

## ***The Future is Ours – Part 8***

### **“Kathryn Janeway: Merely Human”**

By Dawn

Rated PG

Summary: Tom Paris Observes Kathryn Janeway

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I've spent a lot of years watching Kathryn Janeway. She is remarkable – the most complicated person I've ever met. On the outside, she's this tough-as-nails captain who achieved the monumental, single-minded goal of getting us home from the other side of the galaxy. On the inside, she's just like anyone else... strong when she has to be and weak when she doesn't want to be. She has this uncanny ability to roll with the punches when the stakes are high. I like to think I can do that, but she actually does. Lucky for us, her wagers usually pay off.

She just shocked the Voyager crew. Not that we didn't see it coming eventually, but she just kissed Chakotay in front of us. We're at a pizza shop in San Francisco... one owned by Billy Telfer's uncle, no less. Hard to believe that we're actually here, on Earth, and that we've been home for almost four months.

My life changed that day, four months ago. My daughter was born. Miral Kathryn Paris is nothing short of a miracle. She's my heart and soul, and I've never been more vulnerable and more in love with any living being in my life. Her middle name is fitting... Kathryn... named after her godmother. I hope that Captain Janeway can instill in Miral a little of her spark. I certainly wouldn't mind if Miral took after her, except for the Captain's penchant to put her life at risk. That, I could do without.

That day four months ago also brought me back to Earth and to my father. Mom too, of course, but I've never had issues relating to my Mom or my sisters. Dad and I, however, well, we've finally fixed our relationship. It feels strange, but it also feels good. I'm a changed man, and so is he. Now that I have a daughter, I think I know how he felt – a dad wants so many good and wonderful things for his child. I just wish Dad had found a better way to communicate with me. He's trying to do it now, though.

Dad thinks of Captain Janeway as a daughter. Does that make her my sister? It fits... we're both risk takers, both Starfleet brats from birth. Dad once asked me why I couldn't be more like his favorite protégé. I knew who he was talking about; he talked about her all the time. I was furious with him for comparing us, but now that I know her so well, I wonder what my life would've been like if I had been more like her. I might be further ahead in my career, and I also wouldn't have been nearly as much fun.

I'm not saying she's not fun. After all, she just kissed Chakotay in front of all of us. And now everyone knows what I've known all along – that they've been in love with each other for years. You can't sit on the bridge with them every day and not notice the chemistry and the sparks. B'Elanna told me four days ago that they'd finally hooked up, and here's the proof. Not that I didn't believe B'Elanna, but seeing them locked at the lips is a lot different than hearing about it.

Captain Janeway has become a living legend throughout the Federation in the last four months. Everyone is giving her accolades for accomplishing the impossible by getting Voyager home and destroying half of the Borg armada in the process. No one but the Voyagers and selected few others realize that it took two Kathryn Janeways to do it. Now that was a sight to behold – the two of them on the same bridge. The energy between them sizzled.

It was hard for me to tell which one to listen to, but my intuition told me to follow my Captain. At that moment, I wanted to take Voyager home almost as much as the rest of the crew, but not for me, for them. As it turned out, I'm glad I followed the Captain's orders because it made for one hell of a ride. I can't wait to tell Miral what I was doing while she was being born.

Since we've been home, Captain Janeway has become probably the Federation News Corps' most sought-after celebrity. They seem to catch her everywhere she goes, and I feel bad for her. After all those years of loneliness to be suddenly thrust into the public eye has got to be unsettling. Yet, I'm just as obsessed with watching her as anyone else. The big difference is that I'm watching all these news clips to try to figure out what she's not saying with her evasive answers, which is a lot.

As I watch her circulate among the crew tonight, I find myself wondering what Voyager would've been like without her. She gave all these Maquis a second chance and a fresh start, just like she gave me. Not every Starfleet captain would've done that with as much outward confidence in our ability to make it work. Personally, I think she was just rolling the dice again.

A few weeks ago, I asked her about it... whether she realized how much she influenced me over the years. She said that my transformation was my own doing; she merely gave me the opportunity. Chakotay jokingly credited B'Elanna. But I know, in my heart, that it was due to Captain Janeway.

When she first came to see me in New Zealand, I didn't want to like her. However, I decided to go with her because it was more interesting than what I had been doing. At the time, the wounds I carried from Dad's cavalier attitude towards me were still pretty raw, and receiving a hand-up from the one person whom he believed I could never live up to was irritating. However, once I saw her in action out there, I started to respect her.

