Disclaimer: All Voyager characters are the property of Paramount; Donna Reed belongs to ABC, thus no copyright infringement is intended. No offense is intended to those who love either show. The plot and Antonio Moretti belong to me.

Authors note: those asswipes that are considered pocket books never happened in my lil corner of the multiverse.

AN2: Thank goodness for Babel Fish – you’ll see why ☺

The title is taken of this story is borrowed from a poem by Langston Hughes found here. And for anyone looking for a deeper analysis of the poem start here.

Setting: Post Endgame – What if B'Elanna & Harry weren't the only crewmembers the Caretaker experimented with? What if the experiment had lifelong consequences? The Doctor finally comes clean with Voyager’s Captain regarding a deception seven years in the making.

Warning: Angst; Hurt/Comfort; Romance, a bit of Sci-Fi, Brief C/7; P/T, a bit of fluffiness, Ultimately J/C

Rating: - PG-13/final chapters NC17 for language and consensual sex

Spoilers: This story has 15 chapters total. So grab a cuppa and pull up a chair. I do hope you enjoy it. :)

This next bit goes a little deeper into the plot line as my attempt to give adequate warning. So keep going if you don’t want spoilers the story line. Go ahead and continue to chapter 1 we'll wait until you’ve left us....... ........(note to self insert link here once story is posted).

(note to self place this next bit way down on the page on the story is posted)

Okay, so I'll assume if you're still reading you want a longer trailer than the summary I’ve posted in the very beginning. In this tale I attempt to chronicle the development of KJ and J/C after Endgame. My main focus is on the aspects of KJ's personality that had to be suppressed in the DQ. There are those who would consider this tale a babyfic. However I am loath to label it as such.

There is a pregnancy and yes the story follows the pregnancy for a good deal of the plot line, however this story doesn't focus solely the condition of being pregnant, nor solely on babies/infants.

The story focuses on the interrelationships of the multiple characters showcased
A Dream Deferred

Chapter 1

It was quiet, eerily quiet.

Not a sound could be heard amidst the dimly lit background.

'Of course there aren't any sounds - there's no one here', the Captain reminded herself sarcastically. She shook her head to dispel the inner voice and thought back over the evening.

Voyager's captain had shocked everyone when she arrived to the holodeck wearing a simple green knee-length wrap dress and caramel stilettos. She couldn't explain it, but tonight she felt a desperate need to attend the 'Welcome to the Alpha Quadrant' party as Kathryn, not the Captain. The low wolf whistles and blatant stares that heralded her arrival, although surprising, were not unwarranted.

Blushing slightly she remarked, "As you were," off-handily before 'making the rounds', as her crew called it - alone. A fact the crew noticed, but did not comment on while she was within earshot.

As the evening progressed and the crew descended upon the dance floor, Kathryn silently faded into the background to watch those around her. She chuckled at the spectacle Billy Telfer made of himself asking Tal Celes to dance; she smiled tenderly as she watched Naomi dance with Icheb, and laughed aloud when Jenny Delaney tried to goad Tuvok onto the dance floor.

Soon the fast-paced music and infectious laughter that helped cultivate the buoyant ambiance surrounding her, transitioned into a mellow harmony more conducive for slow
dancing. Kathryn smiled as she watched the various couples on the dance floor share the love between them with a look, a smile, or a kiss. It was then that she saw them.

Why did her heart choose that moment to betray her? To command her eyes to seek them out? Did she subconsciously assume that moment would allow her to see them, really see them? Nonetheless, her eyes hungered greedily; yet despaired tragically when she saw them together; so obliviously together.

She looked beautiful. Kathryn couldn't deny the young woman seemed to glow in his presence. And he - he looked happy. For the first time, in a long time he smiled a genuine smile; one that showed his dimples and reached his eyes. Watching them together, Kathryn saw that he only had eyes for the woman in his arms. The woman herself seemed a little embarrassed, almost timid, under the weight of his smile, allowing blonde waves to hide her from his view as she lowered her head. Kathryn watched him lift the woman's chin and gaze into her eyes as he lovingly embraced her while they swayed to the music.

Kathryn was unaware that tears had pooled in her eyes; that her emotions had betrayed her usual stoic control. The melody no longer seemed mellow and soothing, but rather hauntingly sorrowful. As Kathryn watched the new couple she recalled her time with the gentle man across the room, she remembered the occasions wherein he'd saved those dimples and twinkling eyes for her alone.

As the decrescendo petered out, stricken slate blue orbs met concerned coffee brown amidst wavy blonde tresses. The emotion in his eyes jolted Kathryn back to reality. It was as if time were suspended; as if the room and the crew around her were stuck in 'slow motion' as she watched the couple sway to the melody. Only upon seeing the emotion in his eyes did time seem to speed back up to the present. She watched him delicately try to separate himself from the woman in his arms, seemingly coming to Kathryn's rescue, as was his habit.

Kathryn couldn't allow that; he wasn't hers any longer. So as to not make a scene, she subtly raised an open palm and ever so slightly shook her head to stop him. He recognized what she was telling him and stayed where, and with whom, he was. She had succeeded in reigning in the emotion her facial features displayed, but knew she had not managed the same feat with her eyes. Kathryn bowed her head slightly, blinked a tear away and slipped silently through the Holodeck doors.

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Silent tears streamed down alabaster cheeks as she stared out the viewport of her quarters.

She had been a fool.
Kathryn never possessed an explicit claim on Chakotay, but she hoped that they could explore a deeper relationship once Voyager reached home. Each night she prayed he would wait for her until she could give him everything he would demand in a relationship. However, as Captain she didn’t have the luxury of being that selfish. The thought made her cry harder and with the tears came the beginnings of a headache.

In her mind’s eye, she saw herself as two personas: Kathryn, the woman and Captain Janeway.

In the beginning of the journey, there was room for both Kathryn and the Captain to coexist; room for Kathryn to explore, flirt and play while still allowing the Captain to command the ship. She was unable to pinpoint when Kathryn’s prison sentence began. Only that during recent years the Captain demanded nothing less than total reign, convincing Kathryn there was no longer room for both Kathryn and the Captain.

Thus, Kathryn was forced to watch proceedings as they happened around her, losing a bit herself each day, each month, each year the crew traveled across the Delta quadrant and suffering her anguish in silence. She’d allowed herself a few solitary moments to grieve but this time she grieved for herself. She mourned the loss of the optimistic, free spirited woman who’d been ostensibly suffocated by the Delta Quadrant.

Curling into the comfortable cushions of the couch while wearing a veil of tears and nursing a heavy heart, Kathryn found herself savoring the familiar constellations outside her viewport. Taking a deep breath, she began the process of donning the Captain’s mask, watching her facial expression change in the reflective surface from an emotional heartbroken woman to the clear concise mask of the Captain.

Kathryn drew on the same inner strength that would sustain her in the coming weeks, possibly months while fighting for Voyager’s crew. Merely being within proximity of Earth was not enough, not nearly enough. She would allow herself to grieve and then heal, but first she would endeavor to finish Admiral Janeway’s mission.

Captain Janeway vowed to ensure that Voyager’s crew would be treated fairly, that they would have family waiting for them and for those who did not have family, she vowed to make certain they weren’t left alone to fend for themselves. Once her crew was settled, then Kathryn would start her own personal healing process.

Uncurling herself from the couch Kathryn rose with determination and padded through her quarters to the bathroom. As the water poured from the tap, she took a moment to stare at her reflection in the mirror above the sink, before bending to splash cool water on her face.
It wouldn’t do to have the crew thinking, she couldn’t handle the situation or to have them believing that their Captain had retreated from the holodeck heartbroken, even if it was the truth.

Her crew didn’t need to see Kathryn’s heartbreak or her tears. What would do them the most good was to see her smiles and her laughter; to witness her quick-witted teasing of Tom Paris as she thrashed him in a game of pool. They needed just enough of Kathryn to enchant them, as a means of reassuring them that all was well with the Captain. Blotting her lipstick she stood back to examine her make up while practicing her happiest smile. Satisfied with her reapplication, Kathryn walked back into her living room to retrieve her sandals. Fastening the straps on the final sandal, she smoothed her hands down the front of the soft green fabric before standing with her shoulder’s back, her chin up, and what she hoped was a happy smile on her lips before heading back to the holodeck.

CHAPTER 2

September 2379

Kathryn Janeway released a deep sigh as she made her way through Boothby’s garden toward Starfleet Medical, having been summoned by Voyager’s EMH. Finally, after five long months of arduous - bordering on ridiculous - debriefing sessions, she was free to come and go as she pleased. In an anticipated move, the Starfleet review board saved her debriefing until the rest of the crew had been dismissed. The lower deck crew was in and out of Headquarters within a month; the senior staff was released three months later, including the ship’s First Officer.

Kathryn shook her head to stop herself from thinking of him. There were moments when that was all she did, think about what could have been – but no more.

Kathryn decided it was time to take back her life. She would remain in Starfleet, but she was determined to carve out a life for herself. Was it really only a month ago Owen Paris handed her a velvet box containing an Admiral’s rank pin? Was it only a month ago that she actually accepted?

Admiral Janeway - she was still trying to get used to that. Kathryn knew her mother and sister feared she would allow Starfleet to dictate her life. She was also aware of their concern that Kathryn hadn’t survived the Delta Quadrant; and the truth was Kathryn almost hadn’t. She could finally admit that to herself, but only after enduring rigorous bi-weekly counseling sessions with Deanna Troi for the last nine months.
While waiting for the turbo lift in the lobby of Starfleet Medical, Kathryn recalled her early counseling sessions and the emotional devastation that followed each appointment. The grueling two hour sessions forced Captain Janeway to sit down and shut up, but encouraged Kathryn, the woman to stand up and be heard. Some days Kathryn wanted to bitch slap Deanna; and bless her, Deanna knew it, but still patiently reached forth to help heal the battered woman lying beneath the Captain's mask. The sessions were easier now; however, due to her first order of business as Admiral, Kathryn was forced to send Deanna and the Enterprise to Romulus. As a result, her counseling sessions were now being conducted via subspace communication. Begrudgingly, Kathryn accepted the fact that she needed to continue these sessions if she were to have any semblance of the balanced life that she was so desperately seeking.

As she exited the lift, the Doctor's aid genially informed her, “Admiral Janeway, you can go right in. The Doctor will be right with you.”

As she nervously proceeded into the inner waiting area, Kathryn began to wonder why Voyager’s CMO had summoned her. Her requisite post-tour examination had already been completed, so that couldn't be the reason for his summons. Okay, so her blood pressure was higher than what was deemed medically normal for a woman of forty-four years. However, did that really warrant Voyager's EMH demanding her presence, as if she were a child? Kathryn was hardly surprised; the Doctor tended to be acerbic the best of days and damn near condescending on the worst. There was no way of getting around it or sneaking out of it, she had little choice except to show up under her own steam, or find herself beamed in unknowingly. Notorious as she was for finding excuses to avoid her physicals, she wouldn't put that past the former ship's doctor. She drew in a deep breath, squared her shoulders and proceeded to 'bite the bullet' as Tom Paris would say.

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“Ah Admiral, please have a seat. I must say I’m surprised to see you without an armed escort. Very impressive.” the Doctor greeted, as he organized several PADDs on his desk.

Although he greeted her in his usual brusque manner, he had yet to look her in the eye. She wondered momentarily when the Doctor added nervous repetition and eye contact evasion subroutines to his matrix.

“Doctor, I assume you've summoned me for a medical reason, not to watch you rearrange PADDs across your desk. Now, why did you want to see me?” Kathryn asked bluntly, gracefully sitting in the empty chair opposite his desk. This was her attempt at getting right to point, as his nervousness was making her feel rather uneasy. It was never a good sign when the doctor appeared ambivalent.
“Well, if you remember, while aboard Voyager, I entertained a brief role as the local clergy. The crew, yourself, included confessed worries or misdeeds to me in exchange for my infinite wisdom, as well you should have --” The Doctor prattled.

“Doctor,” Kathryn drawled, “Your point is ....” She waved a hand in the air signaling him to wrap it up, whatever 'it' was.

"Yes, well ... I find myself playing the part of the confessor this time. Over the years, you helped me grow from a standard Mark One EMH into a valued, sentient crewmember. You aided me in my exploration of additional subroutines, allowed me to experience what it is to love, to have a family of my own, to take pride in my accomplishments, and you were there to help me when I fell into despair about my medical decision regarding Ensign Jetal. I cannot tell you what your support has meant to me and still means to me. You've campaigned just as tirelessly for my rights to be acknowledged as a member of society as you have for the exoneration of the Maquis and Equinox crews. I never really thanked you properly. I know you're likely to be angry with me regarding what I have to tell you. However, I hope you can understand my reasoning behind withholding this information from you.” the Doctor sighed, as he rose to stand near the window looking out over the horizon. After a few moments of contemplation, he turned back to address her, folding his arms across his chest as he leaned against the glass.

"Doctor, whatever you need to tell me, won't dismantle our friendship," Kathryn tried to reassure him.

"What I have to tell you may not dismantle our friendship altogether, but I will understand if you choose not to speak to me for a good long while," the Doctor stated. "Do you recall after we were pulled into the Delta Quadrant the crew was absent from the ship for three days?" At her nod he continued, "We discovered that Ensign Kim and Lieutenant Torres, were missing and later learned that they both were subjected to experimental medical procedures."

"Yes, I recall Doctor," she confirmed.

"Harry and B'Elanna weren't the only victims of the Caretaker's experiments. There were two additional members of the crew involved." the Doctor stared at her pointedly.

"Me?!" Kathryn asked in disbelief, her eyes wide with shock.
"If you recall, I cornered you in Sickbay a few weeks later, after you were knocked unconscious on the Bridge during one of our colorful exchanges with the Kazon," at her glare and pursed lips the Doctor continued "Well, I took the opportunity to conduct your post mission exam at the same time. I don't know how to say this, except to say it," he paused for a moment and sat in the chair opposite of hers as he took her hands in his.

Alarmed by his actions Kathryn leaned away from him, attempting to free her hands. However, the hologram refused to release her, "Doctor?" she questioned.

"During my examination, I discovered that you were three weeks pregnant. And before you say anything I confirmed that the child wasn't Mark Johnson's. You'd just completed a pre-flight exam prior to taking Voyager out and pregnancy would have shown up at that time no matter how early. That, in conjunction with the embryonic development, I deduced that you had 'conceived' on the array. If you recall, you stated that after entering the 'barn' the next thing you remembered was a stabbing pain in your abdomen. The pain you felt was probably your eggs being harvested and then later re-implanted after they were fertilized. When I examined you, I found evidence of six embryos, but only two were viable. When I realized that you had been violated on the array and that the embryos were not composed of one hundred percent human genome; I removed them and placed them in an autonomous embryonic cryostat unit, which I kept hidden in Sickbay utilizing one of the encrypted lab storage vaults." The Doctor paused releasing her to gauge how the woman before him was suffering any type of distress was her slow deliberate blinking and measured respiration.

Kathryn felt the color drain from her face as she stared at the Doctor in shock. A few moments later, she registered pain. A minute more and she was able to command her fists to unfurl in her lap. She watched blankly as the crescent marks in her palms blotched red before smoothing her hands down her thighs to grip her knees.

She'd heard what the Doctor said. And her scientific mind processed the information he shared with her, but her emotions were a mess. She was incensed to know that her body had been violated in such a manner, concerned about what residual effects might have been present during the intervening years and angry beyond words that the Doctor had kept something of this magnitude a secret.

"Why are you telling me now?" she asked, narrowing her eyes as they meet the Doctor's. "Why wait seven, almost eight years to drop this on me? Why the hell didn't you tell me the moment you found out?!" she demanded, rising to stand in front of the hologram.

"My intent was to inform you the moment we reached Earth. At that point in our journey, we believed we would reach Earth fairly soon. As the years rolled on, and I developed a sense of
compassion, I decided not to tell you. I know you, Kathryn. As Captain, you would have
ordered me to deactivate the unit no matter the cost to you personally. Kes confided in me
after her premature bout with the Elogium, how you comforted her; and that she sensed a
strong desire within you to be a mother someday. She also shared her fear that your
someday would never come as long as Voyager was in the Delta Quadrant.” the Doctor
informed, as he watched her turn her back to him before moving to the opposite side of the
room.

“Now that Voyager is home I’m unable keep the unit activated without arousing suspicions
here at Starfleet Medical. I – I need to know what you want to do.” the Doctor watched
several emotions wash over her features as she paced the length of the room – anger,
disbelief, fear and finally -- acceptance.

“I’m furious, just so you know that,” she growled, whipping around to point a finger at the
hologram before continuing her litany. “You had no right! No right to make that decision on
my behalf without so much as a ‘by the way’ to me! The fact that you kept this a secret for
seven years makes me wonder what else you’ve kept hidden from me, from the crew all in
the name of ‘compassion’ as you put it.” She huffed angrily before attempting to calm herself
down.

"I am truly sorry -"

She cut him off with a wave of her hand. "You mentioned that only two embryos were viable,
but the genome isn't completely human. Explain." she demanded.

"Yes, the genome of the viable embryos consists of ninety eight percent Human DNA
markers and the remaining two percent is - - is Nacene.” the Doctor watched her eyes grow
wide with that information.

"Wha -what?!" Kathryn stated as she paced the length of his office, one hand on her hip and
the other hovering over her mouth. Long moments later she spoke, "Doctor --"

“Nurse Green to the Doctor;” the EMH’s combadge interrupted. “I have the call you’ve been
waiting for – Admiral Hester.”

The Doctor eyed his friend sadly, “I’m sorry Kathryn, I have to take this. It’s of the utmost
importance. I’ll be as quick as I can. Please, stay here. I know you have questions and I want
to answer as many as I can,” the Doctor assured as he left his office.
Kathryn continued to pace, rubbing her temples with the hand that was previously over her mouth. The one thought that kept returning to her was that she should have known. Surely she would have known if she was pregnant.

Standing in front of the windows she thought back to her earlier decision to carve out a life for herself that consisted of more than just Starfleet. Kathryn recalled a particular bitter session with Deanna a few months ago.

*Deanna insisted that beneath the Captain’s calm veneer, Kathryn Janeway raged. For days the Captain side stepped the issue, focusing instead on her crew and how she bled for the losses each crewmember suffered.*

*She couldn’t remember exactly what Deanna asked but before she was able to rein in her emotions, Kathryn violently admitted there were days that she hated Starfleet.*

*She paced the length of the office gesturing in a agitated manner as she screamed her hatred for the organization that constantly demanded so much of its officers. “What kind of sadists head the Federation that would demand the life of a mother’s son? Order the destruction of entire planets merely for political gain? Condemn a husband and father to a violent death? Or on a whim snatch away someone’s spouse or one’s hopes of a family?! How just of an organization are they to only ever take and take and take without ever giving anything back?! Damn it, what gives Starfleet the right to demand a person’s soul as payment for one’s liberty?!”*

*At the end of her rant, Kathryn raised a hand to her mouth as she stared unbelievingly in Deanna’s direction. To say that she was shocked with herself would have been an understatement. As hard as she tried, Kathryn couldn’t still her shaking body. Nor could she hide the emotional pain that lanced across her heart. Slowly, she averted her eyes in shame as she lowered her body down into her seat.*

*After a moment Kathryn was able to look Deanna in the eye again. She started to apologize for her outburst. However, Deanna had other ideas.*

*“Who did Starfleet take from you Kathryn?” The counselor asked.*

*Kathryn shook her head to deny the question.*

*“Don’t deny it, Kathryn. For months we’ve been meeting and this is the first time you’ve trusted me enough to let me see you. Who did Starfleet take from you?” Deanna beseeched.*
Anyone else would have had tears in their eyes. Kathryn could only muster resignation. And yet she remained silent. After all these years, she didn’t have the strength to speak of her traumas.

“All right, Kathryn. Then let me see them. I want to help you and the only way to do that is to deal with them. You’ve buried your traumas so deeply that you’ve fooled yourself into believing you’ve dealt with them, resolved them.”

Kathryn didn’t utter a sound or move an inch from her seated-position; she merely closed her eyes.

She could sense Deanna’s frustration. “Kathryn, I can’t do this for you. You have to take the wall down yourself.”

And so, Kathryn did the one thing she promised herself she never would. She voluntarily took down then emotional wall she’d built to protective herself. Brick by brick the wall fell away and when at last there was nothing left she heard Deanna gasp.

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Deanna found herself on a whirlwind tour of the tragedies and traumas her patient suffered. She was privy to the emotional and psychological traumas of the young girl who put on brave face when her father missed year after year of birthdays, school plays, blue ribbon science fairs, and graduations.

When suddenly, terrifying screams assaulted her ears. Deanna tried to focus on her surrounding rather the terrified screams echoing off the black walls. She could hear singing and found when she attempted to move she was unable to so.

Her hands reached out only to met cold stone. She was in a box of some type barely big enough for her small frame to rollover in. The screams continued, so did the singing. Until she heard heavy footsteps approaching her direction. Something in her gut told her they were coming for her and that before she left this life she would beg them to kill her. Suddenly, Deanna was ripped from her prison.

Instead she found herself on an ice planet staring at a shuttle quickly sinking beneath icy waters. She felt the devastation of surviving the crash that claimed the life of Edward Janeway. There was someone else and she found herself asking “Who was he?” and she became aware that the young man had been Kathryn’s fiancée. Deanna watched the scene of the crash on Tal Ceti Prime dissolve into inky blackness.
She couldn't understand what was going on and then realized that no doubt Kathryn had slipped into shock or some type of depression wherein she had been unaware of her surroundings. Deanna navigated as best she could through the darkness and soon found herself staring at a brightly colored wave of some kind, seconds before being slammed to the deck beneath her. Realizing she was on Voyager, Deanna felt the abject horror of learning that everyone she loved she would most likely never see again in her lifetime. She could also sense that malice of the Maquis when Kathryn destroyed the array.

Soon Deanna found herself on a whirlwind tour of Kathryn’s emotions as she battled new enemy’s, the guilt of stranding her crew, the sadness at each crewmember left behind, and the sorrow of losing someone named Kes. Deanna witnessed Kathryn grieve the loss of yet another fiancée. Deanna sensed an even greater loss on the horizon but whom or what that was she couldn’t ascertain. The councilor in her knew that whatever it was Kathryn wasn’t ready to share it with her.

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Kathryn slumped in her chair as she felt Deanna leave her mind.

“Thank you, Kathryn for trusting me.” Deanna whispered.

Kathryn couldn’t bring herself to look at her councilor.

“My I ask why only half of what I saw is actually apart of your official record? There’s nothing mentioned here about you being captured by Cardassians or that you were the sole survivor of the crash on Tal Ceti Prime. Kathryn, did you receive any kind of counseling after these events?”

Kathryn spoke for the first time in over an hour, “I completed the requisite counseling sessions for Starfleet officers who survive traumatic missions.”

“Which means you spent two weeks with a civilian councilor,” Deanna surmised.

“Look. I was able to do my job and that was all that mattered,” Kathryn argued.

“But ‘the job’ isn’t the only thing that matters. Kathryn, you matter as well. We’ve talked about your crew’s hopes and dreams upon reaching the Alpha quadrant. We’ve talked of
Captain Janeway's obligations, what about Kathryn's hopes and dreams?” Deanna questioned as she searched Kathryn’s mind and heart. What she found would have broken her own heart had she not been trained to handle the emotions of others.

“You hoped for home, didn't you? Not home as in Earth but a home for yourself. Kathryn, there’s nothing wrong with wanting a life of your own—a life completely separate from Starfleet. You have the right to want a spouse, children; you have the ability to have the life you dreamed of.” Deanna encouraged.

As Kathryn thought back over the conversation, she realized that no doubt Deanna was aware just how profound a loss she had suffered when Voyager returned.

Moving away from the window Kathryn considered her options. Should she do this? Could she really do this? Did she have the courage to for once in her life do something solely for her? On the other hand, could she knowingly kill her own children? She could always give them up for fetal adoption.

No! No, she couldn’t do that. Had this happened on Voyager she would have deactivated the unit. She knew that. She wouldn’t have had a choice. But now? She did have a choice. She had a say in what Starfleet assignments she could/would accept. Like Deanna said, she finally had the freedom to say 'No'. She no longer had to worry about the needs and wants of one hundred and forty nine lives before her own. She could do this. Surely, she had enough courage to take her own slice of happiness when given the opportunity.

“Kathryn?” Dimly, she became aware of the Doctor’s hand on her arm. Looking up she realized that he must have been trying to get her attention for some time now.

“My apologies, Doctor,” Kathryn offered.

“No need. You looked as if you were coming to a decision,” The EMH observed.

Doctor, if I go through with this; what are the risks involved, both to me and the resulting fetuses? What’s the probability that the embryos could survive re-implantation?” She inquired as she turned to look out across the horizon.

"I know that these days women are having children well into their sixties, but due to your occupation we do have some worries. You've had a history of hypertension for some time, coupled with this being your first pregnancy; your current age, occupational stressors and your less than healthy eating and sleeping habits, we would have to be extremely careful.
For starters, you would be a prime candidate for Gestational Diabetes, Preeclampsia, Eclampsia, Placenta Previa or Placental Abruption just to name a few. However, there are treatments available that can help diminish those risks. You would need to follow my instructions to the letter; there would be no room for negotiation.

“As to the probability - I can't guarantee you one hundred percent. Nothing this delicate is ever one hundred percent. That being said the probability is approximately eighty percent. If you’re considering continuing this pregnancy personally, due to your age and previous medical conditions I would suggest both embryo's be implanted simultaneously. What I don’t know is which genetic markers from the Nacene would be evident in the fetus - we don’t know enough about them. What we do know is that they’re a Sporocystian life form; a non-corporeal species and from our experience, we observed they possess the ability of psychokinesis, and I would hypothesize, they possess telepathic or empathetic abilities as well.” The doctor advised as he watched her absorb his words.

"You mentioned earlier a fourth crewmember was involved. I take it the paternal genetic markers are from this individual?” she continued at his nod "without ... revealing their identity, can you tell me if he survived the trip home?"

The Doctor nodded so she continued, "All right. Is he currently involved in a relationship or was he reunited with a spouse upon Voyager’s return?” she watched the Doctor hesitate a moment before he nodded again.

After a moment, she turned to face him fully with her arms at her sides and determination in her stance, "How soon could we begin?” she asked.

The Doctor exhaled in relief, "We'll wait a month before performing the actual procedure. I want to start you on prenatal vitamins and hormone supplements, to adjust your body’s natural levels to where they should be at this stage of gestation. You will have to give up your beloved coffee, but I'll compromise and allow you one decaffeinated cup per day. I know you've said often enough that you just 'forget' to eat during the day; you must maintain a consistently healthy diet during the next month and then the remainder of your pregnancy.” the Doctor explained, before he injected Voyagers former captain with a series of hyposprays containing the supplements and vitamins that he’d mentioned.

The Doctor stepped back as his patient rubbed the site of injection.

"Kathryn, I understand that you don’t want to know the identity of the father. However, I must input the information into your medical files for obvious health reasons. If any
complications arise and we are unable to devise a solution utilizing your genetic markers, we'll have to call upon the father for assistance."

"No. I don't want the biological father contacted for any reason short of a life or death emergency. I asked you those specific questions for a reason Doctor. Whoever he is, he has his own life, and I've interrupted that life long enough. I'll do this on my own," she stated, shaking her head "You can include his identity, but I want you to encrypt my medical records so that the information is only accessible to either you or me. All anyone needs to know is that I've decided to have a child via artificial insemination using an anonymous donor. No more, no less," she stated vehemently. "And Doctor" she waited until he came into her line of sight before continuing "No secrets. I don't care how devastating, gruesome, or outlandish. You tell me what the hell is going on this time. Is that clear?" she demanded.

“Yes Ma'am,” the Doctor confirmed, appropriately chastened.

Chapter 3

THREE MONTHS LATER - Dec 2379

“Kathryn....Kathryn...Katie. Come on Kate wake up."

In the distance, she could hear her sister calling her and feel her body being shaken, but Kathryn had no inclination to move. At that moment, all she wanted was to burrow further into the warm covers and sleep for fourteen hours straight. However, her little sister was extremely persistent; and this damn shaking was making her nauseous. Kathryn's hand shot out from beneath the heavy quilt and gripped Phoebe's wrist.

"What, Pheebs. What is it?" Kathryn asked in a gravelly voice.

"It’s past eleven o’clock, Katie and you’ re still in the bed," Phoebe stated before flopping down on the mattress.

"And that’s a problem because?" Kathryn prompted
“It’s a problem because strait-laced Kathryn never sleeps the day away. You’ve been like this since you came back from San Francisco last week,” Phoebe commented.

Kathryn rolled over, allowing the back of her hand to rest on her forehead but kept her eyes closed. Sighing deeply she turned her head towards Phoebe, “I’m fine Phoebe, just tired that’s all.”

That comment caused her sister to sit up straight, eying the woman beneath the covers strangely.

“You’re tired??? You’re never tired, Kate and very rarely do you freely admit it if you are. Did something happen at work? Did you receive bad news about one of your crew? What the hell is going on?” Phoebe demanded as she snatched the quilt and sheet off the prone figure in the bed.

"Damn it, Phoebe!! Let it be! I told you, I'm fine," Kathryn grumbled reaching to take back the bed coverings.

"Uh-huh. Get up Kathryn. The last time you stayed in bed like this, it broke Mama's heart. I won't let you do that again," The younger sister recounted.

Relenting to her her sister’s demands, Kathryn raised her tired body to lean against the headboard and wished she didn't feel so damn tired. The Doctor warned she would feel lethargic for a number of weeks, but this constant exhaustion wasn't what she expected. The mattress dipped as Phoebe shifted to sit across from her older sister.

“Kathryn, do you still feel conflicted about the Admiral's timing? I've noticed your preoccupation about that. You'll end up with a headache if you keep this up,” Phoebe warned.

Smoothing back tangled auburn tresses, Kathryn reflected on the question she kept asking herself lately, unknowingly giving voice to her thoughts.

“Why now? Why did the Admiral pick now to come back? Why did she choose to let Joe Carey die, allow the ship’s stay on Quarra, Teero's transgalactic mutiny and the whole Equinox disaster to happen?
Phoebe turned sideways on the bed, giving Kathryn a penetrating gaze.

“You know, you assume the Admiral came back for the crew; that she risked arrest and imprisonment from the Time Police in order to get them home sixteen years earlier and clawed her way across time and space in order to save Tuvok from insanity. Hell, you think she sacrificed herself to the damn Borg to ensure Chakotay’s happiness by preventing Seven’s death. And you know what? She could have come back to do all of that; but ultimately Kathryn, she came back for you,” Phoebe continued passionately, her bright blue eyes tearing as she silenced her sister with a shake of her head.

“No!! The Admiral came back to save Kathryn. How often have you lamented about feeling as though you were two people in the Delta Quadrant and wondered if you were suffering from Dissociative Identity Disorder?” Phoebe leaned forward to take her sister’s hand tightly, “When you first arrived home I feared for you, Kathryn. I was really worried for you. In those first few months, I only saw Captain Janeway. Not once, did my sister show herself; you didn’t laugh, smile, cry or exhibit any kind of emotion. It took five months before that happened. Damn, you scared the shit out of me when you just burst into tears that night.

“But I’ll say it again, because I know how stubborn you can be; the Admiral came back, first and foremost, to save Kathryn Janeway.”

Kathryn felt her eyes well with tears at the passion with which Phoebe articulated her argument. Damned hormones, she thought to herself. During the last week or so, she’d noticed her emotions were erratic. One moment she was fine and the next she was feeling weepy or experiencing bouts of anger for no apparent reason.

“Phoebe, I’m beginning to think you may be right about that,” Kathryn rasped with a crooked smile.

“Of course, I’m right! I’m always right,” Phoebe exclaimed as she pulled her older sister into a crushing embrace.

After Phoebe released her hold Kathryn commented, “Yeah, okay. You keep telling yourself that,” as she made her way to the bathroom, ducking the pillow Phoebe tossed in her direction.
“Ooo, you’re lucky I’m in a good mood, or you’d so be in trouble,” Kathryn heard Phoebe taunt through the bathroom door.

“Whatever, Brat!” she laughed.

“Come down for brunch when you’re done, Nag!” Phoebe bellowed, falling back on their childhood arguments.

Kathryn chuckled as she stepped into the shower cubicle. She reveled in the sensation of finally being home.

Home in Indiana meant more than residing in her mother’s house. Besides Voyager, this was where she felt the most comfortable. Here she could allow herself to simply be Kathryn for a while – able to bicker with her sister, help in her mother’s garden and snatch fresh caramel brownies on a whim. Being in Indiana gave her the opportunity to breathe; there were no deadlines, agendas, or reports that commanded her attention. Instead, she luxuriated in lazy mornings, starlit strolls through freshly fallen snow, and warm apple cider with cinnamon while reading *Like Water for Chocolate* by the fireplace. She smiled, as she finished wrapping a towel around her body.

As Kathryn passed the mahogany cheval mirror, she stopped a moment, letting the towel drop open to her waist to inspect her body in the glass. Her eyes started with her breasts recalling the tenderness she’d noticed in recent weeks and again during her shower. Her gaze traveled to her abdomen as she stroked the life that was growing there. Was it her imagination or could she already see the beginnings of a bump? She stroked her stomach again and whispered, “Good morning.” After a few moments, she turned away from the mirror and continued her journey toward the matching bureau. She pulled on a comfortable cashmere sweater but could barely squeeze into a pair of old jeans. Yep, there were definitely the beginnings of a bump; she’d have to go shopping soon.

As she made her way downstairs, Kathryn reasoned it was time to tell her family her news.

Nearing the bottom of the stairs, Kathryn overheard a hushed argument between her mother and sister.

