Seventeen years, seventy thousand light years and some, Chakotay finally lands Kathryn Janeway. This is a family saga spanning the first ten years after their return to the Alpha Quadrant.
Chapter 1

Kathryn’s jaw dropped. Her face turned a very peculiar shade of pink, and her eyes bulged in outrage.

"No, Chakotay! Never! You must be out of your mind, if you think I would ever agree to something like that. This is the most appalling thing you have ever asked of me!"

Chakotay was momentarily stunned by her reaction. He had expected some opposition, even outright refusal. That’s why he’d come alone to make the request. But he had never anticipated that she would react with so much horror. He shifted uneasily on his feet.

"I’m sorry, Kathryn. I hadn’t expected you to find the idea so abhorrent. I thought…we thought…it just might be something a close friend might do for people she cares about. Annika has no close living relative to ask, and she cares for you like a sister."

Kathryn brushed the hair back from her forehead with a shaky hand, trying desperately to control herself. She was struggling to find the words to respond. She stared in disbelief at her former first officer. This was the man she had loved for a long time…still did, if she was honest with herself. She had hoped for a future with him when they got back from the Delta Quadrant, but by the time they’d reached earth, he’d started a relationship with Seven. This was something she had forced herself to accept. She had swallowed her pride, and tried hard to stay friends with them for Seven’s sake. At great personal cost to herself, she had even married them, but this latest request went far beyond what she should humanly be expected to endure.

"You think I’d want to stand back and watch somebody else raise my child?"

He had the grace to look a little embarrassed. "Well, of course you’d be able to visit as often as you like…take as much or as little interest as you want. We’d love you to be godmother, aunt…whatever…" She snorted quietly in derision, before fixing him with an icy glare.

"Are you stupid or something? Don’t you realise, Chakotay…I’d want to be its mother!" Chakotay gasped. He’d obviously hit a raw nerve. He had no idea that she still held such a strong yearning for motherhood. No wonder their request was filling her with horror. He was bitterly regretting having asked it now. In fact, he was hoping the ground would swallow him up.

"I’m sorry," he said eventually, "I had no idea you felt so strongly. I would never have asked, if I’d known. I guess the answer’s no then. I’ll do my best to explain it to Annika. She’ll be disappointed, but somehow I’ll make her understand." Kathryn didn’t respond to this. She stood by the office window, breathing heavily, and he could tell that she was barely reining in her fury. She seemed to be studying her hands with remarkable fascination, and he thought it was perhaps fortunate she wasn’t trying to strangle him with them. "For a long time, I wanted you to be the mother of my children, Kathryn," he continued softly. She lifted her eyes to him, and they were shining with unshed tears.

"And I wanted to be the mother of your children."

"You did?" She nodded almost imperceptibly. "If only I had known, Kathryn. You never said anything! Why did you never tell me?" he asked, shocked to the core by this latest revelation.

She looked away from him. "Why would I? When we got home….when I was finally free to pursue
a relationship, you were already dating Seven."

"But you can’t have known that!" he protested.

"Oh, I did!"

"How?" he asked incredulously.

Slowly her head turned back towards him, and she gazed at him steadily before replying. "The Admiral told me."

"The Admiral?"

"Yes."

"What did she tell you?" he asked in alarm.

"That you and Seven would soon be married."

This was a revelation to him, but he did not see how something the Admiral had said about a now defunct timeline, should have had any influence on what she had, or rather hadn’t, said to him. "You should still have told me. I still loved you. I had a right to know if you felt the same way. Seven and I had only had a couple of dates…” His voice trailed off, as he came to a sudden realisation. "The temporal prime directive!!! Kathryn, please don’t tell me you sacrificed our future together over some blind following of the rules….some stupid idea that the time-line should not be tampered with."

She shook her head with half a laugh. "I had already tampered with it more than enough, but, no, I sacrificed our future together for your happiness….and Seven’s. It was more important to me than my own."

He was angry now. "What gave you the right? What gave you the right to make such assumptions about my happiness? Didn’t I have a right to know? Didn’t I have a right to make my own decisions?"

"Perhaps. If I had thought for a moment that you still felt something for me. But I watched you and Seven together and I knew…” she faltered, and shook her head, as if to dispel the moisture in her eyes. "You looked at her the way you used to look at me," she finished in a choked voice.

Chakotay’s blood ran cold. How could he respond to that? He thought he’d been so careful to hide his relationship with Seven at the time, at least from Kathryn. Especially from Kathryn. "Kathryn! No! That’s not the way it was at all," he managed in desperation.

"Really? It’s the way it looked to me!" She sighed, pulling herself together. "There’s no point in this. No point in raking it over. It’s just too painful."

Chakotay stared at her in misery. This was the first time he’d ever had any inkling that she had such depth of feeling for him. She was right. It was too painful. He still loved her, and to probe farther into this wound would too easily upset the delicate balance of his life. There was nothing he could say that would change the past.

"No, you’re right," he said, struggling to keep the emotion out of his voice. "I’m so sorry. Sorry I asked. I never dreamt that the idea would be so disgusting to you! Please forget I ever said it."

"I think you’d better go, Chakotay," she said, crossing her arms protectively across her chest. "Go home to your lovely wife!"
He nodded sadly, and turned to go. "Will you be alright?" he asked, hesitating, his voice full of concern.

"I’m always alright. I’m a survivor," she replied, and he left. It’s just everybody else around me I seem to destroy, she thought. Moreover, there are times when alright is just not enough.

After he had gone, Kathryn paced the floor of her office, her mind raging. How could he have been so insensitive to ask something like that? Never given it a thought that she might desire a child as much as the next woman? And how could he have been so ignorant of her feelings for him? Over the years, they had both left their feelings for each other virtually unspoken, mindful that their command responsibilities kept them from physical intimacy. But they had both shown how much they cared in so many ways, and in time, they had settled for a very precious friendship.

No, he now just thought of her as a single-minded career woman, with no time for distractions. No interest in having a family. Her job was all she needed. A few young Starfleet cadets, and a spattering of nephews, nieces and assorted godchildren were more than enough to satisfy her maternal instincts. No, she would just turn into a sad lonely old woman, just like the Admiral had seemed to her. Seven years in the Delta Quadrant had stolen her chances from her. She would resign herself to her fate…be stoic. She would pull on her mask and smile politely at everyone. It was what they all expected of her. It hadn’t even occurred to Chakotay that she would want it any other way.

She wasn’t short of admirers. Maybe that family life was not yet out of the question. But, if she was honest, she wasn’t sure she could ever make herself that vulnerable again. She’d lost three men she’d loved, and she never wanted to feel that pain again.

Perhaps she had made a mistake trying to stay friendly with the pair of them once they married. It had been too costly to herself. No, she should keep her distance now. She would put herself first for once. After her little confession, she thought that Chakotay would probably think the same way. She wondered how much he would tell Seven.

Now, Seven making the request, she could have understood. She regarded body parts as dispensable. She rarely understood any emotional ramifications. No, she would have regarded the donation of some genetic material, deep frozen for years in some distant Starfleet Medical Facility, on a par with passing over a few nanoprobes or replacing an ocular implant. After all, they weren’t needed, were they? They were just taking up space and using unnecessary resources. It would be inefficient to keep them there, denying someone with a legitimate need access to them. It’s not like she and Chakotay would need to have sex or anything.

Chakotay, however, should have known better. She really couldn’t understand how he could have been so oblivious of what she felt for him. Surely he wouldn’t have dreamed of asking this, if he’d had any idea. Maybe she should have told him. When they’d got back, she should have told him. Did she regret it? Yes, sometimes, but she’d seen the way they looked at each other, and she’d known she couldn’t compete. She had only thought of their happiness.

Chakotay had probably thought that she’d do what she always did…put others first. She wouldn’t balk at making yet another personal sacrifice to help Seven, whose ovaries had been removed during the assimilation process, with her infertility problem.

She could hear their voices now. *Dear old Kathryn will help. There’s no-one else we’d rather have...*
as the genetic parent of our children. She will help. Just like always. After all, she cares deeply for both of us.

Those eggs are just sitting there. Kathryn has no use for them. Well, not all of them anyway. She can spare a few, can’t she? It can’t hurt to ask. We’d rather than have some anonymous donor, with unknown genetic credentials. It’s better for the children to know exactly where they’ve come from too.

Kathryn has no use for them. Well, maybe she does. It occurred to Kathryn that she had no idea if Starfleet Medical had kept the ova she had left there over twenty years ago, as indeed most space-faring personnel did. Amazingly, all the radiation, injuries and partial assimilation she’d suffered hadn’t rendered her infertile, but everyone knew the risks were high. In any case, the stored ova were likely to be healthier than those of a woman in her forties.

Starfleet Medical might have destroyed them on assumption of her death, and she began to panic at the thought. If people went missing, such material was usually kept for a long time, but they’d been gone seven long years. Dropping into the chair, she accessed her terminal, and called up the Medical Facility.

Ten minutes later, there was a beep on her terminal signalling a response to her enquiry. Poring over a page of data, she smiled to herself in relief.

If Kathryn was seething, Chakotay was reeling from shock. He had come prepared for a rejection of his proposal, but had never for a moment imagined the vehemence of her refusal, much less the revelations that had flowed from it. What a crass insensitive idiot he was! Why had he always blindly assumed she felt nothing? How could he have pained her by asking this of her? He was so angry with himself. He was angry at her too. She hadn’t told him. Why hadn’t she told him? Hadn’t he deserved to know the truth? It would have made all the difference in the world to the choices he made. He was happy enough with Annika, but that was before he’d known the truth.

He could have had her! He could have had her...the woman he’d yearned for from the first instant he’d set eyes on her all those long years ago. The realisation was cutting at him like a dagger. He saw with painful clarity that today he had probably lost his best friend. Kathryn would almost certainly distance herself from them now. The calming, precious relationship that had been the rock of his existence for the past eight and half years was over. It hurt like hell.

What was it she’d said as he left? Go home to your lovely wife! Interesting words to use. Had she put emphasis on the word lovely? He hadn’t thought so at the time, but maybe he’d missed it. It was as if she were echoing her thoughts from when they’d first got home...when perhaps she’d weighed up whether to tell him of her true feelings, taken one look at Seven and decided she didn’t stand a chance. Damn the woman! Didn’t she know how lovely she herself was? And what right had she to decide his future for him? In his heart of hearts, though, he knew the blame wasn’t entirely hers. He could have asked her. Given the strength of his attachment to her, even though this was something he was trying to suppress at the time, he should have.

What the hell was he going to tell Annika? As little as possible, probably. She would be disappointed, and might push him for an explanation. He was going to have to handle this very delicately. He needed his wits about him. Perhaps Kathryn would calm down, and forget this had happened. Maybe she’d allow some level of continued friendship, some healing of the rift. Annika
needed her friend and mentor badly. But he didn’t hold out much hope.

Annika had accepted Kathryn’s decision and let it go. She didn’t understand it, but she didn’t read anything into it either, and for that Chakotay was grateful.

He strongly suspected that he might never hear from Kathryn again, something he could hardly bear to contemplate, but understood deep down that it might be for the best. He was extremely surprised therefore to discover a private message from her on his terminal two days later.

It said curtly and simply: *Chakotay, would you consider an exchange of genetic material? In the lab, of course, K.*

He commed her back, amazed that she appeared to have changed her mind. *My dear Kathryn, sounds interesting. Please explain. C.*

She must have been at her terminal, for there was an immediate response. However, she didn’t switch to visual. *You have something I want, I have something you want. An exchange could be beneficial to both parties.*

He thought for a few moments, before replying. *Sounds good to me. Would be delighted. When? Your choice. Can be ready this end at 24 hours notice.*

*Let’s get on with it then. Before you change your mind, he thought.*

*Okay. There was a ten minute pause, in which she went out of communication, before finally another message came through.*

*Starfleet Medical, S.F. Thursday. 09.30?*

*See you there. C.*

He found himself unreasonably excited by this turn of events, and made the mistake of immediately informing Annika, whose enthusiasm soon fuelled his. Neither of them stopped to think that there could be any emotional fall out.

On the Thursday morning, he and Annika both showed up at the appointed time. They were both hoping to talk this through with Kathryn, and Chakotay was also anxious to heal some of the wounds from their previous conversation. They were both in for disappointment.

They were ushered into a large sterile room, where two medical staff were waiting with everything necessary to proceed. Minutes later, a large confident woman of about Kathryn’s age and with immaculate short blond hair, steamed into the room and bore down on the four bewildered people. Her name was Monica Arnold….Kathryn’s lawyer!

She came armed with docupadds containing a contract, one of which she duly handed to Chakotay and Seven to study. It simply stated that following certain detailed procedures, any resulting healthy embryos would be divided equally and at random between the two interested parties, namely Chakotay and Kathryn Janeway. Kathryn had already imprinted her authorisation.

Chakotay was left feeling rather empty. He thought this was rather a cold way to start a new life, but
in the twenty-fourth century, it was not uncommon. He read the contract through carefully. There was nothing in it he couldn’t agree to. Indeed, it was entirely fair to both parties, so he imprinted it and gave his agreement to go ahead. Kathryn never showed up at all. In fact they would not set eyes on her again for another eight years.
Chakotay went through the gate at the side of the house and rounded the corner into the back yard, following the sounds of childish laughter. There he was surprised to see a ball of long dark curls and pale brown fur rolling in the dirt. Two small children stood looking on and shouting encouragement.

"Kathryn Annika!" he shouted in exasperation.

A dishevelled head rose out of the maelstrom, followed swiftly by the rest of her small body. She had on a spoiled pale dress, for she was covered from head to toe in mud.

"Daddy!" she replied in a surprised, guilty voice.

Chakotay was doing his best to sound angry, whilst fighting the urge to burst into laughter. He was staring into the two beautiful dark eyes of this child, who looked so like him in many ways, but had her mother’s distinctive jawline and determined gutsy nature…not to mention her love of dogs. Her genetic mother, that is. There was not the slightest semblance of Annika in her at all. Suddenly, he caught his breath, as he was struck once again how much she resembled Kathryn. The smut on her face just brought back vivid memories of Kathryn covered with dirt from exploded plasma conduits. It stabbed at him painfully. The lack of her presence in his life had been devastating. It had been for Annika too. He often tried to remind himself that the reward of this lovely child in their lives had made up for it.

"I brought you here to play with Henethra, not Mexor!" he admonished.