About a month or two into the trip, I started to see past her bravado and realize that she was merely human, despite what my father led me to believe. Something about that

contradiction enticed me, and the more I got to know her, the more I wanted her to like me. That sounds dumb... as if my self-confidence needed outside approval. But in a way, it did, although I'd never let anyone else know that. I guess I thought that gaining the respect of my Dad's star pupil would somehow fill the void he had created by never approving of me.

Now, I'm not saying that everything I've done in the last seven and a half years is on the up and up. Far from it. But even when I was up to no good, I could see a spark of amusement in Captain Janeway's eyes. I think she needed me to bring levity to our little community, and she trusted me to know when to stop. Well, most of the time.

I failed her twice. She forgave me both times. Something my Dad hadn't done yet. Did I purposely disobey orders to see how she would react? I don't think I did, but it's possible that my subconscious was interfering. Still, I wasn't surprised that she threw the book at me. If I didn't deserve it for something, I would've deserved it for another. In the end, I feel like a better man because she made me realize that I was important to her, I was valued, and no matter what I did, she'd force me to live up to my responsibilities. I had no choice. There was no prison to hide in and no rebel force to join. I had to face my friends, and worst of all, I had to face her.

I was outwardly indifferent when she demoted me, but when I earned my rank back, I knew I had also earned her trust. That moment felt fantastic because the first time she gave me that rank, it was because she wanted my piloting skills and my experiences added up to the rank of Lieutenant. The second time she gave it to me, it was because she believed in me.

The pizza has been served, but she's not eating any. She's walking around, touching every person she talks to, and even those who just pass by her. It amazes me how she can soothe and energize people just by being in the same room. Of course, there are times when she can also clear a room with just one look.

I'm watching Chakotay, too, and as always, he's watching her. I chuckle at her reaction as he wraps an arm around her waist from behind. She's not used to the public display of affection, and stiffens in shock until she realizes that it's perfectly okay and relaxes into him. He presents her with a plate of pizza and whispers something into her ear. I like her smile in response – it's definitely one of those quirky Janeway smiles. She's still listening to Mariah Henley, but she's obviously enjoying the fact that Chakotay hasn't let go of her. I'm glad for them. They're going to be good for each other.

She's talking to Harry now. He confided in me a short while ago that he gets to keep working for her and he's thrilled. I'm not sure whether it's a good idea. He likes her a bit too much, and thinks she can do no wrong. And she tends to coddle him. It's gotten better in the last year or two, but there's still that tendency toward over-protection between them. I'm inclined to have a talk with him about her faults before they start work again, but I don't want to create unneeded tension. Their duties are a top secret

thing for now, but I have no doubt that it's going to be something huge. The last thing they need is for me to cause problems for them.

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It's Saturday night, the night of the big celebration to mark the achievements of Voyager's crew and to hand out promotions. I'm feeling luke-warm about the whole thing. I mean, I'm all for having a big party, but I'd be just as happy with a barbecue with only our friends and family – they're the only ones who care about what we'll be doing next anyway. This 'dog and pony show' is going to get old, fast, and it's going to be a very long night. But I suppose all my friends deserve their special moment in the spotlight, so I'll grin and bear it.

Of course, you can guess who'll be getting the biggest spotlight. Yes, the one and only – Kathryn Janeway. She's arriving now, on Chakotay's arm, wearing the new white dress uniform. I halfway expected her to be in a fancy gown, but I guess since she's probably getting promoted, she has to wear the uniform like the rest of us. She looks great, though. Her bearing and command presence is strong in the uniform, and a dress simply wouldn't do that for her.

I've been thinking about her a lot since the pizza party. It's hard not to because all one had to do is turn on a news feed to be reminded. The reporters must have been tracking her every movement. They broadcasted her image all over the damn quadrant, asking her over and over again what they couldn't wait until tonight to hear. I was amazed at her grace and dignity under all that pressure, not that I hadn't seen it before. She merely gave the cameras that disarming Janeway smile that made you know she was up to something. I loved those days on Voyager when she had that smile. It meant we were in for an interesting ride.

I watch her circulate among the crowd again. Every single person wants to talk to her and try to catch a little of what they believe makes her great, as if simply being around her can rub off on a person. They have no idea that it isn't possible. I've been trying for years.