“Phoebe, I’m telling you something’s not right! My Katie doesn’t just sleep her days and nights away like this. Since that girl was born, she’s been my own little whirlwind. Never staying in one place for any given time,” Gretchen stated passionately.
“Mama, I know something is off, but Kathryn will tell us when she's ready. You know how she is. She won't say a word as long as you keep pushing; you've got to let her come to you. Now, if it gets like it was with Daddy and Justin, then we'll talk about drastic measures,” Phoebe countered.

“I bet you it's that first officer of hers. Have you ever noticed how her voice caresses his name? It's not simply Chakotay, more like Cha-ko-tay. Kathryn is her Father's daughter to a fault at times, especially when it comes to her command. And I know my daughter; she fell in love with him during that odyssey and, rightfully or wrongfully she chose to do nothing about it.”

“You're probably right, Mom. And I think Kathryn would've been fine with him dating. But to know that he hooked up with Seven of Nine had to be a punch in the gut. Aside from the girl being half his age, you know Katie thought of her as a surrogate daughter. Hell, she was probably the closest she thought she would come to having a child out there.”

There was the sound of glass breaking before a low growl could be heard and in a deceptively quite voice, Kathryn heard her mother swear.

“Son of bitch! I never even thought about it from that angle.” Gretchen hissed

“Mom!” Phoebe stated alarmingly, “Mom, are you all right? Stop swatting at me. Mother, you just shattered Aunt Martha's favorite teacup with your bare hand,” Phoebe chastised.

Kathryn chose that moment to make an entrance. She made a show of stomping on the stairs before making her way down the hall. By the time she arrived in the kitchen, no one would have guessed that her family had been speaking so intimately about her; nor would anyone suspect that her mother had just shattered a porcelain teacup in her fist.

“Morning, Mom,” Kathryn greeted, as she kissed her mother on the cheek before grabbing a muffin off the counter.

“Good morning Katie; how did you sleep?” Gretchen asked, receiving a nudge from Phoebe.

“Like a log,” Kathryn stated, as she smiled at her mother.
“Pheebs, while I was upstairs I realized I need to go shopping, but I’m out of touch with today’s fashion. Care to tag along?” she questioned. It would give Kathryn time to feel her sister out and mull over the conversation she’d just heard. That, and she really did need new clothes. There was nothing quite like seven years in constant uniform to deplete a girl’s wardrobe.

“I always said that I had the better fashion sense. Sure, I’ll come with you to make sure you don’t end up with a closet full of frumpy, depressing smocks,” Phoebe teased.

Kathryn rolled her eyes at her sister and moved to pour a cup of tea. Behind her back, Gretchen and Phoebe exchanged a worried glance. Since when did Kathryn - dip me in coffee and call me home - Janeway start drinking tea? In fact, for the last week Gretchen noticed her daughter’s aversion to coffee. She’d just pegged it down to her taste buds being accustomed to the replicated stuff rather than real coffee beans. But still, this complete aversion to real or replicated java puzzled her.

Phoebe, on the other hand, began to suspect the woman before them was an impostor of some sort. Before she thought better of it, Phoebe took the teacup from her sister’s hand and replaced it with black coffee presented in Kathryn’s favorite coffee cup.

_Shit._ She wasn’t supposed to have coffee. Lately the smell alone seemed to make her squeamish. The doctor didn’t need to warn her off the substance; it seemed her pregnancy was doing so quite effectively. Less than forty seconds after catching the first whiff of her beloved coffee, Kathryn felt her stomach rebel. She threw a hand over her mouth and ran out of the kitchen to the bathroom down the hall.

"Okay....." Phoebe whispered, as she looked toward Gretchen.

"What the hell? She’s never had that reaction to coffee a day in her life," Gretchen commented coming around the island to stand beside her youngest child.

Slowly, a thought occurred to Phoebe, "I have. When I was pregnant with Preston....." She eyed the bathroom door, where she could hear running water, then turned back to her mother. "If I didn't know that it was impossible...." She trailed off.

"It’s improbable, but not impossible,” Kathryn stated tiredly from the doorway.
Slowly Kathryn made her way back to her seat at the kitchen island, sipping from the glass of water her mother placed in front of her.

"Kathryn?" Phoebe asked.

“Mmhmm...”

“Uh, would you care to elaborate on that statement?” her sister prompted, as she tapped her foot agitatedly.

“Sit down you two; I need to talk with you,” Kathryn was able to regain her equilibrium as her family sat before her. She was unexpectedly nervous regarding the news she needed to share with them. What would they think? Would they think her mad for doing this?

“The reason I’ve been so tired lately and avoiding coffee like the plague is because I’m pregnant, about 11 weeks now,” she paused to gauge their reactions.

Her sister was up and out of her chair in a flash. “Oh, that’s wonderful! Now Preston will have a playmate...” Phoebe babbled before she stopped momentarily puzzled, something about the timing seemed familiar.

However, her mother sat quietly shaking her head.

“Mama?” Kathryn questioned softly.

“That’s what this is about isn’t it? I’ve wondered what happened the night of the Admirals Ball. What? Did he want one last hoorah before leaving with the blonde?” Gretchen asked.

Kathryn could see where this was going and needed to correct her mother quickly. “Mom, it’s not what you think-”

“Kathryn, is she right?” Phoebe backed away from her sister defensively, “It would make sense. We’ve watched you sleep your days and nights away, moping around the house for weeks. And the timing would be right. It’d be around the time of the Admirals Ball - wherein
we watched him practically drag you out of the gala into the side room. Do you mean to tell me on top of everything, he knocked you up and then left you? I'll kill him!” growled Phoebe.

*Shit!* Kathryn thought to herself for the second time that afternoon.

“*It's not what you’re thinking. Just let me explain, please?*” Kathryn watched her mother cross her arms over her chest and raise an eyebrow.

“Thank you. Yes, I’m pregnant and you’re right, it happened around the time of the Admirals Ball,” Kathryn watched her mother sadly shake her head again. A look disappointment on her face. “But Chakotay and I didn’t have a 'last hoorah’ as you put it. He wasn’t upset with me, he was worried. There were rumors circulating amongst the crew that I’d martyred myself to ensure their freedom and unfortunately I hadn’t had the opportunity to set everyone straight. He wanted to be sure that I hadn’t ‘sacrificed’ myself for the crew and that my promotion wasn’t just a farce to keep me away from Voyager or anchored to Headquarters.”

“Well, that makes sense, Kathryn. You have to admit, it does sound like something you would do.”

“Yeah, Phoebe, I know,” Kathryn admitted.

“You know that we’re here for you. We’ll help in anyway we can Katie, but if Chakotay isn’t the father, who is?” Asked Gretchen.

“I don’t know -,” Kathryn started.

“Kathryn Marie Janeway!! What do you mean, you don’t know?!?” Gretchen asked in shock.

“Mother! Stop. Just let me finish.” Kathryn sighed before rubbing her temples. She could feel the beginnings of a headache coming on.

“Do you remember when I told you about the Caretaker and how in his search for a mate he experimented on members of my crew? Well, it seems he experimented on me as well. Early in our journey, the doctor found that the Caretaker had impregnated me. However, once he
determined I hadn't conceived naturally he removed the embryos and secretly placed them a sort of stasis vial and didn't tell me until recently. I learned the father is a member of my crew but only the doctor knows his identity. I asked the doctor outright if the father was either reunited with a spouse or already involved in a relationship upon our return. And he confirmed that it was one of those two things. So I told him I didn't want to know the father's identity, and that he was not to contact this crewmember, unless it was a life or death situation."

Kathryn exhaled shakily as she took in her mother and sister's reactions, “The official comment that I'll make when the time is right is that I decided I wanted a child and the doctor aided me in artificial insemination utilizing an anonymous donor.”

“That's all well and good Katie. But how are you? This is not by any means a normal pregnancy. This Caretaker- there's something you're leaving out. What is it?” Gretchen questioned.

Kathryn leaned on the counter before taking her mother and sister's hand.

“I'm carrying twins, with both human and Nacene genetic markers. The Caretaker was known to us genetically as Nacene,”

“What?!” Phoebe exclaimed.

“Phoebe, please it's all right. I'm all right. The Caretaker used only a small portion of his own DNA; the babies are ninety eight percent human,” Kathryn attempted to calm not only her sister, but her mother as well.

“Twins?” Gretchen asked in a soft voice

“Yes. The doctor was able savage two viable embryos, so I decided to implant both. I have to admit that I didn't think that both would take but --” Kathryn shrugged her shoulders.

“But nothing - they're Janeways; of course both are going to survive.” Gretchen stated simply.
“How long are you planning to hide this, Kate? You’re due to visit Deanna next week; surely, she’s sensed something already. And don’t forget Voyager’s First Anniversary Banquet is at the end of this month.” Phoebe pointed out.

“I haven’t told Deanna yet and she hasn’t hinted that she knows. I’ll tell her before I leave the Enterprise if she doesn’t approach me sooner than that. And I haven’t forgotten about the banquet. Luckily, I’m not showing much, so hiding the pregnancy for the duration of the event won’t be too difficult. I’m not ready for this to be common knowledge yet, the press is bad enough as it is.” Kathryn stated rolling her eyes at the thought.

“No wonder you need new clothes, Katie, you’re going to be as big as a shuttle!” Phoebe teased, interrupting her sister’s train of thought.

“Hey!” Kathryn exclaimed as she slapped her sister's arm.

“Kathryn, don't hit your sister,” Gretchen admonished as she rose from the counter.

“She started it,” Kathryn stated smiling at her sister

“Mommy, I did nothing of sort,” Phoebe mockingly pleaded.

At the sight of Phoebe pouting Kathryn and Gretchen shared a bout of heartfelt laughter.

“Oh, Phoebe and you wonder where Preston gets it from,” Kathryn laughed.

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**USS Enterprise – one week later**

“Mmm, this headache is killing me,” Kathryn moaned, breaking the silence while rubbing her temple with her left hand.
“Are you all right Kathryn?” Will Riker asked, knitting his eyebrows together as he leaned closer towards her.

“I’m sorry, Will. But this headache is only getting worse,” she commented, as she leaned back in the dining chair.

“It’s fine Kathryn, we can always catch up later. You look exhausted. Why don’t we call it a night and get together tomorrow?” Suggested Will, noticing the manner in which his friend had been squinting most of the evening, in addition to her pallor.

“I feel awful about ruining your evening. You and Deanna obviously went to a great deal of trouble.” Kathryn said tiredly, as she waved her hand toward the candlelit table laden with food and cider.

After nearly three months, Kathryn finally relented to Will and Deanna’s repeated invitations to visit the Enterprise. The impetus being when Will accused her of avoiding him, citing the time that Kathryn actually fled from a blind date with him. Sitting across from the man in his and Deanna’s cabin, Kathryn felt guilty because of the obvious trouble her friends had gone to on her behalf and after three days of juggling everyone’s schedules to allow time for the friends to get together.

Damn this headache! If she didn’t know it was impossible, she’d order Captain Picard to scan for Srivani vessels. The headache had been lingering for several days now but instead of the hot needle-like pain she experienced when Voyager was one giant Petri dish for the alien scientists, her head now felt as if it was trapped in a vice. With each passing hour, the vice-like grip seemed to press tighter and tighter.

“Kathryn, it’s fine. Why don’t I walk you back to your quarters?” Will suggested, standing from his seat before coming around to pull out her chair.

“What about Deanna?” Kathryn asked tiredly.

“She’ll understand. Her appointment was running later than expected anyway,” he commented as they stepped out into the corridor.
“Will, I want to make this up to you. We’ll go to Ten Forward tomorrow night – my treat.” she promised as they walked toward the turbo lifts. She squinted to further combat the increased tension the brighter corridor lights were causing. They assaulted her already tenuous control of the pain.

Once the lift began to move Kathryn found herself drowning under a wave of vertigo, the sensation caused her hand to dart out to brace herself against the turbo lift wall. She desperately hoped that Will hadn’t caught her little slip, but it appeared, he was distracted, having received a comm call from the Bridge. As the lift reached her deck and the doors opened, she felt marginally better. Although the headache remained, at least the unsettling episode of vertigo had dissipated.

“Kathryn, lie down won’t you? Rest and try to get rid of that headache. I have to get to the Bridge, but I’ll have Deanna comm you in a couple of hours,” Will hovered for a moment as he watched his friend lie down on the couch in her VIP quarters.

“Honestly, Will, what would your wife think about you tucking me in?” Kathryn joked, half-heartedly.

Will chuckled to himself on the way out of her quarters.

Kathryn had lain on the couch for close to two hours; the headache still lingered, but the pain seemed to have leveled off. It was no longer near-crippling but rather a constant throbbing in the back of her skull that seemed to keep time with her pulse. The headache wasn’t the only the cause of her discomfort. Now she’d been hit by a wave of suffocating heat!

In the last hour, she’d stripped down to her Starfleet issue T-shirt and ordered the computer to lower the ambient temperature twice. In addition, a sour metallic taste seemed to have taken up permanent residence in her mouth. She rose gingerly from the couch to make her way to the replicator, thinking a glass of cool water could help alleviate her aliments.

“Computer, one glass of water – chilled.” she commanded.

She tiredly retrieved the glass after it shimmered into place, eager to quench the desert heat and sandpaper feel her tongue had suddenly adopted. The cool liquid eased the dryness of her throat and cooled her body as she sipped. She was half way through the beverage before the glass slipped from her fingers, plummeting to the floor; she gripped her uniform tee as
her chest tightened painfully and a moment later she found herself gasping for breath. The onset of the symptoms occurred so suddenly that she had no the opportunity to call for help before she found herself crashing to her hands and knees. As the edges of her vision began to dim, she felt herself begin to shiver uncontrollably.

“No...this can't...be ... happening... not....here .... not now,” panic reigned as Kathryn recalled the last time she experienced these symptoms, before unwillingly succumbing to the encroaching darkness.

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Deanna became increasingly worried as she signaled, to no avail, for entry to Kathryn’s cabin. The counselor had observed the increased tension and tiredness that her friend had tried to hide in the last day or so. After the fourth attempt, she reached out with her mind to sense if perhaps Kathryn was sleeping. She was alarmed when she couldn't sense her at all. Using her medical override, she entered the darkened quarters and peered into the gloom.

“Computer, full illumination,” she ordered, as she made her way further into the quarters, the door to sliding closed behind her. As she scanned the room, she noticed an empty glass in the middle of the floor. The wide damp arc in the carpet suggested the glass rolled to its current position. Then she gasped audibly, as her eyes alighted upon the prone figure of Kathryn Janeway.

“Troi to transporter room two - medical emergency! Widen the beam to include the person with me and transport us to sickbay! Lock onto Admiral Janeway an transport us both to sickbay!” Deanna called as she moved swiftly to Kathryn’s side, and as they dematerialized she was momentarily stunned by the waves of heat that emanated from the unconscious woman’s skin.

“Beverly!! It's Kathryn!!” Deanna called as the two women rematerialized in Sickbay. “When she didn’t answer her door, I thought she might be asleep, but when I couldn’t sense her. I used my medical override, and I found her unconscious on the floor.” Deanna informed Dr. Crusher as they settled Kathryn on the biobed and scanned her.

“It appears, she suffered a myocardial infarction,” Dr. Crusher diagnosed, as she buzzed around the biobed trying to stabilize her patient.

“A heart attack?! Beverly, are you sure?”
There was a secondary beep from the tricorder that caused Enterprise’s CMO to stop in her tracks before looking up at Deanna.

“As her counselor I can ask you this question. Did you know she’s pregnant? Approximately, 12 week’s gestation, with twins, no less?” Beverly inquired, with an air of surprise.

“No, I didn’t. She never mentioned anything. Strange - I haven’t sensed anything either.” Deanna commented as Dr. Crusher returned to her patient.

“She’s stabilized, for the moment. I’m going to administer an analgesic for the fever and the headache she is undoubtedly experiencing.” Dr. Crusher informed as she pressed the hypospray against her patient’s neck.

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Kathryn’s eyelids felt as if lead weights were holding them over her corneas. After a few more attempts, she finally managed to pry open her eyes, only to slam them shut against the intense glare above her.

“Computer lower illumination by fifty percent” Dr. Crusher ordered softly. “Try now, Admiral.”

Kathryn tried again and this time the glare wasn’t as harsh. “What happened? Why am I in sickbay?” she questioned breathlessly, surprised at the amount of effort it took to ask those two simple questions.

“Admiral, what’s the last thing you remember?” Beverly asked as she scanned her patient, noting that the woman lying before her was having difficulty speaking.

“I was in my quarters. My head hurt…was so hot… couldn't breathe….” she began to hyperventilate before she could explain further.

Dr. Crusher typed a few commands into the console creating an oxygen-enriched field around her patient’s head to ease her labored breathing. “Admiral, wait just a moment and then try again,” she offered.
Breathing deeply Kathryn attempted to continue, "That's a little better. I got up for a glass of water .... then suddenly my chest hurt .... I couldn't breathe. I fell --" She stopped her account of events abruptly before darting a hand out to grip the Doctor's wrist. Beverly winced slightly at the pressure the prone woman exerted and noted with alarm that her patients' heart rate was nearly jumping off the scale.

"Admiral – Kathryn, you need to calm down. You're causing additional stress to your already weakened body, not mention to your babies. You must calm down or I'll have to sedate you." Dr. Crusher cautioned

"You have to contact Starfleet Medical immediately!" Kathryn stated urgently as she tried to sit up "You have to contact Voyager's EMH...." she gasped again suddenly having unknowingly overexerted herself. Frustration set in amid panic as she could slowly see her vision tunneling. "Please.....tell him..." she blinked to fight off the graying edges of her vision, looking to Deanna, she pleaded, "Tell him it's back...stasis..." as unconsciousness engulfed her for a second time in twenty four hours.

Deanna and Beverly stared at each other wide-eyed with concern. The shrill beeping of the biobed monitor propelled Beverly's attention back to her patient.

"Her heart rate is dropping steadily. I don't understand this," she commented reading the data on the tricorder.

"Beverly, we need to put her in stasis immediately," Deanna advised, as she readied a stasis chamber in the Sick bay.

"Deanna?" Beverly questioned, even as she began programming the transporters to move her patient.

Beverly watched her patient shimmer off the bed and into the waiting chamber before approaching Deanna.

"Care to fill me in?" The doctor questioned, as she monitored the readings on the stasis chamber.

"I think I just saw one of Kathryn's memories. I could see through her eyes, she was inside a stasis unit looking up at a blue sky. I sensed that she wasn't alone, yet I couldn't see who
was with her. And then it changed from being a memory to what she was thinking right before she passed out. I could hear her desperate need to be placed in stasis, as if her very life depended on it. In addition to a dire need for us to contact Voyager's EMH, something to do with a bug bite, a virus and an M class planet in the Delta Quadrant.” Deanna relayed in awe, “I could hear her telepathically.”

“Well, perhaps the EMH can shed some light on what’s going on,” Beverly conceded as she entered her office to place the call.

Chapter 4

“Kathryn...Katie...open your eyes, sweetheart,”

“Mama?” asked a gravelly voice.

“Yes baby,” Gretchen sighed in relief, brushing a wayward lock of auburn hair behind her daughter’s ear.

“What are you doing on the Enterprise?” Kathryn asked groggily.

“Open your eyes sweetheart. We're not on the Enterprise, Kathryn; we’re at Starfleet Medical,” Gretchen informed slightly worried.

As she opened her eyes, Kathryn took in the unfamiliar sights and sounds of the medical suite. She desperately tried to recall how she’d finished up here.

Suddenly, the memories slammed into her consciousness; faster than her ill-fated warp ten jump with Tom Paris.

“My babies?” she questioned worriedly.

“Ah, I see our favorite Admiral is awake,” the doctor stated, breezing into the suite “Mrs. Janeway, if you will excuse us for just a moment, I’d like to examine my patient now.”
“I'll go and call your sister, Kathryn. She's been worried sick,” Gretchen kissed her daughter on the forehead before turning to leave the two alone.

“Doctor--” Kathryn began once her mother was out of earshot.

“No need, Admiral. Dr. Crusher and Counselor Troi briefed me on what happened aboard the Enterprise. The rest I could observe first hand once you were beamed to Starfleet Medical. You were correct in your hypothesis that the virus has returned. It seems you were also able to communicate telepathically with Deanna Troi. Care to share how long you've had that particular ability?” the doctor rambled on as he continued to scan his patient

“My babies?!” she questioned

“The fetuses do not appear to have suffered any adverse reactions, quite the opposite, in fact. They appear to be thriving; which is more than I can say for their mother.”

“How long?”

“You've been unconscious for three days. When I attempted to remove you from stasis, you presented with the same symptoms that you exhibited nearly six years ago; however, I was able to synthesize a treatment which aided in stabilizing you. While your alerting Dr. Crusher allowed me the necessary time to synthesize the treatment, I have yet to duplicate the cure. The treatment in combination with being planet side will aid in alleviating the symptoms, however.”

“But it’s not a cure? I don’t understand,” she stated puzzled.

“It’s not a cure because you will need to take this treatment daily. If you miss a dose, it could result in a relapse. Rest assured that I am dedicating every available moment to researching a cure for you. I can’t explain it, Admiral; it would appear that your pregnancy has triggered the return of the virus. And yet the fetuses seem to have inoculated themselves against the effects of the disease.” The Doctor continued.

“All right, so I'll have to take a daily prescription --”
“And absolutely no space travel, Admiral,” the doctor interjected.

“Understood. Trust me doctor; I never want to experience those symptoms again,” she stated with a slight shudder.

“Now, about this new ability of yours Kathryn, care to share how long you’ve had psionic abilities?” The Doctor questioned, as he reviewed her most recent neural scans.

“What are you babbling about doctor? I don’t have psionic abilities.” she stated slightly annoyed.

“Hmm. That’s not what Deanna Troi inferred. And the results of the hyperencephalogram I performed would also beg to differ. As a result, I’ve reviewed your medical file more extensively, specifically your neural scans prior to disembarking Voyager. Kathryn, before Voyager being lost in the Delta quadrant, how often do you recall combating headaches and how severe were they?” He questioned as he watched curiosity flit across her features.

“I- I guess I’ve always suffered headaches. Although, my earliest memory would be right after adolescence. After Voyager was lost, they seemed to intensify, ranging from just an annoyance to all out migraines. I guess they would also intensify if I found myself in an emotionally charged situation.”

“I have a theory Kathryn, but it’s a long shot. I think the Caretaker altered your brain chemistry.” The Doctor hypothesized as he handed her scans to compare. “Look here, these scans were taken prior to Voyager leaving DS9. The second set of scans were taken when I examined you upon your return from the array. As you can see, there is only a small difference, so minute in fact, that one could put it down to the head injury you received on the bridge prior to being transported to Sickbay.” The Doctor continued as he presented a third PADD.

“This was the scan I took of you after our contact with species 8472, another small change that could be associated with your injuries at the time. However, look at this third scan versus the initial scan taken before Voyager disembarked. There’s a marked change, it’s as if after each of these occurrences your brain chemistry evolved minutely to a higher level of consciousness. In addition, remember when you assisted Kes to leave the ship?” At her nod he continued. “At the time her mental abilities were destabilizing the ship on a molecular level. You spent a great deal of time in physical proximity with her right before she departed the ship. I believe that she may have inadvertently caused another ‘spike’ in your neural development.”
“Kathryn, I believe you may be one of the very few humans with the necessary genetic markers that, given time, say generations of time, could evolve naturally into a paracortex of sorts. As you are aware, some individuals have stronger abilities to send telepathic/empathetic messages, while other individuals have stronger abilities to receive information. I believe the Caretaker engineered your brain chemistry for the latter; perhaps the pregnancy has enabled you with the ability to send or project short messages in dire emergencies.” The Doctor watched her take in the information.

“I find that hard to believe Doctor. I’ve not experienced anything that I could classify as a telepathic or empathetic ability. Why now? Why would this manifest itself now and not while in the Delta Quadrant?” She questioned, while still reviewing the scans the doctor had presented.

“That’s not completely accurate, Admiral. Remember the Enarans? Jor Brel was able to link with you to share his musical talent. And how many times, against my medical advice, have you mind melded with Tuvok? Again, you were on the receiving end of a link for those encounters. Go back further; remember the Bothans? You were the first crewmember to suffer from their projected hallucinations.”

“Doctor, I would hardly count those events. I wasn’t the only one affected with the Enarans; B’Elanna had a far more intense encounter. And the Bothan’s chose me first simply because I was the Captain,” she argued.

The hologram continued as if he hadn’t heard her rebuttal, “I also have scans of your neural pathways taken after the Srivani’s experiments, post Hirogen neurolytic implants and after your retrieval from Quarra. After each of these instances, the psionic centers of your brain spiked. As to what has now triggered the actual ability, I believe your pregnancy is the cause. We hypothesized that the Nacene possessed telepathic and/or empathetic abilities. Who’s to say that the Caretaker didn’t tweak your brain chemistry to aid in your ability to assist in the development of any offspring that may also have the same ability,” he paused to gauge her reaction.

“So ... you're suggesting that the Caretaker - upon his examination of me - learned of the evolutionary possibility that my descendants could possess psionic abilities. However, to further his own agenda, he activated the psionic centers of my brain generations before they were to evolve naturally. Evidence of this ability was more than likely the impetus that prompted him to impregnated me with his DNA. He wanted to to prepare me to be the mother of a child or children who would undoubtedly possess telepathic or empathetic abilities. Have I got that right, Doctor?” she asked, raking a hand through disheveled auburn tresses.
“As Tom would say, ‘you have hit the nail on the head.’” The Doctor commented, accepting the PADDs back from her.

“But why did he send me back to the ship? Why didn’t he send me with Harry and B’Elanna? How does any of this explain the virus returning? I thought we were cured and how is it that I’m affected but the children aren’t?” she questioned.

“Well, if the Captain of a starship comes up missing you can bet someone’s going to notice. But perhaps he reasoned that if lesser ranked individuals were missing it would take longer to figure out. As to how this relates to the virus, it’s quite possible the unaccounted two percent of the Nacene genome activated the virus; as to why - that I have yet to figure out. I must say that it’s fortunate that we are familiar with the symptoms of the virus from our time in the Delta Quadrant, otherwise a less accomplished physician may have misdiagnosed you,” huffed the doctor as he reviewed her most recent neurological scans.

“I understand and thank you, Doctor,” she stated tiredly, as she leaned back into the pillows. “When can I go home?” she questioned.

“Really Admiral, I’m quite surprised; you lasted twenty minutes before you asked that question,” the doctor teased acerbically.

“This time it’s not just me I have to concern myself with Doctor and I am fully cognizant of that fact.” She retorted.

“Your condition has stabilized thanks the treatment I synthesized. I also took the liberty of conducting your twelve-week fetal scan while you were here. You’ll be pleased to know that both fetuses are developing normally. Would you like to see the image?”

“Yes” she confirmed softly as she nervously took the PADD from him.

After long moments, she commented in awe while stroking the image with her forefinger.

“They’re so tiny.”
“At this level of gestation each fetus weighs approximately half ounce and measure approximately two and a half inches long, about the length of your pinky finger. Kathryn, as your physician I’d like to recommend that you reconsider your current posting. Perhaps a less hazardous and stressful position at Headquarters would be more beneficial for the duration of your pregnancy.”

“Doctor, I’m pregnant. I’m not short any of my faculties! I’m quite capable of doing my job and --” she was interrupted mid tirade.

“Admiral, I’m not suggesting that you’re any less the usual brilliant diplomat. However, you don’t want to put yourself in unnecessary danger. Your current position runs an extreme risk to your personal safety, especially if you should become involved in volatile diplomatic relations with hostile members of the Federation. I’m quite aware of the personal threats you received over the Shinzon affair. I’m sure you would rather orchestrate the switch than have it ordered by your physician.” The Doctor argued eloquently.

“I suppose I would be bored out of my mind simply sitting behind a desk since my space wings have been snipped,” she stated, in her own way grudgingly agreeing with the doctor. “Before the mess with the Romulans, Owen suggested that I may want to head the Delta Quadrant Analysis Division. The engineering and science teams are still scratching their heads over some of our more ‘imaginative’ enhancements to Voyager...” Kathryn trailed off as Gretchen returned.

“Katie, you always did consider yourself a four pip scientist. Who’s to say that you can’t still consider the science track? You can always go back to the diplomatic corps once the babies are born,” Gretchen suggested, secretly hoping that once the children were indeed born, Kathryn would consider switching to the science track indefinitely. It was selfish, sure, but she’d just gotten her daughter back and she wanted to keep her safely on the ground for awhile.

“Precisely,” chimed the Doctor.

“All right I get the message, and I'll think about it,” Kathryn conceded. “Now, I’d really like to go home,” she stated as she threw her legs over the edge of the bed and proceeded to the restroom; leaving her mother and the doctor to shake their heads in her wake.

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Indiana – a week later

35
“Phoebe, I’m not so sure about this,” Kathryn questioned as she eyed her reflection in the cheval mirror.

“Katie it’s perfect for you. You always use to joke that you were built like a boy. Tonight is a black tie affair – no uniforms; and trust me no one could mistake you for a boy with those new curves of yours,” Phoebe exclaimed.

“I should have known better than to let you pick my gown for the Anniversary Banquet without seeing it first.”

“I didn't pick it, big Sis; I designed it, especially for you. It’s one of kind. You don't want to run the risk of showing up to this affair in the same dress as someone else.” Phoebe stated as she made last minute alternations to the garment.

Kathryn eyed the figure hugging dress uncertainly. She had to admit the midnight blue gown set off her ivory complexion and auburn hair perfectly. The keyhole one shoulder dress was seductively classy in what Tom Paris would have called 'vintage Hollywood style'. For once, her shoulder length hair looked beautiful in its naturally wavy state; her eye makeup was minimal, but the deep berry lipstick she wore seemed to make up for that fact. Her gaze traveled across the expanse of the floor length gown and billowing train of fabric that trailed behind her slightly to the left; the sapphire tear drop earrings and tennis bracelet she wore accented the ensemble perfectly. As she continued to stare at her reflection Kathryn rationalized there was no reason why anyone would guess she was pregnant. To the unpracticed eye it appeared, she'd just gained some much needed weight in all the right places, which aided in her new curvaceous figure.

“Ouch! Phoebe!” Kathryn exclaimed, as a pin pierced her side.

“Stop fidgeting and you won't bleed,” her younger sister grumbled with pins between her teeth. “There, all done; you're going to knock ‘em dead, Sis.” Phoebe sighed, as she stepped back to admire her handiwork.

“Hmm...” Kathryn offered.
“No one will be looking at the blonde this time, that’s for damn sure,” Phoebe huffed under her breath. “Kathryn, you’re glowing! I’ve never seen you look this beautiful. Antonio’s going to be speechless, I can guarantee you that,” Phoebe gushed.

“Stop, Pheebs, you’re going to make me cry; and you know that thanks to these damned hormones, I can’t stop once I start. I’ll end up a streaky mess.” Kathryn blinked back tears as she embraced her sister quickly.

“Besides, Antonio is just doing Mom a favor. There’s nothing remotely romantic going on there.” Kathryn stated as she blotted her eyes.

“I know that Kathryn. But he’s still a man. And any man worth his salt will be blown away when he sees you tonight. And I’ll have you know I had a hand with his tuxedo to be sure you’d complement each other; not that the man needs clothes to look delicious, he’d look fantastic in a burlap sack.”

Kathryn laughed with her sister as she thought of the man her mother arranged to escort her to the anniversary gala.

Gretchen refused to entertain the idea of Kathryn arriving without an escort and thus called in a favor from a longtime family friend. Kathryn had to agree that Antonio Moretti was definitely easy on the eyes. His olive complexion, tall muscular build, structured jaw line, dark hair and eyes were the epitome of handsome, and a delightful reflection of his Italian heritage; not to mention the accent. Thinking of him, Kathryn watched her eyes dilate as she trapped her lower lip between her teeth. She’d known Antonio most of her life and never before had she had salacious thoughts where he was concerned. She shook her head to dislodge fantasies of what he’d be like in bed.

_Damned hormones!_ She’d have to ask the doctor if this was normal. Lately, she’d been hornier than a teenager; most mornings she found herself waking up shaking and sweaty in the throes of orgasm. Her train of thought was interrupted by a soft knock on the door.

“Kathryn, you look divine,” Gretchen sighed from the doorway.

“Thanks, Mom.” Kathryn busied herself fanning out the train of her dress to hide her blush.

“Antonio has just arrived. I’ll let him know that you’ll be down in a few minutes,” Gretchen stated as she turned from the door.
Turning to her sister, Kathryn inquired, “You ready, Sis? I know Kevin must be going insane waiting on us girls.”

“Pffttt, my husband only finished his ‘final touches’ a few minutes ago. Honestly, if I had known I was marrying such a.. a.. a.. What did Tom call him? Oh yeah, a ‘metrosexual’ I would’ve thought twice,” Phoebe chuckled as she smoothed down her own grown.

Although the younger Janeway had insisted Kathryn wear blue to the black tie affair, she opted to go with a short, strapless black number. The lace scalloped bodice and full skirt played up her figure quite nicely. In contrast to Kathryn, Phoebe opted to pull her tresses back into a messy chignon with a side part for the evening.

Phoebe preceeded Kathryn down the staircase to be greeted by her husband, who promptly complimented her, “Mrs. Gallagher, you look stunning,” as he kissed her lips.

“You clean up rather well yourself,” she returned the compliment, stepping back to wipe her thumb across his mouth to clear them of her lipstick, “But wait until you see Kathryn. She looks absolutely gorgeous tonight!”

“Kathryn! Come on, love, we men folk are dying to see the ensemble Phoebe has designed,” Kevin, bellowed as he winked in Antonio’s direction.