"Oh, but daddy, Mexor always joins in! He wants to play as well! We couldn’t stop him!" The object of this conversation was lying on his back, four huge paws in the air, tail thrashing impatiently from side to side and whimpering for attention. He just could not understand why this enjoyable little romp was being interrupted.

"Just look at you! That dress is ruined! Whatever is your mother going to say?"

"Chakotay, I’m so sorry," said a harassed looking mother rushing towards them. "I had to go inside to change the baby. I thought they’d be alright for a few minutes!"

"And so they should have been! They’re old enough to know better. Come on, young lady! Let’s get you home and cleaned up! Say goodbye to Henethra." The girl skipped over to her friend and hugged her as she promised to visit again soon. She then politely thanked Henethra’s mother, before taking her father’s hand to leave on the twenty minute walk back to their home. It was a beautiful morning, but she was getting hungry and was looking forward to her lunch. She hoped her father was cooking. If he cooked, her father let her help. Her mother would never let her touch anything. Everything had to be done perfectly for her.

For a while they walked in silence. Chakotay smiled at his daughter, and squeezed her hand in reassurance. They both knew Katie would get a stern lecture from her mother when they got back, and that was no pleasant experience.

After a while the girl began to chat happily about what she had been doing with her friend, what were they going to do that afternoon, was he cooking the lunch and could she help him?

Chakotay responded joyfully to her questioning. This girl had brought light into his life since the day
she was born. Her vivacity and determination never ceased to amaze him. Thank goodness Kathryn’s genes had won out over Annika’s methodical obsessive precision. That woman had no idea how to enjoy herself! He would very much have liked Kathryn to have played a part in his daughter’s life. Instead, Kathryn had distanced herself from them. He had sent her a message telling her of Katie’s arrival; she’d sent a brief note of congratulations. It was the only communication they’d had in eight years. He’d never heard if her part of the bargain had proved successful. He presumed not. There’d never been any news of Admiral Janeway ever having any children, and she was frequently in the news. She had a highly prestigious job now. He felt sorry for her. She was missing out on a lot by not being part of Katie’s life. He thought too that she would be a far better influence on the child than her own mother. Annika had not taken to motherhood well. She’d hated being pregnant. It had been a long and difficult pregnancy. Annika’s nanopropes had fought a long battle against the intrusive alien entity within her body. The act of giving birth had also been pretty disgusting to her. Then she disliked handling the needy creature she suddenly had to care for, and, although she made a lot of effort to talk to Katie, she was not at all tactile. Katie got no hugs from her mother. Chakotay more than made up for this. He did the majority of the parenting.

Another consequence of this was that Katie had ended up an only child, despite the fact that they had been given eight viable embryos at the start. The first had failed to take. Katie arrived as a result of the second attempt. There were still six left in a laboratory somewhere on earth. Annika had been adamant that she was not going to go through that disgusting process again. So, Chakotay did his best to ensure that the little girl had plenty of opportunities to play with friends.

Eventually, they had left earth. Neither of them had much to keep them there. Kathryn had removed herself from their lives. Many of their friends from Voyager had scattered. B’Elanna was barely speaking to him. She had never liked Seven, and couldn’t forgive him for marrying her. He had an idea that she and Tom had stayed thick with Kathryn. He felt a little hurt by this.

They’d come here to this backwater planet, where he had taken a fairly lowly paid teaching job. He felt he was contributing in some way to the effort to rebuild this sector after it had been devastated by Cardassian attacks, and it was away from the glare of the intrusive publicity they had to endure on earth. There was no open hostility to the Borg either. Annika was as content here as she might have been anywhere else.

As they neared the small but immaculate dwelling where they had spent the last six or seven years, Katie skipped on ahead, singing tunelessly to herself. Chakotay smiled to himself, but it was yet another painful reminder of whose daughter she really was! Really he should be terribly grateful to have this small part of Kathryn to himself. He was so lucky, wasn’t he? He and Annika had a pleasant enough relationship. Why did he feel such a wrench to the gut when he foolishly allowed himself to think along these lines? Was he simply trying, not very successfully, to convince himself he was happy? No, the truth was there was something missing in his life, and it still hurt. Something very Kathryn-shaped.

As he ascended the porch steps, he heard his daughter’s frightened voice. "Daddy, come quickly! Mother’s on the floor…she…she won’t wake up!"

He rushed into the house, and followed Katie’s voice into the lounge. There he saw his beautiful blonde wife stretched unconscious on the floor. His daughter was trying in vain to shake her awake, and beginning to sob. Chakotay knelt down beside them, whispering comforting words to his distraught daughter as he felt for a pulse. It was there, weak, but definitely still there. He checked to see that she was still breathing, calling her name to try to rouse her. He pulled her over into the recovery position, as it was evident that she was very seriously ill. He stood and quickly accessed his communications console, and immediately had the three of them beamed to the local medical facility.
Chakotay spent the next few hours calming and reassuring his daughter. He had barely any time to think about what was happening. He and Katie were made to wait outside while the doctor worked frantically to keep Annika alive, but he had no experience of Borg assimilants. He had nothing like the technical knowledge or wisdom of the EMH. He quickly realised that he was out of his depth, and could do little to help. He managed to stabilise the patient, but was soon outside explaining to Chakotay that she would have to be transported elsewhere for treatment. If she could have been put in stasis, it might have helped, but this was a humble clinic on a backwater planet, and it had no such facilities.

It took them three days, Chakotay piloting, to reach DS9. A nurse accompanied them, who tended to Annika during the journey.

A further day later, Chakotay was listening intently as Doctor Bashir explained as gently as he could that the prognosis was not good. Annika’s cortical node was failing again, and the fact that it had taken several days to even begin to get the right treatment had not helped. The surrounding tissue damage was severe and was unlikely to accept a replacement cortical node, even if one could be found. And, despite the fact that she was coming round, she was slowly but surely slipping away from them, and it was only a matter of time, months at the most, before the node failed completely. The best they could hope to do was to make those months as comfortable and enjoyable as possible. Chakotay could hardly take in the news himself, let alone deal with what he would say to either of his girls.

He went into the room where his wife was stirring and sat beside her, taking her hand in his.

"Hi, there," he said gently.

She smiled weakly at him. "Where…?"

"We’re at the medical facility on DS9. You’ve been very ill."

"I remember," she groaned, "Felt faint…collapsed…"

"Yes, you did. We found you. Had to bring you here." She groaned, trying to move. "Lie still!" he continued. "You need to get better. Katie and I want you home real soon!"

"What’s wrong with me?"

"Darling, your cortical node is failing again," he said, knowing she would not rest until she knew it all. "Just as soon as we find you a new one, you’ll be as right as rain!"

There was a long pause, before she said, "Don’t lie to me Chakotay. It’s not good, is it?"

He looked sadly into her eyes for a long moment. "No," he eventually admitted, "but the doctors are doing all they can."

"Chakotay, you and I both know that they don’t have spares of these things lying around."

"They’ll find one, I’m sure of it. Just stay positive for me, will you?" he said, not willing to divulge the fact that even if they did, it probably wouldn’t take.
"How long? How long have I got?" she said, fixing her eyes on him, and daring him to speak the truth.

"They can’t be sure. Probably a few months."
A few days later, Annika was released from hospital. They had done as much as they could for her, and wanted her to be able to spend as much of her remaining time with her family as possible. Chakotay made the decision that they would have to stay on DS9 for the next few months, as they had to stay close to the better medical facilities. Consequently, he enrolled Katie in school on the station. The little girl was aware of the seriousness of her mother’s illness, but did not really understand it. Her mother seemed better to her, for she was conscious and out of hospital now, and to her that signalled an improvement. She didn’t seem to notice the gradual deterioration in her condition, nor the increasing lethargy of her mother. Chakotay, of course spent his time looking after his family. He was unable to work, and this depleted his modest resources quite severely.

During this time, he and Annika talked at length about the future. There was one thing she became increasingly agitated about. She wanted to see Kathryn again. At first, Chakotay deflected her requests. He was not at all sure Kathryn would respond to such an invitation, but as Annika grew more and more insistent, he agreed eventually to contact her. He had to go through Starfleet, as he had no idea of Kathryn’s current whereabouts. He sent a message, laying out the gravity of the situation and emphasising Annika’s desperation to see her. All he could do then was wait and hope. But she came. By the time she did, Annika was back in the Medical Facility and virtually bed-ridden again. She was being given very strong drugs to deal with the pain, which often made her drowsy. The message that Kathryn was on her way preceded her by only a couple of days. She herself appeared one morning, accompanied by Voyager’s Doctor.

He was surprised when he entered Annika’s room that morning, after taking Katie to school, to find the two of them there chatting cheerfully with his wife. Annika was talking with renewed animation, her face radiating the joy she felt at seeing her two old friends again. The Doctor of course, didn’t look the slightest bit different from when he had last seen him. He studied Kathryn. She was looking great…a little older, a bit better nourished, but in great shape. He suddenly became painfully aware of how haggard and thin he would appear to her.

She turned her head and greeted him with apparently open friendliness. Only he detected the slightly wary caution beneath the words. She was steering the conversation very carefully, and he knew it.

He thanked her profusely for coming, and she told him that she could only be spared for a couple of days. After that, he stayed with them for an hour or so. Kathryn did not say a great deal. Neither did he. Annika and the Doctor did most of the talking. Then he left them for most of the day, and went off to use the time to deal with all sorts of overdue business.

He came back late in the day to find Kathryn and the Doctor leaving. They had spent most of the day there, apart from a few hours when Annika was exhausted. He invited them to come back with him for the evening. They declined, but he pressed them farther. He almost begged them to come back to meet Katie. He caught a defiant flash in Kathryn’s eyes, as she refused again. Chakotay felt a pang of despair. He very much wanted to introduce the two of them to each other.

In the end, the Doctor came alone. He got on tremendously with the little girl, and Chakotay thought his interpersonal skills had improved a lot over the intervening years. After Katie had gone to bed, they had a long conversation about Annika’s illness, and they both acknowledged the sad truth of what was to come. He volunteered to stay on DS9 to offer his support. Chakotay could see he still cared very much for his wife, and he had also seen how much Annika had benefited from having him there, so he accepted gratefully.
The following day, Kathryn stayed with Annika, or Seven to her, alone, and they talked rather more freely without the men there.

Seven discussed the inevitability of what was happening to her, and Kathryn offered what support and comfort she could, without lying to her. Seven always appreciated Kathryn’s honesty and advice. Kathryn expressed her sorrow that she couldn’t stay for longer. Seven understood. She was very interested to hear about Kathryn’s job, and news of their former Voyager comrades.

"I sometimes wonder if I did the right thing, keeping you from returning to the collective. I used to be sure I was right, but now this has happened…You’d be fit and healthy now, if I hadn’t."

Seven thought about this for a while. "Speculation is futile," she responded. "I might have been dead long since. You destroyed enough of the Collective. And if I’d been malfunctioning…if they couldn’t easily have made repairs, they’d have deactivated me."

"Even so, I would like to know if you are still happy that I did."

"It always find it surprising that humans need so much reassurance. Chakotay is much in need of it too." She paused again, both women perfectly comfortable to be silent as well. "Yes, I am still happy that you did. I have had thirteen happy, fulfilling years. I have seen enough now to understand that my existence before was no existence at all. I had nothing. No freedom. No individuality. In time I understood the value of these things, and I found friendship and love. And I had Katie. She is a truly astonishing individual. I am very proud of her." She looked at Kathryn fixedly. "I want to talk to you about her. Chakotay told me you wouldn’t go to meet her last night."

"No. I thought it was for the best."

"I understand you find it difficult. I hope I can change your mind." Kathryn said nothing. "I’ve been a bad mother."

"I’m sure you haven’t!" Kathryn protested.

"No, I have. That’s why we never had another one. She needed more from me than I could ever give her. And I demanded more of her than she could ever give. I never hugged her enough. I should have learned to be more tactile. That was something you were always so good at, and I should have followed your example. Chakotay always tried to persuade me to try harder. I wish now I had listened. All I ever did was admonish her for not doing as she was told, for getting into some scrape or for not doing something perfectly. Chakotay always said that she was just a child, that I should encourage her, not make her feel inadequate. He’s been a wonderful father. Everything comes so naturally to him. But I was never meant to be a mother. I don’t understand what it is like to be a child."

"Seven," Kathryn said gently, squeezing her hand in reassurance, "I am certain that you are the best mother you know how to be. You may not realise it, but she is learning so much just from being with you, talking to you and observing you. I am sure she is very fond of you."

Seven studied Kathryn’s face in an effort to analyse the sincerity of her words. She knew that Kathryn was trying to comfort her, but she saw also that she meant what she said. "You really think so?"
"I do. Seven, you are a very unique individual, with many amazing qualities. You will find that as Katie grows, she will appreciate it more and more."

"But I won’t be there to see it."

Kathryn had no intention of denying this. "No. That’s why you must make sure that every moment you spend with her now counts. Talk to her. Tell her about yourself…she’s old enough now. Help her to understand who you are. Give her good memories of you."

"I’ll try."

"That’s all anyone can ask."

"I’ve always tried to talk to her."

"Well, there you are then. Don’t waste time thinking about the things you could have done better. That plan is…inefficient," Kathryn said with a laugh. Seven smiled in response, appreciating the joke. "Focus on the things you did well, and on making the best of what’s to come! Everybody makes mistakes. To err is only human, Seven!"

"You’d have made a better job."

"No. I’d have made a different job of it. I’d have made mistakes too."

"Kathryn, I want you to promise me something!" Seven continued, hesitantly.

"Well…what is it?"

"I want you to promise me you’ll look after Katie when I’m gone." The colour drained from Kathryn’s face. "And Chakotay. He’ll need you. They’ll both need you. Katie needs a mother in her life, and she has one. She knows, you know. We’ve always told her the truth…that she has another mother out there, who is her genetic mother. She doesn’t really understand what that means, but we’ve told her about you, and the kind of person you are. Just because you haven’t been a part of the first years of her life, doesn’t mean you can’t fulfil that role in the future."

"Seven, I don’t know…"

"Kathryn, this really isn’t too much to ask. She is your daughter! She will have a living mother, and she deserves to get to know her, don’t you think?"

"Seven, you are her mother…I can never replace you!"

"I’m not asking you to replace me. Just to look after her. You said yourself you would have done a different job…well, you will have to forge a different relationship…your own relationship. I know it may not be easy, but I also know you can do it. Kathryn, you will be a brilliant mother!" A few moments of silence elapsed, whilst Seven studied Kathryn’s downcast expression, signifying her reluctance to commit. "If you’re worried about how Chakotay will react, well don’t! He loves you, you know."