I might be leaning towards a little hero worship tonight. Why not? That does seem to be the theme for the evening. She really is remarkable. I just wish all these people knew why. It's a lot more than the sum of her accomplishments and her public persona. It's because that even when she's afraid, she can look down the business end of a phaser rifle and not blink, and under all that strength and intelligence, she's one hell of a pool player. Best of all, no matter how bad you screw up, she's always ready to believe that you can do better.

I remember the time when we went to rescue Annika from the Borg Queen. She had to have been scared when she beamed into that cube to confront the leader of the Borg, yet there was nothing in her demeanor that showed it. But when we got back to Voyager, and she and I were the only ones left in the Delta Flyer, I saw her in a moment of

vulnerability. She had her eyes closed and her head back on the headrest behind her. At first I thought she might be injured, but when I asked her if she was okay, she simply asked, “Did I just do what I think I did?” I love that about her – that full-speed-ahead, take-care-of-business attitude. Only in retrospect does she think about what she managed to pull off. Now that’s what I call thinking on your feet.

She’s heading towards me now, after stopping to talk to B’Elanna, who had managed to get far enough away from me that I couldn’t hear what they said. Now she’s here in front of me with one of the biggest smiles I’ve ever seen on her face. Feeling gallant, I kiss her cheek and say, “You look radiant tonight, Captain.”

She quirks that smile of hers, obviously amused at my flattery. “Thank you, Mr. Paris.” Her hand holds my arm as she says, “Tom, I don’t know if I explained it well a few weeks ago when we talked about how much you’ve changed, but I want you know that I’m proud of you. Watching you become the man you are today has been one of the highlights of the last seven years for me.”

My heart is in my throat as I answer with uncharacteristic sentimentality, “I’ve only become who I am because you believed in me, Captain.”

“I do believe in you, Tom, and I always have, even when things got rough. Your father told me a long time ago how talented and capable you were, and even though you didn’t realize it, he was right. You have definitely made me proud to be your Captain, your friend, and... maybe even your older sister.” She winks, knowing exactly how “our” father feels about her.

Someone else draws her away and Chakotay takes her place in front of me. With an amused smile, he says, “I’m proud of you too, Tom. I may have wanted to shoot you at one time, but for some reason I can’t explain, you’re now one of my closest friends.”

B’Elanna steps up and says, “That’s okay, Chakotay. I once wanted to shoot him, too, but look at us now.”

I say, “B’Elanna, you wanted to shoot everyone, including the Captain.”

We all look at Captain Janeway as B’Elanna says, “Lucky for Chakotay that I didn’t.”

“Lucky for you, you mean.” Chakotay raises his eyebrows. “I think she made the ride home a lot more interesting than I ever would have.”

Another thirty minutes of mingling goes by before we sit down for dinner. I’m glad that my table is adjacent to the command team’s, because I love watching them, especially now that they are openly affectionate with each other. The wait staff is bustling around pouring champagne, and we all know that it’s time to quiet down because something is about to happen. I expect to see our captain standing at the podium, but it’s the Fleet Admiral. I’ve seen pictures of him, but have never met him in person. He’s an

imposing-looking soldier with an aura of authority so strong that no one could possibly doubt that he's the top dog.

Admiral Khurma says, "Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen. We have gathered to celebrate the extraordinary achievements of Captain Kathryn Janeway and the crew of the Federation Starship Voyager. They not only managed to survive a solitary existence in the farthest sectors of our galaxy, but they also managed to find a way home in a miraculously short period of only seven years. I can think of only a handful of achievements throughout the history of the Federation that are as notable as this astounding feat of perseverance and ingenuity."

Admiral Khurma pauses to receive a champagne flute. "Would everyone except the Voyager crew members please stand."

I'm surprised to see how many friends, family and VIP's are here tonight. There must be three times as many people standing as there are sitting, not including the reporters and photographers holding position at the back of the room.

Raising his glass, Admiral Khurma offers a toast. "To Voyager, her valiant captain, and her exceptional crew: May your journeys always bring you home."

I smile as a chorus of "Hear, hears" echoes around the room and everyone toasts us. I watch Captain Janeway put a hand over her heart and say a heartfelt, "Thank you." As she lifts her glass in return, we all drink with her.