“Si, Katarina! Come dazzle us,” Antonio called out in a thick Italian accent.

“I’m coming,” was heard from somewhere deep in the second storey of the house; followed by the ordered clicks of stilettos hitting hardwood floors.

Kathryn appeared at the top of the stairs with her head bowed as she fished through the small silver clutch she’d borrowed from Phoebe. “Pheebs, do you have the tickets? I thought I’d put them in this damn thing but --” Kathryn stopped halfway down the staircase in mid sentence. Raising her head, she was greeted by various reactions. Her mother was in the far corner with suspiciously bright eyes nodding ever so slightly. Phoebe was gazing at her with a look of triumph and a lopsided grin that as children meant Kathryn was about to catch the blame for something her precocious younger sister had engineered. Kevin was blatantly staring at her chest until his wife elbowed him in the ribs; he suddenly found the spot just over her right shoulder much more interesting. As her eyes swept toward Antonio, she was
taken aback by the heated look in his eyes; his dark orbs raked over her form looking as if he would devour her. At her raised eyebrow, he seemed to come back to his senses.

“Katarina, sembrate sorprendente,” he complimented heatedly, before repeating the endearment in English, “Sorry, you look astonishing,” and offered his hand to assist her down the staircase.

“Thank you, Antonio. You’re rather dashing in your own right,” Kathryn, commented as she smoothed his collar before tucking her arm through his offered elbow.

“I have the tickets, Bella,” he informed patting the inside pocket of his jacket as he steered her toward the door.

“You girls, save a seat for me. As soon as your Aunt Martha gets here to watch Preston, I’ll be along,” Gretchen offered from the porch, only slightly disappointed her sister was running late as usual, which meant she would miss Katie’s grand entrance.

Just as Phoebe was getting into the hover car she called to her mother “Don't worry Mom, I got Tom to set up the projectors so you won’t miss a thing. The PADD that will have the live feed is on the coffee table. I even had him do a split screen so that you could see Kate, but also the crowds' reaction,” Phoebe winked before darting into the vehicle.

“Oh, that girl!” Gretchen chuckled as she turned back to the house.

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The blinding flash of holo-imagers, the deafening roar of the crowd composed of fans as well as journalists, in addition to the line of expensive hover cars and the imposing presence of Starfleet security outside San Francisco’s historic Fairmont Hotel, heralded the beginning of Voyager’s First Anniversary Banquet.

Upon exiting the hover vehicle Kathryn staggered slightly at the sheer volume of the crowd. After a moment, she felt Antonio pat her hand reassuringly and the two proceeded to make their way through the luxurious lobby of the hotel.
Phoebe and Kevin were led to the head table, but as expected Voyager’s captain was held back to allow for a grand entrance. Kathryn heard the host’s muffled voice introducing her beyond the heavy ornate doors before a roar of applause filled her ears. As the doors opened, she pasted on what she hoped was her sincerest smile before venturing toward her Voyager family.

“You’ve no need to be nervous, Bella. They love you,” Antonio whispered encouragingly.

Nodding she replied softly, “I love them more.”

As they entered the Venetian Ballroom Kathryn noted the expansive and elaborate decor. The white linen table clothes, gold inlay table settings and fresh floral arrangements were a testament to the extravagance Starfleet felt was appropriate for these types of affairs. She smiled genially while greeting members of her crew as Antonio led them toward the main floor.

“Makes you wonder if dinner will look like food or minimalist artwork, huh?” questioned Tom Paris, as he pulled his Captain into a warm embrace.

“Tom! It’s so good to see you,” Kathryn gushed, as she pulled back from embracing her former helmsman, before being enveloped by B’Elanna.

“B’Elanna you look beautiful!” the older woman complimented the beaded black dress the engineer modeled.

“My dress is nothing compared to that gown; you’re absolutely glowing!” B’Elanna commented before her eyes drifted toward Kathryn’s handsome escort.

“ B’Elanna, Tom, this is Antonio Moretti,” she stated as the man beside her gave her a gentle squeeze, “Antonio, may I present the genius engineer responsible for keeping Voyager space worthy for seven years in the DQ, B’Elanna Torres-Paris and the best damn pilot in the Alpha and Delta Quadrants, Tom Paris.” Kathryn introduced as the men shook hands.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you both, Katarina does nothing but sing the praises of her crew”, the handsome Italian gentleman stated with an enchanting smile.

As the men talked amongst themselves, B’Elanna pulled her former Captain aside.
“Ca -Kathryn. Sorry, I’m still getting used to that. What’s the story with tall, dark and handsome over there?” B’Elanna nodded toward where Tom and Antonio were speaking.

Kathryn took the opportunity to drink in the sight of her escort as she responded, “He is gorgeous isn’t he? And that accent – oh! He’s an old family friend. We’ve known each other since we were children,” Kathryn smiled affectionately at the younger woman as her eyes briefly scanned the crowded ballroom.

“How have you been B’Elanna? How’s Miral?” She asked lightly touching the younger woman’s arm.

“I’ve been great. I can’t thank you enough for ‘suggesting’ my promotion to head the engineering teams overseeing Voyager’s overhaul. And don’t give me that innocent look. I know you had something to do with it. And Miral is fabulous. She absolutely adores the dress you sent for her birthday,” B’Elanna chuckled, “she wants to wear it every day.”

“Well, I’m glad she’s enjoying it. I assume Elizabeth and Owen are keeping her entertained this evening?" 

“More like Miral’s keeping her Grandparents entertained,”

“Well, she is Tom’s daughter,” Kathryn laughed.

“Ugh! Don’t remind me. Even at a year old trouble seems to find her,” the women laughed together, drawing the attention of their respective escorts.

Tom noted the way Antonio looked at his former Captain as she conversed and laughed with B’Elanna. Despite what the man said about being an old acquaintance of hers, Antonio Moretti seemed to exhibit all the classic signs of having fallen head over heels for Kathryn Janeway. Hell, Tom should know; at one point, he had been madly in love with the woman himself. And how many times had he seen this same hang dog look on the face of passing aliens his Captain managed to enchant? Yup, the poor guy was a goner but what was sadder, was that the guy didn’t have a clue.
While Tom was making his assessment; across the teeming ballroom, unnoticed behind a large marble pillar, a pair of dark eyes sized up the man who had escorted Voyager’s former Captain. He recalled what he’d said to Kathryn in her ready room after Q wanted to mate with her, and he repeated the sentiment to himself now. He knew he didn’t have a right – especially after his brief dalliance with Seven - but this guy bothered the hell of out him.

Voyager’s former First Officer’s irritation ratcheted up a notch as he watched the other man approach Kathryn and lay a possessive paw across her lower back as he and Tom joined the ladies. Dragging his eyes from the large man, Chakotay let his gaze settle on his former Captain and for a moment, he forgot to breathe. She looked spectacular; the gown hugged her frame in all the right places, the loose auburn waves softened the lines of her face ever so slightly, and her eyes sparkled with excitement. He found himself momentarily drowning in her beauty before he felt the lifeline of his date’s hand on his forearm bring him back to the surface.

“Enjoying the view big brother?” Sekaya questioned, with a smirk.

“I’d forgotten how stunning she truly is, Sekaya. I think daily proximity aboard Voyager bred complacency.” Chakotay mused as he watched Kathryn work the room, speaking with Harry Kim and Tal Celes, accepting a hug from Naomi, stopping to visit with Tuvok and T’Pel before sending Michael Ayala to escort Gretchen Janeway to the head table. He watched her further as she continued through the crowded room to stop at each table before finally posing for the obligatory holo-images with her escort.

Kathryn was aware of Chakotay’s heated gaze the moment she entered the ballroom. With a superhuman effort, she managed to keep her eyes from straying toward the far side of the room, where he’d ensconced himself behind one of the pillars. She couldn’t explain how she knew his exact location. It had been like that in their early years on Voyager as well. He only needed to walk into the room, and she could pinpoint exactly where he was without ever having to set eyes on him; just as she could now sense him weaving between tables heading toward the front of the room.

There was a time that he seemed to have same awareness of her whenever she walked into a room wherein he’d arrived prior to her. Kathryn recalled the many times when they would then seek each other out and spend the evening side by side. Unexpectedly, she was instantly drawn into a whirl of emotions, but Kathryn quickly snapped out of it, convincing herself it was simply due to the nostalgic atmosphere of her surroundings. Still, she briefly wondered if Chakotay was the father of her children. Although the idea was surprisingly pleasurable, she dismissed the possibility. The Fates couldn’t possibly be that cruel.
Antonio moved closer to whisper something into her ear. Apparently, she hadn't been the only one to notice her former First Officer's preoccupation, “There’s a rather large, surly looking gentleman with a tattoo over his brow eyeing you, Katarina. Should I alert security?” Antonio questioned softly as they posed for yet another holo-image.

“No, Antonio that’s not necessary. I should have known your sharp eye wouldn't miss a thing. That ‘surly looking gentleman’ is my former first officer,” Kathryn explained, as she smiled toward the lens of the holo-imager.

“Ah. That explains it,” Her escort chortled.

“Explains what?” Kathryn turned to address the man beside her.

“It explains why he looks as if he wants to kill me with his bare hands. The man is in love with you, Bella,” He stated, watching Chakotay’s movements from across the room.

“Honestly, Antonio, you couldn't be further from the truth. It's just his habit to be protective of me at these types of things.” Kathryn shook her head as they took their leave of the press to join her family and the senior staff at the head table.

“I don’t believe so, Katarina,” Antonio tugged on her arm slightly to turn her toward him “I can see that he loves you. Just as deeply as you love him.” he whispered passionately searching her eyes for the truth she tried to hide.

“Antonio, not here.” Kathryn chided through a forced smile as she broke eye contact and turned to continue toward their table.

As the couple neared the table, Kathryn wondered if it was her mischievous helmsman or meddling sibling that switched the seating cards. It was the only thing she could think of to explain the current seating arrangements. This had to be someone's idea of a joke.

The head table was circular in design like the rest of the tables in the room, but was built to accommodate a larger number of people. Somehow, Kathryn found herself seated with Antonio on her right and Chakotay on her left. Next to Chakotay was his sister Sekaya, then B’Elanna and Tom, Tal Celes and Harry Kim, Seven of Nine and the Doctor, her Mother, Tuvok and T'Pel and finally Kevin and Phoebe, who were seated next to Antonio.
As she came to her seat, she noticed Chakotay already had her chair pulled out for her. She smiled and nodded her thanks as she sat down.

“Captain.”

“Admiral.”

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Standing on the secluded balcony overlooking the bay, Kathryn took a moment to relax, thinking over what she’d learned during dinner.

Chakotay and Seven’s relationship lasted six months after Voyager returned. Chakotay wanted to travel to Trebus and help with the re-terraforming efforts there. He’d thrown himself into the manual labor wholeheartedly. Which was evident by his deepened tan and Kathryn thought he looked leaner than the last time she’d seen him, more toned. During dinner she’d overheard Sekaya boasting how essential Chakotay’s help and expertise had been for the colony,

However, whereas Chakotay wanted to help rebuild the land of his ancestors, Seven wanted nothing to do with the effort. She found life on Trebus mundane and primitive. So six months later she said her goodbyes and boarded a transport headed for the Vulcan Science Institute.

That begged the question ‘why haven’t I heard from him in all this time?’ Kathryn kept in contact with all of her crew via the message board, she and Tom engineered. There was only one name that never showed up on the board, Chakotay.

Perhaps the communications network was one of the many systems that still required rebuilding after the Dominion war. Maybe he’d not been able to send a message, but Kathryn’s heart dismissed the thought no sooner than she’d given life to the idea.

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It was well past two am by the time the Janeway clan arrived back in Indiana. Kathryn hovered on the porch while the rest of her family made their way into house and upstairs to bed.
“Antonio, thank you for escorting me this evening. I know it couldn't have been easy, considering how protective my crew can be of me. Thank you for putting up with - well everything,” she stated, standing on her tiptoes to kiss his cheek.

“The pleasure was mine Bella. You are a beautiful woman Kathryn Janeway; what man wouldn't find himself humbled to be escort to such an exquisite creature,” he complimented, tucking a stray lock of auburn hair behind her ear.

“You deserve love in your life, Katarina,” he drawled with his thick accent “And you will need the love of a good man to help ease the burden of raising your bambino,” he stated passionately as he placed a hand on her abdomen.

“H-How did you know?” she questioned wide-eyed. She'd thought the dress hid her pregnancy fairly well, but if Antonio noticed, then -

“Do not fret, Bella. I have four sisters with eight nieces and nephews between them. I should hope by now that I could pick out an expectant mother. Your friend B’Elanna, she wasn’t joking, you are indeed glowing. But I do not suspect anyone else is any the wiser,” Antonio soothed.

“I-I haven’t shared this bit of news with anyone yet, aside from Mom, Phoebe and Voyager’s EMH. Antonio, I know I can trust you not to mention my pregnancy to anyone. I’m not sure I’m ready yet for the media circus that’s likely to ensue if it becomes common knowledge,” Kathryn confided.

“Yes, I can imagine,” He chuckled, before gently gathering her hands in his, “Katarina, you know that you have a home away from home in Tuscany. My family would like nothing more than to see you, and you can stay in one of the villas for as long as you need. The land is vast; you would have plenty of privacy,” Antonio invited, with warm eyes and a seductive smile.

“I may take you up on that once the cat’s out the bag” she chuckled “Well... it’s getting late, and I’m exhausted,” she hinted as she gently squeezed his hands.

“Buona Notte, Bella.” he stated with flare as he kissed the back of her hand, before turning to head back into the night toward his hover car.
“Lemme see! Lemme see!” Phoebe demanded, snatching the PADD with the latest fetal scans, as Kathryn and Gretchen returned from seeing the EMH.

“Geez, hello to you too, Pheebs” Kathryn greeted, sarcastically. “Well, you were right Mom.”

“What was she right about?” Phoebe asked as she excitedly turned the PADD this way and that.

“Before we left Starfleet Medical, Mom wagered her morning cup of coffee that you’d be waiting in the driveway to snatch the scans, or you’d pounce on me the moment I walked in the door,” Kathryn and Gretchen laughed together as they watched Phoebe squint at the PADD.

“You know - I never could tell which way was up with these damn things,” she grumbled in frustration as she looked up. “Just tell me, boy - boy or girl - girl?” Phoebe asked as she bounced from foot to foot.

“One of each,” Kathryn smiled broadly.

“Yesss! For a minute there I thought we girls were going to be outnumbered,” Phoebe rejoiced, “What did the Doc say?” she asked,

“He said the babies are doing well; developing just as they should at this stage. They each weigh in at ten and half ounces and measure about six and a half inches long. He said that from here on one twin might start to gain more weight than the other, but that’s not uncommon. Interesting enough he also told me that the babies are developing their individual sleep patterns and positions. I can tell you from all the moving about that goes on at night at least one of my children has inherited my chronic insomnia,” Kathryn chuckled as she caressed her growing belly.
“How about we take this outside onto the patio? It’s a gorgeous day and I want to enjoy the
vineyard while I can escape Kevin and Preston for a moment. Kathryn, remind me to kiss
Antonio next time I see him. This is fabulous! And it’s a great place for a family vacation,”
Phoebe basked.

The elaborate Tuscan gardens and lush vineyards were just the respite Kathryn craved after
the last two chaotic weeks in San Francisco. As she reclined on the patio lounger she
thought back to the day on which circumstances forced her to reveal her pregnancy to
someone other than her immediate family.

She was in her spacious corner office at headquarters assisting B’Elanna with the engine
analysis of Voyager’s slipstream attempt. They’d been there for most of the evening and it was
well into the next morning.

“Oh! I didn’t realize it was so late. It’s well past 0600,” observed B’Elanna as she sat forward to
stretch the kinks out of her back.

“Really? I had no idea,” Kathryn chuckled “Seems like old times, huh?” she questioned rubbing
her eyes with her thumb and forefinger with a tired smile.

“You mean pulling all nighters on the warp core? Yeah it does,” B’Elanna agreed with a
whisper of nostalgia in her voice.

“Come on, we can walk down to the transport station together,” Kathryn offered as she began
to store PADDs and powered down her terminal.

“No problem. Before we go; do you mind?” the younger woman motioned toward the small
washroom off Kathryn’s office.

“No, of course not. Go ahead, this last document is taking a minute to save and close anyway.”
Kathryn waved her hand toward the door before rubbing her temples.

As B’Elanna moved toward the washroom, Kathryn rose from her desk and moved to the
replicator. She had a headache that over the last hour had been getting steadily worse but
she hadn’t thought anything of it, just pushing past the pain to focus on the task at hand. Now
though, it couldn’t be ignored.
“Computer, one glass of water – chilled,” she commanded.

She tiredly retrieved the glass after it shimmered into place and feeling slightly warm, she placed the chilled glass against her neck before moving it up to rest against her right temple. Not a second later she felt her tongue take on a familiar sandpaper feel. Whipping around she searched her office for her purse but remembered that it unfortunately was stored clear across the room.

She opened her mouth to call for B’Elanna, but her voice had diminished to a hoarse whisper. At least she wasn’t having chest pains this time, but her legs felt like they’d collapse under her at any moment. And they did – no sooner had the thought entered her mind, she found herself crumpling to the floor. Luckily, she was able to catch herself between the low table to her right and the replicators’ ledge to ease down to the floor. Her vision was tunneling, but with determination and sheer will, Kathryn began to crawl and pull herself along the floor, inching her way toward the opposite wall. She’d covered half the distance when she started shaking uncontrollably.

“Kathryn!!” To B’Elanna it appeared as if the older woman was starting to seize or something. She dashed to her side.

Kathryn gripped B’Elanna’s hand before shakily raising her own to point across the office.

“My...purse...hypo,” Kathryn rasped, as she squeezed her eyes shut, concentrating on trying to control the shaking of her body.

“Okay,” B’Elanna breathed before sprinting across the room to the cupboard where Kathryn stored their purses. She tapped in the lock code and the hidden compartment opened toward her. The younger woman glanced back at Kathryn and noticed her eyes fluttering, as she fought to stay conscious. Racing back to her Captain, B’Elanna upended Kathryn’s purse, frantically shaking it until the contents spilled haphazardly across the floor. Scooping up the hypospray, B’Elanna activated it then pressed it to Kathryn’s neck in one fluid movement.

Activating her comadge B’Elanna summoned Voyager’s former CMO, “Torres to Starfleet Medical, I need Voyagers EMH at my present location immediately!” she called fearfully.

B’Elanna heard the whine of the transported deposit the doctor in the corridor outside Kathryn’s office.
“In here!” she called frantically.

“What happened?” The Doctor asked as he hurried toward the two women.

“You tell me!” B’Elanna growled. “She was fine one minute and the next - - I found her convulsing on the floor!”

Snapping the tricorder shut, the doctor stood from his kneeling position. “She should come around in just a moment. You administered the treatment in time,” The Doctor explained cryptically.

For long moments, B’Elanna held Kathryn’s head in her lap as she knelt on the floor. Almost immediately after she administered the medication, her former Captain’s shaking began to ease and then ceased all together. Her pulse was getting stronger, and she seemed to be breathing easier, but Kathryn had yet to open her eyes. B’Elanna nearly jumped out of her skin when she felt Kathryn’s hand circle her wrist.

“Doctor--” Kathryn prompted softly

“Everything is fine, Admiral.” The Doctor stated

“Everything?” she questioned.

“Yes. Now if you would excuse me, I was in the middle of composing a new aria,” The Doctor huffed as he left the office.

Kathryn smiled from her position on the floor, at the Doctors feigned indifference. She knew that she would be hearing from him soon. No, doubt he’d demand an earlier check up appointment.

“I’m okay,” Kathryn breathed deeply, “Just give me a minute.”

“Like hell you are!” B’Elanna rasped, darkly. “What the hell was that?!”

Kathryn tiredly opened her eyes to see tears beginning to form in her friend’s eyes, “Oh, B’Elanna, I’m so sorry I never meant to scare you. Help me sit up and I’ll explain”
It took two tries before Kathryn could sit in an upright position. She didn’t dare to try to stand yet; breathing deeply to bring her dizziness under control, she signaled for B’Elanna to sit in front of her.

“Kathryn, you scared the shit of me! What’s going on? You were expecting this?” B’Elanna accused, holding up the empty hypospray, as she shuffled around to sit in front of Kathryn.

Raising her hand to forestall any additional questions Kathryn spoke softly.

“No, I wasn’t expecting it per se. As long as I take the hypo when scheduled, I won’t have an episode at all. It’s only if I forget.”

“And since when are you on meds, period?!” B’Elanna asked exasperatedly.

“Since I learned that the New Earth virus is back,” Kathryn explained with shimmering eyes and a sad crooked smile.

“But we ... you were cured of that ... years ago! And...and...and you’re planet side!”

“I know. This was actually a milder reaction. I was completely incapacitated on a recent trip to the Enterprise. I need to start at the beginning, but it’s a long story, and I don’t want to keep you-”

“Like hell! You can’t just collapse or whatever in front of me and expect me to go on my merry way.” B’Elanna sat back and crossed her arms over her chest before leveling a glare at her friend. “Let’s have it, Kathryn what secrets have you been keeping? Does your family know about this?”

“Firstly, yes my family knows. Secondly, you’re right. I have been keeping a secret – well two secrets really,” Kathryn hesitated.

“And---” B’Elanna asked pointedly.
Blowing out a breath, Kathryn began her tale regarding the Caretaker and his newly discovered experiments where she was concerned; the fact that the paternity of her children was known only to the doctor and her reasons for wanting it kept that way. Lowering her head she further confided, “After I decided to resume my pregnancy, roughly three months later I collapsed while visiting the Enterprise. When I woke up the Doctor confirmed my concerns and devised a daily treatment that helps alleviate the virus’ symptoms. And of course, my space wings have been clipped,” after long moments, she raised her head and spoke again.

“B’Elanna, say something.”

“How could I have not noticed something like this? We've been working together the better part of three weeks!” she said astonished.

“Well, for the most part, I’ve been able to keep it hidden but I don’t think that will be the case much longer.” Kathryn chuckled as she rested her hand on her abdomen.

Now that she thought about it B’Elanna recalled how Kathryn seemed to glow at the reunion; she had mistaken the familiar maternal glow for the radiance of being in love. And looking at the older woman sitting across from her, when on the floor rather than behind a desk, B’Elanna could definitely see a very distinctive bump beneath her friend’s tunic. Shaking herself out of her stupor B’Elanna playfully jabbed Kathryn in the arm.

“I can’t believe you kept this from us!”

“I’ve kept it from everyone. I wasn’t – I’m not ready to share this aspect of my personal life yet. You saw what the press was like when we came home, prying into my past engagement with Mark, camping out on my mother’s front lawn, stalking my sister and her family. Hell, B’Elanna they already have me married to Antonio for heaven’s sake. I just want to keep this as private as possible for as long as possible... perhaps that’s selfish of me but --”

“You’re right. The press has been unforgiving in regard to your privacy. They’ve stopped following the rest of us and yet a week doesn’t go by that I don’t see some type of exposé concerning ‘Admiral Janeway’. Kathryn, are you happy about this pregnancy?” B’Elanna asked, as she cocked her head to side.

“B’Elanna, I'm ecstatic and terrified all at the same time!” Kathryn chuckled.
“Well, I’m happy for you. And I’m here if you just want to lament about weird cravings or whatever. And don’t worry I won’t mention anything if you don’t want me to. I can’t believe I haven’t noticed before. It looks like Miral will have a playmate in a few months time. May I?” B’Elanna asked as she reached her hand toward Kathryn’s belly.

Kathryn nodded, “Actually, Miral will have two playmates…” Kathryn bit her lip while she watched comprehension dawn on the younger woman’s face.

“Kahless! Twins?!” B’Elanna asked wide-eyed.

“Yes. I don’t know the sexes yet. I haven’t let the doctor tell me. But I can’t stand it any longer I have to know! I’m going to ask him at my next appointment. I’m tempted to grab a tricorder, but I’d feel as if I were diminishing the moment somehow.” It felt good to talk about her pregnancy with someone other than Phoebe and her mother.

“Kathryn, congratulations,” B’Elanna whispered fiercely before embracing her former captain.

The embrace caught Kathryn by surprise and she was reminded of the time B’Elanna woke up in Sickbay after her experience on the Barge of the Dead. After a moment, she wrapped her arms around the younger woman and hugged her back. Slowly, they began to pull apart and Kathryn realized despite her determination to banish her tears, one stubborn droplet managed to leak down her cheek. Keeping her head down and tilting it slightly to the left, she wiped it away with the back of her hand behind the fall of her hair.

“Thank you for keeping my confidence on this B’Elanna. I don’t plan on hiding it for too much longer, I just wanted this early time to myself, you know? I don’t want you keeping secrets from Tom, so you can tell him if you want, and I know by default that means Harry will find out as well. But please, please keep it there. Our Voyager family can be over exuberant at times.” Kathryn chuckled to herself.

“What about Chako…?”

“No, B’Elanna. I don’t want Chakotay knowing. He is not to be told about my pregnancy, unless I’ve already released a statement to the public. He has his own life and before you say anything, it’s been what-almost a month since the reunion? And still nothing. I haven’t spoken to him since before the debriefings. And he never posts on the Voyager message board. I’ve attempted to find him just for my own peace of mind but it appears as though he doesn’t want to be found. Let it be B’Elanna. Let it be.” Kathryn sighed, as she pulled herself off the floor.
“Okay, but couldn’t he help with the virus? I mean he’s not affected by it and the only reason you’re affected is due to the babies. Couldn’t Doc synthesize a cure from him? I remember when I helped Tom study for Sickbay, there were some twenty first century medical journals that described how sometimes a bone marrow transplant could help with some forms of cancers and other ailments.” B’Elanna offered with worried eyes.

“Yes, that’s plan B. As for plan A, the doctor thinks that he can synthesize a cure from the babies’ cord blood once the placenta is delivered. I think he may have been reviewing some of the same journals Tom studied. He’s eighty percent sure that the procedure will work. But if it doesn’t then Chakotay is plan B, that’s also part of the reason I’ve been trying to locate him. The doctor will need to know where to reach him if the first option doesn’t pan out.” Kathryn countered.

“All right I won’t say anything to him until I have the word from you,” B’Elanna didn’t mention it. But Kathryn had heard enough from Voyager’s grapevine to know that whenever someone did hear from Chakotay, he never once wanted to speak about Voyager’s former captain. It was as if he’d never met Kathryn Janeway; as if he hadn’t spent seven years of his life by her side day in and day out. For the life of her, Kathryn couldn’t understand it.

The sound of Kevin and Preston returning from their tour of Grotta Del Vento, brought Kathryn back to the present.

“Auntie Kathryn! Auntie Kathryn! It was awesome!” the five year old declared excitedly. “When we got there – there were these HUGE metal doors and then the guide opened the doors and this HUGE gust of cold wind came out of nowhere! Oh, oh and then we had to go through these really tight tunnels before we got to a hallway made out of ice. And the rocks were all these different shapes and colors and the ceiling was really high, like at an old church or something. Oh yeah, but the ceiling had teeth. I didn’t know mountains had teeth, Auntie Kathryn”

“The ‘teeth’ if they’re on the floor are called stalagmites, but if they are from above then they are called stalactites, Pres,” Kathryn explained as she watched her nephew scratch his head.

“Oh. Anyway then we saw a water curtain with a rainbow and from there we saw more ice caves and hallways. The coolest part was the bear,“

“There was a bear in the caves? Preston what did you do?!” Kathryn asked in mock astonishment.
“Auntie Kathryyyyyyn! Silly, the bear wasn't alive. It was a skeleton.” Preston explained, not quite believing his super smart aunt could believe the tour guide would leave a real bear inside the cave.

“Oh! Well, I knew that.” Kathryn said nonchalantly as she hugged her nephew to her side.

“Preston, why don’t you and Dad get washed up, it's nearly time for dinner.” Phoebe suggested as she turned the boy toward the house.

“Aw, nuts,” Preston complained, kicking at the dust on the patio ground.

“I know Buddy, come on,” Kevin encouraged, tousling his sons ginger locks.

After the 'boys' were out of sight, Kathryn noticed Phoebe staring at her strangely.

“What? Phoebe, what?” Kathryn asked as she looked herself over.

“You're gonna be a great Mom, Katie. I really mean that, just look at how you interact with Preston all the time. You never speak down to him, as if he can't comprehend what you're telling him, but you know just the right amount of humor to add as well.” Phoebe stated before bending down to hug her sister.

“Thanks, Pheebs, that means a lot” Kathryn sighed distractedly.

“What's wrong Kathryn? All of sudden you look exhausted.”

“I just... Phoebe when you were pregnant, did you have strange dreams?” Kathryn asked pointedly.

“Well, I guess that depends on what you consider strange,” Phoebe tossed back.

“This will sound crazy. But I've seen my children in my dreams, Phoebe. And it's not like I'm watching myself with them as they grow or anything. I knew before my appointment today what I was having. I dreamt it beforehand,” Kathryn shared.
“That’s not crazy Kathryn; I had those types of dreams all the time,” Phoebe comforted.

“Phoebe, you don’t understand. My dreams- they’ve been more like vision quests. You remember me telling you about that, right?”

“That’s the waking dream that Chakotay taught you, right?”

“Similar, but you get the gist. The dreams vary, but I’m never in them. I’m always an onlooker. Sometimes I can see the kids playing or being fed by someone else. Sometimes I see them on their first day of school.” Kathryn confided.

“I don’t know what to tell you Kathryn, I don’t think you should worry about it. I think every new mom has those types of dreams at some point during her pregnancy,” Phoebe soothed.

“I guess you’re right. I’m probably making more of it than I need to,” Kathryn offered with a polite smile.

Phoebe patted Kathryn’s leg affectionately before heading into the house to help her mother prepare dinner. Kathryn savored a moment of solitude as she watched the sunset before following her sister into the house.

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Indiana – March 2380

“Kathryn, I’m moving into the guest house,” Gretchen announced after dinner.

“Mom? Whatever for? I told you this is just temporary. Once the children are born, I’ll look for my own place,” Kathryn attempted.

“No. Before you arrived home I’d already made this decision. I love this house, Kathryn. But it’s too much for me to take care of on my own. Honestly, what would I possibly want with this much space? It was fine when Edward and I first moved in; we needed the space with a growing family. But it’s just me now --”
“Mom, No. You ---” leaning across the kitchen island to place a hand on her mother's arm, Kathryn tried again. “You’ve invested so much in this house--”

“I’ve made up my mind, Katie. It’s already done. I’ve taken care of the proper paperwork to have the deed to the house and the land transferred to your name,” Gretchen stated succinctly, softly tossing her napkin onto her dinner plate.

“Mama, please. I – You don’t have to do this on my account.”

“I know that, Kathryn. I want to do this for you and my grandbabies,” Gretchen smiled broadly, as she affectionately laid a hand on her daughter’s swollen stomach. “End of discussion.” The elder Janeway declared rising to take their dinner dishes to the sink.

People often joked that Kathryn must have gotten her stubbornness from her Father; however, the Janeway family knew she’d inherited her iron will from her Mother. Likewise, Kathryn knew it was a moot point to try to persuade her mother otherwise once the woman’s mind was made up. But that didn’t mean she couldn’t attempt to make her mother regret the action. Smiling deviously, Kathryn uttered the one phrase that was sure to irritate her Mother into thinking twice.

“You do realize this means you’re breaking ‘Gretchen Janeway’s number one kitchen rule’, don’t you? I can assure you as the new owner of this house, there will be a replicator and refresher unit installed in this kitchen.”

“Kathryn...” Gretchen smiled sweetly, “where would you install those monstrosities? Did you forget that this house has been commissioned as a historic landmark?” Gretchen watched the horror slowly settle on her eldest child’s face as her scientific mind absorbed that tidbit of information. “Which means...” the older woman prompted her daughter to complete her sentence.

Kathryn groaned as she dropped her head into her hands, “Which means no technologically advanced amenities may be permanently affixed/installed, which may irrevocably diminish the historic value of the landmark.' Dammit! You know what this means don't you?” Kathryn looked weakly toward her mother.

“Yes, Dear. You’ll have to cook the old fashioned way,” Gretchen chuckled as Kathryn rolled her eyes and dramatically dropped her head back into her hands. “Kathryn, you act as if you
can’t cook, when I know for a fact that you can. In fact, you’re quite good at it. Or does this have to do with you simply not wanting to cook.”

Gretchen laughed aloud as she realized the truth of the matter. “Oh, Kathryn. You didn’t!! You let your crew think you can’t cook?! Or worse yet, you had them preparing meals for you under the guise of thinking they would end up in sickbay otherwise?!”

“It’s not funny Mother!”, Kathryn hissed then pouted “You know I absolutely hate to cook.”

“Yes, but I also know that despite the dislike of the action, you are able to do so,” Gretchen countered.

Waving her hand absently Kathryn lamented, “You have no idea the number of pot roasts I liquefied, the number of times I’ve taken my replicator apart and strewn bits and pieces across my cabin, or the number of times I deliberately fouled up a recipe to ensure that I wouldn’t have to set foot into a kitchen. Now I have to explain to my junior officers that I did that for seven years simply because I couldn’t be bothered with the chore of cooking my own meals. Do you realize that my inability to function in the kitchen served as ship’s fodder for all these years! The crew ate it up! Somehow, it allowed them to relate to me on a more personal level. Apparently, if the Captain is proficient in everything it makes the crew jittery.” Kathryn blew a wayward lock of hair out of her face and, fist beneath her chin, she rested her elbow on the counter.

“Either way, Katie that means no replicator in the kitchen. I’ll leave it to you to explain why that’s the case to any future guests who might inquire about it. Oh, and you can expect to have the family over in a few weeks for breakfast.” Gretchen’s laughter could be heard filtering through the hallway as she made her to the front of the house.

