younger man. “I’m sorry, Harry, my mind is really preoccupied. What were you saying?”

“We can talk later if this isn’t a good time.”

“Now is as good a time as any, I suppose. A lot of your former shipmates have been vying for my attention all morning, and I’ve just got a lot on my mind. Plus, I offered to help the Captain fill her new staff. Sorry, you don’t need to hear all that. Are you concerned about what your detailer offered?”

Harry looked amused. “You didn’t hear a word I said.”

“I’m sorry,” Chakotay sighed. “You deserve my full attention.”

“It’s not a problem, but I think I can help you.”

“Well, that’s good news.” Chakotay glanced at an empty meeting room and said, “Let’s go in here.”

“Captain Janeway asked me to talk to you,” Harry said as he sat down.

“All right. You need help figuring out which assignment to accept?” Chakotay tried to remember the options Harry had been given.

“No, what I was just telling you was that the Captain has agreed to let me work for her.”

Chakotay’s jaw dropped slightly. “She has?”

“I had to convince her, but she came around.”

“Did she tell you what she’s going to be doing?”

“Not in detail.” Harry recapped the earlier conversation and then said, “So now she’s asked me to get with you to decide which two Voyager security officers to invite to be on our team.”

Chakotay exhaled a long sigh and set down the padd he’d been holding. He leaned back in his chair and studied Harry for a moment. “I think this is a mistake for your career.”

“I’m aware of that, but I still want to do it.”

“I don’t think Kath... the captain would have agreed unless she knew that you understood that.”

“I want to do this, Commander. I want to work for her.”

Chakotay looked at Harry thoughtfully for a moment, wondering to himself just how much of a crush the young man had on his Kathryn. Chakotay smiled to himself and then became serious again. “All right, but I’m going to make a request of you.”

“Of course, Commander. What can I do?”

“This position is going to be extremely stressful for her, and as her senior aide, I want you to urge her to take care of herself.”

Harry smiled, “Of course, Commander.”

“I’m serious about this. Bring her food, bring her water, coffee when she needs it. Encourage her to get rest and to stop working at a reasonable hour, and tell her you’re under my orders if she protests. She gets so wrapped up in her responsibilities that she forgets about her own needs.”

“I can definitely do that.”

Chakotay continued, “You don’t know, and won’t know for awhile, the full extent of what she’s taking on. She has a public image to maintain and will have a lot of classified information to juggle amongst a large number of constituents. They will all want her to

disclose everything she knows, but she won't be able to be completely open with anyone. I hope that she'll confide in you, but she may not in order to protect you."

Harry asked, "Will she be in danger?"

"With all this publicity, she's become very influential and very popular. I hope that the result is all positive, but we can't be so naïve as to believe no one will take advantage of her or her fame. I've asked her to request two security personnel on her staff, in addition to the security that will be assigned by whatever ship she's on. I'd like you to also be on your toes, and be her eyes and ears in all situations. She's going to have to play up her charming personality in order to get people to trust her and talk to her. Don't get so wrapped up in all the good that you'll be doing that you lose your perspective."

Harry asked, "Do you have reasons to be suspicious? Has something happened?"

"No, nothing has happened, but I'm rather fond of her. I don't want anything to happen. She has tendencies to leave herself open and exposed."

"Such as?"

Chakotay described it as best he could. "When she has free time, she likes to step away from a crowd. She says it's to get a broader perspective, but it results in her being alone and vulnerable. For example, she likes to look out windows, find gardens, walk along rivers, and look out over cliffs. Her love of nature has only increased since she's been home."

"I've seen her do that, but I never thought about it being dangerous."

Nodding, Chakotay added, "She also doesn't like to ask people to do things for her. There are a lot of situations that require it, but she'd much rather take care of things herself than to be waited on or endanger someone else. This can be something as large as that time when she manually launched a torpedo herself or something as insignificant as stepping outside of a banquet room into the kitchen to refill her own water glass."

"I understand what you're saying, but I also don't think she's going to let me control her that much."

"Don't think of it so much as control, but as maneuvering. Think tactically and stand up to her when you need to."

"I'm impressed that you've noticed all those little details about her."

"Yes, well, I've been looking out for her for a long time." Chakotay didn't add that he had also been completely in love with his commanding officer all that time, too.

“I hope that as I learn more about this situation, that any threats will become clearer. She told me about the need for security, and I have a couple of suggestions that she asked me to discuss with you.”

The two men discussed the security personnel, and Chakotay agreed with Harry’s recommendations and made some of his own. Harry would talk to the officers and then get back with Chakotay later that day. As they were getting up to leave, Harry asked, “May I ask you a personal question, Commander?”