The dinner is much better than I expected. You never know what you're going to get at these banquets, but then again, anything would be better than some of the weird things we had to eat out there in the Delta Quadrant. I have to laugh as I taste the strange little potato puff in the center of the plate. It's flavored with leola root! There has got to be a joke coming later to go along with it.

After dessert is served and all the plates are cleared, there's an air of expectancy as we wait for what's coming. Admiral Khurma takes the podium again and says, "Tonight, it is my distinct honor to introduce the woman who needs no introduction." He extends a hand towards the table at the front of the room and says, "Please give a round of applause to Captain Kathryn Janeway."

The room breaks out in a thunderous standing ovation for her, and I figure why not, so I join in. I whistle as she lovingly squeezes Chakotay's shoulder before she walks up the short stairs to take her place at the podium. She shakes hands with Khurma and he kisses her cheek. She looks proud as she scans the room, waiting patiently for the applause to die down. She lets it continue for a moment before she holds up her hands to request us to quiet down. I decide to push the envelope and take it up a notch by whistling some more. I laugh as all the Voyagers join me, and she merely shakes her head and smiles.

When we finally calm down and retake our seats, she says, “Thank you all for that very enthusiastic greeting. First of all, I’d like to express my appreciation to our hosts, and in doing so, want to take the blame for the little potato-like puff that was served with this evening’s meal.”

The Voyagers laugh and she winks at us. “That puff was flavored with a root that our Talaxian cook, Neelix, served at far too many meals. The leola root is a strong and rather pungent source of nutrition, and in our opinion, entirely too prolific in the Delta Quadrant. Voyagers, you will be relieved to know that this marks the end of our leola root supply.” She laughs as the Voyagers break out in thunderous applause once again.

“Tonight marks four months since we arrived in the Alpha Quadrant.” She looks at the clock and adds, “Actually, it was about four months and six hours ago when Lieutenant Tom Paris flew Voyager out of the exploding Borg sphere. I don’t have to remind any of you what an incredible moment that was.” Her eyes find mine, and I wink at her. I love her quirky return smile.

“Our journey home, although a lot shorter than any of us dared to dream, was not without pain and hardships. There were too many times when I didn’t think we’d survive. I’d like to take a moment to remember those who didn’t make it home. Some of their families and friends have joined us this evening. Please dim the lights as we pay tribute to each of them.”

She turns to the large screen behind the podium and speaks the name of each of our fallen comrades as their pictures are displayed. I feel a strange mix of sadness and pride. The music that it’s set to is a beautiful piece that I’ve never heard before. I’m surprised that she includes the Maquis who didn’t survive the initial displacement wave, and even more surprised that she knows their names. I’m very glad that she left off Seska – that would’ve really put a damper on the evening. When she gets to the image of Lieutenant Stadi, who flew the shuttle that brought me to Voyager, I remember how overcome I felt when I first saw her... the ship, I mean.

After a moment of silence to remember, Captain Janeway speaks again. “I feel a personal loss for every one of these fine men and women, and my condolences, and those of our entire crew, are with their loved ones. I wish every one of them were here with us tonight.”

She pauses for a moment as the lights come up, and I can tell that she is using the moment to control her emotions. She’s good at that. The problem is that she usually relies on an adrenaline high to manage it, and she doesn’t have that right now. The emotional pause only lasts a handful of seconds, but I can tell from the look in her eyes that she is deeply affected by reading that long list of names.

When she speaks again, she is composed. “I would like to take a moment to highlight a few of our accomplishments to remind us that although our primary focus was to get home, we did stop along the way...” She tilts her head to finish her sentence. “...a few

times. It wasn't easy out there, but we did have one grand adventure. It took our entire crew to make it all possible."

I love the sparkle in her eyes as she starts to describe our more dramatic moments, but it makes me a little homesick for the adventures. "We saw stars go supernova. We made first-contact with four-hundred sixty-seven species and life forms. We extended sensors and astronomical surveying capabilities far beyond anything that had come before. We saved two planets from ultimate destruction. We decimated the Borg. We discovered cures for diseases we didn't know existed. We extended the capabilities of holographic technology, even striving towards granting holographic individuals sentience. We found both Klingons and humans living in the delta quadrant and we even solved the mystery of Amelia Earhardt. We also discovered descendants of Earth's dinosaurs living and functioning in a technologically advanced society. We found the Ares IV from Earth's first manned mission to Mars, and we found Friendship One. We made great strides in the fields of propulsion and warp dynamics. We incorporated Borg nanotechnology into the area of medicine. And I think the most astonishing achievement of all is that we remained united in our effort to get home."