CHAPTER 6

Indiana – month later

“No! NO!” Kathryn sobbed harshly as she jolted awake, gasping for breath, with tears streaming down her cheeks, fighting against an unseen enemy.

She looked anxiously around the moonlit room, smoothing tangled waves of auburn hair behind her ears, before reluctantly sitting back against the headboard. She shivered slightly
as the cool air caressed her skin, slick with perspiration. Rising from the bed, she made her way to the bay window to watch the rain fall in rivulets against the glass.

As her heart settled back into her chest and her breathing calmed, she found herself sobbing softly. This was the twelfth night that she’d awoken from a nightmare fighting phantom attackers. If she were honest, the nightmares began quite awhile ago, but they were steadily increasing in intensity. This time, as in every other, she took on the role of an onlooker.

*Kathryn watched herself deliver her children after long and stressful hours of labor. After the final twin was delivered, she saw herself slump back to the bed tiredly and could hear the doctor’s frantically working over the babies. They were quiet, too quiet.*

Suddenly, a high pitch alarm sliced through the air. Kathryn whipped her head back to the biobed where she could see herself, lying still - very still. She watched in morbid fascination as nurses and doctors began to swarm around the bed shouting orders. The doctors were attempting to resuscitate her when suddenly, the screech of the children’s monitors erupted from the other side of the room. Kathryn rushed to the incubators and screamed. Both infants were blue; she reached forward to pick up her son, but her hand went right through him, as if she wasn’t there. The irony wasn’t lost on her, and she began to panic. Was this the matrix alien again? She refused to let her children be sucked into that monstrosity’s web. She tried again, this time attempting to pick up her baby girl but the outcome was the same. Aware that no one could see her, she was distressed to realize that no one had come to the aid of her children. The doctors seemed to focus solely on the dying woman across the room.

*She heard a small blip amidst the chaotic ruckus of the room and looked down anxiously to see which of her children had won their battle to live, only to hear the heartbreaking shrill of the monitor above both incubators signaling that neither child had survived. The blip came from the monitor attached to her other self. The team of doctors in the room were sighing in relief and shaking hands, congratulating themselves on their success.*

*A new figure caught her attention; the outline of a man coming toward her from a shrouded distance. He was dressed in the style of Starfleet uniform worn aboard Voyager, except the color bar across the top was black. She was unable to see a rank bar or pips; the man’s face was kept in shadow, which shouldn’t have been possible in the brightly lit birthing suite. The next thing Kathryn was aware of was someone choking her. Not the woman on the biobed, but her.*

*Somehow this man could see her and he’d wrapped his large hand around her throat and squeezed harshly, lifting her slightly off the floor as he raised his arm up and out perpendicular to his height. “You murdered my children!” he rasped darkly as he shook her, “You heartless bitch!”*
Kathryn clawed at the hand cutting off her air supply and found her legs flailing in the air, her feet unable to find purchase on the floor. “No, I...” she gasped as he tightened his grip.

“Yes, you did. Do not deny it! Their blood is on your hands, Captain.” Her hands felt wet and sticky, and it shouldn’t have mattered - what with the life being choked out her - but it drew her attention. She looked in horror at the blood on her hands and in the same instant, she felt the man snap her neck.

As the memory of the dream faded, Kathryn felt completely shattered. In all of her dreams horror and despair prevailed. This couldn’t be normal, could it? To have only nightmares where her children were concerned? Never to dream of them as she rocked them to sleep, played with them in the park, of her feeding them or tending a scraped knee. She only ever dreamt of being cruelly snatched from her children, dying during childbirth, being declared an unfit mother or of Delta Quadrant enemies stealing her babies in the night and the terror of being powerless to stop it. Was this a premonition of sorts? Was she destined to die before she held her babies? That thought brought a pain, which seared through her chest before finding relief in the form of hot tears that streamed down her cheeks in tandem with the rain streaming down the glass of the window.

With her pregnancy entering the thirty-week mark it took a concentrated effort to ease out of the window seat; once upright she placed a hand on her lower back, massaging the muscles there before continuing to her wardrobe. As she did every night, she pulled out the two medium sized wooden chests that were stored on the shelf just below waist height. She’d been given the chests as a baby shower gift by her Aunt Martha.

Her aunt was insistent that Kathryn began what she called a ‘Hope Chest’ for each of her children. Both boxes were made of polished mahogany with intricate Celtic carvings across the base. Atop the lid of each was a small picture window, the lid itself fastened to the box by old fashioned brass sprung hinges. Aunt Martha had explained that the window could be used to show the children’s newborn picture or a name card.

In each box, Kathryn stored a variety of items including the baby blankets that she’d knitted for them, one blue with white trim and one pink with yellow trim. She fingered the edge of her daughter’s blanket before setting it aside to pull out a small fetal scan. Kathryn had asked the doctor to take individual scans of the babies and when he’d given her the scans, she’d placed copies in each of the children’s chests, along with pictures of her at varying stages of her pregnancy.

Phoebe had taken photographs rather than holo-images and for a long while Kathryn couldn’t understand why her sister insisted on such an obsolete method. However, now as
she spread the images across her bed, she could appreciate the sentimentality behind the gesture. There were photographs of her at four months, one while she was sprawled in the dirt gardening, another of her knitting a blanket. An image of her at five months as she stood silhouetted by the Tuscan sunset and one of her as she napped on the patio during their vacation. There was an image of her at six months with Preston pressing a kiss to her rounded belly, a photograph of her, hands on hips with paint on her nose, standing in a partially completed nursery. Another photo of her from earlier this month with her head bowed as she caressed her belly through a white cotton gown before the brightly lit bay window in her bedroom. Phoebe seemed to favor her in any type of back lighting. Be it a sunset, a sunrise, or in moonlight – there were several of those among the photos she’d just sorted through. The most recent photo was of Kathryn in the nursery as she sat in the rocking chair; her head bowed and a writing tablet resting against her abdomen as she wrote a letter in the old way – with paper and pen.

Kathryn couldn’t believe how large she’d gotten; at seven and half months, she was the size of a small asteroid, as Phoebe often joked. Although her back hurt constantly and she couldn’t remember what her feet looked like; Kathryn found herself marveling at the changes in her body. There were times, like now, when she could have sworn her children sensed her distress and suddenly a wave of calm and a sense of purpose washed over and steadied her. She attributed the sensation to the children’s empathetic abilities.

Kathryn massaged her belly where one of the babies seemed to be doing somersaults. She spoke softly as she caressed the taut roundness in soothing circles to calm the child. She’d noticed early on that the sound of her voice could calm the children when they seemed anxious. She’d also taken to sitting quietly listening to various types of music while she rocked in the nursery.

Unbeknownst to Phoebe, she’d captured an extremely personal moment between mother and children last week. Once she learned of her pregnancy Kathryn begun to keep vid journals as well as handwritten notes for her children.

Before learning their sexes, she opened the letters with 'Cherished little one' or 'Beloved'. The letters generally described her joy of finding out that she was pregnant, her excitement to meet her children and her worries that she would never be able to be all they needed. Once she learned the sexes, she began her letters either 'Cherished Daughter' or 'Beloved Son' still chronicling her excitement over their pending arrival. As her dreams progressed to nightmares, she began to write letters that spoke of her desires for them, her wishes that they be happy, healthy, and loved. She cautioned that if ever they should find themselves without her in their lives, to know that their mother loved them deeply.

To her daughter, Kathryn tried to recall all the life lessons that Gretchen had shared with her as well as ones she learned on her own. Kathryn relayed her love for her daughter saying
how she used to dream of someday having a little girl all her own. Kathryn found that as her letters progressed, she seemed to be leaving instructions on all the milestones a daughter would share and discuss with her mother. In one letter, she found herself giving advice on what type of man her daughter should look for. Kathryn shared that any man who felt threatened by her daughters’ intelligence or by her thirst for life was not one to settle down with. She confided there would be heartbreak in life, but there would also be unbridled joy and passion as well.

To her son, Kathryn began in much the same manner, sharing her joy and excitement over learning of his eventual arrival. She spoke of her nervousness; she knew nothing of what little boys needed. How would she cope? She spoke to him about looking out for his sister, to always be there for her (even when she was too stubborn to admit she needed him) and vice versa to let her be there for him when he needed her. She spoke of her desire for him to stand his ground amidst the Janeway women, citing that ‘we’re a stubborn lot and won’t always admit when we’re wrong’. She laughed then, imagining that he’d more than likely inherit her bullheadedness as well. She spoke to him of girls and being in love, of knowing what caliber of woman, he should choose to spend his life with. She cautioned that he would have his heartbroken, and he would also be the breaker of hearts.

Strangely enough it was about a month ago that she began to address her daughter as 'My Beautiful Rose' and her son as 'My Little Warrior'. At first, she hadn’t noticed the change. She'd written four letters each before she became aware of it herself. Later she could pin it down to a dream she’d had wherein she’d met her children, and they shared with her the cherished endearments of their mother.

Kathryn made it a point never to write to her children after a nightmare. She wanted to be sure that all of her memories in writing to her children were joyous, not melancholy. She fingered her daughter’s letters, tied with a piece of ribbon from Gretchen’s wedding dress. For her son, she had bound his letters in much the same manner using a piece of cord from Edward Janeway’s dress uniform.

The vid journal entries varied – one was of her attempting to paint the nursery, another was a recording of the family in Italy. However, Kathryn’s favorite was of a poem by an unknown author that read:

"Be strong. Be intelligent. Smile.
Know that beauty has everything to do with how you feel about yourself
and nothing to do with looks or other people's opinions.
Never do anything just because everyone else is if you believe it's wrong.
Always be true to yourself.

Expect the best from life and that’s what you’ll get."
Learn from your mistakes and failures.
Believe in magic and wish on stars.
Love and trust and be compassionate.

Make faces. Play in mud puddles. Take bubble baths.
Turn off all the lights and watch lightning storms.
Dance, laugh, cry, and sing when you want to.
Read everything you can get your hands on.
Stand up for what is right especially if you stand alone.
Don’t allow yourself or people around you to tolerate prejudices of any kind.

Don’t be afraid to try something new.
Do something daring at least once a week.
Run through snow drifts.
Spin in circles and roll down hills.

Pet puppies, hold kittens, and talk to babies.
Take afternoon naps. Stay up to watch the sunrise.
Never apologize for being yourself.

Never forget that I love you more than any other person in the world, no matter how far apart we are; you will always be my daughter, you will always be my son.”

Sighing Kathryn gathered up the photographs, letters, and other mementos and placed them gently back into their respective chests and returned storing the boxes to her wardrobe. She stood a moment to stretch and listened to the rain before easing herself into bed. Turning onto her left side and in an attempt to find a comfortable position, Kathryn snuggled down against the maternity pillow that Phoebe had given her.

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Sleep eluded her, however and two hours later, she found herself seated back on the window seat before the bay window. In her lap rested the medicine bundle Kathryn had assembled years before, but very seldom used. She fingered the soft material hesitantly, before opening it and spreading the contents on the bench beside her. Idly, she caressed the river stone from New Earth, the pressed Peace rose, a wine cork; the necklace Caylem had given her and a silver pocket watch she’d received as a birthday gift from Chakotay.

She caressed each item before placing her hand on the Akoona. Closing her eyes she concentrated on steadying her breathing before reciting the well remembered words. “A-koo-chee-moya. I am close to the sacred place of my grandfathers and the bones of my people and pray on this night of unrest that the spirits hear and speak to me. Perhaps there is one powerful being who will embrace me and give the answers I seek.”
When she opened her eyes, Kathryn found herself in a thick wooded area beneath a starry sky. The air was warm but against the evening soundtrack - chirping crickets, the hoot of a night owl, low throaty sounds of a toad, and the gentle lapping of water over smooth stones, she heard a dangerous and rather intimidating growl. She didn’t recognize the silver wolf, which was obviously, less than pleased with her sudden arrival. She chanced a slight step to her left to go around the menacing creature, but even this slight movement seemed to anger the animal.

Kathryn remained still, looking around her to gage where she was. She didn’t recognize this place. How had she ended up here? Where was here? And where was her animal guide? Why was this wolf behaving in such a predatory manner?

Slowly, a thought occurred to her. She felt different here. Something was missing; something fundamental was lacking. Borne of habit in these later months, Kathryn moved to rest her hands on her rounded abdomen. To her absolute horror, her abdomen was no longer round, but flat as it had been upon arriving in the Alpha Quadrant. Panic gripped her. Where were her babies?!? Forgetting about the hostile silver wolf regarding her with cold yellow eyes, Kathryn circled her position frantically searching with her eyes and ears.

Suddenly, she heard the soft mewl of an infant. Just beyond the wolf in a clearing lay two babies wrapped in swaddling. Relief washed over her; her children were okay. Kathryn started toward them only to be knocked violently onto her back by the large, angry wolf.

“I - I....” just what do you say to an animal exhibiting hostile intent, when it’s your own subconscious making the creature hostile to begin with?, Kathryn asked herself silently.

“She is not a figment of your subconscious, Kathryn Janeway.”

From her position on the ground, Kathryn turned her head sideways to see a man leaning against one of the immense mossy tree trunks.

“Who -? What’s going on? Why are you keeping me from my children?!?” she demanded of the stranger, who seemed eerily familiar.

The man gracefully uncurled himself from the tree trunk and stepped partially in a puddle of moonlight to allow her a better glimpse of him. The broad shoulders, golden
skin, and wide stance screamed familiarity to her. But she didn’t know this man. The wide brim hat hid his facial features from her eyes, but she took in the rest of him. The confident bearing, the functional leather slacks and linen shirt, the walking stick ... and his amusement at her predicament.

“You’re laughing at me,” she seethed, leveling a glare at the older man. She could see wavy silver hair escaping from beneath the hat’s brim.

“Yes. You find yourself flat on your back in unfamiliar territory, in the company of a man twice your size and a rather angry wolf, yet you bark orders as if you were still standing on the bridge of your ship. Look around you, Kathryn Janeway. You’re not on Voyager. Your orders carry no weight here.”

The stranger turned and began to move toward the sleeping children. He knelt to lift one of the babies from the grass bed on which they lay. Kathryn felt fear bubble up inside her; her authority as an officer wasn’t working. The stranger had laughed in her face and the snarling wolf had yet to let her up. She tried again to rise, but the wolf increased its weight, standing heavily on Kathryn’s chest before baring gleaming white teeth, amidst a sinister growl.

“Please, don’t hurt them. I- we didn’t mean to intrude I – please I -I beg you don’t harm my children,” she pleaded, her voice thick with emotion.

“Kathryn, it shames me to know that you think I would do such a thing,” the stranger commented as he kissed the child’s head.

“Well, what is she supposed to think Husband? The wolf has yet to let her near them and you - you laugh at her concerns while you keep the child from her. I don’t blame her for the murderous thoughts she’s trying to keep at bay,” chastised a disembodied voice.

“But Corazon...”

“Don’t even try,” the stern voice coalesced into the figure of a slight woman with a commanding presence.

“You and I will discuss your treatment of her later. And you!” the woman snapped at the wolf. “Release her. Don’t argue. Just do it,” she commanded when the animal seemed to hesitate before moving off of the prone woman.

“Thank you-” Kathryn began quietly.
"You’re welcome. However that doesn’t mean that I’m pleased with your behavior either.” the slight woman with dark eyes and long raven hair turned to point in Kathryn’s direction.

“You and I will discuss your behavior later, young lady. You have a hell of a lot to answer for. However, first come here and hold your little ones. Look them over, you will see they’ve not been harmed in any manner.” The woman took the child from her husband’s arms and placed the baby in Kathryn’s shaky outstretched hands.

Once the baby was in her arms Kathryn, hugged the child to her breast and kissed the mass of dark curls atop the baby’s head. Tears began to prick at her eyes, at her relief in seeing that her baby girl was, in fact, perfectly healthy. After a moment, the woman gave her the baby boy to look over.

"Peta,” the woman started with a gentler inflection in her voice “We would never hurt them. We are, in fact, watching over them until it is your time to be with them.”

Kathryn gasped as she looked deeply into the eyes of the woman standing before her - dark, rich, warm chocolate brown. She whipped her head back to the man and peered at him under the brim of his wide hat. At her inspection, he raised his head to allow the full moon to illuminate his face. She felt herself grow faint.

"I – No. I don’t understand this," she whispered.

"Yes you do, Mija. You understand perfectly,” the tall man decreed. “They are children of our people, Daughter. And yet you deny them their heritage,” he accused passionately.

“I -- don’t know what you’re talking about. I don’t-“

"Yes you do! Stop being so obtuse, this is not the time for it!” he roared. Surprisingly, the children merely looked in his direction, but did not cry out.

"Kathryn,” the woman touched her arm gently, caressing the baby’s cheek before raising her hand to caress the cheek of the frightened new mother before her, “Mija. You must tell their Father of their existence. He has the right to know,” she implored.

"If this is real -- how could he know? I didn’t know,” she asked tears pooling in her grey blue eyes. "I can’t find him. Even if I could, he would never believe me. Or he’d believe that I’ve deceived him."
"You are not to blame. This is not something you engineered," The dark man spoke kindly for the first time.

Kathryn's mind whirled as she lowered her head. What the hell was going on? This couldn't be true, what a cruel joke! Was Chakotay the father of her children? Maybe the wolf was actually Coyote.

"It's no joke Mija," the woman placed her hand beneath Kathryn's chin to meet her eyes. "This is very much the truth. You're not well, Kathryn. This illness you carry, The Caretaker unknowingly caused this. It could not be foreseen. You must prepare, Kathryn. Should anything happen to you, the children would become wards of the Federation. Gretchen, as big as her heart is, cannot care for two very young children, Phoebe has her own family and often travels with her galleries. Tom and B'Elanna have young Miral. A one year old quarter Klingon child and two very special children would be more than they could handle. You must tell their Father. Find him Kathryn. Find him before it's too late."

Kathryn eyed her son and daughter tearfully before carefully returning the children to the older woman.

"You worry he won't believe you. Has he ever in your travels, told you my name?" the woman asked as she cocked her head to side while her eyes traveled over the babies in her arms.

"No. No he never did," she realized with a start, he always spoke of his father by name, but never his mother.

"And yet you know my name now, don't you? When you find him and he questions you-and have no doubt, he will question you. He will believe the children belong to the Italian gentleman as most of the Federation believes. Tell him that we spoke to you. Tell him of this vision. Speak my name. He will not be able to doubt you further."

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Kathryn abruptly found herself heavily pregnant again sitting in her room. Regaining her bearings, she released tears of relief, which soon turned to tears of frustration for the daunting task ahead of her, locating Chakotay and then telling him he was going to be father. The scientist in Kathryn was having a hard time digesting the phenomenon she'd just experienced. However, the woman in her was appreciative for the confirmation of something she had been sensing on an irrational level since her first meeting with doctor all those months ago.
Taking a deep breath, Kathryn dried her tears, put away her medicine bundle and then began to mentally formulate the beginnings of a search mission. She knew Chakotay was on Trebus or some place within the Darvon system. The frustrating thing was that she’d been trying to locate her wayward former first officer for the better part of two months already. His complete withdrawal from her life had not set well with her and Kathryn decided to extend the olive branch first. That is if she could find him.

Kathryn decided that since a discrete civilian search had not yielded results it was time to start her own search expedition utilizing all of her available resources, which now extend to hacking Starfleet’s registry. Although, technically she wouldn’t be hacking into the system, now that she was an Admiral, she had the necessary security clearance to search the database.

As luck would have it, a week ago Admiral Hayes had approached her about chairing the fleet that was going to aid in the rebuild efforts of the DMZ. She’d declined because of her advancing pregnancy but thinking about it now. It was perfect. If she were the fleet admiral assigned then she would be privy to all the intelligence chatter in the sector without having to depend solely on the civilian communication grid. Not only would she have daily access to any news in that sector but she would also oversee the building materials, grains, engineering components and personnel traveling to and from the region. She could search for Chakotay without it being obvious.

And when she found him, she would drag him back kicking and screaming if she had to. Kathryn smiled softly to herself, the best part of this idea was she could do all of this from Headquarters. There would be no need for her presence on the ship that headed the fleet. And there was only one captain she could think of who would do the job and still keep her confidence.

After an indeterminable amount of time, she looked up to see the sun rising over the horizon. Thinking there was no time like the present, Kathryn rose from her seated position to make her way to the COMM. Typing in the desired contact detail she waited for the link to connect.

“Kathryn Janeway,” the man answered with a sly grin.

“Hello, Will. I need a favor...”

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“All right crew, we can do this,” Kathryn mumbled, slowly inching down the stairs of the Victorian style six bedroom house, as she made her way quietly to the kitchen.

As she gingerly made her way, she thought back to the discussion, she and her mother had has after returning from Italy as she gingerly made her way. Kathryn could still remember the obstinate bearing her mother exuded that day. Ultimately, Kathryn remembered her own despair, which was currently manifesting itself as irritation.

Recalling the conversation Kathryn Janeway snarled at the apparatus lining the side wall of the kitchen that she’d successfully managed to avoid over the last seven years lining the side wall of the kitchen – the stove.

Gretchen hadn’t changed a thing in the kitchen while her daughter had been lost on the other side of the galaxy. And Kathryn had put this off for a month already before being called on the carpet by the kitchen’s previous owner.

Huffing out a breath Kathryn set about pulling out a medium sized mixing bowl, wooden spoon, flour, sugar, eggs, milk, vanilla extract, fresh blueberries and the waffle maker - at least this was one concession her mother had made in recent years.

This morning Kathryn’s task – as assigned by Admiral Gretchen – was to make breakfast for the family. To her irritation, Kathryn learned that 'the family' included Phoebe, Kevin, Preston and Antonio. Her mother left instructions that breakfast should be prepared prior to the family actually waking up. It was up to Kathryn to time it so that everything would be ready to serve by time the first family member found their way downstairs.

“Just evil! Making me do this at such an unholy hour of the morning!” Kathryn grumbled quietly to herself.

“This is just so...so...so .... Donna Reed!” Kathryn lamented, momentarily glimpsing herself wearing makeup, a perfect hairdo, a red sheath dress, red & white polka dot apron, low pumps, a pearl necklace and oven mitts as she smiled sweetly toward an unknown audience.
while offering freshly baked muffins. Shaking her head to rid herself of the unsettling visage, she nearly dropped the stainless steel mixing bowl.

“Hell no! That will never happen,” she promised herself. She may have to cook for herself now and her impromptu invited family, but she sure as hell didn’t have to do it in such a sickly saccharine manner.

Breakfast was nearly complete as Kathryn waddled into the dining room to finish the place settings. Despite being a child of the twenty fourth century, Voyager's captain inherited her mother’s appreciation for a well-dressed table, fashioned after the cultural mores of the twentieth century. She remembered Chakotay teasing her countless times aboard Voyager about the unusual ritual and her near obsession with being certain the table was set appropriately.

Returning from the kitchen with a pitcher of freshly squeezed orange juice, Kathryn smirked to herself has she eyed the old table – each place setting was arranged in 'proper' fashion. Okay so maybe she did have a minuscule, singular space dust-sized particle amount of Donna Reed running through her veins. Looking over the table, she felt rather proud of herself as she eyed the fresh fruit, toast, juice, homemade blueberry waffles, grits, sausage patties and bacon strips. One more trip to the kitchen and she was finished.

She'd heard movement on the second floor indicating that just about everyone was at least awake. When she returned from the kitchen with a bowl of scrambled eggs. she saw that everyone had finally made their way to the dining room.

“Good Morning, everyone; I trust you all slept well,” she greeted her family with a smile.

Morning pleasantries were exchanged as everyone gathered around the table. After a few minutes, Kathryn noticed that Antonio was the only individual not seated. Instead, he stood behind a chair indicating that Kathryn should sit. As she did so, he pushed her chair in slightly before returning to the opposite end of the table.

“Well everyone – dig in,” Kathryn gestured toward the food. She smiled to herself. Despite abhorring the chore of cooking, she found that the sight of her family all gathered around the same table was a great way to start the day.
“We’re leaving, Katie!!” Phoebe bellowed from the front of the house as she held the door open while her mother, husband and son exited. “Are you sure you don’t want to change your plans? B’Elanna and Tom are more than welcome along. They’re family too, we could make a day of it.” Phoebe offered her older sister as Kathryn slowly ambled toward the front door from the rear of the house.

“I’m sure Phoebe. I wouldn’t be good company with all that walking around and I don’t want to slow you all down. You’ve been looking forward to this trip for the last two months. I’ll be fine. B’Elanna and Tom will be here soon to keep me company. Not to mention that you and Mom are only a transport away if I need you,” Kathryn declared as she ushered her sister out the door.

“Promise to call if you need anything, Kathryn.” Phoebe called eying her sister expectantly before climbing into the hover vehicle with the rest of the Janeway clan.

“Scouts honor,” Kathryn promised laughingly while lifting her right hand with her thumb and pinkie finger meeting as she mock saluted.

Kathryn continued to smile to herself as she locked the front door and turned to open the windows throughout the lower level of the house. In the last month, her family had become suffocating as the babies’ due date neared. At nearly thirty-four weeks gestation, it amazed Kathryn that her family could reconcile her flying an intrepid class space ship, but thought her to be incapable of spending the day alone with her feet firmly planted on Earth’s soil. Antonio was better, but only just. He insisted on visiting every week and on one occasion whisked the whole family back to Italy for an impromptu long weekend. The man was so attentive to her needs that at times Kathryn found herself feeling melancholy because Antonio’s treatment of her was exactly what she imagined Chakotay’s would have been.

A few weeks after her call to Captain Riker, Kathryn visited the Doctor to confirm if Chakotay was indeed the father of her babies. The sympathetic smile the Doctor offered was all the confirmation she needed. She’d nodded her thanks and provided him a PADD with the latest contact details she’d been able to locate for Chakotay through Captain Riker.

Since that day, Kathryn found herself wondering what Chakotay’s reaction would be when he learned of her pregnancy, and furthermore that he’d fathered twins. Kathryn knew of his desire for a family. She had no doubt that he would make a wonderful father. The care and patience he’d had for Naomi was legendary. There were times when only Uncle Chakotay could make ‘it’ better. She’d lost count of the number of times he’d taken the little girl for excursions on the holodeck. There were times Kathryn feared Chakotay blamed her for stealing his opportunity of a family. After each visit with Naomi he would avoid Kathryn for
a few hours and when she would see him again, there was such a profound sense of longing in his eyes when he gazed upon her.

Will Riker shared with her that Chakotay was probably unaware of her condition. Fed News traveled extremely slowly to that sector of space. He’d shared with her the only way Chakotay could have known of her pregnancy was if he’d heard from a former crewmember or close friend through a COMM call.

Kathryn sighed as she opened another window. No doubt Chakotay didn't have a clue what was going with her.

She’d learned through various crewmember that Chakotay never wanted to speak of Voyager’s former Captain. Tom and B'Elanna had been sympathetic, especially after Kathryn shared with the couple that she learned Chakotay was the children’s father. Tom had simply shaken his head in what Kathryn could only guess was pity. B'Elanna on the hand excused herself from the room. Kathryn worried the entire time B'Elanna was gone because it was entirely too quiet. Tom assured her that B'Elanna would be back, she just needed some time to vent her anger and Indiana’s cornfields had better beware. Kathryn smiled knowingly at Tom as he squeezed her hands.

Slowly making her way through the house, Kathryn’s thoughts shifted back to Antonio and his treatment of her. Primarily his response to the press members that hounded her during her second trimester.

One afternoon as they’d lunched in San Francisco, it got to the point wherein she actually feared for her safety. Antonio picked up on her discomfort and exited the bistro intent on speaking with the mass of reporters. Kathryn recalled hearing them shout several questions including, “‘What’s the baby’s sex?’, ‘When did you marry?’, ‘What names have you chosen?’ and ‘How does it feel to be Mr. Kathryn Janeway?’” She didn't hear Antonio’s response, and she’d never asked him what exactly he’d said, but from that day forward, the press hadn’t been so ruthless. In fact, they’d been downright congenial. Surprisingly, thinking of that afternoon caused Kathryn to realize that whenever the press asked when they’d married, if Antonio was with her, he always beat her to the punch by simply putting his arm around her waist and responding with, ‘No Comment’ before ushering her toward their intended destination.

“I must be losing brain cells if I’ve let that continue for this long,” she chuckled at her lapse, as the COMM unit signaled an incoming transmission. Activating the terminal she was pleasantly surprised by her caller.
“Well, hello, Angel.” Kathryn chuckled bemusedly.

“Kat’rin!” Miral squealed, happily before her visage was quickly replaced with Tom Paris’ disheveled countenance.

“Sorry about that, Kathryn.” he apologized

“Quite all right, Tom. What seems to be the problem?” Kathryn asked.

“I just wanted to let you know, that we’re going to be late. There was accident at HQ, don’t worry everyone’s fine but as supervisor, B’Elanna has to file the incident report before she can leave for the day. And we still have to drop squirt here, off at my folks before heading your way. We should she be there in about an hour. Is that okay?”

“Tom, that’s fine. I know how it is.” She chuckled, as Miral captured the imager between her small hands to make herself the focus of attention. “Tom, I’ll be fine. Just get here when you can. I’m not going anywhere.”

“Okay, see you soon. Paris out.” Tom said signing off.

“Bye Kat’rin!” Miral managed to yell just before the link closed.

Kathryn sat for a moment trying to think of something to occupy her time until her friends arrived. Her eyes fell on the book she’d been reading the previous night *The Great Gatsby*. The fact that she was nearing a pivotal scene in the novel didn’t help to entice her one bit. Simply, Kathryn felt too keyed up for reading.

Rising from her place in front the terminal, Kathryn slowly made her way toward the mudroom. Gathering her her painting case and communicator she made her way outside. The case wasn’t very large, just big enough to hold a few utensils and a couple of paints.

Although her younger sister was the professional artist in the family, Kathryn found enjoyment dabbling in the craft. Reaching the collapsible easel Phoebe had brought over the previous day, Kathryn set about spreading out the various brushes and jars of paint around her. The younger Janeway had set up the area just below the main deck of the back porch, allowing Kathryn the opportunity to sit on the drop-cloth covering the steps and still be in reach of her canvas. Eying her Mother’s garden, she tried to find something to paint and
ultimately decided on the carpet of red and orange tulips lining the walkway around the bottom of the patio.

Kathryn was nearly finished with her scene and was just adding a bit more red to the tulip bed, when she felt the first twinge of discomfort. She waited a moment to see if it would happen again, before continuing with her paint strokes. The jar of red paint slipped from her fingers to spill across her thighs at the next sensation - pain! She held her breath as the sensation ebbed and when she felt able, reached behind for her case. Leaning back and to the side as far as she could, Kathryn stretched but her fingers just missed the handle.

Just a few more centimeters and she’d have it.

Kathryn flexed her fingers briefly, in an attempt at hooking the material before gripping her belly, as pain seared across her side.

Gritting her teeth, she waited for the pain to ease again, noting that it radiated around her abdomen before settling in her lower back. When the agony tapered off, Kathryn tried again to reach for her bag. This time using the end of the paintbrush to catch the loop handle, before dragging it toward her.

Unfortunately, the action of stretching herself out seemed to invite a new wave of fiery torment. Riding out the pain, she snatched the bag to her side the moment her fingers made contact with the material, causing several more jars of paint to spill across her lap.

Breathing deeply, she clutched the small combadge she’d retrieved from the side pocket, between her rouge colored fingers attempting to activate the device. She heard a small chirp as she squeezed the metal object fiercely. The unit was pre-programed with a only handful of contacts in case of an emergency.

Panting she tried to call for help, “Janeway to -”

The next ripple of pain stole the very breath she intended to speak with. Clutching her rounded stomach Kathryn groaned as another wave of agonizing pain rippled across her midsection. Somewhere in the distance, she heard the doorbell but the pain both fogged her brain and left her breathless. Kathryn was aware that she needed to call out for help, but she could barely string three words together in her current state. Another bout of searing pain washed over her as she bowed her head, biting down on her lower lip.
Dimly she heard frantic pounding and someone shouting her name. A loud crash was heard toward the front of the house as a new wave of pain swept over her; once it began to diminish, her sluggish mind was able to kick back into gear.

“Tom!” Kathryn screamed.

For a moment she feared that he hadn’t heard her then she heard someone running through the house shouting for her. Her fear turned to panic when she felt wetness between her thighs. A dampness that had nothing to do with the myriad puddle of paint she was sitting in.

In her shock, she found she couldn’t speak.

Searching frantically she found one of the glass jars and picking up the small jar she hurled it as far and as hard she could toward the patio. The resonant shattering noise gave her some comfort when she heard someone running through the kitchen in her direction.

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They’d been concerned when she hadn’t answered the chime or the gentle knocking and downright panicked when the pounding and calling of her name went unanswered. Tom and B’Elanna had exchanged a look of terror before he and his wife kicked the front door in, B’Elanna taking off upstairs while he went running from room to room on the main level, both shouting Kathryn’s name. Suddenly, he heard glass shattering, spinning around he raced towards the kitchen, thinking she was there. Instead he found the room empty but the back door open. He could hear whimpering coming from outside and sprinted the remaining feet out onto the porch as he called for B’Elanna. Reaching the bottom of the deck he finally found his former Captain panting, as she gripped her belly.

“Tom-” Kathryn called weakly.

Attempting to pry the communicator out of her hand, Tom called for an emergency mass transport of all occupants at his current location to Starfleet Medical.