Kathryn looked up suddenly, about to protest, when she continued, "It took me a while to realise it, but I understood it eventually. He pined for you terribly, Kathryn, when you distanced yourself from us. And you love him too, don’t you?"

"Oh, Seven, I never…"

"No, don’t bother denying it. That’s why you kept away, isn’t it?" Kathryn nodded miserably. "In fact, you loved him long before I did."
"I loved you too, Seven. That’s why I had to keep away. I hope you understand."

"Oh, I do! And I respect you for it. But when I’m gone, that barrier will be gone, and you will have no right to deny Katie the presence of her real mother in her life. Chakotay will be a mess, and will need your support and advice. I’m not asking you to live with them, just to look out for them. And let Katie know what a mother’s love should really be like." This brought tears to Kathryn’s eyes.

"Please, Kathryn…I need you to promise me this one thing. I do not wish to spend my remaining time burdened by concerns about their future!"

"Of course, Seven. I’ll do it!"

"Promise?"

"I promise," Kathryn conceded, and the two women embraced, clinging tearfully to each other.

Kathryn spent the next day, her last, mostly alone with Seven. Chakotay had been disappointed yet again that she had not gone back with him the previous evening to meet Katie, and today he had decided, whether wisely or foolishly he did not know, to take Katie to the hospital after the end of her school day. He knew Kathryn would have been saying her goodbyes to Annika that afternoon, as she was leaving that evening.

As it happened, they nearly missed her. Chakotay wondered how Kathryn always seemed to have a sixth sense about such things. As they walked along the dark sterile corridor towards Annika’s room, Katie’s hand was clutching his in apprehension. Distantly, they saw Kathryn’s dark form emerge from the room and turn immediately to walk away from them, almost as if she had known they were coming.

"Kathryn!" he called. The figure froze, and half turned towards them, taking in the silhouettes of father and daughter in the shadowy distance. Then, just as suddenly, she turned back and hurried away from them, one hand quickly brushing the tears from her face. In seconds, she simply vanished.

"Who was that, daddy?" the little girl asked out of curiosity.

"That was your mommy Kathryn."

"Oooo!" said Katie, her mouth opening in a round circle of astonishment. "My other mommy?"

"Yes."

"She’s gone!" continued Katie, as disappointment began to creep into her voice.

"Yes," said Chakotay, equally disappointed. He squeezed the little girl’s hand. "But I promise you will meet her one day."
The Doctor proved to be a godsend. Annika was really content to spend time with him, relieving some of the burden on Chakotay. Despite his own feelings for the patient, he was able to cope with it rather better than Chakotay, who also had Katie to consider. He also helped to make the remaining two months of Annika’s life peaceful and comfortable. Chakotay and Annika were very glad for his presence. He and Chakotay were both there when Annika finally lost her battle to survive.

Chakotay, now in possession of Kathryn’s new Indiana address, immediately informed her of Annika’s death. She did not make it to the funeral, being away on a crucial diplomatic mission at the time, but sent her condolences. The funeral was therefore a small affair, after which they parted company with the Doctor, who returned to earth. He took Katie back to their old home for a few weeks, but the place seemed empty. It didn’t seem like home any more. His resources were dwindling farther…his old job had been given to somebody else. Chakotay knew they couldn’t stay. In the back of his mind he couldn’t help but think that their future was on earth with Kathryn, but berated himself when he caught himself thinking about it. Was it wishful thinking? Was it too late? Could he rebuild his relationship with her? Was it arrogant of him to think he could? Annika had told him of the promise she had extracted from her, and it gave him some hope. But of course, Kathryn could interpret it as meaning just an occasional check on them. Would she renege on her promise? He didn’t think so, and he didn’t think that she could possibly send Katie away after meeting her, but he couldn’t be sure. Taking Katie to Kathryn could be emotionally very risky, but he felt the relentless tug on his heart across the galaxies, and across the light years, and eventually he knew it would be too strong to resist.

At least he would easily find work on earth, and their dire circumstances were eventually going to force his hand. He put it off for as long as he could, not wanting to rush to Kathryn with indecent haste after Annika’s death. Eventually, they packed up their home, sold what they could, and took a passage to earth. Katie regarded it all as a big adventure. Chakotay just prayed that Kathryn would honour her promise and welcome them.

Chakotay stared at the house in disbelief, then checked his co-ordinates for a second time. There was no mistake. This positively palatial building was the address Kathryn had reluctantly given him, when he had last seen her, six months before. It had an imposing white façade, and a tree-lined drive, wide enough to take a land vehicle, leading to the main door. The gardens were neatly laid out, and the whole area was enclosed by intimidating metal railings, topped by ferocious looking spikes. It was clearly built to discourage intruders, and looked as if it had state of the art security systems in place. At first glance, it was not at all welcoming, and Chakotay wondered, not for the first time, at the wisdom of coming here.

The pair gazed in wonder through the gate. Katie’s eyes were wide as saucers as she held her father’s hand.

"Does mommy Kathryn live in a palace?" she asked in amazement.

"No, sweetheart. Princesses live in palaces. Mommy Kathryn is an Admiral." Katie thought that sounded almost as important as a princess, and the whole trip to earth had seemed to her like a visit to wonderland. And this was quite simply the best bit, because her other mommy lived here.
"Are we going to be allowed in?"

"I don’t know," replied Chakotay honestly. In truth, he had no idea what sort of a reception they’d get. He would rather have come alone, but he knew the chances of being ejected would have been much higher had he done so. He thought Kathryn would have more consideration than to make a scene in front of a child, her child.

He ran his eyes over the house. He thought it was indecently big for a woman on her own. It needed a family living there, could probably fit several families in it. There was certainly room for two rather desperate travellers. It hit him suddenly that he had no idea if she lived alone. He had never given the slightest thought as to whether there was another man in her life. He should have found out before now. Well, it was too late now. There was no turning back.

"Is she in?"

"Well, let’s find out," said Chakotay, and he imprinted his hand on the security panel, feeling suddenly very nervous. He realised that, if this system was connected to Starfleet security, and it almost certainly was, he would have been instantly identified from his handprint.

A red light instantly flashed around the security panel and a voice answered, "Yes?" It was a woman’s voice, but not Kathryn’s.

"My name’s Chakotay. I’m here with my daughter, Katie. We’re here to see Kathryn Janeway. Can we come in please?"

"Just a moment, please." A beep sounded, signalling the end of communication and a long time passed. He tried hard not to let his anxiety show.

Suddenly the red light flashed green, and the two huge gates swung slowly inward to admit them. They directed their steps carefully towards the main door. Chakotay felt as if his heart was in his throat, but, glancing sideways, saw that his daughter was happily enjoying this big adventure.
Chapter 5

As they neared the door, it too swung slowly inward to reveal a sprightly woman in her eighties he immediately recognised as Gretchen Janeway.

"Hello, Chakotay. How are you? It's such a long time..." she said, holding out her arms to give him a welcoming hug. "And you must be little Katie!" she said turning to the little girl, and resting a hand on her shoulder. "I'm very pleased to meet you!"

The little girl giggled, slightly embarrassed. "Are you mommy Kathryn?"

"No, I'm grannie Gretchen. I'm not sure if Kathryn is..."

"I'm Kathryn," said another figure emerging from the shadows behind Gretchen. A lump came to Chakotay’s throat as he took in Kathryn’s appearance. She was wearing close fitting jeans, and a white shirt unbuttoned almost to her chest. She still looked so damned attractive. "Hello, Katie...Chakotay." Katie did not reply, suddenly lost for words, and feeling shy. "It's alright, mom... I'll take them into the lounge," Kathryn continued, addressing her mother. Both ladies stepped back to allow admittance to the visitors, and they stepped into the magnificent hall. Both visitors stared around the room in amazement.

"Kathryn, I'm impressed! They must be paying you well!"

"There have to be some perks of the job," she said lightly.

"Would you like some tea?" asked Gretchen.

"Please," said Chakotay gratefully. They were tired and thirsty after the long journey from the transporter station. Not being in Starfleet any longer, they had to use the public transportation system, which had involved a land vehicle and then a long dusty walk.

"Katie?"

"Juice, please."

"Any particular flavour?"

"Orange?"

"I think we can manage that, young lady," said Gretchen leaving them alone.

"Come, sit down!" said Kathryn, leading the visitors into the lounge. He and Katie did as they were told and sat side by side on a large sofa. Kathryn sat opposite, crossing her legs and studied them. The child was dark, beautiful and vivacious. Chakotay, if anything, looked more gaunt and weary than when she had last seen him. The traumas of the last few months had clearly taken their toll, and he looked as if he needed some good food inside him.

Kathryn hadn't welcomed them with a hug as her mother had done, but a smile appeared on her lips, and Chakotay counted that as a success.

"Chakotay, she’s beautiful!" she said warmly. "And a credit to you!"

"Thanks. I think the two of you should get to know each other." Kathryn simply nodded at this.
"Are you really mommy Kathryn?"

"Well…yes."

"You have funny colour hair!

"Katie!" said Chakotay anxiously, but saw immediately that Kathryn was laughing. "Well, I always thought you had beautiful hair, Kathryn!"

"Katie has your hair, and your dark eyes."

"But your chin, and your fiery temper!"

"My fiery temper? I don’t have a fiery temper! Well…only occasionally." They smiled at each other as they began to relax.

"Did you walk all the way from the transporter station?"

"Yes."

"It’s a long way. You must both be exhausted."

Gretchen brought drinks and cookies, which were gratefully received. She fussed around them for a few minutes, but then left them to talk alone.

The conversation flowed along uncontentious lines, until the door creaked open very slightly, and a soft brown nose appeared in the crack. Katie gasped with excitement. The door opened a little more, and a large reddish brown dog scooted through the gap. It scuttled across the room, gangly limbs flying comically in all directions, and slid to a halt in front of its mistress, nuzzling her hand. It then sat, resting its head on Kathryn’s knee, gazing at her adoringly through dark liquid eyes.

"Well, hello there. Have you come to see our visitors?" Kathryn addressed the dog.

"Daddy! He’s just like Mexor!" cried Katie in wonder. This visit was getting better by the minute.

"He is a she," Kathryn informed her. "Her name’s Molly. Would you like to say hello? She won’t bite." Katie rushed across the room and immediately began caressing the dog.

"She has the same colour hair as you!"

"Yes, she does."

"A relative of the Molly?" asked Chakotay.

"Yes. Great granddaughter." They both laughed at Katie’s obvious rapture.

"She’s inherited your love of dogs."

"So I see!"

"I always wanted a dog, but mother wouldn’t let me have one." The adults exchanged a look of understanding at this comment.

"You must be tired and hungry," Kathryn said to Chakotay picking up the earlier thread of the conversation. "Would you two like to stay for a meal?"
Chakotay took a deep breath. "Actually, I was going to ask for more than that. I know it’s an imposition, but Katie and I really have no place to go. It’s painful to admit, but I have precious little credit left. I will look for work as soon as possible. But in the meantime… I really don’t want to take Katie to a hotel, even if I could afford one, let alone the public shelter. Please, Kathryn. I wouldn’t ask if I wasn’t desperate. Please can we stay? You look as if you have plenty of room, and we’d try not to get under your feet.” He’d watched her face intently as he had made this little speech, and at first she’d pressed her lips tightly together, frowning a little at the request, but then she relaxed and looked surprised at the last comment.

"It’s a large house," she responded, unnecessarily.

"And you and Katie could get to know each other." He decided he wouldn’t appeal to the promise she’d made to Annika unless really forced to. Kathryn smiled. "Is that a yes?" he continued, smiling back.

She hesitated only momentarily. "It’s a yes. We’ll do our best to make you comfortable here. It could be complicated…but…well, I’ll go and sort out some rooms."

"We don’t need much."

"I think you could use some tender loving care…and some time to recuperate," she said, sympathetically, but couldn’t help but wonder if he hoped for more than just a place to stay. She stood up.

"I can help," Chakotay offered.

"No, not yet," she waved him away. "There’s something I need to do first." Then she abruptly left the room, leaving him sipping his tea thoughtfully. He was relieved it had gone so well. He hadn’t expected an easy time.

She was gone for about ten minutes, during which Chakotay looked around the rather lovely room. There was a grand fireplace with a hearth, and a vast mirror above. A beautiful plush oriental rug covered much of the polished wooden floor. Several very comfortable sofas were arranged round an elegant coffee table. The room was bright and airy, windows admitting light from two sides. One set of large windows, hung with old fashioned drapes, looked out over the front gardens they had previously crossed. On the opposite side, huge doors opened out onto a verandah. Chakotay went over, opened a door, and stepped out to admire the wonderful Indiana view. He was amazed at the beautiful grounds behind the house. Kathryn truly had done well for herself.

He and Katie exchanged several comments, but the little girl was engrossed in making friends with Molly. He sighed. This was a wonderful house. It deserved to be lived in. Was he fooling himself to hope that there might be a chance for them to stay? Forever? He still loved her. The way he’d missed her over the intervening years had been evidence enough of that. But the way his heart skipped just from seeing her again had surprised him nonetheless. He sucked in lungfuls of the country air with satisfaction. Distantly, he heard voices approach and he stepped back into the room.

Just as he did so, he was absolutely stunned when a miniature Kathryn, a small girl of about five or six, hurtled into the room. She was heading for the dog, but stopped in her tracks on seeing Katie. She froze in surprise, looking back uncertainly towards the door. She was wearing a pale blue dress and had curly chestnut hair cascading down her back. Her face most definitely had Kathryn’s bone structure, but her eyes were dark. The similarity to Katie, other than hair colour, was unmistakable.

Chakotay’s jaw had already dropped open, before Kathryn entered the room holding the hand of a carbon copy of the girl already in the room. Behind them came a dark haired boy of about Katie’s
"Ellie!" said Kathryn, holding out her free hand, and the girl in the room went back to stand beside her mother. Chakotay didn’t know whether to laugh or cry, and he held his breath wondering how Kathryn was going to introduce him. Somehow, it mattered. It mattered a lot. He wanted no more denial of the truth.

"Children, this is your father. And this is your sister, Katie."

"Sister?" said the second twin.

"Yes. They’ve lived a long way away. Katie’s grown up on another planet. But they’ve come to stay, so you can get to know them. Chakotay, Katie…this is Eleanor," she said, patting the first twin on the head.