She receives an immediate standing ovation from the non-Voyagers, but their accolades are not for just our captain. They're for all of us. I think her comments made it clear that it was the entire crew who accomplished these things. I appreciate the sentiment behind it. Most Starfleet blowhards take all the credit.

Everyone quiets down to hear more of what she has to tell us. "As we look to the future, I implore you all to keep the love of exploration and discovery close to your hearts. I heard someone say earlier this week that he wanted to rediscover the passion that first led him to attend the Academy. Let us remember that, even when we carried the burden of what seemed like an impossible goal, we still remained true to who we are. Whatever the burdens we face from this point forward, we are and forever will be Voyagers. We are stronger when we are united and when working towards a common goal. Tonight, I invite our families, friends, loved ones, and the entire Federation to join us. We can all make a difference. When we work together, we can accomplish something greater than we dare imagine."

I don't know who was first on their feet, but I wasn't far behind them. She deserves the applause. It was a very inspiring speech. I watch as Chakotay and Admiral Patterson join her on the podium. In the midst of the applause, Patterson hugs her first, and then Chakotay hugs her, too. I whistle loudly again as she gives him a very quick kiss. There it is, for the entire Federation to finally see... Kathryn Janeway is in love with her former-terrorist first officer. I bet there are a few of the brass who are cringing right now, and I love it.

As the applause dies down, I watch Chakotay as he calls out, "Crew of the Federation Starship Voyager, Attention to Orders."



Throughout the room, all one hundred and forty-seven Voyagers stand and snap to attention. Everyone is wearing the white dress uniforms, except Annika, Naomi, and Icheb, who still complete the picture in their white dresses and white tuxedo. It's a sight to see.

Chakotay stands back and Captain Janeway reads from a PADD. Even from this far away, I can see the moisture in her eyes. "To Captain Kathryn Janeway, Commanding Officer, USS Voyager. Stardate 55239.6. You are hereby requested and required to relinquish command of your vessel to Admiral Matthew Patterson, Commanding Officer, Utopia Planitia, as of this date. Signed, Fleet-Admiral Kamil Khurma, Starfleet Command."

She turns to face Patterson and taps her commbadge, "Captain Janeway to Starfleet Command. Please initiate a com-link with the USS Voyager."

A disembodied voice replies, "Com-link initiated, Captain. Please proceed."

"Computer, confirm voice authorization and identify."

Voyager's computer responds, "Voice authorization confirmed. Captain Kathryn Janeway, commanding officer, USS Voyager."

I see her swallow hard before saying, "Computer, transfer all command codes to Admiral Matthew Patterson. Voice authorization: Janeway-delta-four-seven."

The computer responds, "Transfer complete. USS Voyager now under command of Admiral Matthew Patterson."

An ensign blows the bosun's whistle, and I feel a chill settle over me.

Patterson says, "I relieve you, Captain."

"I stand relieved." She discreetly touches her eye to brush away a tear, and I look at B'Elanna who isn't managing to hide the tears at all. I put my arm around my wife as Admiral Patterson shakes our former Captain's hand, and the ceremony is over.

Patterson says, "May all of Voyager's commanding officers love her as much as you do." With that, he pulls her into another hug.

Everyone applauds again, although this time it's subdued compared to what preceded it. I don't think anyone really wants her to step down as Voyager's captain, certainly not me. It marks the end of something amazing – the most amazing part of my life, for sure. I honestly hope that whatever Captain Janeway is going to do next will be equally as adventurous, but will also give her a chance to be herself. I wonder what sort of things she could do without the weight of Voyager on her shoulders.

The next part of the evening takes awhile, but it's still fun to see everyone get their accolades. I'm sure there are people in here that are a lot more bored than I am. Admiral Patterson asks each Voyager crew member, starting with the lower decks ship's operations crew, to stand in front and receive their orders for their next assignments. Some promotions are handed out, and some awards, too. I'm glad that everyone is receiving commendations for bravery and extended tour ribbons, and I'm equally glad that more significant awards are being handed out where someone has really done something amazing.