CHAPTER 8

STARFLEET MEDICAL
The cacophony of screeching alarms, exclamations of joy, wails of sadness and the suffocating smell of antiseptic all added to his internal chaos. His mind and heart were a swirling mass of emotions; disbelief warred with panic, as he raced through the hospital corridors finally having found his way into the emergency wing. He was out of breath by the time he approached the nurse’s station, only to huff out two words:

“My wife?”

The nurse manning the station came around the desk to place a hand on his arm in a reassuring manner, “Please sir, take deep breaths. Yes, like that; in and out, in and out. There now, we can’t afford to admit both of you, can we?” she asked with a pleasant smile.

The nurse noticed the man before her was almost in a manic state, unbelieving that this could be happening. She empathized with him; the situation was indeed dire.

With his breathing under control, he could articulate his concern more clearly. “I received a call... They told me my wife is in critical condition? Please what --” He was cut off as the nurse led him to the waiting area and began to explain.

“Yes, sir; your wife was brought in a short time ago. She’s still in the surgical wing; the doctor is trying to stabilize her. He ordered me to contact her next of kin and naturally our personnel office called you immediately. Luckily, your wife recently updated your contact information.”

The gentleman paced in circles as she spoke, coming to stop directly in front of her, fire and water poured from his eyes as he spoke.

“There must be some mistake!” he rasped.

Before he could explain further, his attention was drawn to the approaching hurricane that spoke in a hauntingly familiar voice. A voice that chased him and yet eluded him in his dreams; a voice that he yearned to hear whisper loving endearments meant just for him, but he despaired, never would. The voice was eerily similar, but the pitch was off slightly. Not the smooth rich whiskey he remembered; but rather a dark growl that demanded to be taken seriously.
“Young man if you don’t release me, I’ll not answer to the condition that you’ll find yourself in. My daughter is in that surgical bay fighting for her life and by all that is Holy you will let me pass.”

The last part of the statement was a mere hiss as the small woman’s blue grey eyes bore daggers into the young man. Reason clicked within the orderly and the young man released the woman to resume her path. Not far behind her, the gentleman noticed another petite figure striding determinedly in his direction.

The older of the two approaching women came to an abrupt standstill, nudging the man aside as she spoke directly to the nurse.

“My daughter,” she ordered, leaving no question that she was demanding to know the condition of the patient beyond the surgical bay doors.

“Yes, ma’am. She’s in critical condition; the doctor is with her now. I’ve paged him and he’ll be out to deliver a more concise report momentarily. I was just informing your son in law ---” The woman stopped her docile litany as the older woman leaned closer into her.

“This man is not my daughter’s husband,” Gretchen hissed “I suggest you correct that oversight immediately and in the future, as next of kin, her sister or I am to be contacted. Is that understood?”

“Y- Yes, Ma’am. I’ll correct it now.”

Stunned by the commanding presence of the older woman, the nurse sought to correct the error as demanded of her and after a few moments correctly recited back the next of kin contact information.

While the older woman tended to the nurse, the younger approached the silent gentleman that her mother had moments ago unceremoniously knocked to the side. Her eyes were weary, but hopeful as she looked at him.

“Hello, Chakotay” Phoebe whispered tiredly.

“Phoebe?” Chakotay inquired, with barely concealed rising panic. “What’s going on? I take it something has happened to Ka -- Admiral Janeway?”
“It's complicated. And it's really not my story to tell. You'll have to ask the Doctor.”

“Why? Does it relate to why she's here now?” Chakotay asked worriedly. “What the hell has been going on the last year and half that would have her in critical condition?!” He demanded of Phoebe.

Chakotay was so engrossed in his conversation with Phoebe that he nearly missed Gretchen’s approach.

“Mrs. Janeway, I may not be your son in law but I am a friend and colleague of your daughter's and right now I am extremely worried. Please, despite whatever animosity you feel toward me, please allow me stay and help if I can.” Chakotay reasoned.

Before Gretchen could respond, the surgical bay doors opened to reveal Voyager's EMH, disposing bloody surgical garments into the biohazard recycler. Chakotay may not have known Kathryn's diagnosis, but he knew that that much blood was never a good sign. Coupled with the Doctor’s grim expression, the scene sent a chill of trepidation down his spine. He was rooted to the spot, whereas Kathryn's mother and sister raced toward the Doctor.

“Gretchen, Phoebe,” the Doctor held his hand up to stem their obvious question as they rushed toward him. “We've managed to stabilize her – for the moment. Here’s what we know. She was hemorrhaging severely when they brought her in. We've been able to stop the bleeding, however, she is still unconscious. I know that sounds serious and it is. but it’s also a good sign. Had she experienced a seizure... well, we're fortunate that did not occur.

“But I have to tell you we're not out of the woods just yet. Prior to this incident, she was suffering from the affects of her illness and hypertension, which only exacerbated her current condition. Since this incident, her blood pressure has dropped dangerously; we're replacing the blood she’s lost gradually to prevent any further shock to her system. Who reported this? I take it that it wasn't either you,” The Doctor deducted from the women’s shocked expressions.

“No, Doc, I did.” The trio turned to see Tom coming in their general direction. “I'm so sorry Gretchen, we were late getting to the house. I called Kathryn ahead of time to let her know that we would be about an hour later than expected,” Tom continued, “when we got to the
house, there was no answer. We were beyond worried at that point. Eventually, we found her doubled over on the back porch and called for a transport to Starfleet Medical.”

Addressing Gretchen and Phoebe the Doctor inquired, “Are you aware of any discomfort or unusual symptoms she mentioned?”

“Well, she was having headaches,” Gretchen offered worriedly “but we didn’t think anything of it. She’s always been prone to migraines.”

“She did mention to me yesterday that she felt an annoying pain on her right side, under her ribs but she insisted that it was indigestion. I should have realized-” Phoebe commented, hanging her head.

Shaking his head slightly, the Doctor frowned “She should have come to me with those symptoms. Coupled with her history of hypertension they have led us here today. This information is pertinent, so I thank you for sharing this with me. I’m going to wait another forty-five minutes before I move her, just to be safe. I want to be sure she won’t seize while she is unconscious. After that I’ll have her moved to a private suite, and I’ll allow you back two at a time.” The Doctor patted Gretchen’s hand as he prepared to move back into the surgical bay. However, he stopped mid turn, noticing Chakotay in the far corner for the first time.

“Captain? Oh….,” The Doctor sighed, beginning to understand the tension that was evident between Chakotay and at least one member of the Janeway family. “You weren’t – are not aware of the Admiral’s condition are you? Gretchen, I believe I can explain. The Capt-the Admiral while serving aboard Voyager listed Chakotay as next of kin in her medical records, and he listed her as his next of kin in his medical file. In the event of a life threatening emergency, they believed it would be easier on their respective loved ones to have such sensitive news delivered by someone ‘in the family’ rather than by Starfleet,” the Doctor clarified.

“Actually Captain, you may be able to assist with stabilizing Kathryn’s condition further. At the moment, her situation is rather precarious,” the Doctor looked as though he was mulling over a very important decision, stroking his chin as he pondered the situation. After a long moment, he nodded once and walked back toward Chakotay.

“We need to speak privately,” he declared as he guided Chakotay toward an enclosed suite.
“Now, you wait just a damned minute! Anything regarding my daughter’s condition should be discussed with us. Her family. If you’ve --” Gretchen forcefully turned the Doctor to face her.

“Mrs. Janeway!” the Doctor hissed, “I’ve shared with you everything you need to know,” Voyager’s EMH gave her a pointed look.

A look she seemed to begrudgingly understand; she released his arm and stepped back slightly as the Doctor led Chakotay into the suite. Although an understanding had passed between the older woman and the Doctor, it was clear Gretchen was in no way happy about dropping the subject. In fact, Chakotay didn’t believe she would leave it alone; she had the same look in her eyes Kathryn would get whenever she was coming up with an outrageous, albeit brilliant battle plan. No... the Doctor just won the battle, Gretchen intended to win the war.

What were they warring over again? He wondered as the doctor activated the opaque feature of the glass walls shielding them from the others view in the waiting area.

“Captain, if you’ll have a seat,” the Doctor gestured toward the empty chair across from the desk.

“Doc, what the hell is going on? Why wasn't I notified prior to now that something was wrong with Kathryn? And from the sounds of things something life threatening,” Chakotay voiced his concern and frustration at having been left out of the loop.

The Doctor sighed before continuing, “It’s complicated, Chakotay,” the Doctor leaned forward on his elbows with his fingers steeped under his chin as he observed the man across from him. “However, as this also involves you...,” he leaned back in the chair in a tiresome manner; “It’s back Chakotay. The virus the two of you contracted in the Delta Quadrant. It’s back only this time it’s three times as severe.”

Chakotay shook his head in disbelief “No, that’s impossible; you cured us of that almost six years ago.”

“It is possible because it has happened. I know what you’re thinking, that it shouldn't affect her as long as she is planet side. We thought that too at first, once we figured out what was making her ill. She was on the Enterprise visiting Deanna Troi when the illness struck. She was there at total of three days when she suddenly started gasping for breath and clutching her chest. At first, everyone thought she’d suffered a myocardial infarction.”
"A heart attack?! She's far too young for that!" Chakotay interrupted

"Yes, well that's what they thought it was at the time. Kathryn herself recognized the symptoms she was experiencing, and she told Dr. Crusher to contact me and tell me that the 'NE Bug' was back. I'm sure they thought she was incoherent, but Dr. Crusher contacted me, and I confirmed that I knew what Kathryn was speaking of. When I opened the stasis unit I thought she'd be fine; her symptoms were not as pronounced, but they had not dissipated one hundred percent. That was about six months ago," Voyager's EMH concluded, "I didn't lie to the two of you all those years ago, something specific to that planet’s atmosphere counteracted the virus. Essentially, you were cured as long as you stayed specifically on that planet. Earth is similar to the planet you named 'New Earth' but doesn't have the exact same atmospheric make up." The Doctor took a moment to watch Voyager's former XO digest the information and waited for the inevitable. He didn't have to wait long.

Chakotay got up and began the pace the small area in front of the desk, "Is this why she was so desperate to see me? This makes absolutely no sense! If she's ill, then I should be ill as well, and we can both see that I'm not. I just got off a transport from Trebus and at no time did I suffer from what you've just described while I was in space. So how is it possible that this is only affecting Kathryn?" Chakotay stopped abruptly eying the doctor, "How-how did you know what we named the planet?"

"Simple. Kathryn told me. As to why this is affecting her and not you. That's a longer story. Let's just say that the Caretaker's legacy continues. I'll leave it to Kathryn to tell you the details. But I would like to take some blood samples from you. Hopefully, I can create an antigen that can help cure our Captain of this virus once and for all."

"Of course, Doctor--" Chakotay trailed off, wondering if her illness was the reason Kathryn had ordered the Titan to Trebus a week ago requesting that he meet with her, as soon as he was Earth bound.

While the Doctor took the necessary samples of his blood, Chakotay prayed for Kathryn's recovery from whatever the virus had put her through.

As the duo exited the meeting room, they were greeted by B'Elanna's concerned voice, as she released Gretchen from a hug.

"How is she? How are the ---" she gasped mid sentence as her eyes alighted on Chakotay.
“Chakotay?!” she asked questioningly.

“Hello, B'Elanna,” the big man offered.

“PetaQ!” she hissed before sending him crashing to the floor with a right hook. “That's for not keeping in touch and worrying Kathryn and me! What possessed you to just ---” she was interrupted as an orderly informed them that Kathryn had been moved to a private suite.

Tom took advantage of the interruption to steer his wife to the opposite side of the waiting room.

The Doctor nodded his thanks to Voyager’s former helmsman before instructing,

“Gretchen, Phoebe I’ll take you back now,” escorting the women through to the ICU doors.

The moment Gretchen and Phoebe were through the doors, B'Elanna tore her arm away from Tom, stalking back toward Chakotay with tears pooling in her eyes.

“Why is it, you're only showing up now?” she asked heatedly.

Irritation warred with worry and Chakotay lashed out “Gee, I don't know. Maybe it's because I was frog marched off my home planet, wrangled onto the Titan, and then had the breath stolen from me when I received a communiqué from Starfleet Medical marked Priority Blue! The only person that I would ever receive that type of notice for is the woman I love!” He closed his eyes and punched the nearest wall, realizing that he'd just confessed his love for Kathryn in an extremely public venue.

“Damn it! B'Elanna why didn't you tell me Kathryn was ill?” he rasped.

“When would I have told you Chakotay?” B'Elanna asked sarcastically, “You were the one who initiated and maintained a one-sided way of communication. You went so far has to have your communication frequency encrypted to the point that neither Kathryn nor myself were able to trace the origin. You never called on any type of regular basis, just how was I supposed to tell you? Hell, how was I supposed to know you still gave a damn?!? Every time one of the crew tried to bring her name up in conversation you made it painfully clear you
didn’t want to discuss her. And don’t think she didn’t know about it, the knowledge that you purposefully cut her out of your life upset her terribly.”

Properly chastised Chakotay hung his head before replying. “I hurt her too much, B’Elanna. I needed to get myself together before I approached her. And then it just became too hard. I saw for myself that she’d moved on and it’s not my place to waltz back into her life after all this time.”

CHAPTER 9

STARTFLEET MEDICAL

Four days later Kathryn opened her eyes to see a face she’d not set eyes on in almost six months.

“Welcome back and congratulations,” he offered nodding toward her swollen middle.

“Chakotay,” she breathed as a tired smile settled on her face.

She was exhausted, but they had unfinished business, and she was determined to clear it up while the opportunity presented itself.

“Are your children always this active?” he questioned, watching the movement ripple across her enlarged abdomen transfixed, as he held her small hand sandwiched between his own.

“Not always, but more so of late,” she replied as they lapsed into an uneasy silence.

“It’s not what you think ---”

“I’m happy you’ve found someone ----” they stated in unison

Settling further back into the pillows she tried to garner the strength for what she needed to tell him and the ensuing battle that was sure to follow.
“Kathryn?” the big man inquired with a creased brow.

“I said 'it's not what you think' Chakotay. Antonio and I---”

“Like I said, I’m glad you've found someone to love and be happy with. It’s obvious you love each other. I've seen evidence of that in the waiting room – the man has been beside himself with worry.” Chakotay rambled, thinking to himself, does she have to rub it in?

“Chakotay, stop and just listen because I don't have the strength to keep repeating myself.” Letting out a sigh, she eyed him until she saw him acknowledge her request. “Antonio and I aren’t together in the manner you think. We love each other, but it’s the love of a good friend for another. We are not married, despite what the press may print,” She paused for a moment to gauge how her former XO was taking the news thus far.

Chakotay had that okay, I hear what you’re saying, but I don't completely comprehend what you're telling me look about his facial features.

“I'm not explaining this very well. The important thing for you to remember right now is that Antonio is no more than a very good friend of mine and of my family's.”

At this the man sitting beside her simply nodded his understanding of that statement.

Wetting her lips Kathryn began to share with Chakotay selected details of her life for the last year or so. When she’d finished her tale regarding the Caretaker, the Doctor’s comment when Chakotay spoke with him that first day made more sense. It would definitely seem that the Caretaker left a legacy of sorts.

Taking his large hand in hers and placing it just below her left breast, feeling the child move, she held his eyes before stating, “This is your daughter” sliding his hand lower and to the opposite side, above her hip; tears pooled in her eyes as she whispered, “and this is your son.”

Raising heated eyes he stared angrily at the woman in the bed before snatching his hand away from her and abruptly moving to stand on the other side of the room.
“I never took you for a callous woman, Kathryn. That was just plain cruel. You know how much I’ve wanted children. I believe you when you say the Caretaker is responsible for the virus lying dormant in your system all these years. But now you expect me to believe that he impregnated you with twins? And I’m the father no less?!” Chakotay questioned unbelievingly.

This was worse than she imagined. Oh, the line of argument was exactly what she’d expected. However, it was worse because she could feel herself and the children reacting emotionally to his outburst. She was used to compartmentalizing her own emotions, but having to reign in the twins’ empathetic distress was proving a strain to her already taxed energy reserves.

“I’m telling you the truth, Chakotay. I would never try to pass off another man’s child as yours. Do you think that little of me?” she asked incredulously,

“You’re lying, Kathryn. Even if it was the truth, why wait until now to tell me? If what you say is true, then you were pregnant the night of Voyager’s anniversary banquet, why not tell me then?” Chakotay argued, ignoring the pained look in Kathryn’s eyes and shaking his head as he stormed past her bed toward the exit.

Squinting her eyes due to the pain in her head, she whispered tiredly, “Your parent’s said you wouldn’t believe me.”

“What? What did you say?” he asked, slowly turning to face her.

“You know.. you may have your Mother’s eyes. But you sure as hell have your Father’s temper. I thought you described him as being the calm center of your tribe?” she whispered with closed eyes while caressing her side where her son was kicking.

“Don’t lie there and expect me to believe you’ve been speaking with the Spirits, Kathryn. I know better! You may have attempted a Vision Quest once, but that was it. It was nothing but a curiosity to you. You never took it seriously,” He accused heatedly.

“Then explain to me how I’ve seen the clearing you spoke of so many times? Tell me how the hell I would know that your Father has a temper? How would I know that your Spirit Guide is a beautiful gray wolf?!?” she demanded, her breathing becoming labored. “Explain how I know that your Father calls your Mother Corazon? How would I know that you have your
Mother’s eyes? How the hell would I know your Mother’s name was Lailah? You sure as hell never told me that in all the years we’ve known each other!” Kathryn thundered, raising up from the bed slightly, her blue eyes crackling with the intensity of harnessed lightning, before darkening menacingly to a stormy gray as she glared in his direction, breathing heavily through her nostrils.

“Spirits!” Chakotay breathed, taken aback. “How do you know that?”

“I just told you. Your parents --” she sighed, tiredly before laying back against the pillows as Chakotay returned sitting heavily in the chair next to her bed. She turned towards him. “You have to hear me out, Chakotay because if I have to yell at you the Doctor is going to come see why my blood pressure is jumping off the scale. I’m surprised, he hasn’t already,” she muttered tiredly while massaging her temple with a shaky hand.

“Actually, he has,” interrupted the Doctor from the doorway. “I understand there are matters the two of you must discuss. However, I will have to ask you to leave, Chakotay, if the two of you cannot do so in a civilized manner,” Voyager’s EMH warned haltingly.

“Kathryn, how are you feeling today?” the doctor asked, as he reviewed her medical readouts.

“Extremely tired - but otherwise okay. My babies?” she asked worriedly.

“For the most part, they are both progressing well. However, I am concerned about your daughter’s development. In light of that, as long as there is no immediate threat to your health, I want to wait as long as we’re able before inducing labor,” The doctor explained, while watching the emotions play over the expectant parent’s faces.

“Why? What’s wrong?” questioned Chakotay.

“Your daughter is slightly smaller than she should be at this point in gestation. At minimum, another week will help develop her lungs and heart further,” The EMH turned from Chakotay to question the woman lying in the bed. From the look in her eyes, he could tell she was fighting a headache “Kathryn, you don’t have to suffer these headaches, there’s medication that I can give you that won’t harm the babies.”
“I appreciate that Doctor, but at present it’s not so much a headache in the traditional sense.” She explained tiredly.

“Explain,” stated the Doctor puzzled.

“It’s not a headache, there is pressure but... how can I explain this...when the children become upset emotionally I can feel their individual reactions wash over me. The sensation is similar to being mired on a beach watching a large wave approach. You can see and sense the buildup approaching, but you can’t stop it; you can only brace yourself for the impact. There are times when it feels like I’m caught in the undertow; right now I’m fighting that undertow. I’ve learned to calm them telepathically, but it doesn’t always work, especially if I’m upset as well,” she attempted to explain.

Chakotay looked between the Doctor and Kathryn with growing worry, “What do you mean you’ve learned to calm them telepathically?”

The Doctor looked sympathetically in Kathryn’s direction, “You haven’t told him that bit have you?”

When she looked away with tears in her eyes, the Doctor knew he had his answer. This had been a sore topic of discussion throughout her pregnancy. Not only did she have the same fears and worries as every new Mother. Voyager’s former Captain also had the additional medical concerns regarding her age, previous pelvic injuries, not to mention the political threats to her personal safety. Add to that the trauma of finding out that certain parts of her brain had been dramatically altered. The further stress of learning to communicate with her children telepathically and the fear that she would fail them in this aspect of her parenting was compounded by the concern for what this meant for her once the pregnancy was over. Would the ability to communicate telepathically still exist? What additional mental abilities would the children possess? How would she help them to develop their psionic gifts?

The Doctor sympathized with her concerns and worried that they were taxing her already precarious health. Just last week Kathryn had belatedly informed him that her headaches had worsened. She also shared the nightmares that she’d been experiencing and her fears that they were premonitions regarding her fate. Very few people were allowed to see Kathryn the woman and he felt privileged she’d allowed him the opportunity. Turning to face perhaps the only other member of Voyager’s crew to share explicitly in that privilege, he began to speak on her behalf.
“Chakotay, I take it Kathryn has explained about the virus and how the children came to be,” at the other man’s nod the Doctor continued, “well, what she may not have told you is that the children possess a certain level of psionic ability and Kathryn herself has learned that ability now extends to her as well.”

“How is that possible?” the big man asked in shock.

“The Caretaker set into motion a gradual mutation so to speak. We’ve discovered that within Kathryn’s genetic makeup was the propensity -generations into the future - to develop a natural paracortex of sorts. We’ve hypothesized that the Caretaker must have also seen this and manipulated her brain chemistry to hone that potential now, rather than later. For lack of a better phrase, he hot-wired her brain to develop this ability in a relatively short period of time. Once Kathryn decided to continue her pregnancy those centers of her brain were effectively switched on.” The Doctor continued, “at this point she can receive and send empathetic/telepathic messages to the twins. On one occasion, she was able to communicate telepathically with Deanna Troi; although she’s not been able to repeat that action. I think the possible threat to her life, and thus the Caretaker’s offspring was what enabled that particular feat to occur.”

While the Doctor had been explaining all this, Chakotay found himself pacing the small confines of the suite, unable to take everything in. He glanced at Kathryn and noticed the strained expression on her face as she caressed the frantic child in her womb. Even with her eyes closed, lying quietly in the bed, she looked to be concentrating intensely. For the first time since she regained consciousness, he actually saw what this pregnancy was costing her. She looked tired, drained - as if she was only holding on by a mere thread, and he realized this was Kathryn in mental and emotional anguish.

The Doctor’s explanation finally filtered through to his addled brain and jerking his head back toward the Doctor, Chakotay questioned, “What do you mean the Caretaker’s offspring? What am I missing here? And why would he choose my DNA over that of every other human male on the array?”

Kathryn tiredly turned her head to face her former XO, best friend, the father of her children, “I don’t know why he chose us, Chakotay. Maybe it had to do with your tribe’s gift of genetic memory, or maybe your Grandfather’s crazy gene isn’t so crazy after all. Whatever his reasoning he used our genetic makeup, but he also used a small portion of his own.”

“How small are we talking here?” he demanded in a heatedly.
The Doctor intervened when he noticed Kathryn’s heart rate jump as she squeezed her eyes shut suddenly. “Only two percent, Chakotay. Please try to control your reactions. The twins can hear everything you’re saying, they are empathetic and no doubt are privy to your emotions.”

Turning to his patient, he looked into her eyes, clouded with fatigue and laid a hand on her enlarged abdomen. “Kathryn, I don’t like this stress; I’m going to sedate you so that you can rest better. I know—” he squeezed her hand when she looked to interrupt him “I know you just woke up, but I see the added stress this conversation is causing you; and the twins. It’s not healthy and it could send you into labor again. I promise it’s only a light sedative, you’ll sleep for about an hour.”

“All right,” she whispered, as he emptied the contents of the hypospray into her neck.

Chakotay watched stunned as the scene played out before him. You would think the Doctor was the father of her children by the familiar manner in which he interacted with her. He reasoned that Kathryn must be worse off than she originally let on. For her to accept the Doctor’s order of sedation without argument told him far more than any medical report could impart.

CHAPTER 10

SAN FRANCISCO - TWO WEEKS LATER – JUNE 2380

“Have you decided on names yet?”

Tired slate blue eyes met hopeful brown orbs as she lay on her side. “Chakotay, I’m okay now. The twins are okay now. You don’t have to spend your days and nights here.”

“Three days ago my best friend survived forty-eight hours of labor, delivering two of the most beautiful babies I’ve ever laid eyes on. During that marathon labor, one child suffered shoulder dystocia and the other was delivered breech. If that wasn’t enough you suffered cardiac arrest once the second child slipped from your body. Do you understand that? You died in my arms, Kathryn! So for as long as I am able, I plan to be right here.” Chakotay assured. “Now, have you decided on names?” He asked again looking down at the baby girl in his arms.
Lowering her eyes as slender fingers caressed the cheek of the baby boy nursing at her breast under the blanket across her shoulder, she offered, “This little one here with me is Aiden Alexander and there in your arms is Amaya Rose.”

“‘Little Fire’ and ‘Night Rain’ both very beautiful names, you chose well,” he whispered, watching the baby girl doze in his arms. Raising his eyes to meet hers, he asked, “How are you Kathryn? The Doctor has been evasive whenever one of us has asked. Did it work? The babies’ cord blood, did it help develop a cure?”

Blinking away tears she looked at him with remorseful eyes, “Chakotay--”

“Answer the question, Kathryn,” he demanded quietly.

“I can't infect the twins, if that's what you're worried about.”

“Answer the question,” he fumed quietly.

Lowering her eyes to look at Aiden, she replied, “He's still trying, but--”

“But nothing, he's still trying. We talked about this, Kathryn. First he'd try the babies' cord blood and then my blood if needed.” he encouraged.

“You don't have to say that to make me feel better, Chakotay. I've seen --”

“You've seen your fears manifest themselves in your dreams, Kathryn. That's it. We've spent the better part of the last two weeks discussing this-you haven't seen the future. You don't know what the future holds,” he stressed passionately. “You can't afford to walk this road again. We've been here before; I didn't let you travel it alone then, and I'm not going to let you do it now.” The Indian vowed. “Before it was the crew; this time your children need you. I've seen the lengths you'll go through for a child of your heart; the children of your body deserve nothing less.” he declared passionately.

Furrowing her brow she questioned, “What are you talking about 'a child of my heart'?”
Placing Amaya in the nearby bassinet, Chakotay then moved to sit on the edge of the bed hanging his head slightly, “I didn’t see it then or when we got home. Spirits, I only just realized it while I watched the twins being born. It was an epiphany of epic portions, I assure you. Can you ever forgive me?” he pleaded with mournful eyes.

She shook her head slightly with a perplexed look on her face.

“Seven. I never put two and two together, Kathryn. You may not have given birth to her physically. However, you did raise her. I’ve never seen you as determined, fierce or frightened - desperate even - than those times wherein Seven’s life was endangered. And don’t tell me you’d willingly sacrifice yourself to the Borg, or that you would hunt a man down in cold blood for any member of your crew. Those are the actions of a Mother protecting her child.” He stated, as he watched her further cover herself before handing Aiden to him.

“Chakotay, regardless of my feelings for Seven, I didn’t nor do I begrudge her or you for having the courage to try to make a life for yourselves; you don’t owe me an apology,” she whispered, marveling at the resemblance between father and child.

Even at only three days old, she could tell her son would be the spitting image of his father; while their daughter was a mix of her parents, with a head full of dark curls and a café au lait complexion. Gretchen predicted that the little girl would no doubt have her mother’s facial features. As yet she was too young to determine if she would keep the deep blue of her irises, or if they would deepen to be dark brown.

“Don’t do that” Chakotay growled, “Don’t trivialize or belittle the hurt that we – I -- caused you.”

“Chakotay, I’m a big girl. I can take care of myself. And I prefer not to have this discussion with the children in the room. We’re bound to set them off, and we’ve only just gotten them both settled,” she decreed with determination.

Before he could reply a nurse appeared to conduct an after care examination of Kathryn, thus forcing Chakotay to drop the subject as he was escorted from the room.
“This conversation isn’t over, Kathryn.” He promised, placing, Aiden in the bassinet next to Amaya, before leaving the suite.

Kathryn held his eyes defiantly as he turned to leave the suite and, as the nurse began her examination, she then let out a breath she hadn’t realized she’d been holding.

_God!!_ She hated these exams. The birth of her children had not been kind to her body. She’d torn when the Doctor helped deliver Aiden’s shoulders and then torn further when Amaya was delivered in the breech position. That coupled with her already weakened condition prior to going into labor had proven to be too much for her to handle. Once Amaya had slipped from her body, Kathryn recalled letting out a painful cry before collapsing against Chakotay’s chest where he’d been supporting her back, as she pushed her children into the world. She remembered feeling a kiss on her temple and then slipping into a dreamless sleep. She later learned that it wasn’t merely sleep, but rather unconsciousness, which progressed into cardiac arrest.

Chakotay had spent his days and nights at Starfleet Medical, over the last two weeks. B’Elanna informed her that he never left the grounds, unless it was to meditate in the gardens of the Quadrangle. And even then he’d forced the medical team to provide him a with a combadge of sorts to notify him immediately if there were any change in her condition or that of the babies. Although he’d requested to be her birthing partner for the delivery, so far he’d not encroached upon her further. He’d given her the space she’d asked for and very neatly avoided overstepping the line she’d established. _Why had she drawn that line, again?_ Shaking her head to rid herself of her current train of thought, Kathryn instead focused on her babies lying in the bassinet next to her. The nurse retreated from the room after informing Kathryn, that she was healing nicely.

Kathryn watched the nurse leave the suite and turned her full attention back to the twins. “How am I going to do this? How do I raise you alone?” she uttered softly, a tiny voice echoed through her mind offering a whispered promise of long ago “You’re not alone.” Leaning back against the pillows, she allowed her eyes to drift to the ceiling as a way of fighting off the tears that threaten to spill. _Damned Hormones!_ She couldn’t afford to get emotional right now; the twins would pick up on it and start wailing their disapproval.

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Chakotay nodded a hello to the desk clerk as he made his way out of Starfleet Medical. The clerk smiled in his direction as she nodded back.
Making his way across the Quadrangle, Chakotay headed for his favorite meditating spot in Boothby's garden, a small alcove that held a stone bench hidden from general view. This was a spot that he'd literally stumbled upon after his first conversation Kathryn.

After the Doctor sedated her, Chakotay watched her sleep for longer than he could recall. Long moments later, the Doctor chased him out of her room and Chakotay wandering Boothby's garden aimlessly until he found himself sitting on a stone bench. He just couldn't wrap his mind around the idea – no, the fact that Kathryn was pregnant with his children. A son and a daughter all at once! The Doctor had taken it upon himself to provide Chakotay a copy of Kathryn's OBGYN records in relation to her pregnancy, the children's paternity and their development.

Chakotay sat alone for hours thinking over what he'd learned. The many complications Kathryn endured alone, without the support of her children's father and the desperate manner in which she'd been trying to contact him. He kicked himself for immersing so deeply into the reterraforming project on Trebus and furthermore for avoiding all conversation that dealt with Voyager's former Captain. No doubt if he'd given B'Elanna a chance, he would have learned of Kathryn’s condition. And she wouldn't have suffered this alone. Nor would she have needed to clandestinely take the position of Fleet Admiral for the ships heading to the DMZ just to locate him. What additional stress did she suffer from that extra responsibility?

He felt unbearable sadness in knowing that he'd missed a great deal of milestones. The first fetal scan, discovering the babies gender, their first kick from within Kathryn's womb, the joy of speaking to his children as they grew inside their mother – all the things first time parents experience with awe.

As he raised his head, Chakotay made a decision to be there for Kathryn, for as long as she would have him. He'd missed too much and he vowed not to miss another minute. He'd always wanted children. And since meeting Kathryn Janeway, there was only one woman he could see as his children's mother. And here the Fates had given him his heart's desire; albeit in an unexpected manner.

Chakotay sighed as remembered his thoughts after learning he was going to a father. Sitting forward, resting is forearms on his knees, Chakotay lowered his head to run his hands through his hair.

In the last two weeks he'd made Starfleet Medical his home. He chuckled thinking about the vacant room one of the nurses had given him to sleep in after a week of sleeping in the waiting room. Very quickly, the medical staff learned how contrary Voyager's former first officer could be when he set his mind to it. He'd managed to procure a medical comBadge...
alert him to any changes in Kathryn’s condition. He never left the grounds unless it was to come here to the garden to meditate.

During Chakotay's time here he and Kathryn had been able to restore their friendship. She confessed that she’d been trying to reach out to him before learning he was the children's father but had become obsessed with doing so once she’d learned the truth. She said she wouldn't have been able to live with herself otherwise. They talked of all the many things that happened in the time they’d been apart. Of his reunion with his sister and his adventures on Trebus. They spoke of her heading the Delta Quadrant Analysis division and then taking up the post of Fleet Admiral.

One night, Kathryn drifted to sleep as she read a novel. Chakotay took the novel from her limp fingers before leaning over to place a kiss on top of her head. Settling with his on PADD he continued to work on the proposal he was to present to Starfleet Council detailing the additional supplies need for the rebuild efforts.

He was two thirds of the way through the proposal when he noticed Kathryn moving restlessly in her sleep. A moment later she calmed, or so he thought. Looking closely Chakotay saw that she was crying in her sleep and that she was gasping deeply. A second later the Pulse Oximeter machine attached to forefinger screamed a warning alerting Chakotay that Kathryn was indeed struggling to breathe. Turning to face her, Chakotay watched her hands fly to her throat, as though she was desperately fighting off an attacker. It looked as if she was fighting against being strangled.