"I’m five."

"So am I."

Kathryn grinned. "This is Elizabeth. She likes to be called Bethany. And this is Alex. He’s three days younger than Katie."

"They’re mine?" asked Chakotay, incredulously.

"Yes."

"All of them?"

"All of them!" she said firmly, lifting her head in slight exasperation at his slowness.

"Kathryn, you should have…." but a sudden glare from Kathryn’s eyes warned him that now was not the moment to take issue with this.
The family gave them a tour of the house. The twins were very excited about their visitors, and danced with excitement as they showed them their things. They shared a huge bedroom at the rear, with an amazing array of toys. Ellie rushed in and started bouncing on her bed, but stopped immediately when her mother censored her. Kathryn’s bedroom was opposite, with a view down the front drive. Some way down the passage, Alex and Gretchen both had rooms. It seemed she lived here now, although she still owned her former house not far from here.

Chakotay and Katie were offered a pair of rooms at the opposite end of the house. Katie could hardly believe the beautiful room she had been given. It had already been prepared by the domestic hologram, and it was so lovely, that she began to imagine herself as a princess. Mommy Kathryn told her she could bring some of her own things to put in it. They didn’t have all that much, and Kathryn agreed that they could have their possessions beamed over from the transporter station. It was a good sign. Chakotay hoped that she was envisaging their staying some time.

On the second floor, there was a gym and a leisure area, some guest rooms, one of which was occupied by Rosiama, a young Betazoid, who helped with the childcare. She was off enjoying herself, as it was the weekend. There was also unbelievably a private holodeck. It was modest compared with Voyager’s holodecks, but the height of luxury. There were some advantages to knowing Tom Paris!

Back on the ground floor, they saw the dining room and kitchen, where the family ate informally, and another large reception room. Kathryn also had offices, so that she could work from home. The dog joined them as they went out onto the verandah, to admire the gardens. There was an impressive ornamental pond with fish, lilies and a fountain in the centre. Chakotay smiled, as he observed Kathryn put her hand on Katie’s shoulder, as she pointed things out. His daughter was already worming her way into her mother’s heart. If only he could do the same. Everything would be just perfect.

The children relaxed and started to enjoy the novelty of their newly acquired relatives. Eventually, the subject of their familial relationship came up, and Chakotay let Kathryn do the talking. After all, Katie had always known she had another mother. He was rather pleased that Kathryn told it like it was, giving as much of the details as she felt they could handle.

"I doubt they understood much of that…the twins especially."

"No," she replied. "It was probably way over their heads, but the next time they ask, they’ll have heard it before. It’ll be familiar, and eventually it will make sense. Now you’re here, there’s no point in lying."

"Good. Glad to hear it. Have they never asked about their father?"

"Yes. I guess I have to admit to being evasive, but I did show them your picture once."

"Kathryn, you should have told me."

She paused for a moment. "Yes. You’re right. I should have. I’m sorry. I was being selfish. I was hurting so much, so it was self-preservation. My only excuse." She looked sadly at him. "Don’t be angry. This is your chance to get to know them too."

He looked back at her, full of regrets himself. He had been angry earlier, but realised now that, if he
fed his anger, it would damage their fragile relationship. They only had a precarious invitation to stay, and he intended to do nothing to risk that.

"No, Kathryn. I want to put the past behind us. I want us to start over…to rebuild our relationship. I’ve missed you terribly. Kathryn, we’re parents now… to a beautiful family…and that is the most important thing in the universe."

"Yes, it is," she agreed with a smile. "They’re what’s important now. You and I will have to muddle along somehow." She watched Chakotay intently to gauge his reaction, and saw a look of longing in his eyes.

"I hope we’ll do more than muddle along," he said hopefully.

"Don’t get your hopes up, Chakotay!" she warned.

"Okay," he said, disappointed. "One step at a time?"

"One step at a time!" she agreed.

The rest of the day passed in a flash. Gretchen cooked a delicious meal, which was enjoyed in a relaxed atmosphere around the table in the kitchen. It was obvious that she was limping slightly, and Kathryn pressured her to visit the Doctor, saying there was no need for anyone to suffer from an arthritic hip in this day and age. Gretchen responded with typical Janeway dismissal of self-interest, and it was obvious that the two had had this conversation before. The children eventually tired and became grumpy, so Kathryn bathed the twins and then Alex before putting them to bed. He then dealt with Katie, taking her upstairs to her room. Reaching the landing, they both smiled as they heard the strains of Kathryn’s voice reading a story beyond the twins’ bedroom door. It took him a long time to settle Katie, she was so excited and the room was strange. Even after he left her, he knew it would be a long time before she was asleep. He checked the kitchen, but Gretchen and the domestic hologram had cleared up the remains of the meal. He returned to the lounge, where Kathryn was waiting. He was amazed to see that the huge mirror above the fireplace was now showing a rotation of five or six stunning family portraits. Kathryn had clearly had it switched off earlier. There were also a number of other smaller family holographic images displayed around the room, which had also not been visible earlier. Kathryn brought him a hard family album to leaf through as well. He wished he had some images of Katie to show her.

They relaxed and chatted like old friends, reconnecting easily. They talked about Seven, the children, the job he desired, the old crew. They had so much to say to each other that it was very late when they retired. Both of them went to bed feeling good about their day, and a little apprehensive about the future.
A week later Chakotay and Katie were well settled. The place felt like home. What meagre possessions they had, had been transported to the house the day after their arrival. They had enrolled Katie in school…she was in the same class as Alex. She was a little behind, but she was a bright determined child, who would soon catch up. Kathryn had gone to work late on the Monday morning, in order to go with Chakotay to register her. They were up front about the relationship between the children, knowing that the school would keep such information confidential. However, the kids had no compunction about telling their friends everything, and slowly but surely rumours began to start.

Kathryn tried as hard as she could to keep hours that fitted in with the family, hence she worked in her offices at home as much of the time as possible. Her staff came to her. There was a transporter pad in the basement, which allowed access to and from Starfleet HQ quickly and easily. Sometimes a crisis would blow up, or a diplomatic mission off planet would be required, which would take her away for days at a time. During these periods, Gretchen, Rosiama and Phoebe, Kathryn’s sister, would hold the fort. Phoebe and her husband, and twin teenage sons….twins it seemed ran in the family…came one evening to visit. Whilst Gretchen had welcomed him, he detected hostility in Phoebe. No doubt she blamed him for causing unhappiness to her sister, and was only feeling protective.

Alex, Chakotay noticed, was rather a quiet placid child. He soon realised that he resembled himself amazingly, right down to the dimpled smile and the teasing nature. Once he had relaxed at having strangers around, Chakotay observed some interesting playful banter between mother and son, and in time he discovered that Alex hated any confrontation with his mother, and did anything to keep the peace. He was not however above disobeying her, if he thought it would never be found out. He and Katie hit it off immediately, and Kathryn and Chakotay joked that they had in fact got two pairs of twins. Soon, Katie rather idolised her brother.

The real twins, although virtually identical to look at, had different natures. Ellie bounced about enthusiastically, chattering almost non-stop, trying to join in with the older pair’s games, persistent despite frequent exclusion. Bethany was more reserved, sulking occasionally and throwing the odd tantrum. It became clear that she was extremely jealous of Katie, whom she viewed as having monopolised her brother. They were slowly getting to know their father, all them loving the tales he would tell of his tribe, or their adventures aboard Voyager.

Chakotay had not seen much of Kathryn during the week, and he looked forward to the next weekend hoping that they would get some time together. She had pulled a few strings and got him an interview for a job lecturing at Starfleet Academy. He felt both grateful and embarrassed at her help on this, but she insisted that she was only speeding things up…he was exceptionally well qualified for such a post anyway. He longed for some financial stability again and did not like feeling entirely dependent on her.

On the Saturday morning, he awoke, at some unspeakably early hour, to bright sunlight spilling through the window, mirroring the growing feeling of optimism in his heart. He heard some distant laughter, evidently what had disturbed him, and threw on a T-shirt and soft pants. He padded down the corridor to Kathryn’s bedroom, the source of the sound. Her door was ajar, and as he peered in, he saw that Katie was only just ahead of him staring uncertainly at the scene before her. There was Kathryn reclining on her bed, in an impossibly sexy white lace gown, her auburn hair loosely flowing on her shoulders in beautiful contrast, and looking for all the world just like the princess of Katie’s imagination. One small curly haired girl was snuggled to one side, waving a picture book in
front of her mother, Alex was just behind Kathryn’s shoulder peering over with interest, his arms draped round her neck. Ellie was bouncing up and down on the end of the bed, making the book leap. Kathryn looked at Katie and took in her look of uncertainty and envy. She held her free arm out to her, asking her to join them. Katie went forward and eagerly climbed into the bed, resting her dark head against Kathryn’s breast, and smiled contentedly. Kathryn’s arm wrapped around her. This was an amazing novelty to her…a mother that gave hugs! She was loving every minute of it. Chakotay surveyed the scene with a pang of jealousy. He would quite simply have loved to join them, better yet to be exactly where Katie was, his face snuggled up against…well, he’d better not think about it. Kathryn caught the expression on his face, and he knew she’d read it. He did the only sensible thing he could. He went downstairs and brewed her a fresh cup of coffee, and took two mugs back up.

The little group were still snugly settled when he returned, leafing through the album of family pictures. Even Ellie had calmed down and was as engrossed as the others. They were rather squashed on the bed, and Kathryn looked up and took the coffee gratefully.

"Thank you. Daddy’s do have their uses!"

"Chotay, you get in too!" cried Ellie.

"There’s not room," said Kathryn diplomatically.

"I’ll just perch here on the end," said Chakotay, not wishing to leave this delightful domestic scene.

"It’s nice having a daddy," said Bethany. "All the other children have moms and dads."

"Benzo’s got three," said Ellie.

"Three what?" asked Alex.

"Mommies and daddies."

"One mommy, two daddies, silly," said Bethany.

"And they all sleep in the same bed!" added Ellie. Chakotay saw that Kathryn was nearly shaking with laughter.

"Well, I had two mommies," said Katie.

"Yes, that’s right, sweetheart," said Kathryn.

"Mom?" asked Bethany, after a pause, "Why don’t you and Chotay sleep in the same bed? I think that’s what mommies and daddies do."

Kathryn cleared her throat, rolling her eyes at Chakotay. "Well, that’s for moms and dads to decide."

Alex, feeling rather superior, mouthed at his sister, "They’re not married!"

"That doesn’t matter…Benzo’s aren’t, nor are Harry’s or…"

"Well, I think that we should all get up now. How about some pancakes for breakfast?" asked Kathryn, redirecting the conversation, the thread of which was instantly forgotten.

Chakotay grinned. This was something he could do. "How about I make the pancakes? Now, who’d like some?"

"Me!!!!" chorused five voices.
Chapter 8

The pancakes had been a huge success, and an hour later he and Katie walked into the lounge to find Bethany dancing pirouettes around the room, her hair in a careful bun atop her head. Kathryn was on the sofa, pins in mouth, wielding a hairbrush over Ellie’s head, and piling her hair up in a similar fashion. Both little girls were wearing cute royal blue ballet costumes.

"Wow, miniature buns of steel!" laughed Chakotay.

"Oh?" queried Kathryn, through gritted teeth.

"I’m sorry, below decks they used to…"

Kathryn emptied her mouth of pins. "Don’t think I didn’t know some of the names they called me!"

"None of it was malicious. They loved you, and you know it!"

Kathryn skilfully finished Ellie’s hair, and the girl then joined her sister dancing round the room.

"Ballet lessons," she informed the onlookers, unnecessarily.

"So I gathered."

Kathryn caught Katie’s look of jealousy and asked her, "Would you like me to put your hair up like that?" Katie nodded enthusiastically. "You could go along too, if you like. Learn how to dance? We could soon replicate you a costume. Would you like that?"

"Yes, please!!!" Kathryn left the room to fetch more hairpins and a costume, and they soon had Katie looking just as gorgeous as her younger sisters. Chakotay had to go to fetch a holo-imager. This was priceless. When he came back, Katie was just staring at herself in the mirror, delighted with the result. She tried a few steps experimentally. Kathryn took the girls off to the ballet school, and left Alex with Chakotay.

She suggested he took him out trekking, so that they could spend time together. Alex’s reserved nature was making it hard for Chakotay to get to know him, and Kathryn thought that he slightly resented not being the only man about the house anymore. They transported to an ancient Mayan settlement, and he spent the day showing the boy some of his ancestral heritage. Alex had a lot of natural curiosity, and showed a good deal more interest than Chakotay had when his father had first taken him there.

It was late before they got back home, and the girls were full of their day too. Kathryn had taken them out to lunch, and then on to a merchandise emporium, where they had walked around enjoying the ambience and looking at the displays. It was an entirely different experience from choosing things by replication. Katie had never seen anything bigger than a market before, and she had been mesmerised by the array of goods on offer. She had come back with a number of new outfits, which she excitedly showed her father.

In the evening, Chakotay finally got Kathryn to himself.

"You shouldn’t have bought Katie all that stuff."

"Why not?"
"She not used to having so many things."

"I don’t want her to feel she’s missing out. Ellie and Beth have so much." He pursed his lips. "You think I spoil them, don’t you?"

"I didn’t say that. But a child doesn’t need that much stuff. They just need love and comfort."

"Well, thanks for the advice!" she said sarcastically. "I thought I was doing a pretty decent job, considering I’ve managed so far almost single-handedly!"

"I didn’t mean to criticise," he said hastily, not wishing to provoke her. "Actually, I think you’ve done a spectacular job. You’ve got three fantastic kids there…we’ve got four fantastic kids. And Kathryn… you haven’t got to do this alone anymore!"

She lowered her eyes, picking an imaginary bit of fluff off her sleeve. "We’ve managed just fine so far!"

"I know that. But I want to be part of this from now on. I want to do this with you. You’ve no idea how I’ve missed you, and I want us to be part of each others’ lives from now on."

"Chakotay, I’m not sure I believe in fairy tale endings anymore."

"Maybe not. But I hope to convince you." There was a ghost of a smile on her lips.

"Kathryn, are we in your way here?"

"No!" she answered emphatically. "I’ve so enjoyed our evening talks again. I’m not sorry we’re rebuilding our friendship."

"Good," he replied. "Because Katie and I were hoping to stay." He didn’t add forever, he just thought it. "But we wouldn’t want to outstay our welcome."