I wish that Captain Janeway were up there with Patterson, but one quick glance at her, and it's clear why she's not. She's doing all she can to fight tears of joy, but they're escaping anyway. If I hadn't already given my handkerchief to my wife, I'd pass it over. Regardless, we all know that these awards are from her and Chakotay. Every time one is received, each one of the Voyagers turns to the head table and stands at attention. It's no wonder that she's emotional.

When the only Voyagers left are the senior staff, Captain Janeway steps up to the podium. "Would the senior staff, including Annika Hansen, please join me?"

We all rise and take our places, in order of rank. Annika is on one end, Chakotay on the other. She says to the gathered audience, "May I present Voyager's senior staff." Then she tells everyone our names and ranks, as if they don't know. She beams at us as everyone applauds, and I feel kind of proud. Voyager was good to me, and these people are my best friends.

She says, "This outstanding group of individuals has achieved honor, merit, and valor above and beyond anything I could have ever imagined. They continuously exceeded my expectations, standing beside me day in and day out. I couldn't have asked for a better group of officers and friends." She smiles at us while the audience applauds politely. I bet their hands are getting tired of clapping.

She steps up to Annika and says, "Annika Hansen, for your advances toward incorporating Borg and nanoprobe technology in the areas of medical science, sensor technology, munitions, and propulsion, I award you the Starfleet Civilian Commendation Medal, the highest award Starfleet can award to a civilian." Captain Janeway hugs her amidst another round of applause.

Next is the Doctor, or I guess we should call him Joe. I can't believe it took him this long to settle on a name, and he picked Joe. I hope there's a story behind it. "Doctor, or I should say, Dr. Zimmerman," she turns and takes something from Admiral Patterson. "For your advances in medicine and for your ingenuity and work in protecting and safeguarding the lives of Voyager's crew and many others, I award you the Starfleet Legion of Honor and the Starfleet Surgeons Decoration. Thank you, Doctor, for teaching us all about valuing life, no matter what form it may take." He also gets a hug from the Captain, and I lean forward a little so I can see the look on his face. He looks like he could sing. I bet he would if we asked him.

Now, it's Harry's turn. I can't wait to see the look on his face and I'm glad that I get to stand next to him. "Ensign Kim," she is beaming as she takes an award from Patterson. "For outstanding achievement in sensor technology, I award you the Cochrane Medal of Excellence." Harry had the biggest smile on his face as she pins the award on him. I'm surprised that she's picking up another. "For putting yourself in harm's way to achieve mission objectives and for bravery and service above and beyond the call of duty, I award you the Starfleet Medal of Valor." She hugs him, and I watch his face. His eyes are closed and I can tell that he's moved.

Patterson steps in and says, "Ensign Harry Kim. For outstanding services and achievements as Voyager's Operations Officer, it's my pleasure to grant you the rank of Lieutenant Commander."

My jaw drops as I realize that they just gave him a three-step promotion. And then I realize that she's standing in front of me. Ah, oh. Here it is. I take a deep breath as she smiles at me knowingly, as if she can tell what I'm thinking. She winks at me as she picks up my award. "Lieutenant Thomas Eugene Paris, for outstanding achievement as a pilot, bridge officer, and medic, I award you the Starfleet Medal of Valor, the Distinguished Flying Cross, and the Starfleet Life Saving Medal." She pins the three awards on my dress uniform and then I hug her. Really, really hug her, and totally miss the round of applause that I receive. She finally whispers with a chuckle, "Tom?" and I have to let her go.

Now Admiral Patterson is stepping up. "Lieutenant Thomas Eugene Paris, it's my pleasure to grant you the rank of Commander." And I'm shocked. I figured I'd get Lieutenant Commander like Harry, but not this. I catch the Captain's eye, and she winks at me again. I think she's enjoying the fact that I'm stunned. It doesn't happen often.

My mind is a blur as she hands out awards to B'Elanna and Tuvok, and suddenly, I hope that all this is being recorded so that I can listen to what she tells B'Elanna. I'm in shock. I look over at my wife and see that she is also now wearing the rank of Commander, so at least I know that much. I manage to catch Patterson also awarding Tuvok the rank of Commander. A ship full of commanders, that's what we became, it seems.