Chakotay gently gripped her shoulders as he called to her. She as so deep into the dream that the mere pressure of his hands on her shoulders was not enough to free her from the nightmare. He knew she wouldn’t want an army of doctors rushing into her room over a simple a dream. Knowing this Chakotay silenced the Pulse Ox machine and turned his attention back to waking Kathryn. It tore at his heart to see her like this, so obviously tormented.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, Chakotay gripped her arms a little harder, shaking her softly as he called to her this time. He begged her to wake up, assured her that whatever was happening was just a dream, that she could escape it if she just woke up. Several minutes later Kathryn's eyes shot open with a strangled sob. Realizing she was okay and that she was safe, Kathryn collapsed against Chakotay as she cried.

She wept in his arms for a long time. So long that he considered calling the Doctor to sedate her. Finally, she eased back from him with a soft 'Thank you' before laying back against her pillows. Shattered blue eyes met his when she finally looked at him, before running a shaky hand through her hair.
At first, she refused to share the dream with him, kept trying to dismiss it. However, Chakotay firmly let her know that she had two choices, to tell him or he would call Deanna and she could tell her councilor instead. Kathryn sighed in defeat and proceeded to tell him of her dream. She confessed later that it was the same dream that prompted her to take the vision quest wherein she’d met his parents. For hours they spoke of her fears, the fear of losing her children to either death or some other tragedy and they spoke of his fears of failing her and their children. Finally, he shared with her his desire to be her birthing partner.

Chakotay was still shaken by the events of three days ago. He’d worried when he hadn’t been able to get Kathryn to respond to him after Amaya was delivered. The wails of the medical monitors prompted him to panic. He feared that perhaps her dreams were indeed premonitions. Luckily, that had not been the case. The doctors had been able to revive her and Kathryn was fine.

Kathryn was fine. He kept telling himself this and he would keep repeating it until he believed it.

His communicator beeped to let him it was okay for him to return to Kathryn's room. Rising from the bench, Chakotay decided he would offer to come home with Kathryn and help with the twins once they were released. He hadn’t decided how he would raise the idea, just that he had to put it out there.

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Chapter 11

INDIANA – NOVEMBER 2380

Kathryn released a sigh of relief when she came downstairs, taking a moment to lean her head against the wall as she sat sideways on the very last step.

She was exhausted and suspected Chakotay wasn't doing much better.

Her former XO had just managed to quiet Aiden after a two-hour screaming match between the twins. She hadn’t been sure what set them off, one minute they were gurgling and playing happily; and the next a blood-curdling scream had erupted from the playroom. First sensing and then hearing her daughter's distress, Kathryn put down the PADD containing a
review of B’Elanna’s latest report and hastily made her way to where the twins were playing.

Shortly after Amaya began to wail, her older brother joined her and it had taken an hour and half to finally quiet Amaya, the feat having taxed Kathryn’s emergent empathetic abilities.

Chakotay, who had come in from his wood working project, attempted to help comfort their son. Between the two parents, they tried rocking him, walking the halls, offered several small toys, a bottle, changed his diaper, played music, but nothing seemed to calm him. Finally, Chakotay came up with the idea of sitting in the hammock on the back porch, hoping the movement and closeness of the child to his larger frame would calm the boy. Thirty minutes after Chakotay walked into the backyard silence once again reigned in the Janeway household.

Both babies had been restless and unsettled for the last week and it had taken a casual comment from Gretchen to enlighten their parents as to the probable cause.

They were teething.

Amaya had started first, having become listless and irritable, which were personality traits normally associated with her brother and Aiden had followed soon after.

Kathryn smacked her head against the wall softly wondering how she could have missed such an obvious milestone.

“I don’t think that’s going to help your headache,” Chakotay whispered. He chuckled as he took in her shock at seeing him.

“Make a sound or something,” she hissed with a hand over her heart, “you just about gave me a heart attack.” she stated, leaning her head against the wall again. Tired eyes met his before settling on the child in his arms.

She looked a ‘hot mess’ as Tom Paris would say. Her hair was twisted up into a untidy chignon, the t-shirt she wore smelled strongly of baby, as did the spit up rag thrown over her shoulder, the low waist drawstring pants she wore had seen better days, as had the dingy house slippers she was wearing. But to his eyes she was beautiful. Not for the first time he thanked the Spirits that the doctor had been able to cure of her the New Earth Virus. It still
amazed him that Voyagers EMH had been successful creating a cure from the children’s cord blood.

“I figured out why they’ve been so fractious lately,” Kathryn sighed from her position on the stairs. Raising her eyes to meet his, she smiled a crooked grin before stating, “They’re teething. Well, Maya is for sure and AJ is a close second.”

“Now that I think about it, it should have been obvious.” He stated with a furrowed brow.

“Hence the head banging,” she explained of her earlier action. “I dug out the teething rings B’Elanna gave me for a shower gift and put them in the cooling unit before I laid Maya down. So if either of them start up again, we’ll be ready.” She stood up and held her arms out “Here, I’ll take him upstairs.”

Chakotay slid the baby into his mother’s arms and quirked a smile at the picture presented to him.

“Kathryn, my trip --”

“No, Chakotay,” Kathryn cut him off, “go on the trip. I know how important this is to you. We’ll be fine. My Mother and Phoebe are here if I need help.” Kathryn all, but ordered as she carried the baby upstairs.

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Authors note: This next little bit has a few Spanish & Souix endearments

Corazon – Spanish endearment meaning heart or love

Mija- Spanish endearment meaning daughter/ Mijo – Spanish endearment meaning son.

Ina, comes from the Sioux (Lakota) Tribe meaning – Mother/ Ate – meaning Father

Peta comes from the Sioux (Lakota) Tribe meaning – Fire

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Querida-Spanish endearment meaning – Beloved

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Somewhere in the Conifer Forests of Wyoming State – One Week Later

“A-koo-chee-moya. I am far from the sacred place of my grandfathers and the bones of my people, on this day I pray that my Father's spirit hear and speak to me. Speak to me father; speak to me in my dreams.”

A warm breeze danced around his seated form as a salty fragrance tickled his senses. Opening his eyes he found himself on an unfamiliar beach, back lit by a beautiful sunset, of burnt oranges, rich purples, fading blues and waning greens. Turning away from the magnificent sunset, he further observed his surroundings. He was seated on a sandy embankment protected by what looked to be large lava stones with tufts of grass and dune scattered about. Casting his eyes back to the sunset he listened to the ocean crashing against the rocky shore, the echo of the phenomena calming him.

He was enraptured by the view and the utter sense of calm that infused his spirit. Strange that he would feel such serenity now, when in contrast he entered the vision with such apprehension.

“Such an occurrence should be familiar, should it not?” asked a melodic voice; a voice he had not heard in nearly fifteen years.

“Many moons ago you stated that your angry heart had found peace here. Why would now be any different?”

“Ina?” Chakotay asked softly, not daring to believe his ears.

“Yes, Cha-ko-tay” replied the voice, as fingers caressed his check lovingly.
He was a grown man in his fifties, but here he sat on a beach with tears pooling behind closed eyes, afraid to believe the voice echoing in his ears. He registered the sensation of delicate fingers sliding under his chin, tilting his head back, and then the lightest of kisses on his eyelids. An anguished sob tore from his being seconds before the visage of his Mother flooded his sight.

“Ina.” He breathed, as he stared up at into her smiling face.

“Mijo, it has been a long time, my heart. Come walk the shore with your Mother,” she grasped her son’s hand in a gentle grip, encouraging him to stand and follow her to the shore.

Chakotay mutely followed his Mother toward the water’s edge. Never had his Mother come to him in a vision before. Never. He was overjoyed at seeing her again; overjoyed to see the same unconditional love in her eyes that he remembered as a young boy. But why was she here? Why now?

“Cha-ko-tay. Is the why and when really that important? I thought Ate taught you better than that,” she chided lovingly.

“Ina, I – I’m pleased beyond words to see you again. I can’t remember the last time my heart was filled with such joy—,” he began.

“Ah, but you know that is not altogether true, my son. Your heart has swelled with such joy and love before,” Lailah chided, as she turned to look up to her son’s face before turning her attention to view of the sea.
“I believe I understand her a little better now, having seen the setting she would have chosen for herself. Do you realize, my son that the settings we choose for our visions are a direct reflection of our inner spirit? Look around you Cha-ko-tay. What do you see?”

Taking a moment to observe his surroundings, he answered his mother skeptically, “The sea?”

“Yes…. There is the sea. At the moment, the waters are choppy, but not ominously so. The breeze is strong, but not overwhelming; and the sky is luminescent. Is that all there is the sea Cha-ko-tay?” Lailah asked, as she continued to walk the shore.

“No, not all; the sea can be calm or the sea can be tumultuous,” Chakotay pondered, as he watched the stars reveal themselves above the horizon. “The sea can appear to be docile and harmless, but underneath that calmness, there is the possibility of dangerous wildlife and unexpected undertows. The sea can appear abandoned in its stillness, but that stillness conceals many facets of life, large expanses of coral reefs, kelp forests; an entire world of life can be concealed beneath the surface”

“Exactly, Mijo,” Lailah smiled, as Chakotay continued to stare toward the horizon.

“I’d forgotten,” he breathed. “Those later years out there—I’d forgotten.” Turning suddenly to face her with anguish in his eyes, “How could I have forgotten? How many times did I utter ‘you’re not alone’? And in the end – in the end I left her alone. How could I have done that?” he questioned angrily.

“You are merely a man, Chakotay. You are a man with a man’s pride. And that pride was wounded many times; sometimes intentionally for your own safety, sometimes for her sanity and other times without conscious knowledge,” Lailah intoned, as she gathered his hands in her own. “Do not misunderstand me. The fault of this - - this brokenness between you; the fault lies at both your feet. In the beginning, you built a bridge and for a time the bridge was strong,” she emphasized the word by squeezing his hands firmly, “it sustained storms as fierce as any hurricane, braved bitter winds of the most frigid
winters, and survived the stifling heat of the Atacama Desert.” Reaching up to turn his face toward her, she continued, “But as with any bridge, if it is not maintained and repaired, rebuilt after the ravages of the storm, it can falter; threads of the rope begin to fray; the once strong adhesive, begins to crack; the planks can begin to splinter and are unable to support weight any longer. Do you understand my son?” her dark eyes beseeched.

“Yes, Ina. I understand,” he smiled showing her his dimples.

“Oy, put those away Mijo. I swear! If I did not know of her stubbornness, I would wonder what was wrong with our Peta; that she did not succumb to those dimples years ago.” Lailah laughed joyously.

“Well, it wasn’t for my lack of showing them to her.”

“Yes, I know,” Lailah sobered “Mijo, ¿Peta es tu querida, no?”

“Yes, Ina she is,” Chakotay responded, translating fluidly between his mother’s Sioux and Spanish inflections. He chuckled at her nickname for Kathryn, Peta, meaning fire in the Sioux language was indeed an apt descriptor. As was querida, a Spanish endearment meaning, beloved.

“Yes, I knew that the first time I laid eyes on her. You always did strive for the impossible, Mijo.” Lailah chuckled shaking her head in amusement. “¿Y los niños, tu los acepta?” at her son’s nod she continued, “I am glad we do not have to repeat the conversation you and Ate shared previously; that you understand despite their conception, they are children of our people,” a sobering expression then settled on her features.

“Ina? What is it?” Chakotay asked with concerned.
“Peta has experienced such profound hurt and loss in her life; so much so that the mere idea of personal happiness has, at the very least, the power to paralyze her and at worst, petrify her.” Lailah looked up to see a skeptical expression on her son’s face.

“You do not think so, Cha-ko-tay? Think back over the years. How many times have you seen her blink away emotion? How many times has she retreated from your affection? Have you never wondered why she practically ran from your touch on New Earth?”

“On New Earth, she was still engaged, Ina. She’s fiercely loyal; she wouldn’t have betrayed Mark in that manner,” Chakotay contested.

“Cha-ko-tay, you choose only to answer one of my questions. Yes, she was still betrothed to another, but her heart? What of her heart, Mijo?” Lailah watched her son’s brow furrow in uncertainty.

“Think over what we have discussed,” Lailah entreated as her fingers reached up to trace his tattoo before caressing his features with her eyes. “She will run out of habit, Cha-ko-tay; out of fear. You must be diligent if you are to receive what your heart desires most. Lest you lose her to another.”

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CHAPTER 12

Indiana – December 2380

“I still can’t believe it,” Phoebe gushed, as she awed over her six-month old nephew.

“Neither can I,” chuckled Kathryn, curling her legs beneath herself on the opposite corner of the couch while cradling a steaming mug of coffee. “I’d put the idea of having children out to pasture,” she stated, glancing toward Amaya, cradled peacefully in a rocking seat on the floor.
“You can't mean that, Kathryn. You’re not that old, you could’ve still had children by conventional means. It’s not like there were any shortages of eligible bachelors beating down your door,” teased Phoebe.

“Yough!” Kathryn grimaced swallowing a mouth full of the warm liquid before replying sarcastically, “You can't be serious, Pheebs.”

“Oh come on. There had to have been someone who caught your eye during all that time,” Phoebe goaded.

“I wasn't looking, Phoebe, I was too busy to notice,” Kathryn frowned momentarily thinking back over those first few months of being home.

“Oh, I get it. It was one particular suitor that you were interested in, but he never called on you, right?” Prodded her younger sister.

“Ahh.” Kathryn waved a finger in the air, before winking at her sister, “It took you a whole six months before trying to broach this subject with me. You’re slipping li'l Sis.”

“Your son just saved your hide, Katie. because if my hands were free, you’d regret that statement,” Phoebe mock glared at her older sister.

“Oh, sure, I'm afraid for my life,” Kathryn retorted rolling her eyes. “Okay, come on. Let’s get this over with,” she sighed turning to face her sister.

“I don’t get you Kathryn. First, you’re trapped on the ship with the man for seven years day in and day out -- and let’s not forget the three month exile on an uninhabited planet; you were basically the Adam and Eve of the DQ! And nothing, nothing at all?! I don’t know how you were able to keep your hands off him. He’s gorgeous. Add to the fact he’s been living in this house with you for the past five months, accompanying you to various functions, helping to raise the twins and still nothing,” Phoebe enthused.

“You know why I couldn’t do anything on Voyager, Phoebe. Regulations aside, I couldn’t let myself get distracted out there; my all consuming goal was to get my crew home. As for New
Earth --” Phoebe watched as her sister broke off her sentence, for a moment her eyes seemed to look inward and then suddenly she blinked before continuing again, “I don’t know what would have happened, Pheebs. It is one of the most memorable experiences of my time in the Delta Quadrant but …” Kathryn hesitated to voice her next thought.

“But? Come on Kathryn, I know you. There was something that stopped you from taking that next step; something aside from Mark’s memory interfered. What was it?” Phoebe probed gently.

Kathryn chuckled harshly before continuing, “You know by the time Voyager had come back for us, I had actually talked myself out of any lingering doubts. And yet eventually those very doubts were proven to me once we were back on the ship.” she rasped.

Noticing Amaya’s scrunched up little face, Kathryn sent a wave of positive and loving psionic thoughts toward the baby girl; using her foot to gently sway the rocker to lull the child back to sleep. Once the baby had settled, Kathryn picked up her daughter up and motioned for Phoebe to follow her through into the next room where they could lie the children down in the small cradles Chakotay had carved for them. After the babies were settled, Kathryn turned on a mellow jazz recording and the light up mobile Tom had given as a gift before closing the door. Once back in the living room Kathryn switched on the one way baby monitor, so they could hear if the children became distressed.

“If we’re going to talk about this, I need a buffer between myself and the children. I’m still learning how to block my emotions from them, so to speak. But this…there’s no way they’d be able to be in the same room with me if we’re going where I think we’re going,” Kathryn looked at her sister with solemn eyes.

“All right, so the kids are down and out. What stopped you, Kathryn?” Phoebe questioned again mimicking her sisters seated position with one leg beneath her.

“Phoebe, you know I’m fearless when it comes to the job.”

Phoebe nodded her encouragement.

“But I’m a coward when it comes to my personal life,” waving a hand through the air she continued. “Oh sure, I can face the Borg Queen and not bat an eye; I can do hand to hand combat with the Hirogen and never once doubt myself; I can order everyone to abandon ship while I stay behind to plot Voyager’s course. But …” she hesitated momentarily, staring
out the large bay window behind the couch before continuing, "Pheebs, we were the only humans on the planet, it wasn’t like there was anyone else he could form a bond with. There – on that planet – we only had each other. In a situation like that – it’s only natural to turn to the next person – its basic instinct. That was the thought that kept running through my mind. Don’t get me wrong, I do believe at that point, there was a genuine affection for each other, but was that enough on which to build the foundation of lasting partnership? At that point, I’d only known him for two years, and what I knew was circumstantial.”

“What did you mean Katie, ‘eventually they were proven’? I don’t understand.” Phoebe prompted; this was the most she’d gotten out of her older sister on the subject. She intended to learn as much as possible while Kathryn seemed unaware of herself and while she was caught in her memories of the past.

“There was a woman – Riley Frazier,” Kathryn stopped with tears pooling in eyes. The hurt surrounding the knowledge of the two of them, still caused her a great deal of heartache. And just now she didn’t want to fight the hurt anymore. “She was attractive, blond, built, and intelligent – I knew the moment, I saw him what had occurred between them. We never spoke of it, we didn’t have to. I don’t think he was able to look me in the eye the entire time she was on Voyager, nor for a while after we departed from their settlement. I couched the anger and betrayal I felt as Kathryn and instead allowed it to fuel Captain Janeway’s disappointment; at least the Captain’s anger was understandable, plausible.

“After all, Voyager’s First Officer had just mutinied, fired upon his shipmates and disobeyed a direct order, so her reaction was appropriate for the situation. In my mind what he’d done, proved my theory. The only reason he was vaguely interested in me romantically was because there was no one else. On New Earth, I was his only option.” The tears in her eyes still hadn’t fallen. “From that point on I tried to maintain a careful balance between commanding officer and close confidant. Sometimes I’d slip and find myself letting him in farther than I intended, and then I’d have to strategically build that barrier back up again. There were so many battles that ensued through the years – both personal and professional. Sometimes I was to blame, sometimes he was.”

“Okay, so knowing you as I do, you would have discouraged him in the romantic aspect of your relationship, especially with that kind of doubt floating around in your head. You probably pushed him away at every turn. But Kathryn, that was out there.” Phoebe waved her hand toward the window, “You’re home now, you have two beautiful children and the man you love – and don’t bother trying to deny that last statement – living under the same roof with you day in and day out. What’s stopping you from taking that next step now?”

“Phoebe,” Kathryn turned away from the window to glare heatedly at her sister, “Don’t you see? It’s the same damn thing all over again! Why is he here, Why?!”
Her younger sister pursed her lips as Kathryn kept going. Phoebe knew it was better not to interrupt when Kathryn was in this type of mood. “Tell me! Why-is-he-here?” Her sister hissed in a staccato manner.

Holding her sister’s gaze and defiantly raising her chin, Phoebe leveled a steely glare all her own, “Simple—because he loves you; because he is in love with you.”

Kathryn laughed harshly before pushing herself up from the couch to pace before her sister, “You can’t be that stupid, Phoebe. He’s here because his children are here. Yes, he offered to help me, and, because of that, I extended the invitation for him to reside here for a while, but that’s all. We’re the same as we were on New Earth, housemates. That’s it. Only this time I’m bound to him for the rest of my natural life because we share those two babies in there,” Kathryn fumed as she pointed into the other room.

Lowering her voice a notch, she continued, “Phoebe. I had to track him down. I cannot tell you the number of favors I called in just to get him planet side. And no, I didn’t do it to reconcile. I did it so that he could know his children, so that he would know they exist and if anything happened to me, they wouldn’t become wards of the Federation. No!” Kathryn held her hand up when Phoebe looked as if she were about to interrupt.

“It took an armed security detail on my order as an Admiral to get him here,” she inhaled a moment before continuing, shaking her head slightly. “I won’t keep him from the twins. I want them to know their father and for him to know them, but that doesn’t mean we play happy families. I won’t settle for that and I won’t be a consolation prize. I refuse to be that!”

“Why would you think yourself a consolation prize, Kathryn?”

Kathryn waved a hand dismissively as she turned back to the window. “Phoebe, on New Earth I never knew if it was me that he wanted, or if it was simply because I was the only woman on the planet. On Voyager, I never knew if it was me or simply the idea of bedding the Captain and now is no different. How would I know that he wanted me for me and not simply to ensure his place as ‘daddy’ to the twins?” She argued, gesticulating wildly.

Rising from her position on the couch, Phoebe stood up to grip Kathryn firmly by the arms, “Kathryn, I don’t know what happened between the two of you in the Delta Quadrant. But I do know what I saw at Starfleet Medical and that was a man on the brink of losing the one thing in his life that mattered. Before the Doctor cured you of the virus, Chakotay was beside himself with worry. And you have no idea how he just lit up Kathryn, whenever he saw you.
Hell, whenever he talked about you; and the twins. That was like the icing on the cake. I overheard him telling B’Elanna that he couldn’t understand why the Spirits had blessed him in spite of himself. That man loves you. He’s not after your virtue, the ship, or your title. If anything he’s after your heart but you’re too afraid to show it to him. You share a home with this man and children, Kathryn, but there’s a wall of unapproachability about you where Chakotay is concerned. Anyone who didn’t know you wouldn’t see it. All they see is an efficient family unit. But I’m your sister, and I do see it and if you keep pushing him away, one day he’s going to go for good.”

“Phoebe, I just don’t…”

“Kathryn, just think about what I said. I mean, really think about it.” Phoebe watched her sister nod ever so slightly, “not good enough – pinkie swear it!” Phoebe demanded.

Kathryn gave a pained look; they’d adopted the tradition as children – a sacred promise between them. Phoebe grabbed Kathryn’s hand and hooked their pinkie fingers together.

“Swear it, Katie!”

Kathryn, swallowed before reciting softly “I swear, I'll think about what you've said.”

“Good.” Phoebe quickly embraced her sister before pulling back. “So how long is he going to be away?”

“I don’t know. He took a similar quest to honor his Father while we were in the Delta Quadrant. But he has the entire Alpha Quadrant to choose a location from this time,” Kathryn sighed as she began to pick up the toys that were strewn about the room.

“Well, that just means that we have more sister time then. So tell me about this Fair Haven, I’ve heard so much about…”

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CHAPTER 13

INDIANA – ONE WEEK LATER

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Quiet.

That was not something one would normally associate with the Janeway household and yet it was strangely quiet.

Chakotay brushed the snow off his shoulders, set his travel bag against the wall and marveled at the silence. For a moment, he relished the stillness of the house and then he began to worry. Glancing at the old grandfather clock in the entryway, Chakotay rationalized it was too late in the evening for Kathryn to have left the house with the twins. So where was everyone?

He searched the first floor quietly in case Kathryn, by some miracle, had gotten both infants to sleep early. His search of the floor plan came up empty except for the two wine glasses he spied on the side table in the livingroom, one appeared to still have remnants of mineral water, while the other held a darker hue. He also took notice of the dishes in the kitchen sink.

Stealthily, he made his way up to the second level of the house. Traveling beyond the first three guestrooms and then his room; he continued down the hall towards Kathryn’s bedroom. As he neared the door he stopped, suddenly frozen in his tracks.

Not in a million years would he have believed it, had he not witnessed it with his own eyes and ears.

Chakotay stared, unsure of what shocked him more; her voice, what she was saying or her current state of undress.

He closed his eyes and shook his head, as if to dislodge the vision already burned into his memory.

Opening his eyes, he felt an irrational sense of jealousy warm the blood in his veins at the sight and sounds before him.
Never had she shared this level of intimacy with him, not in all of the nine years he’d know this woman. He listened as her rich alto voice crooned to the man in her arms, with a level of gentleness, he’d never heard from her before.

“There was a time when I didn’t have no one
Didn’t have no love, do you remember the love we once had?
If I had the chance to love you again, I’d make your heart forget I was ever there
If we forget the past, I know this time love will last.
Forever... For always... For love…”

Kathryn was lying on the bed, naked from the waist up; long creamy legs peeked through the robe puddled around her waist. Most of her hair was piled haphazardly in a messy twist, only a few strands fell loose to lightly frame her face. Aiden played with the longer strands of her hair as he kneaded her breast. Chakotay blinked to bring his attention back to what she was singing.

“I’m not coming home anymore, it doesn’t matter.
If I had the chance to hold you again, I’d fill your heart with joy and make you
Remember I’m the only one for you, yes I would.
Let’s throw the bad memories out and make this the first day of our
Forever... For always... For love…”

“I’d be a fool to ever change, if he says he loves the way I am
I’d be a fooo-oo-oo-ool too-oo evvver change, if he says he loves the, loves the way I am
It’s gonna be starting here, starting now
Yeah, yeah, yeah,

Forever, For always, For love
Forever, For always, For love
Forever, For always, For love”

She whispered the last three sentences quietly as the baby slipped into a deep sleep. She began to tenderly sweep dark curls away from his forehead as he slept on, unaware of her loving caresses. All too quickly, her fingers froze and her hold on him tightened; her eyes snapped towards the doorway, only belatedly sensing she was being watched.

Her eyes were intense, dangerously so. For a moment, Chakotay was reminded of the wild mountain lion he’d spotted on his trip to the wilderness. Despite the ferociousness crackling in her gaze, she was a beautiful tableau of mother and child. He felt the jealousy effuse into a sensation of pride and protectiveness.
Two seconds later, realizing she was not in danger; she simply arched an eyebrow at his obvious perusal of her nakedness.

Three seconds later, Chakotay mumbled an, “Excuse me.” before turning and heading back down the hall.

Hearing Chakotay move away from the door, Kathryn looked down at her sleeping son and whispered, “Well...it’s been awhile since Mama made your Dad look like that,” she chuckled before shrugging the robe on properly to cross the hall to the nursery.

After placing Aiden in his crib, she moved next to Amaya's and as if sensing her Mother’s presence, Amaya looked up with a wide dimpled grin as Kathryn tickled her feet, “Keep an eye on your brother for Mama, okay?”

Kathryn kissed her daughter on the forehead before leaving the room.

On her way to the kitchen, Kathryn retrieved the two wine goblets from the side table in the living room, the earlier scene upstairs playing through her mind. In those first few moments when she’d been completely focused on her son, Kathryn hadn’t sensed Chakotay’s presence the way she usually would.

There was something brewing behind those dark eyes of his. Chakotay had reached a decision of sorts and Kathryn could only wonder as to what that was. In their time together since the twins’ birth, Chakotay had been an attentive father as well as a gracious and helpful houseguest. His relief when she told him the doctor had cured her of the NE Virus had been palpable. His behavior in the time he’d resided with her was the complete antithesis of what she’d experienced before the twins’ birth. In the intervening months Chakotay of old seemed to resurface.

Although, she generally worked from home, there were days when she needed to be on campus at Headquarters. On those occasions, Kathryn usually found him waiting in her office for an impromptu picnic lunch in the park with the twins. There were times when she ached to have a moment to herself, away from Starfleet, her mother, sister, as well as the babies. During these times she’d mysteriously find that Chakotay had taken the children for a walk or for a visit to Gretchen’s. He was subtle, but there was no doubt in her mind that he was trying to maneuver his way back into her heart.

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Chakotay watched Kathryn from his place atop the stairs, as she moved through the lower level of the house. For months now he’d shared the same house with Kathryn and felt no closer to winning her heart than he had the first day he moved in.

Using his intimate knowledge of Kathryn Janeway to his full advantage, Chakotay tried anything and everything to win her over. And he’d succeeded – to a point.

Kathryn was pleasant in her dealings with him, encouraging him to interact with his children and to make himself at home. And he had to admit that he felt comfortable here with her. He didn’t feel the need to ask permission when borrowing a book from her library or to fix the loose shutter outside his bedroom window. Nor did he feel over looked or out of place when Kathryn’s family came to visit. She’d made it known early on, that Chakotay was a part of the family and should be treated as such.

He’d also been given the opportunity to reprise his role as Kathryn's escort to various Fleet functions. It was considered the norm for him to arrive with her and vice versa, as Kathryn usually accompanied him to various archaeological functions.

Although he was comfortable, he was far from content and even further from completely happy.

Despite his best attempts, Kathryn only allowed him in only so far. Her actions reminded him of the various times she’d smiled her way through negotiations, in an attempt to avoid offending the other party. She was cordial, friendly, considerate even, but there was something lacking in her every day interaction with him.

It was beyond frustrating. Chakotay knew that she was purposely keeping herself from him. She was subtle in her retreat, but that’s exactly what she was doing. There had been countless opportunities in the last few months for them to move beyond this superficial friendship to something more meaningful. She was running from him and he didn't know why. Well, he had a niggling idea but couldn't piece that together with the strong, determined woman he’d known over the years.

A thought suddenly occurred to him, “when was the last time Kathryn touched me?” He asked himself.

Chakotay racked his brain trying to think of the last time she’d laid a hand on his arm, chest, shoulder, or any other part of his body.
Voyager’s former Captain was what the Delaney twins had dubbed ‘touchy-feely’. At any point during an interaction with a crewman, Kathryn Janeway was known to offer a pat on the back or an encouraging squeeze of the arm. Voyager’s former First Officer was often privileged to receive a gentle squeeze of his shoulder, a caress across his chest, and on a few occasions a gentle stroke of his face.

So he was utterly shocked when he realized that the last time she’d voluntarily touched him had been nearly six months ago, during the birth of the twins.

Sure, she usually allowed him to loop arms with her when they arrived at a function, but that was only as they entered the event. And then she would very neatly disengage herself from him, taking a point to make sure that when he intended to place a hand at the small of her back, that she stepped forward a few hairs so that his fingers only grazed the material of her clothing.

As he made his way downstairs, the kernel of a new tactic was planted and left him wondering why he hadn’t realized it sooner.

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Chakotay’s quiet voice startled her as she rinsed out the goblets in the sink, “I never knew you could sing, Kathryn.”

Turning half way, she spotted him leaning casually against the doorjamb, “Hi. How was your trip?” She asked, attempting to change the subject while taking in his handsome features, before returning to her chore.

“Revealing,” he answered noncommittally as his eyes caressed the back of her form.

Kathryn could feel his eyes following her movements and felt the tension crackling between them, which until seconds ago seemed to have only been simmering mildly in their interactions.

“I take it Phoebe was here earlier?” he hedged, secretly enjoying the way the material of the robe molded to her lithe body.

“No, Antonio stopped by to check on us,” she provided, feeling the blood thundering in her ears. What the Hell? Not now. Please not now, she pleaded with her body. Her body betrayed
her command as she felt her breasts swell, her skin flush and a dull throb between her legs. A desire made itself known.

“I’m sure he was just making sure you were all right, alone here with the twins,” Chakotay suggested, clenching his jaw as jealousy flared. The mere thought that Antonio Moretti could have walked in on the scene he’d just witnessed, made the vein in his temple pulse violently.

“Actually, that’s precisely what he was doing. He’s shown up practically every Saturday since you left, just to make sure that we didn’t need anything. Of course, Phoebe has been a daily pest, as only she can be and Mom comes up to help in the mornings. If you ask me it’s just an excuse to spoil her grandbabies,” Kathryn chuckled softly to herself. Turning slightly, she rose on her toes, reaching above her head to store the wine goblets. The action causing the robe to ride higher up on her hips, exposing the tempting shape of her legs from calf to mid thigh.

“Let me,” Chakotay interrupted as he moved quietly behind her to take the goblets and place them on the high shelf, his legs flush against the back of hers. When the task was done he didn’t step back as she might have expected.

In the next instant, she felt his hands softly slide down her back and then her sides before coming to rest on her hips, his thumbs drawing lazy circles on her lower back; his arousal slowly stirred against the cleft of her buttocks.

The hairs at the base of her neck stood on end feeling his breath blow hotly across the back of her nape, as he whispered her name. She trembled at the reverence, dare she say love, in his voice. Keeping her head down to control her breathing and with strength she didn’t know she possessed, she skillfully maneuvered her way out of his hold; slipping to the left and behind him several paces.

Damn it! Kathryn thought to herself.

This was the reason she’d fought to maintain space between Chakotay and herself. She knew the moment he touched her in this manner she wouldn’t be able to think straight.

On Voyager she always had someplace to retreat to or some crisis to resolve when things got this heated. Now, in the dead of winter, in her childhood home there was no such place and currently no such crisis.
Her addled mind raced in the next few seconds, as she tried to come up with something to say, some way to dismiss what had just occurred.

“There’s some leftover vegetable soup and corn bread in the cooling unit if you’re hungry,” Kathryn suggested softly, kicking herself mentally for not coming up with something better to say.

She turned to find him watching her with a sense of triumph in his eyes, as if he’d found her Achilles heel, a weakness that his eyes promised to exploit pleasurably.

Dimly, she heard Chakotay whisper, “Tempting but I have a taste for something else.”

He began to stalk her slowly. But for every one step, he made toward her; she took two steps back; the dance continued until she was backed against the far wall of the kitchen. The wall was cold against her back as Chakotay invaded her personal space, pinning her with a knowing gaze.

Kathryn leaned flush against the wall as she looked up at him, the action exposing the graceful expanse of her throat to the man towering above her. She opened her mouth to protest, but nothing escaped except a harsh sigh followed by a deep gasp of anticipation.

Chakotay’s eyes followed the length of her exposed neck down to the V of her robe. Using the back of his left hand, he slowly traced the edge of her robe; watching as her breath hitched and her flesh rippled with goose-bumps. His hand continued a lazy journey from shoulder to belly, his eyes mapping the dusky freckles that dotted her creamy flesh. His hand repeated his earlier journey; this time gently pushing the soft fabric aside, his fingertips grazing the side of her breast as he exposed the creamy mound to the cool air of the house, causing her pink nipple to harden. Using the same hand he repeated the action, baring her other breast for inspection, surreptitiously noticing a shiver pass through her.