"Don’t worry. I’ll tell you in no uncertain terms, if you have."

The weeks sped by. Chakotay got the job teaching at Starfleet Academy. It was a temporary appointment, but Kathryn told him she was confident it would soon be made permanent. All things considered, the new family melded together rather well, Chakotay thought, with few confrontations. He had rarely felt happier. He regained some weight as the strains of the last few months fell away, and the man he saw in the mirror now looked a lot healthier, much more relaxed and attractive. There were flashes of silver in his shoulder-length hair now, but Kathryn had told him they just leant him a more distinguished air. He was pleased that she evidently still found him attractive, but he was a little concerned that she kept herself physically distant from him. However, their friendship blossomed afresh. Their time conversing alone in the evenings became as precious to the both of them as it had been on Voyager. He longed for more…much more…but he could be patient. After all, it had only been six months since he’d lost Annika.

Katie was thriving too, but the ballet lessons had been dropped as quickly as they had been started. She didn’t like being in the beginners’ class with younger children. Besides, Alex didn’t do ballet. But Kathryn was well on the way to persuading her to take up a more modern form of dancing, which she was confident would suit her more. She loved everything about the house, her new
school, her brother, and above all her new mother. She began to find the relationship with Kathryn that she had never had with Annika, and was getting over the loss of her mother remarkably well. Chakotay reflected that Kathryn had adjusted rather more quickly to the role of Katie’s mother, than she would have done if she had never had any children of her own. If he was honest with himself, he was sometimes a little envious of the physical contact his daughter got with Kathryn.

Kathryn’s job involved long hours, and was very pressurised. He knew she made every effort to spend as much time with the children as she could, and he could tell that she was often tired, existing on too little sleep. How little had changed! Chakotay slipped easily into his old role. He supported her in every way he could, taking on some of the childcare and a lot of the cooking. She seemed happy to let him.

He had an interesting conversation with Gretchen one day, while she was pottering around in the kitchen. The children were at school and Kathryn was out of the house.

"Gretchen, do you mind me asking…did you approve of what Kathryn and I did…about having the children, I mean?"

Gretchen pulled a face in a way that very much resembled her daughter.

"No, not at the time. I thought Kathryn was mad…asking for trouble. I thought she’d suffered enough heartache. But now, I see the results of what happened…four beautiful precious children, who have brought nothing but happiness into our lives, and I realise you did the right thing."

"I know I upset Kathryn when I first made the request, and very much regret losing my close relationship with her over it. But the result I will never regret. I just wish we could have raised the children together."

"Well, she had to cut her ties with you. Your conversation was the catalyst, you know. I was always pressurising her to end her association with you for her own good. She took no heed of me, of course. For some unaccountable reason, she was fiercely loyal to you both, especially Seven. It took your request to tip the balance, so that she finally saw things my way."

"Well, in many ways I’ve wished over the years that I could have erased much of that conversation. Actually, there are many things I would go back and change, if I could. But not having the children. Never that. They are the only good thing to have come out of all that pain."

"That they are."

"But I hope things can be different from now on."

Gretchen was observant. She had seen the way Chakotay looked longingly at her daughter…and seen the way she looked at him, when she thought he wasn’t looking.

"You still love her, don’t you?"

"Yes. I always have."

"Don’t mess her life up again, Chakotay," she warned, in a typical Janeway steely tone.

"That’s not my intention."

"What is your intention, may I ask?"

"My intention is…to make this one family unit, just as soon as Kathryn is ready."
Gretchen looked at him a bit sceptically. "Which means?"

"Marriage…I hope." Gretchen simply nodded. "Tell me, Gretchen, do you think I’m wasting my time? Am I chasing a lost cause?"

"Oh no. Definitely not. She still loves you, you know. But you will have to be very patient."

Chakotay was thrilled to hear this. "Well, I can wait. I’m used to it."

"But you gave up on her once before."

"That is something I’ll regret to my dying day."

"It did a lot of damage."

"I’m just beginning to realise how much."

"She’s been too badly hurt too many times. She’s erected an emotional barrier round herself. You’ll have a real hard job convincing her to take it down, that you’re worth the risk. She doesn’t believe you love her…enough."

"G-d, I love her more than anything. I always have. I just lost hope that she would ever return my feelings."

"Well, Chakotay, she did. And you know fine well why she never told you." Chakotay sighed. He did know. He’d been in Starfleet himself, understood how the rules were drummed into you. And he knew that Kathryn had felt that their isolation in the Delta Quadrant had compelled her to hold on even more firmly to those principles.

"No, it’s not her heart that’s the problem, it’s her head," Gretchen continued. "You have some serious convincing to do. I don’t envy you…it’ll be tough. She’s been on her own a long time, and she’s come to think that men just mess up your life. She’s told me that she has no intention of ever making herself that vulnerable again. But…I know I’m her mother and my opinion’s biased…she’s worth the fight. I was very happily married for a long time, and I’d love to see her find the same happiness. And I think she could with you. You two complement each other well. Mark was a dear man, but he wasn’t her equal. Justin was more exciting, but rather moody. They were both absolutely besotted with her. But I always thought your loss was the biggest blow."

"Believe me, I understand these things. And I have no intention of giving up on her."

"Good. Let me tell you…Mark won out in the end by being patient, and you’ve got lots more going for you. And the fact that she’s let you stay this long tells me that she hasn’t entirely given up on you. Chakotay, you have everything to play for!" she finished conspiratorially.
Chapter 9

One night Kathryn came home very late looking exhausted. She had been away for several days, and had had almost no sleep in that time. She threw off her jacket and slumped on the sofa. They exchanged some of their news, and then Chakotay went off to the kitchen to find her something to eat. When he came back, he found, unsurprisingly, that she had fallen asleep where she sat. He studied her sleepy form for awhile with a rush of tenderness. He decided that the kindest thing was to get her up to her bed. He pulled her up and walked her to the staircase. He managed to coax her halfway up, before he gave in and carried her. There was hardly anything of her, he thought, as he got her into her bedroom and onto the bed. He pulled the clasps from her hair, left her vest, but removed her boots and pants before pulling up the bedcover. For a while, he stood over the sleeping woman, his heart swelling with love, as he enjoyed the rare opportunity to watch her unobserved. She was still lovely…still utterly desirable. He bent down and brushed the hair out of her eyes with his hand, his fingers lingering on her temple. His hand swept upwards over her silky crown, as he murmured his love to her. Then he kissed her on the temple, relishing the feel of her skin under his lips. His mouth moved to her ear, and he spoke to her in the gentlest of whispers.

"Fall in love with me all over again, Kathryn Janeway!"

He wasn’t sure, but he thought she must have heard, because she stirred and shifted her position.

"Mmmm…Chakotay," she mumbled sleepily.

Maybe she had heard him. The next day he felt there was a little less distance between them. She was looking at him a little more openly. And, to his delight, the touches started again…the squeeze of the shoulder, the hand on the arm…not quite the friendly embrace, but a definite step in the right direction.

"Katy, come here!" cried Gretchen, one morning, when Kathryn was working at home. It was always a bit disconcerting when Gretchen called her daughter Katy, as she usually did.

"What is it, mom?" asked Kathryn, emerging from her office.

"There’s a whole crowd of people at the gate."

"Damn, it’s a load of journalists again. I thought we’d finished with them years ago."

Chakotay emerged from the lounge to look himself.

"Don’t worry," continued Kathryn, "they won’t be able to get in. But we won’t be able to get out either. It makes us virtual hostages in our own home."

They accessed the media centre. A number of channels were broadcasting various versions of the story. A few were civil, but the majority were running sensationalist headlines:

Admiral in Love Nest with former First Officer
Kathryn buried her face in her hands in despair. Chakotay hugged her to him, saying anything he could to comfort her.

"We’ll have to beam the children home from school. We can’t bring them through that mob out there," she said eventually.

They had to do just that, and it turned out there was another crowd of media hounds waiting at the school gate. They sat the kids down and explained what was going on as best they could. Alex and the twins were not unused to strange things like this happening. They were aware their mother was famous. They rather liked it most of the time. But Katie was a bit scared, and Chakotay had to give her quite a lot of reassurance.

Kathryn and Chakotay talked it over. Kathryn thought it best to go out there and make a statement. That way there was a better chance that they would broadcast something remotely accurate. Chakotay was a bit worried about letting her go, but she marched down the drive, taking a security guard with her.

He watched as she spoke on the screen.

"Ladies and gentleman, I wish to make a statement regarding the nature of my relationship with Commander Chakotay, my former First Officer.

Chakotay and I are the best of friends, and have been for seventeen years. We grew very close on Voyager, and naturally we have a very special relationship. At the present time, he is my houseguest, and will remain so for the foreseeable future.

There has been a great deal of speculation regarding our relationship, much of which is false. I have never at any time had an affair with him, and certainly not during his marriage to Annika Hansen, a wonderful woman for whom I had the deepest affection. We are both still mourning her loss, and would appreciate being left alone to come to terms with her absence in our lives.

However, it is true that our four children are genetic siblings, as has been reported. They were the result of a medical exchange, entirely overseen by the doctors at Starfleet Medical and fully documented at the time. They are the result of a gift between three people, who cared very much about each other. It is natural, therefore, that the resulting families would feel a strong kinship with each other and wish to spend time together.

That is all I wish to say at the present time. Thank you."

"Admiral, you say you haven’t had an affair with the Commander in the past, could you tell us if you are having an affair now?"

"No, we are not," Kathryn replied firmly. "He is a guest at my house at my invitation."

"Adimiral, can you comment on your future relationship with the Commander? Is it likely that you will become involved at some time?"

"I think it is useless for you to speculate on the nature of our future relationship, when the
Commander and I do not ourselves know what that might be. Now, I have no further comments. Good night." She turned and came back up to the house. Chakotay was secretly rather pleased that she had not dismissed the idea of a possible future relationship. He did wonder at the wisdom of speaking frankly to the press. The headlines did not go away immediately, but at least they were somewhat more accurate, and eventually the crowd at the gate dwindled. Eventually they were yesterday’s news.
Kathryn and Gretchen took the kids away to Risa for a couple of weeks during the recess from school. She had made the arrangements some time previously, and she thoughtfully extended the invitation to Katie. She didn’t extend the invitation to him as well, and Chakotay was rather disappointed at this. As it happened, he had to do some preparatory work for his lecturing course, which was to begin as the new term began, so it would have been difficult to make too strong a stand on it.

He waved goodbye to them rather wistfully.

"Anything you’d like done while you’re away? The carpets cleaned?"

She smiled at him, in a way that showed she remembered.

"No. Just relax, Chakotay. We’ll be back safe and sound in two weeks, I promise." That was more than she could promise the last time he’d said that. He’d noticed that Kathryn was very much more careful these days. She was much more conscious of her own mortality since having the kids. She had also warned him that he and Katie needed to be vigilant. The sensitivity of her job made her and those around her potential targets.

The two weeks in an almost empty house went agonisingly slowly, and he missed all of them, even the dog. It was a painful reminder of what his life might be like, if he failed to cement his relationship with Kathryn. He welcomed them back with open arms, and even Kathryn allowed him to hug her. They had had a brilliant time together. Talking later, she understood how left out he had felt, and promised that they would all go away for a long weekend a few weeks into the new term.

Katie’s eighth birthday came, and they threw a party in the house for her, utilising the holodeck for trips on rollercoasters and other nail-biting thrills. She had a few new friends from school as guests, together with the Paris family. "Uncle" Tom was the biggest hit of all with all the kids, mucking in himself, just like the big kid that he was.

They had had several visits to the Paris family, and Chakotay had been very happy to renew and repair his friendship with the family. Both he and Kathryn had to suffer some irreverent teasing from Tom and B’Elanna about the nature of their current relationship, but they both endured it with resignation. Tom and B’Elanna had a son the same age as Alex, and another close in age to the twins. Miral, now ten, sometimes felt herself too mature for the rest of the company, but she enjoyed the thrills of the holodeck nonetheless.

Alex’ birthday was three days later, but he had to wait till the following weekend for his party. He had invited a whole host of friends from his class to an activities centre, and the whole family went to greet the guests. To Kathryn’s consternation, he had chosen a laser targeting programme, and the kids, Katie and Kathryn included, had to kit themselves out in the appropriate protective gear. Chakotay had to take the twins off for gentler activities for the duration. They were too young to join in, but they protested vigorously, and he had to divert them with the promise of ice cream.

Returning, the three of them dissolved into fits of laughter when they greeted the emergent party. A
few children had spots of green, yellow or blue paint on them, evidence of being hit by enemy or even friendly fire. However, Kathryn, who should have been a non-combatant, had hair plastered with a profusion of colours. She looked as if she’d had a heavy battering, and explained that the directors of the game had recognised her immediately, and thought it a scream to alter the rules of engagement and make a high ranking Starfleet Admiral, a famous one to boot, the primary target. Naturally enough, the children had been very enthusiastic at this change of tactics. Her clothes had been protected, and they had given her a cloth to clean her face and hands, but of course she had been unable to wash her hair. She gave Chakotay a thin smile, half way between amusement and mortification. He lifted his hand, cupping her cheek, and rubbed his thumb lovingly on a smudge on her nose.

"You missed a bit!"

"Thanks," she replied, mildly embarrassed at the contact.

"Well now, are you ready for the feeding frenzy?"

"I can’t go in the restaurant like this!"

"Yes you can! Consider it battle scars. And the children aren’t bothered."

She looked sceptical. "No, they rather enjoyed making me suffer!"

"Come on, Kathryn. I’m sure they’d love to show their parents the results of their handiwork. It’s just a bit of war-paint!" It had been the highlight of the party, a talking point for weeks afterward, and sure enough, the other parents had thought Kathryn’s mishap highly amusing.
"Katy!" came Gretchen’s voice from the hall. Kathryn rolled her eyes at the tone of the voice, and left the lounge to see what her mother wanted.

Hushed voices came from beyond the door, not intended for Chakotay’s ears.

"Kathryn Janeway, whatever have you got on?"

"Why, what’s wrong with this?" asked Kathryn.

"Those tatty old things? Don’t you want him to find you attractive? Go change at once!"

Kathryn replied in slightly grumbling tones, but her voice was lost as it disappeared up the stairs. He smiled to himself, as he thought of Kathryn in the old leggings and baggy sweater she had been wearing. When she re-entered the room, she had on a pristine pair of black pants, and a rather alluring pale green vest.

He smiled at her appreciatively.