Now she's standing in front of Chakotay and she's saying, "Commander Chakotay, for your archeological and historical discoveries, I award you the Gan Laikan Medal of Discovery." She takes a second award from Patterson and turns back to him. "For outstanding achievement as a Voyager's first officer, I award you the Starfleet Medal of Honor." She pins the award to his chest, and I could swear that her hand lingers there a lot longer than decorum allows.

I think Chakotay is surprised when Patterson stands in front of him. "Commander Chakotay, it's my pleasure to grant you the rank of Captain." It's possible that he's as shocked as I was when Patterson exchanges his Maquis rank bar for four shiny little pips.

Chakotay looks at Captain Janeway and I can tell there's a non-verbal exchange between them. She looks very smug, and I love that she's surprised him.

As the applause dies down, Patterson stands at the podium and says, "I'd like to announce the future assignments for each of these individuals. Annika Hansen will be joining the Daystrom Institute. Dr. Zimmerman will be joining the research staff at Starfleet Medical. Lieutenant Commander Kim will be joining Captain Janeway's team at her next assignment, to be announced in a moment. Commanders Paris and Paris-Torres will both be joining my team at Utopia Planitia in starship concept design. Commander Tuvok will be dividing his time teaching personal defense at Starfleet Academy and the Vulcan Institute of Defensive Arts. Captain Chakotay will be resuming his position at Starfleet Academy teaching Advanced Tactical Training."

The audience applauds us once again as we take our seats. I caught sight of Chakotay squeezing Captain Janeway's hand before he walked down the stairs in front of me. She stays on the platform and Admiral Khurma takes Admiral Patterson's place.

Admiral Khurma says, "Ladies and Gentlemen, I am honored to be able to present the final and most distinguished award this evening."

Captain Janeway's eyes widen, probably because she hadn't given any thought to receiving an award herself. My guess is that she believed they were only announcing her next position and probably a promotion.

Admiral Khurma stands in front of her and says, "Captain Kathryn Janeway, in recognition of remarkable leadership, meritorious conduct, and multiple acts of personal bravery which protected your crew in times of extreme hardship and danger, I award you the Christopher Pike Medal of Valor." I join in on the applause as she proudly receives the award, but Khurma has more so we pause for a moment. "Also, in recognition of your achievements in sustaining Federation Principles in adverse circumstances, I also award you the Star Cross, the most distinguished medal that a Starfleet officer can receive."

Now everyone is on their feet, giving her another standing ovation. I expected our energy would be waning at the end of such a long night, but because it's Captain Janeway, we all produce an unlimited amount of appreciation. It doesn't last long because we're all eager to hear what's coming next.

Admiral Khurma waits until we're reseated and quiet. "Captain Kathryn Janeway, for outstanding service to Starfleet, it's my sincere pleasure to grant you the rank of Vice Admiral." He removes her pips and replaces them with the three-pip admiral rank bars. I can tell by the pleased look on her face that she knew this part was coming. He's shaking her hand. "Congratulations, Admiral."

Admiral Khurma lets the applause continue until it finally begins to wane. He has a slightly amused look on his face as he says, "Admiral Janeway's next assignment has

become the most talked-about speculation I've heard in a very long time." He turns to her and asks, "Would you like to tell them?"

She smiles brightly and says, "Please, be my guest."

He turns back to the audience and pauses dramatically, as if enjoying every second of what he's about to say. "I am thrilled to announce that Admiral Janeway has been appointed to the position of Envoy on behalf of the Federation Security Council. She will engage in diplomatic discussions with current and past members of the Federation in order to facilitate open communication so that we may rekindle the basic principles of the Federation – sharing knowledge and resources in peaceful cooperation and space exploration."

To the casual observer, Kathryn Janeway looks proud to accept this challenge as the room once again applauds her. Her chin is high, her smile is wide, her eyes are alert, and her posture is perfect. I've studied her body language at length, however, and what I see is that, although the weight of Voyager has been lifted from her shoulders, a new and much heavier yoke has just taken its place.

I'm worried about her. I look at my wife, and I can see the concern on her face, too. I look at Chakotay's profile. He's applauding along with everyone else, but his eyes have that determined look that he gets before an important mission. Knowing that Harry will be working for her, I wonder what his reaction is, so I glance over. His chest is lifted in pride, but I can see the determined look on his face, too. I wonder if he knew what he was signing up for. The job sounds glorious, but knowing the political turmoil we've returned to, it sounds overwhelming, and I worry that it might also be very dangerous.

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END Part 8