Smoothing his left hand down across her hip, his fingers tickled their way to the knot in her belt. Raising his eyes to hers, he gently pulled the fabric of the robe just below her belt to the side, first to the left and then the right. The result left Kathryn completely bared to him save for the scrape of fabric running across her stomach. Questing fingertips traced her bellybutton in lazy designs, then skimmed over the inside her thighs.

Kathryn couldn’t tear her eyes away from the dark orbs that held her transfixed. Somewhere in her mind she screamed, kicked and railed against the undignified manner in which she
was exposed. However, her body was humming with desire as his fingers grazed closer to her core, knowing that he could feel the heat and dampness pooling between her thighs. Her own hands reached forward to burrow beneath the soft material of his shirt, mapping the muscles hidden beneath with her fingertips. Then circling his navel, dipping lower to trace the solid length of his arousal before pushing the fabric of his trousers over his hips.

She felt his fingertips graze across her belly drawing lazy circles for an indeterminable period of time before she felt his breath on her face. He leaned down to kiss her, and she welcomed the invasion of his lips on hers until he pulled away unexpectedly. Stepping closer he nudged her legs apart with his feet, as he leaned in stealing the breath that she exhaled.

Chakotay’s eyes never left hers and she suddenly found herself unsure. The uncertainty must have crept its way into her eyes for in the next moment, she felt his fingertips tracing her swollen labia a second before the head of his penis stroked her sodden womanhood. He lifted her right leg around his hip and thrust into her, the same instant as he kissed her mouth.

Her muffled moans as he repeatedly rocked her against the wall and his years of suppressed desire fueled his arousal further. Kathryn returned his kiss and Chakotay reveled in the slick heat that surrounded him. Her breasts crushed against his chest, and how she almost purred deep in the back of her throat as her hips cradled him between her thighs.

The kiss continued as he ravished her body, forcing her senses into overdrive but he had yet to taste her. So when she attempted to break off the kiss, he instead used the tip of his tongue to trace her lips softly. Her resulting gasp afforded Chakotay the privileged of slipping his tongue into her mouth, playfully seeking hers out. His effort was rewarded when seconds later he felt her tongue accept his invitation.

Kathryn’s lower back bounced off the wall again as her tongue dueled with Chakotay’s. She moaned in pleasure as she felt his solid length stretch her swollen womanhood, her hips now meeting his thrust for thrust. She curled her legs tightly around his waist to enfold him further as he thrust into her rapidly. Suddenly, he ripped his lips away from her mouth and began to kiss and lick her throat, whispering something in a language she couldn’t understand. Within moments, he found the erogenous zone beneath her ear, causing her to shiver slightly as she arched her neck offering him better access. She felt him suck the flesh of her neck into his mouth and bite down gently. His fingers dug into her hips as he marked her as his. She smiled slightly as she slipped her fingers through his hair dragging him closer. She had been his for years – he just never knew it.
Kathryn gasped as felt him loop his arm around her back to bring her flush against him, his penis momentarily swallowed to the base by her slick folds. He turned them and she dimly heard a glass shatter before feeling the countertop beneath her back, as Chakotay pulled one of her legs up against his chest, before slipping back into willing flesh.

The sight of Kathryn naked and spread eagle on the kitchen counter, as he pumped his rigid cock in and out of her slick auburn curls nearly did him in. But not yet, he was determined to make this memorable for her and he wanted nothing more than to watch her fall apart under his touch.

Breathing heavily Chakotay kissed the inside of her leg resting on against his chest as his fingers fondled her clit. He watched her head loll to the side as her back arched slamming her hips against his. His fingers continued to stroke her, alternating between light circles and harsh flicking as she whimpered beneath him.

She was close; he could feel the walls of her vagina beginning to pulsate. He kept up the onslaught on her sensitive flesh until she gasped loudly, arching clear off the counter and slapping her palm against the wall as she went rigid with her orgasm. Chakotay grabbed her hips firmly, anchoring her to him as her inner walls pulsated.

As she came down from her orgasm Chakotay stepped back, slipping out her and allowing her leg to slide harmlessly off his shoulder.

Kathryn was completely spent.

The sensation of Chakotay’s hand lifting her bottom upward as his other hand pushed legs further apart didn’t register with her right away. Chakotay leaned forward inhaling her heady scent before stroking her heated flesh with his tongue. Before Kathryn had time to fully regain use of her limbs, Chakotay’s mouth was firmly latched to her womanhood.

Ignoring her flailing hands in an attempt to stop him, Chakotay eagerly licked and sucked her sensitive flesh. His penis swelled further hearing her whimpers as she orgasmed again bucking into his mouth. He continued to lap at her until she went still. Rising from his position, he leaned over her body, stroking damp tresses from her forehead as he kissed her mouth.

Kathryn was beginning to feel lightheaded as she felt his lips travel across hers. Again, she heard him whisper something she couldn’t understand as his penis stirred between her
thighs. She moaned under his lips at the pleasurably sensation of his engorged member slipping inside her. Kathryn pulled him to her as her nails lightly slid down his spine.

The enticing sensation of her aroused nipples beneath him and the sparks her nails sent down his back, caused Chakotay’s rhythm to falter as she deliberately tightened her inner walls. Releasing her lips, he bowed his head on top of her chest before gripping her waist firmly as he slammed against her cervix.

Again and again he lunged in and out of her slick core desperately seeking his climax.

Feeling her stomach muscles tighten, he moved his mouth up to hers and kissed her soundly as her inner walls tightened for a third a time, gripping his penis in an unyielding vice. Twice more he thrust into her until she felt thick semen flood her womb, arching her back again, despite his added weigh atop her, as his mouth silenced her screams.

In the next moment, she felt him collapse heavily on top of her. Kathryn brought her legs up to wrap around his back holding him inside her as she ran her fingers through his hair, holding him to her. After long moments, she rotated her hips to get his attention.

“I – I need to get up,” she stated hesitantly. Her back was beginning to ache.

Chakotay stepped back, his softened penis slipping from her. He helped her down from the counter, mindful of the broken glass on the floor and watched as she slowly closed her robe, clutching the lapels with shaky fingers as she turned to leave the kitchen.

“Ka--” he started.

Kathryn silenced him with a raised palm as she faced the doorway leading out the kitchen. With her head bowed, she unsteadily made her way to the hall bathroom, breathing deeply. Stepping into the small lavatory she leaned heavily against the closed door as tears streamed down her face. Feelings of regret bubbled up inside her as she slid to the floor. What the hell possessed her to allow that to happen? Why had she encouraged him? What prompted him to step over that line? Was she just an itch that he needed to scratch? These thoughts and a dozen more ran through her mind. Rather than dwell on them, she stood, slowly making her way to the small sink against the far wall. Using a washcloth she cleaned her thighs of their joint fluids, hissing softly as she wiped between her legs. Kathryn caught her reflection in the small wall mirror as she rinsed the cloth clean, her recent arousal still visible in the ruddy color of her skin, her mussed hair and swollen lips.
She splashed cold water on her face before taking a moment to steady her breathing. Over the thundering of her pulse and the chaos of her thoughts, she faintly heard the chime for the front door.

After tucking himself into his pants and quickly cleaning up the broken glass Chakotay paced the kitchen in circles, glancing toward the hall every few moments. She was doing it again – putting up her damned walls. Not this time! He refused to allow her to hide from him any longer. For almost nine years, he let her dictate the pace and path of their relationship and the Angry Warrior in him decided enough was enough. Chakotay’s eyes cut toward the front door at the sound of the chime. It was past 2200 hours who would be the visiting at this time of night? The chime rang for a second time before Chakotay began to make his way toward the entry hall. His eyes narrowed and his nostrils flared upon opening the door.

“Good Evening, Chakotay. I’m here to see Katarina,” Antonio announced in his rich Italian accent.

Blocking entrance to the house Chakotay replied, “Kathryn is indisposed at the moment. Perhaps you should have called before traveling all this way.”

“I’d appreciate it if you would let her know that I am here. We have – unfinished business to address,” Antonio challenged with a smirk.

“And I told you she is not available,” Chakotay stressed.

“Where is she? Why not allow her to choose for herself,” the Italian gentleman suggested.

Chakotay balled his hands at his sides to keep from pummeling the man.

From her position in the hall Kathryn could hear the thinly veiled threats that passed between her two friends. One man had been her sanity for close to nine months and the other had been her Rock of Gibraltar for nearly nine years. Antonio, she knew loved her, he’d told her only a few hours ago by asking her to come away with him to Italy.

“I can’t leave my children,” she protested.
He simply smiled, taking her slim hand, kissing the inside of her palm stating, “I would never dream of asking you to choose, Katarina. There is room in my home for all of you – bring the children with you”.

Tucking a loose strand of hair behind her ear, Antonio leaned closer to her. “I love you Kathryn Janeway. In these months of your homecoming, I have fallen hopelessly in love with you. You are not happy, Bella. You’re a star actress, but your eyes cannot lie. I can see the pain that you try to hide - come to Italy with me. I know that you do not return my feelings; all that I ask is that you grant me the privilege of making you happy.”

She was speechless, utterly speechless.

“I will go for a while in order to give you time to tend the children and think over what I have said. You don’t have to say anything right now. But I will be back tonight, and hopefully we will leave together.”

He kissed her then. She touched her lips amazed by the reverent way in which he’d cupped her faced and kissed her lovingly with tenderness and warmth.

Shaking her head to rid her mind of the images, she returned her thoughts to the current situation. Antonio was in love with her but Kathryn didn’t return his feelings. She loved him, but it was more like the love of a close friend or of an adopted brother. Whereas she knew Antonio’s feelings, she had no idea what Chakotay felt. There was the beautiful story he shared with her on New Earth, but really what did it mean? At the time she was convinced it was his way of telling her that he was in love with her, but after the incident with Riley, then Kellin, Valerie Archer and most recently Seven, she’d re-examined the memory and concluded that the story was simply his way of trying to put her at ease at the time. Not to mention she didn’t share the attributes he usually seemed to be attracted to; she wasn’t tall, buxom or blonde.

And now?

Despite what occurred between them not twenty minutes ago and what her sister and B’Elanna told her, she still had no idea how he felt about her. Which brought her to the question of ‘how do I feel about him?’

She loved him; she was in love with him – it was as simple and as complicated as that.

“Katarina!” Hearing her name jolted Kathryn out of her inner reverie.
“Step aside, Chakotay! What have you done with her?” Antonio accused. Kathryn could hear the worry in his voice. Just has she could hear the malice in Chakotay's.

“Look, I asked you politely to leave our home. I'll not ask again.”

Tucking her hair back and tying her robe more securely Kathryn walked confidently into the foyer to find her two friends standing toe to toe glaring at each other.

“At ease, gentlemen,” Kathryn's strident voice warned as she faced them. “Chakotay, will you excuse us please?” she asked, eying the way his jaw clenched and he balled his fists.

Placing a hand on his chest, Kathryn stepped between the two men - her back to Antonio; her eyes silently asking Chakotay to give her a few moments. His eyes communicated his unwillingness to leave, to concede to the other man. Nonetheless, he nodded once before turning on his heel to leave them to their unfinished business.

Taking a breath, Kathryn turned and invited Antonio into the entry hall of the house before closing the door.

Emboldened, perhaps with knowledge of Chakotay's return, Antonio gathered her into his arms.

“Bella,” dark eyes looked upon her beseechingly, “Have you thought over my proposition?” Antonio asked softly, enjoying the feel of her in his arms.

Twice Kathryn opened her mouth to reply; twice she closed her mouth unable to relay what she was certain he wanted to hear. Easing her way out of his arms, she stood away from him, regret registering in her slate blue eyes.

“I can't leave with you, Antonio. You want permanence, marriage even. I - It would be incredibly unfair of me to do that to you. I know what it is to wonder if the person you love actually loves you back, and I won't put you, myself or more importantly my children through that.”

Antonio cut his eyes toward the hallway where he could see Chakotay’s shadow on the floor, knowing that the other man was privy to the conversation; taking in Kathryn's red rimmed
eyes and the way in which she fidgeted with her hands. Antonio's eyes hardened momentarily thinking perhaps she was being forced to refuse him.

Gently grabbing her by the elbow he pulled them into the living room, Kathryn almost couldn't understand him in the hurried tones of his thickened accent, "Has he hurt you, Bella? Are you refusing me of your own free will?" he asked, his dark eyes shooting daggers in her direction.

Kathryn was annoyed Antonio would even hint at Chakotay controlling her decision, "Chakotay has no say in how I choose to live my life, Antonio," she hissed. "My answer would have been the same regardless if he had returned this evening or not," she vowed, angry that he thought her so inept of making such a decision on her own.

"Katarina, I do not mean to infer that you're not capable-I know that you are. But look at yourself, there is air of fragility about you that I have never witnessed. You are hesitant, fidgety – these are not traits of the Kathryn Janeway I remember nor of the one I have again gotten to know," Antonio implored passionately.

Releasing a sigh Kathryn assured him, "Antonio Moretti, you are an honorable man. A dear friend and I do love you. Bu--" 

Antonio placed two fingers over her lips to silence her, letting his eyes drink her beauty before placing a kiss on her forehead. "Say no more Bella, I understand," leaning forward he kissed her lips gently before rising slightly to whisper in her ear, "My offer still stands Katarina. Should you ever need a place to rejuvenate the vineyard is yours. I would welcome a visit from both of you with or without the children."

Kathryn eyed him questioningly as she leaned away from him.

"You say you know what it is like to wonder – I don't believe you will have to wonder much longer," he stated as he squeezed her hand. "Stay here, you'll catch the draft in nothing but that robe, I'll see myself out."

Kathryn watched him leave and counted herself blessed to know that she had such a wonderful friend in her life and that her decision had not severed their friendship totally; though she knew it would be some time before he called on her for a visit.
From her place just at the bottom of the stairs, Kathryn sensed her daughter's distress before she heard Amaya begin to fret. Damn it! It had taken an hour to quiet the child earlier this evening. Kathryn hung her head and took a deep breath. She sent waves of comforting emotions and thoughts to the baby as she made her way to the staircase. She couldn't afford to have both children severely upset at the same time. Whenever that occurred, she got the mother of all migraines, which left her completely incapacitated.

Kathryn reached the upper landing before she felt the hairs on the back of her neck stand on end. Swiftly turning around she found Chakotay towering over her with his hands balled at his sides.

“What the hell?!” Wincing, when she realized her harsh yell startled Amaya.

“Did you fuck him?” Chakotay asked in dangerously hushed tones.

“Wha -? What are you talking about …”

He silenced her with a chopping motion of his hand.

“It’s a simple question. Are you fucking him?” Chakotay asked again, his eyes dark with rage.

She felt his anger roiling off him in waves. Dear God, if she could feel it then the children… Amaya’s soft fretting became loud whimpering.

“Chakotay, not now; I have to calm Maya before she wakes AJ,” Kathryn implored as she turned to continue down the hall.

“Don't!” he snarled, grabbing her arm. “Don't use them as an excuse to avoid this conversation! You're always doing that!” Chakotay accused blocking her path.

“Chakotay, you know as well I do--” she began.

“Answer the damn question, Kathryn!” he growled. “You say he's here every Saturday. Do you have a standing arrangement? I saw how he held you, how he kissed you! Those are the touches of a lover.”
Kathryn saw red. How dare he? She lashed out and said the first thing that came to her; she wanted hurt him as much as his harsh words were hurting her. “So what if I slept with him, Chakotay – that’s none of your business;” she declared slamming her hands on her hips as she leaned toward him. “You say ‘those are the touches of a lover’? Then it wouldn’t be fucking would it? It would be making love! There’s a difference,” she stated haltingly, eying him with a steely gaze. “Now what happened between us --” she motioned casually between them with her hand as she leaned back “that was fucking!!”

The piercing cries that erupted from the twins made Kathryn’s head reel. Their distress in addition to the thunderous expression marring Chakotay’s features caused her to regret her words almost instantly. She reached out to touch his chest in way of apology.

“Chakotay, I --” her hands met air as he stepped back from her.

“Exactly how many men have been between your legs tonight?! Who else, Kathryn?!” he spat out her name as if it alone was a vile act “I know Mark was supposed to visit today?” he accused.

Over her racing pulse, the fevered screams of her children and her trembling limbs, her head pounded mercilessly but like lightning her hand shot out slapping Chakotay across the face.

“Bastard! You have no say in how I live my life.” she hissed coldly, “You arrogant son of bitch”. Her head was killing her, and she was having trouble staying upright, with the children’s screaming echoing loudly in her ears and in her mind.

“I have every say in how you live your life! Especially as it affects my children! If you’re whoring yourself again – then I have every right!”

She looked at him with a puzzled and anguished expression.

“Don’t look at me like that, Kathryn. Did you really think the crew had no idea?” he taunted, “We knew, we all knew what you did. How do you explain the Devore letting us out of their space? How do you explain the countless times when a dignitary first refused us passage or supplies, but then suddenly had a change of heart once you spent a day or night alone on the planet in negotiations?” he accused.
Kathryn stumbled back, bent at the waist as if his words were a physical blow. He thought that she had... The crew thought that she had – had...

The revelation caused her breathing to become ragged and she began to tremble. She turned slightly, moving away from him. Stepping back Kathryn shook her head vehemently as he reached for her.

The house was spinning or was she spinning? Kathryn dimly heard him, speaking but couldn’t process what he was saying.

Belatedly Kathryn’s extreme emotional and physical distress registered with Chakotay and he immediately regretted his harsh words.

“Stop it.” she sobbed softly, fighting with what little strength, she had to stay upright. “Just...stop it.” Her head felt like it was in vice and the spinning was beginning to make her ill.

For the last few moments, he’d been trying to calm her down enough so that he could comfort her. But every time he approached she backed way and now she was dangerously close to the edge of the landing.

Taking a chance, he shot a hand in her direction with the intent to grab her back from the ledge.

Unexpectedly, Kathryn reared up screaming at him, twisting violently away from his grasp and for and instant it was as if she were flying. But then her head cracked against the balustrade and a blinding light exploded behind her eyes.

She felt herself tumbling for what seemed like an eternity. A howling scream, hers or Chakotay’s filled her mind until her body stopped abruptly, her head hitting hard against the floor and the cold from of the linoleum in the entryway seeping through her robe. It chilled her back as she succumbed to the encroaching darkness.

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It was the twins’ change in pitch that jolted Chakotay out of his stupor. He’d registered the escalation from whimpering to piercing screams somewhere in his being. But it was the pitch – the sheer terror he could hear in their cries that brought him out of his daze.
Chakotay recalled the rancid words he spewed at Kathryn and the resulting reaction as they hit their mark.

Spirits! What had possessed him?

And then he remembered!

Running and sliding down the stairs two at a time, he rounded the first landing only to stumble to a stop midway down the second flight of stairs.

Kathryn, the mother of his children, the woman he loved beyond life, lay in a crumpled heap at the bottom of the staircase, blood matting the auburn tresses on her temple and staining her lips.

“Spirits!” He stepped over her still form to kneel beside her “Oh Kathryn,” He was afraid to touch her, but his training kicked in, and he gently felt her neck for a pulse.

He breathed a sigh of relief when he felt a strong pulse beneath his fingers but he had to get help, and he needed to console the twins. Barely able to think straight with their escalating screams. He hurried into the hallway slapping the emergency button on the alarm system.

Due to their celebrity, he and Kathryn had previously arranged that only Voyager’s EMH would answer such a call. After what seemed like an eternity but was mere seconds, the Doctor materialized in Kathryn’s study.

“Out here, Doctor! Hurry, its Kathryn!” Chakotay yelled to be heard over the children.

Hearing the panic in Chakotay's voice and the piercing cries of the twins, the Doctor ran in the direction, of the Captain’s voice. What he saw nearly stole his holographic breath.

“She fell...” Voyager's former first officer began.

“Chakotay, go and see to the children. I’m surprised Gretchen isn't here by now. I'll see to Kathryn.” The doctor instructed as he knelt to assess her injury.
After an indeterminable period of time, Chakotay was able to quiet his children. Although he knew they sensed his regret and worry, they were calmer now that he was no longer exuding malicious thoughts against their mother. He’d just closed the nursery door when he heard movement in Kathryn’s bedroom.

Padding across the hall, his heart in his throat, he eased her door open.

Kathryn lay quietly on the bed – she appeared to be sleeping, the doctor having changed her into a night gown.

Anticipating the big man’s next question, the Doctor reported, “She’s going to be fine. The blood you saw around her head was due to a superficial wound, and she split her lip on the way down,” the Doctor reassured. “That being said, what happened?” The Doctor asked, concerned to find his former Captain and friend in this condition. Although she was unconscious, her blood pressure was through the proverbial roof, which indicated she was highly distressed at the time of her fall. And only one person could stress Kathryn Janeway to that extreme.

“We were arguing and I let my temper get the better of me. I said some pretty callous things to her.” Chakotay remorsefully recited as he stared at her small form.

“Chakotay---she did fall? You say your anger got the best of you --” the Doctor hedged.

“Spirits!” Chakotay ran a hand through his hair, “Doc, I swear she fell. I didn’t hit her. I tried to stop her but she pulled away from me and fell.” Chakotay sank to the floor, his back against Kathryn’s bed.

“How bad is she, Doctor?” he asked, looking up at the hologram.

“Like I said, she’s going to be fine. She hit her head pretty solidly – hard enough to knock herself out. But she isn’t suffering a concussion; she was awake earlier while I treated her. She sprained her wrist and ankle in the fall, which I have healed. I’ve also healed the bruising on her back and around her temple. She was complaining of a severe headache,
which must have been excruciating given her fall and the emotional state the children were in when I arrived. She was lucky, Chakotay. Extremely lucky - this could have ended much more tragically had she fallen on her neck rather than her back ---"

Chakotay shuddered at the thought.

“I've given her an analgesic for the pain and a muscle relaxant. Unfortunately, the medication could affect the children since she is breastfeeding. So, until I say otherwise you need to bottle feed them with formula.”

The Doctor closed his case and prepared to leave. “I want her to rest as much as possible, and I wouldn't be surprised if she starts to experience some lower back pain. I'll stop by tomorrow evening to check her progress. I'll see myself out.” the Doctor nodded toward the door.

Turning back to her bed, Chakotay knelt beside her, stroking her hair away from her face. He'd been a prized idiot. He couldn't help himself at the time; he'd still been fuming over his decision in the kitchen, then to have Moretti show up and her to ask him to leave them to their unfinished business. The sight of her in another man's arms and kissing him - it all just boiled over inside him. It was no excuse, but it was the best he could describe; something in him just snapped at the thought of her being intimate with any man other than himself.

And the hurtful things he'd said to her -- Spirits, how was he going to undo the damage? Kathryn prided herself on her character, not only as a Starfleet officer but as a moral person as well. She told him repeatedly over the years that she'd not sold herself for the crew. And what did he do? Throw it back in her face that he didn't believe her, that the crew didn't believe her; that in his eyes and those of her Voyager family she was nothing but a common whore.

Shit! He raked his hands through his hair as he sat with his back against her bed. All these months of slowly winning back her trust - wasted. He'd have to start over - that is if she allowed him anywhere near her, let alone to stay in her home.

While Chakotay silently berated himself, Kathryn dreamed.

_She found herself on the beach she often frequented during her Vision Quests. How had she gotten here? She walked the beach for a long while before flashes of what happened came to her._
The sky turned into a giant viewscreen as she watched the fight she had with Chakotay unfold. She saw herself falling down two flights of stairs, saw Chakotay's panic. She saw the doctor arrive, Chakotay comforting the twins. She watched and heard the conversation between Chakotay and the doctor. And through it all somehow she was privy to what Chakotay was feeling.

Suddenly she was immersed in a murky sea of regret - literally. She fought to the surface, twisting and turning; kicking and pulling her way back up from the gloomy depths of the sea. Just when she would have come up for air, she felt an undertow of self loathing wrap around her ankle and yank her deeper into the cold dark depths of the sea. Her lungs burned with the need for oxygen and her muscles were starting to cramp. She twisted and turned with all her might to break free of the undertow... and then she stopped abruptly. Her strength sapped and her air supply depleted.

Kathryn felt herself sink slowly to ocean floor. She hovered on the edge of consciousness, her eyes becoming heavy as she felt her lungs fill with the icy dank water. Without warning she found herself enveloped in a warm embrace, she recognized the sensation of being towed to the surface, as if a lifeguard were pulling her from the depths of the sea. The sensation grew and her chilled body became warm as she made her way to the surface. When her head broke the surface, her body began choking in response to her attempts for air.

She felt herself enveloped by a love so strong, so absolute that it nearly overwhelmed her. Inexplicably she sensed that the callous words Chakotay spoke to her were spoken in anger and were false in their very birth, he didn't believe she whored herself across the Delta Quadrant nor did her crew. Kathryn felt herself being carried to the shore, then gently placed on the sandy beach away from the water. She blinked and found herself standing on the beach, her clothes and hair showing no evidence of her near drowning experience. She realized then that the love she was feeling was radiating from Chakotay himself, his love for her was overpowering almost suffocating in its intensity. She couldn't breathe – she couldn't believe he felt this way about her. On the whispers of the wind that rippled around her, she heard one word echo **Believe**

Kathryn awoke suddenly, jackknifing into a sitting position in her bed, gasping for breath. Chakotay was by her side in a flash, holding her, as he whispered calming words. Once her breathing was under control and the glazed look in her eyes faded, he helped her to lean back against the pillows. His heart broke at the traumatized look in her eyes; the look was only there for a moment and then she hid the pain where he couldn't see it. Or so she thought.

“Kathryn,” he started, holding her hand in his, “do you remember what happened?”

“Yes.” she confirmed quietly, behind closed eyelids.
“Kathryn, I'm so sorry. I never should have let my anger get the better of me. I didn't mean any of it Kathryn. I'm sorry, I'm so sorry.”

She raised her hand to cup his face.

“Chakotay, it's all right. We both said things we didn't mean. I know now that you were trying to prevent me from falling. And I’m okay,” she tried to reassure him. It was strange, but she didn't feel shattered as she had before her fall - she didn't feel any of that now. She was conscious of having had the emotion, but it was no longer a living breathing entity, but rather like an old memory. She felt a sense of peace she couldn't explain, as if that was the purpose of her vision – to ensure at least one of them came out of this as unscathed as possible.

“Chakotay, how about we keep this one out of the logs – so to speak?” she asked, watching him as her thumb wiped his tears.

“Thank you, Kathryn,” he nodded, then pinned her with an intense gaze. “It won't happen again,” he vowed intensely.

“Chakotay, you were upset -” she started.

Chakotay leaned up to cup her face before gently kissing her lips. Leaning back he locked eyes with her “Never. It will never happen again.” He didn't release her until she nodded her understanding.

“Why don't you lie back for a few, with all of tonight’s – events – I know you didn't get to have your bath; you rest and I’ll prepare it for you.” Chakotay turned, heading off towards her bathroom.

She wanted to cry. He had kissed her as if he loved her. Was it possible? In her mind she heard the echo of her vision again “believe” before closing her eyes.

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AN: the song KJ sings is a rendition of Forever, For Always, For Love written by Luther Vandross, as performed by Lalah Hathaway.
Over the preceding days Kathryn heard various strange noises throughout the house, but was unable to investigate. Her fall aggravated the remaining Borg spinal clamps that the Doctor had not been able to remove after her partial assimilation; as a result she found herself on strict bed rest. She was permitted to sit up in bed or walk to the bathroom, but that was it. When it came time to feed the twins, Chakotay brought the children to her room to nurse. She was slowly going out of her mind with boredom, when the Doctor stopped by with the best news she’d heard in weeks.

“All right, I think it’s safe to move you to limited bed rest,” at the joy in her eyes the Doctor laid down his restrictions. “Firstly, you’re allowed out of bed if you promise to stay off your feet. That means sitting on the couch with your feet up. That doesn’t mean bent over a desk full of PADDs. In fact, all reports regarding the Delta Quadrant Analysis projects you were working on have been redirected to B’Elanna until such time I deem otherwise. In addition, I don’t want you lifting or carrying the twins, if they just need to be held or rocked, then that’s fine. I know you’re used to picking them up and lugging all that infant paraphernalia around – how two such small beings need that much stuff is beyond me. Follow my guidelines and I’ll release you to the Captain’s care by New Years. Do we understand each other, Admiral?” the Doctor asked.

“Fine” she sighed, knowing full well the moment he left, she planned to do otherwise.

“Good. And don’t even think about doing it behind my back. I’ve embedded a sensor chip beneath your dermis to send me hourly updates. So I’ll know if you forfeit our agreement.” The Doctor stated on his way out the door.

Leaning forward in the bed menacingly, she hissed, “You had me chipped!?”
Chakotay stepped in to save the hologram, “Kathryn, it’s for your own good. You know how you are. Besides as long as you follow the Doctor’s instructions the chip will be removed before the New Year.”

“Et tu, Chakotay?” she whispered dangerously.

“Doctor, I'll see you out.” Chakotay stated, leading the doctor from her bedroom, effectively ignoring her accusation.

After long moments, Kathryn calmed down enough to chuckle to herself. It really was her own fault that her physician didn’t trust her to keep her word. She was smiling to herself when Chakotay re-entered her bedroom.

“If you promise not to gouge my eyes out; I have a surprise for you downstairs.” he tempted from the doorway.

“Depends on the surprise. Just what have you been doing around the place while I’ve been held prisoner in my own bed?” she asked, her eyes dancing at the prospect of a surprise.

“Not until you promise, no eye gouging over the Doctor’s chip,” he looked at her expectantly, until she nodded reluctantly, only then did he lean down to her level.

Looping her arms around his neck she asked again, “What exactly have you done to my house, mister?”

He laughed at the inflection she used on the word 'my' she used the same inflection whenever she referred to Voyager as her ship.

Shaking his head as he scooped her up in his arms he teased, “You’re still like a child wheedling, you know that?”

He chuckled when she shot a mini glare his way and pursed her lips but he cut her off before she could comment.
“Close your eyes, Kathryn,” he commanded, waiting until she complied before stepping into the hallway, then making his way down the stairs to the first level of the house. He walked her into the living room and sat her on the couch facing inward toward the fireplace. “Okay, open.”

Opening her eyes, her vision filled with long ago Christmas memories. The whole room, and she suspected the entire house, was filled with Christmas decorations. Over the fireplace hung the little stockings for the twins. In the corner was a huge Douglas fir decorated with a myriad of glass and porcelain family heirloom ornaments. There were a few tattered ornaments she recognized as the handmade ornaments she created for her parents as a child. A ceramic molding of her hand print, a small navy blue felt picture frame, dotted with little silver snowflakes with her primary school picture in the center, and a candy model locomotive made of ‘Lifesaver ‘candies were just a few that she could see from her position on the couch. Atop the tree sat the angel her Father brought home one year from a deep space mission, still as pristine as the day he’d unwrapped the package and strung throughout the branches of the fir were dozens upon dozens of twinkling lights.

Her eyes traveled to the base of the tree, catching the large velvet tree skirt, the piles of wrapped presents in various shapes and sizes, and finally the model train set surrounding the base. She glanced around the room noticing the large wreath that hung above the mantle of the fireplace, there were candlesticks lighting the windowsill, a small nativity scene was displayed on the corner table, and what looked like garland wrapped the banister of the staircase. Looking up with a watery smile she reached for Chakotay’s hand.

“Thank you.” she whispered.

“I know you were worried the twins would miss their first Christmas, so I enlisted the help of a few people to get this done for you. Merry Christmas, Kathryn,” Chakotay whispered as he turned her hand to kiss her palm.

Turning her view back to the room, “I know they probably won't remember this year, but it's perfect – just perfect,” she sighed.

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Chapter 15

Indiana – One Week later – New Years Eve
Chakotay was amazed.

He simply couldn’t believe how blessed he was. His eyes darkened momentarily thinking about the fight from three weeks ago. Despite the precarious situation, Kathryn had forgiven him. He was utterly surprised, he expected her to kick him out of the house, he expected Kathryn to kick him out of her life, out of his children’s lives; never had he expected her to forgive him so wholeheartedly.

Shaking his head he marveled at her resilience, although he shouldn’t have been surprised. He’d seen her survive all sorts of catastrophes, impossible injuries, and unspeakable tragedies over the years, but this was different. This wasn’t a situation caused by a hostile enemy or strange anomaly; this attack came from within her own home.

Furrowing his brow, he thought over their interactions since ‘the incident’. Remarkably, Kathryn hadn’t seemed as guarded as she had previously; there was still an uncertainty that he sensed from time to time, as if she was unsure of what he wanted from her.

Shaking his head to clear his mind of the depressing thoughts he instead focused on the woman sitting across from him. After goading her for the last week, he’d finally been able to persuade Kathryn to leave the twins with Gretchen for the evening. He explained that they needed some adult time, now that the twins were weaned, what better way than to share that time together on New Year’s Eve and what better place to spend New Year’s Eve than at Lake George.

Unbeknownst to Kathryn, the idea had surprisingly come from Gretchen.

During the course of the Christmas day, he caught Gretchen staring in his direction more than once and wondered what the older woman was up to; especially when she showed him a cryptic lopsided grin.

Later that evening she mysteriously disappeared for an hour or so before sidling up to him to slip an old fashioned fob key into his hand.

Chakotay looked first to her and then the key questioningly, until she said, “Kathryn has always enjoyed Lake George this time of year, especially on New Year’s,” Chakotay couldn’t believe what he was hearing and looked around the lounge to see if anyone else had heard Gretchen’s soft remark.