She looked sheepish. "You heard that, I suppose!"

"Yes," he laughed. "But, for what it’s worth, I thought you looked damned sexy in those old clothes!"

"Oh, I’ll go and change back, shall I?"

"No, please don’t. You look damned sexy in what you’ve got on too! As a matter of fact, you looked damned sexy in just about anything, Kathryn Janeway!" Kathryn answered this with a vague half-pout, half-smile. "Let’s just get going! We don’t want to waste any more time. We get little enough time together as it is."

"Is everything loaded?"

"Yes, ma’am. Your carriage awaits!"

They headed out the main door, calling the kids, who came running excitedly out onto the front drive, where Kathryn’s land vehicle was packed and ready to go. She fired it up, and checked the systems, as Chakotay settled the children. Finally they were ready to leave on the promised family weekend away. Molly was staying behind with Gretchen this time, and was whining on the front steps in a final attempt to gain inclusion. Kathryn spoke to her sympathetically, said goodbye to her mother, and ordered the computer to close down the doors. They were off to a cabin at the head of an incredible river canyon. The scenery would be spectacular, but by the time they reached their destination tonight it would be in darkness.

It only took a couple of hours cruising to reach the cabin, but travelling in the land vehicle allowed them to enjoy the views, and the fiery sunset as it faded mysteriously into night. The rest of the evening was spent unpacking, settling in, deciding between the proposed activities for the next day and enjoying some of Chakotay’s much appreciated cooking.

The following morning, they packed a picnic, and set off in the land vehicle to explore the locality. They drove along the ridges of the valley, admiring the stark dry landscape, the rock formations and the deep canyon walls plunging impressively downwards to the river bed far below.
After they had enjoyed the breath-taking views from above for awhile, Kathryn put the vehicle into a
controlled descent, and they dropped down into the valley, and then cruised along looking for a
pleasant spot to spend a few hours. They settled on a grassy flat area beside a bend in the river, shut
down the engines and unloaded. The kids ran around in excitement, ready to release some energy.
Alex had brought a ball, some racquets and nets with him, and they played snareball and tennis for
awhile, despite being handicapped by the low scrubby bushes dotting the arena.

The adults set out a huge picnic rug under the shade of a massive parasol, and sat down watching the
children run about for a while.

"They're amazing kids!" Chakotay said.

"They certainly are."

"Just think... we could have another one. Do it all again the normal way," he said playfully. He
laughed at the expression of horror on her face.

"I think I've done my bit for the preservation of the human race."

"Pity. I'll bet you looked real cute pregnant."

She laughed, wrinkling her nose. "With Alex maybe. I looked like an elephant with the twins."

Eventually the family sat down to enjoy the food... more of Chakotay's delicious fare. They watched
in fascination as several groups of rafters floated past them on the river, and promised themselves
they would try that on a gentle part of the river the next day.

After the picnic, Chakotay joined in the sports, while Kathryn cleared away the remnants of the
meal, and then stretched herself out to snooze in the sun. After a while the kids tired of the ball
games, and began to play hide and seek amid the bushes and grasses. They began chasing each other
with long reedy stalks they had plucked, and this gave Chakotay a rather amusing idea. He picked a
grassy stem, and crept up to the unsuspecting Kathryn, who was lying face up, eyes closed and half
asleep. The children stopped running around to gaze at this little scene, and Ellie's suppressed giggle
almost gave the game away. Alex' jaw dropped open. He could hardly believe that anyone would
dare antagonise his mother.

The stalk was long enough, that he was able to dangle it over Kathryn’s face, and tickle her nose,
without getting too close. She squirmed in irritation, and then brushed her face, as if banishing some
pesky insect. As Chakotay went in for a second assault, a smile hovered on her lips. She was aware
now that someone was playing a trick on her, sensing the people holding their breath around her. But
Chakotay got even more daring. There was a delightful little hollow showing between her breasts,
and he caused the grassy fronds to tease their way across her mouth and chin, down her neck and
provocatively ingress the rather private valley he had been admiring with such pleasure. She sat up
suddenly, turning to see who was doing this, and was shocked to find it was Chakotay. For a
moment he feared she would explode in indignation, but after a few heartbeats, she just laughed with
everybody else.

They went for a walk along the river, passing another pleasant couple of hours, but Kathryn began to
grow a little agitated. Chakotay noticed that she had been warily watching a point on the ridge
someway upstream for some time. She used field visors to scan vaguely in that direction, and it was
then that he realised she was anxious about a group of people she suspected had been following
them.

"Chakotay," she said firmly, but as calmly as possible, "we must get the children back in the car."
"Okay, come on, kids. Time to go!" he affirmed, aware of the potential seriousness of this situation. Kathryn was sufficiently high profile now, for her…and her family…to be at risk.

The kids protested, but the adults insisted on an orderly return to the land vehicle. It only took them ten minutes. Once inside, they started up the vehicle and took off.

Kathryn keyed in some security measures as she moved the vehicle few miles down the valley, and Chakotay used the field visors to keep an eye on the suspects. The children had by now become aware that something was wrong and were starting to fret.

"No doubt about it. They’re following," Chakotay said grimly.

Kathryn stopped the vehicle. Their pursuers stopped too. That confirmed it.

The twins clambered anxiously onto Kathryn’s lap, Bethany’s little lip was quivering. Kathryn wrapped her arms around the girls, but had to shift them slightly in order to tap her comm badge. Katie quickly picked up the mood and threw herself on her father. Alex sat stoically in the rear cabin, unsure whether to enjoy the excitement or crumple too. Chakotay reached out and squeezed his shoulder in reassurance.

"Sshh, don’t worry. We’re quite safe here. This thing’s got armoured shielding to rival Voyager’s!" she informed them. Chakotay raised an eyebrow. She really had some influence these days.


A voice filled the body of the vehicle. "Starfleet Security here, ma’am. Code orange acknowledged. Are you in need of immediate assistance?"

"We are being followed by persons unknown. Five point three kilometres bearing three four seven from our current position. Do you have them on scanners?"

"Checking. How many in your party?"

"Six."

"Are all members currently accounted for?"

"Yes. We’re all within the land vehicle."

"Good, we have you all on scanners. Land vehicle alpha epsilon four five three?"

"Correct."

"Don’t worry ma’am. We’ve locked onto all six life-signs. We can beam you out in an instant, if necessary. Or we’ll beam them out, if it proves more appropriate. Just bear with us a minute."

A minute or so passed, while Kathryn reassured the occupants of the car, and wiped the tears from the girls’ eyes. She dropped her free hand and Chakotay seized the opportunity to reach out and place his hand over hers, squeezing it supportively.

"Admiral Janeway?"

"Janeway here."

"We have identified your pursuers. We can confirm four journalists."

"Journalists!" repeated Chakotay, exhaling in relief.
"Affirmative. Regrettably, much as we would love to give them the shock of their lives, we cannot legally beam them out. Pity…we could have done with the excitement up here! Would you like to request a beam out for yourselves?" Kathryn surveyed the anxious faces of the four children, and Chakotay’s, who met her questioning look with a nod.

"This is Admiral Janeway formally requesting a beam out for six people." She gave the co-ordinates of the cabin. "Could you also send a recovery team for the vehicle?"

"Yes, ma’am. Don’t worry. We’ll have it all under control."

In seconds, they were back outside the cabin, falling on the ground with a bump, and after ten minutes or so, had relaxed sufficiently to enjoy the rest of the day undisturbed.

The land vehicle was returned to them, re-designated as a grass processor. It was hoped that this would throw the press off track. They had clearly been able to pick up the previous signature from the vehicle and identify it. It was a standing family joke for some time that they were driving around in a lawnmower.
Chapter 12

Kathryn held a dinner party for a few friends and colleagues. Considering she cooked the majority of it, the results were surprisingly good. Gretchen stayed out of the way, and initially Chakotay had not been included on the guest list. He began to feel something like a lodger, but she relented and asked him to join them at the last minute. Whether Gretchen had put any pressure on her he never knew.

There were several couples, and one or two singletons, but Chakotay felt particularly wary of a distinctive moustachioed man in his fifties, who flirted rather openly with Kathryn, and seemed to be eyeing Chakotay with some suspicion. His name was Major Ronald Westcliff, a man Kathryn occasionally had dealings with at work, and he seemed overly interested in their living arrangements.

As for Kathryn, she was wearing a figure-hugging black dress. She looked stunning, and Chakotay knew she hadn't dressed up for his benefit.

Westcliff, besides having eyes for Kathryn, thoroughly enjoyed the sound of his own voice, and had a truly wicked sense of humour, which had much of the party in stitches. He was the first obvious rival for Kathryn’s affections, and Chakotay found his dislike of this man growing in intensity throughout the evening. He wondered if he was the reason Kathryn had been so reluctant to invite him in the first place.

He watched them carefully during the evening, and it was quite late when he observed the two of them go out onto the verandah alone. He hung around out of sight, but near enough to eavesdrop.

"How about that weekend away you promised me, Kathryn?"

"I don’t recall making any promises!" Kathryn said, with a laugh.

"G-d, you’re a tease, woman." He sidled up close, sliding his hands round her, feeling her flesh through her slinky dress. "You said maybe you could get some time away from the kids…so when, Kathryn?"

"It’s a bit difficult right now."

"Oh, because of the lovesick Commander in there? I knew there was more going on than you’ve been saying."

"No, I assure you. He is just a houseguest."

"Is that the truth?"

"Would I lie to you?"

"Well, that I don’t know. But I’d love to find out. Come on, Kathryn. You’re a hot-blooded woman. You and I both have our needs…we could have a great time together! Just say the word, and I’ll arrange us a nice suite in a top hotel…anywhere you like!"

"Ron, it’s not the right time. And I don’t want to take any more risks with my reputation!"

"I can be discreet. You know I can!"

"Actually, you can’t…not all the time. We’re being overheard right now," she replied, nodding her head towards the wall Chakotay was secreted behind.
"Ppsht. So lover boy is concerned about us being alone together. I knew there was more to these rumours than you’ve been letting on."

"No, I told you there wasn’t, and I meant it. Chakotay, you may as well come out! We know you’re there!” Chakotay stepped out onto the verandah, and viewed the intimate way Westcliff was holding her with distaste.

"I think you’re deluding yourself, my dear,” said Westcliff, untangling himself from her. "That’s a jealous man, if ever I saw one! Still, you’ll get more excitement with me, so give me a call when you’re ready!” He left the two of them alone on the verandah. They stared at each other in silence for a few minutes.

"Chakotay, what did you think you were doing?” she asked angrily. "You were eavesdropping on a private conversation!"

"I’m sorry,” he replied in embarrassment, "I hadn’t realised…I didn’t know you two were….”

"We’re not!” she said quickly and firmly. "There’s less going on than Westcliff thinks there is. Don’t imagine for a moment that I’m interested in…in him. We work together, enjoy each others’ company from time to time. That’s all!"

"Good.” Chakotay stood in silence, thinking this through for a while. "Are you?"

"Am I what?"

"A hot-blooded woman?"

"Chakotay!” she responded in outrage.

"Well, perhaps it’s not unreasonable to ask….given our history and the distance you like to keep between us!"

She thought it over before responding. "Well, I suppose I can’t blame you for wondering. And, yes, there is a hot-blooded woman inside me. She’s been deeply buried…for a long time.” She smiled encouragingly at him through the darkness. "But she’s fighting to get out.”
A few days passed, and Chakotay began to sense a lessening of the distance between them. He took every opportunity to close it… a touch here, a hug there, an arm round her shoulder when they sat chatting in the evening, and an occasional kiss on the cheek. They had long since relaxed into their friendly supportive banter, talking late into the night, although he knew Kathryn found it frustrating that she could no longer discuss the minutiae of her job with him because most of it was classified. She longed to bounce ideas off him, and joked that she would have to appoint him to her office staff in order to do so. It wasn’t an entirely ridiculous suggestion. If his job at the Academy was confirmed, he would regain his commission and rank.

Yes, Chakotay was aware that the emotional and physical barriers that Kathryn had put up, were slowly but surely coming down. His co-conspirator, Gretchen, suggested that what they really needed was some time on their own…away from the kids, and accordingly they made plans for him to take Kathryn away for the weekend, just the two of them. Gretchen was firmly of the opinion that nothing would happen unless they did, so she and Phoebe agreed to look after the children.

On the Tuesday night, when Kathryn got in from a long day at HQ, Chakotay was nowhere to be seen. She spoke to the children who were finished with their meal, and were bubbling with excitement about something they wanted her to see. The twins dragged her into the kitchen, where Kathryn found a huge bouquet on the table, together with a little note from Chakotay protruding from amongst the glorious lilies. It read:

Welcome home, Kathryn.
Dinner on the Holodeck? Now!!!!
Love, Chakotay.

She kissed the family goodnight, and Rosiama took them upstairs to start preparing them for bed. She stopped by her bedroom to change into some more alluring clothes, and ascended to the second storey, rather looking forward to this.

As she entered the holodeck, she found herself in a darkened room, haunted by the melodic sounds of a string quartet. The room opened out onto decking, which jutted over a lake framed by magnificent snow capped mountains. The ice was glistening pink and yellow from the last rays of the sun. The stars were just beginning to pepper the darkening sky, and little fairy lights twinkled along the trellis at the edge of the decking. The still water was disturbed in only few places, as birds punctured the calm surface. Thus the magnificent panorama was reflected vividly in the glassy mirror of the lake.

Chakotay was waiting for her by a table elegantly laid for dinner. He looked incredibly attractive in his dark suit and he beamed as she approached.

Kathryn’s face shone with an expression of absolute delight, as Chakotay stepped forward and welcomed her, kissing her on the cheek. He was thrilled with her reaction.

"Wow! What have I done to deserve all this?" she asked.

"You know, Kathryn, I have loved you for seventeen years, and you and I have never been on a date. Your mother and I both thought it was high time we rectified it."

"A date?" asked Kathryn, taking the seat he held out for her.
'Yes,' said Chakotay, pouring some wine into her glass.

"You two are in cahoots!"

"Absolutely. Face it, Kathryn, you can’t fight the two of us!"

"So I’d better give in gracefully?" He sat down opposite her, grinning with pleasure.

"I think that would be wise. But this is not all!"

A holographic waiter came and lit some candles, embedded in a circlet of red roses, which together gave off an intoxicating perfume.

"There’s more?"

"Your mother and sister are going to have the kids for the weekend, so I can take you away!"