“Sure.”

“Are you and the Captain dating?”

Before opening the door to the room, Chakotay replied, “Dating is a tenuous stage in a relationship, so in that respect, I would have to say no. There is nothing tentative about how we feel.”

Kathryn was safely ensconced in her temporary office, which had been Admiral Paris’s conference room. Finally able to find some time alone, she was up to her eyeballs reading messages, reports, press releases, and tactical scenarios in order to catch up on the last seven years of Federation history.

She glanced up to see Chakotay coming in and quietly pulling the door shut behind him. His dimpled smile was a balm to her frazzled mind, encouraging her to toss aside the PADD she’d been reading and lean back in her chair as he came closer.

“Hi there, beautiful,” he said as he leaned over her chair and kissed her.

“Hi, yourself,” she smiled. “Do you have a break?”

“Until tomorrow,” he sat down next to her. “It’s after five.”

“It is?” She checked the clock and frowned. “Hours have gone by and I didn’t even notice.”

“Time to call it a day.” He began stacking her PADDs for her.

“Mmmmm,” she groaned. “There’s so much more that I need to do before tomorrow.”

He shook his head. “No, there’s so much that you want to do. That’s a big difference.”

“Yes, I know.” She looked despairingly at the pile of work facing her.

Chakotay said, “I had an idea today while talking to Tuvok.”

“What’s that?” she asked.

“He said he’s splitting his time between Earth and Vulcan.”

“Right,” Kathryn nodded. “He’ll be teaching the fall semesters here, and spending the rest of the time with his family. He said it would keep him in touch with Starfleet without missing too much of his grandchildren’s younger years.”

“I think you should talk to him about your assignment from Q. He might have more time than you to look into it, and he’s closer to the situation.”

Kathryn shook her head in amusement. “Do you think it’s the years of working together that has made us think alike, or is it just the chemistry?”

“You already told him about it?”

She nodded. “Yesterday afternoon. He’s intrigued, but didn’t have a lot to say because we weren’t in a secure location.”

“Good. I think he was trying to get an idea from me today how I felt about it, although he wouldn’t come right out and say it.”

“And since I didn’t mention to you that he knew…” Kathryn laughed. “A tangled web.”

“This new job of yours could possibly become the most tangled web imaginable.”

“Did Harry find you?” She hadn’t heard anything more from him, so she was worried.

“Yes,” he simply answered. “We had a long talk.”

“What do you think?”

“At first,” Chakotay said, “I thought it was an incredibly bad idea.”

“I don’t know that it’s the right thing for him in the long run, but he really wants to do this, and I’d sure love to have him.”

“Maybe he’s the one who’ll be the future politician,” Chakotay offered.

“I’m not sure what his future holds.”

“I believe that he has a crush on you.”

She grimaced as she closed her notebook. “You’ve said that before, and I don’t agree.”

“I know you don’t, but I see it clear as day. He’s infatuated with you. I almost pointed it out to him as a reason I don’t want him to take this job.”

She chuckled, “You afraid of a little competition?”

“Hardly,” he raised an eyebrow. “I was afraid that he’d get so wrapped up in how wonderful you are that he’d forget to watch out for you, but then I changed my mind.”

“Why’s that?”

“I honestly believe that he’d take a bullet for you.”

“Chakotay,” she objected. “I’d never want him to risk his life for me.”

“You’d never want anyone to do that, but I want everyone who’s around you to make that their top priority, including myself.”

She sighed. “I don’t think anyone is going to be shooting at me.”

“I sincerely hope not.” He dropped her stack of PADDs into her satchel. “Your two security officers will be Scott Doyle and Justin Jarvin. You may speak to them if you like, but they’re on board and I’ve had a long conversation with each.”

Frowning, she said, “I just wanted you to get a feel for who might like to work for me, not fill the jobs.”

“Do you have qualms about either?”

“No. They’re perfect, and Yosa or O’Donnell would have been fine too.”

“Harry and I took the liberty of talking to several. We decided that Doyle and Jarvin would make the best team and their skills complement each other. They’re eager to serve and thrilled that you want them on your staff.”

She rolled her eyes, knowing full well that he conveyed her opinions without ever asking what those opinions might be. “Good to know. Now all I need to do is find an ensign who wasn’t on Voyager. I’ve been given a list of potentials, but haven’t had time to study their files.”

“I don’t have anything to do tonight, so I can help.”

“If you want to,” she said as she closed the computer terminal and stood up to go.