His eyes landed on Phoebe and B’Elanna huddled in the far corner. When both women grinned in his direction, he realized a mutiny of sorts was afoot. It was Phoebe who approached him under the guise of refilling his glass of punch.
“I see Mother delivered. I’m not one for subtlety, that’s more Kathryn’s style than mine. So I’ll be blunt – She loves you, Chakotay. But she’s scared. After everything – Voyager, a woman named Riley, Seven of Nine, the twins, and whatever happened three weeks ago - she doesn’t know where she stands with you,” Phoebe touched her chest with her palm, “I think you love her; B’Elanna thinks you love her and so does Mother. I hear you’re a master tactician, so I think it’s high time you used those skills, and your other obvious…” she paused a moment to salaciously rake her eyes up and down his form before continuing “…charms to your advantage. Consider this a Christmas present from the Janeway clan.” And then she was gone just as swiftly as she had approached.

“What are you thinking?” Kathryn’s soft voice cut into his musings, her hand lightly touching his fingers across the dinner table.

“How beautiful you look tonight,” he answered.

“Liar,” she smiled slightly, before eying him across the table.

Chakotay laughed to himself. Only Kathryn had the ability to affect him in this manner simply by changing the pitch of her voice. And he loved her all the more for it. He sobered for a moment, wondering how he was going to do this.

“What? What is it, Chakotay? You obviously have something on your mind.” Kathryn questioned.

Raising his head Chakotay locked eyes with her, before reaching to take her hand in his across the table.

“I’m just trying to figure out how to say this,” he admitted cryptically, as his thumb softly grazed her knuckles.

“I love you. I’m in love with you,” he finally breathed.

Shock registered in her eyes as she sat back against her chair and she shook her head slowly as if in disbelief.
“No,” she whispered “No, you’re not,” sad grey eyes looked at him, “I think our sharing a house and jointly raising the twins has...clouded your judgment in that regard.”

Chakotay wondered if she was aware that her eyes changed color with her moods.

“And I think the mere possibility terrifies you.” he challenged.

She scoffed at the idea, “Chakotay, you fall in love so easily it makes my head spin.”

He knew her acerbic tone was a defense mechanism and chose not take the bait. Instead, he tightened his hold on her hand when she tried to pull free of his grasp.

“The only woman I’ve ever truly fallen in love with is you,” he declared passionately.

Kathryn’s head, cautioned her to proceed carefully; it warned her that to accept his words would lead to disaster. Her heart on the other hand, wanted to grab him with both hands and never let go. However, her habit of self preservation kicked in.

“Fine. You say you’re in love with me. How do you know? How can you be sure?” she challenged.

Typical Kathryn, never willing to give up without a fight, Chakotay smiled at her indulgently.

“I can’t explain love, Kathryn, Love is just...love” he whispered.

Her eyes glimmered in the candlelit of the dinner table. “Try,” she breathed.

Caressing her knuckles, Chakotay looked down at the table momentarily before raising his eyes to hers and cocking his head to the side.

“How do I know I’m in love with you? Kathryn, if I’m away from you for any length of time I can’t stop thinking about you. I carry you in my spirit,” he paused to inhale deeply, “You’re my air,” he breathed. “I love you so much, that beyond my better judgment I would grow you your own personal coffee plantation just to make sure you never ran out of the rancid stuff; simply because I know how much you love it.” She granted him a rare full smile, one that lit
up her entire face. “And when you smile like that...” he huffed a breath as he squeezed her hand “I am in love with you.”

Not accustomed to the depths of love she saw in his dark eyes, Kathryn slowly rose from the table, her hand slipping from his grasp, to stand near the glass doors leading to the patio; her back to the man across the room. She bowed her head, wrapping her arms around herself, as if she were desperately cold.

Chakotay knew what Kathryn was trying to do, even in the face of him flat out telling her that he loved her and only her. He approached her slowly, so as not to startle her. Placing his hands on her shoulders, he pulled her back against his chest so that her head was tucked under his chin. He wrapped his arms around her from behind, hugging her to him; he felt Kathryn stiffen for an instant and then melt into his embrace. They stood that way watching the lake and the stars for an unknown period of time before he turned her to face him.

“Do you love me, Kathryn?” He asked softly. Her eyes begged him not to ask her that question. “My heart, my spirit says that you do. But I need to hear you say it,” he beseeched, caressing her cheek.

She pulled back slightly shaking her from side to side, “You have no idea what you’re asking, Chakotay. Every man I’ve ever said--” she couldn’t seem to bring herself to say the words.

“Kathryn, I can’t promise that I won’t die. Neither of us knows what the next day or next hour will bring, but what I can promise you is that I will fight with my last breath to stay on this plane of existence with you.” Cupping her face in his large hands, he locked eyes with her “I can absolutely promise that I won’t ever give up on you, I will never willingly walk away from you - I won’t do what Mark did to you - and I can promise I won’t let you settle for less than the very best in our lives. I will never intentionally hurt you, Kathryn. You’ll never have to ‘prove’ your love for me. But I need to hear the words.”

She hesitated for a few seconds, “I – I do love you, Chakotay. More than I have loved anyone in my life,” she confessed with a ragged breath.

“Thank you, Beloved,” he whispered pulling her back into his warm embrace and dropping a kissing on her temple. “Come on” he suggested leading her toward the couch against the wall. He knew she had been tired before dinner and their latest emotional pow-wow had further worn her out.
“Rest for a bit, I’ll clear the table and get some Champagne for our midnight toast,” he suggested, helping her prop her feet up on a pillow, before grabbing the chenille throw off the back of the couch to cover her.

For once Kathryn didn’t argue. She’d been slightly fatigued prior to dinner and now she felt exhausted. Laying length-ways on the couch she allowed herself to drift as she listened to Chakotay move about the lounge and kitchen areas of the cabin.

When he finished with the kitchen, Chakotay took a moment to watch Kathryn sleep. She looked so peaceful like this; years of hardship seemed to just disappear. Moving her hair away from her eyes he marveled at the softness of her auburn tresses. And for the first time since he’d met her, he took notice of her matching auburn eyelashes. Why had he never noticed before? Well, they’d have all the time in the world to relearn the little things about each other. He watched her a while longer before getting up to retrieve the Champagne and glasses; after all it was nearly midnight.

Kathryn woke to the sound of glasses clinking and the soft ‘pop’ of a cork. Stretching she sat up on the couch and blinked the sleep out of her eyes, before running a hand through her hair. Looking over her shoulder she could see Chakotay pouring their champagne. She smiled in his direction before rising to meet him in front of the glass patio doors.

“It’s almost time,” he said as she drowsily made her way toward him. He chuckled at the picture she presented, she reminded him of Amaya when the little girl was fighting sleep.

Chakotay turned her toward the patio doors embracing her from behind as he had earlier in the evening before handing her a glass. Leaning back against his broad chest with her eyes closed, Kathryn absentmindedly accepted the glass with her left hand. Watching the reflection of the clock in the glass, Chakotay began the countdown to the New Year.

“10...9... 8...7...6...5...4...3...2...1 – Happy New Year, Kathryn,” he spoke softly, kissing her temple, as they watched fireworks light the night sky.

Kathryn smiled, “Happy New Year, Chakotay,” she stated. Raising her glass above her shoulder to toast against his before arching her neck back to accept his lips against hers, moaning softly when the kiss ended. Settling back against his chest Kathryn closed her eyes as she brought the flute to her lips, savoring the liquid as it exploded across her taste buds.

“Mmmmm, this is delicious,” she purred, lazily opening her eyes as she withdrew the flute from her lips. After watching the fireworks in the distance, she focused her vision instead on their reflection in the glass. She saw and felt Chakotay’s hand flatten against her belly as
he pulled her further into his embrace; she lolled her head to the side as he kissed across her shoulder and up her neck. She took another sip of Champagne as his hands slid down her sides. Lowering the glass, she caught a glimpse of something shiny out of her peripheral vision. Due to the distraction of Chakotay's nuzzling it took her a full minute to realize that the glint she'd seen was her hand. A minute more and she gasped as she realized the glittering wasn't actually her hand, but rather her finger, more precisely the diamond on her finger.

He knew the moment the ring registered with Kathryn and slowly took her flute to ensure she didn't drop the crystal heirloom. He'd placed the ring on her finger while she slept. Chakotay was surprised she hadn't noticed it the moment she woke. He watched her stare at her hand in disbelief, as if the appendage didn't belong there. Long moments later she stared at his reflection with shocked eyes. Turning in his arms she looked up at him, her eyes silently begging the question before her lips voiced her thoughts.

“Cha-ko-tay? Wha--” he interrupted her as if she hadn't spoken.

“Kathryn, you’ve been through so much in your life; lived with unimaginable guilt, grief and loss. Unfortunately, I know that I’ve been the cause of some of that grief and I can’t begin to describe how it pains me to know that,” he shared as he held her hands in his. “I don’t ever want to see you hurt in that manner again. I can’t go back and undo what you’ve gone through - what I have put you through - but I do know if you let me - I can love you past your pain. I don't want you to have worry about anything. You just wake up in the morning. That’s all you have to do, and I'll take it from there.” He spoke passionately, before whispering, “There's just one condition, you have to be my wife.”

She stared at him with tumultuous eyes, unbelieving what she was hearing.

After long, breathless moments she heard him say, “Sweetheart, breathe.” She obeyed his command inhaling deeply, but had yet to speak. “Say something, Kathryn,” he urged taking her in his arms.

Releasing a sigh, she whispered softly, “Okay.”

Chakotay couldn’t believe that’s all she had to say on the matter, he smiled a wide grin despite himself, “Okay?” he asked hopefully.

Nodding once she smiled a full smile, threading her fingers through his hair before pulling his head down mere inches from her lips, she whispered her previous reply “Okay.”
Resting his hands on her hips, Chakotay pulled her pelvis against his as he leaned forward to kiss her.

Kathryn twined her arms around his neck; her fingers stroked his nape as the warmth of his kiss suffused her being. His moist soft lips moved lovingly over her willing mouth, as his hands seductively smoothed up her spine before she felt his fingers tangle in her hair; holding her to him as he devoured her.

Chakotay was drowning under a hypnotic trance, evoked by Kathryn's responsiveness. What started as a gentle kiss was quickly escalating into one of passion.

Chakotay growled slightly as Kathryn trapped his lower lip between her teeth briefly, before sucking his lip into her mouth, her tongue salving the area. The action caused him to grind his pelvis against hers as he tangled his fingers possessively in her auburn tresses. Easing out of the kiss, Chakotay pulled her head back, arching her neck and forcing her arms from around his neck to be trapped between their torsos, as he showered kisses on her exposed throat. He smiled as he hit his mark, feeling her body shiver in his arms and her fingers curl into his shirt.

Kathryn felt him grin against her neck before he marked her throat. She chuckled inwardly at the action; he seemed to have a ‘thing’ for doing that. Unfurling her fingers Kathryn covertly tugged his shirt free of his trousers, slipping the buttons loose before running her hands up his chest; her fingertips learning the muscles under the velvet of his golden skin.

She moaned softly as Chakotay reclaimed her lips, possessively running his hands over her buttocks cupping her flesh repeatedly.

Skimming her hands up over his torso she was able to slip his shirt off his shoulders. Over and over again she ran her fingers over his smooth chest, her thumbs circling his flatten nipples before moving her hands to slide over his arms, squeezing the muscles that rippled under her touch.

Chakotay couldn't get enough of her. He wanted to explore every inch of her; to kiss her senseless, and watch her climax beneath his fingers in the starlight. He wanted to push her against the glass and fuck her while all of Lake George watched. Growling, he cupped her buttocks again, kneading the flesh as he slid his thigh between her legs. He heard Kathryn groan in the back of her throat as he continued to kiss her.
She broke the kiss and threw her head back slightly, her breathing heavy as she ground her pubis against his leg with her head thrown back slightly. He loved seeing her this way, so unashamedly abandoned.

Her brow furrowed for a moment before she raised her eyes to meet his, they were dark with arousal as she gazed at him. She pulled at his shirt again and he momentarily released his hold on her to let the shirt drop to the floor, then watched as she leaned into his chest dropping wet kisses on his torso and her lithe fingers made short work of the fasteners of his trousers. While her fingers slowly slid the zipper of his pants down, her tongue swirled around his flat nipples.

Groaning he grasped her shoulders, pulling her back up to him to kiss her again.

The heat of his kiss suffused her body again as Chakotay pulled her flush against him, evidence of his arousal pressing into her belly. Kathryn gripped his buttocks pulling him even closer to her as she rocked her lower body against his hips, lost in a haze of arousal, love, and lust. As he turned them and walked her backward, Kathryn distantly she recognized that they were moving deeper into the cabin.

Chakotay continued to distract her with his kisses and caresses. Taking the time to stop every now and then to push her against a wall or doorjamb, fanning her arousal even further as he dry humped her feverishly before pulling her away from the surface to continue their journey through the cabin.

Kathryn eased out of the kiss to look at her new surroundings. Chakotay had managed to maneuvered them from the front of the house, up several winding stairs, down the hallway and around the corner to the master bedroom.

She stood back from him with a lopsided grin.

“Impressive,” was all she muttered before trailing her hand across his chest, as she circled behind him.

“I aim to please,” Chakotay moaned, as he felt her breasts press against his back.

Kathryn hugged him from behind, deliberately allowing her aroused nipples to dig into his back as her fingertips trailed over the front of his torso. Pressing kisses along his back, she slowly skimmed her fingers into the waistband of his pants and boxers, and then hooking her fingers in belt loop of the slacks, she slowly peeled the clothing off his body. Her breasts
dragged down the length his back as she lowered his pants, her foot pushed them the rest of the way down as she smoothed her nipples up his back. She felt him groan as her fingers stroked his engorged length.

“Hmmm...we'll see,” she husked, curling her fingers around him.

Growling, Chakotay eased her hands away from him as he turned to face her. His nostrils flared dangerously as his dark eyes raked over her. Stepping forward slightly to rid himself of his cumbersome slacks, he reached for her around the waist bringing her hips in line with his own.

He leaned down to whisper in her ear “You’re over dressed,” before kissing her passionately as his hands smoothed the zipper of her dress down the expanse of her back. Kissing her shoulder, he let the first strap of the material fall, leaning down further to lick the top of her breasts. He held her tightly to him as she arched her back, holding his head to her chest as he licked and sucked on the creamy mounds offered to him. Shifting slightly he allowed the rest of the dress to fall away from her body. Hooking a finger in the fabric of her panties he yanked once and was pleased to note the garment was now balled in his fist.

Kathryn gasped, her eyes wide with the knowledge he’d just ripped her panties from her body; she jumped slightly when she felt his fingers playing in the wetness between her thighs.

Chakotay delighted in her reaction as he began to turn them in the direction of the bed. Lowering her onto the soft covers, Chakotay hovered over her, enjoying the view she presented. Alabaster skin glowed in contrast to dark sheets, silky tresses fanned in an auburn halo beneath her head as she panted, naked save for the lace bra partially hanging off her frame. Her eyes were heavy with desire as he leaned down to smooth the creases in her brow before he kissed her deeply.

Kathryn was floating on the heights of her arousal as she savored his mouth on hers. His tongue dueled with hers as he deepened the kiss, running his hands over her breasts as she moaned beneath him. She felt him begin to kiss her neck, slowly making his way down her torso. Kathryn arched her back, grateful now that she’d decided to wean the twins, as she enjoyed the sensation as his hot mouth engulf her engorged breast; humming as she held his head to her, as he licked and sucked.

Chakotay released her nipple with a wet ‘pop’ as he sat up to watch her. Under heavy lids, Kathryn continued to knead her other breast as the slim fingers of her free hand reached between her legs to disappear beneath her auburn curls. She smiled wickedly at the way his penis twitched towards her as he licked his lips.
Chakotay began to kiss the inside of her leg as he smoothed his hands up her body until he reached the hand that was clamped tightly between her thighs. Removing her hand, he raised her fingers to his mouth, enthusiastically sucking her wetness from each finger at the same time inhaling her heady scent. Her eyes darkened with the action and her panting became more pronounced.

Chakotay leaned down to kiss the inside of her thighs as his hands traveled down their previous path. Leaning back slightly and placing a hand on each of her knees, he gently encouraged her to spread her thighs.

“Spread your legs, Kathryn,” he commanded when she hesitated.

The command reaching her befuddled mind, she slowly opened her legs to his inspection.

“Beautiful,” he breathed as he leaned his face between her legs, inhaling her scent once more. Leaning back to watch her, Chakotay parted her labia with his fingers, spreading her wetness around.

“Mmmm” she moaned, slightly as he watched her head loll to the side, while she tweaked her nipples.

Without warning he latched onto her womanhood with his mouth, sucking and licking greedily at her most sensitive area. His assault having the desired effect, Kathryn bucked wildly beneath him as he continued laving her, forcefully prying her legs apart as he manipulated her flesh with his fingers, teeth and tongue until he felt her tense. Inserting his tongue into her vagina, he laved her nectar until his neck hurt from the position. His chin dripped with her fluids as he raised his mouth away from her. Positioning his member at her entrance, Chakotay coated his turgid penis in her wetness before gently pushing his way inside her body. Cradling her head in his large hands Chakotay leaned forward to kiss her as he rocked his hips against hers. He kissed her, groaning as he increased the pace, moving deeper and deeper within her; pushing and stretching her womanhood to accommodate his girth. Suddenly, Chakotay gripped her hips and began to pound into her with a furiousness neither of them expected as he hammered into her supple body.

Kathryn purred as he slipped deeply into her body. She could feel her orgasm approaching and she strained for it; panting open mouthed, gripping his shoulders while stretching her neck and arching her back. She was so close, but it wasn’t enough and she growled in frustration. In one fluid movement she flipped them so that Chakotay was now beneath her. Sensing his surprise, she lunged forward to claim his mouth. She kissed, licked and nibbled
at his lips; not once had they broken stride, he was still deeply embedded and her sex felt deliciously full.

"God, Cha-ko-tay" she moaned grinding her hips against his; riding him as she tossed her head back.

This was what he wanted; to watch her wantonly ride him. Many a fantasy centered on watching Kathryn make love to him passionately. He marveled at her beauty and reveled in the softness of her skin as he stroked her legs. Pulling her head down for another savage kiss, sucking her lower lip into his mouth, he began to knead her buttocks as she rose up and down. Kathryn leaned back from the kiss and looked at him with a smoldering passion that he'd always suspected she was capable of. He wondered why she moved sitt further away on him, that's when he noticed she was touching herself as she rode him; he watched her stroke her belly, sides, cup her breasts and pinch her nipples before her hand raised to play in her hair while her free hand rubbed the spot above where they were joined.

He licked his lips at the sight of her toying with her nipples and then smoothing her other hand lower to rub at her clit. He tried to sit up but she firmly pushed him back and shook her head slightly. Chakotay watched as she ran her hands in circles along her hips and thighs, noticing the arc was widening until he could feel her hand cup his balls behind her. His head fell back at the sensation, now watching her through hazy eyes.

Kathryn cupped him a moment more, and then separated her cheeks as far as they would go before slamming down on his manhood again. The action actually caused his eyes to roll closed as he gripped her tightly against him and thrust upward.

She ground down against him in a circular motion pivoting back and forward; effectively riding his hard length embedded within her body. He kept one hand resting on her waist guiding her movements. Then, she felt his mouth on her breasts again as his fingers moved to the spot where they were joined. She continued the pace as she felt his fingers rubbing against her sensitive clit. Kathryn gasped and then gave a throaty moan, throwing her head back as she rode him faster.

Chakotay continued to rub her clitoris as he thrust upward into her movements. She could feel the tension coil tightly in her belly just before her inner walls clamped down around his length, she shuttered and bucked violently against him, a husky groan tearing from her throat. After a moment she collapsed on his chest breathing heavily.

Slicking the sweat down her back, Chakotay kissed her temple as he cupped her buttocks; slowly raising and lowering her on his length, delighting in her shivers at the action.
Long moments after her second orgasm, Kathryn realized that Chakotay was still hard. He was effectively massaging her into another orgasm. She sat up in disbelief.

“You're still —”

He brought her mouth to his for a deep kiss, before whispering. “I told you I aim to please.”

She gasped as he rolled her beneath him. She scrambled back from him, wincing at the action as he prowled toward her.

Grabbing one of her ankles, Chakotay effortlessly flipped her onto her stomach. Leaning on top of her, he began to kiss the expanse of her neck. Then down her back stopping to lick the slight dimple at the base of her spine, before kissing and sucking her buttocks. Grasping her waist he hoisted her onto her knees as he leaned forward to lick her womanhood. He licked and sucked her into frenzy before positioning his length between her swollen pink folds, grasping her hips he surged forward into her silken body.

The action caused Kathryn to moan, arching her back slightly. Chakotay continued to drop little kisses on her back as he rode her. He delighted in the way Kathryn pushed her ass against his pelvis. A wicked thought occurred to him, another of his fantasies. He leaned forward, draping his body over hers, allowing his hands to cup a breast as his finger massaged her clit as he thrust into repeatedly for several moments. Suddenly he stopped. He leaned back on his haunches still embedded in her womanhood, but didn’t move. Kathryn whimpered at this and began to move her ass back and forward, effectively riding his length, bringing herself closer to climax, after a few strokes he grabbed her hips to stop her.

“What do you want Kathryn?” he rasped.

She tried to buck beneath him to convey her desire, but received a smack across her bottom for the action.

She growled harshly looking over her shoulder; her arms were shaking from the effort of having to hold herself up.

Dark eyes glittered at her as she furrowed her brow, not entirely sure where he was going.
“What do you want Kathryn” he asked darkly gripping her hips firmly as he bucked into her solidly.

“Mmmm” she bowed her head against the mattress at the sensation. “You” she breathed.

Chakotay leaned forward again whispering in her ear. “Nine years ago, I asked you a question. You never did answer it to my liking, Kathryn.” He surged into her again, causing her to whimper at his deep penetration. “And after all these years it looks like you are willing to serve under me,” he taunted as he pounded into her forcefully.

“Chakotay --” she gasped as his fingers tweaked her clit again.

“Beg, Kathryn,” he ordered as he wound the length of her hair in his fist, gently pulling her head back. “Beg” he licked the side of her neck just below her ear, then he thrust into her again as he nipped her neck.

“Puh, puhlease, Chakotay” Kathryn begged.

“Please, what?” Chakotay taunted “What do you want?”

Licking her lips, unsure if this was he was trying to coax from her she husked, “Fuck me.”

Growling Chakotay released her hair and pressed her shoulders to the mattress, “I’m going to fuck you until you can’t walk, Kathryn.” Chakotay’s growled as he lunged into her warm depths.

The action caused her to yelp at the intrusion and Chakotay smiled as he ran his hands over her buttocks, spreading her cheeks, revealing the rosebud of her anus while he pumped in and out of her. He was close, the realization that he was inside Kathryn Janeway, that she agreed to be his wife, and the fact that she was actively participating in their loving making, caused his member to swell further.

He could feel her hand on his hip, pulling him closer to her body; he felt her slim fingers reach beneath him to cup his scrotum. He groaned loudly as her fingers rolled and kneaded his sack before pressing a finger into the space just beneath his penis pushing firmly as her fingers made circular motion. Fire licked up from the back of his legs as he gripped her hips tightly before roaring his release.
As Chakotay recovered from his climax he realized Kathryn was still trapped in the throes of her orgasm, he felt her breathing heavily, almost whimpering from the force of the tension in her body, reaching around he massaged her clit feverishly with one hand while massaging her breast with the other. Leaning back, taking her with him as he continued to stroke her lovingly. Tears were on her cheeks as she lolled her head against his shoulder.

“Let go love,” he encouraged, “you’re so beautiful, sweetheart. I just can’t get enough of you; the feel of you surrounding me,” he coaxed her as he caressed her body, biting down on her earlobe as he pinched her nipple, he commanded “Come for me, Kat”

With a strangled scream that could have been his name, he held her as the climax ripped through her. She bucked and shivered violently until slowly becoming limp in his arms. Enjoying the feel of her, Chakotay held her to his body for long moments, kissing her forehead; then her eyelids.

Not receiving a response from her, Chakotay lowered them to the bed laying her on her back as he mapped her body with his hands.

He began by stroking across her collarbone then trailed his fingertips down her torso between her breasts. His hands slid over her ribs briefly then down to her navel. He rested his hands on the slight pouch of her tummy; remembering the precious cargo once carried there; before trailing his finger lower to tangle in the auburn curls between the apex of her legs.

Chakotay began to suspect that her climax had rendered her unconscious, it had been a few minutes and she still had yet to respond to his touch. He allowed his fingers to play in the moisture he found between her thighs, slowly spreading the liquid around before dipping two fingers into her womanhood. Rhythmically he stroked in and out of her vagina before scissoring his fingers inside her body; causing the woman beneath to moan softly. He watched with hot eyes as he continued to stroke her. Leaning back on his haunches he used his other hand to stroke himself, pumping his member until he once again stood erect before moving up her body.

“Kathryn?” he called as he kissed her, “Open your eyes, sweetheart”

“Mmmm, wha? What happened?” she asked as she opened her eyes to see Chakotay’s worried expression; dimly aware that she felt physically occupied.
“You were out of it for a minute-you fainted.” He stated, kissing her deeply.

“So are you pleased?” Chakotay asked showing his dimples as he thrust three thick digits into her slick folds.

“Mmmm... you've just told me I fainted after my orgasm. I can tell you that has never happened before.” Reaching up she traced his tattoo, looking at him uncertainly, “What about you? I'm not ---mhhff”

Chakotay silenced her with a passionate kiss as he rolled on top of her, sliding his hands into her hair as he cupped her head, pressing his burgeoning erection into her belly.

Raising his lips from her mouth, he breathed, “Don’t ever doubt yourself Kathryn, you’re intoxicating. I meant what I said earlier, I can’t get enough of you,” he declared, slipping his rigid penis between her swollen folds.

Twin groans filled the room as he rocked against her.

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Epilogue

Indiana - Ten years later ..... 

“Aiden! Maya! Breakfast!” Kathryn called upstairs before heading back into the kitchen.

She shook her head slightly as she heard the thundering noise of her ten year old twins running down the hall of the second floor. Telepathically she chided the children for running and reminded them to walk. The running on floorboards stopped immediately, as her children telepathically chorused a “Yes, Mom.”

Kathryn smiled to herself thinking how far the children had come with their abilities. The family hadn’t made it public knowledge of the children’s gifts. Only close family and friends were aware the twins weren't completely human; the circle of friends included their Voyager family as well. In fact, it was no small feat that the twins and Tuvok survived the many training sessions held over the years. Between Aiden’s stubbornness and Amaya’s incessant curiosity it was a wonder that Voyager’s former head of security hadn't written
her children off as terrorists to his sanity. Tuvok wasn’t the only tutor in relation to Aiden and Amaya’s empathetic and telepathic abilities, Deanna Troi assisted a great deal as well. She offered the twins sound insight on coping with the knowledge they were different from many of their human classmates.

Two years ago, the twins turned eight they began to exhibit traits of telekineseses. One night, Kathryn was reaching for a book but found that the added height of her tiptoes just wasn’t going to get the job done. Aiden, who had been completing his mathematics homework at the time, calmly looked from his mother to the bookcase sensing which novel her mother wanted. Kathryn watched her son squint in her direction and soon the book was sliding out of its housing on the shelf, wobbling a bit before landing in her outstretched palms.

Her children weren’t alone in the continued development of psionic gifts. Over the years with Deanna and Tuvok's help, Kathryn learned to communicate telepathically with her children. She still had the ability to comfort them empathetically but found as the children aged telepathic communication was more effective. She had the ability to project messages now, whereas she’d been unable to do so when the children were babies.

Kathryn developed the ability to link mentally with her children for short distances, even if they weren't in her direct line of sight. She recalled the time Amaya wondered off at the zoo; the child’s curiosity piqued by something she’d seen. Kathryn and Chakotay were panicked when thirty minutes later they were still unable to locate their daughter. Kathryn decided to try a technique Tuvok helped her to develop, despite the fact that the Vulcan warned her she was not ready to do so safely without his assistance.

To calm her thoughts Kathryn inhaled deeply, closed her eyes, and attempted to silence the thoughts of the population in the attempt to locate the small still voice of her daughter. The endeavor exhausted her to the point of near collapse, but when she finally opened her eyes, she was able to tell Chakotay where he would find Amaya. Fifteen minutes later, as Kathryn attempted to regain her strength, Chakotay returned with their daughter in his arms, as the child chattered animatedly. Kathryn recalled the tears she cried later that night as they tucked Amaya and her new stuffed koala bear into bed. It seemed that as the twins’ abilities matured, Kathryn’s abilities did as well.

Stepping out onto the back patio, Kathryn raised a hand to shield her eyes from the sun as she searched the landscape for Chakotay. She finally eyed his form walking back from the creek that ran the edge of their property. Leaning against the banister of the porch she smiled as her thoughts drifted to their wedding years ago.

They’d decided on a small ceremony, just Gretchen, Phoebe, Sekaya, Tom, B’Elanna, the magistrate and themselves. Of course there was no way to keep the reception as quiet. Tom
and B’Elanna surprised them with a backyard garden reception, complete with billowing tents, glowing tea lights and their entire extended Voyager family.

After the initial dance as husband and wife, it seemed as if everyone wanted to dance with the bride and groom. The Delaney sisters promptly descended upon the groom whereas Antonio took her hand and twirled her in the opposite direction.

As they danced, Antonio offered his congratulations and again extended an invitation for them to come to Italy for their honeymoon. Kathryn began to object to his invite when Antonio pulled her close to kiss her cheek. Telling her to consider a week at the villa as his wedding gift to her. Pulling back from her, Antonio held her away at arms length, looking her over before sagely nodding his head.

Before they left the reception for the evening, Kathryn recalled seeing Chakotay and Antonio speaking quietly on the edge of the party. She couldn’t hear what was being said, but she saw them both look her direction before turning towards each other to clasp forearms. She saw Antonio pulled Chakotay close to him, his eyes were intense as the two men spoke. Chakotay nodded to whatever Antonio said before the two men released each other. Kathryn continued to watch as the two men each raised a glass of what appeared to be bourbon, toasting something.

After draining his drink, Antonio clapped Chakotay on the back as he looked in her direction. Ever so slightly he bowed toward her and turned to join the party again. Kathryn never did find out what the two of them spoke of.

Later that night as they prepared for bed Kathryn asked Chakotay what he and Antonio had discussed at the reception. Chakotay was vague in his explanation, citing ‘Men’s Business’, before pulling her against him for a passionate kiss. She tried to ask again, but his hands sliding down her back to cup her bottom as he slipped a masculine thigh between her legs distracted her for the rest of the evening and well into the next morning.

“Mmmm... do I need to maim anyone today?” Chakotay asked jokingly from the bottom of the porch.

“Hm ... what?” Kathryn asked distractedly.

“Just who is my wife thinking of, that has her looking like the cat that ate the canary? Should I be worried?” He prompted.
Kathryn caught her lower lip between her teeth as she eyed him properly. Chakotay was wearing a faded button down work shirt that was only buttoned halfway with jeans and somewhere between the house and creek he’d forgone shoes.

She inhaled deeply before answering playfully, “Maybe...just a little,” as he prowled toward her shaking his head.

“Really?” He drawled, pulling her close for a kiss.

They were lost in each other for a few glorious moments until Kathryn ended the kiss abruptly. Turning in his arms she glanced toward the kitchen door, before dropping her head to his chest.

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Chakotay laughed aloud as Kathryn kissed his jaw before waltzing back inside the house. From his position on the porch he could hear Aiden and Amaya laughing uncontrollably and wondered what the twins were into now. Stepping forward he’d just entered the doorway when he heard saw a flash of red drop out of his line of sight, the very same moment something warm and very sticky collided with his chest.

The projectile, that was still stuck to his chest appeared to be an entire plate of Kathryn's banana pancakes. Raising his eyes he could see the kitchen was indeed destroyed. Flour, banana slices, blueberries, and powder sugar adorned the cabinets, counters, floor and walls. It looked as if a bakery had imploded inside the kitchen. And at the epicenter of the blast were his delinquents.

Amaya had apparently pelted her older brother with blueberries and flour, while Aiden had opted to retaliate with powdered sugar and mushy banana slices. What should have
surprised him, but didn’t, was the fact that their hands were too clean to have had this food fight the old fashioned way. Nope, his children decided to start a food fight telekinetically. During his inspection, the children burst into laughter.

As the sticky projectile slid down his chest, Chakotay heard a snicker from the floor in front of him. Kathryn was taking cover behind the kitchen island as she gazed up at him. Ah, that explains the flash of red he’d seen. Although his wife had been able to dodge the flying pancakes she looked as if she’d been hit by a blizzard. Powdered sugar coated to her neck, face and hair. Oh yeah, Kathryn laugh it up, he thought to himself.

From her position on the floor Kathryn couldn’t help but chortle at Chakotay. When she entered the house she’d found herself on the receiving end of all sort of baking ingredients. It was only a split second later that she sensed Aiden tossing the plate of pancakes in her direction and ducked just in the nick of time. She really shouldn’t snicker at her husband, his eyes promised all sorts of retaliation as stood from her hiding place.

“Dad -”

“Dad -”

The twins chorused. As Kathryn slowly backed her way deeper into the kitchen toward the hall.

Chakotay held up his hand before addressing his family, “I don’t want to know. Just clean it up,” he stated, as he made his way through the mess barefoot.

Turning to Kathryn he stated, “I’m feeling generous, so I’ll give you a ten second head start.”

With that Kathryn turned and took off for the stairs. Chakotay’s voice echoing close behind her, “Have this mess cleaned up by the time we come back down.”

Aiden and Amaya chuckled together listening to their father chase their mother upstairs. They always enjoyed seeing their parents like this. Playful with one another.

Suddenly, they heard their mother shriek from the second level, then a thud coming form their parents bedroom, before hearing the timber of their father’s laugh.
Fin.