"Oh?"

"Yes. They think we need time on our own...away from the kids. We’re far too busy being parents to find time for ourselves. They think nothing’s going to happen between us, unless we get some time alone, and I think they’re right. What do you think, Kathryn?"

Kathryn swallowed a large swig of her wine.

"I think I’m being manipulated here!"

"Only with the best possible intentions. So what do you think?"

She put her glass carefully down on the table. "I think…I think they are most probably right!"

"And?"

"And nothing."

"Will you come away for the weekend?" he asked, exasperated.

"That depends."

"On what?"

"Where we are going?"

"Now that’s a surprise. Don’t expect to wheedle it out of me!"

"And how this date goes," she finished. A waft of alpine air breezed in and she shivered.

"Computer, raise temperature five degrees! Or would you rather I fetched you a jacket to keep things authentic?"

"No, this is just fine," she smiled.

The food was simply out of this universe. Chakotay had had it transported in from a famous Parisian restaurant. Everything was just perfect. The conversation flowed easily. They teased and they laughed. As always they just simply enjoyed being in each others’ company. So why did things have to go so badly wrong? Afterwards, Chakotay could only blame the amount of wine he had imbibed...it was the real thing...for his indelicacy.
They had just finished a mouth-watering chocolate desert and they were waiting for coffee, when he reached out and covered her hand. He rubbed his hand thoughtfully over the knuckles, before deciding that he might just risk taking this a bit farther. He felt he was on a roll, after all.

"Kathryn," he ventured, "I think we should get married." He felt her hand tense. "We get on really well together, enjoy each others’ company...the kids get on brilliantly. They really love being part of a big family!" Her face was registering some degree of shock at this, and she now pulled her hand from his. "I know we haven’t slept together, but, well...frankly, the sex isn’t important." For some strange reason, he thought this might be a relief to her. He couldn’t have been more wrong.

"Not important? Like hell it isn’t!" she responded, in a tone dripping with contempt.

"Well, what I meant was…"

"What you meant was that you would like to put your feet under my table, live in comfort for the rest of your life...at my expense! You’d like to make this cosy little arrangement permanent, would you? Well, damn you, Chakotay! You thought a woman of my age would grasp pathetically at whatever was offered...that I’d settle for a loveless sexless marriage, just because the children think it’s a great idea. No way, Chakotay! No way am I agreeing to a marriage of convenience!" Kathryn Janeway in full flow is quite an intimidating prospect, but Chakotay was not about to be silenced. He had years of experience of attempting to stand up to her.

"Don’t be ridiculous, Kathryn. You know I love you!"

"No, I don’t. You’ve never said it like you mean it!"

"Well, I did. I told you when we were stranded on that planet together!"

"That was fifteen years ago! Besides, you’ve been married to somebody else since then. Why would I suppose for an instant that you still had those feelings, even if I’d believed them in the first place?"

"You didn’t believe me?"

"No. Why would I? You said a whole lot of guff about loyalty and service...embedded in a very blurry theatrical tale. Oh, it was a pretty story, and you had me going for a bit. But I soon understood my place. The fact that I was the only living female within light years explained it all!"

"I meant every word of it!" he protested, horrified.

"Oh, yeah? So how come you were chasing some young piece of skirt only weeks later?"

"Well, at least she was showing some interest! You were giving me zero encouragement whatsoever! Acting the proverbial ice maiden!"

"I was still engaged to Mark!"

"A man who was seventy thousand light years away, and not likely to see you again."

"Well, I’ve got news for you. I did see him again."

"After he married someone else."

"Story of my life," she snorted.

"Well, at least I wasn’t the one who preferred a holographic lover to the real thing!"
"How dare you! You’ve no idea what I did or didn’t do with Michael." By now her eyes were flashing and the anger in her voice was registering on the Richter Scale.

But his anger was not far behind. "It damn well suited you to have children without having sex, didn’t it?"

"Right, that’s it!" she spat, slamming her napkin down heavily on the table, and rising. Her chair toppled backwards. "I’m not putting up with this any longer. I want you and Katie out of my house…tonight!" She turned for the door.

"I was right first time!" he responded furiously. "You are a cold-blooded bitch!"

She froze, turned and fixed him with a deathly cold glare. "Tonight!" she reiterated, her voice full of menace. She lifted her head defiantly and turned again for the door. "Computer, end program." She smiled to herself in grim satisfaction, as the plates and glasses smashed to the floor and Chakotay’s backside hit the deck with a resounding thump. Sweet revenge, she thought.

Chakotay was left sprawling on the floor, nursing a bruised ego and a sore butt. He knew he’d handled that very badly, said some dreadful things that he wished he could take back, but for the life of him, he couldn’t understand the strength of her reaction. Did she mean it? With growing horror, it began to dawn on him that she probably did.
Chapter 14

Kathryn sat on her bed staring into space. The anger had faded, and she was left simply feeling numb. Even her mother’s diatribe on not letting her chances slip through her fingers had failed to provoke her. No, in the end it was Katie’s plaintive wailing from the end of the corridor that had shaken her out of her reverie, and galvanised her into some sort of response. She rose and walked mechanically towards the source of the distress, pausing outside to listen unseen to the conversation. The sounds emanating from Chakotay’s bedroom clearly indicated that he was slapping things into cases.

"But Daddy…why do we have to leave?" cried the sobbing child.

"We’ve stayed long enough. This isn’t our home," replied her father, as gently as he could, considering how angry he felt.

"I thought…I thought this was going to be our home."

"No, it’s not. This is mommy Kathryn’s house. We have to get out."

"But I don’t want to go!! I like it here." Katie was thinking how she couldn’t bear to leave this house, with the most beautiful room she’d ever had in her life. Nor could she bear not to see Kathryn or Alex any more, although she thought wouldn’t miss the twins very much. And, although she didn’t really know why, her father had been so much happier and more relaxed since they’d come.

"I know, sweetheart. But we have to go. Go put some clothes back on."

"Where will we go?"

"We’ll go and stay at an hotel for a few days, until I find us a place to live."

"On our own?"

"Yes."

"Won’t we see mommy Kathryn and Alex any more?"

"Of course we will. They’ll want to see you."

"Daddy, why can’t we stay. I don’t want to go."

"Now, I told you Katie…we have to go."

"But why?"

"This isn’t our house," he reiterated, not really wanting to tell the child that Kathryn had told them to leave.

"But it’s a big house. There’s lots of space." Katie paused for a moment. "Have I done something to make mommy Kathryn angry?" she sobbed, heartbroken.

"No, you haven’t, sweetheart. She loves you very much," he said, snapping his second case shut. "I’ve done something to make her angry."

"Oh, Daddy what did you do?" Katie responded in a shocked voice.
"It doesn’t matter now. Let’s get you dressed and pack some of your clothes. Maybe Kathryn will let you take some of your new things…”

Outside, every word of this conversation stabbed like a sword at Kathryn’s heart. Silent tears were flowing down her face, and she could bear this no longer. She couldn’t let these two precious people disappear from her life. She heard the two of them step towards the door, and so she moved quickly into the room, knowing she would be discovered anyway.

Chakotay met her pained look with a glare of hostility. Look at what you’ve done, he seemed to say.

Kathryn swallowed. "It’s alright Katie…you don’t have to leave. I love you very much and I want you to stay." She held out her arms to the little girl, who ran into them, crying in relief.

"Both of us?" Chakotay asked, defiantly.

Kathryn lifted her eyes to his, meeting his gaze steadily. "Both of you!" she said firmly.

Chakotay nodded and dumped himself on the bed, exhausted and relieved. Kathryn sat too, cradling Katie in her lap. It took her a long time to calm the girl down, smothering her with reassurance, telling her that she would never make her leave. She was her daughter, and she loved her. Chakotay sat in silence, wishing that much of what was being said could be extended to him too, but he felt very unsure of his standing. Eventually, Kathryn set the girl down and told her to go find Gretchen and ask for a hot drink, as she needed to talk to her father alone. Katie nodded, and ran off downstairs, reasonably mollified.

A heavy silence fell for a few moments. "Thank you," Chakotay began. She nodded. "And I apologise for what I said. I had no right to call you what I did. I didn’t mean any of it. Well, except for the bit about loving you. I did mean that. Forgive me?"

She took a deep breath. "Apology accepted, and I’m sorry I reacted so badly, Chakotay, really I am. I don’t want you to go."

There was a long pause before he answered. "Kathryn, I need a reason to stay."

She nodded and her hand stole over his. "I guess you do."

"Otherwise, Katie and I might just as well pack our bags at the weekend and clear out of here." He paused, then continued, "It’s time for some honesty. Kathryn Janeway, are you ever going to give yourself to me?"

A coy smile spread on her lips. She looked at him sideways through her eyelashes. "Maybe."

Chakotay's stomach fluttered, as a knot of hope began to unfurl. "Maybe? Well, it's a start. What do I have to do to convince you?"

Kathryn hesitated before replying. "You have to convince me that it is what you really want. That it’s not just some convenient cosy arrangement, or something you’re just offering because you feel guilty about the past. I have high expectations of what a relationship should be, and I don’t want to settle for anything less. I wouldn’t want to think you were either. I don’t want to be second-best. I want to be loved for who I am."

"You are, Kathryn. I’ve always loved you. I’ve loved you from the moment I set eyes on you!"

"Then why did you marry her?"
"Well, I don’t know…well, I don’t know if I can explain it. You may find it hard to understand, but I loved you both…in different ways. And I despaired of having you. If I’d had the slightest inkling that you, well…felt anything for me, then history would have been entirely different. There was a lot of you in her, and I grasped at it. You mean everything to me, Kathryn. You always have. Now we have a chance to put things right."

"I don’t know if I can fill Seven’s shoes."

"I don’t want you to fill her shoes. I just want you to be you."

After a few quiet moments, Kathryn risked the question that had most been preying on her mind. "Chakotay, are you physically attracted to me?"

"Spirits, woman. That’s what this is all about! You don’t think I can possibly find you attractive after being with Seven! Have you no idea? You are the sexiest woman I know. I’ve longed to make love to you since I first knew you…and all the years between haven’t made the slightest difference. You’re still damn hot!"

"Even so, she was seventeen years younger than me."

"Let me tell you something about Seven. She was about as good a lover as she was a mother…"

"Chakotay, I don’t think I want to know the details in all their glory…"

"Maybe so, but I think you should know that you won’t have to try very hard to make me happier. You and I could be brilliant together. Oh, we might fumble about a bit at first, but pretty soon I think we would be simply sensational. In the bedroom and out!"

Kathryn smiled at this. "You think so?"

"Absolutely!" he smiled back. "Anyway, I could ask you the same question."

"Oh?"

"Are you physically attracted to me?"

Kathryn laughed throatily. "Very."

"Well, good, because most of the time it doesn’t seem like it."

"I suppose that’s fair. I’ve been protecting myself. You know that. I don’t want to get hurt again."

"Kathryn, I want to spend the rest of my life with you. We could have fifty or more glorious years together still. Just trust me. I want to make love to you every day, if I can. I only said the bit about sex not being important, because I didn’t want to put pressure on you. I thought maybe you weren’t that interested…"

"Well, I am."

"Thank G-d. We can work it out. We can take it slowly, if that’s what you want. Or quickly. Whatever you like. I’m almost terrified to touch you sometimes. You’ve no idea how intimidating you can be at times."

"I hate that you think that."

"Well then, I need you to meet me halfway, Kathryn." She sat quietly digesting this for a few
moments. "Agreed?"

She nodded her acquiescence, and then slowly leant in to bring her lips to his. Chakotay was thrilled that she had initiated this first soft experimental kiss. They broke apart, eyes locked and shining.

"Does that count?" she asked dreamily.

He smiled at her tenderly. "Pretty damned close. But I think we should check it out some more..." His hand rose to the back of her head to pull her back this time into a deep demanding kiss. Her hands passed round his neck, and in seconds the passion ignited between them. Their bodies drew tantalisingly close, and their pulses raced. He hugged her tightly to him, as his hands began to explore. He relished the push of her soft breasts against his chest. She became incredibly aware of the hot throb of his desire. They both grew breathless, as they felt the heat rush their bodies. The slow-burning attraction that had simmered between them for years finally burst into flame. This was pure bliss!

"Well, the date was a complete disaster! Are you still on for the dirty weekend?" he asked suggestively between kisses.

"Okay. I’ll come on the weekend. The dirty bit is…still under consideration," she replied huskily.

"Good, I have some persuading to do, then," he replied, capturing her mouth again.

Bethany appeared at the door in her night-gown. She slid to a halt, gasped in shock, then ran off back down the passage, calling excitedly to her siblings. "Everybody, come quickly! They’re kissing!"

There were several distant gasps of happy surprise, but amongst them was Alex’ discordant voice. "Urggh!" came his disgusted response. Kathryn and Chakotay fell about laughing, and then decided it was time to pay the kids some attention. It was something of a reality check!

That night, Chakotay had taken a long time to get to sleep. He tossed and turned, as he still felt his lips tingling from Kathryn’s touch. The date had gone from wonderful to disaster to absolutely wonderful again. Life with Kathryn Janeway could be such a rollercoaster. But his heart was singing. No other woman had ever excited him this much. And now she was within his reach. He really thought he would have her in his bed...soon, if not this weekend.
Chapter 15

Over the next few days, Chakotay found every opportunity, though they were few, to get Kathryn alone. It underlined the necessity of getting away to find some time to themselves. He pushed to escalate the heat between them, touching her with increasing intimacy, whispering suggestively in her ear about just what he was going to do with her when he got her to himself this weekend, and found to his utter delight that his attentions were eliciting the desired responses.

They talked too, and came to realise that it had probably been necessary for them to acknowledge that they had both hurt each other, to discuss their feelings and put it all behind them, before they could move on. They had both spent years suppressing their feelings and denying their obvious attraction for each other, that it had almost become second nature. They’d done it in the Delta Quadrant because of their responsibilities, and to maintain both their friendship and their professional relationship. It had been for the good of the crew. Now, years later, it had been all too easy to slip back into the same old habits. They’d put aside self interest for the sake of the kids. The only sensible thing to do was to stop blaming each other, and accept that circumstances had had much to do with the way things had panned out. The time had never been right for both of them at the same time. Until now.

And so Friday evening came, and they transported to Lake Louise, where the scenery was not unlike that which Chakotay had programmed for their earlier date. He had booked two adjoining rooms… he knew better than to assume anything where Kathryn was concerned. However, frequent knowing smiles passed between them, and it was clear that they both understood the significance of what was about to happen.