“I do. Makes me feel like I have a little bit of say in who’s going to make your job easier.” He picked up the satchel and asked, “What is all this you’re reading?”

“Seven years of Federation history.” She shrugged, “I need to write a speech for Saturday night, and I want to find something new to say.”

“I think you should have Harry help you with that. He has the time, he’s quite passionate about the topic, and he’d be very good at it.”

She thought about what Harry had said to her earlier and agreed. “Good idea. Remind me to call him after dinner.”

No longer hiding their relationship, he put his arm around her as they walked through the corridor and took the elevator down to the main floor. As they were walking through the atrium, they encountered a group of about twenty Voyagers who were surprised and thrilled to see them.

Tal Celes ran up to Kathryn excitedly and then suddenly stopped. “Captain Janeway! May I hug you?”

Kathryn laughed and opened her arms to receive the excitable young Bajoran. “Of course, Celes.”

They hugged for just a moment until Celes said, “I don’t know what strings you had to pull, but I’m thrilled with my new assignment. Thank you so much!”

At a loss for what that might be, Kathryn merely smiled brightly and said, “You’re welcome. I’m so glad that you’re looking forward to it. When do you begin?”

“About a month before the students arrive for the fall semester,” she beamed.

Ensign Sue Brooks was so adept at reading Kathryn’s body language that she always knew just what question to ask to help her along. Sue asked, “What will you be doing at the Academy, Celes?”

“I’ll be working for the Academy admissions office, helping new students get oriented and assisting the Dean.”

Chakotay noted, “We’re going to have quite a few Voyagers on staff at the Academy. Maybe we should set up a weekly lunch or something.”

“Oh! Can we? I’d be happy to organize it, Commander!”

“That would be great. Thank you, Ensign.”

They all walked out of the building together and Billy Telfer asked, “Captain, Commander, we’re all meeting at Keno’s Pizzeria over on twelfth street. Would you join us?”

Chakotay glanced at Kathryn for confirmation and then answered, “We’d love to. Thank you.”

As they walked down the street, Kathryn and Chakotay held hands, quite happy that they didn’t feel the need to hide their relationship. At a traffic signal, Sue glanced down at their joined hands and then looked back up at her and smiled in approval.

Kathryn stepped closer to Sue and asked, “How much do you know about the last seven years of Federation history and politics?”

Sue said, “Not a whole lot, but I’m a quick study if you need help with something. I kept up with the news reports over the last two years, but of course, that only touches the surface.”

“I’ve been reading our recent history all day and it’s all starting to blur together.”

“I know what you mean,” Sue said. “Did you know that I went to the University of Texas before coming to the academy?”

“No, I didn’t.” Kathryn was surprised. She thought she knew everything about her crew.

“Yes, my degree is in Earth History and Political Science, so I know exactly how you feel about cramming history into your memory.”

Kathryn glanced at Chakotay who was trying really hard to contain his smile and not give anything away. She touched Sue on the shoulder and asked, “Did you accept a new assignment today?”

“I did, as a junior aide to Admiral Nechayev.”

“Would you mind if I stole you from her?” Kathryn asked.

“No, Captain, I wouldn’t mind in the least,” Sue said happily.

Smiling brightly as they walked across the street, Kathryn remarked, “Alyna might.”

Chakotay said, “I guess my workload for the evening just got lighter.”

When they got to the restaurant, it was packed with Voyager’s crew. Kathryn asked Billy, “When you said everyone, you meant it, didn’t you?”

“It was an impromptu thing, but the owner doesn’t mind. He’s my uncle.”

When people started noticing that she and Chakotay had arrived, Kathryn could literally see the rush of conversation fly through the room as heads turned and applause began. She shook her head and held up her hand for them to stop, but they didn’t.

Chakotay leaned down to say into her ear. "Just enjoy it."

An idea occurred to her. She looked up at him and said, "Kiss me."

"Gladly." He lowered his lips to hers and gave her a full, lingering kiss amidst a cacophony of whooping, hollering, and whistling all around them.

When the kiss ended, she hugged him and said, "This was a good idea. I'm glad they all get to see this before the rest of the world does."

"Me, too."

When the sound returned to a more manageable level, Kathryn quickly found Sue and said, "If you can find Harry Kim, tell him that you're on our team. He'll fill you in on what he knows, but keep everything extremely confidential. Not a word to anyone."

"Thank you, Captain." Sue beamed. "I'm thrilled."

"I am, too. I'm going to have a very over-qualified staff, but we've got our work cut out for us."

"If my guess about what we'll be doing is right, I'm sure we will."