He took her down to dinner, and she was wearing the figure-hugging black dress that he’d admired on her a few weeks before. Not a lot was said during the meal, and neither of them ate great quantities. Afterwards they walked out along the lakeside in the darkness, chatting comfortably. Standing by the lake in the pale moonlight, it seemed natural and easy to tell the other how much they loved them. The words tripped out easily now, especially for Chakotay. They rose on the breath, almost like sighs, wrapping the other in a cocoon of loving reassurance.

At first lips met gently, and arms embraced tenderly. Then, the hunger ignited and the kisses grew more demanding and passionate. Kathryn’s hands slid under his shirt. He kissed her neck, and then down along the low neckline, pushing the dress aside as far as he could. She moaned softly in response. One hand kneaded her breast through the flimsy material. How good she felt in his hands! He slid the other hand down to her thighs to explore the soft covering on her legs. He pushed up under the hemline, causing the dress to bunch up as he did so, and he encountered something very strange.

"Whatever is this?" he asked in surprise.

She laughed. "They’re suspenders. An old twentieth century device for holding up stockings."

"Oh!" he replied, very intrigued and rather turned on by this. "Interesting! Now, why on earth would you be wearing them?"

"I thought you just might find them exciting!"

"You were expecting me to find them then?" he asked, running his thumb just inside the top of the stocking, and deciding that it would in fact come off quite easily.
"What do you think?"
"I think…Mmmm, I think you’re trying to seduce me!" he said dreamily.
"Very funny. I thought that’s what you were trying to do to me."

They melted again into heated kisses, breathing heavily. His hand rose till it encountered her lacy panties. To his delight, he found that they were on over the suspenders. He probed a couple of fingers under the lace, and gently teased her most precious place. She moaned in pleasure, losing herself in the incredible sensations his hands were provoking. Impatiently, he tugged at the panties, and they came away in his hand. He pulled them off and stuffed them in his jacket pocket.

They gazed at each other for a few moments with a wicked intensity, before coming together once again. Hands were everywhere now, working magic wherever they touched.

Things were getting very heated, when they again broke off breathlessly. Chakotay looked about him, and his eyes alighted on a bench.

Kathryn caught the direction of his gaze. "Chakotay, I’m not a teenager anymore. I really don’t think I want to scramble about on a park bench."

"No, of course not, my love. Let’s go inside," he answered, coming to his senses. "Shall we?" He held out his arm, and she tucked hers inside. He laughed. "One day, perhaps, we’ll make love outdoors…but we’ll come prepared!"

"I’d like that."

Holding close, they walked quietly and sedately back to Chakotay’s room. It was nearer the lift.

The door closed and the earlier passion was quickly rekindled, and he had soon pushed Kathryn’s dress and bra off, pausing only briefly to admire her stunning body. He left the stockings and suspenders...he found them rather erotic. His clothes were gone almost as quickly, and they were soon writhing on the bed revelling in the joys of touching and being touched so intimately.

The hunger spiralled ever upwards, until they could no longer bear the separation. Chakotay loomed over her, cradled between her legs. He rubbed the hair away from her face tenderly, and looked deeply into her eyes, searching for confirmation that she was still okay with what was happening. She smiled encouragingly, and shifted herself to meet him.

Gently he pushed himself into her, finally and beautifully breaking the last barrier between them. She sucked in her breath, and arched her back as she welcomed the wonderful fullness within her. He kissed her lips and neck as he began to move, increasing the tempo, plunging ever deeper, tightening the coil desperate for release. She strained her body, and met his thrusts eagerly. She moulded herself to him, clasping him frantically to her. They were soon drowning in the powerful eddies gripping their bodies. The tension wound tighter and tighter, until they could no longer hold it back. Gasping his name, her body convulsed in ecstasy. Her climax sent him quickly after her, and he spilled his life-force deep within her. It had been a precious, precious moment. Two people, who meant the world to each other, had finally expressed their love in the most special way possible.

They calmed, holding each other tenderly. Chakotay was just thinking how brilliantly it had gone, when he felt Kathryn shudder underneath him. He heard a sob, as she pushed him off her, then rushed for the bathroom.

He rose and followed to stand in shock at the bathroom door. His heart was thumping in panic. She was bending over the sink, splashing water over her face, clearly attempting to stifle some tears.
"Oh, G-d, Kathryn, what have I done?"

Under control again, she lifted her head and took in the look of horror on his colour-drained face. Her shiny eyes quickly filled with compassion, and she smiled thinly. She rushed forward, and pulled him into her arms.

"Oh, Chakotay…they were tears of relief, that’s all! This has been such a long time coming."

"I haven’t hurt you?" he asked in concern.

"No, no…it was absolutely wonderful!"

He heaved a sigh of relief, and kissed her on the top of her head. "Thank heavens. I knew it. I knew we’d be fantastic together." He kissed her again. "I love you so much, Kathryn. And I want you to know that what we did just now was very, very special!"

"It was," she agreed, nestling her head under his chin.

His words echoed through both their minds as they hugged each other. What an incredible difference it makes when you are intimate with someone you love that much.

Kathryn emerged from the shower, and tossed the towel she had just used on the floor. She smiled broadly at the rather handsome naked man sprawling shamelessly on the bed. It had been a long night, and they had made love several incredible times. The sun had long since risen on the first day of their new relationship.

She grabbed a silk robe, and started to put it on, as she clambered onto the bed to join him.

"No, don’t!" he said tugging it away from her. "I want to admire the treasures that have been kept hidden from me for so long."

She laughed, mildly embarrassed, before snuggling up to him and resting her head on his shoulder, her hair fanning out across his broad chest.

"Kathryn, you are beautiful!"

"Well, thanks."

"And what do you think of me?" he asked impishly.

She screwed up her face in amusement. "Pretty impressive!" she laughed.

"Which bit?"

"Why, all of you!"

"No particular bit?" he asked in mock disappointment.

"Well, there is one particular bit…"

"Which is?"
"The bit that does incredible things to my body."

"It has a name. Annika used to call it my reproductive appendage."

They both burst out laughing at this. They had long since agreed that it was healthy to be able to talk about Seven without feeling awkward or guilty.

"I’m sure I’ll be able to think of something more exotic."

"I’m sure you will." His fingers dusted over her belly, and she jumped, sucking her stomach in. "You’re ticklish!"

"No, I’m not!"

"Yes, you are!" he affirmed, assaulting her fiercely, and finding the confirmation in her shrieks. "This could be useful!" He flipped her onto her back, towering over her. He continued until she was almost screaming for mercy.

"No! Stop…pleeeeeease…!" she cried, trying to pull herself into a protective ball.

"No, no way. Not until you promise me something!"

"Anything…anything!"

"Alright then….marry me!"

"What? That’s not fair!"

"Yes it is. Promise!"

She continued to shriek at his persistent tickling. "Please…Chakotay!"

"Promise!"

"Oh, alright then."

"Say yes."

"Yes!"

He stopped the assault and kissed her thoroughly on the lips.

When he paused, she said playfully, "Of course, promises made under duress don’t count!"

"What? Spirits, you’re infuriating. I give up. I’m not going to ask again. I’m fed up with being turned down. When you’ve made your mind up, ask me."

"Okay."

They eventually got up and checked in on the children, who told them excitedly that they had been invited over to "Uncle" Tom’s for the day. Their day was sure to be fun-filled. Kathryn sighed, expressing the opinion that now everybody would figure out what they were up to.

They went out wearing sunglasses and hats to avoid recognition, and explored the locality hand in hand. They felt as if they were walking on air, and took every opportunity to steal kisses from each other. The scenery was breath-taking, and they had the most delightful day together.
That night, after they had made love slowly and sensually, Kathryn sat on top of him, looking miles away for a moment. Chakotay lay quietly studying her. He thought she looked leonine. Her chestnut hair falling in disarray on her lovely creamy shoulders resembled a mane. Her eyes could smoulder and sparkle. Her body was sleek and athletic. He was discovering that she could be soft and pliant, or feral and predatory. He could barely believe how exciting this woman was, or that this was the same woman that had been so anxious about her attractiveness a few days before. What miracles a little love and reassurance could work. The truth was he couldn’t get enough of her.

Her hands slipped up his body and onto his shoulders, and she moved so that she was gazing straight down at him, nose to nose. Curtains of red hair fell from either side of her head. She kissed him softly.

"Chakotay, will you marry me?" she asked.

"Yes!" He kissed her. "Yes!" Kissed again. "Yes!"

"Good, then let's do it quickly. I refuse to be engaged."

"Well, I can understand that."

"How does next weekend sound?"

"Perfect." They kissed again to seal the contract. "Of course, promises made under duress don't count!" he teased.

"What? You're not under duress!"

"Kathryn Janeway, if you bouncing on me naked, with your breasts dangling dangerously close to my mouth, isn’t duress, I don’t know what is!"

"Okay. Wedding’s off again."

"We’ll see about that," he said spinning her over and taking control again.
Chapter 16

Chakotay was up first the next morning, and he wandered over to the window to admire the mountain vista. They had left the shades off, so they could see the view from the bed.

Fortunately he was standing to the side, because, as he glanced down, a crowd of people caught his attention.

"Kathryn, are you ready to go public with our relationship?"

"I guess."

"Good, because there’s a crowd of journalists out there, with their imagers trained on this room."

"We’ve been rumbled!" she cried in alarm.

"Afraid so."

"Someone must have given us away."

They called down the shades on the window, and talked through their plans. There was no point in leaving the hotel today, as they would clearly be followed everywhere they went. They decided to eat a leisurely breakfast in their room, and in the end it was Kathryn who expressed her desire to cut the weekend short and go home.

"Let’s go home and tell the kids our plans. See how they take it, and then we could make a public statement, if you like."

"They’ll be fine with it. They’ve been expecting it anyway."

"I think you could be right," she agreed, biting into a croissant.

"That’s settled then," he smiled fondly back at his non-fiancée, but soon to be wife.

Four hours seventeen minutes…that’s how long they’d been married. He beamed lovingly at his wife. She looked resplendent in her floor length black skirt which rose into a sparkling scarlet bodice. She had completed the outfit with an admiral-like jacket in Starfleet red with a raised collar and gold braid. It was an unusual, but stunning wedding outfit, and little did she know that she was setting the new standard for Starfleet dress uniforms.

The girls had worn matching scarlet dresses with circlets of red flowers in their hair. He and Alex had both worn black suits with white shirts. He had had to cut his hair short, owing to the fact that he had been re-commissioned in Starfleet, and his contract had been made permanent.

Gretchen was the one wearing white…a smart pant-suit. She had walked Kathryn down the aisle with such pride. Her limp had gone. She had finally agreed to have her hip repaired, in honour of the
occasion. She was now sitting beside Kathryn, talking with her old friend Admiral Owen Paris. The children, having tired of the proceedings, were now running amok somewhere in the house, probably on the holodeck with the other kids, and Tom and Rosiama had taken it upon themselves to supervise.

In the end, it had taken two weeks to organise everything for the wedding. This was mostly because the whole thing had snow-balled from the quiet family affair they had first envisioned, to a major Starfleet event and impromptu Voyager reunion. Kathryn had left everything, apart from the dresses, to Gretchen, Chakotay and the enlisted wedding caterers. She spent the two weeks clearing her desk, so that she could take extended leave. Chakotay had also frantically marked some exam papers, and completed his work before the long vacation. They were planning a two week honeymoon, before the rest of the family joined them.

A huge temporary structure, white and elegant, had been erected for the ceremony on Kathryn’s magnificent lawn, surrounding the fountain. There were flowers everywhere, and pillars with floral spirals supporting the roof. A delicious meal had been heartily consumed, and the champagne was flowing. The house had been thrown open too, and a number of former crewmembers had been observed poking around rather nosily.

He cleared his throat and rose. It was his turn to make a speech.

When silence fell, he thanked them all for coming and made the general comments expected of him. He had been delighted to greet so many of their old crew.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to pay tribute to this wonderful woman beside me." He grinned at Kathryn, and she smiled back. "Let me tell you, I fell for her the moment I first beamed onto the bridge of her ship. There I was...a fugitive from justice, and there she was...the paragon of Starfleet Captains. She just looked at me with those beautiful blue eyes, daring me to surrender, and well...," he sighed, "I was sunk. She very quickly had me abandoning ship. Many of you were there at the time, and will vouch for the fact that I was immediately captivated, hostage to her every whim." There were a few nods and giggles from around the room.

"It’s taken seventeen years and seventy thousand light years…and some…to reach this point. Our relationship has taken some wrong turns, but I won’t bore you with the details. Suffice it to say that we’re here now, and without doubt this has been the happiest day of my life. A very wise person told me that her daughter was worth fighting for, and, by heaven, she was right. (Thank you, Gretchen, for your valuable advice!)

"Seventeen years is a long time, but, if you ask her, Kathryn will tell you that they haven’t been wasted. We have four fantastic children to show for it. We seem to have lost them just at the moment, but well…never mind. I’m sure they’re enjoying themselves somewhere."

His eyes settled on his wife. "My life has been much the richer for knowing you, Kathryn, and I am sure everybody in the room will endorse that sentiment." There was a chorus of agreement. "Let me say, here and now, that I intend to devote the rest of my life to making you and the kids happy."

He reached out and took his wife's hand. "Kathryn, you have been many things to me. In varying degrees, you have been my enemy, my pursuer, my commanding officer, my fellow traveller, my companion, my peace, my anchor, my strength...my motivator...my source of inspiration and, dare I say it, exasperation at times...my best friend...my true love, and, at long last and most wonderful of all...my wife. I am truly, truly honoured that you have agreed to share the rest of your life with me."

"Ladies and gentlemen, please raise your glasses to join me in a toast to my wife." Everybody rose to
do as they were bid. Chakotay’s face was radiant with pride and happiness, as he gazed at his somewhat overwhelmed wife.

"The one and only Kathryn Janeway!" he finished triumphantly.

Chapter End Notes

Author's note: I generally don't enjoy stories where Kathryn and Chakotay take years to come together. On the whole, I think the seven years in the Delta Quadrant more than long enough to leave this relationship unconsummated. However, I hope you will agree with Kathryn on this one, ie. that the seventeen years weren't wasted.

I nearly gave Kathryn some stretch marks, but I thought, hey, this is the twenty-fourth century. They'll have solved that one with dermal regenerators, won't they?

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